Online and on land: an examination of Irish arts festivals' response to Covid-19

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Abstract:

At this juncture, it is still too soon to determine the longer-term implications for the Irish arts festival ecology of the public health restrictions introduced to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 during 2020 and 2021. However, research and analysis of the sector over this time has revealed that operational changes, introduced to enable festivals to function while social distancing measures were in place, are becoming imbedded into organisations' operating systems and post-pandemic strategic planning. In particular, this study indicates that festival organisations envisage maintaining a significantly increased level of dependence on digital technologies in both the creation and delivery of festival programmes. There is also evidence of a growing commitment to sustaining a commitment to longer-form creative collaborations outside the public facing festival period. The paper concludes by exploring some implications these sectoral transformations present Irish arts policy, and argues for the need for ongoing research. In particular, it highlights the importance of developing a greater understanding of the public's engagement with online festival programming.

Key words: arts festivals; arts policy; Covid-19; digital pivot

Introduction

At this juncture, it is still too soon to determine with any degree of certainty the longer-term implications for the Irish arts festival ecology of the public health restrictions introduced to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 during 2020

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and 2021. However, this research, which was carried out during 2020 and the early part of 2021, has revealed that some of the operational changes introduced to enable arts festivals to function while social distancing measures were in place, were being imbedded into organisations' operating systems and post-pandemic strategic planning. In particular the study indicates that festival organisations envisage maintaining a significantly increased use of digital technologies in both the creation and delivery of festival programmes, and sustaining a commitment to longer-form creative collaborations outside the public facing festival period.

The research findings are based on detailed analysis of the 2020 operations of two case study festivals (Dublin Dance Festival and Carlow Arts Festival), supported by in-depth interviews the directors of these festivals about their planning for 2021 and beyond. The shift in arts festival practice suggested by the case studies was supported by the testimonies of other festival makers to two webinar series run by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon during this period (The Arts Council, 2020a, 2021a). The key findings of the research are that the pandemic pushed changes to operations, strategic planning and public engagement that are likely to remain post-pandemic. What is learned as a result indicates a need to review how arts policy might accommodate and support arts festivals within this new post-Covid-19 landscape. As will be outlined in the conclusion, the ongoing challenges of the pandemic for festivals in 2021, and the exploratory nature of the study, point to the need for further research, in particular developing a greater understanding of the public's engagement with the changing festival landscape.

Before turning to discuss the complex and evolving domain of preparing and delivering an arts festival in the midst of a pandemic, some consideration will be given to the academic tradition within which this research is placed, and the theoretical frame and research methodology that was used. A brief introduction to the Irish festival ecology and an overview of the sector's response to operating in the face of the varying levels and unpredictability of the Covid-19 restriction will follow. The paper then presents in-depth

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examination of the two case study festivals and considers the operational changes these organisations are implementing in the wake of their experiences in 2020. The concluding section points toward the implications these changes may have for festival and arts policy makers.

The emergent field of festival studies

A steady increase in festival activity in contemporary societies in recent decades, and the growing importance in social, cultural and economic realms of these events, has attracted the interest of researchers from many different academic disciplines, including geography, economics, anthropology, sociology, and business (Getz, 2010, p.2, Mair, 2019, p.3). Over the last decade, in an attempt to provide a more cohesive perspective on these events, and in recognition of the ubiquitous importance of place and community in the study of festivals, regardless of the disciplinary lens being applied, these disparate studies have been drawn together under the banner of festival studies (Getz, 2010, Newbold et al., 2015, Mair, 2019).

