



Solas Festival
Annual Report 2012

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of market research with Solas Festival, carried out during the summer of 2012 by two students – Niamh Tumilty and Sabina Sharma.

We became involved with Solas Festival through the University of Glasgow Settlement, who run a scheme called 'Find a Solution' (FAS). The concept of this scheme is to create partnerships between university students and voluntary organisations based in Glasgow. It allows students to apply the knowledge they have acquired through their degrees, in order to tackle a problem, which the organisation is facing in their workplace.

In this case, Solas Festival was struggling to carry out necessary market research in the immediate period surrounding the festival, something that is vital to sustaining the organisation in the long term. So the hope was that FAS participants would relieve them of the burden of designing evaluation tools and analysing the information, which they produce.

Our hope is that those who read this report will feel that the FAS participants have directly impacted on the long-term future of the Solas Festival by providing them with essential information, which should allow them to grow audience numbers and increase funding for Solas 2013 and beyond.

Solas Aims and objectives

Solas Festival takes place annually in Wiston by Biggar, managed by a board of volunteer directors with the exception of two part-time workers. The festival's website defines its ethos as deriving its inspiration and values from its roots in the broad Christian tradition. These values include equality, justice, beauty and hospitality. By committing to these, Solas Festival aims to create a space, which is tolerant, inclusive and free of prejudice.

Solas Festival offers a creative and entertaining programme for festival-goers of all ages in a safe environment. Within their programming, artists do not only perform but are encouraged to also share their art with the attendees. The programme also contains a "Head Space" and "Soul Space" element, which makes space for challenging debate with activists, writers and thinkers from across the political, cultural and religious spectrum.

Solas Festival's is also geared towards working with many partners. Justice is a central theme to the festival, which drives the organisation to work closely with other campaigning organisations to ensure that issues of social justice and responsibility feature in their programming.

History and Development of the Solas Festival

Solas Festival first began in 2010 with a modest budget and audience. Since its origins, Solas has been able to learn from the experience of their previous two events and to take important steps towards longer-term financial viability. This was made possible due to increased feedback given by its audience members and an effective marketing strategy.

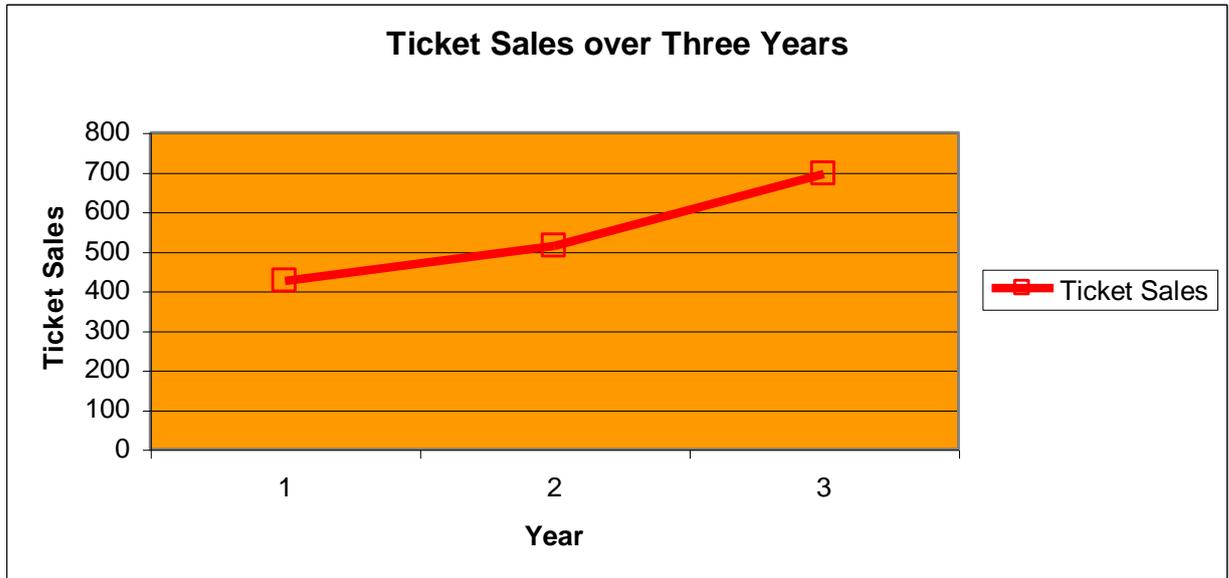


Fig 1.1 Ticket Sales over the running of Solas.

Audience growth has been consistent throughout the three years. As Figure 1.1 indicates, in year one, 426 tickets were bought in 2010, 514 tickets were bought in 2011 and 696 tickets purchased in 2012. Overall audience numbers have increased by 63.4% in between 2010 and 2012. As well as this, it has substantially grown its volunteer team to more than 100 people. Attendance amongst children and young people under 18 years old has also increased by nearly 40%.

Over the 3 years, Solas has also improved the means by which it gathers evaluation information. Since 2010, when the only evaluation method was an online survey, the organisation has been able to gather more evidence using a range of onsite and offsite evaluation methods.

In 2012, and in order to prepare to undertake even more evaluation than done previously, much background reading was done in order to gain an understanding of the festival industry. We carried out a comprehensive literature review of funding guidelines and festival analyses including: Creative Scotland Corporate Plan and Events Scotland Guidelines, and the Edinburgh Festivals Impact Report. In doing so we were able to identify gaps in the existing evaluation methods and to ensure that the evaluation results met the arts sector credentials for festival funding.

Wider Festival Aims

To put our research into context our background reading involved a study of twelve Edinburgh festivals. This study explored the economic and social impacts of the festivals it was investigating. As well as reporting the short-term impact of the festival it also investigates the long-term impacts of the festival through the wider festival aims. These are identified as: -

- 1) Contribute To Well-Being & Quality Of Life
- 2) Support Cultural Diversity & Community Cohesion
- 3) Develop Audiences for Culture
- 4) Enhance the Identity & Image of Edinburgh & Scotland
- 5) Provide routes To Employment & Skills
- 6) Support the Wider Economy of Edinburgh & Scotland
- 7) Provide a Marketing Platform for Sponsors & Stake- Holders
- 8) Contribute To Climate Change & Resource Depletion

However not all outcomes in this framework match Solas Festival's aims as the Edinburgh Impact study suggests "it is not expected that a single festival will achieve this full range of outcomes and impacts." In order to construct a framework that suits Solas Festival it is essential to identify which wider festival aims it contributes to. In order to this it is essential to build on Solas' core aims. These are: -

To create a generous, hospitable space in Scotland where the arts can be performed and enjoyed by all.

To offer a creative and entertaining programme for festival-goers of all ages in a safe environment.

To encourage artists not only to showcase their own work, but to help bring out the artist in everyone.

To work closely with our partners to ensure that issues of social justice and responsibility feature in our programming.

Using these core festival aims as a platform, it was decided that the research gathered on Solas Festival could contribute to the following wider festival outcomes: -

- 1) Contribute To Well-Being & Quality Of Life
- 2) To support Community Cohesion
- 3) Widen participation and Develop Audiences for Culture

Below are some examples of some of the additions made to the post-festival online survey after this background reading.

Online Survey

Using the previous year's questionnaire as a template and the knowledge acquired from the material provided, potential gaps in information were identified. The 2012 online survey included new additions such as:

- 1) An equalities section to compose information about the audience at Solas Festival 2012
- 2) A question to establish how many festival-goers defined themselves as locals. In the Creative Scotland Corporate plan an important point was that events should benefit local residents and get international interest.

- 3) A comment box in the accommodation section to see if any local accommodation was being used, contributing to the local community
- 4) An extra question within the ticket sales section to monitor buyer behaviour and to see if anyone had taken advantage of an early bird ticket.
- 5) A question to investigate how much the event impacts the audience on a long-term basis. We asked, "How likely are you to attend other arts events now that you have experienced the Solas Festival?"

Methodology

A list of evaluation methods used during the festival period and post-evaluation methods are provided below. Limitations for improvement and improved efficiency will be should methods wish to be used again in the future.

Onsite evaluation methods

- **Investigating motivation:** -

Rationale: The intention of this method was to ask festival-goers, “What was the one thing that brought you to Solas?”

Method: - A flower template was used to separate answers. Each petal on the template represented a different answer. Festival-goers indicated which answer related to them the most by sticking a sticker on the petal with their answer on it.

Limitations: The main obstacle that this method faced was the weather conditions. Overnight, difficult conditions led to the templates being knocked over. To combat this, the answers were collected in a questionnaire. This proved to be beneficial as people who answered in the ‘Other’ category could to expand and explain what other meant.

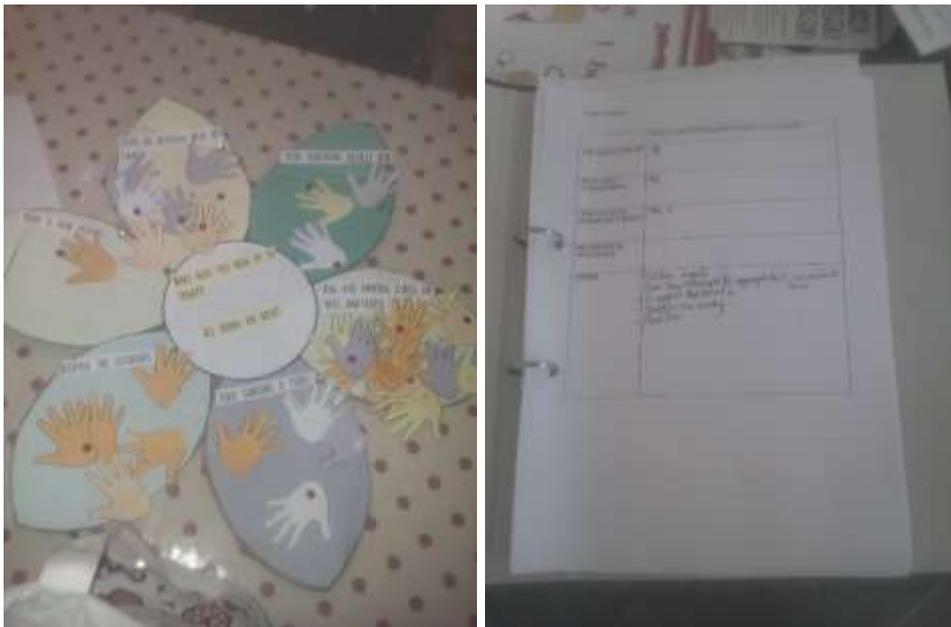


Figure 1.2 Example of Flower Template and Questionnaire format

- **Evaluation of children’s activities:** -

Rationale: The intention of this method was to ask children, “What have you taken part in at the festival?” “What was the one thing that brought you to Solas?”

Method: - Ongoing flower template with a different answer on each petal. Children answered using handprint cut-outs and could answer more than once.

Limitations: Weather conditions also proved to be a challenge for this method. There was also a low rate of feedback at the beginning of the weekend as venue managers and children's workshop leaders were not aware of the feedback method being used. This was overcome by drawing these key people to the evaluation method and interaction with the template increased.

- **Investigating new learning experiences: -**

Rationale: - This method was designed to investigate who was exploring tissues for the first time and who would explore them further as a result of having had the opportunities to do so at Solas Festival. If people who have not encountered the subject matter before are inspired to continue exploring it then it is a positive result as it displays that Solas is a platform for learning opportunities.

