



Social Inclusion in a large scale civic celebration St Patrick's Festival, Ireland

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'Street Theatre & Social Cohesion'

1.1. Holy days

St Patrick's Festival is a 5 day cultural festival based around the national holiday in Ireland – St Patrick's Day, 17th March. St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland so the celebration is based around a traditional saints day similar to the Merce festival here in Barcelona.

St Patrick's Day is celebrated in Ireland and by millions of people around the world. Irish and non-Irish communities around the world celebrate 'Irishness' on St Patrick's Day. There are parades in New York, London, Moscow, Stockholm, Tokyo, Toronto, Korea, Munich and Oslo, to name a few.

The Irish Government invested in St Patrick's Festival in Ireland in 1995, following a submission by a group of architects proposing to increase the size, scale and quality of the parade and turn the eyes of the world back to Dublin....and so the festival as we now know it was born.

St Patrick's Festival, the organisation, was initiated to create celebratory events of high quality entertainment which could attract visitors to Ireland. St Patrick's Festival is the national festival in Ireland. Activities happen largely in Dublin as the capital city with some strands of programming around the country. The parade is representative of areas all over Ireland with street arts companies and communities from all over the country taking part. The Festival was 10 years old in 2005.

1.2 New approaches to celebration and ceremony

St Patrick's Festival has grown from a 1 day parade, (which is still the flagship event and main celebration within the festival), to a 5 day festival. The festival presents the best of Irish and International street theatre, spectacle, carnival arts. The core artform of the festival is street theatre of various sorts – events mostly take place outdoors on the street. We describe ourselves as animating the city for the 5 days of the festival. The programme is very diverse and changes each

year. In the last 5 years we have had Els Comedians work with an Irish Street Theatre Company – Macnas and 4 Dublin communities to create an outdoor spectacle for the city. We have a market in the centre of O' Connell Street, the main thoroughfare in the city. We have had Luminarium – a large inflatable structure by Architects of Air, UK in a public park and Arka, an outdoor night spectacle by Teatre Osmega, Poland in Smithfield Square in the centre of the city, in addition to our core annual events.

The festival has also developed a visual arts programme, a theatre programme, film programme, a music programme, comedy events, a market, a city wide treasure hunt through the cultural institutions in the city, and a fun fair. The festival hosts a symposium as part of the programme to encourage cross sectoral discussion and debate. In 2005 the Symposium was entitled – Converging Voices and looked at the culturally diverse society which is emerging in Ireland.

The festival engages with all the streets, parks, squares and cultural institutions of the city of Dublin and using any available space –(open space is generally very limited and we are not very good at cultural development of public space in Ireland, hence the title for this years St Patrick's Festival Symposium - *What is Public Space?*)

The St Patrick's Festival Parade is a unique event and it has pride of place in the city. The statutory bodies work with us to facilitate the parade along the main boulevard in the city centre. More than 3500 performers taking part (Aprox 1 / 3 from Ireland and 2/3 from all over the world.) In 2005 there were 700,000 spectators on the streets of Dublin watching the parade. Other events such as the Skyfest – a fireworks spectacular along the city quays attract about 120,000 people & Big Day Out, a carnival family day, attracts over 100,000 people. All events on the street are free.

In 2005 we had more than 35 events over 5 days with a total audience of 1.2 million across all the events, as well as 1 million people watching events on TV in Ireland (nationally). There are also millions of people viewing the parade internationally via TV and web cast.

The festival costs about 2.5 million. Research by The Tourism Department at the Dublin Institute of Technology has shown that the festival generates an estimated 84 million for Dublin's economy. The festival spends approximately €400,000 annually commissioning work from Irish artists.

1.3 Involvement in the festival

True to its initial aim, the festival still aims to programme high quality celebratory events which are relevant to the people of Ireland. The festival is a large scale

cultural celebration which attracts massive numbers of tourists joining in the festivities along with local people. In Ireland everyone has an opinion about what we do, how we do it, how they would do it differently which means they feel they have a stake in the festival – as they should!

We work in partnership with many communities, artists, producers, venues arts and cultural organisations to deliver the festival. We work closely with Dublin City Council, Dublin Docklands, The Tourism Agencies, and the Arts Council of Ireland to deliver the events. We have to be very strategic about the principals that guide our programme. The people of Ireland are the largest and most important stake holder.

Street theatre in Ireland is a relatively new artform, it's about 15 – 20 years old. We see part of our role as the national festival to support artists / arts organisations working in street arts. We have hosted master classes in the summer months for artists working in this area. In 2005 we held an international networking meeting the day before the parade to facilitate Irish street artists to meet directors from other international festivals and organisations in order to create links and reference points for these artists. FUSIC (Spain), La Fira de Teatre al Carrer de Tarrega (Spain) and Teatr Groteska (Poland) were represented.



Participant in Brighter Futures, St Patrick's Festival Parade 2005

One of the most important aspects of the festival is its arts education initiative – Brighter Futures which was initiated in 2000. The arts programme which is facilitated by the Festival takes place in second level schools in County Dublin. The aims of the Brighter Futures programme are to enable young people to create their own pageant for the Festival parade and to increase the number of people working in the participative arts area. Schools across a broad socio-geographic range are selected to take place from all corners of the county.

St Patrick's Festival, Ireland 2005
www.stpatricksfestival.ie

Schools who would not normally have a reason to work together, meet together for large scale rehearsals.

Artists visit schools all over the county teaching the young people skills in making, performance & choreography. In 2005 we had 650 young people perform in the parade with costumes and props which they had made. We also partnered a digital learning initiative in 2005 to teach the young people digital media skills. They had a web page on the festival web site and were able to upload photos and video of workshops in their schools and see what other groups were making. The outcome of the digital learning initiative was a documentary made by a number of young people working with a media trainer.

We employ a team of artists and have a mentorship training element to the project where artists interested in participatory arts, work can work alongside more experienced artists and gain experience in this area.

1.4 Ongoing celebration & collaboration

St Patrick's Festival continues to programme work relevant to the Irish context. In 2005 the parade route was reversed and the parade now starts in the heart of Dublin's north inner city. The parade is now a mixture of marching bands, ceremonial aspects and creative pageants made by street theatre co.s from all over Ireland. The parade is themed annually and street theatre companies submit designs in response to the theme.

The festival commissions the companies to make these designs for the parade. Some of the communities who take part in the parade get up at 3am / 4am to travel to Dublin to set up in time. The companies own the work which is created for the parade and they keep it for their own use afterwards. The pageants they create for St Patrick's Day are performed again in festivals in the summer and at regional parades. The companies can generate some additional revenue through the year by these additional performances and hiring out their props and costumes.

In 2006 the Big Day Out – a free family day will have music, circus, puppetry & theatre from all over the world performed alongside traditional Irish artforms – mumming and traditional Irish music. The event is being developed to reflect the increasing diversity of communities living in Ireland.

The international dimension of the festival is also growing. We are stabilising existing relationships with international cultural organisations and artists and festivals, as well as creating new links.

The festival is currently responding to requests to support, advise, send work to celebrations in other countries e.g. in 2006 – London, Singapore, Shanghai. We are currently working with arts companies from Krakow, UK, Czech Republic. We want to bring in interesting international work which audiences would not normally see / have access to in Ireland as well as promoting high quality Irish work abroad.

St Patrick's Festival is the geographic centre of a global celebration. The festival has established new imagery for Irish celebration which defines and promotes Ireland both nationally and internationally. The most important asset the festival has is the Irish people and their engagement with the festival on their national day.