

**beyond
audience
development**

beyond European Capital of Culture

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IMPACT FOUNDATION (FUNDACJA IMPACT) is a nonprofit organization supporting audience development and engagement processes, providing tools and solutions that address the challenges facing the culture sector around Europe.

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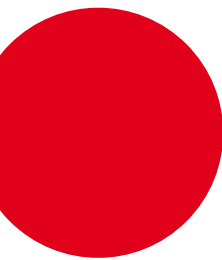
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acknowledgements

To Daiva Price and Agnieszka Wlazeł with love.

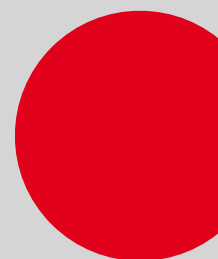
Daiva, without you, there would be no “Audience Development for Kaunas 2022 Programme”.

Aga, without you there would be no Impact Foundation...

Big hugs and thank you to Kaunas 2022 team. Thank you for your friendship and trust in us for all those years.

Low bows and gratefulness to the “family and friends” of Impact. Without all of YOU, we wouldn’t be able to grow, learn and constantly reflect on our work.

introduction





about this book

Dear reader,

Already with the title, we are trying to convey a message. Our aim for the title was to best reflect not only on what's inside but first and foremost: the reasons why we have decided to choose the content as it is. This publication is divided into two parts "beyond audience development" and "beyond european capital of culture". If you have a good look at the cover, you can decode "the subtitle" of this book, a "key message" created by all the words in red. The message states: "audience beyond european capital of culture". We believe that this is something which should be considered long before the ECoC year.

I took the liberty of becoming your guide, a narrator around the content of the book and preceded both parts with texts introducing both "the beyond" approach and all the authors.

Because of our long-term cooperation with Kaunas and the capacity building programme we have realised there, Kaunas 2022 holds the most prominent place in this publication. Nevertheless, we do not get into the "technical details" of the programme (if you wish to learn more about it, have a look at our previous publication: "The audience is the source of happiness"). In this new one, we look at "lessons learnt", the "bigger picture", and what really matters "at the end of the year".

The authors of the texts in this publication come from both Kaunas and around Europe. They all are "family and friends" of Impact Foundation. We have worked together; we can vouch for each other. We might disagree on details, but we agree on what matters. We all care about people: both audiences and culture professionals. That means, that in our work, we all go beyond the marketing-oriented audience development, focusing on processes and investment in capacity building. And this approach is our prism for looking into the future and strategically planning ahead: beyond the European Capital of Culture year.

You will quickly notice that the texts differ in form and style. Some are essays that give an overview of personal experiences, some are more analytical, and some can serve as guidelines. At the end of each part, you will also find articles summarising interviews I have conducted live. Recordings of both conversations are accompanying this publication. So, if you are interested in unabridged versions, just click on the links below the articles, put on your headphones and take them for a walk (or whenever/however else you like your podcasts or audiobooks to be served).

Regardless of the subject and style, all the texts are personal. They are written in the author's voices and reflect their experiences, work methods, and opinions. This way we hope that everyone will find something useful and interesting for themselves - no matter whether you are a culture professional interested in audience development or a person involved with a current, future or past European Capital of Culture.

Let's face it, the best way for most of us, culture professionals to learn is by doing and/ or by getting inspired by those who "did it". That is also the principle on which we base our capacity building programmes. We hope that you will read it all, and after that, you will be inspired and courageous enough to "do it" yourselves. And that later you will share it with us and with others :)

So... Dig in and enjoy!

Agata

Agata Etmanowicz on behalf of Impact Foundation

Accessibility of this publication

We have paid attention to making this publication accessible to different audiences. We want it to be as good as possible so if you notice any errors, if there is anything we can do better, please let us know.

This publication is also accompanied by the Easy-to-read summary and two recordings for which transcripts are available.

You can contact us at: hello@impactaudience.org

beyond
audience
development

 **part one**



beyond audience development

Agata Etmanowicz, Impact Foundation

why beyond?

We have entitled this part of the book “beyond audience development” for a few reasons. The main one is that the way Impact Foundation approaches the subject does not fully fit into a single one of any of the previously built frames. Usually, it feels like “either our head or legs stick out on one side of the frame”. We definitely lean towards an audience-centric approach and at the same time slightly distance ourselves from the marketing-driven one.

Over the years, we got into many disputes with fellow professionals about what audience development is and what it is not. Today, we know that it is pointless. Depending on what you have read, what you have experienced, and very often: where are you from, your definitions of audience development and audience engagement will differ. It is neither our goal to prove that someone is wrong (as they are probably not!) nor is it our goal to squeeze into a specific understanding of the above-mentioned terms.

Therefore, we decided to use the term “audience development” in our work quite loosely, mainly as a trigger, keyword, and invitation for a journey beyond the definitions to the core of the meaning, the value of working with audiences. Indeed, in our practice, we work “with audience development” and “with audience engagement”. This means that: we are familiar with tools and methods associated by many with those terms and we also use them. But at the same time, we do not limit ourselves and our work according to those definitions. We have created our own approach.

what's beyond?

So, if someone asks us today what it is that we do, we would say that we are all about impact & audience. The mutual relationship, the impact that our work as culture professionals has on audiences and the impact audiences have on our work. Understanding the impact, creating an impact, accepting the impact.

We focus our work on culture professionals (and capacity building). We wish all of them to be happy, fulfilled and well! And we believe that in order to achieve that: cultural organisations need a healthy relationship with their audiences but first and foremost with themselves and among themselves.

to fully understand

This part of the book is dedicated to presenting to you what working with audiences is, or can be, according to Impact's "family and friends". We will start with a deep dive into definitions and comparisons of different approaches to audience development and audience engagement by Agnieszka Wlazeł, the "mother-establisher" of Impact Foundation. This text aims to give a better understanding of why we stand for the "beyond definitions" approach. Agnieszka's text gives a good combination of theoretical background (based on dilemmas and observations collected during her PhD studies) and her own practical experiences working with audience development across Europe.

the process always starts inside

One of my all-time favourite quotes comes from the Arts Council England publication titled "Navigating Difference". It is by Maddy Morton: "Anyone who thinks they can achieve a diverse audience by implementing whizzy schemes whilst leaving the core of the organisation intact is on a hiding to nothing. The only really effective way to change the make up of your audience is to first change yourselves." Originally this statement related to cultural diversity and audience development. I like taking this quotation out of context and looking at it from a wider perspective (I do hope that the author does not mind). As no matter, if we speak of cultural diversity, accessibility or generally introducing audience development into the practice of the organisation, this quotation has the ring of truth. Every time, the process of change has to start inside of the organisation (for real!) and has to be supported with strategic planning and be based on evidence. It is also worth remembering – especially while referring to audience development and European Capitals of Culture - that no organisation operates in a vacuum: understanding the power of relations and building cooperation with(in) the local culture sector, with different stakeholders is crucial in succeeding.

strategic planning inside and out

Those issues are tackled by Paul Bogen and Birgitta Persson in the next two articles. Paul gives us an overview of how the pandemic has affected the culture sector, the commentary regarding the role of strategic planning (and consequences of neglecting it) and a slight push for rethinking who we are, where we are heading, and what is our true relationship with audiences. While Birgitta brings us a very clear manual on how we can strategically approach working with our network and local ecosystem to benefit the general wellbeing of our organisations.

It is important to mention, that Paul Bogen, Birgitta Persson and Sandy Fitzgerald together create Olivearte Cultural Agency and that Olivearte is a good, old friend and

partner of Impact. We have a similar approach and understanding of the culture sector and the challenges it is facing, so it was only natural that Olivearte partner up with us within the Audience Development for Kaunas 2022 Programme. Birgitta, Sandy and Paul not only conducted workshops but also – considering their lifelong practical experience – became mentors and supported participants in introducing the change into their organisation. In this publication, they share their wisdom in different ways. You can find Sandy’s text in the second part of this book “beyond European Capital of Culture”.

every journey is different

Next, you will meet a specific person: Neringa Kulik and a specific organisation: Kaunas Biennial and have an opportunity to read the story on what getting acquainted with audience development can mean for both an individual and the organisation. Today Neringa is the CEO of Kaunas Biennial and the main coordinator of Magic Carpets platform. Not long ago, a few years back, Neringa (and Kaunas Biennial) took part in the first edition of the capacity-building programme Audience Development for Kaunas 2022 Programme. As we work with fellow culture professionals, Neringa’s story of working with audiences started, of course, before we met. In her text, she gives an overview of what audience and audience development mean to her and what has happened during and after her participation in the Programme.

for all, exclude no one!

In Neringa’s article, you will also find a reference to accessibility. This is a very important subject to Impact. We truly believe that it is impossible to speak of audience development without accessibility, therefore we came up with the approach we call A². If you wish to know why and what A² is all about, have a look at my short text introducing the concept. It should give you a good warm-up before Rafał Lis’s notes on what it means to be a practitioner working with accessibility. Rafał is giving some tips on where and how to start introducing accessibility to the daily practice of the cultural organisation. These days he wears many hats (one of them being an Impact team member): he conducts workshops, advises and guides others while at the same time developing various tools for accessibility himself. In the past, he was working as an accessibility coordinator. To put it simply: “he has been there and done that” so if being accessible to all audiences is something you are thinking about (as you should!) have a read.

the men, the beast and the audience

The last but (definitely not the least!) in this part of the book is the extract from the interview I had the pleasure to conduct with Rytis Zemkauskas. Rytis is many things: a

journalist, a writer, a broadcaster and a film director. In Lithuania, he needs no introduction. Here, in this book he acts not only as one of the key members of the Kaunas 2022 team but first and foremost: “the man behind the beast”. Rytis is the person who came up with the idea of creating “The Mythical Beast of Kaunas”. It is formally introduced as a story-telling project of Kaunas but in my humble opinion, it is an amazing example of long-term work with audiences and so much more... If you are at least a little bit curious as to why you can read the summary of our conversation. If you are one of those people who like the unabridged version, you will find the link to the full conversation referred to in the article.



beyond definitions, closer to people and the arts

Agnieszka Wlazeł, Impact Foundation

For someone like me, a cultural manager who always cared about creating bridges between the arts and the audience, the “discovery” of audience development (in 2005–2006, when I did a European Diploma in Cultural Project Management) was a blessing and a curse. My first reaction was: great, something I do has a name, so I can get new tools to improve my work and move from intuition based on experience to knowledge and strategies. I have worked with the concept – practising and teaching it ever since. However, I recall the subsequent years (until now) as a constant struggle. I think that I only now, after six years of deep learning and thinking about audience engagement during my PhD research, understand why it felt that way. We need to be careful when we talk about audience development and engagement: depending on whom we talk to, they might refer to (and believe in) different things.

I tracked audience development back to the end of 1950. It was a strategic (marketing and managerial) concept used by arts marketing and public relations specialists in the United States. They used the phrase to describe tactics to broaden audience groups for film and theatre. There were partnerships, like those of the film industry, which collaborated with universities to build relationships between movie theatres and students¹. There were communications techniques, like those described in *In Search of an Audience: How an Audience Was Found for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre*² (1968), the first book describing ‘audience development’ commissioned by Associated Councils of the Arts in the USA. Morison and Fliehr discussed in that book market research, audience segmentation, advertising, the impact of visual identity, hospitality, loyalty, frequency of attendance and how to educate an audience of tomorrow. They purposefully omitted artistic quality and programme selection decisions, although they were aware of the key influence these factors have on attendance. Their job as public-relations and audience development directors was only to educate an audience to appreciate existing artistic policy. At the same time, also in America, Alvin H. Reiss distributed an Arts Management newsletter, including a series of audience development examples of how to attract, measure and analyse spectators. But Reiss also advocated for establishing a role of an “arts-and-society researcher”, someone combining knowledge of fine arts and social science to influence social change³. He was not the first one. The intense social transformations during the industrial revolution caused the formation of new art institutions and the increased need for audiences and alertness to audience composition, needs and behaviour. Since the beginning of the

Twentieth Century, the number of studies concerning audience experience of art has grown exponentially in psychology and sociology (often combining knowledge from both fields). The marketing-oriented audience development grew from the commercial need of selling tickets but on the ground that was already (at least partly) focused on the human experience. Two approaches to audiences within the arts sector accompanied audience development theory and actions from the beginning: first, taking care of building/expanding the audience (or market) for the arts; and second, advocating for social change.

In the UK, the first description of audience development was included in “A guide to audience development” (1997) written by Heather Maitland and commissioned by the Arts Council England. Maitland noted there that “[a]rtists, education workers and marketers share a belief that audience development is a planned process which enhances and broadens specific individuals' experiences of the arts”⁴. At the same time, audiences were firmly present in the Arts Council of England’s mission of “sustaining and expanding existing or regular audiences or visitors, creating new attenders and participants, and enhancing their enjoyment, understanding, skills and confidence across the art forms”⁵. Earlier, although the Arts Council of Great Britain (formed in 1946) aimed also “to extend the knowledge and practice of the arts, to make them more accessible [... and] to bring into being permanent, educated audiences all over the country”⁶ it lacked a detailed explanation of cultural policy making the art and its accessibility subject to a variety of interpretations⁷. Historically, Arts Council has not required applicants to consider the audiences directly in the grants’ distribution, which means that it focused on supporting supply rather than building demand⁸⁹. This is still the case. Arts Council England’s (ACE) recent strategic document Let’s create announces the support for high-quality cultural experiences and creativity, understood as the process of making, producing, or participating in ‘culture’, meaning ACE-supported institutions. In this way, it reinforces the delivery of art (and attendance).

In the UK and Europe, art institutions and approaches to audiences are much more connected to changing political priorities. In the United States art very much relies (since the 18th century) on private funding. For example, the great majority of US museums were built by individuals, families and communities as acts of social responsibility to celebrate and honour local and regional traditions and to educate and entertain people in local communities¹⁰¹¹. Publicly funded European art institutions were created “as instruments of ruling classes and governments to celebrate and glorify the national culture”¹². Even if there were exceptions, divergent political and funding circumstances on different continents have created distinct conditions for arts organisations to operate within. Transferring audience development know-how between continents, countries, or even organisations without acknowledging the difference in understanding and context of specific audience development practices might have contributed to, including mine, confusion surrounding the concept.

