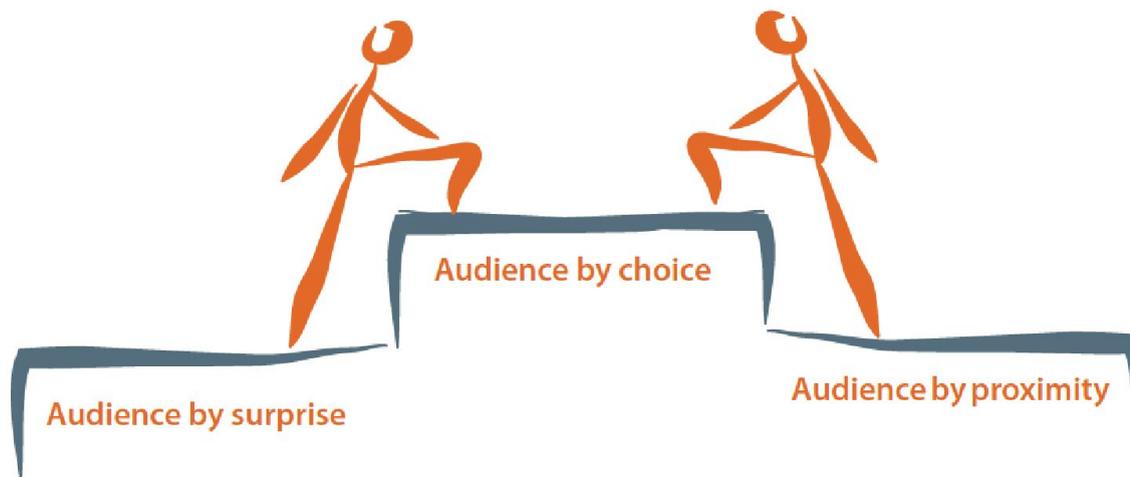


Uninterested, tired, too busy: these are one of the few reasons the great majority of people do not make a sustained effort to reach the cultural act.

CiviCultura brings the cultural act close to where people live, to the places they regularly attend. Once familiar and captivated by the cultural act, occasional viewers become regular viewers.

The same can be expressed for civic engagement and public debate on community issues.



CiviCultura 2019 description

CiviCultura consists of actions that promote the civic engagement of Timisoara's inhabitants, helping them to find the courage to change their role from beneficiaries of local projects into volunteers and even initiators. The main activity, the core performance of the project, was simultaneously presented in different noncentral public areas of the city, which were connected through live video systems. It included several interdisciplinary artistic moments, which engaged both the artists and the citizens in an original experience, during a week of rehearsals and events. The topic of this performance focuses on debunking and disproving harmful myths or commonly held perceptions such as: "nothing changes anyway" or „we are too small or alone to do something”, with regards to engagement effectiveness. It directly addressed the issues that they have and the change that people want, as well as issues and proposals formulated and collected in advance from the same places. Their collection is an important part of the project because these actions will facilitate the receptivity of the engaged public towards the actions of the NGOs and of the informal groups within the community, as well as their engagement in civic actions. CiviCultura is a performance of the city bringing the inhabitants under the spotlight, showing them they aren't the only ones to have such preoccupations and trying to make them aware of their power to change the society, when working in a community of engaged citizens.



Civicultura Timeline overview (2018-2019)

December 2018- May 2019 > Timotion and CivicTalk

> Project Launched at **Timotion** (14.04.19 - Fundraising popular running event for 20 projects). 12 champions and approximately 70 people were running for this cause, including people from other cities. Crowdfunding campaign from December 2018 to May 2019.



