

2040 Looking Back



# Future Activism Interviews

This one-off publication is part of a 6-month project with ILGA Europe which looked at how the organisation has engaged with intersectional feminism. In addition to looking at past and present practices, I proposed a 'learning from the future' component because, while we tend to be overly focused on the past and present, learning can also come from exploring the gap between where we are and where we want to be.

Experimenting with the future is a muscle that we too rarely exercise, but one that can generate valuable insights, feedback and yes, even operational learning. In this case, the experiment was to gather signals from imagining what different futures and structures of LGBTQI+ movement work might look like if movement work fully reflected and modelled the intersectionality inherent within LGBTQI+ communities.

Staff at ILGA Europe connected with LGBTQI+ activists - with direct and personal experience of working with intersectional oppressions in mind - through the practice of 'speculative futures' interviews, set in the year 2040. This is the result.

This publication doesn't intend or aspire to present the future, but rather to present a snapshot and selection of futures without any demand that we fix on one. It's the act of multiple imaginings that matters. In the words of adrienne maree brown: "I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free."

Terri Beswick (Editor)

Strategist | Analyst | Facilitator

iklektik - the political practice

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The future "is not something to be given to be perceived by people, but is rather something to be created by them"  
Paulo Freire

"I found a place of sanctuary in "theorizing," in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently."  
bell hooks

"Remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within."  
Ruha Benjamin

"The thing about science fiction is, it isn't really about the future. It's about the present. But the future gives us great freedom of imagination."  
Ursula K. Le Guin

"The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary."  
Ursula K. Le Guin

"I believe that all organizing is science fiction - that we are shaping the future we long for and have not yet experienced."  
adrienne maree brown

All that you touch  
You Change.  
All that you Change  
Changes you.  
The only lasting truth  
is Change.  
Octavia E. Butler

"Anthropologists tell us that when the structure of a core myth begins to change, everything else about society changes around it, and fresh new possibilities open up that weren't even thinkable before. When myths fall apart, revolutions happen."  
Jason Hickel

"Anyone who tries to tell us they know the future is simply trying to own it... the only way to know the future is to make it"  
Margaret Heffernan

"I have a greater destiny than your oppression. And my destiny will take me beyond anything that your oppression can hold me from."  
adrienne maree brown





Alexei  
Marcicov

*Russian, elderly, gay citizen of the world.*

*At home in Tel-Aviv and Chisinau.*

*Age: 72... but feels 65*

*Enjoys: travelling and being with interesting people.*

### **1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?**

Meetings bring together representatives from different countries and organisations. But in order to spend less money, we gather in countries where it's cheaper. We gather everyone: lesbians, gays, transgender people and decide together how to create organisations, how to conduct trainings, etc. We have understandings and misunderstandings, but we work together. We discuss practices: who does what, what can be passed on to others. We share our work practices. These are truly democratic spaces where we work out tactics and discuss what's happening in our own organizations.

### **2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?**

We got better at understanding that we can work as much as we want and state

our points, but we also have to show ourselves as a force for action.

### **3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?**

Before, when the movement was more fragmented, people entered into confrontations, fighting for grants instead of joining forces. Now we come together to talk about how money is distributed. Not only from among the leadership, but also colleagues in organisations. Of course, questions arise. For example, why the salary of a leader in one organisation is bigger than another. But we think about standards of living, prices, etc. We discuss the effectiveness of the funds so not a single dollar, nor kopeck is lost. There's a feeling of collectiveness in discussions about finances and the distribution of finances.



#### 4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?

Looking back to the pandemic situation in the 2020s, life forced us to provide social care for people who found themselves in very difficult situations. Now we have become more specific in approaching each person, each service. For example, we run support group meetings for elderly gay people. We have social support for gay people over fifty living with disabilities. The way we worked before made it seem like we in the movement had nothing to do with the elderly. Very little money was spent on this group. Now we discuss health issues affecting the elderly, how to get rid of depression, how to train memory. We organise trips to the countryside and do a lot

“Success has come from uniting into larger groups, accumulating funds together.”

of different activities.

