

INTRODUCTION

The team of the Culture Crossroads authors, reviewers and advisors proudly presents the latest, 17th volume of the international peer-reviewed journal *Culture Crossroads*, which as always offers topical commentary on the linkages and impacts of cultural, artistic and creative processes in national economy, politics and social life.

While the previous volume found its readers and authors trying to adjust to the unprecedented situation of the global pandemic and addressing the crucial human resource of creativity, in this volume we are already a year and a half into the unthinkable, and starting to analyse it.

The papers in the volume present a diverse and heterogeneous body of work falling into roughly three thematic strands: identity and its contestations, decision-making and creation of solutions based on various kinds of data (even fake ones) and processes. Finally, the third strand addresses the challenges and achievements of cultural and arts education, continuously working to keep a constant supply of professionals and amateurs in the cultural sphere.

However, when reflecting on the three sub-sets of themes in the current volume, one cannot avoid thinking about a common theme, which is implicitly present – that of human agency. One feels it both in the articles on amateur art and a notable artist transforming his creative domain, both on new kinds of decisions in the lives of cultural institutions afforded by open data and the efforts to define the Latvian-ness of exile art. In short, this volume is about the human spirit and its manifold manifestations.

On the level of individual papers, each of the authors in this volume has addressed a unique and noteworthy dimension of cultural, artistic or creative life of individuals and institutions.

Baiba Tjarve, Agnese Hermane, the authors of the first paper “Institutionalisation of Amateur Arts in Latvia: Involvement of Amateur Artists in Decision-Making Process” bring the readers into the domain of amateur art and explore the gaps in the communication and decision-making process between amateur artists, artistic leaders of the amateur art groups and institutionalised decision-making bodies.

Iloņa Asare follows with examination of a relatively new phenomenon of co-creation in public governance in her paper “Co-Creation as a Means of Citizen

Engagement in Local Cultural Policy Making”. The paper sets to identify the purpose and possible gains of applying the co-creation approach in local cultural policy making.

The paper by **Lolita Ozoliņa** “The Studies of Tangible and Intangible Aspects of Place Brand Identity” takes a comprehensive view of the content of brand identities of Latvian cities and regions, providing a critical view of the current practices of key stakeholders.

Sandis Voldiņš in his paper “Covid-19 and Data: Crisis Mitigation Tools” explores the new avenues for decision making by cultural institutions afforded by the largely unused open data, arguing that these kinds of data have a potential in alleviating the consequences of the crisis (declines in audience numbers and hence revenues, etc.).

The paper by **Sarma Freiberga** “Accessibility of Cultural Education in its Broadest Sense for People with Disabilities in Latvia” advocates for a more inclusive view at cultural participation and thus cultural education. The author strives to emphasize that participation in cultural activities has to be perceived as cultural education in a broader sense, as the participation process brings new cultural knowledge to people.

The volume presents an unusual collective paper by the academic advisor and her students, namely **Iveta Kešāne, Ketrīsa Petkeviča, Ieva Elizabete Ērgle, Nadīna Medne, Elīza Aizpore, Kristīne Šmiukše, Asnāte Kalēja**, “Cooperation Between Artists and Researchers in Producing the Theatre Performance “Fake News” and Why We Share Fake News”. This is a many-level examination and reflection on the creative processes and the phenomenon of fake news posting as facilitated by various emotions.

The paper by **Uģis Nastevičs**, “The Image of Latvia and Latvians on Japanese Twitter: Reflections on People” invites the reader to see themselves through the eyes of Japanese people visiting Latvia. The paper makes use of digital humanities methodology.

Māra Simons presents to readers her paper “Problems in the Definition of Diaspora in the Context of Latvia’s Diaspora Law” which identifies two approaches to defining diaspora and discusses their consequences, telling a distinctive story of Latvia as a country between the past and the future.

The next contribution to the volume, by **Agnija Lesničenoka** entitled “The Role and Identity of Latvian Exile Art in United States of America: Example of The Student Fraternity “Dzintarzeme” of The Art Academy of Latvia” addresses the efforts to preserve and popularize Latvian national art in the USA until 1973, asking deeply probing questions, including the issue of what Latvianness of art consists of.

And last but not least the volume includes the paper by **Rita Ļeģčīlina-Broka**, “Origin of Landscape in Latvian Textile Art. Rūdolfs Heimrāts’s School”, which offers insight into the work and school created by a uniquely significant figure in Latvia’s textile art.

Taken in their entirety, these papers present a broad scene of cultural and artistic processes, each aspect highlighting a significant facet of human agency in the sphere of culture. The Latvian Academy of Culture extends sincere gratitude to all the authors who have engaged in revisions during this challenging time in order to complete this collection. May each of the papers find their committed and enthusiastic readers, and serve as encouragement for further research on the issues presented in the volume.

Ilona Kunda

Deputy Editor-in-chief