



CULTURE OPEN

When the universal language of culture unites people of different origins and backgrounds

PROJECT TITLE	CULTURE OPEN - Creating Culture Together
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD	19.2018 - 12.2020
ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED	Karelian Regional Institute of Continuing Professional Education of Petrozavodsk State University (RU), Joensuu City Cultural Services (FI), Petrozavodsk City Cultural House (RU), The Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Karelia, Development Department (RU), The Petrozavodsk Centralized Library System (RU), Municipal Children's Music and Choral School of Petrozavodsk (RU)
PROGRAMME	Karelia CBC 2014 – 2020
TOTAL BUDGET	438.952,00 €

KARELIA

CBC // Cross-border cooperation



The project aims at improving the sustainability and diversity of inclusive cultural services for vulnerable social groups in Petrozavodsk and Joensuu. Special attention is paid to immigrants and people with disabilities, who take part in the preparation, the development and the implementation phase of cultural events. "Parafest" events, festivals and photography exhibitions are being organised, museums and libraries become cultural clusters: people not only come to see or read, but they also get involved. Another key aspect of the project is the removal of physical barriers to cultural facilities. The project has already organised several workshops to teach professionals from the cultural sector how to make their events reach everyone, including marginalised groups. Culture Open has become a platform to which people refer to, meeting each other and connecting through culture. This platform has now two legs, one in Petrozavodsk and another one in Joensuu: and it is definitely more stable.



Project co-funded by the European Union

CULTURE & EDUCATION

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE COOPERATION



“We didn’t aim for big numbers, or for the large scale. We wanted to create a safe space for active cultural co-creation, where artists with different backgrounds could join in for small and relaxed events.”

say project partners speaking with one voice

Imagine a place where marginalised people take the centre of the stage, where they lead workshops, they produce art. Where they become culture-creators. It is happening across the borders between Finland and Russia.

Joensuu and Petrozavodsk lay on the two sides of the Finno-Russian border. The two cities share a joint path of cooperation which goes back 20 years in time. To some extent, they also share the same problems, notably in terms of social exclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups. People with disabilities – but also immigrants and heirs of the Russian diaspora – are too often left behind in accessing information, they face stigma and exclusion. This becomes even more evident when it comes to participating in cultural life and leisure activities, a key pillar of mental and physical wellbeing, as it is the active participation in society. The inclusion of people with disabilities and other marginalised groups in cultural and artistic activities is, therefore, the goal Culture Open set for its six partners consortium. The project’s aim is to provide a pattern for sustainable, inclusive cultural services. Elizaveta Druzhinina, the project coordinator in Petrozavodsk, recalls how the project springs from her personal family experience with disability, as well as from the recognition that “our Finnish partners are well ahead of us on inclusion, as a society. We thought the project was a good opportunity to learn from them”.

Given the context and the objective, the Karelia CBC Programme represented the perfect ground to plant Culture Open seeds and see a forest of inclusive cultural opportunities grow. A great deal of attention has been dedicated to persons with disabilities: for example, the project has installed devices to make libraries and city halls more accessible to people with hearing impairment, and it has organized artist exchanges between Joensuu and Petrozavodsk, providing disabled artists with a venue and an opportunity to network with international cultural operators.

Several initiatives have been brought forward, from training culture-providers to make events more inclusive, to mapping accessibility in cultural centres. It was the disabled population itself who helped the experts issue recommendations and make small infrastructural adaptations to remove the obstacles in cultural facilities: it was a co-creation process that goes beyond physical spaces.

Immigrants have also been actively involved in cultural activities. Some examples? A multicultural photography club, photo trips in the nature, masterclasses on Karelian poetry, story-telling workshops at museum. Web-based training courses targeted at immigrants interested in becoming culture professionals were also organised, in fact, they could already show their talents, organising and displaying their photos in a rotating

exhibition. The final purpose was to increase the interaction with citizens from all backgrounds, and to achieve inclusion. Implementing activities together with the target groups has allowed Culture Open to ensure and enhance the acceptance of the project: beneficiaries did not feel like mere recipient of the actions, rather as co-producers whose identities and wills were respected and considered. In fact, participation in a co-production environment is the message spread by Culture Open, or in the words of Henna Karhapää, the project coordinator in Joensuu: “We have found people and people have found us”. An approach that clearly brings its fruits, as Elizaveta recalls how beneficiaries now “come to us and tell us to continue, to keep creating new opportunities”.

Ultimately, these efforts translate into an enhanced engagement of the public administration. Culture Open has produced a set of eight best practices to further inform public decision-makers on the possibility to improve accessibility and inclusion in cultural services: this is a crucial aspect of the project’s sustainability over time, linked to a reinforced commitment by the public administrations of the two cities. “Culture Open has become, in a relatively short period of time, an instrument for cultural accessibility and inclusivity used by local administrations”, says Henna. A recognition already worth several prizes: the “Joensuu Disability Council Accessibility Award”, the Karelia CBC Communication Award, and the nomination within the top five best inclusive projects in Russia for the section “Working for Special Audiences” within the “Intermuseum 2020 festival”.