There is limited interest in digging deeper into the human factor of audience development now. Currently, the UK's mainstream policies and actions to support them understand audience engagement (!) as a combination of attendance and participation¹³. The Taking Part, a household survey in England conducted by Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), focuses on socio-demographic factors and frequency of attendance, so aspects that art organisations have little influence over. The existing segmentation tools, e.g. the Audience Spectrum by the Audience Agency presents "patterns of engagement" but mainly patterns of attendance¹⁴. The current practice of data collection segmenting the audience based on socio-demographic, behavioural factors and general attitudes, serve (almost uniquely) the purpose of increasing sale figures. Marketing segmentations have problems with volatile and transient factors that influence decisions about attendance, which may reduce their efficacy. Changing just (or mostly) the label of those actions from marketing to audience development and now to audience engagement does not safeguard a positive transformation of arts attendance. Widespread conceptual ambiguity of audience-related vocabulary with multiple audience development, enrichment and engagement understandings in academia, by the cultural policy and arts sector are part of the problem with the audience studies and audience practice of recent decades¹⁵¹⁶.

This is also my problem with audience development. I first heard about the concept during lectures of the European Diploma in Cultural Project Management, most probably from Dragan Klaić, a theatre scholar and cultural analyst born in (then) Yugoslavia and working in the Netherlands. What I heard from him was probably very much in tune with his text published later:

more sophisticated marketing is not the key to bringing [...] more spectators. [...If arts institutions] care about the audience's appreciation of the work shown and about the cultural diversity of the audience, they need multiple simultaneous strategies that will reinforce each other. There are no ready-made solutions since contextual circumstances tend to be quite specific¹⁷.

His thoughts were very much in line with my values. I love the arts and would love more people to engage with them (that is why we are called the Impact Foundation). I never wanted to 'just' sell more tickets. I wanted people to see the world through the artists' eyes and stimulate feeling and thinking. Still, I worked with audience development, and my way of work was in line with some audience development definitions (that were published at that time). For example, this (probably most frequently cited) audience development definition of Arts Council England (ACE). It describes the concept as an

activity which is undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences, visitors and participants and to help arts organisations to develop ongoing relationships with audiences. It can include aspects of

“More sophisticated marketing is not the key to bringing [...] more spectators. [...] If arts institutions] care about the audience’s appreciation of the work shown and about the cultural diversity of the audience, they need multiple simultaneous strategies that will reinforce each other. There are no ready-made solutions since contextual circumstances tend to be quite specific.”

Dragan Klaić

marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care and distribution¹⁸.

The Audience Agency complements it with a statement that audience development is:

a planned, organisation-wide approach to extending the range and nature of relationships with the public, [and] it helps a cultural organisation to achieve its mission, balancing social purpose, financial sustainability and creative ambitions¹⁹.

But in the UK, the support for a coherent and strategic approach to the whole-organisational cooperation in audience development and engagement is noticeably below the assistance to arts marketing actions. That leaves an

impression that the actual aim is to justify public funding by effectively selling more tickets. If this is the purpose, then audience development as a separate domain is unnecessary. Without it, the arts sector could focus on the strategic implementation of a diversity of more sophisticated marketing tactics to broaden the audience base and discussions on how to facilitate more frequent engagement with the arts.

Although you can hear during Impact’s work about, for example, marketing and segmentation, we focus on a more holistic and human approach in line with this recommendation by Herbert A. Simon:

[...] we should be sure, first, that our social institutions are framed to bring out our better selves, and second, that they do not require major sacrifices of self-interest by many people much of the time. [...] Success depends on our ability to broaden human horizons so that people will take into account, in deciding what is to their interest, a wider range of consequences²⁰.

This approach is not opposing mainstream cultural policies and national practices but offers them complementary measures. Such a mission can be realised without connection to cultural policies when they are ambiguous or missing. Facilitation of the audience experience of engagement with art might be more effective (in multiple ways) if audience development and engagement strategies were based on audiences’ and not just institutional or cultural policy needs.

Adherence to cultural policy guidelines and the use of publicly available data depends on individual organisations. However, in the arts, engagement has often been used as a synonym for attendance²¹, participation²², or explanation of 'audience development'²³²⁴. That causes confusion and challenges. I was getting jobs as an audience development specialist in the UK based on my, very clearly articulated (during the interviews) vision of audience development understood as a process that needs time and cross-departmental and external collaboration. That turned up for some organisations to be tempting at first but unsustainable in the long run. Quickly a vision of audience development as selling more tickets fast was emerging. From the

Fast marketing has not brought lasting results in audience development. Maybe we should learn to simultaneously implement rapid, medium and long-term marketing or audience development actions.

organisational point of view, quick wins are more pressing than long-term gains. In such a fast results context, the more sophisticated marketing tactics also have no chance of implementation. So, we are perhaps stuck in short-sight actions until enough people will finally notice that market segmentation has not yet brought satisfactory outcomes in a general increase in arts attendance (although it might work in specific circumstances). Fast marketing has not

brought lasting results in audience development. Maybe we should learn to simultaneously implement rapid, medium and long-term marketing or audience development actions. Or perhaps it is time to try another (for example, impact the audience through art) strategy.

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a goal without a plan is just a wish²⁵

Paul Bogen, Olivearte Cultural Agency

An audience is never wrong. An individual member of it may be an imbecile, but a thousand imbeciles together in the dark - that is critical genius.

Billy Wilder

introduction

This article considers and reflects on some of the key issues from working on the Kaunas 2022 Audience Development programme over the past 4 years with a range of cultural organisations from the city. It also places these issues in the wider context of the cultural sector in Europe, pre, during and post the pandemic realities.

Having worked with or mentored approximately 200 cultural organisations in 20 European countries over the past 10 years, although it is often dangerous to generalise, there are many commonalities even if some are large public institutions with many staff and others are small, not-for-profit start-ups with only one or two people involved. These commonalities include not being strategic and not planning far enough in advance, an over-dependence on public subsidy, a lack of training, knowledge and skills in non-artistic areas and disciplines, undervaluing and placing a low priority on audience engagement, research and development and not having a clear and shared core purpose and reason for existing. Obviously, this is not the case for all organisations, and some are strategic, plan in advance, are not overly dependent on public funding, have excellent skills and knowledge, value and invest in audiences and research and have a clear vision. But unfortunately, these organisations are in the minority.

Over the past two years, the pandemic exposed many of these issues and forced many organisations to consider and re-examine their artistic practices and means of production, business models, audience relationships and in some cases, their very existence. Some managed to adapt to the new realities, some even decided to re-invent themselves, but others did not survive. In the post-pandemic world, it is still too early to predict and fully understand what the future holds for cultural organisations in Europe. Will they be able to predominantly revert back to how they operated pre-

pandemic, or will they need to adapt and change in order to be sustainable in a new post-pandemic reality? Only time will tell.

strategy, planning and vision

“Getting an audience is hard. Sustaining an audience is hard. It demands a consistency of thought, of purpose, and of action over a long period of time”.

Bruce Springsteen

Adrian Ellis (the founding director AEA consulting) once stated that, “Sustainable arts organisations are those which are artistically outstanding, serve their diverse communities with imagination and verve and are, at the end of the day, financially solvent”. I would add that they also are able to think and plan strategically and long-term and have a clear and shared understanding of why they exist and what their vision is.

In Kaunas, as elsewhere across Europe, it was unusual to find cultural organisations that plan more than a year ahead or have a long-term strategy (at least 3-years in duration). More often than not, organisations only plan for as long as they have public funding for, which is, most usually, a year. However, in a few European countries, national public funders award up to 3-years of subsidy at a time to some organisations, which requires them to plan long-term and therefore be more strategic. But it still is surprising how many organisations do not have a clear shared vision, plan and think strategically. In a survey of European performance arts and cultural centres conducted for the EU funded, Creative Lenses project, although 82% of the centres’ CEOs stated that all of the key people in their organisation had a clear and shared understanding of why they existed, only 53% of the centres’ staff agreed with this statement.

Although it is not a magic solution that works all the time, the successful, sustainable and long-lasting cultural organisations I have come across all share having a long-term and clear strategy.

There is still resistance to planning and being strategic amongst some in the sector as it is often seen as being too ‘business-like’ and not what an arts organisation should be about and prioritise. But the consequences of not being strategic and lack of future planning is often a continuous cycle of crisis, only being able to exist from one public grant award to (hopefully) the next. Although it is not a magic solution that works all the time, the successful, sustainable and long-

lasting cultural organisations I have come across all share having a long-term and clear strategy.

The Importance of having a clear vision, values and purpose

From my experience of working in the sector over the past 40 years, one of the most common reasons that organisations fail or are dysfunctional is because they do not have a clear vision, values or purpose. The other main reason is that they have too many of the 'wrong people' in the organisation with opposing and conflicting values. This is the case for start-ups as well as those that have been in existence for many years. It continues to surprise me how many I come across that cannot tell me why they exist. Although it may seem obvious, you need to know what your purpose is and for whom, what it is you want to achieve and how you are going to do this. And your vision, values and purpose must be shared and understood by everyone in the organisation at all levels, as well as by your key stakeholders. One tool I can recommend assisting in creating or reviewing your vision, values and purpose is the Vision Framework from Jim Collins, which can be found on his website at jimcollins.com.

Being strategic and long-term planning

To be successful and have a reasonable chance of achieving your vision, goals and core purpose, all research and experience show that some form of a plan such as a long-term strategy is essential. Some of the best plans I have seen are only one-page long. Quality and clarity are not defined by length or volume. Strategic planning is the process of identifying what you want to achieve and then making decisions on allocating the

Strategic planning is the process of identifying what you want to achieve and then making decisions on allocating the required resources, time and people to do this.

required resources, time and people to do this. Plans should support and deliver the implementation of your vision and goals, which ideally would cover 3 to 5-year periods. One way of looking at a plan or strategy is like a route map of where you want to go, why you want to go there, whom you will go with and how you will make the journey. Don't try to reinvent the wheel when planning but use the experience and knowledge of others who have been on similar journeys. And if it is possible and feasible, acquire external assistance to assist in the process. This could be a peer-group friend working in another organisation just as well as a consultant. When planning, be realistic rather than overly optimistic and always under-promise and over-deliver. Don't rush, don't overcomplicate, keep it simple, keep it clear and remember that less is more!

(over) dependence on public funding

What is currently called funding for culture in many European countries is funding for art projects, organisations and artists to create, produce, present or distribute arts activities and primarily for the running costs of arts organisations and their buildings. It is not funding for culture, which if it really were, would be and look very different. And many culture and funding policies and systems across much of Europe are still based on antiquated and conservative thinking with funding decisions nearly always political and usually not transparent.

Far too many arts/cultural organisations in Europe have what I call a funding-dependent culture. They receive too much subsidy, which in some cases can be up to 80% of their total income. This is particularly the case for governmental institutions in many countries and non-governmental organisations in some richer European countries. Funding is more often (than not) given to these organisations not because they are necessarily doing exciting, essential or high-quality work, but because they have always had funding, are good at lobbying and know how to 'schmooze' with the right people.

Most Arts and Cultural organisations in Europe, as in Kaunas, rely on contributed income, in the form of public or private funding, to exist and survive. Organisations that receive high levels of contributed income have less incentive and less need to innovate their business models as long as their funding continues. They also have less of a (financial) need to increase and develop their audiences. There are also quite large differences in funding levels between art forms and types of organisations. For example, Opera, Ballet, Classical Music, mainstream theatre and Museums tend to receive higher percentages of subsidy than non-governmental cultural centres, alternative and contemporary theatre, music and dance, festivals and media arts.

But not all cultural organisations receive high levels of public funding. On average, non-governmental cultural centres across Europe earn over 60% of their income, and many earn as much as 80%. As this earned income cannot be guaranteed even a small percentage reduction can have a major impact on an organisation's finances, especially if it budgets to only break-even. With an annual earned income target of, say, €1 million, just a 5% reduction in earned income would mean €50,000, which could determine if the organisation survives or not. With finances being so limited, cultural organisations usually have no or little capital or reserves. With earned income being so uncertain, investing in new business innovations is often either financially impossible or considered too risky. This lack of capital and financial instability are main reasons why many cultural organisations do not take many non-artistic risks or consider innovating in their business models.

Having a funding-dependent culture often results in poor quality art, complacency, stagnation and no need to consider the needs of or engage with audiences (which are

then often very, very low in number). It also means that as well as not having a truly sustainable business model, you are not independent and can be beholden to the priorities, wishes, politics and rules of your funders. An often-used definition of financial sustainability in the not-for-profit sector is that an organisation is financially sustainable if its core work will not collapse, even if its external funding is withdrawn. Based on this definition, the majority of European cultural organisations that receive public funding are not financially sustainable. Ideally, cultural organisations should have a diverse income strategy with a range of income sources, both contributed and earned. If, for example, you have 5 main sources of income with no one being more than 30% of your total income, this greatly reduces the risk of you going into crisis if one of these 5 income sources either fails or is withdrawn. This requires the development of a financial plan as part of your overall organisational strategy, that investigates new potential income sources as well as makes improvements to existing ones.

Over the past thirty years, the number of public or private funding sources has not increased at the same rate as the needs, or as the ever-growing number of cultural organisations and artists. Perhaps now there are just too many artists and cultural organisations across Europe trying to obtain a slice of an ever-smaller cake, operating in many countries where the population is actually declining? And perhaps a society only really needs and can sustain a finite amount and level of artists, art production, events and activity? As John Knell said in his 2005 paper, 'The Art of Dying' for Missions, Models and Money, "(If) it is determined that a vibrant cultural community is more likely if we have fewer better-funded organisations – so be it... the sector urgently requires transformation – not the snail-paced professionalisation of a dysfunctional system that we are currently witnessing."

One of the consequences of the Ukraine war will be the increase in defence spending by most European countries. This has already been the case with some countries such as Germany. The consequences of this may be a reduction in the future spending on culture, as it is usually one of the first areas cut when savings are required by governments. If this is the case, diversifying income and becoming less reliant on public funding may become essential.

valuing, engaging with and researching audiences

"The audience is the barometer of the truth."

Barbra Streisand

As has been previously mentioned, having too much public funding can mean that earned income becomes unimportant. This can then also mean that earning income

from audiences can become unimportant, as it makes no real difference to the bottom line if 50 or 500 people attend an event. This often results in audiences being ignored, patronised or blamed for low attendances. Some organisations' artistic directors have even told me that their low audience numbers are because "the audience is stupid and does not understand art".

The majority of cultural organisations I have worked with did not have a marketing, communication or PR strategy, let alone an Audience Development strategy. Most had not done any Audience Development processes or projects and very few had ever done any audience research. This was also the case in Kaunas. This is partly because there are differences between European countries in the use, practice and understanding of audience development as a concept and process. For example, in the UK it is well developed and practiced having been introduced there more than 20 years ago, whereas in many southern and eastern European countries it is still a relatively new concept and discipline. But partially due to the European Union prioritising audience development in its main cultural funding programme, Creative Europe, it has become more widely known and understood over the past 5 years.

