

LEARNING FROM GOOD PRACTICES

Social cohesion at Budapest100 festival

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INITIATOR OF THE PROJECT

Budapest100 is a spring weekend celebration of the people and buildings around us. The event was founded in 2011 by the **Open Society Archives** and the **KÉK Contemporary Architecture Centre**. Budapest100 emphasises the common values of the city and aims to bring people from diverse backgrounds together.

Our stakeholders include:

- > the elementary school students who visits the festival with family
- > students from various educational institutions who volunteer
- > art historians, urbanists, sociologists or other enthusiastic professionals who are interested in the functioning mechanisms of the city
- > the mayor of Budapest, who helps us provide research materials from the city database
- > leaders of big multinational companies who sponsor the project
- > elderly people who can tell us interesting stories about street names, famous residents or just funny anecdotes on who life was decades ago
- > anyone who is curious about how communities function in the build environment surrounding us.

We help keeping the stories of the residents alive, as we firmly believe: “Every building is interesting”.



MOTIVATION

Budapest100 started as an annual celebration of the 100-year-old buildings and their inhabitants to raise awareness of the built heritage of the city and the local communities who bring these buildings to life and tell stories about them. As of 2015, the focus turned towards different parts of the city. The original purpose remains: to reveal buildings from basement to attic, get to know their inhabitants and form new communities.

Our team at Budapest100 is not only curious about the built heritage but also about the communities who live in these buildings. Our research focuses on **preserving the collective memory** of the city by collecting oral histories and carrying out socio-cultural research. All the research materials are done by volunteers and local inhabitants with the help of professionals and are available open source on our website, **promoting shared knowledge society**.

The festival weekend is organised by volunteers and local communities who live in the buildings. The operative team ensures only the structure of the project and some guidelines to promote **participatory management and an inclusive approach to heritage**.

Budapest100 uses a weekend festival as a format for **identifying, preserving, transmitting and sharing heritage knowledge and skills** among residents, volunteers and the visitors of the festival. During the process of organising the festival we showcase tools and methods for local communities to think proactively about their environment. We encourage them to think differently about their buildings, to show secret places, unused premises and come up with creative solutions for them. As a result, we are working towards a **more inclusive and cohesive society** and **increasing the use and reuse of heritage**.



METHODOLOGY

Of course, Budapest100 does not stand alone. There are many similar concepts in Europe and worldwide. The most well-known initiative is perhaps the **Open House Network** and the **European Heritage Days**. But there are two crucial differences between Budapest100 and the other similar initiatives: 1) involvement of residents and 2) having a strong social focus in addition to the architectural one.

These initiatives are about showcasing outstanding architecture for all to experience (mainly in public buildings). For Budapest100 every house is interesting, not only those with outstanding architectural value or the ones protected by law. These initiatives invite everyone to explore and debate the value of a well-designed built environment. Budapest100 does this, but at the same time also seeks common values together with local residents

and their communities. These initiatives are organised and elaborated by professionals and in some cases volunteers, whereas Budapest100 is about different activities that local communities initiate and organise, strongly coordinated and supported by enthusiastic volunteers.

Budapest100 is unique in an EU context, due to its combination of three pillars:

- > **built environment (but not only of outstanding value)**
- > **strong involvement of communities**
- > **working with volunteers**

Even though its organisational structure is graduated, there is no declared hierarchical relationship between organisers. The structure is transparent, the team uses open communication. Preparation of the event, the involvement of volunteers, fun-



damental building and urban historic research is all done by a 10-member-team. The two project leaders, the coordinators of volunteers, the research leader and the communication team have the role of creating the work phases and getting the whole process to work. Volunteers work together in smaller teams, all of which have a team leader, who helps them with the research processes, the involvement of residents, and realising their own ideas for programmes. Volunteers who are selected based on filling in an online form, meet every 2 weeks. Compilation of the volunteers is very mixed, in terms of age and professions. The group contains university students, high school students, retired people, architects, employees of companies, artists, among others. After that phase, the volunteers go to the houses, deliver letters into the mailboxes, and start conversations with the locals, resulting in community and volunteer-led programmes. The addressed residents (living in the selected houses) are invited to a Resident Meeting, where the organisers present them the structure of Budapest100 and what it means exactly to join the programme. The involved residents and the volunteers assigned to the given houses realise programmes together following the principles ar-

