Information Management and Business Review (ISSN 2220-3796)
Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 331-345, 2026

Event as a Temporary Community: A Conceptual Framework of Belonging in Participatory Events

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Abstract: Participatory events bring individuals together within shared spaces and create opportunities for interaction, collective participation and social connection. While existing event research has examined these social experiences through concepts such as communitas, social identity and belonging, the processes through which they may contribute to the formation of a temporary community remain less clearly integrated. This conceptual paper aims to develop a framework explaining how participatory events facilitate temporary community formation and a sense of belonging among participants. We conducted a focused conceptual synthesis of literature from event studies and related social theories using Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The synthesis identified five connected dimensions: shared event space, shared symbols and identity, collective participation, social connection, and temporary belonging. Based on these dimensions, the Temporary Community Formation Framework is proposed as a sequential process through which participants may move from being present within an event environment to temporarily experiencing themselves as part of a shared social group. The paper contributes to event studies by integrating communitas, social identity and belonging within a single conceptual framework and positioning temporary community as a possible social outcome of participatory event experiences. The framework provides a basis for future empirical testing and offers event managers a social perspective for designing events that encourage shared identity, collective participation, and connection among participants.

Keywords: *Participatory events; Temporary community; Communitas; Social identity; Belonging*

1. Introduction and Background

Participatory events are more than organized gatherings. They provide temporary social spaces where people interact, participate in shared activities, and form connections with others (Getz & Page, 2020). Unlike routine social settings, events bring individuals together within a defined time and space, often around a shared purpose, interest or activity. The experience of being present and participating alongside others can create opportunities for interaction among individuals who may otherwise have little reason to meet. In this sense, the value of an event may extend beyond its program and activities to include the social connections created during the event.

Existing event research has examined participant experiences through concepts such as satisfaction, engagement, event experience and behavioral intention. These perspectives are important in understanding how participants evaluate events and whether they intend to revisit or recommend them. However, the social experience of participation also deserves attention. Participants do not experience events only as individual consumers. They are surrounded by others who share the same space, activities and, in many cases, common interests. The presence and participation of others may therefore contribute to how an event is experienced and remembered.

Social connection is particularly relevant in participatory events, where individuals actively engage with activities, spaces and other participants rather than simply observe. Group performances, collective celebrations, shared traditions and informal interactions can create opportunities for connection. Through these shared experiences, individuals may recognize similarities with others and develop a temporary sense of being part of a group. This feeling may emerge even when participants have not previously met and may not continue their relationships after the event has ended. The sense of belonging created during an event may therefore be temporary without necessarily being less meaningful.

The temporary nature of these social connections can be understood through the concepts of liminality and communitas. Event environments may allow participants to temporarily move away from everyday routines and social roles and enter a shared social setting shaped by the event (Ziakas & Boukas, 2013). Within this setting, communitas may emerge through feelings of togetherness, equality and shared experience among participants. While communitas has been used to explain collective experiences within events, the process through which participation develops into a temporary sense of community and belonging remains less clearly conceptualized.

This presents a gap in the understanding of participatory events. Existing studies have recognized the social value of events and their potential to encourage interaction, social cohesion and collective experience (Lee et al., 2016; Toraldo et al., 2019; Ziakas, 2016). However, these concepts are often examined separately or discussed as part of the broader event experience. Less attention has been given to how the conditions created within participatory events may work together to contribute to the formation of a temporary community. Understanding this process is important because participants may derive value from an event not only through the activities provided but also through the experience of feeling connected to and belonging with others.

Recent research has further connected festival experiences with belonging and community. Gedecho et al. (2023) identify belonging, togetherness, recognition and social support among the dimensions of community in diaspora festivals. Quinn and Kinnunen (2024) likewise place sharing and belonging at the centre of current event scholarship, while noting that social outcomes are not invariably positive. The present paper builds on these developments by specifying the expected outcomes of a proposed process of temporary community formation, rather than assuming that community follows from attendance.

Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to develop a framework explaining how participatory events facilitate the formation of temporary communities and a sense of belonging among participants. Specifically, the paper examines the roles of shared event space, shared symbols and identity, collective participation, and social connection in contributing to temporary belonging. The paper addresses the following research question: How do participatory events facilitate the formation of temporary community and belonging among participants? By integrating literature on event experience, communitas, social identity, and belonging, this paper proposes a conceptual framework that positions temporary community as an important social dimension of participatory event experiences.

2. Literature Review

Participatory Events and the Social Event Experience

Participatory events differ from more passive event experiences because attendees are actively involved in shaping what happens during the event. Rather than simply observing a program or performance, participants may contribute through their actions, interactions and responses. The experience economy framework views participation as a continuum ranging from passive to active participation, with active participants directly influencing the experience being created (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). This perspective is particularly relevant to events because the presence and behavior of participants can contribute to the atmosphere and overall experience of the gathering.

