

Resonant Festival Experiences: Empirical Evidence from Hungarian Festivals

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Abstract:

The article first briefly discusses the various terminological approaches to religious experience, arguing that new and existing concepts are needed to demonstrate their interpretive potential. It then analyses one of these interpretations: Hartmut Rosa's resonance theory. This theory does not describe a clear religious experience, but it has religious characteristics and connections, and the article applies the theory empirically to a qualitative analysis of interviews with participants at three festivals in Hungary. The article aims to present resonance theory as a possible interpretation of 'religious' experiences, without trying to override previous interpretations in other contexts, but to present it as an additional perspective. Secondly, the article aims to demonstrate the empirical applicability of resonance theory.

Keywords: Religious experience; religionesque; resonance theory; festival studies; empirical research

I. Introduction

In religious studies, the exploration of religious experience often begins with two names: William James and Sir Alister Hardy. James ([1902] 2008) 'lifted' the interpretation of religious experience out of the theological realm and placed it within the interdisciplinary fields of psychology and philosophy. Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Centre (1969) in the United Kingdom. Their work is now the main guide to the theoretical and empirical, qualitative and quantitative study of religious experience (Morgan, 2015; Schmidt, 2015). A third notable figure is John Dewey, who claimed that religious experience is an inherent part of human nature and can be part of everyday life. He distinguished 'religions' (in the institutional sense) from the 'religious', which is a subjective attitude and experience that does not require religious belief in the traditional sense (Dewey, 1934). These understandings of religious experience aimed to distance the subject from traditional religious interpretations and allow for a broader perspective on what 'religious' experience is and can be. Since these scholars' pioneering work, religious – or special, mystical, sacred – experience has been approached in an interdisciplinary way – including the fields of theology and religious studies, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology and neurobiology – taking into account emic and etic interpretations and the cultural, social, and neural influences of those interpretations.

Scholars refer to experiences that are out of the ordinary – that is, according to the experiencer's interpretation of what is considered ordinary – as religious or mystical (James, [1902] 2008; Taves, 2020), spiritual (Yaden and Newberg, 2022; Schmidt and Stockly, 2023), religious (Taves, 2009), non-ordinary (Taves and Barlev, 2023), anomalous (McClenon and Nooney, 2002), peak-experience (Maslow, 2021), or something similar to these experiences, such as transformative (Schlieter, 2024), flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 2009), acute religious experiences (Saville-Smith, 2023), or ecstasy (Marshall, Ramji and Wilkinson, 2025). While some of these approaches have provided definitions, others distinguish characteristics or elements of an experience that must be met in order to be called that particular type of experience. Even if some of these terms emerged to replace or at least refine older concepts, others aim to describe certain types of experience that do not fit into any other category. Some originate in the psychological tradition, where the main goal is to eliminate the dichotomy between psychopathological and religious experiences and to draw attention to other possible categorisations. Some terms have grown out of the theological tradition, clearly distinguishing religion as *sui generis* explanations from the ascriptive approach (Taves, 2009) and seeking to promote a broader and more objective understanding from the perspective of religious studies.

I suggest we need new or different concepts not because the existing ones are inadequate but because many previous concepts limit either the experiences that can be categorised or the interpretive framework in which these experiences can be explained. There is no need to consider which terminology is better, more inclusive, or more accurate, or whether we are talking about a religious or non-religious experience. Each term describes something similar to religious experience, either at the level of individual interpretation or at the level of scientific categories. Regardless of this, whether we describe something as religious – or spiritual, transformative, non-ordinary – depends on the interpretation of either the individual (the experiencer) or the scholar. Thus, these terms all describe similar experiences, but each is different in some way: either it describes a different experience, or it describes the same experience differently. In my interpretation, each experience (and each interpretation of experience) is *religionesque* (Heidl, 2023); meaning that it is similar to a religious experience, or has some connection to a religion or religious interpretation, or was described by the experiencer using religious semantics.

This article analyses an interpretation that is a relatively new concept that has been less empirically explored, namely Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance (Rosa, 2019). It was this

approach that I empirically applied to the qualitative interview analysis during my festival research between 2020 and 2023. Resonance theory, as presented in this article, is one possible interpretation of 'religious experience' (i.e. a religionesque experience) without attempting to overturn interpretations used previously or in other contexts. Rather, it places resonance theory alongside them. It also aims to demonstrate the empirical applicability of resonance theory.

2. Resonance

Resonance theory, a term coined by the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa ([2016] 2019), is a sociological analysis which argues that the pressures of social acceleration undermine the ability of human beings to enter into what he calls resonant relationships. Social acceleration (Rosa, 2013) is Rosa's term for the dynamisation of the world that has taken place since the eighteenth century, when the emergence of various technological innovations accelerated, leading to an increase in the speed of transportation, communication, and production. Fast-forward to the modern world and people are finding it difficult to keep up with the pace. Rosa mentions three dimensions of social acceleration: technical acceleration, social change, and the acceleration of the pace of life (Rosa, 2013, pp. 71-80). He argues that acceleration follows a dialectical logic. It produces the institutions and forms of practice needed to sustain further social and technological development, but once these forms reach their own speed limit, they are annihilated, making room for even faster processes. Therefore 'it is the increase of speed rather than the unfolding of forces of production [...] that is the real driving force of (modern) history' (Rosa, 2013, p. 93).

