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Toolkit for Promoting the Use of Art and Culture in Local Initiatives

THE BIG PROJECT - BARABAR INITIATIVE (going) GRASSROOT

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Circulation:
50 Copies

September 2025
Prishtina

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About the Project

The BIG Project – Barabar Initiative (going) Grassroot is an innovative initiative that empowers grassroots organizations, women cultural activists, and artists across Kosovo to leverage art and culture as tools for promoting social inclusion, community cohesion, and democratic participation. The project focuses on strengthening local actors, creating a platform for collaboration, and addressing key social challenges by fostering policy advocacy and cultural activism from the ground up.

Led by Integra, in partnership with CASA and supported by the EU, the project aims to amplify the role of grassroots actors in building a more inclusive and cohesive society. It introduces a new model of cooperation that links local initiatives with national policies, positioning art and culture at the forefront of Kosovo's transformation.

By supporting grassroots organizations, women artists, and local cultural practitioners, the BIG Project encourages creative solutions to complex issues such as social exclusion, discrimination, post-conflict reconciliation, and public engagement. At its core, the project recognizes that sustainable social progress in Kosovo relies on both institutional support and active citizen participation. By offering tools, networks, and resources, the project empowers underrepresented groups to shape the future of their communities.

About the Toolkit

The Toolkit for Promoting the Use of Art and Culture in Local Initiatives is a practical resource designed to empower grassroots CSOs, artists, activists, and others in Kosovo to use art and culture as tools for social change. It provides essential strategies and methods for applying creativity to foster positive transformation within communities. Serving as both a capacity-building resource and a practical guide, the Toolkit offers actionable frameworks and examples to help readers design inclusive, culturally sensitive projects that promote social inclusion, community cohesion, and civic participation.

By highlighting the transformative role of art, the Toolkit equips readers to address social challenges and facilitate inter-community dialogue. Tailored to Kosovo’s unique context, it ensures that its approaches are relevant and impactful for those seeking to create meaningful, lasting change.

This publication was co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Integra and CASA and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Introduction

Art and culture shape not only how we express ourselves, but also how we understand the world, how we carry memory, build relationships, and imagine what's possible beyond the present. In Kosovo, where the echoes of conflict still inform daily life and communities continue to navigate deep divisions and systemic inequality, creative expression offers something both powerful and essential. It opens space for reflection, connection, and dialogue where political or institutional frameworks often fall short. Art transcends conventional discourse, giving form to what words alone can never fully capture — what must be felt, lived, and embodied. It draws us beyond our own vantage points into the lives and perspectives of others, even those we may see as distant or opposed. By crossing these boundaries, art transforms us from within, disrupting inherited narratives and nurturing a deeper recognition of our shared humanity. In Kosovo's complex social landscape, such imaginative spaces are not merely valuable; they are indispensable.

Grounded in this reality, this Toolkit views art as far more than a mirror to society. It is one of our most powerful instruments for challenging, healing, and re-imagining it. Its goal is to illuminate the challenging terrain of making art in Kosovo, both in general and with a particular focus on socially engaged art. While acknowledging the political, social, and economic obstacles activists and artists face, the Toolkit aims to highlight examples of success and proven approaches that have achieved meaningful impact despite these constraints. Above all, it seeks to make a clear and unequivocal case for the transformative power and vital importance of socially engaged art in society. Socially engaged art is not a luxury but an essential driver of democracy and social cohesion.

This resource is designed for activists, artists, civil society organizations, and informal artist collectives, whether experienced in using creative expression for social change or just beginning to explore its potential.

The Toolkit is organized into three interconnected components, designed to inspire and guide readers in harnessing art's transformative potential:

1. Art and Culture for Social Change

2. Gender and Cultural Approaches to Social Change

3. Cultural Approaches to Social Change with a Focus on Non-Majority Communities

Each section offers a thematic overview, practical guidance, and local case studies of good practice. Because these components build on one another, we recommend consulting the Toolkit as a whole, rather than in isolated parts.

Art's power lies in its capacity to humanize: it brings abstract statistics to life, gives voice to the silenced, and opens emotional access to experiences that might otherwise be overlooked. Art does not instruct; it reveals. By centering micro-histories, marginalized

communities, and lived experience, it invites audiences to witness rather than judge. Art also embraces ambiguity, reflection, and nuance, qualities often missing from political discourse, holding contradictions without forcing resolution. This makes it especially crucial in divided or post-conflict societies like Kosovo, where the truth is contested and reconciliation remains fragile.

In short, art accomplishes what politics or protest alone cannot; it shifts perceptions, generates empathy, and sustains long-term conversations about justice, equality, and belonging. For these reasons, socially engaged art must be structurally, educationally, and financially recognized as a foundational pillar of Kosovo's democratic and social development.

Methodology

The development of the Toolkit for Promoting the Use of Art and Culture in Local Initiatives followed a multi-phase process aimed at ensuring its relevance and practicality. A team of three experts, each with unique expertise, co-designed the Toolkit to ensure it was both practical and deeply connected to Kosovo's context. The experts included a specialist in art and culture for social change, one focusing on cultural approaches for non-majority communities, and another with expertise in gender-sensitive cultural approaches.

The methodology combined desk research with consultations involving local CSOs, artists, activists, and community representatives across Kosovo. Through interviews, meetings, and focus groups, the team gathered insights from Kosovo's diverse communities. These consultations, together with national best practices, shaped the Toolkit's content, ensuring it was globally informed and locally relevant.

The experts made sure the Toolkit addressed the needs of all communities, especially non-majority and marginalized groups, while remaining gender-sensitive. In the final phase, the draft Toolkit was shared with stakeholders for review. Feedback from these sessions helped refine the content, ensuring it was clear, culturally sensitive, and practical. The result is a user-friendly resource that blends global expertise with local knowledge, providing a strong foundation for art and culture initiatives across Kosovo.

ART AND CULTURE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Aurela Kadriu

Aesthetics vs. Politics - Art as a Tool for Social Change

In Kosovo, as elsewhere, an ongoing debate persists around the notion that art and activism, or engagement with social issues, are separate domains. A popular belief insists that art should remain "pure," reflecting aesthetic currents without agitating social nerves, disturbing comfort zones, or confronting society with its own contradictions. This belief is reinforced by Kosovo's fragile cultural infrastructure, limited state support, and an education system focused on traditional, linear art forms. The result is a narrow understanding of what art is and what it can do.

Yet this stance contradicts the very origins of art itself. Creative practice emerged to resist convention, speak differently, and reach beyond the boundaries of privilege. From the outset, artistic expression has possessed an extraordinary ability to transcend social boundaries. By delving into nuanced experiences and presenting them to diverse audiences, art sparks dialogue, amplifies marginalized voices, and invites collective scrutiny. To insist that art should exist solely for aesthetic pleasure raises a social issue of its own: the question of class.

The debate over art's function — whether it should communicate beauty and form or challenge social realities by mobilizing communities — is therefore not just theoretical. It shapes how art is funded, how it is taught, and how it is valued within society. The American writer and activist James Baldwin famously wrote, "The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers" (Baldwin, 1962), highlighting art's power to disrupt dominant narratives and unsettle accepted truths.

Public discourse is typically shaped by those with secure access to platforms — voices least likely to be questioned. In this landscape, art's responsibility is to challenge even majority-held assumptions, enriching them with complexity and revealing what they leave out. This task demands from artists a spirit of curiosity, non-conformity, and a willingness to question the very questions being asked: Who is speaking? Whose experiences are excluded? What truths have been deliberately pushed aside?

The imperative to surface what is hidden lies at the heart of the ongoing debate over the role of art: is it merely a vehicle for aesthetic expression, or a means of confronting social realities and enabling mobilization? This debate closely parallels the long-standing tension between the personal and the political. The lived realities of entire social categories, shaped by historical discrimination and exclusion, have too often been reduced to individual experiences and dismissed as private misfortunes.

Yet the role of art is not only to interpret reality, but also to transform it, or at the very least, to provoke the kind of reflection that leads to change. Art carries the responsibility of bringing these experiences, often perceived as personal, into the sphere of collective social debate.

This dynamic became especially clear during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, when the now-iconic phrase “the personal is political” gained prominence. At that time, women’s issues, previously confined to the private sphere, were redefined as public and political concerns. Gender-based discrimination and injustice had to be brought out from behind household walls and addressed as systemic problems that demanded political attention.

Similarly, when we speak of art as a tool for social change, we align ourselves with this feminist rethinking of the personal and the political. We understand that everything that happens around us is political - not in the narrow, partisan sense, but in the broader sense of the collective, the social, the polis. Within this framework, the role of art is to interrogate, challenge, and engage with the world around it. For artists, there are no purely personal fates, only social fates that demand to be seen, questioned, and transformed through creative expression.

Art should, and often does, draw from lived experience. But as Nikki Giovanni reminds us, it ultimately depends on empathy. “Writers don’t write from experience, although many are reluctant to admit it... If they did, you’d have maybe one book, three poems. Writers write from empathy.” (Giovanni, 1983). This principle applies to artists broadly: to create meaningfully, they must hone the skill of social observation.

Unlike casual observation, social observation is a research tool: it is intentional, requires presence, and demands intellectual deconstruction, with a mission and agenda to examine everyday relationships and dynamics. It involves stripping those dynamics of their "personal" layer and placing them within the political realm, opening them to public examination and social problematization.

We have raised this argument about the dichotomous debate over art as either an aesthetic pursuit or a means of articulating social issues because, as previously noted, this very dichotomy often underpins how governments and institutions shape their approach and define their relationship to art and artistic institutions. It directly influences how artists are treated, how art is integrated into education, how it is funded and how it is perceived by society at large.

In Kosovo, however, we cannot speak of a principled or value-based positioning within the cultural scene, nor within government or academia, on either side of this debate. It would be inaccurate to claim that any institution or cultural manager holds a clear position rooted in a defined belief system. Such a stance requires a level of institutional, ethical, intellectual, and aesthetic maturity, which is still developing within Kosovo’s cultural sphere.

Of course, the societal understanding of art in Kosovo is far more complex than a binary divide. Yet, despite all that complexity, both the public conversation around art and culture, and the cultural practice itself, remain at an early stage of maturity. A fragmented

institutional response to the needs of cultural institutions, along with Kosovo's political and institutional history, has left culture on the margins of public attention. This marginalization has led to a cultural sector in identity crisis, lacking clarity in values, mission, and its place in the broader social fabric.

This has also shaped how art is taught in academies, where the focus remains on form and aesthetics, rather than through an interdisciplinary framework that encourages students to engage with the subjects they address in a holistic and critical way. Moreover, this approach fails to foster meaningful engagement with the communities students come from or represent. It does not equip them to use art as a way to reflect, communicate, or respond to the experiences and needs of those communities.

