



# FLUCTUATIONS

## Report

**Strategies for Accessing Water  
as a Creative Space**

**June 2024**

This document was produced by VibeLab for the Creative Europe project "Fluctuations".

VibeLab is a data-driven research, consultancy and advocacy agency dedicated to supporting creatives and preserving night-time culture. With over ten years of experience, VibeLab works with local institutions and governments to develop strategies to effectively navigate and support the nightlife industry. We specialise in making complex data clear. VibeLab's research and consultancy helps identify growth opportunities and connects individuals, businesses, governments and institutions, to boost creativity and local economies. We are passionate about the transformative power that nightlife culture and creative communities have on urban areas. Our strength lies in our connections: we bridge the gap between government authorities, nightlife creatives and local communities. VibeLab creates change with sustainable solutions, backed by data to make cities thrive at night.

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# Introduction



## About the Report

Creative changemakers throughout Europe are turning the tide on traditional uses of rivers and canals, repurposing them as cultural spaces. While public regulations still frame rivers primarily as traffic routes for commercial or leisure transit, some citizens have started navigating on these waterways pursuing different ideas of what rivers could be.

The project Fluctuations, funded by the Creative Europe program from November 2023 - November 2024, has set out to join the ranks of such unconventional captaincy. Fluctuations aims to refurbish a 40m long barge, turning it into an e-powered, travelling festival built on the pillars of culture, sustainability and active citizenship, and raising the question what our rivers are to us.

This report presents the first step on this journey: mapping the European waterways from a cultural perspective. Where in Europe can we find vessels that transport stories and ideas, not goods? Who are their crews? Which places and infrastructures along the water do they stop at to connect to the land? And how do they navigate - and reimagine - the regulations of waterways?



Schrottregetta, Funkhaus Grünau  
© André Wagenzik, 2013

# The Fluctuations Report In Numbers

# 5

focus countries: France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary

# 25.000

kilometres of boatable inland waterways encompassed by these countries

# 36

cultural vessels researched

# 34

stakeholders interviewed

# 30

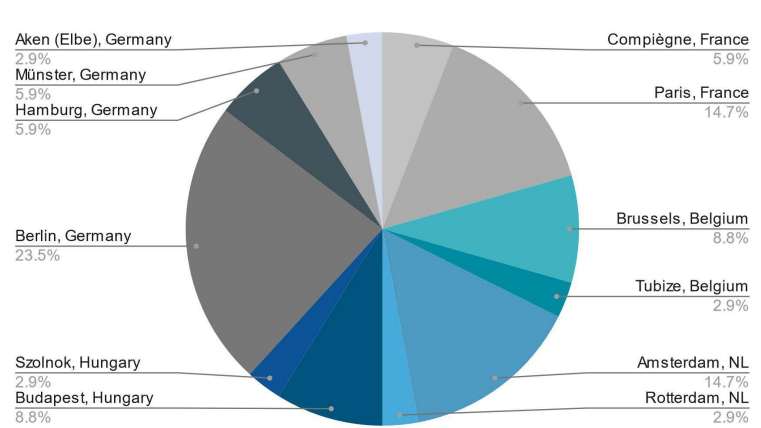
potential locations for events with cultural vessels assessed

# 4

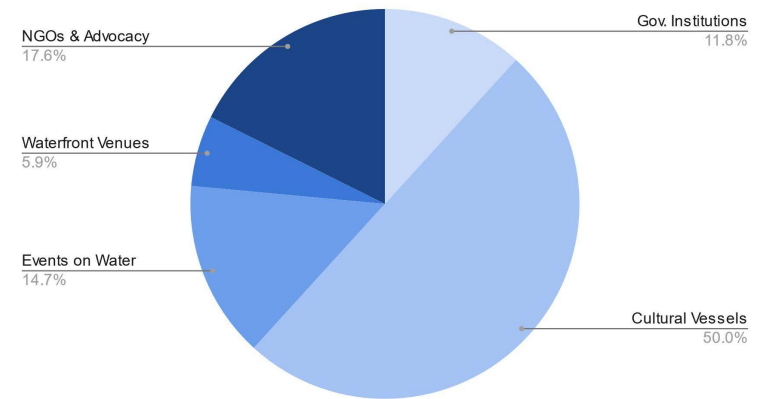
test events on different locations planned

# 10

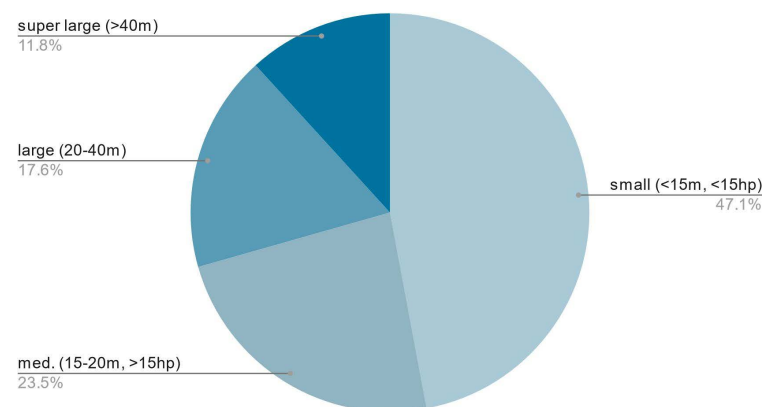
recommendations for accessing water as a creative space



Interviewees by city (n=34)



Interviewees by stakeholder group (n=34)



Vessel categories represented by interviews (n=17)

# Methodology

How does one map out the European waterways from a cultural perspective? Neither an overview of cultural practices on rivers, nor a clear cut and commonly agreed upon definition of a “cultural vessel” previously existed. Hence, it was clear from the start that this would be an explorative endeavor, leaping forward with each new insight.

Employing a snowball sampling method, each interview uncovered new stakeholders that the project team subsequently reached out to. In total, 34 stakeholders were interviewed including 17 members of cultural vessels. Parallel to the outreach process for interviews, all identified contacts were followed up with extensive desk research.

The interviews followed a semi-structured guideline skewed to understand which cultural vessels and communities exist (chapter 2), what types of events they organise on water (chapter 3), how they interact with different water topographies and riverside infrastructures (chapter 4), which policies and regulations they navigate in different countries and which authorities they interact with (chapter 5).

With the research team working in tandem with the Fluctuations event production team, four locations were ultimately selected to plan test events and apply gained insights. At the time of writing this, preparations are well advanced and we are just weeks away from implementing the first event.

To our knowledge, the Fluctuations Report is the first study of cultural practices on water that compares initiatives from several countries in Europe. Research was focused on a handful of territories where Fluctuations is planning a series of pilot events at the time of research: France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Hungary. Germany was added as a crucial geographical connector for more expansive tours towards Eastern Europe in the future. Together, these countries encompass a total of 25.000km<sup>†</sup> of boatable inland waterways - an immense potential of spaces for cultural actors if new visions described in this paper could set foot.<sup>††</sup>



A boat drawn on the ground of a public space in Brussels  
© Federica Teti, Fox Albra, collectif mit, 2015

<sup>†</sup>On a city level, waterways make up approximately 35% of the total urban surface of Amsterdam (<https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/policy-water-boating/>). For Berlin, this figure is 6.5% (<https://www.bwb.de/de/wasserkreislauf.php>). Paris, Brussels and Budapest range just slightly lower.



# A Brief History: Rivers as Creative Spaces

## Founding Era: Natural Lifelines

Rivers were the cornerstone upon which European cities were built, serving as vital sources of water, natural defences, and pathways for trade. The Tiber in Rome, the Seine in Paris, and the Thames in London are merely some examples of rivers around which major European cities flourished. They were the original highways, facilitating the movement of goods, cultures, and ideas that shaped the destinies of burgeoning urban centres.

## Industrial Revolution: Engines of Growth

With the Industrial Revolution starting in the 18th century, rivers transitioned from natural lifelines to industrial assets. They powered mills, transported goods, and bore the brunt of urban waste, facilitating the rise of industrialisation in Europe. This era marked the beginning of significant ecological strain on urban waterways and largely overlooked the costs of progress.

## Today: Reclaiming Urban Waterfronts

In contemporary times, the relationship between rivers and human populations continues to change shape, reflecting post-industrial shifts towards service-based economies, the prioritisation of quality of life, and concerns with the exploitation of the environment. European cities are transforming riverbanks from industrial backdrops into centres of leisure, culture, and green spaces. In Berlin, for example, industrial shipping dropped from its peak in 1929 till 2022 by 86% and more than halved within just the last decade. At the same time, recreational boating and touristic cruises are steadily increasing.

## Tomorrow: Liquid Parks, Biodiversity and Social Change

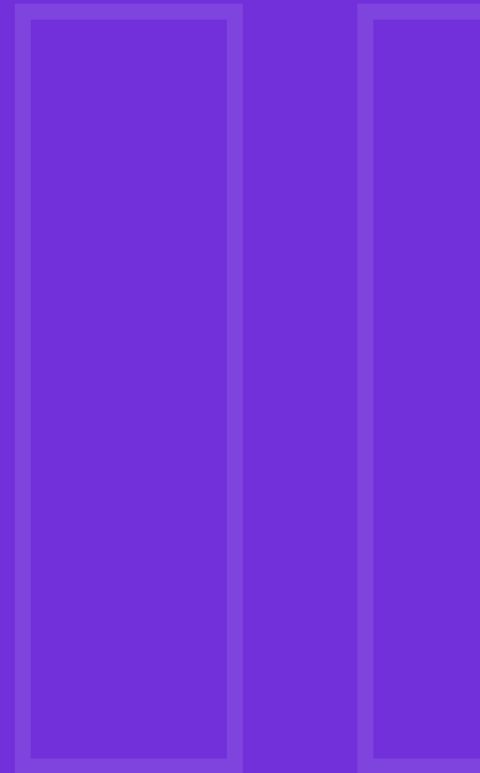
Humans are redefining their relationship with rivers, turning them into focal points for biodiversity conservation, but also recreation and community engagement. Waterways' transforming function is rooted in sustainability, as urban planning increasingly incorporates flood and drought management and environmental protection. The journey of rivers from foundational topographies through industrial channels to contemporary public spaces underscores the changing values and priorities of urban societies. How cultural vessels participate in envisioning this future is the subject of this report.



L'Odyssée, Canal de l'Ourcq, Paris

© Bruno Levy

# People & Vessels



From the smallest and simplest types of vessels to the largest and most sophisticated ones, organised by individuals, collectives and organisations, the key to understanding cultural vessels lies in the connection between people and the floating crafts they use.

A first glance into the diversity of 'cultural boat people', their motivations and political concerns is featured at the beginning of this chapter, followed by an overview of the cultural vessels examined for this study. Two distinct initiatives are then presented in detail: The 38 metre long barge 'Urban Boat' that travels internationally, and the smaller, DIY-built, and locally operating 'Hansafloß' based in Münster, Germany.

Having established a first impression of the range of projects implied in the idea of cultural vessels, a framework for categorisation of such vessels is introduced. Based on the analysis of 36 cultural vessels across Europe and 17 interviews with crew members from nine cities, five key dimensions are identified to differentiate the phenomenon of cultural vessels further.



# Key Themes and Motivations



“One result of climate change is that extreme heat will continue to increase in Europe and citizens will seek out areas by the water to cool down and spend their free time. Instead of developing regulations that merely restrict, we should understand them as tools to shape, to incentivise good practice and to go with the times.”

- Nicolas Dhers,  
SMMMILE / Fluctuations CEO



“Reclaiming the water as a public space is a political act, especially in a city like Berlin. Real estate speculation is making spaces less and less accessible and we need to develop new spatial tactics.”

- Jule Roschlau, LAIKA

© Marco Borowski



“In cities, there is always competition around space. The water is a public space but it isn't accessible to the public. And that's why we built a boat: to claim a space for us, for art, for non commercial happenings and simply having a place to do stuff.”

- Michael Oehmcke, Schaluppe

© Schaluppe



“The energy transition will lead to a decline in coal transport by water and therefore in commercial shipping. Giving absolute priority to commercial shipping makes sense on major waterways, but within cities this principle should be reassessed. There are speed limits for cars in residential areas; parked cars are a strategy to calm traffic. This could also make sense on inner city waterways to promote safety and with it mixed use.”

©

- Jakob Kukula, SpreeVision



“We don't allow enough time. To see what can emerge and what can be possible. That's a really important principle and I think it's reflected in this sailing practice. Imagine if we did allow more space for testing, experiment and relation, and relation is a big topic in this... I believe this would dramatically change the artistic work we'd come up with.”

- Naomi Russell,  
espaço agora now, The European  
Pavillion 2024: Liquid Becomings

© Joost van  
den Broek



“The aim of my collective is to transform our boat into a platform for research and creation on water. We want to steer away from power systems, so minimising the boat's impact on the environment is crucial. We want it to be a practical example of horizontal and participative collective practices, sustainable solutions, frugal innovations, and unhurried mobility.”

- Fox Albra, Barkasse & Libertalia\* e.V.

© Mayra  
Wallraff



“I advocate for the rights of water bodies, embracing the concept of Rights of Nature. It's crucial for humans to consider 'what does a river need?' and strive for a more balanced relationship between human and non-human actants. There's a network in Europe growing around this idea right now.”

© Theresa Maria  
Forthaus



© Max Riche

“For too long, rivers have been considered as borders, whereas for Fluctuations, they become binders, bridges between Europeans. And to bring about this paradigm shift, it is necessary to develop the mixed use of rivers and to strengthen public access.”

- Charline Albericci, COO Fluctuations



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online & OMA

“There’s something to be discovered when traveling on the river. You see different connections between towns and cities, maybe the original routes from the times these places were built. If you think in roads, the connections are very different than when you think in streams.”

- Valentin Rion, Kulturboot Mary Jane



© Urban Boat

“Touring on rivers means we’ll be touching down in major cities located along large waterways - but above all we’ll be able to stop in the so called ‘second cities’: the smaller ones, the seldomly reported on, the ones that attract fewer tourists. Cities that don’t feel so saturated yet.”

- Alexia Balandjian, Urban Boat



© Bastiaan  
Wolters

“What I like most about designing a venue on water is that it’s mobile. It can go with the flow of the city. There are unused plots of land today where in two to five years there will be lots of buildings. But in the meantime, why not put a ship there? And when they need the area for construction, we just move to another part of the city where there’s again a gap. We just need a little space on land for us to get people on board.”

- Bastiaan Wolters, Lastkahn

What drives the people who operate cultural vessels and other stakeholders who employ their imagination to transform waterways?

The quotes illustrate a variety of motivations and priorities. Themes include:

- **Participation and active citizenship:** having a space in the city for self-determined creative engagement, building collective organisational structures, hosting non-commercial / accessible and community oriented activities, acting as a forum for political discourse, relying heavily on support networks and crowdfunding.
- **Urban planning:** cultural vessels as an agile and adaptable spatial tactic, claiming the waters and banks as public spaces or commons, expressing a Right to the City.
- **Environmentalism:** promoting sustainability, protecting / regenerating the biosphere, changing human relations to nature from exploitation to collaboration, using arts, technology and education to change perceptions.
- **Connecting territories and communities beyond political and social borders:** utilising waterways as touring routes, shifting their role from borders to connectors, looking at people’s relatedness from a topographical perspective.
- **Artistic exploration and process orientation:** slowing down, shifting the focus from production to exploration, embracing uncertainty, making space for new discoveries to influence the trajectory, steering away from gigantism.

While stakeholder voices express diversity, they share a common direction towards democracy, equity, environmental concern and the pursuit of transformation. This provides the foundation for understanding cultural vessels as more than scattered, local initiatives, but as an international phenomenon and a field for advocacy containing clear, shared interests to rally behind. Furthermore, cultural vessels can (and already do) form alliances with other stakeholder groups - such as artists, NGOs, policy-makers, and more - as part of wider social, cultural, and environmental movements.

Throughout this report, 59 quotes will allow readers to hear the voices of interviewed stakeholders to paint a nuanced picture of the ideas carried by cultural vessels and to contextualise findings.

