

PLURALISTIC MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND
COMMUNITY BUILDING

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January 22, 2026



TODAY'S AGENDA

1.

Change-
centric
journalism
model

2.

Types, levels
and elements
of audience
engagement

3.

Online
audience
engagement

Key trends on
social
platforms

4.

Mobilizing and
building
communities

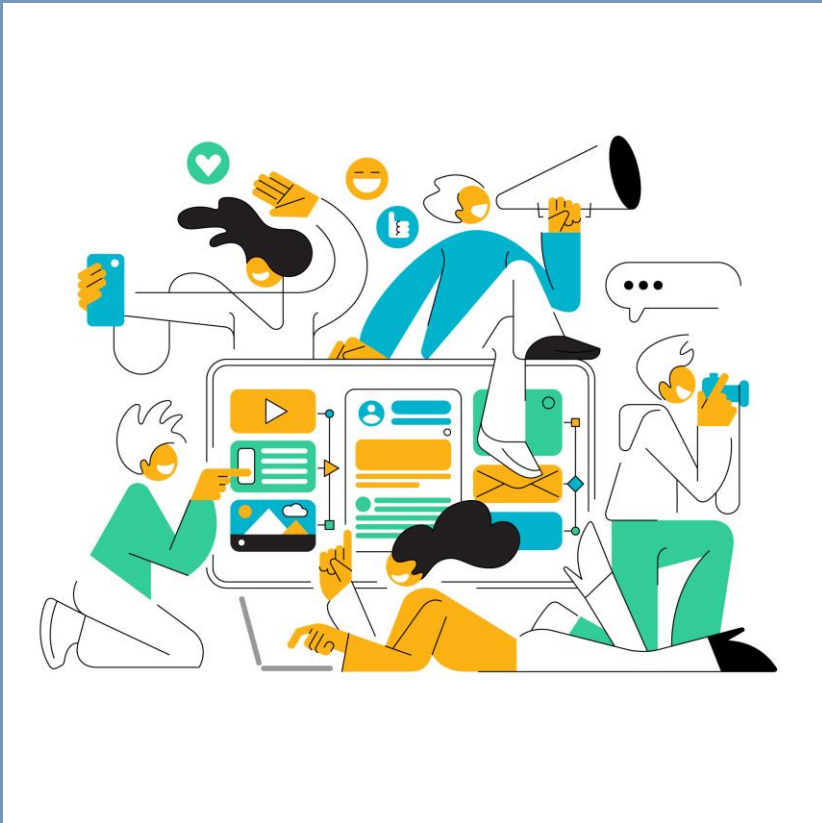
Re:Baltica
case study

5.

Sharing &
learning
from lived
experiences

Takeaways
&
Bonus!

WHY AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT MATTERS



- Contributes towards a better understanding of audiences and their needs
 - Leads to stronger and more representative journalism
 - Helps to inform, connect & equip citizens with knowledge and tools they need to be active members of the society
 - Communities can sustain journalism, directly and indirectly, financially and by contributing their time and expertise
-
- **Fundamental part of journalism mission**
 - **Increases media viability**

Content-centric vs. Change-centric

Change-centric framework draws on the practical experience of small-to-medium digital outlets with a preference for local and investigative work

A comparative analysis of two models of journalism

A content-centric approach to journalism

A change-centric approach to journalism

The end goal is publication

The end goal is impact

Focus is on outputs

Focus is on outcomes and long-term impact

Volume

Value

Primacy of "the story"

Primacy of audience needs

Publishing is the finish line

Publishing is part of a larger process

Purpose is to set the agenda

Purpose is to facilitate change

The relationship with audiences is driven by the search for growth

The relationship with audiences is about purposeful engagement

Transactional

Relational

One-way communication

Feedback loops

Reach and traffic

Meaningful interactions

Multi-platform distribution

Intentional outreach

Form-over-function

Form-follows-function

The guiding principles of reporting are neutrality and objectivity

The guiding principles of reporting are founded in an ethic of care

Deepens unequal power dynamics

Levels the field

Extractive

Collaborative

Distant and unresponsive

Close and accountable

Journalists are subject experts

Journalists are information-based facilitators

The unit for experience design is the lone user

The unit for experience design is community

Readers are treated as entities in isolation

Understanding that learning is a shared experience

Seeks personalization of content

Offers opportunities for connection and belonging


Drives further fragmentation of public discourse


Sustains critical conversations


Often stays in the digital realm


Convenes common grounds for face-to-face interactions


Engagement in change-centric model

 Platforms aren't just distribution channels — they're tools for strategic connections.

