

## Full Length Article

## Food festivals and well-being: Extending the PERMA model

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## ABSTRACT

Scholars are calling for more studies on short and long-term well-being outcomes of festival tourism, especially in different cultural settings. This interdisciplinary study applies Seligman's PERMA model to two food festivals in Italy and England. Findings illustrate how food festivals foster visitors' well-being and reveal which PERMA domains provide the greatest impact for participants. The theoretical contribution is the creation of a new conceptual framework of festival tourism well-being outcomes. The framework expands the PERMA model and shows the different pathways and factors that can help promote well-being. This is informed by the empirical contribution, which is the application of PERMA in a relatively new context of study: food festival tourism.

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## Introduction

Tourism can lead to well-being and happiness for those who engage in it (Dolnicar et al., 2012; Zins and Ponocny, 2022). Savouring tourism experiences can also foster positive emotions such as joy and enthusiasm (Miyakawa et al., 2022). Events, which are forms of tourism (Getz and Page, 2016), have been conceptualised as arenas for well-being generation (Jepson and Walters, 2021), in that they help them to develop a sense of community and belonging (Szmigin et al., 2017). Specifically, research on festivals and well-being, as a subjective perception of being well, has gained prominence in recent research. Studies suggest that festivals can promote some kind of social (Jepson et al., 2019), psychological (Mesana and De Guzman, 2022), or spiritual (Rossetti, 2021) well-being. However, the concept of well-being itself has been defined and measured differently by several authors and to date, there is a 'broad range of terminology and conceptual confusion in well-being research' (Goodman et al., 2017, p. 1).

Indeed, 'despite a growing body of tourism and event literature outlining the many motivations for and subjective benefits of attending festivals, the reporting of positive health outcomes remains underdeveloped' (Wood, 2019, p. 323). Happiness appears to be one element of well-being. However, it has also been argued that going on holidays does not increase well-being because it mainly affects the cognitive component of happiness (contentment), and not the affective aspect (hedonism); therefore, tourists think they are happier without really feeling better (Kroesen and Handy, 2014). Thus, tourism might not have a significant enough impact to 'enduringly raise happiness' (Kroesen and Handy, 2014, p.99). Also 'in a festival context, studies on happiness remain a research imperative to date' (Mesana and De Guzman, 2022, p.129). This has led to several calls to explore well-being in festival studies

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(Wu et al., 2020), including more interdisciplinary research (Wood, 2019) and for studies on festivals' long-term benefits (Armbrecht et al., 2021). Also, scholars such as Mair and Weber (2019) have recommended that more research be conducted on festival outcomes and well-being in diverse cultural settings.

While there are several theories to identify and measure well-being factors, this study uses Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, which identifies positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment as the well-being domains that promote human flourishing. This model has been selected because it is a multidimensional approach to study well-being and has been widely applied to study well-being at events and festivals (Oliva and Colombo, 2021). It has also been chosen because there is a need to further expand it. For instance, Vada et al. (2020) call for deeper studies that expand PERMA to include concepts such as gratitude, humour and character strengths. Similarly, Filo and Coghlan (2016) argued that future research should focus on 'the long-term and cumulative effects of the PERMA domains activated through these events'. Furthermore, they recommended that 'longitudinal data... be collected from event participants at different stages (pre, during, and post-event) to track changes in well-being and the domains of well-being' (p.196).

The theoretical contribution of this paper is the creation of a new conceptual framework of PERMA well-being outcomes. The framework expands PERMA's positive emotions, meaning, and accomplishment components. Specifically, it features new elements, such as feelings of freedom and optimism, spirituality and mindfulness, learning and bodily accomplishment. It also shows how the components are all related and influence each other and includes the different pathways and factors that can help promote well-being. The empirical contribution of the study is the application of PERMA in a relatively new context of study: food festival tourism. This study applies Seligman's (2011) PERMA model to two established food festivals in different countries: Italy (Mercatino del Gusto di Maglie festival, Maglie, Province of Lecce) and England (Ludlow Food Festival, Shropshire). Understanding well-being in the context of food festivals is important as food can increase tourists' sense of being well (Pourfakhimi et al., 2021) and food festivals have the power of changing habits and food choices (Organ et al., 2015). Nevertheless, only a few studies have explored how food festivals generate well-being (Francesc and Pont-Llagostera, 2021), especially in different cultural contexts (Organ et al., 2015). This paper's contribution is to illustrate how food festival participation fosters visitors' well-being and to analyse which PERMA domains provide the greatest impact for festival visitors. So, while this paper does not measure subjective well-being, it does answer the call to advance knowledge on the application of PERMA (Seligman, 2018) while also carrying out interdisciplinary well-being research in different cultural settings.

## Literature review

### Well-being

Seligman (2011), drawing on positive psychology, created the well-being theory which identifies positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA) as the elements of well-being and when combined promote human flourishing. As mentioned, PERMA will be used in this research because it is a multidimensional approach and, while it has been widely applied, needs to be expanded. PERMA has been criticised for not expanding the concept of subjective well-being (Goodman et al., 2017) and has been described as redundant (Kashdan, 2017). However, Seligman (2018) answered these critiques by claiming that PERMA is not an alternative to subjective well-being, but constitutes some elements of it. He also stated that the theory is not exhaustive and further elements could and should be added to the model, such as health and vitality. As measuring well-being is the focus of PERMA, Seligman (2018) also noted that relationships, meaning and accomplishments cannot be measured by self-report alone; more comprehensive methods are needed. He added: 'At present little is known about which interventions impact which elements of PERMA the most and which interventions merely impact global SWB [subjective well-being]... So the investigation of what are the best elements of SWB is in its infancy' (Seligman, 2018, pp. 2-3). This paper answers these calls in its investigation of PERMA at food festivals in that it takes health (physical well-being) into account and applies methods other than self-reporting to better understand well-being. First, it is imperative to first review PERMA in detail.

*Positive emotions* include happiness, life satisfaction, hope, pride, feeling good, contentment and joy (Seligman, 2011). These, like engagement, can only be measured subjectively, while the other well-being pillars (relationships, meaning and accomplishment) have both subjective and objective components. People should try to maximise all five pillars. For instance, social, personal and emotional intelligence play a crucial role in expanding one's sense of being well and happy. It is important to recognise others' emotions and happiness (social intelligence) and then to use 'that knowledge to understand and guide your behaviours' (Seligman, 2011, p. 247) (personal intelligence). These two aspects form one's emotional intelligence. Moreover, Seligman (2011, p. 140) suggested ways to take advantage of one's emotions, such as becoming 'an active participant' by identifying and increasing opportunities to produce positive emotions. This paper explores whether food festivals could be one of these opportunities. Additionally, it has been proven that being outdoors produces psychological well-being, for example by leading to a more positive body image and greater physical well-being (Stieger et al., 2022). Good physical health has also been associated with optimism and positive psychological well-being (Seligman, 2011).

