CUP4Creativity Journal #3: Institutionalisation and continuous experimentation

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This journal by expert Levente Polyák documents the evolution of the UIA project CUP4Creativity. This issue serves as a summary of the project's development in the third year, highlighting its key achievements, revisiting its main challenges and assessing the key elements of its legacy.

1 Executive Summary

CUP4Creativity focused on strengthening the district's collaborative cultural ecosystem by connecting the cultural, technology and environmental scenes around new venues, events and programmes. The new online and offline spaces and the new grant schemes all aimed at expanding the outreach of cultural activities to new audiences, inspiring new collaborations and uncommon alliances as well as activating citizens to build communities through initiatives and events.

The year 2023 saw the maturing of CUP4Creativity: the project's tangible results realised in the form of new venues (Adaptér), renovations (MU Theatre), an online platform (Insert) and a programming framework (Insert) have begun to generate their impact and become part of the local cultural ecosystem. After a long period of planning, Adaptér pre-opened in December 2022 but only became fully operational in 2023. Even after its official launch, Adaptér continued to be an experimental venue, testing new formats and collaborations. The renovated MU Theatre organised a series of participatory plays in connection with the district's locations and issues. In turn, temporary offline venues, such as containers deployed at various public spaces and festivals, helped extend the project's visibility to new audiences.

With a series of delays and technical challenges, the Insert online platform has never become an attractive service and therefore could not play the supporting role it was conceived to play in catalysing local communities around the cultural scene in Újbuda. In contrast, the Insert programme, originally conceived to support the platform with new users, has grown into a programme framework in its own right, inventing new formats like a music talent show, performances in private venues and community building activities in street, parks and semi-private gardens to extend the project towards new, formerly disconnected audiences.

After exploring the achievements of CUP4Creativity, the journal revisits the major challenges of the project, exploring issues of leadership, public procurement, participation, cross-department work, monitoring, communication and scaling up, indicating how the consortium's activities responded to these challenges in the project's third year.

The legacy of CUP4Creativity is manifold. While some of the elements that were conceived as key pillars of the project's legacy did not fulfil this role, other innovations, sometimes unplanned in the original design, have become important outcomes to impact the local cultural scene in the years to follow.

2 Project Overview

In 2023, CUP4Creativity arrived into its consolidation phase. After a period of planning, consensus-building and

experimentation, and a stage of fully operational partnership and implementation processes, the third year marked the consolidation of the project's achievements, the establishment of long-lasting structures such as the Adaptér and the Insert programme as well as by efforts to strengthen the project's legacy. With most of the new structures becoming an integrated part of the district's cultural offer, this consolidation process has been successful in reinforcing Újbuda's cultural ecosystem and institutions.

2.1 Consortium and cooperation

By the project's third year, many conclusions have been drawn about the consortium's cooperation dynamics. In retrospect, the initial coordination logic of the consortium was not incremental enough: the working groups initially established to structure cooperation along different elements of the work plan did not allow partners to take on tasks in a more iterative way to get involved in different processes. A more open approach to roles and tasks and the decentralisation of certain decision-making processes to allow partners with budgets to make more autonomous decisions would have allowed for more cross-pollination and a more organic structure of cooperation. Fortunately, keeping working groups open to suggestions by the broader network allowed partners with earlier unknown competences to join and take on roles and tasks previously not planned.

The attempt to create a shared management structure between the Újbuda Municipality and Burst is seen in hindsight as unsuccessful: in many instances, the Újbuda Municipality and the public company KözPont had to take over various processes that were not going according to plan. The initially fragmented coordination structure also had an impact on the different levels of involvement of partners: while some partners took on a more articulated leadership role in the process, others got isolated, withdrew from active cooperation, receded from taking initiatives and limited their activity to completing their deliverables.

Nonetheless, the partnership was unchanged throughout the project's duration and several external partners were also involved in designing and implementing new venues and community engagement activities. The partnership developed competence in working together between different sectors, mobilising a diversity of competences and this opens the possibility of future collaborations. Experiencing different sorts of cooperation with consortium partners and external associates allowed the municipality and the public company KözPont to establish long-term cooperation and a local governance structure in the form of a "roundtable", building on the most reliable and engaged local partners.

