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**A Relational Approach to Event Sustainability: Applying Actor–Network Theory and
Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to a Music Event**

Abstract

The framing of event sustainability should go beyond the greening of specific events and the event sector. Based on a relational approach, we used actor–network theory and Foucauldian discourse analysis to investigate the debate on a music event sustainability. We collected and discursively analysed online newspapers and social media data regarding this event’s sustainability. The findings showed a polarised discourse characterised by conflicting views on, for example, nature, and three missing discourses—academic, local community, nonhuman—which we identified as alternative discourses and leverage points for greater sustainability. These findings allowed us to conceptualise event sustainability as a catalysing network of actors, ideas, and relationships attracted to magnetic poles powered by different understandings of central concepts. This study proposes an understanding of event sustainability in relational terms and its contribution resides in the combination of actor–network theory and Foucauldian discourse analysis as a possible approach to such understanding.

Keywords: event sustainability, relational approach to sustainability, actor–network theory, Foucauldian discourse analysis

A Relational Approach to Event Sustainability: Applying Actor–Network Theory and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to a Music Event

Researchers (e.g. Mair, 2019; Raj & Musgrave, 2009) have long considered how events impact destinations' sustainability, both positively by, for example, encouraging pro-environmental behaviours (Mair & Laing, 2013; O'Rourke et al., 2011), and negatively through, for example, community disruption (Hall, 2012; Mair et al., 2023). In the past decade, several scholars have argued for the need to frame event sustainability beyond the greening of specific events or the sector. Already in 2016, Getz and Page (2016) advocated taking a critical and comprehensive approach to event sustainability. Similarly, Laing (2018) considered scientific investigations of event sustainability and observed gaps in the literature; for example, very few studies have discussed event failures, resilience, and the potential of events to change behaviours and ensure inclusivity. Partly filling these gaps, Quinn et al. (2021) explored the inclusiveness of festivals in outdoor public spaces and discussed potential sociocultural challenges and opportunities. Mair and Smith (2021) proposed adopting Raworth's (2012) doughnut economy as an approach for understanding sustainable development as a system that provides life's essentials (e.g. health, social equity, etc.) within planetary boundaries. Although undoubtedly valuable, the existing studies have not truly embraced the complexities and vulnerabilities recently highlighted in relation to events (Pernecky & Faisal, 2023) and the associated phenomenon of tourism (Nadegger, 2023; Pernecky, 2023a, 2023b), least of all the persistence of oppressive relational patterns that discriminate against individuals, communities, and the environment.

To critically broaden and deepen our understanding of event sustainability, we asked how such phenomenon can be conceptualised as emerging from networks of actors and relationships. To answer this question, we begin by discussing the concept of sustainability based on central ideas drawn from the sustainability literature, especially those regarding a relational approach to sustainability (e.g. Walsh et al., 2021; West et al., 2020). Then, we

discuss the possibility of developing a relational approach to event sustainability in ontological and epistemological terms. In our study, we specifically combined actor–network theory (ANT) (Latour, 1993, 2006, 2018) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) (Foucault, 1980) as an approach to facilitate a nuanced examination of relations and power dynamics, which is vital for exploring the complexities and vulnerabilities underlying the previously mentioned oppressive patterns (Nadegger, 2023; Pernecky, 2023a, 2023b; Pernecky & Faisal, 2023). We applied this approach to an empirical investigation of an Italian music event (Jova Beach Party), which comprised a series of open-air concerts held during the period of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (July–September 2022). In this paper, we present and discuss the findings of our investigation, which was based on online newspapers and social media data concerning the debate about the event’s sustainability. We conclude by highlighting the study’s contributions, which are a renewed conceptualisation of event sustainability centred on relationality, the proposal of a possible theoretical perspective and a practical suggestion regarding the necessity for pre-event identification and negotiation of concepts related to the potential benefits and drawbacks of events.

Literature Review

This section discusses various understandings of sustainability, including a relational approach to the concept. It then presents ANT and FDA, which we used to explore event sustainability as a phenomenon emerging from networks of actors and relationships.

Sustainability understandings and relationality

Keen interest in sustainability was prompted by the reports *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972) and *Our Common Future* (World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED), 1987). The first report questioned the possibility of exponential economic and population growth and emphasised the need for collective change (Colombo, 2001). The second report provided the standard reference for understanding sustainable

development as development 'that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p. 43). This report also described sustainability according to three dimensions: economic, sociocultural, and environmental. The different interpretations and weights given to these dimensions have led to the development of diverse understandings of sustainability, typically represented by Venn diagrams, such as one with three overlapping circles of the same size relating to the sustainability dimensions, and one comprising three nested concentric circles, with the largest circle encompassing the environmental dimension (Purvis et al., 2019). Concentric circles were used by the Stockholm Resilience Centre to conceptualise an advanced framework for sustainability (Rockström et al., 2013) and by Raworth (2012) to visualise the doughnut economy, both of which include the planetary boundaries by which the natural environment constrains the development of human activities.

Although the aforementioned conceptualisations of sustainability include relationships between its various dimensions and between the human and nonhuman worlds, they lack a truly relational approach. This is a shortcoming that relates to oppressive patterns of discrimination that characterise events and tourism, affecting individuals, communities, and the environment (Nadegger, 2023; Pernecky, 2023a, 2023b; Pernecky & Faisal, 2023). To delve deeper into the concept of sustainability and discuss the possibility of a relational ontology as the basis for our understanding of this concept, we directed our attention to the main philosophical (anthropocentric, ecocentric, and posthuman) views on human and nonhuman entities. Whereas the anthropocentric perspective takes a utilitarian view of nature, the future of humanity, and humans' moral responsibility within and across generations, the ecocentric perspective focuses on the biotic community (i.e. biosphere or ecosystem) and its intrinsic value, implying a broader sense of responsibility as stewardship (Ehrenfeld, 1978; Shearman, 1990; Taylor, 1986). As argued by Washington et al. (2017), anthropocentrism dominates the sustainability

debate: it 'is the prevalent ideology in most societies around the world, and it also permeates academia and domestic and international governance' (p. 38). This is evidenced by the responsibility within and across (human) generations mentioned in *Our Common Future*. Anthropocentrism is also evident in the conceptualisation of weak and strong sustainability, according to which natural resources, considered substitutable to various extents, are assets for humans (Neumayer, 1999).

