

(UN)COMMON SPACES 2020–2024

Audience Development & Art in Public Space

Let's Get Inspired by European Practices





Preface

This publication is the result of a wide reflection initiated during the four-year cooperative project (UN)COMMON SPACES, led by Lieux Publics, which started in 2020 and runs until 2024. It brings together 18 partners, 16 Associate Artists and 11 Associate Citizens from 13 countries: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

To stimulate reflection on audience development among the partners, 17 staff exchanges were organised, and a representative of each partner organisation was hosted by another partner. This peer-learning process aimed to provide staff members of participating organisations with the opportunity to reflect on their own practices in audience development and draw inspiration from others. To build on these experiences, Matina Magkou, the author of this publication, was commissioned by IN SITU to develop action-research, wherein a journal was designed to guide the participating staff through the process, followed with a series of group discussions. The quotes in this publication come from those journal entries and discussion transcripts.

This inquiry revealed the emphasis that the partners place on audiences and participation, the variety of artistic dynamics and expressions in public space art and the diverse realities this encompasses across different European countries. For this reason, a one-size-fits-all script for approaching audience development does not exist. What is successful for one organisation does not apply to another due to the variations in operating contexts, policy and funding environments, the size of the organisation, as well as differing target audiences and artistic styles.

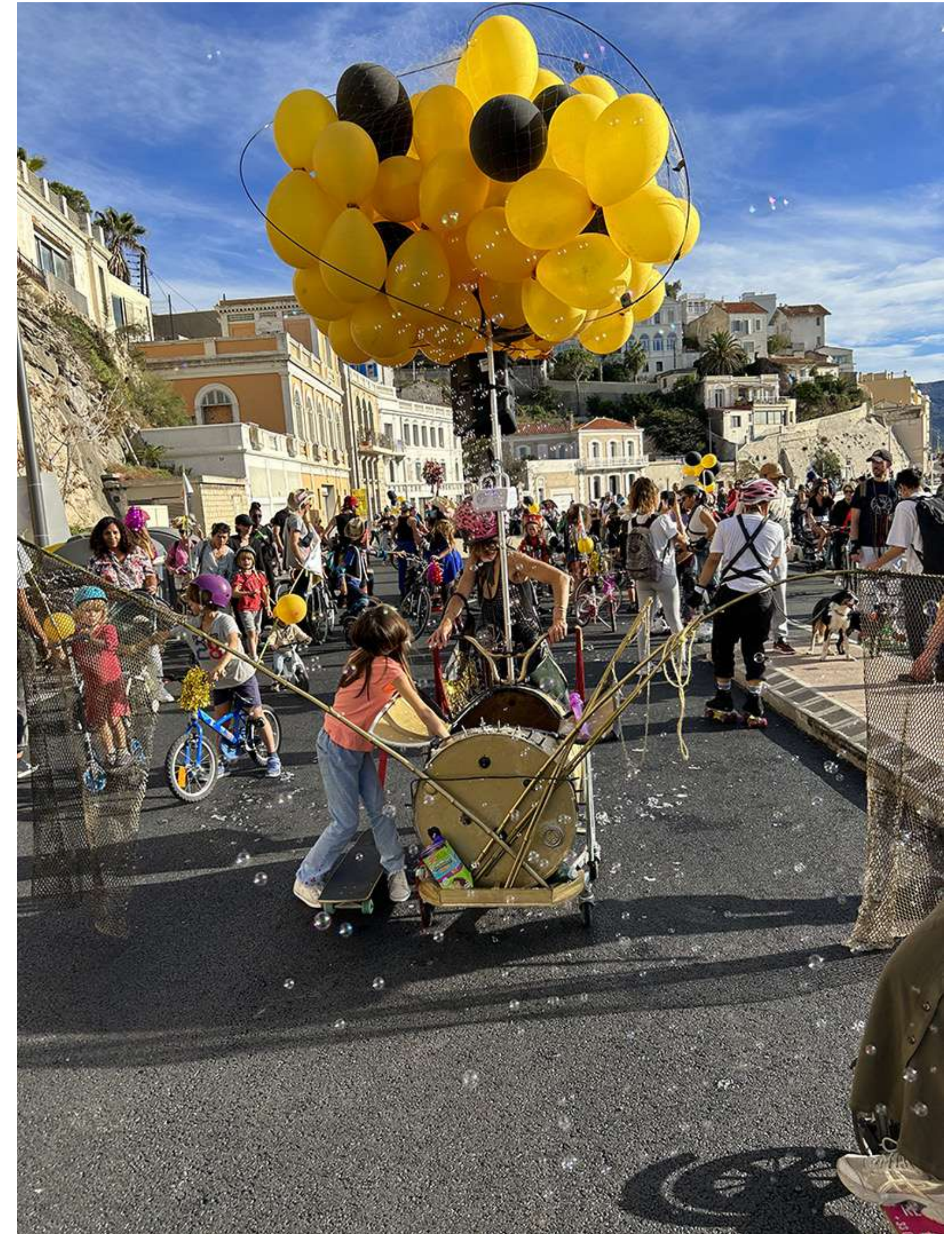
This publication is intended to provide a snapshot of the reflections, practices and concerns related to audience development through art in public space, as shared by participants of (UN)COMMON SPACES and captured through a third eye.

(UN)COMMON SPACES is an ambitious initiative seeking to characterise and question the different audience development practices of the IN SITU network partners. From the outset this project seemed dizzying given that audience development covers many diverse situations, that each partner has evolved in a different environment, and that the essence of art in public space includes unconventional relationships with audiences.

