



Open Access Arts Festivals and Artists: Who Benefits?

Josephine Caust

To cite this article: Josephine Caust (2019): Open Access Arts Festivals and Artists: Who Benefits?, The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society, DOI: [10.1080/10632921.2019.1617811](https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2019.1617811)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2019.1617811>



Published online: 17 Jun 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Open Access Arts Festivals and Artists: Who Benefits?

Josephine Caust

University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Arts festivals are of interest to researchers, but the research focus is usually on the festival's economic or social impact. This approach does not usually reflect the engagement and experience of the artists involved. There has been controversy recently around the experiences of participating artists in open access arts festivals. Open access arts festivals are significant players in the festival landscape. They enable anyone to participate in a festival, if they pay a registration fee. This research, using a case study methodology, examines an open access festival from different perspectives with a focus on the experience of the participating artists.

KEYWORDS

Artists; arts festivals; benefits; costs; open access

Background

Arts festivals by their very nature rely on the contribution of artists. In recent years, there has been considerable controversy around the contributions of artists to open access festivals and the limited financial return many receive from their festival participation (Bellinger 2015; George 2015; Glance 2015; Greer 2015; Watts 2016). In some instances, artists argue that they are “out of pocket” no matter how successful their show may be (Glance 2015; Greer 2015). This has led to artists protesting and demanding change in a festival's policy, with some artists announcing that they will not participate in a particular event again (George 2015; Greer 2015; Richardson 2016; Watts 2016). In 2016, the Edinburgh Fringe experienced, for the first time, a reduction in the number of events (Gardner 2016). It is also noted that performing at Perth's open access Fringe World Festival involves a “trade-off” between exposure and cost (Glance 2015). At the Adelaide Fringe Festival in 2016, some participating artists complained that the festival was exploiting them (McDonald 2016). These examples provoke a question: What is the relationship between artists and open access arts festivals and what are the costs and benefits of participating for artists?

Arts festivals can have many different purposes. Williams and Bowdin (2007, 188) describe arts festivals as:

...the celebration of a theme or event, of human creative skill in areas such as poetry, painting and music and may involve the celebration of an individual artist, artists or historical art event.

They can be a space where the new, different, or experimental in arts practice is seen (e.g., Venice Biennale), where the high arts are celebrated (e.g., Edinburgh International

Festival, Avignon Festival), or they can be an “open access” arts festival (e.g., Edinburgh Fringe, Adelaide Fringe). Open access festivals encourage any form of arts activity and provide entry to anyone who wants to participate. The concept of “open access” implies that the festival organizers do not “curate” or “direct” the festival and so anyone is entitled to participate in it. However, to be part of it, a registration fee is usually required and sometimes more expenditure is expected.

Arts festivals are well acknowledged for their contribution to economic development and for their economic impact (Bowdin 2005; Brown et al. 2015; Burgan 2009). Indeed, there is concern that arts festivals are expected to generate economic benefits at the expense of other goals (Finkel 2006, 2010; Hede 2007). Further, it is noted that arts festivals can be contested domains for artists because of the competing interests of commercial sponsors versus the desire for artistic innovation (Waterman 1998). While other forms of evaluating festivals exist, the economic impact of a festival seems to remain the “holy grail” for funders, sponsors, and significant stakeholders (Brown et al. 2015). In a study focusing on festival evaluation, the authors note that arts festivals say the main purpose of their evaluation is audience development and growth (Williams and Bowdin 2007). As there is usually a desire to increase audience attendances at each event, it is perhaps understandable that the size of the audience receives much attention in any process of monitoring festival outcomes and evaluation. In fact, the “size” of a festival can be seen as the major success criteria—size relating to audience numbers, number of events, and numbers participating (Wardrop and Leask 2016). On the other hand, there is also concern that festivals can become too large, leading eventually to systemic failure (Andersson, Getz, and Mykletun 2013; Getz and Andersson 2008).

For example, the Edinburgh Fringe notes on its website that it is the largest arts festival in the world. In 2017, there were 53,232 performances of 3,398 shows in 300 venues (Edinburgh 2018). In every year a festival occurs, there is an expectation that there will be more events, more people attending, and a subsequent increased economic impact for the community or city where it takes place. In addition, the “economic multiplier” argument is used to quantify the contribution of the Edinburgh Festivals to the city’s economy. The “economic multiplier” represents the indirect dollar value earned in other sectors, such as the service sector, as an outcome of arts activity occurring in a particular location (Burgan 2009). There is no doubt that quantitative measures are easier to assemble and promote (e.g., audience numbers, sponsors, participants, number of events, etc.), whereas valuing the intangible aspects of arts practice and festivals (in this case) presents difficulties. Certainly, a focus on a quantitative measuring approach has permeated itself into the cultural realm. As Belfiore (2004) observes, arithmetical data collection is now playing a central role in cultural policy and arts evaluation.

