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**November
21-24, 2023**

REPORT

ACCOMMODATION

**Noa Glamping Resort
Zrće Beach
Island of Pag, Croatia**

CONFERENCE & RESTAURANT

**Hotel Olea
Island of Pag, Croatia**



YOUROPE
THE EUROPEAN FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION

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European Festival Conference #5
NOA Glamping Resort & Hotel Olea, Zrće Beach, Pag Island, Croatia
Tuesday – Friday, November 21-24, 2023
Report written by Katharina Weber



The 2023 EFC delegates come from 16 different countries. Photo by Rahel Inauen

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Welcome to Pag Island



In the summer, Zrće beach is a popular holiday destination with lots of events. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

YOUROPE always looks for special locations to host its biannual European Festival Conference (EFC). “Sometimes they are very hard to reach, but then at least you have something to tell your children,” said **YOUROPE’s chairman, Christof Huber**, jokingly in his opening speech. This had been especially true for EFC #5 that took place in NOA Glamping Resort and Hotel Olea on Pag Island in Croatia. On the arrival day, the delegates had quite an adventurous trip to the resort with delays and detours caused by Bora, a cold Adriatic fall wind that makes trees on the island grow crooked.

Despite the wind, the fifth edition of the EFC turned out to be special. “I know we are a bit smaller and a bit different, but there are enough big conferences around,” Huber also said in his opening speech. The remote location meant that there were no outside distractions – participants could really focus on getting to know each other and each other’s festivals.

Representatives from more than 50 festivals and organizations across 16 markets – including Live Nation, Superstruct and CTS Eventim as well as independent operators – spent two conference days exchanging experiences and learning from each other. “It was amazing to see the interactions between the participants and the panel hosts,” Huber said in his wrap up speech. “We talked about hate speech, but also about the love and passion for festivals, which clearly showed that this is not just a business.”

The EFC also presented an opportunity to celebrate the 25th anniversary of YOUROPE.



YOUROPE chairman Christof Huber (l.) and General Secretary Holger Jan Schmidt. Photo by Rahel Inauen

Festivals in data: Europe’s most comprehensive festival survey

This year, YOUROPE and IQ Magazine collaborated for the second time to write the European Festival Report (EFR), an annual publication on the state of the European festival industry. An important part of this report are the results of the European festival survey, the continent’s most comprehensive festival survey. At EFC, **IQ’s special projects editor James Drury (UK)** gave a sneak peek of the results, before the EFR’s release in December.

235 festivals from 29 countries took part in the survey in 2023, up from 157 in 2022. Their capacities ranged from 1000 to more than 50,000 daily visitors. Most were multi-day festivals



James Drury. Photo by Rahel Inauen

(4.25 days on average), and 70% of the responding festivals were 11 years or older, speaking for the health of the European festival scene. According to the survey, the top 5 challenges are currently: a rise in production costs (named by more than a third of the respondents), booking artists, selling tickets, staffing, and supply chain issues. For 2024, festivals predicted rising production costs will remain the number one challenge, followed by artist booking, which they feared will become even more difficult.

➔ More results will be presented in the *European Festival Report 2023*. It will be free to read on [IQ's website](#) at the end of December.

Awareness Session: How to Combine Safety and Inclusion

Safety, awareness and inclusion go hand in hand, said **Fruzsina Szép (festival director of Superbloom, DE)**, opening the panel on awareness at festivals. "When we talk about safety onsite, we have to look at the big picture, at the 360° picture," so the panel was full of experts from different aspects of safety and awareness.



Superbloom director Fruzsina Szép has made inclusion a priority at her festival. Photo by Rahel Inauen

Isabel Roudsarabi (DE), co-founder of the German festival network Höme – Für Festivals, presented Höme's activities and projects regarding awareness, among them a recently released guide on awareness at festivals with explanations, advice and best-practice examples from Germany. So far, the guide is only available in German, but it's supposed to be translated into English, Roudsarabi said.

"Awareness is part of our identity and all that we do. It's the reason we founded Höme," she added. That's why her company has an internal awareness team, consisting of four core members that deal with topics such as diversity, inclusion, wellbeing, health, ecological sustainability, purpose and B-Corp certification. "The main focus is to educate and reeducate ourselves and keep up with what's going on in the industry."

They put a strong focus on finding partners to support their ideas. "Partnerships are the most important pillar of the awareness work we do because we're obviously not experts in everything," Roudsarabi said. Among them are [Act Aware](#), [Faemm](#), [Same But Different](#), and [Keychange](#).

"We had one vision: to create diverse communities. It's very important for us," said **Henrik Bondo Nielsen, Head of Division, Area Resources and Guests & Safety at Roskilde Festival (DK)**. He reported that the festival has a dedicated awareness person at the office and that they created an action plan on diversity and equality (that so far is only available in Danish).



*Henrik Bondo Nielsen, Isabel Roudsarabi, Alexandra von Samson, Christian Brüser and Fruzsina Szép.
Photo by Rahel Inauen*

The festival focuses on universal design, behavior and well-being, so that every participant feels like they belong to the festival community. There is an action plan for each of the three target groups (internal, audience/guests, volunteers) including measures in four areas: physical (e.g., step-free access), psychological (e.g., good information), organizational (e.g., personal assistance) and social (e.g., avoiding prejudice).

After a major Danish newspaper in 2017 had published a series of articles on women talking about explicit incidents that happened to them at Roskilde Festival, the festival introduced “dialogue creating activities.” The festival found that many visitors lack experience and the language to talk about topics like sex and sexual harassment. So, with the help of NGOs like [Amnesty International](#) and [Sex and Society](#) they started the conversation with their guests directly on the campsites.

Christian Brüser (DE) and **Alexandra von Samson** (DE), who help further develop the inclusion program of **Superbloom Festival** each year, talked about the issue of security vs. freedom. At a round table with people with disabilities they discussed if people in wheelchairs can go into the general audience or have to stick to platforms specifically for people with disabilities. The round table followed after an incident involving a person in a wheelchair being denied access to the first barrier at the festival had caused a shitstorm on social media.

“I understand that people in a wheelchair don't want to be exposed on a dedicated platform, but if they are in the first pit or even the second one, they might cause security risks for themselves, other audience members and our employees. You cannot cut other people's safety for the benefit of one group,” explained von Samson. The compromise the round table found is to offer more and also different kinds of wheelchair platforms and to



Yummy – Hotel Olea takes care of the delegates in the breaks between panels. Photo by Rahel Inauen

increase the number of wheelchair seats in the stadium in the future. Samson's suggestion is to enable a culture at all mass events of people having a sense of togetherness and taking care of each other. "See something – say something" – if people are aware of their surroundings, they might act before something bad happens. "Awareness is part of audience safety," she underlined.

Brüser concluded that they as a team must learn how to communicate about this conflict of needs, but they also need to realize when it is possible to change the status quo for the benefit of people with disabilities. He added that in order for this to work out, it is also necessary to induce more understanding in outside parties, e.g., politicians and authorities. "Lobbying is not just for the pharma industry," he said.

A Personal Update from Ukraine



Vlad Yaremchuk and Mariana Mokrynska travelled to Croatia all the way from Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo by Rahel Inauen

With everything going on in the world it's hard to keep track sometimes. Even the most atrocious events fade from the news once they have been going on for too long. To prevent the war in Ukraine from becoming a victim of our increasingly short attention spans, the humanitarian aid organization from the Ukrainian music industry, Music Saves UA, keeps their operation running. This year, they collected €91,042 by working with 22 festivals across the continent.

