

## 4<sup>th</sup> European Festival Conference (EFC)

November 23-26 2021, Mas Salagros EcoResort, Vallromanes, Spain

Report written by Katharina Weber, December 1



About 50 people from the festival sector participated in this year's EFC to talk about the future of their events.  
Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger

The fourth edition of the European Festival Conference (EFC) was announced as a pleasant setting with a limited number of participants in which we can talk to someone in a safe environment about our personal and professional experiences. While this might lead you to expect a slimmer version than usual, quite the opposite was the case: the days were still filled with an exciting program – just of a different kind. Rather than one panel chasing the next, only the mornings were dedicated to talks, while the afternoons were spent with excursions into Barcelona and its surroundings. After almost two years of the COVID-19-pandemic, contact restrictions and cancelled festivals, it was a blessing for the participants to have enough time to reconnect, network – and just have fun for a change.

The decision to hold this “special edition” was made in spring, YOUROPE chairman Christof Huber said in his opening speech in the Mas Salagros EcoResort on Wednesday morning. Back then, the YOUROPE team had hoped that the pandemic would be over by now, but now it seems that we are rather in the middle of it again, Huber added. Resilience, responsibility, relevance – how can the industry attract a young generation who missed more than a year of festivals? This key question must be answered in preparation for the upcoming festival season. So rather than looking only towards the future, in the opening session participants also took the time to look back onto the lessons learned from two years of pandemic that have not been kind to the festival sector.

A discussion with the participants revealed differences in crisis management between the countries. While some could access aid programs relatively easily, some are still waiting for funding. Most programs will cease at the end of the year, further increasing the need to have festivals happen in 2022. However, many participants were optimistic that their festivals would take place in some form or another next year, already having announced parts of their line-ups.

It is yet to be determined, who will be allowed to buy tickets. Models vary from the vaccinated, recovered and tested (the infamous German “3G” model), to allowing only vaccinated and recovered (“2G”) or requiring the vaccinated and recovered to provide an additional test (“2G+”). One thing is clear, however: should organizers have to apply such restrictions, they will: “If it’s the choice between ‘you’re on or you’re not’, it’s not a question,” Ruud Berends from ESNS said.

A concern that all organizers shared is the looming price increase: some fear their costs rising by as much as 30 percent. Additionally, festivals might experience a shortage in working force, for example in stage construction and security, because many employees from these fields had to look for different jobs during the pandemic. Staff that is available, for example volunteers, might be untrained because of the two-year break, creating the need for training programs.

A further challenge: some agencies want to strip COVID-19 off its “force majeure” status, meaning festivals would still have to pay artists, even if events are cancelled due to the pandemic. According to Huber, YOUROPE is currently working on a solution, so that festivals across Europe can present a united front.

### 3F – A Project Investing in the Future of Festivals



YOUROPE chairman Christof Huber opens the EFC with a discussion round on lessons learned during the pandemic.  
Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger

As bad as the pandemic has been, Huber could also provide some good news. More festivals have joined YOUROPE, and about a good week before the conference, the EU had granted YOUROPE funding for a project lasting three years. The project with the title “3F – Future-Fit Festivals” will concentrate on the above-mentioned challenge: A future that enables our events to be resilient, act responsible and stay relevant for the millions of young people attending. 3F will be built on classic YOUROPE activities like the established working groups (f.e. YES Group, GO Group, EMAC) and projects (like Take A Stand, European Festival Awards & EFC) and a series of new initiatives and projects dedicated to the 3F goals.

“This will strengthen YOUROPE’s position as the most important festival association in

Europe,” Huber said about 3F. “It’s a major step forward despite the crisis – and the rain,” he added, alluding to the storm that had welcomed the participants on Tuesday. After all, the project application had received a stunning 89 out of 100 points proving the relevance of 3F. The project will also create the “Green Festival Roadmap 2030” supporting festivals in the transition toward climate adaptation. A goal that in a few years might no longer be optional: with the EU’s Green Deal aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 55 percent by 2030 and becoming climate neutral in 2050, festivals will have to adapt. Claire O’Neill (A Greener Festival) reported from her visit to COP26: Politicians there had made it clear that festivals will be shut down, if they do not comply. “This is the moment to think about it, while everything is changing anyway,” O’Neill encouraged her fellow festival organizers.

