

# **Cultural Policy** and **Management (kpy)** **Yearbook 2010**

Dossiers

**Cultural Diversity**

**Cities and Cultural  
Policy Revisited**

Keynote Article

**Hans Mommaas**

Special Interviews

**Raymond Weber**

**Danielle Cliche**

From Anatolian Cities  
Reviews

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*Boekmanstudies*

**Cultural Policy and Management Yearbook 2010**

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**ENGLISH EDITING BY** Esther Hookway - Banev

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Tel. +90 - (0) 212-311 52 62  
nihalu@bilgi.edu.tr  
www.bilgiyay.com

**Boekmanstudies**

Herengracht 415  
NL-1017 BP Amsterdam  
Tel. +31 -(0) 20-624 37 36  
secretariaat@boekman.nl  
www.boekman.nl

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# Engaging the local, urban and the global: the Ahırkapı Hıdırellez Spring Festival

Burcu Yasemin Şeyben

Istanbul has long been a city alive with cultural festivals and artistic events taking place throughout the year,<sup>1</sup> organized by public, private and third sector institutions, drawing on its rich historical and cultural resources and attracting a great number of tourists. In spite of this, the majority of Istanbulians do not actually participate in these events, as they only seem to appeal to the middle and upper echelons of Istanbul society.

The Ahırkapı Hıdırellez Spring Festival organized by the Ahırkapı Hıdırellez Festivals Association, however, is different from other urban festivals in this respect. Hıdırellez stands out in the way it has chosen to engage with local and global communities to enhance their visibility and sustainability. For Hıdırellez the local community is Romany. Thus the whole conception and implementation of the festival takes place in a Romany neighbourhood that has gone through urban regeneration; private and public sectors are promoted by a cultural event organized by local actors; and the impact of the festival in relation to tourism and particularly destination marketing have been taken into consideration. All these elements are at the heart of the festival from its inception to its implementation and make it a unique item on Istanbul's calendar of cultural events.

## Festivals of the Third Sector in İstanbul

There are a number of reasons why actors in the third sector decide to organize festivals. Most festivals organized by established culture and arts NGOs in İstanbul started off doing so by claiming that they would offer a wide spectrum of international artistic works:

Festivals were in the past instigated chiefly by visionary individuals or prestigious cultural institutions with the purpose of compensating for what the regular cultural season could not offer: to celebrate artistic excellence on an international scale. (Klaic, 2008, 260).

**BURCU YASEMİN ŞEYBEN** completed her BA degree in Playwriting at Bennington College, USA in 1999, and her MA degree in Visual Communication Design at İstanbul Bilgi University (BİLGİ). She completed her PhD in 2009 at the Department of Theatre Criticism and Dramaturgy of İstanbul University with her thesis on 'Theatre and cultural policies of the young Turkish Republic'. From 2001 to 2005 she worked as a research assistant for the Management of Performing Arts programme at BİLGİ. Since 2005 she has been a faculty member in the same department, teaching courses on theatre histories, Turkish and contemporary theatre, and sponsorship. Her academic work is mainly concentrated on management of performing arts and theatre, and she writes theatre reviews for newspaper and theatre magazines. (bseyben@bilgi.edu.tr)

<sup>1</sup> According to research in the three creative industries, namely film, arts and cultural festivals, and the fashion industry, conducted by Zeynep Enlil, İclal Dinçer, Yiğit Evren and Ebru Seçkin from 2005-06, as part of a larger research project initiated by İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality 'to contrive the future vision of İstanbul and to strengthen its stance on a global scale, through sectors of strategic importance', 'a total of 154 festivals were organized in 2004. These festivals can be divided into nine different categories of film, music, theatre, dance, university, art-culture, children's festivals, thematic festivals and Ramadan celebrations [...] In 2005, there were 77 festivals in İstanbul that have been running for at least three years. It can be seen that these 'young' festivals make up the widest group (37 in total with a share of 48%). The percentage of the 'long established' festivals, those having taken place for over 10 years, is 27% (21 in total)' (Enlil, Dinçer, Evren and Seçkin, 2008). In addition, since 2008, there has been a significant increase in the number of new festivals and other artistic and cultural events set up due to the fact that İstanbul has become one of the European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2010. Since the foundation of the İstanbul 2010 ECOC Agency on 2 November 2007 the Agency has been implementing or supporting the mounting of 537 projects and events whose budget reaches 420,613,867 Turkish liras. Quantitative and qualitative information and analysis of the festivals organized by the central and local government in Turkey can be found in Festival Jungle, Policy Desert? Festival Policies of Public Authorities in Europe: A Comparative Report. See Ayça Ince's contribution on Turkish public festivals organized in 2007 on the official website of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies <http://www.ifacca.org/publications/2007/10/08/festival-jungle-policy-desert-festival>