5 CivicTalks inviting experts in a public discussions about issues concerning CiviCultura



February-March>meetings and in situ visits for choosing the 4 noncentral public places =4 *urban stages*: **Dacia Park** (the only park in a very high density zone with comunist blocks); **Regina Maria Park** (oldest park in the city-1850); **Mocioni Square** (historical square with 1901 buildings); Student Complex (An alley between student dorms)



June-September> Interview & Questionnaires, improvisations and performances in the 4 spaces



11-19 October > CiviCultura festival



1.A. [#WeAreAllActors](#) (installation)

△ What alternative methods/ instruments from performing arts have been used to stimulate public debate on community problems?



Voting cabins were borrowed from the City Hall and assembled at the venue of a public popular marathon ([Timotion](#) 2019 ⇒ 5000 participants) on 14th of April (prior to the EU elections from 26th of May). People passing by were asked to put yellow stars on the blue cabin curtains. The voting cabins would be arranged to look like stages, as every citizen would have to act/ play his role during the election. Info about the EU benefits would be displayed inside the cabins. There were two major objectives of the installation:

- Inform about the EU elections and promote participation
- Encourage becoming an independent election observer (a massive independent observer badge was borrowed from a civic platform involved in monitoring the european elections)

Also, along marathon path, a stage frame was installed so that every runner would have to pass through it to highlight the fact that the political stage is in our paths, whether we like it or not, therefore we are all actors.

△ To what extent were these methods successful?

The *stage voting cabin* installation was engaging for friends of CiviCultura team, runners for CiviCultura crowdfunding, Timotion organisers and people appreciating civic activities. Some of them shared photos taken during the installation. The action brought up / raised up different points of view regarding EU policies. These came from the people who are usually vocal. The interactive installation was functional only one day from 9:00 to 13:00 in an area with about 20 NGOs expositions and thus with a limited visibility for people with no specific interest in the project.

A limited number of people (approximately 4) registered as independent observers as a result of this particular campaign.

The frame stage installed alongside the marathon path was noticed by most of the runners, but since they were exposed only a limited time, they did not notice the messages associated with it.

△ Suggestions for community building and public debate facilitation through artistic acts?

Such installations should be placed within the pedestrian zones, high traffic areas restricting pedestrian trajectories in such a way that they would oblige people to pass through or very near the installation. Short animated videos that give further information, but also keep or capture the attention should be integrated. Other customized games for children could be designed in order to keep also the child's supervisor in the installation. Other additions could be places where you can visually represent your current values/ point of view (e.g. put a pin on an XY axis chart, cast coloured based votes on certain issues, etc.). Small contests between random people on different themes, approaches, methods or values would be a starting point for minor debates.

Keeping the installation for several days would encourage the introvert and shy people to engage more. This would bring better prospects in terms of participation as these people would get the chance to give their time to interact.



1.B. CivicTalks in the Theatre - moderated discussion with a public

△ What alternative methods/ instruments from performing arts have been used to stimulate public debate on community problems?



There were five sessions of live streamed moderated discussions having brought together invited experts on different topics, which took place before or after the theater plays. The format allowed the public to ask questions or present their opinions during the second part of the CivicTalks. The discussions were held at [Thespis](#) Student Theatre studio and streamed on [CiviCultura Facebook page](#) and Szalt.steam. The invited experts ranged from community facilitators, academics (Sociology, architecture and urbanism, cultural geography, anthropology, etc), cultural managers, journalists, artists, NGO managers, etc.

[CivicTalk # 1](#): CiviCultura (the use of art to encourage civic involvement?)

[CivicTalk # 2](#): Where? (the strategy of choosing the urban stages)

[CivicTalk # 3](#): CivicDev (the IT tools we could use or create for civic actions)

[CivicTalk # 4](#): Civism Through Theater (promoting Civic Values in Theater)

[CivicTalk # 5](#): Community Building (Public Engagement / Problem Collection)

CivicTalk served as a tool for gathering information or consultancy, elements which were used for organizing CiviCultura.

△ To what extent were these methods successful?

