EUROPEAN

POLICYBRIEF

Cultural Heritage Festivals in Europe Enhancing Community, Sustainability and Knowledge
January 2019

This policy brief focuses on three issues of value for policy makers:

1. Cohesion and community
2. Sustainability and economic impact
3. Knowledge sharing, networking and research

This Policy Brief is relevant for:

Politicians	because	it draws attention to the potential of heritage festivals to create a sense of community among diverse groups
Cultural Policy Planners	because	it identifies sustainability issues for organisers and cultural stakeholders involved in heritage festivals
Cultural Agencies	because	it highlights the importance of knowledge-sharing among stakeholder communities regarding legislation at various levels of policy making

This policy brief makes recommendations regarding support for heritage festivals as important instruments for tackling cultural, social and economic issues in Europe today. By developing sustainable mechanisms based on integrated measures across different policy areas, artists and cultural professionals as well as festival organisers can be encouraged to create better projects. Heritage festivals offer unique opportunities to tackle a range of social issues and support the integration of migrant and refugees as well as wider social cohesion objectives. They provide a convivial platform exploring avenues that enhance community cohesion and intercultural integration. They can have significant economic potential which needs to be managed carefully in order to safeguard the local infrastructure. Transnational frameworks can give added visibility and status to cultural events.

Festivals can be important instruments for tackling cultural, social and economic problems across Europe. Their impact and related policy cut across different sectors, including creative industries, traditional arts and crafts, tourism and regional development. WP3 investigated heritage festivals in various European locations to identify the effects festivals have on the transmission of traditional practices, participants' senses of self, and larger social processes at local/national/European level. We conducted fieldwork research in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and UK. This policy brief makes three key recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1**: Cohesion: Cultural heritage festivals provide a mechanism for breaking down barriers between communities, including in multicultural contexts, and therefore should be supported as a valuable instrument of cohesion policy.
- **Recommendation 2:** Sustainability: As the impact of cultural heritage festivals reaches beyond immediate income generation, a European template for impact monitoring should be developed, aligned with principles of sustainable management and supporting more viable livelihoods for practitioners in the cultural and creative sectors.
- **Recommendation 3:** Knowledge exchange: Cultural heritage festivals are often small scale and lack infrastructure for interregional knowledge exchange; existing European support frameworks and structures should be profiled more at regional and local levels.

CoHERE: Critical Heritages – performing and representing identities in Europe, seeks to explore and analyse productions and meanings of the European past in the present. Heritage is made in the myriad practices and cultural forms where the past is valorised for the present, from folk traditions to museums and memorials, the management of historic sites and traditions, and everyday matters such as education, political discourse, home life, food consumption and people's relations with place. Likewise, contemporary connections with events, cultures and sites from prehistory to the very recent past may all be important for the construction of identities, values and futures.

WP 3 'Cultural forms and expressions of identity in Europe' focuses on cultural traditions as significant factors that form local, regional, national and European identities and the ways in which cultural communities and policy makers develop cultural tradition, maintain intangible cultural heritage and ensure its sustainability for future generations. The WP engages particularly with festivals within heritage contexts.

Introduction

Festivals have long been a feature of social and cultural life of different communities, from their earlier roots in religious rituals to secular manifestations in a multicultural and increasingly diverse Europe today. Festivals have become commonplace in most European countries and can be hugely beneficial in enhancing understanding of different cultures and ways of life. Festivals are important mechanisms at European level also; one of the major cultural programmes at European level is European Capitals of Culture, a mega festival that aims to facilitate the development of a shared European heritage, while at the same time embracing local diversities. The European Commission's communication "Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe" (2014) outlines how heritage can contribute to economic growth and social cohesion. Moreover, the communication "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations" (2016) also supports culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development. Festivals can take different forms depending on their focus; in our research we have mainly focused on cultural heritage festivals as defined here.

We define *cultural heritage festivals* as festivals that encompass traditional arts or crafts or have a history in their communities spanning decades or even centuries.

Festivals can serve different purposes:

1. Festivals support the transmission of traditions, cultural practices and values to participants.
2. Festivals support groups and individuals expressing their identities and enhancing their sense of belonging.
3. Festivals are platforms for co-creation, of building new shared meanings between different cultural groups and producing hybrid cultural forms through the meeting of different cultural heritages and traditions, whether local or migrant.
4. Festivals allow communities to change the focus from passive heritage preservation activities to active use and evolution of heritage practices through performance (including change and adaptation).
5. Festivals are often used in promotional efforts of a city/region/locality, as a device for branding a locality and embedding it in a geography of tourism which would bring visitors and monetary gains in that locality.

