European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards (2026)
1448-Education, Training and Skills 3. Education, Training & Skills

Co-Creating Urban Heritage with Children Through Play

OwpEKLoR

Entry details

General information

Main country of application: Latvia

Brief description of the project

> “Cita Rīga” is an educational initiative that engages children and youth with cultural heritage through play, experiments, and urban expeditions. Rather than abstract facts, history is experienced through hands-on activities – from testing historic firefighting methods to exploring hidden city corners. Participants act as young researchers, developing critical thinking and a sense of belonging. Since 2014, over 30 projects have involved 2,500 participants annually, with around 20% returning as volunteers to mentor younger peers, creating a sustainable knowledge cycle. The initiative offers an innovative, low-cost methodology, easily adaptable across Europe, inspiring youth to care for shared heritage.

Start date of the project: 2014-07-06

Facebook page of the project, if any: https://www.facebook.com/CitaRiga

Does the site or heritage in question have national/regional/local cultural heritage designation or protection status in its country?: Yes

If yes, please specify:

> The project is not tied to a single site but explores various locations throughout Riga, many of which are part of the city’s protected historical areas or listed heritage sites (e.g., Old Riga, former industrial zones, archaeological sites). While “Citas Rīgas” does not manage a specific protected property, it works within and about officially recognised heritage environments, encouraging young people to engage with protected sites across the city.

Is the project focused on or taking place in heritage included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, either as an individual site or as part of a larger World Heritage property? If so, please specify which one.

> No, the project is not focused on heritage included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. However, some activities occasionally explore the **Historic Centre of Riga**, which is a UNESCO World Heritage property, through educational walks and urban expeditions, raising awareness and appreciation among children and young people.

Is the project focused on or taking place in a heritage designated as a European Heritage Label? If so, please specify which one.

> No, the project is not focused on heritage designated with the European Heritage Label. Nevertheless, *Cita Rīga* contributes to the same goals by engaging young people with cultural heritage, promoting intercultural dialogue, and strengthening European values through playful, low-cost, and transferable educational activities across Riga's neighbourhoods and historic sites.

If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to the public?	Yes
Please indicate whether your project falls under the subcategory of Education, Training, or Skills (select one type only, as applicable):	✓ Education

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Contact details

Name of the entrant	Inese Grandāne
Entrant's position	member of the board
Organisation of the entrant	NGO Cita Riga
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Organisation of the owner	Not applicable – the project is implemented by the organisation "Cita Rīga" itself, which both designs and carries out the activities. The initiative is not tied to a single physical heritage site owned by a separate entity, but rather takes place in public urban spaces and involves various elements of Riga's cultural heritage.
Name of the project leader	Inese Grandane

Project leader's position	project leader
Organisation of the project leader	Cita Riga
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Concise summary

Concise summary

The project "Cita Rīga" has been developed by a grassroots NGO dedicated to making history and cultural heritage engaging and meaningful for children and young people. Since 2014, more than 30 interactive educational programmes have focused on the history and urban development of Riga, Latvia. Each activity fosters curiosity, critical thinking, and a personal connection with the city's past.

Instead of learning facts from textbooks, children experiment, play, and explore the city as researchers. They test historical accounts – for example, trying to extinguish a wooden church model with milk, as described in 17th-century sources – build miniature ships to simulate river trade, and navigate forgotten urban corners using old maps. History becomes a process of discovery rather than memorisation.

A key innovation is the "experimental history" approach: participants are not passive learners but active investigators. Real-life experiments, urban expeditions, and thematic games strengthen analytical skills and historical empathy. The method is inclusive and low-cost, requiring no specialised equipment and using accessible public spaces as open classrooms.

The long-term impact is significant: around 2,500 children and youth take part each year, and about 20% return as volunteers or group leaders, mentoring younger participants. Schools and libraries have started adopting the methodology, and interest is growing among educators and heritage professionals across Latvia.