Method: - A short questionnaire was distributed at each talk/discussion with two questions asking "Have you ever had the opportunity to explore the ideas raised in this session?" and "Will you seek opportunities to explore the subject matter in the future?" Both questions had a 'Yes' and 'No' option and attendees answered this with two stickers placing a sticker on the answer that applied to them.

Limitations: - Response count for this method was fairly high. A possible improvement could a more interactive form is left in venues and speakers are asked to direct attention of audience to area where feedback can be given. Asking the same question at events can be repetitive for people who are attending the majority of similar events.

Recording participation: -

Rationale: - Solas' programme contains a large number of participatory workshops catered to all ages. The aim of this method was to investigate who was taking part in the activity for the first time

Method: - Workshop leaders at each participatory session were asked to record attendance of all participants and then take a tally of those participants taking part in the activity for the first time. The expected outcome of this method was to record the percentage of attendants engaging in a new skill/activity for the first time.

Limitations: - The volunteers who were briefed on this task had asked who had taken part in the activity before so the numbers that were initially received were miscommunicated. To overcome this it is advised that clear instructions are given as this task was rushed.

- **Evaluating children's experiences: -**

Rationale: - To gain qualitative and quantitative feedback on children's experience of the festival.

Method: - A Drama workshop aimed at children explored the themes of the festival. The desired outcome of this method was to have quantitative data from the children's feedback and qualitative data from the activities in the workshop. Qualitative data was gathered in the form of collages made by the children of their favourite aspects of the festival and quantitative data obtained from a smiley face scale that children used to rate their experiences.

Limitations: - Lack of children due to poor advertising in the festival guide. Had to run out and gather families just before it started. Good as parents got involved as well as the younger children would not have got involved as much.



Fig 1.3 Words children and adults used to describe their experiences in the festival in the drama workshop

• **Interviewing volunteers:** -

Rationale: - To obtain anecdotal evidence of volunteers' experiences.

Method: - Volunteers were asked about the highlights of being a volunteer and what they would recommend to future volunteers.

Limitations: - This worked well. Further improvements would be to gather more anecdotes from volunteers or follow one or two throughout the festival weekend and interview at different points throughout the festival.

Post - Evaluation Tools

Online Survey for festival goers: -

Rationale: - The aim of the survey was to ask for information that could not be readily obtained during the festival period.

Method: - Festival attendees were surveyed for more in depth information regarding their experience at Solas Festival 2012. This includes information on the demographics of the Solas' audience, the effects of marketing, rating elements of the Solas experience from food and accommodation to all elements of the programme, any highlights or improvements Solas could make and the affect Solas has had on them in the future. This online survey allows us to ask more focused questions that obtain data essential to funders' criteria.

Limitations: - According to Constant Contact Resource Center "As a rule of thumb, 10-20% is a common survey response rate."¹79.8% of all respondents completed all questions of the survey, which is an exceptionally high response rate. Certain questions were misunderstood and these will be explored with suggested improvements throughout this report.

Online survey for volunteers: -

Rationale: - To investigate the volunteer's experiences in more depth.

Method: - This is an ongoing process that will culminate in evaluating the volunteer experience at Solas.

¹ http://constantcontact.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/2965/~~/predicting-survey-response-rates

- **Testimonials from Contributors**: - contacting contributors to provide anecdotal evidence of their experience performing/working with Solas.

Audience growth

Demographics of Audience

“A festival that felt entirely safe, family friendly and unthreatening and one where it was so easy to talk to strangers.”

1) As the methodology specifies, the post-evaluation survey was used to gather information about demographic aspects of the audiences attending the Solas festival.

1) The most important areas that provided the most in depth profile of Solas' audience are categorised under the following headings: -

- Age groups of festival attendees
- Origins of audience?
- Roles fulfilled by the audience
- Festivals attendees' experience of the festival
- Buyer Behaviour

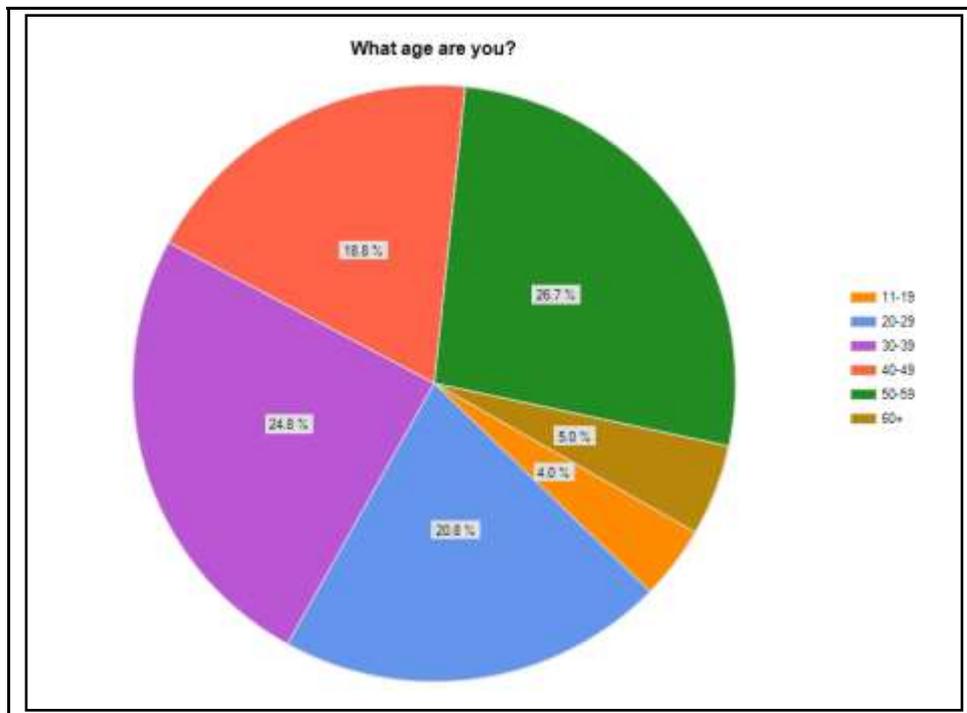


Fig 1.4 Age distributions of respondents

What age are you?

A question in the 2012 survey asked respondents what age category they fell into. The figures suggest that there is a wide spread across all age groups. Solas' programme has many elements that cater to many people's tastes and interests and this is reflected by the following figures.

Beginning with young people, the 4% falling within the age bracket of 11-19 does not necessarily reflect that young people in this area were a minority. In comparison to last year, attendance of people under the age of 18, increased by nearly 40%. The Supernova venue at the festival, a venue set up this year especially for the young people's programme, showed high levels of engagement during the festival period.

What the survey percentage perhaps suggests is that young people are not as engaged in post-festival feedback, thus highlighting an area for future development.

As Figure 1.1 shows 20.8% of 20-29 year old and .43.6% of 30– 49 years old answered the survey. 32% of attendants responding to the survey were over 50, which is often a group that can be less catered for at festivals. Caroline Jackson, a PHD in music festivals comments, "Individual festivals are now increasingly recognised for what type of experience you get there. Certain groups go to certain festival." According to this statement, there are festivals that are focused on certain age groups. Solas is unique as it caters to a high percentage of various age brackets thus suggesting Solas provides an age-free environment by engaging, as one attendee commented, "the hearts and minds of adults." The activities themselves are not age focused the subject and themes tackled can be embraced by people of all ages.

What was your role at the Festival?

One question in the survey asked respondents to indicate roles within the festival. 67% of the respondents were festival attendees with 20.6% volunteers coming second and the following 12.4% were contributors. Asking for feedback from respondents in all roles incorporates all perspectives, thus forming a more complete picture of how the festival affects all those involved.

Perhaps the most striking statistic to take note of is that a fifth of respondents engaging in the survey were volunteers. To obtain such a high level of volunteer responses in the online survey allows the organisers to improve the volunteer experience and therefore work towards retaining volunteers. Volunteers make up 15% of all attendees and help to maintain the running of the festival fulfilling many roles. These roles include box office and information staff, stewarding, children's team, venue managers, drivers, site team and board members. The feedback obtained can also be used to inspire new volunteers to take part to increase levels of participation. There is already evidence of this as 92.9% of volunteers answering the survey said they could help at Solas 2013 by becoming a volunteer. The main online survey captured a lot of information about volunteers' experiences of the festival. A further volunteer survey is also being carried out to investigate the overall volunteer experience e.g. training, chance to balance work and leisure to help improve volunteer support on-site in the future.

As well as gathering information about Solas festival's audience, questions that displayed interesting results were also displayed in the following question in the online survey.

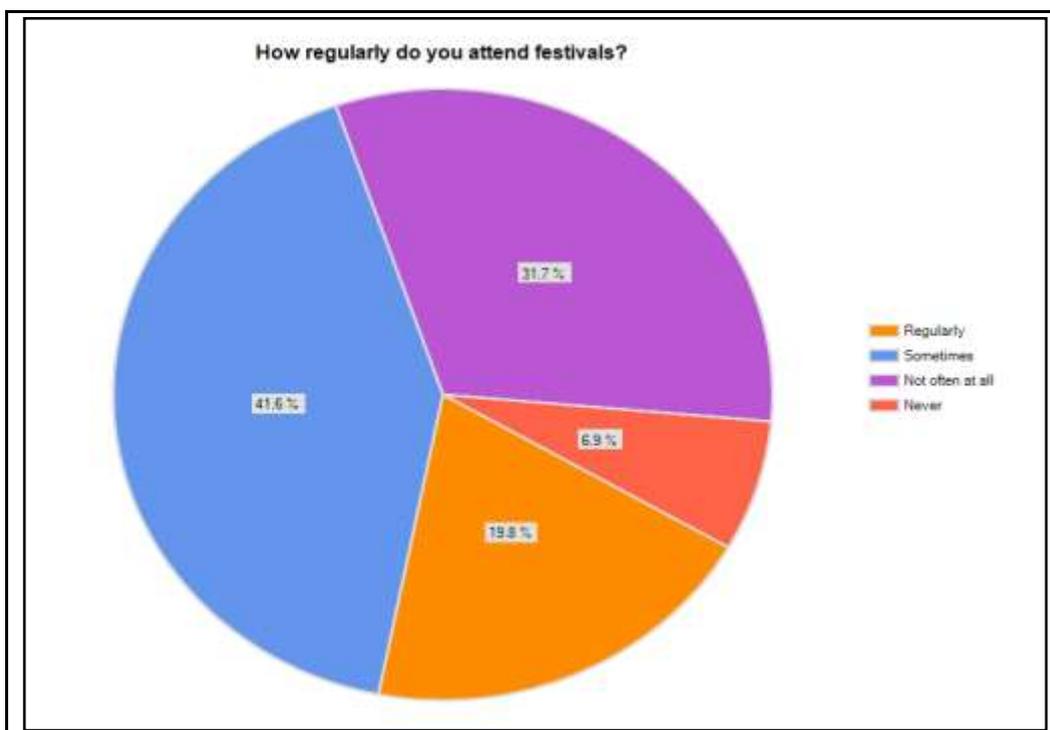


Figure 1.5 Respondent's general festival experience

How regularly do you attend festivals?

