



Research Fellow 

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Festival Futures: prototyping
peer-to-peer foresight mentoring
for festival makers

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People must learn to celebrate again, because in the experience of celebration the necessary transformation of consciousness occurs, unintentionally and unnoticed, which people are unable to bring about through mere intention and rational consideration. Otto Friedrich Bollnow, 1978 (translation by the author)

To put it bluntly, this is also the reason for the great educational significance of the festival: to create community. But secondly, which is no less important: the entire relationship to reality is also changing. Nature is no longer the material to be dominated, shaped and violated; the sharp division between subject and object disappears. Nature also becomes something fraternally related. Otto Friedrich Bollnow, 1978 (translation by the author)

There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns.
Octavia Butler, 1998

Abstract

How can foresight practices help festival makers to create more sustainable, inclusive and resilient festivals? This research question was explored via a mixed methods approach including literature review, qualitative interviews with festival makers from European and Canadian festivals, and the design and organization of a peer-to-peer foresight mentoring prototype. This report documents the research process that took place from April - September 2023 and was developed within the collaborative framework of the CIRCE research fellowship. The report gathers insights about the challenges that festival makers face today and discusses the potential of foresight for the festival sector. As the main outcome, a peer-to-peer foresight mentoring prototype was developed that adapts to the needs of festival makers. It combines existing methodologies such as narrative foresight, narrative strategy and collaborative design for inter-festival collaboration. It is one of the first applications of collaborative foresight methods in the festival sector.

Main Insight

Today, festivals are among the most significant spaces for creative co-production (Taylor, Bennett & Woodward, 2014). They form an important part of the creative industries. In 2018, in Switzerland alone, festivals and cultural events generated over CHF 2.8 billion revenue. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to the sector, disrupting existing business models, but also leading to innovation. Even after the end of the pandemic and its disruptions, the future of many festivals is uncertain. Festivals are confronted with a multi-layered imperative to innovate, while maintaining their operations: digitalization, changing social needs of audiences, shortage of skilled labour and the challenge to reduce carbon emissions in the face of the climate crisis and require new strategies and capacities.

One key skill that can help festival makers in this endeavour is futures literacy: the capacity to anticipate and prepare for different possible futures and to reflect their role in present

decision-making. The main objective of this research project is the application and fostering of futures literacy in the festival sector. While first approaches to increase futures literacy exist in the creative industries, they are still rare in the festival sector. The hypothesis of this research project is that via introducing foresight practices to festival makers, the sector can build capacities for futures literacy. Festivals, thus, are supported in anticipating and preparing for potential future disruptions and navigating the transformations at hand more confidently. The second hypothesis is that prototyping a foresight process tailored to the needs of festival makers is the most suitable form for doing so. As the festival sector is highly diverse, this project focuses on film festivals and art festivals with a strong audiovisual component.

The guiding research question of this project is: *how can foresight practices help festivals become more resilient, inclusive and sustainable?* Each category addresses a particular challenge in the festival sector and specifies one central area of transformation. The research project started with a critical literature review on existing foresight practices in the festival sector. The review shows that, while there are attempts to apply foresight in the sector, foresight for inter-festival collaboration is still rare. While foresight frameworks are an established practice in many other sectors, most festivals currently neither have the capacity nor expertise for them. Building on these insights, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with festival makers. The interviews gathered insights and reflections on the current state of festivals, the challenges of festival makers face today and imagined futures of festivals. Departing from this, a peer-to-peer foresight mentoring prototype was developed. The process blends methods such as narrative foresight, narrative strategy and reflections on the purpose and cultures of festival making. Parts of the prototyping took place during a workshop at the NEW NOW Festival 2023 in Essen, where festival makers from Europe and Canada gathered with experts on sufficiency to learn from each other.

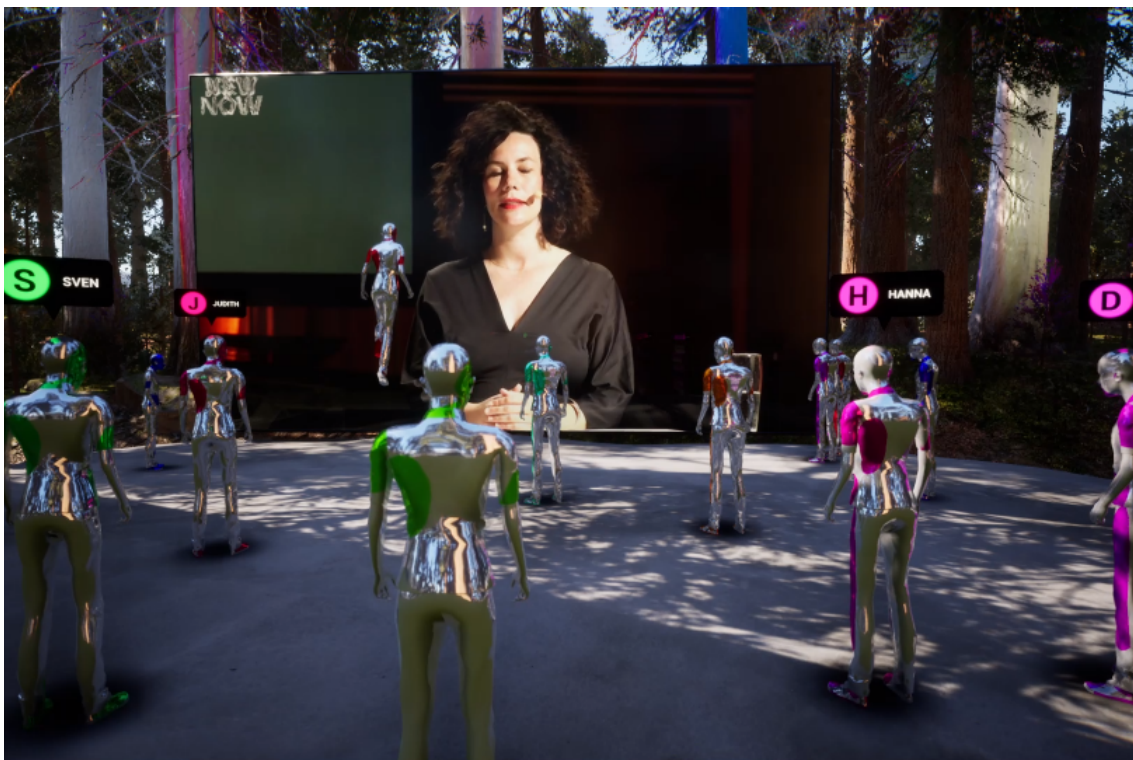
The prototype guides a systematic discussion among festival makers to identify and discuss different possible futures and pathways with a specific focus on sustainability, inclusion and resilience goals. It is designed to generate practical guidance for festival makers, enabling anticipation of and preparation for potential disruptions and changes. By developing a peer-to-peer mentoring foresight prototype for festivals, the research project hopes to enable festival organizers to navigate the uncertain future of the industry with greater confidence and build futures literacy. It also aims to spark a sector-wide conversation on shared concerns, efforts and strategies to make festivals more sustainable, inclusive and resilient in the future.

