



ANALYTICAL DOCUMENT – A PEER LEARNING VISIT HOSTED BY BUDAPEST (HU)

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY BUILDING AND VOLUNTEERING THROUGH CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The visit looked focused on [Budapest 100](#), a community festival organised by the [Contemporary Architecture Center](#) (KEK) in co-operation with Open Society Archives in Budapest. The annual two-day festival aims at initiating a dialogue between citizens, residents and their built heritage, architecture and urban/social environment. KEK acts as a professional platform representing contemporary architecture in Hungary. Its aim is to raise awareness on the importance of cultural heritage. It is an independent organization structurally and financially. KEK was set up as a foundation in 2006 by a group of urbanists and architects.

The festival is a remarkable example of a bottom-up approach managed by an independent NGO in which heritage plays a central role to engage with citizens and community, enabling the sharing of personal stories and the history linked to a place and architecture.

The Budapest 100 festival has been existing for 10 years. Although the open house network runs activities based on very similar principles, the whole concept was invented by KEK with the idea of celebrating the birthday of valuable and 100-year-old buildings. The main difference between the open house network and Budapest100 festival is that whilst the first focuses on buildings, the latter stresses the interaction between citizens. It is people, their stories and their emotional attachment to the buildings make 'every building interesting'. Throughout the years, the concept has evolved to embrace thematic foci such as open spaces, bridges. Nowadays any building can be involved as long as it enables engagement activities with the local community.

MAIN TAKE-AWAYS

- The KEK methodology for community engagement works: a methodology focused on actively engaging with citizens, house owners, residents and volunteers.
- Heritage and culture offer fantastic opportunities to increase citizens' participation.
- The participation of citizens plays a key role to support an inclusive, democratic, and tolerant society.
- Strong research (inventory of buildings for instance, or impact measurement) and cultural activities engaging citizens are key factors to ensure the legacy of cultural projects.
- Volunteering is a way to engage local people in cultural projects.

ANALYSIS

Context of the Budapest 100 festival

Preservation of the built heritage is one of the highest priorities in Hungary. Tangible cultural heritage includes the archaeological heritage, the built heritage, cultural goods, and elements of the military heritage researchable with archaeological methods. Sites which have major importance in the history of the Hungarian nation are considered national memorial places. Registered archaeological sites and built heritage values are protected by law. The number of registered archeologic sites is approx. 60.000; there are approximately 15.000 protected buildings or complexes, registered 'monuments' and protected conservation areas. The built heritage includes historic gardens, historic landscapes and conservation areas.

Tangible cultural heritage is under the protection of the legal framework on the national level (urban, architectural, archeologic, artistic, etc.), but the protection is possible also at municipal level. Relevant ministries, universities and scientific organizations share the principal responsibilities for the implementation and monitoring of cultural heritage protection. But there are no official programmes on awareness raising of cultural heritage, community building, volunteering, and other activities leading to the better understanding of heritage and strengthening the communities. To fill this gap, complementary bottom-up initiatives and NGOs undertake community building and citizen engagement activities. The Contemporary Architecture Center (KEK) is one example of such NGOs.

Objectives of the Budapest 100 festival

The main aim and headline of the initiative is "exploring the built heritage to strengthen communities". One of the main objectives is to raise awareness of cultural heritage values. The idea is to help owners, residents and visitors to learn more about their built heritage and environment.

Through guided visits of selected houses not only those places are showcased that represent historic values, but also place that are not so much attractive. Visitors and residents share stories and knowledge and get to know each other. The organisers emphasize the idea "every house is interesting" (not only outstanding architecture or which is protected by law).

The aims of the project are:

- foster participation from local communities
- record stories of the residents of buildings
- raise awareness about the direct and indirect values of heritage and of a well-designed built environment.

Implementation of the Budapest 100 festival

Organisers co-operate with residents, volunteers, artists and a team of experts to interpret the values of the buildings that are open to the public during the weekend of the festival.

Together with the support of volunteers and of the organisers, residents develop a programme related to the history of their building. Exhibitions, artistic performances and storytelling by residents and volunteers (urbanists, architects, researchers, photographers) complement the visits which allow festival participants to learn about the history of the place and what makes it unique or interesting.

Budapest 100 uses the built heritage to drive community engagement with a view to increase awareness and participation in urban development. Activities contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive social fabric, relying on a strong community of volunteers, residents, owners, artists and researchers.