One question in the survey asked festival attendees how often they attend festivals. As Figure 1.2 shows, there are some significant results gathered from this question in the survey. 41.6% of respondents sometimes attend festivals and 19.8% consider themselves regular attendees. Perhaps the most striking figure is the 38.6% of respondents who answered that they attend festivals "not often or never". This suggests that at least a third of the people attending Solas 2012 were not experienced festival-goers. This result reiterates one of the key festival aims – to inspire new audiences. When asked to describe any new or surprising highlights one respondent said *'it was all new and surprising.'* Of the 38.6% who could were new experiences holders, 74.4% said they were very likely/likely to attend another arts event in the future, after having attended Solas Festival.

Recommendations

In the online survey, there was a misunderstanding with the following question.

Which of the following best describes you?

Respondents were asked where they came from. The four options available to respondents were 'local resident', 'Scottish visitor', 'from elsewhere in the UK' and 'international visitor.' A significant portion described themselves as local residents (29.6%) and residents, within Scotland (68.1%). Respondents from elsewhere in the UK made a smaller percentage (13.3%) with international respondents being the lowest (1%). However our data indicated that there was a misunderstanding of this question. Unfortunately the data gathered from the survey was different from the actual evidence gathered from geographic distribution.

Area from which attendees come from	% Of Ticket Sales
West	43
East	27
Central	11
North	1
England	7
South	3
Local	4
Ireland	2
Unknown	3

Figure 1.6 Geographical spread of ticket sales

These statistics indicate the true geographical distribution of ticket sales. As the graph above shows, 4% of the audience are local residents thus highlighting how different the actual results are from the online survey. Ticket sales also indicate that ticket sales in the local area grew by 22%. However, overall, the actual representation by locals decreased as a percentage of those who bought tickets - from 7.5% in 2011 to 7.2% in 2012.

However, although data concerning local engagement is low, the data does indicate that Solas Festival engages a wider community from throughout Scotland. This is a positive as we can say that 82% of our attendees are Scottish residents. Although many people from the local area do not attend, Solas Festival attracts people from all over Scotland to the area of Biggar, which can boost the profile of the local area. A way to avoid any misunderstanding in the future would be to use the above criteria of 'West, Central, North, South, Local, England, etc' to gain more specific answers and therefore more accurate results.

Accurate data needs to be reported as it is important as it provides valid information on how the Solas Festival impacts the local economy and area, whether it is by increasing the profile of the area or use local amenities such as the accommodation. According to Event Scotland's guidelines,² one of their main aims is to 'Involve and Inspire local communities.' This inspired one question in the survey asking people to give an idea of the places they stayed at during the festival. Any evidence of local accommodation used during the festival allows for opportunities to promote local business to people attending Solas Festival in the future. In addition, if there are any areas that are not showing strong engagement it means that the festival can direct it's attention to improving it's approach. Data concerned with engaging the local community in a wider festival context will be further explored in the 'Community Cohesion' section.

² Events Scotland Application, Event Scotland Page

³, <http://www.eventscotland.org/assets/show/2807> (Accessed 9/9/12)

1) Buyer behaviour

Solas tends to work with a small marketing budget and one of the biggest developments this year for Solas was the redevelopment of their website. Many marketing strategies were put in place to maximise exposure. This section seeks to report the statistics, which report the effects of these strategies and provide suggestions for future development to cover many opportunities for greater exposure.

Where did you first hear about Solas?

In the pre-festival period there were many marketing methods put in place to generate interest and spread the word about Solas. One question in the online survey asked where people had **first** heard about the festival. Results indicated that 61% of respondents heard via word of mouth, which suggests that many people who have attended the festival in the past have told others about their experiences. This is an important piece of information that perhaps suggests that Solas is a memorable festival and its main marketing strategy is by providing a unique festival experience that people take away with them and share with their friends. 86.7% of respondents said they would recommend Solas to a friend. Second to word of mouth, 15% of respondents were previous attendees. 86.7% of respondents said they would recommend Solas to a friend. Second to word of mouth, 15% of respondents were previous attendees.

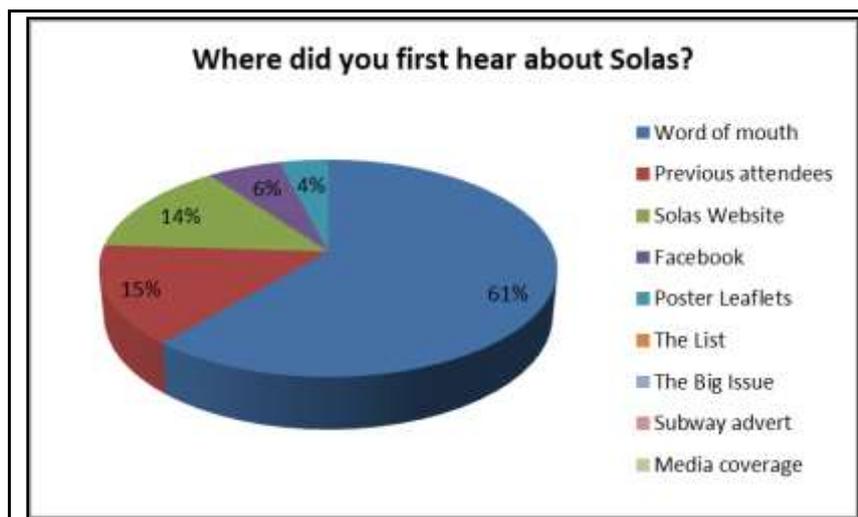


Figure 1.7 Results of “Where did you first hear about the Solas Festival?”

Online methods seemed to produce the highest marketing success for initially generating interest in the festival. 14% initially heard about the festival from the website, 6.7% from Facebook and 5.3% from posters and leaflets. Other options such as Church magazines, articles in The List and The Big Issue, a Subway advert and general media coverage generated no responses but this does not mean that it did not have an effect as they would have a general subconscious influence once initial interest was engaged.

Solas provides many different ticket options throughout the festival weekend. The most popular ticket purchased was the weekend ticket with 300 people purchasing this option. 228 day tickets were bought and 62 evening tickets were purchased. 88.2% of survey respondents had purchased the weekend ticket, which seems to indicate that the majority of survey respondents were engaged in the whole Solas experience so the responses collected reflect the whole weekend rather than a

fraction of the weekend. It also suggests that those who come for the whole weekend get more out of it than those who come just for a day.

Therefore, it is essential to discuss why some people do not stay for the entire festival. A strand in the survey allowed people who did not attend the festival to comment on why they did not attend the festival. A question in the survey asked people what put them off coming. 66.7% of respondents said that tickets were good value but the problems attending were mainly due to 66.7% respondents saying that the date of the festival was a problem, 33.1% said the camping was a turn off and the remaining 33.1% could not attend due to unforeseen personal circumstances.

Recommendations

Word of mouth was the best marketing strategy for the Solas Festival, so it was investigated to see if this method was how other festivals grew their audiences. Although the research conducted did not highlight one favourable marketing method as the most successful, the use of social media has seen an increase in use. Due to it being free and accessible to a wider audience, social media is a cheap and efficient way of generating general interest. It encourages what is known as 'consumer generated content,' which is engagement from the public through commenting, voting and following. T in the Park, a popular music festival in Scotland, for example, give away free tickets to people who upload their photos onto their Facebook page. Solas may benefit to increase their usage of other forms of social media such as competitions, blogs or podcasts. It is a recommendation as seeing that word of mouth is Solas' greatest marketing tool, increasing opportunities for generating word of mouth would be a possible line to follow.

There was also a question on the special early bird ticket that Solas offers. Results showed that 43% took advantage of the offer and 57% did not. The top three reasons for this was deciding to attend after the deadline, lack of awareness of the deal on some attendees parts, unforeseen personal circumstances and unaware of how many tickets were available. To further increase awareness of this deal, details of the availability of tickets and deadlines should be promoted with more emphasis.

The weather and people's personal circumstances are not within Solas' control but improvements can be made to camping (or to the perceptions of the camping) to encourage people to stay for the whole weekend. 65.7% of respondents rated the camping quality as 'very good' and 'excellent' but there are many constructive comments that allow for marketing a positive image of camping. The rating suggests that the camping experience is already very positive but the main problem highlighted by respondents was poor drainage around toilet areas. Placing toilets on in an area where drainage does not collect can combat this. In response to muddy areas after wet weather conditions many respondents suggested the use of more netting and boards. Perhaps an area of development for the festival website is to also advertise the camping facilities visually. Having pictures of the site and facilities can give people an idea of where they will be staying, thus more prepared for what to expect.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Solas Festival has reached a much larger audience previous years on a small overall budget. This audience works for a diverse group of people of all ages due to the various elements covered in Solas' programme. Data also indicates that Solas Festival has an impact on the local community as well as the wider community of Scotland and the UK. Overall, Solas provides a new experience to many

'beginner' festival attendees.

The results obtained for the marketing strategy provides Solas with the information to understand areas of strengths in their marketing strategy and areas that can be developed for maximum results. The desirable results of this would be to engage people at an early period to provide more exposure of the early bird offer and increase weekend ticket sales by perhaps marketing a strong and positive camping experience or local accommodation networking.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

“Solas is not *presenting* an arts festival to people, but asking people to come and be involved in it. “ (Steve Butler, Solas Festival Chair)

The main aim of the UK Coalition Government’s Big Society concept is to build a better, healthier society. This concept proposes that by supporting social enterprises such as the Solas Festival, what they have described as ‘social energy’ might be unleashed, i.e. the positive energy that comes from spending time in a stimulating environment with other people. (<http://www.thebigsociety.co.uk/about-us/>). A festival can generate and nurture social energy by engaging their audience in the festival delivery and strategic direction, and thus empowering that audience.

In the case of Solas Festival, empowerment can be achieved where survey respondents feel that they can give honest and anonymous feedback, under the assumption that the information they provide will be taken on-board and contribute towards the future operations and strategic direction of the festival. Solas Festival can then make the assumption that the motivations behind partaking in the survey can be accredited to the long-term effects that attending arts festivals (more specifically, Solas Festival) can have on an individual. So, the more people feel engaged during the event, the more likely they are to comment afterwards - even if that comment is negative.

Because of the participative environment at Solas, the intention is to engage people on-site, at the festival, to the extent that they will leave with after-thoughts. These thoughts may be related to an issue they encountered at one of the talks in the Christian Aid venue; it could be discovering that their children respond well to a certain genre of music after having taken them to a gig in Aurora, or it could be to do with identifying gaps/flaws in the organisation of the festival. Whether the feedback received is positive or negative, it is nonetheless demonstrating a willingness to engage with the festival delivery and its strategic direction.

For instance, one of the survey questions simply asked, ‘Rate the prices for the following – food, programmes, merchandise’ – the survey provided 5 options as well as a space for further commenting. One participant wrote, ‘Would have liked to see a downloadable programme for the android phone’. This is a perfect example of how, through engaging the audience, the festival may ultimately benefit in the long-run. Addressing stakeholders with such a simple question helps identify the participants’ wants and needs, as well as what the festival may require being sustainable. That is not to say that the festival organisers must adhere to every single proposal, but this particular example is a fairly feasible one and given the number of people who now own android phones, is probably a widely-shared idea also. In terms of the festival’s strategic direction, the aim should be to maximise the potential of new technology - one of many realisations that will arise because of the power granted to stakeholders when they are encouraged to confidently make these types of recommendations.

