

**Luisella CARNELLI**

**ITALY**

## **ITALY: NO COUNTRY FOR THE YOUNGSTERS?**

### **TANTALUS'S MYTH AND THE PERFORMING ARTS: FESTIVALS AND AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT IN ITALY**

*The phenomenon of “festivalisation“ in Italy and especially in Piedmont*

As well as in the rest of Europe, in Italy too the festival industry is flourishing, festival sector being as dynamic and lively as ever. According to many estimates, every year in Italy more than 1.200 festivals (cultural, music, theatre, dance, literary festivals...) take place. On one hand, this figure highlights the vitality and the activity of many big and small centres, towns and cities, and of the promoters; on the other hand, this signals the difficulty in programming and coordinating different events in Italy.

As in all of Italy, in Piedmont too festivals seem to be healthy, and they give an essential contribution to creativity and to the artistic life, acting as significant showcases of creators and new works, presenting new ways of performing and organizing events. Despite the abuse of the word “festival”, the research carried out by the Fondazione Fitzcarraldo portrays the festivals audience, with a particular emphasis on the strategies to attract young people.

*A portrait of Piedmont festivals: a multiform archipelago*

Piedmont festivals differ very much in artistic subjects, programs, size, duration, regions involved, and financing patterns, but almost all of them offer special and complex cultural performances; they enhance cultural exchange; they have artistic directors with individual programming policies based on contemporary theatre, music and dance. Some of them share the aim of enriching their own cultural landscape, provide keys to unknown languages and create new possibilities for communication. Some others are focused on artistic innovation and development, thus acting as a lighthouse in the region.

For these reasons **the existence of Piedmont festivals largely depends on public funding and grant making foundations** ( I.e. private foundations of banking origin).

The Cultural Observatory monitored in 2.008 **142 cultural festivals** (which are financed by the Region, and which are the most significant for audience and programs), taking place in all the provinces of the region. The income sources of the festivals include:

	€	%
<b>Subsidies</b>	<b>12.422.476</b>	<b>75,9%</b>
<b>Sponsors</b>	<b>952.163</b>	<b>5,8%</b>
<b>Box Office</b>	<b>2.285.060</b>	<b>14,0%</b>
<b>Own resources</b>	<b>714.073</b>	<b>4,4%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.373.773</b>	

In particular, subsidies are composed as follows:

	€	%
State	1.128.740	9,1%
Region	4.814.605	38,8%
Province	301.340	2,4%
Cities	2.187.214	17,6%
European Union	92.584	0,7%
Other	1.085.237	8,7%
Foundations of Banking Origin	2.812.756	22,6%
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By analysing the budgets of Piedmont festivals, it is evident that the **public funding** is essential, in particular the funds granted by the **regional and local authorities and by the foundations of banking origin** (called foundations from now on); in Italy, the latter are moving from the traditional grant making approach to the strategic grant making in arts and culture, and they are increasingly eager to get a feedback about the cultural initiatives they finance. Aiming at the integrated planning of all the policies, some of these foundations now make use of periodic measurement and look for best practices in order to collect data and information about their beneficiaries. For example, Cassa di Risparmio della Spezia Foundation is actually committed to an exploratory analysis of some Italian cultural events, aimed at realising a series of publications. According to the so called “patronage of the skills”, the foundation wants to provide the operators with methods and tools, and to link the research field to some practical tools.<sup>1]</sup>

In order to become strategic grant makers in arts and culture, foundations know they must widen their point of view and adopt a strategic long term perspective, using tools helping them in better understanding of what is happening in the arts and culture environment. They must consider the economic, cultural and social impact of the events they fund, using a wide territorial perspective and adopting cultural marketing tools. This approach gains more importance since Foundations must pay attention not only to the audience development, but they must also meet local needs and

<sup>1</sup> See for example “Effetto Festival. L’impatto economico dei festival di approfondimento culturale” (G. Guerzoni, 2008)

take into consideration the potential audience, who is little aware of its cultural heritage and usually does not attend performing arts events.

In this way, for Foundations estimating the actual and potential audience means first of all being familiar with the suitable tools to do the assessment. This represents an advantage for those festivals which are working to increase their audience (paying attention to local audience too) and who are well-known and well-esteemed by their audience, and who invest their resources to enhance the local artistic and cultural environment, and thus perhaps counter the “brain-drain” of the “creative class”. The Foundations know they must use a logic of integrated planning.