In the last edition of the festival, 60 properties were accessible to participants. The festival mobilises around 230 volunteers (students, pensioners, professionals) and artists (musicians, ballet teachers, yoga teachers). The festival has become a recurring feature of the cultural programme of the city (whilst not formally integrated in the official programme of the city) with its increased popularity and positive feedback from participants.

After several years, the experience shows that the festival has become a platform for discussion with the local people on how to improve the quality of urban spaces.

For more info on the festival, check the dedicated [website](#).

Governance and key actors involved in the Budapest 100 festival

Both the Contemporary Architecture Centre in Budapest (KÉK) and the Open Society Archives oversee and support the implementation of the festival each year. KÉK is an independent professional organisation founded in 2006 with the aim of opening new perspectives in architectural and urban thinking in Hungary. Its objective is to initiate dialogue about architecture, the city and its culture both within the profession and beyond, and to operate an independent and open centre that promotes architectural education, awareness and innovation among multidisciplinary professionals and the general public. Through its fresh, provoking and focused programs, relevant also in the international context, KÉK is currently the only internationally acknowledged professional platform representing contemporary architecture in Hungary and has built an extensive international network of like-minded partner organisations. The Municipality of Budapest (Cultural Department, Architectural Department, Mayor's cabinet, City Branding Agency) supports the festival.

13 persons currently work part time on the festival, together with around 150 volunteers. Individual experts (architects, sociologists, urban planners, designers, historians) work as advisors. The festival would not be possible without the participation of owners and residents. Each year various public and private institutions are partners of the festival (museums, archives, libraries, associations, media, universities, business).

Budget of the Budapest 100 festival

Each edition of the festival is organised with a budget of €25-30,000, which is mainly used to cover staff costs (€12,000), communication costs (€7,000) and material costs (€5,000). 30% of the budget is covered by the municipality of Budapest, 40% by private sponsors, 15% by the National Cultural Fund, while 15% comes from self-generated income (e.g. book selling).



Results and impacts of the Budapest 100 festival

The annual festival has become very popular, with a positive feedback from volunteers (such as a journalists, photographers, pensioned people, students and others).

In 2019, roughly 15,000 people participated in the festival, 59 houses were opened to the public, with the support of 164 volunteers. Residents report that the festival is full of experiences and lessons learnt and that it gives them a feeling of uniqueness and importance.

Residents and inhabitants said that the festival helps them to get closer to their own stories, their buildings and their neighbourhood and make them feel responsible for both the buildings and the neighbourhood. Following the Budapest100 festival sessions, community actions have been organised by residents (picnics, concerts) as sustainable results. Renovations and smaller architectural changes to the buildings are also reported.

There are three major impacts from the festival:

- **Increased awareness of the built heritage.** The awareness of residents is raised through storytelling, knowledge sharing about the cultural-historical background of the neighbourhood and small restoration and conservation works.
- A **digital database** of the houses open for visits has been created (Budapest100 website contents of building survey, old designs and maps, historic and contemporary photos, videos...). The co-operative organization Open Society Archive contains of 550 building documentations until now.
- **Increased numbers of volunteers.** The increasing and impressive number of volunteers makes the event prestigious; organisers invest a lot of energy and effort to look after the volunteers, explain their role and coordinate their work. In return, volunteers gain indirect and intellectual benefits: a sense of belonging to the place, the opportunity to meet a group of very different people who have no economic interest in participating in the programme, and connections to buildings through personal stories.
- **Community building.** The festival provides a platform exchange, storytelling, increased interactions with neighbours and within communities.

To measure the long-term impacts of the festival, the following actions are recommended:

- Apply a specific methodology to assess the impressions and feedback after every festival from the point of view of owners, volunteers, other participating bodies (through survey and after-event sessions to evaluate the festival);
- Increase the level of engagement of schools and universities – volunteering, scientific contribution with preparing the history of built/urban heritage fabric (schools/ universities of History, History of Art, History of Architecture, Restoration and other related ones); Relevant multidisciplinary universities engagement can help develop the information database of the festival (e.g. collection of the history of art, history of architecture – can bring something like cultural-historical survey or topography of the urban/architectural fabric – which is selected for “open houses visit”);
- Develop a database of the collected archive materials from the stories, maps, buildings survey for a potential research study.

