
First Report on the

Current State of Photography Festivals in the World

July 2025



International
Photography
Assoc. Festivals



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1) Introduction, context, methodology and acknowledgements

This report, an initiative of the **International Photography Festivals Association (IPFA)**, represents a milestone in the recent history of the sector: it is the **first international study** to offer a comprehensive, comparative, and structured look at photography festivals across five continents. Until now, existing studies and records have emerged from national or local contexts, providing valuable but fragmented analyses. This report seeks to **transcend these boundaries and build a common vision** that allows for the identification of shared patterns, differences, and trends among very diverse events: all of which face similar challenges.

The research is based on the data provided by **215 festivals and photography fairs**, which represent a significant sample within a community estimated at **more than 1,000 active festivals around the world**. Through their responses, we seek to understand how these events are organised, how they are funded, what working models they support, how they engage artists and audiences, and what challenges they face at the structural, artistic, and political levels.

The report is organised into **15 thematic sections** that explore the global ecosystem of photography festivals from multiple perspectives. It begins with an introduction to the context and methodology, followed by a reflection on post-festivals as a conceptual horizon. It then analyzes their geographic distribution, chronologies of celebration, founding dates, life cycles, and comparisons between active and inactive festivals. It delves into the human resources, working conditions, training, remuneration, and participation of artists, curators, and exhibitors. It examines the activities carried out inside and outside the festivals, as well as the profile and number of in-person participants and online communities. It also addresses their social and institutional assessment, funding sources, and budgets, with particular attention to the economic volume they mobilise. A specific section is dedicated to collaborations between festivals and the touring of exhibitions. Finally, it presents the main challenges and future plans for the sector, proposes strategic lines for future research, and offers conclusions that summarise the key findings.

More than a simple diagnosis, this report seeks to become **a tool for consultation, reflection, and projection** for those working in the field of contemporary visual culture. This includes festival directors, curators, artists, researchers, public institutions, cultural managers, and organisations committed to the sustainable development of the photography sector. At the same time, this work is also



a double invitation. On the one hand, to the academic world, **to take on the challenge of in-depth research** into a global cultural phenomenon that is still scarcely studied. On the other hand, to the festivals themselves, **to recognise themselves as part of a vibrant and diverse global community**, to know that they are accompanied, and **to accept the urgent challenge of their modernisation** in the face of a generational and cultural shift driven, among other factors, by digitalisation.

This report is born in a **context of profound transformation**, in which photography festivals—like so many other cultural spaces—are challenged by **generational, technological, and social changes**. The **digitalisation** brought about by the pandemic has modified how images are produced, circulated, and consumed; **multiculturalism** and **internationalisation** have broadened frames of reference. This challenges hegemonic narratives and promotes greater diversity of voices; and **generational change** is driving new ways of understanding culture, community, and sustainability. In this context, **modernising festivals is not an option, but an urgent necessity** if we want to remain relevant, accessible, and transformative in a rapidly changing world.

The **Horizon 2030 for Photography Festivals**, which guides our work, demands that we rethink our ways of creating, connecting, and communicating. The festivals that will manage to survive and grow will be those capable of **adapting to new social and cultural needs** and authentically connecting with **emerging generations**. If we don't transform our structures, languages, and priorities, traditional formats risk becoming obsolete, as Walter Benjamin would say, we are at a **historic crossroads**. Many of the festivals we know today were created and sustained by the baby boomer generation, who are gradually retiring, leaving behind a model that no longer fully responds to the challenges of the present. **We sense that the festivals of the future will be different, but we still don't know for sure what they will be like**. Herein lies the real challenge: we know who we are, but not who we should or want to be, to remain culturally and socially **relevant**. This moment demands that we **rethink ourselves fundamentally**: adapt our structures, question our certainties, support each other, and dare to imagine a new horizon for photography festivals. **Only if we transform ourselves collectively can we build a sustainable, inclusive, and meaningful future for future generations**. From here, we must ask ourselves: which ones will survive when the generation that gave birth to them passes away? How will we respond to the audiences of the present and the future?

Ultimately, this report not only seeks to record the present but also to spark a collective conversation about the future. It invites us to imagine what kind of festivals we want to build for the coming years and what values should underpin



them. **The question is no longer whether we should change, but instead, how and with whom, we change.** True sustainability is not achieved by repeating formulas of the past, but by opening spaces for collaboration, listening, and transformation. Faced with a constantly changing landscape, photography festivals have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to reinvent themselves as living, connected, and relevant platforms for new generations. We aspire to **strengthen international collaboration, foster knowledge exchange**, and contribute to the construction of a **more fair, inclusive, dynamic and connected professional field**. Only by working as a network, and learning from each other, can we imagine and build the future of photography festivals. **The birth of IPFA, the First Meeting, and this Report are just the first step on a path we must travel together.**

a) Context

In recent years, we have witnessed a profound transformation in the way photography—and the festivals that celebrate it—communicate, organise, and project themselves to the world. Digitalisation, global access to social media, and the emergence of new forms of cultural collaboration have allowed projects of all sizes to connect, grow, and learn from each other. In this new scenario, **an urgent need for connectivity, cooperation, and mutual recognition arose among initiatives that, until recently, operated in isolation.**

It is in this context that the **International Photography Festivals Association (IPFA)** was born, driven by the collective desire to professionalise the sector and build a strong, horizontal global community. **IPFA aspires to be an international network that brings together the more than 1,000 photography festivals currently operating worldwide**, with the aim of fostering collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing among its members. This association seeks to become an **open platform where directors, curators, producers, artists, and cultural managers can share experiences, best practices, and strategies, mutually strengthening their initiatives.**

Our vision is based on principles of **inclusion, diversity, sustainability, and international cooperation**. All festivals, fairs, and related initiatives—from the most emerging to the most established—have a place in this network. We firmly believe in a collaborative model, where the value of each project is measured not by its size or budget, but by **its commitment to the community, creativity, and social transformation.**



From our perspective, for an event to be considered **a photography festival** within the framework of this research, it must meet certain fundamental criteria that distinguish it from a simple exhibition, one-off show, or photography award. First, it must have **a curated programme that includes at least three different photography exhibitions** within a limited period of time, whether in in-person, virtual, or hybrid formats. Second, it is important that the event **identifies itself as a festival, gathering, or fair, among others**, whether in its name, its communication strategy, or its curatorial approach, **which implies an intention to build community, project itself publicly, and generate a collective cultural experience**. In addition to these two elements, other key factors are added: on the one hand, it must have a **defined frequency**—annually, biannually, or triannually—which reflects a commitment to continuity over time, even if there have been occasional interruptions. Finally, it must present a **variety of complementary activities** (such as workshops, conferences, portfolio review, roundtable discussions, or educational programs) that allow for the active participation of diverse audiences and foster professional and educational exchanges around photography. These criteria allow for defining the types of events that are part of the global photography ecosystem, **prioritising those that promote encounter, reflection, and the sharing of knowledge beyond the simple act of exhibiting**.

It's important to remember that the format of contemporary festivals originates from film and music and does not date back to 1950. Their recent success is due to several factors. First, festivals allow a large number of cultural offerings to be condensed into a few days, facilitating the visibility of artists and works to diverse audiences. Second, they offer a curatorial narrative that organises the participant experience, distinguishing them from isolated activities. Finally, they become spaces for encounter and exchange that generate community, international exposure, and economic opportunities. In this sense, programming no longer responds solely to the logic of exhibition, but rather to the need to articulate discourses, provoke conversations, and build networks and communities among creators, audiences, and institutions. **This comprehensive and experiential logic is what has made festivals a fundamental pillar of contemporary cultural life.**

We understand that 55 years after the founding of Rencontres d'Arles and with more than 1,000 active festivals, **the time has come to take advantage of digital possibilities to create communities and unite**. Other cultural sectors have been organizing for years. For example, it's worth remembering that the European Festivals Association (EFA) was founded in 1952. In this sense, we consider IPFA to be the fruit of a technological revolution brought on by the pandemic, but also a cultural and ethical one, characteristic of a new generation of cultural managers. We are committed



to **modernising the way we conceive and manage our festivals**, incorporating values such as **gender equality, ecological sustainability, a commitment to emerging artists, and financial transparency**. We believe that only in this way can we build fairer, more accessible events that are aligned with the demands of a constantly changing society. At the same time, it is essential to **vindicate the figure of the cultural manager and their key role in the artistic ecosystem**, also promoting **fair remuneration and professional recognition** for those who sustain these projects day after day. A global network that uses contemporary tools to build the future of photography festivals: **more connected, more responsible, and more influential**.

b) Methodology

With the aim of obtaining a **comprehensive and representative overview** of the current state of photography festivals worldwide, a **structured questionnaire** was designed to address several key aspects of these cultural events. The formulation of the questions responded to two fundamental criteria: first, **maintaining a level of generality that would facilitate responses** from events with very diverse realities; second, **capturing the breadth and heterogeneity** of initiatives active on five continents. The questionnaire design and data collection strategy were conceived with the intention of **producing shared, useful, and applicable knowledge** for the entire international photography festival community, while taking into account the specific conditions of each context.

Fieldwork took place **between February 25 and May 25, 2025**, using the **Google Forms** platform, complemented by **personalised emails, newsletters, and targeted Instagram posts**, which allowed for broadening the reach of the call. The survey was conducted among festival managers of the **709 festivals registered in the IPFA database** at the time of the study. Of that total, **30.32% (215 festivals) completed the questionnaire**, representing a representative and geographically diverse sample. The data obtained were **systematised and analysed** using **descriptive statistics** tools for quantitative questions and **content analysis** techniques for open-ended or qualitative responses. Juliana Gagné and Filip Mitra collaborated in the drafting of the report and for the translation. Artificial intelligence tools, primarily ChatGPT4 or Pro, were also used.

Although our current database includes **709 registered photography festivals**, we estimate that there are more than **1,000 active festivals** worldwide. This projection is based on the accumulated knowledge and research conducted by the IPFA team over the past year. However, **locating and contacting all festivals is a very complex**



challenge due to multiple technological, cultural, and linguistic barriers. Many do not have a presence on the most widely used search engines in the West—such as Google—because they operate in countries where different platforms are used, such as Baidu in China or Yandex in Russia. Others are not active on social media (such as Instagram or Facebook) because other apps or local dissemination channels that are difficult to access predominately in their contexts. Furthermore, language and writing differences, especially in non-Latin alphabets, limit our ability to identify events through conventional keywords.

Adding to this structural difficulty is a conceptual issue: the **IPFA adopts a broad definition of photography festival**, which includes not only traditional photography festivals but also fairs, biennials, congresses, and hybrid events that present at least three photography exhibitions within a single program. It also excludes awards and festivals dedicated to photography in general or the visual arts, many of which are linked to film and the moving image. Even so, we know that there are **many other forms of photography celebration** in different regions of the world that could be considered festivals under other cultural or contextual criteria, but which have not yet been incorporated into our database. Therefore, this report is also an **open invitation to collaborate**: if you know of one that is not listed in our registry, we encourage you to share it with us.

Given that there are estimated to be more than **1,000 active photography festivals worldwide**, the final quantitative results were **projected, extrapolated, and weighted** in relation to both the IPFA database and the estimated universe. This procedure allows us to offer a realistic estimate of the entire sector, **detect trends, identify global patterns, and compare different local or regional realities** while maintaining a broad perspective and being attentive to the specifics of the sector. This report, therefore, not only represents a diagnosis of the current situation but also a **starting point for future research and collaborative actions within the global photography world**.

c) Photography Post-Festivals

Drawing on the critical and visionary spirit of Joan Fontcuberta's Postphotographic Decalogue (2011)¹, we propose a **Decalogue on Photography Post-Festivals**, a provocative guide for rethinking the future of festivals beyond their traditional forms, in a context of cultural, ecological, technological, and social

¹ Published in La Vanguardia on the 11th of May 2011



transformation. Photography has been changing for years, from digitalisation, its incorporation into mobile phones, and the return of analogue forms, all within a context of the rise of the internet and intercommunication. Now, all these revolutions must reach the way we make and experience festivals. From this, our Decalogue is born, contextualizing our reflections and desires for the future:

1. From Event to Ecosystem

A festival should no longer be thought of as a one-off, local event, but as a living network, an ecosystem of relationships, exchanges, and learning spread throughout the year and around the world.

- 2. From Program to Process** It is not enough to showcase results (great works or big names); the value of the festival lies in the shared process of production, mediation, and reflection. Curatorship becomes an expanded, pedagogical, and political practice when we make space for those who don't have it.

3. From Authorship to Community

The festivals of the future do not only celebrate the individual artist, but also promote experiences of co-creation, collaborative work, and collective assemblage among participants, artists, communities, and territories. The final work of the festival is the creation of its own community.

4. From Exhibition to Device

The exhibition is no longer exclusively or necessarily the most effective format, and this opens the door to workshops, lectures, guided tours, portfolio review, etc. The festival thus becomes a laboratory for the production of hybrid formats aimed at provoking critical thinking and community action.

5. From Visibility to Caring

Rather than seeking visibility at all costs by choosing established artists, the festivals of the future care about the community, its image, the environment, labour relations, and resources. They opt for sustainability over spectacularity and choose to create life-changing experiences.

6. From Local Roots to Global Connectivity

Rather than replicating standardised global models, festivals draw from their concrete reality to project themselves globally through collaborative networks, digital platforms,



and transnational communities. It's not about being confined to the local level, but rather strategically expanding it into a connected and critical international sphere.

7. Welcome, Participants!

From the public as spectators to the public as agents: it's no longer just about attending, but about being part of it. Festivals encourage collaboration, co-creation, and shared decision-making. The audience becomes an active community that sustains and transforms the event from within.

8. From Silence to Transparency and Equality

The festivals of the future build trust through transparency: they share how they're funded, how much things cost, and who pays what. Economic pedagogy isn't a technical appendage, but a form of collective consciousness. And there's no modernity without coherence: if 50% of the audience and photography students are women, it's only fair that they're also women on the walls, in decision-making, and on the work teams.

9. From Competition to Interdependence

A festival cannot (and should not) compete with others for funding, artists, or dates. It recognises itself as part of an interdependent ecosystem where collaboration, exchange, and solidarity produce sustainability for all. The festivals of the future do not isolate themselves: they connect, share resources, generate support networks, and build common agendas. Collective intelligence replaces institutional individualism. The future will not belong to those who survive alone, but to those who organise together to reinvent cultural models.

10. From Cultural Consumption to Situated Action

Festivals are no longer just showcases for mass-market products, but are transforming into spaces for critical, affective, and political intervention. They align themselves with their communities and with social, environmental, and cultural struggles, and understand their role as agents of transformation, not entertainment. They don't work to please brands or institutions: they work for those who inhabit them, sustain them, and need them.

d) Recognition

Behind every collective initiative are people who deeply believe in the power of collaboration. This document would not be possible without the generous participation



of the **215 festivals** that responded in depth to the IPFA questionnaire, out of a total of **709 invited**. In addition to thanking the festivals, we would like to gratefully acknowledge those who made the coordination and production of this first report possible: **Pablo Giori, Laura Ligari, Emiliano Covello, and Pedro Pereira**, whose commitment has been key at every stage of the process. This team works within the context of the **Experimentalphotofestival Association** (Barcelona, Spain), the parent organisation of the **International Photography Festivals Association (IPFA)**. Their support, both human and professional, has allowed this research to come to light and chart a path toward the future of photography festivals worldwide. Finally, this report would not have been possible without the co-funding of the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Barcelona City Council.



2) Festivals around the world: 1,000

At the time of this research (June 2025), the International Photography Festivals Association (IPFA) database records **a total of 1,031 documented photography festivals worldwide**, of which **709 are active and 322 are listed as inactive or discontinued**. This information comes from a sustained digital mapping process, based on systematic searches of the internet, social media, cultural directories, and direct collaboration with festival managers. Despite its breadth, we recognise that **this database is provisional and under constant construction**. The actual number of active festivals could exceed 1,000, as detailed in the previous section on methodology.²

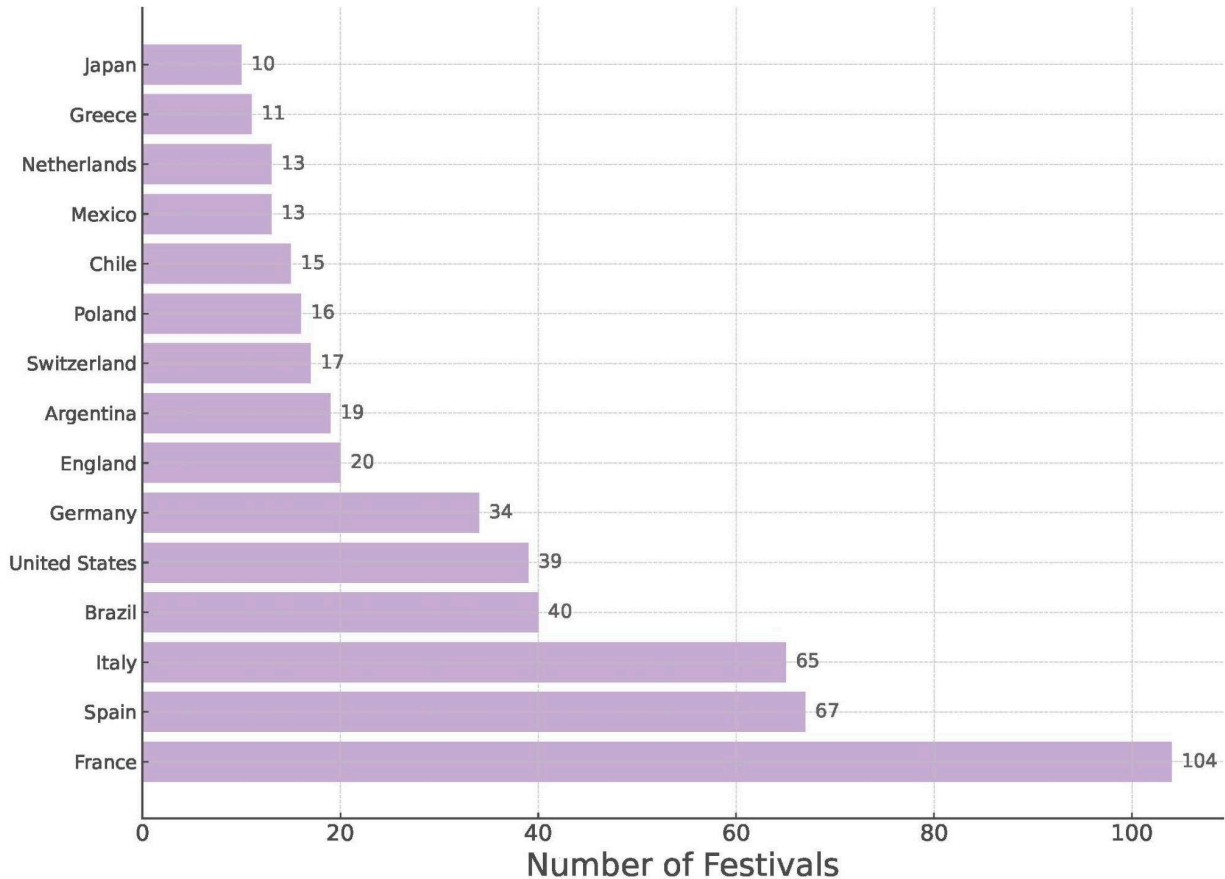
a) Active

The 709 active festivals identified to date are spread across **509 different cities in 91 countries**, spanning five continents and consolidating photography as a cultural, educational, and political tool with global projection. Geographic concentration varies significantly between regions. **Europe** leads the way with **406 festivals**, with France (103), Spain (66), Italy (63), Germany (34), England (20), and Switzerland (17) being the most active countries. In the **Americas**, there are **177 festivals: 113 in Latin America**, with Brazil (40), Argentina (18), Chile (15), Mexico (13), and Colombia (8) standing out, and **64 in North America**, with the United States (39) and Canada (9) as the main exponents. **Asia has 69 active festivals**, led by Japan (10), China (9), India (7), South Korea (7), and Russia (8), although the diversity extends to countries such as Iran, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. In **Africa**, there are **16 festivals**, with presence in countries such as South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso. Finally, **Oceania has 11 festivals**, spread across Australia (5), New Zealand (4), and other Pacific islands. This panorama demonstrates both the consolidation of the phenomenon in regions with a long photographic tradition, such as Europe and America, and its expansion into emerging geographies in Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It also highlights **the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of the international photography ecosystem**.

² You can view the complete database and submit additional information through our website: <https://www.photographyfestivalsassociation.com/es/festivals>



Top 15 countries with the highest number of photography festival



The current map of active photography festivals reflects a vibrant, constantly expanding ecosystem with an uneven but increasingly diverse geographic distribution. The clear concentration of festivals in **Europe**—particularly in countries like France, Spain, and Italy—demonstrates both the continent's historical tradition surrounding photography and the existence of sustained cultural policies and consolidated institutional networks. However, the growth of festivals in **Latin America and Asia** is particularly significant, where the phenomenon takes on specific forms linked to social processes, local identities, and political struggles. The existence of festivals in contexts with greater institutional fragility, such as certain African or Southeast Asian countries, demonstrates that **photography is becoming a strategic tool for cultural visibility and citizen participation, even where resources are limited**. Taken together, the data reveals a productive tension between consolidation and expansion and between tradition and innovation. This challenges the idea that festivals are solely Western or elitist phenomena and opens the door to a redefinition of the global map of photography from the South, from the emerging, and from the hybrid.



The global photography festival ecosystem reveals remarkable diversity in both the themes they address and their organisational structure. The most represented category is **contemporary photography**, with 446 festivals, demonstrating the centrality of this approach to current curatorial agendas. This prevalence can be linked to the flexible and encompassing nature of the term "contemporary," which allows for the integration of a wide range of visual discourses, styles, and practices. However, the strong growth of festivals dedicated to **alternative photography** is also notable, with 80 registered cases, pointing to a growing need to explore unconventional formats, emerging technologies, and disruptive visual languages. This data is key, as it indicates a shift of many festivals toward territories of formal and conceptual innovation, reinforcing their role as creative laboratories rather than exhibition showcases. On the other hand, although with smaller numbers, we find specialised areas with strong development potential: **documentary photography and photojournalism** (47 festivals), **photobooks and publications** (42), and **nature** photography (29). Taken together, these figures show that festivals are not only spaces for exhibition, but also for production, editorial reflection, and activation of specific niches in visual culture.

In terms of the structure and scope of festivals, the landscape is dominated by **annual events (642)**, confirming the desire for continuity, audience loyalty, and a stable presence in the cultural calendar. **Biennial or triennial festivals, although less frequent (67)**, tend to focus on greater curatorial ambition and more complex production, which explains their lower number. In addition to the festivals themselves, the database records **20 conferences and meetings, 12 competitions, and 8 fairs**, indicating a typological diversity that goes beyond the traditional festival model, incorporating formats for theoretical reflection, artistic competitiveness, and marketing. Territorially, **312 festivals identify themselves as local**, highlighting the importance of community roots and the cultural impact of proximity. However, **217 define themselves as international**, demonstrating a clear desire for global projection, transnational networks, and artistic circulation. The **59 regional festivals**, for their part, operate at a strategic midpoint between the local and the global, functioning as platforms for territorial integration. This diversity of scales and models demonstrates that the world of photography festivals is profoundly plural, and that their richness lies in the coexistence of different ways of operating, programming, and connecting with diverse audiences.

At a structural level, most festivals adopt an annual model, demonstrating **an intention to maintain continuity and build ongoing ties with their communities**. This consistency, however, poses challenges in terms of economic and human sustainability, especially for small or self-managed festivals. The coexistence of local, regional, and international festivals—along with formats such as conferences,



competitions, and fairs—confirms that **the ecosystem does not respond to a single replicable model, but rather to a mosaic of practices adapted to diverse contexts, objectives, and capacities**. This plurality should not be seen as a weakness, but rather as one of the sector's main strengths: it allows for responding to diverse audiences, sustaining community initiatives, and simultaneously facilitating the international circulation of artists and discourses. In this sense, festivals not only constitute a globalised cultural map but also a decentralised laboratory where **forms of collaboration, visibility, and belonging are tested, redefining the notions of territory, audience, and authorship in the 21st century**.

b) Inactive

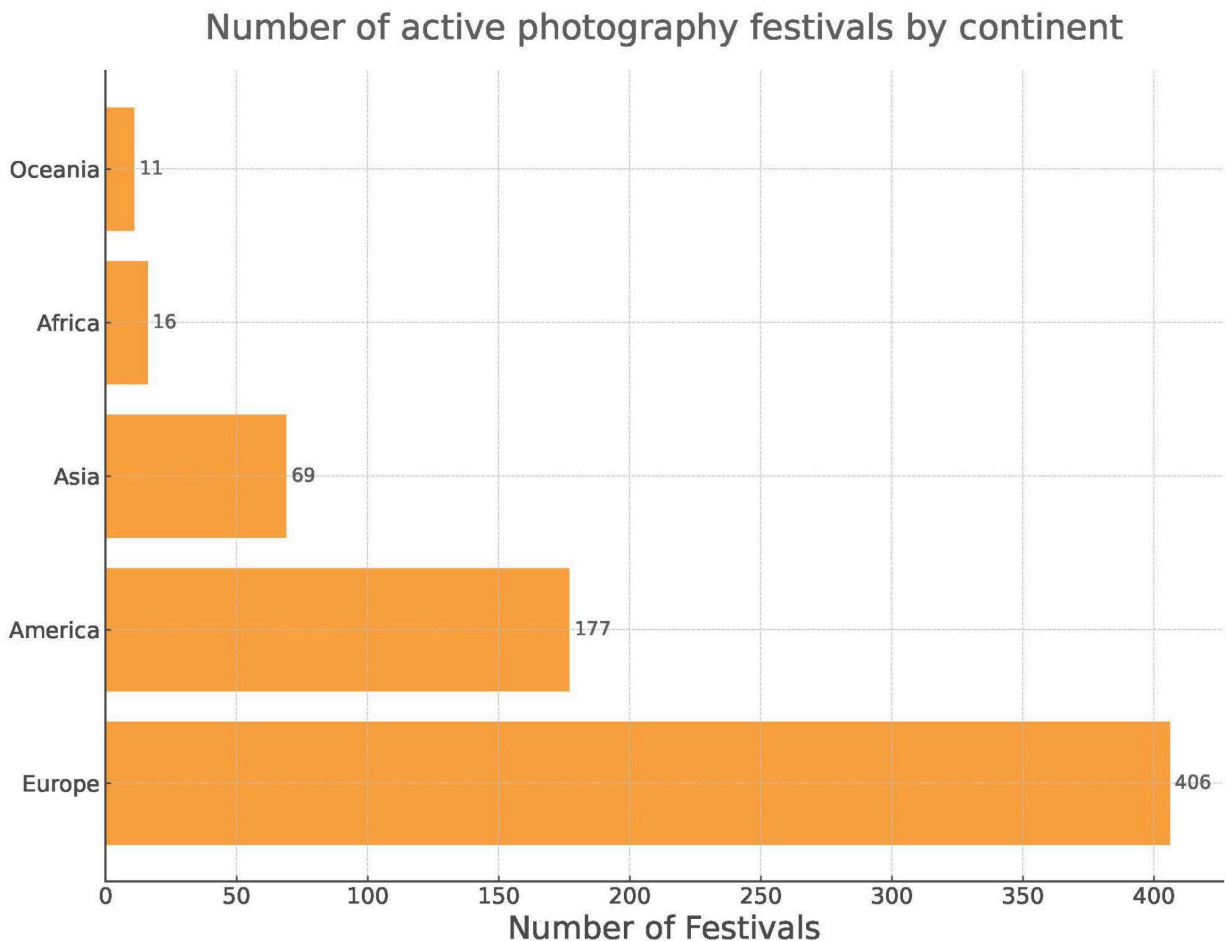
Regarding the **322 festivals classified as inactive**, although the analysis is still preliminary, certain patterns are observed that allow for some hypotheses. Many of these events began their operations between **2005 and 2015**, with the average being 2014, a decade marked by the rise of digital photography, the democratisation of visual production media, and the proliferation of self-publishing and distribution platforms. However, a significant proportion **ceased operations between 2018 and 2022**, partly as a consequence of **the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic**, the reduction of public subsidies in certain countries, and the depletion of traditional management models—a generational shift.

Another relevant fact is that **closures are not limited to small or newly established festivals: there are several cases of initiatives that lasted between 10 and 20 years and yet failed to survive the new challenges**. This indicates that **maturity does not guarantee sustainability**, and that even established projects can disappear if they do not update their models, diversify their funding sources, or strengthen their relationship with the region and its communities. This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about the **structural sustainability** of the global festival ecosystem. What factors allow an event to endure over time? What support does a cultural project need to consolidate and adapt to changing environments? What are the signs of a model's exhaustion?

It's important to highlight that there may be bias in the data on inactive festivals in our database: as this research is primarily based on digital sources, **it is not always possible to accurately verify the continuation or discontinuation of a festival**, especially when organisers haven't left updated online records or have migrated to other forms of cultural production not labelled as "festivals." To address these questions in greater depth, it is necessary to **expand and diversify our research**



tools, including interviews, analysis of historical archives, and direct collaboration with local organisations that don't always have a digital presence, especially in regions with languages, cultures, or technological frameworks distinct from the Western canon.



c) Comparing geographies

The comparison between countries with active festivals and those with inactive ones allows us to identify both the most dynamic geographies and the contexts with the greatest fragility in the sustainability of photography festivals. A first relevant fact is that **countries with the most active festivals also tend to concentrate a high number of festivals that have ceased their activity**. France, for example, leads the list of active festivals with 104, but also records at least 37 inactive festivals, which represents a significant turnover rate in its ecosystem. The same is true



for Spain (66 active / 62 inactive), Italy (65 / 34), Brazil (40 / 28), and the United States (39 / 32), indicating that contexts with a higher density of festivals also face greater challenges to their continuity.

However, in other cases, such as India (7 active / 14 inactive), Mexico (13 active / 18 inactive) or Argentina (19 / 12), **the number of defunct festivals exceeds or is dangerously close to the number of those still active**, which could be a symptom of fragile organisational structures, excessive dependence on local funding or a lack of support networks. On the other hand, some countries have an exclusively active or very low presence of inactive festivals, such as South Korea (7 active / 2 inactive), Portugal (10 / 2), or the Netherlands (13 / 4), **which could reflect a greater capacity for sustainability or a lower saturation of the sector.**

This cross-referencing of data allows us to reflect on the need for long-term cultural policies that strengthen existing infrastructure and prevent the obsolescence of valuable projects. It also highlights the importance of sharing best practices across countries, building international collaboration networks, and promoting sustainable models that reduce the sector's high mortality rate. In short, where more festivals are born, more also die: **the challenge is to transform that vitality into permanence, without abandoning experimentation.**



3) Calendars

The calendar of a festival of photography is not just a matter of logistics: it is a direct expression of their conditions of existence, of their institutional partnerships, their relationship with the climate and with the rhythms of cultural territory. **Choosing what time of the year to organise a festival involves negotiating with multiple factors**—economic, social, climatic, and symbolic—that determine both its viability and scope. In this sense, analyzing the temporalities of the photographic events is **key to understanding not only their distribution throughout the year but also the strategies of sustainability, visibility and community support.**

The data collected in this research allows us to observe, for the first time, **a marked concentration of festivals in certain months of the year**, especially during the spring and autumn periods in the northern hemisphere. This temporal preference responds to the convergence of better weather conditions, favourable institutional cycles, and greater opportunities for audience engagement. However, it also reflects a certain global standardisation in the way cultural events are programmed, influenced by European and North American agendas. In contrast, winter—and to a lesser extent summer—is seen as a period of lower density, **opening the door to a possible more strategic and sustainable redistribution of programming throughout the year.**

On the other hand, this chapter also explores the ways in which festivals are organised over time: **their frequency, duration, and their ability to sustain themselves between editions.** The annual schedule remains the most common, but a growing number of festivals are opting for biannual or even triennial models, no longer as a limitation, but as a conscious choice to slow down. These new rhythms allow for a rethinking of production times, greater care in curatorial processes, and mitigating team fatigue.

