

The use of events as a tool for organisational entrepreneurship in the management of cultural institutions, as exemplified by the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk

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Abstract

The article analyses how a public cultural institution can use events as a tool for organisational entrepreneurship, understood as the ability to initiate new projects, activity formats, and organisational solutions within the existing structure. Based on a qualitative case study of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, the portfolio of events to be held in 2024—2025 is discussed, identifying the dominant types of events (institutional events, business events, incentive events and special events) and the mechanisms for generating development effects. The analysis focused on the non-financial and indirect results of event activities, such as expanding and diversifying the audience, building relationships with stakeholders, strengthening the image of the institution, and developing organisational competences. The following research methods were used in the article: analysis of the literature on the subject, analysis of institutional documents, and a case study.

Keywords: organisational entrepreneurship, cultural institutions, event marketing, event management, stakeholder relations, opera

1. Introduction

Contemporary cultural institutions operate under increasing pressure to adapt, driven by technological transformations and changing social expectations for ways to participate in culture. In addition to fulfilling their artistic mission, these institutions are required to explore new modes of communication with their audiences, build relationships with stakeholders, and enhance their visibility in the public sphere. The literature on cultural economics emphasises that these organisations, despite being strongly rooted in the public funding system, are increasingly operating according to a project-based and strategic logic, using management tools typical of business organisations' (Witkowski, 202, p. 3 – 4) .

One manifestation of organisational entrepreneurship understood in this way is the development of activities that go beyond the basic repertoire. Events, understood as planned communication and relational events, can serve as platforms for testing new formats of cooperation, building image and expanding audiences. Institutions should be focused on creating networks, or rather rhizomes and non-obvious alliances, which will have a reinforcing

effect not only on the cultural environment (Czyżewski et al., 2020, p. 8-9). In the context of cultural institutions, these activities are not only promotional in nature — they also strengthen organisational resilience by developing social and institutional networks. In this sense, they fit into the concept of rooting economic activity, which indicates that the activity of an organisation remains strongly embedded in social, cultural and political structures (Dudek, 2011, p. 155-156).

The growing importance of events is also linked to changes in marketing communication and audience experience management. Researchers point out that events enable the creation of direct, emotional relationships with participants, which can result in increased loyalty, willingness to recommend and a strengthening of the institution's identity (Kalinowska-Żeleźnik, 2014, p. 244-245). In the case of public arts institutions, however, it is particularly important to maintain a balance between audience orientation and creative autonomy, which requires conscious strategic and marketing planning (Glinka, 2015, p. 1-4).

Against this background, a particularly interesting example is the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, which in 2024-2025 implemented a diverse portfolio of events including artistic competitions, study visits, networking meetings and institutional events. An analysis of these activities allows us to look at events not only as a promotional tool, but also as a mechanism of organisational entrepreneurship, enabling the development of competences, building partnerships and strengthening the position of institutions in the regional cultural ecosystem.

The aim of this article is to analyse the use of events as a tool of organisational entrepreneurship in the management of a cultural institution, using the example of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk in 2024-2025. This aim has led to the following research questions:

How does the organisation of events at the Baltic Opera fit into the concept of organisational entrepreneurship of cultural institutions? What types of events dominate the Baltic Opera's portfolio of events in 2024—2025 and what objectives are assigned to them? What financial and non-financial benefits do the analysed events generate and what mechanisms lead to their achievement?

The article uses a qualitative case study research strategy. It uses an analysis of the literature on the subject, an analysis of documents and materials provided by the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, including a list of events held in 2024—2025 with a description of the events as well as information about partners, the course of events and the intentions behind them. To organise the empirical material, the typology of events presented in the theoretical part of this article was used. In the practice of cultural institutions, events are not mutually exclusive, one event can achieve several goals at the same time - but classification according to the dominant function (audience/communication goal) facilitates the comparison of activities and the identification of mechanisms through which events generate developmental effects, becoming a tool for organisational entrepreneurship.

The adopted methodology allows an analytical and exploratory approach to the phenomenon under study, while accounting for limitations arising from the lack of complete quantitative data.

