

Festivals Cities Conversations: report

Preparing festivals and cities for their position in citizens' life

Friday, 22 May 2020 – 13.30 PM - Online

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The Cities in which festivals operate in are one of the most important stakeholders. We need a dialogue between festivals and cities.

This session will mainly address three subjects:

- Culture is not a priority in the countries recovery plan: can we learn about the advocacy actions taken by Cities so far?
- Cultural economy: how can we improve the financial and organisational resilience of festivals?
- The rush to digital: digital offers opportunities (reaching new audiences, new marketing tools) but it also comes with challenges how do you pay the artists performing on a platform, how about the nature of the cultural products... how does this affects the role of festivals in cities?

1. Bergen

- In its masterplan, Bergen wants to position itself as an active and attractive city, recognising the arts and culture abilities to make Bergen a great place to live and increasing the inhabitant's participation in the community.
- The festival market has become increasingly important as a part of cultural life. In the 5-10 last years, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of festivals and audiences. The market has become more professional and well organised. Festivals represent innovation and share cities' relevance and attractiveness, both nationally and internationally.
- The festivals have an important role as tradition bearing, identity building and ever evolving arenas.
- Bergen has a big focus on environment and durability and presents many activities and cultural vibrancy so people don't move in other municipalities out of the city.
- Festivals also have major social and economic impacts in addition to creating jobs and supporting the cultural and creative industry. Festivals also attract visitors and people who want to leave in Bergen.

- Festivals in Bergen are spread out throughout the year but the busiest time is between May and October. Music festivals still make the majority of the festival market. At the same time they are many other well run and stable festivals within most disciplines.
- The festivals' offerings are broad but most of the festivals are very pointed and have a distinctive programme and audience, so there is little competition between them.
- Bergen has a large and very competent amateur cultural scene; this field is made visible through the year in different local neighborhood festivals, cultural days and street markings.
- There are large citywide public events organised in cooperation with the cultural sector and private actors.

2. Krakow

- Krakow is a city of festivals: locally grounded and globally oriented.
- Krakow festivals are composed of about 100 regular festivals, representing all the creative sectors, arts and management models. There are 256 festival days per year in Krakow so festivals cover a major part of the year.
- The City allocates 5% of its budget to culture and invests about 12 million € annually in the festival sector.
- Festivals have an impact of 125 million € and provides 6000 jobs per year.
- The total audience of the Krakow festivals is about 2 million people (80% are residents).
- 60% of festivals are organised by NGO's, 30% through the city and 10% are private
- The Krakow Festival Office is a strong municipal institution in charge of festivals.
- Festivals are treated as a tool that support the culture and creativity sectors.
- How to finance almost 100 festivals from public sources (challenges/alternatives)?
- Because of the COVID-19 crisis and the fact that festivals cannot run, the city grants for festivals have been reduced to 40% in 2020 and this to maintain the structures, jobs, etc. but no money went for programming, travelling or postponing events to a later date in the Autumn for example because the period was already packed. 100% funding should be reinstated in 2021.
- New programmes of support were launched, government assistance, EU aid in the form of micro-credits to be implemented in the near future, a programme to protect jobs.
- Some festivals decided to share their budgets to support the cultural sector (artists, freelancers...)
- Festivals started to talk to each other: a letter of the 400 most important Polish festivals addressed the government with concrete requests and recommendations, among which:
 - The presence of festivals' representatives in negotiations with the government in the next phases of unfreezing the economy and culture (sanitary and security measures)
 - Establishing a compensation (subsidy) fund and low-interest loans for festivals from the National Development Fund, which will allow to compensate for shortages or losses caused by new sanitary restrictions.
 - A system of incentives and tax deduction for potential sponsors
 - A special Festivals Development Fund (Canadian model financed with a percentage of tourism taxes)

- Creation of a grant mechanism for the development of festivals (development of human resources, use of digital tools, copyright for online content access, content monetization, etc.) in addition to the grants supporting the programming, travelling, etc.
- Strengthening the mechanisms of multiannual funding for festivals instead of applying each year for grants in order to work on a longer term period providing more security
- The introduction of the possibility of tax reduction for purchases of specific cultural goods
- Special regulations to support insurance policies for post-pandemic events
- What is our main goal?
 - Be together, integration of festivals and joint management,
 - Common promotional/advocacy/lobbying programme & tools?
 - Develop new business models and opportunities
 - Synergy of festivals and political reinforcement
 - Improved understanding of the influence, impact and social benefits of festivals
 - Develop strategic plans for festival city
 - Work on the programme of resilient culture
 - New tourism policy and partnerships with tourism boards
- ⇒ It is an important moment to reinforce European solidarity and the idea of Europe as a shared public space. We all need more funds not only for programmes but also for structures, for representation, to create a festival ecosystem more resilient.