"Cita Rīga" fosters belonging and identity by showing that heritage is a living, shared story rather than a distant subject. Its model is transferable across Europe – particularly in cities where young people feel detached from heritage. By combining play, STEM methods, and cultural discovery, "Cita Rīga" demonstrates that even with modest resources, history can become exciting, relevant, and community-based. The project thus provides a replicable blueprint for engaging future generations with Europe's diverse cultural heritage.

Objectives and work undertaken

Aims and objectives of the project/initiative.

The main aim of the "Cita Rīga" initiative is to make cultural heritage – accessible, engaging, and meaningful for children and young people. The project strengthens their connection with their city, fosters historical thinking, and promotes curiosity-driven learning through creative, hands-on methods. Its methodology demonstrates how heritage education can be revitalised in European cities facing similar challenges of disengaged youth.

- To increase interest in cultural heritage by transforming it from abstract facts into a tangible and emotionally relevant experience.
- To promote critical and analytical thinking by enabling participants to question, test, and interpret historical information through experiments, observation, and comparison.
- To foster a sense of belonging and identity, connecting participants with their urban environment and encouraging pride in local cultural narratives as part of Europe's shared heritage.

- To create sustainable educational engagement by involving young people over the long term – from childhood to adolescence – and providing opportunities to become active volunteers and informal educators themselves.
- To promote inclusive and accessible heritage education, using simple materials, public spaces, and creative methods that can be adapted in diverse European contexts.

Rather than relying on formal lectures or textbooks, the project develops activities where young people become active explorers of heritage. Through building models, engaging in historical role-play, or conducting research in the city, participants uncover the hidden stories behind buildings, streets, and landscapes. "Cita Rīga" is grounded in the belief that cultural heritage becomes truly meaningful when it is experienced directly a principle that can inspire heritage education far beyond Latvia.

Any historical and technical research undertaken for the project/initiative.

The activities of *Cita Rīga* are grounded in continuous historical research, drawing on archival documents, historic maps, urban planning records, and academic studies. The team collaborates with historians, archaeologists, librarians, and museum professionals to ensure accuracy and depth for each programme.

Before each activity – especially experiments or urban expeditions – in-depth research is carried out on the chosen neighbourhood, theme, or object. For example, while developing the "extinguishing a church with milk" experiment, the team studied 18th-century firefighting techniques, historical building materials, and the architecture of wooden churches.

Expeditions to lesser-known areas of Riga, such as industrial districts, medieval fortifications, or Jewish neighbourhoods, are similarly based on diverse sources to uncover stories rarely included in textbooks. This knowledge is then translated into accessible formats for children, such as illustrated maps, simplified narratives, and interactive tasks.

A distinctive feature is that participants act as young researchers: questioning sources, comparing facts, and forming their own interpretations. By combining academic rigour with playful experimentation, *Cita Rīga* turns complex historical evidence into engaging learning experiences – a model that demonstrates how heritage education can bridge research and community in cities across Europe.

Activities carried out and stages of implementation of the project/initiative.

Between 2013 and 2024, *Cita Rīga* has implemented more than 30 interactive heritage education projects involving thousands of children and young people. Each programme is built in stages, combining historical research with playful, hands-on experiences that make heritage tangible and relevant.

Historical experiments: Participants re-enact past processes or test the plausibility of urban legends. A well-known example is the story that a Riga church was once extinguished with milk. The team built a scale wooden model and compared different liquids, while other experiments included constructing miniature wind-powered boats to simulate trade on the Daugava River. These activities allow children to investigate history like researchers rather than passive learners.

Urban expeditions: Groups explore lesser-known parts of the city, from Jewish quarters and industrial zones to medieval fortifications. Equipped with historic maps, puzzles, and storytelling tasks, participants discover how Riga has changed over time and connect these stories to European themes such as migration, trade, and urban growth.

Heritage games: The organisation designs outdoor and board games adapted to different age groups. The games encourage cooperation while teaching Riga's and Latvia's history in an informal, inclusive way.

Youth involvement: Around 20% of participants return as volunteers, helping to guide younger children and create new activities. This generational transfer ensures continuity and builds community ownership of heritage.

Learning environments: Roughly 80% of activities are held outdoors in authentic urban spaces, while 20% take place in schools and libraries, bringing heritage into both public and educational settings.

