

**November
18 – 21, 2025**

**A CONFERENCE
FULLY DEDICATED
TO FESTIVALS**

**Ecorkhotel,
Évora, Portugal**

REPORT



European Festival Conference

The Lince Ecorkhotel, Quinta da Deserta e Malina, 7000-804 Évora, Portugal

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Introduction: What's in this Report?

This report summarizes the key takeaways and learning from YOUROPE's sixth European Festival Conference (EFC). The biannual conference is open to everyone interested in all matters festival, whether they are YOUROPE members or not. This time, the traveling conference found its venue at Ecorkhotel in Évora, Portugal, about an hour outside of Lisbon.

Please feel free to use the table of contents or the list below to jump to the topics that interest you the most. In this report you will learn:

- How to [navigate the future of festivals](#) by treating the festival as a headliner and promoting its positive effect on tourism
- [Creative ways to create more revenue](#)
- [How the climate in Europe will develop](#)
- [How festivals can better prepare for extreme weather events](#)
- [Why economic impact studies matter for festivals](#)
- About the results of economic impact studies by [Boom Festival](#) (PT) & [Rock in Rio Lisbon](#)
- [Why show stop procedures matter](#)
- [How Sziget \(HU\), Øyafestivalen \(NO\) and Boom Festival handled recent cancellation attempt on their festivals](#)
- [Why populist and autocratic regimes target festivals and culture in general](#)
- How [ARTmania](#) (RO), [EXIT Festival](#) (RS), and [Periferias](#) festivals (ES) have dealt with political pressure in their countries and on their events
- Thinking outside the box: [how a winemaker's passion transformed an entire valley](#)
- [What to consider when looking for insurance for your festival](#)
- [About the results of the EFC debate Club on AI and its role at festivals](#)
- How sustainability measures can be both ecological and economical with good practices from [Valley of Arts](#) (HU) and [Boom Festival](#)
- [What you can do against the illegal resale of your festival tickets](#)
- [Why we all stick to the festival industry, despite its crazy demands](#)



This curious fellow welcomes guests at the entrance to Ecorkhotel in Évora. Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

The EFC was possible thanks to funding by the EU that YOUROPE received through its network project "3F Future-Fit Festivals." When the EFC took place, the European festival association had 138 member festivals and associated organizations from 31 countries. The EFC was visited by 80 delegates from over 20 countries and was thus sold out.

Opening

YOUROPE's chairman of the board Christof Huber and General Secretary Holger Jan Schmidt welcomed the participants of the 6th European Festival Conference in person on the morning of the first full conference day. "We are proud to have a sold-out conference with 80 delegates and speakers from over 20 countries to talk about festivals and the people behind it," Huber said.



Holger Jan Schmidt (left) and Christof Huber addressing the delegates during the EFC's opening. Photo: Rahel Inauen

After editions in Kals (AU), Larvik (NO), Barcelona (ES) (twice), and Zrće (HR), the edition in Évora marked the tenth anniversary of the European Festival Conference (EFC). As always, besides a great panel program, the conference was designed with a lot of time for the delegates to get to know their colleagues. "Here, you can't hide – we'll find you and spend time with you," Huber said jokingly.

The conference comes at a crucial time both politically and businesswise, Huber continued saying. Cancellations and postponements haunt the European festival scene, political opponents and commercial problems put pressure on festivals, and there is a war going on in Europe both physically in Ukraine and for the freedom of speech in many countries on the continent.

As Huber told the audience, YOUROPE has continued its support for Ukraine in the fourth year of the Russian invasion. Music Saves Ukraine (MSU), the humanitarian aid organization of the Ukrainian music industry, was supposed to be present at the EFC, but its members weren't allowed to leave the country. So, MSU's Vlad Yaremchuk addressed the delegates in a video message instead.

"In general, it has been a very challenging year for MSU and yet we have realized some of our most amazing projects thanks to the festivals that have been working with us for another year,"

**If you want to support
Music Saves Ukraine,
reach out to us at
office@yourope.org**

Yaremchuk said. MSU managed to print 30,000 textbooks for music schools, among other things. December will see the third edition of the Music Ambassadors Tour, which invites select music professionals to witness the consequences of the war and the resilience of the Ukrainian people firsthand.

Huber also used the opening to commemorate Steen Jorgensen, who passed away at the age of 68 after a battle with cancer this year. According to his colleague Rikke Øxner, he was "a true warrior of music" who had shaped the European festival scene as a part of Roskilde Festival for 30 years.

360° Experience Required: Navigating the Future of Festivals



Speakers James Drury (from left to right), Fruzsina Szép, Shpat Begolli, Roberta Medina and Mikko Niemelä.
Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

It feels like festivals have never been under pressure as much as they have been in the past couple of years. Rising production costs, paired with a cost-of-living crisis, rising artist fees, extreme weather and political pressure from right-wing parties are just some of the current challenges. In the panel "Navigating the Future," the EFC assembled festival professionals from all corners of the continent to talk about these challenges and the solutions they found.

Answers to the question of how the festival year has been **by IQ Magazine's special editor and host of this session, James Drury (UK)**, were mixed. **Mikko Niemelä, CEO of Ruisrock (FI)**, complained about the "biggest storm of his career" almost cancelling the event, fewer ticket sales, and bad customer feedback.

Roberta Medina, Vice President of Rock in Rio, which takes place in Lisbon (PT) and Rio de Janeiro (BR), felt the effect of US President Donald Trump's policies on the economy – even in Brazil customers chose carefully if and where to spend their money. Yet, she thinks that we have allowed the conversation about competing against headliner and stadium shows to become too big. "Let's stop talking about tough times. This shouldn't go to the press. It's our business," she said. The moment she realized the industry has a problem was when sponsors approached her, asking what is going on with festivals. She suggested talking more within the industry, connecting to other festivals to find solutions and become stronger as a whole. "Everybody has a problem; it's not just festivals. It has to be our conversation," she said.

**"Let's stop talking
about tough times.
This shouldn't go
to the press. It's
our business."**

Shpat Begolli, Managing Director and Head of Operations at Sunny Hill Festival (XK), reported they had a good year and managed to tap into new markets like Turkey and Greece – no small feat in the Balkans. Their biggest challenge was the weather, more specifically the current drought in the country. Since they are in the process of revitalizing their new festival site by planting trees and wildflowers, rain is crucial for them.

Roberta Medina, Rock in Rio

Fruzsina Szép, festival director of Superbloom Festival and Lollapalooza Berlin (DE), had to deal with constant rain from buildup almost to the closing of the 10th Lollapalooza Berlin, but managed thanks to her great crew. "It's the team who is doing the hard work," she said. They created unique moments that could be only experienced on site and that were also not announced beforehand, which the visitors appreciated.



*Superbloom's Fruzsina Szép.
Photo: Katharina Weber*

Superbloom's team managed the impossible and built up the festival in only three days due to a prior event at Munich's Olympic Park. "It was incredible to see how everybody was working so concentrated and hand in hand but also on a very human level together," Szép said. What followed was an incredible 4th edition with many more visitors than expected. "Superbloom is a tiny little flower, but I feel the festival has arrived in Europe." Next challenge: Olympic Park will be closed for renovation until spring 2028, but the team is close to presenting a new concept to the public. "I believe in the power of the team and the force of nature," Szép said.

Drury asked: **"With headliners becoming more and more expensive, is the concept 'headliner = great festival' still a viable concept?"** "We would all lie if we said we don't need headliners," Szép replied. According to her, festivals need a couple of names on their bill that people from different age groups know at least a few songs of.

Besides, she sees the need for concepts that are not only headline-driven and that give a special identity to festivals. "The festival experience is a 360° experience, and our artists are one aspect of it." She revealed that in their festival visitor surveys, the interest in non-music content has been growing year by year and has now reached almost 50%. "People buy their ticket 50% for the experience that they have on site," she said.

Niemelä agreed, saying that Ruisrock's surveys show that visitors mainly come to have a good time with friends. "The goal is to make the festival the headliner but that's easier said than done," he said. People still expect to see Billy Eilish and Beyoncé, even in Finland, which is virtually unreachable for big tours relying on trucks and only accessible for smaller productions that fit on a plane. Luckily, there is also a huge demand for local artists, Niemelä said.

Rock in Rio started in 1995 when Brazil was out of the touring business and the purchasing power of its citizens low, Medina told the audience. They had to sell loads of tickets to finance the first edition, and all the production came from abroad. One goal was to promote Rio de Janeiro internationally, so big international artists were needed to attract audiences from abroad. They couldn't have done it without the support of sponsors. This changed a bit when they expanded to Portugal, where the purchasing power was higher and they needed to rely less on advertising money. She believes that the brand must be relevant – people should come because they want to be at your festival.

"The festival experience is a 360° experience, and our artists are one aspect of it."

Fruzsina Szép,
Superbloom & Lollapalooza

Being a young festival in Kosovo makes it extra hard for Sunny Hill to attract headliners. Being so far away from usual touring routes, "it was really hard to convince people in the beginning to come to Kosovo and perform. It's a day extra for artist to come set up and play," Begolli said. As a new festival, they first had to create the good feeling the festival is supposed to give to people each year, so visitors would believe this is what would expect them every year.

Sunny Hill rewards loyalty by offering a **“believer ticket”**, the cheapest ticket they sell, long before any acts are announced. As Begolli said, the number of believer tickets is currently growing but not the percentage of the total audience. They see big spikes in sales whenever they announce a headliner. “The headliner is the little bit of extra that people need to be convinced,” Begolli said.

Since purchasing power in Kosovo is low, they rely on sponsorships and try to negotiate with artists as much as possible. They try to get as many people as possible to buy stuff at the festival and share revenues with the vendors on site, also designing merch with different brands to maximize merch sales. Since they must import production equipment that is sometimes neither available in their country nor region, they share production with festivals in Bulgaria and Greece, which are at least a 10-hour-drive from Pristina.

While some festivals have resorted to cutting stages, the number of days or artists, Medina thinks that reducing the quality can only hurt a festival. She recommends creating new revenue streams instead, e.g. **B2B investments**, by offering festivals as a place for companies to reward their teams or to receive clients.



*Sunny Hill's Shpat Begolli.
Photo: Rahel Inauen*

Another opportunity is **to present festivals as relevant to tourism** because events attract tourists to a city. “Connecting to the tourism industry has been a place where we have been investing a lot,” Medina said. Another factor is forming people’s expectations through communication – festivals have communicated that they are a place to see headliners, so this is what people expect now. Instead, communication should focus more on the nature of festivals, Medina thinks.

Drury asked whether Gen Z is still invested in festivals. Niemelä mentioned that, with their world being divided into clips that are just a few seconds long, a four-day festival experience is unimaginable for them and can be overwhelming and stressful. Szép thinks that city festivals, where everyone can sleep at home and use their own bathrooms, have an advantage with the young crowd. “The feedback that we are receiving is that this is a gigantic plus for Gen Z,” she said.



Ruisrock's Mikko Niemelä. Photo: Rahel Inauen

Superbloom also heavily invests in making visitors feel safe, e.g. by offering awareness teams that visitors can approach if they have a problem and inclusion teams that answer every mail within 24 hours and are also present on site. On top of that, the festival offers places to sit down and unwind like relaxation zones, wine gardens, and family & friends zones.

To Szép, festivals’ big plus is being places that can make dreams come true. “Show me any other industry that can make dreams come true for their visitors,” she said. Festivals are analogue places where you can hug people, sweat and celebrate

together in person. “We are human beings, we need touching, the feeling of togetherness – and our industry is exactly about togetherness and creating these emotions.”

Medina added that festivals are not only about realizing dreams but demonstrating that people can in fact come together in harmony. “When we take care of people in a good way, they behave. We are proof that it’s possible. It’s not a dream, it happens,” she said.