However, there is still a reticence within some cultural organisations to place the audience at or near the centre of what they do and why they do it. This often becomes an internal argument about the role and purpose of art, the organisation, the audience and the artist. Many still believe that you must only create and present the art you believe in and consider important, without any consideration of if there will be an audience who wants to see, experience or participate with it. Placing the audience at the centre of your organisation and everything you do is still seen by many as being too commercial, populist or dumbing-down your work. It has often been the case with the organisations taking part in audience development programmes in Kaunas and

Placing the audience at the centre of your organisation and everything you do is still seen by many as being too commercial, populist or dumbing-down your work.

elsewhere that the marketing or communications teams want to embrace and engage with the audience, but senior management does not. And without the buy-in and support of an organisation's director or CEO, audience development rarely works and ends up being a stand-alone marketing project rather than a process involving all areas of the organisation.

Prior to joining the Kaunas 2022 audience development programme many of the participating organisations had not done any audience research or if they had, this was often a very basic audience questionnaire handed out after an event. Very few of them had an audience data base and those that did mainly used basic tools and software rather than customer relationship management software. Again, this is the case across

much of Europe. However, there are always exceptions and, for example, one of the Kaunas organisations on the audience development programme was using very sophisticated and specially designed apps to research, monitor and evaluate their audience.

Audience research, as with audience engagement and development, is only really worthwhile and of value, if it becomes an integral part of your organisation's strategy, work and programmes. By definition and to be of any use, it has to be a long-term process that, as well as marketing and communications, involves all of an organisation's key areas of work, especially artistic policy, programming, curating, education and accessibility.

the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on the cultural sector across Europe, the effects of which may not be fully felt for some time. In 2020, the cultural and creative economy lost approximately 31% of its revenue. Performing arts and music were the most impacted of the CCIs. The crisis hit Central and Eastern Europe the hardest (from a loss of 36% of revenues in Lithuania to 44% in Bulgaria and Estonia)²⁶. This loss of revenue and activity resulted in many professionals leaving the sector entirely, particularly those who worked freelance and were self-employed. It is not yet clear, if these individuals will return or have been permanently lost to the sector. Artists also had a very difficult time during the pandemic and many struggled to earn any income.

Well-funded cultural organisations fared much better than those that relied heavily on earned income, many also benefiting from national government wage subsidy and furlough schemes (like in the UK). Perversely, some organisations have even ended up in a stronger financial situation after the pandemic, with additional Covid-19 related subsidies and lower costs due to not presenting or performing any work.

For organisations in Kaunas as with most other European countries, one of the key issues and effects of the pandemic was not knowing from one month to the next if they were going to be able to present or produce their work. Lockdowns were often announced last minute by national governments, and this made any form of even short-term planning almost impossible. And even when events were allowed to take place, the Covid-19 restrictions often made it either financially prohibitive or operationally impractical to programme them.

Audiences also varied in their view of the risk involved in attending cultural events during and after the pandemic. Older audiences have been much more cautious than younger ones for obvious reasons. People seem to have been more comfortable going to outdoor rather than indoor events even if these adopted social distancing rules.

During the pandemic, audiences became used to not going out and entertaining themselves at home. This can be seen by the big increase in Netflix subscriptions that occurred in 2020 and 2021, although this now appears to be declining. However, there is a widespread view that because audiences were deprived of attending events for so long, once able to do so again they will return in large numbers. But it is still too early to know if this will be the case over the long-term and throughout Europe. As this article is being written about half-way through Kaunas 2022's ECOC year, it is also too early to fully know how the pandemic has affected its audience. It will be interesting to see the audience figures for all of the ECOC programmes at the end of 2022 and how these compare with the targets and expectations made in advance.

Ironically, this article's recommendation to be strategic, plan well in advance and not be overly dependent on public funding was rather turned on its head by the pandemic. It seems that in times of major social or financial crisis it may in fact be much safer and secure to be either a publicly owned or a well-funded cultural organisation. Therefore, the Kaunas cultural organisations probably have a lot to consider and think about in terms of their post ECOC futures. Once the year is over and things have calmed down and returned to some form of normal, what should their long-term strategies be in a post-Covid, high inflation, climate change affected Europe experiencing a major and costly war? The only real certainty is that nobody can accurately predict what the future will hold for us, so building flexibility and the ability to make changes quickly in future planning and strategies is most probably essential.

Finally, although not a recipe for instant success or a one-size-fits-all solution, listed below are what I believe are the key ingredients required to have a reasonable chance

of being or becoming a successful and sustainable cultural organisation.

Working with and for many different types, sizes and forms of arts/cultural organisations, I am continually attempting to analyse and assess what the characteristics of those that

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I consider successful and the most sustainable are. This is not in any way an exact science or based on any form of academic research, but for what it is worth, here they are:

Characteristics of a sustainable and successful organisation:

- It knows its purpose, why and for whom it exists and what it believes in
- It strives to be artistically outstanding, producing and presenting work of high quality
- It knows where it is going, why and how it will get there
- It has the right people who share the same values, who are skilled and self-motivated
- It loves and respects its audiences!
- It is not just creative in art, but in everything it does
- It has a diverse revenue model and is not overly funding-dependent
- It has strong management & financial skills, tools, resources & knowledge
- It embraces and knows how to take, assess and manage risk
- It invests in itself, its art, artists, audiences, users, its own people and its future
- It embraces change, learning, partnership and collaboration
- It knows how to communicate and especially how to listen
- It is dynamic, challenging, energetic, exciting and most importantly, FUN!
- It has more income than costs!



the power of working strategically with networks and ecosystems

Birgitta Persson, Olivearte Cultural Agency

“Whenever we look at life, we look at networks and patterns.”

The Systems View of Life, by Fritjof Capra and Luisi Pier Luigi 2016

As both arts organisations and human beings, we tend to focus on changing the minds of those with direct power and influence on us, be it funders, local authorities, bosses, or property owners. However, by focusing only on them, we might miss the opportunity to explore the vast network of existing and possible relations around our organisation. That means looking sideways instead of looking up the ladder. In this article, I suggest that one way of increasing both your influence, resources and your audience is to work strategically with your network and local ecosystem. There can be more support and resources around you than you think and there might be others who need your support.

A good way to start is by making a network map. Who in your city or region has an influence on your organisation in one way or another? It can be:

- The owner or board of your organisation
- The members (if you are an association)
- Staff, volunteers, freelancers
- The owner or landlord of your building
- Your competitors
- Your funders
- Local authorities in charge of permissions (police, health & safety...)
- Suppliers and sub-contractors (those who you buy stuff from like beer, electricity, or services like bookkeeping, IT etc.)
- Audience and visitors
- Customers (rentals, tours etc.)
- Partners
- Artists

- Neighbours
- Media
- Other?

For each category, write the names of those companies, people, and organisations that you think of. Try to make the map as exhaustive and specific as possible. It is easy to forget the companies who deliver the supplies or an NGO partner that you collaborate with occasionally for certain social events and these people are your audience too. Make sure to acknowledge everyone whom you are dependent on and therefore has an influence on your organisation. This exercise is very helpful to do together with your colleagues because each one of you will come to think of different organisations. At the end of the exercise though, you will have a shared image and understanding of your local network and its opportunities.

When you cannot think of anyone else who has an influence on your organisation, it is time to think about the quality of the relationship and not forgetting that real audience development is about relationships. Start with all of those whom you have a good, trusting relationship with and mark them in green. Then mark all those relationships that need improving in orange. Those orange relationships need improvement either because the relationship is weak, nonexistent, or for some reasons partly problematic. Finally, mark those in red that you consider being hostile, antagonistic or on the verge of conflict. Congratulations if you have none of these! Make sure to discuss and agree with your colleagues on how you view the relationships before you colour them. If only one team member considers the relationship problematic, it is still an issue for the organisation and can therefore not be marked as green.

Now reflect on the fact that each organisation, institution or individual on your map have their unique network map. You are just one organisation of many on their map. Some connections you share, others you don't. How do you think that those other organisations colour their relationship with you on their map?

Networks and relations are not static, they are living systems that change constantly. And as Fritjof Capra says "The most obvious property of any network is its nonlinearity,

it goes in all directions." In nonlinear systems, small changes can have dramatic effects since these small changes can be self-reinforced throughout the system and therefore amplified. But how can theories about networks' nonlinearity and properties of living systems be of help in reality?

Networks and relations are not static, they are living systems that change constantly.

Pretend for a moment that you are a seagull who flies effortlessly on a gentle upwind over your city or region. From a distance high up in the sky, you see all the interconnected networks of people and organisations, you see the

entire city's living ecosystem. What kind of pattern stands out for you? What seems to be emerging and what seems to be fading out? What seems to be a prerequisite for something else to happen? Imagine that you now notice that a lot of people are entering the grand opening of the brand-new science centre where visual artists and musicians have worked with scientists on the opening exhibition. Where did the curators, producers, artists and arts managers get their education? Which former job environments did they work in that enabled them to be fit to initiate, manage, and fundraise a contemporary, cross-disciplinary arts-science event that attracts a large audience? Why the scientists and their departments were open and interested to collaborate with artists? When we start to answer these questions, we discover the underlying value chains of a city or a region. Who provides training and education? Who provides the spaces and workshops for experimentation and rehearsals? Who provides the stages and spaces for performances and presentations? Who funds, who invests and who supports entrepreneurship? A successful new cross-disciplinary and contemporary event is the result of a lot of effort, creativity and work of other people and organisations that are unrelated on the surface but not if you look at it with a living system's view.

Where does your art organisation fit into the ecosystem of your city or region? If you are providing opportunities for artists to rehearse, experiment, train, and produce, you are a key resource for anyone else who provides opportunities for artists to present – and vice versa. This is the same for the audience, where else do they like to go? Who on your map of competitors and partners might have an audience that you think would appreciate what you have to offer?

In 2020 the Malmö City Theatre in Sweden knew that for the coming 1-2 years they would be without a stage due to a major renovation of their beautiful old theatre building. Therefore, they decided to see if they could collaborate with other small theatre groups in the city and maybe use their spaces. They reached out to several groups in the city and one of them was the independent contemporary puppet theatre. It turned out that the artistic director of the puppet theatre had an artistic idea of making a new play based on a Jackie Collins novel using live video, puppets and actors. The idea was so tempting that the two organisations decided to make a co-production. The big city theatre had the resources to provide for actors, scenographers, costume designers etc., as well as a professional ticket system, while the small puppet theatre NGO had the artistic idea and did the dramaturgy, live-video design etc. The performances took place in the black box of the puppet theatre in a semi-rough area of Malmö. It was a success both in terms of audience numbers and positive reviews. The collaboration taught both organisations that there are big differences in ways of working that need to be respected and overcome. However, for the puppet theatre they got the resources to realise an artistic idea that they could never have afforded otherwise, and the theatre institution reached a theatre audience who never or rarely

attend the performances of city and state theatres. The experience resulted in the Malmö City Theatre now looking to do more co-productions and collaborations.

All that was needed was the situation of a temporary closure of their space and openness to cooperation.

With this in mind, I invite you to have a look at your own map again. Which relationships need your attention? Who could you approach with curiosity to explore the potential pooling of resources? As soon as you start to take an interest in others around you, you will start to open up conversations. Depending on the level of trust, everything can be shared and pooled, from spaces, equipment and systems, to knowledge, audiences and personnel. For example, several small festivals happening around the year can overcome the volatility of project- and time-based employment of their staff members by creating a joint festival team. The opportunities are many but if they are not explored, they will not arise. Who will be the first one for you to call today?



reflections on my journey through audience development

Neringa Kulik, Kaunas Biennial

In this text, I would like to share with you my personal perspective on the capacity building and audience development programme that was implemented as part of the Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022 programme. I am the Director of the NGO, Kaunas Biennial, which runs the largest, longest running, most significant and most visited contemporary art festival in Lithuania and the Baltic states. In addition, since 2017, Kaunas Biennial has led a Creative Europe platform called Magic Carpets, which unites 16 cultural organisations from 16 different European countries.

Kaunas Biennial programmes include international exhibitions and events, implementation and presentation of interdisciplinary international projects in various countries, such as Latvia, Estonia, Sweden, Poland, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, Ireland, Czech Republic, Austria, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey and Georgia. It promotes emerging talents (curators and artists), extensive educational programme for various audiences, providing accessibility to contemporary art and culture, involvement of volunteers and producing various publications. Kaunas Biennial stands out not only for the variety of projects we run and deliver, but also for its institutional independence. Our organization is open to opportunities of self-realisation and personal development. My professional interests include contemporary art practices and their relationship to audience engagement based on collaborative, inclusive and co-creative practices. And it was my professional interest that brought me to audience development.

As you may know, the city of Kaunas and its district was awarded the European Capital of Culture title back in March 2017. A year later, in 2018, Kaunas 2022 launched a year-long capacity building and audience development programme, in which I participated together with 23 other colleagues from 12 different cultural organisations and institutions in Kaunas. Through the participation in the capacity building and audience development programme, my perspective of audience development has shifted and below I would like to take you on my journey as well as share some key take-away moments from the programme.

what does ‘audience’ mean?

When I first came across the term ‘audience development’ I thought it meant, in most simple terms, ‘working with people that visit cultural institutions or events’. In my head,

there was a singular group of people, who were contained inside the term 'audience', and I never thought of it more than that. I've been working in the culture field for more

They come as an 'audience', and they leave as an 'audience'. This 'audience' exists somewhere out there, outside the museum walls and concert halls. They are only an 'audience' when they visit, participate and engage.

than 15 years and I never questioned the term 'audience' that was used by myself and my colleagues on a nearly daily basis. Any why would we? Working for cultural institutions and organising cultural events many of us do not have time to think about the meaning of the term 'audience' and most of the time we take people, who visit our cultural institutions or events, for granted. Over the years, each of us create our own image of the type of audience that visit museums, art galleries, theatres, go to cinema and concerts. They come as an

'audience', and they leave as an 'audience'. This 'audience' exists somewhere out there, outside the museum walls and concert halls. They are only an 'audience' when they visit, participate and engage.

where I began.

It was my academic and professional interest in audience-centred approach that brought me to look more deeply into audience development. Taking part in the capacity building and audience development programme, which was run by Kaunas 2022 and implemented by an international team of specialists and professionals, I soon realised that 'audience' is not a singular term. And this blew my mind! It was extremely challenging to see this term fit many definitions of many different audiences. All of my professional life, I'd never been asked to define the term 'audience' and when I had to do it, of course, I struggled. Soon I realised that my struggle was a result of the lack of tools and methods that would allow me to go through the process of defining the term 'audience' with confidence and ease.

how to define 'audience'?

