

# Beyond energy-saving tips. Using art to transform habits in Kauguri, Latvia

*What if art could change the way we use energy?*

In the Kauguri district of Jūrmala, Latvia, a new project is blending creativity and sustainability to transform local energy habits. Led by the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC), the CCI4Change project invites citizens to rethink their energy consumption through interactive workshops and an artistic installation. By tapping into the power of art, community, and conversation, this bold initiative is showing how creative thinking can spark change in the pursuit of a more sustainable future.

Read on to discover how this artistic approach is lighting the way forward!

## Introduction: transforming energy habits

The CCI4Change project is currently piloting its exploratory solutions—but what's the story behind it?

In practice, what does it mean to understand more in-depth people's attitudes towards energy consumption? And what role can art and creativity play in this process? This article explores the collaborative efforts of NDPC, the city of Jūrmala, and the art foundation INITIUM.

Together, these organizations are implementing CCI4Change's innovative actions in Latvia, shaping a bold new model to integrates sustainability and engaged art. The questions that their joint efforts are testing are: How can energy consumption behaviors be transformed in Kauguri? And how can artistic skills provi-



-de an innovative approach to support the change?

**Learn more about the experience below!**



Artistic workshop in Kauguri. Photo: INITIUM

## The CCI4Change project explained

The “CCI4Change” project, led by the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC) Secretariat, aims to find new, creative perspectives for supporting a change in energy consumption habits. Focusing on the Baltic Sea region, the core purpose of this international project is to help local authorities (like municipalities, cities, and regions) find better ways to encourage their citizens to use less energy in their daily lives.

In the current situation, cities and municipalities have implemented energy-efficient renovations and adopted green technologies. But it's harder to get individual citizens to change their attitu-

-tudes and habits — it could be turning off lights, using less water, or saving energy at home. Currently, the role of local authorities in this area remains unclear, and the CCI4Change project focuses on building this capacity in a way that is ethical, inclusive, and citizen-driven.

A key element is a new collaboration model with the culture and creative industries (CCI): the project is testing new ideas in three different countries (Finland, Latvia and Sweden) and works with creative professionals (like artists or designers) to find new approaches in how to work together with the citizens to shift the attitudes and behaviors in energy consumption. The final outcome will be a tested toolkit promoting the CCI4Change collaboration model, enabling broader adoption of these strategies by other local authorities and creatives around the Baltic Sea.

## Context: Kauguri, Latvia

The Latvian pilot was born from a collaboration between the city of Jūrmala and the art foundation INITIUM, winner of the project's innovation open call for artists. In the collaboration, NDPC was acting as the intermediary — serving as a mediator supporting the conversation between the two parties.

The location is the neighborhood of Kauguri, which is situated in the seaside resort town of Jūrmala, Latvia, around 30 km away from the capital Riga. Kauguri is one of the most faraway areas from downtown, but it is noteworthy that it is one of the largest districts of Jūrmala, housing a significant portion of the city's population.

During the Soviet era, Kauguri expanded significantly due to industrial and housing development. Nowadays it retains much



Kauguri. Photo: Dmitrijs Purgalvis, CC BY 3.0, Commons Wikimedia

of this Soviet influence in its architecture, urban planning, and energy efficiency challenges, like heating overconsumption and poor insulation of the apartments.

We are currently facing a climate crisis, and Europe is taking all possible actions to become carbon neutral by 2050. Municipalities like Jūrmala are working on diverse levels and various ways to take prominent steps for a green, sustainable future, yet there is only a limited amount of tools and resources in the hands of the local authorities for sustainable energy consumption in their own local surroundings. This is when the support of the creative actors comes in, enabling new ways of creating public dialogue and collaboration and engaging the citizens in the change.

The organization held a multi-steps process: by implementing different public interventions from August to December 2024, they gathered information on the stories of the people living in the area. For instance, on 31.08.24 INITIUM organized a community story collection event, where everyone interested was invited to tell a story of their memories of life in Kauguri.



