

Public Closing reflections – Closing ceremony

We have shared a journey for 7 days, a journey of getting to know each other, a journey of learning, of sharing, of co-creating an open space to reflect critically on the role of festivals in today's world while addressing complexity and learning to deal with diversity.

We have been tackling many issues as working with artists, models of curating, models of governance, working in challenged areas, dealing with different governmental models and the affect this has on the arts and artistic expression, sustainability, climate change, more fair ways of international collaboration, to name only a few of the many issues we have tackled.

In a peer to peer learning environment gently guided by experts coming from all continents. And in different formats like plenary sessions, working groups, roundtables (though rectangular) with mentors, the Open space model proposed and facilitated by participants, one on one mentoring etc.

We have experienced the unique festival Model Next and how the partners work, we have learned from the students Devine of Howest etc.

We have had a revolution and got an insight how to facilitate group dynamics and conflict through a constructive process into a positive experience. How to facilitate an open transparent process to arrive at a group consensus. How to facilitate inequality in the room. How to co create the programme of the Atelier and experiment in this Atelier context. We have learned that we gain and lose things while making choices.

We have generated awareness that when we advocate for things rather than against, doors open more easily, and that positive beliefs and courage and hope can take us to places where magic and surprise can result into things we could not have imagined or anticipated before.

We have been invited by Kengsen to check our privilege We have been invited by Danny to reflect on the world international, which already in its terminology talks about nations, and to consider alternatives as inter-cities, or even inter-communities to go beyond the borders installed through history, politics, economics and which interfere on the essence of connection – humanity. Airan addressed the issue of loneliness in our societies which creates frustration and xenophobia and frustration. We have learned to connect as human beings in the first place through the rituals Erica took us through to ground us in the here and now to be really present for each other. Brett has led us through a participatory panel on possible models of curating. Andrea has continuously gave us input on how to work within a context with limited resources and a government that is openly threatening the arts and education. And all of this facilitated by Mike Van Graan, the sometimes 'hidden' force behind this.

And within all these heavy topics and serious matters, we have had fun together as people, human beings, laughing, dancing, playing ping pong etc.

In a broader context we have been looking into how to create collectively from Festivals as platforms with a direct link to people and civil society, how to build a stronger eco system for the arts and festivals from a platform as The Festival Academy which is bringing together young festival managers and festival experts as well as experts from other fields of actions as foundations, philanthropy, education, social movements, new technologies etc.

And to see from this space, what we can change today, which will affect tomorrow, step by step, towards more open and tolerant societies.

And I would like to really invite you to use this platform and to work towards structural innovation from an organized space. The 7 days is only a beginning. You are now part of the alumni community counting today 683 festival leaders from 80+ countries and all continents + around 100 experts coming from all over the world from festivals, from foundations, from education etc.

As you have seen from this Atelier there are many ways that Alumni feature in this edition, as partners, as speakers, as mentors as facilitators; It is about empowering you. The evolution of the past 3 years have been the result of a participatory process in which we defined together with alumni, mentors and key stakeholders The Festival Academy and its next developments. We continue this co-creation process.

It is also about empowering yourself through the new connections you have made by visiting each other's festivals, keeping in touch, starting up new collaborations and participating in next opportunities of The Festival Academy, in letting us know what you want to continue learning on or what you would like to tackle more in depth.

I would like to sincerely thank our partner, International Arts Festival NEXT and its partners La Rose Des Vents Villeneuve d'Ascq, Schouwburg Kortrijk, le Phénix Valenciennes, Maison de la Culture Tournai, Espace Pasolini Valenciennes, Art Centre Buda Kortrijk and Benoit Geers and Karlijn.

Special thanks go to the European Festivals Association, our initiator and the umbrella organization for festivals, an alliance of festivals through its members, the EFFE label festivals and its outreach to more than 10.000 festivals worldwide. Thanks to all the partners who supported this Atelier and made it possible as Creative Europe, the Flemish Community, La Région Hauts-de-France, Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai + Valenciennes, Interreg, the City of Kortrijk. Many thanks to HOWEST and the Students Devine who researched this week the possibilities of new technologies related to festivals and art of which they presented the innovative and inspiring results to us. I would also like to thank our partners the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture and Icorn.

A huge thank you to our mentors Airan Berg, Ong Keng Sen, Erica McCalman, Brett Pyper, Andrea Saturnino, Danny Yung and special thanks to Mike Van Graan for the facilitation and development of the Atelier programme and others with us the past 2 years. Also thanks to Open Society Foundations and Drosos Foundation to share their expertise and the many guest speakers and observers who took part in the programme. Many thanks to Laure, Valentina, HuiYu and Karlijn, for all the great work they did. Please give them an applause!

And last but not least, thank you participants. I'm looking forward to continue what we started here and to see how we can meet, exchange, collaborate in many years to come.

19/11/2019 – Inge Ceustermans