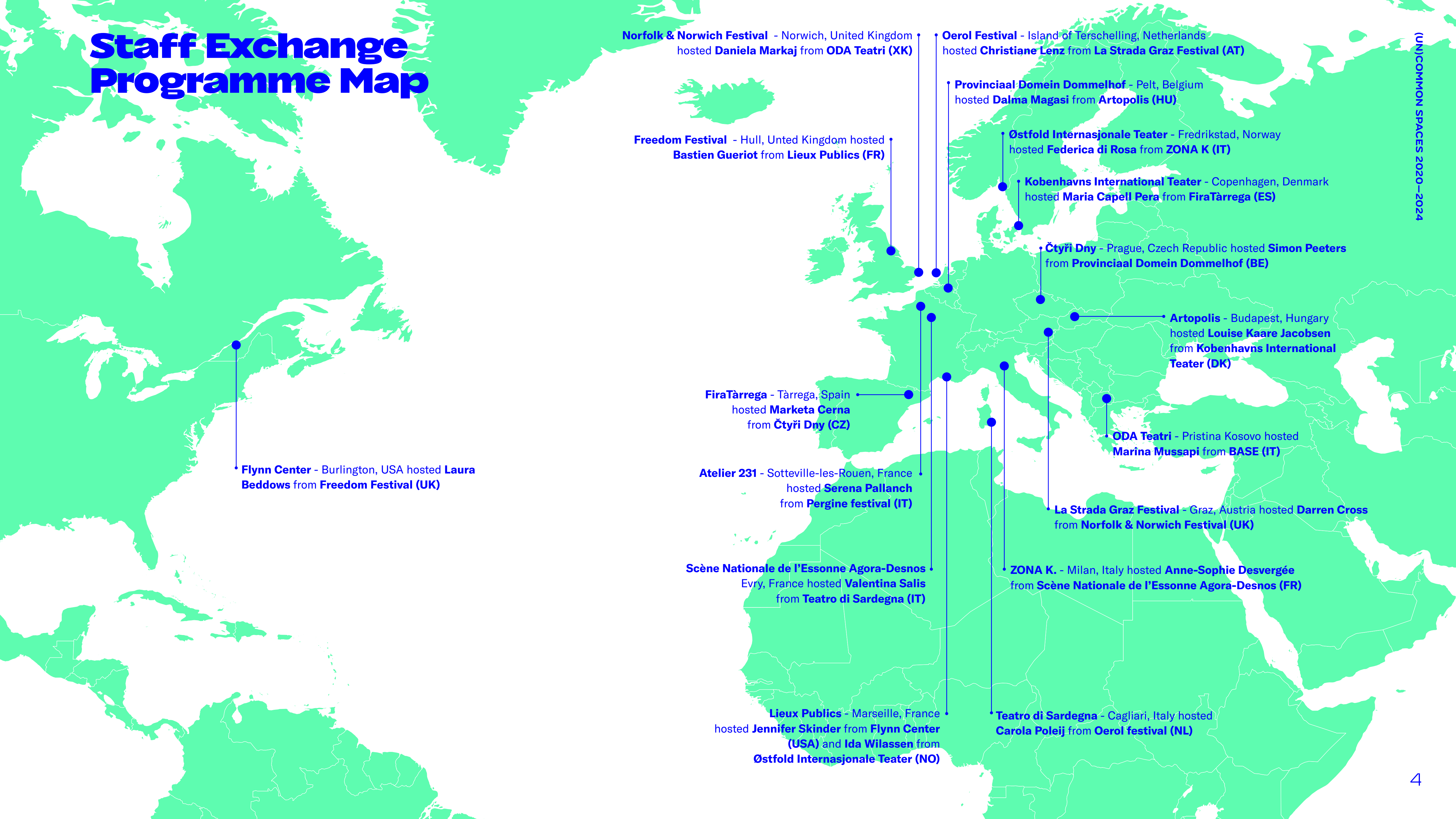
When the project started, the question of defining common terminology already presented a significant challenge. During my week-long exchange with the Freedom Festival Art Trusts team in Hull, I quickly realised that I was not asking myself the right question. What mattered was not so much whether we shared a perfectly common definition of the concept of audience development, but what the practical applications behind the term were. That is precisely where the strength of this publication lies: it relies on the experiences of the exchange staff in connection with audiences “in the field” to highlight, in a very concrete way, how audiences, artworks and artists who make public space their playground, can be brought into dialogue.

More than just a toolbox – which would presuppose standardised practices in our sector – this publication is a tremendous source of inspiration, encouraging us to rethink practices, to experiment, and to reinvent the way we forge links with our audiences.

Bastien GUERLOT
Head of Audience Development at Lieux publics



Staff Exchange Programme Map





“For art in public space, the street as a metaphor is above all an unconventional space where the public as a whole and the city as a stage are constituted.”¹

Introduction

Art in public space is the art of discovering, of inhabiting the world and creating social bonds through culture and creation. It is inherently an art form with high social impact. It stands as a catalyst for living together and sharing our common living spaces.

“Art in public space” acts as a meaningful umbrella concept to designate the type of artistic creation driving the IN SITU network since it was created. Its specificity is hence to be popular (as opposed to elitist) because it is created for a broad audience, so broad that it exceeds the term itself: art in public space does not aim to only reach people already going to the theatre or to cultural venues. Beyond that, its *raison d’être* is to actively seek interaction and action with citizens and inhabitants. In a word, individuals, no matter how far away they feel from the cultural field.

This quest of acting with and for inhabitants calls for a participative and fundamentally experimental approach. By nature, it fosters highly innovative practices not only in form but also in methodology and in the creation process. It is always about adapting, creating with and for diverse inhabitants, communities, contexts and places.

Projects developed in situ renew our way of experiencing, seeing and considering our everyday life environments. As the interaction between artistic forms and public space is fundamental, it makes for a particularly stimulating area to explore the question of audiences.

Thus, what are the different practices of organisations working with art in the public realm? Who is responsible for audience development in art in public space and how do they go about it? What is the link between audience development and community engagement? What are the different practices of organisations working with art in the public realm?

1. Chaudoir, P. (2008). Art public, arts de la rue, art urbain. *Études théâtrales*, 41-42, 183-191, p.188.

Locating Audience Development in the Wider Democratic Discourses of Cultural Policy

Even if the various terminologies used around Europe are not in harmony, audience development ultimately revolves around the concepts and methods one must engage with when aiming for a large and broad audience. It is about enhancing the understanding of targeted audiences, enriching their experiences and making art accessible to all.

At the European level, audience development has been a focal point since the 2014 Creative Europe funding cycle², while the current EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–26 places notable emphasis on culture, democracy and participation. Various studies and initiatives within this framework have highlighted the necessity of a paradigm shift in cultural institutions and policies³. They stress that audience development should be viewed as a collective challenge, requiring a systemic approach with commitment from all stakeholders⁴. This involves establishing frameworks and conditions on the policy side and urging cultural operators to transition toward more “audience-centric” organisations.

Although not universally true across all European countries, arts and cultural organisations are increasingly being recognised by public policy actors as agents for civic engagement.

A recent report has shown that citizens participating in cultural activities are more likely to engage in civic and democratic life⁵. This underscores the significance of audience development in cultural policy.

If public space is perceived as a “democratic operator⁶”, art in public space has a critical role to play in the discourse around audiences and how they are addressed, involved, encouraged or empowered. This approach is in the DNA of the IN SITU network, which has been focusing on audiences for 20 years and serves as a model for rethinking creation in the public realm with its inhabitants. Such a positioning is linked to a conception of culture that aims to redefine the framework of cultural policies in favour of cultural rights, cultural democracy and cultural participation.

In 2019, a report from the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights underscored the significance of public spaces for the exercise of cultural rights and the challenges that must be addressed to ensure universal access to and enjoyment of such spaces⁷. This shift from recognising the right to access culture to exercising cultural rights by actively participating in cultural activities, both as creators and

consumers of culture, is in reality a challenge of democracy. Similarly, Réseau Culture 21, an organisation based in France that works on the question of cultural rights, has identified seven areas to consider when contemplating how public space is inhabited⁸. These can serve as entry points to understanding audiences and creation in public space through a cultural rights perspective⁹.