# List of Cultural Vessels Investigated

Country	City	Vessel	Interviewee
Belgium	Tubize	Le Fairy	Pierre D'haenens
	Antwerp	Boot Tenace	
	Liège	Le Ventre de la Baleine	
France	Amiens	Péniche Célestine	
	Compiègne	Urban Boat	Alexia Balandjian, Nicolas Defawe
	Paris	Le Barboteur	Ian Oxley
		L'Odyssée & Petit Bain	Ricardo Esteban
		Péniche Lapin Vert	
		Péniche Cinéma	
		Metaxu	
	Rosa Bonheur		
Strasbourg	La Péniche Mécanique		
Germany	Aken (Elbe)	Kulturboot Mary Jane	Valentin Rion
	Berlin	8. Mai	
		Anarche	
		CitizenShip <sup>†</sup>	Philip Horst
		LAIKA	Jule Roschlau
		Hoppetosse	
		Hošek Contemporary	
		Insola	
		Newria	
		Panther Ray	Basti Schilling
		Schuti	
		Spree:publik <sup>††</sup>	Jan Ebel, Arik Rohloff
		Unkraut	
		Wackelberry	Daniel Mohns
	Zola		
	Hamburg	Barkasse	Fox Albra
		Schaluppe	Michael Oehmcke
		MS Stubnitz	
Münster	Hansafloß	Christian Nordhoff, Farina Balzer	
Stuttgart	Fridas Pier		
Hungary	Budapest	A38	Szabolcs Berger
		Spoon The Boat	
Netherlands	Amsterdam	Adventures of the Valparaiso	Ulysses Schuitemaker
		Lastkahn <sup>†††</sup>	Bastiaan Wolters
		Veronica Schip	

<sup>†</sup>The Citizenship was a cultural vessel built for the purpose of only one artistic project in 2023 and has since been dismantled.

<sup>††</sup>Spree:publik is not a vessel but an advocacy group for cultural vessels in Berlin.

<sup>†††</sup>Lastkahn is at concept stage - it has not been built yet.

# Case Study: Urban Boat (Compiègne)

**Vessel Name:** Urban Boat (Péniche Thabor)

**Homeport:** Compiègne, France



Birds-eye view of the Urban Boat © Julian Sultan, 2021



© Urban Boat

**“We had to earn our respect on the water. Each travel is still an adventure but we feel now that we belong more and more to this parallel society of river people.”**

- Alexia Balandjian, Urban Boat

**Crew:** The Urban Boat was initiated by Alexia Balandjian and Nicolas Defawe. Both had previously been founding members of multidisciplinary art space Urban Spree in Berlin before moving back to France and refurbishing the old, industrial Péniche Thabor to become the Urban Boat. Neither of them had any naval experience when starting their project. While Alexia studied hard to become a licensed captain, Nicolas led the construction works.

**Specifications:** The Urban Boat is a 38 metre long canal barge built in 1966 which was fully refurbished to become a cultural vessel in 2018. It offers 150m<sup>2</sup> of indoor spaces for creative work and accommodation. Outdoors, an area of 30m<sup>2</sup> metres (6mx5m) can be utilised as a stage. The vessel is propelled by an inboard Diesel engine while electricity is supplied via solar panels installed on the deck. The boat itself is never accessible to audiences for public events as it is not certified as a venue.<sup>†</sup> For private activities it can host a maximum of 50 people when moored or 12 people when in motion.

**Utilities:** The Urban Boat includes a large indoor workspace, sound production studio, communal living space with a kitchen, multiple cabins, and a bathroom. The deck doubles as a stage. The boat is adaptable for various project formats and is equipped with sound systems, musical instruments, DJ equipment, lights, a projector, and a movie screen.

**Mission:** The Urban Boat is a European cultural barge serving as a toolbox and meeting place for creatives, educators, and cultural activists.

<sup>†</sup>Registration as a publicly accessible venue activates different and more complex regulations with regards to safety, accessibility etc. One example is the Peniche Célestine, a cultural vessel based in Amiens, France, which has the licence to host events and navigate with passengers onboard.





Outdoor cinema using the Urban Boat, Saint Denis  
©Urban Boat, 2018

**Activities:** The Urban Boat is a residency, work and presentation space. With its large indoor work area, the Urban Boat can accommodate artistic residencies and educational projects throughout the year. For public events, it usually requires to be moored by a piece of land as audiences are not permitted to access the boat. It is then able to host floating concerts, exhibitions, performances, film screenings, and more. With its outside shell serving as a canvas for large scale paintings and/or video mappings, the Urban Boat is also a mobile sculpture.

**Collaborations:** The Urban Boat collaborates with European artists, helping local talent to cross regions, collaborate and meet new audiences. In 2023, the 'Sound River System' festival spanned three countries, offering cross-border residencies for musicians. Partnering with local institutions, venues, and festivals it jointly promoted events and reached wider audiences. Collaborating with local artists and organisers ensures cultural relevance, credibility, and grassroots community support. Successful collaborations also streamline event replication and manage organisational complexities more efficiently.



© Thomas Scheele

**“Refurbishing an industrial boat has the advantage that it works well with the standard infrastructures on waterways like mooring and locks. That can be sometimes a problem for DIY boats.”**

- Nicolas Defawe, Urban Boat



© Urban Boat

**“We have trouble navigating through Germany because in their regulations, recreational boats longer than 20 metres don't exist. So you need to have a license for commercial boating which takes long training to get. But, of course, I know how to navigate my boat already!”**

- Alexia Balandjian, Urban Boat

**Vision for the future:** The nonlinearity of the route allows the Urban Boat to cross large cities, medium-sized towns, and rural areas, providing a comprehensive overview of the current music, performing and visual arts scene. The crew specifically wants to work in places beyond the metropolitan areas; places where the demand for events and culture is not yet saturated. It seeks to travel new routes to places it hasn't yet explored, particularly Germany and Eastern Europe. The Urban Boat continues to develop its onboard utilities, adding a recording studio and improving its ecological footprint. The team advocates for the concept of cultural harbors to establish new hubs to collaborate with other cultural vessels.

### Pros:

- Year-round usability: With heated indoor spaces, the Urban Boat can be used year-round.
- Wide geographical range: Due to the vessel's strong motorisation, it can travel through most of Europe's inland waterways.
- Linking production and presentation: With its connection of spaces for residency, production, and presentation, the Urban Boat covers the full range of creative work.
- Modular, multi-purpose spaces: Suitable for a wide range of project formats.
- Equipped space: wide array of technical equipment available in house, including sound systems, musical instruments, DJ gear, lighting, a projector, and a movie screen for cultural events.
- Sustainability efforts: solar panels for everyday electricity, use of upcycled waste materials for indoor design, water filtering system and continuous measures for reducing the environmental impact.

### Cons:

- Boating licence required: limits the pool of potential operators. Acquiring this boating licence also entails costs for training and exams.
- Crossing the Rhine River and navigating in Germany, however, require more advanced, commercial boating licences which the crew of Urban Boat has not obtained.
- Costs: Limiting to the range of motion is the engine's high Diesel consumption and entailed costs.
- Environmental impact: The vessel operates on a combustion engine and is heated by a fire place, both of which emit fumes.
- Restricted access for audience: The Urban Boat can host audiences only for private occasions, due to regulations.
- Event promotion as a travelling stage: can be challenging for the nomadic Urban Boat due to the absence of existing audience bases. The Urban Boat thus depends on finding local partner venues with waterfront access that help promote joint activities through their channels.



Workspace onboard

© Marjorie Ray, 2022



© Thomas Scheele

**"We always knew it's crucial to convince cities to provide a cultural harbor - a place that has open mooring spots for boats like ours and some toilets with disability access and all these things that we cannot provide so easily. It would be a total game changer!"**

- Nicolas Defawe, Urban Boat

# Case Study: Hansafloß (Münster)

**Vessel Name:** Hansafloß

**Homeport:** Münster, Germany



Image of the Hansafloß

© Hansafloß

**Crew:** The Hansafloß is operated by the non-profit association Einfloß e.V comprising a core team of around 12-18 active members who receive support from a wide network of friends and local supporters. The association strives to be an inclusive and non-hierarchical platform. It is open to new members who can engage in one of several working groups centred around boat management, event organisation, awareness, and more.

**Specifications:** 11 metres long and 4 metres wide vessel based on custom built, catamaran style, metal floats topped by a DIY-built, wooden upper deck. It is propelled by a 15 horsepower outboard engine. The light motorisation allows the Hansafloß to be navigated without a boating licence under German regulations. This ensures that all members of Einfloß e.V. have equal access to operating the shared vessel and that work can be distributed easily. On the downside, the motorisation also limits the Hansafloß' range of motion. The vessel has not travelled beyond Münster but rather hosts activities for their local commune.

**Utilities:** The Hansafloß features a two-level open platform, with the upper level serving as a partial roof. Utilities include storage boxes, a bar counter, and an eco-toilet. Event equipment is brought as needed, powered by a combustion generator. The vessel also has a fridge, a wheelchair ramp, and plans for a wheelchair-accessible compost toilet. It houses music equipment and lighting, including sound boxes, subwoofers, and microphones. The lower level is wheelchair-accessible via a ramp, but the roof terrace is only accessible by stairs.

**Mission:** The project was started in 2021 with a project grant of 20k euros. The founding collective intended to build its own mobile space for doing 'creative stuff', organising against the issue of gentrification and the lack of spaces for non-profit projects. The Hansafloß understands itself as a space for political utopia where transformative ideas can be prototyped and experienced in practice. It serves as an event stage and a meeting place for non-formal education, discussion, and political activism. It strives to form a countermodel for the utilisation of urban waterways to the commerce-oriented port of Münster and highlight the role of rivers and canals as public spaces.



**"Hansafloß is a free culture space and as the harbour in Münster is falling under gentrification it's like a protest movement against that."**

- Farina Balzer, Hansafloß

© Farina Balzer



Live music concert on the Hansafloß, Münster © Hansafloß

**Activities:** The Hansafloß has been host to political workshops, clothes swaps, theatre performances, movie screenings, and live music, with the audience typically spectating from the shoreline. Due to its open architecture, the Hansafloß is operated only seasonally from spring to autumn.

**Collaborations:** The Hansafloß collaborates extensively beyond artistic endeavours, navigating bureaucratic complexities from securing docking spaces to liaising with regulatory authorities for event permissions. They actively engage with green and left-leaning organisations, hosting meetings and events aboard the boat, showcasing the intersectionality of cultural expression and political activism. This collaborative spirit extends to the broader Münster community, with local businesses providing utilities and support for shoreline events. These partnerships underscore the boat's commitment to collective ownership and solidarity amidst the challenges of gentrification.



© Christian Nordhoff

**“Moving from place to place in the city is where the complicated stuff starts because there are lots of different stakeholders managing different areas on and by the water. There’s private owners, there’s public owned companies and also various city departments exercising ownership over certain waterways and waterfront land. Finding out who is responsible for what and getting authorisation is very complicated.”**

- Christian Nordhoff, Hansafloß

**Vision for the future:** Looking ahead, the Hansafloß aims to add a small solar panel to the roof for sustainability. They also aim to strengthen ties with worker unions and similar groups for political involvement, expanding their target groups beyond student circles which they, at current, mostly entertain. They’re working on a plan to ensure the project can keep going strong by effectively welcoming and training new members. This means creating a guide for future volunteers. Lastly, they’re keen on finishing up the boat with practical improvements like completing the wheelchair-accessible compost toilet, closing open spaces to allow for events all year round, and making small tweaks for better function and appearance to ensure the longevity and respectability of their vessel.

### Pros:

- Localised approach: Focus of operations on the city of Münster presents an opportunity to deeply engage with the community, to leverage existing support structures, and to build a dialogue with local decision-makers around improving the framework conditions for utilising water as a creative space.
- Licence-free navigation: Simplifies operations for the collective and reduces the costs for training, rendering the vessel more accessible.
- Low running costs: The Hansafloß is a moderately sized, lightly motorised, low-tech boat built upon an enduring, high quality float. It therefore produces relatively low running costs for mooring, sailing and general maintenance.
- Non-profit organisation: Allows organisers to tap into various sources of funding, including grants and community support. The non-profit status also builds trust with authorities and other stakeholders.
- Versatile architecture and usability: The open architecture of Hansafloß provides a minimalist but versatile framework for various use cases such as concerts, film screenings, political forums, and more.

### Cons:

- Limited range of motion: Light motorisation renders only short distance travel feasible.
- Safe navigation: Vessel operators not being required to undergo formal training for navigating the Hansafloß may raise safety concerns, especially on routes trafficked by larger ships. Mitigating risks depends on diligent self-education within the team.
- Seasonal use: The Hansafloß' open architecture and absence of heated indoor spaces only allows seasonal use from spring to autumn.
- Vulnerability to gentrification: The issue of gentrification in Münster, like many cities globally, poses a threat to the affordability and accessibility of berths and temporary mooring spaces for non-profit activities. Since the Hansafloß practices depend on access to both, water and land, and as its range of motion is limited, its operation depends on affordable and central mooring and close by, accessible and suitable sites for events.



Live music event on the Hansafloß

© Hansafloß

# Vessel Categorisation

The case studies in this chapter illustrate the diverse spectrum of cultural vessels. Even with just two very distinct examples, several aspects become apparent that can be used to categorise different types of cultural vessels more generally. These categories include construction, motorisation and length, range of motion, time of use, as well as ownership and operation, providing a useful framework for understanding varied approaches and logistical considerations.



The Barkasse in the Port of Hamburg.  
© Mayra Wallraff, collectif mit, 2021

# 1

## Construction:

- **Industrially Built:** Industrially manufactured vessels offer high durability and safety standards. Examples include Kulturboot Mary Jane (see bottom image), the Urban Boat (see case study in this chapter), Le Barboteur (see page 26), and the Barkasse (see image on previous page).
- **DIY-Built:** Self-constructed vessels, typically smaller and flexible for creative modifications, reflecting unique artistic visions. Examples include the Bureaucracy (see top image), the LAIKA (see page 24), the CitizenShip (see page 26) and the Newria (see page 27).
- **Mixed:** Vessels combining industrially built floats with DIY-built decks, balancing professional standards with creative customisation. Examples include the Hansafloß (see case study in this chapter) or the Schaluppe (see page 24).



The Bureaucracy won 2013's Schrottregetta (Scrap Boat Race) in Berlin. The tiny sailing boat was made out of 84 disposed file folders, 4km of wrongly printed sticky tape, and some plastic tube. After her victory, she was dismantled and recycled.

© André Wagenzik, 2013



© Arno Bouma

**"DIY boats are really more of a phenomenon in Germany. I don't know any around the Low Countries... probably because our ports are a lot bigger. Think Rotterdam or Antwerp. There's more industrial shipping in this region. So I imagine that the authorities and regulations are a lot stricter in such areas."**

- Arno Bouma, Space of Urgency



Kulturboot Mary Jane is a 9 metres long refurbished sailing boat. Due to its narrow and uneven deck it is not used as a stage but rather transports artists from place to place to perform on land. With its small indoor cabin, the boat provides basic utilities for residency.

© [thisismywork.online](http://thisismywork.online) & OMA

## Motorisation and Length:

- **Boating Licence-Free:** Vessels with motorisation and length below the threshold requiring a boating licence, making them more accessible and easier to operate collectively.
  - **License-free / small vessels:** commonly <15 horsepowers, <15-20 metres  
Examples include the LAIKA (see top image), the HanseFloß (see case study in this chapter), and the Newria (see page 27).
- **Boating Licence Required:** Larger vessels exceeding the threshold, requiring a boating licence to be operated.
  - **Medium vessels:** approx. <15-20 metres, >15hp  
Examples include the Anarche and the Schaluppe (see page 25).
  - **Large vessels:** approx. 20-40 metres, >15hp  
An example is the Urban Boat (see case study in this chapter).
  - **Very large vessels:** approx. >40 metres  
Examples include Lastkahn (see page 27) as well as Fridas Pier in Stuttgart and A38 in Budapest.

The figures above are based on different national regulatory frameworks from the five assessed countries. Read more about the specific regulations around boating licenses in chapter 5.