Research[1] has shown that festivals are often rooted in place and serve the needs of local communities and newcomers. At festivals like the Edinburgh Mela[2], participants appreciate the opportunities to exchange cultural values, learn about one another and enhance the sense of belonging for migrants, supporting integration efforts. Attempts to build or

strengthen shared European identities and values through festivals need to consider this aspect.

Nevertheless, research has also identified problems faced by organisers and participants in developing different festivals; finding ways of integrating diverse agendas and expectations of different stakeholders and building sensitive approaches to the socio-ecological legacy of festivals into all stages, from planning to post-event activities, are major challenges that have fed into the key recommendations outlined below.

Research findings

Recommendation 1: Cohesion: As cultural heritage festivals provide a mechanism for breaking down barriers between communities, including in multicultural contexts, they should be supported as a valuable instrument of cohesion policy.

Social capital is a form of wealth that is distinct from economic capital. It results from group activities such as participation in communal activities such as festivals. It is a resource that enables individuals to build trust with others, creating social networks that ultimately impact on many aspects of personal and social life.

Our research has emphasised the importance of festivals as platforms for expression of identities, but also as arenas for meeting the 'Other' (be that as migrants, cultural groups or refugees). Hence festivals can be capitalised upon to support community cohesion and integration strategies of different localities. Festivals provide opportunities for newer members of a locality, such as migrants and refugees, to interact in an enjoyable setting, learning about the host culture and vice-versa.

Our research has highlighted the importance of building social capital to advance personal wellbeing, and to support the sustainability of festivals. Participants in workshops and interviews conducted for this project have emphasised the positive outcomes of festivals in breaking down barriers by promoting learning, sharing and celebrating diversity, as well as changing attitudes. Moreover, by offering arenas for performing and showcasing traditional skills and practices, they enable and empower communities to engage more in their locality and increase their efforts for transmission of these practices, thus contributing to intercultural and intergenerational cohesion. In our research, we noted a sense of pride and a re-evaluation of sentiments of belonging and engagement with a locality due to the success of particular festivals.

There are several models of festivals supporting community cohesion and promoting healing of past trauma through creative expressions; Healing Through Remembering[3], for example, is a programme in Northern Ireland using storytelling as a means of working through conflicting historical narratives.

Another case demonstrating the boundary-crossing potential of festivals are the bilingual theatre projects of the Čojčland Theaternetzwerk Böhmen-Bayern[4] that challenge young amateur actors from both sides of the Czech-German border, as well as their audiences, to engage with issues of individual cultural identity. Using a jointly created shared language, Čojč, the network encourages participants to question and transcend personal, cultural, and political borders, to negotiate and redefine social relations through interaction and shared experiences.

Figure 1 Proetnica Festival 2018 Romania © Dr Cristina Clopot

The *Proetnica* festival in Romania gathers participants from all the country's officially recognised minorities, drawing attention to its diverse ethnic heritage, exploring challenges of minority-majority relations, and supporting inter-cultural dialogue.

Every year around 25 January, all across Scotland gatherings are held in honour of the Scots poet Robert Burns, who promoted beliefs in human equality, kinship and conviviality – a festival that increasingly includes 'New Scots', as people who have made Scotland their home are nowadays commonly referred to. An alternative Burns supper is organised by BEMIS (Black and Ethnic Minorities in Scotland), a network whose aims are to promote inclusion, democratic active citizenship and a greater recognition of the diverse intangible cultural heritage of local communities.

Festivals such as these provide a non-threatening, creative space where communities can meet and meaningfully engage with potentially contentious narratives and conflicting perspectives. Support for such initiatives should therefore be prioritised in cultural policy.

Recommendation 2: Sustainability: As the impact of cultural heritage festivals reaches beyond immediate income generation, a European template for impact monitoring should be developed, aligned with principles of sustainable management and supporting more viable livelihoods for practitioners in the cultural and creative sectors.

Figure 1 Valletta Green Festival 2018 (part of the European Capital of Culture programme) - © Dr Cristina Clopot

Apart from cultural and social values, heritage festivals increasingly demonstrate positive economic impacts as they develop tourism, increase employment, improve the location image, and generally advance the regional economy. Heritage festivals may diversify local economies while preserving local cultures and heritages by providing opportunities for artisans, local or migrant artists, or small creative enterprises.

Measuring economic impacts is common for large festivals with sufficient resources to conduct research to demonstrate their economic effects and use the findings to argue for investment of public or private funding in the next festivals. This can be detrimental to smaller heritage festivals that cannot support such evidence because they lack the expertise and financial resources for such research.

Therefore, we recommend paying a special attention to the evaluation of impact of small heritage festivals, taking into account impact assessment in quantitative and qualitative terms. Such a holistic approach would ensure that heritage festivals play a central role in sustaining traditions, cultural heritage sites, enhancing the vitality of small communities or local development.

