

CULTURE AS A SHARED LANGUAGE

AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The City of Brno and the Jiří Mahen Library in Brno will host an international conference titled "Culture as a Shared Language" on 11 June 2026. The event aims to open a debate on the role of culture in building an open and cohesive society. The conference will provide a platform for sharing experiences, gaining inspiration, and engaging in an open discussion on how to make culture accessible to everyone, regardless of language or background.

Topics such as social inclusion, the engagement of non-Czech-speaking communities, and the readiness of cultural infrastructure to meet their needs represent key challenges today—not only for public institutions but also for cultural organizers themselves. In the context of growing demographic diversity, these issues are becoming increasingly important, requiring systematic attention and the sharing of best practices.

11. 6. 2026

JIŘÍ MAHEN LIBRARY BRNO

WHEN: 11 June 2026, 10:00 (Registration starts at 9:30)

WHERE: Central Building of the Jiří Mahen Library (Schrattenbach Palace),
5th floor – Main Hall

CONFERENCE LANGUAGES: The conference will be held in Czech and English,
with simultaneous interpretation provided.

REGISTRATION FOR ATTENDEES (PASSIVE PARTICIPATION):
<https://forms.gle/qGgmfWuxujdrs6tLA> Free admission.

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Knihovna
Jiřího Mahena
v Brně



Ministry of Culture
of the Czech Republic

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

9:30 – 10:00: Registration

10:00 – 11:00: Opening

- **Keynote Speech:** Daniel Styles / Vitamin Cultural Centre

11:00–12:00 Part 1: International Inspiration

- **Imanol Galdos** / San Sebastian Department of Culture (Spain) – The Basque Model of Cultural Normalization and Social Cohesion
- **István Puskás** / Deputy Mayor of Debrecen (Hungary) – Building Collaborative Communities
- **Jurga Knyvienė** / Kaunas City Chamber Theatre (Lithuania) – Serpentine Laboratory: Art Without Boundaries

12:00 – 13:00 Lunch

13:00–14:30 Panel Discussion

„Cultural Infrastructure and Its Readiness“

The panel discussion will consist of two parts: brief presentations of the panelists' projects and topics, followed by a moderated discussion.

Moderator:

- **Iva Pouličková** / Brno Expat Centre

Panelists / Guests:

- **Iryna Zabiaka** / Ukrainian Center in Brno – The Czech Museum as a Space for Ukrainian Integration
- **Aaron Collier** / Czech Theater – Theatre as a Pathway to Czech Culture
- **Kateřina Báňová** / Brno Expat Centre – When Enthusiasm Helps: How Even a Small Organisation Can Support and Multiply the Growth of Cultural Initiatives
- **Lenka Šafránková Pavlíčková** / Jiří Mahen Library in Brno – The Invisible Work of Peace: The Jiří Mahen Library as a Purpose-Built Infrastructure for Encounter
- **Miroslav Zima** / DROM Centre

14:30–15:00 Coffee Break

15:00–16:00 Block 2: Community Cooperation

Magdaléna Rychlíková / Zaedno Association – The “Kamarádi” (Friends) Project: Multicultural Education and the Right to Inclusive Education for Socio-Culturally Disadvantaged Children
Orkun Türkmen / Yolda Collective – “Shared Ground” Socially engaged art for social cohesion
Daniel Styles / Vitamin Cultural Centre – The “Infame Radio” Project

ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Daniel Styles / Vitamin Cultural Centre

Daniel Robertson-Styles is a creative director and project manager working at the intersection of culture, art, and civic life. Based in Brno, he co-leads the Vitamin Cultural Centre and Infame Radio, overseeing programming, identity, and international partnerships, while also consulting for the City of Brno on cultural initiatives. He has presented and moderated at major European platforms including Trans Europe Halles, Eurocities Cultural Forum, and has represented Brno's creative community at events such as the Meet the Mayor forum. Before moving into cultural management, Daniel had a professional career as a ballet dancer and choreographer at the Národní divadlo Brno and Bayerisches Staatsballett in Munich. He has led several Creative Europe projects, including 25AV — a cross-European platform connecting audiovisual artists and musicians — and Bridging Movements, an international mentoring programme for emerging ballet dancers. His work consistently bridges local cultural ecosystems with broader European networks.



