



Arts Festivals Summit 2024 Usedom

Festivals Cities and Regions Workshop, in partnership with A Soul for Europe

14 May 2024, 9.00 AM - 12.00 PM, Kaiserhof Hotel, Heringsdorf

Facilitated by: Nele Hertling and Nicolas Bertrand from A Soul for Europe

Hosted by: Péter Inkei from the Budapest Observatory

Participants: Delegates from the Cities and Regions, Festivals, and Artists from the Arts Festivals Summit 2024 were invited and took part in the workshop

Introduction

At the occasion of the Arts Festivals Summit 2024, festivals, cities and regions representatives took part in a tailor-made workshop that aimed to:

- offer a platform for exchanges and knowledge gathering around the relation between festivals and their local authorities
- bring to the table concrete questions such as: how do cities and regions initiate and strengthen their dialogue with their festivals? How do cities 'value' their festivals - in which policy areas and actions do they address festivals?
- to understand what is important for the cities and for the festivals to shape the agenda of this initiative

All in all, to offer a process, to speak about all three things: practices, policies, and proposals.

This workshop was built as part of the continual work in progress of the EFFE Seal for Festival Cities and Regions and following the sessions organised at the Yerevan Summit in 2022 and the Peralada / Girona Summit in 2023. This time it tried to be more applied to the notion of concrete proposals for the relation of cities and festivals.

Report on discussions

What is very special/or new or relevant in your relation between cities and festivals that you want to share with other cities, regions and festivals?

Different examples of practices were shared:

- Uniqueness of the existence of a local and regional festivals network in Tampere Region. It was born out of a sense of need for a community by the festivals when applying to become European Capital of Culture (Europeanness as an incentive for including culture in the development of a city or region).
- The power of a festival like Ljubljana Festival to internationalise the city and change the lifestyle of the local inhabitants by doing so.
- Cistermusica as an example of a festival that has created connections among municipalities at a national level and aim to do it at an international one by joining them under the topic of the 'Cistercian man' thanks to the cultural heritage of these territories.
- The creation and development of a region through culture and more in particular through festivals who are its driving force: the case of the [European Metropolitan Region of Rhein-Neckar](#) (once again Europeanness as an incentive).
- The case of Varna:
 - Festivals supported by the municipality: Special fund for festivals (for big, medium, and small festivals)
 - Festival makers collaborated on an intermezzo programme combining music, theatre, visual arts, and dance, enabling large projects that wouldn't be possible alone = The innovative practice and its societal impact is what impressed local authorities.

For cities and regions:

Why do you support a festival? What do you think you get from it? Apart from touristic interest. How do this relate to the work of people doing the festival?

For festivals:

Do you discuss new ideas for a festival with people from the political part or is there no relationship just fighting for money and space?

This is important to know for the development in the future: are we depending on ideas of money givers because money is getting shorter and shorter? Do we have to react to that? Are you independent enough as a festival maker or do you have to follow ideas from people giving the money and space?

- It was said that cultural policies of the cities and the festival programmers have a totally different position in the city. A festival is always a profile, heading to a certain kind of public, there is no festival that is oriented to everybody in the city, so it adds to a certain specific 'niche'.
- It was said that the alderman for culture has the obligation to develop a policy that is oriented to the whole population and that bridges differences.



Some provocation and questions: is there a festival format to think a programme that could really fit from the cities' cultural policy? Is it possible to design an urban festival from the point of view from the mayor which is having all the ingredients to unite different cultures to go outside 'classical' formats?

- It is not possible to unite a city through festivals.
- The responsibility from festival makers is to clarify if they are either “niche project” (with its own traditions, business plan, specific public, etc.) or they are imbedded in the local cultural policies (offspring of local government, part of other festivities, oriented to local publics, an event in public domain) and everything in between.
- Try to make a programme or to extend the programme exploring new formats that go beyond the classical formats.
- Suggestion to not have a national background of judging good culture: e.g. the same festival cannot take place in the same way in Marseille and in Paris. A festival needs to be adapted to its social context.
- Example of Manchester International Festival: the festival was created because the city wanted to recreate the experience of when they hosted the Commonwealth Games in 2002: to bring people from outside of the city from all over the world and also people that live in the city to Manchester to experience it differently as being part of something bigger.
 - The specificity of their funding is that it needs to address everyone in the city, knowing what the population from Manchester looks like (ethnicity, income, social class, sexuality, disability...) and they are expected to meet the expectations from the whole population, not with the same event but across the programme.
 - The festival is very diverse in terms of disciplines and a lot of the work that they do has public engagement: it is participatory work through people involved in commissions.
 - The artistic director needs to look through the lenses from all the different realities living in the city and sometimes that means dropping things that from his or her perspective would work in the programme.
- It is a challenge for festivals to not follow the same idea every year and have the courage to navigate the change in their societies to reach new people and audiences. It is necessary to dialogue with city representatives to see how to navigate these changes in society.