However, the way one values something is not fixed. Meyrick (2015) notes that the appreciation of artistic/cultural matters changes, depending on your viewpoint. There is also recognition of the intrinsic benefits of artistic activity to the community (Brown 2006). Placing a “value” on arts events is itself a contested domain (Brown et al. 2015; Meyrick 2015). The value of arts practice is seen as intangible, subjective, not necessarily visible, having many different aspects, and not reflected by monetary values (Lankoski, Smith, and Wassenhove 2016). It is further observed that while the term “value” has an economic meaning, it is differently framed when located within an arts context (Klamer

2002; Throsby 1999). It is said that the value of cultural activity lies in the deep experience it gives to those involved, making sense of why we exist, and is not about numbers (Klamer 2002). It is also noted that the economic framing of everything is limited when there are realms that cannot be valued according to numbers (Klamer 2002).

There are several studies that have looked at the social aspect of festivals and how festivals are valued and experienced by the audience (Arcodia and Whitford 2006; Bordeau, De Coster, and Paradis 2001; Fredline, Jago, and Deery 2003; Pretorius, Viviers, and Botha 2014). The transformative and educative power of a festival and the creation of a sense of community for the period of the festival are emphasized in this work. There is also attention paid to the impact of a festival on its local community (Gursoy, Kim, and Uysal 2004), as well as the varied motivations for festival attendance (Crompton and McKay 1997). It is also noted that the stakeholders who have the most influence in festivals are those involved in their funding, those who are providing their cultural content, and then the audience (Crespi-Vallbona and Richards 2007). As the cultural content providers, artists are thus both stakeholders and providers of value. When discussing the success or otherwise of a festival, the number of artists and the number of events that occurred in the festival are usually mentioned, in addition to the numbers who attended. While there is a focus again on numbers, “artist feedback” is also seen as a criterion in the evaluation of an arts festival (Williams and Bowdin 2007).

Artists and open access festivals

In response to the perceived exclusiveness and élitism of high arts festivals, “open access” arts festivals have developed in many locales. Frequently, these festivals are a direct reaction to the presence of a major arts festival in the same city, such as the Edinburgh, Avignon, or Adelaide Festivals. In the case of the Adelaide Festival, for example, local artists felt disenfranchised by their exclusion from the main festival, and so they started their own open access fringe festival (Whitelock 1980). Open access festivals provide a place that anyone can be part of, contrasting with the curation process of an élite high art festival. On the other hand, open access arts festivals such as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the Adelaide Fringe depend on artists being willing to pay to be there; otherwise, the festival would not exist.

To participate in an open access festival, artists are usually expected to pay a registration fee. In the case of the Edinburgh Fringe in 2018, this ranged from around £96 (about AUD\$160) to nearly £400 hundred (about AUD\$675), depending on the number of performances (Edinburgh Fringe 2018). At previous festivals, participating artists were also asked to pay the festival organizers further charges, such as commissions and hire fees (George 2015; Greer 2015). In addition, they may have had to pay for their own marketing and venue hire, as well as costs associated with accommodation, travel, etc. Thus, the financial investment of artists in open access festival participation can be considerable when it is not a curated event.

Arguments for participating in an open access arts festival for artists are that they receive audience and media attention; they may be picked up by a producer, another festival, or agent; they may win an award; and they possibly get to make some money, if their show is a box office success. It could be said that just the making of an event or

show for an audience provides professional development for many of the artists concerned, particularly emerging artists. It was noted that artists participating in the Adelaide Fringe learned about mounting and selling shows and how to be more self-reliant (Caust and Glow 2011, 7). By participating in a festival, they were not in a passive situation, waiting for a phone call, but out there making work that can be seen by “important” others (Caust and Glow 2011, 7). In fact, some saw the Festival Fringe experience as providing a “launching” pad for their work (Caust and Glow 2011, 8).

Case study

To address the research question “What is the relationship between artists and open access arts festivals and what are the costs and benefits of participating for artists?”, a case study methodology has been utilized. Case studies allow for the development of rich data about a subject and employ a qualitative approach, allowing for different sources of material to be gathered and analyzed (Yin 2003). A qualitative methodology is a critical aspect of this study because, as has been noted already, most studies of festivals tend to be quantitative in nature and focus on numbers. This research is addressing different aspects of one festival to develop a rich picture, and the process includes gathering data from several sources, including interviews. In this way, the research question is addressed from different perspectives and is not the outcome of one source of data. One open access arts festival is the case study for this research: the South Australian Living Artists Festival (SALA).

In this study, we consider how SALA looks after the interests of their participating artists and what costs and benefits there are for artists who participate in such a festival. As part of the research process, a document search was undertaken of SALA’s annual reports and other material related to how the festival has evaluated itself over several years. While this study focuses on the outcomes of the 2017 Festival in particular, written material, media articles, and journal articles relating to previous festivals has also been examined. In addition, formal interviews were conducted with eight participating artists as well as the founder of the SALA Festival, Paul Greenaway.

SALA was initiated in 1998 by Paul Greenaway, a local gallery owner and long-time supporter of South Australian visual artists. He notes¹ that his intention when he began SALA was “to create an audience for the visual arts,” thereby benefiting artists in South Australia. SALA began as a week-long event and then became an annual month-long festival in August that concentrates on the presentation of work by visual artists. While SALA focuses on the work of South Australian visual artists, from emerging to established and across all mediums, artists from other states do participate through collaborations with local artists. The festival takes place throughout the state, and regional SALA events are seen as important as city events. It is seen as an “inclusive” event that does not distinguish between professional artists and amateurs (Nicholls 2015).