© Farina Balzer

**“Our engine has 15 horsepowers so everybody can navigate it without a license. Above that, you’d have to get a license and not everybody from my group could drive it which would be very problematic. We’re a non-profit, it’s all voluntary work so we need to share tasks to carry the workload.”**

- Farina Balzer, HansaFloß



The ZüriGrad was used as a theatre stage on Lake Zurich before being transported to Berlin and receiving her new name LAIKA. Propelled by a small outboard engine with less than 15 horsepowers and shorter than 15 metres, the LAIKA can be navigated without a boating license.

© LAIKA Collective



The 38 metre Urban Boat ‘Péniche Thabor’ is a versatile cultural vessel able to travel long distances with its strong motorisation, but requiring a special boating licence for navigation.

© Urban Boat, 2021



## Range of Motion:

- **Stationary:** Fixed in one location, e.g. permanent floating venues.  
Examples include A38 in Budapest, Fridas Pier in Stuttgart or the concept of Lastkahn in Amsterdam (see page 27)
- **Short Range (Intracity):** Capable of moving short distances within city limits and on waterways with very mild current.  
Examples include the Hansafloß (see case study in this chapter), the LAIKA (see page 24), and the Newria (see page 27)
- **Mid Range (Intercity/Regional):** Able to travel both within and beyond a city, allowing for broader reach and regional initiatives.  
Examples include the Anarche and the Schaluppe (see images on this page).
- **Long Range (International):** Designed for further travel and able to traverse large rivers with strong currents.  
Examples include the Urban Boat (see case study in this chapter) and Kulturboot Mary Jane (see page 23).



© Zoë Japenga

**“Most of our policies and regulations have an underlying idea of people building something permanent. So, of course, if a project [a floating venue] is about agility and staying in one spot for, let’s say, two years and the whole regulation process is going to take half a year... you see how there’s a mismatch between creative ideas and administrative processes that we need to solve.”**

- Shunyata Ossewaarde,  
City of Amsterdam Policy Advisor  
for Nightlife and Culture



Anarche ©Johannes Jelinek / vakatmedia, 2015



© Schaluppe

Schaluppe from Hamburg, and Anarche from Berlin share relatively similar designs: their self-built wooden decks are based on two catamaran-style metal floats. Around 15 metres long and with two levels they can take audiences on a cruise or moor on the riverbank to serve as stages. Schaluppe and Anarche are both equipped with strong motors which require a boating licence but allow them to take occasional trips beyond their city limits. Due to their open structures, these vessels are operated only from spring to autumn.

## Time of Use:

- Single Event:** Built for one-time use, often focused on temporary installations or experimental art projects.  
 Examples include the CitizenShip (see top image) and the Bureaucracy (page 23).
- Seasonal:** Due to open structures and/or lack of heating used only from spring to autumn but often over a number of years.  
 Examples include Le Barboteur (see bottom image), Hansafloß (see case study in this chapter), or Anrache and Schaluppe (see page 25).
- Year Round:** Designed for continuous use with heated indoor space, able to offer ongoing cultural programs.  
 An example is the Urban Boat (see case study in this chapter).



Large but existing for the period of only one artistic project was the CitizenShip; a DIY-built vessel constructed from a repurposed roof, which was powered without fossil energy by peoples muscles and solar energy. It was supposed to traverse over 400km from Berlin to Kassel as part of Documenta fifteen contemporary art exhibition.

© KUNSTrePUBLIK, 2022



© Matthias Einhoff, reSITE

**“The essential part of the CitizenShip, in terms of material and shape, was a recycled roof turned upside down. With no propulsion technology from fossil fuels, the ship had little power to propel itself forward. This was feasible in stagnant water or when going with the current, but as we travelled upstream we encountered tough challenges that ultimately led to a standstill. There were no real difficulties with large ships, but, yeah, when they thundered past us there were some tingly moments.”**

- Philip Horst, ZK/U Berlin, CitizenShip



Refurbished industrial boat Le Barboteur appears from April to September on different public riverbanks across Paris, offering a stage for bands and DJs and running a bar. Events are planned in partnership with public authorities and no entrance fee is charged, creating an inclusive cultural activation.

© Millenaire

## Ownership and Operation:

- **Individual(s):** Owned and operated by single individuals, often correlating with very small vessels (e.g. the Bureacracy, page 23) or vessels that are also used as houseboats.
- **Informal Collective:** Managed by informal groups, fostering a collaborative and community-driven approach, usually with specifications that allow boating licence-free operation.  
An example is the Newria (see top image).
- **Formal Organisation:** Operated by an established organisation (e.g. association), indicating structured management and long term planning. Examples can range from non-profit associations like Einfloß e.V. which operates the Hansafloß (see case study in this chapter) to for-profit companies such as the one foreseen to operate Lastkahn (see bottom image).



The Nuria was built in 2014, fully reconstructed a few years later and renamed Newria. She is as simple as it gets: a 6m x 4m platform floating on upcycled plastic tons and propelled by a 5 horsepower outboard engine. The tiny stage is co-owned by 25 members of an informal collective and regularly used as a concert stage and more. Almost a decade old, it is proof that even simple vessels can be enduring.

© Johannes Jelinek / vakatmedia, 2015



© Bastiaan Wolters

**“If you’re looking for this kind of ship [65 to 75 metre long barge], it would cost around 50 to 70 thousand euros. A lot of these vessels are outdated, they’re not worth keeping anymore so they cost just a little more than the value of scrap metal. But most of the time, the steel is still good, thick enough to endure many more years. Imagine, these ships were handcrafted in the 1960s or even before. So repurposing them also saves that heritage.”**

- Bastiaan Wolters, Lastkahn



Lastkahn is a project from Amsterdam striving to transform an 65-75 metres long industrial barge into a floating venue. The project is still at concept stage, trying to find a suitable location. Nevertheless, it's an example of what cultural vessels and strategies for utilising water as a creative space can look like at the upper end of the spectrum.

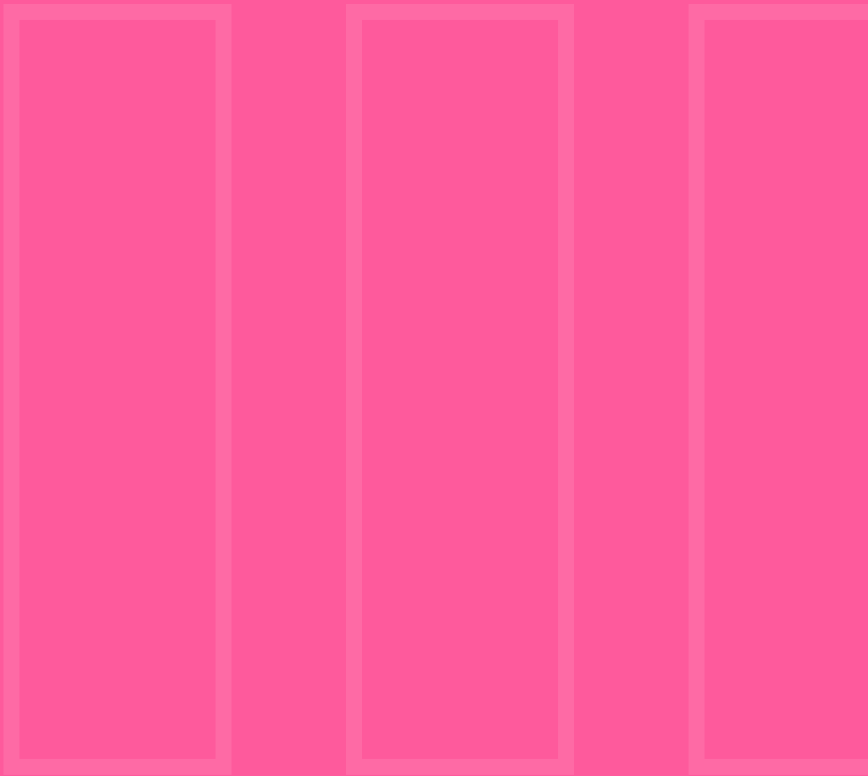
© Lastkahn, 2023

While they differ in size, range of motion, time of use, ownership and vision, cultural vessels form a diverse and yet unique phenomenon. Each type of vessel provides different routes of navigating visions and projects, natural environments, built infrastructures, and regulations.

Paying attention to the technical, spatial, temporal, and operational dimensions of cultural vessels reveals how the floating crafts must themselves be conceived of as cultural actors: They enable certain modes of engagement while limiting others, demanding care, accountability and a close-knit relationship with the waterways their operation relies on.

Still, some new questions emerge: Why are there so many DIY-vessels in Berlin and not in Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam or Budapest? Could creatives in those cities use the same strategies to conquer the waters? What are the factors for certain types of cultural vessels to exist in some cities and not in others? Step by step, the following chapters will add insights to answer these questions.

# Practices



What does it mean to stage a cultural activity on water? By examining case studies of cultural happenings, this chapter dives into the practices that let the idea of a cultural vessel come alive.

Two distinct examples highlight the manifold interactions of creatives, rivers, audiences, communities and policies that cultural events on water both rely on and produce. They provide tangible stories to ground the analysis which follows: The introduction of a system of categorisation for distinguishing different types of events on water.

Becoming aware of the interplay of various factors - people, vessels, regulations, technologies to name just a few - opens the view on strategic options from a programming perspective for accessing water as a creative space in different contexts.



# Case Study: Fluctuations Festival (multiple cities)



Fluctuations Festival poster

© Aurelia Joly, 2024



© Max Riche

**“For Fluctuations to become a feasible model, I believe we need to look at topics that are much larger than the event itself. We need to change our understanding of rivers. Entities involved in waterway management need to rewrite their mission statements. It’s a deep transformation but it’s already being promoted by many organisations across Europe.”**

- Nicolas Dhers,  
SMMMILE / CEO Fluctuations



© Max Riche

**“Fluctuations is a countermodel for festivals. We aim for a slow mode of touring, minimising the environmental impact, organising small but multiple events instead of one giant happening.”**

- Charline Albericci, COO Fluctuations

Fluctuations pursues a daring and unique concept – to set up a floating festival on a transformed and eco-designed, 40 metre long barge touring transnationally via European rivers, engaging communities on social, environmental, and citizenship matters. Fluctuations’ riverboat, known as the “Festiboat”, will serve as both artist residency and stage.

Along its fluid route, the Festiboat docks at suitable event sites and is set up as a stage for two days of programming. Activities include music, performing arts, workshops, and talks focused on environmental sustainability and citizenship, as well as a ‘village of solutions’ where NGOs and social impact companies present practical steps for a better future. Many of these activities will take place on land adjacent to the Fluctuations boat.

In between stops, the boat functions as an artist residency with space for up to 10 crew members. The time of travel between events thus opens a space for reflection and creative production.



Fluctuations manifests a counter-model to festivals by slowing down the pace of touring, decarbonising travel<sup>†</sup>, scaling down events, reducing environmental impacts and investing in local audiences and partnerships.

The event is designed for an audience of 400-700, primarily local residents of all demographics. With a donation-based entry, the non-profit event is accessible to low-income groups.

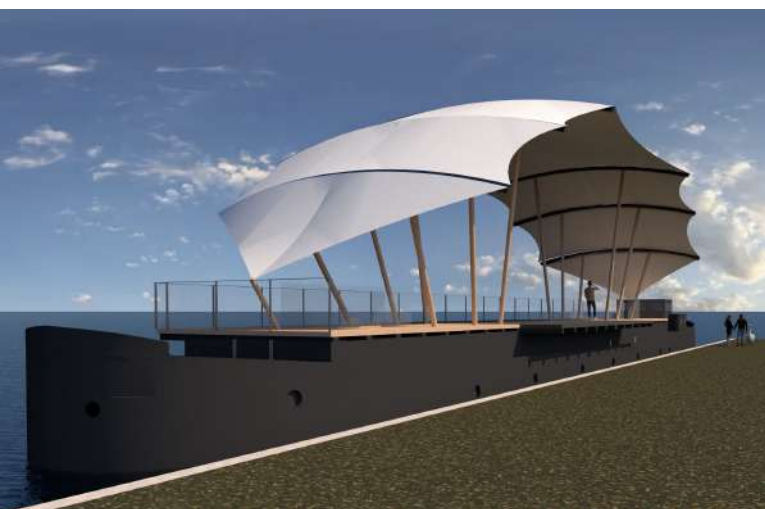
After securing a successful Creative Europe grant in 2023, Fluctuations will implement four prototype events the year after in Lambersart/Lille (France), Anderlecht/Brussels (Belgium), Utrecht (the Netherlands), and in Budapest (Hungary). Not having constructed the Festiboat yet, the Fluctuations team partners up with the Urban Boat<sup>††</sup>, a cultural vessel with similar specifications based in Compiègne (France). These test events serve as precursors to a full-scale launch in 2025, introducing the eco-designed Festiboat.



© Vincent Laglande

**“The main partnership of our festival is obviously with the river. It allows us to tour so we want to use this possibility to mobilise people for environmental protection and to involve NGOs and researchers who can voice the needs of the biosphere. We want to collaborate with these needs.”**

- Vincent Laglande,  
Partnerships Manager at Fluctuations



Fluctuations Festiboat concept ©Du cœur à l'ouvrage, 2024



Fluctuations Festiboat concept

©Du cœur à l'ouvrage, 2024

The enticing vision faces several challenges which this report is aimed to assess and develop strategies for. Most importantly, waterways are approached by policy-makers predominantly as transit routes for commercial or recreational boats and as natural environments. Regulations and infrastructures are designed to serve and protect these two predominant functions. By contrast, grassroots initiatives like Fluctuations, or the many others interviewed in the course of this research, seek to enhance these functions, looking at waterways as open public spaces, as liquid parks rather than highways. This is the basic conceptual gap that makes cultural projects on water exciting - and challenging to realise.

At the scope of the Fluctuations project, complex licensing procedures come into play, requiring to reconcile the project's rebellious vision with existing frameworks. Later on in this report, this question will be dealt with in greater detail: in the future, how could cities develop policies, governance models, and infrastructures which acknowledge the possibilities of using waterways as creative spaces while safeguarding their use as transit routes as well as environmental sustainability.

But before, a second case study in this chapter shall present an alternative path: cultural practices on the water designed to bypass licensing requirements.

<sup>†</sup>In its prototyping phase, Fluctuations partners with the Urban Boat to execute pilot events. The Urban Boat is a Diesel-powered, 38m long barge. Meanwhile, the Fluctuations team aims to refurbish a similar boat to be fully electrified and running on renewable energy.

<sup>††</sup>Refer to pages 16 - 18

## Case Study: Floßkino (Berlin)



Floßkino, organised by the crew of cultural vessel Wackelberry by the Landwehrkanal in Berlin.

©Bootschaft e.V., 2019

From 2015 to 2019, the association Bootschaft e.V. hosted the event Floßkino, a non-profit cinema experience on the waterways of Berlin, utilising their self-built vessel, Wackelberry. This case study exemplified how to design an activity that bypasses the complex licensing processes often required for cultural events on and by the water.

For Floßkino events, the 8m x 4m small Wackelberry was utilised as a multi-purpose, floating stage. Early evenings began with a band performing atop the vessel while, below the roof, an affordable communal dish was handed out. As night fell, the Wackelberry's side transformed into a screen for film projections. Following the screenings, attendees would help clean the site, contributing to the event's community spirit through voluntary donations.

The open-air cinema featured short films by emerging filmmakers, all unaffiliated with Performing Rights Organisations, allowing royalty-free screenings. Filmmakers often attended, providing intimate discussions about their work, enhancing the audience's experience.

The event series highlighted sustainability through the vessel itself, entirely built from recycled materials, as well as alternative power sources, including bicycle generators powered by the audience and supplemented by solar panels and batteries.

Floßkino was free to attend, with donations encouraged to cover the costs of transport, fuel, and maintenance, but carried mainly through great collective efforts behind the scenes. This unique initiative provided Berliners with a memorable summer cinema experience on the water, showcasing the creative integration of culture, community, and sustainability with a smart design that remained under the threshold for requiring a permit and made best use of the freedoms granted by regulations while acting sustainably.



