

CAREER TIPS

Finding creativity through an artistic playground

Mari-Liis Põldar is one of the head organisers of the Intergalactic Journey, a special series of music and art events, bringing together talented artists and musicians offering a playground for adults. A wholesome experience, it consists of music, art, games, dance etc, allowing it's crowd to express their creativity and inner child .



ENCATC: What is the story behind The Intergalactic Journey? Why did you want to start this?

Mari-Liis Põldar: It was 2015 when I had just arrived back to Estonia from my 1.5 year long travel. My best friend invited me to teach a yoga class in a secret festival, I was only told to "be ready for something special".

I was welcomed with an extraordinary scenery and atmosphere, it was something I had never seen before. The 3-day festival was held in a secret location, where DJs were playing the best music I had heard in Estonia, people were painting and making art, playing games. I could see from the first moment that everybody was enjoying themselves. What really caught my eye was that people were taking off their shoes when entering the venue, it was socks only! I have never been a fan of mainstream club culture, so this new environment really surprised me in a positive way.

The second evening I was laying down on the "dance floor", listening to an absolutely amazing set, I started

thinking: What if we redefine the concept of "a party" by making it a more wholesome experience – a playground-like event for adults, where they can express their creativity and inner child? That is how the idea for "Intergalactic Journey" was born. Two months later we held our first event at a yoga studio in the Old Town of Tallinn. It was a socks-only event. We provided paints and paper, board games, cards and also artists who were making body paintings. DJs were playing throughout the night, but they weren't in the spotlight. Creating this playground gave people a choice of how they wanted to experience their evening – they could enjoy music by dancing, sit down and play chess with their friend, paint or just lie down and think their own thoughts. Everybody could express themselves just how they wanted. The first event was a test-event with just 40 people, we received 100% positive feedback and it was clear that we had to keep on going. The next events have gradually grown from 250 to 500 participants.



ENCATC: What differentiates you from other creative companies in Estonia?

Mari-Liis Põldar: Comparing Intergalactic Journey with the overall club culture scene in Estonia, then one aspect is a strong concept. Intergalactic events are held twice a year and every event has a very special theme with lots of decorations, show acts and surprises. We choose our artists carefully and every event carries a special message.

A lot of our guests have said that they don't want to consume alcohol or any other drugs at our events, because they could miss out some important details of the evening. Whereas in clubs it's all about drinking and loud music.

The second aspect is that the crowd. Intergalactic Journey is an event with a strong niche, it attracts people with the same taste of music, values and lifestyles. We have received a lot of feedback about people feeling safe at our events - they don't need to keep an eye on their personal belongings, or some random people trying to hit on them on the dance floor.

Although, there are some similar events to ours. For example, Estonian Burners community (inspired by Burning Man in the USA) has similar events with their extraordinary concept and visual identity. So I guess we can call this an alternative party culture in Estonia.

ENCATC: What role is the audience playing at your events?

Mari-Liis Põldar: The audience is the most important parts of our event. One of our core principles is that we are not organising the event for them, but we are creating the experience together for ourselves. We as organisers create the space for the audience, but they are creating the experience. There is a difference between consuming an event and contributing to the event and for everybody else. People prepare their costumes, take musical instruments along to play with the DJ, they dance, they paint, they play - they all want to be a part of this community. We have received requests from our guests about joining the organisation team because they want to contribute more.

ENCATC: How do you communicate this festival if you don't have a website?

Mari-Liis Põldar: Our target group in Estonia is actually very small, because we have a strong niche. For each event, we create a closed social media event, where we invite people who have already been to our events. As we have been organising this event for over 5 years, we have managed to create an audience group, who either knows us (head organisers) or someone close to us. We also have a Facebook profile "Galaktikatevahelised Sündmused", if someone new wants to reach us. After accepting the friend request, we will send the invitation of the event to him/her. We find that word to mouth marketing is the most effective way to find audience for our events.

ENCATC: What are you going to do for this year's edition in light of the Covid-19 crisis?