One of the principal ways in which Solas empowered young people at the festival, was through the Unsigned Stage, i.e. Supernova. This small music venue allowed amateur acts to take to the stage, which was empowering for young people, as it dedicated a tent to them which allowed them to play music to their peers in a non-threatening and unpressured environment. Typically, the teenage music scene is male dominated and has the misfortune of bearing many negative connotations, but the unsigned stage demonstrated how an array of young male and female musicians could play their music freely, express themselves freely and could take control of operations within the tent, without interruption from parental/authoritarian figures;

additionally, this was all done in the light of day, away from and without the need of drugs or alcohol.

A full debrief was carried out with one of the groups involved in running this venue. During that frank discussion, the young people made a careful list of logistical issues which could be dealt with in future to improve this space in the coming years.

Other examples of comments from survey participants included:

- 1) 'Children's participation at communion' (in reference to a new/surprising thing that they experienced)
- 2) 'The relaxed, fun free atmosphere, giving space and time to chill out and catch up with friends, to get involved or have great chats with the performers and artists - what a privilege.'
- 3) 'Being able to chat to the speakers/performers/artists - just such a joy and great learning experience as well as privilege.'
- 4) 'Ricky Ross - what a legend! Approachable, inclusive, a joy to watch and made us a part of it.'

These comments are reflective of the inclusive environment that Solas Festival tries to and succeeds in creating. It is important to communicate to the contributors the aims of the festival, and this demonstrates that this has been done very effectively.

A further example of the engendering of a creative environment would be Admiral Fallow – a well-known Scottish band that are used to playing large commercial festivals such as T in the Park, and supporting big acts such as Paolo Nutini or Frightened Rabbit. But with the help of Solas coordinators, the festival's objectives were communicated to them and they managed to make their gig a popular choice for musical highlight of the weekend, and doing so without alienating their audience (almost 40% of whom rarely or never attend other festivals). They managed to engage the audience and at one point allowed a small child to take hold of the microphone and sing along to the chorus. For a lot of people, this was a differentiating factor between the usual consumerist set-up of a gig (where in exchange for money the audience are given entertainment), and Solas' participative format. One of the festival's objectives are fulfilled in that the artist helped 'bring out the artist' in the audience members, through encouraging them to be part of the experience, rather than merely being at the receiving end of it.

It would be sensible to consider a few things at this point however. Ultimately, it is the participative environment and the intimate atmosphere at Solas that allows for the kind of interaction highlighted above to occur but this then begs the question: If the Solas Festival continues to grow in size and popularity and subsequently begins to cater for larger audiences, will the festival's aims and objectives remain? In other words, is it feasible to create a similarly participative setting on an even larger scale? It is a question of whether growth and sustainability are compatible in this situation.

ILLUSTRATING ENJOYMENT AND SATISFACTION

All of those involved with a festival will experience immediate feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction when the event was taking place, according to which source? This will then relate with how much they felt they enjoyed the festival as a whole, thus directly providing pre-conditions for any of the wider festival impacts that may occur at a later stage. These impacts may include attending or volunteering at other arts events; taking further interest in a world issue that they encountered at the festival, etc.

So it may be assumed that an overall enjoyable, satisfying event experience is an important outcome on which many of the other outcomes depend on. However, in the Edinburgh Festivals Impact study it is also suggested that there is a fine line (is it a fine line or a direct link?) between the quality of an event and the extent to which someone enjoys themselves at that event. But I would like to question this theory by applying it to The X-factor, the most popular televised talent show in the world. Many people will admit to spending their Saturday evenings watching this show, and understandably so. The X Factor incorporates music, comedy and heightened emotion: elements which have proven to form the framework for 'successful' television shows. But in reality, the winners that emerge from this talent show are almost instantly forgotten and therefore often unsuccessful in their careers which follow. So despite the show's huge success, the quality of talent produced by The X-Factor does not correspond with its continued success as a television show. With that, to measure the quality of any event by firstly measuring the levels of enjoyment, can produce misleading results and take credit away from those who deserve it.

Using a minuscule programme budget, the Solas Festival organisers take great pains to produce as high quality an experience as possible.

In order to assess whether the audience appreciated the quality of the programme provided, we asked a number of questions in the online survey that were linked to audience satisfaction. Satisfaction was measured with regards to a variety of factors - some regarding the festival programme itself (such as the variety of children's activities available), but most of them assessing the events' secondary services (such as booking experience, the facilities on-site or the friendliness of the volunteers).

There is no specific question which asks about the audience's overall satisfaction of the festival. Many of the questions are simply designed to indicate to us the audience's feelings about the quality of certain aspects of the festival, as mentioned above, which may give a partial indication of their consideration of the quality of the event on a whole.

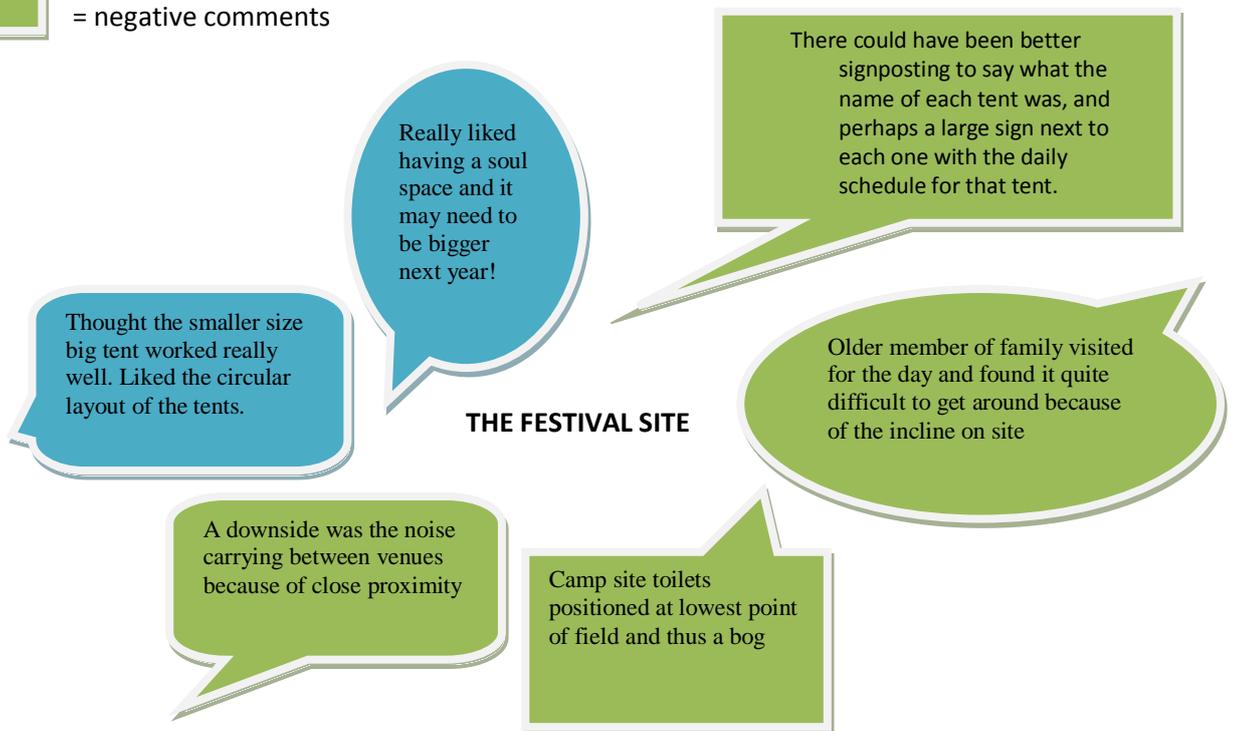
It is worth asking these questions because it needs to be seen that from year to year there is an increasing amount of progress being made and stakeholders' expectations being met. The following three pages lay out examples of comments from the online survey about certain aspects of the festival – those which were not only the most commonly-occurring, but also those which the evaluation team have regarded as important to give further consideration to as Solas Festival prepares for 2013.

