

Festivals Cities Conversations - Report

New partnerships between festivals, cities and other industries

Friday, 10 July 2020, 13.00 – 14.00 PM CEST

This session is co-organised with: Festivals Adelaide

Welcome by: Kathrin Deventer (European Festivals Association)

With presentations by: Fran Hegyi (Executive Director of the Edinburgh International Festival), Mat Schulz (Artistic Director of UNSOUND Festival in Krakow), Natalie Henedige (Festival Director (Designate), Singapore International Festival of Arts - SIFA), Heather Croall (CEO and Artistic Director, Adelaide Fringe Festival), Nick Farkas (Vice President, Booking, Concerts and Events, evenko in Montreal)

Facilitated by: Cristina Farinha (Cultural and Creative Sector Policy Expert)

1. Heather Croall

- Adelaide Fringe Festival is **open-access** and driven from the **grassroots up**. The programme is not curated: the festival is a platform that artists and venues can join by registering. This makes the programme, then tickets are sold by the festival but also by the artists and venues. Artists and venues are taking risks because if they don't sell tickets, they won't get paid. 21 millions of tickets were sold in 2020.
- **Adelaide Fringe View is a digital platform** created in April 2020 to support directly the artists during the COVID-19 crisis. In May, Adelaide Fringe ran a pilot of Fringe online and offered a platform for artists to connect with audiences with (paid) online content in through private links via Youtube or live shows via zoom, etc.
- Adelaide Fringe is busy with a big strategic planning for 2021 to see **how to unlock money from the Government/philanthropists/foundations** to allow more money to go to artists and venues. Sponsorship will probably be very tight.
- Artists and venues expect from festivals to lower fees, mitigate financial risks, accept new plans that will change festivals.
- Fringe is true **co-creation**: the festival emerges from all the parties coming together (crew, digital, ticketing, sponsors, marketers, admin, presenters, artists, venues, government, councils, producers). In COVID times, it is important to **adapt and listen to feedback** (e.g. staff training because a skill-set is needed for the moment).

2. Fran Hegyi

- The Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) has been created after the Second World War to create unity. The festival takes place every August for 3 weeks and invites artists from all over the world.
- Edinburgh cancelled its festivals on 1 April (it is the first time that the festivals can't go ahead) so the team had time to **think about the role of festivals** and **what it means not to have a festival**, creating a worldwide laboratory of what the world would look like without culture. 2020 gave the chance to reflect and think about the joy art and culture brings in our lives. There has been a lot of digital art but the artists and the audience couldn't experience the magic thing of being in a room. In the future, how can festivals engage with people?
- **Arts and culture are good for people.** To make the case that taking part in arts is good for society as a whole but also on an individual level, you need to work with health authorities, social workers, education specialists.
- **Loss of income and the impact on programming:** when EIF was cancelled, the festival lost 45 % of its income. 2021 is an important thing to plan too. On a short term, boards and governments want to take less risks, so festivals are programming more local artists and count on the local audience to take away the travel elements and costs associated with that. More risky arts will probably not find a place in 2021 and 2022 because festivals need to stay alive: developing new business models, better resilience, ways of reducing permanent overhead.
- **Where will the money come from?** Probably from the same actors but with arrangements: more social outcomes, less brand recognition but rather doing good for the community.
- **Living with uncertainties:** things will probably change. We need to be flexible and create different scenarios. Dealing and managing change is important today.
- **Environment sustainability:** we can't go back to an old model, it is necessary to emphasize the local (not making orchestras fly for one or two nights performance). **How can we be international and environmentally responsible at the same time (responsible internationalism)?**

3. Mat Schulz

- UNSOUND Festival is dedicated to **club music**. Krakow is the main city in which the festival takes place but the festival also organises events all over the world.
- UNSOUND puts emerging artists and different music scenes in the spotlight. They help artists to produce **collaborative work and connect people** all over the world so they have a real community. UNSOUND is the space where diverse voice can feel safe.
- The festival has been cancelled because it is impossible to respect social distancing because of the excitement, the fact that people are crowded and you cannot make club night with people on chairs. **There is a need to think outside of the box for club music. UNSOUND is exploring how to produce live events safely, analyse how art forms can collapse into each other, creating new online events that are engaging the audience... 2020 is a year of experiment to see how these new initiatives can be activated in the future.**