This report documents the different phases of the research project and the insights that were gained throughout them. Special attention is paid to the transformational narratives and concepts festival makers themselves proposed to anticipate different futures for their festivals. In doing so, the question is raised how the present crises could lead to long-term innovations in the sector. Finally, the report also aims to advocate for the important work of festival makers that is often hard to quantify and amplify the call of festival makers for a shared repository of exercises that can help festivals with skill sharing and resource sharing.

Research Trajectory

Background

During the initial months of the corona pandemic, festival makers faced unprecedented challenges. Accustomed to planning events that gathered hundreds or thousands in close proximity, they were suddenly confronted with a world where social distancing became the norm. Many festivals that were months, if not years, in the planning were abruptly cancelled or postponed. This led to significant financial losses, strained relationships with funders and partners, and a wave of disappointment among attendees and festival communities. The uncertainty of the situation was palpable, with regulations and recommendations constantly evolving. Indeed, the first months of the pandemic were also a time of many new experiments. Some festival makers explored virtual formats, trying to capture the essence of their events online, while others sought innovative ways to maintain engagement with their audience. Communication became crucial, both in terms of informing stakeholders of changes and in listening to the concerns and needs of their communities. But also emotionally, it was a tumultuous time for everyone involved in creating festivals. Festival makers, passionate about bringing people together through music, art, and cinema, were forced to confront the potential loss of their livelihoods.



NEW NOW Festival for digital arts on August 27th, 2021 in metaverse by Journee © Rafael Dernbach

Are festivals stuck in the present?

My perspective as a curator of conversations at festivals was one of the points of departure for this research project. Indeed, in many conversations with other festival makers a need to talk about the future of festival emerged during and after the pandemic. Our perspective on

festivals after the pandemic was paradoxical. On the one hand, we saw many innovations during the pandemic, on the other hand we had the feeling that festivals became stuck in the present. In the aftermath of the pandemic, the immediate pressures of financial and organizational survival dominated the focus of many festivals. Immersed in the complexities of day-to-day adaptations, festivals had little space to think beyond the immediate challenges. While there were attempts at innovation, many of these initiatives were short-lived, often implemented as temporary solutions rather than long-term strategies. Some festivals even faced a more profound crisis, questioning their ongoing relevance in a world so drastically changed. This experience, combined with the daily operational pressures, often constrained their ability to look ahead with optimism and vision.

Festivals as political acts

And yet, in these initial conversations of the project also another motif and perspective on festivals emerged. In a world that increasingly gravitates towards individualized experiences, carved by algorithms and personal preferences, sharing experiences is a political act. The individualization of experience enabled by technology, while comforting, seeds isolation, narrowing one's world view and diluting the rich spectrum and unpredictability of social interaction. Festivals can be a significant counter-narrative. They stand as a powerful testament to the human need for shared experiences, collective expression, and community engagement. Festivals are political acts - not in the classical sense of political decision-making, but as a vibrant assertion of communal existence and shared experience.

They can transcend barriers, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives, stories, and emotions emerge and intertwine. Every short conversation, every shared moment of music, cinema or performance, and every collective laugh or cheer is a rebuke to the isolating tendencies of an excessively isolating and personalized world. Festivals are beacons of community, they celebrate sharing, igniting connections that defy algorithmic divisions and offer a potent reminder of our intrinsic interconnectivity. In an ever-more customized world, festivals rise as a call for community, emphasizing the profound power and political significance of shared experiences.

Foresight for Festivals

Departing from these conversations, at the start of this project I wanted to explore new ways of looking into the future for festivals and festival makers. During my time as a researcher at Futurium, House of Futures, in Berlin, I had encountered a variety of philosophical and methodological approaches to thinking about the future. There, I had the chance to collaborate with a diverse range of theorists and practitioners from the fields of future studies, technology assessment, science communication and political participation. I learned at Futurium that different communities and organizations require different methods to come to meaningful conversations about the future. And that the attempts to promote a one-fits-all solution to increase futures literacy are often bound to fail.

Accordingly, the hypothesis of this project is that festivals can navigate their post-pandemic challenges by the application of foresight that are tailored to their specific needs. Foresight

practices are usually associated with corporate and governmental strategy development. Over the past decades, however, they have transcended their institutional boundaries and are now increasingly applied across organizations and NGO (see Duin, 2016). Many organizations, now, systematically employ foresight to anticipate potential future scenarios and reflect their current decision-making in the light of different possible futures. Foresight includes a broad range of methods such as scenario building, horizon scanning or narrative foresight. These methods aid organizations in envisioning diverse potential outcomes and in crafting strategies to navigate them. More concretely, they are used to preemptively assess impacts of emerging technologies, societal and ecological shifts and frame decision-making.