ENJOYMENT & SATISFACTION VERSUS DISAPPOINTMENT & DISSATISFACTION

Key

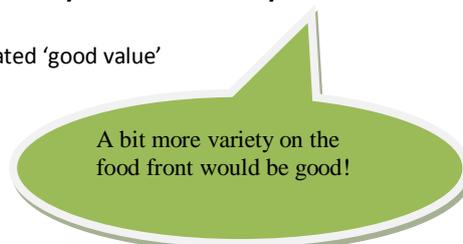
 = positive comments

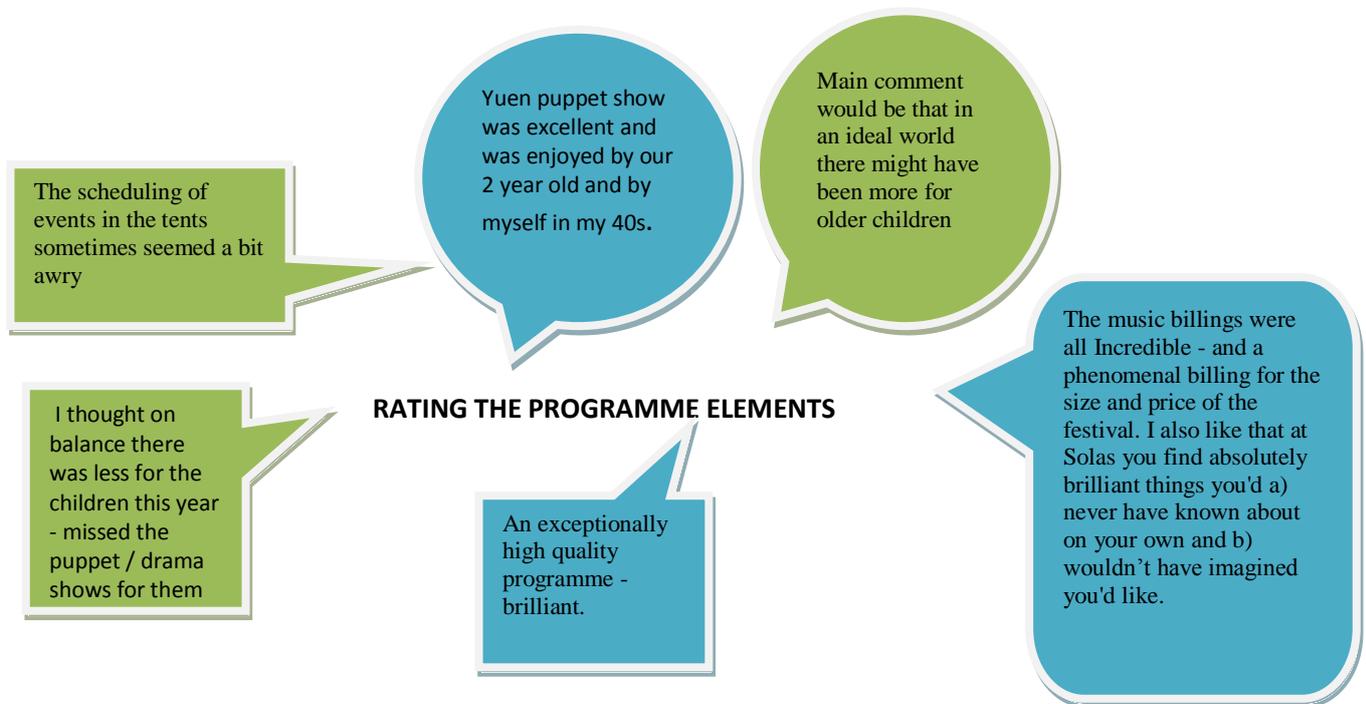
 = negative comments



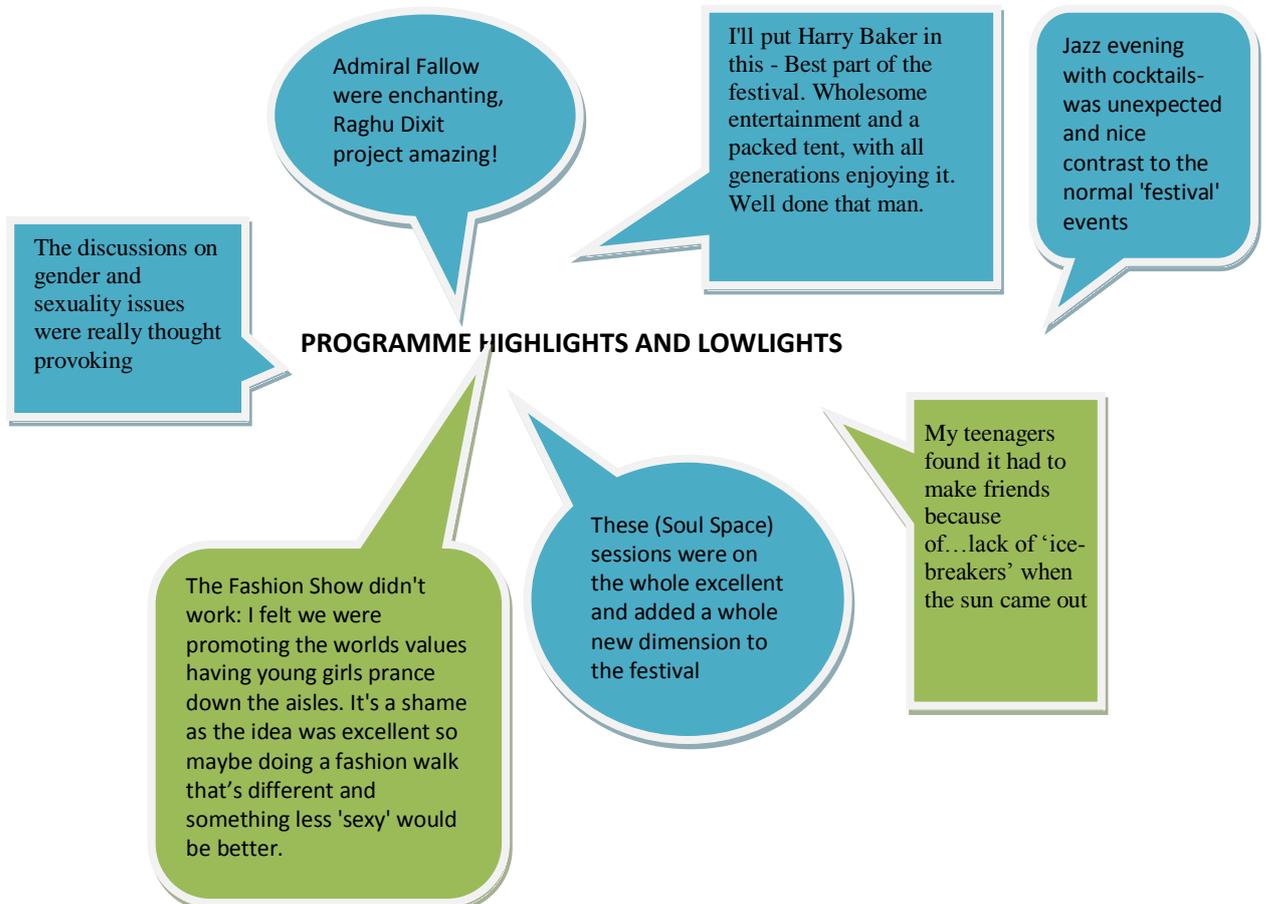
RATING PRICES OF FOOD/ MERCHANDISE/ PROGRAMMES

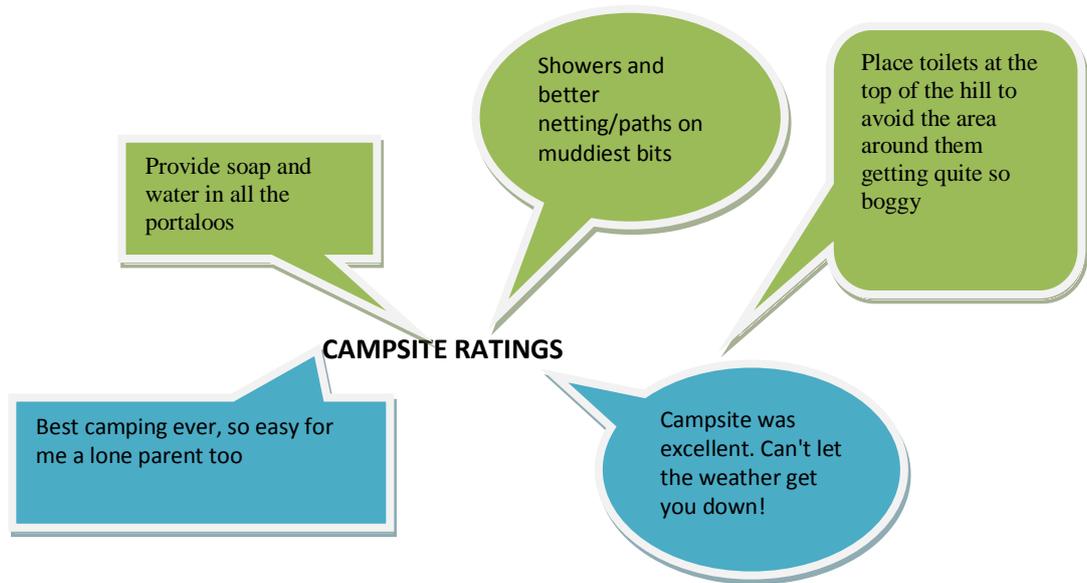
- Prices of food : 22% rated 'very good value'; 50% rated 'good value'



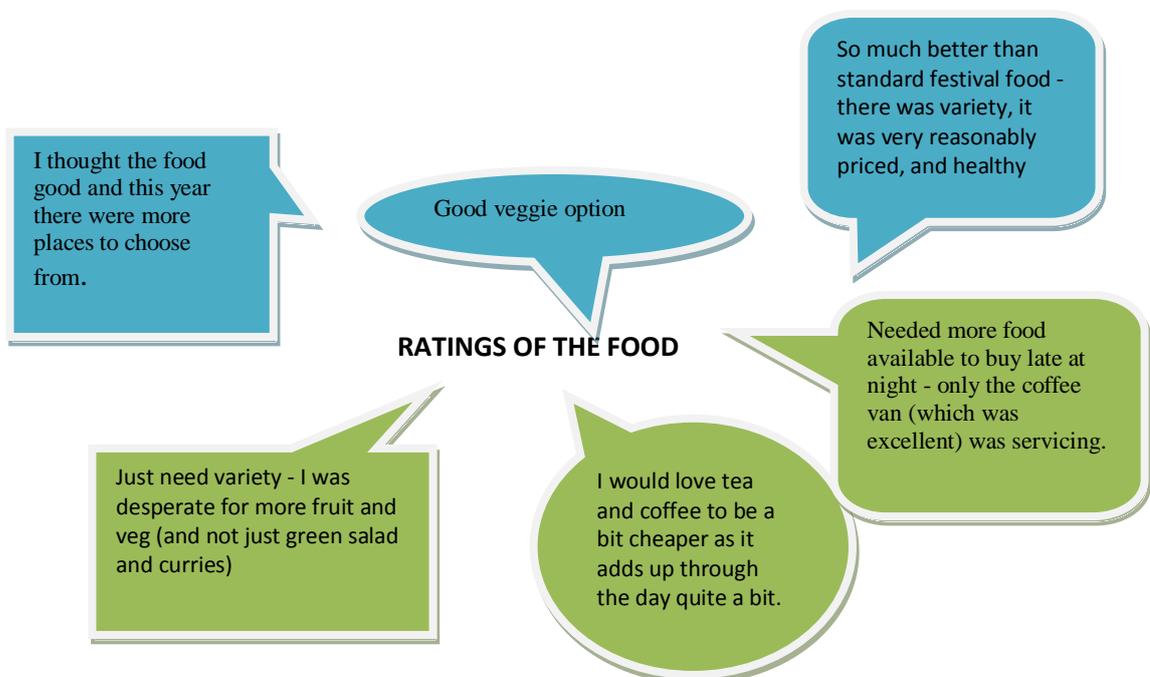


- 2.6% and 7.7%, very poor and poor respectively for Children's programme – it achieved the highest ratings in the 'very poor' and 'poor' categories
- 57.9% of respondents rated the music as 'Excellent', and thus achieved the highest ratings of all the programme elements.





- The majority (just over 50%), rated their camping experience as 'good'.



- 54.4% rated at 'excellent'

ARTS AND ITS LINK TO WELL-BEING AND QUALITY OF LIFE

'The arts are popular with ambitious programmes really making a difference... Yet we know how much work remains to be done because only a minority of the population has much to do with the arts on a regular basis. A big challenge lies in addressing the disparities in levels of engagement between different sections of the population, as currently those who are most active tend to be from the most privileged parts of society.'

Achieving great art for everyone (Arts Council England, 2010)

It is important to ask ourselves why there is an emphasis on making the arts an integral aspect of our communities and everything that we do. The answer to this is that in addition to studying the arts for their own sake, experiencing and making works of art benefits young people in their intellectual, personal, and social development, and can be particularly beneficial for students from economically disadvantaged circumstances and those who are at risk of not succeeding in school.

Research studies point to strong relationships between learning in the arts and fundamental cognitive skills necessary for other core subjects, including reading, writing, and mathematics. The country's long-term aspirations as a creative economy depend on providing opportunities for children and young people to participate in arts and creativity, and Solas provided these opportunities in abundance. When we asked the children at the festival to indicate to us the activities they had taken part in, a huge 43% chose 'Had fun in arts and crafts', which is indicative of the large extent to which the children's programme made participation in the arts and creativity a priority.

The premise of Solas Festival is to create an artistic community which allows bigger questions and skills to be explored and learned; the feedback from the festival weekend certainly produced promising results in that we discovered that adults too were exploring new topics and trying out new things.

There is also an increasing recognition that good health and wellbeing are reliant on an array of multiple factors, not just physical, but also psychological and social. Arts Council England, the Department of Health and many leading healthcare experts firmly believe that the arts have an important part to play in improving the health and wellbeing of people in many ways. At the Solas Festival specifically, the arts and health activities available were designed to help:

- Promote the good health and wellbeing of communities, for instance, the panel on 'Scotland's Health', where thinkers such as Linda De Caestecker, Director of Public Health for Greater Glasgow and Graham Bryce, consultant psychiatrist for children and young people, came together to discuss the themes of Scotland's health and wellbeing, and how to shape the common good across many diverse communities. Also, Ian and Gail Adam's meditative workshops had people realising the positive effects of meditation on a person's physical and mental well-being.
- Promote positive health messages and public health issues. Sessions like Pdraig O'Toole's writing workshop about stories, was a cathartic process that helped people to find new ways of relating to their own stories. Such 'making sense' workshops can really benefit mental well-being.

