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REPORT

CULTURE IN PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

Response and experience of Latvia's arts
and cultural organisations

Latvian Academy of Culture
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Culture in pandemic restrictions: Response and experience of Latvia's arts and cultural organisations

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On the cover: the photo from the theatre play “Iran Conference” by the theatre company esARTE.

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WE THANK LATVIA'S ARTISTS AND CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS FOR SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS!

At the close of 2021, we interviewed:

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Introduction

The past two years since March 2020 have been a time of great uncertainty for the cultural and creative sector. A time when we've had to learn masses of new things, often by selfteaching – through trial and error, again and again. Any comprehensive attempt to chronicle the everchanging rules and regulations of the pandemic period would produce an incredibly long list. In the face of these difficulties, cultural workers and institutions have been tirelessly looking for options and variants to adapt and keep going, even though they've had to work behind closed doors for a very long time, with a ban on receiving onsite visitors.

The main question, how to keep one's audience, has inspired institutions to look for new ways of interaction across two principal directions: creating the digital cultural offer and bringing the cultural content out into the city or other outdoor spaces in new and unorthodox formats. The task hasn't been easy, but it's given arts and cultural organisations new experiences beyond their usual environment, way out of their comfort zone. This, in turn, has opened up opportunities for innovation and outreach to attract new audiences, as the cases in this report clearly indicate. The trouble has mostly been with the quality bar people set for their work – we can't realistically expect quick and perfect results in the digital setting without the growing pains associated with the critical phase of experimentation and building a sound knowledge base to work from.

This report illuminates the experience stories of 25 Latvia's arts and cultural organisations, detailing their most effective solutions and takeaways from successes and failures along with some personal impressions from working in remote-access conditions. Our narrators represent both the public sector and NGOs, and many have underscored the need for mutual support and experience exchange. We hope our review will serve this purpose by supporting and inspiring the people involved in the cultural and creative sector as they keep navigating the situation, all grappling with one persistent question – will our viewers and visitors come back once the pandemic restrictions are eased or entirely lifted? Cultural processes will most likely have a substantial role in mending the social tapestry and strengthening interpersonal ties after such a long time in isolation. Adaptability and flexibility will be the primary muscles we'll need to engage, so cultural organisations will have to keep training and practising towards these goals.

Ilona Asare, director
Lifelong Learning Centre
Latvian Academy of Culture

Experience stories from cultural organisations

Museums

Throughout the pandemic, Latvia's museums have developed new approaches, digital tools and creative solutions to keep their visitors from drifting away. Their greatest challenges have been changing the old mind-set, opening up to innovation, learning to apply digital technologies more broadly and maintaining the drive to keep on working in the new emergency situation. The Latvian Museums Association has been a massive supporting force through its educational activities for museum workers, varied initiatives towards keeping the team spirit alive and general support across the sector, staying true to its role of facilitating collective innovations with the potential to show a positive effect across the board.

Educational programmes for visitors have been relocated online in various forms, such as online exhibitions with guided tours, digital catalogues, public lectures, and seminars. The digital solutions have been impressively diverse, from basic representations of onsite events online to carefully planned and sophisticated products, technologically and conceptually designed as exclusively online experiences.

Museums have pushed the borders of their habitual spaces by holding open-air exhibitions and window displays and producing mobile apps for educational routes around cultural and historical landmarks to be safely experienced by individual visitors at their convenience.

In response to public demand, the Latvian National Museum of Art and the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art have created art therapy sessions on museum premises, with art as a prism for a self-exploratory and self-reflective experience – a muchneeded offer in the present times.

Museums continue to seek new ideas and keep their hand on the pulse through tracking the general sentiment in their viewership and restating the importance and uniqueness of an onsite museum experience while also adapting new methods and products that would add to the current offer.



Latvian National Museum of Art. The Route of Wellbeing – an audio project for a meditative artistic experience

Latvian Museums Association

Told by
Elīna Vikmane, board member

The Latvian Museums Association (LMA) is a non-government organisation uniting 120 statefunded, municipal, private and autonomous museums in pursuit of shared objectives and protection of mutual interests. It aspires to promote development within the sector

across the country in order to strengthen its capacity, boost its general competitiveness, raise the agency of its players and achieve a strong presence on domestic and international grounds.

Solutions and activities



#SEEUYNOW – A PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN MAY 2021

In May 2021, once it became possible to reopen museums to onsite visitors, the LMA launched a joint public information campaign on the subject. Due to repeated adhoc changes in government regulations to contain the pandemic, at that point, the public lacked a clear and straightforward message on when and how to access cultural institutions onsite. To cater for this public need, the country's museums put out bright yellow notices in uniform design – visual aids with clearly speltout information about the governmentissued sanitary protocol. Additional information was provided on the LMA website, detailing current attendance stipulations and museum opening hours.

THE LATVIAN SCHOOL BAG – AN ONLINE SYSTEM FOR THE MUSEUM OFFER REGULAR UPDATES FROM JANUARY 2021

The Latvian School Bag is a state-funded cultural education programme for schoolchildren and youth to learn about Latvia by experiencing its culture and art. The LMA produced a transparent, userfriendly and uptodate search engine summing up the programmerelevant offer from the country's museums.

E-TICKETS FOR MUSEUM VISITS ON THE MOBILLY APP FROM NOVEMBER 2021

This was a collective innovation to introduce etickets for museum visits through Mobilly, a smartphone payment app. By joint agreement among its members, the LMA undertook the coordination and information support to centralise the purchase of museum admission tickets so as to reduce the need for interpersonal contacts, thereby making a museum visit a more secure and convenient cultural experience.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Throughout the pandemic, the LMA maintained a solid commitment to support, inform and encourage museums to use new approaches, tools and resources. With that in mind, a comprehensive study on digital innovations in the country's museums was launched in 2021, with a special focus on new tools and practices motivated by the pandemic.

The LMA continued to hold regular training events, seminars and experience exchange among its members, providing support and encouragement, which was all the more critical in an emergency situation. A good case in point here is Tomorrow's Museum – a lecture series that invited to think about improving the museum experience from the visitor's point of view and was much in demand among the LMA member institutions.

Besides that, a new Museum Sustainability section was put up on the LMA website, featuring expert and specialist guidelines on sustainability awareness in the museum context, a Latvian translation of the Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals manual by the British museum specialist Henry McGhie and some best practice examples from Latvian museums towards the UN sustainable development goals.

Challenges

“Museums are as different and diverse as the general public.
They both direct and reflect public change.”

The digital fatigue brought on by the sheer intensity of our daily presence online has hit hard on museum visitors and staff alike. Successful communication with the audience rests on museums keeping track of public sentiment and adjusting the offer to current visitor needs. By definition, museums ‘serve all humanity’, and there is much talk in the research community about museums responding to public needs, but no society is entirely homogeneous, so what’s perceived as ‘public need’ will vary widely across the board. The greatest challenge is to explore these needs. Digital tools, combined with research skills, should paint the picture more clearly.

“It’s a tough challenge – to break your own resistance
at such a fast pace, to keep learning and telling yourself
to go on and do things despite the real chance you’ll be
making mistakes.”

The second greatest challenge is to kickstart change. In a pandemic situation, change wasn’t slow and gentle; it was rapid and tense and plunged the entire sector into great uncertainty and ambiguity. The shifting landscape required evernew ways and approaches to communicate with the audience. For no museum can exist without visitors.

For the most part, the museum staff works with great enthusiasm and creativity, but the pay rates are among the lowest in the country. Plus, the pandemic often required putting in extra hours to launch the new solutions and disprove the stereotype that a publicly closed and physically unavailable museum means the staff isn’t working. To fulfil their new initiatives, museums could apply for project funds, including some entirely new funding lines, but the competition was stiff. Some museums even managed to increase their available funds through successful project applications. That being said, for museums largely dependent on ticket revenues, the situation became dire, to the degree that they wouldn’t have survived without support from the Ministry of Culture.

The sector is investing significant efforts and resources into new cultural products, but museums have trouble charging visitors for these services, given that the public is accustomed to consuming culture largely free of charge. On top of that, a key working principle for Latvia’s museums labels them as nonprofit institutions, so a focus on revenue is in no way axiomatic. Museums could expect fairly good economic returns from their educational programmes, but for the most part, museum outputs should be viewed in the context of their cultural and social sustainability.

Innovative practices

In 2011, museums experienced substantial changes in terms of administration, communication and offer. Many were quick to introduce effective online communication tools to keep functional despite the new limits on interaction. By a similar token, they actively used social media to communicate with their audience.

The pandemic forced the museums to react quickly and develop new experiences, digital skills and services. In this sense, the emergency was an excellent push for rapid growth. A relatively new trend was greater public interaction and partial surrender of influence and control over building museum supply to the audience. This included open calls to share visitor experiences and relevant visual materials on social media, greater public participation in the making of museum exhibitions and public contributions to the collection with personal items and stories, which give a new meaning to museum work with socially significant topics and trends.

Many of the most active museums have been experimenting with online exhibitions, publishing digital versions of their ‘physical’ shows or right-out creating digital displays online. However, the shifted focus on digital content has raised the question of whether museum materials are actually available to the public and given reason to reconsider the quality of this public access, pushing museums to expand their digitalisation efforts and improve the accessibility of their collections.

Meanwhile, multiple online platforms provided quality opportunities for workshops, conferences, training events and forums, facilitating information exchange across the sector. Despite the limited networking opportunities as an evident downside, the new trend towards digital or at least hybrid events is likely to remain since these are clearly costreductive and timesaving formats for the participants.

Takeaways

They say necessity is the mother of invention. The pandemic necessitated a very particular kind of innovation – giving access to museum content at a distance or in ways that exclude public gatherings.

Digital offer brought opportunities to attract wider audiences, for instance, by making museum content available to diaspora communities overseas. By the same token, digital tools and digital content helped engage younger age groups. The museums that put in targeted efforts managed to attract schoolchildren even when schools and museums were closed, reaching into the outermost regions of Latvia. The museums recognise the latter would not have been possible through the usual means of a guided tour onsite.

The LMA created opportunities for networking, experience exchange and sharing best practices, fuelling development across the field. Foreign language skills permitting, museum workers could get involved in international events online, often free of charge and with no need to spend on transport or accommodation.

On the heels of the first pandemic wave, the joint #SeeYouNow campaign brought the added bonus of increased solidarity across the board. “The sector is not a thing in itself – at its heart are the people who need to feel their colleagues’ support,” stresses Vikmane. The campaign visuals all carried a shared message with a carefully planned design, made both for a print shop and a regular office printer. Mutual care and concern was a massive consolidating force, especially against the general sense of isolation. A few highranking officials also joined the campaign wave, sending the message that museums matter, to all. Thus, the campaign had a huge added value in its emotional impact. The LMA members felt supported and not forgotten while the association felt needed by its affiliates. This double wish for need and support persisted throughout the pandemic.

Suggestions

- ▶ It’s time to face the facts – there’ll be no coming back to the past status quo in the postpandemic reality. The world has changed already, and it keeps on changing, fast, so we need to look straight ahead and plan for the future. The visitors are changing, too, and museums should keep pace and follow.
- ▶ We need to abandon the fear that technologies will somehow ‘kill’ our authentic artefacts or faceto face meetings. The growing digital fatigue and global digitalisation trends suggest that, eventually, the only thing to sustain us will be interpersonal interaction and switching back and forth with adequate ease between digital practices and onsite encounters.
- ▶ We need to abandon the endless pursuit of perfection and the fear of making mistakes. Development rests on experiments, perhaps even failures, and ostensibly useless things – such is the nature of learning. In Latvia, we often deny ourselves the privilege to learn from failure or dread external censure.
- ▶ The study on digital innovations in Latvia’s museums made clear that institutional development essentially rests on individual innovators – the people who come up with new ideas and initiatives. It can be a colleague in any position, most often not the official leader. Teams with someone to take the idea generator and facilitator roles are more likely to introduce new products and services. This is critical for institutional development, so the suggestion is to attract such a person, if there is no one presently on the team, and to review the group with an open mind – maybe the right one has just slipped through the net or somehow remained undervalued.

Looking into the future

Pandemicperiod activities across the museum sector have mainly focused on addressing and attracting audiences. Audience recruitment and diversification will no doubt continue beyond the pandemic by producing new online content, introducing audio guides, adding content in other languages or adapting it to people with disabilities. Once the restrictions for onsite visits

are lifted, all museums and audiences will need to invest some effort to get reaccustomed to visiting cultural sites. Restoring what has been cut short is a slow process, but it applies across the board.

Online education programmes were the most popular museum product introduced during the pandemic, and its development will surely continue. If the programmes were fairly simple to start with, museums now plan to focus on customdesigned offer, especially on live formats online.

The creative sector worldwide is debating whether audiences will be willing to buy online content for a fee. If it largely goes without saying that a ticket should be purchased for onsite experiences, many expect freeofcharge content online. Here, there is much potential for exceptions: environments with no physical entry or ones that take in very limited numbers, such as protected sites. Or products that fall into the category of artistic miracles – technologically or conceptually exceptional standouts, by definition above and beyond the mass market.

There are persistent concerns that digital technologies will replace the authentic object or experience. However, Vikmane believes a digital copy won't force out the original. More likely, the situation will require new digital strategies, now virtually nonexistent, to negotiate digital priorities and create different solutions for onsite and digital environments, tailored to each setting and not meant to outdo the other.

Another contribution from digital technologies is adding to the onsite offer and deepening the impression. This is sometimes referred to as the phygital (from 'physical' and 'digital'). Audio and video tools can help give a historical story a densely emotional message and tone, enabling audiences to imagine historical nuance and context as it could have been. By a similar token, if only a part of the historical object or setting is retained, it can be digitally augmented to compensate for the loss, creating a complete possible representation as it may have been in the past.

The various technological innovations brought by the pandemic have boosted museum development and encouraged openness to new ideas, approaches and experiments. And new cooperations! With that, much like in the larger society, the pandemic situation has exposed a digital gap in the museum sector and disturbing signs of digital fatigue. This suggests that some innovations will remain shortterm pandemic solutions with no future, whereas the most valuable and successful ones will survive. But it will take a few years for them to fall definitively into one group or another.

Latvian National History Museum

Told by
Astrīda Burbicka, Education and
 Communication Department Director;
Dr. Hist. Toms Ķikusts, Deputy Director
 for Research

The National History Museum of Latvia (NHML) was founded in 1869 as the Education Committee Museum under the auspices of the Rīga Latvian Society. To this day, it remains the largest repository of the nation's material cul-

tural values, committed to collect, preserve, research and promote spiritual and material cultural evidence of archaeological, ethnographic, numismatic, historical or artistic historical value, originating in Latvia and beyond.

Solutions and activities

We had to adapt pre-planned events into new formats. The same goes for our educational programmes for schoolchildren. Initial tentative experiments gradually led to bolder solutions across different platforms to maintain cooperation with schools, resulting in 279 online lessons through 2021.

In the context of limited interaction, we were extra active on social media, Facebook especially, on account of it giving us a swift connection to a large and diverse audience. We used Facebook to publish news and educational information and produced regular thematic post series on different historical topics. All these materials had excellent reach statistics.



THE EMUSEUM SINCE MARCH 2021



Fairly soon after the start of the pandemic, we created the *eMuseum* – an online repository for all our existing digital resources (from museum touchscreens, thematic post series on Facebook, online exhibitions, etc.). A user-friendly search tool was developed.

We make regular updates to the *eMuseum* in the form of new thematic galleries and exhibitions, audio and video recordings, publications and learning materials for schools and families, and other resources, many of which can be viewed, downloaded and shared on social media. The *eMuseum* has a public involvement tool called The Centenary Album, where users can share meaningful photos from their family archives.

Online visitor numbers peaked around national holidays and after information campaigns on social media.



ONLINE PROGRAMMES FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN FROM APRIL 2020



We have long offered a wide range of educational lectures and lessons for schoolchildren in The Latvian School Bag programme. As soon as onsite visit restrictions were imposed, we adapted our educational programmes (Made in Latvia, Latvian Solar Festivals, Wood in Latvian History, Regaining the National Independence and many more) so they could be taken online.



THE LATVIAN CENTENARY EXHIBITION CLOSING MAY 2021



23 May 2021 was the final day of The Latvian Centenary – a massive joint exhibition by some of the country's leading museums. It had been on show on our premises since 4 May 2018.

Once it was clear that The Latvian Centenary would not be closed in the traditional way, with large crowds of visitors for the big gala and all the satellite events we had planned, we started to think about how to transform our thematic guided tours into online experiences – through live streams, recordings and posts on social media. The approach was a success because around a hundred people watched our gala event live, with subsequent viewer numbers of the published recording well into multiple thousands.



OPEN-AIR EVENTS

On Museum Night, we offered several individual educational activities out-of-doors, in the city, with the help of a mobile app. These were Rīga across the Times; Multicoloured Latvia: Then and Now; and Discover the House of Dauderi (a search game). In June, we added In the Footsteps of Wood (an interactive game in the urban outdoors) and a few more. The activities were in demand and earned high praise from the audience.



OPEN-AIR EXHIBITIONS SUMMER 2020 AND 2021

Three exhibitions on mobile display boards were created during the pandemic: 10 Questions to the Voter; The Great Northern War in the Baltics; and The 150th Anniversary of Gustavs Zemgals. They were showed in two places in Rīga – in the linden alley in front of the Freedom Monument and in Esplanade Park. Our exhibitions were also displayed in the Ziemeļblāzma Culture Centre and Daugavgrīva Fortress, Rīga and further on in Tukums.



LECTURE, EVENT AND GUIDED TOUR LIVE STREAMS

During the pandemic, we began offering educational events – lectures, thematic guided tours and conferences – in remote-access (live) and hybrid formats (live and on-site). For instance, Starting Latvia Tomorrow, a dramatized story told by museum historians and actors, was filmed and broadcast online. On 4 May, The Liberty Songs musical tour was launched as an expressly digital experience with museum historians and guest appearances by actor Vilis Daudziņš and the Latvian Radio Choir.

This format is being maintained even after restrictions for museum visits on-site have been relaxed because it gives access to wider audiences. The recordings are put in our eMuseum platform.

Challenges

“Our main goal then was to reach potential visitors,
who became online listeners or viewers.”

/Astrīda Burbicka/

The biggest and toughest challenge so far has been the uncertainty over the nature and duration of limitations imposed on museum work. We usually plan three to four years ahead, and now here you are – out of the blue, made to juggle substantial alterations in record time. But you can't really plan ahead, even in the short term, because visiting regulations change so quickly, up to a couple of days before the scheduled event. It's been tough for the staff, too, to wrap our heads around this entire situation brought on by the new disease. But we've all tried to learn quickly and adapt to the state of affairs.

Previous cultural policies lacked sufficiently targeted plans and investments to develop digital content. The latter was limited to a few larger digital initiatives, which were demonstrably not enough. For instance, the State Culture Capital Foundation and other project bylaws have long specified: no funding for new websites, databases, etc. This has effectively landed us in the ditch – badly unprepared for the new situation. At the same time, cultural policy guidelines outline a plan to build museum capacity to maintain and improve public outreach and even attract larger audiences. Clearly, there's no way we can avoid introducing digital tools if we go for these goals. So, having adequate instruments to take us there remains an open question. A crucial thing here was the swift response of the Ministry of Culture to manage the crisis in the cultural sector in 2021 and to offer financial lifelines to many cultural institutions. This included funding for new or upgraded digital content, also through the State Culture Capital Foundation. How to move forwards from there? Time will tell.

Throughout the pandemic, museums have had to put in masses of extra work. Launching new digital products as replacements or add-ons for the onsite offer and communicating it to the public – all these things take a great deal of work. When we make new exhibitions, we already plan for some digital content, anticipating the risk that the onsite version may never happen. This means working on two fronts and producing masses of content in both formats.

Innovative practices

Our activities to involve the audience in content development got substantial engagement. The largest project in this line was The Century Album, inviting the public to upload photos from their family archives. Launched before the pandemic, it worked successfully throughout the restriction period for onsite visits. The Colourful Latvia display achieved a similar degree of engagement – people were very responsive, and we got substantial numbers of coloured photos from their private albums. On Museum Night, we invited the public to take an online tour of Latvia's top cultural landmarks through historical photographs and add some present-day shots of their own.

From when the pandemic first started, our team wanted to deliver a carefully planned and diverse digital offer because, clearly, a simple live stream or recorded narration was not enough to grab and hold the viewers' attention. Remote guided tours represented a totally new solution in both technology and concept. We needed to learn the technical side of things – filming, editing, and delivery to a maximum effect. Another concern was planning the content and its delivery to achieve engagement across a distance. The museum clearly wanted to avoid the onespeaker lecture format, so we pooled the efforts of several curators – their playful interactions and lively improvisations made the tours much more interesting for our viewers. With time came experience. We learnt that online guided tours can't be too focused on the general story – that the guide should take occasional detours to pay closer attention to a few of the objects, but without dwelling too long on the finer details, as one could in a regular onsite tour, because the viewers can't see as well on a screen. Our team continues to learn the best ways to present our material through digital formats and means.

Exhibition openings also happened online, featuring a pre-recorded video about the new show. This meant looking for ways to present the results of our work at a distance.

Takeaways

Dealing with an emergency situation has given the entire team tons of experience. We grew closer, and everybody contributed to the discussions on the best solutions and their sustainability, and there was no talk of cancelling even a single event. Instead, each project manager or event supervisor looked for alternative ways to deliver our work to the viewers. We all pitched in and adjusted.

“Workwise, the pandemic left us in a totally new situation, and my colleagues saw things as they stood and rose to the occasion. The whole team went after new solutions, tweaking previous practices and finding new ways to do things.”

/ Toms Ķikuts /

Hybrid events (taking place both on-site and online) really boosted our audience numbers. Thus, around 150 followed a live stream seminar on the Rīga Palace history and architecture, and another 2,000 international viewers saw it later, at their convenience. We found such hybrid forms a great way to attract viewers from more distant regions of Latvia and even other countries to our educational events; plus, they enabled us to invite some fascinating speakers who normally wouldn't have been able to come in person. Right now, we feel our numbers of digital content consumers are likely to grow even more.

That said, museum performance is routinely assessed by visitor numbers, hardly an adequate criterion in a pandemic. So we see it as a clear positive that assessment practices have started to include online visits, which paints a more objective picture of museum performance. Our internal assessment and planning concludes that posting on social media has become an essential part of our work and that our audience appreciates diverse and high-quality content in this somewhat unusual setting.

Suggestions

- ▶ Digital products can be addressed to a broader range of people with varied interests. On-line tools can be a great extra way to reach more diverse and less typical audiences beyond the regular following of seasoned museumgoers or produce content on niche topics for a narrower viewership.
- ▶ There's no need to go full-digital; each format has its upsides and trade-offs. So we should be open-minded and think outside the box when we judge how to balance analogue and digital environments to make the most of what each has to offer.
- ▶ Cross-institutional cooperation is an essential boost to museum performance through shared projects, added content and opportunities to reach wider audiences (potential visitors!) with updates on museum events and other developments.

Looking into the future

We've successfully launched our *eMuseum* platform and will keep expanding it even more. Online exhibitions and guided tours, made straight for the online setting, have proved a great add-on to our regular display. This will be used and developed in the future.

Educational events such as lectures, seminars, conferences and meetings with experts should be continued as hybrid forms, online as well as on-site, seeing as this attracts a wider audience.

That said, digital access can't replace an active learning experience at the museum. In our view, actual exhibition visits and guided tours will not be outdone by their digital counterparts. The distance format is better for less interactive things like lectures and conferences. People will suit themselves as they decide whether to consume such content in semi-digital ways to save time or to come in person on a special occasion to enjoy being present on-site. As to the visits as such, for now, digital representation fails to give full justice to museum exhibits and beat onsite viewing. Besides, a museum visit is a much broader experience than just getting new knowledge.