© Thomas Scheele

**“Many of our crew members have a background in sustainability and engineering. So our events have always been a playground for us. It's where we try out applying new technologies. A big question is always: How can we replace energy from combustion engines with renewable energies and in a way that it works well in practice and reliably at all times.”**

- Daniel Mohns, Wackelberry

Operating the Wackelberry posed unique challenges for the volunteer team. Given that the event was non-profit and labour was unpaid, it was vital to distribute the workload evenly among a large team. Ensuring that all team members could operate the vessel without specialised training or boating licence<sup>†</sup>, the Wackelberry had to rely on light motorisation, thus propelling through the water at a meditative pace. The journey from its berth at Rummelsburger Bucht to a public green space by the canal with temporary mooring infrastructure located around 4km away required a two-hour long travel each way. Consequently, the project's volunteer-based outset and the technical limitations it entailed made the proximity of necessary infrastructure crucial. Having closely located accessible sites for activities was vital to maintain the feasibility of the project - in turn underscoring the vulnerability of such initiatives to changes in urban waterway access.



Image of the Wackelberry (old model). The current, re-furbished model is slightly longer and based on industrially manufactured aluminum floats.

© Johannes Jelinek / vakatmedia, 2015



Members of the audience powering the Floßkino with bike generators.

© Bootschaft e.V., 2019



© Thomas Scheele

**“The Wackelberry used to float on plastic tons. It was built pretty much entirely from reused materials. We thought that’s good for the environment and we can show what’s possible without a lot of money. But something I would recommend today is to invest into professionally manufactured floats. Build on top what you want but the base is important.”**

- Daniel Mohns, Wackelberry

<sup>†</sup>For more details on which types of vessels can be navigated without a boating licence, see chapter 5 ‘Policies & Governance’

# Practices Categorisation

Inspired by the case studies, the following section categorises creative practices on water, highlighting key distinctions that help map the diverse landscape of floating cultural initiatives. This categorisation aids in understanding how different programming-related options exist which enable organisers to better navigate the surrounding framework conditions.



**“L’Odysée is a two-day festival in Paris every June. My vision is to gather cultural riverboats in the region like the Urban Boat and Barboteur and become stronger and more visible together.”**

- Ricardo Esteban, L’Odysée & Petit Bain

© Ricardo Esteban



L’Odysée, Canal de l’Ourcq, Paris

© Bruno Levy

## Licensing-Related Distinctions:

A primary distinction in the case studies is whether permits are required. More in-depth information about this is provided in chapter 5.

- **Licence-Free Activities:** Operate within 'common use' frameworks, allowing for autonomous, spontaneous, and less intensive planning.
- **Licensed Activities:** Grant special use but require advanced planning, administrative work, and adherence to conditions set by authorities.

Read more about event licensing in chapter 5.



Live music performance on the Panther Ray moored on a bank by the Spree river, Berlin. Pop-up events of this scale usually hope to pass under the radar of authorities. Lengthy permit processes (~ 8 weeks) don't align with the weather dependency and spontaneity of such events.

© Panther Ray, 2018



At the "Schrottrengatta" event, teams built their own watercraft from scrap materials to participate in a race along the former Olympic water racing track of Berlin. Participants were allowed to spend a maximum of 50 euros on materials and had one week to complete their oeuvres. The event was held in collaboration with waterfront cultural centre Funkhaus Grünau and water rescue organisation DLRG. It promoted upcycling and creative river use.

© André Wagenzik, 2013

Cultural events on water can be distinguished by their underlying economic model:

- **Commercial Events:** Aim to generate revenue through tickets, merchandise, sponsorships, and other activities.
- **Non-Commercial Events:** Focus on promoting culture, education, and community goals, using raised funds to cover costs.



Le Barboteur event, Canal de Saint Denis, Paris. Free entrance event on alternating public banks of the Parisian canals with artistic performances (mostly DJ music) on a stage on board and bar operations. The event mixes non-commercial and commercial elements.

© Le Barboteur

Five main types of spatial practices can be distinguished:

- **Events on Water (Moving):** The vessel is not moored but moves, avoiding river traffic disruption and prolonged sound impact on neighbouring residents. The audience can watch from the waterfront, the vessel, or other watercraft.  
Examples: see image (top).
- **Events on Water (Stationary):** Possible in areas off traffic routes (e.g., natural bays), where the audience either fits on board or gathers around a floating stage on other watercraft, creating a picturesque setting.  
Examples: see image (bottom).
- **Events by the Land (Vessel as Stage):** The vessel is moored, serving as a stage while the audience remains on land. This setup extends infrastructure and accessibility.  
Examples include the Fluctuations festival (international), Floßkino (Berlin) or Le Barboteur (Paris).
- **Events by the Land (Vessel as Venue):** The vessel is moored and becomes the venue of a performance with the audience entering it. This setup is most common for very large, high capacity vessels.  
Examples include MS Stubnitz (Hamburg), Fridas Pier (Stuttgart) or A38 (Budapest).
- **Events on Land:** The vessel transports a creative crew, but the event occurs at a land-based venue.  
Examples of cultural vessels prioritising this setup include Kulturboot Mary Jane (Aken) and Barkasse (Hamburg).



Panther Ray (left) and Unkraut (right) in front of the German Reichstag during a protest parade. Example for events on water (moving).

© Panther Ray, 2018



Anarche, Unkraut, Panther Ray, and Newria (from left to right) tied together and anchored close to Rummelsburger Bucht, Berlin, creating a temporary, modular island which combines the onboard utilities of each vessel. Example for events on water (stationary).

© Thomas Scheele, 2018

## Content Distinctions:

The content of water-based activities influences organisational aspects. Examples include:

- **Sound:** DJ performances or movie screenings need amplified sound, requiring event locations distant from residential areas and solutions for electricity. Content thus impacts location choice.
- **Light:** Movie screenings and light installations work at night, whereas protests and parades are preferable during daylight. Content thus influences the choice of day or nighttime which, in turn, influences regulatory conditions (e.g. regarding sound emissions).
- **Authorship:** Playing recorded music or movies at a public event may require fees to performing rights organisations (PROs), as opposed to royalty-free content such as improvised live performances or student films. Content thus influences production costs.



Brass band playing on Panther Ray during Fête de la Musique on the banks of Treptower Park, Berlin. Self-composed, acoustic live music is an example of content that can be performed outdoors during daytime in a relatively high number of places without causing disturbances or requiring royalties. ©Thomas Scheele, 2024



Pilot events of the Lastkahn project took place inside an industrial barge in Amsterdam, allowing amplified music and use of lights. The pop up events sparked the plan to establish a permanent events venue on the water.

©Bastiaan Wolters



Highlighting Fluctuations festival and Floßkino as tangible examples, this chapter turned the spotlight on the diverse ways rivers and canals are being used in practice as creative spaces.

From the two distinct case studies, key aspects of staging cultural events on water were extracted to further elaborate the framework established in the first chapter. Links between people, vessels and practices became apparent: Specific types of vessels correlate with specific types of programming. Licensing-related, economic, spatial and content distinctions were proposed as further specifications of such events.

To build an even more complex understanding of the factors that influence how waterways are turned into creative spaces, the following chapter investigates the role of topography and built infrastructure, mapping out where, geographically, such events are able to take place.

# Places

IN

One major challenge that the Fluctuations festival was faced with from the start was where its events could realistically take place, concerning both routes and event spaces. Drawing on a collection of 30 event spots mentioned in interviews as well as active location scouting for the Fluctuation Festival, this chapter explores diverse spatial settings for hosting cultural events on urban shorelines, connecting water and land.<sup>†</sup>

Through case studies in the metropolitan area of Lille, Berlin, Brussels, Utrecht, and Budapest, it examines the unique characteristics and challenges of different natural and built environments. By comparing these distinct cases, the chapter underscores the importance of tailored strategies that consider the topography and infrastructure along waterways.

By highlighting five distinct event locations along major European waterways, the diversity both in spatial particularities and in strengths and challenges each location faces provides yet another framework to think cultural events on water with.

<sup>†</sup>The Fluctuations festival envisions a vessel as a stage docked by an event area on land. This chapter does not explore other possible settings - e.g. water-based events without connection to the land.



Panther Ray and Nuria on Rummelsburger Bucht, 2015.

© Johannes Jelinek / vakatmedia, 2015

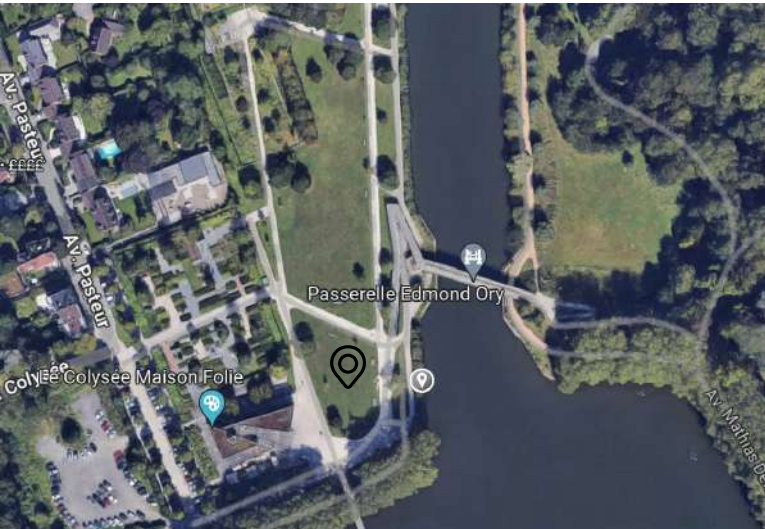
# Case Study: Les Jardins du Colysée (Lille/Lambersart)

**Name:** Les Jardins du Colysée

**City:** Lambersart, France, Metropole Européene de Lille

**Waterway:** Canal

**Land / Infrastructure:** Public park connected to Le Colysée Maison Folie cultural centre



Satellite image of Les Jardins du Colysée and Le Colysée Maison Folie cultural centre (left). Map data.

© Google, 2024

**Topography and Infrastructure:** The waterway topography of the metropolitan area of Lille (Metropole Européene de Lille, MEL) includes the Deûle River - also known as the Canal de la Deûle since it is channeled for its main part - and a network of smaller branch canals. The Port of Lille, France's fourth-largest inland port by tonnage, indicates the historical and contemporary significance of industrial shipping on these waterways. However, the region also offers recreational boating and water tourism infrastructures such as marinas, boat rentals and public jetties.

Les Jardins du Colysée is a public green space located right across Lille's shore in the adjacent City of Lambersart which is part of the joint metropolitan area. The park, owned by the City, is situated on the Deûle with options for mooring, spanning 32,400 square metres, and is adjacent to Le Colysée Maison Folie cultural centre with electricity, storage, and toilet facilities, eliminating the need for generators and additional portable restrooms.

### Pros:

- Existing Infrastructure: electricity grid connection and toilet facilities are available
- Boat stage: the boat is able to dock directly next to the public park and be included as a stage during the festivities
- Large space: dispersing activities such as workshop spaces, food court, and dance floor over a wider area help to reduce the impact of crowds on sensitive ground (e.g. grass) as well as the sound bleed.
- Straightforward event licensing for small events: the simplified licensing process for events under 500 people speeds up procedures and encourages community-oriented cultural activations with smaller impact on the environment.

**Context:** Just 500 metres away from Lille's commercial port, cultural activations like the Fluctuations festival align with the metropolitan area's long-term vision to diversify shoreline activities and enhance recreational offerings.

During the Fluctuations event, the event area at Les Jardins du Colysée will be fenced for security and crowd control, ensuring compliance with French regulations. For events under 500 people, only city hall authorisation is needed. For events exceeding 500 attendees, permission from the Préfecture de Police is required. The public park is capable of hosting up to 2,000 people at peak times, although the current event will be limited to 500 to avoid the need for higher-level permissions and reduce the impact of the event on the facilities.

The Fluctuations boat can be parked on Les Jardins du Colysée's shoreline, close to the cultural centre. This location provides direct access to the park and the event area while ensuring that the boat is part of the event's setup. The boat is then able to serve as a stage for intimate, small-form concerts, with the audience standing approximately 4 metres from the boat's stage.

### Cons:

- Sensitive natural environment: Frequent and large-scale activities can harm local fauna and flora. Developing a thorough sustainability strategy is crucial.
- Restricted public use of park: Event requirements like fencing interfere with common public use, necessitating a balance of different park users' interests.
- Sound complaints and curfew: Outdoor events must stop by 10 pm.
- Feasibility of small events: Smaller events minimise environmental impact but often lack cost efficiency. Co-financing through public funding, sponsorships, and volunteer work is essential to maintain accessibility and quality.
- Promotion: Unlike co-producing with existing venues, organising events in public spaces requires more effort to reach target audiences.



© Max Riche

**"This place is perfect in many ways for creative events around sustainability: close to nature, public transport and grid electricity. I hope our collaboration with the city can motivate everyone to move further into this direction!"**

- Nicolas Dhers,  
SMMMILE / Fluctuations CEO

**Takeaways:** The case study of Les Jardins du Colysée in Lambersart is the only one in this chapter utilising a park for the Fluctuations festival. It highlights the potential of public green spaces for hosting micro-festivals with an environmental focus. The park's connection to the river, existing infrastructure, and alignment with the metropolitan area's vision to diversify shoreline activities make it a promising event site for Fluctuations. However, a concern remains how much such events could upscale in size while ensuring sustainable use of the sensitive environment.

# Case Study: Rummelsburger Bucht (Berlin)

**Name:** Rummelsburger Bucht

**City:** Berlin, Germany

**Waterway:** Natural bay of the Spree River

**Land:** Quay wall, waterfront promenade, residential buildings



Satellite view on Rummelsburger Bucht and the Spree River passing below. Map data. © Google, 2024



**“Our main goal for almost 10 years has been to build a cultural harbor here in Rummelsburger Bucht to protect our boats and solve problems. So we are trying to find a common vision with our politicians and the local authorities.”**

© Arik Rohloff

- Arik Rohloff, Spree:publik



**“Our concept for a cultural harbor has this goal: clear rules, long term perspectives and a place where get together and exchange are enabled.”**

© Jan Ebel

- Jan Ebel, Spree:publik

**Topography and Infrastructure:** Rummelsburger Bucht is an open, approximately 1.2km long and 250m wide body of water with mostly residential buildings surrounding its shore. It is therefore an area highly sensitive to sound. Due to its very mild river current<sup>†</sup>, moderate depth, and particularly thanks to the lack of industrial/commercial shipping transit, conditions for anchoring on the bay are favourable - though it recently has been drastically restricted. The bay is surrounded by a car-free, public promenade which passes along natural shores and green spaces, public quay walls, marinas, private jetties, and a public platform for 23h mooring. Even so, berth spaces are insufficient in relation to the high demand by recreational boat owners. While car parking is scarce, the area is well connected to public transport via Ostkreuz train station (300m east), a bus reaching until the tip of the Stralau peninsula (southern shore), as well as a tramline (northern shore).

**Context:** Rummelsburger Bucht, also known as Rummelsburger See, is a natural bay on the Spree River in Berlin. For almost 10 years, it has been home to several small to medium-sized culture vessels whose crews have formed the advocacy group Spree:publik.

Historically, this area was heavily industrialised leading to pollution still stored in the underwater sediment which continues to plague the waters. Until today, the bay is unsuitable for swimming despite continuous efforts by the environmental authority to improve water quality and revitalise natural habitats.

Over the past two decades, Rummelsburger Bucht has undergone significant urban transformation with industrial remnants being converted into mid and high-end residential complexes. Just like the land, the water too has left its industrial function behind and evolved to become a vibrant hub for house boats and recreational activities on the water.

<sup>†</sup>The Spree River flows at only about nine centimetres per second. In comparison, the Rhine moves at about 3 metres per second. Read more: <https://www.rbb24.de/panorama/beitrag/2023/08/spree-serie-berlin-wasserqualitaet-elektroschiff-tourismus-mueggelsee.html>

The Rummelsburger Bucht as a giant 'free parking zone' had allowed a socially diverse wild growth to flourish - from Yacht owners and hobby sailors to artists and DIY-culture collectives to squatters and impoverished dwellers unable to afford rents in the city.