Lessons learnt & key success factors

The example of Budapest 100 shows that a project can be developed without any public administration support. KEK nevertheless recognizes the need to develop stronger links with the city administration with a view to make citizens engagement more effective in influencing future urban development and cultural heritage policymaking and to raise visibility of the festival.

The main challenges identified by KEK in relation to community engagement are:

- How to overcome residents’ scepticism and establish trust with visitors (why should visitors enter our building?)?
- How to mobilise volunteers?
- How to encourage residents to tell their stories and share them with others?

KEK is proud of the methodology it developed to make the programme a success. The feedback of participants is another source of pride. Unfortunately, the project lacks impact measurement, but KEK is working on it. Possible measurement tools involve surveys, a registration system to keep track of renewed participation and making the community sustainable as a network.

A grassroots community that exists out of a common interest has a rather good chance to remain sustainable and active (as opposed to communities established with a view to access funding for instance). The community is even more solid because the festival has been existing for 10 years. This provides an element of credibility granting participants the sentiment of attending a traditional event.

Community building lies at the heart of the festival:

- Writing to owners, inviting them to participate.
- Inviting volunteers through open calls (importance of social media).
- Inviting artists or institutions to set up events as part of the festival.

The festival could evolve from preserving built heritage to sustainable building that considers environmental challenges and aims at behavioural changes or the better use of public space. KEK is reflecting on the purpose of the community and its goals.

Would the community require some form of leadership to enable the expression of its will towards urban planners, the local administration, policy makers?

Transferability of the Budapest 100 festival

The peer learning visit showed that the festival is transferable whether to large or smaller cities in Hungary and in Europe. This was tested as part of the URBACT Transfer Network called “[Come In](#)” which enabled the transfer and testing of the methodology of the festival in 6 other European cities and in another district of Budapest.

The URBACT experience showed the value of community engagement in:

- Discovering and valuing cultural heritage.
- Addressing modern as well as historical heritage (socialist architecture, prefabricated blocks).
- Delivering an inclusive urban development tool
- Addressing the challenge of finding the right people and volunteers.
- Rewarding participation and sharing the ownership of the project with the community.
- Considering the role of public authorities in fostering such community engagement.
- Stimulating the participation of building owners for cultural heritage preservation and conservation.
- Raising awareness of the authentic historic architectural and artistic values.

Seven Come in! partners presented first-hand experiences on adopting the methodology of the Budapest100 festival:

- Initiative adopted by city administration in Varazdin, Croatia;
- Revalorization of cultural heritage through storytelling in Pori, Finland;
- Societal impact through community interventions in Forli, Italy;
- Festival contribution to the rebranding of neighbourhoods in Targówek (Warsaw), Poland;
- Keeping volunteers on board in Plasencia, Spain;
- Sense of belonging of prefab housing in Ormezo (Budapest), Hungary;
- Intangible heritage using storytelling and community building in Gheorgheni, Romania.

The discussion focused on ways to engage with people either directly or through local associations and on processes to select volunteers or owners of built heritage.

Three main themes were discussed: City administration and community building; Community

It was generally felt that the followings pre-requisite are required to successfully transfer the methodology of the Budapest 100 festival:

- **Strong local political support** (need to develop a narrative that makes citizen engagement part of the policy priority – establish a win-win situation with politicians).
- **Research** (for instance with a local university) to ensure the sustainability of the project in term of data, history, architecture, impact measurement).
- **A strong methodology to engage stakeholders** (notably through open calls).
- **Interdisciplinarity** (historians of architecture, historians of art, urbanists) for better presentation and interpretation of the architectural and artistic values.
- **A platform to share and exchange** e.g. heritage conservation and heritage management experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

The visit showed that culture and heritage are key tool for citizens engagement as they enable to address a wide variety of urban challenges, notably:

- The living environment and quality of life (security, green environment, sustainable tourism, high quality of urban fabric)
- Living together (cultural diversity, migration, social cohesion, difficult past/holocaust, disabled persons)
- Housing issues and the availability of open public spaces in cities (gentrification, rising costs)

Cultural institutions such as museums would benefit from increased citizens engagement, especially in a post-Covid world where revenues will come more from the local neighbourhood than from international tourism. It is important to re-connect with the community.