 Every engagement effort should clarify two things: **What is this story for, and who is it for?**

 When platforms are used with intention, engagement efforts create feedback loops that reveal what audiences find valuable, and why.

 Instead of chasing visibility, it plans for meaningful interactions.

 Prioritises showing that audience voices resonate in the newsroom and that their participation matters.

Intentional Outreach: El Surtidor

“Whether digital or in person, we can’t imagine a relationship with our audience that doesn’t make space for conversation. At El Surti, engagement is part of our identity, and a core driver of impact.

We’ve learned that the most impactful forms of engagement are physical and participatory: our *mingas informativas* (research collaboration sessions) and town-hall-style presentations yield the strongest results.”

[La Memetodología: how El Surtidor approaches engagement](#)

Beyond distribution for views

How El Surtidor builds platforms for intentional outreach



Source: El Surtidor/La Memetodología

INFORM, ENGAGE, EQUIP YOUR AUDIENCES



To inform is to ... connect people's interests to issues and analysis, and vice versa



To engage is to... build long-term relationships with people



To equip is to... provide access and opportunities for public participation and production ('democratizing' journalism skills and processes)

Levels of engagement

“**Audience engagement** is focused on building habit, loyalty, and audience revenue.

Community engagement is about understanding voids in the local ecosystem and positioning the newsroom to help fill those.”

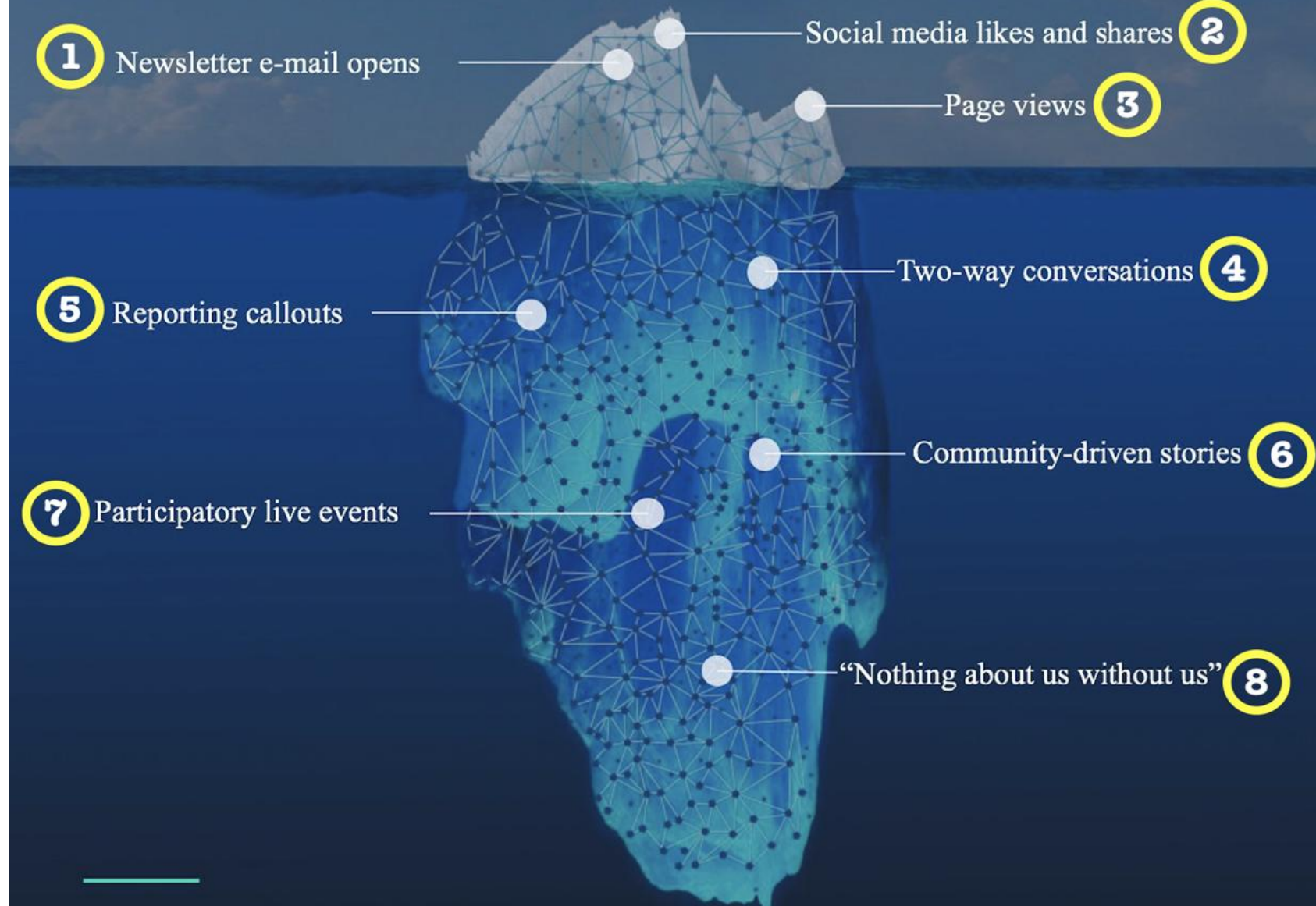
[Ariel Zirulnick](#), senior editor for community engagement at Southern California Public Radio

