



Arts Festivals Summit 2024 Usedom

“Share Care” - a workshop on the well-being of festival-makers

14 May 2024, 9.00 AM - 12.00 PM, Kaiserhof Hotel, Heringsdorf

Conceptualised and facilitated by: Rarița Zbranca (Cultural advocate, programmer and researcher, Programme Director at Cluj Cultural Centre) and Mahir Namur (Existential Coach, Lecturer & Trainer, Project Manager).

Participants: Delegates from the Arts Festivals Summit 2024 were invited and took part in the workshop. Due to its format, the number of participants was limited: 12 participants took part in the workshop.

Introduction

The relentless expectation to continually enhance festival offerings each year, despite constrained resources, appears to be a challenging cycle to break. This is unsustainable not only for us, potentially leading to physical and mental exhaustion or even burnout, but also for the planet. Primarily, this stems from our society's fixation on constant growth and the deep-seated systemic challenges within the cultural sector. Yet, what steps can we take to adopt a more sustainable and compassionate approach to our work?

Share Care was a workshop to openly discuss our struggles in maintaining balance in our lives while intensively working on our festivals. Participants explored how we can gain back energy from the work we do and how we can re-engage with joy and purpose in our work after periods of exhaustion. It was a safe space to unwind, learn, and share experiences that nurture our being, while holding awareness of the systemic problems affecting cultural labour.

This workshop continued the work started by EFA during the 3-days retreat ‘[The Time We Spend Together](#)’ in the context of [Varna Summer International Music Festival](#) in September 2023. A report from this pilot edition of a retreat initiating EFA’s work strand on Arts and Wellbeing can be [found here](#).

This workshop was conceptualised and facilitated by [Rarița Zbranca](#) (Cultural advocate, programmer and researcher, Programme Director at Cluj Cultural Centre) and [Mahir Namur](#) (Existential Coach, Lecturer & Trainer, Project Manager).

Objectives and methodology

The workshop aimed to address the challenges faced by festival organisers in maintaining balance and well-being amidst the relentless pressure for growth and constant improvement. The workshop provided a platform for participants to share experiences, reflect on systemic issues in the cultural sector, and explore strategies for sustaining energy and joy in their work.

The primary objectives of the workshop were to

1. Discuss the challenges of maintaining balance while working intensively on festivals.
2. Explore how participants can regain energy and re-engage with joy and purpose after periods of exhaustion.
3. Provide a safe space for participants to share experiences and learn from each other.
4. Address the systemic problems affecting cultural labour and identify potential steps towards a more sustainable approach.

Methodology

The workshop utilised a mix of reflective exercises, group discussions, and sharing sessions to facilitate engagement and learning. Participants were encouraged to partner up, discuss personal and professional experiences, and brainstorm solutions to common challenges.

Key Themes and Discussions

Meaning in Life and Work

Participants were invited to reflect on what gives meaning to their lives and how their work contributes to this meaning. Common themes included:

- Collaboration
- Success
- Being part of something bigger
- Self-discovery and appreciation

Sources of Sadness/Frustration and Power to Change

Participants identified sources of sadness and distinguished between those they could influence and those beyond their control. Key points included:

- The importance of acknowledging the 'mourning phase' when expectations are not met or when we do not have the capacity to change a situation.
- Recognising systemic challenges in the cultural sector that are difficult to change individually.

Gratitude and Well-being

Participants discussed what they are grateful for and how gratitude contributes to well-being. Key insights included:

- The importance of appreciating family, friends, and beautiful moments in life.
- The role of the arts in offering opportunities for collaboration and personal growth.
- Gratitude as a tool to overcome difficulties and celebrate achievements.

Sources of Drain and Energy

The workshop explored what drains participants and what gives them energy. Common sources of drain included:

- Performing others' tasks
- Bureaucracy
- Narrow-mindedness
- Fundraising
- Feeling taken for granted

Conversely, sources of energy included:

- Successful projects
- Collaboration
- Positive discussions and feedback
- Body-mind connection
- Good work-rest balance

Conclusions and Take Aways

Addressing Burnout and Enhancing Well-being

The workshop highlighted the critical need for festival organisers to address burnout and enhance well-being by:

- **Reflecting on Achievements:** Regularly acknowledging and celebrating achievements can foster a sense of gratitude and meaning.
- **Balancing Work and Rest:** Prioritising a healthy work-rest balance is essential for maintaining energy and productivity.
- **Fostering Collaboration and Positive Feedback:** Creating environments that encourage collaboration and provide positive feedback can enhance motivation and satisfaction.
- **Addressing Systemic Issues:** While individual actions are important, addressing systemic issues in the cultural sector requires collective effort and systemic change.

Future Directions

The workshop emphasised the importance of continued dialogue and action to promote well-being in the cultural sector. Participants were encouraged to:

- Engage in ongoing discussions about well-being and sustainability of work models.
- Implement strategies for balance and gratitude in their work.
- Advocate (through EFA) for systemic changes that support the well-being of cultural workers.

Participants expressed the wish for more conversations and reflective spaces of this kind and suggested that EFA continues to provide such opportunities.

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