



The European Showcase
Platform for World Music

UPBEAT Impact Assessment Study



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BACKGROUND & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UPBEAT – The European Showcase Platform for World Music is a Platform project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. UPBEAT was founded by the Budapest-based music hub, Hangvető, to support emerging artists who sing in their own language, connect to their cultural roots and speak to current audiences. Currently counting 20 members across Europe, The UPBEAT platform is a financial and networking support system for European festivals, contributing to the events and showcases organised by Platform Members. UPBEAT's core values are: the support of new talent, the support of music in the original language, sustainability, and strengthening the European network of industry professionals.

The UPBEAT Impact Assessment document was commissioned by the project coordinator – Hangvető, consisting of two parts:

1. An impact assessment study carried out by an independent researcher, Patryk Galuszka.

Patryk Galuszka is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz, Poland. He holds a PhD in Management from the University of Lodz, Poland, and an LLM in Law and Economics from Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. He has held visiting fellowships at the Institute for Advanced Study at Central European University, Hamburg University, the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Groningen, and Leuphana University Lüneburg. He has edited/co-authored three books: "Made in Poland: Studies in Popular Music" (Routledge, 2020), "Eastern European Music Industries and Policies after the Fall of Communism" (Routledge, 2021), and "Crowdfunding and Independence in Film and Music" (Routledge, 2021). His articles have been published in journals such as *International Journal of Communication, Poetics, Information, Communication & Society, Popular Music, Popular Music & Society*, and *Media, Culture & Society*. His research interests encompass the creative industries, popular music studies, and economic sociology. Currently, his work focuses on investigating showcase festivals from economic and cultural studies perspectives.

The aim of the impact assessment study was to get an objective overview on the scope of the project's achievements, and short, medium, and long term results.

2. An evaluation of the project management and communication efforts, based on the feedback of UPBEAT Platform Members, carried out by the UPBEAT management team.

The project management and communication evaluation is published as a standalone document, separately from the present impact assessment study document.

ABSTRACT

The UPBEAT project is transforming the European world music scene by strengthening international networks, supporting small and large festivals, and promoting diverse musical voices across borders. Drawing on interviews, festival observations, and digital metrics, the study highlights how UPBEAT plays a pivotal role in developing careers and enhancing the visibility of artists from underrepresented regions. Although immediate commercial outcomes for performers are rare, UPBEAT facilitates long-term career growth by enabling meaningful connections between artists, delegates, and industry professionals. Small festivals credit UPBEAT with their very survival, while larger ones benefit from new artistic opportunities and improved inclusivity. The project also boosts audience engagement by embedding world music artists within multi-genre festivals, offering fresh experiences to listeners and expanding reach beyond core fan-bases. Importantly, UPBEAT helps dismantle cultural stereotypes by encouraging cooperation between Western and Eastern European festivals. Its educational and mentoring components support artists' business competencies, helping them to present themselves effectively on global stages. As the music industry becomes increasingly fragmented and algorithm-driven, UPBEAT provides a much-needed human and strategic infrastructure that reaffirms the value of live music and collaboration across Europe's musical landscape.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The members of the UPBEAT project include showcase festivals of various sizes and with different levels of genre specialization. Consequently, the benefits of a festival's participation in the project depend largely on its specific characteristics. For small festivals, UPBEAT provided not only vital funding that safeguarded their existence but also symbolic capital that enabled easier access to national grants. These festivals also benefited from knowledge exchange and professional development through direct collaboration and festival visits. Larger festivals, while not dependent on UPBEAT, used the funding to enrich their programs with diverse artists and realize logistically ambitious projects—such as booking large ensembles—that would otherwise be impossible.

The study examined how artists and professionals engage with showcase festivals. It found that successful outcomes require strategic planning, preparation, and active networking. While digital metrics rarely capture the true impact of festival performances, live encounters and long-term relationships were consistently cited as crucial for career advancement. The educational and mentoring dimensions of UPBEAT helped artists from peripheral regions overcome knowledge gaps and self-presentation challenges, leveling the playing field in competitive international markets.

The study also puts forward several strategic recommendations. For artists and their managers, it is essential to approach showcase festivals as long-term investments rather than short-term goals. Proper preparation—both in terms of materials and communication—is key, as is the ability to articulate a unique value proposition. Similarly, festivals are encouraged to improve the timing of logistical decisions (such as publishing delegate lists and confirming line-ups), provide informal networking spaces, and facilitate

post-performance interactions between artists and delegates. Moreover, efforts should be made to avoid “overprogramming” and venue overlaps that limit audience attention.

The participation of festivals from different parts of Europe in the program is of considerable significance. It fosters connections among music industry professionals representing diverse cultures and musical traditions. For instance, due to geographical distance, collaboration between professionals from Spain and Estonia is naturally less likely than with partners from neighboring countries. UPBEAT helps bridge these gaps, enabling collaboration and cultural exchange across regions that would otherwise remain disconnected due to economic or geographic barriers.

However, geography is only one dimension. Equally important are historical differences—for example, professionals from Eastern Europe are often less established within international business networks. This is reflected in their underrepresentation on the juries that determine festival lineups. UPBEAT’s influence on the music industry goes well beyond laying the groundwork for a more democratic approach to lineup selection. One of its key impacts is in helping to dismantle stereotypes associated with artists’ and companies’ countries of origin—preconceptions that often stand in the way of building trust and establishing meaningful business relationships.

Perhaps most critically, UPBEAT expanded audience exposure to world music by integrating these acts into mainstream, multi-genre line-ups. This cross-genre placement and regional collaboration have helped fight persistent industry biases and encouraged cultural diversity. UPBEAT emerges not just as a funding platform, but as a system-level catalyst for change in the live music industry.

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1. Introduction

A showcase festival is best understood as an event designed primarily to promote emerging artists while facilitating networking among musicians and music industry professionals. These festivals typically feature multiple short performances across various venues, alongside conferences and networking sessions tailored for industry participants (Ahlers, 2021; Brzozowska & Galuszka, 2023; Galuszka, 2021). This format appeals to music industry professionals, who can efficiently assess the potential of numerous up-and-coming acts, and to artists, who gain the opportunity to perform for audiences that often consist of either a blend of general attendees and industry representatives or exclusively the latter. The increasing prominence of showcase festivals reflects an adaptation to the fast-paced and dynamic environment of contemporary music industries. This impact assessment study addresses the following research questions:

- What is UPBEAT's impact on the music industries?
- What is UPBEAT's impact on small festivals participating in the program?
- What is UPBEAT's impact on larger festivals participating in the program?
- What is UPBEAT's impact on collaboration between festivals participating in the program?
- What is UPBEAT's impact on the popularization of world music across diverse audiences?

For the reasons outlined in sections 2 and 3, this study employs qualitative research methods, which yield no quantifiable results; consequently, these questions are not addressed statistically.

2. Methodology

Given the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon under study and the involvement of diverse actors with varying objectives, employing a triangulation of methods is essential to ensure a comprehensive understanding. Triangulation facilitates the integration of multiple perspectives and data sources, enabling a more robust and nuanced analysis (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). Accordingly, the study employs the following research methods:

- **Desk Research:** This method involves the systematic review of existing literature, reports, and archival materials to establish a foundational understanding of showcase festivals and their impacts. Desk research enables the identification of patterns and gaps in existing knowledge, providing a context for subsequent empirical investigation.
- **In-Depth Interviews:** Conducting interviews with key stakeholders—such as festival organizers, artists, and industry professionals—provided detailed qualitative

data on their experiences, goals, and perceptions. This method is invaluable for uncovering subjective insights and contextualizing findings from other data sources. Between 11 April 2024 and 9 May 2025, 54 interviews have been conducted, lasting on average 30 minutes. In most cases they were conducted in person during showcase festivals. The relatively short duration of the interviews was attributable to the limited availability of the respondents, who had exceptionally demanding schedules during these events. When designing the study, this constraint was anticipated, but the number of interviews compensated for their relatively short duration. The interviews were transcribed using Sonix.ai, an automated transcription service, and manually corrected by the author. Most of the respondents consented to having their names used in publications, some preferred to remain anonymous (see Table 1 for more details).

- **Participant Observation:** Immersive observation at showcase festivals allowed for firsthand understanding of their structure, interactions, and atmosphere. This method captures elements that may be overlooked in other approaches, such as informal networking and audience dynamics. Participant observation has been conducted between 11 April 2024 and 6 April 2025 at the following festivals: Budapest Ritmo (Hungary), Czech Music Crossroads (Czechia), A to Jazz (Bulgaria), Mercat de Musica Vica de Vic (Catalonia, Spain), WOMEX (Travelling location), PIN Music Conference (North Macedonia), Babel Music XP (France), Tallinn Music Week (Estonia). (See Table 2 for more details.)
- **Case Study Analysis:** This method focuses on specific examples of artists performing at showcase festivals to provide in-depth insights into the digital metrics generated by these artists. Using data from platforms such as Chartmetric and Viberate, the case studies aim to evaluate the influence of performances at UPBEAT festivals on metrics such as Spotify streams, YouTube views, and social media engagement.
- **Internet Survey:** A set of three targeted questions has been prepared to complement data gathered using other collection methods. These questions were included in surveys conducted by the festivals among their delegates. However, as the author of this study does not control the data collection process or response rates, this method provided only supplementary rather than definitive findings. The results are not directly presented here but were employed during interpretation of other data.