The online reach of the live videos of CivicTaks have resulted in a number of viewers between 1300 and 4000. Some of them expressed in comments but those did not initiate online debates. The attendance was higher when the discussion followed a theater play than when there was a theater play planned at the end of the discussion. Some people attending the discussions were there because they were interested in the discussion. Others (about 35%) at the end of the coupled theater play agreed to remain. The live presence ranged from 14 to 40 people.

The first CivicTaks managed also to get public from the online audience into the live discussion at the next CivicTaks. Some people having attended CivicTalks became volunteers for the project whilst others disseminated online materials. In one particular case, the live streaming of the first CivicTalk came to the attention of a man who had attended almost all talks and eventually became the biggest sponsor of the project.

The invited speakers engaged to one another into interesting conversations and debate, while the public was also keen on participating with questions and positions regarding the discussed issues. Some of the speakers returned as a part of the audience for the next CivicTalks. Some invited speakers who met for the first time, impressed by the work and information they the new acquaintances have reached to invite them to other events.

At the end of the live streaming, the invited speakers and public were invited to a less formal discussion over a glass of wine. As a feedback, they stated that the framework of such a discussion was more enjoyable in the theatre and not as rigid as what one would be in a TV studio.

△How should further endeavors of integrating artistic acts in community building and common problems public debate facilitation for a community?

Debates which took place immediately after (not before) a performance would retain a portion of the initial public which would have not normally attended such debates independently. The theatre offers an unconventional space which appeals as comfortable for the invited speakers. Live streaming could be adopted for several platforms.

The discussions could be gamified (the public using their phones on a common platform or application to give input or choose options, to intervene anonymously or as a group), giving more control and participation to the public and knowledge to the invited speakers about the audience needs.

Written conclusions derived from the discussions could be afterwards posted, giving the occasion for online debate.

1.C. Interview & Questionnaires in public spaces for a theatre play

△ What alternative methods/ instruments from performing arts have been used to stimulate public debate on community problems?

