

**Exploring the Socio-Cultural and Educational Value of Children Festival:**

**The Case of Vegera Festival in Greece**

MSc Thesis Youth, Education & Society

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### Abstract

This study examines the experience and experienced value of participants of the children's festival in Greece 'Vegea Fest'. For the data collection, in-depth semi-structured interviews (n=17) were conducted among three participant groups: children, elderly and educators. Using phenomenology as research method, the analysis shows that participants' experiences are positive and could be separated into shared experiences, such as Entertainment, Learning and Social interaction, and experiences specific to each group. The Experienced Value of the festival concerns Sociocultural aspects such as local heritage preservation and village animation, and Educational aspects, such as teaching customs and providing inspiration for educational design. The findings imply that municipalities that are interested in animating communities or preserving their local customs are encouraged to make use of festivals organized by and with the community members. Educators are also encouraged to participate in children's festivals with their students in order to provide them with non-formal learning opportunities, but also for them to be inspired for their educational design.

*Key words:* Children's festival experiences, experienced value.

Exploring the Sociocultural and Educational Value of Children Festival: The case of  
the Vegera festival in Greece

Urbanisation, coupled with increased mobility threatens the existence of and person's connections to communities that are important to them (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). In this context, communities explore new ideas and ways to maintain their core values in their effort to adjust to the changing times (Rogoff, 2003). Festivals can be considered as one of these ways, since they have the potential in animating communities (Quinn, 2005). Despite the decline of the population, festivals can be seen as a sign of development by residents of communities (Gerrard, 2000). Additionally, Frisby and Getz (as cited in Riga, 2012) support that the idea behind their conception is the preservation of cultural heritage.

Besides the large number of studies about festivals, such as studies on their economic impact, far too little attention has been paid to their social-cultural and educational value (Small, Edwards & Sheridan, 2005; Getz, 2010; Gursoy, Kim & Uysal, 2004). This aspect of festivals has been disregarded, due to a tendency of perceiving them simply as a 'vehicle' for gaining money (Quinn, 2005). Accordingly, the community engagement with festivals in terms of their social-cultural and educational value remains little understood (Kim and Uysal, 2003). What is more, there is a lack of in-depth empirical analysis focused on the experience of participants. This creates a need for implementing phenomenological research on this subject which considers actual experiences of their participants (Getz, 2010).

Studying festivals is important for several reasons. It helps organizers, sponsors, municipalities and community associations to have a better understanding of the value of the festivals beyond the economic terms. Added to that, when festivals

are organized for socio-cultural or educational purposes, educators can get better insights in using festival as tool for informal learning.

This paper presents and investigates the case of the Children's festival Vegera in Greece. The research questions are: 'How did the participants of the 2nd Vegera festival (the children, the educators and the elderly) experience taking part in the festival?' and: 'How did they experience its sociocultural and educational value?'

### **The Current Study and the Children's Festival Vegera**

The current study focuses on the experiences during the children's festival 'Vegera fest'. This is an annual children's festival which has been implemented twice, in June 2016 and 2017 accordingly, at the village of Falatados. This village is located on the Greek island of Tinos and has a long history as it exists since 1400 A.D. The village's population has been dramatically reduced, due to the urbanization. As a result, in 1998 its primary school had to shut down. Today it has approximately 200 inhabitants with most them being at the ages between 60 and 85. In 2016 emerged the idea of creating a children's festival to animate the village for two days. The goals of the organizers of the festival were to: a) preserve the local cultural heritage, b) encourage collaboration and fellowship and c) promote intergenerational solidarity.

For the festivals' realization a team of 5 educators and artists from different places of Greece, was formed. They coordinated a series of educational and artistic activities which were based on the village customs, traditions and old stories. These activities were oriented toward the 4th grade children of the Tinos island. The whole program of the festival had the format of an interactive theatrical play. Some of the elderly residents of the village and the coordinators were the actors. Children's activities and games were integrated into this play and they were presented to children as occurring problems. To be solved, children had to take on an active role, and work

together with the elderly and the coordinators. Educators that accompanied their students and some of the residents of the village were the audience. The festival lasted for two days, during which approximately 80 children of the 4th grade, coming from 4 out of the 5 primary schools of Tinos island, and their educators were the guests.

### **Festivals: Origin, Definitions and Literature Review**

Cultivating festivals has been a dynamic, vigorous and vital practice in the cultural lives of every community, while their existence is far from new (Ali-Knight, Robertson and Fyall, 2008; Zifkos, 2015). It is believed that the first festival was held in 534 BC, in Athens, Greece, dedicated to the God of Dionysus, the saint of wine, feast and dance (Quinn, 2005). Festivals begun as religious celebrations which then turned into thematic ones, carried out on the same place at a specific time of the year (Laopodi, 2003). As the time went by, religious ceremonies started to be replaced by arts and music and it was then, that theatre and dance became the predominant features of festivals, and in the '60 and '70 festivals' main focus was put on culture (Riga, 2012). Nowadays, there are plenty of festivals worldwide, which makes it difficult to decide their exact typology (Quinn, 2005).

One of the most common and concise definition of the festivals is given by Getz (2010, p.2) who described them as “themed public celebrations”, while Picard and Robinson (2006, p.3) defined them as “*playful practices that offer ways of exploring and securing being, belonging and meaning in the world*”. In general, festivals constitute events that can be traditional or contemporary, concerning their content and form, while the themes that they celebrate vary (Page and Connell, 2014).

Most of the literature to date have particularly focused on festivals' capacity to generate money, and on their economic impact (Bagiran and Kurgun, 2016; Quinn, 2005). This has been further reinforced by the presumption that earning money is the

main reason for organizing a festival (Gursoy, Kim and Uysal, 2004). In his literature review of 423 articles on festivals, Getz (2010) illustrates some of the research gaps that exist in this field related to both research topics and methodology. In terms of the topics, Getz (2010) points out the need of examining actual experiences of festivals, given the lack of a unified theory that addresses this. Further, Getz (2010) stresses the need of exploring festivals' value beyond the economic one, by considering societal and cultural inputs. Lastly, on the methodological research gaps Getz (2010) suggests implementing phenomenology.

Page and Connell (2014) state that literature's focus on festivals' economic impacts, does not mean that the social, cultural or educational ones have been disregarded at all, but research on the latter aspects, still remains limited. Yürük, Akyol and Şimşek (2017) support that festivals are created to distribute impacts on persons while they bring outcomes which can be measured. But, since the Vegera children's festival has only been implemented twice, it would be unfeasible to propose that it had an impact on its participants or on the community, let alone to measure that. On the other side, this festival is appropriate for studying, since it was focused on a sociocultural and educational orientation and not on the income generation. The literature contributions that focused specifically on festivals as experiences and their sociocultural and educational value are presented below.

### **Festival as Experiences**

Page and Connell (2014) point out that each festival is a temporary experience, created by the combination of time, place, design and ambience, which are formed by the organizers, the participants and the spectators. Equivalently, Getz (2008) characterizes them as one-of-a-kind experiences, since the interactions between the settings, the people and the elements of a festival's program are also

unique. In fact, each festival offers an experience which is shared by guests and hosts and this experience eventually brings them together at the same time and place (Yürük, Akyol & Şimşek, 2017). As such, they promote social interactions between the festivals' participants who can talk with each other and exchange their ideas (Quinn, 2005; Yürük, Akyol and Şimşek, 2017). Finally, based on their content they offer opportunities for entertainment (Bagiran and Kurgun, 2016) and finally prompt emotions (Getz, 2010).

### **Sociocultural Value of Festivals**

Sociology literature supports that festivals' importance is not limited to their economic impacts, since they appear to have "*an even more profound effect upon the community*" (Bagiran & Kurgun, 2016, p. 931). Specifically, Turner (as cited in Gursoy, Kim & Uysal, 2004) states that festivals display symbolically, what a society considers as being its fundamental life. Hence, as Rao (2001) proposes festivals, as shared celebrations between the community members, can enhance social cohesion by strengthening the ties within the community.

Festivals executed by locals and based to cultural traditions and customs present those traditions and customs to the festivals' visitors (Chhabra Healy and Sills, 2003; Felsenstein and Fleischer, 2003). As such, festivals offer the opportunity for the communities to preserve parts of their local cultural heritage, which is formed from survival memories, parts of the past and artefacts (Chhabra Healy and Sills; 2003; Getz, 2010). Thus, according to Bagiran and Kurgun (2016) festival have a potential to preserving parts of the cultural heritage, like customs and traditions.

In addition, festival can potentially bring large crowds in the hosting places by making these places destinations for visitors (Kim and Uysal, 2003). Attracting many people (hosts, guests or both) in a place jointly with the fact that their preparation and

implementation demands the hosts' active participation, festivals also can animate and promote the host communities (Quinn, 2005). Part of a festival's preparation concerns changes to the settings where they take place and when this happens, there is a chance for enhancing this place's image (Gursoy, Kim and Uysal, 2004).

### **Educational Value of Festivals**

The value of learning that can occur outside formal educational systems has been recognized by the OECD, which supports the three following styles of learning (Werquin, 2008). Firstly, the formal one is systematized and structured and includes specific objectives for the learners. Secondly, the informal learning, or learning by experience, is never organized or predetermined for the learners and as such it does not include fixed objectives (Werquin, 2008). In between those two, emerges the non-formal one which *“consists of learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element and it is intentional from the learner's point of view* (Colardyn and Bjornavold, 2004, p. 71).

In this context, learning can emerge anytime, but it can be defined as the learners' active participation in the learning environment. The learning environment consist not only of the physical space, but also of the social interactions between and among the subjects, the activities that those subjects participate in, and the time, which can last for a couple of minutes to hours or day (Agelaki Golfinopoulou, Didachou, Papadakou and Riga, 2012). Thus, festivals can function as settings of non-formal learning (Riga, 2012), promoting social interactions among hosts and guests, providing them with semi-structured learning opportunities and learning experiences.

Added to that, festivals' literature also supports that they can have an educational value (Getz, 2010). Delamere and his colleagues (as cited in Bagiran and

Kurgun, 2016; Page and Connell, 2014) state that during festivals participants experience new activities and they can learn new things.

This paper presents a phenomenological study. The phenomenon of interest of this study was how the participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> children's festival "Vegeera" experienced their participation to that, as well as its sociocultural and educational value.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that examines the lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Perceiving the world as lived by a person, and not separate from that, it seeks to discover how the individual constructs the meaning of human experience (Laverty, 2003; Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004).

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were organized in three different groups based on their age and their role in the festival. Specifically, one group consists of the 5th grade children that had taken part in the 2nd Vegeera fest. The second one consists of the educators that had accompanied their children during the festival. The third one consists of the elderly, host-village inhabitants who had taken part in the festival.