In the 2017 SALA Festival, its twentieth year, SALA had 660 free exhibitions in 560 venues profiling 6,282 artists (SALA Annual Report 2017). It received state government funding from Arts SA of AUD\$242,405 and had a total income of AUD\$546,238 in 2016. It is noted that, in 2017, SALA reached an audience of approximately 800,000 visitors over the period of the festival with more than 660 exhibitions in 560 venues and

more than 6,386 participating artists (SALA Annual Report 2017). In addition, there were 122 open studio and artists sessions (SALA Annual Report 2017). SALA further estimates that the festival generated sales of around AUD\$1,000,500 and generated overall AUD\$2.9 million in new state expenditure (SALA Annual Report 2017). There are prizes for SALA exhibiting artists in many different categories, so this is another incentive for artists to participate. At the 2017 SALA Festival, over AUD\$35,000 was awarded in prizes to participating artists. As an adjunct to the SALA Festival, each year a leading individual artist is chosen for a critique and retrospective of their work, and this is published as a high-quality book by South Australian publisher Wakefield Press. As of 2017, sixteen artists had been selected to be presented in this way. In addition, there are several artist residency programs in locations such as hospitals, universities, and arts centers for which artists can apply as part of participating in SALA. To register as a participant in SALA in 2017 cost the artist anywhere between AUD\$120 (£71) to AUD\$470 (£278), depending on the kind of venue, the type of show, and the number of artists involved.

SALA promotes itself as the largest visual arts event in Australia, and the use of its website means that artists participating in SALA get the opportunity of achieving widespread visual coverage for their work. The main costs for artists to participate are the initial registration fee and the cost of preparing their work for an exhibition. However, in some cases, there may be an additional financial outlay to prepare the venue for exhibition. But when artists are in group exhibitions, they often do not have to pay any registration fee. In addition, some local councils cover the cost of registration for their residents and then go on to promote the exhibitions and artists to visitors to their region. One local council in Adelaide develops a map of artists' studios and exhibition spaces for interested attendees to follow. Schools often get involved and pursue arts projects in August that are included in the festival program. At the regional level, there is often a high community involvement where events, such as sausage sizzles, are held in conjunction with SALA to celebrate the contribution of its residents.

SALA provides information to artists to understand how to present their work for maximum impact and how to deal with venue contracts, insurance issues, and other aspects of putting an exhibition together. Their role in arts development is more than just providing an opportunity to be seen; they also contribute to the professional development of the artist in a larger sense. In terms of providing ongoing training for artists, SALA also delivers workshops for artists participating in SALA to help them understand more about how to market and present their work. SALA also has a mechanism on their website where artists can develop and promote a portfolio of their work so that their work can be accessed and seen by a much broader audience than through their own networks. Artists can sign up at any time for this opportunity, upload up to ten images of their work, and provide an overview and biography for the audience to find out more information. In addition, SALA is now offering artists the opportunity to include links to Instagram on the SALA website. There is no public evidence that artists are complaining about SALA's role. On the contrary, there is generally a sense of support and respect for the SALA and the staff who look after it.

There were two full-time staff positions at SALA for the 2017 Festival, but during the lead up to the festival, more people were employed. There was a board of eleven individuals and the chair for the 2017 Festival was a former arts minister from the state

Table 1. The interviewees’ profiles.

Artists	Age	Status*
Bill	60+	Emerging
Sonya	25+	Emerging
Anna	35+	Established
Carol	50+	Mid-career
Tim	20+	Emerging
John	60+	Established
Maria	70+	Established
Therese	40+	Mid-career

*Key to status definitions: These definitions are not age-related.

government. SALA’s vision is: “To create and sustain an environment in which South Australian visual artists are supported, valued and celebrated” (SALA Website 2018).

As part of the process of understanding the SALA experience of artists, interviews were conducted by the researcher with eight artists, all of whom had already participated in several SALAs. These eight artists represented different levels of expertise; three were classified as emerging, two were seen as mid-career, and three were seen as established artists.² The interviewees were aged from their early twenties to their early seventies. There were three men and five women, and they were interviewed under the protocol of anonymity, so the names used in the following are not their real names (see Table 1).

- *Emerging*: less than five years after graduation or since identifying themselves as a professional artist.
- *Mid-career*: at least five years post-graduation and/or since identifying as a professional artist, with an independent body of work.
- *Established*: Seen as a successful and senior artist in their community with an established reputation and an extensive body of work (See Ober 2009).

