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Salvador Elisa, Castro-Martínez Elena, Ana Maria Botella-Nicolás, Rosa Isusi-Fagoaga

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## INTRODUCTION BY THE GUEST EDITORS

### **The Importance of Research on Cultural Festivals**

**Elisa Salvador** (ESSCA School of Management, France)

**Elena Castro-Martínez** (INGENIO-CSIC, Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain)

**Ana Maria Botella-Nicolás and Rosa Isusi-Fagoaga** (University of Valencia, Spain)

### **The Idea From Which This Special Issue Was Born**

The idea for this special issue emerged during a research seminar at INGENIO, a joint initiative of the Institute of the Spanish Council for Scientific Research and the Polytechnic University of Valencia, held in October 2018. Given their role in diffusing different forms of cultural expression, as well as their visibility in small cities and their contribution to the local economy, cultural festivals warrant more attention in the academic literature.

Therefore, a two-day workshop at La Nau cultural centre of the University of Valencia was set for 26–27 November 2019. The goal was to share ideas and perspectives among researchers with expertise in cultural events through the investigation of the structure, organization and management of festivals, considering as well the challenges of the digital age. This event arose from the need to analyze the evolution of cultural festivals and the innovations they have brought to the sector. More than 30 researchers participated. They came from 10 different countries – Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and the United States – and they painted a very broad and complex picture of today’s cultural festival scene.

Cross-comparisons of festivals held in different countries were presented in five sessions: (a) Scientific Research on Cultural Festivals: State of the Art and New Avenues of Research, (b) Scientific Research on Cultural Festivals: A Focus on Music Festivals in the Digital Age, (c) Organization and Management of Cultural Festivals: Case Study Analysis at the International Level, (d) Value and Impacts of Cultural Festivals at Local and Regional Levels: Some Examples, and (e) Educational Programs and Cultural Festivals: New Approaches and New Audiences. Additional information and the full program for the two-day event are available on the official website of the workshop: <https://cfest.webs.upv.es/>. The event benefited from its association with the International Association of Arts and Cultural Management (AIMAC).

The call for papers resulted in the selection of some 20 papers to be presented on the first day of the workshop. These papers discussed different aspects of festival management (governance, sponsorship, economic and social impact, digital expansion, networking, quality

of services) and covered various forms of artistic expression (dance, pop music, jazz, classical music, gastronomy). Speakers from Europe, the United States, Asia and Africa presented works in progress and shared their vision with their fellow participants.

On the second day, the seminar Educational Programs and Cultural Festivals: New Approaches and New Audiences (in Spanish) was attended by researchers, cultural event experts, policy-makers, those responsible for educational programs during festivals and other social stakeholders. Discussions centred on the fact that cultural festivals, especially classical music festivals, are still not attracting young people, a situation that calls for new methods and new communication channels. While educational activities aimed at young people could lead to generational renewal, there is a dearth of personnel specializing in the development of educational activities. The consensus was that one solution might be an attractive offer of programs providing listening experiences in new spaces, able to generate memorable emotions associated with singular events that mix music, leisure, gastronomy and tourism.

The success of the first day, and the interest shown by participants, resulted in two publishing opportunities: this special issue of *IJAM*, and a book soon to be released by Routledge.<sup>1</sup>

Workshop participants were invited to submit, for possible publication, a revised version of their work in progress presented on the first day. However, the call for papers for this special issue of *IJAM* was not restricted to workshop participants: some 20 proposals were received (from both workshop attendees and external scholars). Consequently, a strict selection process was put in place. Several reviewers highly qualified in this research field and with an international profile were recruited to read and comment on the manuscripts. Thanks to their reports and to the engagement of the guest editors, the selection process resulted in five articles being accepted. Two of these came from researchers who attended the November 2019 workshop in Valencia and presented their work on the first day of the event.

## **Why the Focus on Cultural Festivals?**

While a niche subject in the research literature, cultural festivals have been gaining prominence all around the world in recent years – as attested to by the increasing number of festivals worldwide. Even the Covid-19 pandemic has helped to draw attention to these events, which have been deeply affected by the safety measures and repeated lockdowns.

Festivals are one of the most diffused examples of “living production” within the cultural and creative industries (Luonila and Johansson 2016). In recent years, they have been increasingly attracting the attention of scholars (Baez-Montenegro and Devesa-Fernandez 2017; Del barrio et al. 2012). Several studies have investigated various aspects related to the organization, management and success of festivals (cf. Baez-Montenegro and Devesa-Fernandez 2017; Rajaobelina et al. 2019; Snowball 2013; Vestrum 2014; Wong et al. 2015).

