

FESTIVALS – BOOM OR BUBBLE?!?!?!?

The popular image of festivals is the one of people camping in the mud, with loud rock music and criminal gangs robbing the daily takings. However, this highly commercialized narrative is not a point of reference for the majority of festivals in Germany, most of which started in the mid-90s. They offer a wide range of different concepts, covering not just music but also various types of art and social culture. After a rapid growth from 2006 onwards, the number of visitors is now stagnating. Is it the end of the festival boom?

Not for Henry Alves, one of the driving forces of Fuchsbau festival. After a year off, it will take place for the seventh time in August 2019. “We have been organizing the festival since 2012 and needed a little break. Now we have found a new approach,” he says, pointing out that future editions of the festival will focus on consumerism. But isn’t Fuchsbau a consumer product itself? “Yes, if you talk about festivals we are one product of many. But are we a product at the gondola end, high on the shelf, or close to the checkout area?”

One thing is for sure, Fuchsbau is everything but a shelf warmer. About 4,500 people joined the last edition in Immensen-Arpke in the Hannover region to take part in "a celebration of togetherness" through artistic collaboration, debates and all-night-partying. There are 24 people in the core team and during the festival up to 400 people are involved in the organization. “We are a collective that likes to think a lot, reflecting on ourselves too. So we organized a conference with

discussions, lectures, concerts; during the day we could think about how we perceive our work as an association, work with input from outside and develop own ideas.”

Even though the team is still processing the results of the conference, one outcome is the new approach to Fuchsbau. “We agreed to set a political agenda within the themes we discuss. We will do it in a way that feels right to us, and the program reflects our political messages. We are not doing a rave. We want to trigger a reflection process and provide people with food for thought,” Alves explains. In the long-term, the organizers also want to instigate new projects outside the festival: “The festival is our visiting card but we would like to develop other interesting formats.”

It all started as a two-day-event without a traditional festival character. “We wanted to bring different forms of art together,” Alves remembers. Initially seeking to help his friends with some design tasks, he quickly became part of the organizing team. “None of us had any experience in running such an event, so we were very open for something completely new.” Fuchsbau would have continued like that if the festival had not been forced to leave its original location at the Fössebad town pool and to move to the countryside. “We thought of many venues, but we had never thought of completely leaving the region of Hanover. We feel connected to Hanover and feel that we can contribute to the cultural landscape of the city.”

6. CITY OF MUSIC-TALK

WITH: Henry Alves
Fuchsbau Festival, Hanover.

WEB: fuchsbau-festival.de

Date: 18 December 2018

Where: Ballhof Café

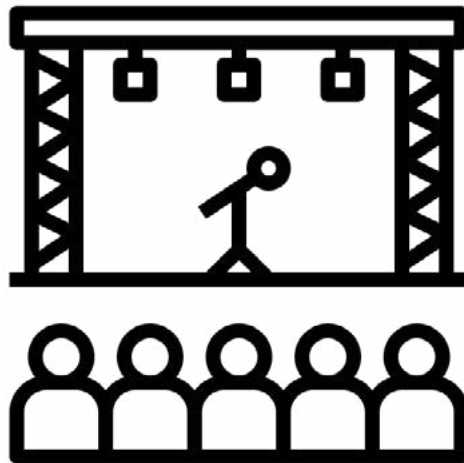


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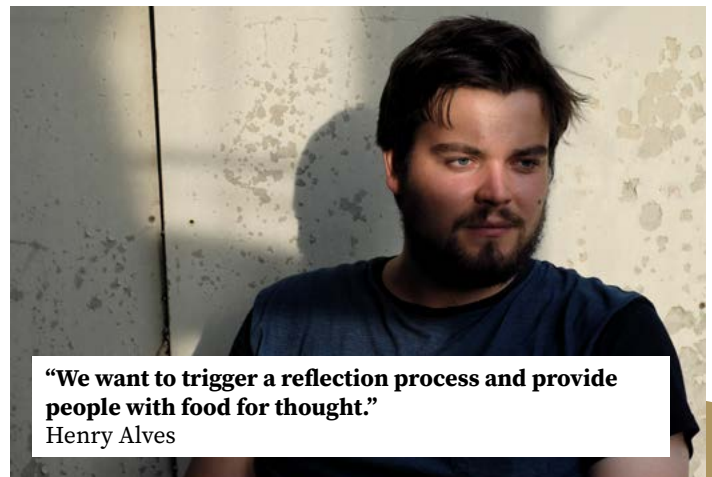
However, this was the catalyst for the current Fuchsbau, which has a much broader international appeal. “The festival has taught us the ability to reflect ourselves, to build a team, to build networks and to reflect them,” Alves says. “We can now rely on the experience we have gathered over the past few years. We haven’t passed a management assistant exam in event organization at school, but we have made it in the mud.” However the

challenges of a changing festival landscape are pressing closer: “Europe and Germany will have difficulty in attracting interesting acts for their festivals because there is concurrence of more than 100,000 festivals worldwide. But as long as people are still willing to pay more than 300 Euro for a festival ticket, the festival boom has not come to its end.”



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