The third philosophical view of human and nonhuman entities is Posthumanist and is particularly relevant to the framing of sustainability in relational terms. Posthumanist scholars have addressed human–nonhuman relationships in terms of the ecological potential of sustainable development, which implies going beyond inequities derived from, for example, species and gender differences (Fox & Alldred, 2020). Posthumanist thinkers vigorously reject any form of dualism and, instead of focusing on human or biotic community, depict the world as an assemblage of biological, sociocultural, and environmental elements (Braidotti, 2011, 2013; Haraway, 2016). Based on such considerations, partly shared by some non-posthumanist scholars (e.g. James, 2017), the concept of sustainability repositions humanity in its ecosystem, aiming to foster the thriving of all life (Cielemęcka & Daigle, 2019) and highlighting human entanglements with nonhuman entities (Mitten, 2017). This conceptualisation of sustainability relies on a relational ontology that embraces the complexities of life on Earth, consisting of a variety of intertwined relationships among different entities (Fox & Alldred, 2020). Such a view can challenge understandings of sustainability that are limited in terms of both the considered entities and the time horizon. We argue that recognising the limits of the traditional ways of understanding sustainability and emphasising the synergistic coexistence of humanity and nature may be a first step towards a better future and, to use Bruno Latour's (2017, 2018) expression, bring humanity 'down to Earth'.

Understanding sustainability in relational terms can be a means of effectively leveraging positive change. Several scholars have advocated transformative approaches to major system changes and/or inner changes (Abson et al., 2017; Feola, 2015; Ives et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2021; West et al., 2020). In the early stage of the emergence and diffusion of the sustainability concept, two of the people involved in producing *The Limit of Growth* highlighted the need to rethink our worldview and values deeply and radically. Peccei (1977), the founder of the nonprofit organisation that commissioned the report, commented on inner changes, recognising the human qualities of responsibility, creativity, and courage as the true engines of change. Meadows (1999), one of the report's coauthors, considered people's underpinning values, goals, and worldviews as leverage points for change, which are 'places within a complex system ... where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything' (p. 1). Such considerations echo some reflections presented in an even earlier work, Hardyn's 1968 seminal work, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, in which the author stressed the 'tragedy' of searching for technical solutions to problems that require moral change. More recently, several sustainability scholars have considered some of the aspects commented on in the early works about sustainability and have pointed to paradigm shifts and leverage points as essential for sustainable transformations (Abson et al., 2017; Leventon et al., 2021; West et al., 2018, 2020).

A relational approach to event sustainability

Several aspects of sustainability presented in the previous section have been discussed in the event literature, but only marginal attention has been paid to a possible relational approach. Several researchers have considered event sustainability (Pernecky & Lück, 2013; Raj & Musgrave, 2009). For instance, some scholars have noted that small events may be important for rural and urban regeneration (Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019; Quinn et al., 2021), and others have discussed how mega-events can be positive for place branding but challenging due to community disruption (Mair et al., 2023). Events as

promoters of change towards greater sustainability at the individual and community levels have been explored by Mair and Laing (2013) and Ruan et al. (2022), and some researchers have discussed possible sustainability strategies and practices, such as waste management and carbon offset (Hall, 2012; Laing & Frost, 2010; Wong et al., 2015; Yuan, 2013). Recent studies have emphasised the importance of relationships for business networking (Mair et al., 2023), collaborative learning, and key competencies and skills, such as soft skills, practical wisdom, and creativity (Carsewell et al., 2023), and in broader terms regarding the adoption of the doughnut economy model (Hartman & Heslinga, 2022).

Despite the undoubted value of these studies, a critical and comprehensive approach to event sustainability is lacking, and only recently have some embryonic signs of the possible emergence of a relational way of understanding this concept been observed in the literature. Specifically, two recent works have suggested such an emergence (Pernecky, 2023a; Pernecky & Faisal, 2023). Although not focused on sustainability, the first study (Pernecky, 2023a) is relevant because it argues for the need to address complex relationships among bounded entities in the light of a 'democratic ecosystem' (p. 275) and nomadic ethics. The latter is mentioned by the author with reference, among others, to Braidotti (2011), and explained referring to the dissolution of boundaries among single entities that, ultimately, come to constitute a 'fluid pool of cocreational potential' (p. 275). The value of the second study, by Pernecky and Faisal (2023), is its consideration of sustainability in terms of the numerous vulnerabilities of the event sector and the opportunity to embrace them by moving towards an understanding of events in hopeful terms, with 'we' including a vast range of entities. The leading author of these works discusses the relevance of such reflections to sustainability in a tourism study: in Pernecky (2023b), the author advocates for focusing on and reimagining the relational entanglements that constitute social phenomena (whether they might regard tourism or events) and calls for advancing a critic-relational approach of inquiry.

Focusing on the idea of relational entanglements, we combined ANT (Latour, 1993, 2006, 2018; Nimmo, 2011; Rodger et al., 2009) with discourse analysis inspired by Foucault's theorisations on discourse and the power relations embedded in language (Foucault, 1980; Grimwood et al., 2015; Hannam & Knox, 2005; Hollinshead, 1999; Wight, 2019). The rationale for this choice, which we further explain in the following section, was the approach's potential value for analysing the key discourses emerging from dynamic networks of heterogeneous actors, actions, and power relationships (Outila & Kiuru, 2021).

Combining ANT and FDA

ANT is a valuable theory for understanding event sustainability more comprehensively. A first feature that made this theory particularly useful for this study is its acknowledgement of the eventful dimension of a space as not merely a physical transit surface, but also as the scene of multidirectional relationships, networks, and connections among multiple human and nonhuman actors (Tomassini & Lamond, 2022). Another relevant feature related to this study's intention to depart from limited anthropocentric views is that ANT relies on a flat anti-hierarchical ontology that does not assign a privileged position to human actors, instead acknowledging them as entangled with nonhuman actors (Latour, 1993, 2006, 2018; Nimmo, 2011). ANT has been criticised for its perceived failure to articulate a comprehensive theory or paradigm and for its antihierarchical ontology precluding the recognition of roles and power dynamics in social structures (Van der Duim et al., 2017). Nevertheless, its performative approach to understanding the emergence of social phenomena provided novel possibilities for more comprehensively framing such phenomena, in general and in relation to sustainability (Jóhannesson, 2005; Jóhannesson, et al., 2016; Nadegger, 2023; Van der Duim et al., 2012).

