

“Artistic Trends in Festivals”

REPORT



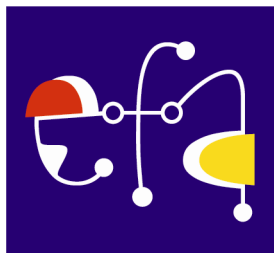
Artistic Trends in Festivals

Laboratories for Creativity, Promoters of Innovation

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In the framework of the European Capital of Culture 2009



The European Festivals Association Giving Festivals a Voice!

The European Festivals Association (EFA) is the umbrella organisation of and for arts festivals in Europe representing more than 100 music, dance and theatre festivals in 38 countries and is in contact with more than 1000 festivals as members of national festivals association and cultural networks.

Index

“Trends are about choices, choices are about taste, taste is individual”.....	4
Detailed report of the proceedings and conclusions	6
Trend: Taking artistic risks remains essential	
Setting trends does not mean following the audiences’ taste!	6
Trend: Taking on societal and political roles	
Festivals are mirrors of a changing society and catalysts of change	7
Trend: Environmental sustainability in the focus of a festival	
Environmental issues gain importance on festivals’ agenda	7
Trend: giving the festival a ‘trendy’ and at the same time historical dimension	
Historical tags - celebration of historical milestones and figures	8
Trend: Participatory audiences instead of receptive ones	
“The audience doesn’t just want to sit and listen”	8
Trend: Early music in the streets	
“To plant a seed and give a certain tolerance for early music”	9
Trend: collaboration between traditional and new festivals - small and big-scale events	9
Trend: Festivals go public - Churches, castles, prisons - new and unusual venues	10
Trend: The “young approach” - filling the “generation gap”	10
Trend: New media and new technology	
“One has to react to what is happening in the young world”	10
Trend: Giving a second life to festivals	
Social, educational, participatory and other outreach projects	11
Trend: beyond pure artistic responsibility: The social and political role of festivals	11
Trend: collective identities reflected in the arts: the rise of small and bigger community festivals	12
Trend: Engage with the personalities of emerging artists	
The new wave of young artists in the “post-canonical situation”	13
Trend in cross-border and cross-continental work	
Act local, think global: intercultural realities of cities	14
Trend: Interaction between disciplines and sectors	
Vital cultural climate invites for a lively mix!.....	15
Conclusion	16

“Trends are about choices, choices are about taste, taste is individual”



From 13-16 May, the European Festivals Association (EFA) held its General Assembly 2009 in Vilnius. The conference was hosted by the Vilnius Festival at the occasion of Vilnius - European Capital of Culture 2009.

Theme of this year's conference: “**Artistic Trends in Festivals**”: How and why do trends in festivals change? Who sets trends? What are the future trends? And what future for festivals: Still the trendsetters of our creative ecology of tomorrow?

More than 100 festival representatives from 30 different countries discussed trends in festivals from the most diverse perspectives, but with an overall unanimous conclusion: A festival has an essential mission to constantly look for its contemporary quality, to be prepared for changes, to permanently choose for innovative means, pick up trends in the arts in order to play an influential artistic, cultural and social role.

Following the inspirational keynote speech by Michael Tyden sharing the story of the Baltic Sea Festival, panellists of the round table – moderated by Hugo De Greef, General Director Flagey including Ruta Staneviciute, Lithuanian Musicologist; Henk Heuvelmans, International Gaudeamus Music Week Amsterdam; Dr. Levan Khetaguri, President Caucasus Foundation; and Sarah Wilson, Managing Director Innsbruck Festival of Early Music, stressed the importance of **reflection** and **exchange**: To trace artistic trends means relating different realities and practices, positioning them in a broader, European or global framework. In times of festivals' booming, trends and new motivations for starting new festivals are almost impossible to identify.

A series of concrete presentations by Enrique Gámez, Director Festival Internacional de Música y Danza de Granada, Johan Moerman, Managing Director Rotterdam Festivals, Piotr Turkiewicz, Head of Music Management International Festival Wroclaw Cantans, and Wei Zhi, Vice-President China Shanghai International Arts Festival, confirmed that looking for trends means in the first place sharing practices that are strongly rooted in a region or the place where a festival happens.