### Safety First – but how?

While COVID lately has absorbed much of the industry’s attention when it comes to safety, it is clearly not the only aspect to consider when creating a safe event. In a 100-minute workshop, YOUROPE brought together the participants and representatives from its GO (Green Operations), YES (Yourope Event Safety) and EMAC (European Marketing and Communication) Groups and TAKE A STAND to rethink “the safe festival experience of the future” together. Four representatives each hosted a table on matters of safety: diversity, communication, sustainability and COVID-measures. After a short introduction of each topic, participants could choose which table they would like to join. After a twenty-minute exchange they chose the next table, and so on. In the end, the four table hosts summarized the discussions they had had with the different groups.



The benefits of COVID-measures were discussed at Andy Mestka's (3rd from the right) table.  
Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

Although YOUROPE General Secretary Holger Jan Schmidt said the aim was to mainly identify the major challenges the industry faces, already many ideas were thrown around on how to solve them, too.

**Communication:** An important lesson from the communication table: Never blame the audience (as a whole) – safety is always a festival’s responsibility. However, after two years without festivals, both organizers and audiences need lots of education. It bears an increased risk, if festivals are the first events young people participate in after the pandemic. They will lack the knowledge of “unspoken rules” that they usually would have picked up at smaller events like concerts (e.g., a mosh pit is not a boxing ring; if somebody falls down, pick them up). For some, it will be the first experience with drinking several days in a row. The worst case could be a scenario like at Astroworld Festival in Texas, where in November 2021 eight people died and 300 were injured during a show.

Much security personnel are not trained to deal with things other than violence (e.g., sexual harassment). Many festivals also lack safe spots where visitors can talk about things that they would not approach security or police forces with (“help, I have smoked too much weed and don’t know what to do”). Advice from table host Mikko Niemelä (Ruisrock Festival): festival organizers need to be honest and communicate a transparent “festival code.” “We have such a strong voice, we really have to use it to create something better,” Niemelä emphasized.

**Diversity:** Many participants agreed: diversity is a process – and many people do not know how to increase it at their festivals. Table host Marta Pallarès (Primavera Sound) suggested to find outside help, for example NGOs or local authorities which have worked on the topic and are eager to share their knowledge. Some goals, like a gender-balanced line-up, will remain impossible to reach for some genres, some participants found (think of the archetypical metal band: all-male, all-white). But diversity involves all areas from line-up and production crew to contractors, visitors and even outside forces such as the police. An example for diversity outside the line-up: at ARTmania festival, Codruta Vulcu explained, all departments of the company producing the event are run by women.

A much easier step is to include all genders in communication. A small-scale solution against everyday sexism: the walk-away-policy as suggested by Johannes Jacobi (Höme): whenever contractors refuse to deal with female crew members, male crew members should walk away so that these people have no choice but to talk to female crew members.



Avid listeners. Photo: H.J.Schmidt

An ethnically balanced line-up is a further challenge. The population of some countries like Poland is simply overwhelmingly white, some participants remarked. Also: Does booking sexist artists support sexism?

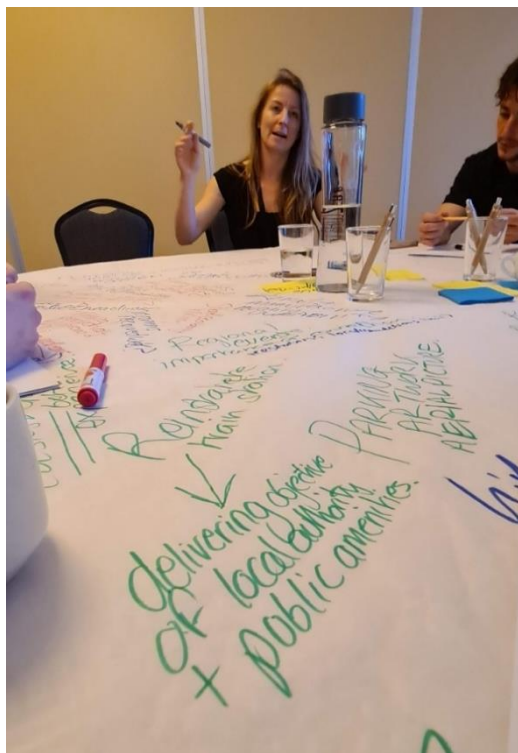


Table host Claire O'Neill is an expert on sustainability at festivals. Photo: H.J.Schmidt

