

Active
CITY|zens



**Developing
New Audiences
in Challenging
Urban Areas**



**Active CITY(zens)
member
organisations**

KUNSTrePUBLIK

Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik / Center for Art and Urbanistics
Germany
www.zku-berlin.org

Факултет за работи што не се учат / The Faculty of Things That Can't Be Learned

North Macedonia
www.akto-fru.org

Arts and Theatre Institute / Institut umění – Divadelní ústav

Prague Quadrennial / Pražské Quadriennale
Czech Republic
www.idu.cz

IZOLYATSIA

Platform for cultural initiatives
Ukraine
www.izolyatsia.org

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Reimagining Audience Development Through Urban Interventions

Foreword



Moataz Nasr, Tanura, 2012, Donetsk, Ukraine.
Photo: Dima Sergeev

In today's evolving cultural and urban landscapes, audience development transcends traditional notions of simply attracting visitors to cultural events. It is about creating meaningful, long-lasting connections that resonate deeply within communities, using innovative approaches to engage diverse audiences. This document delves into the work of four distinct organizations—Prague Quadrennial (PQ) from Prague, Czech Republic, Association For Art And Science, Faculty Of Things That Can't Be Learned (FRU) from Skopje, North Macedonia, Center for Art and Urbanistics (ZK/U) from Berlin, Germany, and IZOLYATSIA from Ukraine—and their groundbreaking initiatives to transform public spaces into vibrant cultural stages.

The Active CITY(zens) project unites these organizations under a shared mission: to design innovative urban interventions that challenge perceptions of culture and its role in everyday life. Through the framework of "10 seconds, 10 minutes, 10 days, and 10 years," the project explores the potential of time-bound prototypes to engage audiences in unconventional ways, fostering curiosity and dialogue. Each organization brings a unique perspective shaped by its urban context and local challenges, offering a collective blueprint for rethinking cultural engagement.



#onvacation, Venice, Italy. Photo: Dima Sergeev

→ ZK/U Berlin redefines micro-engagement through "10-SECOND" performance bites. By utilizing its rooftop as a stage visible to passing commuters and surrounding communities, ZK/U offered fleeting yet impactful moments of cultural interaction. These micro-performances highlight the power of short, accessible interventions to spark interest and connect with audiences who might otherwise remain untouched by traditional cultural programming.

→ In Skopje, FRU's "10-MINUTE" interventions revive and preserve urban landmarks like the smallest brutalist building Domche and their participatory events center both the architecture and the people it serves. The "City as a Stage" methodology bridges the gap between forgotten spaces and active civic engagement, showing how art can reclaim and transform the urban environment.

→ PQ exemplifies the "10-DAY" model, embedding performative interventions into its international festival. With creative teams from 30 universities designing site-specific works, PQ not only amplified emerging talents but also transformed the public realm into a living, interactive gallery. These projects connect global narratives to local audiences, demonstrating how large-scale events can leave a lasting imprint on urban spaces and their communities.

→ IZOLYATSIA, originally from Ukraine but currently operating from various parts of Europe, embodies resilience and the potential of cultural programming in the face of adversity. By learning from its partners and applying these insights, IZOLYATSIA crafts strategies for engaging communities displaced or disrupted by war. Their work underscores the role of culture in fostering healing and dialogue, laying the groundwork for the eventual cultural restoration of Ukraine's war-torn regions.

Together, these case studies illustrate how audience development can transcend geographic, cultural, and societal boundaries. Each organization tailors its approach to local needs while fostering global connections, highlighting the adaptability and innovation necessary for cultural institutions to thrive in today's complex world. Through participatory methodologies and a focus on inclusivity, they redefine what it means to engage audiences, making culture an integral part of daily life.

The following texts uncover the creative and practical strategies employed by these organizations to expand cultural access, build community bonds, and transform public spaces into platforms for dialogue. Their work serves not only as an inspiration but also as a roadmap for anyone seeking to rethink how culture can engage, empower, and connect. These stories remind us that audience development is not just about numbers; it's about fostering relationships that enrich lives and reimagine the potential of public spaces.



Olha Filonchuk, ZK/U Open Studio Event. Photo: Mykhailo Glubokyi

From Moabit's Cargo Station to Cultural Center: Art, Urbanism, and Community Engagement

Miodrag Kuć



Photo: Kristin Krause

Introduction: ZK/U and the Moabit Neighbourhood

ZK/U Berlin (Centre for Arts and Urbanistics) is a hybrid cultural institution that combines an international artistic residency with a neighbourhood socio-cultural centre, music club, community garden, and publicly accessible rooftop.

Established in 2012 in Berlin's Moabit district, ZK/U operates as an independent art residency and project space led by artists. It serves as a hub for the exchange between global discourses and local practices, aiming to share, develop, and make these experiences accessible to other stakeholders and cultural producers.

ZK/U continuously conducts a variety of in-house projects and initiatives, focusing on artistic research and social innovation. These activities include regular formats such as OPENHAUS, GÜTERMARKT, and SPEISEKINO, alongside cultural EU partner projects and neighbourhood-focused programs. Each project aims to strengthen the connection between art and society while deepening the understanding of urban dynamics.

At any given time, up to 15 national and international artists and urban researchers live and work simultaneously in residencies, developing projects that are regularly presented to the public. ZK/U is also actively engaged in numerous social and cultural initiatives that address pressing urban and societal challenges.

The Moabit neighborhood is a significant post-industrial area located on the northwestern edge of Berlin's central district, Mitte. Once Germany's largest inner-city industrial zone, Moabit today features a blend of industrial remnants, dense urban blocks, and large-scale infrastructure.

Historically, Moabit was a 19th-century enclave populated by Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France, who also gave the area its name. With the onset of industrialization in the early 20th century, the district became a vital manufacturing hub. Goods were transported to and from Berlin via Moabit's railway depot and the city's largest inland port, Westhafen.

Surrounded entirely by water, Moabit has historically been home to a growing migrant population, driven by industrial development and infrastructural improvements. Predominantly a working-class district, Moabit has undergone a rapid gentrification process, beginning with property shifts in the 1990s and culminating in radical social and cultural changes during the 2000s. Today, Moabit retains an image of a semi-periphery—part of the extended city center—where marginal populations and migrant communities coexist with tech expats, young families, and cultural workers. Unfortunately, students and artists can no longer afford to live in the area.

This unique socio-spatial context significantly influences how ZK/U operates, shaping both its program structure and thematic focus. ZK/U stands out as one of the rare cultural institutions in Berlin whose programming is highly contextualized and co-produced in collaboration with diverse local communities. As recognition of this effort, the city of Berlin granted ZK/U a funded community manager position this year, aimed at professionalizing the coordination and event management of its community-led programming.

Historical and Urban Context of ZK/U and the Moabit Railway Area

What better place to explore urban issues than a city that has been continuously rebuilt for the past 150 years? Berlin has experienced shifting borders at geographic, political, social, and cultural levels. Transitional regimes, the destruction of war, the division and reunification of the city, the introduction of new legislative frameworks, and the shift from heavy industry to a modern postindustrial economy have all contributed to Berlin's state of perpetual flux.

As a result, the city has acquired a unique urban character, often defined by a chronic lack of financial resources and a high degree of improvisation. This distinctive mix has frequently led to unconventional planning processes and a wide variety of informal activities, establishing Berlin as a globally recognized laboratory for exploring urban challenges and innovations.

Historically, ZK/U has been part of the broader area known as Moabiter Güterbahnhof (Cargo Station). The building itself served as an administrative center for coordinating goods storage and transportation, surrounded by various warehouses. It played a significant role in the distribution of goods between the neighboring Westhafen (an inner-city port and the shortest connection to Hamburg Port) and the city of Berlin, making the cargo station an important heritage asset for the district.

However, with changes to the railway system—primarily the shift toward truck-based transportation—and the relocation of logistics centers outside the city center, the cargo station gradually lost its original importance and purpose. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the German Railway Company (Deutsche Bahn) rented parts of the space as storage for small-scale companies. Eventually, the entire area was abandoned and became an adventurous playground for local youth.

In the course of reconstructing the larger area between two key S-Bahn stations (Westhafen and Beusselstraße), the industrial land was repurposed to accommodate new types of work and recreation. The cargo station area became central to this transformation, driven largely by the efforts and claims of local communities. Following a participatory process that spanned several years, it was decided at the local level that parts of the cargo station would be preserved and complemented by a landscape redesign, including the creation of a public park.

This moment can be seen as the conceptual foundation of ZK/U, although it was followed by a public competition and reconstruction phase. It's worth noting that, at the time, the local mayor and urban development department envisioned a future that went "beyond preservation." The competition brief for a non-profit institution to take over the premises explicitly supported socially engaged urban practices.

After winning the competition with the idea of combining an international artistic residency with a local socio-cultural center, the non-profit organization KUNSTrePUBLIK began exploring ways to finance the conversion process. Fortunately, during that period, the lottery foundation (Lotto Stiftung) adjusted its funding models to support more independent spaces, bringing ZK/U one step closer to its official opening in 2012.



