

FOCUS ON FINNISH FESTIVALS

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Having dropped off the agenda of many European governments across Europe after a boom in the late 1940s and 50s,¹ the potential of festivals to achieve public policy objectives has been rediscovered in discussions about city marketing, placemaking and social integration.² This collection reminds us that festivals have always played cultural and social as well as political roles; as an opportunity to invite a high-profile international artist as part of a celebration of national identity, as inclusive sites for communities to meet, participate, bond and pass on traditions, or as times for experimentation by acting as a catalyst for new artistic adventures.

The increase in festival numbers across Europe was commented upon by Dragan Klaić,³ who initiated the European Festival Research Project (EFRP) to bring together festival managers and academics to try and understand more about the festivalisation phenomenon. By bringing together research by academics from social, cultural and managerial backgrounds with case studies written by practitioners in collections such as this, festival studies is developing a distinctive multi-disciplinary voice. Festivals are discussed as places for debate and as expressions of cosmopolitanism,⁴ as a response to post-industrial decline⁵ and as sites for imagining new futures.⁶ Other commentators focus on festivals as a growing force in the cultural marketplace,⁷ or as places for expressing identity and belonging.⁸ This collection of case studies and research into festivals across Finland reflects these refrains and provides a rare, possibly

unique, opportunity to explore a range of types, purposes and impacts of festivals in a national context.

Comprising 31 chapters, *Festivals in Finland* investigates six themes: festivals as part of the country's intangible heritage; festivals as placemakers; festivals as sites for participation; the festival audience; festivals and cultural policy; and the economic impact of festivals.

Tradition or reform?

Festivals have an historical role as custodian and communicator of intangible heritage and tradition. Agricultural festivals mark the changes of the seasons, and national festivals mark significant historical events. Religious and seasonal festivals provide a regular point in the calendar for communities to connect away from day-to-day concerns. Cultural festivals draw on this festive sense of *communitas*,⁹ a time when society is more equal and playful, when new relationships can be forged, new futures imagined and new cultural forms experimented with. At their best they create a vibrant living tradition that combines the best of the old and the new, yet in festivals as with cultural heritage more generally, there are conflicts that need to be resolved about whose traditions are celebrated and for whose benefit.¹⁰ Is it important to preserve the purity of an art form from a perceived highpoint, or will the introduction of new elements, driven perhaps by technological developments or through collaboration with international artists, breathe new life into the form, making it

1. See Autissier, 2008; Ilczuk & Kulikowska, 2007.
2. E.g. Quinn, 2010; Richards & Palmer, 2010.
3. Klaić, 2007b.
4. Giorgi et al., 2011.
5. Richards & Wilson, 2004; Sassatelli, 2015; Quinn, 2010.
6. Dooghe, 2015; Silvanito, 2015.
7. Jordan, 2016; Nordgård, 2016.
8. Bowditch, 2016b; Longkummer, 2016.
9. Turner, 1969.
10. E.g. Newbold, 2016.

relevant for 21st century audiences? The *Midsummer Bonfires* provides an example of just such a tension in a Finnish context.

Place

Festivals have become essential tools for defining and redefining spaces, both rural greenfield rock festivals and urban events that take place in parks and squares, or in theatres and concert halls. By creating a festive atmosphere these events provide a licence for audiences who might normally feel excluded from areas of cities perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming or art spaces considered as elite. Doreen Massey¹¹ conceptualises place as the result of dynamic interactions between social groups at a point in time, between physical and social infrastructure and the patterns of behaviour that inform how spaces are used.

In everyday life, we know our 'place' in our communities, how to behave, the purpose(s) of the spaces we visit. As Floriane Gaber¹² highlights, festivals disrupt physical spaces and, as a result, also disrupt social spaces, providing opportunities to rethink social and power relations, to create new meanings, new patterns. There are a number of examples of Finnish festivals in this collection, including Johanna Tuukkanen's chapter on the *ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival* that are harnessing this potential to broaden audiences for specific art forms and to encourage encounters between communities who would normally live parallel lives despite sometimes sharing similar spaces.

Thinking of festivals as 'thirdspaces'¹³ places that exist as much in the festival-goer's imagination as in physical space raises a number of questions for festival producers. What is the best site for the festival, both practically and symbolically? Where would be most inclusive and encourage new audiences, but not disturb or upset residents who might not want to attend? How should the venue be designed and

decorated to shape but not constrain the encounters between artists and audiences and between different groups? Which communities' cultures should be represented in a particular place and how is that likely to be read by them and by others? Is the aim to represent existing culture(s) from the local area, or to introduce something new, perhaps international? Is the audience local or are visitors being targeted? The complexity of the collision between cultural tradition and experimentation and the multiple meanings imbued in particular places are illustrated in the range of festivals across Finland.