How to measure the value of the experience for the public? Which are the tools?

- Case of Manchester International Festival: establishing a dialogue with the citizens:
 - people's forum and the young people's forum which are groups of volunteers;
 - they give the festival team their feedback and some of them get to have a seat in the board of directors, meaning that they get to change things, their feedback is heard and they feel heard as their demands are reflected in the programme;
 - they have created a set up in which even if they would like to ignore the feedback from their audiences it is not possible to do it.
- Case of Tampere: there is company from Finland that has developed a matrix for the social part of the events.
 - They measure the 'wellbeing index'.
 - To know your audience is also to give a voice to those that do not feel included in your programme.
 - It is as important to hear the ones that do not take part in the event as to hear the ones attending: The city surveyed the people not taking part in the event and the most common answer was: 'I'm not a cultural person'. This is important to take into account:

we need to find ways to talk about our festivals and cultural activities to these people that shut down when they hear the word 'culture'; break the boundaries.

- Eric Corijn: skeptical about the current methods, they tell you the situation as it is now.
 - Measuring what has an effect that changes people, audiences, groups, is a very difficult thing, and most of the things are very much market oriented (branding is not city imaging, is selling the city to not citizens, a society is not a business).
 - How do you 'make' citizens through arts or artistic experiences: One of the real challenges of our cities that are becoming very diverse is that more and more people of those communities are living their lives alongside communitarian rules and do not feel citizen of the political community, of the city or the metropolis.

How can festivals make the right communication which is not publicity?

- Viewpoint that the festivals are a huge part of the city brand, the value of festivals as the image of a city from the lenses of people in the city but also outside and across Europe; it is how people get to know the city through the artistic point of view.
- There is a growing skepticism towards the words 'culture' and 'arts'. Some of the participants remarked the need to be aware of this tendency and to explore together the reasons behind this negative perception in order to know how to address it.

When someone is giving money, there are always conditions. How do you choose as a mayor to whom to give money, to which festivals?

- Remark to not mix policy and urbanism: It is a contradiction whether to look to organise a festival through an urbanist lens which is different than through political governance lens.
- Proposal for cities and regions to create funds to be given under the condition that they are invested in the "out of the box" part of the programme: to have other styles, other public, to attract other people.
- If we give the money to the festivals doing things "out of the box" but what is exactly to be out of the box? Should cultural politics be intervening in this process, or should it be a curator the one answering that question?
- In an ideal situation a city needs a cultural development plan and strategy and in an ideal world this would be co-developed with the citizens: When that plan is there, you can see with your festival idea if you are following it and if you would like to readjust your festival idea so you can follow it.
- In an ideal world there is a conversation and a development between the two levels: In the Region of Rhein-Nacker there is a conversation between the cultural politics and the festivals and the cultural scene, not always harmonic, but it can be part of the branding of the city, it can be used for tourism (UNESCO plans are still about tourism).
- Some festivals feel against the idea that a festival should reflect the objectives of a municipality: in some cases, it can be dangerous because the municipality and the festival might not share objectives and aspirations.
 - Believe that the artistic directors are the experts on the audience but also on the artistic practices.
- Another opinion was that there is always dialogue with the local authorities but there might not be necessary that there is interference in the content itself.
- Innovation and accessibility but sometimes these two poles are contradictory. Accessibility should not degrade the level of the artistic programme.

How does the festival connect with the city?

- Malta International Festival: curating events that use the cultural heritage of Malta. Site specific concerts, in very unique environments (e.g. like an underground cathedral). People come for the experience.
- Case of a small performing arts festival in Thuringen, East Germany:
 - The festival takes place in an abandoned theatre: people do not come.
 - Solution: take the festival to the people bringing it to a residential area where people live.
 - They founded a programme called Theatre Transformational Process: involve the whole city in the transformation how the work is in the city and in the region.

Festivals and Tourism: Festivals are supported by the cultural sector of the city or region, the cultural sector is supporting hotels and restaurants, is it logical? Is the touristic sector supporting the cultural sector?