Some of the main trends defined include (to be discussed in detail here below):

- Trend: Taking artistic risks remains essential
Setting trends does not mean following the audiences' taste!
- Trend: Taking on societal and political roles
Festivals are mirrors of a changing society and catalysts of change
- Trend: Environmental sustainability in the focus of a festival
Environmental issues gain importance on festivals' agenda
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- Trend: collective identities reflected in the arts: the rise of small and bigger community festivals
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The new wave of young artists in the “post-canonical situation”
- Trend in cross-border and cross-continental work
Act local, think global: intercultural realities of cities
- Trend: Interaction between disciplines and sectors
Vital cultural climate invites for a lively mix!

Concluding the intense working day, the European Festivals Association assigned 106 arts festivals from 35 countries with the 'FestLabPass for Creativity and Innovation', a passport that commits festivals to act as laboratories of creativity and promoters of innovation as festivals' contribution to the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

Receiving the FestLabPass by Ján Figel', European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth festivals confirm their striving for fostering creative and innovative skills in our societies today.

The FestLab for Creativity and Innovation is an EFA initiative taken at the occasion of the 2009 European Year of Creativity and Innovation.



Detailed report of the proceedings and conclusions

Setting trends does not mean following the audiences' taste! Trend: Taking artistic risks remains essential



Opening the day, Ruta Pruseviciene, Executive Director of Vilnius Festival, referred to the conference theme as a very attractive and inspiring one: “**trends are about choices, choices are about taste, taste is very individual**”. Organising festivals and other musical events means stimulating debate and communication. It happens that one experiences an artistic event that one does not like but that raises debate about the ideas that are expressed.

In Vilnius – European Capital of Culture – festival

organisers participate in a fierce political, social and cultural debate. As a conclusion, every artistic event in Vilnius has inspired the debate, not just about the budget, but also about the role of culture and its added value in the long term.

Festival organisers take the risk that the choice, individual taste and trends do not correspond with the ones of the audiences. One does not have to indulge the audience; one does not have to shape the programmes according to some of the general cultural trends. As an example she refers to the Vilnius Festival. 13 years ago, when the festival was founded, it set a social and cultural trend in the cultural life of Lithuania. That period was marked by a huge decrease in audiences, especially in the field of music. It was risk taking and a huge challenge to invite world celebrities in the field of music and ask them to work together with Lithuanian artist. Without the support of some wise politicians – long-term thinking politicians – this would not have been so successful.

The Vilnius Festival has been working on filling some of the niches, on winning back audiences, commissioning works to Lithuanian composers; it has produced several contemporary operas and ballets, oratorios and symphonies. The Festival survived the big criticism from some of the listeners and sponsors.

Today, the festival still chooses the artists itself, sets trends; its courage has inspired many festivals in Lithuania; today, in Lithuania almost every artistic niche is covered.

Festivals are mirrors of a changing society and catalysts of change Trend - Taking on societal and political roles



In his welcome speech, EFA President Darko Brlek touches upon the discussion about artistic trends, ranging from the artistic perspective to the very important social impact of festivals. “Festivals are mirrors of society; society is changing and with it festivals are changing.” It is a task for each festival to make society aware of certain problems and encourage a change of attitude, engagement and thus contribute to the consciousness of our modern societies.

The conference on artistic trends is more relevant than ever as it reflects on arts, on the power of arts in society, on the huge need – also for EFA as an association – to bring across the message of the power of arts in society, Kathrin Deventer, EFA Secretary General, suggests. 2009 is a crucial year to make the voice of the arts and culture heard louder in regards to politics. 2009 is also the European Year of Creativity and Innovation; societies and

politicians are looking for a new discourse. Arts are able to provide these new stories as the outcomes of the conference show.

Environmental issues gain importance on festivals’ agendas Trend: Environmental sustainability in the focus of a festival



Michael Tydén from the Baltic Sea Festival explains the nature of the festival that is responding to the specific situation of the Baltic region: The festival consists of three corner pillars: First of all, it presents the best classical music both artistically and musically that exists in the Baltic Sea region. Secondly, **it focuses on a mutual problem shared in the Baltic Region: the environment in the Baltic Sea.** Thirdly, it focuses on leadership.