The dynamisation of the world is attractive to people because it offers them greater global reach through the tools that it provides, such as the Internet and smartphones. These innovations come at a price, however. Dynamisation requires more investment, and more physical, political, and psychological energy. As a consequence, the role of politics has changed. We are also psychologically overburdened and are beset by stress-related diseases, environmental and psychological crises, and a crisis of democracy (Rosa, 2019, pp. 425-434).

The solution to achieving the 'good life' is to change our relationship to the world: 'The most important thing I can do is to stop and listen' (Rosa, 2024, p. 43). The answer, in Rosa's opinion, is resonance. Resonance is a connection, a relationship between human beings and the world. It is a kind of peak-experience, which allows humans to 'stop for a minute' in the

accelerated world by focusing only on the object of their resonant experience: 'Following its Latin etymology, resonance is first and foremost an acoustic phenomenon – "re-sonare" meaning to resound' (Rosa, 2019, p. 165). When two objects resonate, it is 'a specific relationship between two vibratory bodies whereby the vibration of one body prompts the other to itself vibrate in turn' (Rosa, 2019, p. 165). Resonance is a relationship to the world in which 'subject and world are mutually transformed' (Rosa, 2019, p. 174).

A resonant relationship is without a doubt a dynamic interaction between subject and world, a relation of fluidity and contact that is processual in nature. This suggests that, even at the conceptual level, resonant relationships presuppose a kind of mutual, rhythmic oscillation, and therefore must also satisfy certain demands of synchronization (Rosa, 2019, p. 28).

Rosa distinguishes four characteristics that describe a resonant relationship:

1. *Affection*: a subject feels 'called upon' and is touched, moved, or gripped by something or someone 'out there' as a part of the world he or she encounters.
2. *Emotion or self-efficacy*: the subject responds to this affection in a self-efficacious mode of reaching out and touching or influencing the object or entity encountered.
3. *Transformation*: in this dynamic two-way process of encounter, both sides – self and world – are transformed to some extent. Hence, resonance is not about the affirmation of identity, but rather about its transformation.
4. *Uncontrollability (Unverfügbarkeit)*: resonance in this sense is essentially open-ended and uncontrollable and unpredictable in two respects: first, it is constitutionally impossible to predict its occurrence; and secondly, if this happens, it is absolutely impossible to predict or control the outcome or result of the ensuing transformation (Rosa, 2020a, p. 2; see also Rosa 2020b, pp. 32-39).

These characteristics are like William James's four elements of mystical experience that describe the characteristics of a mystical state of mind: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. Ineffability means that one cannot put into words what one has gone through. One must experience it for oneself to understand its depth. Such experiences have a noetic quality, because they are felt as real, as the true reality, and they seem like revelations and have a high importance. They are transient, do not last long; sometimes only moments, and according to James, no longer than an hour or two. Passivity describes a sense of being in the background; that one cannot control the experience and that there is some kind of superior

being present in the experience (James, [1902] 2008, p. 267). While James describes these as elements of the religious experience, Rosa's idea of resonance, although similar, offers I suggest a different interpretive framework that is distanced from religion but does not exclude religious experience and interpretation. Therefore, instead of arguing that Rosa described the same experience as James, I have put forward the idea that *resonance* is an experience similar to religious experience, and therefore 'religionesque' (Heidl, 2023; 2024b).

To clarify further, resonance is a responsive relationship between subject and world, through which the subject is *touched* and *moved* by the world and responds to this affection through the emotions. Resonance transforms both sides (the experiencer believes in the active role of the object), making them stop in the world for a moment to appreciate the world and forget about the acceleration around them. According to Rosa, resonant relationships to the world ultimately lead to a successful society and a good life. For example, the environmental crisis is not caused by our misuse of natural resources. Rather, it is because we have lost our touch with nature, viewing it solely as a resource rather than as a sphere of resonance. The same is true of the democratic crisis. Citizens no longer feel connected to democracy; they become frustrated with politics because they feel disconnected from the government. This feeling stems from the government not doing enough to improve society for the benefit of all. The psychological crisis of late modernity can also be understood as an expression of alienation (Rosa 2019, 42; cf. Rosa 2024, 42-43). Alienation is the opposite of resonance, another way of world-relations (*Weltbeziehungen*), 'in which subject and world confront each other with indifference or hostility (repulsion) and thus without any inner connection. [...] Alienation thus indicates a state in which the world cannot be "adaptively transformed" and so always appears cold, rigid, repulsive, and non-responsive' (Rosa, 2019, p. 184).

According to Rosa, relating to the world in a resonant state can happen from four directions, or on four 'axes': horizontal, diagonal, vertical, and on a self-axis. Horizontally, people have social relationships with family, romantic partners, and friends. Diagonally, people build relations to objects, spaces, and feelings. The vertical axis is the most complex. In Rosa's words, people have vertical relationships 'to life, existence, or the world as a whole or totality perceived as existing above or beyond the individual, in which the world itself in a way maintains its own voice' (Rosa, 2019, p. 195). In the self-axis, a person relates to their own body, mind, beliefs, and emotions.