In other words, although positioned on opposite ends of the cultural spectrum, both academia and public cultural institutions have erected a barrier between themselves and the substance of art itself, as well as the communities they should give voice to and engage with through artistic expression. These institutions represent two essential pillars of a functioning cultural ecosystem, yet they lack mechanisms for systematic communication. Students in the arts often graduate without understanding how cultural institutions, meant to host their work, operate.

Educational institutions have played a role in this stagnation. Universities typically train artists within narrowly defined, traditional disciplines, offering little encouragement for interdisciplinary exploration or socially engaged practice. As a result, entire generations of artists emerge either unequipped or simply unmotivated to engage artistically with the complex realities that surround them.

Even more concerning is the divide between public cultural institutions and the independent cultural scene. This division is often reinforced by a dismissive stance toward politically engaged art, which is frequently labeled as "NGO art"—a term used to imply that such work lacks aesthetic value or artistic legitimacy. By positioning themselves as custodians of "pure" art, public cultural institutions have created a climate in which politically engaged art is relegated exclusively to the independent scene, leaving both the art and its creators pushed to the margins.

Yet, despite this marginalization, many independent artists, informal collectives, and alternative institutions in Kosovo have succeeded in developing their own aesthetic, ethical, and political frameworks. However, they remain isolated from both state-run cultural institutions and academic centers.

This binary must be dismantled. The idea that socially engaged art and aesthetically sophisticated art are mutually exclusive is outdated. Art that addresses social issues is not devoid of aesthetics, nor does it disregard artistic conventions. On the contrary, socially engaged artists in Kosovo and beyond convey pressing social realities precisely through artistic and aesthetic excellence. In doing so, they reach audiences who seek aesthetic experience while simultaneously challenging society to confront its truths.

Encouragingly, public institutions in Kosovo are beginning to embrace this understanding. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport's increased support for independent artists and collectives is a step forward. Public cultural institutions are also diversifying their programs, increasingly opening space for works addressing sensitive social issues. For example, the National Gallery of Kosovo has recently showcased works on LGBTQ+ rights and labor struggles, signaling a shift toward inclusivity and institutional responsibility.

Supporting such works within public cultural institutions is not only a matter of fulfilling institutional mandates; it also carries powerful symbolic weight. It signals solidarity with the marginalized, the discriminated, and the excluded. In a society like ours, where these groups are many, the impact of such programming is not only meaningful; it is transformative.

Consider Kosovo's participation in the 2024 Venice Art Biennale, where Doruntina Kastrati's "The Echoing Silences of Metal and Skin," curated by Erëmirë Krasniqi, represented the country on an international stage. The project offered a poignant and political exploration of gendered labor in Kosovo, drawing on the stories of twelve female workers at a Turkish delight factory in Prizren. It was a landmark moment: a political narrative told through aesthetic excellence, in one of the art world's most prestigious spaces. (Krasniqi, 2024)

The historical and political circumstances that have shaped, and continue to shape, Kosovo's development have profoundly influenced how art and culture are practiced in the country. These conditions create a powerful foundation for socially engaged art, making it not only relevant but essential. Art that serves a social purpose is no less "pure." On the contrary, it is deeply rooted in the lived realities of the communities from which it emerges. It exposes systemic injustices, engages with collective trauma, and creates space for healing, reflection, and resistance. In all its forms, art acts as a bridge between personal experience and public discourse, transforming private realities into shared understanding.

Before turning to concrete models of how art can function as resistance and social intervention, we must take a closer look at Kosovo's cultural landscape, whose institutions are, in principle, mandated to support such artistic expression. What defines Kosovo's cultural scene? What are its institutions? Who shapes cultural life in the country?

Kosovo's cultural ecosystem currently consists of several key actors:

- **Central governance:** The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of the Republic of Kosovo (MCYS), responsible for national cultural policy and funding central public institutions.
- **Local governance:** Municipal cultural departments, with local public cultural institutions.

- **Central public institutions:** Such as the National Theatre, National Gallery, and Philharmonic, which operate under the MCYS.
- **Local public institutions:** Including municipal cultural centers, libraries, and city theatres.
- **Independent cultural organizations:** NGOs and civil society actors that deliver artistic and cultural programming, often funded by international donors.
- **Independent artists and informal collectives:** Self-organized initiatives that have gained importance in producing contemporary, experimental, and socially sensitive work.
- **Private actors:** Galleries, creative agencies, and production companies that contribute to cultural life, often blending commercial and critical practices.

While each of these actors contributes to cultural production, collaboration across sectors remains limited. Institutional inertia, bureaucratic funding processes, and a lack of structured support for artistic mobility and dialogue often result in fragmentation — particularly isolating independent artists and collectives, especially those working outside the capital.

Real Life: Using Arts and Culture to Address Social Issues

Despite what was previously stated, the use of art to confront social challenges and create spaces for reflection and dialogue is deeply rooted in Kosovo's cultural landscape. Within the creative industries and the broader cultural sector—including public expectations and tastes—socially engaged art is highly valued, drawing large audiences and fostering meaningful community involvement. In practice, artists and artistic collectives in Kosovo have already demonstrated the transformative social potential of art, whether by artistically problematizing issues related to gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, war memory, climate and environmental degradation, or corruption and inequality in general. Kosovar society, and Kosovar artists in particular, are characterized by a strong spirit of resistance, consistently showing through their work that art can be both expressive and interventionist, aesthetically rich and politically engaged.

Models of Organizations, Informal Collectives, and Individual Artists in Kosovo

This section presents concrete, functional models of civil society organizations, informal collectives, individual artists, and hybrid initiatives that use artistic expression to address social issues and mobilize communities. These examples are included to support those looking to establish cultural organizations or collectives with a socially engaged mission, or to develop artistic interventions aimed at community impact. Due to space constraints, one representative example is provided for each category, offering diverse approaches to integrating art with social change.

I. Foundation 17

Founded in response to widespread social apathy, Foundation 17 emerged with a long-term vision: to create a space dedicated to sustained community transformation (Kërqeli, 2025). Its work is structured around three core programmatic pillars: Art and Education, Cultural Activism, and Space. Importantly, "space" here is conceived not only as a physical location but also as a platform for collective imagination.

Initially formed as an artistic and activist duo, Foundation 17 gradually evolved into a community-based organization. Through various artistic interventions, it seeks to challenge and reimagine Kosovo's complex relationship with public space - a relationship that, according to Kërqeli, has become problematic due to the country's historically and politically charged context.

From the outset, Foundation 17 has prioritized a **program-based operational model** over a project-based one. This choice is particularly challenging within Kosovo's financially unstable cultural sector, where international donors, who remain the primary funders of the arts, tend to favor short-term, project-based support over structural or institutional funding.

Nevertheless, for an organization whose mission is to use art as a vehicle for social change, a program-based model offers distinct advantages: it allows time to define the artistic tools it specializes in, to respond meaningfully to pressing social issues, and to cultivate genuine engagement with specific communities. This approach enables slower but more sustainable and impactful interventions.

In other words, while securing small grants for specific projects is often easier, this approach is ultimately unsustainable. It fails to guarantee the organization's continuity beyond a project's duration and limits the potential for sustained engagement with communities once the artistic intervention ends. In contrast, a program-based model, though more demanding in terms of fundraising and long-term thematic planning, fosters deeper, lasting relationships with communities and

partners. It allows for more meaningful, mission-driven work to unfold gradually, leading to outcomes with greater and more enduring social impact.

A noteworthy practice introduced by Foundation 17 is its network-based communication model with partners. Beyond its collaborations with artists and communities, Foundation 17 also engages institutions as active partners in advancing its mission. Through ongoing advocacy, often referred to as cultural activism, it works with public and local institutions to address key issues such as improving working conditions, shaping cultural policy, and strengthening support for the independent cultural scene, individual artists, and the broader cultural sector.

This approach enables the organization to maintain a critical perspective on institutional shortcomings while still engaging in constructive dialogue when it comes to advancing issues that matter to the community. A strong example of this balance is the collaborative work led by Foundation 17, alongside other independent cultural organizations such as Dokufest, Anibar, 7Arte, Teatri ODA, Qendra Multimedia, and Lumbardhi, in addressing the issue of public spaces designated for cultural use.

Some of Foundation 17's most notable programs include:

Residency 17 - a year-round, interdisciplinary residency program that invites artists, theorists, writers, scientists, and researchers to participate through open calls. It includes local thematic residencies, international exchange opportunities, and access to fully equipped creative studios. The program is designed to foster collaboration, stimulate research, and support the development or realization of new artistic and intellectual projects.

With three dedicated studio spaces tailored to diverse creative needs, Residency 17 actively supports experimental and research-driven work. It provides space for artistic production, public talks, open studio presentations, workshops, performances, and other community-oriented activities. Applications for studio use are open throughout the year, ensuring continued access and engagement.

In late 2021, Foundation 17 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Prishtina, securing a five-year mandate to manage the Hivzi Sulejmani house in Taslixhe. This historic site has since been transformed into a vibrant hub for the residency program, an inspiring space for artistic, scientific, and critical inquiry. Building on existing partnerships and fostering new ones, Residency 17 continues to grow as a platform for exchange, reflection, and experimentation.

Gallery 17 - founded out of a need for inclusivity, sustainability, and experimentation within Kosovo's evolving artistic landscape, where flexible, forward-thinking spaces are increasingly vital. Conceived as more than a traditional exhibition venue, Gallery 17 is envisioned as an adaptive structure: like a shell that expands with the mollusk, it shifts and transforms in response to the needs of the artists, curators,

and communities it serves. In doing so, it mirrors the function of public space, constantly reshaped by the dynamics of urban life and social transformation.

The gallery places a strong emphasis on socially engaged themes, inviting artists and curators to experiment freely with ideas, formats, and spatial possibilities. Exhibitions are encouraged to be bold and thought-provoking, sparking dialogue, public debate, and critical engagement. Gallery 17 also plays an important archival role, contributing to the creation and preservation of missing cultural references, and supporting artistic practices that both document and educate.

Beyond its curatorial work, Gallery 17 aims to actively shape participatory and ethical cultural policies, pushing for representation and inclusivity within the broader international cultural sector. By identifying and championing courageous, critical voices, the gallery fosters reflection and drives contemporary art into new and necessary directions.

Metamorphosis Program - aims to bring art and culture into dialogue to discuss the importance of public space utilization. By reactivating and reimagining abandoned or overlooked buildings, even if only temporarily, it sheds light on collective memories often left unspoken, while advocating for the use of public space in service of the common good.

Focusing on buildings, monuments, and public spaces shaped by shifting social forces, Metamorphosis goes beyond documenting architectural materials or design. It interrogates the evolving functions and meanings of these spaces - how they reflect, inform, and are shaped by societal change. In doing so, the program highlights the ways public knowledge is constructed and restructured within the very spaces that house it.

