

Recognition and Validation

## **Case Study: The Festival of Pacific Arts**

Partners: Various

Location: Various

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### **Introduction**

Every four years in a different Pacific Island country or territory, Pacific Islanders come together to share and exchange cultures at the Festival of Pacific Arts. The Festival has grown to include more than 27 nations and attracts over 2,000 participants.

The Festival of Pacific Arts is now well established. It is the biggest gathering of Pacific peoples united in their purpose to gain understanding, respect and appreciation of one another in the context of a changing Pacific. The Festival is now a significant international cultural event and has become a major tourist attraction.

### **Background**

The Festival of Pacific Arts was originally created in 1972 to combat the erosion of traditional customary practices. Pacific leaders wanted the peoples of the region to share cultures and establish deeper understanding and friendship between countries.

Selection of a host country is based on principles of equity and a process of regional rotation. Preference is given to those countries that have not yet hosted the Festival. The past hosts are Fiji Islands (in 1972), New Zealand (1976), Papua New Guinea (1980), French Polynesia (1985), Australia (1988), Cook Islands (1992), Samoa (1996), New Caledonia (2000) and Palau (2004). The 10<sup>th</sup> Festival of Pacific Arts is being held in American Samoa from July 20–2 August 2008.

Delegations consist of artists and craftspeople as well as traditional and political leaders. Activities demonstrated, exhibited and conducted include: contemporary visual arts; photographic arts; cinematography; body art; weaving; wood, bone and stone carving; tapa-making; tattooing; jewellery; beadwork and shell-work; costume pageants; pottery; floral arts; traditional medicine and healing crafts; traditional boat-building and navigational crafts; traditional culinary arts; philatelic arts and traditional moneys; literary arts; traditional and contemporary performing arts (orations and storytelling, musical instruments, song, dance, theatre, drama, fire-walking); traditional sports; and symposiums, debates, and workshops.

## Recognition and Validation

In accordance with tradition, festival participants are guests of the host country from their arrival day. The host country bears the cost for local travelling, accommodation and meals, and other forms of hospitality. Entry to most events is free; consequently, little funding is generated through ticket sales. Merchandising and sponsorship arrangements are developing, although they only account for a small proportion of festival income.

## Impact

The Festival of Pacific Arts has a profound impact in the region. For 10 to 12 days, geographically isolated countries and territories are united, and sharing and exchanges are paramount. Deeper understanding, respect and solidarity in the region is developed.

For the host country, the Festival improves resources, infrastructure and facilities. Before the 9th Festival of Pacific Arts held in 2004, the Republic of Palau improved roads and upgraded the airport. It also opened a new National Museum (US\$2.2 million), a Cultural Centre (US\$2.45 million) and a 3,000-seat grandstand at the Community College (US\$360,000).

There are direct and indirect economic benefits for both the host and participating countries. Again, during the 9th Festival, sales of 'Storyboards' (traditional woodcarvings of Palau) by prison inmates brought in more than US\$11,000. One day's philatelic sales alone amounted to over US\$1,800 and each of the 16 States of Palau earned an average of US\$20,000 in food and craft sales over the Festival's duration.

The Festival encourages the rediscovery and revitalisation of skills in arts, crafts and the performing arts. During the 1st Festival of Pacific Arts in Fiji Islands in 1972, French Polynesia was inspired to revive the disappearing art of tattooing<sup>1</sup>, which is a well recognised form of French Polynesian cultural expression today. In 2004, 17 woodcarvers were considered to undertake further studies in Hawaii under master woodcarvers.

The Festival also offers a perfect opportunity for development organisations and countries to undertake other important initiatives. In 2000 and 2004, 'Safe Festival' HIV/AIDS awareness-raising materials were packaged and distributed to performers and spectators. In 2004, a capacity-building media project trained more than 20 journalists from six countries and resulted in the official Festival DVD. A book of short stories was published from the creative writing workshop. Funds raised from both projects are channelled back into regional cultural development projects.

## Lessons

The Festival of Pacific Arts is the major platform for cultural exchanges, yet because this crucial event occurs only every four years, it cannot on its own ensure the survival of cultural expressions. More frequent cultural exchanges are needed to encourage the dynamic transmission and transformation of culture and creativity.

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<sup>1</sup> Study on the Cultural Co-operation between the European Commission and the Pacific region - Dr Nico Vink, Royal Tropical Institute, The Netherlands (2000).

## Recognition and Validation

Hosting the Festival is a major technical and economic challenge, requiring both government and community participation and co-operation. It is expensive, particularly for Small Island states, and the economic burden is becoming greater.

Currently, the organisation of the Festival is to a large extent dependent on external financial sources. While donors and partners such as the European Union, France and Taiwan/ROC are regular sponsors, the value of the Festival in terms of infrastructure, economic, cultural and social development remains largely unrecognised; no formal measures have ever yet been developed. It is important that this information be gathered and the sooner the better, if not to attract countries to host the Festival then to convince donors and partners that the event is an important activity to support.

Alternative sources of financing like sponsorship, broadcasting rights and ticketing are not sufficiently developed. Yet, if the Festival is to market itself successfully and generate revenue to improve its sustainability, it needs to solve many complex issues. Committing delegations to sign over 'rights' to the host country has understandably brought about some tensions as to exactly whose and what 'rights' are being negotiated, how long the 'rights' would be protected, and by whom. Nevertheless, mutually agreeable mechanisms need to be developed, and soon.

Highlighting the economic importance of the Festival of Pacific Arts does not imply a market orientation for culture. Indeed, a recurring issue is how to continue to foster the cultural exchanges while benefiting from opportunities provided by the Festival. The appeal of the event is that it is an opportunity for genuine exchanges and greater understanding between Pacific cultures. How can the Festival continue to do this and yet market itself successfully without losing its soul? That's the challenge it now has to address.