"In many ways, we entirely depend on the people we collaborate with," said **Vlad**

Yaremchuk from **Music Saves UA**, who had come to Croatia with his colleague **Mariana Mokrynska** all the way from Kyiv. Luckily, winning the Take a Stand Award at the European Festival Awards in January 2023 had opened many doors for them, Yaremchuk said. "It became so much easier to talk to festivals that we hadn't worked with yet. It became a kind of seal of approval. It's an award that we won not because we worked so hard but because we had so many great people who worked with us."

Music Saves UA was founded on March 1, 2022, a week after the Russian invasion had started. In total, the organization has raised more than \$465,000 Dollars, delivered 710 tons of supplies, helped 44,000+ people and evacuated another 20,300+ from unsafe regions.

Teams from Music Saves UA visited many festivals personally this year, setting up info booths to interact with the audience. "The money is great of course – we used it to save lives, to help people. But it was also about us talking to festival guests, to represent our cause. At the festivals, they have a chance to talk to us – people who spend most of their time in Kyiv" Yaremchuk said. "We



Visitors of Das Fest (DE) donated more than €10,000 in cup deposits to Music Saves UA. Photo taken at Superbloom 2023 by Steffen Eirich

were so lucky to represent Ukraine within the music and especially the festival industry. This is how we keep people caring about us. Our ability to come to these festivals makes the war personal for the people who were there.”

Every festival they collaborated with helped in its own way. At Das Fest (DE), for example, visitors could donate their cup deposit of €2 to the cause. More than €10,000 were collected this way in 2023. Superbloom (DE) provided the highest donation of a festival this year (€19,000) mostly by

asking their guest list members for a donation. Les Eurockéennes de Belfort organized a charity auction, which sold the signed guitar of Gojira guitarist Joe Duplantier. For Eurofest (UK), “Liverpool basically turned into Kyiv for two weeks,” Yaremchuk said. There were lots of collaborations with Ukrainians and even a live stream event, where people from Liverpool and Kyiv could interact with each other. Pohoda festival (SK) hired three Ukrainian composers to create new songs that an orchestra played at the festival.

At several festivals, the Music Saves UA teams were allowed to sell Ukrainian merch and hang info posters about Ukrainian musicians fighting at the front lines. “It’s a war that’s being fought by everyone in Ukraine, people from music, people from the most regular jobs, not just military people.” There were many more festivals that they wanted to work with but couldn’t due to logistical reasons. “We will keep doing this as long as it is necessary,” Yaremchuk emphasized.

73% (€67,189) of the donations this year were raised by the 12 YOUROPE member festivals that Music Saves visited. “YOUROPE has been helping us so much,” Yaremchuk said, for example, by providing contacts, funding trips, organizing panels at conferences, and giving them a chance to talk about Ukraine.

Despite the end of the summer festival tour, Music Saves UA has never been more active than at the moment, Yaremchuk said. They are busy organizing the second edition of its music ambassadors tour for January/February 2024, where they invite music professionals to Ukraine to get a first-hand experience of the life in the war-torn country. They also host a festival for internally displaced people to show them that someone still cares about them; and they organize winter holiday gifts for displaced children.



A woman at ARTmania (RO) 2023 buys some Ukrainian merch at the Music Saves UA info booth.

Meanwhile, the rebuilding of the country has to wait. “We’ll get to the rebuilding but we jumped the gun on this a little. Russia is doubling down on whatever they are doing, and people are still dying every day. It’s mentally difficult in Ukraine right now because we have to start treating it like a marathon, but having you and seeing that you are still excited and ready to work with us is what keeps us going. We are here as long as you want to support us. Music can really make a difference. Music can save lives,” Yaremchuk concluded.

YES Group Roles out New Youth Exchange Program



Alexandra von Samson presents the new "Youth Exchange Program" of YES Group. Photo by Rahel Inauen

Since the pandemic, the lack of qualified personnel in various fields of event safety has become blatantly obvious. To tackle the problem and to get more young people and newcomers engaged in these fields, the YOUROPE Event Safety (YES) Group initiated a “Youth Exchange Program”. This year, a test pilot was started with Roskilde Festival (DK) and Superbloom Festival (DE), in which a newcomer from Superbloom was able to visit Roskilde Festival, to shadow their health & safety, safety & security, and crowd management teams for four days. **YES Group management member, Alexandra von Samson, (DE)** presented the scheme at the EFC.

YES Group is known for organizing an annual seminar at ESNS in Groningen and for hosting panels at MaMA in Paris. This year, it also presented a part of the program of Germany’s biggest conference on event safety, IBIT, in Cologne. Its members are active in festivals and other mass events, they study in and teach at university programs, serve as panelists at many international conference and festivals in Europe, and have created a large network of event security and safety experts.

A recent revamp of the YES Group changed its structure, from different groups and committees within the group into one management group. Their plan is to put a stronger focus on being

present at festivals and conferences, on the activities of its members, on networking, and on programs like the new “Youth Exchange Program”.

The program acknowledges the need to raise and support a new generation of event safety professionals. It enables interested newcomers to visit a host festival, while giving them the opportunity to experience the work of the festival professionals first-hand. By doing this, participants are more likely to realize the importance of gaining more knowledge and to want to start a career in event safety. Of course, YES Group’s hope is also that participants will take home impressions and ideas and implement those at their own festival.

Since the pilot was a success, the program will be continued in 2024. Every festival is welcome to serve as a host festival – info on the application process will be released before the end of 2023.

Booking & artist panel: A Promoter’s Moral Responsibility



YOUROPE's lawyer Ralf Kitzberger brings his legal expertise to the booking panel. Photo by Rahel Inauen

What was supposed to become a panel on everything related to artists and booking – rising artist fees, production riders, set lengths, broadcasting rights and so on – turned into an interesting discussion on morale and the responsibility of promoters.

YOUROPE’s lawyer **Prof. Dr. Ralf Kitzberger (Schickhardt Rechtsanwälte, DE)** started the panel with an update on YOUROPE’s [Standard Terms](#), a public document aimed at festivals that book international artists for live performances, free to be used under the condition that it remains unchanged. Kitzberger referred to the legal points relating to artist booking, for instance that artists need a liability insurance, too.

This quickly led to an exchange on the legal intricacies of what promoters can do when their acts use their platform to spread controversial opinions. **Alter Art (PL) promoter, Mikolaj Ziolkowski**, explained that they wouldn’t let Roger Waters play at their festivals because of “his crazy political views and him supporting Russian aggression in Ukraine,” but it was a tough decision that cost them relations. Legally, they had no case, so in the end it was



Mikolaj Ziolkowski (Alter Art / Open'er Festival). Photo by Rahel Inauen



Mikko Niemelä (Ruisrock). Photo by Rahel Inauen

the decision of the promoter. Ziolkowski thinks that promoters should deal with each controversial case individually, do thorough research, and then make an informed decision. “Is it wrong enough – or not?”

Mikko Niemelä (promoter of Ruisrock, FI) agreed, saying: “We have a responsibility as promoters that the stage we offer is used for something good. This is what being a professional means nowadays.”

Legally, cases like, e.g., the allegations against Rammstein-frontman Till Lindemann are difficult, because there are many rights to balance:

the rights of the artist, the victims, free speech etc., Kitzberger said. But even if there is no trial and no verdict, promoters still have to deal with the repercussions of these allegations. **Christof Huber (YOUROPE chairman / Gadget abc Entertainment Group, CH)** told the audience that their office in St. Gallen got sprayed with graffiti after the allegations against Rammstein became public because Gadget promoted their shows in Switzerland. At Gadget, they created a mission statement that serves as a guideline, but according to Huber not every artist signs it.