ANT is also relevant for exploring sustainability in relation to scientific disputes and power, especially when combined with FDA. Rodger et al. (2009) argued that ANT permits

the investigation of 'the processes by which scientific disputes become closed, ideas accepted, and tools and method adopted. ... It explores and follows the strategies actors use to mobilise allies, as well as resources, which ultimately results in the construction of heterogeneous networks' (p. 647). Such considerations of scientific knowledge align with various ways of understanding sustainability, highlighting the power dimension of ANT. Combining ANT with FDA can help in unpacking power dimensions based on the concept of coexisting *épistémès* (i.e. sets of interrelated concepts that sustain a discourse and allow what is characterised as scientific to be separated from what is not) (Bevir, 1999; Foucault, 1980). A discourse is here understood as 'an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomenon' (Hajer, 2006, p. 67), while power is understood not in hierarchical terms but as existing and circulating through negotiated meanings and practices (Waitt, 2005). In this study, the discourse concerned event sustainability, the actors were the human and nonhuman entities involved in the event (e.g. the performers, the event organiser, and the nonhuman animals inhabiting the location), and the investigation concerned the power discourses relevant to sustainability and its negotiations, articulated within networks of such actors and emerging from an underlying *épistémè*.

Importantly, Foucault theorised discourse as a form of sense-making through which power is enacted and vehiculated (Foucault, 1980). Foucault (1980) saw power as relational and productive because it operates not only through dominant discourses in institutions characterised by power and persuasion, but also through alternative discourses aimed at active resistance, generating different meanings and subverting established practices. Discourse analysis examines how 'truths' are constituted and circulated within texts and representations and, ultimately, accepted as valid (Hollinshead, 1999; Waitt, 2005). It can be argued that FDA particularly considers how 'games of truths' play out (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Khan & MacEachen, 2021), and it can therefore be used to explore which

perspectives on event sustainability are legitimised and how possible multiple versions of such perspectives can coexist. The idea of a process of ‘truth’ construction, circulation, and acceptance was relevant to this study because it allowed us to frame potential tensions between coexisting perspectives on event sustainability in terms of sets of concepts relevant to sustainability. Moreover, FDA considers ‘inaudible speakers as legitimate claimants’ (Khan & MacEachen, 2021, p. 2) because invisibility is meaningful for its lack of power. Thus, in this study, we considered all the relevant human and nonhuman actors whose ‘voices’ were missing or only reported by others (Grimwood et al., 2015; Nimmo, 2011; Rose, 2016), limiting the possibility of alternative *épistémès* to the explicit ones emerging.

Thus, although ANT supports the understanding of spaces as eventful and dynamic, comprising multidirectional non-hierarchical relationships and networks among human and nonhuman actors (Tomassini & Lamond, 2022), FDA supports investigation of the power relationships expressed through language and the political implications of discourse (Foucault, 1980; Grimwood et al., 2015; Hannam & Knox, 2005; Hollinshead, 1999; Wight, 2019). Hence, combining ANT with FDA was suitable for exploring and conceptualising event sustainability as emerging from networks of relevant relationships.

Research Context

In the summer of 2022, a series of open-air concerts was held across Italy featuring the pop musician Lorenzo Cherubini, otherwise known as ‘Jovanotti’. The tour (the JBP) comprised 21 concerts on beaches along the Italian coastline and a final event near Milan. Each concert was attended by 20,000–40,000 people (Trident, 2022). The tour was organised by a partnership between the event management company Trident Music, the national World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and Intesa San Paolo Bank. The JBP launch was combined with a crowdfunding campaign called Ri-Party-Amo. Ri-Party-Amo is a play on words that hybridises the Italian and English languages. The word ‘Ri’ expresses a restart, ‘Party’ stands for fun and entertainment, and ‘Amo’ means ‘I love’. Moreover, the word

ripartiamo means 'we restart', which is a value-laden choice for an event held immediately after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. The Ri-Party-Amo project included various land protection activities; clean-up actions; awareness-raising and educational meetings; workshops; grants aimed at young people, schools, families, companies, and communities; and collaboration with 12 universities.

The JBP prompted concerns and criticisms from various actors regarding its impact on the event locations, triggering a reaction from Jovanotti, who called the JBP opponents 'eco-Nazis' in an Instagram video. The geologist and scientific communicator, Mario Tozzi, reacted to Jovanotti's video via an open letter in a national newspaper, arguing that the JBP was unsustainable and inviting the singer to reconsider his ideas and the event. The singer answered with a long post on his Facebook page, explaining his point of view and presenting a strong image of himself, the JBP, and the environment as victims of unfair treatment:

You'll have to burn me in the square to stop me from supporting what I'm telling you: our parties [concerts] are a good thing and done well. ... The Holy Inquisition gloom that someone wants to instil in the environmental theme using the JBP is counterproductive, above all, for the environment.

Such public back-and-forth communication confirmed the JBP as a relevant case for investigating event sustainability and related discourse. The JBP sustainability debate framed event sustainability in terms of conflictual relationships among various actors (e.g. the artist, his fans, his critics, nature, and organisations such as the sponsoring bank and the event management company), making numerous complexities and vulnerabilities evident and suggesting coexisting *épistémès*.

