

What Makes a City a Music City and How Does It Drive Development?

City Talks are three moderated, interactive discussions about live music in cities – what makes a local music scene thrive and how cities, music venues, festivals and cultural institutions can work better together.

They will bring together experiences from Czech and international cities and different perspectives on the conditions, forms of cooperation and responsibilities of the various actors involved.

The discussions will follow the Chatham House Rule, creating space for open sharing of experiences, opinions and challenges that often remain outside public debate.

Organised by SoundCzech / National Institute for Culture (NIK) in cooperation with TIC BRNO and JAMU.

Music vs. City

10:30 – 12:00

The discussion will be held in English.

What makes a city a Music City*

*with a closing round on nightlife as a tourism factor

This conversation opens at the conceptual level: what does it actually mean for a city to be a „Music City“, and what conditions make it possible? The discussion draws on perspectives from international music networks, night-culture policy and city-level programming to work through the non-negotiables — and the nuances.

It moves through four areas: the infrastructure that underpins a music ecosystem; how cities balance genre breadth with a distinctive identity; the role of artist development versus established programming; and how Central and Eastern European cities differentiate themselves in a competitive European landscape.

It closes with a fast round on nightlife as a direct driver of tourism and economic development — a dimension often neglected in official city music strategies.

Key Discussion Topics

- What infrastructure is truly non-negotiable for a Music City?
- Genre breadth vs. strong identity — which defines a music city?
- Artist development, audience building, and the funding reality
- CEE differentiation: what Leipzig, Budapest, Prague and others offer that Western Europe cannot — or is it the other way around?
- **Closing round:** Nightlife as a tourism factor — barriers, wins, and one ask to city officials

Taking part in the conversation

LENA INGWERSEN

Music Cities Network

JANA JANULÍKOVÁ

Director of Tourist Information Centre (TIC) Brno, which promotes Brno as a UNESCO City of Creativity

NILS FISCHER

Night Culture Representative, Leipzig

ZUZANA NOVOTOVÁ GODÁLOVÁ

Anténa Network, Slovakia

JONATHAN BENNETT

Head of Media and Music, Edinburgh College (tbc)

GABIJA LIAUGMINAITĖ

Vilnius Night Culture Office

tbc — City of Budapest, Debrecen

Background reading

- [Music Cities Network](#)
- [UNESCO Creative Cities Network — Music](#)



City vs. Venues

13:00 – 14:30

The discussion will be held in English.

What do cities need from music venues and what do music venues need from cities?

We believe that cities, their communities and community spaces have never been as reliant on each other as they are today. More and more examples suggest that building common strategies may be the only way ahead.

This conversation shifts from definition to practice. Cities and venues both say they want to work together — but in reality the relationship is often transactional, short-term, or structurally misaligned. This discussion names that gap honestly and asks: what can actually be done?

It brings together cultural operators and municipal representatives — a deliberate choice that creates productive tension. It is structured around three arcs: where collaboration currently breaks down and why; the concrete tools available on both sides (legislation, tax policy, programming commitments, community access); and what long-term, sustainable partnerships actually look like in cities of different scales.

The conversation opens with a short grounding input from Audrey Guerre (Live DMA, chair), drawing on Live DMA's 2026 report *Anatomy of a Closure*, which sets out arguments and initiatives that music venues and their associations can bring to local policymakers to propose proactive, workable solutions and prevent further closures.

Key Discussion Topics

- Where does the city–operator relationship break down — and who drops the ball first?
- Concrete city tools: legislation, licensing, tax breaks, long-term planning
- Venue responsibilities: demographics, community access, civic engagement
- How venues can adopt new programmes to engage a wider audience and become part of the connective cultural fabric of communities
- What smaller cities can teach larger ones
- Civic action, honest failures, and what a 10-year partnership looks like

Taking part in the conversation

AUDREY GUARRE

Live DMA, chair

MARK DAVYD

Music Venue Trust, UK

TAMÁS SZÉP

Nappali / Made in Pécs Festival

BEREND SCHANS

Association of Dutch Pop Venues (tbc)

LUKÁŠ STARA

Brno Club Association (BACH)

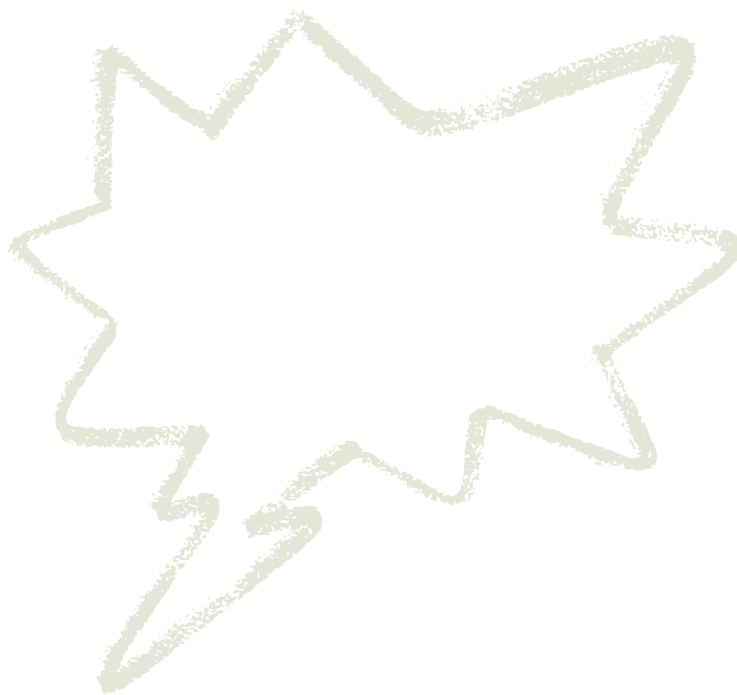
DANIEL KUBELKA

Žamberk Municipal Festival

A representative of the Hungarian venue association

Background reading

- [Live DMA - Anatomy of a Closure \(Audrey Guerre, May 2026\)](#)
- [The Agent of Change principle \(UK Music\)](#)