The Latvian National Museum of Art (LNMA) is the country's largest repository of professional art and a major player towards collection, preservation and promotion of cultural values in Latvia and beyond. It aspires to educate the public and to encourage its interest

in the historical and artistic evidence of visual art, decorative art and design created in Latvia and beyond, emphasising the national school of the arts and placing it in the broader contexts of cultural history and contemporary processes.

Solutions and activities

Our first step, as soon as the emergency situation imposed restrictions on public gatherings, was to review existing resources, take available digital content and communicate it to the audience. On top of that, we produced fairly simple digital content that our staff could make with existing resources. In the autumn months of 2020, it became clear that restrictions on museum work were unlikely to be lifted any time soon, so our museum workers decided to invest their efforts into remote-access projects for the long term.

Further operational planning was informed by the conclusion that onsite work will remain impossible or limited for some time and that the audience is becoming more open to digital experiences, as seen from growing public demand for digital offers. In 2021, the museum worked in three directions towards greater remote outreach:

- added digital content about art mediums, movements and artists available online (audio and visual content, online exhibitions with guided tours);
- Meanings (Latvian - No-zīmes) - a large and unique educational project for schoolchildren providing lessons online;
- adapting the museum's educational functions aimed at individual visitors in the form of audio guides, video narrations and meditation cue cards (<https://www.lnmm.lv/latvijas-nacionalais-makslas-muzejs/izglitiba/patstavigai-apskatei/makslas-mediācijas-kartītes-35>) to provide museumgoers with relevant materials and guiding tools to experience art in restricted interaction conditions.



MEANINGS – AN INNOVATIVE REMOTE LEARNING PROGRAMME FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN FROM AUTUMN 2021



12 new online lessons were made around four art museums – the LNMA headquarters, the Art Museum RĪGA BOURSE, the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, and the Romans Suta and Aleksandra Beļcova Museum. The lessons were created on the Nearpod digital learning platform. The programme was a joint effort by 32 professionals – museum directors, art historians, restorers, exhibition curators and scenographers, artists, and designers.

AUDIO AND VIDEO STORIES ABOUT ARTWORKS AND ARTISTS FROM 2021

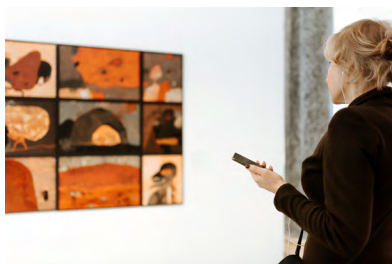


The offer includes audio and video stories, online guided tours around exhibitions, lecture series, video reviews, materials for creative workshops with children and other types of educational content. For instance, the work of Jānis Pauļuks, Māra Kažociņa and Inta Celmiņa is presented by the New Rīga Theatre actors – Kaspars Znotiņš, Regīna Razuma and Gundars Āboliņš.

MYTHOPOETIC FIGURES – A PERMANENT OUTDOOR EXHIBITION FROM NOVEMBER 2021



A permanent outdoor sculpture exhibition outside the National Museum Depository features artworks by Latvian sculptors. In line with its leitmotif, Mythopoetic Figures, the display includes sculptural representations of standout images and figures in Latvian folklore, mythology, literature and nature. In restricted access conditions, a few indoor exhibitions were tweaked to be at least partly available from outside, placing art in display windows or lighting the spaces for better visual effect.



THE ROUTE OF WELLBEING – AN AUDIO PROJECT FOR A MEDITATIVE ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE FROM DECEMBER 2021



Visitors can access a new audio project in the museum's mobile app, The Route of Wellbeing, which helps explore its permanent

display with meditative and awareness-raising techniques. The app covers nine universal themes, such as Friendship, Loss, The Unknown, Daring, To Be Continued, etc. through stories prepared by art historians, who relate them to the featured art, and by art therapists, who help the visitor to find relevant connections in their lives and reflect on the subject. The general atmosphere is enhanced by the music of Jēkabs Nīmanis, expressly composed for the purpose. The stories are told in three languages by professional voice actors.

MAKSLASKOLEKCIJA.LV FROM DECEMBER 2021

This is a digital catalogue of Latvian contemporary visual art created over the past 30 years. Each entry contains information in Latvian and English about the making and concept of the piece, its technical details and visual representation in photography or video. To support the Latvian cultural sector hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, in the summer of 2020, the LNMA received targeted funds from the national budget to acquire artworks by Latvian artists. The resulting collection represents a wide range of visual arts – from painting, sculpture and objects to photography, video, mixed media installations, interdisciplinary projects and design.

Challenges

The first challenge was to react immediately to the new situation and change how work was organised at the museum. The staff had to adapt to new responsibilities and embrace a new way of thinking. Past approaches had to be tweaked and the altered duties redistributed.

An added challenge was learning to use new tools, platforms and ways of communication and to research the best approaches to providing remote services. This meant tons of work to find out which approach out of many would be a success because past experiences no longer applied.

All this required perseverance and coming to terms with not knowing the best way out in a given situation, combined with testing different ideas to get the most successful solution.

Innovative practices

Online lessons for schoolchildren were initially conceived as add-ons rather than replacements for the onsite format – an important factor that led to a successful and wellreceived series. In fact, the online lessons featured the material it was impossible to cover on museum premises. Learners got a digital behind-the-scenes look of the art world through remote meetings with scenographers, museum directors, art historians, restorers, designers, artists and other specialists, getting an idea of the sheer amount of work that needs to be done on all fronts before the finished piece is shown in a museum setting. This way, when the children do get to the museum in person, they are better informed about the broader context of the exhibits.

Preparing the lessons took huge amounts of work on design and content. Schoolchildren are a demanding audience, so we did extensive research on how to produce engaging and attention-grabbing material, doing surveys and interviews with the target group. This way, we learnt that children have masses of unanswered questions on how art's being made, who gets to decide what's to be created, how value and meaning are attached to art, who buys it, etc. All these questions and more were then addressed by the programme-makers.

We then did some test runs, observed children at work, analysed the findings and looked for solutions to identified problems. In all, we held four testing stages, finishing each with a very critical assessment of the results and improving the programme as needed. We were consistently strict with ourselves, and the steering group really went for substantial alterations, not just minor tweaks. The end result got top reviews from learners, who praised the engaging content, applauded its interactivity and really threw themselves into participating.

“You have to be tough with yourself and your ideas if you want your online lessons to be intriguing, really grab the learners’ attention and hold it throughout the session.”

The Wellbeing Project

The pandemic revealed that museum spaces can serve a social function, with people coming there to experience art in peace and quiet to a positive, soothing and harmonising effect. With that in mind, in October 2020, we launched the Wellbeing Project Month, offering visitors art meditation classes, art therapy sessions for senior citizens and special tours. For our senior visitors, we made a customised onsite programme delivered at an inclusive pace, with several resting breaks.

In 2021, the museum wanted to continue in this direction, seeing as the new offer was really popular and had received high praise from the users. However, further restrictions on public gatherings meant it had to be tweaked for individual visits. This was done with a purpose-made audio guide – The Route of Wellbeing. For us, our museum’s social function is essential, all the more so in a pandemic situation. And we feel it should be performed by carefully navigating the shifting landscape of public needs and tapping into the arts potential to improve the visitors’ mental and emotional resilience.

Takeaways

Our principal takeaway from the pandemic is masses of new experience and a few game-changing projects driven by digital technologies.

The whole situation really shook up our perspective, and we saw our museum with new eyes. With everything else shut down and unavailable, it became the go-to destination for many to get some peace of mind and fresh impressions. Our team caught this vibe and worked from it, promoting our museum as a top place for visitors keen to improve their mental wellbeing and enjoy a meditative cultural experience.

Suggestions

- ▶ It pays off to cooperate across the field and exchange experiences. We shared ours in a seminar for Latvia’s museum workers on how to reshape the museum offer in a pandemic.
- ▶ Before you kick off new activities, take time to research your target audience to see what it needs right now. And be very specific in your definition of what you expect to achieve with every activity. What can trip you up is just snatching a trending approach, hastily slapping on your content and mindlessly shoving it to the public. That’s a recipe for failure because there is no one-size-fits-all solution you can just copy across the board. Every museum needs and deserves its own unique tone and message.
- ▶ Museums should stay unique, with their individual message, content and mission. On top of that, it’s technology and going digital. And whatever you do, don’t fall in love with your ideas – be ready to bin them if they don’t work and look for something entirely new. And remember – it’s tough but so worth it.

Looking into the future

All our major projects developed during the pandemic were intended as sustainable solutions viable even after visiting restrictions are relaxed or entirely lifted. They are add-ons rather than replacements for onsite activities.

Digital access is explicitly one of our goals. The digital solutions dovetail into our onsite offer and expand our audience outreach, engaging those who, for varied reasons, can’t visit the museum in person, such as the people living in more distant areas of the country or diaspora pupils abroad. That said, some exclusively onsite offers cannot be digitalised and moved online, such as our wellbeing programmes for senior citizens. Importantly, we will keep producing thematic wellbeing projects as we’ve seen they’re both needed and highly meaningful to our visitors.

We’ll pay extra attention to improving access for people in wheelchairs and visitors with other impairments. The Latvian Museums Association has raised this issue across all of the country’s museums and provides relevant educational support.

Kuldīga District Museum

Told by
Kristīne Āboliņa, Director of Communications;
Sabīne Ernsona, Museum Educator

The Kuldīga District Museum is unique to Latvia and the world as the only institution that pools historical evidence about Kuldīga and its surroundings, profiling it as an exceptional cultural and historic environment, with a special focus on the old town, its vibrant architecture and impressive landmarks. The museum stirs the residents to appreciate local values,

nurtures patriotism and community spirit and cultivates a sense of belonging to the district of Kuldīga and, more broadly, the Latvian State. With that, it raises awareness of Latvia's cultural history and traditional heritage, emphasising preservation, maintenance and transmission to the generations to come.

Solutions and activities

Museum workers initially used existing digital products to fire up our communication on social media. New digital solutions were developed for existing activities. For instance, the monthly family workshops that used to be held on-site morphed into the Stay-At-Home Fun section on the museum website. Educational games out of doors were adapted to solo players who now could take a route and do the tasks on their smartphones. Celebrations of national holidays and memorial dates went digital (e.g., The Barricade Stories and The Declaration of Independence Day).

Every new project began with researching the target group and some test runs to see if the product fit the intended audience.

TAKE A WALK AROUND OLD KULDĪGA – AN ONLINE EXHIBITION FROM MARCH 2020



The exhibition sums up our Facebook posts from the series Take a Walk around Old Kuldīga with the District Museum Collection. The first post was published in March 2020, during a national state of emergency when everybody was asked to stay home. Our historical photos and stories about old Kuldīga invited the locals to explore their town. We keep adding to the display with new tales about historical buildings.

THE SILENT CITIZENS GAME OUT OF DOORS JULY 2021



With Google Maps, you can walk the town gardens and learn about sculptor Līvija Rezevska and her art. The game was made for the artist's anniversary programme, Curling up in Her Lap, in cooperation with the Kuldīga Artist Residency, the Līvija Local Cultural Society and the town council.

OLD TOWN NUANCES – AN OUTDOOR GAME FROM MAY 2020



With Google Maps, you can walk the old town of Kuldīga, taking a purpose-made route – see the old houses and look back in time with historical photos from the museum collection, checking out how the town looked back in the day, doing some tasks and learning historical trivia.



LET SPRING INTO YOUR HEART – A PUBLIC CAMPAIGN APRIL 2020



The photo frame and pointers near the Kuldīga District Museum invite the public to take photos and upload them on the social media as entries in a contest. Besides, everyone can take snippets of timeless advice from purpose-made cards with inspirational quotes, choosing what seems to fit the mood and day, and see a photo exhibition featuring beauty spots across the town.

STAY-AT-HOME FUN

FEBRUARY 2020



A section of the Kuldīga District Museum website with monthly thematic updates, practical tasks for preschool-age children and their parents around historical materials.



THE BARRICADE TIME – AN EDUCATIONAL COLLECTION

JANUARY 2020



The collection contains old photos and a comic strip about the historic events of 1991, learning materials for teachers and a Google Quiz for children and adults, and a bonus visual contest for children – to encourage them to have a chat with those who experienced the barricade period.

Challenges

The first challenge was to know what the audience wanted and when was the right time to offer new, exciting and practical content in a situation of digital overdose and fatigue.

Next came searching the web for free digital tools and putting in tons of time to learn using the software, knowing that some of it might end up being unsuitable. Purchases of online tools had to be vetted with budgetary limits in mind. Plus, you had to be sure your idea is good enough and potentially successful to make spending worthwhile.

For the remote-access creative workshops, a new topic was chosen each month to work with and around the museum collection. Preparing remote-access materials took vastly more work than organising onsite workshops. Visual materials were filmed or photographed, text and sound added in post-production.

Another resource drain was staying up to date with restrictions, regulations and disinfection requirements and keeping the public informed. At all times, we've had to adapt to the changing situation, anticipate the options and prepare for both onsite and online formats. We've had to be constantly ready to switch from receiving visitors onsite and going digitalonly, which meant maintaining an almost permanent state of alert and ability to reprogramme museum activities virtually at the drop of a hat, always adjusting and keeping an eye out for the latest version of the rules.

Innovative practices

It's important to make time and context-appropriate products because that is the key to success. For instance, The Barricade Time was an extremely useful resource for teachers when all schools were working online. Let Spring Into Your Heart was a sweet campaign and proved very engaging, not least due to its timing – people were itching to get out for refreshing spring walks, especially in the face of long spells at home and restrictions on public events.

Creating new digital content is closely tied to its sustainability – thinking ahead how to use the resource later on and how to offer it to broader audiences.

Takeaways

Digital solutions can reach out to much larger audiences and help museum workers better organise their work. The pandemic has given us new digital experiences and pushed us to improve our museum's digital offer.

Suggestions

- ▶ No need to fear, all things new will seem frightening, but it's important to give them a go and approach friends and colleagues for help. To experiment and find something new. Sometimes people don't know what they want but give them something new, and they'll be happy to use it.
- ▶ Museums should be encouraged to use the historical values from their collections. The digital approach offers more space to display your unique and impressive material.
- ▶ Go to your colleagues and partners for help, communicate with your team and share experiences and ideas about using digital tools.
- ▶ Work with other organisations, pool resources, ideas and experiences, and make more substantial and far-reaching projects.

Looking into the future

“This time has proved that we need to think hard about digital content, that it will keep on trending, and that museum collections need to be more accessible, including in digital, easy-to-browse ways online.”

/ Sabine Ernsone /

We plan to keep our outdoor games in a hybrid format – materials will be available on-site, at the museum, and digitally, online. The digital offer will remain an addition to the regular content, but not to the extent of total duplication. We'll keep making parallel digital content on nationally significant themes, so that rural schools can join in without having to go into Kuldīga. Digital solutions can add to onsite events. For instance, QR codes can give more detailed information without overcrowding the physical display.

The team is thinking about a digitalised open-access collection, which will be available to a broader audience. Also, we had the idea to make video lectures and use the urban environment as a history witness besides the collection. These should appeal to both children and adults, and teachers could use them in class.

Will the digital do away with real-life visits? Absolutely not. Nothing beats a physical presence. People will always crave in-person meetings, communication, and interaction experiences, especially in a pandemic and in the post-Covid reality.

Visual art

Like many other cultural sectors, the visual arts lost much of their onsite visitor base to the pandemic. Thus, the main task was to try and reach out to the viewership by bringing art closer, outside the regular exhibition spaces. The most widespread technique was to place art in the windows of exhibition rooms and other public buildings, tweaking the general arrangement and lighting – this allowed for viewing art out-of-doors, at all times, without public gatherings. Some went even closer and placed art around the city – either new purpose-made objects or select pieces from existing collections – in custom-built stands and structures. At the same time, many went actively digital, taking art experiences into people's homes through computers and smart devices.

The pandemic dictated a creative reassessment of existing resources and options and kick-started digital projects as add-ons to the onsite offer – artist interviews, digital catalogues, audio guides for individual exhibition tours, mobile apps and VR software towards new ways to experience art.

That said, a complete experience requires presence if one seeks a personal and unique encounter with art. Digital versions can give extra information and be excellent add-ons, but a genuine and comprehensive experience is possible only on-site, face-to-face with the artwork, in customised rooms with the right background, accents and atmosphere – the things one can't achieve by just dumping art in public spaces. On the upside, having gone out of doors, beyond their regular environment, visual arts organisations have reached out to new audiences. This has opened up the space for diverse opinions and discussions and a broader dialogue with the public.



Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

5/ Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre

Told by
Aivars Baranovskis, Marketing Specialist

The Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre is a multifunctional hub for contemporary art, culture and learning, located in the historical artillery arsenal of the Daugavpils Fortress. To date, it is the only place in Eastern Europe where visitors can see original works by the Daugavpils-born world-renowned artist Mark

Rothko, the founder of abstract expressionism and colour field painting. Meanwhile, the 2000 square metres of temporary exhibition space offer more than 40 shorter-term contemporary art projects in different media from leading domestic and international artists.

Solutions and activities

Our team really thought about bringing art closer to our viewers and making it more accessible in the new situation. So we worked hard to capture and record our exhibitions, did artist interviews and shot videos, publishing all on our social media.

The centre has a substantial art collection, but we didn't want it to be a passive and static repository that's just sitting there doing nothing and gathering dust. So we put things in display windows, reaching at least some of the viewers and keeping art dynamically present in people's lives.

Interviews are available on the Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre website and on social media.



THE CURVED HORIZON. THE ROTHKO LIFT - A VIRTUAL SCULPTURE NOVEMBER 2020



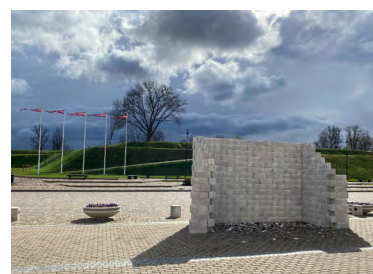
The virtual sculpture by artist Gints Gabrāns is visible only near and around the Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre. After they've launched the SAN augmented reality app on their smartphones, viewers see a virtual lift reaching 50 kilometres up into the stratosphere. Around its central axis, they see compositions of Rothko-style paintings generated by artificial intelligence. The object was made in cooperation with the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, with funding from the KOPĀ (TOGETHER) Public Art Programme by Latvia's Ministry of Culture.



LET'S TALK ART! - VIDEO INTERVIEWS WITH ARTISTS 2020



To boost communication with our audiences and make our exhibits more accessible, once the pandemic hit, we launched an interview series with artists. This way, we documented our exhibitions, discussed art with creators, took photos and shot videos. The



THE DISCHARGE- RECHARGE WALL MAY THROUGH OCTOBER 2021



For way too long, we've had to work in the face of uncertainty. There was tension and doubt about when exhibition spaces would reopen for the public and go back to normal. Responding to this pressure within our team and the general public, we made our DischargeRecharge Wall as a somewhat unorthodox warmup for the Latvia Ceramics Biennale coming up in the summer of 2021.

Thus, an actual wall was built in the Rothko Centre courtyard as a controlled anger management tool. Then, throughout the campaign, everyone could come up and smash their unwanted ceramics against it, letting go of all negativity and charging up with some positive thrills.



WINDOW ART IN THE CITY

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021



Parts of our collection were shown in display windows across Daugavpils to make art more accessible while exhibition spaces were closed due to epidemiological restrictions. Thus, ceramic objects by Anastasia Charina (Saint-Petersburg, Russia) were put in the windows of the Daugavpils District Cultural Centre, whereas the Daugavpils Tourist Information Centre received assorted ceramic heads from our collection.

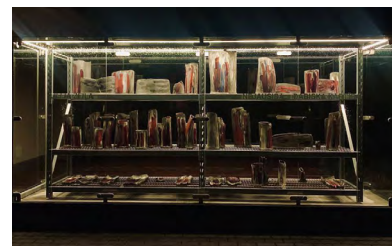


TALK TO ME - AN OPEN-AIR EXHIBITION

8 NOVEMBER THROUGH 31 DECEMBER 2021



We set up an exhibition in the Rothko Centre courtyard, featuring 20 Latvian ceramicists, to bring up the question of communication or how artists talk through their work, to their viewers and themselves. The exhibition was organised by the Ceramic Association of Latvia in cooperation with the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Ceramics and the Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre. The project was supported by the State Culture Capital Foundation through its KultūrELPA target-programme.



HAPPENSTANCE - NATURAL ORDER. LILIJA ZEĪĻA'S SOLO SHOW

SINCE 3 NOVEMBER 2021



Ceramicist Lilija Zeiļa's solo show was displayed at 4METRES - an open-air gallery made of glass in the Daugavpils Fortress. The outdoor display was available round the clock, supported by the State Culture Capital Foundation.

Challenges

The toughest challenges were to do with technical solutions. The problem wasn't the funding but quality ways of content delivery. If art is put in public windows with no proper lighting, the piece loses quality. After the first attempts to display art across the city, we got several requests to keep going with window displays but decided against it.

If the piece is designed as a visual experience, the environment you place it in is essential. For instance, if the nearby windows are plastered with screaming ads, should art try to compete for attention? Exhibition spaces and galleries exist for a reason - they have an important function, and scattering art across the city is no replacement. In exhibition spaces, art is lifted and illuminated - they have the proper environment to ensure preservation and display in the best possible light. Of course, window art in the city is fine as a quick pop-up solution, but it won't always work in the long term.

As to creativity, the pandemic hasn't hit the artists too hard. Many had the chance to put other things on the break and spend extra time in their studios working out new ideas. This has been a curious time in visual arts, and it will likely result in some new creative ideas in the not-so-distant future. It's a rare and exceptional moment for artists to have so much time to work uninterrupted.

Innovative practices

Doing the interviews and processing artist stories pushed the borders of our previous practice and enabled us to reach out to the public more broadly than the standard viewing of art had entailed.

Exhibitions, art objects and campaigns have been held out-of-doors in the art centre courtyard and more broadly across the city, making art more accessible and continuously reaching

out to the viewers. When art spills out beyond habitual spaces, it becomes more accessible to all to enjoy and critique. Having become more readily available, our exhibitions received mixed reviews – some were thrilled and appreciated the chance to experience art outside the regular setting, in the urban environment, but there was also a good deal of criticism. When you put the works out on public display, you must keep in mind that the range of viewers will be broader. Take our Discharge-Recharge Wall – the feedback was very mixed. Athletic and dance groups and families came with crates and boxes stacked with unwanted dishes. With them, the idea was a smashing success. Others were very critical and talked about open vandalism and blatant destruction of cultural values.

Takeaways

The need and demand for art persist regardless of external conditions. Cultivating a habit to consume art and culture among the public is hard, but if you succeed, you stay in demand. It was so rewarding to see our audience appreciating our initiatives in this very challenging situation. After all, we never stopped working. The pandemic has shown that art isn't only for the good times – it stays in the spotlight even in times of crisis.

Digital solutions, such as those used in artist interviews, were a new experience for our team. Preparing the questions and handling video and audio tech required new skills, but with that, the quality of our products grew from post to post.

Suggestions

- The window exhibition at the tourist information centre showed this was not a viable solution in the long term. We realised it would be more reasonable to display art in places where people gather with a conscious intention to experience it. If a project lacks follow-up and consistency to get people accustomed to seeing art in a particular setting, it just makes no sense – the piece will look odd and out of place whatever you do. With this experience under our belt, we did the following exhibitions in our own courtyard, in the open air. This was a more fitting and tenable solution because the centre was made for art by design and definition, and people go there intending to experience it.

“I say – do less but do better. Now we can plan and think ahead about more substantial and therefore more meaningful events, which they will be, if they are well-considered.”

Looking into the future

Recent years in the visual arts sector will not have brought irreversible changes. There will always be a need for galleries and showrooms, and there will always be art designed for such spaces that won't look any good anywhere else. Painting will never be limited to artworks just for the open air, and graphic artists won't exclusively shift to water-resistant pieces.