The level of participation may also influence the social outcomes of an event. Active participation creates opportunities for individuals to interact with others, respond to shared activities, and become more involved in the event environment. As participants become more involved, the event experience may shift from individual attendance towards a shared experience shaped by the presence and actions of others. This suggests that participants may gain social value from events not only because they attend, but also through how they participate in the experience.

The importance of active involvement is also reflected in the concept of participatory experience tourism. de Bruin and Jelinčić (2016) describe participatory experiences as situations where individuals contribute creatively to the experience rather than simply consume what has been prepared for them. In an event context, this means that participants may become part of the process through which the event experience is created. Their actions, responses, and interactions with others can influence the social environment of the event.

Participation need not be understood as a strict division between active contributors and passive spectators. In live journalism, Vodanovic (2022) examines how event formats and settings shape audience engagement with news. This illustrates that participation is context-dependent. Within the present framework, collective participation includes shared responses as well as organized activities, provided that participants experience their involvement in relation to others.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the social experience of an event is closely connected to participant involvement. As participation becomes more active and reciprocal, opportunities for interaction and social connection may increase. Participatory events therefore provide an important context for examining how individuals move from simply attending an event to experiencing a temporary sense of connection with others. This relationship between participation and social experience provides the starting point for understanding how a temporary community may begin to form within an event setting.

Events as Temporary Social Spaces

Events take place within a defined time and space, creating a temporary environment that differs from participants' everyday settings. Getz and Page (2020) explain that planned events bring people into event-specific places for a limited period to participate in activities that are outside their normal routines. The temporary nature of events is important because it creates a shared setting in which participants are present at the same time and for a common purpose. This concentration of people and activities can create opportunities for interaction that may not occur in everyday environments.

The physical setting of an event also influences how participants experience and interact within the space. Pettersson and Getz (2009), in their study of the World Alpine Ski Championships, found that visitors were attracted to locations where other participants gathered. Certain areas developed into experiential hotspots as the presence of people and event activities became concentrated within particular spaces. This suggests that event space is not simply a physical location where activities are organized. The movement and presence of participants can also shape the social environment of the event.

Studies examining visitor movement have further demonstrated the relationship between event space and participant behavior. Pettersson and Zillinger (2011) found that visitor movements during the Biathlon World Championships were concentrated in particular areas and influenced by both the event program and the physical layout of the destination. Similarly, Yun and Park (2015) observed that visitors at the Sancheoneo Ice Festival gathered mainly around the entrance and central event areas, while other parts of the host destination received considerably less visitor activity. Versichele et al. (2012) also identified changing patterns of participant movement during the Ghent Festivities, demonstrating that the use of event space can shift throughout the day.

These studies show that event spaces are socially experienced rather than simply physically occupied. Participants move towards activities, attractions and, importantly, other people. As participants gather within particular spaces, opportunities for observation, interaction and shared experience increase. The event program, venue design and movement of participants therefore contribute to the creation of temporary areas of social activity. In this sense, the social environment of an event develops through the relationship between the event setting and the people who occupy it.

Recent festival research also distinguishes the event environment from the social processes occurring within it. Xie and Li (2023) examine attendee interactions, immersion and perceived emotional synchrony, showing that different elements of the festival experience operate through different pathways. Their findings support treating shared space as an enabling condition rather than a sufficient explanation of social connection; they do not directly test the space-to-identity relationship proposed here.

The temporary concentration of participants within a shared space provides an important condition for social connection. For the duration of an event, individuals are brought together within an environment shaped by common activities and a shared event purpose. However, physical proximity alone does not necessarily create a sense of belonging. Participants must also interpret and experience the event as a shared social environment.

This leads to the concepts of liminality and communitas, which help explain how event settings may temporarily change everyday patterns of social interaction.

Liminality, Communitas and Collective Experience

The concepts of liminality and communitas provide a useful theoretical basis for understanding social interaction within events. Liminality originates from Turner's (1974, as cited in Ziakas, 2016) work on ritual and describes a temporary condition in which individuals move away from their usual social roles and everyday structures. Within event studies, this idea has been used to explain how events create spaces that are different from ordinary daily life (Ziakas, 2016). In contemporary events such as festivals, sporting events, and celebrations, these experiences are often described as liminoid because participation is generally voluntary and takes place within secular and leisure settings.

The temporary separation from everyday routines may influence how participants interact with others. Event environments can create situations where normal social boundaries become less visible, and participants are more open to interaction and shared experiences. Ziakas and Boukas (2013) explain that the communal atmosphere created within event settings can encourage feelings of camaraderie and togetherness. Participants may temporarily experience fewer of the social expectations associated with their everyday roles, allowing them to engage with others within the shared context of the event.

Communitas describes the sense of connection and togetherness that may emerge within these temporary settings. It is commonly associated with feelings of equality, solidarity, and shared experience among individuals (Toraldo et al., 2019). Unlike formal communities that are organized around established structures or membership, communitas can emerge spontaneously through collective participation. Within events, this may occur when participants celebrate together, respond to a shared performance or become involved in common activities.