We are thus contributing to an economic revival and local/regional interest in festivals: they are considered an opportunity for small cities to establish their identity and gain visibility that otherwise would be difficult to achieve. The renewed attention to festivals could also be related to their experiential character, which distinguishes them from the increasing digital diffusion of culture. Also, research on cultural practices indicates a revival in amateur participation, a vital but often ignored factor (Rajaobelina et al. 2019).

Nonetheless, one must not forget that the digital revolution and the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have impacted the world of business, laying the foundation for a new business landscape. The traditional model for the cultural and creative industries has been heavily impacted, the best examples being book publishing and the music and cinema industries (Moreau 2013; Salvador et al. 2019; Salvador and Benghozi

2021). Generally speaking, innovation processes and outcomes have been impacted rapidly by pervasive digitization, putting traditional theories and processes of innovation management into question and leading to talk of “digital entrepreneurship,” underlining the impact of digital technologies (Nambisan 2017; Nambisan et al. 2017). New dynamics, strategies and economic models are thus emerging everywhere (Benghozi et al. 2021).

Yet one cannot assume that digital technologies have also had a disruptive effect on dissemination events like small festivals because of their peculiarities linked to the local territory and to the unique experience provide that cannot easily be replaced by digital tools. For festivals, customer loyalty and increased attendance result more from word of mouth than from digital channels, and festivals also seek new audiences through educational programs for students. Nonetheless, the setting and organization of festivals are tricky: these events are characterized by temporality and a project focus, which require a motivated workforce engaged in intensive short-term collaborations and leadership by one or just a few employees (Abfalter et al. 2012). Consequently, one might ask: how has the digital revolution impacted the organization and management of cultural festivals? One might ask other questions as well. What is the basis of the potential success of a festival, its economic model, the nature of its offer, the services and experiences that it offers, and its impact on and links with various local stakeholders and a city’s facilities and structures? What are the ties between the festival and the city in which it is held, and does the festival promote the city’s identity and brand?

The selection of articles for this special issue of *IJAM* is intended as a response to these questions. It seems that new dynamics are contributing to the success of festivals and that digital proximity is playing a key role in the organization of festivals, as are the constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The five selected articles vary in origin and in focus: they are contributed by researchers from Spain, Italy, France and Canada, and they are focused on festivals in the fields of music, books and the performing arts. The articles are summarized below.

### **The Articles Presented in This Special Issue**

Our first contribution is one of the papers presented at the workshop in Valencia. “Exploring Attendees’ Experience in a Reggae Festival: A Case Study of Rototom Sunsplash,” by Carmen Pérez-Cabañero, Waleska Schlesinger and Amparo Cervera-Taulet, deals with the “quality of the festival experience” seen as an overall subjective perception of the quality of the service experience. The Rototom Sunsplash European Reggae Festival is held every summer in Benicàssim, Spain. This festival was founded in 1994 in Italy and has been held in Benicàssim since 2010. It was recognized as an International Emblematic Event of the Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence by UNESCO in 2010 and was the recipient of the Africa Peace Award by the United Religions Initiative–Africa in 2018. The 2019 edition counted 202,000 attendees from 76 countries and was streamed live worldwide to 7 million people. The authors attempt to empirically understand the embedded experience of attendees as well as the festival’s effects on behavioural intentions. They assess and highlight the role of perceived quality of the festival experience and examine the relationships among this perceived quality, satisfaction, place attachment and behavioural intentions towards the festival. The originality of this analysis is to extend knowledge about the impact of an experience on customers’ post-purchase behaviour in the specific case of a music festival. The results empirically demonstrate that the influence of quality of the experience on behavioural intentions towards the festival is both direct and indirect through attendees’ satisfaction. The high behavioural intentions of attendees related to this festival suggest their long-term loyalty, yet, surprisingly, no place attachment with the host location emerged.

The next article was also presented at the workshop in Valencia. In “Assessing a DIY Toolkit to Measure the Economic Impact of Festivals at the National Level: Evidence From 19 Jazz Festivals in Italy,” Severino Salvemini, Costanza Sartoris and Arianna Riccardi explore the Italian jazz festival panorama and find multiple economic and a few social and cultural impacts of 19 festivals, while investigating both the festivals’ inner structure and their audiences. The authors also critically assess the “do it yourself” (DIY) method of data collection. The DIY approach has been developed through the use of ad hoc quantitative indicators from the literature on jazz festivals’ impact assessment. Thanks to this simple toolkit, the authors have promoted a technique that follows the principles of digital crowdsourcing platforms. Over a period of two years, with the involvement of festival organizers, the authors were able to gather information from nearly 17,000 spectators throughout Italy. Thus, despite some weaknesses, the DIY toolkit has advantages: it has led to a significant collection of data, and it has raised the accountability sensitivity of the festival organizers themselves. This methodology appears to be a promising tool for impact assessment comparisons in festival populations at the national level. Following their experience in applying this data-collection technique, the authors provide a revised DIY toolkit that music festivals could adopt to account for their own impact autonomously.