3. Understanding Causal Relationships When Investigating Showcase Festivals' Impact

The primary goals of showcase festivals are to facilitate networking among music industry professionals and promote emerging artists. While achieving these goals should theoretically produce measurable outcomes, capturing these effects poses significant challenges that require explanation. For artists, measurable outcomes include tangible business benefits such as paid performance opportunities at festivals or music venues or contracts with booking agents. However, two key challenges arise in evaluating these benefits. First, such outcomes are often realized over an extended period, as highlighted by a respondent involved in arranging programs at a cultural center in a large city:

"actually, the most of the times I'm not going home and say, I'm going to book it now, it happens, but I'm putting it in a sort of waiting room and say, okay, this is a really interesting band. I'm not sure if that piece of the puzzle already fits in the puzzle, but it's a really nice piece, and I'm gonna wait it. And it could be even a year or two years later that, when we have a discussion internally or we seek or we miss that kind of band and say, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. I saw that band..." (anonymous)

Another respondent, from the Netherlands, shared similar observations:

"-Don't expect to be booked right away. One or more times. It takes time to build relationships with different promoters. To learn what is a good way of presenting to discover your market. The band is maybe still developing. So it really takes time. It's not just one performance and then you're going to be booked.

- What's the time frame they should realistically take into account?

-Well maybe even between one year and five years. Because it's what I said. The building of relation. And when I would discover a band, then it can take a couple of years before I book it. Because the coming year I'm quite full and I have to find the right moment, maybe kind of think of a new format, make a combination with another band, and see how the band develops. If their audience develops..." (interview 23).

The one- to two-year delay in observing the outcomes of an artist's participation in a showcase festival significantly complicates efforts to measure its impact. While some respondents suggest that effects should become visible within approximately five to six months, the reality is often more complex. For instance, in the case of booking agents or talent managers, interest in signing an artist seldom arises solely from a single showcase performance. Instead, such performances often serve as a preliminary incentive to monitor an artist more closely, analyze their career trajectory, and observe subsequent live performances. This introduces a second layer of complexity: determining the precise factors that led a booking agent or manager to offer collaboration. Such decisions are typically the result of a multifaceted evaluation involving numerous variables, with a showcase festival appearance representing just one contributing factor.

One respondent explained that the decision to see an artist's performance is the result of prior analysis:

"normally we had been interested previously in the artist, and we make the decision after seeing and listening to him or to her at the festival" (interview 30).

In this case, therefore, the artist's performance at a showcase festival is not what sparks initial interest in the act. On the contrary, the respondent's attendance at the showcase is the final step in evaluating the artist's potential.

Another interviewee, a booking agent, when asked if artists' performances at showcase festivals allow him to judge the appeal of a particular performer said:

"It helps us with the filter, but that's probably about it. We're going to apply the criteria that we've got regardless, because this industry is about the audience" (interview 15).

This means that in the case of his company, the artist is evaluated according to various criteria (voice, charisma, potential audience interested in this type of music, etc.), and the fact of performing at a showcase festival is only an additional criterion. Although respondents generally agreed that witnessing an artist perform live is essential—and that showcase festivals provide a valuable opportunity to do so—they often found it difficult to evaluate to what extent seeing an artist at a showcase festival was a decisive factor in their decision to offer that artist a deal.

It can be assumed that an artist's performance at a showcase festival can also influence their digital metrics, such as the number of streams on platforms like Spotify, likes and follows on social media, and other indicators of online visibility (see section 13). While measuring these metrics is relatively straightforward—data can be sourced manually or through specialized aggregation platforms like Chartmetric or Viberate—the challenge lies in interpreting the results. It is not always clear whether improved metrics are directly attributable to the showcase performance or to concurrent events, such as increased media exposure or inclusion on a prominent playlist. For example, while a playlist addition could result from a festival performance (e.g., a curator attending the event), it could also be entirely unrelated or only indirectly connected. Such indirect relationships further complicate interpretation; for instance, an artist may have combined their showcase appearance with additional performances in nearby locations for economic reasons. Improved metrics might then be attributable to those performances rather than the showcase itself, even though the showcase was the catalyst for organizing the tour.

Given the difficulty of identifying clear cause-and-effect relationships when assessing the effectiveness of showcase festivals, this study focuses on illustrating potentially relevant connections rather than presenting numerical values. As a result, this report offers an understanding of the UPBEAT project's impact on participating entities and their wider context, without claiming that any specific project activity raised a particular indicator by a given percentage. Attempting to quantify such relationships would risk drawing unfounded conclusions.

4. Understanding Showcases Through The Prism Of Networks And Transaction Costs

From an economic perspective, in simple terms, showcase festivals help reduce transaction costs and optimize the artist filtering process. The former is achieved by facilitating networking—an essential element in an industry built on trust, as the live music sector can be considered. The latter is accomplished by offering the chance to see many artists

perform in a short time, combined with opportunities to speak directly with artists or their business representatives during networking sessions.

The commercial relevance of showcase festivals aligns with the economic concept of transaction costs, which, as outlined by Furubotn and Richter (2005), can be divided into four main types:

- Costs of searching and gathering information – the effort and resources spent identifying suitable trading partners (e.g., Who provides the needed service? Who offers the most competitive deal?)
- Costs related to negotiation and decision-making – the expenses involved in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement between parties
- Costs of monitoring and enforcement – the effort required to ensure that both sides honor the agreement and to respond appropriately if one side fails to comply
- Costs of investments in social relations, which reflect the fact that “the internal social structure of markets matters,” because it “helps to ease the burden of personal uncertainty, information complexity, and limited rationality of actors” (p. 54).

All of these cost categories are reduced through showcase festivals. The key factor here is, first, the physical gathering of music professionals in one place during such events, and second, the formation of relationships based on reputation and trust. Nearly all respondents emphasized the importance of networking in their professional work. This is reflected in the following sample statements:

“networking is like the most important thing for a professional and an artist in this industry”
(anonymous).

“it’s important to come here because then you have the faces, and you have to know who are the people you want to know, who are the people you want to meet at a music conference? It’s not the quantity. It’s the quality” (interview 35).

“people generally like to work with people they know. It sort of increases the likelihood of getting some kind of response, even a negative one... These people that you usually speak to, they’re the ones who have a lot of these messages, so from their perspective it [makes a difference]: ... We met somewhere. I’ve seen your team. That usually makes a difference” (interview 2).

Many respondents stressed the significance of the networks they are able to build and nurture through showcase festivals. Let us now look at how these networks operate in practice. One respondent noted that he receives so many collaboration proposals from artists that it becomes impossible to respond to all of them. To manage this surplus, he relies on recommendations that come through his existing network of trusted contacts. He explains:

“There’s never a shortcut. You always have to go through a filter to filter something for somebody else. Same with us. If somebody’s from a good booking agency in Holland says, like, ‘okay, we work with this artist, this is the label, we are developing this, this is what they do. I really believe

in the band. Can you please check the band?' Then I will check it. That's basically how it works"
(anonymous).

For this respondent, the main benefit of attending showcase festivals is not to evaluate artists through live performance, but to expand his professional network. This is due in part to the nature of his business (artist management, where judging live performance is relevant but not central) and in part to the belief that any promising collaboration opportunities will surface through trusted contacts. In other words, if an artist suitable for his roster is playing at a particular showcase festival, someone within his network will inform him.

Participants in showcase festivals can broadly be divided into two categories: buyers and sellers. Buyers are those who can offer artists various deals—festival bookings, inclusion in a booking agency roster, management contracts, record deals, etc. Sellers, by contrast, are those seeking opportunities either for themselves (artists) or for the artists they represent (e.g., managers, booking agents). Some participants occupy both roles; for example, a booking agent may be searching for new talent (buyer) while simultaneously promoting their current roster (seller).

One respondent, however, challenged the usefulness of this buyer/seller distinction, arguing that it frames showcase festivals too narrowly in transactional terms. For him, relationship-building is far more central:

"it's all about relationships and generating positive relationships across the world and across your industry. It's not about buying and selling. If we lock ourselves into the buying and selling model, we might as well be in a different industry. And I don't think any of us want to be in a different industry"
(interview 11).

Regardless of whether one agrees with this critique, the business relevance of showcase festivals clearly stems from their ability to foster professional connections and, by extension, trust among participants in the music market.

5. UPBEAT's Impact On The Music Industries

Continuing with the filter metaphor used by the respondent quoted earlier: similar comparisons appear both in the literature (Ahlers, 2021; Thorkildsen & Rykkja, 2022) and in the statements of other interviewees. The fact that artists performing at a showcase festival have already undergone a selection process is particularly significant for music professionals attending these events. As one respondent put it:

"So we all need a sort of gatekeeping in our sector. ...I noticed that the importance of showcase festivals has increased because it's one way of having a sort of gatekeeping of all the offers ... to present a bunch of them, and you can then even select of those already selected bunch. So it's a helpful tool to have that artistic gatekeeping going on" (anonymous).

It can thus be argued that the selections made by showcase festivals are foundational to what later appears in the line-ups of festivals targeting broader audiences, as well as in the programs of music venues. Festivals participating in the UPBEAT project employ several selection methods, typically beginning with an open call in which artists submit their proposals. Such calls often generate a high number of submissions, posing a

challenge for those in charge. Submissions are then assessed either internally (by a group of staff members), in collaboration with external partners (as in the case of Tallinn Music Week, which delegates curation of specific stages to external curators), or with the support of a specially appointed jury.

The use of a jury serves two main purposes: on one hand, it distributes the workload across more individuals, and on the other, it provides a mechanism for objectifying the selection process. When faced with over thousand submissions, even an experienced programmer may struggle to maintain objectivity or consistency. Transferring part of the decision-making to an external jury mitigates this issue. However, respondents acknowledged that the sheer volume of applications can frustrate jury members. A practical solution is to combine an initial pre-selection by the festival team with a final round conducted by the jury. This approach reduces the burden on jury members while still allowing space for overlooked talent to be reconsidered. As one respondent explained:

"We say [to the jury], 'okay, we cannot ask you to listen to 2000 bands because it will be too long for you and a huge work. We selected the 150 bands, but you can also [browse the whole application set]... because we also may have missed something. And so every year ... someone says 'I think we should listen to this band that you didn't select'... because you have so many bands, so many territories, so many different kinds of music. And then we finally have a selection between 30 and 35 bands that will play" (anonymous).