Czech Models, Different Scales

15:00 – 16:30

The discussion will be held in Czech.

Who Actually Owns the Music City?

Testing the Music City concept across the Czech governance ladder — village, city, metropolis, capital, and region

Where Discussion 1 defined the Music City conceptually and Discussion 2 diagnosed the city–venue relationship in general terms, Discussion 3 grounds both in concrete Czech cases at every level of governance: a small-town festival, a mid-size city with both an official and a grassroots scene, a major post-industrial city, the capital's citywide cultural-policy body, and a regional (kraj) authority. The conversation asks whether „Music City“ thinking actually scales — or whether each layer of governance needs its own definition, tools and funding logic entirely.

It is structured around three arcs: what changes about ambition and toolbox as scale increases; where two models coexist uneasily within the same city; and whether a capital-level cultural-policy methodology can travel up to a region or down to a small town at all.

Special attention goes to Festival Kamenice as a direct counterpart to the Žamberk model raised in Discussion 2 — a small town proving that a city-branded festival can rival much larger productions — and to the tension inside Frýdek-Místek between its official municipal festival and its independent, grassroots festival scene.

Key Discussion Topics

- Same ambition, different toolbox: what a small-town festival (Kamenice) can do with fast municipal buy-in that a metropolis can't move as quickly on
- Frýdek-Místek as a case of two parallel models in one city — the officially-branded municipal festival vs. independent/grassroots scenes — do they compete for institutional attention or reinforce each other?
- Ostrava's post-industrial identity: does a Music City built on heavy-industry heritage sites and large-scale festival infrastructure need its own definition, distinct from Prague's?
- Kreativní Praha's citywide cultural policy (KP22+) as a transferable methodology — can it scale down to a Frýdek-Místek or up to a kraj, or does it only work at metropolitan scale?
- The missing layer: what does regional (kraj-level) cultural policy actually fund or coordinate, and where does it create friction with city-level ambitions?
- Closing debate: is „Music City“ a city-scale concept at all — or does the Czech experience suggest it should really be framed at kraj or micro-regional level?

Taking part in the conversation

FILIP KOŠTÁLEK

umělecký ředitel Colours of Ostrava

FESTIVAL KAMENICE*

small-town/municipal-partnership model

FRÝDEK-MÍSTEK*

city/tourism office (Frýdek-Místek plný chutí) + independent festival organiser (Kamenité), for the internal-tension angle

KREATIVNÍ PRAHA*

current KP22+ / cultural policy lead

KRÁLOVEHRADECKÝ KRAJ*

regional cultural policy officer

*to be confirmed

Background reading

- Kulturní politika hl. m. Prahy 22+ (KP22+), Kreativní Praha
- URBACT - síť Cities After Dark



A Note on Format

This is not a panel programme. There are no speakers addressing an audience from a stage: each of the three sessions is a moderated, interactive conversation in which everyone present — city officials, venue operators, festival organisers, researchers and guests — takes part from the first minute to the last.

All three discussions run under the Chatham House Rule: participants may later use the information and ideas exchanged, but may not attribute them to a specific person or organisation without that person's consent. This is designed to let people speak candidly about difficult, unresolved or politically sensitive questions — including their own failures — without it becoming a matter of record.

→ chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule

The moderator's role in each session is to open the conversation, introduce a short grounding input where relevant, keep track of time, and make sure the discussion moves through its key questions and that no single voice dominates — not to run a formal Q&A between a panel and an audience.

Why These Conversations Matter Now

The term „Music City“ or „Culture City“ is used widely — but rarely defined precisely. Behind the branding lies a complex ecosystem: venues, artists, music-related businesses, audiences, policymakers, night-culture operators, and municipal governments, who often struggle to speak the same language, let alone build lasting partnerships.

These conversations bring together practitioners, city representatives and European music-sector organisations to discuss that honestly — grounded in real experience from cities and cultural operators of different sizes and ambitions across Central and Eastern Europe and beyond.

The goal is not to produce a definition. It is to produce clarity: about what works, what doesn't, and what cities and cultural operators can actually do differently — and what practical steps could help tackle the problems that are raised.

Summary and Recommendations

The conclusions from all three discussions will be brought together in a shared summary and a set of practical recommendations for cities, cultural organisations and policymakers. The output will follow the Chatham House Rule, capturing the main ideas, experiences and insights from the discussions without attributing them to individual participants.

The aim is for City Talks to go beyond the conversations themselves and result in a practical resource that can be used further – similar to the [One Voice for European Music](#) initiative.

NIK

Sound —
— Czech

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You can find the registration form for the discussions [here](#).

