



Fellow Report 2024 - Creative Impact in Practice

Barbora Andor Tóthová

Caring Culture

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1. Summary

In her project, Barbora Andor Tóthová aims at fostering the power of communities surrounding her research and professional practice. This deeply personal project builds on the concept of commons, care, caring economics and the use of value-based approaches and deliberative methods, driving Andor Tothova's practice as cultural manager (cinema exhibitor) and researcher (PhD candidate in Economics). She piloted three main project activities: a survey on the impact of grassroots cultural centres, a unique deliberative policy workshop design, and an Inclusive Film Festival with the theme "Connections" addressing cultural institutions' roles in giving voice to marginalised communities and fostering their own voice in the local context. She also launched "Caring Culture", an online platform to share her research, practice and insights within topics of cultural and creative impact in urban environments, with collaborator Zuzana Révészová.

Results point to the wider effects and values that cultural organisations bring to their local environment, such as place-making, engagement, inclusion and entrepreneurial innovations, with communal and caring practices being the moving force of these qualities. At the same time, Andor Tóthová's project highlights the need for more personal and "humane" interactions between representatives of public administration and artists/cultural managers, which can provide more profound understanding of ecosystems in which they operate, in order to mitigate conflicting narratives that shape current public dialogue.

2. Problem and Evidence

The problem the project aims to address is twofold.

First, the project addresses the call for paradigmatic change in the research and evaluation of cultural and creative sectors (CCS), as previous neoliberal narratives highlight that economic impacts have failed to address the causality and quality of impacts. The evaluation of cultural activities in financial terms (such as willingness to pay, return on investment, etc.) is shifting towards the ecological and ecosystemic perspective (Gross & Wilson, 2018; Gross, Dent, and Comunian, 2020). Concepts of commons, care, caring democracy and care economics describe sharing resources, exchange, proximity and relationships as being the driving force of most of the actors within, where traditional market-force and economic behaviour described in standard theory do not apply (Tronto, 2013; Dockx and Gielen 2018). They call for a place-based, interdisciplinary qualitative (or mixed-method) research approach, with the focus on cultural value and its transformative potential (Belfiore, 2015; O'Brien, 2014; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016; Klamer, 2016; Bille, 2024, Kaszynska, 2024).

Second, the project responds to the polycrisis and budget cuts impacting the city of Košice in Slovakia like many European cities post-pandemic. Košice is Slovakia's second-largest city and European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2013 and brands itself as a "city of culture". While ECoC heritage organisation Creative Industry Košice, an NGO founded by the city, handles notable projects like UNESCO City of Media Arts, local grassroots cultural groups – key contributors to Košice's cultural identity – struggle with limited funding and face grant reductions annually¹. Communication barriers with policymakers create tensions and mistrust, worsened by Slovakia's current political climate, where ideological narratives overshadow the reality of the cultural sector. There is an urgent need for evidence-based dialogue and trust-building through real interactions.

To tackle these issues, the project offers four solutions:

1. Through the CIRCE fellowship, Andor Tóthová expands her dissertation research with an audience survey of Kino Úsmev, which enables better understanding of the effects and spillovers of this grassroots cultural organisation and ensures triangulation of the

¹ Yearly allocations to the cultural grant scheme of Košice managed by Creative Industry Košice can be found at www.cike.sk

results after a qualitative analysis based on semi-structured interviews and the grounded theory method.

2. Andor Tóthová in collaboration with Zuzana Révészová designed a three-phase workshop to foster dialogue between cultural managers and policymakers. Guided by conversation cards, the workshop explores what a “caring city” and “caring culture” mean and how both parties can support each other’s wellbeing amid a challenging political climate.
3. An online platform, “Caring Culture”, compiles evidence-based CCS research by Andor Tóthová and Révészová, offering policymakers accessible insights for informed decision-making.
4. A final Inclusive Film Festival connects the project with various city communities, questioning the role of cultural institutions in promoting safety, inclusion and community wellbeing.

3. Journey

The project journey consisted of five steps: **Research, Partnerships, Design, Promotion and Implementation.**

3.1. Research

The focus was on the status quo of the local cultural policy, current issues and challenges of local cultural actors and the local urban environment. To research this, we created an evidence library composed of policy documents, previously gathered data related to Košice and CCS operating in the city and media articles that discussed current local cultural projects. A major part of the research phase consisted of interviews, two formal focus groups and constant feedback loops on the project solutions proposed by Andor Tóthová with both policymakers and local cultural actors.

