

Connecting Communities and Empowering Citizens: Ideals and Praxis

A Case-study of *iepen mienskip* at Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018

ECHC – IO 3

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*“you can be successful as a region when
you are built bottom up and that is what
we wanted to show Europe!”
Lwd-Fryslan2018*

The Context

Europe is a cultural community. This is a statement that probably few Europeans would debate, however, its official iteration has only been circulating in the public and political arena since 2017.¹ The haste with which the Commission tries to forge a common denominator, a sense of self and belonging among the 28 (now 27) nations and to promote a powerful concept of a shared European continent has been visible for the past few years. The relevance of this emphasis on culture and education as pivotal elements in forging a European community has been underlined by several representative continent-wide surveys on social trust and European cohesion. The surveys have made it rather visible that the success and the future of Europe lies first and foremost in upcoming generations in general, and in their shared cultural values and European identifications in particular.

Admittedly, there have been important precedents to this process ranging from the famous European student mobility programs (Erasmus, Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus, Marie Curie and

¹ *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture*. The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017, Strasbourg, 14 November 2017.

Jean Monnet fellowships), cultural initiatives (Creative Europe, ECoC), European Frameworks of Excellence in research and teaching, the Horizon 2020, the Europe for Citizens program to the creation of the European Higher Education Area and European Research Area (ERA), all of which have been operating with a rather high degree of success. However, several important elements needed for a cultural community still await: for example working out the criteria for common standards of excellence in research, education and artistic performance, creating common meanings of Europeanness and constructing a more general (positive) European collective memory, and building harmonized and collaborative practices of education, political culture and social participation to mention but a few. Creating these systems on a continent with diverse cultures, historical nation states with starkly different pasts, different heritages and inherited issues, different economic performance and living standards, memories, and visions are demanding because it means reaching a consensus over who “we” are as Europeans and what we want to achieve in the 21st century without replicating the horrors of the 20th.

The challenge is quite considerable. The nation state is eroding (populist politics is a clear symptom of this) and as Stuart Hall saw it, globalization and the expansion of global capital has produced paradoxical consequences, namely the strengthening of supranational ties and local allegiances and identities within the nation state.² The meaning of the “local” and “local identity” has also changed as a consequence of globalization: the strengthening of local identities is not as much the revival of particular communities of the past, but more as a construction of a sense of community which, although operates locally, does so according to the logic of globalized processes.³ In other words, community and culture are not essential entities, but always reflect a concrete contextual positioning. Cultural heritage and its twin sister collective memory, which are so often resorted to when forging strong communities, are (often competing) narratives that construct values as much as they preserve them, they divide communities as much as unite them. In this sense building a European cultural community (from diverse communities) and strengthening European identity requires us to dig deep into the intricate mechanisms of global

² Stuart Hall, “Culture, Community, Nation”, in *Cultural Studies*, 1993, 7:3, 354.

³ *ibid.*

processes, cultural battles over the past and the formation of new networks and alliances within and beyond Europe as well.

In light of the EU's somewhat belated concentration on the relevance of culture and education in building European identity and social cohesion, the year 2018 was a momentous one: it was the European year of cultural heritage, while it was the year that two far-away regions/cities took on the role of the European capital of culture: Valetta in Malta and Leeuwarden/Friesland in the Netherlands. In this short report I would like to concentrate on the later by giving an overview and an analysis of how it managed to serve as a model event through its core concept of *iepen mienskip* (criss-crossing communities). I seek to trace how the team managed to put in practice many of the noble aims and principles that the European Commission has set for the member states and cultural institutions to follow in the 2020s.

An Integrated and Participatory Approach

In the framework of the European Capital of Culture, Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018 was imagined as a cultural project that would mobilize locals, have them participate in the co-creation of projects and actively seek out ways of involving external organisations, and lay people from different parts of the country and Europe. The designing team had a long-term vision of social innovation: of using an already given communal spirit, their knowledge about the past and the present, and art and creativity to fight the challenges of climate change, and cement communities that would outlive the temporal boundaries of the project.

Current global challenges are as much European challenges, as they national or local ones: in fact whether they are cultural, social, economic or ecological, the problems that Leeuwarden and Fryslân have to cope with are the same in cities, towns and regions throughout the whole of Europe. In this vein, the LF2018 team viewed the ECoC project as an opportunity for a “large-scale cultural intervention that offers the scope for new solutions”:

We are keen to exchange ideas and experiences with the rest of Europe, for the future of our natural heritage, the relationship between town and countryside, the balance between community and world and between uniqueness and diversity.