- Help families/ people of different backgrounds/religion/political stances, to communicate more effectively with each other by offering opportunities for social interaction, involvement and empowerment. The Communion service for example, was an instance where participants did not necessarily need to lay out their religious credentials on the table in order to participate in the ceremony, which is one of the key areas of church life. The opportunity to talk through the communion was also provided afterwards in Jonny Baker's session.
- Provide opportunities for artists to develop their practice, in particular in collaborative working and communication techniques; for instance, the Nic Gareiss and Padraig O'Tuama collaboration where they combined ideas from poetry, spirituality, dance, queer identity and national identity, resulted in a unique explorative experience for the artists and audience alike. In an interview, both Nic and Padraig shared their thoughts on the collaboration:

Nic – 'Coming into the collaboration, I'm not sure that I had too many expectations because it was a new opportunity; I don't usually get to explore ideas about queer identity, poetry, spirituality, national identity and the intersection of all those things with music and dance.'

Padraig – '...There was a sense that we were discovering something on the stage about what embodied thoughts and what articulated movement can look like when it's held together with these voices... It was evident from the word go that it was something that people brought to the room that created what happened...we weren't thinking 'We are *the* queer voice,' but that we were two queer voices of the many that are there, and Solas makes loads of space for that.'

We asked Julia McDonald, who ran meditative workshops at Solas Festival, to reflect on how she felt her own workshops contributed to helping people improve their health and well-being:

"My first workshop was looking at the effect of language and questions on our 'state'. The second was an experiential workshop where people could learn how to access a different state. Essentially what people had the opportunity to experience was how to enter useful, usually calm or more 'spiritual', states. Although there was a potential direct effect on people's health and well-being, what intrigued me most were the people who came up to me afterwards and asked questions. These were lovely interactions and I suspect/hope these helped some people to move forward more positively.

The fab sense of community that existed also seemed to benefit health - people have lower levels of stress when they feel connected to others. The Sunday service was an example of this. And how great was it to all sing together along with drums! Chanting and drumming can help people into trance states which can be useful for calming or stimulating their physiology and enabling people to make changes."

Julia also made a point about how merely having access to the arts and music will pretty much always make any individual achieve a change in state, meaning that their physiology and emotional state will adjust. So something as simple as sitting in on the open-mic nights in Orion listening to Lies Damned Lies or Fay Butler can make a person feel mellow, relaxed, happy and less stressed because of the connections they are making with the people around them through mutual appreciation of the music.

There are few arts festivals that appeal to an older age group as Solas Festival does. An impressive 31.8% of the online survey participants were above the age of 50 and that is perhaps due to the fact that the festival incorporates this health and well-being aspect into its programme. The festival's marketing often deliberately depicts young people in a community environment, but could it be that at Solas Festival, the combination of this youthful environment and the provision of these workshops which are geared towards those interested in maintaining their health, that perchance make older people feel young again?

Community Cohesion

“I was surprised to realise that there are some people that I now know only from Solas, and the kids now have friends they have seen all three years as well. I wonder how you grow this feeling?”

Another festival impact of importance is that which it has on the community. To understand how Solas Festival contributes to a cohesive community it is necessary to understand what ‘a cohesive community’ is defined as firstly. According to the Local Government Association a cohesive community is one where: -

- There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
- People from different backgrounds are regarded positively
- People from different backgrounds have equal opportunities
- Strong and positive relationships being developed between people from different backgrounds whether it is in a school, workplace or neighbourhood.³

During an evaluation method carried out during the festival, attendees were asked what motivated them to attend the festival. The top answer, 26% of respondents indicated that ‘the values and the community spirit’ of Solas was the reason they were attending. Figure 1.3 displays the results of this evaluation method. Many comments in interviews and testimonials also show that the independent weekend community of Solas itself creates new friendships.

Solas Festival dedicates itself to growing the community feeling by creating an atmosphere that welcomes people of all ages and backgrounds. In this section, the area of family atmosphere and engaging the local community will be explored and their contribution to the community spirit that draws so many to the festival.

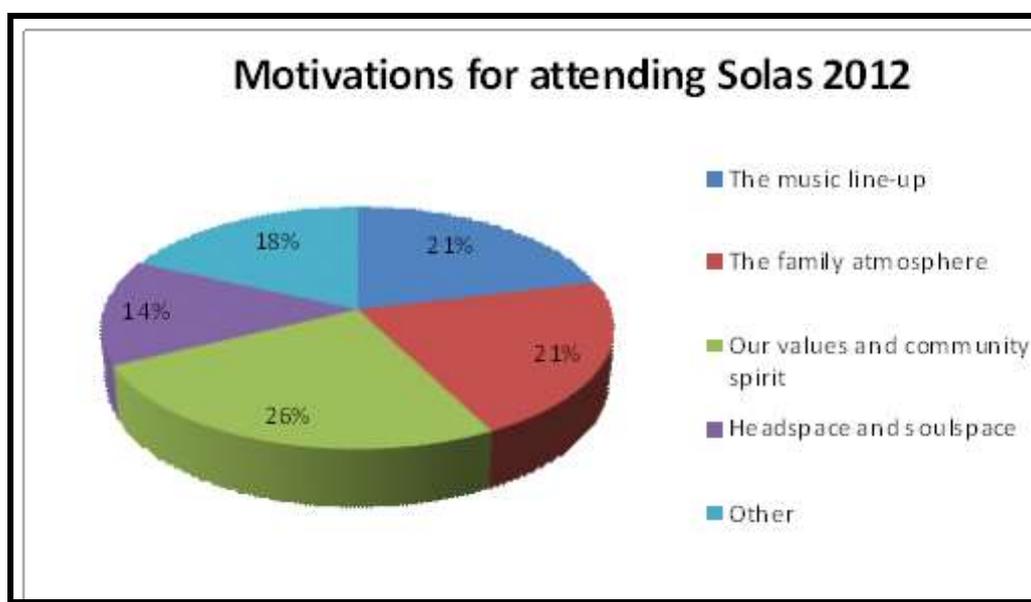


Fig1.8 Results for motivations for attending Solas 2012

³ 'Community cohesion - an action guide' (LGA, 2004)

Family atmosphere

“The complete package was new and surprising as a family experience.”

Solas also aims to create a suitable family atmosphere by giving everyone of all ages a chance to engage in the numerous creative opportunities that the festival offers. The second highest response for motivations for attending the festival was 21% of attendees attending for ‘the family atmosphere’. A significant percentage of 16% of respondents in the survey said they came alone to the festival, which reflects a further 84% of people attended the festival with a group. A minor fault with the survey was that it omitted a ‘attended with family and friends’ option. Nonetheless, 54% of respondents indicated that they attended with family signifying the importance of Solas being a family event. Therefore it is important that Solas Festival can show that it nurtures these networks, though in this day and age, what people classify as ‘family’ and as ‘friends’ is becoming more and more blurred, so when we talk about creating a ‘family atmosphere’, it is no longer just catering to the conventional nuclear family.

The question now arises of how Solas caters to this particular atmosphere. Solas delivered a high quality programme featuring 141 various events spanning across music, performing arts to the more unique elements such as Head Space and Soul Space. All elements of the program are open to people of all ages, however 16% of sessions provided are aimed specifically at children and families. Through this unique programme, Solas provides both supervised and unsupervised sessions, which both allow parents to get involved in the activities too. The chart below displays how parents rated the children’s programme. The highest response rated the children’s programme as very good. Parents were rating on behalf of their children and if they are rating high then it indicated that they were happy to be there during the session and that the program was fulfilling their children’s needs and meeting the parents’ satisfaction and expectations of the sessions.

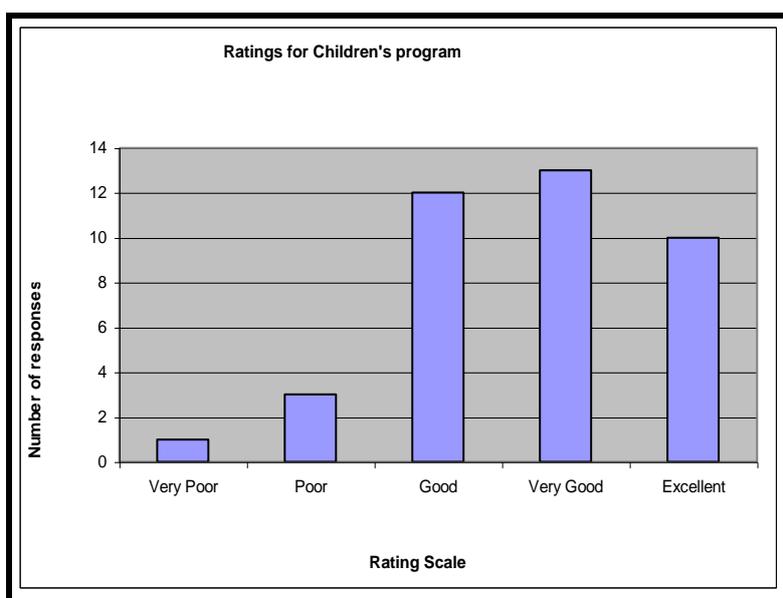


Fig 1.9 Ratings of the Children’s program

In the “empowerment through engagement” section, allowing people the chance to contribute to the festival’s future development through feedback is explored. One particular event in the festival allowed families to give feedback together. A drama

workshop allowed for adults and children to explore and share their experiences of festival together through sculptures and collages. Additionally, in a method of evaluation that asked children to feedback what sort of activities they had taken part in, 17% of children said they tried an activity with their family.

A major event on the Sunday morning was the Communion service that welcomed family worship. During this session children were involved in an interactive form of worship by interacting with the soil. One person commented that the “kids had a role to complete” while the main reflection was being delivered. This indicates that adults could engage in the message of the service while kids had their own responsibility by exploring the symbolism of the message through sensory experience. In feedback on the communion service in the online survey, 36% of respondents responded with positive comments on the inclusive nature and the children’s involvement during the communion service. The remaining 64% of the respondents gave positive comments about the creative nature of the communion, whereas others criticised the length of the communion.

Although 16% of activities were aimed solely at children and families that is not to say that the remaining 84% of the activities are not intergenerational. Perhaps certain events do not cater to children’s tastes such as Head space and Soul space as some of the issues covered could only be understood by adults. However the music, performing arts, literature and film events did not have age barriers and left for open interaction with children. An example of this was during two of the headline acts, Admiral Fallow and Raghu Dixit children were present at these events and interacted with the artists. Had it been a normal ‘late night’ venue, children would not be permitted.

Overall, Solas provides opportunities for parents to spend time with their kids on fun activities such as arts and crafts with 43% of children indicating this as a major activity they undertook. 60% of all people rating the children’s programme as excellent rated the whole atmosphere as of the festival as ‘excellent,’ which reflects how important the family atmosphere was to their overall Solas Festival experience

Recommendation

The main area of interest highlighted in this section is the concept of what makes a family atmosphere. The idea of a traditional family is not necessarily relatable to a typical festival environment so it is essential to ask if people without families also seek the ‘family atmosphere’ at Solas. It would be an area of further interest to decipher if the family atmosphere was alienating or attractive to those who attend without a family group.

Supporting Profile

Responses from the survey allow us to follow certain responses and create profiles of certain stakeholders e.g. contributor, volunteer, local resident thus allowing us to construct a whole picture of what kind of people are being engaged to give us their feedback.