The status quo of the local cultural ecosystem confirmed the hypothesis put forward by Andor Tóthová that the major problem is not resources, but lack of (or difficulty) of communication between decision-makers and grassroots cultural centres, the non-systemic approach towards cultural strategies and a lack of vision for the role of CCS within the urban environment in these challenging times of polycrisis.

3.2. Partnerships

In this project, partnerships are crucial in order to secure the desired outcomes and local impacts. After an introductory meeting and formal proposal of the project to the major public cultural stakeholder, Creative Industry Košice, they agreed to be a partner of the project and were asked to facilitate connections to local policymakers, such as the deputy mayor, district mayor and head of the cultural committee.

With regard to cultural organisations asked to be part of the project, we focused on those that have been operating in the city for a longer period of time and manage physical space on a daily basis. At the time of finalising the report, five organisations are part of the project: Textilné centrum, STROJ, Tabačka Kulturfabrik, Kino Úsmev and Šopa gallery. For the Inclusive Film Festival, as part of the fellowship activity, we fostered previous relationships with different organisations, but also created new ones, including five organisations that work with different marginalised groups – Usmej sa na mňa, ALKA, Platforma rodičov detí so znevýhodnením, Artest and ETP Slovensko. Another important partner to mention in the report is CINEFIL, a non-profit organisation that manages Kino Úsmev and is personally

connected to Barbora Andor Tóthová. CINEFIL (Kino Úsmev) provided space, personnel capacities and additional financial support for the Inclusive Film Festival.

3.3. Project design and key activities

The focus was on prototyping three concrete outcomes of the project: an audience survey on spillover effects (of Kino Úsmev), a deliberative policy workshop design, and new programme/community solutions for the Inclusive Film Festival. The fourth outcome, the online platform “Caring Culture”, was previously unintended, but came in as a need after the research phase, in order to promote the mission of the project and the researchers behind the workshop design (mainly towards the target group of decision-makers).

The audience survey was designed based on a hypothesis around values and effects that Kino Úsmev brings to its local environment, derived from the dissertation thesis of Barbora Andor Tóthová, such as that Kino Úsmev increases safety in the neighbourhood, enhances the city image/brand, wellbeing of visitors, etc. It was complemented by hypotheses that were collected from the Kino Úsmev team members, such as around film taste, visitor behaviour, etc.

The Caring Culture deliberative workshops were designed for candid policy discussions, pairing cultural managers with policymakers to discuss “caring cities” and “caring culture”. The workshop phases include:

1. **Walk & Talk:** Casual city walks guided by policymakers.
2. **Experience:** Visits to cultural centres.
3. **Roundtable:** A final group discussion where participants share insights from previous meetings.

Each participant received a deck of conversation cards with situational prompts on care and culture topics. The first workshop was joined by an actress, a politician and the head of cultural committees in both city and region, Ľubomíra Blaškovičová, and the artist, entrepreneur and representative of the Textile Centre in Košice, Daniela Ferienčíková. The second workshop was joined by the deputy mayor of Košice, Marcel Gibóda, and representatives of artistic studios/co-working space STROJ, Pille Isabella Vojčík (ARTCham) and Michaela Eliáš (photographer). The third workshop was joined by the deputy governor of the Košice region/mayor of city quarter KVP, Ladislav Lorinc, and Peter Radkoff, founder

and artistic director of the biggest grassroots cultural centre in Košice (second-biggest in Slovakia), Tabačka Kulturfabrik.

The Inclusive Film Festival piloted three new programme formats, previously not tried in Kino Úsmev, and also prototyped a form of close participatory programme creation with communities. The first was an “all inclusive” format called “Together in the cinema” (Spolu v kine), aimed at creating an accepting and enjoyable environment for bigger groups and families wanting to spend the evening together. Film screenings offered solutions for diverse barriers, such as: dimmed lighting and freedom of expression and movement for neurodivergent people; audio commentary for the visually impaired and subtitles for the hard of hearing; a workshop space in front of the cinema and an awareness room for sensory-sensitive audiences. The second format was a workshop with arjunraj on “Collaborative storytelling” (Körperkino) for young adults from different communities (Roma community, volunteers, young queer people, students from film school, neurodivergent people, social workers and film professionals). At Kino Úsmev we have experience with workshops for younger kids, but our experience with offering inclusive and empowering workshops for young adults is minimal. It was met with great success and we hope to build on this experience. The third activity was the change of the name “autism-friendly screenings” to “sensitive screenings”, a request from focus group participants in terms of better understanding and in order to be more inclusive for wider range of audience. The participatory process of programme creation and implementation, involving not only organisations but also individuals from different groups working in the cinema for four days, training of the bar staff and other activities, created an atmosphere of acceptance, love and safety.

