



**INFORMAL TALK WITH CATALAN  
FESTIVAL MAKERS**

**Coordinator: Dr. Dragan Klaić**

November 2009

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Dr. Dragan Klaić, Visiting Fellow at Interarts, met with a small group of Catalan festival makers for an informal talk to discuss the dynamics of artistic festivals in contemporary society, as well as their economic sustainability.

*A summary by Carina Lopes*  
November 2009

## **INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Dragan Klaić, a Visiting Fellow of Interarts, and a small group of Catalan festival makers met for an informal talk on the dynamics of artistic festivals in contemporary life, discussing funding, concept implementation and survival issues. The objective was to understand the perceptions, strategies and concerns of the festivals' organizers in Catalonia. The talk also aimed to obtain a sharper insight of the festival scene in Catalonia and understand what issues their organizers have to deal with.

Participants:

Oscar Dasi is part of the collective La Porta which organizes Festival LP. La Porta has been supporting contemporary creation concerned with the body since 1992. The bi-annual international dance Festival LP is part of a process of sharing and distribution of works and processes while it also reflects on the development of dance as a vehicle of perception and knowledge.

Simona Levi is the director of the cultural activity centre Conservas. Such space brings together multiple functions – it allows creation and exchange, to connect and experiment. The festival InnMotion seeks to bring to light new innovative ideas, which can work as transformative force within the social, political and aesthetic sphere.

Tena Busquets is the director of Theatre of Olot. She coordinates the artistic festival 'Panorama' which is a performing arts multidisciplinary festival.

Alfred Sesma directs ANIMAC, the international animation festival of Catalonia, located in Lleida.

Toni Cots is part of the artistic direction team of L'animal a l'esquena with María Muñoz and Pep Ramis. This space aims to share research on artistic practices concerned with the body.

Alba Colombo teaches cultural management at the Open University of Catalonia, conducts research on the impact of festivals and collaborates with EFRP.

European Festival Research Project:

What is a festival? There are different festivals, various programs, festivals that happen outside institutions, independent festivals...

The European Festival Research Project is concerned with the dynamics of artistic festivals in contemporary life. Its focus is on festivals which are driven by a strong artistic vision, with an international programming and which also benefit from public authorities support. This research does not include festivals which are community based, with profit objectives or just a celebration (fiesta, carnival). The consortium instigates research papers, publications and debates, organizes workshops and courses and provides recommendations for festival operators, public authorities and potential sponsors.

Dr. Dragan Klaić, EFRP initiator and Chair, is working on a book with EFRP on the festivals politics, programming, governance and impact.

To open up the session, seven questions were put forward in order to define the talk's framework:

- a) What are the characteristic current shifts and changes in the Catalan festival scene?
- b) What unsettles and frustrates the emerging festival initiatives?
- c) Where are the main support sources of the festival?

- d) What is the relationship of the festivals and of continuously presenting cultural organizations? Who are other strategic partners?
- e) Are festivals enhancing artistic mobility and international cooperation?
- f) Are these some signs of saturation in the festival offer in Catalonia?
- g) Are festivals only competitors, or do they act occasionally as allies and partners?

## **1. THE FESTIVALS**

Panorama is a dance festival on a volcanic land. It happens in Olot, a small Catalan town, and this year celebrated its 8<sup>th</sup> edition. It is a festival for experimental performances that have usually problems to access funding or reach some visibility. 'Panorama' makes available to emergence artists, who need space and time, the necessary tools to produce new work. The festival is part of a local council initiative and therefore, it is an activity undertaken and funded by the council itself.

LP had its 1<sup>st</sup> edition in 2007, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition was realized this year. It was initiated as a response to a proposal done by Generalitat de Catalunya in 2004. After 3 years of talks, concept development and reflection on the meaning of 'festival', LP was born. It is part of the work developed by La Porta, but in no way its main objective. The festival aims to reflect the reality of creative processes and be used as a visibility tool within the city, country and even, internationally.

InnMotion intends to work as a social transformer and agitator. 'Conservas' also organizes the 'World Forum for Free Culture' which is a showcase of work and people working on issues related to the creative commons and intellectual property.

Animac is a festival with full public funding, but with a private management, located in deep Catalonia, in Lleida, city with about 120,000 inhabitants. It has one artistic director and a festival director. This year was its 14<sup>th</sup> edition. Its budget will double at the next year's edition. The festival caters for about 9000 visitors who mostly come to the city especially for this event.

## **2. FESTIVALS' CONTEXT**

It is accepted that festivals can stimulate new networks between researchers and practitioners. They are convenient visibility tools and can to a certain extent induce micro-topographic social change. Consequently, there are festivals emerging with less common themes, such as social or intellectual issues, from philosophy to economics.