In such collective selection processes, one naturally asks: who are the jury members, and how are they chosen? Typically, they are selected by the festival staff (usually the artistic director or lead music programmer) from among individuals with recognized reputations and established networks in the music community. Jury members tend to hold significant symbolic and social capital—such as music programmers from other festivals, bookers, musicians, artist managers, label executives, journalists, or academics.

Participation in the UPBEAT project may also influence future selection practices at showcase festivals. As new networks are formed, it is likely that representatives from participating festivals will increasingly be invited to serve as jury members in subsequent years. For example, a professional from Eastern Europe may join the jury of a Southern European festival. The goal is not to favor artists from one's own region, but to bring diverse perspectives and insights shaped by lived experience in different parts of Europe. UPBEAT's influence on the music industries, however, goes well beyond laying the groundwork for a future democratization of lineup selection processes. Showcase festivals help answer fundamental questions that arise in cultural markets: Which artists should be chosen? Who represents them? Who are the trustworthy business partners? Any well-organized showcase festival contributes to lowering the transaction costs discussed in section 4. The UPBEAT project, by integrating festivals from geographically diverse regions, plays a particularly important role here. It enables connections and business relationships that might otherwise not have emerged. This is reflected in the following statement:

"And the advantage [of visiting these festivals] for me is those are countries which I didn't know much about before. So it's a first step. You meet the organization, you meet other people, other people that go there... and it's just how many things start. ...most frequently, you don't get the business immediately, but you start building the relationships and network" (interview 36).

Many times, in addition to a lack of knowledge about the specifics of a particular market, the problem lies in stereotypes associated with a country or region. The following statement illustrates how such interactions can help dismantle preconceptions based on artists' national or regional origin:

"Western Europe and Eastern Europe obviously have historic prejudices... But the important thing is not to play into those prejudices. ... If you're talking to a booker [venue in the UK], they are going to wonder whether or not you [Eastern European act] can get there. [They will ask questions such as:] Are they reliable? And that's true for African artists as well, and Indian artists, etc.. Are they going to be able to get here if we agree to book the show? Will they do the show if we do a deposit? Will they still do the show? ... You have to find ways to eliminate those prejudices as best you can ... if they've got concerns, try to gently help them understand that everything's fine" (interview 40).

One of the main factors in the UPBEAT project's impact on music businesses in the respective countries is therefore to facilitate the breaking down of stereotypes associated with the countries of origin of the artists and the companies representing them, which hinder confidence building. Thanks to the funds available through UPBEAT, selected business partners from Western European countries can be invited to festivals in Eastern European countries, where by seeing a perfectly organized event they can overcome their fears of doing business with partners from Eastern Europe.

These stereotypes are often perpetuated not because musicians from peripheral regions exhibit a lower artistic standard, but because they are not as well trained in music business knowledge and the art of self-presentation as their counterparts in Western Europe. This is illustrated by the following statement:

"One of the biggest challenges is they are not so well prepared, not in terms of product, but in terms of how they present themselves and how they sell themselves. So this is something that we are working a lot on in the conference part, in capacity building, because they also need to understand better and better how the industry works" (interview 46).

Undoubtedly, an important added value of the UPBEAT project is its investment in increasing knowledge of the music industry and developing participants' business skills. This was evident, for example, during the mentoring sessions held at the festivals where participant observation was conducted. At the same time, it should be emphasized that both investment in knowledge and skills development, as well as networking sessions, will yield results over the long term. As the following respondent's statement shows, the time horizon for assessing such impact is much longer than the duration of the UPBEAT project:

"there are a lot of people starting here and all these people that are starting now, in 20 years, one will be the director of one festival or the other, or a great musician, and if you build a network with all them, in 20 years you can call them and they can call you" (interview 26).

The key impact of UPBEAT is opening the pathway to reorganization of the music business networks in such a way that underrepresented parties are no longer marginalized (which unfortunately happened in the past due to historical or economic reasons, see e.g. Barna, 2021; Galuszka, forthcoming). This aligns very well with the goals of the UPBEAT project: enhancing artistic collaboration on the European level and helping the circulation of artists and works at an international level.

6. UPBEAT's Impact on Performing Artists

Assessing the impact of participation in UPBEAT festivals on the careers of individual artists is difficult for the reasons mentioned in Section 3. In addition, artists performing at showcase festivals, although generally classified as emerging, represent different levels of experience. For example, a band performing at a showcase for the first time will naturally have a different perspective than an artist with prior experience at such events. One experienced artist described his first visit to the WOMEX festival several years ago this way:

"I remember when we went for the first time to WOMEX, it was very disorienting. You don't know what to do... You see everyone doing things and talking to each other, and you don't know how to react... Is it good to go and just interrupt and talk to people? ... you don't know how to do it" (anonymous).

Other interviewees with a classical music education pointed out that, although their training was excellent in musical terms, it completely failed to prepare them for the realities of showcase festivals. One respondent described the experience of attending a showcase for the first time:

"this is another completely different area and perspective...And that's quite shocking for me to hear and see it firsthand" (anonymous).

The shock described by the respondent referred to the realization that the realities of the live music market are quite distant from the curriculum of classical music universities. Naturally, subsequent visits to showcase festivals become easier as artists gain experience. Some showcase festivals (e.g., WOMEX) offer training sessions specifically for newcomers, where they can gain a basic understanding of how to participate in such events. Naturally, the business impact of an artist's visit at a showcase festival depends on a number of factors, such as the quality of the performance, the level of business preparation, and sometimes, a stroke of luck. Factors that can help artists optimally prepare for a showcase festival are described in Section 11.

Since evaluating the impact of a showcase on an artist's career often hinges on variables outside the festival's control, we are left to rely on anecdotal evidence. There are certainly examples of artists who have benefited measurably from performing at UPBEAT festivals. One respondent, when asked to identify the business benefits of playing one of the major European showcases—ESNS—noted that other festivals had produced more tangible outcomes for his band. He cited participation in the PIN Music Conference, which led to an invitation to the Istanbul Jazz Festival. This was particularly valuable for the band, as they were paid for the performance, and travel and lodging were covered. From the artist's perspective, such invitations are the most highly valued, measurable results of showcase participation. A further statement from the respondent illustrates how one festival appearance can lead to others:

"the organizer of Tallinn Music Week saw us there. And then we went to Tallinn Music Week and, the organizer of Sziget was there and invited us to Sziget. And actually, Weyer Balázs from Budapest Ritmo saw us there in Sofia, on A to Jazz. And he invited us to Budapest Ritmo... Tallinn Music Week, actually it was just last week, so maybe something is coming [out of it]. But they already invited us to another festival in Estonia" (interview 8).

Another respondent mentioned that participating in one of UPBEAT's smaller festivals attracted the interest of an agent representing the Austrian market—a market that had previously been difficult for artists from the respondent's country to enter.

These examples cannot be generalized to all artists performing at showcase festivals. Given the large volume of new, aspiring talent, it is inevitable that some will not experience tangible benefits. Nevertheless, these cases demonstrate that real success stories do happen through UPBEAT festivals. It is important to note, however, that these successes often result from significant preparation for a particular event and behind-the-scenes work by music professionals collaborating with the artists. See also Section 13 for a discussion of how a performance at a showcase festival may or may not yield changes visible in digital metrics.

7. UPBEAT's Impact on Small Festivals

The impact of the UPBEAT project on the small festivals participating in it can be described as existential. These festivals often face financial and organizational challenges that are beyond their control. Participation in the UPBEAT project provides them with critical support that helps alleviate economic difficulties by offering tangible contributions to their budgets. As one respondent put it:

"[Without UPBEAT] those big festivals, they would survive. We wouldn't. We would try, I guess, but the festival would look way, way different. ... [We would have to go back to] the way we started: one evening festival with three bands" (interview 54).

In addition to the direct financial support provided by UPBEAT, participation in the project also carries a form of symbolic capital that makes it easier to access additional funding. Naturally, this depends on the local funding frameworks in each country. The same respondent gave an example of how securing UPBEAT funding automatically improved their ability to apply for national funding. The festival no longer had to compete directly with the largest Lithuanian cultural institutions, and was instead placed in a separate funding category, where a simplified application process applied. As the respondent described:

"And then there is still competition and ... you can't predict how much money you will get, but at least you have an idea that you don't need to rewrite the project thousands of times. You basically give like a short description" (interview 54).

As a result, participation in UPBEAT had a multiplier effect—the festival not only received financial resources from the project itself but also gained access to national funds that would have otherwise been out of reach for entities not engaged in European-level initiatives. This helped the festival avoid what the respondent called the "project cycle", meaning a situation where a festival's survival depends on applying for competitive grants every year, with no guarantee of continuation. In this sense, the most direct benefit of UPBEAT was organizational stabilization, offering the festival a clearer path for long-term development.

Another important benefit for smaller festivals was the educational component of the project. Through UPBEAT, festival organizers had direct contact with peers from other

festivals and the opportunity to visit them. These visits allowed for the exchange of best practices and informal consultation. Due to the limited budgets of small festivals, such travel would not be feasible without the support provided by the project.

In conclusion, participation in the UPBEAT project has been fundamental for small festivals in two key ways. First, it provided financial and institutional stability, particularly valuable in national contexts where cultural funding is competitive and unpredictable. Second, it granted these festivals a measure of freedom to plan for the future, explore growth opportunities, and set new goals. In situations where festivals are trapped in a perpetual “project cycle,” this shift from survival mode to strategic development represents a major transformation.

8. UPBEAT’s Impact on Larger Festivals

For large festivals such as WOMEX or Mercat de Musica Viva de Vic, participation in the UPBEAT project is not a matter of survival. However, this does not mean that their involvement is insignificant. Respondents indicated that economic factors still matter even for large-scale events. While these festivals generally do not face the same fundamental budgetary constraints as smaller ones, financial support from the project remains meaningful. It enables them to offer slightly improved conditions for participating artists—for example, in terms of accommodation—“to facilitate the participation,” as one respondent phrased it (anonymous). As a representative from a mid-sized festival noted:

“I can say that [thanks to UPBEAT] we can book some artists and professional delegates that we couldn’t book before... [our festival] became more diverse [in terms of] genre, especially from a delegates’ point of view” (anonymous).