Connecting audience development in public space with the concept of cultural rights addresses the core of the matter. It situates audience development alongside the right to participation, which is also fundamental to community arts projects¹⁰, prompting reflection on the mission of artistic expression and the robust territorial links of art in public space. In other words, it revolves around what it means to create with audiences and not just for audiences.

2. For an overview of the first steps from the European Commission on audience development, see Tomka, G. (2013). Reconceptualizing cultural participation in Europe: Grey literature review. *Cultural Trends*, 22(3–4), 259–264.

3. See Bamford, A., & Wimmer, M. (2012, October 16–17). European audiences: 2020 and beyond [Conference conclusions]. European Commission, Brussels. [View Pdf](#)

4. Bollo, A., Da Milano, C., Gariboldi, A. et al. (2017), Study on audience development – How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations: Final report. Publications Office of the European Union, European Commission, Brussels. [Know more](#)

5. Hammonds, W., Komers, S., Moretto, M. et al. (2023). Culture and Democracy: The evidence – How citizens’ participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion. European Commission, Brussels. [View Pdf](#)

6. Ruby, C. (2023). L’axe du vide dans les opérations (attendues) de l’art et de la rue. NECTART, 17, 56–63. [Know more](#)

7. UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. (2019). Report on the importance of public spaces for the exercise of cultural rights [Report to the General Assembly 74th session]. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. [Know more](#)

8. See Réseau Culture 21. Habitat espace public et droits culturels. Retrieved February 9, 2024, from [this article](#)

9. A MOOC is underway on the topic in the framework of (UN)COMMON SPACES.

10. Matarasso, F. (2019). A restlessArt : how participation won and why it matters. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. [Know more](#)

From Audience Development to Community Engagement

One of the findings of the action-research was that there is little foundation for knowledge-based systematic audience development work among organisations operating within the realm of art in public space. However, IN SITU partners concur that the desire to interact with audiences is inherent to their core mission. It is, by definition, related to the work they undertake and their commitment to social causes, well-being, the revitalisation of places, offering different lenses to explore the surroundings, and empowering various communities – especially those that are considered difficult to reach.

Working with inhabitants in public space is not restricted to the street or outdoor venues but is associated with an attitude of addressing audiences “where they are”¹¹.

“For me, audience development is giving social meaning to the encounter between an artistic proposition and audiences: reaching people that have poor access to cultural offerings, sensitising them to artistic creation in public space and creating engagement and social bond through participative projects.”

Bastien Gueriot, Lieux Publics.

Some organisations embark on public space initiatives out of a desire to extend beyond the confines of a venue they already manage behind closed doors, aiming to engage in a dialogue with the neighbourhood and the city.

“We have always proposed urban performances, a “theatre outside the theatre,” by collaborating with other structures in the city, exploring unusual places and blending the audience with citizens.”

Federica di Rosa, ZONA K.

As explained by Laura Beddows from Freedom Festival in her exchange journal, the term “audience development” in the English language has been positioned in the UK as a strategic area of marketing aimed at developing a particular audience (geographic, demographic etc.) through specific measures and approaches. Additionally, alongside audience development, Laura and other (UN)COMMON SPACES partners frequently employ the term “community engagement” to describe their practices.

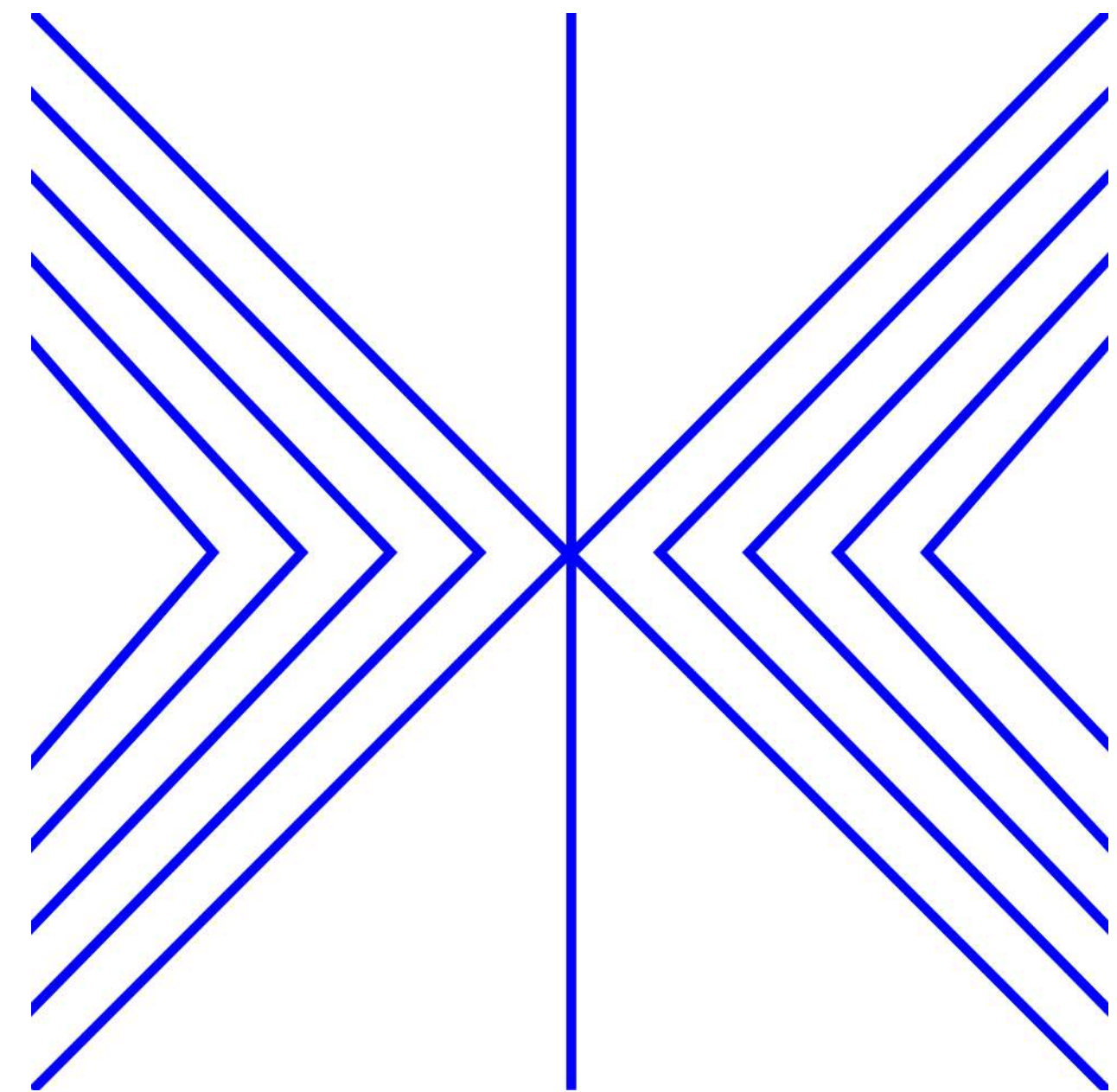
While audience development and community engagement as concepts are not used interchangeably, community engagement signifies a semantic and operational shift towards close collaboration with audiences. It redirects the emphasis of audience development efforts from broadening to deepening. As Darren Cross from Norfolk & Norwich Festival clarifies, audience development is a process through which an organisation expects relatively immediate results as it focuses on attracting audiences, while community engagement focuses on building deep relationships and may not necessarily lead to immediate attendance.