Iceberg image from a [presentation](#) by Jackie Hai, director of Journalism that Matters



What types of engagement do you practice?

Indicate the closest numbers in the chat



Elements of Audience Engagement

[Audience Engagement for Journalism Toolkit](#)

For audience-focused professionals who are ready to build purposeful, engaged communities that sustain their mission.

1. Defining Audience – Clarify whom you serve and why they should care.

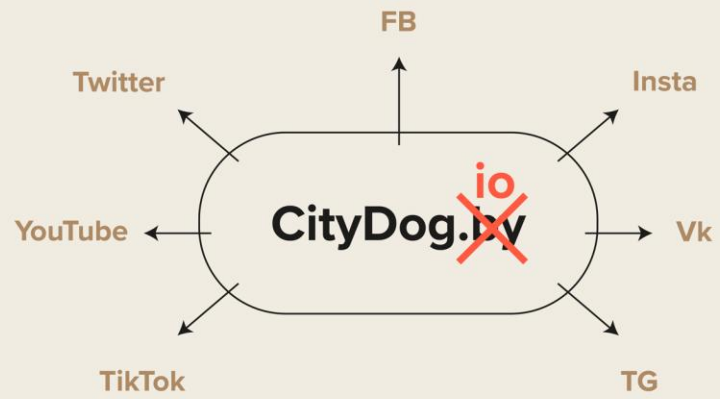
2. Purposeful Engagement – Define purposeful attention across the entire user journey and build meaningful relationships where it matters.

3. Measuring Success – Adopt a data-driven view of success, selecting metrics that map directly to business impact and user value.

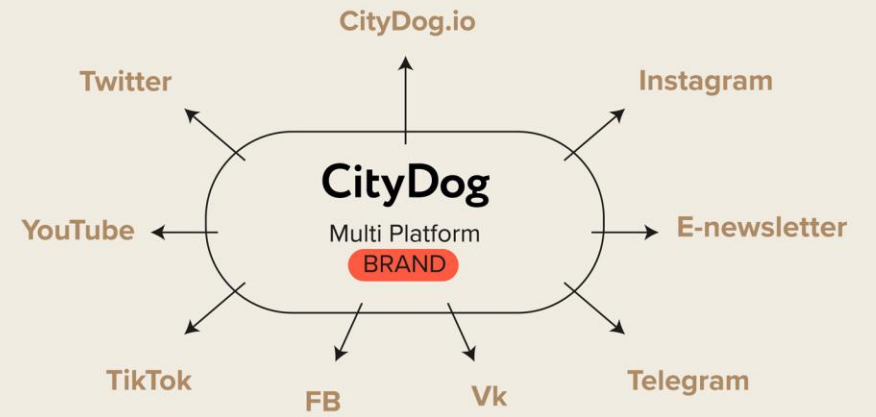
4. Audience Development – Acquire skills and define clear roles, processes, and on- and off-platform tactics that turn strategy into repeatable action.

“In a digital information ecosystem, prioritising audiences – their needs and habits – is journalism’s most resilient foundation for growth and impact, enabling newsrooms not just to survive but to adapt with purpose.”