Youth work and politics expert Prof. Özgehan Senyuva. Photo: Rahel Inauen

From the audience, youth work expert **Prof. Özgehan Senyuva from MET University (TR)** mentioned that, in his field lots of evaluation is done, but not much prediction. He was involved in a huge three-year forecasting study that tried to change that. “The good news is young people will keep coming to festivals, but there are many factors that you have to take into consideration,” he said.

For example: demographic change. While teenage pregnancies used to be a big issue, people are now becoming parents at an older age. Instead, young people dealing with their parents undergoing cancer treatment is a more prevalent topic. “This we didn’t see coming, but now we are developing strategies,” Prof. Senyuva said. The research project also predicts stronger youth migration from the Mediterranean because it will become too hot there during the summer for tourism.

Something that **Natália Oszkó-Jakab from Valley of Arts (HU)** learned about her young visitors is that “they would like to hang out in smaller groups with some activities like learning photography.” Valley of Arts offers a range of workshops to their audience, which produces a heavier workload than just putting up concerts but also resonates well with the young audience, according to her.

When Drury asked about new solutions that festivals found this year, **Achim Ostertag, founder of Summer Breeze Open Air (DE)**, replied that to bring more shade to their site, they decided to plant 10 to 12-meters-tall trees, instead of renting umbrellas that wouldn’t stand a windy day anyway. “We try to find solutions that last long,” he said.

Drury’s final question was whether the panelists look forward to something in 2026. While Begolli mentioned building a one-kilometer-long canal for irrigation to fight the drought, Medina said they will focus more on tourism, presenting Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro as one of their headliners. Szép: “The magical beauty of togetherness is such a healing power nowadays that I couldn’t wish for more in 2026 than to keep this feeling alive for all of our events.”

How to Create Revenue outside of Ticket Sales

It’s no secret that festivals these days are hard-pressed for money. Four times in a row, the European festival promoters survey, conducted by IQ Magazine and YOUROPE, revealed rising production costs as the top challenge for European festivals. In the session “Creating Cash Before Budgets Burst,” host **Greg Parmley (ILMC, UK)** and his panelists talked about some

practical measures they have introduced at their events to increase revenue streams without alienating audiences.

When asked for a concrete moment when production costs were unavoidable, **Jana Posth (Director Festivals at PRK DreamHaus, DE)** mentioned the costs that come with major productions – not just headliner fees but also the materials and staff required to build the set for the next day's headliner overnight at Rock am Ring and Rock im Park. **Rock For People's Luděk Motyčka (CZ)** said it's a challenge to plan your site in a way so you end up having enough stuff available for peak moments rather than just on average, e.g. enough toilets so everyone can use them during breaks.



Speakers Greg Parmley (from left to right), Jana Posth, Luděk Motyčka and Achim Ostertag. Photo: Rahel Inauen

Achim Ostertag, founder of Summer Breeze Open Air (DE), said: "It's a little different for us because we have way smaller headliners – we see the festival as a headliner." The only thing they cut down on was their rotatable mainstage – which made it possible to prepare the stage in the back while another band was playing in the front – because the rotating machine was shipped to the UK during COVID and it was too expensive to bring it back to Germany. They try to invest more in production every year and fund it through VIP camping and VIP ticket offers, Ostertag said.

As Motyčka told the audience, Rock for People learned that **spending less doesn't equal earning more**. When a storm hit the festival one year, cancelling the headline show, it caused a downward spiral over several years with the festival cutting down on budget and stages that eventually

"We see the festival as a headliner."

Achim Ostertag,
Summer Breeze

made a complete restart necessary in 2019. The team asked themselves: what is the festival's DNA? They decided to focus more on international bands and giving a stage to up-and-coming talent – they were one of the first festivals to book Bring me the Horizon as a headliner when they were still new – which eventually led the festival out of its slump.

For the 40th anniversary of Rock am Ring and the 30th anniversary of Rock im Park this year, DreamHaus wanted to give something special to the audience, so they added **relay towers with LED screens** to the areas in front of the biggest stages. For the first time, visitors even at the very back could see everything that was happening on stage and had much better sound. It was a "huge investment," according to Posth, but the visitors' feedback was very positive and Rock am Ring 2026 sold out early.

“If there are people who want to pay us more [for VIP] – why not, but we need to find the right balance.”

Luděk Motyčka,
Rock for People

To save costs and carbon emissions caused by transport, Summer Breeze **built a 3000-square-meter warehouse** next to its site, so they can buy materials they usually rent and store them between editions. Ostertag estimates that the warehouse will have paid off in a few years. And although VIP tickets are still frowned upon in the metal scene, they managed to slowly introduce them to fund other things.

Rock am Ring now offers **fast lane tickets**, Posth told the delegates, mainly to offer more comfort, not to earn more money. Since there is hardly any infrastructure in the area around the racetrack where Rock am Ring takes place, everything needs to be brought in, and the best thing to offer to their mostly Gen X audience are things like decent toilets and

showers, according to Posth. These additional facilities are funded by money made with the fast lane passes, she explained, although the audience wasn't a big fan of the passes.

Being in her only second year at Rock am Ring, Posth often hears the sentence, 'But it has always been like that' in production meetings. "This sentence costs so much money," she complained. Once set up, structures are often just kept the same, despite changing conditions like salary costs. When looking more closely, they found things like an entire security team positioned at the main stage an hour before the site would even open. **Looking at it with fresh eyes** allowed the festival to become more efficient, Posth said.

As an independent festival, Summer Breeze constantly needs to question whether they are investing in the right things. For instance, they **bought about 10% of their festival site** – the area where people park and enter the festival, which needs to be solid ground to guarantee smooth arrivals without delays. What really helped them make informed decisions was changing to **cashless payment**. "Now we really see where the money comes in," Ostertag said. This led to them **starting their own food and beverage company**, so from 2026, they can do F&B on their own. The next step might be to take over the beer booths that are most profitable, Ostertag added.

"Instead of outsourcing things, we insource a lot of staff. Instead of five, we are now 30 people in the office," he said. **Ticketing is 100% in their own hands, as is merch** – quite important, considering that people spend 40€ on merch on average at Summer Breeze. Their concept seems to work, as 80% of the visitors return, according to Ostertag. Their visitors see it as a vacation "and of course you want to have some comfort on your vacation. You don't want to have Dixi toilets and mud everywhere," so they invested, e.g., in permanent water pipes and vacuum toilets.

Posth agreed, explaining that their more comfortable glamping areas with water-flushed toilets and electric charging are sold out in the blink of an eye. **"The more comfort, the better,"** she concluded.



Rock am Ring's Jana Posth.
Photo: Rahel Inauen

Motyčka, however, warned, not to go overboard with VIP offers. “If there are people who want to pay us more – why not, but we need to find the right balance,” he said. “US festivals are a bad example – some have so much VIP, it’s very off-putting. At some VIP levels, you can’t even see the stage anymore.” At Rock for People, they added skyboxes on their tribune, so they can invite their (prospective) partners, these can invite their clients, and everyone can see first-hand that the festival is great and not a mud fest at all. What you need is a **VIP program with state-of-the-art segmentation that is tailored to your audience** – like a menu in a proper restaurant, according to Motyčka.

Ostertag agreed that you must tailor your offers to your audience. He is sure that nobody would pay for a fast lane at Summer Breeze. However, they found out that many visitors come as big groups, so they started offering **larger spots on the campsites specifically for groups** that cost a little bit more. Almost half of their campers now choose this option, which is also great because it means selling more tickets at once, Ostertag said.

One addition from the audience: Dutch Lowlands Festival has bought the land that houses their parking lots and together with a partner turned them into a huge **carport solar park**. They sell the excess energy they don’t need to create extra revenue.

Another thing that Rock for People did was **ditch their main beer supplier**, Motyčka told the audience. Instead, they now offer 182 beer brands and have turned into a beer festival, too. “We are making more money on beer than we were with the partner,” he said. “It’s more work for us but it’s actually paying off.”

Knowing your audience is always a great idea, Posth said. Last year, they sold a Rock am Ring x Soccer World Championship T-shirt that sold out instantly. Although they try to attract Gen Z audience, their core audience is older, so they know that they don’t need too many beautiful “instagrammable” spots.

“World off, rock on. It’s not rocket science.”

Luděk Motyčka,
Rock for People

Merch is a great way to get promotion for your festival throughout the year, Ostertag mentioned. At Summer Breeze, they also give away about **1500 tickets for free to people 19 years old or younger**, who later often return to the festival as paying customers or even want to work for the festival.

To sum it up, the most important things to invest in according to the panelists are their teams, the festival experience, and comfort for the audience. “You can only escape your everyday life at a festival if you don’t have to queue for water, beer and toilets,” Posth said. Motyčka: “World off, rock on. It’s not rocket science.”

“You can only escape your everyday life at a festival if you don’t have to queue for water, beer and toilets.”

Jana Posth, Rock am Ring

Can You Stand the Heat? Managing High Temperatures & Wildfires

Outdoor events have always been at the mercy of the weather gods to some extent, but with the climate changing non-stop for the worse, planning for extreme weather is something that should be on the to-do-list of every event organizer. The European Festival Conference invited **Prof. Miguel Almeida from the University of Coimbra (PT)** and **Roxana Luca from ARTmania (RO)** and **YOUROPE'S Event Safety (YES) Group** to shine a light on current climate trends and potential solutions.

Prof. Almeida has a PhD in Mechanical Engineering – Natural and Technological Risks and focuses mainly on wildfire risk management in his research, particularly in the wildland-urban interface. Since 2018 he has also served as the Safety Director at Boom Festival (PT).

He said that meanwhile, everyone has become familiar with the consequences of climate change – more heat waves and dryness due to a lack of rain, strong winds, and heavy rain. They shouldn't be underestimated because some of these elements can trigger more wildfires, structural fires, structure collapse, flying debris and public health issues such as from heatwaves – heat strokes, dehydration and so on. Heavy rain can contaminate, e.g., lakes people swim in at festivals.



Prof. Miguel Almeida explaining what we can expect from the climate in the coming years. Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

Prof. Almeida gave a sneak peek of what we can expect regarding climate tendencies in Europe based on predictions from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):

- The number of days above 40°C is set to increase. Across all of Europe, there's high confidence temperatures will be a problem in coming years.
- Consecutive dry days are also set to increase. Even the most moderate predictions say this, but reality has proven to be much closer to the more pessimistic models.
- We are looking at seasons with no water and seasons with much more water than we are used to.
- Western and Central Europe are expected to have a higher risk for heavy river floods than the Mediterranean.
- In contrast, the Mediterranean is going to face more fire weather and drought.
- When it comes to wind, averages look fairly stable, but individual incidents will be more serious.

Luca could tell the audience of many examples of severe weather hitting festivals. She explored two weather-related incidents at Pohoda Festival (SK), where in 2009 a stage collapsed, injuring 52 people, and in 2024 29 festival-goers were injured by a collapsing large tent.

At Forza ZU Festival in Timișoara (RO), the wind, which turned out to be unexpectedly strong, blew away parts of the main stage this year. Everything was set up correctly, but the wind was so strong that it still managed to dismantle the stage, Luca said. According to her, it was shocking to watch.

Heatwaves have caused issues at festivals around the globe – e.g. Falls Festival in Australia was cancelled in 2019 due to a heatwave and high fire risk. Pitch Music and Arts in Australia was cancelled in 2024 on advice of the fire authority. In the UK, Bloodstock and Boomtown cancelled in 2022 due to heatwave. In 2023, Rio de Janeiro in Brazil hit a real-feel temperature of a stunning 58.5°C.

