

SMA!

STUDY VISIT REPORT

D FESTIVAL, North Macedonia

1-3, July 2022

DISCLAIMER

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Introduction

The SMA! (Small Festivals Accelerator) project aims to create a sustainable development model for small and medium-sized festivals in peripheral Europe. In 2022, the consortium conducted three study visits to the festivals, partner of the project, in Germany, North Macedonia, and Italy to identify best practices and challenges.

These visits provided insights into innovative strategies for community engagement, environmental sustainability, and enhancing local identity.

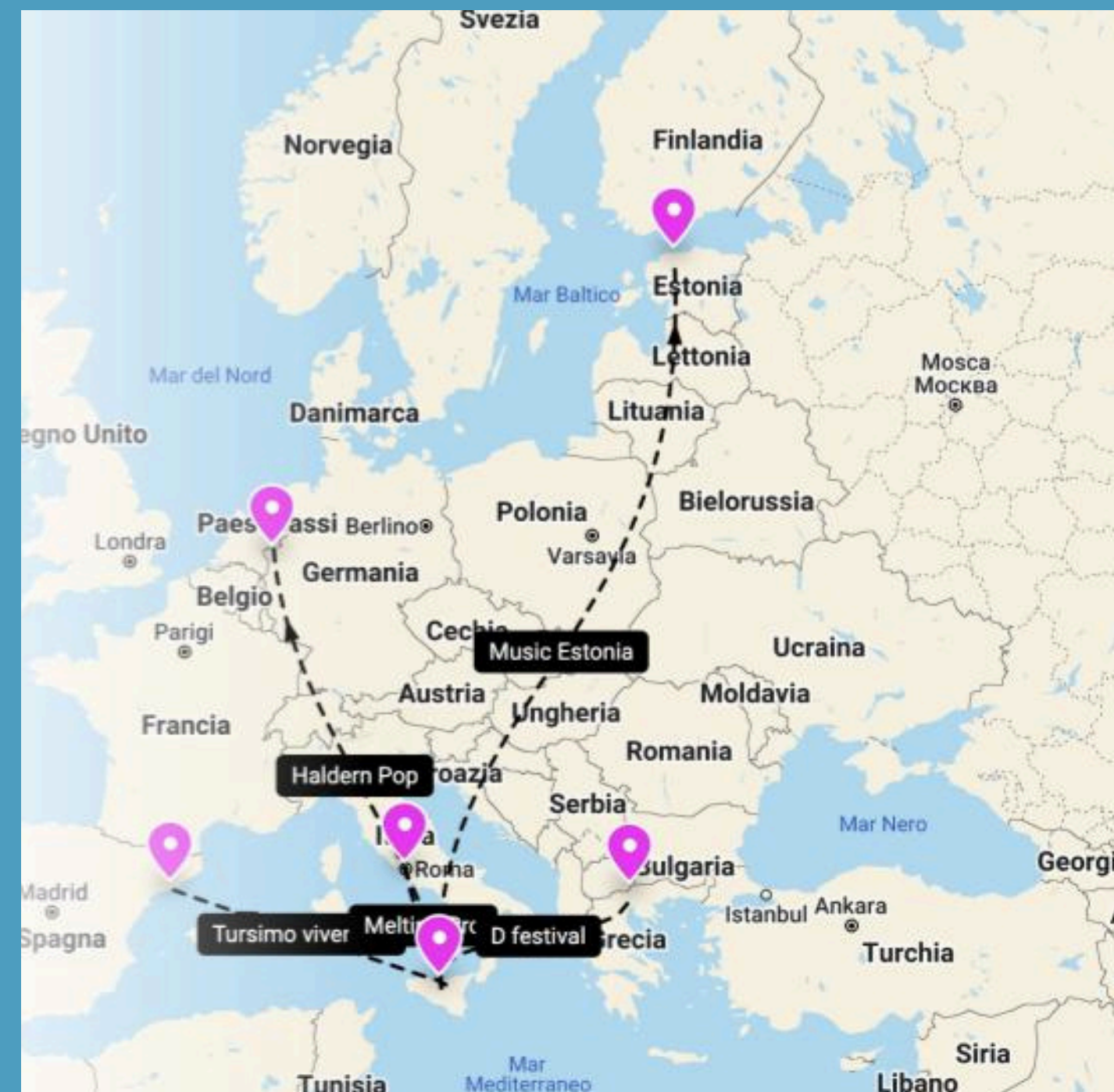
The findings contribute to a transferable business model that supports festivals and fosters socio-economic growth in their regions, as summarized in this report.

D Festival: Overview and Context

D Festival, established in 2011 by Password Production, is a landmark event held annually on the scenic shores of Dojran Lake, North Macedonia.

Known for its deep-rooted community engagement, the festival is co-curated with local audiences, offering a mix of music, social activities, and inclusive initiatives.

It has become a symbol of Dojran, significantly impacting the local economy and identity



D Festival: Overview and Context

It is a young festival always held in a perfect atmosphere.

D Festival is a value-based and community-programmed festival that is “Responding to a need for an independent platform” in the local area. Their audience is mainly local, and the team would like to expand the attractiveness of tourism.