Furthermore, there is a strong self-reflexive element in foresight. During a foresight process, organizations reflect their contribution to different possible futures and the path-dependency of their decisions. This element is of particular importance for festivals and the creative sector, as both play an instrumental role in constructing and disseminating anticipated futures, shaping public imagination and perception. Given this backdrop, festivals, which are microcosms of broader societal interactions, stand to gain significantly by adopting foresight both for their own operations, but also for clarifying their contribution to the future. Such an adoption not only allows them to envision and prepare for potential challenges but also to mold these anticipated futures to be more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive, thereby redefining their trajectory in a post-pandemic world. A guiding principle to specify the impact of foresight in organization is the concept of 'futures literacy'. According to UNESCO, futures literacy is "a capability, a skill that allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do." It combats the 'poverty-of-the-imagination' and empowers individuals to prepare, recover, and invent adaptive responses to changes, aided by an enhanced capacity to imagine diverse future scenarios.

Research Question

How can foresight practices help festival makers to create more sustainable, inclusive and resilient festivals?

The guiding research question of the project specifies the search for foresight practices that can help festival maker to three key challenges: resilience, inclusion, and sustainability. This focus corresponds with existing discussions about the future in the sector. But most importantly, choosing this focus re-directs the attention from technological innovation to organizational and social innovation. While technology plays an important role in creating more sustainable, more inclusive and more resilient festivals, it can rarely be considered the main driver of innovation.

For this project, I will operate with a definition of resilience by Folke et al. (2010) as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change. Resilience building is crucial for organizations in a rapidly shifting socio-economic and technological landscape. Indeed, according to Folke et al. (2010), resilience is the ability of a system to cope with change, utilizing adaptive strategies to maintain its core purpose and integrity. In the context of post-pandemic festivals, resilience implies a festival's capacity to reorganize, adapt, and even capitalize on the disruptions brought about by unexpected events.

Inclusion is already a concern of many festivals, today. In the project, I use a definition articulated by Fraser (2009). Here, inclusion is about ensuring that all individuals, irrespective of their background, have an equal opportunity to participate, be represented, and have their voices heard. Young (2000) stresses that inclusion requires an active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity. For festivals, this translates to breaking down socio-cultural, economic, and physical barriers, ensuring that marginalized groups are not only represented but are active participants in festival experiences.

Regarding sustainability, I position my understanding within the paradigm outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Established by the United Nations in 2015, the SDGs provide a universal blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future, addressing global challenges like poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation. These 17 goals interlink and are grounded in the principle of "leaving no one behind." Within the context of festivals, the SDGs underscore a holistic approach to sustainability that integrates environmental, social, and economic considerations. This perspective is crucial for understanding festivals, as they inherently touch on multiple facets of society and environment. Central to sustainability is the commitment that today's decisions and actions don't jeopardize opportunities for future generations. In his work, Sachs (2015) elucidates on the SDGs, highlighting not only their environmental focus but also their inherent emphasis on societal well-being and justice. As I see it, when festivals embrace this comprehensive approach to sustainability, they don't merely consider their environmental footprint but actively champion social justice and aim for an equitable and viable economic model.

Prototyping a Peer-to-Peer Foresight Mentoring

The project's conceptual framework is grounded in transformative learning, which posits that individuals reshape and expand their perspectives through critical reflection and experiential learning. By equipping festival makers with anticipatory skills and a proactive mindset, foresight has the potential to transform festivals from mere events to visionary platforms for societal change.

Taking into account the specific needs of festivals, my idea early in the process was to design a peer-to-peer foresight mentoring process in the form of a workshop or series of workshops that can be adapted, and thus help festival makers from different contexts. Such adaptive workshops would allow festival makers to uncover innovative pathways to not only navigate, but also shape future uncertainties. The prevailing methodologies employed by many festival professionals often still exhibit a reactive posture, addressing issues as they arise rather than preemptively preparing for them. This reactive approach creates a vacuum where festival professionals are frequently in a state of catch-up, potentially compromising the long-term viability of festivals. By opening a space for foresight, festival makers can be better equipped to ensure their events are sustainable, inclusive, and resilient. It emphasizes the notion of festivals as foresight means, transforming them from mere cultural events into proactive platforms that anticipate and prepare for future challenges.

It was also clear to me from the start that this peer-to-peer mentoring should gather different makers from different festivals for collaboration and exchange. As the festival landscape is characterized by its high organizational diversity and fluidity, an approach adaptable to

different contexts and environments is paramount. Rather than a static, planning model or guideline to imagine the future, building future literacy is a dynamic, adaptive process. This speaks not only to the diversity of the sector, but also takes into account that festivals are not just cultural events but are complex ecosystems influenced by a myriad of variables including social trends, economic fluctuations, and environmental conditions. Any attempt to help festivals with foresight requires a holistic, adaptive approach that considers the particular conditions of a festival.

Significance and Limitations

The transformation of festivals into more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient entities is of great importance, not just for the cultural landscape but for society at large. When festivals adopt these attributes, they hold the potential to transform local and global communities. A sustainable festival minimizes its environmental footprint, paving the way for reduced waste and promoting eco-conscious practices. By doing so, it sets a precedent for attendees, encouraging them to implement similar sustainable practices in their daily lives, thereby contributing to broader ecological conservation. Inclusivity in festivals ensures that individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, or physical abilities, feel represented and valued. Inclusive festivals can foster mutual respect, understanding, and unity among attendees from different backgrounds. This inclusiveness breaks barriers, facilitating dialogues, and thus, contributes to understanding among local and global communities. Finally, a resilient festival can quickly adapt to unforeseen challenges, ensuring continuity. In doing so, it can offer a consistent cultural and economic contribution to their communities, supporting local businesses and promoting tourism, while also providing attendees with an unwavering source of entertainment and enlightenment.

Scope and Limitations

This study predominantly focuses on film festivals and art festivals with a strong audiovisual component, given their distinct challenges during the pandemic (see Damiens & De Valck, 2023 and Krainhöfer & Kurz, 2022). Geographically, the research centers on festivals based in Europe and North America, considering their historical significance and the evolving challenges they face in the current socio-economic context. As for the foresight focus, the study will emphasize its application in enhancing sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience, while other potential benefits might not be extensively covered. One challenge is the diverse nature of festivals even within this category, which makes uniform application of foresight techniques complex. Moreover, there might be inherent biases based on the festivals chosen and the regions they belong to, which could limit the generalizability of the project's findings to other festival types or regions.