It is also noteworthy that representatives of large festivals view their involvement in the project as an opportunity to reflect more broadly on their programming. Participation in these festivals is highly competitive. For example, WOMEX 2024 received 1,700 applications, from which only 58 acts were selected. In such a competitive environment, the difference in musical quality between the selected acts and those that narrowly missed selection is minimal. Here, the UPBEAT project plays a particularly important role in providing a platform for artists who were highly rated by the jury but fell just below the acceptance threshold. While it is difficult to quantify how many such artists were ultimately included, respondents suggest that this did happen:

“[Initially] they were not selected because there was not enough space for everyone. But they were some of the favorites of the jury and some of our favorites” (anonymous).

While it is not possible to accurately reconstruct the workflow of the selection jury, a comparison between the WOMEX main stage lineup and the offWOMEX stage for UPBEAT-supported artists suggests that at least six performers would not have appeared at the festival in the 2023 and 2024 editions without that support. Specifically, in 2023: Júlia Kozáková (Slovakia), Haratago (France), and Almir Meskovic & Daniel Lazar Duo (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway); and in 2024: Āo (Belgium), Zarina Prvasevda (North Macedonia), and Buzz Ayaz (Cyprus).

On one hand, this contributes to the richness of the festival’s program. On the other, it creates new opportunities for emerging artists to perform in front of a wide network of industry professionals—an opportunity that would not exist without the festival’s

participation in UPBEAT. Therefore, when evaluating the involvement of large festivals in the project, it is important to consider not only what they gain from it, but also how their participation enhances the project itself. Providing access to large, professionalized audiences is an important dimension of UPBEAT's impact that smaller festivals cannot replicate.

Additionally, from the perspective of medium and large festivals, UPBEAT funding facilitates initiatives that would otherwise be difficult to realize due to financial limitations. One respondent gave the example of inviting a band with more than 20 members. Under normal budget conditions, this would have been impossible due to the substantial cost of accommodating such a large group. Thus, UPBEAT funding enabled the festival to carry out a unique project that would not have been feasible using internal resources alone.

9. UPBEAT's Impact on Collaboration Between Festivals

One of UPBEAT's goals is to enhance artistic collaboration at the European level by connecting various European world music showcase festivals and motivating them to carry out joint activities. The empirical material collected during the survey indicates that the participating festivals do indeed establish cooperation, but it is primarily geographically and culturally focused. In other words, festivals located in neighboring countries (e.g., North Macedonia and Bulgaria), those with strong historical ties (e.g., Slovenia, Croatia, North Macedonia), or those with cultural affinities (e.g., Spain and Italy) are more likely to collaborate. It is likely that such cooperation would occur even without participation in UPBEAT, although it would probably unfold more slowly and in a less structured way. As one respondent explained:

"it's also regional. It's not only from the UPBEAT, it's a natural collaboration with SHIP [Croatia] and with Password Production [North Macedonia]. We are somehow natural partners. We try to move things together in the region so we can be stronger that way. So we are naturally collaborating with them" (interview 46).

Cooperation between festivals from countries that share geographic, historical, and cultural ties is logical, as they often face similar challenges and have shared experiences. These dynamics are especially visible in the case of music exports from the Balkans, as illustrated in the following quote:

"our region is quite underrepresented, especially, on the European scene, not even talking about worldwide. ... Our regions and our artists are quite underrepresented, and we are supporting each other in terms of being presented as region and trying to do things together... And of course we help each other a lot with ideas, with support, whatever is necessary" (interview 46).

Given that current collaboration within UPBEAT is largely concentrated along these regional lines, it becomes important to create a more deliberate framework to foster cooperation between festivals that are geographically and culturally more distant from one another. Additionally, there appears to be a need for improving awareness of the opportunities afforded by participation as an associate partner. As one respondent noted:

"I spoke to the other associated partners. They don't have a clue what are their obligations, what they have to do" (interview 39).

10. UPBEAT's Impact on the Popularization of World Music Across Diverse Audiences

A key aspect in evaluating the UPBEAT project is its role in promoting music genres broadly categorized as world music to listeners whose daily preferences lie in other genres. This is achieved through the project's support for the participation of world music artists in multi-genre festivals. The unique structure of UPBEAT—which includes both festivals specializing in world music (e.g., Méra World Music Festival, Pannonica Festival) and multi-genre events (e.g., Mercat de Música Viva de Vic, Tallinn Music Week, Waves Vienna)—creates a valuable space for genre crossover.

While it is evident that festivals focused on world music attract an audience already engaged with the genre, multi-genre festivals offer the chance to reach listeners whose musical interests may center around other styles, such as rock, electronic, or pop. This dynamic operates on two levels. First, in the case of general audiences—those who are not music professionals—exposure to world music often occurs unintentionally, as part of the broader festival experience. For music programmers, this opens up an opportunity to surprise and potentially convert these listeners. As one respondent explained:

"They'd be seeing a synthesizer duo, then a pop band, and then an UPBEAT artist. They wouldn't know. They have no idea. And often the people going to the venues and the gigs don't actually necessarily know the artists. And I wanted to do that to surprise the audience, but also [due to] my experience of many, many years doing this and putting things in front of people they're not expecting because of the stereotype of folk roots and world music. They go, I'm going to swear now, but in a good way. They go, 'fuck, what's this? That's amazing! Where's this from?'" (interview 40)

Of course, not every world music performance will elicit this kind of reaction. For such moments to occur, programmers must thoughtfully integrate UPBEAT artists into the general festival lineup, rather than segregating them.

The second dimension involves artists whose work blends world music with other genres—so-called crossover acts. These artists can appeal to both dedicated fans of world music and to audiences aligned with other musical traditions. This broader appeal also enhances the likelihood of engagement from mainstream listeners. The importance of such integration was underscored by the same respondent, who described his approach to programming the UPBEAT section of Waves Vienna:

"So not everybody, but many of the people I program have some crossover, some have none at all. ... I said when I started the project and on the basis I would agree to it, that I did not want the UPBEAT program to be programmed as a separate part of the Waves Vienna program. I wanted it in the normal program. Now to contextualize this. Waves has lots of small venues... It changes every year, but it's got lots of small venues and it's open to the general public. They buy tickets. So the general public go in and [are] expecting to see pop, rock, indie, alt electronica... And I wanted to put in front of those people, emerging world music artists within that same program" (interview 40).

In this context the UPBEAT Best New Talent Award should be mentioned. It plays a vital role in bridging the gap between emerging world music artists and broader, mainstream audiences across Europe. Through a dynamic public voting system and far-reaching PR and social media campaigns, the award not only celebrates artistic excellence but also introduces new talent to thousands of listeners who may not have

otherwise encountered world music. With up to 6,000 voters annually and a digital reach of over 150,000 users, the initiative significantly amplifies the visibility of nominated artists, turning niche performers into internationally recognized names.

Finally, it can be argued that the inclusion of certain types of acts in the line-ups of multigenre festivals serves purposes that go beyond the concept of genre itself. Similar mechanisms apply to artists from countries on the periphery of the global or European music industry. One of the key added values of the UPBEAT project is that it brings these artists to the attention of audiences—whether general listeners or professionals—attending showcase festivals in cultural centers such as Vienna or Brussels. Even when these encounters happen by chance, they offer an opportunity for greater cultural exposure.

This dynamic is especially important in the context of increasing algorithmic filtering of music consumption via streaming platforms and social media. As Tofalvy and Koltai (2023) argue, such algorithms tend to reproduce core-periphery inequalities in the global music economy. Against this backdrop, the UPBEAT project's model—placing music from underrepresented regions directly in front of diverse live audiences—can be viewed as a corrective force that promotes cultural diversity and counteracts algorithmic homogenization.

11. Recommendations For Increasing Artists' And Businesses' Impact At Showcase Festivals

The interviews yielded valuable insights into strategies that artists and their business partners can adopt to maximize the benefits of showcase festival participation. While they do not directly answer to what extent can UPBEAT festivals (or any showcase festivals) increase participating artists' chances of success, they highlight actionable steps artists can take before and during the festival to enhance their prospects. It is logical to assume that participation in an UPBEAT festival, or in any showcase festival, without engaging in networking activities is unlikely to yield significant results. Therefore, it is crucial for artists and their business teams to consider the recommendations derived from this research. Collecting and disseminating such knowledge can be regarded as a tangible impact of the project. This section does not differentiate between activities undertaken by artists and those by business professionals attending as delegates. This is because the recommendations gathered generally apply to both groups. Where differences are relevant, they are noted explicitly in the text.

The primary insight emerging from the research is that participation in showcase festivals should be framed as part of a broader strategic development plan for either an artist or a music business entity. This involves not only identifying the purpose of attending a given festival—answering the question “Why are we here, and what do we hope to achieve?”—but also acting on this knowledge through deliberate preparation. As one respondent emphasized:

“Be very specific in what you're doing and find the right people to talk to. So in our company, it's also very important that you're not going somewhere without a plan. You don't have to come back with a thousand business cards that you got from people that you met. ...”

We're working on a strategic plan for Germany for this and this band, so we only talk to German people at Eurosonic at the moment" (anonymous).

The capacity to plan strategically is especially critical for music professionals, who often attend multiple events per year and must prioritize their time and resources. However, the same principle also applies to artists, particularly those who are not represented by managers or booking agents. Even in the absence of formal business representation, artists can still benefit from strategic thinking.