> Through this flexible model, *Cita Rīga* adapts to changing interests and contexts. The approach demonstrates how research-based heritage education can be transformed into engaging, low-cost activities — a methodology with strong potential for replication across Europe.

Challenges or problems encountered and solutions found to overcome them.

> One of the main challenges for "Cita Rīga" was the low engagement of children and youth with traditional history, often perceived as dull due to formal teaching methods. To address this, the project embraced playful, experimental, and discovery-based learning, allowing participants to actively experience history rather than passively study it.
>
> Another obstacle was accessing lesser-known urban histories rarely included in school curricula. By collaborating with historians, museums, and archives, the team uncovered unique stories and secured a strong research foundation while strengthening ties with cultural institutions.
>
> Organising urban expeditions also posed logistical difficulties, particularly regarding safety and meaningful learning in public spaces. The team responded with structured yet flexible formats, including maps, clear guidance, and supervision, while tailoring routes to both historical value and children's attention spans.
>
> Sustainability was ensured by diversifying funding sources and developing volunteer educators, while historical accuracy was preserved through creative storytelling and role-play.

European significance

European significance of the project/initiative/nominee.

> The "Cita Rīga" model is highly transferable and scalable across Europe, especially in cities facing challenges in engaging youth with cultural heritage. Its low-cost, modular structure — including portable experiments, adaptable games, and urban exploration formats — can be easily replicated.
>
> Because the methodology relies on creativity, local stories, and hands-on learning rather than expensive infrastructure, it can be tailored to fit small towns, rural areas, or diverse urban neighbourhoods. The project's educational materials and templates have already been shared with teachers and youth workers, demonstrating potential for broader use.
>
> By turning public space into an open classroom, the initiative encourages communities to reinterpret their surroundings and rediscover hidden histories. This flexible approach empowers local educators and mediators to adapt it to their own heritage context.
>
> Connecting local stories to shared European experiences of migration, urban growth, and cultural diversity, the model strengthens both community identity and a common European belonging.

Results and impact

Summary of the main results achieved and knowledge that has been gained. List the ways that the project/initiative contributes to the preservation and/or enhancement of the historical, cultural, environmental, educational and/or social values of the heritage in question. Mention the project's impact on conservation policy and practice, if any.

> The *Cita Rīga* initiative has brought a measurable shift in how children and youth perceive, understand, and engage with cultural heritage. Over the past decade, the project has reached an average of 2,500 participants annually through more than 30 interactive programmes tailored to different age groups and learning levels.
>
> A key result is sustained long-term engagement. Many participants join at the age of 7–8 and continue through adolescence, with around 20% later returning as volunteers. These young leaders help guide new groups and act as informal heritage ambassadors within their communities, creating a generational cycle of learning.

The knowledge gained is twofold: (1) participants develop critical thinking, analytical, and observational skills through hands-on investigation; and (2) educators and cultural organisations report that practical experimentation significantly improves learning outcomes compared to traditional methods.

The project contributes to heritage preservation and enhancement in several ways:

- **Historical values:** By interpreting urban stories through games, expeditions, and experiments, it keeps lesser-known aspects of Riga's past alive.
- **Educational values:** It fosters heritage literacy, curiosity, and research skills, offering a model adaptable across Europe.
- **Social values:** It promotes inclusion and cohesion by engaging children from diverse backgrounds and enabling cross-generational knowledge transfer.
- **Environmental values:** By using the city as an open classroom, it raises awareness of how cultural and natural layers interact.

While not yet formally integrated into national policy, *Cita Rīga* has already inspired schools, libraries, and youth centres to adopt its methods. Its grassroots success shows how informal, community-driven education can strengthen cultural heritage engagement – a model with clear European relevance and replication potential.

Aspects of the project that can be considered innovative within its area or field.

The core innovation of *Cita Rīga* is its hands-on, experimental approach to heritage education. Instead of textbooks, children explore history through interactive experiments and urban expeditions: testing historical fire-fighting on model structures, building miniature ships to simulate river trade, or navigating Riga with old maps.