The way in which we approach these problems and challenges stems from our belief in the power of communities. We have been inspired by examples of communities that work together to improve the collective quality of life. Our aim is to act as a cohesive network for these initiatives, by experimenting, sharing our experiences, and learning from each other via community connections. We will be presenting a broad cultural programme supported by methods in which connections, dialogues and interaction are key. ⁴

In the opening sentence to the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage the Commission defines cultural heritage as “a common good passed from previous generations as a legacy for those to come”.⁵ The document provides an informative summary of the most important principles and actions that comprise the EU’s strategy in cultivating cultural heritage continent-wide. The document also took stock as to the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, which aimed at „celebrating cultural heritage as a shared resource, raising awareness of common history and values, and reinforcing a sense of belonging to a common European cultural and political space. It created the momentum for cultural heritage to be placed higher on the EU’s agenda, through an integrated approach.” In order to continue this action The Framework for Action was composed, which promotes and puts into practice an integrated and participatory approach to cultural heritage, and contributes to the mainstreaming of cultural heritage across EU policies.⁶ The text defines four principles and five key areas as ways and fields in which to .

The four key principles are: Holistic, Mainstreaming/integrated, Evidence-based policy making, Multi-stakeholder

The five areas of action are

1. an *inclusive* Europe: participation and access for all
2. a *sustainable* Europe: smart solutions for a cohesive and sustainable future
3. a *resilient* Europe: safeguarding endangered heritage
4. an *innovative* Europe: mobilising knowledge and research
5. a stronger global partnership: reinforcing *international cooperation*⁷

⁴ “Urgency” in *Strategisch Bedrijfsplan*, p. 10.

⁵ *The European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*, Working document, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, p. 4.

⁶ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5a9c3144-80f1-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1>

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policies/selected-themes/cultural-heritage>

Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018 also aspires to achieve long-term success based on the five Es⁸ which bear out the five areas of action the EU promotes as guidelines for cultural heritage projects. Tailored to the project's local priorities and needs, the five Es set the principles for the creation of themes and projects at every level.

1. Entrepreneurship - Opportunities for entrepreneurs

The principle of sustainable local economy: Local tourism was expected to rise drastically yielding major opportunities for entrepreneurs: in tourism and recreation, in food and agriculture, in water and landscape management, and in events organisation or energy consumption.

2. Experience - Welcoming environment

The principle of innovation in service of welcoming visitors: The region wanted to represent itself as a welcoming place. However, several infrastructural requirements were not provided at the outset that needed to be solved, such as creating more infrastructure for hospitality and improving the accessibility of event venues (e.g. cycle and walking routes, in the water district electric-powered (water) taxis).

3. Europe - Connected to Europe

The principle of mobilizing international partnerships in fostering resilience: Through the events the organisers wanted to connect their (sense of) community with other communities in Europe. The organisers took initiative to partner up with more than 300 partners from all over Europe.

E.g.: The project '*Spring Fever*' was about following the trail of the black-tailed godwit through Europe. In countries where the bird is resident cooperation with other local communities was planned, to make people aware, through art, of the problems occurring in the bird's natural habitats;

⁸ Strategisch Bedrijfsplan, p.13.

the project *'Lost in the greenhouse'* from the performing arts group Orkater featured a Polish-Dutch theater performance in the greenhouses of the biggest horticultural company in Fryslân. The play tells the story of Polish labourers looking for work and a better life and the struggles between Polish and Dutch workers.

4. Empowerment - Everyone takes part

The principle of inclusivity: children, young people, people with a mental or physical disability, and people who are socially disadvantaged – they are included not only as visitors but as creators as well.

“...there is room for everyone in Fryslân: from Dokkum to Sneek, and from Drachten to Harlingen. Not forgetting those in the rest of the Netherlands and beyond. That is the essence of iepen mienskip. Open community that extends to the furthest reaches of Europe. It's for everyone, whatever his or her unique talents. And anyone who wants to take part will get the chance to do so: city dwellers, country folk, newcomers, rich and poor, across every generation. With culture as a resource Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018 aims to make the world a better place, forever.”⁹

E.g.: community art projects such as the project *'11 fountains'*, or *'Lân fan Taal'*, i.e. the languages praise project which meant to celebrate minority languages such as Fries; the principle of inclusion is also showcased by the organisers' insistence to include prisoners or people with disabilities in the programs.