PART 1: INTERNATIONAL INSPIRATION

Imanol Galdos / San Sebastian Department of Culture (Spain)
The Basque Model of Cultural Normalization and Social Cohesion



My presentation focuses on the Basque Country. The core thesis argues that the defense of minority realities has been the foundation for building a cohesive society and achieving a significant international standing. While some narratives suggest a contradiction between protecting local identities and embracing global perspectives, the Basque case demonstrates that achieving open societies begins with the care and respect for local and domestic realities.

The proposal covers the following key historical and social pillars:

- **Historical Recovery:** In the 1960s, the Basque language and culture were at risk of disappearing due to the prohibitive measures of the Franco dictatorship.
- **Social Responsibility:** Despite that difficult context, a wide diversity of social agents took responsibility for the recovery and normalization process.
- **Full Normalization:** Since the restoration of democracy in Spain, this process accelerated; today, sixty years later, Basque culture and language have reached full levels of normality. It is also worth noting that Basque culture extends into the South of France.
- **Culture as a Tool for Coexistence:** Although Basque society has suffered periods of division and polarization, culture has been a key instrument for coexistence and a powerful international brand.
- **Integration and Diversity:** Today's society is very different from that of sixty years ago, with an immigrant population of 14%. We are successfully working on their integration by respecting their identities while achieving very positive results in transmitting Basque language and culture to new generations.

We believe this model, which combines high global indices of economic and social development with the defense of minority heritage, offers a valuable perspective for your international congress.

István Puskás / Deputy Mayor of Debrecen (Hungary)
Building Collaborative Communities

The city of Debrecen is currently experiencing a dynamic period of change, which affects the economy, housing, infrastructure, education, culture and various service systems in a complex way. An important element of these changes is the change in the composition of the city's population, the large number of foreigners appearing in higher education and the economy, which now reaches about 7% of the city's population.



The integration of the new community with a diverse ethnic and cultural composition (students from 140 countries study at the university), making Debrecen more inclusive, is one of the most important issues of our time, in which the local government is trying to participate as an active player, mediator and facilitator together with various partners.

The presentation presents two examples through which we manage such processes. One involves foreign universities (Re:shape the City), the other aims to help the local life of the expat community (OTT:HOME).

Jurga Knyvienė / Kaunas City Chamber Theatre (Lithuania)
Serpentine Laboratory: Art Without Boundaries



On the inspiring example of the long term inclusive programme for performing arts Serpentine Laboratory we present the overview of conceptual and methodical challenges and perspectives in inclusive programming. Dismantling the ablist world in all the levels – from socialization to self realisation, from understanding art to artistic presence, from community to performance, from learning to talk to sharing the worldview, from finding a space to institutional influence.

This constant and never ending change as a mandatory state of the platform is seen as a key mover of the process in Serpentine Laboratory.

Serpentine Laboratory is the Kaunas City Chamber Theatre platform for people with different disabilities, who want to create theatre, but because of their disability had no opportunity to study performing art. The programme was inspired by artistic empowerment of variety and fueled by Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022 concept and challenges raised for cultural operators in Kaunas.

From 2019 programmers of the Serpentine Laboratory got the platform through different formats – small artistic teams, community based, individual work, artistic production. All these formats are included in the final version of 3 year programme, which is implemented in 2025–2027. The next challenge is to influence educational and artistic institutions to install the elements of the programme and provided qualification and partnerships to aim the total inclusion of people with disabilities to the educational processes and artistic practises.

PANEL DISCUSSION: „CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND ITS READINESS“

The panel discussion will consist of two parts: brief presentations of the panelists' projects and topics, followed by a moderated discussion.

Moderator:

Iva Pouličková / Brno Expat Centre

As the Buddy Program Coordinator at the Brno Expat Centre, Iva literally “finds Czech friends for foreigners,” helping them build a true home in our city. She also serves as the International Scientific Community Coordinator for Czexpats in Science. Her approach to integration is deeply shaped by her own long-term experience living abroad and her thorough understanding of the Brno region innovation ecosystem. Fluent in English, French, and Spanish, she navigates multicultural environments with ease, drawing also on her background in the tech sector.



