Festival Making In The Arab Region

The Evolving Paradigms of The Festival Landscape

Behind This Initiative

The British Council fosters connections, understanding, and trust between the people of the UK and communities worldwide through arts and culture, education, and the English language. By working both directly with individuals and in partnership with governments and institutions, we aim to create lasting impact—empowering people with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to thrive in an interconnected world. Our work spans more than 100 countries.

In the arts and cultural sectors, we nurture creative expression, facilitate cross-cultural exchanges, and strengthen creative economies. By connecting the best of the UK with the richness of global cultures, we foster dialogue and mutual understanding, building trust that endures even in times of political or economic uncertainty.

British Council's MENA Arts Team

In the MENA region, we believe that a thriving cultural sector is fundamental to a more connected, secure, and prosperous world. Through our global networks, we facilitate knowledge exchange and trust-building, supporting capacity-building initiatives that address local challenges while linking the cultural expertise of the UK with that of the region. Our work includes policy dialogues, skills development programmes, and mentorship opportunities that inspire meaningful change

and contribute to a resilient and sustainable creative ecosystem. Rooted in the values of mutuality, connection, inclusivity, openness, and excellence, the British Council MENA Arts team remains committed to fostering collaboration and innovation across borders.

Fadaa'aat: Enabling a Sustainable Festival Ecosystem in the Arab Region

The British Council MENA Arts team launched Fadaa'aat as a regional initiative dedicated to strengthening festival-making across the Arab region. Recognising the critical role that festivals play in cultural exchange, artistic expression, and community engagement, Fadaa'aat offers multifaceted support—ranging from financial assistance for both established and emerging festivals to opportunities for rethinking the festival landscape. Through capacity-building programmes, strategic collaborations, and audience development efforts, Fadaa'aat seeks to foster a more resilient and interconnected cultural sector. By bridging artistic networks between the Arab world and the UK, the initiative cultivates a space for innovation, dialogue, and sustainable growth within the festival ecosystem.

"Cross-border solidarity allows Arab voices to resonate globally, not just locally."

IN BETWEEN: Rethinking Festival Making

Within this framework, IN BETWEEN emerged as a pioneering initiative that engages in broader festival-making practices across the region. Launched in 2022 as a festival in Beirut, IN BETWEEN has since evolved into a platform that explores new models of collaboration, creative programming, and festival sustainability. Amidst shifting audience dynamics, technological advancements, and socio-political changes, the initiative responds to the pressing need for innovative approaches in the cultural sector.

IN BETWEEN aligns with the vision of Fadaa'aat, offering a space for regional connections, multidisciplinary experimentation, and new festival practices. Rooted in its core values—collaborative, multidisciplinary, and nomadic—the initiative aims

to ensure that cultural festivals in the Arab region continue to thrive and adapt to contemporary challenges.

MOMENTUM: Edinburgh's International Delegate Programme

Momentum is an international delegate programme hosted by British Council Scotland, Festivals Edinburgh, and Creative Scotland, offering cultural leaders, festival programmers, producers, and policymakers an exclusive opportunity to engage with Edinburgh's world-renowned festivals. As the world's leading festival city, Edinburgh provides a dynamic platform for artistic and cultural exchange, making Momentum a key space for fostering global collaboration and dialogue. Through curated engagements, delegates gain insight into the Scottish cultural landscape, explore opportunities to showcase their country's artistic talent, and build lasting relationships with key stakeholders in Edinburgh's festivals and beyond.

Each year, Momentum brings together delegations from around the world, fostering connections that transcend borders and create new opportunities for artistic innovation.

Introduction

"Festivals hold the capacity to connect communities, shape identities, and enable cultural and economic resilience."

Festivals have long been dynamic cultural platforms, serving as spaces for artistic expression, social dialogue, and economic exchange. They reflect the evolving relationships between the arts, society, and shifting economic landscapes. However, as societies in the MENA region and beyond undergo rapid transformations—shaped by technological advancements, escalating conflicts, financial instability, and changing audience behaviours—festivals must continuously adapt to remain relevant, resilient, and impactful.

Recognising these challenges, IN BETWEEN, under the umbrella of Fadaa'aat, launched its first collaborative initiative with MOMENTUM in August 2024, convening a three-day gathering in Edinburgh. This event brought together festival directors from across the MENA region and the UK to collectively examine contemporary challenges and opportunities in festival-making. Through interactive sessions—ranging from open discussions to speed networking and festival presentations—participants explored key themes, including the evolving role of festivals in turbulent times, the impact of political and economic pressures, and the necessity of innovative strategies for sustainability and audience engagement.

Amany Abouzeid, Regional Arts Director of British Council MENA, described it as a "paradigmatic shift"—one that requires fresh approaches to collaboration, audience participation, and funding models. Echoing this sentiment, Julia Amour, Director of Festivals Edinburgh, underscored the urgency for festivals to redefine their relationships with cultural, social, and economic value systems to sustain their impact in a rapidly changing world.

The gathering featured presentations and interventions from a diverse group of arts practitioners, festival directors, and cultural operators, representing an array of festivals from both the MENA region and the UK. These included:

- Ashtar Youth Theatre Festival (Palestine)
- Baghdad Tarkib Contemporary Arts Festival (Iraq)
- Belfast International Arts Festival (UK)
- Counterflows (UK)
- Dance Base (UK)
- Dougga Festival (Tunisia)
- Edinburgh Art Festival (UK)
- Hakaya / Baladk (Jordan)
- Interference Festival (Tunisia)
- Jerusalem Festival (Palestine)
- Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (UK)
- Marrakech Contemporary Dance Festival (Morocco)
- Marsa7 (Lebanon)
- Mina: Artistic Ports and Passages (Syria / Lebanon)
- Scottish International Storytelling Festival (UK)
- Sidewalks (Lebanon)
- Shubbak Festival (UK)
- Sonica (UK)
- Take Me Somewhere (UK)
- Visa for Music (Morocco)

By facilitating dialogue between festival leaders from distinct yet interconnected cultural landscapes, the convening aimed to foster new pathways for exchange, cross-border collaboration, and forward-thinking festival models. The discussions that unfolded over the three days not only underscored the pressing challenges faced by festivals today but also highlighted the potential for collective innovation in shaping the future of the sector.

Key Discussions and Takeaways

1. The Purpose and Impact of Festivals

The discussion explored why festivals are created and their multifaceted impact on society. Key themes that characterised the importance of festivals included:

Space for Dialogue

Festivals can be potent platforms for dialogue, raising awareness of critical issues and challenging dominant narratives. They provide space for diverse voices and engagement, highlighting social and political realities.

Joy, Celebration, and Well-being

Beyond their cultural value, festivals create spaces for joy and celebration, promoting social interaction, enhancing well-being, and fostering environments where people feel safe and connected.

Alternative Spaces and Experiences

Contemporary festivals often adopt alternative art forms, challenging mainstream perceptions of both discursive and physical spaces.