At its peak, an estimated 200 houseboats and leisure crafts, many of them self-built, populated the bay. On the downside, conflicts arose around various topics including sound levels, safety and environmental issues.

In a turn of events, anchoring on the bay was declared illegal in 2024, despite advocacy group Spree:publik's initial victory in an earlier attempt in 2019 when it convinced decision makers to refrain from prohibition and seek solutions in dialogue with stakeholders on the water instead. The new restrictive measures are implemented in spite of Germany's national "Masterplan Recreational Boating" (Masterplan Freizeitschiffahrt) attesting insufficient availability of mooring and berthing infrastructure, i.e. legal alternatives. As grey zones disappear and gentrification advances, Spree:publik aims to develop a self-administered port for culture vessels (Kulturhafen) at Rummelsburger Bucht.

Despite its vibrant creative ecosystem, the bay itself is seldomly used as an event location<sup>†</sup>. Rather, it is the launch pad from which culture vessels move to different sites around the city which are less sensitive to sound.



The culture rafts Panther Ray and Zola on Rummelsburger Bucht.  
© Paula G. Vidal - paulagvidal.net, 2015



© Marco Borowski

**"Rummelsburger Bucht has been the main spot in Berlin for cultural vessels, DIY boats and houseboats. Many have this self-built aesthetic that sends out a message: you can be on the water, just do it! Some people love this, some hate it."**

- Jule Roschlau, LAIKA



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**"Everyone is always afraid about DIY boats; that they will sink and no one takes care of them. That's the big thing."**

- Valentin Rion, Kulturboot Mary Jane



© Jan Ebel

**"We have big problems on the Bucht with abandoned boats. Some people come to live on the water because they have problems and no other place to go, but they can't maintain a boat. Again, the public thinks the cultural boats create problems - but we love the water, we protect it, we organise clean ups and we rescue many boats."**

- Jan Ebel, Spree:publik



© Arik Rohloff

**"We always point out that there's a difference between a cultural boat and a party boat. A party boat is like people get it from a boat rental, bring speakers and beer and have no idea about rules on the water or the neighborhood. But the cultural boats have been here for almost ten years and we are experienced and take care. It's two different worlds but from the outside people confuse us."**

- Arik Rohloff, Spree:publik

<sup>†</sup>An exception is the yearly event "Rummel auf der Bucht" organised by Spree:publik; a daytime event showcasing the creative community on the bay and fostering encounters between land residents and boat people. Read more: <https://spreepublik.org/event/rummel-auf-der-bucht-2023/>



**Pros:**

- Central urban location, proximity to suitable sites for small events
- No industrial shipping transit
- Slow current, easy to manoeuvre
- Existing creative ecosystem of cultural vessels including advocacy group Spree:publik
- Close by marinas for recreational vessels with utilities.

**Cons:**

- Restriction to anchor (since June 2024)
- Close proximity to residential buildings, sound sensitive, not suitable as regular event site
- Lack of infrastructure and utilities for vessels informally anchoring on the bay or berthed on public quays (e.g. lack of grid connection, public restrooms, safe storage, etc.)



**“Instead of constantly introducing new bans, we are in favor of measures that actually improve dialogue and needs-based infrastructure on waterways.”**

- Arik Rohloff, Spree:publik

© Arik Rohloff



DIY-Boats at Rummelsburger Bucht

© Johannes Jelinek / vakatmedia, 2015

**Takeaways:** The case of Rummelsburger Bucht shows how natural topography, regulatory frameworks, and urban transformation influence the utilisation of water as a creative space and, at the same time, how vulnerable such creative ecosystems are. As an event location for Fluctuations it would not be suitable due to a lack of mooring and event infrastructure and sensitivity to sound.

# Case Study: FLOW (Brussels)

**Name:** FLOW

**Location:** Pont Pierre Marchant / Digue du Canal, Anderlecht, Brussels, Belgium

**Waterway:** Canal

**Land / Infrastructure:** Pop up outdoor swimming pool



Satellite view of FLOW's location in Anderlecht, Brussels. Map data.

© Google, 2024



© VibeLab

**“There is a river in Brussels, which is La Senne, but it’s been covered in the city center. There’s only a few places where you can see it. So the water you see, that’s the canal that was built for industrial shipping”**

- Sylvain Godfroid, Coordinator of Communications at Port of Brussels



© Pool is Cool

**“The underused waterfront locations in Brussels are a huge opportunity for more cultural development. There’s a lot of potential here, but getting the community to embrace this culture shift is still a big challenge.”**

- Rahel Gruber, Pool is Cool

**Topography and Infrastructure:** While the majority of Brussels’ natural river, the Senne, lies sealed under the city’s concrete, its boatable waterways mainly consist of the Brussels-Charleroi Canal built in the 19th century for industrial shipping. Since the canal’s construction, shipping traffic has been increasing leading to many restrictions and little infrastructure for recreational boating. Swimming in the canal is generally prohibited.

FLOW is an open air pool project designed by the association Pool is Cool as a temporary, pop-up structure in the Anderlecht district of Brussels. In fact, it is the only (!) outdoor swimming site in all of Brussels. The venue is situated on the canal shore, adjacent to a bridge and a vacant, flat plot of grassland owned by the Port Authority of Brussels. The vacant plot is suitable for events and offers infrastructure for mooring. Meanwhile, FLOW provides a variety of utilities for activations, such as its pool, restrooms, a kiosk, roofed spaces as well as an observatory deck, electricity grid connection and tap water. Access by car is limited, but the site is easily reachable by boat, public, and active transport. The surrounding area of Anderlecht features a mix of residential zones and industrial sites along the canal, creating a unique social environment that benefits from both community engagement and logistical support for events from the authorities and residents.

**Context:** FLOW is operated by non-profit Pool is Cool advocating to re-introduce outdoor swimming in Brussels through actions, projects, research and debate. In addition to its pool, it also hosts events such as film screenings, yoga classes, and late-night gatherings, serving as a recreational and creative hub. The venue has previously hosted events with connection to cultural vessels such as the Sound River System festival realised in 2023 in collaboration with the Urban Boat when the latter docked alongside FLOW and utilised the neighbouring vacant plot of land as an extended event site.

For the future, FLOW envisions developing more permanent structures and integrating the adjacent land with the swimming pool and canal mooring infrastructure for expanded community and cultural use. Additionally, they hope to simplify the event licensing process by obtaining general agreements, reducing the need for individual approvals, and making event planning more efficient and timely.

According to interviewees from FLOW and the Brussel Port Authority, a local community of cultural vessels does not exist though a creative venue by the water may increase the feasibility of starting such initiatives.



© VibeLab

**“We’re always open to new initiatives. But you have to take into account that the canal is primarily a commercial waterway. Unfortunately, it’s been built to be very narrow. You don’t have branches of the canal that aren’t used by commercial navigation. There are, however, certain zones which are a bit wider and where we can enable some ideas.”**

- Wagas Dar, Eventmanager  
at Port of Brussels



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**“The current political will is to keep the port estate as an industrial area, more than an area for leisure. We only have 100 hectares to work with, so if you reduce it even more, then it’s difficult to have any port activity.”**

- Sylvain Godfroid, Coordinator of  
Communications at Port of Brussels

©

### Pros:

- Existing creative venue by the water (FLOW) which can provide basic utilities for events and knowledge about the local neighborhood.
- Adjacent plot of land for an extended event area available. Same land owner (Port of Brussels) simplifies coordination.
- Relatively wide section of the canal with existing mooring infrastructure.
- Port of Brussels with dedicated event manager to handle event requests.

### Cons:

- Brussels has limited water surface, primarily the Brussels-Charleroi Canal built for industrial shipping.
- High shipping traffic restricts recreational boating. Consequently, cultural organisers can hardly use smaller watercrafts but must operate larger industrial vessels, raising the threshold to access and utilise waterways for cultural events.
- Events at FLOW must end by 10 pm due to proximity to residential areas and lack of soundproofing and indoor event spaces.



**“Leisure boats in Brussels, we have almost none. Safety wise it’s very difficult. We can’t let people without experience, without a patent [licence] navigate on such narrow waterways. If you have 1000 tonnes ships coming your way and you don’t know what to do, it’s very dangerous.”**

© VibeLab

- Sylvain Godfroid, Coordinator of Communications at Port of Brussels



The Urban Boat's Sound River System event at FLOW

© Pool is Cool

# Case Study: De Nijverheid (Utrecht)

**Name:** De Nijverheid

**Location:** Nijverheidskade 15, 3534 AZ Utrecht, Netherlands

**Waterway:** Dead-end canal

**Land / Infrastructure:** Former industrial building transformed into creative hub and venue



Satellite view of De Nijverheid's location set by a dead-end canal. Map data. © Google, 2024

**Topography and Infrastructure:** Approximately 5.5% of Utrecht's surface area is covered by water. Utrecht's waterway topography includes the major Amsterdam-Rijnkanaal, one of the most heavily trafficked man built canals in the world which connects to the Port of Utrecht and serves as the main axis crossing the city, along with a widespread network of industrial branch canals and historic canals in the medieval centre. Urban transformation projects, particularly in areas like the Werkspoorkwartier, are focused on shifting building functions from industry to creativity and culture, integrating recreational and artistic spaces along (post-)industrial waterways.

Within the Werkspoorkwartier, creative hub, venue, and self-proclaimed "free port for the arts" De Nijverheid is situated at Nijverheidskade, towards the tip of a dead-end canal under the Port of Utrecht's authority. Thus, cultural activations on the water don't threaten to disturb shipping traffic. De Nijverheid is home to 50 artist studios, an art café, a large indoor space, and a terrace on the waterfront with mooring facilities, including for large industrial barges. Situated 600 metres from Utrecht Zuilen train station and surrounded by a mix of industrial and residential areas, De Nijverheid benefits from excellent connectivity while maintaining a sufficient distance from residential zones to minimise noise disturbances.

**Context:** The Werkspoorkwartier, previously an industrial area in the northwest of Utrecht, is being transformed into a creative and cultural hub, aligning with the city's 2040 vision of sustainable urban living. De Nijverheid, located within Werkspoorkwartier, exemplifies this transformation by repurposing industrial spaces into venues for artistic and community activities. This transition supports Utrecht's goals of fostering creativity, enhancing livability, and promoting cultural engagement, while integrating recreational spaces along the city's historic and industrial waterways.



© De Nijverheid

**"It all started at the end of 2017 with a bare warehouse, a dusty office building, and an industrial outdoor area full of possibilities. Since that time, it has been demolished, built, collected, and created with great zeal and industry with the mission: to be a free port for the arts."**

- De Nijverheid

### Pros

- Existing mooring and event infrastructure, including a large waterfront terrace that enables the boat to function as a stage and indoor spaces that allow amplified music past 10pm.
- Existing stakeholder networks to authorities and audiences facilitate event licensing and promotion.
- On-site artist studios provide potential content for programming the floating stage; versatile venue spaces give diverse options for content presentation, including for artists residing on the cultural boat.

### Cons

- De Nijverheid is on a canal that is part of an industrial harbour zone under the Port Authority. Mooring a cultural vessel by De Nijverheid requires permission from the Port Authority which, according to interviewees, is not easily granted.
- As other urban transformation projects, De Nijverheid struggles with testing new functions of post industrial infrastructures whose governance often continues to be exercised by the previous authorities unaccustomed to artistic needs and perspectives. Obtaining permits, thus, remains a challenge.



The Urban Boat parked across from the De Nijverheid.

© Urban Boat

**Takeaways:** Similar to Brussels, Utrecht's built waterways primarily serve industrial and touristic shipping. De Nijverheid boasts more advanced and permanent infrastructure compared to FLOW in Brussels, which comes with advantages but also raises feasibility concerns for using cultural vessels given the administrative challenges and the limited added value they offer to an already well-equipped venue. The shift of De Nijverheid and similar venues from industrial to cultural functions could be rendered more efficient by updating governance structures and policies that support this transformation - on land and on water.

# Case Study: Community Viadukt (Budapest)

**Name:** Community Viadukt

**Location:** Budapest

**Waterway:** Danube River

**Land / Infrastructure:** Riverside park, road and indoor venue under the tramline



Satellite view of Rakpart's location on the Danube River, Budapest. Map data. © Google, 2024

**Topography and Infrastructure:** Budapest's waterway topography is dominated by the Danube River, which flows through the heart of the city, dividing it into Buda and Pest. The Danube plays a crucial role in trade and tourism; however, its strong current makes it challenging for smaller watercraft to remain stationary, especially during events or festivals, in contrast to calmer rivers like the Spree in Berlin. While swimming in the Danube is not very common due to concerns about safety and water quality, many residents are unaware that the water is indeed clean enough for swimming. The local NGO Valyo (a name combining the Hungarian words 'város' and 'folyó', meaning 'city' and 'river') aims to raise awareness about this possibility and encourage water leisure in Budapest. Unlike some other European cities, Budapest does not have an extensive canal network, relying primarily on the grand Danube.

The Community Viadukt is part of a larger recreational park called Rakpart at Jane Haining Quay, situated along the Danube River in Budapest. This area has been transformed from being previously inaccessible into a vibrant community space featuring trees and benches along the river. Spanning 500 metres from bridge to bridge, Rakpart includes both indoor and outdoor areas under the tramline, with Community Viadukt serving as a large indoor venue capable of hosting a range of cultural events. The road along the Danube is closed to cars on weekends, creating a car-free zone that enhances the space's appeal by allowing the road to be used during events. Owned by BKV - Budapest Közlekedési Vállalat and rented by Valyo, the venue is equipped with numerous plants, tables, and chairs, with plans to add more trees before the Fluctuations prototype event, which will take place at Community Viadukt in September.



© Valyo

**"We founded our organisation, Valyo, to help people reclaim the river embankment. In 2019, Budapest elected a new mayor who is more environmentally focused, and part of the program was to open the Danube for the people and start banning cars in the area."**

- Cecilia Lohasz, Valyo

While there is no permanent bar or infrastructure inside the Community Viadukt venue, a pop-up bar is set up during events. Electricity is connected to the main grid temporarily for each season, lasting from March to October, and portable toilets and drinking water taps are organised for events. The venue's proximity to the river, about 18 metres, requires careful planning for boat docking and safety, as swimming is prohibited due to the strong current.

**Context:** The Community Viadukt is part of a broader initiative by Valyo to campaign for the regeneration of the Danube riverfront in Budapest. Since 2020, seasonal car bans have been implemented along the Danube, with hopes to extend this ban permanently so cars cannot drive along the river and this will make these spaces more accessible to people. Valyo's venue opened in April 2023 and has quickly gained popularity as a community hub for exhibitions and events. The transformation of this space aligns with Budapest's efforts to reduce car traffic and enhance public access to the river.



Rakpart recreational park situated on the Danube river next to the Community Viadukt © Balint Kaszics



### Pros:

- **Car-Free Zone:** The weekend car-free zone along the Danube creates a safe and pleasant environment for events at the Community Viadukt.
- **Versatile Space:** The mix of indoor and outdoor areas inside the Rakpart and under the tramline provides flexibility for various types of activities.
- **Community Engagement:** The venue has a reputation to be open and accessible, fostering a strong sense of community.
- **Available Utilities:** Electricity grid connection helps in event production. However, portable toilets and tap water require to be organised per event.
- **Waterway Accessibility:** Docks are available at 18 metres from the Community Viadukt.

### Cons:

- **Strong River Current:** The Danube's strong current requires careful management of water-related activities in this area, particularly at the Rakpart.
- **Residential Area:** as a central urban location, the Community Viadukt is surrounded by residential buildings, making it sensitive to amplified music, particularly outdoors.
- **Distance:** when water levels are low, the distance between vessels docked on the water and the land can be very wide, making the use of vessels as stages difficult.
- **Limited Shade and Heat:** During summer days, the venue can become very hot due to the lack of natural shade and the venue's location on a road surface, requiring umbrellas and additional shade structures.



