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Festivals

Open doors. Open minds.
Build societies!

FestFlash of the European Festivals Association No 5 / November 2010

Promoting keys:

Which doors to be opened still?

On 20 October 2010 in Brussels, the [European Festivals Association](#) (EFA) invited for a [participatory session “Festivals: Open Doors. Open Minds. Build Societies!”](#) in the frame of the EU Forum “Building together a society for all”. The role of festivals in social developments was the central topic debated.

Participants agreed: It is key that barriers to access the arts are removed as much as possible. In their very essence and with their manifold activities festivals are able to provide access for all kinds of audiences, making space and time available for a real encounter between arts/life, artists and audience. Most importantly, festivals offer artists a platform to challenge the audiences, to change their minds, to offer them different perspectives of life, to propose to them imaginary worlds, to increase their understanding of the other.

Stage director Galin Stoev said during the EFA session: “I cannot change society, but I can reach out to a person!” Festivals offer this meeting place between citizens and artists.

The “keys” applied by festivals to open doors for artist and audiences include: implementation of outreach activities, educational projects or outdoor events, use of new technologies, a diverse ticketing policy, development of innovative artists management and audience approaches, ensuring a diversity of partnerships and both regional and international collaborations - to name but a few.

This FestFlash presents some of the findings of the Open Space Session. A series of festivals - including Flanders Festival International (Belgium); Berliner Festspiele

(Germany); MITO SettembreMusica (Italy); Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival (Poland); Belgrade Music Festival / BEMUS (Serbia); Festival Ljubljana (Slovenia); CULTURESCPAES (Switzerland); Istanbul International Music Festival (Turkey); Media Facades Festival (Europe); Traveling Notes (USA) - presents concrete examples of how festivals indeed open doors!

In the spotlight...

The artist – The linchpin for an open minded society?

The EFA [open space session](#) took place in the framework of the trans-sectoral EU Forum “Building together a society for all” set up by the European Commission. In an interactive exchange with artists, festival representatives, actors from the cultural and other sectors, EFA discussed the role and responsibility of arts and culture for societal development, well-being and raising awareness of social inequities.



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The session aimed to discuss how and if a festival really combats poverty and social exclusion. Participants agreed that the right conditions need to be created for festivals to be able to live up to their expected responsibility: to bring individual citizens from all walks of life together - artists meet audiences! The respective responsibilities of festivals and decision-makers in increasing access to culture and to a ‘social’ cultural Europe were discussed.

Session participants agreed that festivals contribute to a change of mind-set of people that get in touch with artists. Festivals are one of the few places left where artists have almost complete freedom to create, freedom of thought, and that it is the task of festivals to convince politicians that festivals remain a public responsibility.

It was agreed that actors at different levels have to join forces in order to make full use of the potential of arts and culture in societal processes, such as fostering social inclusion or an active European citizenship. The session led to the suggestion that it is key to include the cultural dimension in other spheres, i.e. in economic or regional policies.

[Follow the key moments of the discussion in this short film clip!](#)

In conversation with... stage director Galin Stoev

Participants of the EFA Open Space Session on 20 October 2010 could follow a [critical discussion with Galin Stoev, stage director, Biljana Zdravkovic, General Manager Belgrade Music Festival, and Jelle Dierickx, Musicologist, Artistic Coordinator of Gent Festival of Flanders and Vice-President of ISCM Flanders 2012 Music Days](#). Moderated by Salvatore Marra, Officer at CGIL Roma e Lazio (Italian General Confederation of Labour), the session - with an introduction of EFA Secretary General Kathrin Deventer and critical interventions from the floor - challenged participants on the question how arts and culture are indeed at the basis of changing mind sets and triggering thinking in order to increase a sense of social and cultural responsibility.



Kathrin Deventer (KD): “EFA believes that arts and culture play an essential role in the building of societies. Festivals are deeply rooted in local contexts and contribute to a change of mind-set of people that get in touch with artists. Is it really possible that arts and culture fight poverty? Are arts and culture at the basis of changing mind sets in order to avoid that poverty exists?”

Galin Stoev (GS): “I don’t believe that the artist can fight poverty. I think it is an intellectual concept. I think we have to realise that we cannot save the society as a whole, but we probably can save an individual. I think the individual is the only stable point. How to create an individual? How to push

the individual’s limits? This should be the main preoccupation of the artist of tomorrow. It’s not only a question of producing a good show. It is also important to place it in a spectator’s imagination. It is not just about educating audiences but about guiding the audience and to invite them to dare to dream further.”

“I don’t believe we have to address people as a distinctive group, telling them because you are poor we are doing this or that for you. The crucial attitude we have to apply for the future is that we address people because they are human beings!”

Salvatore Marra (SM): “Most politicians would probably get rid of festivals immediately if they could, because they don’t see the value of culture because some arts festivals have been considered as elitist.”

Biljana Zdravkovic (BZ): “It is very easy for politicians to give us [festivals] up. They don’t know how to use the power of international artistic creation. We have to underline that we are important for different reasons; not the whole world will appreciate and understand what we do but we can have a certain influence on some people and the course of their lives.”