The concept has been widely applied to different event settings. Lockstone-Binney et al. (2020) highlight how sporting events can provide a temporary escape from everyday life and create a shared celebratory environment. In festival settings, Toraldo et al. (2019) found that communitas can develop through shared participation and social interaction among volunteers. Ziakas (2016) similarly argues that event environments can encourage meaningful interaction by temporarily reducing social boundaries. These interactions may contribute to stronger social networks and wider social connections.

Collective emotion offers a further explanation of shared experience. Pizarro et al. (2022) synthesize evidence linking collective effervescence with group identification and social integration across collective gatherings. Their review supports the relevance of shared emotional experience to social connection, while the diversity of settings limits any inference that the same sequence occurs in every participatory event.

The temporary character of an event remains central to this framework. Participants eventually leave the event environment and return to everyday routines and roles. Heidl (2025) distinguishes community at a festival from an event community extending beyond it through online interaction. This distinction allows temporary belonging to be examined in its own right without assuming either that it disappears immediately or that it necessarily becomes a lasting community.

While communitas explains the emergence of collective feelings within events, it does not fully explain how participants come to recognize themselves and others as part of a shared group. The development of a sense of "we" requires further consideration of social identity, shared symbols and belonging. These concepts provide the next stage in understanding how collective event experiences may contribute to the formation of a temporary community.

Social Identity, Connection and Belonging

The experience of communitas explains how feelings of togetherness may emerge within an event. However, a temporary sense of community also requires participants to recognize some form of connection with others. Social identity theory provides a useful perspective for understanding how individuals identify similarities

between themselves and other members of a group. Within event settings, shared interests, behaviors and symbols can help participants recognize others as belonging to the same social group (Lee et al., 2016).

Events often provide visible expressions of shared identity. Clothing, language, merchandise and particular forms of behavior can communicate an individual's connection to an event or group. Lee et al. (2016) explain that participants may use these symbols to express their experience, skills or fandom and to distinguish themselves from those outside the group. At the same time, these expressions allow participants to recognize others who share similar interests. The event therefore provides a social setting in which identity can be both expressed and recognized by others.

The process of recognizing a shared identity may contribute to a sense of belonging. Chiang et al. (2017), in their study of the Harbin Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival, applied social identity theory to explain how event values can contribute to social categorization and identification. When participants identify with others within the event environment, they may begin to experience themselves as part of a wider group. This sense of group connection may influence how participants evaluate the event and their intention to remain connected to the experience.

However, a shared identity does not always depend on formal group membership or an established label. Neville and Reicher (2011) found that individuals within crowds can experience a sense of "we" through shared emotions, symbols, actions, and experiences. Participants may feel connected to strangers because they are responding to the same situation or participating in the same activity. Within events, chanting, cheering, dancing, or collectively responding to a performance may temporarily reduce interpersonal barriers and create a sense of relatedness among participants.

Shared actions can further strengthen social connections within an event. When participants cheer, chant, dance, or respond collectively to an event activity, they become aware that others are participating in the same experience. Neville and Reicher (2011) suggest that shared action can contribute to a sense of relatedness among individuals within crowds. These collective behaviors may reduce interpersonal barriers and strengthen participants' awareness of being part of a wider group.

In some cases, the sense of identification created through events may extend beyond the event itself. Grappi and Montanari (2011) found that identification among festival participants can influence future event attendance, even where no formal membership exists. This suggests that event-based social connections may continue to influence participants after the temporary gathering has ended. Nevertheless, not all event connections develop into lasting relationships or formal communities. Participants may leave an event without maintaining contact with others while still remembering the feeling of being part of a shared experience.

Belonging within participatory events can therefore be understood as a temporary social experience created through shared identity, recognition and collective action. Participants may feel connected to others without knowing them personally or becoming permanent members of a group. This distinction is central to the argument of this paper. The temporary nature of the connection does not remove its social significance. Instead, it raises the question of whether participatory events can be understood as temporary communities that exist through shared space, identity, participation, and social connection.

Allen et al. (2021) distinguish opportunities, competencies, motivations and perceptions within an integrative account of belonging. This helps separate opportunities for contact from participants' subjective sense of inclusion: access to an event and interaction with others do not guarantee belonging. In this paper, temporary belonging therefore refers specifically to feeling accepted and included within the event-based group during the event.

Towards the Event as a Temporary Community

The literature discussed in the previous sections demonstrates that participatory events can create important social experiences. Participation allows attendees to become involved in shaping the event experience, while the temporary concentration of people within a shared time and space creates opportunities for interaction. Liminality and communitas explain how event environments may temporarily reduce everyday social

boundaries and encourage feelings of togetherness. Social identity and belonging further explain how participants recognize similarities with others and develop a sense of being part of a group.