- Edinburgh is going to bring in a tourist tax, part of it will go to hotels. Culture and festivals are going to be the recipients of the funding coming from this tax. Politicians are saying that it should be for the benefit of tourism, but festival makers believe that it should be for the residents and tourism.

Festivals as 'laboratories' to experiment

- Edinburgh is trying to identify the specific role of the festivals in the context of a year-round of artistic programme and festivals: they have identified that the festivals are laboratories of new thinking, new programming, interruptions of the everyday, communal celebration, they do something different. They try to find what they are experimenting in different areas: environmentalism, digital, different funding, measuring and impact (e.g. by hearing the voice of the child).
- Sometimes the festival needs to create mechanisms that engage, inform and educate children (e.g. children's opera). When involving children in a creative journey it presents an aesthetic programme (children playing inside the harp of the piano). Children would embrace and absorb this and when they encounter this kind of music later on, they have a reference.

Could festivals and the arts be considered a 'third space'?

- The Greek city-state vision has traditionally been viewed as an entity that was divided into two distinct spheres (*oikos*, the household and *polis*, the political society to be constructed). The arts were called *heterotopia*: another space than the in-between of the *oikos* and the *polis*, but this other space needs to reflect in a certain way the dialectics between those. The arts as another way, as everything that was not ruled by the binary interaction between the *oikos* and *polis* but have to say something about these relations.
- The independence as if we do not give legitimation of what we do, it is totally freedom, we do it because we do it: that is not the right position.

Ideas shared by the cities as a mandate for the EFFE Seal process:

- **To advocate** for a larger presence of festival cities and regions at the European level:
 - a. When the EU was founded it was said that it would be a union of regions and this was not delivered. Local and regional governments do not have a say in the EU (there are some mechanisms but very weak in general).

- b. The role of culture is not really one of the core strands of the European Union. When we look at the emergency umbrella/fund after the pandemic: culture did not play a role in it. It was the responsibility of national states but cities and regions did not have a say in this emergency fund.

e.g. Mondiacult (Declaration signed by 140 Ministers for Culture): the declaration says that culture is a common public good and this needs to be reflected in the national cultural policies. For the first time it was said in global governance.

The EFFE Seal could work on putting pressure on their governments for them to recognise culture as a common public good (e.g. by participating in Mondiacult 2025 in Barcelona).

- The EFFE Seal **as a reflection of the values** of a city: feeling that the values are the core thing that the city and the festivals should have in common. Taking part in the EFFE Seal would mean that they ascribe to its values if they match with the ones of their city and festivals.

CONCLUSIONS by Nele and Nicolas

1. The need to facilitate the conditions for more cooperation between the cities, regions and actors like festivals (e.g. local authorities through European Capital of Culture's applications have realised about the importance of this cooperation).
2. Recognition that cities and regions also wish to learn from each other, that is why many have joined or are thinking of joining the EFFE Seal process.
3. Notion of experiment and how festivals can be considered organisations that are building knowledge on the people, on the territory.
This should be considered by the city, they might ask festivals to be out of the box, to develop some projects for a certain part of society, but do the politicians know who are the inhabitants living in their cities and regions? They know through figures and numbers, but festivals bring other views more related to sensitive topics, cultural expression.
4. Culture to be more assertive on cultural policies because we may be mixed with tourism issues, social politics, education, etc. It is important to be more assertive especially on relation with tourism because we see that there is a complex proximity between arts festivals and the touristic aspect. It is not only to get money back from tourism but about being more assertive to not be considered as touristic festivals but also as cultural and arts festivals and understand what do these festivals bring to the territory apart from the tourism.

Things we did not discuss and could be food for discussion for future meetings (by Nele Hertling):

- The role of festivals for the artists and the role of artists for the festivals and for the cities and regions it is important in the development of audiences, the closeness of artistic connections to certain parts of society.
- The possibility of festivals by cross border cooperation to create connections and partnerships with countries and cities outside of their own, which can change the communities by getting more knowledge for the neighbours, and societies: transformation of societies through international exchange.
- How to convince our political establishments to use what festivals can offer (partly touched). To make it important and to let people in the government understand what we can do to help societies develop and improve (e.g. Even inside artistic communities' people are fighting each

other, this is something that needs to be overcome by getting together and finding solutions together bringing also the political establishment on the side of the arts and in this discussion).

Picture:



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