*Engagement* refers to a deep level of absorption and focus (Seligman, 2011); like positive emotions, it can only be measured subjectively and can be pursued for its own sake, without the subject wishing to gain any of the other pillars. When people are engaged in an activity, they are fully absorbed, lose self-consciousness and it seems to them that time has stopped. For example, in tourism, flow can be achieved through tourists' perception of soundscape (Lu et al., 2022). The importance of *being in the moment* is connected to the value of savouring positive rather than negative events, which can be beneficial in combating depression and anxiety. This led Seligman (2011) to formulate the What-Went-Well exercise, which helps people to savour positive life events. For instance, living in the moment can increase the intensity of tourists' positive emotions (Gao and Kerstetter, 2018).

*Relationships* encompass bonding, bridging, connections and social integration (Seligman, 2011). Academic deliberations have shown that performing actions and sharing experiences with someone, even if there is no communication with that person, can amplify one's experience (Boothby et al., 2014). Doing things together is therefore better than doing them alone (Wood et al., 2023). Epley and Schroeder (2014) also claimed that forming random social connections and connecting to strangers increases the well-being of all concerned. Thus, both social bonding and bridging appear to be well-being generators. In tourism as well, talking to strangers and building family relationships play a significant role in developing positive emotions (Gao and Kerstetter, 2018).

*Meaning* refers to reason, identity, sense of purpose, personal value and the feeling of being part of something greater (Seligman, 2011). It is both a subjective and an objective state, and 'is often pursued for its own sake' (Seligman, 2011, p. 18). Additionally, it has been argued that experiences can produce happiness more than physical objects because the feelings produced by the latter are subjective and short-term (Gilovich and Gallo, 2020). People have been found to be more satisfied and happier by experiential purchases, including travelling and entertainment, than by materialistic purchases (Kumar et al., 2020). In particular, these experiences enable them to perceive in-the-moment happiness (Kumar et al., 2020).

*Accomplishment*, also called achievement, includes growth, success, autonomy, competency and meeting goals (Seligman, 2011). It can be pursued for its own sake, such as by winning a card game, but can also be linked to evanescent positive emotions or the sense of being part of something greater. Accomplishment can be objectively defined, but is subject to individual ambition and cultural characteristics (Khaw and Kern, 2014). Another way to flourish, according to Seligman (2011, p. 110), is related to the 'virtue of slowness'. In order to achieve this, especially in relation to intelligence, there is a need to slow down mental speed. Intelligence and learning are, in fact, core elements of the well-being theory and are closely related to success, accomplishment, happiness and meaning.

### *Culinary tourism, food festivals and well-being*

Literature on tourism and well-being is far from scarce, and is continuing to expand. Several studies have explored whether and how tourism can generate well-being, both hedonic and eudaimonic (Dolnicar et al., 2012; Filep et al., 2024). For example, tourism can allow people to (re)discover their identities, promote their long-term mental and physical well-being and generate happiness by temporarily forgetting their commitments (Smith and Diekmann, 2017; Zins and Ponocny, 2022). Smith and Diekmann (2017, p. 9) created the 'Spectrum of Wellbeing and Examples of Types of Tourism', according to which cultural tourism produces medium-term eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, and also theorised the 'Model of Integrative Wellbeing Tourism Experience', whereby an integrative well-being tourism experience is made of three components: pleasure and relaxation; altruistic and sustainable activities; and meaningful experiences like education and self-development. And conscious that the processes that generate leisure tourists' well-being are understudied, Zhang (2023) noticed that bonding and reminiscing the past can increase well-being in older adults. Nevertheless, missing in this discussion is an in-depth exploration of long-lasting well-being outcomes.

Several studies have used PERMA to explore well-being in tourism. For instance, Filep and Deery (2010) theorised a happiness framework 'where tourist happiness is understood in terms of positive emotions, engagement and meaning' (Nawijn and Filep, 2016, p. 222). While this framework has been criticised (Nawijn, 2016), some suggestions for its expansion have been provided, including focusing on a specific tourism context, such as dark events, and providing more 'in-depth, qualitative, emic investigations that will tell us more about the nature of tourist well-being in these contexts and how well-being is experienced' (Nawijn and Filep, 2016, p. 222). Mirehie and Gibson (2020) applied the PERMA model specifically to female snow-sport tourists and found that participation in active snow sports and travelling to snow sport environments increased women's well-being.

Recent studies have focused on events/event tourism as occasions for well-being promotion and intervention (Rossetti, 2021). Zhang et al. (2023) identified how some aspects of well-being occurred among event tourists through an application of positive psychology. Some of these studies have included applications of PERMA. Filo and Coghlan (2016), for example, used it to explore well-being at charity sport events, and identified five additional components of well-being in this context: challenge, intention to participate again, novelty/play, learning/homage and lack of solidarity. They were also able to conclude that positive emotions, relationships, meaning and accomplishment were the most evident and articulated domains. Similarly, Oliva and Colombo (2021) applied PERMA to understanding emotions, cultural identity and well-being at music festivals, but they only focused on three dimensions of the PERMA framework.

More specifically, festivals, as a type of event, can promote social and community benefits. Wu et al. (2020) found that three types of communities could be created at Chinese music festivals: spontaneous types, those created incidentally; ideological groups of like-minded people; and normative communities that form new social rules and structures. These three types of communities promote a feeling of safety and identity self-actualisation. Festival participants can also engage with local residents and create a "playful celebration through... 'protoplasmic' encounters" (Giovanardi et al., 2014, p. 113). Szmigin et al. (2017) investigated themes such as identity, escapism, self-expression and co-creation of personal identity at festivals and claimed that spending time with like-minded people promotes feelings of *communitas* and sense of belonging, without, however, linking these to well-being. Festival tourism can shape identities, as festivals are sites for 'identity-making possibilities' (Mason, 2015, p. 93), but only a few studies (e.g. Zhou et al., 2021) explored this in relation to PERMA.

Additionally, limited research has investigated well-being at food festival tourism. For instance, it has been demonstrated that food festivals, which are forms of food tourism, through engagement and positive emotions can change tourists' behaviours, such as food-purchasing intentions, for up to six months after their visit (Organ et al., 2015). More recently, Pourfakhimi et al. (2021) used PERMA to analyse food tourism in Iran; they observed that 'authentic food experiences are strongly associated with positive emotions and the meaningfulness of a trip' (p. 178) and that 'Higher food involvement and lower neophobia [a reluctance to try new foods] are associated with stronger perceptions that authentic food experiences contribute to well-being' (p. 178).

