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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - Deliverable D1.1. European Public Culture and Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This inception report sets out the activities of the partners within the EURO-Festival project and constitutes the first Deliverable (D1.1) of the project. As specified in the ‘Description of Work’ (DoW) of the EC contract it provides details on the research activities carried out in Months 1-9, illustrating the theoretical and methodological approach informing the project. It also sets out the plan of research activities of the partners within the project as a whole, providing methodological guidelines for WP2 and WP3.

The report is composed of two Parts and two related Annexes.

- Part 1 – provides the details of activities to be carried out within the project as a whole and delineates the **theoretical and methodological approach**, setting the **strategy of the research** to come on the basis of the ‘state of the art’ and progress we aim to make beyond it.
- Part 2 – reports on the **literature reviews** conducted as background preparation for the research to come. It contains, classified according to our selected festival genres, overviews of the state of the art in festival research, in particular with a view to extrapolate both useful information and methodological instruments.

Each part is complemented by a related Annex:

- Annex to Part 1 – complements the main Part 1 by providing the actual **guidelines for empirical research**.
- Annex to Part 2 – complements the literature reviews reported in Part 2 by providing results of **preliminary research on our selected case studies** of festivals by genre.

Theoretical and methodological approach

Having contextualized our project within the state of the art of research on festivals, with particular attention for cultural policy and public culture issues, Part 1 of the report details how our research is inspired by recent perspectives from social and cultural theory, providing the guiding theoretical rationale and its translation into analytical approaches. Given the project’s objectives and multidisciplinary approach, this has meant first of all bringing together different theoretical traditions in the social sciences (sociology in particular) and humanities, so as to capture the equally multifaceted nature of festivals. It is both the

specification of object of inquiry (festivals) – and thematic target (transnational identities, new cultural dispositions and how they both find expression in and give form to democratic debate) that holds together and helps in finding a transversal reading of such a vast host of sources.

The original contribution the project aims to make is an innovative empirical investigation with regard to advances that have so far remained at a theoretical level of very broad social theory, in particular regarding issues of transnational identities, public sphere and cosmopolitanism, and still need to be connected to middle range sociological investigations of current phenomena. This objective will be targeted through an interpretive, in-depth approach, combining different but complementary analytical perspectives, comprising in particular discourse and frame analysis, and organisational and institutional approaches, aiming at identifying the cultural ‘repertoires’ that inform the festival ‘scenes’ or ‘fields’.

The broad leading questions that this approach will allow us to address target the relation between democratic debate and cultural creativity/production, in particular with regard to how festivals as sites of public culture may give expression to democratic debate and transnational identifications, and, therefore, what they can tell us about European culture and identity. This is synthesised in the following research objectives:

- Explore how festivals use aesthetic forms to symbolize, represent and communicate social and political life (European / national / sub-national) from the perspective of different actors, including programme directors, funding promoters, performing artists and the audience.
- Study the way in which festivals frame the discourse of identity in relation to arts with particular attention to the local / European and local / global interfaces as well as the conundrum of difference (diversity) and similarity.
- Analyze how festivals represent sites of competition for access to resources, status and power and how this competition impacts on debates about representation, openness and the public sphere.

Research strategy and design

The research strategy adopted is to develop a cultural sociology of festivals through case studies of selected major European festivals with a view to gaining an understanding of their role in the construction of a new European public sphere, related to the trans-national, cosmopolitan character of these festivals. Part 1 (Chapter 3 in particular) spells out the rationale of preliminary research conducted in parallel, and the operative methodological

guidelines elaborated specifically for the project, that we derived from our theoretical approach and analytical outlook.

We consider examples of contemporary international art festivals in (mainly Western) Europe as relatively autonomous social texts or scenes that need interpretation and contextualisation. Also, given the different expertise of partners, we decided to select specific festival types – urban mixed arts, film, literature and music festivals – and within them designated festivals to be analysed following a case study strategy. This includes first an historical analysis on the socio-cultural origins of these festivals and the traditions they might have consolidated or helped to establish. Given our principal (qualitative) sociological approach, the historical analysis supports the main, multidimensional case study strategy that contains the collection of background information (through a variety of sources), in depth interviews with key informants, fieldwork observation and focus groups during the festivals. Historical analysis and case study research each form a main component (or ‘work package’, WP) of the research. These are complemented by a preliminary research design and exploratory research phase (WP1) and by comparative analysis at the end (WP4).

State of the art in festival research: literature reviews

Research on festival is relatively scarce, especially from the comparative cultural sociological perspective adopted by our project and its substantive focus on Europeanization, democratic debate and cosmopolitanism. Contemporary, post-traditional festivals have mainly been addressed from a cultural economic perspective, focusing on their impact either in strictly economic terms, or more generally for economic, social and cultural ‘regeneration’. This is what emerges – notwithstanding sometimes substantial differences in quantity and quality of available recent research – from our joint literature reviews, conducted according to our selected genres of festivals (urban mixed arts, music, literature and film).

Each festival genre we considered stimulated different amounts and types of research; this was a useful reminder of the variety of directions we should pursue, something that a study on a single genre might have missed. Of course, this also means that the result of single literature reviews are quite different, as they report encounters with very different situations; however, this has been useful both as a source of inspiration and as a reminder of our specific approach, which we still found to be largely missing from the available material across our spectrum of analysis.

