

Cultural Capitals and Arts Festivals' Contribution to the Action Agenda for a Europe bottom-up

By the European Festivals Association's The Festival Cities Initiative and 'A Soul for Europe's' working strand on European Capitals of Culture

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Our Contribution to the Action Agenda for a Europe bottom-up discussions at the Berlin Conference 2020, 8 and 9 November

This paper reflects the results of 2 workshops by the European Festivals Association and A Soul for Europe on the topic of 'Festival Cities for Europe', and a series of papers drafted by European Capital of Culture cities and candidates based on a short questionnaire. Their main results are collected in below report that gives a brief analysis of the context all contributions expressed, and the list of proposals and topics that were raised and put at the core of the proposals and demands. Two main angles expressed the need for a 'new culture of dialogue':

1. a continual line of exchange, discussion and sharing of joint action formats amongst festivals and ECOC cities
2. a new line of discussions and joint actions between the sector and public stakeholders under a common agenda of issues and topics this group identified (see below)

Both, the detailed results and proposals of the 2 workshops as well as the various papers of ECOC cities are included as appendix to this Briefing Paper.

The Action Agenda for a Europe bottom-up is our context of work and concrete collaborations we aim to implement (as a working example of a new culture of common responsibilities) as a consequence of discussions in Berlin in a new alliance of stakeholders of cities, festivals, civil society, MEPs and European institutions.

A next anchor moment will be the Berlin Conference 2021 (dates to be confirmed).

This paper is the basis for our discussions and the group's input during the Berlin Conference on Sunday, 8 November at 16.00 and Monday 9 November from 9.30 – 13.30. More on www.asoulforeurope.eu.

1. General concerns regarding the current situation

Past and present crises showcase a desperate need for cohesion and new ways to approach it

- Crises and follow-up crises: the current system needs an additional dimension: bottom-up.
 - Move away from Top-down projects; do not ignore or silence opposing voices; do not leave Europe without a common platform accessible to its citizens; prevent a prevailing sense of uncertainty and distrust.
- Failing to work out our differences in an open manner will lead to further problems.
- Can we afford another set of crises?
- No Culture - No Europe: Faith in democracy, politics, as well as the economy a cultural issue
- Culture lends meaning to people's lives; a foundation of any society
 - i.e. in the case of politics (actions that give form to society), the interpretation and signposts of social reality
 - Build politics on culture, if it results in politics that correspond to people's realities
- Festivals, cities and ECoCs have mechanisms in place to reach diverse groups all over Europe.

2. Approach in general terms

New approach to cohesion: a new Culture of 'Common Responsibilities'

- Bottom-up in addition to top-down form of participation are necessary: through Common Responsibilities, we may create, share, and participate together.
- Introduce a new set of responsibilities for societies:
 - On the one hand to recognise our role and responsibility IN and FOR Europe as participants in the processes that make and shape Europe
 - On the other hand to help those accessing, sharing, and critically developing the content of those processes, as well as the spaces (virtual or physical) provided for them.
 - Rethink the meaning of 'we', not simply as European citizens, -organisations, -cities, -politicians etc., but as recognised & responsible European participants through cities, festivals and public spaces
- Identity and culture are not separate entities, and for Europe to have a construct of cohesion, culture needs to be intertwined with the European dimension of identity in a practical sense.
- In this sense of cohesion Europe could use help, a form of real world binding agent.
 - Cities and festivals, pro-active and interlinked across the continent and beyond, are increasingly capable of disseminating content and knowledge into diverse societies, as the tools of this cohesion.

3. Proposals in practice

3.1. 'Bottom-up' Over Top-Down Approach for participants across europe: Opportunities for Personal Participation, civil society, public institutions and European Values

- Festivals, ECoCs, and cities work with local populations; grassroots is the rule rather than the exception
- Festivals connect wider issues to particular (i.e. local) contexts: perfect tool & space for the European dialogue
- Festivals, ECoCs, and cities are increasingly created by and for the participants
- Thus, they promote some of the fundamental values of Europe and its societies: openness, accessibility, the right to express oneself and participate in European processes

3.2. Festivals, Cities and Ecocs on Digital Platforms: Reaching Participants for Europe, everywhere in Europe

- With recent developments, festivals and cities have developed a plethora of online tools for diverse types of participants, including younger generations less interested in traditional politics
- Supporting these initiatives is a direct contribution to the 'Digital Europe' programme, with the added value of accessibility and participation.

3.3. Non-Metropolitan Areas and Peripheries: festivals, cities and ecocs as Flexible Ambassadors

- Regions outside metropolitan areas are important for Europe, crucial for sustainable future issues (food production, preservation of natural environment, mobility, accessibility, space, etc.)
- They are also important for their potential in terms of space, social networks and more; *viz* the current state of prevalent Euroscepticism, feelings of disconnection: festivals are established tools to improve the situation
 - Festivals, cities and ECoCs can do more than give culture & people spaces and places; they can also connect, create and facilitate ideas, networks and participation.
 - Content, themes and collaboration from festivals and ECoCs can and should go beyond the time they (festivals and ECoCs) take place.
- Festivals have the power to reinvigorate peripheries, promoting dialogue and experiences that address stereotypes

3.4. Sustainability and 'Common Responsibilities': Promoting Advanced Social and Environmental Urban Agenda

- UN Sustainable Development Goals and European treaties of similar kind are intersectoral, but how can we connect social and environmental goals to a particular context, i.e. that of a city? By taking those issues as 'common responsibilities' and finding it necessary to address both of them. How does one create experiences that promote and disseminate this philosophy? Through festivals.