No doubt we'll have new art forms and public campaigns. Urban spaces and outdoor areas will attract increasing attention. The Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre looks ahead and makes plans for a partly open collection, taking weather-resistant ceramic works out of doors into a permanent public display. Sculpture is the best medium to withstand different weather conditions and stay under the elements for extended periods, but we will still have extra fragile materials that require specific storage.

The recent shocks have really shaken things up – given the public new stimuli and exposed the need for new approaches. Only time will tell which plans to discard and which to keep and develop. For instance, artist interviews are a very important add-on to the exhibitions, but once the situation stabilises and returns to normal, resuming former regular duties can mean we won't have enough resources for such extras. So we'll need to draw the line between sustainable and situational projects.

Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

Told by
Māra Žeikare, Educational Project and
Mediation Programme Coordinator

The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA) has been committed to the research, creation and development of contemporary art processes in Latvia and internationally since 1993, with a view to critically investigate and reflect on the evolution of present-day society. The LCCA maintains the country's only digi-

talised archive of contemporary art. Crucially, it explores and discovers the hidden gems of cultural values in Latvian contemporary art, communicates art through up-to-date educational activities and works with leading figures in the fields of design, architecture, research and public writing.

Solutions and activities



TOGETHER (KOPĀ) – A PUBLIC ART PROGRAMME SINCE DECEMBER 2020



TOGETHER (in Latvian – KOPĀ) is an LCCA-supervised public art programme commissioned by Latvia's Ministry of Culture to support the artists hit by the pandemic-induced crisis and elevate the urban environment with quality art. An open call to creators was launched, with funding for site-specific art objects for the public spaces of Rīga and a few regional cities and towns. TOGETHER embodied the spirit of solidarity and mutual support raised by the pandemic – it encouraged creators to produce innovative and inclusive objects, partnering with local communities and NGOs, state or municipal institutions, private initiatives or businesses. In sum,

the programme yielded 10 new art objects in Rīga, Cēsis, Daugavpils, Liepāja, Madona and Valmiera.

With onsite visits to cultural spaces strictly curtailed, exhibiting in the city was a successful initiative to support creators and enable the public to experience art.



MOBILE MUSEUM: THE NEXT SEASON – AN OUTDOOR EXHIBITION JUNE THROUGH AUGUST 2021



Back in 2007, the LCCA did the first Mobile Museum exhibition in the industrial canteen in Andrejsala, Rīga. In 2021, it was followed by Mobile Museum: The Next Season, featuring art made in Latvia over the past 30 years. The message was still the

same, raising valid and lingering questions – when and if will Latvia finally have a national contemporary art museum, what will it be like, how is the idea discussed in the information space, and why has it failed to materialise? The exhibition was held in the outdoor area of the former Bolshevichka textile mill in Rīga. In 2020, an audio guide initiative was launched to help visitors navigate the exhibitions individually. To start, they contained stories about the exhibits, accessed by scanning the QR code of each piece. Then, a separate website was made for the Mobile Museum with a digital catalogue containing audio stories about the exhibits and some visuals from the first show in 2007 and the current project. This website and catalogue were made with an important stipulation – should restrictions prohibit onsite visits to the exhibition, the online resource will be available as its digital representation. The Mobile Museum turned out successful and wellattended, and the added bonus of online materials gave visitors a broader context and attendant information.

SURVIVAL KIT – AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART FESTIVAL SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021



Survival Kit is one of the most impressive contemporary art events in the Baltics. Each year, it seeks to capture timely and fitting survival strategies through contemporary art, offering striking cultural experiences in new and original venues. The 2021 festival explored population ageing, memory and survival.



ART THERAPY SESSIONS FOR SENIORS AND YOUTH SEPTEMBER/NOVEMBER 2021



The programmes were designed to counteract the traumatic effects of the pandemic on mental health in different population groups. Art therapy methods have the potential to help those most severely affected: teens aged 12 to 18 encountering depression

and seniors with dementia in long-term isolation.

Several exhibitions on depression and dementia were scheduled for 2021 to bring these topics into the public eye through the prism of the arts. Sadly, they had to be moved to 2022, given the pandemic. After postponing the exhibitions, we decided to continue the initiative in another way and set up a pilot project with free of charge art therapy sessions for seniors and minors, offering to approach contemporary art through self-awareness. The response was amazing, the places filled up in no time, and we even had to make a waitlist for the next round. The groups started meeting in person, but the programme finished online due to later restrictions.

Challenges

Communication with the audience took a big turn, with the usual formats unfeasible in the new situation. We had to look for other forms and a personalised approach. The viewership had grown wary of going places in person, and the things were further confounded by the constantly changing attendance regulations.

In the new situation, a major challenge was having to adapt all existing projects in a very short time, knowing that the pandemic and all attendant restrictions could be there for some duration. It was really tough for the team, and the amount of work grew for all. While continuing to run the existing projects, we've had to figure out new funding models. Sporadically, we weren't even sure we'd be able to cover the wages. Some people left, others came in and had to be trained. All of this meant additional work for the team. Besides, when working from home, the project managers had to cope entirely on their own because, given the circumstances, engaging assistants was problematic. In the office, they would have had the option to get help from assistants, students or interns, as had been the norm before the pandemic. Now, many helpers had a change of plans. Cooperation was a significant challenge throughout these two years, and in some sense, it actually failed. It was tough to work in isolation, with no team support from the sidelines.

The annual Survival Kit festival of contemporary art experienced a drop in visitor numbers compared to previous years. Typically, the audience includes school groups, who no longer travelled because schools tried to avoid organised visits to public places, whereas individual visitors were often confused by the constantly shifting regulations – these changed several times during the festival. In this situation, it was crucial to keep our communication clear and straightforward, catering to various audiences, sending personalised invitation messages and explaining the latest attendance rules. A significant resource was the festival website, where visitors could learn about each artist concept before the actual visit.

Innovative practices

Our audience hugely appreciated the art therapy programme and its central idea of self-awareness and self-help through the prism of art. For adolescents with signs of depression, this was a precious format. While they normally wouldn't agree to take classical therapy, the young people were very responsive to conversation and dialogue about art. For senior citizens, the project was a valuable social networking and communication experience.

Takeaways

Video and audio tools are no longer a slap-on addition to the project proposal included without actual need – they’ve become an organic part of the programme.

Lecture and seminar recordings are a great way to ensure that the content is chronicled and stored. Plus, it can be offered to audiences online even after the event has taken place. An extra bonus is the option to add subtitles in other languages, including a sign language translation – a significant step towards a wider and more diverse audience.

Suggestions

“The demand for art therapy sessions shows that people are experiencing a collective trauma, and the cultural offer needs to adapt. It should be soothing and supportive.”

- ▶ It’s no longer a given that people will attend cultural events – viewers will have to be re-cruited anew. The world is changing, the social media are changing, audiences are different, and so are communication channels. All this broadens the communication spectrum and requires more resources than before. In sum, communication badly needs a restart.
- ▶ The pre-pandemic cultural offer will no longer work. The demand has changed, people are traumatised, and we have to approach them accordingly.
- ▶ It is crucial to support each other in a work team and privately in our relationships. Let us not forget about sympathy, and let us not be afraid to come close and discuss personal matters through culture rather than pulling away.

Looking into the future

The pandemic has focused us on accessibility issues to make our offer available across the board. Audio guides are certainly here to stay. We plan to develop this tool by adapting the content to people with special needs, people with different perception impairments, and the elderly so that everyone can see and grasp the message. We also intend to work with the Easy Language Agency, who could advise us on how to draft our materials.

We’ll be making digital exhibition catalogues provided that we have sufficient resources. We’re also in the process of upgrading our website, which will have a new section on the history of our exhibitions.

Video recordings of events, lectures and seminars on top of the onsite format will definitely continue. Naturally, this takes extra work, but all the effort is worthwhile if the content produced isn’t temporary but stays available in the archives.

Mobile Museum: The Next Season, in terms of idea and concept, was a huge success. This approach – to talk about pressing topics through the historical perspective of art objects, to discuss the post-exhibition life of art – is fascinating, and we’ll likely return to it in the future.

Next year, we’ve planned exhibitions on critical social issues, such as dementia, senior citizens, and depression, and we intend to keep developing the art therapy approach.

The art mediation programme, in place since 2017, will continue to reach out to a wider audience and help our visitors make sense of contemporary art. Art mediators have learnt special skills and knowledge to explore the display with every visitor, stimulate discussion and help people with disabilities experience art. We plan to further develop this programme so that mediators can work with different audiences, not just professional art connoisseurs, and so everyone can be welcomed with a personalised approach and due support. An individual conversation in an exhibition onsite, in simple language, exploring the stories implied in the featured artworks and unpacking the artist’s message will always be worth the effort.

Music

Throughout the pandemic, the music industry organisations have invested resources in highquality digital concerts and new technologies to bring the public the ultimate musical experience in distantaccess formats. As a result, a lasting digital offer has been created, with the option to enjoy live and recorded concerts of exceptional quality at listeners' convenience as an alternative to in-person visits. The digital offer has brought a substantial rise in visitor numbers, reaching out to audiences beyond Latvian borders.

For artists performing to a digital audience in live online broadcasts, it is hard, if not downright impossible, to get immediate feedback. That said, online listeners can leave the artists individual comments and messages, which is not the case with regular concerts.

New educational programmes have been developed for schools and adults, adapting reallife analogue offer or creating brandnew digital content. Online lectures, seminars and podcasts have enjoyed tremendous popularity and will keep being developed in the future.

Throughout the pandemic, the music sector has also experienced uplifting smaller activities, both domestically and worldwide, when community initiative or individual drive has resulted in charming little concerts for local audiences – in backyards, on balconies or in the public space. These grassroots initiatives have had great community value towards mutual support and encouragement in emergency circumstances.



Latvian National Symphony Orchestra

Great Amber Concert Hall

Told by
Timurs Tomsons, Board President

The Great Amber Concert Hall is a dynamic hub for regional and international professional art, home to the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra and the Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary

School. Its distinctive, eye-catching shape, unique interiors and exceptional acoustics make a strong case for calling it a prime cultural venue for the Baltic Sea region.

Solutions and activities

With the onset of the pandemic, the Great Amber Concert Hall set about digitalising its concerts. To continue delivering quality content, new technical equipment was bought, which enabled us to produce high-grade recordings. A top priority was digitalising our Latvian School Bag projects. Jazz Hour for Teens was the first in this line, so it was vital to survey the audience and get their feedback. Their glowing reviews suggested we were on the right track.



THE DIGITAL CONCERT HALL

FROM JANUARY 2021

[www.](#)

The Great Amber is equipped with RoboCams and other high-tech gear to make first-rate video recordings remotely. The Digital Concert Hall offers concert recordings and live broadcasts available worldwide.

“The trick with digital products is getting feedback to fuel development.”

/ Timurs Tomsons /

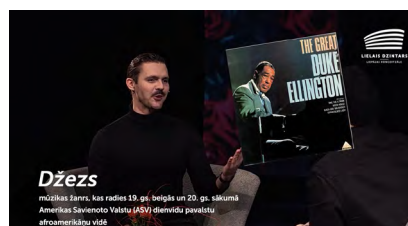
THE LATVIAN SCHOOLBAG PROJECTS ONLINE

[www.](#)



FROM NOISE TO SOUND

Forms 1 to 4 can access an online lesson where children help the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra to create a musical accompaniment for a concert closing piece. The second part of the lesson is a performance by an orchestra musician.

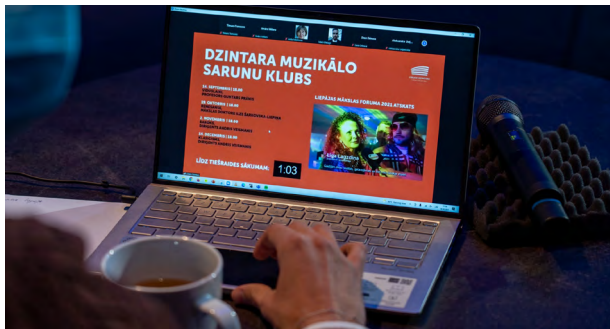


JAZZ HOUR FOR ADOLESCENTS

Upper form pupils can enjoy a concert video and hear a talk on jazz music and its history. The talk is moderated by Deniss Paškevičs (saxophone player, jazz instructor) and Kristaps Vanadzīņš (pianist, composer). After the lesson, pupils can test what they've learnt with a tenpoint quiz.

AMBER'S MUSICAL TALK CLUB

24 SEPTEMBER 2021 THROUGH
10 MAY 2022



The Great Amber Concert Hall teamed up with the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music and Uniting History Foundation to produce an educational programme on European and world music history. It consisted of 10 lectures held once a month on Tuesday nights and available to visitors on-site and remotely. Everyone who attended at least seven events could claim a confirmation certificate.

The turnout was impressive. On average, around 250 people from all over Latvia followed the talks and asked many questions. We were surprised to discover that this type of content was scarce in the country's adult education sector, which probably explains the high demand.

Challenges

The biggest challenge has been attracting an audience. The current offer of digital content is impressive, but the question remains: how to make digital products financially viable? This time, our projects received financial support, but you can't expect to forever rely on additional funding sources. The problem is building a stable audience because to date, the Latvian market has not formed a habit to consume such digital products, let alone at a fee. Culture cannot be free. Someone has to pay for it, so the biggest challenge is making digital content profitable.

Throughout the pandemic, project managers had to learn digital product management, including a new technical language, to organise the team. The legal issues surrounding digital content were highly problematic. Yes, concerts run live, but the recording remains, and that was a problem for the copyright and contracts. Some artists can charge another fee for a recording if the product remains publicly available online. The entire team had to change the mindset and start thinking about the audience for both our onsite and digital products.

It's hard to say if digitalisation has given us a new audience. We've resumed giving concerts on-site, but the turnouts haven't been great – people are afraid of large public gatherings. Shifting to digital concerts, we were surprised to see that the audience was no longer from Liepāja but had expanded to include Rīga and the farther-off regions of the country. For the people of Liepāja, The Great Amber is a physical venue, not digital, so we concluded that the digital offer wasn't locally appealing.

Innovative practices

In 2022, we plan to launch The Great Amber Digital – a permanent online platform with concert recordings and other digital products. This will be a new way to communicate with listeners – users will need to register, hopefully giving us a stable digital audience. That said, in principle, with the digital concert hall and digitisation as such, the only way for them to work is to go hand in hand with live concerts – people come to watch and listen onsite and, at the same time, the event is remotely available worldwide. We've received positive feedback on the concerts being available to people who couldn't have come in person. With our excellent tech, we can develop first-rate digital products.

Takeaways

With the new cameras and tech, space rental has been our second-best source of revenue throughout the pandemic – a tremendous financial boost.

Going digital has connected us to a broader audience. For instance, normally, the From Noise to Sound project would be taken by the schools of Liepāja and the nearby areas a bus ride away. Now, the digital format has enabled us to reach out across all of Latvia, so it's been a hugely valuable and financially viable product.

Suggestions

- Although the new situation has meant tons of extra work and shaky motivations, it's important we keep up the good work. We must press on to keep the audience interested in culture so that people don't forget what it means to physically come in and attend a concert. Sadly, we see some can easily live without culture. And with epidemiological restrictions in place, fewer people actively follow the country's languishing concert life, which makes it all the more critical to hold on to the habit of attending cultural events.

Looking into the future

It is not uncommon for a pandemic-induced digital solution to be seen as a patchup or a temporary measure until we can go back to normal once the dust finally settles. For The Great Amber, digitalisation is a strategic goal. The Great Amber Digital as an online platform with live broadcasts, archived recordings and an e-shop will be an unprecedented, oneofakind product in our country's cultural scene. Ultimately, people will be able to take a subscription. The Great Amber offers a dazzling array of diverse musical experiences, so our product range could be broader than most and give us an edge over our competitors, but it should take at least another three years before we can judge how the solution pans out.

Latvian National Symphony Orchestra

Told by
Artūrs Cāns, Marketing and Client
Services Director

The Latvian National Symphony Orchestra (LNSO) aspires to offer its listeners a broad repertoire of symphony music through outstanding artistic performance, delivering to the Latvian public the classical jewels and lat-

est trends of world music and introducing the international audience to the finest treasures of Latvian music. A key priority is to keep reaching out to new audiences through modern and creative educational programmes.

Solutions and activities



THE LNSO DIGITAL CONCERT HALL SINCE 2020 www.tiesraides.lv

The LNSO Digital Concert Hall has been developed with financial support from Latvia's Ministry of Culture and through successful cooperation with Channel TV4 and the www.tiesraides.lv video company. Several concert recordings and live broadcasts are publicly available free of charge on the LNSO website, and they keep attracting a large audience. The platform delivers an alternative cultural experience, enabling remote audiences to follow live concert broadcasts and watch unprecedented concert recordings to maintain a connection with culture.



THE LNSO PODCAST FROM 2020 www.tiesraides.lv

The LNSO podcast came about as a direct consequence of the pandemic. Conceived as an extra means to reach out to a larger audience, it has grown into a distinct product in and of itself, and there are already plans in place for its future development. The recent proliferation of podcasts as a genre has been tremendous – in just a few years, people have developed a habit of listening and have become dedicated followers, so this type of content is certainly worth developing.

In each new episode of the LNSO podcast, its host – the orchestra's editor-in-chief Orests Silabriedis – talks to a guest on a range of topics across the fields of culture, history and philosophy.

Challenges

“The pandemic has given us a solid base and state support in the form of funding to develop this content, but we do need to think about how to make it financially viable in the future.”

A major challenge is that the audience hasn't developed a habit to consume digital content. To convince someone to buy a digital concert, you first need to provide adequate quality because on the Internet, we compete with digital products from all over the world. Within the industry, too, we're still figuring out how to deal with this product because digital content is new for both audience and performers.

Another challenge is the workload within the organisation, as digital solutions mean extra work on top of your regular duties and team commitments. To be efficient, the existing mechanism must be adjusted, and we have to decide if we're going to train our current staff to take on new duties or recruit new people already with the skills that we need. Another thing that's changed is communication within the organisation – we need new strategies, which links to the issue of staff motivation.

Innovative practices

Digitalised concerts and live broadcasts, which we were able to do thanks to our broadcasting partners, helped reach 15 000 to 20 000 viewers on television. Live broadcasts swiftly became an effective channel to connect with the audience and make our content more widely available. The LNSO Podcast has a follower base of around 500 to 1,000 listeners. This level of public interest suggests the product has been a success and has great potential.

Takeaways

Concert recordings and live broadcasts used to be a seldom practice, mostly reserved for special occasions, but now the LNSO can record nearly every major concert it gives in a year. The live broadcasts and concert recordings are publicly accessible and readily available to all, but the real impact of digitalisation will only be assessable over time.

The opportunity to include concert recordings in The Latvian School Bag programme was a tremendous boost, as we were able to reach out to children and youth. With epidemiological restrictions dragging on and on, the programme was our unbroken link to this age group.

Suggestions

- The pandemic has brought great uncertainty and stifling epidemiological restrictions. In this situation, it is vital to keep up your spirits and try and be more successful in integrating digital products and developing your digital audience. You need targeted plans on cultivating the habit of digital consumption if you want to boost the demand for your product and achieve a competitive edge.

Looking into the future

For now, the LNSO Digital Concert Hall is just a depository of digital concert records, not a fully functional and adequately equipped concert hall, such as The Great Amber. But we are actively planning to install RoboCams at the Great Guild, Rīga. A few years ago, such an investment might not have seemed all that relevant or expedient, but with our recent experience, the issue is both obvious and pressing.

Between 2022 and 2023, the LNSO will have to do without its standard rooms at the Grand Guild while the latter is under reconstruction. So we expect that the challenge to attract and hold on to an audience, especially the citizens of Rīga, will only aggravate once our concert life is confined to regional halls.

The LNSO Podcast has potential – we need to look for solutions to also make a video version of the talks. It might become a way to stay connected with those who'll no longer be able to systematically attend our concerts in the few coming years while the orchestra works away from its headquarters.

Home concerts by Reinis Zariņš

Told by
Reinis Zariņš, pianist

29 MARCH 2020, 3 MAY 2020 AND 13 FEBRUARY 2021

Reinis Zariņš is one of Latvia's most remarkable pianists, master of profound interpretation, a brilliant soloist and a proficient chamber musician whose passion lies in crafting conceptual cross-disciplinary art projects. He

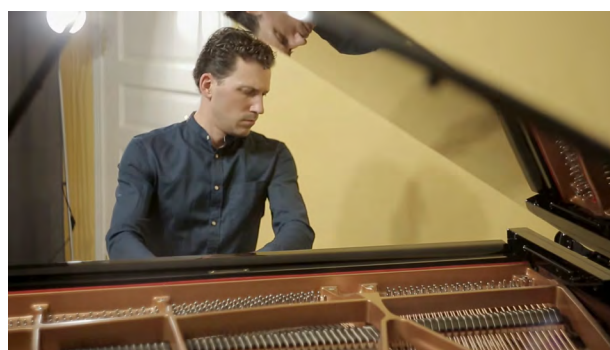
has played in some of the world's most prestigious venues, and his performances have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, Poland's National Radio and other international broadcasting stations.

Solutions and activities

In March 2020, all cultural activities were suddenly banned on account of the pandemic, and interstate travel came to a jarring halt. Confined to his home, Zariņš felt he needed a goal to focus his energies, and with family support came the idea of home concerts.

Thus, Zariņš offered his audience a **home concert series**. Each of the four concerts 'took' the audience to a particular country – local music was played with some added educational content. The audience was both domestic and international, so the artist spoke in two languages, and the live streaming was made with home technology.

In the spring of 2021, with another wave of restrictions in place, the artist gave his fifth concert in the series. With sincere public encouragement, Zariņš produced the show and, helped by his friends, streamed it in superior



picture quality enabled by substantially better technical equipment. Although this concert was given a year after the first series, attendance hadn't dropped and was actually higher.

Challenges

“On the one hand, communication with the audience is direct and more personal, but something fundamental is missing.”

The digital format was a massive challenge. Normally in a concert hall, the audience's silence is a powerful testimony to their presence and absolute attention, and that can't be felt in a digital recital. For instance, at the start of the third concert, there were no audience comments on the live stream, although there had been the previous times, so, for a moment, Zariņš felt overwhelmed by loneliness and doubt – perhaps the video wasn't working, or maybe no one had cared to join? Inadequate contact in the digital environment is one of the main reasons this experience was so challenging and demanding. To quote from the artist, “I'd emptied myself completely, and that's how I left – empty. I got nothing back. It's an intangible – the spiritual reality of our physical togetherness.”

The tech was another challenge. Although Zariņš had an assistant who followed the technical progress of the live streams, the idea that the entire concert hinged on the quality of a home Internet connection was very disturbing.

Innovative practices

The concert was conceived and produced as a computer-assisted experience, not an imitation of a regular show, hence the uncommon emphasis on educational content. With real travel banned, the subject felt really current – travelling across cultures.

Zariņš prepared everything on his own. He came up with the idea for a promotional video, filmed it and edited, and learned to live stream content online. Appropriate tech in the online shops had been sold out, so he used simple devices available at home.

Takeaways

One of the biggest takeaways was experiencing a unique personal contact with the listeners and seeing how much these concerts matter. This was a chance to reach out worldwide, and the streams were followed by a few fellow musicians whom the artist hadn't seen for quite a long time. They followed actively and left their comments. Such communication doesn't typically happen in a concert hall – when the public is asked a question, the answers are vague and hard to catch.

Chatting to the audience between the pieces revealed snippets of personal information that pianists tend not to give from the stage. For example, musicians don't usually give their wives flowers in regular concerts, but the home format allows it. These personal details make the artist more approachable and establish a closer connection with the viewership.

Although Zariņš has always enjoyed a fair amount of creative freedom in his solo recitals, the home concert format eliminated the last limitations – he had no opposition or varying opinions, the programme could be planned and performed as he wished. So it was an excellent chance to play the things the audience usually doesn't get to hear.