Single Mother

This attendee is a female local resident who falls within the 30-39-age bracket. She attended with her children and regarded herself as not having great experiences of festivals. She considered her camping to be easy for a lone parent such as herself. As a single parent she displayed an appreciation for inclusive arts and she regarded the children's entire program as excellent. She comments,

“My daughter and I made peace after contributing to the Ann Duncan [sic] painting; I would like to do more stuff like that with the kids. She suggested an opportunity for family crafts as she recognised the benefits of working together with her daughter.

She regarded herself as likely to attend other arts festivals in the future. When asked to highlight anything new she responded: - “the complete package was new and surprising as a family experience. Been struggling with mental health and single parenting etc and this experience is emotional as it was so rewarding we all gained so much more than you could imagine. Thank you and keep up the good work.”

Evidence for networks with the local community

“That is still so small - it punched above its weight in terms of quality of acts and variety of events. Excellent!”

Solas Festival invests a lot of time in building and maintaining relationships in order to establish networks, recruit volunteers and encourage general interest in the festival. A few of the partnerships include Erskine Music and Media Group, Made in Lanark, Impact Arts and Scottish Refugee Council with each of these groups spreading news about the festival. Links have also been made with South Lanarkshire Council. The council distributed posters and brochures in their libraries and arts centres in order to include the local community in Solas Festival. In this section, evidence suggesting positive impacts on the local community that has been researched will be reported. As well as engaging audiences as a whole we will explore to what extent Solas benefits the residents of the surrounding area. 29.6% of people responding to the survey self-defined themselves as a local resident and there is scope for developing local involvement in the future. The benefits of local involvement are to support the local economy local artists, providing new art experiences and increase the profile of the local community.

The statistics indicate that only 4% of the audience are local residents. Much of the Solas festivals' efforts are spent on building council links so it is essential to question why locals do not engage with this event as much. Perhaps for locals, Solas may be viewed more as a day event rather than a festival to spend the weekend at. As mentioned in “Audience Demographics,” perhaps audiences are made up from a wider spread of Scottish residents because the Solas festival is an opportunity for them to ‘get away’ for the weekend. Although the evidence suggests low involvement from local residents, there is evidence of interest from attendants to help build future links.

Evidence of future links

How could you help Solas in the future?

Evidence from the survey also shows that links are being established for future marketing. 57.8% all of respondents suggested that they could be a liaison with their church or community group. 48.6% of all responses gave the name of the church they attended suggesting development for future links. This highlights audience's willingness to participate after the festival even after the festival period has passed.



Supporting Profile of Churchgoer:

This man was a member United Free Church of Scotland who said he would be a liaison at his church. As one of the older attendees of the festival, he fell within the 50-59 year age gap that already was getting involved with Solas as a volunteer this year. He considered himself as a regular festival attendee and has been to other festivals such as Carberry, Scargill, Summerfest and Big Tent Festival would very likely to attend arts events in the future. This suggests that he is a keen participant in the arts.

He rated the music and performing arts as ‘excellent’ and commented that the programme was “*So full and good there are so many other things I wish I had time to go to.*” At the end of his responses in the online survey he said he would suggest Solas to a friend, continue to be a volunteer at Solas and, be a liaison at his church group suggesting his active participation in Solas before, during and after the festival.

Recommendations

Much of the Solas festivals’ efforts are spent on building council links, however, it is essential to question why locals do not engage with this event as much. Perhaps for locals, Solas may be viewed more as a day event rather than a festival to spend the weekend at. As mentioned in “Audience Demographics,” perhaps audiences are made up from a wider spread of Scottish residents because the Solas festival is an opportunity for them to ‘get away’ for the weekend. Therefore it is possible that the efforts made to engage local residents is reduced but rather attention should be focused on engaging local arts and business’ as they can reap the full benefits of visiting crowds.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that there is a high level of participation before, during and after the festival from people who define themselves as local residents. With strong local partnerships and a significant percentage taking on a role as a volunteer, there is a strong sense that the local residents support the running of the festival. By choosing to tell a friend or be involved in the future shows that Solas has had some sort of impact on them and that they are willing to spread the word. This is important considering 73% of people first hear about Solas from word of mouth.

Widening participation and develop audiences for culture

“Part of the idea of Solas is to try and do something quite ambitious, which is to attempt to create a space where people can have a taste for what it means to be a holistic community for a weekend, so it’s an arts festival, but we’re trying to do it in a way that’s maybe a bit unusual and attempting difficult things, but we catch a glimpse of what it could be like to be in a community with each other” (Steve Butler, Solas Festival Chair)

This section aims to explore Solas festival’s contribution to the wider social aim of widening participation and developing audiences for culture. Solas widens participation through providing new interactive and learning experiences through the provision of workshops and their unique talks programme known as Head Space. The Edinburgh Impact study defines developing audiences as “increasing the likelihood of future participation and attendance.” Through our evaluation methods, information has been gathered to prove that Solas contributes to developing audiences for this purpose. There is also evidence that has been gathered to suggest that participation in events will also be experienced in the future, so this will be explored too.

Increasing Participation through workshops

“The relaxed, fun, free atmosphere, giving space and time to chill out and catch up with friends, to get involved or have great chats with the performers and artists - what a privilege.”

Solas Festival offers first class opportunities for its attendees to participate in new activities. From interactive workshops such as a puppet and silk-making workshops to more reflective workshops such as exploring spirituality and Neuro Linguistic Programming and an introduction to the Enneagram, which has its roots in ancient Sufi Philosophy, the Festival programme offered 50 sessions where participation and interaction from festivalgoers was welcomed. These were generally open to all, but included some workshops designed for children, some for young people and a special dance and movement session for people with additional learning and mobility support needs.

Solas was able to engage attendees with new experiences. One particular session that conveyed positive results described by one participant as “all inclusive.” American dancer, Nic Gareiss or “The man who spoke Gaelic with his feet” led this session. 32% of respondents described him as one of their highlights of performing arts suggesting the impact he made on those attending Solas Festival. When questioned, 100% of those who attended Nic's workshop said that they were trying out this sort of dance for the first time.

Another participative session, which specifically targeted young people (aged 12-17yrs), focussed on circus performance skills. This attracted a significant majority of participants (77%) who had never previously attempted these activities. The benefits of these workshops, highlighted, as an important factor in the Edinburgh Impact Study, are the transference of skills.

In the children’s workshops, workshop leaders asked children if they were taking part in the activity for the first time. The responses showed that children were taking part in activities that they were already familiar with. For example, sing and tell and the

big robot build had no participants trying it for the first time as children are always engaged by activities that are familiar to them so this was an expected result. Perhaps the most distinct figures generated from recording participation were gathered in Solas' unique themed workshops. To celebrate the book 'Where the Wild Things Are,' the Solas Festival held themed workshops with a 'Wild Thing Mask-Making' and 'Make a Monster session.' 60% of children were trying something new in the 'Wild Things Mask-Making' session and 17% for 'Making a Monster'. To utilise what the children had made, they were encouraged to bring their items to the Wild Rumpus, which incorporated a reworking of the story with the items they created in these sessions. As a result, a unique participatory experience is created because children are having a personal connection the theme.

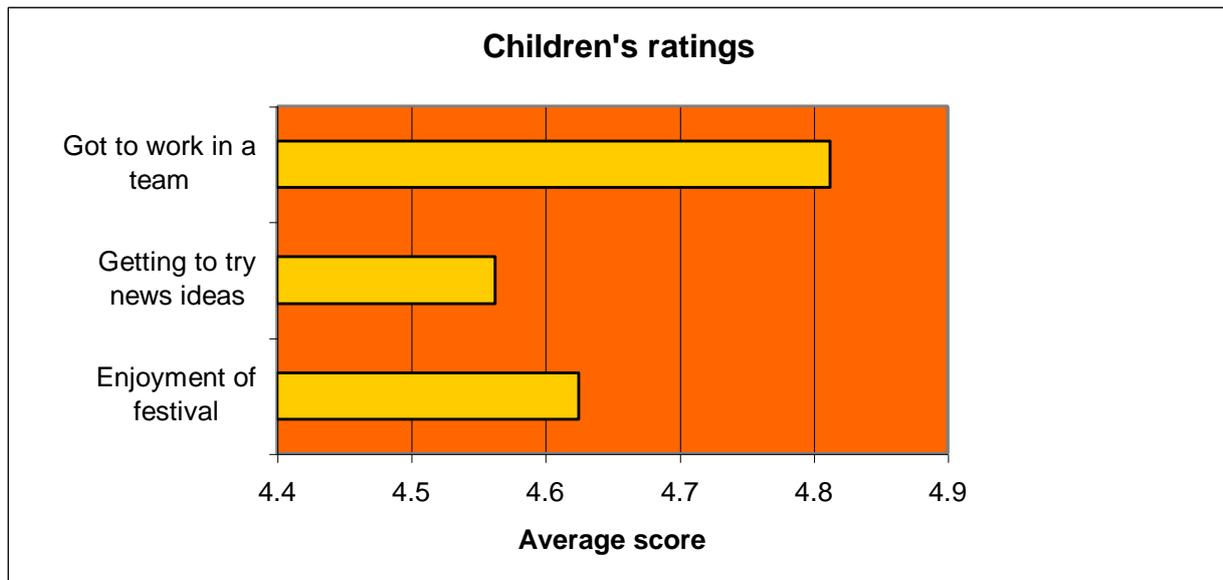


Fig 1.10 Children's ratings of experiences during drama workshop.

Evidence gathered during the children's workshops at Solas also shows that team building was taking place. A drama workshop was set up to explore children's experiences of the festival. Children attending the session were asked to rate their enjoyment of the festival, the level of teamwork at Solas and rate the opportunity to come up with new ideas. Scoring their experiences out of 5 as the below graph displays, enjoyment of the festival and coming up with new ideas averaged at a score of 4.6. Working in a team the average score was 4.8. This high rating notes the high level of participation between children at Solas, which is important in maintaining an interactive learning environment.

Recommendations

The main problem evaluating workshops was that evidence was unable to be gathered from all sessions. To overcome this, it may be advisable to brief workshop leaders before the festival period rather than on the day of the festival. This would allow workshop leaders to incorporate the evaluation into their session and be aware of what sort of data Solas needs. Some workshop leaders seemed confused by the last minute request and many forms of data got lost between volunteers. It may be advisable to collect data online; if this is form is feasible. If this could be achieved, this would reduce the need to collect separate data from workshop leaders, thus decreasing the chance of losing data.

Learning Benefits

Solas hosts a unique talk programme known as 'Head Space,' to allow room for debate and increase awareness on national and international issues against the backdrop of the arts. The programme was well received. Most respondents rated this strand of the programme as 'good, 'very good' or 'excellent,' which reflects the high quality of the speakers Solas collaborates with.

The talk programme held 17 sessions with four panel discussions covering a range of themes from theological discussions, personal issues such as gender and sexuality to more topical debates with a visit from Scottish MP Douglas Alexander. All 15 speakers and panel discussions from the main talks programme feature in the highlights identified by our survey respondents, indicating that the balance of contributions was well judged to cater to our varied audience. One respondent commented that a talk left him with "*fellow feelings and ideas.*" Learning in this context can mean a multitude of things, whether learning involves further research or exploration through thought and discussion. Generally speaking, an increased awareness and continued engagement means that participants can leave sessions with a possible change in attitude.