Photo: Kristin Krause

ZK/U as a Residency and Platform for Creative and Urban Experimentation

Through its glocal program, ZK/U explores and critiques existing knowledge and practices in urban agglomerations, using them as a springboard for individual and community self-empowerment. Drawing on years of collective work as an artist-run initiative in Berlin and beyond, ZK/U fosters the development of resilient and inclusive networks that address the challenges of 21st-century city life.

The residency program is open to artists, scholars, and practitioners whose work focuses on the phenomenon of 'the city.' Residency fellows manage their own time and projects but also participate in ZK/U's collaborative framework. They are invited to present their projects and practices to

a select audience during ZK/U's weekly dinners or the monthly studio visits by professionals and associates from its international network (including research scholars, curators, local historians, practicing artists, university lecturers, and political activists). If they wish, fellows may also share their work with a broader audience during the bi-monthly open studio format, Openhaus, or by proposing their own public events and projects.

Additionally, fellows are encouraged to engage with ZK/U's public programs, such as the Gütermarkt flea market or the Speisekino cinematic-gastronomic nights, and to attend various events, exhibitions, workshops, and conferences organized as part of local and international long-term projects. Fellows are also encouraged to address topics relevant to local communities, ranging from coping with the effects of gentrification to exploring post-migration societies.

Considering the ongoing extension of the ZK/U building (2020–2025), significantly more spaces will soon be available to support community-driven programming. In addition to a multi-functional hall capable of hosting

various events (concerts, cinema, exhibitions, and conferences), special attention has been given to the development of educational spaces on the first floor, including seminar rooms, a communication workshop, an A/V podcast studio, and a rooftop terrace designed as an elevated public green space.

Challenges and Realities of the Reconstruction

The second phase of the ZK/U reconstruction, envisioned as a complex extension of a previously unheated warehouse, involved preserving and incorporating many historical elements into the new architecture. This phase is currently in its testing stage. Initially conceived as a project to extend the usability of the warehouse (Common Space) during colder months, it eventually evolved into a full-scale reconstruction.

The new steel-and-glass structure, designed by Peter Grundmann Architects, now envelops the historical building. This innovative design addresses energy efficiency concerns while creating

a variety of new multifunctional spaces, including a rooftop designated as a performative space.

However, several serious challenges arose along the way:

- **Pandemic and Market Disruptions:** Shortly after the project began, the global pandemic slowed down—or in some cases completely halted—the construction process. This was followed by the war in Ukraine, which caused significant price increases in the market.
- **Public Funding Procedures:** Since the reconstruction was financed by public funds (EU + City of Berlin, EFRE Program), all construction steps required tender procedures. These were often interrupted due to either a lack of bids (an overheated private market) or bids that exceeded the assigned budgets.
- **Ongoing Residency Program:** Throughout the reconstruction, we continued running the residency program, relocating activities to the park. This required additional effort and coordination from the entire team.
- **In-Kind Contributions:** As the official 'client,' we were required to invest 10% of the total project cost as in-kind contributions. This meant part of our team had to manage public competitions, coordinate construction companies on-site, and handle financial oversight.
- **Technical Challenges:** Lastly, synchronizing and reconnecting all the historical layers of the building with its infrastructure proved far more technically challenging than anticipated.

These challenges caused delays and frustrations but ultimately made the team more resilient and better prepared for future use of the new spaces.

All of this resulted in significant delays and team frustrations but ultimately made us stronger and more resilient as future users of these spaces. The reconstruction process proved particularly valuable for internal team development, adaptation to organisational growth, and the professionalisation of external services (such as bar/kitchen, cleaning, and technical maintenance). It also gave us the opportunity to reconsider the previously rigid departmental structure of our organisation and transition gradually toward a more flexible and theme-oriented team framework.

Curatorial Risks and Methodologies

As a central component of the Active CITY(zens) (AC) project, the Berlin Residency was originally planned to take place toward the end of the project (June 10–June 27, 2024) and coincide with the re-opening of ZK/U (September 2024).

However, as is often the case with EU partner projects, the residency structure and timeline determined during the project's application process proved difficult to synchronise with the realities of an active construction site and uncontrollable global events. While the building was still in the final stages of

reconstruction during the residency, this did not significantly impact the participants' day-to-day experience (e.g., accommodation or working conditions). Instead, it primarily influenced the process of producing and presenting the prototypes.

The residents were selected by our three partners (Izolyatsia, FRU, and PQ) and hosted by the ZK/U team, led by curator Miodrag Kuč, who oversees the educational department and institutional programming. The ZK/U team included a project manager (responsible for the financial and administrative components of the project), a residency coordinator (handling accommodation, hosting, and care infrastructures), and temporary members such as a house technician and a communications team member.

Given the challenges of securing partners for an extended period (six weeks), the curatorial concept was structured around the productive overlaps between different guest artists. The residency was designed as a six-week educational program, featuring programmatic loops and multiple opportunities for exchange.

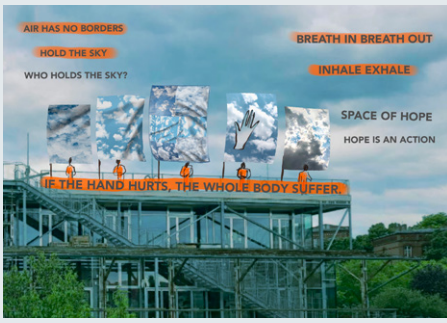
Weeks 1 and 2 were dedicated to research, initial designs, and analyses. This preparatory work laid the foundation for subsequent members of the artistic consortium, who would continue developing the project and its production. This approach posed the first major challenge: how to ensure the continuity of an idea, maintain a coherent visual language, and bridge diverse concepts into a meaningful and unified whole.

Weeks 3 and 4 focused on production, specifically the materialization or presentation of an idea. In our case, this involved creating a production plan, establishing a clear spatial setup, synchronizing with the involved actors, and managing costs. However, since the final presentation took place during Openhaus, ZK/U's monthly open-door format, the production plan remained somewhat speculative and was presented in the form of a public exhibition and performative action.

Weeks 5 and 6 were dedicated, in addition to the presentation, to communication and reflection on the project. Key questions addressed during this phase included: How can ideas be translated and elaborated into a full-scale 1:1 prototype? What resources are required for this process? And how can the project be synchronized with the overall ZK/U program?



Visualization: Zuzana Šklibová



Visualization: Olha Filonchuk

In conclusion, the concept of assigning one topic per partner (ensuring continuity) proved to be a significant structural improvement. Despite the frequent changes in participating artists (on a two-week rotation), this framework transformed their work into a cohesive team effort rather than a collection of isolated individual residencies. While this approach demanded considerable coordination, repeated practices, and patience, it ultimately resulted in a far more coherent and relevant presentation of the works.

On the other hand, two-week stays proved to be too short to produce a high-quality artistic piece, given the time needed to orient oneself in a new city, engage in ZK/U's intensive social life, and explore the city's extensive cultural offerings. Despite these challenges, we successfully created what we call the "atlas"—a catalogue of prototypes that serves as a foundation for long-term audience development centered around ZK/U's rooftop as an elevated public space.

Audience Development and the Active CITY(zens) Project

According to the digital data backbone of ZK/U, the typical audience profile is female, aged 25–35, educated, and with an interest in art. However, the reality is much more diverse, as these algorithms only capture digitally measurable data. In practice, our audience also includes neighbors seeking a space for their gatherings, satellite projects in the surrounding park (such as the community garden, graffiti crews, or the boulevards), and even a park regular yelling at passersby. Each of these individuals and groups, with their own tools and unique contributions, adds to the 'spirit of the place.' It is this mix of interactions that makes the space truly distinctive.

The group that remained invisible to us for a long time were the train commuters—around 150,000 per day—due to the proximity of multiple train tracks serving international, regional, and local routes. This audience was 'discovered' once we realized that our rooftop would become clearly visible to these commuters after the reconstruction, effectively transforming it into an elevated urban stage.

Although the ZK/U audience spans many levels of engagement intensity and socio-economic backgrounds, the institution's motto, '*Global discourses meet local practices*,' encapsulates the scope of these relationships. But what about the completely anonymous, rapidly passing commuters who only perceive our institution for a fleeting ten seconds? Can we engage this transient audience, capturing their attention and redirecting it away from staring at their mobile devices?

This situation became the starting point for the residency's theme, *10 Seconds*, which aimed to create a series of prototypes exploring the concept of micro-performative actions with artistic, pedagogical, or aesthetically spectacular characteristics. These actions could serve as visual provocations, awareness campaigns, or political statements, fostering a new connection between anonymous commuters and a hybrid cultural institution.

Practically speaking, we decided to focus on creating two types of outcomes:

1. **Atlas:** A catalog of prototypes derived from the partners' residencies, consisting of three coherent collective works. This serves as a foundation for further funding and 1:1 scale execution (presented at the Openhouse collective exhibition on 18.07.2024).
2. **Micro-performances and Interventions:** These were showcased during the re-opening of ZK/U (12–15.09.2024) by seven current and former resident artists, created in response to the *10 Seconds* curatorial framework.

The outcomes of the residencies were quite elaborate and addressed significant social issues, ranging from migration to loneliness in the contemporary megalopolis. However, they were not performed in a full 1:1 scale on the rooftop due to several factors, including budget constraints (they were simply too expensive at the time), production complexities (requiring additional

security measures for the still-incomplete rooftop), and the lack of a clear production plan caused by the compressed timeline. As a result, the prototypes remained in the form of sketches, drawings, and collages.