The stories that festivals tell also then feed into the identity of the places they inhabit. A street art festival says something different to a classical music festival. Negotiating the identities of a diverse urban neighbourhood may be an obvious challenge, but it is not the only one. Artistic traditions have their guardians who may not welcome new approaches to the form brought in from outside. Professionals may be concerned by the involvement of non-professional performers. Residents of city neighbourhoods and rural villages may feel overwhelmed by the number of visitors to a popular festival or frustrated by the sometimes stereotyped views that tourists have of an event, community or place that misses the cultural nuances they themselves value. There is evidence throughout this collection of Finnish festivals negotiating these conflicts to produce meaningful and successful events that appeal to a wide range of interests and values.

Co-creation

Co-creation is one solution that festivals are trying to engage with new festival-goers and to deepen the experience for those who already participate. Minni Haanpää's work identifies volunteers as a significant interest group at the heart of many festivals, a group that often holds the institutional memory and

11. Massey, 1994.

12. Gaber, 2016.

13. Soja, 1996.

knowledge about working practices and acting as intermediaries between community members, professional cultural managers and artists. Participation, volunteering and co-creation opportunities also give community members a voice in shaping the festival's narratives and a sense of ownership and belonging. Roxy Robinson¹⁴ identifies the commercial potential of co-creation to provide unique identities for small boutique festivals in the UK that cannot compete for headline acts. In Finland, one example with a less profit-driven focus is the *Kirjahyrrä* children's book festival which is organised thanks to the strength of its support networks, mutual exchange and collaboration.

Audiences, risk and experimentation

At the same time as responding to existing spaces, communities and traditions, festivals are also sites for experimentation. Alessandro Falassi¹⁵ calls them 'time out of time', a break from everyday routines and norms, from the workaday world. At such times we are more open to new ideas, new ways of seeing. So a festival in a run down part of the city, or a village or coastal town that is losing population to urban centres can help its residents, and visitors, to see it anew. For some festivals this is an opportunity to break down barriers between communities, freeing artists from the constraints of working within a theatre space or concert hall and allowing them to spill out on to the streets to transform and create new meanings for the places that their audiences regularly visit, or to actively involve community volunteers. For others it is part of a regeneration strategy, or city marketing exercise. Increasingly corporate sponsors are responding to the experimental ethos to 'activate' brand relationships with festival-goers or to test out new products on audiences perceived as open-minded.¹⁶

Several of the chapters in this book explore new ways of working that break down barriers. *Meidän*

Festivaali uses a traditionally conservative art form to actively engage audience members in debates about societal issues. *The Black and White Theatre Festival* performs in non-traditional spaces in order to connect residents of a small town with international performers.

New technology has enabled festivals to experiment in how they communicate and build festival communities. Crowdsourcing, for example, is being expanded beyond simply funding to enable genuine co-creation as festival-goers contribute production ideas, generate support and word-of-mouth promotion.

Other Finnish festivals are experimenting with social media to enhance two-way dialogue through user-generated content before during and after the event, to give the festival a longer life and to create an online community, although genuine festive sociability appears as yet to be elusive. It seems that the community exists, but as yet it is between festival-goers themselves, and not with the organisers. This confirms research undertaken in the UK that describes online festival forums as 'relatively static'.¹⁷ Yet it is clear that audiences and managers would both value a deeper dialogue that truly informs festival development, indicating that there remains work to be done to find the best ways of communicating and engaging with audiences.

Policy

Participation is an important cultural policy question across Europe. Festivals are perceived as less elitist than many cultural buildings such as theatres or concert halls. They can also be flexible and responsive solutions to enhancing supply in areas without ready access to other cultural institutions. In the UK the Independent Street Arts Network found in its Global Streets 2015 research¹⁸ that 10 per cent of those surveyed at outdoor arts festivals had not participated

14. Robinson, 2015.

15. Falassi, 2015.

16. Anderton, 2015.

17. Morey et al, 2014, 262.

18. GDIF, 2015.



FLOW FESTIVAL. KUVA SAMU HINTSA.

in any other cultural activity in the preceding year. In Finland, too, it appears that educational experiences influence personal taste and willingness to participate in culture, with the sociability of crowds playing an important role for some whilst for others it is experimentation, ethics or aesthetics.

The geographic spread of cultural opportunities are also raised as a policy question. Residents in urban areas, particularly Helsinki, have access to a variety of cultural resources. A common policy question for all governments is how to ensure access for those living in more rural areas. As Pasi Piela and Sari Karttunen's innovative research into the geographic spread of festivals illustrates, their relative flexibility makes them a good solution to deficits in areas with few other cultural assets. Warning flags should perhaps be raised about the relative ease of cutting support for temporary events though, and the fact that gaps in provision can relate to time as well as space. One easy-to-get-to festival a year is not the equivalent of a nearby arts centre with a year round programme.