In contrast to the international context where the dedicated field of festival studies has emerged, the festival ecology in Ireland has, as yet, received comparatively little academic attention. The exception has been Quinn (2005, 2006, 2010) who has published numerous, highly-regarded studies examining the social and cultural impact of Irish festivals. In recent years, a number of other scholars, including Mahon (2019), Gugliamini (2016), and Hadley (2020), have published articles that interrogate Irish festivals from the perspective of rural development, arts management and cultural policy respectively. This paper adds to this growing body of Irish festival studies literature, providing a critical reflection on the festival sector's response to Covid-19 from an arts management and cultural policy perspective.
While the history of arts festivals in Ireland has many similarities to the European context outlined by Newbold et al. (2015, p.xviii) that began with the setting up of dedicated arts festivals after World War II, there are also a

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number of significant differences due to the country's distinct history. For example, there existed in Ireland a nationwide tradition of music festivals called Feiseanna that promoted Irish music, language, drama and dance, which had flourished in the advent of independence from Great Britain in 1922. With the establishing of the Arts Council in 1951 there was a growing acceptance of 'the so called high-art forms – opera classical music and ballet' (Kennedy, B. 1998, p.74), which led the way for the establishing of the Wexford Opera Festival (est. 1951), followed soon after by the setting up of the Dublin Theatre Festival (est. 1956). Amateur drama festivals were also beneficiaries of funding from the Arts Council during the 1950s (Kennedy, 2021, p.9), although this declined significantly in 1957 when the Council was advised against the 'sponsoring of amateur dramatic activity' (Kennedy, 1998, p.122), a position that the Council has held ever since. The arts festivals that form the focus of this research are those that fall within the current remit of the Arts Council, and while some are run by voluntary committees, they would all engage with professional artist and arts organisations.

During the 1970s, the concept of a combined arts festival, which involved experimentation with 'new combinations of art forms, and with the traditional relationships between artist and audience' migrated to Ireland from Continental Europe (Quinn, 2005, p.13). The growing importance of arts festivals in Ireland is evident in the increasing number of festivals funded by the Arts Council over the last forty years:

Year	Number of festivals funded	Reference
1977	12	(The Arts Council 1978)
1999	76	(The Arts Council 2000)
2018	173	(The Arts Council 2019)

Table 1: Number of arts festivals funded by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon 1977-2018

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A large percentage of these festivals are focused on the presentation of specific artforms, as is the case with Dublin Dance Festival (DDF). Others, like Carlow Arts Festival (CAF) that present a wide variety of artforms, are classified as multi-disciplinary arts festivals. Spread throughout the country, varying in size from one day events in a set location, to events that take place over several weeks and traverse whole counties, festivals have been recognised by the Arts Council because of the 'unique stage they provide for presenting and experiencing art' (The Arts Council, 2016, p.6).

In the context of this research it is important to note that there has been a gradual increase in the use of digital technology by Irish arts festivals over the last two decades, including the use of social media for marketing and computerised box office systems for ticket sales. However, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Galway International Arts Festival broadcasting *First Thoughts* talks live on Facebook) Irish arts festivals had, up to the arrival of the pandemic, remained committed to presenting work live and in-person. As a result, the decision by festivals to migrate programming to online platforms in 2020 introduced new operational demands, including film making and broadcasting, of which many of these organisations had previously limited experience.

These developments in the Irish arts festival sector are set against an international context in which, as noted by Duffy and Mair (2021, p.11), festivals were being cancelled entirely or providing 'a small part of their usual offering online'. Challenges in relation to knowledge and resource deficits relating to the online platforming of festival content were also highlighted as issues of concern for non-Irish festival organisations at the Arts Council's Talking Festivals 2020 international webinar (Canadian producer Dani Kefeckolette's presentation, The Arts Council, 2020b). However, there is also evidence that, like Galway International Arts Festival, festivals in other jurisdictions had also begun online broadcasting pre-Covid. For example, Bossey (2019, p.407) notes the growing trend towards the 'live-streaming of performances' directly from festivals, giving the example of Glastonbury