Place-making and Evolution

Festivals contribute to the evolving nature of cities and communities, reflecting changing dynamics and needs. They play a vital role in place-making, particularly in post-conflict or post-colonial contexts, fostering cultural revitalisation and social cohesion.

Identity Formation and Cultural Heritage

Festivals provide platforms for asserting, forming, and negotiating identities, especially among the diasporas. They also support the preservation of intangible heritage as lived, experienced, and ever-evolving artistic practice.

Community Engagement and Outreach

Festivals foster meaningful connections with local communities through inclusive programming, participatory experiences, and partnerships with grassroots organisations. By creating accessible and responsive cultural spaces, festivals amplify community voices, encourage dialogue, and promote social cohesion rooted in shared cultural expressions.

Platforms for Capacity Building and Showcasing for Burgeoning Artists

Festivals serve as vital incubators for emerging artists, offering opportunities for professional development, mentorship, and public visibility. Through residencies, workshops, and curated showcases, they support artistic growth, facilitate network-building, and enable early-career practitioners to gain experience and recognition within the broader cultural landscape.

Presentations from Visa for Music (Morocco), Timitar Festival, Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (UK), and Dougga Festival (Tunisia) illustrated how festivals fulfil these roles within their unique socio-political landscapes while maintaining artistic focus.

2. Funding and Financial Sustainability

This session highlighted the complexity of festival funding and financing. James McVeigh from Creative Scotland presented three different business models: Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and the Edinburgh Science Festival. The session outlined key approaches to developing sustainable business models, understanding audience demands, and adapting to market shifts. Core components included:

Value Proposition

Each festival format carries a unique value proposition, which informs its programming, funding mechanisms, and audience-building strategies.

Diversification of Funding

A broad funding base—public support, ticket sales, corporate sponsorship, and individual contributions—is crucial for long-term viability.

Audience Engagement

Research and feedback mechanisms are essential tools for understanding audience needs and preferences, enabling the development of effective and sustainable audience strategies.

"What if funding were based on care, not just metrics?"
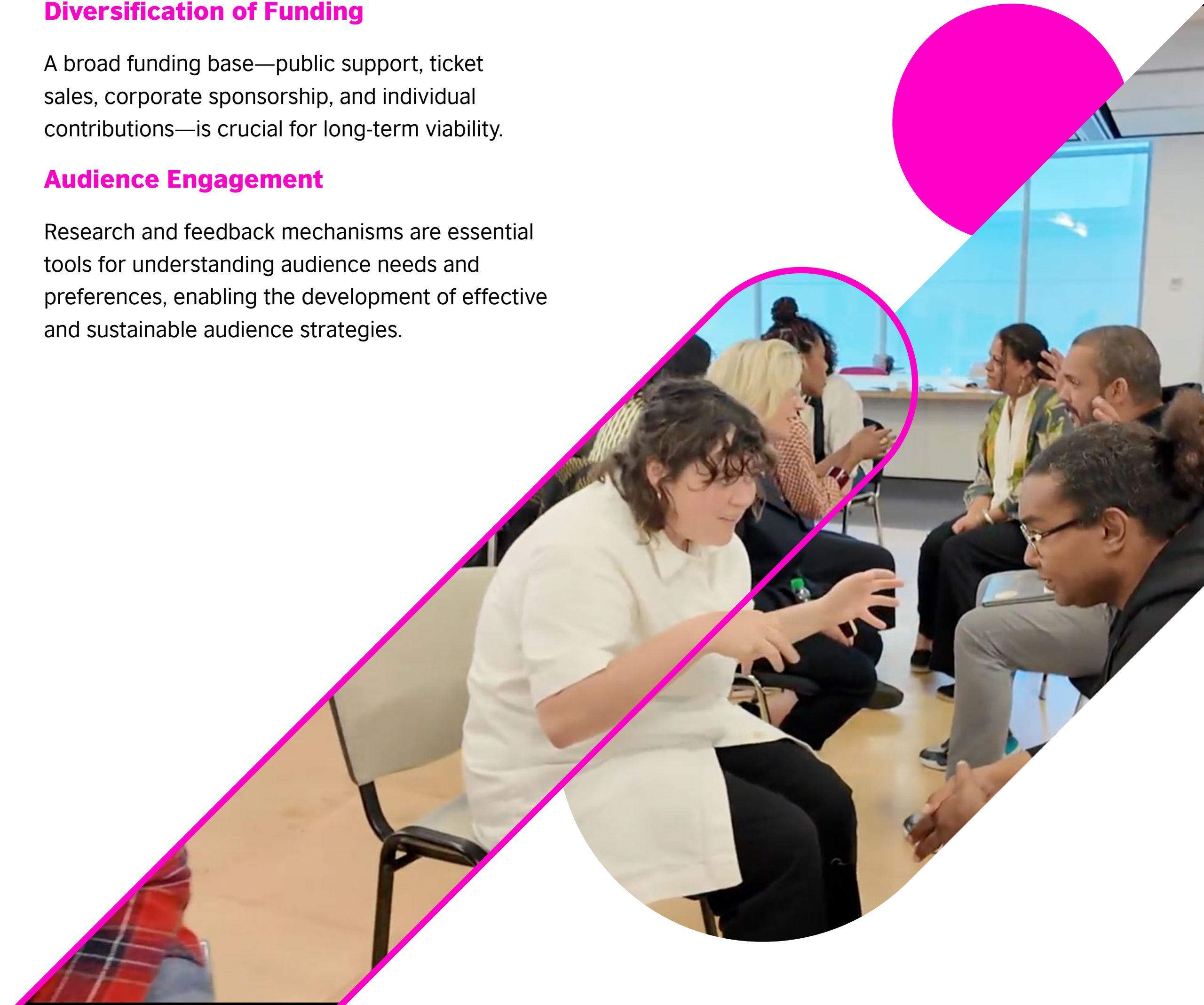
3. Audience Development and Engagement

Building a broad and diverse audience base is essential for the continuity, sustainability, and impact of arts and cultural festivals. A thriving audience is the backbone of artistic innovation. Diversifying and engaging audiences fosters cultural participation, social cohesion, freedom of expression, and resilience in the face of economic or policy changes.

Participants also emphasised the need to move audiences from passive spectators to active participants and constituents in festivals—and in the arts and culture sector more broadly. Audience development remains one of the most challenging aspects of festival-making.

Case studies from Belfast International Arts Festival, Hakaya (Jordan), MINA Festival (Syria/Lebanon), and Marrakech Contemporary Dance Festival informed the discussion. Key strategies included:

Segmentation and Targeting

Segmenting audiences based on demographic, geographic, and behavioural characteristics, and targeting each group with tailored programming and outreach.

Accessibility and Affordability

Offering free or discounted events to ensure access for a wide range of audiences.

Community Engagement

Building long-term relationships with local communities through partnerships, collaborative programming, and community-based initiatives.