As a result, the festival achieves to bring

thousands of people in contact with music from the Baltic region, to contribute to a cleaner ocean and to the development of the region.

Music, as a symbol, has played a major role as a uniting force. Music as an expression of human feelings is needed, especially in difficult times. Music can take many forms and it can be a

uniting force in many different settings. Music is a power that touches people directly and can create a platform for discussions of important and serious questions. Music is also the most boundary breaking international language that exists. It creates immediate contact, and even though we don't speak each other's languages we can understand each other through the language of music. The Festival encourages music collaboration in the Baltic region.

Evolution and ongoing development have changed the conditions on earth. The Baltic Sea Festival has the important mission to spread the knowledge about the Baltic Sea and its increasingly polluted environment. During the last years there were some positive signals that the Baltic Sea is recovering. This means that it is possible to change the development and that the festival has to keep up the good work. The festival collaborates with environmental organisations such as the WWF that holds seminars on different pollution related topics.

Leadership is about having the ability to make humans work together. A good leadership also consists of having a vision, and a goal that is appreciated by other human beings. Good leadership benefits a large number of people, but it also tries to benefit future generations. It stretches across generations, national boundaries and different interests.

Historical tags - celebration of historical milestones and figures Trend: giving the festival a 'trendy' and at the same time historical dimension

Ruta Pruseviciene hints at another trend: **the aim to link our ideas to famous people, historical events and movements**. One example is a trend in Eastern Europe to link to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the iron curtain. It is important to link ourselves to the history and to have a future vision.

"The audience doesn't just want to sit and listen" Trend: Participatory audiences instead of receptive ones



Michael Tydén suggests that new audiences would like to participate, not just sit and listen. He stresses that one part of a festival, next to concerts, has to be participation; this, subsequently, is one way to find new audiences. Thus, creating interactivity is very important; a key question is: how can we improve audience participation?

Sarah Wilson hints at the importance of audience development and involvement in our modern societies. One has to reflect how different audiences lived decades ago when many of the festivals were founded, in comparison to today. How do we see and include the audience into what we do? She suggests that it is a question of life style – festivals have to fit into a certain life style; one has to be part of the audience's life. Then, one has the ability to persuade the audience to attend a festival.

“To plant a seed and give a certain tolerance for early music” Trend: Early music in the streets

Early music is part of the culture. In Innsbruck, the festival goes to the street, makes jam sessions, a rock brunch; one has to think what in one's own genre is there to make it modern? It is important that festivals take place in the middle of the city without entrance fee so that people automatically pass. When setting up audience participation initiatives one has to take into consideration the change of life style including the fact that the attention of audiences went down enormously as people nowadays are constantly exposed to sounds. One has to find new ways of catching their attention. One has to surprise people; this is one way of getting new audiences – thus, it is possible “to plant a seed in them and give a certain tolerance for this kind of music.”

Trend: collaboration between traditional and new festivals - small and big-scale events

Henk Heuvelmans considers that the word “contemporary” can have a broad meaning; its enormous span sometimes makes it complicated to politicians to understand. In terms of audiences, through many small scale events a big audience is reached. But this often is not seen by politicians. The situation differs from city to city; for festivals it is a matter of connecting to the audience through e.g. involving new venues and introducing these venues to new audiences. The presentation, the contextualisation, the format can also address people who are not familiar with a certain artistic genre.

Helmut Erdmann from ECPNM suggests the importance to create synergies between traditional festivals and festivals of contemporary music.

A trend in Finland, according to Kai Amberla, is that big festivals are very divers in themselves: there are a lot of smaller festivals inside a single big festival. For example, Helsinki Festival is a very strong brand, but inside that brand there many small brands – a way to reach out to more divers audiences.

Trend: Festivals go public - Churches, castles, prisons - new and unusual venues

Festivals go where the public is, especially through creative educational and outreach projects: prisons, schools, retirement homes, churches and castles, beaches and parks, metro stations and airports – to name but a few that were mentioned.

Trend: The “young approach” - filling the “generation gap”



Ruta Staneviciute suggests that the trend to reach out to new audiences is also related to the artistic content and programming. In Lithuania, where one can find a significantly young audience, festivals are competing for audiences. Young audiences are very selective. It is not always satisfactory to them if there is a “big name”. Contextualisation is important: there has to be a context to attract people.