Table 1

#### *Demonstration of participants' description*

Groups	Total number	Male	Female	Ages
Children	10	3	7	10-11
Educators	4	-	4	40-55
The Elderly	6	3	3	70-85

In total, 20 participants took part in this study. In Creswell's work the suggesting sample size for phenomenology is "5 to 25 interviews" (1998, p. 60). The sampling method that was used here was the non-probability one (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vegera fest were included in the sample, since the data in phenomenology must be collected from those that have experienced the examined phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Since the researcher was at the same time one of the festivals' coordinators, all coordinators were excluded from the sample so that to avoid biased answers. Lastly, the fixed number of 20 participants was pre-decided when designing the research for practical reasons. As for the type of sampling strategy the opportunity one was used (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). In the children's case, given that more than 10 children were willing to participate a lottery selection was made so that to provide them all equal opportunities. Overall, the analysis included the 17 participants, 5 male, and 12 female, given that 4 out of the 11 interviews with children were non-codable.

Finally, to ensure the ethical requirements, information sheets and consents forms were given to and fulfilled by the adult participants. Parental consent was obtained for the participating children following the guideline by the European Union Agency for fundamental rights ("Child participation in research", 2018).

### **Instrument**

A protocol with semi-structured interview questions was designed, considering the aforementioned conceptual framework about festivals. In order to ensure validity, it was based also on the work of Gasparatou and Ergazaki (2015) who had applied a phenomenological study with students examining their experience from a 'philosophy for children' program. In the current study though, questions were

categorized based on what they were aiming to examine while each group was asked the same type of questions but from a different perspective (see Appendix A).

### **Procedure**

This paper examined how the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vegera fest, which took place at the village of Falatados in June 2017, worked, through the eyes of its participants. This means that the design of the festival was not part of the research, while the research took place approximately one year after the festival's implementation. For the data collection semi-structure interviews were used. Every participant was interviewed separately. Children's and elderly's interviews lasted at about 20 to 30 minutes for each one, while the educators' lasted from 30 to 45 minutes for each of them. Laws and Mann (2004) propose that incentives can increase participation in research significantly. They also state that it is a way to recognize the value of respondents' time and contribution. For these reasons, t-shirts with the festival's logo were given to children, while cloth bags with the festival's logo were given to the educators and the elderly.

### **Analysis**

"NVivo", qualitative data analysis software, was used for the coding of the tape-recorded interviews. Coding scheme categories emerged from participant's responses from each open-ended question, which are explicitly presented in the results section. To visualize the results, diagrams per each question including categories of responses per group, as well as their frequency were made (see Appendix B). Finally, to summarize them, a table which organizes the results in two themes based on the two research questions was made (see Table 2).

In order for the research questions to be answered, the analysis included only those questions and answers that were relevant for the experiences and value. One

extra question was left out from the analysis, as this had been posed only to the 4 educators and no clear meaning could be attributed to it as the answers diverged greatly (see Appendix A).

## Results

### Experiences from the Children's Festival

All the interviewees stated that they enjoyed their participation in the festival. When asked why, the majority, 75% of the educators and 72% of the children, attributed this to the festivals' educational design: mainly to its interactive activities. As one of the interviewee children said: *"I liked it so much! All these activities are unusual. It was not a show, you didn't have to watch a dancing performance. [...] It's not the case with the other activities that we had taken part with our school"*. As for the elderly, 67% of them stated that they liked it because it brought in touch with young children. One of the elderly said, *"I like it a lot because it brought together the young children with us, the elderly"*. The rest of the elderly enjoyed it because, as they noted, it animated both the children, the elderly and the village.

The responses of participants on how they felt during the festival were centered on feelings of excitement and enthusiasm. Specifically, this was the case for 50% of the children and the educators, who attributed this to the active switching from one activity to the other. It was also the case for a third of the elderly group. Happiness or pride was stated by the rest of the children and 33% of the elderly. Children explained that they were happy for what was happening during the festival because it was the first time that they were taking part in it.

On the other side, the elderly felt happy and pride because many young children visited their place during this day while they got positive feedback for its creation. Some of the elderly felt emotionally moved. Talking about this, one of the

elderly stated: *"I was so emotionally moved, so many children came to our village, they animate it with their voices! [...] I felt it when hearing and seeing our old customs being observed by our grandchildren. It reminded me of my childhood."*

Similarly, one educator noted: *"I felt like I was a child again. I couldn't stop smiling and laughing"*, adding to the elderly.

When asked whether they would recommend the festival to others all of them answered positively, while some of them stated that they had already done so. About a half of the children would recommend it to their friends for the new, fun and different activities. When asked what they mean by 'different' they clarified that they had an active team-player role during the festival. For example, one child said: *"They are different because you don't do them on your own. You need to work with the others and it's fun."*

Half of the elderly would suggest it to their grandchildren to learn about customs and traditions, while the other half would do so for a meeting point of the elderly with the children. 75% of the educators would recommend it to their students since one of them said: *"they can play, learn and have fun with it"*. One of them would advise it to her students since it includes activities and games as a better alternative to 'computers'. When suggesting it to their co-workers, half of the educators see an entertaining and educational value for their students.

Another question, posed to the children and the elderly, was whether there was anything during the festival that they saw, did, listened or learned for the first time in their lives. The equivalent question to the educators was whether they think that the festival had an educational value. All of them answered positively. Specifically, 50% of the educators and 43% of the children, stated that children learned about the old customs, traditions, and old occupations in a playful way. One of the educators said,

*“It definitely has educational value: it offered knowledge about customs to the children that we couldn't transmit no matter how many hours we would talk about them!”*. As one child said: *“I was not aware of what the custom of the 1<sup>st</sup> of May was about. I become familiar with that during the festival”*. Another third of the children did not state that they learned old customs but said that they learned new games.

One of the educators also said that the festival had educational value because children could learn new things regarding their culture without them realizing it. For the elderly it was also the first time that they acted in front of so many children.

Children and the elderly were also asked whether they have ever played with the elderly or children accordingly before the festival. Most of them, 57% of the children and 67% of the elderly, answered positively, stating that they usually play with their grandparents and grandchildren. However, all of them noted that the time spent among them during the festival, was totally different when compared with the time spent with their own grandparents/grandchildren. The interaction was considered unusual due to the type of the activities/games during the festival as well as the settings where they took place.

The rest of the children and the elderly stated that it was their first time playing games with one another. All of them were also asked if they liked the fact that they had to collaborate in some of the activities with one another. All the participants (children and the elderly) answered positively, except from a child who mentioned that playing with the elderly is not fun in general. As for the rest of the children, about half of them noted they could achieve better results by collaborating with the elderly during the games for example:

*“I liked it! To be honest, at the beginning I thought that it would be difficult, [...] for example, we, the children, can run faster than the elderly. But eventually, we slowed down our speed just a bit, so that us to go all together [...] They cooperated too, and they helped us to find the flower because they knew the yards. So, together we made it easier and we won”.*

Lastly, one child said that she enjoyed collaboration because she could meet new grandparents, other than her own. About half of the elderly also stated that they liked it because it brought them closer with the children and another half said it was new and fun to collaborate with children.

Another question posed to the children and the elderly was if their perceptions of the elderly and the children have changed after the festival. Almost all the interviewed elderly stated that their perceptions of children did not change after the festival. This was the case for the 42% of the children who stated that they think about the elderly in the same way as they did before the festival. Apparently, one of the elderly stated that his perceptions have changed after since now he finds children more interesting. Most of the children pointed out that their perceptions of the elderly have actually changed after the festival. Specifically, they explained that it was during the festival that they realized that the elderly can be interesting, fun, they can make jokes. One of them said: *“I saw that no matter how old one is, he has still something interesting to say or teach me through the game”*, and *“I also didn't know that the elderly people are able to run! [...] .*

**Summary of experiences from the festival.** In general, the results of the study can be summarized into two themes with one of them being the experiences from the Vegera festival, as presented in Table 2. Experiences can be separated in

“shared experiences”, that were similar among all groups and more “specific experiences” presented for only some of the groups.

During the Vegera festival three types of shared experiences emerged: the entertaining, the educational and the social interactions. Specifically, one of the common views amongst all the interviewee groups was that the children's festival was an entertaining experience for all. The whole program of the festival had the format of an interactive theatrical play, with some of the elderly (residents of the village) and the coordinators being the actors. Children's activities and games were integrated into this play since they were presented as occurring problems. To be solved, children had to participate, take on an active role, and work together with the actors. Educators that accompanied their students and some of the residents of the village were observers.

Another recurrent view in the three groups was that the festival constituted an educational experience for the children who participated. Customs, traditions, stimulations of old occupations and games were perceived by the participants as being taught to and/or learned by children in a playful way. The festival was also perceived as an implicit educational experience for children, since they saw a real example of collaboration, among those who worked together to design and run it. Having to form teams with children from different schools, work with them or with the elderly during some of the festivals' activities, offered children the opportunity to practice their own collaborative skills in practice.

Finally, the festival was perceived by all the interviewee groups as an experience which promoted social interactions. Specifically, participants referred to the social interactions between and among: (a) the 4<sup>th</sup> grade children who were coming from 4 different schools of the same island, (b) the elder people of the village who had an active role in this, (c) those residents who followed and watched the

whole event, (d) the educators that accompanied their students to it, (c) the festival coordinators' team members.

Turning now to the specific experiences per group, for children this was the activities, for the educators was the observation and for the elderly the rejuvenation. Regarding the group of the children, what was considered, according to them, as a unique experience, was the festivals' activities and games. First, what made them special, was the setting of the village (72% of the interviewed children hadn't been in this village before) where they took place. Also, the fact that the activities were implemented in many different spots of the village outdoors. Lastly, the fact that they had to work in groups and not individually, often interacting with the elderly people through energetic games made it also a unique experience for children.

All of the elderly proposed that they felt rejuvenated during the two days of the festival, which was supported by the educators too. Elderly attributed this feeling of "being a child again" to their interactions with the children, as well as to the fact that the content of the festivals' activities included their old habits and customs which reminded them of their childhood.

As a special experience for the educators was that they took on the role of observer during the whole program of the festival. Specifically, they stated that since they saw that the activities attracted children's attention to their full extent, or that they didn't have to tell them explicitly to pay attention, they could be present-minded to what was happening. So, they could observe their student's behaviours and emotional reactions to what was happening and their interactions with the other participants. What also they could observe was their students' aptitudes, talents and preferences as expressed during the activities.