Digital Engagement

Utilising websites, social media, email, apps, and digital ticketing to reach and grow audiences.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

Collecting and analysing data on demographics, attendance, ticketing, and post-event feedback to refine audience strategies and improve future events.

"Audience development isn't just marketing—it's movement-building."

4. Technology in Festival-Making

In a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and digital innovation, technology plays a central role in both artistic production and festival operations. This session examined how technology functions as both a creative medium and an operational support tool—without replacing the human and emotional dimensions of artistic experience.

Presentations from Interference Festival (Tunisia) and Sonica (Scotland) explored examples of:

Immersive Experiences

Using AR/VR and interactive media to enhance engagement.

Operational Efficiency

Leveraging digital ticketing, data analytics, and AI-driven marketing for smoother festival management.

Ethical Considerations

Addressing concerns around data privacy, accessibility, and digital exclusion, particularly for rural communities, the elderly, and those with limited access to technology.

Technology holds great potential but raises ethical questions around privacy, inclusivity, and the risk of deepening inequalities—issues that must be considered at every level of festival-making.

"Technology can enhance engagement, but only if it does not replace the emotional and human dimensions of festivals."

5. The Power of Collaboration

Fruitful collaborations and long-term partnerships are key to successful festival-making. Festivals often collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders—including other festivals, artists, governments, donors, individuals, NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), and, above all, the broader arts sector. A central contributor to a successful festival is the ability to weave strong, meaningful partnerships across this diverse ecosystem. Effective collaborations require transparency, shared goals, and a commitment to common values.

Presentations from the Edinburgh Art Festival, Marsah (Lebanon), and the Baghdad Tarkib Contemporary Arts Festival highlighted both the benefits and challenges of collaboration in festival contexts.

Benefits of Collaboration

Collaborative models can provide access to new and otherwise unavailable resources. These include funding opportunities, sponsorships, technical and logistical support, partner expertise, venues, equipment, and expanded audience reach through shared networks. In doing so, collaborations contribute to building more resilient and sustainable festival structures by sharing responsibilities, diversifying funding streams, and pooling knowledge.

Cultivating cross-cultural collaborations in particular can deepen mutual understanding and appreciation, fostering intercultural dialogue and enriching festival programming. Such partnerships open doors for artist exchanges and new ways of working, while also enabling festivals to present diverse artistic voices to wider audiences.

Collaboration further supports the sharing of skills, tools, and professional expertise among partners, contributing to capacity building and long-term growth. It allows artists to showcase their work through new and varied platforms, helps reach untapped audiences, and expands professional networks. When rooted in trust and mutual respect, collaborations also strengthen collective advocacy efforts for the arts and culture—whether in advancing policy, promoting cultural development, or tackling shared challenges.

Challenges of Collaboration

Despite their benefits, collaborations are not without challenges. Differences in organisational culture—including vision, mission, and values—can create tensions. These issues are often compounded by discrepancies in underlying business models, organisational structures, and levels of capacity and skill among partners.

Building trust takes time and requires sustained investment of resources, especially when working across sectors or regions. Additionally, collaborations often expose existing power dynamics and resource imbalances—particularly between large, well-established institutions and smaller or community-based initiatives. These disparities require careful negotiation to ensure equity and respect across the partnership.

International collaborations bring additional layers of complexity. They demand sensitivity to diverse cultural norms, ethical frameworks, and communication styles. Misunderstandings or missteps can easily lead to offences or breaches of trust. Furthermore, differences in expectations and strategies for audience engagement—especially when targeting distinct audience segments—can create dissonance and ultimately dilute the impact of the festival if not properly aligned.

6. Challenges and Opportunities for the Festival Scene

At times, it may appear that the festival scene in the MENA region faces more challenges than opportunities. Issues such as funding limitations, political instability, censorship, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to shape the cultural landscape. Representatives from Shubbak Festival, Jerusalem Festival, and Ashtar International Youth Festival shared their experiences, highlighting a wide range of obstacles, while also pointing to emerging pathways for innovation, collaboration, and resilience.

Key Challenges:

Funding Limitations

Securing adequate funding remains a major concern for festivals, impacting essential operations such as artist fees, staffing, venue hire, and marketing. Cuts in public and governmental funding—compounded by economic downturns and diminishing corporate or individual sponsorship—have placed increasing pressure on festival budgets.

Political Instability and Censorship

Political instability creates unpredictable environments for organising and delivering festivals, particularly in areas affected by conflict or war. Censorship and limitations on freedom of expression in the MENA region often manifest through the suppression of speech, restrictions on content, and pre-approval requirements that complicate the implementation of artistic programmes.

Self-Censorship

To avoid potential repercussions from authorities, political actors and social norms, some festivals resort to self-censorship. While often a protective measure, this can undermine artistic freedom and curtail the potential for open dialogue and social reflection.

Mobility and Visa Restrictions

Artist mobility is frequently constrained by complex visa requirements and insufficient infrastructure. These barriers can result in delays or, at times, the cancellation of key festival components, forcing last-minute programme adjustments and limiting international exchange.

Lack of Cultural Policies and Legal Frameworks

The absence of supportive cultural policies and robust legal frameworks that are suited to the specificity of the artistic sector, creates significant bureaucratic and logistical difficulties. Inconsistent or unclear regulations slow down operational processes and place festivals at risk, particularly when policy gaps make long-term planning difficult.

Scarcity of Resources

A lack of training and professional development has contributed to a shortage of skilled human resources at the management, administrative, operational, and financial levels. Additionally, limited financial means—whether from ticket sales, sponsorships, or grants—often result in difficult decisions around programming, artist support, and audience engagement.

Climate Change and Sustainability

The climate crisis necessitates more sustainable practices within the festival sector. Environmental responsibility must go beyond superficial "green" actions to include a fundamental shift in values—rethinking our relationship with the environment. Yet, limited expertise, competing priorities, perceived cost implications, and the relatively small scale of many festivals make it challenging to mainstream environmental sustainability. This is especially true in a region where climate concerns are often deprioritised due to more urgent socio-political realities.

Mental Health and Well-being:

The pandemic placed mental health at the forefront, exposing vulnerabilities across the cultural sector. Many artists face financial insecurity while being pressured to produce creatively, often while managing administrative burdens such as funding applications. Festival staff face similar pressures—working long hours for modest compensation, especially in the wake of budget cuts and understaffing. In this context, prioritising mental health and well-being must become a core part of festival culture—not just for artists and teams, but also for the audiences they serve.

Key Opportunities:

Build Community and Solidarity:

Harness the potential and capacity of festivals to bring together people from diverse backgrounds, cultivating shared identity, belonging, and connection. They provide space for meaningful social interaction and act as platforms for marginalised voices to advocate for justice, equity, and positive change.

Drive Innovation and Experimentation:

In the face of adversity, festivals are increasingly turning to innovation and creative risk-taking. This may include adopting new technologies—such as VR, AR, live-streaming, and interactive digital platforms—to engage broader audiences. Hybrid models, blending in-person and virtual components, have expanded reach and accessibility. Additionally, working across artistic disciplines can generate entirely new formats and experiences, pushing the boundaries of traditional festival-making.