In an audience reaction Ibrahim Barisik from the International Ankara Music Festival agrees that the “young approach” is crucial if the artistic trend is a need to change, if one is to catch the young generation, which is the generation of the future. One has to catch the creativity of the young generation.

In Finland, a strong trend is the boom of children’s culture and festivals who dedicate their work specifically to children. Professional artists produce culture and arts for children, including opera. Kai Amberla suggests that this trend could help overcoming the “generation gap”.

Next to the inclusion of children and teenagers in the festival programme, explains Enrique Gámez, the Granada Festival for example works with ethnic and religious minorities as well as with disabled people, including workshops and training.

“One has to react to what is happening in the young world” Trend: New media and new technology

In an audience reaction Michael Nieuwenhuizen from ECPNM picks up on the reference about life style: a new trend in festival organisation is oriented at life style. He makes the connection to modern (communication) technologies and media and refers to internet platforms and networks, to instant emotions, to large communities reached by internet technology. One has to react to what is happening in the young world and use new technologies for one’s own advantage. This concerns all genres: it is about new techniques and using new techniques across genres.

Social, educational, participatory and other outreach projects

Trend: Giving a second life to festivals

The Atelier on “Festivals’ outreach: Social, educational, participatory and other outreach projects: A second life for festivals or a trend to push the artists back?” discussed a variety of projects and festivals including the Flanders Festivals, the topic of “festivals and food” with the example of one-hour-long concerts with wine tastings that create a different atmosphere, schools projects in Holland exposing children with their peers to the art forms, a children initiative of the Europäische Festwochen Passau introducing music to babies.

Atelier participants concluded, in terms of work with children, one should not dumb down for children but introduce them to “serious art forms”.



Trend: beyond pure artistic responsibility: The social and political role of festivals

Levan Khetaguri from the Netherlands based Caucasus Foundation outlines the specific situation in the Georgian region. First music festivals emerged in the 1970s. At that time everything was censored. It was easy for the government to find music that fitted into its philosophy. Performing arts festivals starting their activities in the 90ies. The Caucasus Foundation has been organising festivals since then, serving as a meeting place for the different countries of the region. The region faces a difficult political situation: both from the outside and from within the region with Armenia and Azerbaijan having serious problems with one another. In addition, the government more and more aims to control activities; it is becoming more and more totalitarian. There is a big protest in Georgia: citizens would like to change the attitude of the government and like to decentralise all activities, not only in culture.

This situation influences the programming. In the beginning of the year, the government established a new structure, a sort of festival agency. All funding was allocated there. They have the exclusive juridical right to organise festivals in this country and bring Georgian culture outside. Since 2003, Mr Khetaguri explains, they have been focusing more on the European way to set up different centres, like foundations, that receive money from the state and then distribute it based on expertise and applications. But now the situation according to Mr Khetaguri is reverting; there are similarities to communist times: a centralised structure and pure political decisions.

The art scene is reacting on this situation: 95% of the artists are with the opposition and against the governmental policy. There will probably be more organised actions from the theatre field and artistic society. Levan Khetaguri explains that in Georgia, they are trying to do a lot of advocacy projects and to push new ideas. At the moment in Georgia, the population just needs general civil rights, like freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

Levan Khetaguri explains that in the past several years, funding was not a problem; there was the problem of choice: if you make an agreement with the government you do not have problems to get funds. That EU policy puts more and more focus on culture is important to transform the European project into a cultural one. At the same time, if one follows the debate of the past two years, not much is said about festival policy in national cultural policies. That the place of festivals is not recognised is a problem.

Referring to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, Henk Heuvelmans suggests festivals as best place to realise a political mission. Managers have the ability to create these connections and use political topics for their own purposes. Nonetheless, one should keep in mind that “arts start with the arts”; “if the starting point is not an artistic one, we should better stop”.

A representative from Estonia underlined that festivals play a special social and political role especially in countries where the political situation changes.

Huge De Greef summarises that new trends also include **assuming a social and political responsibility**. A festival’s responsibility goes beyond the pure artistic one. This is another element, why festival organisers are looking for new art forms.