2.2 Achievements in 2023

In 2023, all outcomes of the CUP4Creativity arrived to their consolidation phase. The project's tangible results realised in the form of new venues (Adaptér), renovations (Eleven Blokk), an online platform (Insert) and a programming framework (Insert) have begun to generate their impact and become part of the local cultural ecosystem. By the end of 2023, it became clear that while certain elements will be discontinued after the end of the project, others will be integrated in the regular operations of the municipality and KözPont, yet others will find their place in the regular activities of project partners (BT, Eleven Blokk). This means that the experimentations that were conducted by the consortium in the form of pilot spaces and services, have become established elements of the district's cultural offer, consolidating a new line of cultural spaces and mobilising the corresponding audiences. Such a consolidation process also made these new spaces and services more visible for local residents who got used to new forms of engagement.

"While 2023 was really a year of break-through and experimentation for Adaptér, for the Insert programme it was more about consciously fitting them into the system." Máté Ábrahám

2.2.1 Offline spaces

One of the project's key outcome, the **Adaptér** is seen as the successful implementation of an innovative idea. After a long period of planning the profile of the new institution, co-designing its technological offer and procuring the equipment needed for its daily operations, Adaptér pre-opened in December 2022 but only became fully operational in 2023.

Adaptér now acts as a creative technological knowledge hub with **different kinds of events** including lectures, workshops and trainings as well as happenings in various kinds of experimental formats. As a state-of-the-art venue situating itself at the crossroads of art and technology, it plays an integrating role to connect local tech organisations with the cultural scene. An open call to local tech organisations to design exhibitions and the venue's welcome experience has been a helpful way to **engage local tech and design companies in the Adaptér's work**: involving organisations like the interaction design company XORXOR can create bridges between hitherto disconnected segments of the local organisational tissue. In the same time, Adaptér also has a **strong educational profile** supporting local residents, cultural producers and companies not only with digital and technology-related know-how, but also with insights into how technology shapes contemporary society and the environment.

Adaptér has also become a successful seismograph of Újbuda's intellectual mood: constantly exploring new demand among local communities, Adaptér staff has been keen on **monitoring new ideas** and adapting the venue's offer to emerging need and interest. The real impact of Adaptér's integrating function is yet to be seen. It is a matter of how the new venue, its programmes and calls can bring closer technology and cultural scenes in the form of new informal and formal networks, mutual interest and long-standing cooperation projects.

Besides Adaptér and the renovated ateliers of Eleven Blokk, another important "offline space" of the programme was **MU Theatre**. The theatre building went through a not very spectacular but all the more useful transformation: the renovation of the theatre's roof ensured the necessary conditions for the theatre to operate on a daily basis. On the other hand, the interactive plays organised by the theatre were an important element of CUP4Creativity. Throughout the year of 2023, the theatre accommodated a series of democratic theatre projects based on audience participation. In April, a drama about home office was created for workers of British Telecom, another partner in the consortium, addressing work issues. In June, a community theatre game was organised around the district, its locations and challenges. In the second half of 2023, a series of other theatre workshops and games were hosted by MU Theatre.

Temporary "offline" venues also contributed to the project's visibility. A set of **containers**, acting as "satellite laboratories" of the Adaptér, were deployed at a great variety of locations. The containers, appearing at festivals ranging from mainstream events like Sziget to indie happenings like Bánki tó, have become an important means of and community outreach and gained "followers" among families, fond of the science games

offered by them.

2.2.2 The Insert platform

The Insert digital platform was probably the least successful element of the project and as such, it was an important disappointment in the overall project. Originally, the idea of the Insert platform was to make event organisation collaborative by sharing skills and equipment. Moreover, Insert aimed to connect people who practice their creative activities (playing music, creating art, etc.) alone by bringing them together online to form communities and move their activities offline. The platform encountered a series of technical difficulties and its launch was postponed: it lacked various functions that would have been needed to support matchmaking in the organisation of offline events. With such delays, the platform has never become an attractive service and therefore could not play the supporting role it was conceived to play in catalysing local communities around the cultural scene in Újbuda.

