



Introduction to the Special Issue on Pop Music Festivals and (Cultural) Policies

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From the early days of IASPM until comparatively recently, the main focus of research into the industrial aspects of music was on the recording sector. However, following the effects of digitisation, recorded music has declined in relative economic importance, with revenues from live music overtaking recordings in some territories in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Page and Carey 2009), and live music often continuing to financially outperform recorded. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there has also been a rise in political attention to the live sector in recent years. Academics have also increasingly turned their attention to live music. Work here has addressed such phenomena as: the effect of live music on national and local economies, the regulation of live music, tensions between different stakeholders (musicians, audiences, managers, labels, publishers, organisers, local residents, politicians, policy makers, entrepreneurs etc.), cultural value, and the interrelations of cultural/music/event management and 'cultural education' – the aesthetic, social and economic value creation processes generated by live music, including music festivals. In keeping with the multidisciplinary nature of Popular Music Studies, researchers from different scientific disciplines have studied the diverse and complex research field of live music through a range of theoretical, methodological and methodical means.

(e.g. Anderton 2019, Behr et al. 2016, Holt 2013, McKay 2015, Robinson 2015, Webster et al. 2017)

This special issue of the IASPM Journal narrows the focus from live music at large to the political contexts of popular music festivals in particular. This is another field fraught with potential difficulties as countercultural values come into contact with more mainstream ones, the local interacts with the global and the vexed question of whom festivals are actually for (fans, musicians, the owners, the location etc) often bubbles underneath the surface of the frequent debates about their cultural, economic and spiritual values and directions. Here we present five contributions by scholars from Austria, Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden dealing with different aspects of such debates. While these contributions all emerge from central and northern Europe, the questions the authors raise have implications well beyond this domain.

In “From Dalarana to the Orient’: Falun Folk Music Festival” Daniel Fredriksson makes use of interviews with key organisers, readings of festival brochures and other materials to discuss this festival. He shows that rather than being the main ideological goal of the organisers, the cosmopolitanism of the festival worked as a means to an end – namely the professionalisation, and artistic recognition, of Swedish folk traditions.

“Practical Idealism: Live Music Associations and the Revitalisation of the Music Festival Scene in Finland”, by Heikki Uimonen, considers the ways in which music culture consists of ideas, activities, institutions and material objects. He highlights the symbiotic relationship between live music associations and various political and cultural institutions and discusses the developments, which helped the live music associations to become transregionally and transnationally influential cultural actors in Finland.

Stian Vestby’s contribution, “Keeping it Country while dancing with the Elite”, examines the programme and audience development processes at the Norwegian Country Meeting festival following its achievement of the status of Norwegian hub festival for country music in 2012. Based on the concept of ‘musical gentrification’ this ethnographic study describes how cultural practices and policies relate to wider systems of power and socio-aesthetic inequality.

In “Understanding World Music Festivals as Sites of Musical Education – An Ethnographic Approach”, Peter Lell focuses on the interaction between festival visitors, musicians and the festival environment. Drawing on literature and data from ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the WOMAD UK festival and the Africa Festival in Germany, the findings suggest that world music festivals can be seen as sites of high potential for musical education.

In “Transmedia festivals and the accelerated cultural sector”, Bianca Ludewig considers how transmedia festivals are part of ‘eventification’ – the social and cultural processes related to the growing importance of cultural events – and the precarity and gentrification that have emerged alongside them. Based on results derived from ethnographic fieldwork the article introduces transmedia festivals as a new type of contemporary festival, situating them in wider urban processes and discusses their interrelations with cultural policies.

We are pleased that the great methodological, theoretical and empirical diversity which is characteristic of Popular Music Studies is also reflected in the wide range of scientific approaches within the articles here and would like to thank all the authors for their contributions. We trust that readers of this journal will benefit from this. In short, we hope that this special issue can offer something for everyone with an interest in live music in general and festivals in particular.

Finally, we would like to thank the Editorial Team of IASPM Journal, especially Koos Zwaan, Mary Fogarty Woehrel, Raquel Campos and Bernhard Steinbrecher, the copyediting-team and the anonymous peer-reviewers for their invaluable contributions to the process of bringing this edition together.

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