3.4. Promotion, implementation and reflections

Compared to the original project plan presented at the beginning of the Fellowship, the implementation did not lose any of the main activities intended, however some of them needed to be adjusted due to the dynamic nature of the participatory process and updated goals. The audience survey was completed as planned, however the original idea was to think about an impact survey replicable in other municipalities and organisations. The design of the survey itself can be copied (to some extent); however, as we complete the report, we are discussing the ability to interpret results by people without an analytical background, as it involves working with analytical software. Due to the lengthy research phase, personal

interviews and time capacities of participants, the roundtable phase of Caring Culture policy workshops is to be postponed further to December 2024. As at completion of this report, three out of five workshop pairs have met and delivered recordings. Conversation cards as a “product” of the Fellowship Programme that are replicable in any local environment and have an attractive design, were previously not intended, but seem to be a very useful tool that will go into further development after collecting overall feedback from the Caring Culture workshop activity. The Inclusive Film Festival was originally intended to be a much smaller event, but the participatory process of programme creation required more time, finances and energy (that was absolutely worth the effort). The toolkit as a final outcome will be published on the Caring Culture website as part of the creative impact resources, addressing the issue of community involvement in cultural activities.

Find more details on all activities in Attachment 1 and images from the activities in Attachment 2.

4. Impact

We will describe the impact of the project through concrete outcomes/activities conducted within the CIRCE Fellowship:

1. **An audience survey** on the spillover effects of Kino Úsmev produced 350 responses and was launched on 25 September 2024. In the survey we asked the audience, through a series of statements/hypotheses related to results of Andor Tóthová's thesis, to what extent factors relating to the local impact of the cinema are relevant for them. Preliminary results indicate that the five main factors for the audience are: **place-making, engagement, inclusion, value conflict and entrepreneurship**. These factors can be further used in the analysis as either dependent or independent variables.

There is a need for further analysis, connecting these factors with different audience groups and their personal values and interests (which were also part of the questions). The final results are to be expected during December and will be published on the Caring Culture website.

2. **The Caring Culture deliberative policy workshops** had overall very positive feedback on the workshop structure, conversation cards and idea of recordings.

All participants welcomed the future roundtable as a final activity. A very immediate impact was created after the meeting of the deputy mayor and the STROJ organisation, with the deputy mayor planning further connections between STROJ and other stakeholders in the city. At least two other workshop sessions are planned during November. There is a confirmed interest in bringing this deliberative workshop format into other municipalities, based on informal discussions with other cultural managers in Slovakia.

The workshops confirmed that there is a need for more intimate conversational formats and better knowledge about the cultural sector and its myriad of activities and effects in Košice. Among other things, workshops pointed out the contrast between expectations around cultural activities, which are often connected to emotional and very personal experience, and the instrumentalisation of arts and culture for funding purposes.

At the same time, there is little knowledge about operational models of cultural centres from the side of policymakers and how the combination of non-profit and entrepreneurial activities contributes to the sustainability of cultural organisations. To conclude, this workshop format also humanised politicians, with very positive feedback from participating cultural managers on their communication and active engagement in conversation.

“I think it was useful, and I believe that such conversations and introducing the unknown is a recipe for opening the eyes of those stakeholders who need it but don’t realise it. I also think it’s an idea suitable for repetition, and (...) to attract (...) important people to your attention. Yes, it’s hard to get into their programme, into their heads, but it’s effective. Especially when they relax, open up, draw inspiration, and see everything we have here.” – Workshop participant, policymaker

- 3. The impact of the Inclusive Film Festival** is not quantifiable with audience numbers, but through the participatory process and overall atmosphere that developed throughout the four days. Pilot activities addressed multiple barriers that different communities encounter on a daily basis when they want to enjoy cinema screenings or perform simple actions, such as order a drink from the bar. We tried to look out for details that would soften or erase these barriers completely, through discussions with members of different communities and organisations that work with these communities (partner organisations).

Technical solutions for different barriers worked very well (such as audio commentary for the visually impaired, subtitles for the hard of hearing, dimmed lighting for “sensitive screenings”, toys in the screening room for babies and kids, a bar menu with pictures for non-verbal visitors, and a specially adapted “elevator” for people with physical impairment to bypass stairs in the cinema). The festival, however, affected different people in different ways.