Finally, this chapter offers a comparative look at active festivals and those that have ceased their activity. This historical and statistical perspective allows us to recognise patterns, identify windows of opportunity, and pose questions for the future: **how might the global calendar evolve?** Which months are currently underutilised and could open up space for new initiatives? What conditions favour the temporal stability of an event? **By understanding the "when" of festivals, we open the door to rethinking their "how" and "why" in a constantly changing cultural ecosystem.**

a) Monthly Calendar



Regarding the **temporal distribution of photography festivals**, the data reveals a strong concentration in the fall and spring months of the Northern Hemisphere, coinciding with the traditionally busiest seasons for cultural programming in many regions of the world. Below is the number of festivals held each month of the year, according to the information collected:

- **January:** 7 festivals
- **February:** 4 festivals
- **March:** 13 festivals
- **April:** 15 festivals
- **May:** 30 festivals
- **June:** 28 festivals
- **July:** 12 festivals
- **August:** 19 festivals
- **September:** 57 festivals
- **October:** 61 festivals
- **November:** 23 festivals
- **December:** 7 festivals

The marked concentration of photography festivals in the months of September (57) and October (61) is not accidental, but rather responds to a combination of structural, climatic, and financial factors that shape the international calendar. In many regions of the world, especially in the northern hemisphere, these months coincide with mild temperatures that favour public mobility and outdoor activities, especially in festivals that integrate urban or natural spaces as part of their exhibition proposal. Furthermore, September and October mark the beginning of the academic year and the institutional calendar in numerous countries, which not only facilitates collaboration with cultural centres and universities, but also coincides with **the execution of public budgets allocated in the first half of the year**. The presence or absence of public funding is a key factor here: **when they depend largely on state or municipal funds, their schedules tend to align with the administrative calendars of calls for proposals and grants**. This institutional logic, combined with weather conditions and the pace of cultural life, has consolidated autumn as the time of greatest density of festivals worldwide.

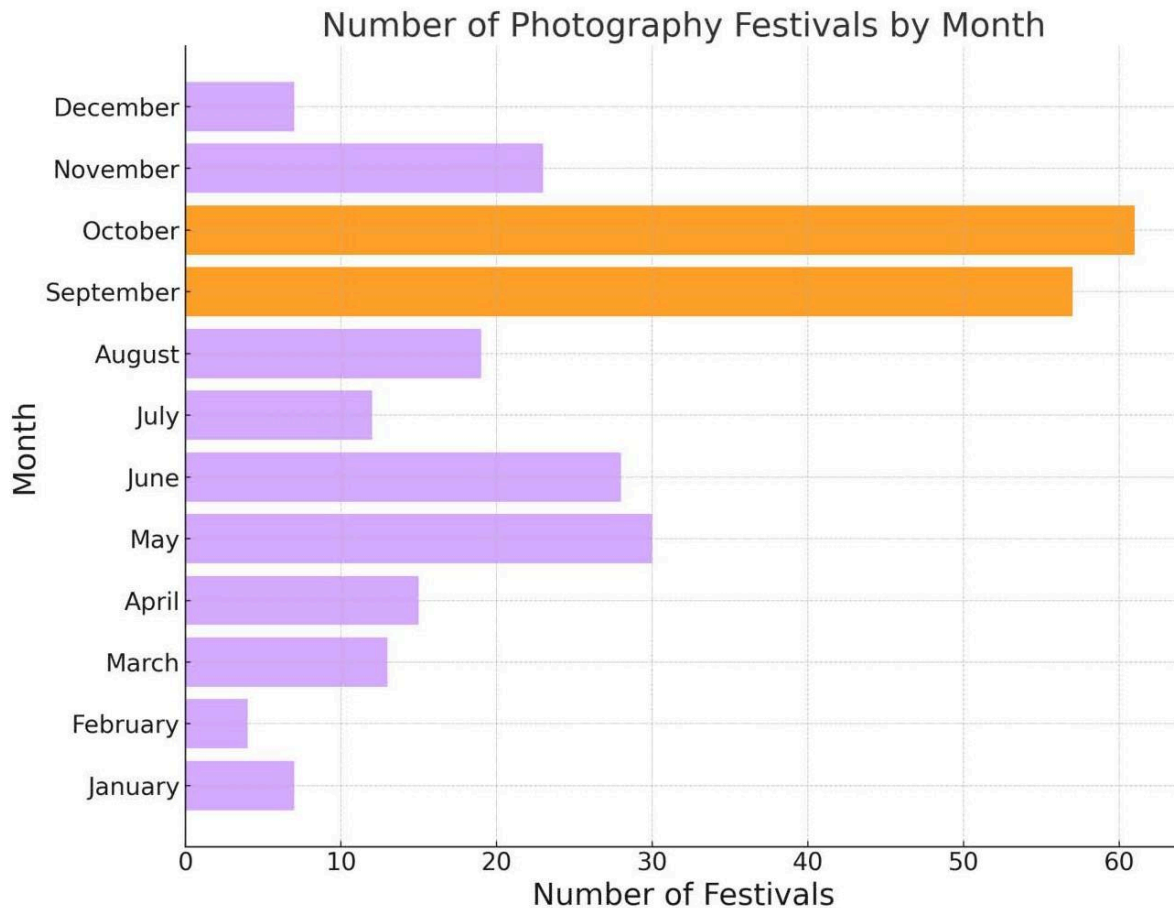
In contrast, the winter months—**January, February, and December**—show much lower activity, with just 7, 4, and 7 festivals, respectively. While in some contexts this timing may reflect strategic decisions to avoid calendar congestion or take advantage of festive periods, generally speaking, it reflects the limits imposed by the



climate and the lack of available resources at the beginning or end of the fiscal year. Given this concentration in just a few months of the year, it is worth asking whether **expanding the calendar could contribute to a more sustainable distribution of cultural work, while allowing audiences and artists access to a more diverse offering throughout the year.**

In this sense, it is interesting to note that **67 festivals declared their biannual and triennial nature.** These alternative models, far from being a sign of weakness, can constitute conscious sustainability strategies, allowing for more thoughtful curatorial processes, greater institutional consolidation, and more stable budget planning. In a global context marked by the precariousness of cultural work, climate change, and the need to rethink cultural production models, biannual or triennial events can offer a way to strengthen the impact and resilience of festivals, avoiding the pressure of annual hyperproduction. On the other hand, **although these models can strengthen structural sustainability, they also carry a significant risk:** by being spaced out over time, they run the risk of diluting their presence in the collective imagination and losing continuity in their ties with their communities. In a cultural ecosystem saturated with stimuli, where the public's attention is competed for daily, prolonged absence can translate into a loss of symbolic and operational relevance. **Maintaining a community alive without regular gatherings requires specific communication strategies, interim programming, and networking** that reinforce the sense of belonging and maintain the emotional and intellectual connection with the audience. Otherwise, there is a risk that by the next event, the community fabric will have changed or even disappeared, and the festival will have to start almost from scratch in its work of convening and social legitimisation.

Rethinking the "when," therefore, is also a way of questioning the "how" and "why" of our cultural practices. This information can be key to understanding programming and planning strategies, as well as **identifying potential windows of opportunity for new festivals in less crowded months.**



b) First editions

Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire on the founding years of photography festivals, a **clear and significant evolution can be observed in the dynamics of the emergence of these events over time**. From the 1980s to the early 2000s, the creation of festivals was **sporadic and moderate, with between one and three new events per year**. During this period, the initial momentum was more limited, likely due to logistical, technological, and access barriers to photographic and curatorial production. The 1990s and **early 2000s marked a period of gestation for the ecosystem, characterised by pioneering initiatives and slow consolidation**.

However, **sustained growth has been observed since 2003**. This growth intensified particularly between 2010 and 2019, with years such as 2017 (12 new festivals), 2016 and 2018 (11 each), and a peak in 2019 with 14 new festivals. This trend coincided with key factors such as **the democratisation of digital photography**,



the expansion of access to the internet and social media, and the emergence of new generations of artists and cultural managers interested in creating their own dissemination platforms. During this decade, festivals diversified both territorially and conceptually, responding to a context of growing interest in the visual and collaborative.

Growth did not stop with the pandemic. In fact, between 2020 and 2024, 61 new festivals were created, with a new record in 2024 with 16 events established. This data is especially relevant because it demonstrates the resilience and vitality of the sector even in the context of the global health and economic crises. In recent years, many festivals have emerged with more flexible, hybrid, or digital models, connecting with both local and international communities. **This latest stage suggests a clear expansion of the phenomenon as a form of contemporary cultural organisation, confirming that we are witnessing an ecosystem undergoing rapid transformation and growth.**

c) Cycles of life: the creation and disappearance

The analysis of the **322 currently inactive photography festivals registered in our database** offers an in-depth look at the life cycle of these cultural initiatives. The database includes information on the year of the first and last edition, allowing for a precise study of the sector's rise, consolidation, and decline from the mid-20th century to the present.

Photography festivals, in their **contemporary** form, are a relatively recent phenomenon. Before 1950, most photography-related events consisted of **exhibitions organised by photography societies, art salons, or artist collectives**, often with a competitive or institutional focus. Although these gatherings played a fundamental role in the consolidation of photography as an artistic and documentary form, they did not yet reflect the festival logic as we understand it today.

The festival format as we know it today began to take shape in the mid-20th century, particularly with the proliferation of **film festivals** such as Cannes and Locarno (founded in 1946) and Berlin (1951), which marked a turning point in the way cultural events were organised. These were not simply showcases of works, but multidimensional platforms that combined exhibitions, debates, awards, professional meetings, and collective experiences. **This model was soon adopted and adapted by other cultural sectors, such as music, theater, and, later, photography.**



In our field, it emerged and consolidated in parallel with **the development of contemporary visual cultures, cultural tourism, the globalisation of art, and the expansion of digital media**. Beginning in the second half of the 20th century—and with increasing intensity since the 1990s—festivals began to emerge as platforms for exhibition, meeting, and professionalisation, directly connecting creators, curators, institutions, and audiences. From a sociological perspective, festivals not only serve a cultural function but also a social one: **they are spaces for socialisation, negotiation of meanings, construction of collective identity, and the formation of professional networks**. Their open, participatory, and transnational nature has allowed for the democratisation of access to photography, bringing creative processes closer to the public, and fostering critical dialogue across disciplines, generations, and territories. This transformation explains **why we do not find festivals with their current characteristics before 1950: the cultural, technological, and economic ecosystem necessary to sustain them as such did not yet exist**.

According to our database, a sustained and significant growth in the creation of new photography festivals that are still active today began in **2000**. This process intensified especially between **2010 and 2024, a period in which more than 130 were founded**. **The most prolific years were 2024 with 16 new ones**, followed by 2022 with 15, 2019 with 14 each, and 2023 with 13. This boom coincides with structural transformations in the cultural and technological fields: **the democratisation of digital photography, widespread access to social media, and the emergence of new generations of photographers and cultural managers who decided to promote their own platforms**. In many cases, these festivals emerged in local contexts without significant cultural infrastructure, becoming key spaces for meeting, training, visibility, and circulation of contemporary photographic practices.

In contrast, an analysis of the years of the last edition before the closure reveals a highly significant pattern. Although festival closures are spread across several decades, **a sustained and remarkable increase has been observed since 2016**, with a sharp rise in subsequent years. Data indicates a progressive growth in the number of festivals that ceased to take place, **reaching particularly critical figures in 2022 with 43 closures and an all-time high in 2023 with 55 festivals closed**. This pattern is clearly influenced by the cumulative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its structural consequences: **reduced public funding, loss of human resources, decline in in-person audiences, and difficulties in sustaining traditional formats without an effective digital transformation**. Beyond the pandemic, this wave of closures also reflects the tensions inherent in an ecosystem that, without systematic support, sees its capacity to adapt to new social, economic, and technological challenges limited. **The "death curve" intensifies when projects fail to renew**



themselves, diversify their sources of income, or consolidate communities beyond their founders.

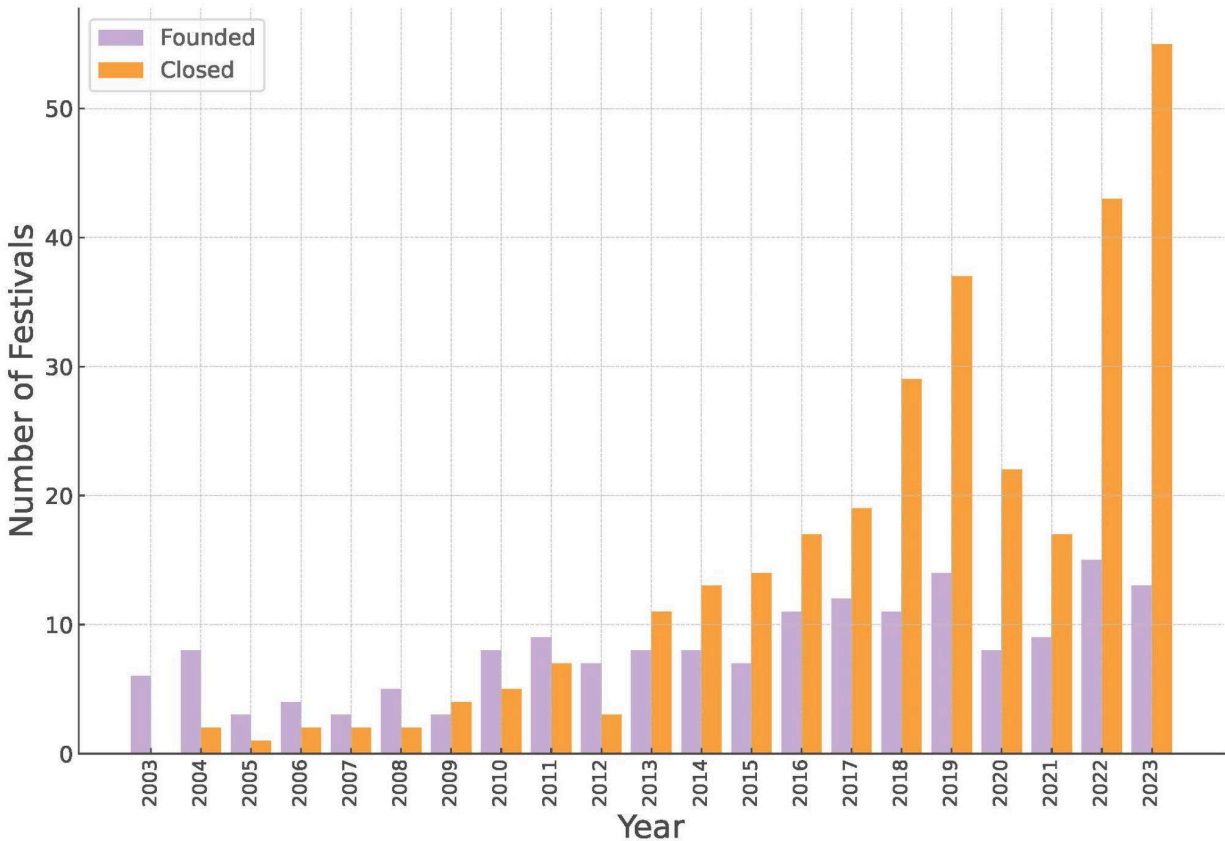
If we consider average duration and sustainability, although some festivals only survived one or two years, most of the inactive projects lasted for **more than a decade**. This reveals that **we are not dealing with ephemeral projects** (or that these are still represented in our database), but rather with valuable cultural endeavours that achieved a degree of consolidation before disappearing. **Lack of institutional renewal, team burnout, and a lack of structural support (public or private) emerge as frequent causes of closure**. The estimated average lifespan is **13.6 years**. This fact challenges the idea that inactivity is due exclusively to inexperience or precariousness: **many festivals closed after years of stable programming, with proven artistic and social impact**.

The analysis reveals a structural paradox: **while more festivals than ever are being founded, closures are also increasing**. This dual trend reveals a vibrant, but also vulnerable, ecosystem. The creation of new festivals continues to be a driver of cultural dynamism, but **the lack of sustained public policies, the precariousness of cultural work, and the absence of collaborative frameworks hinder their long-term survival**. **The concentration of closed festivals in the last three years suggests a saturation of the traditional model**. Many projects are born with enthusiasm but without strategic planning, clear governance models, and legal, communication, or financial structures capable of sustaining them over time. **The emergence of festivals with shorter cycles (2-5 years) also reflects a new logic: more flexible, but also more exposed to discontinuity**.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the study of inactive festivals should not be approached solely as an inventory of losses, but as **a space for collective learning**. Understanding why festivals disappear helps us design better support tools, promote the professionalisation of the sector, and develop more sustainable and collaborative models. The challenge isn't to prevent festival closures at all costs, but to **create conditions so they can transform, migrate, or reconvert** into other formats when necessary. Because the true vitality of the photography ecosystem depends not only on how many festivals exist, but on **how many manage to adapt, reinvent themselves, and continue to have a significant cultural and social impact on their communities**.



Annual evolution of the creation and closing of photography festivals (2003-2023)



d) Comparison between active and inactive festivals: between expansion and the fragility

Cross-referencing data between active and inactive festivals offers a complex and deeply revealing picture of the current state of the international photography scene. At first glance, the fact that there are **more than 700 active festivals** worldwide might seem encouraging. However, the existence of **322 inactive** festivals forces us to go beyond the numerical count to understand the **dynamics of sustainability, growth, and risk** that coexists in the sector.

A young, vibrant and still unstable sector

The fact that the **average founding date** for active projects is **2014**, and that the **average duration** of inactive projects is around **13.6 years**, indicates that most of



these projects were born in the context of global digitalisation and are still in the process of consolidation. This reinforces the idea that this is **a young and expanding ecosystem**, but also a fragile one, exposed to cultural, economic, and technological changes that directly affect its continuity.

The 2010s Boom: Digital Momentum and Continuity Crisis

Many festivals in our database were created between **2010 and 2019**, a decade marked by the emergence of the internet, social media, and a growing need for independent platforms for contemporary photography. This boom, however, also generates a **critical maturity curve**: many created 8 to 12 years ago are now reaching a point where **they need to professionalise, grow, or reinvent themselves to avoid disappearing**. The data suggests that the transition between founding enthusiasm and long-term sustainability remains one of the sector's greatest challenges.

An Intermediate Generation as a Driver of Change

The festivals that participated in this research—mostly active and between 5 and 15 years old—represent an **intermediate generation**, more professionalised, with a capacity for renewal and a global vision. They are festivals with young teams, open to international collaboration, with active digital strategies, and a strong desire for growth. This time period seems to be the true **driving force of the ecosystem today: those who are able to sustain themselves and, at the same time, innovate**.

Sustainability as a Common Frontier

The contrast between active and inactive festivals reveals that **institutional, financial, and generational sustainability** is the key turning point. Festivals that manage to diversify their sources of income, establish collaborative networks, and build long-term community tend to endure. Those that depend exclusively on volunteers, a single individual, or a one-time grant often become extinct when the context changes.

The future lies in networks and community

A key difference between many active festivals and those that have disappeared is **the strategic use of social media, the internationalisation of their audiences, and their ability to generate community**. Today, it's not enough to organise exhibitions: **the festivals that survive and grow are those that understand their work as a relational, educational, and professional platform. Photography is no longer thought of solely as an image, but as a network**.



4) The human team behind the festivals: between 8,000 and 12,000 people

Beyond the programs, exhibitions, or international acclaim, every photography festival is, above all, the result of the sustained and committed work of a human team. Behind every opening, every catalogue, every exhibition, or workshop, there is an invisible network of decisions, care, urgency, and knowledge that make its existence possible. **Understanding how these teams are made up—in terms of size, training, and conditions—allows us to access the internal dynamics of the ecosystem and recognise both its strengths and structural vulnerabilities.**

Our events mobilise not only images, but also people: **professionals, volunteers, managers, curators, technicians, communicators, and cultural mediators who invest time, energy, and knowledge to make each edition a reality.** Studying who makes up these teams—how many people are on them, their training, how they are organised—is a way to read between the lines of the possibilities and limits of the sector. **Recognising these conditions is a key step toward imagining more inclusive and effective cultural policies, capable of strengthening the human heart of festivals: their teams.**

a) Number of workers

The human dimension of photography festivals is as essential as their artistic programming. According to the responses collected in our survey, it is estimated that **between 8,000 and 12,000 people collaborate annually in the organisation of these events worldwide.** This figure includes personnel such as technicians, curators, communicators, cultural managers, and mediation staff (not including volunteers), which demonstrates the human capital-intensive nature of these types of initiatives. Festivals are not automated or mass-replicable structures: **their viability depends on the artisanal, contextual, and coordinated work of multiple actors.**

The data shows that more than half of active festivals (exactly **55.5%**) operate **with teams composed of between 4 and 10 people.** This segment represents the core of the ecosystem: medium-scale festivals, with a certain degree of



professionalisation, but still dependent on **the versatility and multitasking of their teams**. This size allows for a certain amount of organisational stability, but **requires the assumption of multiple tasks simultaneously**, which can lead to work overload, especially in contexts with limited resources or heavy programming.

18% of festivals report having teams of between **11 and 20 people**. Although a minority, these tend to have a greater degree of institutional consolidation. They tend to be events with **expanded programming, international alliances, greater funding capacity, and more hierarchical structures**. This size allows for a clearer division of functions, the establishment of internal departments (exhibitions, production, communications, education), and the adoption of parallel projects such as **fairs, schools, publications, or residencies**. In many cases, they represent more sustainable management models, although also more demanding in administrative and financial terms.

At the other extreme, **16%** of festivals report working with teams of **only 1 to 3 people**. This data is key to understanding the resilience—but also the fragility—of a significant portion of the sector. These events, often driven by **local artists, collectives, or managers, tend to adopt self-managed, horizontal models deeply connected to their territory**. They operate with minimal structures, where passion and personal commitment are fundamental drivers. However, their long-term survival is often threatened by team burnout, a lack of generational change, and a shortage of structural resources.

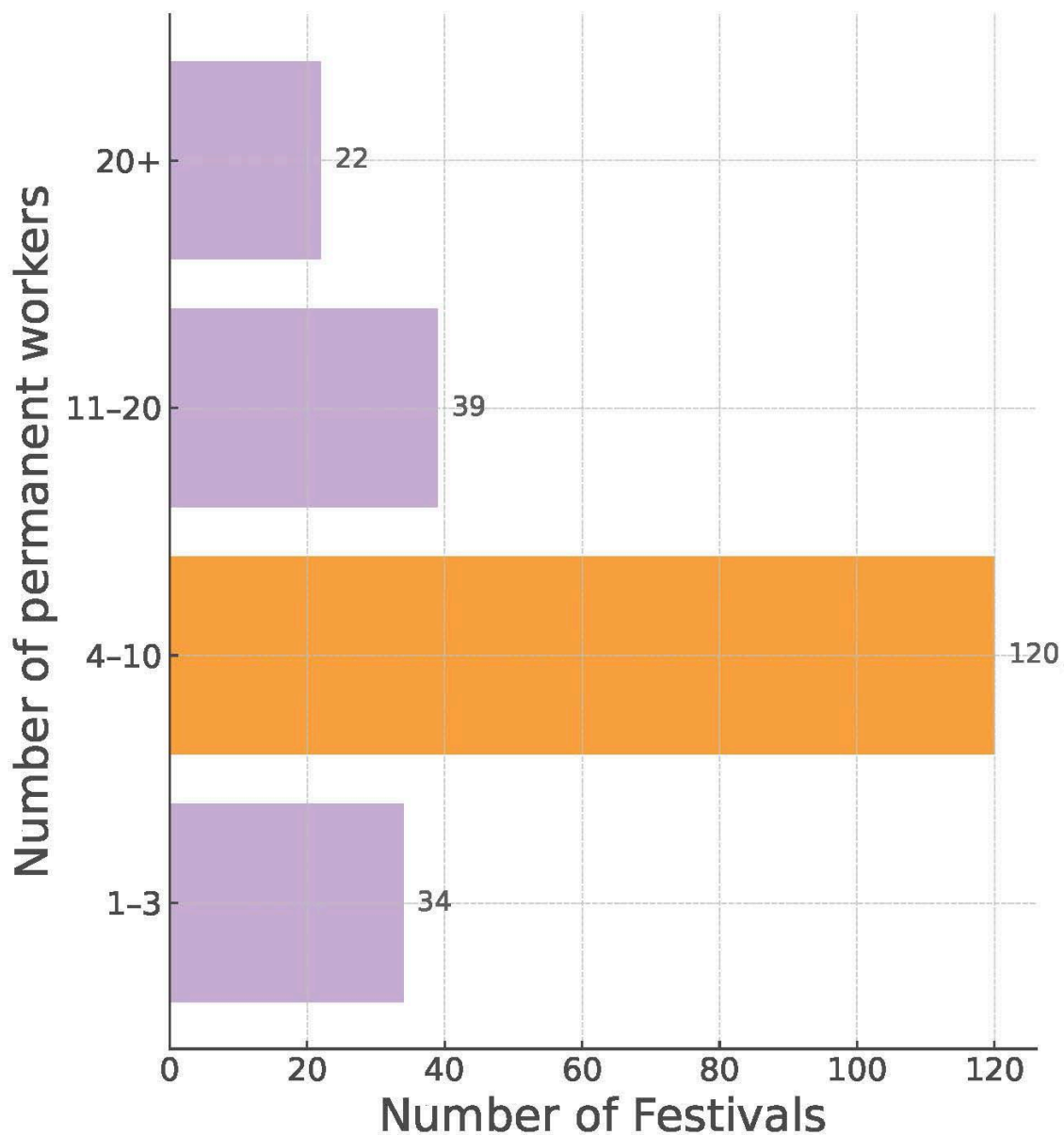
Finally, **10%** of festivals report having teams of **more than 20 people**. These events represent the most institutionalised segment of the ecosystem, with the capacity to support large numbers of attendees, multiple venues, and strategic alliances with cultural institutions or private sponsors. They are also the ones that contribute the most to direct cultural employment and, in many cases, set the professionalisation standards for the rest of the sector. It should be noted that the groups with the largest staff also organise **other events (photographic or not) and activities (such as museums, publishing houses, and schools)**, and it is here that it is most difficult to determine the actual number of team hours allocated to each project. However, their numerical weight remains a minority, indicating that most photography festivals continue to operate within medium- or small-scale structures.

Overall, this panorama reveals **an unstable balance between professionalisation and precariousness**. While one part of the ecosystem has managed to consolidate itself, another continues to depend on the extraordinary efforts of small teams with limited resources. **Medium- and long-term sustainability cannot be separated from the ability to strengthen organisational structures**. Ensuring



adequate funding, fostering professionalisation, and creating collaborative networks between festivals are essential conditions for ensuring that the human capital supporting these projects can do so under dignified, stable, and future-facing conditions.

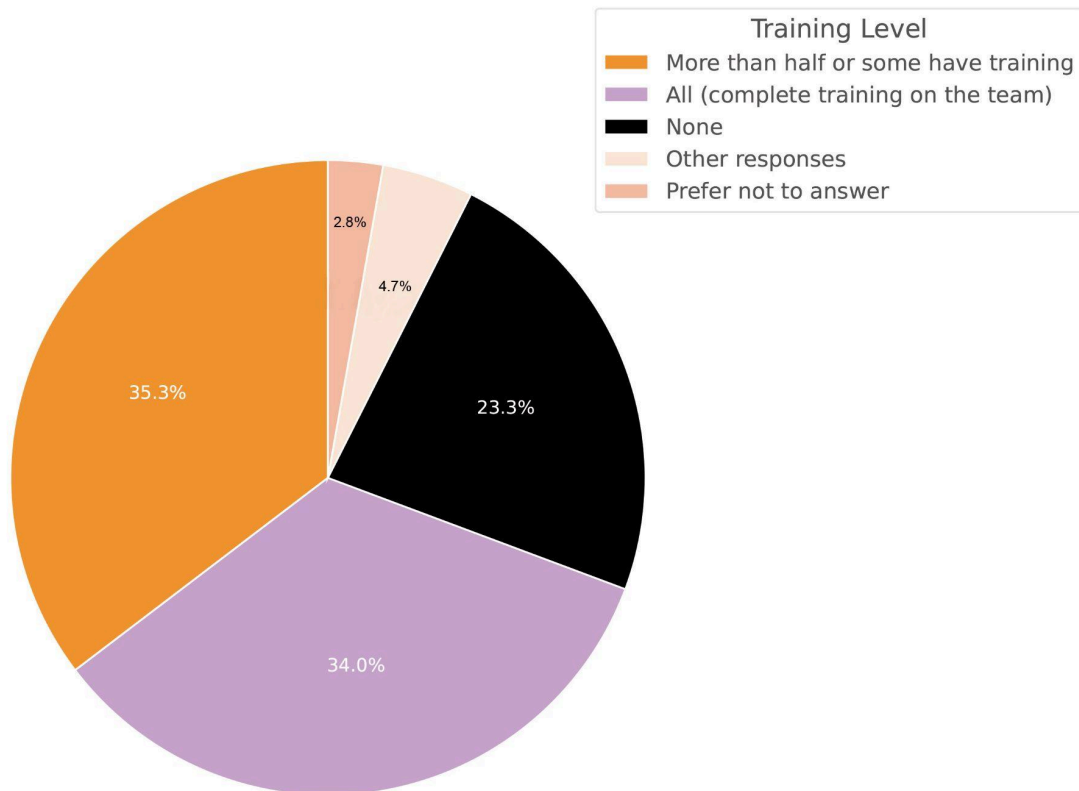
How many people work at the festivals?





b) Training of workers

Team training in cultural management



The quality and sustainability of a photography festival do not depend solely on its programming or financial resources: they are also directly linked to **the preparation, experience, and capabilities of the human teams driving them**. For this reason, one of the key questions in this research was to understand the level of specific training in cultural management among those who organise photography festivals around the world.

The data reveals **an encouraging picture in terms of professionalisation**: 73 festivals — **33%** of the sample — report that **their entire team has specific training in cultural management**. Added to this are another 76 festivals (35% of the cases), where **more than half of the team or at least some members have training in the field**, indicating a sector that, for the most part, has understood the need to acquire technical tools to plan, implement, and sustain their projects over time.



However, not the entire ecosystem follows this logic. **A total of 23% (50 festivals) state that none of their members have formal training in cultural management.** Far from being alarming in itself, this finding opens the door to a reflection on the different organisational models that coexist within the sector. In many cases, these are self-managed, community-based festivals or initiatives developed by artistic collectives that prioritise experience, situated practice, and empirical knowledge over academic certification. It may also reflect **geographic, linguistic, and economic inequalities in access to specialised training programs**, particularly in regions where cultural policies are weak or nonexistent.

To this we must add 6 festivals that chose not to answer this question and another 10 whose responses could not be classified within the proposed categories. **The low proportion of omitted answers suggests a widespread awareness of the relevance of this dimension**, even among those who lack formal training but see themselves as legitimate cultural agents.

However, **having training in cultural management is not the same as knowing how to organise a festival.** Cultural management, as an academic discipline, tends to emphasise theoretical frameworks, public policies, institutional history, or the economics of culture. Yet the reality of a contemporary photography festival demands a much broader — and at the same time more specific — skill set: from curating in non-conventional spaces to international logistics, coordinating cross-functional teams, designing audience experiences, working with emerging artists, managing social media, ensuring mixed financial sustainability, or engaging in community mediation. **Many of these skills are not covered in traditional university programs.**

c) Conclusions: is it time for a specific training?

By crossing both axes — **team size and training** — it becomes clear that the photography festival ecosystem is largely sustained by **small yet qualified teams**, typically composed of 4 to 10 people who, in many cases, have professional training in cultural management. **This hybrid model of professionalisation and flexibility appears to be the norm, reflecting the artisanal, human capital-intensive, and relationship-driven nature of most of these festivals.**

However, the significant presence of festivals without specialised training or with very small teams presents **important structural challenges**: long-term sustainability, risk of burnout, dependence on key individuals, limited generational turnover in some



cases, restricted resources that prevent the consolidation of more stable structures, and constraints in developing stronger management models. This diagnosis points to **the need for public policies, support networks, and training programs that strengthen the management capacities of festival teams — particularly in emerging festivals or those located in regions with less access to resources.** In this context, strengthening training, fostering collaborative networks, and ensuring adequate public support are not only desirable strategies, but **necessary conditions for long-term sustainability.**

The data collected open the door to **a critical reflection on cultural management training** as it currently exists. While a significant portion of organizing teams comes from the field of cultural management, the day-to-day reality of a photography festival **presents complex challenges that often go beyond the content of traditional academic programs.** This situation invites us to **reconsider whether current training models** are sufficient, or whether there is a need to move towards more specialised approaches focused on the particularities of organizing cultural festivals — and specifically, photography festivals. Such training would allow for a more coherent articulation of knowledge that is currently acquired in a scattered or empirical way, and **would provide tools adapted to the demands of a sector operating in increasingly global, diverse, and changing contexts.**

In this context, the sector faces a **training paradox:** although there is growing awareness of the need for professionalisation, the available educational frameworks do not always succeed in keeping pace with the real transformations occurring in the field. Thus, **the development of specific programs should not be seen as a devaluation of self-taught or community-based trajectories, but rather as an opportunity to complement and strengthen this diversity of knowledge.** Investing in specialised training would contribute not only to improving the quality and sustainability of festivals but also to **dignifying the work of those who make them possible,** by providing them with greater strategic tools and a stronger international outlook. **Training competent teams is, ultimately, a commitment to cultural justice and to a more equitable and resilient ecosystem.**

Based on this reflection, **at IPFA we believe that the time has come to take a collective first step toward systematically sharing and transmitting all the knowledge accumulated over the years by hundreds of people who have created and sustained festivals in very diverse contexts.** Although we are not in a position to



offer professional training in the academic sense, we do want to begin building a **horizontal space for peer-to-peer learning, where empirical knowledge, everyday strategies, mistakes, and successes can be shared openly.** This initiative aims to democratise organisational knowledge, generate networks of mutual support, and begin to outline — together — a collective map of the specific skills that can only be acquired through the experience of organizing festivals. Our goal is not to impose a single model, but to foster an intergenerational learning community in which those with more experience can support those just starting out, and where shared challenges can be met with collective solutions. This commitment to practice-based, peer-led training may become **a key tool for strengthening the global ecosystem and opening up new possibilities for sustainability and growth for all the festivals that are part of it.**



5) Economic Remuneration and Sustainability

One of the least visible — yet most structural — aspects in the functioning of photography festivals is the **distribution of financial resources between the necessary human resources: the organizing teams and the participating artists**. Most independent festivals operate with tight budgets and a strong reliance on volunteer work, self-funding, or unstable public funding calls. In this context, **the research indicates that priority is often given to compensating invited artists**, which creates a paradox: **the workers who make the festival possible frequently end up without a decent salary, without a stable contract, or even without any remuneration at all**. At IPFA, we believe this logic must be re-examined. **Fair and sustained payment for management teams does not compete with artists' rights — it guarantees them**. A festival with stable, qualified, and well-compensated staff is one that can grow, improve its programming, expand its audiences, negotiate better terms with institutions and sponsors, and build stronger international networks of collaboration. In other words, **better conditions for the team create better conditions for the artists**.