At its core, Metamorphosis investigates the relationship between architecture, public memory, and social consciousness. It asks not only how knowledge is spatially embedded but also how these structures actively participate in public life. Through artistic engagement with spatial histories and memory symbols, the program emphasizes the power of collective memory to shape more just, inclusive, and reflective urban environments, reclaiming the right to the city as a shared civic responsibility.

Artistic Residency — INFRARED - is dedicated to exploring environmental issues through artistic research, experimentation, and public engagement. Inspired by the nature of infrared light, an invisible force perceptible only through heat or specialized equipment, the residency seeks to reveal overlooked or hidden ecological concerns, making them visible through creative practice.

Rather than limiting itself to conventional artistic production, INFRARED welcomes interdisciplinary and research-based approaches that align with its environmental focus. Participants are encouraged to engage critically and imaginatively with environmental themes, using the residency as a platform to develop, question, and communicate new ideas.

The program supports the full development cycle of a research or experimental project, culminating in a public talk or presentation. Its open-studio format invites ongoing dialogue with the community, fostering transparency, process-sharing, and deeper public understanding of ecological challenges. Through this model, INFRARED not only promotes environmental awareness but also positions art as a vital force in shaping more sustainable futures.

II. HAVEIT Collective

Comprised of Alketa Sylaj, Arbërore Sylaj, Hana Qena, and Vesa Qena, HAVEIT has become one of the most influential informal collectives in Kosovo's cultural ecosystem over the past decade. Operating without formal structure or institutional support, HAVEIT was founded in 2011 with a mission to use art and performance to confront social taboos, particularly those related to gender and human rights.

Their work includes protest performances and direct interventions in public spaces, with each element—theme, medium, and location—carefully chosen to carry a strong political message. While their practice primarily addresses gender issues, such as femicide, homophobia, the systemic neglect of women, and unequal opportunities for girls, their artistic interventions also engage with broader forms of injustice and marginalization.

Unlike program-based organizations such as Foundation 17, HAVEIT's practice is immediate, reactive, and rooted in the urgency of the moment. Their interventions occupy public space both physically and discursively, often generating discomfort and triggering conversations that society tends to avoid. This shock effect, though momentary, has a long-term capacity to provoke deeper reflection and societal dialogue.

Their first performance, "The Crowning", was staged in 2011 as a response to the femicide of Diana Kastrati. Standing silently in wedding veils, the collective protested the societal and institutional violence faced by women. In "The Kiss" (2014), two of the members kissed in public as an act of solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, receiving over 100 death threats in response. In "Examination" (2013), they crushed apples, a metaphor for the myth of virginity, in protest against calls for "medical verification" of survivors of wartime sexual violence.

HAVEIT exemplifies how informal collectives can create space for artistic expression and political resistance outside institutional frameworks. Their work directly challenges patriarchal norms and brings public attention to violence, discrimination, and systemic neglect. Unlike conventional art meant for galleries, their performances are meant to disturb, provoke, and awaken public consciousness.

Yet while their interventions are urgent and necessary, the conditions under which they work are precarious. Their model highlights the critical need for institutional support, not to formalize their practice, but to ensure its sustainability, safety, and public value. In this Toolkit, the HAVEIT Collective serves as an example for reflecting on the structural needs of informal artistic actors.

Three core areas require immediate institutional attention. First, formal state recognition of independent artist status is essential, along with accompanying provisions such as minimum income, health insurance, and fair taxation. Second, a dedicated public fund for independent culture should be established, allowing direct access for informal collectives and individual artists without requiring them to convert into associations or foundations, thus preserving their authenticity and autonomy. Third, public institutions must commit to systematically archiving such artistic interventions, ensuring they are not only documented but also integrated into educational and cultural discourse.

HAVEIT's practice reveals that art can be both radically expressive and a powerful form of social resistance. Their work underscores why structural support for independent artists is not a luxury, but a necessity, for a culture that seeks to confront itself honestly and evolve.

III. Saranda Sadikaj

Saranda Sadikaj, known artistically as Ms. Indefinite is an individual artist whose work powerfully merges artistic expression with social advocacy, particularly around the status and rights of women in Kosovo. Starting with poetry, she soon expanded her practice across various media to address a range of pressing social issues, using art as a means to translate policy, research, and activism into emotionally resonant and publicly engaging works.

Sadikaj exemplifies how advocacy can be reimagined through artistic form to reach broader and more diverse audiences. Her performances, such as "Our Blood, Your Tax", which critiques the taxation of hygiene products, and "The Labyrinth of Equality", which explores women's access to property, tackle themes including gender-based violence, reproductive justice, and legal inequality. These works stand as clear examples of how socially engaged art can transform data and policy into lived, felt experience.

Operating as an independent artist, Sadikaj has built strong collaborative relationships with civil society organizations in order to ground her work in real data and amplify its societal impact. This approach not only ensures that her art remains relevant and informed but also underscores the socially responsible role of the artist in public discourse.

Her practice demonstrates that artists can function as public intellectuals, translating abstract statistics into narratives that humanize and mobilize. At the same time, it illustrates the reality that independent artists must often create their own support ecosystems in the absence of formal institutional backing. Sadikaj's strategic network-building sustains the reach and relevance of her work over time.

Importantly, her collaborations have also influenced the organizations she partners with. By integrating artistic expression into advocacy work, she challenges traditional methods of engagement and expands their communicative reach. In doing so, Sadikaj not only brings artistic tools into the realm of activism, but also reframes how advocacy itself can be conceptualized, offering socially engaged art as a vital medium for reaching audiences and communities that institutional advocacy might otherwise overlook.

IV: The Hybrid Model of Integrated Art to Address Social Issues

The power of art to address social issues and connect more deeply with communities is increasingly recognized in Kosovo. Many civil society organizations, whose core mission is advocacy, have begun to integrate artistic practices to broaden their reach and amplify their impact. These practices represent what we refer to here as a hybrid model, where art is integrated into broader strategies for social change.

A prominent example is Integra, an organization focused on human rights, the rights of non-majority communities, transitional justice, and dealing with the past. While its primary work centers on policy advocacy, Integra has embraced artistic expression as a means to reach new audiences and advance its mission.

The festival "Mirëdita, Dobar dan" is a powerful example. Fostering dialogue about confronting the past through an intense program of artistic and discursive exchange between artists and intellectuals from Kosovo and Serbia. Likewise, the play "I Am My Own Wife", produced by Integra, offered unprecedented visibility for LGBTIQ+ rights in Kosovo, bringing the topic to a theatrical stage for the first time. "The Father and the Father" similarly tackles issues of transitional justice, while "Stiffler" explores the realities and layered oppression faced by sex workers in Kosovo's deeply patriarchal society.

Beyond integrating art into its programs, Integra's work demonstrates a collaborative model between the independent and public sectors, a model applied

across all these examples. By presenting these performances in public institutions such as the National Theatre of Kosovo, city theatres, and the Ethnological Museum, Integra has helped these traditionally cautious institutions open up to sensitive topics, expand their cultural discourse, and engage audiences who might otherwise remain disconnected from such issues. This collaboration has also encouraged public cultural institutions to adopt more inclusive programming that embraces diverse artistic voices.

Similar practices are emerging across Kosovo. Organizations not traditionally rooted in artistic expression are increasingly adopting it as a powerful tool for public engagement. The exhibition "Once Upon a Time, Never Again", and others that followed, broadened the reach of the Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo's documentation of war crimes. Likewise, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights has been employing artistic formats to address issues of transitional justice and historical reckoning.

These are just a few examples - among dozens, even hundreds - of organizations within Kosovo's vibrant civil society that are incorporating artistic expression into their advocacy, despite it not being their primary mission.

We highlight these cases to inspire curiosity and expand the thinking of artists, encouraging them to proactively seek collaboration with advocacy-based organizations and institutions. Socially engaged art does not always require the traditional comfort of galleries or theatres. It should be assertive, adaptive, and responsive to the community's needs, as interpreted through the artist's own creative vision.

Creating Synergies to Reach Wider Audiences: Models of Collaboration between Artistic and Cultural Actors

Although not actively encouraged by national cultural policy, models of collaboration between different sectors of the cultural scene in Kosovo have existed and continue to exist. Below, we highlight several functional models that have produced tangible results and can serve as reference points for future practice.

Previously, we outlined examples of potential collaborations that not only align in values and vision but also allow for the pooling of diverse resources, including financial, intellectual, creative, logistical, and human. These examples are worth revisiting in a more structured format:

- **Collaborations between civil society organizations** that possess complementary resources
- **Collaborations between individual artists and organizations**
- **Collaborations between organizations and public institutions**

- Collaborations between organizations and academia
- Collaborations between academia and public institutions

Ultimately, there is no single formula, no universally successful model, that guarantees the success of an artwork, a collaborative effort, or a funding strategy, particularly within a cultural landscape as unregulated as Kosovo's. When we refer to successful examples, it's important to recognize that behind visible aspects such as strategies, networks, and public engagement lie often overlooked emotional, interpersonal, and structural struggles that profoundly shape the sector. These challenges are particularly acute in contexts like Kosovo, where institutional support is scarce and artistic passion is too often exploited. Artists are often expected to work under precarious conditions with little to no backing from public infrastructure.

While passion remains a vital driving force behind cultural production, it cannot substitute for structure. Advancing artistic projects that respond to social issues demands more than personal commitment, it requires systemic change. In the end, sustainability, not passion, is the only reliable foundation for a strong and enduring cultural ecosystem.

Available Funding Models in Kosovo

Art and culture are widely acknowledged as pillars of social cohesion, yet their development relies heavily on sustainable institutional funding, something that remains elusive in Kosovo. The country's funding landscape is shaped by persistent economic limitations and the political instability that has defined the post-war period. Despite these conditions, Kosovar artists continue to demonstrate remarkable creativity. However, the long-term viability of their work is undermined by restricted access to funding, professional networks, and public platforms - challenges compounded by Kosovo's stringent visa regime and ongoing international isolation.

In recent years, modest progress has been made in drawing institutional attention to the cultural sector, largely driven by the sustained advocacy of artists and cultural civil society actors. Historically, Kosovo's post-conflict status attracted substantial donor interest, but this donor-dependence has, at times, allowed public institutions to abdicate responsibility for cultural development and policymaking.

As a result, cultural practitioners in Kosovo still face significant hurdles in securing funding and maintaining long-term operations. While many of these structural obstacles have been addressed elsewhere in this Toolkit, it bears repeating: even in the face of minimal state support, over-reliance on short-term grants, and a fragmented legal and bureaucratic framework, numerous artists and organizations continue to persevere, sustaining their work through resourcefulness, adaptability, and resilience.

To date, the primary public funding body for culture in Kosovo is the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (MCYS), which oversees the central public cultural institutions (such as the National Gallery, National Museum, National Theatre, Kosovo Philharmonic, etc.). Through its subsidy scheme, MCYS also provides financial support to independent organizations and individual artists. Recently, the ministry introduced a new structural funding mechanism that offers three-year programmatic support to select cultural organizations, a step forward in the direction of long-term sustainability.