Meanwhile, authorities have become involved in telling audiences how to behave and stay safe at festivals facing a heatwave. In Brazil, a 29-year-old woman died in 2023 after suffering a heart attack due to dehydration at a Taylor Swift concert. Media debated whether the security team had controlled access to water. The question of whether we as promoters should provide free water remains. If we have restrictions on water being brought into an event, what danger is that bringing to the audience? There's legal responsibility but also moral responsibility at play here.

**“We shouldn’t
copy/paste
previous plans
because the world
is changing.”**

Roxana Luca, YES Group

YES Group’s Alexandra von Samson chimed in from the audience, saying it’s important to remind audiences that they are responsible for their own safety. And that health and safety should liaise with communication teams to ensure people understand their responsibilities.

Luca recommended using weather data in both the planning process and decision-making processes to create an event experience that benefits everyone, despite extreme temperatures. And plans need to be updated regularly: “We shouldn’t copy/paste previous plans because the world is changing,” she said.

According to Prof. Almeida, one way of dealing with this is to **take extreme weather into consideration in all parts of the planning process**, from prevention and preparedness to response, and finally post-event evaluation. He said the most efficient procedures are the ones that don’t get tested because prevention was good. It’s important to analyze and evaluate afterwards, too. If we make a good plan for what happens under each incident, we can plan better. These elements need to be considered both during the build/production phase and during the festival running.



YES Group members Roxana Luca (standing) and Alexandra von Samson (middle). Photo: Rahel Inauen

It's important to establish "triggers," i.e. **certain thresholds** that trigger a certain procedure. For example, if there is a forecast with strong winds, you must determine "after this wind value or

temperature value, we do this or that," the professor said. Wildfires can be tricky to handle because, if the wind direction changes, it forms its own convection.

When it comes to safety, 'competition' is not the keyword – 'cooperation' is.

Panel conclusion

Festival owners and teams must cooperate with public institutions, other festivals, and other vital actors, so everyone can work together and combine their knowledge. Public involvement is increasingly important, too.

Remember: an accident at one festival affects all festivals. **When it comes to safety, 'competition' is not the keyword – 'cooperation' is.**

Prof. Almeida's final message to the audience was this: **extreme weather phenomena are here to stay and the danger is inevitable.** Major impacts, however, are not inevitable. There are no zero-risk incidents but there are many things that can be done to prepare and prevent. Applying best practices in safety and implementation is vital.

Analyzing the Economic Impact of Festivals and Why it Matters

Knowing the economic impact of your event can be beneficial, e.g. when applying for public funding or when explaining your festival's value to local governments and communities. In a panel on "The Economic Impact of Festivals", hosted by **ILMC's Greg Parmley** (UK), representatives from Rock in Rio Lisbon and Boom Festival (PT) talked about their experiences with impact studies of their events.

Boom Festival

The reasoning: Boom Festival hired **Assistant Professor Vitor Éscaria**, an economist from the School of Economics & Management at the University of Lisbon, to conduct a detailed analysis of the 2025 edition's economic impact. Éscaria said it's important to spread information on the economic impact of festivals to governments – the more evidence the better – to have a fair discussion about things that are relevant for festivals and their local communities. "If you show that you bring results, you will be able to discuss with them which kinds of investments you deserve," Éscaria said.



Speakers Greg Parmley (left), Roberta Medina and Vitor Éscaria. Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

The methodology: The study examined Boom 2025's economic impact at a local, regional, and national level. Éscaria analyzed key figures from Boom's history, data on Boom's participants (age, gender, expenses etc.), and the impact created by Boom in the region and by Boom's expenses.

As Éscaria explained, impacts were spread across three levels: short-, medium-, and long-run impacts. Short-run economic

impacts include costs related to event organization, ticket sales revenue, and participants' expenses both on and off site. Medium-run economic impacts relate to the compensation of employees and demand generated by the permanent organization's activity. Long-run socioeconomic impacts assess if individuals are attracted/retained to the region and the effect on businesses and economic activities. The study considered direct, indirect and induced impacts.

Éscaria collected data from several sources, through desk research (e.g. by looking up statistical sources), provided by the organization (e.g. the number of workers, revenues and expenses), and through directly asking people involved (e.g. a visitor survey, both on site and online after the festival, and interviews with local authorities and residents living close to the festival). For the study, Éscaria's team surveyed 400+ on site and 4600+ people online.

The results:

- On average, each visitor spent around €1204, with food and drinks being the main category of expenditure (€422), followed by leisure / experiences (€294).
- Other expenses related to transport, accommodation, and non-food retail.
- The overall expenditure of Boomers was €51 million, of which not all were spent in Portugal.
- Boom Festival 2025 involved 1800 workers overall, with expenses of €17.7 million over two years of preparation.
- Compared to the first edition in 1997, attendance has grown by 1113%.
- Boom has a predominantly young adult audience, with a notable concentration in the 30-39 age group. The majority of visitors is male (59.5%). Although Boom's audience comes from a wide range of countries, visitors are predominantly European. The audience is highly educated, with $\frac{3}{4}$ holding a university degree. Most Boomers are single and don't have kids, used a mix of private and public transportation to get to the festival, and stayed for 7 nights at the festival grounds (i.e. the whole festival).
- Although Boom was the main reason to travel for 95% of them, 2/3 used it as an opportunity to see and stay at other places, too.



Economist Vitor Éscaria explaining the benefits of conducting economic impact studies. Photo: Rahel Inauen

- Each festival-goer visited an average of 1.34 locations, resulting in over 5600 visits identified in total, with an average stay of 2.89 nights per location. That means festival-goers generated 119,000+ overnight stays before and after Boom, both in the festival region and other locations like the rest of Portugal, Spain, France and the rest of Europe. Besides the Boom region, Lisbon, Madrid, and Porto benefitted the most. "This is the impact on tourism," Éscaria explained.
- Boom 2025 generated over €25 million in compensation of employees, which equals 0.01% of the total national compensation of employees and even 1.1% of the compensation of employees of Beira Baixa region, making Boom stand out as a significant driver for the national and regional economy.
- Its impact on the Portuguese GDP is 53.3 million (0.02%) and 14.7 million on the GDP of the Beira Baixa region (0.7%).
- Its impact on employment is even more relevant, with Boom workers representing 0.03% of all Portuguese workers (1,367), and 1.4% of the workers in the Beira Baixa region (568). "A significant contribution to employment in a very deprived area of Portugal," according to Éscaria.
- Boom 2025 created tax revenues of €15.5 million, with €8.3 million coming from the organization of the event itself.
- The study also asked if people would come back to the locality, the region, and Portugal. Most agreed that they would return to all three.
- The main takeaways from the interviews: Boom is very relevant for the area because it attracts young people and foreigners. Some came for the festival and decided to stay, either because they are workers / suppliers or just because it's a good place to stay (digital nomads). Villages are growing because the festival boosted the region. There is an increase in cultural events and community life, as well as economic and social revitalization.

"[Boom made a] significant contribution to employment in a very deprived area of Portugal."

Vitor Éscaria, economist

Present in the audience, Boom's co-managing director Artur Mendes answered the question if the study has changed anything. He said that they want to establish Boom as an anchor to develop the whole region. For instance, there are plans to build a huge solar farm in the region, and the study helps to argue against these plans. Tourism is very important in Portugal, so the study, proving people are willing to come back, is a very important tool for the festival to talk to local politicians, stakeholders and officials.

Rock in Rio

Rock in Rio Lisbon has conducted a study that examined the direct, indirect and induced impacts of the 2024 edition on the Portuguese economy. As Roberta Medina, **Vice President of Rock in Rio**, said, her festival has similar values to Boom but is still different, e.g. because it's urban. 60% of the audience came from outside of Lisbon, but only 15,000 tickets were bought outside of

Portugal. So, their study mostly focused on the economic impact in Portugal – the international impact was only considered by looking at ticket sales abroad.

According to the study, the 2024 edition created a turnover of €120 million, tax revenue of €12 million, €28 million in salaries and wages, and 2204 jobs.

For their last edition, they moved the festival to Parque Tejo, so now the main stage sits in front of one of Lisbon's iconic bridges, and the image of the event is much more connected to the city. For their Rio edition, the festival team has conducted economic impact studies for years, which showed that music is a strong pillar of tourism and that people are willing to travel for live experiences. They successfully marketed Rio as a headliner, resulting in people and even artists wanting to travel there. Now they are applying the same strategy to Lisbon and Portugal.

Medina underlined the importance of these studies because they help show to authorities that festivals are a good investment for cities. In her talks with the city of Lisbon, she found that festivals still have a bad reputation among economists. Simultaneously, discussions about an excess of tourists are ongoing in many major touristic cities, but according to Medina, it should rather be a discussion about how to better manage large numbers of tourists. "Culture is content to make people come to a city or country in a permanent way, but it's still not embraced like that, despite the big numbers," she said.

Cities could be the ones commissioning economic impact studies of festivals because they benefit from them, too, but often they don't. Medina also thinks that, while festivals could be the ones framing themselves more as drivers of tourism, this should be the responsibility of the cities and their tourism departments. "It's a lot of work to connect and convince people," she said from her own experience. Cities could even use the festival dates to organize other things in the city to promote the city even more. "It shouldn't be our responsibility to do that."

An economic impact study can be a method to give external validation, proving the relevance of festivals. Proving, e.g., that festivals bring in tax revenue, gives value to entertainment and culture. "Culture is needed for a society to be healthy," Medina said.

Rock in Rio's impact study cost about €20,000, Medina said. Most working hours are spent gathering information, Éscaría added. In the future, it will likely get easier and cheaper to conduct these studies, because more data will be digital and thus easier to access. Yet, some impacts are perceptions that can only be collected through interviews and surveys, i.e. by talking to people.



Roberta Medina presenting the results of Rock in Rio's economic impact study. Photo: Katharina Weber

How Show Stop Procedures can Help Prevent Tragic Events



YES Group expert Morten Therkildsen talking about his experiences with show stop procedures at Roskilde Festival and beyond. Photo: Rahel Inauen

Nobody likes to interrupt a show, but when the lives of fans are at stake, it is the only reasonable thing to do. In the session “Show Stop – When Safety Must Take Center Stage”, **Morten Therkildsen** talked about what show stop procedures could look like. As **the Director of Safety at Roskilde Festival Group and a member of YOUTROPE’s Event Safety (YES) Group**, he knows a fair share about the tragic events that can unfold when an event doesn’t have any show stop procedures in place.

If you have lots of people, you need to understand how to stop the show, Therkildsen said. Roskilde Festival learned this lesson when during their 2000 edition, nine people died in a crowd crush in front of the main stage during a headline show by Pearl Jam. Therkildsen quoted from the report of the Public Prosecutor for Zealand’s investigation into the accident, which criticized the lack of show stop procedures at the time:

“In my opinion, too much time elapsed between the moment when the security guards recognized the seriousness of the situation and the moment when the music was stopped. The main reason for this, in my view, is the lack of clear guidelines on who does what. In my opinion, drawing up such guidelines and communicating them to the persons responsible for implementing them is a management task.”

Meanwhile, Roskilde Festival has, e.g., implemented a switch that in case of emergency takes over all sound and turns on white light going into the audience.

Another example of when show stop procedures could have saved lives is Astro World 2021, where 10 people died due to a crowd crush at Travis Scott’s performance. The event led to the founding of the **Pink Bows Foundation**, whose “mission is to identify and mitigate foreseeable hazards and foster a positive culture of safety, care and awareness, no matter the type of event.” One of their tools is a show stop procedure course they developed, a standardized safety

protocol to better prepare event organizers and public safety personnel, as well as enhance audience safety during live performances.

“At Roskilde Festival, a show stop is a full and immediate halt to a live performance due to a serious safety risk.”