**Corona:** Hygiene and disinfection are key elements in fighting the pandemic. So far, so good. But can these measures be more than just producing extra costs? How can promoters transform expenses into added value for customers? This question turned out to be hard to answer. Data collection usually benefits the organizers rather than the visitors, table host Andy Mestka (OpenAir St.Gallen) said, summarizing the discussions. So, what is the best that festivals can do? Put a great effort into communicating that they do everything to keep their audience safe.

An idea that might also benefit the audience: a central app to access all festivals. Festivals could use it to pass out information, visitors could use it to hold their ticket, money and vaccination certificates, saving time at the entrance, reducing cues and infrastructure, maybe even replacing wristbands. Other problematic aspects: Testing required to enter festivals might be more expensive than the ticket. Hand sanitizer is crucial – but highly flammable. Can small bottles of it be allowed on campsites?

**Sustainability:** “Is there a contradiction between safety and sustainability?” asked Holger Jan Schmidt. Just one example: sustainability demands reuse, while hygiene demands single use. So, which will it be? And can data collection help with sustainability? It probably can, Claire O'Neill summarized the discussion rounds: festivals should know their audience, so that they can plan the event around their needs. Groceries and beer? Offer a pre-order service. Accommodation? Offer pre-pitched tents and equipment. Transport? Offer shuttle services and maybe even work with local authorities to create a nearby train station. “There is a culture for unsustainable behavior in humans. We have the opportunity to tell a new story through festivals, through being part of this community,” O'Neill said.

“Communication is everything,” Holger Jan Schmidt said, concluding the workshop with a quote by a wise man – or so he had thought, until he found out that he was quoting actor Will Smith. Still, there is truth to the statement: good communication is needed for safety and sustainability. “We need to communicate these topics in a sexy way”, Schmidt recommended.

## What Jürgen Klopp and Billie Eilish Have in Common

The art of sexy communication is something Viva con Agua has nailed. The NGO is a WASH project (water, sanitation, hygiene) based in Hamburg which uses sports, arts and music – universal languages – to connect people worldwide across language barriers. With a simple call to action, they have been collecting money for drinking water projects for the past 15 years. At concerts and festivals, volunteer crews collect donations of deposit cups and return them to the cup company, which gives them the deposit, usually one Euro per cup. In 2019 alone, the organization collected 600,000 Euros this way.

Instead of co-founder Michael Fritz, who had to join a fundraiser in Hamburg last minute, it was co-founder Tobias Rau who delivered the keynote about Viva von Agua on Thursday morning of this year's EFC. He told the story of how the movement was founded in 2006 as a platform for people to think and act socially and how it grew into an organization present at 150 festivals in German speaking countries. "We wouldn't be where we are without thousands of volunteers. They are the backbone of the project," Rau stressed. Volunteers can access the festivals for free, it is easy for visitors to engage in this social project and festivals become more sustainable – a win-win-win.

Support also comes from artists, who sometimes alert the audience to the presence of the collector teams in a playful way (e. g., by surfing the crowd in a rubber boat and inviting the audience to throw their cups into the boat). Celebrities from singer Billie Eilish to soccer coach Jürgen Klopp have joined a Viva con Agua-campaign, posing with a cardboard sign saying "Water is a human right".

Since the roots of Viva con Agua are tied to the German second division football team FC St. Pauli, the club still supports the movement to this day. Once a year, artists and visitors are invited to paint the walls of the Millerntor Stadium, turning it in to the Millerntor Gallery. At least 50

percent of the proceeds from art pieces sold there go to Viva von Agua. In its most successful year (2019), 20,000 people visited the Stadium during the five days of the event.

Viva con Agua has established its own brand of drinking water and, in cooperation with the non-profit enterprise Goldeimer, a brand of toilet paper and soap – "doing good, even while shitting," Rau described the idea.



