

Written by: Gideon Gottfried / Christof Huber

December 2, 2019

***REPORT 3<sup>rd</sup> EUROPEAN FESTIVAL CONFERENCE AT THE MAS SALAGROS ECO RESORT IN VALLROMANES, SPAIN, NOV. 20-23, 2019***

**European Festival Conference – The Third Time's The Charm**



"No one can run away," Christof Huber, General Secretary of Yourope, said in his opening speech for the 3rd European Festival Conference.

He was referring to the remote and special setting of this year's EFC venue, Mas Salagros, a tastefully designed Eco Resort located in the scenic village of Vallromanes, some 25 kilometers outside of the Catalan capital Barcelona.

The entire hotel, converted from 15<sup>th</sup> century stables into Spain's first 100% eco-friendly resort, was booked exclusively for EFC delegates, including the Spa facilities, which were highly praised by those, who found the time to treat themselves after a long day of discussions, workshops and meetings.



Christof counted only 55 participants in his opening remarks, explaining that a lot of Yourope members hadn't been able to take the time off given their busy schedules. November is no longer a quiet month for many working in this business, but honestly, there are hardly any quiet months left anymore. The fact that this business has developed into a 24/7 siege that hardly leaves time to focus on anything but work, was a topic in several discussions during EFC 2019.

The small number of participants had an upside, too, making it very easy to network and just pull somebody aside to spark a conversation. More or less shut off from the outside world, it didn't take long for that familiar EFC vibe to take hold of the guests. Of course, there's a mutual understanding among those, who work in the same business, but, more importantly, they also share a lot of the same values.



It is those values that led to the formulation of a Mission Statement at the very first EFC in 2015, which developed into Take A Stand at the 2nd edition two years later, the movement encouraging social cohesion in our society, promoting awareness and tolerance for all cultures, genders, races, religions, sexual orientations, colors and origins.

***Charging Europe With Positive Energy: Learning With The Brain, The Hands & The Heart***

Since its foundation, Take A Stand – thanks in particular to the dedicated work of Holger Jan Schmidt – has garnered hundreds of supporters from the live entertainment industry and media, and has become an active force in charging Europe with positive energy – which was also the title of a Take A Stand session at EFC. In it, Holger, Fruzsina Szép (Lollapalooza Berlin), Özgehan Senyuva (Middle East Technical University), and Sebastian Fleiter (The Electric Hotel) talked about the festival promoter's role in developing the competence of the festival audience, contributing to European culture and identity, and strengthening values.



Özgehan's presentation touched upon the benefits of non-formal learning, and defined competence as a "combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes," which can also be represented by the brain, the hands and the heart. The professor for European Studies defined 8 key competences for lifelong learning as:

- Communication in mother tongue
- Communication in foreign languages
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- Digital competence
- Learning to learn, the "most important" one, according to Senyuva
- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression



When participants were asked to rank how festivals contributed to those competences, cultural awareness and expression, social and civic competences, as well as communication in foreign languages ranked the highest.

One man, who has found a creative way of fostering competence in the festival audience, is Sebastian Fleiter. He invented the Electric Hotel, a brightly polished 1960s chrome camper van, where festivalgoers take turns pedaling on an exercise bike in order to create the electrical power needed to charge their phones. Combined with the Electric Hotel's solar cells, wind turbines and a pump storage hydro power unit, the station can charge some 400 mobile phones at once.

***Today's audience prefers experiences over lineups, loves surprises, and isn't on Facebook***

Another EFC speaker dealing directly with the festival audience was Linnea Svensson, who's session was titled "Audience of the Future." Three students at the Berklee College of Music in Valencia – Alyssa from New York, Louis from Mexico, and Gaby from Puerto Rico – joined the delegates in Mas Salagros via Skype to share their festival experiences and expectations. Some key takeaways: the lineup is secondary to the experience offered by promoters, they don't mind or even love travelling in order to get to a festival, and they appreciate a good app that keeps them up to date on the festival in a meaningful way.