Morten Therkildsen,
YES Group

Roskilde Festival has an **artist safety rider** it sends to artist teams in place of accepting a rider. It clearly outlines the systems Roskilde Festival has in place to ensure the event's safety. They take over the role of primary safety authority from the touring professionals coming to their event, while still asking for their collaboration and insights.

Safety measures also include inviting the artist's security representative(s) to a show stop coordination meeting on site. The representatives need to sign an agreement, confirming that they received the briefing and will comply with the festival's show stop procedures. According to Therkildsen, this way of handling things has worked well.

Therkildsen: **“At Roskilde Festival, a show stop is a full and immediate halt to a live performance due to a**

serious safety risk. This may involve stopping the music, interrupting the performance, and activating wider site protocols. The show stop is not a partial or tentative pause – it is a definitive stop. A decision about whether the performance can resume will follow only after an evaluation has been completed by the Command & Control team.”

The chain of commands in case of emergency is clearly outlined at Roskilde Festival, as are the steps that need to be taken, in case a show stop becomes necessary. Therkildsen gave a detailed insight into the concrete processes happening before and during a show stop that are not included in this report.

- ➔ If you are interested in more details on Roskilde Festival's show stop procedures, please reach out to office@yourope.org. We will put you in touch with RF's Director of Safety, Morten Therkildsen.

Festivals in the Crossfire – Cancel Culture vs. Artistic Freedom

Promoting your values publicly or booking artists with opinions can make festivals the target of those with differing opinions. The panel “Festivals in the Crossfire – Cancel Culture vs. Artistic Freedom,” hosted by **IQ Magazine's James Drury** (UK), brought together festival organizers who had to deal with attacks on their events this year.

Boom Festival (PT) was targeted by calls for boycott from anti-Israel audiences, and at the same time, they were targeted by Israeli audiences, the **festival's co-managing director Artur Mendes** reported. The festival appeared in the news in Israel due to an alleged plot to poison Israeli audiences at Boom, leading to a deeper interest in the event from Portuguese and other European authorities alike.



Speakers James Drury (left to right), Artur Mendes, Claes Olsen and Ádám Kiss. Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

Despite all of it, Boom celebrated a “loving festival,” Mendes said, adding: “We need to know our audience very well.” Boom had a worldwide audience coming from 165 countries this edition, including Israelis, and thus the team developed strategies to raise awareness and solve potential conflicts on site, at a festival with no record of any conflict in almost 30 years.

The festival management was transparent with the team, which was hurt a lot by everything going on, Mendes said, but also believed in the power of freedom. They already had experience with cancel culture from previous editions. “The team was safeguarding the ship, so we managed to navigate these troubled waters,” he said.

The festival team talked to artists that they considered might pose a problem to the peace at the event beforehand and educated them on the topic. On top, they received great support from the local authorities, which was important to handle the situation.

His advice for festivals facing similar situations: “Your first reaction should be silence and breathing.” He recommended looking at what you can really influence, which for them was their visitors during the festival. Boom was never silent and never stopped communicating on the topic. “Culture is an easy target. We create togetherness, where the system creates division,” he said.

After the festival was over, they published the steps they had taken for the past half year on this matter, including supporting Doctors without Borders and Oxfam missions in Gaza, on their website and on social media. However, they switched off the comments on social media, so they could “preserve the mental health of their social media teams and users,” according to Mendes.

“Culture is an easy target. We create togetherness, where the system creates division.”

Artur Mendes, Boom Festival

At the same time further north, Øyafestivalen was struggling with cancellation attempts as well. As Øya’s founder **Claes Olsen** told the audience, his festival was first attacked by pro-Israeli activists mainly from outside Norway because Øya featured pro-Palestinian act Kneecap. According to him, this experience was ok to deal with, as they do not believe in deplatforming artists, and freedom of speech matters in Norway. They received the same email as Glastonbury

demanding a cancellation of Kneecap's performance, but did not reply. However, the pressure grew over the summer, because the Kneecap story garnered more and more attention globally.

On top of this, the festival was attacked by pro-Palestinian activists because of third-party investments in Israel made by the private equity conglomerate KKR, which owns Øya's owner Superstruct. The goal of these activists was also to get Kneecap to cancel.

Activists put immense pressure on artists to cancel their Øya performances by claiming that, if they played at Øya, they were part of the genocide in Gaza. Olsen said, for a while, different activist groups were sending lots of false information to the artists, but the debate really took off when one of the biggest newspapers in Norway sent emails with false and undocumented claims about Øya's owners to all artists booked by the festival. According to Olsen, this stirred up a panic, especially among young artists without a team around them. It spread to partners, led to new media stories, and so on.

Øyafestivalen had to put out a new fire every day for months, Olsen said, and yet, it had a successful edition. "Value-driven festivals [like Øya] are most open to attack," he said. Øya looked for support from organizations like Amnesty International and political parties to educate themselves on the topic and communicate better about it. The festival released a statement explaining their values in detail, which heated up the debate again, but in the end, all artists except one local DJ stayed on, Olsen said.

There is no one answer to how to mitigate such a media frenzy and protect your values, he found. "Stick to your values is my main advice," Olsen said.

For **Sziget Festival** (HU), it was a tough year. Troubles started in March, said Sziget's **Head of Operations Ádám Kiss**, when the Hungarian government passed a law that effectively banned Pride parades. This included Budapest Pride, which Sziget, as an active supporter of the LGBTQIA+ community, was involved in.



Artur Mendes (Boom; left) & Claes Olsen (Øyafestivalen).
Photo: Rahel Inauen

Then followed the abovementioned KKR/Superstruct scandal, which was in turn followed by a domestic debate on Sziget booking Northern Irish, pro-Palestinian band Kneecap. Pro-Israeli activists urged them to cancel the performance, Kiss said, but the festival wouldn't bow to their demands. In the end, the government banned Kneecap for three years from Hungary, so Sziget was forced to cancel their performance.

On top, the government declared 'the war on drugs' in the country, which according to Kiss feels more like a witch hunt against the live music scene. Finally, the ownership of Sziget changed and for a moment it seemed that the festival would fall victim to the fierce struggles of Hungarian politics – but it didn't. The festival celebrated a great edition and will be back next year, Kiss said.

His advice to handle calls for boycott: "Keep calm and stick to your values." He recommended thinking the whole thing through, and to not lower yourself to the level of the comment sections. "Take one step back and look at it, instead of rushing to the keyboard," Kiss added.

To the question of where the limits of free speech are, Mendes replied that everything that emphasizes hate should not be tolerated. At the same time, "we should strive for spaces of

dialogue.” People are unable to have a conversation anymore in which someone has a different opinion than them, and that divides us. Host Drury remarked that this division is often being sown on purpose by forces trying to destabilize our democratic societies. “We need to remind ourselves that we have much more in common than people have us believe,” Drury said.

Resist! How Populist Governments (Try to) Cancel Festivals



Speakers Holger Jan Schmidt (left to right), Ivan Milivojev, Codruța Vulcu and Prof. Özgehan Senyuva. Photo: Rahel Inauen

Reports of governments exerting pressure on festivals in Eastern Europe have circulated for a while now – but the problem is not limited to Eastern Europe anymore. In the panel “Dancing in The Dark – Festivals & Political Pressure” YOUROPE invited three festival promoters and a political scientist to shed a light on what has been happening to their countries and events and how they have dealt with external forces trying to make them abandon their values. Hosted by **Holger Jan Schmidt (YOUROPE General Secretary, DE)**.

Prof. Özgehan Senyuva from the Middle East Technical University (TR) started out doing and researching youth work and is now a professor of international politics. He opened the panel by explaining the methods and motives of autocratic governments when it comes to oppressing their opponents.

One of his key research areas is the difference between formal, informal and non-formal learning. Festivals, he said, are spaces for informal learning. What he teaches in theory is the lived experience for many festival promoters – not just simple political pressure on festivals but an emotional campaign against certain aspects that festival naturally represent. “What we see now are not isolated cases limited to certain countries. It’s happening across the globe,” Prof. Senyuva said. Festivals are important testing grounds for political scientists to see how far freedom can survive.

The professor explained that often, we imagine oppression and autocracy as something distant and easy to identify – just one guy doing the oppression in a closed system – but autocracies don't fit this image anymore. North Korea is the last example of this. Now, it's not one isolated man ruining the lives of everybody around him anymore; instead, it's a whole system, a network of political, financial and technological actors working together. "Their learning curve is better than in democratic systems. After the Arab spring, summer didn't come because they didn't understand that it's not enough to just remove one leader," Prof. Senyuva said.

Manipulation as the ordinary is what we are supposed to accept now. Populist movements within democracies use a similar playbook as autocrats. Cultural and creative spaces are their number one target, because populists aim to divide. "This is emotional polarization, not rational politics," the professor said; us vs. them; the patriots and the traitors. "The mentality is 'you are either with us or with them' and this goes across countries."

Populists want to control creative spaces where you can step out of 'the normal,' where you can experiment and learn. They don't want young people to have the experiences they can have at festivals – **festivals as democratic microcosms** and temporary learning spaces, places where you can create and be different, explore autonomy and identity. Festivals create a sense of unity, of being part of something larger. "This is the essence of democracy: being together but being different."

Spontaneity is another important keyword, according to the professor. Revolutions never start as such but as spontaneous protests. "Festivals really represent the spontaneous gathering, joy, and self-expression." Regimes put restrictions on alcohol and create curfews to try to regulate when you can celebrate and have fun or not. It's a demonstration of power over the spontaneous.

"When an artist or a festival is deemed as 'unfit' by the government, it's not about ethics, it's about power and defining who belongs and who doesn't," Prof. Senyuva said. As seen in Poland, Turkey and Hungary, this tactic **reframes artistic freedom as immoral**, as not patriotic enough.

"This is the essence of democracy: being together but being different."

Prof. Özgehan Senyuva

Populist regimes thrive on **emotional otherization**. They create "corrupt elites," "foreign agents," or "immoral subcultures" to define themselves as protectors of the people. Festivals fit easily into the category of the invented enemy. The attack is emotional, not rational. It says, 'they are not like us,' not 'they broke the law.' "When it's emotional, they are targeting your heart," the professor said.

When tickets become unaffordable, cultural participation becomes a privilege. **Economic control is another form of censorship**. A Turkish survey showed the last festival students could afford happened 10 years ago. The erosion of accessibility is an approach that isolates the youth and wants to eliminate what makes a festival – the power to be together but different.

"What we see now are not isolated cases limited to certain countries. It's happening across the globe."

Prof. Özgehan Senyuva

Serbia: Exit Festival

To understand EXIT Festival's values, you need to understand how EXIT began. **EXIT co-founder Ivan Milivojev** explained that before the first edition, a one-day event called "Šakom u glavu" ("Fist to the Head") was held, which served as a precursor to EXIT. It took place in 1999 in Novi Sad, on the plateau of the SPENS sports center, as support to the student movement protesting against the Milošević government. Milivojev and his team members were students themselves, and they organized this event through the Students' Union of Novi Sad.

He recalled how the police confiscated the event's posters featuring a fist crushing the red star. "But we held the event anyway," Milivojev said. Around seven bands performed on two stages, entrance was free, and about 20,000 people came, all exhausted by the wars, the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, and the corruption that marked the era.

According to Milivojev, the following year, EXIT Festival was born, carrying this name for the first time, even though it was not yet held at the Petrovaradin Fortress. This was what the team likes to call "zero EXIT." Inspired by other European festivals like Sziget, the team organized this hundred-day EXIT event and launched a campaign encouraging young people to vote in the elections that eventually led to Milošević's fall.