### **Experienced Value of the Children Festival**

In order to see how children experienced the festival's value, they were asked if they would like to participate to the next Vegera fest as volunteers/facilitators. All of them answered positively, while the reasons showed some slight differences. Specifically, 58% of the children stated that they would like to become volunteers. For example, one of them said: *"Of course! Because then, I would have to come up with new games for the guest children and play that with them, which means that I would have the chance to learn more things like customs, or funny stories"*. One of those children stated that by becoming a volunteer, he could inspire the other children to become also volunteers and help to its creation. 28% of the children pointed out that they would like to do it so that to make new friends, and generally meet new people.

Elderly's view of the Vegera fest's value, was examined by asking them initially whether they think that the festival is significant, and if so, for whom and why. All of them stated that the festival is important for the children. When asked why, one third said that children learn about customs and traditions, or, that they can be inspired when building their own identities by its content and its creation (33%). As one of them said, *"it is unique because they learn things about who their grandparents used to be, how they used to live, things about their parents' identities and culture which have their roots in the past"*. One of the elderly further stated that when coming to the festival children are taking part in the community and its habits.

83% of the elderly also supported that the Vegera fest is important for the host-village of Falatados. Almost half of them stated that it animates and promotes the village, or as one of them said: *"It's so significant because it revitalized the village! The old school was overrun with children, they walked in the streets, houses*

*were open, doors were open, the elderly came out of their homes. [...] Falatados came to life these days*". As for the rest, they stated that it preserves the cultural heritage.

All the educators that were asked if they think that the festival promotes social collaboration among the participants, answered positively. Specifically, 75% of them stated that it promotes it among and or between the children, the elderly (residents) and the coordinators' team, referring to the time that it takes place, as a program. On the other side, one of the educators supported that the whole festival is based on the social collaboration, between the elderly (residents of the village) and the young coordinators' team who work together to design and run it.

Educators were then asked if they think that the festival could promote social cohesion between different groups. 75% stated that it promoted cohesion between the different age groups. As one of them said, *"I believe that this was one of the goals of the festival and it was achieved to its full extent. Different people, different ages, different backgrounds all come together and work together. They have fun, learn new things and cooperate"*. Here, some of those who answered positively, also noted that it could promote it more, if including guests from different islands, or if being implemented in different villages of the same island. Lastly, one of the educators said that festival's duration of two days was too small and as such it couldn't promote social cohesion.

Educator's view of the Vegera fest' s value was asked by questioning them what the benefits are of this festival, if any, in terms of (a) the children that participate, (b) the educators that accompany their students, (c) the host-village of Falatados. Being in the same line with some of the elderly, half of the educators, also supported that this festival is beneficial for the children, since according to them,

children learn about customs and traditions, in a playful way. The rest found the festival beneficial for the children because it is based on non-formal learning. For example, one of them answered: *“It was beneficial because it was based on non-formal learning. It wasn't something that the children had passively to watch. [...] They felt, observed, saw, smelled, tasted, laughed, they experienced it [...]! It was so real, so vivid!”*.

Regarding the festival's significance for those educators that accompany their students to it, almost all of them (75%) found it inspirational or helpful for their own educational design. Another one affirmed that the themes presented during the festival became topics for discussion among her and the students during her lessons in the classroom. Additionally, one also noted that even the format of a children's festival was inspiring and helpful, given that it was adopted by one of the island's schools, which organized such an event at the end of the school year.

One of the educators said that the Vegera festival was helpful for her because she had the chance to discover some of her students' talents (like dancing, singing, drawing) that she didn't know about before. She proposed that contexts like those of the children's festival allow the students to express parts of their psychological aptitudes that are hidden. Understanding what the preferences of her students are, was, according to her, useful feedback for her to design activities based on her student's preferences. Finally, one of them considers it as beneficial for the educators since it offers them the opportunity to come closer to their students and feel restful and happy.

Regarding now the benefits for the host-village, almost all the educators stated that it animates and promotes the village. Finally, one of them pointed out that it

contributes to its economy, since many people visit the village during this day the festivals' attendees learn about and or use the facilities of the local cafes, or taverns.

**Summary of the children's festival experienced value.** The second theme into which results can be summarized is the Vegera festival's experienced value (see Table 2). The participants' experienced value of the festival can be divided into two types based on its content: the "sociocultural" and the "educational value".

The sociocultural includes the cultural heritage preservation and the host-village promotion and animation. Children's festival experienced value by adult-participants showed that it can contribute to the cultural heritage preservation. As they said, Falatados, like the other villages of the island, has customs and traditions that only the elderly residents of the village know. Since in this festival the village's customs, traditions and old occupations were integrated into the activities and since they were introduced to the children, it helps to keep them "alive".

Another theme that emerged during the interviews, was that it promoted the place where it took place, the village of Falatados. According to the participants, through this festival, the village was 'opened up' to the broader community. Approximately 85 children with their educators, four incomers coordinators visited and became familiar with that. Lastly, the adult-interviewee participants noted that the village, which has started becoming desolated, was for two days animated through the festival. When asked how, they noted children's attendance, the sound of their voices, the elderly's interaction with the children and their feeling of rejuvenation.

As for the educational value of the Vegera festival, it was associated with the teaching of local customs and traditions to the children through non-formal learning. The educational value of the Vegera festival was also associated with the inspiration for educational design that it provided to the educators. Although this was not one of

the goals of the festival, educators proposed that it had an educational value for them as well, as they became familiar with its content and mainly with its interactive teaching methods. Features of the festivals' educational design were adopted by them in their lessons and even the format of a children's festival was adopted in the school context by one of the schools.

Table 2

*Demonstration of Summary of interview results*

Theme one: Experiences from the children's festival Vegera	
Shared	Specific
Entertainment	Children: Activities
Learning	Elderly: Rejuvenation
Social Interactions	Educators: Observations
Theme two: Experienced Value of the Children's Festival Vegera	
Sociocultural	Educational
Local Cultural Heritage Preservation	Teaching Customs
Village-community Animation	Inspiration for Educational Design
Village-community Promotion	

### **Discussion**

The current study aimed to answer how the three participant groups (children, elderly and educators) experienced their involvement in the children's festival Vegera. Further it focuses on how these participants experienced its sociocultural and educational value. Findings suggest that the Vegera festival was a positive experience for both children, elderly and educators. These experiences could be separated into shared ones such as entertainment, learning and social interaction and experiences specific to each group. Specifically, as a special experience for the children was the

festival's activities and their active role during them. For the elderly was that they felt rejuvenated and finally for the educators that they were observers of the whole process.

Findings on how they experienced the festivals' sociocultural value, suggest that it helps to preserve the local cultural heritage of the village, as well as to its promotion and animation. As for the experienced educational value, it was pointed out that children were taught about local customs and traditions through an interactive and playful way. Added to that, due to the educational orientation of the festival, it was suggested that educators got insights about interactive teaching methods and that they were inspired to use local customs and traditions as materials to their educational design.

The findings of this study and especially the experienced value of the Vegera festival is here just suggested. This means that this value cannot be generalized in other contexts, since only one children's festival was examined. Further, the Vegera festival had a small duration, which lasted only for two days. Nevertheless, it is here suggested that participants' view about the Vegera fest' s value matters since they were those that experienced that. Besides, although the research was conducted one year after the festival's implementation, participants were willing to give interviews while they could recall the festival's content in detail.

As mentioned in the literature review, festivals can offer to the participants opportunities for entertainment (Bagiran and Kurgun, 2016). Being in the same line with this, findings showed that the Vegera festival was an entertaining experience for all of its participants (the children, the educators and the elderly). Given that the festival had the format of an interactive theatrical performance, there were also parts that participants were simply observers as an audience does.

In addition, festivals promote social interactions among and between the hosts and guests that participate in (Quinn, 2005; Yürük, Akyol and Şimşek, 2017). This was also the case for the Vegera festival. It was perceived as a shared experience that brought together the children, the elderly, the educators and the coordinators, encouraging social interactions among and between them.

Considering now the experienced sociocultural value of the Vegera festival, the study suggests that it animated and promoted the village. This was attributed to the fact that approximately 85 children with their visited it and played in its different spots for two days. It was also attributed to the elderly residents of the village active participation and involvement to its implementation. All these findings are related with the work of Kim and Uysal (2003) and Quinn (2005) who also state that festivals can promote and animate the host-communities.

Sociocultural value of festivals organized by communities, was associated with their potential in preserving the local cultural heritage (Bagiran and Kurgun, 2016; Chhabra Healy and Sills, 2003; Felsenstein and Fleischer, 2003; Getz, 2010). This is also supported by the findings of the current study: according to the participants the Vegera festival contributes to the maintenance of the local cultural heritage of the village. This was attached to the festival's activities content which was based on the local customs and traditions of the host village.

Further, festivals can function as non-formal learning environments for their participants providing them learning experiences (Riga, 2012). Learning environments consist of the physical place, time, social interactions among the subjects and the actives offered to them (Agelaki et all, 2012). According to the findings, the Vegera festival functioned as a non-formal learning environment, that took place in the different spots of the village, like yards, squares, streets and it lasted

for two hours. It also provided children with semi-structured activities through which children became familiar with local customs. During these activities social interactions between and among the children, the educators, the elderly and the coordinators emerged. As such, the Vegera festival according to the participants had an educational value and was also perceived as a learning experience for the children. This finding also supports Delamere and his colleagues (as cited in Bagiran and Kurgun, 2016; Page and Connell, 2014)'s statement according to which during festivals participants can learn new things.

So, this study contributes to the existing literature on festivals including actual experiences of three participant groups the Vegera festival. It also provides a better understanding on festival's sociocultural and educational aspects that have not been researched as much as the economic ones. Further, it also contributes to the research considering the methodology by applying phenomenology. Lastly, it also gives an insight of festivals as non-formal learning environment.

Considering the limitations of the study, one of them was the small number of participants in the case of educators, which did not allow for variety in their answers' content. Further, the fact the festivals' coordinators were not part of the sampling, was also a limitation. Their views for example, could have contributed to an even more holistic perspective on the festival.

These limitations, jointly with the findings of this study provide the following insights for future research: in order to get an even more holistic perspective upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vegera fest, researchers could also examine the coordinators' experiences. Further, to get a better understanding on festivals' sociocultural and educational value, a comparative study between the Vegera fest and other children's festivals could be conducted. The second ones could be either from the Greek context or

outside of this. Lastly, given the lack of a unified theory that describes the festivals' experiences, research on festivals' actual experiences, using empirical data is a necessity.

One of the practical implications of this study concerns the municipalities that try to animate communities and preserve their local cultural heritage. Specifically, they are encouraged to make use of festivals. However, in order to achieve such goals, communities' residents should be some of the festivals' hosts. Local customs and traditions should be also included in their content and presented to their guests. Secondly, based on the findings, educators are also encouraged to participate with their students in children's festivals in order to provide them with non-formal learning opportunities. Added to that, children's festivals could function as an inspiration for their own educational design. Spending time with their students outside the school classroom, observing them participating in activities, enables them to get a better insight of their students' talents and aptitudes.