#### 5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?

Success has come from uniting into larger groups, accumulating funds together. Before, funders were giving ten thousand here or five thousand there in every country. A lot of money had no effect because organisations could only exist for a year and then die. They could barely start digging, and they were isolated. Today, we work in unions at the level of the state. It started during the pandemic of the 2020s when several organisations came together to work in coalition on the sexual health of LGBTI people. We each had funds, but we also had a council so we could do things together, like organising public events.

Ministries distribute funds to the larger group in accordance with agreed indicators, such as the number of people served, or serving people with certain needs. I.e. the distribution of finances and material resources is fairer.

We still have supervisory bodies. And we haven't been able to get away

from having policies for finance and for the procurement of goods. These are material services and material services always require clear accounting and reporting. But in these larger groups, the feeling of responsibility is very high. Not only within the group, but also outside. There's a feeling of accountability.

#### 6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?

Twenty years ago, I was involved in a five-year project, PRECIS, involving seven countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine. I got to know the life and culture of other organisations. The Caucasus was a completely different area. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova have completely different traditions and sometimes we came

**Born in 1950 in a small village in the Russian Federation into a family of peasants and went through military service in the missile forces in the Republic of Belarus. In 1982, he graduated from the Chisinau State University as a journalist, and then obtained another qualification as a political party and administration leader at the Kyiv Higher School of the Party. Worked as chief editor of print media, including the newspaper Argumenty i Fakty in Moldova. In 1982, he founded the Information Center GENDERDOC-M and had been the chairman of the center for 18 years. From 2006 to 2011, he supervised activities in the countries of the Caucasus in a regional LGBT rights project PRECIS. In 2002, he formed a support group for third-age MSM, and continue to be its leader to this day. In 2018, he founded the Caring Heart award for human rights defenders fighting for LGBT rights.**

across things that seemed impossible to understand. But working on this project helped me realise that the creation of coalitions, platforms and regional associations was the project of the future. And it has been. Over the past two decades, we see the evidence that working in conjunction has made us stronger, more solid, more efficient, more purposeful, and more economical.

“These are truly democratic spaces where we work out tactics and discuss what's happening in our own organisations.”



# Anton Macintosh

Trans activist in happy gay partnership.  
Designer of the social environment. At home  
in St Petersburg. Age: 42... and feels it.  
Enjoys: people and the beauty of this world.

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?

There is less internalised stigma. Less homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, etc. More self-awareness in people, in the community. People live openly, openly accept each other, accept their own diversity and the diversity of others. Because there is less internalised stigma, there is less hostility inside the community. Twenty years ago, there was the 'right' way to be a transgender person, the 'right' way to be homosexual, which is in fact internalised transphobia and homophobia. Now there's less of this. Sexual orientation, gender identity and transgender are no longer something special. It's just the way things are. Of course, we're still a little separate, like all subcultures are. The circumstances were lucky. Within the last 5 years, I've seen this shift. The pendulum could easily have swung back to the radical right again. We could have

been thrown back into very conservative patriarchal times where trans people were oppressed again. One minute left till the nuclear Doom's Day. But it shows that the official Russian state discourse of homophobia, transphobia, whatever-phobic, goes against reality.

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

The COVID pandemic of the 2020s made everyone collaborate with unpredictable people. I remember back in 2018 we did a panel about trans inclusive international standards of care at a psychiatric hospital that we'd been cooperating with for a long time. Some people were hissing at us. Three years later during COVID, one of those hissing doctors called to ask me to organise a symposium on transgender health. I don't know what that pandemic did! I think it showed us some crazy collaborations and I don't think you can

“Communities needed to help themselves, grow themselves and strengthen themselves. Who else could do it?”

undo this sort of experience. When the situation got worse, we saw collaboration grow tighter and when the situation got better, the collaboration just continued.

For public communication, television and other media channels are open to us. We have more access and more channels to communicate and get messages out. And we have stronger laws that limit propaganda. It was so difficult to communicate when you had to label it 18+ or when groups were being shut down or targeted by the foreign agents legislation. In some ways, Russia looks more like the West twenty years ago, with the Pride events, the adverts in Pride Month with a same-sex couple and transgender people. But in other ways, we've taken another path.