Ivan Milivojev (EXIT) and Codruța Vulcu (ARTmania). Photo: Rahel Inauen

However, as Milivojev explained, the period after Milošević's fall was a short-lived "happy era," ending in 2003 with the assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister. After that, democracy in Serbia struggled for years to take root. The system soon revealed that corruption remained deeply embedded – the same people continued to hold power, only now under a different party name and in coalition with Milošević's former party. "We have witnessed lots of crazy things. The law doesn't affect them. It's a deeply corrupted system," Milivojev criticized.

The most tragic example of the system's failure was the collapse of the main railway station's concrete roof in Novi Sad in the middle of the day on November 1, 2024. The accident killed 16 people and triggered massive but peaceful protests led by Generation Z that are still ongoing.

EXIT is the only major company that has publicly supported the protests, according to Milivojev, which immediately brought enormous pressure from the government. "They did everything they could to stop the festival. Literally everything you can imagine," he said. Funding was cut; attempts were made to ban the festival; sponsors were threatened, causing them to pull out; meetings were held with police and special forces, pressuring the festival to stop their support of the protests; the operating permit was withheld until five days before the event; blacklists of bands supporting EXIT were created; and a media campaign against the festival was launched in pro-government outlets, painting EXIT as a place of drug abuse and more.

“They did everything they could to stop the festival. Literally everything you can imagine.”

Ivan Milivojev, EXIT Festival

Milivojev criticized that the government operates like a mafia, that no one has been held accountable for the tragedy, and that President Vučić is trying to criminalize the protests. “I have never seen anything like that before. I never even dreamed about it, but it’s my country and I’m not leaving it,” Milivojev said. He feels like this is a different kind of battle compared to the one against Milošević – because unlike Milošević, Vučić enjoys support from both the United States and several European countries, which makes the situation even more complicated. Nevertheless, the protests continue every day, without leaders, spreading from city to city.

Under such conditions, organizing EXIT in Serbia has become nearly impossible, and therefore the festival – until the situation changes and the country “is taken back” – will be organized outside of Serbia, Milivojev said.

Spain: Periferias Festival

Luis Lles, program director of Extrarradios Festival (ES), couldn’t join the conference in person, but send in a video message, telling the story of how in 2023 right-wing parties cancelled Periferias Festival that he promoted at the time.

The multidisciplinary festival in Huesca, a 50,000-inhabitant city in North Spain, took place in clubs and venues of the town for 23 years until 2023. “Periferias was a festival of culture,” Lles said. The name was given to it not only because Huesca is in the periphery of Spain but also because the team thought that the most important things in culture succeed in the periphery, in the margins, and not in the core, on the mainstream culture.

Most of the funding came from the city council. Most of the time, Huesca was governed by left-wing parties, but then the right-wing Partido Popular (PP) was elected to power. The festival continued more or less normally, albeit with a smaller budget, but then far-right Vox was elected to the council. “They are absolute enemies of culture. For them, culture means left,” Lles said. The only culture they are interested in is bullfighting.

PP needed the support of Vox to pass the city’s budget, but Vox wouldn’t give their support unless Periferias was cancelled, which to them was “a nest of arty-farty lefties,” Lles said. The festival was removed from the budget, effectively cancelling it in December 2023. “It was surprising because Periferias is a cultural festival with 23 years of existence that put the small city of Huesca on the map of Spain’s contemporary culture,” Lles said.



Luis Lles speaking to the delegates in a video message.

The cancellation made the national news and became one of the most commented on cultural constellations in the country. Despite a campaign on change.org with more than 5000 signatures to reinstate it and a "Periferias resurrection" shirt, the festival remained cancelled. It was a hard blow for Lles, who had spent most of his professional life with the festival, and for the production team because there are not many work opportunities in the region.

Host Schmidt finished Lles story by explaining that two villages with an even smaller budget contacted Lles and made it possible to create a festival with a similar spirit, Extrarradios Festival. Since Huesca owned the Periferias brand, they had to opt for another name. The national government supplies some funding as well, which is great for the moment, but also means that, should the government change, this story might end as well.

Romania: ARTmania Festival

Codruța Vulcu, founder of ARTmania Festival (RO), told the story of how a Russian proxy almost won the last presidential elections. She said that, although Romania is an amazing country, the government and justice system are "seriously corrupt." At the presidential elections 2024, a new candidate entered the scene, Călin Georgescu. The independent nationalist candidate won the first round, although nobody really understood who he was and he had barely registered in the polls.

As it later turned out, before the elections, dormant TikTok accounts (likely bots) got activated, which told the Romanian population that Georgescu would deliver exactly what they wanted based on their personal preferences. The videos were shared millions of times. Vulcu didn't even know he existed, because apparently, the algorithm realized that she wouldn't be a suitable target. What was also weird: Georgescu had zero expenses declared for the elections, which was quite unbelievable.

**"How did the
Romanian system
fail at this level?
Corruption!"**

Codruța Vulcu, ARTmania

Before the second round, the Constitutional Court annulled the election because intelligence documents had been declassified indicating that Russia had run a coordinated cyber campaign to interfere in the election. Six months of complete chaos followed, Vulcu recalled. People wondered, is Georgescu a Russian proxy? She is sure that things like this couldn't happen without people in the state being involved. Vulcu said, at one point, paramilitary groups who had worked in the Congo travelled to Bucharest, armed, but luckily, they were arrested along the way.

People were ready to leave the country in case of Georgescu's election. And she believes that he would have won the election, if the court hadn't pulled the plug. The question remains: how could this have happened? Against all odds, the independent, pro-Western candidate and former mayor of Bucharest, Nicușor Dan, won the new election in May 2025.

During the six months of chaos, ARTmania didn't sell any tickets because they were on a blacklist prepared by the extreme right who supported the Russian proxy. Alongside other festival owners and artists, they were to be eradicated in case of Georgescu's win. "'The moment we have the power, they will be gone,'" is what they said," according to Vulcu. The choice was between fleeing the country and civil war.

"How did the Romanian system fail at this level? Corruption!" Vulcu said. "If you want a democracy, you have to fight corruption every single day." Now they have a great president, who has the chance to dismantle corruption in his term.

"Somehow, through the algorithms, people are convinced in their own storytelling."

Codruța Vulcu, ARTmania

responsibility to support a free candidate. Dan is also a mathematical genius, so ARTmania ran a public campaign, saying they like maths, comparing it to the chaotic sounding yet perfectly structured sound of Meshuggah and the power of voting to bring order into the chaos of democracy. "Vote – don't let others set your playlist," it said.

A part of the audience liked it, another part started trolling the campaign, telling the festival they will burn. They lost around 20-25% of the audience and still receive negative reactions to this day from people under the influence of propaganda. "Somehow, through the algorithms, people are convinced in their own storytelling," she said. She called for a dialogue identifying propaganda as fake.

According to Vulcu, it's written in the Romanian constitution that the country is a part of NATO and the EU, so she thinks a candidate like Georgescu, who is opposed to both, shouldn't even be allowed to run for presidency.

After witnessing how a fake information campaign can influence public opinion, swaying an entire election, she has lost some of her tolerance for freedom of speech. "You still need to stick to some rules, otherwise you will get to an anarchic state where everybody can say anything," she said. It's a narrow street to find balance long term. The problem is also that Russia doesn't have second thoughts about the methods they use, so she wondered: how can you have a fair dialogue when you talk to someone who doesn't care about any rules?

Prof. Senyuva closed the round, saying that these are real experiences happening to people every day. In Romania, it's the Russian influence, in other countries it might be other foreign countries interfering. The other side uses the system against you, creating a dilemma. "We are facing something bigger than single-country issues. It's about survival," Prof. Senyuva said.

Vulcu said new in the 2024 election was that Russian proxies had gained the support of the USA – Vice-President J.D. Vance and Elon Musk both posted against a Westernized Romania. "It was a confusing period, unbelievably hard for the festival sector. Consumption dropped by 30% because people were putting money aside to flee the country," Vulcu said. Three years of Dan's term are left to get out of this mess. "If this will not be solved, we will have no way out," Vulcu said.

Festivals, alongside all of the civil society in Romania, supported Dan, because they had a moral

"Joy itself is an act of resistance. It's not only about surviving but having joy."

Prof. Özgehan Senyuva

How come we don't hear about Serbia and Romania more? The algorithms are filtering it out, Senyuva said. When protests surged in Iran a few years ago, the first thing the government did was shutting down telephone and internet. "Now, they don't do that anymore. Instead, they drown you out with bots," he said.

It's important to reclaim the narrative. Populists always have a framing of patriotism and freedom of speech, talking about alleged decadence, decay and immorality. "Joy itself is an act of resistance. It's not only about surviving but having joy," the professor concluded.

Workshop on Building Resistance



*Prof. Özgehan Senyuva teaching the delegates how to identify their events' weak spots and counter populist propaganda.
Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt*

In the second part of "Dancing in the Dark," Prof. Senyuva offered a workshop to identify vulnerabilities and weak points within our events and discuss practical strategies and actions that both individual festivals and the wider scene can take to resist political pressure, threats, and attacks.

The participants mapped their festivals' weak spots – when it comes to how authorities or governments can attack or prevent festivals from happening, or otherwise interfere with the smooth process of an event. They identified ways of combatting some of the main routes oppressive organizations use against festivals.

This was followed by a discussion to combat the art of spin. "Facts are countered with facts, but if you target people's emotions, they can get through," Prof. Senyuva said. He outlined key characteristics of spin, and the groups practiced countering the messaging.

Keynote: What you can Achieve with a Passion for Plants

It's a tradition for the European Festival Conference to invite keynote speakers from outside the industry to give the delegates some inspiration to think outside the box. This year, **Álvaro Martinho of Portugal's oldest wine company Real Companhia Velha**, delivered the keynote. The winemaker and viticulturist has used his incredible passion for wine and plants to transform the

Portuguese Douro Valley, despite its harsh growing conditions, into a lush, green valley and tourist destination.

"Music and wine. Similar or not? I think they are. Wine is love, passion, pleasure. Like music," Martinho said at the beginning of his flaming speech. He himself was born in Douro Valley in 1972, where plants have to fight for survival, enduring eight weeks without rain and 45°C in the summer as well as freezing temperatures in the winter. "How can a plant support that with just one body? If you don't understand the plant, you will never understand the wine," Martinho said.



*Keynote speaker Álvaro Martinho has a passion for plants and winemaking.
Photo: Rahel Inauen*

The winemaker told the audience that Douro Valley is home to varieties of wine that

are more than 2000 years old and a UNESCO World Heritage site created by hard work. The valley has always produced excellent wine, but at the end of the 20th century, it used to look quite brown and gray, lacking professionalism, variety, and any culture around wine. He considered it "a little boring" and stopped in time. 44,000 hectares of the valley were dedicated to winemaking, but most plots were smaller than five hectares.

Martinho wanted to do something useful with his life but was met with rejection when he argued for systemic change in the valley. He even considered leaving his home – but did something else instead. About 25 years ago, he produced a 75-page report on how to turn the vineyard he was

working at, Quinta das Carvalhas, into a "model estate", in hopes of infecting the other vineyards in the valley – with success.

**"Don't just
follow tradition.
Science makes a
difference."**

Álvaro Martinho, winemaker

60% of his workforce has been female. Workers get trained and treated fairly with good working conditions. "It's not machines, it's people," he emphasized.

What is part of the "model estate" strategy? For instance, a requalification of the workforce. Martinho elevated women from doing menial tasks to doing the same labor as men and paying them 30% more – equal pay. "People said, 'Alvaro, you are crazy because ladies can't do a great job with the vines,'" he said. But according to him, working on vines only requires "movement, fingers and ability," so since 2002,

Secondly, he changed Quinta das Carvalhas' methods to become more sustainable, e.g. by gradually using less herbicide and insecticide every year and non-lethal pheromones in their stead. "Don't just follow tradition. Science makes a difference," Martinho said. He is able to plant

grass between his vines because he insisted on the development of a machine that can cut grass even on the steep slopes of the valley.