Audience support and positive messages were a massive bonus. As a rule, there is no way to experience it after regular concerts – a few people might go backstage and say something, someone might post a comment on Facebook. Either way, the feedback's fairly limited. In the home concerts, it was much more pronounced, and the comments came from the heart.

Crucially, some of the positive reactions translated into financial support. The concerts were streamed live free of charge to give broad unlimited access, but there was the option to send donations. At a time when many had no income whatsoever, the decision to introduce the option was a leap of faith. In fact, the people were willing to donate even more than they would normally pay for a ticket. Moreover, the donations came in with affectionate comments, bracing the artist's entire family.

Suggestions

- At this challenging time, it's extremely important to push your boundaries and break the mould, learn new things and educate yourself on emergent technical solutions. To let down your guard and be approachable. Humans crave personal contact and a sense of community. Music has the capacity to bring people together, rally the spirits and spark incredible joy. So we have to believe that music has power and meaning and keep looking for ways to reach out and touch people with it.

Looking into the future

Although the experience with the home concerts has been really positive, it's too early to call digital shows the new normal. Yes, they are a successful solution with no other options in place. But hybrid events, when onsite concerts are recorded and subsequently available in an archive, are even more practical because the recordings then become accessible to a larger audience. That said, there is much uncertainty about hybrid events where presence on site is combined with streaming online. By coming in person, people show that they care, and artists need this human presence. However, won't it become more convenient for the audience to stay at home, on their sofa, see all the closeups on stage and pay a lower ticket price into the bargain? It may well become hard to balance this out.

What's important is that home concerts are done under suitable conditions, in an appropriate situation. All the concerts so far have been held in direct response to the pandemic. Today, we need to think about the public that cannot attend concerts on-site without a vaccination certificate. It's essential not to pretend these people don't exist and show them some solidarity. With this in mind, home concerts might become all the more relevant.

Urban Serenades concerts in Liepāja's neighbourhoods

Told by
Ainars Ronis, Senior Project
Manager, Liepāja Department of
Culture

15 MAY THROUGH 12 JUNE 2020

Solutions and activities

THE URBAN SERENADES CONCERT SERIES [www.](#)

In late April 2020, with strict epidemiological restrictions in place, we had the idea to bring culture out to the people, so the Liepāja Department of Culture produced a new programme with pop-up concerts in 10 courtyards across the city. It was important to cover the entire city and reach the most faraway neighbourhoods. That spring, public gatherings were severely limited, so the concert sites and schedules had to be kept a secret to avoid attracting large crowds. The events were aimed at the people who lived in the nearby houses, but they were also live-streamed online.

The Urban Serenades were available free of charge from the windows of residents' homes and through live Internet broadcasts. Ten concerts were held across five weeks, featuring popular musicians – Ivo Fomins, Uldis Marhilēvičs, Jānis Strazds, Andris Ērglis, Ainars Virga, Tabita Balode, Karina Tatarinova, etc. There was no prior notice of the venues, and municipal police were on-site as a security precaution.



Challenges

The greatest challenge was to negotiate the use of sites with the landlords. With each location, we had to contact the managing company, have the residents sign a form of consent and agree that the concert would take place on a given day without revealing the time slot. Dealing with private property wasn't easy – most people were very responsive, but a certain house in the city centre refused consent, and we had to look for another location.

Another unknown was how residents would react to the concerts. The first one took place in the SouthWest District, and we had trouble keeping everyone inside at their windows. Municipal police helped keep the distance between the people who had come down to watch. So, the first concert exposed the need to be extra careful with the risk of public gathering. The rest of the shows went more smoothly and from then on all the organisers' instructions were followed. By the last concert at the Lakeside District, people had grown accustomed to expecting one and even went on search missions to try and find the next location. The final show took place in the summer towards the end of the restrictions, with more people coming to watch.

Live broadcasts from each concert were a smashing success. They became so popular that the Council even got comments about distorting the market. At that time, several locallybased musicians and producers offered paytowatch digital concerts and had to compete with the freeofcharge offer. This is important and deserves respect, so similar programmes in the future should perhaps reconsider the extent and relevance of live broadcasts.

Innovative practices

The concerts were organised throughout the city. Local audiences are rather different – normally, the larger events all concentrate in the city centre, with other areas, such as the Karosta, having fewer. Each venue has its vibe, so we tried to match them with the right performers. Although we did our best to keep the locations and times a secret, the venues needed to be prepared in advance, rehearsals had to be held, so, naturally, the people suspected that something was brewing.

The live broadcasts could be called effective because several thousand viewers logged on to watch, but being present on-site was certainly a more personal experience. People were surprised to see concerts in places where nothing like this had ever happened. A pop-up concert, star musicians, diverse musical material. For instance, actress Karīna Tatarinova's performance featured Russian serenades to make the programme more appealing to the mixed audience of ethnic Latvians, Russians and Lithuanians.

Takeaways

Such a model is a great way to bring culture to different places across the city and revitalise the neighbourhoods. There've been very few concerts to match these in audience reactions and positive feedback. There are places in Liepāja where nothing like that had ever happened, and it was touching to witness how well the public responded, to see happy people chilling out on their balconies, sipping coffee and listening to music. It was also an excellent way to reach out to an audience that most likely doesn't go to the city centre to see concerts or participate in the larger events.

"In Green Grove, we asked the head of the care home to take people out onto the balcony. The Covid-19 crisis hit care homes hard, causing terrible problems; the residents were effectively banned from going out, so I asked for them to be taken onto the balconies. They were so grateful."

Suggestions

- ▶ The pandemic struck the cultural sector particularly hard. There were days you couldn't help fearing culture would disappear altogether, taking away our spiritual values. A lesson for the future here would be to think outside the box. For those who've been stuck in a rut, doing things one way for years and years, this could become an excellent shakeup to look for new forms of expression and creative solutions.
- ▶ Our primary function is to provide a high-quality cultural offer and nurture creativity. Sometimes, you can get something new by tweaking an old thing or borrowing an existing solution and adding your personal touch. Back in 2020, when our concert series was still taking place, courtyard concerts began to pop up in other Latvian cities with different alterations. There were some great creative ideas on how to develop our initiative.

Looking into the future

This concert type has excellent future potential because it helps reach and engage the entire city, not just the central area, as is the standard practice. Our idea could morph into a digital story that starts in the centre with a smaller programme and then pops up in different neighbourhoods. By involving the city and considering different audiences, the history of the place and the atmosphere, the events can become much more meaningful.

Theatre

Like most cultural institutions, theatres tried to work on-site as much as possible while visitor restrictions were in place, meanwhile offering some remoteaccess content. The online format allows reaching out to a wider audience, including those who might never go to the theatre in person. The digital environment opens up new opportunities for creativity and offstage experiments with a boosting effect on the genre. The digital and the onsite format both have distinct, exceptional qualities, and they do not replace one another but exist side by side, with tremendous potential for playful cross-format interactions and original hybrid forms.

The theatre industry has had to be intensely creative in looking for new ways to address the viewers. In the course of the pandemic, a few bold and innovative forms have emerged, such as online virtual shows, dialin audio productions, interactive shows with audience engagement through props and tasks delivered by parcel stations, and walkaround shows in the city taking each participant on an individual adventure.

Theatre is a demanding art form and cannot be easily moved to the digital setting. Fundamental to an authentic theatrical experience is the viewer's presence at the show and their interaction with the actors on stage. These subtle intangibles can never go digital, or we risk losing some of the defining qualities of the genre.

The form and content of pandemic productions reflect pressing social issues and shifts in the public mood. It is hard to imagine any other situation that could have sparked an offer to place a solitary phone call and listen to a story, enter into a conversation with an actor, perform instructions and effectively cocreate a production. Or enjoy a virtual show on Zoom – the near-ubiquitous element of most people's pandemic workdays.

Experiments with form and structure have sparked a debate about the very nature of theatre – what it is and what it isn't, and how to classify these innovative performances. These controversial questions and attendant discussions are in themselves a valuable contribution towards future developments across the sector.



KVADRIFRONS Company: Dial-In Theatre

New Theatre Institute of Latvia

Told by
Beka Bergere, Creative Director

The New Theatre Institute of Latvia (NTIL) is a non-governmental, nonprofit organisation with domestic and international outreach, working within and across contemporary performing arts, including theatre, dance and other art forms. NTIL pushes the boundaries of theatre

production, distribution and perception and promotes the development of diverse, innovative, responsible and independent professional performing arts through immediate and passionate reactions to current processes and needs in Latvian and European theatre.

Solutions and activities

THE HOMO NOVUS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY THEATRE 8 TO 18

SEPTEMBER 2021 [www.](#)

The festival aims to reflect on Latvian soil some of the most exciting and trending contemporary theatre developments worldwide and attract the industry's leading performers. The greatest challenge of Homo Novus 2021 was the planning stage during the spring lockdown, not knowing what the situation would be at the time of the festival. When planning the programme, the aim was to select the content that could be adapted to varied formats – in the event of a ban on indoor performances, they would take place in unorthodox spaces or out-of-doors. The emphasis was on readiness to adapt the show, which took long conversations with artists and drafting different action scenarios. The festival ran predominantly onsite, but the programme also included a few remoteaccess projects.

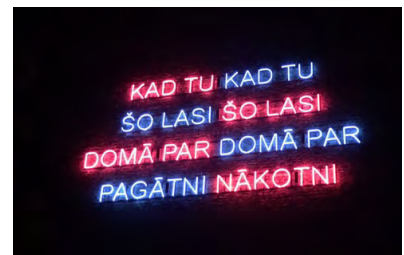
A THOUSAND WAYS. PART ONE: A PHONE CALL – A HOME THEATRE PRODUCTION [www.](#)

This dial-in production in English was made in cooperation with the ANTI Contemporary Art Festival in Finland, whose participants were at the other end of the line. The show connected the participants across national borders.



THE WITNESS STAND – AN OPEN-AIR SHOW [www.](#)

The show ran in six different locations across Rīga. Since several sites were inaccessible to persons in wheelchairs, a live broadcast was provided in cooperation with LSM. LV public media portal.



WRITTEN IN NEON [www.](#)

This summer project coincided with Homo Novus but wasn't affiliated with the festival. It ran online masterclasses for neon artists. During the festival, neon signs were put up in various places in Rīga in the spirit of contemporary performance art. Now they've left to stay in different regions of Latvia.

LIVE LATVIAN THEATRE SHOWCASE

2 TO 5 NOVEMBER 2021 www.lvtheatre.lv



The purpose of LiVe is to present Latvian performing arts to international professionals. For that, the showcase must run on-site, but already back at the planning stage, it was decided

that some content would be available remotely. This would be around 20% so that Latvian theatre could be experienced by the people who know nothing about the country yet wouldn't risk travelling in a pandemic. This audience should be offered digital-access solutions that would introduce Latvian performing arts and could spark an interest in potential cooperation. However, in the autumn, the epidemiological situation rapidly deteriorated, and in just two weeks,

the showcase had to be replanned to run entirely online. This was complicated because many artists had an opinion on how the digital content should look but lacked adequate technical skills for their ideas. In the face of the need to produce a fully digital version of LiVe in a very short time, we tried to recreate a structure found in several other digital performing art displays. The showcase programme included project presentations, shows, discussions and pitches.

Challenges

The toughest challenges have been to do with funding. The government imposed varying epidemiological restrictions but was slow to follow them up with support mechanisms. When it was suddenly necessary to shift from onsite to fully digital content within a very short time, no adequate support was offered, although the same quality was expected. There are no appropriate action mechanisms in place for such abrupt changes, which is the worst challenge event organisers will face. In a pandemic situation, it is extremely hard to plan ahead, and you're constantly adapting to yet another sudden shift.

For instance, when we were frantically replanning the entire LiVe showcase to quickly move it online, there were no financial support mechanisms to expedite the process. Under the latest epidemiological safety measures imposed in the autumn of 2021, which also affected the LiVe showcase, event organisers were able to apply for a support programme of ticket refunds, which in no way covered free-access events.

Innovative practices

With digital content, one should keep in mind that the audience's attention can have substantially declined. If the spectator is right there in the room, they will give all their attention to what is happening on stage. When consuming digital content from home or an office, this focus won't be exclusive – we're talking completely different viewing habits. So it was important not to place full-length shows lasting several hours on the showcase platform but to use fragments and emphasise variety and scope in order to tease the public interest and nurture subsequent communication – a dialogue with the authors of the show.

There are other strategies to address foreign guests, especially those with no prior experience of Latvian theatre. For example, if an international guest speaker is invited to speak on a discussion panel, first they will need to get the picture of Latvia's current situation – an important strategy widely used in various international showcases.

The showcase had scheduled a few productions designed for remote access, and those were a brilliant success. That said, the shows that had to go digital at the last minute due to epidemiological restrictions aren't the finished product. The content was presented to international curators, but wasn't available to the general public because it hadn't been made for digital use.

Takeaways

The organisers managed to achieve their main goals of involving more than 100 international participants who wouldn't have otherwise taken part and helping at least half of the artists featured in the project to start negotiating international cooperation. The overall number of international participants registered for the showcase had almost doubled compared to previous years, and we've established communication with partners whom we wouldn't have otherwise engaged.

An exciting innovation this year was project pitches – something that's not habitually used in Latvian performing arts but is a well-known practice in other countries. Swedish producer Magnus Nordberg trained nine artists selected for the project pitching programme. As a result, they each have a video of their project that can be used in different situations to present their work briefly and concisely. These presentations also informed Latvian artists about each other's work and launched several co-operations within the country.

A brilliant solution was to invest funds and effort in the showcase website from the very start of the project. Without it, when the showcase was going full digital at the last moment, we wouldn't have had a proper platform to put it on. Previously, the showcase ran on a smaller budget and with no digital elements, but the KultūrELPA programme of the State Culture Capital Foundation enabled us to develop a new online platform. Crucially, the website and the digital archive will be continuously available online.

Suggestions

- ▶ Adapting to the ever-shifting global situation in a pandemic is a massive challenge. But there's no need to go fully digital. With our theatre showcase, we started off with the idea that there might come a time when we'd need to digitalise our content, so solutions were considered and scheduled in good time.
- ▶ If you've had to cancel an onsite show at the last minute, you have to think very carefully if it's worth moving it online. Some shows simply can't be fully adapted to the digital format, whereas others are perfectly flexible. It's essential to consider this in advance. This timely approach will make it easier to make the right choice if needed.
- ▶ During the summer, it became clear that people rush to see shows on-site at the first opportunity rather than continue to watch remotely. So you need a very good reason to offer a digital product. Jamming an on-site product into a digital 'box' can be really problematic.

“Having discussed this with an international colleague, my impression was that moving festivals or productions online doesn't mean engaging a wider audience; it is rather a means to keep roughly the same audience rates in the small and medium-size festival sector.”

Looking into the future

Although digital engagement in online events can create intriguing conversations and dynamic communication, in the digital environment, it is hard to see how the show would have gone on-site and what emotional impact it would have had. It's important to know this when you plan cooperation. So, the digital is an excellent add-on to onsite content but not a complete replacement.

In the coming years, the LiVe showcase is expected to continue in hybrid form, both to navigate the shifting landscape of the pandemic and to engage professionals who can't be present on-site. The live.theatre.lv online platform will be maintained and developed, working towards a digital archive of Latvian theatre productions.

KVADRIFRONS Company: Dial-In Theatre

Told by
Ance Strazda, actress

KVADRIFRONS is an independent, non-governmental, nonprofit theatre company founded in September 2017 by a small group of like-minded artists: Reinis Boters, Klāvs Mellis, Āris Matesovičs, Ance Strazda and Evarts Melnalksnis. Its cross-disciplinary programme fuses the elements of theatre, music,

the visual arts and film. KVADRIFRONS aims to talk about interpersonal and social relations here and now, offer a critical assessment of the past, an active stance in the today and an emergent vision for the future – all with a healthy dose of humour, irony and controversy.

Solutions and activities



THE SONG OF ROLAND – A DIAL-IN THEATRE SHOW 14 AUGUST 2020 THROUGH 28 JANUARY 2021



The making of The Song of Roland as a dial-in theatre show was a long and intense journey. At first, we intended to produce an onsite event as one normally would, on stage. Then the pandemic hit and threw the plan out of the window, so the team had to look for new solutions. Several formats were considered and discarded. We even tried to record the show on film until it finally became a dial-in production after a long search for suitable options. This format gave the team a solid feeling: although the end result doesn't happen onsite with

the audience present, listening on the phone still creates an authentic theatrical experience you simply don't get from a video recording.

The production is based on the French medieval epic The Song of Roland. The story has been taken to modern-day Latvia, focusing on a fierce rivalry between two rural choirs dead-set on qualifying for the grand gala concert of the country's Nationwide Song Festival. The show is available on the phone as an interactive acoustic experience, where the listener can choose how the events will progress.

THE CHRONICLE OF A RĪGAN RAG – A PERFORMATIVE AUDIO SHOW 14 JULY THROUGH 30 AUGUST 2021



The idea of a walkaround show was first tested at the Valmiera Summer Theatre Festival 2020 with an earlier production – Tour de Valmiera. The format was exciting



and inviting: people were happy to walk and engage in interactive activities. An urban audio show has its advantages: you can manipulate the space where you've taken your audience and create new experiences. It is also a very accessible product, particularly in the middle of a pandemic, so the idea was developed further and taken to Old Rīga.

The show combines different stories and urban legends about Rīga, focusing on its formation and expected destruction someday in the future. The participants take a stroll down the Old Town streets across seven stops to try and solve the mystery of The Rag and figure out how to prevent the city's mythical collapse. The walkaround audio show was available free of charge 24/7.

Challenges

Bad timing was a fundamental problem for both projects. Preparing The Song of Roland took a very long time, and the show came out when the pandemic-induced restrictions had been temporarily lifted, which meant digital content was losing appeal. On the other hand, The Chronicle of a Rīgan Rag didn't get funding at first attempt – it was granted only when the project was resubmitted. Crucially, the funding came in the summer, when onsite events were also

allowed, and remote-access solutions were no longer relevant. Plus, the heat drew the public out of town, so visitor numbers fell short of their full potential.

Innovative practices

“The technical solution for The Song of Roland was somewhat unorthodox. Basically, the show ran on an answering machine – the ticket holder places a call, chooses an answer to the first question and gets to the following questions and answers. Essentially, it was a pyramid structure where one point of entry leads to different scenarios. It was critical to make sure that the listener could keep track of the story and understand the larger plotline, whatever the chosen path. The approach produced a fascinating material, but it was timeconsuming and difficult to develop. The technical side was administered by the Latvian Mobile Telephone company – they created an answering machinetype system with around 200 steps. Thus, with this service outsourced, the theatre company didn’t have to worry about technical solutions.

Although audio shows are generally available in a digital format, most often, through headphones on your phone, The Chronicle of a Rīgan Rag ran differently, enabling any curious passer-by to jump right in by following the instructions found in the multiple stops around town and hearing the tale on a loudspeaker. A knock on the right door gave you a piece of the story, revealing the following stop at the end.

Takeaways

A great deal of work was invested in The Song of Roland, and the result can be called a success. Without a pandemic, such a format would never have been found. The piece would have been made on stage, as had been the norm. Now the new material can be used as a springboard for further development.

**“I guess this is the greatest takeaway –
pushing your borders.”**

The Song of Roland was offered in The Latvian School Bag programme, and many schools purchased it for their students. To get some feedback on the product, the company asked teachers to get their pupils’ perspectives. Their feedback shows that most young people had trouble following the show because they were unable to fully grasp the information only by listening – they lacked visuals and couldn’t picture what was going on. That was a surprise because imagining the story hadn’t been a problem for adult listeners. This suggests that the new generation really struggles with narrative audio content, so we’re thinking about producing a comic strip to go with the show to make it more accessible to children.

A major takeaway was producing content explicitly aimed at schools. For various reasons, it is easier for teachers to work with the digital content of The Latvian School Bag programme than to organise a school trip to the theatre. This has encouraged the theatre to digitalise its cultural products, making them more accessible and intriguing for specific groups.

Suggestions

- We recommend taking a step up from simply filming theatrical productions and getting away from the screen into the real world. Most viewers enjoy going to the theatre in person, so we must be creative and look for new ways to do theatre outside its building. And we need interactive solutions to give the viewer a more complete and diverse theatrical experience.

Looking into the future

Digitalisation and remoteaccess cultural offer have opened up a range of options for cultural organisations as to what they could do and offer. Onsite theatre certainly can’t be replaced altogether, but the cultural sector now has alternative options and new opportunities stemming from new demand for digital and remoteaccess content, which is unlikely to go away.

KVADRIFRONS is thinking ahead and keeps looking for effective ways to deliver highquality digital content. The pandemic has given us a wide range of theatrical recordings online, which helps us grow and draw conclusions about what works and what doesn’t. The new situation pushes the company to change its mind-frame and think outside the box, effectively integrating digital solutions into its shows already at the production stage to lift the overall quality of the product.

The Iran Conference: An Online Theatre Show

Told by
Elmārs Seņkovs, Director

8 TO 10 MAY 2020,
WITH RE-RUNS FROM 20 DECEMBER 2021 TO
20 FEBRUARY 2022



Elmārs Seņkovs is active across multiple fields as a theatre director, founder and artistic director of the esARTE Theatre Company, and professor of acting and directing at the Latvian Academy of Culture. Consistently immaculate in aesthetics through scrupulous attention to detail, his productions achieve a harmonious blend of classical means of expression

with perceptive referencing of contemporary themes and concerns. The same is true of the message of Seņkovs' productions – through profound engagement with classical material, he finds valid points of intersection with the here and now, exposing a stunning present-day relevance in every play he directs.

Solutions and activities



Pandēmijas sākumā daudzas radošās personības pārcēla. When the pandemic struck, many creators moved online and remained active through a range of alternative ways, such as different forms of digital theatre, book readings, etc. However, it soon became clear that producing a high-quality remote theatrical performance was a complex process. Creators were hurriedly learning the ropes with mixed success. The situation prompted a search for

a fitting solution to using the new format without compromising quality.

Seņkovs had planned to stage *The Iran Conference* by Ivan Vyrypayev well before the pandemic, but the project had been postponed for various reasons. Now, the form of the play proved extremely suitable for Zoom, as the events take place at an international conference in Denmark, where westerners have gathered to discuss the current problems, culture and religion of another country, Iran. The monologues of the conference participants expose several controversial issues and pending questions in the Western culture and society as a whole. For the past couple of years, all conferences have effectively relocated online, so the Zoom format came up as an appropriate solution for the production.

The show was recorded and available free of charge for three days in 2020, and in 2021 it was rerun for a fee. The production won Latvia's National Theatre Award 2019/2020 in the Best Digital Event nomination.

Challenges

An online show depends entirely on technology and the Internet connection. No video editing was made during The Iran Conference recording, so it was crucial to ensure a stable two-hour Internet connection for the actors, especially in the monologues. There were some technical glitches, such as a briefly lagging connection during the monologue of Artūrs Skrastiņš, but the defect was left where it was because it didn't disrupt the story and looked consistent with the conference reality.

The format was tough for the performers because they didn't have the reactions of the other actors or the audience. For an actor concentrating on their own performance, it is hard to read the colleague's response in the tiny square on the screen, which really complicates communication. On stage, actors also feel the atmosphere in the room, sense the mood in the audience, and tweak their performance. In a pre-recorded show, they have no control of the audience and no way to fix any mistakes.

In a Zoom production, actors are visible throughout the show, so they have to stay in the role at all times. They can turn away on stage or step aside, but a permanent close-up in Zoom demands full attention, nonstop. There are a few other circumstances in play that can jar the performer and disrupt concentration, such as a family member or a pet suddenly appearing in the background.

Finally, it was a challenge for the director to work with actors who were not in the same city while the show was being prepared. All communication went on through video calls or by phone. Actors had to work intensively on their own, and there was no time for fundamental changes. The show was produced very fast, with just two weeks for rehearsals.