Kauguri festival in September 2024. Photo: NDPC

## Researching Kauguri with artistic lens

**INITIUM's artistic intervention in Kauguri began with inquiry and knowledge gathering.**

**How was it to approach Kauguri's settings?** We asked **Ieva Niedre**, Chairwoman of the Board and Producer at INITIUM. Understanding the unique challenges of Kauguri as a place was one of the staples of this intervention. INITIUM knew this area from before, but not in-depth, and Ieva saw this as an opportunity. While working in fa-

-miliar places might seem easier, it can also be more challenging due to preconceived ideas about how things should be.

For instance, to explain the apparent neglect of the area, one of the initial assumptions that INITIUM considered was that people would have rather lived in the richer parts of Jūrmala rather than Kauguri -- which perhaps they were seeing just as a “place to sleep at night.” Instead, what emerged in the data gathering process was that people were very proud and attached to the place where they lived as youngsters.



Windows from a building in Kauguri. Photo: NDPC

INITIUM quickly realized that what Kauguri lacked most was a space where residents could come together which wasn't a commercial or private space. This notion directly influenced the organization's concept of their final community art installation, one of the core outcomes of INITIUM's proposal: Kauguri's “Neighbors' House” environmental installation.

The project came to life with an artistic process also including the citizens in its development through a series of public interventions. It became an interactive public piece designed to encourage communal engagement in addressing these shared challenges, such as poor insulation of the housing and the energy overuse. The installation is envisioned to be based on windows and window frames, which symbolically act as both

“the eyes” of the building and the connector between the inner and outer worlds. Moreover, the window is also often a heat loss point in the building.

**That's how leva describes it:**

*“[...] What we want to create is a space for them to gather, to come, sit down, and talk. To discuss serious matters, or not-so-serious matters. [...] The installation will take the shape of a triangle, showcasing bits and pieces of local stories and items we've collected. It's like a museum or exhibition, surrounded by tools and small roofs, so people can come and stay. [...] the concept that we created is with a light that lights up only if there are three people or more sitting, and only then they can illuminate it.”*

With this project, Initium aims to highlight the value of such communal spaces to both the municipality and the residents.

## A different type of artistic engagement: a pop-up event at a Kauguri market

In the process of creating this installation, one of the public interventions took place in one of Kauguri's covered markets on 12.11.2024.

Kauguri has different lively markets which cater to the needs of residents and visitors; but, besides being a place for shopping, the market is also a public space where people have the chance to meet each other. This event wanted to give them an opportunity to come together in a different way. Here, citizens were invited to a “habits change workshop” in



Moments from the artistic workshop in the market in Kauguri. Photo: NDPC

Kauguri's 'Ligo bazaar' to share their feelings about life in the area and to participate in the creation of new ideas, collecting habits, wishes and needs to improve the environment of Kauguri. Here, the artists from INITIUM foundation collected information on the movement habits of Kauguri residents when arriving at the market, going home, or doing other business.

During the event, passersby were invited to map their movements interactively using colored markers on a plexiglass panel. They could also highlight their favorite and least favorite spaces in the area with green and red sticky dots. While engaging in this activity, they had the opportunity to participate in broader conversations and learn more about the project.

**By the end of the day, the mapping revealed how people move around, the types of transport they use, and their mobility needs. The map also captured the community's feelings about the space and the city.**

These panels were later used in the composition of the final installation.

Reflecting on the event, Ieva Niedre shared:

*"I think it turned out really well. We achieved much of what we had ho-*

*-ped and expected, along with some unexpected and interesting additions. What's often most important in these kinds of pop-up events is the interaction with the city and its communal spaces."*



Results from the artistic workshop. Photo: INITIUM

## The artist's point of view: How is it to work with the public sector? And what does the municipality think about it?

Events like the one at the market in Kauguri are showcasing how artists can bring new approaches to engaging with citizens, create dialogue and gather relevant knowledge with quite simple methods. They also raise a deeper question: how does an artists work relate to the institutional setting of the municipality, and how collaboration formats like CCI4Change contributes?

Collaborating with the public sector is always a different experience, and, in the end, it often comes down to the people working within it. For an artist, having engaged individuals "on the other side" and reliable points of contact when challenges arise can make a world of difference.