CityDog **Before**



CityDog **NEW**



Recognizable style → audience reaction:

"I've seen it on CityDog"

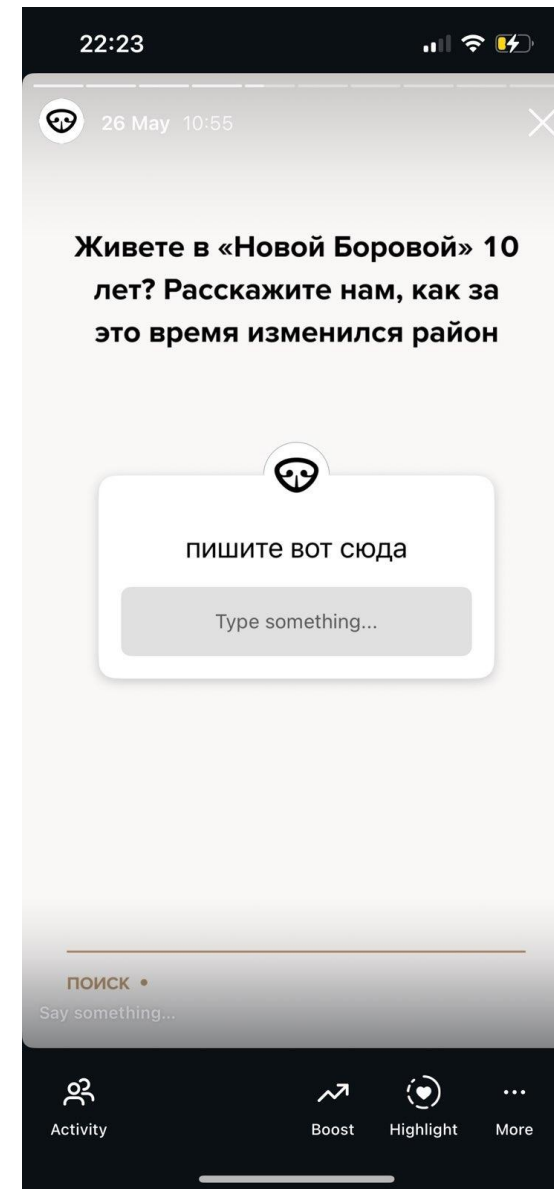
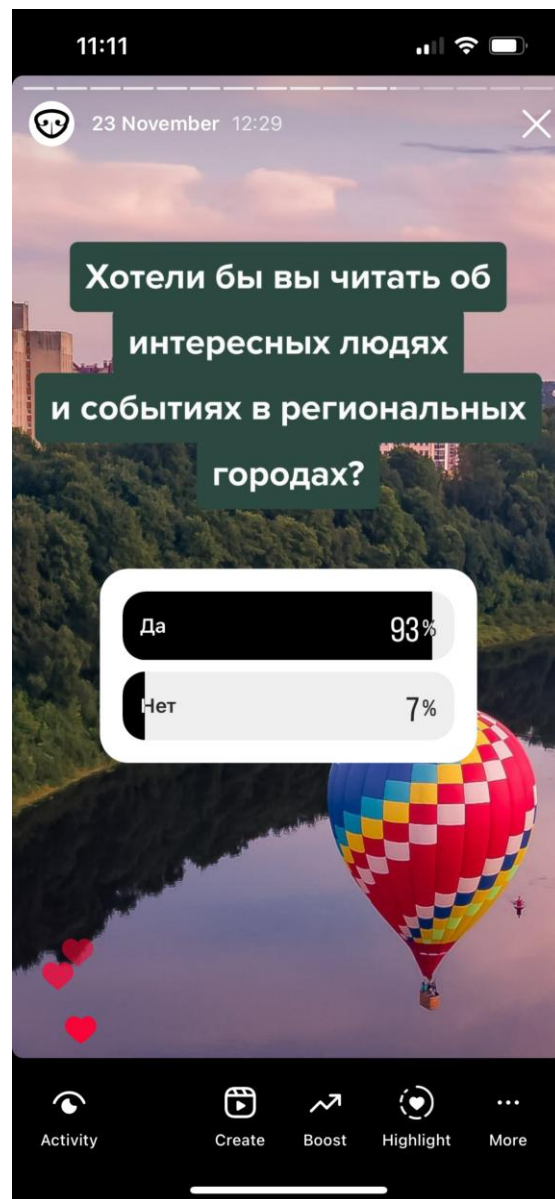
Instagram Stories

Effective **audience understanding and engagement tool** for a media outlet in exile.