Research Process

Literature Review

The literature review section delves into existing scholarly and industry literature to offer insights into research on the festival sector. In particular, existing approaches to foresight in the festival sector are gathered and analysed. The review is guided by two questions: firstly, what kinds of foresight practices have historically been applied within the festival sector? This inquiry seeks to map the trajectory of foresight application and to discern patterns or methodologies that have proven particularly efficacious. Secondly, how have festivals reacted to the Covid-19 pandemic? This question is poised to uncover current innovation practices, strategies, and pitfalls documented in the research literature. The literature review aims to shed light on barriers that might impede long-term strategic planning in the festival domain.

Foresight research in the festival sector

The research literature shows that a range of approaches to adapt foresight in the festival sector have been developed in the past ten years. The research on foresight practices fall into three categories. The first category of papers analyses the application of foresight practices by festivals, while the second one studies festivals to develop sector-wide future scenarios. A third category of papers analyze festivals as a method and space to practice futures thinking more generally.

Lorincz, Formadi, and Ernszt (2023) investigate the adoption of risk management models in the festival industry, highlighting the challenges and risks faced by festival organizers during the pandemic and the need for more flexible management decisions to deal with uncertainty. They assess the adoption of the PwC Risk Management Model's four pillars: detect, protect, react, and restore, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic by festivals in the Veszprém–Balaton region in Hungary. Through structured interviews with 19 event organizers and a questionnaire involving 1133 festival attendees, the research identified major challenges like uncertainty, financial strain, and increased mental burdens, yet also pinpointed positive shifts such as a preference for smaller, family-oriented events. The paper emphasizes the future role of festival-goers in supporting sustainable practices and underscores the need for more adaptable management strategies and a commitment to sustainability among festival organizers.

Similarly, De Valck & Damiens (2023) study the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on film festivals. Their edited volume challenges many narratives about festivals during the pandemic. On one hand, they criticize the traditional linear understanding of crisis management, which views crises as tests revealing an organization's adaptability or lack thereof. They argue that many innovations adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, like virtual festivals, were pre-existing solutions rather than direct responses to the crisis. On the other, they observe that festival makers often opted for temporary solutions to maintain the festival experience, rather than implementing long-term organizational changes.

Andersson (2008) analyzes the social and cultural community roles of festivals' and their influence on the sustainability of festival. The paper investigates stakeholder support and management strategies using a survey from 14 live-music festivals in Sweden. For long-term viability, festivals should achieve 'institutional status,' carve a unique community 'niche,'

maintain dedicated stakeholders, and continually innovate. Although foresight is not explicitly mentioned, the paper proposes a strong integration of stakeholders and communities in strategy development. Brito and Terzieva (2016) investigate European music festivals as case studies, describing elements for designing strategies focused on social and environmental hospitality value. Key components identified for successful strategies include visionary leadership, authenticity, and strategic partnerships, leading to a suggested design approach for events emphasizing sustainability. Based on their findings, the researchers a three-phase model for designing a strategy for aimed at generating social and environmental value, including the discovery, development and delivery processes.

A second category of papers applies foresight methods to develop future scenarios for the festival sector more generally. Yeoman et al. (2021) examine the future of food festivals using the Wellington on a Plate (WOAP) event as a case study, emphasizing the growing role of food-related events in the experience economy and their socio-economic benefits for communities. Through interviews with 12 individuals, the study identified 22 drivers of change influencing food festivals, including factors like mobility, technological immersion, and shifts in social demography. Building on these findings, a conceptual framework is proposed, focusing on five key success factors: the political capital of food festivals, their visionary state, community engagement, the pursuit of affluence and exclusivity, and the evolving identity of food enthusiasts.

Robertson, Yeoman, Smith, and McMahon-Beattie (2015) highlight the challenges faced by many music festivals, as they often fail to provide experiences that resonate with attendees. The authors suggest that embracing new technologies and virtual landscapes can enhance sensory experiences and connect more meaningfully with festival-goers. Through trend analysis, scenarios, and science fiction, their study proposes prototypes for future music festivals that not only ensure relevance but also contribute to positive social outcomes.

A third category of research describes how festivals can act as platforms for practising foresight and futures thinking. Selkirk, Selin, and Felt (2018) investigate the Emerge festival at Arizona State University to highlight the value of art and design in providing a tangible and experiential medium for exploring nonlinear futures and the complex temporalities. The study underscores the role of innovative foresight methods in enhancing anticipatory skills, such as critical reflection and responsible decision-making, positioning them as essential tools in navigating an uncertain future. A value of festivals can be to argue against viewing the future as a linear extension of the past and present, by making futures experienceable. Similarly, Perry (2020) argues that festivals are sites that can illuminate wider concerns in sustainable urban development. As manifestations of the entanglement of tangible and intangible heritage properties, they can help their communities to imagine alternative futures.

It can be concluded that the application of foresight in the festival sector is a relatively new phenomenon. While different approaches to apply its methods have been carried out, to the knowledge of the author, no foresight model for collaboration between festival makers has been developed to this date. Highlighting the collaborative potential of foresight, therefore, guides the subsequent development of a foresight mentoring process tailored to the needs of festival makers.

Qualitative Interviews

For the qualitative component of this project, festival makers from six festivals spanning different geographical regions were interviewed. These included festival makers from Filmfest Hamburg in Germany, I Land Sound in Estonia, MUTEK in Canada, Mois Multi in Canada, NEW NOW Festival in Germany and the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland. To limit the scope of the project, festival makers from film festivals and art festivals that have a pronounced audiovisual component were recruited. This focus aims to delve into specific nuances and challenges associated with these types of festivals, offering a more concentrated and in-depth analysis. The selection of the interviewees was designed to align with the study's research objectives. An emphasis was placed on securing participants occupying senior management or curatorial roles within their respective festivals. This decision ensured that the insights gathered would come from individuals involved in the decision-making processes and who possess a comprehensive understanding of festival's strategy development. Furthermore, a keen interest in contemplating the future trajectories of festivals was deemed essential, ensuring that the respondents would provide forward-looking and visionary perspectives. Availability during the study's timeframe was another practical consideration.