The artists were interviewed individually, in their home, in their studio, in a nearby café, or over the phone, for a period of up to ninety minutes. As the festival is an open access event, some people who participate in it might be called “amateurs” rather than professional artists; however, all of the individuals who were interviewed saw themselves as professional, practicing artists. Three individuals framed themselves as full-time professional artists only later in their lives (John, Bill, and Carol), after previously working full-time in other roles. Three interviewees worked in galleries to supplement their incomes (Therese, Carol, and Tim). Two interviewees (Maria and Tim) undertook part-time teaching as another way to supplement their income. Two interviewees (Sonya and Anna) relied solely on their arts practice to support them. The artists were asked several questions about their participation in SALA and their views about SALA. Their responses were then structured and analyzed around different themes. Some of the main issues that emerged from the interviews are summarized in the following, with comments interspersed from the artists.

Summary of outcomes

Why do you participate in SALA?

All of the artists who were interviewed had already participated in SALA several times, the average being around five times. This means that some of the interviewees began

participating in SALA during their training and some of the established artists had been in the first SALA in 1998. Two interviewees said that they had participated more than ten times (Therese and Anna) and believed that it was inevitable that they would be participating in one way or another again. Two other artists recorded that SALA offered the opportunity to be seen at several venues and in several exhibitions simultaneously (Maria and Carol). All of the artists interviewed saw their participation in SALA in a positive framing, although a couple of the established artists interviewed indicated that they now participated with some reluctance (John and Maria). For some, it gave them the chance for their work to be seen, and others participated because they loved being part of it:

Wanted to show my work to a wider audience... very welcoming to any artists of any practice and any reputation. (Tim)

It has given me opportunities and invitations to be seen at several venues. (Carol)

Participating in SALA, particularly in the case of emerging artists, was seen as a critical step for their development as an artist. The open access nature of the event also meant that participants indicated that they felt included and acknowledged, no matter what their practice, level of experience, or skill:

Such a great platform initially for artists. (Anna)

It is a sensible time to show. I've always been aware of it. It also fosters a sense of community. (Sonya)

It gave them the opportunity to receive feedback from other artists and to feel that they belonged to a community of artists. In addition, the staff at SALA try to assist new participating artists in whatever way they can to meet others involved and learn about ways of maximizing their SALA experience:

The first time I approached SALA they ran a welcoming ceremony for you to meet other artists and give you the opportunity to share your work. ... It was really important for me as I had never exhibited before. (Tim)

Being in SALA also provided a goal or motivation to complete a body of work so that there was enough material for an exhibition. Alternatively, it offered an excuse to go in a different direction artistically and take risks that the artist might not have taken otherwise:

Being involved in SALA gives you a goal in terms of doing work. (Bill)

Ways of developing new body of work. (Anna)

There was a sense overall that SALA was a wonderful time of celebration for the visual arts:

When it first started off, I thought it was fantastic. ... How much pleasure arts practice gives and how much pleasure it gives to look at other peoples' work. (Maria)

I love SALA because so many people are excited about art. (Sonya)

This recognition and acknowledgment of the visual arts and of artists was something that all of the interviewees valued highly. Nevertheless, there was an indication by the

established artists that the size of the event is starting to become a disincentive for their own participation:

I have said that I didn't want to be in SALA again because no one pays any attention. (Maria)

I don't think professional artists get anything out of it because it is just so big and diluted and distracting. (John)

Now it's so busy I might not choose to be involved. (Anna)

What were your costs? Did you sell any work?

For some artists, SALA provides a platform for promotion of their work, leading to sales and commissions. The nature of SALA attracts the attention of potential buyers so that when they look at the work, they often also engage with the artists more personally:

I get several commissions at SALA time. (Sonya)

Big work load for limited monetary reward. But it brings more promotion and gets you known in Adelaide. In a way it has put me on the map. (Carol)

Thus, there can be a considerable cost involved for the artist but, on the other hand, the festival offers promotion for the artist that can have a long-term benefit:

You don't make any money but it provides an incentive. ... [G]etting out and selling it is hard. (Bill)

This artist also notes that, given that the nature of their work is solitary, to then try and be entrepreneurial and market oriented is challenging. However, one artist observed that, in their first SALA:

I sold about three or four works and then sold more after that. (John)

Another artist noted that while they did not sell work at the actual exhibition, afterwards they received a commission from an audience member (Maria).

What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of SALA?

An important characteristic of SALA is that it includes exhibition venues that are not normally used for that purpose. This means that spaces that are not necessarily set up for showing work become galleries during the month of SALA. This use of alternative spaces has positive sides to it, as it transforms cafes, public institutions, shops, or businesses of one sort or another into temporary galleries.

In the context of an "artist run" culture, it provides an opportunity for dis-used spaces to become galleries. (Therese)

It encourages places/venues not usually associated with art to have exhibitions. (Bill)

This also means that new audiences are often exposed to art for the first time, and this can bring many positive outcomes. For example, it can arouse an interest in visual art that previously wasn't there.

It has been successful in encouraging more people to go out and look at art. (Therese)

But it is noted that while there are large audiences for the visual arts during SALA, these numbers may not convert to increased attendance at gallery shows at other times of the year (John).

If the venue has participated in SALA several times, they may be quite knowledgeable about how to mount an exhibition and support the artists. However, if the venue is new to SALA, it may not know how to mount an exhibition, and the artist may have to do all of the hanging and managing of the exhibition. This can involve more time and money on the part of the artist. Further, the space may have limitations that can compromise the showing of the work. This might mean that a potential audience is challenged by the experience of trying to see the work.