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Festival's screening of concerts on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Similarly, Taillbert and Vinuela (2021, p.1) documented the tendency by some film festivals 'to replicate part of their programming online, thus extending their traditional format in order to reach wider audiences'. They also signal that within the film industry there was, as early as 2016, evidence of 'the emergence of totally dematerialized online festivals'. In his efforts to reach 'a wide range of audiences, including the much-discussed digital natives', LIFT Festival Artistic Director Mark Ball (2009 -2017) developed a digital strategy that challenged the traditional binary divisions between artistic production and marketing. Embracing the interactive potential of the internet, Ball commissioned artists to create works that existed wholly online, and in some cases involved the participation of the public in co-creating the work (Miles, 2018, p.312). While these examples demonstrate that online programming by festivals predated the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, they were initiated and developed within very different circumstances. The pandemic prompted a new and different focus on digital for multiple arts organisations (Jeannotte, 2021, p.4)

Towards a reflexive ethnographic practice

In undertaking this study, I used a mixed-method research methodology incorporating ethnographic practices of participant observation and interviews, combined with document and policy analysis. As a participant observer at the festival events I am researching, I adhere to Erwin's six guiding principles of participant observation: 'dual purpose, explicit awareness, wide angle lens, the insider/outsider experience, introspection and record keeping' (as cited by Jaimangal-Jones, 2014, p.42). In this study, my observation of festival events was supplemented by a number of semi-structured interviews and written correspondence with the case study festival directors, that were clearly signalled as part of an ethically robust academic research project. The choice of DDF and CAF as case studies was determined by the focus of this paper, which sought to understand the

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evolving nature of festival making in Ireland as a result of Covid-19. Key to their selection was for one, the fact that they both occurred early in the pandemic cycle when the country was in the first phase of lockdown in the spring and early summer of 2020 when live events of any kind were not permissible. Of additional relevance, was that their plans for the next festival iteration were, at the time of the research, well advanced as they were both scheduled to run in the first half of 2021.

Paquette and Redaelli (2015) have observed that, like other societal environments, the ecology of arts management and cultural (or arts) policy is a relational field. Consequently, a researcher operating in this domain must

> …acknowledge the multiplicity of alliances and associations
> between researchers, institutions, arts managers, objects of
> study, think tanks, students, and many other actors.
> (Paquette and Redaelli, 2015, p.3).

In the relatively small Irish arts ecology this circumstance is particularly true, as those operating in this field over a period of time are likely to become acquainted with each other, building complex professional, creative and personal relationships.

Since 2016, I have worked as a researcher in an academic context, while also acting as a policy advisor to the Arts Council. This dual role puts me in a very particular locus within the arts festival ecology. My research has born in mind this positionality and the potential conflicts of interest that may result. Conscious of 'the uneasy relationship between academic cultural policy research, policy advocacy and the policymaking process' highlighted by Belfiore (2016, p.7), I endeavour in my research to maintain a vigilant reflexivity, to ensure that knowledge and power relating to my professional work is not misused when undertaking academic research. This process includes, rigorous peer review via conferences and sharing my research with academic and professional peers. However, I must also acknowledge that, as has been recognised within contemporary anthropology, interpretation flows from 'personal, cultural, and historical experiences' (Creswell, 2003, p.8) and

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that the role of 'interpreter-observer' is never that of 'a neutral observer' (Springer, 1991, p.178). Consequently this work is presented as a perspective on a complex, everchanging story, with the understanding that there will inevitably be 'a foregrounding of certain interpretations and exclusion of others' (Hall, 1997, p.166).

Factors effecting the contours of digital festival making

The first festival to be cancelled in Ireland as a result of Covid-19 was the 2020 St Patrick's Festival in Dublin, which had been due to begin on March 13th, the day before the first governmental regulations on social distancing came into effect. Within two weeks, the initial directive that indoor mass gatherings of more than 100 people, and outdoor mass gatherings of more than 500 people should be cancelled, had escalated to the banning of all private and public gatherings (Carroll, 2020). As a consequence, the running of festivals as planned over the following months became an impossibility. As evidenced by the testimonials of Declan McCarthy (Baltimore Fiddle Festival) and Cora Gunter (Galway Film Fleadh) many Irish festival makers, like their international counterparts, turned to the internet at this time, as it presented a medium through which they could at least deliver some part of their programme or a variation thereof (The Arts Council, 2020c).