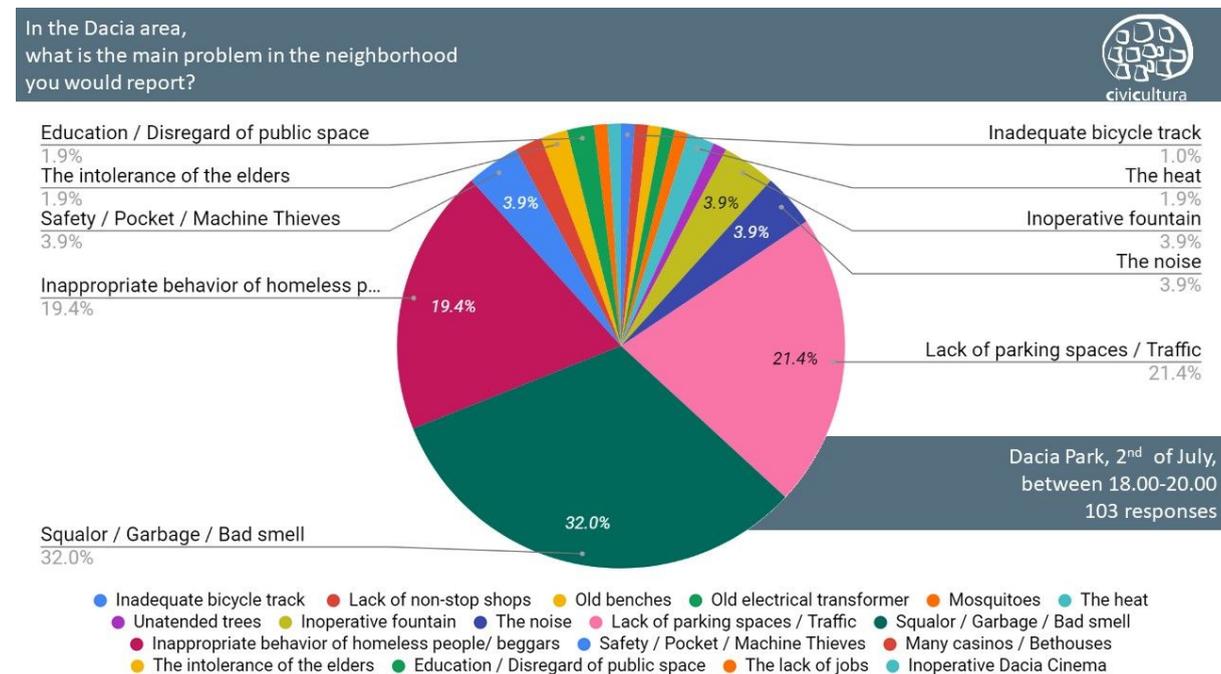


Group of volunteers presented themselves as being part of a student theater group (to make people aware they are not from religious or political groups) in 4 different neighbourhoods of the city (the urban stages). They told them that they were organizing CiviCultura and they wanted to make a theatre show having their problems as subject/ theme.

The following questions had been asked:

- i) In this area, what is the main problem in the neighborhood you would report?
- ii) What do you think is the cause of this problem?
- iii) Do you think that the problem can be solved by the people from this neighborhood? How?
- iv) What other issues would you report?

A total of about 400 people were asked



△ To what extent were these methods successful?

The questionnaires were easy to use in high density parks (Dacia Park), where people were not in a rush, in opposition to transit zones (squares with no sitting facilities - Mocioni). In Dacia Park for instance, in approximately 2 hours, 6 volunteers would be able to get 100 responses (approximately 7 min/ response) having maintained a leisurely and unhurried conversation with the people.

The “artistic alibi” provided a trustful environment as people weren’t thinking they were being pulled into political or religious propaganda. People started then to share their beliefs, to point at what they thought is wrong within their community and what was very important was the fact that they were not just preaching their beliefs, but they were asking the interrogators for validation of their beliefs, being thus opened to other suggestions. They identified as being the main cause of the problem, but they’d also engaged in discussing the possible solutions with a considerable amount of launched discussions from their part, rather than simply giving statements.

△ How should further endeavors of integrating artistic acts in community building and common problems public debate facilitation for a community?

Volunteers and facilitators who are to ask the questions should benefit from special trainings (in our case the volunteers were amateur actors with no special training) to a such extent that they could better engage the people into discussions, to enable their curiosity and thus, to get to in-depth responses. As people may need more time in order to give better responses, the possibility of people completing their responses later on via a form or online channels would be most helpful.

1.D. Improvisation on the collected themes of interests

△ What alternative methods/ instruments from performing arts have been used to stimulate public debate on community problems?



The collected problems were used as improvisation themes for small sketches and games with the public, including children. The games and improvisations were performed two days after the Interviews & Questionnaires (section C).

The sketches included construction workers, administrative staff, people feeding the pigeons vs. people disconsidering them, etc. dealing with the highlighted problems.

The games with the children addressed the power of doing things together.

△ To what extent were these methods successful?

The children were captivated by the activities, therefore their parents were obliged to be attentive and to actively participate. Some of the collected problems were easy to gamify and transform into interactive games. Most of the actions were received better than expected and the local community was looking forward to the next meeting. The debates at the end of improvisations were not successful as people and children got quite excited and there was not very much interest shown.

Improvisation shows in Mocioni Square had not been able to retain public, as people do not use to spend time there due to the lack of sitting facilities. As a place without any traditions nor events, parents having passed by with their children were rather on a tight schedule.

△ How should further endeavors of integrating artistic acts in community building and common problems public debate facilitation for a community?

The improvisations could be well reversed and different game strategies could be simulated to find the most engaging way to present some themes. If the team is well prepared, it can easily facilitate an enjoyable positive experience for everyone which could be also filmed. If people had a good time they would be interested in promoting the video material. Along with the sharing, different points of views on that matter might come as well, which could potentially start small-scale debates.

1.E. Post-performance discussions in public spaces

△ What alternative methods/ instruments from performing arts have been used to stimulate public debate on community problems?