In summary, the main key limitations and knowledge gaps concern the review of PERMA and its application to different interventions, especially considering all its components for both temporary and enduring outcomes. This paper is going to address these gaps and contribute to the above-mentioned research by expanding and applying PERMA to food festival tourism, a new context of study, in England and Italy. Specifically, it suggests a new framework that expands positive emotions, meaning, and accomplishment and shows how PERMA components are all related and influence each other. The framework also explains the different pathways and factors that can help promote well-being.

## Methods

This research takes a social constructivist approach, and employed mixed multiple methods to collect data in three phases across two case studies of visitors to food festivals. We collected mixed data in the form of questionnaires (pilot study, non analytical), qualitative data through researcher observations, field notes, and in-depth semi-structured interviews (main study). Further details of the three phases of our research are presented in later paragraphs and in [Fig. 1](#). The two food festival case studies in this research take place in England, UK (Ludlow Food Festival, Shropshire), and in Italy (Mercatino del Gusto di Maglie, Maglie, Province of Lecce). The two festivals were selected according to the location of the research team members, and adhered to five key criteria: 1) one should be based in Italy and one in England; 2) they should be established (e.g. at least five years old), 3) they should have a generic food focus (not be focused on one specific type of food, e.g. vegan, chocolate, cheese); 4) they should feature several activities such as tastings, talks and shows; and 5) they run between June and September. The festivals were selected to test the PERMA model and there was no intention to compare them due to the cultural differences between the two countries.

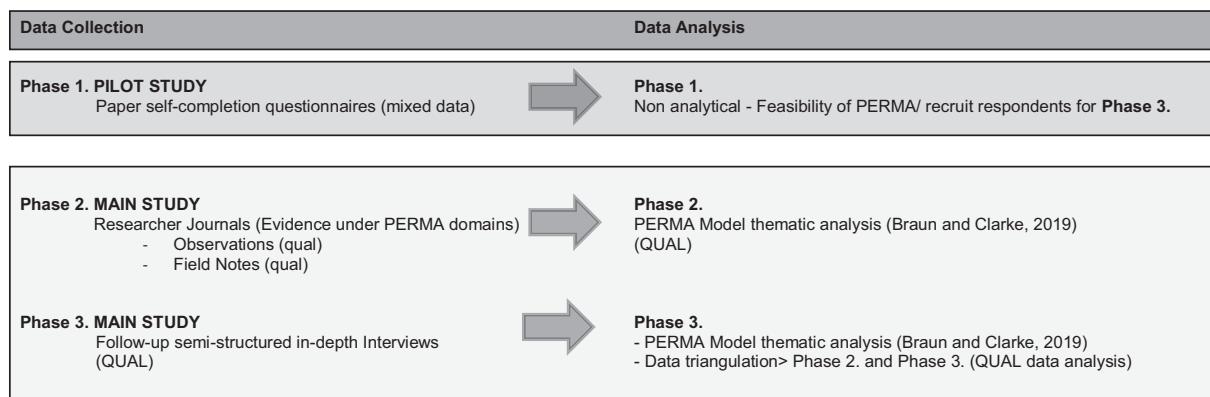
Ludlow Food Festival, founded in 1995 to promote local business, is one of three main annual events in the town, along with Ludlow Spring Festival and Ludlow Magnalonga. It usually lasts for three days in September and is located inside the Ludlow Castle walls. In 2022 it featured tastings, trails, slow food workshops, kids' activities and a live fire cooking stage. There were also a few events outside the castle, such as the Sausage Trail and Bill's Kitchen dinner, which were located around the town. All events took place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday during the day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Friday night from 6.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.

The Mercatino del Gusto in Maglie was first organised in 2000 and lasts for five to seven days in August. The festival consists of an open free-entry market throughout the town that features several different sellers as well as more private ticketed events like 'GustoLab' (TasteLab). Each street has a lighting banner that indicates the type of food sold on that street, such as coffee, desserts, wine, spirits and ice cream. The festival is only open at nighttime, from around 7 p.m. to midnight. In 2022, besides food vendors, there were also different types of experiences in the streets, such as the 'pasta experience' square, the 'street food' corner and literary events inside the main courtyard.

Our research has been designed to test the feasibility of and ratify the PERMA model domains across the two food festivals. Our data collection and analysis methods were designed across three phases ([Fig. 1](#)).

Phase 1 of our data collection (Pilot Study) began with visits to the Mercatino del Gusto di Maglie festival in Italy (1–7 August 2022) and the Ludlow Food Festival (9–11 September 2022). During our visits to the festivals we displayed posters at main entrances to inform visitors of our research and then distributed and collected paper self-completion questionnaires ( $n = 344$ ; Italy,  $n = 190$ , UK,  $n = 154$ ) at various locations within the festival sites, taking care not to recapture respondents. The questionnaires collected mixed data and were used only as an exploratory pilot study firstly to assess the feasibility of testing the PERMA model indicators within two different countries. Secondly, we used the questionnaires/ pilot study to connect with festival visitors and to recruit them as future interviewees for our third phase of data collection and analysis. The data generated by the questionnaires was a pilot study only and not intended to generate 'deep' data or theoretical insights and therefore did not form part of our data analysis.

Our second phase of data collection was qualitative and ran simultaneously with the first; the researchers wrote reflective research journals containing field notes and observations upon the festival, its attendees and their behaviours, its organisation, the venues, the atmosphere/ambience, our methodological notes and our experience of the festival, which were categorised under the PERMA model headings for future triangulation (see [Fig. 2](#)). This answers [Seligman's \(2018\)](#) call for the use of methods beyond self-reporting to



**Fig. 1.** Methods of data collection and analysis. Source: authors.

PERMA Model Domains		
1.	<b>Positive emotions:</b>	happiness, life satisfaction, hope, pride, feeling good, contentment, joy
2.	<b>Engagement:</b>	absorption, flow, focused, in the moment
3.	<b>Relationships:</b>	bonding, bridging, social integration, connection
4.	<b>Meaning:</b>	reason, identity, sense of purpose, personal value, being part of something greater
5.	<b>Accomplishment:</b>	achievement, growth, success, autonomy, competency, meeting goals

Fig. 2. PERMA model of human flourishing. Source: authors, adapted from Seligman (2011, 2018); Goodman et al. (2017).

analyse relationships, meaning and accomplishment. The purpose of the second phase of qualitative data collection enabled a more holistic exploration of participants' festival participation (Wu et al., 2020) and explicit qualitative analysis of PERMA through which we make our contributions to knowledge.