5. Ecology - Sustainable future

The principle of sustainability: the organisers took this principle as one of the main themes, around which they elicited projects from locals. Respecting the land that is being cultivated and the water that surrounds the region, and the biodiversity that is threatened by overconsumption has immediate effects there, it is something that is close to home. Taking Leeuwarden and the surrounding region as a living lab, they initiated projects that centered around changing people's approach to the consumption of water, energy, food and nature.

⁹ *Strategisch Bedrijfsplan*, p.23.

E.g.:

Together with artists and scientists the project '*Embassy for Water*' meant to represent Leeuwarden as a global city in the field of water technology and water management;

The project '*Spring Fever*' (Silence of the Bees & King of the Meadows) - Scientist Theunis Piersma and percussionist Sytze Pruikma are committed to the plight of two threatened species: the black-tailed godwit and the bee. An international touring festival followed the trail of the godwit through Europe to Fryslân in order to draw attention to the vulnerability of nature;

The project '*Energy Now!*' was about creating artworks that give energy. It was meant to figure out creative ways for the town and province to choose sustainable energy supply (with the business community, education and government, but mainly from people themselves);

In the project '*Farm of the World*' artists spent a month living on a farm, using the harvest of the land to make new works. Professor and musician worked together: the former providing the facts, the musician wrote music, and they tried to push it to political agenda;

The organisers also created a Festival village, where everything was done in sustainable way: 80 000 people did not use fossil fuel for 2 weeks.

The five Es above seem to be a well thought-out set of principles, which are consistently and quite creatively reflected in the type of concrete projects that were realized (and are still being carried out until 2023).

Open communities and Culture

In this section I would like to review and analyse the foundational concept of culture and community in the Lwd-Fryslan2018 project and to demonstrate how the way the organizing team understood these two concepts, reflects a rather progressive approach on the scene of European Capital of Culture.

First: **community is understood as a plurality and open entity**

Second: **culture is understood as the singlemost element that builds and binds communities**, it resides as much in the mindset, attitudes, knowledge, identifications, linguistic or artistic expressions, as in the most mundane everyday practices, or they way these are structured into

social and institutional forms of existence. Therefore culture is not exclusive (i.e. high culture) or nation-based, but it is the soft element that shapes people into communities and allows them to connect.

Mienskip

It describes a sense of togetherness. In earlier times, when society had a strong farming bias, people were connected through economics and religion. Those components were possibly the most dominant binding factors within mienskip. Nowadays, people seldom earn their money in the place where they live, because agricultural communities have partly been replaced by a more urbanized world in which industry and services have acquired a major role. The role of the church has also diminished. And yet mienskip has survived.

What connects people now? What is the factor nowadays that ensures togetherness both in the town and in the countryside? The answer is culture. Culture - in all its various guises - brings people together and allows new communities to be created.¹⁰

In towns, cities and villages culture is experienced at micro level. There are numerous societies in every Frisian village. The same is true of towns and cities. At macro level we are advocating the same structure in Europe. In our view this is what Europe needs, i.e. making a connection with the various communities, criss-crossing Europe, both online and offline.

Today we live in times of perpetual crisis, which is palpable in every sector, it is a crisis of governance, of global finance and neoliberal capitalism, but it is also a crisis of societies and of identity. If people want a better future, then they need to stand up themselves and work on their own societies.

Bearing this in mind, the organisers set out to promote the concept of open community to enhance communal cohesion and to demonstrate how current global challenges are better (more efficiently) overcome if people start solving things locally and doing that together. O. Westerhof, responsible

¹⁰ Strategisch Bedrijfsplan, p.11.

for the legacy of the project, in his presentation of Lwd-Fryslan2018 shared that the organizing team chose the bottom-up approach and community planning in putting together the projects: “we had many conversations with locals, in pubs etc. and asked them what they thought was important to be presented.”

The result was 60 main projects, 200 activities, 600 bottom up projects, all of which contributed to the three storylines (messages) that the community wanted to tell: dare to dream, dare to act and dare to be different.