Readers are willing to share their personal experience, especially if it can help others and if they **feel safe**.

What we use Stories for:

- **Discovering inspiring people and narratives**
We seek out individuals and stories that resonate and inspire.
- **Exploring interests and opinions on important topics**
Stories help surface diverse perspectives on issues that matter. Help to make editorial decisions.
- **Sharing insights and life hacks**
We use stories to source practical tips, lessons learned, and smart shortcuts.



“News for Communes”

[Gazeta Radomszczanska](#) (Poland, PM4D)

Created dedicated Facebook pages in 12 municipalities to share updates on hyperlocal issues

Results:

- ✓ **700-1000 followers on each FB page** – and continue growing
- ✓ **3.8 mln total reach** across all 12 pages in 7 months
- ✓ **Expanded and activated new local audiences** around community issues
- ✓ **Opened a new channel for sourcing hyperlocal stories**, enabling the production of high-quality, verified journalistic content

Learnings:

- Uneven performance across pages → 7 are growing and active, while 5 show stagnation
- Lower-than-expected advertising income

“Strengthening pluralism in low-urbanized areas”

TuLodz (Poland, LM4D & PM4D)

Launched [hyperlocal websites](#) and a dedicated local section on [TuLodz website](#), supported by an interactive web-module and a chatbot

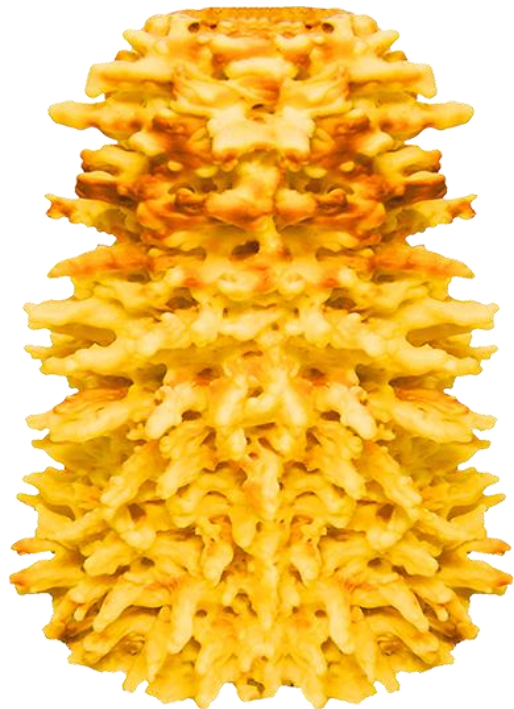
Results:

- ✓ **Piątek became the smallest town in Poland with its own digital media**, boosting local pride; readership exceeds the town’s population **threefold**.
- ✓ **The dedicated section attracted over 140,000 users in the first five months** (original target: 5,000 users in the first year)
- ✓ **30% of editorial content was created with reader participation**, strengthening community engagement

Learnings:

- Readers mainly use interactive modules mostly **to alert the editorial team** about local problems or story ideas
- **In-person meetings remain more effective** than online tools for building meaningful relations with the readers

Key Trends in Social Platforms



Massive Computing Power

All major social platforms now operate on large-scale neural networks, processing vast amounts of data—both user behaviour and content units.

Video Content Explosion

Over the past five years, there's been a surge in video content. Platforms have made breakthroughs in video analytics, enabling them to match and process enormous volumes of data.

Personalised Algorithms

Each user is served by a unique algorithm tailored to their behaviour and preferences.

Cohort-Based Targeting

Platforms now group users into cohorts based on location, demographics, interests, values, and more—capturing the multidimensional nature of user.

What This Means for Audience Engagement



Define & Understand Your Audience Clearly

Using data and research methods or creating personas (for new audiences). Editorial teams must continuously analyse audience interests at a granular level. Even when focusing on local or niche topics, users often engage with broad range of themes.

Build a Distinctive Brand

Every piece of content carries a brand. Media must project a strong, recognisable journalistic identity—anchored in values and uniqueness—not just deliver information.

Foster Core Engagement

A loyal base of followers who consistently like and comment is essential. Platforms prioritise such content, amplifying it to similar users.

