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Showcasing European Music Festival Networks

Ahlers, Rob

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Showcasing European Music Festival Networks

The Case of Eurosonic Noorderslag

Robertus Bernardus Ahlers

Showcasing European Music Festival Networks

The Case of Eurosonic Noorderslag

Doctoral thesis, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

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Showcasing European Music Festival Networks

The Case of Eurosonic Noorderslag

PhD thesis

to obtain the degree of PhD at the
University of Groningen
on the authority of the
Rector Magnificus Prof. C. Wijmenga
and in accordance with
the decision by the College of Deans.

This thesis will be defended in public on

Monday 1 March 2021 at 14.30 hours

by

Robertus Bernardus Ahlers

born on 16 August 1976
in Schoonebeek

Supervisor

Prof. S.M. Strandvad

Co-supervisor

Dr. K.A. McGee

Assessment Committee

Prof. L.C. Bieger

Prof. E.H. Bisschop Boele

Prof. G. McKay

Dedicated to the loving memory of my mother
J.A. (Anneke) Ahlers-Geerdink

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Abstract

In recent years, and before the dramatic downturn of festivals under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European popular music festival market has seen a considerable growth in the number of showcase festivals: those music industry events which showcase new musical talent, provide a platform for music industry networking, and are often held across multiple days, primarily in urban spaces. These events represent the annual (re) configuration of the European (live) music industry; it solidifies and extends the often rhizome-like connections and updates the knowledge canon of the ways in which festivals function in society. Despite their multi-faceted cultural significance, however, there is a notable gap in academic research which critically investigates these showcase events and traces their connections to local and translocal networks. This lacuna is addressed here by exploring the ways in which the Eurosonic Noorderslag festival has become the main fulcrum of the European transnational music industry. In its 35-year existence, the *European Music and Showcase Festival Eurosonic Noorderslag* has developed into the leading platform for the promotion of European music repertoire. Each year in January, the northern Dutch city of Groningen takes central stage in positioning European popular music as a core component of contemporary European culture. A detailed account of its history explores how this festival's social, ethnographical and cultural processes have facilitated its successful development from 1986 until the present. Its explicit focus on the circulation of European repertoire – as opposed to Anglo-American repertoire – invokes questions about European identity formation and utilization. In other words, how is it performed and how is it perceived? Then, the artistic reality of participating festival musicians will be examined. Due to its award culture and mediated character, Eurosonic Noorderslag serves as a stepping-stone for upcoming groups and artists internationally. But what is the significance for participating artists? What does participating in this festival do for the sustainability of artists' careers? These questions are addressed by focusing on career trajectories of artists from the northern part of the Netherlands. Narratives and experiences from musicians from this specific area trace back to debates about local representation in early festival editions and provides a new – and often obscured – perspective on the utility of showcase festival performances. Finally, three other showcase festivals provide the foil to which Eurosonic is compared and contrasted. Taken together, these perspectives present an original contribution to knowledge about the (European) music industry and its culture, in that it introduces the first multi-perspective account on the *showcase* festivals specifically. It reveals why these festivals matter for culture in society and synthesizes practical and theoretical perspectives upon which festival scholars can build.

Acknowledgments

When I decided to “go back to school” and pursue an academic career back in 2011, I never thought that acquiring a PhD degree would eventually become reality. At that point I had been a professional musician (drummer) and teacher for about ten years, with nothing else in my pocket but my practical musical skills and experience – and curiosity. While it has been a great privilege, one can imagine that conducting research and writing a dissertation is also challenging at times. It is a mostly solitary undertaking and having a deadline somewhere on the distant horizon can easily make you lose focus and look for some welcome distractions. Also, it was not always easy to find out which perspectives were important to elaborate on, and which claims to substantiate. After all, the more answers I got, the more questions arose. Needless to say, I couldn’t have done this by myself and I owe gratitude to many people.

First of all, I am indebted greatly to my “daily” supervisor and co-promotor Dr. Kristin McGee, who has been a guide throughout my academic development as a scholar and has never failed to provide useful and substantive feedback on my drafts. Also, her efforts in providing opportunities to further my academic career, such as drawing attention to job positions, conferences and publishing opportunities have been invaluable to my academic career trajectory. To Prof. Sara Malou Strandvad I remain grateful for her thoughtful and insightful guidance throughout the process, which has made all the difference to me.

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Introduction

An article in the Dutch local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, dated January 5th 1991, reads: “Noorderslag succesvol, maar hoe nu verder?” (*Noorderslag successful, but how to continue?*). The article describes the course of the fifth edition of “the only music festival that provides a representative image of Dutch popular music.” In this fifth edition, in 1991, Noorderslag attracted a larger crowd (2800) and more bands (34) than previous editions, which led to the question of how the festival was prepared to deal with its audience capacity problems. Could Noorderslag maintain its newly achieved reputation as an exciting event, as the supply of young and talented Dutch bands was then “too limited to have a surprising and exciting program on every edition,” according to this newspaper critic. Today, however, the *European Music and Showcase Festival Eurosonic Noorderslag*, as it is referred to now, claims international recognition as the leading music festival to promote regional, national, and European music talent. In its thirty-five-year existence, the *European Music and Showcase Festival Eurosonic Noorderslag* has developed into the leading platform for the European music industry. Each year in January, the Dutch city of Groningen takes central stage in positioning European popular music as a core component of contemporary European culture. With its emphasis on the circulation of European repertoires and networks, it is unique in the contemporary music festival landscape. Due to its award culture and mediated character, Eurosonic Noorderslag (ESNS) serves as a stepping-stone for upcoming groups and artists internationally. Combined with a music industry conference, the ESNS festival successfully presents a European-based cultural event, claiming to provide a counterweight to the dominance of the Anglo-American music industry. This aim is underscored by the festival’s annual focus on one of Europe’s nations to “showcase the diversity of musical talent across Europe.” Besides showcase performances of the country’s domestic artists, this also entails country-themed conference panel sessions and networking receptions.¹

By zooming in on Eurosonic, this dissertation examines how music showcase events function as platforms for the music industry, and in particular to how they relate to the local and transnational European music scenes and facilitate the circulation of musical talent. This circulation will be further examined by juxtaposing Eurosonic with three other representative European showcase events, the Reeperbahn Festival (Hamburg, Germany), SPOT Festival (Aarhus, Denmark), and MENT (Ljubljana, Slovenia). I am concerned with their role and embeddedness within the European music festival landscape. This thesis, then, operates at the intersection of music festivals, European identity and live music careers.

My close reading of Eurosonic and its accompanying European narrative reveals how artistic careers within Europe have evolved in relation to festival culture and how

¹ To support the European music industry in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the profound consequences music sectors face due to the restrictions, the 35th edition of ESNS in 2021 has focused on *all* of Europe, rather than on one specific country.

European identity is performatively constructed, challenged and reaffirmed throughout thirty-five years of sonic narration. ESNS will be contextualized within broader urban cultural developments such as festivalization, the creative economy, and cosmopolitanism as theorized by Franco Bianchini (1993), David Throsby (2010), and Monica Sassatelli (2011). Also, insights are drawn from quantitative oriented research from the fields of sociology, popular music studies and cultural studies, which often take starting points from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1968) concept of the carnivalesque, Victor Turner's (1982) notion of *communitas* and more recent theorizations involving the notion of "festivalization" (Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2014). Further, I draw on qualitative research techniques which have included extended participant observation, document analysis and interviews. This research is also a multi-sited ethnography, in that it documents and draws insights from fieldwork in four European cities: Groningen, Aarhus, Hamburg, and Ljubljana. This field work is predominantly conducted between 2016 and 2020. Each event profile is accompanied with a description of the local music scene, a short history of the event, and description of the festival structure (i.e. venues, key players, cultural specifics).

In this dissertation I map the ways in which Eurosonic Noorderslag is widely interconnected to European institutional structures (e.g. other showcase events, the European Broadcasting Union, and the European Commission) who share a similar aim: to circulate European music within the continent's borders. As such, I argue, it is a fulcrum of the European music industry, bringing together key players operating in this industry, such as artists, professional, media partners, and international policy makers. In the following, I will also reveal how the festival's position is unique and that, while other showcase festivals benefit greatly from the platform and its aims, the European music industry remains a collection of markets, rather than one unified entity. Initiatives from the European Commission, such as the Music Moves Europe Talent Awards (MMETA) music prize, efforts to construct a European identity, and extensive funding for organizations which aid transnational collaboration, however, solidify and foster European collaboration. Furthermore, the brand that is Eurosonic Noorderslag enables participating musicians to utilize their festival performance to enhance band biographies. While the narrative of "discovery" afforded by appearing at Eurosonic is considered a false one, artists acknowledge the window of opportunity that it offers. Consequently, a novel theoretical concept is introduced. Building on Bianchini's (1999) conceptualization of post-war developments of (arts) festivals and their function in society, I coin the term "Age of Translocalism" to indicate the relationship of local music scenes that travel to other transnational local music scenes within Europe through the network of showcase festivals. This moves beyond the idea of festivals merely utilized for city marketing (Bianchini 1999, Gibson & Connell 2005) to suggest a more comprehensive perspective of showcase festivals: showcase festivals as vehicles for export *and* local development. In this sense, transnational localism extends beyond conceptions of festivals as merely spacial and temporal events and addresses the ability of events to work year-round to enhance festival strategies and collaborations. The term "transnational localism" is new to the vocabulary of popular music with regard to festivals, and I have attempted to legitimize its presence in

this dissertation. This concept will contribute to shaping the context within which specific festival configurations, such as showcase festivals, materialize and thrive. In other words, these concepts help make sense of showcase festivals as industry events, as they emerged and developed in recent decades, and why they remain an enduring element of the European music industry. In what follows I will provide a condensed overview of relevant perspectives on festivals and festivalization, before synthesizing this body of literature to the chosen research methodology and the claims I make throughout the dissertation.

Theoretical Roadmap

In order to gain an understanding of modern-day music festivals as collective social gatherings, this research takes theories on collective rituals and shared values as its starting point. Foundational theories have been written on this topic by sociologists, anthropologists, and music scholars – in its earliest conceptions describing inter-human relations which inform the functions of ritual (Van Gennep 1960, Douglas 1966, Turner 1969), carnival (Bakhtin 1984), religion (Durkheim 1912, 2001), and social gathering (Goffman 1963). Erving Goffman, for example, has provided relevant anthropological theoretical insights in his investigation on *co-presence*, *gatherings* (when people are co-present, but not necessarily interacting) and *occasions*. Alessandro Falassi (1987) has provided a foundational characterization of anthropological perspectives on festival research in *Time Out of Time: Essays in the Festival* (3): “At festive times, people do something they normally do not; [...] they carry to extreme behaviors that are usually regulated by measure; they invert patterns of daily social life.” These insights are relevant for research on music festivals today, as festivals remain social gatherings where shared values are important in the construction of participants’ identities.

More recently, insights in sociological structure and collective belief within temporal spaces have been updated in the works of Randall Collins (2004) and Barbara Ehrenreich (2006). In *Dancing in the Streets: a History of Collective Joy*, Ehrenreich describes how the countercultural festivals of the 1960s provided a modern substitute for the carnivalesque: “Finally, with secularization, there had to be a realization that festivity, even when it occurred on religious holidays, was ultimately a product of human agency. [...] In the secularized festivities of the late Middle Ages, people could discover the truth of Mikhail Bakhtin’s great insight: that carnival is something that people create and generate *for themselves* (94-95).” To which she adds: “The hippie rock fans had re-created carnival – and more. To most participants, rock festivals were something beyond temporary interruptions in otherwise dull and hardworking lives. These events were the beachheads of a new, ecstatic culture meant to replace the old repressive one [...]” (220-221). Similarly, festival scholar Andy Bennett (2004) provides an extensive account on Woodstock and how it represented “a milestone in the use of music [...] as a springboard for the more expressly commercial of rock and pop events which were to follow.” The popular music festivals that emerged in the US in the 1960s, such as Monterey, Woodstock,

and Altamont, were mediated overseas and influenced the development of subcultural British festivals (Nelson, 1989, McKay 1996). In a broader analysis, Richard Pells (1997) and Alexander Stephan (2008) described the complex ways in which American culture transferred European continental culture. Pells, for example, concluded that “American products and attitudes were not directly imposed upon Europe. The influence of America’s exports depended instead on how easily they could be integrated with the social and cultural folkways that existed in each of the countries on the other side of the ocean” (283).

More recent academic literature on music festivals addresses research on music (and multi-arts) festivals from a variety of perspectives, but is most often connected to four broader areas of conduct. First, space and place making (Bennett and Peterson 2004, Jongenelen 2010, Wynn 2015). Bennett and Peterson (2004, 4) noted: “Scenes are often regarded as informal assemblages, but scenes that flourish become imbedded in a music industry.” Secondly, many investigations focus on the historical significance of specific events (McKay 2000, Bennett 2004, Bijer 2007). Other focus on the Event organization (Lampel and Meyer 2008) or economic impact (Frey 2003, Leenders *et al* 2005) of festivals. By developing a conceptual model to identify and explain the success of music festivals, Leenders *et al.* have shown that festivals can increase the chances of success when they explore and exploit a niche within which to operate. This holds true for both smaller and larger events. This insight is particularly relevant in a time when the growing number of festivals results in increasing competition for visitors and resources. In recent years, music festivals have become the main fulcrum of how the performative and public dimensions of music is made visible and accessible to large audiences (Bosch, Van Vliet, Colsen 2012, Bell and Oakly 2014). As Anderton (2015, 204) noted: “The increased visibility and championing of festivals in the traditional media, together with a broadening of interest online and in fashion, lifestyle and celebrity gossip titles, has helped to drive changes in public perceptions of the sector, making festivals more accessible and desirable for a wider part of the population and contributing both to the sector’s growth and to the broadening of corporate sponsorship interest [...]” Indeed, the idea that festivals are closed off temporal spaces which are primarily utilized by audiences looking for escapist experiences outside of society has transitioned into a broader and more integrated form of cultural celebration. Societal issues such as urban development, sustainability, and social inclusion, for example, have often become part of the festival agenda.

Another relatively new avenue of research focuses on tourism (Picard and Robinson 2006), which has become increasingly relevant with the striking increase in festival events since the late 1980s and 1990s (Kruijver, 2009).² Since then, festivals have become more established strategic tools for place development and tourism, and tools for city marketing (Bianchini 1999, Gibson & Connell 2005). The explanation for the popularity and proliferation of festivals is complex, Picard and Robinson (2006, 2) explain, “[b]ut in part relates to a response from communities seeking to re-assert their

2 In thirty years, between 1980 and 2011, the number of festivals in the Netherlands has quintupled: from 150 in 1980 to 800 in 2011 (Kruijver 2009, 55). Also, open air dance music festivals have increased from three in 1996 to forty-seven in 2011 (Van Vliet 2012, 22). In 2019, 1115 festivals were organized in the Netherlands, of which the majority (approximately 60 percent) were explicitly designated as music festivals (EM Cultuur, 2019).

identities in the face of a feeling of cultural dislocation brought about by rapid structural change, social mobility and globalization processes (De Bres & Davis, 2001; Quinn, 2003).” Similarly, Connell and Gibson (2006, 245) have described how festivals impact the relation between local dynamics and tourism stating “[...] festivals function to create networks for performers, generate tourist income, help regenerate urban areas, or to enhance cultural awareness and experiences of local populations.”

In *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (2004) Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson explored the concept of translocal music scenes and practices. They describe translocal scenes as geographically dispersed local scenes which are connected through specific corresponding and affiliated characteristics. Local communities actively engage with the cultural products of the transnational music industry and utilize these events to enact new formulations of the “local.” The music festival and its related scenes, and showcase events in particular where there is an explicit networking focus, are provided with a platform to meet, connect, and rethink their individual collaborative strategies. In *The Festivalization of Culture* (2014) Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor, and Ian Woodward bring together a variety of perspectives, ranging from cultural identities and political ideologies, to leisure practices and audience perception.

In the 2000s cultural policy increasingly became a tool for the European Union to solidify its unifying strategy (Shore 2001, Valtysson 2018). Monica Sassatelli’s work on urban festivals, cosmopolitanism and public culture (2010, 2011) addresses the increasing influence of festival in imagining European cultural policies. In *Becoming Europeans* (2016, 48), she notes: “Given its marginality in more established and ‘hard’ European integration matters, cultural policy has for a long time attracted scant attention, most of which addresses cultural policies *in Europe*, comparatively assessing national or local policies, rather than European policies in the strong sense defined here.” Today, however, Europe’s institutional bodies recognize the ways in which European collaboration is about more than merely the distribution of coal and steel. It is about the exchange of cultural heritage, and, as Sassatelli (198) writes, finding a cultural context “favourable for the expression of [these] cultural specificities.” However, geopolitical developments in recent years, such as the Brexit, the 2008 economic crises, and the refugee crisis has given rise to a polarized political landscape that prompted new research on the ways in which the cultural industries can intervene. In *No Culture, No Europe: On the Foundation of Politics* (2016) Pascal Gielen and Thijs Lijster (8) argue for a re-evaluation of the value of culture with a transnational level of analysis:

When culture is understood as giving meaning to a person’s life, to a group or to society as a whole, it is not surprising that it touches upon values, normative ideas and fixed customs. Culture touches upon what people think they have in common and therefore upon a community that might be called Europe.

The plea here is to imagine Europe as a cultural entity first and foremost, rather than as merely an economic entity: “Technocratically good administration and economically

efficient management are not enough to make Europe into a living community. That would indeed take a solid cultural embedding” (49). Gielen and Lijster encapsulate this “meta-ideological” model in the term “commonism.” This framework can help legitimize and explain the increasingly significant role showcase festivals play in the EU’s cultural policies to stimulate collaborative transnational cultural exchange.

Finally, festival scholars have addressed the place of festivals in the age of digitalization and online platform in recent years, investigating how festivals navigate and incorporate new media to audiences around the world (Jenkins 2006, Holt 2013, 2015). In recent times, the COVID-19 pandemic has catapulted new ways of social interaction, resulting in the (partially) digital conversion of many showcase festival events.³ Obviously, research in this area is still in its early stages at the time of this writing. While some exploratory investigation has been undertaken (Davies 2020, Banke and Woodward 2020), what the scope and (long term) impact is of the pandemic on showcase festivals and on the live music sector in general remains yet unclear. These topics will provide interesting topics for future research.

The theoretical insights discussed above provide a backdrop for my investigation in which I aim to synthesize and further the knowledge of how showcase festivals function in the European musical landscape. I follow a hermeneutical line of analysis to make a series of descriptive and conceptual claims, which unfold at varying moments throughout the dissertation. Before I present a dissertation structure overview, revealing how these methodologies are furthered into the claims I make in each individual chapter, I’ll first provide a brief overview of the methodologies I have applied.

Methodology

In order to integrate these broad topics, I have taken a multifaceted methodological approach. First, I have conducted archival research on ESNS. Access to private and public archives from the ESNS organization and *Poparchieff Groningen* has been crucial. Also, gathering material online has been an inexhaustible source of information. Second, I have conducted 45 interviews with members of key organizations. These members include founders of ESNS, booking agents, members of European cultural institutions, municipal representatives, owners of music venues, musicians, and attendees. Interviews were one to two hours in length and were semi-structured. I always prepared a list of pre-set questions, but often new questions emerged as the conversations unfolded. For industry professionals, the list of themes included: the showcase as a concept and its utility for the music industry; views on the circulation of European repertoire; strategies about networking and (international) showcase collaborations; the politics on European music programs; and opinions about the utility of these events for artists. For the study of artists and their careers important themes were: career development in relation to showcase

³ Reeperbahn, for example, announced in early August 2020 that the Reeperbahn Festival Conference 2020 would take place exclusively online. This decision was made on the basis of the latest ordinance for the containment of the spread of the virus. Press release 04-08-2020.

events; imagining international markets; views on networking; and results from showcase performances.

Finally, ethnographic research has been a major source of enquiry. My personal participation in ESNS (as performing musician, festival visitor and conference participant) since 1996 allowed me to gain access to musicians that otherwise perhaps would be harder to reach. Also, to undertake this endeavor responsibly, it requires a substantial degree of self-consciousness about my own investments and occupying my position as musician and Groningen resident. An underlying practice of “reflexive ethnography,” therefore, has been in place when documenting the festival experiences. Participating in conferences allowed me to take field notes or digitally record some of the conference panels, when writing along was not an option. The combination of these ethnographic research practices allowed me to gather the data necessary to present the story that is about to unfold.

In the ethnographic world we like storytelling as a way to get closer to culture and to better understand it. Storytelling is not necessarily a factual representation of life, it is an embodied, affective, experience, which aims to promote certain values in a particular time and moment. Therefore, one of the theoretical frameworks employed here, and always in close engagement with interviews that address relevant phenomena, is Clifford Geertz's (1973) famous treatise on “thick descriptions.” The more we know about the context, the more we know about the historical moment or social moment, the more we can interpret that and make it meaningful. In the music world there is not merely one truth, rather knowledge and experience gained is dependent upon a body of social interactions, institutions, values, conventions and norms. My approach, while it retains the academic's ambition to reveal something of the larger cultural-historical scheme in which (showcase) festivals exist, maintains a focus to encapsulate some of these important moments in music history and to interpret them within the context of ongoing processes of cultural heritage as lived history.

Of course, the material presented in this thesis only covers a fragment of the multitude of European showcase events, including their (collaborative) strategies, results and cultural impact. “Festivalization” is a profound and comprehensive topic and in a dissertation – or any codified work – one can only point to a fragment to interpret the whole. The choices made in the case studies, then, were perhaps more to illustrate and underscore, rather than provide definitive hard “evidence.” However, the musicians and professionals that were interviewed, the case studies that were chosen, and the topics which were discussed reflect the research potential of showcase festival events and their significant role in the European musical landscape.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation begins with a relatively wide scope in Chapter 1, then narrows down to the case study chapters (Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4), to the artistic experience itself (Chapter 5), and finally, it offers a wider scope with the juxtaposition of three European showcase events, providing the foil to which Eurosonic is compared and contrasted (Chapter 6).

After discussing this dissertation's theoretical concepts and methodological approach in more detail, the first chapter will provide contextual insight into the festivalization of culture (Bennett et al, 2014), in other words the emergence and the increasing prevalence and popularity of European music festivals. It investigates the multifaceted contemporary urban European festivalscape within the twenty-first century music industry. The focus of this chapter is not on the traditional festivalscape, often associated with rural geographies (Bey 1991, Falassi 1987), but rather on urban, creative cosmopolitan networks that perceive of music festivals as something that occurs within society, rather than looking at festivals as isolated from cultural reality. As Sassatelli (2011) suggests, festivals ought to be studied as “social phenomena to be contextualized in the particular settings and contradictions of modern societies (2011: 7)”. Since the late 1990s, when music digitalization and sharing practices dramatically transformed the music industry, the exponential growth and popularity of live music festivals has increased significantly (Frith 2007, Holt 2010, Sassatelli 2008, 2011, Picard and Robinson 2006) and the function of festivals in today's music industry has become complex. The focus of this study, therefore, is on festivals and their multiple dimensions, such as performance practice, musical aesthetics, new media, city marketing, branding, internationalization, cultural exchange, livability, and inclusion by taking into consideration the different realities of the “outside world” (Picard 2006).

Drawing on sociologist Jürgen Habermas' (1991) notion of “public sphere,” this outside world is what Sassatelli et al (2011) refer to as the “cultural public sphere.” The cultural public sphere refers to “the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication” (McGuigan 2005, 435). Drawing on Sassatelli's theorization of the cultural public sphere and her distinction between traditional (ancient and ritualistic) vs. the post-traditional (modern and multifaceted) festivalscape, this chapter analyzes the urban music industry festival in contemporary society in what, I suggest, might be exposed as a third period: the post-digital festivalscape. That is, how real-life festival spaces interact with the possibilities of the digital environment (e.g. social media, international collaborations, advertising).

Sassatelli (2008: 30) identifies three stages in which post-war festival expansion can be explained. Borrowing from Bianchini (1999) she defines these three stages as the *Age of Reconstruction* (1940s-1960s), the *Age of Participation* (1970s and early 1980s) and finally the *Age of City Marketing* (from the mid 1980s to present). The first stage covers the period from the mid-1940s until the 1960. The aim of these early festivals was to help provide political stability, stimulate collaboration and re-value cultural diversity.

The Edinburgh Festival (1947), The Holland Festival (1947) and Swansea International Festival (1948) are but a few examples of these early “rebuilding-focused” festivals. The second stage evolved in the 1970s, when festivals became sites of debate and when social agents envisioned cultural policy as a tool to establish new political and social goals. Lastly, the third stage emerged in the 1980s. This stage resulted from a concentration on the development of city identities. Economic possibilities in city-marketing (tourism), revitalizing city centers or regenerating neglected urban spaces became focal points for local authorities.

One of the questions I am concerned with is, how urban music festivals function as a cultural playground today when negotiating music in terms of notions of cultural inclusion and (international) collaboration. This international cooperation doesn’t mean that the unique qualities of the local should be disregarded, but rather that locality serves as a concentrated representative of global culture: “[S]uccessful festivals create a powerful but curious sense of place, which is local, as the festival takes place in a locality or region, but which often makes an appeal to a global culture in order to attract both participants and audiences” (Waterman 1998:58 Quoted in Sassatelli 2008).

Although the American influence on European festival culture cannot be ignored, the focus of this research is on the European music industry and it examines the ways in which the European music industry responds to the long-standing dominance of the American music industry. This is especially interesting in a time when “reunifying Europe through culture” – as was the mantra of the Edinburgh festival in 1947 – is an urgent topic in contemporary European politics. Ultimately, the study aims to perceive of festivals as social phenomena to be contextualized in the particular settings and contradictions of modern societies (Giorgi 2011) before magnifying ESNS as “local cultural tradition” (Picard 2006: 16).

As a historical and contextual chapter, Chapter 2 (“Eurosonic Noorderslag: Emergence and Historical Development”) provides an analytical review of the development of ESNS in the last thirty-five years. By examining the unique development of ESNS in the course of its history, the creative and economic importance of this music festival for both the Dutch and the European music industry will be traced and documented. How did Dutch media assess the festival’s value for Dutch and European music culture? And how does the international reception of ESNS differ from its Dutch reception? In this chapter I argue that a diverse representation of genres is crucial for its positive assessment in the media, and secondly, that the festival’s reception became more positively assessed as it became bigger, more successful and generated economic and cultural capital for the city of Groningen.

Chapter 3 (“ESNS and European Identity Formation”) focuses on European cultural identity. ESNS presents a European-based cultural event, claiming to provide a counterweight to the dominance of the Anglo-American music industry. This inclination to differentiate is explicit in the policy strategy and international positioning of ESNS. The ESNS framework that is created by the cultural and economic realities of the industry create an environment where discourse about ‘Europeanness’ exists. The presence of that

discourse itself *interpellates* (Althusser, 1970) the artists and other participants of the festival into an idea of European identity. Related to this idea of an emerging European identity, I'll explore questions such as: what are the dominant debates and discourses in media outlets surrounding ESNS? How does European identity, collectively imagined by the people who perceive themselves to be part of it (Bhabha 1994), manifest itself? How is the discourse changing the way that participants think about who they are and what they are doing? In other words, when is identity performed and when is identity perceived?

In Chapter 4 ("Breaking EU Borders: European Border Breakers Awards and Focus Countries") I present a deeper analysis of two promotional mechanisms of transnational collaboration within the European music industry. I will historicize and contextualize the development of the European music prize EBBA and the annual focus of ESNS on one specific EU country and examine how these initiatives have developed into essential elements in promoting supranational cultural exchange.

Chapter 5 (ESNS Live Music in Practice: Battle of the North") focuses on the artistic careers of ESNS acts. In the past, the festival has been a springboard for breakthrough or promising bands and artists. But how important is it to play on ESNS in accumulating economic or cultural capital? What does this do for the sustainability of artists' careers? And what role do media play in this exposure? I focus on artists from the northern part of the Netherlands to investigate how Eurosonic is perceived and utilized over time by regional performing artists. Research methods will encompass interviews, literature research and analyses of music industry statistics.

In Chapter 6 ("Showcasing Europe"), I expand my scope and turn my attention to the landscape of European urban showcase festivals. By examining three compelling examples of European urban showcase events, Reeperbahn (Hamburg), SPOT (Aarhus) and MENT (Ljubljana), I look into the ways in which they express their distinctive relationships between the local, the national, and the transnational music markets. I have selected these specific cases as the foil to which Eurosonic is contrasted and have strived to provide for a diverse mix of showcase events: Reeperbahn as one of the largest showcase events, SPOT festival as a strong regional event, and MENT as a smaller and newer event. The primary focus is to examine to what extent they are nodes of a larger European network of circulating music professionals, artists, and media. Also, the ways in which they relate to (international) collaborative networks, how these are sustained, and how a Europe is imagined. That is, to what extent they envision Europe as a single music market and strategize accordingly.

The dissertation will conclude with a summary and discussion of the six chapters in which I will establish a connection to the central research question of this dissertation. Here I will elaborate on the theoretical implications as well as the limitations of the studies and, finally, present suggestions for future research.

Now that I have presented an overview of the dissertation and briefly discussed the topics at hand, I will take a step back to investigate festival ontology and the ways in which festivals have functioned in (European) cultural history.

Chapter 1

European Festival Cultures: Definitions and Histories

What is a festival? It's something exceptional, something out of the ordinary... something that must create a special atmosphere which stems not only from the quality of the art and the production, but from the countryside, the ambience of a city and the traditions... of a region. - De Rougement (1976, 131)

I see festivalization as not just the general rise of festivals, but an ongoing organizational process wherein short-term events are used to develop, reinforce, and exploit an array of communal goods, churning out costs and benefits both near and far. - Jonathan R. Wynn. (2015, 12)

This synergistic relationship between the festival and the city works, we might say, like a chemical reaction. - Monica Sassatelli, Gerard Delanty (2011, 47)

This chapter prefaces the subsequent chapters in that it offers a historical framework in which the contemporary European urban music festival and processes of festivalization can be contextualized. First I synthesize some of the distinctions between traditional and post-traditional festivals (Sassatelli 2008, 2011); then I present an overview of traditional anthropological ways of interpreting festivals; finally, I adapt Bianchini's (1999) organization of post-war expansion of European music festival culture in order to suggest that the three periodic stages that inform Bianchini's framework, the Age of Reconstruction, the Age of Participation, and the Age of City Marketing, need to be re-evaluated and modernized. That is, I suggest that there are more recent developments in the relationship between music festivals and society – developments that have been underexposed in festival literature – which can be recognized as a fourth stage in festival development. I will refer to this fourth stage, in which digital media, festival tourism, and international networks and value systems coexist, as the *Age of Translocalism*. That is, an “age” of festivals in which processes and networks are considered that transcend locality.

As the case of Eurosonic will show throughout this dissertation, it is these translocal qualities (i.e. increased mobility, European connectedness, and festival tourism) that served as catalysts for the development of Eurosonic Noorderslag in the early 2000s. Festival tourism, the number of artists, and the number of music professionals attending the event, for example, increased dramatically.⁴ As a result, the festival became

4 The number of hotel bookings increased from 200.000 in 2003 to 325.000 in 2008. One of the main crowd pullers in the city, according to reporter Mick van Wely, was Eurosonic Noorderslag. (DvhN 07-05-2009)

an important urban development factor for the city of Groningen as an economic and cultural force.⁵ Translocalism, then, is here understood as the social and professional relations of mobility (Urry 2007) and festival tourism. It draws attention to alliances and networks that are formed as representatives of how these events travel around Europe and operate within the European showcase festival network. The characteristics that constitute the Age of Translocalism, I argue, provide for the context and framework in which we can understand how European showcase festivals have come to function as platforms for transnational collaborative networks. This concept will be investigated in more detail in the second half of this chapter. But to provide some historical context, I will first discuss how festivals have been conceptualized in more anthropologic oriented scholarly literature.

1.1 Traditional Festivals and Anthropological Perspectives

According to the Polish human geography scholar Waldemar Cudny (2014, p. 643), “a festival is an organized socio-spatial phenomenon, taking place at a specially designated time, outside the everyday routine, shaping the social capital and celebrating selected elements of human tangible and intangible culture.” As such, festivals have scaffolded societies and shaped transformational processes for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years (Bakhtin 1984, Muir 1997, Ehrenreich 2006). Depending on how one would define “festival,” we can trace their development to ancient times, especially if we were to include fertility rites, religious gatherings, or harvest festivals etc. The modern commercial music festival, however, where audiences pay for tickets to see bands and get access to festival sites, which provide for music, food and peripheral kinds of (commercial) entertainment and sale opportunities, has its roots in the classical music festivals of the nineteenth century and post-war jazz and rock festivals (Quinn 2005). While the transformational, religious, or ritualistic aspect has waned, festivals impact modern society in various ways. In contemporary society, for example, festivals play a significant role in the re-formulation of social relationships, providing new economies, audiences, communicative networks and structures for the processes of cultural exchange (Picard and Robinson, 2006; Turnbull, 2017). Moreover, Webster and McKay (2016, 173) argued that the impact of festivals “should not easily be overstated,” and identified at least eight areas in their research on the impact of festivals. These pertain to: economic impact, socio-political impact, temporal impact and intensification and transformation of experience, creative impact - on music and musicians, discovery and audience development, place-making, mediation of festivals and environmental impact.

The function and form of contemporary festivals in society is multi-faceted

⁵ It was estimated that the expected 15.000 visitors of the festival in 2007 would spend approximately 2.5 million euros in the city of Groningen, mostly on restaurants, cafes and lodging. DvhN 11-01-2007: “Noorderslag raises 2.5 million”

and their significance, meaning and structure depend on cultural and historical contexts (Ehrenreich 2006, Sassatelli 2008, Falassi 1987). What can be considered as common ground, however, is that festivals are experienced and perceived as communal events. In other words, they are social events where local (and global) cultures meet, identities form and lifestyle narratives are recognized and re-affirmed (Bennett 2014). In recent decades, the number and popularity of music festivals have grown dramatically and the festival market size in Europe is estimated to double in 2020 (Johnson 2019).^{6 7} Also, the capacity of many older existing festivals have grown significantly (Stubhub, n.d.).⁸ The increasing presence of festivals as vehicle for cultural exchange is referred to as *festivalization* (Häussermann 1993, Bennett 2014). “Festivalization,” as Maurice Roche (2011, 127) argues, “can be taken to refer to the role and influence of festivals in the societies that host and stage them – both direct and indirect, and in both the short and the longer term.” Festivalization is also what Jonathan Wynn (2015, 12) described as “a *process* where cultural activity meets placemaking, but it is also a *cultural policy* that cities and communities can debate and adopt.”

In her work on festivals and the cultural public sphere, ethnomusicology scholar Monica Sassatelli (2008, 2011) distinguishes between *traditional* and *post-traditional* festival practices in order to provide a useful framework for understanding historical developments in festival culture. Sassatelli’s characterization of traditional festivals resonates with academic literature on festivals that is concerned with the sociological and anthropological concepts of community, ritual or “primitive” societies (Durkheim 1912, Turner 1982, Falassi 1987, Bey 1985). As Sassatelli (2011, 12) explains, traditional, often rural, festivals are “[...] organic expressions of so-called traditional societies and platforms for the representation and reproduction of their cultural repertoires and, thus, identities”. In other words, they are concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage and to reaffirm and strengthen community identity. Traditional festivals often served a religious and ritual function. As Falassi (1987, 3) argues, festivals – deriving from the Latin word *Festum*, for “public joy” – were often referred to for religious commemoration, folklore, rural (agrarian) fertility rites or defining and maintaining social identities. Falassi also notes that, along with the major distinction between sacred and profane, “another basic typological distinction that is often made draws upon the setting of the festival, opposing rural to urban festivals. Rural festivals are supposedly older, agrarian, centered on cosmogony myths, while the more recent, urban [post-traditional] festivals celebrate prosperity in less archaic forms and may be tied to foundation legends and historical events and feats.”⁹

Analyses of these primitive functions of traditional festivals, and their cultural significance within the societies from which they emanate, has mostly developed within

6 <https://www.umbel.com/blog/entertainment/6-factors-driving-massive-growth-of-music-festivals/>

7 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/752101/festivals-market-size-in-europe/> Note: this research was undertaken before the global Covid-19 Corona virus outbreak.

8 <https://www.stubhub.co.uk/fastest-growing-festivals/>

9 Traditional European festivals one can think of are the Carnival in Venice (dating back to the 12th century, but reinvigorated in 1979), or Celtic Festivals, such as the Eisteddfod festivals, a Welsh music, literature and performance festival which dates back to the 12th century or the German Oktoberfest (since 1810).

what is now considered classic anthropological and sociological scholarly research. Most older literature evaluates festivals as social phenomena that happen outside of society, i.e. as microcosms that have a cultic, religious or ritual connection, and examines them as such. As Andy Bennett et al. point out in *The Festivalization of Culture* (2014, 1), “[...] festivals traditionally are conceived in anthropological and historical literatures as ritualistic or recurrent short-term events in which members of a community participate in order to affirm and celebrate various social, religious, ethnic, national, linguistic or historical bonds.” Here, too, these concepts will serve as a starting point in my discussion on traditional and post-traditional festivals, for one cannot discard these classic and influential analyses for moments of, what Barbara Ehrenreich (2006) called, “collective joy.”

One of the most well-known and cited studies is Durkheim’s classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) in which he studied “primitive” forms of community building and collective consciousness. His work afforded the field of cultural ethnography insight in what Mark S. Cladis described in the preface of *The Elementary Forms* as “[...] the religious aspects of the social and the social aspects of the religious” (2008 [1912], xxxv). These communal aspects are widely recognized and discussed in ethnographical and anthropological scholarly literature.

In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), for example, Victor Turner develops his concepts of *communitas* and *liminality*. Turner demonstrates how the analysis of ritual behavior and symbolism may be used as a key to understanding social structure and processes. He extends the notion of the “liminal phase”, developed by Arnold van Gennep in his book *Rites of Passage* (1960), to a more general level and applies it to gain understanding of a wide range of social phenomena. What Turner borrows from Van Gennep is not just that rites of passage are transitional and result in a change in social role, but that they have a three-part structure. These three phases of ritual are: *separation*, *liminality* (transitional phase) and *integration*. These phases describe the stages that a participant of a communal event will experience and how identity is re-shaped. In festival experience this would result in a changed societal role when the event is over and the participant returns to everyday society.

To perceive of festivals as closed off from society, Falassi (1987, 3) refers to them as “time out of time” events, meaning that these events occur outside of structured and regulated society. They take place in a spatially and temporally closed-off space where different rules apply for the duration of the event:

If we consider that the primary and most general function of the festival is to renounce and then to announce culture, to renew periodically the lifestream of a community by creating new energy, and to give sanction to its institutions, the symbolic means to achieve it is to represent the primordial chaos before creation, or a historical disorder before the establishment of the culture, society, or regime where the festival happens to take place [...].

Falassi stresses here that festivals have a revitalizing and regenerative function. The participants of this community need this “primordial chaos” in order to cope with the banal societal power relations of everyday life. This way, he argues, festivals have served to keep communities together and tie social bonds since ancient times.

Similar to the “time out of time” conception, Hakim Bey (1985) also theorizes liminal communal forms and regards festivals as a “Temporary Autonomous Zone” (TAZ). Bey investigates the possibility of socio-political activities that create a non-hierarchical social system and that serve as an alternative to formal power structures.

Finally, traditional festival experience is often associated in scholarly literature with the “carnavalesque,” a term coined by literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) who introduces the term to connect the act of transgression and experimentation to the formation of social identity in medieval Europe.¹⁰ For Bakhtin (1984, 10), the carnivalesque encompassed a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order”. The carnivalesque is associated with a temporary period of unstrained expression where, as Anderton (2011, 150) explains, “[...] social distinctions were mocked and flattened, and where societal prohibitions were subverted, inverted or removed.”¹¹ Anderton coins the term “countercultural carnivalesque” to describe a festival audience that actively incorporates critique of consumerism in the 1960 and early 1970s. And, to some extent these rituals remain part of communal celebrations today. But the postmodern (and locally decontextualized concept) of the festival no longer focuses primarily upon consumption of meaning, identity and inversion of norms (Macleod, 2006; Ehrenreich, 2006; McKay, 2015). Therefore, the role of the carnivalesque needs to be renegotiated within contemporary festival practice.

What the above scholarly approaches share is their sociological perspective towards traditional notions of festivity. Perhaps it is because passing on cultural heritage or the preservation of local identity has become less relevant in post-traditional festival culture, that festivals have been taken less seriously in contemporary scholarly writing, as Sassatelli (2011) suggests. Indeed, while some of the ritual, liminal, or carnivalesque aspects still exist in contemporary urban festival experience, post-traditional festivals serve a more multifaceted amalgam of economic, cultural and political purposes in contemporary society. Therefore, we will now shift our analytical lens and examine the processes that have contributed to the shift in festival practice towards critical cultural engagement, commercialization and civic identity.

10 Also, Edward Muir (1997) has analyzed ritual activity and carnivalesque festivity in a European context in his book *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (1997). In this work he historically traces the importance of public festivities across Europe from the 12th to the 18th century.

11 Note: to describe a festival audience that actively incorporates critique on consumerism in contemporary capitalist society, Anderton coins the term “countercultural carnivalesque”. This movement emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s and showed a strong interest in environmental and social issues. Anderton, Chris. “Commercializing the Carnavalesque: The V Festival and Image/Risk Management.” *Event Management* 12, no. 1 (2008), 39-51. doi:10.3727/152599509787992616.

1.2 Post-Traditional Festivals

Post-traditional festivals are events that are not primarily concerned with fertility and agricultural rites, myths or the preservation of ancient communal rituals. They are not built on sacred origins. Rather, their focus has shifted to processes connected to modernity, such as civic identity, urban spaces, socio-economic concerns, urban regeneration, city marketing, tourism, international collaboration and more profane forms of communal celebration (Muir, 1997; Gottdiener, 2000; Ehrenreich, 2006; McKay, 2015). In post-traditional festival research these developments need to be taken into account, while, in Sassatelli's (2011, 4) words, "treasuring the lessons from that socio-anthropological approach so successfully applied to traditional ones". In other words, post-traditional festivity encompasses a complex mixture of economic, political and social dynamics that impact society as well as the individuals that participate. For the focus of this dissertation, I am primarily concerned with post-traditional festivals that are associated with music.

Music has always played an important part of communal celebration – in traditional as well as in modes of post-traditional festivity. Perhaps, the rock festivals of the late 1960s and early 1970s are the most well-known and were the most spectacular, but the practice of music festivals goes back to the early eighteenth century, when religious congregations held massive singing revival conventions (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 10). As Quinn (2005, 929) reveals, forerunners of contemporary urban music and arts festivals can be traced back to the Bayreuth festival (1876) and the Salzburger Festspiele (1920), both of whom contributed to the process of reaffirming the civilizing and educational values of 'high' culture. In the twentieth century, there was a dramatic rise in the number of festivals established after the second World War (Autissier, 2009). The altered political, economic and cultural relations resulted in increased awareness of societal issues and conflicting value systems. Eventually, this provided the conditions for ideological vs. capitalistic conflicts during the countercultural upheaval of the 1960s. Many early post-war festivals, however, were devoted especially to the themes of reconstruction and reunification (such as The Holland Festival and the Edinburgh Festival.) The concept of the post-traditional festival is closely associated with the post-war expansion of music and arts festivals. In what follows, I will reconstruct the evolution of European festival culture using Sassatelli's concept of linear stages, each of which describe a dominant cultural approach to festival practice in a post-war period. Although Sassatelli stresses that these phases should not be regarded as radical shifts, but rather as different emphases regarding developments in the festival field – with differing values or criteria promoted –, these phases provide a useful historical overview and a tool with which we can uncover current developments and the role of festivals in the contemporary creative cities environment. Finally, I will argue that we have reached a fourth stage in contemporary festival culture that I will refer to as the *Age of Translocalism*.

1.3 Three Festival Ages

Age of Reconstruction

Sassatelli (2008, 30) identifies three stages in which post-war festival expansion can be explained. Borrowing from Bianchini (1999) she defines these three stages as the *Age of Reconstruction* (1940s-1960s), the *Age of Participation* (1970s and early 1980s) and the *Age of City Marketing* (from the mid 1980s to present).

The first (post-traditional) festival era covers the period from the mid-1940s until the 1960s. The festivals that were founded in these re-constructural post-war years were mostly linked to classical music (“high art”) and were modelled after the classic Bayreuth (1876) and Salzburg (1920) festivals (Autissier, 2009). Their aim was to rebuild Europe after the devastating consequences of the two world wars Europe had to endure in the previous years. It was a time where, as Quinn (2005, 929) formulates it, “[...] the drive towards reconstruction, political stability and the forging of international linkages through trade (including through a fledging tourism industry) set the tenor for economic and social advancement [...]” The aim of these early festivals was to help provide political stability, stimulate collaboration and re-value cultural diversity. Europe’s nations not only had to rebuild their cities and infrastructure, but also to cope with disillusionment and post-war trauma. European countries were forced to re-negotiate their identities, reaffirm their moral values and find ways to reposition themselves in relationship to their neighbors. One strategy for all these challenges was through art and cultural exchange.

One of the earliest post-World War II festivals, and now the largest art festival in the world, is the Edinburgh Festival, which was founded in 1947.¹² Like many festivals that were initiated in the early post-war years, the Edinburgh Festival was established in a post-war effort to “provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit”, as founder Sir Rudolph Franz Joseph Bing (1902-1997) put it.¹³ It took on an interdisciplinary character, mingling music with other art forms such as theatre, dance and poetry.¹⁴ As the War ended and Europe gathered economic and geo-political stability, people were re-evaluating cultural life and seeking new dynamics of peace, cooperation and humanism. The initiation of the Edinburgh festival was about providing a platform to meet this objective, hence its slogan: “Reunifying Europe through culture” (Autissier 2009).

Another example of this rebuilding of European culture in the *Age of Reconstruction* can be found in the French Aix-en-Provence Festival. The Aix-en-Provence Festival, devoted mainly to classical music, was founded in 1948 by Lily Pastré (1891-

12 The Edinburgh Festival is actually not one single festival, but consists of a multitude of festivals, such as The Edinburgh Festival Fringe (‘The Fringe’), The Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) and the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF). These separate festivals take place in the same city in the same month, but are arranged by independent organizers with separate agendas.

13 Retrieved from website: <https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/festival/edinburgh-international-festival/> Accessed: 18 November, 2016.

14 Other early post-war inter-disciplinary festivals include the Grenade Festival from Spain, which was first organized in 1952 under the name “First festival of Spanish Music and Dance” and the Holland festival (1947) Besides its traditional mix of music, theatre and dance, multimedia, visual arts, film and architecture were added to the Holland Festival program in recent years.

1974) who helped establish the festival by covering the entire costs.¹⁵ It was established only three years after the end of the war in a newly constructed France that wanted to send out a “worthy image” of itself and show how chaos can be a fertile breeding ground for artistic renaissance.¹⁶ Other examples of these early “rebuilding-driven” festivals are the Holland Festival (1947) and the Swansea International Festival (1948); In both of these, musical performance played a pivotal role.

Perhaps one of the most well-known and notable examples of attempting to bridge borders between a war-torn Europe is the *Eurovision Song Contest*. In 1955, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) set up a committee with media representatives from different countries to look for ways of bringing together the EBU countries. The competition was based upon the existing San Remo Music Festival (IT), and was seen as a technological experiment in live television.¹⁷ Seven countries participated in the first edition, with each country performing two songs. Contributing a song to the European Song Contest is seen by many people not simply as a means of competing, but as a way of showing solidarity with the European idea and of sharing both a song and the affective cultural moment with one’s European neighbors.¹⁸ The event continues to be an important driving force for European integration and identity formation today.

What these festivals and corresponding initiatives exhibit, is the search for a Pan-European common ground and a collective European cultural identity. These two goals have been a key objective in European politics since 1945. However, Europe could not do this without post-war financial aid. Shortly after the war, participant states in Western Europe received comprehensive American support for its rebuilding process. The *European Recovery Program* was initiated in 1948, commonly referred to as the *Marshall Plan*. It encompassed extensive financial aid and was aimed at rebuilding Western European economies.¹⁹ Not only was America financially invested in Europe in the post-war years, it also played a pivotal role in Europe’s cultural developments (Tomlinson, 1991; Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000; Stephan, 2008). With more than three million US G.I.s stationed in Western Europe, American pop culture entered and spread throughout Western Europe in the 1940s and 1950s and Western European audiences became exposed to US consumer products, movies and popular music on a large scale.²⁰

This cultural cross-fertilization was soon reflected in Europe’s music culture. During the 1950s, both jazz and folk music became popular in Britain, demonstrated by the ‘traditional (trad) boom’ of New Orleans-style jazz in the popular music charts

15 Le Salon de Lily, Hommage à la Comtesse Pastré, mécène, Culture 13. Note: Pastré was a patron of the arts and sheltered Jewish artists in her Château Pastré during World War II.

16 Information retrieved from: <http://festival-aix.com/en/festival-daix/history/history-festival> Accessed: 18 November 2016.

17 The San Remo festival was founded in 1951 and was the largest song and new talent contest in Italy.

18 Motschenbacher, Heiko. *Language, Normativity and Europeanisation Discursive Evidence from the Eurovision Song Contest*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 13-50.

19 See, for example, Maarten Hajer (1993) “Rotterdam: re-designing the Public Domain”. In: *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration* Ed. Bianchini. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp. 48-72.

20 Dean, John. “The Diffusion of American Culture in Western Europe Since World War Two: A Crosscultural Survey.” *The Journal of American Culture* 20, no. 4 (1997), 11-24. doi:10.1111/j.1542-734x.1997.t01-1-00011.x, p. 14.

and American jazz and folk dispersed fast across continental Europe (McKay 2015). American folk, blues and jazz were also popular within US music festivals, such as the Newport Jazz Festival (1954) and the Monterey Jazz Festival (1958). This resulted in the rise of European jazz festivals, which were modeled after the American example.²¹ As ethnomusicologist Kristin McGee (2017, 145) explains in her investigation of European jazz festivals, there are two specific reasons for this sudden increase in popularity:

European jazz festivals arose in the 1950s, in part, to channel post-war preoccupations with two cultural *dispositifs*: first, jazz festivals fueled a post-war fascination for the Black urban, vernacular emotive expressions of what Richard Middleton coins the ‘low others’ of late modernity (Middleton, 2000; Middleton in Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000: 59), and second, festival performances and their promotion simultaneously stimulated a cultural nostalgia for an imagined, pre-modern pastoral life-world.

Indeed, there was a nostalgic current undergirding these festivals which related to processes of modernity, race, and transnational circulation of ideas about musical cultures. Some early jazz and blues festivals, then, were showcases for rock and roll artists, mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom. One notable example of this can be found in London. Here, British music executive Harold Pendleton started organizing jazz nights in the Marquee Ballroom in Oxford Street in 1958. Soon, Pendleton expanded his program and occasionally invited American musicians, including blues legend Muddy Waters. Pendleton was also the cofounder of the Beaulieu Jazz Festival in 1956, which is regarded as one of Britain’s first experiments in pop festival culture (McKay 2004, 2015). After the Beaulieu Jazz Festivals were canceled due to a violent uproar in 1960, Pendleton founded the National Jazz Festival, which was organized under the aegis of the National Jazz Federation (NJJF) in 1961 (Bennett 2004, 94). The Marquee Ballroom began hosting rhythm and blues nights in 1962, which, among others, featured the Rolling Stones. Over time, the event expanded to include blues, rhythm and blues and rock music, before becoming known as the Reading Festival (Frith *et al* 2013, 190).

After the Monterey Pop Festival (1967) and the Woodstock Music and Art Fair (1969) festivals, the American countercultural upheaval culminated in the Altamont Free Concert in December 1969.²² Due to the tragic events that took place at Altamont, killing four people, the festival came to be viewed as the symbolic end of the revolutionary flower power era. As Rock historian Ed Ward (1993 [2006]) noted, “Meredith Hunter died at Altamont, but a generation’s faith in itself was mortally wounded.” The idea that music was a spiritual – non-profit – celebratory agent between artists and fans faded and

21 Ironically, most of the early American music festivals were showplaces for classical European music. Wynn, Jonathan R. *Music - City American Festivals and Placemaking in Austin, Nashville, and Newport*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 21.

22 This free concert was seen as an attempt for the Rolling Stones to restore their countercultural credentials after critique about high ticket prices. Lytle, Mark H. *America’s Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era: from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon*. New York: Oxford University, 2006, p. 337.

commercialization corrupted the Woodstock spirit. “Rock had left counterculture to become business”, as historian Mark Lytle (2006, 337) put it.²³

European festival culture was inspired by these American countercultural events. In Europe new festivals emerged while older festivals evolved into multi-genre events, shifting their focus from jazz to rock music and multi-arts practices. Although they were fewer in number, these events, as Mankin suggests, were much more daring, rebellious, and influential culturally – and politically. (*Ibid.*) Festivals such as Glastonbury (1970), Pinkpop (1970), Reading (1971) and Montreux Jazz festival (1967) emerged and/or diversified its programs and attracted new audiences. The commitment of festivals to cultural democracy, along with political and economic challenges within larger society during the 1970s, marked an era of increased social participation and the emancipation of minority groups.

The Age of Participation

This second phase in the evolution of European festival culture developed when society saw a trend of decentralization of governance in Western Europe. The recession that began in the early 1970s, putting an end to the general post-World War II economic boom, forced cities to respond to socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, political emancipation, and integration. To meet these challenges, cultural policy became a tool to establish new political and social goals.²⁴ For example, cultural integration, democratizing culture so that it is available for disadvantaged groups and creating spaces for the unemployed became a subject of debate and part of the urban political agenda.

Festival culture in the 1970s also saw an expansion of musical styles in part by developing new artistic ideas or breaking down social class divisions, as Quinn (2005, 930) explains: “Festivals during these decades grappled with definitions of culture, challenging accepted definition of “high” and “low” arts and gradually breaking down distinctions between the two.” Cultural policy promoted initiatives to make culture available to people from the margins of society. Also, festivals began experimenting with new artistic ideas and challenging dominant social structures and the political establishment. As a consequence, the adjective “multidisciplinary” was increasingly promoted at the entrance of European festivals in the 1970s (Autissier 2009, 31).

In the late 1970s economic growth was re-established in the western world. While the record for individual countries was different, the initial difficulties of the recession had been “satisfactorily managed” (Cox 1982, 8). This recovery had implications for cultural policy in many European cities in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bianchini (1993, 1)

23 Also: Bands such as The Who and Jimi Hendrix commanded large fees and record contracts. Lytle, Mark H. *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era: from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon*. New York: Oxford University, 2006, p. 337.

24 The recession, also referred to as the ‘oil crisis’, afflicted the world economy after 1974 due to the quadrupling of oil prices in 1973. See also: Cox, Andrew. *Politics, Policy and the European Recession*. London: Macmillan, 1982.

identifies several trends in the evolution of urban cultural policies. One of the key trends for this, he explains,

[...] is the decline in working time and the increase in the proportion of disposable income spent on leisure activities. This led city governments to increase expenditure on culture and create specialized bureaucracies and policy-making bodies, to enhance their provision of cultural services to cater for growing, more sophisticated and differentiated public demand.

As new kinds of cultural demands – such as leisure, tourism, media and fashion – emerged, local governments saw cultural policy as a valuable tool to achieve greater social cohesion and to diversify the local economic base (2). Tourist appeal, civic identity, attracting (international) companies, and strengthening its competitive position became dominant focal strategies for cities. Within this new field of interests, festivals served as a means to merge economic, political, social and cultural interests, as well as provide new possibilities for the music industry. As Fabian Holt (2016, 30) explains: “Festivals went from being viewed as idiosyncratic cultural projects outside the daily business of the live music industry to becoming a generic format and avenue of commerce for the music industry as a whole.” Not only did this provide opportunities for the music industry, however. Festivals became tools for urban development strategies as well.

The Age of City Marketing

According to Sassatelli (2008, 29), this third approach still dominates the field of festival practice today. Increasingly, festivals have been used as tools for city marketing, to stimulate tourism or used as a banner to regenerate and gentrify neglected urban spaces in Western European cities during the 1980s and 1990s (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993).²⁵ Creative industry policy makers saw festivals as new opportunities to mediate and facilitate cultural consumption as well as construct positive urban images. In this frame, economic possibilities in city marketing, revitalizing city centers or regenerating suburbs became focal points for local authorities. Cultural consumption also became a mediator in new societal developments, such as increased mobility of people and resources (Urry 2007). A city connection to a festival can be rather explicit, which is the case with festivals such as Tallin Music Week, Reeperbahn Festival, or Liverpool Sound City, while in other instances reciprocal interaction with the festival and its urban surroundings is established in less visible (though not less effective) ways (Cudny 2016). In any case, the flexible (temporal) nature of festivals make them suitable tools to facilitate the multitude of stakeholder interests.

25 See, for example, Maarten Hajer (1993) “Rotterdam: re-designing the Public Domain”. In: *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration* Ed. Bianchini. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp. 48-72. Sometimes, European municipalities were influenced by regeneration strategies in American cities in the 1970s and 1980s, as was the case with Rotterdam, pp. 48-72.

Now that the post-war expansion into the three ages is summarized, I will explore how political, economic and cultural changes from the 1990s to the present informed festival practice. I will explore to what extent the *Age of City Marketing* still dominates the field of festival practice today. Of course, one cannot deny the impact of cultural consumption, tourism and city marketing for civic identity in contemporary festival culture. However, since digital practices invaded cultural society, festivals have a more complex societal impact. Not only do festivals provide for age-diverse social spaces, networking platforms or serve as a societal pressure valve – the interaction between the music industry, corporate culture, city strategy politics, and digital social media networks in today’s festivalized society requires a more in-depth examination of its components. Conforming to Bianchini’s vocabulary, I will coin the term *Age of Translocalism* to encapsulate the synergy between these contemporary components.

1.4 The Age of Translocalism

The contemporary urban music festival functions in society in a way that incorporates and transcends the aforementioned ages. The *Age of Translocalism*, starting roughly at the turn of the century entails several things: Firstly, it stands for the integration of the previous Ages described above. But it is also concerned with environmental issues (sustainability and innovation), broadened demographic, themed or specific genre events, mediatization, festivals as business model and festival tourism. Indeed, the focal points of the previous Ages (city marketing, participation and reconstruction) can be perceived as integrated into one collective strategy in contemporary urban festival practice and inform what we understand today as festivalization. As this dissertation will reveal, ESNS serves as a prime example of this development. Its collaboration with programs such as the Powervibes project (sustainable energy sources), partnerships with social inclusion programmes (Keychange and Take a Stand), and local talent development programs (Hit The North) are some examples of the ways in which it transcends the traditional conceptualization of “music festival” into a wide-ranging public event.

Another illustrative example of such an event is the MENT showcase festival, which takes place annually in Ljubljana (see Chapter 6 for a more in-depth examination of this event). MENT is focused mostly on experimental and underground music genres from the Balkan region. Reconstruction is relevant here as its organizers, in collaboration with municipal and national governments, increasingly strategize on ways to build and stimulate an underdeveloped music industry. Organizing an international music conference in Ljubljana stimulates these international networks, while also serving as a cultural marker for the city of Ljubljana. The festival offers a multidisciplinary platform for the underground music practices, societal debates, and cultural idealism and navigates successfully between safeguarding local artistic dynamics while also joining international collaborative networks.

Translocalism also stands for today’s broader demographic appeal of festivals,

the changed economic role of festivals (and live performance) within the European music industry, the vast integration of mainstream and social media, and new and expanding routes of tourism. For example, the Hungarian festival Sziget (1993) has developed from a small student event into one of the largest European music festivals, attracting over half a million visitors over the course of seven days. The majority of these visitors are from abroad, mostly from the UK, Netherlands, France, Germany and Italy.²⁶ The *Age of Translocalism* entails the omnipresence of large music festivals such as Sziget in contemporary society. Moreover, it is concerned with how festivals function *in* society, rather than outside society and considers (digital) mobility, international music networks, and tourism.

Sassatelli's observation, then, that the Age of City Marketing started in the mid 1980s and still dominates the field today, deserves nuance and revision. Much has happened in festival practice since Sassatelli made her claim and there is ample evidence to suggest that new trends are evident as festival practice has evolved under the new societal media conditions and communication technology in the twenty-first century. As Fabian Holt, for example, explains: "With the expanding range of mediations beyond conventional broadcasting, even phenomena such as festivals that were once confined as worlds outside media culture now become objects and agents of intense mediation in new configurations of time, space, and capital" (2018, 223).