Recently, the Israel/Gaza conflict has led to difficult decisions for promoters. Choosing whether to book Palestinian and Israeli artists might not only be a question of political views but also of safety risks. Boom Festival co-manager, Artur Mendes, reported that someone suffered from a PTSD attack after an Israeli artist had spoken out at his festival.

Ziólkowski said that although art has always been about political statements, promoters should draw the line when statements slip into hate speech. Alter Art, for instance, decided not to book a Palestinian artist/activist because the team was afraid of antisemitism on stage. "For many artists political statements are a big part of their work, but what we should work on is that we as festivals don't accept any kind of hate speech," he stated. A zero-tolerance approach towards hate speech could even be included in the contracts to have financial leverage over the artists.

Two Approaches to Social Ticketing



Artur Mendes (from left to right), James Drury and Kiki Ressler. Photo by Rahel Inauen

Are festival tickets starting to become somewhat of a luxury good? Are we as promoters starting to exclude people with lower incomes from our events? And is that okay? Questions like these were central to a panel on ticketing hosted by **James Drury (IQ Magazine, UK)**. His guests **Kiki Ressler (founder of KKT GmbH Berlin, DE)** and **Artur Mendes (co-director of Boom Festival, PT)** each presented their approach to keeping events accessible for everyone.

Portuguese Boom Festival is a 40,000-capacity festival taking place every two years with a wide array of arts and cultures and visitors from 169 nations. On the festival site about 3 ½ hours from Lisbon, the festival runs a regenerative permaculture project to transform the land. Having

people from so many different countries made it mandatory for the festival to take different economic realities into consideration from the start, Mendes said.

Their solution is to offer two types of tickets: 90% are regular-priced tickets for people from financially stable countries and 10% are friendly-priced tickets for countries with signs of development. In 2023, a regular ticket cost €275, a friendly ticket €200. In addition, the festival gives away 500 free tickets to a guest country which they choose for each edition based on factors like how far the festival culture is developed in the country and how Boom can foster this development.



*Artur Mendes is a strong supporter of offering cheaper tickets to people with low income.
Photo by Rahel Inauen*

The friendly-ticket countries are determined based on objective, economic criteria like minimum wage per country and GDP per capita. Boom Festival selects ambassadors in these countries, and potential friendly-ticket buyers must prove to them that they are residents.

Mendes said about their motivation: "It was a political statement but at the same time we could see the economic situation of the people deteriorate." They want to grant low-threshold access to culture for people in countries that are really struggling and to low-income groups like students. Although Boom is an independent festival without any kind of sponsor, the ticketing model works well for them, Mendes said, and every edition since 2014 has been sold out before the line-up announcements.

The friendly tickets are a part of Boom's radical transparency approach. Boom makes public how much they pay for what and where they make how much money. Parts of their income are given to the local community. Social ticketing is just a part of this "interdependent eco-systemic approach," he said. If people are more interested in creating value for shareholders, it becomes difficult to maintain this balance, but in theory it can work for everyone, according to Mendes.



Kiki Ressler introduced social tickets at concerts of one of the biggest German bands. Photo by Rahel Inauen

Kiki Ressler works with one of the most famous and longest-performing German bands, Die Ärzte, who agreed to test a social ticketing price at two of their concerts at Tempelhof in Berlin. He remembers how annoyed he was when dynamic pricing came up in the event industry and suddenly international artists were asking for insane prices. "I was completely fed up with this new idea of dynamic pricing. It's how airlines and hotels sell their tickets and rooms. But we are selling culture, and culture should be available to everybody," he said at EFC. "Dynamic pricing is nothing but greed." According to him, normal ticket prices are already calculated to return a big profit.

High prices exclude a big part of the fan base that can't afford these tickets prices anymore. So, he thought up a

converse concept for the two Die Ärzte shows, which had 60,000 capacity each. 5% (3000) of the tickets were allocated to be social tickets and cost €19.90; regular tickets cost €83.

Ressler said it was tricky to determine a system to select who qualifies for a social ticket. Since these were the only two shows the band played that year, lots of people came from outside Berlin. Still, it was decided to sell social tickets only to people from Berlin, because the city hands out a certificate to people with low income. This served as a basis to proof someone was qualified, saving the promoter the effort to check people's economic background.

"With rising costs, of course, the ticket prices have to rise as well, but we should ensure that people with low incomes can still afford tickets," Ressler said, announcing that he would like to roll out the system on a wider basis. "In each case, the band and the management have to agree to it, but I would like to install this at least at our tours in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland."

The system worked out pretty well, but Ressler acknowledged that this is not ideal yet, calling for the industry to work on solutions. "If we all exchange ideas and lobby our politicians, I hope in the long term we can find a system that works on a national or, even better, on a European level."

After the conference, Ressler said about EFC: "I was very pleased to be able to attend the EFC 2023 as a guest. I found the 3 days very inspiring, especially the small format size with only about 50 participants led to a lively exchange and good discussions."

Some Ideas to Rethink Ticketing



Jana Posth shares her experiences with ticketing at Lollapalooza Berlin. Photo by Rahel Inauen

Artur Mendes and Kiki Ressler's interview was followed by an intense discussion about ticketing trends and issues, once again hosted by **James Drury (IQ Magazine, UK)**. Some takeaways:

- **It's often the very young audiences that can't afford festival tickets anymore.** Festivals have to attract young audiences to remain relevant, but it's often young people still in school or training that can't pay hundreds of Euros for a festival ticket. Festivals must find a balance between making profits and staying affordable for young people. A possible

solution would be to create a ticketing system that charges people with a strong economic background more to subsidize tickets for visitors with lower incomes.

- **Accommodation influences if city festivals are affordable.** Some participants reported that the hotels in their city thanks to dynamic pricing have become so expensive during their events that people couldn't afford to come anymore. Possible solutions could be to reduce the number of festival days or introduce on-site camping.
- **It's not just the ticket price that makes festivals off all kinds unaffordable.** On top of the festival tickets, visitors have costs for travel, food, and accommodation. If a burger costs €15 and a coke €6 it's easy to see why people can't afford festivals. It might help to think about how the whole festival stay can be made cheaper, for example by offering an on-site super market, so people can buy cheap pasta instead of a €15 burger. Companies like NOA Glamping resort, host of the EFC, specialize in offering everything from venue to food vendors and accommodation – everything except booking and ticket selling, which the festivals taking place at their location have to take care of themselves.
- **Festivals need to offer more value for participants' money.** It might not be enough anymore to just offer concerts and a place to lounge in the sun. More value doesn't necessarily equal go-kart tracks and Ferris wheels, but experiences that people can't make elsewhere.
- **Festivals will compete more and more with stadium shows.** So, it might be time to teach young people festival culture. Show them why it is more fun to invest €200 in a whole festival weekend rather than in a single concert by Taylor Swift.
- **It might be time to reconsider where you sell your tickets.** While the non-transparency of extra ticket fees has caused the legislators in the US to propose a new law tackling excess fees, not all ticket sellers are the same. Ticket systems like the one offered by Höme, for instance, use their fees for investments in the festival industry, e.g., to fund exchange programs for young festival makers.
- **VIP tickets can be used for good.** If VIP tickets are a part of your package, consider using a share of the profits for social causes, e.g., to keep the regular tickets cheaper, to fund social tickets or to donate to charities.