During the interviews, four main themes emerged:

1. Festivals are under pressure.
2. Festivals are laboratories for transformation and new social practices.
3. Initiatives to increase resilience, sustainability and inclusivity are varied but 'insular'.
4. Festival makers are looking for new formats to learn from each other.

1. Festivals are under pressure.

The interviews revealed common challenges of festivals after the pandemic. At the forefront is the current economic strain from inflation, which intensifies the financial risks of festival making. This is exacerbated by increased operational costs and the challenges associated with securing suitable venues due to rising rents and gentrification, especially in urban areas. Particularly, festivals that are largely reliant on ticket sales are grappling with escalated operational expenses and the resultant financial vulnerability. Costs associated with technical equipment have surged, and the increased fees for workers, artists, and speakers are adding to the budgetary pressures. Concurrently, interviews mentioned short-term funding structures as jeopardized long-term planning and stability.

Furthermore, the departure of key personnel post-pandemic, termed as a 'sector exit' by interviewees, has left a palpable skills gap, affecting many festivals' operational capabilities. Mental well-being has emerged as a critical concern, with reports of burnout and mental health issues among festival teams. Furthermore, there's an increasing scrutiny of festivals' environmental impact, pushing for more sustainable practices. This was perceived as a positive development, and simultaneously as a challenge to many established practices in the sector (e.g. intercontinental flights, international booking of artists). Inclusivity challenges were mentioned, particularly driven by aging audience demographics and potential financial exclusions due to ticket pricing. In the interviews also the broader societal and political

context in Europe emerged as a challenge. Marked by political polarization, festival makers raised concerns about safety at events of members of marginalized communities and the fear of politically motivated public funding cuts. Of the discussed challenges, economic inflation and financial sustainability were perceived as the most pressing one, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the future of many events. There was agreement among interviewees that addressing these issues requires a concerted and collaborative effort among festival makers and intensified political advocacy for festivals.

2. Festivals are laboratories for transformative practices.

From the interviews emerged a second common theme, describing festivals as "laboratories for transformation". While not all interviewed festival makers used this particular metaphor, the role of festivals as experimental grounds for novel social practices was raised in all interviews. In several interviews, it was mentioned that festivals create temporal communities and that participants tend to be more open to novel experiences and social practices in a festival context than in their everyday lives. Some festival makers consciously curate their festivals to promoting more sustainable lifestyles or actively thinking of festivals as places for democratic dialogue. Indeed, the political notion of festival making as a community practice was stressed. One interviewee called festivals the "heartbeat of democracy" underscoring their role in fostering dialogue, promoting freedom of expression, and making community experienceable. It was also implied that festivals carry a particular responsibility. Rather than neutral gatherings, they were perceived as embedded within broader cultural and political landscapes that they have an active role in and influence on.

Festival makers also described their events as "more memorable" and "immersive" than digital equivalents, signifying that festivals offer a depth of engagement surpassing that of many other social gatherings or events. This intensified experience can be attributed to the shared narratives and collective participation that festivals foster. They act as "temporary communities", providing attendees with a concentrated sense of belonging and interaction. An interesting analytical point that emerged is the framing of festivals making as the "art of hosting". This suggests that festivals are about the curation of experience, a meticulous orchestration of interactions, and narratives to achieve a desired collective response. In sum, festivals, were not perceived merely as events but complex entities that intertwine art, social experimentation, and communal engagement. Their potential impact was perceived to extend long beyond the event itself.

3. Resilience, sustainability and inclusivity initiatives at festivals are varied but 'insular'.

Regarding existing initiatives for resilience, sustainability and inclusion, another common theme came up in the interviews. Festival makers described a broad variety of initiatives at their own festivals or at festivals that they had attended. However, initiatives were perceived to remain insular and localized. These initiatives were described as tangible practices such as waste reduction, recycling promotion, and the adoption of eco-friendly materials. Other initiatives focused on the sharing of skills. Notably, The I Land Sound Festival in Estonia, for instance, has established a repository of best sustainability practices, which are made

accessible to the public via their website. Such transparency not only exhibits accountability but also acts as a beacon for other festivals seeking inspiration.

Initiatives for more inclusive festivals were described as focussing on both removing barriers of attendance for marginalized communities and active partnering with representatives from these communities. The introduction of awareness teams was mentioned as a crucial step, as well as the establishment of socially sensitive ticketing schemes. The NEW NOW Festival stands out with its policy of free entrance, while also strengthening community ties through collaborations with local schools and by training local volunteers as festival guides. By emphasizing the philosophy of creating festivals "with communities" rather than merely "for them", they underscore the importance of holistic community integration. However, there are perceivable impediments. Economic pressures, heightened by inflation and the prevailing polarized political atmosphere, were perceived to pose potential threats to these inclusion initiatives. There's an underlying fear that these pressures might dilute existing inclusivity goals. In conclusion, the interviewees described a myriad of sustainability and inclusion initiatives. Yet, their varied and insular nature calls for a more integrated and collaborative approach.

4. Festival makers are looking for new formats to learn from each other.

Another recurring theme in the interviews was the desire to learn from other festival makers. Several festival makers described a lack of opportunities and platforms for festival makers to exchange knowledge and launch inter-festival collaboration. Such platforms should foster learning, sharing, and perhaps even standardization of some of the best practices across developed by festivals. Some festival makers described that their festival excels at specific transformations such as sustainability, while lacking expertise in fields such as inclusion. The expressed desire of festival makers to engage in mutual learning underscores the potential for a future where festivals not only draw from their individual experiences but also from the insights of the larger festival community. Festival professionals see immense value in sharing best practices, insights, and learnings with their peers. The described vision was twofold: to elevate individual festivals by drawing from the collective wisdom of the sector and to foster a sense of solidarity and shared purpose among festivals.

