



Good Practice Story Title: Accessible opening event of Tartu 2024 for European Capital of Culture

Destination: Tartu

Country: Estonia

Submitting Organization: SA Tartumaa Turism

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- X Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Tartu, Estonia's second-largest city, located in South Estonia with nearly 100,000 residents, is steeped in history and culture. The oldest city in the country is situated along the Emajõgi River and served as a vital trading hub since ancient times. Established in 1632 by Swedish King Gustav II Adolf, the University of Tartu laid the groundwork for its reputation as an intellectual oasis and smart city. Historic landmarks like Tartu Cathedral and St. John's Church coexist with modern attractions like Aparaaditehas, a cultural hub, and picturesque Baltic wooden housing neighbourhoods like Supilinn and Karlova. Tartu seamlessly blends urban life with nature, boasting green spaces throughout the city. As Tartu is small and compact, visitors can explore on foot or bike, immersing themselves in Tartu's unique charm and vibrant atmosphere.

Summary of Good Practice Story:

The opening event of Tartu 2024 aims to set a benchmark for sustainable management as the European Capital of Culture. Key challenges identified include making the event more accessible for individuals, enhancing their ability to see and hear effectively, and preventing overcrowding, all while navigating the challenges of a January event.

To address these issues, the organizers are implementing a range of solutions. For improved visibility and audibility, advanced technologies such as using multiple screens around the city centre with real-time captioning on television in 60 countries and subtitles that can be accessed via QR code.



By focusing on inclusivity, Tartu 2024 aims to create a welcoming and efficient event that sets a new standard for future cultural initiatives. This approach underscores Tartu's commitment to accessibility and thoughtful event planning.

Issues faced:

On January 26, 2024, Tartu launched its European Capital of Culture year with the theme 'Arts of Survival,' emphasizing knowledge, skills, and values shaping our future. The icy Emajõgi riverbank hosted the main event, alongside seven other activities. Thousands gathered in the cold city center, with many more watching live. Accessibility challenges were significant, focusing on disabled individuals, families, the elderly, and non-Estonian speakers. Planning began in June 2023 with extensive consultations to understand target group needs. Initially, there were no dedicated accessibility team members, highlighting the importance of direct communication with affected individuals.

Freezing temperatures posed significant challenges for visitors and organizers. Unpredictable weather led to multiple backup plans. On the event day, icy rain and snowfall made the roads and riverbank dangerously slippery, complicating logistics and safety. Accessibility issues included viewing platform placement and sign language translation before the event. Ensuring clear, accessible information and managing crowd movement in icy conditions were key challenges. The team's commitment to learning and adapting daily led to a more inclusive and successful event.

Solution:

Several solutions were implemented to ensure accessibility. The team engaged directly with disabled individuals for feedback, informing improvements. Pre-event communication was crucial, with accessibility information published a month before the event. The viewing platform was redesigned for better visibility and accessibility. Multiple city screens with QR codes provided live English translation and real-time sign language translation on television at all times. Descriptive translation was also available. Clear, accessible information channels were established, including song lyrics on the Tartu2024 website in English and Estonian. For icy conditions, sand was placed on icy ground multiple times a day, and crowd safety was prioritized. Continuous learning ensured a successful, inclusive event.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

The opening event of Tartu 2024, the European Capital of Culture, was a meticulously planned project led by Kuldar Leis and Heigo Teder, focusing on accessibility and inclusivity. Here's a detailed outline of the project's execution:

1. Initial Planning and Team Formation: Heigo Teder led brainstorming sessions to define event objectives, emphasizing inclusivity and sustainability. A core team was formed, including event planners, accessibility experts, environmental consultants, and technology specialists. Lee Saarsen headed accessibility efforts, while Triin Pikk focused on environmental aspects.



2. Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Consultation: The team consulted with disabled individuals to understand their needs, prioritizing accessible viewing platforms, real-time translation, and navigation aids. Expertise in technology, crowd management, and security was added, and environmental planning included waste management and eco-friendly materials.

3. Infrastructure Design and Technological Integration: Detailed design plans prioritized accessibility, with redesigned viewing platforms for better visibility and wheelchair access. Technology included QR codes for live English translation on city screens and sign language on television. Necessary equipment and services were acquired.

4. Testing, Feedback, and Refinement: Full-scale tests were conducted just days before the event to assess the functionality of sign language translation and QR code systems. Feedback from target group members led to adjustments in infrastructure and technology, with documentation facilitating continuous improvement.

5. Final Preparations and Training: Final logistics covered security protocols and crowd management strategies. The team underwent comprehensive training on accessibility and communication, and technological tools were installed.

6. Event Execution and Post-Event Evaluation: The event was executed seamlessly with real-time monitoring to resolve issues promptly. Post-event evaluations, including feedback from disabled attendees, assessed the effectiveness of solutions. A comprehensive report documented experiences, challenges, and solutions for future events.

