

Project Type: Internship at *Filmfest Osnabrück – Festival des Unabhängigen Films*.

Research Question:

How does a small film festival like *Filmfest Osnabrück* contribute to preserving and cultivating the cultural identity of a city?

Research Approach:

My research will be qualitative, focusing on observations and informal conversations.

Key Considerations:

I will observe the behavior of both local residents and visitors from across Lower Saxony and the world who attend the festival. I will pay attention to how they engage with the films, discussions, and the festival atmosphere. I will focus on the ways in which the festival chooses to focus on upholding the city's and its own culture. To gain authentic insights, I will listen to conversations around me rather than conducting formal interviews, allowing for a more natural understanding of audience reactions and interactions.

Plan:

- Attend screenings, panels, and events to observe audience engagement.
- Note how the festival promotes local events and independent films.
- Observe any recurring themes in discussions among attendees.
- Reflect on how the festival connects people to cultural experiences.

Outline of Internship Activities

Internship Period

- 15 July – 11 October 2024

Main Area

- Press and Public Relations for Filmfest Osnabrück

Key Responsibilities

1. Festival Website Management

- Editorial and technical maintenance of the official festival website
- Updated texts, images, and screening dates
- Added new content such as announcements, program information, press releases, and news
- Managed media libraries: photos, videos, trailers, and galleries

2. Online Presence

- a. Maintained the festival's event page on the local cultural calendar website
os-kalender.de
- b. Ensured the festival program and events were visible to the local community

3. Festival Catalogue and Program Content

- a. Wrote descriptive texts for the printed festival catalogue
- b. Created English-language short descriptions for films on the festival website
- c. Contributed to curating and editing program information

4. Tasks During Festival Week (1–6 October 2024)

- a. Moderated film screenings (introductions and discussions)
- b. Worked in ticketing (selling tickets, checking reservations)
- c. Welcomed and assisted guests in the festival center
- d. Served as a point of contact for audience questions and information

Performance Highlights

- Produced texts with exceptional linguistic precision and depth of analysis
- Showed strong ability to understand and communicate complex cinematic topics
- Worked reliably, carefully, and to the full satisfaction of supervisors
- Demonstrated high cooperation, teamwork, and professionalism

Description of Internship Tasks

My internship lasted from 15 July to 11 October 2024. The first weeks were spent preparing for the festival. Later I worked during the festival week itself. My tasks were varied and allowed me to see many sides of the organization.

One of my main tasks was working on the festival website. The website is an important tool for communication with the audience. I updated texts, pictures, and dates. I added new content like announcements, program information, press releases, and news. I also helped organize the photo and video archive of the festival. This meant uploading trailers, photos, and galleries so that they were ready for the public.

I also helped maintain the festival's presence on the website os-kalender.de, which is a local calendar for cultural events. This was important because it reached people who might not have visited the festival website directly. Keeping this page updated made sure that the festival was visible to the local community.

Another task was writing texts for the festival catalogue. The catalogue is printed and handed out to visitors during the festival. It contains descriptions of all the films, schedules, and information about the events. I wrote descriptions of films for the catalogue and for the website. Some of these texts were in English, which helped international guests understand the program. This task helped me showcase my writing skills and my ability to describe films in a clear and interesting way.

During the festival week from the 1st to 6th of October I was very active on site. I moderated several film screenings. This meant introducing the film, welcoming the audience,

and sometimes leading a short discussion after the screening. Moderation required me to prepare background information about the films and their directors. I learned to speak in front of an audience and to be confident even when many people were watching.

I also worked in ticketing. I sold tickets, checked reservations, and helped people find their seats. This gave me a lot of contact with the audience. I saw how excited many visitors were and how much they looked forward to the films.

Another important task was welcoming guests in the festival center. I gave them information, answered questions, and helped them with practical things like finding the right screening room. I tried to be friendly and helpful so that everyone felt welcome. This role also gave me the chance to listen to what guests were saying about the films and the festival. My tasks showed me how much work goes into organizing a film festival. Every small detail matters, from updating the website to greeting guests at the door.

Research and Observations

My goal during the internship was to observe how the festival connects with its audience and how it contributes to the cultural identity of Osnabrück. To do this, I attended about 20 screenings, observed around 10 Q&A sessions, and listened to conversations in foyers, queues, among the interns, and the festival center. I wanted to understand how the festival connected with its audience and how it contributed to the cultural identity of Osnabrück. I watched how people behaved, what they talked about, and how they reacted to the films. I also paid attention to how the festival presented itself and how it treated its guests.