Investing in the professionalisation and fair remuneration of organizing staff is not an ancillary expense, but a **structural investment in the sustainability of the cultural ecosystem**. Recognizing that cultural managers are also creative workers — with rights and needs — is essential to ensuring that festivals are not spaces of precarity, but **living, transformative platforms for contemporary photography**.

a) Workers

The economic remuneration of the organizing team is one of the most sensitive aspects of the structure of photography festivals — and one of the least discussed. The results of the study reflect a **significant disparity** between those who are able to maintain more stable labour models and those who rely almost entirely on unpaid work. While **39%** of respondents report that their **entire team receives financial compensation** — suggesting a degree of consolidation and professionalisation — this figure is offset by another **36% who state that only part of the team is remunerated**. This reveals an intermediate situation in which professional roles coexist with tasks carried out due to personal commitment, cultural activism, or a lack of sustainable alternatives.

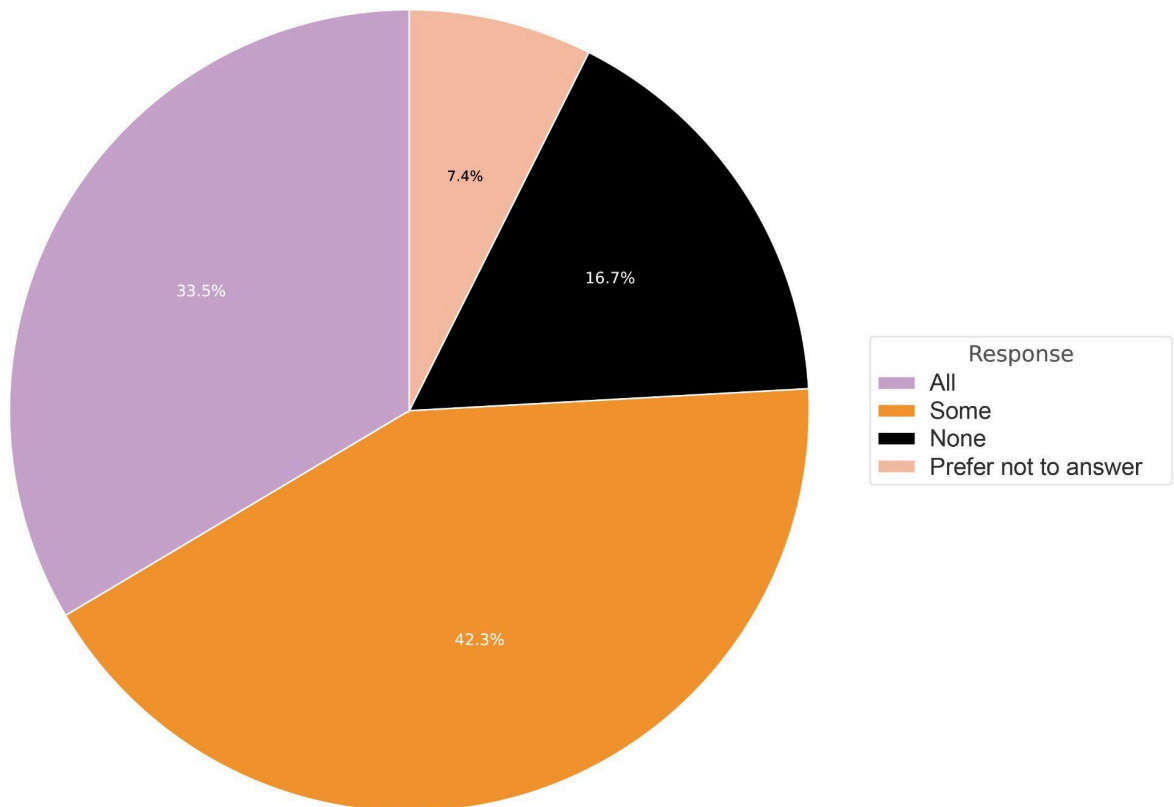


Even more concerning is the fact that **23% of festivals do not remunerate any of their members. Far from being anecdotal, this figure points to a widespread model of structural precarisation**, often normalised within the cultural sector. While some may justify this on the basis of being an emerging festival or community-based initiatives, the complete lack of financial compensation for those who sustain festivals year after year puts their continuity, quality, and social impact at risk. In this context, **unequal access to financial resources** becomes a decisive factor. Those with access to public funding, institutional partnerships, or sponsorship networks are able to maintain more professional structures. In contrast, self-managed festivals or those located in geographic areas with limited cultural support must rely on systematic volunteer work — a model that can lead to **burnout, demotivation among teams, and, ultimately, the closure of festivals.**

In light of this situation, we believe that **fair remuneration for organising teams should not be seen as a privilege, but as an essential condition for the sustainability of festivals.** Ensuring decent working conditions strengthens those who make these spaces possible and amplifies their impact on artists, audiences, and institutions. Investing in teams is not a threat to art — this guarantees it. While we recognise that achieving equitable compensation for everyone can be challenging in the early stages, it is both possible and necessary to **design proportional remuneration structures in which both artists and workers are treated equally.** This equality is not defined solely by absolute amounts, but by the recognition that all actors involved deserve to be valued on equal terms.



Economic remuneration of the organising team



b) Artists

The financial remuneration of **artists, authors, speakers, or curators** in photography festivals is a key issue for understanding both the model of cultural sustainability and the ethical positioning of these events. The data analysis reveals a mixed landscape, where **professional practices coexist with models still based on the precarisation of artistic labour.**

In quantitative terms, **the largest group (42.3%) consists of festivals that pay only some of their artists or curators.** This reality reveals a structural imbalance: while the criteria used to determine financial compensation may vary (career trajectory, role, available funding), the outcome is **an internal hierarchy that is precariously a part of the cultural ecosystem. Often, those who do not receive remuneration are emerging artists or artists from peripheral regions, reproducing already existing dynamics of exclusion.** On the other hand, **33.5% of festivals report paying fees to**



all participants involved in the artistic program without making distinctions. Although this figure is encouraging, it remains a minority compared to the total number of festivals that pay only some or none. This data reflects, at least in part, a sector-wide desire to build more equitable and horizontal relationships with creators — where their time, talent, and contributions are fairly compensated.

Alarming, **16.7% of festivals report not paying fees to any of their artists.** This figure cannot be interpreted solely as a budgetary issue; it also reflects cultural models that have yet to internalise the centrality of artistic labour within the cultural value chain. In a global context where the professionalisation of the creative sector is a pressing goal, the absence of artist fees — even if minimal or symbolic — **undermines the legitimacy and sustainability of festivals.** Finally, the **7.4% who chose not to answer this question** can be interpreted as a zone of uncertainty or a sign of internal lack of clarity. In many cases, these may be festivals that have not yet formalised their economic structures or that prefer not to disclose practices they themselves recognise as problematic.

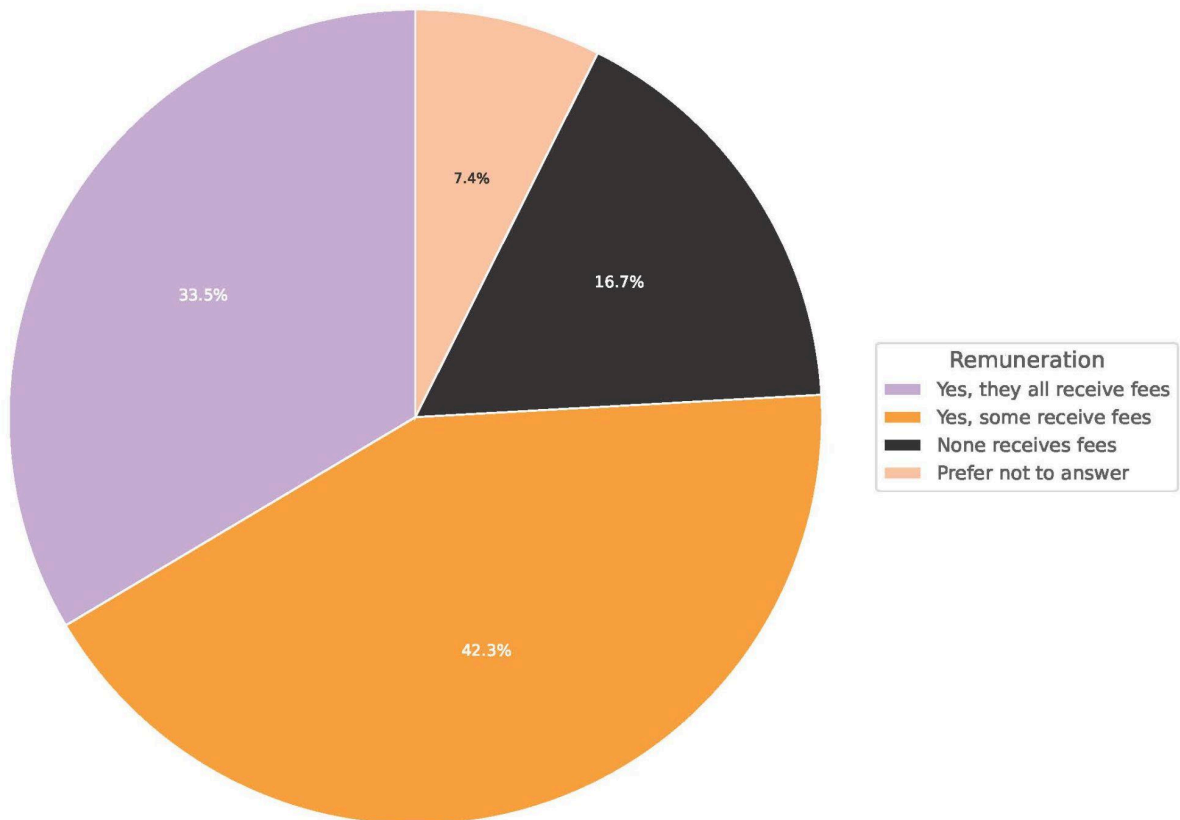
The fact that 42.3% of festivals report paying only some of their artists or curators reveals a widespread practice of individualised contracting which, far from adhering to standardised equity criteria (such as harmonised fee scales), **perpetuates inequalities within the cultural ecosystem.** In this model, remuneration largely depends on the prestige or negotiating power of each artist, resulting in scenarios where **a well-known name may earn double or triple what an emerging creator receives for participating in the same event.** In the medium and long term, this dynamic fosters an insular circuit in which the same names circulate through all festivals, while new voices are pushed to the symbolic margins — often without any remuneration at all.

In light of this scenario, it is essential that festivals **commit to genuine openness and equity.** **Having open calls** is not enough if they are used to select only a small fraction of the exhibitions. A substantial — and preferably majority — portion of the program must come from these public calls, managed in a transparent and accessible manner. Only then can festivals guarantee a space for international circulation and representation for artists from diverse backgrounds, regions, and perspectives, promoting true diversity in content and strengthening a fairer, more dynamic, and more representative ecosystem. **Committing to this model is not only an ethical imperative, but also a vital strategy for the renewal and long-term relevance of photography festivals.** It is crucial to implement equal access pathways for all artists — where each and every one of them receives the same remuneration for their work. **This also means that all workers are paid equally and that all artists are**



compensated equally, without distinctions or hierarchies among them. Only then can we build festivals that are more just, inclusive, and sustainable over time.

Economic remuneration of the invited artists



c) Conclusions: A Snapshot of Imbalance

A detailed analysis of the data reveals a widespread perception that **artists receive higher compensation per hour worked than festival staff**, with 35.8% of respondents selecting this option. This figure is nearly double that of festivals that believe organisers are paid more (15.8%). This perception may be linked to the structural conditions of festivals, where fees for artists — especially well-established ones — tend to be concentrated in specific activities (talks, exhibitions, workshops),



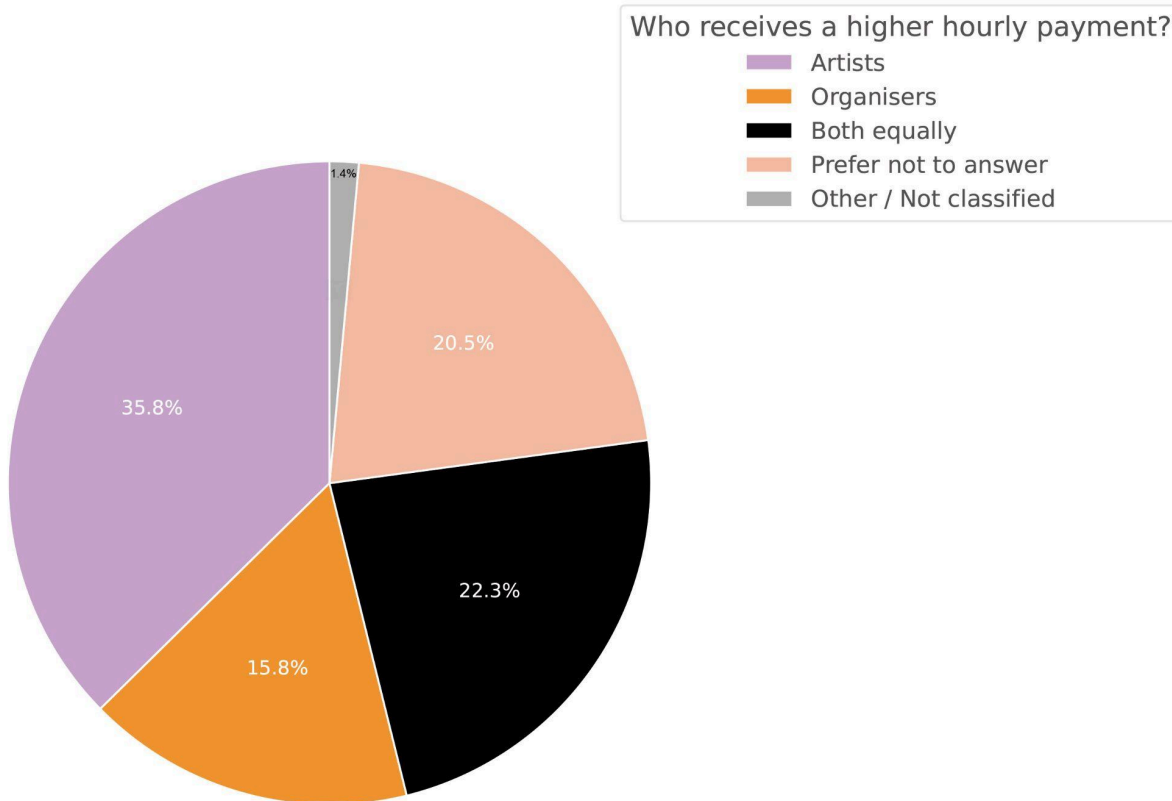
while **organisers carry out months of preparatory work that is less visible and less compensated.**

On the other hand, **22.3%** report that **both groups receive the same compensation**, which suggests efforts to establish more equitable models — or at least the perception that the balance is fairly distributed. This trend may indicate that some festivals are beginning to adopt **more transparent or symmetrical salary structures between creators and managers, representing an important step toward greater professionalisation within the sector.**

It is also noteworthy that **20.5%** of responses selected “**Prefer not to answer.**” This relatively high rate of statistical silence can be interpreted in various ways: from a lack of precise data, to a reluctance to disclose internal inequalities, to the absence of hourly compensation as a standard metric. **This underscores the urgent need to establish clearer standards for remuneration and transparent criteria within photography festivals.** Taken together, this distribution of responses reveals a persistent tension between the ideal — fair and equitable compensation for all cultural agents — and the operational reality, where imbalances and a lack of standardised remuneration practices still prevail.



Who receives a higher hourly payment?



The first notable finding is that **the majority of festivals do remunerate their organizing teams in some way**: a total of 71.2% report that all or some team members receive compensation. However, the fact that **over 23% do not pay their teams** at all reveals a structural fragility — many festivals are being sustained through **unpaid, informal, or volunteer labour** during the production, planning, and management phases.

In contrast, **artists have slightly higher access to remuneration**, with 78.1% of festivals stating they pay all or some of them. While this might seem positive from the perspective of supporting artistic creation, the key detail lies in the fact that **42.3% of festivals pay only “some” of their artists**. This reveals that **individual contracts dominate the system**, where established artists negotiate better conditions while emerging ones often participate without pay. As previously discussed, this practice **reproduces systemic inequalities and restricts democratic access to exhibition spaces**.



The third level of analysis — **remuneration per hour** — adds a crucial dimension: it is not only a question of whether people are paid, but of how much and how the time and labour involved are valued. Here, the majority perception is that **artists earn more per hour than organisers**. While this view could be interpreted as a sign of appreciation for artistic practice, it also reveals a systemic imbalance: **whereas artists typically contribute at specific moments, organising teams often work for months with little or no income**. We must make our work visible so that it can be valued socially and economically, just as artistic work is. Monetary recognition rarely reflects the time, emotional burden, or complexity involved in cultural production.

This reality presents a clear urgency: **we must rethink working conditions within the festival ecosystem by establishing ethical remuneration frameworks that ensure the sustainability of those who make festivals possible**. Reinforcing the value of organisational work does not mean taking space away from artists; on the contrary, it means consolidating a system in which professionalisation becomes the norm for all parties involved. Only then will festivals be able to grow as fair, inclusive, and socially influential platforms, capable of building culture through equity. There is an **urgent need to establish clear ethical and wage standards** across the ecosystem, where **the professionalisation of all actors is a priority**, not an exception.



6) Activities: 18,000 each year

The activities that make up a festival's programme not only define its identity, but also its capacity for cultural, social, and professional impact. In this section, we analyse three key dimensions that help us understand how contemporary photography festivals are structured: **the types of activities they offer, the total number carried out during their most recent edition, and finally, the overall length of the programme and any additional activities organised beyond the main event throughout the year.**

This comprehensive approach allows us to identify prevailing curatorial and educational trends, as well as different levels of institutionalisation or growth. While some festivals remain concentrated within a few days and focus on core activities such as exhibitions, workshops, or talks, others are moving towards broader models that incorporate year-round training programmes, residencies, fairs, screenings, open calls, or community-based initiatives. **Observing this diverse ecosystem helps us not only to better understand the current state of festivals, but also to envision future models of management and sustainability.**

a) Type of Activity

Based on the update, we can confirm that the **most common activity at photography festivals remains the photographic exhibition**, with **211 out of 215 festivals** reporting it, that is, **over 95%**. This consolidates its position as **the symbolic and material core of photography festivals**, even within a contemporary context marked by format diversification. Exceptions are still found in **photobook fairs and specialised gatherings**, which tend to prioritise alternative forms of display such as stands or presentations. However, the printed image on the wall **continues to hold central cultural legitimacy** within this ecosystem.

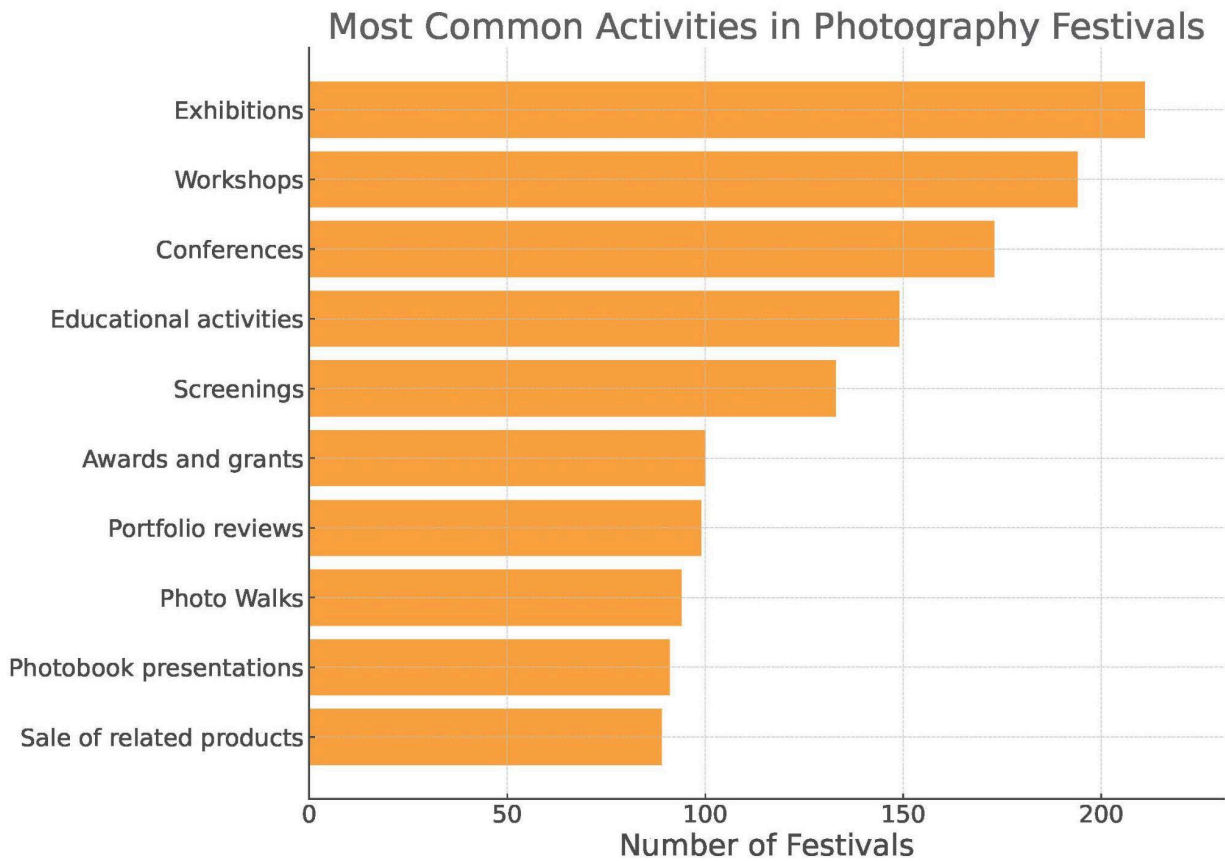
Complementing this exhibition dimension is a **wide range of educational and participatory practices**. **194 festivals** (88%) offer **workshops**, **173** include **conferences**, and **99** carry out **portfolio reviews**. These figures reflect a **clear commitment by organisers to foster knowledge sharing**, peer exchange, and professional growth within the sector. This set of activities transforms the festival into a **pedagogical platform for reflection and professionalisation**, not just a showcase for images. Likewise, **collective and participatory activities** are strongly represented: **133 festivals include screenings**, **94** organise **photo walks**, and **91** host **photobook**



presentations. These formats help **bring photography closer to everyday life**, promoting **immersive, social, and community-based experiences.**

On another front, **the sale of related products (89) and the awarding of prizes and grants (100)** reflect a **growing professionalisation** and an increasing concern with **creative sector economies.** These aspects also signal a shift towards **economically sustainable models** that complement the festivals' artistic and educational missions. Taken together, the **breadth of activities** recorded in this study suggests that photography festivals are **embracing an interdisciplinary role**, functioning as **sites of convergence for art, education, economy, cultural participation, and social rights.**

This data reveals a photography festival ecosystem in full expansion and diversification. **Traditional exhibitions remain a fundamental pillar**, but they are now accompanied by **a dynamic array of activities focused on education, social interaction, sustainability, and civic engagement.** This panorama highlights the **sector's growing maturity**, not only celebrating the image but also **using it as a tool to build community, stimulate critical thinking, and spark cultural transformation.** Looking ahead, it will be essential to **strengthen management structures, ensure fair and accessible working conditions, and maintain inclusive and plural programming** that rises to the challenges of the contemporary world.



b) Amount of activities

The data regarding the number of activities carried out by photography festivals in their most recent edition provides a revealing insight into the organisational capacity and resources of the surveyed events. With **61.4% delivering between 1 and 15 activities**, it is clear that the majority of these festivals operate with limited structures — both in terms of staffing and budget. This segment likely consists of emerging festivals, independent initiatives, or community-driven events that **prioritise operational sustainability over programme expansion**.

The second largest group, comprising **21.9% of festivals offering between 16 and 30 activities**, represents those in an intermediate stage of development. These events already exhibit greater complexity in their programming, are likely supported by larger teams, and are in a phase of consolidation. This category often includes festivals that have achieved a certain level of recognition and, **thanks to institutional support or a solid production framework, can diversify their range of activities**.

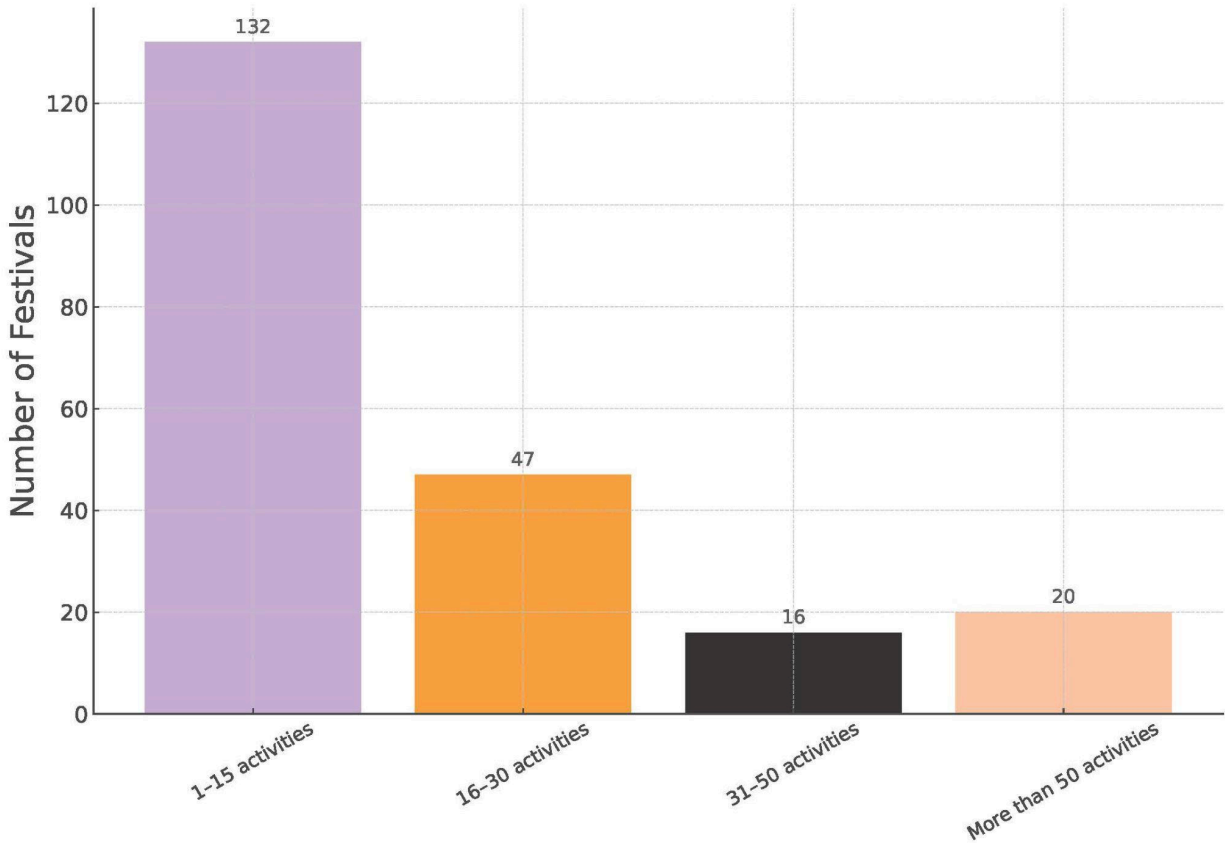


At the other end of the spectrum, only **9.3% of festivals organised more than 50 activities**. This small group reflects the **limited number of festivals with significant international visibility, large professional teams, and robust funding – capable of operating over several weeks or even months**, with simultaneous programming across multiple venues. These festivals function as true cultural hubs and reference platforms for photography, with the ability to generate media impact and attract both specialised and general audiences.

The reflection that emerges from this distribution is twofold. On the one hand, it demonstrates the vitality and diversity of the photography festival ecosystem, where micro-events coexist alongside complex organisational structures. On the other hand, it poses a clear challenge in terms of equity and sustainability: **if more than 60% of festivals do not exceed 15 activities** (within an average programming period of 31 days), **it becomes essential to develop support policies that allow these festivals to grow their activities without compromising their identity or exhausting their resources**.



Number of activities carried out in the last edition by each festival



The estimated average number of **activities** organised by festivals in their most recent edition is approximately **18**. If we take as a reference an estimated **1,000 active festivals worldwide**, we would be looking at around **18,000 photographic activities held annually** within the framework of festivals. This figure includes exhibitions, talks, workshops, panel discussions, portfolio reviews, competitions, awards, photo walks, guided tours, and other formats that form part of standard programming.

Among these activities, **exhibitions** represent a fundamental component, both in terms of quantity and significance. Although this number is an approximation, exhibitions can be considered to account for at least **30% to 50%** of the overall programme, depending on the festival's focus. Beyond their numerical proportion, their **symbolic and logistical weight is significantly greater**: exhibitions require investment in production, installation, transport, and insurance, and they tend to be the



main attraction for both general and specialised audiences. Based on the data gathered in this study, the **215 respondents** report approximately **913 exhibitions per year**. Extrapolating this ratio, **1,000 festivals** would generate around **4,250 photographic exhibitions annually worldwide**. This level of output reveals an enormous potential in terms of **artist visibility**, circulation of work, and public access to contemporary visual culture.

This scale also presents significant challenges. The number of exhibitions produced annually by festivals **requires strategies for sustainability, cooperation, and collective intelligence**. In order to reduce costs, avoid duplication, and minimise ecological impact, it would be desirable to promote touring exhibitions, international co-productions, and the reuse of curatorial content. This collaborative dimension not only optimises resources, but can also enrich programming, broaden audiences, and help consolidate more equitable and resilient cultural networks.

Beyond exhibitions, there is an urgent need to rethink not only the duration of the festival but also the density and diversity of its programme. A festival **reporting 15 activities** over an average period of 31 days **may appear dynamic** in numerical terms, but when breaking down the figure, it often reveals a minimal structure: for example, **8 exhibitions, 4 guided tours, one book presentation, and two workshops**. While these activities are valuable, their reach may be limited when aiming for sustained audience engagement, territorial outreach, or meaningful educational offerings. **Increasing the number and variety of activities — without compromising curatorial coherence, overburdening the team, or exceeding available resources — could have a multiplying effect in terms of cultural and social impact**, particularly in contexts where festivals represent one of the few active platforms for photographic dissemination.

In this regard, a potential model could be a festival that manages to deliver at least **30 activities over 30 days**, distributed across various formats and levels of participation. This might include around **10 exhibitions, 10 training workshops, 4 open talks, one portfolio review, 2 screenings or photobook presentations, 2 photo walks, a fair or market for selling artwork and merchandise, and an award for emerging artists**. Such diversity not only broadens participation opportunities, but also enables different audiences — professionals, students, local residents, collectors, the curious — to find their place within the festival. **By combining artistic production, mediation, market engagement, and education, a more robust, appealing, and sustainable ecosystem is created**.

The number of activities should not be seen as the sole indicator of success, but it can serve as a useful barometer of available resources and the potential impact of



the event on its communities. For this reason, **it is important to foster collaborative environments, support networks, and public policies that recognise the social function of all festivals — regardless of their size.**

c) Activities during the festival

The duration of photography festivals is a key indicator for understanding their organisational model, cultural ambition, and relationship with the territories in which they take place. The data collected in this research reveal that **the average duration is 31 days**, reflecting a clear trend towards **month-long formats**. This average indicates that the concept of a “festival” does not correspond solely to the logic of a weekend or short-term gathering, but in many cases functions as a platform extended over time — offering long-running exhibitions, cycles of educational activities, or events spread out across several weeks.

