

Successful Fak'ugesi African Innovation Festival

The 2016 Fak'ugesi African Innovation Festival held from 19 August to 3 September 2016 in Johannesburg was once again a success.



Future Sounds with Goethe Institut

This year's festival brought together diverse digital and technology sectors to collaborate and share skills in digital media and technology innovation. Christo Doherty and Tegan Bristow from Wits Digital Arts, together with Barry Dwolatzky from the Joburg Centre for Software Engineering (JCSE), first founded Fak'ugesi three years ago.

"A very special thank you must go to our primary sponsor, the City of Johannesburg and the partners we worked with to make 2016 Fak'ugesi Festival come alive," says Bristow, 2016 festival director.

"The City of Johannesburg has a vested interest in developing Johannesburg as a technologically advanced and engaged city, and with this is a dedication to supporting the digital creative sector as well as making technology accessible to all those who want to learn more and innovate," she adds. The festival's partners also included the JCSE, Wits University, the British Council's ConnectZA and InnovationZA, and the Goethe Institut, and new partners for 2016, Pro Helvetia Johannesburg and the Innovation Hub.

Among the many highlights of the festival was the Smart City Day, a celebration of Johannesburg's innovations and developments for service delivery, which included a special showcase of the young graduates enrolled in the COJEDI (City of Johannesburg Educating Digital Interns) programme. Annual favourites also made a return to Fak'ugesi including A MAZE Johannesburg – a festival in its own right focused on local and independent gaming, playful media and game development.

The British Council's Connect ZA 2016 programme again brought innovation and creativity to life, hosted a Maker Library for the duration of the festival, as well as the ever-popular annual Market Hack, as well as the Soweto Pop Up; a special

collaboration with local artists and dancers with British digital artists, SDNA. The SDNA collaboration resulted in show stopping giant projections that could be seen on the buildings of Braamfontein for the official Tshimologong Precinct launch and the Alight party held with Future Sounds and Between10and5 on 1 September.

“For the Fak’ugesi African Digital Innovation festival, these collaborations and their respective developments are paramount to the definition of the festival; as not just a festival where you can come to see and hear, but a festival that is a location for learning, making, developing and innovating,” explains Bristow. The spirit of sharing, fun, making and collaborating was also evident in the Goethe Institut’s partnership with Create Africa and film maker Lebogang Rasethaba to create Future Sounds; a week-long festival development between performers and technologists based in Joburg and Cape Town, and German based digital interactive group The Constitute. The outcome of these developments was performed at the Alight party stage and through various installations throughout Fak’ugesi.

An important collaboration is that of the Fak’ugesi Digital African Residency. This year Pro Helvetia (the Swiss Cultural agency) in their ANT project funding supported three young artists from the SADC region to be official festival artists in residence for a month prior to and during the events. Residents explored in their artworks the role of traditional African cultures in the Digital sphere.

Bristow says preparations are already underway for next year’s festival, which is preliminarily booked from 5-16 September 2017 and will feature a full calendar of events together with exciting collaborations and a celebration of all things digital.

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