Patrick Müller (stagedates) develops a new ticketing system involving AI. Photo by Rahel Inauen

First-Ever EFC Pub Quiz Checks Delegates' Festival Knowledge



The golden Pub Quiz trophy, to take home for the winning team. Photo by Katharina Weber

Did you know that Dutch DGTL Festival only produced 20 grams of residual waste per visitor and day in 2022? No? Well, neither did the participants of the first EFC Pub Quiz. Some questions that **Katharina Weber (YOUROPE project manager)** and **Holger Jan Schmidt (General Secretary YOUROPE)** had prepared proved to be too hard even for the most experienced festival organizers.

Together, Weber and Schmidt led through 15 questions on festivals in Europe and beyond. Participants learned that Lowlands Festival (NL) built 90,000 solar panels as a solar carport park on their site, that the oldest visitor of German Open Flair Festival in 2022 was no less than 106 years old, that Burning Man (US) had to deal with climate protests and weather chaos this year, and that Pinkpop (BE) promoter, Jan Smeets, rode approximately 400 kilometers to book Golden Earring for the first festival edition in 1970.

Some things that all teams knew: the name of the festival that took place on a farm in Bethel, New York, in 1969 was Woodstock, and the name of the band that caused a row this year because two male band members kissed at Malaysian Good Vibes Festival was The 1975. Funny: Even in a room full of YOUROPE festivals nobody knew how many members the association actually had at the time (it was 123). But no worries, the organizers didn't take it personally.



Nobody stood a chance against the combined festival knowledge of team "Royal Family". Photo by Rahel Inauen

In the end, it was team "Royal Family" that took home the golden Pub Quiz trophy with 10 out of 15 points.

Youth Sports Games: Learning from other Industries

Day 2 opened with a keynote that gave an insight into events outside the music industry. **Slaven Marić, co-organizer of the Youth Sports Games (Sportske Igre Mladih, HR)**, explained how the games became the largest free of charge event of its kind in Europe and which challenges they face today. "We might not have the same target group, but the games are preparing the target group for your events," Marić said.

The YSG were started in Split, Croatia, in 1996 as a football tournament, to give children and adolescents something to do during the summer. Back then, lots of social activities and programs for children had disappeared due to the war in the Balkans and the reforming of several separate countries out of the former state of Yugoslavia, Marić explained. Since then, the games have added more disciplines and first grew within Croatia, and when support from the government failed to materialize, they expanded to Bosnia and Serbia.



Slaven Marić helps organize the biggest amateur sports events for kids in Europe. Photo by Rahel Inauen

The games go from February to August, with something going on most days. Depending on how far they go in the tournaments, some kids are with them the whole time. Last year alone, more than 260,000 kids were part of the YSG. "In 27 years, no child paid anything to participate in the games," Marić said. Over the years, the games have become the biggest amateur sports event in Europe, promoting values like fair play, also for youth not professionally organized in a sports club.

The overarching goal has always been to bring children together, so they can form new friendships and learn good things through sports. The specific goals have changed though, from avoiding drug abuse to fighting child obesity and promoting sustainable development.

In the beginning, the challenge was to get proper support, which they now have from all three governments, Marić said. This doesn't only mean financial support, but also in terms of logistics, to be given free hand, to be allowed to do announcements in schools. The border crossing quality of the event is considered valuable by the governments, according to Marić. "In this region people don't interact a lot across borders," he said, quoting a survey that found that only 5% of the children asked would sleep in the room with a kid of a different nationality.

Today the challenge for the YSG is mainly to find staff, Marić added. In the future, they would like to expand further into more countries, but it's a long process, Marić knows. They would also like to offer specific competitions for children with disabilities, which so far has failed due to a lack of infrastructure.

It's also a problem that kids are not keen on doing sports anymore. "Back in the day, you had to go outside to have fun. Now you have mobile phones and can bridge the distance to others without even going outside," he said. It used to be enough to hang an info poster in schools to bring kids to the YSG, but those times are long gone. Now you have to work closely together with the schools and get media on board. "It will be more and more challenging in the future, we believe. Social media are becoming a tool to distance instead to connect."

Storms, Heat Waves, Torrential Rain: How to Deal with Extreme Weather

When Europe's biggest metal festival, Wacken Open Air, drowned in a sea of mud this summer caused by never ending heavy rain, it made international headlines. Unfortunately, it wasn't the only festival that had to deal with severe weather episodes this year. In a panel hosted by **Greg Parmley (IQ Magazine/ILMC)**, three festival organizers talked about how they handled weather disrupting their events.



Greg Parmely (from left to right), Thomas Jensen, Mikolaj Ziolkowski and Alexandra von Samson. Photo by Rahel Inauen

On the third day of Open'er Festival 2022, a storm approached the festival site. **Mikolaj Ziolkowski (Alter Art, PL)** told the audience that in Poland, it's the organizer's decision to evacuate or not, who has to take full responsibility, so at around 7 p.m. his team decided to fully evacuate. According to him, it was the biggest evacuation in Poland in three decades.

65,000 visitors were already on site at this moment, and 80,000 tickets had been sold in total, meaning more people were still on their way to see the headline show. They informed the visitors on site and stopped the traffic to the site. All 65,000 people left within 30 minutes, Ziolkowski said.

He will never forget the moment in the control room, with police, fire department, security all being present. "It was probably the most stressful moment of my life," he said. Today, he can laugh about the fact that the US ambassador was visiting the festival during this exact moment. "Imagine what would happen to you if something happened to the US ambassador on your festival site," Ziolkowski said.

Because the festival site is on the coast and strong winds are common, everything is prepared for wind from day 1. Often, storms pass the site, but it's hard to predict their course. When Ziolkowski decided to fully evacuate, "even the police were surprised," he said. But it turned out to be a good decision. Later, wind speeds of about 100 km/h were registered at the main stage.

And yet, not one structure was destroyed because of the wind-friendly design. At 10.30 p.m. the festival could resume, which was “extremely difficult,” but they didn’t want to leave their 20,000 campers stranded. About 35,000 people came back, and Martin Garrix played the last show until 4 a.m.

Many details regarding communication, social media, and security were involved in the evacuation. The evacuation became the top news in Poland, and the team spent about half a year after the festival dealing with the PR fallout, explaining why the evacuation had been the right decision. However, the country’s fire brigade chief said they did a great job, which they wore like a badge of honor.

Open’er performs regular evacuation drills on the fully built-up site, the last one was on the day before the site opened in 2022. It helped, Ziółkowski said, but admitted that they could have done plenty of things better during the actual evacuation. He found that it is important to 1) quickly decide whether to evacuate and inform the people on site that they have to leave, 2) go through with the evacuation, 3) and only then publish explanations, e.g., on social media.

“We had weather situations in the past. Some of our greatest promotion pictures were done in the mud,” **Wacken co-founder Thomas Jensen** (DE) said, although the statistics say it’s more often sunny than rainy during Wacken. But this year “it hit with the wrong timing. After a long period of dry weather, making the ground really dry, we had a lot of rain during set up.” The ground couldn’t absorb the rain, turning it muddy, leading to long traffic jams of people trying to enter the area.



Luckily, Wacken co-founder Thomas Jensen (r.) also found positive aspects in this year’s mud chaos. Photo by Rahel Inauen

The festival started on Wednesday, and on Monday night it was a was touch and go whether the local authorities would cancel the festival. “We’re not in this to cancel. We are always trying to make the show happen. Wacken is like a lighthouse for people, we are in this to give them hope and confidence. We didn’t want to give up this story, but safety first. It is our highest good,” Jensen said. So, together authorities and promoter decided to go ahead with the festival but stop the ingress completely. “This was the hardest decision we had to make,” Jensen added. They had to get the police and fire brigade to support this decision, which was a matter of trust. According to him, it helped that someone from the authorities was a metal head himself and familiar with the festival site.