### **3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?**

There's only been slight changes, with some more specialised sources of support like special funds that give money only to trans groups. They've brought and maintained balance. But even though the World Health Organization wanted to include trans people already twenty years ago, no one wanted to give money to trans groups. The biggest funds went to HIV-services, including gay-oriented ones, because HIV was seen as a socially significant disease. But for more specific, less privileged groups it's always been difficult. So it's been about the diversification of the resources. There are those who were quicker to adjust, to find support through crowd-funding, socially-oriented businesses, and community organisations that are maintained by the community itself. These groups have been more sustainable. We've needed a large and strong community of motivated allies, but communities needed to help themselves, grow themselves and strengthen themselves. Who else could do it?

### **4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?**

Even back in 2021 this was not a real problem within the trans community. At some point before, there had been divisions inside the trans community, between transfeminines, transmusculines, non-binary people, trans sex workers, trans migrants, and so on. But we got to a mutual understanding. When it comes to civil society in general and intersectionality, support in consortia really created a strong foundation for intersectional work. For example, we have been part of a consortium of organisations working on various aspects of access to health. While we had our distinct component in the overall programme - the trans health work in St Petersburg, we were interacting with all other organisations and communities in the structure. There were cross-groups everywhere: trans sex workers, trans people who use drugs, and so on. Even the fact that we were interacting greatly increased our understanding of intersectionality and inclusiveness. This has just become the usual process. It was impossible to stop it. That's how

intersectionality increased.

### **5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?**

Firstly and secondly, civil society organisations today are no longer mostly managed by heterosexual cis men. It used to feel so patriarchal. That would be simply indecent now. Consequently, there's just much more inclusiveness in civil society agendas, not only in their collaborations, but also within their own strategies.

### **6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?**

“Even the fact that we were interacting greatly increased our understanding of intersectionality and inclusiveness.”



I'm a trans activist, so I speak from this position. We made the trans topic trendy. It's cool to be a trans ally in Russia now. We've honed our messages very specifically! Decades ago, we started offering learning courses for doctors and giving out qualification certificates. But very quickly, we shifted to saying: "If you are a good doctor, if you are professional, you know how to work with transgender people. If you don't know, then you are underqualified".

Now specialists come to our courses not

so much because of certificates, but in order to gain knowledge about working with trans people. When we launched an online discussion club for doctors on trans health issues called, "I just need to ask" and we easily got 70 participation requests in the first month. It was popular. If you know how to work with trans people, it means you're a good doctor. If you know how to work with trans people, it means you're a good psychologist. You're sensitive. You're up-to-date with the latest developments in your profession. You're on trend. This is how we won.

*"The COVID pandemic of the 2020s made everyone collaborate with unexpected people."*

**Anton Macintosh is the coordinator of Trans Initiative Group T-Action, trainer, facilitator, leader of support groups, narrative practitioner.**



Sarajevo Pride 2019, Bosnia and Herzegovina first pride. Photo: BiH Pride March



# Antonella Lerca Duda

Transgender roma woman, sex worker and intersectional person. Human rights activist.

At home: in Romania and Italy.

Age: 30... but feels 16. Enjoys: a good cup of tea and equality.

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI movements come together?

Well, governments are providing more money for art and cultural events. More public events are organised by governments and supported by public money. Finally, we have the money, support and protection for our movements, meetings, and conferences.

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

We have the Ten Commandments on inclusion, stopping discrimination around gender, protecting those who are vulnerable. Every organisation and every employer has to respect the ten commandments. It's made news reporting more truthful, and scandal and sensational news articles are rare. Hate speech in the public sphere is almost gone. Some conservatives still use hate speech, but they

are the minority. We are now the majority now!

We have a lot of queer politicians in high level roles. There's a lobby who've stood with us and fought with us. They come from the movement so they have a much better understanding of our rights.

And at global level, there's now an LGBTI commission paid for by states. It's an elected group of queer activists who meet with the most vulnerable communities and meet monthly to discuss current developments and situations globally.