During the pilot study (Phase 1) we talked to participants about our third phase of data collection (follow-up semi-structured in-depth interviews), and if they agreed to take part we asked if they would also take photographs on their mobile phones for later use as photo elicitation to aid reminiscence. After we had visited both festivals, we contacted all the participants who had agreed to be interviewed and began our third and final phase of qualitative data collection. The interviews took place from September to November 2022 at a mutually agreed convenient time for researchers and respondents. Interview questions were constructed using the five domains of the PERMA model, but still allowed the interviewer the flexibility to return to questions to gain further information. The interviews were structured as follows: one break-the-ice question, demographic questions (e.g. age, gender...), details of their festival participation (e.g. days, group etc), and questions for each PERMA domain (e.g. could you please talk about the range of emotions you felt while visiting the festival?; did you feel fulfilled at the festival? If so, why and how?; have you improved (or not) your social relations at the festival, even with people you didn't know?). During the interviews, photo elicitation was used to prompt discussion around participants' memories, thoughts and feelings about their festival experience. All interviews were recorded and carried out online using Zoom and Microsoft Team and lasted on average 33 min or more. Following the completion of all in-depth interviews the recordings were independently transcribed, and the Italian transcripts were translated into English.

During the festival, banners, flyers and brochures were distributed including details of the research, so participants were aware that observations were taking place and that they might be asked to complete a questionnaire. The research was approved by festival organisers prior to granting us access to the festival sites. All participants in all phases of our data collection were given an information sheet and privacy notice forms, and understood that their participation was completely voluntary. Written consent was obtained for questionnaires and interviews. We took a non-intrusive approach to data collection and recognised the importance of leisure time and the significance of deep sociality within it, as such participants were free to stop completing the questionnaires or interviews at any time to have a break or to withdraw from the study.

On-site purposive sampling was used during the pilot study to recruit participants to complete questionnaires and then to recruit participants for interviews (Phase 3). Ten festival visitors were selected from the Maglie festival and 10 from the Ludlow festival. The details of all our interviewees from England and Italy can be seen in Table 1. Through purposive on-site sampling we aimed to select, in both festivals, a mix of: first-time and repeat visitors, varying age ranges (over 18 years of age) and genders, a variety of educational

**Table 1**  
Details of the interviews and the interviewees. Source: authors.

NR	Country	Gender	Age	Type of visitor	Group
1	England	Female	61–70	Repeat	Husband + Friends
2	England	Male	51–60	First-time	Wife
3	England	Female	41–50	First-time	Husband
4	England	Male	51–60	First-time	Wife
5	England	Male	41–50	Repeat	Wife + Children
6	England	Male	31–40	First-time	20 people (hen-party)
7	England	Male	51–60	Repeat	Girlfriend
8	England	Female	51–60	Repeat	Husband
9	England	Female	21–30	First-time	Parents + Boyfriend + Friend
10	England	Female	21–30	First-time	Parents + Friend
11	Italy	Female	61–70	Repeat	Husband + Friend
12	Italy	Female	41–50	Repeat	Husband + Child + Friends
13	Italy	Male	41–50	Repeat	Family + Friends
14	Italy	Female	41–50	Repeat	3–4 Families
15	Italy	Male	41–50	Repeat	Children + Friends
16	Italy	Female	51–60	First-time	Husband + Child + Friends
17	Italy	Male	51–60	First-time	Wife + Child + Friends
18	Italy	Female	41–50	First-time	Husband + Child + other 2 families
19	Italy	Female	41–50	First-time	Partner
20	Italy	Female	41–50	First-time	Friends

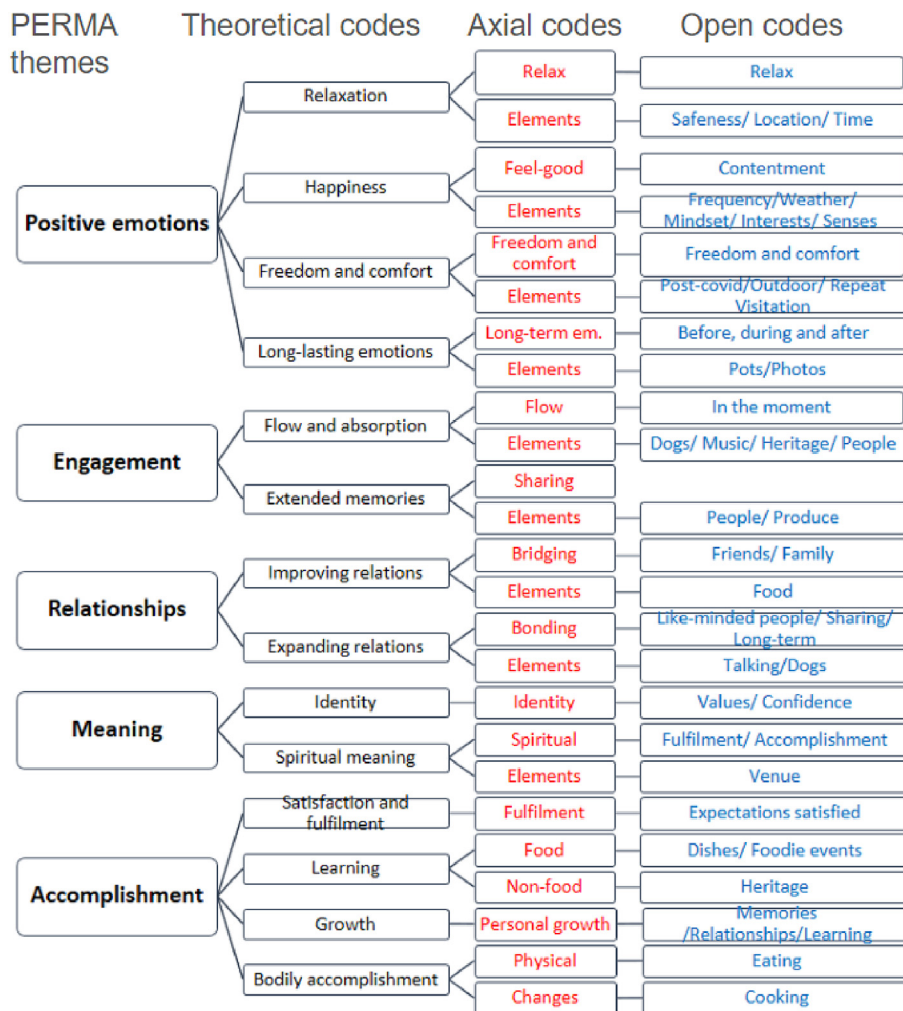


Fig. 3. Coding diagram. Source: authors.

backgrounds and occupations and varied group sizes. We did this to reduce any potential for bias within the sample, improve its reliability and validity and to ensure that we fairly tested all five PERMA domains.

The analytical relationship between data in our study is between phases 2 and 3 (Main study) (qual>qual>QUAL) with qualitative data as the source of validation for all contributions to knowledge through deeper accounts of PERMA. This would not be possible with a quantitative data collection and analysis approach. With the exclusion of the pilot study (Phase 1) our data analysis was a twofold process.