In each of the four public spaces Thespis Student Theatre performed different shows (two in each space). The performances varied from performing to reading a play. The texts of the plays were selected in relation with the collected problems (section C).

After a month (in September), *YUKUITA / Andanza del Kant* show was presented by AlaRieTe (a cultural and environmental association from Mexico, dedicated to creating, promoting and researching the performing arts). The AlaRieTe members, the producers of the show, work in a cultural complex of artistic residence located in the southern mountainous areas of Jalisco, on the territory of Tapalpa. A bamboo yurt ([video here](#)) was specially built for their show in a community-engaging workshop ([ro article](#)).

The discussions used microphones, the purpose of which was to lure in other people nearby which successfully enhanced the participation.

△ To what extent were these methods successful?

If in the studio debate participation is limited to the people who devoted their evening to the event (theatre or theater and debate), performing in public areas can retain a passing audience which would have never planned this. Also, if starting directly with the debate or discussion most people would be rather reluctant in giving their time to find out what is happening and give the discussions a chance. Therefore, colourful artistic actions are a hook which can be successfully used to attract people, to bring them together and prepare them for discussions, even in “hostile” places (Mocioni Square). At the end of a 30 minutes performance, people in the audience had already a feeling of companionship, as they shared an experience and were witnesses of the same events, and processing the same artistic messages

In a low spectator retaining public space, where for the first encounters the turn-up or stand-by was very low, we were surprised that on another occasion there were about 12 spectators engaged in the post-event discussions in a very friendly environment where the owner of a close bagel shop turned out with free bagels for everyone.

Members of the Mexican company also joined the discussions, giving interesting perspectives on how communities in Mexico regard such discussions and on the difference between Mexico and Romania in view of the problems and the methods used to approach them.

△ How should further endeavors of integrating artistic acts in community building and common problems public debate facilitation for a community?

Such performances should be promoted with some kind of totem in the place they will be held, with all information displayed in order to inform people in advance.

The regularity of such events should be consistent.

The number of sittings should be variable throughout the performance or debate. It is not encouraging to take a seat at a starting event if 80% of the seats are empty - the message received is that the event is not worth the time. On the other hand, if there are just 2-3 unoccupied chairs, most people would prefer not to sit down, being very easy for them to leave the place at any point.

To be noted that the film presentation, although requiring less resources than theatrical performances or concerts, managed to attract a significant number of people. Therefore, for actions with low numbers of volunteers, public screenings are recommended to engage pedestrians.

1.F. Discussions (CivicTalk) in public spaces on community issues

△ What alternative methods/ instruments from performing arts have been used to stimulate public debate on community problems?



CivicTalks had been prepared for each of the four “urban stages”. People from the Consultative Neighborhood Council, students representatives, authorities, etc were invited. The mayor joined 3 out of 4 debates.

The discussions were held in each space on a constructed wooden stage with stage lights and used microphones to lure in people nearby. The moderator for each discussion was Mihai Lisețchi (Pro Democrația - Timișoara Club). The event was live streamed on Facebook platform.

△ To what extent were these methods successful?

The 4 debates managed to gather an amount of 10500 views. People passing by stopped to listen and asked some questions during the discussion.

The presence of the mayor increased both the online and live audience. In Mocioni Square, the talk started with almost no live audience, but with the mayor in sight, the curiosity of the people passing by filled the available chairs.

The mayor had an extensive presentation of the discussed issues in his first press [conference](#) after the 3 debates he participated in. More than 12 online press articles have presented different issues discussed in the press conference as a result of the mayor's participation to the event.

Microphones were extremely helpful in moderating the discussions, especially when the public was involved.

The wood stage setting, the stage lights, microphones and sound system managed to create a new, fresh expressive space in places that have become common for most people, raising the interest for discussions and giving a sense of relevance for all participants (as it is not another endless, purposeless discussion).