11. Gaber, F. (2014). Les arts de la rue et les publics éloignés de la culture. *Vie sociale*, 5, 69-78. p.69

Audience Development versus Community Engagement

Audience Development

- Enlarging the existing audience of an arts organisation.
- Challenged by the characteristics of Art in public space as often performances are “unexpected” or without tickets.
- An overall strategy of the organisation that defines which target audiences are to be reached and what the roadmap for this is.
- Traditionally linked with audience research, branding, marketing and ticket pricing.
- Includes “parallel” activities to the performances, such as educational activities or workshops/seminars to reach specific groups.
- Mainly a unidirectional process: from the organisation to the target audience/community.



Community Engagement

- Can be considered a strategy of audience development but requires an analytical and operational shift in the way audience development is undertaken.
- Listening to the needs of the target community before conceptualising or executing any artistic outcomes.
- Collaborating with other sectors of society, community groups, organisations, schools, associations etc.
- Engaging audiences “where they are” as opposed to inviting them to a specific location just to attend an event.
- Encouraging participatory approaches that move from consuming art to co-creating art.
- Reflecting an arts organisation’s values and commitment to their social role.

These concepts are not mutually exclusive, but it was noted that community engagement practices are essentially how IN SITU partners undertake audience development. This genuine engagement enables them to comprehend the impact of their activities on the addressed populations, allowing them to re-orientate their work if necessary for greater relevance and subsequently extend their reach to new audiences.



“Anything that leads the organisation to find more interactive ways to connect with them can be understood as community engagement. Community engagement comes at a deep second stage level: through community engagement strategies you can reach new audiences.”

Marina Mussapi, BASE.

Unveiling the Actors of Audience Development Practices

There is no singular model regarding the allocation of responsibility for audience development within organisations operating in the realm of art in public space. Some organisations have a dedicated individual, or even a team, often focusing on “community-related projects.” Others integrate this role into their communication and development teams or view it as an integral part of the programming strategy. Smaller organisations commonly express: “we all do it.”

For most, the responsibility for audience development is implicitly woven into the fabric of the entire organisation. It is not solely the duty of one person but rather reflects an overarching organisational approach and attitude towards audiences, closely intertwined with how they understand their role in society.

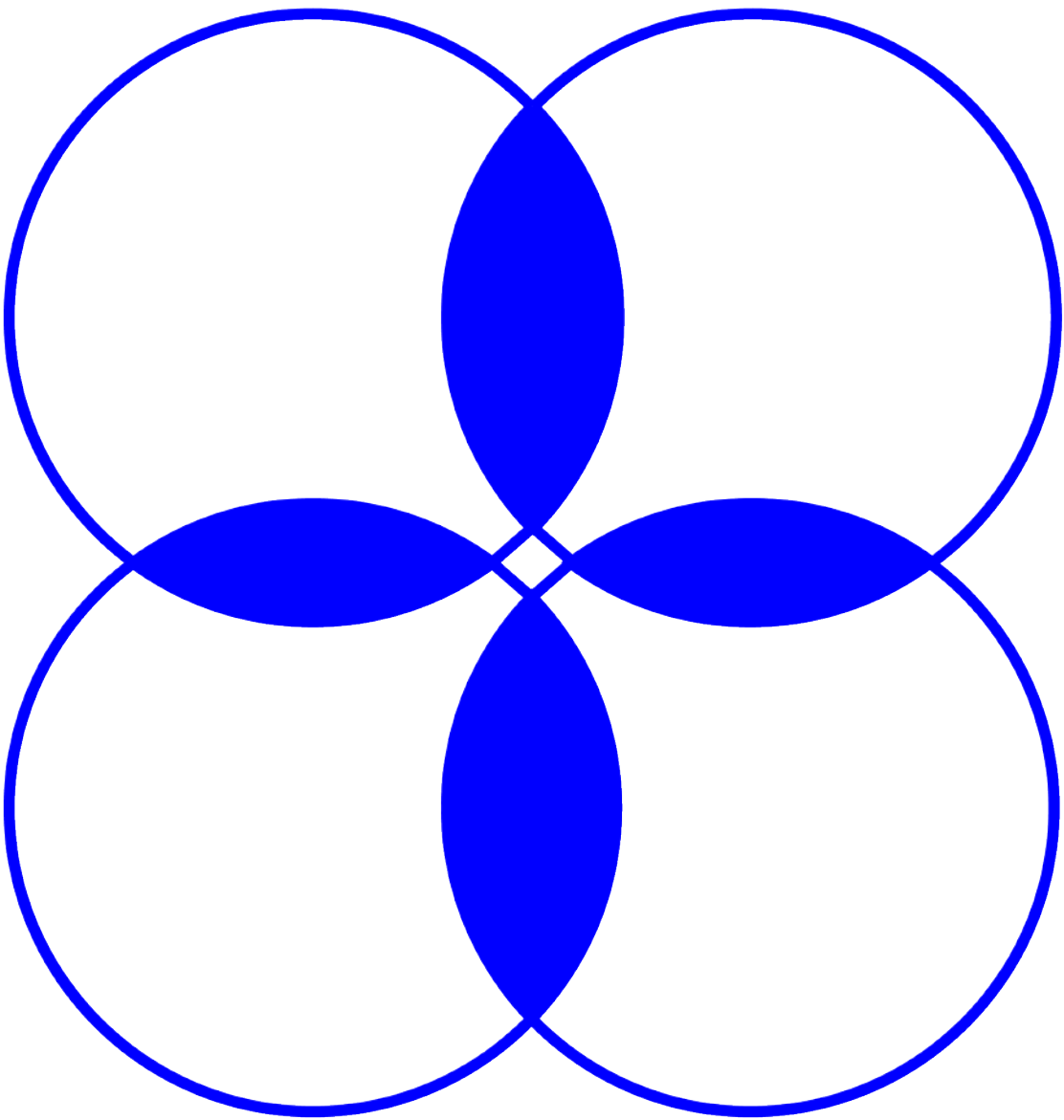
The graphic on the right encapsulates the skillset, values, knowledge and attitudes that individuals engaged in audience development within the field of art in public space are encouraged to possess. These attributes were identified through interaction with IN SITU partners and staff members.