Workshop inside Valyo's Community Viadukt © Simon Zsuzsi



Entrance to the Community Viadukt

© Valyo

**Takeaways:** Valyo's Community Viadukt exemplifies how road dominated spaces along waterways can be transformed into vibrant cultural hubs. The combination of strategic car bans from local government, Valyo's community-focused design, and the use of flexible infrastructure supports diverse events while promoting public access to the Danube. However, the venue's reliance on temporary facilities and the challenges posed by the river's strong current necessitate careful planning and coordination for large events in this area. Incorporating a boat into events is possible, as the boat can dock outside the Community Viadukt with the correct permission from MAHART, which owns the docking space out front. As the space continues to develop, its role in Budapest's cultural landscape is likely to grow, demonstrating the potential for similar initiatives in other urban settings.

The inherent diversity of European waterways - natural riverscapes and built canals, heavily and less trafficked waterways, rough and mild currents, public spaces and private venues, vegetated environments and post-industrial concrete jungles - enable unique cultural activities while posing distinct challenges.

Examining five spatial scenarios for hosting events with cultural vessels on urban shorelines served to highlight the characteristics, advantages and challenges of each location, thus creating a framework to assess further locations with.

This comparative and concrete presentation of different urban settings lined up along the streams of Europe emphasised how strategies for accessing water as a creative space depend on topographies and infrastructures, as much as on different types of cultural vessel and event concepts.

One key element, though often mentioned, hasn't been explored in depth yet: the regulatory frameworks.

# Policies & Governance



Cultural vessels and their crews are confronted with an array of regulations across Europe as diverse as the waterways themselves. The intention of this chapter is to provide a foundational understanding of how waterway governance and policies are organised in different European countries, where challenges and opportunities lie, and how to find more detailed information.

Focussing on France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Hungary, the first part of this chapter compares types of boating licenses, waterway regulation and managing authorities, fees, vignettes and mooring in just five EU member states. The second part further outlines which regulations are of particular importance to people who want to navigate a cultural vessel and organise cultural events on the water.

These perhaps rather dry regulatory details provide additional context to the case studies presented in the previous chapters, helping to further understand how the strategies of different cultural vessels across Europe that link people, topographies and infrastructures are enabled as well as limited by governance and policies.



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Amsterdam Pride Canal Parade  
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# Scenario

To focus on only the most relevant policies to cultural organisers on water, a few assumptions will limit the scope of the governance and policy assessment:

1. The scope of this Report is boating on **inland** waterways (rivers, canals, lakes), not coastal/ maritime waters.
2. In a regulatory sense, cultural vessels commonly fall under the category of **recreational boating**<sup>†</sup>, i.e. not under commercial shipping.
3. Cultural vessels are in their majority **motorised** vessels, i.e. not muscle or wind powered.

In summary, this chapter looks at governance and policies relevant to the field of **recreational motorboating on inland waters in Europe**<sup>††</sup> on the example of five focus countries: France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Hungary. Local grassroots initiatives will benefit from the extensive information provided on small, licence-free and therefore more accessible and inclusive strategies while professional cultural managers receive a nuanced description of various levels of complexity when developing larger-scale initiatives for staging culture on water.



The Barkasse in a shipyard in Franeker for restoration.

© Fox Albra, 2017

<sup>†</sup>Takeaway from interviews with stakeholder who operate cultural vessels.

<sup>††</sup>This would be the closest approximation to a regulatory definition of cultural vessels.

# Boating Licences

This subchapter assesses regulations concerning the navigation of cultural vessels. There is **no European standard for boating licences**<sup>†</sup>, i.e. which licence is required for navigating which type of vessel.

Accordingly, rules and regulations differ significantly between the EU member states.

The following list of boating licences and requirements per country always refers to **recreational motorboating on inland waters**. For commercial boating, sailing vessels and navigating in maritime waters different licences exist which will not be referred to in this assessment.

Note that regulations outlined below concerning the **licence-free navigation of certain vessels** often do not apply to all waterways. Adjusted rules may apply on particularly challenging waterways, e.g. port areas and routes with large cargo ship traffic or rivers with strong current.



Kulturboot Mary Jane

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## France

- **Licence-free:** Vessels with a motorisation of 6hp or less do not require a boating licence.
- **Permis Péniche de Plaisance (Small Pleasure Craft Certificate):** Vessels 15-20 metres in length require the Permis Péniche de Plaisance. Captains must be min. 16 years old.<sup>†</sup>
- **Extension Grande Plaisance (Large Pleasure Craft Certificate):** This licence is required for vessels longer than 20 metres.

## Belgium

- **Licence-free:** Vessels shorter than 15m and with a maximum speed of 20km/h are licence-free. If the motorisation is less than 10hp, captains must be min. 16 years old. If the motorisation is more than 10hp, the minimum age is 18.
- **Beperkt Stuurbrevet / Brevet de Conduite Restreint (Limited Boating Licence):** Vessels more than 15m and/or faster than 20km/h require this licence, limited to inland waterways (rivers, lakes, canals) except the Lower Maritime Scheldt.
- **Algemeen Stuurbrevet / Brevet de Conduite Général (General Boating Licence):** This licence differs from the Limited Boating Licence in that it permits pleasure boating on all waterways incl. coastal/maritime waters.

## The Netherlands

- **Licence-free:** Vessels up to 7 metres and a maximum speed of up to 13km/h can be navigated without a licence by people aged 12 years or older. Vessels 7-15 metres in length and with a maximum speed of 20km/h are also licence-free but require a minimum age of 16<sup>††</sup>.
- **Vaarbewijs 1 (Boat Licence 1):** Vessels 15-25 metres in length and/or with a maximum speed of more than 20km/h require this licence which is valid on most Dutch rivers, canals and lakes.
- **Vaarbewijs 2 (Boat Licence 2):** This licence is for vessels with the same specifications but extends to more challenging waterways such as the IJsselmeer, the Markermeer, the IJmeer, the Wadden Sea, the Westerschelde, the Oosterschelde, the Eems and the Dollard.
- **Groot Pleziervaartbewijs (Large Pleasure Boat Licence):** This licence is required for navigating 25 - 40 metres long vessels.
- **Groot Vaarbewijs:** For pleasure boats longer than 40m, this licence is required. It permits navigation of a wide range of boat types incl. commercial boats.

<sup>†</sup>Some online sources checked for researching boating licence regulations as well as some interviewees stated a passenger limit for recreational watercraft of 12 people plus skipper. This information was stated during research in relation to regulations in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. However, the mentioning of this information was inconsistent and should be checked locally.

<sup>††</sup>The exact requirements relating to boating licences in the Netherlands are included in Articles 13 to 16 of the Binnenvaartbesluit (<http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0025631#Hoofdstuk3Paragraaf3>) and Chapter 7 of the Binnenvaartregeling (<http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0025958#Hoofdstuk7>).



## Germany

- **Licence-Free:** Vessels shorter than 15 metres and motorised with a 15hp combustion engine can be navigated without a licence by people aged 16 and older on many inland waterways. For electric motors, this specification is limited to 10hp due to the faster acceleration which e-motors allow in lower speed range. On international waterways, such as the Rhine, Danube, or Lake Constance, a boating licence is required already with smaller motorisation.
- **Sportbootführerschein Binnen unter Motor (Pleasure Boat Licence Inland w. Motor):** Vessels 15-20 metres in length and/or an engine with more than 15hp require this licence. The minimum age is 18. It is valid for most inland waterways with some exceptions - most prominently the Rhine river - which require a "Streckenkundennachweis"<sup>†</sup> (route knowledge certificate) that can be obtained through additional exams.
- **Sportschifferzeugnis:** Same as SBF Binnen / Motor but for vessels longer than 25 metres.
- **Sportpatent:** This licence is valid for common inland waterways and the Rhine. It permits the navigation of 20-25 metres long leisure boats motorised with more than 15hp.
- **For vessels longer than 25 metres:** Captains in Germany wanting to navigate a cultural vessel longer than 25 metres need to take a big leap and do a commercial boating licence such as the internationally standardised "Union Certificate". For details, see below "Other International Licences". This also means that foreign pleasure boating licences are valid in Germany only for vessels up to 25 metres.<sup>††</sup>

## Hungary

- **Licence-Free:** Vessels of under 7 metres and a combustion or electric engine with less than 20hp can be navigated without a licence in most of Hungary's waterways by people aged 17 and over. On some lakes like the famous Balaton, however, pleasure boats with combustion engines are generally prohibited. The particularly liberal regulation in Hungary may indicate efforts to strengthen water tourism and offer low threshold access to motorboating.
- **A Kedvtelési Célú Kishajóvezetői Jogosítvány (Small Leisure Boat Licence):** This licence is for navigating motorized leisure boats of up to 20 metres, 20 horsepowers and 12 passengers.
- **Large/Commercial Boating Licence:** Required for vessels of more than 20 metres and/or 20 horsepowers and/or 12 passengers on board. This licence is skewed towards commercial boating as there are no more dedicated leisure boat licences for larger vessel categories.

## Other International Licences<sup>†††</sup>

- **VHF Radiotelephone Certificate for Inland Navigation (UBI):** This certificate enables skippers to participate in radio communications on European inland waterways. It is required for navigating larger vessels and / or on specific routes with higher traffic and more challenging waters.
- **International Certificate for Operators of Pleasure Craft (ICC):** The ICC is an international certificate that may be issued to anyone who has successfully completed certain national pleasure boating licences.
- **Union Patent:** This commercial boatmaster licence permits the navigation of water crafts of all kinds (commercial and pleasure) on all waterways in the EU.

<sup>†</sup>A route knowledge certificate is required for trips on the Elbe river from Schöna to the upper limit of the Port of Hamburg, the Upper Weser, the Danube from Vilshofen to Straubing, the Lower Havel Waterway from Plaue to Havelberg, the Oder river from Ratzdorf to Widuchowa and the Saale river from the mouth of the Elbe river to Bernburg. See: <https://www.elwis.de/DE/Binnenschifffahrt/Befaeigungsnachweise/Schiffsfuehrer/Allgemeine-Informationen/Allgemeine-Informationen-node.html>

<sup>††</sup>Alexia Balandjian, captain of the 38 metre long barge "Urban Boat" (see case study on pages 16 - 18) can navigate her ship in France and the Benelux countries with her French licence (Permis Péniche de Plaisance - Extension Grande Plaisance). Entering German waterways, however, her licence would lose validity and she would need to hire an external captain with a commercial boating licence valid for vessels of that length to navigate her ship (Balandjian, 2024)

<sup>†††</sup>More boating licence information for other European countries can be found on this website: <https://bootjes.nl/en/Taking-your-boat-on-holiday-in-Europe>

# Waterways Regulation & Management Authorities

This section outlines the key authorities responsible for the regulation<sup>†</sup> and management of inland waterways in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Hungary. Understanding these entities is useful for anyone operating cultural vessels - as they govern navigation safety, infrastructure maintenance, and environmental compliance - or wanting to engage in advocacy for cultural events on water.



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**“Infrastructure depends on policies. You see that when you’re crossing from one region in Germany to the next. For three days you don’t find any place to moor and the moment you cross a regional border, suddenly there’s lots of infrastructure; like little harbors, public mooring spots and basically stuff that supports water tourism. Because this region issued a strategy and that other one didn’t.”**

- Valentin Rion, Kulturboot Mary Jane



The Dahme river from above, Berlin.

© Thomas Scheele, 2024

<sup>†</sup>In most European countries, rules applicable to the traffic on inland waterways (e.g. visual signs on vessels, sound signals, radiotelephony, waterway signs, rules of the road, berthing rules, and prevention of pollution of water and disposal of waste) follow a uniform standard called CEVNI (Code Européen des Voies de la Navigation Intérieure / European Code for Navigation on Inland Waterways). See <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/doc/finaldocs/sc3/ECE-TRANS-SC3-115-Rev.5eWEB.pdf>

## France

**Voies Navigables de France (VNF):** VNF is responsible for managing the majority of France's inland waterways network (approx. 6,700km out of 8,500km total), ensuring navigation safety, infrastructure maintenance, and environmental protection.

Other sections of the waterway network are managed by **local port authorities, local municipalities, or regional authorities** (e.g. the Somme river). The Rhône is managed by **Compagnie Nationale du Rhône (CNR)**, a French electricity generation company operating hydroelectric facilities on the Rhône but also in charge of managing navigation.



**"I have so many ideas and also a lot of professional experience, but me and my partners are really struggling with regulations, like, how to implement these ideas."**

© Bastiaan Wolters

- Bastiaan Wolters, Lastkahn

## Belgium

**Service Public Fédéral Mobilité et Transports:** This federal public service sits under the Belgian Federal Government. It oversees the management and safety of Belgium's inland waterways, coordinating with regional bodies for navigation and infrastructure. However, acting much like a ministry, its tasks also include all aspects of mobility and transportation policy and regulation at a national level.

Belgium's federal system divides many responsibilities between the federal government and the regional governments of Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels-Capital Region. Each region independently manages aspects of transportation and infrastructure that also touch on waterways:

- **De Vlaamse Waterweg:** In Flanders, this agency manages the navigation on Flemish rivers and canals which are accessible with boats. Non-boatable, natural rivers are commonly managed by regional environmental departments.
- **Service Public de Wallonie (SPW):** In Wallonia, the SPW, specifically its Mobility and Infrastructure department, takes on a similar role.
- **Port of Brussels:** In the Brussels-Capital Region, the local port authority takes on a similar role

**Local Port Authorities:** Local port authorities manage specific port facilities and operations within their jurisdictions. Their responsibilities include ensuring a safe and efficient boat traffic within their mandate area, coordinating local mooring, as well as managing port logistics and day-to-day operation of maritime facilities. In some cases (e.g. Port of Brussels), they have a designated coordinator for events.

## The Netherlands

**Rijkswaterstaat:** This executive agency under the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management oversees the main infrastructure and water systems, including safety, maintenance, and environmental management of national waterways and shipping routes. They are responsible for broader strategic planning, traffic management on major waterways, and ensuring navigational safety across all national waters.

**Local Port Authorities:** Local port authorities in the Netherlands cover a very similar role to that of port authorities in Belgium, France, and other countries.

## Germany

**Wasserstraßen- und Schifffahrtsverwaltung des Bundes (WSV):** The WSV in Germany is the central federal authority for the administration of federal waterways and shipping. It is set under the Federal Ministry for Digital Infrastructure and Transport (Bundesministerium für Digitales und Verkehr). The WSV oversees the management, maintenance, and operation of Germany's inland waterways and maritime shipping routes.

**Wasserstraßen- und Schifffahrtsamt (WSA):** The "Wasserstraßen- und Schifffahrtsämter" (Waterways and Shipping Offices) are regional agencies that operate under the umbrella of the WSV. They are responsible for the practical, on-the-ground management and implementation of policies set by the WSV. The WSA directly interacts with ship operators and is the first point of contact for operational issues.

**Local Port Authorities:** see above.



© WSV

**"The WSA's prime responsibilities include managing matters of traffic on the federal waterways as a transport route, aiming to ensure the safety and ease of navigation."**

- Stefan Sühl, Head of Navigation Department, WSA Spree-Havel

## Hungary

**Országos Vízügyi Főigazgatóság (General Directorate of Water Management):** This directorate manages Hungary's water resources, including navigable waterways, focusing on flood control, irrigation, and maintaining navigability.

**Nemzeti Közlekedési Hatóság - Útügyi, Vasúti és Hajózási Hivatala (National Transport Authority - Road, Railway and Shipping Office):** This authority oversees various aspects of national transportation, including on inland waterways. It is responsible for regulatory tasks such as the certification of seafarers, registration of vessels, overseeing maritime training and qualifications, and regulating ports and shipping infrastructure.



© Mayra Wallraff

**"In Hamburg, the 'Bezirke' [district authorities] are interested and willing to support cultural projects on the water. They're keen to connect citizens with the Elbe river which is culturally very significant for Hamburg as a Hanseatic port city. On the other hand, the Hamburg Port Authority is in charge over the waterways and a considerable amount of real estate on the banks. It's a huge institution and it's primary concern is large scale transportation and trade. Every single cultural initiative asking the Port for authorisation will be turned down. So a cross-departmental strategy to enable culture on Hamburg's waterways would be really useful."**

- Fox Albra, Barkasse & Libertalia\* e.V.