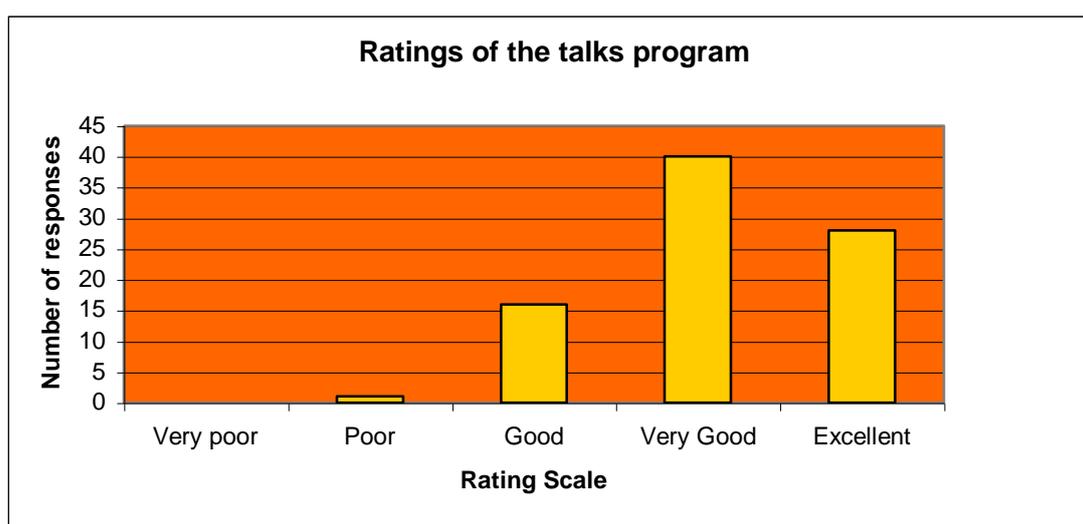


Fig 1.11 Rating of the talk program 'Head Space'

Have you experienced this subject matter before?

The premise of this question was to see if people are inspired to explore a new subject matter during Head Space events. The desired outcome was to find those who had never experienced the subject matter before and would further explore it further. This is the desired result because it shows that Solas' environment inspires people to learn new things inspire further interest. Positive responses were generated from this area of investigation. The key points of increased knowledge and opening new areas for discussion contribute to wider participation, which is a large part of Creative Scotland's corporate plan.

Within the Solas festival context, 53% of people attending talks were exploring issues that they had already encountered and would take their interest further. 41% of people had encountered subject matters in the talk for the first time and would further explore it after the festival. This indicates a significant percentage of people had increased their knowledge in some form and increasing it further contributes to wider

festival aims, which will be explained further. For the 53% of people already aware of the subject matter, it can be said that Solas allows social issues to be learnt about but also for opportunities for specific people to further extend their knowledge and hear key speakers speak about areas of interest.

Recommendations

One problem obtaining feedback at talks was repetitively asking audience members the same questions. The main recommendation for talks would be to brief speakers about evaluation methods beforehand. To prevent asking the same people the same questions, it is recommended that questionnaire slips be left in venues. Speakers could then direct audience members to it so feedback is given freely rather than festival attendees being asked repetitively. A few comments also expressed an interest for more opportunity for questions and actual discussion so more time to allow for this could fulfil this request.

How likely are you to attend other arts events in the future now that you have experienced the Solas Festival?

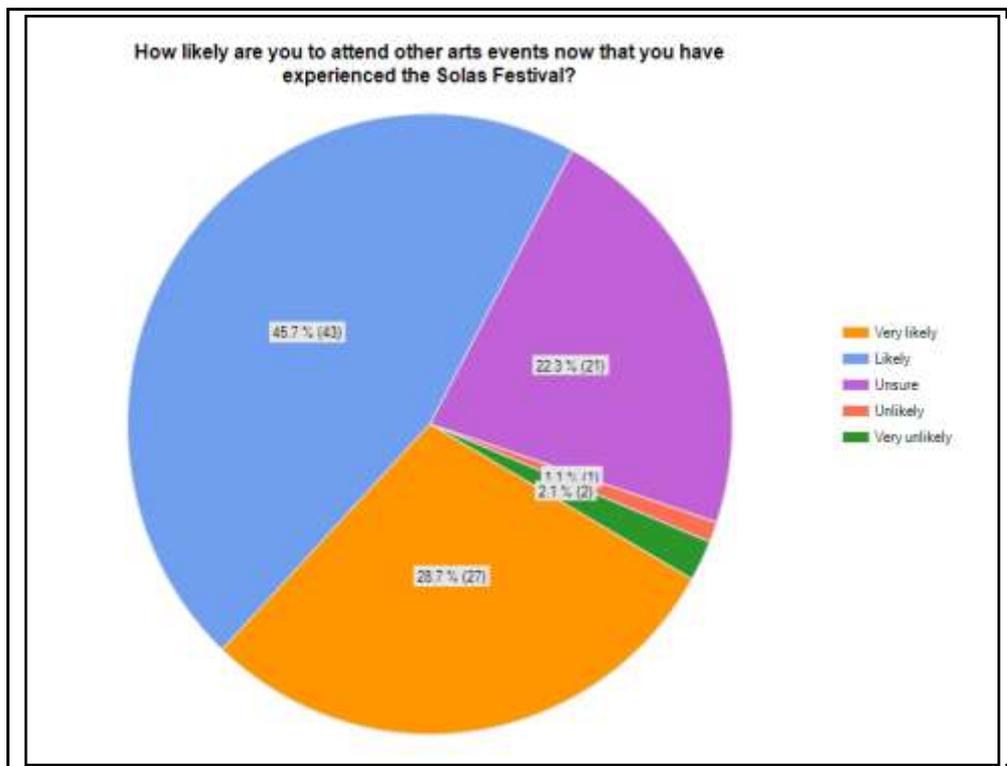


Fig 1.12 Results obtained on how likely someone was to attend another arts event because of having attended Solas

A question in the online survey asked people would attend other arts events because of Solas. Overall, 76% of people were ‘very likely’ and ‘likely’ to attend other arts events. In addition, 71% of respondents who had never attended festivals responded that they were likely to attend arts events in the future due to their experiences at Solas. This data suggests that Solas generates strong level interest in future participation that benefits not only Solas but also the arts industry as a whole.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Solas in itself is an independent a community with opportunities allowing people of all ages to engage in new experiences. Solas creates the fundamentals of widening participation in the arts by engaging people with new skills, increased teamwork and interactive experiences that are unique to the individual. Audiences are developed through the inspiration to further explore issues or engage with other arts events in general.

Recommendations

- 1 A way to avoid any misunderstanding about what defines a local resident in the future would be to use the above criteria of 'West, Central, North, South, Local, England, etc' to gain more specific answers and therefore more accurate results.
- 2 Solas may benefit to increase their usage of other forms of social media such as competitions, blogs or podcasts. It is a recommendation as seeing that word of mouth is Solas' greatest marketing tool, increasing opportunities for generating word of mouth would be a possible line to follow.
- 3 The top three reasons for not purchasing an early bird ticket was deciding to attend after the deadline, lack of awareness of the deal on some attendees parts, unforeseen personal circumstances and unaware of how many tickets were available. To further increase awareness of this deal details of the availability of tickets and deadlines should be promoted with more emphasis.
- 4 The weather and people's personal circumstances are not within Solas' control but improvements can be made to camping (or to the perceptions of the camping) to encourage people to stay for the whole weekend. Perhaps an area of development for the festival website is to also advertise the camping facilities visually. Having pictures of the site and facilities can give people an idea of where they will be staying, thus more prepared for what to expect.
- 5 An area of interest is the concept of what makes a family atmosphere. The idea of a traditional family is not necessarily relatable to a typical festival environment so it is essential to ask if people without families also seek the 'family atmosphere' at Solas and to decipher if the family atmosphere was alienating or attractive to those who attend without a family group.
- 6 Much of the Solas festivals' efforts are spent on building council links, however, it is essential to question why locals do not engage with this event as much. Therefore it is possible that the efforts made to engage local residents is reduced but rather attention should be focused on engaging local arts and business' as they can reap the full benefits of visiting crowds.
- 7 The main problem evaluating workshops was that evidence was unable to be gathered from all sessions. Data got lost between volunteers. It may be advisable to collect data online; if this is form is feasible. If this could be achieved, this would reduce the need to collect separate data from workshop leaders, thus decreasing the chance of losing data.
- 8 Do Solas Festival do enough for their contributors? We emailed contributors to ask for some brief feedback about their Solas experience - most of which was positive - but a couple expressed lack of interest; others not satisfying us with a reply. This would perhaps indicate that their festival weekend was not satisfactory. Solas Festival organisers have the potential to greatly impact how enjoyable a contributor's weekend is, in terms of how well they are treated and how smoothly things go for them. This is just something to keep in mind for future reference.

- 9 Solas Festival already incorporates health and wellbeing-related workshops into the programme, falling under Soul Space and Head Space. There is however, room for much more of an emphasis on these sessions and their potential benefits, for as research for this report has shown, the arts have an important part to play in improving the health and wellbeing of people in many ways. It would certainly do no harm to place further importance on this aspect of the programme, for it can only draw attention to the festival from a wider, more adverse audience.
- 10 Another question which was raised during this report was the feasibility of retaining the unique, intimate atmosphere of the Solas Festival weekend (that which makes it stand out from other arts festivals) whilst continuing to grow in size and popularity. Sustainability is always a priority, but does that also mean sacrificing, that close, family atmosphere that Solas have worked hard to create, in order to make room for a larger audience?
- 11 Maximising the potential of new technology is a must if the festival is to be sustainable.
- 12 Organisers at Solas Festival must also ask themselves: does the festival do enough to reach out to people from a wide range of backgrounds? Or does the festival mostly address those who already have regular access to the arts (which tend to be those from privileged parts of society)?
- 13 One problem obtaining feedback at talks was repeatedly asking audience members the same questions. To prevent this, it is recommended that questionnaire slips be left in venues and speakers direct audiences' attention to them.

CONCLUSION

In carrying out this research during the summer for Solas Festival, it has become apparent why the arts are so crucial to social and cultural development in the UK, and why efforts must continue to broaden arts participation.

Arts festivals are a particularly convenient medium of reaching those who may only encounter the arts sporadically throughout the year. They also allow people of an assortment of different backgrounds to gather in a stimulating environment and connect on a mutual ground of appreciation for and participation in the arts, nationally or internationally inspired.

The benefits of attending arts festivals, particularly the Solas Festival, have been addressed in this report and are as follows:

- A festival can generate and nurture social energy by engaging their audience in the festival delivery and strategic direction, and thus empowering that audience.
- Not only does a festival have the potential to be satisfactory and enjoyable at the time, but an arts festival has that unique after-effect in that it can encourage further interest in an arts form, thus leading to festival-goers independently seeking out new ways of fulfilling that desire to do something again
- Participation in the arts can have a positive effect on a person's psychological and physical well-being; it can also improve the quality of life for those from deprived backgrounds and provide new routes to employment and social interaction for both young and old.
- Festivals support community cohesion by creating an atmosphere that allows certain groups to interact and share new experiences together. Links with local communities can also be made to support the local economy and raise the profile of the area the event is held in.
- Festivals that provide interactive experiences allow people to interact on a personal level with different activities. This personal connection creates unique experiences that individuals can take away with them and further explore these experiences elsewhere.

Solas attracts a significant number of people who have a limited experience of festivals. Solas encompasses all of the benefits mentioned above and to bring those benefits to new attendees is a positive impact to take note of