Trend: collective identities reflected in the arts: the rise of small and bigger community festivals

The current situation in Lithuania is governed by the economic crisis. Nonetheless, Ruta Staneviciute suggests that money is not the most important thing. Despite the political and economical situation and these in relation to one another, she suggests that one should try to find some tendencies in every country. She refers to the current state of play of the Lithuanian festival scene: In Lithuania, booming festival activities can be witnessed, especially in the past five to seven years. To establish festivals seems important even for smallest communities. For her – as a critic and to some extent programmer – this trend is related to changing collective identities. People seek to rethink – after some years of independence – their current collective identities. For this, they are using the arts. They are communicating through the arts. This is a quite typical tendency in Lithuania.

Why are small communities setting up festivals? Is it also a marketing instrument, for touristic and economical reasons? Ruta Staneviciute suggests that there are different symptoms and strategies. In Lithuania, some festivals, especially at regional level are related to tourism and cultural heritage (one trend). Next to this, today, there is also a trend to create cities, to establish creative cities. There are different trends that characterise the movement and the tendency of the festival boom in small communities.

Levan Khetaguri suggests that each city needs to have its identity and cultural activity. That's the idea of festivals (since ancient Greek times): to unite societies.

The new wave of young artists in the “post-canonical situation” Tend: Engage with the personalities of emerging artists

The festival International Gaudeamus Music Week Amsterdam focuses on young composers only, explains Henk Heuvelmans. The festival aims to offer the audience what the composers of today are producing. Henk Heuvelmans identifies two kinds of young composers: the ones who take account of their history, who have studied the history of music and against this educational background look at the future. They ensure a sort of “continuous flow”. The others reflect “discontinuity”. Sometimes they are aware of history and consciously want to do something completely different, others are not aware of the history at all; they do not care if they do something that already exists. A challenge is to combine these two “regions”, to try to give a platform to both; where “discontinuous people” meet the others.

Comparing small scale festivals with more established festivals, another trend becomes obvious: Despite the economic crises, in Lithuania, one witnesses enormous activities of young artists to establish their own activities, projects and festivals, especially in the music field (new opera action, new musician generation etc.). Extraordinary traditions are collaborating with young artists and some innovative festivals (new drama action etc.) are generating, producing and collaborating with young artists.



One reason for this tendency in Lithuania is that there is a truly **new artistic generation** educated during independence. Since the early 1990s, radical changes in the way of consuming music can be witnessed, especially in field of music. One should rethink living in a “post-canonical situation”: How and why do people listen to music? One should use these changing cultural experiences.

Sarah Wilson suggests that sometimes we are so much looking for new things that we are forgetting about the quality of the artist himself: The excellence of the artist is the key. Hugo De Greef stresses that “**the quality of the total is based on the quality of the artist.**”

The Atelier on the topic of “Festivals as a stepping stone for young artists” came up with the following conclusions: there is big preoccupation to work with young artists, also as a means to reach out to younger audiences. Many concrete examples were discussed. It is important to give the artists the opportunity to develop further their techniques and creation and to support this development process. As innovative and creative examples the Mare Nostrum project (Estoril Music Week), the Bergen International Festival that is promoting amateur and children projects, BBC Proms and its Competition for Young Composers as well as ECPNM’s Young Composers’ competition were mentioned.

Jan Briers speaking on behalf of the Federation of Music Festivals in Flanders underlines the power of festivals in Belgium for supporting young artists. Therefore, the initiation of participation, education and social projects is a key.

Act local, think global: intercultural realities of cities

Trend in cross-border and cross-continental work

Emilia Levi on behalf of the Spanish Association of Classical Music Festivals (FestClásica) explains a specific trend in Spain: the attempt to increase collaboration between Spanish festivals and South American festivals and cultural organisations. In concrete projects, contemporary composers are supported in order to recover the South American heritage, to recover some unknown ancient Spanish and South American repertoire. The aim is to create a network between Spanish and South American festivals.

“Cross-border” can also mean crossing borders and removing barriers between different cultural communities within a single city or region: Enrique Gámez from the Granada Festival suggests that intercultural activity can be seen as a trend: The Festival is “a showcase for intercultural activity which contributes to the visibility of cultural projects and gives them an added social and artistic value.”. The example of the Festival Extension (FEX) in Granada, which includes over 70 performances and a wide variety of programmes, is one of the clearest trends of this old Festival. The FEX offers specific cycles aimed at promoting the integration and cultural awareness of new groups of immigrants in the city with performing groups and companies from Morocco, Bulgaria, Senegal, Turkey, Algeria, Pakistan, Serbia, Tunisia, Colombia, Macedonia, Egypt, Iraq and India.