In hindsight, consortium members confirmed that the platform's priorities were not correctly set. A recent audit confirmed that the platform's backend is a well-designed, complex system that – despite lacking a user-oriented logic and thus a structured user experience – could accommodate a wide variety of functions. However, while these functions were integrated into the platform, they were not connected to actual needs through a business development process. The same audit established that since the Insert platform has not become an integrated part of the Újbuda creative ecosystem and its economic sustainability model has never been fully elaborated, with the lack of additional municipal funds there is no economic rationale or social benefits in further developing it.

Insert is not the first or the last digital platform that failed to become a game changer in urban transformation. Many websites conceived to trigger changes in the offline world remain limited to online exchange, before gradually losing their appeal and dynamism. The digital ruins scattered across our online world might prompt us to come to the conclusion that developing new digital platforms might not be conceived as the most important elements of integrated innovation projects.

2.2.3 The Insert programme

What was lost on the Insert platform, was gained back in the Insert programme. The Insert programme, originally conceived as a framework to animate the online platform, on one hand, and to lead activities to the physical space towards building communities, on the other hand, has grown out of its original role and became one of the flagship initiatives of CUP4Creativity.

The Insert programme grew out of the ambition to amplify the project's cultural offer and make up for the missing online platform with a series of offline events developed through creating unusual collaborations between artists, locations and audiences or bringing about successful encounters between different worlds.

One of the key events within the programme, the **Nagyelőadó** (Main Auditorium) Talent Show series began in Spring 2023 with the aim of revitalising the once legendary concert culture of the university clubs. Nagyelőadó was born from the recognition that the university campuses of BME and ELTE, despite bringing tens of thousands of students into the district, are completely disconnected from the local cultural scene. This recognition fuelled the ambition to introduce students to the district's cultural offer and open university facilities as relevant cultural venues.

Nagyelőadó proved to be an immediate success: in the 2023 edition, 64 bands entered the competition with at least one student studying at BME or ELTE. The attractiveness of the show was further raised by the jury, composed of known musicians from the contemporary independent scene, also raised the attractiveness of the show, the finals taking place in prestigious music venues and indie festivals that included selected bands in their programme. Besides the organisation of a series of full-house events in almost forgotten cultural venues, the Talent Show also led to the creation of the Young Alternative Musicians Union (FASZ) established to

connect young independent musicians.

Another successful event series, **Privát Színpad** (Private Stage) aimed at making up for the lack of cultural venues in a period when many cultural spaces had to suspend their activities as a consequence of the energy crisis of 2022. By bringing cultural events to uncommon locations such as private homes, warehouses or ateliers, the programme intended to bring the local audience into a more intimate, direct contact with artists. Between January and April 2023, seven special productions were hosted in seven unique venues, with 20-50 spectators selected from hundreds of applicants for each event, and informed about the locations on the day of the event.

While Nagyelőadó and Privát Színpad addressed artists and cultural initiatives, the **Szabad a Tér** (Space is free) open call series offered funding and mentoring to local residents, organisations and community groups. Integrated into the Insert programme, the grant scheme offered support for the creation of community spaces or a better use of public spaces, empowering residents to take actions. Selected initiatives received financial support and assistance as well as participated at networking events for the exchange of experiences and skills. While the initiative supported 12 initiatives in 2022 and 11 in 2023, it also opened a winter edition with the title Szabad a Tél (Winter is Free) for winter events and placemaking initiatives. The **Insert Idea Competition** called for community building projects that engaged in activating untapped resources in the district. In 2023, 6 projects were selected from 27 applications. The selected initiatives included placemaking on the Danube riverbank (VALYO), community reading sessions (CAN Architects), community cooking (CoHousing Budapest), the Earthworm Festival focusing on composting (Humusz), chldren's clothing workshops (Me&Mitzi) and an open call for creative projects at the BME campus (Garden of Wonders), addressing rainwater retainment and water management issues in BME's garden.