However, these areas of literature are often discussed separately. Participation is commonly examined in relation to event or tourism experiences, while studies of event space focus on visitor movement and the use of physical environments. Communitas is frequently used to explain collective feelings and social bonding, whereas social identity research examines how participants identify with groups and other attendees. Each perspective contributes to the understanding of social experiences within events, but the relationship between these processes remains less clearly integrated.

This paper argues that these processes may be understood as connected stages in the formation of a temporary community. The shared event space first brings individuals together within a defined time and environment. Within this space, event-related symbols, interests and forms of identity allow participants to recognize similarities with others. Collective participation then provides opportunities for participants to act, respond and experience the event alongside one another. These shared experiences may encourage social connection and contribute to a temporary sense of belonging.

The term temporary community is used in this paper to describe a short-term sense of social belonging that develops among participants through shared presence, identity and participation within an event setting. It does not require formal membership, long-term relationships or continued interaction after the event. Participants may not know one another before attending and may never meet again once the event has ended. However, during the event, they may experience a meaningful sense of connection and recognize themselves as part of a shared social experience.

This conceptualization differs from viewing communitas as the final social outcome of an event. Communitas provides an important explanation of the feelings of togetherness and reduced social boundaries that may emerge during collective experiences. However, the concept of temporary community proposed in this paper places greater attention on the process through which event conditions, shared identity, participation, and social connection contribute to belonging. The focus is therefore not only on whether participants experience togetherness, but on how the event may create the conditions through which this sense of belonging develops. Heidl (2025) also demonstrates why temporary community should be distinguished from continuing event networks. The present framework concerns the experience of community during a bounded event; subsequent online interaction or repeated attendance is a possible extension, not a defining requirement. Likewise, Gedecho et al. (2023) examine festivals embedded in an established diaspora community, so their findings inform the relevant dimensions without demonstrating the formation of community among previously unconnected participants.

Based on this synthesis, the paper proposes that temporary community formation in participatory events develops through five connected dimensions: shared event space, shared symbols and identity, collective participation, social connection, and temporary belonging. These dimensions form the basis of the conceptual framework presented and discussed in the following sections.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual research approach to examine how participatory events may contribute to the formation of temporary communities and a sense of belonging. A conceptual approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study is to integrate existing theoretical perspectives and research findings rather than to test relationships using primary empirical data. The paper draws together literature from event studies and related social theories to develop an explanation of how social connection and belonging may emerge within participatory event settings.

The literature was reviewed through a focused conceptual synthesis. Relevant studies were identified around five areas that directly relate to the research question: participatory event experiences, event space and time, liminality and communitas, social identity, and belonging. Literature from event and tourism research was used as the main foundation of the review, while selected studies from social psychology and related fields were

included where they provided theoretical explanations of collective identity, social connection, and shared behavior.

The review was guided by the research question rather than a systematic review protocol. Studies were examined based on their conceptual relevance to the social processes that occur within participatory events. Particular attention was given to how the literature explained the role of shared space, participant involvement, collective action, shared identity and interpersonal connection. The purpose was not to provide an exhaustive review of all research on event participation or belonging, but to identify theoretical connections between areas of literature that have often been discussed separately.

The synthesis incorporates recent literature published within 2021–2026 on belonging, collective emotion and festival communities alongside foundational event research. Sources were used to refine the conceptual distinctions, proposed mechanisms and boundary conditions, rather than as empirical validation of the complete framework. The resulting propositions express expectations for future investigation; no primary data, pooled effect estimates, or tests of the proposed sequence are reported.

The conceptual synthesis involved comparing the main ideas and relationships identified across the selected literature. Recurring concepts were grouped according to their role in explaining the development of social experiences within events. Through this process, five connected dimensions were identified: shared event space, shared symbols and identity, collective participation, social connection, and temporary belonging. The relationships between these dimensions were then interpreted using communitas and social identity as theoretical foundations.

Based on this synthesis, a conceptual framework was developed to explain the proposed process through which temporary community may form within participatory events. The framework is presented in the Results and Discussion section and is intended to provide a basis for further theoretical discussion and future empirical testing.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

The conceptual synthesis identified five dimensions that contribute to explaining the formation of temporary community within participatory event settings. These dimensions are shared event space, shared symbols and identity, collective participation, social connection, and temporary belonging. Although each dimension is discussed within different areas of existing literature, the synthesis suggests that they can be connected as a sequential social process.

The first dimension, shared event space, represents the physical and temporal environment that brings participants together for the duration of an event. The second dimension, shared symbols and identity, refers to the interests, behaviors, language and visible cues through which participants may recognize similarities with others. Collective participation, the third dimension, involves shared actions and responses that allow participants to experience the event alongside others. The fourth dimension, social connection, refers to the feelings of relatedness and interpersonal connection that may develop through shared participation. The final dimension, temporary belonging, describes the short-term experience of feeling part of a shared social group within the event.