At the municipal level, local departments of culture also allocate funding through periodic open calls and support local institutions such as cultural centers, libraries, and city theatres.

International donors remain key contributors. The European Union (through IPA, Creative Europe, and other mechanisms) continues to be a significant cultural funder. Other accessible donors include the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, various diplomatic missions (notably the Dutch Embassy), and foundations such as the European Endowment for Democracy, Allianz Foundation, and Goethe Institute, all of which offer project-based or programmatic support.

While these funding opportunities are important, the reality is that, apart from MCYS, municipal support, and a small number of dedicated cultural grants, Kosovar artists and organizations often compete for funds with entities pursuing entirely different missions. Given the large number of civil society actors in Kosovo, this competition is intense.

The newly adopted Law on Art and Culture in Kosovo introduces significant changes to the country's cultural funding landscape, including the establishment of an Independent Culture Fund and a comprehensive reform of existing funding mechanisms and the governance of public cultural institutions. These reforms aim to offer more consistent financial support and strengthen the structural conditions of Kosovo's cultural ecosystem. Under the new law, public institutions will be expected to engage more actively with independent cultural organizations, individual artists, and academia. The Independent Culture Fund is designed to provide sustainable, dedicated support to each of these pillars, without placing them in direct competition with one another.

Additionally, the Law on Sponsorships in the Field of Culture, Youth, and Sports allows businesses to allocate part of their tax obligations toward cultural and artistic projects, offering a valuable, though still underutilized, opportunity for private sector engagement.

Despite these advances, Kosovo's funding schemes rarely recognize or prioritize experimental, interdisciplinary, or politically critical work, especially the kind of socially engaged art emphasized throughout this Toolkit. As a result, many artists continue to rely on self-funding or unstable short-term grants to sustain their work.

While advocacy efforts are ongoing, it is essential that grassroots initiatives, alongside their artistic practices, continue to document and communicate the social value of their work. Only through continued visibility and sustained pressure can institutions be pushed to recognize, support, and integrate this work more meaningfully into the cultural fabric of Kosovo.

GENDER AND CULTURAL APPROACHES TO SOCIAL CHANGE

Leonida Molliqaj

Art as a Tool for Advancing Gender Equality in Kosovo

Gender equality in Kosovo remains a deeply rooted structural and societal challenge shaped by entrenched patriarchal norms, conservative traditions, and the lack of effective enforcement of existing laws and policies. With only around 17% of women formally employed, one of the lowest rates of female labor force participation in Europe, women face systemic disadvantages in employment, property ownership, access to credit, and representation in political and institutional decision-making.

Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, domestic abuse, and femicide, is a persistent phenomenon. According to 2024 data from the Ministry of Justice, 2,959 cases of domestic violence were reported, an increase of 321 cases compared to 2023. Of the perpetrators, 2,667 were men; of the victims, 2,385 were women. Many incidents go unreported due to fear, shame, and a lack of trust in state institutions. High-profile femicide cases have sparked public outrage and protests, prompting deep societal reflection on the state's failure to protect women.

Although Kosovo has adopted progressive legislation, traditional gender roles continue to dominate, confining women primarily to domestic and caregiving duties and limiting their civic, economic, and creative potential.

In this context, art and culture play an irreplaceable role.

Real change requires not only legal and policy reform but also a cultural transformation — a process of rethinking collective values, challenging stereotypes, and constructing new narratives rooted in equality. Art has the unique power to reveal what is often left unsaid, to cultivate empathy, and to inspire collective action. In Kosovo's post-conflict context, where traditional norms remain strong, art is increasingly emerging as an innovative tool to question the status quo and dismantle gender barriers embedded in the collective mindset.

This section presents both a theoretical and practical framework for understanding the intersection of art, culture, and gender equality. It includes concrete examples from Kosovo and other societies facing similar challenges and explores artistic approaches and methods that drive gender-focused social transformation. It also highlights inclusive practices that address the exclusion of marginalized gender groups in a culturally sensitive way and offers practical guidance for designing, implementing, and evaluating gender-responsive initiatives through art.

The approach outlined here is grounded in the conviction that lasting gender transformation cannot occur without a shift in cultural norms and that art holds the unique power to spark and sustain such change.

Art, Culture, and Gender Equality

Achieving gender equality requires more than legal protections and economic measures, it demands a fundamental shift in cultural norms and narratives. Gender inequality is often upheld by deeply internalized myths, stereotypes, and traditional values that dictate what women and men "should" be or do. Art offers a space in which these narratives can be reimagined, re-evaluated, challenged, and replaced.

Through storytelling, imagery, and performance, injustices can be exposed, and alternative visions of gender roles can be projected. Art plays an important role in society as a tool for expression, creativity, and social change. It promotes unity, connects us to our culture and communities, and has the power to inspire people, especially young women and men, to think differently, question biases, challenge inherited norms and imagine new possibilities. In this way, the arts can act as a catalyst for disrupting patriarchal norms and cultivating new values rooted in equality and justice.

From the earliest feminist movements, artists and activists have used artistic expression to denounce gender-based oppression and advocate for justice. This fusion of art and activism—commonly known today as feminist artivism, brings together creativity and resistance. Unlike conventional forms of advocacy, art speaks to the senses, stirs emotions, and sparks imagination. It invites both personal reflection and collective action, creating space to question what is normalized and to reshape harmful social norms. Through art, personal and collective experiences of discrimination, violence, or inequality can be expressed with emotional depth and political urgency, opening new paths toward empathy and awareness.

Moreover, art plays a critical role in making feminist theory and critiques of patriarchy more accessible. By translating abstract or academic ideas into visual, narrative, and performative forms, artists extend these concepts far beyond activist or scholarly spaces and into the public domain, reaching audiences who might otherwise remain excluded from such conversations.

However, it is important to recognize that not all feminist art is received equally, especially when it confronts uncomfortable truths. While many institutions and grant-making bodies promote gender equality in principle, their support often favors projects that remain within safe or traditionally acceptable boundaries. Art that openly challenges dominant norms, questions entrenched power structures, or is perceived as provocative or "disrespectful" to cultural values is frequently marginalized or denied funding. This institutional selectivity means that artists who push hardest against the status quo may find themselves excluded from opportunities, resources, or recognition, not because of the quality of their work, but because of its political edge.

This paradox highlights an important truth: the relationship between art and gender equality is deeply reciprocal. On one hand, art influences how gender roles are imagined and represented in society. On the other, the cultural sector itself reflects broader patterns of exclusion and inequality. Women, particularly those from marginalized communities, have long been underrepresented as creators, leaders, and subjects of art. They are often excluded not only from decision-making roles within cultural institutions, but also from the funding structures that sustain creative work. Without full inclusion and support for diverse voices in the arts, the cultural narrative remains incomplete and so too does our collective vision of equality. For this reason, empowering women in the arts is inseparable from using art to empower women in society more broadly. One cannot succeed without the other.

In Kosovo, where the legacies of conflict, ethnic fragmentation, and patriarchal norms continue to shape social life, the role of art takes on particular urgency. Here, art offers not just a means of expression, but an imaginative and culturally resonant avenue for confronting injustice and advocating for gender equality. When rooted in local realities and driven by community engagement, whether through murals, participatory theatre, inclusive festivals, or digital storytelling, artistic projects can communicate complex social messages in ways that feel relevant, accessible, and transformative.

By opening space for reflection and creative expression, art enables communities to confront gender prejudice not through direct confrontation, but through emotional engagement and shared experience. In doing so, it nurtures understanding, cultivates empathy, and opens new pathways toward a more just and equal society.

Examples of Feminist Artistic Interventions in Kosovo

In Kosovo, feminist artists, activists, and collectives have increasingly turned to art as a powerful medium for social critique and political engagement. Through their work, they challenge patriarchal structures, make the lived realities of women visible, and amplify calls for gender justice and emancipation. For these practitioners, art is not simply a form of personal expression; it is a strategic and often urgent response to systemic inequality. It becomes a space to confront societal norms, provoke public dialogue, and bring to light experiences that have long been silenced or ignored.

Whether through street performances, murals on public buildings, or data-driven installations, these interventions reveal the transformative potential of art to disrupt entrenched power dynamics, provoke discomfort, and spark critical reflection. They are often carried out despite the risk of backlash — be it social, financial, or psychological — underscoring the courage and commitment of the artists behind them.

These examples offer not only inspiration but also practical insight for those seeking to initiate similar efforts. They show how art can be mobilized in context-specific, concrete ways to engage with difficult issues and promote gender equality. Some projects stand out for their simplicity, others for their boldness, but all demonstrate art's enduring capacity to question, to resist, and to imagine more just and inclusive futures.

I. Orange Girl

Ermira Murati, widely known as Orange Girl, is recognized for her graffiti and murals that consistently engage with themes of justice, gender, and social equality. From the very beginning, she envisioned art as a medium for conveying powerful messages. She is one of the few women artists in Kosovo who has consistently used public art to address issues of justice, gender, and social transformation.

Some of her works have been vandalized—underscoring both their social resonance and the discomfort they provoke. "When I painted two men wearing traditional Albanian hats (plis) kissing, I felt it was important to bring that topic into our community," she explains. "It needs to be talked about—even rhapsodists could have been gay." The painting, part of her project "K is S", remains one of her most widely recognized and controversial works. It sparked intense backlash, including a series of threats directed at her, several of which were serious enough to be reported to the police. She pursued legal action against all individuals involved, and in at least one case, the court ruled in her favor, an outcome that speaks not only to the personal risks she has endured, but also to the deeply rooted patriarchal resistance her work continues to confront.

That same resistance, though less publicly amplified, was also reflected in the response to another of her works, "It's just a body, guys." The mural confronts the politics of bodily exposure and the unease provoked by the female form in public space. "As I began sketching the body and the breasts became visible, people passing by started whistling—it made me feel deeply uncomfortable," she recalls. "The next day, the mural had been defaced: the breasts were covered in black paint. In response, I wrote the word 'breasts' over the blacked-out area as a symbolic gesture. But soon after, the upper part of the body was painted over again." Although it did not garner the same level of recognition or controversy as "K is S," the mural laid bare how swiftly the female body is rendered intolerable in public space — censored, erased, and disciplined into invisibility. It exposed the everyday mechanisms of patriarchal discomfort; those subtle yet entrenched forms of control that police public expression and dictate whose bodies are allowed to be seen, and under what conditions.

Similar reactions followed other works. In a mural depicting a woman masturbating, public complaints prompted her to paint the word "Censored" over the exposed part of the body. "The next day, I found the entire mural covered in black," she says. Another

piece, a mural of two eagles kissing, was also vandalized. "I was 21 when I created that one," she recalls. "It was near the university campus, a high-traffic area. I was under a lot of stress and constantly afraid that something might happen to me."