According to this new approach, Compagnia di San Paolo, a banking foundation, commissioned from the Fondazione Fitzcarraldo a survey on the festivals they finance in the frame of “Arti Sceniche in Compagnia” (Compagnia di San Paolo Performing Arts grant programme). All festivals granted by Compagnia di San Paolo have specific features: they are well-known events, they have a transparent track of record, which is particularly oriented to classical music.

#### *The methodology of the survey*

The survey aims to estimate festivals’ social impact (with regard to the participation of young people and to the social composition of the spectators), the artistic quality of the performances (especially in terms of interdisciplinary), the new productions, the use of new and alternative locations.

#### *The numbers of the survey*

61 festivals have been monitored (50 taking place in Piedmont and 11 in Liguria), out of 64 festivals supported by Compagnia di San Paolo; 11.228 questionnaires have been distributed, of which 8.387 have been collected and 8.196 have been considered valid. Data have been collected using patterned questionnaires filled in by the audience of each festival.

The kind and nature of the festivals analysed are very different with regard to the artistic programs, locations, audience, timing, progress during the year, audience. When the survey was planned, Compagnia di San Paolo decided to distribute the questionnaires during the second performance of each festival, without either planning a sampling of distribution or collecting rate compared with the real attendance of each festival. It was therefore not possible to draw an exact estimate of the audience but rather a portrait of these festivals, thus addressing two needs:

- providing foundations, and Compagnia di San Paolo in particular, with a picture of what is happening in Piedmont in the performing arts sector;

- providing each festival with a specific report, outlining an exact picture of its audience: a useful tool to understand, plan, and decide specific marketing strategy for both big and little organisations' marketing directors (who will not be able to carry on a survey by themselves).

I think this is an Italian, and in particular, Piedmont anomaly: instead of festivals researching their audience in order to strategically position themselves and acquire additional arguments for their subsidy request from the foundations, in this case a foundation is undertaking such a survey to better subsidize the granted festivals. Piedmont marketing directors of performing arts organisations often do not acknowledge the importance of an audience development strategy: they sometimes say not to have enough money to carry out strategic survey to better know their audience, they sometimes think they know their audience and they do not need to discover the weakness of their strategy, in other cases they just do not feel the need to develop their audience. Generally speaking, in Italy, marketing strategies are perceived as unsuitable for the arts & culture field and in particular for the performing arts.

#### *The main outcomes*

The richness and variety of the festivals financed by Compagnia di San Paolo (which is a representative sample of the Piedmont festivals) influence the composition of the audience. For this reason, this paper shifts from the identikit of an ideal audience to a punctual interpretation, to identify the guidelines of the behaviours of the audience.

The questionnaires provide a **rich portrait of the current audience of festivals**, pinpointing anthropologic patterns and ways of participation, the targets met and the targets missed. Thanks to these tools festivals promoters can find a way to develop their real and potential audience.

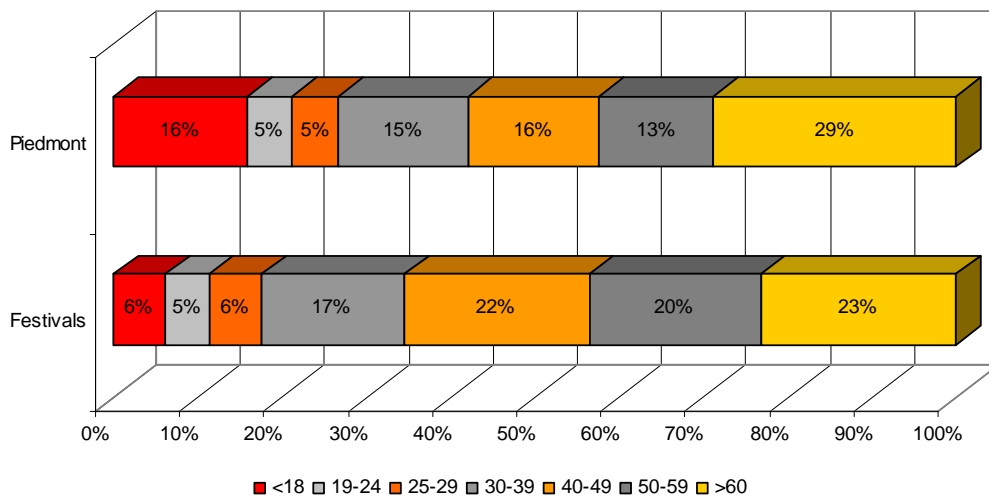
In summary, **the audience of Piedmont festivals responds to some general dynamics and tendencies of the audience of the performing arts**, but with some exceptions. At a first sight, the portrait of festivals audience corresponds to the “big family” of “universal Italian audience” of the performing arts; a kind of culturally addicted elite which chooses a performance because it sums up different elements and becomes a part of a complex and individual growth, a step in the personal cultural training, provided by the experience of the performance, which takes place in a particular location, and is part of the complex offer of the festival.