SKILLS

- Time and project management
- Team management
- Public relations
- Effective communication
- Active listening
- Identification of opportunities
- Synergy building
- Negotiation skills
- Risk management skills
- Fundraising skills
- Managing multi-stakeholder relationships

KNOWLEDGE

- Knowledge of local ecosystems
- Understanding of the performing arts
- Expertise of conceptualising and designing online and offline communication material
- Mastering event production



VALUES

- Sensitivity to cultural differences
- Gender equity and inclusivity
- Collaboration
- Awareness of disability

ATTITUDES

- Empathy
- Care
- Collective learning
- Reflective practice
- Harnessing uncertainty
- Collaborative working

Inspiring Insights & Experiences

Participants in the staff exchanges shared diverse practices encompassing both those they adopt themselves and noteworthy observations from their hosting partners.



UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCES

One of the biggest uncertainties shared by IN SITU partners is the empirical nature of their knowledge about their audiences, especially in smaller organisations. When asked about her knowledge of audiences, Markéta Černá from Čtyři Dny / 4+4 Days in Motion Festival in Prague said, “I know each and every one of them personally.”

Experiences certainly differ for larger organisations, or in countries where audience data is a standard reporting requirement. In the UK for example, funding bodies demand detailed data on audiences, compelling organisations to conduct surveys systematically. Despite being a labour—and time—intensive process, gathering this information serves as a foundation for programming and outreach strategies.

The better an organisation knows its audience, the more likely it is to meet their needs. Surveys, interviews or group discussions provide insights into the demographics, interests and behaviours of existing and potential audiences. Moreover, such practices can empower audiences by giving them a voice and the opportunity to provide feedback on an organisation’s work, or express interest in greater involvement in various activities.

Bastien Gueriot from Lieux Publics, during his staff exchange at the Freedom Festival Art Trust (FFAT) in the UK, noted various tools employed by the festival to understand their audiences. These methods encompass online audience studies, field studies conducted by volunteers, analysis of engaged audiences in participative projects and the use of data from the ticket office – which includes postcodes for identifying the locations that audiences come from. He explained that FFAT was surprised to find from these surveys that ten percent of their audience identified as disabled. This revelation not only reaffirmed their commitment to accessibility but also provided additional evidence to support their case with potential funders. Bastien also highlighted an interesting aspect of FFAT’s audience surveys. Rather than focusing solely on demographics, the emphasis was on engagement and participation. Audiences were asked about their interest in being more involved, whether in workshops, production tasks or even performances.

In a similar vein, **Darren Cross** from Norfolk & Norwich Festival, for whom audience surveys have become an integral part of his work, explained that the festival maintains detailed data on audience demographics, which is reported back to the Arts Council England. While online questionnaires are widely used for ticket buyers, their art in public space audience surveys rely significantly on face-to-face surveys. They usually train a team of people to conduct short interviews with audiences on the streets, inviting them to participate in further detailed questionnaires. The collected information is then sent to the Audience Agency in the UK, which is dedicated to audience development for all organisations funded by the Arts Council. Darren reports that these surveys helped them find out that their outdoor program is by far the most accessible to a variety of audiences.

LISTENING TO THE TERRITORY

Seeking input from local communities in the planning and implementation of artistic projects in public space helps to ensure relevance and resonance to the territory and thus speak to wide audiences. This can range from identifying a topic that is important for them and curating a programme around it, to giving them a voice in decision-making processes. It is a way of attracting new audiences, but also of giving participatory power to existing ones while stimulating greater interest and engagement from them.

One approach to developing and maintaining a close ear to the territory is the establishment of advisory groups with local citizens, curating feedback moments that will make them feel valued and engaged in the overall success of a project. These moments can be organised before, during or after a production or artistic project to ensure that the art is relevant, meaningful and respectful of community values.

Leveraging audiences through testimonials on their own experiences with art in public space projects was also underlined as a powerful audience development strategy. Maria Capell Pera from FiraTàrraga explained in her staff exchange journal how beneficial it has been for both performers and audiences to have open rehearsals and listen to feedback. Local audiences have attended many performances over the last 40 years of FiraTàrraga and have developed a high level of expertise in giving valuable opinion and comments to creators.

ECHOES FROM (UN)COMMON SPACES PARTNERS

Christiane Lenz from **La Strada Festival** was hosted by **Oerol Festival**. During her stay, she explored the *Assembly of Trees* project by Elmo Vermijs¹² where local communities were invited to participate in workshops discussing topics like the involvement of the non-human environment in decision making. Christiane explained that this specific artistic project is a long-term project unfolding over four years. It aims to find new relationships between humans and forests in Terschelling specifically. Its approach is participatory, inviting citizens to engage in discussions.

“Of course, the workshops were also open to the general audience of the festival, however the focus was on the local community, since the project really focused on the natural environment of Terschelling and its rights, involvement, our relationship to it and what all this means or could mean for the future. [...] Therefore, the artist, the organisation and the local community are tied together closely in order to be able to realise this long-term project.”

Christiane Lenz, La Strada Festival.

Another example of how an organisation is exploring the needs of its territory is the effort made by **Scène Nationale de l'Essonne** to work around the concept of the “situated project.” The organisation explains that the demographic in this area is, on average, 26 years of age¹³. Consequently, they have placed a strong emphasis on creating tailored performances including an adapted pricing strategy. Moreover, in collaboration with social centres and neighbourhood organisations, a group of 9-13-year-old individuals has been formed who attend several shows annually and participate in the selection and programming of activities. Similar deliberative processes are facilitated with a group of 18-25-year-olds, who curate an evening based on a theme of their choice, including film selection, guest invitations and discussion sessions.

¹². To find more about the project and the artist see Vermijs, E. *Assembly of trees*. Studio Elmo Vermijs. Retrieved February 7, 2024, from [this article](#)

¹³. Tronqual, M. *Scène nationale de l'Essonne Agora-Desnos*. In Situ. Retrieved February 7, 2024, from [this article](#)

PARTNERING WITH LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Establishing partnerships with local entities stands out as a predominant strategy implemented by most IN SITU partners to extend their reach where communities are located. Many of them highlighted their engagement with local schools and social centres, facilitating outreach to diverse age groups, especially younger and older audiences. This approach enables them to identify “intermediaries” within their communities, collaborating closely with them to design programmes. It is a particularly effective way of enriching the cultural fabric of the community.

Collaborations with organisations acting as “mediators” are also prevalent. These mediators are the ones that travel to participate in an event, bringing their established audiences with them. Simon Peeters from Provinciaal Domein Dommelhof, reflecting on his observations of the 4+4 Days in Motion Festival, noted their collaboration with Do You Have a Knack for Art?, an organisation that visits the festival’s main exhibition daily with children from different schools and age groups. He emphasised the engaging dialogues initiated, occasionally involving artists present at the event.

Choosing the right organisation to collaborate with within a specific territory is contingent upon the unique identity of each project. Some partners opt for long-term engagement with specific groups, while others choose ad hoc partnerships with organisations active in specific fields.