Methodology

The empirical investigation was based on data collected from online news media because they presented texts with greater 'rationality and critical deliberation' (Schweinsberg et al., 2017, p. 243) than other media and tended to disseminate news and

information faster than offline media (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020). In FDA terms, the criteria for selecting such data sources as the discourse sample was their role in problematising the object of study (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) — the JBP sustainability. Foucault (2022) conceptualised discourse as a system of representation made of language and practice. According to Hall (2018), Foucault defined a discourse as ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about — i.e. a way of representing — a particular kind of knowledge about a topic’ (p. 86). Hence, online news media, despite being a particular type of media, served as a paradigmatic source of discourses disseminated through written texts, and the value of news media data for the construction, articulation, and reinforcement of discourses has been widely recommended in the literature (Bednarek & Caple, 2014; Cotter, 2015; Fulton, 2005; McGannon & Spence, 2012). Recently, the relationship between discourses and online news media has attracted interest from tourism scholars regarding overtourism (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020) and tourists during the COVID-19 outbreak (Tomassini et al., 2021). Among the most recent studies is also the one by Joyce (2024), who has adopted a Foucauldian approach to explore power and online media discourses about rewilding tourism. Hence, acknowledging the influence of news media in building consensus, setting political agendas, and shaping public opinion and actions, we began the data collection by examining major online national newspapers. Using snowball sampling, we explored other relevant sources (e.g. online local newspapers for the event locations) that contained heated discussions about the event, together with news websites that presented the perspectives of or information about relevant actors.

After gaining an overview of the debate on the JBP’s sustainability, we selected the most relevant texts, excluding texts that presented duplicate information and considerations expressed in other texts that contained no new elements or nuances. The JBP was held between 2 July and 10 September 2022, and the selected data ran from the official event

launch on 3 May to 3 weeks after its end (21 September). The dataset comprised the texts shown in Table 1, which specifies their sources (including website addresses), authors (when relevant), and the content that prompted their selection. The selected sources provided a rich, accurate picture of the JBP sustainability debate. To investigate deeply the ideas behind the JBP's sustainability and how it was discussed, we identified eight core texts (indicated with asterisks in Table 1) that presented particularly significant information and/or reflections. These core texts included the transcribed text of the singer's reaction to criticism (ID15*), the back-and-forth communication between the singer and the geologist (ID19* and ID20*), articles by or about other engaged scientists (ID11* and ID30*), articles that represented the main points of the two positions (ID4* and ID8*), and an article including some post-event reflections by the main organiser (ID32).

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Table 1. The online texts constituting the dataset

We discursively analysed the narrative data drawn from the core texts to understand how the JBP discourse was produced, justified, and maintained (Wight, 2019), and we explored the different 'truths' articulated by the various actors, the power relations underpinning them, and the relevant concepts and their meanings, suggesting possible coexisting *épistémès* (Bevir, 1999). The texts were in our native language, and we paid close attention to the linguistic features of the discourse to unpack and interpret the meanings embedded in the communication, including those relevant to power and hostile relationships. This was done by examining words, verbs, adjectives, and rhetoric across the texts to identify key images, metaphors, or themes (Tomassini et al., 2019). An example of such an analysis was the use of the expression 'belly button of the world', which is the title of one of Jovanotti's hits and was associated with different reflections pointing to different 'truths'. This expression was used to ask a rhetorical critical question ('Shouldn't nature be the real belly button of the world?', ID11*), to praise the singer for his global perspective ('I also appreciated the global

perspective of some of your songs, such as “*The belly button of the world*”, ID19*), and to emphasise the importance of the event as a social gathering that its critics, depicted as killjoys, would not enjoy (‘Their problem is listening to “*The belly button of the world*” in the company of cool people having a good time, and maybe even risking dancing’, ID20*). Another example was the use of references to tragic historical phenomena in Italian history (fascism and the death penalty for so-called heretics, ID20*) to express injustice. Finally, we identified some ‘gaps’ in the dataset that indicated silent human and nonhuman actors who failed to articulate their perspectives on the sustainability of the event but were clearly relevant to the JBP debate (Grimwood et al., 2015; Khan & MacEachen, 2021; Nimmo, 2011; Rose, 2016).

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we explore the JBP sustainability, by discussing the findings as seen through an ANT lens and FDA. We begin by presenting the JBP’s sustainability as a polarised discourse, continue by conceptualising event sustainability as a network permeated by conflicting forces, and close by identifying and discussing missing discourses as possible leverage points for change.

The JBP’s sustainability: A polarised discourse

The data showed that the JBP debate was characterised by two conflicting positions: one extremely critical of the JBP’s sustainability (‘against-JBP’) and the other supporting the event’s sustainability (‘pro-JBP’). Such polarised discourse suggested coexisting *épistémès* (Bevir, 1999) that we tried to unpack to fully understand the conflict and consider viable paths for reconciling opposite positions in the dialogue. This contrast was clearly observed in most of the pro- and against-JBP texts. An episode concerning a sea turtle hatchling in a nest on a beach near one of the concert locations, interpreted in diametrically opposing ways by the two groups, clearly illustrated such polarisation. The pro-JBP group interpreted the episode in terms of the overlap between the JBP and local

wildlife, the protection of the latter, and the animals choosing the beach as their nursery because 'it is a happy, cheerful, and well-kept beach' (ID27) where they feel safe, so 'the party can go on' (ID27). Conversely, the against-JBP group viewed the hatchling as representing the fragility of the ecosystem and the invasiveness of the human presence: 'The beach is their [the turtles'] habitat, so what right do we have to disturb them, particularly at the delicate moment of their birth?' (ID28). These two points of view clearly reflected the polarisation of the JBP sustainability debate, which we further explored by considering the core texts representing pro- and against-JBP positions.

The analysis revealed that the disagreement between the pro- and against-JBP groups could be explained by considering different understandings of the concepts of nature, human–nature relations, science, and time. These were identified as interrelated concepts in coexisting *épistémès* (Bevir, 1999; Foucault, 1980). The depiction of the natural environment by the against-JBP group clearly showed that the nonhumans mentioned in the geologist's open letter (ID19*) about flora and fauna were rich and heterogeneous. They were referred to using scientific and vernacular terms (e.g. *Charadrius alexandrinus* and Kentish plover) and in terms of landscapes, ecosystems, and the whole planet. The findings indicated that humans were seen as integral to the system, as evidenced by the geologist's referral to humans as *sapiens* (ID19*). By framing human actors as *sapiens*, the geologist argued that humans occupy only a small space in the world as one among many other living beings, but our activities can have a disproportionate impact, as shown in the following extract: 'In this world, there is a place for the mosquito, for the bat, for the Kentish plover, and for the jellyfish. Only we, *sapiens*, take others' places, bullying and invasive as we are' (ID19*).