The Atelier on “Regional Trends: Europe-Asia-South-America-Africa: learning from others, moving together?” discussed the music market in the globalised world where artists are easily in touch with one another. It concluded that music itself is changing and one has to act accordingly. It is important to be aware of different local situations: for example classical music in Europe

might not be considered the same in a different part of the world. **A good festival is sensitive to the local situation**; it is not only about countries, but about regions and cities. Also in this context educational work in Europe is needed, especially in the work with faraway regions.

Vital cultural climate invites for a lively mix! **Trend: Interaction between disciplines and sectors**

Johan Moerman from Rotterdam Festivals underlines that festivals have a specific “bridging function” as they attract new audiences, are visible to everybody in town, flexible and can draw attention to certain chosen subjects.

As an example he outlines the 2007 project “Rotterdam – city of architecture” which resulted in the creation of a new interest in the quality of the city amongst specialists and the general public, in the extension of networks (collaboration between visual artists, architects, theatre makers, festival organisers and policymakers), in reaching out to a big number of visitor (345.000 visitors, 88% with a positive opinion) and in many new and inspiring art projects.

One of the afternoon Atelier sessions on “Festivals’ formats: What works: The cross-disciplinary/ cross-sectoral urban city festival vs. niche-work: what future for what festival?” came to the conclusion that “only the good one works.” A good festival is carefully fitting in the festival in the local situation: in a village the festival has to be different than in a city. The main purpose is to serve the respective specific audience. A good festival is sensitive to the local situation. The future is not harder for city or niche festivals. One has to understand one’s festival as a “part of a bigger whole”: a niche festival can exist because there are broader festivals and vice versa. We witness a “vital cultural climate”: all forms and different layers are needed in order to be able to discover “the other”.

Sarah Wilson refers to the aspect of improvisation where she sees a link between jazz and early music. She further suggests that it is a key to rethink the teaching at conservatoires. One has to find out what students need. Festivals have to provide possibilities for the artist to dare. To find new ways of doing things is to throw them into cold water.



Conclusion

Trends are clearly interwoven. The reflexion on “**Artistic Trends in Festivals**” made it obvious: a strong and alert festival is constantly looking for and focusing on audience participation, audiences’ development, winning new audiences and on bringing different audiences together, this by means of taking up new approaches, including new venues, working with new media and technologies. To embrace these aspects into the festival programming is clearly connected to the specific context in which a festival takes place, which often motivates a festival to look beyond its artistic mission and assume its specific social and political responsibility.

It is impossible to define ONE trend. Countries, regions cities or villages, genres and contexts (cultural, social, political, ecological etc.) are very different to one another. The main aim is to define a festival’s own position and goals – in a flexible way, always taking changes of the context (again, cultural, social, political, ecological etc.) into consideration.

This report could have been structured differently, for example by country or by region. Nonetheless, the overall result and tendency would have stayed the same: festivals today are aware of their position, their power and their importance in societal processes. They do not shy away from assuming their social, political and economic responsibility, neither in regions facing crises (be it financially, economical or political), nor in regions with less obvious problems. It is key to any festival of any artistic genre in any region to keep up to modern developments and incorporate them into their own specific mission and local contexts. To be alert is not something a festival should aim for; it should be an immanent characteristic.

Last but not least, conference participants agreed with Hugo De Greef’s statement “**the quality of the total is based on the quality of the artist**” – one should not forget that despite all different agendas and responsibilities of a festival, the core mission is still the artistic one – which by its very nature assumes a societal function.

Let us digest the diverse abilities of festivals and join our efforts in making people aware of the important role festivals play in societies today at a multitude of level.

Links:

[Keynote speech](#) and [presentation](#) Michael Tydén – Baltic Sea Festival
[Presentation](#) Johann Moerman – Rotterdam Festivals
[Press release](#) FestLabCeremony
[Programme outline](#) including contributions by presenters

More to follow!