Co-founder Tobias Rau talks about his NGO Viva con Agua.  
Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

With the proceeds, the NGO builds wells in countries along the southwestern African coast and in South Asia. For this purpose, Viva con Agua bought its very own machine to drill into the ground. Once they have built a well together with the local population, the community has to maintain the well itself. A water committee is elected, which collects a small fee from the citizens for the maintenance. This way, the water and the well gain value, and communities are more committed to taking care of it, Rau explained.

### **“Welcome to the Data Shitshow”**

Although Johannes Jacobi opened his talk with the words “welcome to the data shitshow”, his presentation on the most important results of the first major festival survey did not fail to entertain – in no small part thanks to a fine selection of supporting GIFs of animals playing instruments.



Johannes Jacobi presents the findings of the festival survey conducted by Höme.  
Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger

“Höme – Für Festivals”, a team of young festival enthusiasts and former organizers working towards a pan-European festival platform to make smaller festivals visible, conducted the survey among festival goers as part of their “Festival Playground” project. 70 questions were designed to find out how festival goers imagine festivals in 2030 to be like: Who are they? And what do they want? 80 festivals joined the project, 37,000 visitors from 800 festivals participated, investing 613,000 minutes in the survey – quite the feat.

After analyzing the data, Höme hosted a festival for festival organizers with a program created around the results. According to Jacobi, the event connected big and small festivals, showing them that they have more in common than they thought.

Picking just a few interesting points from the data: once the pandemic is over, the participants want to visit even more festivals than before. Approximately 812,000 extra tickets could be sold. Corona did not kill the mosh pit: 93 percent want to join in on the fun again. One out of ten visitors does not feel safe at festivals – among other reasons because of sexual harassment, racism and alcohol. A solution could be to establish social teams which offer more services than security personnel.

“Festivals have a responsibility, because we bring together young people who still need to find themselves,” Jacobi said. And according to the survey, 80 percent of the participants agree with him. Only half of the participants want a gender-balanced line-up. More than two thirds of the participants disagree with the statement that being on a festival means taking a break from sustainability. “Sustainability becomes a selling point,” the Hölme-co-founder concluded. According to the data, more visitors would leave their car at home, if festivals offered shopping on site, if train tickets were affordable and if intercity busses were available.

At the end of his talk, Jacobi directed a heartfelt plea at his fellow festival organizers: Festivals are a unique space to offer much more than just art and music – use it!

## Exposure, Evaluation, Eyeballs



Azucena Micó developed a method to measure the value of events. Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger

During the pandemic, arts and culture were often deemed a “non-essential” part of society and as such shut down quite quickly. But are they really mere entertainment? To assess the value of events, Azucena Micó and her team developed a methodology, which represents the value in a single score.

Micó is head of quality assurance at the consulting agency Sound Diplomacy, which specializes in music, culture and the night time economy. Sound Diplomacy works with city governments and the event sector to create strategies to increase the value of cities, Micó explained. The new approach was created in cooperation with the city of Barcelona to assess the public

value that events bring to the city, so the municipality can decide which events best to allocate public funding to.

Her talk at the EFC was a world premiere, as it was the first time that she spoke about the project publicly. The final score is based on a combination of more than 60 indicators including much more than obvious factors like the number of visitors or employees. Although there are

still many limitations and the approach needs some refining, Micó said, it has the potential to change the reputation of festivals, which in the eyes of city officials are often considered to be no more than a place of excessive alcohol consumption.

“Exposure” is the key word in advertisement: the more people (“eyeballs”) see a product, the better. But it might be time to rethink the exposure concept, said Andreas Groth Clausen. The Head of Partnerships at Roskilde Festival presented a state funded project of the festival and techno anthropologists from Alborg in his talk on Thursday morning. After all, exposure does not in any way measure the effect an ad has on the spectator. “Most of these eyeballs are just going to ignore your presence,” he added.

94% of customers expect companies to take a stand on issues important to them, Groth Clausen reported. So, a brand like Roskilde increasingly has to prove to its sponsors which effects their sponsorship has. Analyzing social media posts can help: Groth Clausen showed a cluster of interconnected dots, each representing an account posting about Roskilde on Instagram. A second cluster of dots represented which sustainable topics at Roskilde people on Instagram talk about. Combining the two, and marking where the accounts from the first cluster appear in the second, helps to identify specific groups and which topics to approach them with. Actual Roskilde data revealed that people did not yet talk about clean energy in relation to the festival, so Roskilde approached a clean energy company and asked them, if they want to fill this gap.