Resonance theory has received a variety of critiques and appraisals (Masquelier, 2019; Tsuo-You and Shuwen, 2019; Anderson, 2023; Hellerma, 2024). One critique is that people

from different economic and cultural backgrounds may have different interpretations of what a resonant relationship is, and thus of the actions required to create change (Masquelier, 2019). Another critique arises from the problem of recognising whether a group's connection is resonant or merely an echo of it, based on the false promise of resonance. This can lead to problematic effects (Hellerma, 2024). Despite its shortcomings, reviewers also recognise the theory's potential, and it is now among the most popular contemporary sociological theories. It is used in disciplines such as sociology, social theory, philosophy, and theology. This article places it into an empirical sociological-anthropological context and uses it as an analytical category from the perspective of religious studies.

3. Festivals

Rosa describes religion – especially churches, whether the institution or the building – as one of the spaces that is able to create the conditions for resonance to appear. He argues that while resonance cannot be controlled or forced, there are certain settings – church, nature, the ocean, the stars – that have the power to unlock resonance (Rosa, 2024). Festivals, as events 'in and out of time' (Turner, 1969, p. 96), are, I suggest, settings that can trigger resonance in similar ways.

This article brings empirical examples from three festivals in Hungary: Everness, a mindfulness, lifestyle festival; Lélek, a Catholic festival; and Fekete Zaj, a rock-metal music festival.

3.1 Everness

The Everness festival is one of the largest lifestyle festivals in Hungary today (Everness.hu). The event is organised by a private organisation and has been held every year since 2013, for 5-6 days in the summer, in a town near Lake Balaton. The number of participants has ranged from 1,500 to 5,000, mainly from among those with a university education; the strongest representation is women in their 30s and 40s. The organisers and participants like to describe the event as 'spiritual', but without clearly defining the term – it seemed to be more like a keyword to catch the attention of the participants so that they have an initial picture of the festival.

The name 'Everness' stands for infinity, eternity, and is also a play on the word 'awareness', which is the main message of the event (*Everness Fesztivál*, no date). The festival programme features a variety of performers, leaders, coaches, trainers, consultants, and musicians who speak and teach about awareness and conscious living, focusing on topics such as religion, spirituality, sexuality, body-soul-mind balance, inner development, and physical and

mental health. The musical performances include musical prayers, mantras, hand-pan music, world music, didgeridoos and harps, and singing about primaeval forests, the seas, love, unity, and God. Dance and movement programmes include contact dance (where the focus is on touch), free dance based on ecstatic music, various yoga exercises, massages, and bodywork. Speakers boast a wide variety of titles: mental hygiene professional; heart and soul healer; spiritual teacher; psychologist; family constellation facilitator; actor; writer; natural healer; founder of the New Alchemy self-development method; poet; cultural anthropologist; trainer; coach; spiritual teacher; yoga instructor. Many such specialists are self-proclaimed, as they introduce practices that were invented by themselves.

Since 2021, the event has been held at Siófok-Sóstó, in a campsite not far from Lake Balaton. There is plenty of camping space for tents and caravans, as well as mobile wooden cabins for 3-5 people. The stages are located all around the campsite and have different themes: the main stage with lectures and concerts; bodywork and dance pavilions for physical exercises; music pavilions; meditation tents; food vendors; and an 'intimate area' for lectures and programmes on sexuality, womanhood, romantic relationships, and themes that are often considered 'taboo' elsewhere in contemporary society. There is also a 'daycare' area where parents can play with their children or leave them under supervision while they attend a programme. The whole area is family- and dog-friendly; children and dogs can be seen running around the festival site apparently unsupervised.

The 'street' for vendors includes food stalls with mostly vegan and vegetarian dishes, drink stalls with juices, smoothies, teas, and coffees (in 2021, only one drink stall sold alcohol), and stalls selling books, accessories, jewellery, objects such as 'lucky charms', crystals, gemstones, candles, hand pans, pendulums, bells, flutes, meditation and yoga accessories, and clothes and blankets (usually with geometric or floral motifs, the tree of life, the Om sign, the chakra motif, Buddha, mandala, etc.). Some tents offer massage (free or for an extra fee), fortune telling, horoscope reading, chakra cleansing, oxygenated water, and similar services. The whole site is decorated with lampions, dream catchers and suchlike, and colourful design elements. The Everness mindset can be described as 'healing yourself through the healing of others, and vice versa' (Gauthier, 2014, p. 268), an outlook that is common in settings similar to Everness, where mindfulness and mental health are at the forefront, often combined with spiritual practices and ideas.

3.2 Lélek

For the comparative analysis, I conducted fieldwork at two other festivals. The first was the Lélek festival (Lélek Fesztivál.hu), which was held for the first time on Pentecost weekend 3-5 June 2022, in Szombathely, Hungary, and was modelled on the Loretto festival in Salzburg. The event, which has its roots in Catholicism, has an ecumenical approach, is open to members of all Christian denominations, and has a strong charismatic influence. The event was organised by the local diocesan youth worker and was held in a Catholic school. The main venue was the gymnasium (sports hall), where a stage was set up and chairs were placed in the auditorium for the participants. Several rooms were used for prayer groups and workshops, and the school chapel was also open to visitors during the event. The gymnasium and the corridors leading to it were decorated with colourful garlands. A row of benches at the end of the gym was set up to sell books and magazines, and a few floor cushions were placed in a corner. The event began on the Friday afternoon with introductions, presentations, praise and worship, and a concert. Saturday's programme consisted of workshops, a tour of the cathedral, talks, music programmes, and a mass in the afternoon, which was also held in the gymnasium. A temporary altar was set up on the stage. The evening ended with a concert, after which the chairs were removed and a DJ provided music for those who wanted to dance until 2.00am. The DJ also played music with Christian lyrics. On Sunday, the activities moved to a cinema, where the visitors were invited to a time of praise and worship, a lecture, and a concert. Food was provided in the school canteen, but alcohol was banned from the festival area.