Case Studies: Descriptions of the Prototypes

Three main topics and prototypes emerged from the collective inquiry conducted during the Berlin residency.

The FRU

Team (Skopje, Macedonia)

The team from FRU explored the concept of the so-called "fourth wall" in theatre by creating a dialectical wall that redefines the relationship between the audience and performers. This wall enables a multitude of new interactions depending on spatial arrangements, the participants involved, and the time frame.

Their methodology, titled '*City as a Stage*,' examined how urban landscapes could become integral elements of scenography. The rooftop was reimagined both as a venue for the audience (where the mobile fourth wall created dynamic, shifting scenes) and as a stage where performances could take place. Visual connections were established with neighboring terraces, a crane operator, and other surrounding elements, integrating the city into the performance itself.

Artists involved: Dimitar Milev, Ivana Samandova, Tamara Djerkov, Martina Peneva, Filip Jovanovski, Slobodan Veleviski

The Team from IZOLYATSIA (Ukraine)

The team from IZOLYATSIA focused on the ongoing war in Ukraine, their personal experiences of exile, life infrastructures, and "points of unbreakability," alongside themes of ecocide and hope amidst catastrophe. The history of the ZK/U building itself, previously used as a Warm Hall and shelter during the interwar period, served as the starting point for this prototype. The parallels between the building's past and Ukraine's present—constant air raids and life underground—deeply inspired the Ukrainian artists to create an immersive presentation.



Photo: FRU Skopje

The prototype guided the audience through staged scenarios inside the building, ultimately leading to a performative intervention on the roof. This intervention featured people wearing rescue costumes, flags printed with images of the polluted Ukrainian sky, and live banners with rapidly changing messages. The aim was to raise awareness of Ukraine's current plight through artistic strategies and practices, while also offering audiences an unexpected physical experience—complete with moments like temporary electricity blackouts and sitting in the dark of a simulated basement.

Artists involved: Danylo Symonovych, Olha Filonchuk

The Team from Prague Quadrennial (Prague, Czech Republic)

The team from Prague Quadrennial worked collaboratively, building on each other's materials and creating continuity through a park-related dramaturgy. Their research phase explored invisible micro-histories of "park heroes," the relationships between humans and non-humans, and deep-listening sessions. This foundation led to proposals for short performances, such as connecting the rooftop and park audiences using pipes as a communication medium.

Another intervention featured two performers on stilts, referencing local traditions while addressing an "us/them" dichotomy. This allowed the audience to view the performers' bodies from vastly different perspectives—cut off, above, flying, and more. Through the

use of mixed media, including textile design, inexpensive industrial tubing, video, and performance, these prototypes functioned as communication tools between the building's users and the park audience.

The final presentation took the form of a curated exhibition of prototype possibilities, filled with playful and thought-provoking moments.

Artists involved: Jana Nunčič, Adam Dragun, Zahra Fuḷadvand, Zuzana Šklíbová, Domen Šuman

Conclusions: Lessons Learned from the Prototypes

The Berlin residency highlighted the significance of mobility for young artists, the value of collective artistic practices, and the ability of socially engaged and contextualized art to reach and cultivate new audiences. Additionally, we discovered that artists' interests often extend beyond research and production, encompassing communal living, professional excursions, and curatorial visits. At ZK/U, the act of being together and sharing knowledge on an informal level has always been regarded as equally important as producing art itself.

We have also learned how important it is to provide a structured framework for an artistic residency of this type

(short-term and intensive), beyond just rules and regulations. This includes daily check-ins, repetitive rituals (such as Monday dinners), occasional visits to exhibitions or concerts, and collective activities like bike rides. Given the always-limited timeframe, it is crucial that everyone involved understands each other's capacities and limitations.

As a pioneering process with the first set of prototypes, the project gave us an opportunity to learn how to balance artistic thinking with building regulations (e.g., fire protection, structural integrity), neighborhood expectations, and the existing program of the institution. We particularly learned that creating prototypes is far more complex than an interventionist approach to capturing attention—it requires careful preparation, a deep understanding of the context, and synchronization between artistic representation and technical requirements.

Finally, we discovered that a collective approach to prototype production is the only way to make them truly effective, given their interdisciplinary nature and unconventional setup. In this sense, the atlas of artistic prototypes produced during the Berlin residency has become the foundation for a more structured 'production atlas,' providing future teams with a comprehensive starting document that balances opportunities and limitations.



Photo: Mend-Amar Baigalmaa

Reclaiming Public Spaces: Lessons from Skopje and Beyond

Filip Jovanovski

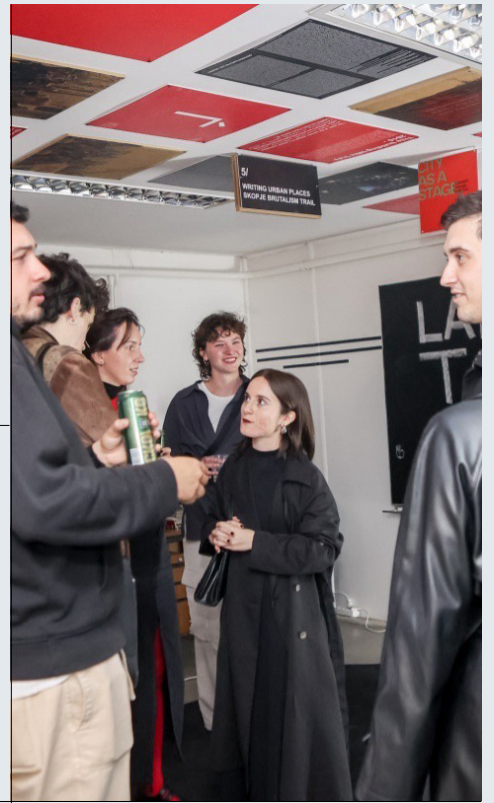


Photo: Natasa Geleva



Photo: Ivana Samandova

Introduction: FRU, City as a Stage, and Skopje

Overview of FRU

The Faculty of Things That Can't Be Learned (FRU) is a collective operating within education and contemporary visual and performing arts. Established in 2000 by artists, theater practitioners, visual arts students, and architects, FRU was formally constituted as an organization in 2003. Its core mission is to explore and innovate methodologies in research, engagement, and collective action across diverse socio-political and cultural landscapes. Functioning as both an educational and practical framework, FRU challenges traditional educational paradigms by fostering environments where principles of sharing, collaboration, self-organization, and mutual learning can flourish locally.

AKTO Festival for Contemporary Arts

Launched in 2006 by FRU in Bitola, the AKTO Festival has grown into a platform for promoting interdisciplinary critical programs and innovative artistic concepts. AKTO tackles pressing socio-political issues through contemporary art, emphasizing production formats that challenge conventional norms.

Until its 15th edition, the festival was held annually in August, serving as a subversive counterpoint to local cultural events organized by municipalities and institutions. In 2016 and

2017, AKTO rebranded as POP UP AKTO, adopting a nomadic approach to address local issues. This format brought the festival to various Macedonian and international cities, including Skopje, Tetovo, Shtip, Kochani, Prilep, Gevgelija, Kavadarci, Veles, and Sofia.

AKTO in the last three editions, in 2021, 2022 and 2023, has been transformed into a several-month festival platform with a three-year research theme – contemporary (non)democracies and in 2024 with the theme of art and work. The idea of AKTO is to grow from an active scene of presentation into a festival platform for production and education in the field of contemporary art through artistic research practices. FRU's Dual Pillars and Platform

FRU's activities are structured around two primary programs and a complementary platform:

1. Visual and Performing Arts Production:

This program critically examines (modernist) visual and architectural (city) heritage. Through an interdisciplinary lens, it focuses on the research, understanding, and creation of contemporary public (performative) spaces using an experimental, process-driven, and collaborative approach. It scrutinizes aesthetic and policy implications in modern contexts, employing hybrid formats

such as exhibitions, performances, conferences, and discussions to foster dialogue and collaboration among cultural practitioners. The program also prioritizes the research and production of visual art exhibitions, projects, and curatorial programs.

2. Education:

Dedicated to fostering open and critical educational practices within the country, this program emphasizes knowledge creation through collective effort and exchange rather than passive learning. Key initiatives include:

- THE PERFECT ARTIST, a discursive and educational program for emerging artists.
- DENES Young Visual Artist Award, which recognizes promising young visual artists in Macedonia.

In recent years, FRU has been developing a new educational platform called the Laboratory for Performative Space Research in collaboration with various CSO organizations, public entities, and educational institutions.

Both programs are supported by a strong publishing arm, which produces books, booklets, and newspapers, contributing further to intellectual and cultural discourse. FRU remains committed to its mission of redefining educational and cultural practices while fostering a dynamic and critically engaged artistic community.

Introduction to the City as a Stage¹

The traces of the modernist utopia envisioned for Skopje after the devastating earthquake in 1963 still dwell in the city—many abandoned, privatized, or forgotten like ancient ruins in the urban landscape. Rebuilt through Yugoslavian and global solidarity funds, Skopje was imagined as a city of internationalism, reflecting Yugoslavia's antifascist, anticolonial, anti-imperialist, and non-aligned politics. The city became a stage for world modernist architecture, with vast knowledge shaping its cultural identity.

