

GIJÓN – FETEN, THE EUROPEAN PERFORMING ARTS FAIR FOR CHILDREN 2016 Max Prize for Contribution to the Performing Arts



**ARTS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CULTURAL
PLANNING CITIZENSHIP CREATIVITY EDUCATION
YOUTH PUBLIC SPACE**

1. Context

Gijón is the most populous city in Asturias, and one of the biggest in northern Spain, with 276,443 inhabitants. In fact, 90% of the population lives in the city centre. Its western side is characterised by its industrial zone, shipyards, industrial parks, and working class neighbourhoods. Conversely, its east has become a residential area and between them sits the historic centre, with its primary cultural, administrative, and commercial landmarks.



The area has a long, rich history reflected in its Roman and pre-Roman archaeological sites that are over two millennia old, its medieval Romanesque churches, or palaces from the 17th and 18th centuries. The combination of its history with the flourishing of the urban area, new demographics, and manufacturing all form the area's essence and character in combination with the city's present services and technologies.

The format of a fair was chosen because it lends participants the opportunity to establish long-term business relationships with their clients, to acquire knowledge through professional information exchanges, and thus to create ongoing professional relationships. The goal for FETEN was to establish itself a combination of all of these processes.

It also defined itself as a space that promotes exchange and cooperation between specific creative sectors, as well as the distribution of performing arts, with the aim of improving and establishing a reputation for high quality productions.

FETEN SEEKS TO SHOWCASE THE PERFORMING ARTS ENVIRONMENT TO YOUNG AUDIENCES, ALLOWING THEM TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH, AND ENJOY THE WEALTH OF, THESE ARTS WHILE HELPING TO CREATE NEW AUDIENCES, PARTICIPANTS, FELLOWS, AND CRITICS.

2. Gijón and Culture

The city has been traditionally linked to its development in the steel, mining, or shipbuilding industries, which were severely affected by the crisis during the decades at the end of the last century. Since then, Gijón has been in a restructuring process, accelerating the search for solutions as well as the implementation of strategies conducive to socioeconomic transformation and recovery. This created a direct link with the cultural policies implemented throughout those decades, which have proved to be catalysts for the city's transformation.



As a result, cultural policy in Gijón has centred on the creation of a large network of cultural facilities connected to historic/artistic heritage, neighbourhood sociocultural participation, and artistic production.

THANKS TO THE MUNICIPAL FOUNDATION OF CULTURE, FETEN HAS BECOME AN ESTABLISHED TRADITION OVER THE LAST TWENTY-SIX YEARS. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL CULTURAL PROJECTS MANAGED BY THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN RECENT DECADES.

The FETEN fair has been able to adopt a set of principles that are closely aligned with all of those present in Agenda 21 for culture. Of these, the following are particularly noteworthy:

- It emphasises the significance of the citizens' festival, an event that positions culture as a fundamental element for human development.
- Local artists' participation in FETEN enables the improvement of citizens' creative and critical capacities, as well as co-existence and better quality of life.
- The cultural diversity represented at FETEN. It offers events from all corners of Spain and continents around the world.
- Through its organisation as a fair, FETEN facilitates dialogue, co-existence, and interculturality as core principles in relationship dynamics.
- Public spaces are turned into cultural spaces. Including the street itself, FETEN becomes a place for performances, games, and interactions between professionals and the public.
- The event is vital for safeguarding the broader public's access to the cultural and symbolic world, especially in childhood.
- The fair acts as a means of generating economic wealth and development.
- The importance of the networks formed by this event are evident in each subsequent year.

3. Objectives and Project Implementation

3.1. Specific Primary Objectives

FETEN seeks to showcase the performing arts environment to young audiences, allowing them to become familiar with and enjoy the wealth of these arts, while helping to create new audiences, participants, fellows, and critics. In turn, FETEN's aim is to fortify the exchange of projects,



experiences, and business relationships among professionals in the performing arts sector. This promotes interaction between production organisers and companies. Every year, they further consolidate their roles as Europe's distribution centre in this field, thereby providing organisations with the optimal conditions for showcasing their creative, professional works to organisers, distributors, and the public.