Otherwise than in other European countries – as we can read in some research report (Tilman Broszat, Theatre festivals – why?, 2007; Festival means business 3 A survey of arts festivals in the UK, BAFA, 2008), the Italian festivals' visitors are not so different from the classical theatre, music and dance audiences. Festivals do not attract a completely different young audience, even if it

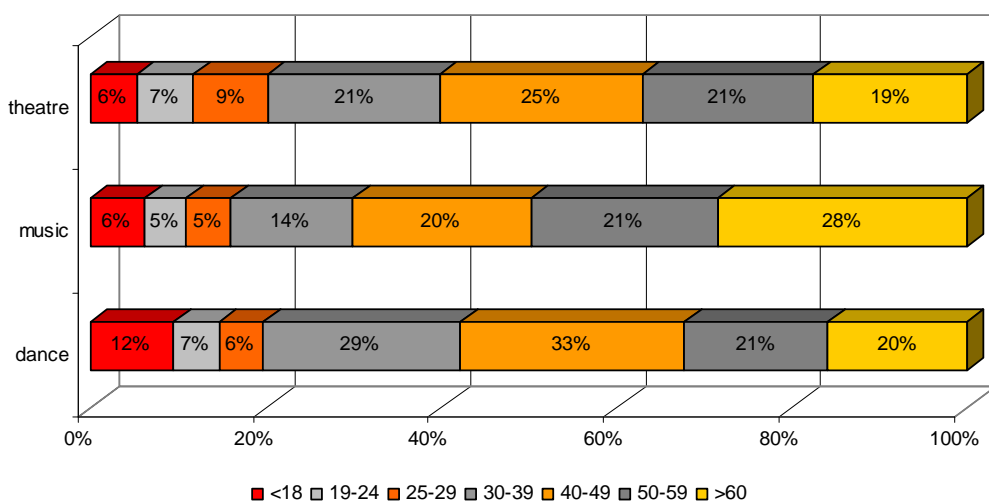
supposedly interested in contemporary production. Piedmont festivals are not able to intercept the so called “young creative artists” that are constantly growing in numbers everywhere (but perhaps not in Italy?).

*Piedmont festivals are not festivals for the youngsters!*

Paraphrasing the title of a Coen Bros’ film, Piedmont festivals are not festivals for the youngsters. They attract a **huge majority of adult audience**: 70% of the audience is over 40 and the average age is 47. In comparison with the regional population<sup>2</sup>, the youngsters (under 29) are under-represented and the adults (40-59) are over-represented, as shown in the graph below.



Considering the different typology of performances, theatre and music attract an adult audience (30-49), while dance is more of interest of the youngsters. About 50% of the music festivals audience is over 50 years old; about half of the audience of theatre festivals is between 30 and 49, and about one third of the audience of dance festivals is between 30 and 39 (see the graph below).



The small presence of the youngsters has an impact on the planning of the programs of each festival: as a matter of fact, only 69% of the audience interviewed would like more performances with young artists, while the 21% has no preference and 10% has a conservative attitude, and prefers performances with famous artists.

#### *A local audience: strength or damper?*

Festivals' audience is **mainly a local audience**: 73,6% come from Piedmont and 41% from Turin. Even if these data are influenced by the location of the festivals (about 60% take place in Turin and its surroundings), a large participation from the region is registered while the participation from other Italian regions is limited.