¹ This text was written together with Ivana Vaseva as curatorial text published in the official catalogue for National Pavilion of the Republic of North Macedonia at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (2023) – CITY AS A STAGE – LOST (MODERNIST) UTOPIAS <https://pq.cz/prague-quadrennial-2023/projects-2023/exhibition-of-countries-and-regions/republic-of-north-macedonia-city-as-a-stage-lost-modernistic-utopias/>

Catalogue: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/ff/nicgz5h159rx5c-4d70th5/FRU-Praga-katalog-ZA-WEB.pdf?rlkey=-065fcmz3a28bv9ma4bcgaytx6&st=0nrdv3i&dl=0>

Today, questions arise about the city's use of that opportunity and knowledge. What remains of the solidarity? What is the power of citizens, especially youth and students, to shape the city according to universal democratic values? The project aims to address these shortcomings by constructing new mechanisms and methods for citizens to protect and transform their urban environment.

Some modernist buildings still fascinate globally, such as:

- Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (Marko Mušič, 1974)
- Hydrometeorological Service Building (Krsto Todorovski, 1975)
- Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Boris Cipan, 1976)
- Transportation Center Skopje and City Wall (Kenzo Tange)
- National Bank of North Macedonia (Radomir Lalović and Olga Papeš, 1975)

However, many buildings face dubious renovations into fake Baroque styles, degradation, or outright demolition. For example, the Telecommunications Center in Skopje (designed by Janko Konstantinov and built in two phases in 1974 and 1981, with a third phase completed in 1989 by Zoran Shtaklev) was threatened by the aggressive trend of "Baroquization" but was ultimately preserved through public effort. Similarly, the Macedonian Opera and Ballet remains unrenovated after a fire, while other landmarks, such as the City Shopping Center, have also been preserved thanks to significant public advocacy.

What Was This Utopia Made Of?

This utopia embraced equality in a self-managed socialist system where factories belonged to workers. International solidarity stimulated Skopje's reconstruction, embodying the anticolonial spirit during the Cold War. Modern styles in arts and architecture were reinterpreted locally, as in brutalist architecture, with concrete symbolizing change. In the post-socialist era, these buildings became estranged from their original ideals amid deindustrialization, unemployment, poverty, and neglect.

Platform—Method

The Platform City as a Stage examines city spaces by engaging with people, taking notes, photographs, and videos, and debating with authorities. Through performative engagement with architectural heritage, it aims to learn from the modernist utopia and use it as a resource, extracting elements like



Photo: FRU Archive

solidarity and equality. By involving locals, it rethinks how transnational solidarity can reshape the city. The Method of Reading Buildings² transforms a building (city) into a stage, using biographical analysis to rediscover layered histories and understand the present moment. It relies on artistic research methodologies, intertwining facts and fiction. This method critiques authoritative narratives and contributes alternative narratives, activating space through creating relations and bonds. It unites elements of architecture, stage design, visual and performing arts, advocating for the preservation of the public realm.

FRU's Focus and Historical and Urban Context of Skopje

In the past decade, FRU focused on several buildings as stages:

- Railway Residential Building (2014—)
- Universal Hall (2020)
- Macedonian Post Office (2021)
- Domche Building (2021—)
- Macedonia Square (2021—)

Using the methodology of reading buildings, FRU produced performances and interventions in public spaces. Significant case studies include the Railway Residential Building and the Domche building, both important for their community, historical, societal, architectural, and civic significance.

² Repository: 49 Methods and Assignments for Writing Urban Places (Rotterdam: nai010 Publishers, 2023), digital edition, <https://writingurbanplaces.eu/repository-49-methods-and-.../>.

After civic organizations pressure, a proposal for protecting Domche as cultural heritage was initiated by national institutions, though the process is ongoing due to administrative issues. For the Railway Building, despite signing an agreement for reconstruction in 2019, progress stalled. FRU plans to start an international crowdfunding campaign for reconstruction in 2025.

Developing New Prototypes of Using/Performing Public Spaces

Dear Roamers,

Have you ever thought that the city could be a stage?³ We, the Roamers—wandering, observing, meeting—transform the city into a stage to offer new, unofficial, radical ways of living together. With new tools, we can experience every city in completely new ways by deviating from official paths and creating new trajectories, relationships, and narratives.⁴

Phase 1: Educational and Research Process with Students

This project continues FRU's collaboration over the past three years, involving

³ <https://pq.cz/prague-quadrennial-2023/projects-2023/student-exhibition-pq/republic-of-north-macedonia-once-in-a-lifetime-rare-experiences-of-the-city-as-a-stage/>

⁴ This text was written together with Kristina Lelovac as a part of curatorial text for the national student Pavilion of the Republic of North Macedonia at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and space(2023)—"Once in a Lifetime—Rare Experiences of the City as a Stage".

young students in research, production coordination, and programming of public events focused on public space and its connection with performance art, architecture, and activism. In March 2023, we started Active CITY(zens) with actress and professor Kristina Lelovac, mentoring students of theater and architecture.

We initiated City as a Stage, researching lost public spaces through case studies. Part of this research was presented at the Prague Quadrennial in June 2023, titled "Once in a Lifetime—Rare Experiences of the City as a Stage".

Using an interdisciplinary approach, students developed prototypes for performances in public space, representing tools and recommendations on how rare experiences can create a new, radical reality for a better present.

We designed a special map with guidelines for the audience to experience certain locations as a stage, tested prototypes in Skopje, and implemented reflections in future activities. Experiences were archived and published on cityasastage.net, and a selection was exhibited at the MOT theater⁵ festival and Prague Quadrennial.

Phase 2: Performing Public Spaces

Through the methodology of reading buildings, involving the community and experts, we aim to transform public space into a stage where community problems are "performed" to change the general situation. Public space becomes a stage for action, change, inclusion, and activation of the community.

We broadened activities in two directions:

1. Extending the Scope: Deepening research in several lost public spaces.
2. Developing Methodology with Students: Involving previous students as mentors to new generations.

This year marks the third generation of students working on this interdisciplinary methodology. We engaged students from the first generation as coordinators/assistants, naming them the Creative Team of the Platform City as a Stage. An open call attracted around 35 new students, strengthening a core group of young people active in solving problems using performative spatial knowledge.

Smarter City(zens) Workshop/Research

Continuing our research on lost public spaces, architecture and drama

⁵ <https://www.mot.mk/en/event/the-city-as-a-stage/>



Photo: Natasa Geleva

students developed prototypes for performances that transform the city into a stage. They explored preserving local cultural values and innovative methods of programming in abandoned spaces.

Students found new lost public spaces and created guided tours, connecting the Railway Building to the community space DOMCE. Methodologically, students were divided into pairs to research narratives of past or potential communities, developing these into a public performative event.

We worked on the site-specific exhibition SMARTER CITY by Boris Bakal, integrating the students' process as a performative action named Smarter Citizens 01. This public presentation allowed us to test methodologies and involve different communities in reclaiming public spaces.

SMARTER CITY—SMARTER CITIZENS 01⁶

The event was structured in several parts:

1. Open Area Presentation: Serving soup and introducing the project.
2. Opening of Site-Specific Exhibition: Smarter City.
3. Public Presentation of Students' Work: Smarter Citizens 01.

Students presented their research performatively, involving the audience in discussions. The reactions were positive, indicating a successful prototype

⁶ The process of working with the students was mentored by Filip Jovanovski, Miodrag Kuć (ZK/U Berlin) and Boris Bakal (Shadow Casters—Zagreb) in cooperation with the Creative Team part of the "City as a Stage" platform: Ivana Samandova, Dimitar Milev, Martina Peneva, Tamara Dzerkov, and the participants/performers and researchers in the process: Andrea Markoska, Marija Arizankovska, Ekaterina Dobrivojevska, Bojana Vukovojac, Leonid Velkovski, Martina Danilovska, Hristina Krsteska, Ridjet Ferati, Katarina Tomikj, Krsto Gligorijadis

for activating the cinema space and reclaiming public spaces.

PERFORMATIVE SPACE RESEARCH⁷ From 'Fourth' Wall to 'Dialectical' Wall

During a residency at ZK/U in Berlin, researchers developed a prototype focusing on performative elements transforming the city into a stage, specifically on the rooftop of ZK/U.

The research process included:

1. Phase 1: Researching theoretical and practical aspects, focusing on previous FRU actions and framing them into theoretical discourse.
2. Phase 2: An educational process with students during their residency, divided into groups focusing on local context, community structure, narratives, and documentation.

The research introduces the concept of the dialectical wall as a machine generating actions by establishing a dynamic relationship between abstract and active spaces, questioning the relation between audience and performers.



Photo: Natasa Geleva

⁷ Project: from 'fourth' wall to 'dialectical' wall. Was developed by authors: Filip Jovanovski, Slobodan Veleviski, Collaborators: Miodrag Kuch, Dimitar Milev, Ivana Samandova, Tamara Dzerkov, Martina Peneva.

Laboratory for Performative Space Practices: City as a Stage

This interdisciplinary platform focuses on researching, understanding, and creating contemporary public space through experimental, processual, and collaborative approaches. It explores different media, using architecture, theatre, video, film, visual art, and installations to reveal the meaning of public space today.

