

EFRP RECOMMENDATIONS TO PUBLIC AUTHORITIES ON SUPPORT FOR ARTISTIC FESTIVALS

In the summer of 2007 the European Festival Research Project and the Circle network of cultural policy researchers collaborated on a research project that examined the festival policies of public authorities in Europe. Some interim results from this research were discussed in a workshop entitled "Festival Jungle, Policy Desert?" in Barcelona from 18-19 October 2007, hosted by Interarts (www.interarts.net).

This workshop indicated that the number of festivals in Europe is growing and that this growth is imposing an increased pressure on public authorities at all levels to provide funding support. However, the workshop also revealed that funding decisions are often made on the basis of habit, routine, impulse and superficial assessment.

Taking into account the research conducted as well as the presentations and debates at the Barcelona workshop, EFRP has formulated a set of recommendations to public authorities on how to replace improvised and often arbitrary festival funding decisions with a comprehensive policy that will transform not only festivals themselves and their relationship with public authorities but also the cultural offer and create additional benefits to the communities served by those authorities.

Rationales and requirements for supporting festivals

Those authorities faced with a growing demand for funding and other support from diverse festivals require a comprehensive festival policy which can

- articulate clear goals, expectations and criteria of success
- establish procedures for monitoring and evaluating festivals, and
- enable the festivals to understand the decision making process of any public support allocations.

This policy would need to:

- Be reviewed annually, so as to optimise the balance between supporting established festivals and providing access and encouragement for new, possibly riskier festival initiatives that could augment/complement the mix of festivals in terms of programming and other activities that are organised in the area (be that local, regional or national).
- Distinguish clearly between artistic festivals and other related forms, such as carnivals, parades, feasts and celebrations which might improve the social atmosphere and benefit the local economy but which are not necessarily driven by any coherent artistic vision.
- Differentiate between those festivals that reach out to the public and those which are in fact showcases, organised to prompt the curiosity of professional programmers and presenters.
- Allow space for single, one-shot festival initiatives that do not necessarily intend to come back each year but which serve to reveal the emergence and depth of artistic energy, vision and public appetite and curiosity.

- Reflect the specific benefits that each festival and the allied cultural producers create: artistic, cultural, social, and economic.

Public authorities need to make a clear distinction between the expectations of individual festivals and general methodology to measure their impacts. A festival of high artistic calibre but minimal (or limited) economic impact might still be well worth supporting. The artistic integrity of a festival is especially vulnerable to excessive economic ambition. Festivals of genuinely commercial potential should be encouraged to operate in the market without any need for public subsidy.

Balance public funding of festivals and of continuously active cultural organisations

The policy should balance support for festivals with its support for those continuously active cultural organisations which provide programs throughout the year. A short intensive festival is a privileged experience, an artistic feast, but its outstanding merits will become obvious only in conjunction with the continuously active organisations that sustain the audience's engagement with art, their curiosity and offer lasting creative and employment opportunities to artists.

The synergy between festivals and the year round mix of available artistic and cultural programmes is dependent on cultural networks that themselves deserve public support.

Festival processes and operational necessities

The policy should ensure responsible governance by autonomous festival boards, making their decision-making process fully transparent and setting standards for a festival's financial accountability.

This should be revealed in the policy by a clear articulation of:

- Reporting requirements for those festivals receiving public support.
- How a festival's performance will be monitored and evaluated as a precondition for the granting of subsidy and its extension or renewal.
- A requirement for festivals to conduct self-evaluation and engage independent evaluators.
- How evaluation and its outcomes will be opened up to public debate.

In addition, a festivals policy should:

- Contain a commitment to timely decision-making, so that subsidy decisions take into account festivals' planning cycles (including a commitment to fund a festival for three or four years).
- Be clear about the authority's expectations for a festival to diversify and increase its income from box office, donations and sponsors, but also to protect festivals as parts of a subsidized cultural system against the risk of corporate appropriation.

A festivals policy should also note that:

- If festivals are supported for their ability to enhance tourism, then the cultural interests of residents should be factored in together with the interests of visitors.

- If artistic festivals are co-financed by different public authorities then they must articulate common expectations and synchronize their funding requirements and timetables.

Ultimately a festivals policy should enable an authority to:

- Treat festivals appropriately as events and processes that are: ambitious, artistic endeavors of high logistic complexity, intensity and risk taking; capable of reaching out to new audiences, new places and new partners; and, thus enhancing the quality of the cultural life and cultural democracy in the locality.
- Support festivals as important catalysts of: artistic creation, innovation and exchange; exploration of notions of local and European identity; schools of intercultural competence.
- Recognize that these features are often primarily articulated in a festival's program rather than in its economic benefits or the contribution it makes to an area's destination marketing strategies.

Policy priorities and additional benefits produced by festivals

- Festivals that integrate local artistic communities in their international program and build partnerships with local cultural, educational and other organisations. These linkages articulate original strategies to combine global and local resources and concerns.
- Festivals that provide a platform for artistic, cultural and cultural-political debates.
- Festivals that create opportunities for professional development of artists and cultural operators (seminars, workshops, master classes).
- Festivals that launch ambitious outreach programmes to enlarge and diversify their audiences.
- Festivals that implement complex educational programmes, using their international artistic offer to enhance the intercultural competence of the audience and especially of young people.
- Festivals that invest in the continuing loyalty of their core audience, by providing special programs and activities in between festival seasons (i.e. festivals that operate on a year round basis).
- Festivals that seek to build a secondary audience in time and space by recycling their live programs into digital products, especially if they are collaborating in production and distribution with other festivals.
- Festivals that display extra ambition by acting not only as programmers but as co-producers of new artistic capital, sharing risks and pooling their capital with other festivals, venues and producers.
- Festivals that rely on volunteers, offering a range of participative opportunities to people from various social groups and specific communities, especially underprivileged ones.

- Festivals that are able to discard the mantle of traditionalism and elitism by penetrating the underprivileged groups of citizens, demonstrating a pattern of interculturalism and reaching out to the more marginalised and isolated parts of the community.
- Festivals that seek to reduce their environmental impacts through imaginative use of recycling schemes, transport initiatives, and other low energy activities in terms of programming, presentation, on-site management and care for their audiences and their localities.

The European Festival Research Project (EFRP) is an international, interdisciplinary consortium, which is focused on the dynamics of artistic festivals in contemporary life. One of its principal aims is to understand the underlying causes of the current proliferation of festivals and its resource implications and diagnostic perspectives. EFRP focuses on those festivals that are driven by a firm artistic vision, involving international programming and which benefit from substantial support from public authorities.

The consortium instigates research papers, studies, trainings, publications and debates and articulates tentative conclusions, trends, forecasts and recommendations for festival operators, public authorities (as subsidy givers) and potential sponsors. All research outcomes are being made accessible in a public depository at the web site of the European Festivals Association (<http://www.efa-aeef.org/efahome/efrp.cfm>). Periodically EFRP organises intensive research workshops on specific topics where the results of research are presented and discussed. Such workshops have taken place in Nitra (2005), Leicester and Le Mans (2006), Barcelona (2007) and Helsinki (2008). Further workshops are being planned for Moscow (autumn 2008) and for 2009 and 2010. An edited book on festival politics, programming, impacts and governance will be produced by the consortium and associated researchers in 2009/10. Contact: Dr Dragan Klaic, Leiden University, EFRP Chair, draganklaic@gmail.com or Chris Maugham, DMU, EFRP Coordinator, ccm@dmu.ac.uk.

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