Some venues don't understand what an art exhibition might require. (Tim)

Some venues that have been involved previously may approach artists directly to participate in a show at their venue and vice versa. In fact, some artists develop an ongoing working relationship with their SALA venue that continues outside of SALA time. However, artists who are newer to the process may have less profile and therefore find it harder to initially get the interest of a venue. This can cause a challenge for some artists:

It is hard finding a venue however. (Bill)

A feature of SALA, as noted earlier, is the “open studio” program where artists open their studios for a day or so for the public to visit. This can be both a positive and negative experience. One artist says that it encourages people to come and visit who may want to copy her ideas, people she calls “art stalkers,” so she finds the open studio scenario somewhat challenging. Nevertheless, she notes:

Open studios give many otherwise isolated artists an opportunity to meet the public. (Carol)

Another artist relishes the contact with her potential audience and finds that she gets a lot of interest in her work through opening her studio (Sonya). Inviting others into the artist's space can also have other spin-offs. Artists visit other artists in their studios, and people who may be too nervous to venture into a gallery get exposed to both an artist's work and their process.

I invite others in and get invited to see the work of others. It supports us all. (Sonya)

As noted earlier, it can also facilitate the development of a closer relationship between the audience and the artists, leading to more knowledge and understanding and the possibility of getting commissioned work.

What are the outcomes of your participation in SALA?

There are several responses to this question, depending on the level of the experience and attainment of the artist. For example, an emerging artist comments that:

It's very emotional when you see your first exhibition. Seeing people looking at it is quite exciting. (Bill)

For another, the whole experience of preparing work, mounting it, and then having people come and see it plays an important developmental role for the individual artist:

My SALA experience has helped me develop as an artist. (Tim)

Other benefits of being in SALA are noted:

It has certainly expanded access to my own work and provided a few sales and meant that people have written about my work in different mediums. (Therese)

There were also comments that being involved in the event overall provides a stimulus for doing new work (Anna). It is also a forum where artists get to meet and see each other's work, and thus provides an important networking opportunity (Carol). But, for a more experienced artist, the excitement of SALA has faded:

In the beginning I enjoyed going to all the exhibitions and tried to be encouraging. ... [N]ow I have a bit of a problem with it re quality, in the sense that anybody can call themselves an "artist." (Maria)

Future engagement with SALA

Most of the artists interviewed indicated that they wanted to continue their involvement with SALA. It represented to them an important part of their artistic development, which they saw as essential:

It is a nice time of year to touch base with your community and stay connected. SALA participation is great. (Sonya)

They all seemed to suggest that it was part of their calendar of artistic activity and was valued by them for the various opportunities it presented. Indeed, it seemed that being part of SALA was seen as a prerequisite to being seen as a practicing visual artist in South Australia.

There was respect expressed for the organizers and the limitations within which they worked. It was well recognized that SALA functions with very limited funding and financial support. The staff of SALA were therefore seen as supporting the artists and working with them to produce amazing outcomes, despite their own limited resources:

All the SALA staff work hard and they are doing great things with limited resources. (Anna)

But there was an indication from some interviewees that established artists may choose not to participate in the future:

...those who have degrees and have invested a lot of time into their careers find SALA an insult to their practice. Some established artists don't participate. Some galleries don't want SALA shows. (Carol)

It has become too open ended, lacks focus and lacks professionalism. (John)

It is less helpful to mid-career and senior artists. I think there is a challenge now where professional artists fit in the mix. (Therese)

These are important issues for the organizers to consider. If both established artists and well-known galleries do not participate in SALA in the future, the event itself may become only identified with emerging artists and community practices. Further, some interviewees suggested that, given the size of the current event, it might be time to consider approaching it differently and include a curated section:

I think it should have 2 sections: a curated section and an open access section and make very clear distinctions between the two. (Maria)

However, there is a major implication if this occurred, as having a curated section would change the nature of the open access event.

Discussion

From the discussion with these artists, the statistics related to artist participation, and the analysis of ways the festival contributes to the artists' development, this festival plays an important and significant role in the professional development of visual artists and the creation of new work in South Australia. SALA is an open access festival, which means that anyone who wants to participate can, without the process being mandated by gatekeepers. In fact, it seems that it is seen as a rite of passage for South Australian artists to participate in SALA as an acknowledgment that they are a visual artist. By being in SALA, they believe that they join a "community of artists" and feel then that they have a place where they belong. In addition, they feel that SALA is a celebration of art where they, as the artists, are the lead players. The festival continues to play an important role in expanding audiences for the visual arts, as was originally intended by its founder. However, there is some concern that the large numbers of audiences recorded during SALA do not automatically convert to increasing audiences at galleries at other times of the year. This was also the view of the festival's founder and gallery owner, Paul Greenaway, who noted that the audience for SALA was now enormous, but it was not obvious that this translated to larger audiences at galleries at other times of the year.