The approach involves mentoring and research work with students, including workshops, lectures, and active involvement of citizens. The goal is to create prototypes for understanding and intervening in public space through a defined methodology.

Audience Development and Active CITY(zens) Project

written by Ivana Samandova

Overview of Existing Audience Demographics and Engagement Levels

- Instagram Followers: Gained 1.2K followers within a year.
- Age Distribution: Majority within the 25-34 age bracket (39.3%), followed by 18-24-year-olds (25.3%).
- Gender Representation: Primarily female (71%), with male audience at 28.9%.
- Geographic Location: 73.4% based in Skopje, followed by Ljubljana (6.3%), Bitola (4%), and some cities in Germany and the Netherlands.
- Engagement Metrics: Audience engages with content 4-5 times per week. Engagement grows significantly when events are promoted actively.

Analysis of Current Outreach and Engagement Strategies

Current strategies include:

- Effective Digital Presence: Especially on Instagram, connecting with younger demographics and professionals interested in contemporary art.
- Consistent Interaction: Posting four times weekly to sustain audience interest, gathering positive reception as seen by likes and shares.
- Event-Driven Engagement: Strategic promotion of events and exhibitions leads to increased audience participation.

Approaches for Attracting New Audiences to FRU and Selected Skopje Locations

To expand reach and diversify the audience, several strategies will be employed:

- Broaden Scope: Include a wider range of themes resonating with various audience segments. Incorporate more interdisciplinary collaborations, appealing to younger audiences with progressive interests.
- Expand Digital Presence: Utilize platforms like TikTok and YouTube for broader reach among younger demographics. Create engaging content like behind-the-scenes looks, artist interviews, and event previews.
- Community Engagement: Collaborate with neighborhood associations, faculties, and cultural institutions. Host free public events in public spaces to foster inclusivity and accessibility.

- Create Immersive Experiences: Focus on interactive, site-specific events or workshops that encourage participation rather than passive observation.
- Targeted Strategies: Develop precise campaigns focusing on regions showing increasing interest, like Ljubljana and Bitola. Use geo-targeted ads and partnerships with cultural institutions in these cities.

The Active CITY(zens) Project's Role in Audience Development

By integrating digital and physical experiences, the project aims not only to attract new audiences but also to encourage deeper engagement with the context in which we work. This results in lasting impressions and the building of a culturally engaged community. These strategies expand FRU's demographic profile and ensure content reflects the diverse and evolving interests of the communities.



Photo: Natasa Geleva



Photo: Natasa Geleva

Conclusions: (ACTIVE) AUDIENCE – SHORT (PERFORMATIVE) REMARKS

“Good films get smaller audiences, but more of the viewer.” – Jean-Luc Godard

In the context of Godard’s quote and the Active CITY(zens) project, we must address audience development from the perspective of FRU’s scale as an organization, the local cultural context, and audience development efforts by state institutions, among other factors.

In our context—whether within public or CSO organizations—audience development is often approached through populist methods, treating the audience as mere numbers rather than as active participants in shaping societal processes. This frequently results in passive rather than active audiences.

In contrast, through our activities and methods, we cultivated an active audience—students and collaborators with whom we not only developed the current project but are also building the foundation for future follow-ups. Designing and implementing new activities, especially in the laboratory for performative space practices, demonstrates the close connection between the dialectical relationship of audience participation and passive viewership. Using a theatrical analogy, we ask: who is watching, and who is performing (on the stage or in the city)?

Our approach consistently sought to blur the line between audience and performer, between citizens and experts.

If we were to summarize the methodology for activating the audience, it could be distilled into several key concepts:

CLOSE WORK with the **COMMUNITY** (experts—students—cityzens)—**RESEARCH—PRODUCTION.**



Photo: Jakub Červenka

Holešovice Market: A Complex, Fluid Urban Spot as a Site for Extensive International Cultural Programming

Markéta Fantová

Introduction: PQ 2023

The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (PQ) serves as a platform, network, and festival dedicated to exploring and presenting the latest ideas, innovations, and trends in performance design, scenography, immersive performative approaches, site-specific and public space engagement, as well as related research, pedagogy, and professional development. The PQ's active network spans over 100 countries and regions worldwide, emphasizing the importance of geographical, cultural, artistic, and creative diversity as an essential resource for fostering new development and creativity.

The main theme, RARE, for the 2023 festival inspired participants from diverse countries and regions—artists, designers, architects, scholars, students, and emerging creatives—to showcase their latest approaches, attracting both long-standing and new audiences. In the aftermath of the pandemic, numerous performing arts activities migrated to new and engaging sites, prompting a mission to reflect on and emphasize this new wave of public space inclusion across various performing arts activities, including scenography, performance design, and new media. The interplay of architectural and site rejuvenation with performative interventions became a central artistic and conceptual focus in selecting the Holešovice Market as the main festival location, closely aligning with the goals of the Active CITY(zens) project.

Holešovice Market: Historical and Urban Context

The chosen site, imbued with a strong genius loci and fascinating history, originally served as city stockyards and a slaughterhouse, necessitating its isolation from the rest of city life. The market is a walled-off complex with its own urban structure, comprising a rectangular street grid, elongated stable and slaughterhouse halls, a large stock exchange building, an open stockyard area, and remnants of train connection points. Despite changes in its function over the years, the market's historical records reveal its significant scale and grim purpose, having processed an astonishing 87,000 animals per year at its peak. It remained a city slaughterhouse until 1982, undergoing various insensitive repairs during the communist era. By the 1990s, it had devolved

into a dilapidated marketplace with great potential but no visionary leadership. Following the devastating floods of 2002, revitalization and restoration became inevitable; however, the repairs were selective, leaving some sections of the market in complete disrepair.

In January 2020, the strategic planning section of the Prague Institute of Planning and Development (IPR) issued a comprehensive study¹ mapping and analyzing the functions, urban development, and community engagement in and around the market. The study served as a foundational resource for future revitalization plans, highlighting the market's potential to become a vital hub of life in Prague, with a focus on gastronomy, culture, and a strong sense of identity.

Excerpt from the study indicating the direction recommended by IPR:

"In the future, the Holešovice Market Hall should become an important center of life in Prague, attracting visitors of all ages, from different parts of Prague and abroad. It will be accessible to a wide range of visitors. The Holešovice Market Hall is to be a place of meeting, entertainment, and relaxation, with a connection to its history and a strong sense of place identity.

The main pillar of its development will be the gastronomic segment, based on the integration of establishments from the Holešovice Market in Hall 22, through the cooking school, shared kitchens, and gastronomic start-ups in Hall 36, restaurant stalls in Hall 29 (food court), and established restaurants in Halls 4, 25, or 5.

The second pillar is the cultural and creative sector, building on the already developing tradition in the Holešovice Market Hall in the form of theaters, galleries, pop-up events, and more. This should be further complemented by an appropriate mix of shops and leisure activities, including a thriving night-time economy.

The operation of the Holešovice Market should be economically sustainable and cost-effective. The City's primary goal is not to maximize profit in its operation; rather, the goal is for the Holešovice Market to cover its operating costs while developing in line with the other core principles of this vision."²

1 Veronika Marianovská and Vladimír Lieberzeit, *Ověřovací studie rozvoje Pražské tržnice* (Prague: Institut plánování a rozvoje hlavního města Prahy / Sekce strategií a politik, 2020), <https://iprpraha.cz/assets/files/files/a096b74f99a4038f3e-48c69a32272371.pdf>.

2 Ibid., 5.

The city of Prague owns the market area land, and the study was intended to serve as a preliminary guide for architects and urban planners.

Currently, a comprehensive study and plan for a complete overhaul of the area have been developed by CMC Architects. The co-founder of CMC, architect Vít Máslo, highlighted these key objectives: "We aim to achieve the defined goal of revitalizing the Holešovice Market through an urban planning study. This study clearly organizes the functioning of the area, prioritizes public spaces, preserves the industrial character of the site, and simultaneously provides attractive spaces for new uses and new tenants, ensuring their offerings appeal to and attract a broad range of visitors."³

However, my personal observation is that the architectural proposal and study plans often clash with the realities of obtaining building permits and the lengthy construction company selection processes, during which unexpected changes can occur. The road from concept to realization might lead to adjustments in the final outcome.

What also concerns me is that the current plans suggest a level of gentrification that could jeopardize the strong community attachment to the site. Additionally, while the plans are visually impressive, it seems the surrounding communities may not have the socio-economic capacity to fully embrace the changes. It appears that the primary goal outlined in the IPR study—namely, not to maximize profit—might not be fully upheld in these plans.

PQ in Holešovice Market: An Incredible Amount of Risk

When we began our search for a festival venue, we were fully aware that the Holešovice Market did not meet many of our spatial requirements. However, the idea of exploring a site undergoing yet another phase of functional repurposing aligned perfectly with the main theme of PQ 2023—RARE. This approach also aimed to inspire fresh perspectives on post-pandemic cultural efforts.

3 CMC architects, a.s. *Pražská Tržnice: Urbanisticko-architektonická Studie—Masterplan Rozvoje Areálu*. Prepared for Hlavní město Praha, December 2019–May 2020, 5. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rK71i7sbcsXsTiFm_uqDTjTX_3rScIS/view.