Despite these challenges, Orange Girl believes many of her goals have been realized. "There are many ways to foster broader inclusion," she says. "Take breast cancer, for example it's often framed as a women's issue. But we challenged that perception. Through an artistic video that featured both men and women, we raised awareness that breast cancer can affect everyone, regardless of gender."

Ermira emphasizes that the value of art needs to be better understood, especially in institutional contexts. She points to funding challenges: "Often, the messages I want to convey through my art don't align with institutional agendas and that can hurt my chances of receiving funding or grants."

For Orange Girl, supporting artists goes far beyond individual recognition, it means building an environment where creativity can genuinely flourish. She stresses the importance of focusing on three key areas to strengthen the role of art in society:

- First, she advocates for free and open access to public spaces for artists. In a cultural landscape where NGOs often face financial hardship just to cover rent, the ability to create and exhibit in shared, accessible spaces becomes essential, not just for visibility, but for survival.
- Second, she emphasizes the need to raise public awareness about the power of art to communicate meaningful messages. For her, art is not simply about beauty or technique; it's a powerful vehicle for reflection, protest, and change.
- Finally, she is committed to action through engagement. From lobbying and advocacy to counseling sessions and community workshops, Orange Girl champions initiatives that demonstrate how art can function as a language of communication, a medium that bridges divides and fosters social transformation.

II. FemArt Festival

One of the most significant examples of feminist artistic engagement in Kosovo is FemArt, a feminist arts festival held annually in Prishtina and organized by the NGO Artpolis. For 12 consecutive years, FemArt has provided a safe and creative space where important ideas are explored, and artistic expression around gender issues is celebrated and encouraged.

The festival has become a central reference point in the city's cultural calendar, known for its bold performances, thought-provoking exhibitions, and public discussions on topics such as women's rights, domestic violence, and gender emancipation.

"For me, it's like an oasis," says Zana Hoxha, the festival's founder, highlighting how, within the space of the festival, participants experience equality and freedom, even as the broader reality outside remains marked by inequality and struggle.

III. Feminist Murals in Kosovo

Murals have proven to be a powerful medium of artistic expression within gender advocacy. By occupying public space and confronting viewers with bold, symbolic imagery, murals are uniquely positioned to raise awareness, provoke reflection, and honor the stories and struggles of women. In Kosovo, feminist murals have increasingly become tools for both commemoration and activism, transforming walls into spaces of resistance, remembrance, and hope.

In 2022, artist Fitore Berisha Alisdottir, in collaboration with the Kosovar Gender Studies Center, created a mural titled "Broken Dreams". The work was designed to raise both public and institutional awareness about violence against women. Featuring a woman with closed eyes and an expression of pain, the mural symbolized lives cut short, and futures denied. The image resonated widely, and in 2025, Berisha Alisdottir recreated Broken Dreams in the city of Gjakova, this time near the banks of the Drin River. The second version of the mural served as a direct tribute to women and girls murdered by their male partners, its quiet grief rendered in bold, public form.

Another powerful example appeared on September 21, 2024, marking the International Day of Peace. A mural was unveiled on the wall of Xhevdet Doda school in Prishtina to honor the victims of femicide in Kosovo. At its center stands the figure of a woman, her head held high, holding a bouquet of sunflowers as symbols of resilience, healing, and hope. Surrounding her are red shoes, each one representing a woman who lost her life to gender-based violence. The lead artist, Argjenda Azemi from Ferizaj, explained that each pair of shoes was meant to symbolize a life lost and to inspire hope for a future in which women live free from fear.

These murals do more than add beauty to urban spaces. They speak loudly and publicly about issues often confined to private pain. They invite collective mourning, but also collective reckoning. In doing so, they reclaim the public sphere as a space not only for artistic expression, but for feminist resistance.

IV. Other Local Initiatives

In addition to the previously mentioned examples, Kosovo has seen a range of both grassroots and large-scale initiatives that harness the power of art to promote gender equality. In recent years, gender-focused exhibitions have gained visibility, such as photography displays portraying women in non-traditional roles, or handcrafted installations that tell the stories of women who experienced wartime violence, giving voice to pain that is too often silenced.

The Prishtina International Film Festival (PriFest) has introduced dedicated categories for human rights cinema and has featured films by women directors exploring gender-related themes. Similarly, cultural and social spaces like Kino ARMATA and Termokiss in Prishtina have served as important forums where young people engage with issues such as sexual harassment, gender equality in education, and women's political representation, using music, poetry, and mural art as modes of expression.

Relevant initiatives have also emerged outside the capital. In Peja, for example, a community event held on International Women's Day 2025 brought together a marketplace for women-led businesses with a local art exhibition, creating a space that celebrated both creative and economic empowerment.

On September 23, 2024, Mural Fest Kosova organized an edition themed "Women's Empowerment", placing a strong emphasis on the role of women in public art and society. The project intentionally involved women artists, including those from non-majority communities, and highlighted diverse gender and cultural identities through mural creation. This integrated approach sought not only to elevate women's visibility in the arts but also to challenge gender stereotypes and support women's participation as both artists and entrepreneurs.

Together, these initiatives send a powerful message: women are not only survivors of violence or passive subjects of policy, but also creators, leaders, and active contributors to Kosovo's cultural and public life.

Recommendations for Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Gender-Sensitive Artistic Initiatives

Having explored why and how art can be a powerful driver of gender equality; we now shift to practical guidance for those planning artistic projects through a gender lens. The following recommendations cover the entire project cycle: from design and field implementation to monitoring and impact evaluation. By following these steps, practitioners can help ensure that their initiatives are not only effective and sustainable, but also truly meaningful to the communities they aim to engage.

Designing the Initiative

1. Conduct a gender-sensitive contextual analysis

Begin by clarifying the specific gender issue you aim to address and identifying the participants and beneficiaries. A simple gender analysis can ask:

- What are the main gender inequalities in this community or sector?
- How do women, men, and non-binary persons experience these inequalities differently?
- Whose voices are heard and whose are missing?What geographic areas are being prioritized by artistic interventions?
    - o Do these efforts actively include women and queer individuals in local or marginalized communities, or are they concentrated mainly in central or urban spaces?

If, for instance, the goal is to use art to confront domestic violence in one municipality, investigate local reporting rates, cultural norms, and available support services. Map which art forms—drama, folk music, murals, etc.—the community already values or accesses. This groundwork will shape both your choice of message and artistic medium.

Importantly, when tackling sensitive themes such as violence against women, avoid portraying women solely as passive victims or reproducing graphic scenes. Focus instead on dignity, resistance, resilience, and structural critique. The goal should be to raise awareness and provoke thought without retraumatizing audiences or reinforcing disempowering narratives

2. Set clear and measurable objectives

While art may seem difficult to measure, it's essential to define concrete goals, both for the process and the results:

- Process: "Engage X women and Y men in co-creating a public mural."
- Outcome: "Raise awareness of the Istanbul Convention among 70 % of visitors," or "Record a measurable shift in male participants' attitudes toward traditional gender roles (via pre-/post-surveys)."

Clearly defined objectives also shape the design of your project. For instance, if the goal is to raise public awareness, a mobile exhibition that reaches diverse audiences might be the most effective format. On the other hand, if the focus is on women's empowerment, a series of art therapy workshops could offer a more impactful and supportive approach.

3. Involve key stakeholders and the community in planning

Adopt a participatory approach from the very beginning. Form an advisory group that brings together key local stakeholders, such as women's rights activists, municipal representatives (especially important if public spaces are involved), educators (for any learning components), and others with relevant expertise.

Use this group to collectively discuss core decisions: What theme will the project explore? What message should it convey? Which artistic formats will resonate most with the intended audience? At the same time, identify local implementing partners, such as women's organizations, youth centers, schools, or existing artist collectives, who can help bring the project to life on the ground.

Building strong, collaborative partnerships not only helps mobilize resources but also ensures the initiative is embedded in local structures and contexts. Crucially, involve artists in the planning phase as well. They can provide valuable input on feasibility, timelines, budgets, and potential artistic or logistical challenges.

4. Secure appropriate resources and a gender-sensitive budget

Plan ahead by anticipating key project costs, including artist or facilitator fees; materials such as paint, craft supplies, musical instruments, or props; event logistics like venue rental and audio/lighting equipment; promotional efforts (flyers, posters, and social media campaigns); and transportation, especially if participants are coming from different areas. Don't overlook accommodations that ensure inclusivity, such as childcare for mothers, translation in multiethnic contexts, or accessibility for people with disabilities.

A well-prepared and transparent budget demonstrates your commitment and professionalism. If financial resources are limited, explore in-kind contributions, for example local businesses might be willing to donate materials, print promotional materials, or offer space free of charge.

Equally important is assembling a well-rounded team. Make sure to include individuals with gender expertise, project management skills, and artistic experience. Define clear roles early on, such as community outreach, logistics coordination, documentation, and discussion facilitation, to ensure smooth and effective implementation.

5. Plan for safety and ethical considerations

If your project addresses sensitive issues, such as gender-based violence, war trauma, or personal narratives, it's essential to anticipate both emotional and social risks. For example, if women are invited to share their personal stories through a theatre performance or public art piece, ensure that appropriate support systems are in place, such as having a psychologist or social worker available during and after the activity.

Privacy and informed consent are equally critical. Always obtain explicit permission before photographing or filming participants, especially when working with minors, and clearly communicate how the materials will be used, whether for documentation, advocacy, or public sharing. Respecting participants' boundaries and ensuring their dignity is key to building trust and fostering a safe, inclusive environment.

Implementation

1. Create a safe and trusting environment

The atmosphere you establish from the very first rehearsal or group meeting will shape the entire project. Ensure that all participants, especially those from marginalized groups, feel welcomed, respected, and safe.

Set clear ground rules from the beginning: confidentiality (what is shared in the group stays in the group), non-judgment (no mocking, shaming, or stereotyping), and equal participation (avoid letting a few voices dominate).

Foster empathetic listening and provide a physically comfortable space. For instance, if working with rural women who cannot leave their children, make the space child-friendly by providing toys, coloring books, or on-site childcare.

In multiethnic contexts, offer translation services or provide bilingual materials (e.g., Albanian/Serbian/Romani) to promote inclusion and mutual respect.

2. Balance professional guidance with creative freedom

Bring in the right experts to guide the artistic process, such as a community theatre director, a muralist, or a festival curator, but ensure that participants are co-creators, not just followers.

Support them with the necessary technical skills (e.g., how to use spray paint, how to project their voice), and then step back to allow space for their ideas to emerge.

Non-professional participants often contribute unique and powerful perspectives. For example, young women might develop poetic lines in small groups, which can then be transformed into a collective song.