One of the strengths of the framework was its **flexibility**: Insert project managers were very sensitive to emerging ideas within the consortium and beyond and quickly understood their potential in the programme. Another strength of Insert was the **efficiency of implementing programmes**, based on streamlined organisation through the involvement of various local actors that also ensured a better outreach to the broader public.

While for Insert, 2022 was characterised as a year of experimentation, the year 2023 brought about the **integration of Insert into the municipal structure.** Having tested certain event formats and understanding the costs and conditions of their realisation allowed the municipality and KözPont to **incorporate these costs into the core municipal budget** and make it part of the established funding schemes, thus assuring their long-term continuity.

2.3 Cultural services to corporate organisations

In its ambition to connect the cultural and technology scenes and develop cultural services with and for technology companies, CUP4Creativity also relied on corporate actors like British Telecom. In 2022, British Telecom moved its offices to a new four-storey building in the district. The CUP4Creativity partnership supported BT with a set of ideas on how to encourage creativity in the office environment. The ideas developed by the partnership, recommending the establishment of a creative area with new technologies, support for artistic creativity and play areas for imaginative play and stress relief were implemented with great success to encourage workers to return to the office after the pandemic. Peaking in October 2023, designated as "Creativity Month", dozens of workshops were organised throughout the year in partnership with artists associated with Eleven Blokk, attended by hundreds of BT workers. Besides improving corporate culture and creating uncommon collaborations in Újbuda, the services developed for BT were also seen as a potential financial pillar for Adaptér.

3 Challenges

3.1 Leadership

By 2023, the partnership arrived to a stage where some of the illusions regarding co-governance and co-management were abandoned. The experiment to allow for a shared management of the project with relative autonomous decision-making within certain project areas gave way to a more centralised approach. Some of

the insufficiencies of the project's initially conceived flat hierarchy in, for example, decision-making regarding the online platform led to serious delays and therefore risked to impede several aspects of the project. While partners remained involved in co-designing many aspects of the project like the grant schemes, the municipal company KözPont also claimed its leadership in conceiving and operating Adaptér.

"Our insistence on shared decision-making made the process inefficient: there was no one with the authorisation to take the lead and push some of the project's elements to a direction or another." Eszter Ézsiás

3.2 Public procurement

In the last year of CUP4Creativity, the project continued its troubled history with procurement processes. Once the renovation of spaces was completed, the most important procurement element of the project was to provide Adaptér with technological equipment. This equipment did not only include 3D printers, laser cutters and other instruments of the makerspace attached to Adaptér, but also the venue's "welcome experience." Conceived in the form of an installation combining technological interfaces and digital art pieces, commissioning the welcome experience raised a series of technical and philosophical problems related to procurement: how can art pieces and technology equipment be distinguished in a public procurement process and how can a municipality procure pieces of art under obligations to select the economically best offer. The necessity to procure pieces of digital creation generated debates within the municipality around Hungarian procurement law, raising serious doubts about the feasibility of commissioning art pieces for Adaptér. After a procurement process that lasted over six months, an important learning point of the project is that innovation projects need to be allowed more flexibility, and certain cost items cannot be treated like regular services or goods purchased by the municipality.

"If we accept that these are unique and unrepeatable works of art, then we have to treat them as works of art. When it comes to a literary volume, for example, you can't just put out a call for a poem and then have the cheapest poet win." Máté Ábrahám

3.3 Participative approach

Throughout the project's three years, the CUP4Creativity involved a broad partnership beyond the strictly understood consortium. In 2023, with the Insert programmes including Nagyelőadó, Privát Színpad and the various grant schemes, the consortium came in touch with a broader cultural and technological ecosystem. Similarly, Adaptér attracted a series of collaborators in a wide range of roles including designing the venue's installation, bringing events or conducting training sessions.