Strengthen Regional Collaborations:

Initiatives such as IN BETWEEN offer valuable opportunities for festivals to build and strengthen regional ties. These collaborations promote continuity, enhance mutual support, and contribute to a more connected, resilient, and impactful ecosystem.

Upskill New Practitioners:

By investing in the training and mentorship of emerging artists and arts professionals, festivals can help close skill gaps and ensure a pipeline of talent for the future. This contributes not only to individual growth, but also to the overall sustainability and development of the cultural sector.

Enhance Interactions with Local Businesses:

Strengthening relationships with local businesses embeds festivals more deeply in their communities. These partnerships can stimulate the local economy, enhance social cohesion, and build long-term economic impact by rooting cultural activity in local ecosystems.

Diversify Income Streams:

As public funding becomes increasingly scarce and institutional grant systems grow more unstable, festivals are being driven to explore alternative financial models. These include generating earned revenue, offering membership schemes, and engaging local communities in co-investment. Innovative business models—founded on collaboration, shared resources, and sustainability—are emerging. These efforts are complemented by the development of more equitable governance structures and strategic advocacy to influence funders, policymakers, and the public, paving the way for new coalitions and support mechanisms for the festival sector.

"The show must go on is being replaced with: let's take care of each other first."

Festivals Highlights

Insights From The Field

As part of the Edinburgh gathering, festival directors and cultural practitioners from across the MENA region and the UK shared insights into their work, offering valuable perspectives on the evolving role of festivals in today's landscape. Rather than in-depth case studies, the following sections present key highlights from the discussions, capturing essential themes and reflections shared by festival leaders. These insights, drawn from a diverse array of festivals, shed light on the creative responses and adaptive strategies cultural practitioners are employing within their respective contexts.

Beyond Entertainment: The Deeper Purpose of Festivals

The question "Why do we create festivals?" invites a deeper exploration of the motivations, goals, and impact behind festival-making. While often perceived as entertainment platforms, festivals hold far greater potential—they drive economies, attract tourism, and act as catalysts for cultural expression, community engagement, and artistic representation.

Drawing on the experiences of Visa for Music, Timitar Festival, the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival, and the Dougga International Festival, this section revisits diverse approaches to festival creation. Whether showcasing musical talent, fostering cross-cultural dialogue, preserving heritage, or amplifying underrepresented voices, festivals shape and reflect cultural landscapes.

Visa for Music and Timitar Festivals: Bridging Regional Connections and Preserving Local Heritage

Presentation by: Brahim El Mazned, Director of Visa for Music and Timitar Festival

Visa for Music (V4M) and Timitar Festival exemplify how festivals can serve distinct yet complementary purposes—addressing both regional connectivity and local cultural preservation.

Visa for Music: Bridging Continents Through Sound

Established in 2014, Visa for Music (V4M) is a pioneering festival and professional music market based in Rabat, Morocco. Its primary mission is to spotlight emerging talent from Africa and the Middle East, offering artists exposure to industry professionals and facilitating access to international markets.

In addition to its performance programme, V4M functions as a platform for bridging cultural and linguistic divides between the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) and the Mashreq countries of the Arab region. It fosters collaborations that celebrate both cultural commonalities and diversities.

Over the years, the festival has evolved into a dynamic hub for professional networking, project development, and skill-building. It hosts workshops and training programmes that focus on the technical aspects of music production, including sound engineering and lighting design. These initiatives not only enhance artists' technical proficiency but also encourage cross-cultural collaborations that reinforce the global music ecosystem.

Visa For Music

Timitar Festival: Celebrating Amazigh Heritage on a Global Stage

In contrast, Timitar Festival—held annually in Agadir since 2004—upholds the foundational theme: "Amazigh artists greet world music." This reflects its deep commitment to showcasing traditional Amazigh music alongside a diverse range of international genres.

The festival employs a "microlocal" strategy, ensuring that at least %50 of its lineup features local musicians. This approach not only supports and uplifts local artists, but also contributes to the popularisation and preservation of Amazigh music as a vital cultural heritage. By inviting internationally renowned headliners, Timitar provides local artists with valuable opportunities for exposure, exchange, and growth.

Each edition of the festival includes a wide range of activities aimed at promoting and transmitting Amazigh artistic heritage. These include musical awakening workshops that engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds, ensuring the festival remains accessible, inclusive, and intergenerational.

Timitar Festival – Official Link

Together, Visa for Music and Timitar Festival illustrate the multifaceted roles festivals can play in both fostering regional integration and preserving local cultural identity. While V4M acts as a bridge between musical traditions across Africa and the Middle East, Timitar roots itself firmly in local heritage, bringing it to the forefront of international appreciation.

Both festivals highlight the enduring power of music as a universal language—one that fosters unity, celebrates diversity, and enriches cultural landscapes.

"In the Arab region, festivals often challenge erasure, preserving heritage while imagining new futures."

Celebrating Identity and Decentralising Art: Insights from the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival and Dougga International Festival

Festivals serve as platforms for cultural expression, community engagement, and the decentralisation of artistic opportunities. The Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (LAAF) and the Dougga International Festival epitomise these roles, each responding to unique community needs and aspirations within their respective contexts.

Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (LAAF): Fostering Community and Cultural Pride

Presentations by:
Anne Thwaite, Director of LAAF
Afrah Qassim, Chair of LAAF

Established in 1998, LAAF has grown to become the UK's longest-running annual Arab arts festival. Its mission is to increase public understanding and appreciation of Arab culture through the arts. In a context where educational resources and representative cultural platforms are limited, the festival invites members of the Arab community to reflect on their cultural identities—balancing the recognition of their heritage with the need to navigate and adapt to new social environments.

By curating multidisciplinary artistic line-ups and launching cultural education initiatives in mainstream schools, LAAF introduces broad audiences to media that transmit Arab traditions, language, history, and values. The festival's educational and participatory approach provides a unique entry point for intergenerational and intercultural dialogue.

In addition to programming, LAAF actively supports local Arab artists by providing resources and opportunities to develop and showcase their work. This community-centric model fosters sustainable cultural engagement within Liverpool's Arab community and promotes co-creation through inclusive leadership. Notable initiatives include the MENA Beats DJing Group and the Young People's Steering Group, both of which empower young community members by involving them in consultation, planning, and leadership roles—ultimately enhancing long-term community ownership and involvement.

LAAF – Website

Dougga International Festival: Decentralising the Arts and Building Cultural Ecosystems

Presentation by: Mohamed Ben Said, Executive Producer, Dougga Festival

Located in north-west Tunisia, Dougga is a UNESCO World Heritage site recognised for its historical and architectural significance. The Dougga International Festival, first established in the 1920s and revitalised in 2016, presents a vibrant array of performances in music, theatre, and dance. It embraces a deliberate strategy of decentralisation, aimed at democratising access to the arts and promoting cultural inclusivity beyond Tunisia's capital.