The audience of festivals is growing and there are today strong events with complex cultural programming in mid to large size cities. However, in cities with over 750.000 inhabitants, the existence of too many festivals happening throughout the year means they overlap and crowd each other out.

⇒ In Barcelona, the festival's calendar is packed and festivals tend to overlap each other. Such excessive offer is reflected negatively on the survival of the festivals when it comes to funding. Since there is an expectation from the local authorities to 'diversify' the offer, it is hard for festivals to survive for more than 3 years (or editions), especially for smaller festivals.

The offer of too many festivals raises the question of reflection and assimilation. How can the local population and public be able to enjoy festivals without a sense of a quick consumption?

⇒ The Catalan festival scene diverges accordingly to its geographic location. In Lleida, there are about 25 festivals and there is still scope for these to grow. However, the lack of a good and strong cultural policy is an impediment.

Across Europe, there is also a lack of festival policy as the study, conducted by CIRCLE and EFRP in 2007 indicated; and the EFRP 'Recommendations to the public authorities about a festival policy' (2008) was offered as a tool to the public authorities and also festivals initiators.

Festivals are appreciated by the politicians under the assumption that they have a significant economic impact, which is true for a few major festivals only. Consequently, there is a gap between the objectives of the festival organizers and the expectations and funding rationale of the politicians.

⇒ Barcelona, in the words of festivals organizers, suffers from its own branding strategy. Over the years, regulation and the regional government practices have slowly turned against smaller artistic initiatives, against the volunteers work and consequently, on the cultural development of Catalonia.

⇒ In the case of Catalonia, cinema festivals have been to a certain extent distinct from other festivals as they have worked quite well as a strategy to create and develop a network of artistic cinemas through the countryside.

### **3. FUNDING**

The Generalitat of Catalonia has over the last few years become very involved in festival organization, "eating away" the space for small initiatives, often through over-funding of some existing festivals, destroying the possibility of other festivals within similar fields to survive.

The ways how to access public funding are also not clear.

The newly established Arts Council of Catalonia has little competence, its funds are limited and the political interference with it is noticeable. Nowadays, it provides funding to what had been initiated before its own creation and gives a national cultural award.

⇒ The festival ANIMAC has grown a lot over its several yearly editions. It started with a budget of 12,000 euros, with the last year's edition reaching a budget of 200,000 euros, provided by the local council and Generalitat de Catalunya.

### **4. FESTIVAL'S AIMS**

"Handmade" festivals are a format that allows new and experimental work to be introduced within the cultural milieu.

⇒ Due to Panorama at Olot's theatre, every fortnight a piece of experimental performance work is presented. Over 10 cities across Catalonia have also integrated in their normal theatre programs experimental productions.

Festivals are an opportunity to decentralize culture and to help improving artistic mobility - in opposition to the perpetuation of the same offer. They also allow through their alternative offer to teach, develop and challenge audiences and therefore, prepare audiences to what is being done outside the large and traditional cultural organizations.

Small festivals that become relatively successful run a danger of being appropriated and developed into massive and very commercial projects, such as 'Sonar', which is today part of brand called 'Barcelona'.

⇒ In Catalonia, small festivals are doing a job that does not get done by the large public cultural organizations, as many of them would never include risky work or projects in their regular programs. What seems to be happening is that the 'traditional' and the 'risky' works never appear within the same cultural framework.

Festivals are like living processes, more organic than institutions. Therefore, the concept of a festival has to be developed and changed according to the reality of the productions presented.

## **5. ARTISTIC MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

⇒ The experience of Conservas in organizing InnMotion has shown that in order to have a full house in Barcelona the program offered needs to have always a mix of local and international work.

⇒ In relation to the work done by the artists, Conservas refers to a persistent artistic autism, where artists keep refusing to understand the system (political and economic) they are part of.

⇒ To work in a city such as Olot, it is necessary to feel that the festival itself and organizers are part of something bigger. The small dimension of the city and its geographic isolation exacerbates the need of networking and collaboration. A group of 14 small and medium cities, around Catalonia, are involved in Transversa' including Olot and Lleida. Even then, networking is not enough to avoid an occasional sense of isolation and artistic loneliness.

There might be a necessity to reformulate networking and collaboration and consequently find and develop solutions to share problems and "cry together", in particular for those working in more isolated locations. Other (or more) partners and networks have to be generated.

⇒ La Porta has a close contact with other dance structures and collectives in Portugal, Belgium and various cities around Spain, such as Bilbao and Madrid.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Today, it is becoming common for the events such as festivals to be highly divided and categorized in the funding applications accordingly to their field of work. Such classification under cultural policy can become a constraint for the creation and development of festivals, as they often do not reflect the needs of artists and cultural organizations, or even, their pattern of work. There are also patterns of inequality built in many cultural collectives and organizations which are more prepared to ask than offer something to the others.