Based on these five dimensions, the Temporary Community Formation Framework is proposed, as presented in Figure 1. The framework presents temporary community formation as a connected process beginning with the shared event environment and progressing towards a temporary sense of belonging.

The framework proposes a sequential relationship between the five dimensions. Shared event space provides the setting in which participants encounter and observe others. Shared symbols and identity allow participants to recognize common interests or connections within the event environment. Collective participation provides opportunities for shared action and experience, while social connection reflects the relatedness that may develop between participants. Temporary belonging represents the final dimension of the framework and the

proposed formation of a temporary community during the event. P1–P4 specify proposed relationships between the five dimensions. P5 interprets temporary belonging within this process as the experience of temporary community; it does not introduce a sixth independently established causal stage. The sequence is a theoretical organizing device, and reciprocal relationships or alternative pathways remain possible.

Figure 1: Temporary Community Formation Framework

1. Shared Event Space
Participants are present within a shared event environment.
↓ P1
2. Shared Symbols and Identity
Shared cues may help participants recognize a common identity.
↓ P2
3. Collective Participation
Participants engage in shared activities and responses.
↓ P3
4. Social Connection
Shared participation may support relatedness and interpersonal connection.
↓ P4
5. Temporary Belonging
Participants may feel accepted and included in the event-based group.
↓ P5 (interpretive)
Temporary Community
Proposed interpretation of temporary belonging within the framework (P5).

Five conceptual propositions were developed from the framework:
P1: Shared event space facilitates the recognition of shared symbols and identity among participants.
P2: Shared symbols and identity encourage collective participation within the event.
P3: Collective participation strengthens social connection among participants.
P4: Social connection contributes to a temporary sense of belonging among participants.
P5: Temporary belonging, arising within the proposed process, represents participants' experience of a temporary community within participatory event settings.

Table 1 links each proposition to its expected conceptual outcome. These outcomes are theoretical expectations, not findings from this paper. Neither presence nor participation guarantees temporary community, and the proposed direction and sequence require empirical examination.

Table 1: Propositions and Expected Conceptual Outcomes

ID (P1–P5)	Proposed relationship	Expected conceptual outcome
P1	Shared event space → shared symbols and identity	Participants are expected to recognize common interests, symbols, and social cues, increasing their perception of a shared identity.
P2	Shared symbols and identity → collective participation	Recognition of a shared identity is expected to encourage willingness to join shared activities and collective responses.
P3	Collective participation → social connection	Shared actions and responses are expected to strengthen relatedness and interpersonal connection among participants.
P4	Social connection → temporary belonging	Social connection is expected to support feeling accepted and included within the event-based group for the duration of the event.
P5	Temporary belonging → temporary community	Within the proposed process, temporary belonging is expected to be expressed as a perception of being part of a temporary event community. This is an interpretive outcome, not a separate proven causal effect.

Note: Arrows indicate proposed relationships. P5 specifies the community meaning of temporary belonging. The table reports no empirical results.

Discussion

From Shared Event Space to Shared Identity

The proposed framework begins with shared event space because participants must first be brought into a common physical and temporal environment before a temporary community can develop. Planned events create defined settings where individuals gather for a particular purpose and within a limited period (Getz & Page, 2020). However, the framework does not suggest that physical proximity alone creates a sense of community. Being present in the same venue may provide the opportunity for social interaction, but participants must also recognize some form of commonality with others.

The social use of event space may contribute to this process. Pettersson and Getz (2009) found that event participants were attracted to areas where other people gathered, creating experiential hotspots within the event environment. Similar patterns of concentrated visitor movement have been identified in other event settings (Pettersson & Zillinger, 2011; Versichele et al., 2012; Yun & Park, 2015). These findings suggest that participants do not experience event spaces in isolation. Their movements and use of space are influenced by the presence and activities of others.

Within these shared spaces, participants are exposed to event-related symbols, behaviors and social cues. Clothing, merchandise, language and visible forms of participation may communicate an individual's connection to the event or its purpose (Lee et al., 2016). These cues allow participants to observe similarities between themselves and others. A participant may not know the people around them personally but may recognize that they share an interest, identity or reason for attending the event.

This recognition is important because it begins to shift the experience from simply being among other people to perceiving oneself as being among people with something in common. Social identity perspectives suggest that individuals develop a sense of group connection by recognizing similarities with others and identifying shared characteristics (Chiang et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2016). The event space therefore provides more than a location for gathering. It creates the setting in which shared identity can become visible and socially recognized. The expected outcome of P1 is recognition of commonality, rather than social connection itself. Although Xie and Li (2023) link festival elements to collective emotion, the proposed transition from a shared setting to shared identity remains an inference requiring direct testing. The visibility and interpretation of social cues may differ between established participants and newcomers.

The first relationship in the framework is therefore expressed through the following proposition:
P1: Shared event space facilitates the recognition of shared symbols and identity among participants.
Expected outcome: Participants are expected to recognize common interests, symbols and social cues, increasing their perception of a shared identity.