Indeed, we have seen dramatic changes in consumer society since the early 1990s due to processes of globalization (Tomlinson 1999, Lash and Lury 2007). As the artist Frank Zappa already observed in 1991, "The single most important development in modern music is making a business out of it" (Volpacchio 1991, 125).²⁷ Of course, the music industry had always prioritized the business side of music ever since the early twentieth century Tin Pan Alley era, but the rise of large-scale collaboration between music and commercial corporate businesses – for example, sponsorship, licensing and branding – became strategies to provide for a profitable business model for stakeholders within the music industry in the 1990s. Due to horizontal and vertical integration processes major record labels merged and, as a result, the music industry was dominated by only four global media companies in the late 1990s and then three in the 2010s.²⁸

Globalization and the Western increase in economic prosperity allowed for faster circulation of information and increased access to export markets for international businesses (Robertson 1992, Tomlinson 1999). Festivals stimulated growing corporate sponsorship interest and growing mainstream media interest because of three factors: the rise of commercial satellite and cable television, the sponsorship of individual television programs and the growth of the Internet (Anderton 2015, 210). For consumers, the growth of economic prosperity resulted in increasing mobility and, consequently, tourism. The tourist industry helped perpetuate some music scenes to the expectations of what Urry

26 <https://hungarytoday.hu/sziget-festival-2019-visitors-attendance/>

27 "1991-00 The Mother of All Interviews: Zappa on Music and Society." Afka.net. Accessed March 1, 2017. [Http://www.afka.net/Articles/1991-00_Telos.htm](http://www.afka.net/Articles/1991-00_Telos.htm).

28 The Big Four: Sony, Warner, Universal and EMI. In 2012, Universal Music purchased EMI, reducing the Big Four labels to the Big Three.

(1990) calls the “tourist gaze.” That is, that a tourist’s (or fan’s) expectation about a certain place or event was based on media-generated information which could be cultivated for economic purposes.²⁹ This was especially interesting for festivals, since the promotion of locality and place-making has always been an important aspect of festivals.

The number of festivals increased dramatically and expanded into a diverse array of – often genre-specific – music events in the 1990s (Bennett 2014, McKay 2015). The emergence and popularity of electronic dance music, for example, resulted in large-scale international dance events. For example, festivals such as Mysteryland (1993), Dance Valley (1995) and the Amsterdam Dance Event (1995) were founded in the Netherlands. Internationally, the Sónar Festival (1994) in Barcelona and Melt! (1997) in Gräfenhainichen (Germany) became highly popular dance events. Another notable major 1990s dance event was the Love Parade (1989-2010), which became known as the most famous techno parade in the world (Nye and Hitzler 2015).³⁰ Today, dance events remain highly popular. Tomorrowland (2005) in Belgium, for example, is considered to be the foremost global EDM festival, selling out immediately every year and attracting 180.000 visitors over three days.³¹ Having a multiple-day festival allows the organization to use an *economies of scale* strategy, in which multiple performances on the location are planned to cover costs and underpin logistic difficulties.

Festivals from other musical areas also emerged and became popular during the 1990s. The aforementioned Sziget festival (Hungary) is one example. Older festivals, such as Glastonbury (1970) and Roskilde (1971) also saw attendance rates rise during the 1990s. Roskilde, for example, almost doubled in size, going from 56.000 visitors in 1989 to 96.000 in 1999. As Holt (2017, 30) points out: “By the 2000s there were more festivals, bigger festivals, and corporately owned festivals [...]. The large-scale festival became such a lucrative format during the festival boom that many event and concert promoters began promoting festivals”.

Internationally, the number of new festivals, as well as the popularity of older festivals grew significantly in the 2000s. The EXIT festival (2000) held in Novi Sad, Serbia, Rock in Rio (1985, originating in Rio de Janeiro, but branching into other locations such as Lisbon and Madrid in the 2000s) and the English Isle of Wight festival (that originally took place during 1968-1970, but was revived in 2002 and has been taking place ever since) are only a few examples of immensely popular events that attract visitors from all over the world.

Not only has increased mobility and financial recourses of consumers resulted in the internationalization of these larger festivals. Festivals have been integrated into

29 One can think about events such as Sziget or Glastonbury. But also the famous Abbey Road crosswalk in London, Wagner’s Festspielhaus in Bayreuth or Elvis’s Graceland in Memphis (TN).

30 The Love Parade was discontinued permanently in 2010 due to a fatal accident in the GERman city of Duisburg. Twenty-one people died and over 500 were injured when the large crowd got stuck in a pedestrian tunnel. Nye, Sean and Hitzler, Ronald. “The Love Parade: European techno, the EDM festival and the tragedy in Duisburg” In: George McKay, *The Pop Festival: History, Music, Media, Culture* (2015), p.115.

31 “Tomorrowland 2016 Sells Out in 40 Minutes -- Without an Announced Roster.” Billboard. Accessed February 27, 2017. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/dance/6859539/tomorrowland-2016-sells-out-40-minutes>. Web. Accessed: 27 February 2017.

modern-day life to the point where they function as an essential part of the leisure economy. In Netherlands alone, for example, there were 837 festivals organized in 2016, which amounts to 2.3 festivals per day.³² Indeed, as McKay (2015, 3) stresses: “Today’s festivals range from the massive – such as Roskilde or Glastonbury Festival, Notting Hill Carnival or (until recently) Love Parade, Lollapalooza or Big Day Out – to the local, small-scale, community or the recently innovated ‘boutique’ events.”

1.5 Digital Revolution and Social Media in the Age of Translocalism

In contemporary society, it is hard to imagine a world without digital media. Professional promoters and event organizers use media companies to market an event, to sell tickets and to provide visibility for sponsors. Also, audiences often share their experiences on social media in text, pictures and movies, resulting in instant outsider access and providing a digital form of inclusion. Indeed, as Fabian Holt (2010) has argued, digital media alter our spatial and temporal relationship to the outside world. It is no longer necessary to leave the house to buy music, tickets, to watch live performances in *real-time*, or see a documented registration of a festival.³³ Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram – social media have become part of everyday life. It is hard to imagine that Facebook emerged in 2004, that YouTube was founded in 2005 and Instagram arose in 2011. Teaser movies, after movies, streams, podcasts, tweets and “likes” provide forums for social participation and interaction of the live experience and festivals in new ways. To put it in Holt’s (2010, 248) words: “[...] live music has a new cultural location in the era of networked digital media.”

The digital revolution fueled these changes within performance practice. Since peer-to-peer file sharing internet services (Napster) and digital downloading practices caused a financial crisis in the music industry in 1999, live performance has shifted from having a primarily supporting role in the music business (to sell more records) to a leading role (making a record as an excuse to embark on a tour). With records sales dropping, live performance – and the concert experience – had to provide for the stream of income after the 2000s and therefore significantly transformed the role of festivals within the music business (Krueger 2005). As Simon Frith (2007) points out, a longing for collective live experience informs the organization of the music economy, even in a highly mediated environment. According to Frith (4), the music industry’s strategy to deal with the shifting business model from recorded to live music, therefore, was to increase audience capacity and grow music festivals: “Festivals are the key asset in the portfolio of the international

32 “Nieuws: Aantal Festivals in Nederland Blijft Maar Doorgroeien - EventBranche.nl.” EventBranche.nl: Trends, Nieuws, Vakinformatie En De Laatste Ontwikkelingen over Evenementen. - EventBranche.nl. Accessed March 20, 2017. <http://www.eventbranche.nl/nieuws/aantal-festivals-in-nederland-blijft-maar-doorgroeien-11563.html>.

33 These media practices have been accelerated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

corporations [...] and the economic reasons for this are obvious.”

Another aspect of music festivals with regard to the *Age of Translocalism*, is the recent trend in festival practice that they have become increasingly “ageless.” Ageless, in the sense that festival facilities have become more sophisticated in recent years in order to serve the needs of an increasingly age-diverse audience. In the past, music festivals were often associated with bad hygienic circumstances, dirty camp sites, long waiting lines or bad and expensive food, things that primarily only a youthful demographic might be willing to endure. Now that festivals have become more mainstream, more attention is paid to proper facilities such as catering, bathrooms and accommodation. As SPOT festival organizer Jesper Mardahl argues:

The average festival goer is not necessarily young people anymore. People from our generation and even older are attending festivals because they have been doing that for twenty, thirty or even forty years. So why should they stop doing that? But obviously they will have other needs and demands for festivals. You see this at Roskilde festival: you can buy a tent in a quiet area so you can be assured that you get a hot shower in the morning and even a breakfast. But you have everything. You still have the area where people just go crazy and then you can upscale to the point where they offer hotel rooms. They have to do that, to broaden their scope.³⁴

The threshold to experience culture and live music in a festival setting, whether rural or urban, has been lowered and insofar as festivals were ever completely closed off from larger society, they are now experienced and celebrated at the very center of consumer culture.

Today’s music festival practice is a complex field of interests where different value systems are at work. Economic value systems, (e.g. ticket sales, branding, media rights, pouring rights), political value systems (e.g. tourism, city marketing, sustainability) and cultural value systems (e.g. artistry, education, social identity) all have a stake in contemporary festival practice (Anderton 2015). Multimedia, technological innovation and increased audience participation inform concert and festival experience and, therefore, these value systems. Instead of paper programs we have apps that guide us through the festival experience, providing instant information about artists, locations or musical preferences. Audience engagement might not be something new, but, as media scholar Joshua Meyrowitz (2014, 319) knew, “Even conservative content may be revolutionary when disseminated in new ways.” While the quintessential festival experience remains reliant on one’s presence in the here and now, the digital shift has had a profound impact on the democratization of its practical routines. In addition, the recent CoVid-19 outbreak has accelerated this process.³⁵

34 Jesper Mardahl, co-organizer SPOT Festival and head of Promus, interview with author, 13 January 2017.

35 The Reeperbahn festival’s conference, for example, has taken place exclusively online in September 2020.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of how post-traditional music festivals were informed by political, economic and cultural motives from the post-war period until the present. Adapting Bianchini's division of festivals into three historical periods, I have argued that we need to expand these three stages into a fourth stage to shed light on contemporary festival practice. Reconstruction – especially as (re-) unification became an urgent topic in contemporary European politics –, participation (i.e. social engagement), city marketing, digital media, and demographic diversification increasingly emerged as part of contemporary festival culture. These multifaceted convergences have lead to what I coin as the fourth stage, the *Age of Translocalism*.

The development and increasing popularity of international European music festivals can be attributed to international cooperation, (trans)local cultural policies and fast distribution of knowledge due to developing (digital) media networks. As we have seen, the expansion of commercial companies into promotion, branding and sponsorship enterprises played a major role in the growth of the music festival sector in the last twenty-five years. But aspects of countercultural thinking remain part of contemporary festival experience as well. Tensions exist between social autonomous festivals – which have critical authority and are not commercially motivated – and the creative economy value system, in which culture may serve a purpose outside of culture. One challenge is to find out how these systems can work together and co-exist.

In recent years more research has been undertaken on popular music festivals and the role of these within contemporary creative economies (McKay 2015, Bennett, 2016, Holt 2017). As we have seen, older research mostly deals with anthropological perspectives or cultural economic perspectives, measuring the “impact factor” (Vaughn 1980, O'Hagan 1992, Pommerehne 1992). Until recently, contemporary festivals were perceived as mere commercial enterprises and therefore inauthentic or commodified. In other words, in terms of what they lack in relation to older, mostly rural, festivals. Perhaps this is because, as Sassatelli (2008, 17) points out, “[...] contemporary, post-traditional festivals have lost their strict association with religion that they have escaped the sociologist's attention and have been dismissed as not equally revelatory of a society's self-representation as their traditional forebears.” In the *Age of Translocalism*, I suggest, we explore the various value systems adopted by festivals and to what ends can such an exploration can reveal insights with regards to how festivals compete with other's value structures.

To investigate contemporary festivals through only one of the analytical lenses mentioned above is to overlook important facets of our post-globalized festival culture. After all, often music is not the only “product” that is sold; other art forms, fashion, tourism, branding and merchandising all play an important role in the music festival economy. How an urban music festival evolved within European cultural policy strategies, how it negotiates contemporary European music industry values and how it functions as a representative of the European music industry today, is something the case of Eurosonic Noorderslag will reveal.

Chapter 2

Eurosonic Noorderslag:

Emergence and Historical Development

2.1 Holland vs Belgium

An article in the Dutch local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (Duk and Van Schoonhoven 1991, 9), published on January 7th 1991, reads: “Noorderslag succesvol, maar hoe nu verder? (*Noorderslag successful, but how to continue?*).” The article describes the course of the fifth edition of “the only music festival that provides a representative image of Dutch popular music.” In this fifth edition, in 1991, Noorderslag attracted a larger crowd (2800) and more bands (34) than previous editions, which led to the question of how the festival was prepared to deal with its audience capacity problems. Could Noorderslag maintain its newly achieved reputation as an exciting event, as the supply of young and talented Dutch bands was then “too limited to have a surprising and exciting program on every edition,” according to this newspaper critic. Today, however, the *European Music and Showcase Festival Eurosonic Noorderslag*, as it is referred to now, is one of the most recognizable and longest running cultural events in the Netherlands and claims international recognition as the leading music festival to promote regional, national and international musical talent in Europe.

Though some centralized archival material is available (e.g. Poparchief Groningen), no serious attempts have been made to write its history. In this chapter, I therefore offer a first reconstruction of its history. This chapter is based on primary sources, such as the festival’s own publications as well as internal documents and financial reports. Digital sources were also consulted, such as media reports, municipal policy reports and impact studies commissioned by the festival. This material has been integrated with interviews with key representatives from the festival, some of whom who have been involved since the inception of the event in 1986.

Each year in January, the Dutch city of Groningen serves as the epicenter of the European music industry with a four-day series of events, officially named *The European Music and Showcase Festival Eurosonic Noorderslag*. Since 1986, the festival has served as an important platform for local and national popular music talent. With the initiation of Euroslagt in 1995, it has added an international European music platform aimed at showcasing new talent and fostering the circulation of European popular music repertoires. Today, it provides a platform for hundreds of artists, thousands of professional music industry representatives and, through international dissemination of (digital) media by and about the festival, it reaches a crowd of millions. In its 35-year existence, *Eurosonic Noorderslag* or ESNS, as it is commonly referred to, has developed into the leading platform for the European music industry. With its emphasis on the

circulation of European repertoire and networks, it differentiates itself from other events within the contemporary music festival landscape. Combined with a music industry conference, the ESNS festival presents a European focused cultural event, claiming to provide a counterweight to the dominance of the Anglo-American music industry.

In this chapter I will historicize and contextualize the translocal development of ESNS over the course of its history. That is, I will examine how the growing influence of ESNS as music festival informed the reception and organization of the festival and, also, how it transitioned from a playful one-off event to a highly mediatized international music platform. I zoom in on what I have identified to be the three dominant themes that have preoccupied organizers, media outlets, visitors and artists since the festival emerged in 1986: *Institutional Dynamics*, *Curation and Award Culture*, and *Place and Cultural Representation*.

The first section discusses the institutional development of the event, which illustrates the role of popular music in municipal cultural policy. The Curation and Award Culture section will discuss the genres, selection criteria, accessibility and rewards embedded into the development of Eurosonic. In this section the music will come to the fore. The final section, Place and Cultural Representation, will discuss how this large urban event impacts the urban environment, but also how the unique city characteristics (e.g. demographic structure and the city center layout with its large density of clubs and bars) helped shape the festival profile and, consequently, have been crucial in maintaining the event for the city of Groningen. Ultimately, this chapter will reveal how the case of ESNS offers a model for initiatives that can aid in the preservation and promotion of local cultural identity while, concurrently, engaging in international collaborative projects. I will argue, then, that ESNS has acquired its status as the foremost European music showcase event through building innovative international networks while at the same time solidifying its reputation as a locally embedded event.

It is this local embeddedness that sparked debates when the local music scene felt they were under-recognized. Precisely because the festival was held in Groningen, bands from the north felt it was the cultural duty of *Noorderslag* to promote the local (or at least the northern) music scene. When this didn't happen to their full satisfaction, local musicians initiated unofficial peripheral events to provide them with alternative ways to present these artists. While the controversy and the consequential unofficial initiatives undeniably add to the dynamic character of the event there were also concerns about the event getting out of hand. Over time, festival representatives have indeed often expressed their concerns about the festival becoming an uncontrollable proliferation of parties.

To integrate the large variety of perspectives and views in composing a coherent story, I decided to use two main methodological routes. First, I conducted twenty-six in-depth semi-structured interviews with the festival's key players and festival participants. These include ESNS representatives (i.e. founders, organizers, bookers), musicians, visitors, venue owners and booking agents. The interviews were held in the period between May 2017 and March 2020. mostly I approached the respondents by email, explain the reason for contacting them, and ask them for an interview appointment. In

instances I did not have their contact information, I would consult people within their network for the best strategy to contact them. Most interviews were conducted in person at various locations and were typically one to two hours in length. When conducting an interview in person was not an option, we would arrange an appointment by phone, which occurred in five instances. With consent from the interviewee I recorded the interview on my phone or tablet, after which I would transcribe the conversation and incorporate relevant information in my research. The interviews were semi-structured. That is, I had prepared a list of questions (tailored to the specific respondent), but I would also let the conversation decide which additional questions came up during the conversation. This strategy was geared towards gathering as much in-depth information as possible on the interviewee's backgrounds, opinions, and experiences. The second main methodological route was also ethnographic in nature; that of a participant observation strategy. This involved making field notes, making recordings of panels, interviews, and concerts, and also taking photography whenever the situation could provide an explicative image. Being granted media access by the festival organization was very helpful in this regard. I then cross-referenced this data with (digital) media sources, historical accounts, festival programs and newspaper archives, in order to paint a complete as possible picture. The analysis hereafter – which is the result of these efforts – will provide an essential foundation on which my analysis in consequential chapters in this dissertation is based.

2.2 Institutional Dynamics

“I have instantly made pop culture central to the policy strategy”³⁶ – Pim van Klink, 2018 (Former managing director Oosterpoort and Noorderslag founder)

This section will discuss how Groningen's municipal cultural policy sparked the initiation of pop music in Groningen. I will discuss several key features of the festival relating to its organizational development, such as municipal cultural policy, artistic curation, corporate expansion, music industry networking, European identity construction, translocalism, city branding, and money streams. First, in order to get some grasp on the scope of its development in terms of growth, the following figure shows the festival's expansion over the course of thirty-five years:

	1986	1995	2005	2018
Festival visitors	1100	6000	14.200	40,288
Conference visitors	-	350	1500	4,092
Number of acts	19	51	170	352
Number of venues	1	5	25	53

Figure 1. *Note: In this table the *Oosterpoort*, where *Noorderslag* is held, is regarded as one venue, although it holds multiple stages.

36 Interview with author, 11-05-2017

The multi-faceted, internationally acclaimed showcase festival that ESNS is today began as a modest initiative to bring pop music to the *Oosterpoort*, a venue located south-east in the city center in Groningen. The *Oosterpoort* is a cultural center dating back to the early 1970s. Besides the main hall (seating 1200) people and the smaller hall (seating 450 people), many other areas of the building are used for performances. It holds two larger stages as well as conference spaces, providing for a maximum capacity of approximately 5,500 people.

In 1985 the Groningen city council hired art economist Pim van Klink (1952) to be the new managing director for the venues the *Oosterpoort* and the *Stadsschouwburg* (city theatre). His primary task was to resolve the growing financial problems the venues were confronted with, after a failing economic policy from the previous management. Van Klink made pop music a priority in his management policy because pop music was virtually non-existent in these city venues. Therefore, Van Klink approached the Groningen organization *Stichting voor Pop Groningen* (Foundation for Pop Groningen), a foundation which was initiated in 1982 and was dedicated to promoting pop music in Groningen. One of its primary aims was to bridge the gap between the many smaller music venues in Groningen and the bigger venues, such as the *Oosterpoort*, the *Stadsschouwburg* and the *Martinihal*, and offer a stage for bands that would otherwise not be able to perform in Groningen. One of the foundation representatives was Peter Smidt (1959), who would become very important for the development of the festival over the years as its creative director and main spokesperson.³⁷ In collaboration with Smidt and the foundation, a new vision was developed to promote pop music in the *Oosterpoort*.

The first edition of the festival we know now as ESNS saw the light of day on January 4, 1986. It was meant to be a playful music contest between Dutch and Belgian pop bands, aimed to promote Dutch bands and was named, accordingly, the *Holland-Belgium* festival. The *Holland-Belgium* festival did not meet the attendance expectations and was, consequently, not a profit-making undertaking for the festival organization. But press reviews were positive and the festival received substantial attention in local and national media. Due to this media exposure, the initiators recognized its potential and decided to continue the festival in the following year.³⁸ To this objective the *Holland-Belgium* festival was organized on the night of January 4, 1986, which is considered the first edition of ESNS. As stated earlier, the festival was intended as a competition between (ten) Dutch and (nine) Belgian pop bands with the central goal to discover the “status of modern pop music in the lowlands,” as a local journalist stated (Palfenier 1985, 36). After the festival, the media claimed the *Holland-Belgium* festival was “won” by Holland, due to the fact that “Belgium was leaning on its acquired fame from previous years too much,” referring with this comment to the success of Belgian electronic pop music in the early 1980s.³⁹

37 Besides Peter Smidt, the foundation consisted of Rob Kauffman, Rob Acker and Eddy Koekkoek. On 11-01-2019, Smidt announced that he would resign from the ES organization due to health issues.

38 The reported attendance numbers for the first festival edition vary. The NvhN report mentions 1500 visitors, Pim van Klink mentioned 1000 in an interview with the author. In an interview with DvhN 16-01-2016 he mentions 1100. In the same interview Van Klink mentions a budget of 25,000 guilders and an eventual loss of 40,000. Due to its media success, they decided to continue, nevertheless.

39 The Belgian act *Front 242* was considered one of the leading acts of the Electronic Body Music (EBM) genre

The *Holland-Belgium* festival was not a financial success; only 1100 people attended out of the 2000 available places. It did, however, attract substantial media attention. As Van Klink recalled: “The national press was really excited about the festival concept. The concept was Holland vs. Belgium at the time. Those Belgian bands were quite hip. [...] it was a huge success and the name was established. We then agreed to elevate it as a tradition.”⁴⁰ The response to the festival was not merely positive, however. Regional bands and musicians, as well as some local media, were dissatisfied because no acts from the northern part of the Netherlands were included in the festival line-up. Musicians felt ignored because of the fact that a festival, held in the *Oosterpoort*, which claimed to represent Dutch music, proceeded without including any local bands.⁴¹ Northern-based singer and *Top Hole* record label owner Jos Hayer, for example, claimed that this was “[...] a slap in the face for many northern pop groups”.

The organization proved susceptible to the criticism and changed the festival’s direction for the second festival edition in the following year. Again, the organization promoted the festival as a contest once again, but this time only Dutch acts appeared on the program. The competition was now between acts from the northern part of the Netherlands (the provinces of Groningen and Friesland) against bands from the remaining parts of the Netherlands. This change gave the festival its new name, “*De Noorderslag*” (The Battle of the North).⁴² After this second edition the festival organization abandoned the competition element as the event proved viable as a showcase for promising and successful Dutch bands. The festival concept – a playful competition – proved successful, although questions arose about the festival’s direction for the second year. Interestingly, the organization’s initial idea for the second edition was to organize a competition between bands from Eastern and Western Europe. To this end, three executives travelled to Eastern Europe, but after listening to Hungarian, Russian and Polish bands, they concluded that the quality was too low: “They start off playing reggae, then a few rock and roll riffs and a song from the Eurovision Song Contest, all shit,” Smidt stated about this international endeavor (Palfenier 1986, 13).

Music journalist Wierd Duk epitomized the discussion concerning the change in the festival’s direction in local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* on 12 May 1986, referencing the organization of *Holland-Belgium festival*. After Duk (1986, 11) reviewed some new acts from the Dutch (northern) provinces of Friesland and Groningen, he closed the article somewhat sarcastically, suggesting that “[...] all this talent from Friesland and Groningen might be something for the Holland-Germany Festival in 1987.”⁴³ Not

in the 1980s.

40 Pim van Klink, conversation with author, 11 May, 2017.

41 Northern-based singer and *Top Hole* record label owner Jos Hayer, for example, claimed that this was “[...] a blow in the face for many northern pop groups” (Duk 1986, 11). The nineteen participating Dutch and Belgian acts were: Blaine L. Reininger, Red Zebra, Flesh ‘n Fell, Dirk Blanchart, La Cosa Nostra, Poësie Noire, Arbeid Adelt, The Scabs, The Neon Judgement, Paleis van Boem, De Div, Claw Boys Claw, Tröckener Kecks, Fatal Flowers, Eton Crop, The Plastic Dolls, 5 Slag 1 Wijd, I’ve got the Bullets en Amsterdamse Gitarenslag.

42 The poster advertising the event read: “The best from the north against the rest of the Netherlands in one evening and night.” Data retrieved from Poparchieff Groningen. <https://www.poparchieffgroningen.nl/festivals/noorderslag/noorderslag-1987/view-01-05-2017>.

43 Of course Duk was unaware of the changes that were about to happen and that the bands mentioned in the

knowing at that point that the event would in fact change its concept to becoming a barrage between acts from Groningen and Friesland and acts from elsewhere in the Netherlands.

This second edition of the festival, now coined *De Noorderslag* (the battle of the north), was perceived to be a success. Not only was the festival a success because of the attendance rates (2200, which was almost double the amount of attendance in the previous year), but also because the Dutch music press, such as VARA radio and the pop magazines, were able to “find Groningen once again”, as reporter Max Palfenier (1986) stated. This statement, to find Groningen again, was a reflection of the lingering belief that the city’s musical past was neglected.⁴⁴ It also connected the festival explicitly to the city and its relative remoteness. Both locals and local media attributed to popular music events for conferring local forms of musical heritage.

Press reports were also critical about the seemingly random choice from the organization regarding the performing bands. Media claimed that the “best of the north” bands were already active (and successful) in the previous year, when no northern bands were booked for the first edition of the festival. “True,” Peter Smidt replied in an interview in newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant* (Snijder 1987, 2):

Some of them have existed for years. [But] those bands found their form just now and that is an important selection criterion for us. [...] The bands we book have to have proven themselves in one way or another if we will have them on our festival. We don’t consider it our task to confront the audience with new, unknown bands.

This is an interesting statement, considering the showcase direction the festival would take in later years, presenting mainly unknown and upcoming talent during the *Eurosonic* part of the festival. As we shall see later, industry networking, international connections that were established during the 1988 Eurorock event in Groningen, and adding the European element to the festival in 1995 impacted this change.

In 1987, however, there was no winner of the competition according to media consensus. Northern bands, as well as the acts from the other parts of the Netherlands, were all able to entertain the audience and to deliver musically. This sparked the idea that perhaps the competition element was not the unique selling point of the festival. Rather, that a broader showcasing of Dutch talent was a more fruitful festival strategy. Interestingly, Smidt claimed the competition element of the two previous editions was added by accident and was subsequently exaggerated by the press. He stated: “Everybody talked about dichotomies, but in fact we just presented what was happening in pop music.

article would be on the *De Noorderslag* bill eight months later.

44 By “Finding Groningen once again” Palfenier referred to the period in the late 1970s when Groningen was well-known for its vibrant and productive music scene. This was a result of the city policy that allowed bars to have flexible opening hours at night, as long as they would have live music in their venue. This period is now referred to as “Groninger springtij” (Groningen spring tide), a term coined by journalist Wierd Duk, with bands such as White Honey, New Adventures and Herman Brood being the most successful exponents of this period.

And that is what we aim for now” (Palfenier 1988, 9). Here the tension between festivals as locally connected events, performing a sense of place (Whitley, Bennett and Hawkins 2004) and as occurrences aiming at broader audiences and appealing to the national music industry becomes apparent.

In 1988, the program for *Noorderslag*, as it was renamed now (without the prefix “De”) consisted of twenty-four acts who would be spread over four stages in the *Oosterpoort*. All 2150 available tickets were sold during presale and on 8 January 1988, one day before the 1988 edition, the line-up was complete. The festival also grew in size. The organization expected a sold out venue, attracting approximately 2100 visitors. De Oosterpoort could handle more visitors but, as Peter Smidt (Palfenier 1988, 9) stated, “we have to keep it cozy.”

After the second festival edition in 1987, the *Foundation for Pop Groningen* wanted to adjust its organizational structure. To this objective, the rapport “*Verslag en Beleidsplan 5 jaar Stichting Pop Groningen*” (Rapport and Policy plan 5 years Foundation Pop Groningen) was presented during *Noorderslag*. Their situation was discussed in the report and plans for the future were unfolded. One of the plans, as foundation member Rob Kauffman revealed, was to ask the municipal government for a “risk budget,” a guarantee. The financial and cultural climate was challenging in Groningen in this period. Groningen’s most successful popular music venue Vera, for example, found itself in jeopardy due to cutting of municipal subsidies by more than two-thirds (Palfenier 1987, 17).

In 1991, a mere five years since the initiation of the festival, financing remained an issue, despite the fact that the festival sold out. The budget was below 100,000 guilders. “That is not much, and we’d rather invest that money in bands”, Peter Smidt stated (Duk 1990, 17). “A lot of bands don’t receive their full fee, that is just impossible.” After 5 years the festivals had built some prestige and could thrive without programming commercial headliners. He remarked: “The bands like to play here. They know that, and if they perform well, they will receive a lot of press attention the next day.” Little has changed over the years: To this day, acts that perform on Eurosonic don’t get paid – not even a reimbursement of expenses – but they perform for media exposure and the potential benefits for their careers (see Chapter 4).⁴⁵

In 1992, *Noorderslag* was co-organized with *Conamus* (renamed *Buma Cultuur* in 2006) for the first time, which was (and still is) the leading Dutch organization concerned with the promotion of Dutch popular music. Peter Smidt remembered the initial process and the mutual interest in an interview (Groenewold 2011, 48):

We were always looking for money with *Noorderslag*. The primary concern of *Buma Cultuur* was to support and promote Dutch music. So this was a logical

⁴⁵ This discussion surfaced in an article in 2017, when Edwin Vis, the drummer of local band *Black Fuse*, wrote an article in the newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*. His argument was the fact that acts do not get paid deems them “worthless.” He claimed that the organization should pay the bands at least something for their efforts and spend less on side events that (seemingly) don’t benefit the musicians. After, all, the festival needs musical talent to exist and should therefore nourish the participating acts. The article was a reaction to an article from a week earlier, in which festival programmer Joey Ruchtie mentioned that artists “have to bring money to perform” (i.e. not getting reimbursed for expenses).

partner for us. There was immediate interest in working together, both financially as well as strategically.” [...] We did not have access to important radio DJs or music programmers in Hilversum. The people at Buma Cultuur did. But they lacked the right platform to bring attention to the Pop Prize.

As a result of this shift, the *Foundation for Pop Groningen*, the founding partner in the initiation of Noorderslag, was excluded from the organization in the following year.⁴⁶ Peter Smidt left the foundation and became an employee of *Conamus*, under the prerequisite that he could stay involved with Noorderslag. *Conamus* recognized the festival's potential and utilized its extensive networks to bring Noorderslag to the attention of the international music industry. This allowed Noorderslag to professionalize and develop its seminar as an international event.

Another issue the media reported on was the social aspect of the festival. As is the case with music festivals more generically the opportunity to see bands perform is not the festival's only appeal. Whether it is an intentional or unintentional process, a side effect is that visitors socialize, network, catch up with old friends and form new bonds. This was also the case when the European rock equivalent of the Eurovision Song Contest, *Eurorock*, was organized in the Oosterpoort in 1988.

This European dimension was incorporated into *Euroslagt* after the seminar preceding Noorderslag started attracting music industry representatives from countries outside of the Netherlands. These international networks were already established when the *European Broadcasting Union* (EBU) organized an event in the Oosterpoort in 1988 called *Eurorock*. *Eurorock* was a festival with exclusively European acts and international European broadcasting organizations who were members of the EBU. These members broadcasted recordings of the festival in their home countries (VARA in The Netherlands). Attendance-wise, *Eurorock* was not a success. However, it marked the beginning of cooperation on a European level. As Peter Smidt remarked (Groenewold 2011, 48) about this development: “Suddenly we were in contact with radio producers from all over Europe. It was the first start to what would become EuroSonic.”

The EBU is still a major player within the festival today. Each participating EU radio station can delegate one of their own acts to Groningen, in cooperation with the ESNS bookers. It has to be an act with sufficient potential for an EU audience. (i.e. a band with a “story,” a booking agency, record company, management office). There has to be spin-off, as Peter Sikkema stated.⁴⁷ *Eurorock* can be perceived as the predecessor of Eurosonic, he continued: “Every year one of the participating EBU countries organized a festival where every country could send their acts. But it was very difficult to find an

46 The Pop Foundation (*Stichting Pop*) was unhappy about the one-sided termination of the cooperation between Stichting Pop and the *Oosterpoort* leading up to Noorderslag 1993. Foundation chairman Rob Kauffman proclaimed in the media that the break-up was strange because De Oosterpoort had never expressed any dissatisfaction during the yearly evaluative meetings. Kauffman suspected that his criticism towards Peter Smidt was the main motif for the break-up. (Vos 1992, 15)

47 “Unboxing Groningen” event, discussion on the importance of ESNS with Gert Plas (Pop Archive Groningen), Peter van der Heide (Journalist) and Peter Sikkema (Programmer ESNS). Grand Theatre, Groningen on 13-01-2019.

audience for that and to turn that into a successful event. With the initiation of Eurosonic (Euroslagt) the EBU joined in to support the event and also to perceive it as their event to which they could send their acts and broadcast it internationally.”

The media observed that while the festival failed as an event for the “regular” visitors it was a great opportunity to network. Representatives from the international music industry were well represented and made use of the networking possibilities: “Sometimes it seemed as if there were more people present with guest tickets than regular (paying) customers,” as journalist Jacob Haagsma (1988, 11) noted. Early signs of the future Noorderslag conference started to emerge when the festival organization decided to initiate official meetings during the afternoon of the festival day.

As Noorderslag became a commercially successful and influential festival for the Dutch music scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it also attracted an increasing number of music industry professionals (e.g. bookers, promoters, record label executives and media outlets). These professionals would often meet informally at concerts and discuss acts and new developments. The media also recognized that the festival was not just a band presentation, but served networking and other social interactions as well. As journalist Max Palfenier (1988, 9): “A young man, who was inside the venue for three hours, hadn’t seen a band yet.” [...] “Noorderslag is the New Year’s reception where it is more important to see and to be seen, than watch yet another Dutch pop band.” Because of this, festival founder and creative director Peter Smidt decided to institutionalize this networking dynamic of the festival in the early 1990s, initiating a music industry-focused seminar prior to the festival. The New Year’s reception of the European music industry would become the well-known unofficial description of the festival henceforth. It started out as a small informal event to which very little media attention was given.⁴⁸ Over the years, however, it grew into a multi-day international networking event, attracting over 4,000 music industry professionals annually.

With the expansion and the continued success of the festival, unofficial events started to emerge in the 1990s.⁴⁹ Echoing criticisms of the first Noorderslag edition, local musicians still felt that the organization ignored local music culture when composing the festival line-up. If, as Krims (2007) claims, a shared sense of place through music directly constitutes a sense of shared identity, local musicians from Groningen felt that their identity was, at best, ignored and, at worst, completely stripped. Therefore, a peripheral counter-festival for bands from Groningen was organized by the name of Noorderslagting (the word Noorderslagting being a pun, meaning “Northern massacre”).⁵⁰ The aim of organizing this alternative festival was to provide a stage for local bands only and served as a counterpart to *Noorderslag*.

48 It was mentioned as a separate festival part for the first time in a report in *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* “Programma Noorderslag is Rond” on 2 December 1992.

49 It also opened up opportunities for local businesses and musicians to profit from it, without officially participating in the event. These processes resemble the expansion of the festival’s American equivalent showcase festival, South by Southwest (SXSW). See Jonathan R. Wynn, 2016. “The sites and Sounds of Placemaking: Branding, Festivalization, and the Contemporary City.” In *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 28 (2).

50 Eddy Koekkoek came up with the idea and initially wanted to call the festival “Noorderknaal” (Northern Bang). Martin Groenewold came up with the name “Noorderslagting” after that. DvhN 10-01-2015

Noorderslagting was held on the 8th of January 1993 in Groningen's historic venue Huize Maas, the day before *Noorderslag* was scheduled. It provided a platform for 12 local acts.⁵¹ *Noorderslagting* was a private initiative, organized by musicians Eddy Koekkoek, Bert Volmer and Peter van der Heide, all representatives from the Groningen music scene.⁵² Koekkoek, the initiator as well as the musician in the participating band *The Seventh Son*, said that the initiative was “just a pinprick,” not an anti-festival: “But there are a lot of good bands in Groningen, this place is really happening. This is ignored on *Noorderslag*, while it all started out once with northern bands.” To which *Noorderslag* executive Peter Smidt replied: “That was six years ago. And I know another 30 bands who want to play on *Noorderslag*. But our point of departure is: what is happening in The Netherlands. And, consequently, we apply the criterion of quality” (Haagsma 1992, 21).

Ironically, the local media response to *Noorderslagting* was somewhat critical. Local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (Van Vliet 1993, 17), for example, reflected on *Noorderslagting* stating: “Yesterday's *Noorderslagting* was not very representative of the music scene in Groningen, but the variety was positive.” As of 1995 *Noorderslagting* was incorporated in the *Noorderslag* weekend under the name *Euroslagt*. Peter Sikkema, who had taken responsibility for the *Noorderslag* program in 1995 after Peter Smidt left to work for Dutch music organization *Conamus*, stated about the cooperation with *Noorderslagting*: “The *Noorderslag* organization has reached out to *Noorderslagting* to cooperate because we wanted to provide an overview of new groups from Groningen and give them a chance to present themselves. We can serve foreign upcoming acts as well as local upcoming acts. A showcase concert might just provide that extra little push” (Vos 1995, 13).

The initiative revived and intensified discussions about the role of bands and artists from Groningen and to what extent they should be promoted. *Noorderslagting* was held for two consecutive years, until both organizations decided to cooperate and integrate the initiative under the name *Euroslagt* in the official *Noorderslag* program in 1995.⁵³ *Euroslagt* was added as an extra festival day and incorporated an eclectic mix of not only local bands, but also European acts.

Since 1995, the two festival elements, *Euroslagt* (which was renamed *Eurosonic* in 1999) and *Noorderslag* have coexisted and each evolved into full-fledged festivals claiming their place within the music industry. *Noorderslag* focuses exclusively on acts from the Netherlands and the Dutch music industry and *Eurosonic* as the European showcase festival, aimed to circulate European acts and repertoires – a dual approach which illustrates the aforementioned idea of the translocal dynamic. *Eurosonic* and *Noorderslag* expanded significantly since the 2000s and, although it is promoted as one event, it is actually a combination of two festivals along with a cluster of music industry related sub-

51 The venue is called Huize Maas, located on the *Vismarkt* in the city center. The monumental building was built in 1925 and used as a dance hall. Performing acts on *Noorderslagting* included: Detour, Da Zombi Squad, Windischrätz, Kleg, 't Combo Knus en Gezellig and Koekkoek's own band, The Seventh Son.

52 The main sponsor of the event was coffee shop “De Vliegende Hollander” owner Theo Buissink.

53 The second edition of *Noorderslagting* was, again, a separate initiative. However, collaboration with the official organization became apparent as the line-up was incorporated in the official *Noorderslag* program.

events which all represent and serve a wide variety of music industry stakeholder interests. The European focus, for example, is represented in the *European Talent Exchange Program* (ETEP), in which bands are stimulated and supported to perform outside of their home country. Also, the several national and international awards presented during the festival (among which, Pop Prize, EBBA and European Festival Awards) have been a significant part of the festival since 1992.

By 1994, the “Seminar Dutch Pop Music” attracted over 300 record label representatives, broadcasters, agencies and publishers who would discuss processes and developments within the music industry. For example, topics that were discussed in panels were city regulations for noise pollution, the level of Dutch pop music and the state of Dutch pop journalism. Interestingly, topics about the rise of digitalization were discussed such as “fascination visions for the future,” stating that: “Soon it will be possible to bring music to people’s homes digitally, who will then be able to archive this music digitally.” Which then raised the question: “Will retail disappear or will things not get off the ground due to piracy?” (Vos 1994, 11). In the mid-1990s, the increasing significance of the seminar was notable in press reports, designating Groningen as the “pop capital” during the event (Groenewold 1996, 15).

With the initiation of *Euroslagt* in 1995 the seminar would take on a more European character and was expanded into two days. In 1996 *Euroslagt* was renamed *Euroslag* (subsequently renamed *Eurosonic* in 1999) and was officially announced as “The European Showcase Festival.” With this addition, the festival and conference would definitively establish its focus on Europe for the subsequent years. On a European scale, industry festivals such as *Popkomm* in Berlin (GER) and *Midem* in Cannes (FR) were still leading in the early 1990s. The *Popkomm* festival was discontinued after 2011. In 1999, the prestigious European prize for artist who gained international success, the *European Border Breakers Award* (EBBA) show, was relocated from the Cannes *Midem* festival to Groningen as part of ESNS gaining international significance within Groningen. In 2005, *Midem* in Cannes was still considered the foremost networking platform to industry professionals (Carroll 2014). In recent years, however, the attendance numbers at *Midem* have been decreasing steadily.⁵⁴ And though other European festivals such as *SPOT* (Arhus, DK), *Reeperbahn Festival* (Hamburg, GER), *Primavera Sound* (Barcelona, ESP) and *Waves* (Vienna, AT) have a European music industry conference attached, the ESNS conference solidified its reputation as the focal point for the European music industry in the 2000s (Resnikoff 2013).

2003 was a landmark year in the history of ESNS when it launched its *European Talent Exchange Program* (ETEP) program. ETEP is an international cooperation program, which was initiated to stimulate the circulation of European repertoire within

54 In an interview with chief executive Alexandre Deniot, Music Business Worldwide journalist Rhian Jones suggested that the reason for the decline is that the global music business lost much of its revenues in the post-digital age, and that business executives could no longer afford to enjoy the luxurious accommodations and lodging facilities in Cannes. Also, previous head of the festival Bruno Crolot suggested that the decline in attendance was, at least in part, the result of industry professionals parasitizing on the event without buying conference tickets. Jones, Rhian, June 7, 2017. Accessed via: <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/future-hold-midem/>. Access date: 21-04-2020.

(participating) international festivals. The primary goal of the ETEP program was to provide European bands a podium with the opportunity to breakthrough internationally. In this program, the European festivals that take part in the program commit themselves to book at least two foreign bands from the Eurosonic line-up. In return, these festivals gain financial support from the sponsor organizations involved, such as the European Commission and *Buma Cultuur*. In the early stages of the program, only larger European festivals, such as *Roskilde* (DK), *Open Air St. Gallen* (CH) and *Glastonbury* (UK), were affiliated with the program. Today, however, there are over one hundred participating festivals on which over 3,000 ETEP shows were presented since the start of the program. After initiating ETEP, ESNS became more vocal in expressing its European interest, aiming to provide a counterweight to the dominance of the American music industry. Yet it remains significant that when an act from Eurosonic breaks through, it is “strikingly often” (Haagsma 2016, 34) a British act: including, for example, Sam Smith, James Blake, Franz Ferdinand, Dua Lipa, Hozier, Royal Blood, or Bastille. This is reflective of the significance and the continuing dominance of the Anglo music industry on the European continent.

EU cultural policy became more focused on culture as catalyst for international collaboration in the early 2000s. With the initiation of ETEP, *Eurosonic* had gained momentum within this broader focus on European cultural heritage. Consequently, as of 2005, *Eurosonic* introduced a focus country each year, signifying its European focus and, giving extra attention to interesting musical developments from that country. In 2005 the first focus country was France. The country provided fourteen acts for the *Eurosonic* program.

In the early 2010s, a wide variety of topics were on the conference agenda, such as sustainability and environmental issues, as well as digital technologies, the circulation of European live performance and social media. In 2011 the talk of the day was the reselling of tickets and the possibility of the introduction of a flexible pricing system (offering different prices for the same ticket). In 2014, new conference topics emerged, such as the need for innovation and sustainability. These included *Innovative Production Fair & Conference* and *Buma Music Meets Tech*. *SummerLabb* was launched in 2015. *SummerLabb*, initiated by presenter Jan Douwe Kroeske, was one such initiative, aimed at providing sustainable solutions for festivals. The pavilion travels from festival to festival to make people aware of innovations regarding sustainability. The Ebbingekwartier was the first location for the *Summerlab* event during ESNS 2014. On 14 January 2016 ESNS kicked-off the project *Innofest* in which large cultural festivals would become the experimental playground for innovative and sustainable practices from cooperating northern companies from different sectors. *Innofest* remains part of the festival program today (2020).⁵⁵

To a large extent the exponential growth of ESNS since the early 2000s has been made possible by the funding the festival receives on a regional, national and international scale.⁵⁶ The European Union, for example, committed to 2.1 million euros in subsidies

55 *Innofest* is currently a cooperation of eight Dutch northern festivals: Into the Great Wide Open, Welcome to the Village, Oerol, ESNS, TT Assen, Noorderzon, Festival der Aa and Paradigm. 104 parties were affiliated with the program in 2016.

56 Getting subsidy from local government was always an uncertain issue for ESNS. In 2008, for example, ESNS

in 2011. This money was granted to support the development ETEP. In 2015, ESNS successfully applied to the Creative Europe programme, securing 3,000,000 Euros of EU funding over six years, plus another €50,000 from private Dutch donors.⁵⁷ In 2018, the festival receives approximately 400,000 euros in regional subsidies as well as an additional 250,000 euros from the national institute *Fonds Podiumkunsten* (Performing Arts Fund) each year.⁵⁸ These subsidies provide the festival with opportunities to expand and further strengthen its position in the international music market. In June of 2020, however, the national Council for Culture (*Raad van Cultuur*) advised the national government to not include ESNS in the “Basisinfrastructuur (BIS), the organizations which are subsidized directly by the government due to their cultural significance. Because of this decision ESNS was in danger of missing out on 2.4 million Euros in subsidy over the course of four years. To the benefit of ESNS, the minister Bussemaker decided to ignore the advice and grant the subsidy after all.

The recurring struggle for structural financial support is in contrast to the substantial economic and cultural capital the festival generates for a wide variety of stakeholders. The cultural and economic value of ESNS for the city of Groningen gained attention in the mid-2000s as the festival was more oriented towards Europe. It was estimated in 2007 that the expected 15,000 visitors of the festival would spend approximately 2.5 million euros in the city of Groningen. This sum was mostly spent on restaurants, cafes and lodging. The international visitors of the Noorderslag seminar, especially, are good customers for the city. Per day they spend approximately 335,00 Euro, according to research conducted by *Groningen Congresbureau* (*DvhN* January 11, 2007).

In 2011 the economic impact of the festival would be under scrutiny again. In this research, conducted by *Hendrik Beerda Brand Consultancy*, media value would also be taken into consideration. Media value was calculated according to the amount of money that should have been paid for news article space or broadcasting time.⁵⁹ The expectation was that the economic spin-off would be much higher than before. In 2008 the media value was estimated at one million euros. But this statistic only considered print media. The new research conducted in 2011, included TV, radio and Internet as well. Mischa de Gier, municipal policy advisor for retail business and tourism in Groningen emphasized this importance: “[ESNS is a] focus event of the municipality of Groningen,

and some other local art organizations (among which *Noorderzon*, *Jonge Harten* and *Noorderlicht*) would not receive the extra subsidy that was asked for because they already received funding from the national government. Several cultural organizations from Groningen (among which Noorderslag), acting under the name of G7, debated about the subsidy cuts. Not just because of the money, but they also felt that they were not taken seriously. Eventually, the city council decided to reverse the decisions and provide full subsidies after all. In 2009 the plan was to cut the subsidy once again, decreasing the amount by €50,000, to a grant total of €100,000. After criticism from local political parties the decision was turned back by Councilman Jaap Dijkstra.

⁵⁷ Through project organization BECCA: <https://www.becca-europe.eu/projects/eurosonic-noorderslag> Accessed: 25-04-2018.

⁵⁸ <http://meerjarigeadvieszen.fondspodiumkunsten.nl/advieszen/noorderslag/>

⁵⁹ In ESNS's 2009 selected Press archive, for example, every article is accompanied by an estimated figure in Euros. An article in the Belgian newspaper *De Morgen*, published on 19-01-2009 is valued at € 8700,00. Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* published an article on the same date, valued at € 9088,61. And an article published on 31-03-2009 in Dutch *Oor* magazine is valued at €7220,00. The figures are calculated based on the frequency and the printing run (72.355, 703.584 and 23.362, respectively, according to the archive).

which has significant cultural and economic value and we therefore subsidize firmly from different angles. It is an event that makes us a little bigger” (Broere 2011). Late in 2011 *Hendrik Beerda Brand Consultancy* presented its report. The consultancy company added up the media value and international value and affirmed that ESNS was valuable for the city because it generated free publicity and also because the city was flooded with (international) tourists in the festival week who came here to eat, drink and spend the night. The conclusion was that ESNS grossed 1.7 million euros annually: the festival costs € 4,768.713 and grossed € 6,506.701. The publicity value had been calculated at around 3.6 million, in the Netherlands only. The “societal value” of 31.5 million euros is the number the festival would be worth if it is sold, considered from a long term perspective (Haagsma 2011, 9). With this study, ESNS revealed that culture could be economically beneficial in a time when cultural budgets were cut by the Dutch government dramatically.

Mediation and digitalization have been crucial in the festival’s development since the late 1990s. From the live broadcasting of the Pop Prize on Dutch TV in 1994, the European-wide radio broadcast of Eurosonic in 2004, and the YouTube broadcasting of the EBBAs live in 2012, all have been an integral part of the festival’s success as a mediated event. In early January 1999, for example, discussions on developments within the digital sphere intensified. As a journalist (Groenewold 1999, 26) reported: “More and more the Internet provides a solution for the limited audience capacity of Noorderslag.” It was ultimately inevitable that media expansion would be desirable and necessary. The limited visitor capacity of the *Oosterpoort* left the festival no choice but to relocate its ambition to expand to the ether and the digital realm. ESNS would increasingly become a media event, motivated by the festival’s mission: the circulation of European repertoire.⁶⁰

2.3 Award Culture

The aforementioned cooperation of *Noorderslag* with the organization *Buma Cultuur* resulted in the annual presentation of the most prestigious Dutch music prize, the Pop Prize (*Popprijs*) which consisted of a 10,000 Guilder (now 10,000 Euro) money prize and a commemorative art statue.⁶¹ Each year the award is presented during Noorderslag to a Dutch person or artist for making the most important contribution to Dutch pop music in the

60 DvhN 12-01-2011. Since the early 2010s, digital media have also played a significant role for festival visitors. In 2011 a free app was made available, for example, which contained the festival and conference programme by date and location. Today, the comprehensive app also displays background information, maps and up-to-date festival information. In 2012 ESNS visitors could share their opinion about the festival concerts using the review app, which was developed by news platforms *Leeuwarder Courant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*. The app could be downloaded for free and was compatible with different smartphone operating systems. Reviewers could give their opinions about the quality and the originality of performances. In the same year digitalized systems were integrated to help with crowd management. The flow and distribution of EuroSonic visitors was aimed to be improved by a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) registration system, with which visitors and professionals could check in and out by making use of a chip. Since then, the system has developed and expanded the range of RFID services to gain access to exclusive and personalized content as well as a cashless system, with which visitors can pay for their drinks using a chipped wristband.

61 <https://www.poparchief groningen.nl/festivals/noorderslag/view>. Retrieved: 17 May, 2017.

previous year.⁶² The prize was awarded for the first time during the 1992 edition of *Noorderslag*.

The announcement of the prize is the key moment during *Noorderslag* each year and the name of the winning artist is kept a surprise until the very last minute. Immediately after the winner is announced, the curtain hiding the surprise winner opens, revealing the winner.⁶³ After accepting the prize, the winner performs for the audience. The prize is awarded by an annually changing jury consisting of music professionals (e.g. bookers, journalists, festival organizers, or venue owners). Although multiple statistical criteria are considered, the final decision is up to this jury. This is also the fundamental cause there is annual public debate about which artist should be entitled to the prize.

In Early 1999 Junkie XL received the Pop Prize 1998. That was the only time the winner was leaked when the father of Tom Holkenborg (alias Junkie XL) overheard a conversation at a party. Even within the ESNS, only two or three people within the ESNS organization know who the winner is. The prize is also the handle to write something about *Noorderslag*. Almost every review opens with the news of the winner. Peter Sikkema: "When Kytteman won the 2009 Pop Prize [in 2010], only Colin [Benders, alias Kytteman], his father and one of the crew members knew about it. That day the band got on the bus for a performance in Hamburg. They made sheets before that stated they were to perform at Rockpalast. They drove via Joure, which struck them as odd, but still nothing dawned [on them]. At the local McDonald's they went for a snack and when they re-entered the bus everyone had to hand in their mobile phones and they were told they had won the Pop Prize. Everyone happy. After that they drove to Groningen, but they were too early. So the bus drove another 4 rounds on the city ring before they could enter the Oosterpoort."⁶⁴

Debates and speculation about this has been part of the festival dynamic ever since the prize was awarded.⁶⁵ In 1998, for example, Dutch singer Marco Borsato was awarded the Pop Prize which sparked debate in the media: "A little strange to see Marco Borsato on *Noorderslag*. One can ask why this distinctly mainstream artist is allowed to perform here, while acts such as [more Indie-related bands] *IsOokSchitterend* or *De Kast* were labeled as "not sufficiently alternative" (Vos 1998, 18). While others were more

62 Pascal Jacobsen, the lead singer from the band *Bløf*, illustrated the importance of the prize when, after winning the prize in 2004, he proclaimed: "I'm glad we have proved we're not a one-day fly. If this prize ever gets awarded to an *Idols* participant, we will return it immediately." 12-01-2004

63 The 2007 Pop Prize winner, Armin van Buuren, was absent due to obligations in Brazil. His absence was greeted with disapproving hisses from the attending crowd and was probably not the best strategic move for ESNS. The Dutch broadcaster NOS traveled to *Noorderslag* to report live on the event for the first time. In a two-hour show, broadcasted on prime time, presenter Brecht van Hulten worked towards a climax only to find an absent winner and a disappointed crowd. The consequence of the absence of Van Buuren was that the biggest stage in the *Oosterpoort*, the Buma Cultuur stage, remained unused for two hours, which was a missed opportunity. The absence of Van Buuren also caused logistical problems in the other rooms of De Oosterpoort, when people started to move to other venue locations instantly. Although coordinator and jury member Peter Sikkema rejected the criticism ("Awarding the prize to a certain artist shouldn't be dependent on whether the artist is able to perform at *Noorderslag*. The prize is awarded objectively"), there was a replacement performance scheduled by Jett Rebel in 2017 when Martin Garrix won the prize, but could not be there to perform himself.

64 "Unboxing Groningen" event, discussion on the importance of ESNS with Gert Plas (Pop Archive Groningen), Peter van der Heide (Journalist) and Peter Sikkema (Programmer ESNS). Grand Theatre, Groningen on 13-01-2019.

65 Sieme Gerrijts, a radio DJ from Middelstum, a small village close to Groningen, turned it into a sport to find out each year who would win. He succeeded for six years in a row, until 2007, when he predicted Jan Smit when actually DJ Armin van Buuren won.

positive, stating that Borsato was a justified winner, not only because he had sold more albums than all other acts combined, but also because the majority of those other acts imitated their foreign models (*Ibid.*) In his acceptance speech Borsato appeared very happy with the recognition from the “serious” pop music side of the industry. Another remarkable moment happened on Noorderslag 2003, when DJ Tiësto was awarded the prize, but was not present to collect his prize or perform. The reason for his absence was a concert in Israel, so there was a video screen with a pre-recorded acceptance speech instead. His election was plausible; Tiësto (whose real name is Tijs Verwest) is one of the predominant ambassadors of the Dutch dance scene. Soon after, however, discussions arose whether it was acceptable to award the prize to an artist who was not present during the key moment of Noorderslag. As one journalist concluded: “Next year we want to throw beer at real people again” (*DvnH* January 14, 2003).

What the comment was referring to, was the tradition of throwing beer on the winners as soon as they are announced and the curtain drops. The tradition was said to be initiated because the audience didn’t agree with the winner, when in fact it was initially aimed at the person *announcing* the winner, then DJ Jan Douwe Kroeske. When the VARA broadcasted the festival live in 1994 it had to adjust to a TV broadcasting format. The festival was even put on hold because the 11 PM news had to finish first, before the winner could be announced live. This delay resulted in the discontent from the attending audience. Kroeske, who did not have the approval from the hardcore music aficionados had to endure the crowd’s displeasure. First verbally, and consequently with a well-aimed plastic cup of beer to Kroeske’s head. Then there was no stopping. A year later Kroeske provoked the audience when entering the stage wearing a full firefighter outfit, resulting in a full blown beer attack on both him and the winners that year, the dance duo *2Unlimited*. Though Kroeske would be gone from the *Noorderslag* stage soon thereafter, the beer shower remained part of the Pop Prize tradition.⁶⁶ In the late 2000s, however, artists became more vocal in expressing their discontent about the proceedings. The lead vocalist of Dutch act and winner of the award, *De Dijk*, Huub van der Lubbe, for example, stated in 2009: “I think it’s a weird, disrespectful deed. And what is more disturbing, is that the [broadcasting organization] NOS announces this event showing commercials in which people throw beer. Then you present a respectable festival in a childish way” (Groenewold 2009, 7). After Ilse de Lange won the prize (and the beer shower) in 2015, action was undertaken to prevent it from happening in future editions. The discontinuation of this tradition sparked debate among audiences about the negotiation of local cultural identities: are festivals for unabashed merry making or for respectful accordance of talented artists – perhaps more in line with high culture? The ESNS organization motivated their decision by noting that throwing beer to artists was taking away from the music, damaging to the equipment, and, mostly, disrespectful to the artists.⁶⁷

In 2009, an important international award was presented during ESNS for the

66 In 2015 the organization decided to ban the beer throwing by not allowing people to bring beer or other liquids into the hall where the prize is presented.

67 Peter Sikkema, NOS.nl 11-01-2016: <https://nos.nl/op3/artikel/2079819-bierdouche-eurosonic-noorderslag-is-verboden.html>

first time, the *European Border Breakers Award* (EBBA). The EBBA prize was initiated by the European Commission and is presented to artists whose debut album gained international European success in the previous year.⁶⁸ With this award the European Commission wanted to “Highlight the richness and diversity of European music, its creativity and its contribution to innovation.”⁶⁹ The award show was previously presented at the annual *Midem* festival in Cannes (FR), but has been transferred to Groningen. On 15 January 2009 the EU praised ten European artists based on their debut album, sales, and performances outside of their home country. Music legend Jools Holland from the BBC presented this sixth edition of the show. After evaluation of this first edition the European Commission decided the EBBA award show would continue to be held in Groningen for the coming years and was indeed held in the week of ESNS ever since.⁷⁰ It has been significant for ESNS that this award show came to Groningen. Not only was the show broadcast on television throughout Europe, drawing valuable attention to the city, but the budget of ESNS had also increased significantly. Besides being recorded for TV, the EBBA awards was also broadcast live on YouTube for the first time in 2012.

This digital expansion was significant for the festival’s outreach, especially as the growing opportunities for ESNS were limited. The maximum capacity for the number of venues, bands or festival days, for example, had been reached. Frans Vreeke, producer and director of ESNS in 2009, explained that what was important was to strengthen the ESNS brand on a European level: “[B]ringing the EBBA awards to Groningen [...] is a good step forward. [...] This we had to thank to our contacts in Brussels.”⁷¹ Vreeke hoped that the prize would be continued to be awarded in Groningen. Not only for its cultural value, but also for the financial additive: “It increases our budget with 25 percent. It provides additional weight to the whole story” (Van der Heide 2009, 27). With the award show, the opening day (Wednesday) of the ESNS week had increased its significance for Groningen and the festival. Also, as musicians and professionals were already in town, it was convenient and obvious to plan some extra concerts in the evening. In 2012, thirteen concerts were planned, which expanded to forty-five in 2013. This extra night was appreciated by the audience – who could attend extra performances without having to wait in long queues – as well as by the artists who would have an extra day to showcase their performances.