ECHOES FROM (UN)COMMON SPACES PARTNERS

Ida Willamsem from **Østfold Internasjonale Theater (ØIT)**, hosted by **Lieux Publics**, highlighted a project with the Associate Artist Eva Bubla with the collective Sza-badonbalaton that focused on developing research-based ecological art projects to enhance public awareness and support decision making on sustainability. Applying the method previously developed for Lake Balaton in Hungary, the collective extended their efforts to the local Aygalades Stream. During a week of research in collaboration with the local environmental group Les Gammars—stakeholders living along the Caravelle-Aygalades Stream—the artists gained practical and theoretical knowledge of the river, the area, and its challenges.

The collaboration with Les Gammars not only provided valuable insights but also supported the artists in creating an immersive experience during the public intervention. The audience was served purified water from the stream and snacks made from locally grown fruits and vegetables, prompting contemplation about the environment’s safety.

“Here, the artistic work complements the efforts of local environmental activists in raising awareness about the state of the Ruisseau des Aygalades and the environment surrounding La Cité des Arts de la Rue.”

Ida Willamsem, Østfold Internasjonale Theater.

CREATING INCLUSIVE AND RESPECTFUL ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS

Considering the diversity of potential audiences—including differing age groups, cultural backgrounds and abilities—offering experiences that respond to the unique needs and preferences of inhabitants is key to enhancing engagement with them.

Being inclusive and respectful requires paying attention to detail in the planning and execution of arts interventions in the public space to ensure a holistic and positive experience for audiences. It reflects a commitment to creating art that is not only visually striking but also meaningful, inclusive and harmonious within its public context. Such details are site- and community-specific. They can range from thinking how audiences reach the public space where the artistic intervention takes place to how they sign up for restricted performances, or informing them about potential content or operational constraints that might cause discomfort.



Serena Pallanch from **Pergine Festival** mentions the creation of the *No Limits* project¹⁴ as one of the few examples in Italy addressing the theme of accessibility. *No Limits* is a project dealing with cultural and social inclusion, dedicated to making the festival venues and the proposed projects accessible. Serena explains that some projects in the festival's programme were chosen to be made partially or totally accessible for people with sensory disabilities:

“The quality of the cultural experience is at the centre of the festival's mission, that from the perspective of accessibility, aims at guaranteeing to the audience the best conditions of autonomy, comfort and safety for selected artistic proposals.”

Serena Pallanch, Pergine Festival.

In his staff exchange journal, **Bastien Gueriot** also stressed the need to inform surrounding communities about possible interruptions that a performance could have on their routines. He gave the example of the Freedom Festival Art Trust (FFAT) and its neighbourhood engagement. The production team leaves personal letters trying to reach audiences living nearby to warn them about possible troubles they may encounter during some shows, to inform them that their parking spaces might be inaccessible, or to invite them to attend some paying shows for free.

Marina Musapi from **BASE** Milano was hosted by ODA Teatri in Kosovo during her staff exchange. She was surprised to see a lot of older women and deaf-mute people attending the shows. Later she understood that these communities were previously involved in other activities and workshops and this is how they became “followers” of ODA Teatri's programme.

¹⁴. See Perigrine Festival. No Limits. Retrieved February 7, 2024, from [this article](#)

MAKING AUDIENCES PART OF THE STORY

Audiences can also be part of an artistic project in the public space and actively contribute to its creation. By making audiences active participants in artistic interventions, artists create an immersive and memorable experience that resonates with the public on a personal level. This collaborative approach transforms performances in public space into a shared journey, where both artists and inhabitants co-create a narrative and develop meaningful relationships.

The (UN)COMMON SPACES project is an example that aims to define new arenas for creation and performance opportunities, developing new art audiences by piloting a model where Associate Artists work with Associate Citizens in a participatory dimension, giving a voice to civil society and enabling public debate and deliberation. Such an approach regenerates the sense and value of European public space through power-sharing experiments, where the borders between creators and audiences are diluted.

ECHOES FROM (UN)COMMON SPACES PARTNERS

Valentina Salis talked about *Cities by Night*, a project carried out by Teatro di Sardegna in collaboration with artist Valentina Medda, whose artistic focus revolves around borders and the ways in which women navigate and explore them. The participatory performance, prepared through a series of workshops, invited women from diverse backgrounds, countries of origin, and ages, to venture onto the streets of their own city on solitary journeys after sunset, consciously avoiding areas where they felt uncomfortable. The outcome of these walks took the form of maps of the city delineating perilous areas marked in black ink, while light areas reveal a totally different topography.

Participation motivations varied among the women-performers. Some residing in the district aimed to challenge the prevailing stigma that painted their neighbourhood as unsafe, while others sought to confront personal biases and prejudices. On the performance day, participants received instructions on where to meet their assigned performer to start the walk. At the end of the itinerary, the women-performers drew a chalk line on the pavement, indicating the limit of their secure zone and revealing a phrase written on their hand: “My city stops here.” Subsequently, participants were left to decide whether to return to the meeting point or continue on their way home. The performance eventually illustrated how our access to urban space is not solely shaped by gender but also influenced by shared beliefs, prejudices and cultural backgrounds.

During the festival Vapeur sur la Ville organised by Atelier 231, the Associate Artists **600 HIGHWAYMEN** closely collaborated with the Associate Citizen **Marc El Samrani** to later present the French version of the project AN ASSEMBLY in Marseille without the artists. The performance is an artistic process during which a group of 16 strangers come into a room together, guided by a shared script on notecards. The script is a set of instructions that help the group create the experience together. This installation is performed autonomously by the participants. No one is present in the room except the audience, not even the artists or the Associate Citizen. In this frame, Marc El Samrani—a researcher specialising in architecture and cultural mediation – brought his perspective to the project, studying how the initiative manages to create social bonds and how people form a community.

*[The Fame]*¹⁵ was a project developed by Associate Artists **Eléctrico 28**, a collective that nurtures the ecosystem of daily life in open-air immersive street performances. The Frame proposes that audiences settle down in front of the passing city life to observe it, think about it, calculate it, designate it and share it. Four characters, trained in the disciplines of observation and arranging the space, translate what happens with the help of letters that become words and then words that become phrases in a co-creation manner mixing artists and everyday citizens.

15. See IN SITU. Eléctrico 28. Retrieved February 7, 2024, from [this article](#)

ATTRACTING BY SURPRISE

From the experiences shared by the IN SITU partners, the “surprise” element works well when attracting and involving audiences, especially unintended ones. The unexpected and novel experiences offered by such artistic proposals create intrigue, capture attention and leave a lasting impression.

Such artistic interventions help “break the ice” with communities that are a bit harder to reach. They might include a preparation component that engages with the audiences where they are. For instance, by seeing the artistic company rehearsing and exploring the physical space where they will perform. Such preparation can include elements that invite passers-by and inhabitants of a specific neighbourhood to explore and experiment in an artistic project in the making.