From Shared Identity to Collective Participation

Recognizing a shared identity may influence how participants engage within the event environment. When individuals perceive similarities with others, they may feel more comfortable responding to shared activities and participating alongside the wider group. Event-related symbols and behaviors can communicate that particular forms of participation are recognized and shared within the event setting.

Lee et al. (2016) highlight how distinctive dress, language and behavior can express an individual's connection to an event community. These expressions are not only personal displays of identity but can also be recognized by others. The recognition of shared identity may therefore create a social environment in which participants understand how others are engaging with the event and feel encouraged to participate in similar ways.

Collective participation can take many forms depending on the nature of the event. Participants may cheer at a sporting event, dance during a festival, sing during a concert, join a parade, contribute to a workshop, or participate in shared traditions. These actions allow individuals to express their connection to the event through visible participation. In this sense, shared identity provides a social basis for collective action.

Neville and Reicher (2011) suggest that shared symbols and a sense of common identity can influence how individuals behave within crowds. When participants perceive others as part of a shared group, interpersonal

barriers may be reduced, and collective actions become more meaningful. Participation therefore becomes more than an individual response to event activities. It can become a way of expressing and reinforcing a shared social identity.

P2 concerns readiness to act alongside others, rather than the assumption that identity always produces participation. Shared identity and participation may reinforce one another, as the collective-gathering literature suggests (Pizarro et al., 2022). Future research should therefore distinguish prior identification from identity developed during participation and examine the direction of the relationship.

The second relationship in the framework is therefore proposed as follows:
P2: Shared symbols and identity encourage collective participation within the event.
Expected outcome: Recognition of a shared identity is expected to encourage willingness to join shared activities and collective responses.

From Collective Participation to Social Connection

Collective participation represents the point in the proposed framework where shared identity is expressed through action. Participants move beyond recognizing similarities with others and begin to experience the event alongside them. The importance of collective participation lies not only in the activity itself but also in the awareness that others are participating in the same experience. This shared involvement may create opportunities for emotional responses, interaction, and a growing sense of connection among participants.

The social value of participation may depend on whether the experience is shared with others. An individual may be actively involved in an event without necessarily feeling socially connected to other participants. The framework proposed in this paper therefore places greater emphasis on the collective nature of participation. Social connection may be more likely to develop when participants become aware that their actions and responses are shared with those around them.

Shared actions may contribute to this awareness. Cheering, chanting, dancing, singing, or participating in group activities allow individuals to observe and respond to the behavior of others. Neville and Reicher (2011) explain that shared action can contribute to a sense of relatedness among individuals within crowds. Through these collective actions, participants may become increasingly aware of their connection to the wider group. Such experiences can temporarily reduce interpersonal distance because participants are responding to the event alongside others rather than as isolated individuals.

The relationship between collective participation and social connection can also be understood through communitas. Communitas describes the feelings of equality, solidarity, and togetherness that may emerge through shared experiences (Toraldo et al., 2019). Within participatory events, collective action may provide the conditions through which these feelings develop. Participants do not need to communicate directly or develop personal relationships for social connection to occur. The experience of acting, responding, and feeling alongside others may itself create a temporary sense of relatedness.

This distinction is important to the proposed framework. Participation alone is not treated as evidence of community formation. Instead, collective participation is proposed as a mechanism through which participants may begin to feel socially connected to others within the event environment. The movement from shared action to social connection therefore represents a shift from doing something together to feeling connected because of the shared experience.

Recent work strengthens the rationale for examining this mechanism. Xie and Li (2023) identify inter-attendee interaction as relevant to perceived emotional synchrony. Wood and Alonzo (2026), in a conceptual analysis of festivals in border regions, connect emotional synchrony and social exchange to belonging and mutual understanding. These contributions help explain why collective activity might support connection, but neither establishes P3 or the full sequence across participatory event settings.

The third relationship in the framework is therefore expressed through the following proposition:
P3: Collective participation strengthens social connection among participants.
Expected outcome: Shared actions and responses are expected to strengthen relatedness and interpersonal connection among participants.

From Social Connection to Temporary Belonging

Social connection reflects the sense of relatedness that may develop when participants share actions, emotions, and experiences with others. However, feeling connected during a particular moment is not necessarily the same as feeling that one belongs. The proposed framework suggests that temporary belonging develops when social connection contributes to a broader perception of being part of the event community.

Belonging involves a sense of acceptance, inclusion and connection to a wider social group. Within participatory events, this experience may develop without formal membership or established relationships. Participants may feel comfortable within the event environment because they recognize others who share similar interests and have participated in common activities. The social connections created through these experiences can contribute to a sense that the participant is not simply attending the event but is temporarily part of it.

Social identity provides an important explanation for this process. When individuals recognize similarities between themselves and others, they may begin to identify with a wider group (Lee et al., 2016). Chiang et al. (2017) demonstrate how social identification within an event setting can influence participants' responses to the event and their future behavioral intentions. Within the proposed framework, social connection strengthens this identification by adding an interpersonal and emotional dimension to the recognition of shared identity.