Festivals are significant in developing understanding of and audiences for specific cultural forms. By creating high-profile events and economies of scale they are able to attract international artists and create relationships between Finnish artists and international partners that both inform local practices and helps to create touring opportunities. The festival atmosphere also encourages experimentation as artists meet and see each other's work, and audiences try out shows they would be reluctant to buy a separate ticket for or come across unexpectedly.¹⁹

Economic benefits plus

This sense of festivals as sites for innovation is being harnessed in economic development policies of some cities and regions, too. Socio-economic impact assessments adapted from tourism research are now

routinely used by festivals seeking state support.²⁰ In addition to the economic benefits claimed, festivals are viewed as institutions that enable the sharing of skills and know-how between sectors through their complex networks of producers, funders, sponsors, artists and audiences, encouraging innovative solutions to multifaceted social and developmental problems. Reviewing research into the social and economic effects of *Holstebro Festival Week* and *Operaestate Festival Veneto*, Chris Newbold comments that festival's role as a 'public good' has 'a knock-on effect on the viability of the city, both commercially and socially'.²¹ In Finland economic development and tourism are both identified as a driving force behind strategic planning in some Finnish festivals as they respond to national, local and EU funding criteria.

Research into the internationalisation of festivals has recognised the essential role of traditional and new media in communicating the specific appeal of festival places, and their role in developing attractive destination tourism strategies. The *Galway International Arts Festival (GIAF)* which takes part in a remote area of Ireland, uses social media, web sites in several languages and its own YouTube channel to create a sense of knowing but not knowing enough that reduces fear of the unfamiliar amongst potential tourists.²² The *Flow Festival* case study in this collection has worked with international press agents to target more traditional media, but as with *GIAF*, the festival's story is presented as a taster of the full experience that can only be fulfilled by a visit.

Focus on Finnish festival experiences

The chapters in this book explore each of these and identify the successes and some of the problems festival producers face, exploring the Finnish experience as part of the global festivalisation phenomenon.

Of course, in an era of globalisation there is a complexity to each festival that this commentary

19. Morgan, 2007.

20. E.g. Snowball, 2016.

21. Newbold, 2016, 161.

22. Guglielmini, 2016.

cannot do justice to. Marjana Johansson's and Timo Kopomaa's chapters both explore the interaction between festivals and their places, asking us to focus on the local. Elsewhere, the theme of international exchange between artists is a common theme found in Sylvia Guglielmini's study of *GLAF* in Ireland²³ and Saijaleena Rantanen's research into early music festivals in Finland.

Dragan Klaić²⁴ summarised the role that official festivals played throughout the Cold War. Artists moved relatively easily between countries in their respective blocks, but with difficulty between the East and West. When performers did travel to the 'other side', it was a political act, a signal of each side's superior artistic achievements and civilisation. Festivals were a rare opportunity for audiences to peep through the iron curtain. Today internationalisation is a central part of many festivals. Whether it is the *Flow Festival* producing a partner edition in Slovenia, and attracting international media attention, or the best international artists performing in the Bogotá, Colombia²⁵, there is a global dialogue between artists and festival-goers. Whilst government subsidy means that political influence is a factor, particularly for festivals that are perceived as national icons, for most festivals across Europe such influence is quite light touch, particularly, in relation to which artists can be programmed. The choice of performers is more likely to be driven by market factors (who will guarantee ticket sales, or media coverage?), or aesthetic questions (who is the best musician or actor in this tradition, or who is pushing the boundaries of this art form?) than censorship or patronage.

Managerial concerns are also discussed. The intermittent nature of festival production raises im-

portant questions for many organisers. How can the complex web of relationships needed to remake the event each year be maintained with artists, audiences, residents, volunteers and policy-makers when the festival finishes and the organisation reduces to a few people, or a small committee of volunteers? Where will the finances come from? How can the festival engage with new audiences, produce the highest quality work, expand the horizons of the form?

The case studies and analyses in this book illustrate that festivals across Finland are continuing to evolve in response to technological, social, cultural and political changes. Their roots remain deep in local and national cultures, but they are adaptable, creating new relationships between audiences and producers; crossing linguistic, cultural and social barriers; reshaping how places are seen and used, and playing with new cultural forms. All festivals experience tension between the need to uphold or renew tradition; between local, national and international, between voluntary and professional, between artistic excellence and community arts, between specialist or generalist. Their individual and collective choices reflect the values of their societies. Their comparative flexibility means they are a good solution to gaps in cultural infrastructure, and the willingness of festival-goers to experiment makes festivals a valuable lens through which to explore the frontline of social and cultural change. Combining so many cases, research studies and perspectives from one national context provides a rare opportunity to appreciate the social and policy forces that shape festivals.

23. Guglielmini, 2016.

24. Klaić, 2014.

25. Vignolo, 2016.