

70-Years-On Agenda Update 2023

In 2022, for EFA's 70th anniversary, the 15 point 70-Years-On Agenda was launched. This agenda was shaped by a Thinking Group that committed not only to putting forward pertinent points of festival life today, but also to monitoring the development of each of its concerns and communicating current challenges relating to the impact of festivals in society. In a nutshell: the 70-Years-On Agenda is under continual construction.

One year later, in its capacity as collective advisors to the European Festivals Association, the 70-Years-On Thinking Group wishes to communicate the issues that it believes have had the greatest impact on the arts festival environment in Europe recently. Through various contacts with members of the Group (in particular in Girona on 25 April and from the online meeting on 26 June 2023), three fundamental themes have emerged.

1 We are witnessing the increasing volatility and instability of the world order, highlighted by the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine and, most tragically, by the recent Hamas attack and subsequent retaliation in Gaza.

2 The ever-increasing frequency and severity of climate disasters on the one hand, and the wavering attitude of governments on the other, underline the urgent need for action to promote sustainability.

3 The festival concept and model have continued to diversify and blur boundaries, weakening the protection of the integrity of festivals in the face of competing expressions of art, entertainment, and fulfilment.

The last of the 15 Point Agenda proposed by the Group in Yerevan in September 2022 calls on festivals to integrate these issues into their deliberations in order to be relevant and resonate with their environment. The Group also stated that affirming political principles does not transform festivals into political actors. They are, however, fruitful places in which to reflect together, as citizens, on political issues.

The group wondered whether the European Festivals Association should increase its activist engagement and inspire its stakeholders to follow suit?

Or should festivals capitalise first and foremost on the intrinsic power of culture, on the fascination and satisfaction one feels when engaging with art? The shift to the right (and far right) in many parts of Europe may also lead festivals to focus more on art (and art alone) rather than a broader agenda - this is a legitimate dilemma for the Group to consider.

One thing is certain: everyone involved in festivals must keep perfecting their knowledge and skills in the tools that digital opportunities can offer. The latest advances – the formidable AI – must be embraced when tackling the challenges that festivals face.

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