There is no easy or simple approach to defining your audience. For me, the take-away from the capacity building and audience development programme was that in order to find your audience, you need to take a close look at yourself and your organisation. This means a lengthy process of self-reflection and evaluation. I won't lie, it's hard work, but, in the end, when you understand who you are as an organisation, it becomes much easier to work with your audiences. Self-reflection and evaluation are ongoing processes of assessment of your organisation and your organisation's activities, therefore you (and your team) need to dedicate time and effort, sometimes in-between the many different projects that you run, to do it. In my experience, it is important to find

the time to do it no matter how busy you are with other projects. It should become an important ongoing 'project' that you build into your (already busy) schedule.

I thought I knew.

I've been working with the Kaunas Biennial since 2013. I started as a volunteer, gradually working my way up to become the Audience Development Manager, implementing a four-strand educational programme and, finally, becoming the Director. Throughout my time with Kaunas Biennial, I've been carrying out people-facing tasks on a daily basis from selling tickets to giving tours and running workshops for school children. I thought I knew our 'audience'. I knew our audience was loyal, because I kept seeing the same faces attending exhibitions and events year after year. But why were they returning each year? What was motivating them to attend? Although I could partly say who was attending Kaunas Biennial exhibitions and events, I couldn't say why. The who part is easier to identify by observing and without carrying out a survey: male or female in their 20's, 30's, 40's, by themselves or with friend(s), relative(s). The why part is more complicated. It is nearly impossible to identify the views, thoughts, intentions, actions, or reactions of audiences without asking them. And this is exactly what you need to do – ASK.

asking questions.

Another important take-away for me from the capacity building and audience development programme was that audience development is a process that will probably make you ask more questions than you have ever done before. By the end of the capacity building and audience development programme I had a clear idea that what the Kaunas Biennial team needed to do is to carry out audience research. Kaunas Biennial has been running since 1997 and audience research has never been done – until 2019! I should say that there is no survey in a magazine or online that will help you identify your 'audience'. The 'copy-paste' methodology does not work here. Therefore, with the help of professional mentors, Agata Etmanowicz and Aleksandra Koltun, the Kaunas Biennial team designed our own audience research. It took us 2 months to design the methodology and 1 month to run the survey.

now I know (a bit) more.

After preparing and carrying out an audience survey together with the Kaunas Biennial team we learnt who visits our events, what are their motivations for coming to our events (the why), and what are their expectations for future events. The audience survey required a lot of preparatory work but the results and the knowledge we gained were irreplaceable! I believe, we have built a strong foundation for further audience research and next time we can go even deeper into our audience's motivations and

We use the results of our audience survey to inform the strategic planning of the organisation and future events in order to put the audience at the centre of everything we do.

expectations. In addition, we use the results of our audience survey to inform the strategic planning of the organisation and future events in order to put the audience at the centre of everything we do.

in the end, what does 'audience' mean to me?

Through the capacity building and audience development programme, I learnt the benefits of proper strategic planning, audience research, participatory and co-creative practices, communication and marketing. Above all, I understood that audience development is a process that makes you reflect and evaluate yourself and your organisation and this involves asking (many) questions of you, your colleagues and your audiences. Participating in the capacity building and audience development programme has taught me the importance of human relationships – most importantly, those between your organisation and your audiences. Honestly, I can say that the time and effort I put into a project or event is worthwhile and I feel a sense of reassurance in what I do when I receive feedback from audiences. For example, when a parent of a deaf child tells me that the educational activity we have organised has provided them with an opportunity to spend quality time as a family, I know my work has real value!

final thought/question:

Audiences find the motivation to visit your institutions and events, so why not find the motivation to get to know them and build a long-lasting relationship with them?



a²

Agata Etmanowicz, Impact Foundation

where did it come from

Over the last decade of working with audience development, I had a chance of observing how all around Europe, different experts approach the concept and how different organisations implement the concept into their work. I could not help wondering how one can speak of “strengthening relationships with existing and reaching out to new audiences” without truly taking into consideration accessibility.

How is it possible that there is so much attention dedicated to audience segmentation, but no one seems to notice that accessibility sleeps away from, and goes beyond categories? That no matter how we approach segmentation, on which criteria we decide to base it (demographic, geo-demographic, behavioural or whichever else), accessibility always applies. Not only because disability “doesn’t care” about one's place of birth, level of education, or financial status nor is it in any way connected to an individual sense of aesthetics. But mainly because accessibility is about so much more than its primary function of getting rid of barriers, it reaches beyond “its primary target group” of audiences with various disabilities.

Accessibility, the way we understand and approach it, is about an open invitation, it is about giving people options, allowing them to make their own, informed choices about participation and participating on their terms. And approached this way, accessibility benefits ALL audiences! And this is why and how a² approach was born.

everyone has the right. not some.

Access to culture is widely recognised by international law as one of a human rights.

The essential reference point is still Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which clearly states that:

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

The opening line on the UNESCO website dedicated to the “Right to participate in cultural life” says: “The protection and promotion of culture is a human rights

Everyone has the right to participate in culture. Not some. Not based on any conditions. Everyone. And it is generally applicable law. Why then do so many cultural organisations still tend to ignore it...?

imperative. The right to take part in cultural life guarantees the right of everyone to access, participate in and enjoy culture, cultural heritage and cultural expressions.”. This is expressed, among others, in UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

Everyone has the right to participate in culture. Not some. Not based on any

conditions. Everyone. And it is generally applicable law. Why then do so many cultural organisations still tend to ignore it...?

accessibility benefits all audiences!

I try not to speak about obligations, but I think that from time to time, it is worth a reminder. Normally, instead, I prefer to introduce accessibility by appealing to “basic human decency” and “the language of benefits”. So, let’s do that now. As I have stated above, accessibility benefits ALL audiences. Let me explain exactly what I mean by that.

In the “accessibility toolbox” there are a lot of tools. Most of them come “with a manual”, with specific guidelines on how to apply them. Usually, those tools are designed to eliminate barriers for a specific group of people (with a certain disability). But no matter which tool (from a very long list) we take out and analyse, we will notice that its functionality is much broader. That it is useful not only to “the original, primary target group” it was designed for but also for others. Examples? I will give you three (for the warm-up!).

Example no. 1: A ramp

Let’s start with the most obvious. The reason for having ramps is quite simple: they should be provided wherever stairs or other differences in levels obstruct the free passage of pedestrians. When we think about the “main target group” of ramps, immediately wheelchair users and people with mobility problems come to mind. Now, let’s stop for a moment and think. How about you? If you carry a suitcase, travel around the city on a bike, or with a baby carriage, or you are tired after a long day, or you are trying to get to your car with a trolley full of shopping, or simply most days when there is a choice between stairs and a ramp: what do you choose?

Note: The requirements for a ramp slightly differ depending on the country. So if you are thinking about installing one, check your national guidelines and regulations to be sure about: ramp configuration, width, slope, landings, handrail and tactile marking.

Example no. 2: Closed Captions (CC)

The difference between subtitles and captions is that the former includes only the dialogue and the latter includes both the dialogue and any other relevant audio. Closed captions are a tool originally dedicated to people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing. Who else benefits from this tool? Those who watch video material in loud, as well as, in very quiet places, those for whom the language of the recording is not their mother tongue, and those who focus better on the content while reading.

Example no. 3: Pre-visit guide

A pre-visit guide can take different forms: a text document with photos/drawings, a video, or an audio recording. One medium does not exclude and might be accompanied by the other. Predominantly, pre-visit guides are created for audiences on the autism spectrum or for audiences with intellectual disabilities. They aim to let audiences prepare for the experience. So they know what to expect and feel safe. Who else benefits from pre-visit guides? Teachers preparing their classes for an out-of-school visit, any adult taking a child on an excursion who wants to be a guide around the institution, any person who has never been to this particular institution and doesn't know what to expect, how to dress and how to behave.

There are so many examples. No tool serves just one purpose and benefits (only) one group of audience. And most of the tools for accessibility are very effective in supporting cultural organisations in their efforts to reach out to new audiences, especially those who are currently non-audiences.

Most of the tools for accessibility are very effective in supporting cultural organisations in their efforts to reach out to new audiences, especially those who are currently non-audiences.

eliminate barriers, create opportunities

Ideally, everything around us would be created in line with universal design principles, so “without the need for adaptation or specialised design”. But, as amazing as the universal design concept sounds in theory, it is often close to impossible to fully implement it in reality. For objective reasons. This is also why in our everyday practice we lean towards the accessible design approach. The one in which people with different disabilities are the main focus. Especially as we have noticed that the elimination of barriers results in the creation of opportunities for various groups of audiences.

In other words: “the side effect” of applying accessible design to everyday work results in becoming more open, and inclusive to all audiences. Accessibility constantly makes

“The side effect” of applying accessible design to everyday work results in becoming more open, and inclusive to all audiences.

you think about people. All people. Different people. About what they will experience, and how they might feel - from the first contact with communication about the event/organisation, through all elements of participation up until they are safely back

home. And you end up thinking and planning on how to make this experience as good as possible. Look for new ideas and solutions. Accessibility “keeps you on your toes”. Every day.

a², because you can not have one without the other

Regardless if you are aiming at “reaching out to new audiences” or “strengthening the relationship with existing audiences”. No matter if you define your audiences as “teenagers”, “inhabitants of XY district”, or as “DINK” (double income no kids). You need to remember that in all of those groups there will be people with various disabilities. So, if you decide to “place the audience in the heart of everything you do”, that means ALL the audiences. Not some. A simplified marketing-oriented approach to audience development is not enough here.

Accessibility, just like audience development, is a process. It does not happen overnight. Exactly, as in audience development, it is also about the whole organisation (and every member of the organisation is equally important and responsible for this process). So why not combine the two? From the very beginning?

Accessibility, just like audience development, is a process. It does not happen overnight. Exactly, as in audience development, it is also about the whole organisation.

the beginnings and the dilemmas

I was about five years old when I took part in the first project focused on inclusivity (believe it or not in the role of “an artist” and “a culture animator”). I have met, sung and danced with a group of kids with various disabilities. Accessibility is entangled with my life ever since – both privately and professionally. I would not have it any other way. These days and many, many projects later (though for the sake of humanity in different i.e. non-artistic roles) I feel none the wiser. And that’s what I love about this part of my work: there are new dilemmas and new questions every day! That, and the fact that every action results in more people having a choice...

When you begin your journey with accessibility, as with any other “firsts”, you might have more questions than answers. And that is totally fine. Have also in mind that not everything can or should be done “DIY style” (I know that this is a wild concept for cultural workers used to doing everything by themselves). For some tools, actual expertise and financial resources are needed. Therefore, planning ahead is necessary. But you can begin planning right about... NOW!



a few notes on accessibility shared by the practitioner

Rafał Lis, Impact Foundation

Dear Reader, you are just about to read a text that has been composed of my various contemplations. These thoughts and reflections were coming to me at different moments of my professional life, sometimes many years after an event (especially when I think about the very busy times when it was easier to act rather than analyse things as they were happening). I have tried to organise these thoughts for you, and I hope it will be useful.

Accessibility does not have just one definition and it is not a value that can be easily measured. Just consider this, some of the solutions that build your organisation's accessibility for one of the social groups (yes, I deliberately do not use phrases such as “disadvantaged”) – may make the accessibility difficult or even impossible for another group/ groups. As you know perfectly well, there is a simple reason for this: different people have different abilities and different ways of fulfilling their needs. And this can become your accessibility mantra.

Accessibility does not have just one definition and it is not a value that can be easily measured.

But what is accessibility? I will answer by quoting some words of people that I have met on my professional path.

1. A legal requirement regarding spaces, products, and services (especially regarding public entities)
2. A quality that determines the participation of various people in social life
3. A human right
4. A challenge

All of these answers are close to the truth. Each of them in different circumstances and in different contexts was voiced both by people from various institutions and by people who are their audiences (most often people with some disabilities).

Especially accessibility in the context of the work of the arts/culture institutions and access (here meaning: a chance to get to know something and experience it

personally) to, for example, architectural objects, music or pantomime seem important, as basic elements that guarantee a real sense of being together and feeling together - with people from local communities (no matter how you define them for your own purposes). It all directly concerns matters such as quality of life, having a choice, equality with others.

accessibility is everywhere

Accessibility is in every aspect of the institution's work.

This statement “accessibility is everywhere” is linked to the fact that accessibility is in every aspect of the institution's work. I immediately recall the courtesy nods, accompanied by a slight dilation of the pupils of my interlocutors when I make the above statement during meetings or training. The nodding stops and faces become concerned when I ask specific questions (that are usually left unanswered):

1. How do you inform your visitors that a specific object has been temporarily withdrawn from the exhibition?
2. What means do you use for people to sign in for workshops?
3. Will everyone who signs a contract with your institution be able to read and sign it – without any difficulties?
4. Is the computer server room accessible to an IT technician in a wheelchair?

Yes, you understand right, the questions indicate that disability/disabilities do not have to occur only outside the institution (within the local audience) but also in your workplace.

where to start?

When I talk with people (especially from arts/culture institutions) about accessibility, this question always arises: where to start? And I never have a good answer. This happens for a number of reasons: first of all – with the exception of new organisations, it's very difficult to imagine a team of cultural workers, who never had or currently don't have any dealings with accessibility. After all, almost all of the art/culture institutions are being visited (or will be visited) by seniors, teenagers, young children, people with babies or foreign tourists. When we get down to discussing details, it turns out that almost every cultural institution (also any practical workshop requiring practical engagement) is visited by people with apparent or not so obvious disabilities or different abilities.

In the worst-case scenario, working with people with disabilities becomes/is simply intuitive without any preparation; no-one from the staff can share their experience (as they have none), and no-one even proposes cooperation with those who have. But it is not uncommon for people with disabilities (especially those with sensory or movement disabilities, or neuroatypical people) to be culture professionals, and to be part of a team working in a particular institution/organisation. And I hope that institutions listen to them and do not leave anyone without sufficient support.

To emphasize – accessibility always begins “in the heads” and “in the hearts” of those who work and are responsible for the institution. One of the first challenges is always jointly deciding about first actions: identifying barriers and methods of overcoming them. There are plenty of methods to choose from to support your accessibility work: audience research, diagnosis of needs, audience development; and many forms of doing it: barter, voluntary work, casual or full-time work. You don't have to choose just one method at any given time.

the first step is not the difficult one

For the purpose of this text, I suggest a ‘thought experiment’: an institution has zero contact with people with disabilities. It is this institution’s first step forward. Where should it start? There is no golden answer to it. It all depends on the institution/organisation’s current position, with whom it works (and with whom it wants to work), and what are its goals?

Dear institution/organisation, when you are at the very beginning of the process (or always when you introduce a new tool or service) you will be able to say these great sentences:

1. “I am doing this for the first time”
2. “Help me”
3. “I want to learn from you ‘and with you’.