“The trademark for the D festival is the community engagement”, and it helps strengthen the democracy of the city because the content is made by citizens



D Festival: Unique value proposition



Democratic Community Engagement:

The festival is a community-driven and value-based event, responding to a local need for an independent platform. It distinguishes itself through active citizen participation, with content creation and programming handed over to participants. Good volunteering programme to engage young people.

D Festival: Details

D Festival, North Macedonia

Interviewee: Login Kochishki, director

Location: Dojran, which is a very small town at the border with Greece, North Macedonia, Skopje

Nearest international airport: Thessaloniki

International Airport and Skopje Airport.

Main transport: bus/car

First edition: 2011

Capacity (tickets on sale): 10.000 and facilities

Camping



BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

The festival stands out for its co-curation model, where local residents actively contribute to programming, inclusion of the community people through different free time activity spaces – football stage, board games etc. “As one of the stage was managed by locals themselves, it showed a very clever and hopefully a continuous way of implementing the strategy “

(by Music Estonia)



BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

Dedicated spaces for community activities, such as debates on societal issues, board games, and locally managed stages, create an inclusive atmosphere (by Music Estonia)

“Let’s talk about” - Debate Space to exchange views, raise awareness and make known issues such as cyberbullying.



BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

A mental health stand and workshops promote awareness and social well-being
(by TurismoVivencial and Melting Pro)



BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

Volunteer Management:

Volunteers play a pivotal role in the festival's operations, gaining valuable experience and contributing to a structured, yet inclusive, team environment.

Specific shifts, access to exclusive areas, and provision of meals ensure a positive volunteer experience



(By Glenn Gould and Halder Pop)



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BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

Volunteer Management:

Effective coordination and the fact that the volunteers are from across Europe contributed significantly to the festival's success.

The festival creates a platform for international knowledge exchange, reflecting broader cultural and social values



(By Glenn Gould and Halder Pop)



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BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

Local Identity:

The festival leverages its natural setting and cultural heritage, using venues like the church for events and showcasing young Macedonian artists. This enhances the local character and authenticity of the festival



Local Identity

Use of Local Venues:

Unique settings, such as a lakeside park and a church, highlight the region's cultural and natural heritage

Focus on Regional Talent:

Young Macedonian artists are prominently featured, showcasing and supporting local talent

Economic Impact:

The festival contributes significantly to the local economy, stimulating investment in infrastructure, accommodation, and businesses



BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

Environmental Sustainability:

Innovative practices, such as using festival cards for transactions and raising awareness about waste management, reflect a growing commitment to environmental responsibility



BEST PRACTICES OBSERVED

Inclusive Practices:

Gender balance is maintained in staff and volunteer roles, while the festival's marketplace promotes female artisans.

Efforts to include people with disabilities through accessible infrastructure and activities underscore the festival's inclusive ethos

Gender-Neutral Facilities: All toilets and showers are gender-neutral, reflecting a practical and inclusive approach



Tourism and Economic Development:

The festival attracts regional audiences, boosting local businesses, accommodation facilities, and the municipality's revenue. Plans for campervan parks and solar-powered boats illustrate a forward-looking approach to enhancing tourist infrastructure



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D Festival serves as a prime example of how a small-scale festival can significantly impact its community and region. Its emphasis on local identity, community ownership, and sustainable practices align closely with SMA!'s objectives.

The insights from this study visit can inform the development of a replicable and adaptable model for festivals in other peripheral areas. However, challenges like improving accessibility and securing sustainable funding remain areas for further exploration and strategic planning

Voices from the Field

- **Festival Organizers:** The organizers emphasize creating an inclusive and vibrant environment that mirrors the diversity and energy of larger international festivals while being rooted in local culture
- **Local Government:** Officials highlighted the festival's role in boosting regional tourism and local investments, such as in accommodation and public infrastructure
- **Volunteers and Participants:** Many volunteers expressed pride in their roles and noted the festival's relaxed, inclusive atmosphere. A psychologist providing support at the mental health stand commended the festival's innovative focus on
- **Challenges Noted:** Some locals feel disconnected from the festival, viewing it primarily as a business opportunity rather than a cultural event. This highlights the need for deeper integration of the festival into the community

Conclusion

D Festival serves as a vibrant example of how festivals can balance community engagement, cultural expression, and sustainability.

Key recommendations for enhancing its impact include:

1. Strengthening community integration by involving locals in planning and decision-making processes.
2. Expanding environmental initiatives with better recycling systems and eco-friendly alternatives.
3. Enhancing accessibility and inclusion, ensuring that festival spaces are welcoming for all.

These observations and practices will contribute to the broader goals of the SMA! project, promoting resilient and impactful cultural festivals across Europe



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Federica Taeko Centra - Melting Pro, Italy

Silvia Punzo - Melting Pro, Italy

Guadalupe Fili -Turismo Vivencial

Vincenzo Barreca - Ypsigrock, Glenn Gould Italy

Gianfranco Raimondo - Ypsigrock, Glenn Gould Italy

Robert Baumann - Haldern Pop Festival - Germany

Ave Tölpt - Music Estonia, Estonia

D Festival Team