Despite the spatial deficiencies and logistical challenges, we creatively resolved many issues and embraced the positive aspects of this historical site. Our vision was to host a 10-day international festival in a space predominantly known for its local and community-oriented activities. This also allowed us to examine whether international engagement could positively influence the site's development plans, especially as it stands on the brink of reconstruction.

During our initial meetings with representatives from Prague City Hall, we were informed of imminent plans for the reconstruction of the Market Money Exchange building and were assured that the pedestrian bridge Holka would definitely be completed before PQ in June 2023. This was crucial and exciting news, as the bridge would connect the market with a park on a river island and the Karlín area on the opposite riverbank.

We took a calculated risk, assuming that reconstruction works would not begin before the festival, given the notoriously long process for obtaining building permits in Prague. We also trusted that the bridge would open in time for PQ. Unfortunately, the exact opposite occurred. The reconstruction of the Money Exchange building, along with repairs to all surrounding infrastructure at the Market, began about a month before the festival, while the completion of the bridge was delayed.

Curatorial Process

The situation at the Market site and its surroundings became increasingly fluid and unpredictable at a critical point when we were finalizing our performance and exhibition schedules. From the outset, our goal was to explore tools and methodologies for working in complex areas—a challenging task on its own. However, we hadn't anticipated that the situation would verge on the impossible, requiring us to manage so many unforeseen changes. Nevertheless, the performing arts demonstrated their resilience and adaptability, proving their ability to adjust, evolve, and embrace challenges.

Eighty percent of the festival projects selected by our curatorial team were newly created art pieces, many of which had incorporated the site into their concepts from the very beginning, while others were adaptable to different



Photo: Jakub Červenka

locations. This unique and shifting environment provided an ideal setting for us to research and reflect on the processes involved in setting up cultural programming in such fluid circumstances.

As a curator, I must say that building a festival around entirely new pieces carries an incredible amount of risk. However, despite the challenges, having a higher percentage of content that hasn't been experienced yet creates opportunities for dialogue about emerging trends and innovative approaches. By including not only artists but also theorists and multidisciplinary specialists, we positioned ourselves in a proactive, trend-setting mode rather than a reactive one. This is where the methodology of the curatorial process, which focuses on building a program from entirely new works, becomes crucial.

Combining this approach with working at a complex site leads to new discoveries and forces creative teams to adopt a different process—one that requires negotiation across artistic, curatorial, and practical production dimensions. Knowing that some parts of the creative process will need to be adjusted makes artistic decisions more difficult but often leads to fresher and more tangible results. This type of process also demands a smart, efficient, and resilient team that is open to a certain level of creative improvisation.

However, logistical challenges can have a negative impact on the production team's energy, which is something that must be managed carefully.

Audience Development Interventions of the Active CITY(zens) Project

The selection of the site and the learning process associated with its use for complex international festival programming were central to our Active CITY(zens) grant proposal mission. Many changes tied to the site's repurposing process were not fully predictable at the project's outset. Nevertheless, two of our main grant projects were designed to align with the site's evolving conditions. Both were carried out in collaboration with and supported by the Volkswagen Group in Prague. Each project aimed to develop new audiences while working to blur the abstract yet habitual boundaries between the artistic and commercial. In one case, we transformed the new, trendy VW ID. Buzz electric vehicle into a mobile gallery space. In the other, we created a performative shared drive that connected various sites around Prague, echoing the atmosphere of the Holešovice Market.

Each project targeted a specific audience and had slightly distinct objectives. The exhibition installed inside two ID. Buzz vans was created by students from Berlin's Hochschule für Technik. Featuring special lighting, it was presented in four

locations across Prague. The exhibited objects included architectural models of selected Holešovice Market buildings as well as a scenography design installation. The Market models established a clear link to the PQ site, while the scenography design installation formed part of the PQ [UN]Common Design Project, which brought together students from 25 universities worldwide.

The locations for this exhibition were carefully selected to engage a broad audience, requiring negotiations between city district representatives and our production team before receiving approval. Blurring the lines between what constitutes a parking space and an exhibition site sparked engaging conversations, offering valuable insights and informing potential future negotiation strategies for artists working on public art space interventions.

Strategies for Developing New Audiences

The strategy to attract new audiences was threefold: international participatory, international public, and local public. Our audience included everyone engaged with the [UN]Common Design Project: students, educators, festival attendees, and those following the project as audience members from their own countries. Audience members encompassed friends of the students, other students, educators, and members of the general public who connected with the project via QR codes attached to each student's piece, created at or near their participating university.

Across 25 universities/locations, we engaged approximately 125 students, 30 educators, and hundreds of active online public viewers across 25 different localities, in addition to the hundreds who came to see the [UN]Common Design Project exhibition in Prague during the festival.

Regarding the Active CITY(zens) project, the most crucial aspect is the number of participating students and their supporting audience peers, as they are the ones gaining direct experience and driving methodologies and practices forward. Regardless of how small that number may be in comparison to the number of passersby viewers or festival attendees, the actively involved students form the core of future cultural endeavors. Our second project focused on introducing a form of participatory performance

centered on the time people spend together while traveling. This particular performance methodology draws attention to complex urban areas and brownfields without requiring intricate or costly performative interventions. The audience-building element relies on word of mouth, as participants, by sharing their experiences with friends, created quite a buzz and generated significant interest—bringing in more potential participants than we were able to accommodate. This type of project can be replicated in any city or rural area, making it a versatile prototype for future use by others. It is best described by the words of Michael Spencer, the artist who led the project as the main performer, created the dramaturgy, and selected the shared ride locations:

“For a visual artist exploring the impact locations have on people—their ability to trigger memories and associations—being offered the use of a VW ID. Buzz van for an art project during PQ 2023 was a rare gift. It provided an intimate space for passengers/audiences to experience a unique performance.

My project drew on the relatively recent phenomenon of ‘car sharing,’ where chance encounters with strangers can lead to revealing conversations. As the ‘host,’ I initiated these conversations, adding an improvised and playful element by taking three strangers on an unknown journey into the Prague night. A simple questionnaire was completed by each participant so we could all understand who was on the shared journey, with the twist being that passengers were free to invent facts about themselves—or not—as they wished. I did

the same, and we proceeded to a series of pre-arranged stops where I asked passengers to share something from their past connected to, or prompted by, each location. These locations were chosen to represent different phases of life. One stop was a cemetery near an abandoned asylum on the outskirts of Prague, known for its reputation for supernatural sightings. Another was a large disused building adorned with ever-changing graffiti. The connections shared by the passengers were at times deeply personal, at times humorous, and sometimes purely anecdotal—their validity was never questioned. Even the driver became a performer.

Passenger-selected music provided the soundscape for the journey. The van's headlights illuminated the darker locations, while its internal lights were used to distinguish moments of reflection from moments of active conversation. The van, in effect, became a roving theatre. Passengers included students and professionals visiting PQ, as well as, in one case, a Prague resident attending the event for just one day. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, particularly for the opportunity to experience an ‘unseen’ side of Prague in comfort.

On reflection, the potential for devised performance-related events using the VW van is enormous. Both students and professionals could benefit from such an opportunity. Narratives could be presented using minimal props or puppetry/object theatre techniques. A recorded soundscape could accompany a journey, punctuating and underscoring the reality outside. A choreographed movement piece, working within the physical limitations



Photo: Jakub Červenka



Photo: Vojtěch Brtnický

of the small environment, could be performed during the journey. A monologue reflecting on the journey, or using the concept of a journey as a metaphor, could be delivered. Ultimately, a 'roving theatre' using the urban environment as the 'set' opens up endless possibilities for innovative theatre and performance forms."⁴

Conclusions: Holešovice Market as a Microcosm for Exploration

In summary, the spatial decisions we navigated, the adaptability required to respond to dynamic changes, the chosen theme, and our identified target groups collectively propelled our team to move beyond the confines of traditional and well-established processes. This unique approach enabled us to chart unexplored territories and uncover new possibilities for creative work in complex urban spaces, particularly with the active

involvement of the international community. These methodologies are not easily transferable through written accounts alone; rather, the hands-on experiences and lessons learned by the team throughout these situations should serve as the core source of practical skills. The duration of the Active CITY(zens) project and participation in collaborative activities will provide opportunities to share these skills with others.

The deliberate selection of Holešovice Market—undergoing transformation amid ongoing urban development—as the festival's location created a microcosm for exploring how cultural events can integrate into evolving city landscapes. The challenges we faced, such as unexpected construction delays and changes to the site's original plans, became pivotal in refining our strategies for future cultural interventions in similar settings.

In essence, our methodologies mirrored the dynamic nature of the urban spaces we sought to activate. This endeavor not only enriched Prague's vibrant cultural fabric but also served as a valuable case study for cultural programming in complex urban environments. As we reflect

on the outcomes, it is clear that our efforts not only expanded the boundaries of traditional festival planning but also highlighted the importance of adaptability, community engagement, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. These elements are essential for shaping the future of cultural initiatives within the intricate and ever-changing tapestry of modern cities.

⁴ Unpublished, PQ Archive.