Some acts were allowed a podium on ESNS when winning an outside prize for

68 British news platform *Newswire* reported on October 22, 2013, explaining the rules of the EBBAs in more detail: “To be eligible for the awards, the artists must have achieved border-breaking success with their first international release in Europe between 1 August 2012 and 31 July 2013. The winners are selected by market analyst Nielsen Music Control on the basis of sales and broadcast frequency, as well as votes cast by European Broadcasting Union radio stations and music festivals supporting the European Talent Exchange Programme. One of the winners will receive a Public Choice Award based on votes cast from 1 November to 20 December on the EBBAs website.” Former winners of the EBBA award include Adele, Katie Melua, Mumford & Sons, The Common Linnets and Caro Emerald.

69 European Commission press release. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-62_en.htm

70 The award show has been relocated in Groningen several times. De Oosterpoort, Stadsschouwburg and Martiniplaza have all provided the stage for the ceremony. In 2009, the first Groningen edition, was held in De Oosterpoort. Due to the lack of space, however, the horns had to play from the balcony, normally intended for the audience.

71 Frans Vreeke decided to end his activities as director/producer at Noorderslag shortly after the 2009 edition. Dago Houben would be his successor as of September 1 2009.

starting music talent. An example of such a prize was the *Essent Award* (2001-2007), a prize awarded to promote Dutch talent and which also involved a promotional budget of 5,000 Euro. In 2005 acts such as Lange Frans & Baas B., Solo, Intersection, Asrai and Blues Brother Castro were all added to the line-up as a result of being awarded the *Essent Award*. In 2008 Noorderslag and the internet company *TheFactor.E* initiated a new international prize: *The Interactive Awards*. The prize was meant for European acts and companies that had presented themselves on the internet in a striking fashion.

The ESNS festival and organization have been awarded prizes themselves as well over the years. Peter Smidt and Peter Sikkema, for example, were awarded with the *Jans Cats Prize* in 2010, a prize initiated by entrepreneurs belonging to the City Club Groningen. It is awarded to companies, persons or organizations who have made themselves commendable for the inner city of Groningen. Thanks to their efforts, it was argued, the city of Groningen is home to an important international event that has a very positive effect on the circulation of European repertoire and the city of Groningen (Hoexum 2010, 11). Later that year, in June 2010, the *Wessel Gansfort Prize*, a cultural prize of the province of Groningen, was awarded to Peter Sikkema for his activities for De Oosterpoort and the ESNS and Noorderzon festivals.⁷² In 2011 the *Groningen Medal of Valor* was presented to the ESNS foundation. Then city mayor of Groningen, Peter Rehwinkel, was short on words on how proud he was that ESNS made Groningen the pop capital of Europe in this week. The prize has existed since 1940 and this was the twelfth time that the medal was awarded. In 2015, ESNS was awarded the *Outstanding Contribution Award* of IMPALA. IMPALA serves as the umbrella organization for independent music labels. The organization praised ESNS for its efforts for European independent music.⁷³ Finally, ESNS received an award for best festival by the VNPF, the Dutch association of venues and festivals.⁷⁴

Having the EBBA in Groningen also appealed to international festival organizations, who were now more inclined to collaborate and the quantity and categories increased over the years. In 2010, for example, the *European Festival Awards* were initiated, organized by *Yourope* and *Virtual Festivals Europe* in cooperation with ESNS. Designed as a combination of online public voting and an expert jury from the music industry, the EFA was the only Pan-European event which focused on contributions and earnings of the organizers and artists who transferred monies to national and international economies by way of summer festivals. The prize has been awarded ever since. Other prizes that were awarded during the festival week in 2018 included: *European Festival Awards* (for the best European festivals, aiming to stimulate diversity), *Buma Music Meets Tech Awards* (stimulating innovation), *Ijzeren Podiumdieren* (best managing director, best programmer, best venue and best festival), *Pop Media Award* (for career spanning work and contribution in the previous year), and *the Feather* (person with the most significant

⁷² Groninger Gezinsbode 17-06-2010

⁷³ <https://impalamusic.org/content/eurosonic-noorderslag-receives-impala-outstanding-contribution-independent-music-award>

⁷⁴ <https://www.bumastemra.nl/en/eurosonic-noorderslag-awarded-best-dutch-festival/>

contribution to the Dutch music industry).⁷⁵ The awards remain a significant part of the festival today, and confirm its status as an established representative of the Dutch and European music industry.

2.4 Genre and Selection Criteria: towards a European outlook

With increasing media attention, national significance, and the increasing amount of funding it received, Noorderslag was pressured to legitimize its choices, not only to government organizations, but also to the outside public. The press questioned the festival about its primary focus and what or who it represented from the early stages of its emergence. Why were certain acts on the bill, while others were inexplicably left out? What about genre diversification? Was it about providing a platform for new talent or was the festival merely mirroring what was happening in the Dutch music industry? According to some media, the strength of the festival was when it served as a platform for lesser known bands, providing the audience with the opportunity to discover new acts. Others claimed that the festival should curate carefully, and should only present acts of acclaimed stature.

Dutch national newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, for example, published a critical review about the second festival edition in 1987 (Vollaard 1987, 5). The headline read: “Marathon show ‘Noorderslag’ in Groningen proves lack of originality once again.” Its renowned pop journalist Jan Vollaard stated: “The ambitious set up of the festival deserves continuation, but its organization should prefer quality above quantity as its primary point of departure.” In the following year the competition element was abandoned and Noorderslag claimed to be representative of the Dutch music scene, presenting a wide variety of more established and promising acts. Interestingly, media rendered the verdict on the 1988 edition with the headline: “Quality, though little surprises,” opposite to the press response in the previous year (Palfenier 1988, 9). The distinctive feature of this program, however, was the broadening scope of music genres. For instance, relatively new genres such as rap and hip-hop became part of the festival line-up. Programmer Peter Smidt explained:

What was happening in the past year? Hardcore, and therefore the band Gore performs at Noorderslag. Hip hop, too, has stepped into the limelight. Although many people thought it would disappear quickly, it is something we cannot ignore anymore now. Noorderslag claims to be representative, so we present rap and hip hop at this festival. (Palfenier 1988, 9)

After three festival editions and the *Eurorock* event, which raised awareness about the

⁷⁵ Winners include: Anton Corbijn (Pop Media Prize), He was awarded the prize during the seminar Dutch pop music for his whole oeuvre.

potential of a European market, national media attention on Noorderslag intensified. The broad representation of music genres and its claim to provide a representative overview of the Dutch music scene, gave *Noorderslag* its reputation of being the “Dutch music barometer.”⁷⁶ In the early 1990s, *Noorderslag* was marked by plurality and the representation of a wide variety of genres. Besides pop, rock and indie, hip-hop was prevalent. The local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* referred to Noorderslag as being a “pluriform chaos”: “Ranging from punk to pop, from house to rock and from folk to rap: Noorderslag begins the new decade like the past ten years ended: in an “all goes” atmosphere. No categories or boundaries, just music” (Duk 1990).

In 1991 the Noorderslag line-up was characterized by the representation of lesser known acts. Peter Smidt claimed that, for the first time, the organization chose not to book the big names such as *De Dijk*, *The Nits* or *Urban Dance Squad*, because they had all performed on Noorderslag before. Smidt claimed that Noorderslag didn’t need the “big names.” After five years the festival has some prestige and could do without commercial headliners. Instead, the organization decided to expand and make use of its growing reputation as an industry event.

Newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* stated, for example: “Why not integrate genres? One can also think of a more principal change in formula. Without changing or letting go of the original festival viewpoint, attracting international acts would widen its horizon.” (Duk 1991, 9) These observations were interesting and somewhat prophetic considering the knowledge we have today regarding the international direction the festival has taken since.

In the early 1990s, the Noorderslag festival increasingly focused on the diversification of genres. Also, early signs of the need for a broader festival perspective started to emerge. Most bands on Noorderslag followed the well-known Anglo-American path (which was not surprising considering the small domestic market, a topic which was also discussed during the Seminar Dutch Pop Music). However, what was missing in this edition was the category of upcoming talent: acts that had not released an album yet, but could really use this festival as a stepping stone. Music journalist Siebrand Vos (1994, 11) noted in *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*: “Chances that one bumps into a real musical surprise would be greatly enhanced by programming such acts. At this point, Noorderslag is a little too much an ‘established bands fair’. It’s all a matter of choice.”

As outlined earlier, the European focus was incorporated into the festival in the mid-1990s with the initiation of *Euroslagt*, transforming into *Eurosonic* in 1999. This European focus allowed for a more eclectic programming of genres on the extra festival day, showcasing acts from a diverse range of European countries. This expansion gave the genre discussions at *Noorderslag* some breathing room. In that period *Noorderslag* was still the main event of the festival, but the debates shifted to the question which act was awarded the most important Dutch music prize, the *Pop Prize*.

⁷⁶ *NRC Handelsblad*, for example, published an advertisement on 22 December 1989 stating: “Groningen sets the tone for the 1990s. Also, the national newspaper *De Telegraaf* reported on Noorderslag for the first time, providing a feature on the Dutch band *Sjako!* on 4 January 1990, previewing their scheduled performance at the 1990 Noorderslag edition.

By the early 2010s the two main bookers for *Eurosonic* and *Noorderslag* were Joey Ruchtie (responsible for Dutch acts) and Robert Meijerink (responsible for international acts). How do you program such a broad and international festival? The fact that ESNS was (and still is) curated brings forth questions about this selection procedure. Who is allowed to perform when? Who is excluded? In other words, who is interested in what? Meijerink stated that he has to know what is going on in the international music industry. He manages an extensive network and visits lots of other festivals. On site, he contacts radio makers, booking agents, looks around in clubs and local record stores. The information he gathers helps to map what is happening in a certain country. But Joey Ruchtie claimed it is hard to consider all stakeholders, stating: “Dutch bands that want to perform at *Eurosonic* have to have international potential and ambition. They already have to have some international potential, a licensing deal, a tour, or an interested booking agent. It is not enough to just be a nice band.” (Van der Heide 2011, 54) Of course, to please the press and potential bookers is a priority for most acts that perform on *Eurosonic* and *Noorderslag*. After all, a successful performance might instigate or reaffirm an act’s artistic reputation.

Today, *Eurosonic* primarily serves as an international stepping stone for upcoming acts, obscuring the issue about genre representation. The debates, however, have remained at *Noorderslag*. *Noorderslag* has grown into a festival with a distinct demographic (predominantly male, white, middle-aged) who grew with the festival and its organizers and for many of whom *Noorderslag* became hardly more than an annual extended New Year’s party get-together with friends.⁷⁷ The social aspect became equally (if not more) important than seeing what the status of Dutch pop music was in the Netherlands. There is a tension when *Noorderslag* aims to present a cross section of what is musically happening in the Netherlands while the majority of the audience is rather distinct in its musical taste. This tension became explicit in 2016 when the Dutch hip-hop collective New Wave was announced as the 2015 Pop Prize winner. This stirred up a wave of indignation and disbelief among the present audience who, consequently, left the hall *en masse*. The conservative audience wasn’t willing to listen to an act that was more popular among their children. A good case could be made, however, to award New Wave with the Pop Prize. They scored the biggest hit of 2015 (“Drank & Drugs”), had over 60,000,000 streams on Spotify and over 80,000,000 views on YouTube, two of the new platforms for judging popularity. In that regard they easily matched the criteria on which basis the prize is awarded. An audience, however, who wanted to see stadium rockers Kensington, festival act Typhoon or see Golden Earring get the award for their career, were intolerant to these young rappers. The organization of ESNS saw this response as a turning point and an incentive to change its strategy. Since 2016 their aim was to renew their audience, providing reduced “young” tickets for festival visitors under twenty years of age and programming acts that appealed to a younger audience, e.g. Fresku (2016), Ronnie Flex (2017) and Maan (2018). It seems as if the question posed in a news article (Duk 1991, 9) after the 1991 edition, “How to continue?,” is as relevant for *Noorderslag* today, than it was before.

77 For a discussion on cultural intermediaries, see: Negus, Keith R., 2002. *The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance between Production and Consumption*. Cultural Studies, 16 (4). pp. 501-515.

2.5 Place and Cultural Representation

As cultural theorist Stanley Waterman (1998, 58) rightfully noticed, successful festivals create a powerful but curious sense of place, which is local, as the festival takes place in a locality or region, but which often makes an appeal to a global culture in order to attract both participants and audiences. ESNS appeals to the international music industry, but is inseparably linked to the Dutch city of Groningen. Ever since the festival's inception in 1986, the location of events has been the inner city and its venues. Three important factors can be attributed to the festival's success in this specific location. Firstly, ESNS is held in the first month of the year, a quiet period for the music industry and a time when concert and festival organizers are getting ready to book new acts for the coming festival season. Organizing an event right after the turn of the year festivities proved effective and grew into a situation of what is now referred to as the New Year's reception of the music industry. Secondly, an essential element is its location. With a population of over 200,000 it is the largest city in the northern part of the Netherlands. It is, however, surrounded by wide acres of farmland.⁷⁸ The city's relatively remote location forces festival visitors to book hotels and spend more time in the city they might have otherwise had. This generates income for local companies, restaurants and bars, but also stimulates networking possibilities. Today, for many music industry representatives, artists and visitors, it is the annual field trip to which they have become accustomed. Thirdly, the inner city provides for an appealing public event space as the festival venues are geographically proximate – within walking range. This is an important precondition when a city center itself serves as the festival landscape. As Austin city mayor Will Wynn mentioned in his speech during the city's 2007 South by Southwest (SXSW) music festival: "We need venues [...] They gotta be in town. We gotta have a bunch of venues that are downtown, so that folks can walk to five or six or ten or twelve venues in one night."⁷⁹ The condensed city center of Groningen is characterized by its narrow streets, historic architecture (with lots of "hidden" courtyards and monumental pieces), and the recognizable Martini Tower, which has dominated the city skyline since the sixteenth century. The design of the city center is reminiscent of the days when Groningen was a Hanseatic city, protected by city walls and the canals (*diepenring*) surrounding it.⁸⁰ The rich cultural history of the city of Groningen is palpable, although in recent years the city and the surrounding area has been developing and the processes of urbanization and gentrification have become apparent.⁸¹

78 Hence its marketing slogan: *Er gaat niets boven Groningen*, which translates as: "there is nothing above Groningen", meaning both Groningen holds the top position and, more literally, there are no more northerly cities.

79 Quoted in: Wynn, Jonathan R. *Music - City American Festivals and Placemaking in Austin, Nashville, and Newport*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 13. Wynn refers to these festival configurations as "confetti patterns", where festival events are scattered across a wide area, as opposed to a "citadel pattern", in which a festival is organized in an isolated, bounded space.

80 The necessity of this fortification was proven in 1672, when Groningen successfully protected itself from a month-long besiegement by the Bishop of the German city of Münster, Bernhard van Galen, and his troops. Finally, on the 28th of August, Van Galen (nicknamed Bommen Berend, due to the heavy bombardments he imposed upon the city) retreated. To this day, the liberation of Groningen (commonly referred to as "Bommen Berend") is celebrated with a variety of activities each year on the 28th of August to commemorate this event.

81 For example, projects such as the rebuilding of the east-side market square, the re-designing of the southern

Also characteristic of Groningen is its vibrant nightlife. Unlike most other cities, cafes are allowed to decide their own closing hours. This not only provides for an appealing condition for many partygoers to travel to Groningen during the weekend, but it makes it also attractive to students, who – to a large extent – dominate the population of the city.⁸²

In conjunction with the exponential growth of the festival in the late 1990s, the scarcity of lodging space in Groningen became an issue during the festival week. The influx of tourists had increased now that the conference held in the Oosterpoort expanded to two days and was gaining national and international significance. Visitors were forced to find lodging space outside of the city in an increasingly wide-ranging span into the region. In 2006, for example, all hotels were booked within a radius of twenty kilometers from Groningen. To meet this ever growing demand for lodging, the organization of Eurosonic and Noorderslag came up with a solution and brought three hotel boats to Groningen in 2007, providing an extra capacity of approximately three hundred beds. The boats were located in the *Eems channel*, on the east side of the city center. In 2008, festival director Peter Sikkema remarked: “My estimate is that four to five thousand people seek lodging. In such case Groningen is quite small” (Borst 2008, 13). Indeed, demand continued to increase and by 2015 twenty-one ships were brought to Groningen, exclusively for ESNS, providing 1,269 beds. Those were additional to the twenty-one ships that reside in Groningen on a more regular basis, providing an additional 374 beds. (Brouwer 2015, 26) Never before was it this busy with floating hotels during ESNS. If the boats were lined up after one another, the line would have been two kilometers in length.

Figure 2. Hotel ships

city ring and the re-shaping of the main city station area.

⁸² The University of Groningen currently holds 30.000 students, in a city of approximately 200,000 total inhabitants.

Figure 3. Reception hotel ships

In 2018 over 40,000 people visited the festival, resulting in an ever continuing quest for lodging space in the festival week. As a result, the city of Groningen was immersed in the festival experience. This situation is reminiscent of what anthropologist Alessandro Falassi (1987) referred to as “time out of time” events, which pertains to the idea that these events occur outside of structured and regulated society; they take place in a spatially and temporally closed-off space where different rules apply for the duration of the event. In the case of ESNS, festival tourism displaces local rituals and living conditions. One can think of the hotel boat “conglomerate” mentioned above, the backstage area “artist village” or the priority venue access for industry representatives.

Homi Bhabha (1994) referred to these liminal in-between space as *third space*. He describes this as an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” space of new forms of cultural meaning and production where existing boundaries and established categorizations of identity are questioned. A third space “[...] initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.”

The geographically isolated location of the city of Groningen brings about challenges as well as opportunities. As mentioned in the 1995 municipal cultural policy document *Alles voor de Kunst* (All for the Arts), the cultural sector of Groningen is of specific importance for the urban cultural image: “As Groningen cannot offer access to a beach, forest or mountains, the attractiveness of the city is largely dependent on the achievements of human labor, especially in the fields of culture and art.”⁸³ Groningen hosts several educational art institutions, such as the *Prins Claus Conservatory* and the

83 *Alles voor de Kunst, cultuurbeleid 1996-1999* (1995, p. 64). Quoted in: Hoogen, Quirijn van den. *Performing Arts and the City: Dutch Municipal Cultural Policy in the Brave New World of Evidence-Based Policy*. S.l.: s.n.], 2010, p. 123.

Minerva Art Academy. Also, arts and culture are well represented in the daily life of Groningen, with, for example, the summer art festival *Noorderzon*, the *Noorderlicht photo festival* and the characteristic *Groninger Museum*. But no other event in the region draws more national and international attention than the music showcase festival known as *Eurosonic Noorderslag*.

Over time, places acquire historical and cultural meaning. As music is directly connected to a sense of place, a shared sense of place through music directly constitutes a sense of shared identity, because, in music and urban geography scholar Adam Krims' (2007, 141) words, "[P]lace becomes something like the geographic equivalent of 'identity,' referring to a discursively constructed notion [...] defining a locality in some way; specific music can constitute a specific version of geographical identity, as well as, subsequently, a specific social identity."

This final theme looks into issues of cultural identity on different geographical levels. It reveals how local identity played an important role in the development of *Eurosonic Noorderslag*. Also, it investigates how the festival has become inextricably linked to the city of Groningen. Why is Groningen still the central stage for the European music industry each year, especially considering that other festivals emerged using the same concept? The SPOT festival in Aarhus (DK), The Great Escape in Brighton (UK), Waves in Vienna (AT) and the Reeperbahn Festival in Hamburg were all modelled after and inspired by ESNS. There have also been attempts to copy the concept and relocate to another city in the Netherlands. For example, a festival by the name of *Access to Amsterdam (A2A)* was organized in Amsterdam in 2001. The event, organized by Dutch concert promoter Mojo, was a 4-day industry showcase festival as well, with a seminar and focusing on the international market. But it failed to succeed because of little interest from industry representatives and low ticket sales. In contrast to ESNS, A2A failed to slowly develop into a festival for which people buy tickets regardless of the program, as media reported (*NvhN* 2002).

Peter Sikkema commented on the A2A festival: "A2A, the National Pop Institute and MOJO had invested a substantial amount of money and wanted to organize a competitive event in Amsterdam. They thought, 'Groningen, you can do the Dutch bands, we'll do the rest of the world.'"⁸⁴ Subsequently, cultural municipal councilor Pattje provided additional subsidy for Eurosonic to ensure that Eurosonic remained its leading international position. Sikkema: "We are now collaborating closely with the Groningen municipality. In the late 1990s their stance was that Noorderslag should cover its own expenses and Eurosonic received perhaps 20.000 Guilders (9.000 Euros) in funding. We've protested against that. And now, especially we have had research done about the economic spin-off, the realization had come that this festival is of significant value for the city."⁸⁵

Groningen benefitted from the unique characterization of the festival what might be encapsulated in the notion "splendid isolation." Its remote location, the city

84 "Unboxing Groningen" event, discussion on the importance of ESNS with Gert Plas (Pop Archive Groningen), Peter van der Heide (Journalist) and Peter Sikkema (Programmer ESNS). Grand Theatre, Groningen on 13-01-2019.

85 *Ibid.*

center infrastructure and the specific time of the year all contribute to this situation of endured visitor attraction. The head of the SPOT festival conference, Jesper Mardahl, for example, stated: “For me it is the kick-off of the season. This is how we start the year. You have meetings with people, you see shows and you go to seminars. It is very important as a meeting point.”⁸⁶ Another important aspect about Groningen is presented by former *Buma Cultuur* CEO Jerney Kaagman, when the unique city center infrastructure was discussed in a newspaper interview: “[...] Eurosonic and Noorderslag are unique: they are proof that Amsterdam is not always the cultural center. I don’t know any other location that has this many suitable locations in such a small area. [...] If you would have such a festival in the west, the pop industry will attend for only one night. Groningen has a lot to offer” (*Dagblad van het Noorden* 2005, 27). Due to the compact city center of Groningen, most venues are within walking distance (figure 4).

Figure 4. Eurosonic stages

⁸⁶ Jesper Mardahl (SPOT conference manager and managing director of Promus), in discussion with author, January 2017.

Also, since the festival is highly visible in outside public space, visitors have the feeling that the whole city center is transformed into one large festival terrain. These characteristics have added to the festival's continuing success as a local cultural tradition.

With the expansion and the continued success of the festival, new initiatives and unofficial events started to emerge in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For example, for whomever could not acquire or afford a ticket for *Eurosonic* or *Noorderslag*, local record store Plato provided a free alternative as of 2000. Under the name of "The Best of Eurosonic" several bands performed in the store. Plato would be listed as an official *Eurosonic* podium as of the next year, where some bands from the official ESNS line-up would give in store performances.⁸⁷ In 2007 the initiative would become known officially under the name of *PlatoSonic*. Plato owner Appie Clermonts stated about the festival's expansion: "During the year we sell records of these artists. It's nice to get some of them in the store, while they're here. [...] EuroSonic has become so big, we can almost speak of four days of EuroSonic" (Schlimbach 2005, 11).

In 2003 ESNS acquired a small and unofficial addition in the venue Simplon on Thursday under the name of *Donderslag* (Thunderstruck). *Donderslag* focused on loud bands and was an initiative of pop foundation *Grover Pop*. Northern bands were programmed on the sub festival *Noordersonic* in the venue Shadrak in 2004. In that period another initiative infiltrated the larger festival. What started out as an experiment in Amsterdam has spread across seven Dutch cities: *Live in the living room*. Concerts were given in the intimate setting of a living room. In different locations, living room concerts were held as part of the *Noorderslag* weekend.

In late 2005 the debate on the (lack of) the presentation of local acts on *Noorderslag* became current yet again. Bands from the Groningen and Drenthe region took action against ESNS to protest against the lack of northern pop music on the festivals. They planned to organize alternative festivals. *Noorderslag* booker Joey Ruchtie stated about this: "We had several acts from Groningen on the shortlist, but in comparison to what happens in the rest of the country, what these acts do is not sufficiently up-to-date" (Groenewold 2005, 19). In the pop scene of the north, however, there was much discontent about the policy. Head of record label Platex records and singer-songwriter from Groningen, Bert Hadders, responded: "It's completely unclear to me what one has to do to be booked on *Noorderslag*. As manager of Planet Orange I have tried for three or four years. That band made three fantastic CDs, easily sells out Vera. But *Noorderslag* was never interested" (*Ibid.*). January 12 and 13, during EuroSonic, Hadders would go on to program his own acts in the music café De Kar. The manager from the Groningen act LPG, Sander Zuidema, also prepared a counter event. He said: "[...] It is strange that in this banner year [2006, the twentieth anniversary of the festival], acts from Groningen are completely ignored. It's a good idea that they send a message collectively." Plato owner Appie Clermonts by then had his own festival in the store and said: "*Noorderslag* could have filled a stage this year with Northern acts. I have lobbied for them quite intensely. It is a missed opportunity."

87 The featured bands were three acts from the Netherlands: Over The Moon, The Coonies, and Benjamin b.

Interestingly, ESNS booker Joey Ruchtie welcomed these counter responses. “This revolt is healthy,” he stated. It’s the basis of pop music [...]” (*Ibid.*). Fellow ESNS booker Robert Meijerink defended his choices, saying: “There is always criticism on large festivals. People say: ‘It’s not about Groningen anymore’. But these people have to understand what the festival is about. It is international: professionals from all over the world come here. It is the sample card of European pop music. That’s when I think: be proud of what you have in your city. This couldn’t happen in Amsterdam” (Borst 2005, 22).

In 2007 the ESNS organization decided to embrace and incorporate the smaller unofficial initiatives and initiated *GrunnSonic*, an official free-entrance side program aimed at providing a platform for local acts. It provided a platform for 16 acts from Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe in four venues across the Groningen city center.⁸⁸ *GrunnSonic* has developed ever since into a significant part of the festival weekend, with approximately 50 acts performing on multiple stages over three days. About this, Peter Sikkema stated: “It concerns 16 additional bands, because the regular northern input will remain as well. This results in a grand total of 30 groups from Groningen and Drenthe. They will be provided with a full-fledged stage and will be included in the festival promotion” (Groenewold 2006, 15). In the following year, the second edition of *GrunnSonic* would have twenty acts performing. In 2008 the large contribution of northern acts during the regular Eurosonic and Noorderslag program was remarkable as well. Apparently there was momentum for northern acts to present themselves. By 2009, over a dozen free activities surrounded ESNS as well as multiple showcases of record labels.

Another local musician, event organizer and former “Night Mayor” (the official nightlife spokesperson) of Groningen, who was always vocal about expressing his advocacy for non-commercial music initiatives was Chris Garrit. In collaboration with local café owners, the *Stichting Muziek Over Groningen*, of which he was a representative, initiated the sub-event *A Rocket Ride to Grunn City Music Festival* in 2010 at eight locations in Groningen’s city center, programming an additional 75 acts to the music weekend.⁸⁹ This was followed by *A Rocket Ride to Grunn City Music Planet* (2011) in the following year and by *A Rocket Ride to Grunn City* in 2012. In 2014 this festival was renamed *Freesonic*, which was by then the largest alternative festival of the ESNS weekend with thirteen locations presenting over seventy-five acts. The festival was held for three consecutive years before it discontinued after 2016. The reason for the discontinuation after 2016 was that Garrit wanted to put his efforts into building a new music venue in Groningen (EM2) and also because, as he stated, “The goal [free accessible music] had been reached.”⁹⁰ The ESNS management was not merely against having an unofficial side program, but they did see some problems with the magnitude. Peter Sikkema wondered: “If you have fifteen additional acts outside of the official program you can draw some attention to them. But

88 Buckshot, Koster, De Spieghele and De Kar

89 In the same year Garrit also initiated the festival Groningsch Peil, held 28 and 29 October 2010. Its focus was on bands from Groningen and its province and wanted to provide an overview of active acts from Groningen. The two-day event provided a platform for 73 acts on twenty stages in the inner city of Groningen. The festival was discontinued after 2013.

90 Chris Garrit (cultural entrepreneur), in discussion with author, January 2018.

if there are 150, it becomes a non-transparent mess. Than you exceed the aim, which is to draw attention to acts from the right people. Also, quantity might become prevalent over quality” (Broere 2010).

By 2011 *GrunnSonic* had been officially integrated to the ESNS program for the fifth time. During this edition a total of sixteen acts from Groningen performed in four venues: Koster, Buckshot, De Walrus and Pand 48, besides many other side events: The concert series *Live in the Living Room*, for example, was now also part of the official program. For the fifth time acts performed in the intimate setting of a living room located somewhere in the inner city in Groningen. The non-official program was extended in 2010 with *Gideon’s Rocket Ride to Grunn Music Planet*. In 2011 its second edition was held. On Thursday, organizations, bookers and musicians discussed music matters at the *Gideon Music Festival Conference* in café Het Pakhuis. Then there was *AlterSonic*, the showcase from a booking agency from Almelo. Thursday and Friday they presented over sixty bands from Holland and Belgium in the venues Pruij City, Donovan’s and De Drie Gezusters. In Plato and Coffee Company fifty bands would perform in the course of three days that are also performing on ESNS. Finally, there were three smaller initiatives: Bar Pacific had booking agency *Funny Trees* do a showcase. The venue Crowbar offered a stage to ten rock and punk acts. The Groningen record label Subroutine Records held its own showcase in Café Kult.

The ESNS organization became more critical about these initiatives and felt that the side program missed the point: “It should not be just about having a nice performance, but to move forward and get bookings”, Peter Sikkema stated. “Now there is so much, and with such varying quality, that professionals don’t enter the cafes anymore.” The often expressed fear that *Eurosonic* might become too big, however, is denied by Sikkema: “Instead, the festival becomes more rooted in Groningen” (Nederkoorn 2011, 36). Exercising control and the struggles to retain organizational authority, however, remains a complex problem. After all, as festival scholar Jonathan Wynn (2015, 251) noted: “As festivals attempt to more tightly contain their activities by limiting or at least regulating participation, porosity and turbulence become major challenges.” Defining a European industry and the role of grass-roots counter-movements in this process will continue to be the subject of discussion and, indeed, turbulence. It is this turbulence, however, that also provides the festival with its dynamic and vibrant reputation.

In 2012 yet more initiatives were employed in the wake of ESNS. Venue De Silo provided sessions with twenty-seven acts who – according to the program – would perform acoustically. Also, the sub festival *PleuropSonic* was organized, with heavier music acts on the program. This sub event was initiated out of discontent about the absence of metal and punk acts on ESNS. The first edition was held in 2011 and featured a performance of the band Vanderbuyst in local venue Benzinebar. In 2012, for the second edition of the sub-festival, several acts performed over three days in venues just outside of the inner city.⁹¹ With *Grunnsonic* taking place for three days the first time and the introduction of the GasTerra Energy Stage, the significance of the northern music scene was yet

91 Venues: ORKZ, Crowbar, café La Vida

again emphasized in 2013. *GrunnSonic* cooperated with POP Groningen and provided a platform for over thirty acts, giving a broad overview of the music scene in Groningen. The GasTerra stage was a free accessible stage at the Ebbingekwartier presenting acts from Groningen. Also, a new free festival called *CircleSonic* was initiated, a festival for singer-songwriters organized by *Groninger Songwriter Circle Foundation* (GSC). The first edition was on January 17, 2015 in cafe De Spieghel. The festival was discontinued after 2018.

In the late 2010s, the large supply of free events was one of the reasons ticket sales were slowing. To the general audience, Eurosonic was still a somewhat complex enterprise. Who could attend what? What was part of the official program, and what was not? Why did some people get priority access? These were all questions the regular visitors remained confused about, resulting in ticket sales lagging behind. Visitors were hesitant to pay for Eurosonic (€77,00 for two days) or Noorderslag (€79,50) when one could spend the night watching bands for free as well.

As outlined above, debates about the representation of bands from the northern part of the Netherlands have always been an undercurrent issue. Media from the northern province of Friesland, in particular, have been exceptionally vocal in expressing their opinion on the number of acts coming from their region. Friesland is the only Dutch province with its own official language and regional anthem and Frisians tend to be very proud of their language and shared cultural heritage. Being neighboring provinces, the historic narrative between the provinces Groningen and Friesland has been one of cooperation, but also of competition and conflict, resulting in a sometimes complex relationship today.⁹² For this reason, the Frisian media was always particularly concerned with the amount of acts from Friesland represented on Noorderslag and (later) Eurosonic, sparking discussion on regionalization and local cultural heritage against the larger representation of European cultural heritage.

It is remarkable how often Jacob Haagsma, the main music journalist from Friesland's biggest newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant*, expressed his discontent about the meager Frisian input on ESNS. One example of this was published in 1997, when he stated: "The search for Frisian bands on the coming edition of the Noorderslag festival is in vain, the self-proclaimed bellwether of Dutch Pop" (Haagsma 1997, 17). On behalf of Noorderslag Peter Sikkema replied: "In the past year I have seen little exciting new groups in Friesland, as well as in Groningen. These are just upward and downward trends. It will return someday. And for that matter, how often do we have bands from the provinces of Zeeland or Limburg?" (*Ibid.*). Indeed, one can hardly claim that acts from Friesland were willfully ignored. Frisian pride echoed in media outlets, nonetheless. Other *Leeuwarder Courant* newspaper headlines over the years included: "Frisianness on Noorderslag" (7 January 1994), "Frisian bands to Noorderslag weekend" (14-12-2001), "In the midst of a new Frisian wind" (04-01-2001), "Five Frisian bands on festival from Groningen" (04-12-2003), "Substantial Frisian input on Noorderslag" (21-12-2009), "Frisian horns, rough

92 For a historical account, see: Duijvendak, Maarten Gerrit Jan, 2003. *Regionaal Besef in het Noorden*. Van Gorcum: Assen. Also, one mundane example of the competing nature of the provinces occurs whenever the Groningen and Frisian city of Heerenveen soccer teams compete. There is fierce animosity over this "derby of the North."

retro and awarded righteousness” (14-01-2013) and “Frisians conquer Groningen” (20-01-2014).⁹³

In the early 2000s *Eurosonic* and *Noorderslag* both had a generous supply of Frisian bands on the bill. This was partly due to the input of the *Friesland Pop foundation*. For several years they were allowed to program a stage with bands performing from Friesland only. The representation of northern acts continues to this day. In 2017, for example, acts from Friesland had their own showcase by the name of *Friese Lente* (Frisian spring).⁹⁴ Also, the Groningen brewery and local hotspot Martinus offered a stage for talent from the north during their initiative *House of the North* in 2018. And *Grunnsonic*, the showcase for acts from Groningen, has been an official part of the ESNS program since 2007.

As ESNS emphasized its European focus in the late 1990s, the two-sided character of the festival became more explicit. Besides the recognition of the local musical voice, European identity was acknowledged as a legitimate contrasting cultural force against the long-standing dominance of the American music industry. So what distinguishes European music? Peter Sikkema explained it this way: “For youth coming from the rural parts of the Netherlands it is much more likely to start a band, than to join a local brass band. Pop music connects to youth culture. Bands often adopt Anglo-Saxon styles without losing their own voice. The Icelandic group Jet Black Joe, for example, leans towards Pink Floyd, but one can hear the Glaciers and the long dark pole nights” (Haagsma 1994, 7). Elsewhere, Sikkema stated that Europe was getting more important in general: “We look at other countries more than we did a few years ago. There might be several explanations for that: national borders have opened up, European groups increasingly acquire their own identity and the large record labels have tapped into that [...]” (Vos 1995, 13). The promotion of European repertoire was welcomed in the media as well, claiming that *Euroslag* and *Noorderslag* share a common vision and goal: away with the dominant position of Anglo-Saxon pop (Haagsma 1994, 27).

The expansion of *Euroslag* was in compliance with the strategy the organization had set out in prior years. Festival founder Pim van Klink, who was by 1996 head of municipal organization *Dienst Kunst & Cultuur*, said that *Euroslag* was the only component in which growth was possible as *Noorderslag* and the seminar had reached their max capacity by 1996. Not only could more venues be included in the expanded festival concept, but European media outreach was an alternative for the limited visitor capacity of the city. In 1999 the European Broadcasting Union recorded and broadcasted the festival (renamed *Eurosonic*) throughout Europe. For the first time the festival program was entirely written in English, adding to its international ambitions.

Echoing earlier debates about the representation of local acts, discussion emerged about what the festival meant to local residents as the festival grew in size and gained

93 As of 2014 the editorial boards of DvhN and Leeuwarder Courant were merged. Similar articles on national affairs, foreign affairs, economics and media were now found in both newspapers. With this the discussion about Frisian input on ESNS moved elsewhere.

94 The name is reminiscent of the renowned “Friese Bries.” In the late 1980s Dutch pop magazine *OOR* coined the term “Friese Bries” to designate the wave of new and upcoming Frisian acts in the second part of the 1980s.

international significance in the 2000s. With the large number of acts and sub-events, all of the awards, the illusive conference and the many divergent ticket forms, the festival was becoming a non-transparent, even alienating, event for many. “Is EuroSonic still fun for Groningen residents?,” a newspaper headline read in early 2006 (Borst 2006, 24). One of the frequently heard complaints, were the long queues the more popular venues, such as *Huize Maas*, *Grand Theatre* and *Vera*, while some music industry delegates got priority access. City Council Member Jaap Dijkstra justified this priority policy when he remarked (Borst 2009, 9):

I had a black wrist band, which means I had priority access. This is important: if there are no professionals, there are no bands. The festival generates about 2 million euros. Indirectly, that is probably 10-12 million euros. For the name of the city of Groningen it is huge exposure. The NOS has a broadcast, and there are 22 European radio stations.

The organization used this access strategy to manage the limited capacity of the city venues and keep the international industry representatives on board. Festival coordinator Peter Sikkema commented: “There are 2,000 radio DJs, festival organizers, booking agents and record label bigwigs present. They can help the bands develop their career. That is why they will have priority access at the entrance” (Groenewold 2007, 1). Festival director Dago Houben (who became festival director in 2009) supported and reaffirmed this approach by stating: “[Bands] don’t get paid, but get the chance to present themselves to many bookers and festival promoters. Therefore, these professionals get priority access into the venues. Their presence is the main reason why all of these bands are in Groningen” (Groenewold 2010, 28). The queue problem was addressed in 2006 with the use of digital technology. As a visitor one could sign up and be updated by SMS text message about which venues could better be avoided at one particular moment. Also, the organization of Eurosonic used guides to inform the public about queue waiting times. Despite these initiatives, queues grew with the growing amount of visitors in recent years and the problems have remained an issue to this day.

Eurosonic belonged to Groningen, but yet local residents felt they had become a distant spectator to a spectacle which was not theirs.⁹⁵ Groningen was taken over by the European music industry, which was an honor and a privilege, but for the regular (non-industry) crowd it was also difficult to grasp. This lack of transparency has been an ongoing discussion to this day. The wide variety of venues, acts and parties, and the overgrowth of free accessible performances, resulted in waning ticket sales since 2015. Booker Joey Ruchtie commented on the lack of transparency and the accompanying challenge of maintaining organizational control: “This is something we take into consideration. There are quite some visitors who used to buy a ticket faithfully, but now think: “There is enough to do and I can have a fun weekend without having to buy an expensive ticket.” We have

95 In 2014 it was estimated that international media reporting on the festival reached approximately 800 million people. DvhN 15-01-2014.

to be careful [...] we don't get to a point where the market takes over.”⁹⁶

The increasing unwanted proliferation was, at least in part, the consequence of the expansion of the festival in the mid-2000s; a time when Eurosonic became more vocal in expressing its aim to distinguish itself as a European event. The Thursday program was expanded and, as a result, the festival provided access to 15,000 visitors in 2006, which was a dramatic increase in comparison to previous years (e.g. 5,000 visitors in 2002). What started out as a small-scale festival held in De Oosterpoort evolved in twenty years into a vibrant key event within the national and European music industry. Also, media attention abroad for Groningen increased. The festival provided Groningen with a cultural image of being hip and happening. And that positive image drew more people to the city. “The promotional value is insane,” Peter Sikkema stated. “Eurosonic, especially, reaches magazines and press from all over the world. The BBC mentions the name ‘Groningen’. And those 40 other radio stations that are broadcasting from the festival, have a combined reach of millions. That cannot be translated into advertising value” (Haagsma 2007, 10).

As producer and director of the festival, Frans Vreeke was on the threshold of his fifth festival edition in 2009, and was a key player in substantiating its European character. That year, the festival was officially named Eurosonic Noorderslag, i.e. officially combining the names, instead of promoting it as two separate events. Vreeke stated: “We profile ourselves clearly as one event, in which *EuroSonic* and *Noorderslag* support and strengthen each other” (Van der Heide 2009, 27).

In that same year, in 2009, the ESNS organization installed a festival venue on the main market square in the city center, the *Grote Markt*, during Eurosonic for the first time. The “Magic Mirror Tent”, named after its *Jugendstil*-like red velvet and mirrored interior, provided free accessible concerts during the day. The idea with having this tent on the trademark central location of Groningen, was that *EuroSonic* became more visible to the city, since it was always somewhat hidden in the venues of the city, as Peter Sikkema stated: “With this Mirror tent everybody can immediately see that there is something going on” (Borst 2009, 11). It was an extra service to the city, he claimed. Another incentive, perhaps, to be more visible in the city was that the EBBA awards were presented in Groningen for the first time. Groningen was determined to show itself to Europe from its best side and market the city by having a festival venue in a public space. Festival booker Joey Ruchtie proclaimed: “We’ll do this more often, a tent on the Grote Markt. This is a small one, but this company also rents bigger ones in which 1,000 people fit in. We want that for next year” (De Jonge 2009, 16). His vision became reality when a freely accessible open air stage was added to the festival program on the Grote Markt in 2011. The free stage, named *EuroSonic Air*, was claimed to be a gift to the city of Groningen celebrating the festival’s 25th anniversary.

The celebration also entailed an extra festival day, which made ESNS a four-day festival. The performances, which took place under what was referred to as “Europe’s biggest umbrella”, drew approximately 12,000 people to the Grote Markt over two days, making the total amount of visitors of the four-day event 33,000. *EuroSonic Air* has been

96 Joey Ruchtie (Noorderslag booker), in discussion with author, January 2018.

sustained to this day, although since 2016 it takes place in a giant indoor club tent, which has a crowd capacity of 3,000 people. With this tent, the organizers tried to expand the intimate club vibe that is characteristic of venues such as Vera or Grand Theatre to the Grote Markt. Access was (and still is) free of charge, but part of the space is reserved exclusively for seminar participants and industry representatives.

In its history, this need to be inclusive and widely representative – to serve the regular festival visitors as well as the industry stakeholders – has been exemplary for the festival's complex relationship to locality and (inter)national identity. As festival scholar Robert Wynn (2015, 4) rightfully noted: "Festivals [...] illuminate some of the key struggles in our modern urban and cultural lives, as they bring some groups together and marginalize others, impose a crafted image of place for locals and visitors, and create unintended opportunities and challenges." As we have seen in this chapter, the *European Music and Showcase festival Eurosonic Noorderslag*, is no exception.

2.6 Conclusion

What has become clear is that ESNS is a diverse and multifaceted cultural event. Now approaching its thirty-fifth edition, ESNS has evolved into an event of international cultural and economic stature. It is the Dutch music barometer, a European showcase festival, an award show, a cultural playground, laboratory, and an international networking platform all condensed into a single event. The festival is more than just a multitude of bands. It provides social interactions, different forms of cultural exchange and new artistic experiences. ESNS is highly mediated, reaching a potential audience of millions.

Its name is inextricably linked to the city of Groningen by encompassing its situatedness as splendidly isolated. The city's location and its facilities are important for the success of the festival. But, conversely, the festival is important for the city as well. No other event in this region draws this much national and international attention. Its strong reputation generates valuable publicity for the city. Perhaps Groningen City Council member Jaap Dijkstra was correct after all, when he stated: "What Berlin and Cannes are for film, Florence is for visual arts, Groningen is for the European music industry" (Borst 2009, 9).

Besides the promotional value for the city of Groningen, ESNS also has its effect on the local music scene. Each year various peripheral initiatives are organized outside of the official ESNS program in the festival week, providing stages and networking possibilities for many local acts and artists who might not have had access to these audiences otherwise. Also, and not trivial for the preservation of local heritage, the festival stimulates local residents to visit the diverse supply of music venues the city of Groningen has to offer, which they might not have otherwise.

Visitors, press and (local) artists seem to always have had an ambivalent relationship to the festival. In 1986 the press claimed it was too small to make credible claims about providing a representative overview. Once the festival expanded in

consecutive years, however, the critique became that the supply of acts was too large to digest. Debates about the representation of genres have dominated the discourse surrounding the festival since the early days. As genres represent identities, regions and taste cultures, the question became: who was absent? Who was neglected? And why? The representation of acts from the northern part of the Netherlands has also been an ongoing issue throughout the festival's history. As recent as 2016, news reports of *Noorderslag* mentioned explicitly that acts from Groningen and Drenthe were completely absent from the program, which was considered "a shame" (Van der Heide 2016, 20).

Perhaps the discussion about the representation of the local and regional music culture was sparked by the festival itself in its initial stages. After all, the organization implemented notions of music's relation to geographical location (*Holland vs. Belgium* and, later, the *Battle of the North*) into the festivities as a competition parameter. Also, claiming to be representative of a diverse and comprehensive field motivated appraisals of such representations. Those who were chosen to perform (thus qualified as representative) and those whose were not (thus unqualified as representative). In other words, when claiming to provide a representative image, it is inevitable that value judgments come into play. Precisely because the festival was held in Groningen, bands from the north felt it was the cultural duty of *Noorderslag* to promote the local (or at least the northern) music scene. When this didn't happen to their full satisfaction, local musicians initiated unofficial peripheral events. Debates about cultural negotiations about genres, programming, cultural representation, and identity have become inextricably linked to the festival's development.

Eurosonic was meant mainly as an industry event, but also provided the regular (non-professional) festival audience with the opportunity to see an eclectic selection of bands. However, discussion arose about the non-transparent goals and aims of, its magnitude and about the priority access for industry representatives. These conflicts about local representation illustrate how notions of heritage and cultural representation inform local identity (Cohen 2012, Wynn 2015), themes that would provide for reoccurring debates and controversy regarding access and exclusion for local bands. In the past the festival has been a stepping stone for many promising artists. The ETEP program, for example, has provided an international stage for many acts.

But what about success factors for local acts? In the history of ESNS, many bands from the northern provinces of the Netherlands (Groningen, Drenthe and Friesland) performed on the festival, partly as a result of their own lobby. This urge to be heard, to be seen and to be recognized raises some interesting questions such as: to what extent has the festival been pivotal for successful careers of these local musicians? How important is it to play on ESNS in accumulating economic, cultural or symbolic capital? And what has it done for the longevity of artists' careers? These questions will be addressed in chapter 5 ("Battle of the North"). First I will take a closer look at the ways in which the construction of European identity informs the international collaborative strategies of Eurosonic and, also, on the institutions that were established to help support imagining the European music industry as a collective.

Chapter 3

ESNS and European Identity Formation

“Most of the early American music festivals were, ironically, showplaces for European music.” - Jonathan R. Wynn (2015, 21)

Since the peripheral event *Noorderslagting* was integrated into the official Noorderslag festival program in 1995 as an extra festival day (and was renamed *Euroslagt*), its focus shifted to the European music industry and the circulation of European repertoires. Since then, the festival has presented itself as a guardian and an ambassador of the European music market. This market has primarily been defined by Eurosonic in relation to what the festival's key players referred to as the longstanding Anglo-American cultural hegemony.⁹⁷ Indeed, research conducted by Emmanuel Legrand in 2012 showed that, while European repertoire does surprisingly well in EU countries nationally (the share of EU repertoire is superior to the share of US repertoire in all countries surveyed), the number of European artists capable of transforming a local success into a cross-border success is “quite limited” and “the only music that crosses borders without limitations is US-based repertoire” (2012, 3).

This chapter, then, focuses on the question of how ESNS relates to European identity in order to – as it claims – provide a counterweight to this dominance of the Anglo-American music industry. How do artists, visitors and organizers relate to this idea of “Europeanness”? How is this institutionalized? In other words, how does ESNS *perform* European identity and when is it perceived? By examining the festival's institutions, media outlets and experiences of festival participants, I will argue that ESNS negotiates European identity in two contrasting ways. One seems to be *regressive* in nature, viewing Europe as a cultural entity (a market) that needs protection from the hegemonic *other*. Conversely, there is the perspective of imagining Europe as more *progressive*. That is, as an anti-nationalistic entity, ultimately aiming at supranational collaboration within a community that seeks a unifying narrative in the current context of instable geopolitical developments.

Before I venture into a close reading of the various festival components, the first issue that will be addressed is identity formation and the temporality of identification. How is European identity imagined within the cultural realm? And how is this Anglo-American culture from which Europe supposedly needs protection conceptualized? In

97 Former festival director Frans Vreeke, for example, stated in the local newspaper *Dagblad van het Noorden* in early January 2005: “We want to provide a counterweight to the still dominant American culture.” A year later, in January 2006, festival programmer Robert Meijerink stated something similar when he stated: “[...] European bands get an opportunity to provide a counterweight to the American [music] mass production.” This narrative has been part of the ESNS strategy – even brought forward as its unique selling point – more recently as well. In the festival's design plan for 2017-2020, for example, ESNS claims: “The European market is still too fragmented to provide a sufficient counterweight to the Anglo-American dominance.” As a result, the music industry has become a “monoculture”. ESNS claims to pursue a richer – European – artistic diversity.

post-war Europe, America has often been represented through its hyper-real American cultural products, such as *McDonalds*, *Nike*, *Disney* or Hollywood, referring with this image to an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) that goes beyond the geographical boundaries of the United States of America. So, was Europe really a defenseless victim of America’s commercial and cultural expansionism? I will argue that Europe’s cultural heritage and foundational values (Rationality, Justice and Democracy – Bauman, 124-142) have proven to be more resilient and the proposed dichotomy is, at least, problematic.

3.1 Identity formation

Identity is a process, not a thing, and social groups only get to know themselves as groups through cultural activity and aesthetic judgment. – Simon Frith (1996, 125)

In the popular Dutch TV talk show *De Wereld Draait Door*, First Vice-president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, expressed his candidacy to succeed Jean-Claude Juncker as the next President of the European Commission.⁹⁸ He did so officially in his Dutch home town Heerlen. “So back to the people?” presenter Matthijs van Nieuwkerk asked, implying that Timmermans’ choice was a strategic move to communicate to the outside world that he had not forgotten about his roots. “It’s funny,” Timmermans replied, “When I’m in the United States they say Frans Timmermans, the *European*. When in Brussels I’m the *Dutchman*. In the Netherlands I’m the *Limburger* [coming from the region Limburg]. And in Limburg I’m the person from Heerlen. But it’s the same person all over. [...] This is the case for every European.”

Timmermans’ reply refers to the idea that one can occupy multiple identities at the same time, depending on the situation or set of cultural/geographical relations. Indeed, one can oscillate between different modes of identification. For one to identify locally is not difficult to imagine. Someone who lives in the Dutch city of Groningen, for example, is often referred to as a *stadjer*.⁹⁹ To identify with a region is also rather common. The Dutch province of Friesland, for example, is home to many proud Frisians who speak their own language (which is a mandatory subject in primary and secondary schools) and cultivate their own sport heritage.¹⁰⁰ Regional identification can even be a fierce subject of political discussion, as we have seen in 2017, when political tensions concerning the declaration of the Catalan independence in Spain escalated. To identify nationally is rather common too. After all, what would sport competitions be without nations competing for national victory? But to what extent does one identify as European? Is there such a thing as *internationalism* or do people in Europe still tend to define their sense of identity in more regional and nationalistic ways, contrary to what Brussels and European institutions would have us believe?

98 Dutch television show *De Wereld Draait Door*, broadcast on 11 October 2018.

99 Which roughly translates as: “from the city”.

100 e.g. *fierljeppen*, a sport related to pole vaulting and *Skûtskesilen*, a traditional sailing boat race.

As Swedish scholar Johan Fornäs (2012, 52) argued, the symbolic construction of communities is relational rather than absolute. He states: "People's sense of their Europeanness (or otherwise) is always intertwined with other identities, including those involving nationality, ethnicity, class, age, generation, gender, sexuality, religion and political affiliation." In other words, when people construct identity they do so in relation to other established symbolic identities.

There can only be European identity, then, if it is imagined in its multiple meanings and differences. We should first move beyond the idea that European identity is something explicitly articulated or strictly defined. It is something that is crafted and constructed; relationships that become cemented over time. As Zygmunt Bauman (2004, 2) noted, "there is a common thread running through all the stories: Europe is not something you discover; Europe is a mission – something to be made, created, built." In a similar vein, Political Science scholar Oriane Calligaro (2014, 31) notes: "European identity is not presented as a given but as a construction based on a trinity constantly present in the European cultural policy: values, heritage, diversity. Values are the common bedrock, heritage refers to existing historical and cultural commonalities and diversity indicates that this heritage cannot be equated with a dominant culture, that it is one aspect in a broader cultural landscape." This view is encapsulated in the EU's emphasis on its paradoxical mantra, "unity in diversity," which lies at the foundation of its cultural policies. The challenge, then, is to find how common ground can be conceptualized between all these nations and their geographical and cultural differences.

The European project is often seen as an exemplary cosmopolitan effort (Rifkin 2004, Beck 2006, Kendall et al. 2009). Nation states voluntarily give up some level of political autonomy and participate in democratic processes that are in the transnational domain of this union of nations. However wide one's cosmopolitan horizon, the practical realities of the local, grounded sense of belonging from where it stems should be considered. After all, as Beck and Grande (2007, 81) argue, identity can only be sustained "[f]rom below – by its citizens and by movements in civil society, and not from above, by the member states and their governments." That supranational collaboration and policy-making often collides with these bottom-up local, regional and national interests is perhaps not something to be pessimistic about or should be overcome per se. Kendall *et al.* (2009, 53) synthesize the local vis-à-vis the cosmopolitan in their idea of "imaginative realism," where the cosmopolitan stance should be grounded in social, economic and political realities: "[T] building and strengthening of the European agenda," they argue, "is fundamentally about the combination of a cosmopolitan vision in conjunction with the recognition of the need to take this vision through the process of public and institutional deliberation." In other words, the European project can develop more effectively when recognizing how the bottom-up construction of European identity can be negotiated.

In *Becoming Europeans: Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies* (2009) Monica Sassatelli argues for multiple identities in which Europe can only provide the framework of diversity, but cannot provide the common cultural content. Sassatelli creates an institutional framework in which the ways official European bodies and projects participate

in the politics of European identities are analyzed. In *Becoming Europeans* (2009, 199), she concludes: “Multiplicity is what we have, unity may well be a regulatory idea that the term identity somehow implies but in which, as we are increasingly conscious of, it is dangerous to look for an essence of identity itself.” But having identity derived from otherness might not be a convincing solution either. So, Sassatelli suggests, we need to focus on bottom-up practices and collaborations that inform identity processes in a natural, non-imposed way.

The potential in valuing cultural diversity on a supranational level has also been addressed by art sociologist Pascal Gielen et al. (2015, 11), in their conceptualization of the “common,” or “commonism.” Here, they opt for a renegotiation of values with culture at its core: “In the end, we argue for a new ‘meta-ideological’ model that goes beyond both the Rhineland model and neoliberalism, and is called ‘commonism’. Contrary to the communism of days gone by and the more recent neoliberalism, it takes culture and not the economy as the basis of society.” In Gielen’s view, a Europe of diversity and harmony can only find collective support within a conceptual framework that encapsulates various interaction models and societal forms, but takes culture as its ultimate signifier. That does not mean we should strive for consensus, as tensions between social groups (tastes, styles, convictions) move culture forward and provides dynamism. Rather, as Gielen remarked, differences should be kept alive: “Cohesion then is not defined by consensus, but rather by the will to enter into conflict with each other, albeit without bloodshed” (26).

This anti-war narrative has been a significant part of cultural policy in the post-war period. In what Monica Sassatelli (2008, 30) designated as the *age of reconstruction*, the rebuilding years after the devastations during the second World War, European countries were forced to re-negotiate their identities, reaffirm their moral values and find ways to reposition themselves in relationship to their neighbors. This was well exemplified in the mantra of the Edinburgh festival (1947), Europe’s first post-war multi-arts event, with its aim to “reunify Europe through culture.” Today, as a “United States of Europe,” the European Union still describes itself consistently as a project of peace, security and welfare, to be built, as Johan Fornäs (2012, 21) has put it, on the ruins of inter-European destruction. Reminiscent of the slogan “reunifying Europe through culture,” as the creators of the Edinburgh Festival envisioned, we might indeed need to reach out to neighboring countries and find common ground. Especially in a time when European unity is under pressure and facing geo-political challenges. Next I will examine in more detail how this idea of transnational unity can be imagined.

3.2 Towards a United States of Europe

*“It must be all for all; Europe can only be united by the heartfelt wish and vehement expression
of the great majority of all the peoples
in all the parties
in all the freedom-loving countries,
no matter where they dwell or how they vote. – Winston Churchill (1948).¹⁰¹*

After Winston Churchill unexpectedly lost the English election in 1945, he turned his focus on the project towards European unity, a union he referred to as a “United states of Europe.”¹⁰² The “European Movement” (what has later become the European Union) has achieved relative political and economic stability and peaceful international cooperation in the second half of the twentieth century. In recent years, however, geopolitical, economic and social problems have undermined the utopian message of European unity.

One challenge has been the attempt to provide Europe with an overarching supranational symbol and to develop its “brand.” Spanish marketing expert Nicolas De Santis was involved in the European project since the 1990s and in 1998 he created the superhero comic figure Captain Euro in preparation for the introduction of the euro currency. Captain Euro, obviously made to mimic the American 1941 Marvel comic book hero Captain America, was created to appeal to young European citizens’ attitudes to issues of European identity and citizenship. Mirroring the shared values the USA needed to indeed become United, Europe, too, needed a unifying symbol to become the signifier of collective supranational identity. Captain Euro is described on the website as “Europe’s superhero” who “combines technology with intelligence and persuasion to solve the world’s big issues and defeat his greatest foes.”¹⁰³ Captain Euro’s adventures are therefore full of European symbolism and signifying story hooks, well in line with the policies and symbolic practices of the EU.¹⁰⁴

In an interview De Santis (2018) discussed the “EU brand” and its failing role in fighting against Brexit and concluded that the EU hasn’t stood its ground in defending European unity and that its weak brand continues to alienate the citizens it aims to represent. He stated: “Until the EU has a clear ‘strategic’ vision and a ‘friendly’ brand that

101 European federalist conference speech. The Hague, 1948.

102 Churchill was honorary chairman at the first conference towards this goal, the Congress of European federalists, which was held in The Hague in May 1948. Its goal was to initiate the European Movement, an organization aimed at working towards a peaceful Europe and the common good. The main accomplishment of the Congress of Europe was the European Court of Human Rights, the predecessor of the European union.

103 <https://www.captaineuro.eu/about-captain-euro/>

104 The stories are full of references of European traits. Actual European architectural and cultural icons, such as the Colosseum in Rome, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Atomium Building in Brussels and Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate are deployed to evoke a European image. Captain Euro is a diplomatic hero, who uses intellect, culture and logic to fight the threats of the evil organizations which are under the leadership of Dr D. Vider. The whole format is, indeed, geared towards preventing divide and to promote “strength through unity”. However convincing, the Captain Euro project was met with great skepticism and failed to appeal to Europe’s collective imagination as these characters were controversial (echoing sensitive ethnic and racial issues) and ambivalent in their message. See Fornäs (2012) p. 42.

connects with its citizens, the EU will always remain a project of the ‘élites’ and an easy target for national politicians to attack.” The problem Europe faces is its inclination to generalize European culture and to impose it on its member states. This top-down approach neglects culture’s natural tendency to surface from bottom-up initiatives. Culture focuses on immaterial values and does not often provide “hard” scientific evidence. As Gielen (2015, 65) argues: “Generating uniqueness and singularity,” is indeed one of culture’s most important functions. “And it is this uniqueness which is hard to quantify or measure.”

One event, however, that has stood the test of time is Europe’s musical institute, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). The music event where, as ethnomusicologist Dafni Tragaki (2013, 14) has pointed out, “we are invited to engender and reflect upon our European/national selves in the performances of songs we find either arresting, or clichéd, eccentric, sentimental, kitsch, or camp.” The ESC was based on the earlier Italian SanRemo festival and its first “contest” edition was held in 1956. The ESC had its roots in anti-war sentiment, a top-down ambition of the European Commission to present a unified Europe through culture. As Franco Fabbri (2013, x) pointed out: “After the Second World War, and fascism, it was important for Italy and its public broadcasting company to be perceived internationally as promoting cultural exchange and quality in the field of modern, technically advanced media.” The ESC has this duality of presenting the supranational state as a community, while at the same time being a contest among nations struggling to find its boundaries and position within the global cultural industries.