Andreas Groth Clausen analyzes social media to measure the impact of sponsorships. Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger

## **Kitzberger to the Rescue: A Guide through the legal jungle**

Annexes, clauses and insurances – topics which give most people a headache. Which does not make them less important, though. In fact, during the pandemic, with its everchanging rules and regulations, good legal advice has become more valuable than ever. Luckily, YOUROPE’s lawyer Prof. Dr. Ralf Kitzberger took the time to come to Barcelona to host an interactive Q&A session with the participants.

Currently, three of the most pressing legal matters are fee payment, cancellation because of force majeure and inclement weather. YOUROPE suggests solutions to these issues in two legal documents the association drafted: the YOUROPE standard agreement and standard terms. Kitzberger discussed the respective paragraphs of these documents relating to the issues at hand, asked for experiences with the regulations and if any modifications are necessary.

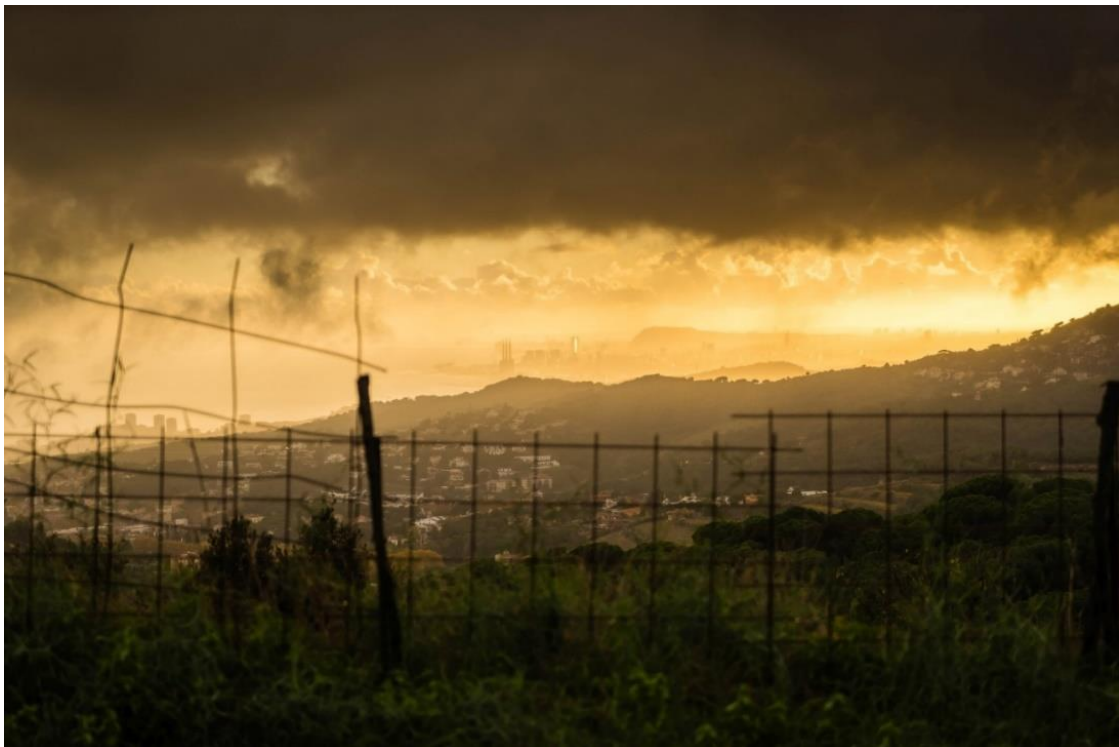
Force majeure in the last version of YOUROPE's standard terms is defined as "any condition or event beyond the reasonable control" of festivals and artists "which directly affects the performance and makes the staging of the performance or the festival impossible, infeasible, or unsafe." Examples include earthquakes, terror threats, epidemics, and government orders as well as cancellation due to COVID-19. This also goes for any government order that occurs up to three months before the festival. However, some forms of inclement weather are not considered force majeure.

The results of the exchange at EFC will find their way into the newest version of the YOUROPE Standard Terms, which will be made available in an adapted form and open source as soon as possible for the association's members and non-member festivals who want to use them.