Another key finding is that artists should attend a showcase festival with a well-prepared business infrastructure, which includes a dedicated team to support them during the event. This team should ideally consist of a manager and, where possible, a booking agent and/or a PR support. This importance is underscored by the following statement:

"there are showcases that are not worth doing at all without having the infrastructure. There are showcases that are sort of doable from the perspective of not having a team, an agent for a particular market or an agent at all. ... It's roughly about making sure that these people [delegates] more or less know and associate what they're going [to hear] and that they understand why it's special. So that's probably it, because realistically on the world music scene we don't compete for who is better. Because like there's a competition between a high jumper and a distance jumper, it can't be compared. We actually compete on like who is a high jumper and who is a distance jumper. What are we actually doing?" (interview 2).

Following the respondent's logic, one might conclude that artists should arrive at a showcase festival equipped with what in business terminology is known as a unique selling proposition (USP)—a clear attribute or positioning that sets them apart and makes them memorable to delegates. They should also possess at least a minimal level of industry knowledge and basic networking skills. Of course, it is possible for an artist performing for the first time to impress through sheer musical talent and stage presence. But in the absence of preparation or business awareness, even a standout performance may yield limited results. This risk was illustrated by a respondent, who described the outcome of such a case as follows:

"It was the very first showcase of a Mozambican artist at WOMEX, and the showcase was really good. The outcome was terrible because it was an artist that didn't know how to deal with the promoters and every single connection that happened failed because it was so hard and it didn't work, and it was a waste of money. You know, the investment was big, but he was not prepared professionally. He didn't have the material. He didn't have the skills. He didn't have the knowledge to negotiate. It was a failure. So the outcome, it's only measurable if there's immediate work that comes out of the showcase" (interview 24).

An artist attending a showcase festival without an agent and aiming to secure representation faces obviously a more challenging situation. In such cases, thorough preparation for the event is essential. This involves researching agents who might have a professional interest in the artist's specific genre or profile. Communication with these agents should be highly targeted and personalized to maximize the chances of engagement, as illustrated by the following statement:

"I mean, please don't send off those general emails that you send to everybody. I mean, it just doesn't work like this. Just don't put the effort in it. Just select those ten, fifteen venues that you think are interesting for your band and say 'Hi, I noticed some really interesting program at your venue. I think our bands could be really fitting in. We're doing this and this and this. We're playing on that that day in that venue. If you would be interested, please give a call. I will be there as well. This is my

contact. I hope to see you there'. And then you say, okay, this is somebody that at least approached you directly because he or she thinks that the band is really suitable for you. And that's a totally different kind of approaching a presenter than just having those general nonsense of e-mails" (anonymous).

Personalizing messages and targeting them to specific, potentially interested delegates does not guarantee success—but it significantly increases the chances of standing out from the many other attendees who do not make this effort. As one respondent pointed out:

"That's the thing that was really shocking to me. I got a lot of invites and there was not even one trying to do it in English, and it's 100% Spanish, so not even 99%. So I sent a couple of people—I think the first 5 or 6 or 7—I sent back: 'Sorry, I don't speak Spanish. Can you please translate it for me?' Because, you know, I don't want to. If you really want to talk to me, you can do some effort instead of putting me on CC to everyone. And there were like two replies. So I was a little bit shocked" (anonymous).

This anecdote underscores the importance of tailored communication. Generic, mass-sent invitations—especially those that ignore language barriers or fail to address the recipient directly—are unlikely to produce meaningful outcomes. Delegates are more inclined to respond to well-crafted, relevant messages that demonstrate effort and intent.

In light of such perspectives, it becomes clear that artists and their managers should approach showcase festivals as part of a long-term engagement strategy. This might include attending multiple events over an extended period to build relationships, observe market dynamics, and gradually increase visibility within the professional community.

Initial festival appearances may primarily serve to establish a network of professional contacts, with tangible results materializing in subsequent events. This process is based on the premise that participation in an initial showcase festival allows artists to become familiar to delegates, who may then be more receptive to future invitations and performances. For example, an artist's performance at their first festival might lead delegates to pay closer attention to future communication, such as emails inviting them to subsequent showcases, precisely because the artist is no longer unknown to them. This observation emphasizes the importance of sustained participation and strategic engagement with industry professionals over time:

"for example, this is a showcase that we go to in order to get to know someone of the people at all, but only at the next one, for example, we are able to go realistically, having already an agent. In general, this kind of thinking in the long run is something that can work" (interview 2).

A valuable piece of advice for artists and music professionals with limited experience at showcase festivals is to understand how seasoned delegates typically prepare for participation. The simplest answer is that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy—preparation varies significantly depending on the role of the delegate (e.g., buyer or seller) and the type of business they represent. However, a general rule of thumb is that experienced delegates come well-prepared.

For example, music programmers attending with the intention of discovering new talent typically review the full list of performing artists in advance. They identify which acts align with their curatorial goals and plan their schedule accordingly. Even within this group, preparation approaches differ. As one respondent explained, his core preparation

involves listening to the music of all scheduled performers prior to the event to assess who merits closer attention during the festival. This level of preparation is reflected in the following statement:

"Oh yes, I listen to everything. I listen to everything! So 300 [bands]. At the Great Escape it's 450 bands. I listened to everything. And I've got a book, a real book with my annotations. I don't leave anything to chance. I really want to be sure that I missed nothing" (interview 17).

Another statement, in turn, shows that preparing a delegate for a festival doesn't necessarily mean only listening to an artist's recordings. Not everyone has the time to do that, and that's why it is important to prepare good materials published on the festival's website:

"I tend not to listen to much in advance and it's, to be honest, more based on the liner notes. So the liner notes are really, really important. Yeah, I read, I read, I read, I read, and I say, okay, this is something interesting. And then in two minutes time [during the showcase] it can be, oh no, this is not what I have looked for" (anonymous).

Based on the interviews, a few additional pieces of advice addressed directly to performing artists can be identified. They can be summarized as follows:

- Prepare for a short performance, and never exceed the scheduled time ("showcase is not a place to experiment" (interview 13).
- Choose songs that will best capture the audience's attention ("every song should be hit" (interview 10)); avoid songs with long introductions.
- Adopt a proactive, open attitude and communicate with the audience during the performance ("[what] you say between the songs is as important as the song because this is information. ... It has to look improvised, but it has to be here, inside. You have to know what you say" (interview 10).
- Introduce yourself clearly ("you have to say who you are shortly, not only after the first song, but somewhere in between, because [during] showcase festivals, people are coming and going and it's not obvious that they saw your first song with the presentation" (interview 10).
- If possible, influence the choice of the venue in which you perform. In most cases, this is not feasible unless the artist or their agent has some clout. Nevertheless, as one respondent emphasized: "Make sure that the sound is great. Make sure that you do not say yes to a spot, which is not good. Because it doesn't make any sense. So if you spend a lot of money to go there, it needs to be good" (anonymous).
- Treat participation in a showcase festival as an investment, not a goal in itself.
- Do not be discouraged if audience members leave during your performance—this is typical behavior at such festivals and not a sign of disrespect.
- Do not be discouraged by a small audience: "Because even if you're in front of ten people, it could be the right ten people" (anonymous).
- Be available to delegates after the performance.

Based on the empirical material, it is also possible to identify advice aimed directly at delegates representing artists' interests (e.g., managers). These include:

- Come prepared, and ensure you have connections who know you and can help build your presence (“the work starts before: you go through the list [of delegates]. You see who is there. You understand who is important for you” (interview 10).
- Focus on building relationships rather than aggressively trying to sell (“and there needs to be some kind of discussion or some kind of mutual interest in what we’re doing” (anonymous).
- Ensure your contact information is included in the delegates’ database as early as possible. Include both your details and a photo to help other delegates who don’t know you to identify and locate you.
- Prepare materials for the artist you represent, both online (website or social media) and in physical or digital form (“I still look at websites ... it helps if there’s already an electronic press kit ready for me where I can get a bio and photos right away” (anonymous); “I still love, for example, physical CDs, but I know that for other people it’s something not important... I understand that now it’s not so practical, but it’s always good to have something. It can be a flash disc, it can be material about the band” (Interview 7).
- Do not assume in advance that a delegate—because of their specialization in a certain genre—has nothing to offer the artist (“If you’re programming a whole weekend, you want something different every day. You want to have... different offerings so that it’s not all the same. And [so] you can attract different audiences” (anonymous).
- Consider your participation in showcase festivals as a series of related events. Each step leads to another; in the case of beginners, “it’s very practical to come alone without a band first to see how it functions. Just to make friends. Introduce yourself” (interview 10).

12. Recommendations For Increasing Showcase Festival’s Impact

The interviews offered valuable insights into the various logistical arrangements at showcase festivals. While some limitations, such as the availability of suitable venues, are difficult to address due to the constraints of the festival’s location, other aspects warrant consideration, particularly given their potential to enhance the festival’s long-term impact.

One respondent emphasized the importance of well-prepared venues specifically designed for delegate meetings, highlighting their role in facilitating meaningful interactions and networking opportunities:

“So it’s nice to prepare this space for meeting, for people; it’s nice to have some conference points. And, for example, because I was a member of the jury of showcase this year, I participated in speed meetings today, and so, it’s good. But what’s also good are the informal parts of this conference day between the [panels when] we are all together journalists, bookers, musicians. All these people, [when] we can speak together. That’s important for me” (interview 7).

Another respondent emphasized the necessity for more meeting places for delegates, especially in the case of showcases where language barriers arise. He experienced this in Spain, putting it in the following words:

“One thing what I do miss here: If you don’t know anyone, it’s very hard to talk to people because they’re all in their own bubble. It’s all Spanish. So if you would make a couple of stands where people can introduce themselves - it’s very easy to go to a place where people introduce themselves and where you can talk to people” (anonymous).