This requires a bottom-up approach 'à la Budapest100':

- Make space available for local communities within cultural institutions.
- Invite local communities to propose activities within or outside a cultural institution.
- Make local businesses profit from increased activities around the institution (restaurant, retail, local traditional and new buildings, craft persons, etc).
- Instruct architects and urban planners to incorporate community engagement requirements.
- Make entry price affordable for locals.
- Mobilise local associations, artists and cultural organisations.
- Work in an interdisciplinary way/discourse (involving experts and local authorities).
- Support built heritage restoration programmes – Training, education and skills.
- Raise motivation for small restoration/ conservation works.

Culture and heritage should not act as dividing factors among communities but should be inclusive, independently from beliefs, social backgrounds, education levels or geographical / ethnical origins. Hence the importance of community engagement activities for citizens to better know their heritage and of institutions that are locally based.

Citizen's engagement is intrinsically a requirement for a healthy democratic society in which issues are debated openly. The online visit showed that culture and heritage, because of their strong emotional element and their capacity to generate stories (collective or individual), are perfect vehicles to enable confrontation and to better understanding the past. This contributes to building a more democratic future as well as better understanding the historic values of our own urban and architectural environment.

The external experts involved in the online visit encouraged Budapest100 to be more ambitious in its aims. Contributions from partner cities have shown the potential to further enhance community engagement for stronger impacts.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM PARTICIPANTS (NON-EXHAUSTIVE)

City/region/ stakeholder	Main learning points	Future use of ideas and knowledge gained – Projects that were shared and that could be transferable to other contexts
Cyprus	Research and knowledge – to promote art and creativity – as a part of the cultural heritage projects	Knowledge can be used for a number of cultural heritage projects. Promote cultural heritage and creative industries as drivers of innovation.
Province of South Holland	Cultural heritage “story telling” – involving the local people, the visitors, volunteers	To increase the contribution for society – inclusion of disadvantage people (disabled persons, immigrants..., involve them into the process)
Province of South Holland	How to deal and communicate with the public; Intangible heritage presentation	
Polin Museum, Warsaw	Learned how to build partnerships for programme planning	
Stuttgart	Better engagement and volunteering of local people in the cultural projects; Knowing better the history of neighborhood and storytelling by using archive	Experience to apply in the programmes for artists in Stuttgart
Cluj county, Cluj Cultural Centre	- Heritage promotion through community engagement	
City of Prague	- Inspirative theme of social inclusion and cohesion through heritage and culture - The idea of heritage which strengthens communities - How to raise awareness about the value of heritage (cooperation with the Archive), - How to engage communities, - Place-branding through storytelling, - Engagement of volunteers	- Place-branding and revalorising cultural heritage through storytelling - Engagement of local communities. For cultural institutions it is important to be identified in the local community, so work on cultural programming in this way. Municipality can organise initial communication with local NGO’s and put them together - Incorporating community impact in the urban policies
Eindhoven	- Methods for trying to engage the citizens (via a sense of belonging), using emotional engagement as a good way for social mobilization and to nurture the journey of	- Trying to implement the lessons learnt in future projects

	volunteers with personal support.	
Cork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early identification of problems to be solved is important - Stakeholder identification at an early stage is essential. - Full and trusted collaboration of stakeholders is a must. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We hope to build on the ideas presented and hope to collaborate with European partners to form a consortium to apply for EU funding as means of addressing some of our local issues.

REFERENCES AND PROJECTS SHARED DURING THE ONLINE VISIT

- ✚ Future creative cities report (Culture for cities and regions, predecessor of Cultural Heritage in Action): https://nws.euocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Future_creative_cities_.pdf
- ✚ Youth Solidarity Corps: https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en
- ✚ West/South Hollan cultural heritage limes: more info [here](#)
- ✚ Sectoral skills alliance in cultural heritage project: <https://charter-alliance.eu/>
- ✚ Fort in Cork harbour: <http://www.camdenfortmeagher.ie/>
- ✚ Urbact city festival: <https://hopin.com/events/2021-urbact-city-festival>

Presentations: [First day](#), [second day](#), [third day](#), [fourth day](#)

Videos:

- [The role of NGOs in managing and preserving cultural heritage in Budapest](#) (first day)
- [Every building is interesting - Empowering local communities through cultural heritage in Budapest](#) (second day)

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