According to the geologist's reasoning, the event epitomised this invasive attitude and behaviour and was therefore deemed 'anti-educational' (ID19*). The notion of limitation was interpreted in terms of a geographical border ('no big events in natural areas', as stated

in an online petition, ID14) and as a figurative concept about being aware of our limits as one among the many species inhabiting the planet. Such thinking was expressed by the geologist asking the singer to ‘avoid an anti-educational message that things can always be done at the expense of the environment’ (ID19*). In the same vein, other against-JBP partisans (e.g. the ethologist president of an association for scientific dissemination, ID11*) commented on the damage humans caused to the fauna and flora on the beaches:

From 1993 to 2010, the Kentish plover population decreased by 50% due to the intense and increasingly exploitive use of beaches by humans. ... ENPA (the Italian National Association for Animal Protection) reports that ‘animals witness the destruction of the sites where they rest and reproduce, ... trees and bushes are cut, works on the beaches compromise the ecosystem of the dunes, acoustic pollution is caused by the concert’. (ID11*)

A third scientist (an academic and botanist) who engaged in the debate but authored no texts gave access to his online dataset for the ecosystem of a beach that hosted a concert (ID29). These scientists’ contributions to the debate characterised nature as an extremely complex and dynamic system that science can help us understand. The scientists described their work as a serious long-term commitment that would contribute valuable knowledge about practical matters, reflecting a long-term perspective that became even longer (geological eras) when scientists referred to changes in the natural environment. These aspects of the time dimension were evident in the geologist’s request to the singer to rethink the project in regenerative terms (ID19*):

Long-term ecologists like me who study the environment from a scientific perspective and who have seen enough suggest you give up this project and reshape it by connecting it to environmental compensation initiatives. ... Today, our sandy coasts are often eroding, and the coasts with cliffs end up bearing the brunt of the tides. ...

We should rely on natural guided nourishment, but this requires long lead times and gentle, quiet work. (ID19*)

Some texts critical of the JBP's sustainability also commented on the timing of the event, which raised problematic issues, such as water shortages, an accentuation of the peak tourist season, and logistical challenges due to the concert infrastructure being transferred between locations (ID4*, ID5, ID6, and ID7). The following extract (ID5) reveals a hotel trade association president's concern about and criticism of the event timing and the involvement of local tourism operators:

We [tourism operators] would have liked a meeting with the local municipality six months ago, as the date of the planned concert had already been decided in September. ... We are very worried about the suitability of the infrastructure, especially the water infrastructure, as the population doubles during that period (summer), not only in the hotels, but also due to second homes. We don't like polemics, but the reality is that we are very worried. (ID5)

Regarding the analysis of the pro-JBP position, the findings showed that human actors were the focus of this aspect of the discourse. This was evident in the singer's words (ID15* and ID20*), which mentioned nonhuman actors, in precise terms, only in the case of the most debated animal species (the Kentish plover and *Caretta caretta*), and then moved to using more generic expressions, such as 'other protected animal or vegetable species' and 'beaches'. Human actors ranged from opponents of the JBP (referred to as 'the ecologists'); the Italian WWF; the Intesa San Paolo Bank; local, regional, and national authorities; and fans, technicians, and experts. These actors were categorised according to their roles in relation to the event, suggesting an event-centric view. The singer recognised the uselessness of polarised debates but nevertheless contributed to such polarisation by using an informal, direct, juvenile, and sometimes aggressive linguistic style, unsophisticated semantic choices, and strong images connected to military and religious

persecution, describing 'the ecologists' as 'eco-Nazis' acting in 'a fascist way' and behaving as a 'Holy Inquisition' (ID20*). The singer mainly used the first-person plural 'we' to refer to his community of supporters and the public, juxtaposed with a dangerous group of people threatening the JBP.

The data revealed that the singer understood human–nature relations in terms of dominance or, at least, control. For example, he described the beaches used for the concerts as 'already popular and full of people ... already urbanised. ... The Lido di Fermo beach is no more "natural" than Hyde Park or the lawn of the San Siro stadium' (ID20*). Such a viewpoint, which takes for granted that humans can continuously and further exploit fragile natural areas, relates to a specific view of science. Pro-JBP voices highlighted the organiser's collaboration with the WWF and referred to the demanding pre-JBP feasibility studies conducted by experts (ID20*, ID21, and ID33). The singer clearly stated that science was not one of his competencies and stressed that he had complete trust in the expertise of the WWF and the local authorities that approved the event:

Everything has been done properly in collaboration with the WWF. I do not have those specific competencies; they have them. ... We have all the permissions from the local, regional, and national authorities. A long period of monitoring and research by the national WWF, conducted by a team of technicians and experts, has scrutinised each square metre and evaluated all issues. (ID20*)

Such complete trust in the 'technicians and experts' led to a rather simplistic delegation of responsibility by the singer and the event organisers to the partner environmental association. The pro-JBP group emphasised the green solutions applied during the concert period and for a few months afterwards, claiming they were innovative and groundbreaking:

We believe that green transition must be done together with the people, and this is a great opportunity to deliver the sustainability message ... to as many people as

possible. ... What is done at the JBP can't be compared to anything that has been done before. (ID33*)

Regarding such green practices, the singer referred to the JBP's waste management and clean-up activities following the event and, taking a distorted view of the concept of regeneration, argued that the event left the beaches in better condition than they were before (ID15*): 'The Jova Beach Party doesn't endanger any ecosystem. ... We don't destroy anything. ... Not only do we clean the beaches; we also take them "to a higher level", better than the one on which we found them' (ID15*).

This short-term perspective also characterised reflections on the income generated by the event for the hospitality sector in the event locations—an aspect that, in some cases, was related to the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis (ID2, ID8*, ID9, ID10, ID13, ID17, ID20, ID26, and ID34). Longer timeframes were applied to reflections on the cultural and educational value of the many activities, especially those of the Ri-Party-Amo project directed at young people. Some of these reflections viewed the huge crowds of attendees, so harshly criticised by the event opponents, as successful gatherings of Jovanotti's 'dancing tribe' and sometimes referred to them as 'a new Woodstock' (ID5).