3. Rome

- In Rome, 2,5% of the city's budget (250.000.000 € per year) goes to culture per year which is divided into 2 categories: heritage and cultural activities (= 74.000.000 € per year).
- Festivals provide exceptional experiences in the city (E.g. Romaeuropa).
- The city of Rome confirmed its financial commitment taken at the beginning of the year. So whatever happens, if the festival is not able to fill in the obligations of the year, the structure will get the public funding that was committed. Rome has been advocating with the national government to take decisions that goes in the same direction.
- Flexibility measures have been adopted for those who received grants to re-organise the way they want to plan their activities in 2020, even to organise them in 2021.
- Rome works on easing bureaucracy and waiving taxes.
- How to make culture a priority? By fighting! First with one's own administration. Rome puts together at the same table the culture responsables of the major Italian cities and achieved to ask the national government measures in favor of the independent worker in the sector who are not protected by the wealth. Rome works with the United Cities Local Government Organisation in order to launch an initiative that might bring back the cultural issue in the revision of the SDGs. People from the cultural sectors have to show the social relevance and the social responsibility that are on their shoulder: how cultural life rebuilds and reconnects society.
E.g. Singing on the balconies was just a way for the community to reconnect to each other when social connection based on sharing physical spaces was cancelled.

- We need to keep in-person experiences that depends on rules, security measures (limit of people) that are decided by health authorities. Some rules taken by the National governments have to be discussed and cities and festivals must collect information to make some things possible.
- There is a long lasting competition between cultural activities and heritage that should end. In a society that is so strongly impacted by the social heritage as Europe, the perception of the value of the contemporary also depends on the relationship that contemporary is capable to physically establish with the cultural heritage. The separation that exist and the non-dialogue constitute a weakness in the lobbying and advocating capacities of the sector.

4. How do we put the festivals at the heart of cities recovery policy?

- Festivals are the cities' creative DNA.
- Festivals are important platforms for European values.
- Festivals can bring social changes, raising responsibility for the others, the planet and the art sector in general. Festivals share their resources with artists and venues.
- Each city is structured in a different way and each city needs to find its own way to do things. In his help to help people and organisation survive.
- We should continue to collaborate on all levels: cities with festivals, artists and citizens. Contact is how you can help each other and build trust and collaboration.
- Bergen: It's very defining to already have existing city policies and identity around culture in this crisis, so when moving into negotiations about how to spend crisis-emergency funding in the local politics, supporting culture was kind of taken for granted. This has to do with their identity of a cultural city that was the groundwork of putting culture at the core and the festivals as a part of that.
- Bergen: the national government has also been providing some help to the cultural sector in Norway but it is less targeted, more narrow and they haven't been very sensitive to the different needs of the cultural sector, just covering a small part of it. Bergen hopes that the messages sent to the national level will help but so far they are not really seeing the results of advocacy and they are happy that their own measures seem to be successful.
- Switch from the idea that culture is for people's spare time and supports tourism to the idea that participating in culture is a fundamental human right. Cultural policies are part of a policy that imagines that human development is the core of the economic model and not the other way around.
- Countries but also the cities need to keep public hands on culture as a strong social service that needs to get stronger than what was before while the taxes income are falling down.
- Working on a charter of cultural rights on the city scale became one of the major policy points for Rome to discuss with the UN tourism organisation, the UN for the revision of the SDGs...

5. The economic consequences

- We need to speak about the economic impact of festivals and the close relationship between festivals and the social economy.
- Festivals are an important economic force for Creative Industries, Leisure Industry and Tourism.
- Cancelling festivals had major impact on several connected businesses that lives around festivals and not just within the cultural economy.
- Bergen: communication with the local and national governments have been crucial for the festivals in this period. The festivals – both large and small – have been able to express their needs, concerns and challenges and the governments have replied with targeted measures as fast as possible, for example with emergency funding (e.g. maintaining public funding to all organisations even if the planned programme had to be cancelled, changed or moved, launch of a new grant scheme for projects which can be implemented with the current COVID-19 restrictions, launch of an investment-loan fund for the commercial cultural industry directed at businesses that would not qualify for regular loans with good conditions, launch of a new grant scheme to cover fixed expenses and lost revenues during the crisis, a grant is also assigned so it can cover expenses for organisations that want to develop their operations and help equip them in better meet other challenges in the future. With this package of measures it allowed Bergen to be more specific and more legitimate in their lobbying, critics and wishes towards the national level of Government.
- What happens tomorrow? We should imagine that for a while we will only address local markets. Maybe artists will be able to move across the continent, hardly across continents. People will have more challenges. There are differences between festivals (eg: festivals that happen in a city and a festival in the middle of nowhere gathering hundred of thousands participants).