The opening film was *Shahid* (2024), directed by Narges Kalhor, an Iranian filmmaker who sought asylum in Germany for political reasons. The film was very powerful. It told a deeply personal story but also spoke about political issues in Iran. After the film there was also a screening of her short film *Sensitive Content* (2023). Both films were political but also very human. The audience reacted strongly. There was a long applause after the screening. Many people (almost all of them) stayed to listen to the discussion that followed.

Although the director was not present, the star of the film and one of the supporting actors attended the festival and joined the discussion. Their presence made the evening more special, adding more legitimacy to the festival. I saw how engaged people were. Questions were asked about the characters and the political context.

The presence of the actors also showed how the festival works hard to bring representatives of the films to Osnabrück. It is not easy for a small festival to arrange travel, accommodation, and schedules for guests, but the team puts a lot of effort into this. When someone connected to the film is present, the experience becomes more meaningful for the

audience. People get to ask questions, share their thoughts, and hear directly from someone involved in the film. This creates a strong connection between the local community and international cinema.

During the festival, one of the jury members also had her own film in the program. This was *Maydegol*, a documentary directed by Sarvnaz Alambeigi. The film was very moving and offered a unique look into Iranian life, or better yet the life of an Afghan girl living in Iran. The screening attracted a full house. In my opinion such a screening shows how the festival gives space to diverse voices and makes sure that important stories are heard.

As part of my internship, I also helped the festival team with small translation tasks from Persian into English or German. These were sometimes needed for the website or for internal communication. This made me feel even more involved, because I was contributing to making the festival more accessible to everyone.

Another observation was how the festival treats its younger audience. Filmfest Osnabrück has an excellent children's film section. It is one of the highlights of the program every year. During these screenings, I saw many children coming with their parents. They were excited to sit in the cinema and watch films made just for them. I think this is very important for the cultural identity of the city. It introduces children to the idea of cinema not just as fun, but as a way to learn about the world. It also keeps the tradition of going to the cinema alive for the next generation. This is something that will stay with them and may inspire them to love film when they grow up.

The festival also included a program called *You Can't Get What You Want, But You Can Get Queer Shorts*. This section celebrated queer voices with a powerful and poetic tone. The

program brought together short films that explored queer love, memory, and identity. The description said, “They tried to bury us, but they did not know we were seeds” which captured the spirit of the event. The films showed how people grow from painful memories and find strength in each other. The selection included *Slimane*, *Dancing Bodies*, *You Can’t Get What You Want, But You Can Get Me*, *Out of the Blue*, and *Hideous*. Each film had its own style but all were about courage and connection. The screening created a warm and thoughtful atmosphere. People in the audience reacted with laughter, thoughtful silence, and applause.

Another special event was *The Queer History of Osnabrück*. This program focused on the city’s own queer past. It showed that queer life has always been part of Osnabrück, even in times when it was hidden. The event included stories, and archival material. The tour guide spoke about secret meeting places, discrimination, and progress over the years. This program made queer history part of the city’s shared memory. It was not just a look back but also a call to continue building a more open and inclusive future.

By including queer stories and voices, the festival invites everyone in the city to see diversity as part of Osnabrück’s identity. It creates a space where people can talk honestly and understand each other better.

Another small yet notable part of the festival was the *Filmfest Forum: Filmclubs*. This event brought together film club members and guests from across Germany to talk about the past, present, and future of film clubs. It asked what film clubs used to be, what role they play today, and how they can stay alive in the future. The conversation was about the collective experience of watching films and the love of cinema as a shared practice.

Keeping film clubs alive is another way in which this film festival helps in keeping the light of the city's heritage alight. Film clubs are often small and run by volunteers. They show special films that are not always part of the regular cinema program. The festival gives them a place to meet each other, exchange ideas, and connect with a wider audience. This helps them survive and stay active.

When these film clubs remain strong, they keep cinema culture alive all year, not only during the festival week. They bring people together, organize screenings, and create discussions on a smaller scale. This means that the spirit of the festival continues long after it is over. It also shows that the festival is not an isolated event but part of a bigger network of cultural life. By supporting film clubs, the festival helps make sure that Osnabrück stays a city where cinema has an important place in daily life.