Another phenomenon that frustrates delegates is the excessive distances between concert venues and the inability to get to concerts due to overcrowding. Importantly, the following statement is not about any of the UPBEAT festivals, but about other events, shown as an example that should not be followed:

“There is nothing more frustrating than having a program lined up and say, okay, this band and then this band and this band, that is not possible because of holes that are too far away from each other, or you arrive at a hole that is full and you’re not allowed anymore” (anonymous).

Particularly appreciated by respondents was the design of speedmeetings in such a way that they took place after the artists’ performance. This allowed the conversation between the artists and the delegates to be specific. This is shown in the following two statements:

“I think here it’s really well organized because they have a great selection of performances, and everybody from the performance is there for the speed meeting. And if people come into a speed meeting but they’re not playing at the festival, for me it’s useless because now I can really talk with people about their performance, and about how to bring that to our venue, and bring it on a higher level. And if I’m talking with a band who’s just proposing me a CD, which I haven’t listened to then [it’s useless]” (interview 23).

“it depends if I’ve seen the group or not. If I’ve seen it like here today, this is the best. This is the best way actually to have the showcases. And then the next day I have the speed meeting, so that’s perfect. The other way around, it’s less okay. So, like here, you can immediately talk about what you saw, give feedback. That’s really good. ... I think they [the artists taking part in speed meetings] need to have all the material ready. They need to have the recordings. They need to have a live video, some information ready, technical rider, things like that. I think they need to be honest. If you feel like, oh, he’s bluffing or something, then it does not really give a lot of confidence. And if you haven’t seen them. Yeah, they have to know how to get catch your interest, you know, catch your attention by explaining what the music is about. I’m very interested in the background of music, the instruments that are being played, where it comes from, how the culture is lived, how it’s linked to people” (interview 20).

Some respondents also noted the quality of digital tools associated with the festival, such as the website and festival app. These—particularly the database of registered delegates—are useful when preparing to attend the event. As one of respondents emphasized:

“Some showcases provide you the delegates list, including the contacts. Some don’t which I don’t understand ... [or] they are on the website [but] you even can’t copy them... You can’t do it because it’s not in the copyable format” (interview 6).

Measures likely motivated by the desire to protect delegates from excessive unsolicited communication, according to some respondents, can also make their work more difficult. An interesting solution was implemented at the Czech Music Crossroads festival, where a dedicated WhatsApp group was created for all delegates. It provided an effective way to communicate relevant information in real time. Naturally, such a solution is not replicable at the largest festivals, where the number of delegates is so high that effective communication via messaging apps would be impractical.

From the point of view of performing artists, a significant problem is the relatively late communication of information about acceptance to the festival. First, it makes it difficult to obtain financing. Second, it makes it more difficult to construct a tour in the area,

which is usually a desirable solution for artists for economic reasons. This is shown by the following statement:

"If I had to decide a second time for Budapest Ritmo I probably wouldn't, because it is an event that confirms artists too late. I, for one, had two months to figure out whether I was able to, for example, build some kind of route with this trip. I barely actually fit in the deadline for obtaining funds from the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, so that this trip would not bring losses. ... And I think that for all the nobility of this event, this is its mega-weakness. Because, in general, sort of the industry is going, in my opinion, in the suicidal direction of just shortening these periods, announcing things they're planning [too late]. I remember when I first went to WOMEX, it was already clear probably two years ahead where it would be held. At the moment it's like, you come to WOMEX, and you find out on the spot or a week in advance where the next one will take place. I understand that there are still kind of aspects there, maybe that there is an issue there, [related] to speculate on hotel prices or something, but gee, kind of from the perspective of musicians, really. It's like we just don't give ourselves time to prepare things calmly and we start doing too many things on the spur of the moment... if I had six months to prepare [this showcase], I would have squeezed, I have this feeling, more out of it" (interview 2).

Similar comments were made about the publication of the delegate list. It would be best if it appeared as early as possible because that way those taking part can prepare well for the event, which is time-consuming. This is shown by the following statement:

"Well, but it's also again back to the time when we registered, when we got confirmation from Budapest Ritmo well I don't know, within how many weeks some in general first names of delegates appeared and there were very few there. And, in fact, again: there is some work, for example, figuring out who will be [at the event], who we know, who we don't know, who to pay attention to, who not, who interests us, who are the people we don't know. Well, this is in general work, which has to be done in large numbers at the last minute, given the current realities, also financial, these are no longer things that anyone has time for" (interview 2).

Regardless of the recommendations presented here, it is important to remember that the attractiveness of a particular showcase festival to international delegates depends not only on how efficiently it is organized. It also—and perhaps most importantly—depends on the overall appeal of the specific music market. Since showcase festivals are often seen as tools for entering a country's music market, it is natural that some events will be more attractive to music professionals (because they are organized in countries where more money is spent on music) than others (organized in peripheral countries with smaller music markets). Nonetheless, a well-prepared showcase festival can serve as a crucial first step in building an international network that supports artists and businesses from regions outside the traditional music industry centers.

During the interviews, respondents also raised concerns about the effectiveness of showcase festivals as tools for music promotion. In particular, there is the issue of artists reaching a certain level of skill and recognition sufficient to gain entry into showcase festivals, but without this translating into opportunities for commercial performances. This concern is best illustrated by the following remark:

"We are playing a showcase to get to the different showcase. So it's like a bubble" (interview 26).

On the other hand, the growing number of showcase festivals has led to their becoming the standard route for artists seeking international recognition. This is shown in the following statement:

“The thing is that bands can easily get stuck in this showcase bubble. But again, it’s a game you need to play, but you have to play it with some idea behind what you want to achieve and which festivals to apply for, which can be of help” (interview 13).

In conclusion, this again underscores the importance of strategic planning and preparation for showcase festivals—particularly in terms of networking and developing a solid understanding of how these events and the broader music market function.

13. UPBEAT’s Impact on the Artists Performing at Showcase Festivals as Manifested in Digital Metrics

As mentioned in Section 3, evaluating artists’ performances at showcase festivals using digital metrics is challenging. Most of the interviewed respondents claimed that they either do not use digital metrics at all or use them as one factor among others—particularly less important than evaluations based on live performance. Even in the case of those who do consider digital metrics, their use is always contextualized, as shown in the following exchange:

– Do you take into account the digital metrics when making decisions about booking an act?

– *That’s very difficult. The easy answer is no. It’s not like I’m going to go into whatever data to make this decision, because some acts are really starting very small and then they go very fast, and we are in the business of small acts. So no, but if I see that a band has 300 followers on Instagram and is trying already for ten years, that’s a metric that I would definitely consider” (interview 41).*

It should be noted, as mentioned in earlier sections, that the festivals participating in UPBEAT vary in size. They include small, ticketed events, small and large events aimed exclusively at music professionals, and festivals open to the general public. The latter—particularly when admission is free—can generate noticeable effects in digital metrics, although given the “randomness” of the attending audience, these effects may be short-lived. On the other hand, small events open only to music professionals (such as part of the lineup at Czech Music Crossroads) are unlikely to generate any visible effect on digital metrics.

Taking these complexities into account, this study adopts a cautious approach to interpreting digital metrics. It posits that a lack of visible change in digital metrics at the time of the festival—something true for most analyzed acts—should not be interpreted negatively. However, if there is a notable improvement in metrics within two weeks before or after a showcase performance, it can reasonably be attributed to the festival’s influence (not only the performance itself, but also media attention such as interviews during the event). For an accurate interpretation, the highest observed data point during this period is compared against average metrics from prior months.

The case studies draw on data from two platforms—Chartmetric and Viberate—to evaluate the potential impact of participating in UPBEAT festivals on an artist’s digital metrics. However, data availability poses challenges, particularly for emerging artists (UPBEAT’s primary focus). In some cases, Spotify stream counts are available, while YouTube or TikTok data are not. Moreover, when an artist has a very small fanbase—for

example, 50 followers on Facebook—gaining just 10 more followers represents a 20% increase. While this may appear impressive in visualizations on Chartmetric, the absolute numbers are too small to be meaningful. Nevertheless, after analyzing several cases, a few interesting cases of digital metrics reactions—with possible explanations—are presented.

The following two charts illustrate the influence of showcase’s audience size on digital metrics. A comparison of Figure 1 and Figure 2 reveals differences that likely stem from audience scale. Nasip Kismet’s performance at A to Jazz attracted a larger audience (due to playing at a larger venue, and the fact that the festival was open to the general public), possibly explaining the increase in Spotify and YouTube statistics in July 2024. In contrast, Bicho Carpinteiro performed at MMVV in a small room (approximate capacity: 50 people), which may account for the lack of visible effect.

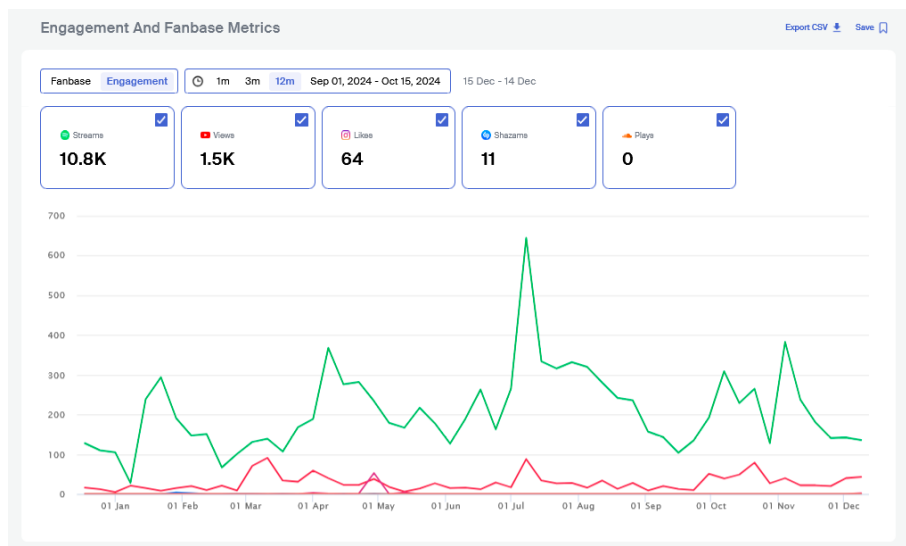


Figure 1: Nasip Kismet stats — visible impact of A to Jazz performance (Spotify increase in early July, green line).