However, the diversity in duration is striking. Responses range from extremely brief festivals — such as three cases with only a **1-day programme** — to one exceptional case reporting a **duration of 365 days**, which could be interpreted either as an input error or as the manifestation of an institutionalised model in which the festival operates as a permanent programming entity. Similarly, **4 out of 215 festivals reported durations between 90 and 120 days**, which likely points to long-term exhibitions, extended activity cycles, or **hybrid structures between a festival and a cultural centre**. This wide spectrum of durations reveals that, beyond a single definition, **the concept of a photography festival encompasses multiple temporal formats.**

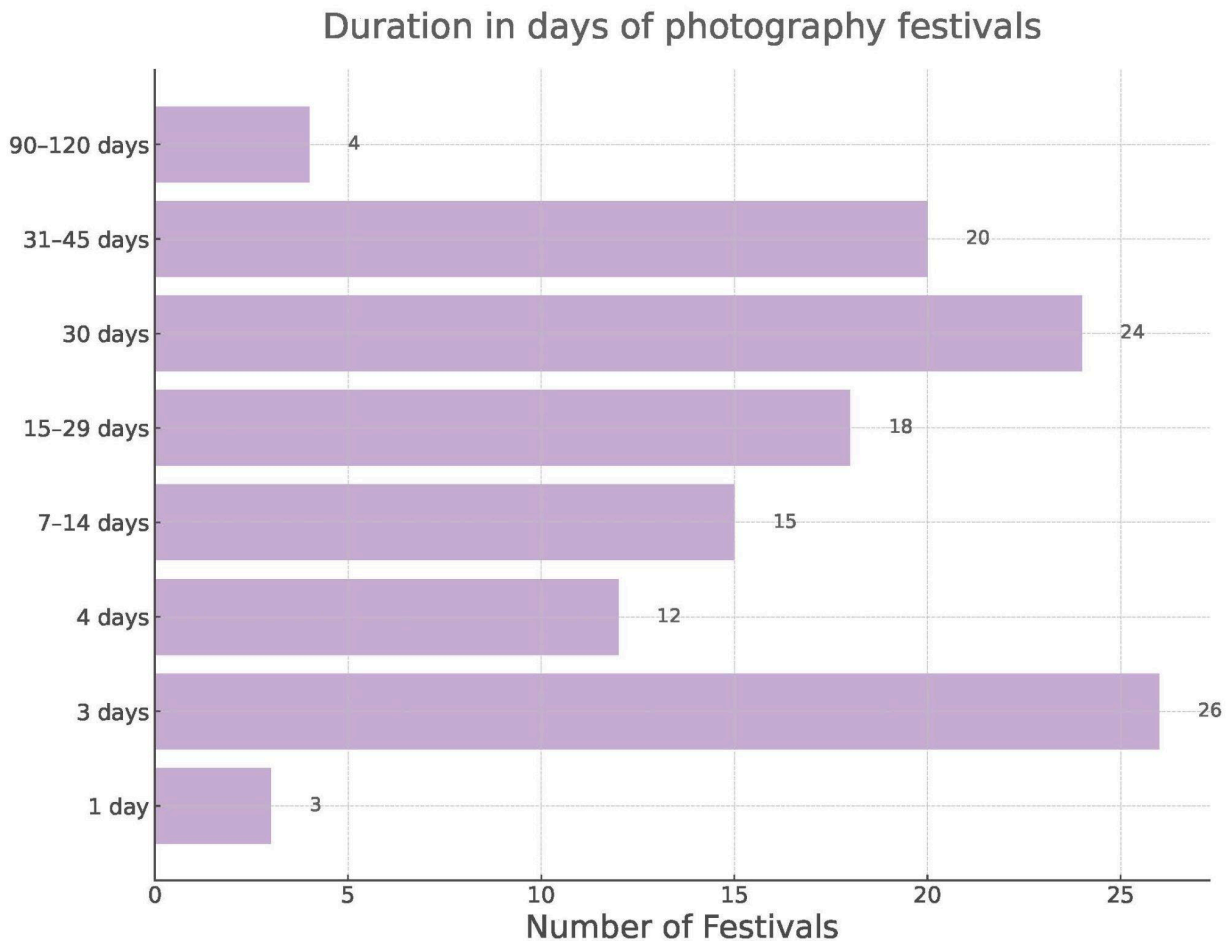
In this context, it is essential to examine the **modes of concentration and expansion** that coexist within the sector. **The most frequently reported duration is 3–4 days**, chosen by **38 festivals**, pointing to a compact, **weekend-focused** model. This is followed by the **30-day format (24 cases)**, indicating a month-long model with activities extended over time. This **bimodality reveals two distinct strategies**: on the one hand, those that concentrate their efforts into a few days to generate impact, visibility, and momentum; and on the other, those that opt for a **sustained presence**, with activities unfolding in parallel, targeting diverse audiences and placing greater emphasis on the visitor experience, mediation, and territorial engagement. Among those indicating a one-month duration, both **concentration and extension** models coexist: activities are typically concentrated on weekends — when audiences are more available to attend — while exhibitions remain open throughout the entire month.



Between these two extremes, a robust intermediate range can be observed, with a **significant number of festivals lasting between 7 and 14 days** (15 cases), and **between 30 and 45 days** (20 cases). This range appears to offer a suitable balance between cultural impact and operational sustainability. It allows for **the attraction of different audience types** — local, national, and even tourist — while enabling a richer and more varied programme. In these cases, it is common to find a combination of exhibition openings, workshops, talks, guided tours, community actions, and professional gatherings, allowing for a **more solid and diverse proposal, even when human resources and budgets remain limited**.

From a sustainability perspective, **the duration of a festival has a significant impact on its management model**. The longer the event, the greater the need for **stable funding, a professionalised team, and long-term planning**. A festival that runs for one or two months requires more robust structures, greater team commitment, and strategic partnerships to sustain its programming. In contrast, **shorter festivals can operate with fewer resources**, greater flexibility, and smaller teams who may collaborate during their free time or holidays — but they have less opportunity to build lasting connections with their communities or to generate a symbolic legacy. Duration, therefore, is not merely a logistical decision but a strategic one: **it defines the kind of relationship the festival establishes with its audiences, with its surroundings, and with itself**.

Finally, the analysis shows that **there is no single ideal duration**; rather, the international ecosystem of photography festivals is characterised by a **high degree of adaptability to specific contexts, operational capacities, and curatorial objectives**. The average of 31 days should not be interpreted as a normative standard, but as evidence of a growing trend towards **hybrid models that combine intensive moments with extended periods of exhibition or activity**. This flexibility is a **strength of the sector**, but it also highlights the need to **design differentiated support policies**, evaluation indicators tailored to each type of duration, and sustainability frameworks that take into account the specificities of each format. Ultimately, duration is a reflection of a festival's cultural vision and its ability to transform time into shared experience.



d) Year-round activities: A still-emerging practice

This question, introduced to examine the consolidation of festivals and their potential for replication, yielded highly significant results. Of the 215 participants, **only 28% — 60 festivals — provided** a quantifiable response to this question and, therefore, reported organising **activities outside of their main event**, which is in itself revealing: **the majority of photography festivals (72%) do not organise any activities beyond the specific moment of celebration.**

Among the 60 festivals that did respond with concrete figures, **the annual average number of programmed days with activities** outside the main event is **37**, while the **median** is **20 days**. In other words, half of those that do carry out year-round activities schedule fewer than 20 days annually, and the other half schedule more. The range is quite broad, with responses varying from just **2 days** to a maximum of **250**



days per year. The latter figure corresponds to **festivals with a strong institutional vocation, those with permanent physical venues**, or initiatives that combine the main event with **schools, galleries, residencies, or continuous training programmes**. At the opposite end, some festivals only carry out one or two complementary activities per year, such as a **touring exhibition, a book launch, or a specific workshop**.

These data also suggest a structural tension between two models: the **festival-as-event**, generally driven by volunteers or small teams operating with high intensity over a short period; and the **festival-as-institution**, which begins to function more like a **cultural centre** with continuous programming or as a **school** offering courses throughout the year. Most of those that reach 60 days or more report having permanent venues, stable teams, or strategic partnerships that allow them to maintain activity year-round — something which, as previously discussed, requires greater human, financial, and infrastructural resources.

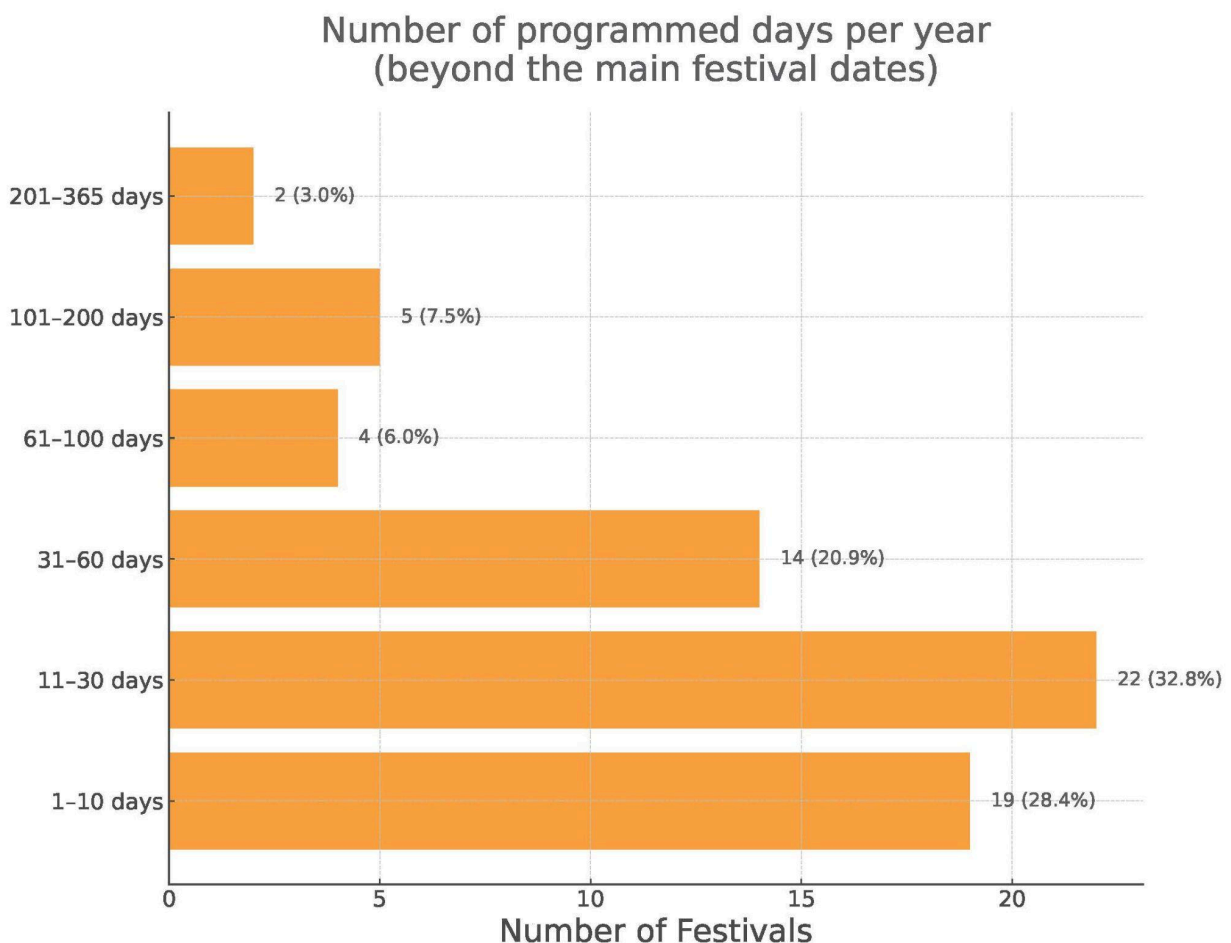
While many festivals are moving towards greater professionalisation with a desire for territorial impact and staff recruitment, the majority still operate according to a time-limited event logic. The lack of year-round activities may stem from multiple factors: budget constraints, the absence of a physical venue, limited staff, reliance on annual grants, or simply a strategic decision to focus on delivering a strong single edition each year. Beyond the figures, this points to a structural challenge within the ecosystem: **the difficulty of maintaining a continuous cultural presence that does not rely solely on the festival period.** If we consider that one of the distinctive values of festivals lies in their ability to foster community, visibility, and learning, **the key question becomes how to reinforce that role during the months when the main event is inactive.** In a global context where audiences increasingly seek closer and more sustained relationships with cultural projects, **diversifying activities throughout the year** can serve not only as a sustainability strategy, but also as **a tool to strengthen connections, broaden audiences, and consolidate working teams.**

Finally, it is important to highlight that this temporal extension of activity does not necessarily mean becoming a permanent institution. Rather, it is about imagining **new forms of continuity**: from thematic cycles to informal gathering spaces, from collaborations with schools and universities to online programmes for mediation or dissemination. The key lies in understanding that a festival is not just an annual event, but **a platform for engaging with its community.** The more that platform succeeds in extending its presence and impact over time, the greater its chances of sustainability, innovation, and cultural relevance. **Continuity can even be achieved simply by**



maintaining a presence on social media throughout the year — sustaining interest, sharing content, and engaging in dialogue with the community, without generating additional costs. Many festivals abandon their social media accounts for months after an edition ends, only returning two or three months before the next one begins to attract attention — a practice that leads to a complete disconnection from digital communities.

In this context, a twofold reflection emerges. On the one hand, there is a clear need to recognise and professionalise organisational work, even within short-duration festivals — which represent the majority. On the other hand, there is an opportunity to **explore hybrid models that preserve the spirit of the festival as a vibrant cultural event, while incorporating ongoing activities, inter-institutional collaborations, or sustained educational initiatives that contribute both to the festival's visibility and to its long-term social and cultural impact.** Ultimately, rethinking temporality may be a strategic key to ensuring future sustainability.





d) Conclusions: Programming is not only about offering activities, but about building communities

The cross-analysis of the types of activities carried out, their volume in the most recent edition, and programming beyond the main event reveals **a plural and diverse picture of contemporary festivals**. The majority offer a varied range of activities that go beyond exhibitions, incorporating workshops, talks, portfolio reviews, photobook presentations, and screenings. **This diversity reflects a clear intention to engage with different audiences, support the professional development of artists, and provide an educational dimension that positions the festival as a space for thought, training, and community.** At the same time, it demonstrates curatorial maturity and a conscious effort to enrich the experience of both the public and participants.

In terms of the number of activities per edition, a significant majority of festivals — **nearly 70% — continue to operate on a small scale**, offering between 1 and 30 activities. Only a minority reach volumes of more than 50 activities. This limitation may be due to budgetary, logistical, or structural factors, but it also reflects the existence of two operational models: **some with compact programming, possibly more specialised and concentrated; and others with broader, more ambitious, and diversified offerings.** The latter tend to gain greater visibility and establish themselves as international reference points, but they also place increased pressure on production teams.

Finally, the level of activity throughout the rest of the year reveals another important line of differentiation: **only a minority of festivals have a stable programme outside the official days of the event.** Those that do — through touring exhibitions, monthly workshops, activities in cultural centres, or collaborations with other institutions — **manage to remain active as permanent cultural agents within their territories.** This continuity not only expands their social and educational impact, but also **contributes to greater stability for their working teams and affiliated artists.**

Taken together, the data suggest that **although festivals have diversified their programming and seek deeper relationships with their communities**, fragile structures still predominate — sustained by concentrated efforts over a few days and by occasional rather than continuous programming. Promoting models that support both greater year-round stability and an expansion of activities could be key to **consolidating their role as leading cultural institutions, capable of combining local impact with international influence.**



7) Artists, authors, exhibitors and curators: 32,000 the year

Understanding how many **artists, authors, exhibitors, and curators have participated in photography festivals** — both in their most recent edition and throughout their history — allows us to draw a detailed picture of the actual reach of these platforms. These figures reflect not only volume, but also the **capacity to attract participants, openness to new voices, and sustainability over time**. This section aims to analyse in detail both current and historical data on artistic participation, highlighting the dynamics of growth, stagnation, or concentration that may be occurring within the international ecosystem.

Comparing recent participation with cumulative figures across the years also offers insight into the coherence (or lack thereof) between the declared trajectories and the current programming models. **This perspective invites reflection on how the history of festivals is constructed and projected, what space is given to artistic renewal, and what challenges exist to ensure the diverse, broad, and sustainable circulation of the people who make these gatherings possible.**

a) Latest edition

The data reveals that the majority of photography festivals enjoy high levels of artistic participation: **over half (51.8%) featured more than 30 artists, authors, exhibitors, or curators in their most recent edition**. This is a significant figure, as it demonstrates the scale and diversity of proposals that many festivals are able to mobilise — which, in turn, points to a solid organisational structure and a strong network of collaboration within the artistic ecosystem. These types of festivals tend to have extensive programming, including multiple exhibitions, activities, and open calls.

A second significant group (24.5%) brought together between 16 and 30 participants, which also represents a considerable volume and indicates a balance between diversity and operational management. These festivals can be characterised as medium-sized, with a well-structured programme that offers visibility to both established and emerging artists.

In contrast, **20.5% of festivals featured between 6 and 15 artists**, which may indicate smaller, local, or thematically focused events that opt for more concentrated



curatorial approaches or more intimate formats. Finally, **3.2% presented only between 1 and 5 participants**, which could reflect highly specialised festivals, new initiatives, or events focused on solo exhibitions or author-driven projects.

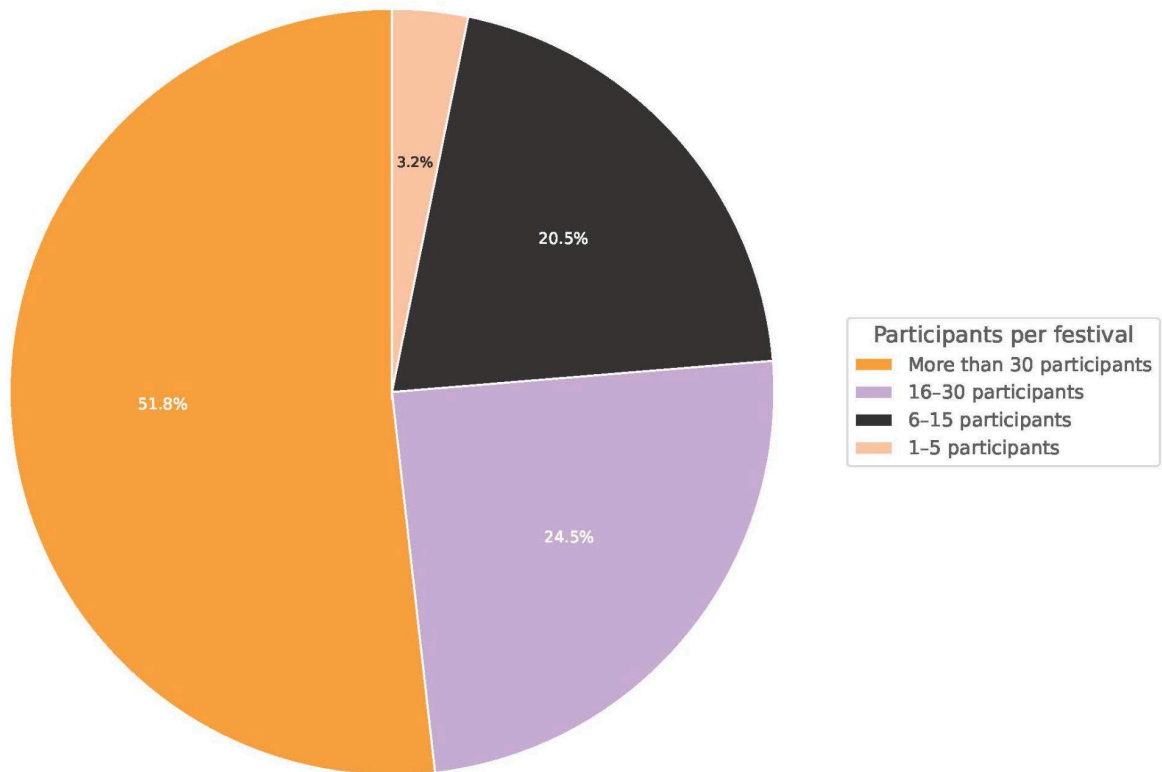
This distribution highlights that photography festivals are not homogeneous: there are various models in terms of scale, management, and reach. Larger festivals offer strong platforms for visibility but also entail greater logistical and financial challenges. Smaller festivals, on the other hand, foster closer relationships between artists, organisers, and audiences, and often serve as spaces for innovation, risk-taking, and experimentation.

Artistic participation is one of the essential driving forces of festivals. According to estimates based on the average responses, each festival hosts between **25 and 40 artists per edition**. When projected onto an approximate base of **1,000 active festivals worldwide**, it is estimated that **around 32,000 artists take part in photography festivals each year**. This figure reflects not only the scale of the sector, but also its strategic role as **a platform for visibility, professional circulation, and cultural validation** for contemporary photographic practices.

However, beyond size, what matters most is that festivals create fair, accessible, and diverse spaces for artists. **High levels of participation should not translate into precarious conditions or invisibility for lesser-known creators.** For this reason, it is crucial that festivals implement open and balanced curatorial policies that provide opportunities for new talent without sacrificing quality or conceptual coherence. In this regard, valuing the number of participants is important, but even more so is **understanding how they are selected, how they are supported, and what role they play within the overall narrative of the event**. In an evolving international landscape, those festivals that succeed in combining scale, diversity, and fairness will be the ones to set the pace for the future.



Number of artists and curators participating per festival
(last edition)



b) Historical

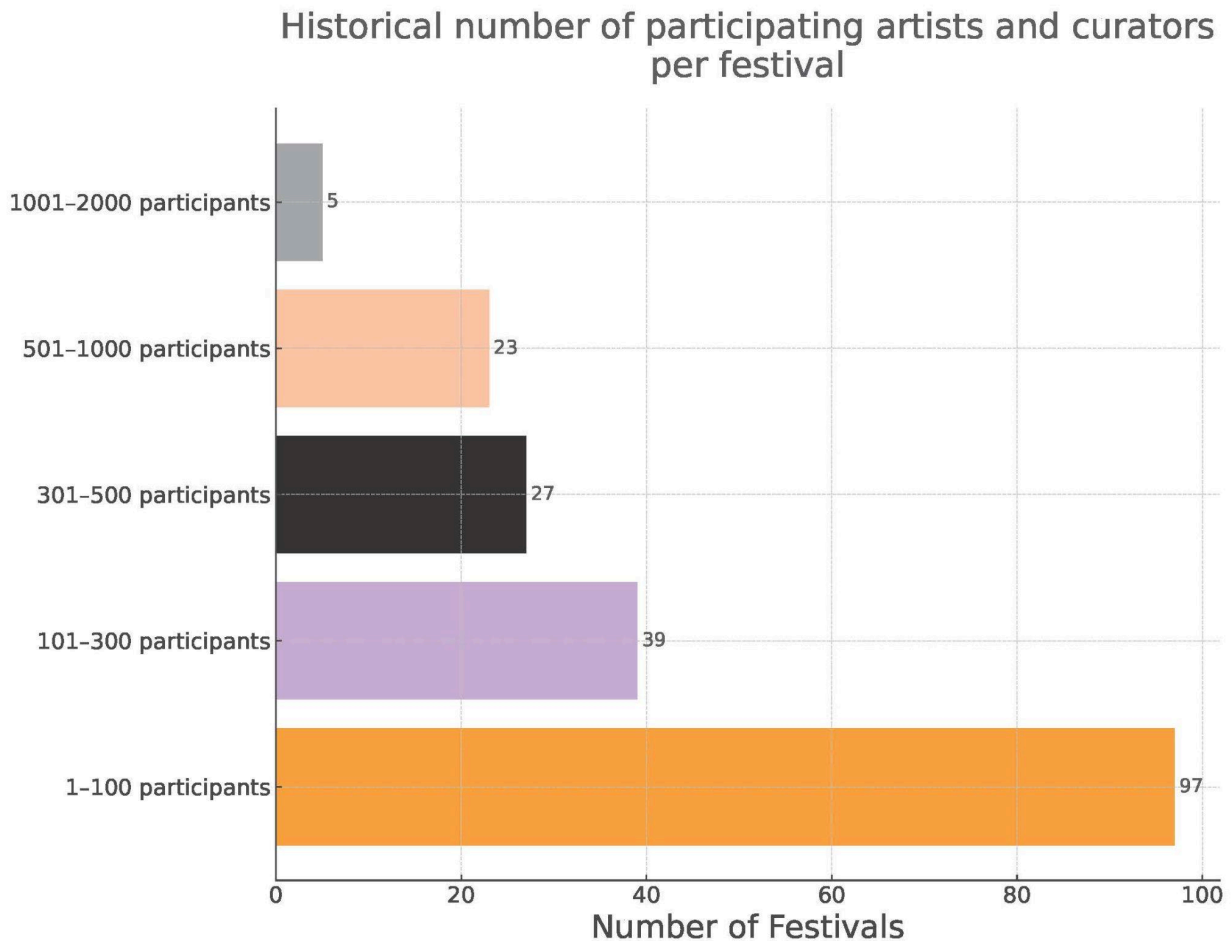
The analysis of the historical participation of artists and professionals in photography festivals helps us to understand both the scale and the evolution of these events over time. Based on responses from the 215 participants, we observe that **the majority (97 cases)** report having hosted **between 1 and 100 artists** throughout their history. Considering that the average lifespan of a festival in our dataset is **13 years**, **this indicates an average of 7.7 artists per year**. This suggests that a large proportion of festivals still operate on a small or medium scale, with recent editions or limited trajectories — which may also reflect budgetary, logistical, or territorial constraints.



At a second level, **39 festivals reported having hosted between 101 and 300 participants**, while **27 registered between 301 and 500 historical participants**. This mid-range group represents a significant segment of the ecosystem that has achieved a certain level of consolidation. These festivals have likely held multiple sustained editions over time, established institutional partnerships, and diversified their programming to include exhibitions, workshops, portfolio reviews, and other collaborative formats.

Those with **a track record of more than 500 participants** are positioned at a more consolidated level: **23 festivals reported between 501 and 1,000 historical participants**, and **a further 5 exceeded 1,000**. This latter group is mainly composed of long-standing festivals (running for more than one or two decades) or those with year-round programming models. In some cases, these operate as international platforms that combine in-person exhibitions with open calls, competitions, touring shows, and educational activities. These figures show that, although less numerous, large-scale festivals play a central role in the professionalisation of the sector, the visibility of photographic art, and the circulation of established artists.

In this context, it is essential to understand that the total number of participating artists reflects not only **the size of a festival, but also its public mission, curatorial model, and its capacity to sustain ongoing programming over time**. **Building stronger institutional trajectories, reinforcing international networks, and designing support policies tailored to each stage of development** emerge as strategic pillars for promoting equity, diversity, and long-term sustainability within the sector. In this way, the data allow us not only to assess the past, but also to project scenarios for future growth and collaboration.



c) Conclusions: resilience, diversity, inclusion and renewal

Unless it is the result of a statistical anomaly, the comparison between **the historical average of 19.4 artists per festival per year and the average of 32 artists per festival reported for the most recent edition reveals a significant increase in recent artistic participation.** Firstly, many festivals begin their trajectory with smaller editions and limited artist participation, gradually expanding their scale and ambition over time. Therefore, the historical average includes early years of low activity, which lowers the overall mean. **The current figure of 32 artists per edition suggests a more mature phase within the sector, in which festivals have succeeded in consolidating their presence and expanding both their curatorial and operational capacity.**



This growth is also linked to greater professionalisation. Festivals today operate with more robust structures, more experienced teams, and stronger institutional partnerships. This enables them to design more diverse programmes, incorporate new formats (such as workshops, portfolio reviews, photo walks, or fairs), and take on a greater number of curatorial proposals. Added to this phenomenon is a growing process of **internationalisation**: many festivals now launch open calls, collaborate with sister festivals in other countries, or develop hybrid platforms — **all of which significantly increase both the number and diversity of participating artists.** Another possible reason for the recent rise in artistic participation may be related to **the post-pandemic effect.** **Some festivals have expanded their programmes or resumed accumulated activities following the years of health-related interruption,** resulting in editions that are denser in terms of content and participation. This temporary expansion may have boosted recent figures, without necessarily indicating a new structural norm for all festivals.

This difference between historical and current figures should not be interpreted as a contradiction, but rather as **a sign of transformation.** **Festivals have grown in impact, visibility, and ambition.** However, it is also important to remember that not all follow the same trajectory: many continue to operate on a small scale, with self-organised or community-based models. An increase in the number of participating artists does not in itself guarantee better conditions for participation, nor does it replace the need for coherent curatorship, organisational sustainability, and careful attention to relationships with audiences and communities. **Quantity matters — but how that growth is managed will be key to the future of festivals.**

In this sense, the number of participants in each edition should not only serve as an indicator of scale, but also as a reflection of the festival's **commitment to the circulation of knowledge, the democratisation of access, and the construction of active photographic communities.** Recognising these tensions between history and immediacy allows us not only to better understand the current state of festivals, but also to guide their future towards more inclusive, sustainable, and culturally meaningful practices.



8) In-person participants and online communities: 10 million

Audience participation is one of the key indicators for understanding the real impact of a festival within its community. This chapter addresses three complementary dimensions: **the number of in-person attendees at the most recent edition, the types of audiences each event targets, and the ability of each festival to build stable digital communities through social media and online platforms.** Taken together, the data allows us to analyse the extent to which festivals are succeeding in connecting with their communities — both physical and virtual — and how they combine on-site and digital engagement to expand their influence.

Beyond absolute attendance figures, it is crucial to consider the diversity of audiences being targeted — from professional photographers and students to the general public. This range of perspectives highlights the role of the festival as **a meeting point between creation, education, and dissemination.** At the same time, the analysis of online communities — through the 15 festivals with the largest social media presence — provides insight into their international positioning and their ability to generate lasting connections beyond the event itself. This chapter thus offers a comprehensive overview of the public ecosystem of contemporary festivals, where **physical presence and digital interaction intertwine to shape new forms of engagement, circulation, and belonging.**

a) In-person participants: 5 million people

The first notable insight from the analysis is that **most photography festivals around the world operate on a small to medium scale.** Specifically, **35.8% receive fewer than 500 attendees**, and a further **34.9% fall between 500 and 2,500 attendees** — meaning that **over 70% of festivals report fewer than 2,500 participants per edition.** This figure reflects an international landscape largely dominated by proximity-based events, aimed at local or regional communities, which prioritise a close, specialised experience over mass attendance.

On the other hand, **only 20% of the surveyed festivals receive more than 2,500 attendees**, and among them, **only a small group of 16 festivals (7.4%) report having over 15,000 attendees.** This limited group likely corresponds to well-established events with a solid track record and resources, which have succeeded in positioning themselves as international benchmarks. These events are typically held in large cities, benefit from significant institutional or governmental support, and



possess the infrastructure necessary to host extensive programming, parallel exhibitions, and complementary activities.

This contrast between the majority of smaller festivals and the minority of large-scale ones highlights **two major operational models within today's photography ecosystem**. On the one hand, **proximity-based festivals** which are managed by small teams with limited budgets, are often characterised by strong community involvement and, in many cases, innovative curatorial proposals. On the other hand, **large-scale festivals** with strong drawing power, which operate as international platforms for visibility and validation for artists and cultural professionals.