Panelists / Guests:

Iryna Zabiiaika / Ukrainian Center in Brno

The Czech Museum as a Space for Ukrainian Integration



In this presentation, I would like to highlight the role and potential of museums in the process of integrating Ukrainians into cultural life in the Czech Republic. My arguments will draw on the specific experiences of the Ukrainian community in Brno collaborating with the Moravian Museum. I will emphasize the need for mutual support in co-creating content and service offerings, backed by individual case studies (event organization, guided tours with interpretation, lectures, and tours for children). Among other aspects, I will focus on the insights gained during museum visits dedicated to children's education. Within the framework of the “Roots and Wings” project, which provides a history teaching methodology for Ukrainian children outside Ukraine, the Ukrainian Saturday School in Brno combines knowledge that children acquire in Czech schools with a Ukrainian context, utilizing the resources of the Czech museum and its exhibitions. Such a combination leads to genuine integration rather than assimilation, where facts and information from different cultural backgrounds build upon and complement one another.

A further step in this process could be collaboration on designing exhibitions and educational methodologies aimed at all children (and adults), rather than just representatives of a single minority. Current integration efforts can thus be seen as part of a broader, more deeply rooted process of productive coexistence, which historically has been the rule rather than the exception. The aim of this presentation is to outline these possibilities and perspectives.

Aaron Collier / Czech Theater
Theatre as a Path to Czech Culture

Can theater help people connect with Czech culture? This contribution involves the presenter's experience with Czech Theater, z.s., co-founded in 2018 by Aaron Collier, an American originally from near Boston who has been living in Brno since 2004. The group puts on Czech plays in English to make Czech theater culture accessible to people who do not understand the Czech language and to show Czech people a different view of their culture than they are used to, thus bridging the gaps between cultures. Theater is an important part of Czech cultural life, as evidenced by the inclusion of Czech amateur theater in the UNESCO cultural heritage list. Czech Theater, z.s. has brought together people in Brno from more than 30 countries so they can work in the same direction and understand each other and the culture of the place where they are living. The contribution will discuss how plays put on by Czech Theater, z.s. have contributed to mutual understanding among Brňáci and people from elsewhere. Its existence as an amateur theater means it includes people who otherwise would have no opportunity to participate in this part of cultural life.



Kateřina Báňová / Brno Expat Centre
**When Enthusiasm Helps: How Even a Small Organisation
Can Support and Multiply the Growth of Cultural Initiatives**



The “Welcome to My District” project will be presented by Katka Báňová from the Brno Expat Centre. In cooperation with the Brno City Municipality (MMB), BEC supports around 12,000 skilled internationals working in multinational companies, universities, or research institutions in Brno. Katka is in charge of events and community activities, which include opportunities to connect expats with locals and support their integration into the local community. One of these projects features guided walks through various Brno districts where the expats themselves live. This allows newcomers to get to know their neighborhood better, discover nice venues or essential services, and feel more at home. Each expat volunteer in the project group has designed a walking tour of their own district, and these will be offered to the public.

Lenka Šafránková Pavlíčková / Jiří Mahen Library in Brno
**The Invisible Work of Peace: The Jiří Mahen Library
as a Purpose-Built Infrastructure for Encounter**

Public discourse is constantly saturated with narratives of threat and conflict. Meanwhile, in parallel—quietly and without headlines—a different kind of work is taking place. People are connecting communities, crossing language barriers, and helping neighbors they barely knew a short while ago. Research shows that this work of building everyday peace is carried out in society primarily by women—both Czechs and foreigners. This work is real and demonstrable. Yet, it remains systematically invisible. The “Everyday Peacemakers” program, currently being developed at the Jiří Mahen Library in Brno as part of a new project titled “Education for Confident Citizenship” (OP JAK, 2026–2028), aims to bring this work to light.



Grounded in Brno-based research on the social networks of migrant communities (Topinka et al., 2018) as well as international concepts such as everyday peace (Mac Ginty), bridging social capital (Putnam), and informal peacebuilding, the project asks: What specifically does everyday peace mean in Brno? Who creates it? And how can a library contribute?

We are not looking for answers alone. Within Brno's foreign communities, there are women virtually unknown to the majority population, despite doing an immense amount of work for their communities and daily coexistence in the city. They are the very ones with whom the Everyday Peacemakers program is being created – centered around an organically growing network of community gatekeepers who have been co-creators from the very beginning and continue to invite others.

The “CultureLABORATORY” program puts this collaboration into practice through community roundtables, participatory cultural and educational events, educational programs for the public (CultureLAB EDU), and ongoing communication via the CulturePOT podcast and social media (all part of the OP JAK project). In this process, the library is not merely a host; it acts as a intentionally designed relational infrastructure. Eric Klinenberg's research empirically demonstrates why libraries possess unique prerequisites for this role: public accessibility regardless of origin or income, a non-commercial logic, and a physical presence.