Event sustainability as a net permeated by conflicting forces

Based on our reflections about ANT and FDA and the findings presented in the previous section, we conceptualised event sustainability as a metallic network of actors, ideas, and relationships attracted to two magnetic poles powered by different sets of understandings about the concepts of nature, human–nature relations, science, and time. In this conceptualisation, such different understandings shaped the network in terms of pro- and against-JBP poles to give meaning and coherence to each of the two positions on event sustainability.

The network around the against-JBP pole appeared to be extremely rich and thick, characterised by innumerable reciprocal links among human and nonhuman actors,

suggesting a rather ecocentric and posthuman philosophy (Cielemęcka & Daigle, 2019; Ehrenfeld, 1978; Fox & Alldred, 2020; Shearman, 1990; Taylor, 1986). Such an underlying view made this part of the network particularly dynamic, with changes occurring at different tempos, varying from short-term (human actions, often reported as damaging the environment) to tremendously long-term (geological eras). Planetary boundaries were understood as unmanageable; therefore, drastically limiting or refraining from activities (including events) in natural areas was seen as the best way to avoid environmental disruption (Raworth, 2012; Rockström et al., 2013). Although the latter viewpoint dominated the against-JBP discourse, the findings revealed the recognition of some socioeconomic challenges and problems (seasonality, anti-education, lack of dialogue with local tourism operators, and water shortages). The main idea about possible solutions on which this position mostly focused was about limiting growth (the number of event attendees) and, importantly, framing tourism as embedded in a broad, complex system.

The network surrounding the pro-JBP pole was characterised by the scarce presence of nonhuman actors and a dominant human presence. The latter related to actors with utilitarian aims and to a short-term perspective on all phenomena, including business practices and potential economic benefits. This reflected an anthropocentric (Ehrenfeld, 1978; Shearman, 1990; Taylor, 1986), if not event-centric, underlying perspective (Getz & Page, 2016). This side of the event sustainability discourse held that human actions, supported by science, can cross planetary boundaries in both directions (Raworth, 2012; Rockström et al., 2013). The pro-JBP group relied heavily on science to understand and, to a certain extent, manage nature, which meant identifying and maintaining a safe space for holding the event. Notably, the reasoning of the pro-JBP group aligned with several sustainability principles about creating experiential and educational value for the attendees and developing a regenerative form of event tourism (in relation to post-COVID-19 recovery and, although incorrectly, damage to the natural environment).

Missing discourses as leverage points for event sustainability

The extreme polarisation of the discourse made the dialogue and collaboration among the actors who potentially influenced event sustainability extremely challenging. Each position was powered by conviction. Aiming to identify leverage points that could help overcome such an impasse, we identified relevant missing discourse participation by three silent actors (Grimwood et al., 2015; Nimmo, 2011; Rose, 2016): academia, local communities, and nonhumans. The findings showed that 12 universities conducted educational workshops within the Ri-Party-Amo project. Although the pro-JBP position greatly emphasised this project and collaboration, none of these universities or their affiliates engaged with the debate on the JBP's sustainability. This lack of engagement constituted a missing subdiscourse that, by definition, was impossible to interpret. The universities' failure to articulate their expertise and leverage their educational role resulted in a silence that, importantly (and unfortunately), excluded academia from the network surrounding the sustainability discourse. This was particularly true for social scientists, who could have enriched the discourse with their expertise in tourism, event management, and destination and regional development. Such themes, which are of paramount importance for identifying and developing a safe space for events, were completely absent from the discourse.

The extremely marginal role of academia was confirmed by the fact that the scientists who engaged in the debate had no affiliation with the academic world. Applying Rodger et al.'s (2009) perspective on how scientific disputes develop, it is notable that, in this case, the perspective of sustainability as a transdisciplinary science hardly featured in the overall discourse. The few individuals who advanced this perspective were not powerful enough to create and maintain a network of relationships and alliances around a meaningful discourse on sustainability science. It is also worth noting that two of the engaged scientists were professional scientific outreach communicators, suggesting that the lack of engagement by other academics might have been due to a fear of stepping outside their comfort zones. This

could be particularly true for academics belonging to institutions close to the event locations, who had to avoid conflicts of interest, and for academics belonging to the universities that collaborated with the event organisers.

The discourses of local communities and nonhumans were also missing. Although local communities were mentioned in the debate, their relationships within the network were weak or unclear, as were their ideas and actions. Twenty-one different locations and municipalities hosted the JBP, but participation in the discourse by the citizens of those locations was missing. The media debate on the JBP gave voices to some representatives of the local authorities (mayors) and environmental and hospitality associations, but the broader local communities abstained from the debate, suggesting that these actors were unable to articulate their points of view and/or lacked the necessary power to make their voices heard. Although the Ri-Party-Amo initiative and the JBP event promoted the idea of regenerating natural habitats and fragile ecosystems, and this issue was broadly commented on, the nonhuman discourse was trapped in a human, though not always anthropocentric, stance in the sustainability discourse. Regarding the environment and the missing nonhuman discourse, we argue that the against-JBP discourse is related to what Foucault described as 'bubbles' that sometimes emerge on the surface of a discourse and, eventually, initiate its disruption (Bevir, 1999). The attention such discourse pays to nonhuman entities, particularly wildlife, can be interpreted as a sign of the possible emergence of posthuman values and ideas about sustainability.

The findings suggest that such missing discourses are potential leverage points for change towards event sustainability, and their elucidation could provoke major changes in the event-sustainability discourse. These silent voices offer the possibility of changing the relationships underpinning the discourse that is conceptualised as a bipolar metallic network, making some of the links stronger and others weaker, creating new relationships, and eventually forming a new pole. In the literature, leverage points for change can foster

greater responsibility, creativity, and courage, prompting shifts in values (Hardin, 1968; Meadows, 1999; Peccei, 1977; Walsh et al., 2021; West et al., 2018, 2020). This was highlighted by Pernecky (2023a, 2023b) and was confirmed by our findings concerning different views on nature and human–nature relations. Despite its paramount importance, such a perspective is difficult to translate into practical terms. Elucidating silent discourses as leverage points for change can lead to practical strategies. This study suggests that among silent actors, academia can most effectively contribute to event sustainability due to its competence and power to argue for sustainability in terms of the interdependence of natural and human scientific phenomena (Hollinshead, 1999; Waitt, 2005). In addition, academia might have a more factual and fruitful way of communicating and be better able to elaborate on relevant ideas than other voices.