“In Friesland we’ve already begun creating an open society.’ Prejudices become questions. Creators from around the world are invited. Residents are working for a more diverse landscape. Anyone who feels secluded is given space; anyone who has a talent is given a stage.”¹¹

What culture? Whose culture?

The concept of culture has evolved throughout the twentieth century mainly due to the evolution of anthropology as a discipline and its diverse dilemmas of how we can learn about the other’s culture by doing justice to it. I write this because the way a cultural project understands culture is of enormous significance as it will then have consequences of what kind of culture(s) it will promote and what type of cultural attitudes, values and practices it will foster for communities and social groups.

Edward B. Tylor had defined culture as including knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, capabilities and habits.¹²

Franz Boas emphasized the importance of **enculturation**, the process of learning culture, in the lives of individuals.¹³

¹¹ Year Magazine 2018, p.3.

¹² Tylor, Edward B. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Customs* (London: Cambridge University Press. 1871).

¹³ Boas, Franz. *Race, Language, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and others established that through **enculturation** culture shapes individual identity, self-awareness, and emotions in fundamental ways. They also emphasized the need for **holism**, approaches to research that considered the entire context of a society including its history.¹⁴

Alfred Kroeber and others also established the importance of language as an element of culture and documented the ways in which language was used to communicate complex ideas.¹⁵

Clifford Geertz, the founding member of postmodernist anthropology, noted in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) that culture should not be seen as something that was “locked inside people’s heads.” Instead, **culture is publicly communicated through speech and other behaviours**. Culture, he concluded, is “an historically transmitted **pattern of meanings embodied in symbols**, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life.”¹⁶

To be sure, the above short evolution of definitions are theoretical, however, the understanding of what culture is comes from actual empirical research done by generations of anthropologists/ethnographers: people who wanted to know how communities get formed around culture, how we can understand this elusive concept and how we can turn it to good use in practice (i.e. for emancipatory purposes such as empowering disenfranchised groups, or for bridging communities with rather different histories).

The cultural project of Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018 seems to follow the latest developments in how culture could and should be understood for the betterment of society. The ways in which the concept aims to form (and inform) European identity on the basis of an understanding of culture that is dynamic, open and thriving on connections reflects a notable change and improvement from other “transnational” traditions of cultural initiatives or projects, which have a tendency to

¹⁴ See for example Benedict, Ruth. *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Company, 1934).

¹⁵ Kroeber, Alfred. *The Nature of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

showcase national culture, to represent it as static and unchanging, and infused with hints of ethnocentrism they become ethnographic theatres reaffirming cultural stereotypes of a certain national contingent. (I think of the history of World and International Fairs, the Venice Biennale, the Eurovision Song Contest etc.)

In the formulation of the concept, the themes and the description of the concrete projects, the organiser tried to do something new by extending horizons and promoting the noble ideals of inclusivity, cultural pluralism and diversity by their actual practical realisations - which is always the most challenging task. And by doing an exemplary series of initiatives, they functioned as a “cultural test tube” and with many successful incubations they pioneered and preceded many of goals in the Commission’s agenda on “strengthening European citizenship through culture and education” for the upcoming years.

Iepen mienskip thus, translates to an open sense of community, which sounds wonderful, but of course the question remains how exactly to achieve it. The first step is to openly face the challenges and discuss possibilities of dealing with refugees, racism, climate change, the crisis of democracy and freedom. While the concept of open communities probably did not solve all of these massive issues during 2018, it did take up the important challenge to encourage people to really think about how we can and want to live together in a world that is rapidly changing.

“We talk about everything from Trump, racism and other current events, to topics on the social agenda. How can we live together, which subgroups exist in our city and how can we ensure that we meet each other more often, understand each other better?”
(De Boer, Year Magazine, p. ...)

Five Themes

The programme in 2018 reflects the urgencies of an agricultural region, where city and countryside, native and new-comer must work together. The programme therefore offered surprising combinations: artists with bio-diversity, theatre with immigration, festivals as a lab for sustainable innovation. Showcasing art projects are not done in a l’art pour l’art manner, but

treating art as the medium for change, and having the artist work within communities to shape a new environment. The European capital of culture initiative is also seen as a means (rather than a goal) of shaping the future. The programme has a strong European and international dimension, and is equally attractive for those who want to get immersed in cultural projects, but also for the ecological and social activists whose pivotal goal is to foster change.