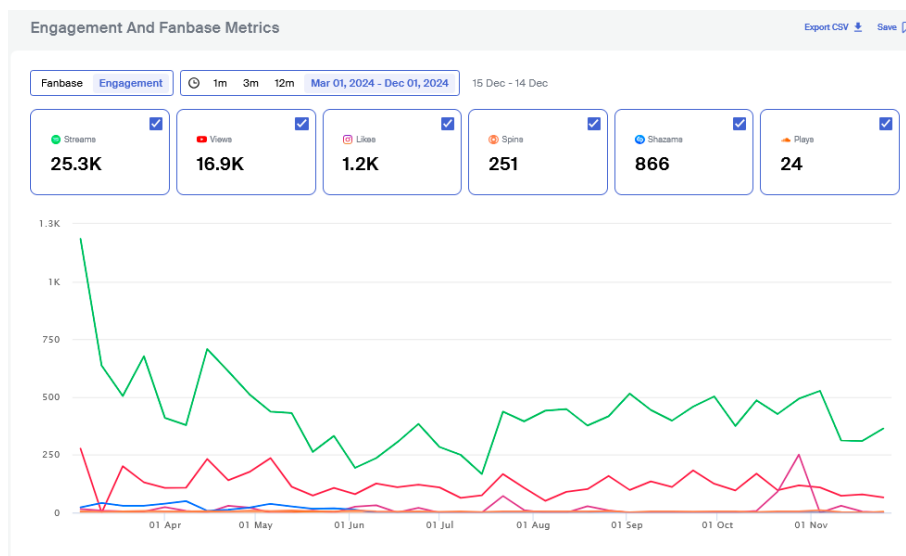


Figure 2: Bicho Carpinteiro stats — no visible effect from MMVV participation in September.

One of the most convincing examples of the analytical limitations of digital metrics comes from Puuluup. Figure 3 shows a spike in the band’s Spotify streams in spring 2024, clearly linked to their Eurovision Song Contest performance. Figure 4 reveals no noticeable impact of their MMVV 2024 performance; the decline reflects lag effects from their Eurovision appearance. From a statistical point of view, the showcase performance had no measurable effect—though this does not imply the visit was unsuccessful. The key lesson here is to avoid comparing events aimed at mass audiences (e.g., Eurovision) with those targeted at professionals (e.g., showcase festivals).

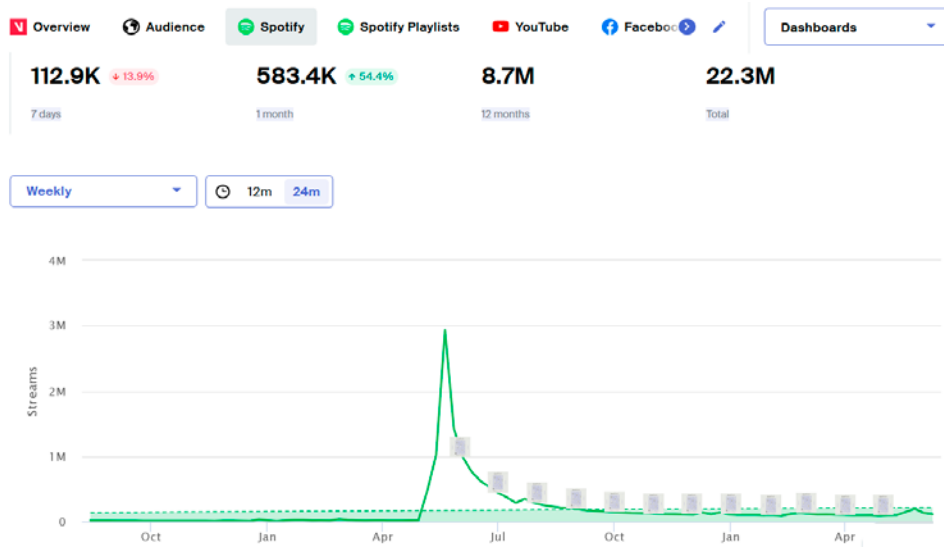


Figure 3: Puuluup Spotify stats — significant increase in spring 2024 due to Eurovision performance.



Figure 4: Puuluup Spotify stats — no visible effect from MMVV performance in September.

The next case (Figures 5 and 6) shows Instagram metrics for Las Lloronas. A notable increase in followers in April 2025 suggests an impact from their Budapest Ritmo performance. However, their Instagram feed (see Figure 6 and https://www.instagram.com/_las_lloronas_/p/DGqyJMaNSrv/?img_index=1) shows they also played concerts in Austria and Spain that month. Without detailed platform analytics or firsthand event observation, it's difficult to determine which event drove the increase. Likely, the band itself has the best insight.

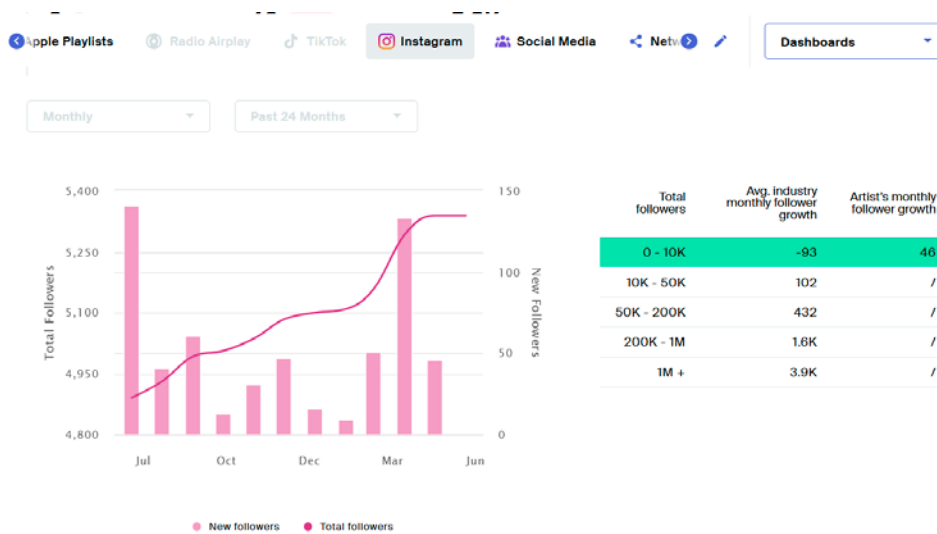


Figure 5: Las Lloronas Instagram stats — increase in April 2025 suggests Budapest Ritmo impact.



Figure 6: Las Lloronas Instagram profile — shows additional concerts in April 2025 besides Budapest Ritmo.

Another interesting case is shown in Figure 7: a significant increase in YouTube views for Fanie Fayar in July 2024 (see official YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVYolzf_KJ9cWviDm4N6LSg). This coincided with her A to Jazz performance, where she received the UPBEAT Best New Talent 2024 award. However, a short video of her festival performance had only 610 views (<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/dSicx-lbmuIE>), whereas the video “Bo Yoka,” also posted in July 2024, received 38,000 views (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBoW3uVERK0>). Thus, the rise in aggregate views appears more tied to this video release than the festival itself.

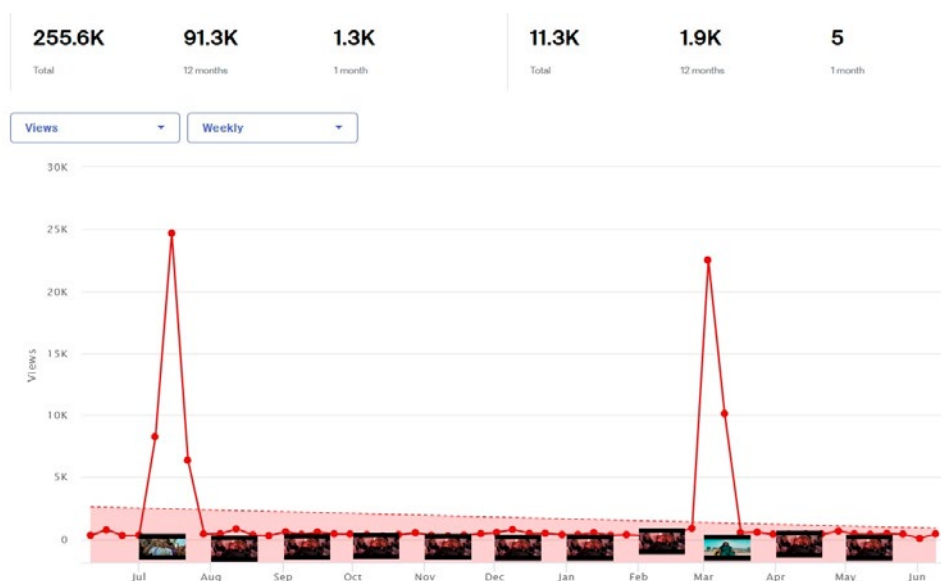


Figure 7. Fanie Fayar YouTube stats: significant increase in July 2024 can be attributed most of all to the publication of new video on her YouTube profile.

In conclusion, the analysis of digital metrics should not be the primary method for assessing the impact of showcase festivals on artists’ careers. Firstly, performance visibility is rarely discernible in statistics, typically due to the relatively modest audience numbers characteristic of such events. An exception to this trend may be festivals open to mass audiences, such as A to Jazz, where the sheer volume of attendees at a performance could yield a statistically observable effect.

Secondly, even when a visible improvement in statistics occurs during the event (which is infrequent), attributing these changes solely to the artist’s performance at the analyzed showcase festival is often challenging. Concurrent concerts immediately preceding and following the festival could equally contribute to these fluctuations. Given the common practice of integrating a showcase festival performance with a tour in surrounding cities, precisely determining the influence on statistics becomes inherently difficult.