Festival organisers from different countries (e.g. UK, Romania) have recognised the challenges that multicultural festivals meet in terms of limited funds for minority/ethnic heritage, the risk of exclusion of the majority population, or structural issues, such as underrepresentation on funding bodies. These challenges should be taken into account in the development of policy aiming to support the development of self-sustaining cultural heritage initiatives.

Becoming a tourist destination brings a risk of trivialisation of cultural heritage, and potential destruction the heritage assets. Mass tourism may impact negatively on the life of local communities, bringing challenges for organisers to develop balanced relationships between visitors and local inhabitants. For example, a plethora of festivals during August bring too many visitors to Edinburgh, exceeding the city's capacities, whether it be traffic or waste collection. Venetians are currently protesting against a tourism industry that is damaging their environment and eroding their quality of life. In a similar manner, our research in Malta has indicated the limitations of tourism development when the carrying capacity is exceeded. Many localities become victims of their own success, with tourism generating unwelcome side-effects such as an increased aestheticisation of public space, or gentrification.

We recommend development of a common European template for monitoring impacts and effects of the heritage festivals, aligned with principles of sustainable management informed by global standards like the UN's Sustainable Development Goals[5]. Local initiatives to introduce a tourist tax as a source of funding public services should be encouraged.

Recommendation 3: Knowledge exchange: Cultural heritage festivals are often small scale and lack infrastructure for interregional knowledge exchange; existing European support frameworks and structures should be profiled more at regional and local levels.

Our research indicates that many organisers of cultural heritage festivals, as well as many cultural practitioners, seem to be unaware of the European frameworks that could support their work. Moreover, it highlights inconsistencies in the implementation of legislative measures across the different countries.

European frameworks such as the Council of Europe's 2005 Faro Convention[6] on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society supports the preservation of traditions and creative expressions. Policy work in connected areas, such as the European Commission's European Agenda for Culture[7], and initiatives such as the European Capitals of Culture[8] programme, support the activities of festivals organisers, artists and cultural professionals.

The *Faro Convention* emphasises important aspects of heritage in relation to democracy and human rights and. It promotes a broader understanding of heritage relating to communities and society.

Although the Council of Europe's instruments such as the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages[9] or the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities[10] influence the development and preservation of heritage of different ethnic groups/minorities across Europe. The European Union has ratified the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions[11] but none of the others UNESCO conventions. UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage[12] (2003) has not been ratified at European level; participation is devolved to the national level. Ratification of this Convention gives communities the opportunity to have their cultural heritage festivals inscribed on three lists associated with UNESCO. These lists give visibility to the diversity of cultural heritage in Europe and raise awareness about its diversity and importance.

Some European countries have already had their cultural heritage festivals inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritages. These include the Baltic song and dance celebrations[13] (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the summer solstice fire festivals in the Pyrenees[14] (Spain, Andorra and France), and the Processional giants and dragons ritual[15] in Belgium and France. Our recommendation in relation to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is twofold:

Figure 2 The XXVI Latvian Song and XVI Dance Celebration 2018 - © Aivars Liepiņš - Latvian National Centre for Culture Archive

(a) Politicians and policy-makers should support cultural agencies by drawing attention to the benefits of ratification of the Convention for living cultural heritage at EU level of the benefits of ratifying the convention.

(b) Politicians representing regions in countries that have already signed the Convention, such as Germany (2013), Finland (2013) or the Netherlands (2012), should encourage

and support cultural agencies and local communities to propose, through national or cross-border nominations, cultural heritage festivals for inclusion on the UNESCO list.

We have identified significant benefits from the participation in transnational programmes and initiatives such as those mentioned above. These benefits include:

- Precise definitions of the role and value of heritage at national and international level that can be communicated in, for example, tourism, marketing, and education.
- Enhanced social capital of the community –sense of the identity and belonging – through the prestige and educational programs of UNESCO.
- Heightened awareness of the diversity of cultural heritage across the continent.

Further reading

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Endnotes

[1]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291345426_Expanding_the_Domain_of_Festival_Research_A_Review_and_Research_Agenda
[2]https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/assets/000/001/964/Edinburgh_Festivals_-_2015_Impact_Study_Final_Report_original.pdf?1469537463
[3]https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/victims/docs/kelly0905storytelling.pdf
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FUNDING SCHEME	Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme 2014-2020, "Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", REFLECTIVE 2 (Emergence and transmission of European cultural heritage and Europeanisation)
DURATION	March 2016 – March 2019 (36 months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: €2,499,651.75
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	CoHERE has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 693289
ONLINE PRESENCE	Website: https://research.ncl.ac.uk/cohere/ Twitter: https://twitter.com/cohere_eu @cohere_eu Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/cohere.eu/