- Culture needs to be included as an integral part of the sustainability agenda. 'Anything that should last' as a whole, cohesive, requires a binding agent.
 - From working towards social cohesion and responding to climate change, and even economic challenges, festivals, cities and ECoCs contribute to the sustainable urban agenda
- Sustainability through culture translates into networks of collaboration and ideas of lasting and more effective partnerships (synergies with other actors involved, i.e. educators).
 - The idea of participants sharing a culture of 'common responsibility', knowledge of sustainable processes and objectives they are to work with and achieve (social, environmental among others), with more effective partnerships and thus, more on the 'same page' with other actors involved.
- Added value of 'we' through culture: More cities and festivals in these joint ventures: more contribution to the sustainability agenda

3.5. Investment in common good: Call for a Clear Channel of Support and Enhanced Opportunities

- Festivals and participants in the processes IN & FOR Europe require a channel of support for their contribution to be more successful and effective in categories 1.–4.
- Our common goal is Europe, let us work together for it.
- Political (incl. financial) commitment is essential to make it work for us all. Enhanced opportunities are needed for the culture of 'Common Responsibilities' to deliver cohesion from the bottom-up initiatives to address problems facing Europe; synergies between the non-metropolitan and metropolitan societies; as well as contributing to the sustainability agenda of cities and societies, depend on investing in them.

3.6. Enabling & Connecting Participants, Spaces, and Places: Promote Innovative Use of Public Space by Cities and Festivals

- In order to facilitate the work of cities and festivals to employ indoor and outdoor (especially) spaces in a sustainable manner, and to promote the impression that "festivals allow locals to view place in new ways and to reconnect through defamiliarisation and refamiliarisation with their locality" (Finkel & Platt 2020, 8), while still allowing them feel in control of their surroundings, projects that innovatively employ public spaces, should be increasingly supported.
- Added European value that enhances participation, including local wellbeing, and the principles of accessibility, recreation and the right to participate (2.)

4. Appendix

Based on the following documents

A Soul for Europe (ASfE)

Wagner, Lene, Hochleichter, Carolin, Böhnlein, Elisabeth, and Modrakowski, Lisa (2020).

ASfE Working Paper: Hildesheim 2025: *We Care. Beets, Roses, and the Meaning of Europe*. Sharing experiences and insights on fostering a Europe made by its citizens, from a European Capital of Culture bidding process in a provincial region.

[.PDF link](#)

Piran 4 Istria 2025 - European Capital of Culture candidate city (2020). Short answers to the preparatory questions, ASfE Berlin Conference 2020 and Preparatory Workshops.

[.PDF link](#)

Szalay, Tamas (2020). Magdeburg 2025 – European Capital of Culture Candidate City, introduction of Magdeburg candidacy, ASfE Berlin Conference 2020 and Preparatory Workshops.

[.PDF link](#)

The Festival Cities Initiative

European Festivals Association (2020). *Festival Cities Conversations: Report: Contributions & responsibilities of festivals and cities towards Europe*, 19 June, 2020.

[.PDF link](#)

European Festivals Association (2020). *Festival Cities Workshop n°1: Summary*, 25 September, 2020.

[.PDF link](#)

European Festivals Association (2020). *Festival Cities Conversations*, Workshop Descriptions.

[.PDF link](#)

European Festivals Association (2020). *Towards the Berlin Conference 2020: Preparing the Action Agenda for Europe, Ideas floated during the 1st Festival Cities Workshop*.

[.PDF link](#)

European Festivals Association (2020). *Festival Cities Workshop n°2: Report*, 16 October, 2020

[.PDF link](#)

Berlin Conference Concept Documents

ASfE, We are Europe, Cities for Europe (2020). *The New Culture of Common Responsibilities*, Berlin Conference including the “Speech of Europe”, 8 and 9 November 2020

Action Agenda 2020/2021 (2020). *Towards a new Culture of Common Responsibilities for a Europe bottom-up*

[.PDF link](#)

Invitation letter: Berlin Conference keynote speakers

Invitation letter: Berlin Conference co-organizers

External literature

Collins, Andrea & Cooper, Crispin (2017). *Measuring and managing the environmental impact of festivals: the contribution of the Ecological Footprint*, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 25:1, pp. 148-162. DOI: 10.1080/09669582.2016.1189922

Finkel, Rebecca and Platt, Louise (2020). *Cultural festivals and the city*, Geography Compass, 14:e12498, pp. 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12498>

Delanty, Gerard, Giorgi, Liana, and Sassatelli, Monica (2011). *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere*, Routledge.