Daniel Buren, Dans les filets, la couleur, Donetsk, Ukraine.
Photo: Dima Sergeev

From Donetsk to Exile: Transforming Communities Through Art and Resilience

Mykhailo Glubokyi

Introduction: Origins and Mission of IZOLYATSIA

IZOLYATSIA, a partner in the Active CITY(zens) project, has a long and complex history of building connections with new audiences. Founded as the first contemporary cultural center in the industrial city of Donetsk, Ukraine, it worked tirelessly to win the hearts of a local population largely unfamiliar with this type of cultural experience. Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, IZOLYATSIA has been forced to relocate three times, re-establishing its work in new locations each time. To support cultural decentralization, it has concentrated on developing new audiences within smaller communities across Ukraine.

IZOLYATSIA is a platform for cultural initiatives, created as a model and catalyst for systematic change in Ukrainian society. Through its platform, IZOLYATSIA uses culture and creativity to drive systemic transformation and empower representatives of local communities. From its inception, the organization has focused on engaging with the local context, creating site-specific works that respond to the immediate societal challenges of today and anticipate those of the future.

The original space of IZOLYATSIA was established on the site of a former insulation materials factory, which had been closed due to the financial crisis. The factory previously produced mineral wool for technical insulation, serving industries such as military complexes, aviation, heating, shipbuilding, and space exploration. Functioning as a self-sufficient "city within the city," the factory not only provided jobs for its workers but also offered a range of amenities, including a cultural club, school, canteen, and grocery store, ensuring employees had everything they needed without leaving the factory grounds. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the plant was left without orders, infrastructure support, or state funding, ultimately leading to its bankruptcy and closure in 2005.

In 2010, the site was revitalized as a cultural institution, aiming to carry on its former roles by creating job opportunities in the creative sector and offering spaces for education, leisure, a library, a cinema, a canteen, exhibition spaces, and more.

The foundation worked with the industrial heritage of the site, using it as a foundation to build new regional and national identities. It addressed the decline of traditional industries and envisioned a bright future for the region rooted in its local past. To foster new audiences and encourage active participation in the cultural center's programs, the IZOLYATSIA team adopted a participatory and open project structure. This approach transformed individuals into contributors and collaborators, allowing them to experience the impact of their own creativity and empowering them to pursue their ideas and visions further.

miners, which were later transferred to large canvases. With the help of more than 100 local volunteers, Cai Guo-Qiang's team used various types of gunpowder, employing the power of fire and explosions to finalize the portraits.

The miners who participated in the project, along with their families and friends, immediately became the foundation's audience and active participants. They attended the exhibition opening and brought along their relatives. For the local community, the project was a significant moment of recognition—they saw that this institution wanted to create art about them, their challenges, and their everyday lives.



Photo: Dima Sergeev

Early Projects and Community Engagement

In 2011, IZOLYATSIA launched a large-scale project with Cai Guo-Qiang, a renowned Chinese artist known for winning the 48th Venice Biennale International Golden Lion Prize, who had directed the visual and special effects for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, and created and exhibited artworks worldwide. The project, 1040m Underground, focused on the lives and challenges of Ukrainian coal and salt miners at the time, and invited local artists from the city to collaborate. Together with Cai, the artists visited mines to create portraits of

IZOLYATSIA has maintained close ties with the project's participants, inviting them as collaborators on future projects and residencies. Local artists and volunteers became active contributors to subsequent IZOLYATSIA initiatives, with some later joining as team members, project collaborators, or featured artists supported by the organization. This project and its community-driven approach have become a blueprint for IZOLYATSIA's future work.

Forced Relocation and Resilience

Throughout its existence, IZOLYATSIA has faced significant challenges. In 2014, its premises were forcibly seized by the Russian military. Since then, the location has become infamous as an

illegal prison—a site of unlawful detention, torture, and murder. Ukrainians who dared to oppose Russia’s occupation, along with randomly chosen innocent civilians, have suffered there as part of a campaign to instill widespread fear among the occupied population. This notorious facility has become a chilling symbol of oppression, representing the brutal tactics used to suppress resistance and control the local community through terror.

Following the seizure of its original premises in Donetsk, the IZOLYATSIA team relocated to Kyiv, settling in the industrial area of Kyiv Shipyard, which bears a resemblance to the space they were forced to abandon due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In response to the occupation of its former premises, IZOLYATSIA devised creative methods to amplify its message and engage new audiences. At the 2015 Venice Biennale, the IZOLYATSIA team carried out a guerrilla campaign titled #ONVACATION. Team members infiltrated the Biennale preview event, carrying hundreds of pre-printed military uniform jackets. Exhibition visitors were invited to wear these uniforms, which featured the inscription #ONVACATION on the back, and visit the pavilion of the country they considered to be the occupying power.



Moataz Nasr, Tanura, 2012, Donetsk, Ukraine.
Photo: Dima Sergeev

This performance aimed to expose the fake narrative Russia constructed around its invasion of Ukraine, particularly the claim that Russian soldiers occupying Donetsk and Luhansk were not acting under government orders but had traveled to Ukraine of their own accord while “on vacation.” The campaign was highly impactful, generating hundreds of social media posts, extensive coverage in prominent international media, and the distribution of thousands of uniforms during both the Biennale’s preview days and its regular exhibition period.

Working in a new location in Kyiv proved to be even more challenging than IZOLYATSIA’s beginnings in Donetsk. With no established roots in the capital and facing competition from existing cultural and entertainment venues, it was particularly difficult to build a new audience in the city. To directly engage with potential audiences, the IZOLYATSIA team created a series of pop-up performances and exhibitions in unexpected locations across Kyiv, including parks, bridges, subway stations, and streets in more distant areas of the city.

The project was titled ZAKHOPLENNYA, a Ukrainian word with dual meanings: it can describe both the act of forcible seizure (of property, space, or physical objects) and the experience of profound fascination or being captivated by strong emotions (such as being in love). This project challenged artists and viewers alike to creatively address shifting physical, emotional, and social concepts of occupation. It explored various issues faced by Ukrainian society, including the lives of internally displaced people, the differences between life in “safe” Kyiv and in occupied or war-torn territories, and the state of human connection and empathy during the Russian invasion.

For example, Katerina Berlova’s Deafness installation took place in an underground shopping center in Kyiv. It explored the media’s oversaturation with tragedy and the challenge of maintaining empathy under such conditions. The artist juxtaposed visual images of calmness with media images of war and disaster, intensifying their contrast to provoke reflection. Another work, Sasha Kurmaz’s Hostage performance, was a human installation involving refugees from areas affected by the Russian invasion. Volunteers from Ukraine’s eastern regions posed as hostages in various locations, bringing the bodily presence of war to the streets of Kyiv.

In total, nine projects by nine artists were presented multiple times in different parts of the city, reaching diverse audiences and sparking important conversations about the realities of war and occupation.



Tayou, Pascale Marthine, Make up... Peace!, Donetsk, Ukraine. Photo: Dima Sergeev

Recent Efforts

Since 2019, IZOLYATSIA has focused its main efforts on cultural decentralization, supporting work in small towns, cities, and villages across Ukraine. The strong emergence of cultural organizations in these areas inspired IZOLYATSIA to share its resources and knowledge to help build a stronger civil society at the local level. One example of such work was IZOLYATSIA’s office in Soledar, a small salt-mining town in the Donetsk region, located just 50 kilometers from the contact line with occupied territories.

To initiate its work in Soledar, IZOLYATSIA conducted an in-depth analysis of local lore, context, and the needs of different communities. The team identified active individuals who could become dedicated participants and, eventually, leaders in driving civic development within the city. By working with resident artists from Ukraine and abroad, researchers, urbanists, educational programs, and movie screenings—and by engaging the local population in its programming—IZOLYATSIA successfully built a strong core of active citizens committed to advocating for the changes their city needed.

In 2022, the Russian army completely destroyed the city of Soledar. Its population of approximately 11,000 people was displaced across the country. In the aftermath, Ukrainian society has recognized the crucial role that local cultural organizations, in partnership with social organizations and local administrations, must play in integrating internally displaced people and fostering dialogue with host communities. This process could be rooted in the local identities of both host and displaced populations, preserving and honoring their respective heritages, or it could involve creating new, shared identities that stem from collective ideas and visions for Ukraine's future post-war development.

Audience Development and the Active CITY(zens) Project

The audience development initiatives of the Active CITY(zens) project offered valuable insights through partner collaboration. This practical knowledge is essential for organizations seeking to broaden their local audience base, providing various strategies to attract and engage diverse community members. By fostering word-of-mouth engagement, accidental participants can share their experiences and create a sudden viral effect, introducing even more individuals—often beyond typical social bubbles—to an organization's work.

The projects, based on ideas developed in the Active CITY(zens) prototypes, are highly adaptable and can be applied to various urban and rural locations, in different contexts, both indoors and outdoors, and tailored to different audiences and backgrounds.

Prototypes for a Post-War Future: Prague, Skopje, Berlin

IZOLYATSIA's team participated in the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, which showcased innovative approaches to engaging audiences through performances and participatory practices. The experience of repurposing the Holešovice Market buildings proved particularly significant in the context of future reconstruction efforts for cultural infrastructure and the revitalization of abandoned spaces in Ukraine. While similar projects already exist in Ukraine, each experience is unique and contributes new layers of ideas and inspiration for future applications.