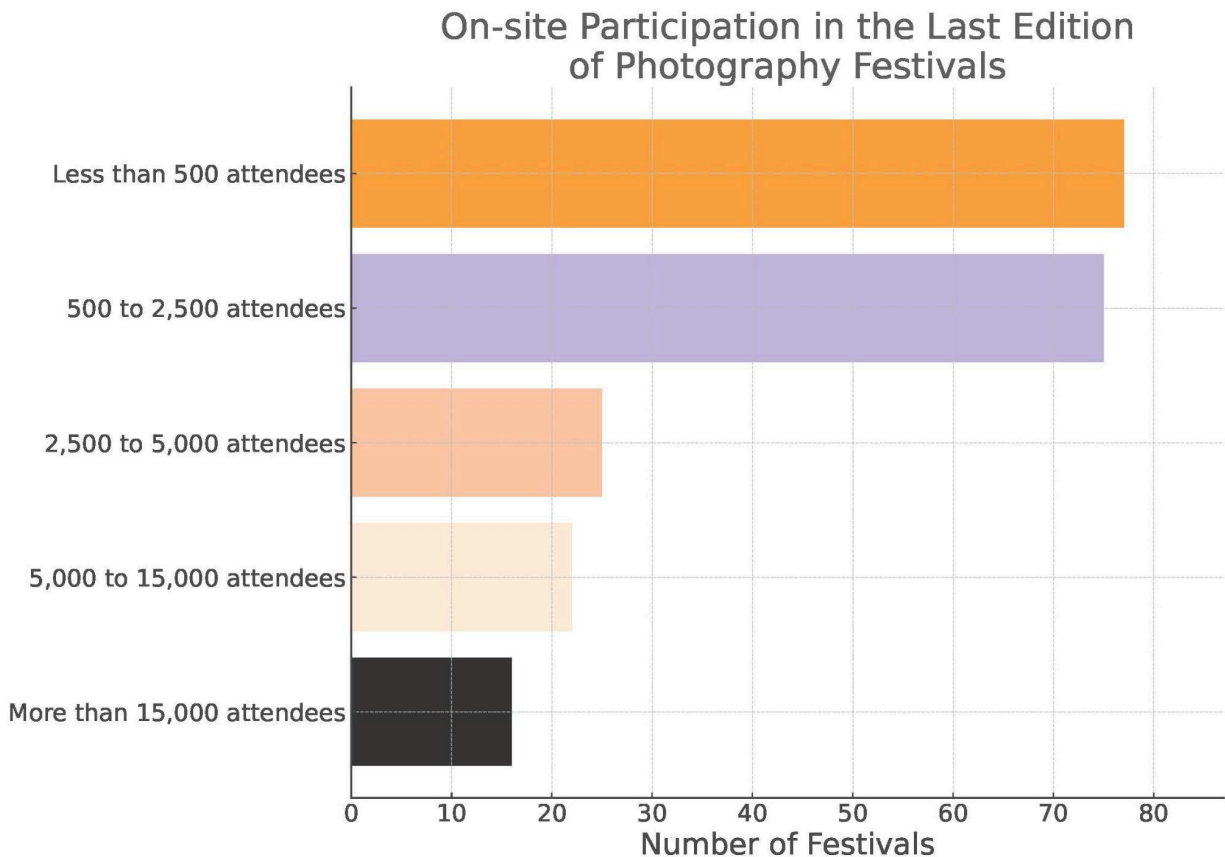
It is important to emphasise that **the size of a festival** — in terms of number of activities or audience volume — **is not, in itself, an indicator of its cultural or artistic impact**. Many festivals with small audiences generate a deep transformative effect within their territories and in the careers of emerging artists. However, it is also true that **large-scale festivals have greater potential to influence cultural policy, attract media attention, and establish broader international networks**. For this reason, a critical reflection on sustainability, visibility, and growth models is essential if we are to strengthen this ecosystem in an equitable and diverse way.

While each individual festival may be small, the aggregated data allow us to project a broader picture of the real impact of photography festivals in terms of audience reach. Although most report modest attendance figures, **by calculating an estimated weighted average of 5,000 people per festival, we arrive at an approximate figure of 5 million annual participants worldwide**. This estimate includes both visitors to exhibitions and those attending workshops, talks, school activities, book presentations, fairs, portfolio reviews, and other associated initiatives. **This scale reveals that, collectively, photography festivals constitute the main infrastructure for connecting audiences with photography, with remarkable reach and social relevance**. Even small festivals — when replicated by the hundreds across different countries — generate a decentralised network of access to photographic culture, functioning as spaces for encounter, visual education, and collective reflection. The overall volume of participation further strengthens the case for developing targeted public policies, support mechanisms, and recognition strategies that measure not only individual size, but also **the cumulative impact festivals have in building cultural citizenship**.

Ultimately, the data reveals that **the landscape of photography festivals is composed, for the most part, of small and medium-sized projects**. Many of which operate with fragile structures, yet contribute significantly to local cultural life. **Promoting their professionalisation, ensuring decent working conditions, and**



strengthening their relationships with communities could be just as important as giving visibility and support to large-scale festivals — thereby **contributing to a more balanced and sustainable system.**



b) Target audience

The results clearly show that most contemporary photography festivals design their programming with **a wide diversity of audiences** in mind. With **204 respondents (almost 95%)** indicating that their target audience includes **photographers**, it becomes evident that these events continue to function, first and foremost, as reference points and spaces of visibility within the photographic ecosystem itself. **Photography is therefore both content and community: festivals are a meeting point for those who create, research, edit, or teach photographic practice.**



Another highly significant figure is that of **the general public**, cited as a target audience by **194 respondents**, which highlights the organisers' efforts to broaden access and turn their events into experiences open to all those interested in visual culture, beyond the specialised circuit. This points to a clear **intention towards democratisation** and social inclusion, positioning festivals not only as showcases for art, but also as spaces for mediation, participation, and community building.

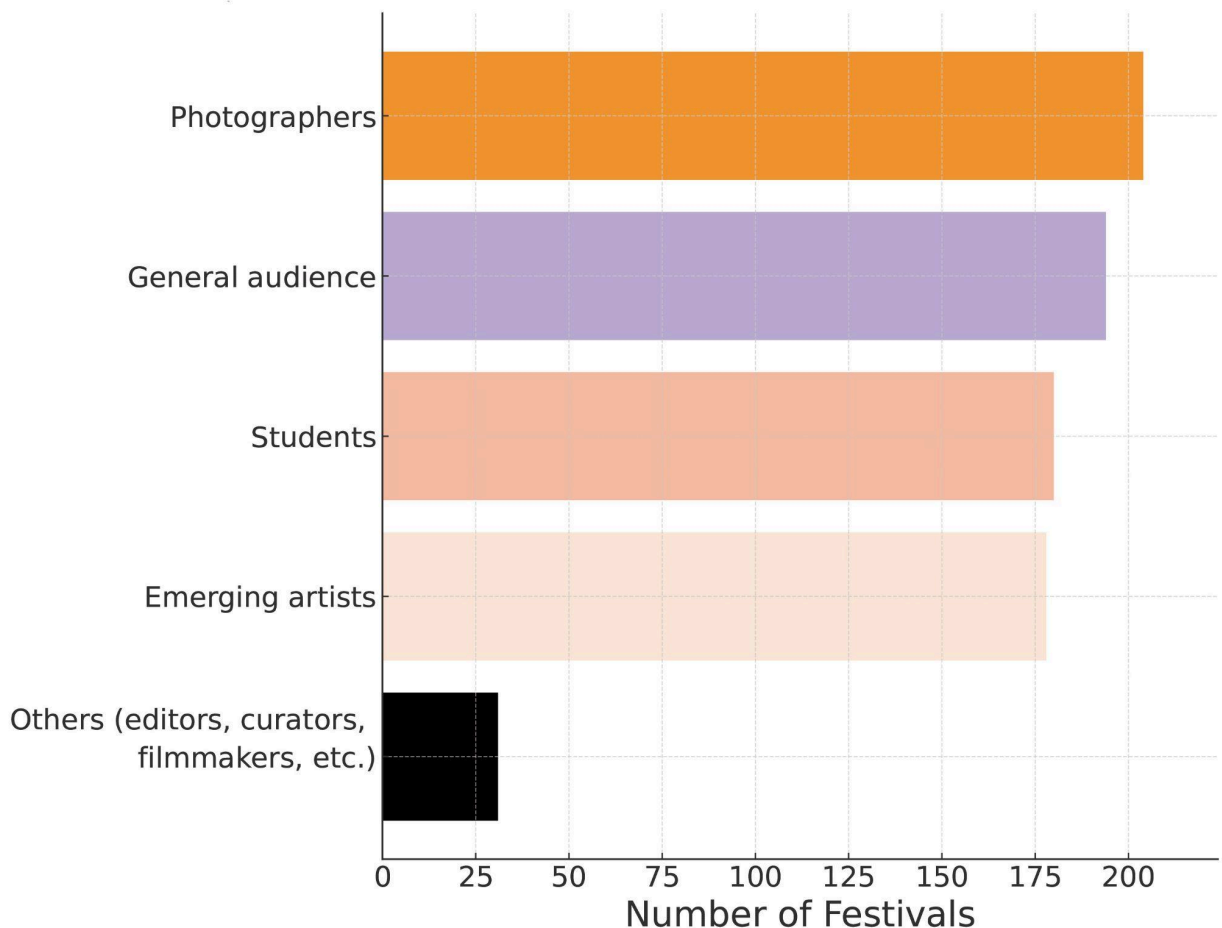
On the other hand, **the high number of festivals that target students (180) and emerging artists (178)** confirms the **formative** and **supportive** role these spaces assume within the cultural field. These events serve as **essential platforms for initiation and professional development**, where new generations can gain access to exhibition experiences, training, networking opportunities, and mentorship. This educational and developmental function is key to the sector's dynamism and also **reflects an institutional responsibility that goes beyond exhibition alone**.

Finally, the fact that **31** festivals explicitly mention other specific audiences — such as **curators, editors, filmmakers, designers, collectors, or academics** — points to a growing **professionalisation and specialisation among certain events**. This type of audience not only consumes content but also plays a decisive role in shaping artists' careers and the circulation of their work, generating networks of collaboration, market opportunities, and institutional validation. This strategic openness allows festivals to position themselves as nodes within a broader artistic ecosystem, integrating key agents across the contemporary photography value chain.

Taken together, the data reveal **a balance between specialisation and openness**: festivals function **as spaces of professional validation, emerging training, and cultural democratisation**. This threefold vocation reinforces their role as central actors within today's artistic landscape, with the capacity to influence both creative processes and social access to visual culture.



Target Audience Mentioned by Photography Festivals in Their Latest Edition



c) Online communities: 5 million people

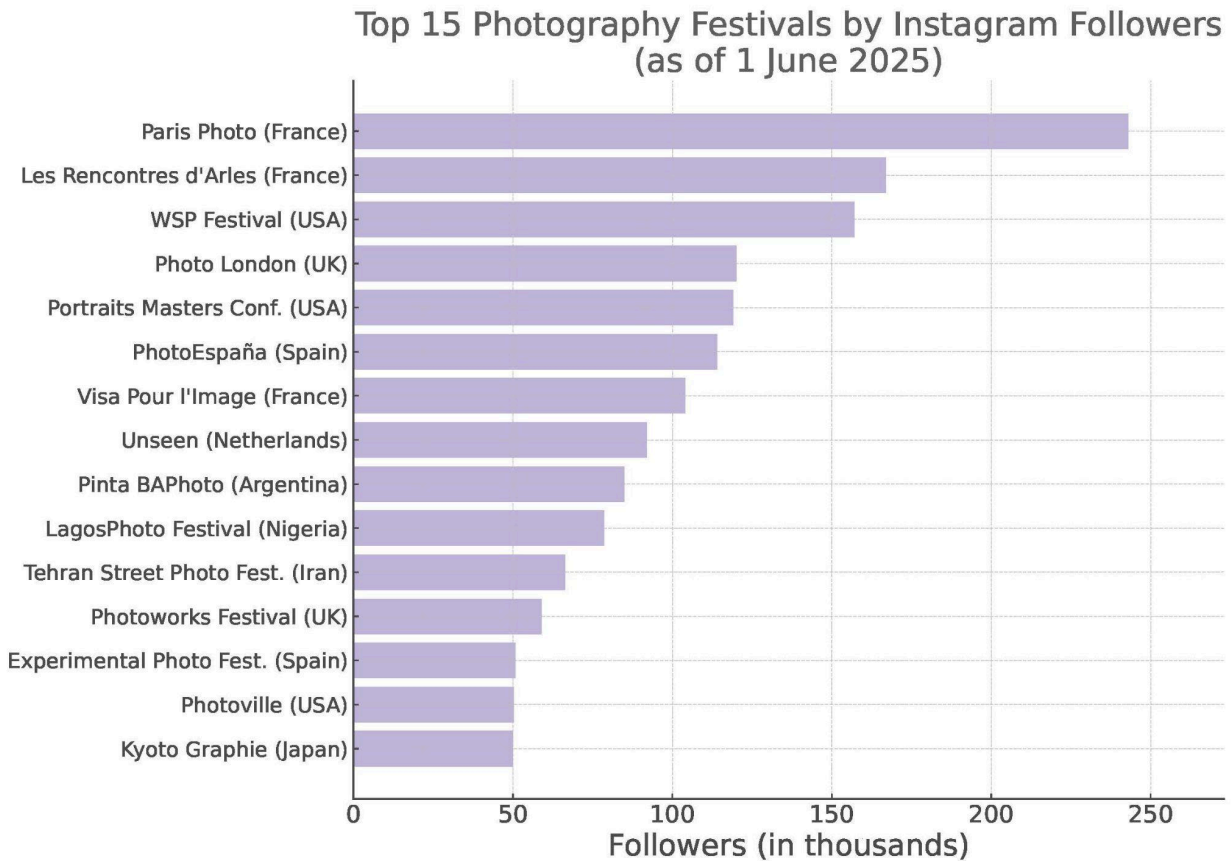
Digital presence has become one of the key indicators of visibility, prestige, and influence for contemporary festivals. In this regard, the number of followers on social media — especially on Instagram, a visually driven platform widely used in the photography world — offers insight into **which festivals have succeeded in building international and active communities beyond the physical sphere**. The data collected reveals a clear hierarchy: **only a few festivals concentrate massive digital audiences, while the majority fall within intermediate or lower levels**.



Follower data reveals a landscape in which those festivals with the strongest digital presence often coincide with events that have a long international track record, substantial institutional investment, and a consolidated position within the art and photography markets. At the top of the list is **Paris Photo** with 243k followers, firmly established as one of the most influential photography fairs in the world. It is followed by **Les Rencontres d'Arles** (167k), also based in France and the longest-running festival still active, and the **WSP Festival** in New York (157k), whose digital strategy has proven particularly effective. **Photo London** (120k) and the **Portrait Masters Conference** (119k) demonstrate how festivals focused on specific niches — such as portraiture — can also attract large online communities. Most of these are located in major cultural hubs such as **Paris, London, New York, or Madrid, suggesting a correlation between geographic centrality, available resources, and digital reach.**

However, the ranking also allows for more nuanced readings: festivals from diverse geographies such as **LagosPhoto** in Nigeria (78.5k), **Tehran Street Photography Festival** in Iran (66.4k), **Experimental Photo Festival** in Spain (50.8k), and **Kyoto Graphie** in Japan (49.9k) demonstrate that international visibility is no longer dependent solely on being located in the Global North or in traditional art capitals. These cases show that with an alternative curatorial proposal and a strong online presence, festivals can achieve prominent positioning in just a few years. This confirms that, in the digital sphere, organic growth, a coherent visual language, and community engagement can be just as decisive as institutional history or financial resources. **Social media thus opens up a parallel path to legitimacy and visibility, enabling emerging festivals to place themselves on the international map more quickly and with less investment than through traditional channels.**

Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals a phenomenon of concentration: the top five festivals account for a substantial share of the total followers among the 15 with the largest audiences. This indicates that digital visibility is not evenly distributed and that, as in other areas of the art system, **the most recognised festivals tend to attract the greatest volumes of attention, while the rest operate within more limited margins.** This landscape raises an important point of reflection for emerging or smaller-scale festivals: **building an online community not only broadens their reach, but also strengthens their legitimacy in the eyes of institutions, sponsors, and the media.** Moreover, an active social media community can become a strategic ally for promoting open calls, selling tickets, or encouraging participation in educational activities. In this light, **investing in digital communication should not be viewed as a secondary task, but rather as a core component of curatorial and organisational work.**



Based on the analysis of IPFA's general database (709 festivals), it is observed that **only 31 do not have an Instagram account** — representing just **4.5% of the total**. This figure highlights the extremely high penetration of this visual social network within the ecosystem, making it an almost indispensable tool for contemporary cultural communication. By contrast, **10 festivals use only Facebook as their digital channel** — a platform which, although still maintaining an active user base, has lost its central role in the digital strategies of younger and more dynamic audiences. The exclusive use of Facebook — a network launched in 2004 and whose popularity peaked before 2015 — **suggests either an orientation towards more traditional audiences or a limited updating of communication resources by certain festivals.**

This landscape reveals a paradoxical reality: **although many festivals operate at a local or community level, almost all have adopted the logic of global communication.** Even the smallest events recognise that their digital presence — especially on Instagram — allows them **to project beyond their immediate territory,**



connect with artists, curators, institutions, and international audiences, and consolidate a visual identity that aligns with the medium they promote: photography. In a sense, **the digital space has amplified the existence of these festivals**, enabling them to be discovered from anywhere in the world, even if their programming takes place in a single city — or even within a single building. This dual dimension, both **local and global**, has become fundamental: festivals are no longer defined solely by what happens in their physical venues, but by how they are narrated, presented, and connected within the digital ecosystem.

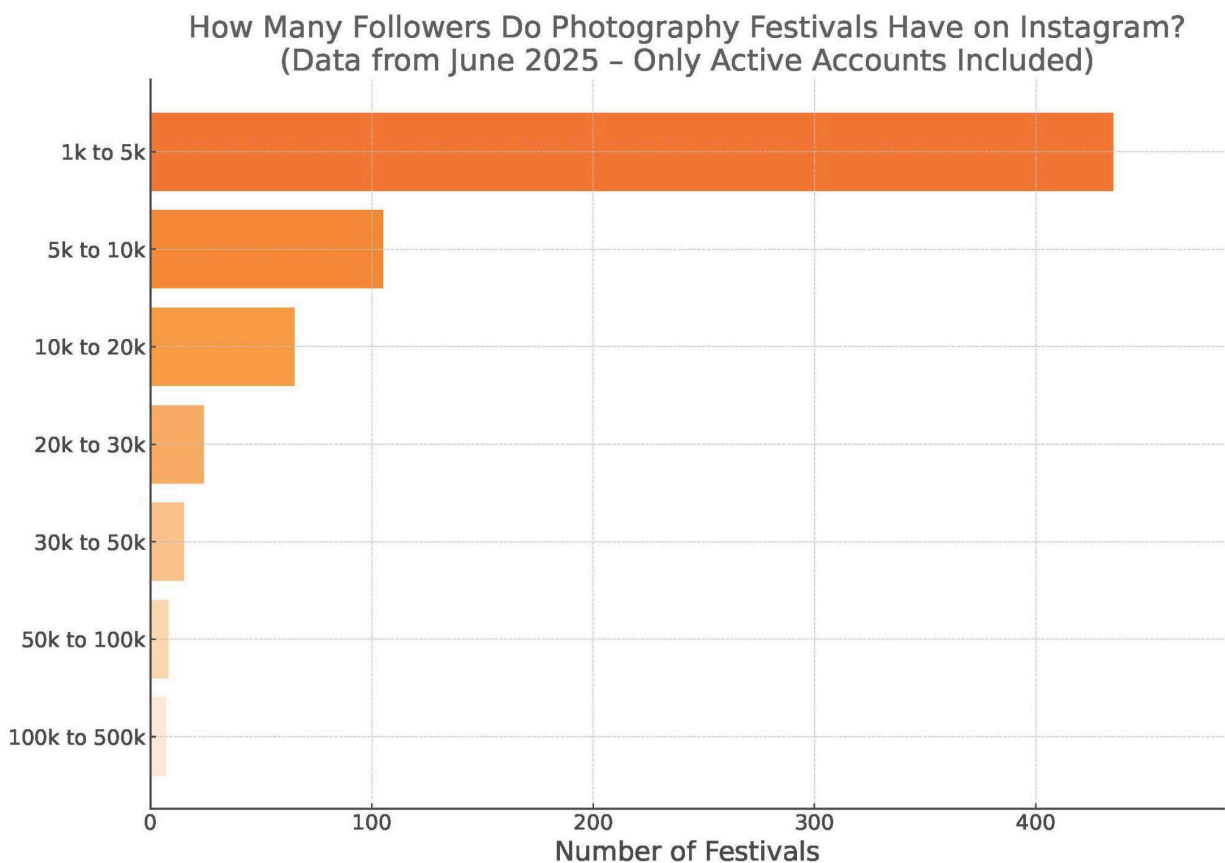
The analysis of the presence of photography festivals on **Instagram** reveals a **significant concentration in the lower follower brackets**. Of all those included in our database (**709**), **435 (62%) have between 1,000 and 5,000 followers**, representing a clear majority of those with an active presence on the platform. This suggests that most operate with a small but likely close-knit digital community, in line with the profile of locally or regionally scaled festivals. Even so, **the mere existence of a social media account already implies a degree of professionalised communication effort**, even if resources and reach are limited.

In the higher brackets, **105 festivals (15%) fall within the 5,000 to 10,000 follower range**, while **65 (9%) are in the 10,000 to 20,000 range**. As **audience size increases, the number of festivals decreases**, highlighting a digital growth barrier likely linked to factors such as longevity, investment in social media, language, or communication strategy. Only a very select minority surpasses 20,000 followers: **24 (4%) in the 20k–30k bracket, 15 (2%) in the 30k–50k range, and a handful of exceptional cases — 15 (2%) — beyond 50,000**. The remaining **4.5%** corresponds to festivals with no account. None exceed 500,000 followers, which indicates that even at their highest reach, photography festivals **still do not compete with major cultural brands or visual influencers in terms of digital scale**.

This distribution confirms that most festivals work with **moderately sized communities, although significant in terms of impact**. The use of Instagram is clearly widespread across the sector, demonstrating that even the smallest recognise the importance of having a presence on social media. This democratisation of access to digital platforms allows events of all kinds — from international fairs to rural festivals — **to be discovered and shared**. However, it also presents challenges: **improving communication capacities, investing in the production of high-quality visual content, and professionalising social media strategies to increase impact without losing authenticity**. In summary, the data on online communities reveals a crucial dimension of today's ecosystem: **the ability to build audiences beyond physical territory, consolidating a continuous, engaging, and globally accessible presence**.



Strengthening these networks not only amplifies the impact of festivals but also positions them as living cultural agents, in constant dialogue with their time.



Finally, based on data from the 709 festivals analysed, the total number of followers on Instagram amounts to 5,062,730. This figure represents the gross reach of these accounts on this social network. If we take this figure as representative of the global ecosystem — which, according to our estimates, includes around 1,000 active festivals — we can project that **the total number of Instagram followers for all photography festivals worldwide would be approximately 7.1 million.**

However, this figure should be interpreted with caution due to **the phenomenon of audience overlap**. Many followers subscribe to more than one festival, especially in a cultural field with high interconnection such as contemporary photography. If we



estimate a **30% overlap** — a commonly accepted average in cultural marketing studies for specialised communities — the actual number of unique followers of photography festivals on Instagram worldwide would be **between 4.5 and 5.5 million people**. **This range may be considered a fairly realistic approximation of the effective digital impact of the ecosystem.**

This estimate positions photography festivals as one of the most active cultural infrastructures on social media within the artistic field. It is not only a question of the number of accounts or their aggregated visibility, but also of **the potential for mobilisation, content circulation, audience development and community building that they represent**. In a cultural environment increasingly defined by digital dynamics, this network of over 5 million unique followers represents **a key strategic asset for the internationalisation, sustainability and symbolic legitimisation of contemporary photography**.

d) Conclusions: presence and possibilities

The combined analysis of data on in-person participation and digital presence on social media reveals a central duality in the operation of contemporary festivals: **their ability to function simultaneously in both physical and digital spaces**. **These two dimensions not only coexist but also complement and influence one another**, shaping the actual reach of festivals as cultural and social platforms.

On the one hand, **the in-person data show that the vast majority of festivals still operate on relatively modest scales**: 63% attract fewer than 5,000 attendees per edition, and only 17.7% exceed 15,000 visitors. This does not necessarily indicate a shortcoming, but rather **a generalised model of proximity festivals, with strong territorial roots, lighter organisational structures, and direct contact with the public**. This format, though modest in numbers, allows for more immersive, accessible, and locally tailored experiences. In many cases, this closeness and horizontality are their greatest strengths in comparison to large-scale, high-profile events.

However, **the digital world offers a possibility for expansion that radically transforms this equation**. **Festivals that welcome no more than 2,000 or 3,000 attendees in their physical editions can reach online communities of thousands**. The contrast between physical and digital scale thus becomes evident: **while the in-person event is limited by logistical, spatial, and financial constraints, digital platforms enable the construction of international, decentralised, and year-round active communities**. A clear example is how some local festivals, thanks to a coherent



social media strategy, achieve global visibility that far exceeds the size of their physical audience. **In this digital space, creativity, consistency, and authenticity can matter as much as—if not more than—economic resources.** The online ecosystem therefore presents itself as a democratising space: a field of opportunity for emerging festivals seeking to grow, project themselves globally, and actively participate in the contemporary cultural conversation. In the age of hyperconnectivity, the world of social media is also the world of cultural globalisation, and represents **a key tool for expanding horizons beyond physical borders.**

This asymmetry also highlights the emergence of **new forms of legitimacy**: it is no longer enough to have a strong programme or a long-standing history; today, the ability to produce relevant, aesthetically refined and communicatively compelling content in the digital environment has become key to **capturing the attention of audiences, media, and funders.** In this context, Instagram — with its visual language, speed, and reach — has positioned itself as the platform par excellence for photography festivals.

The question that arises then, is how these two worlds connect and feed into each other. In the most successful cases, the digital community is not merely a promotional showcase, but **a genuine extension of the festival**: it gets informed, participates, applies to open calls, shares experiences, and even attends certain activities virtually. Conversely, those most active on social media also manage to attract new people to the physical event, both as audiences and as artists. **The convergence between in-person and online participation thus has the potential to enhance reach, diversity, and sustainability.**

The sum of both dimensions — physical and digital — allows us to grasp **the true scope of the global photography festival ecosystem**: **10 million people** take part each year in the **18,000 photographic activities** offered through our events. This unprecedented figure in the sector positions festivals not merely as exhibition platforms, but as genuine international cultural infrastructures capable of mobilising audiences, generating learning networks, disseminating work, and producing collective meaning. In the face of fragmented cultural consumption and today's crisis of attention, this data clearly shows that **festivals remain one of the most effective forms of mediation between artistic creation and citizenship.**

Moreover, this critical mass of 10 million participants enables the sector to project **structural legitimacy** to other cultural and institutional actors. These are not merely ephemeral events, but an organic set of practices that impact visual education, critical thinking, and the social fabric. While each festival operates at its own particular scale — small, medium or large — **the sum total allows us to speak of a global**



cultural phenomenon, capable of generating employment, education, artistic circulation, and social transformation. Acknowledging this quantitative impact is the first step towards designing appropriate support policies, but also towards asserting the role of photography festivals as strategic agents in building a more diverse, accessible, and participatory contemporary culture.

Ultimately, photography festivals today operate within a hybrid field, where the physical and the digital intertwine strategically. Recognising this complexity and viewing both spaces as interdependent — rather than separate spheres — will be essential to envisioning the future of these events. **A future in which success is measured not only by the number of attendees, but by the ability to activate networks, inspire communities, and generate sustained cultural impact across multiple layers and territories.**



9) Social and institutional recognition

Beyond the number of activities or visitors, **a festival's legitimacy is also measured by how it is perceived by its surrounding environment.** In this sense, social and institutional recognition is key to understanding the place festivals occupy within the cultural ecosystem and the community fabric. **To what extent do organisers feel their work is recognised by the general public? What kind of support or acknowledgement do they receive from institutions such as governments, museums, foundations, or cultural centres?** These subjective questions point not only to the level of external support but also to the project's sense of self-worth and its ability to build strategic alliances for long-term sustainability.

The responses to these questions reflect both the degree of each festival's integration within its context and the way its proposal is interpreted by various social actors. Measuring this perception not only provides useful data on legitimacy and recognition, but also **opens the door to a deeper reflection on the need to build stronger, more continuous and horizontal relationships between festivals, civil society, and cultural institutions.**

a) Society

The analysis of the results indicates that **the vast majority of festivals** believe their activities are rated at **a medium-high level by society and their communities.** A total of 31.6% of respondents selected a rating of 4 out of 5, while 25.6% stated they felt fully appreciated. This means that **over 57% consider their work to be well or very well received by their social environment.** In many cases, this perception reflects the festival's consolidation within its local community or cultural sector, as well as a direct connection with its audiences and territories.

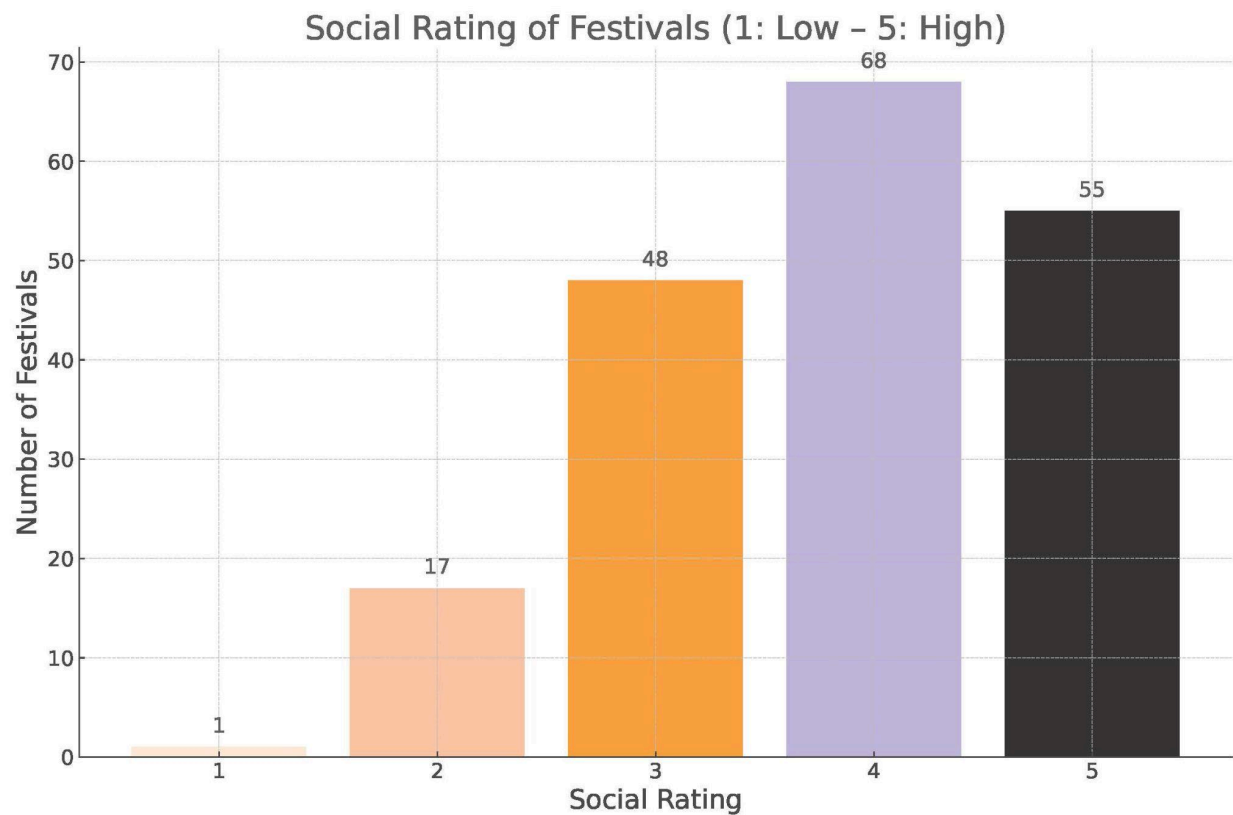
A medium level of recognition was selected by 48 respondents, that is, 22.3% of the cases. This data suggests **an ambivalent position: festivals perceive a certain level of validation, but also identify shortcomings or limits in their recognition.** Factors at play here may include the relative youth of the event, limited dissemination capacity, or the need to strengthen partnerships with social actors in order to expand their support base.

At the other end of the spectrum, only **1** respondent (0.5%) felt completely unappreciated (1 point), while **17** (around 8%) reported a perception of **low social**



recognition (2 points), though not total disregard. This may be due to several factors: lack of public awareness of the festival, limited media or institutional visibility, or tensions between the proposed programming and the interests of the local audience. In many cases, such perceptions may reflect **a disconnection from the immediate social environment**, particularly when the festival has a highly specialised focus.

Taken as a whole, the data show that, although there is **a generally positive perception** of the social value of festivals, **significant disparities** remain. Some events succeed in establishing themselves as cultural landmarks within their territories, while others face challenges related to visibility, community integration, or symbolic legitimacy. These findings highlight **the importance of actively developing strategies for mediation, communication and community engagement — especially for emerging or more niche festivals — if they aim to consolidate their role as culturally relevant agents within their communities.**





b) Institutional

According to the data gathered in our survey on institutional perception, as reported by the festivals themselves, the results reveal a nuanced picture, with **most responses clustered around the middle values of the scale (3 and 4)**. This suggests that, while there is a certain degree of institutional recognition of their activities, it is not perceived as full or particularly strong. In other words, institutions appear to value the work of festivals, but in **a reserved or conditional way, lacking sustained commitment or strong structural support**. This partial recognition may manifest through occasional collaborations or intermittent support, but **not necessarily through a relationship of trust or long-term investment**. Moreover, such collaboration is typically built over time (usually from the third or fourth year onwards), and with the average lifespan of festivals being 13 years, **this indicates that institutional support is not perceived as something that naturally strengthens with time**.

At the same time, the number of festivals reporting a perception of **high institutional recognition (a score of 5 or “Highest”)** is notably low: **barely one in five considers their work to be fully appreciated**. This figure not only shows that institutional backing is concentrated among a few, likely well-established or large-scale festivals, but also highlights the gap between these and the rest of the ecosystem. At the other end of the spectrum, nearly **one in five feels that their work is either not recognised at all or only marginally**. This points to a more structural issue, in which many festivals —possibly small, emerging, or independent ones— **operate without the recognition or support of cultural, educational, or governmental institutions in their respective territories**.