As I argue elsewhere (Teevan, 2020, p.145), 'location, time, resources and the artistic mission of the festival was, as it is in the making of a live festival, a contributing factor in determining the contours of the online event'. In this paper, which examined the 2020 programmes of Earagail Arts Festival (July) and Dublin Fringe Festival (September), I concluded that the format of the online programming of these festivals was influenced by their geographical and temporal circumstances, and their distinctive aims and objectives.

In the case of Earagail, a decision was made to pre-record and broadcast eighteen video pieces created by artists working in collaboration with AV professionals and the festival team. The recordings were released one each day over the eighteen days the festival would have been happening. For its

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online programme, Dublin Fringe chose to focus on the interactive potential of the internet. Working with two groups of artists, the festival supported the creation of experimental art events that were experienced remotely by the public. This research revealed that during this period, while working under very different contraints due to the public health restrictions, both festivals utilised a similar durational, dialogical, curatorial process of festival making as they had pre-pandemic by:

> …initiating, maintaining and responding to a complex matrix
> of relationships with artists and production personnel,
> institutional and community stakeholders and diverse
> publics, while simultaneously constructing a festival
> programme of individual events that sat coherently together
> to form a unified whole. (Teevan, 2020, p.148)

Using the conceptual framework outlined in the ENCATC publication, this paper examines two similarly sized festivals, this time looking beyond the actions undertaken in 2020 to operational innovations being proposed for and trialled in 2021. In the next section, each case study festival is discussed. The changes instituted as a result of restrictions within Ireland's first / initial lockdown from March - July 2020 are first described, followed by an analysis of what implications these changes might have for arts festival policy moving forward.

Dublin Dance Festival

Established in 2002, DDF has always included a high percentage of international productions, along with work by Irish choreographers. For both Irish dance artists and audiences, it is, more often than not, the only time in the year that international dance can be experienced in this country. The festival is also a pivotal moment in the annual calendar of the dance community, providing opportunities for dance artists to network with each other and international colleagues, participate in masterclasses and, if they

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are presenting work in the festival, have it seen by international festival directors and venue managers.

On March 12th, the day the first restrictions were announced in Ireland, DDF launched its 2020 programme of events for the period May 19th to 31st which included presenting dance artists from USA, Palestine, Greece, France, Belgium, India, Portugal and Guadeloupe. Within days of the launch, the festival organisers made the difficult decision to cancel the entire festival. In the weeks that followed, Perchet and his team dismantled the logistical framework that had been in place, including negotiating the cancellation of artists contracts.

While this process was ongoing, consideration to presenting the festival digitally was discussed by the DDF team. Perchet, who was well acquainted with digital technologies and their application within dance practice, was initially unconvinced about the idea of presenting a festival programme online. In his mind he considered digital technologies 'as something coming alongside a live programme… to compete, complement, or go with a live event' (2020a, np). He was also clear that it would not be possible or desirable to present the planned programme via the internet, as this work had been conceived for a live situation. In the end, encouraged by his team, and his understanding that the organisation 'had a responsibility to do something for the dance community that was experiencing very challenging times', Perchet was persuaded to present a fully digital festival (2020a, np). Over a number of weeks, he and his team, in dialogue with the dance community, funding agencies and other stakeholders, devised and organised a completely new programme in two strands. This was called DDF Digital Capsule 2020, described as 'an invitation to experience dance in different ways until we meet again' (Dublin Dance Festival, 2020a).