On the upside, remote-access performances have sparked a debate about the very nature of theatre, whether it can happen in other forms, and what distinguishes recorded theatre from film. Thus, the industry is left with a number of pertinent questions, and there are no right or wrong answers.

“On the one hand, I think it is theatre because there's scenography, there's the play, there are actors playing their parts; it's no documentary but a fictional story with its composition and spacetime. The only difference from regular theatre is that you can freeze time.”

Innovative practices

The show was highly successful due to a variety of factors. First of all, one production brought together a group of actors who would most likely never have met in an onsite project. For instance, Inese Kučinska and Artūrs Skrastiņš have busy careers each in their own theatres, so it's an unusual thing to see them both in one show. The remote-access format brings together actors from different theatres, sparking public interest.

Secondly, the material is very up-to-date and raises important and complex questions: what are the Western-European values, what about our individual values, what does society want, and where's the rush? The viewer tries to find the right answer in the characters. Each monologue takes us further and asks new questions. The content is fresh and relevant – it resonates across Europe and can engage different social groups.

Thirdly, although it's a virtual show, great attention is paid to the physical space. Every character, their appearance and the room they are seen in – all these things reveal some extra details. There is carefully planned virtual scenography and music to amplify the effect. The success of the show is mainly due to the excellent balance between substance and form.

Takeaways

A massive boost was the chance to reach beyond the ranks of regular theatregoers. Many people still have ungrounded stereotypes about theatre, which they associate with a stilted performance or frivolous entertainment. They have no habit of going to the theatre and don't know that it's raising relevant hot-button issues. With remote access, some people stumbled upon the production by chance and then realised – hey, that's some great theatre there!

The show turned out surprisingly appealing to schools. It wasn't offered in The Latvian School Bag on account of its complex themes but proved it could speak to the upper form pupils. The initiative came from the teachers, who saw that it raised some pertinent questions on

a number of tough, controversial topics, fuelling discussion and reflection on the complexities of life.

The show also caught the attention of the broader theatre community. Many members of the industry logged on to see it. No one knows if the production would have made such a splash had it been done on an actual stage. The Internet allows reaching a much broader audience. According to Elmārs Seņkovs, about 8,000 people watched the show over three days. That's, give or take, eight sold-out nights at the National Theatre. Compared to regular theatre plays in terms of attendance, it achieved the impossible.

Suggestions

- ▶ Every problem has a solution, so it's critical we keep looking. The last few years of the pandemic have shown that those who stopped and waited got nothing because they didn't embrace change.
- ▶ The epidemiological situation is getting more stable, and theatres are reopening, but the people aren't coming. Theatres are half-empty. This should have been anticipated, as many had warned it would be difficult to get back the viewers who only went out of habit. This raises the question of what's being done to address those who don't come. This is why it's so important that The Iran Conference also reached out beyond the ranks of regular theatregoers. With subsequent projects and solutions, we need to look for ways to reconnect with the audience, build a dialogue and talk about pressing social issues.

Looking into the future

As a general assessment of the pandemic experience, Seņkovs points out that the remote-access format doesn't go the whole way with theatre. It's been tried and tested, but no one will say the result's been great and they'd love to continue. Overall, people want an onsite theatrical experience. New ideas about remote shows are running thin, and projects get abandoned. The format is unsustainable – it can't outcompete film or onsite theatre. If the latter two are available, remote-access theatre is no longer relevant. And it's tough to compete on the Internet – you're running up against Netflix and other popular streaming platforms.

That said, technology certainly has a future on stage. Some exciting experiments are already underway. For instance, Seņkovs worked with filmmaker Liene Linde in his 2019 show *The Hunt*, and it will go digital in 2022. The original production has been re-imagined as an audio-visual experience appropriate for the digital format. The result, a vibrant mix of theatre and film, premiers on 20 January 2022.

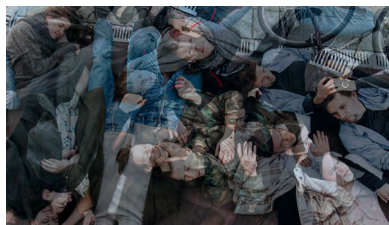
Dirty Deal Teatro (DDT) is a non-governmental professional theatre that engages experienced and emerging directors, playwrights, actors, choreographers and other performing artists to deliver an innovative and contemporary

theatrical experience. Its repertoire includes works on uncomfortable, controversial topics and questions that tend to remain unasked. Through its original plays, DDT aims to tell the untold stories of the here and now.

Solutions and activities

Pandemic theatre falls into two broad categories – productions expressly designed for pandemic conditions and adaptations. Once epidemiological restrictions were introduced, DDT's onsite performances were moved to Zoom, and new remote-access productions were made. Mission: Earth was a Zoom show for children and drew large audiences on The Latvian School Bag programme. The show worked well with learner groups because it had educational content and remote-access availability.

At the start of 2021, it became clear that the ubiquitous Zoom events had started to get on people's nerves, so we made no further plans for significant shows in this format. It was time for new solutions. Listen In! had been a germinant show for some time, but the pandemic convinced us it needed to be re-made into a remote-access audio product. A separate website was created where the audience could enter an access code and step into the shoes of a KGB agent. Exercises of (Be)Longing went through several format changes and was premiered in Estonia before being delivered to the Latvian audience.



WHY I DON'T SLEEP AT NIGHT – A SHORT PLAY SERIES OCTOBER 2020 THROUGH JANUARY 2021



This short play series across four evenings introduced 12 emergent theatre directors. The opening night was held on stage, with the rest available remotely – on Zoom or as an audio walk.

LISTEN IN! – AN ONLINE AUDIO SHOW FROM 15 APRIL 2021



DDT CHAT NIGHTS (Č(V) AKARĒŠANA) – AN ONLINE CHAT SHOW JANUARY THROUGH MARCH 2021



The series featured several remote-access chats where the host, Jānis Kronis, invited DDT-associated theatre directors to talk about their professional and personal lives. The series ran every other Tuesday for three months and gave the public a more personal take on the directors of DDT productions.

This interactive online audio show by Valters Silis put the audience into the shoes of a KGB agent secretly eavesdropping on the phone talks of multiple suspects. The show could be accessed remotely through a website and featured an interactive element because each listener would choose which stories to follow.



EXERCISES OF (BE) LONGING - A DIAL-IN AUDIO SHOW

6 TO 7 NOVEMBER 2021



The show presents the true stories of different people about their experience of belonging and struggling to fit in across multiple facets of life. A package containing five envelopes with photographs and phone numbers is sent to the ticket holder through a parcel machine. After calling a specified number at a specified time, the caller gets connected to a narrator who shares his or her experience. In the course of one hour, the caller hears five different stories and keeps track through the photographs.



A WALK THROUGH THE TRIUMPH ARCADE

MAY 2021



In this unorthodox time, it seemed the audience was looking for reasons to get away from digital screens and leave the house. It was clear people wouldn't be buying tickets to Zoom shows in the warm days of May but would prefer to go out and see an art object in a park. The location and timing were carefully selected to fit the project theme and attract a broader audience - May is the cherry blossom season in Riga's Victory Park, and the Ninth of May celebrations gather masses of very different people in this open-air venue.

We placed eight triumphal arc-shaped objects made by our actors across Victory Park in Riga. The project aimed to spark discussion and stimulate reflection about victory and loss on a personal and social scale.



MISSION: EARTH

NOVEMBER 2020
THROUGH FEBRUARY 2021



Director Inga Trope made this online show for children about a distant future when the Earth is no longer habitable due to a series of ecological catastrophes, so two people go into space to look for a new home. In the end, they find that home is closer than they thought. The show was available remotely on Zoom.

Challenges

The greatest challenge has been to attract the audience. Although the theatre had plenty of content, viewers simply couldn't get there in person for various reasons. When conditions began to change and restrictions were relaxed, theatres resumed receiving visitors, but the audience numbers were low, and they haven't really gone back up. People have lost the habit of coming in and participating. At the start of the pandemic, social media were still buzzing, people were sharing cultural developments, events and ideas. Now it's dead quiet, and the public is exhausted.

The Exercises of (Be)Longing succeeded in attracting and engaging an audience in both Latvian and Russian, but the English-speaking part of Latvia's population remained unengaged. It is difficult to pin down the reasons, but the final months of 2021 were an especially dry spell.

Technically too, the Exercises of (Be)Longing presented several challenges. The show required a number of actions from the viewer, so we had to find a way to give simple and straightforward cues. They needed to understand what had to be done and what to expect. The entire show hinged on logistics - we had to compile relevant information and send out the parcels, which required new skills and knowledge.

Innovative practices

The creative team and the theatre in general did well with finding ideas for remote access solutions targeted at different audiences - we used a custommade website, telephones, parcel machines and online options. All this was new in the theatre repertoire. Physical engagement through packages shipped to parcel machines and an actual telephone conversation

helped make the Exercises of (Be)Longing a more realistic, tangible, personal and profound theatrical experience.

Takeaways

“The best thing about remote-access shows is their outreach to an audience beyond Riga, especially the places with no theatres at all.”

Listen In! is an excellent show for adolescents and youth, and remote solutions have made it generally available. It is such a boost that culture and theatre have become accessible across Latvia, beyond the larger cities and towns. On that account, the remote-access format should definitely be kept as an additional option for the future.

Suggestions

- ▶ A computer isn't the only way to create and offer theatre shows remotely. You can enjoy a play on the go from your pocket or listen to one on your phone. Theatre can also be taken out into the city. With no other options in place, theatres can still give their viewers a chance to experience art, exchange views and share perspectives.
- ▶ The main thing is not to be afraid to give things a try. The Exercises of (Be)Longing were a formidable challenge to start with, but the show managed to find its audience and brought in some great reviews. If something seems overly complicated, it's good to remember that people are smart, and we have to give them credit. Then even the most complex ideas will be a success.
- ▶ When we plan shows and cultural events, it's important to find the right timing for each product. We need to keep track of current events and developments, understand what is trending here and now and try to predict the right time for the offer to reach the broadest possible audience.

Looking into the future

Because remote-access shows are so easily and generally available, it's important to keep this form alive. Zoom might not be the best fit for the purpose, but there are alternatives – phone calls, audio walks and, potentially, other solutions. The theatre could also consider more site-specific art objects and events out of doors. Audiences are looking for ways to get away from screens, for reasons to leave their homes and experience something new, and nature and the city offer plenty of opportunities for people to meet.

Film

The film industry has suffered significantly from pandemic-induced restrictions on public gatherings over the past two years. Since cinemas are a non-essential service, they were immediately closed as soon as the first emergency situation was declared in mid-March 2020. Later, they were briefly allowed to reopen, albeit with caps on visitor numbers in place, before being closed again at the end of the year. 2021 was a similar limbo, with sporadic closings and re-openings, always with some capacity limits.

Some cinemas have sought creative ways to adapt to the new situation and stay operational. Whenever possible, they offered home cinema and online streaming services. Traditional film festivals and awards were partially or entirely relocated online. Educational lectures, film schools and seminars also continued remotely.

Film production never stopped, but premieres have been substantially delayed in the hopes of showing them on-site. In autumn 2021, the National Film Centre supported Screen Matters – a Latvian premiere marathon that called to experience film on the big screen. During the marathon, theatres all over the country showed the latest Latvian films produced over the last two years.

In sum, this time has brought new digital tools and communication channels to reach out to the audience and a chance to attract a broader viewership through online platforms. However, a complete film experience clearly requires presence onsite, so the digital tools can be only an add-on.



Kino Bize Cinema

The National Film Centre (NFC) aims to implement national policy in the film sector. It maintains the filmas.lv portal – the world’s largest online database of Latvian film, with informa-

tion on more than 2600 films made in Latvia since 1920. Some are permanently available to watch free of charge.

Solutions and activities

The National Film Centre had a fundamental resource in place well before the emergency – the filmas.lv platform. With pandemic-induced restrictions limiting public gatherings, several film festivals were organised in a remote-access format. Thematic film collections were also offered online, celebrating special occasions or directors. Once the restrictions were imposed, the new situation required an immediate reaction. Culture went largely online. The online film offer grew when filmmakers started to initiate putting their work out there for remote access.



THE FOURTH OF MAY LATVIAN FILM MARATHON MAY 2020 AND MAY 2021

www.filmas.lv

During the national emergency, the Latvian Film Marathon went online and could be accessed worldwide while still maintaining the ‘cinema model’ – nine film runs at specific times, including a few premieres.



LATVIAN FILM WORLDWIDE – A MIDSUMMER FESTIVAL JUNE 2020 AND JUNE 2021

www.filmas.lv

The online film festival featured 10 Latvian films and could be watched free of charge on computers worldwide.

SCHOOL FILMS ONLINE MARCH THROUGH MAY 2020

www.filmas.lv



With the introduction of remote learning in schools, the NFC decided to support teachers and pupils by giving free access to School Films – an online film

collection previously available only to educators with an access code. For three months, until the end of the school year, each Latvian learner could access the materials from home. To provide it, the NFC had to work on copyright issues and get permission from each featured filmmaker. The offer also included educational materials for all 16 films from the Latvian Films for the Centenary programme.



BALTIC SEA DOCS – THE BALTIC SEA FORUM FOR DOCUMENTARIES

SEPTEMBER 2020 ONLINE AND SEPTEMBER 2021 IN HYBRID FORM www.film.lv

During the 2020 festival, the filmas.lv portal offered a free Baltic Sea documentary parade – eight films that had earned praise in international festivals. They were available across Latvia in the form of scheduled online screenings. In 2021, the festival ran in a hybrid format, with some films available in cinemas and others online on the filmas.lv platform.

LIELAIS KRISTAPS NATIONAL FILM AWARD

NOVEMBER 2020; THE 2021 FESTIVAL HAS BEEN RESCHEDULED TO 2022 www.film.lv

Given the national emergency, the Lielais Kristaps Film Award 2020 was held online and on television. Before the event, the audience could go online to the filmas.lv platform and see all the nominated films, a few premieres and a retrospective collection of the Life Award winner Kalvis Zalcmanis. Films were also available on other platforms.

Challenges

The unpredictability was harsh. New restrictions often took effect a week or even a few days before the scheduled event. So the NFC had to adapt very quickly, which is difficult for the film sector, given that there is no way to mechanically transfer onsite screenings online because each film is bound by contracts that limit the display to a broader range of viewers on Latvian soil and beyond.

Double-scheduling the events for onsite and online conditions demands a great deal of extra work, which is format-specific. Festival programmes will also be different for onsite and online formats due to copyright issues.

Innovative practices

Organising online events was an entirely new experience. To preserve the sense of cinema attendance, the Fourth of May Film Marathon screenings ran at specific times worldwide. This was a huge challenge: arranging the technical side of things to enable worldwide viewers to connect from different time zones at specified times. In addition, some prefilmed welcome speeches were produced. These normally take place in person before each screening at the cinema. Now they were played before each film run online. On account of international coverage, the festival lasted two and a half days, which required a roundtheclock presence of IT personnel to maintain the technical progress of the event.

It's certainly easier to offer films online for a certain period so that every viewer can decide when to watch rather than running them during fixed time slots. But the NFC team chose to maximise the effect of a real-life cinema presence with time-specific screenings. The remote format already takes away immediacy and presence, which are fundamental to a cinematic experience.

Takeaways

Compared to onsite film runs at the cinema, attendance numbers for online screenings were considerably higher, most probably due to worldwide availability. The diaspora community was especially thrilled to have access to Latvian films. The NFC has received heartwarming reviews from Latvians worldwide who could watch The Fourth of May Film Parade online. There were some amazing stories about people from different countries arranging to see a film together or even meeting on Zoom for a more complete shared watching experience.

Matīsa points to a gradual shift in perception and thinking about online film. This format has become more accepted and respectable. And she admits that cinemas too now have a radically different attitude to online platforms. They used to insist that films could not be shown online while they ran in the cinema, whereas now, on account of the pandemic experience, such practices are seen as perfectly normal.

“The onsite and online formats aren’t mutually exclusive, and an online offer will actually expand your audience outreach. In fact, more often than not, these are different audiences – the people who’ll come in person and those who will watch online.”

/Kristīne Matīsa/

Suggestions

- ▶ Galvenais ieteikums būtu nebaidīties. Viegāk, protams, ir atcelt un pārcelt ieplānoto, taču izaicinājuma pieņemšana rada jaunu pieredzi, iespējas. Pandēmija ļoti daudzās iestādēs ir veicinājusi digitālo rīku izmantošanu un ieviešanu.
- ▶ Ieteikumi komunikācijai ar auditoriju. Varēja novērot, ka ārkārtas apstākļos informācijas plūsma bija ļoti haotiska, plānotie un pieņemtie lēmumi mainījās, izmaiņas nereti tika izziņotas pēdējā brīdī. Šādos apstākļos ir ļoti svarīgi skaidri un pārskatāmi veidot komunikāciju ar savu skatītāju, lai ir saprotams, kad un ar kādiem nosacījumiem drīkst nākt klātienē un kad nevar. NKC komanda izveidoja saprotamus un pārskatāmus vizuālos materiālus, lai skatītāji varētu orientēties, ar kādiem nosacījumiem pasākumi notiks. Ieplānotā pasākuma operatīva pārceļšana uz tiešsaisti prasa ātru izlēmību, psiholoģisku gatavību mainīt ieplānoto un skaidru vēstījumu skatītājam. Tiešsaistes un klātienē skatītājs ir atšķirīgs, un katra auditorija prasa savu pieeju.

Looking into the future

Although the online cinema model no longer has the poor reputation of before, it certainly can't replace the complete cinematic experience. Although films are made for the screen, they can be fully enjoyed only on the big screen of a film theatre, with no outside irritants, with the audience engrossed in the process. Appreciating film art requires uninterrupted watching with no distractions, which is hard to achieve at home when you're watching online and keep hitting the pause button to answer a phone call or get yourself another mug of tea. So Saulīte is confident that once the restrictions are lifted, the audience will definitely return to the cinemas for the ultimate film experience.

In some cases, the NFC will keep the hybrid model offering both onsite and online content. It will also continue to develop the filmas.lv portal – a few technical changes will be made to the website so new films can be added more easily. The online model allows reaching out to a wider audience, including those who can't come in person. So, yes, we should take advantage of every format, but some things inevitably lose their meaning and value online. For instance, film premiers are very special, festive occasions with a personal address from the filmmaker and the chance to meet and mingle. The online premiere format is highly inappropriate because all the added emotional value is lost.

We should bear in mind that preparing an event in two formats, on-site and online, takes significantly more work, which, in turn, implies additional resources. That said, it was often the only viable solution during the pandemic – you keep going and prepare for different developments. This means running one step ahead, trusting your gut and modelling possible scenarios. For that, teamwork is essential – it's a critical resource that will take you where you hope to get.

Told by
Māris Prombergs, Director
Paula Bērziņa, Project and Children's
 Educational Programme Manager

Kino Bize is an intimate art-house cinema in Rīga, whose programme mainly consists of new independent film and video from around the world with occasional thematic retrospec-

tions, lectures and special events. Since 2013, Kino Bize has expanded its profile, becoming a film distributor.

Solutions and events

Once the restrictions were imposed, the events Kino Bize would normally organise onsite were moved online. Introductory lectures were recorded and played before online screenings. The Film in School lectures for adults and youth and our morning programme for children were also taken online.



THE ANTOINE DAINEL FILM SCHOOL FOR ADULTS AND YOUTH; CHILDREN'S MORNINGS [www.](#)

Kino Bize offered online lessons for adolescents on various themes around film for a more profound understanding of the film industry and its state amidst the pandemic. Lectures for adults and [children's mornings](#) were also held online. Every other Sunday, children would be offered a film, followed by a talk and creative workshop.

DESIGN FILM FESTIVAL AUGUST 2020 AND AUGUST 2021 [www.](#)

Kino Bize's annual design film festival traditionally takes place in Kuldīga in cooperation with the Kuldīga Artist Residency. In 2020, the festival was taken outside into the public garden. The following year holding the event out of doors seemed unfeasible due to visitor control regulations and the requirement to cordon off a garden section for the festival, so it was decided to move it entirely online.



HOME CINEMA FROM APRIL 2020 [www.](#)

The pandemic-induced restrictions accelerated the existing idea of building a Home Cinema platform so people could watch films online from home after purchasing a ticket for a specified time slot.

The platform was developed in communication with Kino Bize's Lithuanian colleagues, who shared their experience with

a similar project. In a very short time, the team completed all the preparations to offer the audience the first films as early as April 2020. Today, new films keep being added, and Kino Bize is also producing special compilations and retrospectives. In addition to the films, they offer talks with directors and filmmakers on various topics. To date, the Home Cinema has panned into an excellent addition to onsite events. That said, visitor numbers on site exceed the online viewership, and worldwide experience also suggests that online cinema doesn't beat the demand for an onsite cinematic experience.

Challenges

The cinema is highly vulnerable in the current circumstances since the aim is not only to show films but also to talk about them, maintain a debate and promote an exchange of opinion, all of which hinges on in-person presence. If that is denied, organiser motivations can wane. They can be hesitant to, let's say, organise film festivals if people cannot be present on site.

Prombergs describes this time as a permanent limbo. "You can't plan anything with visitor restrictions changing so often, and these get announced at extremely short notice. The constant changes are exhausting! The cinema's being opened and closed, on and off, and you don't even know if it's worth ordering stuff for the café. And it's a huge emotional pressure on the business. Let's say you've taken someone on and trained them, and in just a few weeks, you have to let them go, as the cinema's closed once again. It's hard to keep faith that things will settle down, and we'll be able to go back to work without all this uncertainty. In the past 18 months, we've worked in a normal full-scale regime for no more than three."

Bērziņa quotes another problem, lack of clear communication, as very frustrating and says it hasn't helped with adapting to the new situation. The government decisions are made at very short notice, which leaves little time for your own business decisions and procurements. Not infrequently, the authorities themselves hardly know what the current rules are. The audience is confused, so some choose not to bother and don't go anywhere at all.

To keep the cinema operational, the team is putting in double efforts, making backup plans for each event, just in case they have to switch from the onsite format. And both options are fundamentally different because certain things cannot be moved online. All of this takes its toll, both physically and emotionally. The scheduled premieres, which depend upon physical presence on-site, may have to be suddenly cancelled, and then all the work will have been for nothing.

Any changes to do with moving the scheduled screenings online must be approved by distributors. There are contracts to be reviewed, and in some cases, going online simply isn't an option. So the onsite festival programme and its online counterpart may substantially differ in content.

Innovative practices

With years of experience under their belt with the Children's Mornings programme, the Kino Bize team has established strong ties with the families who attend these events on a regular basis, has seen their children grow and developed an individualised customer approach. After moving the programme online, before each scheduled screening, the team would send the children their follow-up workshop materials through parcel machines so they could join in from home and have all the articles they need for a complete participatory experience.

Takeaways

The cinema has learned to adapt to the new situation, produced new digital resources, and new film collections and compilations are still being created. To quote from Prombergs: "We are relatively flexible, so whatever happens, we should be fine. If there's another lockdown, we will be able to keep on working." The online format enabled the team to keep going and continue their projects. Plus, it helped reach a wider audience in other cities and towns beyond Rīga and even in other countries.

There are plans to improve the functionality of online content by adding subtitles or a sign language inset, which would benefit people with special needs and be easier to do online than on-site. Another bonus is the option to save the recordings and have them available on the website for later viewing.

"Online viewing numbers of our festival programmes are growing, and people are getting used to the remote-access format. So it's no longer a film festival for Rīga; it reaches out across the entire country."

/ Paula Bērziņa /

Suggestions

- Stay open to innovation, embrace new ideas and experiment with new tools. Don't be afraid to test new approaches. Online film platforms used to have a negative ring across the industry, but now they're widely applied across the board and certainly have their advantages. You can test new ways to work with your audience. And an open mind and flexibility will surely bring new opportunities and foster development.
- Maintain a personalised approach with your permanent visitors. Kino Bize is a local community centre where like-minded people come to talk about film and other issues. In times of crisis, this two-way communication is a critical resource that keeps everyone going.