Attendance ranged from young to old, with 500 people registered on the Friday and 600 on the Saturday. On Sunday, around 350 people attended the cinema. Most of the people attending the festival were local, but some came from Budapest and the surrounding towns and villages. The younger age group consisted mainly of students who came to the festival to receive confirmation in the Catholic Church. Older adults were mostly parents of the students present and people with families. The young people were at primary and secondary school; the older people were mostly those with a university education.

3.3 Fekete Zaj

The other comparative case study was the annual Fekete Zaj festival (17-20 August 2022), held near the town of Gyöngyös in Hungary. The festival represents an experimental, techno, metal, rock, underground, alternative rock music stream and plays a unique role in the country's

music scene (Fekete Zaj.hu). The festival received 900–1,000 visitors a day. The average age of my interviewees was 34.9 years. People over the age of 35 mainly came with their families, and there were similar proportions of couples and singles. Most people were university or college graduates. Many visitors came from Budapest and from other large towns; most were middle-class and in work. The musical milieu attracted a community whose members felt excluded from traditional cultural trends for a variety of reasons, and their behaviour and expression often showed anti-systemic criticism, creating a kind of counterculture that is a common feature of transformative festivals and music communities (D'Andrea, 2007; St John and Gauthier, 2015; Lucia, 2020). The festival site was a campsite with mobile homes and tents. There were three stages inside the festival area and two stages outside: one on a small island on Lake Sástó, and one further into the woods under a lookout tower. There was a children's playground in the middle of the campsite. The campsite is located on the Mátra mountain, the highest mountain in Hungary (1,014m), surrounded by forest, where mobile phone signal was poor. Many people saw this as a positive thing, helping them to get away from the 'real' world, but communication between participants was difficult.

The music performances included a wide range of musical styles, such as alternative indie, rock, experimental, techno, metal, underground, and alternative rock genres. Most performers played metal music. Other programmes, called 'OFF' programmes, included 'dark' yoga and fitness (yoga and fitness to metal music), literary programmes, poetry readings, tattooing, film screenings, football, discussion with music performers, video games, an exhibition, and chess.

Most of the visitors appeared in black clothing, especially T-shirts sporting album covers or band members printed on a black background. The food street offered the kind of food that is common at most festivals (hotdogs, burgers, burritos), as well as alcohol (beer, wine, spirits). The vendor stand sold exclusively merchandise, clothing and accessories related to the festival, with the Fekete Zaj logos from previous years and clothing featuring music bands or motifs representing the lifestyle and subcultures of the festival participants (often with sarcastic depictions, images with sexual or religious connotations, or the theme of death).

4. Methodology

The research began with a team led by Réka Szilárdi and in 2021 by the author from the University of Szeged ('Fesztívalvállás', 2021) in 2016 at the Everness festival. It began with survey research and observation and moderate participation (Kawulich, 2005; Spradley, 2016, p. 60). Repetitive fieldwork and constant theoretical and empirical comparisons echo certain

elements of the Grounded Theory (GT) method (Glaser and Strauss, 2006), such as data collection as a first step, theoretical sampling, constant comparison, memo-ing, coding, and theoretical saturation. Since 2021, I have expanded the qualitative fieldwork with semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in 2021 at Everness, and in 2022 at the other two events as comparative case studies. I interviewed nineteen participants at Everness, ten at Lélek, and fifteen at Fekete Zaj. I conducted thirty-eight interviews in all (some interviews included multiple respondents). The interviews were recorded, transcribed (Azevedo *et al.*, 2017), and analysed using qualitative content analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2017; Graneheim, Lindgren and Lundman, 2017; Faggiano, 2023) and thematic analysis. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research before the interview and were granted anonymity. Their participation was entirely voluntary. All names mentioned in the excerpts from the interviews are pseudonyms.

In this article, only those interview excerpts will be analysed in which I found the resonance theory applicable. For a full analysis of all interviews, see my other works (Heidl, 2024a; 2025).

5. Discussion

The interviews analysed in this paper follow the structure of the ‘event religion’ model, which was the framework for the whole research project. Event religion is a conceptual approach to examining short or one-off events from the perspective of religious studies, using sociological and anthropological tools, in order to reach a clearer understanding of the event experiences. Event religion works with four dimensions: spatiotemporality, symbols, community, and inward (Heidl, 2024a, 2025). These dimensions overlap to some degree with the resonant axes: the horizontal axis, which describes the human-to-human relationships; the diagonal axis, which includes relationships to objects and spaces; the vertical axis, which includes abstract notions, such as religion, nature, or art; and the self-axis, which includes the relationship to oneself, one’s own body and emotions (Rosa, 2019, chs. 7-9, 2020a). The analysis follows the structure of the event religion dimensions, because that is what the empirical research focused on, and aims to find the respective resonant axes in the analysis of certain interview excerpts.