ESNS, too, portrays this duality. Although ESNS shifted from being a contest (Holland vs Belgium, *De Noorderslag*) to representing national and European musical trends, there are still two attitudes towards Europe at play. While there are some similarities between ESC and ESNS – both institutions are sponsored by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and both depend heavily on its media networks – the differences are abundant. First of all, the ESC is broadcast in every European home, contrary to ESNS. Also, the ESC serves as a (politically laden) stage spectacle on which its actors engage in battle for national recognition and “European subjectivities” (Tragaki 2013, 15). Its coverage is often permeated with stories of scandal and controversy surrounding its participants. Often, songs and their entourage serve to foreground issues regarding social injustice or emancipation. ESNS, on the other hand, aims to provide a stage proper for disseminating European identity and European repertoires.¹⁰⁵ Its press coverage is focused on the music industry and its repertoire tends towards more alternative music genres.¹⁰⁶ In this sense the content of the music and the music making processes appear on the surface to be apolitical. The main distinguishing trait (as will be discussed in more detail further on) is ESNS’s concern with the protection of this European music market.

This anxiety about neglecting of European sources belies a broader phenomenon in which *Americanism* has generally been a term of rejection in Europe, as Dutch professor of American Studies Rob Kroes (1996, x) observed: “[...]: “In its negative

¹⁰⁵ See mission statement on the website: <https://esns.nl/info/mission/> Access date: 26-08-2020.

¹⁰⁶ The media reach differs as well. Where the ESC draws television audiences reaching millions, ESNS is primarily a radio and online media festival. 37 EBU radio stations covered ESNS in 2018: <https://esns.nl/info/about-esns/> The FPK 2017-2020 plan mentions 133.000.000 listeners in 2015.

sense the term symbolizes America as the antithesis to Europeanism, to everything that European intellectuals conceive of as their common cultural heritage.” This sense of anti-Americanism in Europe can imply a view of America as a country at the periphery of a Eurocentric world. Before we examine how this attitude is reflected within ESNS, it is therefore interesting to take a closer look at Europe’s cultural relationship to America. A relationship which, of course, dramatically transformed after WWII.

3.3 Protection from what?

The infiltration of American Culture in Europe

AMERICA, always means two things: a country, geographically, the USA, and a concept of this country, its ideal. - Wim Wenders (1986, 142)

As we have seen in Chapter 1, modern European culture and its attitude towards music festivals is highly influenced by its historical legacy. Ancient festivals, its religious past, the (continental) philosophical tradition and the classical music tradition, to name but a few foundational elements, have all shaped contemporary European music culture.

One pivotal moment in how Europe’s history shaped its moral and political values was The French Revolution (1789-1799). The revolution profoundly redesigned the French political landscape and standardized new moral values, encapsulated in the well-known mantra *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* (freedom, equality and fraternity). The upheaval was caused by widespread discontent with the French monarchy and poor economic policies. Consequently, it triggered the global decline of absolute monarchies and replaced them with liberal democracies. Its values infiltrated the rest of Europe leading to the spread of liberalism, nationalism and secularism.

In the postwar period Europe worked towards reconstruction, political stability and the forging of international linkages through trade in order to set the tenor for economic and social advancement (Quinn 2005). America’s aid program for rebuilding Europe, The Marshall Plan (1948-1952), provided a powerful tool for the repositioning of the cultural relationship with Europe. In the course of the second half of the 20th Century, this has resulted in an ambivalent stance towards America and, more specifically, what it represents. The Marshall Plan provided the necessary monetary tools to help rebuild Europe’s infrastructure, but primarily served a political purpose as American historian Richard Pells (1997, 52) argues. The Plan was an attempt to rebuild West Germany according to American specifications and to secure its allegiance in the ongoing struggle with the Soviet Union. Yet the plan also had a cultural component, which was less publicized but no less significant. The Truman administration recognized that cultural expansionism travelled easiest through arts and pop culture and its related consumerism. Therefore, the administration made it clear that any country receiving money under the Marshall Plan should also be willing to accept an unlimited supply of American movies (1997, 54,

216). In Pells' words: "In every international forum since 1945, American diplomats and media executives had opposed all barriers to the free flow of movies, television programs, and music across national borders" (276). Most of this cultural dissemination was through the film industry and European (mostly French and Italian) cinema regarded Hollywood as the main cultural threat. As Pells (212) points out: "From their [Europe's] perspective, the studios –with the collaboration of the U.S. government – were bent on monopolizing the European film market, thereby destroying not just the local competition but all traces of Europe's distinctive identity." But not only movies disseminated American culture to the European public. Radio also played an important role.

Music and sports were broadcast by the Armed Forces Radio Network (AFN) to U.S. troops by 1943. Shortly after D-Day (June 6, 1944) AFN was able to broadcast throughout Europe from American military bases with few restrictions. For many Europeans this radio network (along with Radio Luxembourg) provided their life-changing introduction to "American" English, American politics and the latest jazz and dance music. In the Netherlands, for example, as Mel van Elteren (1993, 184) observed,

[t]he American Forces Network, which could be received well in parts of Holland, played an important role [for country music in the Netherlands], because a not insignificant amount of music programming on AFN featured genres – bluegrass and various forms of country and western – which were the favourites of many of the Southern and rural Midwesterners who constituted a substantially higher percentage of the G.I.'s in Germany and France than were represented in the American population as a whole.

In other words, it was possible to learn about the United States and its popular culture simply by listening to the Armed Forces Radio Network. Popular forms of musical, literary and cinematic entertainment, made available as a consumer product to as many people as possible in the US, consequently hypnotized consumers in Europe as well.

American culture entailed, for example, movies, jazz, rock and roll, newspapers, advertising, comics, and (commercial) television broadcasting. From the 1940s on, as Richard Pells remarks (1997, 241), youthful Europeans identified with those elements in American society that appeared marginal, alienated, and definitely not middle class: "[j]uvenile delinquents (as long as they looked like Sal Mineo or James Dean), Beat poets, Black jazz musicians, rock stars, hippies and new leftists in the 1960s, Native Americans in the 1970s, the urban poor in the 1980s." So concerns about America's imprint on Europe preoccupying the European intelligentsia were not imaginary. By the 1960s it would have been difficult for anyone not to notice the immense popularity of American movies and music. Nor could one have ignored the European fascination with American tastes and lifestyles. This fascination continued in the 1970s and 1980s with the widespread distribution of American movies, sitcoms and mediated (world-wide broadcast) music events.

In his analysis of the 1985 pop song "We Are the World" by USA for Africa,

for example, American Studies scholar Jaap Kooijman (2013, 23) provides an illustrative example of how Americanization can function on a global scale. Kooijman showed how this one song is emblematic for how Americanization and globalization work through pop culture, stating that “[...] “We Are the World” can be perceived as part of “an engine of global hegemony,” presenting these American national values of democracy, freedom, and open exchange of goods and services as universal.” This European fear of American dominance over its economic, political and cultural life has been ever present since America’s presence in Europe in the postwar years. European politicians and social critics from the late 1960s, referred almost automatically to America’s cultural and linguistic “imperialism” whenever they wanted to describe the effects of Europe’s subservience to the American entertainment industry (Pells 1993).¹⁰⁷

French critics in particular, were skeptical about the endeavors and have always been very vocal in expressing their discontent with what they perceived to be cultural colonialism. A book, for example, titled *The American Challenge*, written by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and published in 1967, became a bestseller. In this book he argued that American investments amounted to a “seizure of power” over the European economy (Pells 1993, 191). This message was widely recognized and adopted in France, but also throughout Western Europe. “The central problem for the western Europeans”, as Pells (1993) notes, “was how to live in two worlds at the same time – the American world of mass production, modern technology and communications, and unrestrained consumerism, and the European world whose culture and values seemed almost preindustrial. For some, the answer was to adapt to the American future while preserving as much as possible of Europe’s heritage and independence.” Europe, then, was not merely a defenseless victim of America’s cultural hegemony. The American image of Europe was a somewhat naive construction and the mere “Americanization” of Europe was actually a myth, Pells (xv) argues. Instead, the people of (primarily western) Europe “adapted American culture to their own needs, tastes and traditions, ultimately “Europeanizing” whatever they received from the United States.”

This is in concordance with what Rob Kroes (1996, 176) observed in his analysis of classic Dutch songs, such as “Oerend hard” (by the band *Normaal*) and “Kom van dat dak af” (by Dutch singer Peter Koelewijn) to argue that instead of Dutch music becoming Americanized, American models had actually been “Dutchified”:

America reaches us through a great many media of transmission. [...] We are always the last link in these chains of mediation, the final recipients of messages from America. In that position we are never purely and only passive, gradually losing our Dutchness while becoming ever more American. We make room for “America” in a context of meaning and significance that is ours. [...] If in England and the Netherlands groups of young people began to make music in idioms that

¹⁰⁷ Also, in the politician’s attempt to impose continent-wide restrictions on America’s cultural exports, they succeeded in excluding audiovisual products from the antiprotectionist provisions of the 1993 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). (Pells p, 263)

drew on American blues and rock music, they were not simply the agents of an American cultural imperialism. They wrote their own lyrics, they made their own music, and they gave vent to sentiments that were their own.

What Kroes here points out, is that cultural appropriation is a reciprocal process and cultural “imperialism” – and losing cultural authenticity in the process – is a complex intertwining of power, resilience and adaptation.

Clearly, America as an imagined community (Anderson 1991) has transcended the geographical boundaries of the nation-state USA. More than any other country, America has spread its cultural ideals across Western Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. However, the American “hegemony” over European culture is a complex and multifaceted issue, and, unless we are talking specifically about annexation, to state that one nation simply “dominates” another is a problematic oversimplification (Poiger 2000). Already in 1991 Simon Frith (268-69) proposed an alternative, perhaps more useful perspective, when he stated: “The cultural imperialist model – nation versus nation – must be replaced by a post-imperial model of an infinite number of local experiences of (and responses to) something globally shared. In this context the “local” is defined by reference not to a specific geography or community but, rather, to a shared sense of place that is, itself, part of the global picture.” In other words, in this mapping process we imagine ourselves as being a fragment of a global community in which all elements of that larger whole are represented. ESNS, then, most convincingly identifies as European when it is framed as a unifying transnational entity. I will examine how it does so in the next part of this chapter.

3.4 EuroSonic and European Repertoires:

Showcasing European Identity

“It is fascinating that American [music] culture is so dominant in Europe. From the artistic perspective this obviously is a tricky situation. If you’re from the Netherlands [...] you almost have to copy your American role models to enter into that canon.” - ESNS founder and creative director Peter Smidt (Interview, 2018)

The festival’s persistent emphasis on the European music industry throughout its history raises some interesting questions: How, for example, do artists, visitors and organizers relate to this idea of “Europeanness?” How is this institutionalized? In other words, how does ESNS *perform* European identity? And when is it perceived? To answer these questions, I examine ESNS from three analytical perspectives. First I will look at which European-focused institutions have emerged within the festival and how they are framed. I’ll provide two perspectives of contextualizing ESNS in the face of European identity

formation to show how identification on a supranational level – one of the key issues in today's cultural and political landscape – is considered by the festival in two contrasting ways. Secondly, I will look at how the European character of the festival is communicated in official policy documents and in its marketing strategy and, consequently, how it is perceived and reported on journalistically in (social) media outlets. Finally, I will provide a grassroots ethnographic analysis of how festival visitors experience supranational identification to argue that for festival participants, European identity is solidified through the interaction and confrontation with bands, media and audiences from all over Europe.

3.4.1 Institutionalized Europeanness: ETEP and EBBA

In 2003, ESNS (and its partners) initiated the *European Talent Exchange Program* (ETEP). This international program facilitates bookings of European acts on festivals outside their home countries. The European festivals that take part in the program commit to booking at least two acts from the Eurosonic line-up. In return, these participating festivals gain financial support from sponsor organizations involved. In the 2003 festival seminar program, creative director of the festival, Peter Smidt, enlisted to supranational collaboration to promote the new initiative:

Obviously, promoting European artists in Europe is not easy, yet, there are numerous opportunities if the people who are here this year are willing to join forces. Together, we can create a bigger market for our artists, help our talent to the road of success and help ourselves, whether you're [a] promoter, radio producer, festival organizer, (online media) journalist or manager. [...] So come on. Let's forget all the reasons why it might be not possible. Let's just get on with it and work together.¹⁰⁸

This plea to international collaboration was not in vain. Today, there are over one hundred European participating festivals in the program on which over 3,000 ETEP shows were presented since 2003.

Besides this more progressive collaborative supranational voice, however, there is another attitude towards European collaboration. On the ETEP website, for example, the festival organization accounts for the need to exchange European artists as follows:

"ETEP was implemented because of the great difficulties that European pop music experiences in international promotion and distribution. Historically, Anglo-American repertoire has been the main focus of professional music distribution and promotion. Despite its great diversity and quality, European music has lagged behind."¹⁰⁹

108 Introduction (word of welcome) seminar program 2003, p. 1.

109 <https://esns.nl/etep/intro/>

As this quote illustrates, the ETEP program also explicitly expresses the need to provide an answer to the Anglo-American dominance as a primary concern. This resonates with what has been a prevalent underlying narrative ever since the European focus solidified in the late 1990s: the need to provide an alternative to the Anglo-American music industry. This protectionist stance has been widely expressed in previous years by key players of the festival in interviews and media outlets. This narrative has been part of the ESNS strategy – even brought forward as its unique selling point – more recently as well. In the festival's subsidy design plan for 2017-2020, for example, they state: “The European market is still too fragmented to provide a sufficient counterweight to the Anglo-American dominance. [...] Artistically this dominance results in a monoculture and less artistic diversity.”¹¹⁰

In this conceptualization, ESNS is looking at Europe as a market that needs to be protected. It is implied that Europe needs to define itself as separate from the Anglo-American music industry. If not, European music identity is in danger of losing or neglecting its potential. So two attitudes towards Europe seem to be at stake here: supranational collaboration and cultural protectionism.

This two-sided message is also conveyed in my second institutional example, which shows how the negotiation of European identity is embedded in its award culture. Several awards related to the music industry are presented during ESNS, the most influential being the EBBA award. The *European Border Breakers Awards* (EBBA), celebrates European artists who have been successful outside of their home country. The award is a prize initiated by the European Commission, who wanted to “Highlight the richness and diversity of European music, its creativity and its contribution to innovation.”¹¹¹ This award show has been presented as part of ESNS since 2009 and is broadcast on television throughout Europe.

On the one hand this award is framed explicitly to encourage participants to identify as European and conceptualize their career and artistic relationships as happening within the European community. The EBBA website states: “These music awards aim to highlight Europe's great cultural and linguistic diversity in popular music. The EBBA provide the opportunity for the public to discover emerging European artists, and for their music to be spread and enjoyed across Europe.”¹¹²

In August 2018, the EBBA has been redesigned after existing for 14 years and has been renamed *Music Meets Europe Talent Awards*. This to make it more in alignment with the overarching framework of the European Commission in support of the European music sector (and perhaps to lose the explicit idea of existing *borders*). Although some reorganization has taken place, the message remains the same. The new website, for example, states: “The prize is to be awarded annually to those artists who represent the European sound of today and tomorrow.”¹¹³ The plea here is to aim for a supranational

110 Inhoudelijk plan Eurosonic Noorderslag 2017-2020 volgens de richtlijnen van het Fonds podiumkunsten. P. 4. <https://anbi.nl/wp-content/uploads/stichting-noorderslag/ESNS17-20%20FPK%20inhoudelijk%20plan.pdf>

111 European Commission press release. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-62_en.htm

112 <https://esns.nl/ebba-overview/>

113 <https://musicmoveeseuropetalentawards.eu/about/>

cultural voice; within this context, musicians are provided with a platform to affirm their connectedness across national difference, somewhat akin to the aim of Europe's music monument, the Eurovision Song Contest. This transcultural idea of Europe aims to transcend established national boundaries and aims to find what Monica Sassatelli (2009) refers to as "unity in diversity." However, the MMETA (the former EBBA) also expresses a more protectionist message. The website, for example, also states:

Compared to Anglo-American music, the total percentage of music originating from mainland Europe is relatively small. The Music Moves Europe Talent Awards are designed to counter this Anglo-American dominance in the European music industry by accelerating the international careers of upcoming European artists.¹¹⁴

In this case the European music industry is yet again seen as a market that should aim to counter the Anglo-American hegemony.

The protectionist idea towards the Anglo-American music industry is somewhat problematic, considering that the UK was technically still part of the EU until 2020. However, more than 80% of the bands that perform on the festival do sing in English and many artists whose career catapulted after performing at the showcase event in the past were UK acts (e.g. Franz Ferdinand, Sam Smith, James Blake, Bastille, George Ezra and Dua Lipa).¹¹⁵ This language issue will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Also, at the time of writing, organizers are still uncertain how to cope with the *Brexit* issue and say they will wait and see how the negotiations unfold.

However, both institutions, the ETEP Programme and the MMETA (the former EBBA), reflect two different versions and visions of Europe. ESNS's multifaceted attitude towards EU identity is perhaps exemplary for Europe's larger challenge of finding its supranational voice. The geopolitical situation in Europe can, of course, not be ignored: economic upheaval, the refugee crisis and the *Brexit* have put Europe's utopian dream under severe pressure in recent years. Indeed, Europe is a complex amalgam of languages, conventions, boundaries and locations. As Johan Fornäs (2012, 60) noted: "There could never be one single identity for Europe, but always multiple and contested identities, developing in overlapping interpretive communities by means of interlacing communicative networks [...]" We should therefore move beyond the idea that European identity is something explicitly articulated or strictly defined. Rather, it is something that is crafted and constructed; relationships that become cemented over time.

In its respective sixteen and ten years in existence, the ETEP and the MMETA have become symbols of ESNS's expression of European music identity. My aim here then, was to uncover how debates surrounding these institutions reflect the inherent problem of trying to construct cross-cultural symbols to be used on a supranational European level. As we have seen, the ETEP program and MMETA reflect two versions of Europe: as a market

114 <https://musicmoveseuropetalentawards.eu/about/>

115 Lipa was born on 22 August 1995 in Westminster, London to Albanian parents.

that needs protection from the hegemonic *other*, but also as an anti-nationalistic entity which needs to redefine itself and reshape its relation to its neighbors. Let's now examine how this multifaceted idea of Europe has been expressed in the festival's endeavors in spreading that message.

3.4.2 *Europeanization in marketing and press*

In early November 1988 Eurorock was organized in Groningen, a festival with exclusively European acts. As a consequence, Noorderslag was cancelled in January of 1989. Eurorock was an initiative of the EBU (European Broadcasting Union), which organized a rock festival, held in a different country each year. On the first three days of November 1988, its sixth edition was held in the Netherlands in the venue *De Oosterpoort* in Groningen. Twelve acts from the Netherlands and twelve acts from the rest of Europe were to perform. Among the performing bands were: Hearthill (F), Then Jericho (UK), Simcess (DK), Won Ton Ton (B) and, from The Netherlands, l'Atentat, Claw Boys Claw, Funky Stuff and Herman Brood. The organization of the Eurorock festival in Groningen and the networks established in this period was the beginning of Noorderslag's cooperation on a European level. The poster emphasized the international character of the festival in its design. Note the flags, the large "Euro" logo and the listing of the country of origin of the foreign bands (small text):

The international event was not met with much enthusiasm in press reports. Journalist Wierd Duk reported on the festival on the 4th of November 1988, claiming that the "European rock scene has little to say," indicating that the European bands did not impress. *Leeuwarder Courant* reporter Jacob Haagsma (1988, 11) agreed with this verdict and stated that the European bands were "disappointing." Also, Haagsma wondered if the concert audience from the Northern part of the Netherlands was perhaps not ready for the "European thought," referring to the low attendance rates during the festival. (The second festival day, the Wednesday, attracted only 500 visitors. However, Eurorock was not solely meant to attract visitors. This co-production from the EBU, the broadcasting organization VARA and municipal art organization *Directie Cultuur Groningen*, was initiated to record bands that would later be broadcasted throughout Europe. The associated EBU countries delegated twelve acts, to be completed with acts from the Netherlands, some of which were broadcasted live by the VARA radio. This might have been a success, but as a public event the festival failed. Interestingly, reporter Haagsma observed that while the festival failed as an event for the "regular" visitors, it was a great opportunity to network. People from the music scene ("het wereldje") were well represented and made use of the networking possibilities. Haagsma: "Sometimes it seemed as if there were more people present with guest tickets than regular (paying) customers." Early signs of the future Noorderslag conference started to emerge as international music industry representatives now also knew how to find their way to Groningen. The annual (informal) meetings during the

festival were institutionalized in 1993 and developed into the renowned (international) industry conference in subsequent years.

Fig. 1 Eurorock 1988

In 1995, the (now two-day) conference was still titled “the Dutch pop music seminar.” Also, the seminar program was still written solely in Dutch. The addition of Euroslagt did, however, put more emphasis on the European aspect, as Peter Smidt stated in the opening statement:

Also because of Euroslagt, the Friday program will feature several Europe-related topics. Now that the situation of Dutch pop music continues to improve, the time has come to look at opportunities outside our borders. Perhaps those who are interested in this issue can make contacts during Euroslagt and the seminar in order to exchange European talent. *Europe* is the red thread in this third seminar.¹¹⁶

The poster of the first official edition of the European focused festival component, then named *Euroslagt*, stated: “Euroslagt, European Showcase Festival,” adding the words “New,” “Nouveau,” “Nieuw,” and “Neu” underneath (English, French, Dutch and German, respectively) to emphasize its international character (see Figure 5). To avoid any misconceptions about this European focus, the statement “Een Europese Invasie in Groningen” (*A European Invasion in Groningen*) was added as well. In Dutch, that is, to be certain that native Dutch speakers also understood its international message. Dutch graphic designer Elzo Smid, who had previously also designed the Noorderslag logo, designed the Euroslagt poster.

Figure 5 Euroslagt 1995

116 Introductory remarks by Peter Smidt in seminar program (and timetable), January 6 and 7, 1995.

The Euroslag and Noorderslag designs also contained a geographical element. As can be seen in figure 3, the logo tilts to the right, which according to Smid refers to the relation (and difference) between the geographical north and the magnetic north: “So that tilting was sort of a translation of “north.” Well... nobody notices that, of course, but that was sort of the company logo instruction, that is was always tilted – never upright.”¹¹⁷ The Euroslag logo had to contrast the Noorderslag logo and Smid therefore chose to have it tilted to the other side. “In the end,” Smid states, “both logos just needed to combine well together.”¹¹⁸ This was because the two events were often advertised on one poster. Therefore, both logos had to co-exist harmoniously and communicate the festival as a single event.

Figure 6 Noorderslag 1995

In 1996 the name Euroslag was changed to Euroslag. The logo, however, remained unchanged (figure 6):

¹¹⁷ “En ik had hem altijd een beetje gekanteld en in mijn hoofd was dat het verschil tussen het fysieke noorden en het magnetische noorden. Dus die kanteling was eigenlijk een soort vertaling van “noord”, zeg maar. Nou ja, dat ziet natuurlijk niemand, maar dat was eigenlijk wel een soort huisstijlvoorschrift van het logo, dat het altijd gekanteld zou zijn. Nooit rechtop.” Elzo Smid (graphic designer), in discussion with author, October 2018.

¹¹⁸ Ibid

Figure 7 Euroslag & Noorderslag 1996

1999 was the first edition where the name Eurosonic was used. The logo was slightly altered, now showing the twelve stars which represent the ideals of unity, solidarity and harmony among the nations of Europe. This time the program designer had chosen two different colors for distinguishing the two festival components: red for Noorderslag and blue for Eurosonic (adding the comment “formerly known as Euroslag”). As in advertising during the previous editions, the front cover of the festival program again explicitly stated “The European Showcase Festival.”

Figure 8 Eurosonic & Noorderslag 1999

In 1999, EuroSonic (then still spelled with capital S) presented a more international program than ever, according to the program's organizational welcome message, resulting partly of its cooperation with the European Broadcasting Union, who asked Dutch broadcasting organizations VPRO and the NOS to make recordings of acts who wanted to "present themselves to the European audience." A diverse international line up was presented as the unique selling point of this first EuroSonic edition as acts from twelve different countries performed, "[...] ranging from Icelandic indie pop to bigbeats from Switzerland, from post-rock from Spain to jazzy techno from Finland and, of course, everything in between." Notably, the program as well as the advertising poster were written entirely in Dutch, implying that its intended audience was still predominantly Dutch.

The explicit reference "The European Showcase Festival" was abandoned in 2001. Instead, the sober looking advertisement poster merely stated the facts: "Friday 5 January 2001, over 90 acts – 21 venues, all over Groningen." 20:00-04:00 HRS.

Figure 9 Eurosonic 2001

This indicates that the festival had established its name in the musical landscape. Not only locally, however. This was also the first time that the advertising language was changed to English, indicating its increasingly international (European) focus. In the following year, 2002, the seminar program was made bilingual for the first time “as much as possible and wherever relevant,” as Peter Smidt remarked.¹¹⁹

3.4.3 A language we all understand?

“Music is a world within itself, with a language we all understand,” Stevie Wonder famously sang in 1976.¹²⁰ Indeed, music can have universal aesthetic qualities, but to one way to really comprehend the narrative of a musical piece is to understand its lyrics. Indeed, the way in which indigenous culture can be expressed most directly is through its native language. Or, in the words of linguistics professor Claire Kramsch (1998, 3): “Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, *language embodies cultural reality*.” This is true not only through

¹¹⁹ Introductory remarks by Peter Smidt in seminar program (and timetable), January 11 and 12, 2002.

¹²⁰ “Sir Duke” on *Songs in the Key of Life* (1976)

spoken word or in literature, but in music as well. This is why the French, for example, have been very vocal in expressing the need to resist America's musical influx. To obtain control over its citizens' lingual musical consumption France has installed radio airplay quota for songs sung in French. In 1994 it was statutory requirement that the percentage of songs sung in French played by Radio DJs had to be at least 40% (Looseley 2003).

France's minister of culture Jacques Toubon expressed the importance of the French language to French culture: "It is their primary capital [...] the symbol of their dignity, the passageway to integration," [and] a common heritage" (Pells 1997, 270). Other European countries have also tried to regulate the input of foreign (mostly American) musical influences. The infiltration of American slang has been on national agendas since the influx of American blockbuster movies (*Rambo*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, TV series (e.g. *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Baywatch*) and MTV entered Europe in the 1980s (Kooijman 2013). The French, therefore asserted during the GATT negotiations (which had the encouragement of free trade and eliminating quotas as its main purpose) in the 1980s that they were not only defending French culture, but European culture as a whole (Pells 1997, 273). Also, in France and Germany almost all films and musicals are dubbed to protect their language and cultural tradition.

So if the primary goal of ESNS is to promote European repertoire, one would imagine that the circulation of Europe's national languages is an effective place to start. A quick search in the Eurosonic festival archives, in which I looked at language use of the participating acts, resulted in some interesting findings.

The first edition when the name Eurosonic was used was in 1999 so that was my first data set. Of the forty-seven acts that are listed on the archive website *Poparchief Groningen*, thirty-six were acts that used vocals.¹²¹ At least twenty-six of them sang in English (four sang in Dutch, for six acts data was not retrievable), which is 72% of the acts. For all twenty-six acts but one (a band from Ireland), English was *not* their native language. The second sample consisted of sixty acts from the 2009 edition of Eurosonic. From these sixty randomly selected acts, eight were instrumental. Of the fifty-two remaining vocal acts eight sang in a non-English language. Therefore, 84,6% of the acts sung in English language. Only twelve of the forty-four bands that sang in English were native English-speaking acts. So 72,7% of bands that performed singing in English were non-native speaker acts. The last sample I took was from the 2017 edition of Eurosonic. Eurosonic 2017 featured 382 acts from 42 countries. I took a sample of 62 acts. Four of these were instrumental acts. Of the 58 remaining vocal acts, 52 acts sing in English, 6 sing in their native language. So 89,6% of acts in this random festival sample sing in English, which provides a representative indication of language use of the festival acts. The average percentage of bands singing in English in the previous three samples is 82%. More thorough research has to be conducted to provide the exact numbers, but this sample indicates that around 80% of the acts performing on Eurosonic sing in English.

The question then is: is singing in English (as opposed to singing in the native

121 <https://www.poparchiefgroningen.nl/festivals/esns-eurosonic-noorderslag/eurosonic-1999/view> Data retrieved: 02-10-2018.

language) constraining the dissemination of European repertoire or an indication of a more unified and emerging supranational identity? After all, if the goal is to promote European diversity, why not start with having only bands on the program that sing in their native language? Thomas Elsaesser's concept of karaoke Americanism might provide an effective tool to help understand the language dynamics. Anglo-American pop/rock music continues to be perceived as the main inspirator for many European bands, rendering the Anglo-American as "original" and "authentic." Karaoke Americanism localizes the space in which we can determine when the distinction must be made between imitation and active appropriation. As Elsaesser (2005, 317) explains: "Besides the discourse of anti-Americanism and of counter-Americanism, we may have to find the terms of another discourse: let me call it... the discourse of karaoke-Americanism – that doubly coded space of identity as overlap and deferral, as compliment and camouflage." In other words, whatever is hiding behind the mask of universalized language might be designated quintessentially European and appropriating American culture *is* the defining European characteristic. This is not to say, however, that language choice is the defining characteristic of expressing transnational identity. What the Eurovision Song Contest has taught us over the course of sixty years about European musical self-consciousness, for example, is that the notion of Europeanness is negotiated through emphasizing cultural differences and stereotypes (e.g. through instrumentation, dancing, costumes) between nations (O'Connor 2015). Furtheron, in Chapter 4, I will provide some musical examples to illustrate how transgressing these various cultural conventions and stereotypes has been the defining characteristic of successful and original European music at the annual focus country theme at Eurosonic.

3.4.4 *Interpellation: participant perception*

Music can indeed be a powerful tool to negotiate identity. European music scholar Melanie Schiller, for example, concluded in her book *Sound-tracking Germany* (2016): "[A]nalyzing pop music through the lens of national identity reveals pop's relevance as a medium of collective and individual identity formation in its ability to offer subject positions and affectively engage its audience, not only emotionally but also ideologically."

So one can feel *Gronings*, Dutch, European, but when do you feel which and how do they inform one another? When do they become identities you can occupy at the same time? What are the limitations? The dynamic and unstable nature of identity makes this challenging to grasp. Especially, as the French Marxist political philosopher Louis Althusser (1971) suggested, if one can be *interpellated* into identity. The notion of interpellation describes the process by which a certain ideology manipulates or "hails" individuals into identifying in a certain way. The discourse presents the framework or, differently put, the *mode of address*. ESNS, for example, creates an environment where discourse of Europeanness is mediated. The actual presence of that discourse interpellates the musicians and others participants of the festival into an *idea* of European identity. This

sub-chapter asks if, and how, expressions of Europeaness manifest within the context of Eurosonic's festival experience and how it relates to identity formation. Through engagement with ethnographic data, I arrive at the concept of *transcended localism*: an awareness of European identification processes that incorporate locality with transnational identity.

Therefore, one of the main questions here, is: how is the environment changing the way that bands think about who they are and what they are doing. To start off my investigation, I have interviewed band members of acts that have performed at Eurosonic. One band that performed on Eurosonic is the Dutch band *Nemesea*. Being the first band to acquire substantial funding through the crowd funding platform *Sellaband*, *Nemesea* gradually built a fan base, both nationally and internationally. *Nemesea* has performed on Eurosonic twice, in 2005 and 2008. In an interview with *Nemesea* guitar player and band leader HJ de Jong I asked him about his experiences with ES:

[In 2005] we didn't really notice anything special. You perform at ES and you are aware that foreign parties are present. But we didn't notice that at all and haven't been approached by international parties. [...] Also, I didn't know that much about the festival. We were more concerned with the fact that a Dutch booker was going to see us. That was our focus and we mostly talked just to him. We were actually only concerned with the Netherlands and didn't think beyond that.¹²²

The second time they performed at Eurosonic, however, it was quite a different experience:

Yes, because we were with [booking agency] AT. After *Sellaband* were with *AT Bookings* from The Hague, a major party. They had a stage at ES, I think it was the Platform Theater, and that is where they programmed us. [...] In that period, we were signed with an English manager, David Arden, who said that a Danish booker was going to see the band. When we were walking around, I didn't have the impression that there were bookers in the audience. It seemed like a normal gig, with a regular audience. But as we found out later, there were quite a few people there from Europe to see us.

HJ doubts if performing at ES really made that much of a difference, as many contacts were already established before the performance. "Look," he says, "I do think you get a spot at the festival, and I hear this from other bands as well, when you have already established certain contacts. There is a form of curation before you will be on the program, which might not be a bad thing. But to say "you're a new band and you get a spot so people can discover... that is too easy." HJ did not experience an enhanced European awareness during his first performance, which changed when there were international cont(r)acts at stake for the second performance. He also mentions that if they would perform at Eurosonic in the future they would have a more Europe-minded mindset: "Because we'd

122 HJ De Jong (guitarist and songwriter), in discussion with author, June 2018.

be looking for an international party who would be interested in booking us abroad. So then Eurosonic is a good place.”

A festival component, which is framed within the Eurosonic festivities is Grunnsonic. Grunnsonic focuses on local bands and has been part of the official program since 2007. It has developed into a significant part of the festival weekend, with approximately 50 acts performing on multiple stages over three days. One group from Groningen which has performed there in 2011 is the rock band *Vanderlinde*. I interviewed front man and name-giver of the band, Arjan van der Linde, and asked him about his experiences with Grunnsonic and its relation to the European context:

I think that international industry representatives, or international press, are less likely to go to a place where bands from Groningen perform. They tend to go to the bands from their own country and follow the “regular” Eurosonic trail. [...] I think only the regular [café/podium] Buckshot crowd was there plus perhaps five extra people. [...] I don’t believe that professionals who could make a difference attend the Grunnsonic program. There is just too much. It didn’t result in any bookings, so in that sense it wasn’t of any use to us. However, you do get publicity. You’re in the festival program and people read about you. That is very cool. I was quite honored to perform there. People think it is quite impressive that you perform there. So it definitely adds to your cv.¹²³

Van der Linde’s observations relate to long-term processes but also modes of acquiring cultural capital by association. Its reputation as dynamic event is evident: the city is transformed into a vibrant event where, due to the presence of the many international visitors and European music professionals, the main language is English. Also, Groningen municipal policy officer Lieuwe Rozema noted, “It’s a very important European festival and people from all over Europe come here. [...] You cannot escape it. You see flightcases, bands performing, queues in front of cafes... It’s really visible.”¹²⁴ A performance during the event, therefore, interpellates an artist with this European impact. While Van der Linde did not feel part of the “European community” when performing at Grunnsonic, being part of the event, as well as the marketing and media outreach did align the group to the broader international message of the festival: the circulation of European repertoire.

3.5 Conclusion

ESNS’s negotiation of European identity is most convincing when it is focused on transnational cooperation rather than on protectionism. That is, on emphasizing European cultural exchange and collaboration, however challenging navigating through the instable current geopolitical landscape might be. Indeed, alongside a sense of regional or national

123 Arjan van der Linde (bass guitarist and songwriter), in discussion with author, July 2018.

124 Lieuwe Rozema (senior policy advisor Groningen municipality), in discussion with author, July 2018.

belonging, a study conducted in 2006 showed that European citizens increasingly identify themselves as European (Lutz 2006, 425). The study was revisited in 2016, and, even with the recent crises regarding the Brexit and the resulting broader national skepticism about continued EU membership and the ever present debates on integration, the sympathy for the European project was ever growing (Striessnig 2016). European citizens continue to support the idea of a united Europe and do not see going back to a pre-EU situation as a desired alternative. The development of a European identity complements, rather than replaces, national or regional identities.

Europe has a complex cultural relationship with the United States. Of course, its influences cannot be denied. Hollywood and other large corporations of consumer culture (e.g. McDonald's, Nike, Coca Cola) have become omnipresent in post-war Europe as did sitcoms, fashion and pop music (e.g. Michael Jackson and Madonna) in the 1980s. As Pells (1997, 153) has showed, this impact on Europe caused a form of alienation and "othering" when interpreting the United States. But to regard this historical development as a one sided hegemony of culture is too simplistic. European identity, then, is something that is continually crafted and constructed; relationships that lead to collaboration, travel routes and, eventually, cultural heritage. To support this process, Europe is signified through a wide range of symbols, all of which constitute a complex image of Europeaness. As Johan Fornäs (2012) has showed, the signifying power of symbols serve to strengthen a sense of civic and cultural European identity. Some of these symbols, such as the European flag (circle of twelve golden stars on blue background), the anthem (Beethoven's Ode to Joy), the motto ("Unity in Diversity") and the official Europe Day (May) 9, are vital elements of communication processes, because, as the EU Parliament has put it, they "convey an emotional image of the underlying values of the organizations they represent."¹²⁵

In its thirty-five-year existence, ESNS, too, has become a symbol of European music identity, evolving into one of the leading platforms for the circulation of European repertoire. The protectionist narrative of Europe as "nation" just like the various US states are a "nation," serves the goal of defining Europe as a market that needs to be guarded. For festival participants European identity relates to the collaborative potential the festival facilitates and fosters. To retain a unity in diversity, human-identified anti-war notion of Europe, this collaborative potential should perhaps be explored and developed. My aim here, was to uncover how debates surrounding the festival's institutions reflect the inherent problem trying to construct cross cultural symbols to be used on a supranational European level. As Fornäs (2012, 256-57) remarked, "[A]ll such symbols [...] simply must have multiple meaning potentials in order to fulfil their functions as key identifying symbols, since the identities they are meant to signify are also multifaceted and in flux." This, I conclude here, is why the ESNS festival is not merely a band showcase. It is showcasing Europe.

¹²⁵ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/public-affairs/news/meps-legalise-eu-symbols-through-the-backdoor/>
See also: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/2823052/EU-flag-and-anthem-revived-by-MEPs.html>

Chapter 4 Breaking EU Borders:

European Border Breakers Awards and Focus Countries

The EU must contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore. – Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)¹²⁶

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present an analysis of two promotional mechanisms of transnational collaboration within the European music industry. This analysis aims to reveal how a European music prize and the annual foregrounding of one particular European country have developed into essential elements promoting supranational cultural exchange within the framework of the Eurosonic Noorderslag (ESNS) festival. Both initiatives emerged in the mid-2000s: European Border Breakers Awards (EBBA) was initiated in 2004 and the annual country focus element was launched as part of ESNS in 2005.

While the country focus was an initiative by the ESNS organization, the EBBA awards were developed by the European Commission. This is why the award ceremony was organized by the French MIDEM festival in the first five years of its existence (2004-2008). In 2009 the EBBA event relocated to Groningen (NL) where, from then on, it was organized and promoted as part of ESNS. Over time, both initiatives have become essential elements within the European framework of ESNS.

Juxtaposing the EBBA award show with the annual country focus at Eurosonic reveals how each expresses a transnational outlook and aims to “break borders” in two distinct ways. When the European Commission communicates the border breaking narrative within the EBBAs it is not exploring aesthetic concerns, but, rather, commercial concerns. Indeed, the essence of the award is that it rewards acts that have sold internationally and broke the financial border between European countries. However, while the aim of the EU is to present itself as a single music market, it simultaneously functions as a conglomeration of national music industries with each their own unique aesthetic and cultural characteristics. How those countries themselves position groups, reveals the ways in which nations conceptualize breaking borders, which often has more to do with musical, cultural and aesthetic borders than with geopolitical borders. Within such succesful musical selections, cultural characteristics and conventions are blended

126 Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/137/culture>

with more cosmopolitan performance practices to appeal to an international audience while maintaining an aura of authenticity. Indeed, as we shall see, country focus acts are often more experimental in nature and more likely to transgress genre conventions in their attempt to represent their home country. This process will be conceptualized from the perspective of what Monica Sassatelli (2008) and sociologist and music scholar Motti Regev (2013) have described as *aesthetic cosmopolitanism*. The term “cosmopolitan,” having a long history in social sciences is defined here as overcoming cultural borders into what Ulrich Beck (2003) has explained as a hybrid of transnational aesthetic practices. To investigate how these transnational aesthetic practices can be traced back to Eurosonic I will explore ESNS’s annual country focus – for which I have chosen to zoom in on three emblematic years (France 2005, Netherlands 2011 and Denmark 2018) – in the second half of this chapter.

The first part of this chapter, then, will focus on the development of the EBBA award (renamed *Music Moves Europe Talent Awards* in 2018). To provide some context, I will first illuminate how the larger goal of European cultural exchange in the second half of the twentieth century provided the foundation for the emergence of the EBBA. I will then focus on how the award ceremony developed, first, as part of MIDEM festival (Cannes) and, later, at ESNS. For this investigation I have chosen to focus on three hallmark years: 2004, 2009 and 2019. Consequently, I will zoom in on selected award winning acts from these years to claim that, in contrast to promotional discourse which claims musical diversity, commercial concerns are at the heart of the initiative. I will examine how this impacts the performance practice of selected acts and the representation of genres.

4.2 EBBA: Europe’s Symbolic Cultural Capital

However varied the structure of the relations among agents of preservation and consecration may be, the length of ‘the process of canonization,’ culminating in consecration, appears to vary in proportion to the degree that their authority is widely recognized and can be durably imposed. Bourdieu (1984)¹²⁷

These awards are a testimony to the diversity of European music and the potential of the single market – Ján Figel (2005)¹²⁸

In the formative years of the European Community in the late 1950s, its founding institutions, the European Economic Community (EEC), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) perceived European collaboration primarily in terms of economic prosperity and political stability (Fligstein *et al.* 2011, Calligaro 2014). The concept of cultural heritage as a unifying process within Europe became part of political discourse more recently, in the 1970s

¹²⁷ Bourdieu, P. (1984) “Market of Symbolic Goods” pp. 14–15.

¹²⁸ EBBA award opening ceremony speech on 23/01/2005 at MIDEM. European Commission press release 24/01/2005: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-05-83_en.htm Accessed: 30-01-2019.

and 1980s (Smith 2006, Hafstein 2012). However, cultural policy on a European level was not implemented until the 1992 Maastricht treaty marked the beginning of the European Union and introduced its profound reforms for European policy.¹²⁹ The most significant innovation being the single currency and Economic and Monetary Union. The Union's cultural policy was formalized in Article 128 of this treaty: "The community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the member states, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore."¹³⁰ After concerns with steel and coal (ECSC 1951), European organizational reform (Single European Act 1986) and environmental issues, economic and monetary unity (Maastricht 1992) and national and foreign security issues (Amsterdam 1997), the EU now fully recognized and implemented the importance of arts and cultural exchange.

In 2000, the EU officially adopted the motto "Unity in Diversity" and recognition of cultural diversity became a core value to promote European heritage (Sassatelli 2002, Delanty 2003, Shore 2006). Despite inherent operational difficulties (Gordon 2010), the perhaps somewhat essentialist conception of Europe's cultural heritage (Shore 2001), and procedural challenges (Bell and Oakley 2015), EU's mantra "Unity in Diversity" crystalized into several generations of EU cultural initiatives. The *Culture 2000* programme, for example, was a seven-year EU programme – the first EU framework programme devoted entirely to cultural matters – and was instantiated to support cultural cooperation projects of pan-European character in all artistic and cultural fields, of which many in the field of music.¹³¹

In the early 2000s, the European music industry faced difficult times. The music industry was confronted with declining sales of recorded music as music consumption shifted from sound carriers to the digital realm (Jenkins 2006, Emmerson 2007). Without sufficient copyright legislation, piracy was at the heart of music distribution. According to the 2003 KEA European Affairs report, world sales of recorded music decreased by 8.9% in 2001 and 11% in the first half of 2002.¹³² While US sales were recovering and the UK market was "resilient" (due to strong album releases and added bonus material), continental Europe saw "big falls" in 2003.¹³³ At the same time, a new interest for music was emerging in Europe. Not only because of its economic potential (e.g. the integration of large music catalogues into the assets of global media companies), but also as part of

129 As the European project had been a primarily elitist endeavor, without much legislative consultation with the general public, renaming the European Community to European Union reflected a closer relationship to its neighbors (Staab, 2013).

130 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1992:191:FULL&from=NL> The next paragraph specified the areas that were regarded as significant to cultural political intervention: "Action by the community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between member states and, and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas: - improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples; - conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance; - non-commercial cultural exchanges; - artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector."

131 EC press release, IP/04/97 Brussels, 25th January 2004.

132 "Profile of the European Music Sector", KEA European Affairs, January 2003. https://www.impalamusic.org/docum/04-press/press_0302_1.pdf

133 IFPI World Sales report 2003. <https://www.ifpi.org/content/library/worldsales2003.pdf> Accessed: 23-02-2019.

the process of European integration.¹³⁴ However, little (non-English language) music produced in Europe circulated in other countries on the European continent.

In 2004, then, the EBBA was initiated by the European Commission to boost European music culture. The prize – consisting of a commemorative statue and extensive media attention¹³⁵ – was designed to reach a general public audience, much akin to other prizes with a large international profile, such as the Grammys (US) and the MTV Europe Music Awards (EMAs) or the Eurovision Song Contest. However, the EBBA had no large-scale commercial sponsorship and did not shine its spotlight on established American artists that MTV had helped export to Europe. Instead, the EBBA focused its attention on the achievements of emerging European talent. Honoring them with building their reputation and gaining prestige, ascribed to the award winners symbolic cultural capital. A concept which mechanisms I will explore a little further.

Symbolic Capital in Festival Awards

The idea of *symbolic capital* was described in 1984 by the famous French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 291) as “[...] a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honorability.” In other words, that which goes “unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence” (Richardson 1986, 18). Symbolic capital, then, is a credit, Bourdieu (1989, 23) noted: “[...] it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition.”

While capital can come in multiple variants (e.g. social, cultural, political or, of course, economic capital), symbolic capital can emerge from all of these forms. They can function as, and feed into, the volume of symbolic capital a person, object or institution possesses. While an actor can move from one type of capital to another, all forms add to the volume of symbolic capital. Vice versa, symbolic capital can be converted to other forms of capital (e.g. when artists acquire recognition and status, it will increase the price of their work and accumulate economic capital). In that sense, symbolic capital can be regarded as the overarching form of a capital (“meta-capital” Swarts 2013) from which other capital can emerge. The position of events within the “field” (i.e. network of relationships) of music showcase festivals, for example, is influenced by competition as they try to accumulate different forms of capital.

Symbolic cultural capital describes a form of cultural value which conveys symbolic meaning and is in that sense contrasted to economic (monetary) value as this may be insufficient of representing the full range and complexity/ intangible nature of an event’s cultural worth within the musical ecosystem. It may, for example, have social significance, influence on the city’s foreign appeal and act as a symbol of identity, all qualities that are

134 “Profile of the European Music Sector”, KEA European Affairs, January 2003, p. 1.

135 In 2006, however, a fund was set up to support tours by winning acts in at least four member states. Legrand, E. “EBBA Winners Break Borders” in *Billboard*, February 5, 2005, p. 43. Also: “Scream van Sarah Bettens wint European Border Breaker Award” 6 January 2006: <https://www.entertainmentbusiness.nl/muziek/scream-van-sarah-bettens-wint-european-border-breaker-award/>

difficult to express in monetary terms. Different forms of capital (symbolic, economic, social and cultural) are interlinked. The defining characteristic of cultural capital is that it is convertible into other forms of capital. Cultural economist David Throsby (2000, 44) introduces the idea of cultural capital in economics. He notes: “Cultural capital, in an economic sense, can provide a means of representing culture which enables both tangible and intangible manifestation of culture to be articulated as long-lasting stores of value and providers of benefits for individuals and groups.”

Bourdieu’s analytical framework emphasizes the relational and dynamic aspects of actors within a certain field, which makes this analytical lens an advantage when looking at ephemeral (temporary) networking events such as showcase festivals. After all, these events are in flux constantly; their positions are seen in relation to each other within the field-specific demands alongside their constant attempts to acquire or convert capital (Ihlen 2018). In a similar vein Bourdieu (2000, 243) explained how symbolic struggles require “acts of performative magic.” They enable the recipient “to take on the social image or essence that is conferred to on him in the form of names, titles, degrees, posts or honours,” thus recognizing the constructive potential of performativity and the potential efficacious force of authority. In that sense, symbolic capital can be objectified through prizes and awards. A strategy which is at the core of the European strategy of breaking musical borders.

The EBBA was added to two already existing European cultural prizes (awards for architecture and heritage), and all were “to highlight excellence in a number of fields in order that artists, works or cultural and artistic achievements become known beyond national borders, thereby encouraging mobility and exchanges.”¹³⁶ The EBBA was awarded each year to ten artists (and their record companies, their writers and publishers) that achieved the highest sales with their debut album in the EU outside its country of production.¹³⁷ To legitimize the prize, the European Commission worked in cooperation with established European music organizations: European Music Office (EMO, initiated in 2004 and dissolved in 2013), European Grouping of Societies of Authors and Composers (GESAC), International Confederation of Music Publishers (ICMP/CIEM), International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) and Independent Music Companies Association (IMPALA). The selection process of the winners was based on statistics provided by Billboard Information Group, in accordance with the following criteria:

- original debut album by artists or groups from an EU Member State;
- sales figures in the 15 Member States, not including the country of origin;
- sales between 27/11/2002 and 26/11/2003.¹³⁸

136 Creative Europe Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/eac-s12-2018-summary_en.pdf Other prizes were: The European Prize for Contemporary Architecture (1987), The European Prize for Cultural Heritage (2002). The European Prize for Literature was initiated in 2009, the Prix MEDIA for film in 2012 and The Young Talent Architecture Award in 2016.

137 The number of winners has shifted over the years. From 2004-2006 there were 9 winners, 2007-2018 there were 10, and in 2019 the format changed and 12 winners were selected.

138 European Commission press release: 25/01/2004: https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvij5epmjl1ey0/vgnan1zpmru0?ctx=vvgbnhigl7xa&tab=1&start_tab0=800 Accessed: 13/02/2019.

The official 2004 press release stated: “These awards highlight the diversity of European music and the potential of the single market. They unite professionals from the world of music, authors, composers, performers, major or independent producers, in helping to improve the distribution of European music across the European Union.”¹³⁹ However, the event was also explicitly used as a symbol for European unity, as it was to “[...] supplement the European Commission’s aim to stimulate the mobility of artists and their work and to highlight intercultural dialogue.”¹⁴⁰ The event was organized by what was then considered to be the leading European music industry event, MIDEM.

4.3 2004: The EBBAs at MIDEM

The French music event MIDEM (Marché International du Disque et de l’Edition Musicale), billed as “the leading music industry event for the music ecosystem,” was established by Bernard Chevy in 1967 and has been organized annually since. MIDEM began as marketplace for deals for independent labels and music publishers. In the early days, the central focus at MIDEM was its performance theatre, where world-class artists would stage special shows promoting their latest records to music industry representatives. It “was the gathering place for everyone in music publishing before the advent of the Internet,” as chairman of Sony/ATV Music Publishing Martin Bandier, recalled (*Billboard* 2016).

After several years of waning attendance and significance in the late 2000s, 2012 was a year of reinvention for MIDEM. In an article in the industry magazine *Billboard*, journalist Andrew Hampp (2012, 22) noted: “Gone were the large [one-day digital-focused conference event] MidemNet sessions and 3,000-seat auditoriums in the Palais des Festivals et des Congres – this in favor of music hack sessions, breakout panels and global brand/ad agency pitches that could only take place at MIDEM. Attendance topped 200 people each.” Also, as Hampp mentions, there were concerts scheduled, something MIDEM had only recently embraced. A new music director, Bruno Crolot, was appointed in 2011 and MIDEM gained its first rise in attendance in five years in 2012. Today, like ESNS, MIDEM is a four-day event, comprised of a conference, a showcase for bands (although, with 28 concerts in 2018, significantly smaller) and music related products and a networking platform for representatives of the music industry. In 2018, the event gathered 4400 participants, 85 countries, 1824 companies and 105 international media representatives.

On January 25th, 2004 the first EBBA awards were presented at MIDEM to the following acts: Lasgo (BE, EDM), Saybia (DK, Rock), Carla Bruni (FR, Folk/Chanson), Masterplan (DE, Power Metal), The Thrills (IRE, Rock), Tiziano Ferro (IT, Pop), Mariza (PT, Latin Pop) and Las Ketchup (ESP, Latin Pop).

Belgian producer Peter Luts (A&S Production), whose act Lasgo was a 2004

¹³⁹ European Commission press release: 25/01/2004: https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9vvij5epmj1ey0/vgnan1zpmru0?ctx=vggbnhigl7xa&tab=1&start_tab0=800 Accessed: 13/02/2019.

¹⁴⁰ ESNS 2009 recap (*terugblik*) report, p. 8.

EBBA winner: “The awards are very important, because foreign success is the dream of every songwriter or producer. [...] With this award, people can see which bands and singers are selling well outside their home countries.”¹⁴¹ Lasgo, a Belgian EDM group, formed in 1999, consisted of MC Peter Luts, DJ Dave McCullen and singer Evi Goffin. The self-produced debut album *Some Things* (Antler Subway) was originally released in Belgium in November 2001 and released across the world throughout 2002 on the Positiva label. The debut single “Something” was released in Belgium and Spain earlier, in May 2001, and started climbing the Dutch and German charts in October 2001. In February 2002 the single was released in the UK Top 40 and peaked at number 4 on the singles chart Top 100 in early May.¹⁴² The single was preceded by two more singles from the album, “Alone” and “Pray.” The album peaked on the *Billboard* Dance/Electronic charts at number ten on February 15, 2003.¹⁴³ In March 2003 they won their second award (Best Hi-NRG/Euro track) at the Winter Music Conference’s International Dance Music Awards in Miami (Florida). Lasgo proceeded to make two more albums, *Far Away* (Robbins Entertainment, 2005) and *Smile* (Sinuz, 2009).

As the case of Lasgo demonstrates, the prize sent out two messages: the first being commercial; after all, one of the main selection criteria to be eligible for the prize was the highest number of sales. And, secondly, as a gesture of encouragement for new acts (sales had to be based on an act’s debut). While the prize was promoted to stimulate emerging talent, the consequence of its commercial aim was that the prize was essentially more of an extra promotion for established acts. For example, “Aserejé,” by the Spanish EBBA-winning act Las Ketchup, was the best-selling single in France in 2002, selling over 1.3 million copies and as such did not need the extra encouragement. Also, merely stimulating the most commercially viable music ran the risk of obscuring more vulnerable repertoire and become too much of an elitist undertaking.

This elitist and bureaucratic image of EU government and institutions was something the EU struggled with since its emergence (Fornäs 2012). Indeed, the EU slogan “Unity in Diversity” implied that more obscure cultural expressions should also find a way to a larger audience to recognize and tolerate difference. Organizers came to realize that simply awarding the most successful acts lacked an aspect of investment and longevity to the prize and also neglected the potential of new (perhaps less strong) music markets. Therefore, after the first edition of EBBA, its selection criteria expanded. In 2005, an additional award was presented to celebrate the enlargement of the EU (to twenty-five countries). The “European Breakthrough” Prize, for an act from one of the ten new member states, was given to the Polish band Myslowitz for its album *Korova Milky Bar* (EMI). EC commissioner for education and culture Ján Figel stated in his opening speech at the Cannes venue Palais des Festivals: “Our musical diversity is getting stronger, and we should celebrate that.”¹⁴⁴

141 In: Legrand, E. “EBBA Winners Break Borders” in *Billboard*, February 5, 2005, p. 43.

142 <https://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/20020303/7501/> Accessed: 23-02-2019.

143 According to the regulations, however, sales in the United States were not considered for winning an EBBA.

144 Legrand, E. “EBBA Winners Break Borders” in *Billboard*, February 5, 2005, p. 43. See also: <http://europa.eu>.

While selection criteria continued to focus primarily on sales statistics, more attention was given to intercultural dialogue and exchange, as well as reaching a younger audience as the prize developed. As the press release of the 2007 award ceremony stated: “It also aims to raise young people’s awareness about the importance of breaking geographical and mental barriers in such fundamental matters as creativity and the dialogue between cultures.”¹⁴⁵ In 2008 another variable – touring experience – was added to the selection criteria, making more flexible assessment of EBBA winners possible. This also allowed more room for grounding the prize within the ETEP framework of Eurosonic when it relocated to Groningen in 2009.

4.4 2009: The EBBAs at ESNS

“Come & join a grand celebration of European music!”¹⁴⁶ – 2009 EBBA advertisement

The shift of the EBBAs from Cannes to Groningen was the result of a call published by the European Commission in 2008 for proposals to select the organizing body for both the selection of the award winners and the preparation of the award ceremony.¹⁴⁷ There were several advantages of relocating the event to Groningen, as a 2013 study conducted by the European Commission on the impact of the EU prize for culture, illuminates.¹⁴⁸ A key benefit has been the link with Eurosonic Noorderslag and its affiliated ETEP program. Since the live sector had become increasingly important for artist’s success and revenue, having representatives of nearly 123 international festivals present (59 within the ETEP context), provided major opportunities for the EBBA artists to expand their network. Also, ESNS focused more on engaging with industry representatives and the media, rather than focusing on policymakers, which seemed appropriate in the context of stimulating the live sector. In sum, collaborative opportunities with ESNS and its diverse array of events would create “synergies” and allow the EBBAs “[...] to play a much more prominent role at Eurosonic than at MIDEM [...]”¹⁴⁹

Again, the selection criteria for nominated artists were expanded: besides debut album sales in EU member states (outside the country of production), now airplay and live performance capabilities were also considered. As noted in the report on the program “Culture in Motion”, these qualities included 1) touring capacity outside the country where

eu.rapid/press-release_IP-05-83_en.htm

145 IP/07/68 European Commission press release. Brussels, 20 January 2007. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-07-68_en.htm Accessed: 25-02-2019.

146 2009 festival guide advertisement on the EBBAs.

147 Report on The Culture Program “Culture in Motion” 2007-2013. http://www.provincia.torino.gov.it/europa/file-storage/download/europe_direct/pubblicazioni/pubblicazioni_sito/cultura/NC3008545ENC_002%5B1%5D.pdf Accessed: 18-02-2019.

148 Ecorys, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture Final Report, March 2013. http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/tools/actions/documents/eu-culture-prizes-study_en.pdf

149 *Ibid.* p. 57.

the artists/group is based and 2) the artist/group's capacity to give live performances.¹⁵⁰ As ESNS had been providing an important platform for the circulation of European acts through the 2003 ETEP program, part of these criteria were appearances within this network of international festivals.¹⁵¹

As the organizational structure of the EBBAs developed, new collaborations were established. By 2009, for example, the European Commission cooperated with Nielsen Soundscan, Music Week and the EU countries participating in the EU Culture Programme. But most importantly, shifting the prize ceremony to Groningen allowed the European Commission to collaborate with Eurosonic's influential media partner, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). Due to this collaboration, the show was taped and broadcast on TV by public stations in ten European countries (screened on Dutch national television at prime time Jan. 17 2009).

The location of the event was the Oosterpoort, the same venue where Noorderslag was (and still is) held. For the occasion, the biggest stage in the history of the Oosterpoort was built in the large hall (*Grote Zaal*).¹⁵² Pianist, bandleader and BBC presenter Jools Holland presented this sixth edition of the EBBA award show and the show was accessible to the general public. The event was scheduled for 15 January, the Wednesday prior to Eurosonic, serving as the opening party of the festival week. Signifying this expansion, as well as stressing the equal importance of both festival parts, the festival changed its official name from "Noorderslag Weekend" to "Eurosonic Noorderslag."¹⁵³

The EBBA award generated modest media attention when it was organized at MIDEM, but since the move to Groningen, more TV, radio and online coverage was generated across Europe. Collaboration with the EBU and format changes within the event (e.g. interviews with and performances by winners and the creation of the Public Choice Award) stimulated promoting opportunities and communication with media channels.¹⁵⁴ The choice for Groningen as organizing body for the EBBA was for a fixed period of four years. Calls for proposals to select a capable organization for organizing the ceremony were published by the European Commission every four years (2010-2014, 2015-2018, 2019-2021). Until today, ESNS has been selected each time as the most convincing option.¹⁵⁵

150 Report on The Culture Program "Culture in Motion" 2007-2013, p. 49. http://www.provincia.torino.gov.it/europa/file-storage/download/europa_direct/pubblicazioni/pubblicazioni_sito/cultura/NC3008545ENC_002%5B1%5D.pdf Accessed: 18-02-2019. The Creative Europe program (€ 1.46 billion) was implemented for the creative sectors in 2013, encompassing previous programmes such as European Capitals of Culture, European Heritage Days and several prizes, among which, the European Border Breakers Awards.