Keep in mind: the process is just as important as the final product. Check in regularly with the group: Do they feel heard? Are they engaged? Be flexible and willing to adapt. In one case, when participants lost interest during theoretical discussions on gender, facilitators shifted to role-play theatre activities and allowed the concepts to emerge through practice rather than lectures.

3. Document the process and use creative communication

Documenting your work serves two essential purposes: internal evaluation and external advocacy. Assign someone to capture photos, video clips, participant quotes, and reflections throughout the process.

Share the project with the public through local media or online platforms, especially if there is a public event. Prepare a short press release or a series of social media posts that clearly communicate the project's goals and impact.

Keep the communication visual and story-driven: post behind-the-scenes footage, interviews with participants, or brief reflections that illustrate what the experience meant to those involved.

4. Ensure equal inclusion during implementation

Be attentive to group dynamics during implementation. If men begin to dominate discussions or take on leadership roles disproportionately, intervene respectfully: rotate speaking turns, assign women to lead small group tasks, and ensure balanced participation.

Be equally mindful of LGBTQ+ participants, ethnic minorities, or others at risk of marginalization. This requires active facilitation and a deliberate commitment to inclusion.

Above all, your project must embody the values of gender equality it seeks to promote, not just in message, but in practice.

5. Plan for sustainability and continuity

Throughout the project, identify opportunities to maintain momentum and ensure lasting impact. For example, if a group of young people forms a theatre troupe during the initiative, explore whether they would like to continue as a community club. If so, support them in finding a venue, such as a room in a public library or youth center.

If you've painted a mural, consider replicating the project in other neighborhoods or involving more artists to expand its reach. Where possible, work to institutionalize successful efforts, for instance, propose that a well-received festival or performance become an annual municipal event.

Begin planning for sustainability early. Invite potential donors, partners, or local stakeholders to attend project events, experiencing the impact firsthand is often more persuasive than any report. At the same time, invest in local capacity: train youth or community members to lead future initiatives, ensuring knowledge and leadership remain within the community.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Collect both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the project to help assess its impact and support future advocacy or funding applications.

Use simple, accessible methods:

- Track participation numbers, disaggregated by gender, age, and background
- Gather feedback through open discussions, anonymous sticky notes, or short surveys
- Document key moments, outcomes, and stories of change

These tools not only help measure effectiveness but also make your initiative more visible, credible, and replicable in the long term.

CULTURAL APPROACHES TO SOCIAL CHANGE WITH A FOCUS ON NON-MAJORITY COMMUNITIES

Stefan Kalaba

Inclusion of Non-Majority Communities – General Context

Kosovo is a multiethnic society where diverse communities, including Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani, and others, coexist and interact within a complex and often fragile social landscape. Despite this rich tapestry of identities, Kosovo's internal ethnic dynamics continue to be shaped by historical tensions, social divisions, lingering conflict, and cultural fragmentation.

While Kosovo's legal framework is notably progressive, guaranteeing the rights of non-majority communities, in some cases even exceeding international standards, these legal guarantees often remain aspirational. Institutional shortcomings, particularly the lack of consistent political will and effective implementation at the local level, prevent these rights from being fully realized. Persistent ethnic mistrust and structural segregation further limit the practical inclusion of non-majority communities in political, social, and cultural life.

As a result, the institutional architecture intended to protect and promote inclusion remains incomplete and underdeveloped. Legal principles, though present on paper, have not been translated into systematic and sustained inclusion in practice. These challenges are also visible at the community level, where social inclusion efforts frequently struggle to gain momentum and deliver lasting impact. Attempts to integrate non-majority voices into broader civic processes often clash with entrenched political divisions and social prejudice, leaving meaningful integration out of reach.

Efforts to reduce social inequalities have been ongoing for decades, with civil society organizations and international partners working to promote equality, develop inclusion policies, and foster trust among communities. Despite these efforts, deep divisions persist, indicating that existing strategies have failed to address the underlying structural and cultural barriers. What Kosovo needs now is a new approach: bottom-up, community-led mechanisms that empower marginalized groups to lead their own inclusion processes.

Innovation in this context means more than new tools or top-down policies, it involves designing participatory, community-driven models that prioritize the perspectives of marginalized groups at every stage of decision-making. One such approach is the use of art and culture as catalysts for social inclusion.

Globally, creative expression has long played a role in connecting divided communities. In Kosovo, however, this potential remains largely untapped, limited by language barriers, contested cultural identities, and the lack of systematic programming. The Toolkit for Promoting the Use of Art and Culture in Local Initiatives has been developed to help address this gap. It offers structured guidance for planning, implementing, and evaluating art-based initiatives, anticipating challenges at each stage of the process.

Its purpose is to support practitioners, civil society actors, community organizers, and socially engaged artists in using art and culture as effective tools to promote social change and build more inclusive, cohesive communities.

Toolkit Relevance for Ethnically Inclusive Programming

The Toolkit is designed to inject new energy into interethnic relations by offering structured, culturally sensitive methodologies for designing and implementing inclusive art and cultural activities. Drawing on best practices from ethnically inclusive cultural programming and adapted to Kosovo's post-conflict context, it presents both theoretical frameworks and practical examples.

A key feature of the Toolkit is its incorporation of Kosovo-based case studies, allowing future practitioners to learn from existing models, assess potential risks, and adapt proven practices to their own settings. Once integrated into programmatic activities, the Toolkit becomes a valuable resource for civil society organizations, art collectives, and individual practitioners, particularly those operating in non-majority or mixed communities, enabling them to design, manage, and evaluate inclusive cultural initiatives more effectively.

Importantly, the inclusive strategies outlined in this Toolkit are not limited to ethnicity alone. They extend to a broad spectrum of marginalized groups, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others. This intersectional applicability positions the Toolkit as a vital resource for promoting broader social cohesion, something Kosovo urgently needs. By fostering visibility, collaboration, and equity across social divides, the Toolkit offers a pathway toward transforming a fragmented civic sector into a more resilient, inclusive, and impactful civic ecosystem.

Cultural Practices as Foundations for Civic Engagement of Non-majority Communities

Marginalized groups in Kosovo, particularly non-majority ethnic communities, have long drawn on their cultural heritage and artistic expression to preserve collective identity and navigate social and political challenges. Traditional and contemporary forms of music, dance, visual art, and written narratives serve not only as creative outlets but also as mechanisms for reinforcing community solidarity and strengthening ethnic identity. Through cultural practices, exhibitions, and storytelling formats, members of non-majority communities have created informal "safe spaces", bonds of mutual support that help them withstand external pressures, transform personal expression into collective action, and resist marginalization.

Beyond reinforcing internal cohesion, art and culture also function as a universal language that transcends ethnic boundaries. Joint cultural events, such as collaborative exhibitions or interethnic music workshops, facilitate cross-community dialogue, foster interaction, and allow for the exchange of experiences and aspirations. This universality of artistic expression enables empathy and understanding, allowing participants from different backgrounds to communicate beyond language, challenge stereotypes, and build bridges, especially where formal channels of dialogue remain limited or ineffective.

Civil society organizations in Kosovo have long recognized and harnessed this potential. Art and culture provide low-barrier entry points to participation: they are widely appealing, require minimal formal education or material resources, and are accessible across diverse age groups and backgrounds. Their emotional resonance helps build trust quickly among participants, an essential element in divided or post-conflict communities.

These advantages have led CSOs to increasingly use art and culture as tools to address pressing social concerns, mobilize communities, promote dialogue, and encourage civic participation. In doing so, they lay important groundwork for more inclusive societies and stronger intercommunity solidarity.

Arts and Culture as Mechanisms for Social Change in Kosovo: Barriers to Participation in Divided and Post-Conflict Settings

Designing civic programmes that genuinely include non-majority communities is difficult everywhere, but especially in post-conflict environments like Kosovo. Structural obstacles (economic disparities and scarce resources), social barriers (inter-ethnic conflict and deep mistrust), and political impediments (institutional exclusion, limited political will, and overt pressure) form an interlinked web that every initiative must confront.

For Kosovo's non-majority groups, particularly the Serbian community, these challenges are compounded by the unhealed wounds of war. The transitional-justice process has yet to deliver full recognition of all victims, meaningful reparations, or a society-wide reckoning with the past. Without that catharsis, mistrust lingers, reconciliation stalls, and inclusive participation remains elusive.

Effective, ethnicity-inclusive programming therefore demands sensitive, adaptive strategies. Practitioners must first acknowledge and understand the key obstacles that define the local landscape:

1. Political Polarization and Legacy of Conflict

Deep-rooted mistrust between ethnic groups, particularly in Serb-majority municipalities, often leads civic initiatives to be perceived through a political lens, discouraging meaningful participation due to fears of bias, backlash, or community pressure. Conflicting narratives about the wartime past further entrench "winner-versus-loser" mentalities, making it difficult to establish shared, neutral civic goals. In such politically polarized contexts, dominant public narratives, shaped by political leaders and mainstream media, tend to amplify divisive rhetoric and normalize social distancing as an accepted mode of behavior.

2. Physical Segregation and Limited Mobility

Many non-majority communities in Kosovo reside in isolated settlements with minimal or no social interaction with the surrounding majority populations. This isolation stems from a combination of factors: the legacy of political and ethnic conflict, practical limitations such as inadequate transportation infrastructure, and pervasive concerns about safety and freedom of movement. These tangible barriers are compounded by psychological ones, where fear and perceived insecurity lead individuals to self-isolate, further limiting opportunities for interethnic contact and inclusive civic engagement.

3. Socio-Cultural Prejudices and Language Barriers

Historically rooted stereotypes, stigma, and mutual distrust between communities have long hindered both civic practitioners and community members from engaging in collaborative initiatives. In Kosovo, these divisions are further deepened by persistent language barriers that obstruct everyday communication and limit access to information about civic opportunities. As a result, communities often remain isolated, disconnected from programs aimed at fostering social inclusion and strengthening inter-community cohesion.

Together, these factors create an extraordinarily demanding environment for inclusive civic action. Overcoming them requires approaches that move beyond standard outreach or generic project templates, methods that adapt to local realities and spark true community mobilization. As this publication illustrates, few tools match the power of art and culture to bridge divides, foster empathy, and promote social cohesion in Kosovo's complex post-conflict landscape.

Advantages of Art and Culture Programming in Non-Majority Community Inclusion

Art and culture are powerful tools for fostering social progress and building a more just and inclusive society. Their accessible formats allow individuals and communities to engage in critical reflection, challenge discriminatory norms, and express lived experiences in ways that resonate broadly. Cultural expression amplifies marginalized voices and raises public awareness of the challenges these groups face. As such, art-based initiatives offer an especially effective means of advancing the inclusion of marginalized social groups, including ethnic and non-majority communities.

