

Arts Festivals Summit 2026 Budva

Workshop Beyond Borders: Regional and Cross-border Collaborations

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The session “Beyond Borders: Regional and Cross-border Collaborations”, held within the Arts Festivals Summit 2026 in Budva, gathered festival representatives, cultural professionals and project coordinators from different European and regional contexts to reflect on the importance, challenges and future of cross-border cultural cooperation.

Designed as an open conversation rather than a formal panel, the session created space for honest exchange between participants coming from different artistic disciplines and organisational realities, from music and theatre festivals to interdisciplinary cultural initiatives and community-based programmes.

Due to the dynamic and highly engaged nature of the discussion, it was unfortunately not possible to fully cover all the initially planned thematic segments within the scheduled timeframe. However, this became one of the strongest indicators of the relevance and need for such conversations within the sector. Several participants informally expressed the wish for the session to continue for at least two additional hours, while others suggested that the topic should return in future summit editions in an extended format or as a dedicated follow-up session.

The discussion successfully focused on four central thematic areas:

- motivations behind cross-border collaboration today,
- sustainability of partnerships beyond short-term project frameworks,
- audience development and knowledge exchange,
- and the relationship between regional and wider European cooperation.

One particularly valuable aspect of the session was the introductory networking and “getting to know each other” segment, which organically took more time than originally planned. While this slightly influenced the timing of the later discussion, participants themselves highlighted that this part was essential in creating a more open, relaxed and trust-based atmosphere for the exchange that followed.

The discussion focused mainly on the motivation behind festivals’ decision to build cross-border partnerships and on the needs that such collaborations currently address. This question is layered differently according to the maturity level of each organisation’s cultural strategy, at both regional and national levels.

For Portugal, one of the reasons is to create the right conditions for festivals to flourish and for intercultural dialogue to take place, for example through new funding opportunities. In days where

countries tend to eliminate plurality and the values of the European Union, we must turn to European funding and opportunities in order to help preserve these values.

One other important aspect is the impact of starting regional or national collaboration between festivals which are not driven by entertainment. It exists with Aporfest in Portugal but this national organisation as a wide scope. The arts festivals are not united in Portugal (national and regions).

In response to the question 'How can festivals create meaningful and sustainable networks rather than short term project collaborations?', EFEEA and EFA were taken as examples, as they can foster the exchange of knowledge in the future without necessarily contributing to the 'festivalisation' of the performing arts. If a 'festival' is defined as a flagship event offering an intensive (and therefore irregular) programme, how can it – paradoxically – forge lasting connections? How can we move from a 'project-based approach' to a 'relationship-based approach' whilst still calling it a festival? By providing ongoing support for artists? By offering outreach activities throughout the year? By focusing on participatory programming (such as 'carte blanche' initiatives, etc.)? This is a subject that deserves further exploration.

Theatres: How does one relate regular programming (usually under artistic direction) with festivals? Is it possible to programme a theatre only with festivals, or should festivals represent a percentage of high-impact programming that is closely linked to the regular programme?

This format enabled participants not only to present their work, but also to gain a better understanding of each other's contexts, challenges and approaches, while also creating space for potential future collaborations and deeper professional connections.

In many ways, this initial exchange set the tone for the entire session and contributed significantly to the openness and quality of the conversation.

The session had an exceptionally positive response, gathering around 50 participants and generating a very dynamic and engaged discussion throughout its duration. One of the most encouraging outcomes was the strong interest expressed by many participants to continue the conversation beyond the session itself, including suggestions for additional future formats dedicated specifically to regional and cross-border festival collaborations. Conversations and exchanges continued informally throughout the entire Summit, further confirming both the relevance of the topic and the need for more spaces dedicated to meaningful exchange between festivals, cultural organisations and professionals working across different contexts and artistic disciplines.

Particular attention was given to the Balkan and regional perspective, where participants reflected on the complexity of collaborating within contexts that are geographically close, yet often institutionally fragmented. The conversation highlighted the importance of trust, continuity, informal networks and long-term relationships in sustaining meaningful cooperation between festivals and cultural organisations.

What became particularly visible during the exchange was a shared need for:

- stronger regional networking,
- more continuous exchange between festivals,
- greater visibility for smaller cultural scenes,
- and more sustainable models of cooperation that go beyond administrative project requirements.

Conclusions

The session also reaffirmed the important role festivals can play not only as artistic platforms, but as spaces of dialogue, mobility, community-building and cultural connection across borders.

Rather than offering definitive conclusions, the conversation opened important questions for future reflections:

- How can festivals move from project-based cooperation toward long-term cultural relationships?
- How can collaboration become meaningful not only for professionals, but also for artists, audiences and local communities?
- And how can regional cooperation become a stronger foundation for wider European cultural exchange?

The openness, generosity and honesty of the participants contributed greatly to the atmosphere of the session and confirmed the relevance of creating more spaces for collective reflection and exchange within the cultural sector.

Pictures





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