Moreover, Piedmont festivals seem not to have an international appeal: in fact just 2% of the audience comes from other European countries.

#### *Many festivals for a few*

Festival audience is a sort of **cultural elite**, more than one-third of the participants having a high level education and about one third attending more than 12 performances per year.

Festivals audiences pay much attention not only to the performances, but also to the locations: 82% say that attending a performance is an opportunity to discover new and unusual locations and to discover cultural and artistic sites. According to this, the pleasure of attending a performance is closely connected to the fascination of the location: **the decision to see a performance also depends on the place where it is performed.**

#### *Loyalty to the festivals; bad ability to involve new audiences*

The results of the survey show that Piedmont festivals are able to make their audience more loyal, but not so much to involve new audiences, especially the youngsters. A reason could be the communication tools they use to communicate their initiatives. 45% of the audience say they already knew the festival, which means that the brand of festivals is well-known. Good results come from the word of mouth (27%) and from the articles on the newspapers (19%). Considering the age of the audience, Internet is underused for the development strategies of festivals: only 6,4% of the audience make use of it to find information about the festival. This is also due to the lacking familiarity of the Italian adult population with the ICT.

#### *I go to the festival! ... but why?*

Generally, festivals audience provides more than a reason to attend a performance; since attending a live performance meets many needs: aesthetic, cultural, social ones... The main reason to choose a

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<sup>2</sup> ISTAT (Italian Institute for Statistics) 2008.

performance are the artists (93,3%), followed by the pièce or the performance or the concert (83,3%). This has to do with an aesthetic motivation, as well as with the “opportunity to increase one’s own culture” (88,2%), or “the opportunity to see something new” (90,7%).

**Festivals audiences want to build their own personal cultural path to increase their knowledge and sensibility.**

*What way? Is there a way?*

The results of this survey are important not only for foundations of banking origin but for festival organizers as well: it is essential that festival organizers know their audience and take the audiences’ expectations seriously into account. This does not necessarily mean that the structure of the program must be oriented towards audiences’ tastes, but that festival organizers should be able to challenge and involve their audience. Festival organizers should succeed in transforming a lack of understanding into an interest, using “audience development strategies”.

Over the time, festivals that have existed for a long time constantly have to recruit new audiences; in particular, **the anomaly of Italian festivals** in comparison with the European ones seems to be **the lack of the youngsters.**

*A net of festivals for the youngsters*

To fill in this gap, the Italian Ministry of Youth in collaboration with Anci (National Association of Italian Municipalities) launched the project “Net of festivals for the youngsters”.

*Premise*

Before introducing this project, some considerations are needed:

1. **It is one of the rare occasions that cultural policy instruments deal with the audience development**, and in particular with festivals audience development. The project does not start from the input of local and artistic needs, but it is an initiative of the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI, i.e. local government) and is funded by the Ministry of Youth (central government). It means that:
  - a. It is a **top-down project**;
  - b. It is an **institutional project** that responds to an attention or a rhetoric of attention: “we have to give room to the young people”.
2. This project of audience development for the youngsters is funded by the Ministry of Youth and not by the Ministry of Culture. It aims at **promoting the young creativity and its spread.**
3. Born as a top-down project, it risks to be considered an imposition and not to find a natural ground to grow.

4. Since it involves a limited number of festivals, it could be seen as a political imposition, discriminating against other festivals.

### *The project*

The “Net of Italian festivals for the youngsters” involves 17 Italian festivals, which should become the hubs of a net aimed at developing the offer for the youngsters through advertisements, competitions, workshops, performances, master classes, exhibitions.

The project meets the need of creating a net for all the Italian events, paying attention to involve young talents, and aims at developing local specificities, building chances of visibility for the youngsters in the some famous festivals programs.

The project wants to involve all Italian youth, with a big program providing new chances in all the performing arts and cultural events: music, theatre, dance, poetry, literature, new technologies.

One of the aims of the project is the audience development, targeting the youngsters, through the building of places devoted to them, both as audience and as performers. This means building a net to make ideas and performances circulate and gain visibility.