5.1 Resonant spaces

At a festival, the design, symbols, objects, and decorations create a space where experiential fulfilment is in focus. The festival area is carefully constructed: different areas offer different programmes. The stages have the main role, but there are several important places alongside them: the vendor street, the food court, the accommodation area, or, for example, a lake or an art exhibition. The space itself creates the festival ‘vibe’, the atmosphere, which often represents the mindset and message that the event is aiming to promote.

The participants experience a different space and a different time that is clearly distinguishable from the ‘outside world’. A *liminal* time and space (Turner, 1969), in which one can *stop and listen* (Rosa, 2024). In Rosa’s understanding, a space can become special for people in a mutual connection. He speaks of a *resonant relationship* in which both object and subject are transformed. The subject has to feel called upon by the object of the experience, and resonance happens independently of human intention; their relationship, their emotions towards it, create the resonant connection. For the experiencer, both sides of the relationship are active agents.

One example Rosa uses regarding relating to spaces, objects, and materialities in resonance theory is the school. The school can become a place of alienation when the actors (the teacher and students) cannot find a way to resonate. For example, if the children find the material boring, and the teacher is unable to present it as something interesting, the result is alienation. When the material seems interesting to both sides, – the teacher can reach the children, and the children are open towards the teacher and the possibility of learning – the school becomes a resonant space (Rosa, 2019, pp. 238–48). Here we see that the *space* itself does not play the main role but provides a setting for the actors to act and therefore creates alienation or resonance depending on the behaviour of the actors. In Rosa’s own words: ‘When I describe school as a space for constituting relationships to the world, I mean particularly that schools both develop and solidify the ways in which subjects encounter the things, people, and events of the world’ (Rosa, 2019, p. 247). People can only experience resonance with places and times that they believe can speak to them, can affect them, and are ‘independent of their own concrete wishes, needs, and desires’ (Rosa, 2019, p. 270). It is not something that *has* to be found, but something that *can* be found and gives the person *something more*, outside their daily needs, and therefore has a special meaning for the actor. How the actors create this resonant space can be seen at both the Everness and the Lélek festivals, as the interview excerpts below show.

Here, practically at the moment the programme starts, I think it’s different. It already permeates the whole thing, as I said at the beginning that now this room

is not a gymnasium, but practically like a large church interior. (Albert, male, 59, local, Lélek festival 2022)

Albert described the Lélek festival as a *church outside the church* (Povedák, 2014, p. 201). Taking religion out of the church and bringing it to a different location disrupts and rearranges the role of ritual. It creates a temporary 'communitas' (Turner, 1969) within the community of the Christians and uses the event as a de-structuring of the world. This transformation creates a resonant space for the visitors, even if in everyday life the sports hall would not have the same effect as it has for the time of the event.

Since it was cancelled last year [because of COVID-19], it was also possible to come in this year with the 2020 tickets, and a lot of people did, and the atmosphere they created is very noticeable. When you walk through the small streets, you meet smiling faces. In Budapest, when I am on public transport and the other line of the escalator comes across me, I try to make eye contact and smile. There was a time when I would count how many people smiled back. If the statistics were very bad, I would look for children's eyes, because children always smile back. Here the adults smile back too. You can be safe here. You can experience a lot of freedom, you can discover yourself while others respect your boundaries. You are even specifically asked to respect yourself, not to traumatise yourself unnecessarily. [...] But maybe it wouldn't be good if it's like this at home. Because this festival is quite a rollercoaster. It's emotionally exhausting for everyone. We push our own limits. A friend of mine put it very well that the ups and downs we experience here are of greater amplitude (Hanna, female, 21, county town, volunteer, Everness 2021).

As Hanna explained, Everness builds a special world, but this only works in this particular place and time. If the specialness (that is, the time and the space) is taken away, the resonant nature would be lost. Regarding the sacred space, Kim Knott says that 'people's agency is continually expressed in and through it. [...] The ritual gathering spawns new social groups or cultural products which themselves have a physical form' (Knott, 2005, p. 166). Space and time are ephemeral, but a liminal community is created in it, or expressed through it, which goes beyond the event.

5.2 Resonant symbols

Motifs and objects have a significant role at festivals, helping to decorate the space and to represent meaning: i.e. what the event means for the organisers and the participants. Many festivals sell objects related to the event, and festival merchandise. Visitors often carry items with them that they bought at the event, or wear clothes bearing the festival logo. Material anthropology examines cultures in which objects and motifs are often endowed with special power – are ‘ensouled’ or ‘animated’ (Descola and Sahlins, 2014) – or, as Rosa suggests, which are *speaking* to humans, therefore creating a resonant relationship between the person and the object (Rosa, 2019, p. 226). For people who like to wear signs and motifs on their clothes and accessories at festivals, the spirit of togetherness and awareness appears through these objects. They express their identity – that they are members of the event community. Rosa is drawing from Merleau-Ponty and other scholars when he says ‘things observe us’ (Rosa 2019, p. 228). Objects can take on an active role for the person (Merleau-Ponty, 1964), therefore ‘speaking back’ to the subject – in a self-efficacious mode, as Rosa described it (Rosa, 2019). Things can strengthen human relationships and the human–world relationship, making it more palpable through the object. The significance of objects was most obvious at the Fekete Zaj festival. Participants bought many products bearing the festival logo: bags, shirts, and especially the reusable festival cup. This item could be returned to be reused or recycled, and the visitor could get their money back, but many chose to keep the cup to add to their collection at home.