Approximately 25,000 metal fans consequently didn’t make it to Wacken this year. Luckily, the authorities and the whole region answered Wacken’s call for help. Within hours, 70 tractors arrived to help pull cars through the mud. “There was a lot of solidarity in a world where you sometimes think solidarity is not the highest value anymore.” Even after 30 years in the business, this gave Jensen hope for the future, because they felt wanted by the audience, authorities and everyone in Wacken. “With this energy, you can manage any kind of difficulties.”

Jensen underlined how important it was to have a great team to handle difficulties like these – experts, locals, famers who know how the ground on the fields would develop. And you need the

ability to improvise. “You can have evacuation plans and everything in place, but believe me, the reality is going to be really different.”

He also knows that the weather situation won’t become any easier. In fact, Wacken had already invested in more ground protection, thinking, they had learned from their mistakes. After the festival, there were calls to cover the fields in concrete. “You just have to live with that criticism,” Jensen said. Currently, they are in the middle of planning which changes they must make for 2024, announcing that they will “change a lot”. A central challenge will be traffic control caused by a rise in campervans. “Wacken is constantly changing, although people think it is very constant. The only constant thing is that [co-founder] Holger [Hübner] and I are there,” Jensen said.

And yet, it seems that Wacken bounced right back: the 2024 edition was sold out in a record 4 ½ hours.



The delegates had to deal with extreme weather in the form of a wind storm at the EFC themselves. Once it had calmed down, the NOA Glamping Resort appeared much more welcoming. Photo by Katharina Weber

Alexandra von Samson (DE), who is involved as a security expert in stadium shows and festivals like **Superbloom**, shared some general advice on safety. “You can’t prepare for everything. Things are happening that we never thought possible, so get prepared as well as you can for situations that you *can* imagine.” It’s important to get the local authorities on board and to create a relationship of trust. The same goes for the audience. “These are the things every festival can improve year on year.” New festival goers need to be educated before the festival. Keeping the audience on site informed, especially in cases of emergency, is equally important. “Make them aware that things can happen and what they are expected to do if something actually happens.”

Von Samson also shared her experiences with extreme heat in stadiums. Recently, a fan died after she collapsed due to extreme heat at a Taylor Swift show in Brazil. Von Samson emphasized that promoters must do everything in their power to prevent cases like this from repeating, although

she thinks that the industry isn't prepared enough yet for this kind of heat. Luckily, the YOUROPE Event Safety (YES) Group that von Samson is a part of is already working on the topic, she said.

You didn't need to go to Brazil to feel extreme heat this summer. Even in Germany, von Samson managed shows in 35°C. She described that it almost felt like the audience got cooked alive when the metal panels that laced the arena floor heated up. She observed how the visitors followed the shade on the arena floor, so providing shade is obviously an important factor, but solutions must be wind-proof, she remarked. At the shows she managed, they also created more shade in front of the stadium, increased the amount of water people were allowed to bring inside and offered free water points on site to the audience. Nothing revolutionary, but it helped, she said. "Do what you did before but do it constantly," is her advice.

Spraying people with water from the stadium's built-in sprinkler system was prohibited by the authorities due to hygiene concerns. It wouldn't have been a good idea anyway, as Professor Robert Lončarić explained in the following panel.

Artur Mendes (Boom Festival) invited festivals to learn from his experiences. In Portugal, drills preparing for wildfires are mandatory, and providing shade is more important than scenography at his festival. They found that some materials are better suited to provide shade than others; fire resistance in materials also plays a role.

The Science of Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events



Professor Robert Lončarić considers climate change from a scientific perspective. Photo by Rahel Inauen

By now, probably all of us have seen some kind of video of an extreme weather situation on the news or the internet. How these actually come to be was explained by **Professor Robert Lončarić from the Department of Geography at the University of Zadar (HR)**. Considering the rise of climate change deniers worldwide, he said he was glad to see that people outside the scientific community acknowledge the problem and want to do something about it.

Lončarić started out explaining an important distinction. While the term "weather" describes the current state of the atmosphere around you, "climate" describes the average weather conditions for a particular location and over a long

period of time (at least 30 years). "You need long data sets in order to determine whether there is a climate change," and we have reliable data for the past 200 years or so, starting when weather measuring instruments were invented.

Climate change and the greenhouse effect

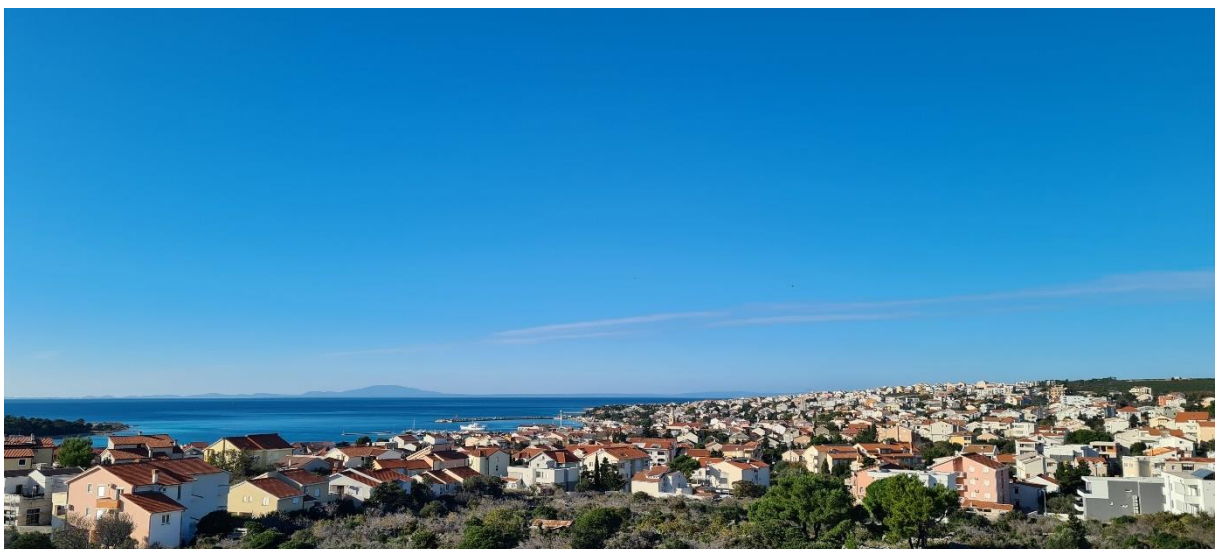
Professor Robert Lončarić explained the basic mechanism that leads to global warming. "The main source of heat on our planet is the sun," he said. Some of the sun's radiation gets reflected on the Earth's surface and sent back towards space. Greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, like water vapor trap, some of this radiation, keeping some of the heat inside Earth's atmosphere. This "greenhouse effect" is the one of the reasons why there is life on earth – without it, the surface would be frozen solid.

However, there is now increasingly more water vapor in the atmosphere worldwide, meaning more heat is kept, causing global warming. The reason for the higher temperatures especially in the last 60 years is the increased amount of another greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide (CO₂), in the atmosphere. And the warmer it gets, the more water vapor gets into the atmosphere, further amplifying climate change.

Even if we kept CO₂ levels the same, the temperatures would still rise, the professor said. They will rise even more, the more CO₂ gets into the atmosphere.