"The great thing in such a partnership is the abundance of expertise. Partners gave us a lot of inspiration. We could always reach out with any question to different partners, we could try a great diversity of ideas and this made the project very colourful." Eszter Ézsiás

3.4 Cross-department and integrated management and implementation

From the beginning on, the CUP4Creativity project was a flagship initiative of Újbuda's cultural direction. Seen as delegated to the domain of culture within the municipality, project managers needed to make a constant effort to engage other departments and companies in the management and implementation of the project.

In earlier stages there were attempts to involve all the departments in monthly updates of the project: understandably, the largest investments (renovation of spaces, purchase of technological equipment, etc.) attracted the most attention from other departments, public servants and political representatives. Once the key budget items of the project were resolved, these meetings lost their immediate appeal and were emptied of their trans-departmental significance.

In the last phase of the project, KözPont stepped ahead to take a leading role in coordinating between the different departments: using its embeddedness in the municipality's various areas, the public company constituted a bridge towards departments, facilitating the preparation and implementation of various kinds of events within CUP4Creativity.

"It was very helpful that KözPont didn't treat CUP4Creativity as a side-project: we know that of we were stuck with a process, we just had to call KözPont and they would take our hands and lead us through the corridors of the municipal departments." Eszter Ézsiás

3.5 Monitoring, evaluation and measurement

In 2023, the monitoring workgroup continued its regular meetings with consortium partners. In August 2023, the last of the three offline monitoring sessions was held in cooperation with consortium partners, evaluating the project's progress and working together on the development of measurement methods, monitoring plan and results analysis. Besides this larger event, smaller online and offline meetings based on key topics (collecting offline monitoring data, tracking visitor numbers at physical locations, creating and analysing datasets from the online platform, aligning offline and online data, etc.) were organised with the relevant partners and subcontractors. Cooperation with Calliovision, a Hungarian startup, to implement a monitoring system based on camera devices resulted in a test mode at B32 Cultural Center until June 2023, later expanded to other locations to collect timestamped anonymous data on the visitor numbers at these benchmark locations. The Insert platform was also used for monitoring purposes: early users tested the platform's functions, and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of data on the platform allowed the consortium to better understand user experiences and the platform's shortcomings.

"We believe that the activities of the monitoring workgroup provided valuable information not only for the project itself but also for the decision-makers of the municipality and thus, in the long term, for the cultural and community development of the entire district." Bálint Köves

3.6 Communication with local partners and beneficiaries

While the online platform Insert was conceived to support community outreach and communication to these new target groups, in practice it were the new programmes launched within the Insert framework that managed to reach new audiences in 2023. While Privát Színpad mainly spoke to Újbuda's middle class already interested in culture, Nagyelőadó involved hundreds of students who had not been reached by Újbuda's cultural events and communication before the talent show, and the various Insert programmes involved different social groups ranging from young mothers participating at sewing workshops to neighbours involved in a permaculture training or joint gardening sessions.

"We reached people with various levels of involvement: some people joined as spectators, others participated at workshops, went home to implement what they learned and next time they initiated new activities." Eszter Ézsiás

3.7 Scaling up

The ambitions to scale up some of the solutions developed in CUP4Creativity have changed throughout the project. While the **Insert online platform** was conceived as a tool that could easily be scaled and expanded to new areas, activities and users, it did not grow into being a central space in matchmaking between local actors and facilitating exchange. On the other hand, the CUP4Creativity partnership has developed several elements during the project that can be transferred to other cities or upscaled to broader areas.

Adaptér, with its focus on connecting art and technology and through them, the cultural and technology scenes, is an institutional format that can either be replicated in other places or can inspire institution-building in other contexts as well. The local **collaborative ecosystem methodology**, developed throughout the project can be implemented in other cities or neighbourhoods. However, its results depend on peculiar local constellations, such as the co-existence of universities, tech companies and a strong cultural scene in Újbuda.

Therefore, these methods need to be adapted to the specific circumstances and relevant local actors. Some of the Insert programmes, with their **innovative and inclusive grantmaking schemes**, aiming at reaching an extended field of cultural actors and residents as well as matching them for pioneering or unconventional collaborations can create stronger tissues of cooperation in cities and neighbourhoods of various scales.