Historically, the centralisation of economic and cultural opportunities in Tunis has prompted artists to leave their home regions in search of visibility and platforms. The Dougga International Festival

directly addresses this disparity. Through targeted capacity-building initiatives, workshops, and artist residencies, the festival provides emerging and local artists with structured opportunities to learn, practice, and showcase their work. This not only expands their professional networks and resource access but also enables them to gain recognition within and beyond the region.

The festival has contributed to the development of a robust cultural ecosystem in Dougga, one where artists are supported, audiences are engaged, and community infrastructure is activated. Moreover, it ensures that audiences outside urban centres—particularly from underserved or rural areas—have the opportunity to participate, whether as performers, organisers, or audience members. This inclusive approach broadens cultural participation and reflects the festival's commitment to equitable access to the arts.

Dougga Festival – Facebook Page

Together, LAAF and the Dougga International Festival exemplify the transformative power of festivals in celebrating cultural identity, decentralising artistic opportunities, and fostering sustainable cultural ecosystems. Through active community engagement and strategic decentralisation, these festivals create inclusive platforms that not only enrich cultural landscapes but also empower local communities to shape and lead their own artistic narratives.

"Cultural decentralisation is an act of justice."

The Value of Festivals in a Competitive Cultural Landscape

Presentation by: James McVeigh, Head of Innovation and Marketing at Festivals Edinburgh

Edinburgh, known globally as the "Festival City", offers a unique setting in which to examine how festivals evolve, sustain themselves, and deliver artistic value. With 12 major festivals taking place annually—including six in August alone—the city represents one of the most competitive cultural environments in the world.

Drawing on this dynamic context, James McVeigh introduced three cornerstone festivals as case studies to explore how festivals define their identity, operate financially, and respond to shifting artistic and societal conditions:

- Edinburgh International Festival (EIF)
- Edinburgh Festival Fringe
- Edinburgh Science Festival

Festivals as Laboratories for Innovation

As McVeigh notes, festivals increasingly function as "laboratories"—spaces to trial and refine new approaches to programming, business modelling, audience engagement, and fundraising. The three festivals profiled each demonstrate a different model of festival-making, responding to distinct audience needs and institutional missions.

Defining the Value Proposition

A festival's value proposition articulates its core purpose and unique contribution to audiences and artists. The value proposition guides programming decisions, shapes audience expectations, and underpins long-term sustainability.

Edinburgh International Festival (EIF)

Founded: 1947, post-WWII
Focus: Cultural diplomacy and artistic excellence
Mission: "Creative excellence, new ideas, collaboration, accessibility, and inclusivity"
Programme: High-calibre opera, music, theatre, and dance from around the world
Positioning: A beacon of internationalism and prestige in the arts

Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Founded: 1947 (informally)
Focus: Inclusivity and experimentation
Mission: Open-access arts platform for all creators
Programme: Uncurated, city-wide performances in all genres and formats
Positioning: A global incubator for risk-taking, diverse, and avant-garde artistic practices

Edinburgh Science Festival

Founded: 1989
Focus: Public engagement with science
Mission: Make science accessible, fun, and socially relevant
Programme: Hands-on exhibits, educational workshops, and interactive experiences
Positioning: A bridge between academic research and public audiences, especially youth

Operational Models and Financial Strategies

While their missions differ, each festival has adopted a tailored operational and funding model aligned to its values and stakeholder relationships.

EIF: Artist-Led with Balanced Funding

• **Model:** Artist-led, prioritising excellence and international collaborations
• **Budget Allocation:** 72% production, 13% marketing
• **Funding Sources:**
- 50% public funding (City of Edinburgh Council, Creative Scotland)
- 25% ticket sales
- 25% co-productions, sponsorship, membership
• **Approach:** Reduced reliance on corporate sponsorships (now 12%), favouring philanthropy and global partnerships

[EIF Website](#)

Fringe: Agency Model for Artist Autonomy

• **Model:** Facilitator, not curator
• **Artist Autonomy:** Full control over creative content and location
• **Revenue Streams:**
- 36% commission on ticket sales via central box office
- 25% sponsorship (e.g. Deuchars, Amazon)
- 19% participant registration fees
- 7% grants (5% from Creative Scotland and City of Edinburgh Council)
• **Investment Priorities:**
- Fringe App and digital infrastructure
- 30% of budget allocated to staff salaries

[Fringe Website](#)

Science Festival: Stakeholder-Funded Model with Reinvestment

• **Model:** Stakeholder-driven (science communicators, educators, corporate partners)
• **Revenue Composition:**
- 50% corporate sponsorship (e.g. technology and pharmaceutical sectors)
- 20% public funding
- 19% internal reinvestment
- 11% ticket sales
• **Expenditure Priorities:**
- 65% of budget reinvested in school programmes and outreach
- Long-term social impact beyond festival dates

[Science Festival Website](#)

"Rethinking success means moving beyond ticket sales to measure impact through participation, inclusion, and trust."

Comparative Overview

Aspect	EIF	Fringe	Science Festival
Founded	1947	1947	1989
Core Value	Excellence, cultural diplomacy	Inclusivity, open access	Public science engagement
Programming Model	Curated, artist-led	Open access, self-produced	Curated, experience-based
Funding Approach	Balanced: public + earned + private	Mixed: commissions, sponsorship, fees, grants	Corporate-heavy, public and internal support
Audience Strategy	Prestige and quality	Broad and diverse experimentation	Education and youth outreach

This comparative lens underscores the adaptability of festival models in response to context, mission, and market. It also affirms that while funding and operational models may differ, all three festivals succeed in cultivating unique forms of cultural value and public engagement.

More than a Figure: Cultivating a Community of Festivalgoers

A recurring challenge for festivals worldwide is balancing financial sustainability with artistic and audience engagement. While the three Edinburgh festivals have established strong value propositions, they also highlight a broader dilemma: how much should festivals prioritise financial imperatives over creative freedom and audience connection?

This question is particularly pertinent in the MENA region, where public funding is scarce and reliance on international donors often comes with stipulations that may shift artistic priorities. As festivals in the region seek to establish sustainable models, they must navigate constraints on, and competing priorities of, artistic experimentation, audience development, and financial viability.

This section examines audience engagement strategies adopted by MENA festivals, drawing insights from Ettijahat's MINA platform in Syria, Al-Balad Theatre's Hakaya Festival in Jordan, and the Belfast International Arts Festival in Northern Ireland, highlighting how festivals in diverse cultural and political contexts adapt their strategies to cultivate lasting relationships with their communities.

MINA: Connecting Ports through Arts

Presentation by: Abdallah Alkafri – Founder of Ettijahat and MINA

Amidst the upheaval of war, Syrians have become geographically dispersed across various host countries, making the very notion of a 'Syrian audience' problematic and difficult to define. In an effort to maintain connections with these fragmented communities, Ettijahat's MINA consolidated a multidisciplinary forum that serves as a liaison between Syrian artists and their peers within the broader artistic milieu, while also reconnecting them with Syrian audiences and wider Arab communities living in the diaspora.