## Fees / Vignettes

In some European countries, fees apply for using certain waterways, and they typically require the purchase of a vignette or similar permit:

1. **France:** Vignettes for using waterways are managed by VNF (Voies Navigables de France). These are necessary for accessing various canals and river routes throughout the country.
2. **Belgium:** In Belgium, the use of waterways in the Flemish region requires a vignette - also if a vessel is moored / stationary. Fee collection is managed by De Vlaamse Waterweg. Information is best accessible through its VisuRIS app.
3. **Netherlands:** The Netherlands requires a vignette for larger vessels and for those using extensive waterway networks.
4. **Germany:** In Germany, leisure boating does not require a vignette.
5. **Hungary:** In Hungary, leisure boating does not require a vignette.

Always check the latest requirements from official sources or the relevant waterway management authorities to ensure compliance when planning waterway navigation.



Barges passing through a lock at Compiègne, France.

© Thomas Scheele, 2024

# Mooring

For a trans-local cultural initiative, temporary mooring for either stopovers during travels or conducting an event is an important topic. But also locally operating water crafts, like Berlin's "Kulturflöße", depend on this public mooring infrastructure as informal locations for small, licence-free events where the vessels can be docked and used as stages.

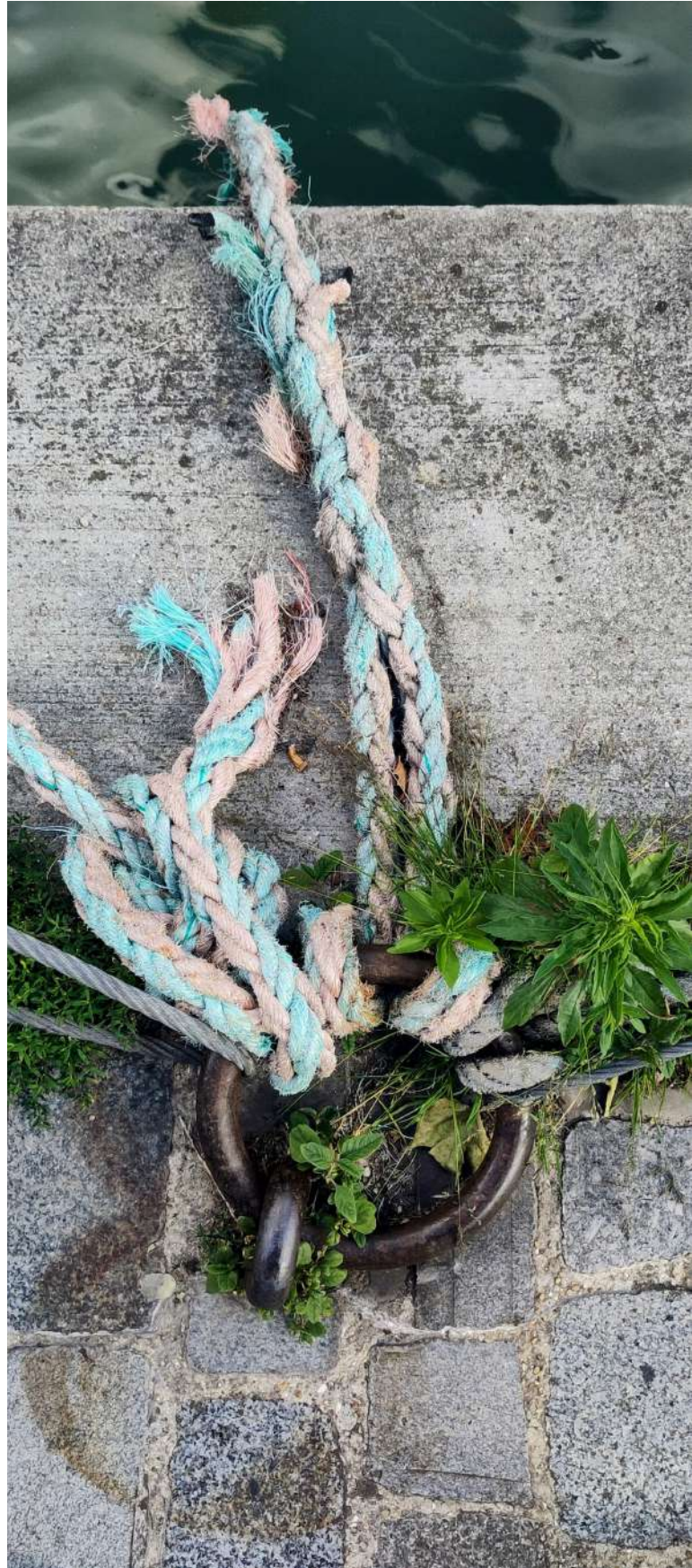
While this section outlines policy and governance frameworks for the dynamic landscape of mooring infrastructure, it will not address the question of finding permanent berth - which should be answered at the very start of launching one's cultural vessel.

**Vessel Size and Type:** Mooring needs vary significantly between larger, industrial vessels and smaller rafts and boats. Larger vessels typically require more robust infrastructure such as heavy mooring lines and specialised berths at quays, often equipped with cleats and fenders to mitigate physical stress and prevent damage during mooring.

**Finding Mooring Spots:** Waterways are commonly equipped with signage that indicates mooring spots, similar to parking signs on city streets. These locations are also marked on both physical and digital waterways maps, providing essential navigational aid to captains.

**Mooring Infrastructure:** Part of public waterway management is to provide infrastructure for temporary mooring (but also private yachting clubs and marinas offer mooring spaces for guests). The allowed duration of stay on public moorings can vary, extending from a few hours to several weeks or months, depending on local regulations.

**Fees:** In countryside and suburban areas in particular, free mooring for longer periods of time can be found in many countries. Detailed information can be obtained through waterway maps and via the websites of regulating authorities listed before. Paid mooring is also common, especially in cities and around locks, but rates can vary widely. They usually depend on the location, the size of the vessel, and the length of stay.



A metal ring on a quay wall used to tie moored boats.  
© Thomas Scheele, 2024

**Communication and Coordination:** For larger vessels, mooring arrangements usually need to be coordinated with the waterway authority in charge through radio communication. This is especially important in territories with busy waterways, like the Netherlands, where precise navigation routes and mooring spots may be assigned centrally by the authorities to manage the high traffic effectively.

**Mooring for Stopovers vs. Mooring for Event:**

Finding a mooring spot for a stopover is a lot easier than finding one that is also suitable as an event location (because that's not what moorings are planned to be - yet). When looking into organising a larger, licenced event like Fluctuations, it may help in the process of applying for the event permit to have a suitable mooring spot / event location identified, or at least a shortlist of promising options that can be assessed with the public authorities. Some municipalities may even have the capacity to provide mobile infrastructure (e.g. large concrete blocks with metal handles) which allow mooring a vessel for an event where normally mooring is not possible.



**“When you navigate the boat, everything is fine because there are laws and rules and you just behave according to them and it's much easier than on the road. But as soon as it's about the connection to the land it becomes complicated.”**

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online & OMA

- Valentin Rion, Kulturboot Mary Jane



Parking signs of a public 23h mooring for recreational boats at Berlin's Landwehrkanal. © Thomas Scheele, 2024

**Examples of Mooring Places:**

- **Marinas:** These facilities often provide guest moorings with adequate services for both short-term and long-term stays. Showering and washing clothes, disposing of rubbish and chemical toilets, filling up portable water tanks and charging electricity are usually possible for a fee.
- **Public Jetties:** Often operated by municipalities as infrastructure for water tourism; thus commonly designed for travelling leisure boats of small and medium size. Mooring is usually permitted for a small fee.
- **Public 23h Moorings:** Moorings installed along the waterways in some larger cities. These have no accompanying amenities (such as toilets, electricity, etc.), but can be used free of charge for a maximum of 23 hours. In cities like Berlin, these are sometimes used as locations for small, licence-free cultural activities like the “FloBkino” (see case study on pages 34 - 35).
- **Anchoring on Open Water:** Areas where anchoring is permitted are marked on waterway maps. Most often, this is permissible on open waters like lakes or river bays where anchoring does not hinder the flow of traffic. Depending on regulations, anchored vessels can be left unattended for some hours.
- **Quay Wall:** Walls along rivers and canals equipped with handles and robust infrastructure to secure vessels from small to large. Commonly found around locks but also elsewhere.

# Organising Cultural Events on Waterways

In Chapter 3 - Practices, case studies of different water-based cultural events were presented. Highlighted as an important distinction were licence-free events vs. events which require licensing. These represent two very different strategic paths that creative actors can choose: the first allowing for spontaneity and autonomy but (usually) only small scale interventions which can stay under the radar; the second one allowing to operate at larger scale and more public display but requiring to go through the challenging permit application process.

This section assesses governance and policies relevant to organising cultural events on waterways outlining the two main scenarios - the boundaries for licence-free events and the process for obtaining licences. Rather than outlining this for all five focus countries, the two scenarios are displayed based on the legal frameworks in Berlin, Germany. While in detail laws and policies vary from country to country (and sometimes city to city), Berlin as a case study helps to understand how to look at different strategies for licensing events - or not - and which main aspects are to be checked and strategised around.



**“For anything cultural or event related, I'd recommend you to stay away from that sort of 'big ship water'.”**

© Marc Bartels

- Marc Bartels, Pride Amsterdam



**“The general mega rule is: don't get in the way of big, industrial ships.”**

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online & OMA

- Valentin Rion, Kulturboot Mary Jane



Schaluppe, Hamburg, during the event 48 Stunden Wilhelmsburg © Schaluppe





## Licence-Free events<sup>†</sup>

**Private or Public Event:** Private events do not require a licence but must take place in accordance with common regulations (e.g. noise protection).

The location of the event does not determine whether it is categorised as public or private. Private events, like birthday gatherings, can take place in public space, just like public events can be held on private premises. What is important for an event to be considered private is that all participants are "internally connected" to each other or to the organiser.

As a rule of thumb, this means that an event with more than one hundred participants is likely to be considered public and is only recognised as private if good reasons are given. Another indicator for the public nature of an event is when public invitations are issued via social media.

### Commercial or Non-Commercial Event:

Commercial events are defined as events organised in a planned and regular manner and with the intention of making a profit. Whether or not, in fact, a profit is made with the event is secondary. Aspects such as flyers, event logos, and dedicated social media accounts would speak for a planned manner of organisation. Repeated editions of an event under the same name would speak for a regular manner of organisation. Entrance fees and/or a bar where drinks are handed out at prices much higher than at regular supermarkets would speak for the intention to make profit. By contrast, non-commercial events do not fulfil at least one of the three aspects used to define commercial events.

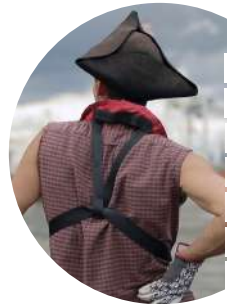
**Food & Beverages:** If alcoholic beverages are served at a fixed stand at a commercial outdoor event (see paragraph "Commercial or non-commercial event"), the organiser requires a permit for a catering business. If, on the other hand, there is no commercial activity, this legal requirement is also not applicable and no licence under catering law is required



© Jan Ebel

**"In Berlin, there's no dedicated policy for cultural vessels. Everything's kind of happening in a gray zone. So you have to restrict yourself, make small events that can go without a permit. But doing a larger event and making it official would be very difficult."**

- Jan Ebel, Spree:publik



© Mayra Wallraff

**"At some point, we have to bypass licensing and implement 'pirate strategies' in order to just show that it's possible, feasible, interesting and desirable to transform society, its habitus and its regulations."**

- Fox Albra, Barkasse & Libertalia\* e.V.

**Toilets:** If a (travelling) catering business is operated (see "Food & Beverages"), toilets must be easily accessible, usable and marked. Even if this is not the case at your event, you should check a potential location for nearby public toilets or a closeby restaurant willing to make their bathrooms available for a fee. Having such options available will help to create a nuisance (and licence) free event.

**Sound / Noise:** Public outdoor events require a licence if they are accessible to the general public (see paragraph "private or public") and disturbing noises for third parties are to be expected. In practice, once a neighbour complains, practical evidence suggests that the sound levels constitute such a nuisance. From an organiser's standpoint, it is difficult to prove compliance with the decibel limit, as measurements at the location of the complaint (and not at the source of the sound) as well as special technology would be necessary to carry out reliable sound measurement protocols. In practice, it is therefore recommendable to dodge complaints by selecting suitable locations with sufficient distance to the nearest residential area and by using PA systems in moderation.

<sup>†</sup>The following information is based on the legal assessment for non-commercial open-air music events done by Härting Rechtsanwälte, commissioned by Clubcommission Berlin e.V. <https://kiez-toolbox.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/03/rechtsgutachten-free-open-air.pdf> as well as the Freiraumfibel published by BBSR <https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/sonderveroeffentlichungen/2016/freiraum-fibel.html>

**Land Use:** For events, cultural vessels are often moored alongside land and used as a stage while audiences attend performances from the land.

- **Public Green Spaces / Parks:** If this land is a public green space, it may only be used in a way that is consistent with the nature of the facility and its recreational purpose - meaning: authorisation is required if plants or infrastructure are damaged, littered or otherwise impaired or noise is caused by the event that unreasonably disturbs other visitors to the area. Requests for event authorisations are seldom approved unless the event aligns significantly with public interest, outweighing the recreational needs of visitors - which, in the case of small DIY events, is commonly rejected by authorities.

However, this strict assessment may differ for parks with planned event areas such as amphitheatres and stages or a generally more lively character, indicated by sports facilities, barbecue areas, and other infrastructure that invites larger social gatherings. To claim licence-free use, it is generally advisable to blend in with an area's common use. In practice, this also means to promote events thoughtfully, limit event sizes, mitigate negative impacts on the space, put up enough bins, program the event with content that is less likely to interfere with the relaxation of other park visitors such as acoustic music, theatre or movie screenings, and to have team members assigned for conflict resolution who can speak to displeased park users and find common ground.

- **Public Ways:** The purpose of public walkways, bicycle lanes, streets and others is to facilitate the flow of traffic. In case your event spreads across a public way, for example a promenade running alongside the water, and it hinders the flow of traffic, you will need to authorise such special use. Examples for licence-free forms of occupying such spaces for events are few but Critical Mass bike rides are one of these. On rivers and canals, some cultural vessels who were interviewed for this study stage concerts while moving at minimum speed along the banks, thus falling under the licence-free, so-called "common use" of waterways.
- **Private Land:** In the case of using private land, the organiser must find out the owner's contact, convince him/her/them of the event concept, and set up a contract or at least obtain written consent to the clearly outlined concept.



© Farina Balzer

**"Moving from place to place in the city is where the complicated stuff starts because there are lots of different stakeholders managing different areas on and by the water. There's private owners, there's public owned companies and also various city departments exercising ownership over certain waterways and waterfront land. Finding out who is responsible for what can be tricky - but it's super important."**

- Farina Balzer, Hansaflöß



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online & OMA

**"It's so important to find local partners. Once we have partners, we just ask them: hey, can you tell us where we can do this or who do we call to fix that? You figure things out by talking to people. On land, this doesn't exist so much anymore. People are more under stress, they just stick to rules and don't look at you. But on the water it's still a bit like this."**

- Valentin Rion, Kulturboot Mary Jane

The second part of this section offers a step-by-step guideline for obtaining an event licence. The specific procedure may vary from country to country but it should give readers a good enough guideline to find their way more easily through the bureaucratic processes and gain an overview of key aspects to keep in mind.