"When looking into potential ways to multiply and scale the project's solutions, we have to keep in mind that the Bartók Quarter represents a unique constellation with universities, cultural organisations and local entrepreneurs." Eszter Ézsiás

3.7 Other challenges – Sustainability

Similarly to ambitions to upscale, the concept of sustainability has also changed throughout the project: from a great diversity of understandings of what sustainability means and should represent in the case of CUP4Creativity, the partnership moved towards better defined sustainability ideas and plans. This thinking included envisioning services and project outputs that can be monetised and can **generate revenues** for the project or the institutions after the closure of the project. Such services include **workshops and trainings** in Adaptér that have been fully booked and can contribute to the venue's budget.

While it became clear quite early in the project that a certain kind of financial involvement by the municipality will be necessary for most of the project elements, it also emerged that certain elements of the project are more **suitable for sponsorship** than others: in fact, potential sponsors already contacted the consortium in relation with Nagyelőadó talent show that feels like a genuine, authentic initiative, an excellent channel to reach students and youngsters. However, it is important to underline the potential bureaucratic difficulties of involving private sponsors in municipal programmes.

"In the beginning, we all had a different understanding of sustainability. During the project, we all converged towards agreeing on an important role for the municipality in continuing to fund some of the new programmes and facilities, while also developing services that can bring in additional revenues and sponsorships." Máté Ábrahám

3.8 Legacy

The legacy of CUP4Creativity is manifold. While some of the elements that were conceived as key pillars of the project's legacy did not fulfil this role, other innovations, sometimes unplanned in the original design, have become important outcomes to impact the local cultural scene in the years to follow.

Adaptér, as an innovative new institution, has become an integrated part of the district's cultural and education offer, without losing its experimental character. Other "**offline spaces**", such as the renovated MU Theatre and Eleven Blokk ateliers, will continue to enrich the neighbourhood's cultural scene.

CUP4Creativity also generated a series of spin-offs. Many of the **Insert programmes**, originally conceived to bring people onto the online platform of the same name, have been integrated into the regular municipal budget or are looking to establish sustainable economic models with the contribution of external sponsors.

A key outcome of the project is the **Bartók Quartier Roundtable**, a group of local cultural organisations and entrepreneurs, meeting monthly at various locations in the district. Acting as a network of advocacy and co-governance, the Roundtable advises the municipality on prioritising certain themes and activities within the cultural budget as well as on connecting initiatives into joint actions.

Another spin-off of CUP4Creativity is GOOD CITIES, an Interreg Europe project launched in 2024, focusing on the **sharing economy of goods**. It organically builds on the local collaborative cultural ecosystem of Újbuda, with sharing and circular economy mechanisms experimented with during CUP4Creativity. GOOD CITIES aims to institutionalise and upscale the sharing of cultural equipment, for example, among cultural organisations in the district.

4 Conclusions

The third year of CUP4Creativity was marked by a stage where most project elements reached a more stable, established phase. This sense of fulfilment felt in the consortium with the growing success of the Insert programme and its events like the music talent show, the performances in private spaces or the various community-driven activities, however, did not prevent partners from continuing to experiment with new formats, collaborations and audiences.

With the third year, the official project period is over: 2023 was marked by the closure of all investments from the CUP4Creativity: all renovations and purchases of equipment were completed in that year. Besides the closure of various project activities, this period also implied transitioning to a regular operational period. This meant for the municipality and its partners to find ways to integrate the new venues and programmes into the administration's regular work and financing.

The year 2024 brings a series of questions to CUP4Creativity, mainly concerning the evolution of the project's main activities. How can the Adaptér establish itself as an institution bridging different worlds? How can the Insert programmes become part of the municipality's regular grant scheme without losing their innovativeness and appeal? How can the district give birth to new initiatives every year that could be supported, incubated and grown by these programmes? Can the Bartók Quartier Roundtable help local cultural initiatives work better together instead of competing for financial support and human resources?

Culture and cultural heritage

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