- UNSOUND is preparing a book collecting texts from artists explaining how this year has been for them and it will connect with what they will be doing online.
- **Business model:** the support of the City of Krakow is very important. There are no real tax incentives so it's difficult to get funds from philanthropists. A membership model could be put in place like a crowdfunding allowing clubs to ask audience's support.
- **UN SOUND** has been thinking about game production. There are so many live streaming events for the moment that it is difficult to stand out.
- Many things were **unsustainable in the music industry** and it's a positive thing to think about all this. There are many conversations about supporting voices of marginalized groups, working on terms of diversity and inclusivity. All the chains try to understand more their position: artists, managers, producers, clubs...

4. Nick Farkas

- evenko organises many shows and festivals on two different sites: free festivals in downtown Montreal and multi-days festivals in the middle of an island.
- **The Jazz Festival** runs 11 days in the middle of the city and is free of charge. The business model here is governmental support coming from different levels, a lot of sponsoring and tickets sold to attend activities in specific venues. The focus of this year was to keep the brand alive and support the artists so it was decided to organise a digital festival of four days, with a lot of content filmed with local artists, during which the teams were involved again. This event received **tremendous feedback** from the audience. The festival has been supported by the Government and big sponsors, this helped evenko realise that there are other hybrid business models.
- **Osheaga Festival** takes place on Osheaga Island. The business model here is different: it's a pre-paid tickets event, with a lot of sponsoring and government support is very low. The infrastructures are shared between festivals of different music genres which allows for economies of scale.
- There were no lobbying groups until five years ago → **call to advocacy**. People talking to each other, exchanging best practices, is very useful. It is important to be united.
- Uncertainty was devastating but evenko has then realised that its team was very **creative, coming up with new models**, often hybrid models to find new ways of financing with corporate partners, private partners, etc.

5. Natalie Henedige

- **The pandemic showed diseases that were already there:** social inequality, economic inequality, genre inequality...
- Festivals should start questioning what is their **role in arts and well-being**. Festivals can bring the arts sector together with other sectors including the health sector. These two sectors can be related. Women empowerment, racial justice... are a health and well-being issue. Festivals **can identify pertinent social and health challenges that artists can address in their way**, applying the vocabulary of art.

- Festivals offer **listening places**, where one can be shifted by the perspectives shared by others. Festivals deliver a multiplicity of experience, inspire deep reflection and reflect a microcosm.
- Embodying stories is what makes us human. Listening and sharing each other stories is important! Festivals **communicate stories**. They are not just an escape from the daily, a joyful gathering. There is more. We need to advocate for what festivals mean and bring.
- Festivals can **open a dialogue on questions of our time** (eg: Occupy Movement, Climate Strikes, #MeToo, Black Lives Matter) and embody marginalised voices.

6. Conclusions

- There are many obstacles but also a lot of hope.
- Listen to the feedback from artists, venues and audiences and try to adapt.
- We are living a worldwide experiment: living with uncertainties, ecology of the arts, responsible internationalism, social well-being.
- Festivals need to connect with health authorities and individuals to demonstrate that taking part in cultural activities is good for health and have a positive impact on the society as a whole.
- We need to find new business models and ways of financing (e.g. crowdfunding, etc.)
- Online events can have a positive impact because people watching performances online are often people who don't come to festival.
- Diversity is a matter of health and well-being. We need a platform for pluralism and story-telling and festivals can embody this platform.
- We need to approach stakeholders so they can listen to our proposals.

7. Some links on the topic

- Adelaide Fringe: <https://adelaidefringe.com.au/>
- Edinburgh International Festival: <https://www.eif.co.uk/>
- Creativity and well-being for older people: <https://my.demio.com/ref/xFjCTKjBaWenJcau>
- Unsound Festival: <https://www.unsound.pl/en/intermission>
- Montreal Jazz Festival: <https://www.montrealjazzfest.com/en-CA>
- Osheaga Festival: <https://www.osheaga.com/en>
- Singapore International Festival of Arts – SIFA: <https://www.sifa.sg/>