151 Ecorys, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture Final Report. "Study on the impact of the EU prizes for culture." March 2013, p. 20: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/eu-culture-prizes-study_en.pdf Accessed: 18-02-2019.

152 There was, however, still lack of space, resulting in moving the horn section to the balcony, a space normally reserved for spectators.

153 The official festival recap program 2009 states: "So far in the Netherlands, Noorderslag was a better known name than was EuroSonic, outside our country it was the other way around: people know Eurosonic better. Eurosonic is a whole consisting of these two festivals and the conference. The elements cannot be divided and are mutually enhancing, EuroSonic Noorderslag it is therefore."

154 Ecorys, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture Final Report. "Study on the impact of the EU prizes for culture." March 2013, p. 63: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/eu-culture-prizes-study_en.pdf Accessed: 17-02-2019.

155 The award show has been relocated in Groningen several times. De Oosterpoort (2009), Stadsschouwburg

The event's placement in Groningen and the additional media expansion brought new economic and marketing opportunities for both the city and the festival. The show was broadcast on television throughout Europe, drawing valuable attention to the city. To festival organizers, mediation and branding became increasingly important as the city provided limited opportunities to further expand the festival when it came to venues, bands or number of days. Frans Vreeke, who was producer and director of ESNS in 2009, felt that the maximum capacity had been reached and it was now more important to strengthen the ESNS brand on a European level. "[B]ringing the EBBA awards to Groningen," he stated, "is a good step forward" (Van der Heide 2009, 27). Indeed, having the EBBAs in Groningen added a cosmopolitan sentiment to the festival, while still being grounded in village-like local singularities. The complementary qualities of the local and the cosmopolitan is a perspective perhaps best described elsewhere as "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Beck 2003, Appiah 2005). Indeed, rooted cosmopolitanism recognizes the importance of belonging, while simultaneously maintaining an open stance to the world that sustains individual autonomy. With organizing the ceremony, the festival budget of ESNS had increased with 25 percent (Van der Heide 2009, 27). The grant for organizing the award was provided via the European Culture programme, on a co-funded basis at a rate of maximum 60% of overall costs. The overall budget for the Prize averaged €720,000 and Eurosonic received a maximum contribution of €360,000 from the European Commission, representing around 50% of the total budget.¹⁵⁶

Here is an overview of the 2009 winners:

Act	Country	Album
Adele	United Kingdom	<i>19</i>
Alphabeat	Denmark	<i>Alphabeat</i>
AaRON	France	<i>Artificial Animals Riding on Neverland</i>
Cinema Bizarre	Germany	<i>Final Attraction</i>
The Dø	France	<i>A Mouthful</i>
Kraak & Smaak	Netherlands	<i>Boogie Angst</i>
Ida Corr	Denmark	<i>One</i>
Lykke Li	Sweden	<i>Youth Novels</i>
The Script	Ireland	<i>The Script</i>
The Ting Tings	United Kingdom	<i>We Started Nothing</i>

Figure 10.

Five of these ten award winning acts, Lykke Li, Cinema Bizarre, Kraak & Smaak, Ida Corr and AaRON performed at the show in the Oosterpoort.¹⁵⁷

and Martiniplaza have all provided the stage for the ceremony.

¹⁵⁶ Ecorys, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture Final Report. "Study on the impact of the EU prizes for culture." March 2013, p. 63: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/eu-culture-prizes-study_en.pdf Accessed: 17-02-2019.

¹⁵⁷ Also, special guest performers were Gabriel Rios (B), who performed his hit song "Broad Daylight", and the Jools Holland Rhythm & Blues Orchestra.

When looking at this year's winners, we can draw the conclusion that the criteria for winners have been applied more flexibly. While all acts had acquired substantial international success, the debut album of Dutch trio Kraak & Smaak, for example, was already released in 2005. Throughout 2006 and 2007 their live show gained international recognition, designating them as "Must see live band" by dance magazine IDJ. Their second album, *Plastic People* (Jalapeno Records), was released in 2008.

German glam rock band Cinema Bizarre received the EBBA award for their debut album *Final Attraction*, which was released in 2007 on Island Records. The band was inspired by 1980s bands such as Depeche Mode, Eurhythmics and Erasure and their sound mixed glam, goth and new wave. Their looks were inspired by the flamboyant Japanese Visual Kei scene and Manga image culture. The Slovakian Commissioner for culture, Ján Figel, handed the band the award after stating: "Europe is about people, is about living together. And EBBA is about breaking borders, living together in diversity, but also in unity."¹⁵⁸

While the awards explicitly sought to "open up the European market" and "stimulate the mobility of artists and their work within Europe and beyond," research conducted in 2013 has shown that there is no evidence of winners generating sales in new countries or developing new ways of reaching new audiences.¹⁵⁹ However, the report concludes, the EBBA awards are "a useful way of promoting less well-known acts and those from other parts of Europe, publicizing the fact that there is a diverse and successful European music offer. This is potentially able to support positive political messages about Europe and European collaboration [...]"¹⁶⁰

In the late 2010s, this same message had been sent for almost fifteen years. In these years the European music industry had seen dramatic changes. Therefore, reform was essential for the event to adapt to new challenges the industry and (European) acts were facing. The European Commission published the call (EAC/S26/2017) for the organization of the "EU prize for popular and contemporary music," for the next period (2019, 2020, 2021) in 2017.¹⁶¹ This was part of the "preparatory action," aiming to build on and further develop support for music under the Creative Europe programme. It should also test what actions could provide more targeted support in the next generation of EU programs. According to the call, the prize was "uniquely placed to highlight and promote the diversity of the European repertoire, celebrate the international success of European and emerging talent, and reach out to new, particularly young, audiences with positive messages about European values."¹⁶² On August 2, 2018, it was announced that ESNS was

158 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ts9p7LU_0 (4:23)

159 Ecorys, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture Final Report. "Study on the impact of the EU prizes for culture." March 2013, p. 63: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/eu-culture-prizes-study_en.pdf Accessed: 17-02-2019.

160 *Ibid.*

161 EAC/S26/2017, p. 1. Under the sub-programme of the Creative Europe programme (2014-2020) https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/eac-2018-00032-00-00-en-rev-00_final.pdf

162 EAC/S26/2017, p. 3. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/eac-2018-00032-00-00-en-rev-00_final.pdf

again selected as the organizational platform for the event.¹⁶³

4.5 2019: MMETA

(Music Moves Europe Talent Award)

Music production, distribution and consumption had changed profoundly in the 2010s; it had become highly digitalized, and new ways of distribution and consumption (e.g. streaming) had emerged. According to the 2017 call, therefore, the new prize construction had to face the challenges of the digital shift and support upcoming acts in their international development: “The new prize is intended not only to reward emerging artists but also to support their efforts to incubate, develop and accelerate their international career in the new music ecosystem.”¹⁶⁴

Indeed, the new prize underwent profound procedural changes to underscore these aims. First, the chosen acts were now awarded more for their potential than for their first international success. Therefore, not only sales data were considered, also a jury was installed to have final say in which acts had the most potential and, notably, reflected the European aim of diversity and inclusivity:

“The selection process should rely on quantitative and qualitative criteria, i.e. analyzed data and professional recommendations. The criteria should ensure geographical and, as far as possible, linguistic balance. They should also make use of new technologies and new approaches to creation, production, distribution and promotion, particularly in teaming up with European digital services platforms.”¹⁶⁵

The new organizing committee was also asked to propose a new name for the prize, which “includes at least the terms “Europe” (or “European”), “music” and “awards.” And does not duplicate the names of other existing awards.”¹⁶⁶ The new name had to echo the 2015 Music Moves Europe program, the overarching framework for the European Commission’s initiatives in support of the European music sector. Although the EBBA had built its brand for fifteen years, the name change was necessary “to enhance creativity, diversity and competitiveness even better,” according to the information provided on the website.¹⁶⁷ Eurosonic organized the *Music Moves Europe Talent Award* (MMETA) in

163 Groningen was granted the event after a positive assessment of the organizational and financial demands: The MMETA is financed by the EC, with a total budget of 500.000 EUR, limited to a maximum co-financing rate of 80% of eligible costs. Additional support by the Ministry of OCW and the city and province of Groningen (who invested 300.000 euro for a period of three years.) was granted.

164 EAC/S26/2017, p. 3. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/eac-2018-00032-00-00-en-rev-00_final.pdf

165 EAC/S26/2017, p. 4. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/eac-2018-00032-00-00-en-rev-00_final.pdf

166 EAC/S26/2017, p. 4. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/eac-2018-00032-00-00-en-rev-00_final.pdf

167 <https://musicmoveseuropetalentawards.eu/about/>

collaboration with Hamburg's Reeperbahn Festival – where the MMETA nominees were announced in September 2018 – and several international music organizations.¹⁶⁸

Selection of the MMETA nominees was now based on their position on the Music Moves Europe Talent Charts (MMETC), streaming data, airplay, live (ETEP) performances in Europe and a jury of music professionals.¹⁶⁹ Winners were informed and made public approximately two months prior to the ceremony. The Public Choice Award, which was introduced as an additional prize in 2010 to stimulate audience participation, was (traditionally) kept a surprise until the night of the event. MMETA winners received two performances at ESNS, live session recordings, a photo shoot, a customized mentoring program (e.g. focusing on online distribution and music export) and 5.000 euros in financial aids to support promotion and touring.

A notable modification to the EBBAs was the introduction of genre categories. As of 2019, six categories were in place: pop, rock, electronic, r&b/urban, hip hop/rap and singer-songwriter. Each category featured four nominees from which then two were selected by the jury as winners.¹⁷⁰ Also, from the twenty-four nominees the public could choose their favorite in each category, resulting in six Public Choice award winners.¹⁷¹

The choice of these genres indicates that these are the ones the organization perceive to be the most commercially successful in this digital era and where the EU cultural stakeholders think the music industry is currently thriving. While acknowledging the dominant commercial success of these categories, the division in genre categories also seemed to put an emphasis on creating diversity. However, whether the awards effectively highlighted the diversity of European music in all its forms, or focused attention instead on a musical niche of pop and alternative rock had been subject of discussion. Most winners, for example, perform in English instead of their national language. It is suggested that singing in the native (non-English) language limits an artist's access to an international audience.¹⁷²

Other significant format changes of the prize were that it was now focusing more on stimulating new talent and taking into account the digital presence and the amount of streams. One winning example is the Dutch singer Pip Blom. Pip Blom is both the name of the twenty-two-year old lead singer from Amsterdam and the name of the four-piece band. Blom's rise to fame started in early 2016 when she decided to start self-releasing

168 Digital Music Europe (DME), European Broadcasting Union (EBU), European Music Exporters Exchange (EMEE), International Music Managers Forum (IMMF), Independent Music Companies Association (IMPALA), Live DMA, Liveurope, and Yourope.

169 Within the Music Moves Europe Talent Charts (MMETC), the Monthly Artist Chart is the selection tool for future nominees. Emerging artists are all artists who released their first single in the past 36 months and did not yet reach 1 billion listeners across the continent. Airplay information is based on 61 public EBU stations in 41 European countries, measured by Radiomonitor. <https://musicmoveseuropetalentawards.eu/about-the-charts/> Accessed: 19-02-2019.

170 2019 winners: Pop: Bishop Briggs (UK), Lxandra (FI) Rock: Pale Waves (UK), Pip Blom (NL) Electronic: Smerz (NO), Stelartronic (AT) RnB/Urban: Rosalía (ES), Aya Nakamura (FR) Hip Hop/Rap: Blackwave. (BE), Reykjavíkurdætur (IS) Singer-songwriter: Avec (AT), Albin Lee Meldau (SE).

171 In 2019, these artists were chosen: Pop: Bishop Briggs (UK), Rock: Pip Blom (NL), Electronic: Stelartronic (AT), RnB/Urban: Rosalía (ES), Hip Hop/Rap: Reykjavíkurdætur, Singer-Songwriter: Albin Lee Meldau (SE).

172 Ecorys, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture Final Report. "Study on the impact of the EU prizes for culture." March 2013, p. 64: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/eu-culture-prizes-study_en.pdf Accessed: 17-02-2019.

songs on the Internet. The English music blog DIY called her “a gem” and she received substantial air play on the US radio station KCRW. The Paradiso Vinyl Club (PVC)– an initiative by the famous Amsterdam venue Paradiso – released her single “Working on it” in October 2016. Her EP *Are We There Yet* was released in October 2016. In 2017 a series of singles Blom uploaded to online platforms hit millions of plays, bringing sudden attention to the group. In less than six months her music was added to 60.000 Spotify playlists. Resulting from her online presence, she received airplay on BBC radio and performed at Brighton’s showcase festival The Great Escape in 2017. She performed at multiple festivals in 2017, opened for UK act Franz Ferdinand in 2018 and performed at ESNS for three consecutive years (2017, 2018, 2019). The EP *Paycheck* was released on the Rough Trade sub-label Persona Non Grata in 2018. Following that release the group was signed to Heavenly Recordings in late 2018. Blom received the MMETA to further stimulate and boost her career on a European scale, although her debut album had yet to be released. Her debut album *Boat* was recorded in the UK and was released in May 2019.

After the final EBBA ceremony took place in the Martinihal in 2018, the event relocated (again) to the Oosterpoort. The event was propagating its European scope on the festival program flyer 2019 as *European Music Awards Night* (fig. 11), and as “[...] a celebratory evening during which multiple awards ceremonies will be hosted.”

Figure 11. *European Music Awards Night* (Oosterpoort side entrance)

Indeed, during the evening of Wednesday January 16, 2019, multiple ceremonies took place, including the commemoration of managers by the IMMF (International Music Managers

Forum), the presentation of the European Festival Awards and the announcement of the MMETA Public Choice awards.

What was striking at the MMETA event in the Oosterpoort was that the location format had changed dramatically from previous years. In 2018 there was a single large stage on which the procedures and concerts took place, surrounded by a substantial crowd (see figure 12). The scale, lights and decoration of the stage and hall provided a sense of grandeur to the event.

Figure 12. EBBA awards, Martinihal Groningen 2018

In 2019, however, the event was dispersed into smaller stages on which presentations and concerts took place. This caused some confusion for the public about what happened when, and on which stage. These field notes illuminate how the 2019 layout affected my experience of the event:

A walk through the MMETA, Wednesday 16 January 2019

I entered the queue that was forming outside the Oosterpoort at 8:30 PM. The entrance was at the front side of the building. Not the main entrance, but a smaller entrance, normally the entrance of CBK (arts exchange company). Outside, a large sign was attached to the building which stated: "European Music Awards Night". Several people who wanted to attend the event mistakenly walked to the building's main entrance some 50 yards away, but were immediately redirected to the actual entrance they had just missed. This minor faux pas seemed indicative of how the new format and location of the event was perceived: somewhat confusing and alienating.

When entering the lobby ("back foyer"), I noticed there were 3 smaller stages built

in the lobby area, named Mid Heineken foyer, Back Jack Daniels Lounge, and the Back Orange Bar as well as the entrance to the “Kleine Zaal”. From there, one could also access the other Oosterpoort spaces, such as the Heineken Foyer stage, the Grote Zaal (big hall, where a separate award show, the European Festival Awards, had taken place earlier in the evening) and the patio. Performing artists on the various stages were: Blackwave (BE), Reykjavíkurdætur (IS), Lxandra (FI), Pip Blom (NL) and Albin Lee Meldau (SE). Also, one surprise award was to be presented in the Kleine Zaal, the MMETA Public Choice Awards.

What was striking about this award show in relation to last year, was that the event was now decentralized. The bands were programmed so that they wouldn't perform simultaneously. But to see all bands, visitors had to relocate and move from one stage to the next. For most people it was unclear what would happen where next and most just stayed where they were, talking and socializing, or just moving in the direction to where part of the crowd went. So instead of being an award show the event felt like a small festival inside the Oosterpoort. A festival at which not the bands dictated where you would be going, but the acquaintance you would accidentally meet and have a beer with. This was very different from last year where there was one big stage and all the attention could be directed at one point. The contrast was striking and evident. Approaching 11 PM I made my way to the Kleine Zaal where the announcement of the winners of the Public Choice awards was scheduled. Although called the “small hall”, the Kleine Zaal can still hold 750 people (including 450 seated places). While taking a seat waiting for the ceremony to begin, I noticed that the room was still rather empty. Dutch co-host of the show, Eric Corton, came on stage twice before starting the ceremony, encouraging people to “get their friends” from the lobby trying to fill up the space. After all, this was supposed to be the main event of the evening and the show would be taped for European audiences. An empty concert hall would not make for an appealing (credible) scene for such a prestigious prize. Oosterpoort personnel guided as many people as they could into the hall and to the front of the stage where eventually the event kicked off. The main host, UK musician and BBC presenter Jools Holland, was introduced who then announced the two MMETA winners per category.¹⁷³

Although the winners were already announced months prior to the event (November 2018), some were not there to accept the awards. These absences resulted in somewhat clumsy scenes with hosts uncomfortably joking around on stage when there was no one there to accept the physical award (“we'll have to send it through the mail”). After the presentation of the regular awards, six Public Choice Awards (one in every genre category) were revealed around 11:30. After UK singer/songwriter Bishop Briggs was announced as one of the winners, the large curtain obscuring the stage dropped after which she performed two songs: “The Way I Do” and “River”. By this time, however, most people had left the venue, probably realizing that a long

173 Pop: Bishop Briggs (UK), Lxandra (FI) Rock: Pale Waves (UK), Pip Blom (NL) Electronic: Smerz (NO), Stelartronic (AT) RnB/Urban: Rosalía (ES), Aya Nakamura (FR) Hip Hop/Rap: Blackwave. (BE), Reykjavíkurdætur (IS) Singer-songwriter: Avec (AT), Albin Lee Meldau (SE).

weekend was still ahead. The overarching feeling of the event was that it had lost the grandeur of the previous editions, resulting in a random small-scale networking festival which was followed (interrupted?) by having awards presented to artists the audience was not very familiar with nor seemed to care about.

As depicted in this personal reflection, the 2019 MMETA ceremony was trying to create a moment to convene cultural capital but failed to acquire interest or dedication from the live audience. Striking, however, was that the proclaimed EU music industry event had more to do with being in contact, as an informal networking event, than that it appealed to a live audience to have a EU event/prize. Also, the contrast between how the event actually unfolded and then looking at media representations of the award show – by means of editing suggesting it was a succesful and visually exciting event – seems to suggest that the live presence is perhaps not that important anymore and visibility of the prize is primarily dependent on mediated (online) distribution.¹⁷⁴ For example, the MMETA YouTube channel has generated over 2 million views (since May 25, 2010). In short, the 2019 MMETA seems to mirror the observation of the European Commission that the EU music industry indeed predominantly operates within the digital realm.

The EBBA awards emerged in the early 2000s, a period where the music industry faced challenges, mainly due the digital revolution. The EBBA awards were envisioned to make an economic contribution, promoting sales of European works and keeping those proceeds circulating within Europe. Due to their mediated nature, the EBBAs could also help to make industry players aware of opportunities to work with European artists.¹⁷⁵ At the same time the collaborating European countries identified the potential within the creative sectors. The developments of the award as described above reflect the increasing importance of the digital realm in music distribution and consumption. The continually mediated nature of the prize seems to mirror this shift and incorporates the economic possibilities of digital music promotion.

As the EBBAs moved to Groningen, the prize was still developing and in the process becoming a reputable and respectable European music prize. The awards were an effective way for the EU to provide support to the music industry and to interact with its key stakeholders; but also, provide a marketing tool. After all, successful international artists provided the EU with positive stories of supranational collaboration. The development of the EBBAs has shown that its first main objectives were related to core EU values, including cultural diversity and the common values that were emphasized in the EU Culture 2000 program. As Danish cultural studies scholar Bjarki Valtýsson (2018, 34) has argued, the 2014 Creative Europe program recognized to a larger extent that the creative sectors had much to offer in terms of economic growth, which was a discursive shift from earlier EU culture programmes. After 2020, the emphasis has shifted towards

174 The official after movie on YouTube, however, was viewed only 37 times one month after the event took place. <https://www.youtube.com/user/EBBAAWARDS> Accessed on 18-02-2019.

175 Ecorys, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture Final Report. "Study on the impact of the EU prizes for culture." March 2013, p. 64: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/eu-culture-prizes-study_en.pdf Accessed: 17-02-2019.

promoting talent and adapting to technological innovation. This has given more room for interpretation and curation and recognition of the cultural singularities of promising acts, without being confined to sales alone.

The EBBAs were the result of a top-down approach to the music industry, creating an institution to make visible and reward the transnational success of European music. As such, it created an international stage representing European music. ESNS has been the ideal partner to convey this message. Since 1995, ESNS has been at the forefront of promoting the circulation of European repertoires. The name change to EuroSonic (1999), the collaboration with European (media) partners, the initiation of the ETEP in 2003 and installing an annual EU country focus in 2005 have become essential elements to this aim. It is the latter initiative, the country focus, that will be under scrutiny in the next part of this chapter. I have chosen three country focus years as the subject under investigation. Which acts can best represent the nation on a European level? What did their performances reveal about European identity? As the represented acts were upcoming, but not (yet) internationally successful, juxtaposing some of these acts to EBBA (MMETA) award winners will disclose some interesting observations about how European identity is performed.

4.6 ESNS Country Focus (2005, 2011, 2018)

“[W]hen individuals, as members of one national or ethnic culture, have taste for cultural products or art works that unequivocally ‘belong’ to a nation or ethnicity other than their own, they display aesthetic cosmopolitanism.” - Motti Regev (2007, 125)

The Slovakian born singer/composer Katarína Máliková performed at ESNS 2019 in the Czech Republic/Slovakia focus country context. The music of Máliková is a cross-over of classical music (she is a classically trained pianist), folk and pop and was described as presenting “dark Slovak traditions in the prism of contemporary music”.¹⁷⁶ During her 2019 Eurosonic performance she performed standing at a digital piano, directing an “orchestra” consisting of piano, drums, upright bass, accordion, violins, flute and electronic soundscapes. All this accompanying her opera-like singing style, sung in her native Slovakian language. The music, then, can be described as a cross-over; a mix of genres, transgressing stylistic boundaries and aiming at freedom of expression. Further, her music offers a convincing example of *aesthetic cosmopolitanism*, the process in which the international mobility of artistic practices and art works is welcomed and integrated into a new cross-cultural context. As Motti Regev (2013, 3) has argued:

“[A]esthetic cosmopolitanism refers to the ongoing formation [...] of world culture as one complexly interconnected entity, in which social groupings of all

176 Digital program ESNS 2019

types around the globe growingly share wide common grounds in their aesthetic perceptions, expressive forms, and cultural practices.”

Aesthetic cosmopolitanism, then, occurs when forms of cultural ethnicity are presented within a wider (global) cultural context and outlines the intensified connectivity (and blurring) of local, national and international aesthetic cultural boundaries in late modernity. These eclectic stylistic features, I argue, are characteristic of focus country acts and, also, what sets them apart from EBBA winners. It is this intercultural exchange that has been at the heart of Eurosonic. As a breeding ground for emerging international talent, Eurosonic has provided a platform for musical experimentation since 1995. Aesthetic appeal, creativity and potential have been the decisive issues for the curation process, rather than album sales or streams.

After the initiation of the European Talent Exchange Program in 2003, the 2005 focus country initiative was yet another signal that the European project was a priority on the agenda for the ESNS organization.¹⁷⁷ The concept was to promote European music by highlighting one specific European country’s music industry and draw attention to what upcoming bands in that country’s music scene had to offer. Here is an overview of the countries that have been chosen since 2005 and the number of acts represented by that country:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Acts</i>
2005	France	14
2006	Germany	24
2007	Italy	18
2008	Sweden	23
2009	Belgium	29
2010	Norway	22
2011	Netherlands	131
2012	Ireland	20
2013	Finland	16
2014	Austria	18
2015	Iceland	20
2016	Central/Eastern Europe (14)	34
2017	Portugal	21
2018	Denmark	22
2019	Czech Rep./Slovakia	21

Source: *Iprecom*¹⁷⁸

In what follows I will explore how these focus countries represent themselves at Eurosonic. I will pick three focus country years as case studies and examine how represented acts

¹⁷⁷ The cultural industries also increasingly became a tool for the EU to further stimulate international cooperation and subsidies were given to initiatives that stimulated European cultural exchange. ESNS was awarded structural subsidy from the Dutch government for a four-year period in 2005 and, as a pilot project, ESNS received an additional two-year subsidy from the EU.

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.iprecom.nl/noorderslag/archief/esns.php?country=>

relate to the notion of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. In other words, how they relate to the sense of belonging to the local, the translocal, and the European simultaneously. We might describe this as performing cultural uniqueness on a global scale. That is, a rooted cosmopolitanism, which Beck (2003, 27) notes, is defined “[...] against two extremes of being at home everywhere and being at home nowhere.” As we shall see, acts that have been selected by these countries to perform at Eurosonic in these three represented years often transcend genre conventions and cross aesthetic borders in their aim to appeal to an international audience. The argument that I aim to defend in this part of the chapter, therefore, is that successful (and what is perceived to be compelling) *European* music is characterized by diversity, *bricolage*, crossover, eclecticism and experimentation. That is, artists that transcend genre conventions and standardized performance practices are often regarded as having connective qualities by the practice of cross-cultural experimentation. Embracing difference by incorporating non-conformative musical elements (such as instrumentation choices, odd time signatures, or vocal exploration) can provide a stamp of originality which, I argue, can ultimately be perceived as a crystalized reflection of Europe’s unity in diversity mantra.

4.7 (13-15 January) 2005: France

France was not an illogical choice for the first ESNS focus country as, historically, it has been one of the strongest music industries in Europe. When the music industry was enduring heavy challenges around the turn of the century due to the digital revolution, for example, France was the only music market of the world’s top ten music markets that reported growth in the first half of 2002, this success was largely driven by local repertoire.¹⁷⁹ France has always had a strong focus on its domestic music market and government policy was designed to stimulate national music culture. Its cultural aesthetic image was built on the French *chanson*, which emerged in the late 19th century from historic cultural and economic dynamics, such as the development of the cultural industries, urban development resulting from the industrial revolution, and, importantly, the (political) role of spreading the French language (Guibert 2017, 2). In 1994, for example, the French government had installed radio airplay quotas (40%) for songs sung in French in order to obtain control over its citizens’ lingual musical consumption. While 2004 saw a steep (14.8%) fall due to internet piracy, the French market revived in 2005 with the help of a strong release schedule that included names like Daft Punk and Carla Bruni.¹⁸⁰ In 2005 it was listed as the world’s number five music market in both digital and physical sales.¹⁸¹ And, as discussed earlier, the Cannes music festival MIDEM hosted the European Commission’s EBBA award show in the mid-2000s, which coincided with the

179 <https://www.ifpi.org/content/library/worldsales2004.pdf> P.2. See also: “Profile of the European Music Sector”, KEA European Affairs, January 2003. https://www.impalamusic.org/docum/04-press/press_0302_1.pdf

180 Pichevin, Aymeric. “Bonjour America” In: Billboard magazine 21 June, 2008.

181 IFPI World sales report recording industry: <https://www.ifpi.org/content/library/worldsales2004.pdf> Also, IFPI digital sales press release 2005: <https://www.ifpi.org/content/library/worldsales2005.pdf>

expanding European focus of Eurosonic.

With France being the country of focus, several panels discussing topics concerning the French music industry were on the Eurosonic conference program.¹⁸² Fourteen promising acts were sent to Groningen to represent the live music industry of France. These acts performed showcases as part of the Eurosonic lineup: Avril, Bikini Machine, CQMD, DJ Vitalic, Doubleman, Gomm, Laurent Garnier, No Jazz, Overhead, Le Peuple de L'Herbe, Emilie Simon, Les Suprêmes Dindes, Têtes Raides and We Insist!.

When examining the musical characteristics of these acts and how they are presented, the first thing that is remarkable is that ten were explicitly promoted as experimental in nature.¹⁸³ Only four were characterized as performing within the conventions of one specific genre: Émilie Simon (pop), Doubleman (indie), Laurent Garnier (EDM) and Overhead (rock). When looking at the ten best-selling singles in 2004, however, mainstream music in France consisted mostly of contemporary R&B and dance.¹⁸⁴ Interestingly, the poly-generic music France promoted at Eurosonic seemed to deviate from what was played on national radio. Genres that were commercially successful contrasted with what the French industry promoted as representative of the French music industry as it sought to break acts internationally. I'll now take a closer look at one of the more experimental acts and examine how their performance practice relates to the EU music industry.

4.7.1 *Têtes Raides*

It appears that what constitutes an attractive and promotable European musical identity according to Eurosonic is associated with crossing borders, not just geographical borders, but musical genre borders. *Têtes Raides* is a representative example of the type of acts that are valued by Eurosonic for their experimental and interdisciplinary performance practice. A press release published on December 3, 2004 promoted the band as follows: "With its unique mix of chanson, punk and rock *Têtes Raides* is one of the most original acts that France has produced in previous years. As representative of the 'Chanson Realiste' movement – the strength of France's perceived cultural heritage – the band launched the festival theme 'Focus on France' on Thursday 13 January."¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, *Têtes Raides* was also one of eight European acts that performed on the first edition of Euroslagt in 1995.

Têtes Raides is a 7-piece folk rock band, that formed in Paris in 1984. They mix instruments such as tuba, violin, cello, flute and accordion with typical rock instruments such as drums and guitar. Their music has evolved over the years into an eclectic mix of folk, rock and punk. On the surface their music is characterized by cheerful polka

182 One example was a panel called "How to export your music to France."

183 Also, these characteristics – bands that provided a cross-over between genres and provide "a story" – were highlighted and valued in media coverage more often.

184 https://acharts.co/france_singles_top_100/2004/41 A side note on the french lingual quota: The fourth best-selling single in France in 2004 was "Si Demain... (Turn Around)", sung by Kareen Antonn and Bonnie Tyler, which is a bilingual (French/English) adaptation of Bonnie Tyler's song "Total Eclipse of the Heart" (1984).

185 <http://www.iprecom.nl/noorderslag/2005/festival/index.html>

and chanson, but underneath there is a darker element of melancholy present. Their genre is described as chanson alternative, alternative Rock and art punk. They mostly sing in French, but also sometimes English or mix up languages.¹⁸⁶ They are influenced by classic French-language artists such as Jacques Brel and les Nègresses Verts. In their lyrics Têtes Raides incorporates topics of French cultural heritage and music styles. Not only do they mix musical styles and instrumentations, their performance practice also incorporates theater, comedy and visual arts.¹⁸⁷ Têtes Raides has been characterized by multi-disciplinarity and experimentation and, as one biography states, “the refusal of any commercial compromise.”¹⁸⁸ Their style is also referred to as *chanson néo-réaliste*, which emerged in the 1990s. It is characterized by a performance practice affiliated with 1980s punk rock, circus style artistry and street performance. Mixing genres such as punk, reggae, and ska with *chanson* results in an eclectic mix which is characteristic of an alternative European music scene, as Catherine Rudent (2018, 146) argues in the *Made in France*:

These diverse sources take distance from Anglo-American influence, offering rapid tempos, systematic offbeats hammered on the acoustic guitar or brass, a rudimentary (perfect chords) and rustic melodies, sung by rough male voices, heterogeneous, without vibrato, off key or with a limited range.

Led by vocalist and graphic designer Christian Olivier, Têtes Raides released the self-produced single “C’est Quoi” (Studio 1 [2]) in 1988, but began to garner a following after the release of their 1989 debut (10 inch) album *Not Dead But Bien Raides* (Tôt Ou Tard). Like many bands in the alternative scene, they built their audience with extensive touring rather than acquiring airplay.¹⁸⁹ In 1991, their efforts were recognized by the French government by awarding the band financial aid through the French FAIR (Fonds d’Aide et d’Initiative pour le Rock) programme. Artistic director of the French branch of (major record company) Warner, Vincent Frèrebeau, then offered the band a contract for two more albums, providing the band with access to a larger logistical system and networks. Frèrebeau recognized the potential of Têtes Raides for the alternative market. In 1996, to focus more on the development of French “authentic” alternative productions, he launched an integrated label within Warner, Tôt Ou Tard, which was to appear as an independent company. In her book *Protest Music in France: Production, Identity and Audiences* (2009, 33), Barbara Lebrun describes how the label was marketed: “The label was introduced as an ‘adult’ niche, based on its interest in the poetic and political maturity of its artists.” The label was committed to build upon and develop the reputation of Têtes Raides as a hard-working grassroots band, crafting “real” music while avoiding the mainstream

186 In their song “So Free” taken from the album *Lan demain* (2011), for example they collaborated with singer of London art rockers Tiger Lillies, Jacques Martyn Richard, to state combine French and English.

187 It is not uncommon to see a trapeze artist or actors appear on stage. A registration of their live show from 2003 can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RVu_g_z8yg

188 Biography: <https://musique.rfi.fr/artiste/chanson/rock/tetes-raides> Accessed: 27-02-2019.

189 Performing in venues such as Sentier des Halles (Paris) and festivals (Printemps de Bourges)

media. This non-commercial ethos was marketed carefully, with fixed (low) ticket prices, their artistic visual presentation and the repackaging of their back catalogue in natural materials (as opposed to plastic) (Lebrun 2009, 34). Constructing this non-mainstream identity, however, required substantial support from a major record label, as Lebrun (34) reveals: “The decision to dedicate a new label to ‘alternative’ or ‘serious’ French music also reflected the saleability of this protest identity, which was carefully engineered in the case of Têtes Raides, and sustained economically with the support of Warner.”

Their marketing strategy paid off and album sales increased. Their album *Chamboulou* (Tôt Ou Tard, 1998) reached number fourteen in the French top album charts in April 1998 and lasted in the charts for twenty-three weeks.¹⁹⁰ The album *Gratte Poil* (2000) spent 61 weeks in the French album charts and achieved gold status.¹⁹¹ In 2004 they had released ten albums on the Tôt Ou Tard label. Their latest album *Les Terriens* (Tôt Ou Tard) dates from 2013, though the band maintains a significant following on social media.¹⁹²

The example of Têtes Raides reveals how an eclectic mix of musical components can transcend cultural and genre-specific borders. These musical elements were, in Regev’s (2007, 125) words, “[...] mixed and hybridized into recipes and products that become signifiers of current cultural uniqueness of nations and ethnicities.” Combining genres, instruments, languages and art disciplines the band was acclaimed for its experimental (indie) aesthetic, although drawing on a carefully constructed marketing strategy. Têtes Raides, I conclude, was celebrated as a symbol of supranational European cultural exchange and was presented to a European live music audience to negotiate aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

4.8 2011: The Netherlands

The focus of the 2011 edition of the festival was on the Dutch music industry. In that year ESNS was at the peak of its popularity and the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the festival was the motivation to choose The Netherlands as this year’s focus country. Peter Smidt stated in local newspaper *Groninger Gezinsbode* (2010, 9): “This, in combination with the multitude of extraordinary and qualitatively strong acts is a good reason to focus on the exiting and diverse Dutch music scene.” The twenty-fifth anniversary was celebrated with an extra festival day, making ESNS a four-day festival event.¹⁹³ Also a new stage was added on the Grote Markt. The concerts performed on this stage, named “EuroSonic Air,” were freely accessible to the general public, free of charge. The performances drew approximately 12.000 people to the Grote Markt over two days.

ESNS had momentum in 2011 and many things were happening. As one media headline stated, ESNS was “more popular than ever before” (Van der Heide 2011, 36).

190 <http://www.chartsinfrance.net/Tetes-Raides/Chamboulou-a100514572.html>

191 <https://lescharts.com/showitem.asp?interpret=T%EAtes+Raides&titel=Gratte+poil&cat=a>

192 56,256 likes on FB 18/12/18

193 ESNS 2011 was held from 12 until the 15th of January 2011.

Underscoring this observation was that the Noorderslag part of the festival sold out in fifteen minutes, resulting in a vivid ticket business (with inflated prizes) on the black market. With 260 acts, the number of performing artists was larger than ever and the organization welcomed a record number of over 2800 music professionals to the three-day conference. The extensive unofficial side program added to the appeal of the event.¹⁹⁴ On the opening night the EBBA awards were presented, which received substantial media attention. The city of Groningen recognized the value of the event for the city of Groningen by awarding ESNS with the prestigious medal of valor. Finally, ESNS received a five-year EU subsidy of 2.1 million Euros in support of the ETEP program.

While ESNS didn't explicitly choose specific groups to represent The Netherlands at Eurosonic, more emphasis was given to issues related to the Dutch music industry during the conference.¹⁹⁵ Topics included: "The Caro Emerald Case," (Dutch singer Caro Emerald was one of the EBBA winners and she also won the Pop Prize) "Transparency of the [Dutch] music industry," "Dutch Explorers" (on how Dutch bands acquire success abroad), and "Enough Dutch Pop on Public Radio?." Due to this lack of a Dutch "delegation," I will here discuss the broader Dutch phenomenon of Nederhop to illuminate how Dutch repertoire relates to an expanding aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the early 2010s.

4.8.1 Case study: Nederhop

After rap music became a global phenomenon in the 1980s (Mitchell, 2001), a growing number of Dutch rappers started adapting Black American US hip hop to create an individual and collective identity for themselves. The internationalization of hip hop in non-American cities beginning in the 1990s (Mitchell 2016) was a trend also exhibited in the Netherlands. Rappers began experimenting and writing their rhymes in Dutch and referring to typical Dutch social and cultural events (Wermuth 2001). With acts such as Osdorp Posse and Extince being the forerunners, Dutch hip hop gained mainstream popularity in the 2000s with acts such as Opgezwolle, Def Rhymz and Brainpower and De Jeugd van Tegenwoordig ("Today's Youth"). The music of the four-piece Dutch (Amsterdam) hip hop group, De Jeugd van Tegenwoordig, is characterized by their inventive raps over electronic beats as well their creative use of the Dutch language. They made their breakthrough with their 2005 hit single "Watskeburt?!", followed by the release of their debut album *Parels voor de Zwijnen* (Top Notch/PIAS) in September 2005.¹⁹⁶ Their second album *De Machine* (Top Notch) was released in 2008, followed by *De Lachende Derde* (Top Notch) in 2010. The group would go on to receive the Pop Prize 2011 (presented at the 2012 edition of Noorderslag). In 2016, "Watskeburt" was voted in the top

194 A list of activities can be found here: <https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2011/januari/eurosonic-noorderslag-2011-randprogramma-en-on-offici-le-spin-offs.html>

195 Also, the total number of Dutch acts in 2011 was no significant contrast to adjacent years (100 in 2010, 131 in 2011, 125 in 2012, 136 in 2013).

196 "Watskeburt" is a neologism, akin to the English "wassup".

three of “ultimate Nederhop classics” on a survey by 3FM radio DJ Michiel Veenstra.¹⁹⁷

Dutch hip-hop artist Ali B received the Pop Prize in 2005, which was claimed to be a recognition of wider societal discussions regarding inclusion and diversity, developments which were reflected in this edition of Noorderslag, according to local media (Haagsma 2005, 6). Despite these debates, Ali B was the proof that artists didn’t need record labels anymore, according to the Pop Prize jury. He released his album *Ali B Vertelt het Leven van de Straat* himself and proved that this didn’t hinder commercial success. And, as head of jury Hans Kosterman, concluded: “Dutch hip-hop was without a doubt the most vivid genre of 2004” (Groenewold 2005, 20). With the breakthrough of Ali B, Lange Frans & Baas B and K-Liber, Dutch hip-hop (commonly referred to as “Nederhop”) experienced a comeback in 2004.

The genre remained well-represented in the 2000s until a shift occurred in 2009, when the contribution of soul and jazz pop cross-over became much larger than Dutch hip-hop. With acts such as Alain Clark, Giovanca, Wouter Hamel and Room Eleven being successful, 2008 was a good year for these genres and would consequently be added to the 2009 line-up of Noorderslag. Dutch dance was doing well in this period as well, as DJs Armin van Buuren and Tiësto and many other EDM acts traveled the world. The representation of the genre on Noorderslag, however, was meager. There were four live dance acts on Noorderslag and no DJs. According to programmer Joey Ruchtie, 2010 would be a year of planting seeds: “There are little significant developments at the moment,” Ruchtie (Broere 2010, 26) claimed. “There are developments, new artists and success stories. But these build on things we already offered a stage for in the past years. [...] New talents are in the studio now and will release a record next year. I’m sure that Dance will be omnipresent on Noorderslag 2011 once again.”

Dutch Hip Hop, also referred to as “Nederhop” is characterized by Dutch lyrics and the glorification of American hip hop lifestyle practices (e.g. fashion, romanticizing criminal behavior and the gang lifestyle, drugs and the possession of luxurious cars and goods). These local interpretations of an “imagined America” is an example of how aesthetic cosmopolitanism travels across (transatlantic) borders. As Amercican studies scholar Jaap Kooijman (2013, 125) notes, African-American hip hop provided the language and imagery for youth subcultures and was the tool with which national (Dutch) identity was discussed. Mixing “authentic” elements of US hip hop subculture and with Dutch lyrics and new sounds, an independent national and local hip hop culture has emerged in the 2000s (Wermuth 2001) and continues to grow into a self-sufficient culture in which American attitudes are far removed from Dutch realities.

On the 2011 edition of ESNS several Dutch hip hop artists performed, such as Kleine Viezerik, The Opposites, Boef en de Gelogeerde Aap and, from Groningen, Kraantje Pappie. Kraantje Pappie’s career catapulted after winning the competition Before The Fame Awards (part of the POPGroningen Talent Award) in 2007. Pappie released his debut album *Crane* (Noah’s Ark) in 2012 which reached number 8 in the Dutch album

197 Next to “Sprakwater” by Extince and “Origineel Amsterdams” by Osdorp Posse: <https://www.npo3fm.nl/nieuws/3fm/365432-dit-zijn-ze-de-beste-nederhop-classics> Accessed: 04-03-2019.

charts. On the album he collaborated with a producer trio from Groningen, Noisia (aka Nightwatch), with whom he created a trademark electronic sound. His Dutch raps are characterized by rhythmic sounds, the use of wordplay and rhyme technique. His lyrics discuss everyday no-nonsense topics, often in a humoristic fashion. He is renowned for his energetic live shows, for which he is accompanied by two DJs (Friss and Fiddox). His single “Lil Craney” (Noah’s Ark, 2018) reached number five in the Dutch singles chart and has sold over 170.000 copies. The song generated almost 33 million streams on Spotify.¹⁹⁸ Kraantje Pappie is one of many Dutch rap/hip hop artists (e.g. Ronnie Flex, Fresku, Broederliefde) who have gained a massive following with Dutch youth, resulting in large numbers of digital streams.¹⁹⁹ In recent years ESNS has recognized and embraced the success of this genre.²⁰⁰ More Dutch hip hop artists were included in the lineup of Noorderslag, despite its audience demographic with a preference for pop, rock and indie music.²⁰¹

The case of Nederhop evidences the ability of local groups to adapt and appropriate worldwide aesthetic movements to shape their own cultural and political voice. Inspired by African-American hip hop, national identity (hence “Nederhop”), and what it means to be Dutch – a cultural identity related to “Dutchness” – has been often addressed in Dutch hip hop songs. As Kooijman (2013, 144) has shown, Nederhop appropriates elements of its American example to comment on a political reality, although it should be perceived as part of an “imagined America” which transcends geographical boundaries. As we have seen, Nederhop connects Dutch realities to transnational identities. It is through the valuing of, and reflexive engagement with, this otherness and difference that an aesthetic cosmopolitanism is performed.

4.9 2018: Denmark

In 2018, the focus country at ESNS was Denmark. The music industry of Denmark is characterized by a strong domestic music market.²⁰² State support of the live music market makes Denmark – and Copenhagen especially – one of Scandinavia’s most important hubs for electronic and alternative pop music.²⁰³ Denmark also has a flourishing jazz scene, due to government cultural policy. Copenhagen, especially, has been a popular base for jazz musicians from all over the world. This is due to the stimulating music climate with venues such as Copenhagen Jazzhouse, Jazz Club Loco and Jazzhus Montmartre. It is also home to the Copenhagen Jazz festival.

Denmark is also home to many music festivals, the most famous one being the

198 Reference date: 05-03-2019.

199 The single “Energie” by Ronnie Flex, for example, has almost 50 million streams. Reference date: 05-03-2019.

200 In 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2018, for example, the Pop Prize was awarded to Dutch hip hop artists.

201 “Young tickets” were sold as of 2018 to attract younger audiences to the event.

202 Stoll, Julia. Sep 18, 2020. retrieved from Statista.com: <https://www.statista.com/topics/6952/music-market-in-denmark/>

203 Info retrieved from: <https://no.musicnorway.no/veikart/danmark/>

Roskilde Festival, which takes place annually in the city of Roskilde. Another festival, the showcase festival SPOT, is organized annually in Arhus. The organizational structure of this showcase festival bears similarities to Eurosonic, albeit smaller in scale and focused more on the domestic (Scandinavian) music industry.²⁰⁴ The Danish music industry has been growing significantly in recent years. Music industry revenue has increased from 6.14 billion DKK (931 million USD) in 2012 to 9.3 billion DKK (1.41 billion USD) in 2017.²⁰⁵ Denmark is also one of the world's most advanced nations in terms of streaming music consumption and streaming revenues are growing steadily.²⁰⁶ 38% of the Danish industry's total revenues derives from recorded music. Streaming income accounts for approximately 40% of that total, 8% from physical sales and 4% from downloads.²⁰⁷ Since 2008, the organization Music Export Denmark (MXD) was stimulating the international affairs of Danish artists. With acts such as Lukas Graham, Volbeat and MØ acquiring international success, the Danish music industry was becoming a larger international player.²⁰⁸

With the slogan *Denmark Blooms*, twenty-two acts represented Denmark as it was the focus country at Eurosonic. Peter Smidt reflected upon the choice: "We are always in dialogue with nations on what a good moment is to highlight that country. We need to know if we have a story, since the conference is dealing with many topics related to that country's music industry. Denmark is the country that lends itself perfectly this year."²⁰⁹ Here is an overview of the acts, with the designated genre as promoted at Eurosonic added in parenthesis:

August Rosenbaum (jazz, though additional info states: "Think jazz, think modern classical music, think experimental, think cross-over"), AV AV AV (techno), BAEST (metal "Inspired by strong Scandinavian traditions"), D/troit (soul), Ellis May (techno, blues, trip-hop and folktronica), Goss (alternative), IAMJJ (pop), Iceage (Rock), Lydmor (electronic), Maximillian (soul), MYRKUR:Folkesange (black metal), Off Bloom (electronic), Pardans (post-punk), Phlake (pop "R&B meets pop"), Scarlet Pleasure (soul "soulful R&B and electronic pop), School of X (alternative "alternative pop and trip-hop"), Snavs (electronic "bass"), Soleima (pop "where garage and pop are just as cool as electronica and R&B), SVIN (EDM "Ambient"), Velvet Volume (rock), VERA (electronic "He combines androgynous pop vocals, smooth saxophone and bossa nova guitars with future electronic beats"), We Like We (neo-classical "through their collaborative compositions We Like We creates music that travels far beyond the hegemony of genres." These descriptions of acts and their genre exemplify how the cosmopolitan stance towards music has been dominant in the 2018 country focus theme. Experimentation, crossing

204 An in-depth analysis of the connections between this festival and Eurosonic can be found in chapter 6.

205 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/569882/turnover-in-the-music-industry-in-denmark/>

206 <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/youtube-generates-just-2-2-of-denmarks-growing-recorded-music-business/>

207 Dansk Musikomsætning 2017: <https://www.koda.dk/undersogelser/tal/dansk-musikomsaetning>

208 MØ's collaboration with Major Lazor, the single "Lean On", has over 2.5 billion views on YouTube. Reference date: 05-03-2019.

209 Interview with journalistic online platform Face Culture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjzTK81y-iwA>.

musical borders and transcending genre conventions are what constitutes successful European music, echoing Europe's mantra of finding a unified voice in which diversity can be celebrated.

4.9.1 Case study: GOSS

For fans of genre-meshing and boundary-crossing pop - ESNS festival press info²¹⁰

Copenhagen-based producer, singer and instrumentalist Mads Damsgaard Kristiansen is the front man of GOSS, whose music he describes as electronic soul, but whose music has also been described as “sci-fi-R&B.” Before undertaking a solo career, he was part of the Danish electronic rock duo Reptile Youth, with whom he recorded three albums between 2012-2015. Kristiansen also contributed to the album *Forever Neverland* (Columbia Records) of Danish singer-songwriter (and Kristiansen's spouse) MØ, with whom he co-wrote the single Kamikaze (Chess Club, RCA Victor) in 2015. MØ acquired international fame with the Majoe Lazer and DJ Snake collaboration “Lean On,” which peaked highly on global charts. The international success of MØ paved the way, as MØ's drummer Rasmus Littauer states. She “broke down borders” at a time when breaking in the UK and US seemed like an impossible task for new Danish artists.²¹¹

The first two songs of GOSS as a solo artist were released on SoundCloud in March of 2017. He chose to operate anonymously to “have a little more room to find out where I was going,” as he stated.²¹² His debut single “I Want To Know” was released from the 5-track EP *Healthcare* in 2018. It reached ... in the Danish electro-pop charts. Sustaining his anonymity, his debut was awarded with positive reviews: “This faceless project from Denmark combines simple electronics with effective crazy pop bits which make us chill and dance” (Coelho 2017).²¹³ GOSS's second EP *Homeland Security* was released in November 2018. On this album he experiments with pop electro and lo-fi R & B, trying to extract, as the description on his account on online promotional platform Bandcamp reads, “the maximum amount of impact and emotion through the fewest elements.”²¹⁴ The music of GOSS is characterized by experimentation and transcended genre conventions. As he explains, “It's all about trying to connect interesting thoughts, and I tend to want to connect things that haven't been heard together as much.”²¹⁵

As he is understood as breaking borders, GOSS is exemplary for Denmark's choice of artists to represent the Danish music industry. Not the “safe” adaptation to

210 <http://www.iprecom.nl/noorderslag/archief/esns.php?year=2018&country=DK>

211 <http://www.thebeatjuice.com/2018/03/28/road-new-vanguard-danish-pop/>

212 <https://translate.google.nl/translate?hl=en&sl=da&u=https://gaffa.dk/artikel/133682/goss-at-rejse-sig-fra-reptile-youth-asken&prev=search>

213 Review published in online music magazine “Where the music meets”: <http://www.wherethemusicmeets.com/2017/07/12/goss-healthcare/>

214 <https://goss-goss-goss-goss.bandcamp.com/album/homeland-security>

215 Interview with GOSS: <https://www.dummymag.com/features/goss-is-a-man-of-mystery/>

commercial trends, but providing a platform for the novel and alternative. GOSS's music is, as the ESNS promo info stated, "for fans of genre-meshing and boundary-crossing pop". Indeed, his stylistic characteristics borrow from a wide array of stylistic characteristics, echoing Motti Regev's (2007, 125) conceptualization of aesthetic cosmopolitanism as a "[...] fluid conception of ethno-national uniqueness, one that is constantly and consciously willing to implement stylistic innovations in art and culture from different parts of the world." Acts that transgress (musical) boundaries reflect Europe's supranational message, the promotion of transnational collaboration through familiarizing with the "other." Ultimately, the propagation of blending genres, styles and performance practices reflect Europe's mantra "Unity in Diversity."

4.10 Conclusion

As Motti Regev (2013, 179) concluded his account on the global diffusion and re-configuration of pop music cultures, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is indeed "the shivering and withering of cultural otherness." It is the openness to late modern cultural forms, he argues, where the quest for essentialist purism has been replaced and transformed into a hybrid of artistic practices. At Eurosonic, acts that are selected within the focus country context are often valued for their originality and cross-over aesthetic. Familiarizing an international audience with the singularities of domestic European music also provides a marketable "border breaking" story. Within the framework of the European Border Breakers Awards, however, the border breaking process occurs within the commercial domain and successful acts tend to adhere to genre conventions.

The introduction of genre categories in the 2019 MMETAs, confirm the observation that successful MMETA acts excel in a specific genre rather than transgress the norm boundaries of that genre to acquire commercial success. Acts that have won an EBBA have become mainstream by definition. After all, the recipient is rewarded for acquiring international commercial success (albeit at an early stage of their career).

These two different dynamics which are present in both Europe-focused festival elements, reveals somewhat of a tension: If successful European music is characterized by genre transcending qualities, how should we conceptualize prizes that are awarded for different conventional genre categories? These two approaches seem to reflect the classic music dichotomy between mainstream and niche. Airplay, charts and sale statistics, the classic domain of breakthrough artists, are of less importance for the circulation of underground, experimental avant-garde acts (Bennett, Guerra 2018). These acts find an international audience in the underground scenes and exchange music and contacts more easily on specific social media, websites and fora, resulting in the transnational circulation of "European" repertoires in obscure clubs and small-scale festivals. Juxtaposing the EBBA and the Country Focus in this chapter has disclosed how ESNS provides top-down (European) as well as bottom-up (national/regional) initiatives to promote the circulation of European repertoire. Moreover, it has provided insight into how its institutional dynamics

create platforms for European repertoire to a situation in which its constituent elements, as much as they maintain their unique characteristics, display greater intersectionality and connectedness than has been the case previously. In other words, how they established a transformation to a condition of aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

Chapter 5 ESNS Live Music in Practice: Battle of the North

5.1 Introduction

Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.²¹⁶ - William Bruce Cameron (1963)

In the previous chapter I have discussed how the (perceived) structural absence of local musical talent at early editions of the Eurosonic Noorderslag festival sparked debates concerning the representation of local talent at the event. Over time, these debates resulted in various official and unofficial sub-events within the larger Eurosonic Noorderslag framework. Noorderslag, Noorderslagting, Eurosonic and GrunnSonic all have their roots in complying with the call for recognition and stimulus of local musical talent (see chapter 2). These experiences and initiatives have been essential markers for the development of the festival's identity and, notably, have provided waves of opportunity for artists to gain access to the event.

While the demand for quantitative data has increased in recent years and several initiatives have been undertaken to measure results and document statistics of the event (e.g. ETEP archive, Music Moves Europe Talent Charts and ESNS Charts), no attempt has been undertaken to document the grassroots, personal and idiosyncratic experiences of artists who have performed at Eurosonic in the course of its historical development.²¹⁷ Therefore, it is these more obscured narratives of subjective perceptions of career impact that I am interested in here. This chapter, then, investigates career trajectories of bands from the northern part of the Netherlands (Groningen and Friesland) to better understand how performing at Eurosonic has impacted their career.

For many musicians, framing the festival as “journey of discovery” (Broere & Van der Heide 2011, 50) appeals to a romantic notion of getting “discovered,” getting recognized as a hidden gem and then lifted from obscurity to tour the world and sell your music. An appealing prospect for any (upcoming) band struggling for recognition, and for many the incentive to perform at the festival for free. Indeed, as Joey Ruchtie (Van den Krommenacker 2019) mentioned: “Eurosonic is a showcase festival. That means that all

216 Cameron, W.B. (1963) *Informal Sociology*, a casual introduction to sociological thinking. Random House: New York, p. 13.

217 For example, one of the most comprehensive initiatives is the European Music Observatory. Supported by the European Commission and under the Creative Europe umbrella program, the sub-program Music Moves Europe launched a call for a feasibility study for a European Music Observatory. A study which “[s]hould investigate the possible future full-scale establishment of a data collection organization as a core strategic resource to drive relevance and value for future policy actions in the music portfolio and across the sector.” See: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/content/music-moves-europe-feasibility-study-establishment-european-music-observatory-and-gap_en (Accessed: 12-06-2019) Also, the ESNS festival organization keeps track of the results of the ETEP exchange program as well as data on streaming and airplay to compose the Music Moves Europe talent Charts: <https://musicmoveseuropetalentawards.eu/charts/>

artists perform for free, hoping to get noticed by bookers from other important festivals in Europe, such as Lowlands, but also Glastonbury.” The romantic appeal of the event and the often disillusioning reality form an uneasy relationship that was discussed rather vocally during the interviews. A relationship that, as British cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie notes (2002, 106), can result in a permanent state of transition, an endless *rite de passage*. In other words, getting stuck in a cultural endeavor that is invested in creative output and acquiring symbolic capital, when in fact the process itself preserves the status quo of unredeemable potential.

When contending with the issue of how a showcase performance impacts the career of a participating band or artist, the elusive nature of measurement becomes relevant. But, how can one define success? By what standards? Simon Frith (1990, 181) observed: “The continuing need for “new” product, the irrationality of aesthetic tastes, and the central place of romanticism (its language of art and genius) in rock ideology mean that the creative process itself – the set of social relations, rules, and practices within which the pop musical product is made – is exceedingly complex.” Nowhere does this complexity become more relevant than in the case of a music showcase festival, the place where music, business, media and networks come together in promoting and developing the music careers of what is often considered to be “new talent.”

Often, these talents are at the beginning of their career and aim to utilize the showcase platform to acquire access to new markets – access that is provided by music industry professionals and media outlets. Those who are in the position to ascribe value and meaning to artists and are involved in mediating between the production of cultural goods and the production of consumer tastes (Bourdieu 1984) are often referred to as “cultural intermediaries” (Negus 2002; Moor 2008; Smith Maguire & Matthews 2010). Establishing connections to cultural intermediaries (i.e. music professionals) is pivotal to an artist’s career; as Smith Maguire & Matthews (2012, 552) argue: “Cultural intermediaries impact upon notions of *what*, and thereby *who*, is legitimate, desirable and worthy, and thus by definition what and who is not.” Taking a closer look at the artistic experiences of local artists at Eurosonic reveals that, following Frith’s observation, the creative process and making connections with cultural intermediaries remains indeed complex. This complexity makes necessary a prioritizing strategy for which market to focus on. For most respondents interviewed in this chapter, then, penetrating the national market seemed to be of higher priority than being concerned about its international potential.

In their vivid account of jazz musicians’ lives and their careers in *Do You Know...? The Jazz Repertoire in Action* (2009), musicians and sociologists Robert Faulkner and Howard Becker explore how careers are formed and argue how the notion of repertoire can be understood as a form of practice. Not only as actual performance practice, but also, more theoretically, in how cultural dissemination is a form of “action.” Rather than merely being about the (musical) art work itself, Faulkner and Becker (2009, 339) explain, “[...] repertoire, considered in this way as process, as something continuously made and remade as people acquire, exchange, learn, and teach the relevant elements, gives us a flexible tool for understanding forms of collective action.” This building of repertoire is

reflected in how northern artists developed new strategies in engaging with Eurosonic as their careers evolved over time.

It is precisely this notion of “opportunity” which is crucial in the case of the showcase festival. While perspectives on the struggles musicians face on a day-to-day basis are relevant, showcase festivals have a rather distinctive dynamic. This is because they are temporally limited events, localized short-term music scenes in which a music world is created for the duration of the event (most often two to four days). Such planned events, as tourism and event studies scholar Donald Getz (2008, 404) describes, “are spatial – temporal phenomena, and each is unique because of interactions among the setting, people, and management systems – including design elements and the program. Much of the appeal of these events is that they are never the same, and you have to be there to enjoy the unique experience fully; if you miss it, it’s a lost opportunity.” Opportunity constitutes hope, belief, investment, promise, discovery, urgency and access, all (sometimes ephemeral) aspects that come into play.

Considering the large number of participating acts (in 2018, over 350 acts performed on Eurosonic alone) there are by definition more “unsuccessful” acts (i.e. those that remain obscure) than there are “successful” acts. After all, the nature of these events is such that out of the large pool of talent only few “make it” (if success is indeed defined by sales and international outreach). Typically, only few “discovered” artists get access to what Robert Frank and Philip Cook (1995) described, as a “winner-take-all” market. That is, having access to, for example, (international) touring, airplay, fame, prizes, shows, media, promotion, money and endorsements. Performing at a showcase event, however, can also be beneficial in less visible configurations. Building professional networks, as Zwaan et al (2010, 18) concluded on their study of career trajectories of Dutch pop musicians, is “significantly related to the level of career success.” These connections, however, are established in sometimes unpredictable (and often unquantifiable) ways (Baker 2000, Higgins & Thomas 2001, Hall 2002). Indeed, it is significant to recognize that music is an active (social) process, not merely a product. A process that Christopher Small (1998) encapsulated in the term “musicking.”