Looking into the future

Kino Bize will keep working on its Home Cinema project by adding new content because it's an excellent add-on to onsite film runs. The online format helps reach out to a broader audience, perhaps even those who have never heard of Kino Bize before, which may even bring them to eventually come down in person.

The team will keep recording lectures, seminars, introductory speeches and expert talks for the screenings. That said, onsite activities will be given priority whenever possible because a onetime reallife event is an exclusive experience and a precious opportunity to interact with the public. Recorded content is treated more casually because it's available anywhere, any time, and you can put it on pause or fast forward.

Surveying the Film in the School participants on their preferred format shows that a large percentage wants onsite sessions. Even though Zoom has its advantages and is, in some sense, a comfortable solution, people seem to be experiencing digital fatigue and craving real human contact. Blending both formats would be a perfect solution – those who live in Riga could come in person with nonlocals joining in online. But this would require double investments in preparation and organisation.

Libraries

During the emergency situation, libraries have experienced both a complete lockdown and partial restrictions, all of which has reduced the number of readers across the board. Since November 2021, solutions have been introduced to allow readers to receive and return books without direct contact with staff through book drops and library parcel machines where they could collect the books they had ordered online.

Cultural and educational events moved online. The National Library offered a range of remoteaccess classes, creative workshops and interactive activities for schools, providing massive support for teachers with remote learning in place. The offer was also actively used by diaspora children abroad.

Libraries found new and creative ways to reach out to their audience throughout the emergency situation, doing outdoor events in the summer, organising interactive hikes and involving the public in producing library content by contributing stories, photographs and exhibition material.

Libraries are a critical information and education resource for their communities and a massive joining force that brings people together. Open talks and communitybuilding events reduce the risk of social exclusion and alienation. This has been particularly important throughout the pandemic when many people have felt depressed by the longdrawn restrictions on facetoface contact.



Kuldīga Central Library

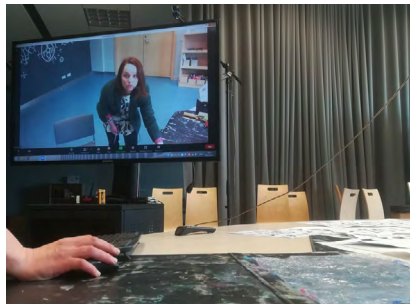
The National Library of Latvia (NLL) pursues a fundamental goal to acquire and perpetually preserve the totality of national literature and keep it lastingly and publicly available. Our

primary focus is on supporting higher education, research and lifelong learning, and promoting reading among children.

Solutions and activities

Once the pandemic restrictions were imposed, we revised our operational goals and tried to see which of our existing plans could be used in the new situation – to find the most appropriate idea, figure out how to transform it to best fit the need and try to predict what would work best in the given circumstances.

In the early phase of the pandemic, onsite cultural life came to a complete and abrupt halt, and digital activities were only beginning to get traction. So even small-scale campaigns drew media attention and got vast publicity.



THE VIRTAKA LECTURE ROOM EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FROM 2020 [www.](#)

The Virtaka Lecture Room is an actual space in the National Library where we normally offer educational activities to schools. When all schooling in the country was moved online, we needed to figure out how to keep exercising our educational function in a meaningful remote-access way without putting an extra burden on pupils and teachers alike. So we developed training materials and teaching guidelines that educators could use to diversify their classroom content. We also produced new activities, such as interactive online escape games *Can Books Do Harm?* and *Digital Technologies – Good or Bad?* to educate learners about the environmental impact of printed and digital books and product sustainability.

Schools can still apply to our online lessons, including practically oriented creative workshops and more theoretical classes on various

topics, where pupils work with a museum educator.

Towards the end of 2021, we organised an ambitious online project, the Christmas in the Canon Quiz, to reach out to a regional audience who used to take study trips to the library or invite our museum educators to their schools. A month before the event, its host and scriptwriter, professional actor Jānis Kronis, working closely with our museum educator, held regular online meetings with a learner focus group who helped design a product that would really appeal to their age group. Eventually, nearly 50 groups, totalling around 800 pupils from different parts of Latvia, took the quiz when it was launched. It would have been much more difficult to reach such a vast audience with onsite events, and we could never have afforded a professional actor to host the quiz with each group.



THE FAMILY BIBLE CAMPAIGN MARCH 2020



Our Book in Latvia exhibition already had one family Bible, but that exhibit was on its way to being replaced. At the start of the first national emergency situation, there was talk of slowing down, of people finally having some free time to think, read, and dwell on their memories. It was a perfect time to address the public with The Family Bible campaign, and we launched it within the first few weeks of the restrictions. On the library's social media, we put up an open call for

people to review their family Bibles and share the stories they find. Many families have traditionally put in their family Bibles meaningful personal details, records of milestone events, significant photographs or cards. As a result, numerous family stories were published on social media, and one Bible was chosen to be featured in the Book in Latvia exhibition.



THE TALKS ON BOOKS AND READING PODCAST FROM MAY 2020



The first episode of the Talks on Books and Reading podcast was produced for the Long Night of Museums. It was then used to talk in more detail about the topics

in our permanent exhibition and draw attention to other issues surrounding books and reading. The podcast became an alternative to our previous onsite lectures, discussions and other events.

The podcast format has allowed us to continue our fundamental focus on the culture of conversation, reaching out to a broader audience in terms of both space and time – the talk isn't tied to a specific room or time slot, and anyone with access to the Internet can hear it whenever they want. The podcast conversations continue and expand the themes in our Book in Latvia exhibition. Some more extensive topics, such as food in literature and cook-books, were discussed across several episodes.

Challenges

As we thought about making online learning materials, our greatest challenge and concern was choosing appropriate content and form. We wanted them to be meaningful, necessary and helping rather than complicating the learning process by putting an extra burden on pupils already spending most of the day in front of a screen. In a nutshell, we aimed for something intriguing, exciting and easy-to-work-with.

Another fundamental challenge was the impossibility of long-term planning. Schools, in particular, were subject to constantly changing rules and regulations, which meant that teachers and pupils often were neither willing nor able to use additional services like the ones in our offer.

The best solutions came gradually for both The Virtaka Lecture Room and our podcast series. The two projects are still a work in progress, both being tweaked and refined, as we follow the changing regulations, keep tracking our audience needs and explore best practice examples across the field.

Innovative practices

Practical workshops for schools are an amazing online solution. We communicate through Zoom, but the pupils do practical hands-on tasks at home. We know that learners today spend endless hours in front of a screen, so our workshops are based on practical work and physical handling of the material. When a teacher signs up their class, we give advance information on what materials the pupils will need to prepare and, if necessary, send the required things to the school (such as for the printmaking workshop). Thus, all our communication is digital and remote, but pupils still get to work with their hands using physical materials.

Although we use digital solutions, our educational offer is a call to return to the physical world. By way of example, during our workshops, the pupils can practice their handwriting or make their own book.

Takeaways

“We got the result. We had an online exhibition where people could not only watch from the sidelines but – and this is very important – actually be the ones who produced the content.”

By and large, we assess The Family Bible project as a success. We had some really active participants who sent in their stories and photographs. Others followed it as viewers and readers. We connected with new groups and religious communities. One Bible story was sent by a clergyman's family, and we were invited to tell about the project on Latvia's Christian Radio. Remote educational activities have helped us reach out to the country's faraway regions. At the moment, we also work with diaspora schools outside Latvia, offering master classes and workshops. If we discount the difference in time zones, there are no significant restrictions on such remote activities. With exclusively onsite content, we could never have reached these groups.

The podcast was another successful product, as well as our live streams. For instance, we opened our book, *The Reading Pandemic: Essays on the History of Reading in Latvia*, by streaming the event live on our Facebook and YouTube pages, later making it into a podcast. As a result, the event was followed by around 1,000 people, counting both the live and subsequent views. An incredible number we never would have made if the book had been opened traditionally.

Suggestions

- The critical thing in project planning is to keep the audience needs in mind rather than dumping your stuff into the already crowded information space just for the sake of trying. If you organise something, always ask yourself – who needs this project? Will it do someone good? At the start of all your activities, think about who will consume your product. Ideally, not just consume but get involved in the making.

Looking into the future

As we look into the future, we intend to develop both our onsite and online products and services, doing a casebycase assessment to choose the fittest format for each initiative.

The Virtaka Lecture Room will certainly continue in hybrid form. Even when schools get back to predominantly onsite learning, some events will still be held online, especially for our regional and diaspora audiences. Online learning materials will stay available on our website, and we will be working with teachers to train them to use the offer to a maximum effect.

The podcast will keep going strong with new episodes pursuing other thematic directions besides *The Talks on Books and Reading* inspired by our *Book in Latvia* exhibition.

The pandemic has exposed the need to think more intensely about the digital, remoteaccess offer and raised the quality bar for such products. For instance, we have consciously shifted from quantity to quality in our social media posts, producing carefully curated content that really fits the platform. Consistent and focused development of remoteaccess content is also a key future priority for our *Book in Latvia* exhibition.

Kuldīga Central Library

Told by
Daina Girvaite, Director

The **Kuldīga Central Library** works to collect and give general access to books and other printed publications, preserve local cultural

heritage, promote reading among children and youth, teach digital skills and provide methodological support to rural libraries.

Solutions and activities

The pandemic fundamentally changed the day-to-day of library life. At first, it was hard to see how to stay connected to your audience and keep delivering cultural events. Both the organisers and the public had to learn new digital skills. In 2020, the Kuldīga Central Library supervised 17 parish libraries, with the number growing to 24 parishes and the town of Skrunda in 2021. It was essential to maintain the connection with this extensive library network and train the librarians.

All our activities moved online. Our Meet the Author events and The Travellers Club worked the best of all – people actively joined and followed online.



THE NEW BOOKS MORNING

This pandemic-inspired live event is delivered online on Friday mornings, introducing our new acquisitions for children.



THE KULDĪGA CENTRAL LIBRARY CENTENARY 11 DECEMBER 2020

[www.](#)

2020 was our library's centenary. We had planned various activities throughout the year – talks with notable locals and meetings with poets, all of which had to be moved online.

The centenary celebration went on the whole day and was made public by streaming online. There were speeches, quizzes and presentations on library history, special content for children, video greetings from the Kuldīga District Museum and the local children and youth centre, and a celebratory performance from the Ernests Vigners Music School.

The viewing rates were low at the start – people weren't used to digital content, but, with time, the numbers have grown.



THE TRAVELLERS CLUB

[www.](#)

We invite different people to talk about their unusual travel experiences and share curious facts from across the world. During the pandemic, The Travellers Club is streamed live, so anyone can follow.

MEET THE AUTHOR

For the duration of the pandemic, we provide Meet the Author events online, and anyone can participate.

WATER IN KULDĪGA AND KULDĪGA THROUGH THE ARTISTS' EYES – INTERACTIVE WALKS

The programme uses an interactive and engaging approach to help people explore our database about Kuldīga and learn new facts about the town. Anyone interested can follow each walk online from their

homes or physically take the actual route. The idea is to use our local content database, follow the map and find hidden cues that will take you on to the next stop.

Challenges

“We have dedicated readers who say it’s easier to follow events online, so they’ve just stopped coming.”

We’ve seen our readers get used to following us online, and they’re no longer motivated to come. This may develop into a significant challenge – getting the people physically back to the library. On the whole, the pandemic has dramatically reduced our client numbers – they’ve dropped by several thousand. This may be due to the constantly shifting regulations making it hard to keep track when we open and close.

The technical side of things has been another challenge. During one Meet the Author event, when the live stream was started, the microphone wasn’t working. People called in from other cities and towns saying they couldn’t hear. Of course, the issue was immediately resolved, but such situations always cause additional stress.

We also struggled with timing our content and deciding what we would offer. For instance, our Tips for Everyday Life project featuring experts in different fields in 15minute video segments was an interesting idea, but it took huge amounts of work and didn’t attract a large audience.

Innovative practices

When you move activities and discussions online, it is crucial to have them moderated. With onsite events, you may be fine without a moderator, but one is absolutely essential online. For us, having a moderator was a massive bonus that helped make the talks more interesting for the audience. Another thing that worked very well was quizzes – our clients know their library and the town and are happy to use their knowledge and get involved in interactive activities.

Takeaways

About 6,000 viewers watched our centenary broadcast live, and then the published video kept getting more views throughout the year. That and our other online events have helped us reach out to masses of new people. The online format proved a very successful solution for our centenary celebration in particular because it allowed engaging a much larger and broader audience and was economically viable, saving us lots of money. Instead of a large concert that would have required more finances yet allowed only a limited number of people inside the room, the event was broadcast live rather than kept behind closed doors, and was therefore available to an unlimited audience.

Online activities have raised our profile and visibility beyond Kuldīga. We’ve engaged new remote users from different parts of Latvia and the locals who hadn’t participated in our activities before the pandemic. These people don’t come to the library every day, but now they could follow our online events and happily did. Many took the opportunity to register as our readers online. Throughout 2020, we processed five to six hundred online registrations.

We have bought new equipment for live events to deliver high-quality broadcasts and other digital content. This has helped us become more flexible: events can be held onsite or moved online without particular problems. Hybrid events work especially well with epidemiological restrictions – there’s a smaller number of people onsite, and the rest can follow online.

Suggestions

- ▶ The pandemic has shown that not everything can be moved online. The Internet already offers masses of diverse, highquality content, so when we're producing new live streams or video materials, it's important to think about technical quality and competitive potential.
- ▶ People want to engage in different activities, so it pays to think about interactive solutions – discussions, games, quizzes, walking and bike routes. Urban installations can be another effective outreach tool. They give the people a much-needed dose of culture on the go and eliminate the risks associated with indoor gatherings. Fundamentally, it's important to seek solutions for a personal conversation and experience.

Looking into the future

Hybrid events certainly have a future. Most librarians have a persistent concern – what to do if you don't have a large enough audience for your event? This is especially true for rural areas due to all kinds of reasons, from as simple as bad weather. Suppose only a handful of people come to meet a prominent author? If these talks are streamed and the recordings remain on the library website and social media, anyone can join live or see the material later. With that in mind, electronic user registration and remote-access solutions for people who can't come in person will remain our priority for the foreseeable future.

Rīga Central Library and its branch in Čiekurkalns

Told by
Dzidra Šmita, RCL Director
Aija Namavira, RCL Branch Director in Čiekurkalns
Santa Mūrniece, RCL Project and Public Relations Department Head
Evita Hofmane, RCL Project Manager
Inese Ruskule, RCL Project Manager
Daina Ģeibaka, RCL Public Relations Manager

The Rīga Central Library (RCL) is committed to preserving and disseminating cultural values while providing public library services within the city of Rīga.

Its branch library in Čiekurkalns provides literature to the adult and children residents of the neighbourhood, holds book exhibitions and delivers events.

Solutions and activities

In late autumn 2020, the RCL and its branch libraries developed a three-way plan – for ‘normal’ conditions, medium restrictions and a fully remote-access situation. When it was time to switch to the latter, the library tackled all the jobs that had been put off and worked on stock-taking and staff training. The plan for 2021 concentrated all events in the summer and early autumn, with the spring months reserved for remote activities, local studies, and audience research.

Numerous events were moved online, and options were sought to use outdoor areas near the libraries.



THE LIBRARY GARDEN FROM 2021



The RCL branch in Čiekurkalns worked with its head library and the local community development society to create a new outdoor cultural space – The Library Garden.

The development project for the outdoor space around the Čiekurkalns Library coincided with the pandemic. The RCL worked with municipal authorities and the local community development society to envision the future of the site and start making it a reality. In August 2020, the outdoor venue received the Čiekurkalns Community Festival, which sparked the idea of a library garden. The site is still being developed, but the space around the library already serves different population groups as a public venue for events and gatherings.

The site is being developed as an open-access public space for all. There are plans to put up an open-air stage and build raised beds for flowers and other greenery.



ČIEKURKALNS. YOURS AND MINE – A COMMUNITY INTEGRATION PROJECT MARCH THROUGH OCTOBER 2021



In the spring, the library did an audience research project with local seniors – identified their needs and listened to their concerns. This branched off into a new community project – Čiekurkalns. Yours and Mine. The Family Stories. The library also joined the Hive: A Mobile Cultural Space project by the Rīga City Council Education, Culture and Sports Department, which backed various cultural events in several neighbourhoods from July through September.



2021. A cultural programme for the outdoor community space near the Čiekurkalns Library was produced in cooperation with the VEF Cultural Palace. Various activities were organised for different population groups: chat nights, a flash mob, cultural tours in the neighbourhood, a literary afternoon, and activities for

children and schools. The project was documented in an exhibition, Čiekurkalns. Yours and Mine. The Family Stories, detailing the stories of 10 local families. It is now available on the RCL website. The project was funded by the Public Integration Programme of the Rīga City Council Education, Culture and Sports Department.

Challenges

In the summer and autumn of 2021, planning library events in the 'green' security mode – open only for people with Covid-19 certificates – posed a substantial challenge. There were various technical issues with checking visitor IDs, making visitor lists and keeping records. Many people couldn't participate because they didn't have a certificate. In the autumn, these problems went down, as more and more people were obtaining certificates, and the public was getting used to the rules and coming prepared.

Innovative practices

The library has expanded and improved its remote-access services, and introduced remote client registration. Čiekurkalns produced a remarkably successful example of community development through active involvement of local residents and targeted social and cultural activities. An open-air stage was built in the community space near the local library and used for various activities. For instance, the local elementary school teamed up with the library to organise a Back to School event for its pupils on the first of September. Before the project, the neighbourhood didn't have a proper public space for gathering, but the local community development society helped make the area around the library an accessible and welcoming site for different community groups.

Takeaways

“Social exclusion is a major pandemic-associated risk, but telephone calls and community building activities helped to address the problem.”

Čiekurkalns. Yours and Mine has helped to stay connected to the local residents. The people addressed during the making of the family stories exhibition felt engaged and appreciated. The library has stayed connected with the seniors even after the project through its Library-on-Call initiative, providing stories read aloud and friendly informal chats.

The gradual improvement of the library territory creates a new and much-needed community site where the locals can gather for joint activities. Within targeted cooperation projects with the central library, the territory is used by different organisations. A community Christmas tree has been put up there for the past two years in a row.

In sum, by various activities throughout the pandemic, the library has executed its fundamental function as a community centre for information, education, culture, public interaction and communication.

Suggestions

- Whatever the type of your event, form is always secondary to substance. It's important to offer high-quality content and document your activities, so try to record everything you do for what seems matter-of-fact at the moment may look very different within a year. The essential thing is to show your readers and the general public what happens behind closed library doors, so let them know what the librarians are doing. The RCL has placed a range of materials into the library archive – an important and worthy job for the future. And we've come to embrace this simple truth – whatever you do, do it from the heart.

Looking into the future

In 2022, the Library Garden project will continue, and we're planning an official opening event for the space. A key future direction is to keep strengthening our cooperation with local community associations and individual residents. Public image is another important concern, so we intend to work on our public presence and keep sharing the things that we do. Positive online publicity expands your reach and engagement. This is due mainly to online events where more people can join.

Hybrid forms certainly have a future – onsite events can be filmed and the recording made available to a broader public. A great way to make content more generally accessible. Different events often take place simultaneously, so recordings are a great solution to deliver content to people at their convenience.

Cultural centres and urban culture

The pandemic experiences of cultural centres have fluctuated between closed-for-the-public and limited-access regimes. But the work never stopped, and cultural workers kept looking for new approaches and solutions to continue communicating with the audience through art and culture.

Cultural centres became more imaginative with different communication channels to address their audience. Some went outside to meet with their visitors, using outdoor spaces and adapting their content to the new setting. Cultural workers embraced untried, unorthodox spaces through innovative approaches, new tools and technologies.

They developed outdoor games and navigation activities in the urban environment for individual participants who would use pre-made content and personal mobile devices towards an interactive ludic experience.

The pandemic has been a tough and challenging time, but it has cultivated creativity and curiosity, imagination and exploration. Cultural institutions refocused on individual visitors and their needs as they tried to deliver a meaningful, up-to-date cultural offer and involve the client in content production in the spirit of cooperation and social cohesion.



Krustpils House of Culture

Siguldas Devons is a multi-functional space for culture and arts in Sigulda. Home to amateur art groups, a concert hall and an exhibition

gallery, it is a popular venue for events, conferences and other forums.

Solutions and activities

OWN YOUR TOWN - A PUBLIC CREATIVE LABORATORY FROM FEBRUARY 2021



The Sigulda railway station has four glass cabins for commercial hire, and they are leased by businesses, mainly during the tourist season. Since the cabins stood empty due to the pandemic, the town council handed them over to Siguldas Devons as an alternative space for arts and culture. Our team decided to explore the Nature-City-Future connection. The goal

was to stimulate public dialogue on these concepts and develop a new creative platform for innovative artistic expression to counteract the impact of Covid-19 restrictions.

The Own Your Town slogan was an open call for residents to contribute creative content. As a result, numerous exhibitions were produced in close cooperation with local creators, delivering original stories about the trio of topics - Nature, City and Future. In the first three months, the cabins were used to exhibit photography, painting and textile, an insect hotel made by children, kinetic sculptures and works from discarded plastic, and the output of a local robotics club. The second half of the year

focused on literature. Finally, at Christmastime, the Dolls Art Museum produced a thematic kinetic scenography that radiated love, kindness and holiday cheer.

Crucially, the residents were involved throughout the project. Anyone could come up with an idea and display their work in one of the cabins. We were approached both by organisations and individual creators. Overall, the project managed to spark and sustain public dialogue through art, raising important questions around the broader topics of nature, urban life and our common future. The displays were on show 24/7, and people could watch from outside or go in for a closer look.

Challenges

Creating engaging and up-to-date content was challenging. First, the team studied different project experiences and best practice examples for tight exhibition spaces. Another concern was the conditions inside the cabins - cold and humid in winter and scorching in summer. Once the umbrella themes were chosen, we moved to the next stage - reaching out to the public to fill the cabins with exhibits, which we would change roughly every two weeks.

There were also some managerial complications. Most of our work involves solo projects, but this was the ultimate joint effort. Everybody pitched in with ideas and supervised implementation. Managing such an extensive and dynamic project was a very demanding task.

The project taught us to surrender control and trust the creators. As a rule, Siguldas Devons

maintains a high quality bar for its indoor exhibitions, but this time we weren't partnering with professional artists. The idea was to engage local residents and support their initiatives, so we had to step back, resist the instinct to control everything and stop worrying about how things would look. After all, the focus was on the people, community involvement and enthusiasm.

“This has been a fantastic time to go from showing to making. That was the whole point – the genuine effort, the charming personal touch. Those are the things that matter.”

Innovative practices

The task itself was innovative – to fill four glass cabins at the railway station with art and culture when cultural institutions were closed to the public. In time, we took over the entire train station square. Special stands were built for an open-air display about the station. In April 2022, the square will receive an exhibition about local artists.

We also produced a photographic story, *The Third Eye*, randomly involving local residents of different ages and occupations, from children to senior citizens. And they had to be regular people rather than local celebrities. The idea was to make a visual story about Sigulda through the eyes of its residents. The participants were invited to take pictures of the town, including the lesser-known places that don't feature in postcards or travel guides. The participants were given film cameras, which added a touch of authenticity because they couldn't see what they'd taken or delete and replace a shot with a better, more beautiful one.

An interesting solution was to engage the citizens in the content making. We involved pupils, religious communities, folk groups, students, institutions, organisations and other participants who wanted to produce a story and show it to the public. Dance students used the cabins for a graduation project, young girls came on bikes to play cards, and someone sat down for some tea. Overall, the cabin project was a great example of placemaking and community involvement in local cultural life. At the end of May, the people make an Identity Wall – the symbolic DNA of a Sigulda resident. A huge stand was placed in the square, and people could take a piece of yarn and wrap it around the identity elements they associate with themselves. At the end of the day, we had our communal Identity Wall.