6. The digital development

- Bergen has seen a great effort in innovation in the festival market, not everything has been closed down. A few days after the lockdown, several online festivals appeared in the city with an impressive artistic programme and were followed by a large audience even with minimal time for marketing (E.g.: Bergen International Festival has relaunched an entire digital programme organised in a matter of weeks and present about 60 activities in the same period than the original festival). This shows the collaborative spirit in the arts field in Bergen but also the will and ability of festivals to innovate and connect with audiences.
- At the same time as the digital development is accelerating, we can today make a parallel between live and online performances with the merge made between analog and digital performances. It's a new form of creation, dissemination and experiencing that will evolve further and be more used in the future.
E.g., Norway's contemporary dance company Carte Blanche has been performing in the backyard of nursing homes, they have started to perform in different parts of cities. The crisis

can have pushed some of the cultural actors and institutions to become interesting, relevant and visible to a different group of citizens.

- The city of Rome asked all the cultural institutions of the city to be part of a large digital programme as of mid-March and be part of a weekly programme to share with the audience.
- Rome and Krakow are working on an audiovisual online offer and investing in platforms to disseminate content from archives, films (paid or unpaid) in order to create a kind of “Festival Netflix”. We need to think the digital work as a solution and potential to raise money but also not lose the content in the internet trash. Cities can also help in negotiating rights: E.g. Romaeuropa has large archive of more than 1000 titles after 35 years of the Festival and they are negotiating with the artists to show these archives.

7. Sustainability

- As a final perspective, Bergen wants to profile itself as the greenest city in Norway. In April, the city has launched a new grant scheme for festivals seeking to reduce their emission and become more sustainable. The emission cuts can be linked to indirect emissions such as waste reduction, increased recycling or direct emissions like travelling. When festivals re-open in Autumn or next year, this might be relevant for them to evaluate, use and structure their cooperation and ambitions to become more sustainable than before.
- What do festivals will do to continue international collaborations without being necessarily in the same place or bringing in different artists for every festival? Can we collaborate more so that the audiences in Europe can enjoy high-quality culture without having everybody working from their own city?
- Countries that have a big concentration of artists like Italy, France, Germany... are more lucky than others because they have the possibility to run a festival with only artists coming from their country, with a high variety and artistic quality. Other countries are not as lucky and they need to bring artists from all over the world.

8. What do festivals expect from cities?

- Festivals expect cities to work in a comprehensive way and bring all the stakeholders in the conversation to prepare the post COVID-19 world: not just the cultural organisations but also the education, the tourism, the economy, the community oriented people. There are strong connections in engaging the students, the young people, the community not just from the side of the audience who will attend the festival but also in the role of arts and culture in the healing process of the community; and not just from the economy but the individual breakdown and the community fragmentation after this isolation. The sector has an important role to play and a cohesive approach is necessary from the city’s side.
- Funding must not only be in terms of compensation for loss, salaries for people and artists while the activities are on pause. Funding must also take into account what it will take to reignite the whole activity process: ticket prices will have to go significantly down to the level of almost “pay as you can” not only for people to entrust to come back but also that people have the means to do it.

- Festival der Regionen has been working with some inventors in the USA who are designing applications to minimize risk when activities can start again. What we can do with cities and partners is to create spaces for outdoor activities and connect with the physical spaces around venues when it comes to perform inside: many things deal with flow of people (how to get them in and out? Maybe we need to block roads) and formats (creating a repertoire of short pieces without break and play them 2 or 3 times in the same evening/creating a new kind of model mixing live and livestream performances and online performances especially commissioned for this purpose).
- People's perception of what is necessary or relevant can be a problem.

9. Conclusions

- Cities are on our side and cities that are pioneer in the starting of the fight to include arts and culture on the local level should be taken as models to implement in other regions/countries.
- Festivals and Cities have to work hand in hand to co-shape our shared public spaces, communities celebrations and cultural life after corona.
- Start an action list/a joint strategy/agreements/proposals with cities: we are all convinced to put arts (and arts festivals) at the heart of cities' recovery policies towards resilient cities: how is our strategy together to convince/address more/others?