With regard to the latter, its relevance for the chosen research objectives and central issues found confirmation. Mixed arts urban festivals are particularly interesting and relevant given

our research questions because they often draw their specificity from the city that hosts them, on its 'identity' or 'sense of place', rather than from single artistic genres. At the same time, within these international festivals, that identity is also connected with the encounter with outside artists, cultures and even publics. This is perceived as enlarging the city's identity itself and is often explicitly connected to an official discourse of cosmopolitanism and transcultural exchange. The choice of music festival is perhaps even more obvious, since music is among the most enduring and influential of performing arts, and music festivals are certainly among the most popular and widespread. Music's centrality for public culture in its relevance for processes of persona and collective identity formation has been recognised and studied: music festivals as venues in which this performative and public dimension of music is made particularly visible and prominent thus constitute a privileged site of research. However, whilst music festivals are those that stimulated the wider literature so far, closely followed by studies focusing on mixed arts urban festivals, little of this directly thematises the issues that are at the core of our project. Instead, film and literature festivals revealed a surprisingly scant body of sociological research. This we found striking, first of all because film festivals are among the most established ones, and literature festivals a particularly interesting type emerging more recently. This scarce attention is also surprising given these festivals potential for research in the social sciences considering their embeddedness in recent processes of commercialisation and internationalisation, that affect all festival types but are clearly more evident when the link with a specific, strong and relatively closed industry (such as film and literature, increasingly dominated by major agencies) is so strong. More specifically still, when looked at from our particular viewpoint thematising transnational identities and democratic debate, their relevance and potential for empirical research is even more evident: both in terms of their organisation and of the discursive fields that they generate, they often quite explicitly address issues of internationalisation and identity formation and transformation.

Methodological guidelines

The case studies that make up the empirical research with the Euro-Festival project are the following:

<i>Urban-mixed arts</i>	<i>Film</i>	<i>Music</i>	<i>Literature</i>
Venice (1895)	Venice (1932)	Umbria Jazz (1973)	Hay-on-Wye (1988)
	Cannes (1946)		
Vienna (1956)	Berlin (1951)	WOMAD (1982)	Berlin (2001)
Brighton (1966)	Jewish Film Festival (1991)	Sonar (1994)	Borderland (2006)

As relevant research dimensions to be addressed to the study of festivals, both from an historical point of view and from a (cultural) sociological one, we selected the following:

- **The spatial / temporal dimension.** How are festivals structured through and by references to their local or urban environment and how do they use these to establish and justify their mission over time?
- **The economic / organizational dimension.** How do festivals function as economic organizations and operate as commercial enterprises? (the economics of festival celebration)
- **The cultural policy dimension.** How are festivals directly or indirectly influenced by cultural policy and funding for cultural activities?
- **The social actors' and network dimension.** What groups are impacting on the festivals' organization and thematic orientation? What is the role of social differentiation axes such as class, gender, race, status, ethnicity?
- **The representation dimension.** What identities and ideas are constructed and transmitted? How is content selected and value consecrated? What are the semiotics of festivals?

In each of the above five dimensions, our research is especially interested in the following themes:

- Internationalization vs. globalization vs. commercialization
- Cosmopolitanism and trans-national identities
- European identity and citizenship
- Politics, democracy and the public sphere

This has been translated in detailed and specific guidelines, for both historical analysis and case study research, that are fully included in Annex to Part I of D 1.1.

Historical analysis

Each festival has its own specific history as a cultural institution or organization and in relation to its component elements, that is its location, its timing, and the art(s) it represents. Our project considers several festivals, among which we find eight with a longer history and four with a shorter history. Archives are relevant for those festivals with a longer history but are not always accessible.

The historical analysis of festivals will be organised around the dimension listed above. Given the project's constraints and main objectives, it will clearly not be possible or advisable to carry an in-depth historical analysis of all festivals and of the festival culture as such. For the purpose of historical analysis, it is therefore proposed to focus on one (or at most two) festival(s) for each genre. Clearly, those festivals with the longer history are more interesting for a historical analysis. The decision regarding which festivals to focus on in WP2 rests with the partners in charge of each festival type.

The guidelines for historical analysis detail the periods to focus on, the issues to address and the sources to target within historical analysis, as well as including a time plan.

Case study research

The EURO-festival project will employ the following methodologies in the framework of the case study research design:

- Compilation of background information on each of the festivals such as recent programmes, list of programming directors, budgetary information, list of sponsors and amounts committed, audience statistics etc.

- Expert in-depth interviews with programme managers, relevant (cultural) policy stakeholders, funders and/or sponsors, as well as performing artists
- Fieldwork observation / site visits
- Focus groups (targeting festival participants)

Some of the above methodologies are being used for the purpose of tapping on background information alone, others for tapping on opinions and/or representations. The majority will be used for both purposes.

Guidelines for case study research detail: what to collect as background information as well as what sources to target and how to report on this; how to conduct in-depth expert interviews (including as Appendix the full interview guide and reporting guide); how to carry out fieldwork observation and report on it. A preliminary guide for conducting focus groups is also provided, and a time plan.

Preliminary research results

Festivals are complex organisations displaying multiple dimensions, therefore there are several ways to look at them. The social scientific literature on festivals is, however, comparatively limited in scope and displays recurrent themes. Festival-specific publicity, such as that included in programmes, annual reports, and related publications (online and on paper), also tends to cover similar items and displays similar formats. In this preliminary phase we aimed at charting this available information; that is, what is already in the public domain but has not been collected and systematised for research purposes (the collection of such background information, beyond what was readily available and could be collected as a preliminary step, will also continue during our main empirical work). The main dimensions we decided to explore, also on the basis of what previous research on festivals had shown to be relevant and available, were the following:

- Inception and history
- Events and thematic structure
- Funding and organization
- Urban context and impact
- Competitors, partners and networks
- Archive

This first exercise in preliminary research was also important in order to get a better sense of the scope of the subsequent in-depth research and analysis.