Our second phase of data analysis was qualitative and applied Braun and Clarke's (2015) manual reflective thematic analysis to the five PERMA domains as evidenced in our research journals, field notes and observations. Our third phase of data analysis (also qualitative) took place in two parts. Firstly, the 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews also underwent thematic analysis. All authors analysed each interview and identified new and emergent themes thought to be unique to this study. Authors then shared the existing and emergent themes with each other. Secondly, they revisited their festival journal analysis data sets (observations, field notes) and triangulated these with the in-depth semi-structured interviews to uncover validation between researcher journals and our contributions to knowledge towards PERMA which emanated from the analysis of our in-depth interviews (qual>qual>QUAL) (Fig. 3). Authors then revisited literature around the PERMA model to ensure that their findings were valid and justifiable. This manuscript is based on the main study (second and third phases). The following sections present and discuss the findings, which are cited with the participant number (P1–20; see Table 1) as identifier for the interviews; 'RD' refers to research diaries.

## Findings

### Positive emotions

Positive emotions was the first most frequently occurring and articulated PERMA domain. Analysis also revealed four sub-themes: relaxation; happiness; freedom and comfort; and long-term positive emotions.

### Relaxation

Data shows that participants were relaxed, perceiving 'a holiday feel' (P1), since 'the situation makes you feel rather calm, it is serene as a place, as an event' (P14). All this was also noted in several observational notes: in Ludlow, 'people are relaxed, they walk slowly, and the tables help people to stop and take breaks. At the Fire Stage one performance is running late and the performer said it will probably start at 11.30ish. The crowd is laughing so it means that they don't mind waiting for a bit longer - the atmosphere is really relaxed' (RD).

Respondents cited a number of reasons for this sense of relaxation. For some the festival was relaxing because it was a safe environment with 'plenty of stewards' (P4). Others enjoyed the fact that it was 'far away from everyday life, from work, from children. It was a quiet time' (P19). Being on holiday and enjoying free time was therefore relaxing: the festival was 'an evening... of vacation, of leisure' (P20) and conveyed a 'sort of weekend feeling' (P1). The festival 'enables you to forget the stresses of life' (P2). Time was therefore perceived as slow, with events proceeding at a 'leisurely pace' (P3). All of these aspects promoted well-being. Relaxation was interlinked with the feeling of happiness: 'I was pretty mellow and relaxed and I had... warm positive feelings' (P7). Visitors were happy because they were relaxed, and vice versa.

### Happiness

People were 'very happy' (P19) because the festival 'does lift your mood... it is uplifting' (P7), 'it's heart-warming, it's positive, it's happy' (P6). The annual and brief frequency of the festival helped to make people happy: 'I wouldn't like to do it every evening, because it's still beautiful but up to a certain point' (P13). Similarly, the 'venue' (P2) and the local heritage fostered contentment. In Italy, 'walking there in Maglie was pleasant' (P12). Likewise, in England it was an important factor: '[it's] the history of the town... which makes Ludlow such a pleasant day out' (P7). Furthermore, the 'weather' (P2) helped people to feel good. In Italy people enjoyed the evening festival because 'during the summer the morning is hotter' (P18), while in England, they appreciated the summer season, because 'it was a sunny day... [and] sun always lifts the mood' (P2).

Additionally, several personal factors generated happiness. For instance, P3 said that it 'depends very much on the mindset of the individual going there'; when 'you're in a good mood, you're there to enjoy yourself' (P4). So, pre-existing personal expectations impacted how people perceived the experience, as well as their states of mind and feelings. Furthermore, pre-existing interests, such as 'a real interest in food and produce and sort of getting to know sort of farmers' (P5) shaped the choice to attend and the outcomes. Finally, bodily senses modified how people perceived the festival and, in turn, the well-being they gained from it. 'It's nice to stay there, walk around, observe the city, meet people, chat' (P19). Smells played a central role from some: 'you walk past a lot of stalls and you get different smells... so smell is part of it really, you know so yeah you feel happy' (P2).

### Freedom and comfort

Visitors enjoyed the post-Covid freedom: 'It's great to be feeling that you're returning to normal again after Covid... it was back to normal, family thing, everybody happy, people laughing, people enjoying their food' (P1). Being outdoors also made people feel free. 'One of the advantages of an open-air festival is that... you don't feel so enclosed so you know you feel freer' (P2). An interviewee explained that seeing green spaces had 'a good impact on [their] well-being, [because they] spend quite a lot of time studying and spending time indoors' (P9). In Ludlow, 'from the tower you can see the fields, the hills, a river: it's a gorgeous view' (RD). Additionally, being a repeat visitor and knowing the place made the experience comfortable: 'it's that traditional thing, that sort of we are all creatures of comfort and creatures of habit so... it's happening in the same place, you know that place is a safe place, you know... it becomes a safe place because you know it' (P5).

### Long-lasting positive emotions

The experience generated long-term positive emotions; according to P11, the festival creates 'a beautiful thing that stays inside you' long-term. These positive feelings started before the festival: the experience 'gives you that sense as I say, contentment and optimism and it's something good to look forward to... it helps you maintain a, well that's called a positive mental attitude... from the time you start planning' (P7). These feelings also last once the festival is over 'for several days' (P17) or 'for the week ahead' (P2). Happiness can even last 'through several more months of your life... and also of course you're thinking I'm going back again next year and it gives you more to look forward to in the future' (P7).

Some tangible objects helped participants to recollect positive emotions: a prime example was a clay-pot-making experience at Ludlow. An attendee commented that the pot would 'always be a memento and therefore a memory of that day' (P5). Photos also fostered positive reminiscence as they 'will remind us of the good times spent together' (P18). Even during the interviews, the photos generated positive emotions: 'it's lovely to like look back at the memory and it definitely elicits... positive emotions and... when you're... stressed and whatever, it's lovely to look back at those photos and remember that, you know, you've had kind of positive times' (P9).

### Engagement

#### Flow and absorption.

Participants explained that they enjoyed being *in the moment*. P3 mentioned that festivals are a way to 'give yourself some space to slow down, enjoy things, be very much more in the moment, rather than concentrating on all the other things that might bother you outside it'. One respondent explained how this contributed to their well-being:

'something like this [the festival is]... just full of lovely people and lovely food and lovely experiences and dogs and music... you're not worried about the future, you're not worried about what's at home, you're not worried about the ironing' (P6)

People were 'not bored' (P15), as the events were captivating and entertaining. This was because 'there was always something to see, if not the local stalls or dishes. Even the architecture...[and] I wasn't careful, you know, to look at the clock, so I didn't care [about the time]' (P18). An observational note from the Italian festival reports further supports this finding: 'While completing the questionnaire, someone said: "I don't think about my life at the festival, maybe in the car coming here, but not now. I come to walk, see what's new, maybe meet new people".'