2. Organisational entrepreneurship in cultural institutions - selected theoretical aspects

Organisational entrepreneurship is most often defined as the process of creating new ventures, services, products or organisational solutions within an existing institutional structure. Unlike classic market entrepreneurship, it does not necessarily lead directly to financial profit; its essence is to identify and exploit new opportunities for the organisation's development, including in the social and cultural dimensions (Bratnicka, 2015, p. 23-26). In the context of cultural institutions, this means the ability to initiate innovative projects, develop relationships with the environment and adapt ways of operating to changing conditions of participation in culture.

The literature distinguishes several basic types of organisational entrepreneurship. First, corporate entrepreneurship (Bratnicka, 2003, p. 6-9), which refers to initiating new projects within an existing organisation. Second, intrapreneurial entrepreneurship, carried out by employees undertaking innovative activities within an institutional structure. Thirdly, social entrepreneurship aims to create social value, not just economic value. Finally, in the case of public institutions, there is also public entrepreneurship, which encompasses innovation in service delivery and resource management. These categories are not mutually exclusive – cultural institutions often combine several of them, implementing artistic, educational and social projects simultaneously. The functions of organisational entrepreneurship can be considered on several levels.

Firstly, it has an adaptive function — it enables responses to technological and social changes through the development of new forms of activity. Secondly, it has a relational function – it promotes the building of cooperation networks with public, business and international partners. Thirdly, it has a competence function it supports the development of organisational knowledge and institutional learning. Finally, it has an image function, strengthening the position of the institution in the minds of audiences and stakeholders' (Witkowski, 2015, p. 138-141).

The concept of organisational entrepreneurship in relation to cultural institutions requires a departure from the narrow, market-based understanding of entrepreneurship as profit maximisation. Public arts institutions operate in hybrid conditions, balancing the logic of public mission with the need to strategically manage resources and relationships. Witkowski emphasises that the development of entrepreneurship in culture consists in "embedding"

innovation in the organisation's operating system, rather than in one-off project initiatives (Witkowski, 2015, pp. 130-132).

The cultural dimension of entrepreneurship is also an important theoretical context. Entrepreneurial activities are always embedded in specific symbolic and social frameworks that influence how innovation is defined and the organisation's identity. In the case of arts institutions, this means that entrepreneurship can manifest itself in developing new relationships with audiences or reinterpreting the function of institutions in the public space, rather than solely in commercial activities (Glinka, 2015, p. 1-4).

This perspective is complemented by the concept of embeddedness, which holds that the organisation's activity remains strongly embedded in networks of social and institutional relations. The development of cultural institutions therefore depends largely on the quality of cooperation with local government, the educational community, foreign partners and the creative sector. Organisational entrepreneurship can manifest itself in the ability to build and maintain these relationships as a strategic resource (Dudek, 2011, p. 158).

The importance of organisational entrepreneurship has become particularly evident in the context of contemporary social and technological crises. The authors of the "ALERT ICULTURA 3" report emphasise that cultural institutions must develop new models of cooperation, digitisation and communication with the public in order to maintain their social role and increase organisational resilience (Czyżewski, 2020, p. 7-9). In this sense, organisational entrepreneurship is not an addition to statutory activities, but one of the conditions for their long-term sustainability. As a result, organisational entrepreneurship in cultural institutions can be understood as a multidimensional process, encompassing programme innovation, team competence development, relationship building and redefining ways of communicating with the audience. Events as project-based activities that allow for direct experience can be a particularly visible manifestation of this logic, as they combine artistic, organisational and communicative dimensions, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this article.

3. Events as a management tool - concept and typologies in literature

In the literature on marketing communication and event management, an event is defined as a planned communication activity aimed at eliciting a specific response from the audience and building relationships between the organisation and its environment. Event marketing is treated as a tool supporting the achievement of the organisation's goals by organising events addressed to selected stakeholder groups, and its effectiveness is linked to direct contact and participation enabling the acquisition of experience (Kalinowska-Żeleźnik, 2020, p. 7-9). Unlike traditional promotional tools, events are based on interaction and participation, thus enabling the creation of more lasting associations with the institution.