All in all, the findings of this study suggest that festivals can have a positive social, cultural and educational relevance, beyond the economic one.

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### Appendices

#### Appendix A. Semi-structure- interview question protocol

Theme:	Children	Educators	Elderly
	-	-	What is Vegeera? Do you keep this habit/custom with the other people at the Village today?
1. Impresion	What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase 'Vegeera fest'?		
2. Descriptive	Had you ever been in Falatados before the Vegeera fest? If not, did you like the village? Yes, or not & why? If yes, did you see that in a different way during the festival?	Which is your relationship with the village of Falatados? What is Falatados for you?	
3. Experience - Liked or not	Did you enjoy the festival? Yes, or not & why?		
4. Descriptive	Which activity/game did you like most? Why?	Did not ask, but they referred	

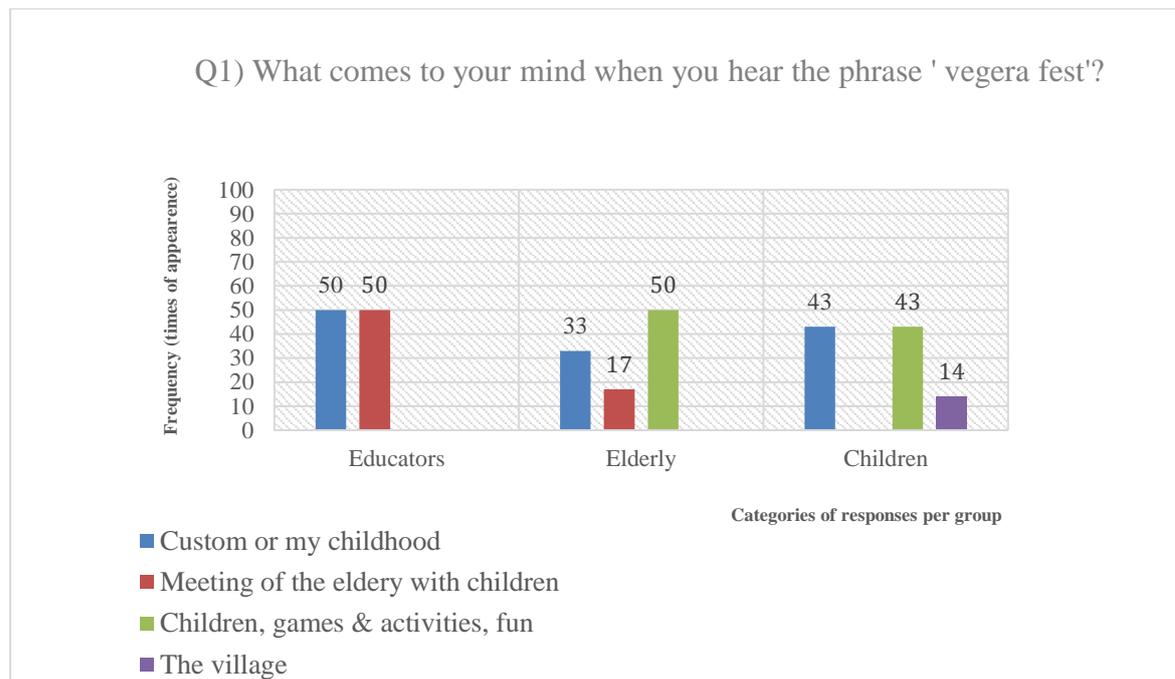
5. Experience - Feeling about it	How/what did you feel during the Vegera fest?		
6. Learning	Is there anything that you saw, listened, did or learned for the first time of your life during the festival? What was that?	Do you think that this festival has an educational character? Yes, or not and why?	Is there anything that you saw, listened, did or learned for the first time of your life during the festival? What was that?
7. Social interactions (among and between different age groups)	At this festival, elder people took part too. In some of the activities you had to collaborate with them so that to fulfil a task (examples).  Have you ever played with elder people before?  Was there any difference compared to the time spent your grandparents?  How was it to collaborate with	What do you think that we would like to achieve through this festival?  Do you think that the festival promotes the social collaboration? Yes, or not and why?  Do you think that the festival could promote social cohesion among the different groups (elder, children, educators, locals) that participate?	At this festival, children took part too. In some of the activities you had to collaborate with them so that to fulfil a task (examples).  Have you ever played with children before?  How was it to collaborate with them?  Did you like it? Why? Did your perception on elder people changed after the festival?

	<p>them? Did you like it? Why?</p> <p>Did your perception on elder people changed after the festival?</p>		
8. Value	<p>Would you like to participate to the next Vegera fest as a volunteer-facilitator? Would you like to be part of the team that organizes/hosts it?</p>	<p>According to your opinion, what are the benefits (if any) of the Vegera fest in terms of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Children</li> <li>b) Educators that accompany their children</li> <li>c) The host community of the village (Falatados)</li> <li>d) Tinos island?</li> </ul>	<p>Would you like the Vegera fest to be continued in the future? Do you think that it is important/necessary ? Yes, or not and why?</p>
9. Experience- 'check' Descriptive	<p>Would you suggest the Vegera fest to your best friend (take part to it)?</p>	<p>Would you suggest the Vegera fest to your co-workers (accompany their students)? And or</p>	<p>Would you suggest the Vegera fest to your grandchildren (take part to it)?</p>

	Yes, or not and why?	to your students (take part to it)? Yes, or not and why?	Yes, or not and why?
10. Dislike - a 'check' on Liking Descriptive	Is there anything that you would like to change in terms of the festival?  Do you have any suggestions for its improvement?		
11. Extra Question		How would you define the cultural identity?  Do you think that this festival could make a small contribution to the development of the participants' cultural identity? If so how?	

**Appendix B.** Diagrams for each interview question with categories of responses per group and their frequency, organized per theme