ticulated by the board of Budapest100: cultural development, information transfer, preservation of values, and community cooperation. Based on all of these, the basic programmes are the following: house history and city history walks; community picnics; memoirs of the elderly (personal stories); exhibitions; theatrical and music programmes; interactive city questionnaires.

Beyond the programmes realised in the houses (both apartment blocks and institutions), workshops and discussions are also organised (mostly for professional audiences and decision-makers) about the questions of urban planning and new approaches to city planning. These events are realised separately, with specific professional mentors, by the leading team. The board closely cooperates with architects, landscape architects, art historians, and sociologists. However, organisers pay attention to the residents as well and make sure they are getting involved in these discussions, so they have a chance to give their own opinions and ideas, and the organisers also make sure that every professional team dealing with social problems has a chance to appear at these professional events.



The prime moment of the organisational process is the Budapest100 weekend, which usually happens on the weekend closest to the 100th day of the year. After the festival, the board organises evaluation meetings both for the residents and the volunteers. The organisers' principle is that they do not provide financial aid to realising the programmes and for the buildings, but they help the volunteers and the residents with infrastructural and relationship capital. The engagement rate is very high despite the financial conditions.

The Budapest100 project implements recommendations S2 and S10, namely, **Making heritage more accessible and Facilitate and encourage (public and private) partnerships in cultural heritage promotion and conservation projects.** Budapest100 as a festival is also very relevant to recommendation K3, **Encourage creativity to capture the attention of the heritage audience.**

Budapest100 is a community festival in Budapest celebrating the city's built heritage and common values. This two-day long festival is co-organised by residents and a massive group of volunteers to highlight the values of the built environment as well as common values to identify, preserve and reuse the buildings surrounding us. The main aim of the project is to encourage civilian power alongside the built environment as a catalyst. Its broad mission is to initiate a common discussion about urban revival and to inspire the establishment and strengthening of residential communities by using tangible and intangible cultural heritage and built environment as a tool. As a conclusion the mission of Budapest100 is complex: firstly, it wishes to reform the urban community co-existence, **living in**

peace and improving the quality of life in our own environment, secondly, to change the relationship between residents and the city, and thirdly to help the crowds to become more responsible citizens working towards **good and shared governance.**

The following indicators help us follow up on the efficacy of our work:

- > **the number of opened houses** (50-60 buildings annually) shows us how many local communities we reach with tools and methods promoting participatory management, working towards **good and shared governance** and setting an example for how to make heritage more accessible and inclusive
- > **the number of visitors** (15-20.000 persons annually) shows us how much a cultural festival can achieve as a format for raising awareness of built heritage and its values
- > **the number of volunteers** (150 - 200 annually) helps us to see how many people can contribute to promoting a **shared knowledge society** connected to cultural heritage
- > **the number of research materials** available open source on our website (approx. 1300 houses) also contributes to a **shared knowledge society and preserving the collective memory connected to built heritage**
- > **the number of programmes organised in each opened building** (approx. 200 annually during the festival weekend) which include multidisciplinary community events (exhibitions, concerts, performances, talks, lectures, street art, gastronomy, visual arts, etc.) that help us **build new audiences, encourage creativity and raise attention to heritage**



OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS



Obstacles are common to all projects, none is perfect, analysing them objectively may help others solve their problems and foresee the weak points.

As a consequence of recent austerity policies, cities are increasingly limited by budgetary constraints (which is a common challenge in European cities). Thus, there is an increased need for urban stewardship, for citizens willing to value and preserve their built environment and to take action together. This represents a challenge that Budapest100 is addressing in a form of a community festival.