Researchers emphasise that events perform several parallel functions within an organisation: communication, image building and relationship building. Events enable information to be conveyed in an engaging way and strengthen participants' identification with the brand/institution. At the same time, a well-prepared event can generate media interest and allow for feedback from participants, which increases its significance as a management tool, not just a promotional one (Kalinowska-Żeleźnik, 2014, p. 245). In the case of cultural institutions, events have an additional symbolic dimension—they become part of the artistic experience and co-create the place's identity.

A particularly important element of theoretical reflection on event marketing is the classification of events according to their dominant function and target audience. One of the typologies cited in the research distinguishes four basic categories: institutional events, business events, incentive events and special events (Chlechowicz, 2009, p. 65). Each of them corresponds to a different dimension of an organisation's communication with its environment and plays a different role in the relationship management process.

Institutional events include events of an official, ceremonial or representative nature. Their purpose is to build the legitimacy of the institution in the public sphere and to strengthen relations with local authorities, partner organisations and expert communities. This category includes, among others, anniversaries, conferences, symposia and gala events. In the context of cultural institutions, institutional events can play a strategic role by strengthening the institution's visibility in the decision-making network and enabling the presentation of development and investment projects.

Business events focus on organisational and networking relationships. These events are aimed at business partners, sponsors, representatives of creative industries or the business community. Their purpose is to support cooperation, knowledge exchange and the development of an institution's relational capital. In practice, business events can serve both to build sponsorship and patronage potential and to initiate project partnerships.

Incentive events are both motivational and developmental. In the classic sense, they include team-building trips or training courses for employees, but in cultural institutions they are often replaced by study visits, expert workshops or international exchange programmes. Events of this type promote knowledge transfer, the development of organisational skills and the strengthening of teamwork, thereby supporting innovation processes.

Special events are the most diverse category and include events that are unique, prestigious or highly emotional. These can be art competitions, premieres, happenings, charity events or projects of particular symbolic significance. In cultural institutions, special events often serve to broaden the audience and strengthen the image through unique artistic experiences.

It is worth noting that the presented classification is analytical in nature, and in organisational practice, individual types of events often overlap: a single event can simultaneously serve an institutional, relational and promotional function. Such multifunctionality is particularly evident in artistic institutions, which combine cultural, educational and image-building goals.

Contemporary technological changes further expand the possibilities for using events. The digitisation of communication and the development of social media strengthen the dialogical nature of relations with audiences, increase the reach of activities and enable the engagement of audiences around content created in online and hybrid formats (Adamczyk, 2014, p. 10-12). From the perspective of cultural institutions, this also means the need to develop digital competences and redefine ways of managing the audience experience.

As a result, events can be interpreted not only as a promotional tool, but also as part of an organisational entrepreneurship strategy. Thanks to their project-based nature, they enable experimentation with new formats of activities, the development of partnerships and the building of audience experiences.

4. The use of events as a tool for organisational entrepreneurship by the Baltic Opera in 2024-25

Baltic Opera in Gdansk - profile of the institution

The Baltic Opera in Gdańsk is a local government cultural institution - an artistic institution within the meaning of the Act - run as a joint institution of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage and the Pomeranian Province. In organisational terms, it is important to note that the Opera was established by order of the Governor of Gdansk on 28 December 1993, following the division of the State Opera and the Baltic Philharmonic, and was entered in the register of cultural institutions of the Pomeranian Province on 1 January 1999. (under number 11/99) (Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, "Status — Baltic Opera in Gdansk", Baltic Opera Public Information Bulletin). This point of reference organises the analysis of the event portfolio, indicating the institution's strong embedding in the regime of a public organiser and, thus, the importance of institutional relations as a resource for development.