My aim in this chapter is to give a grassroots account of how performances at Eurosonic have impacted particular musician’s careers, how they perceived the event and how that changed over time. I have chosen to not pick artists based on (inter)national success factors such as sales/streams numbers, tours or prizes, but to provide a modest but representative overview of how participating regional and local acts attempt to further their career at the event to achieving *subjective career success*, which might include more local levels of success and prestige.²¹⁸ The intended objective, then, is to document the impact of Eurosonic within the confines of unique career trajectories of northern acts.

The sample examined covers musicians and acts from a broad range of genres, ages and backgrounds, but, geographically, I have chosen to spotlight artists from the two most northern Dutch provinces: Groningen and Friesland. The focus on these provinces

218 Notably, Eurosonic presents itself as a festival with “equal billing”, i.e. no festival headliners. In theory, therefore, every selected act has equal opportunity.

is both a pragmatic as well as a cultural choice. Cultural, as the narrative of competition and representation in relation to these regions have been an integral part of the event, which has manifested itself throughout its various alterations tracing back to the festival's emergence.²¹⁹ Both Groningen and Friesland have a strong and competitive music culture, not only towards each other but, prompted by the geographical position in the Netherlands ("the north" often defines itself as separated from, and contrasting to, "the west"). Building, preserving and defending regional musical cultural heritage, therefore, has been central to its cultural identity.

5.2 Methods

The pragmatic element of this research chapter can be understood as a form of active participant observation: being both a musician (having performed at the event as a drummer in the bands Chaos! and Xess in editions in the years ranging from 2003 to 2007) and a resident of Groningen, many of the respondents have been accessed through my own professional musical network.²²⁰ These circumstances allowed me to be a "participant" and an "observer" during the interviews. A position, as Hammersley & Atkinson (2007, 112) describe, where "the dividing line between participant observation and interviewing is hard to discern." I concur with their assessment that this should primarily be regarded as a resource rather than as a problem. Many respondents, for example, regarded me as "one of theirs" and felt comfortable to speak freely about their experiences as a consequence.²²¹

Providing they were artists from Groningen and Friesland, the acts were chosen semi-randomly from the officially sanctioned festival program in the years between 1995 and 2019. I have strived to provide a representative overview of acts with maximum variation of billing years and showcase elements. These elements include, but are not limited to, auxiliary events such as Grunnsonic, Freesonica and PlatoSonic. Often, however, respondents also performed at unofficial events at some point and imagined these as inherent to the event as a whole. The Noorderslag part of the festival has not been included in this research, however, respondents that have performed at both Eurosonic and Noorderslag did often explicitly refer to Noorderslag during the interviews, mostly to compare its career impact to Eurosonic.²²² Based on the criteria outlined above, I contacted respondents directly from my personal network or found them through social media, after which I sent a message with an interview request. The outcome of this sample resulted in a predominantly white, young to middle-aged male demographic, a profile

219 See, for example, the second edition of the event, De Noorderslag, in 1987 in which artists from Groningen and Friesland competed against acts from other parts of the Netherlands.

220 Being active as a professional drummer and teacher since 1996, I have built an extensive musical network in the region. I performed during Eurosonic with the Dutch rock group Chaos! in Buckshot cafe in 2004 and with EDM cross-over band X-ess in cafe Pacific in 2005.

221 I also made explicit that my research was conducted independently, that is, there was no link to organizational interests.

222 For example, Titus van 't Veer, singer and guitar player of pop-rock band Lawn, mentioned Noorderslag as being their "holy grail" when first getting involved with the festival. In other words, a performance at Noorderslag, for them, was of greater (symbolic) value than performing at Eurosonic.

which is not uncommon in the alternative/rock band circuit.²²³

Although (online) archives were very helpful at times, most data for this chapter has been collected by conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews. I have based my conclusions on these verbal accounts of events, supplied in the form of anecdotes, descriptions and experiences, which I then compared and contrasted to my own experiences with the event (as visitor, performer and Groningen resident). Questions I was concerned with included: How did you perceive the event at the time of the show? Has your view of Eurosonic, as the event developed, changed over time? And, ultimately, has performing at the festival contributed to your career, network or performance practice?²²⁴ My objective was to use a grounded approach where I allow the themes that my consultants prioritized to come to the fore in this chapter and to provide the structure and theoretical framework for this chapter. The personal accounts described below offer a bottom-up look into the strategies that bands have deployed to navigate through the field-configuring event (Lampel and Meyer 2008) that is Eurosonic. Voices that are often obscured by the lack of immediate recognition, the magnitude of the event, or the sheer dominance of media marketing which emphasizing its international music industry status.

Finally, most contemporary cultural criticism, sociologist and economist James F. English (2005, 12) wrote, “suffers either from an overvaluation of the particular or from overreliance on the general.” I am aware of the risk this chapter runs of suffering from the former. With this in mind (and to provide an antidote to the latter) I have chosen to highlight eleven artists that each have their unique story and career trajectory. The musicians that were, or still are, part of these acts provided valuable reflections on how they have experienced Eurosonic in the course of their career. Some participated in the very first edition of the festival in 1995 (Moonlizards), while others performed there in subsequent (MakeBelieve) or recent years (The Homesick). Here is an overview of all consulted artists (see figure 13).

From interview analysis and bottom-up coding, I have extracted the following four recurring themes: *Imagining markets*, the narrative of *discovery*, the idea of *CV enhancement* (symbolic capital) and, finally, *professionalization* over time. In what follows, each of these themes will be contextualized and discussed. The accounts of experiences and perspectives of the informants points to several conclusions.

First, the reputation and stature of the event is widely acknowledged by artists. Even when a performance has taken place on a more accessible, perhaps less strictly curated, stage, the stature of the event grants them with “a license of ability,” which can be beneficial for future career trajectories. In fact, this reputation as gatekeeper enhances the band biography and is utilized as “CV enhancement.” Second, the romanticized notion of getting discovered is illusory. The chance of an artist getting noticed “by accident” and whose exceptional talent will be recognized by a music professional who will catapult their career is very small, at least without preparatory effort from the artists themselves. Rather, to

223 Considering the wide-spread debates about unequal gender distribution in the (live) music industry, I should emphasize that respondents were selected randomly, insofar the artists matched the practical criteria I have outlined.

224 See full question guide in appendix.

advance a showcase performance from merely being another gig into being a window of opportunity with the realistic potential of furthering of one's career, artists need a certain level of professionalization. That is, to have substantial knowledge of their specific network needs and the communicative skills to obtain it. Moreover, already having a network in place increases the chance of getting access to another, perhaps more influential, network. Ultimately, I suggest, a showcase festival performance facilitates opportunity, but the level of professionalization of the artists themselves is determines to a large extent whether potential is transformed into being.

	<i>Identifying as artist from Friesland (F), Groningen (G) or both (F/G)</i>	<i>Career span</i>	<i>Year of Eurosonic Performance</i>	<i>Eurosonic Element</i>
Moonlizards (punk-rock)	G	1989 - 1995	1995	Euroslagt
Lawn (indie-rock)	F/G	1998 - 2010	1999, 2000, 2002, 2003	Eurosonic
Meindert Talma (multi-arts singer songwriter)	F/G	1994 -	1998 1999 2004 2020	Euroslag Eurosonic Eurosonic Grunnsonic (ESNS Extra)
Nemesea (gothic metal)	F/G	2002 -	2005, 2008	Eurosonic
Audio Adam (Pop)	F/G	2009 -	2012 2013 2015 2019	Eurosonic Eurosonic Eurosonic
Mydearestdear (folk, singer-songwriter)	G	2012 - 2017	2016, 2017	Grunnsonic Grunnsonic
Ilanois (Rock)	F	1990 -	2010	Freesonica
Vanderlinde (rock)	G	2005 -	2011	Grunnsonic
Traumahelikopter (punk rock)	G	2010 -	2011, 2014	Eurosonic
MakeBelieve (pop)	F	2008 - 2016	2010, 2012, 2015 2016	Eurosonic Grunnsonic
The Homesick (alternative pop)	F	2012 -	2015, 2018, 2020	Eurosonic

Figure 13. Respondents

5.3 Imagining Markets:

A European Invasion in Groningen?

“To me, that was just a show in VERA” – Dik Smid, Moonlizards²²⁵

In 1995, the unofficial counter event Noorderslagting (see chapter two) was encapsulated into the official Noorderslag event and renamed Euroslag, the first edition of what we now know as Eurosonic. Moonlizards, a four-piece punk rock group from Groningen formed in 1989, was one of the acts chosen to represent Groningen in the nineteen-act line-up which was referred to in the festival program as “a European invasion in Groningen.” the “perfect warm up” for Noorderslag and “perhaps even the start of a long tradition...”²²⁶ Moonlizards formed in 1989 and became a successful underground act in the Groningen and Dutch club circuit.²²⁷ Former Moonlizards band members, vocalist Jurgen Veenstra and guitarist Dik Smid, recall the controversy regarding the counter event Noorderslagting and its incorporation in Euroslag:

[Noorderslagting] was absolutely a rebel festival, so to speak. That’s how it was presented. And then after two years it got incorporated. That’s what always happens to these old hotbeds, or pockets of resistance or whatever... At a certain point, OK... silence them and incorporate them, right. That’s how it felt to me at the time. [Dik Smid continues:] What is of course tragic when it comes to these phenomena, it gets encapsulated. Eurosonic emerged out of resistance against that large endeavor, Noorderslag. And then it gets bigger still.²²⁸

While they were sympathetic to the rebellious nature and message of Noorderslagting, it was less relevant for the band to be a part of it. They had already performed on Noorderslag in the previous years (1991, 1994). Also, they had gained experience performing internationally in Europe in the early 1990s when touring with then renowned underground act from Germany, Spermbirds. As a local act with relative stature, the band was asked to perform on Euroslag in Groningen’s underground venue VERA.²²⁹ Indeed,

225 Dik Smid, Jurgen Veenstra, Ricky van Duuren, in discussion with author, September 2019.

226 Official Noorderslag and Euroslag 1995 program introduction, p. 3. “A European Invasion”, the newspaper program stated. Other performing acts included Têtes Raides (France), Skintrade (Sweden) and Perverted by Desire (Belgium).

227 In 1990 Moonlizards toured with German group Spermbirds throughout Europe. In 1991 and 1994 they performed on Noorderslag before they were asked to perform on Euroslag, the first edition of what would evolve into Eurosonic, in 1995. Moonlizards have released two albums, *Foom* (Schemer, 9012, 1990) and *Stradivarius Transistor* (Top Hole, 1993). Voted “best Dutch band” by a poll conducted by Groningen venue VERA. <https://www.vera-groningen.nl/poll-results-1993/moonlizards-best-dutch-band-93/>

228 Veenstra: “Het was absoluut een festival om te rebelleren tégen, zeg maar. Zo is het ook wel verwoord. En toen is het twee jaar daarna gewoon ingekapseld. Dat heb je altijd met die oude broeinesten of verzetshaarden of wat dan ook... Op een gegeven moment, oké... maak ze monddood en haal ze erbij hè, zo’n gevoel had ik er toen over. Smid: Wat natuurlijk zuur is met dit soort fenomenen, het wordt ingekapseld. ES komt voort uit de hoek van het verzet tegen dat grote gebeuren, Noorderslag. En dan wordt het nóg groter.” Group interview with author, 13-09-2019.

229 V.E.R.A., Veri Et Recti Amici (True And Genuine Friends), is situated in a stately building with a medieval

the band was more concerned with the venue, maintaining their “authentic” underground image and the possibility to reinforce that message by performing at VERA, rather than making use of the international possibilities of the new European festival framework:

Dik Smid: By the time we played on Euroslagt we didn't really need anymore to be showcased, because nationally we were already quite well known. At the insistence of Jurgen we even performed in the cellar bar, while we could easily have played on the main stage. Jurgen Veenstra: That would indeed have been more fitting. I figured since we already had made a name for ourselves, we might as well perform in the cellar bar. I thought that was “credible” in some sense. [...] Overthinking. And it was insufferable; the place was packed. Dik Smid: I have to say that I leaned back quite comfortably at that point. I thought: ‘we perform internationally, we managed to play the [Dutch] club circuit for a few consecutive years. What are we worried about? If it was Euroslagt, or something else... It was just a show. To me, cellar bar VERA – I actually didn't know until today that happened within the context of Euroslagt – to me, that was just a show in VERA.²³⁰

For Moonlizards, the showcase festival concept was still new and did not appeal to them. As bass player Ricky van Duuren stresses, they were more concerned with “just making songs, releasing a record and having as many gigs as possible.”²³¹ In these early editions in the mid to late 1990s, however, the showcase concept was still developing in the music industry and often the explicit international outlook was obscured by the eminence and prestige of performing at a specific venue. Titus van ‘t Veer, singer and guitarist of alternative-indie rock band Lawn, reported a similar experience: the particular location of the show was more significant to the band than the European contextual framework and its showcase potential. Their first Eurosonic performance, in 1999, was in VERA as well. Van ‘t Veer recalls:

[I]t was our first gig in VERA. Even if it was the cellar stage, it was still cool to do. [...] At that point we just had our first demo and wanted to gig more. No way we thought about inviting international people for our showcase. [...] Back then it

basement. VERA was founded as a reformed student club in 1899. In the early 1970s it became in use as music and multi-arts venue. Many world-famous bands performed in VERA early on in their careers, such as Joy Division, U2, Slayer, Nirvana and Dua Lipa. Today, VERA remains the foremost center of underground Pop culture in Groningen.

230 “Maar goed, tegen de tijd dat wij op Euroslagt speelden, hadden wij het niet meer nodig om geshowcased te worden of zo. Want toen waren we landelijk eigenlijk redelijk bekend. We hebben nog expres zelfs, op aandringen van Jurgen, in de kelderbar gespeeld. Want we konden gewoon in de zaal spelen. [...] Ik vond waarschijnlijk dat we toch al naam hadden en daarom net zo goed lekker in de kelderbar gaan staan. Vond ik wel *credible* misschien. Teveel nagedacht. Overthinking.” “Nee. Wij hadden toen elk podium in NL toen wel gehad, wij tourden ook veel in Duitsland. [...] Dat soort dingen leefden toen wel. J. Ik moet zeggen dat ik wel redelijk comfortabel achteroverleunde toen. Ik dacht: we treden internationaal op, spelen in het clubcircuit lukte een paar jaar achter elkaar. Waar maken we ons druk om. Of het nou een Euroslagt was, of iets anders... Voor mij, Kelderbar VERA – ik weet pas sinds vandaag weer dat dat Euroslagt was – voor mij was dat gewoon een optreden in VERA. Group interview with author, 13-09-2019.

231 Group interview with author, 13-09-2019.

was like: “Hey, we get invited, cool. We’re in VERA, even cooler. [...] For us it was perhaps more important to play in VERA, than that it was Eurosonic.”²³²

Lawn formed in Groningen in 1998. Although the group formed in Groningen, formative band members have Frisian roots – a dual heritage which allowed them to participate in multiple region-specific band contests.²³³ Lawn released three albums: *Lawn-dro-mat* (Grond Records, 2001), *Backspace* (My First Sonny Weismuller Recordings, 2003) and *Silver* (My First Sonny Weismuller Recordings, 2008). Throughout their twelve-year career, Lawn performed at Eurosonic four times: in 1999 (location: VERA), in 2000 (Huize Maas), 2002 (PLATO) and 2003 (De Troubadour). In addition, they performed for the Noorderslag part of the festival in 2004.

While venues such as VERA, Huize Maas and Grand Theatre provide prestige and legitimation to a Eurosonic performance, as Van ‘t Veer and band members from Moonlizards stress, other smaller locations were more obscured from the festival and the Eurosonic brand. These locations are often hired for the occasion by organizations to facilitate specific themed sub-events, which are then used for networking and organizational branding. To the artists that are invited to play there, these events and locations sometimes have little appeal. One example from such an experience comes from the Frisian alternative rock band The Homesick. As a result of winning a Frisian band contest in 2014 the band was allowed to perform at Eurosonic in 2015. The show took place in Klub Troubadour, a bar in the city center at which Frisian music organizations Friesland Pop, Freesonica and Popfabryk organized a Frisian showcase by the name of “Friesland Pop Talent Stage.” The Homesick guitarist and vocalist Elias Elgersma recalls:

That was kind of a low-key show, of course, this official show. That happened because we had won the contest. [...] Presenting bands from Friesland who are allowed to perform at the official Eurosonic lineup. But that was, from what I remember... [...] that it was basically a Frisian informal reception [*borrel*]. You don’t get some kind of big show from that or a European booking agent. It’s very low-key. [...] It is part of the official program, but doesn’t really count. You perform for Frisians.²³⁴

The Homesick was formed in 2012 in the Frisian city of Dokkum. In 2013, and still in their teens, they released their first homemade EP *Television* (2013) after which they quickly became noticed for their original experimental blend of rock, pop and post-punk. Derek Robertson (2017) strikingly summarized their music on European music platform Europavox: “Sounding like a long lost Factory act, they mix bratty garage rock with a sense of the absurd, all the while displaying a remarkable pop nous for ones so young.”²³⁵ They have released another EP (*Twst Yr Wrsts*, Subroutine Records, 2014) as well as the album

232 Titus van ‘t Veer, in discussion with author, July 2019.

233 e.g. Kleine prijs van Sneek (Friesland) and Popprijs Groningen.

234 Elias Elgersma, in discussion with author, December 2019.

235 <https://www.europavox.com/bands/the-homesick/>

Youth Hunt (Subroutine Records, 2017). Their second album *The Big Exercise* was released in February 2020 on the legendary Seattle record label *Sub Pop*.²³⁶ After their first show in Klub Troubadour, they have performed several times on Eurosonic in different locations. Elgersma notes how location can also serve a gatekeeper function and can provide a “stamp of approval” from which a band can benefit substantially:

What often helps with Eurosonic... and that depends on who or what organizes the event... At Grunnsonic, say, those bands don't get much attention. But performing in VERA or similar locations at Eurosonic... actually the mere fact of a band performing there contributes to the hype. We noticed this ourselves. [...] As in: if you play there, then it *has* to be good. [...] You're deemed professional.

This enhanced “professionalism” opens up opportunities for career advancement. It is, however, mostly utilized to acquire access to the national club circuit. Most respondents had imagined their careers to progress outside of the region first – within the Dutch market – and did not aspire towards a transnational career.

For Meindert Talma (Surhuisterveen, 1968), the regional outreach is more or less self-imposed, as Talma sings in Dutch and Frisian. Also, the subject matter of his lyrics and writings often deal with autobiographical anecdotes (from his upbringing in the Frisian town of Surhuisterveen and later move to Groningen) and region-specific historical topics.²³⁷ Meindert Talma is a multi-artist with Frisian roots who became known in the alternative music and art scene in Groningen in 1995. Besides being a singer-songwriter, Talma also writes books, newspaper columns and makes theater productions, all in his own inimitable, unique style earning him the title “cult singer”. In 2011 an article published in Dutch newspaper *Vrij Nederland* (Pleij, 53) referred to Talma as “[t]he best that Dutch art has produced: he is musician, poet, artist and autonomous genius.” With his band “The Negroes” (the band name being inspired by the group's love of black blues and soul music), he released his first album *Hondert Punten* in 1996.²³⁸ Since then, he has released fourteen albums, has written four novels, a collection of poetry and theatre plays. With his band, Talma performed on Euroslag 1998, Eurosonic 1999, Noorderslag 2000, Noorderslag 2006, Eurosonic 2008 and Eurosonic 2011. Talma considers his performance at Eurosonic 1999 (in venue Grand Theatre) his breakthrough: “The owner of my current record label Excelsior” Talma explains in an interview (Walhout, 2019), “saw me perform[...] and that

²³⁶ The label was responsible for early releases by Soundgarden and Mudhoney as well as for Nirvana's debut album *Bleach* in 1989.

²³⁷ For example, a tribute CD honoring the eccentric checkers champion from Groningen, Jannes van der Wal (1956-1996), and his musical “Passion” project on Frisian socialist politician Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919).

²³⁸ While the band members insist upon the innocence of the chosen band name, the name incurred much criticism. Talma describes, for example, how a visitor of their performance at festival De Parade in Amsterdam angrily explained how the term “Negroes” facilitated the fetishization and othering of blackness in popular music. Also, American bands with whom the band performed were shocked at how the usage of the term implied a fascination, or “love and theft,” how it is described elsewhere (Lott 1993) of black culture. Finally, the usage of the name was discontinued in the late 2000s.

got us a record deal.”²³⁹ Despite some recognition nationally (appearing, for example, on renowned national TV talk show DWDD), however, Talma’s market has been mostly centered on the northern part of the Netherlands.²⁴⁰

For most respondents interviewed in this chapter, penetrating the national market with doing the showcase seemed to be of higher priority than being concerned about the international potential. Ilanois drummer Gerwin Terpstra, for example, claimed: “I think Dutch bands don’t do that very quickly. I think they’d be happy if they could just open up the Dutch market. That would be a lot already.”²⁴¹ With his band Ilanois (originating from the Dutch province of Friesland), he performed at the festival in 2010. As part of the band coaching program Freesonica+, they performed in café Shadrak, together with metal act Greyline. Soon after Ilanois became 3FM Serious Talent.²⁴²

Ilanois was formed by Frisian singer-songwriter Ilan Palstra in the early 1990s. Throughout the years, involving different band configurations, they recorded two albums: *Do You Hear Me* (Rough Trade Arvato, 2007) and *Chase The Sundown With Me* (PIAS, 2011). The band was awarded with the radio network title *3FM Serious Talent* in August 2010. Earlier in that year, they performed a double bill with metal band Greyline at Eurosonic in the venue Shadrak, located in the heart of the city center, a show that was part of the Frisian talent program Freesonica.²⁴³ While the band worked with international professionals such as renowned music producer and audio engineer Simon Gogerly, with whom they recorded their album in the UK, the European market was not something the band was aiming at or concerned with. They did, however, recognized the festival’s stature and the exposure the festival could potentially generate for their CV. “A booker needs a story and Eurosonic is a story,” Terpstra explained. “Every band that broke through in the past ten years has once performed there. Perhaps Eurosonic wasn’t the reason for the breakthrough, but it definitely is an imprint and in that sense it is a quality filter. It is just a matter of building a CV.”²⁴⁴

239 <https://www.rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/203660/Dit-mag-je-volgens-Meindert-Talma-niet-missen-op-ESNS>

240 Out of the 44 shows he did in 2019, 31 were located in the northern regions. Source: <https://www.meinderttalma.nl/optredens/archief/>

241 Gerwin Terpstra, in discussion with author, June 2018.

242 “Serious Talent” is a title awarded to talented acts by the Dutch radio station 3FM. 3 FM has a reputation in the Netherlands as the most innovative contemporary pop and alternative music station in contrast to other Dutch music stations. Bands that are awarded the title are provided with shows on national events as well as media attention. The title is quite prestigious and chosen bands receive media attention, airplay and performances to further their career and is awarded every two months to four different acts.

243 Freesonica was a band coaching and professionalization program initiated by the Frisian music organization Popfabryk. Its aim was to promote and stimulate new talent from Friesland and provide them with career opportunities. In collaboration with Eurosonic, Freesonica presented Frisian talent on various locations during the festival. In 2018, Freesonica was incorporated into a new organizational project called Hit the North, a collaboration between popular music organizations, festivals, stages, educational institutions, and media from the three Dutch northern most provinces. Other participating organizations include Excelsior Recording, (festival) Into The Great Wide Open and the organizations POPGroningen and Kunst & Cultuur Drenthe. Besides government subsidies, Hit the North was awarded € 162.000 subsidy from the Groningen municipality for the period 2018–2020. <http://www.wethenorth.org/projecten/nieuws-projecten-0/subsidie-up-north/> In this project, which is part of the umbrella program We the North, ESNS is partnering with these regional organizations to offer a customized coaching trajectory to nine acts annually. To conclude the year-long process, these acts are offered a performance at Eurosonic at local beer brewery Martinus, referred to as “House of the North” during the event.

244 Gerwin Terpstra, in discussion with author, June 2018.

Robert-Jan Zigterman, drummer for Groningen indie-pop group Audio Adam, who performed multiple times on Eurosonic, reported a similar experience. Audio Adam formed in 2009. Their Frisian roots allowed them to participate in the Frisian band contest “Kleine Prijs van Friesland” which catapulted their career. In 2011 they acquired the radio network title “3FM Serious Talent,” performed on national TV (DWDD) and participated successfully in band contests (Unique Ambition Challenge, 2012). They have recorded three albums: *This Is Our Home* (AA Records, 2012), *Moving Down The Grey Line* (AA Records, 2015) and “3” (AA Records, 2019). Zigterman reported how their performances on Eurosonic “snowballed” into career developments: “We were booked a lot more. And the smaller B-stages were exchanged for main stage positions.” All, however, within the national music industry: “For us, the focus was – and still is – on the Netherlands and the Dutch market exclusively. There is still a lot to gain there.”²⁴⁵ This comment is exemplary for how Eurosonic was often utilized by local artists as an artistic crowbar on a national scale, rather than recognizing the ways in which its international potential could be employed.

5.4 Journey of Discovery

‘Discovering’ the ‘new talents,’ [critics] guide buyers’ and sellers’ choices by their writings or advice [...] and by their verdicts, which though offered as purely aesthetic, entail significant economic effects [...].” Pierre Bourdieu “The Production of Belief” (1980, 265)

The band members of Moonlizards explicitly sympathize with VERA and its underground ethos – a DIY and punk mentality that is skeptical about what they perceive as large, corporate and commercialized festival organizations. This skepticism is reflected in their negative, sometimes even hostile, attitude towards the ESNS organization and its perceived motives. While the Moonlizards’ musicians acknowledge the benefits of Eurosonic for the city’s appeal, the band is critical of the event and feels that over the years its corporate image has taken over from the music, which opens up the discussion of authenticity vis-à-vis commercialism. Dik Smid underscores this perspective: “It is a network meeting. My impression is that bands are just decoration, background noise. And they are used as coat hanger for the network meeting. [...] Mostly, these are a just few nice lively days for the city.”²⁴⁶ “The concrete result,” Smid concludes, “is actually just the show itself.” Van Duuren was particularly vocal about his criticism of the event and the potential career benefits: “The impact on your career is non-existent, I’d say.” One critique that respondents referred to is that bands are enticed to perform as the career potential is emphasized, while the reality proves such opportunities to be far less viable. This critical attitude was shared by

²⁴⁵ Robert-Jan Zigterman, in discussion with author, October 2019.

²⁴⁶ “Het is een netwerkmeeting. Ik heb het idee dat bands gewoon behang zijn, op de achtergrond. En het is de kapstok voor de netwerkmeeting. [...] Ach, het zijn voornamelijk een paar leuke bruisende dagen voor de stad.” Dik Smid, group interview with author, 13-09-2019.

other respondents as well. For example, Mark Lada, front man of the punk-rock band Traumahelikopter, points out that: “They are shooting with hail, you know. Hundreds of bands are thrown in, but there are perhaps only ten acts that matter each year. [...] Only the acts that already have this “buzz” can gain from it, the rest is more or less accessory matter.” Punk rock band *Traumahelikopter* formed in Groningen in 2010 around front man Mark Lada. In 2011 they performed as part of the auxiliary program Grunnsonic. Their self titled debut was released on Excelsior Recordings in 2013, shortly before they were booked on Noorderslag and were hyped as giving a “legendary show.”²⁴⁷ Traumahelikopter has toured throughout Europe in recent years and released three more albums: *Down In the City* (Burger Records, 2013), *I Don’t Understand Them At All* (Excelsior Recordings, 2014) and *Competition Stripe* (Excelsior Recordings, 2016). At the time of writing the band is inactive, while its members are pursuing side projects, but there are plans to revive the band in the near future. One of the reasons why bands are still eager to perform, then, is that a showcase festival appeals to, and is associated with, the romantic notion of getting “discovered.”

As a showcase festival, the festival’s potential for bands to expose themselves to music professionals and delegates has been emphasized persistently over the years by representatives of the festival organization.²⁴⁸ This narrative of discovery and “observed stardom” is often fueled by media reports.²⁴⁹ By conveying the message that one can spot the “new” Franz Ferdinand, Dua Lipa or IDLES here, they appeal to the urge to spot the new future superstar in a small bar in Groningen.²⁵⁰ After all, many music lovers want their distinctive taste to be recognized and affirmed by being able to say they saw the new big act before they were “discovered” by the professionals in the music industry. “Visitors of ESNS can be participant observers of the discovery of artists such as Dua Lipa or Calvin Harris. Once in Groningen first, now one of the highest-paid DJs in the world”, as festival booker Joey Ruchtie stressed in an interview in *Dagblad van het Noorden* (Van den Krommenacker 2019). Traumahelikopter front man Mark Lada, however, pointed out how, for many beginning bands, this narrative of discovery is merely a false pretense: “That feels fake or bland sometimes. When it’s being presented as a place where you can make your breakthrough. To me, that is essentially nonsense. You can make a breakthrough when you have already broken through.”²⁵¹

A romanticized notion of stardom and fame is what is at stake, and what often informs the motivation to invest in career development. It is the clash between hopeful

247 <https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2013/Eurosonic-Noorderslag-2013/ESNS13-traumahelikopter.html>

248 See, for example, Frans Vreeke’s statement in the welcome page of the 2009 festival program: “[...] professionals from the global pop industry will check out these talents. That’s why Eurosonic Noorderslag is the perfect festival for acts that want to get noticed to boost their career.” (Vreeke, F. 2009 Festival program, p. 3.

249 For a newspaper article, see for example “EuroSonic is a Journey of Discovery”, DvhN 11-01-2011 and Trouw, 16 January 2018, stating: “They come from all over Europe, the undiscovered talents that aspire to get notices within the inner city of Groningen.” (“Uit heel Europa komen ze, de onontdekte talenten die zich de komende dagen in de Groningse binnenstad op het festival Eurosonic in de kijker hopen te spelen.” Also: “Artists become big in Groningen” (*Artiesten worden groot in Groningen*) Trouw, 11 January, 2017. <https://www.trouw.nl/cultuur-media/artiesten-worden-groot-in-groningen~b6683719/>

250 <https://www.thedailyindie.nl/the-daily-indies-grote-survivalguide-to-eurosonic-noorderslag/>

251 Mark Lada, in discussion with author, september 2019.

aspirations and the harsh, unruly nature of actuality which informs experiences of many participants. This clash is described by Raven (2002, 5) as the “dark underbelly of pop.” In fact, he claims, “For pop to work reality and fantasy must merge.” These discourses are representative of how fame and recognition are organized through the “success myth” concept (Dyer 1998), a myth that, perhaps ironically (considering the core European message from ESNS) originated from the star system (McDonald 2000) and the American dream, and is prevalent in western society (Becker 1982). This dream was fueled by the entertainment industries recognition of youth peer pressure as a powerful market force in the 1990s (Klein 1999, 68). It was given a platform when *The New Original Amateur Hour*, the first television talent competition, aired on the The Family Channel in the US in 1992. Among other things, this idea includes contradictory notions that anyone can become a star, the system rewards talent and specialness and, also, that hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom (Dyer 1998, 42).

Moonlizards bass player Ricky Van Duuren asserted how this romanticized dynamic is part of the expectations of bands that perform at Eurosonic and criticized the narrative of “discovery” as being a false pretense to have bands perform for free:

That is a romanticized fantasy, nonsense, that won’t happen. If bands get noticed that happens because A&R managers are being sent somewhere. Same with journalists. Who will watch where, is all decided by the editorial board. They all watch the same band. And that band has already been booked for the coming festival season. It is just a marketing trick, that you perform here and accidentally get discovered by anyone.²⁵²

Mark Lada (Traumahelikopter) also notes how getting noticed (or discovered) as a band is unlikely to happen coincidentally:

“However, my opinion is that if there is not yet a buzz surrounding your act before the festival, then it is rather naïve to assume that industry professionals discover bands in the bars. And that is actually how the festival, every showcase festival, sells itself. That it is a discovery festival. *But I think it is a discovery festival for visitors, not for the music professionals*, because they [the music professionals] are doing completely different things behind the scenes.”²⁵³

Elias Elgersma (The Homesick) underscores how this buzz is essential for the utilization of the festival’s potential:

252 “Dat is een jongensboekverhaal, een zwetsverhaal, dat gebeurt niet. Als bands worden opgepikt gebeurt dat door A&R managers die ergens heengestuurd worden. En dat is het hetzelfde met journalisten. Wie waar gaat kijken wordt allemaal bepaald door de redactie, ze staan allemaal bij dezelfde band. En die band is al lang geboekt voor het komende festivalseizoen. Het is gewoon een marketingtruc, dat je hier staat te spelen en per ongeluk wordt opgepikt door iemand.” Ricky van Duuren during group interview with author, 13-09-2019.

253 Mark Lada, in discussion with author, September 2019.

“The buzz is of crucial importance. Unless perhaps when you play horrible or are a terrible band. But indeed, that buzz... We have the advantage now with the Sub Pop announcement and a few singles... and then there is the release of a single just prior to Eurosonic [2020]. That helps tremendously. [...] And indeed, if you perform at Eurosonic as a band, but no one cared in the previous weeks... first of all not many people will attend, very few bookers etc. Yes, then it will be difficult. I also think that Eurosonic is very difficult [to utilize] when you don't already have a manager or a booker. [...] You have to more or less be established, have to have some level of professionalization if it can be of any use.”²⁵⁴

These three musicians' accounts touch upon some interesting points. First, that the narrative of discovery should shift from the romantic narrative of the musical genius waiting to be discovered by professionals (gatekeepers) to actually mostly being a discovery event for the *audience*. Undisclosed to a receptive crowd navigating through the event randomly and being surprised by certain acts.²⁵⁵ In other words, “discovery” is what is at play for the audience, not for the bands. An observation that Danish head of Hamburg-based music agency Factory 92, Christian, underscores. His company works for artists, as well as for European music export bureaus, conferences and showcase events in communicating their bands, receptions towards the industry and press.²⁵⁶ About the narrative of discovery, also in relation to other showcase events, he noted:

I think for the audience [the element of discovery] is probably true. Because there's an audience here as well. Which is a good thing about being here at Eurosonic, so then you get to see bands with an audience, not just for the professionals. Which might also be a difference in relation to smaller events like MENT [Ljubljana, Slovenia], where sometimes you have a room that's mostly filled with professionals because the event has not arrived with the local audience yet (although MENT has grown a lot in the last years). Whereas Eurosonic has been taken place for so long that the students here, they know that this is the cool... it's worth getting a ticket and discovering new bands.²⁵⁷

Secondly, already having a network in place, or a “buzz” around the act, implies that furthering one's career at the event is indeed, as art sociologist Howard Becker argues in his seminal work *Art Worlds* (1982), a collective activity; it is not created by the artist alone, but is the result of a process which involves the efforts of many people. The idea of

254 Elias Elgersma, in discussion with author, December 2019.

255 One example of a journalistic account of this process can be found here:

Gottfried, Gideon. 2020. “How Can You Be So Good? The Promise of ESNS.” *Pollstar*, January 21, 2020. https://www.pollstar.com/article/how-can-you-be-so-good-the-promise-of-esns-143301?fbclid=IwAR0nJ1CTnNRFD59j2rliVN0AFNxWzUMaMI8pwJY5H_cGnWPcBwRc1rjnxA

256 In 2020, *Factory 92* worked at Eurosonic for several European music export offices, including the Swiss Music Export, which served as the focus country during Eurosonic. In total, they promoted 52 artists during the event.

257 Christian Holl Buhl, in discussion with author, January 2020.

talent as individuals who possess exceptional creative abilities as creative geniuses (see also Negus & Pickering, 2004) might indeed have to be replaced by the more critical question Pierre Bourdieu (1980/1993) was concerned with: the question of “not what the artist creates, but who creates the artist” (Bourdieu 1980, 147). Production, distribution and reception are what constitute this process. As a consequence, artists should inform themselves of what they want, need and lack. However, the realization that cooperative and active participation in the music world is pivotal, is what musicians often don’t want to hear, as it fails to cohere to their romantic preconceived notions of what constitutes an artist. As Holl Buhl notes:

But I think the problem is, is that the emotionality in the industry is really high. To get people to face what is really necessary... they switch off, you know. Some of the people that I used to play in bands with are still doing music to this day. [...] If I start telling them what they actually need to do, they switch off. You see it in their eyes, they don’t want to know, that’s not the dream. And that’s OK, but the band needs to have that one business head in their team. And it’s not all bands that have that. Maybe they have the managers, and maybe many bands don’t have that either. Maybe it stops them from getting further, you know.²⁵⁸

And when discussing how musicians could become better informed about the business side of the music business, Holl Buhl adds:

Because it’s an emotional industry, people don’t want to be told that they don’t know something. ‘Cause there’s a lot of attitude as well. Sometimes this clashes, these student and teacher mentalities are sometimes difficult to align. That’s the challenge, but it’s always worth investing in that. And the serious people that really want to make it will also take the offer to get more knowledge and know-how.²⁵⁹

Despite his critique, Mark Lada does underscore that when a band is current, business can be done. Since many industry people are present at the festival, connections can be established, albeit he is convinced this does not happen by coincidence. He touches upon the volatile nature of festivals and popular music culture in general and how the pursuit of popularity and creating a hype (i.e. creating “momentum,” where the artist’s sound, originality, story and (not yet crystalized) potential align, creating ample public, professional and media attention) seems to be the ultimate and most legitimate aim:

You live in a world in which the only things that matter are hypes and the “flavor of the month.” You notice that on showcase festivals too. Each year a new can of acts is opened that all are eager to make it. However, if they break through that means they can do one round [in the music circuit] and after that they are

258 *Ibid.*

259 Christian Holl Buhl, in discussion with author, January 2020.

dismissed and then the next can is opened. [...] This as something you never hear about from the festivals themselves. It always has to be the newest of the newest. I think the music world should think about that... if you catapult new talent all the time, do you ever achieve something enduring with that, something with a longer expiration date? I don't think so. I think those festivals fall short on that issue, Eurosonic falls short on that issue.²⁶⁰

Elias Elgersma (The Homesick) adds:

I think somewhere there might be some truth to the idea that you can get discovered at showcase events and also on Eurosonic. But I think that if Eurosonic wouldn't exist, those same acts would be discovered somewhere else. [...] When you throw this number of bands on a pile in a weekend, the odds are that there will be some in there. That is statistically obvious.

Elgersma mentioned The Homesick as an example of how a step forward for an ambitious band can come from unexpected moments. The band's new record label, Sub Pop, discovered them via Spotify with Discover Weekly, a weekly playlist suggested by Spotify based on user's algorithms: "It's not that they spotted us at a showcase festival. Very often, it is coincidental [...]."

Some interviewees mentioned that recruiting new (unexperienced) talent every year might actually be a business model to have bands perform for free. Having performed in the Groningen music scene since the early 1980s, Ricky van Duuren has been part of many bands involving younger band mates who performed on (showcase) festivals with enthusiasm, anticipation and expectations. Van Duuren: "I then tried to dampen this enthusiasm somewhat," Van Duuren states. "I'd say: guys, that will only get interesting if they ask us again next year and will actually *pay* that time. And then you never hear from them again. Each year, a new batch of enthusiastic groups is just reeled in."

Most musicians are aware that there is no financial compensation or reimbursement of expenses for their efforts and accept this as investment for the potential benefit for their career. In recent years the issue of (under)payment of musicians received more media attention as performers have to rely more on *performing* rather than *selling* music. Within the context of ESNS, the discussion surfaced in an article published on 13 January 2017 when Edwin Vis, drummer of local metal band Black Fuse, wrote an opinion piece in the newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (14). The piece was a reaction to an article that was published a week earlier, entitled "The Choreography of the Festival" in which festival programmer Joey Ruchtie mentioned that artists "have to bring money to perform" (i.e. not getting reimbursed for expenses). Vis, then, argued that the fact that acts do not get paid deems them "worthless." He claimed that the organization could better pay the bands at least something for their efforts, to protect them from their inability to negotiate and spend less on side events that seemingly don't benefit the musicians. After

260 Mark Lada, in discussion with author, September 2019.

all, Vis argued, the festival needs musical talent to exist and should therefore nourish the participating acts. Vis's plea points to a broader mentality that underpins musicians' choices and their proclivity to invest. An investment made, amongst other things, due to the *consecrational* power of the event and its decision makers. In "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods" (1980, 262), Pierre Bourdieu's exploration of symbolic investments in relation to economic success, Bourdieu notes that this pursuit of symbolic capital is the core legitimate aim for cultural actors:

For the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or the theatre manager, the only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark or signature) or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.) and therefore give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation.

What Bourdieu is referring to, is that participants of the "game" of showcase festivals grant authority to the event (organizers) by the mere act of being willing to participate. The profound question Bourdieu formulated in "The Production of Belief (1980, 263), "Who creates the 'creator'?" can thus be answered as: Those who are willing to participate, take action to achieve that aim and thereby acknowledge, affirm and preserve the system.

While bands are often critical of this dynamic and its (financial) ramifications, the festival reputation that stems from this romanticized sentiment is also deployed. There is an interesting dual dynamic at play where on the one hand musicians report explicitly that the festival is useless for their career (dismissing as "just a few nice days for the city"), while at the same time the Eurosonic performance is deployed to enhance the band's biography and credentials. In other words, bands are passionate about being associated with Eurosonic, due to public appeal and legitimation about the event as functioning as quality filter through which acts are "consecrated". Bourdieu wrote on the entering the "game of culture" in his seminal work *Distinction* (1984, 250):

Culture is a stake which, like all social stakes, simultaneously presupposes and demands that one takes part in the game and be taken in by it; and interest in culture, without which there is no race, no competition, is produced by the very race and competition which it produces. The value of culture [...] is generated in the initial investment implied by the mere fact of entering the game, joining in the collective belief in the value of the game which makes the game and endlessly remakes the competition for the stakes.

In other words, when entering any competition, whether it's in sports or music, the rules of the game set the limitations to which one is subjected. Of course, one can always strive to change the rules (which, however, inevitably leads to new limitations and challenges), but one can never change the game.

5.5 CV Enhancement: Capitalizing on the Symbolic

Yes, you don't just get chosen to perform on Eurosonic. If you really wouldn't have any quality, you wouldn't be standing there. [...] Even when you'd perform at a festival element which was freely accessible, you would always mention you had a show at Eurosonic. That's how it goes. It is CV enhancement.²⁶¹ Joey Dussel
- MakeBelieve

Respondents conveyed mixed messages about the event: while many were rather vocal in dismissing it as being too corporate, exploitative and even morally corrupt, they did acknowledge that performing at the event does have a symbolic gatekeeping function, providing useful validation for its acts. As such, the Eurosonic performances were often mentioned in band biographies in order to create legitimacy and increase field access. Public opinion of the festival enables bands who perform at the event to get this public "stamp of approval." Illinois drummer Gerwin Terpstra, for example, recalls how their record label PIAS (Play It Again Sam) arranged the show at Eurosonic as a promotional tool:

We always had a meeting before our band practice and this point [Eurosonic] was discussed. That the record company wanted us to do the show there. [...] The question was: "What's the use of it?" Well, nothing. It's just a prestige matter, nothing more. [...] But after the show we never heard from it again. I do think it's used, but by the professionals. They used it as a tool to say: "They have done a show there, so listen to these guys." So that somebody else thinks: "they performed at Eurosonic? In that case I'll have a listen." In that sense it acts as a quality filter. Or perhaps more of a "fame filter." [...] But I can't think of a concrete result coming from that show. But, actually, such a stamp is something in and of itself. It prompts people to take you a little bit more seriously.²⁶²

Singer, bass player and composer Arjan van der Linde reported a similar perspective. He formed his pop/rock country band *Vanderlinde* in Groningen in 2005. The band has released seven studio albums and toured extensively in Germany, where their music is well-received. In 2019 Vanderlinde scored a number 1 radio hit in Norway with their song "Watch your Game."²⁶³ He performed at Eurosonic 2011 as part of Grunnsonic. Van der Linde acknowledged the importance of being visible at the event and performed several times at smaller unofficial locations. Eurosonic was a welcome addition to the band's CV, even though their performance was in the context of the freely accessible fringe program

261 Jawel, je staat niet zomaar op ES. Als je echt geen kwaliteit zou hebben zou je daar ook niet staan. [...] Ook al stond je op een gratis toegankelijk onderdeel, ging je altijd vermelden dat je op Eurosonic stond. Zo gaat het toch. Het is toch cv-verrijking. Joey Dussel, in discussion with author, September 2019.

262 Gerwin Terpstra, in discussion with author, June 2018.

263 Radio 2DAY Airplay chart: <https://www.dvhn.nl/groningen/In-Nederland-onbekend-maar-elders-verslaat-Groningse-band-Vanderlinde-toppers-als-Sting-en-Shaggy-24457353.html>

Grunnsonic.

I don't think that the professionals who could be important for us walk around at Grunnsonic. There is just simply too much. [...] In that sense, it never helped us. However, you do get publicity. People read about you. You're in the festival program. I think that's great, you know. And it was part of Eurosonic just the same. [...] So when people ask me if we ever played at Eurosonic, I can proudly say "yes."²⁶⁴

Lawn singer Titus van 't Veer could not remember any concrete bookings or connections from the show, but did also acknowledge the potential of the performance for the band's CV and building the band's reputation:

Perhaps people will still associate the band with Eurosonic when they receive our demo somewhere down the road and which therefore sparks their interest. So then you know it might not have been a direct consequence of the gig, but indirectly there was definitely a connection. I'm pretty sure it worked that way, because our geographical outreach did indeed increase.

In fact, Van 't Veer stated resolutely, "in my estimation all editions of Eurosonic and Noorderslag [on which we have performed] have mostly been CV enhancement, rather than making connections or anything else."²⁶⁵ In other words, performing at Eurosonic operated as a "quality filter," a stamp of approval. Similarly, Elias Elgersma (The Homesick) states:

What the main benefit is for a band is a sort of professionalization of your name. It enhances the name of your band. But that is no guarantee whatsoever for a career or anything. You can be a terrible band that will never make it and still perform at Eurosonic. That can happen too. Or you can have a great career without ever performing at Eurosonic. In any any case, if you perform there for the first time and think 'this will be it', I would temper my expectations somewhat.

Elgersma's and Van 't Veer's assessments reflect how the status of the festival builds its ability to function as a gatekeeper, especially as it gained recognition as a reputable (curated) music event. When reputation creates validation it invokes symbolic capital, which is considered an important asset in the music world. "A reputation," as French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 291) defined symbolic capital, "for competence and an image of respectability and honorability [...]" Due to the established name of the festival and the careful curation of the acts, being allowed to perform there serves as a quality filter, a form of symbolic capital which potentially can be transformed to other forms of

264 Arjan van der Linde, in discussion with author, July 2018.

265 Titus van 't Veer, in discussion with author, July 2019.

capital in the future. In other words, opportunities may come in the future to capitalize on the “stamp of approval” that is Eurosonic. In that sense, symbolic capital is, as Bourdieu (1980, 262) pointed out, “a ‘credit’ which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic’ profits.”

Singer and performer Marije Boonstra experienced this approval after she had performed at the Grunnsonic element of the festival in 2016 and 2017 with her folk duo MyDearestDear. MyDearestDear was a singer-songwriter duo from Groningen, consisting of multi-instrumentalists Boonstra and Tristam de Rooij. Their minimalistic and dreamy indie folk songs were characterized by the use of smaller instruments (such as ukulele, travel guitar or mini-synth), close harmony singing and unconventional (“dreamy”) song structures.²⁶⁶ MyDearestDear never had a manager, booker or record label. For two consecutive years, 2016 and 2017, they performed on Grunnsonic as a direct result from their application to perform at the event. Both (pop-up) performances took place in clothing and shoe store Men at Work, which was located in Groningen’s main shopping street, De Herestraat. When asked about concrete results from doing the shows at Grunnsonic, she noted how the performances added to their status as reputable artists:

Small bookings within, as well as outside the province. Perhaps some increased status as a musician in the city [Groningen]. I remember how a student platform was honored that we would perform for them, since we had [...] performed on [Groningen’s summer art festival] Noorderzon and Eurosonic.²⁶⁷

Boonstra did make the distinction between the showcase for regional acts, Grunnsonic, and the main program, Eurosonic. “Grunnsonic,” she stated, “is a great platform to spotlight local bands and for a band to be able to refer to. It is the case, however, that Grunnsonic is quite accessible for regional bands [...] which makes it perhaps less special.”²⁶⁸ “Less special,” what Boonstra refers to, relates to the notion that the gatekeeping position governs the amount of symbolic capital that is attributed when granted access by a particular authority. Because getting access to Grunnsonic is less competitive (after all, one has to compete with local artists only instead of the artists on a European level) it “commands” less authority. After all, “this ‘authority,’” Bourdieu wrote (1980, 265), “is nothing other than ‘credit’ with a set of agents who constitute ‘connections’ whose value is proportionate to the credit they themselves command.”

The term “gatekeeper” refers to how an influential decision maker is able to function as a filter in a (or any) system of production. In the art world, Peterson (1994, 172) notes: “[G]atekeeping has to do with accepting or rejecting works or their creators and the consequences of these choices for subsequent works and creators.” In the music

266 Poparchief Groningen: <https://m.poparchiefgroningen.nl/bands/my-dearest-dear> and ESNS archive: <http://www.iprecom.nl/noorderslag/archief/index.php?year=2016&day=GRUNN&country=NL&find=mydearestdear> “Our main ambition was to have people enjoy our music and evoke emotion and to also create a certain atmosphere,” singer Marije Boonstra stated. Response to author’s questionnaire, 10-09-2019.

267 Marije Boonstra, in discussion with author, September 2019.

268 *Ibid.*

world, one example of such a person would be the festival booker, who filters out what they consider to be the best artist to perform on the particular event line up the booker is responsible for.

Artistic careers are dependent upon decisions and efforts from other people. In fact, Howard Becker (1982) argues that all art forms rely on a division of labor. That is, as he refers to it, on *core* personnel (the artist) and *support* personnel (peripheral actors). While the line between core and support personnel is often blurred, musicians should realize they're part of the music chain, not just the beginning or the end. Acknowledging these processes, and pursuing informed collaboration with gatekeepers is what is necessary to thrive in the art (music) world.

Becker's theory calls attention to how the artist is merely one participant in the system that is the music world. A showcase festival is the perfect example of how this gatekeeping system becomes reality. In a field where "quality" is arbitrary, gatekeepers are essential in furthering artist's careers. After all, as Christian Holl Buhl points out: "Of course you have to be good enough, but what is good enough, you know? That is also [dependent on] trends and a lot of factors that come into play. You also need to be lucky that you have the sound of the moment."²⁶⁹ For artists, then, finding a "cultural broker" (DiMaggio 1977, Jezweski & Sotnik, 2001), i.e. someone who can function as an intermediary between artist and gatekeepers (e.g. business managers) is often pivotal.²⁷⁰ At least, as Finnegan (2007) showed in her study on local music-making, music networks are established through commitment and joint collective efforts.

All of this relates to the production of culture perspective. This integrated approach recognizes that artistic endeavors are mediated by creation, production and distribution, rather than viewing them as opposing, or "mirroring" one another (Peterson 1994, 164). As Peterson elaborates: "The production of culture perspective focuses on how the content of culture is influenced by the milieux in which it is created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved." (1994, 165) When projecting this approach onto music industry events such as showcase festivals, where the mobility of music and artists is the highest stake, it seems evident that contending with the festival through this strategic lens, provides a more fruitful approach than feeling disadvantaged and becoming resentful. However frustrating some arbitrary organizational decisions might be, the challenge then is to retract, integrate, reconsider and re-strategize for the next move forward.

269 Christian Holl Buhl, in discussion with author, January 2020.

270 Examples of such "brokers" are booking agents for the live music sector and the Artist & Repertoire managers in the recording industry.

5.6 Building networks:

Professionalization over time

I'm not completely cynical, by the way, but I think you shouldn't take it too seriously. - Elias Elgersma

Bands that have performed multiple times at the event, in different years, all mention how their attitude and strategy had changed as the band and the awareness of how the event functions developed. Sometimes their first show was indeed just another show, but if they were to perform again in the next year, they would strategize in order to gain the most from the event. This was associated with increased professionalism from the act themselves, as their career and networks developed over time, but was also related to an increased knowledge and awareness of the potential impact of the event.

Older, more experienced musicians tend to approach the festival differently. Still acknowledging its potential, but leaving behind the romantic narrative in favor of a more pragmatic, pro-active strategy. One example of this is described by front man of alternative-indie rock band Lawn, Titus van 't Veer. Throughout their twelve-year career, Lawn performed on Eurosonic four times. During Eurosonic in 1999 (VERA), in 2000 (Huize Maas), 2002 (PLATO) and 2003 (De Troubadour). In addition, they performed for the Noorderslag part of the festival in 2004. In the aftermath of that first performance, they became more aware of the potential of being booked on the festival. This was also related to the size of the event, the exclusivity of the smaller early festival editions as Van 't Veer states:

I don't want to say I could barely hold my guitar, but as a band we were in our infant stages. [...] That showcase was one of the first gigs we ever did, so that was definitely no picnic yet. Let alone that there were any international ambitions. We were mostly concerned with how we'd survive that half hour. [...] "Perhaps now it wouldn't be such a big deal anymore, because there are so many performance locations nowadays, but back then it was.

Lawn's second Eurosonic show was in 2000 and took place in Huize Maas, another historic music venue in the city center of Groningen. This time the band was indeed more aware of the potential of Eurosonic, especially in terms of media and networking outreach. "Not even on an international level," Van 't Veer stated, "but in that it would be nice if people would write some reviews of the show."²⁷¹ Being more concerned with the potential career benefits, Van 't Veer recalled not being too content with the time and location of the performance and contacted festival booker Peter Sikkema to discuss:

I was like: "So we won this prize [the performance was the result of winning the

271 Titus van 't Veer, in discussion with author, July 2019.

Groningen Pop = Prima award in the previous year] – thinking, therefore, that we were something special – and now we were booked as opening act in the [smaller] front stage of Huize Maas. I would have preferred to perform somewhat later in the evening. Then Peter said: ‘Don’t worry man, just play there. You’ll see that it will be really great. A crowd will turn up, especially for the first act...’ And he was right, the place was packed. [...] It was one of our best shows ever.²⁷²

After their second Eurosonic show, the band was fully aware of the showcasing possibilities of Eurosonic. What became evident was that having Eurosonic on your CV as a band, enhanced your status. If bookings or deals were not made instantly, surely the reputation made making connections easier, as Van ‘t Veer recalls:

After our first two gigs at Eurosonic received reviews and gained some national visibility, Eurosonic manifested itself as a networking reception. I remember some editions where we would just stand in front of the large entrance doors of the large stage in VERA. There you see people walking in and out, and we were just standing there talking to some twenty people from 11 PM until 3 AM. That also makes things happen. Your visibility, the conversations... In that respect Eurosonic plays a significant part. Not just the playing, but the networking moment is very convenient. [...] Talking face to face still always works best.²⁷³

When they wouldn’t receive an invitation from the Eurosonic bookers in the following years, the band would become more proactive. Van ‘t Veer remembered how the band lobbied themselves in the following festival editions:

After our show in Huize Maas we realized that this was a festival we had to be part of. [...] We were convinced we had to be there, so [when we weren’t asked] we lobbied with [Plato Record Store owner] Appie Clermonts for a slot. By that point it was important to us to be visible at Eurosonic. The first time you’re happy just to play there, but by the second time you become aware that Eurosonic does indeed matter. Huize Maas was a good show for us with good audience feedback, so next time we have to make sure to be there, was how we figured.²⁷⁴

After Lawn broke up, Van ‘t Veer’s role changed to the opposite side. As a booker for Freeze, a festival for Frisian acts exclusively, he scouted bands himself at Eurosonic and has indeed booked acts that he saw at Eurosonic. As project manager from Frisian music promotion platform Friesland Pop, Van ‘t Veer knows how bands are pushed to create interest prior to the event. As he describes it, his strategy was to:

Attract people, think of something playful that stands out. Somehow you have to

272 *Ibid.*

273 Titus van ‘t Veer, in discussion with author, July 2019.

274 *Ibid.*

get noticed. That is not always possible. You're in such a big pile, everyone is so overwhelmed... Everybody has the same strategy. So try to get noticed somehow. Just try to get those international types to your showcase [...]. So the upscaling toughens the game. You have to be even more persistent and do even more preparatory work. The best thing is to be in contact with people ahead of time and to make sure they're committed to see you. That requires some more effort.²⁷⁵

This adoption of activities outside of performing is associated with the boundaryless career model (Arthur and Rousseau 1996, Sullivan and Arthur 2006, 28), which describes how career mobility, both physically (actual movement) and psychologically (personal growth) is moving away from traditional, perhaps more static, organizational models of pursuing a career. Besides developing one's skills and earning a higher salary, individuals pursuing boundaryless careers are inclined to cross psychological boundaries for the sake of personal growth. While physical movement (e.g. traveling to another city to do a show) might be an obvious and accepted element of music practice, networking is something not every musician is comfortable with. But, as De Jansz & Forret (2008, 629) claim in their practical assertion of networking capabilities: "In this era of boundaryless careers, with individuals making frequent career moves and needing to get up-to-speed quickly, networking is seen as a critical competency."

Each of the four performances Lawn did at Eurosonic appealed to the band differently, which supports the point that the expectations of what artists could gain from the event differed as individual careers developed (and, in turn, as the festival gained status and popularity in those years). In that respect, doing a showcase is a reciprocal endeavor. That is, it is not just the festival taking artists by the hand and shaping their career, the festival also provides a platform for active engagement and opportunity. Artists that performed at the festival multiple times, reported on how they learned to adjust to the conventions and dynamics of the festival. They increasingly became accustomed to locations, stages and audiences over the years. Consequently, it became easier to identify what they wanted to gain from the event and set out strategies on how to obtain it.

Joey Dussel reported a similar experience. With his pop-rock band MakeBelieve, he performed multiple times on Eurosonic and fringe events between 2008 and 2016.²⁷⁶ MakeBelieve was formed in the Frisian capital of Leeuwarden during their time studying at D'Drive, a school for performance art and event production. As part of their curriculum, the band was allowed to assemble a goodie bag for ESNS conference participants. The band made clever use of the opportunity and pressed some CDs, composed a band bio and secretly added them to the conference bag. "We used to do these kinds of naughty things just to get some exposure," Dussel explained. MakeBelieve always tried to optimize the opportunities at the festival, a strategy often undertaken by local bands specifically. Dussel

275 Titus van 't Veer, in discussion with author, July 2019.

276 The band participated in a band competition organized by Dutch music TV network The Music Factory (TMF) in 2008, which catapulted their career. They have done a sold out club tour, were awarded the radio network title *3FM Serious Talent* and performed throughout Europe on festivals, such as Sziget (HU). They released two albums: *City Lights* (No label, 2010) and *Matter of Time* (BrainZone, 2016).

explains:

[...] There hasn't been a ESNS time where we did nothing. We always did things. [...] We just wanted to do three or four shows over the festival weekend. Because as we had the feeling, as act from Groningen, we wanted to do something during this special moment. [...] Everyone's here. Literally everyone. So as an upcoming band it is very easy to approach people and invite them. [...] Our strategy, really, was to create as many opportunities as possible to invite people. For it was quite possible that a certain person could not make it on Wednesday or Thursday, but perhaps could on Friday.²⁷⁷

While the band was motivated to make the most of the event, Dussel doubts if it had any effect. "Look, imagine if we wouldn't have done anything during the rest of the year, but only were active during ESNS, I'm not sure if that moment alone can be decisive for a career. I can't assess that. But ESNS is something to be part of." In that period the shows at Eurosonic were part of a much larger movement of progressing the band. The band's management was important in establishing the connections with the festival bookers, Dussel thinks. "I think that was more important than the label."

However, doing the shows at Eurosonic felt important to MakeBelieve at the time. Being ambitious and creating opportunities in the city you know so well was important, especially as a young band, Dussel points out: "At that moment, when you're young and things are happening you don't want to miss out..., I think sounded and felt more important than it actually was." A hindsight observation which traces back to what Moonlizards' Ricky van Duuren described earlier, the sentiment that particularly younger bands are willing to invest, regardless of conditions, for the benefit of their career. As musicians get older and more experienced, that sentiment tends to change and other strategies are deployed.