Secondly, there was a wish for a structured process that enables festivals to reflect their future. This is not merely about predicting trends or identifying potential challenges, but about crafting a narrative that aligns with the festival's identity and purpose and helps to narrate its impact to funders, partners and its communities. Festival makers described the challenge to communicate the value, significance, and transformative potential of their events in a manner that resonates with stakeholders. This wish indicates a desire to also address indirect and intangible impacts, such as community engagement, cultural enrichment, and innovation. In conclusion, festival makers are not merely looking for predictive tools when thinking of foresight but are imagining frameworks that help to narrate their future impact with clarity, purpose, and a sense of collective endeavour.

Collaborative Workshop at the NEW NOW Festival

As part of the research process, I curated a test workshop with festival makers at the NEW NOW Festival in Essen on 3 June 2023. This day-long workshop for festival makers was realized in collaboration with the sufficiency researchers Wiktoria Furrer and René Inderbitzin from Zurich Knowledge Center for Sustainable Development (ZKSD), Maurice Jones from Canadian Future of Festivals network and Jasmin Grimm, the artistic director of the NEW NOW Festival. The idea was to invite festival makers to a day-long series of workshops and discussions on sustainability and the future of festival at the NEW NOW Festival. The day-long programme was met with great resonance, with 20 festival makers from Europe and Canada attending. The aim was to test and experience foresight and collaborative exercise with festival makers in action. Emphasizing the idea of “research with” rather than “research about” festival makers, the curation of the day was emergent. While certain sections were prepared and organized by invited experts (such as ZKSD), the format and exercises of other sections emerged from the discussion during the day.

Particularly, the section by the sufficiency experts Wiktoria Furrer and René Inderbitzin was insightful and this described here in more detail. The "Patchwork of Futures - The Challenge of Sufficiency" workshop embarked on an exploration of sufficiency within the contemporary backdrop of global challenges and the constraints imposed by the traditional industrial growth model. At its core, this workshop aimed to tackle pivotal questions concerning the trajectory of societal growth in the future—what should expand, and what demands restraint? Conducted over a 3-hour duration, the workshop acknowledged the diversity of values and future aspirations held by individuals, seeking to catalyze collaborative efforts toward a future that is both desirable and sustainable. Central to its discourse was the realization that the conventional paradigm of economic growth is rapidly approaching material thresholds, ushering in a critical need for innovative approaches - especially for festivals.



Festival Futures Workshop at NEW NOW Festival Essen in collaboration with ZKSD and the Future of Festivals Network © Dirk Rose / Stiftung Zollverein

The workshop's overarching goal was to raise awareness of sufficiency and empower festival makers to enact changes in their festivals towards sufficiency. The workshop encouraged to contemplate an array of future scenarios, inviting dialogue on aligning their ideas with sufficiency principles. It placed particular emphasis on the possibility of attaining a fulfilling life without the perpetual expansion of resource consumption—a paradigm shift toward a more sustainable existence. Through collaborative efforts within smaller groups, participants charted pathways leading to sufficiency-driven futures, intricately linked to their individual interpretations of the "good life."

The workshop further introduced the concept of "Sufficiency Roadmaps" as valuable tools to guide festival makers in linking their envisioned futures to "Compasses of the Good Life." These roadmaps effectively identified actionable steps and potential barriers on the path to realizing sufficiency-focused futures for their respective festivals. Beyond the confines of the workshop, its overarching mission extended to society at large—to elevate awareness surrounding sufficiency and empower festival makers to proactively modify their lifestyles in alignment with sufficiency principles. This multifaceted approach also sought to engage participants in actively combatting the structural underpinnings of unsustainable growth.



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Analysis / Peer-to-Peer Foresight Mentoring Design

Concept

The proposed foresight mentoring process aims to combine foresight methods with collaborative design. It is developed in response to the needs of festival makers described in the previous sections of this report. Accordingly, the process aspires to equip festival makers with a guided foresight process to increase futures literacy and a space for inter-festival collaboration to sculpting more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable futures for their festivals.

At the heart of this process is the idea of a peer-to-peer foresight mentoring. I understand this a curated learning experience among equals that aims for a better understanding of different possible futures and their role in present narratives. Echoing the sentiment that "festival makers want to learn from each other," this approach combines existing foresight methodology with the Barcamp method as a collaborative format for exchange of ideas and visions. The idea of peer-to-peer foresight aims to open a collaborative environment that focuses on the challenges, potential futures and goals of festivals without losing sight of their social, ecological and institutional environment.

To facilitate a meaningful peer-to-peer format, the prototype will utilize a value-based match making approach to gather festival makers. By pairing festival makers with shared values or complementary insights, the foresight mentoring process aims to foster deep, meaningful professional connections. Guided by expert facilitation, one of the standout features of this process will be the development of a robust narrative strategy. Given the increasing emphasis on effectively communicating the impact and relevance of festivals to diverse stakeholders, crafting compelling narratives about possible futures is paramount. Such narratives will empower festival professionals to articulate their value proposition, vision, and the transformative role they play in society.

Recognizing the critical importance of sustainability and inclusion in today's festival landscape, the foresight mentoring process also makes space for "sustainability skill sharing" and "skill sharing for inclusion". These segments are designed as platforms for festival makers to share, exchange, and adapt best practices, and transformative ideas, amplifying their collective efforts towards a more sustainable and inclusive festival environment.

Emphasizing the significance of an immersive learning environment, the proposed foresight mentoring process is set to take place during an actual festival, ensuring embedded learning. Such a setting does not merely serve as a thematic backdrop; it immerses participants in the very essence of what they are strategizing about, resulting in insights and solutions that are deeply contextual, relevant, and actionable. This also resonates with the necessity of a comprehensive understanding of an organization's environment to develop effective foresight.