## 3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?

Activism has become more optimistic now that the state provides mental health support, financial support, and housing for activists. In the past, so many activists gave up the fight because of a lack of

support. But the state took from the rich and gave to the poor... like Robin Hood... and now every activist has a home, free healthcare, and psychological support. It started with a testing phase, giving some individual activists money for a few months to see if it worked. And it did.

So now we have more direct access to monthly funding. We have more freedom to organise our work because we don't

have to fill in ten forms. No more  
**“Activism has become more optimistic now that the state provides mental health support, financial support, and housing for activists.”**

academic grant applications. Governments like to see and hear about the activities in the press, but you're not expected to change the world!

Organisations still exist, but now they are more like a certification service for activ-

ists. Like how people used to access social services back in the 2020s. The office for LGBTI assistance offers everything in one place: legal assistance, housing support. It's much easier to access.

#### **4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?**

The movement has also grown bigger because it's intersectional. We introduced LGBTI+ history in all schools. Sex education from young to higher levels. More activists went into teaching, in schools and universities. There are classes, trainings, on LGBTI+ vulnerability. And more support for parenting in general because when you decide to be a parent, you have access to counselling all the way through until

your child reaches majority. In school and in jobs, there are programmes to support psychological health throughout your life. All this mental health support means we don't have taboos around difficult topics anymore in society, there's less stigma.

#### **5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?**

In the past, we let too many mistakes go, but now we're a lot more radical. Recruitment processes need to be in line with the Ten Commandments. And in general, it's become more difficult to operate if you aren't embracing intersectionality. It even affects your taxes. You pay less tax if you are proactively LGBTI-friendly or work with intersectionality in mind. And if you aren't really complying in practice, you risk being closed down.

**“More activists went into teaching, in schools and universities.”**

**Antonella Lerca Duda is the first transgender woman candidate for a political position in Bucharest, Romania. In 2020, she published the book “Sex work is work: a transgender story”. She's a board member of TGEU.**

#### **6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?**

I think eradicating hate speech and initiating the Ten Commandments law was really the first step. At a certain point, the high number of victims of hate speech forced a change. People revolted. Enough was enough. Queer people were out on the streets starting a revolution.

Since then, things like having the LGBTI Commission has enabled us to have a role in reviewing and auditing political party platforms. And it's made it easier to put pressure on conservative politicians.





# Betel Mabille

Black queer femme

At home: nowhere

Age: 29

Enjoys: tea and their cat

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI movements come together?

Compared to the 2020s, there is so much more visibility of LGBTI organisations, groups, and collectives outside big cities, even in rural areas like where I'm from. People don't need to travel or migrate anymore to be in a place where they can meet and socialise with people who share interests and identity experiences. We've also seen more space for topics like mental health or parenthood, for example. It's now recognised that people within the LGBTI population suffer from additional stress and discrimination. But back then we lacked the space to talk about it. They were too few and less visible. Now more LGBTI parents come to events with kids. A lot of work has been done on inclusion in the broad sense. So now, when you go into a space as a minority – whether that's racial identity, gender identity, ability status, etc. – you

feel included from the start. I was missing that because you used to see the reproduction of racist patterns, whether at parties, in the workplace or in LGBTI organisations.

Another big shift was when we re-appropriated events like Pride. We need festive events too but it had a history as moments of political struggle. I didn't go to pride marches for a long time because I didn't want to be marching with people who I knew were against what I stood for. More and more groups had started to step away. It felt like there was a kind of abandonment by the larger organisations, which was sad at the time. I'm happy that the political struggle is back at the forefront.

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

Communications reflect people in all

their diversity and are accessible to as many people as possible, for example to people living with a disability. Representation was and still is at the core of our struggles. It doesn't solve homophobia and transphobia, but it's crucial to be more consistent in representing alternative models that diverge from 'the norm' and allowing multiple representations to co-exist.