The last part of the strategy is reconstructing parts of the landscape not involved in growing wine back to a more natural state. For instance, by turning old garages and abandoned buildings into ponds and roadsides into wildflower strips, offering habitats to plants and animal species. Eventually, the brown/gray landscape turned green.



*In his presentation, Álvaro Martinho shows how he and his fellow winemakers transformed Douro Valley.
Courtesy of Álvaro Martinho*

They calculated the optimal density of vines to plant on the steep slopes of the valley, further transforming the valley. Some of Quinta das Carvalhas' vines are 75 years old, the oldest even 110. They also cultivate very old, native varieties of grapes that are unique in the world. 60% of the wine from Douro Valley is exported – curious considering that growing wine is much more cost intensive in the valley due to its steep hillsides. Martinho explained that with the support of machines, flat fields yield up to 20 tons of wine after about 150 hours of work. In Douro Valley, no machines can be used for harvesting, resulting in about 3-5 tons of wine after 480-720 hours of work.

So, how can the winemakers survive with five times the work? According to Martinho, it's because the valley produces category 3 wines. Category 1 wines, the large majority of wines, are good, but a streamlined product. They taste the same and are of the same quality year after year. With category 2 wines, you can identify the variety and the place it came from by tasting it, e.g. a Pinot Noir from Tuscany. "Customers pay more for it because they drink a place," Martinho said. Category 2 wines have a restricted quantity, but more quality.

Category 3 wines can be produced only in specific vineyards and climate conditions / years, in even smaller quantities and higher qualities – and they have an extraordinary longevity. You can drink them now or keep them in their bottle for years. Martinho told the story of how he once drank a 155-year-old category 3 wine which absolutely enchanted him, creating taste explosions in his mouth and saturating the air in the entire room. “What I drank? The fighting of the plants!” he said.

Martinho has dedicated 1000 hours of his life to checking plants, not just wine but all plants in the valley. “Nine months of winter and three months of hell,” this is how you can describe Douro

“What I drank? The fighting of the plants!”

Álvaro Martinho about
drinking a 155-year-old wine

Valley according to the winemaker. Despite the temperatures and the rocky soil, he identified more than 1185 plant species there. Why so many? His conclusion: “They like it!”

The first rule of plants, according to Martinho: what they have is exactly what they need. The second rule: the root system commands everything. “Roots are like the internet of the plants,” he said. The soil in Douro Valley is poor, but not as poor as many imagine. Water and oxygen reach many meters down thanks to fissures in the soil, which helps the

plants survive the hot and dry summers by growing deep roots. As a result, they live a slow life. Compared to plants growing in ideal settings, plants in Douro Valley produce less each year, but over a much longer time.

What at first glance seems negative (climate, soil, steep slopes, low production, etc.) ultimately turned out to be Douro Valley’s distinguishing factors, resulting in wines of the best quality. In conclusion, preserving the landscape and nature, recovering native grape varieties, producing iconic wines, promoting sustainable economic activity, and creating a clean, beautiful and flowery region has led to the improvement of the entire Douro region.

Better Safe than Sorry: Festival Insurance for Beginners

Risk assessments and contingency planning are great ways to prepare for emergencies. However, even with the best preparation, you are never secured against all eventualities. If something goes wrong, it’s great to have insurance. In the session “Who’s Got Your Back? Festival Insurance 101” YOUROPE’s lawyer **Prof. Ralf Kitzberger (Schickardt Rechtsanwälte, DE)** and **Christian Denzer (founder of covermyass insurance, DE)**, discussed what to consider when getting insurance for your festival.

Liability: Your Legal Responsibilities as a Promoter

Prof. Kitzberger started out by delivering the legal basis in liability. As a promoter, you must adhere to the common principle “duty of care” – which means as a promoter, you’re responsible that your event does not pose avoidable risks to visitors, staff, suppliers etc. He explained that you must

- ensure the event’s equipment is secure to withstand adverse weather,

- ensure that all emergency routes are open,
- prevent overcrowding,
- ensure that all equipment is safe and inspected.

Tip: make sure you have documented all the measures you've taken so – should it go to court – you can prove you took reasonable steps.



Prof. Ralf Kitzberger (left) and Christian Denzer explaining the dos and don'ts of insuring a festival. Photo: Rahel Inauen

Prof. Kitzberger noted that you are liable not only for your own employees but subcontractors, too. Contracts should be written to protect promoters from risk, e.g., in case contractors or artists show up too late or not at all; in case bands cancel or you have to cancel them; and in cases of force majeure. He shared some top tips:

In all contracts, ensure the following:

- **Liability clauses:** Who is responsible for damage to rented equipment or infrastructure? Require contractual partners to demonstrate that all equipment is safely installed and inspected.
- **Insurance obligations:** Require stage builders, security staff, caterers, etc., to provide evidence of adequate liability insurance.
- **Transfer of contractual obligations:** Make sure subcontractors are also included in the liability regulations.

Withdrawal Rights and Force Majeure Clauses

Equip all contracts with specific clauses on withdrawal and termination:

- Under what circumstances can parties withdraw? For instance, illness, force majeure, regulatory bans, security risks, etc.
- Who bears the costs of cancellation? Clearly stipulate who will pay fees, preparatory expenses, travel costs in case of a last-minute cancellation or termination.

- Handling of payments already made: Define what happens to down payments and how refunds are processed.
- Duty to mitigate loss: Parties must strive to minimize damages caused by cancellation.

Obligations Relating to Safety Concepts and Regulatory Requirements

- Responsibility for compliance with all official regulations (e.g., fire safety, noise protection, visitor numbers)
- Duties to cooperate on development and implementation of the safety plan
- Commitment to provide relevant evidence and documentation
- Legal consequences of violations (e.g., contractual penalties, claims for damages, termination rights)

Prof. Kitberger advised all contracts to use clear, unambiguous wording, especially regarding liability and withdrawal – and cover the risk with insurance.

Insurance: What (not) to Do

Which led to Denzer's section of the panel. Christian Denzer is the co-founder of covermyass and managing director of a medium-sized insurance broker in Germany. He likes to insure what others don't and has ten years of experience in advertising film insurance.

His top tips:

- Get insured as early as possible
- Every decision impacts your cover – consider what you need covered and what you don't.

Planning phase: "80% of all future coverage issues are in the planning phase," Denzer said. He outlined the many risks during the planning phase that you will need to consider insuring. According to him, this should be completed 3-12 months before the event day.

Build-up phase: This phase has the highest technical and legal exposure. He stressed there must be strong documentation during this period, including weather forecast estimates, review of outsourced roles, and verification of processes. "A solid setup phase secures coverage and prevents obligation issues," Denzer said.

Live event phase: This is the phase with the lowest impact of risks and hazards, according to Denzer.

Dismantling phase: "Remember you have a duty of care until the last person leaves," he reminded the audience. Contractor errors are still on the organizer. You must secure the area against unauthorized access. You are still responsible for rented equipment. "75% of all property damage happens during event teardown," he said.

Post-event phase: He warned the delegates that shutdown without authority order or evidence will mean that the insurer rejects your claim. Also, if something was stolen but you have no police report for theft, this means you won't get a payout from your insurance. Similarly, if you leave your budget underdeclared, the insurer will only pay you with a proportional reduction.

**"Remember you
have a duty of
care until the last
person leaves."**

Christian Denzer, covermyass

What's not included in cancellation insurance (non-weather-triggers)

- Contract cancellation without an external trigger
- Known risks before binding the policy
- Economic reasons like poor sales, insolvency, cost overruns
- Pandemic / epidemic, which is explicitly excluded
- Regulatory non-compliance like missing permits, failed inspections
- Internal issues like crew strike, service provider problems, mismanagement
- Violations of safety rules during build-up or teardown

Prof. Kitzberger and Denzer's final message to the audience: Legal clarity and tailored insurance are essential to safeguard your festival in today's evolving risk landscape.

EFC Debate Club: AI – Friend or Foe?

Whether you like it or not, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become prevalent in many apps and online environments. But what about the world of festivals? To talk about the role of AI in festival organizations, the EFC invited its delegates to the "Debate Club: AI – Friend or Foe?", hosted by **YOUROPE board member Marta Pallarès** (ES) with the kind support of **Prof. João Pereira from the University of Évora** (PT).

In preparation for this session, Pallarès had asked ChatGPT itself whether AI is friend or foe. It replied: AI is a friend if you use it as a tool, but a foe if you use it as a replacement.

Prof. Pereira, who is an expert on machine learning, natural language processing, and databases, gave a little introduction to AI. In general terms, the science of artificial intelligence is about programmes thinking like people, acting like people, thinking rationally, or acting rationally. Either approach can be more suitable, depending on the situation you want to apply it.

AI can be classified as two types: **symbolic AI** (also called classic AI) and **machine learning**. According to the professor, symbolic AI takes rules, logic and knowledge representation to reason and make decisions. Machine learning on the other hand describes AI that learns patterns from data, e.g. Deep Learning, Generative AI, and Large Language Models.



Marta Pallarès, YOUROPE board member and host of the EFC debate club. Photo: Rahel Inauen

The so-called machine learning pipeline describes the process of how AI models are trained. First, data must be collected, cleaned and prepared. Then it can be used to train the model, which will then be evaluated. Afterwards, the model will be deployed to production, then monitored and evaluated. Then the cycle begins again by collecting new data. Important: Prof. Pereira said if the data is not good enough, the response from the AI won't be good enough either.

Machine learning has two basic phases: training and prediction. During training, data is fed into machine learning, resulting in a trained model. During prediction, the trained model receives new data and, on this basis, makes a prediction, e.g. a weather forecast.

To prepare the debate, the professor suggested some areas where AI could be useful for festivals, like creating festival line-ups, talent prediction and booking; art installations and marketing, generating content, promo materials or interactive installations; logistics and operations; AI supports planning, staffing, transport, waste and real time operations; and security and surveillance. He also asked the delegates to consider angles like efficiency, cost vs. value, reliability, flexibility, safety / harm potential, risk of feedback loops or unintended consequences, inclusivity and fairness, creativity and innovation, and whether AI or a lack of AI supports or distorts audience experience.



Prof João Pereira is an expert on machine learning. Photo: Katharina Weber

The delegates then split into two groups, one arguing for AI as a friend, the other for AI as a foe. After some discussion time, one delegate from each group volunteered for the debate. The result

“AI can be used for good or harm; it depends on the intention of the people using it.”

Prof. João Pereira,
University of Évora

was an interesting back and forth on the benefits and risks of AI for festivals. **On the plus side**, AI helps be more efficient, kickstarts creative processes, delivers initial designs that can be further improved on by a human, gives you ideas you did not think of; it can support safety by predicting problems before they occur; it creates new jobs and saves money by replacing redundant jobs.

On the downside, AI only delivers great results, if you feed it with great data; you don't know what happens to the data you put into models own by big tech; there is the risk of monopolization (or 'oligopolization') in tech companies running AI models; AI can't account for irrational human behavior like mosh pits or brawls, so it shouldn't replace security completely; blind reliance on AI can lead to negative consequences; if you use AI to do what you are too lazy to do, you run the risk of losing the skill to do it; AI has all the biases from the data it is based on; AI models usually have no fact checking, so you don't know

when they lie to you; you might accidentally create a feedback loop; automation endangers jobs, especially entry level designers and texters.

To close the debate, Prof. Pereira stepped in once more. He said he is not an ethics expert, but works on the technical aspects of AI. He believes that we as festival makers must decide how we want to use AI in our work – and politicians must take care of topics like job loss through automation. “We say that AI is a tool, and that is in fact also my opinion,” he said.