SM: “In how far can festivals carry out a social role and engage in social values?”

Jelle Dierickx (JD): “This is not even a question. Festivals are simply doing exactly that. We have to make sure that politicians know they need us! Not vice versa. When you have two coins you should use one to buy bread and one to buy a bunch of flowers. We have to convince politicians about that. The real poverty is *poverty in thinking!* The richness of Europe is that we can debate.”



SM: “Which doors need to be opened still?”

KD: “The way of measuring the value of the arts and its social relevance has to be adapted to the realities of the sector. Politicians ask for indicators when they decide who to support financially. They ask for figures of audiences and target groups reached etc. But rather than using quantitative indicators a qualitative long-term approach should be applied. Researchers more and more follow the practice and provide the needed tools: The level of participation in cultural life is put into relation with the level of well being for example.”

JD: “We have to approach our supporters with idealistic visions. We have to convince them to invest into the arts.”

GS: “We have to underline that public funding is still very important. If we are told by politicians, go to McDonald’s to find funding, then we might end up having Hamlet dressed as a donut.”

BS: “It is the task of festivals to convince politicians that festivals remain a public responsibility. We should not lose that battle.”

GS: “On the festival’s side it is key to create an alternative way through which people can access culture and arts differently. There is a ‘mental space’ where despite of cultural, educational or social differences we can meet without creating conflicts. This is a value and it should be a common agreement.”

SM: “Exactly. Culture is there for overcoming conflicts.”

KD: “The change of mind-set leads to assuming responsibility. Let’s make use of this force of festivals to bring together individuals, to shape a sense of responsibility and to link with these individual levels of responsibility.”

The upcoming FestFlashes put festivals into the spotlight that open doors for artists and audiences and that open doors to arts and culture for everybody!

FestFlash Highlights

Berliner Festspiele eager to open new horizons

“We believe that with art, important topics of our living together are disputed in a playful manner,” once said Joachim Sartorius, Director of the Berliner Festspiele which unites several international festivals and programmes under one roof: the *Theater Treffen* includes i.e. public debates with renowned guests from culture, politics and business and creates links between theatre and social and political issues. The *Berliner Lektionen* are dialogues with artists and significant figures from public life. The *international literature festival berlin* aspires to opening new horizons and challenging young people emotionally, socio-culturally, artistically through an extensive youth programme. Currently running: *spielzeit’europa 2010* which challenges the audience to go beyond the traditional European way of looking at things.

CULTURESCAPES festival opens doors to Asia



©CULTURESCAPES

The Swiss festival CULTURESCAPES goes beyond political boundaries, reflects the variety and distinctiveness of heterogeneous cultural landscapes and provides a panorama of their art and cultural scenes. After initially presenting Eastern European countries, in 2010, CULTURESCAPES puts focus on China. “CULTURESCAPES as a whole is based on social inclusion. It is not an exclusive festival for the few, the happy and the rich,” [says festival director Juriaan Cooman](#).

BEMUS launches No Borders Orchestra

On 23 October 2010, directors of festivals from the Balkans and music institutions agreed on the establishment of the NO BORDERS ORCHESTRA. It is a collaborative project launched by a group of well established festivals and music institutions operating within the borders of the former Yugoslavian countries. The Orchestra shall be composed of 80 to 100 of the best young professional musicians from the region. The overall goal of the project is to emphasise the necessity of cultural involvement in all aspects of social and political life. [Read ahead!](#)

MITO SettembreMusica spreading music culture



©MITO SettembreMusica

MITO SettembreMusica (Milan & Turin) focuses a great deal of attention on spreading music culture. The programme's key performances are bolstered by educational projects for everyone. The *Musica che incontra...* series for example is dedicated to music's relationship with other disciplines, such as politics, mathematics and architecture. This educational initiative is aimed at involving schools and families in a series of quality concerts at nominal prices. Furthermore, MITO organises special concerts for children and young people and brings performances to hospitals, rest homes and prisons.

Istanbul International Music Festival engages for an open-minded, creative society

In its 37-year history, the International Istanbul Music Festival has played an important role in reinforcing such values as tolerance, respect for cultural diversity and freedom of expression in order to enrich dialogue between societies and cultures regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or belief. "Our purpose is to contribute to the education of an open-minded and creative society for the future generation," [says Director Yesim Güler Oymak](#) in an interview with EFA.

Accessibility is key at the Flanders Festival International



©Flanders Festivals

For the organisers of the festivals of the regional Flanders Festivals in Belgium "accessibility" is a core mission. In several initiatives - i.e. "Dorp op Stap" (Village Goes Culture), "Living Room Music" and the Klarafestival in Brussels, or "OdeGand", "Kids OdeGand" and "Avanti" in Ghent - the festivals live up to their ambitious goal. [Jan Briers, General Manager Flanders Festival International](#), and [Sophie Detremmerie, Business Director Flanders Festival International Brussels](#), spoke about their visions.

Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival opens doors for young artists

"We work with the best Polish young artists, often from poor strands of society. (...) The artists who are under our patronage often take part in charity projects to help young children facing social exclusion, children with illnesses, handicapped children or other serious problems," explains Elzbieta Chojnowska, Producer at the Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival, one of the festival's missions.

Festival Ljubljana assumes its social responsibility



©Festival Ljubljana

The Festival Ljubljana enriches the capital's cultural life with many concerts, shows and exhibitions. "The role of the festival in society is very important, including its role in the social agenda. But society in general also has a strong influence on festivals," [says Darko Brlek](#), President of the European Festivals Association and General and Artistic Director of the Festival Ljubljana, in an interview with EFA.

Media Facades Festival: Window for societal processes

The MEDIA FACADES FESTIVAL EUROPE 2010 is an urban media pilot project that interconnects seven European cities through the existing infrastructure of urban screens and media facades sited in public spaces. The media facades open a global window for cultural and societal processes to create a dialogue and connect the local public virtually with the other places throughout Europe. [Read ahead!](#)

Traveling Notes: works to expand minds towards other possibilities



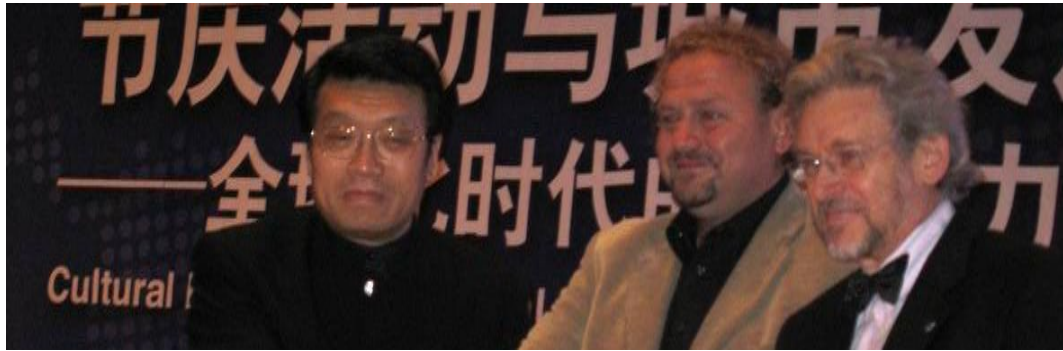
©Traveling Notes

[Traveling Notes](#) combines music education with foreign travel and social outreach. It originated from the desire to use the universal language of music as a bridge to connect cultures and cross social barriers. In 2010 the project participated in the [Flanders Festival International Gent](#): it was part of the chamber orchestra in residence in the frame of the first edition of KidsOdeGand! Youngsters from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, the United States, Peru, Bolivia and Belgium performed at their very best.

Interview with Kathrin Deventer: "Arts reflect and point out changes in societies"

In a [recent interview](#) EFA Secretary General Kathrin Deventer spoke about the 2010 EFA flagship project "Open The Door", about the role of arts and culture in contemporary society and how festivals can contribute in the processes of building societies. The interview was conducted by Dea Vidovic from [LabforCulture](#).

Commitment to cultural collaboration between Asia and Europe



On 27/28 September 2010 in Shanghai, the European Festivals Association, together with the Association of Asian Performing Arts Festivals (AAPAF), the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the China Shanghai International Arts Festival (CSIAF), signed a [commitment](#) to stimulate cultural exchange between Asia and Europe. In a [recent interview](#), EFA Vice President Jan Briers underlined the important role of cultural networks in this context. [Find out more about the event!](#)

How to commit to “Open The Door”

The European Festivals Association invites all arts festivals to commit to the initiative “Open The Door” at the dedicated website: www.Open-The-Door.eu.

Festivals who express their commitment are invited to [submit their best practice](#).

The “Open The Door” project will continue to advocate for the transformative power of festivals in our societies today. Also in 2011, festivals are invited to share their best practices; the “Open The Door” website will feature all projects and results researched! [Have a glance at some insights already published!](#)

About FestFlash and EFA

The 2010 FestFlash series brings news about festivals and their activities implemented in the spirit of the “Open The Door” initiative.

Latest news and relevant information may be found on the Open The Door website at www.Open-The-Door.eu and on the EFA website at www.efa-aef.eu!

“Open The Door” is an initiative of the [European Festivals Association](#) in the framework of the [European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion](#). As in [2008](#) and in [2009](#), EFA is official partner of the European Year.

The **European Festivals Association (EFA)** is the umbrella organisation for arts festivals across Europe and beyond. Over more than 50 years, EFA has grown into a dynamic network representing more than 100 music, dance, theatre and multidisciplinary festivals, national festivals associations and cultural organisations (representing on their behalf more than 1,000 festivals) from 38 (mainly European) countries. Since 2004, the EFA offices are based in Belgium.

EFA is initiator of the **European House for Culture** (www.efa-aef.eu), a member of the EU Platform on ‘Access to Culture’ (refer to the extensive [Policy Paper](#) with best practices) and collaborates closely with ‘[A Soul for Europe](#)’.



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