The curation aspect is very important to the audience of the future. "We love creating things, editing them, sharing them. It makes us feel like we're part of the festival," said Gaby. All three agree that they like to be surprised by random stuff happening on site, including unexpected artist features, and being made to feel special amongst tens of thousands, for example by being projected onto the giant LED wall. They appreciate art areas and quiet zones to take a break from the main event every now and again. Communication in the event's aftermath was also important to the students, who all agreed that Instagram was the go-to social network. No one seems to check Facebook anymore.

***"Festivals Maximize Their Full Potential When Bringing People Together" – Tamás Szűcs,  
director for culture and creativity, European Commission***

Both of the aforementioned sessions took place on day two of EFC, which kicked off with a keynote by Tamás Szűcs, the director for culture and creativity in the European Commission. He acknowledged that "festivals maximize their full potential when bringing people together," and contributed to enhancing the lives of Europe's citizens. He laid out the EU's strategic agenda for 2019 to 2025, which recognizes that culture is an integral part of the European identity. One sign of this is the fact that the EU Commission brought back the term "culture" to include it in the title of the new commissioner overseeing the programs Creative Europe, Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 as well as Music Moves Europe, Mariya Gabriel.



Tamás emphasized that while the EU Commission had no direct influence on culture, it indirectly influenced the cultural sector through its policies. Fair remuneration, more transparency for artists, closing the value gap, copyright directive were among its priorities. According to Tamás' presentation, more than 90 cultural projects have been supported through Creative Europe between 2014 and 2018 with a budget of around EUR 57 million. The performing arts, which includes music, generally receive around 60% of that. In addition, the sector benefitted from an additional budget of EUR 1.5 million in 2018 through the preparatory action "Music

Moves Europe: Boosting European music diversity and talent," a budget that was doubled in 2019.

In the live space, the EU is concerned with increasing the circulation of European talent, which is why it is going to look into the grassroots music sector, as well as mental and physical health challenges going forward. The total planned Creative Europe budget for culture until 2027 is just above EUR 600 million. One idea is to use some of it to finance the cross-border travel of musicians from 2021 onwards. As Jacob Bilabel of the Green Music Initiative pointed out from the audience, the EU's current plan didn't mention any measures to increase the environmental sustainability of the live entertainment sector.

***“Anybody Can Build A Perfectly Viable Explosive Device With Ingredients Found At Most Supermarkets” – Police Officer Pete Dalton, PAD Command Consultancy***

Those who tend to fall asleep when confronted with too much bureaucratic jargon and numbers, were immediately woken up by another session that morning, a keynote interview with serving police officer Pete Dalton of the PAD Command Consultancy. Pete shared his experience from working on several large-scale events, including the London Olympics 2012, the Royal Wedding 2018, and two visits of U.S. president Donald Trump.



He explained how a lot of terrorist attacks were planned well in advance and told his audience what to look out for with people entering their events. Pete also went into specifics, like improvised explosive devices, a go-to solution for many terrorists, seeing how anybody can build a perfectly viable explosive device with ingredients found at most supermarkets. He explained why such devices weren't really used for outdoor festivals, as they developed more impact indoors.

Pete gave tips for planning and tactical coordination, laid out who to best have around the table in order to effectively deal with safety issues, like the head of security, the production, festival and customer managers, as well as the head of communication, and went into the so-called Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle. The experienced officer rounded out what was a gripping keynote by passing on a couple of good resources for event organizers to read up on, which cover a lot of security measures they can take at their events themselves.

***"Investors Are Not The Bad Guys" – Matthias Just, Chairman Mayland AG***

One highly anticipated session was called "Dog Eat Dog," which addressed the increased interest of private equity in this industry. It turned out to be a pretty candid interview between journalist Manfred Tari (Pop100) and Matthias Just, chairman of Mayland AG, an expert in mergers and acquisitions. Matthias explained what an investor seeks in a festival before deciding to purchase a stake in it, and what promoters should take into account when looking for an investor in times, when no one can escape the fact that money rules the (festival) world. Matthias concluded that the trend of consolidation was only about to get more pronounced but emphasized, that "investment companies are not the bad guys. In this competitive market they are a vital partner."