Another example of how bands connect to the event differently over time is provided by Nemesea. Gothic metal band Nemesea was formed in Groningen in 2002 by singer Manda Ophuis and guitarist Hendrik-Jan (HJ) de Jong. Their debut album *Mana* (Ebony Tears) was released in 2004. After a successful crowd funding campaign with Dutch crowdsourcing campaign Sellaband, Nemesea released their second album *In Control* in 2007, followed by *The Quiet Resistance* (Napalm records, 2011), *Uprise* (Napalm Records, 2016) and *White Flag* (Napalm Records, 2019). They performed at two editions of Eurosonic: in 2005 and in 2008. In 2005 the location was Het Tehuis, a venue in the city center close to the Vismarkt.²⁷⁸ The themed metal-only night featured five acts (including Nemesea) that were showcased by Groverpop, a local organization in

277 Eigenlijk wilden we gewoon 3 of 4 keer spelen dat Noorderslagweekend. Toch omdat je wel het gevoel hebt als Groningse band dat je wel wat wil doen tijdens de mooie tijd zeg maar. [...] Iedereen is hier. Echt iedereen. Dus als beginnende band is het wel heel makkelijk om mensen te benaderen en uit te nodigen. Of ze komen weet je natuurlijk niet. [...] De strategie was echt om zoveel mogelijk momenten te creëren en mensen uit te nodigen. Het kon best zijn namelijk dat een bepaald persoon op bijvoorbeeld woensdag of donderdag niet kon, maar misschien wel op vrijdag. Joey Dussel, in discussion with author, September 2019.

278 The building was demolished in 2005.

Groningen concerned with supporting and promoting local talent. De Jong explained how the performance was a catalyst in establishing their connection with a Frisian booking agency:

They really came to see us to find out if we could collaborate. Before that we were only doing support shows with [Dutch gothic band] After Forever. [...] But didn't have a booking agency. Until that Eurosonic show we were mainly a support act. From that moment on we collaborated with [booking agency] MBN Productions and did some shows.²⁷⁹

The European focus, however, was not relevant to Nemesea at that moment: "We didn't notice anything about the European focus. We knew we played at Eurosonic and foreign parties could be present. However, we were only concerned with the Dutch market. [...] We didn't look beyond that." This Dutch focus changed when the band performed again in 2008. By that time the band was part of booking agency AT, a large agency located in Amsterdam. They performed at Platformtheater, which was a MOJO and AT showcase event.²⁸⁰ Due to this connection, the international music industry focus was much more explicit. After a successful crowdfunding campaign (Sellaband) Nemesea signed with renowned British manager David Arden. The show at Eurosonic, then, was primarily aimed at attracting European bookers and establishing new international contacts. While the performance failed to result in further international connections, HJ became aware of the importance of having a solid organizational structure supporting the band:

Then we suddenly realized: as a band you're in the middle, and you're surrounded by all these parties. And if they fail to cooperate properly, then the band stagnates. Then it all fell apart. [...] What you notice is, that when some new party enters the scene and they feel that the band might be good, but the organizational circle is not strong enough, they will back out. If the booking agency doesn't do their job, or the label, or the management, forget it. Then everything will respond to everything and people become more cautious. As a band, that is frustrating to witness, because there is nothing you can do.²⁸¹

HJ's reflection brings up the interesting point that, as a band, you need a competent and collaborative network to infiltrate another network.

Howard Becker argued in his seminal work *Art Worlds* (1982) how artists are at the center of a network that surrounds them, a "[...] network of people whose cooperative

279 "Dat was eigenlijk het eerste optreden dat zij voor ons hebben geregeld. Zij kwamen daar echt kijken of ze iets met ons konden doen. Daarvoor deden we alleen maar supportshows met After Forever. [...] Maar we hadden toen geen boeker. Tot aan dat optreden van ES waren hoofdzakelijk support act. Vanaf dat moment zijn we gaan samenwerken met MBN en hebben wel optredens gedaan." HJ de Jong, in discussion with author, June 2018.

280 MOJO Concerts was founded in 1968, and is the largest music organizing and promoting agency in the Netherlands.

281 HJ de Jong, in discussion with author, June, 2018.

activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for” (Becker 2008, xxiv, preface to first edition). For Becker, every step in the production process of creating an artwork (in any of the arts) is responsible for the manufacturing, distribution, and, eventually, society’s validation of the work. That is, a cooperative effort in which there is consensus and a joint goal in which “[...] no specialized functional groups develop” (Becker 2008, 25). In other words, art is a collective activity, a process, in which art works are shaped by the whole “art world” that produces them, not just by individual artists. While the value of this “network” of materials, external distribution and reception cannot be denied, the case of showcase festival networks suggest that a network is already established beforehand and, consequently, that network is expanded by having people act as spokespersons for them, often with their own agendas. In other words, the organizational structure already in place surrounding an artist is more likely to advance the career of an artist, rather than the artist doing this themselves. This organizational structure might, however, also be provided by an artist themselves. In a self-management scenario, the same rules apply.

For Danish agent Christian Holl Buhl it is very clear what an artist can gain from Eurosonic and which strategies to follow: “So those are the two things that you can win here: [find] missing business partnerships for an artist or media exposure for the artist. Or live opportunities. ES is especially strong in that area. I think you don’t have any business event in Europe that has that many festival bookers from all over Europe. Such a strong unique selling point for ES.”²⁸²

According to Holl Buhl, having a team, or at least some sort of professionalized band profile is crucial to further one’s career at showcase events. “I would always be careful about Reeperbahn and even Eurosonic as a complete newcomer,” he points out. “If you don’t have a team that’s established behind you, then I would be careful.”²⁸³ Buhl elaborates on this “warning” and elaborates upon how he feels a band should strategize when approaching a show at a showcase event:

[C]ome well prepared. If you don’t have a manager, spend time... maybe buy an accreditation for the band so you access to the delegates database. Because if you have a conference badge you can actually go in and prepare. Know what you’re looking for and then start digging through that database and work. Work and prepare. Work and prepare. If you’re looking for a booking agent in a specific market, figure out which agencies are there. And then figure out which artists they work with. And figure out if your sound might match with some of those guys. Do the homework, reach out to the guy personally. Put an email out that shows that you did your homework. Not just some general “hey, check us out,” but say: “hey, I looked at your roster and see that you’re working with these acts and it might be a match with our profile and we’re actually looking to do a tour in your market and we got a release...” The more you can show in terms of professionalism

282 Christian Holl Buhl, in discussion with author, January 2020.

283 *Ibid.*

[the better]... [...] So if you reach out you have to document that you've done your homework and that you're ready. And not just reach out at random. And most bands, even professionals, they don't do that. I think that's the biggest favor you can do for yourself. [...] People will actually take you seriously, but if you are sending out random newsletters with flyers, people feel that it's just random. And they already have so much on their agenda, so. I think that's a big improvement. If an artist does that they have improved their chances a lot. So I think if artist are just crying that Eurosonic is exploiting them, and it's so big, and it doesn't make... But then you should ask: "what did you do? What did *you* do?" OK, you don't have a manager? Doesn't make you a victim, did you *do* anything?...²⁸⁴

This professionalized attitude to building networks in order to further careers underscores many respondents' earlier claim that no band gets "discovered" by accident: in order to make it, a band needs professional industry representatives that help establish new networks. Or as Mark Lada put it: "I believe that if no preparatory networking has been done, or there is no "buzz" around the band, or there are some connections already... I don't think you get discovered on a showcase festival."²⁸⁵

Inspired by what he saw at the world's largest showcase festival, SXSW in Austin (TX, USA), Lada has organized his own peripheral event during Eurosonic in The Gym, a former school premises located in the heart of the city center. For three consecutive years, 2014 (*Back in the Saddle*) 2015 (*Still in the Saddle*) and 2016 (*Zadelpijn*), Lada initiated the events to provide opportunity for local befriended bands to perform and present more experimental "art-scene" music. "Eurosonic, although they wouldn't want to hear it," he states, "has become quite corporate." So the more experimental, really avant-garde, has no place on Eurosonic... or [those acts] want to perform at more exiting locations. The Gym very much met this criteria, it was a stimulating place, somewhat more embedded within the arts scene. [...] It was never my aim to rebel against Eurosonic or something, we just wanted to throw a party."²⁸⁶

Lada recalled how the ESNS organization was motivated to keep some organizational supervision over unofficial events as they insisted on an alternative time schedule: bands that also performed on Eurosonic were only allowed to perform at our event at night after 1 AM. Local digital news platform *Sikkom* also reported on this urge for organizational control and stated that the organization threatens to ban acts permanently from the official program if they perform on a (free accessible) non-official event.²⁸⁷ "Since a couple of years you're not allowed anymore to play at unofficial events," Elgersma adds. "They're quite strict about that, they just cut you from the official program." When discussing the unofficial festival events, however, Elgersma claimed these initiatives add substantially to the dynamics of the event as a whole:

284 Christian Holl Buhl, in discussion with author, January 2020.

285 Mark Lada, in discussion with author, September 2019.

286 *Ibid.*

287 Willem Groeneveld, *Despite Sometimes Rightful Criticism ESNS is a Blessing for Groningen*. 18-01-2019. <https://www.sikkom.nl/ondanks-soms-terechte-kritiek-is-esns-een-zegen-voor-groningen/>

That's what makes Eurosonic very cool in regards to other showcase festivals. Because the unofficial program is so huge. From 11 AM... there's something to see around the clock almost. And fat parties in East. Euromoney. Then you can perform for 400 people at 5 AM. That is very cool of course. That's what makes it so great, sort of a "rock ADE."²⁸⁸

Elgersma concludes: "Through the years we performed there a lot with The Homesick, especially on the unofficial events and they're always a lot of fun. It's an extension of Christmas, really. After the holidays there suddenly is four days of Eurosonic... everyone you know is there." His statements reflect how the national and international appeal of Eurosonic is of great benefit to the city of Groningen, the music scene and its (informal) networking potential. The more obscured career impact resulting from social contact is what often remains under the radar, but the event functions as an important meeting place for local musicians to engage in informal networking and socializing. For example, strengthening contacts, hearing scoops from other bands, learning about band vacancies, hearing rumors and making new friends are important activities. Respondents all mentioned the importance of this informal network potential and that many career decisions are based on personal connections, a matter of "who knows who." In a similar vein, MakeBelieve singer Joey Dussel mentioned how he thinks the festival is important for the city, being the foremost showcase festival in the Netherlands, encapsulating the stance of many interviewees: "Everyone is there, also many people from abroad. It is really big. I think it's fantastic that Groningen is still the place of events. For a while, there were ideas to move the festival to Amsterdam, but that would be a disaster. It's such a big name. And Groningen is a beautiful city. You can do everything by foot, that is great. That's what really makes it unique." Mark Lada added: "I do think that Eurosonic is the European equivalent of SXSW."

5.7 Conclusion: When the Smoke Clears

As a curated event with significant national and international status, Eurosonic has built a strong name as "quality filter," providing symbolic capital to whoever is granted access to the event. While regional musicians are skeptical of the career benefits of Eurosonic as showcase, its function as CV enhancer is evident. The European outreach and international significance often impacts an artist's career, even if a performance doesn't have immediate measurable positive consequences. Performing at Eurosonic provides exactly this stamp of approval that artists can put on their CV, potentially allowing them access further on in their career. Interviewees often outlined the necessity to address this in their marketing outlets.

The size of the event ensures that groups without a "buzz" and well-developed

²⁸⁸ Elgersma's comparison to the hugely popular five-day conference and festival for electronic music, Amsterdam Dance Event (ADE), relates to the dynamic, vibrant and prolific nature of ADE.

organizational and promotional structure become easily obscured. From nineteen bands participating in the first edition to currently over 350 acts, default visibility and promotion has waned. Creating interest and having a network in place have therefore become essential to benefit from the event. The romantic idea of being “discovered” without any preparatory work is considered an illusory, romanticized narrative, a narrative nurtured by marketing and media outlets as an incentive for new acts to apply. Musicians who have strong connections in the professional music business do indeed have a better chance of becoming successful professionals than those that lack these connections (Zwaan 2009, 107). Artists learn what to gain from Eurosonic as their career evolves and the notion that Eurosonic provides a formula for the romantic desire to be discovered is discarded in favor of a more rational approach and work ethic.

As an artist you are at the center of a network of people around you, as acclaimed socialist Howard Becker (1982) suggested. To make use of these connections is pivotal in advancing one’s career at a showcase festival. Artists should be aware of the position they take in the music industry “system”. Before any performance, recording or transcription reaches an audience, gatekeepers such as cultural intermediaries and “brokers,” all play their role in the process. Contrary to popular belief, a musician’s artistic product, then, is not merely the result of the solitary endeavor of the lone genius, but it is a joint effort of many people who shape the development. If artists work hard to identify which of these players are essential in furthering their career, these products become tools with which to build a successful career trajectory.

The event mirrors to what extent the artists are professionalized, exposing some as inadequate or underdeveloped, i.e. “not ready.” This, however, is not simply a judgment which is “imposed” on an artist as an act of oppression. Rather, the responsibility lies with the artist, not with the platform. The challenge is how to work *with* the event and the window of opportunity it provides. And to persist, even when circumstances diminish the chances. As psychologists Andrew Evans and Glenn Wilson (1999, 52) underscore the importance of motivation: “Drive, determination, persistence, single-mindedness, ambition (call it what you will), can make all the difference between triumph and obscurity.”

On a final note, the present study by no means claims to be exhaustive and should be regarded as only the start of more extensive research on this comprehensive subject. In this chapter, for example, all Eurosonic (sub)events were treated equally, i.e. no distinction was made between shows that were given on the main Eurosonic program and (albeit official) sub-events such as GrunnSonic and PlatoSonic. It is reasonable to assume that Grunnsonic attracted a different (professional) audience than shows done by (international) acts in the main Eurosonic program on more primary locations and time slots. Therefore, possible avenues for future research might entail including variables to measure the individual impact of the festival components. Also, interesting insights might be gained from gathering similar data from other European showcase festivals to gauge the significance of other (location-specific) contextual factors.

Chapter 6 “Showcasing Europe”: European Showcase Festival Networks

If I would, finally, make an effort to synthesize in one single formula the main identifying meaning the combination of all these symbols tend to construct for Europe, I would confirm the ideas of Europe as eccentric, decentered and translational: Europe is characterized by its *desire for elevating contacts with others!* - Johan Fornäs (2012, 265)

In the previous chapters I revealed how ESNS is embedded within historical narratives of festivalization arising after the post-war period and how its development informed its current status as a fulcrum of the European music industry. In the early and mid-2000s, ESNS adopted European transnational music industry strategies to actively stimulate the circulation of European repertoires (See Chapters 3 and 4). But what has been under the radar thus far, is how other European showcase festivals relate to ESNS. How do they differ and in what ways are they similar? Are they inter-related and, if so, how? And, more broadly, how do other showcase events imagine Europe and conceptualize a common European music industry?

Although academic attention for music festivals has increased in recent years (e.g. McKay 2015, Wynn 2015, St John 2017), the rise and increasing relevance of (European) music *showcase* festivals have been largely overlooked in scholarly research. Within festival studies, three general discourses are typically at play: sociological and cultural impact of festivals in society, festival management and organization, and the role of festivals for tourism (Getz 2010). In the case of showcase festivals, however, two other discourses are prevalent: festivals as a vehicle for the music industry as business enterprises and, perhaps its core focus, their role in developing artistic careers. After all, the core function of a showcase performance is to draw attention and interest from music industry professionals. Considering the lack of academic conceptualization of this specific type of festival event, this chapter can also be understood as a first attempt to discuss and theorize the increasing visibility of European showcase festivals and their influence on the development of local and translocal music economies.

To this end I turn my attention to three European showcase events. These events, Reeperbahn (Hamburg), SPOT (Aarhus), and MENT (Ljubljana), were chosen based on their geographically dispersed locations (Northern -, West -, and South-Central European) as well as their contrasting characteristics in size, scope, focus, and background, to compare and contrast how they imagine Europe as a music market. Through ethnographic fieldwork I trace the ways in which these events navigate between local, national and transnational networks and explored how they connect to ESNS.

Here is a table (*figure 14*) with an overview of these events and, for the sake of completeness and comparison, Eurosonic.

Showcase event:	Founded:	City/Country:	Total number of visitors in 2019:	Temporal structure and characteristics:
Eurosonic	1995	Groningen, Netherlands	42.000	Three-day showcase event + conference. Non-profit. European artists only. Strong focus on live acts
Reeperbahn	2006	Hamburg, Germany	50.000	Four-day showcase and public event + conference. Focused on the global recorded and live music market.
SPOT	1994	Aarhus, Denmark	8.000	Three-day showcase + conference. Strong regional event focused on the Danish and the Nordic music industries.
MENT	2015	Ljubljana, Slovenia	5000	Three-day smaller showcase event + conference. Focused mostly on the Balkan region but also European market. Experimental and underground music genres.

Figure 14. Overview of showcase events

Reeperbahn Festival, SPOT and MENT provoked my interest because of their contrasting characteristics as well as their position in the European showcase festival landscape. Each festival operates in a different (geographical) area within the European music industry, but all aim to establish and maintain connections within a transnational music scene and transcend national borders for their featured artists. SPOT (1994) is a strong regional event focused on the Nordic countries, Reeperbahn Festival (2006) has become an established commercial industry event for the North-Western parts of Europe and MENT (2015) is an upcoming smaller event in music markets in Southeastern Europe, industries that have been underdeveloped internationally for various (often political) reasons. In the following, the analysis of the case of MENT reveals how cultural memory, emotion and affect (Bennett and Rogers 2016) inform an underground music scene, which aims carefully to develop an international network. In juxtaposing these events and tracing their connections I map how they oscillate between inscribing a local scene and mediating trans-local scenes (Bennett and Peterson 2004), each with their own agendas, specificities, and singularities.

Integrating these multitude of perspectives and the varied ways they produce culture (Peterson 1994) requires a variety of research methods. I have therefore utilized a multi-layered approach. This entailed a combination of historical analysis of archival

data (insofar available) as well as real-time (on-site) collection of primary ethnographic material.²⁸⁹ The cases under study will then be subject to what Testa (2019, 6) has designated as a third irreplaceable methodological tool, that of *critical comparison*. Not only do I discuss their respective biographies and industry dynamics, I will also consider how these festivals exist in relationship to the urban spaces they occupy. That is, how they create valuable experiences for festival participants, industry representatives, and for audiences. Surveying the festival site and its (urban) surroundings in order to observe and identify similarities and differences between the various festival spaces, allowed me to compare and contrast gathered external information with my own experiences.

This approach will reveal how these festivals channel and negotiate collective action processes. In other words, how they function as, what organizational scholars Lampel and Meyer (2008) referred to, as Field-Configuring Events. They define Field-Configuring Events (FCEs) as:

temporary social organizations such as trade shows, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets, and industries. [A]renas in which networks are constructed, business cards are exchanged, reputations are advanced, deals are struck, news is shared, accomplishments are recognized, standards are set, and dominant designs are selected (2008, 1026).

According to this definition, showcase festivals are key examples of FCEs, which provides for a fruitful theoretical framework. Indeed, showcase festivals can be the crystalized result of the developing professionalization of a field, but can also structure, (re)shape or instigate change. In that sense showcase festivals, as FCEs, can be understood as both the products and the drivers of field evolution (2008, 1028).

Representatives of each event acknowledged the importance to find their own position in an ever expanding European festival market in order to create and maintain a sustainable foundational framework. While this results in evident mutual differences, they are also modeled after more experienced events and successful formulas.²⁹⁰ All festivals described below, for example, provide an industry oriented conference as part of the festival. This serves as an effective collaborative initiative to invite a network of international key players and establish connections during the event.

Eurosonic, as the longest-running and successful international music industry event is often seen as the example and precursor to many newer and upcoming showcase event in a field where these industry events become more and more alike. Not only are they leading this process, they also are seen as capable of adjusting it due to their leading

289 This included interviews with key players from each festival, such as festival directors, conference organizers, bookers, export office directors, journalists, musicians and festival attendants as well as participant observation. Also, showcase events tend to leave an explicit and documented record of the proceedings and events statistics, so this too was a helpful source of information.

290 SPOT founder Gunnar K. Madsen stated how SPOT "[...] was definitely very inspired by Eurosonic's model." Interview with author, 01-05-2019.

reputation.²⁹¹ This process can be understood as *isomorphism*, which DiMaggio and Powell (1991, 70) describe as a process in which “organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful.” In other words, organizations become structurally more similar due to constraining field forces or imitation in the pursuit of institutional legitimacy.

However, based on the material presented in this chapter I will suggest that the European music industry is more regional, national and transnational than it is European. In other words, each showcase festival operates within their perceived market before imagining the European music market as one unified entity. This view supports Sassatelli’s (2009, 198) conclusion that “[...] European identity is not one among many, but rather there are many of them [...]”. In her book *Becoming Europeans* (2009), Sassatelli investigates how narratives of European identity intervene with what it means to be European, individually as well as collectively. The multiplicity of specifics and characteristics, she argues, is what constitutes Europeanness. It is to be found in the particularities of individual conceptualizations of how a European music industry could be utilized and developed. The cases described in this chapter exemplify just that: regional qualities and national singularities are employed towards collaborations on a transnational European stage.

Before zooming in on the case studies, however, a useful step is to first establish a definition of what is considered to be a showcase festival and also provide some context on the phenomenon’s historical development.

6.2 Showcase festivals: Definition, Formats, and Historical Context

The structure of an organizational field cannot be determined a priori but must be defined on the basis of empirical investigation. DiMaggio and Powell (1991, 65)

Music festivals, I argue, can roughly be subdivided in two categories: those that (primarily) serve the interests of the audience and those that (primarily) serve the interests of the music industry. Festivals that serve the interest of the audience are curated to satisfy the tastes and expectations of spectators (and thus boost ticket sales) and therefore choose the line-up accordingly. Organizers are concerned with providing the public the most pleasing aesthetic experience first and foremost, in their attempt to organize an event that matches their artistic and commercial vision. Glastonbury (UK), Roskilde (DK), Rock am Ring (GER) and Pinkpop (NL) are just four established examples of audience-focused festivals, attracting many thousands of people annually. Research in this area has focused primarily on, for example, historical significance (Hillstrom 2013, Harsløf

291 Head of the Slovenian Music Information Centre (CIGIC), Peter Baroš, for example, stated: “Because [Eurosonic] is a huge one and bands who are playing in a huge festival will probably set a new trend of music. [...] So I feel Eurosonic is somehow setting the trend of what will be popular in the live music scene in the next period.” Interview with author, 06-01-2020.

2020), sociological perspectives (Till 2010, Bennett 2014) or urban development (Holt and Wergin 2013, Wynn 2015, Cudny 2016).

A showcase festival, however, is aimed primarily at serving the interests of the *industry*, i.e. the professional mobility of performers and industry gatekeepers. In its broadest sense then, a showcase festival can be defined as *a field-configuring event for the music industry where artists perform to present themselves to a professional industry audience, pursuing connections to further their career*. Showcase festivals not only provide artists with a platform to be discovered, they also stimulate music business networking and have an educational purpose. A showcase festival typically presents a combination of live music performances and a conference program (emphasizing education, innovation and business) in order to function as a fulcrum of the music industry it aims to represent. Showcase festivals thus support the music industry on multiple levels: Besides their focus on the artists, also music professionals (e.g. label representatives, bookers, managers and media) can benefit greatly from these events. Not only are they allowed opportunities to spot undiscovered musical talent, they also offer a platform for developing their professional network. Staying informed and up to date as well as networking has proven to be of pivotal importance for professionals working in the music business (see, for example, Kimpel, 1999, 2005). The showcase festival's main concern for the industry is not to say that there is no public interest in these events. Quite the contrary: many visitors who attend showcase festivals highly value the opportunity to obtain a curated behind the scenes look into the music industry and the artists they regard as having (international) potential. As many acts are still relatively unknown, they mostly perform on the smaller, more accessible stages. This allows the audience to experience this "raw musical talent" in a small setting. Finally, as the cases discussed in this chapter will illustrate, showcase festivals themselves keep developing in their capacity as field-configuring events in that they can be perceived as vehicles for the creative economy policies. As Fabian Holt (2017, 67) explained: "In those policies, grassroots and independent production are not alternatives to the market but in fact breeding grounds for the market; their purpose is economic."

As with "traditional" music festivals, showcase festivals can also utilize different categories and formats. Some might have a more regional focus (e.g. the Swiss M4Music festival or the Estonian Tallinn Music Week festival), while others have a broader, international outlook, such as SPOT (DK) on Scandinavia, Eurosonic (NL) on Europe, and SXSW (US) on the USA. Also, some showcase events distinguish themselves by focusing on one particular music genre. Such is the case, for example, with the Classical:NEXT festival (NL) which focuses on classical music or Jazzahead (GER), which focuses on the international jazz scene. Other festivals are very much linked to a specific geographical location, such as the hosting city (e.g. Eurosonic in Groningen, SXSW in Austin and Reeperbahn Festival in Hamburg), while an event such as WOMEX (*World Music Expo*) is held annually in different locations throughout Europe.

Finally, as showcase festivals serve different audiences (i.e. professional and non-professional), there is usually a variable amount of exclusivity to the events. Some festival spaces, for example, are for industry showcases exclusively (sometimes invite-

only) where others are (semi-) accessible. As US festival scholar Jonathan Wynn (2015, p. 17) has revealed, three (general) music festival layouts can be distinguished. First, a *citadel* pattern, where the “festival is organized in a way that consolidates and isolates events within a single, bounded space.”²⁹² Secondly, the *confetti pattern*, in which the event is scattered around various locations in and around a city center. It places artists on a variety of unconventional (improvised) stages, “[...] perhaps bringing together the widest array of actors, organizations, and experiences, but also involving the least amount of control over those activities.”²⁹³ Finally, a *core* pattern, in which the festival is located in centered urban space, utilizing various public and private venues and spaces where “passersby have mixed levels of admittance.” In this configuration the city center serves as the location of events, allowing non-participating bars and venues to contribute to the overall experience of the event. Eurosonic, as well as the four cases discussed in this chapter, fall within this latter category.

When thinking of a showcase event, one might first think of World Expos and Fairs, the mega-events that were launched in the mid-nineteenth century through processes of cross-national competition and emulation (Roche 2011, 130). Indeed, the large World Expo events of the mid-nineteenth century were designed to showcase innovations, achievements of nations to the rest of the world. Events such as The Great Exhibition (London 1851), Exposition Universelle (Paris 1889) and New York’s World Fair (New York 1939) focused primarily on industrialization, science and technological innovations (Gold, 2005).²⁹⁴ It wasn’t until after WW II that World Expos, along with art festivals such as the Edinburgh festival (1947), Festival d’Avignon (1947), and the Sanremo Song Contest (1951), became platforms for artistic cultural exchange, aiming to reconnect European countries after the devastating effects of the war.

Starting out as a competition of previously unreleased Italian songs, the *Festival della Canzone Italiana di Sanremo* (1951), the Italian Sanremo Song Contest, can be regarded as one of the earliest examples of a music festival explicitly aimed at showcasing musical talent. The festival was initiated to promote the Italian song tradition, while also protecting it from non-European influences. This excerpt from *Made in Italy* (Fabbri 2013, 14) of the official presentation of the first edition of the event reveals this showcase character (while, notably, also echoing pre-war Fascist rhetoric):

The influence of African-American and Hispanic-American popular music [...] has become increasingly prominent, and in recent years has imprinted an exotic physiognomy on the songs of various European countries, weakening their original character and making them less consistent with the ethnic and emotional substrate of the peoples from whom they spring. RAI wishes to promote, by means

292 One can think of Pinkpop in the Netherlands or Roskilde in Denmark.

293 SXSW (Austin, Texas) is a prime example of such an event.

294 The famous Eiffel Tower in Paris is one of the technological master pieces built as the entrance to the Paris World fair in 1889. The formal focus of these exhibitions should, however, not obscure the fact that music, theatre, and cultural exhibitions also played an important role in, for example, the Chicago World Fairs (Larson 2004, Carlton 1995).

of a series of initiatives, the rebirth of a truly active spirit in Italian song, and the acquisition of a notable individuality, directing authors and music publishers toward such aims.

For RAI the challenge was to showcase light “decent” music, seeking “[...] a balance between the national popular tradition and the modern pro-American trend” (Agostini 2013, 28). This changed in the late 1950s, when the organizational structure foreshadowed a new, more cosmopolitan outlook (29). From the beginning the Sanremo festival was one of the great media events of the year. By broadcasting the three-night event live, it was radio that was instrumental in making the festival a national event and the most representative showcase for mainstream Italian popular music (Billboard 1967).²⁹⁵

The Sanremo festival was also the inspiration for the Eurovision Song Contest, which was established in 1956 by the European Broadcasting Union to structure tighter relations between European countries (Ecott and Siim, 2015). While its main aim was to unite European countries after the devastations of WWII, it did so by showcasing unknown national talent on a European stage. It wasn’t until the 1960s, however, that the business side of the music industry was explicitly incorporated. European festivals such as the Brighton festival (UK, 1967), MIDEM (France, 1967) were pioneering events in featuring panels and showcases, i.e. exhibitions for selected professionals, of artists and bands.

In the early 1980s, a new interest in approaching culture on a European scale emerged, after some stagnation in the 1970s (Gold, 2005, p. 222). The nascent belief that political and economic integration could benefit from cultural exchange resulted in the EU-sponsored European Cities of Culture programme. In this program member states of the European Community would alternately host an annual arts festival, boosting European collaboration while also maintaining national (cultural) sovereignty. This process of Europeanization in conjunction with the globalization of (music) markets and, later, opening up the European borders (Schengen Treaty 1995) have all played a significant role in the possibilities of international collaboration.

Inspired by the success of the American “Music and Media Conference” South by Southwest (SXSW, Austin 1987), now the largest and arguably most influential showcase festival in the world, music festivals in Europe started to profile themselves more explicitly as showcase festivals since the 1990s.²⁹⁶ Music events such as Eurosonic, SPOT and M4Music (CH) recognized the potential in establishing and cementing these international networks and conferences. Showcases (i.e. often short concerts for a selected or invited audience of professionals), network meetings and (academic) panels became a formalized part of the event, sometimes flanked by a (commercial) live music program

295 Billboard, 4 Feb 1967, p. 55. https://books.google.nl/books?id=-igEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA55&lp-g=PA55&dq=sanremo+music+festival+1951+jury&source=bl&ots=BGO9GJ62il&sig=ACfU3U2UT-tErZqoW8wtsCtv7zUvQ8ab_YA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi5xvLfkuhAhVP2qQKHwu0CXc4ChDoA-TABegQICRAB#v=onepage&q=sanremo%20music%20festival%201951%20jury&f=false

296 Reeperbahn Festival (Hamburg), for example, was founded by Alexander Schultz after he visited SXSW and was inspired to initiate a similar event in Hamburg.

featuring established names.

The music industry's transformation in the digital age in the early 2000s has also dramatically increased the number of showcase events. Now established festivals such as By:Larm (Norway, 1998), Iceland Airwaves (Iceland, 1999), The Great Escape (UK, 2006) and Reeperbahn festival (Germany, 2006) are only a few examples of this trend. As the industry for recorded music lost significance, events driven by live music became an important tool utilized by artists to present themselves to a professional audience and boost their live performance careers (Holt 2010, 2013). Indeed, many new artists today do not anticipate a career by selling music, but are focusing on live performance instead.

More recently, showcase festivals have become catalysts for European cultural collaboration by applying for European funding for programs aimed at stimulating European music networks. One example of such an initiative is the Innovation Network of European Showcases (INES), a European showcase festival collaboration program which was founded in 2017. This EU funded initiative aimed to connect often smaller European showcase festivals in order to stimulate international collaboration and exchange on a European level.²⁹⁷ Its members engage with the network by nominating artists to a talent pool out of which all participating festivals can book artists for the following year.²⁹⁸ This network is exemplary for how the EC stimulates initiatives that promote European unity within the umbrella program, the Creative Europe Program.²⁹⁹ One associated festival is the Slovene MENT festival, which will be discussed in more detail below. In short, European institutions and framework programs have come to realize that showcase festivals offer new perspectives on the "global localities" (Chalcraft and Magaudda 2013, 175) of late modernity and a musical window to European collaboration.

6.3 Case study 1: SPOT festival (Aarhus, Denmark)

Denmark's SPOT festival, held annually in the city of Aarhus, was initiated as a small local initiative in 1994 and developed into an influential showcase event in the 2000s, with a distinct focus on the Danish and the Nordic music industries.³⁰⁰ SPOT offers a

297 The total project grant was 1,997,813.15 EUR and ran from 14 July 2017 - 14 July 2021: <http://www.creativeeuropeuk.eu/funded-projects/innovation-network-european-showcases>

298 As of April 2019, the eighteen participating festivals are: C?O pop festival & Convention (DE, 2004), Budapest Showcase Hub (Hungary, 2016), ENEA Spring Break (Poland, 2014), FOCUS Wales (UK, 2011), Linecheck (Italy, 2016), Live at Heart (Sweden, 2011), Liverpool Sound city (UK, 2008), Mastering the Music Business (Romania, 2016), MENT (Slovenia, 2015), M4Music (Switzerland, 1998), Monkey Week (Spain, 2008), Nouvelle Prague (Czechia, 2013), PIN Music Conference (North Macedonia, 2012), Sharpe Festival (Slovakia, 2018), Sonic Visions (Luxembourg, 2008), Waves Vienna (Austria, 2011), Westway LAB (Portugal, 2014), What's next in music? (Lithuania, 2016).

299 Even festivals that were not necessarily concerned with larger EU goals became associated with the EU project through collaborations with funded artistic companies. The Brighton festival (UK), for example, does not receive EU money directly, but the EU logo is used in promotional materials in acknowledgement of the support that collaborating organizations receive. Segal, J., Giorgi, L. (2009) "Art Festivals and the European Public Culture" (2009) Euro-Festival, Seventh Framework Programme, p. 106.

300 One of the stages at SPOT was reserved for a collaborative project. Roots&Hybrid, a festival-within-a-festival for which separate tickets could be bought, presented acts which blended native with more cosmopolitan music styles. Danish/Turkish band Ipek Yolu, for example, performed there on Friday 3 March 2019, connecting

mix of bands looking for international careers, and a more experimental music program where interdisciplinary collaboration is stimulated. This combination of established and experimental artists provides for the integration of an industry-oriented program with a program for a general audience.

Figure 15. SPOT Festival Aarhus.

The SPOT festival is the culmination of close collaborations between key organizations of the Danish music industry. SPOT has a strong emphasis on Denmark and the Nordic countries: of the 305 featured acts in 2019, approximately 95% were acts coming from the Nordic region.³⁰¹ Also, the associated industry conference attracted 1,414 delegates, of which 1152 were from Denmark and 262 from other Nordic countries and abroad. This provides for a demarcated international framework. The SPOT festival's organizational institutions (ROSA, MXD, PROMUS) are stressing the importance of maintaining the local and translocal (Nordic) cultural narrative, but are also aware of the need for broad intercultural dialogue. While their artistic outlook is primarily concerned with the Danish and Nordic music markets, international networks are of crucial importance to provide artists with connections to the global music market.

Indeed, similar to Eurosonic, the festival aims to provide a platform for artists who qualify as having potential on the international market. The multiple-day layout of the festival, the conference and the artist showcases in multiple venues across the city center bear resemblance to Eurosonic. The demographics of the city of Aarhus also bears

"flavors, smells and sounds from different corners of the globe, connecting the world." (See: <https://www.roskilde-festival.dk/en/years/2019/acts/ipek-yolu/>)The initiative indicates that SPOT stimulates intercultural (western and non-western) cultural exchange, despite its clear focus on the Nordic music industry.

301 Information provided by SPOT press & PR manager Henrik Friis.

some resemblance to Groningen. While the number of citizens of Aarhus (300.000) is larger than Groningen (231.000), Aarhus University and the University of Groningen are of similar size.³⁰² Both cities present a vibrant cultural life and a dynamic urban space for young people. Indeed, head of the festival and MXD vice-president Gunnar K. Madsen explains, “both cities are very similar... the same basic structure to deal with.”³⁰³ The infrastructural conditions make both festivals embedded within the urban city space, rather than a closed-off event.

The SPOT festival concerts take place in various venues across the city center, such as Musikhuset, Scandinavian Congress Center, VoxHall, Atlas, Godsbanen and Radar. While the Congress Center is a modern multi-purpose building (with big windows, a marble floor and housing multiple stages where (classical) concerts, musicals and events are held), the adjacent Godsbanen (meaning “cargo tracks”) is an industrial space with, indeed, a railroad yard overlooking the festival terrain. Godsbanen and the surrounding festival space housed several stages. Though most areas have catering facilities, visitors are allowed to bring their own drinks inside (semi-)closed festival spaces. This tolerant policy adds to the informal festival atmosphere, as do the many decorations, lights, cozy seating areas and food trucks surrounding the Godsbanen venue.

In 2015, a two-day networking and business event was added to the conference program by the name of SPOT+, making the festival a five-day event in 2019. The conference is organized by PROMUS, a local music networking organization concerned with collaborative networks between the established music businesses and new emerging talent. In 2017 the SPOT festival presented 200 shows and attracted approximately 8.000 visitors. 1500 industry representatives participated in the associated SPOT+ conference. The 2019 edition of the Danish SPOT festival took place from May 2-4th. In 2019 audience attendance was approximately 12,000 people. The conference attracted around 1400 music industry professionals who participated in or attended approximately sixty different panels. The festival offered thirty-eight stages on which 356 concerts by 305 acts were performed.

The festival features artists and bands that perform mostly within pop and rock-related genres and all acts that perform on the SPOT festival are curated. The first selection from the applications is made by an (appointed) group of nine industry professionals, where after the three main bookers appoint the final selection. The lineup at SPOT features debuting acts as well as more established ones. The main precondition to be eligible for a showcase is that you have to present new, original material.

From 1995 onwards it has been organized by the Danish Rock Council (ROSA) and Music Export Denmark (MXD). Festival director Gunnar K. Madsen explained that ROSA, MXD and PROMUS are working closely together in organizing the SPOT festival and run one central administration: “[SPOT is a] self-governing institution with a four-year contract with the Ministry of Culture and also the municipality in Aarhus. We have those two contracts and a seven-person board, elected for four years and then we have our

302 33.120 in 2017: <https://international.au.dk/about/profile/keystatistics/students/> University of Groningen: 31.000 students as of 2018: <https://www.rug.nl/about-us/where-do-we-stand/facts-and-figures/>

303 Gunnar K. Madsen, in discussion with author, May 2019.

secretary. But the secretary is the same as ROSA's. So actually to produce the festival SPOT buys [contracts] ROSA to produce it."³⁰⁴

The festival budget is approximately 1.5 million euros. One third of that money is public funding, one third is ticket sales and a third is based on different forms of sponsorship branding. Royal Brew, the second largest brand in Denmark, for example, is a major festival sponsor. A sponsorship deal has also been made with a large shipping company, where SPOT organizes luxurious concerts on the ferry from Copenhagen to Oslo in return for a financial investment. This illustrates how the SPOT festival, which originated as a regional exhibition of musical talent in the music industry, evolved into an event with international stature and sustaining European outreach.

6.3.1 *European Networks*

What common values are we talking about? [...] It's easy for me to have a pretty fine explanation why I support the European idea. But it's also easy to produce a lot of ideas which make me against it.³⁰⁵ – Gunnar K. Madsen

The SPOT festival and its organizational institutions are linked to an international network in various ways. Madsen keeps close connections with representatives from other (showcase) festivals, mostly from the countries closest to Denmark: "We have a lot of good partnerships with German business people and the Reeperbahn Festival (Hamburg) is a close partner."³⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, Germany is the most important market for the Danish music industry outside of Denmark. But SPOT also cooperates with other festivals on a regular basis. SPOT is a member of a French festival network, for example, and also collaborates with festivals in Spain and South America.³⁰⁷ But the collaborations outside Scandinavia are not a strategy, because Nordic music "has been easy to sell outside their countries."³⁰⁸

Ever since the late 1990s, the Danish music organizations had close relations with Eurosonic. "For many years we made showcases on Eurosonic. [...]," Madsen explained. "We had about sixty bands playing, which was enormous, because it was a smaller festival at that time. We had a very fine cooperation with Eurosonic on a practical level. We were very fond of the concept." The SPOT festival in Aarhus and Eurosonic in Groningen share some similarities. The festival layout, the conference and the showcases are constructed so that both festivals are semi-accessible urban events, emphasizing the relevance to the music industry. And indeed, as Promus representative and SPOT+ organizer Jesper Mardahl stated, although smaller, the SPOT festival in this form is actually modeled after

304 Gunnar K. Madsen, in discussion with author, May 2019.

305 *Ibid.*

306 A former employee of Madsen, Christian Holl Buhl, is running Factory 92, a company in Hamburg which works with artists breaking into Europe.

307 This series of festivals is called Días Nordicos, which is a multi disciplinary festival of Nordic culture promoting cultural exchange.

308 Gunnar K. Madsen, in discussion with author, May 2019.

Eurosonic.³⁰⁹

This strategic process of modeling is what DiMaggio and Powell (1991) referred to as *mimetic isomorphism*, and is essentially a response to uncertainty of field dynamics. As they argue, organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they consider to be more successful or legitimate (1991, p.70). While there is no concrete evidence that this mimicking increases organizational efficiency per se, it is the case that when organizational efficiency is enhanced, “the reason is often that organizations are rewarded for their similarity to other organizations in their fields.” (1991, 73) This is because:

[T]his similarity can make it easier for organizations to transact with other organizations, to attract career-minded staff, to be acknowledged as legitimate and reputable, and to fit into administrative categories that define eligibility for public and private grants and contracts. Non of this, however, ensures that conformist organizations do what they do more efficiently than do their more deviant peers.

As SPOT festival’s main focus is on the Nordic countries, the strongest international connection is indeed to the Scandinavian countries neighboring Denmark. Thomas Rohde, head of the Danish export office (MXD), confirms that this has been a strategic decision. It provides “critical mass,” economies of scale, and not least, a saleable story as the Nordic countries still have this “fairytale narrative” to the outside world, he explained.³¹⁰ This narrative, in combination with Anglo idioms has indeed provided Nordic music with an international music market, as Fabian Holt (2017, 69) notes: “[...] the broader transition from a national to a transnational Nordic modernity has created an economy that rewards a wider international orientation through the mastery of Anglo idioms with an individual and regional flavor.” The Scandinavian collaborative network was substantiated in 2009 with the foundation of NOMEX, an umbrella organization instantiated to support this Nordic focus. The collaboration between the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) serves, as Rohde explains, as a platform to “promote the Nordic brand to distant markets but also break down the borders between the participating countries.”³¹¹ It has launched several foreign projects to promote Nordic music abroad.³¹²

Despite this international outreach, the SPOT festival is not working on a European institutional level in applying for funding. Part of the reason, according to Madsen, is because of the administrative burden. Applying for international funding can be a time-consuming effort and Madsen believes that in order to be efficient in making choices that benefit the artists, they have to make organizational decisions in the

309 esper Mardahl, in discussion with author, January 2017.

310 Thomas Rohde, in discussion with author, May 2019.

311 *Ibid.*

312 One example of these projects is the “Ja Ja Ja” club nights in London and Berlin. These one-night monthly showcases take place in local clubs to attract music industry representatives which are based in these European metropolises.

moment. Complying with European administrative demands on a European level does not necessarily harmonize with this cultural strategy: “We consider ourselves very close to the environment of musicians and the music people and we can’t work so slow. We have to [...] take decisions here and now. You can’t just produce because you get the money. You have to be on top of the game.”³¹³

Another explanation, however, for SPOT festival’s reticence of reaching out to European institutions is the national willingness to support popular music. “Denmark has less of the financial struggles other countries in Europe might have,” Madsen stated. “If you go south of Holland it is very difficult to get government money for modern music. So in that sense the EU programs are their only help. We have a long tradition to raise our national money to do export.”³¹⁴ Madsen’s stance towards protecting the Nordic interests is reflected in his broader political views on European collaboration: “How – in the midst of the EU crises – do we maintain a national frame when the national framing is fading away?” he wonders.

I think it’s a big political issue. The politicians want a national cultural production, but we also want to be a full member of the EU community. [...] If we stick to our national production, then on some level you send a signal of nationalism. But if you don’t, if you don’t kind of rethink the national frame for what reason then do you help specifically Danish music? And if you don’t help Danish music, what could we miss on the long run there? [...] Or should we go to Brussels to equalize that only one central place they say what is up or down? I mean, is it good for the art if we centralize all the decisions? I’m not so sure.

Madsen’s observation is interesting. After all, it is not obvious that (unity in) diversity is best served with decentralization. When discussing the supranational aim of Eurosonic and its mantra, the circulation of European repertoires, therefore, Madsen is reluctant:

I don’t agree with Smidt on this matter. Because the major part for all of us working on these levels... we are very close to not being able to solve the really artistic challenge. We are able to make let’s say some tracks for the commercial music. We help the commercial music travelling around in Europe, that’s fine. We like it and listen to it. [...] But are we really moving the *music* around or are we moving the *business* around? And I think Peter, because he has been so straight on the thing for many years, it is also his identity, what he believes in, he is trapped in the model. He can’t turn around. It’s not criticism on his work, but I’m more in doubt.

In 2018, Denmark was given the opportunity to become the focus country at Eurosonic and present Danish acts to the European music industry. What then, was the incentive to become the focus country at Eurosonic? Madsen was rather vocal about distinguishing

313 Gunnar K. Madsen, in discussion with author, May 2019.

314 *Ibid.*

the political advantages from the artistic benefits, when asked about the procedure. The annual country focus of Eurosonic, he stated, is “more a business model than a realistic way of working.” While he questions the practical utility of it, the country focus “business model” can be beneficial for both Eurosonic as well as for the focus country:

Because that’s a way to go to the government and say: ‘we need a million because we can be focus country’. It has no impact on the real business, it’s just politics. In that sense I have a kind of distance to it, but of course when we get the opportunity we do it. Because if we don’t do it, somebody else does. [...] And also it is a tool to place the event in maybe a bigger political scale, on the EU stage. Because people who don’t know anything about business or music, they recognize the tool. And then say, OK now it’s something. So it’s a game.

Madsen’s outspoken opinion about the country focus element of Eurosonic is somewhat contrasting to what music export office (MXD) president Thomas Rohde stated about the experience. Rohde too acknowledged the risks of the country focus theme becoming a mere political tool. Therefore, his primary aim was to focus on the music first:

We really wanted to focus on the bands. When I applied for the funding I was very explicit about the [practical] strategy and we said to the politicians: ‘when you go down there you’ll be disappointed because there won’t be wall-to-wall branding for Denmark. [...] We will spend the majority of the resources *before* Eurosonic on PR, creating a buzz, meeting each band and let them define their goals. [...] So we sat down and really made a battle plan. [...] But I really had to explain it to the politicians: it doesn’t *look* like we’re focus country, but that doesn’t mean there are no results. That’s why we also made the report. [...] We wanted to show to the ministry of Culture, who are funding us, concrete results. Focus on the bands is of primary value.’³¹⁵

Indeed, the report that Rohde is referring to reveals a substantial number of concrete results. According to the report, the campaign has reached a media potential of over 132 million people (based on 191 media reviews).³¹⁶ Furthermore, the twelve mentioned bands were booked at thirty-six festivals throughout Europe and many entered into booking agreements with international agents. Some of these acts also performed at the 2019 SPOT festival. I interviewed two of them and asked about how they experienced their showcase performances at Eurosonic and SPOT and how it benefitted their career trajectories.

315 Thomas Rohde, in discussion with author, May 2019.

316 <https://mxd.dk/projekter/oevrige-projekter/denmark-blooms-at-esns-2018-mxds-kampagne-ramte-et-tocifret-millionantal-laesere-lyttere-og-seere-og-lukker-aftaler-til-de-danske-bandsdenmark-blooms-at-esns-2018-presserapport-aftaler-til-de/>

6.3.2 Artist perspective

One of the acts was D/TROIT, described as a “Copenhagen soul and funk” band playing old school soul and 1960s/1970s R&B. After their concert at Eurosonic the group made deals with the Dutch booking agent Friendly Fire and German agent FKP Scorpio, the latter booking them an eight-concert club tour in Germany in February and March of 2018. After their concert on the Royal Stage at SPOT festival 2019, I approached bass player Jackie Larson for some insights on his experiences at Eurosonic and SPOT, as well as the band’s broader approach to creating European networks. Larsen explained that they have a hard time getting established in Denmark, so the band is operating in international networks by necessity:

Denmark is little tough, because we have one main radio station, Danish Radio (DR), and there is one guy there doing all the playlists. And we’re not getting airplay, so it is hard to get out to play. If you don’t have airplay it’s hard to sell tickets, so you don’t get booked. When we get to Germany or Holland it seems like people have a different opinion about going out. More open. People also telling each other and on the second German tour we doubled the ticket sales. We are a hard working [live] band. It is quite different as a promotional tool.³¹⁷

For D/TROIT, therefore, showcase events are primarily a tool to acquire bookings for live performances and building these live networks on a grassroots level is important for their career. “[...] We need to get that live audience to come in and spread like that,” Larsen stated. “Now we have the schedule in Germany going well and then Holland, Austria. And [Danish indie record label] Crunchy Frog has a really good network in France as well.” The band played two shows on Eurosonic in 2018. One official booking in the venue Der Aa-Theater and one unofficial, ad hoc, event on a boat (in a location Larsen cannot remember). The performance at Der Aa-Theater was attended by a representative of Dutch (Amsterdam) booking agency Friendly Fire with whom after the concert a deal was made.

D/TROIT performed four concerts at the 2019 SPOT festival. Interestingly, the band did not have an album out and, in addition, they appeared on SPOT despite having missed the festival application deadline by two months. It was their agent that pushed them forward and managed to get them booked for two official shows and two additional shows exclusively for the label and their guests. This illustrates that stakeholder politics are of importance at showcase events and that network connections are of crucial importance to open up (commercial) doors. As Larsen concludes: “[W]hat is important is also to show yourself to publishing partners etc. Sorry to say, but that’s where the big bucks are, so it’s also a commercial effort.”

As Larsen stresses, connecting to different types of people is of crucial importance and showcase festivals are the pre-eminent vehicle for making these connections. This occurs not just on a commercial or artistic level, but on a European collaborative level

317 Jackie Larson, in discussion with author, May 2019.

as well: “These showcases are a great chance for us to talk to people and to connect. It’s wonderful. I presume all these festivals are funded by state funding, so it’s nice to see that some of the tax money is being used to connect people instead of separate them. Let’s have loads more of these kinds of festivals to keep spreading that message.”

Danish artist and producer Mads Damsgaard Kristiansen reports a similar conception of the international significance of showcase events. In the early 2010s Kristiansen had substantial international success with his electropop band Reptile Youth, with which he toured extensively throughout Europe and China, building a solid live reputation in each region.³¹⁸ In 2017, Kristiansen started his new project GOSS. In 2018, he was selected to perform at Eurosonic as part of the country focus on Denmark. Kristiansen revealed, however, that he was not fully ready “to take the next step on an industry level” at that point in his career:

[A]t the time I was like... yes, I want to embrace every possibility, I want to really go for it. I didn’t want to say no to things, because you never know what can get you somewhere. [...] It *could* have been. That’s an important thing to say. And it’s not that I didn’t get anything out of it. I met people and I talked to people. [...] A big part of it is to socialize and meet people. Also because I feel like it is something in the industry that people don’t put that much focus on, but human connection is a huge value point in working together. So having the opportunity to meet people and just ‘feel’ who they are, or their energy, or you hear them talk about stuff and see if you connect is a big part of going to festivals like that.³¹⁹

What should be mentioned, however, is that due to his previously acquired success Kristiansen also has the luxury to choose when and how mobilize his network. That is, if he needed it to sustain his living he would probably have pursued more. Kristiansen still acknowledged the opportunities showcase events such as SPOT and Eurosonic could bring, despite his feeling of not having artistic momentum, nor the “musical machinery,” as he put it.

As both organizers and artists have emphasized, international networks are established on a grass roots level. Decisions are made after a careful assessment of the practical utility for artists. The necessity of politics is acknowledged, but a Pan-European music industry is looked at with caution. Two questions which were raised are exemplary for the perspective of the SPOT festival: Is a centralized European music industry really the best option from a cultural perspective? And, secondly, is striving for European collaboration not just benefitting commercial (saleable) music? These questions are approached with skepticism. As Gunnar Madsen remarked: “Are we moving the *music* around, or are we moving the *business* around?”

318 See chapter 4 for a more in-depth account on Kristiansen’s career trajectory.

319 Mads Damsgaard Kristiansen, in discussion with author, May 2019.

6.4 Case study 2:

Reeperbahn Festival (Hamburg, Germany)

Honestly my visit at SXSW in Austin, TX, back in the year 2000 was the inspiration. I was wondering if something similar like on 6th. Street might work out fine on Reeperbahn with its many clubs, bars and theatres.³²⁰ - Alexander Schulz, CEO and founder of Reeperbahn Festival

The Reeperbahn festival is the largest urban festival for new international pop (mostly Indie, Singer-Songwriter, Rock and Electronic) music in Germany. It takes place annually in September in the heart of Hamburg's nightlife and entertainment district, St. Pauli. Its many clubs, theatres and industrial spaces provide the stages for approximately 500 concerts, of which 250 are showcases. During the four festival days there is an international conference program focused on music industry professionals from around the world, which includes a programme of over 300 sessions and networking events. Each year over 5,500 delegates attend the conference. The main festival location is the *Spielbudenplatz*, an improvised festival space right in the center of the Reeperbahn, the street legendary for its adult entertainment night life. This festival square is accessible without a festival ticket to the general public.

Figure 16. Reeperbahn Festival Hamburg, *Spielbudenplatz*.

A pop-up/improvised festival village is located close to the Millentorn-Stadium. This multi-purpose stadium is best known as the home of local soccer club FC St. Pauli. The area has

320 Robert Helbig, 18-08-2013, Online interview. Music journalism platform *Nothing But Hope And Passion* (NBHAP).

a high density of historical venues and theatres. The impressive modern Elbphilharmonie is also used as festival location. The local music scene of Hamburg is represented through the Hamburg House, an initiative by the Hamburg Music Association. The Reeperbahn Festival organization facilitates this initiative by providing them with a showcase platform. The location of events is the St. Pauli Museum, serving as the base for local artists, creative companies and institutions to promote local initiatives and talent. This variety of venues and locations add to the vibrancy and diversity of the festival. However, it also makes the event feel more geographically dispersed compared to ESNS, SPOT and MENT. According to head of showcases Evelyn Sieber, this is also one of the strategies to manage the high numbers of spectators. Over four days, the Reeperbahn Festival sold approximately 48.000 tickets in 2019.

The festival's mother company is Inferno Events (headed by festival founder Alexander Schulz and Detlef Schwarte), which partnered with leading German concert promoter Karsten Jahnke to initiate a cooperation for the public (commercial) part of the festival. The later added conference is organized separately and independently by Inferno Events. The conference, Sieber mentioned, was added after the discontinuation of the Berlin conference Popkomm created new demand for network interaction.

Reeperbahn Festival was founded in 2006 after founder Alexander Schulz had visited Austin's South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in early 2000. Being impressed with the event he came up with the idea to initiate a similar concept in Hamburg. Reeperbahn, he figured, had the infrastructure and the nightlife mentality to provide for a successful music event. Of course, being located in the heart of Hamburg's red light district, Reeperbahn was a name that would easily lend itself for marketing purposes. It wasn't until 2006, after some years of discussing the idea with city officials, club owners and other stakeholders, that the first edition of the event took place. This first edition, however, was a financial failure due to "planning too big."³²¹

In 2009 a business to business conference element was added to the festival. In 2019, the transnational outlook of the event was illustrated by the number of international delegates attending the conference. In an interview with *Billboard* (Spahr 2019) Alexander Schulz mentioned that 38% of the 5,900 professionals were from outside Germany.³²² In 2016 they initiated ANCHOR, the Reeperbahn International Music Award, a prize given to, according a jury, the most promising emerging music acts. The global outreach and the interest in exploring largely obscure music markets such as Africa and China, was reflected in one of the Anchor Awards nominees with The Hormones, an all-female indie-rock group from Chengdu, China. "As an internal market for rock and pop music," Schulz stated, "China is still insignificant, but for Europeans and Americans that is precisely why it is so interesting."³²³

321 Founder Alexander Schulz mentioned a loss of almost 400.000 euros in a 2016 interview. <https://nbhap.com/people/reperbahn-festival-alexander-schulz> Accessed: 11-10-2019.

322 Wolfgang Spahr, 26-09-2019, *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/8531425/reperbahn-ceo-alexander-schulz-festival-growth-interview>

323 "Noch ist China als Binnenmarkt für Rock und pop völlig unbedeutend, für Europäer und Amerikaner aber gerade deshalb hochinteressant." Stefan Krulle, Welt, 16-09-2019. Access via: <https://www.welt.de/regionales/hamburg/article200371202/Big-in-China-Das-Reeperbahn-Festival-ist-laengst-ein-Global-Player.html>

Different from Eurosonic, SPOT and MENT Reeperbahn Festival explicitly presents itself explicitly as a commercial event. Ticket sales and selling showcase slots to, for example, export initiatives who then hire a venue to showcase their program, is how their business plan is designed. “One of our main pillars is to book bands that we sell tickets with [have commercial appeal],” Reeperbahn’s head of showcases and international cooperations Evelyn Sieber, explained.³²⁴ “And that’s the curated part, and for those it’s mainly bands where there’s a certain buzz already in Germany. [...] And for the showcases I partner with mostly international, but also German partners who want to present artists.” In this sense the festival functions as a platform to discover new bands, although the curative aspect of the festival organization is only involved with the commercial line-up.

Reeperbahn Festival is an important cultural marker for the city of Hamburg and the municipality has supported the event from the beginning. While the organization aims to bring the subsidy percentage down each by aiming for higher number of ticket sales and growing sponsorship, the city of Hamburg as well as national governments are responsible for a large part of the budget.³²⁵ The financial core of the festival is a combination of ticket sales, sponsorship and funding. Reeperbahn received 20 million euros in funding from the German federal parliament in 2019 as part of a larger cultural investment of 263 million euros.³²⁶ The foreign ministry, Evelyn Sieber explained, is interested in Reeperbahn Festival to become for music what the Berlinale in Berlin is for film and what the Frankfurt Book Fair is for literature. So for them having festival elements with large international stature, such as the award show and having a grand opening, are particularly important.

In 2018 Reeperbahn received a five-year subsidy from the German government for 27,85 million Euros, money that was intended to develop Reeperbahn Festival into “the leading platform for music, music economy and digital economy in Europe.”³²⁷ That was on top of the subsidy they already receive of 1 million Euros. A substantial financial injection, also considering that ESNS, for example works with a grand total of approximately 800.000 Euros, all subsidy streams combined. “Reeperbahn has given the assignment to become the largest showcase festival in Europe,” ESNS programmer Peter Sikkema noted:

After SXSW this has to become the biggest player. We’re not afraid of that development, but we have to keep distinguishing and standing out. Our European focus is unique. Reeperbahn will also look outside of Europe for their acts. With that it’s hardly different from, for example, The Great Escape, MaMa... There are many of these showcase events. They are more or less interchangeable. The good thing of ES is that we have the EU radio stations feel at home here. It is their

324 Evelyn Sieber (head of showcases and international cooperations Reeperbahn Festival), in discussion with author, September 2019.

325 Ministry for Culture and Media for Reeperbahn Festival in Germany and the Federal Foreign Office for Reeperbahn’s international spin-offs.

326 <https://www.welt.de/regionales/hamburg/article203523072/263-Millionen-zusaetzlich-Geldsegen-fuer-Hamburgs-Kultur.html>

327 <https://ruedigerkruse.de/kahrs-spd-kruse-cdu-weitere-49-millionen-euro-aus-berlin-fuer-hamburger-kulturprojekte/>

festival. For the EU festivals: it is their festival. Speaking about success having many fathers: Everybody claims it is their event, and that is also its force; It's a platform event for many EU platforms who regard ESNS as their event.³²⁸

Indeed, Reeperbahn Festival not only serves as gateway to the European and German music markets, but also focuses on intercontinental music markets. This focus was institutionalized in 2019 through the Reeperbahn festival International, a global series of Reeperbahn Festival spin-off events in Nashville, Beijing, New York, Accra and Los Angeles.³²⁹ In November 2019 Reeperbahn Festival and music industry delegates traveled to Ghana's capital of Accra to attend the pan-African Music in Africa Conference ACCES 2019, "to set up a network for intercultural and music business exchange."³³⁰ Also, showcase activities at SXSW and the A2IM Indie Week festival in New York have been part of its annual schedule and the potential of new future markets actively explored.