The scope of the Opera's activities includes satisfying society's cultural needs by conducting artistic activities in opera, ballet, and other musical forms, as well as implementing various theatrical and interdisciplinary projects. Its statutory activities include organising opera and ballet performances, symphony concerts, chamber concerts and recitals with the participation of its own ensembles and invited artists and ensembles, both domestic and foreign. The Opera also conducts educational, dissemination and promotional activities, may make recordings of artistic productions and conduct impresario activities in accordance with its statutory objectives (Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, "Tasks — Statute of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk", Resolution No. 620/L/23 of the Pomeranian Provincial Assembly of 30 January 2023). In its institutional communications, the Opera emphasises that, in addition to presenting opera and ballet performances, it organises concerts, educational performances and workshops. This model of operation provides the backdrop for above-standard activities that go beyond the so-called repertoire activities, which are analysed further as tools of organisational entrepreneurship.

2024 event portfolio — classification and analysis

Special events

European Semi-Final of the Valentina Kozlova International Ballet Competition — an international event organised in cooperation with the Janina Jarzynówna-Sobczak General Ballet School in Gdańsk and the Mikhail Zubkov Foundation. Young dancers from all over Europe met on the Opera stage to compete for places in the competition final in New York. It should be emphasised that the competition created a real career development path for participants on the international artistic market.

This is a model example of a special event because: it has an unusual and prestigious format, generates a strong image effect (the opera as a "hub" for young talents from Europe), broadens the audience to include dance community, educators, families and people interested in competition, not just repertoire. In addition, it is a "networking" event – linked to an educational institution (ballet school) and a foundation, which strengthens the institution's roots in local and supra-local networks.

The 23rd Wojciech Werszowski National Dance Competition — a prestigious event organised every two years in cooperation with the same ballet school. The description emphasizes the high calibre of the jury (outstanding dancers, choreographers, directors of schools and dance companies from Poland and foreign cultural centres) and the fact that the competition and the gala concert were broadcast via live streaming.

As a special event, the competition strengthens the institution's reputation (as the host of a prestigious competition) and builds media reach through online broadcasting (additional "remote audience"). This is important in the context of building experiences and relationships with time institution's brand: even audiences who are not physically present can come into contact with the Opera and its stage space through the broadcast.

Family concert on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Home Hospice in Gdańsk — a charity concert in the foyer, organised by the Gdansk Culture Foundation, held for the hospice's patients on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. It was a special event with a social and charitable dimension, fulfilling an image and relationship function (the opera as a socially sensitive institution), while at the same time fitting into the logic of social entrepreneurship. It is worth noting that the foyer space becomes a "platform of hospitality" here — the institution mobilises material (space) and symbolic (prestige) resources for a social cause.

Incentive events

Study visit by representatives of Dance Brno / Národní divadlo Brno (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage programme "Inspiring Culture") — The Baltic Opera was the only institution from the Pomeranian Province to receive funding under the programme. The aim of the project was to establish cooperation with the Dance Brno Festival (Czech Republic) and the institution organising the event, as well as to promote the art of dance in both countries; the Polish Institute in Prague was involved in the implementation. In 2024, discussions were held regarding the visit date (third quarter), but it was carried out in the fourth quarter. The guests – Mario Radačovský and Markéta Habalová – watched the ballet performance "Carnival of the Animals" (choreography: Katarzyna Kozielska), were given a tour of selected parts of the Opera building, and the talks continued outside the institution (a walk along the Motława River, a Christmas Market, Polish cuisine). The visit was supported by a Polish-Czech interpreter; documentary photographs were taken. The description indicates that the meeting showcased the potential of the Opera and its dance company and served as the basis for discussions about future cooperation.

The event can be classified as an incentive/learning event, as its core is the transfer of knowledge and the building of international cooperation capabilities. The "soft" relational component is particularly important: non-work-related elements (walk, cuisine, market) are, in practice, tools for building trust and deepening relationships — key in the context of embeddedness.

Study visit by representatives of the Klaipėda State Music Theatre (May 2024) and cooperation agreement (Q4 2024) — in May 2024, a visit was made during which preliminary arrangements were made for the staging of the Polish opera "King Roger" produced by the Baltic Opera in Klaipėda. In the third quarter, talks were held on the terms of cooperation (agreement) regulating the rules for guest performances in Lithuania, and in the fourth quarter, an agreement on the performance was signed. At the same time, talks were held on the technical aspects of the event and the first materials promoting the event in Lithuania were prepared.