The first strand, *10 Days of Movement,* aimed at dance audiences, included dance documentary films, a number of specially-commissioned articles about dance in Ireland, and a number of interactive works that invited the public to participate. The other strand, called *3 Moments of Connection,* was aimed at

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the 'dance community' as a platform 'to come together and explore the important conversations that we need to have right now' (Dublin Dance Festival, 2020a). The first of these events was a two-day seminar held on the Zoom platform that included keynote addresses, panel discussions and screenings of a number of video pieces commissioned by DDF from Irish dance artists, in which dancers represented their corporeal response to the restrictions they were experiencing.

For members of the public, the Digital Capsule provided a rich window into the world of contemporary dance, one that is not as evident or accessible when the festival is presented on stage. In the absence of live dance, the public were invited to listen to dancers talking about the process of making contemporary dance performances and to engage in the critical discourse that is an integral part of this artform. There was also an invitation to the public to participate in dance workshops at home, offering an opportunity to explore dance in the safety of one's own space away from the gaze of others. Having attended and engaged with many of the events in the Digital Capsule, I would contend that for the dance community and public, the clustering of these virtual events fulfilled the festive function of marking time. Further, while audiences were physically separated from one another, the programme permitted some sense of gathering and togetherness in the Zoom rooms of the symposium and dance workshops. At the same time the public, like the festival organisation and dance community, were also required to operate in an environment that lacked the familiar features of the festive space, including the embodied presence of performers and spectators and the possibility of having encounters with other attendees. As will be outlined in the conclusion, further research is required to better understand public engagement at festivals accessed through digital portals.

In planning for 2021, Perchet acknowledged the advantage of having more time to plan, but highlighted the ongoing challenge festivals were facing because of continuing uncertainty around international travel and live performance. For events like DDF, that have a high percentage of imported

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programme content, the travel issue is a particular concern. Aside from not knowing what quarantining will be required in six months' time, the planning of international dance troupe travel, usually part of a touring schedule that involves other international festivals, is hugely problematic in the present moment. Responding to this scenario, DDF decided to present their 2021 programme in two tranches, with a number of Irish shows being presented in the usual May timeframe, and an international programme being tentatively planned for the autumn, when it is hoped that Covid-19 related travel and performance restrictions will have eased. The performances planned for May will be filmed in city centre venues, with live audiences if permissible. Perchet made the decision not to broadcast the work live, citing both cost and aesthetic reasons (Perchet, 2020b, np). Instead, it will be streamed at a future date in an edited format, when it can be targeted at an audience that stretches beyond the confines of the domestic market.

While the mounting of a spring and autumn programme is seen as being a temporary solution, with a return to a single event in May 2022, Perchet sees other initiatives introduced in response to Covid-19, like the filming of events for broadcast, as having longer-term application by the organisation. He also cited increased investment in incubation initiatives and commissions as being something he hoped the organisation can sustain. While DDF had already a commitment to supporting projects with strategic partners like Tipperary Dance Platform (a recently established, regionally based dance festival) and Dance Limerick (a support and development organisation based in Limerick city), a number of factors arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, including a surplus budget as a result of savings on travel and accommodation and available administrative time and capacity due to the restrictions, allowed the organisation in the short-term to significantly increase its commitment to working with the dance community on developmental projects. This led to an new collaborative venture with Carlow Arts Festival to commission a number of experimental dance pieces to be presented as works in progress in Carlow in May 2021, with a view to the completed work being premiered at DDF

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2022. As will be discussed in the conclusion, the sustaining of an increased programme of developmental activity when the festival returns to presenting an in-person festival will have financial and human resource consequences for the organisation.

With regard to the use of digital technologies in the preparation and presentation of dance, Perchet was of the opinion that Covid-19 accelerated a process that was already well established in professional dance. He cited French choreographer Jérôme Bel as an example of a choreographer that has, for a number of years, been remounting his work internationally using Zoom or Skype to work with dancers remotely. In the context of performance, the use of video backdrop and video mapping on the bodies of performers was also a common practice pre-Covid-19. However, Perchet (2020a, np) believes that there has been an escalation of technological experimentation, like multi-locational dance performances where dancers participate in a live show while working remotely on camera. This technique is being proposed by one of the Irish companies scheduled to perform in the May strand of DDF 2021, with the international dancers participating live from their home bases abroad.