Conclusion

In this study, we explored how event sustainability can be conceptualised as emerging from networks of actors and relationships using an ANT lens and FDA. Based on a selection of data from online news media, the focus of our analysis was on the discourse's linguistic features. The findings revealed an extremely polarised (pro/against) discourse on event sustainability. This study's relational approach led to the conceptualisation of event sustainability as a metallic network of actors, ideas, and relationships attracted to magnetic poles powered by different understandings of central concepts, such as nature, human–nature relations, science, and time, sustaining different 'truths'. Such understandings gave meaning and coherence to each of the polarised positions, which were virtually impossible to reconcile. The findings also suggested three missing discourses—academic, local community, and nonhuman—that we identified as leverage points for prompting event sustainability.

Theoretically, this study contributes to a renewed conceptualisation of event sustainability that aligns with the emerging relational perspective on phenomena such as

tourism and events and showcases how such conceptualisation can be operationalised using a combination of ANT and FDA. Our approach offered a new ontology and epistemology for events that allowed important reflections about how we, as event scholars, managers, and attendees, relate to 'others' and understand and practice events in anthropocentric terms. It is worth noting that such a renewed way of conceptualising event sustainability implies a critical evaluation of our values, which has its roots in the core ideas expressed by some of the pioneers of sustainability. It can be then advanced that such early contributions were marginalised by a dominant neoliberal way of thinking. However, at least to some degree, such contributions seem to be reemerging in several contributions across fields of study on sustainability *in primis*, including tourism and events.

Practically, this study sheds novel light on the implications of powerful voiced discourse and media debates regarding events in which academics and scientists should actively engage with civil society. Such implications highlight the importance of fostering deeper connections and more active collaboration among academics, scientists, artists, event organisers, members of local communities, and actors who represent the nonhuman perspective. Such collaboration could take the form of structured consultations, co-constructed decisions, policies, and performative events aiming to build a common language for discourse and a shared understanding of event sustainability and its enactment. The aim of such activities would be to uncover potential conflicts before they occur and, most importantly, disclose unconscious or hidden ways of imposing events and their consequences on human and nonhuman entities, creating the conditions for what Pernecky (2023a) called a 'democratic ecosystem' in line with nomadic ethics.

Our suggestion for future research is to investigate event sustainability using non-anthropocentric lenses, such as posthuman lenses, to question the dominant Western cultural stance. Such studies could add critical reflections on the concept of sustainability (sustain 'what?' and 'why?'), well-being and justice (for whom?), and limits (the temporary

and spatial limits of events for sustainability). Additionally, to foster further knowledge and critical reflection, the use of different methodological approaches should be considered. Our study relied on secondary data, which can be considered a limitation. Particularly promising approaches for future studies, based on our observations regarding the importance of academic engagement and taking a non-anthropocentric stance, might be participatory action research, appreciative inquiry, and multispecies ethnography.

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Statement of contribution to events-related research

This study contributes to the emergence of relational thinking in the context of events. Recently, a *relational turn* has been observed in various fields of study, including those considering event-related tourism. Although relations are a core element of studies on events that involve multiple actors, only a very limited number of event studies have promoted a perspective that, in our opinion, has great potential to foster a renewed way of understanding and practising sustainability. This contribution should drive an agenda for a less anthropocentric view of events.

This study has an important educational aspect because it provides an example of a deep analysis of media data, revealing crucially important mechanisms through which various perspectives are advanced and argued for and how 'truths are built. Our application of combined actor–network theory (ANT) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to a case study constitutes a good example of how such analysis can be conducted. At a time when communication, especially online communication, has been identified as potentially dangerous in terms of spreading fake news and partial views on specific topics, a study highlighting the importance of a critical in-depth analysis of media debates may be particularly valuable, especially for younger readers.

Time with regard to the JBP 2022	ID	Source type and name, web address	Selection criterion
Before	1	Trident website, https://www.tridentmusic.it/jovabeachparty2022/	JBP and "Ri-Party-Amo" presentation
	2	Banca Intesa San Paolo website, https://group.intesasanpaolo.com/it/sala-stampa/comunicati-stampa/2022/05/ri-party-amo--la-grande-iniziativa-ambientale-per-pulire-e-recup	
	3	WWF Italia website, https://www.wwf.it/pandaneews/wwf-life/progetti-e-iniziative/ripartyamo-con-intesa-sanpaolo-jovanotti-e-wwf/	
	4*	LN - <i>Ravenna e Dintorni</i> , https://www.ravennaedintorni.it/societa/2022/06/20/da-woodstock-al-jova-beach-party-ma-quanto-e-green-la-cultura-rock/	Criticised aspects: overview
	5	LN - <i>Chiaro Quotidiano</i> , https://chiaroquotidiano.it/2022/05/05/jova-beach-party-albergatori-data-infelice-avremmo-voluto-essere-consultati-prima-preoccupazione-per-le-forniture-idriche/	
	6	LN - <i>Faro di Roma</i> , https://www.farodiroma.it/le-associazioni-ambientaliste-diffidano-il-comune-di-fermo-per-il-jova-beach-party-importante-proteggere-il-fratino/	
	7	NN - <i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i> , https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/07/02/jova-beach-party-2022-musica-per-le-orecchie-io-ci-vedo-un-disastro-per-lambiente/6646572/	
	8*	NN - <i>La Repubblica</i> , https://www.repubblica.it/spettacoli/musica/2022/07/02/news/jova_beach_party_jovanotti_lignano_s_abbiadoro-356338022/	Praised aspects: overview
	9	NN - <i>La Stampa</i> , https://www.lastampa.it/spettacoli/showbiz/2022/05/03/news/jovanotti_e_la_svolta_ancora_piu_green_del_beachparty_ripartyamo_per_ripulire_le_spiagge_i_laghi_e_i_fiumi_-3247280/	
	10	NN, local section - <i>Corriere della Sera</i> , https://corrieredibologna.corriere.it/bologna/cronaca/22_maggio_09/jova-beach-party-oltre-concerti-pulizia-spiagge-tutela-habitat-4dc42e50-cfa2-11ec-a7e1-075fddfc3baa.shtml	
During	11*	NN, environment and animals section, ethologist - <i>La Stampa</i> , https://www.lastampa.it/la-zampa/2022/07/14/news/il_jova_beach_party_in_spiaggia_e_non_solo_non_dovrebbe_essere_la_natura_il_vero_ombelico_del_mondo-367928429/	Criticism focused on the JBP's environmental sustainability
	12	NN - <i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i> , https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/07/15/jova-beach-party-2022-niente-contro-lartista-ma-serviranno-anni-per-ripristinare-la-biodiversita/6662302/	
	13	NN, environment section - <i>La Repubblica</i> , https://www.repubblica.it/green-and-blue/2022/07/29/news/jova_beach_party_fermo_polemica_ambientalisti-359618102/	The experience of a group of young journalists (https://www.giovaatutti.it/chisiamo/) attending the JBP