This is an example of a learning/incentive event combined with a business event (negotiations and cooperation arrangements), with the aim of both learning/transfer of know-how and developing a specific cooperation framework (agreement, logistics, promotion). From the perspective of organisational entrepreneurship, this is an investment in the internationalisation of activities and diversification of the institution's channels of influence (promotion of Polish production abroad).

Visit of students from the University of Gdańsk and the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk to a rehearsal of "Rigoletto" (March 2024) — the event included an introduction to the performance prepared by a theatre educator, a tour of the stage and a conversation with the conductor and orchestra manager Piotr Mazurek. The description emphasised the importance of the meeting as an introduction to the opera theatre, from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

This event has the characteristics of an educational event and a "format that lowers the barrier to entry" to the institution. For organisational entrepreneurship, this means creating a new educational and relational service that can build a future audience in the long term.

Institutional events and business events

The "Teacher of Pomerania" conference — an awards gala on the occasion of National Education Day — an event organised by the Department of Education of the Marshal's Office of the Pomeranian Province. The opera house hosted an event of high symbolic importance for the region (the field of education), which strengthens relations with the public organiser and the educational community.

"Business is not everything — let's get to know each other" (Pomeranian Employers, with the participation of Tomasz Konieczny) - a meeting from a series organised by Pomeranian Employers, responding to the need of member companies to get to know "exceptional figures" in a format other than a business card or biographical note. The meeting at the Opera House was attended by singer Tomasz Konieczny.

A relationship-building business event, developing the potential for patronage/sponsorship, but also presenting the Opera as a "meeting place" for the worlds of culture and business. From an embeddedness perspective, this is a conscious strengthening of relationships with the environment, which can increase the institution's resilience.

2025 event portfolio — classification and analysis

Special events

Concert of Graduates of the Janina Jarzynówna-Sobczak General Ballet School in Gdańsk (March 2025) – the event was the culmination of many years of work by young dancers. The programme included classical and modern choreographies prepared in collaboration with renowned teachers and choreographers. The description emphasised that the young students had the opportunity to work in the professional environment of a cultural institution, which allowed them to acquire practical skills in real theatre working conditions.” A special event with a strong educational and community dimension (especially for the ballet community). In terms of organisational entrepreneurship, this is an event that (1) strengthens relations with educational institutions, (2) builds an audience consisting of families and the community of students/graduates, (3) strengthens the image of the opera as a partner in talent development.

The 75th anniversary concert of the General Ballet School (April 2025) — two ceremonial performances of the *concert* crowning the anniversary celebrations; the institution was visited by, among others, graduates of the school from various parts of the world and Europe. The first concert was broadcast live on YouTube.

A special anniversary event combining an image-building function (the prestige of the anniversary, the presence of graduates from abroad) with the function of expanding reach through streaming. It is also a tool for building a "community of memory" (alumni, school tradition), which strengthens symbolic capital in cultural institutions.

Incentive events

Meeting of representatives of Green Institutions of the Tri-City and Pomerania (June 2025) - "Sustainable opera — behind the scenes of the Butterfly Project" - the meeting summarised the project's activities in selected ecological and technological areas. The description indicated that each module from costumes, through transport and Lola technology, to cooperation with partners — involved specific challenges, but brought valuable experiences and solutions. The aim was to summarize the activities and formulate conclusions useful for future projects of a similar nature; representatives of cultural institutions forming the network (including ECS and GAC) participated.

The event was hybrid in nature: the educational dimension (organisational learning, experience sharing, conclusions) predominated, but it also had certain features of a business event (networking between institutions, building partnerships) and an institutional event (strengthening the opera's position as a leader in sustainable development practices in the region). In the context of organisational entrepreneurship, this is an example of process and competence innovation: the Opera not only implements elements of the "green transition" in practice, but also operationalizes them as transferable knowledge (using case learning for other institutions).