The PQ team also organized pop-up public interventions featuring its visual identity and an interactive model of the market square displayed inside VW vans. This approach was compelling in two key ways: first, it demonstrated effective collaboration with the private sector to support such interventions; second, it highlighted the impact and effectiveness of physical, site-specific public engagement. Additionally, this provided an interesting perspective on using contextual marketing in real-world spaces, beyond traditional social media targeting—particularly in the context of large-scale gatherings like festivals.



Photo: Dima Sergeev



Cai Guo-Qiang, 1040m Underground, Donetsk, Ukraine. Photo: Dima Sergeev

The revival of Skopje after the devastating earthquakes of 1963 offers valuable lessons for the rebuilding of Ukraine's post-war cities. Many discussions in Ukraine revolve around the opportunity to create cities from scratch, incorporating better public spaces, community-oriented facilities, and higher levels of citizen participation in decision-making. The experience of Skopje's civil society provides much food for thought, offering both inspiration and cautionary insights for Ukrainian civil society actors. The unwavering commitment of local activists in Skopje to drive positive change, include citizen voices, and embrace bottom-up initiatives is a powerful source of hope and a reminder that rebuilding is not only possible but can lead to stronger, more inclusive communities.

The 'City as a Stage' method provides valuable insights into working with urban environments that consist not only of physical spaces—buildings, streets, and parks—but also the dreams and visions of their inhabitants. This method offers tools for conducting public performative acts across various city locations, while simultaneously exploring the inner workings of the city: the relationships between its structure, its people, and its authorities, as well as its history and present through archives and personal interviews. By creating a shared "stage" that unites all active players in a locality, the method fosters new connections that can lead to meaningful outcomes aligned with



Photo: Dima Sergeev

the community's collective expectations. Furthermore, its foundation in theatrical practices makes it easier for communities to engage with and embrace new projects.

'City as a Stage' offers a framework to incorporate city landscapes into larger artistic and performative contexts, which can not only enrich an organization's overall work but also serve as an effective tool to engage broader, nontraditional audiences. This method could be particularly beneficial for the complex realities of Ukrainian cities, which are now home to a mix of local residents, displaced individuals who lost their homes in occupied territories, people forced to relocate due to ongoing UAV and artillery attacks, and servicemen and servicewomen stationed in these areas. Ukrainian communities, fragmented by diverse war experiences—tragedy, loss, fear, as well as resilience and an incredible will to survive—require participatory methods to bring people together. Such approaches can enable discussions and collective action toward a shared vision of coexistence and rebuilding.

The Railway Residential Building, as well as Domche, serves as an important example of the revitalization of former industrial and communal buildings. The methodology of "reading the building" fosters deep participatory approaches to working with the local context and history. By leveraging local aesthetics and the community's connection to the heritage of the space, this method creates new narratives and generates fresh ideas for community engagement and unity.



Sasha Kurmaz, Hostage, Kyiv, Ukraine.
Photo: Dima Sergeev



Alina Yakubenko, Close, Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo: Dima Sergeev

Berlin's ZK/U has provided valuable insights into attracting casual visitors to former industrial areas, a concept highly relevant to Ukraine. The revitalization of industrial spaces was actively underway before (and in part, during) the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. Beyond IZOLYATSIA, numerous cultural institutions have successfully transformed former factories, plants, warehouses, and administrative buildings into vibrant community spaces. Notable examples include IZONE (Kyiv), the Dnipro Center for Contemporary Culture (Dnipro), Prompylad (Ivano-Frankivsk), Lem Station (Lviv), Rezavod (Lviv), the Kryvyi Rih Cultural Centre (Kryvyi Rih), Elektrovymiriuvach (Zhytomyr), Art-Zavod Platforma (Kyiv), Art-Zavod Mekhanika (Kharkiv), and others.

Many of these locations face challenges in attracting visitors, as industrial areas are often perceived as unsafe, dirty, difficult to access, and generally unappealing. The prototypes developed by Active CITY(zens) participants could help increase the visibility of these spaces to the general public, who are often unaware of the cultural activities taking place in such locations. These initiatives have the potential to spark interest in the work of these organizations and expand their audience base. By working with site-specific residencies, new audiences can be engaged, especially those naturally drawn to local topics, challenges, and reflections that resonate with people living in the area. These local themes often feel relevant and relatable to the broader community.

ZK/U possesses unique expertise in building reconstruction, having transformed its space into a functional cultural center while preserving its industrial heritage within the new architecture. One of the building's most distinctive features—its roof—has been cleverly converted into a versatile event venue and exhibition space. The roof is visible to both local residents and S-Bahn passengers passing by the building every minute. This constant flow of commuters creates an opportunity for unique interactions where art and everyday urban life intersect, making culture visible to thousands of individuals who might not otherwise engage with cultural spaces.

The ZK/U residency stands out as an exemplary model of best practices in program organization. It incorporates meaningful and effective routines, such as daily check-ins, community dinners prepared by residents—where discussions about their work and practices take place—engagements with local residents, and the OPENHOUSE event. This event strikes a balance between the visibility of a formal exhibition opening and the accessibility of a casual meeting with local community members.

Prototypes Developed by Artists from Ukraine at ZK/U in Berlin

During the residency, IZOLYATSIA had the opportunity to invite two artists from Ukraine to stay and work at the ZK/U residency space. Both artists have strong ties to theater: Olha Filonchuk is a theater scenographer, designer, and multidisciplinary artist, while Danylo Symonovych is a theater director. Although they were not in the space simultaneously, the artists coordinated the development of their projects together, with both concepts presented at the OPENHOUSE event.

Danylo Symonovych reflected on the unexpected insights into the lives of local people during energy crises throughout German history when *Wärmehallen* were built to help citizens cope with fuel shortages and extreme cold. These social hubs, often located in municipal buildings, schools, or other large facilities, provided warmth and community support. One such *Wärmehalle* was located near ZK/U and bears many similarities to Ukraine's "Points of Invincibility," established by the Ukrainian government during blackouts caused by Russia's mass bombardment of Ukrainian power infrastructure.

In his prototype, Danylo sought to explore the transformation of buildings over time: the historical evolution of the ZK/U building and its potential role in an imagined scenario of military danger, akin to the Russian attacks on Ukraine. Using this hypothetical framework, the artist aimed to draw parallels between the peaceful purpose of the ZK/U building, the wartime transformation of buildings across Ukraine, and the existential human experiences associated with such spaces.

Olga Filonchuk developed a prototype for a rooftop performance, exploring how art can challenge the marketing industry, advertising, and digital content. The performance would feature large banners or flags printed with images of skies, accompanied by text and performers dressed in bright uniforms. The performers would shuffle the flags, texts, and recognizable images to create new meanings and messages.

The artist's concept is rooted in avoiding overly catchy visual forms, opting instead to use familiar symbols and metaphors, combined with the handmade construction of new constellations of objects. This approach encourages viewers to focus their attention more deeply, offering a chance for those fleeting 10 seconds of art in a train passenger's window view to transcend mere visual noise. Instead, the performance aims to provoke a genuine reaction.

While a train passenger might not grasp the entire context or concept behind the moving rooftop imagery in such a brief timeframe, Filonchuk's vision relies on emotionally and conceptually impactful words and phrases. Even if each viewer interprets the messages in their own way, the artwork's ability to touch the audience on some level ensures its effectiveness.

Olga also tailored the performance for two distinct target audiences, each experiencing it on different time scales. Train passengers would only catch a glimpse of a single message presented by the performers, as their view of the stage lasts for just 10 seconds. Meanwhile, audiences on the ground would have the opportunity to perceive the full message during a longer, more detailed presentation.

Both prototypes provide valuable insights into how repurposed buildings can be leveraged to communicate with their local context, engage both local and external audiences, and operate effectively across short and long distances.



Artenzil factory office, Soledar, Ukraine.
Photo from social media

Conclusions: Rebuilding Through Art and Community

Through the Active CITY(zens) project, the IZOLYATSIA team has expanded its expertise in public space methodologies, exploring various urban contexts and, most importantly, uncovering new ways to connect with unfamiliar audiences. Each project partner brought a unique approach to working in complex urban environments, rich with history, current realities, and aspirations for the future. Every intervention delved deeply into the local context, drawing from the memories, roles, and visions of both local communities and external participants.



Photo: Mykhailo Glubokyi

The hands-on approach of the Active CITY(zens) project equipped the IZOLYATSIA team with new skills and capabilities that can now be shared with other cultural players across Ukraine. The prototypes and experiences developed by each project partner serve as vital case studies, offering practical tools to enhance participation, resilience, adaptability, and collaboration between cultural actors and community representatives.

A deeper understanding of local identities, urban structures, and societal dynamics in complex environments like Ukraine provides new opportunities for meaningful connections. This insight can help bridge the gap between communities and internally displaced people who have relocated, fostering integration and dialogue. Additionally, these methods can aid in addressing and reflecting on the collective trauma faced by Ukrainian society as a result of the Russian invasion.

Active  **Developing New Audiences
in Challenging Urban Areas**

**Authors of texts: Miodrag Kuč, Filip Jovanovski,
Markéta Fantová, Mykhailo Glubokyi
Editorial revision: Barbora Příhodová, Pavel Kraus
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