This method turns learners into young researchers who question, test, and interpret the past themselves. Public spaces — streets, riverbanks, and industrial zones — become open classrooms where forgotten stories come alive. Such direct engagement fosters emotional connection and a deeper sense of belonging.

A second innovation is the long-term involvement model: many participants later return as volunteers, ensuring continuity, peer-to-peer learning, and the growth of young heritage ambassadors.

Simple, low-cost, and adaptable, the model shows how heritage education can be inclusive and replicable across Europe, offering a sustainable way to reconnect youth with cultural heritage.

Steps taken to reach people who have not previously interacted with the site/project. This might include youth, local communities, non-traditional audiences, people with disabilities, etc.

Steps taken to reach previously unengaged audiences

"Cita Rīga" has developed inclusive strategies to involve children and youth who might otherwise remain disconnected from cultural heritage. Recognising that traditional, fact-based teaching methods often fail to inspire, the project adopts informal, curiosity-driven approaches to lower barriers to participation.

Key actions include:

Free, open-access events in parks, neighbourhoods, and public spaces, reaching diverse socio-economic groups;

Partnerships with schools and youth centres, especially in underrepresented districts;

Mobile and flexible formats, such as portable games and modular experiments, allowing outreach beyond central Rīga;

Engaging communication styles, using storytelling, humour, and hands-on tasks rather than academic instruction;

Family involvement, encouraging intergenerational learning.

> Though not focused on disability inclusion, the team adapts activities for children with different cognitive needs. The overarching aim is to ensure that every child can connect with heritage and discover their city's stories, regardless of background or prior experience

Participation in the initiative (number of participants/audience/users per year and/or, in the case of websites and digital platforms, information regarding visitor numbers and online interaction).

> Each year, *Cita Rīga* involves about 2,500 children and young people aged 7–17. Activities are designed for continuity: many return annually, some beginning at age seven and later becoming volunteers or junior facilitators guiding younger peers.
>
> The initiative also engages families and educators, reaching around 300 adults annually through school-based and intergenerational activities. Roughly 80% of events take place in public spaces — parks, squares, and historic neighbourhoods — attracting spontaneous interest and ensuring broad visibility, while the remaining 20% are hosted in schools and community centres.
>
> Online outreach extends the project's impact through social media storytelling and photo documentation, generating thousands of views and active interaction from parents, schools, and youth organisations.
>
> This consistent participation underlines the project's accessibility, community relevance, and inclusivity. It fosters continuity, strengthens intergenerational learning, and builds a growing network of young heritage ambassadors who sustain and spread engagement with cultural heritage.

Environmental, social, and economic sustainability of the project (e.g. contribution to climate action and environmental protection; measures to ensure long-term financial sustainability or future viability; benefits for people and communities, where relevant).

> *Cita Rīga* is built on a sustainable foundation, integrating environmental awareness, social inclusion, and financial resilience across all its activities.
>
> **Environmental sustainability**
> The project treats the city itself as an open-air classroom, turning public parks, riversides, historic neighbourhoods, and industrial zones into learning environments. This approach avoids the need for resource-intensive infrastructure and keeps the ecological footprint minimal. At the same time, it builds environmental awareness: children explore the historical role of the Daugava River, natural springs, and green zones in shaping the city. Materials for games and experiments are chosen for durability, recyclability, and reusability. Activities also model respect for public space, instilling in participants the idea that cultural heritage and the natural environment are interconnected and should be protected together.
>
> **Social sustainability**
> Accessibility and inclusion are central to the programme. All activities are free of charge, ensuring participation regardless of socio-economic background. Children and families from underrepresented neighbourhoods are actively engaged, creating opportunities for those who may otherwise lack access to cultural education. The initiative's long-term design builds social cohesion: many participants continue into adolescence as volunteers or peer educators, mentoring younger children and strengthening community ownership. Intergenerational learning is also encouraged, as parents and grandparents are often invited to take part, reinforcing family bonds and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations.
>
> **Economic sustainability**
> The project achieves financial resilience through a diversified model that combines municipal and national grants, private sponsorship, in-kind donations, and volunteer contributions. Its methodology is intentionally low-cost and scalable: most tools and materials can be adapted and reused, reducing expenses over time. By partnering with schools, libraries, and local NGOs, the initiative leverages shared resources and reduces dependence on a single funding source.