While starting the process, you have this amazing opportunity to invite people into a dialogue.

Yet, it's important to talk about these implemented changes with everyone, to those “with” and “without” disabilities. There is a simple reason for this: people do not like changes. Even changes for the better. Changes need to be ‘told’ as a story and named so they can become familiar and accepted. Then all audiences, regardless of their capabilities, will hopefully acknowledge the needs of other audience members.

what happens next?

Your team will most likely not like these changes. They mean new algorithms for all audience-related services, new costs, new tasks. What's more, they also mean a need for new skills, new marketing and sales tactics, new joys and new disappointments. And since the accessibility can be found within the whole institution, no one will be bypassed by these changes.

The process does not stop... You need to continue asking questions:

1. Are you doing the audio description right? Who decides?
2. Had you scheduled time to create the subtitles for the film which was meant to be published yesterday?
3. Can your newly employed Project Manager check the accuracy of prepared tactile materials?
4. When you hired a new accountant, did you ask about their needs regarding evacuation procedure?

It's getting hot, right? I am going to raise the bar.

Are the subtitles correct or misinterpreted/mistranslated? Alternative text prepared for the photo report from the vernissage might make you realise that the photographer likes specific frames or a person from the audience. Preparation of an easy to read and understandable text about your institution could be delayed by 3 months because the team does not reach an internal agreement on what means what in practice.

Remember! You do not have to work alone! You can build a team (including people with various disabilities) to work with you.

'everything with us'

'Everything with us' is an increasingly popular demand from people with disabilities. There isn't a more beautiful slogan which reminds us that there is no accessibility and access without the participation of people with disabilities. Their participation primarily means diagnosing needs, testing solutions, proofreading content.

Each audio description of an object at the exhibition, each conversation about these objects with people with disabilities and finally gradual 'gathering' of audiences, in this case people with visual impairment – will quickly convince you that – attention! – people have the same, common needs, but may have different ways/methods of fulfilling them.

Different people like different types of audio descriptions, or different forms of presenting them (a recording vs a real person speaking). Or that some terminology used (take for example the industry term *contrapposto*) – can be differently understood by different people. Also, it can be translated differently. You will also realise that audio descriptions do not have to focus solely on actual description, definition or verbal communication. For example, you can show a blind person what *contrapposto* is (about) by instructing the participant how to place their own body in this specific pose.

Not only that – the audience will grow and develop with you. Both the audience with and without disabilities. These audiences will be developing competencies needed to experience art and culture through the tools your institution will propose and provide to them. Then they will be expecting to receive these tools and to test them. And this is where the real dialogue about accessibility will begin. A growing number of fairly optimistic feedback is your goal, because it is an indication of development. For both – the institution and audiences.

what change may bring?

The wider the spectrum of accessible events and facilities the more dispersed the interest of audiences with disabilities may be so you also have to accept their non-

The wider the spectrum of accessible events and facilities the more dispersed the interest of audiences with disabilities may be so you also have to accept their non-attendance.

attendance. As a natural outcome people will start to acquire new competences for a conscious perception of culture (or some of its phenomena) and choose events according to subject matter, timing etc. And it is also absolutely natural that sometimes people will not come to the events. For example, because the weather is beautiful and it's better to go to the beach, rather than attend a workshop translated into sign language. This beautiful lesson was taught to me by one of the

deaf mothers. Sometimes the point is that people should have a choice and choose rationally (adequately to current needs, nice weather = BEACH!). It is fantastic to give people choices that they have not had before. And the beach 'tastes' so much better if there is (hopefully) an attractive alternative to it, for instance - a visit to a cultural institution.

multisensory translation

Everything that happens in the institution can be experienced through different senses. Or at least, data available through one of the senses can be translated into data available to another sense. And this in short (also) summarises accessibility.

What is visible – can be described. And this is what audio descriptors do. What can be heard – can be written down and read. After all this is the basic principle of how subtitles are created. What can be seen – in most of the cases can be touched by getting some help in the form of a tactile equivalent of what's been painted, for instance. Other objects such as the dancer's costume can be touched either before or after the show. It's always possible to go a step further. Things that can be seen in the painting, could be experienced in a form of smell or through a taste. Also, the art objects have smells of their own which can be experienced and explored.

So, let's think – if an important historical hero has been depicted in the painting (from the beginning of 20th Century) against a dense pine forest backdrop, why not bring some pine branches and cones to the gallery to intensify the experience?

Success in accessibility to culture and art can be achieved by those who are open to new solutions. And by those who trust (even a little bit) people from a Baroque mindset fascinated with many senses and try to translate data available to one sense into data available to another one.

postscript

The accessibility and access to arts and culture – in the context of the functioning of an organisation/institution – has many shades. They are not just projects; they are not a one-off task. Nor are they something that is achievable without the participation of people with varying (dis)abilities.

Accessibility is a process; it is the engine of change. It is not the aim; it is a means of real

co-existence. Accessibility is a way of describing the interaction between human beings and the world they find themselves in.

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between human beings and the world they find
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the city is a beast, and the beast is us

An interview with Rytis Zemkauskas was conducted
by Agata Etmanowicz.

Listened to and summarised by: Joanna Wróżyńska.

Wish to listen to the whole conversation?

It is available in the form of podcast:

[The city is a beast, and the beast is us. An interview with Rytis Zemkauskas](#)

„The Mythical Beast of Kaunas” is a story-telling project of Kaunas 2022. At least this is how it is formally being called. In fact, it is so much more. It is a great example of working with audiences, multi-layered cooperation of creative professionals, and an innovative approach to marketing. It is also a narrative, “a connector” of the Kaunas 2022 programme. A constant presence in the city.

But why do cities need myths? What is this „Mythical Beast” and why does it sleep (snoring loudly) under the Kaunas Castle?

the beast and the man behind the beast

The idea of the Beast - a creature from legends and fairy tales, the guardian of the city that lives in the Underworld Kaunas and travels back and forth, was born in the mind of Rytis Zemkauskas, a Lithuanian journalist, who became the programme curator and, so to speak, the „man behind the Beast”. Rytis explains his concept in conversation with Agata Etmanowicz: „A city becomes a real city when it has a mythological being somewhere deep inside. You have to have it, this raison d’etre - something that answers the question: <<why we are here?>>”. He continues: „It was the first citizen of this city and is going to be the last. It is a guardian for the city and its job is to make sure

everything is ok in the city". Rytis says that he understands the city as a living organism, so the Beast becomes an avatar or an allegory for Kaunas. And even though he refers to the Beast as a project, it seems to be more of a process as the idea is for it to never end. But it does have a very definite beginning.

Creating the Beast was a way to create the myth for the city – that Kaunas was lacking. The idea of „The Mythical Beast of Kaunas” started from Rytis’ love for storytelling, which he believes has almost a magical power. „We understand the world through storytelling. This is my deepest belief about how the human mind works. It is basically always a Rorschach test because when you see something, you desperately want to make sense of it. So, you need stories to feel more comfortable in your environment, and the Mythical Beast, who is said to have always lived under your city, could make you feel protected. And there is a logical sequence of events, which we don’t necessarily always see, but it is there. And it is a soothing experience”, he elaborates. The story of the Beast can give people a sense that there is more to life and that they are a part of something bigger, meaningful, magical, and transcendental even. And what is equally crucial – children love stories, and you certainly want to win them over.

But there was no Beast, no legend, and no story. It had to be created, and it was a serious task that proved to be more difficult than expected. Retrospectively one can say all that is needed to prepare such a programme are just three people with three different sets of skills: a writer, a designer, and a manager, but in reality, it is never that easy.

the beginning of the myth

So how did it start? To quote the classic: „In the beginning was the Word”. In this case, it was a fairy tale book written by Rytis explaining the program of Kaunas 2022 and introducing the Beast and its world as a fun part of the programme. The next step was reaching out to professional writers who were supposed to participate in creative writing workshops and contribute their stories about the Beast, but this was not as successful as expected. Rytis believes that the reason for this is that professionals tend to own their stories and his idea was to let go of the story and allow it to develop on its own. So, the brainstorming process began, and a few additional concepts were born – amongst them a fairy tale book and a novel of which Rytis wrote the first three chapters and published them on the Internet with the hope that people would catch up with the idea and someone would continue the story. But that did not work either. It showed that the concept of collaborative writing needs more management than one might expect. Finally, they came up with the idea that people should just send in their stories. And that worked. „To some disappointment, maybe” - notes Rytis. „Because we had this idea that it could be done by collaborative writing, that a city could write a myth for itself. Well... You need an author” - he sums up a bit bitterly and adds that he wanted to back

away as far as possible. He insists that his „strong intention is to be forgotten” as the author of the concept. Why? He hopes that the story of the Beast will live for the centuries to come, and the lack of an author will maybe give it more credibility.

to give the beast a face and body

The project was slowly but steadily gaining attention, and Rytis decided to wait patiently for people to recognise it and get involved. Once that happened, the next step was to create a shape, an image that would correspond with the words. The Beast needed a body and a face that could be used later as a marketing tool. They decided that the image of the Beast was to be selected in a competition. „A nerve-racking experience”, remembers Rytis. „When you have this idea and you just let everything go and have an open competition, you don’t know who or what wins”. The voting was also an opportunity for residents of Kaunas to express their opinion which, as might be expected, was divided. In the end, the image of the Beast was drawn by the talented illustrator Darius Petreikis and based on mythological beings such as beasts, sea serpents, or ghosts, but at the same time on modern artefacts such as stealth fighter planes, drones, Tesla models or even anime characters. So, Darius's Beast is what a city is - a mix of old and new, flesh and metal, tenderness and dynamism.

Even though it was stressful at times, in the end, Rytis, who deliberately did not have a leading voice in choosing the winner, was happy with the result. He also points out that the voting was in a way a co-creative experience. There were all sorts of comments on the Internet, drawings done by children in kindergartens - it all inspired the final image, which as Rytis admits, looks nothing as he imagined it.

so much more than initially intended

„The Mythical Beast of Kaunas” programme was intended as a social project, but it became also a marketing product. The Beast has become many things – it is now a huge merchandise endeavour; one can buy T-shirts and hoodies with its image and all sorts of masks. It has its own fragrance that is a variation around the topic of the city smells; there are books written in ten languages and even pills that „you can take when you are feeling too beastly”, jokes Rytis. The Beast became a symbol of Kaunas. „Of course, it is a mascot of the European Capital of Culture”, says Rytis, who also points out that he likes this modern approach to his concept. „This is the way the things are done today”, he notes and adds that the Beast has a good heart. It can be dangerous at times, but only for the right reasons. „When people stop loving their city, it becomes furious”.

The Beast can also be found in three locations in Kaunas. It sleeps (and snores) below the western tower of the Kaunas Castle, in the Old Town. It lost its tooth which can still be seen there and there is also a sculpture of the Beast in front of the Žalgiris Arena.

There was also a city game called the „Beast Game” where people could search for the locations connected with the Beast, look for clues, and find messages left by the creature in different places in Kaunas.

the beast is us

One of the programme’s accompanying events is a unique three-act play that takes part throughout 2022. It started in January with „Confusion”, the „Confluence” took part in May and the „Contract” is scheduled for November. It is based on a classic concept: at the beginning, a hero has a problem, then he has to acknowledge it and, in the end, is forced to do something about it. Along the way, the hero finds not only his archenemy but also some helpers and teachers who act with him. „In the end, it will be a contract between the citizens and the Beast. And the Beast is us”, sums up Rytis. He convinces us that every city can be, and in fact is, this metaphorical Beast. „I hope these ideas can be useful for others. This is a very important part of the legacy [of this programme]”.

there’s no manual

Rytis is far from imposing his idea on anyone. He underlines that the Beast is only a tool, but it would be very difficult to prepare a manual on how to create a myth for a city that is lacking one. Rytis: „It can be done, but it won’t be the whole truth. You have to believe it. And have lots of patience because nothing is ever gonna happen as you plan”.

What will happen to the Beast when Kaunas is no longer the European Capital of Culture? - asks Agata. Rytis: „That is a very good question. We still have to think about it. (...) It is still too early to say, but we are working on it”.

Asked by Agata, if the Beast met or exceeded his expectations, without hesitation Rytis answered: „It exceeded my expectations. And I am very thankful for that”.



beyond
european
capital
of culture



beyond european capital of culture

Agata Etmanowicz, Impact Foundation

the legacy

As the title states: this part of the book is dedicated to what is “beyond european capital of culture”. There is this very well-known to all people involved with the European Capitals of Culture term: legacy. Cities applying for the title need to plan on the legacy at the very beginning while preparing the bid book for the first stage of the competition. History shows that the legacy means different things to different ECoC projects and processes. It has also been approached from many different angles over the years by researchers and policymakers. Sometimes out of pure curiosity, other times “with the agenda”, to prove that it is worth both the effort and money invested in it. To put it simply, the legacy is what stays after the ECoC title goes away.

the proper celebration

Cities prepare for the year of the European Capital of Culture for years - five, six years, sometimes even longer. At first, and from the outside view, this process might seem slow or even remain invisible. Later it speeds up to open the year with a “big bang”. The new tradition is to hold opening and closing ceremonies. In that respect, there are some similarities between ECoCs and the Olympics. And from one ECoC to another it seems that especially opening ceremonies become louder and bigger every year. As both the beginning and the end of ECoC falls in winter (the period in most of Europe known for not being very “temperature-friendly” for outside events), the newest practice in some cities is to add one more large event in the summer.

Those events are usually constructed so as to resonate with diverse audiences. There is an artistic concept, many months of preparations and a large number of people engaged. There is music, lights, fire(works). High-quality technical production. A proper celebration. And that’s on top of the whole year calendar full of events.

Not that somebody asked, but as I am the author of this text, I am going to use this opportunity and share my personal opinion anyway: I feel that sometimes it becomes a little bit too much. Do not get me wrong: the celebration is needed and all inhabitants of the ECoC city should have a chance to be part of it. What I am trying to say is that sometimes “less is more”. That there should be some kind of a limit to the number of events happening during the year (in general) and the size and scope of those large-

scale events. And yes, also the money spent on them! I am not talking here about the top-down directive but rather the conscious choice of those in charge of the ECoCs. To find just the right balance.

title goes, what stays?

Interestingly, during most of the conferences dedicated to the European Capitals of Culture initiative, when so-called “best practices” are being presented, the legacy takes centre stage. And the legacy is usually not “the fireworks” (even though sometimes the enormous numbers of attendees to these events are being mentioned) but those process-based initiatives which were aimed at the cultural sector and/or local communities. Those are the “invisible” with naked eye ones. Usually, also the ones with the smallest budgets (in comparison).