Louise Kaare Jacobsen from **Metropolis** shared an experience from some years ago when they collaborated with the French circus company EXIT in a project situated in a housing area in the north of Copenhagen, which some people consider a ghetto. She explained that the company spent the first five days of the week on site without any programme: “They were just kind of cruising around the neighbourhood, meeting people and then inviting them silently to join the acrobatics”, while the performance took place on the weekend. This approach allowed people to attend, participate and get familiar with the company. They were hesitant at the beginning, looking behind their curtains from their apartments, but progressively they started going on the street and interacting with the artists.

“Then, at the actual performances, it was really nice to see that half of the audience came from the local area – people we never reach in other circumstances – and the other half were outsiders who were coming for the first time. It was a nice way of mixing those two groups and making them aware of something they were not aware of before.”

Louise Kaare Jacobsen, Metropolis.

Darren Cross from **Norfolk & Norwich Festival** explained how the production of *Dominoes* by Station House Opera¹⁶ allowed them to reach audiences in parts of the city where the least arts-engaged audiences live. In this project, a line of dominos is built throughout the day, gathering attention from the residents that follow its construction. The dominos are all knocked over, ending in the city centre.

“So it works really well in terms of taking some work out to certain parts of the city, getting people excited about it and then getting them to follow the final event into the centre. It was a very simple piece but works very nicely from an audience engagement point of view.”

Darren Cross, Norfolk & Norwich Festival.

Simon Peeters from **Provinciaal Domein Dommelhof** made reference to the project *I Think We Need to Talk* by Collectief Elan(d)¹⁷ that was part of their programme in 2022. The artists rolled a ball of pink wool through the city, trying to attract people to follow the thread, thus inviting them to where another show was taking place. This activity was complementary to parallel activities such as workshops in schools and elderly people’s homes, where they knitted the wool together.

¹⁶. Norfolk & Norwich Festival. *Dominoes*. Retrieved February 7, 2024, from [this article](#)

¹⁷. Collectief Elan(d) & Manoeuvre. *I think we need to talk* (2022). Retrieved February 7, 2024, from [this article](#)

LEVERAGING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS WITH A FOCUS ON STORYTELLING

While many stated that audience development falls under their communication team, they stressed the need for regular collaboration with the programming team to curate the appropriate and relevant communication material. A good understanding of the targeted audiences was therefore highlighted as crucial so that the communication channels and tools could be tailored. Another important element is finding the right balance between offline and online communication.

The difficulty of garnering recognition for their own organisation when performing in public space was brought to the forefront by some of the partners. Louise Kaare Jacobsen from Metropolis in Denmark, related that they staged a performance in the Town Hall square, and people immediately associated it with the municipality. This underscores the critical role of communication to ensure that the artistic organisations operating in public space are directly acknowledged and attributed so that audiences can better follow their work. Strategic use of communication channels, coupled with the crafting of compelling stories around artistic projects through storytelling practices, can attract a broad audience and establish lasting, impactful connections within communities.

ECHOES FROM (UN)COMMON SPACES PARTNERS

In her staff exchange journal, **Federica di Rosa** from **Zona K** referenced the communication of Østfold Internasjonale Theater (ØIT) around Pig¹⁸, an art installation in the form of a giant transparent piggy bank. Developed by the Associate Artist Kaleider, Pig traveled to six locations in Europe within the IN SITU network, including ØIT. In all locations, Pig appears in public space without warning, accompanied by a short message that members of the public can put money into Pig's "community fund" if they want to, and spend it when they have agreed on how to spend it. The appearance of Pig attracted the interest of the press and a general conversation among citizens. The staff at ØIT video recorded some people's reactions when they were confronted with Pig, which were subsequently used for communication purposes.

“ZONA K is looking for different ways to narrate the work-in-process to the public, to make them participate in the construction of the work and not only in the final result, in the belief that this storytelling can contribute to the audience development, always searching for new forms and practices of theatrical performances.”

Federica di Rosa, ZONA K.

Federica also referenced a blog¹⁹ that ZONA K created providing a digital space to the public to share their thoughts in a participative manner. The blog was created to give voice to the followers, those who participate and those who are curious inviting them to share a few lines, a video, photos, audio, or any tool or content that is connected to ZONA K's work.

¹⁸. The evaluation report of Pig gives insightful information about the surprise elements of art in public space and its communication potential. See UCLG Committee on Culture, In Situ, & On the Move. (2020). A cultural policy contribution to the evaluation of art in public space pig an experiment in collective decision-making. [Read this article](#)

¹⁹. See ZONA K. Blog. Retrieved February 7, from [this article](#)

CELEBRATING EXISTING AUDIENCES

“Nurturing” an existing audience involves cultivating and sustaining a positive and engaging relationship with those who already support and participate in a particular initiative. Offering exclusive content, early access to special events or going back to these audiences when looking for new participants in projects, makes them feel valued and appreciated, fostering ongoing engagement and a sense of belonging. Indeed, the existing audiences contribute to an organisation’s audience development strategy. By recognising them, organisations not only express appreciation but also cultivate a positive and collaborative community that is motivated to continue supporting the arts and cultural initiatives. This can be done through public acknowledgments, thank-you notes, social media shout outs, spotlight features on websites, newsletters or other communication channels, or community appreciation events that recognise the collective efforts of individuals working towards audience development. This recognition can also be achieved by “friends programmes,” such as the one introduced by Oerol Festival that gives benefits to audiences, such as early access to ticketed events.