Q - Do you buy or keep a Fekete Zaj cup or T-shirt?

A - Yes, I wear [the T-shirt] especially on weekdays, and we use [the cup] at home.

We actually have at least 20 Fekete Zaj cups at home. They are very practical, they come in handy when we organise a party and have guests [smiles] (Alvin, male, 41, suburb of Budapest, Fekete Zaj 2022).

While the reusable cup was perceived as a utility item, most participants kept it because for them it represented the event and their ‘event-identity’. The cup, and other objects associated with Fekete Zaj, reinforce self-identity and collective identity, creating a resonant relationship between the owner and their object as Kevin exemplifies.

Q - Do you wear the festival T-shirt on weekdays as well?

A - Yes, of course! Yes, it... It's the same here and at the other festival I usually go to, I buy a festival T-shirt almost ritually and I really like to wear it on weekdays. So definitely yes.

Q - When you think about why, what does this mean to you?

A - Well, the fact that I belong to this musical milieu, to this world of taste, to this culture, and it gives me a sense of identity (Kevin, male, 38, county town, Fekete Zaj 2022).

Another interviewee extended this not only to the clothing and the cup, which were the most typical among the respondents, but also to all kinds of Fekete Zaj items, posters, and memorabilia.

Basically, I fill my living space with such items. Because I feel comfortable in an environment where, I don't know... Tarkovsky said something like that, that the home is the sanctuary of the private mythology. Where there are the various material imprints of my life, and it's really a bit like... I'm in one place with my little... I don't know, sacred objects (Cintia, female, 27, Budapest, Fekete Zaj 2022).

Describing everyday objects with religious terms has a 'religionesque' character. Many participants connected religious semantics, and therefore meanings, to everyday objects. At other times, they reinterpreted the meanings of religious objects to suit their own tastes. At all three events, regardless of personal belief or religious denomination, these terms often appeared to emphasise the specialness and significance of the event in the participants' lives. However, some took an opposite stance: both at Everness and at Lélek, many participants emphasised that they do not need material things in order to enjoy the full festival experience.

I don't think that we can be mesmerised or even feel God's closeness because of the symbols. I have a large garden, almost 2,000 square metres, and there in nature I feel God much closer to me. Okay, in the church too, because there really is something different there. (Max, male, 45, local, Lélek festival 2022)

For Max, the atmosphere, the special space, has a greater significance than things. Material symbols, according to some participants, prevent them from gaining awareness or truly experiencing their beliefs. This is also a reasonable reaction when we follow Merleau-Ponty's train of thought. The ensouling, animating objects in modern societies are no longer common:

late developmental processes brought the objectification of things, and the original, inner connection between person and object has been lost (Rosa, 2019, p. 228). Therefore, many people today see attachment to things as an addiction, a product of capitalistic consumerist societies, and reject their importance in order to escape being the victims of consumerism. This kind of rejection appears to be opposite to the reaction of other participants, for whom the festival logos and memorabilia symbolise belonging to the community and escaping everyday society. The difference dissolves, however, because the result is, in fact, the same: carrying or not carrying, wearing or not wearing these motifs proclaims the same message: belonging, identity, harmony, and a common belief.

5.3 Resonating with Others

Rosa describes a 'horizontal axis of resonance', which includes the resonant relationships that people experience in connection with each other. Affection and emotion, as two essential elements of the resonant experience, play an important role in this process (Rosa, 2019, p. 202).

Visitors to a festival are connected by shared experiences, which play an important role in the formation of community and the relationship between participants. German sociologist Babette Kirchner pointed out that the participants at a festival can feel affection for each other through shared emotional moments (Kirchner, 2011). In mass societies, tribal behaviour can arise from a longing for earlier forms of human communities and lead to the formation of neotribes, as Michel Maffesoli has argued (Maffesoli, 1996). Neotribalism, in contrast to tribalism, manifests in sporadic gatherings and is distinguished by its 'fluidity' and 'dispersal' (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 76). Spaces of temporary community-building, where a return to the elements and functions of tribal ritual can appear, are also spaces for resonance.

Public viewing events, particularly of World Cup or European Championship soccer games, can in this sense be understood as social 'oases of resonance' whose popularity stems from the fact that they are able, in a fragmented and individualized world, to seize and direct the attention and emotions of hundreds, even thousands, of people at once, generating as well as amplifying moments of collective effervescence not least through the awareness that one is connected to people all around the world who are witnessing the same event at the same time (Rosa, 2019, pp. 197–98).

Clearly Rosa is describing Emile Durkheim's 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim, 1964): the elevated, electric, avalanche-like emotions of ritual participants. Alongside Victor Turner's 'communitas', these two theories are commonly applied in festival research to examining the collective experience of the participants. I propose that visiting a festival gives an opportunity for resonant experiences: in the joint programmes, participants are 'capable of response', and resonant relationships can be formed.