I am definitely less than objective here, as this is what Impact does while cooperating with ECoCs. Our focus is on cultural professionals and their work with audiences, local communities, and on ensuring accessibility to culture for all. It brings us joy and even a bit of pride sometimes when former ECoCs present the results of the capacity building we have done together as the legacy, as one of the key projects conducted.

And what makes us a bit sad, is that for some people (not directly involved in capacity building and outreach) the importance of this part of the process comes as an “afterthought”. Another thing is that there are still so many ECoC projects not seeing the value of a long-term investment in the culture sector and audience development. Let me say it out loud: cultural organisations in the city are the ones who can introduce audience development into their practice, not the ECoC projects. Unless the organisation stays after the year of ECoC, but in this case, it becomes a “culture organisation in the city”. The same principles apply.

cultural sector stays!

Cultural professionals and cultural organisations are the ones who stay in the city after the ECoC year. They are the ones to deal with the possible “aftermath” of ECoC. To deal with “awoken audiences”, eager for more high-quality culture productions, used to “for free” and “everyday something new” experiences. Very often in combination with much smaller budgets after the year of ECoC.

And now, for those most recent ECoCs and probably also those to come, the situation is even more complicated. I do not want to sound too pessimistic here, but we do live in turbulent, difficult times. The pandemic hit the sector hard. A lot of connections that cultural organisations have lost with their audiences remain unbuilt. Many artists and organisations still have not regained their financial stability; some even changed their professions. At the same time, we are dealing with rising inflation, topped with

operational costs which become higher every day. In one way or another, we are also affected by the war in Ukraine. Emotionally, financially and in many other ways.

The culture sector can survive it all. It can also be a remedy and bring solutions to many problems. It just has to remain unified in those efforts and cooperate internally. And it has to be seen and supported before, during and after the ECoC year.

rijeka 2020

The first to share their experience is former ECoC: Rijeka 2022. Tanja Kalčić and Marija Katalinić open this part of the book with their text, summarising and analysing the results of the capacity building and outreach programmes conducted by Rijeka 2020. This article gives not only a good overview of what has happened in Rijeka but gives a solid framework for discussing capacity building both on an individual and organisational level.

I had the great pleasure of working with Rijeka 2020 within two of their programmes. In “Production in culture” my main task and focus were introducing accessibility. The other one was dedicated to audience development and entitled “Applause, Please”. I was a part of a team of international experts and also acted as a mentor. Rijeka's 2020 was one of my mentees, so I had a close-up look at their work. That is also how I know how much was done, and that even more was planned. Rijeka 2020 was one of the unlucky ones totally surprised by the global pandemic. A lot of the projects did not happen but the investment that was put into capacity building and outreach stayed. Internal processes that started in the organisations participating in various programmes continued, the knowledge and skills people gained cannot be taken away, and the cooperation with self-advocates resulting in mapping the accessibility of cultural institutions will serve both current and future audiences and the sector.

In this article, you will find much evidence for that. Tanja and Marija contacted participants of various capacity building programmes and, at the end of every paragraph, you can find the commentary of those who took part. Both ladies have agreed also to share their personal experiences.

trenčín 2026

From former ECoC to the future ECoC: Trenčín 2026. Trenčín's bid book is entitled “Cultivating Curiosity” and the whole project is strongly human-centred. The team behind the 2026 ECoC title truly and deeply cares about people. All the citizens of the city! From the very beginning, already during the bidding process, they paid a lot of attention to ensuring accessibility. This is why and how we met and started cooperating. We are immensely happy (and also a bit proud) that with our help the first ECoC bid book in the Easy-to-Read text was created. It is a great example of how

something which is primarily considered a tool for accessibility becomes a universal tool for communication with the so-called “general audience”. Veronika Žák Sučanská, who is the outreach manager, writes about what has happened so far in Trenčín, and what there is to come in terms of “making the city a better place for all. Veronika shares also her personal journey with accessibility.

We keep our fingers crossed for her and the whole Trenčín team and hope they will make their dreams come true!

kaunas 2022

The last section is dedicated to the current ECoC, i.e. Kaunas 2022. In the previous publication, we had presented the Audience Development for Kaunas 2022 Programme in detail, so this time we have decided to approach the subject slightly differently. From the personal perspective of two people: one “outsider” and one “insider”.

We have asked Sandy Fitzgerald from Olivearte Cultural Agency, who was a mentor and trainer in the programme, to give a commentary and share his thoughts on “Community, Culture & Audience Development”. Sandy’s perspective on the city is the one from the outside. In his essay, he recalls his first impressions from the first visit to Kaunas, and shares observations on the relationship the young generation of Kaunasians has with the city. Sandy also gives an overview of the process that has happened within the programme and gives examples of projects and actions that were carried out by the participants. All that in a larger context, setting the weight on the importance of equal and honest relationships: inside of the culture sector, between cultural professionals and communities/audiences. Only then, in a safe space of cooperation, can people freely express their creativity, and engage with the arts and with their city.

the person behind kaunas 2022

Over the years I had the privilege to meet brilliant individuals, and experts in their disciplines who were the “original” Kaunas 2022 team. I have seen others joining, including a new generation of cultural professionals growing inside of this team. I got a chance to observe the way the Kaunas 2022 team works, communicates, cooperates, and the way individual team members refer to each other. I know that very rarely things are as they seem and nothing is ever perfect but I also have comparisons and Kaunas team is as close as it gets to be an example of a really good one. I am not going to give all the credit to Virginija Vitkienė, the CEO of Kaunas 2022. Mainly because she would never take it. She is one of the most humble people I have met.

Virginija is a rare example of so many things, she defeated and still defeats probably all of the clichés and stereotypes connected to being the “director of ECoC”. To start with, the obvious fact is that: she is a woman (the female CEOs are still in the minority). She is there from the very beginning (that’s very rare, as in most of the ECoCs the person in this position changes during the process, sometimes even a few times). She is still in the same marriage (believe it or not but relationships tend not to survive the ECoC). She kept being herself. Her humble self. And, to refer to the archetypes, a “caring mother”, not a “king”.

For those reasons, I was, and still am, very curious about her. Therefore, I have asked her to agree to talk to me about her journey, experiences, feelings, herself.

From those few paragraphs, you can easily deduct that I am in “Virginija’s fan club” so I might lack the objectivity to write an extract from the conversation we had. Therefore, I have asked another brilliant woman and professional journalist, Joanna Wróżyńska to help me out with this task.

I hope that with this part of the book we will manage to convince you that the legacy of ECoC is first and foremost: the people.

When the lights go down people stay. Culture professionals. And audiences. Let’s take good care of them! Let’s take good care of ourselves...

Hope you will have a good read!

Agata



capacity to learn – rijeka 2020 – european capital of culture and additional programme

Tanja Kalčić, Marija Katalinić

Rijeka 2020 – European Capital of Culture project, along with the cultural-artistic programme, emphasized the importance of developing participants' capacities in its programme and the cultural scene in general. Considering the individual and organisational level of capacity building, participation of various groups of people, which was one of the programme's goals, was ensured by the structured activities of Additional Programme and through the implementation of participatory and audience development strategies in the artistic programme. This programme – Additional Programme, was composed of sub-programmes: Capacity Building, Audience Development, Participatory Programmes (Citizens Council, Grant scheme Civil Initiatives, and Green Wave), Volunteering Programme, Cultural Diplomacy, and Business Club. Additional Programme complemented the core artistic programme of Rijeka 2020 in its preparatory years, from 2017 – to 2020, and during the implementation period from 2020 - to 2021.

capacity building programme

When thinking about learning as an educational practice and process in the context of the European Capital of Culture project, the question of methodology is significant. From our practice, we have learned that offering non-formal, formal, and informal learning to the audience and the programme's partners throughout the programme, yielded results that created and strengthened the ECoC's legacy. The Capacity Building Programme titled "Classroom" was designed according to the needs of the Rijeka 2020 cultural programme, but also according to the needs of the entire cultural sector in the view of building and strengthening the capacities of professional stakeholders in the cultural sector and the wider local community. The main purpose of this programme was to invest in the people through educational practices, which it has accomplished through the participants' personal and professional development. The Programme also strengthened local organisations in culture and created new initiatives and NGOs. Most programmes were organised as continuous educational programmes, designed for smaller groups of participants. Different educational activities (workshops, seminars, conferences, summer schools, and lectures) covering four main topics: audience development and community engagement, cultural management and

technical production, were designed and implemented. The main methodology used was appropriately designed for adults. Trainers could connect their learning experiences to what adult learners already knew. The trainers' support in this process focused on participants' self-reflection and participants' concrete project examples, in that way enabling upgrade and adaptation of new learning. During the joint activities stated above, the participants were encouraged to learn from and with one another in formal and informal ways. Participants of the Capacity Building Programme were Rijeka's citizens, representatives of cultural associations and institutions, independent cultural workers, students, representatives of the tourist and business sector, and current and future employees of Rijeka 2020 LTD. Two continuous programmes, "Production in culture" and "Applause, Please" (Audience Development) were the most recognized nationally and internationally.

"production in culture"

The roles of producers and cultural managers are often overlooked, but they are usually the key aspect to an event's successful outcome. There is a lack of experienced producers in small cities, especially when trying to raise the bar to European standards,

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which most European Capitals of Culture face as they try to equip the project with that type of staff. Buying or trading experts from other cities or countries can be an expensive act and ultimately doesn't make much sense, therefore bringing forward the need to produce them locally. That is why the continuous programme for producers was specially designed in Rijeka.

Strengthening the capacity of cultural workers and producers who would implement the ECoC project in Rijeka, created a strong cultural scene that operates after the opening year in 2020. The programme allowed professional producers competent to work in the field of culture, as well as beginner-levels, to gain a wider knowledge of production in culture. After attending the programme, all of the participants were enabled to take on greater responsibilities in the production process. They increased their employment, developed informal peer groups of practice, and initiated new collaborations. Some participants became employed later on in Rijeka 2020 LTD, while others have partnered their organisations with ECoC – Rijeka 2020, and all of them have been continuously developing the city's cultural production scene and running new cultural venues and programmes. The participants who attended the programme praised the new skills attained that made them feel more confident to work on larger projects with colleagues from abroad and how they now better understand and apply European values in their work.

“Production in culture has been a wind in my back to do bigger projects. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to work with those kinds of profiles of trainers to develop my knowledge. When we started, it was intense, everything was in English, and half a year after the start, we all spoke English fluently, so that moment is also important. I can apply what I have learned to various things in life, from private to business, from office business to organising a concert or a performance. The whole programme gave me breadth, how to deal with challenges, what to expect, and how to insure myself, and the people who will be part of my team”. (R.V.)

“Production in culture was one of the most super useful programmes that I have attended. It gave me an understanding of European values, awakened me, and made me understand things that can be done. Quite often, we just censor ourselves and in essence, this programme broadens our horizons”. (N.M.Š.)

“applause, please”

When we introduced the topic of audience development within Rijeka 2020 – ECoC, the concept itself was not defined and the audience development practices were not developed in Croatia to their full potential. The process of its formation started in 2017, through the seminar “Applause, Please”. Organised by Rijeka 2020, the seminar gathered NGO representatives, the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media, local city authorities, and cultural institutions, and strived to encourage all of the parties to learn more about audience development practices. After the seminar, the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media created a Call for projects within the audience development scope, for which they used the seminar brochure created from our side (Rijeka 2020 – ECoC), and suggested it as required literature for all the applicants. This action confirmed that our given attention and development of the Audience Development Programme was a valuable asset on the state level of cultural development. Consequently, in the following year, the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media invited us to share our knowledge of audience development with the open call participants at its opening presentation. Cooperation with the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media continues, even after the finalisation of the ECoC project, and for this year – 2022, there is a scheduled workshop about audience development that will be run by experts on this topic from the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC project. The continuous Audience

As a result, in most of Rijeka’s cultural institutions and NGOs, there are now defined AD plans/ strategies embedded in their programmes.

Development educational programme was designed for fifteen (15) audience developers who went through an intense capacity building programme constructed of workshops, action learning sets, and mentorship support. These participants gained

knowledge and an opportunity to work with a mix of international and national expert mentors through developing their audience development plans/strategies. As a result, in most of Rijeka's cultural institutions and NGOs, there are now defined AD plans/strategies embedded in their programmes. Aside from this successful example, it is important to recount that the programme's legacy remained within the people who now think through the audience's perspective. Due to this, Rijeka is the only city in Croatia that employs, within several cultural institutions and NGOs, individuals who possess knowledge of audience development and who are, therefore, audience developers. One successful example is Rijeka's National Theater "Ivan pl. Zajc" which, at the time of programme development, created a new job position for an Audience Development Manager who is still employed and maintains the practice. Participants stated the remarkable benefit they gained from the Audience Development educational programme. Not only in understanding the concept of audience development and working with the audience, but also in their new ability to connect with colleagues, share experiences, and problems, and disseminate learning through it. All of this is due to the knowledge gained in the educational programme: additional skills of active listening, learning to ask the right questions, and understanding and respecting others.

"The programme brought new knowledge and values to people who are world-class professionals. They focused very much on our specific situations, it was not just a general transfer of knowledge but an analysis of our specific contexts, especially when we got mentors, so they built programmes with us. The programme was an opportunity for us as a cultural scene of Rijeka and other cities from Croatia not only to get to know each other but to exchange experiences and problems". (K.M.J.)

"Through Action learning I saw results very quickly. A very nice method of community support, a different approach to the challenges that an individual faces. Active listening has a psychological effect on a person to get more into himself/herself, to have space and time to think, and for someone to hold space for him". (I.P.)