Our main strength is our main weakness at the same time, because it is challenging to convince the local communities and sometimes even our visitors about our motto, “Every house is interesting” and also to convince them that oral history is also part of cultural heritage, part of the identity of the neighbourhood and that these are the things that are invisible but make the built heritage exciting for everybody.

IMPACT AND CHANGE

In the past 10 years, Budapest100 has opened the gates of 50-60 houses and institutions each year. Year by year they work together with 100-150 volunteers, and the festival attracts some 20.000 people each year.

In terms of involved residents, encouraging them towards self-organisation is a great result. Based on residents' feedback, the weekends were full of experiences and lessons learned. Many of them have highlighted that they would never have thought that so many people were interested in their lives or in their neighbourhood. In an indirect way the organisers offered the feeling of uniqueness and importance to residents. Also, the organisers caused them to see a situation where the neighbourhood cooperates and acts towards a common goal, successfully making their voices heard.

The main strength and specific character of the Budapest100 programme is that we are approaching built cultural heritage through the community, through oral history and storytelling. Budapest100 is raising attention to built heritage by mobilising and empowering local communities to be proud of their environment, enjoy it together and take care of it by collecting and sharing stories and memories. We believe, that it is a unique approach to look at built heritage from the individual's perspective, through the stories and memories of generations of individuals who have lived in the buildings.

Additionally, the organisers gave them access to knowledge that helps them to get closer to their own stories, their building and through that their cities. It makes them feel responsible. It is an even more concrete success that after Budapest100 many apartment blocks have started repeating community action in a self-organising way, meaning renovations and smaller architectural interven-

tions or organising a yard picnic or a concert.

At this point, the cooperation with the related municipalities is crucial. The volunteers gain professional knowledge on the one hand, and also they can become a member of a community on the other. They are more willing to act and believe that they are able to work creatively for a good cause by themselves. From the professional aspect, they are given project management skills and research knowledge, and they are also encouraged to be proactive.

The organisers also think of the increase of audience as a success, and also that on a professional level, the acceptance of the programme has improved. Even local government actors have become aware of the potential of the festival to create value. They are supporting the principles of the Contemporary Architecture Centre.



LESSONS LEARNED

Evaluation

Our evaluation is implemented on 4 levels:

- > Numbers (participating houses, number of volunteers + residents, visitors, press releases, programmes)
- > Feedback from volunteers and residents (feedback sessions are organised)
- > Visitors' feedback (mainly through social media)
- > Outcomes (staying in touch with residents and volunteers; follow-up on their proactivity 6 months after the festival; volunteers returning each year)

Budapest100 project has been a catalyser for many initiatives in Budapest that are dealing with built heritage, oral history, local communities, hidden gems of the city, etc. These include blogs, newspaper columns, photo competitions, other events and urban walks. However, while it would be very egoistic to think that we are solely responsible for all that, when the project started in 2011 it was basically the only initiative that involved communities in talking about buildings, and now it is the most popular in the city.



LESSONS LEARNED

During the past 10 years of the Budapest100 festival we have continuously finetuned our methods based on the feedback coming from volunteers, residents, and visitors. Thanks to this feedback, the project has developed into a well-functioning cultural project with a clear methodology, which is also easy to adopt. In the past few years, we have been working on foreign adaptations of our festival in seven different European cities.

Main conclusions and recommendations

Our key recommendations for those who would like to try to implement something similar themselves would be to:

- > choose a well-defined theme or topic for your festival, such as 100-year-old buildings or Bauhaus-inspired houses in your city
- > keeping the volunteers active and giving creative tasks because that is the key to engaging them long-term
- > pay attention to personal connections with the residents - it is key for their involvement
- > make sure that organised programmes rely on collective cultural heritage and storytelling coming from the residents - it's their time to shine
- > ensure broad and inclusive communication (both with participants and visitors). Good photos and quality visuals are very important in raising awareness