Evidence that these shifts in the operating model of DDF are envisaged as long-term is provided by a revision to the organisation's mission statement that was published during autumn 2021, that introduced a commitment to 'working locally, nationally, internationally and virtually' (Dublin Dance Festival, 2020b), where heretofore the priority had been given to 'working nationally and internationally' (Dublin Dance Festival, 2019). Bearing in mind that the extended engagement by the festival with the dance community outside of the festival period was made possible by having a budget surplus due to travel and accommodation underspend, the organisation's capacity to sustain its expanded remit will be contingent on the availability of funds. Similarly, the desire to continue having a 'virtual' presence will require substantial investment in filming and editing. While the monetisation of its digital steaming may in time generate increased revenue, it is unlikely to

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provide sufficient funding to meet the increased human and production resources required when the festival is again permitted to present dance to live audiences in theatre spaces. This points to an urgent need for arts festival policy to interrogate if an expanded year-round programme of engagement and digital streaming of content are apposite activities for festival organisations.

Carlow Arts Festival

A shift to working locally on longer-form projects during the year, and an accelerated embracing of digital technologies is also evident in the new operating model being proposed by Carlow Arts Festival (CAF), one of the country's oldest multidisciplinary festivals, which takes place every June. Under Artistic Director Jo Mangan, who took over the role in 2016, the festival was transformed from being a two-week town-wide event into a six-day event confined to the town's art centre (Carlow Visual) and the parkland outside this building. Mangan's aesthetically eclectic programme has included large-scale spectacles, like *Sugartown* (2019) an event featuring a 300 strong cast of professional and community performers directed by Dina Abu Hamdan that was attended by over 5000 people, an eight-hour live performance of Max Richter's *Sleep* (2019) performed to an audience of four hundred people camping overnight in front of the stage, and *Crave #2* (2019), an interactive live art performance by Danish artists Eja Due who, embodying a prostitute, discussed theories of prostitution with an audience of one.

Like DDF, CAF was required to cancel their planned programme for June 2020. In its place, the festival decided to present *Slices #1-7,* a series of online offerings and live events. These were released at different moments over the year, with *Slices #2*, going out live on the Saturday night when the festival would have been happening. For this event, CAF commissioned a variety of artists to create short video pieces. Slices #2 included *A Broken Connection* - a spoken word monologue by Irish poet and performer Felispeaks, *Grow Your Own Way* - a clown performance by Cian Jesus

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Kinsella, and *Precarizada* - a dance/music/spoken word piece by Josefina Gorostiza. While the acts were pre-recorded, Mangan decided to broadcast the event live. She herself opened the event welcoming the audience before introducing the person who would act as compere for the evening. He introduced each of the events, periodically returning live to Mangan and a number of remotely situated festival-team members, to discuss aspects of the programme and talk about the festival. This format mirrored the theme noted in relation to DDF Digital Capsule of revealing to the public the mechanics of festival making and artistic process that are not visible when a festival is experienced in the public domain.

Mangan's decision to present this event live was motivated by the festival's core value of 'bringing people together to experience live work', a feature she felt was missing watching pre-recorded broadcasts (Mangan, 2020, np). However, delivering a live broadcast required considerably more technical knowledge and infrastructure than CAF had hitherto possessed. In spite of undertaking a rapid learning process and hiring the professional expertise and equipment they lacked, the event ran into difficulties on the night causing a delay of forty minutes. During this delay, the core team watched helplessly as many of the audience that had tuned in at 8pm dropped off. Happening so early in the pandemic cycle, the difficulties experienced by CAF were a salutary warning of the challenge festival organisations, whose working practices were focused on live performance, had to contend with when presenting work online.