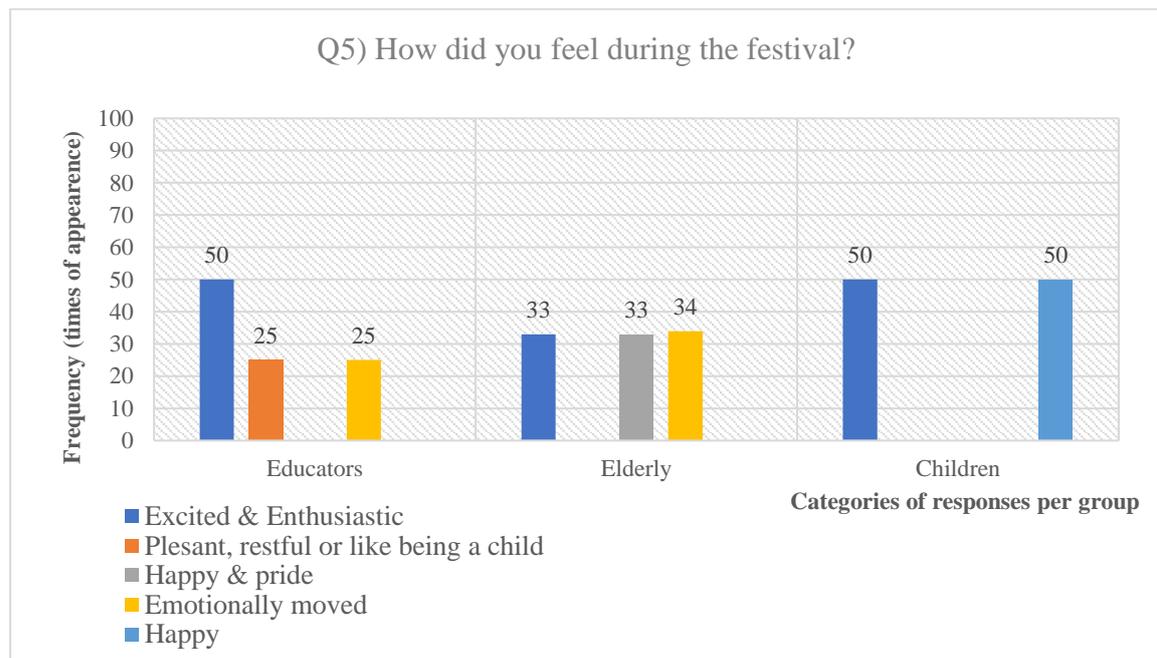
*(Q1) Theme: impression*



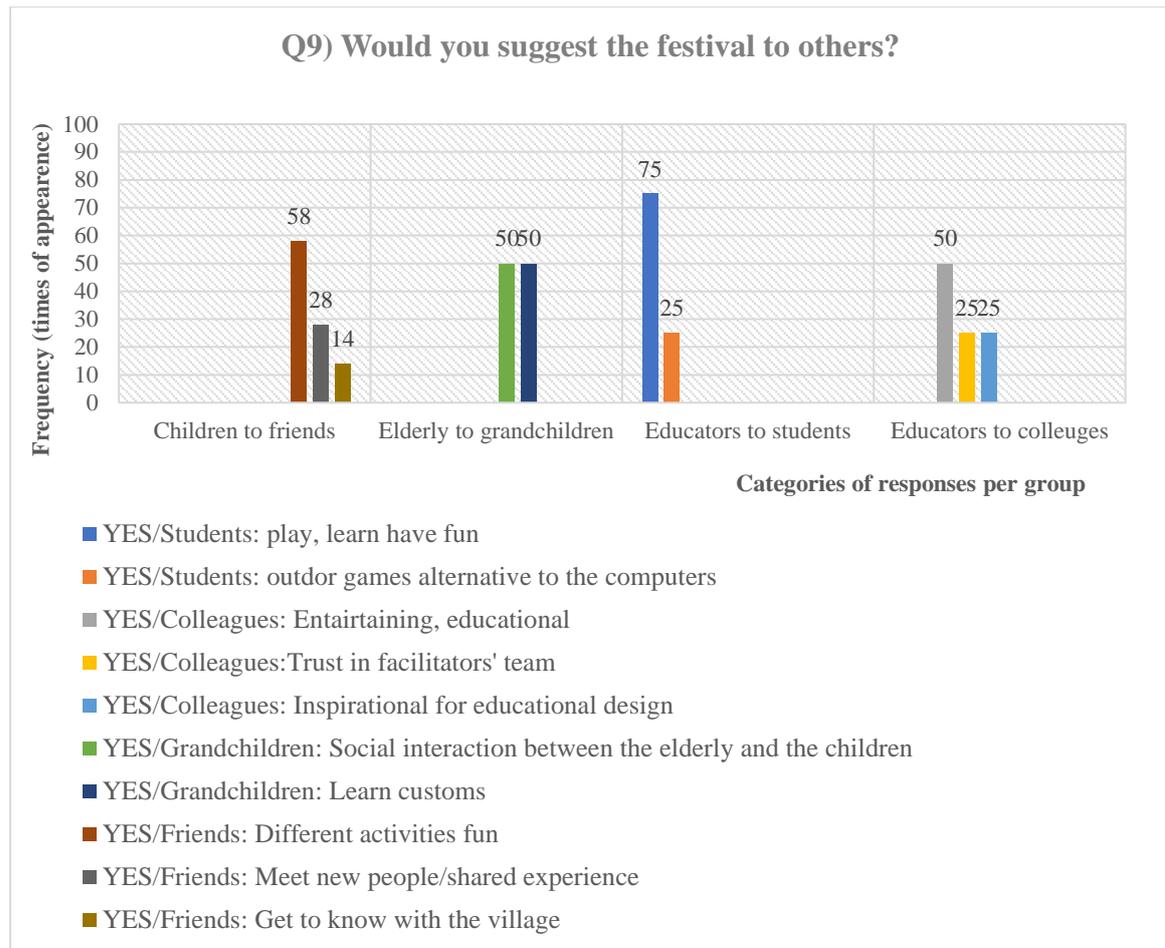
*(Q3) Theme: Experience*



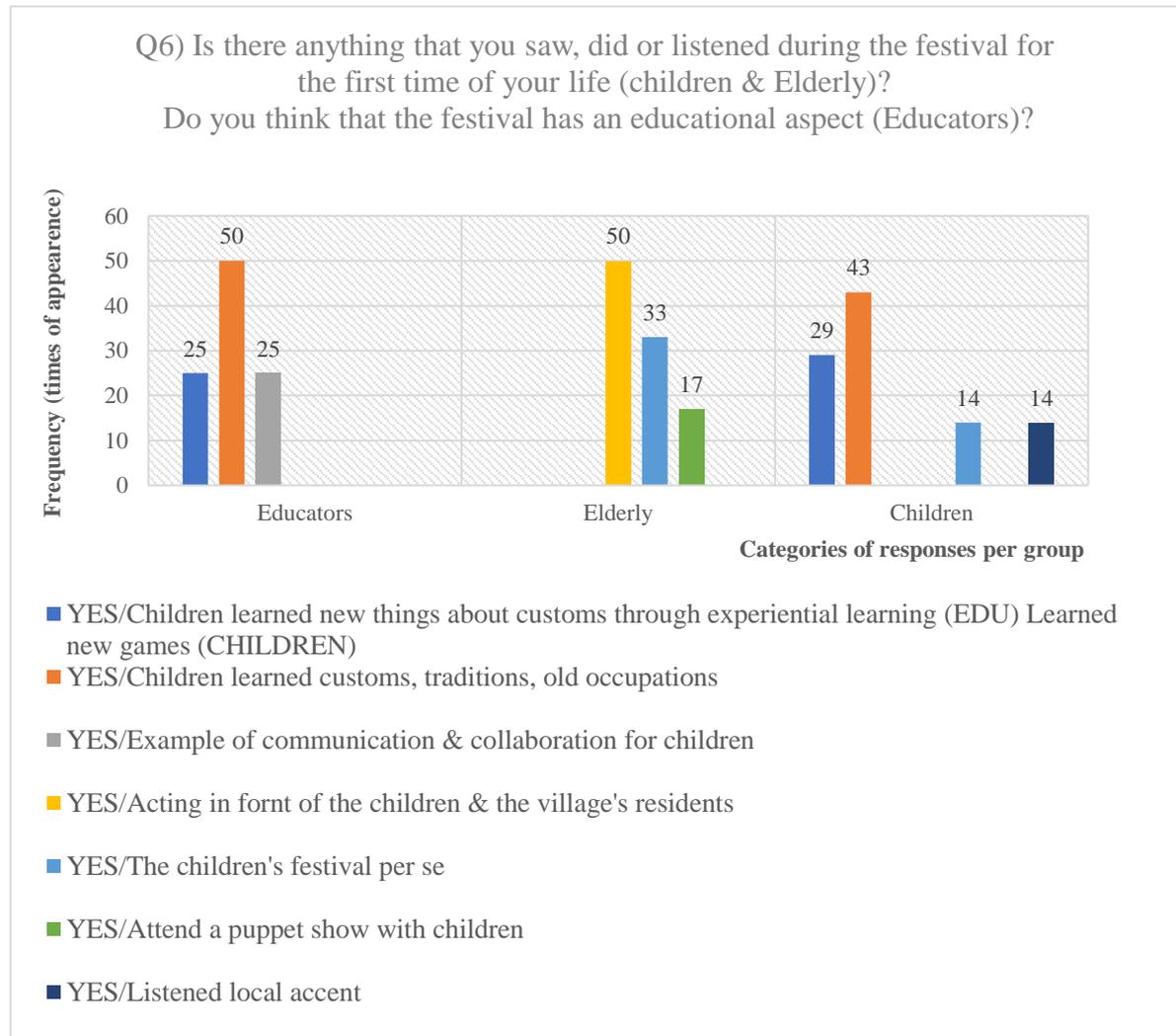
*(Q5) Theme: Experience*



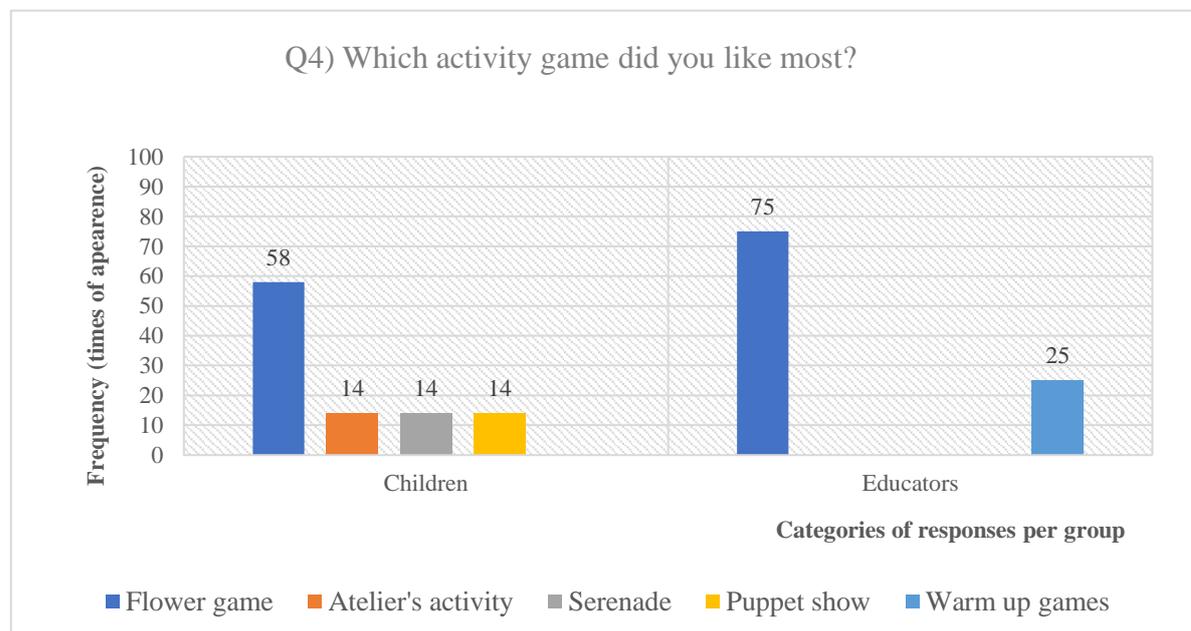
*(Q9) Theme: Experience*



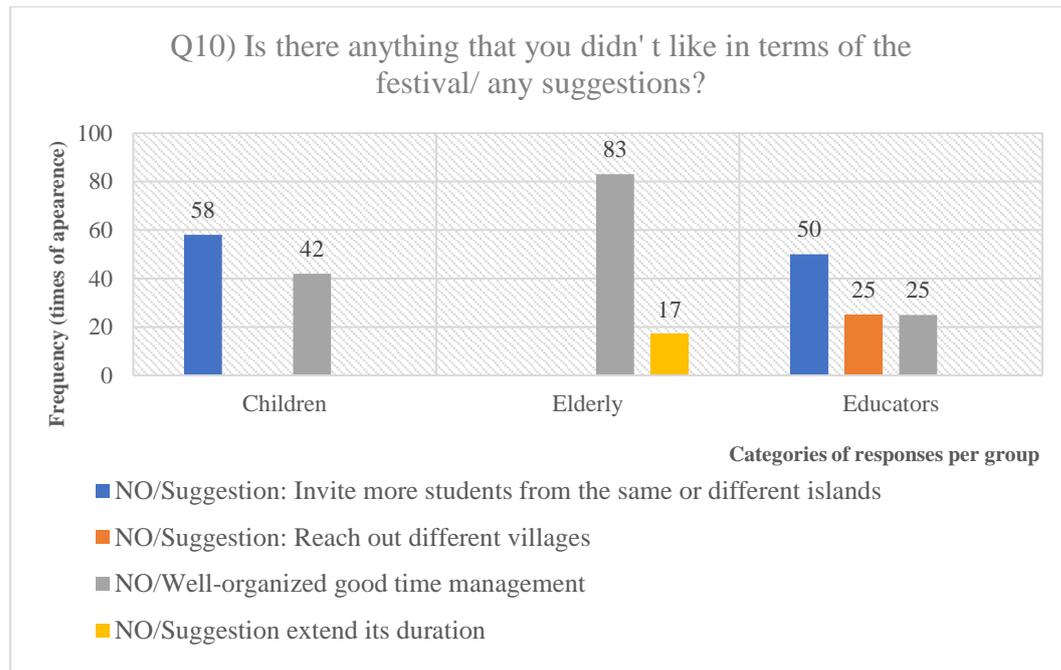
*(Q6) Theme: Learning*



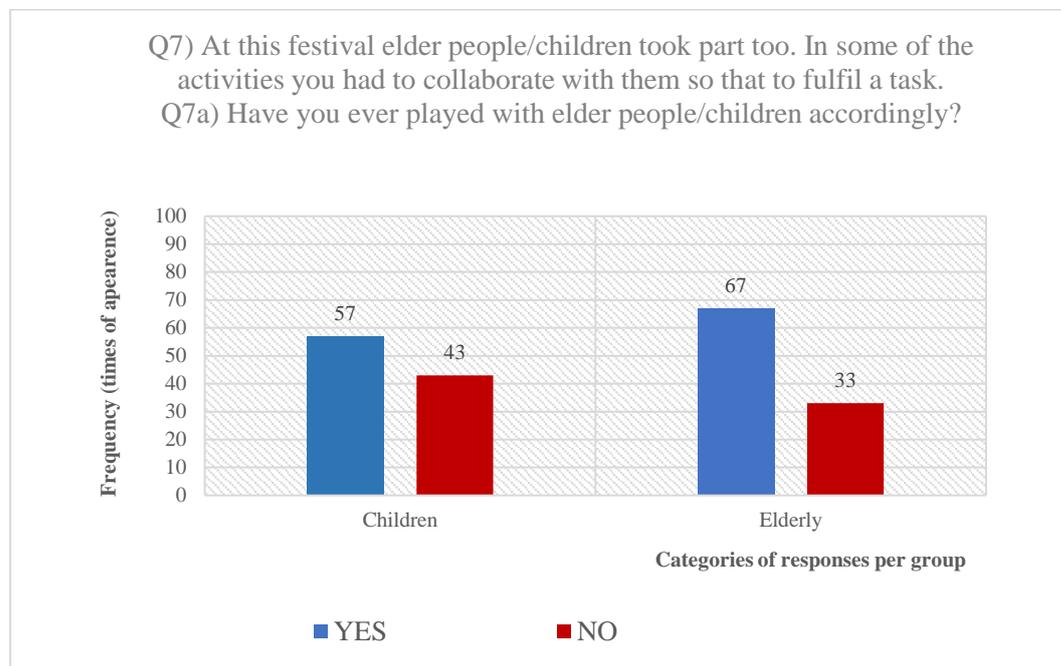
*(Q4) Theme: Descriptive*



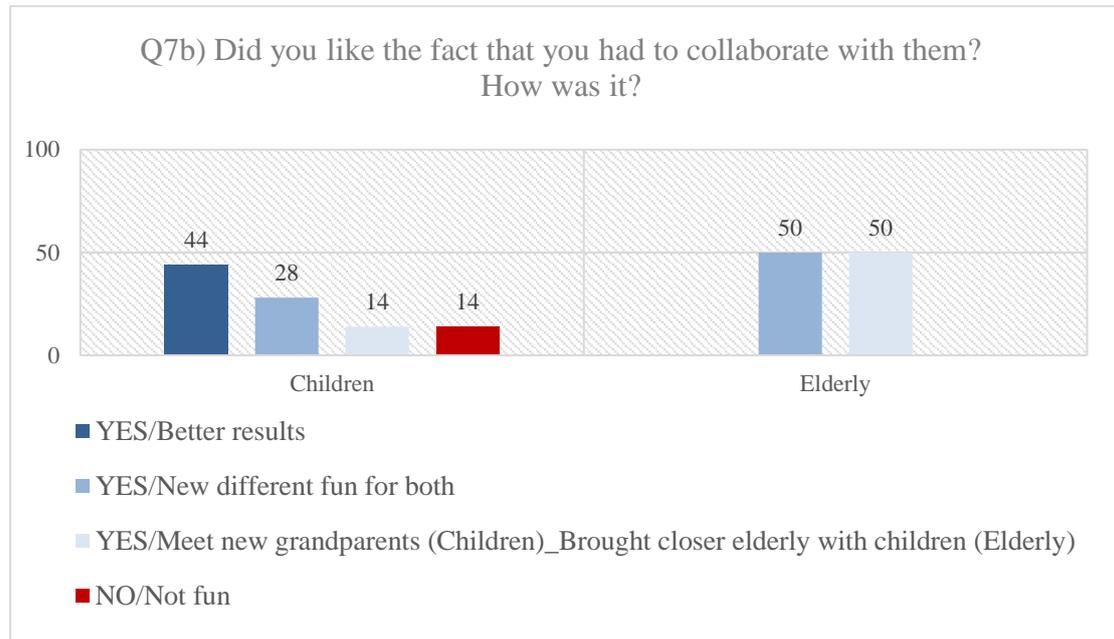