Optimise for Watch Time

For video, completion rate is key. A 50–70% watch-through rate is considered excellent and increases platform promotion.

Audience/Community Motivation Drivers

Discover: driven by curiosity

Residents are seeking the new and novel where they live — could be information and/or experiences that help them explore, pique their interest in or satiate their curiosity about the place they live in.

Connect: driven by isolation

Residents are looking for meaningful interactions, to meet their fellows and to find/join the community.

Audience/Community Motivation Drivers

Navigate: driven by confusion

Residents are seeking simplicity, clarity or guidance on something complex. This could include accessing essential information, services or resources, or understanding and solving a problem that affects their daily lives, their livelihoods or their future.

Change: driven by dissatisfaction or concern

Residents are looking for ways to do their part in contributing to positive change on issues that feel important to them. They want to make a meaningful difference, but might be lacking the information, connections or impetus to get started. Some are seeking to change themselves and their behaviors (e.g., living a more climate-friendly lifestyle) while others are seeking to make change in society.

Working in Latvian news deserts before election

Re:Baltica (PM4D)



What Re:Baltica Did



February - June 2025

Like this - but in 3 cities



24. Apr, 2025

Vai Rēzeknē pildīja vēlēšanu solījumus?



19. Apr, 2025

Kas ir kas Rēzeknes vēlēšanās



27. Mai, 2025

Kā Rēzekne nonāca līdz bankrotam

Re:Baltica atskatās, kā Rēzekne Aleksandra Bartaševiča vadībā 14 gados nonāca uz bankrota sliekšņa – un kāpēc neviens to neapturēja agrāk.

[Lasīt vairāk](#)



22. Mai, 2025

“Visa sistēma tā dzīvo.” Bijušais “Rēzeknes satiksmes” šefs atzīst sarunātu izsoli

Bijušā “Saskaņas” biedra priekšvēlēšanu atklātība parāda, kā Bartaševiča un Ušakova laikos Rēzeknē un Rīgā abpusēji izdevīgi sarunāja transporta izsoli. Aizdomas par to bija jau tolaik, tikai neviens nerunāja. [Lasīt vairāk](#)



19. Mai, 2025

Nenogremdējamais cars

Rēzeknē retais šaubās, vai vēlēšanās uzvarēs atstādinātais domes priekšsēdētājs Aleksandrs Bartaševičs. Viņa ģimene jau gadus 15 pilsētu pārvalda kā klans – viens brālis mērs, otrs būvniecībā izpilda dāsnus pašvaldības pasūtījumus. Taču tagad radi sanaidojušies. [Lasīt vairāk](#)

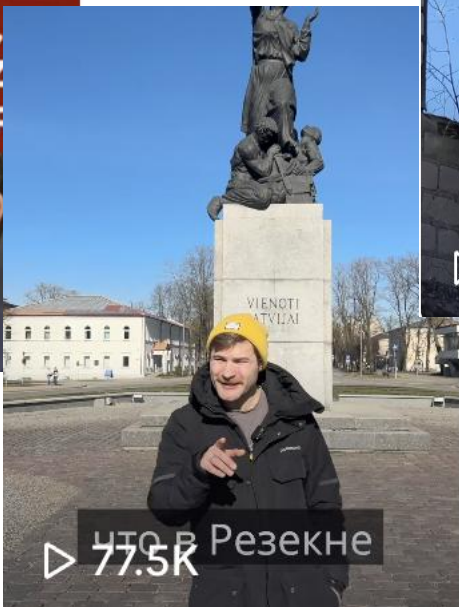
What does she mean?



5 LIETAS, KAS TEV JĀZĀ PAR ŠLESERU



170.7K



- ✓ New playgrounds
- ✓ Renovated homes and courtyards
- ✓ Cleaner air
- ✗ Unified design code
- ✗ 4,000 new rental apartments
- ✗ Lower land tax
- ✗ A tree planted for every newborn

JAUNĀ VIENOTĪBA

Vai partijas pildījušas solīto mājokļu un vides politikā?

13. MAIJS, 2025 • EVITA PURĪNA, RE:BALTICA/RE:CHECK



Izveidosim dzīvojamo māju atjaunošanas un pagalmu labiekārtošanas programmu

Pilnība

Kopš 2021. gada pašvaldība piesūcī līdzfinansējumu dzīvojamo māju atjaunošanai. Naudu var saņemt ēku fasāžu atjaunošanai, nelieliem remontiem un pagalmu labiekārtošanai.