These advantages are particularly visible in three key areas:

- **Reinforcing collective identities beyond existing divisions**

  In Kosovo, markers of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, religion, and others, often act as lines of division, fueling social fragmentation and mutual distrust. Art has the potential to transcend these divides by cultivating shared identities through collaboration: as co-creators, performers, activists, or participants in dialogue. These new, collective roles emerge through the creative process itself, allowing individuals to connect beyond inherited boundaries. By redirecting focus from fixed identities to shared artistic expression, art fosters a deeper sense of belonging rooted in common experience rather than social separation.

- **Generating social dialogue beyond linguistic barriers**

  Effective communication is central to ethnically inclusive programming, yet in Kosovo, language differences continue to be a major obstacle, exacerbated by the lack of multilingual education in the formal school system. Art offers a distinct advantage in this context. Visual, musical, and performative media, such as imagery, rhythm, movement, and gesture, can communicate across language divides. These non-verbal forms of expression enable participants to share perspectives, emotions, and experiences without needing a shared spoken language.

- **Fostering a sense of acceptance among non-majority communities**

  The principle is simple: shared work and cooperation are among the most effective ways to build trust and break down barriers, and art provides a natural platform for both. When members of majority and non-majority communities collaborate on creative projects, whether composing music, performing in theatre, or co-producing exhibitions, they relate to one another as partners, not as outsiders. This collaboration promotes empathy, reduces prejudice, and lays the foundation for mutual recognition and respect. Over time, it helps foster a social environment where diversity is acknowledged, accepted, and valued.

In summary, the strength of art and culture lies in their ability to bring people together, bridge divides, and inspires collective action. Embedding these elements into civic programming not only enhances the experience for all participants but also lays the foundation for more resilient, inclusive communities and a stronger, more connected civic sector.

Designing Inclusive Cultural Initiatives

Designing cultural initiatives that genuinely include non-majority communities requires more than goodwill — it demands a clear, systematic approach that centers local perspectives at every stage. Practitioners must recognize the unique histories, power dynamics, and logistical barriers these communities face, and commit to a process grounded in shared trust and ownership from day one. By following the structured steps below, from early partner engagement to transparent feedback, initiatives can remain rooted in local realities and deliver lasting, meaningful impact.

Below is a roadmap to guide each step of this inclusive process:

Step 1: Find Your Partners

Start by identifying local partners whose credibility and community knowledge can help you build genuine engagement. Avoid assuming you already understand the local dynamics. Instead:

- **Identify local civic and community leaders,** as well as artists who have demonstrated experience working within non-majority groups and reach out to them.
- **Seek partnerships with grassroot organizations that already enjoy trust within their communities**. Involve them in co-designing and co-delivering activities. These partners bring essential local knowledge, existing networks, and credibility, ensuring the initiative reflects community realities, not external assumptions.
- **Include emerging youth activists and informal artist collectives that operate at the grassroots level.** Their fresh perspectives and peer connections can bring valuable energy and help expand the reach of your project.

Step 2: Inclusive Planning

True inclusion begins at the planning stage. Waiting until implementation is too late - critical needs and risks may be overlooked, resulting in poorly tailored initiatives. Here's how to ensure inclusivity from the start:

- **Organize small focus groups or consultation sessions** with your local partners. These conversations will help you understand local cultural norms, taboos, aspirations, and sensitivities. These are key insights for successful implementation.

- **Integrate local elements into your initiative so that it resonates with the target community.** For example, use familiar symbols or traditional musical motifs rather than imposing external themes.
- **Ensure logistical arrangements reflect community practices:** choose accessible venues, schedule events around religious holidays or family commitments, and provide inclusive amenities such as gender-sensitive spaces, translation, and culturally appropriate catering.

Step 3: Adapt Standard Planning Models

Generic project models often fail to account for the realities of divided or post-conflict settings. Tailor your implementation design accordingly:

- **Test your assumptions**: Conventional project plans usually assume a shared language, neutral civic spaces, and unrestricted mobility of participants, conditions that may not exist in Kosovo's context.
- **Build a modular project framework:** Divide each activity into small, standalone components, such as discussion topics, creative exercises, or public events like exhibitions or concerts. This modular approach enables facilitators to adapt the program to local contexts, allowing them to select, modify, or omit specific elements based on community sensitivities or practical constraints.
- **Acknowledge local concerns without assumptions or judgment.** For example, in Serb-majority communities, start with individual skill-building sessions before introducing interethnic collaboration to address initial comfort levels. In RAE communities, consider informal public spaces for activities, as formal institutions may not be trusted or easily accessible.

Step 4: Anticipate Political and Social Triggers

This step is vital to ensure cultural initiatives remain inclusive, safe, and neutral. In politically sensitive environments like Kosovo, where cultural events are often interpreted through partisan or ideological lenses, even well-intentioned actions can spark unintended tensions.

Anticipating these triggers helps practitioners protect participants, encourage engagement, and preserve trust within the community. To do this:

- **Create a simple decision matrix that maps out potential sensitivities,** such as election periods, religious observances, or national commemorations, alongside possible adaptations or alternatives. This helps to visualize when and where caution is needed.
- **Use the matrix to adjust scheduling, content, or location/venue choices** to avoid unintentional provocation of tensions. Refer to it regularly during planning of each project activity.

Step 5: Build Transparent Feedback Mechanisms

Ongoing feedback ensures participants feel ownership of the process and that the initiative remains responsive to their needs. To do this:

- **Provide multilingual comment boxes** (physical or digital) for anonymous suggestions or concerns.
- **Conduct brief post-activity surveys,** translated into local community languages, to gather immediate feedback on what worked and what needs adjustment.
- **Host periodic community (reflection) meetings** where non-majority community members can share their experiences and propose improvements. This helps ensure their voices shape the project's evolution.

These five steps offer a practical guide to developing inclusive, sustainable cultural initiatives for non-majority communities. By centering local voices, adapting to real-world constraints, and maintaining transparency throughout, initiatives can foster genuine inclusion and leave a lasting impact.

Methods and Approaches in Creating Ethnically Inclusive Cultural Projects

Achieving genuine inclusion of non-majority communities requires a fundamental shift away from traditional top-down programming, still common in civic initiatives, toward a co-creative model that actively involves communities at every stage. This shift relies on a diverse set of participatory methods and culturally tailored tools that promote meaningful engagement and shared ownership.

As outlined in earlier sections, the success of inclusive cultural initiatives depends on several key factors: thorough context analysis, collaborative project design, cultural and linguistic adaptation, and participatory programming practices. Together, these elements ensure that initiatives remain responsive to community realities and foster long-term local ownership.

Below are several proven, community-rooted participatory methods relevant to the Kosovo context — tools that practitioners should consider when aiming for authentic participation and locally driven outcomes:

- Co-creation and Public Consultations

Engage community members, local partners, grassroots artists, and activists in shaping the project's goals, themes, and content. Focus groups, workshops, and consultation sessions are effective tools for this purpose, fostering shared ownership and validating local knowledge from the very beginning

Co-creation transforms participants into active stakeholders rather than passive recipients. This approach, widely adopted by museums, theatres, and cultural institutions across Europe, has been shown to broaden audience engagement and deepen community investment in cultural spaces.

- Participatory Steering and Advisory Committees

Establish inclusive decision-making bodies, such as steering committees, advisory boards, or technical working groups, comprised of artists, CSO representatives, and community leaders. These structures ensure a range of voices inform each stage of the project, build shared responsibility, and increase legitimacy and transparency.

This governance model helps ensure that the initiative responds to genuine community needs and expectations. Artistic institutions across Europe increasingly use this approach to redistribute authority and strengthen collaboration with local communities.

- Mobile Outreach and Pop-Up Cultural Programming

Instead of expecting audiences from marginalized communities to come to central venues, bring cultural programming directly into grassroots spaces that lack formal infrastructure. Mobile or pop-up initiatives remove geographic and logistical barriers, extend access to underserved populations, and enable participation on the community's own terms.

This approach embodies the widely embraced principle that "art belongs wherever people gather" and is used globally as a key strategy to expand cultural inclusion among marginalized groups.

- Community Mapping and Asset-Based Approach

Identify both formal and informal cultural assets in your target areas, including established venues, cafés, public squares, and informal gathering spaces, and integrate them into your planning from the outset. This internationally recognized method enables initiatives to uncover hidden resources, activate trusted local networks, and reach marginalized groups more effectively. By grounding initiatives in spaces already familiar to the community, these approaches strengthen trust, increase participation, and promote long-term sustainability

These methods are not intended as a rigid checklist, but as adaptable starting points. Practitioners should assess their specific context, reflect on the suitability of each approach, and either replicate or adjust them to foster truly inclusive cultural engagement. The more tailored and participatory the process, the greater the chances of achieving meaningful, community-driven impact.

Project Implementation Tools in Assuring Inclusion of Non-majority Communities

As emphasized earlier, achieving ethnically inclusive implementation requires more than goodwill—it requires the deliberate use of structured planning, implementation, and monitoring tools with clear, measurable indicators. These tools enable practitioners to translate inclusive intentions into action by aligning project design with the lived realities of non-majority communities, adapting to local contexts, and facilitating meaningful participation.

Important note: While each tool can be tailored to the specific needs of your initiative, adhering to the core indicators outlined in this guide will help ensure consistency, relevance, and authentic community ownership.

The following list outlines the key tools and logistical considerations required for practitioners to effectively adapt and implement inclusive cultural initiatives:

1. Adaptation Requirements Checklist (ARC)

- Review your full project proposal and all supporting documents, including budgets, timelines, and logistics, and develop an Adaptation Requirements Checklist to identify all elements that may require cultural or contextual adjustments. These may include language, cultural references, event locations, budget lines, or visual and content design.

- Clearly label each section of your proposal and annexes as either **Core** (standard across all contexts) or **Customizable** (requiring local adaptation). Tag each customizable field so adaptations are targeted and efficient, avoiding the need to redesign the entire plan.
- Convene local partners and stakeholders to validate the **Customizable** elements, ensuring proposed adjustments reflect the community's norms, needs, and expectations before finalizing the design.

2. Location and Timing Planner

- Evaluate potential activity locations based on accessibility (transport, distance from the community, safety), and cultural appropriateness (neutrality of space, gender-sensitive arrangements, etc.).
- Align the timing of events with local calendars—avoiding major religious holidays, political events, market days, and peak agricultural periods. Consider daily routines such as school hours, work shifts, and community gatherings to maximize attendance and cultural sensitivity.
- Use the **Location & Timing Planner** with input from local partners to confirm that your choices respect local dynamics and do not unintentionally exclude or alienate community members.

3. Contextual and Cultural Risk Assessment Sheet

- Develop a risk-mapping template that flags political, social, or cultural triggers, such as elections, memorial dates, or festivals, that may affect project implementation or community participation.
- Accompany this with a calendar of key dates and local events to inform scheduling and content planning and to avoid missteps that may be seen as provocative or insensitive.

- Work with local stakeholders to assess the likelihood and severity of risks and create corresponding mitigation measures with clear responsibilities, deadlines, and resource allocations.