△ How should further endeavors of integrating artistic acts in community building and common problems public debate facilitation for a community?

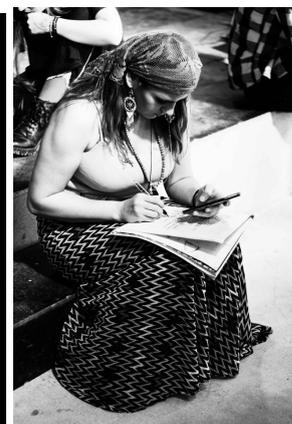
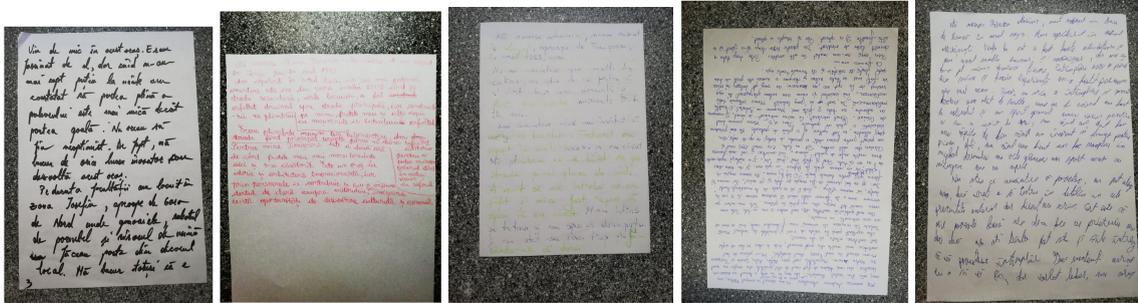
The advantages of organising the discussions or debates in public spaces include the benefits from CivicTalks in the Theatre (section B) and benefits from Post-performance discussions in public spaces (section E).

Some precautions about bad weather should be taken. It would be not recommended to host such events in cold weather, as people would not be comfortable to participate in such actions. Recommendations from section C and section E should be taken into consideration. Having a CivicTalk format (which demands consistent organisation endeavour), with invited experts, stakeholders, authorities, etc. could be organised after several consistent **Post-performance discussions in public spaces (E)** with the same facilitator and in the same space. Post-performance discussions would prepare the engagement of the audience, give them time to exercise expressing themselves and get public validation that their opinion is consistent. Therefore, during the CivicTalks, an exercised voice would not feel their reason is less worthy of attention or that they have less rights in expressing their opinions with regards to attending authorities and specialists . It is advisable not to have only one high-profiled invited speaker (in our case just the mayor), as all questions and responses from the other participants, especially the public, would be directed only to him and this would reduce the balance within the discussion.

1.G. Creating/ rehearsing a play about the collected community issues

△ What alternative methods/ instruments from performing arts have been used to stimulate public debate on community problems?

One week, each morning, a professional theatre team (BIS from Sibiu, in charge with directing the play) met with the residents of the CiviCultura project (theatre group members from student cultural houses) for the creation zone and rehearsal in common with all artistic leaders and actors from all urban scenes, thus ensuring the development of a unitary show. The scenarios and lyrics were written together with the actors based on the problems studied (section C). Melodic lines used in the show were created and recorded.



The rehearsals in the public spaces, the urban stages for the main CiviCultura show, took place every day for one week before the show, from 5 to 7 p.m. allowing anybody to join. After each reversal, at 7 p.m. different events were planned in each of the 4 urban stages to engage the public.

- 1) A nationally known band - Țăpınarii; 2) A CivicTalk on the stage (section F);
- 3) A documentary projection; 4) A theater play.



In several iterations the scenarios have been finalized. All the moments were linked and unified to create a unitary show, in which each urban scene had a balanced artistic contribution.