*(Q10) Theme: Descriptive*



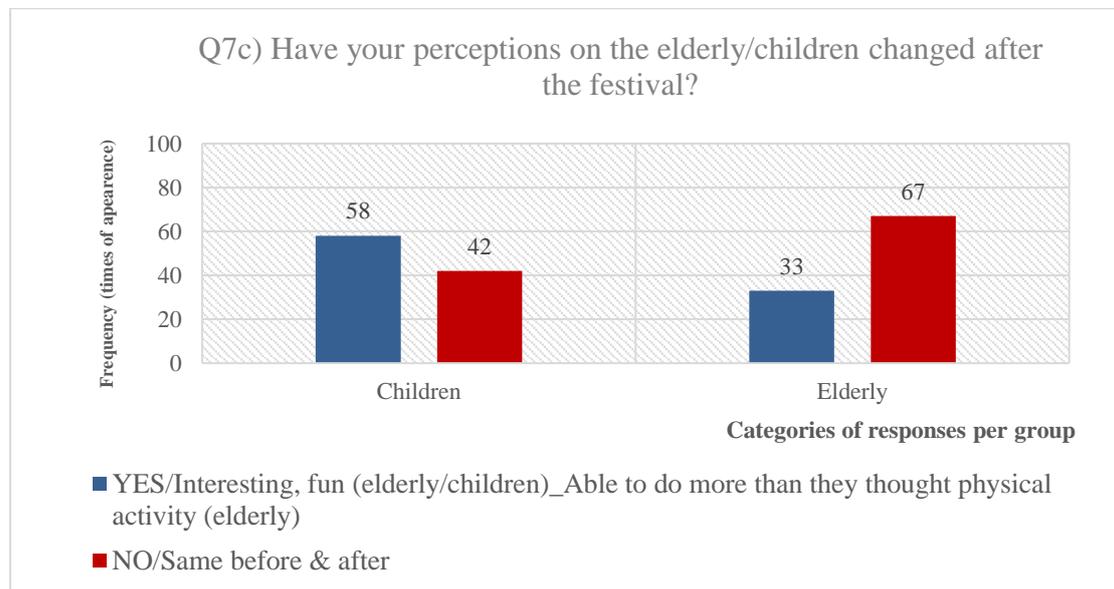
*(Q7 & Q7a) Theme: Social interactions (among and between different groups) Posed to Children & the Elderly*



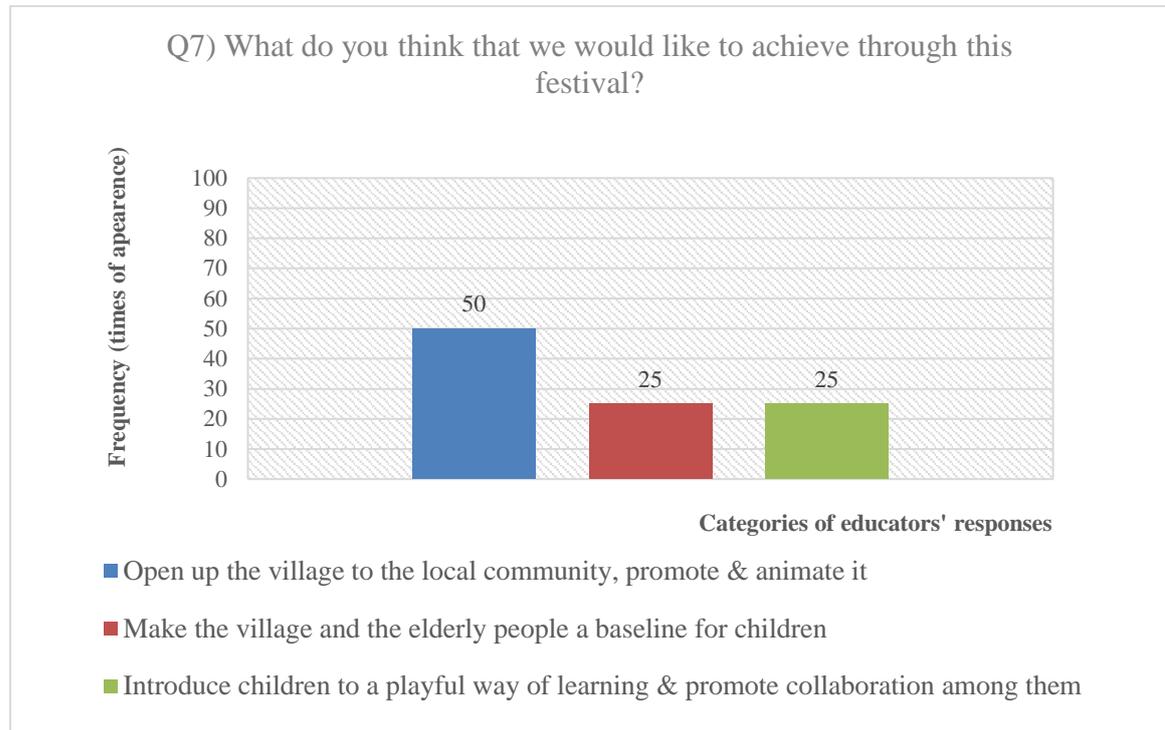
*(Q7b) Theme: Social interactions (among and between different groups) Posed to Children & the Elderly*



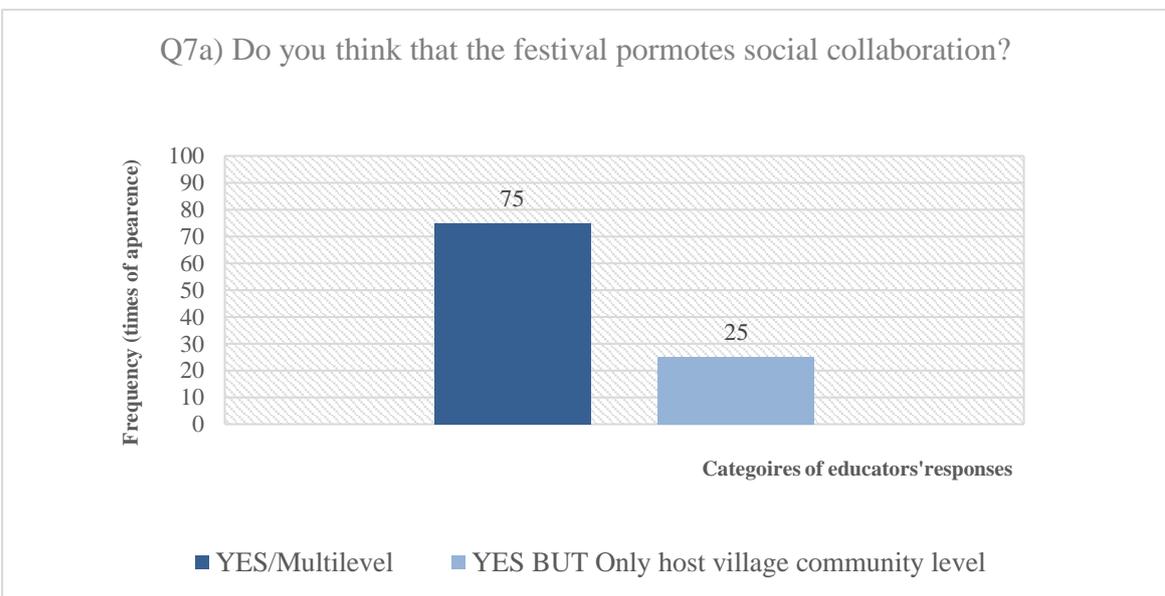
*(Q7c) Theme: Social interactions (among and between different groups) Posed to Children & the Elderly*