Communitas also contributes to understanding the movement towards belonging. Feelings of equality, solidarity and togetherness can temporarily reduce social boundaries between participants (Toraldo et al., 2019; Ziakas & Boukas, 2013). These feelings may allow participants to experience a sense of inclusion even when they do not personally know those around them. A participant may therefore feel that they belong within the event environment because of the shared social experience rather than because of an existing relationship with other attendees.

The temporary nature of this belonging is central to the framework. Participants may feel included during an event and subsequently return to their usual roles. Heidl's (2025) distinction between community at the event and the community beyond it supports examining these different temporal boundaries. The framework proposes that belonging can be socially meaningful during the event without requiring continuing relationships afterwards.

This distinction also separates temporary belonging from formal community membership. Participants do not need to maintain contact, join an organisation or develop long-term relationships for the experience of belonging to occur. Instead, temporary belonging describes the experience of feeling included within a shared social environment at a particular time. Social connection provides the relational basis through which this sense of inclusion may develop.

P4 distinguishes relational contact from subjective inclusion. Allen et al. (2021) show why opportunities for interaction need to be considered alongside individual motivations and perceptions. Accordingly, the expected outcome is a felt sense of acceptance, not merely a larger number of interactions. Exclusionary group norms or inaccessible activities may interrupt this proposed transition.

The fourth relationship in the framework is therefore expressed through the following proposition:
P4: Social connection contributes to a temporary sense of belonging among participants.
Expected outcome: Social connection is expected to support feeling accepted and included within the event-based group for the duration of the event.

Temporary Belonging as Temporary Community

The final relationship in the framework concerns the interpretation of temporary belonging as the formation of a temporary community. Existing event literature has used concepts such as communitas, social connectedness and social identity to explain the social experiences that occur when people gather. These concepts provide important explanations of togetherness, interpersonal connection and group identification. However, each concept tends to emphasize a particular aspect of the social experience. The concept of temporary community proposed in this paper brings these processes together within the context of participatory events.

Communitas explains the spontaneous feelings of equality and togetherness that may emerge during collective experiences (Toraldo et al., 2019; Ziakas & Boukas, 2013). Temporary community is related to communitas but is not used as an alternative term for the same experience. In the proposed framework, communitas helps explain how social boundaries may be temporarily reduced and how connection between participants can emerge. Temporary community, however, describes the wider social condition that develops when participants experience shared space, recognize common identity, participate collectively, develop social connection and ultimately experience belonging.

Similarly, social connectedness does not necessarily indicate the presence of a community. Participants may feel emotionally connected to others during a particular activity without perceiving themselves as part of a shared group. The framework therefore positions social connection as a stage in the process rather than the final social outcome. Temporary belonging represents a further shift in the participant's experience, where connection contributes to a sense of inclusion within the event's social environment.

The use of the term community requires careful consideration. Traditional understandings of community often emphasize continuity, established relationships, shared locality or formal membership. Participatory events may not meet these conditions because they are temporary and participants may have limited contact before or after the gathering. However, event participants can still experience some of the social characteristics associated with community, including shared identity, collective action, interpersonal connection and belonging. The framework therefore suggests that the duration of a social group should not be the only factor used to determine whether an experience of community has occurred.

The concept of temporary community recognizes that social belonging may be meaningful even when it is short-lived. Participants may leave an event and never interact with the same people again, but the experience of being part of a shared group may remain part of how the event is remembered. This may help explain why participants often describe particular events through collective language, referring to what "we" experienced or what "everyone" felt. The event becomes meaningful not only because of what was presented or organized but because of the participant's temporary position within a wider social experience.

The proposed framework therefore extends existing discussions of event experience by positioning temporary community as a possible social outcome of participatory events. It also connects areas of literature that are frequently examined separately. Event space explains the conditions for gathering, social identity explains the recognition of commonality, collective participation provides shared action, and communitas contributes to understanding social connection and togetherness. Temporary belonging brings these processes together as an experience of being part of an event community for a limited period.

P5 is an interpretive proposition: temporary belonging is understood as community experience when it is situated within the shared identity, participation, and connection described by the framework. Belonging and temporary community should therefore not be measured with identical items and then treated as independent causes and effects. Future research could examine participants' accounts of a shared "we" and their perception of community, alongside evidence of the preceding dimensions. This would assess whether the community interpretation is warranted rather than assume it from attendance alone.

This interpretation has implications for how participatory events are understood and designed. If temporary community is considered a possible social outcome, the role of event management extends beyond delivering activities and satisfying individual participants. Event environments may also be designed to create

opportunities for shared identity to become visible, collective participation to occur, and social connection to develop. The framework therefore shifts attention from the participant as an individual consumer towards the participant as a temporary member of an event-based social group.