How we can rely on AI is one of the big questions in his research, and luckily, the EU has already created guidelines for developers on what to consider when developing AI products. It's important to make AI more reliable, according to him. ChatGPT now sometimes delivers sources along with its answers or explanations of how it came up with this conclusion, which is a good first step.

“AI can be used for good or harm; it depends on the intention of the people using it,” Prof. Pereira said. AI is now evolving like the internet did before – or like the music industry has evolved from tape to radio to streaming. In his research, he is working on mitigating problems like feedback loops and recommendations that are always the same. His final message: “We always need a human in the loop. You need a human working with AI to make the most out of it.”

**“You need a
human
working with
AI to make
the most out
of it.”**

Prof. João Pereira,
University of Évora

Creating a Stronger Economy with Sustainability Policies

How can festivals strengthen their economic sustainability and resilience? In this session hosted by **Linnéa Svensson (GreenerEvents, NO)**, Valley of Arts Festival (HU) and Boom Festival (PT) talked about how they are applying sustainability strategies to enhance their events ecologically, socially, and economically.

Valley of Arts

Valley of Arts has been running since 1989 in three Hungarian villages. According to **festival director Natália Oszkó-Jakab**, it was the country's largest multi-genre festival in 2025, attracting more than 200,000 culture-lovers, and more than 130,000 visitors bought daily passes to the festival. They have no big international headliners but instead focus on offering lots of activities and workshops to engage people in working together.

**“We are in a
symbiosis
with [the local
villagers].”**

Natália Oszkó-Jakab,
Valley of Arts

The local villagers help by providing parking, food, and more. “We are in a symbiosis with them,” Oszkó-Jakab said. The festival is built on diversity and staying independent in a rural area of Hungary, focusing on social, ecological and economic sustainability. Having taken over in 2013, she is already part of the second generation of festival management.

On the **ecological side**, Valley of Arts removed single-use plastics in 2019 and managed to reduce their waste from 49 tons in 2018 to 32 tons in 2025, despite a growing audience. At the same time, their recycling rate has gone up from 18% to 69% thanks to a team of 20 people in rubber gloves separating the festival's trash. Now they require fewer trucks to transport the waste off site, which saves them money.

Thanks to ongoing negotiations with the public transport providers, festival-goers with a ticket now enjoy a 50% price reduction for train and bus tickets going to the festival, halving the number of cars arriving at the festival in the first year. The festival team also organizes carpooling, shuttles circulating between the three involved villages, and the vehicle flow of their 200 merchants and 65 catering vendors, which saves both money and CO₂ emissions.

Since 2015, the festival has been completely free of diesel generators, having connected to the electricity grid. Although they are not required to, they publish ESG reports explaining their **E**nvironmental, **S**ocial, and **G**overnance impacts and activities. According to Oszkó-Jakab this has helped them win over sponsors.

On the **social side**, Valley of Arts has laid internet cables providing fast bandwidth not only to the festival but the villages. On top of that, they gained EU funding to build a community space including a playground, bike station, stage, café, park and co-working spaces that allows them to show movies, host concerts, yoga lessons, and business classes financed by the festival all year round.

During the festival days, they have a strong voluntary program, whose applicants double each year, according to Oszkó-Jakab. They give free passes to locals and offer program and services for people with disabilities. Both their programming and company structure pay attention to diversity.



*Valley of Art's festival director Natália Oszkó-Jakab.
Photo: Rahel Inauen*

On the **economic side**, the festival managed to implement a number of eco-friendly solutions in a financially sustainable way. For example: After convincing 86 partners, they were able to introduce reusable cups as well as biodegradable cups, plates and cutlery by using extra profits. To run on grid electricity only, they built 42 connection points to accommodate 40 stages. To achieve greater acceptance of sustainability, they invest in workshops to educate their visitors.

While they were 100% government-funded in 2013, the festival managed to diversify their incomes and now relies on the government for only 16% of their funding. The rest are ticket sales (65%), sponsors (11%), and merchants (8%). To grow their audience but still attract people sharing their values, the festival analyzed their audience according to attributes like age, gender, relationship status, kids/no kids, working/studying etc. Marketing the event to people with the same attributes has been successful so far, Oszkó-Jakab said.

Valley of Arts has started a network with smaller village-based rural festivals to share their learnings, which eventually led to Oszkó-Jakab founding the Hungarian Tourism Program Foundation.

Boom Festival

Boom Festival (PT) is a great example of an event being independent, sustainable and still profitable. “Boom’s central challenge is this: How might we create a biennial festival, for a segment of a niche market, on the periphery of Europe, without sponsors or state funding, with a ‘no headliners’ philosophy, with a strong focus on environmental and social initiatives, in a financially sustainable way?” said **Mariana Macedo, co-director of Good Mood, the producers of Boom.**



Mariana Macedo explaining Boom Festival's impact on the local economy. Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt

Their solution is to put sustainability at their core with the ethics of permaculture: earth care (i.e. rebuilding natural capital), fair share (i.e. setting limits and redistributing surplus), and people care (i.e. looking after yourself, those close to you, and your community). Their bottom line is threefold: profit, people, and planet. To explain Boom’s approach, Macedo quoted Rosa Luxemburg, who said: “The profit system must serve life, not life serve the profit system.”

The biannual festival has developed a sustainability paradigm considering 12 aspects. Besides typical festival areas like energy, food, waste as a resource, water, and mobility & transport, it also considers things like air, soil, public health, arts & creativity, and engagement & social change.

In their sustainable business model, they create revenue via five methods:

- **Boom Bus:** A total of 220 buses collect 26% of the audience in three cities: Lisbon, Porto and Madrid, creating 6% of Boom’s total revenue.
- **Merchandise:** All merch is produced in Portugal from reused materials, creating 1% of the total revenue.
- **Boom Loo:** Boom offers compost toilets only. They built the toilet units themselves, meaning they can rent them out when they don’t need them. Renting out eight units externally pays for the construction of a toilet trailer with eight cabins.

- **Food & Beverage:** Commissions paid by food and drinks vendors make up 23% of Boom's total revenue. By the way, 90% of all food options were vegetarian and/or vegan, and 100% of the used tableware and soaps used at food vendors and bars was biodegradable.
- **Support of local economies:** 87% of Boom's suppliers come from Portugal, 76% even from their local community. The economic impact Boom has on the GDP of Portugal is €53.3 million or 0.02%, and the impact on the GDP of the Beira Baxa region equals €14.7 million or 0.7%. The festival has an equally important impact when it comes to job creation.

Boom follows four financial principles:

- **Financial sustainability:** Ticket revenue covers festival costs; and F&B, transports & merchandising cover the overhead costs for two years. Ticket funds are invested in low risk fixed-term deposits, equaling 1% revenue growth. Contingency funding arrangements cover a four-month operational liquidity buffer.
- **Festival Area Coordinators Autonomy:** Area Vision is co-created with each coordination. A plafond (i.e. upper limit) is given for budget definition and controlled with a management software.
- **Transparency:** All economic data is published in an annual public financial report. There are transparency boards for all products at the festival, explaining the costs for Boom, the festival price and the surplus/loss Boom makes with the sale.
- **Participation:** All festival-goers can give feedback in a survey. The festival then decides measures based on their needs.

Macedo's three key takeaways:

1. It is possible to be sustainable, independent and profitable.
2. Being transparent with the audience is key in the strategy.
3. It is crucial to have a technical financial department supporting your team and decisions.

What You can Do against the Illegal Resale of your Tickets



FEAT's Sam Shemtob. Photo: K. Weber

The secondary ticketing market can be a huge nuisance. The more popular an artist, the more likely scalpers will buy up large numbers of tickets for their shows to resell them for profit, often illegally. A loss for artists, promoters and fans.

Luckily, there are organizations like **FEAT, the Face-Value European Alliance for Ticketing**, fighting for better regulation of the secondary ticketing market. In the session "Wake me up before you Viagogo – Removing Illegal Resale Listings: What You Need to Know" **FEAT's Sam Shemtob and Tristan Skelley** (UK) explained what you can do if your event's tickets end up on the secondary ticketing market.

FEAT is a non-profit organization promoting better ticket resale practices representing promoters, venues and sport clubs in nine European countries. Shemtob and Skelley started out by explaining the basics. For example, legally, a ticket is a service contract and not a good that can be freely bought and resold, as confirmed by the European Court of Justice.

When they speak of “unauthorized ticket resale,” also called ticket scalping, they mean **the unauthorized resale of tickets by predatory traders on third-party websites**. Scalping leads to high ticket prices as well as fraudulent, duplicated or speculative tickets that don’t guarantee

**“We think this
is the perfect
solution.”**

Sam Shemtob
about the ticket resale
model in Belgium

entry to an event. This means fans lose money on fake tickets and travel. They might blame the organizers and/or artists and lose trust in event ticketing.

The scale of the problem shouldn’t be underestimated. According to estimates, **the unauthorized resale market in Europe alone exceeds €2.5 billion each year**, with tens of thousands of fans being ripped off. The US resale market is even estimated to be at €20 billion annually.

Some extreme case studies: FEAT found tickets for Raye’s Barcelona concert listed at €5717, and Bad Bunny Stockholm at €10,243. Ticket listings for Primavera Sound in Barcelona were at €883 and for Rock am Ring at €2293. The cake was taken by a listing **for Ed Sheeran’s Wembley show for a whopping €119,784** (€136,000) on Viagogo. As Shemtob said, nobody would probably buy a ticket as expensive as this. But considering this price, listings for €600 suddenly don’t look as unattractive anymore – although they are still twice the price of a normal ticket. “It creates a market ceiling,” Shemtob explained. “It’s all manipulation.”

What should resale actually look like? It should be approved by the promoter, with full control of their inventory by the event organizer. Tickets should be sold only at face value. In Belgium, e.g., the law says organized resale must be authorized, and resale above face value is banned. “We think this is the perfect solution,” Shemtob said. Another good practice example: Greenhouse Talent has integrated its primary ticket sellers with its authorized resale platform. A new ticket is issued when resale takes place, which guarantees fans entry.

To reduce illegal online sales (among other things), the European Union passed the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**, which came into effect in February 2024. It addresses unauthorized ticket resale sites like Viagogo – despite them pretending sales on their sites are not their responsibility since they allegedly only serve as an intermediary.

The idea of the DSA is to enable people to report ticket listings with the click of a button, so the listing can be assessed and taken down – without the need to open a court case. Three different things can be reported: tickets that are being resold against the law in the country of the event, tickets that are being resold against EU law (e.g. purchased by bots), and tickets that break the promoter’s terms and conditions.

Unfortunately, national laws and fines differ quite a lot across Europe. In some countries, laws are strict and fines high; in other countries laws exist but are practically not enforced. Skelley said

**“It’s all
manipulation.”**

Sam Shemtob
on five-figure ticket
prices on Viagogo & Co

platforms like Viagogo and StubHub will continue to run from anywhere they can, so **we need a united front of all countries and big fines to deter them.**

FEAT has tested if the DSA works by reporting illegal ticket listings. Their conclusion was that the **DSA doesn't work as intended (yet)**. FEAT reported 296 illegal resale offers in the last 18 months, a total of 1000 tickets. Although resale websites are obliged to reply to every single report made, Viagogo only replied to only one, and none of the websites made any decisions about the reported illegal content. "That shows they just don't care," Shemtob said. The number of cases where action has been taken was also zero. "This could work, but right now it doesn't."

When it comes to illegal ticket sales, Google has a special role. 70% of the global traffic to Viagogo comes from Google. Sometimes, fans using Google don't even realize it when they end up on a secondary ticketing website, so stopping ads for your illegally listed tickets can prevent harm.