Takeaways

We gained an additional space – a public platform for 24/7 creativity. If not for the emergency situation, we'd have probably stayed indoors and wouldn't have taken on such a challenge. But the season was such a success that the council has decided to leave all the cabins in our care. The excellent location and format of the public creative laboratory cabins helped us engage a larger audience beyond our regular visitors, as passers-by stopped, had a look and stayed on to read the textual material.

Suggestions

- ▶ Keep looking for new solutions, earmark them for the future, and keep a mental bank of ideas and possible partners.
- ▶ Try to stay tolerant, work together towards solutions and support your team. People get used to predictable patterns, so a crisis can leave us confused. Remember – we all react differently to sudden change.
- ▶ Try different approaches, and don't be afraid to experiment. Every cultural centre can take a fresh look at its inner and outer space, notice new, original things and toy with ideas and options. A playful touch sometimes helps achieve the impossible.

Looking into the future

With all the cabins permanently in our care, we'll plan for new content to fill them – most likely more substantial exhibits, with more significant investments and at least a month for display. Sigulda has applied to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and aims to earn the City of Literature title, so our future work with the cabins will continue in this direction.

Krustpils House of Culture

Told by
Inta Ūbele, Director

The **Krustpils House of Culture** (KHC) is a structural unit of the Jēkabpils District Culture Department. It supports amateur groups, promotes creative initiative, develops, nurtures

and promotes popular art and ensures public access to professional art besides organising national celebrations, traditional events, concerts, theatre shows and festivals.

Solutions and activities

The ultimate goal of our cultural activities is to encourage public cooperation. So for Christmas and Easter 2021, to keep up the spirits of our community when traditional concerts and celebrations could not take place, we organised a thematic bus. Fitted with lights and festive decorations, it drove through the streets playing music. Transformed into a gingerbread house for Christmas and adorned with flowers for Easter, the bus helped us reach our people in the yards of their homes.

The traditional Michaelmas fair and concert were replaced by an audio-visual display on an outdoor digital screen blending musical entertainment and household tips on using the autumn harvest. The key was to provide fun, engaging and relevant content for our audience. So we really focused on public outdoor activities, delivering open-air concerts and exhibitions, placing art objects in public spaces across town and trying other initiatives.



THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE ON WHEELS DECEMBER 2020 THROUGH JANUARY 2021



To provide some Christmas cheer for the locals and out-of-town guests, a festive bus drove through the town streets, pulling a decorative gingerbread house. The route changed every time to safely lift the spirits of random passers-by and visit the residents in the yards of their homes without attracting large crowds.

THE EASTER BUS 4 TO 6 APRIL 2021



The Christmas bus idea was brought back during the Easter holidays – again, a thematically decorated bus drove through the streets and neighbourhoods to give the people some festive cheer.

Two special characters, Easter Bunny and Bear, rode on the bus and gave brief 15minute performances.

To raise public engagement, we prepared thematic interactive tasks with cues placed around street decorations. They were simple and doable and could be completed throughout the holiday week. With this activity, we tried to give the townspeople, especially the families with children, a little extra motivation to go out and take a walk around town. Social media helped give and get feedback, as people sent in their answers.



THE MUSICAL BALCONY FROM 2020

On Wednesday evenings throughout the summer, we held open-air concerts by different musicians on our balcony. This allowed the people to gather and maintain a safe distance. The project was launched in 2020 and resumed in 2021.

MY JĒKABPILS. MY LATVIA – A FESTIVE LIGHT SHOW 17 TO 20 NOVEMBER 2021



To celebrate the Proclamation Day of Latvia, the façade of the Krustpils House of Culture became the setting for a light show featuring children's drawings of Jēkabpils. The activity proved very engaging, as many locals came to see the projections.

Challenges

The pandemic has left its mark on the public, and event organisers need to invest more effort to lift people's spirits and get a positive reaction. The events no longer attract large crowds, but people are still thirsty for culture, and some continue to come. The challenge is to maintain synergy – not just to give information but to persuade people to actually come and join in. And you need a different approach to each age group, from senior citizens to youth.

These are all challenges, but they're not all bad. Quite the opposite – hardship can inspire progress and drive new ideas. This time opens new opportunities for new cultural sites, new forms of engagement and types of activities.

Event organisers need to make sure they strictly observe all epidemiological regulations. We had to learn to produce events without specific start and end times. For instance, the starting time for a light show that was part of the town festival got published by sheer accident, and so many people came that it had to be postponed. A bad mistake, but we've learnt from it that it's crucial to be extra careful with regulating the people flow.

Innovative practices

Epidemiological restrictions pushed us to find new ways to reach the public. As a result, several new ideas were launched. Art objects in town had been used before, but now we re-focused on giving people a more personal and meaningful experience and encouraging them to participate. Instead of concerts and onsite activities, the whole town was covered by a festive bus, and we put up art objects in public spaces and organised interactive outdoor activities for families. The Musical Balcony provided a way for the public to enjoy music as safely as possible, and the place became a new cultural site, where concerts continued in 2021.

Takeaways

The challenges helped us come up with new initiatives for cultural events. New cultural sites and public engagement were two significant achievements. For instance, on Midsummer, we invited the locals to decorate their homes and gates with greenery, and they responded with birch boughs and wreathes, lifting the atmosphere throughout town.

Suggestions

- ▶ Running short on interpersonal contacts leads to running short on ideas. Cultural workers need regular communication with colleagues and experience exchange, at least at a distance. They can find inspiration in good practice examples, observe colleagues at work, see new approaches, talk things over with colleagues – this is how you arrive at innovative ideas and solutions. It helps to stay open-minded to embrace change and meet your audience to figure out what they need.

- To look for solutions, you need inspiration and a genuine desire to work. Think carefully about what and how you could do and what resources and funding you'll need. Secondly, focus on audience needs. Ask yourself – will people like my idea, and will it have a practical application? Thirdly, try to avoid pursuing trivial, boring ideas. Essentially, all of this means that new initiatives don't come easy.

Looking into the future

When larger events resume, they will need a more personal and emotional approach. Local communities need to feel involved, so it falls on the organisers to look for ways to ensure that the audience is engaged in the making of events.

“We’ve come to believe that the key to success lies in not standing by but in being actively engaged and engaging your audience. Then the people become co-responsible, feel that they belong and get a shared emotional experience.”

If you simply move onsite exhibitions online, they may appear bland and dull, so we plan to do interviews with creators to make the content more meaningful and intriguing. Overall, we're committed to seeking new ways to deliver our audience quality cultural experiences, not least in the urban environment.

The Valmiera Municipality Culture Department (VDCD) is committed to stimulating cultural diversity and providing public access to culture in Valmiera Municipality, nurturing creative diversity and excellence and support-

ing the creative economy and its sustainable development. Under its auspices are the local cultural centres, the Valmiera Library with its branches and local municipal museums.

Solutions and activities



THE INSIDE OUT PROJECT 2021



The Inside Out Project ran with a Notice Us! slogan and was one of the most significant cultural events in Valmiera in 2021. When the city bid for the European Capital of Culture 2027, the Inside Out Project became a way to involve and engage the community. We went to various locations across the municipality and invited the residents to join the project by having their portrait taken. The large-scale images were then displayed on the massive industrial chimney of Valmiera's former boiler house. In addition, five project participants were featured in five documentaries.



THE GARDENS OF LIGHT FROM DECEMBER 2020



On winter evenings, light installations illuminated the town parks to raise public spirits when large Christmas events were still under strict limitations. The project started in 2020 and came back in the winter of 2021.

Walking trails and hiking games enjoyed great popularity throughout the pandemic, especially in the first few months. So we paid extra attention to lifting the urban environment by decorating the parks and public spaces to give our residents some festive cheer.

THE LOOP GAME IN VALMIERA

FROM 2020

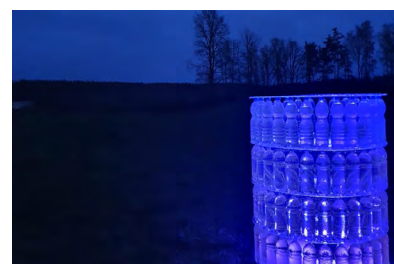


The game uses the Loquiz app and takes people along a gamified walking path in Valmiera. The experience includes various questions and tests the players' erudition.

THE WOLF MOON WALKING TRAIL 24 TO 25 FEBRUARY 2021



An animated walking trail was available for two nights in February near the old baronial manor in Kocēni District (part of Valmiera Municipality after the latest administrative reform). The track was illuminated, and visitors could hear stories and legends and have a good time out of doors.



THE PET BOTTLE ART INSTALLATION 30 MARCH TO 15 APRIL 2021



The Residents of Kocēni District were invited to collect PET bottles and contribute them towards making light sculptures. The sculptures were displayed on 24 and 25 April within the national Spring Cleanup campaign. The initiative was supported by ZAAO Ltd. and Balts uz Melna Ltd.

Challenges

Our experience suggests that online events can be fairly ineffectual due to the stiff competition on the Internet. If an online event was offered on a pay-to-watch basis, it had less engagement, so overall, our online events didn't go too well. Also, many people didn't want to spend their free time in front of a screen. Given that many were working and studying remotely, they tried to spend their off-work hours in nature, enjoying the outdoors.

From an organisational point of view, the pandemic was challenging because it demanded quick reactions to different situations, adaptation and change of plans. Generally, we schedule our events well in advance, but these circumstances refocused us on the here and now. The budgets had to be adjusted to include greater safety costs – security guards, disinfectants, etc. And we had to be careful with setting the start and end times for our events. They needed to be vague and approximate to minimise the risk of large public gatherings.

Innovative practices

The Inside Out Project was very successful – we managed to engage the residents and claim a new cultural space in Valmiera. The turnout was unexpected and quite overwhelming – 378 citizens got involved. Valmiera's former boiler house is on its way to becoming a cultural space for visual and performing arts. Publicly claiming it for culture has been a fundamental goal for the project. Incidentally, we owe it to the pandemic that Valmiera decided to take the plunge and bid for the European Capital of Culture.

Many people were happy to explore our walking trails. We used apps such as Strava or Endomondo to prepare walking routes and GPS tracker-made shapes to be recreated by our residents, which was a new experience and enabled us to offer original content – something that hadn't been widely used before.

The Gardens of Light was a way to make up for the lack of habitual Christmas season activities. A beautiful initiative that, most probably, wouldn't have happened under different circumstances. Since we couldn't organise large events, we looked for alternatives such as smaller street markets, which also supported the local businesses.

Collecting PET bottles for art installations was a very exciting campaign. Special containers were put up in the streets to accumulate the material. The people were very active – we received bottles from families and kindergartens. Similar campaigns have been done in other countries. For us, it was a way to engage the citizens and stimulate environmental awareness, and the format seemed very appropriate as it didn't go against the pandemic restrictions.

Takeaways

“Online events, mobile apps, hybrid formats – all these challenges pushed us to think outside the box.”

The new skills we've had to learn throughout the pandemic are an indisputable takeaway because they've given us new opportunities and ideas for the future. It's been essential to learn to think outside the proverbial box and really push the boundaries that had constrained us. It has definitely done us good to see what else we can do beyond our habitual limits. This time has taught us how to respond more swiftly and creatively, find alternatives and reach out to people, not least through social media.

Suggestions

- The hardest thing in a pandemic is to hold on to your motivation and inspiration. It's essential to try new things and experiment with new formats, new activities. Society is becoming more and more divided for various reasons, and we need to keep looking for ways to reach out to a broader audience.

Looking into the future

The walking trails were a huge hit, so we made a new route for Christmas 2021. But we need to remember that people tend to get bored of things, so it's important to keep our hand on the pulse and react when it's time to plan something new. Besides, we should consider the hybrid form and aim for variety in our events and activities.

The City Pocket Pop-Up Square

Told by
Kārlis Jaunromāns, architect

The City Pocket pop-up square was set up in Rīga, on the corner of Maskavas Street and Turgeņeva Street, in July 2021, as a public space for recreation and creative activities. Throughout the summer and well into autumn,

it was a buzzing venue for several chess tournaments, discussions, a graffiti festival and other events. People were free to use the space 24/7 to chill, communicate and have a good time.

Solutions and activities

The main idea was to transform an abandoned, degraded territory – a ‘pocket’ in the urban fabric – on the plot of land of a torn-down house into an upcycled public space for rest, recreation and events, open to all.

The idea, design and spatial solutions are the work of Kārlis Jaunromāns and Dārta Ādamsone, founders of the T13 Architects Studio. Activities and events have been developed in cooperation with the Free Riga Society, which helped with the programme and organisation. The project successfully brought together the local community and engaged the residents.



Challenges

First of all, the very idea was a challenge – developing the concept, planning the spatial solution and managing project activities across several months. We aimed for a sustainable model that would be viable even if events and gatherings could not be held due to the pandemic. There was uncertainty about how the situation would change and whether it would be possible to implement our plans, and to what degree. Eventually, a fashion show and several concerts had to be cancelled, and some events were held on a smaller scale or moved to an adjacent area in Lastādija, which could accommodate more visitors and comply with the regulations. Solutions had to be found to zone off the area and perform visitor control.

Since the project aimed to create a public space for communication on-site, the remote format imposed by the restrictions was fundamentally unfeasible – it couldn't replace faceto face meetings. Some onsite events were also streamed live on the Internet, but the principal point was onsite communication, and that's irreplaceable. So we tried to adjust to the restrictions and keep having onsite gatherings, even if they were extremely small. In fact, this outdoor space was, for a while, the only format for any kind of public activity.

The space was designed with a modular principle: design elements and the furniture were adjustable, anyone could rearrange things to fit their need, but that wasn't as clear as we had thought. So we had to explain the modular principle and actively encourage the people to use and alter the space as they needed or wanted. Most often, the people were shy and hesitated to move the modules around and change things. So someone had to be there all the time to explain and encourage the users to go ahead.

I'm happy to say there was not a single instance of vandalism. Nothing was damaged or taken. This showed that the locals respected the initiative and proved that the project had been meaningful and necessary for the community.

Innovative practices

Creating a public space that could be easily transformed and quickly and comfortably adjusted to different activities required innovative solutions. And, actually, the events weren't the point; they were part of a larger process. The makeover was, in a sense, a performance. Over two months, the space gained something new every two weeks, gradually acquiring new elements. First, we tidied up the abandoned plot, sowed the lawn, installed sprinklers and foundation blocks for the stage supports. The square consisted of four types of elements, and every two weeks, we would add new modules, things and greenery. Through its transformation, the space wrote its own story, and the locals were keenly observing and following its makeover.

Takeaways

This has been a great and satisfactory experience with a meaningful and necessary community project. It was such a joy to see people come, join in and work together. The response rate was fantastic.

For an architect, it is always intriguing to produce spatially challenging solutions. Doing it in a very uncertain situation, building something without really knowing how it would all pan out, was exciting.

“Eventually, all this uncertainty was inspiring... limitations encourage alternative approaches to the city space.”

Suggestions

- ▶ When working on public spaces, it is exciting not to create a framework to be filled with content but to present the space itself as a happening – its gradual shaping and transformations along the way. Space can be a self-sufficient element of the urban performance in its own right.
- ▶ With meaningful public projects, it is essential to find out whether the community even wants and needs your initiative. In this case, the project was a success because the Moscow Street suburb hadn't had a well-designed and accessible public space for its residents.

Looking into the future

The project is done for the year, and now further plans will be made for the spring. Clearly, this has been an intriguing and successful experience of working with a void outdoor space. The format can be replicated in other 'urban pockets', provided there is community interest and initiative. Another possible version is 'Dissolution' – splitting the elements of the square and putting them in other suitable places across the city.

The project has been very positive in terms of community engagement. People were given a chance to get involved, and they readily did – by contributing ideas, joining in, dropping by, or simply using the pocket to chill out with friends. It was a new public experience – the residents were reshaping a place and having a positive impact on the environment they inhabit rather than being just passive users of public space, which is the typical experience of city-dwellers. This was something midway between a private garden, where you can plant whatever you want, and a public park where you can't touch anything.

The City Pocket remains an upcycled place in the city, leaving the local communities with an experience of togetherness and co-creation, which can develop into further cooperation.

Festivals and events

The pandemic has forced festival and event organisers to abandon their habitual forms of work. Thus, onsite events were either banned altogether or required substantial extra resources to be held in the so-called 'safe mode', which has meant strict epidemiological regulations, cordoning off the territory and checking that every visitor has a Covid19 certificate.

Technologies have helped provide digital versions of events to reach would-have-been visitors remotely. Since people couldn't attend events, alternative solutions were sought (and found!) to bring the events into people's homes through computers, smartphones and parcel machines or, indeed, out of doors, reshaping the outdoor environment towards an individual cultural experience.

The new and unusual circumstances have sparked intriguing and innovative solutions, and some will keep developing even after the restrictions are lifted. But the digitally dense days are starting to feel exhausting and making people long for face-to-face encounters, conversations and authentic communication experiences.



Skudras Metropole Creative Partnership

LAMPA Conversation Festival

Told by
Lelde Prūse, Festival Producer, head of
LAMPA Conversation School

The **LAMPA festival** is a broad open platform totalling more than 300 contributing organisations and individuals whose joint efforts create a relaxed and welcoming space for exchange

of opinions and respectful discussion on topics of public interest. Everyone can propose and hold their event on LAMPA – a two-day summer festival in Cēsis.

Solutions and activities



THE LAMPA CONVERSATION FESTIVAL 2020 AND 1 TO 2 JULY 2020



On account of the pandemic, the last two years were poles apart in terms of festival content and production. In 2020, the festival was moved to about 30 venues across Latvia from its habitual grounds at the Cēsis Castle Park, where it had been happening since 2015. The traditional LAMPA stages transformed into LAMPA studios – indoor conversation spaces designed for the online format. The studios could also be visited on-site, within the limits of current restrictions. The usual two-day format was stretched into four, spacing out the content to make it easy to follow.

In 2021, the festival returned to Cēsis and its hallmark format of

conversation stages for onsite visitors. Having anticipated some form of restrictions on public gatherings, we had planned to locate the stages in multiple venues across the town. However, shortly before the festival was due to start, new regulations came into force stipulating Covid19 certificate control for the visitors and cordoning off the territory.

In the past two years, we have made significant headway with live broadcasts. Even before that, we would record some conversations, broadcast them live and save them in the archive, but that was just an add-on to the onsite format. With restrictions on public gathering, we actively shifted to live broadcasts and adjusted the festival website for a more comfortable viewing experience, archiving and searching.

The festival extended its collaboration network to channels TV4 and TV24, which provided live broadcasts in addition to the LMT Straume streaming platform. This way, we reached out to a new audience who wouldn't have come in person under regular circumstances. In addition, we have observed that in many people's homes, the festival conversations run in the background on a parallel

screen, delivering our content to those who hadn't exactly planned to sit down and listen.

In 2020, we introduced the concept of Communal Viewing Sites, and any public or open place where people could watch and discuss the LAMPA events together could become one. Communities could pick and choose their own programme out of all the available broadcasts, focusing on their topics of interest, and have follow-up discussions. The initiative helped us expand the festival space, engage local communities and promote a culture of conversation and discussion across Latvia. People were very enthusiastic and happy to get involved. A few sites were even organised in the Latvian diaspora communities abroad. The venues were very diverse, from small cafes to libraries to large public centres with a huge visitor flow and a follow-up cultural programme after the festival broadcast.

In 2021, LAMPA offered training and seminars to those who wanted to create Communal Viewing Sites, introducing the LAMPA concept and helping to define what we mean by community-specific content, how to work on publicity and reach their intended audience.

THE LAMPA ONLINE CONVERSATION SCHOOL 2020 AND 2021



The Conversation School is a series of open workshops to develop practical skills for better interaction with others and learn to converse with dignity and respect, maintain a wellargued discussion, listen to opposing views, reflect and analyse information.

The Conversation School also moved online, which turned

out to be a massive bonus, as the audience increased about tenfold. The live lectures were also recorded and added to the archive, potentially increasing the viewer numbers even more. Organisation and finance also benefited from the new model compared to driving to onsite events across Latvia.

Challenges

The hardest thing to deal with was the unpredictability of the situation, the not knowing how it will develop and the constant adaptation. It was a huge challenge to organise such a massive event onsite, complying with all epidemiological safety requirements. Typically, the planning takes up to a year, so in 2021 we already had a contingency plan about physical distancing, which meant multiple smaller venues. But shortly before the festival, additional restrictions were imposed with visitor Covid19 certificates and cordoning off each territory. Such a vast festival with more than 200 partners is very hard to reorient and relocate to one larger venue. So we ended up cordoning off every single festival site in Cēsis and checking visitor documents throughout. It was a massive challenge and a very specific experience. To ensure everything was done to the letter, we even consulted with the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the Ministry of Health.

Communication with visitors was another test. Since ours was one of the first events with certificate control, some people hadn't known about the new rule, and there were multiple cases of misunderstandings and complaints. LAMPA had always been a familyfriendly festival, but now we couldn't admit families with children. A couple of days before the start, new rules were adopted with the option to allow families with children and adults with tests into a separate zone, but there was no way we could reorganise all the festival territories at such short notice. It just couldn't be helped, and we had to take complaints from the audience.

To deliver the festival programme both on-site and online, we had to keep two audiences in mind – the people right there and the ones on the other end of the screen. To address and engage both. In our experience, with a focus on the audience on-site, online viewers feel left out and reduced to the ranks of passive observers. That said, if the focus is moved online, enabling and supporting online questions and discussions, onsite visitors also switch to this format, and there is less face-to-face interaction in the conversations and questions.

“Actually, it's impossible to focus on two audiences at once, on-site and online, so one will inevitably prevail. The question is which, and also – what's more important for the organiser.”

The events designed expressly for live broadcasts are limited in format. If onsite events can take different forms (creative workshops, one-to-one conversation or role-plays), a panel discussion will most likely prevail with recorded content.

Innovative practices

A great solution for visitor document control on-site was to arrange wristband stations where visitors would show the required documents and get one wristband for safe admission to festival venues. This made the work much easier for our staff and reduced the risk of large gatherings near the entrance.

Since this type of admission control was news for visitors, too, some didn't have an ID to go with their Covid19 certificate, only a driver's licence, which wouldn't do. So we worked with municipal police to develop a system for recruiting their help to identify people who didn't have a passport or ID on them.

Given that many people often consume the festival content as a background sound, without even looking at the screen, we experimented with offering conversation audios on Spotify. There's been some engagement, although still less than with the video archives.

Takeaways

The team has gained a rich experience with flexible planning, we're now much better prepared to adjust more quickly than before, there's less stress and anxiety with unpredicted situations.

The online format has several advantages: the festival and the conversation school audiences have expanded, and a rich archive of stored content is being produced, with unlimited access for the viewers and the organisers. That said, the archive also has its downsides: the viewers become more casual and less committed to watching live if they know they'll be able to see the event later in the archive, although many never get round to it.

Suggestions

- ▶ Try to rise to the challenge and choose to keep going rather than cancel.
- ▶ Keep in mind that now you need a whole different kind of planning: for the shortterm and more adaptable.
- ▶ Be aware that the public still needs cultural events – the demand during the pandemic confirms this. Consistency is the key to not losing your audience. In the case of LAMPA, we need to keep talking about issues of public concern, and maintaining a culture of conversation in a pandemic is all the more critical.

Looking into the future

People need live experiences, two-way conversations and consistency in cultural processes, and this need isn't going anywhere. It will persist no matter what. Knowing this helps to keep things going. LAMPA is committed to nurturing conversation and discussion among diverse speakers who might never have met if not for the festival. LAMPA emerged with a mission to organise face-to-face talks with decision-makers and public officials in the form of physical meetings. Live broadcasting takes away these unstudied onsite conversations, serendipitous encounters, follow-up discussions, contact-building and networking.