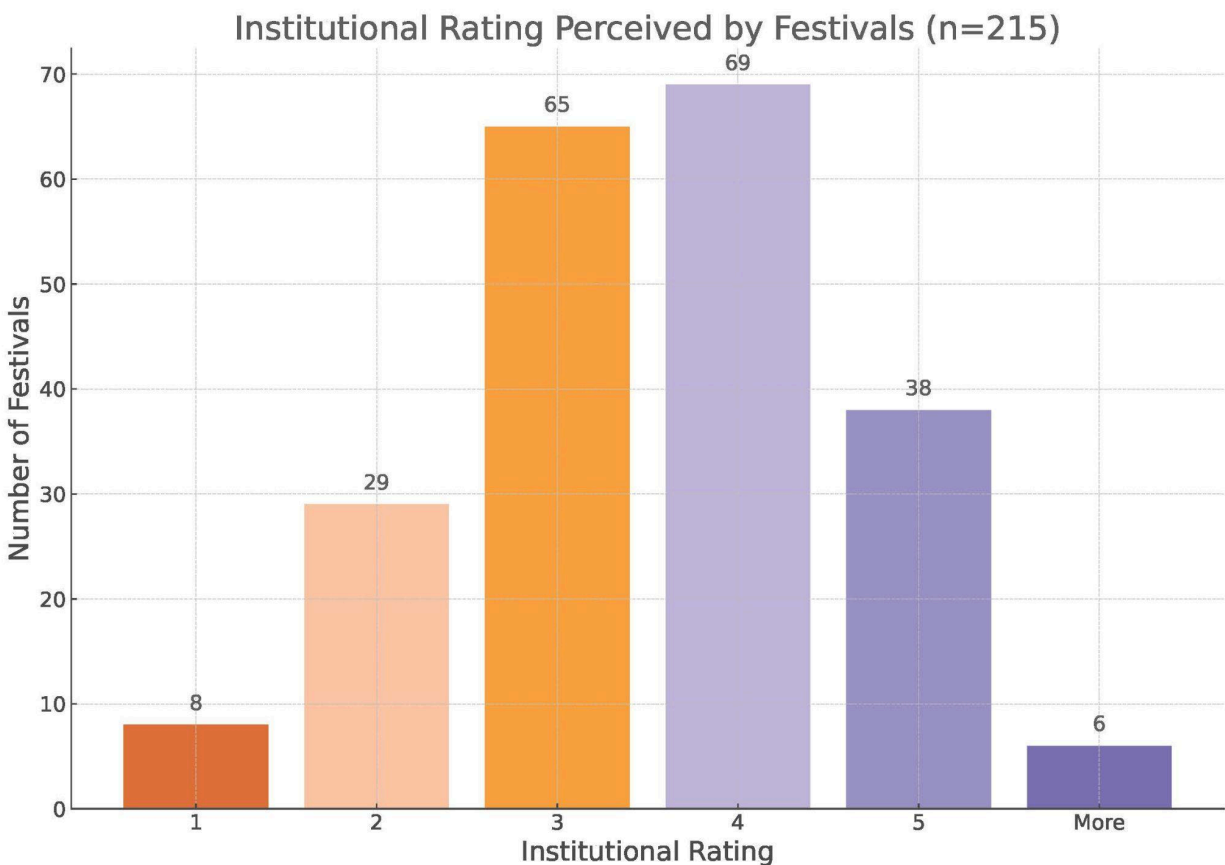
The overall set of responses reveals a festival landscape that, in institutional terms, **moves between partial recognition and invisibility**. The general perception is that institutions do acknowledge the importance of these events, but **not always with the clarity or continuity required to ensure their sustainability**. This situation places many festivals in an ambiguous position within the cultural system, where **they must constantly prove their worth to be considered relevant actors**. In this context, the lack of firm support **hinders long-term planning and generates a dependence on informal resources or personal efforts**.

This gap between well-supported festivals and those struggling to find a place on the institutional map reflects an internal hierarchy within the sector. While some established festivals benefit from stable backing, others operate under precarious conditions, which perpetuates inequalities in visibility, access to funding, and opportunities for growth. In this sense, the results also highlight an opportunity: **if more**



inclusive and horizontal public policies were designed –ones that value not only longevity but also innovation, local impact and diversity of formats– many festivals could be strengthened as essential cultural platforms.

Finally, it is important to recognise that institutional value is not limited to financial support. It also encompasses **symbolic legitimacy**, inclusion in cultural agendas, and access to spaces, collaborations, and professional networks that contribute to the development of the sector. **Strengthening this dimension of institutional recognition is essential if we are to build a festival ecosystem that is fairer, more diverse, and sustainable over time.**



c) Conclusions: the challenges of articulating cultural impact and institutional support

When looking jointly at how festivals perceive their social and institutional recognition, an interesting contrast emerges, revealing both strengths and tensions



within the ecosystem. On the one hand, **most festivals consider their work to be positively valued by society**: a large proportion of responses fall within levels 4 and 5, indicating that the public perceives the festival as **a relevant, enriching and meaningful event** in cultural, educational or community terms. This social appreciation seems to stem from the festivals' direct connection with audiences, their local impact, and their active role as drivers of cultural life.

On the other hand, **when analysing perceptions of institutional recognition, the trend appears more dispersed and less robust**. While a significant number of festivals rate their institutional support at mid-levels (3 and 4), only a few feel clearly or consistently backed by institutions. This disparity suggests **a gap between the impact these events have on civil society and the level of attention or legitimacy they receive from institutional structures**—whether governmental, academic or from the professional cultural sector.

The **average score for social recognition is 3.84 out of 5**, based on 189 responses, while **the average score for institutional recognition is 3.58**, based on 215 responses. Although this numerical difference may seem small, it is significant when viewed in the qualitative context in which festivals operate—often with precarious structures, uneven support, and fragmented recognition. Moreover, social recognition shows a lower standard deviation (0.97 versus 1.08), indicating **a greater consistency in how festivals perceive their relationship with the public**. In contrast, the **broader range in institutional scores** suggests that access to recognition and support from institutions is highly dependent on factors such as country, festival size, or the strength of their networks and partnerships.

This comparison thus reveals a paradox: **festivals are valued by their communities, but not always acknowledged by those who could contribute to their sustainability and growth**. This gap may be due to various factors—from the absence of cultural policies that prioritise photography and independent events, to institutional logics that remain focused on large-scale structures, historic festivals, or projects with high international visibility. In contrast, social recognition tends to be built through proximity, direct experience, and participation—elements in which many festivals, even the smallest ones, excel at.

This mismatch highlights an urgent need: to more closely align social and institutional recognition. If institutions more clearly acknowledged the impact these festivals have on their communities—not only in terms of attendance, but also cultural transformation, education, and social cohesion—**new pathways could emerge towards a more symmetrical, equitable, and strategic relationship**. In turn, this would reinforce the festivals' legitimacy and capacity to influence, while also



consolidating their role as key cultural agents not only in practice but also within public policy frameworks.



10) Funding: 63 million euros a year

The financial sustainability of photography festivals is one of the most sensitive pillars of their development and survival. By analysing three key areas — **sources of income, the temporality of public funding, and budget ranges**— this section aims to identify both the prevailing economic models and the levels of precarity or stability under which festivals operate. **The data not only helps to map the economic landscape of the ecosystem but also invites reflection on the structural challenges faced by organising teams as they attempt to balance cultural ambition with financial sustainability.**

a) Sources of funding

The data reveal a clear picture of **the structural dependence of photography festivals on certain types of funding, primarily from public sources**. Out of the 215 festivals surveyed, **176 report receiving public subsidies**, representing **over 81% of the total**. This figure indicates that the majority of these events are largely sustained by funds from governmental or municipal institutions. Such a strong reliance on public funding reflects both **a recognised cultural legitimacy from the state and a vulnerability to potential cuts or shifts in cultural policy**.

Private sponsorship, meanwhile, is present in **131 festivals** (around 61%), making it the second most common source of funding. This significant percentage suggests that a considerable portion of the ecosystem manages to establish connections with **companies, foundations, or brands** interested in aligning themselves with cultural positioning through photography. However, the fact that this figure remains below that of public funding also highlights that **festivals are not always perceived as commercially attractive**, or that barriers still exist to professionalising their approach to securing private funds.

However, it is important to introduce a fundamental caveat in interpreting this data: in this first report, **no detailed information was requested regarding the amounts contributed by each source, but only their presence or absence**. This introduces a significant interpretive bias, as we cannot determine whether, for example, public funding — although more frequent — accounts for a substantially larger share of the total budget, as is likely the case. Similarly, **the presence of private sponsorship does not necessarily indicate a significant financial contribution**; in many cases, it may consist of in-kind support, logistical collaborations, or **symbolic**



sponsorships that are not essential to the festival's survival. Therefore, **while public funding appears as the most common source, its actual weight in the sustainability of festivals may be even more decisive than the data suggest.** This limitation obliges us to be cautious in drawing conclusions and to acknowledge that dependence on public funds could be even greater, thereby revealing an even more pronounced structural fragility in the face of policy changes, shifting institutional priorities, or budgetary cycles. This issue must be studied in greater depth in the future in order to reach more conclusive insights.

Ticket sales, reported by only **86 festivals (40%)**, represent a more volatile source of income and one that **depends heavily on the event's drawing power.** While not insignificant, this figure also indicates that **the majority of festivals do not rely primarily on direct income from their own communities.** This may be due to various factors: free entry as a policy of accessibility, events made free due to institutional requirements, or simply models that prioritise external funding over ticketing. Even so, **those that manage to monetise attendance can increase their autonomy and long-term sustainability.**

In this context—where 60% do not charge for entry—it is worth noting that **the creation of active, engaged communities**, together with co-payment models, appears in the literature as **one of the most solid strategies towards true autonomy for festivals.** It is in this ongoing relationship with the public that true independence is forged: not only financial, but also in terms of **meaning, relevance, and social and cultural legitimacy.** Rather than shaping our decisions around institutional agendas or market interests, we should aim to **understand and respond to the real needs of our communities, encouraging their direct participation in sustaining the project.** At the same time, one important exception must be acknowledged: there are festivals that, thanks to strong institutional support, are **entirely funded by public bodies, thus enabling free access as part of a cultural policy to promote visual literacy.** In all other cases, **economic transparency is key: we must educate our audiences to understand that behind every exhibition, workshop or programme are artists, curators, designers, technicians and printers who deserve fair pay.** If the public does not contribute, that cost falls on cultural workers, who often end up being underpaid, paid late, or not paid at all. **Democratising access must not mean disenfranchising those who make access possible.**

Another noteworthy category is **the sale of artworks or products (books, photographic materials, merchandise, etc.)**, mentioned by **54 (25%).** This channel represents a more entrepreneurial approach, linked to the strengthening of editorial and collecting circuits. Although less frequent, **this form of financing is highly sustainable**



in the long term and offers the festival the opportunity to reinforce its brand identity, build community, and encourage collecting.

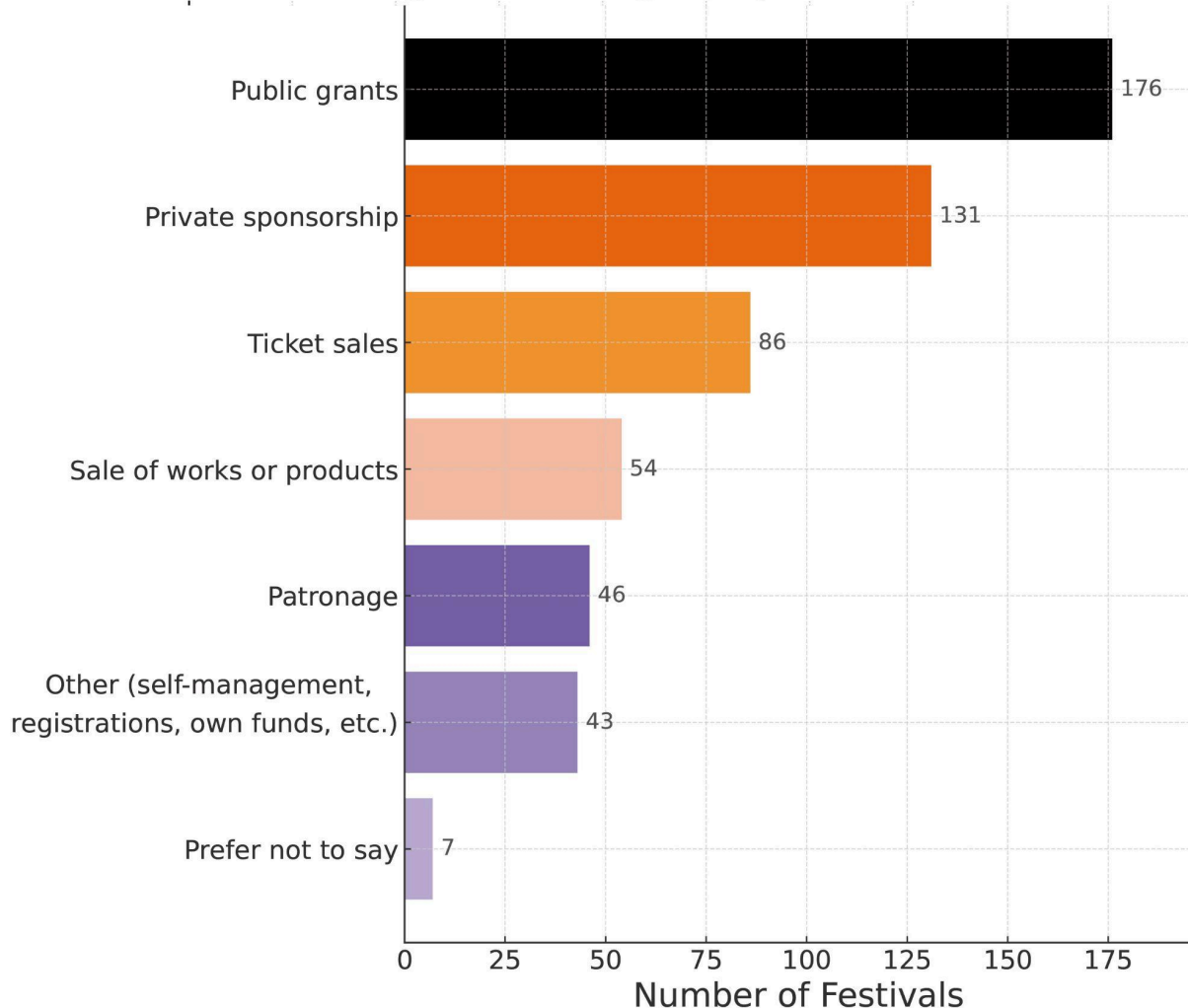
Philanthropy —that is, support without direct commercial return— appears in 46 cases (21%). While this is a valuable form of backing, its low frequency suggests that **there is still a long way to go** in terms of establishing philanthropic networks or raising awareness among major donors about the social and cultural value of festivals. **This low presence can also be explained by structural factors:** some countries have a strong tradition of philanthropy, supported by legal frameworks that incentivise it, such as tax deductions or public recognition programmes, whereas in other regions this figure either does not exist or is not supported by current regulations. In many contexts, companies or individuals who might wish to collaborate cannot deduct such contributions from their taxes, which **discourages these altruistic forms of funding**. To reverse this situation, **regulatory change would be needed to enable and encourage philanthropy as a cultural tool**. However, it is also important to recognise that, while philanthropy can provide essential and flexible resources, it is not without risks: **it can generate new forms of dependency**, especially when curatorial or programming decisions begin to align with the personal or ideological interests of patrons. For this reason, **its promotion should be accompanied by clear criteria of ethics, transparency, and governance, which preserve the autonomy of cultural projects**.

Finally, 43 festivals report using **other forms of funding**, ranging from **self-management** and **contributions from organisers** to **paid registrations for contests, fairs, or workshops**. These mixed or informal forms of support are often linked to smaller, newer festivals or those with limited access to institutional funding. While they may reflect significant innovation and resilience, they also highlight **the system's precariousness and the lack of clear standards** for structured financing. One important detail is that **7 festivals (3%) chose not to answer**, which may be due to informality, financial instability, or confidentiality.

Taken together, this analysis shows that although photography festivals have developed diversified funding strategies, **the prevailing model remains highly dependent on the public sector**, complemented by private sponsorship efforts. Market-linked sources (such as ticket or product sales) still occupy a secondary place, **which limits the sector's financial autonomy**. This suggests **the need to professionalise the economic management** of festivals, develop cultural marketing strategies, build support communities, and establish stable relationships with private actors and patrons — all without compromising open access or the cultural and social mission of these events.



Sources of Funding for Photography Festivals (n=215)



b) Public funding

If public funding is the main source of income, **the timing with which festivals receive subsidies becomes a key factor**. The analysis of data provided by 130 of the 176 respondents who receive such funding clearly reflects **one of the most important structural tensions in the cultural sector: the uncertainty and fragility of financial planning**. Although a significant portion (around **30%**) manages to obtain funding with some anticipation (between 1 and 3 months before the event), only a small group (less than **15%**) accesses funds with at least a 4 to 6-month margin, which would be ideal for solid planning and smooth production. **The most critical data point is that at least 33 festivals, representing 26%, report receiving the subsidy after the event**



has taken place— a condition that puts organising teams in an extremely vulnerable economic position. **They must advance resources, take on personal financial risks, or rely on alternative sources** (such as sponsorships, self-management, or informal credit), **which can significantly affect both the quality of the programme and the working conditions of everyone involved.**

Another significant figure is the number of responses categorised as **Variable or Dependent (24)**. This group reveals the lack of guarantees or consistent timelines from public administrations. Variability may stem from **political changes, bureaucratic delays or the absence of multi-annual programmes**, and its most immediate consequence is the inability to establish sustainable growth strategies or long-term commitments with artists, suppliers, or partners.

Moreover, it is concerning that **37 festivals — nearly 30% — reported receiving no form of public subsidy**, which points to a **system** that, in many countries, **excludes visual culture from institutional support frameworks**. This reality deepens the inequalities between festivals with strong state backing and those that are more peripheral, independent or emerging, which must rely on their own income or unstable private partnerships.

Finally, another revealing figure is that **only 130 of the 215 respondents to the general survey answered the specific question about the timing of public funding**. This low response rate (barely **60%**) may be due to several reasons. Firstly, some do not receive any public subsidy and therefore consider the question not applicable. But it may also reflect **a reluctance to speak openly about financial matters**, a lack of awareness within the teams about the exact timelines, or — more worryingly — a lack of administrative structure that prevents them from properly tracking funding processes. **This opacity or disorganisation around financial resources is yet another symptom of the institutional fragility that characterises much of the ecosystem.**

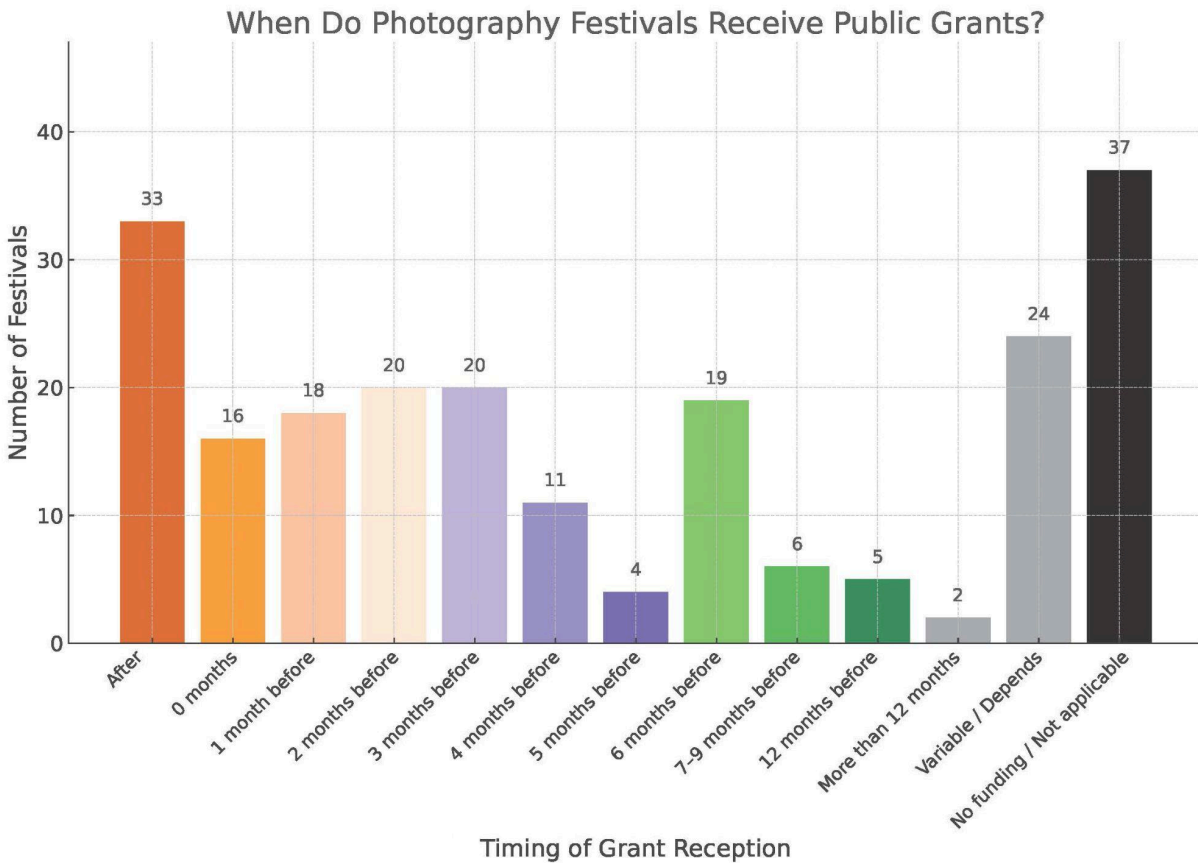
For many of these projects, **organising a festival without knowing for certain when or how much funding will be received is an almost heroic task**. The need to design a programme, make commitments to artists, rent venues, produce materials and coordinate teams — all without knowing if the funds will arrive on time or even arrive at all — **forces organisers to operate under a constant logic of risk**. In this scenario, **the festival becomes an act of faith**, sustained more by the conviction of its creators than by the support of a solid and professionalised cultural system. In many cases, **the only way to cover expenses is to resort to personal credit, informal loans or even incur debt**, meaning that organisers end up putting their own assets at risk for the sake of a cultural project that ought to be protected and valued by



institutions. **This situation is not only unsustainable, but profoundly unjust:** cultural work cannot continue to rely on the personal sacrifices of those who drive it, nor on structural precarity as the norm.

For all these reasons, **there is an urgent need to move towards more responsible, predictable and transparent models of public funding**, which include mechanisms for early calls, staggered disbursement of funds and professional oversight of the processes. Only in this way can we ensure **that our events do not depend on chance, indebtedness or the emotional toll on their teams**. Culture — and in particular photography festivals, which often operate from discursive and budgetary margins — **needs support structures that recognise the complexity of organisational work and the social value these events generate within their communities**. Without such recognition, any attempt to establish inclusive and sustainable cultural policies will always remain incomplete.

Ultimately, the data shows that, beyond the presence or absence of public funding, **the core issue lies in the lack of predictability. This chronic instability hampers the professionalisation of the sector, endangers the continuity of many projects, and forces organising teams to work under pressure and uncertainty**. An effective cultural policy should include mechanisms that not only guarantee resources, but also establish clear timelines and advance funding, enabling festivals to develop their projects with quality, fairness, and ambition.



c) Budgets

The collected data reveals a wide diversity in the operating budgets of photography festivals worldwide. **Most of these events operate with limited financial resources**, highlighting both the structural precariousness of many cultural initiatives and the creativity required to manage their activities. When analysing budgets, it is important to bear in mind that **the figures provided in euros (as requested in the survey) do not hold the same value or purchasing power across all geographic and economic contexts**. What may constitute a tight budget in Western Europe could be a sufficient or even substantial amount in regions where production costs, rents, or wages are significantly lower. Likewise, **some festivals manage to achieve extraordinary impact despite limited resources, thanks to networks of collaboration, volunteer work, or creative management strategies**. However, in order to compare, make visible, and collectively defend the sector's needs, it was necessary to establish common ranges that would allow the construction of a global



picture of the current state of festivals. This standardisation does not seek to homogenise the diversity of realities, but rather to offer a basic framework that enables the identification of imbalances, **opens up debates around fair funding, and lays the foundations for more equitable cultural policies.**

The most represented budget range was between **€5,000 and €30,000**, with **94** festivals falling within this bracket, representing **43.7% of the total**. This intermediate budget category suggests that **many festivals operate with a minimum economic infrastructure** that allows them to develop a programme, albeit likely with limitations in terms of staffing, logistics, and international visibility. This also indicates that, despite having access to some resources, **the majority must function under a logic of optimisation and austerity.**

The second largest group consisted of festivals with budgets **below €5,000**, accounting for **39** festivals, or **18.1%**. These cases reflect projects with little or no institutional financial backing, often driven by independent collectives, artists, or grassroots initiatives. In such contexts, **sustainability largely depends on voluntary work**, self-funding, or local collaboration networks. This figure is alarming in terms of the economic fragility of a significant part of the photographic ecosystem, as it reveals a heavy reliance on the motivation and personal sacrifice of its organisers.

The third group, comprising **27 festivals** with budgets between €70,000 and €130,000 (approximately **12.5% of the total**), tends to have a consolidated structure, combining in-person activities, international exhibitions, and a certain capacity for editorial, educational, or professional development work. Operating within this budget range allows festivals to offer fair remuneration to a core team, hire external artists or curators, cover substantial logistical costs, and develop broader communication strategies. These festivals often rely on **a mixed funding structure**, combining stable public subsidies with private contributions, ticket or product sales, and in-kind collaborations. The main challenge for festivals in this bracket lies in **balancing professionalisation and sustainability**: their budgets are not large enough to allow significant growth or absorb financial risks, yet they face high expectations from both audiences and funders.

Only **24 festivals** reported budgets **exceeding €200,000**, representing just **11.2%** of the total. This privileged segment typically includes well-established events with strong institutional or corporate backing and international visibility. These festivals have sufficient resources to develop ambitious programmes, attract renowned figures from the photography world, and maintain professional work structures. It is important to note that although these festivals are few, they play a symbolically dominant role in the public perception of the “photography festival world”, despite being a minority.



Finally, the **17 festivals** that reported budgets between €130,000 and €200,000 (**around 8% of the sample**) are usually those that operate across multiple venues, offer ambitious international programming, and **have developed more professional structures**: with stable teams, in-house content production, publications, residencies, or extended touring circuits. These festivals tend to have **strong relationships with public cultural institutions**, potentially accessing multiannual national or European funds, as well as with larger private sponsors. They have often also managed to professionalise their fundraising efforts, management models, and accountability mechanisms, enabling them to compete for larger resources and position themselves as key players within their respective geographical contexts. However, they also face tensions: the bureaucratic demands of public funding often require a significant amount of administrative work, which can limit artistic innovation; moreover, **increased budgets are often accompanied by pressure to achieve media impact, large visitor numbers, or quantifiable indicators, which can shift the focus away from artistic or community-based processes.**

The weighted average budget of photography festivals stands at €62,438—a figure which, although it may seem modest, gains significance when considering the operational complexity involved in organising such events. These festivals typically cover not only artistic expenses—such as exhibitions, talks, or the printing of works—but also production costs, communication, insurance, staff, transport, and accommodation. **All of this supports programmes that, on average, run for 31 days.** In this context, the average budget highlights both the diversity of existing financial models and the **structural fragility** affecting a large portion of the sector. However, it is also **surprisingly positive**: given the volume of activities and the average duration of the festivals, this figure represents **a significant economic effort and reveals a notable degree of professionalism and commitment on the part of their organisers.**

Another noteworthy aspect is the significant disparity between the extremes: **while some festivals manage to operate with less than €5,000, others exceed €200,000, suggesting a highly unequal system in terms of access to resources and opportunities.** This gap may correlate with factors such as geographical location, level of institutionalisation, historical background, or their ability to attract subsidies and sponsorship.

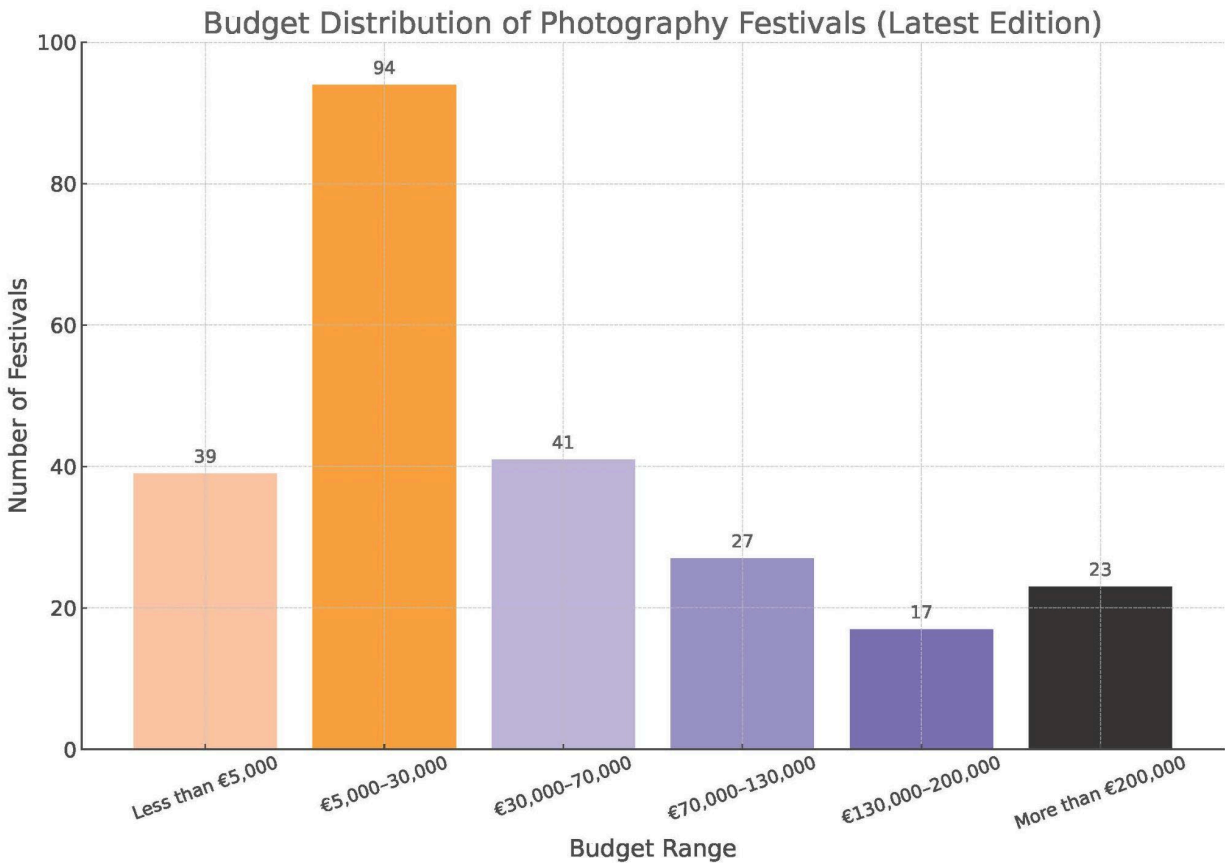
The existence of festivals with **budgets under €5,000** not only highlights the diversity of the cultural ecosystem but also reflects a brave and autonomous way of doing things. Far from being a definitive disadvantage, operating with limited resources can become an opportunity: these festivals are not dependent on major institutions or



private interests, granting them an uncommon degree of creative freedom. **This independence allows them to respond directly to the needs and desires of their communities, experiment with innovative formats, and reinvent how culture is made and shared.** Their legitimacy stems not from the size of their budget but from their ability to generate meaningful and transformative experiences from the ground up—often with a level of agility and closeness that larger festivals cannot match. In this sense, they serve as living laboratories of new cultural practices, with a potential for social impact that goes beyond economics. That said, this positive aspect does not negate the importance of developing professionalisation and institutionalisation—through increased budgets—that can help consolidate the team and sustain innovation. **Without a more solid financial foundation, the risk of burnout, discontinuity, or informality remains high, limiting long-term growth and the possibility for these initiatives to expand without losing their core essence.**

By contrast, festivals with budgets **exceeding €200,000 are often regarded as reference models, enjoying greater media visibility and international recognition.** This creates a concentration effect in terms of resources, attention and prestige, reinforcing their privileged position within the cultural ecosystem. While many of these festivals are rightly acknowledged for the quality of their programming, **the risk is that they become the only legitimate interlocutors for institutions, sidelining alternative narratives and more experimental formats that often emerge from the margins.** A cultural model that prioritises financial scale over diversity of approaches ultimately impoverishes the global landscape of contemporary photography.