The main projects were all grouped under five umbrella programmes, which structured the individual events, projects or event series. The five themes were all overarching frameworks that grew from the issues and needs of people living in Friesland: a cultural and social innovation for actual uses that locals face in the current reality (poverty, student remittance, imagining new communities, the relationship of rural and urban communities, the co-existence of natural landscape and civilizational impact and issues of cultural memory and local history as part of the European traditions).

The five main themes are as follows¹⁷:

Lab Lwd

In Lab Lwd Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018 is seen as the laboratory for innovation. A new interpretation is being given to the notion of cooperation. People are being called upon in their immediate neighbourhood and asked to make changes there themselves. At the heart of society Lab Lwd is entering into the debate about the future of people and the city. The idea is that we do not simply accept the current reality, but that we try to create new forms of living together.

City and Countryside

In the city everything is within reach. You get on your bicycle and find what you want. It is often busy and noisy in the city. In the countryside there is space, silence, darkness and nature. In our programme City and Countryside we bring the two together. What can city and countryside learn from each other? For what is lovelier than a dark night where you

¹⁷ Strategisch Bedrijfsplan, p.27.

can still see the stars? What would it be like for people from the city to experience darkness again? And vice versa, how do we take the abundance of art and culture out of the towns and cities and back to the villages?

Community and Diversity

Communities take many forms. A club or band can be a community; residents of a particular district, or people who enjoy hard rock - they form a group, too. Communities are formed around music, sport, language, faith, country and culture, but personal preferences also play a part. Within this theme the projects are trying to introduce communities to each other in an exciting way. And we are celebrating the differences between people.

Nature and Culture

Frisian nature and culture are inextricably linked. Think of the role that water plays within our province. The terps (mounds) remind us of a time where the Frisians had a daily battle with the water. The Wadden Sea is on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Friesland has a long and world-renowned tradition of water sports. The projects within this theme are about the relationship with our surroundings.

Royal Friesian

History has brought us much of which we are proud. The programme Royal Friesian, the English name for the Friesian horse, includes great names from the past, such as M.C. Escher, Mata Hari, J. Slauerhoff and Alma Tadema. Not forgetting the Woudagemaal (Lemmer) and the Planetarium (Franeker), the terps, the monastic culture and the Dutch royal family. But the theme also focuses on the social struggle that was once waged. Culturally important aspects of modern life, such as the music tradition, festivals and open-air concerts, are also a feature of the Royal Friesian programme.

Impact

The LF2018 Foundation convinced the jury with its broad interpretation of art and culture. From the central theme of “Iepen Mienskip” (open community), the Cultural Capital year was used to promote participation, decrease differences, enhance the quality of life and strengthen the image of Leeuwarden and Fryslân as the leading region in agriculture and water, as well as an attractive destination, particularly for the cultural and experiential tourist. The monitoring results reflect an overall success in the target indicators that the project organisers wanted to achieve. This applies to the economic KPIs, such as the number of visitors, the revenue from the main program and the prospective repeat visits, but also to the indicators of the intended change to be effected by LF2018. The most striking example of this is that the Mienskip projects together ended up as no. 1 on the list of events that attracted the most visitors. The increasing appreciation of LF2018 through the year and the increased participation among residents that had little affinity for culture, shows that the Cultural Capital induced the kind of positive social change that the general programme was meant for.

- the 65 000 volunteers (10% of population) prove that it is possible to sensitise and mobilise people (even those with not much previous cultural affinity) through creative community projects. 22% of the residents of Leeuwarden indicated they were actively involved with LF2018. If the same percentage was involved in the province, it amounts to 100,000 residents. That would mean that nearly 84,000 volunteers were involved with the Mienskip program.
- The District Survey showed that 71% of all residents of the municipality of Leeuwarden between the ages of 18 to 84 visited the Reuzen (Giants). Among the people who are not or barely making ends meet, this was 64% and for people with a low level of education, it was 65%. The District Survey showed that 71% of all residents of the municipality of Leeuwarden between the ages of 18 to 84 visited the Reuzen (Giants). Among the people who are not or barely making ends meet, this was 64% and for people with a low level of education, it was 65%.

