



Meeting minutes	Presentation of pre-feasibility study and discussion
Date, location	4 June 2026, Universul, 5th Floor
Note taker	Ecaterina Luțișina

Names of participants are removed from the minutes in accordance with GDPR.

Agenda overview

- Welcome and introduction to the agenda and speakers by Natalia Todorova (Center for Policies and Reforms)
- Presentation and status of tender by Bogdan Zgherea (Ministry of Culture)
- Introduction to pre-feasibility study by Olesea Galusca (Innovate Moldova) and Luka Piskoric
- Presentation of pre-feasibility study and Q&A by Luka Piskoric
- Open discussion
- Presentation of plans of the building and guided tour with Dumitru Cărbune (Galeria Plai, architect)

Minutes

Presentation by Bogdan Zgherea, Ministry of Culture

Bogdan Zgherea provided an update on the current status of the Universul project. He explained that the Ministry of Culture, together with the Agency for Regional Development (ADR), is currently preparing the tender documentation for the next stage of the project. He noted that the input delivered by the participants from the workshop will be taken into consideration when finalising the tender documents.

Bogdan Zgherea also informed participants that the Ministry of Economic Development is working to identify and secure funding for the renovation project. He stressed that the upcoming design phase is expected to take approximately 12 months and that a number of technical, financial and institutional aspects still need to be clarified as part of the process..

Q&A

The facilitator, Natalia Todorova, asked if the working groups would be able to review and contribute to the technical specifications and tender-related documentation

prepared by ADR. Bogdan Zgherea responded that this would be possible and reiterated that the design phase is expected to take up to 12 months..

One participant asked if it would be publicly announced who the bidders for the tenders are. Bogdan Zgherea informed that all tenders are conducted in accordance with the law and that the information will be published on MTender. He noted that he was not aware of the details of the composition of the selection committee, but that the Ministry of Culture will publish all relevant information on its website.

It was asked if the Ministry of Culture has any plans to establish a funding program to support the independent cultural scene in Universul, and noted that the scene relies on long-term funding to produce their work. Funding sources should, however, include options covering a 5 to 10-year period. Bogdan Zgherea responded that the Ministry of Culture needs to cover capital costs, and first to understand what the long-term costs will be and how we can make Universul self-sustaining in a way that achieves an economic/cultural balance.

Participants further stressed that spaces for residents require a clear plan/vision for the future use of the building, including the role of future residents, cultural organisations and support mechanism for cultural production. Concerns were raised that, without a clear operational and governance model, there is a high risk that the Ministry of Culture will not end up committing to long-term funding, and that this risk should be addressed and discussed already at this point. Bogdan Zgherea responded that the Ministry wishes to establish an autonomous structure for Universul. If the space will be done with state funding, it is one thing, but if we go with another model, it will be another thing. He noted that the future governance and financing model will depend on decisions taken in subsequent stages of the project and on the overall funding structure that will be adopted.

Presentation of the pre feasibility study

Olesea Galuşca, Innovate Moldova

Olesea Galusca presented the background of the pre-feasibility study conducted by Innovate Moldova in August 2025, and resulting in the study that was finalised in January 2026 and will be presented by Luka Piskoric.

Luka Piskoric, Poligon Creative Center

Luka Piskoric presented the study (*that can be found on the Universul webpage*), and underlined that the pre-feasibility study is an attempt to better understand the needs of the local cultural community and to explore how the building could function in the future.

Luka Piskoric also highlighted that he has a background from Slovenia establishing a cultural centre in an old Tobacco Factory with almost no support from the Government (Poligon Creative Center).

The basis for the pre-feasibility study is a result of interviews with 39 members of the cultural sector, resulting in 5 key observations:

- The precarious situation of the cultural workers;
- High degree of mistrust towards the government;
- Division between culture and the creative industries;
 - Here, Olesea Galusca commented that there is no intention from Innovate Moldova to transform Universul into another ArtCor, and that she has heard this concern from different sides. She stressed that there is no intention to make the disruption even bigger.
- A lot of concern about accountability, governance, and the scope of the project;
- Rent prices for the commercial spaces that should sustain the independent cultural community.

Luka stressed that the proposed programmes and models from the study presented should be perceived as 'building blocks' for the participatory process to build on, adjust and use as they like.

Luka also highlighted that one of the biggest outcomes from the study was the architectural mapping of the building itself, which clarified the space structure and availability and provide an overall overview.

In this context, Luka also stressed that the development of Universul should not be understood only as a question of physical renovation or space distribution. The building would also require resources, support mechanisms and a management model that can make cultural production and long-term use possible.

Questions and remarks

A participant highlighted that the space should give back something to the wider public, and that it should be considered how to include the surrounding environment; streets and courtyards in the project and how the wider public can be involved and should be thought into the project. It will be important here to consult with urban planners.