MINA's approach to audience-building focuses on introducing meaningful engagement and outreach at a time when traditional festival models are often unfeasible due to conflict, displacement, and limited resources. Initially launched as a festival in 2017, MINA (which in Arabic means 'port') has since evolved into a mobile forum that relocates across cities without being confined to specific locations or demographics.

It aims to design programmes that showcase the work and achievements of Syrian artists, while applying a hybrid co-curatorial model that maximises partnerships with external collaborators and experts to expand its audience base.

Beyond broader outreach, MINA also invests in supporting local venues in Beirut struggling to attract audiences in the wake of the Beirut Port explosion—ensuring accessibility for those facing economic hardship, without undermining the viability of local venue business models.

MINA – Ettijahat

"A festival is a port, a passage, a temporary home, especially in times of displacement."

> "When festivals co-create with communities, they become sites of genuine transformation."

Hakaya Festival: Building Audiences Through Shared Narratives

Presentation by: Rita Akroush – Al-Balad Theatre

For nearly two decades, the annual Hakaya Storytelling Festival, organised by Al-Balad Theatre in Jordan, has been committed to building communities through storytelling. Over its years of operation across Jordan, Hakaya has developed audience-building strategies that centre on active community engagement.

These include:
- Utilising alternative public spaces such as streets, cafés, and outdoor venues to enhance public interaction and create spaces for congregation;
- Forging local partnerships with governmental institutions, community-based organisations (CBOs), and municipalities to access underrepresented audiences, including those in refugee camps.
- Creating regional and international partnerships with organisations from the MENA region and Europe to broaden the festival's reach;
- Supporting talented and skilled volunteers, investing in them as audience ambassadors to promote the festival in their hometowns.
- Involving audiences in the storytelling process and encouraging refugee participation by writing and performing their stories publicly—reinforcing active participation and highlighting the resilience of communities.

Through these interconnected approaches, Hakaya fosters ownership and inclusion, while enabling marginalised voices to contribute meaningfully to cultural dialogue.

Hakaya Festival

Belfast International Arts Festival: Redefining the Audience Base

Presentation by: Richard Wakely – Artistic Director and Chief Executive of BIAF

Founded in 1962 at Queen's University, the Belfast International Arts Festival (BIAF) faced the threat of closure in 2013, when it became clear that its programming no longer aligned with contemporary audience needs. In 2015, Artistic Director and CEO Richard Wakely launched a comprehensive overhaul of the festival's audience engagement strategy.

Over the past nine years, BIAF has restructured its audience development efforts by:
- Curating a wide-ranging programme that reflects contemporary global themes, including environmental justice and human rights.
- Designing content that speaks to varied generations, cultural identities, and interest groups.
- Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities through signed and captioned performances.
- Introducing a tiered pricing structure with discounts, package deals, and free events to reduce financial barriers and encourage broader participation.
- Establishing the EMBRACE programme, which actively includes underrepresented communities such as asylum seekers and LGBTQ+ individuals through free performances, artist talks, workshops, and post-show discussions.
- Engaging volunteers as cultural ambassadors who introduce the festival to their own networks.
- Partnering with academic institutions by offering discounted tickets and promoting arts participation among students.
- Using audience data analytics, digital advertising, social media campaigns, newsletters, and strategic partnerships to refine marketing and expand reach.

In light of limited access to funding sources, BIAF has prioritised maximising its marketing reach and forging partnerships with venues, institutions, and businesses—extending outreach without incurring high costs. However, donor stipulations tied to specific project outcomes have sometimes redirected attention and resources away from local audience development, presenting an ongoing challenge for long-term engagement.

Belfast International Arts Festival

Digital Innovation in Festival-Making: The Future of Human Connection at Festivals

The advent of technology has markedly impacted festival-making, enhancing both artistic expression and logistical efficiency. Festivals such as Sonica Glasgow and INTERFERENCE have harnessed technology to foster interactive participation, demonstrating how immersive art, virtual reality (VR), and digital media can create dynamic, multi-sensory experiences that deeply engage audiences. By merging physical and digital spaces, these festivals challenge traditional artistic practices and the very notion of space, offering innovative performances that blend music, visual art, and interactive technology.

Beyond artistic engagement, digital tools can help streamline logistical operations—from ticketing and navigation apps to large-scale multimedia coordination. However, technology brings its own set of challenges. While it introduces new modes of interaction, it also raises ethical concerns, as it risks diluting authentic human connections by shifting communal experiences into the digital sphere. It also contributes to the shrinking of public space, which can carry social, political, and economic ramifications.

Striking a balance between technological innovation and genuine human engagement remains a critical challenge in the evolution of festival-making. Moreover, technology can sometimes exacerbate existing inequalities by widening gaps in access, digital literacy, and rural-urban divides, ultimately working against true inclusion.

INTERFERENCE: Light, Technology, and Participation

Presentation by: Aymen Gharbi, Artistic Director, INTERFERENCE

Established in 2016, INTERFERENCE is an international light art project based in Tunis, Tunisia, that celebrates contemporary art through light-based installations and performances. Technology is a central pillar of the festival, employed not merely as a tool but as an artistic medium. Through advanced technical production methods—including light projections, motion graphics, and interactive installations—the festival transforms public spaces into immersive and participatory experiences.

The integration of augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), and cutting-edge lighting technologies such as LED mapping, laser projections, and holographic displays enables a new mode of audience interaction. Viewers are no longer passive spectators but become active participants within the artwork itself. This transformation of public space into a platform for artistic engagement reflects the festival's wider mission of democratising access to the arts and challenging conventional boundaries between artist and audience.

INTERFERENCE

Sonica Glasgow: Immersive Arts for a Digital Age

Presentation by: Claire Moran, Producer, Sonica

Sonica Glasgow is an international festival dedicated to "immersive arts", with a particular focus on experimental and electronic music, digital media, and audiovisual innovation. Presented by Cryptic, the festival synthesises sound, light, and digital technologies to create immersive, multi-sensory environments that redefine the boundaries of live performance and contemporary art.

Through the use of interactive installations, projection mapping, and real-time audiovisual manipulation, Sonica offers audiences fully enveloping artistic encounters. The festival's commitment to experimentation and interdisciplinary practice places it at the forefront of digital performance, offering a platform for artists who blend creative technologies with visual and sonic storytelling.

Sonica challenges the traditional spectator experience by inviting audiences to navigate, co-create, or respond in real time—blurring the line between performer and participant.

Sonica Glasgow

"To remain relevant, festivals must shift from spectacle to social engagement."

The Power of Connections: Re-visiting Models of Collaboration

Collaboration is a driving force in festival-making, encompassing artistic partnerships, programming synergies, resource mobilisation and sharing, and community engagement. While these collaborations offer clear benefits, they also introduce complexities when misaligned with a festival's mission and audience development strategies.