- 4.5 million visitors to the main events and 800 000 visitors to the mienskip projects (more than 90% indicated they would return to the region). The cultural events attracted a lot of extra visitors. The appreciation for these events was high. Several projects created a permanent cultural tourism offer.
- 79 million Euros in revenue
- In Leeuwarden, the number of establishments and jobs grew. In 2018, there were 25 companies with at least 5 employees that work at least 15 hours a week that were established in the municipality for 3 years at that time. In total, this provided nearly 300 jobs. In the province of Fryslân there were more than 100 establishments with about 100 jobs.
- international exchange was also enhanced (seen both in the number of partnerships with foreign partner institutions and the number of international students).

Conclusion

The great interest in LF2018 shows that the idea of Europe is not a fallen one just yet, even amidst the revival of tribal nationalisms, and other crises. The success of the projects, shown by the impressive monitoring results show that if people are encouraged to actively participate in shaping their own surroundings and its future, positive results can be attained. Community planning, and co-creation are not just empowering, but also economically much more viable and efficient. As final words, let me quote from a interview with the organisers summarising their experience and hopes for what is to come:

Jelle Burggraaff, who was responsible for the programme connections with Europe, said “It’s an exciting journey, which started in 2012. A journey during which we looked at what binds our city and our province with Europe. Whether it is the sustainability of culture and nature, a better balance between city and countryside, or more understanding of what diversity means for society, these are all themes which our city and our province have in common with regions in northern England as well as in the deep south of Italy. And they play a crucial role in our future.”

“With the motto of *iepen mienskip* we’ve spent the past few years constantly shifting our perspective from our own borders outwards towards Europe. With the participation of more than

300 international artists, producers, schools, festivals, communities, networks, cities and regions – from all over Europe and far beyond – we can say that we are a real European Capital of Culture. In this sense Leeuwarden-Friesland 2018 really is a turning point. And we have absolutely seized the opportunity to position ourselves as an exciting, cultural, interesting region in Europe.”

Whether this is with birdwatchers from Portugal, labourers from Poland, or with a group of artists from Birmingham, Leeuwarden-Friesland has, over the past few years, brought people together. People who also want to continue working together into the future to create great cultural projects. “Being a European Capital of Culture has given us so many wonderful opportunities to get involved in networks in which we will remain active into the future.”

A Selected List of Projects

Sense of Place

Creative intervention in nature such as laying a new marsh outside the dykes at Terschelling, or an art installation of willow twigs in the landscape, in the form of the painting ‘Pier and Ocean’ by Piet Mondriaan.

Embassy for Water

Leeuwarden is a global city in the field of water technology and water management. In 2018, together with artists and scientists, the city wanted to showcase this to the European continent.

Spring Fever (Silence of the Bees & King of the Meadows)

Scientist Theunis Piersma and percussionist Sytze Pruikma are committed to the plight of two threatened species: the black-tailed godwit and the bee. An international touring festival followed the trail of the godwit through Europe to Fryslân in order to draw attention to the vulnerability of nature.

Energy Now!

Artworks that give energy. How town and province are choosing sustainable energy supply. With the business community, education and government, but mainly from people themselves.

The Sea! The Sea!

Literature festival on board the ships of the Tall Ships Races, with European and American authors such as Yann Martel (Life of Pi) and John Banville (The Sea). Special focus on the Frisian poet Jan Jacob Slauerhoff.

To the End of the World

Artist Marten Winters, together with volunteers, has made a seaworthy ship of papier-mâché that crossed Europe by land and water.

Romantic Painters from the North

The Fries Museum showed how the northern landscape inspired great artists from Fryslân and further afield, such as Jan Mankes, Thames Oud and William Turner.

Feel the Night

The beauty and natural rhythm of the night. Feel the Night incorporated darkness and silence in a number of events, with the ultimate aim of restoring darkness to Fryslân.

Farm of the World

Artists spent a month living on a farm, using the harvest of the land to make new works. In Leeuwarden urban gardens were springing up in the oddest places.

Eleven Fountains

World-renowned artists such as Marina Abramović and Jaume Plensa were making fountains for an artistic Elfstedentocht (the legendary open-air skating competition). They were intended to become enduring monuments for the imagination.

Sailing on the grass

Young photographers, film-makers and other artists tackled the theme of 'favourite landscape'. The efforts culminated in a major exhibition.

Under the Tower

The Dylan Thomas classic Under Milk Wood in a Frisian re-working. Hi-tech theatre in the Grote Kerk at Leeuwarden, and events in many churches in Fryslân where artists collaborated with church communities. From the makers of Kening Lear, Abe! and Peer Gynt.