Aims

The aims of the prototype are formulated in response to the insights from the presented literature review and the interviews with festival makers. They address the needs of festival makers for a shared space for collaboration and a systematic process for guiding discussions about more sustainable, inclusive and resilient futures. Accordingly, I have identified three main aims for the prototype:

1. **Mapping a purpose-focused foresight landscape:** The current challenges of festivals demand a new clarity of vision that guides decisions with long-term consequences. The process, thus, aims to map the multitude of potential futures that a festival is embedded in, enabling festival makers to articulate a clear and coherent purpose and derive actionable goals from it.
2. **Developing a narrative strategy:** The process' ambition is to foster future literacy among festival makers, empowering them to conceptualize and communicate transformative narratives. This aspect is especially critical as stakeholders, be it funders, attendees, or collaborators, seek demonstrable value beyond mere transactional engagements. A narrative strategy is critical for this.
3. **Peer-to-peer mentoring with festival makers:** Recognizing the profound value of existing knowledge in the festival sector, the process is designed to curate spaces where this knowledge is not just disseminated, but actively exchanged. Through structured dialogues and collaborative activities, professionals can pool their insights,

co-create solutions, and participate in shared capacity building. This inter-festival collaboration is a proactive step towards a more integrated, holistic, and resilient festival industry.

Methods

The proposed process is rooted in a triangulated methodological foundation. For the first two aims (foresight landscape, narrative strategy), methodological frameworks of narrative foresight (Milojević and Inayatullah, 2015) and narrative strategy (Fischer-Appelt & Dernbach, 2022) are adapted. Their insights provide a structured approach to explore, challenge, and re-envision the future, guiding participants to craft compelling narratives that resonate with stakeholders and shape festival trajectories. For the third aim of the prototype an adaptation of the Barcamp framework is proposed. Each framework is briefly introduced in the following section.

Narrative Foresight / Narrative Strategy

For Milojević and Inayatullah's (2015) narrative foresight emphasizes the importance of the stories that entities, from individuals to civilizations, convey about the future. Instead of merely focusing on what the future holds in terms of technological advancements, narrative foresight delves deeper, exploring the foundational myths and worldviews that shape our visions of potential, probable, and preferred futures. The methodology seeks to transition from the prevailing myths or metaphors towards those that align better with a desirable future. Rooted in the understanding that stories shape our perceptions and actions, this method leverages the power of narrative to not only convey possible future scenarios but also to engage stakeholders in a collaborative envisioning process.

The core process of narrative foresight begins with the collection and analysis of narratives – these can be derived from literature, expert interviews, participatory workshops, or any other source rich in descriptive insights. These stories, which may be based on current realities, historical accounts, or speculative fiction, are dissected to understand the underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions of the narrators, as well as the larger societal context in which they are embedded. Themes, patterns, and archetypes are identified, which serve as the building blocks for constructing multiple future scenarios. These scenarios are not mere extrapolations of current trends but are imaginative constructs that offer a wide range of possible futures. Once formed, they become the springboard for strategic conversations, where stakeholders engage with these narratives, challenging or reshaping them based on their insights, aspirations, and concerns.

The use of narrative foresight as a scientific method offers several advantages over traditional forecasting techniques. First, it acknowledges the non-linear, complex nature of many of the challenges we face, sidestepping the pitfalls of over-reliance on quantifiable data or deterministic models. Second, by using stories as the primary vehicle for exploration, it appeals to human cognition in a way that numbers or graphs might not. This means that participants are more likely to internalize and act upon the insights derived from these narratives. Furthermore, the participatory nature of the method ensures a diversity of perspectives, mitigating the cognitive biases that often plague other foresight exercises. Lastly, narrative foresight not only aids in envisioning a spectrum of possible futures but also

in building a shared vision among stakeholders. This collective sense of purpose and alignment is critical in mobilizing resources and orchestrating concerted efforts towards desired outcomes. In summary, narrative foresight, as a scientific method, holds the promise of a more holistic, inclusive, and actionable approach to grappling with the uncertainties of the future.

The process of developing a narrative strategy (Fischer-Appelt & Dernbach, 2022) builds upon the work on transformational narratives. It extends the method, understanding narratives as expressions of how organizations are embedded in a social, ecological and institutional environment. The idea of transforming narratives expressed by Milojević and Inayatullah's thus gains an environmental dimension. By changing narratives, an organization consciously or unconsciously changes its relations to its environment. The relevance of narrative foresight and narrative strategy for the prototype lies in its potential to facilitate a profound, participatory exploration of the underlying stories that shape festival makers' perceptions of the future. In the context of a festival, this approach can catalyse a collective reimagining of future celebrations, grounded in shared, transformed narratives. Four steps are proposed for a narrative strategy development for festival makers.

1. Exploration of Underlying Present Narratives:

- Attendees delve into the stories they tell themselves about festivals and celebrations and that they perceive other tell. This initiates dialogues about the cultural, social, and individual narratives that define a current festival experiences.

2. Mapping of Current Future Narratives:

- Through guided activities, participants get to know and express the future narratives that they currently hold. The goal is to become conscious of the expectations, fears and visions that one holds today. Participants are invited to especially explore future narratives that imagine festivals as more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient.

3. Framing Preferred Future Narratives:

- Participants key challenges and visions for the future more precisely and identify and frame preferred future narratives. The process becomes a microcosm of collective storytelling. Attendees participate in crafting, challenging, and transforming narratives, making the process deeply personal and communal.

4. Formulating Cultural and Societal Impact:

- The process not only explores narratives but also strategizes their realization, turning reimagined stories into actionable plans for future festival designs. The transformed narratives have the potential to influence not just the festival experiences but also extend their impact on societal and cultural norms, fostering a broader transformation.

In conclusion, narrative foresight and narrative strategy provide a methodology for the future festival process to explore and transform the cultural, social, and individual stories that shape festival experiences. It ensures that future festivals are not just an extrapolation of

current trends but are reimagined spaces that reflect the evolved, shared aspirations of diverse participants.

A Barcamp for festival makers

Regarding the identification and sharing of key future skills and best practices among festival makers, an adaptation of the Barcamp framework is proposed. The Barcamp methodology has emerged as an alternative conference model, emphasizing participant-driven content, open dialogue, and a democratic approach to knowledge dissemination (Miller & Comperness (2023). In its departure from conventional top-down conferences, Barcamps have been studied for their implications in a variety of sectors. In the traditional conference paradigm, there is a distinct hierarchy: organizers set the agenda, select speakers, and attendees often passively receive information. Barcamps challenge this norm. They operate without a predetermined agenda, and participants, irrespective of their background or expertise, can lead or contribute to discussions. (Fahrenkrog, Heller & Blümel, 2023). Such an environment, predicated on spontaneity and equal participation, allows for the organic exchange of ideas that can be particularly salient for the diverse challenges faced in festival management.