#### *Extended good memories*

The attendees' flow and absorption were clearly extended after the festival by the long-term positive memories they created by talking to friends and reminiscing about the experience: 'It certainly left me with a beautiful memory' (P15). Several elements generated these extended good memories. First, the social atmosphere: food festivals 'are certainly experiences lived together with friends, friends and family. In short, they leave you precisely this beautiful memory' (P17). P1 also mentioned that 'over the next few days a lot of people referenced the food festival and so it brought up nice memories of it'. And second, buying and eating the produce helped those good memories last: 'you buy food at the festival which you enjoy later in the week and it brings back memories or you've had at last a chance to sample this maybe and it extends the pleasure' (P1).

#### *Relationships*

This was the second most evident and articulated PERMA domain. Participants both strengthened and expanded their social relations at the festivals.

#### *Improving existing relationships*

People reinforced their existing social connections, for example with 'acquaintances, friends' (P16). 'It was an opportunity for fun, exchange or jokes, happy moments, so it was certainly a good time to spend with friends' (P15). An Italian observational note reports: 'the festival seems to be a meeting place with friends' (RD). Some enjoyed 'meeting with... family' (P9), and with old friends: 'thanks to the festival I saw old friends and even family members that I hadn't met for a while and therefore it certainly helped to get closer to these people...I saw them again after the festival' (P12). Existing relations were therefore strengthened: 'when you find yourself with acquaintances, friends in these manifestations, [you] bond even more in the relationship, because... you see yourself in a different situation from the usual situations' (P17). Food was perceived as promoting relationships because 'food is conviviality, food gives serenity and brings many people together' (P18).

#### *Expanding relationships and incidental interactions*

Participants also expanded their social relationships and perceived these interactions as well-being generators: 'I got opportunities to talk to a few new people... it's improved my sort of social network' (P5). P4 remarked of food festivals that 'it's a bit like attending group therapy, isn't it, because you're all there for the same... reason and enjoying the same thing... [there are] like-minded people'. P3 explained in detail how socially valuable festivals can be, especially for those people experiencing isolation:

'just passing a few words with somebody that in your normal life you would never have those moments to talk to... and these events are a good opportunity for that, but also for people who may be more lonely, they could be the start of something where they might be able to forge those relationships longer-term' (P3).

Interestingly, queueing was also seen as a way to get to know people: 'because standing in line is a way for us to also chat with those around us' (P12). In Ludlow, 'people are queueing for coffee, but don't seem to mind. They smile, chat, but I don't think they know each other' (RD). Dogs also promoted casual conversations: 'when people chat to other people with animals it just makes people proud they've got a lovely dog and other people are happy to chat' (P1).

#### *Sharing, collective memories, and long-term relationships*

Going back to the concept of happiness, results revealed that it was shared: 'I also noticed from the few words that we exchanged also from other people, a light-hearted attitude and therefore it was a context, I was able to notice, general one of joy, of lightheartedness' (P15). Attendees share 'food' and 'comments are made on the beautiful things that are seen' (P18). Interestingly some claimed that sharing the experience even produced a shared language:

'We've been together for many, many years and so you kind of get that, almost a second language that other people don't understand because they haven't been through the same things that you've been through, so it kind of adds to that vocabulary that we've got, that encyclopaedia of shared experiences' (P3).

As P9 put it: 'If I just went on my own... you wouldn't have that element, it's nice to kind of discuss memories together, like positive memories... it makes them last more'. These collective memories promote well-being: 'when we all get together we sort of relive those memories from sort of 20 plus years ago... it's [a] positive experience... which is made all the better by sharing it with people' (P5). Sharing food after the experience also prolonged the positive emotions and improved relationships as people 'go on talking about [the experience] all year round' (P11).



## Meaning

### *Identity, personal value, and confidence*

Festival participation strengthened people's identities by, for example, bringing back memories from the past: 'festivals of this nature always remind me of when I was little... It is a recall of some memories from the past' (P13). Others considered that the experience reinforces 'your existing sort of values and beliefs... it's nice to spend some time indulging your foodie passion' (P4). Some even perceived an increased feeling of confidence: 'it felt like there was no judgement there, it was just you were there being who you needed to be and that was fine, so even that can give a sort of confidence' (P6).

### *Spiritual meaning*

A few respondents perceived a sense of higher purpose in attending the festival, which was linked to a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment. For example, P9 felt fulfilled because the festival 'kind of made me realise that... life is more about... the bigger picture and spending time with people... [and] you feel... fulfilled in the sense... I'm helping small businesses'. Even though most interviewees did not mention a sense of being part of or serving something bigger than themselves, for some, the local heritage created a spiritual discovery, 'an evanescent thing' (P19).

'Ludlow is very cultural... it's also quite a spiritual place... because obviously it's got a history within the castle walls, so... I think the fact that it has... kind of a spiritual essence where you can imagine the people who would've been there previously... that definitely adds some depth to the experience' (P7).

How the venue was decorated also created a particular atmosphere. For instance, in Maglie, festival-goers noted the props and decorations: 'when I went up to the terrace, before this year's laboratory of taste started, being there with all those lights, with those tables set, it was exciting, wasn't it? You say uh wow, how nice' (P11). In England, researchers noted: 'Friday night at the Fire Stage – there's a DJ, rope lights, cocktails, a big fire, and people are sitting around it: it's very emotional, cosy, magical' (RD).

### *Accomplishment*

#### *Satisfaction and fulfilment*

Some attendees recalled that they felt fulfilled by the festival, and the reasons for this were diverse. In some cases, expectations were fulfilled: 'I felt fulfilled that it was an event that was very much in line with what we were looking for' (P3). People were feeling 'very pleased... satisfied' (P16). All this seems very subjective and not fully in line with Seligman's view of accomplishment as personal success that can be objectively recognised. An interviewee explained how this feeling of fulfilment is subjective in comparison with other more objective fulfilling experiences and how it can last long-term:

'it's not like, you know, we do a good job at work... it's not that kind of fulfilment... but in terms of, yeah, did I achieve what I wanted to do on the day? Yeah. And do I look forward to going back again? Yeah... the good thing with a food and drink festival is that... you can literally do 48 hours or 72 hours because you're... fulfilled in as much as your appetite is satisfied so... you can actually maintain that, the enjoyment for much, much longer... [because] you can replenish your energy levels' (P7).

### *Learning*

Achievement was also obtained by learning something new. Festival visitors learned 'practical cookery things' (P1) and 'suggestions for certain dishes' (P11). This happened because 'you have the opportunity to see the product, the company that produces it, as it is displayed to you' (P17). The festival also 'points you in the direction of other foodie events' (P1). This was supported by the researchers' observations: 'the educational and cultural aspect is very visible. There are sensory education workshops and these are also opportunities to meet the producers and their products' (RD, Maglie). Participants also learned about the local tangible and intangible heritage. For instance, 'walking through the streets, it gives you the opportunity to get to know the corners or courtyards that otherwise we would not have had the opportunity to get to know' (P12). According to P17, this learning can be therapeutic for international tourists because the festival 'teaches those who come from outside to enjoy our foods which are very natural, very poor, but at the same time very nutritious'.