We're very strong in our messaging and our demands. At some point things were evolving really slowly, there was a huge inertia and so I started to focus on re-inforcing our communities instead of waiting for decision-makers to decide if

**"I really believe that reclaiming power at the level of our communities made a difference. We focused on lobbying at the local political level, on issues of health, education, and access to services."**

someone could be a parent or not, or someone could have

this or that surgery. We were still debating people's basic human rights with policymakers. I really believe that reclaiming power at the level of our communities made a difference. Instead of going to distant political institutions which were remote from people and which take a lot of time to change, we focused on lobbying at the local political level, on issues of health, education, and access to services. We didn't shy away. I sometimes felt there was a temptation to tone down our messaging in order to reach a larger audience. But the public needed to see the real-life experiences of LGBTI people. And if we didn't do it, who would have?

### **3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?**

The LGBT movement has finally come to terms with the fact that there is a diversity and plurality of movements, political strategies and opinions. I think it's a really positive evolution that groups now have real political autonomy and the movement is OK with the fact that there are minority groups that do need

to come together among themselves to think together and strategise.

A lot of work also happened in terms of looking at the distribution of power through an intersectional lens. Power imbalances became more visible and tangible. There was an overall reflection on socio-economic, capitalist and productivity questions, looking at how we spend our funding, fair remuneration, labour, wellbeing at work, and working conditions. But also critical decisions - from recruitment to work priorities - started being reviewed using intersectionality as an analytical tool. There was an increased understanding that by meeting the needs of people most at the margin, you'll meet the needs of people at the centre too.

### **4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?**

A shift happened twenty years ago when we started looking beyond exclusively LGBTI-related issues. There was a sense that many other social justice issues

**"We became intersectional when we stopped limiting ourselves to the LGBTI prism and broadened the scope to truly represent the diversity within the LGBTI population."**

impacted LGBTI people's lives but organisations didn't necessarily know how to approach this work. It took time to build knowledge and expertise internally before being able to take a position and be credible on certain topics publicly. We were missing expertise, for example on climate. And we had to build a lot of bridges and to pilot work in completely new areas where the connection with LGBTI communities was not obvious at first, such as prison conditions. So we became intersectional when we stopped limiting ourselves to the LGBTI prism and broadened the scope to truly represent the diversity within the LGBTI population.

### **5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years**



**ago?**

Twenty years ago, when I was giving intersectionality training to organisations, my main message to people was that they need to dissect every aspect of their work. And now I see organisations really questioning things they were taking for granted. The turning point was when we stopped putting words like 'intersectionality' everywhere when in fact it was not happening, and we needed to own that reality.

What has changed since is that the distribution of resources has become fairer. Intersectional practices have existed for decades but for a long time groups didn't have the same amount of money. They were smaller, less visible. The spaces in which I used to go twenty years ago were spaces where there were almost exclusively for queer and racialised people but you really had to look for those! It's been positive to see larger organisations engaging more with smaller groups and collectives where there is a lot of energy, creativity, and boundaries are being pushed. This is in the form of conversations, partnerships or offering

**Betel Mabile is a black queer activist, anti-racism educator and decolonising feminist. Her work surrounds the impact of racism, intersectionality, LGBTQI+ people of color and afrofeminism. Photo credit: Lydie Nesvadba**

help – while knowing and accepting that help might not necessarily be welcomed. There are different streams of work that happen in parallel. Larger organisations with more resources cover several fronts while smaller groups and collectives make strategic and political choices.

## **6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?**

The real impact came from being transparent about this work, giving visibility to it, communicating externally about where we were coming from, what we were trying to achieve, the results, and not being shy about talking about the things that weren't perfect. Organisations that have been transparent about the challenges that they faced and how they overcame them have been so much more inspiring than the organisations that tried to present themselves as if everything was perfect. Visibility can't only be about the things that go well! Being honest and humble about what needed to be improved was - and is - a good way to lead by example.



Protests after METU Pride in Ankara, 2019. Credit: ODTÜ LGBTQI+ Dayanışması





# Diana

Friend, family member and partner.

At home: in Bishkek and Moscow

Age: 32... but feels 25

Enjoys: Her work and travelling

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?

Everything is online now. There's been some improvements... especially with visual effects! But also just on reaching agreement and cooperating together, which has been the basis of everything. To be honest, twenty years ago I didn't feel much support from the global community. I lived in Central Asia, then in Russia, and it felt very fragmented. As a trans woman, I faced misunderstanding within the community, then with some feminists. On top of this, I was a migrant in a foreign country, which made it even more difficult to find a job or rent an apartment.