"Humanity has shifted climate to the more extreme events," he said, showing two maps of extreme weather events in Europe in 2010 and in 2022, including large hail, heavy rain, tornado, extreme heat waves and more. "I have no good news for you, because these events will become more and more frequent. We'll have normal summers in the future, but the probability of normal summers is decreasing. And continental areas of Europe are in the most danger of extreme hazard events."

Particularly the Mediterranean is more and more in danger of "heat domes," prolonged, persistent heat waves. Air up high moved downwards, getting warmer and warmer, acting like a shield, not allowing cool air to move inwards. When cool air finally manages to penetrate the heat dome "you have ingredients for complete chaos," as was underlined by video, showing a severe storm following a heat dome.



Novalja on Pag Island as seen from the roof of Hotel Olea. Photo by Holger Jan Schmidt

An interesting fact especially for festivals that the professor dropped: spraying people with water in hot weather is not a good course of action. It evaporates, increasing the humidity in the air, so sweat can't evaporate as easily from our skin, interfering with our body's natural cooling system.

According to Lončarić, the atmosphere is a so-called "chaotic system": "Everything is interlocked in our atmosphere. This is why it is hard to predict the weather." He said that scientists can predict the temperature fairly easily a week in advance, but it's difficult to predict micro events like thunderstorms that can develop in a very short period of time.

So, what can we do? The key words are mitigation and adaption. Mitigation means taking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, e.g., by using sustainable transportation and clean energy. Adaption means taking actions that manage the risks of climate change impacts, e.g., disaster management and flood protection. The two areas overlap in measures like water conservation, eating local food, educating people on climate change. Lončarić's top recommendation for festivals: "You need to have meteorologists on speed dial. This is the best thing you can do."

Delegates blown away by bora wind

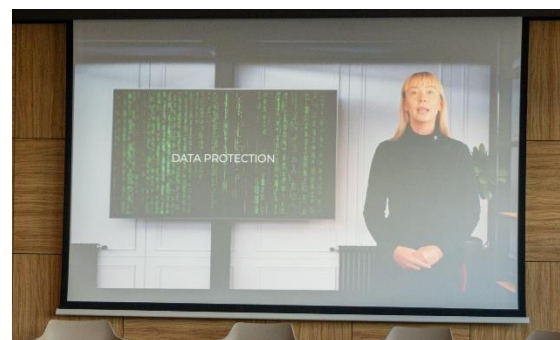
Professor Robert Lončarić also used the opportunity to explain what the delegates had witnessed on Pag the day before: a so-called windstorm which is typical for this part of Croatia mostly in the cooler parts of the year. In extreme Bora events, speeds can reach up to 200 km/h. Yet, this Bora wind has nothing to do with climate change; it's a regular phenomenon caused by cooler air from a high-pressure area on the continent meeting warmer air from a low-pressure area over the Adriatic Sea. Traveling down the mountain range that sits directly at the coast makes the wind pick up quite some speed.

After the panel, Lončarić said: "I was impressed by the participants' awareness and knowledge about climate changes and challenges they bring, and the level of the discussion about this topic was higher than on some scientific conferences that I have attended! I only wish my students and colleagues could witness this."

How AI can Support Marketing

AI – curse or blessing? While opinions are deeply divided on this issue, EFC invited **Professor Aleksandra Przegalinska (Harvard University, US, Vice-President of Kozminski University, PL)** to talk about a more specific question: will AI replace marketing jobs? Unfortunately, Przegalinska had to cancel her appearance, but found a replacement: her own avatar that tried to answer the question in a pre-recorded video.

The short answer: AI is more than a Swiss army knife, but when it comes to creativity, humans still



Professor Aleksandra Przegalinska's avatar explains how to use AI in marketing. Photo by Rahel Inauen

have the upper hand, so the best solution is to combine AI with a human touch. "It's like pairing wine with cheese," the avatar said. "It's not about AI versus humans but about AI *and* humans."

AI's are great at performing certain tasks, like processing information and looking for patterns, but they are not good at doing whole jobs. This can be used to our advantage in marketing, where clients accept generic advertisement less and less and instead expect personalized content. AI can be used to automate processes and increase efficiency, to predict customer preferences and future needs based on available data. Humans come in when it comes to setting the right tone based on the targeted context, considering sensitive contexts, and creating an emotional connection.

Stagedates Develops Ticketing System Supported by AI

For those looking for an alternative to big ticket sellers, there will be another solution available soon. The company stagedates is currently testing their newly developed, AI-based ticketing system in an open-beta phase, with a release planned for early 2024. **Patrick Müller** and **Volker May (stagedates)** explained that the system is based on a so-called LLMS, a Large Language Model System that uses about 1 million Gigabyte of data to optimize ticket sales. It involved deep learning, which means the AI trains itself to become better with time.

Müller further explained why social demographic data is not the best data to base your marketing on by comparing King Charles and Ozzy Osbourne: they have surprisingly similar demographic data (age, gender, income etc.) but probably don't go to the same events. So, their system aims to use many more types of data to create targeted marketing campaigns. The system uses internal data from the promoter as well as external data, e.g., from Google and Facebook to create so-called taste clusters. These taste clusters might, e.g., be based on a specific headliner or a specific pricing category.

Stagedates also offers an integration of these taste clusters into the Meta Business Suite. This means promoters could run their marketing campaigns as usual through the Suite, but since they are based on data collected by the AI, Müller predicts that they will reach more customers that are willing to buy a ticket than before. To create a campaign, promoters have to enter a primary text into the suite, then the AI will test hundreds of versions of the text and will publish only the best-performing one. Müller calculates that this will make marketing 92% faster, meaning promoters will have more time left to focus on other aspects of their job.

The tool is supposed to be free for promoters. According to Müller, the costs will be covered by a presale fee of 10 cents on every ticket paid by the ticket buyer.



Cats are not a part of stagedates' new ticketing system – but an integral part of NOA Glamping resort. Photo by Katharina Weber

Globalization Challenges the Festival Market

Where are we in a world that seems to be spinning ever faster and in which a huge number of issues have cross-border impacts? The festival market is exposed to many influences, how do we deal with them? Do headliners still want to play festivals or do they prefer arenas and stadiums? Can we adapt? Who does inflation hit and how hard and what does it lead to? Do the wars in different parts of the world affect us and what are the effects on our daily business? And what role does the segmentation of our market play? How much independence is left? So much to talk about – let's give it a try.

It's no secret that the festival market is becoming increasingly globalized. New markets keep opening up in countries that so far have spent little effort on hosting festivals, new festivals are popping up left and right, and big corporations are buying up established festivals, adding them to their diverse portfolios. Reason enough to dedicate a panel to the topic.

It had a good mix of speakers: host **Greg Parmley** is connected to many different kinds of festivals thanks to his work for IQ Magazine and ILMC; **Christof Huber** is head of the festival department of Swiss promoter Gadget, which is connected to the Eventim portfolio; while **Mikko Niemelä (Ruisrock promoter)** and **Codruta Vulcu (ARTmania founder)** represented two festivals with a long history that remain independent to this day.



Greg Parmley, Christof Huber, Mikko Niemelä and Codruta Vulcu. Photo by Rahel Inauen

The speakers agreed that the festival market will become decreasingly independent over the next few years. Vulcu even compared the corporatization of the festival market to communism, whereby single dominant organizations decide the fate of everyone, she predicted. Yet, despite the tough competition in the festival market, they also agreed that festival promoters, whether independent or corporate, will likely keep communicating with each other.

Increasing artist fees and growing competition from stadium shows were another talking point. It remains to be seen if the current model of festival organization can keep up with the increasing costs or if the industry has to come up with a new model.

