



## “Open The Door”

*An initiative of the European Festivals Association*

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### **Interview with Juriaan Cooman, Director Culturescapes**

*Festivals are in a privileged position to provide the means for **everyone to experience culture**. Festivals open doors to new artistic forms, new performers, new audiences, unusual venues, unknown cultures, new points of view, new approaches to arts and the world, new social orders, new political discussions. Festivals have always been deeply rooted in society and contributed to its development and transformation. Today, festivals, next to their core artistic mission, are often having a ‘social agenda’. Can festivals do something to fight poverty and social exclusion (European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion)?*

**Under the motto ‘Festivals: Open doors. Open Minds. Build Societies!’ in 2010, EFA states that festivals increase social inclusion and encourage participation.**

#### **What do you understand under ‘social inclusion/transformation’ through festivals?**

For Culturescapes it is an overall policy. We are based in Basel but we work all over Switzerland, which means 4 different languages, 26 different cantons and covering all disciplines. We work with immigrants, with foreigners etc. Each year we focus on a different country; in 2010, it is China. We are in contact with the Chinese community here; in the previous years we worked with the Turkish community for example.

We are reaching many different audiences through our diverse activities; the aspect of social inclusion is enormous because the traditional theatres who are partners of our festival see that there is a new audience developing because there is a festival focusing on their background, on their culture. For each year and each project we have different tools and steps developed according to the specific needs for the realisation of each project. We work with some 60 different partner organisations in Switzerland: from jazz clubs, theatres and concert halls to open universities and schools.

#### **Which is the one project in your festival that shows your social relevance?**

It is not just one project. I think Culturescapes as a whole is based on social inclusion. It is not an exclusive festival for the few, the happy and the rich; it is the opposite. It is not meant to be a festival. It is meant to take place in the normal cultural season starting in September and going on for 3 months, thus being part of the cultural year. We give a strong input and do not compete with the cultural scene.

## **Could you tell us a bit more about this year's festival with focus on China?**

We have 60 different projects running in only 3 months. When we had put the main programme ideas together we identified the main themes, combining different projects and what each has to do with the China that we want to present or with the culturescape we are facing when we think of China. There are 10 to 15 different projects around each of the four themes identified.

We realised there was a way of dealing with the roots of the culture; we called this “Roots Searching”, as the way of describing the traditional aspects of each culture and the way of dealing with this.

The second theme is “New Voices”. In China both the cultural and the economical sector are exploding. It is an “exploding society”: many new voices in the artistic field can be heard and we are presenting quite a lot of them.

The third theme is maybe the most important one: “Interior View” is about digesting or dealing with the past. It focuses on the more recent history, the last 30 to 80 years, when China has been undergoing huge transformations due to political changes and a cultural evolution. But in the society it seems to be a taboo to talk about this. They always want to look ahead; they don't want to look at the past. For us, it is very important to reflect in our programme that China is digesting its past.

The fourth theme is “Beyond the wall” which looks at China and the West or China and the rest of the world: this includes all the collaboration projects between Swiss and Chinese artists, or between Chinese artists who work abroad – on who Western society and culture has a strong influence.

## **What are the results of these specific activities?**

We can of course identify how our audience is mixed. Secondly, we see how our partners are reacting to this; are they happy about us bringing new audiences? We get an impression of the results and in how far the festival has an impact in terms of social inclusion. Since this is our main topic, we can only be successful.

## **What are the limits and challenges the festival faces?**

Firstly, in terms of sponsorship it is getting harder because sponsors are looking more carefully. Secondly, Culturescapes is not very interesting for private sponsors since we work on “risky countries” like Azerbaijan, Turkey, China or Israel. “Something small” could happen and then the good image a sponsor would like to achieve might get lost because of negative press. On the other hand, this year and also next year, we are very well supported by the different governments from the countries involved: Switzerland, China, Israel. This is very good!

## **Who else is financially supporting your activities?**

We are funded by different sources: we receive public funding for example from the Direction of Culture, the Swiss Culture Foundation prohelvetia, the Direction for Development and Exchange, and from the countries involved. This year, we have a contract with the Ministry of Culture of China.