Thirdly, as many respondents indicated, the impact of a showcase festival performance on artists' careers necessitates analysis over a longer timeframe. Adopting a perspective of a year or more allows for the consideration of potential business contacts established during the event. However, from such a long-term perspective, identifying the specific variable that influenced statistical changes remains problematic. Therefore, a very careful and contextualized analysis of the impact of showcase festival performances on artists' digital metrics is strongly recommended.

14. Conclusions

In summary, reference can be made to the goals of the UPBEAT project as stipulated in the Creative Europe Programme application form.

Firstly, a primary objective of the project was to enhance artistic collaboration at the European level by connecting various European world music showcases and encouraging joint activities. As demonstrated in this study, this objective was met not only through formal partner meetings but also via direct regional initiatives (see section 9, in particular). This study suggests further opportunities for achieving this goal by fostering cooperation at a broader (pan-European) level, beyond merely regional efforts.

Secondly, the project aimed to facilitate the international circulation of artists and their works. This goal was achieved through both formal cooperation frameworks derived from the program's incentive schemes (credit points) and the inherent nature of showcase festivals, which are designed to promote the international mobility of artists and their creations.

Thirdly, the project sought to build the capacity of emerging world music artists through information and opportunities offered by the Platform, coupled with mentoring. This objective was accomplished through several training initiatives, including mentoring sessions conducted during various partner events. It is worth considering the collection and dissemination of knowledge regarding the live music market in written or audio-visual formats, which could then be distributed via the project's website.

Fourthly, the project aimed to increase the visibility of emerging European artists and their works, and of world music in general, both within Europe and internationally. This goal was achieved through the promotion of artists performing at platform festivals. As this study indicates, the results of these efforts should be evaluated from a long-term perspective.

Fifthly, another goal of the project was to establish a unified brand and streamline the marketing efforts of world music showcases. While this study did not directly address the measurement of brand recognition, observations conducted during the analyzed events indicate that the UPBEAT brand achieved significant exposure. Furthermore, the public nature of the voting process for the UPBEAT Best New Talent award can also be recognized as contributing to brand awareness.

Sixthly, the project intended to collect and disseminate data, information, good practices, ideas, and solutions both within and outside the Platform, and to represent the world music sector at national and European levels. This objective was met through several

collaborations between platform members and external stakeholders, notably including conference panels highlighting UPBEAT's values, as well as the promotion of the Fair Trade Guide and Sustainability Guides developed by the project. The widespread dissemination of this study's findings will also contribute to the achievement of this goal.

Seventhly, the project aimed to develop and introduce innovative practices resulting in fairer and environmentally more sustainable showcases. While the environmental aspect was not thoroughly examined in this study, which necessarily concentrated more on the core music business side of the project, respondents did reveal several actions that directly correspond to meeting this goal. Actions that increase the opportunities for artists from peripheral regions (as described in section 5) can be regarded as practices contributing to the development of fairer showcase festivals. Such actions relate to both the environmental and gender equality aspects of festival operations.

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Table 1. List of respondents.

Interview number	Interview date	Name/Institution	Main role	Country	Form
1	11.04.2024	Jana Kuffová Popovicsová / DIS IS MARKĚTA	Music group and their manager	Slovakia	In person
2	11.04.2024	Mateusz Dobrowolski and Daria Butskaya / Hajda Banda	Music group	Poland / Belarus	In person
3	11.04.2024	Petr Dorůžka / Czech National Radio	Radio DJ, journalist	Czech Republic	In person
4	11.04.2024	PJEV	Music group	Croatia	In person
5	12.04.2024	Chris Eckman / Glitterbeat records	Record label / artist	USA/Slovenia	In person
6	12.04.2024	Dušan Svíba / Earth Music	Booking agent / manager	Czech Republic	In person
7	12.04.2024	Milan Tesař / Radio Proglas	Radio DJ, journalist	Czech Republic	In person
8	13.04.2024	Duckshell	Music group	Hungary	In person
9	13.04.2024	Greta Wardęga / Bombalkanica Festival	Artist / cultural entrepreneur	Poland	In person
10	13.04.2024	Juliana Voloz / JV-Promotion	Booking agent	Germany	In person
11	13.04.2024	Robert Singerman / LyricFind	Multiple roles	USA	In person
12	13.04.2024	Silvia Calogiuri / Zero Nove Nove	Booking agent	Italy	In person
13	19.04.2024	Rok Košir / MOST Agency	Booking agent	Slovenia	Online
14	20.06.2024	Petra Řezníčková, Petra Hradilová, Matyáš Hradil, Zlata Holušová / Czech Music Crossroads / Colours of Ostrava	Showcase festival organizers, including CEO and artistic director	Czech Republic	In person
15	20.06.2024	Matthew Bartlett / Midnight Mango	Booking agency director	The UK	In person
16	21.06.2024	Kobe Leestmans / European Forum of Worldwide Music Festivals / Slinks Animatie	Music programmer	Belgium	In person
17	21.06.2024	Mathieu Gervais / Trans Musicales	Music programmer	France	In person
18	21.06.2024	Nicolas Kuitca / Bienal de Musica Cordoba	Artistic director	Argentina	In person
19	4.07.2024	Marieke Meischke / Fonds Podiumkun- sten / Arts & Parts	Multiple roles	The Netherlands	In person

20	5.07.2024	Jan Hoozee / Trefpunt Festival	Artistic director / music programmer	Belgium	In person
21	5.07.2024	Nikki McNeill / Global Publicity	PR agency	The UK	In person
22	5.07.2024	Roel Vanhoeck / BOZAR	Music programmer / deputy director	Belgium	In person
23	6.07.2024	Frank van Berkel / BIMHUIS	Artistic director / music programmer	The Netherlands	In person
24	18.09.2024	Joni Schwalbach / Ekaya Productions Lda	Cultural entrepreneur	Mozambique	In person
25	18.09.2024	Pamela Briz / Harbourfront Centre	Music programmer	Canada	In person
26	19.09.2024	Vasco Ribeiro Casais / Repasseado	Booking agent / artist management / artist	Portugal	In person
27	19.09.2024	Andries van Wieren / 3S Music Management	Artist management agency director	The Netherlands	In person
28	19.09.2024	anonymous	Artistic director / booking agent / management	anonymous	In person
29	19.09.2024	Gala Sola García / Panda Artist Management	360° label	Spain	In person
30	19.09.2024	Josep Gómez Sancho / Ventilador Music	360° label	Spain	In person
31	20.09.2024	Claudia Norman / Claudia Norman Management LLC / Mexico Now Festival	Music programmer, cultural entrepreneur	USA	In person
32	20.09.2024	anonymous	Music export office	anonymous	In person
33	20.09.2024	Anna Cerdà Callís / Paral·lel 62	Music programmer / venue co-director	Spain	In person
34	20.09.2024	anonymous	Showcase festival	anonymous	In person
35	21.09.2024	Consuelo Arbeláez / CA Musica	Booking agent	Italy / Colombia	In person
36	21.09.2024	Miguel Santos / Red Orange	Booking agent	The UK	In person
37	25.10.2024	Antonis Antoniou / Buzz' Ayaz	Artist	Cyprus	In person
38	18.11.2024	anonymous	Festival director and music programmer	anonymous	Online
39	29.11.2024	Bojan Djordjević / Ring Ring / Todo Mundo World Music Festival	Artistic director	Serbia	In person
40	29.11.2024	Ian Smith / Waves Vienna / Frusion	Booking agent / Waves Vienna programmer	The UK	In person

41	29.11.2024	Oskar Strajn / ESNS	Music programmer / showcase festival	The Netherlands	In person
42	29.11.2024	Turna Ezgi Toros / Müzikli Mevzular	Booking agent / artist management / music programmer	Turkey	In person
43	30.11.2024	Radek von Bronikowski / Greyzone Concerts	Music promoter	Germany	In person
44	30.11.2024	Silvij Skok / Glitterbeat records	Record label	Slovenia	In person
45	21.03.2025	Frane Tomašić and Mirko Burazer / We Move Music Croatia / SHIP	Music export office / showcase festival	Croatia	In person
46	21.03.2025	Mila Georgieva / So Alive	Showcase festival	Bulgaria	In person
47	21.03.2025	Frédéric André / Babel Music XP / Fiesta des Suds – Marseille	Music programmer	France	In person
48	22.03.2025	Christine Semba / WOMEX	Showcase festival	France/ Germany	In person
49	22.03.2025	Valentine Pradier / Babel Music XP	Showcase festival	France	In person
50	22.03.2025	Xavier Barceló / Fira B!	Showcase festival	Spain	In person
51	5.04.2025	Eva Johanna Lepikov / Tallinn Music Week	Showcase festival	Estonia	In person
52	5.04.2025	Esa Valkeajärvi / Blow up that gramophone	Music programmer / production and tour management agency	Finland	In person
53	5.04.2025	Indrek Migur / Tallinn Music Week	Showcase festival	Estonia	In person
54	9.05.2025	Vilius Arlauskas / Saulės Muzika Festival	Showcase festival / artist management	Lithuania	Online

Table 2. List of interviews visited.

Date	Festival	Place
11-13 April 2024	Budapest Ritmo	Budapest, Hungary
19-21 June 2024	Czech Music Crossroads	Ostrava, Czechia
4-7 July 2024	A to Jazz	Sofia, Bulgaria
18-21 September 2024	Mercat de Música Viva de Vic (MMVV)	Vic, Spain
23-27 October 2024	WOMEX	Manchester, the UK
28-30 November 2024	PIN Music Conference & Showcase	Skopje, North Macedonia
20-23 March 2025	Babel Music XP	Marseille, France
3-6 April 2025	Tallinn Music Week	Tallinn, Estonia

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