Throughout the festival I observed how people engaged with the films and with each other. Many visitors stayed after the screenings to talk in the foyer or at the festival center. They exchanged opinions about the films, recommended other screenings to each other, and sometimes even debated different interpretations. This showed me that the festival encourages active participation. People are not just passive consumers of culture. They become part of a community that thinks and talks about what they have seen.

I also noticed how international the audience was. There were people speaking German, English, and other languages. The festival seems to attract visitors not just from Osnabrück but from other cities in Lower Saxony and even other countries. This international character makes Osnabrück feel more connected to the world. For a smaller city, this is a very important cultural function.

Another thing I observed was how well organized the festival was. Even though it is a relatively small event compared to large international festivals, everything ran smoothly. Screenings started on time, guests were greeted warmly, and there was always someone available to answer questions. Of course me and all the other members were stressed and worried that things might not run smoothly and there were some hiccups, but in the end most of the events went the way they should have. Upholding this level of professionalism helps build trust with the audience. People feel that the festival is a serious and high-quality event.

During my observations, I also reflected on my own feelings. Being part of the team made me proud. I felt that my work mattered and that I was contributing to something valuable for the city. I enjoyed seeing the results of my efforts when people used the website I had updated, or when they read the catalog texts I had written. It gave me a sense of purpose and connection.

Brief Notes on the Catalogue

The catalogue is a square-shaped booklet, which makes it stand out from standard rectangular formats. The front cover is not too flashy, but the inviting purple tones give it an approachable and attractive quality. It is considerably thicker than an average booklet, though not too heavy to handle.

The glossy paper is immediately noticeable, catching the light and making the images and colors more vibrant. Inside, the layout is clear and well-structured, with a good balance of text and visuals, so going through it feels easy and not complicated.

As a physical booklet, it feels substantial, professional, and visually engaging. As a digital PDF, it is easy to read and navigate on a screen. In this way, the catalogue works well in both formats. While the digital version is great and very accessible, I personally prefer the physical booklet because it looks especially nice, feels tangible, and can be experienced directly with my own hands.

Filmfest Frieden and the City's Heritage of Peace

Osnabrück is known as the “city of peace.” This title comes from its role in the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years’ War in 1648. The city has carried this history into the present. Its museums, monuments, and public spaces remind residents and visitors of the importance of dialogue and reconciliation. This peaceful identity is not just part of the past but something that continues to shape Osnabrück’s cultural life. The city celebrates this heritage with events, exhibitions, and public discussions that focus on freedom, democracy, and human rights.

Filmfest Osnabrück plays a special role in carrying this tradition forward through its section called Filmfest Frieden (Filmfest Peace). This part of the program is dedicated to films that explore themes of peace, conflict, resistance, and the human cost of war. It allows the festival to connect directly with the city’s historical identity. Watching these films in Osnabrück feels significant, it is as if the city itself is part of the conversation.

Another screening was Filmfest Extra: Wiederholung Gewinnerfilm Friedensfilmpreis Osnabrück, which was a repeat showing of the winner of the Peace Film Prize. This prize is one of the main awards of the festival and shows the commitment of the organizers to films that carry messages of justice, and human dignity.

Other films in this section included *Forest*, *In Liebe*, *Eure Hilde*, *Intercepted*, *Our Land*, *Our Freedom*, and *Pol Pot Dancing*. Each of these films approached the theme of peace from a different perspective, from personal letters written during times of war to documentary footage during a war, and freedom movements. All of them together formed a picture of peace that was not abstract but in fact concrete. They showed that peace is not just the absence of war but the presence of justice, memory, accountability, and humanity.

This section of the festival made the research question come alive for me. A festival like Filmfest Osnabrück does not only preserve cultural identity by remembering the past. It actively works on identity by making the audience think about what peace means today. It turns the city's history into a living conversation. People leave the cinema reflecting on what peace and freedom mean in their own lives. I elaborate further on this point in the Analysis and Reflection section.

Analysis and Reflection

Looking back on my time at Filmfest Osnabrück, I see clearly that the festival is much more than a simple schedule of screenings. It is a living cultural space where films, words, and people meet. My research question was how a small film festival can preserve and cultivate the cultural identity of a city. After three months of being part of the team, I have learned that the answer lies in a combination of film, conversation, written word, and human connection.