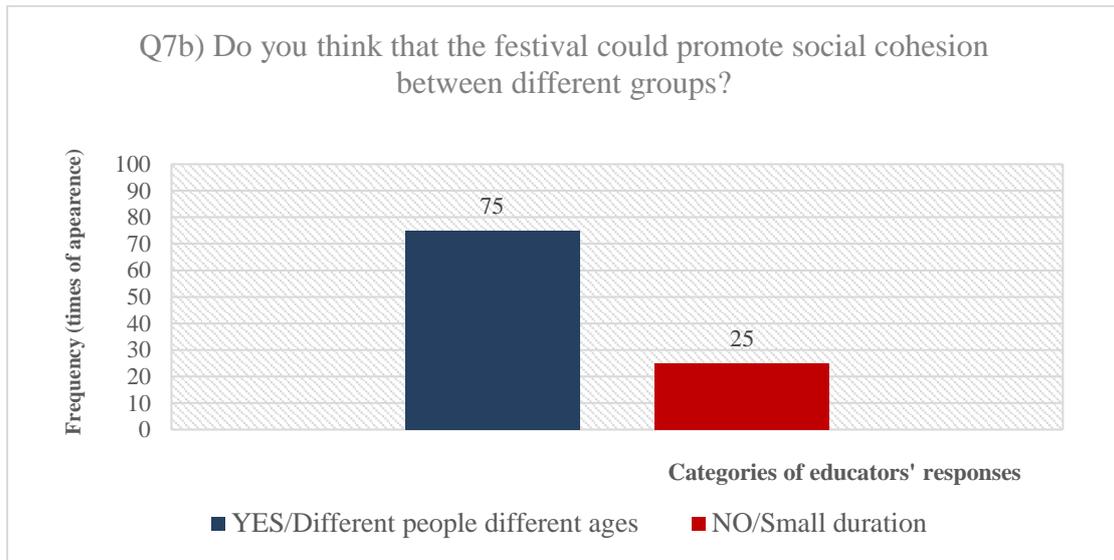
*(Q7) Theme: Social interactions (among and between different groups) Posed to the Educators*



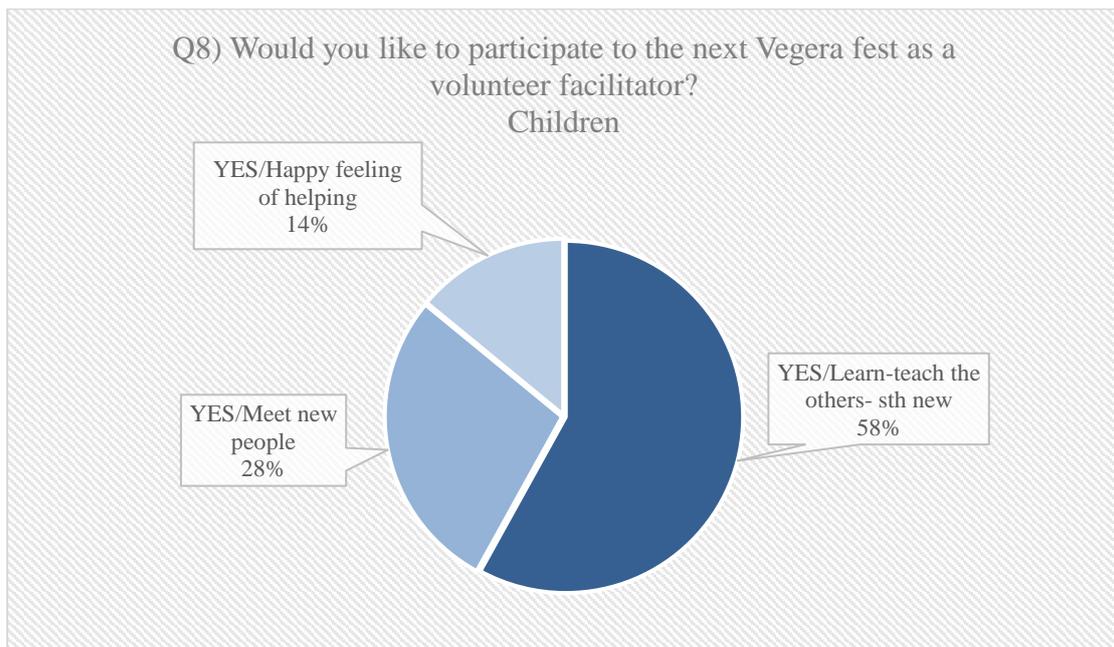
*(Q7a) Theme: Social interactions (among and between different groups) Posed to the Educators*



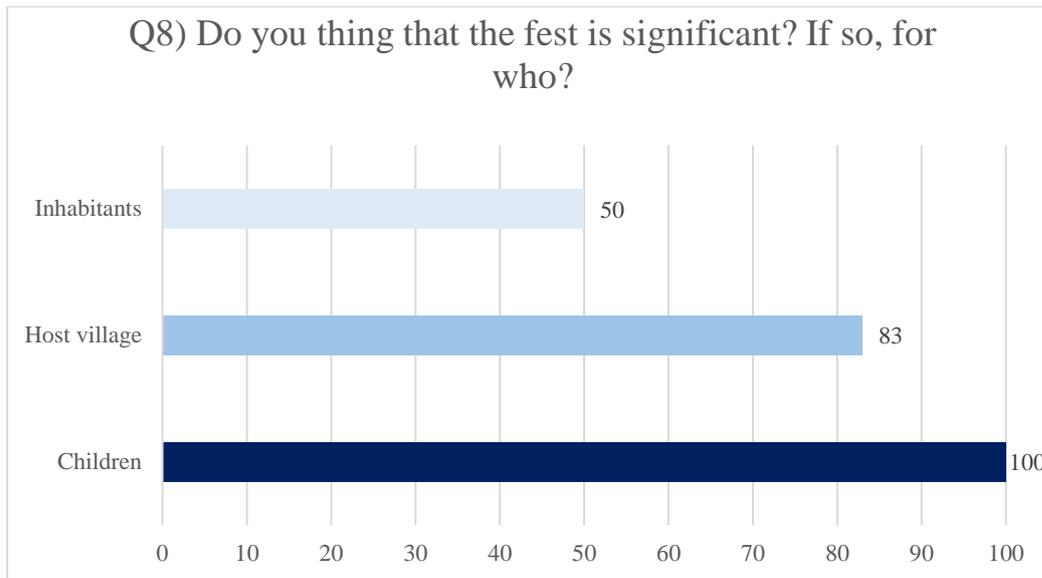
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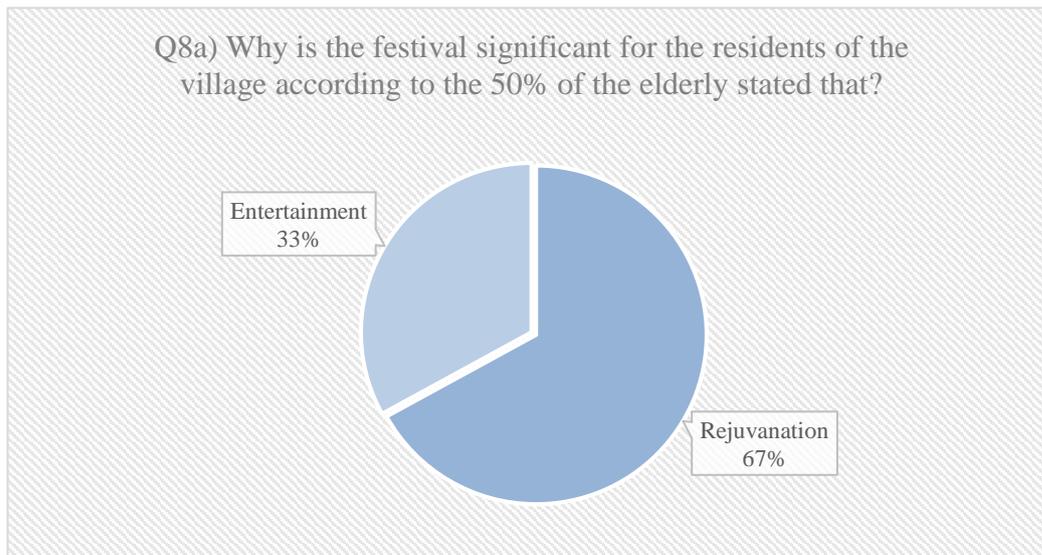
*(Q8) Theme: Value Posed to Children*