© Marc Barthels

**“How to convince decision makers to accept your event: first, by showing the value of the event. What is the social, economic and ecological impact? That’s something the authorities want to hear before they even start a conversation. Strengthen the relevance of the event for local neighborhoods, for example by organising activities that include children, families and elderly people. Not just to think: ‘I want to organise my music event here in this public space,’ but to make it inclusive and socially valuable.”**

- Marc Barthels, Pride Amsterdam



© Vibelab

**“There need to be safety measures, like barriers, put in place to prevent people from falling into the water. That’s certainly a requirement for any event by the canal.”**

- Sylvain Godfroid, Coordinator of Communications at Port of Brussels

- 1. Define the Concept:** Write an overview profile of the event listing the key facts relevant to the authorities involved. These (ideally) include<sup>†</sup>: Event name, contact person, event location, type of event (commercial / non-commercial), a site plan with marked event set up (incl. stages, temporary constructions, emergency exits, entrances for fire fighters etc., parking), event dates and times, size of audience and demographics, programming, timetable, F&B offer, PA systems, safety measures, environmental protection measures.
- 2. Identify a Suitable Location:** Choose a suitable public or private land by the water for mooring the boat and setting up the event. Clarify landownership and obtain contact details to prepare your request. Depending on the local municipality’s willingness to support your initiative, authorities may help you in identifying suitable locations. If this is not the case, it is advisable to secure a letter of intent (LOI) from a land owner prior to applying for a permit to specify your concept as much as possible before its assessment.
- 3. Apply for Permits:**
  - **Event Permit:** Discuss your event concept with your local municipal authority responsible for event permits to understand which other authorities are to be involved to obtain all necessary permissions for the various aspects of your event. These commonly include the environmental department (sound emissions), police and fire service (safety) and - depending on the event set up - others, too. Communication with these stakeholders is then often coordinated by the central authority in charge of event permits.
  - **Mooring Permit:** Engage with the designated waterway regulating authority to obtain permission for mooring the boat.
- 4. Engage Local Stakeholders:** Inform and involve stakeholders in the local neighbourhood early in the planning process to foster support and address potential concerns.

The duration of permit processes varies depending on many factors such as staffing situations in the administrative departments, the political support for the event, and the complexity of the event concept. In general, organisers should calculate with a process of at least 2-3 months. Fees apply to the issuing of permits, the details of which are generally provided on the websites of local authorities.

<sup>†</sup>See also: Freiraumfibel, p.83f. <https://www.bbsr.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/sonderveroeffentlichungen/2016/freiraum-fibel.html>

Offering a topline guide for navigating legal and administrative waters, this chapter has synthesised the regulatory frameworks governing cultural events on waterways across five European countries.

One overarching takeaway is that using waterways as creative spaces remains a topic that cities, countries and the European Union have not developed designated strategies for. To a large extent, it thus remains informal practice.

Understanding current regulations is foundational not only for compliance but for advocacy as well. Being well informed on current legislation, cultural organisers can push for reforms that facilitate better access to waterways as creative spaces.

Identifying for example the lack of consideration that cultural activities receive as part of the policy field of leisure boating or the absence of designated mooring infrastructure for events, organisers can target specific decision-making processes. Promoting cultural uses of waterways in such a manner can lead to a more vibrant and resilient cultural scene, utilising European waterways in a sustainable and community-focused manner.

# Insights & Recommendations



## Condensed Insights from the Report

Witnessing a growing trend across Europe to repurpose rivers and canals as cultural spaces, this report set out to explore the phenomenon of 'cultural vessels'. Sparked by a utopian idea - Fluctuations' founding vision to tour European waterways as a floating festival - the Fluctuations Report gathered a substantial amount of information, daring to map, preliminarily and for the first time, the European waterways from a cultural perspective.

As a first step, the report contextualised Fluctuations festival's endeavour in a wider transformation of urban rivers from commercial traffic routes to spaces claimed by citizens for recreation and ecological regeneration, pondering the question how the relationship between rivers and people will continue to change - and shape the future of European cities and countrysides alike.

Across five countries - Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands - 36 cultural vessels were identified and investigated, leading to a first categorisation of cultural vessels. A spectrum was drawn from small, DIY-built, and locally operating vessels to those designed to maneuver well in industrial and post-industrial zones.

**Advocacy and policy strategies should consider the whole spectrum of these diverse vessels and approaches as part of a common creative ecosystem.**

Still, the phenomenon of cultural vessels remained puzzling. Widening the scope of the investigation, various practices were analysed in order to translate the abstract formula of 'using water as a creative space' into concrete examples of initiatives and events. The distinction between licence-free activities, which fall under the common use of rivers and shorelines, and events which, often due to a larger size, require authorisation, was introduced. **Cultural vessels establish unique and diverse interactions between creatives, rivers, audiences and communities, and it is only in this rich interplay that the phenomenon can be understood.**

Embracing the challenge posed by the Fluctuations festival's vision to tour European waterways, five locations were compared and presented in detail that could potentially host a floating festival. Here, the relevance of natural and built environments as both limiting and enabling different strategies for staging culture on water became apparent.

Finally, one central issue remained: the role of policies and governance. The review compiled on the regulatory frameworks governing cultural activities on water led to one further categorisation: By mapping out requirements of boating licences in five different European countries, this section retraced how cultural vessels are understood from an administrative perspective. Surprisingly, the survey concluded that none of the cities investigated have a coherent set of measures in place with the aim to facilitate the access of cultural organisers to waterways. **Knowing the given regulatory frameworks is vital for compliance as much as for promoting their transformation.**



© Zoë Japenga

**“For industrial ships or leisure boating there’s policies of course, but culture on water has very specific requirements and there’s no policy framework that shows a clear and feasible path for this.”**

- Shunyata Ossewaarde,  
City of Amsterdam Policy Advisor  
for Nightlife and Culture

# Defining Cultural Vessels

In waterway regulations, various vessel classes are defined, such as **recreational boats** (also known as leisure boat, pleasure boat or sport boat), **industrial ships** (also referred to as commercial or professional ships), and **houseboats**.

However, the term '**cultural vessel**' is newly introduced in this study to describe a growing phenomenon where watercraft are used for cultural purposes.

Throughout the report, several systems of categorisation were outlined. Cultural vessels can be distinguished by type of construction, motorisation and length, range of motion, time of use, and ownership and operation. Cultural events differ in terms of licensing as well as economic, spatial, and content distinctions. On an administrative level, no common European regulatory framework exists, demanding operators of cultural vessels to navigate complex and varying local requirements.

To provide a clear definition underlines the essential takeaway from this study that **cultural vessels are a distinct political entity worthy of policy attention, advocacy, and public engagement**.

Simultaneously, the findings presented in this report univoqually stress the range and diversity of this exceptional cultural phenomenon. Connecting creatives, rivers, audiences and communities in unique and historically significant ways, **cultural vessels are pioneers in envisioning socially just, sustainability based futures, re-imagining European cities, countrysides and riverscapes**.

## Definition:

A cultural vessel is any floating structure, such as pontoons, rafts, boats, or ships, that serves as a cultural workspace, stage, and/or canvas. These vessels facilitate artistic expressions, providing spaces for creation, presentation, and exchange on water.

## Characteristics:

- Purpose: Cultural vessels are dedicated to creative activities, offering platforms for performances, exhibitions, workshops, and other cultural events.
- Diversity: The term encompasses a wide range of vessel types and practices, promoting a shared discourse among various local creative communities.
- Usage: These vessels are used solely for cultural projects or regularly (at least six times a year), and they engage with the public.

## Regulatory Context:

Currently, cultural vessels are mainly registered as recreational boats, which poses challenges due to the mismatch between regulatory definitions and their use. This study suggests a need for specific policies to better support cultural vessels.

## Exclusions:

Cultural vessels may include aspects of the following while not becoming their main purpose:

- Recreational boats: Used primarily for leisure activities such as sailing and fishing.
- Event boats: Hosting private, exclusive events like parties and weddings.
- Bar & restaurant boats: Operating commercially to provide dining experiences on water.



# Recommendations

The following recommendations are for those wanting to promote creative river strategies, whether from the position of cultural organisers or public officials.



SpreeVision, Osthafen

© Jan Colomer & Jakob Kukuła

1

## Discourse:

Enhancing access to the water as creative space should be understood as part of a broader shift from industrial exploitation of waterways to mixed use and environmental regeneration, turning some of today's liquid highways into tomorrow's liquid parks.

2

## Local Practice:

Analyse local conditions in your area - including people, vessels, existing events, locations, and regulations - to see what creative activities you can already realise in relation to the water. Organise them, gain experience and build your community.

3

## Infrastructure:

Look for affordable berthing spots in your city. Without one, it's hard to operate a cultural vessel. Once you find a safe homeport, your cultural vessel can take shape and go on its excursions. City officials, on the other hand, can create designated spaces such as 'cultural harbors', temporary mooring in places suitable for events, and overall consider cultural vessels in riverbank design.

## 4

### Partnerships and Networks:

Mobilise advocacy. Build alliances with stakeholders engaged in arts and culture, recreational river use and water sports (e.g. NGOs promoting swimming in the river), environmental regeneration and sustainability, urban planning, and water tourism.<sup>†</sup>

## 5

### Advocacy:

Write a shared manifesto<sup>††</sup> with this alliance defining the common vision for the future of urban waterways and connected rights and responsibilities to realise and sustain it.

## 6

### Urban Planning / Zoning:

Identify zones on waterways where large vessel transit can be banned temporarily or permanently, allowing safe swimming, anchoring and mooring for recreational watercraft, thus making the space accessible for recreational use.

## 7

### Spontaneous Practice:

Many groups operating cultural vessels - especially non-profits - seek to bypass permit procedures for reasons of feasibility. Rather than pursuing bans, cities should acknowledge this need for spontaneous practice and provide public cultural infrastructure, the design of which proactively permits types of activities that elsewhere would require authorisation.



FLOW Aquagym

© Pool is Cool

<sup>†</sup>In Germany, the Federal Ministry for Digitalisation and Transport (BMDV) issued a Masterplan Recreational Boating (Masterplan Freizeitschiffahrt) in 2022, dealing for example with public investment into infrastructure supporting recreational boating. While in this edition of the masterplan, the words “cultural” and “creative” are entirely missing, it could be formulated as an aim of creative river advocacy to have them included in the future. See more: <https://masterplan-freizeitschiffahrt.bund.de/downloads/publications/0/Masterplan%20Freizeitschiffahrtbarrierefrei.pdf>

<sup>††</sup>A great example is provided by Spree:publik's 'Kodex': <https://spreepublik.org/unser-kodex/>



The 'Arènes' in Jardin Tino Rossi by the Seine in Paris are an example of public infrastructure for spontaneous cultural practices self-organised by citizens. © Thomas Scheele, 2024

## 8

### **Environmental Sustainability:**

Support measures targeting to improve local water quality and environmental regeneration along shorelines. Making swimming possible is a core element in enhancing the access of residents - and their creative ideas - to the river.

## 9

### **Education:**

Share your knowledge and develop educational resources about sustainable river use to accompany your cultural activities and your campaigning for widening public access to the water. Help build positive habits among organisers and audiences and a shared culture of sustainability.

## 10

### **Research:**

Collect data and evaluate measures. How many citizens are empowered to access the river by participating in cultural vessel collectives? How many kilos of floating waste are removed from the water by a creative cleanup action? How many performances of emerging artists are enabled by floating stages? How much media attention is drawn to important social topics through creative protests organised on the river?



**International projects like Fluctuations, just like locally operating cultural vessels, are part of a connected movement in Europe that creates new urban utopia. One day, we will see a city come forth as the first to launch its Creative River Strategy. The function of rivers has evolved over the course of history and it will continue to change.**

# End Notes



## Special thanks to those who contributed their knowledge to this report.

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Bastiaan Wolters, Lastkahn (Amsterdam,  
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Charline Albericci, Fluctuations (Paris,  
France)

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Daniel Mohns, Wackelberry (Berlin,  
Germany)

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The European Pavillion 2024: Liquid  
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Nicolas Defawe, Urban Boat  
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Nicolas Dhers, SMMMILE and  
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# Project Team



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## VibeLab

VibeLab is a data-driven research, consultancy and advocacy agency dedicated to supporting creatives and preserving night-time culture. With over ten years of experience, VibeLab works with local institutions and governments to develop strategies to effectively navigate and support the nightlife industry. We specialise in making complex data clear. VibeLab's research and consultancy helps identify growth opportunities and connects individuals, businesses, governments and institutions, to boost creativity and local economies. We are passionate about the transformative power that nightlife culture and creative communities have on urban areas. Our strength lies in our connections: we bridge the gap between government authorities, nightlife creatives and local communities. VibeLab creates change with sustainable solutions, backed by data to make cities thrive at night.

Thomas is based in Berlin and co-founded creative river advocacy group Spree:publik in 2015 as a member of the vessel Newria. He has more than ten years of experience working in nightlife, events, and cultural advocacy and is a Senior Project Manager at VibeLab. For Fluctuations, Thomas has been in charge of this strategy, assessing the most feasible way of implementing a floating, transnational festival at present as well as opportunities for evolving framework conditions in the future.

Ali is a cultural and creative producer who operates at the intersection of music, culture, and innovation. With a background in social design and festival production, she has worked on projects across Europe that promote social and environmental sustainability. Her work aims to amplify the voices and ideas that are often overlooked in capitalist-driven nightlife culture.

Sina is a researcher and creative writer with a background in Cultural Anthropology. She reviewed this report to make it more legible and accessible to a broad readership.

## Consortium Partners



### **SMMMILE**

SMMMILE, a French nonprofit established in 2015, pioneers multidisciplinary events fostering awareness on environmental issues, food systems, and social justice, and serves as the coordinators of the Fluctuations project. Notably, the SMMMILE Vegan & Pop Festival, held in collaboration with EPPGHV, has convened over 10,000 attendees, 60+ NGOs, and featured 30+ artists and 20+ keynotes. Their expertise extends to media partnerships with Arte and Radio Nova, fundraising, and sponsorship. Beyond the festival, SMMMILE hosts networking events for impact entrepreneurs, pop-up parties, and club nights. Recently, they undertook a consultancy mission for OXFAM, showcasing their adeptness in event production, purposeful design, and promoting plant-based diets, culminating in the executive production of OXFAM's forthcoming festival.

### **European Alternatives**

European Alternatives is a pioneering organisation with 15 years of expertise in fostering European citizenship and culture through innovative festivals like TRANSEUROPA. These festivals, spanning multiple cities simultaneously or touring across Europe, cultivate a shared European cultural space. Recognised by esteemed institutions and supported by various programs, including CERV and Creative Europe, European Alternatives orchestrates collaborations among diverse cultural entities, artists, and activists. Through four distinct streams—assembly, education, research and reflection, and creation—it facilitates discussions, training, research, and artistic endeavors that transcend borders, contributing to a vibrant European identity and fostering solutions to common challenges.

### **BESIGN School**

BESIGN School, located in the picturesque French Riviera near Nice, is an internationally renowned institution specialising in sustainable design and innovation. With a focus on ecodesign and metadesign, BESIGN brings invaluable expertise to Fluctuations' sustainability objectives. As a co-founder of UCA - University Côte d'Azur, it collaborates with European partners, offering research and academic knowledge. BESIGN's approach emphasises design thinking and result-oriented prototyping, exemplified by successful projects with global companies like Airbus, L'Oréal, and Michelin. Students actively participate in co-creating solutions, showcasing BESIGN's commitment to fostering sustainable solutions for real-world challenges.



## Consortium Partners



### **Subject Values Foundation (SVF)**

The Subjective Values Foundation (SVF) has 20+ years of experience in cultural events and European projects. As a member of the Roots and Routes International Association since 2001, SVF integrates artistic expression and social inclusivity. They organise official cultural events for the European Commission Representation in Hungary, promoting European values. SVF produces Artravalo, a social-art project for disadvantaged youth, and engages in sustainability and anti-racism campaigns. With over 40 European-funded projects, SVF focuses on empowering marginalised groups through initiatives like JobAct and Women In Creative Power (WICP). On the national level, SVF is involved in youth, anti-hate speech, and crime prevention committees.

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# FLUCTUATIONS

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BRUSSELS  
13-14/07

UTRECHT  
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BUDAPEST  
14/09

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Fluctuations festival events poster

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