Once we started to set more common goals globally, such as eradicating HIV, patriarchy, goals on equal access to education - things that were relevant for everyone, then everyone benefited. We fight

on a global scale. People finally understand that cooperation was the path to progress. So now we often come together with different people to look for common ground, not only within 'our group.'

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

So many LGBTI people were sitting in the closet twenty years ago, so the situation wasn't really changing. As more people began to come out, we cooperated and united. There are many more LGBTI celebrities, activists and athletes. Of course, sometimes their influence is not always useful! But in terms of visibility, this helped. The more people speaking out and being proud, the harder it was for politicians to create laws that prohibited this. No one is surprised anymore to see someone with green hair who looks femme but uses the pronoun "he". Who we are - this is now the norm. I don't have

to answer awkward questions anymore. Most people just see the person and that's it, they don't think about it. The labels are gone.

### **3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?**

It's simple. Just ask people what they want, what their primary needs are, where to spend the money. Not based on what seems necessary by someone sitting in an office. Twenty years ago, whoever had the resources dictated the rules. Also, because we fought for policies to cover everyone's primary needs for survival and security, we've achieved some degree of equality in society. Not only among LGBTI people, but for everyone. Some issues have disappeared. There's less pressure now that we're less critically dependent on finances. There's no longer the same need to compete with each other. We have more of a common vision.

### **4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?**

We are just better at understanding that

we all have specific needs. It doesn't mean that our needs are more important or their needs are more important. It's just that everyone has their own needs. And at the same time, we see the points of contact that unite us.

In Uzbekistan, in Turkmenistan some were fighting to stop the criminalisation of sodomy. In Russia, laws on gay propaganda, deportation of HIV-positive migrants, and the criminalisation of sex work. I think before, perhaps some people could only see their own problems. We were sometimes demanding equality and solidarity for ourselves, but failing to do the same for people in similar situations; pulling a blanket in our direction, like: "You have no problems. Things are worse for us." This was always very strange to me. But having fought hard to cover basic needs for all, now it's easier to be understanding and accepting. Now, we look for the commonalities in our problems.

### **5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?**

People are assessed more sensibly in recruitment, not based on random facts,

such as gender, age or nationality, but really taking into account the qualities that the profession requires. We haven't eliminated hierarchies or moved to completely horizontal structures, but it's different from how it was twenty years ago where labels got in the way of common sense. Because everyone has access to educational opportunities, people from remote areas, people from villages, everyone.

There are fewer barriers to work. Twenty years ago organisations looking for an employee only had access to the limited group of people who enjoyed access to education. Now the pool of potential workers has grown and consequently, jobs are going to competent people, regardless of disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity. So we haven't needed to use quotas. I wish there was no need for laws against discrimination, but we still haven't reached the point where there is no need for anti-discrimination legislation.

At the moment, we're more concerned about robot technologies and comput-

**Diana is a trans\*activist from Kyrgyzstan. She has worked at LGBT organisations Labris, Kyrgyz Indigo and TAIS Plus and she's part of the management committee of SWAN and ECOM. She lives in Moscow and works at the PSYOZ Foundation in the Red Gate project as an equality consultant on HIV, sexually transmitted infections, trans\*transitions and socialization of trans\*people, sex workers issues and migration.**

er automation replacing people at work. This has brought other problems, and we are starting to see unemployment and the gap between rich and poor increasing again.

### **6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?**

Well, feminism is prevailing and everyone finally understands what feminism is! Before, we had too much gender. I would still like the concept of male and female, of gender, to disappear. But in general, we've created successes by leading by personal example.

**“Who we are - this is now the norm. I don't have to answer awkward questions anymore.”**

...Why do we professionalise events so much that we end up creating obstacles to human connection?

...Why do we focus communications on conveying information instead of inspiring recognition and resonance?

...Why are resources so hard to access for those working toward social justice and so easy to access for those working against it?