### *Growth*

According to some respondents, 'every experience makes you grow' (P3). At food festivals, 'you grow as a human being... you're going for more than just the entertainment value, you're going there for the experience and the memories' (P2). The perception of growth was linked to memories, building 'relationships' (P2) and learning. For instance, 'meeting different people is always a way of growing... you learn something new from being at the [festival] show, you know, talking to different people and thinking about ingredients' (P5).

### *Bodily accomplishment*

Accomplishment, fulfilment, and satisfaction were also physically achieved. The act of feeling 'hungry' (P2) and eating led to bodily satisfaction: 'what I ate... made me feel good' (P16); 'I think there's something nice about buying stuff and the anticipation of eating it

and then you have the enjoyment of eating it... [it's] kind of momentary happiness' (P3). So, at food festivals people can satiate hunger and feel accomplished: 'there is the tasting, that... remain[s] with you, you necessarily have something left inside you' (P11). The researchers also observed that 'people eat, drink, talk, smile... One woman says: it's delicious' (RD, Maglie). Behavioural changes were also noted. For example, some claimed that, after learning new dishes at the festival, they cooked more or cooked differently: 'we went back and picked up some cookery ideas which we will put into progress in weeks to come' (P1); 'I think I've cooked more [since then]' (P6).

**Discussion**

The theoretical contribution of this paper is the creation of a conceptual framework (Fig. 4) of shared and long-lasting well-being generation at food festivals with the PERMA outcomes and factors that influence them. Answering calls to further explore the PERMA domains (Seligman, 2018; Vada et al., 2020), positive emotions, meaning, and accomplishment components have been expanded. Findings showed that positive emotions not only included happiness, contentment and joy, but also feelings of freedom and optimism due to the post-pandemic scenario. Meaning went beyond identity, sense of purpose and personal value by encompassing a degree of spirituality and mindfulness. This confirms that festival tourism promotes spiritual well-being as 'travel experiences can be touching on a spiritual level' (Zins and Ponocny, 2022,p.7). Similarly, accomplishment was expanded to not only comprise achievement, growth, success and competency but also learning and bodily accomplishment. The feeling of growing by learning is indeed not new in tourism (Zins and Ponocny, 2022), nor in festival studies (Rossetti, 2021). This answers Seligman's (2018) call for more studies on different types of interventions to help establish which ones can impact PERMA elements the most.

Moreover, the analysis reveals that the PERMA components are all interrelated and influence each other (Fig. 4), which supports Filo and Coghlan's (2016) argument that dimensions of PERMA can appear together and overlap in event outcomes. This also supports Seligman's (2011) view that learning is a core element of well-being and is related to accomplishment, happiness and meaning. Additionally, the conceptual framework shows that several factors shaped the PERMA outcomes and can be clustered into external/extrinsic and internal/intrinsic factors (Fig. 4). As a matter of fact, on the one hand, external factors play a role in generating well-being - for example being outdoors produces psychological and physical well-being (Stieger et al., 2022). On the other hand, vacations are individual and 'mean different things to different people' (Dolnicar et al., 2012,p.59). Also, some well-being components are subject to individual characteristics (Khaw and Kern, 2014), such as interests, state of mind and expectations (see Fig. 4).

The theoretical contribution was informed by the empirical contribution of this paper, which concerned the application of PERMA to food festival tourism. Food festival tourism can transmit a sense of feeling well, as do other types of holidays (Dolnicar et al., 2012;

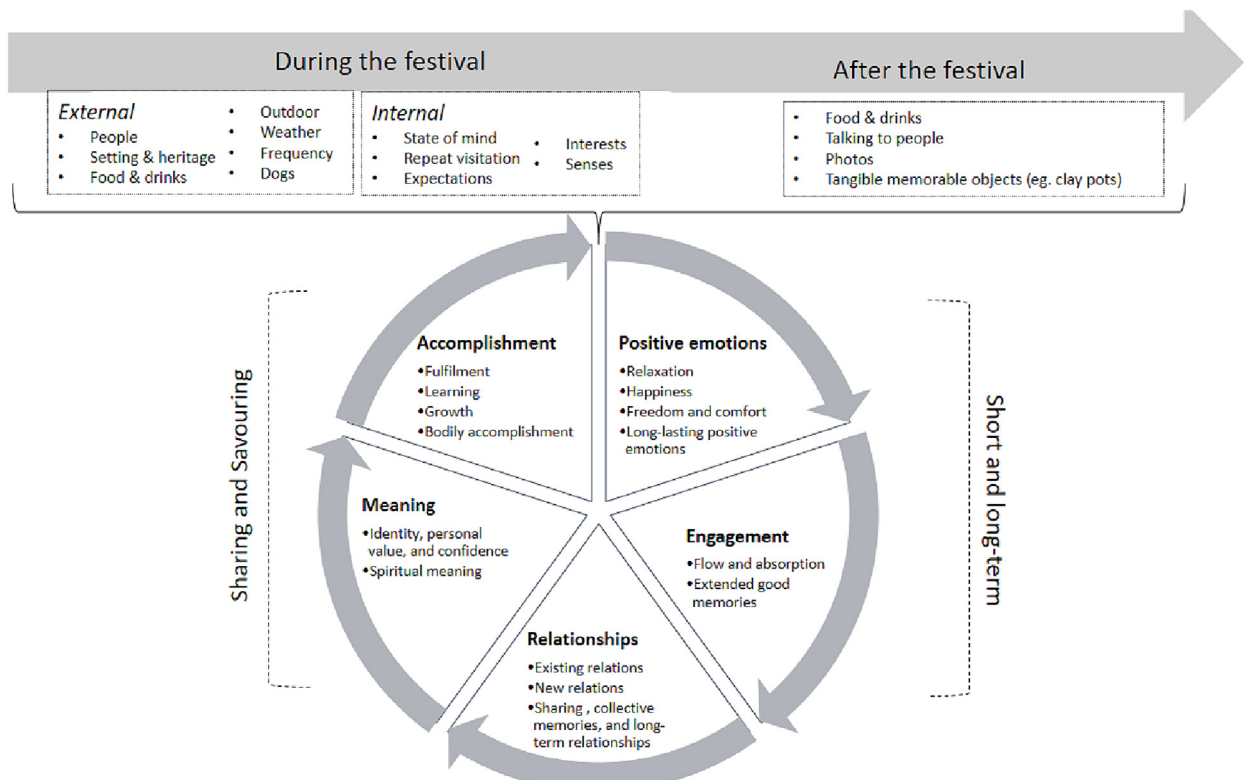


Fig. 4. Proposed conceptual framework of food festival tourism and PERMA well-being. Source: authors.