One of the powerful moments (as I mentioned before in the observation section) was the opening night screening of *Shahid* by Narges Kalhor and the short film *Sensitive Content*. After the screening, the star of *Shahid* spoke about freedom of expression and the long struggle of Iranian women for their rights. She said that this fight had been going on for generations and would continue until freedom was achieved. The supporting actor also spoke about the courage of Iranian women. The audience was completely silent while they spoke and then applauded for a long time. It was not just a film screening, it became a moment of solidarity and reflection. In that room, people from different backgrounds came together to listen, learn, and feel something bigger than themselves.

The festival is not just about showing films but about creating space for exchange. People do not just come to watch a movie and leave. The festival becomes a bridge between Osnabrück and the world, allowing local residents to experience other cultures without leaving their city. One of the most meaningful examples of this exchange for me was my long conversation with Toma Selivanova, the director of *Dolomite and Ash*. We spoke for hours about the process of making her film, the political and social challenges she faced in her country, and the personal struggles that inspired her work. She told me about filming in difficult conditions and about the

courage it took to tell this story despite obstacles. Our conversation went beyond cinema. We spoke about the experience of leaving home, about freedom of expression, and about how art can sometimes be the only way to process reality. Talking with her made me realize how film festivals can create rare human moments of connection, where strangers discover they share similar hopes and fears.

Another point is how much the physical media of the festival contributes to its cultural identity. The film catalogue that I briefly described earlier, is not just a program guide. It is a small but beautiful book that introduces every film, every section, and every guest. It is a historical record of the event. Long after the festival is over, the catalogue remains. It can be put on a shelf and looked at years later. It shows who worked on the event, which films were screened, and what topics were discussed. I am even more proud of having worked on the catalogue than on the website. Online content is important for reaching people, but it can disappear if a server crashes or data is lost. The printed catalogue is durable. It is proof of the hard work of everyone involved and of the legitimacy of the festival. It shows that this event is part of the city's heritage.

Another key observation was how much literature is present in every part of a festival. Writing the film descriptions for the catalogue is not just functional work; it is creative work. The words you choose can shape how people see a film before they even watch it. Moderation before and after a film also has this power. When you introduce a film, you can guide the audience to notice certain elements. When you speak after a film, you can open up new ways of thinking about it. I learned that the right words can turn a film into an experience that stays longer in the mind. They can even lead people to write about it later, whether in a formal review

or just a short post on social media. The act of writing becomes part of the cultural process, it creates a chain reaction of reflection and discussion.

I also saw how the festival invests in the next generation. The children's film section was full of energy and joy. Kids laughed and gasped, and overall were joyed by the screenings. But what impressed me most was the group of teenage film reporters. They interviewed guests and audience members and worked hard to create their own coverage of the festival. They were clearly having fun, but they were also learning skills: how to ask good questions, how to listen, and how to report their findings. This program allows young people to feel that they are part of the festival. It teaches them that culture is something they can create, not just consume.

Behind the scenes, I saw how much work goes into making such an event happen. The team is small, but every member contributes a lot. Many of the interns, like me, were doing this for the first time. There were many questions, a lot of learning, and sometimes moments of stress. But it was inspiring to see that even with a small team and limited resources, a festival of this quality could be organized. It showed me that cultural identity is not something that appears by itself; it is something that has to be built carefully every year.

All of these experiences answer my research question. Filmfest Osnabrück preserves and cultivates the cultural identity of the city in many ways. It connects the local population to global conversations. It keeps alive the tradition of peace and dialogue for which Osnabrück is known. It educates the young, involves the community, and invites international guests who add to the cultural life of the city. It also creates physical and digital traces: the catalogue, the photos, the website. All of this will remain as a record of what happened and who took part.

Conclusion

For me, the internship was not only about gaining work experience but also about understanding the power of culture. I learned how communication, literature, and film come together to create something bigger than the sum of their parts. I saw that culture is a living thing that needs people to maintain it, to talk about it, and to pass it on. Reading David Lowenthal's *The Heritage Crusade* last semester changed how I thought about my internship. I learned that heritage is not just the past itself but what we choose to do with the past in the present. It is shaped by memory, emotion, and politics. This idea helped me understand the importance of the printed catalogue, the Filmfest Frieden section, and even the website updates I worked on. They are all ways of deciding what stories the city wants to tell about itself right now. This reflection also helped me write this report with more care. I realized that what I observed is part of a bigger process where Osnabrück chooses which films, histories, and voices to present as part of its identity. Once again it is important to note that the festival is not just preserving culture; it is actively shaping it. The festival helps Osnabrück remember who it has been and imagine who it can be. That is how a small festival shapes the cultural identity of a city.