Looking ahead to 2021, CAF is proposing a number of significant changes to their operating model. With ongoing concerns about limited capacity for live events, it was clear that the clustered campus festival model that brought together crowds of five to six thousand people would not be workable in 2021. Mangan described how, in planning for 2021, she and her team were faced with 'starting again, building a festival from the ground up'. While this was frustrating in some ways, as it meant letting go of a successful model, she also realised that it would 'make possible things that wouldn't have happened

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in previous years' (Mangan, 2020, np). Because of Covid-19, Mangan has observed festival organisations being

> …forced to step back from chasing the inexorable upward curve of attendance numbers, forced to dig deeper in terms of the work that they're going to be programming, forced to look very much on the island of Ireland and even more closely in the vicinity of their festival for inspiration and collaborative partners. (Mangan 2020, np)

Responding to this, CAF made a commitment to pivot to deeper forms of collaboration with artists and audiences that will happen throughout the year (Carlow Arts Festival, 2020, p.10). According to Mangan this will include artists working with members of the community on projects

> …that can happen, either with remote engagement or with real engagement, and working with international artists, where they will come and self-isolate before beginning work or work remotely with Irish collaborators to deliver their work. (Mangan, 2020, np)

To be able to deliver this kind of programme, CAF is preparing to initiate changes to the organisation's operating model 'bringing on board additional producers and project managers, because we're going to have to do a lot more ourselves' (Mangan 2020). CAF estimate that to sustain these organisational changes the organisation will require a 200% increase in Arts Council funding over the following three years (Carlow Arts Festival, 2020, p.27).

While much of the work being scheduled for CAF 2021 has a live component, there is also evidence of an increased use of digital technologies. In planning for 2021 Mangan was adamant that she was only going to commit to work that had, at the very least, 'elements that can be pulled into something else if necessary, if we get into hardcore lockdown' (Mangan, 2020, np). Consequently she was only interested in talking to artists who were 'interested and able to lean into digital options' (Mangan, 2020, np). With the expectation that the maximum indoor audience is likely to be 50 and the maximum outdoor crowd limited to under 200, Mangan is also planning to

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broadcast a significant element of the programme. Nor is the festival limiting online programming to live and pre-recorded elements of live events, but is building on the work done in *Slices #3* with artists Peter Power and Leon Butler, to incorporate digital native art works into the festival, and expanding on the *Slices #5* strand that invited audiences to experience virtual reality cinema in their own homes. CAF is planning to sustain these initiatives beyond the short-term. Like Perchet, Mangan cited the capacity online programming has to extend the reach of the festival beyond the public that can attend the event in Carlow, as a key motivator in this context (Mangan, 2020, np).

Looking beyond short-term survival strategies, CAF developed a new three-year strategic document in the second half of 2020 that addressed the impact of Covid-19 on how they make and present the festival. In it there is a commitment to prioritise the introduction of 'new working models' in the short to medium-term with the understanding that they 'are then embedded and developed for the long term' (Carlow Arts Festival, 2020, p.3). This change indicates a commitment in the organisation to sustaining into the future components of operational change, initially instituted as stop-gaps to enable the festival to operate during the pandemic.

The evolving of a future festival model

The findings of this research, which was based on the analysis of two case study festivals, supported by the archived minutes of the two Arts Council webinar series (The Arts Council, 2020a, 2021a), point to a sectoral shift towards extended engagement by festivals with communities of place and interest outside of the public-facing festival period, and an increased use of digital technologies in the making and presentation of festivals.

