

The impact of a new circus festival on urban and community development.

Key findings from the research of the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów audience, Lublin, Poland

Aleksandra Koltun, PhD (Research to use // Badania do działania, aleksandra.koltun@gmail.com), Anastazja Szuła, Oskar Adamus, Małgorzata Klimkowska

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The findings presented below are drawn from two sources: quantitative – two identical audience surveys, conducted in 2017 and 2023, and qualitative – interviews with selected members of festival audience who attended it at least three times, conducted in 2024.

Full research report can be found here: warsztatykultury.pl/badania/

For more information on the festival: carnavallublin.eu



Comparison between the 2023 and 2017 surveys shows that the composition of the audience of the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów remains almost unchanged in terms of characteristics such as gender, level of education or assessment of one's financial situation. Participants are still mostly women (61.7%), young people (50% of those surveyed were 37 years old or younger), with at least a university education (63.7% in total). In 2023 68.4% of people assess their material situation as good or very good. More than half of the participants - 52.8% declared they lived outside of Lublin. 6.2% of the respondents came from a country other than Poland, including Ukraine (3.4%) and other European countries (2.5%).

There is little change in the age of the festival audience – it has slightly increased, by around 2-4 years compared to 2017. Also when it comes to assessing the material situation, there is a decrease of around 5% in the proportion of people who can be described as satisfied.

Compared to 2017, the share of people from outside Lublin and from a country other than Poland has increased significantly in 2023. In 2017, the percentage of people from outside the city was 43.1%; in 2023, it was already 52.8%. As for the percentage of foreigners, on the other hand, it increased from 3.75% in 2017 to 6.2% in 2023.

61.7% of those attending the 2023 Carnaval Sztukmistrzów declared that they had been to it before. At the same time, for almost 1/4 of the total audience this was at least the fourth edition, and for a further 8.5% at least the seventh. Only 2.1% of those surveyed declared having been to the festival the last time in 2019, that is, before the global COVID-19 pandemics.

According to the 2023 results, 75.1% of non-residents came to Lublin specifically to participate in the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów. People living outside the city declared using a range of services in connection with their overall stay. Almost 80% of respondents declared going out to a restaurant, about half going to a pub or bar or doing some grocery shopping. In terms of accommodation, 31.8% of visitors rented a hotel room, while 28.1% rented an apartment. Almost one in four people shopped in a shopping centre.

Compared to 2017, there is a more than doubling in the proportion of people using hotel accommodation (up from 12.5% to 31.8%) and those who rented apartments (up from 12.5% to 28.1%).

The 2023 survey shows that festival participants not living in Lublin were keen to take advantage of the city's wider cultural offer. 33.3% said they visited a museum, 18.2% bought tickets to events other than Carnaval, 17.2% visited a cinema or theatre.

83.4% of those who participated in the survey agreed with the statement "Carnaval Sztukmistrzów makes me proud of Lublin" [or] "...that the citizens of Lublin can be proud of their city".

For the Lublin residents who took part in the interviews, the festival is an opportunity to put themselves in the role of a proud host. Such situations – which involve presenting oneself to a certain kind of audience, namely, the visitors – are, in turn, an important element in the formation of local identity.

Participants who came to the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów from other parts of Poland had a particularly positive image of Lublin – and this image was strongly shaped by their experiences of the festival. These people described Lublin as a magical city, offering unusual experiences and events of exceptional quality, a city saturated with culture that appears in every corner and tightly fills the space. Among these respondents, Lublin is also perceived as a city full of dynamism, where something is always happening and languages from all over the world can be heard everywhere.

In 2023 people attending the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów were usually accompanied by their closest relatives: 44.4% by their spouses or partners, 39.4% by children. 40.7% of respondents had their friends as companions. Only 5.8% were at the festival on their own – and this is the lowest percentage of all the events surveyed.

Visits to Carnaval are also an opportunity for spontaneous meetings with distant acquaintances. As sociologists point out, it is the maintenance of contacts with people who are not part of one's immediate family or social circle that is key to maintaining effective social networks.

One in four children taking part in the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów was six years old at most. It can therefore be assumed that the festival has a significant educational potential: the earlier children treat culture and art as something that is simply 'done' in their free time, the greater the chance that they will become part of cultural audiences in the future.

Participation in Carnaval Sztukmistrzów evoked in our interviewees a sense of sharing their experiences and emotions with others, and also a belief that all people present at the festival constitute a specific community. However ephemeral this community might be, it is a situation of certain social significance. It is rare for strangers, in such large numbers, to have the feeling that they have something in common and at the same time that this something is not antagonistic towards any other social group (as is the case during political elections or sporting events).

From the qualitative interviews, it is the desire to have fun, to get away from everyday life, that is one of the most essential elements of the festival experience at Carnaval, and

something one returns for. Interviews participants emphasised that these feelings arise in response to the exceptional talents of the artists: their physical prowess, finesse in movement, but also their sense of humour and ability to engage the audience in a lively way. The accumulation of events in public space is also an important factor here, providing a sense of intensity and a suspension of what is 'normal' and familiar from everyday life. Finally, other participants of the Carnaval are one more source of positive feelings – smiling people who, supposedly, react to certain situations in a similar way and share common experiences.

95.6% of those attending the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów in 2023 would recommend it to their friends. 83.4% of those surveyed said they would attend the festival the following year.

At the same time, the qualitative research shows that people who regularly attend Carnaval are increasingly disappointed by the decreasing diversity of its programme. This mainly concerns the lack of spectacular performances on huge stages, as well as the repetitiveness of some performances. The changes in the programme are, in turn, due to the event's limited budget: the amount of money allocated to its organisation in 2017 and 2023 has been reduced. The continued underfunding of the event is a serious threat to the quality of the festival and thus to the retention of audiences, especially those who come to Lublin specifically for the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów.