

LOOKING THROUGH ČIURLIONIS' WINDOW

Audience Development and Audience Engagement

at Lithuanian cultural centres:

a case study of M. K. Čiurlionis House in Vilnius

Elena Mantvilė Kirdaitė

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Author Elena Mantvilė Kirdaitė	Semester Spring 2026
Department Arts Management, Society and Creative Entrepreneurship	
Abstract <p>Cultural institutions cannot exist without their audiences. However, external processes, including shrinking access to arts education, decreasing funding for culture and digitalisation of our societies, among others, have negatively impacted cultural participation statistics around the world. Therefore, in order to thrive in the current cultural landscape, institutions must take their audiences into consideration, in fact, even adapt an audience-centric outlook. In addition, cultural institutions, especially public ones, hold a level of responsibility towards the community they operate within, and ought to address societal needs, such as ensuring the promotion of cultural inclusion and meaningful participation among different types of audiences.</p> <p>One of the tools to achieve aforementioned goals is to employ audience development and audience engagement strategies. As such processes have been researched less in continental Europe, especially within smaller cultural organisations, this thesis addresses the research gap whilst investigating internal audience-centric processes, understandings, existing strategies, burdening and enabling factors, and future directions of a memorial cultural centre in Lithuania, namely, the M. K. Čiurlionis House in Vilnius. The qualitative research method of a case study was chosen to ensure thorough analysis and aims to provide possible insights and inspiration for other small scale cultural centres around Europe.</p> <p>The findings of this research indicate that audience-centric practises are positively influenced by the distinct place factor and location of the venue, horizontal organisational structure and encouraging work environment, in addition to intrinsic artistic values of the institution's personnel, manifesting in appearance of unique audience engagement practises, such as "hosting", qualitative listening-based audience research, support of young artists and creative partnership and collaboration abilities. Nevertheless, such processes are mainly challenged by conceptual confusion and translation of audience development and surrounding terminologies into other linguistic formats, fragmented local cultural ecosystem, physical space and human resource limitations, lack of defined strategic frameworks, and the dilemma of balancing audience-centricity together with maintaining artistic quality.</p>	
Keywords audience development, audience engagement, arts management, cultural centre, participation	
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1. INTRODUCTION

What is art without its audience? First of all, humanity cannot be separated from art, as it is a foundational part of our existence, therefore this philosophical question can be debated endlessly. However, for contemporary arts and culture organisations of today, it is a more pressing question of survival. To thrive in the current cultural landscape, institutions must take their audiences into consideration, in fact, even adapt an audience-centric outlook (Bollo, Da Milano, Gariboldi, Torch, et al., 2017). In addition, it is essential to remember that art has the power to significantly contribute to positive change in societies. Arguably, cultural organisations ought to use art for the benefit of cultivating societal welfare, as well as bringing feelings of fulfilment and belonging to our communities (Cancellieri et al., 2018; Holt, 2023). People participating in arts feel happier and more socially connected, therefore, art and involvement within artistic life seems to have a positive effect on our overall well-being (Bianchini & Borchi, 2018; Lithuanian Council for Culture et al., 2023; Sonke et al., 2025). Consequently, one of the obligations and responsibilities that art and cultural institutions hold toward broader society might be to promote equal cultural participation and meaningful engagement. In conclusion, an art institution in our society cannot exist without its audience, nor should it, for a myriad of reasons.

Hence, audience development and audience engagement tactics are considered to be beneficial and relevant tools to meet several goals, in addition to solving difficulties that contemporary arts institutions face. More importantly, they are needed to ensure survival of cultural institutions, especially those, concerned with more traditional, classical forms of art, which tend to be labelled as elitist or “hermetic” (Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024, p. 69) by the society. Moreover, such practises may also play a part in helping address various dilemmas that our society faces today, in making arts institutions more socially responsible (ibid.). Furthermore, it is an important step towards cultivating the withering need for arts in our society in general, focusing on the dilemma of shrinking arts participation by addressing the issue at a core level (Staniškytė, 2013; Zakaras & Lowell, 2008).

While there are many different definitions and understandings, heavily dependent on the cultural context, audience development¹ can generally be described as a strategic, holistic, encompassing the whole organisation, institutional process, that cultural institutions use

¹ The terminology will hereinafter be abbreviated as AD.

to diversify and widen their audience circle, whilst at the same time deepening their relationships with audiences, both already existing and potential (Bollo et al., 2017). Audience engagement² focuses on the individual aspect of engagement with art, which can manifest in many different ways, and is a deeply personal process of an audience member. AE practises ought to be used to facilitate the cultural event, or as authors call it, “artistic exchange”, for each individual, to enrich the experience of it to become more meaningful for the audience (Brown & Ratzkin, 2011, p. 10). Both concepts can be understood as one continuous long-term process, in which AD attracts and sustains audiences (existing and potential), encourages relationship building between an institution and their audiences, whilst AE empowers individuals to enjoy art to the fullest. Both strategies ought to be employed in a balanced way for improvement of social and financial sustainability, promotion of cultural inclusion, and relevance of the institution. More detailed definitions of both terminologies are presented in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The relationship between artistic institutions and their audiences, in addition to institutional frameworks and the overall structures that influence such relationships and interactions, are of great interest to me, and have been an underlying theme in most of my professional life. Consequently, I intend to investigate how such processes appear in frameworks of cultural organisations and are translated to practical applications. For this reason, an explorative case study of a cultural institution’s inner workings may be a suitable task to explore the aforementioned aspects.

The institution that was chosen for this research, namely “*M. K. Čiurlionio Namai*”, or “M. K. Čiurlionis House”, is a memorial cultural centre in Vilnius, Lithuania. Among the standard programming of chamber music concerts, exhibitions, cultural evenings and educations, the centre dedicates a big part of their work to explore more unique types of programming, with extensive focus on partnerships and innovative education opportunities. Therefore, the centre can additionally be categorized as a multidisciplinary cultural centre. Several factors influenced the decision to choose this institution for analysis as a case study for this thesis. First of all, whilst considering positive examples of audience-centric institutions in Lithuania, M. K. Čiurlionis House appeared to be a clear case of such an organisation. Secondly, the institution has gained a reputation for being open and accessible, particularly in its support for young artists. Furthermore, it is

² The terminology will hereinafter be abbreviated as AE.

a small-scale institution – such institutions remain insufficiently researched in relation to their audience practices. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate what external and internal factors positively influence its reputation, and whether such factors can be taken into consideration and applied when managing other smaller-capacity cultural centres, nation-wide and Europe-wide.

1.1. Research Literature and Research Gap

Research and practises within the field of audience development and audience engagement, unfortunately, remain quite fragmented and deeply varied on the geographical context, and are considerably more advanced in some regions than in others. While some scholars estimate that participatory, or audience-centric, practises can be traced back to the times of ancient Greece (Lipps, 2015, p. 8), in English speaking countries (particularly the UK and the USA), the usage of AD as its own independent practise appear as early as 1950s, although the early application of the terminology initially connects mainly to the paradigm of public relations and marketing (Wlazeł, 2021, p. 375). As some researchers argue, later replacing the name with “development” seemed more acceptable and more suited to the arts, than merely “marketing”, which is frequently frowned upon due to its ties to the criticism of commercialization of art (Hadley, as cited in Wlazeł, 2021, p. 375). This might partially explain a common misconception about AD that it solely involves marketing activities, with the primary goal being to sell out tickets and attract as many attendees as possible by any means.

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, through the change of cultural policy direction in the UK and Australia (Hayes, as cited in Wlazeł, 2021; Kawashima, 2000), AD started to become more like what we know today, an “active and deliberate process of creating meaningful, long-term connections between people and an art organisation” (Lipps, 2015, p. 7). Later on, a new distinct terminology of audience engagement emerges, although, as Wlazeł (2021, p. 380) notes, the change of focus does not address the aforementioned underlying issues. These two concepts often remain blended together, with AE frequently absorbed into AD frameworks, rather than operating as an independent practice. Nevertheless, in Anglophone countries, with the UK leading, the pattern of extensive research on audience-centred institutional practises can be noticed (Arts Council England,

2004; Baker, 2013; Brown & Ratzkin, 2011; Kawashima, 2000; 2006; Zakaras & Lowell, 2008).

Since the 2010s, the amount of interest and research throughout the whole of the European Union has risen as well, with the publication of various analyses and practical application toolkits, mostly as part of EU funded projects. Such projects include *New Music: New Audiences* (NewAud, 2014), *ADESTE* (ADESTE project, 2014), *Be SpectACTive!* (Bonet et al., 2018; Rasmussen & Righolt, 2024), *(UN)COMMON SPACES: Audience Development & Art in Public Space* (Magko, 2024), among others. European-wide rising concern with building and engaging audiences can be attributed to the start of the 2014-2020 Creative Europe (EU's funding programme for culture) programme. While preparing for the launch of the programme in 2012, cultural experts had stated that, in order to address various cultural participation barriers, "a more holistic audience development strategy" is needed (European Expert Network on Culture et al., 2012, p. 4).

In Lithuania, while the importance of equal participation and engagement in cultural life is emphasized in the national cultural policy (Rimkutė, 2024a, p. 23), AD as a term is not commonly used in documents of the cultural institutions themselves, even if on a practical level, they apply many of the same practises that might be classified as AD and AE. Among other research on Lithuanian audiences, cultural participation surveys nationwide have been conducted since 2014 (Lithuanian Council for Culture, Institute for Marketing and Communication Sciences, et al., 2023). Lithuanian cultural researchers are informed on the subject in the theatre field (Staniškytė, 2013, 2015) and art galleries (Citvarienė, 2015). Additionally, case studies of contemporary art centres (Gulbinas, 2008) exist. Notable work has been done in regard to research about Kaunas 2022, when it was the European Capital of Culture, through which Impact Foundation (2022) investigated AD practises from a Lithuanian perspective. During the year of Kaunas being the ECoC³, training workshops and personal consultations about AD for artistic organisations taking part in the programme have been organised, with European experts and mentors taking part (Kaunas2022.eu, 2022). It is interesting to note that in this Open Call, AD is translated to Lithuanian as "*auditorijų vystymas*", not as "*auditorijų plėtra*", the latter of which is a term more prevalent in Lithuanian research vocabulary currently. Nevertheless, according to a Lithuanian AD expert, J. Staniškytė (personal communication, January 26, 2026), Kaunas being the ECoC 2022 has played a considerable role in advancing the

³ Abbreviation for „European Capital of Culture“.

conceptual understanding and practical implementation of audience development strategies within the city's and the surrounding region's cultural institutions.

Within the field of performing arts, research and analysis was conducted on St. Christopher Chamber Orchestra from Vilnius, throughout its participation in two European Union funded projects: "New Music: New Audiences" (NewAud, 2014), and during the study on audience development, "Engage Audiences", for Creative Europe (Bollo, Carnelli, et al., 2017). In addition, the rise of the number of MA theses on the subject in recent years indicates the field's perceived significance for the younger generation of cultural professionals of Lithuania (Gudvalytė, 2020; Kačinskaitė, 2021; Končius, 2022; Rimkus, 2025; Šeduikis, 2020). It is interesting to note, that in Lithuania, researchers occasionally additionally approach AD from the point of view of social sciences and applied informatics, mostly to conduct quantitative research (Balevičiūtė & Sokolovaitė, 2018; Jurėnė & Krikščiūnienė, 2020).

Overall, in Lithuania, AD has been more extensively explored in theatres than in other art sectors, owing in part to the longer-standing tradition of participatory practice within these contexts (Kalinauskas, 2019, p. 4). Moreover, AD proves easier to implement in larger, more stable, nationally subsidized institutions which have more stable conditions to experiment, given the considerable resources such processes require (both on a financial and human resource level). Thus, institutions, such as the National Opera and Ballet Theatre, Lithuanian National Drama Theatre in Vilnius, National Kaunas Drama Theatre, state the prioritization of AD explicitly in their strategy documents (Lietuvos Nacionalinis Dramos Teatras, 2025; LNOBT, 2026; menufaktura.lt, 2025; Nacionalinis Kauno dramos teatras, 2025). In other institutions, educational activities, cultural accessibility and public engagement are more commonly mentioned in strategic documents, although not in the clearly stated definitions of AD or AE.

Consequently, apart from the selected few institutions that have taken part in EU-funded projects and experimented with AD and AE practices, in addition to larger, state-subsidized and prioritised institutions, on a broader European scale, as well as in Lithuania, it is still uncommon to find a cultural organisation with a clearly defined AD or AE programme. It is important to strive toward making this a standard operational practice across all European cultural institutions, rather than a fragmented or isolated phenomenon. In Lithuania, the lack of research of AD and, especially, AE, is arguably most evident in smaller scale cultural institutions and cultural centres, housing different types of events and forms of art in one place (Kačinskaitė, 2021). While research on

Lithuanian cultural audiences is more prevalent, analysis of the inner workings of cultural institutions and how the processes of AD and AE are understood within the Lithuanian cultural field remains limited.

1.2. Research Objectives and Main Questions

The purpose of this case study is to observe, analyse and describe the audience development and engagement processes, strategies, implementation techniques and future possibilities within cultural centres in Lithuania, namely of the memorial cultural centre “M. K. Čiurlionis House” in Vilnius. Within this thesis work, audience development and audience engagement strategies are generally defined as strategic processes and activities that institutions use to attract new audiences, widening and diversifying their reach, while deeply engaging their current audiences, in addition to practises of creating meaningful artistic experiences and cultivating community relationships with audiences, both existing and potential.

The findings of this research may be of relevance to other small-scale arts and cultural institutions across Europe, particularly those housing multiple art forms within a single organisation. Especially in Lithuania, cultural centres are an important part of the country’s cultural ecosystem, especially in smaller cities and in regions, where art events and products are less widespread (Lithuanian Council for Culture, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, et al., 2023; Matulis, 2025, p. 59; Pfeifere, 2022, p. 34). Consequently, such institutions become increasingly important in ensuring equal distribution of cultural access and participation opportunities across the whole country, not only its saturation in the big cities.

The research of this case study is structured around the following main research question:

- How are the concepts of audience development and audience engagement understood and practiced in the context of the M. K. Čiurlionis House?

Additional supporting questions are investigated:

- What institutional strategies or policies for audience development and/or engagement currently exist within the M. K. Čiurlionis House, and how are they aligned with broader cultural policy frameworks?

- How are these strategies implemented in practice, what challenges or successes can be identified?
- What are possible future directions and opportunities for developing and engaging audiences at the M. K. Čiurlionis House, based on internal perspectives and external best practices?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Whilst discussing audience development and audience engagement, research, terminology, and context from related fields, such as arts management, cultural policy, audience studies, cultural participation, social sciences, and even psychology, need to be taken into consideration. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this thesis is divided into several chapters, addressing related fields, relevant to the research.

2.1. Definition(s) and Dilemmas of Audience Development

Despite the long history of audience development in practise (Kawashima, 2000, p. 13), the appearance of its terminology in scientific research and academic literature can be attributed to the tendency of declining cultural participation (Ciancio, 2018b; Zakaras & Lowell, 2008) and British cultural policies changing towards democracy of culture, with the overarching ideal that culture ought to be accessible to the whole of society and include various understandings of culture, as opposed to one singular definition (Kawashima, 2000, p. 18). It can be deduced that the terminology was born in the UK, first mentioned by an arts marketing specialist Keith Diggle in his book “Guide to Arts Marketing”, published in 1984. Years later, expert Heather Maitland, on behalf of Arts Council England, published the first comprehensive AD guide in 1997 (Maitland, 2019, p. 18). Afterwards, in 1998, Arts Council England introduced “The New Audience Programme”, in which its government invested £20 million into increasing cultural participation across the country. The programme, which operated until 2003, was meant to encourage innovative implementation and practise of AD (Arts Council England, 2004, p. 6). The programme had accomplished notable achievements, such as improving the accessibility of cultural events in various ways, widening and diversifying the audience composition, providing meaningful engagement opportunities, in addition to

encouragement of information and experience sharing between organisations to improve audience-centric processes overall (ibid.). It was the earliest programme of such scale in research and focus on AD universally. Perhaps the most important factor was the programme’s duration of five years – as proven by scholars, AD does not produce instant results and needs long-term considerations to be rewarding (Bollo, Da Milano, Gariboldi, & Torch, 2017a).

Since the terminology is native and rooted in the UK, it is no surprise that significantly more research has been conducted there than in other European countries. One of the first extensive studies on the subject was accomplished by Nobuko Kawashima, published in 2000. She defines AD primarily as expanding the audience as a unit, quantitatively and qualitatively, in addition to “enriching the experience of customers” (ibid., p. 4). The usage of the word customers regarding audiences, implies that earlier understandings of AD were much more connected to marketing than later, more holistically developed definitions.

	<i>Target</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Purpose</i> ⁽¹⁾
Cultural Inclusion	People least likely to attend, eg low-income	Outreach	Social
Extended Marketing	Potential attender, Lapsed attender	The same product offered, but with improvement to cater for the target	Financial, Artistic
Taste Cultivation	Existing audience	Introduction to different art forms and genres	Artistic, Financial (and educational)
Audience Education	Existing audience	The same product offered with extensive education	Educational (and financial)

Note: (1) only refers to the main one(s), but not excluding the others.

Figure 1: Typologies of audiences (*by target group*), audience development tactics (*forms*) and their purposes. Source: Kawashima (2000, p. 8).

Kawashima’s definition of audiences is categorized in four types, based on different goals and means to meet them: artistic (by Taste Cultivation), educational (by Audience Education), financial (by Extended Marketing) and social (by Cultural Inclusion). The author segments the audience into three: existing audiences, potential or lapsed attenders, least likely to attend, and offers different tools to improve the participation opportunities of each group. However, as it becomes clear from the table above, none of the proposed strategies are focused on changing the cultural product itself (apart from improvement of

the same product as part of Extended Marketing). This suggests that through Kawashima's clarification of AD, the main cultural product stays unchanged, only the behaviour of the audience ought to be "developed". This aspect presents a dilemma within the field of AD, as its perceived roots in democratisation of culture are criticized by some as a problematic aspect (Hadley, 2014, p. 21), critiqued similarly already by Kawashima herself (2000), in which she calls this top-down method a "product-led" approach. She stresses that the prevalent "Liberal Humanist" view, in which democratisation of culture is founded on, presumes that "great art" is universally relevant (p. 19). The core belief of this view is that the only obstacles to audience participation are merely logistical: physical, financial, or psychological. Through the "product-led" approach, the product itself, in this case, an art piece, is non-negotiable. This theory has already been critiqued by earlier critics, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, declaring that there are also invisible barriers, such as presence or absence of personal "cultural capital" that typically can only be acquired through a person's upbringing, highly dependent on social class (Bourdieu, as cited in Kawashima, 2000, p. 21). Therefore, merely removing barriers and offering access is not enough. Consequently, Kawashima suggests that a contrasting, "target-led", approach is needed, in that the product (art offering) itself might need change if one wants to meet the existent needs of the audience. This is further proven by the case study of Birmingham Contemporary Music Group's tours in rural Shropshire, throughout which all the possible logistical barriers were removed (the concerts were free, took place in accessible local schools and churches, the musicians were dressed in casual clothing and mingled with the audience after the performance, complimentary tea was served). Despite these occurrences, the core artistic product remained unchanged – the ensemble played avant-garde, contemporary classical music, therefore the project used "product-led" AD tactics. As the interviews with the audience show, removing logistical barriers did not address the underlying multifaceted issues of cultural capital. The "rejectors" in the audience did not understand the art, nor the meaning of it. Therefore, in order to be democratic, AD must apply a target-led approach. Similarly, from an arts marketing perspective, Byrnes (2015⁴) emphasizes, that, "no amount of managerial brilliance or sophisticated marketing and PR effort will amount to much if the basic product does not meet the needs of the consumers for whom it is intended" (p. 424). In addition, Handeland (2024, p. 25) states that, primarily, AD was used to describe all "new and experimental methods" to attempt to reach people, who were not attending publicly funded art

⁴ First edition published in 1993.

institutions. However, as understood within the scope of this thesis, in order to apply the “target-led” approach, first, the democratization process needs to already have taken place. Arguably, only those institutions, who have already enabled inclusive access and removed logistical barriers for various society groups, can then focus their efforts for supporting more participatory and co-creative practises, in other words, ensuring that cultural democracy goals are met. In conclusion, while the “target-led” approach is the final goal, “product-led” practises are nonetheless beneficial to employ in cultural organisations, as they address the need of equal cultural accessibility, at least in removing logistical barriers.

Furthermore, later definitions of AD place an emphasis on building and maintaining a mutual relationship or a similar connection with audiences (both current and potential), with the help of different tools, such as marketing, programming, educational activities, among others (Arts Council England, 2018, p. 3). The mutuality between an institution and its audience is a significant factor in AD, the process ought to not only to provide a service to the audience, but also to ensure meaningful opportunities to engage: “at its heart it is about cultural institutions and cultural actors simultaneously building a relationship between their own artistic or cultural content, their institutional identity, and those they want to be something for”. (Rasmussen & Righolt, 2024, p. 16).

In addition, several audience agencies exist in the UK, dedicated to researching the arts audiences, understanding, segmenting them, encoding data, conducting participation surveys, and providing help with AD strategies and activities to cultural organisations, such as “The Audience Agency”, “Thrive Northern Ireland”, “CultureRepublic Scotland”, and Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (“MHM”). Such agencies throughout continental Europe are much rarer, but they do exist, especially in Scandinavia (“Audiences Norway”, founded in 2009, and “RePublik Sweden”, founded in 2015), also in Poland (“Impact Foundation”) and the Netherlands (“iamair”). Nevertheless, a gap between audience-centricity prioritisation in the UK and the Nordics and the rest of Europe can be observed (Bollo, Da Milano, Gariboldi, & Torch, 2017a, p. 8). This is one of the challenging aspects of audience-centric work, as Gariboldi (2014) states: „AD is still mainly a ground activity, not a discipline (yet), strongly related to single professionals’ practises across different countries” (p. 10). More than ten years later, it is reasonable to ask whether things have actually moved in the right direction.

From a broader continental European perspective, the rise of practising AD is deeply connected to its appearance and prioritisation in EU cultural funding programmes,

especially Creative Europe, starting with its implementation in 2014. The need for such practises emerged as it became clear that the European public was participating in arts culture less and less, despite the overall rise in living standards (Ciancio, 2018b, p. 33-34). Among the various aforementioned EU-funded projects, I will analyse the AD descriptions of ADESTE (ADESTE project, 2014) and Bollo et al.'s (2017) „Study on Audience Development” in more detail. However, European cultural institutions arguably ought to not rely solely on the EU support to reach their audience goals, as EU cultural funding programmes receive a significantly smaller share of the overall budget. For example, Creative Europe operated with merely 0,15% of the overall EU budget and therefore was able fund only 15% of the project applications it received (Ciancio, 2018b, p. 33-34).

ADESTE project (2014b, p. 10) widely uses the term “audience-oriented” when describing a cultural organisation, in touch with their audience’s needs. The audience-centric direction or “audience centrality”, as Bollo et al. (2017) later calls it, ought to be one of the highest aspirations of contemporary cultural organisations, according to the authors of both studies. ADESTE project (2014a) distinguishes, that AD ought to be viewed as an all-encompassing philosophy, understood as a responsibility of every person in the organisation (p. 18), and that AD and its main priority of audience centrality can contribute to the sustainability of the cultural organisation overall. Additionally, this involves employing various other strategies: “this requires organisations to be vision-led; outcome oriented; brand-driven; insight guided; inter-disciplinary; interactively-engaged and personalised” (ibid.). By this definition, AD is a complex, multidisciplinary effort, and demands institutional-wide commitment.

The comprehensive European project, published by Bollo et al. (2017), introduces the concept as a philosophy, a dynamic process, employed by the institutions with the goal of “deepening, strengthening and widening the relationship between cultural institutions and different audiences” (p. 55). Once again, the emphasis on creating mutual relationships with audiences is significant. An important distinction here from the previous definitions is that the authors emphasize that AD is more about developing and progress of cultural organisations themselves, as opposed to influencing or somehow changing their audiences (ibid.). Without this declaration, the chosen wording of AD as terminology indeed presents certain ethical dilemmas. Critics have noticed that there is an ethical question of wording, the choice of using “development” together with “audiences”. In other words, suggesting some kind of lack, a need to “develop” something

or someone. This further implies a position of giving, therefore, a “superior” position of power, belonging to the institution or the artist, and imposing a position of insufficiency or passivity on the audience member without their consent (Matarasso, as cited in Wlazeł, 2025, p. 3; Walmsley, 2018, p. 198). Because of this reason, Maitland (2019, p. 18) shines a light that many indeed prefer using the term “public engagement” instead, as it better conveys the democratic element; use of participation and communication with the audience as partners of equal importance in the artistic process. This further connects with the dilemma of conceptual confusion, surrounding the audience research field as a whole, and presents more questions than answers.

Nevertheless, the European experts (Bollo et al., 2017) strive to introduce a new methodological approach, taking into consideration both Kawashima’s (2000) and earlier European Commission descriptions, the biggest shift being in naming the audience “participants” as opposed to “users” in earlier works. In doing so, the emphasis is placed on ensuring cultural accessibility for various types of audiences, which operates as a significant component of AD (ibid., p. 11). The authors categorise audiences in three ways based on their accessibility level and own perceptions towards cultural participation:

- *“Audience by Habit”*: already existing audiences, participating habitually and often, who face minimal or no barriers to participation;
- *“Audience by Choice”*: audiences with lower levels of participation due to lifestyle choices or financial capacities, but who are not at risk of broader social or cultural exclusion;
- *“Audience by Surprise”*: “hard to reach/indifferent/hostile” audiences, often from marginalised groups, prone to exclusion, whose barriers to participation are most difficult to address, stemming from a combination of causes (ibid., p. 11).

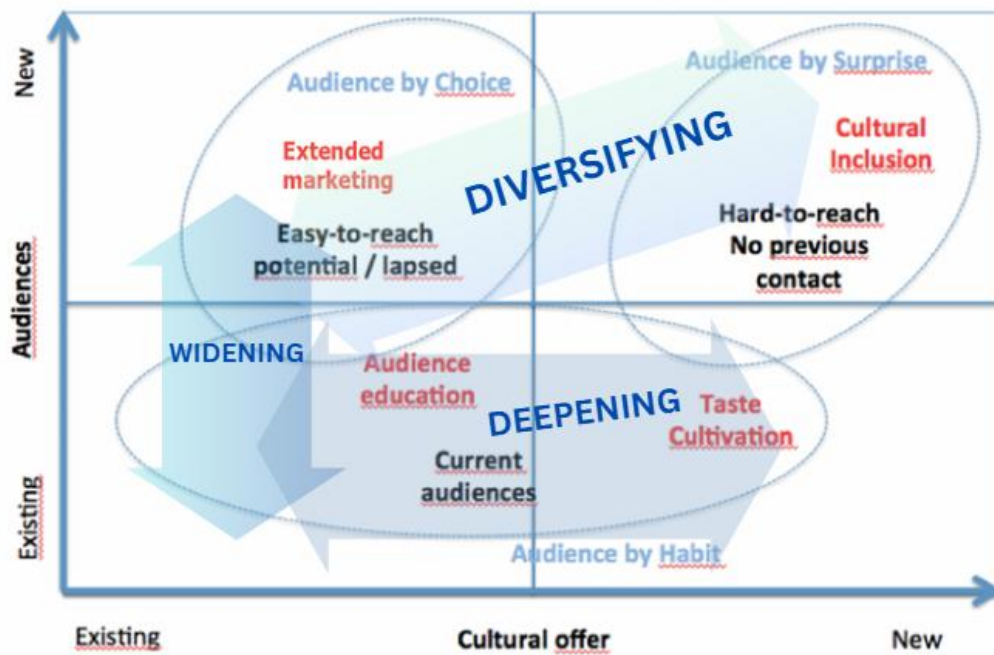


Figure 2: Graph, displaying the newest European methodology for AD practises, based on different audience types and strategies meant to reach and engage them. Source: Bollo, Da Milano, Gariboldi, Torch, et al. (2017, p. 14).

Furthermore, the authors introduce three distinctive AD activity varieties, intended to improve relationships with all three audience types, both existing and potential: *widening* audiences, *deepening* audience relationships, and *diversifying* audiences. The graph also includes an arrow for difference in cultural offers, ranging from usual to new. This indicates that in the European framework, as opposed to earlier descriptions, innovative programming formats and adjusting cultural offers are considered an important part of AD, consequently emphasizing Kawashima’s (2000) “target-led” approach.

As shown in Figure 2, a *Widening* strategy can be used in regard to both regular attenders (“*Audience by Habit*”), attracting more of the same profile participants, as well as part of the potential audience types (“*Audience by Choice*”), who are prospective attendees, whose barriers to participation are therefore easier to overcome. *Deepening* may be used to improve relationships with audiences of the usual type (“*Audience by Habit*”), strengthening their engagement, in addition to introducing them to new cultural offers and new participation possibilities. *Diversifying* processes seek to involve both hard-to-reach, indifferent or hostile audiences (“*Audience by Surprise*”), together with a segment of potential audiences, who might have lower attendance potential, and whose barriers to participation are more difficult to overcome (“*Audience by Choice*”). The aforementioned

categorizations will be used as the primary methodological framework throughout the analysis of the empirical findings of this research, including both the audience typologies and the categorization of different institutional AD strategies.

Besides, Carnelli & Tomanová (2018, p. 394) emphasize three notable motivations and justifications for AD application in every cultural institution: *Responsibility* (especially for publicly funded institutions, who ought to have the priority to give back to society, in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity), *Revenue* (AD strategies may promote financial sustainability, especially in times when public financial support is decreasing), and *Relevance* (the institutional responsibility to work with and for surrounding communities, promote social justice). Righolt (2019) too, stresses the significance of striving for relevance in contemporary cultural organisations, stating that AD “is increasingly about being perceived as relevant by a wider group of people with very different backgrounds and preferences” (p. 159).

In summary, this thesis aligns with the position, that successfully planned and applied holistic AD ought to add value not only to the cultural institutions themselves, but also to the wider society, in which the organisation operates in, empowering individuals and communities, while campaigning to “engage individuals and communities in experiencing, enjoying, participating in and appreciating the arts” (Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024, p. 39). To conclude, aforementioned definitions and explanations of AD processes will be taken into consideration throughout further analysis of the empirical data of this research. Within the framework of this thesis, successful AD consists of the following features: strategic, long-term thinking, encompassing the whole organisation, in order to ensure that the needs of the audiences are met. Additionally, the characteristic of contributing to cultural inclusion of our societies whilst guaranteeing equal access and participation opportunities for different types of audiences, including trying to address various barriers to participation, also of marginalized audiences. Lastly, one of the most important elements of AD might be the activity of mutual relationship building between an institution and its audiences.

2.2. Audience Development or Arts Marketing in Disguise?

One of the dilemmas in the field appear due to the widespread conviction that AD is mainly a new name for a much more usual practise: arts marketing. As both the phenomenon and its terminology of AD has roots in marketing (Maitland, 2019, p. 18), this is understandable, although provides only a portion of a full scope of AD's activities. The question has been widely discussed and yet, remains, whether these are truly distinct concepts, and what separates one from the other. As the final report of the case studies from European cultural institutions demonstrates (Bollo et al., 2017), AD at that time was still mostly understood as a marketing and communication activity by European cultural professionals (p. 16). Some criticising views do share this position about AD, that it heavily relies on marketing, and therefore can be presumed that not a lot of difference between the two concepts exists (Wlazeł, 2021, p. 375). Earlier contributions to the discussion, such as Kawashima's (2000, p. 8), acknowledge the issue of dividing what the definite goal of each process is. She differentiates that arts marketing is primarily employed to focus on existing attenders, while AD is meant to deal with hard-to-reach audiences. In this view, AD does appear simply as a new branch of art's marketing, but only for secluded, unreachable audiences, with the added responsibility of addressing cultural inclusion.

Indeed, many earlier publications on arts marketing enclose descriptions that assume considerable resemblance to what is now understood as audience development. For example, Byrnes (2015)⁵, when debating cultural marketing, public relations, and fundraising, summarizes the processes as a base for "promoting the arts and building what we hope are life-long relationships with our audiences and donors" (p. 424). In a similar vein, in the book about marketing for cultural organisations, Kolb (2013, p. 10) states that an effective marketing campaign consists of collaboration between the artistic department (in charge of the institutional mission) and the marketing department (in charge of understanding the surrounding environment of the institution). Furthermore, the author (ibid.) stresses the importance of recognizing the audience as equals in the artistic process, in that "the cultural organisation must do more than open the door: they must attract, welcome, and communicate with their audience as equals" (p. 15), therefore it can be stated that the audience-centric view likewise exists in marketing practise, and does not exclusively only appear in AD. Besides, the author does use the term of AD in the

⁵ First edition published in 1993.

publication, although sparingly, and describes it simply as “increasing the range, or breadth, of the audience“ (p. 88), including „targeting new segments of the population who are currently not attending“ (ibid.), which is quite a limiting view, similar to that of Kawashima (2000). The author divides between commercial arts organisations and non-profits, in that “this focus on mission before money is a fundamental difference” (Kolb, 2015, p. 88). As can be concluded based on these views, the main difference presents between the goal with which marketing strategies are applied, as cultural institutions within the commercial sector arguably apply marketing tools primarily for financial gain, in comparison to non-profit organizations, in which marketing is employed to further the mission (of which cultural inclusion, for most non-profit cultural organisations, is a part of) of the institution – therefore, the only difference is the goal for which marketing is employed. From this perspective, marketing of a non-profit organisation is indeed indistinguishable from AD.

The confusion in separating the two concepts might additionally deal with the fact that the vocabulary of AD and surrounding practises, especially audience research, is inherently vague and abstract (Kawashima, 2000; Walmsley, as cited in Wlazeł, 2021, p. 1), which might lead to various misunderstandings. This point is brought forth almost in every research paper or publication concerning AD. As Bollo et al. (2017a) highlight, AD continues to confuse even the cultural experts themselves: “[it] remains a foggy concept. Interpretation varies significantly from a sectoral, geographical and institutional point of view” (p. 8) As Tim Baker (2013) wittingly remarks, “there are almost as many definitions of audience development as people working in the field” (p. 3). This occurrence may be explained by the fact that, at least Europe-wide, the terminology is not yet used often enough to become part of everyday vocabulary for cultural institutions, with rare exceptions (e.g. in very big cultural institutions with unrestricted funds), according to an interview with AD expert Agata Etmanowicz (LRT.lt, 2018).

Nonetheless, as above-mentioned, authors additionally remark that despite the fact that the term was born out of arts marketing, it has since evolved into a more “holistic”, widely multidisciplinary field (Bollo, Da Milano, Gariboldi, Torch, et al., 2017, p. 55). Moreover, Righolt (2019) observes, that the discipline did substantially develop since the 2010s, progressing from a method to meet financial goals, to the well-rounded philosophy we perceive it to be today (p. 154). Furthermore, as revealed by several authors (Bollo, et al. 2017; Hagerius, 2024; Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024), the true aspiration of AD must initially be to advance and improve the internal workings of the organisation

and its structure, more than merely influencing audience behaviour: “[AD] is synonymous with leadership and organisational development” (Hagerius, 2024, p. 157).

Considering the scholarly opinions, this thesis adopts the position that the main difference between AD and artistic marketing is the way it is applied – marketing aims to somehow influence the audience behaviour, while AD is primarily concerned with developing the institutional structure and strategy. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the line between these concepts is, at times, barely there – and that successful marketing remains an integral part of AD, arguably, one of the most important parts of the audience-centric practise. However, it cannot act as a sole replacement for the variety of other AD strategies, values, tools, and processes that constitute the whole system.

2.3. Distinguishing Audience Engagement from Audience Development

Similarly to the debate around AD and arts marketing, several questions arise when trying to distinguish between AD and AE. To complicate things further, other terms are used interchangeably, such as “audience outreach”, “audience building”, or “public engagement”.

First of all, the literature indicates, that experts likewise share conflicting opinions about AE – some deem it an inseparable part of AD itself, a second phase, in which AD is responsible for the initial task – *reaching* the audience, and AE for the following – *engaging* the audience, in addition to building a mutual relationship between an audience member and the institution (Bollo et al., 2017, p. 55). According to the EU experts, AE is considered as a “phase made up of heterogeneous and articulated processes, actions and organizational behaviours” (ibid.), which are implemented through various tools and practises, such as employing educational and digital methods, in addition to co-creation, participatory, and collaborative practises, among others. It comprises a more practical approach than an all-encompassing complete philosophy that is AD. Similarly, “Dublin Culture Connects” director, Iseult Byrne, describes AE as a phase that happens after AD succeeds in giving the audience access to the cultural event, physically: “audience development stops once you have got them in the room. Audience engagement is also about what happens in the room and continues after everyone has left” (Byrne, as cited in Maitland, 2019, p. 17). In agreement of Byrne, the selected position, assumed throughout this research, shares the view that AD is about ensuring access, in removing logistical, psychological, and other, barriers, that audiences might experience, before deciding to

participate; while AE is about facilitating individual engagement and enjoyment during the event, together with possible internal audience experiences post-event.

A thorough publication has been issued in the US about engaging, in contrast, to developing, arts audiences, by Alan S. Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin (2011). In the book, both quantitative and qualitative research is conducted into how AE is understood and practised throughout the country. The authors introduce a valuable and concrete AE structure and methodology, which has not previously been attempted. According to the data, through the transformation of the social and digital context within our societies, audiences are likewise changing, together with the expectation of what and how people expect and prefer to engage with art (ibid., p. 8). The experts position AE as a facilitating practise for the audiences to better understand and enjoy an art piece, such as “helping audiences and visitors make meaning from artistic work” (ibid., p. 2), and that the main goal of the practise is “maximizing impact”. Brown & Ratzkin (2011) further describe the process as a “unifying philosophy that brings together marketing, education and artistic programming in common service of maximizing impact”, which does indeed sound very similar to aforementioned descriptions of AD. This demonstrates that the boundary between AD and AE is less concrete as one may think it to be. Whilst being a part of the same audience-centric process, there is some overlap in how both theories are understood and applied. Nonetheless, especially in the context of AE, *meaning-making* and *impact* become crucial terms, as will be discussed next. Furthermore, Brown & Ratzkin introduce a theoretical framework – “The Arc of Engagement” – which illustrates when and in what ways it is possible for the audience to engage with a work of art.

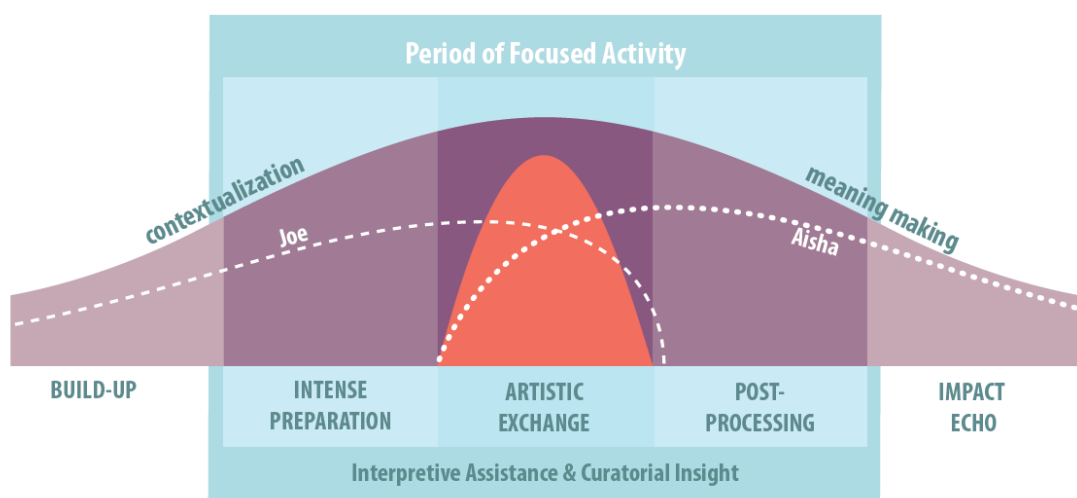


Figure 3: Brown and Ratzkin’s (2011) “Arc of Engagement” (p. 15).

The cultural event or product itself is called the “*artistic exchange*”, which the authors clarify as mutual communication between the artist and the audience, or “the transference of emotion and meaning between the artist and the public” (p. 7). This is the main phase of the cycle that might come most naturally to associate with engagement possibilities, and in some cases, as the authors highlight, it is the only time the audience can or will be engaged, the only point of contact. Consequently, it is marked as the most important part of the arc, although each phase in itself presents a possibility to “deepen understanding and enrich the experience” for the audience (p. 15). The overall cycle of audience experience can be divided in two parts – contextualisation⁶ (pre-event, through feeling of anticipation) and meaning making (post-event, through analysis of the event). According to the authors, there are many different ways for this to be carried out in practise, although the authors emphasize four main categories: engagement via technology (community building, prolonging the artistic experience), collaborations and partnerships, experimentation with setting (place, venue: “artistic experiences begin the minute someone walks through the door”), in addition to participatory engagement (p. 11). Furthermore, Walmsley (2018) introduces a new crucial tool of AE practises for cultural institutions: “*hosting*” (p. 208), the responsibility of caring for their audiences, that cultural organisations ought to pass for their attendees, as opposed to simply operating within the relationship of provider and customer. In comparison, the tools of AD, as envisioned by Bollo et al. (2017, pp. 15-16), include digital practises, place improvements, building capacity, organisational change, partnerships, innovative programming, among others. It becomes apparent that there is significant overlap among the tools and implementation methods meant for each practise.

However, one characteristic of AE that suggests the existence of a distinction of the two terminologies, albeit a slight one, is that AE is highly dependent not only on during which phase or what kind of activity is undertaken, but also what kind of audience the individual is or prefers to be. People have very different ideas and preferences regarding their relationship with art, the extent to which they wish to engage and participate and how they wish to do it. Brown and Ratzkin distinguish 6 typologies of audience: *Readers*, *Critical Reviewers*, *Casual Talkers*, *Technology-based Processors*, *Insight Seekers*, and *Active Learners* (p. 8), ranging in dimension from social to solitary, peer-based to expert-led, active or passive, from community to audience (pp. 26-29). Thus, AE is a highly individual process. Likewise, Walmsley (2018) critiques the need for oversimplified

⁶ AE tools in this stage include pre-program lectures, open rehearsals, video interviews with artists and curators, among others (ibid., p. 15).

segmentation of the audience. The critic claims that there is no “heterogeneous audience” as a singular unit, and this ought to be considered: “audiences are not just characterized by their age, gender, income, drive time, profession or ethnicity. Nor are they distinguished purely by their recent ticket purchases, their artform preference or their propensity for risk” (p. 200). Brown and Ratzkin (2011) recognize this perspective by acknowledging that the AE process must primarily be devoted to the special and highly individual experience of each participant, stating that AE is purely an “attempt to provide a structural framework in which to consider the unique experience of every audience member” (p. 34), and that the individual has the choice in how to approach their own participation to art, suggesting agency (*ibid.*). Based on the reviewed literature, this aspect is the only true distinction among the both definitions – AD aims to tailor the artistic activities mostly by segmenting audiences through demographic characteristics, whilst Brown and Ratzkin’s suggested methodology illustrates an alternative, or, arguably, an additional way to segment the audience – by their preferred mode and intensity of individual engagement. Additionally, by the understanding that will further guide the analysis part of this thesis, both practises can be regarded as a part of the same process – AD is envisioned as a more strategic and long-term process, largely related to the internal development of the organisation, while AE might manifest in different ways, as it is intended for individual engagement of audience member’s own choosing. Therefore, AD ought to be implemented for reach and diversification (getting people informed and *there*), in addition to AE for individual engagement with the arts (facilitating audience’s personal experience and *meaning-making* of the art, *once there*).

	Audience Development (strategic action)	Audience Engagement (facilitation of an individual process)
<i>WHEN?</i>	Mainly pre-event	Mainly during and post-event
<i>HOW?</i>	Strategic, long-term process (internal organisational development)	Separate initiatives, does not necessarily have to be long-term, can be temporary, one-time, or continuous (facilitation of audience experience)
<i>TO WHOM?</i>	Aimed at targeted audience groups	Aimed at individual audience members
<i>MAIN GOAL</i>	Access to art	Facilitation of understanding and enjoyment of art
<i>TOOLS</i>	Education, marketing, place factor, digital, organisational development and building internal capacity, active participation and co-creation, programming, use of data	Digital, marketing, experimentation with setting (place factor), active participation and co-creation, programming, “ <i>hosting</i> ”
<i>AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION</i>	Mainly by demographic data (age, income, gender, education)	By individual preference of engagement level (social to solitary, peer-based to expert-led, active or passive)
<i>ORIGINS</i>	Democratisation of culture: ensuring access	Cultural democracy: Participatory, co-creation approaches

Table 1: Distinction between Audience Development and Audience Engagement. Created by the author, based on Bollo et al. (2017), Brown and Ratzkin (2011), Maitland (2019) and Walmsley (2018).

Yet, even with valuable contributions of several researchers, it becomes clear that the defining of the AD and AE vocabulary proves to be a challenge in itself, which in turn produces unnecessary misunderstandings and slows any possible progress (Bollo et al., 2017a; Wlazeł, 2021). As Wlazeł (2021) states, “the myriad of complex definitions of audience development and audience engagement [...] cause confusion in the arts practice, cultural policies, and academic discussions” (p. 375). It is evident that difficulty arises when trying to differentiate AD and AE, not even carried out by practitioners themselves, consequently, the terminologies are being used interchangeably (ibid., p. 385). For example, Bob Harlow, in his book “The Road to Results: effective practises for building arts audiences” (2014), uses “audience building”, “audience development” (or “developing audiences”) and “audience engagement” as synonyms, providing no distinction between them. From the practises introduced later in the book it can be concluded that his definition is more consistent with the viewpoints of AD and not necessarily AE. Similarly, whilst discussing participatory approaches in culture, Bonet & Négrier (2018)

apply terminologies of audience engagement and cultural participation interchangeably, consequently conceptualising them as part of one continuous process.

A further consideration lies in what truly defines an engaged cultural experience. Wlazel (2021) argues further that when all the multi-dimensional emotional, intellectual, sensory and cognitive processes of experiencing art are taken into consideration, there is no such thing as a passive audience member: “intellectual form of meaning-making, also facilitated by arts organisations, may have a role but is not a prerequisite for the quality of engagement with art” (p. 381). This might have already been proven by Kawashima’s earlier research (2000), where the author discovered that even those audience groups who did not particularly understand, enjoy, or appreciate the performance, such as the so-called “rejectors”, were nonetheless engaged, as they were analysing the performance days later, therefore, it must have left an impact (p. 66). In support of this approach, Walmsley (2021) declares that “audiences are not generally passive” (p. 199), and that engagement ought to be better understood simply as a “psychological process or state” (Brodie et al., as cited in Walmsley, 2021, p. 302), not necessarily requiring additional external stimuli.

Finally, it can be concluded that AE is closely connected to the appearance of participatory practises in arts and mainly involves activities during and after the event itself has taken place, in addition to being primarily connected to the personal processes of every audience member individually. It is an important, although not a mandatory element, for engagement and connection with art to take place – AE can help facilitate the preparation of the audience, enrich the experience, and extend the impact of it, although it is not a prerequisite for the engagement to happen in the first place. Thus, while AD encompasses the dynamic and strategic point of understanding the needs of the audience and planning of how to accomplish satisfying them, AE is one of the practical parts of practising AD in a sustainable and complete way.

2.4. Understanding Audiences and Cultural Participation

AD and AE cannot be meaningfully addressed without initially taking into consideration the existing knowledge about cultural audiences and their own perception of their experiences. There are plenty of publications which focus on why and how people choose to participate and enjoy the arts – the following section concentrates on contributions, most directly relevant to the research questions and the theoretical framework of this thesis.

In the context of classical arts, it is widely recognised that the typical audience member profile can be described as predominantly white, middle class, middle-aged or older, in addition to being more educated and affluent than the general population (Kolb, as cited in Pitts, 2016, p. 22). Beyond this, even the current audiences are progressively shrinking in size (ibid.). In Europe, the situation does not seem more hopeful – some society groups (for example, men, those with limited formal education, rural populations) are at risk for participating in arts less (Maitland, 2024, p. 33). Moreover, numerous marginalized communities are at risk for exclusion from cultural activities, such as migrants and minorities (Salgado & Patuzzi, 2022), people with physical disabilities (Leahy & Ferri, 2022), people suffering from mental illnesses (Baxter et al., 2022), senior citizens (Jakubowska et al., 2015), among others.

Audience-centric strategies, such as AD and AE, might help address these inequalities in cultural participation, although it cannot solve the cause of underlying societal issues by itself (Maitland, 2024, p. 38). The recognition of positive social impact of art has placed significant expectations on cultural organisations to address social exclusion and other pressing social issues. Moreover, while a cultural organisation ought to strive to be socially responsible, doing so in practice is far from straightforward (Kawashima, 2000, p. 20). Cultural organisations cannot and should not be forced to solve such a complex problem alone, it must be a joint effort of a wider societal scale, requiring a “coordinated ecosystem” (Maitland, 2024, p. 38). Besides, research indicates that declining cultural participation is in part a consequence of deteriorating support for cultivating demand of arts, starting with art education, otherwise known for “giving people the skills and knowledge they need to have encounters with works of art” (Zakaras & Lowell, 2008, p. xv). Overall, literature indicates that while cultural organisations can try to facilitate cultural inclusion, meaningful results require shared responsibility across society at large.

The starting point is to recognize that, while the view of contemporary researchers emphasize that audiences are an integral part of the artistic process, and that they ultimately “co-create value” (Baker, 2013, p. 8; O’Reilly et al., 2016, p. 10), according to Walmsley (2021), this was not always the case. The area of audience research is internally fragmented and divided across different disciplines, partly because, for much of history, audiences were not held in a sufficiently high regard and were therefore perhaps considered insignificant to the artistic process. The focus was on the artist (Walmsley, 2021, pp. 299-301). This is where the roots of the dilemma regarding artist-centricity versus audience-centricity can be traced.

Within contemporary cultural institutions, a common assumption is that audience-centricity leads to oversimplification of the work of art to increase its popularity. To address this, several points must be considered. First of all, the discipline of the arts is highly subjective – what constitutes excellence in other fields, cannot so easily be translated to the arts. Tomanová (2018) asserts that although high technical ability might attribute to quality in arts, it does not, however, guarantee it (p. 73). In the words of McMaster, relevance is central to assessing the quality of art: “Culture can only be excellent when it is relevant, and thus nothing can be excellent without reflecting the society which produces and experiences it” (McMaster, as cited in Tomanová, 2018, p. 74). Nonetheless, this raises the question of whether only participatory art ought to be considered as valuable (Tomanová, 2018, pp. 75-76). This could lead to discarding and undervaluing other forms of art. Furthermore, such reasoning may pose a threat to artistic legitimacy: if anyone can be considered an artist, what then becomes of the professional artist? It is worth mentioning that art, primarily, is a skill like any other, and a particular set of talent or physical predisposition is needed to master it, as in any profession: “artists and other cultural professionals must be considered as highly qualified professionals just as any other specialist workers in any area of the public domain” (ibid., p. 78).

Thus, what might be the answer in balancing audience-centricity together with artistic excellence? Tomanová (ibid.) argues that while experts are competent in judging technical expertise of artists, audience members are likewise capable to assess the appeal of an experience and how it expands, benefits or changes their understanding of reality (ibid., p. 74). Artists ought to be trusted to create excellent art, while audiences should have the agency to decide the relevance of it for themselves, and how they wish to engage with it (ibid.). Furthermore, according to Handeland (2024), these two ideas might not be conflicting at all, and can be implemented in harmony:

It was about holding two thoughts in your head at the same time: on one hand, the artistic and cultural mission, and on the other hand, a clear understanding of what drives cultural participation in different groups, as well as a willingness to adapt form and content to the cultural segments' premises (p. 29)

This is further confirmed by Carnelli (2018, p. 216), who reinforces that the possibility of such institution, which is simultaneously artistically-led and audience-centric, can indeed exist. As claimed by Rasmussen & Righolt (2024, p. 15), achieving such delicate balance within the artistic programme often ensures success for both the institution and

its intended target audience group. The most relevant and effective approach lies in the integration of both elements rather than the prioritisation of one over the other.

Furthermore, in order to better understand cultural participation, it is necessary to consider potential motivating factors, in addition to possible barriers, preventing audiences from engaging in culture. Editors K. Burland & S. Pitts (2016) compile a collection of findings on various audience experiences, regarding live music performances. People who attend concerts, regardless of genre, have different motivations to do so, varying from practical to social, from personal preferences to even feeling a sense of moral obligation (Pitts, 2016, p. 32). The social element of sharing the same experience with other attendees plays a significant role in the audiences' decision to attend, together with being close to the performers (or possibility of interaction with them), in addition to being immersed in the experience (Radbourne et al., 2016, p. 67). A distinctive atmosphere of the venue likewise influences the enjoyment of the event positively (ibid., p. 61). Other motives for attending concerts include satisfying various needs, such as emotional (for relaxation, excitement, escapism), personal (for education, discovery, feeling of nostalgia), social (interaction, sharing, entertainment, common sense of humanity), among others (South Bank Centre Audience Research, as cited in Baker, 2013, p. 26). This implies that an art event does not exist merely as a separate, isolated entity or phenomena (*art for art's sake*), disconnected from society, but also as a shared experience that fulfils social, in addition to various other, individual human needs. In the case of music festivals especially, Karlsen (2016, pp. 115-126) mentions a unique element of participation – the chance of an attendee facing “strong experiences with music”, or SEM in short. Festival goers often feel a strong sense of belonging and community, even if the feeling is fleeting (ibid, p. 127). Researchers found that live music performances are considered as a more meaningful experience by audiences, when compared to listening to music in other ways, due to many specific factors of live performance, although situational factors were found to be the most influential for the engagement of an individual audience member, in comparison to other, such as social or personal, factors (Burland & Pitts, 2016b, p. 176). Consequently, it can be determined that social and personal emotional levels are crucial to the audience experience of the art event. Additionally, audiences perceive participation as entering a social experience, in addition to an artistic one. Furthermore, evidence indicates that situational and environmental factors of the venue itself have significant power to positively influence the audience experience, therefore this ought to be considered more by cultural institutions when organising the art events.

However, in recent times, with the rise of digitalization, technology and social media usage, the ways in which people engage in culture has changed severely (Righolt, 2018, p. 283). Social media might promote creativity, communication, and more proactive audience participation. This has resulted in the introduction of the terminology of the so-called “prosumer”, a blend of an audience member, who additionally becomes the producer, as opposed to a mere “consumer”, through cultural consumption (Bianchini & Borchi, 2018, p. 46). It is through these societal changes that participatory approaches and terminologies of “audience empowerment” and “power sharing” between the artists and the audience (Bonet & Négrier, 2018, p. 19) appear, although more prevalent still in theatre and modern dance fields, as shown by the European research project, “Be specACTive!” (Bonet et al., 2018). This reflects the more ambitious end of the audience engagement spectrum – the authors label it “active engagement”, meant to discuss and reconsider the artist-centricity in arts. This stance might at the same time cause controversy (Bonet & Négrier, 2018, p. 13), as active engagement, or „active spectatorship” practises go a step further than engaging audiences, into empowering them to be decision-makers throughout the artistic process (Bonet et al., 2018, pp. 24-25). According to the participatory paradigm, AD and AE are used more as collaborative and co-creation tools, based on the bottom-up approach, as compared to the usual top-down tactic, in which the institution decides, and the audience follows (ibid., p. 27). Within this approach, Dupin-Meynard (2018b) characterizes a full range of audience participation possibilities, starting from the traditional audience presence (“watching is participating”), to active audience (in which the audience members provide feedback, debate, comment online), all the way to the audience being a performer or a director, in which, for example, the audience directs the artists or actors (p. 113). According to Walmsley (2018), introducing these practices of participation and co-creation in the artistic or institutional process proves to provide mutual benefits, both for the audience member, as it deepens the impact of AE, but also for the artist, as it can offer valuable unique perspectives (p. 208).

To conclude, an art event does not exist in a vacuum. Various situational and even logistical factors, such as the space, in which the event is taking place, can influence the audience’s experience and have a greater impact on the level and intensity of engagement than might appear at first glance. For this reason, cultural institutions ought to prioritize not only the artistic quality of an art piece itself, but also ensure that the surrounding influencing factors, such as the concert venue and its atmosphere, and even details, such

as seating arrangements, are considered to be as accommodating and facilitating as possible for different types of audiences.

2.5. Lithuanian Context

As discussed previously, knowledge, strategies and application of AD and AE practises is very context dependent and quite fragmented throughout the whole European continent. The situation appears to be similarly challenging in Lithuania.

To begin with, the context of Lithuania regarding its cultural policy needs to be established. Lithuania regained its independence and democracy in 1990 – after decades of Soviet occupation and a long, hard-fought struggle to reclaim sovereignty. At present, through the implementation of the national strategy “Lithuania 2030” by the Lithuanian Parliament in 2012, the country has followed ambitious plans for “creative empowerment of each and every member of society” (Rimkutė, 2024b, p. 2). In 2018, the first official, separate policy document for culture, “Culture 2030”, has been implemented, with one of the main goals being the process of decentralisation of funding for culture with the “arm’s-length” culture policy model, although despite efforts to do so, the cultural sector remains rather dependent on state funding (Lithuanian Government, 2019, as cited in Rimkutė, 2024a, p. 22, author’s translation⁷).

Within the cultural policy, the primary strategic aim is to employ “culture as a driver of sustainable society and wellbeing” (LR vyriausybė, as cited in Rimkutė, 2024a, p. 23). Out of the three main directions, each including various objectives, the second objective of the II strategic direction is focused on promoting participation in cultural life, creative empowerment of citizens, in addition to aiming to ensure “equal access to high quality and diverse forms of cultural expression for all social groups” (Objective 2.2, as cited in Rimkutė, 2024a, p. 23). Therefore, AD and AE strategies ought to be prioritized within Lithuanian cultural institutions, as they provide the means to meet the objectives of one of the three main goals of the current Lithuanian cultural policy.

One of the ways to improve cultural participation statistics in any context is through understanding of the existing situation. Lithuanian Council for Culture, on the behalf of

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Lithuanian into English presented in this thesis are the author’s own.

Lithuanian Ministry of Culture, has been conducting surveys about cultural participation trends of Lithuanian residents and their satisfaction with cultural services every three years, starting from 2014. The newest survey was published in 2023, in which 3300 citizens were surveyed (Lietuvos Kultūros Taryba et al., 2023, p. 2). The report additionally had a goal of analysing “the links between social aspects and cultural engagement, the reasons for and barriers to participating in cultural life” (ibid. p. 6). By sociodemographic context, people of ages 15 to 70 and older were surveyed, segmented by their education level, ethnicity, career, if they were a student, in retirement or with any disabilities, their family situation (married, cohabiting, single, divorced or widowed), how many people there are in the household, are there any children up to 15 years of age, income per one household member, association with the culture sector, and living location. Overall, the sociodemographic groups were divided quite equally within the survey respondents. The report considers three main aspects of cultural participation (Lithuanian Council for Culture et al., 2023, p. 7): engaging in cultural activities as a creator (independent from the level of engagement, can be for self-expression), social participation and volunteering (in cultural organisations or clubs), and consumption of cultural services and goods (as an attendee). The 8 spheres of art identified in the Lithuanian report are as follows: performing arts; visual arts, crafts, architecture, and design; museums and cultural heritage; archives; literature and press; public libraries; cinema and video art; radio, television and digital. Each section of the report includes the accessibility rating of that art category, both in a physical and digital sense (ibid.).

The report found that almost all residents of Lithuania consume some kind of cultural products (99,3%), most popular cultural activities being film watching and video art, reading books and newspapers, and attending performing arts. When discussing factors, which positively affect cultural participation, the survey revealed that women, people with higher education, office workers, pupils and students, cultural workers, higher income earners are more likely to more often participate in culture. Almost the same groups rate the quality and accessibility of the cultural products better, with the addition of younger people (ibid., p. 259). This aligns with broader audience participation research patterns around the world.

The main barriers to participation remain the same as previous years: lack of time, interest, and high costs (ibid., p. 40). Another often mentioned barrier is lack of information. The survey expresses that the primary reason could be an overwhelming flow of information, for example, in social media (ibid., p. 317). Out of all spheres of

culture, the area of performing arts stays the most inaccessible, with 32% of respondents reporting cost as the biggest obstacle (ibid., p. 322). Regarding motivational factors for cultural participation, the biggest indicator seems to be the so-called “favourable cultural context”, aligned with Bourdieu’s “cultural capital” – for Lithuanians, influencing factors are considered to be the respondent’s attendance at concerts, theatres, and museums during childhood and adolescence, participation in artistic activities during childhood and adolescence, among others (ibid., p. 359). The findings, as expected, indicate that cultural capital is “influenced by a person’s immediate environment” and other aspects, such as their social standing (ibid., p. 365).

Moreover, the report offers segmentation of Lithuanian society based on their cultural consumption patterns:

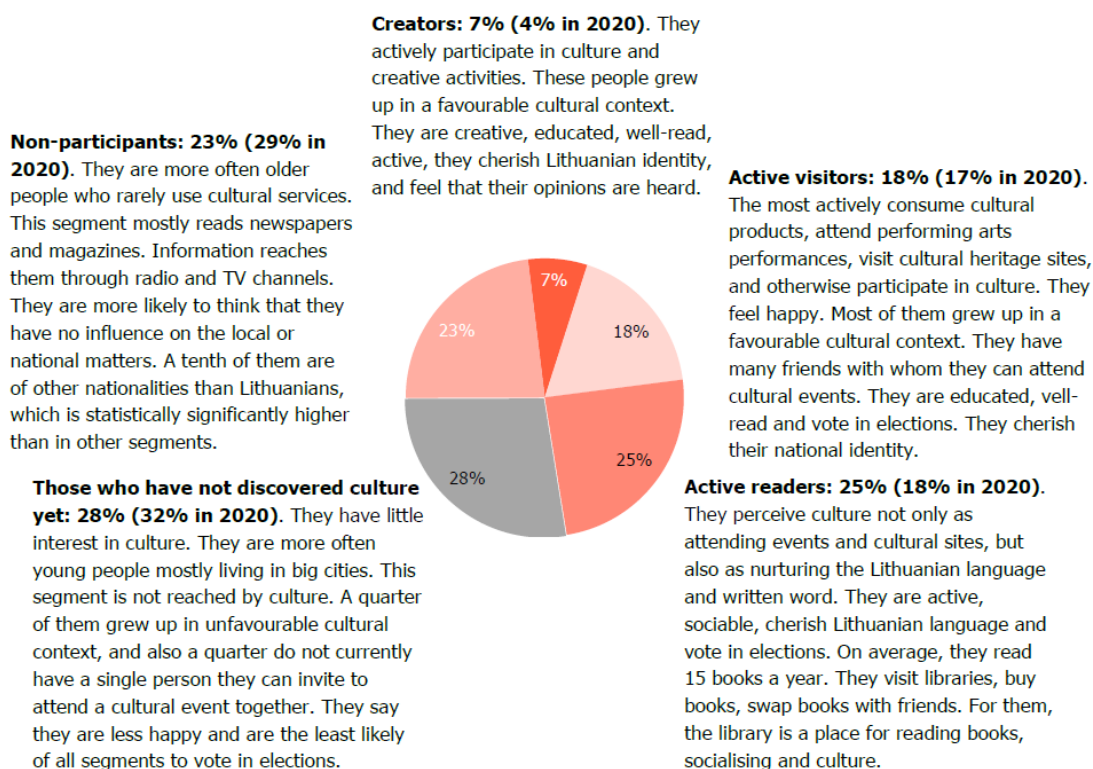


Figure 4: Segmentation of Lithuanian residents based on their cultural engagement and consumption habits in 2023. Source: Lithuanian Council for Culture, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, et al., 2023, p. 53

As seen in Figure 4, marginalized groups of Lithuanian society, such as seniors, immigrants, young people growing up in unfavourable contexts, are the audience segments least likely to engage with culture. Therefore, targeted cultural inclusion through AD initiatives is crucial to facilitate cultural participation for audience groups at risk.

Nevertheless, the gap between ideological philosophies and AD activities in practise raises certain questions. Upon closer examination of the activities of Lithuanian theatres, it is evident that attention to the audience, declared at the theoretical level is only partially reflected within the practical activities of the theatres (Staniškytė, 2013, p. 141). Literature finds that in Lithuanian theatres, educating future audiences is prioritised the most, although such existing initiatives are understood in a rather narrow sense and lack strategic direction (ibid.). In relation to audience research, merely electronic voluntary feedback or comments on social media are utilised, therefore theatres in Lithuania, both public and private, understand their audiences in a very narrow way (ibid., p. 139). Furthermore, as the research for Kaunas 2022 (European Capital of Culture) showed, most cultural organisations in the city had done little or no audience research beyond basic post-event questionnaires, apart from a couple extraordinary cases (Impact Foundation, 2022, p. 23). This highlights the need for prioritization of audience research in every Lithuanian cultural institution. Still, as Staniškytė (personal communication, January 26, 2026) later explains, Kaunas being the ECoC 2022 has played a considerable role in advancing the conceptual understanding and practical implementation of audience development strategies within the city's and the surrounding region's cultural institutions.

Moreover, Citvarienė (2015) explains AD in an instrumental way, explaining its appearance as “the need to expand audiences as a way to attract new financial resources” (ibid., p. 241), however, additionally mentions the importance of the community aspect, clarifying it as the “creation of services for local communities” (ibid., p. 273), in addition to highlighting the significance of understanding audience needs and expectations. The author reaffirms the value of audience research, which, especially considering potential audiences, is conducted too rarely (ibid., p. 263). Furthermore, Citvarienė stresses the importance of committing to audience segmentation and identifying specific target groups, as wanting to appeal to and attract “everyone”, as the galleries currently tend to operate, is not a productive AD strategy (ibid., p. 264). Biggest barriers to successful AD implementation, identified by the author, are namely lack of clear strategic AD direction, instrumental approach to partnerships, or even a feeling of competition among the

institutions, lack of digital skills, and the intuitive assumption that the institution already knows their audiences, rather than relying on research (ibid.).

Other organisations, such as St. Christopher's Chamber Orchestra from Vilnius have taken part in European funded projects, dedicated to building and engaging audiences. As Bollo et al. (2017) found, the orchestra has had success within the field whilst using such tools as catering the concerts to different audience profiles, analysing audience habits and identifying target audience groups (focusing on children, young adults up to 25, classical music enthusiasts), involving orchestra musicians in discussions about audiences to reinforce the philosophy that their performances should be audience-centred, increasing focus on using digital tools, social media and video campaigns for marketing and cross-genre experimentation in programming choices. Arguably the most fruitful approach – and what the orchestra is best known for – is performing concerts in unconventional or unexpected venues. This method may also be employed to reach the notoriously difficult target group (especially for an ensemble, primarily performing classical music) of young adults. As the “New Audiences” evaluation report states, “the best way to attract young audiences between 18 and 35 was to perform in places they already know and love” (p. 13). Nevertheless, there is the danger of overdependence on European funding as the primary driver for AD and AE practises.

In other instances, efforts to diversify programming recently have included collaborations between orchestras and popular Lithuanian singers. A notable example is Monika Liu's concerts with the orchestra of the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre, an event that was widely recognized and well-received for its high musical quality, featuring both professional orchestral arrangements and a strong vocal performance. Additionally, this doubled as great material for social media visibility, as it received abundant attention from the audience. However, it is debatable whether the increased interest has benefited the orchestra's reputation to the same extent as it has that of the singer. While many other pop artists have followed this example, such copies of collaborations risk compromising artistic integrity and often suffer from lower-quality orchestral arrangements of pop songs. As for other tools of AD of the LNOBT⁸, these include newsletters, their own magazine “Bravissimo” (physical and digital), special operas and programmes for children and even babies (Music Information Centre Lithuania, 2023), backstage tours of the opera premises, cycle of interviews with professionals about current productions (“Let's talk Opera and Ballet”) which are additionally broadcasted online, and organising

⁸ Abbreviation for Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre.

ballet lessons for adults. Furthermore, the website is quite attractive for a potential visitor and offers information both in Lithuanian and in English. Another prominent aspect is LNOBT's active presence on social media, especially TikTok, which stands out in the Lithuanian cultural field, where such digital engagement is still relatively rare. Thus, this reflects the aforementioned statements that AD tactics are much easier implemented at bigger institutions with more stable financial conditions (LRT.lt, 2018).

Additionally, within research of the younger generation of cultural professionals, plenty master theses on AD (less so on the topic AE) have been published in recent years (Balevičiūtė & Sokolovaitė, 2018), including findings on regional culture centres (Kačinskaitė, 2021), performance art (Končius, 2022), the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre (Šeduikis, 2020), modern dance theatres (Gudvalytė, 2020), the cinema field (Lekavičiūtė, 2025; Maziliauskaitė, 2026); contemporary classical music (Kažimėkaitė, 2013); art galleries (Sabeckytė, 2025) and performing arts in Lithuanian resort towns (Žvikaitė, 2022); among others.

To conclude, tangible progress is apparent, as Lithuanian cultural organisations are interested and actively participating in European funded audience development projects, a dedicated group of scholars have been concentrating their attention towards researching audience development, and a plentiful number of Master's theses in recent years signal that the next generation of cultural professionals demonstrate genuine interest in the field. However, within practical processes, audience development and engagement remains overlooked compared to broader European standards, while literature on audience engagement remains virtually non-existent and requires urgent attention.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the case of the cultural institution and its activities, chosen for this research, will be explained in detail, in addition to describing research approaches, data collection and analysis methods. Furthermore, limitations and ethical considerations, apparent and important for the entire research process will be brought to light.

3.1. Case of “M. K. Čiurlionis House” in Vilnius

“M. K. Čiurlionis House” or, originally, “*M. K. Čiurlionio Namai*”, is a memorial cultural centre in Lithuania’s capital city, Vilnius, dedicated to the celebrated Lithuanian artist, composer, painter, musician and cultural activist, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875-1911). Established by the Čiurlionis Association (“*Čiurlionio Draugija*”) in 1995, since then it also operates as its headquarters (Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija, 2023). The centre is a budgetary institution and belongs to the municipality of Vilnius. It is situated in Vilnius old town, in a historical building where the artist himself lived and worked during the years of 1907-1908. The centre houses a handful of spacious rooms, one of them accommodating a small concert hall with a grand piano, fitting up to 50 people, which can be connected with another room to host more people. One of the rooms, which the composer himself rented, is used as an exhibition room for the artist, while the spaces of the other rooms are used for art exhibitions, changing with the programme, and other artistic, cultural and educational activities (Čiurlionio Namai, 2026). With most other concert halls in the city being of a grander, more formal, scale, this venue offers an intimate and welcoming atmosphere, unique for a classical art institution, as entering the space feels almost like stepping into a preserved moment of the past.

Although the institution describes itself as a memorial cultural centre, based on the programming selection, ČH⁹ arguably additionally fits into the multidisciplinary cultural centre category. Besides chamber music concerts and exhibitions, the centre hosts educational programmes (including lectures with musical interludes), international conferences, theatre performances, cultural evenings, book presentations, talks with artistic professionals from various fields, film screenings, discussion panels and sightseeing tours in Vilnius. In addition, they publish books, CDs, DVDs, music recordings, sheet music albums, produce films and other publications. Events and exhibitions are organised not only at ČH, but also in various other venues nationally and internationally. The centre has held countless concerts by prominent musicians not only from Lithuania, but from all over Europe, as well as North and South America and Japan (Gaidauskienė, 2017, p. 78). Furthermore, since 2009, the centre has been organizing an increasing number of contemporary music concerts (ibid, p. 95). They also participate in local and international festivals and frequently take part in “Culture Night”, a one-night festival in Vilnius of various art installations, taking place in public spaces all over the

⁹ Hereinafter: abbreviation for „M. K. Čiurlionis House“

city (Kultūros Naktis, 2020). During the period of the years 2018-2020, ČH hosted a community choir, which actively performed in concerts. Moreover, the centre's activity additionally includes extensive partnership activities, not only with the surrounding cultural sector, but also with schools and universities, Lithuanian Union of People with Disabilities, associations of minorities, and others. Among other projects, ČH is a key partner in the M. K. Čiurlionis Route, a national cultural itinerary connecting seven cities associated with the artist's life and work (Čiurlionio Kelias, 2019), during which they were leading the programming choices. Besides, they are one of the partners in the EU funded project "European Music Trails", partnering with institutions from Germany and Norway. They additionally take part in the artistic virtual reality project "Angely takais", where Čiurlionis' paintings come alive with the help of technology.

The institution is known for supporting young artists and musicians, providing them a venue to perform (Gaidauskienė, 2017, p. 103). Their reputation for openness and approachability was one of the reasons why it was chosen for this research. This was further confirmed by the fact that out of all the staff working in the centre (currently there are 5 employees in creative roles), all 5 of them were able to dedicate around 1.5 hours each of their time for semi-structured interviews for this research, including the director. An additional reason for selecting ČH lies in the social, community-based element, articulated in the institution's mission statement. Incorporating social objectives suggests that the institution's aims extend beyond artistic quality, to include other forms of participation opportunities for audiences:

"Our aim is to make M. K. Čiurlionis House a modern social centre¹⁰, as well as a place for informal learning, education and leisure culture, including the accumulation, dissemination and realisation of ideas, developing lifelong learning opportunities and cultivating the spiritual culture of society. We seek this by organising and carrying out cultural, educational, social, leisure and other events, among them educational and socio-cultural programmes" (Čiurlionio Namai, 2026)

As a memorial centre dedicated to Čiurlionis, the institution operates within integral institutional boundaries that distinguish it from standard cultural centres. Maintaining relevance and distinctiveness presents an additional challenge, given that Čiurlionis, as a historical figure, functions as a significant symbol of Lithuanian national identity and cultural heritage. This is likewise reflected in the number of cultural institutions and

¹⁰ Author's note: The existing English translation is overly literal; "community centre" may be a more accurate equivalent in this context.

initiatives dedicated to his legacy throughout the country. In addition to ČH in Vilnius, several others exist, such as the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art in Kaunas, M. K. Čiurlionis Memorial House-Museum in Druskininkai, the National M. K. Čiurlionis School of Art in Vilnius. Among other types of institutions, the Čiurlionis Association in Vilnius, M.K. Čiurlionis Charity and Support Foundation and Čiurlionis String Quartet exist.

The year 2025 marked the 150th anniversary of Čiurlionis' birth – an occasion that was celebrated widely across Lithuania and beyond through a broad programme of engaging and innovative cultural events, in which ČH and its director took on an important role. The date has additionally been inscribed in the UNESCO calendar of commemorative anniversaries.

Overall, the nature, scope and the variety of activities, carried out by the M. K. Čiurlionis House, is distinctive and inspiring, considering the size of the institution. Consequently, it was selected as the focus of this research. Perhaps it is best expressed in the words of cultural historian Nida Gaidauskienė: “The events organized here cover not only Čiurlionis and the realities of his era, but also contemporary cultural issues” (2017, p. 75).

3.2. Research Approach

For this thesis, a research method of a qualitative case study was chosen, as the main aim is to understand how audience development and audience engagement are understood institutionally and practically, in addition to how they are subsequently applied in practise by the staff of the M. K. Čiurlionis House, a memorial cultural centre in Vilnius, Lithuania. Furthermore, the thesis intends to consider areas for improvement and suggest future possibilities. This can only be accomplished through comprehensive research of the organisation, both while studying internal strategic documents, and recognizing individual opinions and philosophies of the cultural professionals working at the centre.

The primary method to conceptualise the AD strategy and activities in this thesis and its research project was taken as described in the European research project on Audience Development, “How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations”, by Bollo et al. (2017), considering the authors' definitions of the process as an institution-wide, holistic process of “deepening, strengthening and widening the relationship between cultural institutions and different audiences” (p. 55), taking into consideration the

determined audience typologies (*audience by Habit, audience by Choice, audience by Surprise*), in addition to the different categories of possible AD tools. Further material from this research project was additionally used to create questionnaires for the semi-structured interviews for this thesis, based on the “Self-Assessment Tool” published within the “Guide Part I – Tools of Audience Development: a Practical Guide for Cultural Operators” (pp. 12-14). Likewise, Brown and Ratzkin’s (2011) concept of AE being a “guiding philosophy in the creation and delivery of arts experiences in which the paramount concern is maximizing impact on the participant” (p. 5), and additional explaining concepts, such as “Arc of Engagement” (p. 7) were used as a foundation to understand and separate the AE concept from AD, for the creation of the questionnaires.

Among finding the answers to the research questions of this thesis, through in-depth analysis of one organisation, whilst discussing AD and AE concepts and surrounding perceptions, the process might encourage further dialogue or reflection of these concepts within the organisation, which might result in additional value creation of the research process.

3.3. Data Collection

To accomplish the aforementioned aims, the empirical research for this thesis consisted of semi-structured interviews with the cultural professionals working at the institution. As AD and AE processes are widely referred to as encompassing the whole organisation and not only certain departments, I aimed to interview as many staff of the institution as possible. Altogether, the institution employs 10 staff members, almost all working part time. Out of 5 creative professionals¹¹ at the institution, responsible for artistic projects and programming choices, all 5 of them were able to dedicate time to answer my questions either face-to-face at the institution itself in Vilnius, online, or in writing. 3 interviews were conducted face to face in ČH, lasting around 1,5 hours. The director of the institution, project coordinator for concerts, and project coordinator for culture evenings were interviewed face-to-face. 1 interview, also lasting around 1,5 hours, was conducted through *Microsoft Teams*, with the project coordinator for exhibitions. Project coordinator for educational activities answered the questionnaire in writing. Interviews were conducted in the time period of December 2025 to February 2026. In addition to the

¹¹ Other staff at the institution work in administrative or housekeeping roles.

standard format semi-structured interviews, project coordination and administration staff provided me with internal documents needed for this project.

Upon the first contact with the institution, explanation of the research, its reasons, goals and a preliminary plan was provided to potential interviewees. Before the interviews took place, the interviewees were sent consent forms and introduced to their rights, that their participation in this research process is voluntary and that they can withdraw from it at any point, if they feel the need to, without any consequences. All interviews were conducted in Lithuanian, which is the native language of both the participants and the researcher. This was a deliberate choice made to ensure convenience for the interviewees, in addition to receiving more natural and insightful answers to the questions. Although the participants did not request anonymity, due to the nature of in-depth, qualitative research within a small institution, I nevertheless chose to secure the confidentiality of the respondents' answers by not publicly stating their names. The respondents will therefore be referenced as Respondent 1 to Respondent 5.

Before the interviews, the participants consented to being voice recorded. A separate voice recorder was used for recordings, apart from the interview on *Microsoft Teams*, where the conversation was recorded with the provided online recording service. Throughout the interviews, I additionally wrote down notes by hand on paper.

Furthermore, a free-format consultation through *Zoom* was held with a teatrologist and a Lithuanian expert of AD, Prof. Dr. Jurgita Staniškytė, Dean of the Faculty of Arts of Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, who very kindly dedicated her time to answer questions about the Lithuanian AD processes and practises within the Lithuanian context.

In addition to the interviews, secondary data, such as internal documents (yearly plans, final reports), ČH's website and social media (*Facebook* and *Instagram*) were analysed to paint a thorough picture of the institution's inner and outer mechanisms.

The questions of the interviews and written questionnaires were organised in three main themes: audiences, current strategy and processes, and future in practise.

3.4. Data Analysis

While collecting and researching existing literature for AD and AE strategies and their application within cultural organisations along with surrounding research fields, several main concepts and dilemmas appeared in texts of various different authors across countries. I was interested in whether these themes would also reveal themselves in my research, and almost all of them, indeed, did, as will be seen in the findings chapter of this thesis.

Most significant dilemmas appear to be the questions abovementioned in the literature review section, namely: the conceptual confusion surrounding both concepts, the question of balancing artistic excellence and audience-centricity, and AD as a tool of either democratisation of culture or cultural democracy, as well as AD as cultivation of society's need for art, among others.

I transcribed the voice recordings in Lithuanian and then translated them into English. Later, keeping in mind the main topics within the field, thematic analysis of the data was conducted, as some themes, as I predicted, repeated throughout most of the interviews.

The selected parts of the interview that are later referenced in the thesis were then sent to the interviewees for final confirmation.

3.5. Limitations and Reflections

A limitation of this study is the absence of primary audience research, which would have enabled triangulation of the findings of the semi-structured interviews. However, given the scope of this research within the timeframe of a MA study programme, such an undertaking would have been too extensive to complete. Nonetheless, this reveals a further research opportunity in the area: in-depth analysis of both internal workings and processes of AD and AE institutionally, in addition to audience perceptions and effect on them, surrounding the aforesaid processes.

Secondly, the creation of a comprehensive strategic plan for the institution's future implementation would have been of value too, however, it fell beyond the scope of this study and the practical limits of this research project. Nevertheless, reflections and possibilities for future directions for ČH will be provided in the analysis chapter of this thesis.

Lastly, my own understandings and musings on many different terminologies mentioned in this thesis, such as AD and AE itself, has gradually changed throughout the thesis writing process.

3.6. Critical Reflections on the Research Process

It is important to note that my positionality as an arts professional concerns this research. Coming from a background in classical violin performance, I feel strong appreciation for the value and benefit of art towards our societies, classical music and its institutions included. I realize, however, that my personal education and experience may introduce a certain amount of privilege and a degree of bias.

In addition, my personal connection with the case study institution is not completely detached. As a violin student, I had the opportunity to perform a school graduation concert at ČH and was therefore among the young musicians who were supported by the institution. This position provides me with easier access into the institution's perspectives, but it might additionally shape my perspective in ways that differ from that of an external researcher or a general audience member.

Throughout the research process, I have tried to remain aware of these influences, my automatic assumptions, and to approach the analysis with as much critical reflection as possible.

4. AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITHIN M. K. ČIURLIONIS HOUSE

In this chapter, I will report findings from analysing the openly available secondary data of M. K. Čiurlionis House, such as their social media websites and channels, internal strategic documents and plans, in addition to examining results from investigating primary data, acquired from the semi-structured interviews with the staff at the institution.

Thematically, I will be using the suggested framework of AD in the Final Report of Bollo et al. (2017, p. 19) using their categorizations of AD tools, namely, categorizing my own research findings through the already established 8 categories by the European experts, namely: the place factor, innovative use of digital resources, building capacity (internal empowerment), active participation and co-creation, innovative programming,

organisational change, use of data (data analysis), and collaboration and partnerships (networking).

Although Bollo et al. (ibid.) do mention active participation, engagement and co-creation as one of the tools of AD, it can also be separated, as discussed before, into a separate AE strategy, therefore, for this part, AE practises for a certain event or concert, Brown and Ratzkin's (2011) definition and their "Arc of Engagement", with the phases of *contextualisation* (pre-event) and *meaning-making* (post-event), offering possibilities to provide "Interpretive Assistance and Curatorial Insight", or opportunities to deepen engagement for the audiences, will be used.

In addition to more widely discussed appearances of categories of AD and AE strategies and tools, some topics and themes appeared that were only mentioned by Lithuanian scholars, but not apparent wider universally. These themes likewise became visible throughout the interviews too. Therefore, we can assume that these processes are unique to the Lithuanian cultural landscape, and in some cases only in the cultural scene of the city of Vilnius.

4.1. Conceptual Dilemmas within Audience Development in Lithuania

As already mentioned before, conceptual ambiguity is a crucial problem within the field of AD internationally. The issue becomes even more complex when trying to apply said concepts to different linguistic and cultural contexts.

This became apparent to me as the researcher, already from a practical point of view, whilst preparing the interview questions. As the interviews and the questionnaires for them were presented in Lithuanian, I translated Audience Development as "*Auditorijų Plėtra*", which is the most prevalent terminology used in research and scientific literature in Lithuanian. In addition, to explain and describe the phenomenon further, I have used "*žiūrovų pritraukimas*" as a synonym for AD and "*žiūrovų įtraukimas*" to explain AE. However, in some cases, different translations are used, such as "*Auditorijų vystymas*", as in the case of Kaunas ECoC 2022 (Kaunas2022.eu, 2022), which already presents unclarity. What became evident as the research progressed, is the challenge of trying to apply context-dependent concepts in a template-like manner from one context to the other. Regarding translation to Lithuanian, the word "*publika*" [the public] is the most

commonly used word for audiences in a natural context. “*Auditorijos*” is not a regularly used word in the spoken language when describing people and is much more frequently used to describe a room, an “auditorium”. Therefore, “*Auditorijų plėtra*” operates as a so-called “loan translation” [*vertinys*] in this specific form of translation and is used only to a limited extent in the Lithuanian cultural field, primarily by researchers rather than practitioners, as the translation does not sound natural in everyday professional usage. Same fate befalls Audience Engagement, as it is translated as “*Auditorijų Įsitraukimas*”, although it does sound more natural in Lithuanian than its AD counterpart, the grammatical reflexive particle “*si*” noting agency – emphasizing that audiences are the ones doing the engaging, it is not only something imposed on them from inside.

This is consistent with the theme of not only conceptual confusion, which already notoriously surrounds AD, but also a further difficulty whilst translating the phenomena into different languages, as terminologies carry their own distinctive cultural connotations, even when translated. More specifically, this refers to AD being a UK-born practise, deeply embedded in the country’s cultural policy framework. While it is well-rooted and widely understood there, this might not translate as fluently, both literally and figuratively, to other cultural contexts. It is not that Europe lags behind in promoting equal cultural participation – it might be that within the multilingual European context, the specific strict vocabulary of AD and its conceptual confusion makes it challenging to understand and follow. This introduces a further question of what happens when certain terminologies are only used in research and academic contexts and are differently named in practise. Participatory approaches and audience-centric techniques are widely used across the Lithuanian cultural field, yet such practises are not largely called by the name of Audience Development. Cultural participation, art engagement, public engagement in art, participatory art approaches, accessibility – are all terminologies utilized significantly more frequently are more easily comprehended within European contexts, whilst a similar pattern can be observed in Lithuania. Respondents from the interviews note that calling AD “*žiūrovų įtraukimas*” (Respondent 2) might be more fitting, and that “it’s always important to clarify what a particular person means when using the term audience development” (Respondent 1), as it’s not used commonly in day-to-day activities, and appears to be more common within administrative or project-based tasks, such as grant applications, although even then, it is unclear if the word “*plėtra*” [development] is specifically used (Respondent 1). Consequently, throughout the research process, I came to a pressing question: if a concept introduces more challenges than solutions, to what

extent is it still relevant? At least in Lithuanian, it might be beneficial to rethink the concept and, especially, its naming and translation. A more natural sounding translation might be “*publikos pritraukimas*” for AD or “*žiūrovų įtraukimas*” for AE, although further research is needed.

As for how the professionals at M. K. Čiurlionis House understand these concepts, most of the respondents are familiar with the concept of attracting audiences to the institution, as in widening the audience circle. Explainably, “*plėtra*”, comes from a verb “*plėsti*” [to expand, widen]:

In my opinion, it's about working with the audience – how to attract people from as many different fields, backgrounds, as possible. [...] This is not an unfamiliar concept to me. [...] I'm not sure if it's specifically the word “development” but we definitely discuss such topics when organising events. – Respondent 1

Several respondents state that the concept is familiar to them, although not expressed in the exact wording of “*auditorijų plėtra*”. Furthermore, the role of audiences and their needs are discussed throughout the creative project process and its implementation. However, when asked whose responsibility in the institution it is to implement AD and its processes, some staff noted, that it might only be the responsibility of the communications or marketing departments: “[the person responsible is the] advertising professional. Their goal is to advertise, develop a marketing plan and strategy, and thereby attract visitors.” (Respondent 5). This advances the dilemma that the terminology used to describe *auditorijų plėtra* influenced respondents’ understanding of the concept, and that alternative formulations and explanations of it – such as ensuring cultural inclusion or practising accessibility – might have produced different responses.

Moreover, the interviews exhibited that staff at ČH understand audience segmentation (categorisations into groups such as age, social group, local or international audiences, family, student segments), and event’s intent for a specific audience group is also noted as an important part of AD. However, segmentation is most commonly used in the context of grant and project funding applications, both municipal and national, where institutions are required to identify target groups or audience segments for each proposed project. Whether this is equivalent to genuine audience development, or whether certain audience segments are systematically prioritised over others, can be discussed further. For example, it is logical to assume that Vilnius municipal funding prioritizes projects, meant to engage the city residents of Vilnius.

Overall, in ČH, AD is seen as a process of attracting audiences to the institution, or, by the European expert definition, widening and diversifying audience participation, including audiences from diverse spheres of life and backgrounds, and therefore seen as more closely related to the concepts of marketing.

When discussing audience engagement, and “deepening” of the audience experience, however, the staff were much more likely to share and discuss its societal value and meaning. This suggests that the term “audience engagement” might be more familiar and intuitively understood as a wider, all-encompassing, audience-centric practise, as opposed to institutional-centric marketing, understood within “audience development”.

4.2. Internal Processes: Strategy, Organisational Structure, Professional Values

According to scholars, AD is much more an internal strategic process, meant to develop organisations from within, enhancing their leadership and organisational capacity, rather than simply attempting to influence audience behaviour (Bollo et al., 2017; Hagerius, 2024; Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024). Subsequently, in this chapter, I will present findings about how the organisation’s strategic direction and its artistic professionals influence audience-based decisions.

M. K. Čiurlionis House is a unique cultural organisation, firstly in its niche genre – it is a memorial cultural centre by description, although by the variety of activities, it may additionally be defined as a multidisciplinary cultural centre.

Secondly, it is a small scale, municipally funded institution. As reported by the interviewees, the municipality does not put any pressure on inside processes or programming direction. However, although the municipality is responsible for providing staff salaries and covers venue costs, an additional part of the budget comes from the intrinsic artistic motivations of the professionals working at the centre, as they apply for additional funding, both through national grant applications, in addition to seeking private sponsorships. Yet, staff members emphasise that financial gain is not considered a primary indicator of success for the institution. Instead, greater importance is identified through intrinsic individual artistic values and the shared creative motivations of the organisation’s staff: “At our organization, we do more than is required of us [...]. That’s

because all of our creative staff are involved in creating and implementing projects themselves” (Respondent 4).

Unsurprisingly, the central figure in the strategic direction of the institution and the single most famous Lithuanian cultural symbol of all time, M. K. Čiurlionis, influences the artistic direction, the audience strategy, and the institutional approaches overall. This positioning presents both opportunities and challenges simultaneously: it might additionally manifest in oversaturation of usage of the composer’s name throughout various events across many institutions. Although the knowledge of Čiurlionis is widespread throughout Lithuania and beyond, this strong recognition can sometimes become a disadvantage for cultural institutions in his name, as audiences may experience a form of resistance caused by perceived exposure, or “cultural fatigue”, mentioned by some of the respondents. This question is especially relevant in 2026, a year following Čiurlionis’ 150th anniversary celebratory year of his birth, which spanned a multitude of events and projects all over Lithuania and abroad.

4.2.1. Mission(s), Vision(s), and Internal Values

The staff themselves position the institution primarily as a centre for discovery and societal learning of Čiurlionis art, in addition to being a “culture centre for modern society” (Respondent 4), and a “a vibrant, creative space” (Respondent 1). The intrinsic institutional values of Čiurlionis as a central figure operates together with more collaboration-based and community-based values: “One of our missions is to create a comfortable environment for people to create, listen, and experience” (Respondent 4).

The house and home element of ČH is highly emphasized and was mentioned by all employees as an important part of the vision and primary aims of the institution – the place being a house, or even a home (in Lithuanian, “*namai*” carries the meaning of both “house” and “home”) – a community space, where “lively interactions” happen, therefore where the institution can operate as a meeting place for communities: “Yes, this is a home; we always emphasize the word *home*. [...] When you’re here, you welcome people as if they were in your own home” (Respondent 4). As will be later analysed, this *home* characteristic becomes a key element throughout analysing AE practises in ČH: it becomes part of *hosting* the audiences in a cultural institution, a practise introduced by Walmsley (2018, p. 208).

Furthermore, the value of “humanizing Čiurlionis” was also identified as a key theme within the area of improving cultural accessibility: “One of the missions of ČH is to humanize Čiurlionis. To bring him down from some imaginary pedestal. To make him accessible to everyone. [However], not necessarily understood by everyone in the same way” (Respondent 4). This conveys audience-centric principles in several ways: first, employees recognize the need and aim to shape the institution into a *house* and a *home*, primarily a place for people, a place for communication, creation and human connection. Secondly, they identify the necessity to make the institution comfortable and accessible for all audiences.

This can be attributed in part due to the staff’s personal understandings of the value of culture and art and what it should be used for, in addition to their personal professional experiences. All 5 staff members who work with artistic project creation and implementation (the director of the institution included) are practising artists or academics, with extensive professional experience in various cultural fields or roles, such as combining artistic and managerial work, or artistic, educational and academic professions. All positions at ČH are part-time (one staff member working quarter-time), therefore, the professionals work multiple roles in arts and/or education additionally to the position in ČH. 4 out of 5 staff have worked at the organization for more than 8 years. At ČH itself, professional roles overlap, the staff undertake multiple responsibilities, not restricted to one job description as they are multifunctional and variety-based. The staff are all involved in AD processes for their own projects, as they oversee the creation and implementation of the projects from start to finish. The projects feel quite personal to the workers, one person is responsible for the whole process throughout its conception, financing, programming, from initial planning through to final evaluations. This enables a personal relationship with each project, therefore, with the potential audiences too, as the creation process is continuous and not fragmented in sharing responsibility between different departments.

Likewise, each staff member’s individual professional values influence their work and the type of the events they organise, this in turn impacts their target audiences, as illustrated by Respondent 2: “Since I love children, the projects I initiate are usually aimed at children and children’s centers”. This is an interesting phenomenon in ČH, as the staff members reflect on their possibilities for considerably free artistic expression, being able to pursue artistic ideas that matter to them, without micromanaging or strict institutional constraints. Consequently, developing creative projects not out of obligation, but out of

sincere motivation. In terms of audience practise, this presents both opportunities, such as more sincere engagement opportunities for some audience groups, however, the possibility of challenging aspects also rises, as without overarching institutional audience goals, this might result in prioritising some audience segments over others.

4.2.2. Organisational Structure and Working Environment in a Small Cultural Organisation

M. K. Čiurlionis House is led by a small group of artistic practitioners, which presents the institution with both opportunities and limitations.

First of all, in a small team, it is far easier to foster a sense of community and healthy teamwork than it might be in bigger institutions. All the respondents mention good organisational structure, good working atmosphere, the so-called “microclimate”, a feeling of community among the staff, in addition to positive communication styles and relationship to the director (upper management), that consequently helps their motivation and commitment to the job: “We have an agreement among colleagues that I can call if I need anything, and they can always call me, I’ll always answer” (Respondent 4). The feeling of support and community at ČH is often mentioned among the answers of the respondents. Organisational structure becomes particularly crucial when considering its effect on enabling successful long-term and sustainable implementation of AD and AE practices. This is a truly commendable aspect that can clearly be seen in ČH, as the organisation is run by a small, tight-knit team. This creates a sense of community and creative freedom between the employees. As Bollo et al. (2017) assert, organisational change, such as making the institution more horizontal and teamwork-based, has a considerable positive effect on advancing AD practises (p. 50). Other authors likewise mention the impact of more flexible, collaboration-based organisational hierarchy and leadership styles: “In order to enable change, hierarchies should be flat and leadership must be distributed” (Walmsley, 2018, p. 206).

Furthermore, in a smaller organisation with less bureaucracy processes and easier communication between the team members, the decision-making time, especially in situations, requiring special attention and quick decisions, is much faster, compared to what it might be in larger institutions: “The dynamics are different, the pace is different. We can resolve a critical situation within two hours” (Respondent 4). For example, on one occasion, a free-of-charge concert was scheduled to begin on a Saturday at 15:00;

however, by 14:30, approximately twice as many people, as the hall could have accommodated, had already arrived. In response, the staff present made a quick decision to organise a second concert later that same day, immediately following the first performance, in order to accommodate audience members who were unable to attend the first concert. This example shows how organisational flexibility can lead to better ability to cater to audience needs even in most unexpected situations.

As will be discussed further later in the following chapters, while smaller institutions are presented with numerous challenges throughout AD implementation processes, nevertheless, such a distinctive environment presents prospects for growth too.

4.2.3. Audience Development and Audience Engagement Strategies at M. K. Čiurlionis House

AD is widely described by scholars as primarily a strategic process requiring long-term thinking, within which concrete audience-centric aims are named. To analyse how AD processes work within a specific organisation, its strategic focus when it comes to audiences must be analysed.

Two main phases in the life cycle of M. K. Čiurlionis House can be distinguished: the first phase, starting since its establishment by the “Čiurlionis Association” in 1995, and the current one, starting with the change of leadership in appointing the new director in 2014. As observations reveal, in the last 12 years, the organisation had undertaken considerable efforts to become more audience-centric than it ever was in the first 20 years of its existence: “The previous director had cultivated a mystical, sacred image of Čiurlionis. As if the intention was for ČH to be a gathering place for the *chosen ones*, the select few” (Respondent 3). As evidenced by personal opinions of the members of the personnel, there had not been a lot of deliberate publicising or marketing of the institution’s events to the broader public previously – ČH was treated as an exclusive cultural club, in which only the select few and their circle had access to. This is a stark contrast to the current mission and values of the institution, in which the cultural centre aims to be a vibrant cultural centre for communities, inspiration and creation, balancing together audience-centric goals at the same time as maintaining artistic excellence:

Over the past decade or so, we have been gradually moving toward making Čiurlionis accessible to everyone, while striving to maintain high [artistic] standards. [...] We strive

to attract as diverse an audience as possible, but we want people to know that here they can expect something truly exceptional. Not popular culture, but rather culture of the highest calibre, yet tailored to a wide range of audiences. – Respondent 3

The respondent emphasizes that artistic excellence is equally as important as audience goals. As is evident from the literature, this is the greatest challenge in audience-oriented work: balancing these two levels. The relationship between these two themes in more detail is discussed later in this chapter.

On the one hand, ČH abides by more intuitive audience practise when it comes to AD, thereby, the institution may benefit from more strategic clarity. This echoes the earlier findings by Bollo et al. (2017), on the strategical aspect of AD: “When organisations were too small, it was more difficult to articulate strategies and organisational structure” (p. 17). On the other hand, my findings indicate that nevertheless, some audience practices are implemented particularly effectively, even when developed informally, as they stem from audience-centred values, which all the staff collectively share, therefore, the practises appeared not from a need to “tick a box” in a project application form, but more from a value-based direction of the institution, striving to make Čiurlionis accessible to the broader public.

This manifests likewise through the fact that the institution had changed from being almost unknowable to the general public in its first twenty years of existence, to a much more balanced institution now. One of the first challenges that was encountered during the early years throughout the new strategic phase of ČH was the dilemma of visibility and recognizability within the Lithuanian cultural map: “[ČH before] was completely unknown as an institution, as a place where people could walk in off the street to see an exhibition, a concert, an event, or [participate in] a cultural evening” (Respondent 3). The question was further complicated by the already established concern of the specificity of an institution in Čiurlionis’ name. The difficulty to form a distinctive position and institutional branding comes from the fact that a considerable number of institutions are already associated with Čiurlionis: “I suppose that right up until 2022–2023, people were very surprised to learn that there is a house of Čiurlionis in Vilnius as well” (Respondent 3). Consequently, the first five years of the new phase in the life cycle of the institution consisted of the priority direction being the aim to gain “recognizability”. This was sought to be achieved through intensive organisation of numerous concerts, exhibition cycles and other events, including collaboration with various artists, who in turn could bring their

own audiences to ČH. Debatably, certain elements of AD practise were already established in that stage. Thus, in the second phase of the institution's existence, significantly greater openness and efforts to reach and engage diverse audiences can be observed.

Regarding the current strategy, Respondent 3 noted that one of the key advantages is that Čiurlionis is "inherently a figure with a very broad range of expressions". This allows the institution to additionally explore various means of expression in its events, there are no limitations in sticking to one genre of art. Currently, practises, such as strategic positioning for Thursday as a concert day (as there are certainly fewer cultural events on weekdays in Vilnius, compared to such number on the weekends), or the introduction of seasonally-programmed events (concert cycles for summer and for the winter holiday season) demonstrate a commendable strategic move. Additionally, the format of paid concerts was established as a well before-considered strategic step, as it introduced the institution to new audiences – those who search for information about events and concert tickets through commercial ticketing platforms (*bilietai.lt*). Specifically tailored marketing tools to reach tourists was initiated as well, through collaboration with hotels and tourist information centres in Vilnius.

In the most recent phase, the institution focuses most on the current listener, on their existing audience – this can be used as a foundation for establishing a future audience strategy, as deepening AE practises targeted to current audiences can enrich their experience further and improve the relationship between them and the institution.

Whilst discussing hindrances to AD practises, the staff often mention the problem of remaining visible among the "information overload" (Respondent 5), in addition to financial barriers: "exponential growth requires funds" (Respondent 4), although not everyone agrees the consideration of finances as the most pressing question:

It's no use complaining about finances, because I personally feel that the budget for a concert venue of a certain size has to match its scale. Our hall has its own limits. However, finances aren't a deal-breaker for us, everything is in balance. – Respondent 3

By far the biggest difficulties for audience work within ČH ought to be the venue's physical limitations, in addition to those, stemming from small human resource capacity. This represents a meaningful distinction, that the strategies that bigger institutions are able to experiment with, might not work in this specific field and the institution of this

size: “We would need to request extra staff, because we don’t have enough working hours here to cover everything” (Respondent 2). There is no straightforward solution to these limitations, as the same conditions which enable specific strengths of ČH (the intimate, cozy atmosphere, or the ability of each member of the personnel to personally welcome the audience into the institution by themselves), present challenges in other areas. It additionally invites the question whether it is worth to addressing these specific strategic questions and then risk losing the unique AE practises that ČH already possesses, which are examined more in detail later in this chapter.

Moreover, from the municipal funding perspective, the financial opportunities and the staff capacities are structured in balance, as the ČH’s concert hall seats only around 50 people. This raises the question of whether further investment is feasible in a small space such as this, and whether the municipality might be willing to support projects aimed at expanding the institution, both physically and in terms of its human resources:

Maybe we ought to suggest to the municipality that we need twice as many staff positions, and then we’d organise events all over the city. I don’t know if the city would go for that idea. – Respondent 3

This would have to include an elaborate plan to completely change the foundation of the organisation.

Additionally, possible psychological barriers were mentioned as a question to consider while trying to attract new, diverse types of audiences. Possibly, a psychological dilemma from the audience’s side appears, regarding already existing audiences:

People who are accustomed to seeing our institution as only a venue for exhibitions, concerts, and cultural events, are unable, psychologically speaking, to accept us as anything else. Even when it seems that you’re offering something very modern, very new, very interactive. To our natural audience, this is completely uninteresting and completely foreign; they don’t really respond to it. And it’s extremely difficult to break into a new audience segment. – Respondent 3

This challenge might be connected to another recurring aspect, often reported in AD literature – balancing the needs of both the existing audiences, in addition to at the same time trying to branch out to uncharted territories – creating offerings for new audience types. Consequently, tensions may arise between traditional, loyal audiences, and the new programming formats that the institution may experiment with, in trying to reach new

audience segments (Bollo, 2017b, p. 9). How, then, does an institution balance this fine line of keeping both types of audiences satisfied? European experts (ibid.) suggest that this becomes possible only by implementation of clear segmentation and prioritization of certain audience groups, after researching their needs and values. It is not plausible to target all the possible societal groups simultaneously; prioritization must be employed (ibid.).

4.2.4. Future Directions

The institution dedicates this year to Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė, a writer, social activist and suffragist, as it is the 140th anniversary year of her birth. This presents the opportunity for the institution to break out of the strict limitations of a memorial centre, dedicated to a single cultural figure, whilst introducing new programming choices. This year's cycle of concerts will be focused on women composers, in which women's perspectives will be central. Another important strategic direction this year is placed on developing partnerships with other institutions in Vilnius further, both from artistic and other sectors, thereby becoming "integrated in the city's cultural panorama" (Respondent 3).

Staff identified several potential target audience groups for this year: for example, more focus on teachers as a community within ČH, in addition to families with children as a way to educate the future audiences, "to install an appreciation for art and foster it in young residents" (Respondent 2), consequently while positioning Saturday as a family day at ČH.

Arguably, future strategic direction at this stage ought to not primarily focus on further widening and diversifying audiences, as these efforts have already been undertaken and have encountered structural limitations that are difficult to change. Besides, the institution presents significant strengths and organically appearing advantages for audience practice that should be preserved rather than fundamentally altered. The suggestion might be focused on engaging existing audiences more deeply, therefore enabling more meaningful mutual relationships between the audience and the institution. The findings reveal that groups forming the unit of primary audiences of ČH, can be considered to be teachers, students, cultural professionals, including young artists, whom the institution supports. As Bollo et al. (2017b, p. 8) likewise found, there are occurrences in some cultural organisations, where the primary audience is the cultural professionals themselves, and

not the general public. This not to say that ČH should once again become an “exclusive club“ only for certain members, however, the institution ought to benefit from more specific, strategic focus on certain audiences, as Bollo et al.’s (ibid.) analysis of “*Künstlerhaus*” shows: “They realised that their main audience was the artists themselves, not the wider community they wanted to meet. They started focusing on their key assets (artists as members) and on a specific segment (families), developing tailored programmes.” (ibid., p. 8). The direction going forward may be placed on researching those specific target audience needs and hindering barriers, in the format of focus group interviews or anonymous online forms and then planning new programming and partnership strategies accordingly. Additionally, another significant strategic direction may include stating measurable aims to be met; both qualitative, and quantitative. For example, measurable indicators ought to include the percentage of new visitors belonging to a specific target group relative to the total number of new audiences, an increase in the proportion of that target group within the overall audience number, and a rise in the frequency of their visits over time. Additionally, individual audience members ought to be given outputs for their comments and opinions to provide feedback; doing audience research before and after an event on the same focus group might be beneficial.

Furthermore, from a marketing standpoint, a recommendation might include to lean in more into the existing positioning of the organisation and its venue as a *home* – with the help of slogans such as “Come visit Čiurlionis” (“*Ateik į svečius pas Čiurlionį*”), positioning the institution more as a communal space to be for all of Vilnius residents, in addition to attending cultural events.

4.3. Audiences of M. K. Čiurlionis House

Whilst no official audience research within the institution has been carried out, information about audiences and overall tendencies are acquired through registration forms for free-of-charge events, social media statistics, and, most importantly, personal staff experiences, which is a unique feature of ČH. Within the institution, the staff share a rare personal bond and connection with their audiences – this stems from specific characteristics of a small institutional structure, and abovementioned lack of human resources, which was previously framed as a challenging aspect, however, which also presents interesting outcomes for new ways of getting to know audiences. Since the working team is small and each professional works with their projects from start to finish,

one other aspect of working at ČH appears, namely, that every creative professional, including the director, is present and welcoming the audiences themselves, when their organised event is taking place. Therefore, it becomes evident that the staff share deep knowledge and close connections to the audience members – consequently, they are welcomed into the venue as if they were guests, coming to visit a friend’s house.

This might present an informal method of audience research – the involvement of creative staff themselves, as they act as *hosts* during events – an approach that helps avoid the risk of overgeneralized audience segmentation by pigeonholing people into specific categories, merely based on their demographic information, as Walmsley (2018, p. 200) warns. Although appearing intuitively, this practise, unique to the small team and the small physical space aspect of ČH, stands out as an interesting perspective to qualitative audience research that bigger institutions might also learn from, as in this case, each person is firstly recognized as an individual, and not simply a *customer*, while giving them time to express themselves and share their experience. This is an already documented audience-centric “listening strategy” practise, employed by other small capacity cultural organisations, named by Bollo et al. (2017b, p. 9):

“With small resources and without a solid quantitative analysis tool, [the staff] activated intense qualitative strategies to be in constant relationship with their audiences. Part of this “listening” strategy led to the decision to rotate staff responsibilities, each member working for a while at the front desk, to become further aware of audience needs.”

Naturally, as the institutional activities span concerts, exhibitions, cultural evenings, educational activities and film evenings, the audience profile is quite different within each of the activity groups. Certainly, there might be some mix up between those groups, as, for example, someone might come to listen to a concert and then get interested in an exhibition, or see a flyer for a culture evening, and then deviate from their usual participation patterns. Secondly, when ČH organises events in other institutions, or outside in public spaces around Vilnius, as they often do, the chance of unusual, hard-to-reach audiences grows.

As respondents note, currently there is no static, unchanging audience unit at ČH. All three audience types, audiences *by habit*, *by choice*, and *by surprise*, can be met at the institution:

We attract all three types of audiences. There are enthusiasts who come to concerts, and those who choose based on a particular performer. [...] [In addition to], people who may have ended up here by chance, who might feel a bit out of place at first, for example, if a friend brings them along. We've had various cases of this type. – Respondent 2

As reported, in the first stage of the life cycle of the institution (before 2014), the audiences were mostly the aging population, established cultural professionals, or people with some connection to Čiurlionis' work. With the democratisation efforts of the second institutional phase, with the change in management and diversification of programming (through the establishment of cinema evenings, participation in such festivals as "Museum Night" and "Culture Night", in addition to digitalisation initiatives and establishment of new partnerships), the typical participant at ČN house is becoming younger and more diverse:

Previously, I used to see more older people who would come specifically to ČN. For them, it was a familiar gathering place, with refreshments at exhibition openings, offering the cozy atmosphere of a home. That "homey atmosphere" hasn't disappeared now either, but we're also collaborating with younger creators, composers, and performers. This has attracted the younger generation, which is very exciting because things are truly changing. Many young, energetic people, who are interested in Čiurlionis, are coming – and they are interested in their own, different way, not just in the traditional sense. – Respondent 2

This is confirmed by everyone at the institution:

There was a felt perception that, in a sense, we were a "clichéd" venue that certain people would 'clichédly' go to. Right up until 2020, our audience – our viewers, listeners, and visitors – were truly of a respected age, following the old tradition of "idolizing" Čiurlionis. Then, around the time of COVID, things started to change. On the one hand, of course, during COVID we experimented a lot with digital initiatives. During COVID, we were actually very active. – Respondent 3

Overall, as the demographic information from social media statistics show, women, as is in line with the broader culture participation trends in Lithuania, make up the bigger part of the ČH audiences. Recently, through participation in the city festivals and introducing theatrical elements to concerts and sightseeing tours, the notoriously hard-to-reach audience type, teenagers, started to show considerable interest (Respondent 5).

Throughout last year, 2025, during the joined efforts of most cultural institutions in Lithuania and large national funding support for Čiurlionis 150th anniversary cultural programme, where ČH played a big part in, tourists from abroad held a special place as a new important segment of the audience for ČH.

Furthermore, logistical factors, such as seasonal, and even a specific weekday and time, in which a certain event takes place, can influence audience formation. Seasonal particularities are reported as being especially important to take into consideration when planning events in Lithuania, as the country experiences significant variations in temperature and weather conditions between seasons: snow, ice, cold temperatures in winter, and heat in summer. For example, young people are more likely to attend concerts in summer than in other seasons, especially when they are free-of-charge (Respondent 4). Among all the weekdays, Thursday concerts are also particularly popular among younger audiences.

Regarding the consideration of deciding factors which attract audiences to their institution, staff emphasize high artistically inspired events, word-of-mouth recommendations from other people, and even value-based factors, connected to the unique quality of mysticism and reflection, which Čiurlionis' art possesses:

From personal experience, I can honestly say that ČN is visited by people who love, respect, and admire Čiurlionis' art, and very often – those seeking peace, comfort, depth, spiritual growth, who seek these things through the life and work of his, which is why they come to visit us. – Respondent 5

Main barriers within the audience strategy are perceived to be difficulties with marketing and communicating the activities to both current and potential audiences, in addition to the absolute digitalisation cultural marketing: for example, to reach young people, an extensive digital marketing strategy is needed, as they are not anymore interested in physical posters or platforms where free events are publicized (Respondent 5). Besides, the professionals notice preconceived notions about professional art, wherein people think they won't be allowed to not like it, or to express disappointment with their experience. As Respondent 4 states:

But it's okay if they don't like it – not everything has to appeal to everyone. It's the same with music – Čiurlionis also has this prejudice. People are afraid they won't like the art and then they'll look foolish in front of others, because everyone else supposedly likes it.

Respondent 4 emphasizes that the most important thing is to allow people to decide for themselves whether they like an art piece or not. Not everyone has to like or enjoy the art of Čiurlionis, but it is important that people have the opportunity and access to see his art, if they wish, and then decide for themselves, what their opinion of the art is. It is giving the people the power to decide what they like for themselves, which is in line with Brown and Ratzkin's (2011) emphasis on the individual aspect of audience engagement.

However, this might also present a risk of placing too much trust in staff's own assumptions about their audience, and in turn, treating it as a substitute for official research, as is present in other Lithuanian cultural institutions (Citvarienė, 2015, p. 263). Qualitative personal observations can be a helpful tool to compile information about existing audiences; however, this type of audience research might additionally benefit from official qualitative or statistic data whilst combining both research methods.

4.3.1. Target Audiences: Past, Present, Future

Throughout the research process, I wanted to analyse the target audience groups of ČN, as understanding audiences is a foundational goal of any AD or AE practise. The respondents were asked how systematically target audience segments and their needs are considered when planning a new event or project.

As already mentioned in the previous subsection of this chapter, in ČH, AD strategy as a whole is approached intuitively, based on personal and genuine experiences and values of the staff themselves. Here, however, a much more multifaceted picture of the strategic processes can be revealed. Through selected events, such as those of an educational type, this process is done strategically, in the case of prioritizing educational activities for children in socially vulnerable environments and daycare centres. Similarly, in the case of cinema evenings, where the target audience is clearly stated as art cinema enthusiasts, as the offerings of screening niche, non-commercial films in Vilnius are not widely available:

When we started our film screenings, we were very clear that we wanted to create a space in the film world for people interested in art cinema. There isn't really much art cinema in Vilnius. Film theatres show new films, but there's an endless treasure trove of older films that many people don't know about or have forgotten and would like to remember.

Turns out, there are actually a lot of people like that. We always have a full house, and people are very interested in them. – Respondent 3

For other events, such as concerts, the targeted audience segments are much wider and are approached more spontaneously, therefore, audience needs are understood through how much attention an event receives and how successful it is:

That's how we know if our activities are engaging, because if no one came, we wouldn't organize concerts or other events; we'd have to shift our focus to different kinds of programs that people would find interesting. – Respondent 2

Consequently, what appears is the risk of measuring the success of events only by how many people came, and if all the seats are filled. In an audience-centred institution, there are other additional, more qualitative measures that can be considered when measuring audience satisfaction. One of these additional strategies, which ČH itself applies, is taking into consideration and reflecting upon audience feedback, which will be analysed more in detail throughout the following subsections of this chapter.

Moreover, Čiurlionis, as the overarching central figure within the institution, thereby influencing every aspect of the cultural centre with its additional memorial genre, plays a role within strategy for audiences in this sphere as well. Upon reflecting about programming for specific audience groups and taking into consideration the concrete needs of the audience, the staff reveal that the thematic material of Čiurlionis might add to the instinctive approach to target audiences, and the particular employed strategies:

But perhaps it is precisely so because we are a thematically focused institution. The theme itself creates a particular relationship with the audience. On the other hand, I fully understand the importance of this [audience segmentation and targeting]; around 2021, in our efforts to increase visibility, we talked quite a lot about what kind of new audience certain events would bring us. – Respondent 3

Indeed, the thematic nature of the institution may present a limitation in some cases, showing through another phenomenon, which I have classified as potential *cultural fatigue* of particular cultural themes and programming. As aforementioned, this is largely due to the fact that last year, during the 150th anniversary of the artist, there were extensive programmes dedicated to Čiurlionis. The programme dominated the Lithuanian culture field. As so much, associated with the name of Čiurlionis, has already been done,

this presents a dilemma of how to proceed further, considering the potential risk of oversaturation, therefore, alienating the audiences, both current and potential:

Perhaps this is a time, after the anniversary, when Čiurlionis feels a little weary, both as a concept and as a theme. To now try something new and targeted, to try to engage one, two, or three new audiences, to try to draw them toward Čiurlionis – in my personal conviction, this is an untimely phase right now, though I'm not sure. Perhaps it's untimely because 2025 was, after all, very saturated. The most diverse expressions related to Čiurlionis were organised. [...] If we were to imagine, for example, a new project aimed at engaging as many students as possible, and if we were to try to reach out to students right now with Čiurlionis-themed initiatives, it might seem like we're "beating a dead horse." – Respondent 3

This aspect contributes to the potential risk of *cultural fatigue* among audiences. Past experiences within the institution suggest that periods of particularly intensive programming are regarded as a causing factor in a phenomenon of increased *rejection reaction* of the audiences, or audience disengagement, as reflected in more people unsubscribing from the ČH's newsletter during the periods of much increased activity. Therefore, a balance needs to be found within the sphere between too little and too many activities.

Thus, whilst thinking and strategizing about the future audiences of Čiurlionis House, aforementioned specific contextual features of the institution need to be considered. Additionally, a commonly met misconception appearing within AD and AE ought to be acknowledged: a prevalent belief that such practises mean creating artistic programmes, suited for all possible groups of society for each programme, every time, targeted for all ages and all social groups. In practice, it is neither realistic, nor strategically possible for cultural institutions to appeal to all audiences simultaneously. Individual events cannot address the needs of every audience member, and organisations must therefore make deliberate choices regarding which audience groups to prioritise and target, as it is the "only effective and measurable way to engage with audiences" (Bollo, 2017b, p. 9). One institution, independent of however successful and audience-centric, will not be considered as relevant by every individual. A more realistic aim ought to be satisfying the needs of prioritized target groups and already existing audiences, which, in ČH, as discussed in the previous strategy sub-chapter, may be cultural professionals, teachers, students, and young artists, acting both as audience members and as independent partners

to the institution. Further analysis of the institution's AD tools at ČH in the following chapters will demonstrate which audience-centric instruments are already employed within the organisation and identify potential strategies for improving such practices in the future.

4.4. Audience Development Tools and Practises within M. K. Čiurlionis House

4.4.1. The Place Factor

One of the aspects of AD in practise is the way that physical space and its attributes, in which the institution operates, influences audiences that are present in the space during the event. In this instance, ČH is a rare example, as constrained physical space is considered as a limitation, but nevertheless presents unique opportunities for effective audience-centric practices, not often found elsewhere. According to Radbourne et al. (2016, p. 61), a distinctive atmosphere within the cultural venue can have the effect of increasing audience enjoyment of the event itself.

First of all, the space itself is especially important for ČH as it is a historical building. Secondly, the house element is already mentioned in the name of the institution, as the building includes one of the rooms where Čiurlionis himself lived. It is a special place for the enthusiasts of Čiurlionis to connect with the artist. Thus, the place factor becomes extremely important for this institution, additionally functioning as an attraction point by itself:

I think we attract a lot of people precisely because of this space. When people come here, they get that “dose” of the Čiurlionis’ House spirit, and I think that’s very important. Everyone who comes to any room also goes to the Čiurlionis’ room and spends some time there. It’s like free advertising, but it’s almost the most influential and impactful kind.

– Respondent 2

Secondly, a big part of the institutional mission is to welcome audiences as guests who are visiting you at your own house: “Yes, this is a home – we always emphasize the word *home*. [...] You welcome people as if they are in your own home” (Respondent 4). The less assuming, less formal physical space may also remove psychological barriers some audiences might have in approaching professional art institutions. Several respondents

mention the felt atmosphere of coziness as an important factor of the specialness of the space, as well as the audience proximity to the artists on stage – there is no clear separation between the musicians and the audience in the hall of ČH, and they are seated nearby musicians during concerts. This allows for deeper audience engagement during an event, as research proves, that “audience showed a noticeable surge in the emotional impact and overall appreciation of their participation in the concert”, when sitting closer than two meters to the musicians themselves (Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024, p. 49). Moreover, as research demonstrates, audiences do indeed prefer informal spaces for concerts in “welcoming and cosy venues, where they can sit near the musicians, not in rows” (NewAud, 2014, p. 14). ČH achieves this naturally. Additional suggestions for future practises might include experimenting even more with the place setting, for example, seating arrangements: placing the grand piano in the middle of the hall and then arranging the audience’s chairs in circles around the instrument, as opposed to the traditional seating in rows, or exchanging the usual chairs with sofas, or even armchairs, to make the concert hall even more like a lived-in house. This is already done well in the room of Čiurlionis, as the space there is treated more like a lively space for a conversation and human connection than an exhibition in the traditional sense: during my research, the interviews took place exactly in this room, while tea was served.

Furthermore, the location of the institution is another beneficial factor in this sense: ČH is located in the centre of the Old Town of Vilnius, close to the Town Hall Square, in an area, where there is a lot of pedestrian traffic, especially in summer (no cars are allowed in the small cobbled old town streets). In the same street, there are bars with outdoor seating places, people sitting along the street while enjoying the good weather. As mentioned before, the seasonal aspect does affect the audience flow, consequently, the street is much livelier during the warmer seasons than in winter. Next door to ČH there is the Vilnius St. Virgin Mary’s Church, a one-of-a-kind structure architecturally of the Baroque era, in which ČH has already organised collaborated art installations during “Culture Night”. The central, pedestrian-friendly location aspect also improves the chance of audiences *by surprise*, as the location might be discovered as part of a sightseeing tour of a walk in the old town of Vilnius: “unexpected people drop in while out for a stroll, and they often come back again” (Respondent 2). Overall, the area hosts many different buildings and organisations that might point to partnership opportunities for ČH in the future, such as compiling a whole-encompassing day programme for their

audiences, with food and drinks included, in partnership with surrounding bars, restaurants, and other organisations or businesses.

Moreover, the institution also has experimented with introducing more engaging visual elements, such as different lighting options, colourful lighting or playing by candlelight – this could become regular practise, introduced for concerts.

As limited physical space is reportedly one of the main challenges for the institution, additional spaces, such as the basement, could be utilised more often – as has already been done, for example, for “Culture Night” in 2024, during which a sensory exhibition “Improvised Room of Čiurlionis” (*“Improvizuotas Čiurlionio kambarys”*) was organised. In addition, a sensory installation by an interdisciplinary artist Deinora Rudėnaitė, “Šviesotamsa”, was also hosted in the basement of ČH.



Image 1: “Šviesotamsa”, sensory installation, by Deinora Rudėnaitė, hosted in the basement of the M. K. Čiurlionis House. Photo credit: K. Pleita.

These cases are inspiring examples for future directions whilst fully employing the unique elements of ČH in terms of physical space. Similarly, the outside space, next to the side entrance, as usual for buildings in the old town of Vilnius, possesses a passageway and a small inner courtyard, which could function as an experimental concert space in the

summer, or even a possible space for a pop-up cafe, where people could get drinks before or after the concert in ČH.

In terms of physical accessibility, ČH is located on the ground floor of the building, with wide enough doors on both sides for a wheelchair to pass through, although there is a step before both doors, higher than ground level. A wheelchair ramp ought to be installed to ensure physical accessibility for people with mobility impairments, as well as adding an “accessibility” section with clear directions on their website.

Other suggestions for the development of the space in ČH might include a more eye-grabbing sign outside, perhaps with lighting for evening-time events, especially for the side entrance, in addition to distinguishing the main entrance more with the help of banners, hanging flags, or other distinctive visual elements, as is used by bars or restaurants, positioned on the same street. A standing sidewalk sign could also be used outside the entrance, informing passersby about events, taking place at the institution that day or coming weeks, as well as inviting them to “*come visit Čiurlionis!*”. Additionally, in the warmer seasons, perhaps the entrance doors might stay open an hour or so before an event, with music playing from the speakers inside, to pique passerby interest and welcome them in. This suggestion was based on the findings on Lithuanian art galleries by Daiva Citvarienė (2015, p. 266), where the author found that the lack of the clearly positioned, visible, informative, or eye-catching advertising banners, flags, or other visual markers present a clear barrier for the audiences.

In conclusion, the location of ČH in the heart of Vilnius Old Town, with a lot of passersby traffic, might be one of the most significant directions in terms of the institution’s future audience development. If used to its fullest potential, these spatial improvements could not only progress the physical accessibility of the space but also advance the number of audiences *by surprise* that visit the institution.

4.4.2. Collaboration and Partnerships

Searching for mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations with different actors within not only the surrounding artistic sector, but also broader fields, occupies an important role within the concept of AD, as it leads to “new mixtures of audiences” (Bollo et al., 2017b, p. 9). As I will reveal in this chapter, this is one of the most significant tools that ČH employs to attract new audiences.

Additional aspect that is worthy of a mention is that the partnerships ought to not only be conducted based on financial or reputational gain, but likewise founded on the value of social responsibility and the acknowledgment, that the cultural institution ought to thereby give back to and consider the local community in which it itself operates: “cooperation with the local community should be a natural part of the development and implementation of [the socially responsible cultural organisation’s] institutional mission” (Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024, pp. 67-68). As the authors further uncover, this can happen through partnerships with educational, childcare (also for socially at-risk children), non-governmental organisations, centres for people with social risk, such as refugee centres, social welfare homes, and even hospitals (ibid.).