For those involved in festival making the operation is year-round, even if the festival event(s) seem shorter-lived. Building on the findings of my earlier research (Teevan, 2000) the case study examples in this research provide further evidence that the durational, dialogical, curatorial process of festival

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making of pre-pandemic times, adapted and continued during 2020, in spite of restrictions imposed to stem the spread of the virus. Emerging from this process, there appears to have been a shift in practice within some festivals towards an increased focus on working in the locality where the festival is situated, and a commitment to longer-form projects with communities of place and interest taking place away from the public facing festival event. In the case of DDF this resulted in an increased investment in funding and supporting projects throughout the year that are focused on strengthening the Irish professional contemporary dance community. For CAF, there is a wider focus that includes a greater investment in emerging and established artists in Carlow, and growing its engagement with communities in the locale in collaborative and participatory art projects.

The increased importance of digital technologies is also evident in the case study festivals' near and medium-term planning. In both organisations this was not a completely new departure, but rather an escalation of a process that was already ongoing. While the sector is still learning about the possibilities new technologies present within a festival context, the scenario within which they will be used in 2021, will be different to 2020. In addition to organisations having more time to plan and the experience of 2020 to draw on, the Arts Council, 'responding in part to intelligence gathered from the sector' (Wallace, 2020), initiated the Capacity Building Support Scheme (CBSS) in autumn 2020. This award was aimed at providing funding to organisations to better equip them to fulfil their remit, and included the option of applicants requesting funding to 'strengthen an organisation's digital infrastructure' (The Arts Council, 2020e).

Notwithstanding the limited timeframe of this research, which did not include the delivery of festivals in 2021, and the small number and specific genre of festivals that were examined, this study indicates that operational changes introduced as stop-gap solutions in response to the pandemic restrictions are being built into these festivals' longer-term planning. That these findings are

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representative of a widespread change in the sector was supported by the testimonies of many of the festival makers to the Arts Council's Pathways webinar series, who spoke of instituting changes to their organisation's operating models to focus on more year-round activities and adapting their public engagement strategies to include some online festival programming. Given the significance such a sectoral shift will have on the festival ecology and the implications it will have for arts festival policy, this study points to the need for ongoing and wider research to ascertain if these changes are specific to some genre of festivals and not others, and if the scale of the festival operation is a contributing factor in this regard.

As noted already the public presence in the online festival space has been very limited, with many events being pre-recorded broadcasts that separated the public from the event in both space and time. Even those events that have invited public participation in Zoom rooms, have had to operate within parameters determined by the platform's format that offer very limited opportunities for spontaneous interaction and exchange. As noted by Clonmel Junction Festival Director Cliona Maher, festival organisers traditionally rely on observing audiences at in-person events and personal encounters with patrons to inform their planning and programming (The Arts Council, 2021c). Presented on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Zoom, where such encounters are not possible, festival organisations become overly reliant on statistical information provided by the online platforms for information about their audiences. While this data can be of use in providing some insights into public engagement patterns, it is limited in that it lacks personal nuances, and as Maher demonstrated, is collated differently by the different platforms making statistics comparison and the collating of a coherent overview of audience behaviours difficult (2021c). It is imperative as 2021 progresses that the voice of this essential constituency within the festival ecology is heard once again, so that it too can be part of the evolving of a future festival model. To conclude, I would like to consider briefly the wider socio-political context within which the practice of festival making is happening, and how the

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changes identified in this research might augur shifting societal and governmental patterns. In a recent article Davies (2020) speculated on potential futures for society post Covid-19, and the role festivals might play in this new world order. In concluding, she suggests that some form of radical social change will be required. Based on her analysis of four possible outcomes formulated by ecological economist Mair, Davies (2020, p.188) states that 'there is some hope for a blend of state socialism and mutual aid' emerging. In such a future she envisages states being required to make 'good financial decisions on what services to support' and of successful companies being required to 'maintain a sense of responsibility to the wider communities that they serve'. The research findings outlined in this study provide evidence of Irish arts festivals increasing their investment in deeper longer-term mutually supportive relationships with communities of place and interest, suggesting that these organisations are well on their way to fulfilling Davies' hypothesis of festivals being 'a leading light' in guiding us to the new world order.

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