“The festival introduced a new concept – an innovative approach to the cinematic experience – which was accessible to a wide range of audiences. The ‘Together in the Cinema’ concept and the activities around it were great for me, and it would definitely

be nice to continue in that direction.” – Feedback from a member of a partner organisation

The mother of a teenager with Down syndrome was very happy that she could enjoy time with friends while her son was in the cinema room, in the evening, watching a film on his own for the first time. Bartenders and ushers with cognitive impairment spent hours in the cinema, talking to people and making friends. They reported feeling part of a team and getting paid for actual work, something hugely meaningful and unfortunately not very common for them. People from the Roma neighbourhood Luník IX, a segregated neighbourhood with challenging living conditions (such as poor access to electricity and water) took Kino Úsmev for one night as their own space and enjoyed safety while watching a film and dancing in the bar. We celebrated queer people with film, slam poetry and an afterparty at times when this community is heavily targeted by ministers and members of parliament. Important moments of connection and care were embodied and lived. The Inclusive Film Festival is a very practical case study of the social impact that cultural organisations can have on their local environments.

“Similar activities help to avoid alienation of different people that come from a wide range of sociocultural backgrounds, help them get to know each other and find common discussions, common things that connect them, and this is a functional tool against bullying and oppression stemming from misunderstanding, lack of empathy, and dehumanization.” – Visiting artist (part of the programme)

Even though the project activities are completed (or partially completed, as with the workshop series), there are still numerous feedback loops that need to be completed and further analysis of the data (from the survey and workshops) still to come. This is also the reason why the online platform (website) caringculture.net exists and offers a more flexible space to share partial outcomes and impacts/reports in a more detailed manner than this project report. We hope that Caring Culture will be a long-term project and help build connections between stakeholders and communities such as those who were part of the CIRCE Fellowship 2024.

Find more detail on activities in Attachment 1 and images from the activities in Attachment 2.

5. Learnings and Contributions to CIRCE

We hope our project and its outcomes and insights contribute to CIRCE as another creative impact case study. This project could stand out in its radically participatory approach, where personal contacts, ties and involvement enable Fellows to overcome barriers and problems on their journey. The key is to identify the problems and involve communities. Once communities and project partners are involved, it is much easier to follow up on the structure and the activities planned. When the ownership of the project is shared, it is so much easier to overcome challenges during implementation.

As for the practical learnings for future Fellows:

- Create bottom-up activities with participation from all stakeholders
- Build on previous knowledge and resources of the Fellows and stakeholders
- Make sure that the pilot is not only thought through, but also goes through constant feedback loops with participants
- Create a profile/blog/platform where your project can live on, or you can share the process and outcomes in more detail
- Create opportunities for experimentation, playfulness and mistakes
- Be honest to yourself and your partners
- Be kind
- Be caring

Recommendations for policymakers:

- Think about cultural and creative sectors as ecosystems with shared resources
- Listen to a variety of participants and focus not only on KPIs, but on values you want the CCS to bring to your local environment
- Create opportunities (these do not have to be connected to finances)
- Create support systems and serve the existing local cultural actors
- Be honest
- Be kind
- Be caring

6. Use of AI

We assert that all the content of this report is original. Some parts of the text were proofread by AI, as English is not the first language of the author.

7. Sources

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8. Further material

Caring Culture website: caringculture.net

Inclusive Film Festival site: <http://bit.ly/InkluzivnyFilmovyFestival2024>

Kino Úsmev website: www.kinousmev.sk

9. Attachments

Attachment 1: Further details on the survey, workshops and Inclusive Film Festival

Survey in numbers and methodology

We collected 350 responses, which is considered a representative sample. There were 981 views of the survey, 604 starts, with a 57.9% completion rate, which is a good result considering the average time to complete the survey was 24.5 minutes.

We used factor analysis to validate a scale of value impacts/spillovers that cultural centres can have on their surrounding environment. Originally the scale consisted of 24 questions, but one of the questions was removed during the analysis as it was covered by two factors. The number of factors was selected based on eigenvalue higher than 0.