The third article, “The Economic Impact and the Return on Public Investment of a Book Fair and Cultural Festival,” by Giovanna Segre and Andrea Morelli, contributes to the literature on the economic impact of cultural events by considering both the monetary effects and the tax revenues for the local economy. It focuses on the 30th edition of the book fair and cultural festival Salone Internazionale del Libro, held 18–22 May 2017 in Turin, Italy. This festival, founded in 1988, was the first and is the largest Italian event dedicated to publishing. The authors measure its economic and fiscal impact on the Piedmont region. The book fair is managed by a cultural foundation (Fondazione per il libro, la musica e la cultura) and is promoted by the city of Turin. The Salone Internazionale del Libro has a dual and multi-faceted identity: on the one hand it promotes culture, and reading in particular, and on the other hand it is a book market. Actually, it is the largest bookshop in Italy as well as a cultural festival, featuring hundreds of meetings and a space dedicated to children and young people, and is also a professional and commercial showcase for actors in the publishing world. The findings reveal that it has significant economic impacts on the Piedmont region: jobs and resources in many local productive sectors, besides the cultural sector, are highlighted. The beneficiaries include not only the tourism and food service sectors, but many other local sectors, some of which are highly specialized, such as publishing and legal services, scientific and technological R&D, advertising and market research, and arts and entertainment. In short, the article shows how a cultural event lasting only five days can attract a large number of tourists and professional workers, who stay in the area for several nights and inject significant resources into the local and regional economies.

The fourth article, contributed by Mathilde Puhl and titled “Towards a Quest for Differentiation Through Over-Experientialized Cultural Offer Strategies: The Case of Contemporary Music Festivals,” looks at means of identifying and examining the experiential strategies of contemporary music festivals. The objective is to identify the main action levers used by festivals to ensure that attendees have a memorable and unique experience as well as to differentiate themselves from their competitors. The author reviews the research on festivals, which often considers the festival-goer’s point of view. She conducts a multiple case study by examining the programs of 39 music festivals around the world whose practices have been carefully monitored for several years. Several sources are used to collect data, including official websites, social networks and media articles. Additional information was gathered from online videos and photographs. The information is processed by theme within a grid to reveal practices in each category of action levers identified. The analysis identifies, details

and illustrates the main levers of theatricalization and spectacularization – location and time frame of the festival; the festival’s central or peripheral offer; the role played by attendees and their interaction with the festival – used by each festival to establish its uniqueness and to differentiate itself from the others. Finally, the author discusses the findings of the comparative analysis in order to underline each festival’s distinct cultural essence.

In the final article, “Business Model Evolution and Entrepreneurial Adaptation of Festivals: The Case of Santiago a Mil,” Serge Poisson-de Haro, Alvaro Espejo and Ignasi Martí examine the case of Santiago a Mil, an annual festival held in the Chilean capital in January. Founded in 1994, this is one of South America’s largest and most established performing arts festivals. From a theatre festival offering just five shows, it evolved into a performing arts festival presenting 105 shows featuring over 900 artists from 24 countries. The event is analyzed from its creation in a post-dictatorial environment to recent times in a climate of social protest. The article focuses on how the design and implementation of the business model components of performing arts festivals can respect an event’s entrepreneurial spirit and social mission and at the same time foster social transformation by responding to local needs and social, cultural, political, environmental and economic demands. Digital and social media played a key role in the latest adaptation of the festival’s business model and ensured a large audience: the 2020 edition went ahead while most other cultural events were cancelled because of turmoil in the streets. Thanks to social media and virtual platforms, even the 2021 edition was confirmed at the time of writing despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

While the foregoing selection of articles cannot be considered a comprehensive overview of cultural festival organization and management today, this special issue is a first step in advancing a literature on this niche subject. Furthermore, the themes and concerns highlighted in these articles underline the importance of conducting more and better research in such a pivotal sector within the cultural and creative industries.

In presenting this special issue of the Journal, we hope to elicit the interest of other researchers in this subject.

### *Notes*

1. *Managing cultural festivals: Tradition and innovation in Europe* (Routledge, forthcoming), edited by E. Salvador (ESSCA School of Management, France) and J. Strandgaard Pedersen (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark).

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