Sometimes there might be a "commissioning mentality," which puts the artist in the position of a subordinate "grant receiver" and disregards the innovation power that creative thinking can hold. Ieva points out how this collaboration can unlock new insights; she highlights the value of creating work that supports artistic practice while also producing useful data that can be shared with the municipality, and which perhaps couldn't be accessed in other ways.

Project manager **Edgars Ražinskis**, who represents Jūrmala in this project, also notes the importance of having an intermediary between the municipality and artistic creators; he puts emphasis on how this approach was particularly needed in Jūrmala, a city that has traditionally been less open to contempo-

-rary artists, or addressing social issues.

Issues like excessive heating consumption in Latvia are often linked to structural problems: due to these challenges, people are unable to organize the necessary actions, groups, or financial support to address issues like home insulation. While municipalities are expected to step in, in practice, this often doesn't happen – the reasons for which remain unclear.

Thus, Edgars saw it as a positive and bold move for Jūrmala's development department to recognize this challenge and use the project as an opportunity to address it. He describes it as a brave step.

## "Switch On Kauguri:" Challenges and future for the area

In this project, INITIUM approached Kauguri from "the outside." When working in a local context, what could be the role of a project implemented by non-locals? According to Ieva Niedre, outsiders have a role as catalysts or mirrors: they are reflecting societal issues or highlighting certain aspects for the municipality. Working in an unfamiliar area is surely challenging, especially when it's unclear who the key local contacts are outside the municipality. But Ieva points out to how the value might lay right in that challenge, as it requires finding new approaches, recognizing that what works in one place may not work in another. She says:

*"We could see that events which usually would bring together people in other places didn't work so well here, but there were instead others, and I don't know if I can try the same again in another town."*



The final art installation in Kauguri during the night. Photo: NDPC

Another key catalyst is the idea of active citizenship. This is especially important to foster in the context of Latvia, since because of history, Latvian citizens may overall be less used to speak up and think they can change something, in comparison to other Western countries.

When it comes to the context of Kauguri, Edgars points out to how the problem is indeed a lack of agency among residents: factors like language barriers, social segregation, and the area's reputation have made it difficult for them to communicate their needs or organize themselves into community groups. Unlike in Riga, where community-building efforts have been more encouraged in recent years, Jurmala has not provided similar support or motivation for residents to take collective action.

And where does that sort of action come from? It is born from spaces of conversation that artists may now mediate. As Ieva Niedre describes it, the artists' and municipality's joint efforts are "catalyzers." She argues that people want to organize and create together, and they are patriotic enough to do so. But maybe they don't feel like they will be heard, understood, or listened to.

*"If we can change that – through projects, artworks, social work, and other efforts – things could shift. I've met people who say, 'I'd love to join an existing group, but I don't want to start one myself.'"*

A core takeaway from this process is surely how many aspects are interconnected beyond the issue of energy consumption; CCI4Change strongly acknowledges this since the vision behind the project is that the inhabitants shape the environment they live in.

**That's why the innovation open call in Kauguri was titled "Switch On Kauguri:"**

The mindset change on citizens energy consumption behaviour can be made by educating, promoting a conversation, understanding the essence and seriousness of the matter. And when residents are actively included in the process, it becomes more important to them.



View of the inside. Photo: NDPC.

*Read more about the art installation at [ndpculture.org/news](http://ndpculture.org/news) ([bit.ly/KauguriArt](https://bit.ly/KauguriArt))*

Note that the CCI4Change project is still ongoing; in Spring 2025 further discussions and analyses will take place to better understand this area.

This article was written by Giulia Gotti, Communications Coordinator, NDPC, in December 2024. We thank Ieva Niedre and Edgars Ražinskis for their time and collaboration.

For any questions about CCI4Change, please contact the project manager Krista Petäjäjärvi, at [krista@ndpculture.org](mailto:krista@ndpculture.org)

## Further resources

- Learn more about INITIUM's environmental installation in Kauguri [here](https://bit.ly/KauguriArt) ([bit.ly/KauguriArt](https://bit.ly/KauguriArt))
- Read more about CCI4Change pilots across Latvia, Finland, and Sweden. Article [here](#)

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