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***Operaestate Festival Veneto:* A socio-cultural and economic analysis**

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Introduction

Bassano Operaestate Festival Veneto has presented more than four hundred shows in castles, parks, palaces, villas, squares and museums in thirty municipalities of the region of Veneto in the North East of Italy. The festival hosts artists and productions from all over the world, ranging from contemporary theatre to the most innovative international dance, music, opera, classical, jazz and art films. The diversity, breadth and quality of its programmes are its greatest strengths. The primary objective of the festival is to enable large audiences to experience the performing arts in its many different forms, and to do so through a programme of cultural animation across the entire region. This case study of *Bassano Operaestate* aims to provide a picture of the effects produced by the festival with over three decades of activity, in an area that has experienced vibrant and dynamic growth in the industrial, creative, artistic and cultural sectors, especially in recent years. The research study was commissioned by the festival and carried out by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo (FF). FF is an independent centre, based in Turin, for planning, research, training and documentation on cultural, arts and media management, economics and policies, at the service of those who create, practice, take part in, produce, promote and support arts and cultural activities.

Specifically, the study analysed the following aspects of the festival:

- ◆ its audience;
- ◆ its economic flows;
- ◆ the cultural impacts generated in the region and how these impacts were measured and assessed by *Operaestate's* main stakeholders.

The research therefore puts the festival at the centre of a complex system that reflects the multiplicity of the art forms it works with, and seeks to

investigate and interpret the multi-layered system of relationships, and the many interconnections between the festival and the region (considered as a complex system of players). This ambitious research project does not pretend to reveal the full multiplicity of effects that a cultural event like *Operaestate* can generate, but it is a first attempt to produce a multi-level representation of the 'benefits' that a long running cultural activity can generate over time.

The Research Project

This evaluation of the impacts of *Operaestate* aims to describe the multiple dimensions and effects resulting from its work over thirty years. *Operaestate* is deeply rooted in the region, and is especially renowned for how it presents the artistic and cultural challenges of contemporary theatre.

The research methodology began with the key features of the festival, which are:

- ◆ The temporal dimension: in which key aspects are short term planning (June to September) and sustainability and the festival's longevity (31 editions).
- ◆ The wide range of stakeholders, which includes about 40 municipalities and 67 venues.
- ◆ The density and variety of the programme: drama, opera, cinema and contemporary dance and theatre.
- ◆ Its commitment to best practice in production, programming and support for artists and performers.

These project coordinates allowed for the articulation of some key questions. In particular, whether the nature and history of *Operaestate* required a broad definition of regional development, one which took full account of the different values and benefits that the festival can deliver over time, but which are often difficult to measure.

The research incorporated a multi-layered approach in its use of selected analytical tools in evaluating the different outcomes that *Operaestate* produces in the region.

The research analysed the following topics:

Part	Topics	Target	Tools and Data
I - Analysis of the audience	The audience of the festival	Socio-demographic data Loyalty and participation Satisfaction Audience behaviours	PAPI ¹ 1826 questionnaires
II - Residents of Bassano and the festival	The residents of Bassano and the festival	Brand positioning Evaluation of participation Evaluation of the impacts on local residents of their participation in cultural activities	CATI ² 500 interviews with residents of Bassano
III - The economic impact	The regional economic stakeholders The festival	Economic impact generated by the festival Calculation of the financial benefit generated for different economic sectors Impact on the region's tourism and hospitality sectors Economic impact of the festival's activities and budget	CATI 20 telephone interviews 7 in depth interviews with selected stakeholders Analysis of administrative data and the operating budget for <i>Operaestate</i>
IV - Operaestate under the lens	Artists	Artistic role: evaluation of the festival's artistic focus and content Development role: evaluation of the impacts of the advice and support the festival gives to local artists	In depth Interviews: 8 national artists (5 in choral area and 3 on the theatrical side) 5 international artists

Figure 15.1: *Operaestate* research table

Part I - Analysis of the festival audience

Profile and identity of the audience

(based on analysis of 1826 audience questionnaires):

63% of the audience are female.

Their average age is 43. The largest age group is 30-59 years (over half of respondents are between 40 and 59).

Residency: 65% of the audience are from Bassano, 28.7% from other provinces in the Veneto region, 4.3% from other Italian regions and 2.4% from outside of Italy.