One of the biggest threats to the European festival market that the panel identified was the disparity between artist fees that can be realized in the USA and in other markets. It's already the case that many A-listers tour less through Europe (or not at all anymore), because they earn more money just touring in the US. Another issue that might impact the festival market in the future is the currently high influx of venture capital into the business. It remains to be seen if the investments will turn out profits, and if not, whether the investing parties will withdraw from the market, potentially leaving a vacuum behind.

How to Hand over a Festival from One Generation to the Next

Even the best-running company will collapse if the business is not handed over correctly to the new generation of employees. This is also true for festivals – oftentimes, they were founded by a group of motivated individuals that wanted to bring culture to the people. But no matter how motivated you are, you can't work forever, so the topic of generational handover must be dealt with in every company. How can the responsibilities be transitioned from the senior to the junior staff?

German festival **Das Fest** supported a bachelor thesis on the topic of generational handover in the festival industry a while ago.

Markus Wiersch and **Kevin Leider** introduced the study and the process that their company has gone through since then at the EFC. "We have no expertise on the topic, but lots of experience," Wiersch said. "Markus has been in the music business since 1992, and Kevin was born in 1992," he said, showing that they represent the older and younger generation, respectively.

During the pandemic, the festival founded a working group to rethink the event because they could sense that the festival wouldn't be the same afterwards. Markus voluntarily withdrew from the group, because – being about 10 years away from retirement – he didn't feel it was his place anymore to decide the future of the event. He discussed the results with the working group and together they decided which ideas to move forward. Some worked out, some failed, but he was still glad they tried, Wiersch stated. Leider agreed, saying: "Your company should have a positive mistake culture. Making mistakes is very important to gaining experience."

The bachelor thesis examined 30 festivals from 15 countries. One of the most important findings was that, while $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents agreed that generational change is an important topic to them, about half of them said they should have handled it differently in the past or weren't sure



Kevin Leider (l.) and Markus Wiersch from Das Fest deal with generational change at their festival a lot. Photo by Katharina Weber

how to handle it at all. This is why Leider and Wiersch opened the panel up for a discussion with the participants, to share experiences and find solutions. These are some of the results:

- **The company needs to find out what the younger employees want.** This might differ from company to company. It might mean being assigned new tasks in regular intervals, an opportunity to grow, room to test themselves out and thrive, the chance to go the meetings like the EFC and talk about their experiences there. But it can also mean more salary, the perspective to be promoted, or benefits like extra vacation days.
- **Experienced employees/ management: Try not to micromanage younger employees.** It can be hard to hand over responsibility, but micromanaging your employee's every move keeps you from doing your own job and leads to frustration, because you limit their possibilities. Try to create an atmosphere of mutual trust, where tasks are clearly divided and there is always a chance for constructive feedback talks for both sides.
- **Work-life-balance is a thing now.** There might not be a study proving that Gen Z values a balance between time spent working and time spent doing other things more than Gen X or the Boomer generation, but many delegates talked about their experiences with younger employees demanding work-life-balance. It's important not to misinterpret this as laziness or a disinterest in the job – which is not the case in most instances. It just seems that there is a greater awareness for mental health, especially after the pandemic, that makes people nowadays more reluctant to sacrifice their wellbeing for an 80-hour work week. This doesn't mean that younger employees do a bad job – they just know when to stop.
- **Idealism and dedication can be grown in people.** The festival market is a different one than it was 30 years ago. While back in the day groups of dedicated individuals simply founded festivals out of their personal motivations, today, there is already a festival for everything and if you want to work for a festival, you apply at an existing festival rather than found your own. It is understandable that the young festival makers of today start with a different motivation than the young festival makers of 30 years ago. This doesn't mean that the same idealism and motivation can't be grown in today's young festival makers. Companies must give them good reasons to care about the event. Is it socially inclusive, innovative, is there still the same love involved as 30 years ago – or is it just another money maker for a rich person?
- **There is a difference between power and responsibility, and learning how to take over responsibility is a process.** With management positions comes the power to make decisions, but also the responsibility to own up to these decisions, if things go wrong. Both aspects have to be learned. It might be a good idea to start giving younger



Markus Wiersch has worked in the festival industry for 30 years. Photo by Rahel Inauen

employees a little power and a little responsibility first and gradually give them more, when they feel comfortable in their position.

- **Create a company structure in which not everything rests on a single person's shoulders.** For example: A delegate talked about his company that has a flat hierarchy. The staff is challenged to do a bit more than is normal, but they are also compensated better, which creates a competent "base layer" of employees. Managers don't need to determine a successor ten years before their retirement, but if the company has a robust employee base, it is also prepared much better for personnel changes. Having as many people as possible in an organization that *could* take over, should someone in a managing position leave, is a good idea.
- **It might be time to create better working conditions in the festival industry.** Long hours and a crazy workload sound familiar to many in the events industry. But maybe instead of looking down at colleagues who want to go home after their contractual eight-hour shift has ended, we should ask ourselves why it is necessary for us to work overtime, all the time, and whether we can find other, healthier working models for everyone.
- **If young employees leave your company, give them the chance to come back.** Employees might be looking to make experiences that your company can't offer at the moment. If they decide to quit, don't hold it against them, but leave the door open for them to be hired again in the future, bringing new back new experiences to your company.
- **Maybe we need a broad exchange program in the festival industry.** After a few years, it might help employees to experience something else to progress in their job. A Danish festival reported that they successfully initiated an exchange program that switches employees with festivals in Iceland and Sweden. Experiencing other festival productions, maybe even in different countries can open up entirely new perspectives for individual employees and, after their return, also for their companies.

Are You Really Okay? Checking the Mental Health of the Festival Sector

The session was designed as a so-called sound check, which captures the memories and experiences of the past four years, puts them into perspective and creates an outlook to the future. It continued the series of mental health focus sessions at EFC. It was hosted by **YOUROPE General Secretary Holger Jan Schmidt** with key inputs by **EXIT Festival's Milica Dragomirović** about the experiences made and measures taken by the festival.



Milica Dragomirović. Photo by Rahel Inauen

The session plan was to take a journey from

- **retrospective** (How was it during the pandemic? What were the changes we imagined?) to
- **restart & today's soundcheck** (How did we come out of the pandemic? Did we create the "new normal" many of us aspired?) and ending at
- **outlook** (What will become more relevant in the future? What would participants like to be addressed?).



The discussion with the panel participants showed that there is a great need to talk about mental health in the music industry. Photo by Rahel Inauen

Thus, the session started in **retrospective**. The subject was only meant to be the opener, but it quickly proved to be a very important topic on its own that many wanted to talk about. One could feel a great need to share how the pandemic was experienced, which participants did in very different ways, as it turned out. The original session plan was amended and the participants were given time to speak, which meant the outlook part was cut short at the end.

Some takeaways from the retrospective part:

- The virus was seen as the common enemy.
- Another perceived common enemy were the governments as they were imposing restrictions on the sector.
- The possibility to live one's creativity was stolen.
- There was an intense workload for HR and mental health departments.
- "Worst time in the world", since home office felt like torture for some participants.
- Others enjoyed this experience.
- Remote work and online meetings meant positive change also for post-pandemic times.
- People realized the importance of feeling safe.
- Participants felt pressure caused by an uncertain outlook on the future and frustration about the perceived incompetence of politicians and decision makers. A solution was to build resilience against it and strengthen a DIY mentality and creative problem solving.
- Some were anxious and scared for their health and the safety of their jobs. It felt like they were in survival mode – not a comfortable feeling.
- Several participants experienced having more time available for themselves and their families, e.g., for vacations, trips, hobbies.
- It also enhanced opportunities for alternative income sources. For example, test centers were run by many festival organizers because they already knew how to do logistics and infrastructure planning.
- Some worried that there will be a "covid pass forever" and that costs for hygiene measures from now on need to be budgeted for every show. Neither has turned into reality.