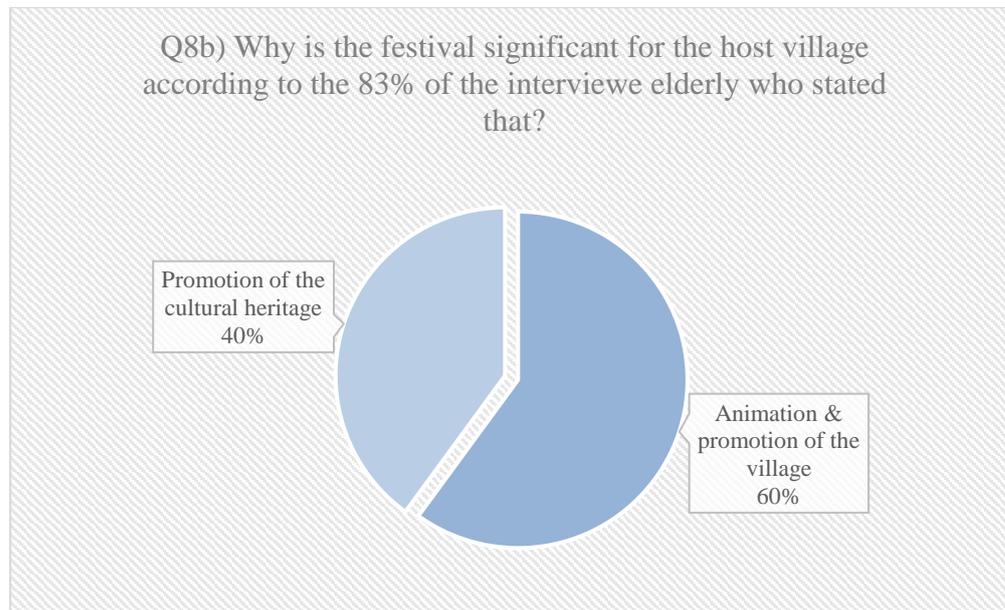
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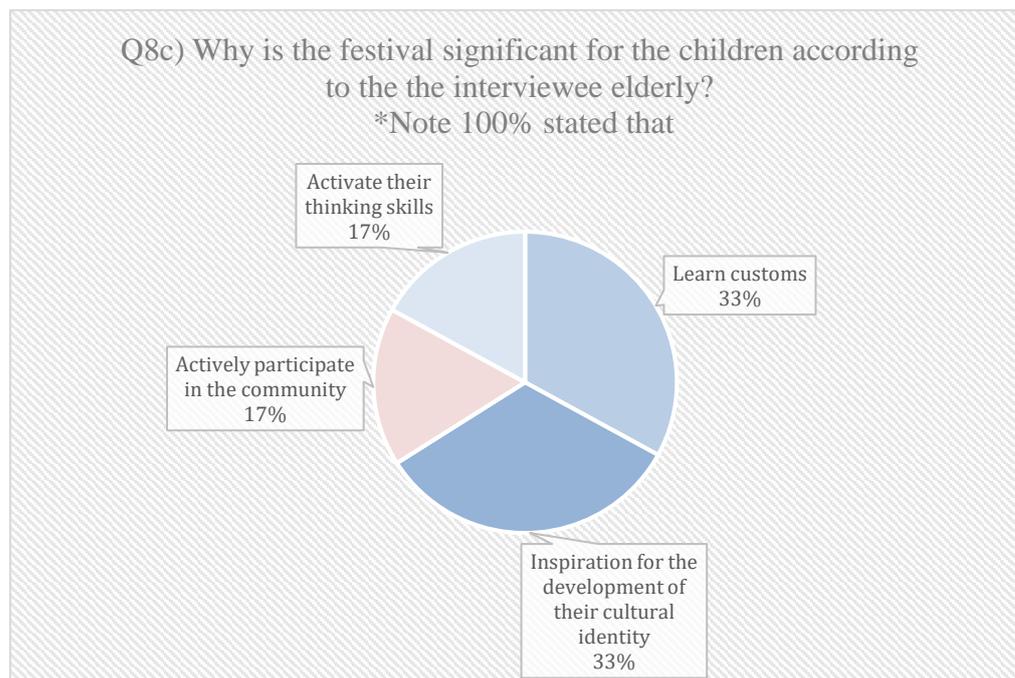
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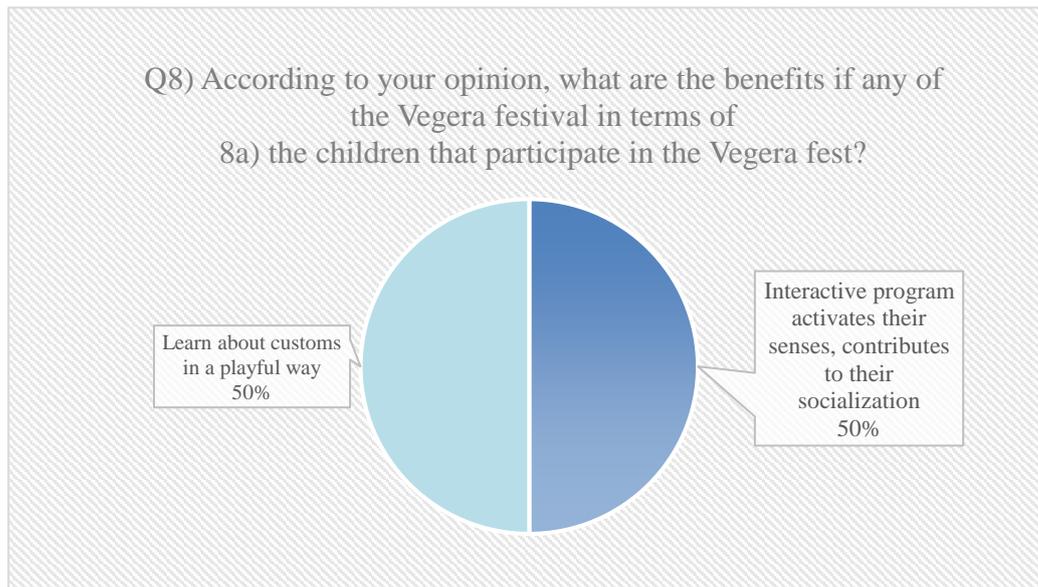
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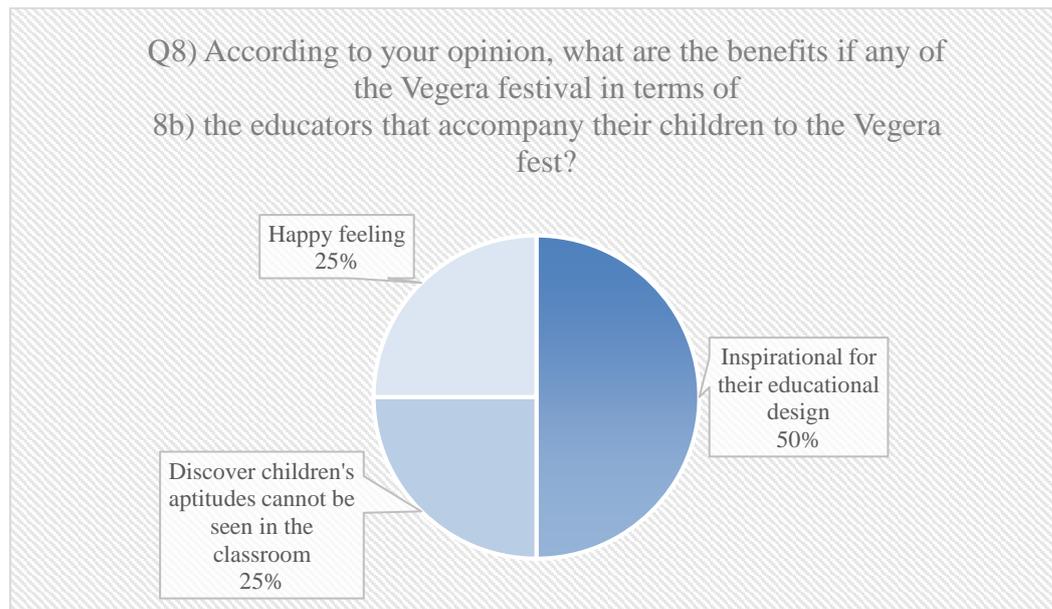
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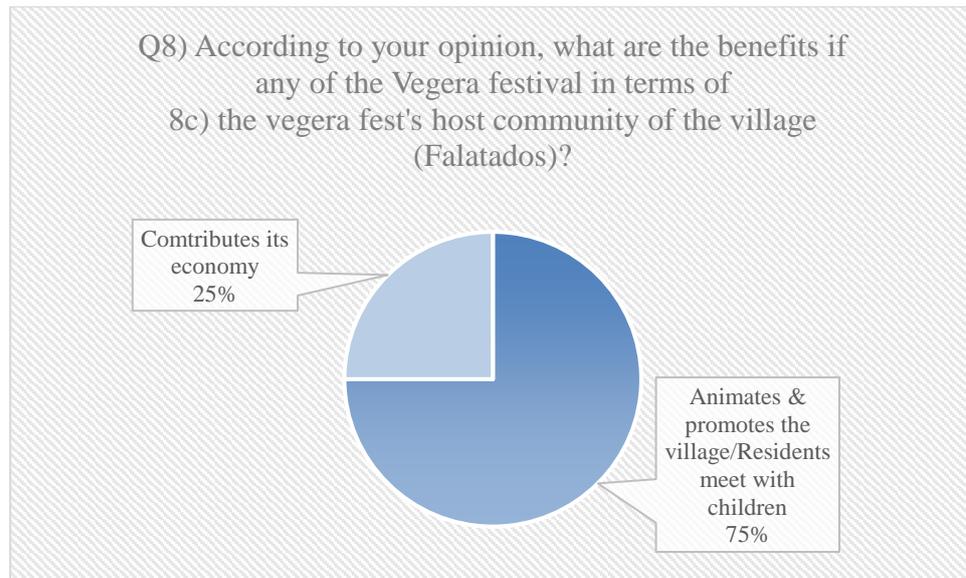
*(Q8, Q8a) Theme: Value Posed to the Educators*



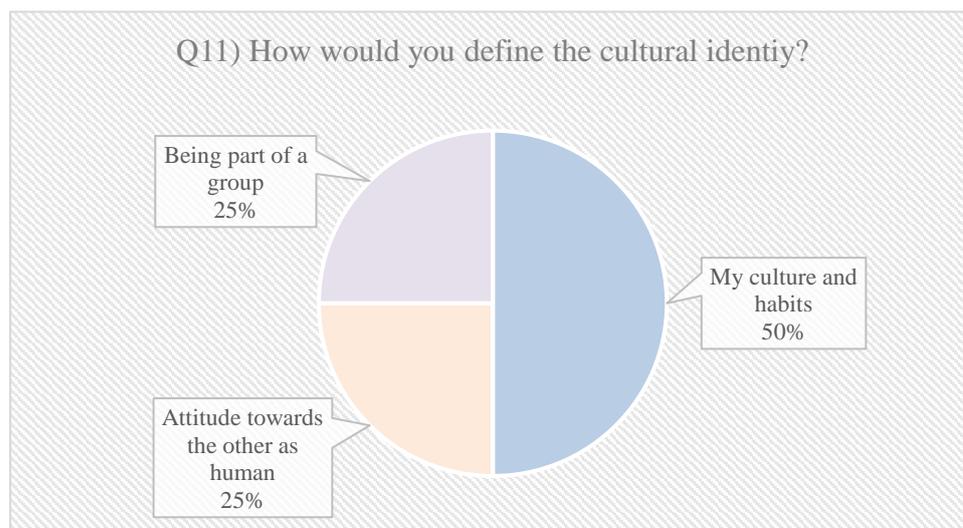
*(Q8b) Theme: Value Posed to the Educators*



*(Q8c) Theme: Value Posed to the Educators*



*(Q11) Extra Question, theme: cultural identity not included in the analysis*



*Q11b) Extra Question, theme: cultural identity not included in the analysis*