In conclusion, we see that 62% of all festivals operate with under €30,000, while 38% manage more than that amount annually. This scenario raises urgent questions about how to redistribute both resources and visibility within the field of festivals. What public policies could support the sustainability of events without imposing a singular model of success? How can we build networks of solidarity that recognise the value of small but meaningful initiatives? Beyond budget size, festivals must be evaluated by their territorial impact, their capacity for inclusion, and their contribution to a more diverse, critical and democratic photographic culture. **The challenge is not just to fund more, but to fund better: through criteria that promote cultural equity and the symbolic richness of smaller-scale initiatives.**



d) Conclusions

The analysis of photography festival funding worldwide reveals **a deeply unequal landscape fraught with structural tensions**. Firstly, when examining **sources of income**, it becomes clear that the majority rely heavily on **public subsidies**, followed by **private sponsorship** and, to a lesser extent, the **sale of tickets** or **cultural products**. However, this dependence on the public sector is unstable and often unpredictable. **Only a small number of festivals manage to sustain themselves through significant self-generated income**, highlighting the structural fragility of much of the ecosystem.

This fragility becomes even more apparent when looking at **the timing of public funding disbursements**. Among festivals receiving state support, **a worrying proportion report receiving the funds in the same month as the event, or even after it has taken place**. Only a small percentage access funding more than three months in advance. This temporal precariousness forces many organisers to **front**



their own resources, incur debt, or take on personal financial risks—a situation that is both unsustainable and unprofessional, yet is repeated year after year without guarantees. **The current system of public subsidies, rather than serving as a tool for cultural development, often becomes an additional burden that undermines the viability of small- and medium-sized festivals.**

Finally, the analysis of **the approximate budgets of photography festivals** confirms this disparity: **over 40% operate with budgets under €30,000, nearly 20% with less than €5,000, and 38% with more than €30,000.** This wide heterogeneity reveals a fragmented ecosystem, where self-managed projects coexist with institutionalised ones, highlighting the urgent need to design public policies that acknowledge and support the diversity of existing models without leaving anyone behind. While absolute figures offer guidance, it is important to recognise that **the value of money is relative to the local context**: what is sufficient in a country with low operating costs may be inadequate in another with high prices or strict regulations.

The analysis of budgetary data from the 215 respondents shows that **the average budget per festival is approximately €63,502.** This figure was calculated using estimated median values for each budget range and weighted according to the number of festivals in each group. If we extrapolate this average to a global estimate of **1,000 photography festivals**, the **total annual expenditure** of all of them would amount to **around €63.5 million.** This figure offers an idea of the total economic weight represented by the international photography festival ecosystem, even acknowledging the great diversity in their scale, sources of funding, and management structures. **This exercise in estimation helps to measure the sector's economic magnitude and opens the door to reflect on its cultural and social relevance, as well as the need for greater institutional recognition and support at a global level.**

In conclusion, the chapter on funding reflects not only how festivals are sustained, but also **the contradictions of a system that demands excellence and professionalism while often operating under conditions of precariousness, improvisation, and lack of protection.** Regulation, foresight, and transparency in financing are key elements for the future of the international ecosystem of photography festivals.



11) Collaborations between festivals

Collaboration between photography festivals represents **one of the most powerful strategies for strengthening the global cultural ecosystem**. Rather than competing, these events have **the opportunity to complement each other, share resources, circulate exhibitions, co-produce content, and build networks of mutual support**. This cooperation not only expands the reach of their programmes and audiences but **also reinforces the sector's sustainability, professionalisation, and international visibility**. In a context increasingly marked by financial precarity, territorial fragmentation, and logistical challenges, fostering alliances between festivals is a key way to face the future collectively, creatively, and resiliently. **This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the current state of such collaborations and explores their potential.**

a) Analysis of the surveys

Based on the analysis, we see that **international collaboration is the most common**, with **33 festivals having worked exclusively at that level** and another **38 having done so in combination with national-level partnerships**. If we add up all the responses that mention international collaborations—including those combined with local and national levels—we find that **at least 117 festivals (over 54%) have engaged in some form of international collaboration over their lifetime**. This figure reflects the global outlook of the ecosystem and the interest in expanding audiences, visibility, and opportunities beyond national contexts.

By contrast, **local-only collaborations (12) and national-only collaborations (18)** are much less frequent, though they appear reinforced through combinations. For instance, **5 festivals have collaborated at both the local and national levels, 8 at the local and international levels, and 18 have formed partnerships at all three levels**. These numbers suggest that while geographically close collaborations are important, **many festivals tend to expand quickly into more distant or diverse contexts**.

However, **83 festivals, around 40% of respondents, reported having never collaborated with other festivals**. This percentage, far from being anecdotal, highlights a structural reality that needs to be addressed. The reasons behind this lack of collaboration may be multiple: from operational limitations—such as a lack of human or financial resources to manage international networks—to disconnection from the global ecosystem due to a lack of awareness, geographic isolation, or language



barriers. Other factors may include more introspective or community-focused approaches that prioritise local identity or respond to very specific socio-cultural contexts. **In many cases, this absence of collaboration does not stem from active refusal, but rather from a lack of incentives, encouragement, or platforms that facilitate those first steps.** Some festivals—especially younger or self-managed ones—may not know how to start building connections, or perceive collaborations as complex, costly, or beyond their reach. Others, by contrast, may feel that collaborations don't align with their model or philosophy, preferring autonomy or full control over their programming.

However, in the context of a globalised world and an artistic practice increasingly built through networks, **this lack of interaction between festivals can represent a significant loss of opportunities: less circulation of artists and content, reduced international visibility, weaker access to funding, and strategic isolation in the face of cultural policies or structural crises.** Enabling these festivals to collaborate with at least one other initiative would not only be desirable—it is essential. A strong, interconnected network based on reciprocity could offer greater stability to the sector as a whole, as well as a diversity of voices, experiences, and audiences that enrich the international photography scene. **Because collaboration does not mean losing independence, it means amplifying impact, sharing the load, and multiplying possibilities.**

The most relevant finding in this section is not only *how many* festivals collaborate, but also **how and with whom they collaborate.** The high frequency of international partnerships suggests that the world of photography festivals thrives on mobility, the exchange of ideas, artists, and formats, and on internationalisation as a positioning strategy. However, it may also point to a **lack of strong networks at local or national levels.** Some festivals may be collaborating more with foreign entities than with others in their own country or region, raising questions about how local cultural ecosystems are structured and how internal alliances could be strengthened to support sustainability and sectoral development. **In this regard, two of the European countries with the most festivals, France and Spain, do have national associations that support collaboration among festivals.** Finally, it is important to recognise that collaboration is not always a matter of willingness, but also of structures, resources, and cultural policies that either promote or hinder these partnerships. Therefore, **fostering mechanisms and platforms for cooperation at regional, national, and international levels should be a central objective in strengthening the sector.**



b) Recommendations to strengthen the collaborations

Collaboration emerges as a key strategy not only for **sharing resources, artists, and content but also for building a more resilient, innovative, and equitable ecosystem**. However, despite the clear benefits of cooperation, many initiatives still face obstacles in establishing sustainable connections with other events. For this reason, we propose a series of recommendations that can serve as a **roadmap to foster effective, horizontal, and transformative alliances between festivals around the world**.

1. **Promote thematic gatherings** (e.g. contemporary, documentary, or urban photography) or those based on **geography or language** (e.g. by language, country, or continent) that share similar values and audiences, to facilitate coherent exchanges.
2. **Establish formal collaboration agreements** between festivals, including the exchange of exhibitions, talks, artists, or juries, benefiting both parties.
3. **Encourage the touring of exhibitions** between festivals, reducing production costs, increasing artists' visibility, and lowering the sector's ecological footprint.
4. **Create a network or association of festivals and organise annual meetings**, either in person or online, to share best practices, address common challenges, and generate strategic partnerships.
5. **Create shared-use digital platforms** to promote collaboration: Instagram accounts, joint catalogues, shared websites for touring exhibitions, collaborative archives, etc.
6. **Support the co-financing of joint curatorial projects**, allowing each partner to contribute part of the budget and access more ambitious proposals.
7. **Prioritise collaborations with emerging or peripheral festivals**, helping to decentralise the global photography scene and generate new audiences and narratives.
8. **Establish shared residency programmes** so that young curators and artists can develop multi-site projects with mentors and logistical support.
9. **Develop multilingual materials adapted to different contexts**, facilitating the understanding and replicability of projects across various regions.
10. **Promote local public policies that recognise international collaborations** as a quality criterion in the awarding of grants or funding.

These ten recommendations aim to go beyond one-off collaborations to generate **real structural change as to how festivals relate to one another**. Collaboration should not be seen as an added burden, but as an opportunity to amplify cultural impact, optimise resources, and strengthen the diversity of the photographic



landscape. By creating thematic networks, sharing content, designing joint platforms, and developing public policies that support these processes, **festivals can evolve toward more sustainable, accessible, and innovative models. Internationalisation, decentralisation, and cultural solidarity are not distant goals—they are achievable paths, if taken together.**

c) Travelling exhibitions

One of the greatest challenges for any photography festival is the **high cost of producing and managing exhibitions**. Mounting a professionally presented show involves printing, framing, packaging, transporting, insuring, and installing works—all of which require a significant investment of financial, technical, and human resources. However, **if that same exhibition can be shown at several festivals instead of just one, everyone benefits.**

As noted in the chapter on the number of activities, around **18,000 are organised annually**, including approximately **4,250 exhibitions**. This figure highlights the **enormous volume of cultural production** generated by the global ecosystem of photography festivals. While not all exhibitions have the same level of resources or impact, this number represents an **impressive capacity for artistic visibility**, the circulation of work, and audience development. It also underscores the urgent need for **coordination, sustainability, and collaboration** to avoid unnecessary duplication and to maximise the reach of these exhibitions, both ecologically and culturally.

If we estimate that the 1,000 active photography festivals around the world produce roughly 4,250 exhibitions per year, but **nearly 40% of them have never collaborated with other events**, we're talking about around **1,700 exhibitions annually that had no opportunity to circulate or be shared with other platforms**. These exhibitions were produced and shown only once, **typically for about 31 days, and are now stored away or have already been destroyed**. As previously noted, if those festivals have an average lifespan of 13 years and never shared any of their exhibitions, then **over that time, approximately 22,100 photography exhibitions have been produced, stored, and destroyed worldwide**. The material, social, and **cultural loss resulting from these non-collaborative practices is incalculable—an irreparable loss of opportunities to expand the impact of artistic work and to increase public access to valuable content.**

Of the remaining 60%—those who report that they *do* collaborate—it is reasonable to assume, based on observed trends, that each festival shares a maximum of three



exhibitions per year, resulting in approximately 1,800 shared exhibitions. This means that the rest—around **2,450 additional exhibitions** (added to the 1,700 produced by festivals that state they have never collaborated)—**have never been toured or reused beyond the event that originally produced them.** In short, **over 70% of the exhibitions produced annually are shown only once and never leave their festival of origin,** revealing an alarming structural inefficiency in terms of **cultural sustainability, artistic visibility, and resource use.** This lack of circulation not only limits the reach and impact of the content but also fragments the international photography scene and reduces opportunities for connection among audiences, artists, and contexts. This phenomenon is directly related to the lack of institutional cooperation and weak network coordination. While other **cultural sectors—such as theatre or independent film—**have advanced in co-production strategies, touring, or collective distribution, photography festivals still largely depend on **isolated, short-term structures with limited capacity for projection.**

These figures reveal not only a concerning fragmentation of the photographic ecosystem but also the absence of effective cooperation structures that would allow curatorial projects to **extend their lifespan.** Exhibitions—which require time, creativity, transportation, installation, and promotion—often end up as ephemeral, local events, despite their potential to contribute to a broader and more enduring artistic dialogue. From an **ecological and ethical perspective, this situation is also unsustainable.** Producing exhibitions involves printing, energy consumption, transport, and sometimes the fabrication of structures or materials that end up discarded. Failing to extend their life beyond the original festival not only limits their cultural impact but also **increases the sector's environmental footprint.** **Touring exhibitions, by contrast, would allow for maximum use of those resources, audience diversification, and the creation of a much more resilient and meaningful value chain.**

The challenge is not simply to produce more exhibitions or more festivals, but to rethink the current model to make it **more sustainable, collaborative, and effective.** **Creating exchange circuits, collaborative labels, or institutional mechanisms that reward the circulation of content** could be key to ensuring efforts are not wasted, and that exhibitions don't become forgotten artefacts after a single use. We're doing the same thing we did with single-use plastic bags. We need to think in terms of paper bags (and simplify exhibitions) or, better yet, fabric bags that can be reused many times (and improve exhibition materials). In an ecosystem as productive as that of photography festivals, **the lack of collaboration today represents one of the sector's greatest invisible cultural losses.**



Exhibitions need to circulate among different festivals because **it is efficient, sustainable, and enriching**. When an exhibition is presented in multiple contexts, its initial cost is not only offset but its cultural impact is multiplied. Artists reach new audiences, curators see their work recognised in other regions, and festivals benefit from high-quality proposals without having to produce everything from scratch. Moreover, **this circulation helps to strengthen a solid, interconnected, and professional network.**

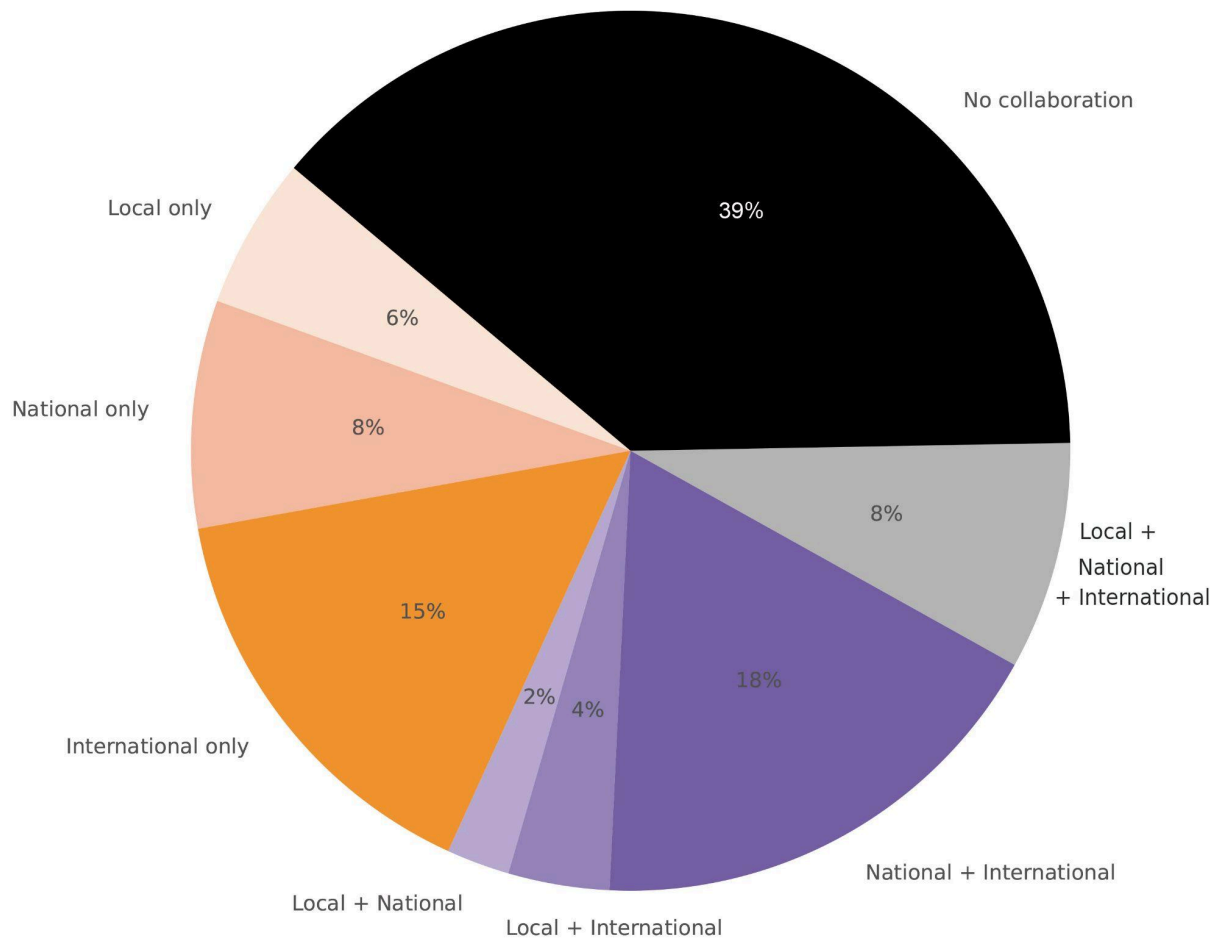
The benefits are multiple:

- **Cost reduction:** Sharing an exhibition allows production, transport, and insurance costs to be divided, making it possible for even festivals with more modest budgets to access high-level shows.
- **Greater sustainability:** Extending the lifespan of exhibitions and reducing the need to print and transport new works for each event helps lower the environmental impact of the sector.
- **More visibility for artists:** A touring exhibition provides photographers with an international platform without requiring them to bear additional costs or logistical efforts. This enhances their professional profile and connects them with new audiences.
- **Mutual support among festivals:** This system encourages networking and the exchange of knowledge, experience, and resources between events of different sizes and trajectories.
- **Stronger case for funding:** Projects with a broader reach are more appealing to public institutions, foundations, or private sponsors, who value amplified impact and efficient use of funds.

To get started, it's enough to identify recent or upcoming exhibitions with potential for touring, reach out to other festivals with compatible calendars, and organise a clear roadmap. The exhibition can be adapted to different spaces and audiences without losing its curatorial coherence. Communication materials and texts can also be shared in multiple languages. This model is not only more efficient—it is fairer, more ecological, and more inspiring. **Sharing exhibitions means sharing culture. It's time we work together to amplify what each of us is already doing so well on our own.**



Collaboration Between Photography Festivals (n=215)





12) Possible futures

The ability of photography festivals to project themselves into the future depends largely on their capacity to **adapt to a changing, competitive, and often uncertain environment**. Funding conditions, the professionalisation of their teams, access to adequate spaces, and connections with artists are essential factors that define their sustainability and future projection. That is why this chapter aims to **explore not only the most common structural concerns within the ecosystem, but also the strategies that festivals are developing to ensure their continuity**. Identifying these challenges makes it possible to highlight the most common areas of fragility, but also to showcase the creativity and resilience that characterise the sector.

In this sense, it is also crucial to understand how festivals **have evolved** in recent years—whether they have grown, stabilised, or reduced their activity—in order to contextualise their future objectives. **From internationalisation plans to proposals for innovation in formats and curatorial approaches, festivals are constantly redefining their mission and their role within the cultural landscape**. This chapter does not aim merely to list aspirations, but to analyze how strategic projection is built from accumulated experience, and what paths can be collectively opened toward a more solid, inclusive, and sustainable model.

a) Main concerns to ensure operation and continuity

203 of the replies mentioned (representing approximately **94%** of the responding festivals) **identified funding**, both public and private, as the main concern. This demonstrates **the sector's strong dependence on external economic resources** to sustain its basic structures and develop its programming. The issue is **not only the amount of funding, but also the instability and lack of predictability with which these funds are typically received**. In many cases, public funding arrives just a few months before the event, which affects strategic planning and puts the continuity of the project at risk. **This financial fragility cuts across festivals of all sizes and regions**.

The second most frequently identified concern was **human resources** (mentioned by 114 festivals), equivalent to **53% of responses**. This category includes issues such as **staff retention, turnover, generational renewal, and professional training**. It points to a structural problem: many festivals operate with very small teams, partially staffed or supported by volunteers with low levels of professionalisation. This hinders knowledge consolidation, continuous innovation, and sustained growth. Staff



burnout, the inability to offer stable compensation, and the lack of generational renewal threaten the long-term sustainability of both individual events and the ecosystem as a whole.

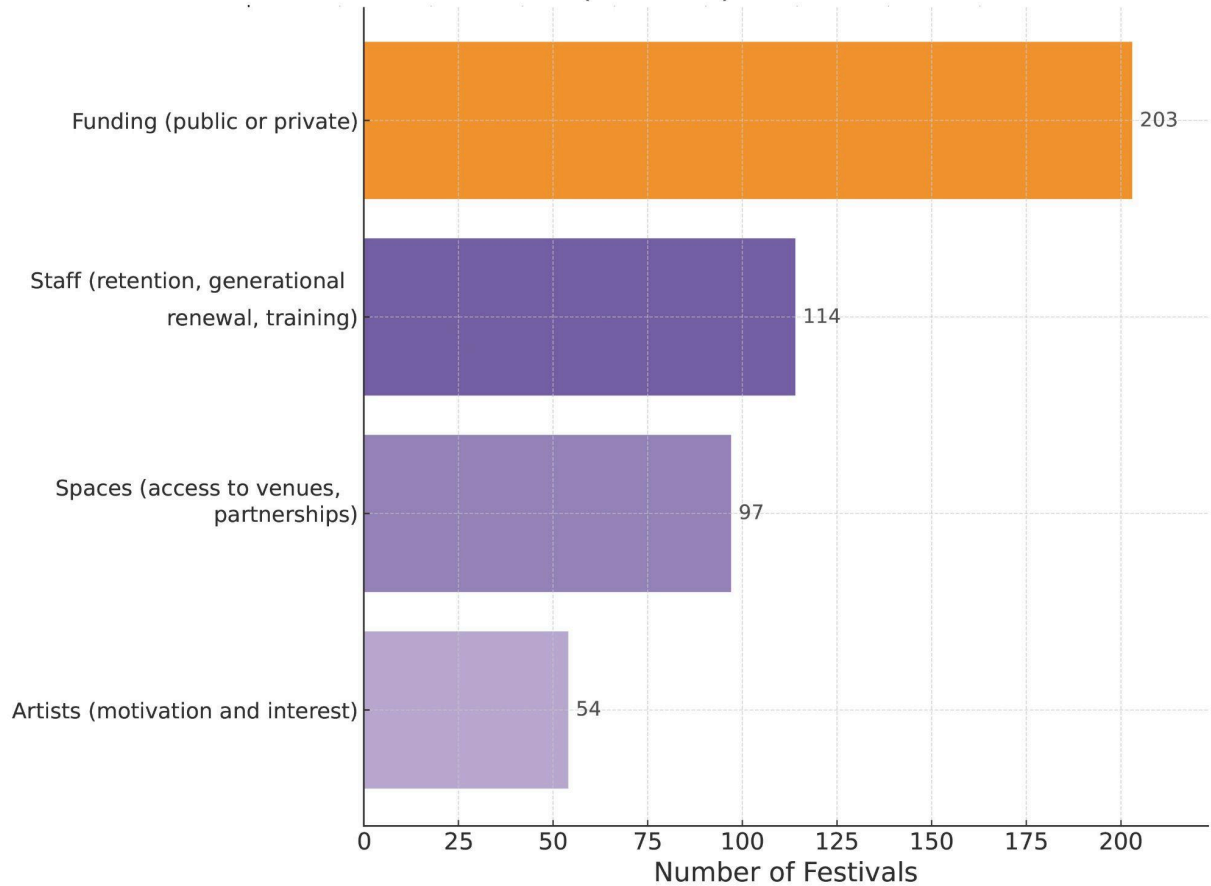
A total of 97 festivals (45%) indicated **access to adequate spaces** for carrying out their activities as a concern. This dimension refers both to physical infrastructures (venues, cultural centres, exhibition spaces) and to the conditions of use or **collaboration with public and private institutions**. In contexts where **festivals do not have their own headquarters**, this dependence can become a significant obstacle, especially if there are no stable collaboration frameworks. Uncertainty about the venues **compromises the quality and continuity of the programming**.

Finally, 54 festivals (25%) pointed to **the participation and motivation of artists, authors, curators, or speakers as a concern**. This figure, lower in comparison to the other categories, suggests that although artistic commitment is a cornerstone, it is considered less threatened than other structural factors. However, it may also indicate **a growing difficulty in attracting new emerging artists due to a lack of modern dissemination and selection strategies**, such as open calls on international and online platforms available today.

This analysis shows that **the main tensions within the ecosystem are not merely artistic or curatorial, but deeply organisational, structural, and political**. Festivals urgently need stable funding models, professional training programs, policies for access to infrastructure, and mechanisms that strengthen the professional fabric. Strengthening the sector requires addressing these pillars simultaneously, **promoting a fairer, more equitable, and more resilient environment for everyone involved**.



Main Concerns for the Continuity of Photography Festivals (n = 215)



b) Evolution of the festivals in the past few years

The collected data reveal that a large majority (143 out of the 215 respondents, that is, **66.5%**) **perceive that they have grown in size and scope in recent years**. This result is particularly revealing because it is based on the direct perception of the organisers themselves, which speaks not only to quantifiable changes (such as more days, activities, or attendance), but also to a **sense of progress and consolidation within the sector**. This growth may **reflect greater institutional maturity, increased media visibility, or improvements in programming and in local and international collaboration networks**.

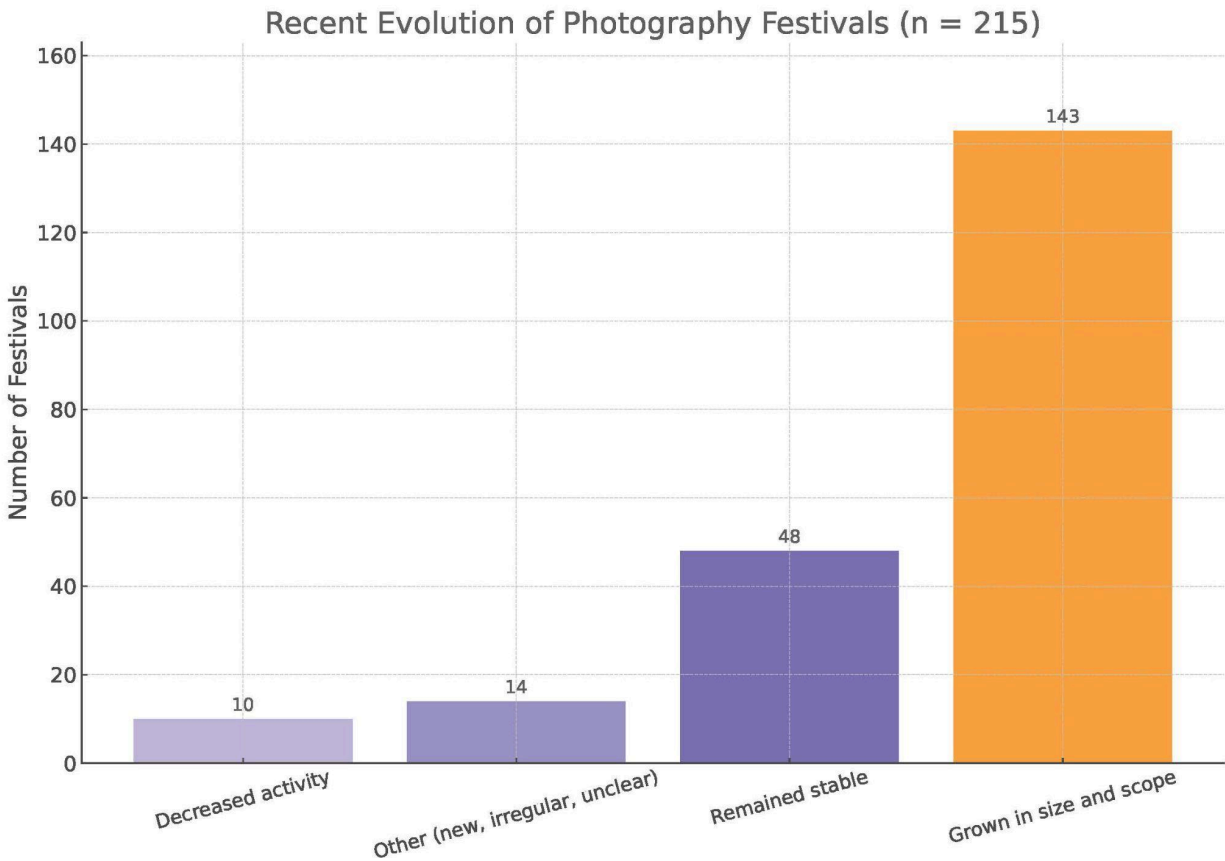
On the other hand, **48 (22.3%) indicated that they have remained stable**, which should not necessarily be interpreted negatively. In a context that is highly precarious, including constant changes in cultural policies, and growing competition for



resources, stability can be seen as **a form of resilience**. These festivals have likely managed to maintain their programming, community, and operations consistently, without major setbacks or advances, which also represents an organisational achievement.

A more concerning finding is that **10 festivals (4.6%) acknowledge having reduced their activity**. Although the number is low, it is important to pay attention to it, as it may be linked to multiple factors such as loss of funding, decreased local interest, organiser fatigue, or cumulative effects of external crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). The existence of this category reminds us that, beyond the enthusiasm and creativity that characterise many festivals, and the emergence of new initiatives, **each year some projects disappear**. Finally, **14 festivals (6.5%)** indicated that it was not possible to provide a clear answer because they were **first editions**, had irregular developments, or operated on a biennial or inconsistent basis. This group represents a segment still in the **process of definition or consolidation**, and whose future outcomes will depend on structural factors and the support they receive.

Taken together, the data reveals a diverse and evolving photographic ecosystem, where **more than half of the festivals perceive a positive evolution, but where stability or even decline remains a reality** for a significant number of them. Understanding these internal dynamics is essential for designing public policies, support networks, and collaborative strategies that strengthen the sector's long-term sustainability.



The photography festival ecosystem has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years, marked by an **intense dynamic of renewal**. A particularly revealing fact is that **20% of the surveyed festivals (44 out of 215) were founded in just the last three years (2022, 2023, and 2024)**. This figure highlights a moment of strong creative momentum, even in a context marked by the post-pandemic period, economic instability, and an oversaturated cultural calendar. Far from retreating, the sector has demonstrated a surprising capacity for regeneration, with new projects aiming to fill vacant spaces, propose alternative models, or respond to new social and artistic demands.