***The Downsides Of Success: A New Booking Reality***

One reason this business has become so interesting for investors is, of course, its continued success. Another byproduct of this success is a new booking reality, which has promoters and agents work 24/7, all year round, to complete lineups for events that lie as far as two years ahead. Agents sitting on a dozen offers are spoilt for choice, and some make full use of it, often leaving promoters hanging in the air, who therefore cannot complete their lineups.

The new booking reality leads to a lot of artists being booked way ahead of time. If they blow up in the months leading up to the festival, they are then playing a slot that was originally meant for an up-and-comer. EFC delegates addressed these issues, and more, such as direct licensing, in a dedicated meeting hosted by Christof Huber and Mikko Niemelä, head of Ruisrock.

This session may have made it clear more than any other, how important it is for the creators of this business to exchange their different experiences and share best practices, because it allows the sector to move forward with one unified voice. That way, even independently run events still have a chance of bundling their resources and approaching an increasingly corporate industry with negotiating power.



### ***EMAC Sessions: Dos And Don'ts Of Influencer Marketing***

Another idea from the first EFC edition that has become reality is the European Marketing and Communications Group (EMAC). In 2019, the group curated three EFC sessions, exploring the "visitors' digital journey before and after entering our festivals" as well as "influencer marketing of music festivals." The third hotly anticipated session, a marketing, sponsorship and international brand building workshop with two heads of the FC Porto football club, had to be scrapped because of a missed flight.



One highlight from EMAC's influencer session included a case study of what went wrong in terms of social media marketing in the disastrous case of FYRE Fest. Even though some participants thought the marketing campaign was the only thing the festival got right, the sessions moderator Felicitas Cardenas Carbajal of digital consulting agency WUNDERKIDZ made it pretty clear why the FYRE Fest's influencer marketing had been just as poorly planned and executed as every other aspect of the non-event. She picked Happiness Festival in South Germany as an example for an event that got influencer marketing just right.





***"We need to pull the goddamn fire alarm" – Meegan Jones, The Ocean Race, Sustainable Event Alliance***

Two other important Yourope groups, the Green Operations Group (GO Group) and the Yourope Event Safety Group (YES Group) also curated sessions at EFC 2019. GO Group had invited Meegan Jones of The Ocean Race and the Sustainable Event Alliance, who made it very clear that she thought this business had to act now to get its own house in order in terms of sustainability. Promoters needed to become responsible business owners and take it as far as they could in that regard. "Your responsibility doesn't end with recycling. We need to go to the level where the waste is followed to where it gets chopped up. That level of transparency,"

Jones emphasized, adding, "this stuff is minimum best practice, in a time when we need to pull the goddamn fire alarm."



Jones wanted to know, whether we even had the right to continue staging indulgent party events, looking at the state of the world, and whether this business found ways to utilise festivals as a catalyst for the response to the environmental emergency. "The answers exist," she said, "you just need time, money, people. If you take time, money, people out of the equation, every question becomes answerable," Jones continued. She pointed out that the



sustainability message was so powerful these days, it could attract big sponsorship. "It's a tsunami of opportunity that we can't even handle right now," according to Jones.

Tying directly into this session, was Jacob Bilabel's keynote on how to streamline a festival's research and innovation challenges, so they could turn their sustainability ideas into reality as soon as possible. How can the process of turning prototypes into proof-of-concept be accelerated? What kind of cooperations with scientific institutes, universities, foundations or government bodies could make sense, and what funding schemes are available on a European level? Those were just some of the questions tackled by Bilabel.