6.4.1 *European Networks*

When considering European networks and talent exchange Reeperbahn Festival does not have the export of its national artists as its primary point of focus. Reeperbahn Festival's international activities are primarily instantiated to promote the festival and to connect delegations of industry people and businesses with markets "where it's hard to get a foot in the door," rather than promoting and exporting German music. Working with other festivals, therefore, is often a unilateral interaction. About such collaborative initiatives and talent exchange requests from other, often smaller, festivals, Evelyn Sieber stated:

A lot of times when you get approached what they want is talent exchange because they all have an export hat on. And we don't have an export hat. So why would we give a slot to somebody else, letting them program it? [...] We don't have acts that we want to send, that we benefit from... So a lot of times when we get approached for exchanges, I think: "You benefit hugely, but what do we gain from that?" I mean, we're a commercial company, what's in there for us?³³¹

Sieber later adds:

Generally, we are very open and positive to any form of collaboration, but in our commercial reality real costs arise when we have a partner presenting a stage.

328 "Unboxing Groningen" event, discussion on the importance of ESNS with Gert Plas (Pop Archive Groningen), Peter van der Heide (Journalist) and Peter Sikkema (Programmer ESNS). Grand Theatre, Groningen on 13-01-2019.

329 <https://international.reeperbahnfestival.com/en/about/>

330 "Ziel des vom Auswärtigen Amt geförderten internationalen Projektes war es [...] eines nachhaltigen Netzwerkes zum interkulturellen und musikwirtschaftlichen Austausch zu ermöglichen." Dietmar Schwenger, Music Woche, 02-12-2019. <http://beta.musikwoche.de/details/446053>

331 Evelyn Sieber, in discussion with author, September 2019.

We have to hire an extra venue, staff, technical setup etc. Already existing stages need to present the acts that we sell tickets with and therefore have an income offsetting the costs. So if a partner presents a stage at RBF, either they compensate (pay) these costs or offer a similar-value exchange (aka barter). A barter is what most partners that approach us with talent exchange proposals have in mind. And for talent exchange [...] very unfortunately we can't dig into that pot, as we are not the German music export office.

However, Reeperbahn Festival's separately financed export program *Wunderkinder - German Music Talent* might become more instrumental in the development of an international exchange program. "Depending on grant restrictions," Sieber concludes.

European collaborations, then, are informed by how they contribute to the festival's status as international Field-Configuring Event. This involves cooperating with competing events, as Dobusch *et al* (2010, 22) concluded in their study on Field-Configuring Events in the German music industry: "[A] major source of legitimacy for an event lies in the ability to congregate a huge variety of actors and interests – in other words: to involve opponents in the event, as well." Due to their close geographical proximity and similarities as showcase and conference event, Eurosonic Noorderslag and Reeperbahn Festival are often considered as mutually competitive.³³² However, since 2018 Eurosonic and Reeperbahn Festival work together on a European level in organizing the Music Moves Europe Talent Award (MMETA), the new formatted European music prize, which they were granted after their joint application resulted in a positive evaluation of the European Commission in 2018. As a result, the MMETA nominees are presented at Reeperbahn Festival annually in September when the actual award show takes place during Eurosonic a few months later in January.

Reeperbahn Festival is involved in more European initiatives. For example, Reeperbahn Festival was one of the first major festivals to sign the Keychange pledge, an initiative which addresses unequal gender distribution in the music industry. With financial support from the European Commission's Creative Europe programme, Keychange was initiated in September 2017 by UK based music funding organization PRS Foundation. It aims to achieve a 50/50 gender split across line-ups, conferences and commissions by 2022 from its participating (festival) organizations.³³³ Participants receive access to promotion, network meetings, as well as financial compensation for attending Keychange events. Reeperbahn engages with this initiative because, as managing director Alexander Schulz stated in his opening speech of the Keychange 2.0 kick-off ceremony, "[...] this industry, especially, sees itself as the embodiment of diversity. And that's far from being reflected in its own structures. Female and other underrepresented groups have fewer opportunities to perform, and earn less, and find it hard to get jobs in the music

332 See, for example, discussions in these newspaper articles: "Iedereen die ertoe doet is hier", Leeuwarder Courant 10-01-2017, p. 28, "Eurosonic heeft wind in de zeilen", DvhN 27-11-2018, p. 1 and "Één munt, maar welke liedjes zingen onze burens", DvhN, 11-01-2011, p. 48.

333 50/50 in line-ups of popular music festivals will be measured according to the number of acts featuring at least one woman or gender minority member. See: <https://keychange.eu/about-us/>

industry.³³⁴ Since its launch, over 140 festivals have signed the Keychange pledge, among which ESNS and MENT.³³⁵ In 2019, the program was extended receiving €1.4 million in additional funding from the European Union. This next phase, by the name of Keychange 2.0, includes new collaborative initiatives and announced a new management structure with Reeperbahn becoming the leading partner.

While Reeperbahn does not explicitly focuses on music export, there are some programs instantiated to stimulate the international circulation of German artists. One example of this is the *Wunderkinder Program*, presenting German acts who have an international approach. This program presents promising German acts with “exceptional (*ausserordentlichem*) international potential” the opportunity to network with international professionals in order to further their international career.³³⁶ Two examples of these *Wunderkinder* artists are Amilli and ELI. Amilli is a 19-year old singer from Bochum, Germany. She mixes a soulful voice and sense for unique melodies into a fusion of contemporary RnB and pop. ELI (born 1998) is a multi-instrumentalist singer/songwriter from Cologne, but is now living in Berlin. His music is influenced by Justin Timberlake and Shawn Mendes and covers a wide spectrum of styles and reaches from old school R&B to modern pop music. Both artists performed on Eurosonic as well in January 2019, I asked them about their experiences and expectations and contrasting Eurosonic to Reeperbahn festival, which I will address in the following section.

6.4.2 Artist perspectives

I interviewed ELI right after his performance at Reeperbahn Festival. The acoustic solo performance took place in the afternoon at the central open air festival space (*Spielbudenplatz*) on a stage called N-Joy Reeperbus. N-Joy, a German public radio station by the *Norddeutschen Rundfunk* radio network aimed at a younger audience, recorded the performances at Reeperbahn, which could then be streamed from the station website. In early 2019, Eli had performed a showcase at Eurosonic. I asked him about his experiences there and also about the career potential from performing at Reeperbahn. He stated:

Yeah, that was... the funny thing is, we played there and that was the first gig as a band *ever* in Groningen at Eurosonic. It was one of the best gigs, so it was crazy. It was in a church, Lutherse Kerk, and I loved the vibe. [...] And actually, I played the showcase and then one day later I got offered the main slot for Lollapalooza

334 Opening speech Alexander Schulz of the launch of the Keychange 2.0 program. Reeperbahn Festival 19-09-2019.

335 Interestingly, bookers from other European festivals (e.g. Roskilde festival, Tomorrowland and Iceland Airwaves) are divided on the merits of gender balanced bills, claiming to not book based on gender. See: Jon Chapple, 13 June 2019. "It can be done"; Primavera Sound Talks Gender-Balanced 2019. <https://www.iq-mag.net/2019/06/male-stale-primavera-sound-gender-equal-booking/#.XnDN1S1x9sN>. Oskar Strajn (Eurosonic) and Andraž Kajzer (MENT) also claim that gender doesn't influence their booking decisions. Future research might provide more insight into the motivations, implications and effects of festival curators who have committed to the Keychange pledge.

336 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmSPXSjqjCY>

on the main stage as opener on Sunday [Lollapalooza Berlin, Sept. 9, 2019].³³⁷

According to ELI, this really was a direct result from the gig and the professionals that were present. While ELI was aware of the impact of performing at Eurosonic, he also recognizes how having a network around you is of pivotal importance for an artist to further their career at a showcase event.

[I]n my personal case, because I was still independent and didn't have the opportunity to reach out *that* much... [...] I think if I played now again, with more backing and with more... you know, proper management and like... a label in my back, I think that would definitely help me. But I think it's a great opportunity to reach out.

For ELI, performing at Reeperbahn festival was considered an opportunity to further his career on an international level. By then he had a strong network (label and manager) around him and also has created momentum on streaming services having over 50 million streams on *Spotify*.³³⁸ "I'm looking for booking in terms of agents and for festival stuff for next year," he explained. Also the vibrant atmosphere and the lingering opportunities are what ELI mentions as potential: "I mean, there are so many creative people. It's not only bookers, labels, publishers, it's also video guys and everyone who's creative is here. That's what I love about this place. So I'm just looking for creative people who want to join me on the journey." As ELI professional network allowed him to focus on the music and creative aspect of his "journey."

In a similar vein, the German singer Amilli also described how an open minded attitude to what opportunities arise from performing at the event. Amilli currently has seven million streams on *Spotify*.³³⁹ As was the case with ELI, her first festival performance was also at Eurosonic. Her goal was to perform internationally, she noted, first focusing primarily on Europe. A European tour was already scheduled for December 2019. Her aims for the future how performing at Reeperbahn could contribute to that, however, were quite clear: [I] hope that some interesting people may notice me, hopefully from the US as well. I think that my music will fit very well to the States. [...]. Amilli feels that, ultimately, her music might find a more appreciative audience overseas I think the more "soulier" it gets, the less people listen to it in Germany. That's my feeling."³⁴⁰ It is this global market outreach that is one of most distinguishing features of the Reeperbahn festival. The case of Reeperbahn illustrates how a music industry event can thrive on the cutting edge of commercialism and idealism, city marketing and transnational music industry networking.

The final case I will investigate is the event which contrasts most to the others; its aims, visions and genre aesthetic are considerably more niche and underground-driven.

337 ELI, in discussion with author, September 2019.

338 Currently, he has approximately 60 million streams on *Spotify*. Poll date: 20-12-2019.

339 Poll date 20-12-2019

340 Amilli, in discussion with author, September 2019.

The MENT festival will show how the limitations of small-scale can actually be utilized as a strength to develop not only artistic careers, but also retain its idealistic vision.

6.5 Case study 3: MENT (Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Showcase festival MENT was established in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana in 2015. The three-day event takes place annually in February in various venues across the city. MENT is considerably smaller than Eurosonic, Reeperbahn and SPOT. The audience capacity is around 1,500 people a day. And on Friday, the last festival day, it is around 2,000. Approximately one third of the attendees are music professionals. In 2017, MENT was chosen by the European Festival Awards “Best Indoor & Best Small Festival.”³⁴¹

Upon arrival, and wandering through the Ljubljana city center, what struck me was how the only signs that an urban showcase festival was about to take place over the next few days, were some sparsely scattered advertising billboards around the inner city.

Figure 17.
Advertising poster
MENT.

³⁴¹ The European Festival Awards was established in 2009 by Festival Awards Ltd, Yourlope, and Eurosonic Noorderslag. The awards are aimed at European festival organizations and present awards in 15 different categories, such as "The Green Operations Award," and "The Award for Excellence & Passion."

Whereas with Eurosonic, Reeperbahn and SPOT it is hard to not be confronted with festive utterances in the respective inner cities, the underground musical ethos of MENT is honored in its lack of urban visibility.

The basic vision for MENT, founder and head of the conference Miran Rusjan explains, is to function as a meeting point for the ex-Yugoslavia region; to showcase Slovenian and other “ex-Yu” artists to the “outside world” and to the people who are coming to Ljubljana for the event.³⁴² The number of bands coming from the former Yugoslavia region is relatively high. For music professionals coming from elsewhere, MENT can therefore be a good starting point to know more about, not only Slovenia, but ex-Yugoslavia as a whole. Not just seeing the bands from this region, but also getting to know the key players of the region, such as the festivals, the promoters, the venues, and the media. The Slovenia and ex-Yu focus might be the main element, on the other hand they also want to find a balance between artists and professionals from Eastern and Western Europe.

The main venue and producer of MENT is Kino Šiška, the Centre for Urban Culture, a former cinema which was transformed into a concert venue in 2009. This venue is located outside the inner city –albeit within walking distance– and holds two concert stages: Komuna hall, with a capacity of 250 people, and Katedra hall, with capacity of approximately 1000 people. Kino Šiška programs around 90/100 concerts per year alongside art exhibitions and theatre. Since the Slovenian music industry is centered in Ljubljana and Kino Šiška is Ljubljana’s main venue, it actually serves a double role: the bands which come to play at MENT often get invited back again to Ljubljana by Kino Šiška. In collaboration with the adjacent *M Hotel*, Kino Šiška is also the venue where the conference element of the festival takes place. During the day, various panels, workshops and network meetings as well as various art exhibitions provide for the music business conference element.

Besides Kino Šiška as the main venue, other concert locations are in the inner city of Ljubljana. Most are centered around Metelkova, a former military headquarters consisting of seven buildings (former barracks) which now serve as spaces for social interaction and performance art. The site serves as an autonomous social and cultural arts site which holds several venues, a hostel and is decorated with many graffiti paintings and arts installations. This space functions as the center of the underground music and arts scene and holds a special place in the Ljubljana music scene. The intricate history of the site, as well as its problematic relation to the municipal (and national) authorities contribute to and nourish an underground activist festival landscape, reminiscent of what Hakim Bey (1991) referred to as a “Temporary Autonomous Zone.” That is, a space which eludes formal structures of control to serve a socio-political agenda. This underground dynamic is reflected in the performance practice of many artists. Punk, rock and indie dominate the event, predominantly favoring a punk DIY aesthetic (anarchism/the activist message) over commercial potential. During the final evening of the event (Friday), the Ljubljana castle serves as the location of events. The castle with its towers and church

342 Miran Rusjan, in discussion with author, January 2020.

serves as an atmospheric backdrop to the often experimental sounds. Within the castle space, six locations serve as festival stages. After 10 PM the concerts here are finished. Buses are provided which then take the audience back to Metelkova, where artists perform until the morning hours.

The festival's main founders and curators Miran Rusjan, Andraž Kajzer and Matjaž Manček emerged from this alternative music scene. In fact, Rusjan explains, most people who are involved in the festival organization and in Kino Šiška went through the "school" of Metelkova. That is, this is where they learned to organize events, to be part of an organization and where many played their first shows with a band. This facet helped the local music scene to adapt and accept a music festival that would present itself as showcase event. Music "industry," "conference," and "professionals" were concepts that the local, more underground and alternative music scene participants were indeed skeptical about, as Rusjan explains:

Because we, the basic organizers, are coming from the underground scene, I would say the music scene knows us, and they know that we're not corporate guys. It's not somebody from outside or a big company that comes to Ljubljana to show how the business is done. But it's like people from the scene that try to make something new. Somehow it works and now after 5 years the skepticism of the scene has vanished. At first there was this fear of the music "industry." [...] Just because of this word. People don't need to care about the industry. People come to the conference and do whatever they'll do, but you can just come to the shows [as well]. There are great bands playing, you don't have to care about the business side.³⁴³

What also helped, according to Rusjan, was that venue locations were "alive," centered around the Metelkova area, rather than in "artificial" pop-up locations. Which is one of the reasons MENT does not aim to grow bigger. Growing bigger would involve finding new venues. And this might also involve compromising what is considered to be another strength of the festival: that all concert venues are in very close proximity to each other.

The relationship between the music scene and its participants in Ljubljana mirrors Bennett's (2016, 34) observation of how a scene's articulation in the present is often based on cultural memory and a strong affective link with past events. Inspired by the early works on scenes and subcultures within cultural studies (Shepherd & Straw 1991), Bennett et al theorize music scenes as spaces in which the past and the present inform its current aesthetic biography. What links these often diverse array of practices within scene activity, they argue, "is an affective sense of oneself as a part of something that is alive – both in a physical and temporal sense – and woven into the cultural landscape" (2016, 2). The Metelkova scene is a hallmark example of how these personal and affective "taste biographies," and also being strongly embedded in the scene, inform its curation and vision for future collaborative strategies. In the case of MENT this often translates

343 Miran Rusjan, in discussion with author, January 2020.

into a more daring curation, more focused on edgy, experimental and underground music genres.

Since its second edition in 2016, the Slovenian Ministry of Culture has funded MENT. Kino Šiška was funded by the municipality, which in effect means that the people employed in Kino Šiška also work for MENT during the festival. Other income streams are sponsorships and ticket sales. Also, being part of the INES network of festivals helps with covering costs for (conference) travel, accommodation, and artist exchanges. INES is a showcase festival consortium project which was created with the assistance of funding from the Music Moves Europe program. Its leading partner is *Gigmit*, a European digital platform for artist booking. While this funding helps to develop international collaborations, Rusjan is rather reserved on committing to projects that receive EU funding and prefers to have full control of how the money is spent. Within the INES network there were different visions on this issue, as Rusjan reveals:

[At MENT] we pay the bands, give them accommodation, hotel, catering. We give them the backline. Basically we act as a festival. We don't expect them to play for free. Sometimes it will not be the highest fee possible, but it will be something that covers a big part of the costs. And within the INES network this was an issue in a way, because we were like; there is EU money, maybe there is no need that we ask... I mean, we were paying, but some of the other festivals were not paying. We said: come on, can't we make an agreement within the network that these bands can get paid at least a minimum. Because we're getting the money. Tax payer's money. I mean, it's about how you make the model.³⁴⁴

The characteristic DIY mentality of MENT comes to the surface when Rusjan explains how he aims to manage the festival financially:

Personally, how I run the record company... we get some funding from the state and the city, but I really try to keep that to a minimum. I mean, in a healthy... forget the money, but I will not compromise my programs and my vision what we do for the sake of the projects and be dependent on the money. Getting money helps us, of course, but we would do it anyway. It should be my decision to release a certain band, not some bureaucrat's decision. If he wants to give me a thousand euros, great, but it should be my decision.

As head of the associated conference at MENT, Rusjan's ethic is reflected in the curation of the speakers and guests. Mostly the people who are invited should be interested in finding what he calls "edgy" Eastern European and ex-Yugoslavian bands: "We always reflect about professionals who attend the festival and decide if we will invite them again." The festival conference is co-produced by SIGIC, the Slovene Music Information Centre. SIGIC is a non-profit organization and aims to promote Slovenian music and

344 Miran Rusjan, in discussion with author, January 2020.

artists through providing an online artist database, music information and exploring music export opportunities. The organization is also committed to developing the region culturally more broadly, synthesizing its multi-disciplinary arts movements and literary heritage with musical infrastructure.

6.5.1 Position in the European showcase festival landscape

Every Slovenian can name ten Slovenian novelists, poets or writers on the spot, but in the case of Slovenian composers they probably can't even name two. - Peter Baroš Secretary General of Slovenian Music Information Centre (CIGIC)

With a population of just over two million people, Slovenia is among the smaller countries in the former Yugoslavian region.³⁴⁵ Ljubljana has a population of around 300,000, a relatively small country capital and approximating the size of Groningen (235,000).

For MENT and SIGIC to focus on Slovenia and the regional music industries first, before thinking about broader European collaborations is understandable. While Slovenia, Serbia, and Macedonia all have showcase festivals, the music infrastructure is still upcoming and music scenes are centered mostly within the region's capital cities. And because the traveling distances are quite challenging (Ljubljana to Skopje, Macedonia is twelve hours by car), it is hard for bands to tour the region. Not only traveling distances can be time-consuming, also having ATA carnet (customs document for goods) inspections and complex border dynamics, especially in the more southern Balkan region, can obstruct mobility. MENT's artistic director Andraž Kajzer illustrates this latter problem: "Yes, it's the further you go, the more complicated it's financially. Not just in the sense it's harder to get even public funding [...]. But there are more open grey areas of cash flow and the fees for not well-known artists can be very small. [...] Everything is a bit different, it's not so European, you know."³⁴⁶

Slovenia, being in the center of Europe, can serve as a gateway to the Balkan region, but it is still very hard to go deeper south for a tour. Dutch agent and concert promoter Koen ter Heegde works a lot in the Balkan region and collaborates extensively with the MENT organizers, also outside of the festival days. With his organization Yugofuturism, Ter Heegde specializes in the former Yugoslavian region. He has toured extensively with bands such as The Homesick and Neighbours Burning Neighbours. The reason why it is so hard to penetrate the ex-Yugoslavian market, Ter Heegde explains, is that in fact there hardly is one, particularly for non-insiders:

Many of the people I work with now and book concerts with in South-Eastern Europe, are people I have known for some fifteen years. Which is exactly the heart of the matter for most bands: you can be very good, but it is very difficult to

³⁴⁵ With Serbia as the country with the highest population (over 8.5 million people).

³⁴⁶ Andraž Kajzer, in discussion with author, January 2020.

book a tour in the former Yugoslavia region if you don't already have an existing network in place. You might be able to do shows in Ljubljana or Croatia, but if you want to expand it gets more difficult. One reason for that is: the more south you go, the lower the fees.³⁴⁷

Even in Slovenia, as Miran Rusjan explained, there are only a few channels to present new international artists. It's possible to get coverage for more established artists, or artists that are more locally embedded, but for upcoming international artists it's problematic. There are no music magazines and the daily newspapers reserve little space for acts other than the most established ones. While national TV and radio channels have an expansive reach, they are hard to penetrate for new acts. There is online presence with music websites, but most have a very limited reach.³⁴⁸

Slovenia's music industry is indeed underdeveloped, as Secretary General of CIGIC, Peter Baroš confirms. In fact, "Slovenia is Ljubljana. Beside that you have some smaller cities, but in the sense of cultural development you can't compare," Baroš states. The complex issue until now, he explains, is that the Slovenian government does not understand the idea of music as *business*. They mostly perceive the value of music as a non-profit culture and, while some public funds are available, they do not recognize its potential as an industry. This is in part because Slovenian culture is founded on literature and poetry, not on music.³⁴⁹ Baroš elaborates:

As for literature and for film... they treat that like culture AND business. That's why we have national agencies for literature and films. And we have commercial labels that publish high cultural books and also like books for the beach. So it's circulating some money, many people are involved and it's a business case. Music is not on that level yet. [...] The problem is that there is no collaboration between, say, ministry of Culture, Finances, Economy, Labor... no connections. So we have some connections between ministry of education and ministry of culture. We got audio development, youth culture... but on the level of business... for example, we have a quite difficult situation with the office for intellectual properties. Which is part of the ministry of Economy. And guys from this office and from the ministry of Culture, they don't speak the same language. They see numbers, they see culture as romantic.³⁵⁰

347 "Veel van de mensen met wie ik nu samenwerk en met wie ik concerten boek in Zuidoost Europa, zijn mensen die ik eigenlijk al vijftien jaar ken. Dat is voor de meeste bands de crux als je dat wil doen. Je kunt wel goed zijn, maar het is heel moeilijk om een tour te boeken in voormalig Joegoslavië als je daar niet een bestaand netwerk hebt. Dan kun je wel optredens doen in Ljubljana en in Kroatië, maar wil je dat verder trekken dan wordt dat best wel lastiger. En dat komt ook omdat de gages, hoe zuidelijker je gaat, minder hoog worden." Koen ter Heegde, in discussion with author, March 2020.

348 Miran Rusjan conference presentation on music industries in the ex-Yugoslavian region. 06-02-2020.

349 On the Prešeren square in the heart of Ljubljana's city center, a statue of famous national poet and hero France Prešeren is located. Prešeren (1800-1849) is acknowledged as the greatest Slovene classical poet. The national cultural holiday, Prešeren Day, is celebrated annually on 8 February.

350 Peter Baroš, in discussion with author, February 2020.

The strategy to address this and improve the Slovenian market, he argues, is for countries in the ex-Yugoslavian region to join forces. Now that the complex history of internal regional struggles and the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s has been left behind, the time has come to start working towards a strong collaborative music industry, Baroš explains:

But I have a good picture of what can happen. What I'd like to see happening is... You know, ex-Yu is a brand. [...] It's something interesting, also for people from abroad and I'm really sad that we cannot present ourselves as ex-Yu market altogether. OK, there was war, there was a lot of shit... but now, after so many years, I can feel that people are now curious about collaboration.

In order to stimulate this collaboration, a new cooperative network project was initiated, by the name of HEMI (Hub for the Exchange of Music Innovation), of which CIGIC is the leading partner. HEMI, is four-year European Union funded program aimed at stimulating and expanding the music industry of Central and South-Eastern Europe.³⁵¹ As Baroš claimed: "We're trying to connect with all those networks, associations which are following something similar in ways to make better options for musicians to stay alive in the professional business. So it's about education, it's about networking, about context, about quality products (albums), distribution. It's about everything."³⁵² For Slovenia, the initiative aims to create awareness of the cultural and business potential of having a professionalized music industry.

Baroš hopes that the HEMI project will draw more attention to the ex-Yu region more broadly. Its music industry is still under developed and unknown, so he understands why, for more western showcase festivals, focusing on this region is a challenge. However, he is confident that by professionalizing this market, it will be easier to gain access to the musical talent that is available: "So if you have one speaker on the other side like HEMI, who has already done all of this research [on unknown music scenes], it's much easier to collaborate."

For Slovenia, then, initiating MENT in 2015 was an important step in this process, Baroš states. In order to take it further than being just a festival, the event had to address broader cultural issues, take the next tentative steps towards professionalizing the music sector and educate artists on what it means to be export-ready:

Because of MENT we started to think: OK, now we will prepare our first showcase festival here in Ljubljana. People will come here, so what to do now? If the musicians don't understand the whole point about showcases and the music business as a whole, it's very likely to become a lost opportunity. So, no point, we will have 20 Slovenian bands play at MENT each year, but what then? That's the problem. So before the first edition we started to do an educational training

³⁵¹ 2020-2023, total amount of EU support: 1.941.171 EUR. See: <https://ced-slovenia.eu/en/project/hub-exchange-music-hemi-2/>

³⁵² Peter Baroš, in discussion with author, February 2020.

program by the name of Fundament.

[...] But let's say that MENT was the first trigger to start thinking: OK, we have to do something now.

Comparing MENT in this regard to other showcases, Baroš explained how larger showcase events such as Eurosonic serve as an inspiration: "We all know that Eurosonic is, let's say, the number one. You can call it that way. Not just because of the size, or because of the history, but also because of the whole structure that is built around it." This is indeed a major difference with Eurosonic, which, according to Baroš, serves as a forerunner because of its international stature and setting the trend of what will be popular in the live music scene. In that sense the MENT organizers see other showcases as leading by example, albeit not without critique and the need to have its own voice. As Dobusch et al (2010, 22) concluded in their study on German Field Configuring events, "[w]hile new events call existing ones into question they still define their role – even justify their existence – with reference to those events." Indeed, as Miran Rusjan explained:

I wouldn't say that I see them [Eurosonic, Reeperbahn, SPOT] as competition, because we are way smaller. [...] Also geo-strategically they're way bigger than us and we cannot compete. We cannot become so big as they are. But, as I said before, because we are smaller maybe we can be more flexible and do some things differently. Maybe we see things at Reeperbahn or Eurosonic that we don't like, but we also understand that these might be necessary parts of their whole picture. And it would be not fair from us to be like critical. [...] But the thing is, we were traveling around a lot for two or three years [before initiating MENT]. We've been to SPOT, Eurosonic, Reeperbahn and we were observing, learning etc. What we like, didn't like and thinking about how we... not copy, because it's a specific situation, but translate it in a way that can be useful and working in our environment.

As for future ambitions, the organizers of MENT festival don't aim for the event to grow. "Actually," Andraž Kajzer stated, "what we want to do is make it a bit smaller next year, in the sense that we want to have more focus on less bands." That is, to sustain their underground aesthetic and continue to provide for an accessible platform for alternative music. Deeply rooted in the underground music scene of Ljubljana and a strong local network of venues, MENT's aims to retain the exclusive and carefully curated nature of the event, while simultaneously exploring initiatives that can bring additional value for its participants on an international stage.

The outlook of MENT remains directed towards the Balkan region and finding acts from the more obscured markets in Southeastern Europe. Most music markets in the western part of Europe have a well-organized music infrastructure and promising bands often have a constructive network with professionals to guide them. But to find good bands

in Eastern and Southeastern Europe is challenging, Kajzer admitted. There is a lack of proper infrastructure which would help promising groups that are ready to be promoted internationally with a clearly defined profile. However, this is what separates these smaller strongly curated “boutique” events from ESNS or Reeperbahn. For MENT this can in fact be regarded as its strong point. In some respect they withdraw from the “market” or “industry” principle, Koen ter Heegde pointed out for example, which for many of the professionals coming to Ljubljana is an opportunity to get to know bands from that don’t appear on other showcases. The challenge, then, is to select acts that are of sufficient international potential, have a certain level of professionalism, while simultaneously reflecting MENT’s underground aesthetic. One of the bands that performed at MENT 2020 is a Rotterdam based Noise pop/Post-punk formation, by the name of Neighbours Burning Neighbours. Their drummer, Aram Scheeve, pointed out how MENT, and also performing in smaller (east and central European) markets, shaped their career and performance practice.

6.5.2 Artist perspective

On Thursday February 6, 2020 Neighbours Burning Neighbours performed at MENT festival at the Klub Gromka, a venue located in the heart of (underground arts community) Metelkova (figure 16).

Figure 18. Club Gromka at (former military headquarters) Metelkova.

The venue holds approximately 170 people and is widely used as space for music performances, theatre, film screenings, rehearsals, lectures and political-activist activities.

Neighbours Burning Neighbours formed in Rotterdam in 2018 and quickly became popular in the international underground music scene. The band consists of Daanie van den Ijssel (guitar/vocals), Bart Kalkman (bass guitar), Alicia Breton Ferrer (guitar/vocals) and Aram Scheeve (drums).

Earlier in their career they also performed in Groningen, on three occasions: first at an alternative showcase during Eurosonic on 17 January, 2019 in bar O'Ceallaigh. And, later that year in the downstage podium in VERA on 28th of July 2019. And, finally, on the 17th of January 2020 at KULT, again during Eurosonic. The alternative showcases were organized by Lepel Concerts and Subroutine Records (co-owned by Koen ter Heegde) by the name "The Sound of Young Holland." In 2019 they toured in Germany, Austria and Poland. Their performance at MENT was part of their MENT tour [sic.] which brought them to Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Croatia and, of course, Slovenia. On the insistence of Terheegde they applied for a place in the lineup. They were chosen from a larger pool of acts, including some acts from Rotterdam. Drummer Aram Scheeve elaborates on how the band experienced their performance:

The night before we did a show in Kroatia, so we arrived quite early in Ljubljana. My girlfriend, who joined the band to take on some managing tasks, contacted the MENT organization if we could check in the hostel earlier, which was no problem. We were very pleased with how accomodating the festival organization was. Also with being flexible with equipment storage. Also during the show in Klub Gromka, Metelkova area, the stage manager was very welcoming and invested to make the experience as smooth as possible. I was actually quite nervous, because we had been focusing on this show for the whole trip. And it was also our first show where there was a very tight schedule, with only twenty minutes conversion time. We were second on the bill, and the first band played on their own equipment. So did we, so all instruments had to be removed from the stage before we could set up our own equipment including my drumkit. This was something I had never done before this way. Luckily, it all went very efficiently. These are the moments that you grow as a band, advance in our professional development. A showcase festival is an ideal place for testing if you can handle the pressure and see how we perform under those circumstances. [...] It was a special night. It was a bigger club than we had performed in until then. And packed too. Quite impressive. But since we had already done some shows on the tour we were able to deliver a good performance.³⁵³

For the band in this stage of their career this showcase performance was utilized as a testing ground and to experience the dynamics of a showcase festival. They had not done prior investigation into the event by sending out invitations or making connections to professionals. They just hoped that press or bookers would attend the show, "But I couldn't really imagine how this would actually go or how easy those connections could be made,"

353 Aram Scheeve, in discussion with author, May 2020.

Scheeve points out. Indeed, their connection with Terheegde was helpful in making connections to professionals and actively promoting the show. “This was very nice to have,” Scheeve notes. “Someone who is building the hype.”

Even though the band had little expectations there were some notable results. In a conference panel dedicated to a review of the festival’s best moments up until then (“Agent’s Panel - The Day After Moment”), for example, the band was mentioned as one of the highlights by the representative of the German Powerline Agency. Consequently, connections were established with them and Terheegde. There was also a journalist present from England on invite, who wrote a positive piece on the band and could be a useful connection for the band in the UK. It is these “soft skill” connections that often provide fruitful in the long term. “You get noticed,” Scheeve points out, “and after some months there might suddenly come a message in your inbox asking if we’re available to perform somewhere.

The musicians of Neighbours Burning Neighbours are not particularly concerned with how they can advance in a certain market. In fact, they do not imagine the musical spaces they navigate through as a “market.” Rather as a string of one-off connections and gigs. While they acknowledge the potential of showcase events, connections in the noise rock scene they operate in are established mostly through personal routes and in often less-visible ways. Interestingly, bands such as Neighbours Burning Neighbours build up their network through underground connections. In Rotterdam, Scheeve pointed out, there is a large and active underground music scene which is up to date with new developments rather quickly. Also, musicians travel within the scene from group to group and bring along their networks to the new band configuration. When asked about the European tour of Neighbours Burning Neighbours, Scheeve explains:

We have arranged the tour ourselves. Most of the connections were already established by Alicia [Breton Ferrer] who performed in those countries with [band] The Sweet Release Of Death and became friends with regional bands in the process. One example of this is the [Polish noise rock] group Hanako, with whom we have done four or five shows. We’ve been free-riding with them on that tour. Alicia has contacted her friends trying to get things organized. Same with this year’s tour; we have planned this ourselves. [...] Playing together with other bands are the closest connections we have. We can turn to those whenever we want to perform again in a certain region. And we also ask those groups to perform with us in the Netherlands. It is fun to support each other in that way and to help establish new networks.

Even though connections are often established in underground processes, the band was provided with an international showcase platform, potentially granting accelerated access into undiscovered territory. Perhaps this intersection of the DIY dynamic with a more institutionalized professionalism is exemplary of how MENT distinguishes itself from other, more commercial, events. Providing a platform for underground groups to present

themselves to a new audience, while seeking to maintain the experimental, underground mentality of its artists.

For Neighbours Burning Neighbours, however, this performance was not merely seen as a gateway to new markets. Rather, the whole process of doing a showcase in a more professional setting was a learning curve in an of itself.³⁵⁴ It provided them with valuable experience, which will help shape their future career trajectory. The case of Neighbours Burning Neighbours, then, shows how MENT is valuable in two ways: as a professional platform providing an international window of career opportunity and the invaluable professional insights that results from the experience itself. In fact, Scheeve aims to get more involved with the dynamics of the music industry and the opportunities that showcase festivals can provide in the future for the band. “Especially if we can do a lot of gigs and also have a release a showcase event creates momentum. People write about you when you put on a good show and will share that with others. Then a snowball effect can occur.”

6.6 Conclusion

The contrasting selection of case studies discussed in this chapter reveals how European urban showcase festivals are embedded in their local, regional and national environments. Reeperbahn, SPOT and MENT all collaborate on a transnational scale, but the urban spaces they occupy are crucial in expressing their distinctive relationships between the local, the national, transnational, and the global. Cultural, political and financial resources are utilized to strengthen the particular festival frameworks, which then serve as unique selling points to create and develop international networking strategies. The three festivals described in this chapter are market-creating, field-configuring (Lampel and Meyer 2008) events. They serve as platforms for increased musical mobility, provide access to international networks, and open up new, previously undisclosed, musical routes.

The festivals documented in this chapter have proven quite effective at putting EU funds to use in the benefit of their own, bottom-up, ways. However, while the European Union’s top down approach does not always coincide with these individual development strategies (Sassatelli 2009), its intervention inevitably creates collaborative potential. This is one reason why funding for cultural projects has increased with every new European cultural program the EU has initiated since the turn of the century.³⁵⁵ Indeed, celebrating cultural diversity is one of the most effective ways to imagine a unified Europe.

It is the case, however, that many European citizens feel that European institutions fail to represent them at a local level, which is one of the reasons why the European

354 The band received a contractual arrangement for a fixed fee (250 EUR), lodging, food and free access to the whole event, conditions which are often not self-evident in the DIY live music scene.

355 Culture 2000 programme (2000-2006) budget: 236.4 million Euros, Culture Programme (2007-2013) budget: 400.000 million, Creative Europe Programme Culture (2014-2020) budget: 453.4 million Euros, Creative Europe Programme Culture (2021-2027): 609 million Euros. See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-creative-europe_en.pdf

geopolitical situation has become increasingly unstable in recent years. Therefore, as Chiara Bottici concluded in *Imagining Europe* (2013, 177): “Rethinking democracy in Europe cannot bypass the question of European citizens’ capacity to decide on substantial issues and, more generally, on their own fate.” One of the strengths of showcase festivals, then, is the ability to mobilize people and organizations working on a grassroots level in cultural institutions and stimulate communication among them. And, in doing that, engaging in reciprocal actions that actively benefit the European circulation of musical endeavors, and ultimately, with identifying as European.

Of course, the three cases discussed above constitute only a small sample of the many existing European showcase festivals.³⁵⁶ The data collected in this sample study, however, suggests that each event functions within their own market of choice, a market which is more regional, national or transnational than it is imagined as European. Indeed, where SPOT focuses on the Nordic countries, MENT on South-Eastern Europe and the primary collaborative strategy for Reeperbahn is to become a global player, the differences are evident. What binds these events, however, is the two-sided aspects of having a music program and conference aimed at a professional audience while also having a program which serves a regular audience. These two dimensions are disconnected in various visible and non-visible ways. Visible, for example, when certain festival events are accessible exclusively for a professional audience. And non-visible during moments where the regular and professional audience mix – providing for a “regular” festival atmosphere – while artists themselves might be well aware that the stakes are different.³⁵⁷ Managing and coping with the challenges that come from this duality have resulted in similarities in the organizational structure and models of integration of the cases presented in this chapter, displaying what has been described elsewhere as institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

However, geographically, artistically as well as economically the European music industry is not one single market, I suggest, but rather a collection of markets. The challenge remains to find ways in which these singularities can be embraced while simultaneously disseminating these cultural differences into collaborations on a transnational European stage. And, in that process, to show how the whole can be more than the sum of its parts.

356 Approximately 60 festivals in 2019.

357 As Mads Damsgaard Kristiansen, for example, noted about his performance at SPOT 2019: “I had like different record labels watching me. So I was actually a bit nervous about that. Also because normally I don’t get nervous when I play shows.”

7.0 Conclusion

At the time of writing this conclusion, the world is slowly recovering from the first devastating consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic health crises. The Netherlands (and the world) has not seen a societal crisis like this since WWII. While the safety measures, the “lockdown,” putting a halt to public and social life as drastically as possible were necessary and urgent, the consequences on the economy, (mental) health system and social behavior and forms of interaction remains to be seen. For (music) festivals and live events the measures have been disastrous. Many musicians have seen their income stagnate within a matter of weeks. Events have been cancelled, leaving event organizers, technicians, caterers, sound and lighting engineers, equipment rental companies, security people, and artists without a job. While some tentative steps have been taken to “unlock,” the live performance music domain (i.e. events, concerts, festivals) has no perspective as of yet. There is no predicting if, and when, large scale events can resume to take place. Not before there is a vaccine or enough testing possibilities to ensure the safety of visitors involving the risk of a return of the outbreak and risking a collapse of the hospital health system. At this point people expect that 2020 will certainly see no (large scale) events and festivals. Indeed, SXSW, Reeperbahn, SPOT, Pinkpop, Roskilde, and many, many more festivals have been cancelled. How the music world will cope with the devastating consequence of this collapse of the live music market is yet unknown.³⁵⁸ While for many small businesses in the cultural domain this crisis has proven fatal, people also have become creative in finding survival strategies. Online festivals, drive-in rave parties, and digital livestreaming performances are just some examples of how music life is adapting to the regulations.³⁵⁹ For how long? No one knows.

For Eurosonic Noorderslag, the COVID-19 crisis came at a time when the 2020 edition was only just behind. Because of this perhaps not unfavorable moment, the organization has some time to re-strategize, adapt, and prepare before the next edition of ESNS is scheduled to take place. At the time of writing (late November 2020), however, the ESNS organization is planning to continue with the 35th edition of the festival in 2021, “in whatever form it might be.”³⁶⁰ In any case, one change has already been implemented: the annual country focus is abandoned for the upcoming edition in favor of focusing on the whole of Europe. While this European focus has always been the core mission of the event, the organization chose to underscore the importance of European connections in these difficult times by emphasizing the European outlook. Therefore, ESNS calls out to

358 If there has to be found a positive side effect of this crisis, it might be that these times will provide ample possibilities for alternative ways of circulating and experiencing live music and future research on the ways in which the music industry has coped with this crisis. In late May/early June, for example, Eurosonic Noorderslag organized a series of online panels on the future of the popular music sector.

359 On Saturday May 9th 2020, hundreds of party goers assembled for an in-car drive-in rave party in the German village of Schüttorf. See also: <https://nos.nl/video/2333417-drive-in-rave-party-in-duitsland-dit-is-geweldig.html>

360 <https://www.oogtv.nl/2020/05/eurosonic-noorderslag-gaat-door-in-januari-in-welke-vorm-dan-ook/> and <https:// groningen.nieuws.nl/evenementen-in-groningen/987569/35e-editie-van-eurosonic-noorderslag-gaat-door-in-welke-vorm-dan-ook/>

all European artists to apply for the next festival edition, which is scheduled for 13-16 January 2021.

7.1 Summary of findings

One of my core objectives to write this dissertation was to establish a comprehensive account on one of the most successful and longest-running music industry showcase festivals, Eurosonic Noorderslag. Its multi-faceted historical development and socio-cultural impact on the European music industry has been unvoiced in academic literature. Another aim was to address the specific lack of research on music *showcase* festivals in general, and provide a basis on which to further build a body of work within this unexplored scholarly field of research. With the dramatic increase in the number of showcase festivals, especially in recent decades, many opportunities for examination have presented itself on various levels of analysis and from a multitude of perspectives. The intersection of festivalization, (European) identity and live music careers within showcase events have been my specific point of focus here.

This dissertation, then, operates at the cross-sectoral research areas of festival studies, ethnomusicology, and cultural studies to reveal how *Eurosonic Noorderslag: The European Music Platform* (ESNS) functions as a platform for the European music industry. That is, how it relates to the local and transnational European music scene and the ways in which it facilitates the support of music talent. My close reading of this festival and its accompanying European narrative has revealed how artistic careers evolved and how European identity is performatively constructed, challenged and reaffirmed throughout thirty-five years of sonic narration.

The first contextualizing chapter (“European Festival Cultures: Definitions and Histories”) offered a historicized overview of how post-traditional music festivals were informed by political, economic, and societal motives from the post-war period until the present. Adapting Bianchini’s (1991) division of festivals into three historical periods, I suggested that these three stages needed to be expanded into a fourth stage to shed light on contemporary festival practices from the 1990s until the present. These multifaceted convergences have lead to what I have coined the *Age of Translocalism*. *Translocalism* stands for today’s broader demographic appeal of festivals, the changed economic role of festivals (and live performance) within the European music industry, the vast integration of mainstream and social media, and increased mobility (festival tourism). Ultimately, it uncovers how festivals were utilized as cultural policy tools within post-war histories and compares these to how festival events now function as an integrated part of contemporary society today.

In Chapter 2 (“Eurosonic Noorderslag: Emergence and Historical Development”), I revealed how ESNS acquired its status as the foremost European music showcase event through building innovative international networks, while at the same time navigating its reputation as a locally embedded event. By exploring its institutional dynamics,

curation practices and place making qualities, we have seen how ESNS exemplifies the role of popular music in municipal cultural policy as an urban showcase event. Also, it has revealed how it can function as model for initiatives that can aid in the preservation of local cultural identity while simultaneously engaging in international collaborative projects. And, finally, it revealed how these translocal qualities continually inform and advance each other.

I then took a closer look into the European identity forming processes of ESNS in Chapter 3 (“ESNS and European Identity Formation”).³⁶¹ I zoomed in on two European focused festival elements and also traced connections between ESNS and the EU music market to argue that two different attitudes towards Europe seem to be at stake: supranational collaboration and cultural protectionism. In the latter conceptualization, ESNS is looking at Europe as a market that needs to be protected. Here it is implied that Europe needs to define itself as distinctive from the Anglo-American music industry. If not, European music identity is in danger of losing or neglecting its potential. Just like the various US states are perceived to be a “nation,” European protectionism is focused on creating a “United States of Europe.” That is, to create a unifying European identity, while providing enough space to retain a unity in diversity and a human-identified, anti-war, notion of Europe. Conversely, identification on a supranational level is also considered necessary: this is aimed at collaboration within an international community that seeks a unifying narrative in the current context of unstable geopolitical developments. For festival participants, European identity is negotiated and solidified through the interaction and confrontation with bands, media and audiences from all over Europe, resulting in a “continental village” for the duration of the event. This relates well to what Eurosonic aspires to foster and promote: the circulation of European repertoire.

In chapter 4 (“Breaking EU Borders: European Border Breakers Awards and Focus Countries”) I presented a deeper analysis of two promotional mechanisms of transnational collaboration within the European music industry: The European music prize EBBA and the annual focus of ESNS on one specific European country. I have historicized and contextualized the development of both initiatives and examined how these initiatives have developed into essential elements promoting supranational cultural exchange. Both promotional mechanisms, I have suggested, express the transnational outlook and aim to “break borders” in two distinct ways. When the European Commission communicated the “border breaking” narrative within the EBBAs, it was not exploring aesthetic concerns, but, rather, commercial concerns. The EBBA prize was focused on developing its economic potential in relationship to the US and other global music markets. While the aim of the EU is to present itself as a single music market, however, it simultaneously functions as a conglomeration of national music industries with each their own unique aesthetic and cultural characteristics. The country focus, then, seems to be more oriented

361 It is important to note here that at this point a distinction was made between the two festival elements “Eurosonic” and “Noorderslag.” Noorderslag focuses happens as part of the festival as a one-day event and focuses exclusively on the Dutch music industry. Eurosonic, however, is oriented towards *European* music. That is, European artists, organizations, and music industry representatives. Since it is technically one event, I refer to Eurosonic with the full abbreviated name: ESNS.

towards a cultural understanding of the aesthetics of music. How those countries position themselves and present their artists, reveals the ways in which nations conceptualize breaking borders, which is often more closely associated with musical, cultural and aesthetic borders. Examining the country focus has suggested how nations try to come to terms musically with this idea of “Unity in Diversity.” I have argued that whereas aspiring US artists tend to abide by genre conventions (and a compartmentalization of one’s music is mostly even required), what is perceived to be “successful” and interesting European music is characterized by *bricolage*, crossover, eclecticism, and experimentation.

Through ethnographic fieldwork, I have also investigated how Eurosonic is perceived and utilized over time by regional performing artists. To this end, artists from the northern part of the Netherlands (the provinces of Groningen and Friesland) were examined to disclose how grassroots, personal and often more obscured narratives of performing at Eurosonic in the course of its historical development has impacted career development in Chapter 5 (“Live Music in Practice: Battle of the North”). Here I focused on artists who had been part of the Eurosonic lineup in the course of its development since 1995. By doing interviews, I have traced and documented how artists reflect upon the event as well as understand how participating in it has contributed to their careers. To delimit this investigation and also to reconnect to the core local concerns of “Noorderslag,” I revisited earlier editions of the festival and its reception which sparked debates about the representation of acts from the northern part of the Netherlands. My focus upon bands and musicians from the regions of Groningen and Friesland exclusively enabled me demarcate my investigation while also addressing the issues about representation – issues which were explicitly debated in earlier festival editions. Of course, the artists interviewed are just a small sample of the hundreds of bands that have participated in the event in its long-standing history. My exploration, therefore, should be regarded as a first exploration, which could prompt further research on this comprehensive and understudied topic of artistic experience. Based on these interviews and tracing the artists’ career trajectories, however, I have suggested that, as a curated event with significant national and international status, Eurosonic has built a strong name as “quality filter,” providing symbolic capital to whoever is granted access to the event. While many regional musicians are skeptical of the explicit and measurable career benefits of a showcase performance, its benefits for an artist’s or band’s biography is widely supported.

The second finding is that Eurosonic enabled an accelerated momentum in creating interest and media attention, that is, a “buzz,” which is often needed to maximize the result potential for a band or artist. Thirdly, already having a network in place, displaying a professional attitude, and being able to articulate what (and who) is needed to make the next step in the career are pivotal markers to infiltrate into new industry networks. Musicians who have strong connections in the professional music business have a better chance of capitalizing on this momentum than those that lack these connections. Next, the romantic idea of being “discovered,” without any preparatory work, is considered illusory, and a romanticized narrative deployed by festival outlets and media reports. Moreover, the circulation of this narrative is considered as a strategic incentive for new acts to apply

and, when selected, uncritically agree to the terms and conditions of the performance. Finally, artists learn what to gain from Eurosonic over time as their career evolves. The notion that Eurosonic can provide a formula for the romantic desire to be discovered is discarded in favor of a more rational approach and work ethic. In this sense, the festival performances provide an educative experience in itself. Over time, as musicians become more experienced, they also become more proactive and pragmatic about the ways in which the event can be utilized. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the artist, not with the platform. The challenge is how to work *with* the event and the window of opportunity it provides.

The case of Eurosonic has served as an example of how showcase festivals have become networked in the European music festival landscape. It has revealed that, not only do they function as a stepping stone for upcoming acts, they also serve a networking purpose for music professionals, as an educational platform for discussions on innovations and developments, and – perhaps the central issue – as events that can provide access to international music markets. This is not only potentially beneficial for musicians and industry people, but also to help reach political goals, for example, via alliances with municipal and national policy makers. Indeed, music connects, educates, stimulates, moves, regulates and sells. No wonder, then, that the “ultimate goal” of Music Moves Europe, the European Commission’s initiative in support of Europe’s music sector, is to develop “a truly European music policy.”³⁶² To support this aim, and solidify its common vision, ESNS has collaborated with the European Commission on substantial financial and organizational levels.³⁶³ One passage from the content plan Eurosonic Noorderslag 2017 - 2020 – made by the guidelines from the Dutch Performing Arts Fund (NFPK) – (p. 12), for example, illustrates this connection:

Because ESNS is the only event which exclusively focuses on European music and represents the interests of the European sector, we have been very successful, and still are, in acquiring European subsidies. [...] Content - and production wise, these projects are strongly connected to the event and contribute significantly to the scale and impact of ESNS.³⁶⁴

But is such an overarching European music policy necessarily reflecting the aims and goals of local, regional, and national music markets? Can unity in diversity be found by centralizing such a culture-specific phenomenon as music, practically or symbolically? Is European collaboration the direction the music industry should take? To address these questions, I expanded my scope and turned my attention to the landscape of European urban showcase festivals in Chapter 6 (“Showcasing Europe”: European Showcase Festival Networks”). By examining three compelling examples of European urban showcase events, Reeperbahn (Hamburg), SPOT (Aarhus) and MENT (Ljubljana), I have revealed multiple points of difference and comparison in the ways collaborative networks are

362 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/music-moves-europe_en

363 In 2016 the festival budget was covered by European subsidies for 28% of the total budget.

364 <http://meerjarigeadvieszen.nfpa.nl/files/avr/0545/Noorderslag.pdf>

sustained and how Europe is imagined. Moreover, how different historical backgrounds, unique cultural narratives, and the particular urban spaces they occupy are crucial in expressing their distinctive relationships between the local, the national, and the transnational. Despite common features – a drive towards professionalization, to facilitate (professional) networking and the objective to sustain a solid music industry platform – the data collected in this sample study suggested that each event focuses on its own target market first and foremost, a market which is more regional, national or transnational than it is imagined as European.

Indeed, both the practices and discourse of its participants and gatekeepers indicates that Europe is imagined differently by actors and key players in the varied showcase festival landscape, even if the benefits and significance of international collaboration is widely recognized. Eurosonic, for example, is explicitly promoting a unified European music sector, whereas SPOT centers around Scandinavia and therefore exploits its unique Nordic characteristics. Whereas Reeperbahn Festival aims to build and sustain its global outreach by extending to yet unexplored intercontinental music markets in, for example, China and Africa, MENT festival imagines European collaboration to help develop its local and regional markets. In other words, transnational European collaborative strategies in the music sector remain multifaceted and fluid, and is highly dependent on perspective. In other words, geographically, artistically as well as economically, the European music industry is a fragmented collection of markets, rather than one unified music industry.

This conclusion echoes Benedict Anderson's study of nations as "imagined (political) communities," that is, how they are the result of symbolic constructions articulated over time. Johan Förnas (Signifying Europe, p. 52) rightfully noted, however, that "this is not to say that it is a pure fiction, since when people act according to such imagination, they make it as real as anyone can ask for [...]." Indeed, cultural narratives inform collaborative efforts in the European music sector, both symbolically and practically. The cases discussed communicate a sense of transnational communality and the realization that international collaboration can bring about opportunities that would otherwise remain obscured. This can be both an official policy – underpinning subsidies that practitioners need to address – but this is also enacted from bottom-up informal networks.

7.2 Areas for Future Research

Throughout this dissertation, I have worked towards a deeper understanding of how urban European showcase festivals imagine Europe and work towards facilitating international networks while also celebrating the unique culture in which they are embedded. By drawing on a range of archival materials and theoretical perspectives, I have explored and historicized the development of the Eurosonic Noorderslag Festival and its relation to European music industry networks. This work can be considered as the first explorative endeavors into the functioning of music showcase festivals within the European festival

landscape and opens up possibilities for further research in other related areas.

The question of how Eurosonic functions as a stepping stone for upcoming acts, for example, could be explored in further detail. This could be done by extending the number of respondents to also include musicians from other Dutch regions, or to extend the research to include international acts. Also, by distinguishing between the accessibility of the separate festival elements (e.g. Eurosonic vis-à-vis GrunnSonic), one could obtain more insight into the ways in which specific festival elements are utilized in accumulating cultural capital. This research might also include discussions on musicians' working lives and overall career paths. That is, how musician's career trajectories navigate between having a portfolio career (self-employed, freelance) and pursuing a more traditional (full-time) job. Particularly in the current challenging times where the COVID-19 outbreak intervenes with the practices of professional freelance musicians, this might provide for a fruitful and current avenue for further research.

One topic which received scant attention in this project was the Noorderslag part of ESNS. As the Noorderslag element focuses on the Dutch music industry only, and focuses on already successful Dutch acts, it was not given the attention it deserves. This was due to the primarily European analytic point of departure in this dissertation. Another study, then, could productively and rewardingly expand this research to also include Noorderslag. For example, to investigate how artists – who are perhaps more advanced in their career – benefit from performing on this prestigious event for the Dutch music industry.

Furthermore, the research on career trajectories of festival artists conducted in this specific context and location (Eurosonic, Groningen) could be undertaken at different showcase events and locations. Especially for smaller showcase events, in perhaps less developed (European) music industries, collecting data on results and experiences from performing at showcase events could provide insight into the ways in which artists can benefit from showcase festivals.

Indeed, my (four) fieldwork sites were located in larger European urban city centers – cosmopolitan areas which potentially have access to economic, practical and political resources, whereas festivals occurring in smaller cities or rural areas might experience more challenges in sustaining such an event. Tracing showcase events and networks in regions with less developed music industries could be explored, not only within Europe, but also on a global scale. Particularly, investigating the translocal qualities of such events might be interesting in this regard, as they oscillate between embedded local specificities and aspire to more international showcase strategies and networks. Examining the ways in which these music networks develop can provide a deeper understanding of the impact of showcase festivals upon broader societal cultural infrastructure.

Future studies might also consider the ways in which niche music showcase festivals which focus on one specific genre are sustained and promoted through the use of showcase festival networks. One example of such an event is the first showcase festival fully dedicated to metal and related genres, "Scherpe Tanden," which is held annually in Antwerp (Belgium). Examining such events can extend the concept of translocalism and

provide insight into niche events that aspire to transform the dynamics of local music culture into transnational collaboration.

7.3 Final thoughts

The emphasis of this dissertation on the cultural-historical aspect of showcase events could also provide a point of departure for further investigation on other events (festivals) to document and gage their significance as forms of cultural heritage. The famous counter-cultural US festivals from the 1960s, for example, such as Monterey (1967) and Woodstock (1969) acquired their legendary status, at least in part, as a consequence of how the events were documented and disseminated as films, documentaries, and books. And, ultimately, how they became mythologized (Bennett and Rogers, 2016, pp. 40-41). Obviously, the digital age has implications for how music (culture) is consumed and celebrated. Music careers are made and terminated online, without ever having been on tour. Music events have become fleeting events, its significance often reduced to after-movies in which the next events are immediately hyped. Similarly, careers, concerts, moments are lost in the multitude of (digital) content. Exactly why this occurs, I'd like to suggest in this final note, remains under-researched and reminds us why it is important to rethink the impact and the narrative qualities of music events, concerts and festivals; to document them as time-capsules and to research them as the soundtrack to specific moments in time. Not only to see how they function in culture, but also, as French social theorist Jacques Attali (1977) claimed, to observe how music is not merely a reflection of culture, but is a messenger of change.

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Abstract in Dutch

Europese Muziekfestivalnetwerken in de Etalage: De Zaak Eurosonic Noorderslag

Vóórdat de COVID-19 pandemie een drastische neergang van het aantal festivals en evenementen veroorzaakte, was er al jaren een aanzienlijke groei waarneembaar in de Europese populaire muziekfestivalmarkt wat betreft het aantal showcasefestivals. Showcasefestivals zijn evenementen die nieuw muziktalent presenteren en etaleren en daarnaast een netwerkplatform bieden voor professionals die werkzaam zijn in de muziekindustrie. Meestal vinden deze evenementen plaats in een stedelijke omgeving en spreiden ze zich uit over een aantal dagen. Showcasefestivals belichten de artistieke en economische stand van zaken in de (live)muziekindustrie, maar kunnen daarnaast ook een voedingsbodem zijn voor hervormingen. Er worden nieuwe netwerken tot stand gebracht, zowel formeel als informeel, en bestaande connecties worden er verstevigd of uitgebreid. Maar ook wordt er kennis overgedragen over de manier waarop de muziekindustrie functioneert, hoe artiesten een bestendige (internationale) carrière kunnen opbouwen of de manier waarop (muziek)festivals functioneren in de maatschappij. Ondanks dit veelzijdige culturele belang is er een evident gebrek aan academisch onderzoek dat deze evenementen uitvoerig onderzoekt en de connecties traceert naar lokale en interlokale netwerken. Deze leemte wordt in deze dissertatie opgevuld door onderzoek te doen naar de manier waarop Eurosonic Noorderslag zich heeft ontwikkeld tot spil van de Europese muziekindustrie. In de loop van zijn 35-jarig bestaan heeft Eurosonic Noorderslag zich ontwikkeld tot vooraanstaand platform voor de promotie van Europees muziekrepertoire. Ieder jaar in januari fungeert de stad Groningen als centrum van de Europese muziekindustrie en presenteert het populaire muziek als kernonderdeel van de hedendaagse Europese cultuur. Een gedetailleerd verslag van zijn geschiedenis bespreekt hoe sociale, etnografische en culturele processen deze succesvolle ontwikkeling hebben gefaciliteerd vanaf het begin in 1986 tot aan het heden. De expliciete focus van Eurosonic op de circulatie van Europees repertoire – en de positionering ten opzichte van Anglo-Amerikaans repertoire – roept vragen op over de constructie van Europese identiteit en de toepassing ervan. Met andere woorden, hoe wordt Europese identiteit uitgedragen en, vervolgens, ontvangen? Daarnaast wordt in deze dissertatie de speelpraktijk bestudeerd van artiesten die onderdeel zijn (geweest) van het festival. Mede door de prijzencultuur en het gemedieerde karakter dient Eurosonic Noorderslag als duw in de rug voor opkomende (internationale) artiesten. Maar wat is het belang voor deelnemende acts? Wat heeft dit betekend voor de lancering en duurzaamheid van een carrière? Deze vragen worden behandeld door de focus te leggen op de carrières van artiesten uit de twee noordelijkste provincies van Nederland, Friesland en Groningen. De verhalen en ervaringen van

artiesten afkomstig uit deze specifieke regio koppelen terug op controverses en debatten uit de eerste festivaledities en bieden een nieuw en soms onthullend perspectief op de functie van showcasefestivaloptredens. Tot slot worden in deze dissertatie drie andere Europese showcasefestivals onderzocht waartegen Eurosonic kan worden gecontrasteerd. Alles samen genomen leveren deze perspectieven een originele bijdrage op aan kennis over de (Europese) muziekindustrie. In het bijzonder omdat dit het eerste onderzoek is dat specifiek gaat over showcasefestivals als specifieke categorie, en deze bestudeert vanuit meerdere invalshoeken. Het onthult waarom deze festivals belangrijk zijn voor cultuur en legt praktische en theoretische verbanden waarop festivalonderzoekers kunnen voortbouwen.