However, this wave of new foundations coexists with a parallel phenomenon of significant closures. Among the 322 festivals identified as inactive, **102 held their last edition also in the years 2022, 2023, or 2024. This represents approximately 32% of all closures**, concentrated in just three years. The figure is troubling and suggests that **while many new festivals are emerging with strength, an even greater**



proportion of festivals fail to sustain themselves over time. The causes are multiple: **burnout of founding teams, lack of funding, loss of in-person audiences, poor digital adaptation, or difficulties in institutionalizing their structures.**

This contrast between emergence and disappearance outlines an ecosystem that is deeply unstable, yet also dynamic and in constant transformation. The high turnover can be interpreted as a sign of vitality, where initiatives follow one another and reinvent themselves; but also as a warning about the structural fragility of many projects. **The creation of support, sustainability, and training policies becomes urgent so that this creative energy is not lost in short-lived cycles, but instead consolidates over time and strengthens the global cultural fabric.**

When contrasting empirical data with the perceptions of the festivals themselves, a significant paradox emerges: while 66.5% of respondents claim to have grown in recent years, the evidence shows a more fragile reality, with a high rate of recent closures. In fact, among the inactive festivals analyzed, one-third disappeared between 2022 and 2024 alone. This contradiction does not necessarily invalidate the perception of growth, but rather **highlights a divergence between the internal sense of development of those that have survived, greater visibility, team consolidation, expansion of activities, and actual long-term sustainability.** There may be festivals that grow quickly in their early years but fail to endure due to a lack of structure or adequate resources. **Initial enthusiasm, while an indispensable driver, does not always translate into long-term stability.**

This tension between perceived growth and actual mortality illustrates **one of the sector's greatest current challenges: transforming creative energy and the will to expand into lasting structures.** The positive evolution many organisers report must be accompanied by concrete measures of institutional support, professional training, and access to international networks that reinforce their viability. Only then will it be possible to transform this vibrant—yet still unstable—ecosystem into a solid, resilient, and diverse cultural framework. Acknowledging this duality does not mean dismissing optimism, but rather integrating it with a critical and strategic perspective that enables the design of policies that respond to both the potential and also the vulnerability of contemporary festivals.

c) Future plans

The analysis of photography festivals' future plans reveals an **encouraging scenario, marked by a clear desire for growth, renewal, and projection.** A large



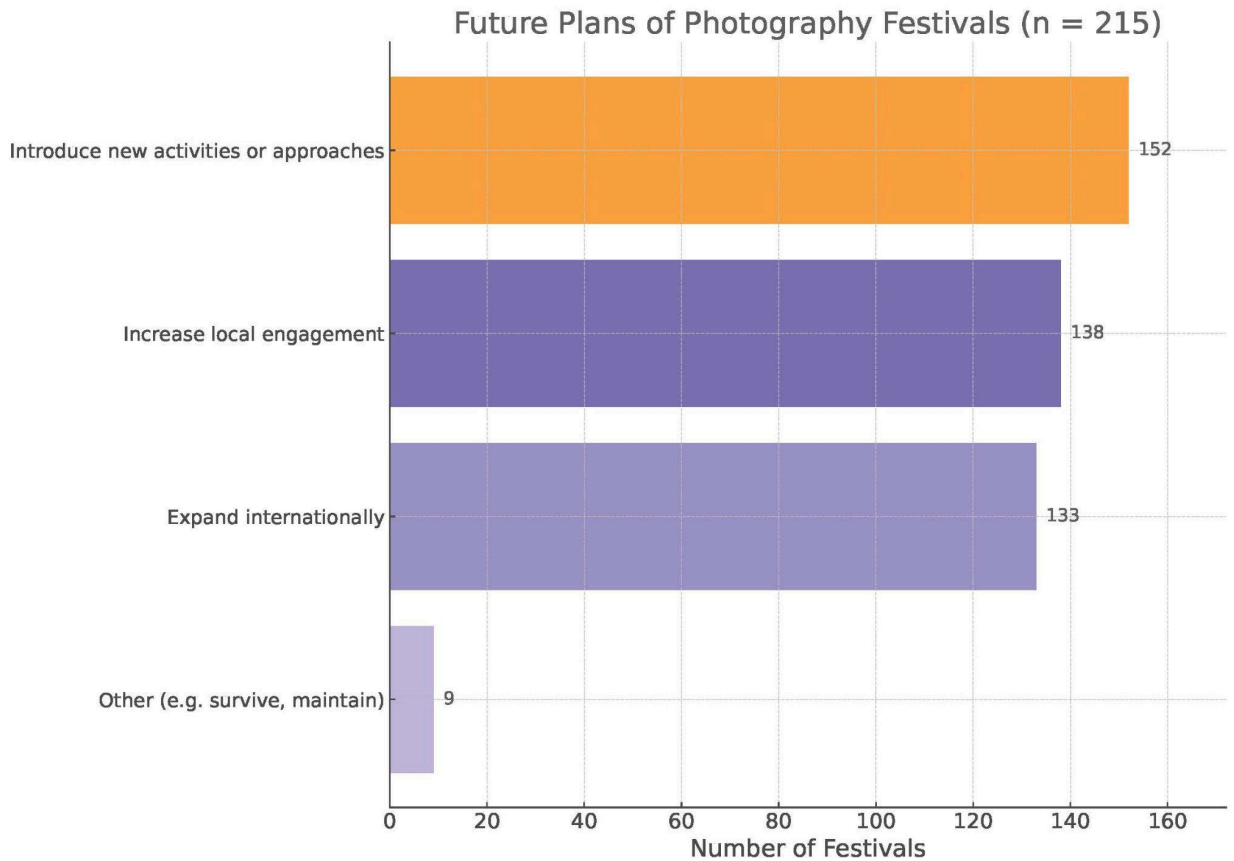
majority, 152 festivals (**70.7%**), indicated their intention to introduce new activities or approaches, suggesting an ecosystem in constant transformation that **seeks to adapt to new audience expectations as well as to present-day technological, economic, and cultural challenges**. This orientation toward innovation reflects strong creative vitality and a capacity to continually rethink the purpose and formats of the festival.

At the same time, an equally significant number of festivals, 138 (**64.2%**), express a desire to **strengthen their connection with local communities**. This strategy of territorial anchoring not only aims to increase participation from nearby audiences but also to establish the festival as an active agent in the cultural development of its surroundings. In contexts where financial sustainability and institutional legitimacy depend largely on social impact, this orientation is key to the project's continuity and recognition.

On the other hand, many—**133 festivals (61.9%)—envision a future beyond national borders, aiming for international expansion**. This projection responds to a need to broaden collaborative networks, access new sources of funding, circulate content and artists, and position themselves on the global map of cultural events. Internationalisation, however, is not merely a matter of scale or prestige, but also a **commitment to connecting diverse communities, forging strategic alliances, and enriching discourse through cultural exchange**.

Although the majority appear proactive and growth-oriented, some voices also express uncertainty or limitations. A small number, **9 festivals (4.2%)**—likely those that previously acknowledged having reduced their activity—report modest plans or are directly focused on ensuring their survival. These responses remind us that, while the ecosystem shows signs of expansion, not all festivals start from the same resource base or face the same structural conditions.

The cross-reading of these three axes: **programmatic innovation, local anchoring, and internationalisation** makes it possible to identify **three predominant strategies** among contemporary photography festivals. On the one hand, a **proximity strategy** focused on strengthening ties with the local sphere: building community, responding to specific contexts, and acting as a cultural engine for the territory. On the other hand, an **international projection** strategy that seeks to expand networks, legitimise curatorial work on a global scale, and multiply opportunities for the circulation of artists and content. Finally, a **constantly updating** strategy, which cuts across the sector and is reflected in the willingness to experiment with new formats, technologies, languages, and ways of engaging with audiences.



What is interesting is that **these three strategies are not mutually exclusive**; in many cases, **they coexist within the same festival**, creating a **complex dynamic where the local and the global, the traditional and the emerging, the community-based and the professional intersect in varying proportions**. This plurality of approaches is indicative of a **diverse, adaptable, and ambitious ecosystem** that does not settle for repeating formulas but instead explores new paths to remain relevant and expand its impact. In this sense, future plans reflect not only individual aspirations but a **collective trend toward reinvention**—one of the sector’s main assets. Overall, the data suggest that festivals do not view themselves as closed or fixed formats, but as **evolving projects, attuned to contextual changes and opportunities for growth**. This ability to imagine possible futures and work to realise them is undoubtedly one of the sector’s greatest strengths and a clear indicator of its cultural relevance today.



d) Conclusions:

The data collected in this chapter offers a comprehensive and nuanced view of the state of mind of photography festivals in relation to their long-term sustainability. One of the most recurring concerns is the **uncertainty of funding**, both public and private, which results in difficulties in medium and long-term planning. This financial vulnerability affects not only artistic programming but also the ability to retain talent, professionalise teams, and maintain stable operational structures. In addition, many point out the lack of **adequate or permanent spaces**, as well as the need for greater institutional support to ensure their continuity. Another key dimension is the fragility of **human capital**. Numerous festivals highlight the difficulty of consolidating professional, trained, and well-compensated teams, which generates a heavy dependence on volunteers or individual initiatives. This situation particularly affects those festivals with lower budgets, which operate under precarious conditions, and hinders the generational renewal necessary to guarantee the festivals future sustainability. The lack of specific training in cultural management is also mentioned, which limits the potential for strategic innovation.

Regarding the **evolution in recent years**, the overall perception is positive. A significant majority report having **grown in size and scope**, both in the number of activities and the participation of audiences, artists, and collaborators. This growth is usually accompanied by greater professionalisation, diversification of formats, and territorial expansion. However, there are also festivals that have experienced a **stabilisation** of their dynamics or even a **reduction** in their activity, in many cases as a result of the impact of the pandemic, the regional economic situation, or changes in local cultural policies. **Expansion does not always imply linear or tension-free growth**. Some have reached a stage of maturity where they prioritise consolidating what they have already achieved, deepening community ties, or redefining their objectives, instead of focusing exclusively on growth. This type of stabilisation can also be interpreted as a strategic evolution, especially when it is based on reflection on the cultural, social, and ecological impact of the festival on its surroundings. At the same time, **several testimonies mention a need to rethink the festival model itself, adapting it to new social, digital, and environmental realities**. It should be noted that these positive perceptions contradict the **high objective rates of festival closures in our database**.

Regarding future plans, respondents are ambitious and proactive. More than 70% want to introduce new activities or approaches, in a clear attempt to maintain their relevance, attract new audiences, and respond to changes in the cultural sector. At the same time, a high percentage (64.2%) want to **strengthen local**



participation, working more closely with their immediate surroundings. Finally, a majority (61.9%) also aspire to **expand internationally**, denoting a strong interest in entering global networks, promoting artists and exhibitions, and positioning themselves within a broader ecosystem. **This triple strategy—innovate, establish roots, and project—expresses a comprehensive and ambitious vision of the future.**

In short, festivals face the future with a balance between **optimism and awareness of their limits**. On the one hand, they demonstrate a great capacity for adaptation, creativity, and openness to change; on the other hand, they recognise the structural weaknesses that threaten their continuity. For these future projections to materialise, it will be essential to have cultural policies that value the role of festivals, foster collaboration among them, and support their transformations with sustainable resources. **Ultimately, this chapter reveals a vibrant, dynamic sector with enormous potential, but one that requires nurturing and strengthening to ensure its long-term sustainability.**



13) Future research IPFA

Following the development of this first global report on the state of photography festivals, IPFA (International Photography Festivals Association) **commits to continuing its research in a detailed, systematic, rigorous, and collective manner.** The information gathered has not only helped identify trends, strengths, and weaknesses of the current ecosystem, but has also revealed numerous questions that require more specific, continued, and in-depth studies.

In this section, we present a roadmap for the coming years of research. Each proposed study stems from **a need identified during the preparation of this report and aims not only to describe the sector**, but also to transform it: providing relevant data, stimulating reflection among member festivals, and proposing sustainable, collaborative, and innovative models for action. **These future investigations seek to strengthen the ecosystem, prevent risks, promote good practices, and expand the strategic horizon of festivals worldwide.** Here are the proposals:

- 1) **Audience Mapping: Who Participates in Photography Festivals? (2026)** will investigate the profiles, motivations, levels of participation, and access barriers of audiences in festivals across different regions of the world. This analysis will enable festivals to adapt their programming, diversify their audiences, improve accessibility, and strengthen their cultural impact, providing tools for more inclusive and strategic local and international programming.
- 2) **Working Conditions and Organisational Structures in Photography Festivals (2027)** will address how these events are internally organised: levels of professionalisation, team stability, types of employment, and working conditions. This is a key study to shed light on the structural precariousness affecting much of the sector, and improve the human sustainability of cultural work, and promote care-oriented policies that support the continuity and professionalisation of the ecosystem.
- 3) **Green Festivals: Ecological Sustainability and the Production of Photography Festivals (2028)** will analyze current and potential practices to reduce environmental impact, from exhibition materials to transportation and energy consumption. In the face of the climate emergency, this study will offer guidelines and replicable models to help festivals remain culturally relevant while also being environmentally responsible.
- 4) **Economic Anatomy of Photography Festivals: What Keeps Festivals Afloat? (2029)** will be the first study to attempt a precise quantification of the actual weight of each funding source: public subsidies, private sponsorships,



self-financing, ticket sales, or collaborations. Understanding this economic composition is essential to assess the sector's true autonomy or vulnerability and to design sustainable strategies in the face of potential crises or political changes.

- 5) **Horizon 2040: Possible Scenarios for Photography Festivals (2030)** will project potential futures for the ecosystem based on current trends such as digitalisation, internationalisation, the climate crisis, changes in global mobility patterns, and new forms of cultural consumption. It will serve as a roadmap to anticipate challenges, envision transformations, and prepare strategically to remain relevant in the decade ahead.
- 6) **Festival Mortality Rates: Causes, Consequences, and Lessons Learned (2031)** will focus on analyzing the reasons behind the closure of festivals. It will explore economic, political, institutional, and personal factors, as well as issues related to lack of professionalisation, and will identify patterns based on regions, scales, and management models. This study will enable learning from failures and help design more resilient strategies, avoiding common mistakes and generating recommendations to increase the longevity of cultural initiatives.
- 7) **How Does One Learn to Organise a Festival? Training, Knowledge, and Transmission (2032)** will investigate the educational and professional paths of those who organise festivals: their academic or self-taught backgrounds, the knowledge acquired through practice, support networks, the role of mentors, and the availability of specialised training. This study will help to understand how the necessary skills to sustain events are developed, shedding light on current gaps and proposing new training models. The new models are more accessible, systematic, and context-specific—as well as being aimed at strengthening future generations in the sector while addressing a key question: should specialised training in festival organisation be created?

With these annual studies, IPFA positions itself as an active research **observatory committed to the present and future of photography festivals**. Each of these planned studies aims to generate useful, open, and actionable knowledge that not only allows festivals to adapt to changes in their environment but also to lead those changes with responsibility and vision. From the analysis of their economic structure to the projection of future scenarios in 2040, these studies will contribute **to building a stronger, more connected, professionalised, and resilient community**. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that photography festivals continue to be key spaces for creation, the circulation of images, and the construction of collective meaning in a constantly changing world.



14) Conclusions

This final chapter presents a synthesis of the report's **main findings and offers a panoramic view** of the current state of the global photography festival ecosystem. Through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 215 participants in the report—alongside the projection of 1,000 active festivals and hundreds of discontinued initiatives—**an integrated vision is constructed of the sector's scale, impact, strengths, and vulnerabilities**. Far from being limited to a statistical summary, these conclusions aim to provide tools for strategic reflection for organisers, institutions, cultural networks, and public policy makers, with the goal of **strengthening the sustainability, diversity, and long-term projection** of festivals as fundamental spaces for the circulation of photography and cultural transformation worldwide.

How many festivals exist (and how many have disappeared)?

It is currently estimated that there are around **1,000 active photography festivals worldwide**, unevenly distributed across regions but featuring a wide diversity of curatorial approaches, scales, and organisational models. This figure is key to understanding the magnitude of the global ecosystem and its impact on artistic production, audience development, and cultural dynamisation. The fact that **nearly 16% have been founded between 2023 and 2025** shows remarkable dynamism, **encouraging optimism and reflecting the sector's ongoing capacity for renewal**.

However, this vitality coexists with **a high rate of disappearance**. Through digital sources, we have identified at least **322 inactive festivals**. If we include those that existed between **1950 and 2004** and left no trace online—though they appear in printed archives or analogue sources—the real number could exceed **600 and possibly even approach 800 defunct festivals**. This implies that for every active festival, there is at least one that has ceased activity, revealing the sector's **structural fragility and the urgent need to develop sustainability strategies, collaborative networks, and public policies** that strengthen the longevity of these cultural initiatives. It is worth noting that the current estimated **average lifespan is 13.6 years, with a median of 15 years**.

How many people work in photography festivals?

Photography festivals mobilise a significant volume of human resources. According to our estimates, between **8,000 and 12,000 people** collaborate each year in the organisation of these events worldwide. This group includes professional teams



as well as volunteers, curators, technicians, communicators, cultural managers, and mediation staff. Organizing a festival requires a wide variety of profiles and skills and represents a considerable human investment.

This workforce—often precarious or driven by vocation—forms a **fundamental pillar of the sector**. Its recognition is essential to highlight the economic and social value of festivals, as well as to promote fairer working conditions. Investing in the people who make these events possible is also an **investment in cultural quality, institutional continuity, and organisational resilience**.

How many artists participate each year?

Artistic participation is one of the essential driving forces of festivals. According to the average obtained, each festival hosts between **25 and 40 artists per edition**, which, projected across 1,000 festivals, amounts to **approximately 32,000 artists** per year who find in these events a space for visibility, circulation, and professionalisation. This figure reflects not only the productive scale of the sector, but also its role as a platform for validating contemporary photographic practices.

Festivals function as spaces for **discovery and legitimization**, boosting careers, strengthening artistic networks, and promoting values such as memory, social justice, and sustainability through visual language. Their role in **diversifying voices** and activating critical discourse makes them key actors on the international cultural scene.

How many participants do festivals engage?

Photography festivals attract a broad, diverse, and steadily growing audience. With an estimated average of 5,000 participants per festival, and considering a total of approximately 1,000 active festivals worldwide, **annual in-person attendance** reaches around **5 million people**. To this, we must add audiences interacting in the **digital sphere**, especially through social media platforms like Instagram, where communicative impact has multiplied in recent years. As we have seen, the online community associated with festivals also reaches **5 million people**, bringing the total number of global participants to **10 million per year**.

This massive reach shows that photography festivals are not marginal events, but rather **cultural platforms with international impact**. They serve as spaces for visual education, community engagement, artistic circulation, and critical reflection. Additionally, they have a direct impact on local identity, cultural tourism, civic networks, and audience development. This level of civic participation, both physical and digital, consolidates festivals as **strategic agents of social transformation**, with an influence



that transcends traditional exhibition formats. Their recognition and reinforcement should be a priority in public policy and contemporary cultural agendas

How many activities and exhibitions are produced (and don't circulate)?

Festivals organise an average of **18 activities per edition**, which translates to **18,000 photography-related activities globally each year**. Of these, between 30% and 50% are exhibitions, resulting in an estimated total of around **4,250 exhibitions annually**. While this figure is an estimate, it highlights the **enormous volume of artistic production** concentrated in festivals.

The exhibition remains the primary format—not only due to its frequency but also because of its **symbolic, logistical, and communicative weight**. However, this production faces **challenges in sustainability and circulation**: many exhibitions are seen only once and then archived or dismantled. This raises a debate about the **need for collaboration between festivals**, content circulation, resource optimisation, and reduction of ecological impact—key elements for a more efficient and resilient cultural model.

It is worth noting that over **70%—nearly 3,000—of the exhibitions produced annually are shown only once and never leave their festival of origin**, reflecting an alarming structural inefficiency in terms of **cultural sustainability, artistic visibility, and resource use**. This lack of circulation not only limits the reach and impact of the content, but also fragments the international photography scene and reduces opportunities for connection between audiences, artists, and contexts. This phenomenon is directly linked to a lack of institutional cooperation and weak network coordination. In an ecosystem as productive as that of photography festivals, **the absence of collaboration today represents one of the sector's greatest invisible cultural losses**.

What is the economic volume of the ecosystem?

The average budget per festival is approximately **€63,500**, which projected globally represents an estimated annual expenditure of **€63.5 million**. This figure reflects both the **economic importance of the sector** and its internal inequality: some festivals operate with budgets exceeding €200,000, while others survive on less than €2,500 per year. **This heterogeneity calls for differentiated approaches to support, planning, and financial analysis**.

Moreover, most festivals rely heavily on **public funding**, which is often subject to political shifts or budget cuts. Understanding the real balance between subsidies,



self-generated income, and private contributions will be key to **reducing the sector's economic vulnerability**. Financial sustainability must be a priority to ensure the continuity and autonomy of festivals.

Final thoughts

1. A Living, Expansive, and Vulnerable Ecosystem

The report confirms what many in the sector had long suspected but had not yet been rigorously quantified: photography festivals constitute a far-reaching and dynamic cultural ecosystem. With an estimated **1,000 active festivals worldwide, more than 4,000 exhibitions organised annually, and a community that mobilises over 30,000 artists and between 8,000 and 12,000 workers, festivals are key agents in contemporary cultural production**. Their capacity to provide access, dissemination, circulation, and transformation around photography is remarkable. However, this vitality coexists with deep fragility: **a high mortality rate, strong dependence on unstable public resources, a lack of collaborative networks, and often precarious working conditions**. The coexistence of expansion and vulnerability is one of the sector's structural paradoxes and must be a priority to address.

2. The Urgency of a Sustainable Economy

One of the report's most striking findings is the **structural precariousness of funding models**. Although most festivals receive some form of public support, there is no direct correlation between the number of funding sources and economic stability. The vast majority operate on **limited budgets, often below €30,000 annually, and depend heavily on subsidies tied to political calendars or institutional shifts**. The lack of data on the amounts contributed by each source prevents a realistic assessment of each actor's economic weight, but everything indicates that the sector's vulnerability to budget cuts or restructurings is critical. It is urgent to develop more precise indicators, explore new funding avenues (such as corporate partnerships, philanthropy, or collaborative economies), and demand greater institutionalisation of public support as a long-term cultural policy.

3. Artistic Richness in Search of Greater Circulation

The report reveals that despite the extremely high number of exhibitions organised each year, only a small portion manage to circulate beyond the festival that



produces them. It is estimated that at least **40% of festivals worldwide have never collaborated with other platforms, meaning that thousands of exhibitions remain untraveled, without shared resources, and without reaching wider audiences.** This finding challenges the model of the festival as a closed or time-limited space. **Rethinking festivals as nodes within active networks—capable of sharing content, co-producing exhibitions, or coordinating travelling exhibitions—**would not only make more efficient use of resources but also expand cultural impact and reduce both the material and symbolic waste involved in producing works that are only shown once. As the report highlights, **it is essential to consolidate a coordinating actor to lead the circulation of works and exhibitions.**

4. Festivals as Invisible Schools

Although not always recognised as such, the photography festival is also an educational platform. Through **workshops, lectures, guided programs, thematic exhibitions, and residencies, festivals play a key role in the training of artists, audiences, and cultural managers.** This pedagogical function is often **underfunded, overlooked, or relegated to peripheral spaces within the program.** Yet its transformative power is enormous: festivals are spaces where people learn not only about photography, but also about ways of seeing, thinking, and engaging with the world. IPFA seeks to promote explicit recognition of this educational dimension and support the development of more solid, inclusive, and cross-cutting educational models—ones that connect artistic practice with critical reflection and context-based cultural action.

5. Diversity, Access, and Representation

The report highlights the willingness of many festivals to be more diverse, inclusive, representative, and horizontal. However, it also shows that these aspirations have not yet translated into systematic mechanisms for open calls, evaluation processes, or sustained actions over time to create space for emerging artists. Declaring principles are not enough: **concrete policies are needed for equitable programming, inclusive access, audience care, and recognition of cultural plurality.** In a global context marked by conflict, inequality, and displacement, festivals have a unique opportunity to become spaces of symbolic repair, mutual recognition, and intercultural dialogue. This requires rethinking languages, formats, curatorial criteria, and institutional practices through an ethical, situated, and committed lens.



6. The Need to Think Collectively

A recurring pattern throughout the report is the **high degree of institutional isolation in which many festivals operate: lack of partnerships, limited circulation, and scarce international collaboration. This fragmentation not only limits development opportunities but also weakens the ecosystem as a whole.** It is time to think collectively—to build genuine networks of exchange, to share best practices, to promote co-productions, curatorial exchanges, and joint strategies for funding, training, and circulation. **Only a connected community will be able to face the structural challenges that currently threaten the sector’s sustainability. IPFA has a crucial role to play here as a space for horizontal coordination, mutual listening, and collective action.**

7. A Long-Term Roadmap

Finally, this report is not an ending, but a beginning. Based on its findings, it **proposes a seven-year research agenda to explore key issues in depth:** economy, labor, training, diversity, ecology, and the future. This roadmap seeks not only to produce knowledge but also to guide action, inform public policy, design support programs, and promote the structural transformation of the ecosystem. The study planned for 2030 aims to envision the possible scenarios of the “Horizon 2040”: an invitation to imagine the role photography festivals will play in a world shaped by new technologies, cultural transformations, environmental crises, and geopolitical shifts. **Preparing for that future begins today—with bold decisions, collective intelligence, and an ethics of care as a guiding principle.**



15) Festivals participating in this report:

215 festivals from 54 countries on five continents participated in this research: Tomar la Calle Fotofest (Mexico), Biennale della Fotografia Femminile (Italy), Budapest Photo Festival (Hungary), Bucharest Photofest (Romania), Experimental Photo Festival (Spain), Tigre Photo Fest (Argentina), InCadaqués Photo Festival (Spain), Festival de Arte Analógica São Paulo (Brazil), On Photo Soria (Spain), Fokus Award (Spain), Photoimagen (Dominican Republic), Bienal Argentina de Fotografía Documental (Argentina), Belgrade Photo Month (Serbia), BPM Book Week (Serbia), Abuja Photo Festival (Nigeria), Basque Dok Festival (Spain), Brussels Street Photography Festival (Belgium), Photo|Frome (United Kingdom), Lisbon Street Photo Fest (Portugal), Ojos Rojos (Spain), Photo Days (Italy), International Photo Festival Olten (Switzerland), Ficha Fest (Chile), Lens op de Mens Internationaal fotofestival Pelt (Belgium), Valija de Luz Festival (Chile), Katharsis Festival (Spain), Festival de Fotografía de Paranapiacaba (Brazil), São Paulo Photo Festival (Brazil), Foto Festival Internacional Manzana 1 (Bolivia), IPMA Festival (Lithuania), Festival Pinhole Perú (Perú), Photometria International Photography Festival (Greece), MontPhoto Fest (Spain), Festival of Ethical Photography (Italy), f/stop - Festival for Photography Leipzig (Germany), Festival International de la Photo Animalière et de Nature de Montier en Der (France), Festival de Fotografía de Tiradentes - Foto em Pauta (Brazil), Festival Lumen (Ecuador), analogueNOW (Germany), The Phair Art Fair (Italy), PhEST - Festival Internazionale di Fotografia e Arte (Italy), Fotografia Calabria Festival (Italy), MargenFest (Mexico), Women Street Photographers Festival (United States), Bandung Photography Month (Indonesia), Calamuchita FotoDoc (Argentina), El Ojo Salvaje (Paraguay), Festival Ascenso de Fotos y Videos de Aventura (Chile), Orvieto Fotografia (Italy), IMP - International Month of Photojournalism (Italy), Festival de Fotografía Analógica Ricardo Martín (Spain), Festival Araucano de Fotografía FAF (Chile), Esfotoperiodismo (El Salvador), IN[Visibles] (Spain), Ragusa Foto Festival (Italy), Festival Hercule Florence de Fotografía de Campinas (Brazil), Trieste Photo Days (Italy), PhMuseum Days (Italy), Les Boutographies (France), Cairo Photo Week (Egypt), Cortona On The Move (Italy), Quijote Photofest (Spain), Efêmero Festival Experimental de Fotografía (Brazil), Diafragma. International Festival of Photography and Visual Arts (Portugal), Les Villes Invisibles (France), Exposure+ Photo Festival (Malasia), Białystok INTERPHOTO (Poland), Mesnographies (France), Encontros da Imagen (Portugal), Goyazes. Festival de Fotografía (Brazil), L'Émoi Photographique (France), Fotografia Europea (Italy), barrObjectif (France), Fif Colombia (Colombia), Chennai Photo Biennale (India), Miami Streets Photography Festival (United States), Fest Comarcas Photo (Spain), MFA - Mostra de Fotografía e Autores (Brazil), Cosmo Photo Fest (Mexico), ISO Photo Festival



(Mexico), FotoFabrika (Macedonia), Image Festival Amman (Jordania), Kolga Tbilisi Photo (Georgia), International Edremit Photo Festival (Turkey), LagosPhoto Festival (Nigeria), TANK - Immagine Analogica (Italy), Photo Romania Festival (Romania), Port Harcourt Photography Festival (Nigeria), Photo In Rio Conference (Brazil), Head On Photo Festival (Australia), Festival de Fotografía de la Sexta Región-FEFS (Chile), Copenhagen Photo Festival (Denmark), Yeast Photo Festival (Italy), FOCUS (Austria), Lancashire Fringe Festival (United Kingdom), Photopolis Agrinio Photo Festival (Greece), Imago Lisboa (Portugal), BredaPhoto Festival (Netherlands), PhotoBrussels Festival (Belgium), Cleveland Photo Fest (United States), Tirana Photo Festival (Albania), Estepa Fotoferia (Argentina), Gibellina Photoroad Festival (Italy), Click! Photography Festival (United States), Medium Festival of Photography (United States), FotoArtFestival (Poland), Sarajevo Photography Festival (Bosnia and Herzegovina), FOTOCANÍMAR (Cuba), Fotodoks - Festival for Contemporary Documentary Photography (Germany), Helsinki Darkroom Festival (Finland), Fotofestival Naarden (Netherlands), Festival La Gacilly-Baden Photo (Austria), Pavlovka Pinhole Fest (Ukraine), Foto Festival Lenzburg (Switzerland), Verzasca Foto Festival (Switzerland), Ballarat International Foto Biennale (Australia), Dublin Street Photography Festival (Ireland), Enfocats (Spain), Festival Cargo. Les photographiques de Saint-Nazaire (France), Photo+Adventure (Austria), Wallmapu Foto (Chile), Encuentro Foto Atacama (Chile), Festival Internacional de Fotografía de Valparaíso (Chile), Foto Arica (Chile), Month of Photography Denver (United States), PolaCon (United States), Florida's Photo Fest (United States), Festival Nacional de Fotografía Fotoveritas (Chile), Escales Photo (France), Festival Photo Brioude (France), Biennale L'Été des Portraits (France), Chamonix Photo Festival (France), NARNIMMAGINARIA (Italy), Photolab Panamá (Panama), PhotoAlaquàs (Spain), Rome Photo Lab (Italy), Festiwal Fotoforma (Poland), 212 Photography Istanbul (Turkey), Noorderlicht Biënnale (Netherlands), Zero Negativo (Mexico), Vintage Photo Festival (Poland), Privas Photo Festival (France), San Francisco Photo Book Fair (United States), Saywa (Perú), Greater Poland Photography Festival (Poland), Palm Springs Photo Festival (United States), Livorno Photo Meeting (Italy), Rencontres Image & Environnement (France), PHOTAIX (France), The Eye International Photography Festival (United Kingdom), Exposure Photography Festival (Canada), Karuizawa Foto Fest (Japan), Swiss Photomonth (Switzerland), BZH PHOTO (France), Getxophoto Nazioarteko Irudi Jaialdia (Spain), Belfast Photo Festival (Ireland del Norte), Daegu Photo Biennale (Corea del Sur), Festival Impulse (France), BPM Biennale de la Photographie de Mulhouse (France), La Photo Madre-Lpm (France), Darmstädter Tage der Fotografie (Germany), :unmittelbar / Werkschau Deutsche Sofortbild Kunst (Germany), Festival de la Photo Urbaine de Fabrègues (France), FASE (Italy), FORMAT Festival (United Kingdom), Les Nuits Photographiques de Pierrevet (France), FotoFocus Biennial (United States), Norsk Naturfotofestival (Norway), Funzilla. Rome Photozine Festival (Italy), Rovinj Photodays (Croatia), Photoworks Festival (United



Kingdom), Masterclass Festival Internacional de Fotografía de Bogotá (Colombia), Sanremo Photo Fest (Italy), Le Vie delle Foto (Italy), Encuentro de Fotografía Análoga Aysén (Chile), Temps d'Expo (France), Review Santa Fe Photo Symposium (United States), The Analog Festival (Portugal), SI FEST (Italy), FLOW Photofest (Scotland), Visiona (Spain), Fiebre Photobook (Spain), Mesiac Fotografie (Slovakia), Rencontres Photographiques du Prieuré (France), Kuala Lumpur Photography Festival (Malasia), Enfoto Los Lagos (Chile), T3 Photo Festival Tokyo (Japan), Leipzig Photobook Festival (Germany), GU.PHO. Festival (Italy), Les Femmes s'Exposent (France), Festival de Fotografía Internacional en León (Mexico), FotoFest (United States), OKO Foto Festival Bohinj (Slovenia), IMAGINÀRIA (Spain), FELIFA (Argentina), L'Image Satellite (France), Feria de Fotografía (Colombia), Semana de la Fotografía Estenopeica en Oaxaca (Mexico), BOP Bristol (United Kingdom), Menorca Doc Fest (Spain), Jornadas de fotografía creativa InVisibles (Spain), Auckland Festival of Photography (New Zealand), Photo Oxford (United Kingdom), Montreal Street Photography Festival (Canada), PA-TA-TA FESTIVAL (Spain), Stirling Photography Festival (United Kingdom), Storie di un Attimo (Italy), Festival internacional de fotografía Campos de Luz (Brazil), StgoFoto (Chile), Rencontres de la photo de Chabeuil (France), Emergente. Festival de Fotografía (Ecuador), Festival Mês da Fotografia (Brazil), Festival Fotográfico de Medellín (Colombia) and Phodar (Bulgaria).



Annex I: Research Questionnaire

This questionnaire was distributed to international photography festivals as part of the data collection process for the preparation of the *First Report on the Current State of Photography Festivals in the World*:

1. Email address
2. Festival name
3. Year of first edition
4. Month in which the festival is held
5. Number of scheduled days
6. If the festival organises activities throughout the year, please indicate the total number of scheduled days (optional)
7. How many people are needed to organise your festival? (Not including volunteers who work exclusively during the festival) Does the organizing team receive financial compensation for their work?
8. Do artists, authors, speakers, or curators receive fees for their participation in the festival?
9. In terms of hourly compensation, who receives a higher salary?
10. Does the organizing team have specific training in cultural management?
11. What types of activities take place at the festival? (You may select more than one option)
12. How many activities were held at the last edition?
13. How many artists, authors, exhibitors, and curators participated in the last edition?
14. How many artists, authors, exhibitors, and curators have historically participated in the festival? (Open field)
15. How many people attended the festival's activities in the last edition?
16. What is the festival's target audience? (You can select more than one option)
17. Do you feel that the festival's activities are valued by society? (From least to most valued)
18. Do you feel that the festival's activities are valued by institutions? (From least to most valued)
19. What are the festival's main sources of funding? (You can select more than one option)
20. If the festival receives public funding, how many months before its event did it receive funding? (Optional)
21. What was the approximate budget for the last edition of the festival? (in euros)



22. Has the festival collaborated with other photography festivals? (You can select more than one option)
23. What are the festival's main concerns to ensure its operation and continuity? (You can select more than one option)
24. How has the festival evolved in recent years? (optional)
25. What are the festival's future plans? (You can select more than one option)
26. Consent for data processing
27. If you have any additional comments, please write them here.

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