Indicators:

1. Cultural participation

- frequency of cultural participation in general
- psychographic profile (includes consumption of food and openness to experience and active engagement)
- visit frequency of the local cinema (and its diverse sites)
- visit frequency of other cinemas
- other cultural centres

2. Values of cinema (impacts) - Likert scale of all the values that can be derived from the dissertation

- exclusivity of the visit
- role for urban development
- role for the community

3. Inclusive practices of cinema (evaluation)

4. Programme profiling (preference to watch here vs elsewhere)

5. Marketing survey

6. Cinema space

7. Demography

8. Contact

Policy workshops in more detail

The workshop phases include:

1. **Walk & Talk:** Casual city walks guided by policymakers.
2. **Experience:** Visits to cultural centres.
3. **Roundtable:** A final group discussion where participants share insights from previous meetings.

Each participant received a deck of conversation cards with situational prompts on care and culture topics. Conversation cards were developed based on theoretical concepts related to care, inspired by conversational games focused on relationships. One deck of cards concerned the topic of the city and neighbourhood (handed to the political representative) and in the other deck topics related to culture (handed to the cultural manager). The deliberative policy workshops were completed by 7 individuals by the end of October 2024. Pairs/groups were formed according to the interest verbalised by policymakers and with confirmation from the cultural organisation. Power relations were controlled by a facilitator and secured by introductory interviews. The first workshop was joined by an actress, a politician and the head of cultural committees in both city and region, Ľubomíra Blaškovičová, and the artist, entrepreneur and representative of the Textile Centre in Košice, Daniela Ferienčíková. The second workshop was joined by the deputy mayor of Košice, Marcel Gibóda, and representatives of artistic studios/co-working space STROJ, Pille Isabella Vojčík (ARTCham) and Michaela Eliáš (photographer). The third workshop was joined by the deputy governor of the Košice region/mayor of city quarter KVP, Ladislav Lorinc, and Peter Radkoff, founder and artistic director of the biggest grassroots cultural centre in Košice (second-biggest in Slovakia), Tabačka Kulturfabrik.

Inclusive Film Festival in numbers

The survey counted roughly 180 participants and 13 activities over four days. The Inclusive Film Festival promotion used a playful visual consisting of colourful beads connected through a thread that represented the main theme of “Connecting”.

To promote the festival, we used mainly online tools – social media events, posts, press releases and direct mail; but also offline tools such as posters and promotion within participating communities and word of mouth. The online campaign reached roughly 30,000

people and there were two media reports in Rádio Devín (part of National Radio) and National Television as part of the programme REGINA.

Attachment 2: Images



Caring Culture Walk & Talk begins!

Photo credit: Michaela Eliáš



Caring Culture: cards

Photo: Barbora Andor Tóthová



Caring Culture workshop: Ľubomíra Blaškovičová/head of the cultural committee in both the city and region of Košice (left), and Daniela Ferenčíková/Textile Centre, wnoozow, STROJ (right)

Photo: Barbora Andor Tóthová



Caring Culture workshop: Marcel Gibóda/deputy mayor of Košice (left), Pille Vojčík/STROJ (second from left), Branislav Fecko/Wing Tsun martial arts (second from right), and Michaela Eliáš/STROJ (right)

Comment: The only workshop where there were two representatives of a cultural organisation – Pille Vojčík and Michaela Eliáš.

Photo: Barbora Andor Tóthová



Caring Culture workshop: deputy mayor Marcel Gibóda in the studio of academic painter Eva Moflerová (STROJ)
Photo credit: Michaela Eliáš



Caring Culture workshop: Ladislav Lorinc/district mayor of KVP and deputy mayor of the Košice region, and Peter Radkoff/art director of Tabačka Kulturfabrik
Photo credit: Barbora Andor Tóthová



Inclusive Film Festival: “Together in the cinema” concept with one of the youngest audience members. Screening of Little Miss Sunshine
Photo credit: Alex Osvaldo Kostovčik



Inclusive Film Festival: “Together in the cinema” workshop for older kids in front of the screening hall during Little Miss Sunshine screening – connecting colourful braids and creating sensory aids
Photo credit: Alex Osvaldo Kostovčik



Inclusive Film Festival: Film breakfast with artists
Photo credit: Alex Osvaldo Kostovčik



Inclusive Film Festival: Presentation of talented young dancers from dance group LstreetK9 in the bar of the cinema
Photo credit: Alex Osvaldo Kostovčik



Inclusive Film Festival: Kateř Tureček (director) introducing trans slam poetry by Abby and afterparty by DJ POLYESTER after their screening of the film LIDI (PEOPLE) in the Kino Úsmev bar
Photo credit: Alex Osvaldo Kostovčík



Inclusive Film Festival: arjunraj and their Körperkino workshop
Photo credit: Alex Osvaldo Kostovčík