



THE THIRD INTERVIEW: SANDRA AND JANKA

Nitra's Local Community Activators

Why did you decide to embark on this IN-HABIT journey?

Janka: I have been working for four years in Hidepark, an independent cultural and community centre in Nitra, in several positions: I am a cultural manager, project manager, dramaturg, production manager, accountant, volunteer coordinator and, if necessary, I collect entrance fees during events. This job fills me with happiness, because it is a hobby and a job at the same time. Here, I come into contact with the best people and artists from the city and the region, and at the same time I am filled with the great feeling that I am bringing culture and art into the life of our community.

However, although the community dimension of our centre has always been present and has grown over time, it has never been set as a goal - in the IN-HABIT project, it is exactly the opposite. This is why I decided to set out on this journey.

Sandra: I wanted to be a part of a change, to contribute to it and also to get to know my environment and surroundings, including the people living here, better, from another point of view. I also like to try new things and learn through them.





Describe your neighbourhood and its main highlights.

Janka: Nitra, in general, is a very cosy town of medium size, where a bicycle is enough as a means of transport. I moved here when I started university and I liked it so much that I decided to stay here. And I can just say that our neighbourhood is one of the most beautiful parts of Nitra. In my view, it is dominated by two things: the river, intertwined with the city, which is iconic for Nitra and alongside which every city resident passes at least once a day; and Hidepark, a cultural and community centre, the only independent cultural and community centre in the city. This is where activists, artists, and young people who will shape our future come together.

Sandra: Dražovce neighbourhood is very distinct compared to the other Nitra districts. Mostly due to the fact that although it is part of an urban area, it has retained its rural character with low-rise housing, intertwined with allotment gardens and overlooked by the Zobor mountain and the Romanesque church Dražovský kostolík.

What has been done in your neighbourhood so far?

Janka: The most important thing that has happened in our neighbourhood is that we have opened a dialogue, even among stakeholders who have not communicated with each other before. Topics have started to be explored that have not been thought about for a long time, or had been moved to the background because they were difficult or uncomfortable. And, from conversation, we have sprung into action. The establishment of the IN-HUB is one of the most important things for me, because bringing together such a diverse group of people who are willing to work on the well-being of their community without any direct financial gain is rather an exception in our region. I personally appreciate the little things, such as the science workshop for Roma children from Dražovce school, in which, together with researchers from Slovak University of Agriculture and its Botanical Garden, we planted a tree as a symbol of further cooperation.





What are the biggest challenges you have encountered?

Janka: I think our biggest challenge so far has been explaining to people in the community, but also to the authorities and companies, how much this project can help individual members of society. We live in a country where not many things are in perfect condition yet and many basic things are missing, so, at first, our project may seem less important than others. However, we managed to refute this notion and today we are beginning to feel support. Of course, we also face more traditional problems, such as land ownership in our neighbourhood, political relations, intolerance and insensitivity to certain groups of people, and the myriad of problems the pandemic brought about.

Sandra: Explaining the concept of this project to people – its aim, focus, and possible results – to make them want to cooperate and not be afraid of sharing their ideas for change out loud.

What have you taken home from this experience so far?

Janka: By working on the IN-HABIT project, I have learned patience and greater understanding. I have come to understand that it is necessary to be able to look at one thing from different angles and to let things flow freely rather than pushing for them to be resolved quickly. This type of work with people is somewhat new to me, because I am not the one who is supposed to come up with a solution, but I have to be the one to help the community come up with this solution collectively. I'm not a sociologist or a psychologist or a motivational speaker, although sometimes when working on this project I feel like I am – or should be – a little bit of all of these.

Sandra: The fact that I'm enjoying working with and for people more than I thought I would.