...What stops us from dedicating time and resources to collaborating with others working on social justice?

...Why don't we stop to question if the processes that we reproduce 'in the name of professionalism' are actually serving the purpose?

...Why do we spend time thinking about 'the activities we have to do' instead of the minds we need to change?





# Dina Bajrektarevic

Non-binary lesbian

At home: in Tuzla and Banja Luka

Age: 24... and feels it

Enjoys: their team from Tuzla Open Center  
and their oldest dog, Pia

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?

We've stopped doing events that focused only on injustice against one group. We show up at each others' rallies, we call in our partners, people with disabilities to occupy public space against LGBTI+ oppression. When rallies on independent living happen, others from LGBTI+ communities show up. We incorporate each other in all of our movements fighting for social justice.

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

In 2021, we were excluding many people from campaigning and lobbying. Now we've learned new languages that reach more people. Naming the communities within the community has been really important. Being a woman in the LGBTI+ community versus being a LGBTI+ wom-

an with a disability is a different experience. Now there is truly more diversity, more life experiences reflected within our lobbying. And more perspectives have been better at bringing out more 'truth'. And when we engage in public campaigns, everyone sees that there is more than a single homogenous 'community'!

## 3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?

We know that people have different needs. In 2021, we didn't think as much about imbalances of power. As we've learned more about disproportionate power, we've been able to plan our resources with more fairness. We're talking more and checking on different needs. Diversity of experience has been essential for better resource planning. Before, our resources were channeled in one direction. Now the whole process of

thinking about resources has completely changed.

#### **4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?**

Major systems of oppressions are inter-linked. But back in 2021, we used to see LGBTI+ as 'one' movement. But communities within the community were being left behind. Now we start by building from the problems faced in multiple communities. We see that there is more to us than just being LGBTI. Different movements recognise that they are similar, but not the same. They are coming at the same underlying issues, just from different angles.

We see that some experiences of being disabled and the issues faced by lesbians overlap. For example, both face barriers to marriage: because same-sex marriage is illegal in many contexts and because people with disabilities might not be viewed as legally 'competent' to get married. Likewise, LGBTI people aren't seen as 'competent' enough to be a parent, just like people with disabilities are assumed not to be 'competent' parents.

Now we look at the right to marry or be a parent and analyse how this is denied in different ways. Our battles are very intertwined. We see that we're making more progress than when we used to focus on single identities. Social justice is key. It helps a lot in advocacy.

#### **5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?**

Institutions pumped up the diversity in their teams, which has contributed to better problem-solving. People with more varied life experiences bring different approaches and problem-solving skills. It helps us to solve new problems as they get recognised. Before in Bosnia when you used to report discrimination, you could only report on the basis of one type of discrimination. Now the laws have changed to recognise discrimination because of intersectional identities. Another thing that's changed is that we just weren't thinking about accessibility as much twenty years ago. Now our needs are taken into account. Institutions and NGOs do this automatically.

#### **6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more ef-**

#### **fective at influencing the practices of others?**

It's finally the default and not the exception. We used to work only towards one group and ended up perpetuating discrimination and injustices against other groups. As a white woman who's a lesbian with disabilities, those are two marginalised identities. But before, I didn't know the different experiences of lesbian women of colour. Now it's easier to talk and advocate together. And our multiple lenses inform our experiences and views on the world.

Intersectionality is really prioritised in our approach to problem-solving. For example, gay cis-men automatically know that they have to advocate for others, using their privilege as cis-men. They are just as vocal about issues like gendered pay gaps, and they know how to use that privileged aspect of their identity to advocate in support of outcomes that we all need.

**Dina lives in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina where she's working as program manager at Tuzla Open Center. Actively dealing with human rights issues of marginalised and vulnerable groups. Intersectionality is strongly represented in her work. She emphasises the importance of networking and practicing solidarity with other marginalised groups.**

“Different movements recognise that they are similar, but not the same. They are coming at the same underlying issues, just from different angles.”



# Jovan Dzoli Ulicevic

Visionary, trans man of color, Montenegrin, Balkan, activist, feminist and ecologist

At home: anywhere in Montenegro

Age: 30... sometimes feels 5, sometimes 50, but rarely 30

Passionate about possibilities, ideas, connections and love of all kinds

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI movements come together?