Drawing insights from the Scottish International Storytelling Festival and Dance Base Festival, this section explores the role of collaboration in shaping the festival production process.

"Smaller, more intimate festivals are not a compromise. They are a strategy for depth, connection, and inclusion."

Scottish International Storytelling Festival: Connection through Storytelling

Presentation by: Donald Smith, Founding Director of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival

Storytelling has been a fundamental human activity since the earliest recorded history, serving as a means of communication, knowledge exchange, resistance, resilience, and cultural preservation. The Scottish International Storytelling Festival embraces storytelling not only as a medium for safeguarding oral traditions, but also as a catalyst for meaningful collaborations.

These collaborations prioritise genuine connections, building partnerships that enable deeper cultural engagement—moving beyond bureaucratic or superficial alliances to ensure representation of marginalised cultural groups. By amplifying overlooked narratives, the festival broadens perspectives and offers alternative understandings of cultural heritage.

The festival ensures that collaborations result in tangible outcomes through co-productions, joint artistic projects, or resource-sharing initiatives that reinterpret traditional art forms through contemporary lenses. Incorporating elements of music, dance, and design also enhances accessibility and broadens relevance for diverse audiences.

Scottish International Storytelling Festival

Dance Base: Presenting Polar Transactions

Intervention by: Tony Mills, Artistic Director of Dance Base

Collaboration can take many forms—not all of which stem from shared artistic interests. For Dance Base, partnerships are seen as opportunities for artists to engage with diverse perspectives and develop new creative insights.

As the National Centre for Dance based in Edinburgh, Dance Base operates on two levels of collaboration: artistic partnerships and stakeholder alliances.

Its artistic collaborations function under a "transactional" model, where partnerships are determined by mutually beneficial exchanges that align with the organisation's commitment to artistic development. This model includes:

• Enhancing artistic skills, knowledge acquisition, and career progression through collaborative projects.
• Improving resource accessibility by engaging stakeholders who offer mobility, learning, and exposure opportunities, especially for artists facing barriers.
• Expanding donor networks to support programming and facilitate international artistic exchanges.

By fostering these strategic partnerships, Dance Base remains dedicated to artistic excellence, talent development, and advocacy for equitable access within the dance sector.

[Dance Base](#)

TARKIB Baghdad Contemporary Arts Festival: A Platform for Contemporary Art in Iraq

Presentation by: Zaid Saad, Founder of TARKIB Festival

For years, Iraq has been caught in a cycle of political and social upheaval, leading to the marginalisation of the arts. While some efforts to re-engage with artistic expression have surfaced, public institutions often idolise classical forms of art, sidelining contemporary practices as insignificant or non-essential. In this context, the TARKIB Baghdad Contemporary Arts Festival has carved out a dynamic space for contemporary visual arts, emerging as one of the few platforms in Iraq dedicated exclusively to such expressions.

Founded in 2015 as a research and education initiative, TARKIB aimed to introduce Iraqi artists to contemporary art methodologies. Over time, it evolved into a fully-fledged annual festival. Despite this growth, securing financial and institutional support has remained elusive. Institutions often prefer the perceived safety of traditional forms,

and even when support is promised, bureaucratic rigidity and vague commitments frequently hinder progress and long-term collaboration.

Beyond institutional challenges, Iraq's arts scene suffers from a lack of capacity-building and professional exposure. Many artists and students lack access to training, mentorship, and opportunities—often leading them to abandon artistic careers in favour of more stable paths. Despite these hurdles, TARKIB continues to push boundaries and champion artistic experimentation, driven by a deep belief in the transformative power of contemporary art. The festival inspires a new generation of Iraqi artists to reclaim their creative agency in a space that validates their practice.

[TARKIB Festival](#)

Shubbak Festival: Questioning Artistic Freedoms

Presentation by: Alia Alzogbi, Director of Shubbak Festival

A UK-based biennial celebration of contemporary Arab and SWANA arts, Shubbak Festival offers a critical lens through which to examine the challenges facing modern festival-making. While operating in a relatively privileged context, Shubbak faces what its director calls an "unprecedented intersection of polycrises"—including the rising cost of living, climate emergencies, and a mental health crisis—necessitating a rethinking of the traditional festival model.

Artist mobility is increasingly constrained by visa refusals and growing travel costs. In parallel, rising racism and discrimination—both overt and systemic—have created a more hostile environment for Arab artists. Internal debates around cultural boycott movements and scarce resources have further complicated curatorial decisions, especially in terms of whether to support fewer artists in depth or a larger number more modestly.

Yet these challenges have also sparked new opportunities. Shubbak is exploring ways to go "beyond the traditional festival model" by embracing a "small is beautiful" philosophy. This includes re-evaluating economic frameworks and

intentionally slowing down production cycles to allow for deeper engagement. The festival is also leveraging partnerships with high-profile institutions to amplify Arab and SWANA voices, directly confronting anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Muslim sentiments. It is forging solidarity with other global majority artists and cultural workers, creating spaces for shared learning and mutual support. These pressures have catalysed Shubbak's development of holistic care infrastructures for artists, staff, and audiences, while also advancing systemic shifts toward greener, more sustainable practices and community-rooted models of cultural production.

[Shubbak Festival](#)

“Artists need more than visibility. They need infrastructures that sustain them.”

Conclusion

Shaping the Future of Festival-Making: A Collective Vision

Over the course of three days, this gathering reaffirmed the essential role that festivals play in the cultural fabric of societies. Beyond entertainment, festivals are sites of resistance, storytelling, memory, solidarity, and healing. They are also an essential component of the cultural and creative economy eco-system. They hold the capacity to connect communities, shape identities, safeguard heritage, and enable cultural and economic resilience.

In a world increasingly shaped by uncertainty—be it political repression, economic volatility, or ecological urgency—festivals must evolve to remain meaningful. The gathering called for a shift: from isolated events to resilient ecosystems rooted in care, equity, and long-term vision.

Rethinking the Festival Ecosystem

A common theme emerged: no festival operates in isolation. Festivals thrive when embedded in broader networks—of practitioners, communities, funders, policymakers, and artists. Collective action, knowledge exchange, and cross-sector partnerships are no longer optional—they are fundamental to survival and sustainability.

There is growing recognition that festivals must redefine success, moving beyond audience numbers or headline acts. Impact is measured through participation, inclusion, and social relevance. New models of festival-making are emerging: smaller-scale, deeply local, more collaborative, and more focused on meaningful engagement than spectacle.

At the same time, the mental health and wellbeing of artists and cultural workers have come into sharper focus. The longstanding "show must go on" mentality is being replaced by more ethical, caring infrastructures that prioritise safety, sustainability, and humane working conditions.

"Collaboration is no longer optional. It is a condition for survival."