In the case of ČH, the local community of the institution are the residents of Vilnius. This is a strong point in ČH’s AD strategy, and although done intuitively, the organisation demonstrates a value-driven direction within its collaboration with plenty of schools, universities, as well as day care centres for children from vulnerable social groups.

Additionally, partnerships with other artists proved to be a successful tactic within ČH for engaging the audience, as the value of partnerships is held in high regard by all the respondents. Projects, such as the cycle of meetings with Lithuanian National Prize for Culture and Arts winners, a series of lectures with the professor and philosopher Naglis Kardelis (“*Čiurlionio kūrybos slėpiniai*”), cinema evenings with the film director Audrius Stonys, among others. Other events include book launches, meetings or talks with artists. All the guest artists that are included in the cultural evenings then bring their own new audience that has the opportunity to get to know ČH for themselves. All of these projects were made possible through collaboration, founded on shared ideas with artists from other fields. Therefore, if the primary target audience of an institution is other artists, that in itself constitutes an audience-centric approach. One instance that stands out as unique, was the event of a presentation of cake by a young chef, who used one of Čiurlionis’ paintings as her inspiration: “It was a culinary take on the painting, and the result was a beautiful event with a beautiful cake”, remembers Respondent 3. From other types of partnerships, notable ones include last year’s summer concert cycle “*Skambantis Čiurlionio Vilnius*”, where the final concert was organised in partnership with the French Institute in Vilnius on behalf of it being the French composer’s, Claude Debussy’s, 160th birthday anniversary. Both Čiurlionis’ and Debussy’s pieces were performed, and the concert took place at the Palace of the Grand Dukes.

Another important aspect of partnerships within ČH is the focus on educational activities. ČH takes part in activities such as the nationally funded programme “Culture Passport” (“*Kultūros pasas*”) for school pupils, where the children are able to choose their own educational activities, in addition to joining the Vilnius city initiative “The school is Vilnius” (“*Vilnius yra mokykla*”), where various spaces around Vilnius can be used for educational purposes and to hold lessons, or to hire the educational programmes of the institution itself. The staff emphasize, that educational of projects are held in high regard within the institution, as they mention the importance of passing on the value of art and the significance to convey it to the younger generations: “I believe it is important to pass on art to the younger generation and nurture it from an early age, so that the seedling, once planted, will flourish beautifully” (Respondent 2). The institution offers various educational activities, organised by several staff, booked consistently by the schools of Vilnius: in 2025, 140 educational activities were prepared and carried out. The prioritisation of educational activities stems from educational professional backgrounds of some team members, as well as personal professional philosophies. The importance of including children from less fortunate backgrounds to get access to cultural education is also apparent:

Some projects are designed specifically to ensure that day-centres for children are involved. A conscious effort is made to give opportunities to precisely those children, who are not from well-off families, but those who need greater support, both emotional and financial. – Respondent 2

A further suggestion for such practises might be embedding them within a strategic structure, while determining concrete aims. For example, organising educational activities for at-risk children at least once a month.

4.4.2.1. Distinctiveness of the Lithuanian Cultural Ecosystem

Although ČH are active and successful within the sphere of partnerships, there is one hindering aspect that is unique within the Lithuanian cultural field, influencing its collaboration processes that started to emerge while analysing the empirical data.

The respondents often mention a fragmented nature of Lithuanian cultural institutions and the presence of unwillingness, if not reluctance, regarding collaborating and sharing information between institutions. This is not always the case, as practical abovementioned

examples have illustrated, however, it additionally complicates progress in the field of audience practice:

It happens that very similar projects will be carried out in parallel, at the same time. Instead of sharing resources or knowledge, we end up offering Vilnius' cultural audiences virtually the same cultural product. This fragmentation and insularity within each institution is very traditional and very typical in Lithuania. This is not good; it is not encouraging. There is neither cooperation nor a joint search for solutions to problems. We are very fragmented. – Respondent 3

This concerning aspect of Lithuania's cultural field might have appeared due to the already limited, albeit increasingly decreasing public funding to culture, as it creates the feeling that institutions need to compete with each other to acquire the scarcely available funding, as opposed to prioritizing partnerships. The grant system, employed by the Council of Arts adds to this pressure, as only a small percentage of applicants receive funding, whilst the feeling of "competition is brutal" (Respondent 4). This additionally creates a sense of competition among the cultural actors, because the struggle to survive is tangibly felt.

Furthermore, as the respondents note, the cultural landscape in Lithuania possesses an additional stagnant quality, as public funding systems, in addition to private sponsors, prioritize already established cultural projects over innovative ideas. This, in turn, creates a further challenge for new or original cultural projects or cultural organisations to flourish, as already established institutions "do not want any additional competition" (Respondent 3). The ecosystem itself is already very rigidly defined; everyone is "put into clear boxes", with their own established audiences, sponsors, and supporters. It is a rigid, stagnant ecosystem, which presents considerable challenges for a small, relatively newly rebranded institution like ČH.

The feeling of competition between institutions is echoed through Lithuanian researchers' findings whilst analysing AD practises in different institutions, such as art galleries (Citvarienė, 2015, p. 270). This is a huge dilemma without an apparent, quick solution, as such would encompass complete systemic and institutional reforming of an already established ecosystem. Here we meet a multifaceted, nation-wide problem, caused by a multitude of factors outside of one institution's capacities or responsibilities, which in turn additionally affects AD processes internally. AD initiatives, such as fostering the collaboration of cultural institutions, ought to be prioritized and made possible by broader

systemic support of the national, regional, and municipal cultural policies, in ensuring sharing of information, and perhaps even national AD information centres, as they exist in other countries, such as in the UK or Scandinavia. Lithuanian cultural policymakers ought to reflect on how to solve this problem – how to encourage the Lithuanian cultural field to collaborate, instead of competing.

4.2.3. Digital Perspectives

The rise of artificial intelligence and the overall prominence of technology usage, especially forced upon society due to convenience in challenging times such as the Covid-19 pandemic, brings a lot of competition and demanding perspectives in the field of arts and culture, but paradoxically can work as an unexpected advantage: people are craving real, tangible, intimate, original, connected, *human* experiences again. This might make the future cultural institutions see a rise in their audience numbers, which is a hopeful possibility for the time ahead. This means, however, that cultural institutions of today are not only competing for audiences with other cultural institutions, but likewise with all the possible digital entertainment options enabled by the internet that are offered to our society every day. Therefore, a new type of potential audience appears for cultural institutions: the digital audience. In fact, research shows that an art piece, when presented digitally, in addition to its traditional live performance form, can attract a more diverse audience, in its potential to introduce audiences to the types of art they would not traditionally be interested in (Arts Council England, 2018b, p. 7). As data in England demonstrates, cultural consumption through digital means is now a more popular way to engage in culture for audiences, than the traditional live performances (*ibid.*). Thus, cultural organisations must adapt digitally, in order to stay relevant and cater to all possible audience types. Through the lens of Audience Development, however, this area often presents more significant challenges out of all the other possible AD tools. Frequently, in institutional contexts, digital tools are understood merely as usage of social media channels, as highlighted by European researchers (Bollo et al., 2017, p. 17). Additionally, the shift to more digital production requires considerable resources, challenging financially and timewise, and these aspects might intimidate institutions, wanting to experiment with such tools (Arts Council England, 2018b, p. 6).

In the context of Čiurlionis House, the digital shift likewise presents challenges, as some staff opinions present a value-based dilemma, that digitalized strategy may contradict the

values that Čiurlionis stands for: “Running an Instagram account with daily content aimed at attracting such groups [young people] is a very modern approach – and one that is perhaps somewhat far removed from Čiurlionis’ values” (Respondent 5). This is debatable, as it introduces the following question: does that mean that Čiurlionis cannot be modern, therefore, cannot be relevant to today’s youth? Within taking this stance, the institution risks closing itself off to more diverse audiences. As own ČH’s practises show, it is possible to conduct a digitalization project that would align with institutional missions and visions, and not only through marketing practises. ČH itself has experimented with digital expressions: namely, the mobile app, “M. K. Čiurlionis in Vilnius”, operates as a musical tour through Vilnius, created as a part of the European project “European Music Trails” (European Music Trails, 2018), in addition to the virtual reality projects, “Trail of Angels”, and “Creation of the Worlds”, wherein Čiurlionis’ visual art comes alive through the means of virtual reality, created in partnership with the Lithuanian Cinema institute, Innovation Agency Lithuania, and others. Both initiatives were successful, as they attracted much more diversified audience groups, and brought attention not only from cultural fans, but additionally from tourists visiting Vilnius. They engaged all three audience types: audiences *by habit*, *by choice*, and, *by surprise*. Experiments like these prove that digitalisation processes do not necessarily compromise the values of the artistic product, if done well and professionally. Partnership and collaboration with different sectors play a prominent role in digitalisation processes as well, demonstrating that most successful AD initiatives include several of audience tools within one project.

Furthermore, ČH were especially active in the digital sphere throughout the pandemic times, proving that although challenging for all cultural institutions, Covid-19 has also presented opportunities to branch out into different types of artistic content, wherein more time was dedicated to digital content creation and brainstorming new cultural format opportunities, especially to try and connect with hard-to-reach audiences:

We decided that during the pandemic, we would try to reach a more unfamiliar audience through social media, using short videos, brief clips from concerts, stories about various topics, and presenting information in a completely different format. [...] We managed to reach people who wouldn't normally visit our website. – Respondent 4

Overall, the institution is participating quite actively online, has created various types of digital content, and possesses quite an active audience online, especially on *Facebook*,

wherein some posts have gained significant community engagement, audience attention and praise, such as the sweater knitting initiative “Let’s Knit Čiurlionis” or announcements of theatrical guided tours of Vilnius. On *YouTube*, the institution has published various visual projects, such as trailers for events, for the institution itself, recordings of concerts, in addition to interviews with artists, which is a good strategic direction. Although a potential problematic aspect might be, as research suggests, that digital algorithms prefer to give more visibility to short-format content (Arts Council England, 2018b, p. 7), and the organisation has not experimented too much with this yet. The report conducted by Arts Council England offers various means of producing *live-to-digital* art offerings, which might also fit the scope and mission of ČH, such as livestreams of live concerts, full or in-part recordings of events, trailers, talks or interviews about a certain event, in the format of a video, posted online (ibid., pp. 13-14).

Finally, ČH might benefit from a more cohesive distinctive branding within its online visual identity throughout all the social media platforms, including their website. Likewise, these practises ought to be embedded strategically and guided by measurable aims, connected to the target audiences.

4.5. Audience Engagement Tools and Practises within M. K. Čiurlionis House

While distinguishing the practises as those of Audience Development and those of Audience Engagement, I found, once again, that the line is not particularly straightforward. There are significant overlaps in both categories of such methods. Nevertheless, as was determined earlier in the methodology section of this work, based on my understanding, acquired during the research process, AD practises are concerned with attracting and widening the audience reach, while AE consists of deepening the distinct experience of an individual audience member. Nevertheless, to strictly divide the practises into one category or the other is not uncomplicated, as technically, each practise might belong to both categories, as they have the same goal – greater consideration of the individual audience member and deepening their audience experience. Yet, the practices were categorised in the manner that I considered most appropriate within the specific context of Čiurlionis House.

4.5.1. The Search for New Formats in Programming: Managing Artistic Excellence together with Audience-Centricity

The search for new, innovative formats may present artists and cultural institutions with great new opportunities, while at the same time creating challenges within their implementation. The balancing of this question is considered by the literature as one of central dilemmas within the field of audience-centric practise (Bollo et al., 2017b, p. 7). The authors observe that introducing diversified types of programming beyond the scope of usual, traditional programmes, are a big part of this. ČH has experimented with such practises, with the introduction of various digital initiatives, discussed previously, in addition to projects, such as regular (twice monthly) cinema screenings, performing in public space, and various others.

However, especially when considering alternative concert formats, not everyone has the same opinions on the practise. Sometimes, such practises present a dilemma for artistic professionals, in which they understand such methods as devaluing of the art itself, and therefore “pandering to a small social group who think that art is boring. [...] If we start simplifying its format, that means in ten years’ time we’ll have to simplify it even further, until eventually there won’t be a “concert” left at all” (Respondent 4). It seems that there appears to be risk in comprehending AE practises in one distinct way, such as understanding it as marketing ploys, in which the art itself loses meaning and artistic value, for example, playing only string quartet covers of popular pop songs, therefore “popularizing” or simplifying the art, which is, debatably, not true – AE does not mean that classical music should become pop music. There are different ways to engage the audience – successful, meaningful AE is more about deepening the experience for the audience, to make it more valuable and enjoyable, therefore, providing tools for facilitating the *meaning-making* processes of the audience. After all, ČH does already employ innovative audience-centric practises within their event formats: such as introducing pre and after informal event talks with musicians, composers or artists themselves, artistic workshops within the programming, among many others. Indeed, when discussed further, the same respondent agreed, that there are different ways to understand and implement engaging and interactive practises, starting with the fact that every concert must have its own concept and justification, for what reason it is being organised, for example, on that particular day. The contextual framing of artistic offerings is critical for programming decisions. When a performance is meaningfully connected to the social or cultural context of its programme, and when there is a clear justification for

presenting that repertoire on that particular date, communicating this context to audiences becomes easier. The respondent agrees that there are many different ways of engaging audiences during an event. The most important enablers of engagement, or as the respondent names it, “explanations of the game rules”, are clarifying the context of the musical piece that is about to be performed, the conditions, in which the piece was created, and what it is about. A short talk before the concert, either by the composer themselves, if the piece is contemporary and new, or by the musicians, to explain to the audience why it is being performed today, additionally, helps explain the significance and relevance of the piece:

When we're performing something very new, unfamiliar, or contemporary, we always invite the composer and ask them to hold a meeting – for example, an hour before the concert – to give a talk about the upcoming performance. Then it's easier for people to understand the context, the concert program itself, and the main themes. [...] I understand that it will be much easier for people to receive the music once they know the context. [...] People listen to certain music in a completely different way when they learn the circumstances behind why that music was created. And that communication fosters inclusivity – in this way, I'm a huge supporter of it and very much in favour of it.
– Respondent 4

Through the description of the context, meaning, and the underlining themes of a certain piece in an informal, talk-like format from the musicians or composers themselves, a supportive environment of facilitation for meaningful participation is created, even if the audience are not in the know about the programme or the pieces before coming to ČH. In such ways, perceived psychological barriers might be removed, whilst increasing cultural and psychological accessibility, especially for less experienced audiences, as the audiences potentially feel intimidated by certain rituals, commonly found in classical music performances (when to clap, how to clap), or the feeling of strict division between the performers and the audience. Brown & Ratzkin (2011, pp. 17-18), name this *interpretative assistance* for the audience, and state, that “heightened level of engagement can occur with contextualization and interpretive assistance” (ibid., p. 18), therefore such practises empower the capability of audiences to be more engaged in a certain art piece, or “increasing their readiness” (ibid., p. 32) to receive, understand, and form their own opinion about a work of art.

Additionally, practises, such as giving space for the audience to express themselves after the event, discuss what they just saw, and share their views, together with the musicians, artists, or film experts, in an informal, casual environment, ought to be considered an encouraging audience-centric practise:

After the concert, everyone is welcome to stay and chat about the concert and with the performers. Film nights are another great example. There's a film screening followed by a discussion about the movie. For people, this is a special experience because after the film, they want to discuss it and share their opinions. It's the same with a concert – you want to discuss it, debate it, understand it, and hear the opinions of others. Yes, I'm all for that kind of engagement. – Respondent 4

This is an example of what Brown & Ratzkin (2011) call the phase of facilitating *meaning making* within their conceptualised Audience Engagement cycle, whilst deepening and extending impact of a certain art piece (p. 32). These practises are widely found within all events, taking place at ČH, emphasizing the inner institutional values that are placed on facilitating the audience experience within an informal environment. All of these aspects are likewise mentioned by Poprawski and Wittchen-Barełkowska (2024), in which they emphasize that creating a welcoming space, wherein the audience has the opportunity to express themselves and are given the chance to discuss the experienced art piece with other people, contributes to the addressing of the social responsibility of a classical music institution (p. 76). Furthermore, the authors remark the value of creating a social space, in addition to the primary artistic one, with helpful tools for engagement being, for example, serving refreshments during the intermissions or after the event, and socialising with other audience members in addition to connecting personally with the musicians (ibid.). This is already a usual practise throughout the ČH events, as complimentary drinks, as tea or a glass of wine is served during the events, thereby facilitating “lively socialisation” between the artists and the audience members (Respondent 2). To conclude, it can be assumed that ČH dedicate certain efforts into moving from what Poprawski and Wittchen-Barełkowska (2024) call one sided communication (artists in the position of power and giving, audience being the passive receivers), to a more “mutual, double sided communication” between the artists and their audience, which is a characteristic of active participation (p. 76).

4.5.2. Audience Feedback and its Considerations

Another important expression of facilitating meaningful audience engagement is how far the audience feedback is taken into consideration institutionally. More specifically, the question is if the institution is considering the voices and perspectives of their audiences. Both Brown and Ratzkin (2011), and likewise Poprawski and Wittchen-Barełkowska (2024), mention this aspect in their publications, describing this as a fundamental characteristic of audience-centric institutions.

Similarly, this is a part of audience practise within Čiurlionis House. Previously, during other lecture-type events concerning Čiurlionis (not necessarily organised by ČH themselves), feedback was expressed by the audiences, that they lacked the space to express their own opinions. Respondents within ČH note, that throughout future practises, this response will be taken into consideration when planning events of a similar type:

Čiurlionis is definitely a cultural icon; almost everyone has their own opinion about him and feels they have something to say. So now we've been thinking of making the upcoming evenings much more open, so that the speaker wouldn't come strictly to give a lecture, but would come with a topic in mind, ready to develop it further together with the audience and their observations. They would be more evenings of discussion and conversation.

– Respondent 3

This clearly points to the existence of institutional listening capacity, through taking into consideration what the audiences have already expressed. This therefore can also be counted as a co-creation practise, as audience feedback is crucial for a successful AE strategy. Another aspect that is significant and unique within ČH as a smaller institution, is that audiences are free to express their opinions and reflections straight to the artistic and creative professionals, or curators, who organised the events themselves, as they are present at every event:

We are very happy to receive written and verbal feedback. After a performance, I stay on and listen to the audience, they really love to share their opinions. I've learned a great deal from this. Other project managers also listen to people, and the comments are always read and discussed. – Respondent 5

Connected to the practise of *hosting*, which will be analysed further in this chapter, it seems to be the case that there is no division between the audiences and the creative management. The practise is more similar to a conversation, through which the audience

can freely share their opinions and feedback straight to the professional. This conveys moving from one-sided communication to mutual communication, information exchange, and towards community integration: “It is worth shifting the emphasis from one-way communication [...] to mutual curiosity and/or collaboration, engaging in interaction, entering into a dialogue with the audience” (Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024, p. 76).

Other ways to collect audience feedback usually include reflecting on audience comments on social media. As Brown and Ratzkin (2011) advise, one step forward towards a more collaborative practise might be collecting audience feedback on a creative work in progress, with given opportunity for the audiences to present their own creative ideas (p. 68), as well as having anonymous spaces (physical – a guest book, or online – a survey form), where audiences can leave their comments within a low-pressure environment, with the added security layer of anonymity (ibid., p. 63).

4.5.3. *Hosting* in Cultural Organisations

One of the most significant findings from this qualitative case study is the implementation example of what Walmsley (2018, p. 204) introduces as the concept of hospitality and *hosting* in a cultural institution. This characteristic of audience-centricity, although conducted intuitively, is apparent throughout all of the activities, which are organised by ČH.

The *hosting* aspect connects deeply to the unique physical place characteristic of the venue. These two features work in synergy in their ability to offer deeper engagement of the audiences. The intimate, cozy, informal physical space creates a special atmosphere, as it consists of smaller, more intimate areas rather than the usual large concert halls. Furthermore, one of the aims of the institution is named as the goal to become a *community centre* – this is successfully implemented in practise through the fact that since the team is very small, everyone takes turns working the front of the house roles, as guides. This in turn creates a personal connection with the audience, who are referred to by the staff as *guests*, as opposed to the more common practise of naming audiences as customers or visitors. Additionally, this fulfils the possibility for the audience to converse with both artists and cultural professionals, working in the institution. When the cultural staff are present at events, and therefore can hear, listen, and understand their audiences, this creates a special bond, much like a personal one, with the audience and with each

person in attendance. Members of the audience feel heard and can express their opinions directly to the personnel, which is a rare occurrence in cultural institutions. This is evidenced by the fact that the respondents were able to recall many such instances, in which they shared a special or interesting moment where they connected or listened to an audience member: “We talk freely with guests. [...] After the event, we talk with the guests not only about past or upcoming events, but also about Čiurlionis House itself, and our presence here” (Respondent 2). The specificity of the nature of the job (working here part-time) allows to “meet everyone with an open mind, welcome them” (Respondent 1) into the institution. When the first point of contact for an audience member is a professional directly involved in the creative process, the institution is more likely to be perceived as accessible and welcoming. This may benefit both audiences and the institution itself, as it gains more information about who, why and when, attends which events, therefore collecting information about their current audience. Collecting verbal feedback might also be more convenient for audiences, as they may often feel more comfortable sharing their impressions informally immediately after a performance than expressing their views later in written form.

In conclusion, the implementation of a personally impacting practise, such as *hosting*, might enhance the audience experience, in addition to perceiving of such an experience as more welcoming. Consequently, this may help improve the relationship of the audience member to the institution. All in all, this practice contributes positively to the quality of the audience experience and represents a valuable example that ought to be adopted more widely across cultural organisations.

4.5.4. Community Creation and Active Participation

It may be argued that the aim to create a community within a cultural institution can be understood as an audience-centric practise. One such example of this practise within ČH was the creation of the in-house choir, which, unfortunately, did not survive the pandemic of 2020. Nevertheless, it was established by “young, enthusiastic people, who wanted to create together” (Respondent 3) in Čiurlionis House.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, as an institution, belonging to the municipality, ČH has the responsibility of catering to the community of residents of Vilnius: „From the perspective of the people of Vilnius themselves, we are creating a cultural centre that is accessible to everyone, so that they can feel a sense of community here” (Respondent 2).

A big part of such activities is providing support to the community of young artists, artistic students, school pupils, and their teachers, which, in my proposition, are the primary audience and community unit within the institution. The staff themselves emphasize the aim to support young artists, suggesting that ČH operates in a way through which they can realise themselves creatively:

One of our missions is to give young people the opportunity to showcase their art here [...], a place where a young artist can come and say, "I want to put on an exhibition here". We always answer, "Bring it, and we'll make it happen". – Respondent 4

Additionally, young musicians from music schools and academies from around the city, in addition to their teachers, enjoy the community created within ČH. Throughout the months of May and December (the busiest, semester-end months) especially, the staff present these audience groups with institutional power through enabling them in organising their own events at ČH:

In May and December, we essentially hand over our concert hall entirely to Vilnius' music schools, conservatories, and the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. Teachers and methodical groups come to us. Instead of holding their recitals at school, they come here, including during Christmas. Parents visit, and together they celebrate here. – Respondent 3

If one of the institution's primary audience groups are considered to be young artists, therefore, in this way, they are provided with the chance to largely shape the programming choices by their own initiatives. By these means, the institution is absolutely audience-centric: "We definitely aim to do that, it's important to us. Especially in the spring, when things really pick up: student concerts, graduation recitals, winter concerts, Christmas concerts, the doors here just never close" (Respondent 2).

Furthermore, no individual institution can meet the cultural needs of the entire society. All cultural institutions operate with defined target audiences. At ČH, one of the primary audience groups consists of young artists. While these individuals are creators in their own right, they function as the institution's audience rather than its institutional actors. By providing space for them to initiate and implement their own programmes, it can be concluded that ČH responds to the needs of its audience. Overall, ČH fulfils the audience-centric programme, insofar that the surrounding actors and forces, such as other artists, shape the institution from the inside, as they have the power to involve themselves inside

the institutional choice-making and its programming. When the target audience includes individuals who seek to organise events or develop their own projects at ČH, this may be interpreted as a form of audience-centred practice. In facilitating these initiatives, ČH positions audience members as active participants and partners of the institution at the same time.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Audiences are an inseparable part of the artistic process. However, in the cultural landscape of contemporary societies, ensuring equal cultural participation of every citizen is no easy feat. Therefore, audience-centric practises, such as Audience Development and Audience Engagement, become increasingly relevant in ensuring the achievement of cultural democracy goals. These practises, born and rooted in the UK, can take on other names in different countries, although they are characterized by the fact that they aim to put audience opinions and needs at the centre of the organisation, as opposed to the traditional view of focusing on the artist and the institution itself. Consequently, such practises are important to implement for every institution in our contemporary society, but especially for public institutions, which possess some sense of responsibility to provide for local communities, in which they operate. To reach these goals, audience-centric practises must be strategically and sustainably embedded in the institutional strategy, encompass the whole organisation and employ a variety of tools, ranging from audience research to partnerships, from educational activities and marketing, to improving the physical event space, among many others. The main objective for employing an AD strategy is not about necessarily influencing audience behaviour, per se, but improving the institution and its inner processes (Bollo et al. 2017; Hagerius, 2024; Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024). Furthermore, according to Carnelli & Tomanová (2018, p. 394), successfully implemented AD practises help institutions to improve in their provision of three main aspects: support in achieving institutional relevance, revenue (financial gain), together with improving institutional responsibility.

Another important feature ought to be to move away from purely commercial institutional thinking, in which cultural participants are *consumers* of an art product, towards a more inclusive, participatory approach, in which the audiences are considered as participants, or *guests*. The level and scope of participation depend on the audience members themselves, and they ought to be given the agency to participate how they see fit, ranging

from passive to active participation on the AE scale (Brown & Ratzkin, 2011, pp. 25-29). Additionally, the ever-increasing global digitalisation processes and the usage of technological enhancements have introduced a new type of cultural participation, enabling audiences to attend events not only physically, but also digitally, online through various platforms (Righolt, 2018, p. 283). This appears to align with the rise of participatory art practises and encouraging audiences to co-create and include them in the artistic process as much as possible. Introducing such practices within the artistic process provides mutual benefits, both for the audience member, and for the artist or the artistic institution, according to Walmsley (2018, p. 208). In short, audience-centric practises can be understood as getting to know audience needs, later reflecting upon what can be changed not only within the surrounding practises of the cultural offering, but also within the existing cultural product, thus considering the needs of the existing and potential audiences. These processes help ensure that the mutual relationship between the cultural institution and its audiences is cultivated and nurtured.

Dilemmas appearing within the research field of Audience Development and Audience Engagement – questions regarding how to balance audience centricity and artistic excellence (Handeland, 2024, p. 29), conceptual confusion (Kawashima, 2000; Walmsley, 2019, as cited in Wlazel 2021, p. 1), as well as the tremendous responsibility of expectations, that are put on cultural institutions to deal with social inequality alone, without a surrounding supportive ecosystem of processes (Maitland, 2024, p. 38), all further complicate audience-centric research and implementation processes. All these aspects were similarly reflected in the findings of this research.

AD and AE practises are much more common and systematically more thoroughly researched in the UK, whilst both research and understanding stays fragmented throughout the continental European context. Literature finds that AD and AE practises prove especially difficult to implement in smaller cultural organisations (Bollo et al., 2017, p. 48), therefore, such institutions are additionally more likely to be overlooked in terms of their audience-centric practises. In addition, AD research within Lithuanian cultural institutions is lacking, while research of AE processes is practically non-existent. My qualitative case study research on the small-scale memorial cultural centre, M. K. Čiurlionis House in Vilnius, hopes to address this research gap. In the words of Bollo et al. (2017, p. 48), “small and medium sized organisations can hardly find the resources – both human and economic – to continuously work with audience initiatives, apart from the traditional marketing strategies”. This raises the question of whether sustainable and

inspiring audience practices are only contained to large cultural institutions with substantial financial resources. As the findings of this case study illustrate, unique audience-centric practices can likewise emerge in smaller cultural organisations too, serving as inspiring examples for other institutions, including larger ones.

The purpose of this research was to investigate what perceptions, understandings, planning processes and practical implications exist in the Lithuanian cultural institutions within the field of audience-centric practise, through analysing its methods in M. K. Čiurlionis House, as well as considering surrounding external factors, barriers, challenges, and successes. The organisation was selected to be the case researched in this thesis, as it possesses a good reputation among audiences as an accessible and welcoming institution. My hypothesis was that ČH, whilst being a small organisation with limited resources, is at the same time audience-centric, therefore an inspiring example in the Lithuanian cultural field.

5.1. Institutional Strategy within M. K. Čiurlionis House and Influencing Factors

The importance of Audience Development practises for cultural institutions has been emphasized in the EU documents since the preparation for the EU culture funding programme “Creative Europe” (European Expert Network on Culture et al., 2012). Similarly, within the current Lithuanian cultural policy, encouraging citizens to create and to actively participate in culture, therefore, the importance of public participation in the arts and cultural life, as well as promoting cultural accessibility, is prioritized as one of the 3 main goals (Rimkutė, 2024a, p. 23). The exact terminologies like Audience Development are not used in the national cultural policy, therefore, additionally they are rare in the local cultural institutional policy documents, although on a practical basis, institutions apply many of the same practises. In Lithuania, terminologies such as cultural accessibility, cultural democracy and public engagement in the arts are more commonly mentioned in strategic documents and are better understood and more commonly used by cultural professionals.

Furthermore, based on the findings of this study, the position advanced in this research is that AD might risk overcomplicating the actual needed processes of striving towards cultural democracy. This conceptual ambiguity complicates AD processes in practice, as each professional has their own understanding of it (Baker, 2013, p. 3), even in the UK,

where the terminologies are widely used. In Lithuania, like the rest of continental Europe, these exact terminologies are not employed often enough to become part of the everyday professional vocabulary, as stated by Agata Etmanowicz (LRT.lt, 2018). Consequently, as is empirically supported through the findings of this thesis, this presents a risk in attempting to draw precise boundaries around terminology, therefore more time is spent trying to define the concepts versus actually applying them and improving cultural accessibility. This is tangible especially, and echoed through the findings of this research, when multilingual factors come into play, whilst trying to employ and translate terminology, catered to English cultural policy, into European cultural contexts.

Secondly, audience-centric practices, such as AD and AE, are much more aligned as improvement of the internal mechanisms of the institution (for example, introduction of horizontal-style leadership, further organisation development), as opposed to influencing, or “developing” audiences (Bollo, et al., 2017; Hagerius, 2024; Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, 2024). This research found that Čiurlionis House has already gone through a quite intense period of democratisation of the institution since the introduction of the new artistic direction in 2014, towards making Čiurlionis accessible to the whole of society, with the introduction of a much more audience-centric direction in the organization. This additionally manifests with the introduction of new programming forms, such as dedicating this year to a writer and social activist, Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė.

The institution and its staff value audience-centricity, the institutional aim to become a social, community centre is explicitly stated in the mission of the institution. Audience-centric, inclusive practises are taking place at Čiurlionis House, stemming from individual passions and inner values of the cultural professionals, working at the institution. Additionally, the values of seeing the importance of enabling cultural accessibility and inclusivity are naturally present. Nevertheless, the audience strategy within the institution is conducted intuitively. In order to further progress toward audience-centricity, strategical direction, focusing on concrete audience goals with measurable objectives and evaluating impact ought to be employed. The findings suggest that while all three audience types are met at the institution (audience *by habit*, *by choice* and *by surprise*), the institution might benefit from prioritizing a naturally forming community within Čiurlionis House – their primary audiences of cultural professionals, pupils, teachers, students, in addition to young artists. Furthermore, prioritization of several audience segments from other types, audience *by choice* or audience *by surprise*,

such as families with children or children from underprivileged backgrounds, might be employed. The institutional focus on this audience segment may enable the institution to foster a mutual relationship and promote deeper engagement with said segments.

5.2. Strategy in Practise: Hindering and Facilitating Factors

To analyse the empirical findings of this thesis, the proposed framework of AD of Bollo et al. (2017, p. 19), with therein its categorized practice categories, namely: place factor, innovative use of digital resources, building capacity (internal empowerment), active participation and co-creation, innovative programming, organisational change, use of data (data analysis), collaboration and partnerships (networking), together with Brown and Ratzkin's (2011, p. 15) "Arc of Engagement", with its phases of contextualisation (pre-event) and meaning-making (post-event), was applied. Through the lenses of these practical applications of AD and AE, all the categories of the tools and instruments of these practises, to lesser or a higher degree, were found to operate within the institution. M. K. Čiurlionis audience practises are engraved primarily in its place (location) factor and collaboration through partnership creation. Innovative programming and educational activities play an important additional role. Furthermore, horizontal organisational structure operates as a significant factor for benefitting audience practises – within a positive professional microclimate, where there is no overarching sense of control by the upper management, the artistic professionals can bring their own creative ideas to life, meaning that they genuinely care for their target audiences, each project is born not out of necessity, but from artistic values and artistic passion. Moreover, the discovery of AE practises unique to the institution, such as *hosting*, might be the most significant finding of this thesis, as they are not widely reported as established methods, other than by Walmsley (2018, pp. 203-204).

As predicted in literature, in small cultural institutions, the lack of financial and human resources is believed to hinder audience-centric strategies and practises (Bollo et al, 2017, p. 48). This is similarly reflected by the empirical research within this thesis, as the limitations in physical and human resource limitations were perceived by the institution as one of the biggest challenges to overcome when it comes to a sustainable audience strategy. Although, upon further analysis, it can be revealed that while such factors may be limiting, they might at the same time facilitate several unique audience engagement processes. For example, limited physical space, seating only up to 50 people, enables less

intimidating and more welcoming atmosphere, in addition to lesser human resource capacity enabling *hosting*, the ability of artistic staff to welcome the audience themselves, further lowering any possible *entry anxiety*, as investigated by Walmsley (2018, p. 204). Therefore, it can be debated whether these conditions are truly challenges to be solved, or merely exist as special, unique institutional characteristics of the institution that bring more possibilities than in other, more standard, concert venues.

An additional potential challenge, affecting audience practises within Čiurlionis House, was found to be what might be named *cultural fatigue* among audiences. This is a unique aspect for an institution that operates as a memorial cultural centre in its genre. In the case of ČH, this figure is nonetheless one of the most famous Lithuanian cultural icons overall. When the programming selection is oversaturated, there appears a potential paradox in that audiences may reject some offerings, merely because there is too much happening, resulting in potential fatigue of the audiences. This might be better explained by the previous year being dedicated to an intensive cultural programme of Čiurlionis' 150th anniversary, during which a plethora of events, commemorating Čiurlionis, took place. This paradox might be remedied by introducing different programming thematic directions, such as dedicating a thematic year to other cultural figures, as demonstrated by this year's focus on Sofija Kymantaitė-Čiurlionienė. Nonetheless, further research is needed to analyse the specific nature of memorial cultural institutions and such genre specificity influencing audiences.

Besides, the stagnant and divided nature of the contemporary Lithuanian cultural field, caused by the increasingly depleting public financial budgets and consequent surrounding competition, further obstructs possible partnership and collaboration prospects between cultural institutions, as they are more likely to see other cultural organisations as competitors and not possible partners. This presents a significant barrier for AD progress, already noticed within the Lithuanian context by Citvarienė (2015, p. 270). This illustrates external factors beyond the control of the organisation, that shape the internal institutional decisions.

Regarding successful audience-centric practises at ČH, several notable findings emerged. Firstly, the analysis suggests that audience research can also be conducted in a qualitative way, considering the individual opinions and experiences of the audience. Such practises avoid overgeneralization of audience members, through structurally treating them as simply statistical data, which Walmsley (2018, p. 200) warns against. Activities, such as

audiences being able to express their thoughts, ideas, and feedback straight to the artistic professionals, includes them in the artistic process themselves and might be considered a co-creative practise, as it connects to the practise of *hosting*. The consideration of audience feedback is substantial for a sustainable audience-centric strategy. Arguably, in order for the institution to be truly audience-centric, both audience research types ought to be employed – quantitative, in addition to, qualitative, methods, so that the institution comprehensively understands needs and opinions of their audiences.

The institutional capacity to listen and to consider audiences directly connects to the phenomena of *hosting*, which appears throughout ČH naturally, and ought to be applied more widely across other cultural institutions. The practise is deeply grounded in the unique intimate home-like atmosphere of the venue; therefore, these features all work in synergy to more meaningfully engage audiences. Audiences are referred to as *guests* within ČH, and the institution aims to welcome each and every member of the audience as if they were a guest visiting their own house. This is achieved through the artistic staff, who are responsible for both organising the events being present and available for the audiences to connect with on a human level, throughout the duration of, and after, the events. This creates the feeling of the institution being open, accessible, welcoming, assists the maintaining of the relationship between the institution and its audiences, and is a foundation for ensuring successful co-creative practise (Walmsley, 2018, p. 204).

Furthermore, as aforementioned, the physical space itself additionally contributes to the unique welcoming atmosphere. Physical aspects of the space and the atmosphere of the concert venue in ČH play an extremely important role within its engagement of the audiences, as it is informal, relaxed and truly like a lived-in house. As research shows, audiences indeed prefer to attend events in informal spaces (NewAud, 2014, p. 14). Logistical factors, such as how close to the musicians the audience sits and how closely they can observe the artists, contribute to a more engaged audience experience (Poprawski & Wittchen-Barełkowska, A. 2024, p. 49).

5.3. Future Directions and Possibilities

Whilst considering the above-mentioned aspects and characteristics of the audience strategies and practices within M. K. Čiurlionis House, several future directions can be suggested.

Firstly, one cultural institution cannot and should not aim to target and satisfy the cultural needs of the entire society. Strategic prioritizing and targeting of certain audience segments must be employed, as it is the only way to meaningfully engage with audiences, and especially, measure their engagement (Bollo, Da Milano, Gariboldi, & Torch, 2017b, p. 9). At this stage, as the institution already underwent a significant democratization process, in widening and diversifying its audience circle since 2014, presenting unique strengths for audience-centric practice that should be preserved, rather than reformed. The future strategic audience direction might include focusing on more deeply engaging already existing audiences, in addition to building meaningful mutual relationships. Within ČH, the inner community of audiences consists of young artists, art and music pupils, students, and their teachers, and cultural professionals. Several other audience groups from, such as audiences *by surprise* – for example, students from underrepresented social backgrounds might be additionally focused on, as this already occurs naturally, now it ought to be strategically positioned further. The strategy might include concrete, measurable aims and evaluation methods, in addition to first conducting official audience research, with the help of focus interviews or anonymous online forms, aimed at the audience target groups, thereby clarifying their needs and possible barriers to participation and engagement. Moreover, it may be beneficial to conduct audience research on the same audience group before, during and after event to better understand the audience groups. Qualitative audience research, an already naturally occurring phenomenon in ČH, is a beneficial audience-centric practice, although might also present a risk of forming assumptions towards the audience, through relying on personal opinions rather than data (Citvarienė, 2015, p. 263). ČH might additionally benefit from official qualitative or statistic data, combining both research methods and consequently successfully acquiring a comprehensive knowledge about their target audiences.

Furthermore, from a marketing viewpoint, a recommendation might include to lean in more into the existing brand positioning of the organisation as a *home* – with the help of slogans such as “Come visit Čiurlionis” (“*Ateik į svečius pas Čiurlionį*”), positioning the institution more as a social space to be, in addition to a cultural venue. This may involve presenting the space in a more distinctive way, by introducing more visual branding elements, such as advertisement signs, equipped with lighting, flags or banners outside the building, to make the venue more visible from the outside. As found by Citvarienė (2015, p. 266), physical location markers of the venue influence the audience perceptions towards the institution. Additionally, further development of the physical space and its

attributes might be beneficial – extra spaces can be utilized more, such as the basement or the outside area. Moreover, the central location with many bars and restaurants nearby might suggest possible innovative partnership opportunities. Finally, similarly as in other smaller institutions (Bollo et al., 2017, p. 46), the adjustment of digitalization has introduced certain challenges within ČH. The organisation may improve its distinctiveness from other cultural institutions by employing visual branding elements throughout social media platforms, including their website, as in our contemporary societies, the digital space is often where audiences have their first contact with an institution.

As this case study was of a Lithuanian cultural institution, suggestions for further research themes that emerged are likewise connected to this cultural context, however, may perhaps additionally apply to other contexts. Firstly, as conducting primary audience research was beyond the scope of this study, it might be beneficial to conduct research and analyse a cultural institution from all the possible viewpoints, therefore determining a final overview of the institution, both from institutional and external views, thus offering more concrete possible answers to the dilemmas, plaguing the audience practise field. Secondly, a significant theme that appeared within the findings was the tension and the feeling of competition among the Lithuanian cultural institutions, therefore potentially affecting a significant portion of audience development and engagement practise – partnerships. More research is needed to address this issue and offer potential solutions within the Lithuanian cultural field, including, perhaps, the discernment of how cultural policy makers influence such matters. Thirdly, the field may benefit from more research on the phenomena of memorial art organisations as an institutional genre, as it heavily influences the process of how audience-centric practises are conducted. Lastly, as cultural institutions, especially those of smaller capacities, struggle with digital strategies, this likewise presents opportunities for further research.

Overall, as this research illustrates, some structural restrictions in smaller cultural organisations that restrict the existence of several audience-centric processes, at the same time contribute to the appearance of other unique audience-centric practises, such as *hosting*, qualitative audience research, and institutional listening capacity, which can be applied throughout other cultural institutions, both smaller and larger. Additionally, it was found that the physical space and place, in which certain events take place, can considerably positively influence audience engagement. Furthermore, horizontal

organisational structures aligning with professional artistic values of the staff are also of influence to the broader audience strategies.

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All the content presented in this thesis is my own, except where other authors are cited as appropriate.

ChatGPT (free version) was used whilst writing this thesis, regarding checking grammar, punctuation, and sparingly for inspection of the stylistic mistakes of the text.

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