The SALA Festival develops artists by teaching them how to present their work for exhibition, how to work with galleries (and how to exhibit outside of conventional galleries), and how to market their work. The festival is particularly suited for emerging artists as a way to develop their craft, as well as a means of connecting with a broader community. Artists also get the opportunity to meet "the public" who visit their studio, providing another layer of experience that contributes to getting more confidence as a practicing artist. They also network with each other and share ideas about art that can be helpful and affirming. SALA provides traditional prizes and awards that highlight the work of particular artists, which is another incentive to participate. Most work exhibited in the SALA Festival can be purchased, providing additional income for artists. Further, it is noted that the profile of being in SALA can lead to other work and commissions for the artist. In addition, SALA celebrates the work of a leading South Australian artist every year through the publication of a book about an artist, featuring their work.

With a focus on the development of artists, the presentation of new work, and the shifting of boundaries around the nature and making of art, it seems that this festival makes an important contribution to society, which is potentially more important than the economic benefits the festival may generate (Brown 2006; Klammer 2002; Lankoski, Smith, and Wassenhove 2016). In fact, it is arguable that SALA plays "above its weight," given the amount of funding it receives and the benefits it generates. SALA as an overall concept is primarily focused on developing new audiences for the arts, as well as encouraging the development of artists, particularly emerging artists. This aspect of the

festival is acknowledged and respected by the artists. There is no evidence of resentment or hostility towards the organizers, as seems to have occurred in other events (George 2015; Glance 2015; Greer 2015; McDonald 2016; Watts 2016). In fact, the artists note how the small number of staff go out of their way to attend most of the events and help artists as much as they can. Further, the desire to continue to participate in the event by most of the artists interviewed is a sign that the event provides value for them, which is not necessarily related to economic outcomes. This is also evidenced by the increasing number of participating artists and venues each year.

But there are challenges for artists participating in the festival that need to be recognized and, in some cases, may need addressing. Visual artists appearing in SALA must cover the costs of presenting their work—e.g., framing or mounting—and may also have to cover the costs of marketing the venue, if it is a new or unusual space. In some cases, they have to prepare the venue to be a gallery, as it may not be normally used for this purpose. Further, one artist suggested that the open studio experience sometimes facilitated poor behavior by other artists and the public. Most of the artists indicated that they did not make money from being in SALA. If they are able to sell their work, then they may cover their initial outlay costs. While SALA would be seen as a successful arts festival, given its history, growth, and recognition (Getz and Andersson 2008), and a successful event for artistic development for all of the artists involved, the capacity for artists to make money from their involvement in the festival is limited.

Another developing challenge is that, with the amount of work being presented, more experienced artists are starting to feel lost in the event and suggest that they might receive more individual attention from critics and audiences outside of the festival dates. Further, the quantity of work also affects the overall quality, and some more established artists are already deciding that being in SALA is less attractive to them because of issues around the overall quality of the work on display (i.e., the brand of SALA is becoming associated with low quality). Some galleries are also taking this view, so that both established artists and well-known galleries may choose to not participate in the future. This could make the event seem more about emerging artists, community cultural development, and amateur practices than to be seen as an event for visual artists at all levels. It could also affect the perceived quality of the event overall.

The focus for recording the festival's success is related to numbers: the number of events, the numbers attending, the numbers of artists, and the economic outcomes generated by the event (SALA Annual Report 2017). While these statistics also include the overall income from sale of work during the festival, the costs and the individual income made by the participating artists are not recorded. Gathering this form of data would be challenging, but it might provide another layer to the economic picture of the festival. While SALA is unique and demonstrates a heightened awareness of contemporary needs, it is likely that a continued focus on an ever-increasing festival size may not necessarily benefit the artists involved (Andersson, Getz, and Mykletun 2013; Getz and Andersson 2008).

The emergence of artists protesting at several open access arts festivals over the past few years suggests that the model of being bigger all the time may not be sustainable in the longer term (George 2015; Glance 2015; Greer 2015; McDonald 2016; Richardson 2016; Watts 2016). Certainly, the hyperbole about being in a festival is

attractive, but the reality for many is that they do not receive the exposure they expected and are liable to incur much greater expense than they had envisaged. This disquiet is already been talked about by the more experienced artists. It may be time for large open access festivals, such as SALA, to consider different framings for participating artists, so that artists do not feel lost or exploited in the maelstrom of a huge festival.

Alternatively, satellite specialist festivals may begin to emerge that cater to both audiences and artists who have indicated that they can become lost in a larger event. The advantage of specialist art form festivals such as SALA is that the focus on one art form can be enhanced in different ways by “add-ons” to the festival. In SALA’s case, this includes artists’ forums, artist in residency programs, and the profiling of individual artists through their website and in publications. Nevertheless, it may be time for SALA to consider, as has been suggested here, that there be a curated section in addition to the open section, to accommodate artists at different levels of development.

Conclusion

Arts festivals play a major role in the arts calendar, but their economic value to the community is frequently given a higher profile than their contributions in other areas, especially arts development and arts practice. Arts festivals originally were places to see the best of arts practice. It is now suggested that this vision has been negatively affected by the need to please funders, sponsors, and other stakeholders. In particular, there is a perceived need to generate ever larger audiences and demonstrate positive, community-wide economic outcomes that may not be in the best interest of the participating artists, nor the art form as a whole.

