

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award

Project Title			
Re-imagining the arts festival in times of crisis			
LEAD INSTITUTION			
Name of HEI institution	Birmingham City University		
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/> Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION			
Name of organisation	British Arts Festivals Association		
Website URL	https://www.artsfestivals.co.uk		
THE RESEARCH PROJECT			
<p>UK arts festivals are in crisis. They are dealing with the impact of Brexit and COVID, alongside questions around diversity, inclusivity, equity and sustainability. Working with the British Arts Festival Association (BAFA), the research will examine festival cultures, management, policy and programming to re-imagine the future of arts festivals.</p> <p>Since 1945 arts festivals have become a prominent feature of cultural life in the UK (Ali-Knight, 2004; Anderton, 2018; Finkel, 2009, Sassatelli et al, 2011). They make a substantial contribution to the creative economy, but are also uniquely placed to build and create sustainable communities, encourage social justice and cohesion, and make a positive impact on health and wellbeing. Yet the sector is facing unprecedented challenges. Drawing on BAFA's experience, networks and resources, this research will address the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the key organisational challenges for arts festivals in the UK? 2. How are arts festivals in the UK changing/adapting as a result of Brexit/Covid/issues of EDI/sustainability? 3. How are arts festivals in the UK uniquely placed to respond to times of crisis? <p>The student will work with BAFA to evaluate the UK festivals landscape post-Brexit and post-Covid and establish priorities and principles for the sector's recovery. Building on the baseline data that BAFA has on the sector (i.e. the Festival Mean Business 4 programme), they will undertake three case studies at selected BAFA-member festivals based on size, time and location (examples are Cheltenham Festivals, BBC Proms, Ventnor Fringe). They will use a mixed methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews with festival organisations, data analysis, collaborative and co-design research processes (such as audience forums and creative labs), historical/archival research, and extensive fieldwork at each of the festivals. They will also reflect critically on theories of cultural practice within festival organisations and reconsider the basic assumptions about festival cultures (Delanty et al, 2011; Duffy & Mair, 2017). The project will establish a model for evaluating the impact and role played by arts festivals, as well as creating a conceptual framework for understanding the changes taking place across the sector more broadly. It will also address key academic debates about why festivals exist, where they happen, who participates in them, and what their purpose and value is within the UK.</p>			

The aim is to provide BAFA with a template for their ongoing research programme and enable them to evaluate festivals' operational strategies and processes, approaches to programming and audience development, EDI and sustainability. It will inform strategies and practices for institutional change within BAFA (i.e. consolidating a culture of research, greater links with universities), contribute to sector-wide policy recommendations (i.e. DCMS policies on the creative industries), and offer solutions to current challenges resulting from a period of intense social transformation.

Given the challenges that arts festivals are contending with, there is an urgent need to understand both quantitatively and qualitatively the state of the sector. Drawing on Birmingham City University's expertise and track record of research into festival cultures, the researcher will play an integral role in enabling BAFA to make a step change in its research capacity and profile. Their research will inform a series of policy recommendations designed for the sector, as well as shaping other research initiatives and engagement activities within the organisation. Additional support for the research will come from the BAFA board, which will act in an advisory role. This research is crucial on a number of levels: it provides much needed evidence and data to really uncover the impacts of the various crises the sector faces, and in turn this allows BAFA both to develop appropriate programmes, tools and initiatives to support the sector and more effectively make the case for sector support to government and funding bodies. In the longer term, building capacity for research both within BAFA and its members will further strengthen the crucial links between this under-explored but vital part of the UK arts ecology and the universities sector, bringing synergetic benefit to all partners.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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