



# Arts Festivals' Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue

In this increasingly globalised and multicultural society, facing cultural diversity has become a major challenge. Migratory flows and the successive enlargements of the European Union have brought the European peoples and cultures into continuous contact and exchange, so that living in a multicultural community has become the norm for millions of people.

The significance and the role of culture in the process of European integration are aspects which can no longer be ignored. In this new social context, the different facets of the cultural identity of the individual and of the local communities are constantly subject to a process of renewal and revision. Festivals have been playing a key role in this process, as they represent an ideal location where, in a festive atmosphere, the different cultural streams and phenomena closely linked to immigration and multicultural communities find an ideal place for free and peaceful expression. They have always been powerful promoters of the protection of the fundamental right of freedom of expression and their programmes helped to boost the circulation of ideas and people, the creation of a more peaceful coexistence and the promotion of an active European citizenship.

European arts festivals initiated a vital process of circulating and giving visibility to the different cultural streams of European arts and cultures, which represented a significant step toward the development of intercultural competences. Festivals, while respecting and promoting the regional and national diversity of the local

communities, cultures, values and traditions, have at the same time been highlighting a common European heritage by promoting a culture of mutual exchange and respect for cultural diversity. Disadvantaged people, youth and minorities living in this more open and complex society must be given, like all other people who are temporarily living in the EU, the possibility of accessing active citizenship.

Cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and the economic impact of culture have now gained a top position on the agenda of the EU. The decision of the European Union to declare 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue is the latest step in a long-term plan to create an ever closer union between the peoples of Europe as well as providing all citizens with the opportunity of participating actively in intercultural dialogue in order to strengthen the coexistence of different cultural identities and beliefs, to highlight their common heritage, and at the same time to acknowledge and look respectfully at the differences of individual and local experiences.

## Festivals play a powerful role in turning a multicultural society into an intercultural society, a strategic step in the process of integration:

### ■ First of all, **festivals reach broad audiences.**

The number of people attending festivals keeps increasing, which in turn shows a growing interest in the events organised in the frameworks of festivals. Reaching the largest number of people for the promotion intercultural dialogue is an important goal, as there cannot be any intercultural interaction if the people have no means to get in touch.

■ Festivals give **artists** from all over the world the opportunity of increasing and developing their artistic experience, thus initiating a process of mutual exchange of artistic excellence among different countries. In particular, the artists-in-residence programmes allow artists to live and work in new contexts and to combine their own experience with the local one, creating a positive and illuminating example of **integration**.

■ Differently from other media, the audiences attending festival events are encouraged to actively participate in them. Festivals, conceived as plural and open moments to be shared and participated in by the largest number of people, enhance the concept of **participation** and promote a **sense of belonging**, as they are expressions of a local community, but at the same time address international and European topics.

■ Festivals boost **cultural tourism**. Every year millions of visitors decide to attend festivals in different regions or countries, coming

into contact with new and different cultures and learning about foreign traditions and history.

■ Festivals are unique **expressions of the local community**, as they are firmly rooted in the local environment, but they are also very often linked to national and international contexts. They are challenges to local traditions -as they acknowledge cultural diversity- but at the same time they also stimulate innovation and respect the common cultural heritage.

■ Festivals play a unique role in the context of **education** by promoting a culture of peace and shaping understanding and respect amongst groups of people.

■ Fringe activities, extensive use of new technologies, schemes and activities conceived especially for young people are particularly useful tools to **reach youths** and communicate with them, sharing values such as respect for other cultures, and launching education processes in the field of inter-cultural exchange.

■ Outreach and fringe activities provide easy and open access to the cultural activities of festivals for all kind of audiences, attracting all kinds of people, thus enhancing the process of **social inclusion**. More and more festivals' events take place in convivial atmospheres and in open venues which can be accessed basically by all, including disadvantaged people and ethnic or cultural minorities.

## Festivals and other parties signing this Declaration are engaged:

■ In building an effective intercultural dialogue, in the conviction that such a dialogue represents an essential tool for peaceful interaction among different cultures, ethnic groups, religions, languages, beliefs and social backgrounds. Such interaction will in turn encourage a respectful and enriching exchange of ideas and help identify the boundaries that define individuals and communities;

■ In raising the awareness of artists, managers, collaborators, volunteers regarding Intercultural Dialogue conceived as a respectful and free exchange among communities and individuals and aimed at the promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity which is indispensable for the protection of human rights and democracy;

■ In opposing stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and ignorance about different, foreign or minority cultures and are committed to and engaged in promoting Intercultural Dialogue in the framework of the European Year and for the years to come by mobilising their collective creative resources and celebrating participation as a bond among people;

■ In disseminating the European Year documents and its core ideas to the largest number of people possible and ensuring visibility for the logo, brochures and all communication and information materials referring to the European Year in order to promote its essence and objectives.

ARTS FESTIVALS'



Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue

AN INITIATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN FESTIVALS ASSOCIATION