Major Cost: The total cost for the Tartu 2024 opening event was €920,000, with €850,000 allocated for the concert on the Emajõgi banks. Additional expenses included €20,000 for the introductory event and the afterparty at City Hall Square, and €50,000 for the official afterparty at the ERM open-air rave. Significant expenses were incurred for accessibility measures like wheelchair-accessible platforms and translation services.

Resources and Information Sources:

- **Tartu 2024 Team:** Comprised experts in accessibility, sustainability, and event management.
- **Stakeholders:** Included local authorities (Tartu City government and its departments and foundations), cultural organizations, disabled individuals, families, elderly people, non-Estonian speakers, and community representatives.
- **Continuous Learning:** The team's commitment to daily learning and adaptation was crucial for the event's success.





Context and Background:

- **EU Initiative:** Tartu 2024, an EU initiative, prominently featured the EU flag in its branding.
- **Foundation and Candidacy:** Launched by the Tartu City Government, the initiative was supported by the Tartu City Council, leading to the establishment of the Tartu 2024 Foundation in December 2019.
- **Competition and Cooperation:** The Ministry of Culture and the Estonian Association of Cities led the competition for the European Capital of Culture in Estonia, with Tartu and Southern Estonia securing the title. An agreement in April 2019 backed Tartu's candidacy, promoting regional collaboration. Through systematic efforts to address accessibility challenges and incorporating ongoing feedback, the Tartu 2024 opening event set a benchmark for inclusivity and cultural involvement.

Achievements and Results:

The Tartu 2024 opening event achieved remarkable results, showcasing unprecedented inclusivity and cultural engagement. Addressing the diverse needs of disabled individuals, families, elderly citizens, and non-Estonian speakers, the event fostered a profound sense of belonging and participation. By implementing real-time translation services and improving viewing platforms for people with mobility issues, it ensured seamless communication and enhanced experiences for all attendees. The event's success was further evidenced by its substantial attendance, with thousands gathering in the city centre and many more engaging through live broadcasts. Technological innovations like QR codes for live English translation and real-time sign language translation on television effectively bridged language barriers, highlighting the efficacy of these solutions. Comprehensive documentation and post-event evaluations provided invaluable insights, facilitating continuous improvement in accessibility practices for future events.

Ultimately, the primary beneficiaries were the attendees themselves, who experienced firsthand the transformative impact of inclusivity and accessibility in cultural events. Through collaborative efforts and innovative solutions, the Tartu 2024 team not only left a lasting impact on the community but also set an example for future cultural initiatives.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

The journey of organizing the Tartu 2024 opening event illuminated invaluable lessons and insights. Challenges like navigating diverse accessibility needs and ensuring effective communication underscored the importance of proactive stakeholder engagement. Collaborating closely with local authorities such as SA Tartumaa Turism, Tartu City Government, Public Relations Department and the whole tourism sector, cultural organizations, and community representatives enabled the gathering of essential input and support, fostering a sense of ownership among stakeholders. Continuous feedback loops with target groups allowed the identification and prompt addressing of emerging issues, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in event planning. Leveraging innovative solutions, such as real-time translation services and redesigned viewing platforms, demonstrated the power of technology in overcoming accessibility barriers. Moving forward, the advice is to prioritize inclusivity, engage stakeholders early and consistently, and embrace a culture of learning and adaptation to create truly transformative cultural experiences.



Recognitions and Additional References

The Tartu 2024 opening event garnered widespread recognition, including two prestigious 'kuldmunna' (Golden Egg) awards, affirming its exceptional promotion and PR campaign effectiveness. Moreover, collaboration with ERR was pivotal, with 117,000 viewers tuning in for the live broadcast and EBU distributing the event to 60 countries. The ceremony was also aired live by Lithuanian and Latvian national broadcasters, reaching even broader audiences. Accessibility measures, such as sign language and descriptive translation, along with simplified language, ensured inclusivity for people with disabilities. The event attracted 35,000 attendees and 100 accredited press members, half of whom were international journalists. Extensive media coverage included 420 articles in Estonian media and 80 stories in national publications across eight countries. Social media engagement soared, with opening posts viewed a remarkable 23.5 million times, affirming the event's broad impact and success as stated by the SA Tartu 2024.

Accessibility support material for organizers –

https://tartu2024.ee/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Ligipaasetavus_Kultuuriaknas_14.08.2023.pdf

Easy language - <https://tartu2024.ee/avamine-lihtsas-keeles/>

Tartu 2024 opening - <https://tartu2024.ee/avamine/#26-jaanuar-ligipaasetavus-ja-muu-oluline-info>

Tartu 2024 opening ceremony "All together is one!" texts in Estonian - <https://tartu2024.ee/avatekstid/>

Subtitles for the opening act - <https://live.syncwords.com/m-d5CyLC>

THE ARTS OF SURVIVAL – Tartu 2024 vision book -

<https://tartu2024.ee/elluajaamise-kunstid-tartu-2024-visiooniraamat/>

Accessibility - <https://tartu2024.ee/en/accessibility/>