The discussion also showed very different approaches to our jobs and differences in our industry. While for some identification and passion are important to do their job, one of the participants expressed a more neutral approach; the job is a contract with my employer. Thus, the feeling of being cut from what is loved in this case was not as strong. It came as no surprise that others mentioned that they could not work in such a relationship. This was a great example of how different people can be found in similar positions and that neither approach is better or worse.



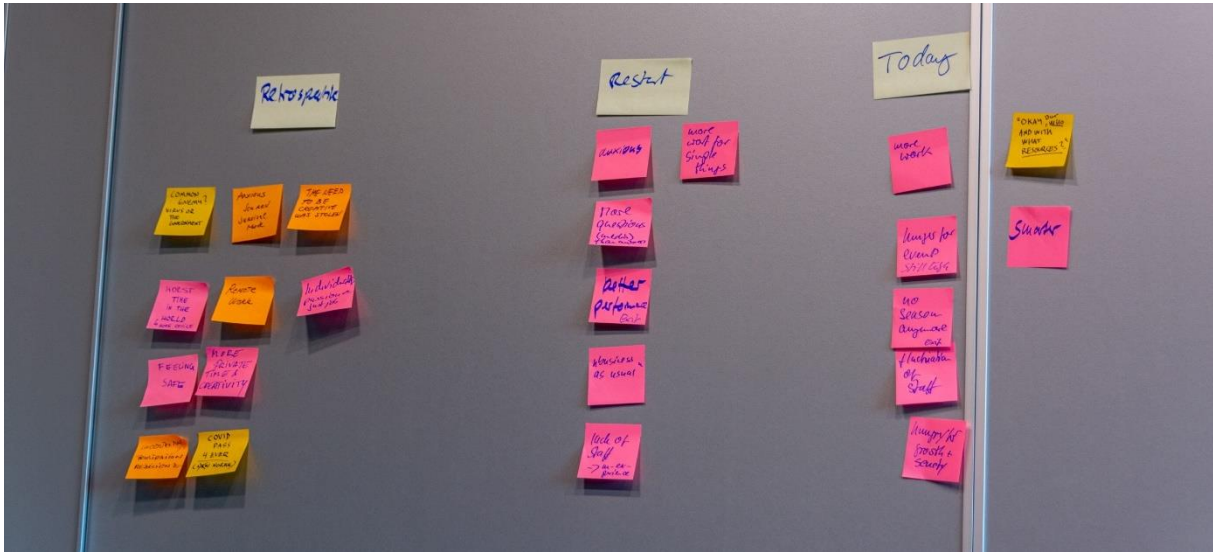
*Hosts Holger Jan Schmidt and Milica Dragomirović lead through the panel.
Photo by Rahel Inauen*

After the long opening, which in the end took the biggest part of the session, the group looked back at how to **restart** the industry to become fully running again. Some takeaways:

- Many were anxious if this will work out: Can we still do it? Will the people come back (audience & staff)?
- We were confronted with more questions about how we are going to make it work, especially from the media, which added to the stress.
- Some experienced a better performance in their team due to various reasons like increased motivation and good preparation from the HR team during the pandemic.
- Others felt it was "business as usual".
- The lack of staff or working with inexperienced staff led to stress and/or higher workloads in many departments.
- Some also realized that they need to invest more work into simple things and tasks.

In the final minutes of the session, we took a look at the situation **today**, which for some still feels like a part of the restart. The participants feel:

- There is more work to do than before.
- Business is okay, but there is still a lack of staff and resources.
- A hunger for events is still there (staff and audience).
- In some companies you don't have a "season" anymore – they organize events all year long, making taking breaks almost impossible.
- The fluctuation of staff is still very high and this means more work and/or stress for the remaining colleagues (briefings, trainings, help, support).
- Many long for their events and/or companies to grow, but still also for security (health and job).
- Some mentioned that we got smarter during the pandemic as many of us had to be creative to find solutions, and we kept this skill.
- And last but not least: the calls for a better work-life-balance are louder than before.



Participants collected their thoughts on post-its. Photo by Rahel Inauen

At this point of the session, the time was up and Holger had a hard time stopping the discussion to return to the conference as planned. Clearly, there is more need to talk.

Another issue that should be mentioned is the special situation that our Ukrainian colleagues are in and which was felt intensely during this session. For them, all these topics are so far removed from their reality, and it became clear that they would rather deal with inexperienced staff or a high workload organizing a festival instead of dealing – in which way ever – with a reality that has been imposed on them by the Russian invasion. This imbalance between Ukraine and the rest of Europe was also felt by the participants, but the session was designed to look at the situation in all of Europe. But it also showed that we have to keep a focus on the situation of our Ukrainian peers and keep giving them a stage to talk about their reality.

...and some Fun Stuff

The European Festival Conference is not only about learning new things about organizing festivals, it's also about experiencing the respective host country. After the first conference day, delegates visited the Salt Museum in the center of Pag town. An employee, whose own father worked for 40 years in the salines on Pag decades ago, told the delegates how salt used to be produced on the island. In about 35°C heat, men used to work in the salines, spreading sea water over large areas and extracting the salt from it in a long process that required lots of physical labor. Today, the process is largely automated and takes about 45 days per cycle. The salt produced on Pag is still said to be one the best in the region.



Pag's salt museum. Photo by Katharina Weber



All self-made by Konoba Prtorić. Photos by Holger Jan Schmidt

The salt is also the reason why the meat and cheese produced on Pag taste so good. The strong wind blows the sea salt over the island, and the farm animals eat the salt covered grass, absorbing it into their bodies. The delegates could convince themselves that this isn't just a marketing gag when they had dinner at Konoba Prtorić after their visit to the museum. The family-led restaurant is proud to raise their own cows and sheep, and produce their own cheese and honey, which they also served that night in a delicious three-course meal.



Art installation "A Greeting to the Sun".
Photo by James Drury

On the second day, the conference participants went on a bus tour to the nearby city of Zadar, where a guide took them on a short tour through the picturesque old town that is located on a peninsula. They saw the Romanic church St. Anastasia, excavated ruins from Roman times, and the illuminated church of St. Donatus, where they coincidentally witnessed an outdoor concert by a local choir.

They also passed the Sea Organ, an architectural installation that lets the waves that hit the promenade create organ-like sounds, and "The Greeting to the Sun," an art installation that absorbs sun light during the day and creates a colorful spectacle at night.

Of course, a delicious dinner was also part of the trip, this time served at Morita Bar & Kitchen. Back at NOA Glamping resort, delegates were looking forward to a DJ set by Mikko Niemelä from Ruisrock, also known as DJ Mini. Unfortunately, it was cut short by an island-wide power outage (locals said it was



A package fresh from the oven. Photos by Holger Jan Schmidt and Katharina Weber

probably related to cleaning measures that were necessary after the windstorm from the day before had spread salt everywhere).



DJ Mini (Mikko Niemelä) shortly before the power outage ended his set prematurely. Photo by James Drury

Nevertheless, the delegates made the best out of the situation, enjoying their drinks while listening to music played by DJ Spotify, illuminated only by the light of an almost full moon.

The European Festival Conference is an event of

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