As its reputation grows, *Cita Rīga* is increasingly able to attract new collaborations and supporters. This mix of grassroots involvement, low overheads, and transferable content ensures that the project remains financially viable.

Long-term perspective
By uniting environmental responsibility, social cohesion, and economic pragmatism, *Cita Rīga* provides a sustainable model for heritage education. It not only preserves and transmits cultural knowledge but also cultivates community resilience and environmental consciousness, ensuring its impact endures well beyond individual activities.

Dissemination of the project's results and knowledge gained and any outreach or educational activities.

"Cita Rīga" shares its results through diverse and accessible formats. Project activities and outcomes are regularly documented and shared via social media (Facebook, Instagram) and the organisation's website, reaching thousands of followers locally and abroad. Visual stories, short videos, and behind-the-scenes insights communicate methodology and impact in an engaging way.

The team collaborates with schools, libraries, and interest education centres, providing free methodological materials and ready-to-use activity scenarios adapted for different age groups and learning needs. Workshops for teachers and youth workers help transfer knowledge and encourage adoption of similar hands-on methods in other contexts.

Former participants who become volunteers also contribute by mentoring younger children. In addition, the project's approach has been presented internationally, including at a heritage education event in Malta, where it received strong interest as a transferable model. Through partnerships, public events, and digital presence, "Cita Rīga" ensures its results reach and inspire wide audiences.

Contribution to intercultural dialogue and to the protection of cultural diversity.

"Cita Rīga" fosters intercultural dialogue by uncovering and sharing the multicultural layers of Riga's history — from medieval German merchants to Jewish communities, Soviet-era influences, and modern urban dynamics. Activities often focus on lesser-known stories and marginalised perspectives, encouraging children to explore diverse cultural identities that have shaped the city.

Through thematic expeditions, storytelling games, and roleplay activities, participants learn to appreciate the coexistence of different communities and traditions. The programme emphasises that history is not a single narrative but a mosaic of experiences.

Children are encouraged to reflect on their own family stories, linking personal heritage to the broader cultural context. This helps build empathy, critical thinking, and openness to difference.

By promoting respect for diverse historical legacies and facilitating inclusive dialogue, "Cita Rīga" contributes meaningfully to safeguarding Europe's rich cultural diversity and strengthening a shared sense of belonging.

Transferability of the initiative to other contexts and its scalability potential.

The model is highly transferable and adaptable across Europe, particularly in cities where engaging youth with cultural heritage remains a challenge. Its low-cost, modular structure — including portable experiments, adaptable games, and urban expeditions — can be easily scaled to different contexts.

Because the methodology relies on creativity, local stories, and hands-on learning rather than costly infrastructure, it works equally well in small towns, rural regions, or diverse urban neighbourhoods. Educational tools and activity templates have already been shared with teachers and youth workers, showing clear potential for wider application.

By using public spaces as open classrooms, the initiative encourages communities to reinterpret familiar surroundings and uncover hidden histories. This approach empowers local educators and cultural mediators to design similar programmes rooted in their own heritage. The model has also been presented internationally, including at a heritage education event in Malta and Estonia, confirming its value and relevance for broader European use.

Any related work that still needs to be completed, if applicable.

> While “Cita Rīga” has developed a strong and adaptable model, several areas are planned for further development. The organisation aims to expand its digital learning tools, including the creation of an interactive map of Riga’s hidden heritage stories, accessible to children and educators online.
>
> In addition, more structured training materials for teachers and youth workers are in development to support replication of methods in other regions. There are also plans to improve accessibility for children with disabilities through adapted games and inclusive communication formats.
>
> Finally, “Cita Rīga” seeks to strengthen its documentation and evaluation systems in order to better measure long-term impact and share insights with the wider European heritage education community.