Luka Piskoric responded that the user experience is indeed very important and that the logic of going through the building needs to be taken into consideration and planned for.

Another participant highlighted that they hoped that the presented project could be revised to also have spaces for live audiences and large events, including music and nightlife, which was highlighted as important to attract a young audience. It was also highlighted that there is an overall need for spaces for young people to conduct their activities in and for them to have their own communities. Finally, it was mentioned that for the organisation, there is a need for budgets of at least 5000 EUR.

A participant asked whether a subsidy model is currently incorporated into the presented concept and how such a financial model would look, and stressed that it is necessary to consider in order to ensure the survival of the independent spaces.

A participant highlighted that there is an overall lack of community spaces, and brought the example of Queer Cafe, which has a programme six days a week. It was stressed that there is a need for safe spaces for the activist cultural scene to work in, and that different communities need to be involved when defining the spaces. Some communities are exposed politically or to commercialisation. The participant pointed out that they think the Ministry of Culture should take on the responsibility of subsidising non-commercial activities. Finally, the participant asked Luka Piskoric whether he had been to Casa Zemstvei and talked to grassroots organisations like Queer Cafe. Luka Piskoric responded that he had indeed been there and thought it was an important model to take into account when discussing the relevant model for Universul Cultural Centre. Luka also pointed out that from the practices at the art centre he established in Slovenia, they only survived financially from renting out conference spaces in the building.

There was also a comment from the same participant regarding the management model that could be used at Universul. The hybrid model was highlighted since it would ensure financial sustainability for the independent cultural sector and would avoid throwing them into more precarity.

A participant highlighted the importance of thinking about people without financial resources for the cultural activities in Universul, and making an accessible cultural centre. They also added that they don't go to Artcor because it is not affordable and, in their opinion, takes away space from the students. The task is to consider how to make a space for everyone in Universul and that this is done by encouraging and providing accessible spaces and programmes. It was proposed to conduct a study to identify where funding for culture exists in Moldova. Questions about the end users of the building were raised, about the end beneficiary, and the people who can feel safe and welcome in the space.

The same participant asked rhetorically whether the concept behind Universul was only a business model and whether the former minister of culture, Sergiu Prodan, thought of it. Additionally, the Republican Stadium was mentioned, since the Government promised that the money from selling the stadium would be redirected to Universul.

A participant asked how the conflict of interest, spurred through the previous discussions, would be resolved. Here, Natalia responded that the participatory process is designed to address this issue as well. Moreover, Natalia stressed that the community has the expertise to have input on the issues that are arising in the participatory process. Vera added that the role of the Working Groups is very important in this case.

Another participant commented that, in Moldova, the government is not really taking into consideration and thinking about disadvantaged groups.

Natalia asked Luka if the experience of building Poligon Creative Centre was similar to Universul, to which Luka answered that, in the whole process they went through, trust was the key element.

The last comment from a participant was about considering cross-sections in modeling the spaces.

Presentation of the workshop on 5 June

Natalia Todorova presented the workshop programme for the next day and added that the Ministry of Culture has confirmed that all participants in this workshop would be consulted on the draft tender specifications.

Dumitru Cărbune, Architect

Dumitru Carbone was invited to present the mapping of the building and encouraged architects to get involved in the working groups. He informed that the building was constructed in the 1970s and 1980s. From the outset, it was not designed to be energy-efficient due to the equipment used in the printing factory to ensure proper cooling and ventilation. This was highlighted because energy efficiency is a very important aspect of this process.

The participants were invited on a tour of the building.

Open issues requiring further clarification

Several questions and concerns raised during the discussion remained open and may require further clarification in the next stages of the participatory process:

- How the input collected through the participatory process will be reflected in the technical specifications and future tender documents;
- What model of long-term financing and operational sustainability could support both the building and cultural programming;
- Whether and how non-commercial cultural activities, independent cultural organisations and grassroots initiatives could be subsidised or otherwise supported;
- How the future centre can balance public access, cultural production, commercial activities and financial sustainability;
- What governance and management model would allow Universul to remain accessible, representative and protected from politicisation or commercial capture;
- How safe and accessible spaces can be ensured for different communities, including those with fewer resources or higher exposure to political, social or commercial pressures;
- Who the future users and beneficiaries of Universul should be, and how they can be meaningfully involved in future stages;
- How current users, grassroots cultural initiatives and relevant models such as Casa Zemstvei can inform the future development of Universul;
- How the future spatial model can respond to different cultural needs, including large events, music, nightlife, youth activities, production spaces and community spaces;
- How potential conflicts of interest between different users, sectors and institutional actors can be addressed through the participatory process.

End of meeting.