### ***"We've Got The Problem Under Control" – Table Top Exercise: Virus Outbreak At A Festival***

YES Group rounded out day one with what has become a highlight at YES Group Seminars worldwide: a tabletop exercise. Led by Chris Kemp (MOM Consultancy), Andy Mestka (OpenAir St. Gallen) and Henrik Nielsen (Roskilde Festival), participants had to deal with a live festival scenario, in this case, the outbreak of an extremely contagious virus at an imagined 30,000 capacity live music event. Participants were assigned specific roles, which they had to stick to, and worked together on dealing with the situation under enormous time pressure. The exercise ended with each group's assigned head of comms delivering a press conference.

What became very clear, was the importance of staff in an emergency like this, where the ability to delegate tasks to a competent team can make the difference between a happy end and a disaster.





### ***It's Not Just About The Lineup – A New Mission Statement For Diversity Management At Festivals***

Take A Stand made itself felt in more than one way at EFC 2019: In a workshop led by Fabienne Wolfschläger of Yourope and OpenAir St. Gallen, participants developed a new mission statement, which aims at achieving diversity at all levels of an organization, not merely as far as

festival lineups are concerned. The statement will allow festival promoters, who cannot fulfil the #keychange lineup quotas because of their size or the musical genre they work in, to take a stand for diversity nonetheless. The statement will be finalized in consultation with Yourope members over the coming weeks. Like any Yourope initiative, it is an entirely voluntary initiative that Yourope members and non-members can opt in and out of.



That is not to say that gender-equal lineups didn't take center stage at EFC, too. Marta Pallarès of Spanish mega event Primavera Sound laid out the festival's journey to a truly balanced lineup in 2019. She also addressed criticisms that a quota-based approach led to the program quality suffering and made a case for why most of those comments were unfounded.

Primavera Sound had been on a good way to achieving gender-balance on this bill in 2018 already, which is why the festival's organizers decided not to take part in the #keychange initiative, which aims to achieve gender-balanced lineups in 2022. "We thought we could do it in 2019," said Pallarès, who was already concerned with the next campaign, dubbed "Nobody Is Normal", which declares Primavera Sound a space free from gender-based violence and discrimination.



***"Building The Festival Of Dreams"***

The last session of EFC 2019 was very interactive again: Holger Jan Schmidt and Jacob Bilabel took participants through a philosophical journey that had them imagine, create, and reimagine their festival of their dreams. Divvied up into six groups, participants had a wide assortment of crafting materials, toys and tools at their disposal, with which to build the representation of the system of a festival on their respective tables. What was remarkable to see in the end: despite the designs on each table varying wildly, the core ideas and important principles they wanted their festival to embody, were almost the same from group to group. It was a fun session, in which everybody took part with childlike enthusiasm, and a good way to bring things to a close.



### ***How To Stay Sane In An Industry That Never Sleeps***

The stand-out session of EFC 2019, however, was one of the very first. Prof. Dr. Katja Mierke, professor at the Fresenius University of Applied Science in Cologne, talked about ways of preserving your (mental) health and creativity in an industry that never sleeps.

She went through typical stresses and characteristics of working in our industries, dynamics and symptoms of stress, as well as physical, mental, socio-behavioral, economic consequences of chronic stress and followed it up with concepts of prevention and intervention.