Challenges that Demand Transformation

Across the MENA region and beyond, festival-makers are navigating a landscape marked by:
- Rising censorship and discrimination
- Economic instability and inflation
- Restrictive visa regimes that hinder artist mobility
- Precarious funding models
- Difficulties in retaining young talent and ensuring institutional memory.
- Challenges in attracting new audiences.

These external pressures are compounded by internal challenges around strategic planning, staffing, and equitable access to resources. If left unaddressed, they threaten not only the longevity of festivals but their cultural relevance.

"In a region facing censorship, instability, and economic volatility, festivals are acts of cultural resilience."

Emerging Opportunities and Shared Intentions

In the face of adversity, a collective intention emerged: to reimagine the way festivals are made, funded, and experienced. Festival directors shared practical steps already underway—building communities of practice, re-evaluating programming through a care lens, co-creating with local communities, and confronting dominant narratives.

A noticeable trend is the embrace of smaller, more intimate festival experiences, not as a compromise, but as a strategic approach to depth, connection, and inclusion. In parallel, practitioners are exploring new funding partnerships, more ethical use of technology, and decentralised programming models that are less vulnerable to crisis.

Crucially, this shift signals a new ethos—where festivals are not merely events to be consumed, but processes rooted in values, shaped by the people they serve, and capable of enacting social change.

Looking Ahead

What this convening made clear is that the festival sector is at a pivotal crossroads. Incremental change is no longer enough. What's needed is a structural transformation—one that is guided by shared learning, long-term investment, inclusive practice, and cultural relevance.

The following 9 recommendations synthesise the key ideas, concerns, and solutions that emerged throughout the gathering. They are addressed to both festival directors and funders, with the aim of supporting a sector that is more resilient, equitable, and impactful in the years to come.

9 Key Recommendations for Festival Directors and Funders:

1. Rethink Funding Models for Long-Term Sustainability

- Move beyond traditional, grant-dependent funding by diversifying revenue streams, including memberships, earned income, and sponsorships aligned with the festival's mission.
- Encourage multi-year funding commitments rather than short-term project grants to ensure continuity and stability.
- Invest in capacity-building programmes for festival teams to develop financial literacy and strategic fundraising skills.
- Explore and share knowledge on different business models for festivals, providing case studies, best practices, and adaptable strategies for various contexts.

For Funders: Support the creation of a knowledge-sharing platform on festival business models to encourage innovation in financial sustainability. Support multiyear initiatives rather than activity based, short terms projects.

"To build the future of festivals, we must first dismantle outdated models and imagine new ones, together."

2. Strengthen Audience Engagement and Development

- Shift from passive spectatorship to active audience participation, turning attendees into co-creators.
- Employ segmentation strategies to tailor experiences to different demographic and interest groups.
- Prioritise affordability and accessibility, offering diverse ticket pricing, free events, and outreach to underrepresented communities.
- Encourage and fund audience outreach initiatives, including community-building programmes, educational partnerships, and engagement in marginalised areas.

For Funders: Provide targeted grants for audience-building initiatives, including subsidised access, free programming, and outreach in underserved areas.

"No festival operates in isolation. Collective action is what ensures continuity."

3. Prioritise Collaboration Over Competition

- Build cross-sector partnerships with businesses, educational institutions, and civic organisations to amplify reach and resources.
- Foster regional and international festival networks to share best practices, co-produce events, and support artist mobility.
- Address power imbalances in collaborations, ensuring smaller festivals have equitable access to shared resources.
- Invest in and support collaborations among festivals, creating structured networks and communities of practice.

For Funders: Fund initiatives that facilitate

ongoing festival collaborations, knowledge exchange, and mentorship programmes.

4. Foster Local Community Connections

- Design festivals that are deeply rooted in local contexts, involving local artists, businesses, and communities in planning and delivery.
- Develop community-based initiatives that empower local voices rather than imposing externally driven narratives.
- Engage marginalised groups in storytelling and artistic programming to reflect the diversity of society.
- Encourage partnerships with local businesses and institutions to reinforce the role of festivals within cultural and economic ecosystems.

For Funders: Support community-driven festival models that prioritise local engagement and impact.

5. Balance Innovation with Ethical Tech Use

- Use technology to enhance experiences through immersive media, virtual and augmented reality, and interactive digital tools.
- Ensure digital transformation does not exclude audiences due to economic barriers, digital illiteracy, or accessibility issues.

- Be mindful of data privacy, avoiding exploitative audience tracking and maintaining ethical standards in digital engagement.
- Support digital knowledge-sharing among festival practitioners, focusing on audience engagement, marketing, and online programming.

For Funders: Invest in research on ethical and accessible digital innovation in festival-making.

6. Build Festivals as Platforms for Social Change

- Ensure festivals serve as spaces for dialogue and advocacy, amplifying underrepresented voices.
- Support artists from conflict zones, underrepresented communities, and politically sensitive backgrounds.
- Prioritise projects that demonstrate social impact and long-term cultural resilience.
- Encourage festivals to share their social impact models, creating replicable frameworks for others to adopt.

For Funders: Support documentation and dissemination of successful case studies showcasing festivals as platforms for social change.

"The festival is a site of memory,

resistance, storytelling, and healing, not just entertainment."

7. Invest in Human Capital and Mental Wellbeing

- Recognise that festivals rely on passionate teams, but burnout remains a major issue due to low pay, long hours, and precarious employment.
- Allocate sufficient budgets for staffing, fair wages, and artist support.
- Establish mental health support systems for festival workers, acknowledging the pressures of the industry.
- Promote knowledge exchange among festival practitioners in areas such as team management, workload distribution, and wellbeing.

For Funders: Include staff wellbeing and fair compensation as eligibility criteria in funding frameworks. Support core costs for organisations and festivals.

8. Ensure Festivals Adapt to Evolving Sociopolitical Realities

• Account for mobility restrictions and visa challenges, particularly for artists in politically unstable regions.
• Integrate crisis preparedness into festival models, planning for political upheaval, funding cuts, and public health emergencies.
• Encourage alternative models, such as hybrid or decentralised festivals, that are less reliant on physical gatherings.
• Strengthen regional collaborations to ensure cultural continuity and long-term impact, even during disruption.

For Funders: Support festivals that proactively develop adaptable and resilient operational strategies.

9. Foster Long-Term Thinking in Festival Design and Funding

• Design festivals for lasting cultural impact rather than one-off spectacles.
• Shift from short-term project-based funding to sustained, multi-year investments.
• Develop adaptive festival models capable of responding to political, economic, and social uncertainty.
• Support ongoing research and dialogue on sustainability models to ensure festivals remain dynamic and adaptable.

For Funders: Establish long-term funding commitments for festivals that demonstrate resilience and deep cultural engagement.

"Festivals are no longer just events. They are ecosystems rooted in care, equity, and long-term vision."

Acknowledgements

This report is the culmination of a collaborative effort grounded in the shared commitment to reimagining festival-making as a resilient, inclusive, and transformative practice.