The final relationship in the framework is expressed through the following proposition:
P5: Temporary belonging, arising within the proposed process, represents participants' experience of a temporary community within participatory event settings.
Expected outcome: Within the proposed process, temporary belonging is expected to be expressed as a perception of being part of a temporary event community. This is an interpretive outcome, not a separate proven causal effect.

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

The proposed framework provides several directions for event management practice and future research. Event organizers should consider social connection and belonging as possible outcomes of the event experience rather than focusing only on participant satisfaction and program delivery. This requires attention to how event spaces, activities and communication encourage participants to recognize shared interests and engage with others.

Event spaces may be designed to increase opportunities for shared presence and interaction. Areas where participants naturally gather, observe others or participate in common activities can contribute to the social environment of an event. Organizers may also consider how event-related symbols, language, dress and traditions communicate a shared identity. These elements should not be treated only as branding tools but as social cues that may help participants recognize commonality with others.

Opportunities for collective participation should also be intentionally considered in event design. Activities that encourage participants to act, respond, or contribute alongside others may support the development of social connection. However, participation should not be forced or assumed to create belonging automatically. The design of participatory activities should consider the event context and provide different levels of involvement for participants.

The expected outcomes in Table 1 offer provisional design aims: make shared cues understandable, enable voluntary collective activity, support interaction, and assess whether participants actually feel included. Quinn and Kinnunen (2024) caution against assuming uniformly positive social effects. Organizers should therefore seek feedback from newcomers and less involved participants as well as enthusiastic regular attendees; these recommendations remain implications of the conceptual framework, not interventions validated by this paper. Future research should examine the proposed relationships using distinct measures of perceived shared identity, collective participation, social connection and temporary belonging. Repeated observations before, during, and after events could help establish temporal order, account for prior relationships and identification, and test reciprocal or alternative pathways. P1–P4 can inform relational hypotheses; P5 requires assessment of whether temporary belonging is meaningfully experienced as community, rather than an automatic additional path between overlapping constructs.

Qualitative research may also provide a deeper understanding of how participants describe temporary community experiences. Interviews, participant observation and event ethnography could examine the moments when participants begin to feel connected to strangers or perceive themselves as part of a wider group. Such research may be particularly useful in identifying event-specific rituals, symbols and collective behaviors that contribute to belonging.

Ziakas and Boukas (2014) provide a methodological rationale for examining event meanings through phenomenology. Such an approach could explore how participants distinguish a momentary connection from feeling part of a temporary community. The framework should also be examined across different event contexts, including festivals, sporting events, cultural celebrations, community events and business events. The strength and sequence of the proposed relationships may differ according to event size, duration, purpose and

level of participant involvement. Comparative research may therefore help determine whether temporary community formation is consistent across event types or shaped by particular event conditions.

Finally, future research should consider the duration and possible longer-term effects of temporary belonging. Although the framework focuses on community formation during the event, the experience of temporary belonging may influence event memories, future attendance, event identification, and continued engagement. Examining what remains after the temporary community has ended may provide a fuller understanding of the social value of participatory events.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper proposes the Temporary Community Formation Framework to explain how participatory events may support temporary community and belonging. Its contribution is to connect five dimensions—shared event space, shared symbols and identity, collective participation, social connection and temporary belonging—and to specify the expected outcome of each proposition. The framework retains communitas and social identity as complementary explanations of the social experience of events.

Taken together, P1–P5 describe an expected progression from shared presence to perceived community. Shared event space is expected to make common symbols and identity more recognizable (P1). Recognition of shared identity is expected to encourage collective participation (P2), which may strengthen relatedness and interpersonal connection (P3). Such connection is expected to support feeling accepted and included in the event-based group during the event (P4). When this belonging is situated within the preceding dimensions, it is interpreted as participants' experience of a temporary community (P5). P5 therefore expresses the integrative social outcome of the framework, rather than a separate empirically established causal effect.

These outcomes are conditional. Physical proximity, visible symbols or collective activity alone need not produce inclusion, and participants may experience the same event differently. The proposed sequence may be interrupted by exclusion, limited opportunities to interact, or a lack of perceived commonality. Reciprocal relationships are also possible. Temporary community is consequently presented as a possible event-based experience, without requiring formal membership, enduring relationships or continuation after the event.

The framework advances the conceptual argument by making the relationship between event conditions, shared action, social connection and belonging explicit. For organizers, it directs attention to opportunities for voluntary participation and inclusion alongside program delivery. For researchers, it provides a set of differentiated expectations and a clear distinction between the proposed mechanisms and the interpretation of temporary community.

No empirical confirmation of P1–P5 is claimed. Recent and foundational research informs the rationale, but does not validate the complete framework. Future studies should examine the direction and timing of P1–P4, assess whether the community interpretation in P5 is supported by participants' experiences, and compare alternative pathways across event contexts. This would establish whether, for whom, and under what conditions temporary community emerges.

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