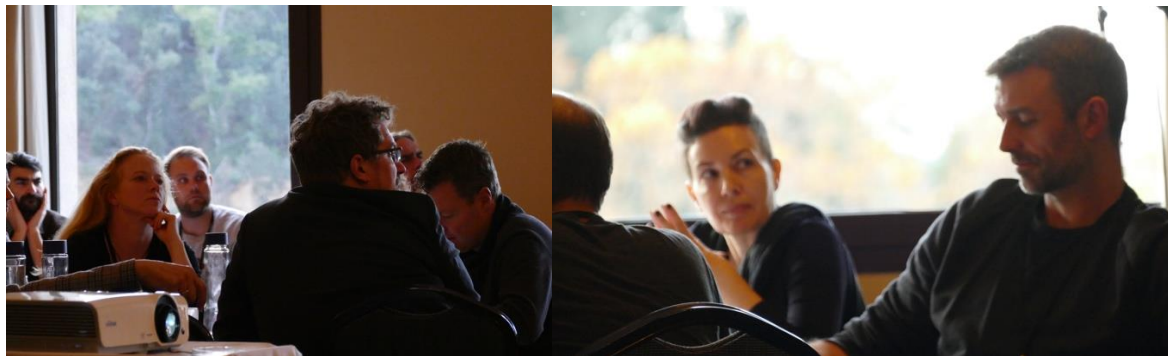


It was an inspiring session, and timelier than ever for all of the aforementioned reasons: The live entertainment industry is as successful as it has ever been, but it also demands more from its professionals than ever before. Not only has the booking war for artists never been more competitive, festivals need to offer complete experiences outside their musical offering, all in an environment of unpredictability, high workloads, insane working hours, and in many cases life on the road. Combine that with the cultural responsibility promoters are faced with, ever

advancing consolidation, and the challenge of working through all of these issues in an environmentally sustainable way, and it becomes clear how it can take a huge toll on the protagonists making it all happen at once.

And that's not even touching upon the additional pressures people exert on themselves by wanting to be perfect. Changing the stigma around failure was one important step to mitigate, according to Katja, but there were others, as well. Talking about it was the first step: Simply opening up about (mental) health issues made a huge difference, communication was of utmost importance. Another variable that determines the outcome of a stressful situation is the social support from beloved ones. The research supporting this was "pretty powerful," said Katja.

She also talked about the importance of recovery periods, explaining that, after a phase of stress, you need extensive time to wind down. In this business, November used to be the time for that. But the current way this industry operates doesn't allow for that anymore. According to Katja, again, communication was the way forward. If everybody in this business could come together and agree that this wasn't a sustainable way of working, things could change.



### ***"Stay Sound & Check Yourself"***

Katja is currently working on a book alongside Holger Jan Schmidt, with the working title "Stay sound & check yourself: Honest reports and best practices on stress and self-care in the music, festival and event business." Both are aiming for an early summer release, depending on when the interviews for the book are completed.

What makes dealing with stress in this industry so unique is the fact that working in it is also very rewarding. The people, who attended this year's EFC, are all involved in creating magical



experiences for an audience to enjoy, and clearly get a lot out of it. The willingness to go the extra mile, squeeze out that last drop of energy, or forgo another vital hour of sleep, is very

pronounced in this business. It is therefore easier than in other industries to literally work yourself to insanity, without being fully aware of it. Katja's insights were both fascinating and helpful in order to deal with this situation in a more mindful manner going forward.

### ***Thank You!***

One thing is for sure: the setting of EFC 2019 did a lot to improve the sanity of everyone attending. The staff of Mas Salagros made guests feel incredibly welcome, they were attentive and outstandingly friendly.

As usual, the planning team around Christof, which includes Fabienne, Lisa Rüegg and Pascal Frei, did an incredible job scoping out the venue and creating a schedule that broke up the intense day-time program with fun activities – including a Cava tasting and an excursion to a much-hyped (and rather inconspicuous) rock, a famous landmark in Vallromanes. And while the rock failed to emanate the magic that locals ascribe to it, the brandy that Andy Mestka (nicknamed "Brandy Andy" by Pascal) brought along certainly did.

In honor of a now accepted EFC tradition, Christof and guests took the stage at the closing party on Friday night, which was held in Mas Salagros' cozy wine bar. While the tempests outside made it hard to believe you were actually in Spain, the wine left no doubt about it. It was the perfect atmosphere to end yet another remarkable and unforgettable EFC.

Thank you, Christof, Fabienne, Lisa and Pascal – and all the session curators and dedicated pros working in this industry. What a privilege to be working with you!