Just this morning I shared a post on Facebook about how if you can connect well with others, you can really connect with yourself. And from there you can measure where you are with yourself. When you see someone and you see everything in them, the fallibility, the good, the bad, but you can see them as good as they are, even with the bad, then you see yourself from a higher perspective. It is like seeing yourself through the eyes of God. And that this is such a... so I believe that 'healing' in a group can be much better than individually. (Barbara, female, 44, small town, Everness 2021)

As noted earlier, this aspect can be found in the thought of Gauthier, who suggested that one of the characteristics of these events is 'healing yourself through the healing of others, and vice versa' (Gauthier, 2014, p. 268). Temporary relationships create resonance when a mutual recognition and response exist between the subjects. The common worldview and experiences connect the festival participants, and the horizontal axis of resonance emerges. At the Fekete Zaj festival, the aspect of connecting to others while still having their own experiences was also emphasised. Individual and collective experience occur separately, but they influence each other. This is also a characteristic of horizontal resonant relationships (Rosa, 2019).

It is a very good feeling for me to feel that people are somehow connected despite their differences. These human encounters that I have, I have even met old acquaintances here and new ones, it is very fulfilling. [...] I walk around and I really feel like I'm in a village where you greet people just because they're in the same place. So, I like it a lot. Of course, when you're at a concert, the crowd moves together, but I've heard that people can experience it very differently (Kira, female, 31, county town, Fekete Zaj 2022).

5.4 Resonance on the self-axis

According to Rosa, the self-axis that exists alongside the other three axes describes resonance with oneself, with one's own mind, body, and soul. The resonant relationship occurs with oneself, with another person or community, with an object, a place, or nature, with divine or supernatural powers, when the self is 'in resonance with our highest aspirations and strongest evaluations' [borrowed from Charles Taylor (1989)] (Rosa, 2020a, p. 6). Resonance works on this axis in the same way as in any other relationship: both sides (in the case of the self-axis, *body* and *interpretation*) are balanced, and 'constantly respond to and transform each other' (Rosa, 2020a, p. 6).

When talking about religionesque experiences, the vertical axis should also be mentioned. In these relationships, a person can resonate with a higher power, a divine being or something they believe in, and with 'life, existence, or the world as a whole' (Rosa, 2019, p. 195). In these relationships, the self, the body, and the object of the experience are all active participants. They are most interesting when one resonates with such abstract notions as life, existence, a higher power, or the self.

The interviewees at Everness reported that the people and atmosphere helped them to leave their comfort zone, which suggests the characteristics of affection and self-efficacy. In addition, they do not consciously seek resonant experiences but simply let them happen.

Q- What kind of experiences and feelings are you looking for during a programme?

A - Well, I'm not looking. I receive the signal. So, if I walk in front of [a lecture or performance] and it grabs my attention or calls me in, I go in there. [...] When we finish this interview, I will check in the programme what is going on, and there will be a reason why a programme starts exactly when we finish. [...] There are programmes that interest me, and if I can get there, that's great, but I let myself drift and I don't have any expectations (Barbara, female, 44, small town, Everness 2021).

Letting the programmes 'call', 'touch', or 'attract' the participants was a commonly held view at the festival. Visitors always found an explanation or a reason why they came to a certain programme. They felt that they had been called upon, and this had already put them on a resonant axis with the object of the relationship. Most of the time, they felt emotions that could suggest resonance when they happened to go to a programme that then spoke to them.

This was closely related to the fact that the randomly selected programmes often pushed the participants out of their comfort zone, thereby increasing their self-awareness.

Two of my interviewees reported an experience that reflected the elements articulated by Rosa, and even by James and his 'mystical experience' (James, (1902] 2008).

Q: Did you have an experience that was more important, when a feeling found you?

A1: Yes, absolutely, at the Earthjam concert. (a Hungarian band playing psychedelic trance music.) I think I can say that about both of us there.

A2: Yes, I think it was very....

A1: ...it really took us away...

A2: ...we danced together there, and I think we danced quite a lot...

A1: Yeah it was...wow. It was a very interesting state and I think Earthjam is very good at taking you from the most natural, slow, breeze-like movement to a place where your body is practically falling apart. So you go through a process where it doesn't matter who's around you, it doesn't matter what the temperature of the ground is – although usually it's very important whether you are standing on a cold or a warm or a gravel ground – and when you've been dancing for an hour and a half and your muscles are throbbing and cramping but no, the world just disappears... I think it's indescribable.

A2 – [in awe] I don't really have anything to add to that... (Roland, male, 25, Budapest, volunteer, Everness 2021).

A1 - ...it was really special for us on Earthjam (Lili, female, 21, county town, volunteer, Everness 2021).

At the Lélek festival, it was clear from the outset that there was a sense of collective effervescence and *communitas*. This was expressed in a religious ritual that bound people together through the practice of a common faith. Most of the participants mentioned that the performers and the musicians help them to live the experience, to *immerse* themselves. Immersion can be understood as 'getting-drawn-into-something' and 'letting go' (Schüler, 2017, p. 368).

I already have a few favourite songs that I sometimes listen to at home. And sometimes their vibe is very good because I can relate to them, I can experience them in myself. Now I could hear them live, for example by Béla Pintér, (one of

the best-known Christian singers in Hungary, performing at events regardless of denomination.) and the feeling was [very good]. And I actually made a video of it to have the experience, but I was *in* the experience, so I don't think I actually filmed him, I filmed something else [laughs], so I just stood there and said 'Oh, it's good' (Mira, female, 21, small town, volunteer, Lélek festival 2022).