Kroesen and Handy, 2014; Nawijn and Filep, 2016). This study confirms that experiences can produce happiness more than physical objects (Gilovich and Gallo, 2020; Kumar et al., 2020). It shows that food festival tourism can trigger well-being via all PERMA dimensions and at all time periods, from planning the trip, to being at the festival, to recalling the memories later. Interviewees even defined it as a therapeutic experience and the data expand Smith and Diekmann (2017) 'Model of Integrative Wellbeing Tourism Experience', since this tourism experience is not only made up of relaxation, altruistic activities and meaningful experiences. Food festivals can be arenas for social (Jepson et al., 2019) and psychological (Mesana and De Guzman, 2022) well-being.

The experience mainly impacted the positive emotions and relationships components of the PERMA model, which are also the most articulated with the concepts of relaxation and sharing. As such, the findings show that well-being can be transmitted and shared at food festivals (Fig. 4). Seeing people happy and enjoying themselves and the community spirit generated a shared feeling of happiness: 'it makes you smile when other people are smiling' (P8). This suggests the importance of both social (recognising others' happiness) and personal intelligence (modifying personal emotions and behaviours accordingly) at festivals (Seligman, 2011). Thus, happiness was extended through a longer period by means of socialisation, including via random social connections (Epley and Schroeder, 2014; Gao and Kerstetter, 2018). People were sharing and spreading well-being during and after the event, by engaging in conversations with like-minded people, sharing memories, watching other happy people and sharing produce with friends afterwards. Here, individual well-being generated collective well-being and the facets of reminiscing about the past, forming social networks happened not only for older adults (Zhang, 2023).

Thus, this study confirms that 'very little that is positive is solitary' (Seligman, 2011, p. 20) because 'shared experiences are more memorable and they're different... than single experience' (P2). Tourism experiences shared with family members, friends, or even strangers can regulate and increase emotions (Gao and Kerstetter, 2018). It also supports the view that performing actions and sharing experiences with someone can amplify one's experience (Boothby et al., 2014) by creating collective memories (Jepson et al., 2019). It echoes Zins and Ponocny's (2022) argument that sharing holiday experiences with others is more fun and produces eudaimonic well-being. Festival participants also interact and engage with locals, creating inclusive protoplasmic encounters (Giovannardi et al., 2014). All these were spontaneous *communitas* (Wu et al., 2020) and show that random social connections and connecting to strangers increase people's well-being and those of whom you are talking to and interacting with (Epley and Schroeder, 2014). Moreover, ideological *communitas* of like-minded people (Wu et al., 2020) can promote a feeling of safety and identity self-actualisation. These *communitas* foster a stronger sense of belonging (Szmigin et al., 2017) as well as self-expression and co-creation of personal identity.

This research is consistent with Seligman's (2011) What-Went-Well exercise and the importance of savouring positive life events. For visitors, it is important to *be there*, and this supports the argument that savouring and being absorbed in a touristic activity can increase happiness (Gao and Kerstetter, 2018). Savouring emotions and experiences in tourism can indeed generate positive memories and build memorable experiences (Miyakawa et al., 2022), including festival tourism experiences. Sometimes the well-being promoted via the festival could be considered long-term (Fig. 4), for days, weeks, or even months. This included behavioural changes, like ways of cooking (Organ et al., 2015). Emotions like happiness, comfort, and relaxation were savoured by visitors, which is an important process in tourism (Miyakawa et al., 2022). Festival tourism therefore has the potential to create long-term emotional value, for example through triggering happy memories (Zins and Ponocny, 2022). This suggests that festival tourism can promote both the cognitive component of happiness (contentment) and the affective aspect (hedonism), so tourists can really feel better (Kroesen and Handy, 2014), at least at food festivals. This answers Filo and Coghlan's (2016) call for more research on the long-term effects of the PERMA domains.

## Conclusion

This paper aimed to discover how food festival participation increases visitors' well-being and to identify which PERMA domains impact that well-being the most. It addressed several gaps in knowledge, including the need for more studies on the short- and long-term well-being outcomes of festivals (Armbrecht et al., 2021; Mesana and De Guzman, 2022; Wood, 2019; Wu et al., 2020) and on the impact of different cultural settings (Mair and Weber, 2019). The theoretical contribution of this paper is the creation of an innovative conceptual framework of well-being outcomes (Fig. 4), which shows that food festival participation can increase people's well-being and how this can occur. The PERMA model is therefore used not only to understand the well-being outcomes but also to identify the pathways and factors that generate them. Its components were expanded, especially positive emotions, meaning, and accomplishment. This study confirmed that PERMA is not redundant (Kashdan, 2017) and constitutes some elements of SBW, even if its investigation still needs to be developed (Seligman, 2018).

The empirical contribution of this paper is how the PERMA model was applied in a new context of study (food festival tourism), in different countries (Italy and England). The findings revealed that food festival tourism can generate happiness and, more generally, can increase people's well-being. Specifically, this paper argues that PERMA well-being can be shared and transmitted during and after food festival participation. Sharing one's food festival experiences with someone else can amplify one's own experience (Boothby et al., 2014). This paper contended that the PERMA aspects of well-being resulting from food festival tourism can include short- and long-term benefits. To prolong this sense of well-being, visitors can consume festival food, share their memories with other people and reminisce with photos and souvenirs. Finally, some practical implications are present: this study can help organisers to fully understand the potential positive short and long-term well-being impacts of their festivals as well as the positive cascade effect it can have on non-visitors with, for example, the act of sharing food and exchanging gifts afterwards. Another practical implication from festival attendance is derived through knowledge and skills acquisition leading to new ways of cooking or being more experimental with food preparation in the longer term. Conscious of that, festival stakeholders in the tourism system can design for positive well-being by applying the enhanced PERMA model and deliver higher positive outcomes in visitors.

This study has several limitations, including its use of only two festivals in two Western countries, which means that the findings might not be generalisable. However, they create a solid starting point to research the topic and several conclusions of this study support previous research, so results might be applicable to other food festivals. Future studies should analyse different food festivals in other countries, including those located in other continents, and compare food festivals with other types of festivals. More in-depth analyses of the long-term benefits as well as of the act of sharing in festival tourism is needed. Our study employed the use of semi-structured interviews to allow interviewees to express themselves in deep and meaningful ways as well as meet our objectives and saturate all the PERMA dimensions. The sole use of online interviews created further limitations if there was not a stable internet connection/ dropping out of the call, background noise, echoes, causing the need for repetition by interviewers/interviewees. These aspects often create more time consuming data collection than in person interviews. Future festival research might also include inter-cultural longitudinal studies to help expand our understanding of PERMA's significance in the life course.

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### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Giulia Rossetti:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Allan Jepson:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Valentina E. Albanese:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Project administration, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

### Declaration of competing interest

Nothing to declare.

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