Open access arts festivals developed as an alternative to mainstream arts festivals and were seen as sites of new and often exciting arts practice. However, like high arts festivals before them, open access arts festivals have become influenced by an obsession with numbers. At present, it seems that the model of the large open access arts festival requires the artists to carry most of the economic risk. If that risk cannot be balanced by other rewards, then the attraction to participate in these festivals becomes significantly reduced. In the case of SALA, most of the artists interviewed valued their involvement with the festival and want to continue that engagement. However, there was a warning from more established artists that the value of SALA involvement is decreasing for them as the size and breadth of the event increase.

As “open access” arts festivals developed in reaction to the perceived élitism of high art festivals, it may be time to once more consider an alternative model. There is an argument presented here that a focus on the needs of artists and art forms may ensure that an arts festival can successfully serve the needs of artists/art forms as well as audiences. If that focus is embedded, it may be possible to contribute to arts development at a deeper level and be an incubator for new and cutting-edge arts practice. In that scenario, artists may see real value in their festival experience. It can also benefit the audience, as it may provide a deeper engagement and an enhanced learning experience.

Notes

1. Paul Greenaway in interview with the author, February 9, 2019.
2. See more ways of defining the stages of an artist's development at: <http://www.bmoreart.com/2009/07/differences-between-emerging-mid-career.html>

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all of the artists interviewed for this research, as well as the administrators of SALA; Penny Griggs and Kate Moskwa, who helped to facilitate this process as well provide other key information about the festival.

References

- Andersson, T. D., D. Getz, and R. Mykletun. 2013. "The 'Festival Size Pyramid' in Three Norwegian Festival Populations." *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism* 14 (2):81–103.
- Arcodia, C., and M. Whitford. 2006. "Festival Attendance and the Development of Social Capital." *Journal of Convention and Event Tourism* 8 (2):1–18. doi: [10.1300/J452v08n02_01](https://doi.org/10.1300/J452v08n02_01).
- Belfiore, E. 2004. "Auditing Culture." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 10 (2):183–202. doi: [10.1080/10286630042000255808](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630042000255808).
- Bellinger, C. 2015. "Is Going to Edinburgh Fringe Worth it?" ARTSHUB. Accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/career-advice/performing-arts/caroline-bellinger/is-going-to-edinburgh-fringe-worth-it-248971>
- Bordeau, L., L. De Coster, and S. Paradis. 2001. "Measuring Satisfaction among Festivalgoers: Differences between Tourists and Residents as Visitors to a Music Festival in an Urban Environment." *International Journal of Arts Management* 3 (1):40–50.
- Bowdin, G. 2005. "An Investigation into the Effectiveness of Arts Festivals Evaluation." Event Management Conference Proceedings. Australian Centre for Event Management. Sydney: University of Technology, July.
- Brown, A. 2006. "An Architecture of Value." *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 17 (1):18–23.
- Brown, S., D. Getz, R. Pettersson, and M. Wallstam. 2015. "Event Evaluation: Definitions, Concepts and a State of the Art Review." *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 6 (2):135–57. doi: [10.1108/IJEFM-03-2015-0014](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-03-2015-0014).
- Burgan, B. 2009. "Arts, Culture and the Economy – A Review of the Practice as to How the Arts and the Economy are Understood to Interact." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management*, 8 (2):457–470.
- Caust, J., and H. Glow. 2011. "Festivals, Artists and Entrepreneurialism: The Role of the Adelaide Fringe Festival." *International Journal of Event Management Research* 6 (2):1–14.
- Crespi-Vallbona, M., and G. Richards. 2007. "The Meaning of Cultural Festivals; Stakeholder Perspectives in Catalunya." *The International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13 (1):103–22. doi: [10.1080/10286630701201830](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630701201830).
- Crompton, J., and S. McKay. 1997. "Motives of Visitors Attending Festival Events." *Annals of Tourism Research* 24 (2):425–39. doi: [10.1016/S0160-7383\(97\)80010-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(97)80010-2).
- Edinburgh Fringe. 2018. <https://www.edfringe.com/experience/what-is-the-festival-fringe>
- Finkel, R. 2006. "Tensions between Ambition and Reality in UK Combined Arts Festival Programming: Case Study of the Lichfield Festival." *International Journal of Event Management Research* 2 (1):25–36.
- Finkel, R. 2010. "Re-Imaging Arts Festivals through a Corporate Lens: A Case Study of Business Sponsorship at the Henley Festival." *Managing Leisure* 15 (4):237–50. doi: [10.1080/13606719.2010.508664](https://doi.org/10.1080/13606719.2010.508664).
- Fredline, L., L. Jago, and M. Deery. 2003. "The Development of a Generic Scale to Measure the Social Impacts of Events." *Event Management* 8 (1):23–38. doi: [10.3727/152599503108751676](https://doi.org/10.3727/152599503108751676).