The greatest legacy of an ECoC project is a well-organised and adapted learning system that successfully introduces and extends the knowledge to the project's participants. Through the Capacity Building Programme, a certain level of confidence was singled out, as well as how it (the newly reached confidence) contributed to the

The greatest legacy of an ECoC project is a well-organised and adapted learning system that successfully introduces and extends the knowledge to the project's participants.

development of the participant's competencies, later applicable in professional and private lives. The programme results showed what Lave and Wenger suggest: "Learners play a central role in contributing to the collective knowledge of the community while building their sense of identity, at the same time providing a positive incentive for sustained participation in the learning community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The Capacity Building Programme was intense and required obligation and time from the participants to set aside during a three-year period, which was not always possible. Rijeka 2020 LTD has explicitly asked key partners to set aside time and organise their work to be able to attend the Capacity Building Programme, which resulted in all key organisations developing their capacities. The Capacity Building Programme did not only transfer knowledge and strengthened individuals, but it also influenced the organisational and programme changes, and thus the development of Rijeka 2020 LTD. Through the Capacity Building Programme, the Rijeka 2020 Audience Development Programme emerged.

audience development strategy

Since Rijeka 2020 initiated the topic of audience development in 2017, there was the opportunity and time to define the audience development methodology and targets and to decide on our plan/strategy. Initially, the Audience Development Programme was launched to encourage Rijeka 2020 LTD to think strategically and comprehensively about the audience, within its entire programme's directions and additional activities. During the preparation of the audience development strategy, collaboration with different groups was established: 1/ programme managers and directors of Rijeka 2020 LTD, 2/ participants from the educational programme "Applause, Please" (the audience developers), 3/ the Accessibility Group

(representatives of people with disabilities), 4/ representatives of primary and secondary schools from Rijeka and its surrounding areas, and 5/ the volunteers. The most important contribution was certainly made by the mentors of the "Applause, Please" programme who gave the support to Rijeka 2020 – European Capital of Culture in developing the audience development strategy, and in the process

The Audience Development Programme was launched to encourage Rijeka 2020 LTD to think strategically and comprehensively about the audience, within its entire programme's directions and additional activities.

of organisational changes. With the support of the Accessibility Group, accessible cultural events and venues for all citizens were created. Through minor public interventions, programme interposing, conducting the education of sensibilisation for cultural organisations' employees regarding accessibility challenges for people with disabilities, and mapping out of all cultural venues, there was a strive to shift the scope

of accessibility for people with disabilities and movement challenges. Also, Accessibility Etiquette was designed and shared with all cultural institutions in Rijeka. The development of an audience development strategy requires data for defining audience segmentation. Since this strategy needed to encompass almost all citizens of Rijeka plus their guests (the tourists), the segmentation of non-goers (to cultural events), sometimes goers, and goers, as the most general one, was the only possible segmentation that can tackle the audiences for all the various events in the production of all the organisations, during just one year. Such a broad segmentation was narrowed by intersecting three dominant motivational categories of culture consumers through three levels of engagement. This is also a condensed reflection of public opinion survey results, with a focus on the leisure-time practices, confidence and openness, patriotism, relationship with religion and politics, and socialising habits of the respondents. All of this finally created nine audience segments towards which we directed communication and actions.

Most of the challenges in preparing the audience development strategy depend on the local context, currently existing programmes, and resources such as finances, and time. As with perhaps other ECoC cities, we also experienced several issues in developing the strategy. The first issue was certainly the lack of research results that were necessary for audience segmentation. The second was the lack of understanding of audience development in terms of the cultural sector and the non-existence of national and local cultural policies in this area. Upon the completion of the Capacity Building Programme “Applause, Please” and with the final research results from 2019, the audience development strategy for the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC was successfully developed.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and its restrictions the project suffered, and the full strategy could not be implemented. The participants and representatives of working groups pointed out the level of awareness they gained in terms of a better understanding of the issues people with disabilities in movement confront, and in learning to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities with the production’s requirements. The most important aspect of the audience development strategy is the raised awareness and empathy among everyone involved with the programme.

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“participatory programme”

Another important element of the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC programme was strengthening and enhancing the culture of active participation of citizens through community development and cooperation between communities and local governments. The development of participation within the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC took place through a series of activities, workshops, lectures, mentoring support, and through the establishment of the Citizens Council, and the Grant scheme which funded citizens' project ideas – Civil Initiatives and the Green Wave. To achieve social change and to encourage activity, the activation of citizens is crucial. Changing the community's, i.e., audiences' perspective, from being passive observers to becoming active participants, was important in rethinking the city of Rijeka and its needs. The proposed process directly involved the citizens in the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC project through its additional programmes. Through its Participatory Programme, the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC created a platform for citizens to present, engage, and develop their ideas by using artistic practices and/or innovative strategies. The Citizens Council, which was established by members chosen through a random lottery drawing, constituted a representative sample of Rijeka's population by taking age and gender into account. Once founded, the Citizens Council reviewed citizens' project submissions and applied for the grant scheme through the Open Call. In this way, a circular practice of community decision-making and funding opportunities enabled the citizens to actively participate and to come together in learning participatory practices. Deciding on the projects submitted by their fellow citizens, the Council members were deciding about the development of Rijeka, their city. Bridging the distance between the local governance and the participatory group has been somewhat challenging. As our experience showed, creating a space of listening and hearing between the two groups required more time, preparation, and moderating. Although the bridge was finally created between the two spheres of city life – municipality and citizens, the desired outcome of them becoming closer and more receptive to each other (such as we created between the project and the participants) required more practice. Nonetheless, through the Participatory Programme scheme, all of those included adopted various knowledge and skills related to community involvement, communication, and project implementation. In addition to developing skills of cooperation, observation, and active listening, they managed to understand what active citizenship is, how to be engaged in citizenship, and how to encourage active participation from others.

“One thing has come to my surface, and that is how many people are there who want to be active for the good of the community. That's my discovery. Such initiatives that have been created through the ECoC have had a positive impact on a lot of people. You realise that the world is not just so awful, there are a lot of people who care, and who will give their strength for the good of the community.

When you give people a chance, they will use it, but there must be a structure to make it happen". (S.S.)

"With the ECoC, a new world opened up in which I was most fulfilled. I worked with my heart where I could intertwine all my competencies, be creative and work with pleasure.

The project I did, inspired me to do a good thing and inspire others. Simple and inviting for anyone. Anyone can find a place in that programme, everyone is invited. It was great to create such a programme. That would not be the case without the ECoC". (N.M.Š.)

empowering the individual

The basis of an ECoC's legacy lies within the individual's personal and professional development. No cultural activity can be successful if individual consciousness of the matter is not given. This statement responds to the act of merging, i.e., uniting individual consciousness into a collective one, through which then the collective social process results in a social event. The connection between the people is the most important segment of the ECoC project. Understanding the importance of every single person involved in the creation and execution of the project, brings humility, sharing, and finally success to all those associated.

The empowerment that occurred within these individuals personally, and concerning the collective social ties, is evidence of the importance of an empowered individual. The empowered position teaches one about the distribution of power and about the culture that belongs to all, and not just those privileged concerning class, race, or gender divisions. The education processes which we noted, helped in creating long-term effects in the community. The Rijeka 2020 – ECoC project initiated visible cognitive change in certain individuals. The changes included the development of values such as multiculturalism, acceptance, inclusion, and equality, value for diversity, civic engagement, active participation, creativity, critical thinking, critical observation, and learning with and from others.

A successful ECoC needs to create and then give space to quality methodologies of learning to all its current and future engaged participants. Enabling space to be heard, involved, and educated through the project, guarantees personal and shared developments, as well as the development of the ECoC city. These engagement manoeuvres are precarious and can sometimes be hazardous as one does not hold control over the public. Nonetheless, without the human factor there is no healthy base for the community's growth, and thus neither for the ECoC project. The city should strive to suit its citizens' needs and be able to offer new learning and the potential for mutual collaborations. There is an incredible power that is located within the people

and through the ECoC project. This power can be managed, ushered, and released in creative, urban, and community-focused programmes which then have the capacity to continue further, after the ECoC. This newly created creative power can also extend itself as a force into changing current or previous paradigms of how cities and cultural organisations operate and how they involve citizens in their activities and decision-making processes.

“ECoC opened the door to culture for me, a place where everything is softer, more beautiful, and more emotional. It gave me an insight into what culture is”.
(N.M.Š.)

“As an active citizen, I have seen that a series of activities of smaller projects can improve the situation in the community in which we live”. (T.F.)

“Self-reflection. I learned about audience development at the local, national, and EU level. Recognising the capacities and shortcomings, valuing oneself and one's work and sector. Acquaintances. Meeting people at the local and European levels, something turned into collaborators and friendships. I learned the most through my work not only about how the EU project works but also about interpersonal relations”. (I.P.)

from the personal perspective

Tanja Kalčić

Working on an ECoC project is incomparable with work on any other project. Being part of a team in developing such a programme is a learning process for everyone, as it was for us. From the bidding phase, I was driven by the thought that an ECoC (through Capacity Building) should be a generator of change in the internal restructuring of cultural organisations as it encourages organisational and personal changes, and supports paradigm shifts in the local and regional context.

Capacity Building is not just a programme that supports an ECoC programme, it intertwines the process of programme structuring and offers to learn through various ECoC activities. Therefore, when generating the core of an ECoC project, a space should be secured for thinking about, and investing in, the Capacity Building Programme. The outcomes of the Capacity Building Programme are of crucial importance to the city's legacy and in tightening ties between the current and future city's cultural scene and its audience. While working with, and for, the audience I embraced and enhanced values of humility, sharing, caring, enjoying and listening. The vastness of the perspective and the opportunities which capacity building and audience development programmes create changed my approach to working with the community.

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Conclusions taken from lessons learned from the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC experience suggest that every bidding city should: 1/ start to develop their Capacity Building Programme on time, 2/ involve honestly all relevant partners and representatives of citizens in the process of the development of the bid book, 3/ gathering and having useful data to define audience segmentation on time and finally, 4/ develop the

programme by putting the audience at the centre of the programme. In my opinion, that is the only correct way of successfully approaching audience development in the context of an ECoC.

Another important aspect here is the European component, specifically the cooperation with foreign experts and organisations. In the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC, there were many contributions to the development and understanding of the European dimension and values in the project itself and the Capacity Building Programme. European collaborations have connected and opened new partnerships for the participants of the Capacity Building Programme and us working on the project. The experiences were memorable and important to all involved. However, it was the intensive capacity building programmes through which the participants were able to work continuously with mentors, and which ultimately contributed most to their empowerment. Even though the Capacity Building Programme we offered through the Rijeka 2020 – ECoC, started 3 years before the title year, in retrospect I can conclude that starting earlier would have been more beneficial to the whole project, as well as to the Capacity Building Programme.

Marija Katalinić

The Participatory Programme uncovered a great potential in Rijeka's citizens as active members of the community. The Programme brought people from different lines of work, educational backgrounds, and personal histories into a joint democratic cultural programme. Community circles created through their participation gave not only the perspective of where the city needs to grow but also of their needs as individuals to be a part of something greater. In this respect, the Council of Citizens, founded as a voluntary body of citizens, showcased how power can be shared for the common good and needs. Engagement of elderly members of the community with students and mothers with high school pupils displayed interest in urbanism, creative actions, sustainability, and financial challenges. This exchange created newfound friendships, collaborations, and actions from people who, before the ECoC, were not interested in connecting with other members of the community, nor understood how culture functioned. The Participatory Programme deeply changed the local community as it

unleashed the participants' inhibitions towards creating, building, and sustaining. These acts of engagement remained alive even after the project itself ended. When during the Covid-19 pandemic, citizen projects were halted and other similar programmes obstructed, the community of the participatory programme wrote to the Mayor, expressing dissatisfaction and their wish to work voluntarily going forwards. The power they gained by becoming more knowledgeable in what capacity implies, showed that they were not a stream that had ended its course. These people, the work, and the effort of all involved stand as a monument to audience development and capacity building strategies. The process of managing the programme was immensely rewarding for me as an individual, but also as a professional. Being attentive and humble is what I learned is crucial when working with the community. Everyone brings their own 'selves' into a group and then it all takes another form of life; it evolves into something better and healthier, more dynamic and progressive. Letting go of fear when working with the public, allows one, as I discovered, to experience the richness of encounters that would otherwise be skipped, overlooked, or unused.

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the most meaningful thing I've ever done

Veronika Žák Sučanská

a lot of questions

Two years ago, the candidacy for the European Capital of Culture started with lots of questions, including: What are the outreach goals? Who should be involved? How to ensure an inclusive environment? How to make culture accessible for everyone? The answers to all these questions were preceded by countless meetings, focus groups, workshops and joint activities with communities and organisations in the city.

who lives in the city?

In the beginning, I faced the most basic question - who are the people and communities living in the city? I started by studying the city's strategic documents such as the Economic and Social Development Plan, the Youth Strategy, the Sustainable Mobility Plan, etc. - which gave me geographical, social and economic statistics. When I had a clearer idea about the city and its citizens, the fun part began - fieldwork.

what are our dreams and needs?

The second step was to reach out to people and communities in the city through focus groups and interviews. I organised 25 focus groups with various citizens, communities and organisations such as athletes, seniors, people with disabilities, parents, minorities, entrepreneurs, young people, cultural workers, skaters, people without homes, non-profit organisations and many others. I asked them questions that no one had asked them before. "What does culture mean to you? How would you like to contribute to the culture? What city needs to become the European Capital of Culture?". The answers differed in the communities, but one thing was common - culture is important for everyone but there are many barriers that need to be overcome in order for culture to be for everyone. All needs, dreams, barriers and ideas were the basis of the goals of our candidacy.

there is nothing wrong with people

The desire to work with the communities, especially those who typically are labelled "disadvantaged and marginalised groups", arose from my own physical disability. However, it has never been my disability that has stopped me in my tracks.

What can stop me is the question that perfect strangers ask me, surprisingly often: “What is wrong with you?”.

I am aware that so many different people are facing this question in their everyday lives. That is why we have started our work by converting that question into “What is wrong with the culture sector?” or rather: “How do we (i.e. the culture sector) have to change so that everybody

feels welcome to participate in culture?

How to invite and make it possible for different people to use and enjoy public

spaces, cinemas, theatres, and parks?” Because only when diversity becomes part of everyday life, will we stop asking “what's wrong with people”. Culture is the simplest, yet most effective way of connecting people across communities and professional fields, and as the European Union motto says, “we are united in diversity”.

Only when diversity becomes part of everyday life, we will stop asking “what's wrong with people.”

into action!

Having the needs, dreams and barriers of the different citizens of Trenčín mapped, the next step in bringing us closer to fulfilling not only the previously established common goal – winning the title of European Capital of Culture, but also making “culture for everyone” a reality by uniting our efforts. It is no surprise, that the key word for achieving this is: cooperation. A cross-sector cooperation. Therefore, we have engaged different communities, cultural organisations, and all the team members of Trenčín 2026.

First, Trenčín 2026 team participated in workshops with Impact Foundation dedicated to audience development and accessibility. Later they were attended by dozens of Trenčín cultural organisations. The workshops helped everyone to better understand the topics of accessibility, to define their audiences and to understand that we all have to start with ourselves. Because no organisation will change unless the people in it change. Agata Etmanowicz showed us how to achieve accessibility in the city and culture, and how to communicate well in person and online. In these workshops, organisations realised for the first time who their audiences are, what their needs are and what new audiences they can reach. We have developed these workshops into the Cultivating Accessibility Plan, which is part of the Outreach Strategy, and from 2023, organisations in the city will work to improve accessibility and create their audience development strategies.

the “to do” list

Based on all the findings from meetings, workshops and consultations we have created a list of tasks that need to be done to reduce or completely remove barriers in access to culture so that it really is for everyone. These tasks were later incorporated into the outreach strategy:

- use barrier-free places for culture,
- train cultural workers to welcome everyone with empathy,
- create accessibility and audience development plans in cultural organisations,
- create cultural activities directly with self-advocates,
- create conditions for different people to be able to participate as volunteers, cultural workers, artists or audiences.

bid book accessible for all

In collaboration with Impact Foundation, we created an Easy-to-Read (ETR) version of the Trenčín 2026 Bid Book, the first ETR Bid Book ever. The Bid Book serves as a record of what citizens want and what the culture should look like, hence it needs to be accessible to all.