Ieviesīsim vienotu Rīgas dizaina kodu, kas noteiks pilsētas vizuālos elementus, lai saglabātu galvaspilsētas pievilcību rīdziniekiem un pilsētas viesiem

Darījās pilnība

Vienota dizaina koda Rīgai nav. Pilsētas attīstības komitejas vadītāja Inese Andersone (LŅ) norāda, ka tas nozīmētu noteikt vienotu dizaina standartus arī komersantiem, kas radītu papildu izmaksas. Viņa skaidro, ka domē ir pieņemti jauni noteikumi un saskaņā ar tiem vēsturiskajā centrā no 2028. gada reklāmām uz ēku fasādēm būs jāatbilst noteiktām vadlīnijām. Tāpat esot akceptēts dizaina katalogs, kas liktu projektētājiem izvēlēties vienota stila un krāsu pilsētvīdes elementus, piemēram, soliņus, atkritumu urnas, pieturas.

Uzbūvēsim vismaz 4000 īres dzīvokļus

Nav pilnība

Jaunu īres dzīvokļu celšana pašlaik ir tikai plānu stadijā, Rīga ir sagatavojusi pietiekumu 1000 dzīvokļu izbūvei valsts programmā. Rīgas mērs Ķirsis (LŅ) saka, ka šo solīto būtu pareizāk īgāka termiņa programmā.

Par trešdaļu samazināšim nekustamā īpašuma nodokļa maksājumu privātpersonām piederošai zemei

Nav pilnība

Rīgas mērs Vīnis Ķirsis (LŅ) saka, ka solījuma aktualitāte esot mainījusies un tagad viņš vairāk tic citai pieejai – atļaidi dot nevis visiem, bet tiem, kas sniedz liela mēroga pilsētas politikai. Piemēram, īpašniekiem, kas izbūvē patvertnes vai kuru īpašumā ir dīdkoki.

What came out of it


- Engaged local residents directly in the editorial process, enabling them to better understand how investigative journalism works and to suggest topics for future investigations
- Young regional voters gained greater access to engaging, fact-based political content, reducing their reliance on unverified social media narratives and decreasing their vulnerability to populist disinformation
- New leads: 11 in-depth local investigations → residents gained greater access to independent, fact-based local journalism
- The City Chronicles videos: high engagement rates and viral performance
- Relationships: people do not feel so alone
- Strengthening local journalism and its ties to national level
- Re:Baltica plans to replicate this approach during the 2026 Parliamentary elections

What you need to do before doing


- Develop some sort of relationship with place (previous work and/or local journalists)
- Think of your work as public utility - what can people do with each piece? CAT
- Be very open about what you will do and why. Tell ahead. Saves trouble later.
- Think of everything what may go wrong (transmission, security, weather)
- “How to” hostility
- Think video and visuals first (and test what works)



TIME TO SHARE EXPERIENCES...

 **Recent** example of your most successful audience/community engagement experience—online or in-person

 One example that didn't work as expected

 Your **hypothesis** on why each example succeeded or failed and lessons learned.

Building Communities: Where & How

💡 Community can be one or a mix of:

Geographical: people living in a specific place

Topical: people who care about a given topic

Community of interest: people that have a shared identity or experience

- **Choose the Right Platform**

Communities can be built anywhere users can comment—even on TikTok.
→ Engagement thrives where interaction is possible.

- **Define Message, Rules, and Moderation**

Every community needs a clear purpose, rules, and active moderation.
→ Structure builds trust and sustainability.

- **Focus on Interests, Not Just Geography**

Communities grow stronger when built around shared interests.
→ Think in cohorts: values, passions, and behaviours.

Building Communities: Where & How




- **Balance Issues with Positivity**
Don't just highlight problems—generate positive emotions.
→ Themes like nostalgia, future vision, and exclusivity drive engagement.
- **Bridge Online and Offline**
Use online platforms to organize offline events—and vice versa.
→ Each activity fuels the other, strengthening community ties.
- **Use Creative Tools for Direct Connection**
Go beyond platform features—leverage all available tools and creative solutions to build direct relationships with community members.
→ Collect emails, require event registration, and track participation to better understand your audience's interests and offer tailored content products that help bridge communities.