- Gardner, L. 2016. "Festival in a Flash: Theatre Companies Keep Edinburgh Visits Short and Sweet." *The Guardian*. Accessed August 8, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatre-blog/2016/aug/07/festival-theatre-edinburgh-visits>
- George, J. 2015. "Examining the Cultural Value of Festivals Considerations of Creative Destruction and Creative Enhancement within the Rural Environment." *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 6 (2):122–34. doi: 10.1108/IJEFM-01-2015-0002.
- Getz, D., and T. Andersson. 2008. "Sustainable Festivals: On Becoming an Institution." *Event Management* 12 (1):1–17. doi: 10.3727/152599509787992625.
- Glance, V. 2015. "Forget Passion – Unpaid Work Keeps Fringe Festivals Afloat." *The Conversation*. Accessed February 9, 2015. <https://theconversation.com/forget-passion-unpaid-work-keeps-fringe-festivals-afloat-36777>
- Greer, S. 2015. "Defying the Norm? Hardly, the Edinburgh Fringe Defines It." *The Conversation*. Accessed August 7, 2015. <https://theconversation.com/defying-the-norm-hardly-the-edinburgh-fringe-defines-it-45474>
- Gursoy, D., K. Kim, and M. Uysal. 2004. "Perceived Impacts of Festivals and Special Events by Organizers: An Extension and Validation." *Tourism Management* 25 (2):171–82. doi: 10.1016/S0261-5177(03)00092-X.
- Hede, A.-M. 2007. "Managing Special Events in the New Era of the Triple Bottom Line." *Event Management* 11 (1):13–22. doi: 10.3727/152599508783943282.
- Klamer, A. 2002. "Accounting for Social and Cultural Values." *De Economist* 150 (4):453–73. doi: 10.1023/A:1020146202001.
- Lankoski, L., N. Craig Smith, and L. Van Wassenhove. 2016. "Stakeholder Judgments of Value." *Business Ethics Quarterly* 26 (2):227–256.
- McDonald, P. 2016. "Adelaide Fringe Director Heather Croall Says Arts are a Business, After Complaints by Comedian Alexis Dubus." *The Advertiser*, March 7. Accessed December 13, 2016. <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/entertainment/adelaide-fringe/adelaide-fringe-director-heather-croall-says-arts-are-a-business-after-complaints-by-comedian-alexis-dubus/news-story/2727f9a514effd4b5f73508aba142220>
- Meyrick, J. 2015. "Numbers, Schnumbers." *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 6 (2):99–110. doi: 10.1108/IJEFM-04-2015-0021.
- Nicholls, C. 2015. "The South Australian Living Artists Festival is Like No Other – See for Yourself." *The Conversation*, July 31. Accessed November 3, 2015. <http://theconversation.com/the-south-australian-living-artists-festival-is-like-no-other-see-for-yourself-44952>
- Ober, C. 2009. "Differences Between Emerging, Mid-Career, and Established Artists: Professional Practices for Visual Artists." *Bmore Art*, July 5. <http://www.bmoreart.com/2009/07/differences-between-emerging-mid-career.html>
- Pretorius, S. C., P. Viviers, and K. Botha. 2014. "Is it Still about the Arts? The Perceived Contribution of KKNK to the Arts." *South African Theatre Journal* 27 (3):159–82. doi: 10.1080/10137548.2014.910964.
- Richardson, T. 2016. "Adelaide Fringe: The Worst Ever Say Artists Blaming 'Entitled' Audiences." *Daily Review*, March 7. Accessed December 13, 2016. <https://dailyreview.com.au/adelaide-fringe-the-worst-ever-say-artists-blaming-entitled-audiences/38301/>
- SALA Annual Report. 2017. <https://www.salafestival.com/m/downloads/maps/SALA-report-2017-16pp-A4-FINAL-lowres.pdf>
- SALA Website. 2018. <https://www.salafestival.com/>
- Throsby, D. 1999. "Cultural Capital." *Journal of Cultural Economics* 23 (1/2):3–12. doi: 10.1023/A:1007543313370.
- Wardrop, K., and A. Leask. 2016. "Edinburgh Festivals: How They Became the World's Biggest Arts Event." *The Conversation*. Accessed August 5, 2016. <https://theconversation.com/edinburgh-festivals-how-they-became-the-worlds-biggest-arts-event>
- Waterman, S. 1998. "Carnivals for Elites? The Cultural Politics of Arts Festivals." *Progress in Human Geography* 22 (1):54–74. doi: 10.1191/030913298672233886.

- Watts, R. 2016. "Fringe Artists Fight for Support as Festival Numbers Swell." *ArtsHub*. Accessed March 11, 2016. <http://www.artshub.com.au/festival/news-article/features/trends-and-analysis/richard-watts/fringe-artists-fight-for-support-as-festival-numbers-swell-250763>
- Whitelock, D. 1980. *Festival! The Story of the Adelaide Festival of Arts*. Adelaide: Griffin Press.
- Williams, M., and G. A. J. Bowdin. 2007. "Festival Evaluation: An Exploration of Seven UK Arts Festivals." *Managing Leisure* 12 (2–3):187–203. doi: [10.1080/13606710701339520](https://doi.org/10.1080/13606710701339520).
- Yin, R. 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.