FEAT was able to report Google successfully for showing an ad for illegal ticket listings for a show in Belgium. As Skelley reported, Google removed the ad. He explained that, because of its size, Google is regulated by the EU commission. Google knows they must comply with the Digital Services Act, otherwise they will be fined directly by the EU Commission. This is different for medium-sized companies like Viagogo, which are fined by the country they say they reside in. This means, making a complaint to Google has a good chance to be heard. If you want to report illegal listings on Google, you can use [this form](#).

In summary, it is not yet worth reporting Viagogo & Co via the DSA, but "the DSA will work. It's not going to go away," Sam said. It's a big system that takes a while to set up. However, reporting illegal listings on Google is already worth it.



*FEAT's Tristan Skelley explaining how to report ads for fraudulent ticket listings on Google.
Photo: Holger Jan Schmidt*

Explaining Festival Magic: Why We Work in this Crazy Industry

With all the challenges facing the festival industry, it can be easy to lose sight of why, at some point, we all decided to join this crazy business. In the closing session, "This is Why We Do It!", **Fruzsina Szép (Festival Director Superbloom / Lollapalooza, DE)** and **Christof Huber (YOUROPE chairman, Director Festivals at Gadget Entertainment, CH)** let the delegates explain what had made them join in the first place and what keeps them going. Delegates had had the chance to send in a picture before the conference to help them tell their story in this session.

One delegate brought a picture of the flyer of his first-ever festival from the 80ies that he drove 60 kilometers on his moped to see. Somebody showed a picture of a street named in honor after

his festival – a proud moment. One picture showed a festival’s main stage – a place where everything feels alright, a place that feels like home.



Hosts Christof Huber and Fruzsina Szép. Photo: Rahel Inauen

Lots of pictures showed exhausted but happy festival teams – someone spontaneously throwing champagne into the air to make her team laugh after a tough edition; two women taking a selfie after the last container had been transported off site at their event run only by women; someone holding two phones and a radio, coordinating and being the backbone of her team; someone shoveling dirt to finish the dance floor very last minute together with the whole team.

Other pictures captured the weirdness that you can only encounter at festivals, like a group of 15 people in bright red lobster costumes;

someone holding a cow on a leash that had just starred in the production of a new festival ad; someone in a pig-bear costume; a festival visitor wearing a sign saying “Marry me, I want to stay in Europe #fuckbrexit #british.”

Many delegates brought pictures of themselves and their offspring at their festivals, manifesting that festivals are places to share love between generations and for the youth to explore their identity. Somebody said: “Music festivals are better with us in them, because we work so hard to make people feel welcome. There is a reason to continue fighting.”

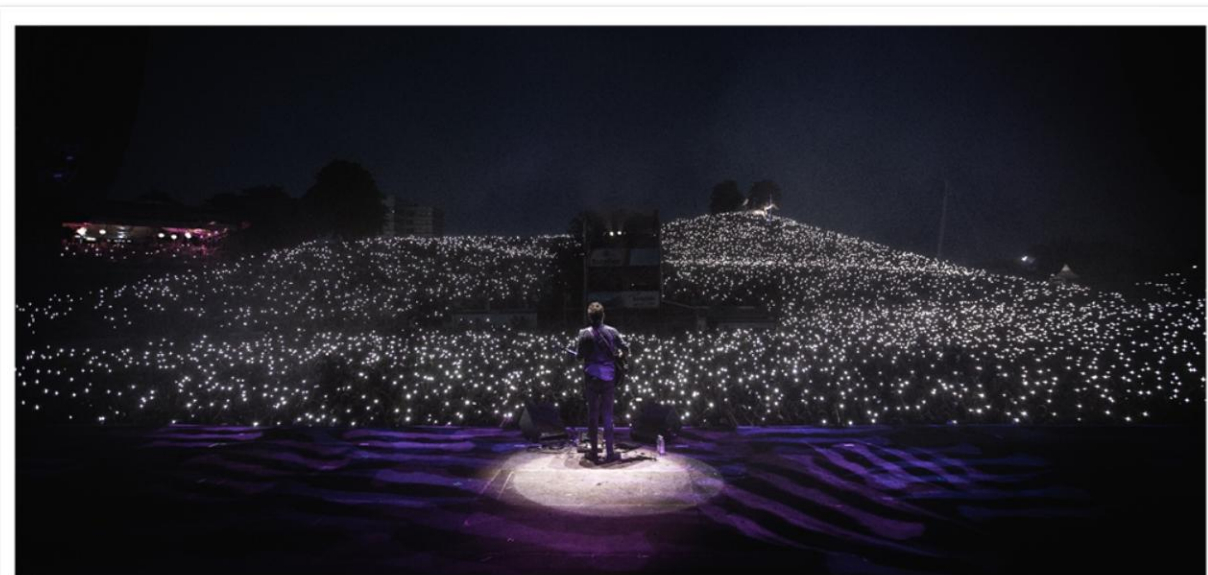


Photo: Stu Larsen

A motivator that was named again and again was “the people” – we organize festivals to create special moments for our audiences, to bring happiness to people, including those with special needs that are too often excluded in public spaces. And somewhere along the way, colleagues turn into friends, leading to friendships lasting a lifetime. Without knowing it, three delegates had sent in pictures showing their mutual group of festival friends – which made not only them choke up with emotion during the session.

Some photos showed special moments that will forever be engrained in the minds of the ones involved. A sea of lights in front of the mainstage during a captivating solo guitar performance that formed the perfect ending of the first edition after COVID. An artist playing a secret show after having had to cancel a few years earlier. Two friends working in the photographer's pit while witnessing a concert up close, which still gives them goosebumps when they think about it today. The opening of the festival gates and people rushing in all excited and ready for the day. Someone holding a beautiful bouquet of white roses that were given to her by an artist after she and her team had gone the extra mile for him. An artist encouraging someone to believe in her dreams and work in the music industry full-time.

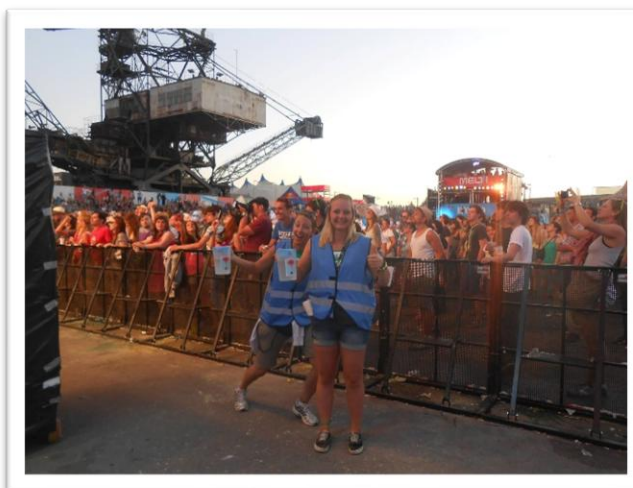


Photo: Luisa Gajewski

Other photos were a reminder – of festivals as places promoting life and values, of our responsibility to keep our festival participants safe, and of the importance to share our knowledge and keep inspiring each other – and that you can get much further with kindness.

Fun Stuff: Tours of Évora and Fitapreta Winery



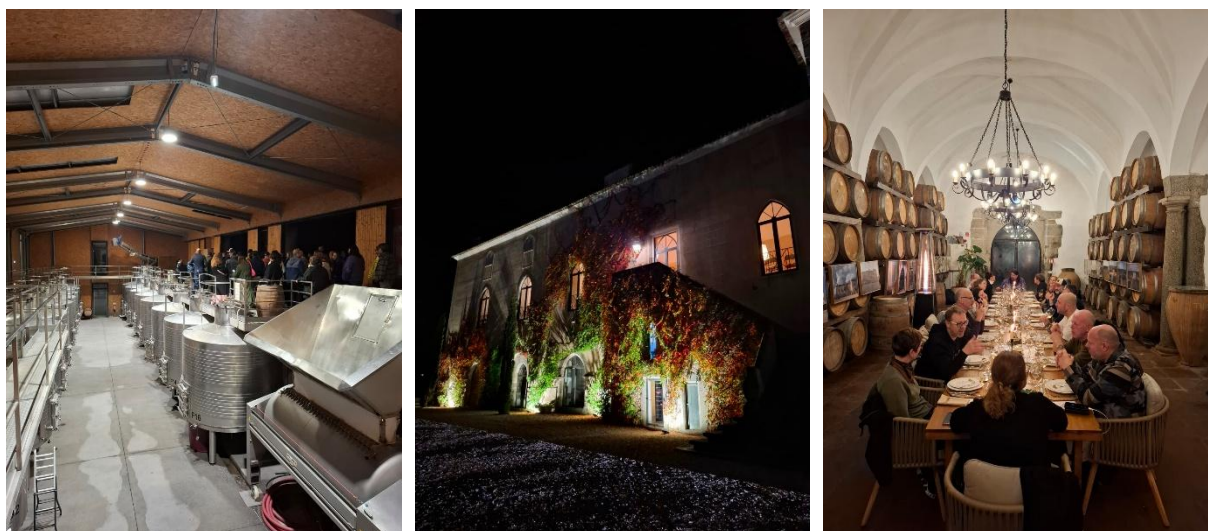
The ruins of a roman temple in Évora (left), Álvaro Martinho and Achim Ostertag entertaining the dinner guests (middle), and the Évora city square (right). Photos: Rahel Inauen

A YOUROPE event wouldn't be a YOUROPE event without dedicated time to get to your fellow participants. After the first full conference day, the delegates took a trip to the center of their host town Évora for a guided tour and a dinner. Two experienced guides led the delegates through the historic old town of Évora, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the European Capital of Culture

2027, to get a first-hand look at its well-preserved Roman, medieval, and Renaissance architecture.

Starting at a statue personifying the city and holding its coat of arms, the participants learned why it shows a man on horseback and two bodiless heads. The man depicted is likely Geraldo Geraldês, a knight who supposedly conquered the city by beheading its then king and his daughter – although what is fact and what fiction can't be said with certainty anymore.

The close-by Roman temple was built in the first century to honor the emperor, although the Romans never settled in Évora and only passed through to go to war. Since Évora held one of the Portuguese tribunals of the inquisition, the participants learned all kinds of facts about the disturbing ways in which the inquisition allegedly defended the Catholic faith. "History is a wild animal," one of the tour guides said.



Fitapreta Winery: production hall (left), the historic estate (middle), and the delegate's dinner (right). Photos: Rahel Inauen

Some less dark tour stops included the former court building, which was turned into a contemporary art gallery, and a shop selling a "corkini" – a bikini made of cork – since Portugal is the leading global exporter of cork.

Many of Évora's narrow cobblestone streets are lined by its typical whitewashed houses with yellow or grey trim. As the guides explained, yellow represents Portugal's historic connection to India (and it's supposed to scare off bugs), while the trim is painted grey as a sign of mourning after the woman of the house lost her husband.

The tour ended in Restaurante Dom Joaquim, where the delegates were received with Portuguese specialties like meat and cheese, olives, and pork cheek. Winemaker Álvaro Martinho, who was to deliver his keynote speech on the next day, surprised the dining crowd with a performance on the Galician gaita (bagpipes), a traditional instrument of Northern Portugal. He was accompanied by Summer Breeze Open Air's Achim Ostertag on the drum.

The evening of the second full conference day took the delegates to a gem of the Alto Alentejo region, ten kilometers north of Évora: Fitapreta Vinhos. The winery's team showed the participants around the beautiful, centuries-old estate, which serves both as a winery and an event location. After tasting five of Fitapreta's excellent wines, the delegates were served a delicious three-course meal on long, decorated tables placed atmospherically between huge shelves filled with wine barrels.

