



Arts Festivals Summit 2023 Peralada / Girona

Festivals and Cities Meet up, in partnership with A Soul for Europe

23 April 2023, 16.30 – 18.30, Girona

Moderated by: Nele Hertling and Nicolas Bertrand from A Soul for Europe

Participants: All the participants from the Arts Festivals Summit 2023 were invited

Introduction

The Festivals and Cities Meet up was an open discussion moderated by **Nele Hertling** and **Nicolas Bertrand** from the civil society initiative A Soul for Europe. The joint reflection focused on how arts festivals and cities can work together to address local cultural, environmental, social and economic challenges. More than fifty festival makers, artists and city representatives from Spain, across Europe and as far as Georgia, shared examples of local situations and views on the topic.

Report on discussions

Jordi Pardo, Director General of the Pablo Casals Foundation and an expert in urban renewal, opened the floor by affirming the need for more co-operation between cities and festivals, as they have the capacity to enhance well-being, promote social cohesion, enrich artistic expression, and even have an impact on local GDP and competitiveness. However, standard indicators are needed to learn from best practices and to show local authorities the importance of festivals.

But "everyone wants different indicators, it is as if we were all divided by a common language!" commented **James Mc Veigh** of Edinburgh Festivals. He went on to share the results of a study carried out in Edinburgh, which revealed that the word festival means more to audiences than just arts or culture.

For **Eduardo García Salueña** of the Festival de Música Antigua de Gijón, even though the festival is fully integrated by public funding, the main challenge is to maintain an ongoing collaboration with local authorities beyond political changes.



Simon Mundy (Writer, poet and cultural policy expert) stressed the lack of co-ordination between the artistic community and local authorities, who only hear from established organisations, whereas the philosophical arguments of the artistic community are as important as the mathematical ones.

Rarita Zbranca from Cluj Cultural Centre agreed. She felt it is essential to look at a variety of indicators, not just hard ones, for evaluating cultural projects, and to be flexible rather than pigeonholing artistic work.

Best practice examples

- Hester van der Werff from Learning Hub Friesland in Leeuwarden (the Netherlands) shared that the municipality created a community fund, small budgets can be mobilised by five people to support an idea.
- Stephanie Bonnici from ARC Research and Consultancy Ltd. in Malta said that EFA Collective Members and EFFE Hubs came together. This helped them to get to know each other and to identify the issue of sustainability as a common challenge. Now they are working on an Erasmus+ application, which aims to learn from peers in other countries to develop their own approach to working with local authorities, rather than indicators.

Jorge Losana, director of the Spanish vocal ensemble Cantoría, presented the ECOS Festival. The ensemble created this early music festival in a small town in the Sierra Espuña, a Regional Nature Reserve in south-eastern Spain, when they were looking for a place to develop their artistic activity. Through the festival they try to offer the audience a meaningful experience of this particular place, with concerts held in caves, public squares, heritage sites... and European connections by inviting young musicians from abroad.

In Italy, **Matteo Penazzi** who is a TFA Alumni and Artistic Director of the Lugo Music Festival mentioned that his staff meet annually with city officials to discuss local challenges, the needs of people living in remote areas, and the insights and perspectives of citizens. This lengthy discussion helps to develop the festival away from the perspective of the city centre (with concerts and performances taking place in the open air) and promotes its sustainability.

In relation to this intervention, artist **Chris Baldwin** shared his experience of participatory events in public space, starting with the question "What is this place? Who are we? What holds us back from expectations? What forms do we use to tell these stories?" in order not to let people out.

Neyko Genchev, artist, editor and deputy mayor of Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria), agreed on the complexity of co-operation between municipalities and cultural operators, and in his case on the need to establish cultural, economic and even religious indicators. It is essential to establish a dialogue.

The experience of **Mariia Kotviska** of KOLO Foundation, a Ukrainian cultural manager now living in Spain, illustrated the difficulty of establishing this dialogue, not only with local Spanish authorities, but also with other local cultural actors. She believes that "they feel threatened and don't understand why Ukrainians should develop culture in Spain when they don't share any historical or cultural characteristics". How can the refugee situation and international issues be turned into an opportunity for new cultural events?



Examples of good practice

- Eduardo García Salueña from Música Antigua Xixón: In Asturias, north-west Spain, *hórreos* (typical granaries) are used for concerts, helping to preserve this rural heritage.
- Neyko Genchev, deputy mayor of Veliko Tarnovo: This small city is the spiritual and historical capital of Bulgaria. Festivals are rare moments to celebrate our ancestors and boost tourism.

Levan Khetaguri (Stichting Caucasus Foundation, Georgia) replied that there is no recipe, but he advised young cultural institutions not to follow the agenda of local authorities as the situation of festivals can be very unstable when politicians in charge change. He stressed the importance of having a sustainable vision for a new project and advised to start by asking local authorities "Why do you want to have a festival?".

Best practice examples

- In Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria), NGOs convinced the municipality to stop car traffic on the city's main street for one evening: they had to insist and argue: "How would it be possible to have a festival with cars? Advice from Neyko Genchev, Deputy Mayor: "Be brave and be stubborn".
- Irina Bilan who is a TFA Alumni, Mystetskyi Arsenal, Ukraine, shared the experience of a book festival in a rural area of Ukraine. The local people and the regional authorities were in conflict, to the detriment of the festival's funding. Despite this difficulty, the success of the festival demonstrated its usefulness in bringing people to the region and increasing its visibility, which resolved the dispute between the authorities in favour of the festival.