The final show CiviCultura summed up and summarized the problems collected from inhabitants of 4 city neighborhoods, offering a "bright" perspective of things, promoting the choice to involve in solving problems in the common space. The show began in Victoria Square, symbol of the freedom gained 30 years ago, a freedom that could not be won without having mobilized the people in the neighborhoods. So the attention was diverted to these neighborhoods having passed from one to the other. The 4 neighbourhood urban

stages were linked with screens which displayed live views of what was happening in the other urban stages.



△ To what extent were these methods successful?

The student residents of the project were very engaged, contributing to the co-writing of the play. They had debates between themselves regarding various issues which were highlighted by the people in section C. Their likeness to research related subject, to express themselves on the topics and to discuss possible solutions between them and with the public had a considerable development, especially for those who volunteered also in collecting the community problems (section C) . This part of the project was a success in an unintended way, creating a community of actors engaged and interested in civic activities, rather than the initial thinking (creating 4 different communities of residents in the urban stages neighbourhood - engaged in the project and willing to take civic actions on the reported community issues). The project was not able to build 4 different communities as it would have needed a lot more well organised time for gaining trust and community building for the people in the neighbourhood.

People were interested in the idea of a show that was based on them expressing their problems. They have stated their opinion in what needs to be changed in their neighbourhood. The reaction to plays or rehearsals opinions in debates has been integrated in the show. Also, having the public present in open rehearsals allowed us to see which gigs catch, what gets their interest and what is not captivating or what they consider as exaggerated, allowing amendments to the show.

There were cases of people living in the neighborhoods having expressed their interest in the first rehearsals to be actors in the final show, but they did not return for the next rehearsals. The fact that the show was in construction and that it might not have seemed clear enough towards what would happen could be the cause those people did not join the project.

△ How should further endeavors of integrating artistic acts in community building and common problems public debate facilitation for a community?

In order to engage people from the neighborhood to act in community theatre, they should be able to be part of the making-of process and to give them time (several months) to get accustomed to the group, working with the same facilitator during the whole process. Less work is needed with communities which are already formed.

Maintaining the same facilitator for the same space to have consistency is a plus. The same facilitator should ask questions, wait for the response, be able to get the response on other occasions and online channels, then engage with them in depth interviews and be the co-creation interface between the project and the residence of the neighborhood. People should be able to ask for the consecrated facilitator's phone number or email address, building in this way a personal relationship with the facilitator.

Forms of intervention or expression should be set to allow a long-term, ongoing channel of giving input (a wall to write on; a space, real or virtual, where to send messages, opinions, reactions). Engagement should not come to a halt at the end of the programmed collection time.

CONCLUSIONS

- "Culture is a safe environment through which we can have divergent opinions" Simona Fit, @ First CivicTalk. By having an artistic alibi, people reached and opened themselves for interviews, discussions and proposals.
- Consistency - building trust. It plays a key role in getting people to allow themselves to engage. Once they get to know and befriend the facilitators and their neighbours, they are more confident and this would give more ease for expressing their opinion. Therefore, maintaining the same facilitator and group would be an advantage.
- Captivate children and young people. In this way you can reach their parents.
- Cultural actions in noncentral areas can give the possibility for people to raise their voice and can help them acknowledge that their voices are heard and that they are part of the city's history.

The CiviCultura project was part of Timotion 2019, through the *Timisoara Community Foundation* and *Alergotura* Association.

The final show had been performed with the support of the Timișoara 2021 European Cultural Capital Association and co-financed by the City Hall of Timișoara and the Local Council, through the cultural program "Timișoara. European Capital of Culture 2021 ", being part of the TM2021 Cultural Program from 2019.

CiviCultura and the show was also supported by the Culture House of the City of Timisoara, the House of Culture of the Students Timisoara, FITT Timișoara, the Polytechnic Foundation of Timisoara, the Western University of Timisoara.

Video streaming: SZalt.stream. Media partners: TVR Timișoara, Radio Free Europe Ro
Sponsors: Intel Movidius, Optilux

Timișoara,
November, 2019

Diogene Cultural Association