The festivals are required to answer to specific criteria: quality of the program activities, geographical localisation (all the regions of the country are involved), kind of area involved (big cities and small towns), skills in creating activities for the young (festivals must launch new initiatives for the youngsters). According to these criteria, the festivals involved are very different: some of them are very well-known (like Festivaletteratura in Mantova, or the Night of Taranta in Lecce), some take place in small towns, some are new festivals.

The goal is to develop innovative activities for the youngsters, so as to:

- Develop young artists talents,
- Qualify the cultural offer for the youngsters,
- Develop vocational training initiatives.

The project will last 2 years, and counts on eur 4 millions of public funding (20% from the municipalities, 80% from the Ministry and the Anci). Anci is in charge of coordinating all the activities organised by the network, also through the creation of a specific 2.0 web site; fostering the interaction among the youngsters who are directly or indirectly involved in the project.

A particular attention is granted to the local identity, whose development is among the Ministry’s goals.

At a first glance, this initiative shows many points of weakness and risks to implode just after two years of test period. It could actually be seen as an external and political imposition, introducing selection and discrimination among the festivals. Even if ANCI is aware of the local and territorial

distinctiveness, it does not have a specific clue on the performing arts and could not be able to coordinate and create an effective relationship between the cultural and aesthetic needs and the local and political expectations. A real network of festivals for young creators in Italy would be in any case much desirable.

*Cultural fields involved:*

Comics, music (from classical to electronic, from rock to pop, to jazz), promotion of books and the reading, poetry, street arts, cinema, theatre, experimental theatre, dance, audiovisual arts. Many of the festival involved in the project are multidisciplinary: their programs range from the reading, to theatre, dance, music performance, or even multidisciplinary performance. The selection meets the purpose of the Ministry project, aiming at involving all the facets of young creativity.

*Festivals involved:*

1. Festivaletteratura, Mantova
2. Notte della Taranta (Unione dei comuni della Grecia Salentina)
3. Lucca Comics
4. Festival dell'economia di Trento
5. Sila in festa (Cariati, Cosenza, Pedace, Rossano, Serra Pedace, San Giovanni in fiore, Spezzano della Sila)
6. Mozart Box (Portici – Napoli)
7. Festival letterari della Sardegna
8. Giornate del Cinema Sportivo (Valdengo – Biella)
9. Festival della poesia di Monfalcone (Go)
10. Veneto Jazz (Vicenza, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Chioggia, Bassano del Grappa, Verona)
11. Meeting delle etichette indipendenti (Faenza)
12. Enzimi (Roma)
13. Nottenoir (L'Aquila)
14. Intradando e Cantieri di strada (Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto (ME), Stigliano (MT))
15. Narrazioni in corso (Marsala, Pisa)
16. Caffèina Cultura (Anzio, Viterbo)
17. Festival dell'energia (Lecce)

*What about the future?*

For the Ministry of Youth, the project should be the creation of a network of festivals where the **young talents' proposals can circulate**. Secondly, it should activate a sort of virtual circle, and a word of mouth effect among the other festivals not involved in the network. For the Ministry in fact

the project represents a chance for the festivals involved to show the possibility of attracting young audience and making new ideas and performances circulate. If the project reaches its goals, it will be possible to reverse the nature of the project, transform a top-down initiative into a bottom-down one: in fact, the festivals which this time are not involved should be stimulated to take part into the project, proposing themselves as partners. A chain reaction could thus be activated.

At the moment, ANCI and the festivals involved have not set an action plan yet. As from the title of this paper we can just hope that the project of the Ministry of Youth will not be like Tantalus' enterprise.

For this reason, the Italian Ministry of Youth in cooperation with Anci is going to test an evaluation system to calculate the benefit of this project. And the Fondazione Fitzcarraldo offered to help the Ministry in this task.

### **Luisella Carnelli**

Luisella Carnelli is a researcher of **Fondazione Fitzcarraldo** and of the **Culture Observatory of Piedmont** since 2004. Her interests range from cultural behaviours to the analysis of management of cultural organisation, the effects of networking, with a special attention to the world of the performing arts and to theatre in particular. She carried out various audience surveys and researches, making use of quantitative and qualitative techniques (especially focus groups). For the **Culture Observatory of Piedmont** she is part of the editorial staff for an annual review giving a regional overview of cultural activities and their impact.