Costs of the project/initiative

Costs of the project (in euro), financial and management arrangements, funding partners and/or the type of funding.

> The average annual budget of the NGO “Cita Rīga” is approximately €25000,00. About 70% is secured through project-based funding from the Riga City Council’s cultural and educational programmes, 5% comes from private donors, and around 20% is earned directly by the organisation. In addition, many of the necessary materials are received as in-kind donations. The remaining share is covered through volunteer involvement and small-scale partnerships with local institutions such as schools, libraries, and community centres.
>
> Financial management follows NGO transparency standards, with each project budget allocated to cover essential costs: materials for workshops and experiments, coordination and facilitation, communication, and modest administrative expenses. Many activities are designed to be low-cost and re-usable, ensuring efficient and responsible use of resources.
>
> This mixed funding model — combining municipal support, private contributions, self-generated income, and community involvement — strengthens financial sustainability and reduces dependence on any single source. It also allows the organisation to respond flexibly to new themes, reach broader audiences, and ensure continuity. By leveraging partnerships and community resources, “Cita Rīga” maintains resilience while maximising the long-term cultural, educational, and social impact of its work.

Funding provided by the European Union or the EEA/Norway Grants (including programme, year and amount of the Grant), if any.

> Not applicable.

Additional information

How would winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award benefit you, your project and/or your organisation?

> Winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award would give *“Cita Rīga”* international recognition, strengthening our credibility and helping attract new partners, schools, and municipalities. It would increase opportunities for long-term funding and ensure the continuity of our low-cost, creative methods. For our team and young volunteers, the award would be a source of pride and motivation, showing that children and youth have a meaningful voice in Europe’s cultural heritage.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, what will the monetary award be used for?

> If awarded the Grand Prix, the prize will fund new portable educational kits and games, enabling outreach beyond Rīga into rural communities. It will also support volunteer training, ensuring continuity and wider impact. The funding would strengthen replication and sustainability of *"Cita Rīga"* across Latvia and Europe.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, who will be the recipient of the monetary award?

> The monetary award will be received by the NGO "Cita Rīga", the association responsible for implementing and sustaining the project.

How did you find out about the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Creative Europe social media
Is this the first time that this entry has been submitted to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Yes
On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with this online submission form?	✓ 8
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7_ExploringThe... 113 KiB



8_Construction... 112 KiB



9_CreatingRigaT... 136 KiB



10_LearningAb... 357 KiB



11_HertigeGam... 134 KiB



12_HertigeGam... 114 KiB



13_SewerHistor... 193 KiB



14_WaterSuppl... 137 KiB



15_Introduction... 312 KiB



16_HistoricalSo... 525 KiB



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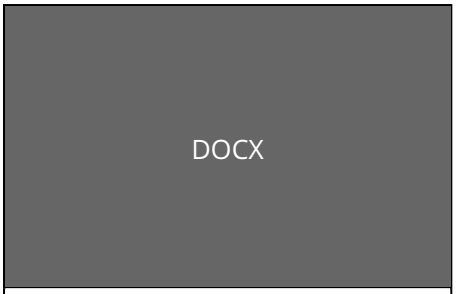

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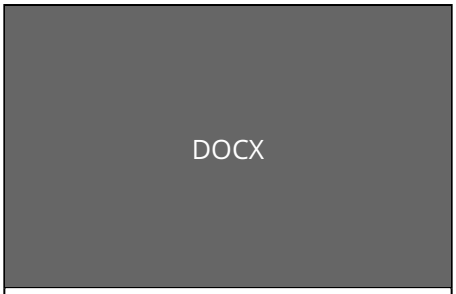

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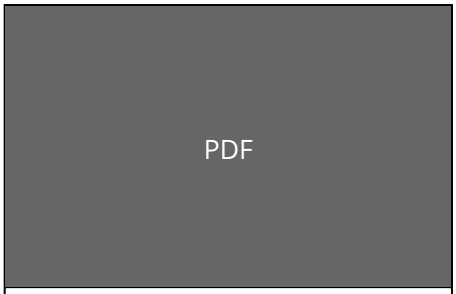

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