The specific objectives for FETEN are: (1) To trigger a change in children's attitudes towards new experiences in the field of performing arts; (2) To spark interest through research and works that are reflected in shows specifically designed for early childhood (0-3 years old); (3) To bring a selection of theatrical performances to Gijón from both a wide range of themes and geographic regions, including national and international; (4) To present the largest possible amount of diversity in its annual performing arts lineup; (5) To explore a variety of spaces for stages and exhibitions, from open-air spaces to medium- or large-scale multimedia rooms; (6) To attract organisers and producers with a vision for staging a large number of shows over a short period of time.

3.2. Development of the Project

The organisation responsible for holding FETEN is the Department for the Promotion of Arts of the Municipal Foundation for Culture, Education, and Folk Schooling for the Gijón City Council. Year after year, this public service collaborates with many institutions, bodies, or companies to carry out the week-long fair.

It relies on support from the Government of the Principality of Asturias through the Department of Education and Culture, as well as from the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport through the National Institute for the Performing Arts and Music (INAEM). Furthermore, the organisers collaborate with the Spanish Agency for Cultural Activity and Divertia Gijón (Enjoy Gijón).

The children of Gijón and nearby towns are those who benefit primarily from these initiatives. FETEN is a celebration of family. Professionals in search of a meeting point to strengthen an exchanges in cultural projects, experiences, and business, also benefit from the project.



4. Impacts

4.1. Direct Impacts

Impact on the Local Government

Thanks to the Municipal Foundation of Culture, FETEN has become an established tradition over the last twenty-six years. It is one of the most successful cultural projects managed by the municipal government in recent decades. This is evidenced by its figures showing ongoing growth.

Impact on Culture and on Local Cultural Actors

It is crucial for the culture of Gijón and Asturias to be able to rely upon an event like FETEN that is dedicated to the performing arts, and which rejuvenates the overall sector. All Asturian organisers, producers, and companies have benefitted from the fact that the city organises one of the most important fairs of its kind.

THE FAIR PROMOTES THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF CULTURE BY BRINGING TOGETHER ORGANISERS, COMPANIES, AND ARTISTS, THUS FACILITATING CULTURAL AND BUSINESS AGREEMENTS AMONG THEM.

4.2. Evaluation

The event will be evaluated through a mobility study carried out by the Spanish Government's Coordinator for Performance Art Fairs (COFAE), highlighting that: FETEN is the first option chosen by the majority of Spanish organisations outside of their own regions. FETEN is one of only two fairs attended by professionals from all 17 of Spain's Autonomous Communities. It accounts for 600 stakeholders in the sector (organisers, distributors, etc), authorities, and an additional 250 artists, creators, and directors from various companies. As a result, there are over 800 professionals who live in Gijón for a week who work towards supporting and promoting performing arts for children.



4.3. Continuity

FETEN was deservedly awarded the 2016 Max Prize for Contribution to the Performing Arts after twenty-five fruitful years. It was recognised for breaking new ground as well as breaking traditional habits. Furthermore, it provided spaces for new forms of artistic expression, and for the interweaving of artists, productions, and creative processes. As a result, in the coming years FETEN will seek to adopt improvements that try to support the presentation of works in the best possible conditions, both technically and in terms of the Fair's spaces. It will also attempt to offer services catered toward sponsors, while shifting focus back on to audiences and organisers. Finally, the objective is to maintain FETEN's position at the forefront of creative initiatives that gear performing arts towards children and family audiences. Indeed, FETEN has set a global benchmark for professionals and stakeholders in the sector.

5. Further Information

The City of Gijón was a candidate for the second "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (January - May of 2016). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June of 2016, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

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This article was reviewed and approved by Marián Osácar Gallego, Head of the Department for the Promotion of Arts - Municipal Foundation for Culture, Education, and Folk Schooling of the Gijón City Council; Artistic Director for FETEN.

Reference website: www.gijon.es y feten.gijon.es