14	<i>Change.org</i> - online petition supported by four national environmental associations (started on 2 Aug), https://www.change.org/p/no-ai-grandi-eventi-su-spiagge-e-siti-naturali	Petition against the use of natural areas for big events, endorsed by 53 national and local environmental associations
15*	<i>Instagram</i> - Official profile Jovanotti: 2'11" video (transcribed), https://www.instagram.com/lorenzojova/	The singer's reaction to the criticisms
16	NN - <i>Liberio Quotidiano</i> , https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/personaggi/32664622/jovanotti-linciato-eco-nazisti-caso-clamoroso-spiaggia.html	Comments on the singers' reactions to the criticism
17	NN - <i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i> , https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/08/08/jova-beach-party-salvini-difende-jovanotti-lambiente-non-si-salva-fermando-un-concerto-in-spiaggia/6756563/	A national politician defending the JBP
18	NN - <i>La Repubblica</i> , https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/08/07/news/altro_che_attacchi_jovanotti_dica_grazie_a_chi_sfida_il_lavoro_nero-360666941/	A case of job irregularities
19*	NN, Prof. Tozzi, geologist - <i>La Stampa</i> , https://www.lastampa.it/la-zampa/2022/08/09/news/caro_jovanottistavolta_sbagli-367928929/	The geologist's open letter to the singer
20*	<i>Facebook</i> - Official profile Jovanotti, https://www.facebook.com/lorenzo.jovanotti.cherubini	The singer's answer to the geologist
21	NN, environment and animals section, WWF representative - <i>La Stampa</i> , https://www.lastampa.it/la-zampa/2022/08/12/news/limpatto_ambientale_e_inevitabilema_non_e_stato_fatto_alcun_danno-367928979/	The WWF study centre president's description of the conducted pre-event studies
22	NN - <i>Internazionale, l'Essenziale</i> , https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/sarah-gainsforth/2022/08/19/jova-beach-party-costi-sociali	Criticism about the JBP's socioeconomic benefits for local communities
23	NN - <i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i> , https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/08/21/jova-beach-party-gestione-sanitaria-garantita-e-capillare-le-misericordie-della-versilia-rassicurano-per-il-live-di-viareggio-dopo-la-polemica-di-anpas/6769793/	Criticism by local associations of volunteers (security/health services)
24	Blog - <i>Management Cue</i> , https://managementcue.it/jova-beach-party-i-pro-e-i-contro-di-un-evento-non-proprio-ad-impatto-0/34401/	Reflections on the pros and cons of the JBP
25	NN, local section - <i>La Repubblica</i> , https://firenze.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/08/23/news/jova_beach_a_viareggio_la_procura_di_lucca_riceve_un_esposto_e_apre_uninchiesta-362674111/	A mayor's reaction to a formal complaint by local associations

	26	NN, local section - <i>La Nazione</i> , https://www.lanazione.it/viareggio/cronaca/vertice-jova-party-1.8022783	Formal procedures for evaluating the sustainability and security of a local beach; a local politician's defence of the JBP
	27	NN - <i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i> , https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/08/27/dopo-il-jova-beach-party-nascono-30-caretta-caretta-e-si-avviano-verso-il-mare/6776361/	The hatching of a Caretta caretta (sea turtle) nest close to a JBP location
	28	Environmental news website - <i>Greenme</i> , https://www.greenme.it/ambiente/jova-beach-party-nate-30-tartarughine-castelvolturno/	
	29	NN, local section - <i>La Nazione</i> , https://www.lanazione.it/viareggio/cronaca/mega-eventi-sulla-spiaggia-bacaro-prosegue-lo-studio-1.8021046	Prof. Bacaro's (academic botanical) study on the fragility of a local beach hosting a concert and the sharing of his data and results on an online open archive (https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JtT7M1J98fywKqPB1XusHD6RMRqStpF?fbclid=IwAR2PUgnD5Yhm99Xv9ihAygG_a_uA0XwyRXUZZ7Cja0czCMmjtU9vBLXQF6Q)
After	30*	Blog - <i>A chi Jova Beach Tour</i> , https://achijovabeachtour.blogspot.com/2022/09/bacaro-beach-tour.html?m=1&fbclid=IwAR0qTrxcJnaQE9zE6vuuEaj-oMhZ03QWgpAXoMfkUgVtdAP22sQ4_TTfFqk	A commented summary of the JBP environmental impact (especially about one location, largely based on the study by Prof. Bacaro)
	31	LN - <i>Bari Today</i> , https://www.baritoday.it/social/ri-party-amo-pulizia-spiagge-fiumi-fondali-wwf-molfetta.html	The post-event Ri-Party-Amo initiative
	32*	News Website - <i>Adkronos</i> , https://www.adnkronos.com/il-jova-beach-party-2022-e-atterrato-anche-a-milano_4ZPptLYz68c1jMb24R8jtV	Post-event reflections by WWF and Trident representatives' perspective
	33	NN - <i>Il Giorno</i> , https://www.ilgiorno.it/spettacoli/jove-beach-party-bresso-1.8041764	Post-event reflections, emphasis on the considerable size of the event and its innovativeness