Facing the current challenges to the festival sector regarding sustainability, inclusion and resilience requires a multidisciplinary approach. Each challenge touches many areas of a festival and, thus, necessitates a broad spectrum of knowledge and skill. Barcamps' decentralized format can cater to this multifaceted demand more efficiently than the unilateral transmission of traditional conferences. Furthermore, integrating Barcamps with foresight methodologies can establish a peer-to-peer process for envisioning future possibilities and challenges. This confluence of methodologies aids in harnessing collective intelligence towards future literacy.

The Barcamp method is also particularly apt at identifying, exploring, and sharing future skills. The inherent adaptability and flexibility of Barcamps, aligned with the rapidly evolving demands of industries, make it an ideal platform for future skill forecasting. By enabling discussions grounded in emerging trends and innovations, Barcamps can be instrumental in both recognizing future skill sets and sharing strategies for capacity building in those areas. In summary, the Barcamp methodology offers potential avenues for festival makers to share best practices and enhance skills in a manner that may be more aligned with the intrinsic complexities of their profession. The integration of foresight processes further enriches this platform, ensuring a forward-thinking, collaborative approach to addressing challenges. Further empirical studies can deepen the understanding of the tangible benefits and possible limitations of Barcamps within the festival domain.

Prototype Proposition

Combining narrative foresight, narrative strategy and the Barcamp framework and adapting their models to festivals, five workshop segments were identified that can guide the process. Each segment is formulated as a critical question that opens the discussion among festival makers in their proposed foresight process:

1. *Why are we really gathering?* This section delves into the purpose of festivals, beyond commercial or logistical considerations.
2. *Which format can draw out the best of this gathering?* Here, the emphasis is on structural and operational aspects that could enhance the festival's experiential value.
3. *How do we practice sustainability?* This segment does not only touch upon environmental sustainability but also broader aspects of social and economic sustainability.
4. *Whom are we making the festival with?* This section examines inclusivity, probing the roles of various stakeholders from artists to the audiences.
5. *What is our way of resilience?* Recognizing the challenges festivals face, this segment is dedicated to strategies ensuring their continuity and adaptability.

In accordance with these segments, the following schedule was developed for a prototype:

Day 1 Schedule

Morning Session

09:00-09:30 - Welcome

09:30-10:00 - Impulse Peer-to-Peer Foresight: A walkthrough of the collaborative foresight process, emphasizing its importance in understanding possible futures and their implications in present scenarios.

10:00-11:00 - Exercise: "Why are we really gathering?" A deep dive into the existential purpose of festival making and its futures

11:00-12:00 - Session: "Which form can draw out the best of this gathering?" Focus on structural and operational elements enhancing a festival's experience

Lunch Break

Afternoon Session

14:00-14:30 - Introduction to Narrative Foresight: An exploration into how narrative shape our perceptions of the present the future

14:30-15:30 - Exercises in Narrative Foresight: Identifying and analysing potential, probable, and preferred futures of a festival

Coffee Break

16:00-17:00 Developing a Narrative Strategy: Formulation of key transformational narratives

End Day 1

Day 2 Schedule

Morning Session

09:00-10:00 - Recap of Day 1: Reflections & Key Insights

10:00-11:00 - Session: "Whom are we making the festival with?" An inclusive exploration of stakeholder roles, ranging from artists to audiences.

11:00-12:00 - Session: "How do we practice sustainability?" A workshop on future skills for environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Lunch Break

Afternoon Session

13:00-14:00 - Session: "What is our way of resilience?" A workshop for ensuring festival continuity and adaptability amidst challenges.

14:00-16:00 - Barcamp for Festival Makers: Participant-led discussions emphasizing spontaneous and equal participation, targeting current challenges in the festival sector.

Coffee Break

16:30-17:00 - Feedback and Closing Remarks

The proposed workshop prototype will most like by first tested in its full format at the Mois Multi Festival in Quebec City in February 2024.

Conclusion

The festival sector has faced significant challenges, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. This research project sought to investigate how foresight practices could aid festival makers in navigating these challenges. The project's primary focus was the development of a peer-to-peer foresight mentoring process tailored for festival makers, integrating methodologies such as narrative foresight with collaborative design. The aim of this investigation according lies in introducing futures literacy to the festival sector and fostering collaboration among festival makers. It was argued that foresight practices, as an emerging phenomenon in the sector, can empower festival makers with the ability to anticipate, prepare, and adapt to possible futures, thereby reinforcing the decision-making process.

The research further emphasizes the importance of shared narratives and a united vision for the festival sector's future. It highlights the broader role festivals play beyond entertainment, impacting cultural, social, and economic facets of society. The interviews with festival makers laid a strong foundation for this. They also gave deep insights into the current challenges of festivals, the specific needs of festival makers and, a first glimpse into possible futures of the festival sector. The foresight process prototype emerged as a collaborative format for

facilitating a systematic dialogue among festival makers and concentrating on sustainability, inclusion, and resilience.

While once festivals were deemed successful through exponential growth and commercialization of experiences, today's transformative narratives seem to emphasize meaning, community-building, and shared experiences. Understanding festivals not merely as commercial events, allows evolving them into critical social gatherings, combating loneliness, fostering inclusivity, and making democratic values experienceable. By developing collaborative foresight and inter-festival collaboration, the sector can chart a resilient and sustainable path forward.

In conclusion, this research project advocates for the irreplaceable role of festivals and the people making them possible. The commitment of governments to support festivals is crucial, and ongoing advocacy efforts by festival makers will likely shape the industry's future. Ultimately, festivals remain essential for celebrating culture and bringing people together, making their future a subject of critical importance for communities and artists alike.

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