Sebastian Schüler explains that immersion 'always involves two sides, namely affective as well as controlling aspects, and their merging and convergence' (Schüler, 2017, p. 379). *Affect* is an 'occurring emotion or temper with a special quality of feeling or sensing to it, which can cause particular behaviours' (Schüler, 2017, p. 379). Schüler continues:

The ritual participant is not a machine that automatically falls into arousal and entrancement after entering the ritual mode. Rather he or she tunes in to the ritual atmosphere and thereby gives way for the feeling of 'being-drawn-into-something' while at the same time being able to control the moment of 'letting-yourself-go' (Schüler, 2017, p. 379).

This interpretation is very close to the description of resonant relationships, which are, additionally, always reciprocal. Immersion (and resonance) can be created when both parties influence and control each other in the ritual encounter. Rosa explains that without a mutual connection, the relationship is *resonanceless*, because the two parties 'never manage to move in sync with each other' (Rosa, 2019, p. 65). Total immersion was often manifested in physical movement: singing and praying with arms open or raised was common. Although the auditorium was full of chairs, at the concerts people mostly stood up from their seats and many knelt on the floor.

At the Fekete Zaj festival, as at Everness, visitors could show their identity without judgement, living their true selves without having to play a role or 'wear a mask'.

During these few days every year, I feel that I can really be myself, and this does not mean that I behave completely differently from usual, because I don't, but somehow, somehow, it's a little bit different. So, I don't need to wear masks. And by the way, something else is, this feeling that usually hits me... this may sound stupid, but from the thought of the Zaj, somewhere around last weekend I already felt like I was in love. And it wasn't love for a specific person, so there was no object, just the feeling, from this Zaj vibe. That it's coming soon and I'm really

looking forward to being here – and this is the kind of feeling of love that I can attach to it (Dorina, female, 37, volunteer, Budapest).

The cathartic experiences could be achieved through music, which has a strong and ineffable character.

Q - You mentioned this cathartic experience. If you think about it, how could you describe it? What happens inside you when you experience catharsis?

A - Well, we once said that there are one or two performers whose concerts are almost like going to a ceremony or experiencing a ritual. And seeing and experiencing such a ritual together creates such a... strong relationship. But for example, a [friend of mine and I] were at a concert in one of the previous years, and I stood with him speechless and we just hugged each other afterwards because that concert was such a visceral experience that... I can't find words. We looked at each other and felt the same. And this is something that I don't think happens often... and I like it very much [tears in her eyes] (Emma, female, 31, Budapest, Fekete Zaj 2022).

6. Limitations and risks

The research itself has limitations as it is qualitative research that cannot provide a full picture of all the events – although neither is its goal. The goal was to show instances from festival events that can be understood through the lens of resonance theory, testing its applicability to empirical research. In these settings, this experiment can be deemed successful. We may then ask: Is this the solution? Shall we all go to festivals in order to attain the uncontrollable – to attain resonance? Of course, in addition to chasing the idea of resonance, festival experiences have potential risks. It is no coincidence that Rosa emphasises on many occasions that resonance is uncontrollable (Rosa, 2020b). Some authors would disagree. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, for example, described what he called the 'flow' experience (something very similar to resonance), but suggests that such an experience can be learned and controlled (Csíkszentmihályi, 2009). Rosa may, however, be wanting to warn us: chasing resonant experiences can lead to a lack of fulfilment or even to hedonism (Schulze, 2008). Building our emotional balance on temporary experiences may result in an emotional crisis – something that we are already living in the twenty-first century (Rosa, 2019, p. 427). However, in

contemporary society the concept of resonance is very much needed as a response to alienation, and even if it cannot be controlled, one can still be open to it.

As well as being able to ‘unlock’ resonance, festivals can also have some dangers. Visiting festivals is often described as a ‘switching off’ from everyday life, as an ‘escape’ to another reality. This is a concept worthy of further investigation: Does humanity today need to escape from societal problems and crises or rather to actively work on solutions? Or are festivals not a way to escape only, but an opportunity to experience the values and goals that humanity is indeed actively working on in a temporary utopia?

Another issue is the consumerist aspect of the events: festivals such as Everness, but also the other two festivals described here, are essentially selling something. They are brands that sell products (Schouten, McAlexander and Koenig, 2007; Hudson *et al.*, 2015), and through these products, they sell experience, religion, spirituality, and, yes, resonance. Visitors often return to the event the following year in the hope of receiving the same product, but the product is elusive and there is no guarantee that it will be the same. Rosa warns us about exactly this: the need for more and more just feeds the acceleration process (Rosa, 2024).

7. Conclusion

Resonance theory proved to be applicable to the three festivals examined here. The characteristics of a resonant experience can be traced in some of the interview excerpts, and the axes of resonance identified. Participants at a mindfulness festival, a religious festival, and a metal music festival had experiences that can be understood as resonant in relation to the festival area, the festival objects, other participants, and to themselves. The two methodological tools – the event religion model and the umbrella term ‘religionesque’ – seemed useful in the empirical analysis of resonance theory. ‘Resonant experiences’ (or relationships) can be placed among the collection of terms that aim to grasp and describe experiences that are ‘religious’ or at least akin to being religious. Further research should explore the potential interpretive dangers of resonance theory and how this is manifested empirically, and whether resonance theory offers an appropriate interpretative framework for approaching religious experiences, and what this could mean for this field of research.

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