**YOUROPE's lawyer Ralf Kitzberger knows all about legal issues concerning festivals.**  
**Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger**

## **Drenched to the Bone – but Totally Worth It**



**This stunning view of the Barcelona area was the reward of a rainy hike. Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger**

The timing could not have been worse: just when a group of about 25 EFC-participants set out on a hike through the hills around Mas Salagros on Wednesday afternoon, it started to pour. Yet, no one turned back, because they knew what would await them at the end of the trail: a wine tasting. Winemaker Oriol Artigas of Llebeig vineyard led the tour through the hills and parts of his vineyard himself. On top, a magnificent view of the misty Barcelona area offered itself to the hikers at the highest point of their tour.



**Oriol Artigas (right) presents the first wine to the hikers.**  
Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger

The vineyard produces natural wines, which means they are handmade with traditional methods and contain no or only few additives. Artigas and his team had prepared four different kinds for the thirsty hikers. The secret of natural wine often lies in the way its grapes are grown: in one of the wines, a white wine, you could actually taste a certain salinity, because the vines were grown close to the seaside, where they would often come into contact with the salty sea breeze.

Although it rained throughout the entire hike – with the exception of the wine tasting on the vineyard – and no sock remained dry, the mood remained bright. Afterwards, there was plenty of opportunity to heat up again: Claire O'Neill instructed a Yoga class for three brave ladies and one equally brave man (nothing too acrobatic, she said, but the downward dog sure knows how to tickle those never-used muscles), and the thermal baths offered even more relaxation. The old farmhouse – which houses the baths and according to the brand AIRE Ancient Baths stems from the 15<sup>th</sup> century – included several pools of different temperatures, a steam room and a saltwater pool you could float in, all surrounded by candlelight, making the baths a popular destination for the participants.



**Wet, but happy: the hikers at the highest point of their hike. Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger**

## A Place Where All Music is Welcome



The Palau de la Música Catalana is impressive inside and outside.  
Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

So many details, it almost made your eyes hurt: Thursday afternoon was spent with a trip to an architectural treasure of Barcelona, the Palau de la Música Catalana (the palace of Catalan music). Two enthusiastic ladies gave the interested EFC-participants a tour through a concert hall that every musician would be glad to perform in – the soundcheck the participants walked in on proved that the acoustics really are *that* fantastic. Built by the Catalan architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – and in less than three years –, the Palau hosts concerts of many genres for reasonable prices.

Flowers are a common element of the building: different kinds can be found on every column inside and outside, but not one can be found twice; larger columns are formed like palm trees; stone roses cover the ceiling. In the back of the stage, sculptures of 18 women, each with a different hairstyle, dress and instrument in her hands, cover the walls. The stage is framed by two gigantic statues, each including many different shapes, from galloping horses to the famous composer Ludwig van Beethoven. The colored glass window in the ceiling bulges downwards in the middle, representing the sun.

The participants were also shown places which are usually off-limits to the public, like the floor above the concert's hall ceiling and the roof. Even these areas, although almost always inaccessible to visitors, were affectionately decorated by the architect – “for the eyes of god,” as the guides explained.



The glass ceiling in the concert hall represents the sun, surrounded by a host of angels. Photo: Fabienne Wolfschläger

## Home away from home

For the second time, EFC had chosen the Mas Salagros EcoResort as its venue. Not for a lack of alternatives, but it had proven to be a favorite among former participants. Located in a nature reserve, with views of the Parc de la Serralada Litora, it claims to be the first 100 percent eco-friendly resort of the Spanish peninsula. Thanks to its cozy rooms, thermal baths and well-equipped bar it once again won the hearts of the EFC crowd. A special mention to the kitchen: the food was not only delicious and of high quality, the cooks also managed to cater to the special diets of all participants, be it vegan, gluten free or keto.



On the last night, EFC even enabled a memorable farewell event. To the sounds of Mikko Niemelä, lovingly nicknamed DJ Mini, the participants enjoyed their last hours together – until reality (also known as “corona regulations”) hit at 1 a.m., when the get together had to be shut down. Particularly memorable was a sing-along of Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody”, in which all attendees happily joined in. Rumor has it, some dedicated souls were still occupying the bar at five in the morning – or at least until their cab took them away at around three, sleepy, but also excited about a week well spent.