With the ETR version, anyone and everyone can become familiar with the concept of the European Capital of Culture and Trenčín's 2026 goals and main planned activities. All in easily understandable language (not the “jargon” normally used among people working in the culture sector or the language used for the purpose of applications).

The essence of the Bid Book is packed into 25 plain text pages with black and white pictograms, instead of the 100 pages of the full-length Bid Book. Both versions are in Slovak and in English.

Even though formally speaking, the main “target group” of Easy-to-Ready text is people with

intellectual disabilities, the truth is that it is a pleasant read for everyone. And thanks to its large font, also much more accessible to all people with low vision, including senior citizens.

The goal to communicate in a language understandable to all people and with high accessibility remains ingrained in the team. We are doing our best to use it in

With the Easy-to-Read (ETR) version, anyone and everyone can become familiar with the concept of the European Capital of Culture and Trenčín's 2026 goals and main planned activities.

communication in person and on social media so that everybody can clearly understand and get engaged with Trenčín 2026.

only we can make the change

People and communities take centre-stage in our project. They are our project's ambassadors, they met the ECoC jury panel, they shot videos with us, they wrote articles about their stories, they created projects and they will be the ones with whom we will create everything we dreamed of in the Bid Book.

We are aware that inclusion is only possible when both accessibility of physical space and of the content are in place. That is why it is the baseline for our outreach programme. Therefore, we will continue to organise capacity building activities for organisations, training for accessibility coordinators, mentoring and volunteering programs and providing other tools that will empower everyone to fulfil our common dream of culture for all.

We are aware that inclusion is only possible when both accessibility of physical space and of the content are in place.

When I presented Trenčín's bid to the ECoC jury panel, my last words were that "culture is for everyone, and anyone can contribute". In front of my eyes, I had an image of all the people, who will feel welcomed and engaged by culture. I hope my dream will become a reality and nobody will be asked what's wrong with them ever again.



community, culture & audience development

Sandy Fitzgerald, Olivearte Cultural Agency

My first visit to Kaunas took place in March 2019 BC (Before Covid), a time when freedom of travel was taken for granted! I was there as part of the facilitation team for the Kaunas 2022 Audience Development Programme. My initial impression of the city, as I walked its old-world boulevards and faded grandeur, was a sense of isolation, a melancholia that permeated the streets. On subsequent visits, I came to know the story of the city and its people and understood more the burden of history carried by Kaunas, especially under Soviet occupation, and later the population drain from 1989 onwards. However, what also emerged, as I got to know the place, was the deep emotional attachment that a new generation of Kaunas citizens have to the city, with a clear commitment to investing time and energy in creative solutions for a better future.

And there is no shortage of creativity when it comes to ideas and projects encountered around present-day Kaunas. What is striking is the number of initiatives that are in development, at every level of the art and culture sector. Some are new, others well established, but all are engaged with contemporary challenges and opportunities in this fast-changing regional capital.

A challenge that this new generation has to overcome is the residual scar of communism, which has embedded a wariness around sharing or collaboration that still resonates today. This reticence has the potential to inhibit the full realisation of community. Ironically, the very idea of community was suspect under communism, in the sense that real community development values empowerment, which is not considered desirable by any regime. Of course, this applies to capitalism as well because empowerment does not translate into passive consumers as readily as the disenfranchised. Perhaps because of the history, there is an awareness, certainly amongst the people and organisations I worked with in Kaunas, that art and culture can have a role to play in progressing society, contributing to improved quality of life for citizens and moving beyond the concept of simply cultural consumers.

This is why we quickly advanced past the traditional audience development marketing approach, where the simple measure of success is the increased number of tickets sold, and endeavoured to see audiences not as passive onlookers but as active participants. This means a much more holistic approach, whereby the objectives

of a project have to be set taking all stakeholders into account and, in particular, community, be that a geographical community or a community of interest. Art and culture then becomes a process for realising a shared imagined future.

Imagination costs nothing but it is the wellspring of possibility and yet most of us are denied this possibility in favour of norms dictated by society: tradition, the

market place and again, history. What all the research shows is that development depends on diversity and a melding of ideas. But it is also common for our imaginations to be stifled by exclusion, separation and competition. In the Kaunas Audience Development programme, there was an innate understanding by participants of how freedom of expression can be a powerful tool for transformation. What we explored together was how to turn dreams into action by looking at two basic elements: the first is the possibility of citizens to have confidence in their own voice, as something that matters when investing in the future, and the second is the facilitating of these voices in real participation for change. This is why in the programme we began with finding out as much as possible about the participating organisations, not just vertically for the facilitators but also horizontally among the participants themselves, so that there was a sharing of peer-to-peer knowledge, mutual support and increased impact for the citizens of Kaunas that they individually and collectively served.

The way all of this can be achieved is by forging relationships as an important first step and an ongoing practice. But there is a very important word that must be inserted before taking such a step and that word is 'equal'. If the relationships are not equal then there is always a danger of exploitation. The classic marketing ploy tells you what you want to hear in order that you will part with your cash. But if values are most important for any meaningful and honest engagement with community, then protecting and engaging in relationships on the basis of shared values is how this engagement is made possible. Secondly, you have to give people a reason to engage. Opportunities must be created to participate, for example: open days, meetings with local leaders, attending events, using social media. In other words, the process becomes as important, if not more important, than any artistic product. For instance, Kaunas County Public Library needed to temporarily vacate their building because of refurbishments during our programme. As part of this move, they had to transport a huge quantity of books to an

We quickly advanced past the traditional audience development marketing approach, where the simple measure of success is the increased number of tickets sold, and endeavoured to see audiences not as passive onlookers but as active participants.

if values are most important for any meaningful and honest engagement with community, then protecting and engaging in relationships on the basis of shared values is how this engagement is made possible. (...) you have to give people a reason to engage.

interim home. This move was an event in itself whereby many volunteers of all ages made a human chain of 1km in length, who then passed the books hand to hand from one location to the next. There was a good deal of media attention, with a lot of positive coverage for the library. But more importantly, it showed that the community valued the library and that they supported each other for mutual benefit.

Another good example is the Memory Office of Kaunas 2022, which collected and re-

represented forgotten or erased stories from the diverse history of Kaunas. Protecting, articulating and presenting community history - the hidden history of a place - can inspire and validate communities to build together for the future. This was achieved through performances, exhibitions, music and publications, drawing on people's individual and collective memories and memorabilia. One of the most important outcomes of this project is City Telling, now a yearly festival, which has as its aim the 'memory of Kaunas and its surroundings, to strengthen the dialogue between different communities, to encourage pride in the place we live and to talk about topics relevant to contemporary Europe'. In 2022 a central theme in the programme evokes the city's Jewish memory, not just as a remembrance of the Holocaust but also to highlight the rich cultural contribution that the Jewish community has made to the city and its present-day relevance.

Culture is much more than just what we know as the formal arts and certainly more than just the artist/audience relationship. Everyone has the capacity to be creative and to express this creativity in unique ways, informed by their life experience, and collectively there are many different cultures existing side by side with defined and distinctive characterisations that deserve recognition and validation. The hierarchy of culture is an artificial construct that usually has more to do with power than any perceived indicator of quality or aesthetic exemplar. This is exemplified by the rich tapestry of cultural organisations in Kaunas who give voice to communities throughout the city and the region. From districts Aleksoto to Dainavos, on the river Neman and in the old Fortress bunkers, the ingenious use of space by organisations like Con Tempo festival, Kosmos Theatre, Betonlauzis (Concrete Breaker) and Nemuno7 engage with and represent communities on their own terms, authentically and in a spirit of cooperation.

In his seminal essay *Culture Is Ordinary* (1958), Raymond Williams says 'the making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active

debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land'. If audience development is reduced to a ticket price, then it is meaningless but if it strives to contribute to society through deep and cooperative relationships, then our communal lives are enriched, building new models for living, working and celebrating together.



i am virginija and i am from kaunas 2022

An interview with Virginija Vitkienė,
conducted by Agata Etmanowicz.

Listened to and summarised by Joanna Wróżyńska.

Wish to listen to the whole conversation?

It is available in the form of podcast:

[I am Virginija and I am from Kaunas 2022. A conversation with Virginija Vitkienė](#)

Virginija Vitkienė never wanted to become the CEO of the European Capital of Culture. „I was pushed to become a CEO and I don't feel like this should be my role in this organisation,” she told Agata Etmanowicz when they met in Virginija's home in Kaunas. Virginija is one of the few women who hold such a high position in the European Capitals of Culture and even though she proved herself to be the perfect person for the job, she admits that it comes with a price.

Virginija has always been a team member. „One of the first ones who generated ideas, who were mad about strategy, concepts, artistic ideas” - she begins her story. She wanted to be the artistic director, instead, she became the CEO, a job nobody else wanted, so she was asked to take it. „I was not happy about that, but I just had to [do it]”.

Asked by Agata how her career in the cultural sector began, she said that before starting her journey in the ECoC, she got married and had three children. But she felt that she wanted more from life, and after some consideration and thorough research, she decided to study art history. „I was curious about art. And I knew nothing about it” - she admits openly. It took her 10 years to finish her studies as she decided not to stop before she gained her doctorate. This impressive drive to achieve her goals and be the best version of herself is also something that still keeps her going and pushes her forward.

She started to work in a gallery as a curator and volunteer at the Kaunas Biennial of which she soon became the director. Virginija was working almost for free, looking for

funds and filling out paperwork. Along the way, with a budget of about 1500 euros, which was only enough to publish a catalogue, she was gaining more and more experience in a field in which she found herself just out of curiosity.

every day is an adventure

A few years have passed and now, she finds herself managing a team of about 90 people putting together almost 1600 events: performances, discussions, seminars, exhibitions, concerts etc. And with an overall budget of 29 million euros. „Not so big” - she notices and adds quickly: „In comparison with other European Capitals of Culture”.

„So how does it feel to have all this responsibility on your shoulders?” - asks Agata. „I wake up and I am open for adventure. Every day is new. There is new information, new challenges, new problems and new rewards” - Virginija answers simply. But she also admits that being the CEO of the ECoC is a very lonely position to be in. „Sometimes there is almost a queue in front of my office door, people are coming to me but almost nobody comes to just enjoy [my company] or ask how my day was. Everyone brings some problems. But it’s as if I had some sort of a helmet on my head and I just keep my brain from accepting even really bad information as bad information” - says Virginija and convinces that with the right perspective everything can be better than it seems. But it is obvious that Agata has touched on a very sensitive subject. „I got to a point where I feel a bit lonely” - continues Virginija. „I cannot put my problems on somebody else. It would not be fair, I think. So I have very few people to talk to about the pressure and difficult situations we are facing. This circle is smaller and smaller, and I am really afraid to be left alone”. She also notes bitterly that she doesn’t even have time to have friends outside of Kaunas 2022.

kids are proud

On the positive side, Virginija has managed to keep her family together, which is not so obvious as many people, especially women, working for the ECoC tend to put all their energy, time and efforts into work and often neglect their private lives. Half-jokingly Agata calls it even a curse of the ECoC and says that not many marriages survive the ECoC. Virginija admits that she has been warned about it and advised to remember to take care of her family first. „My family life is very smooth after all those years. My husband is very supportive and modest. He tells me to complain more about some stressful situations and to talk with him about issues and problems I face at my work. And sometimes I do, but sometimes I don’t want to because it adds to my pains and problems even more. I don’t want to think about it at home, you know? But if I just want to talk or to have someone who will listen, my husband is always there. So, I am really, really happy and lucky” - she sums up and notes that they will have a landmark 30th anniversary of their marriage in 2023. They haven’t planned anything special yet but

they may spend it in their cottage house in the woods surrounded by family and closest friends.

Asked what her family thinks of her position as the CEO of the ECoC, Virginija answers truthfully that it is a difficult question. „My mum doesn't understand at all what I am doing" - she admits. But also adds that her kids are proud of her and discuss her job with their friends.

miraculous kentrige

It comes as no surprise that Virginija has her personal highlight of the ECoC pointing to William Kentridge's exhibition. She curated the exhibition. Even though it was a lot of work, it was an artistic and rewarding. Something she loves doing. She calls this project „miraculous", also because it apparently took a lot of time to convince Kentridge to bring his works to Kaunas. „He said NO maybe 17 times before he said YES" - says Virginija and laughs as it all ended well. „I admire his work, him as an artist and the depth of his art. And I had a chance to meet him personally, to visit his studio, his house, meet his family". Even though Kentridge's exhibition is her favourite, she doesn't forget to mention meeting and spending time with Marina Abramović, which she calls an „unforgettable experience".

don't do it!

Virginija is very humble about her position and the work that she does for the ECoC. She cherishes all these moments when she is able to do things that give her personal pleasure but does not run away from the difficult parts. „Nobody said that it would be easy" - she notes and remembers being told by some of the people who worked for Vilnius 2009 that she will regret the time spent working on the ECoC project, mostly because it is a challenge for her personal life and can be very exhausting. When asked what she would advise a woman that would like to do what she does now, she says laughing: „Don't do it!". But quickly adds that if she had to do it all over again, she would: „Because I am not disappointed at all" - she stresses.

She does not forget to give credit to the people she works with, and she admits that they often navigate the bureaucratic parts of the programme better than she does. It doesn't mean that they don't have some disagreements, but Virginija tends to think that it may be productive. And if necessary, she will not hesitate to fight for what she believes is good for the organisation even though she admits that showing power goes against her nature.

When asked what parts of the programme she finds the most challenging she mentions that over the years, she's been forced to work with the changing governments and had to overcome some mistrust on both sides.

„So, what's next after 2022" - asks Agata. The answer is simple: „2023". But Virginija elaborates that what is important is the legacy of this project and she, as well as her team, plan to work on maintaining it. But other than that, her future remains a mystery.



endnotes

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²⁵A quote by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), who was a French writer, poet, aristocrat, journalist and pioneering aviator.

²⁶ Figures taken from Rebuilding Europe, The cultural and creative economy before and after the Covid-19 crisis. EY consulting 2021