4. Inclusive Feedback System

- Design a system for gathering and integrating participant feedback through tools like anonymous comment cards, post-event questionnaires, or pre- and post-activity reflection exercises. This will help assess impact, surface lessons learned and refine future activities.
- Ensure feedback is acknowledged and shared back with participants in their preferred language. Communicating what was heard and what actions were taken in response is a vital trust-building measure that reinforces transparency, accountability, and local ownership.

These tools are designed to help practitioners move from intent to action, embedding inclusion into the operational core of their initiatives. When used thoughtfully and collaboratively, they support more context-sensitive, adaptive, and equitable project outcomes.

Key Indicators for Monitoring Ethnic Inclusivity

Effectively monitoring ethnic inclusivity within cultural and arts programming requires a well-defined set of indicators that track participation, resource distribution, representation, and other metrics that reflect genuine engagement and ownership. Without measurable benchmarks, inclusion risks becoming anecdotal, uneven, or superficial.

The following list presents a set of generic indicators applicable across different types of arts and cultural initiatives. Practitioners are encouraged to adopt these in full or adapt them according to their specific project context and goals.

1. Diversity of Participation:

Indicator: Proportion of non-majority participants involved in project activities relative to their share of the target population or specific project objectives.

Example: Reserve 4 out of 10 sub-grants specifically for artists from non-majority communities.

2. Equitable Resource Allocation:

Indicator: Percentage of project funds and material resources (e.g., grants, stipends, production support) directly allocated to non-majority community participants.

Example: Allocate 40% of the total sub-grant budget to initiatives led by or benefiting non-majority groups.

3. Decision-Making Inclusion:

Indicator: Representation of non-majority individuals in key decision-making structures such as steering committees, advisory boards, or co-design teams.

Example: Ensure at least 30% of seats on the steering committee are held by representatives from non-majority communities.

4. Inclusive Communications:

Indicator: Availability of communication materials (publications, outreach, documentation) in the primary languages spoken by non-majority communities.

Example: Translate all key reports, event invitations, and promotional materials into Serbian and Romani.

5. Cultural Relevance:

Indicator: Number of project activities that integrate non-majority cultural symbols, narratives, practices, or art forms.

Example: Feature traditional music or crafts from at least two non-majority communities in each festival edition.

6. Feedback Responsiveness:

Indicator: Percentage of suggestions or concerns raised by non-majority participants that are addressed or integrated into subsequent phases of the project.

Example: Track and report on how 75% of community-submitted ideas are incorporated into the next activity cycle.

7. Sustained Participation:

Indicator: Rate of repeat engagement among non-majority participants across different project phases or events.

Example: Aim for a 60% return rate of non-majority participants from one round of programming to the next.

These indicators provide a practical framework for assessing ethnic inclusivity and ensuring accountability throughout project implementation. When systematically applied, they help move inclusion from rhetoric to measurable reality.

Kosovo Real-life Practices and Good Examples of Ethnic Inclusive Programming

I. The Mobility and Grassroots Reach of Cultural Programming - filming in Rural Areas

The Rolling Film Festival brings Roma-produced and intercultural films directly to Roma settlements across Kosovo, screening them in schools and community centers. Each screening is followed by a bilingual discussion in Roma and Albanian, breaking down geographical and infrastructural barriers while validating marginalized narratives and fostering genuine intercultural dialogue. Recognized under Kosovo's National Roma Integration Action Plan, this mobile model extends cultural rights and civic participation to communities that are often left on the periphery.

DokuFest's "Cinema at Your Door" similarly brings cinema to rural Prizren through portable projection kits and solar-powered setups. Documentaries are screened in village squares or schoolyards, with post-screening discussions tailored to local audiences. This approach overcomes both infrastructural and linguistic barriers, revives community participation, and reflects the principle that "art belongs wherever people are."

Lessons Learned

- Local partnerships are essential. Collaborating with trusted community mediators and institutions ensures logistical feasibility and deepens community buy-in.
- Bilingual facilitation strengthens dialogue. Holding discussions in both majority and minority languages validates diverse experiences and expands engagement.
- Flexible technical setups increase reach. Using mobile and solar-powered tools enables programming in under-resourced areas without relying on fixed infrastructure.

II. Building Shared Identity Through Art

The collective exhibition "I Sing the Body Electric, the Armies of Those I Love", curated by Vesa Sahatçiu at the Barabar Centre in October 2023, illustrated how art can cultivate a shared identity among young artists from different ethnic backgrounds. As part of the *ArtSphere* project by Integra and CASA, the exhibition brought together over twenty emerging artists from Albanian, Serbian, Bosniak, and other communities around the common theme of the human body. The body was framed as a site of culture, resistance, and vulnerability, allowing artists and audiences to transcend narrow ethnic affiliations and connect through shared human experience.

The initiative emphasized support for young and emerging artists across all communities, aiming to raise the public visibility of their work and strengthen their professional identity as they entered Kosovo's cultural scene. This initiative also achieved a rare breakthrough: collaboration between students from the University of Prishtina and the University of Mitrovica, artists who had never previously worked together in post-conflict Kosovo. This outcome was made possible through conflict-sensitive framing, inclusive facilitation, and targeted outreach through trusted community networks.

Lessons Learned

- Conflict-sensitive framing enables safe collaboration. A universal theme like the human body provided neutral ground for participation without political overtones.
- Context-sensitive communication broadens access. Multilingual materials and targeted outreach ensured all communities felt invited and represented.
- Inclusive facilitation fosters co-ownership. Involving all artists in curatorial decisions helped build mutual respect and relationships that extended beyond the event itself.

Working in Networks

Meaningful participation of non-majority communities in networks that use art and culture as tools for social change requires inclusive strategies and principled leadership. Numbers alone are not enough. True inclusion means empowering non-majority actors with decision-making authority and leadership roles, enabling them to shape agendas and resource allocation.

Key Strategies for Inclusive Networks:

• Prioritize Expertise-Driven Inclusion

Including non-majority members in civic and professional networks should go beyond fulfilling quotas. Genuine representation requires meaningful participation, grounded in relevant expertise and a diversity of viewpoints. The goal is not simply to involve the most agreeable individuals, but to engage the most capable experts from within the targeted non-majority communities whose skills and insights align with the network's goals.

How to do this: Identify the core competencies needed for the initiative (e.g., community facilitation, policy analysis, artistic curation) and actively seek non-majority professionals who meet those needs. Assign them roles that allow them to shape agendas, contribute technical knowledge, and participate in decision-making. This ensures that inclusion leads to influence, not just presence, and strengthens the overall quality and impact of the work.

• Ensure Equitable Power Sharing

Meaningful inclusion requires more than participation; it demands shared authority. Granting co-leadership roles and real decision-making power to non-majority representatives fosters trust, reinforces the network's commitment to partnership, and cultivates a sense of shared ownership. True power sharing enables all members to shape priorities, influence outcomes, and co-direct the network's agenda.

How to do this: Adopt co-leadership models that pair non-majority representatives with majority counterparts in key governance bodies. Formalize these arrangements through clear regulatory frameworks—such as Memoranda of Understanding, statutes, or bylaws—that explicitly delegate decision-making responsibilities (e.g., budget approval, program planning) to non-majority co-leaders. Where long-term commitments are challenging, incorporate rotating leadership, co-chairing arrangements, or other inclusive mechanisms to ensure power is continuously and fairly distributed.

- **Use Quota Systems Thoughtfully**

Quotas are a common tool for ensuring the social and political representation of non-majority communities. Kosovo's legal framework sets formal targets for these groups across many decision-making bodies, yet genuine inclusivity remains uneven. Applied mechanically, quotas can slip into tokenism or even undermine legitimacy. Non-majority communities in Kosovo are diverse—Serbs, Bosniaks, Roma/Ashkali/Egyptians (RAE), Turks, and others— each with distinct needs and varying levels of influence. One network may have robust Bosniak or Serb participation while RAE voices remain marginal. Effective quotas, therefore, require context-specific design and clear, transparent rules.

How to do this: Start by engaging all non-majority communities in a consultative process to set realistic, time-bound targets that reflect the specific size, context, and needs of each group. Link these quota commitments to capacity-building measures, such as training, mentorship, or resource support, to ensure that representatives are empowered to participate meaningfully. To maintain transparency and accountability, establish a straightforward appeals mechanism through which underrepresented groups can highlight gaps and propose corrective actions, helping to keep the system responsive and inclusive.

- **Promote Co-designed Collaborative Projects**

For networks and collectives aiming to pursue long-term goals and sustain operations beyond individual initiatives, inclusive project development is essential. This means creating a decision-making structure where non-majority community members are actively involved at every stage, from ideation and design to implementation. Meaningful participation not only strengthens relationships across groups but also ensures that initiatives genuinely reflect the priorities, experiences, and insights of all communities involved.

How to do this: Once non-majority participation in governance is secured and roles are clearly defined in the network's bylaws, the process becomes largely operational. Establish joint planning teams that include non-majority members from the outset. Involve them in co-designing all elements of the project, budgeting, scheduling, outreach, and evaluation. Clearly assign roles and responsibilities to ensure transparency and accountability. Use shared planning tools and inclusive methodologies to foster collaboration, build trust, and reinforce collective ownership.

These strategies and tools for inclusive networks, alongside the recommendations for designing, implementing, and evaluating gender-sensitive artistic initiatives, and the exploration of art and culture as vehicles for social change, form the core of this Toolkit's contribution. Together, they offer a practical and reflective guide for those working at the intersection of creativity and civic life. At the heart of this approach is the belief that inclusion must be intentional and built in from the very beginning when preparing projects that aim to create meaningful social change. Gender sensitivity and ethnic inclusion are not checkboxes, but core values that shape how projects are envisioned, who is involved, and how impactful they become. Lasting change requires the meaningful participation of those most often excluded, not just as audiences, but also as co-creators. This Toolkit aims to offer concrete tools to help practitioners put these principles into action.

While grounded in lessons drawn from initiatives already implemented in Kosovo, the Toolkit does not advocate for replication. Instead, it encourages future projects to build on the insights gained, recognizing the value in approaches that, while sometimes uncertain, broke new ground. Practitioners are encouraged to adapt to the values and flexible methods presented here in ways that reflect their own contexts and values. In this way, the Toolkit promotes evolution over repetition, supporting approaches that remain responsive, inclusive, and rooted in local realities.

At its core, the Toolkit affirms a simple but powerful message: art and culture are not luxuries, but essential tools for social change. Artistic expression helps communities make sense of their histories, build trust, and amplify voices that are too often silenced. In post-conflict contexts like Kosovo, cultural initiatives play a crucial role in fostering dialogue and creating shared spaces across deep divisions. Creativity, in its power to reconnect, reclaim agency, and spark lasting change, may be the strongest form of civic action we possess.

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