This presentation will outline the specific design principles underlying this project and open up a space for dialogue. The Jiří Mahen Library is looking for partners – libraries, cultural institutions, researchers, community organizations, and enthusiastic individuals – who wish to pilot similar initiatives or share their experiences.

Miroslav Zima / Drom Centre



DROM, a Romani community center, is a contributory organization established by the Statutory City of Brno to provide support to city districts in the process of social inclusion. We help individuals on their journey toward a better life, support people at risk of social exclusion, empower Romani students and initiatives, bridge the civic and public sectors, and seek new approaches and solutions for better cooperation. Miroslav Zima serves as the deputy director of DROM. He stood at the

inception of projects whose outcomes have become systemic tools in the process of Romani integration.

15:00–16:00 BLOCK 2: COMMUNITY COOPERATION

Magdaléna Rychlíková / Zaedno Association – The “Kamarádi” (Friends) Project: Multicultural Education and the Right to Inclusive Education for Socio-Culturally Disadvantaged Children

“Kamarádi” (Friends) is a long-term educational project for children run by the non-profit organization Spolek Zaedno, which began in 2012. While its scope covers the entire Czech Republic, it occasionally crosses these territorial borders. The main areas to which the Kamarádi project contributes are national minority language education, multicultural education, and the right to inclusive education for children facing socio-cultural disadvantages, such as language barriers, ethnic differences, or low social and economic status.



The project consists of several main interconnected activities that form a cohesive whole. These include the publication of the printed Kamarádi magazine, an interactive digital version of the magazine, and the nationwide children's competition "Multilingualism is Wealth". An integral part of the project also includes local and national events for public presentation, such as seminars for professionals, creative workshops, discussions, exhibitions, and showcases of national cultures, folklore, and traditions.

Over the many years that the project has been carried out with great dedication by Spolek Zaedno and numerous supporters and volunteers from all corners of the Czech Republic, it has become a true passion project for many of us. Today, Kamarádi is well-known across the country, reaching schools, libraries, and organizations working with children. The project serves as practical proof that a positive approach to diversity, multilingualism, and different cultures enriches and unites us.

The Kamarádi project maintains a carefully managed and content-rich website (www.kamaradi.eu), featuring a variety of educational materials available for free use, multicultural programs, online games and quizzes, as well as audio and video recordings. While anyone can find something of interest there, it primarily serves as a tool for children's education and for strengthening intercultural and multilingual learning.

Both the materials we create and the overall project presentation are built on creativity and a playful approach. Therefore, we also offer interactive presentations where the audience becomes an active part of the program, allowing them to experience our games and other creative educational methods firsthand.

Orkun Türkmen & Šimon Peták / Yolda Collective
"Shared Ground" Socially engaged art for social cohesion



The presentation entitled "Shared Ground" explores the potential of socially engaged theatre to support open, inclusive societies by addressing participatory and, in particular, movement-based artistic practices. Movement-based creation reduces dependence on verbal language and has strong potential to open alternative pathways for communication, trust-building, and mutual understanding. The power of movement / movement-based creations can be used as a tool

to reduce cultural differences and language barriers.

Due to the nature of community-based work, the inherent tension between "being a group" and "individual experiences" continuously pushes us to seek balance within these dynamics, while opening pathways for dialogue between different cultures and backgrounds. This tension situates cultural engagement not only as a creative practice but as a vital tool for social cohesion. Drawing on case studies, the presentation demonstrates how theatre and participatory arts can act as a bridge across social, cultural, and linguistic divides, while also giving voice to underrepresented communities.

Through case studies of community-based projects from Yolda Collective, – such as "Recycle of Movements", "The Season We Share", "The Power of Kindness" and more importantly recent developing project "Shared Ground" in collaboration with Center for Foreigners(Brno) – the presentation highlights the importance of socially engaged art for intercultural and interpersonal exchange .



Daniel Styles / Vitamin Cultural Centre
The “Infame Radio” Project



This presentation introduces Infame Radio, a Brno-based independent online radio station that serves as a dynamic platform connecting the local creative scene with international networks. The project will be presented by Daniel Robertson-Styles, the station's creative director and co-leader of the Vitamin Cultural Centre. Drawing on practical examples and cross-European initiatives (such as the 25AV audiovisual platform), he will demonstrate how Infame Radio empowers contemporary artists, builds local communities, and bridges Brno's cultural ecosystem with broader European platforms. Daniel will also share insights from his extensive background in international cultural management and community building.