Mari-Liis Põldar: We are planning to organise a small summer-edition in the end of August. I am aware that a lot of festivals are going hybrid, combining digital and physical presence. However, we decided that the hybrid version is not for us and thus we will create a very special event with just 100 spots in a special location. The head artist comes from Europe and is very well known in his field of music, which means that the ticket price is quite expensive. But the audience will have a unique and intimate experience, as we never compromise on the quality. Having a "super-unique" or "VIP-event" will hopefully raise the overall interest towards Intergalactic events, and next time when we organise a big event for everyone, we can be certain that the audience is still there.



ENCATC: Can you give us some background into your educational and professional experience that has led to where you are today leading The Intergalactic Journey?

Mari-Liis Põldar: To be honest, my career path has been a little unconventional. I have always been an action-person. When I was a little girl, my mom took me to different conferences, concerts and other kinds of events and I fell in love with the whole creative process – from the creative concept to realization. At some point I just knew that working together with professional producers and designers is something I want to do for my whole life. I started to organise an Intergalactic Journey before attending a university, but this led to the realization that I want to dedicate my life to the creative sector. Today I am to graduate from the Cultural Management curriculum from University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy, a member of ENCATC, which has led me to work as a project manager and producer in a live events agency.

ENCATC: What skills or personal attributes do you think you have that have helped you to run your company?

Mari-Liis Põldar: Courage and vision are two keywords. To start something entirely new, might not always be the easiest thing, so the courage to think big and try out crazy ideas has helped me to run the Intergalactic Journey.

Some of our event themes have been controversial. When we were organising an erotic art journey, some of our guests were doubting whether to come, because they did not feel open for that. But, what mattered was that it created a discussion that it made

people question and step (or think) out of their comfort zone, allowing themselves to grow by experiencing something new. The constant process and redefining their values is something that keeps me going.

ENCATC: What had you wished you had known before starting the company?

Mari-Liis Põldar: If I had to answer this question, I would say "good friends are not necessarily good business partners". However, I am very grateful for all the lessons learned and actually there is no such thing.

ENCATC: What have been the most difficult challenges you have encountered? How have you been able to overcome them?

Mari-Liis Põldar: The most difficult experience was organising our event in a spa. The spa had very strict rules and we had to build up the whole production in an hour and a half. This required very precise planning. We had a team of 20, who had their own personal schedules, with their exact tasks and timeline. It was very important that everybody stuck to their timetable and didn't go to help another team member, but unfortunately this happened and we had to postpone opening the doors for 30 minutes. This was the first time in 4 years when we could not stick to the overall event schedule.

ENCATC: How did you go about getting start-up funds and how did you use them to get your company up and running?

Mari-Liis Põldar: Intergalactic Journey is a niche event and based on private capital. Ticket sales are very important to keep us going. It is a constant challenge to offer interest to our exciting crowd and attract new ones. The key is to create strong narratives and try new things to surprise the crowd. Sometimes I feel I have to jump over my own shadow in order to come up with something completely new, but so far we have succeeded.

ENCATC: What advice would you give to students or early career professionals looking to start their own creative project?

Mari-Liis Põldar: Find your strengths! Distinguish what you are really good at and what you are passionate about. Next, find like-minded people to work with and try creating something original together. Have the courage and make a move – believe me, there is a crowd out there who is probably going to like what you are doing. You just have to find them.

ENCATC: What keeps you motivated and going?

Mari-Liis Põldar: Passion about creating art and my art is my event. As long as I have something to say with my art, I will keep on doing that. After 9 Intergalactic Journeys I still have this almost unbearable excitement before every event. Maybe one day when I won't organise it anymore, I will think about changing a career.



About Intergalactic Journey

Intergalactic Journey is a special series of music and art events, bringing together talented artists and musicians and a quality crowd. Each event is a playground for adults – a wholesome experience, consisting of music, art, games, dance etc, allowing it's crowd to express their creativity and inner child. Each event has a strong concept and visual identity, getting its inspiration from Burning Man and from other outstanding projects around the world. The project was brought to life in 2015 by two best friends – Mari-Liis Põldar and Henri Liiv who have been the head organisers of 9 Intergalactic events.



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