Looking ahead, it is clear that some conversations will keep being broadcast online and stored in the archive. That said, the principal focus of LAMPA is on visitor presence and onsite conversations. A significant portion of these doesn't happen on-stage but during follow-up chats and discussions that bring together like-minded people and spark valuable discussions. The festivals often result in new associations and other NGOs being established due to having brought together people with similar views or a shared vision.

Communal Viewing Sites has been a successful innovation, and we intend to develop it further, maybe slightly tweaking the organisation. We're considering regional festival embassies that would coordinate local sites.

Conversation schools will definitely remain online. Although there's less sense of presence, the gains outweigh the loss – this way, masses of people have been able to participate and gain valuable experience.

Skudras Metropole Creative Partnership

Told by
Gundega Skudriņa, Director

Skudras Metropole (Latvian – Ant Metropolis) is led by Gundega Skudriņa to implement unique and creative projects in the event sector, culture and art. The partnership has won

international praise for countless projects, including The Mirror Cabin. The conversation covered cultural projects during the pandemic and associated challenges.

Solutions and activities

Our team has always worked in a dynamic sector where you're facing change every day. We've developed many experimental projects where we've experienced change, risk, courage and unpredictability – all these things had long been present in our work and had qualified us to rise to the occasion. So when the pandemic hit, it was plain to see that changes in our professional lives would eventually be good for the sector, though not without tough times along the way. So we were excited but also knew it was going to be hard – we'd have to put in huge amounts of work, and the situation would require massive physical, mental, emotional and financial resources.

Successful projects are sparked by the creative impulse of the here and now. It's a functional formula and, actually, pretty straightforward – if you're really focused on finding these impulses, you will. And once you do, you will figure out how to help the people in their situation. The real challenges are the other factors that come into play once you start the project – enterprise, courage and other issues.

“The click of understanding what and how you should do comes from being attuned to what's going on. Culture

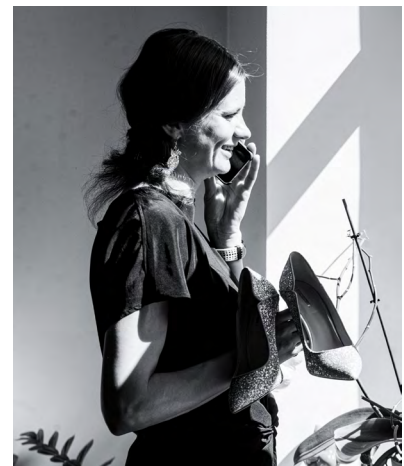
can reflect on the here and now and be the light of hope for the public.”

The fundamental task for the cultural sector is to keep moving and keep looking rather than just going through the motions, stuck in a rut. This is tough, and not everyone will be bothered because it means keeping your eye on the ball all the time, always on the lookout for the spark of impulse. Rather than following the old pattern only because you're used to it, and that's how things are normally done, you give people what they actually need today. What the world and the public need right now.

DIAL-IN THEATRE APRIL AND MAY 2020



Essentially, this was a one-day performance by phone. After you purchased your ticket, actors would call you five times a day at certain intervals, tell you a story and give you a task, such as to look through your family album or make yourself a cup of coffee. The following stories would link to these actions. During the phone calls, the audience would be asked some questions. There were five actors involved, calling one after another, each telling their story, and in the



end, all stories fell into place and revealed the whole picture. Each sketch lasted 10-15 minutes, and people from nine countries dialled in to listen.

The 'dial-in theatre' proved that people were desperate for communication and scared, locked up in their homes at the start of the pandemic. After the show, the audience was very moved and grateful – this had been a chance to talk. Overall, it was a clearly successful and heartwarming project. For the actors, too – they were intrigued by the challenge to play on the phone for just one listener.

The project won silver in the Best Virtual Event category from Global Eventex Awards 2021 and got Grand Prix bronze as the Best Virtual Event & Experience.

THE GLASS CABIN FROM JUNE 2020



This project is about an exclusive mirror cabin suspended above the Amata River and reflecting the landscape. The sides of the structure can be opened, and the floor window allows a thrilling view of the rapids. The cabin is available for meals and accommodation.

The mirror cabin was hugely popular – it sold out in a couple of hours for the entire season and earned excellent visibility worldwide. The key to success was its concept that blends tradition and innovation. It combines digital technologies with a connection to nature (extremely important for the Latvian people) and a unique sensory experience. The solution is up-to-date and context-specific, and meets an actual need.

The project won seven awards, including the gold prize at the BEAWORLD 2020 international festival for creative excellence.

Challenges

Innovative ideas need innovative solutions, often unprecedented. The technical side of things was the greatest challenge. The communication went entirely digital, but event management might require sophisticated technological solutions, and they're not always easily communicable online.

Another challenge was the bureaucracy. Innovative projects such as a mirror cabin above the river or a floating island often struggle with approval. You spend months and months doing paperwork because existing regulations don't cover things that have never been done before. There's no precedent for rules to build a cabin above the river.

New ideas and event forms require a firm conviction – the whole team must believe in them and deliver with absolute confidence. The public is changing, too. Today's visitors aren't what they were two years ago, but there's no guarantee the new form or solution will make sense and catch on.

Innovative practices

Pandemic projects have been totally different, with totally different solutions because the circumstances have been extraordinary, which had led to unprecedented offers, such as the dial-in theatre.

Throughout the restrictions, the persistent questions have been why something is being developed, what people need, and what's the purpose of the initiative. If cultural workers start with these questions and give honest and straightforward answers, they may succeed and deliver winning projects the public appreciates and accepts.

Takeaways

The pandemic projects have proved viable, surprising and groundbreaking. They've continued existing practices on entirely new levels and unprecedented forms – meaningful, useful and inspirational.

**“These changes have driven progress and creativity.
We can't go back to how things were, but how they are can
always be changed.”**

Professionally, the pandemic has done the industry good. Stagnant pools have been re-freshed, and people have had to think outside the box and learn creativity, not just in theory but through practical work. It's been a win-win for the visitor since all cultural content makers are exploring new forms. Not all solutions will work, which is normal because there's a good deal of trial and error in change and transformation. But navigating these pitfalls can get you a better, more worthwhile result.

These two years have taught us to work remotely, and now we know great things can happen across significant distances. For instance, the dial-in theatre project has shown you don't necessarily need to leave the room to deliver quality cultural projects and experiences. Ultimately, though, what matters is that people love the result and positive feedback stimulates future development.

Suggestions

- Resist the instinct to listen to others and trust your own intuition. Don't be afraid no one will need the new product. Offer will prompt demand. A good idea with a specific goal, something people need here and now, will definitely succeed and find an audience. The key ingredient is knowing that it's all in your hands, all up to you, and you can't sit and wait for others to start moving. You may need to restructure your field or explore other options, pathways and forms, but it's up to you, so get to it.

“Content is king, and form should go with the times.”

- Cultural workers should go in with passion. Without it, there's no point trying. The important thing is to want to work, be less critical of others, pitch in, hard, and right any wrongs.
- Teamwork matters – you can't fight it alone. Your team is your fundamental resource, so choose colleagues who match your passion and enthusiasm. The rest can be learnt.

Looking into the future

Creative products and services should be made for the here and now. So you need to keep your hand on the pulse to detect the need for a new project. There's no point making longterm plans – you can't know how things will go, what the situation will be. Even the nearest plans will always need tweaking.

Ultimately, stay true to your audience, and they will stay true to you. Our audience does. And every new project sets the quality bar for the next.

#Ēkultūra Campaign

At the very start of the pandemic, in March 2020, Latvia's Ministry of Culture and its institutions launched a public information campaign encouraging the citizens to enjoy a broad spectrum of culture online and receive the available e-services remotely without visiting cultural institutions in person for the duration of the emergency situation.

The campaign listed the digital offer of cultural organisations on the Ministry of Culture website (section #Ēkultūra Digital Resources and e-Services), pooling the links to virtual exhibitions, concert and theatrical performance recordings, educational programmes and other digital opportunities by cultural institutions active across a wide range of genres.

As of now, the offer is summed up in a simple list with no search function. That said, it is still a valuable source of information that paints a comprehensive picture of the current offer in Latvia's cultural sector.

The up-to-date offer in the government-funded [Latvian School Bag](#) programme is summed up in a downloadable file, giving educators a complete list of programmes proposed by different cultural organisations that can be paid for with this targeted public funding.

Creating a user-friendly electronic platform with a search function for the digitally available cultural offer and detailed information on each listed item would be the next step in promoting digital cultural products. This, however, needs more significant investments than are currently planned.



Summary

The pandemic took the cultural sector by surprise, abruptly snatching away its onsite visitors, setting operational limits and putting on hold future plans and ongoing projects. This has brought lasting changes to people's experiences and communication patterns and affected cultural consumption habits.

That said, the new and unprecedented conditions, the need to adapt and the will to keep going have contributed to creative approaches and innovative solutions in the presentation of cultural content. The genuine efforts of arts and cultural organisations to reach their audiences in a pandemic situation, given the limited capabilities, have no doubt contributed to growth and resilience across the sector. All our interviewees who shared the experiences of 25 Latvian arts and cultural organisations have confirmed this in their accounts of the main pandemic takeaways.

In fact, these takeaways are the principal focus of our report. This time, we haven't analysed cultural consumption data showing a drop in onsite visits due to pandemic-induced limitations and a corresponding increase in digital audience numbers or the impact on employment and career opportunities in the creative sector. Instead, in this review, we have tried to document the pandemic trends in the cultural offer and draw conclusions on lessons learnt in the context of potential future developments.

Four major formats of cultural developments have dominated the pandemic as organisations have been trying to come up with diverse creative solutions.

1. Onsite events with caps on visitor numbers

As far as possible, cultural organisations have tried to organise events on-site for a limited number of people in the so-called secure mode as stipulated by the official protocol – reorganising the venue, checking visitor Covid-19 certificates, putting up signs and posters, providing disinfectants, etc. This solution dramatically reduced visitor numbers and show or concert revenues but did provide a degree of continuity in art and helped creators to stay employed.

Cultural organisations have learnt to function in new venues as they tried to reach out to new audiences. For instance, concerts in residential courtyards drew viewers who wouldn't have gone to a show in a cultural centre. The organisations also sought new interactive forms for closer cooperation with the audience focusing on individual creativity. Some of the most striking examples here are the Own Your Town public creative laboratories in Sigulda, the new sitespecific objects in the KOPĀ Pub-

lic Art Programme run by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art or the innovative architectural solution for a new open-air cultural space in Rīga's Latgale suburb.

The new cultural content has given comfort and encouragement to overcome the pervasive sense of social isolation through artistic representation of universal values, and a few cultural organisations have offered art therapy practices. Museum programmes made in cooperation with art therapists have enjoyed great popularity (The Route of Wellbeing at the Latvian National Museum of Art, etc.), and there have been campaigns and initiatives to reduce stress and anxiety (such as the Discharge-Recharge Wall by the Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre during the Latvia Ceramics Biennale).

2. Digital events

Digital events evolved during the lockdown when physical attendance on-site was prohibited. The digital format hasn't entirely replaced face-to-face interaction, but people would have felt even more isolated and deprived of information and communication in the absence of digital tools.

The range of digital offers has been really diverse, from simple live broadcasts and recordings or presentations and photo galleries published on websites to targeted digital products with setting-specific digital content, user-friendly design and interactive communication mechanisms, or augmented reality programmes. Cultural organisations have learned new skills and improved existing ones in technology application, gradually exploring the finer details of digital content production to make it as user-friendly and accessible as possible in the given circumstances.

It hasn't been easy for musicians and performing artists to adapt to the digital format because, by nature and definition, it rules out a direct and immediate connection with the audience – a massive contributing factor to a complete artistic experience. That said, it has enabled giving and receiving post-event feedback through digital communication tools. Besides, digital performances could be easily experienced by audiences beyond Rīga and even Latvia – a really valuable opportunity most appreciated by the Latvian diaspora worldwide. The Great Amber Concert Hall, whose development strategy clearly stresses the improvement of the digital offer, has managed to attract an incredibly broad audience in terms of geography, which they could never have done with onsite concerts. These new participation opportunities are extremely important and most appreciated by groups whose capacity to join events on-site is limited for a

range of objective reasons (people with motor disabilities or certain health conditions, young parents, etc.).

Cultural organisations have been very creative in using diverse technological platforms and tools – different mobile apps, Zoom, Spotify, Google maps, etc. A great case in point is The Iran Conference – a Zoom play by eSARTE Company, which earned high praise across the theatrical community. The play was staged entirely on Zoom – actors played the participants of a Zoom conference, and the audience watched the recording. Another example is the visual artist Gints Gabrāns, whose site-specific virtual sculptures could be accessed through the SAN mobile app.

Cultural organisations have substantially developed their educational offer with new lectures and seminars, podcasts and video interviews, enabling a vibrant public discussion around various topics in the cultural domain. This has supported learning about different art styles and musical genres and brought the artists closer to their audiences. For instance, the Latvian National Museum of Art has made and published on its website multiple audio and video stories about artists and artworks delivered by professional actors – an excellent example of cross-sectoral cooperation.

The Great Amber Concert Hall offered remote participation in Amber's Musical Talk Club, and the virtual turnout beat all expectations with around 250 participants, way more than they could ever receive on-site. That said, with this format, it's impossible to assess the degree of engagement with the content because logging on to a live broadcast does not mean every viewer is one hundred per cent immersed and isn't doing anything else on the side. So this is an extra challenge for online event directors – figuring out the right dynamic to fit the relatively brief audience attention spans associated with content consumption on digital devices.

In addition, the cultural organisations were very focused on schools when all learning went online. They offered digital educational programmes in The Latvian School Bag programme – these were either adapted from earlier or made entirely from scratch with the new format in mind. Museums have been especially active in building this offer, tweaking and transforming their programmes to fit the digital setting. For instance, the Latvian National Museum of Art produced Meanings – an innovative remote education programme that pooled the efforts of exhibition curators and art historians, scenographers and designers. These programmes have been a substantial contribution to the educational sector and a huge support for teachers and pupils in remote learning as well as a great opportunity for creators to stay professionally active despite the pandemic.

3. Hybrid events

Onsite events for a limited audience have been streamed online or accompanied by satellite events in a digital setting. This has been the most common format. It has de-

veloped during the pandemic and will likely continue in the future. The biggest dilemma here is providing remote participants with equal opportunities for engagement on a par with their onsite counterparts. So far, more often than not, this has not been the case.

LAMPA Conversation Festival has provided extensive broadcasts for numerous events involving 200 partners and supported “communal viewing sites” in other cities and towns to maximise interaction among the participants. However, the organisers have concluded each audience – onsite and online – has its own fitting formats which can't be easily combined, so it's better to choose one primary focus.

4. Individually navigated cultural participation

Cultural organisations have provided stories and various pre-made materials to help people join cultural processes remotely, at their convenience, and enable them to navigate the new cultural experience.

The pandemic inspired such popular formats as tours and walks, games and audio shows in the urban environment, where, after downloading the story, tasks and the route to their smart device, the visitor goes on a self-navigated tour with the help of pre-made materials. For instance, the Kuldīga Museum produced an urban game, Old Town Nuance, where players use Google Maps to take a particular route and learn historical facts about the place. Meanwhile, the KVADRIFRONS Company offered an audio play, The Chronicle of a Rīgan Rag, where the participants took a walking route around the city and heard stories and legends about Rīga across a series of stops. Feedback on these innovative formats can be obtained by asking the participants to share their experiences on social media.

The organisations used broadly available tools, such as smartphones and parcel machines, to deliver cultural content to the audience. Libraries used the latter to provide books – an innovative service that quickly became standard and convenient practice, seeing as the public had already grown accustomed to using remote delivery for commercial purchases. Dirty Deal Teatro used parcel machines to deliver visuals and instructions for their dial-in audio show, Exercises of (Be)Longing, connecting the audience with the narrator. Skudras Metropole also offered a dial-in theatre show to be experienced from home during the lockdown – a most welcome solution at a time when people were starved of communication.

Thus, public cultural institutions have introduced multiple products and services in this category, using fairly basic technical solutions to develop exploratory routes and offer free-of-charge content. This raises the question of sustainability and future development of such cultural products, the feasibility of potential content updates, and cultural institutions' capacity to turn a profit with these services.

Principle takeaways

→ A broader and more diverse audience

Today, cultural policy has a strong emphasis on cultural rights and access to culture for different social groups. While the pandemic reduced the numbers of loyal audiences, that is, the regular visitors, it may have helped attract and engage new, harder-to-reach audiences, which has always been an important concern for arts and cultural organisations.

- ▶ Sharing content online has drawn geographically distant visitors and culture consumers whose capacity to participate had been limited. Also, there are more options to invite artists and speakers, which helps diversify cultural content and attract new audiences.
- ▶ Event recordings with no fixed access times enable viewers to consume cultural content at their convenience. Besides, recordings can later be enhanced with subtitles in other languages or a sign language translation to deliver the information to an even wider audience.
- ▶ The digital format makes it possible to deliver to a broader viewership specific cultural content on narrow, niche topics that would normally have limited demand in one particular geographical setting and would most likely attract very small crowds to onsite events.
- ▶ Larger outdoor events in cities and towns have created participation opportunities for a harder-to-reach audience that doesn't normally visit cultural institutions.
- ▶ Institutional efforts towards a more comprehensive audience engagement in cultural content making have stimulated co-creation, given the public new cultural venues and improved social cohesion.

→ Developing digital cultural content

Communication has largely gone digital, as people talk remotely with relatives and colleagues, attend conferences, study, watch films and consume cultural content online. When you create a cultural offer in such circumstances, you can't ignore these changes and emerging habits if you intend to meet your audience in the digital environment. Remote life and isolation have pushed cultural organisations to reach out to their visitors on a more personal, individual level. So digital solutions to adapt cultural products to different target groups could be an important point on the future agenda for arts and cultural organisations.

- ▶ Audio-visual recording of cultural events has helped preserve masses of cultural content. Recordings can be used internally within the organisation and offered to the public on Internet platforms and social media. The future will call for solutions to monetise such recordings, which will require a more detailed analysis of existing sales data (such as the demand for theatre recordings on a pay-to-watch basis).

- ▶ Parallel digital alternatives to live events (such as streams and Internet broadcasts) have become more widespread and easier to do, so they will most likely remain an alternative for onsite visits but won't replace the latter with exclusively digital products.

- ▶ As to the most perspective digital products, those will likely be made-for-the-digital offers with targeted content and design and interactive participation opportunities.

- ▶ Hybrid events with audience engagement are hard to make if we're aiming for equal quality for both audiences, on-site and online. Like it or not, one will feel neglected because each format demands distinct accents and tools.

→ New skills among cultural workers and creators

Cultural workers and creators have demonstrated impressive creative initiative, remarkable enthusiasm, and a strong commitment to keep working and stay in touch with their audience throughout the pandemic. It's been a difficult, challenging time, but it has brought new creative approaches, innovative solutions, and original perspectives on the resources within the sector.

- ▶ We've seen substantial growth in digital skills and methods across the board. The situation has required that organisations quickly learn to use new digital tools, develop their digital offer and diversify communication channels.
- ▶ Team leaders have had to learn new tech solutions for remote management, and although this didn't necessarily lead to universally successful communication and information exchange across the sector, the situation has certainly sparked an interest in trying new digital tools.
- ▶ Managers have had to learn ways to keep the team spirit alive in remote employment conditions. Organisation members have stressed that team spirit and mutual support throughout the pandemic have been crucial, and their absence has been acutely felt.
- ▶ Initiative, enthusiasm and creativity have been more important than ever. Organisations have managed to look more broadly at their field and learn to use alternative spaces and environments for culture and art.

Some organisations have used the pandemic to reflect on more environmentally friendly operating solutions or more inclusive practices to attract diverse audiences. Embracing such ambitious goals makes organisations more future-oriented and involved with imminent global challenges – a massive step towards organisational growth.

Challenges

Persistent uncertainty has been the central challenge for all industries across the sector. When it's impossible to plan even a week ahead, continuing with projects whose activities are normally planned a year in advance is very hard. Restrictions on public gatherings have changed multiple times, almost right before they come into force, making cultural organisations grapple with lastminute changes to their programmes and plans. Not infrequently, events have had to be cancelled. Long spells in the face of such uncertainty have built tension and heaped on cultural institutions masses of extra work associated with rescheduling. Organisations have learned to make contingency plans and prepare at least two scenarios for each event and activity, with and without restrictions on visitor numbers, not knowing what the situation will be on the day.

With regular communication channels cut off or restricted, organisations have had to adapt and seek new forms and appropriate technical solutions to reach their audience. The overabundance of digital content on the Internet, the general isolation and subsequent change of habits all had to be considered. Unfortunately, all cultural workers didn't feel equally at home with new digital tools. To deliver high-quality digital products, organisations have had to redouble their focus on the technical issues, know and manage the process and ensure constant quality control. This was the hardest for organisations with no pre-pandemic investments in digital skills and tools.

Another concern was finding ways to make digital content turn a profit. Visitors are used to buying tickets for onsite events, but purchasing online content hadn't been a regular practice before the pandemic, and people still tend to expect all Internet content to be available free of charge. Working around these attitudes takes skills and knowledge, suggesting that cultural organisations will need highquality inservice training programmes to share and learn from successful experiences.

Copyright issues are a major organisational concern with events that feature copyrighted work. When moving their scheduled events online, organisations need to review their prior copyright agreements, which usually limit the options to change event formats and expand the potential audience by offering content online. As a rule, distribution rights for copyrighted material will be different for an onsite performance, a live broadcast online, or a recording, so addressing copyright issues before publishing various kinds of recordings in the digital environment will remain an important concern for producers of digital cultural offer.

Looking into the future

The pandemic has brought us digital cultural products and new art forms, which, in turn, has sparked ongoing discussions among professionals and cultural policymakers. One persistent question has been how much

attention we should pay in the future to building a digital cultural offer while urging the audience to come back to onsite events. Also, what new channels and funding models could we use to distribute cultural content? There is also the question of looking for new forms and content (do Zoom and dial-in shows still count as theatre?) and new forms of interdisciplinary cooperation, say, between culture and healthcare. There are no quick and ready answers, so it'll be interesting to keep track of the discussion and see how it unfolds.

At the start of the pandemic, there was a trend towards digital versions of existing supply, but as time went by, new products were created as a direct and unique response to the here and now. And cultural organisations will likely continue developing these solutions to keep diversifying the offer and reaching out to a broader audience.

Expanding and diversifying the audience through digital tools is one of the greatest takeaways from the pandemic. The next question is how to store and give access to the masses of recordings and other digital materials – the current websites of cultural organisations aren't designed to offer substantial amounts of digital content in an easy-to-access and user-friendly way. Perhaps there's a need for a joint national platform for digital cultural content, or maybe we can go international and work towards a more comprehensive distribution of cultural content on an even broader scale – across the Baltic Region or even all Europe?

Our interviewees overwhelmingly agree the digital offer can't replace onsite experiences. Moreover, given how much remote communication has entered our lives during the pandemic, people increasingly crave face-to-face encounters, actual physical experiences and conversations in real life rather than through a screen. The online format deprives us of natural feedback, spontaneous interactions, dynamic discussions and new contacts. In the post-pandemic world, cultural activities could play a key role in mending the tears in the social tapestry and restoring lost interpersonal ties, which has direct links to mental health, public wellbeing and solidarity. Cross-disciplinary cooperation between culture and healthcare could become a key direction for experimental and explorative developments in the nearest future.

People's habits and communication patterns have changed. In the post-pandemic reality, we won't come back to where we were before – the change is irrevocable. Art and culture will need to reflect the new public mood and respond to audience needs. We will have to find a meaningful and intelligible creative language for new topics and issues of concern for the future society. So we hope arts and cultural organisations can keep their passion and enthusiasm, grit and determination to continue with their essential public functions, which are likely to stay at least as fluid and challenging as they have lately been.