Institutional events

A ceremonial meeting of the Social Committee for Construction Support (July 2025) — the meeting was attended by representatives of local governments, the world of science, business and culture; Plac Zebrań Ludowych was officially designated as the future location of the Baltic Metropolitan Opera. The meeting ended with the signing of a letter of intent by Mayor Aleksandra Dulkiewicz and Marshal Mieczysław Struk.

This was a strongly institutional event, the essence of which was to legitimise the strategic project (location and letter of intent) and integrate decision-making circles. From the perspective of organisational entrepreneurship, it is about managing the conditions for development in the public environment. The institution uses the event as a tool to "materialise" support and reduce uncertainty surrounding the infrastructure project.

Meeting of the Pomeranian Culture Council (25 November 2025) — an institutional event related to the functioning of the regional advisory system in the area of cultural policy. An event strengthening the Opera's position in the region's institutional network; it maintains relationships which, in line with the perspective of rootedness, are important for stability and development opportunities.

The "Teacher of Pomerania" conference (a cyclical event - the repetition of the event in the portfolio indicates the durability of relations with the public organiser (Department Of Education of the Marshal's Office of the Pomeranian Province) and the consolidation of the Opera as a venue for ceremonies of social importance.

4. Conclusions from the analysis

The list of events for 2024—2025 shows a portfolio that covers all four event categories. In terms of organisational entrepreneurship, this portfolio generates three types of results:

- expanding the audience and lowering the barrier to entry. The students' visit to the rehearsal of "Rigoletto" is an example of an "introductory format" combining education with the experience of the stage space. The family concert for the hospice opens up another channel of contact an audience with special needs and different motivations for participation. Ballet school competitions and concerts broaden the audience to include artistic education circles and family and community networks.
- building relationships with stakeholders and institutional roots. Institutional events in particular strengthen relationships with public organisers, the educational community and advisory bodies (Culture Council). The event with the Construction Support Committee creates a framework of legitimacy and "public proof" of support for the project. Business events with Pomeranian employers develop relationships with the business community, potentially increasing opportunities for patronage and sponsorship.
- competence development, internationalisation and process innovation. Study visits (Brno, Klaipėda) and the Butterfly Project summary meeting indicate that Opera uses events as a tool for organisational learning: transfer of how-how, testing of solutions and dissemination of good practices (ecology, technology, logistics). In the longer term, this may increase the institution's effectiveness in building partnership projects.

Summary

The analysis shows that the events organised by the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk do not function as side activities to the artistic repertoire, but are part of a broader logic of managing a cultural institution in a changing social and organisational environment. The diversity of events — from institutional meetings to relational and educational initiatives, to international projects — allows the portfolio to be treated as a tool for strengthening organisational agency and building the institution's multidimensional presence in the public space.

The results of the analysis directly relate to the article's aim, which was to examine how events can be used as a tool for organisational entrepreneurship in a cultural institution. The case study of the Baltic Opera shows that the event activities fit into the logic of entrepreneurship by creating new formats of cooperation, developing organisational competences and strengthening relationships with stakeholders. In response to the research questions posed, it can be pointed out that the event portfolio covers all the key types of events described in the literature, and their functions go beyond promotion — they also include organisational learning and institutional rooting processes.

Another important conclusion is that the significance of events does not result solely from their scale or attendance, but from their mediating function between the world of art and various groups of recipients and partners. Events enable institutions to redefine their relationship with the public and strengthen their role in the regional cultural ecosystem. In this sense, organisational entrepreneurship is a gradual, relational process rather than a single innovation.

The case of the Baltic Opera also shows that “non-repertoire” activities can support the coherence between the public mission and the strategic approach, provided they are embedded in a long-term vision for the institution's development. Events then become not only a communication tool, but also a way of building organisational resilience through cooperation networks, internationalisation and the development of team competencies. Future research should deepen the reflection on methods of measuring the effects of event activities and their role in shaping the identity of contemporary cultural institutions.

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