Potatoes go Wild

The second European Capital of Culture in 2018 is Valletta in Malta. Like the Frisian municipality of Het Bildt, the island is famous for its potatoes. This export product took the centre stage in poetry, concerts and exhibitions, among other things.

Giant Steps

The French company Royal de Luxe delivered an ode to the Afsluitdijk, using giant mechanical marionettes.

Dada in Dr88888888

How do the modernist movements of Dada and De Stijl live on in the present day? In 2018 these two art movements were the subjects of exhibitions in the two museums in Drachten.

Language Lab/Lân fan Taal

Multilingualism: most Europeans grow up with it. Giving the Frisian language priority, a centre was created in order to research and promote linguistic diversity.

Strangers on Stage

European urban festival for new theatre centring on The Stranger, the often unexpected, uninvited guest. Initiative of the Nederlands Theater Festival.

Lost in the Greenhouse

Theatre production from the performing arts group Orkater, in the greenhouses of the biggest horticultural company in Fryslân. The play tells the story of Polish labourers looking for work and a better life.

Museum of Love

Artists worked together with visitors on a modern European love story. The seasons are the wheel of the cycles of love.

The Never Ending Orchestra

In a year-long relay, organists, DJ's, pop bands, choirs, orchestras, singer-songwriters, fanfares and brass bands were playing, demonstrating that music enriches us - in good times and bad.

Migrating Ceramics

A major exhibition at The Princessehof National Museum of Ceramics (Keramiekmuseum Princessehof) told the story of the European trade links and migration flows from the Middle Ages onwards.

Sports for Europe

In 2018 Leeuwarden staged the inaugural European Sports for All Games, the biggest multi-sport event in the world.

Yiddish Waves

In the seventeenth century a strong Jewish community established itself in Leeuwarden. The combination of the Yiddish and Frisian cultures was celebrated in a five-day music festival.

Mata Hari

Possibly the most mysterious woman ever to emerge from Fryslân, Mata Hari was executed as a spy in 1917. There was an exhibition in the Fries Museum devoted to her and an opera in four languages.

Royal Chamber Music

Classical music, art, nature, history and gastronomy came together in a special way in the village of Oranjewoud, to form a feast for all the senses.

Alma Tadema

The Fries Museum showcased the work of Alma Tadema from an international perspective. The focus was Tadema's influence on Hollywood.

M.C. Escher

Both the Fries Museum and The Prinsessehof National Museum of Ceramics (birthplace of Escher) held exhibitions on this important artist. As part of this, the Fries Museum worked closely with game designers.

Explore the North

At the Explore the North festival writers and performing artists tackled the theme of 'the North'.

Adje Lambertz

Children from Leeuwarden and Valletta came together for a special youth festival, named after the sixteenth-century mayor of Leeuwarden who at one time introduced a freedom festival for children.

Flying Carnival

All 110 nationalities and the varying religions that make up the rich tapestry of Leeuwarden took part in colourful parades from the four points of the compass. They converged on a central square with four bands playing world music on four terps.

Gameland

For five days the biggest game developers gathered in Ameland. They worked on developing serious games that touch on subjects relating to mienships. The same event was being held on Malta, on the Swedish island of Gotland, and in South Africa.

Triple A Landscape

Coming from various communities, Frisian, national and international architects designed sustainable, often temporary, structures that enrich the landscape.

Club of Leeuwarden

Through meetings, debates and surveys the Club of Leeuwarden worked on new forms of democracy.

Behind the front door

Children from disadvantaged areas in Valletta, Aarhus (European Capital of Culture in 2017) and Leeuwarden made a film about their own lives.

Dancing in the Streets

With Dûnsdancedance, dance conquered Fryslân. A huge dance parade will wend its way through the streets of Leeuwarden in the early summer of 2018. Visitors were be treated to leading performances.

Do It Together

Programme relating to digital innovation, concerning issues of minorities and linguistic diversity.

Hack your Neighbourhood

A new edition of the 'De Reis' project, where important issues are tackled with local residents. Always using art and culture as tools.

Welcome to the Village

Socially involved musicians and artists created a summer festival themselves, lasting several days. Community thinking and a do-it-yourself-mentality: the aim was to bring artists and visitors together.