Facebook Groups: On.ge

On.ge launched its first thematic Facebook groups shortly after the platform began prioritising “posts that spark conversations and meaningful interactions” in 2018.

By 2023, the media outlet had created and actively maintained **16 Facebook groups**, with membership ranging from **800 to 44,000**.

 Learn more about how to manage FB groups and how to turn a group into a community in [The Social Media Monetisation Playbook | IMS](#).

On.ge uses Facebook Groups to:

- **Create “cozy” digital spaces** for readers to connect with the outlet and with each other.
 - **Gather communities around different topics covered by On.ge.** For instance, On.ge regularly addresses mental health topics, consequently fostering a substantial community of 13,700 members within a FB group named “Mental Health Forum”.
 - **Collect data on what is trending and interesting for their target audience.** Monitor the conversation, use FB group insights to identify posts with the most engagement and reach, survey members with the built-in poll function (you can also use Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, or Mailchimp).
 - **Promote editorial materials and increase traffic to the website.** An article shared to the thematic group often gathers more pageviews and comments than those shared on main Facebook page.
-  All groups are managed by one community manager and a group of volunteer moderators.
-  Invest more time and energy in promising communities while leaving other groups mostly to their own devices.

TAKEAWAYS

Engagement takes time and (human) resources

With a multitude of platforms, formats, and methods, audience engagement demands time and human resources. Focus on those that best serve your strategic goals.

Community engagement is about trust

It's about building relationships. That means showing commitment and making systematic, consistent efforts.

Experiment. Learn. Adapt.

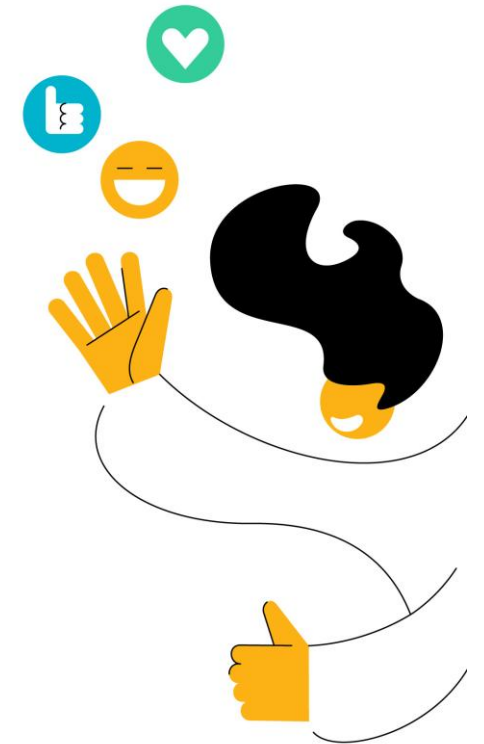
Try new things, embrace quick learning, and don't fear failures—they're part of the process.

Stay tuned to social platforms

Most interactions happen there—and they're constantly evolving. Keep up to stay relevant.

Connect with your PM4D peers

There's a wealth of knowledge in this group—reach out, exchange ideas, and learn from each other.



Instagram: Important Updates



 [Instagram Insights Updates](#)

Reel Like Insights

See exactly which moments in your Reel triggered likes.

→ Helps identify what content resonates most and refine your creative approach.

Carousel Like Insights

Discover which slide in your carousel prompted a like.

→ Enables data-driven decisions—e.g. where to place your call to action.

Post-Level Demographics

View demographic breakdowns for each post and Reel.

→ Understand who your content is reaching and tailor accordingly.

Top Follower Drivers

See in one place which posts and Reels converted viewers into followers.

→ Learn what drives growth and how to replicate success.

Search Engine Visibility (Spring 2025)

Instagram posts are now indexable by search engines.

→ Local and niche content is more discoverable—account permission required.

Useful tools and resources



[Engagement Rate \(ER\) formula and online calculator](#)

→ Evaluate how much the audience interacts with your content online.

[The Change-Centric Journalism Framework](#)

[Audience Engagement for Journalism Toolkit](#)

[The Future Report - Google x Livity](#)

→ 7,000+ teens from across Europe share their views on AI, learning, trust, wellbeing and future of technology

[Australia social media ban: one month on](#)

→ Mixed early results and interesting insights into teens' online behaviour