ECHOES FROM (UN)COMMON SPACES PARTNERS

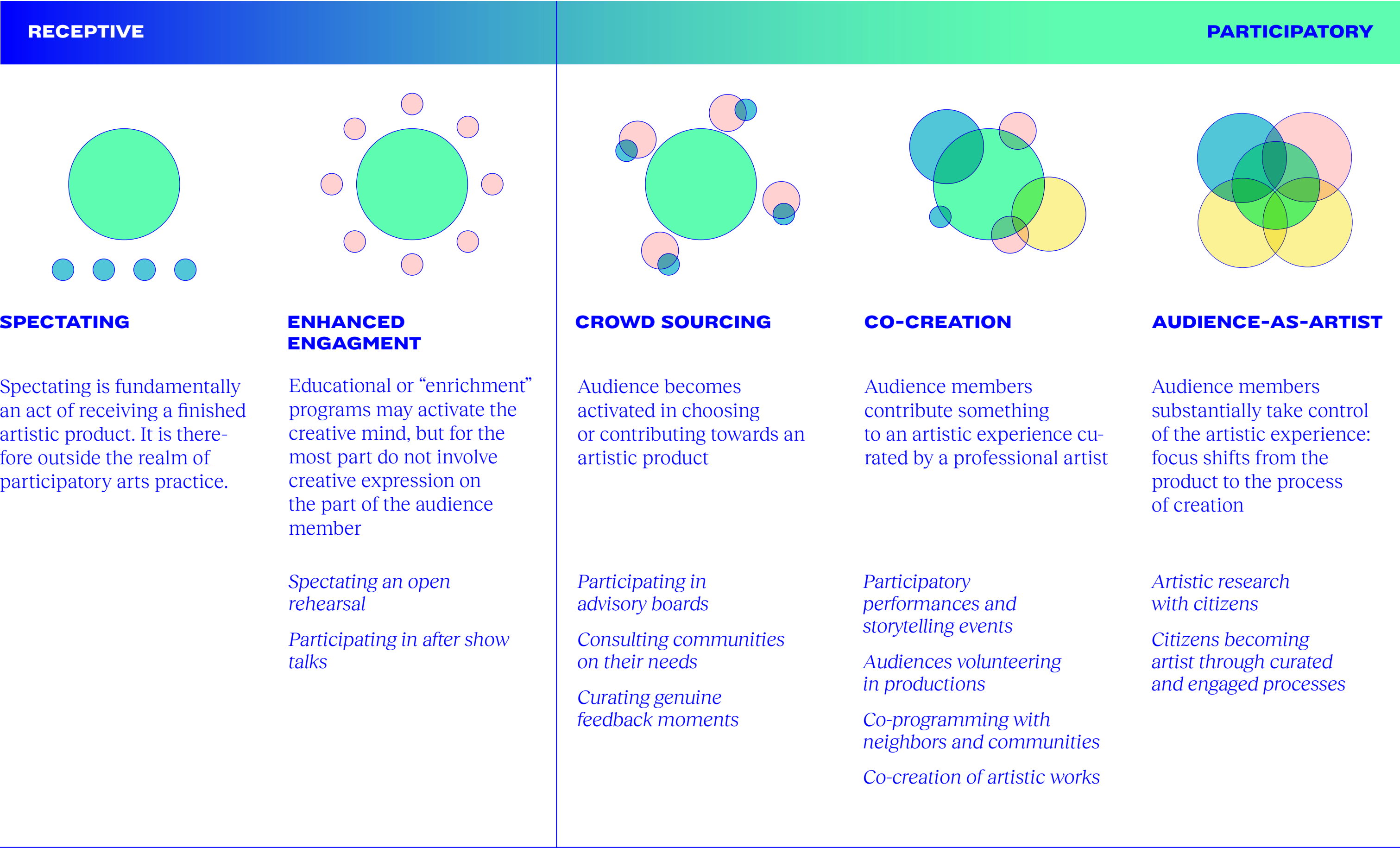
Bastien from **Lieux publics** observed that his hosting partner, the Freedom Festival Art Trust (FFAT) takes very good care to highlight all the people they are connected to: the participants, the volunteers, the board, the team, the partners, the artists and of course the audiences.

“You can easily feel the positive communication on the social networks and the website of the festival, which is certainly good leverage to engage with existing audiences and win their undeflectable loyalty. For example, each member of the board is introduced on the website, as well as the core volunteers of the organisation that they call “ambassadors.”

Bastien Guériot, Lieux Publics.

Connecting with Audiences in Public Space

Audiences of art in public space are dynamic & heterogeneous.



Depending on their level of engagement and participation in the artistic process or the final artistic outcome, they might range from random audiences to representative citizens, from anonymous passers-by to identified groups, from a broad public to specific groups, from ad hoc participants to participants by rights, from individuals to collective parties, and from passionate arts-driven individuals to those who are not interested in the arts. Additionally, audiences encompass diverse groups simultaneously, as art in public space engages with people from different generations, financial acquisition power and social status.

The wide spectrum of engagement possibilities depends on the intended level of audience participation. The image on the left shows different examples of audience development approaches and illustrates the variety of IN SITU practices. They are positioned on a scale according to their level of participation and shared power foreseen between artists, cultural operators and the audiences²⁰. In contrast to traditional scenarios where audiences are often unexpected and serve as passive spectators of artistic practices, the network members actively encourage audience involvement. This ranges from proposing open rehearsals, documenting creative processes, co-programming, commissioning artwork, and even the opportunity for audience members to become artists themselves.

²⁰. The diagram is from Brown, A. S., & Novak-Leonard, J. L. (2011). *Getting in on the act: How arts groups are creating opportunities for active participation*. In C. Tiller (Ed.), (2014). *Participatory performing arts: A literature review* (p.9). Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK. [Know more](#)


CONCLUDING THE JOURNEY

In an era dominated by evaluations and metrics, there is a broader expectation to quantify audience development, measuring it by the attendance or non-attendance of a performance. Art in public space proves this wrong. What distinguishes artistic practice in public space is its evident aspiration for more than simply drawing in audiences. Its goal is to actively engage with the social base, even if it means doing so “one person at a time.”

Like art itself, audience development for art in public space is not a sterile process. It is an ongoing, continuously unfinished reflection on the interaction between art and diverse audiences. For cultural operators and artists, creating for public space means “creating with the public space, and with its users – whether or not they become ‘an audience’”²¹. Although “the idea of an ‘audience’ serves the cultural sector to maintain the long-established narratives connected with its impact, value and social role”²², art in public space challenges predefined frameworks and places the focus on the relation between cultural and artistic expression, cultural rights and citizen participation.

21. Saint-Do, V. (2018/1). Éditions Observatoire des politiques culturelles. *L'Observatoire*, 33-35, (51), p.34.

22. Hadley, S. (2021). *Audience development and cultural policy*. Palgrave, p.3.



“This is how it happens: one person at a time. [...] Sometimes you have to start somewhere other than with the art. And maybe, maybe, you can at some point, when you’ve created a relationship and trust, move people towards becoming an audience for your artistic projects.”

Louise Kaare Jacobse, Metropolis.

Further Resources

Study on Audience Development

Bollo, A., Da Milano, C., Gariboldi, A. et al. (2017), *Study on audience development – How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations: Final report*. Publications Office of the European Union, European Commission, Brussels.

[View the Pdf file](#)

A Handbook for Fostering a Participatory Approach in the Performing Arts

G. Calvano, L. Carnelli, E. Zuliani (Eds.). (2022). *Making culture in common: A handbook for fostering a participatory approach in the performing arts*. Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

[View the Pdf file](#)

Participation in the Performing Arts

L. Bonet, G. Calvano, L. Carnelli, et al., (Eds.). (2018). *Be spectactive! Challenging participation in performing arts*. Editoria & Spettacolo.

[View the Pdf file](#)

Audience-centred Experience Design

Adeste+ partnership. (n.d.). *A blueprint for audience centred experience design*. Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

[View the Pdf file](#)

The Audience Agency

The audience development planner tool.

[Read the article](#)

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Since 2003, it has supported over 300 artists working outside conventional venues and brings together 18 partners from 13 countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, The United Kingdom and the Unites States of America.

IN SITU also gathers 12 Associate partners from Belgium, France and 9 additional countries: China, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Taiwan.

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