Events stopped being boring! After COVID-19 at the start of the 2020s, you could feel that people were craving a different energy, raw emotion, connection. Now we have events that move you. No more 20-minute speeches prepared by someone who you'll never meet properly. We were speaking to people based on their status, because we were afraid of losing the middle-ground. There were a lot of 'allies' that didn't do anything for us. Yet, we kept thinking that maybe they'd be useful at some point. So we've learned to organise for our own enjoyment and empowerment, not just for training or learning. There's so many inspiring queer artists out there and now we get to see their art when we meet. We needed to learn how to play. We've done work on healing in the past 20 years and it was playfulness that helped us heal.

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

Two things were killing us. One was only focusing on representation. It's important, but we were focusing on representation in a way that had become tokenism. And yet at the same time, a lack of representation was also killing us. For example, as trans people, we never used to be included in the discussion of gender equality, but now we are. Now we look at LGBTI movement work differently. We look at it through the lenses of class, economics, feminism, decolonial lenses. We've stopped using human rights language. Because it wasn't resonating. Not with the movement. Not with the public. And not with politicians.

Our public campaigns have become more focused on changing the narrative. We do more context-driven campaigning



linked to research on the context and the audience. The anti-gender movement of the 2020s campaigned in ways that connected emotionally. Now we're better at campaigning with emotion, not just for education.

Along with outward facing campaigns, we're also doing more campaigning within the community to close the gap that people were feeling between activists and the wider community. And we've shifted our values not to idealise only those who are outspoken.

### **3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?**

We invest in collective care. We allocate resources for play and importantly, for rest. Before, we were spending more time on admin, e.g. getting three proposals for every procurement contract, than actually doing the work. For decades, this kind of admin was draining all the capacity out of the movement. Project-based grants were literally killing us. Twenty years ago, many trans and intersex organisations in particular were facing a huge gap. There were funders like International Trans Fund, Astraea, and Mama Cash and we

needed these kinds of donors because while the EU would give big grants, as a small organisation you'd end up choosing 10k from Astraea over 150k from the EU. Meanwhile, the anti-gender movement had at least three times more funding. Imagine what we could have done with that kind of money!

Now that we have core grants I'm no longer working five or six weekends in a row. We've gained new donors, redistributed resources from those organisations who had a lot of the resources. And the way that our work is funded has changed. Donors have got more used to asking people: "What do you need? What is the most efficient thing to do in your local context?" Before, we were adjusting ourselves to donors and being forced into trying to solve problems that couldn't be solved by activism alone.

### **4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI movements?**

We've had to keep insisting that our story is interconnected with other stories. We knew that we needed alliances. We knew that we needed cis-feminists on board.

They had to understand that it was their struggle too. It's about accomplices not allies; someone who's willing to support us in the fight against oppression. I still want to see even more solidarity. But at least now we're less self-victimised. We're more empowered because power is a dispersed thing. Not just up and down. We all see how we're privileged in some ways and discriminated against in other ways.

### **5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?**

In the 2020s, there were a lot of debates around hierarchical / non-hierarchical organisations. We wanted to avoid informal hierarchies where power is still there, but just hidden. Formal hierarchies are at least visible. The bigger NGOs got, the more they functioned like corporations, which created distance. So at the moment, we're striving for some kind of hybrid. We're organised, but not like corporations.

Having multiple leaders to do the work

**After twenty years of lobbying donors - they've finally realised it's not necessary to have their logo and disclaimer on everything!**

with different kinds of skills has also really helped. Before, we had leaders who were multitasking even though it was unlikely we could be good at advocacy, media, managing an organisation, administration, and funding all at the same time. We were all collectively burning out. It had become the default state. It was overwhelming to work a full day and then need to go out and connect with others. If you end your day at 11pm, will you go to a protest? No. Now I have more time to spend connecting with others. And we've also shifted our perspective on work as not only sitting in an office. I can still be working when I'm in a bar and drinking alcohol and manage to accomplish valuable things.

And - after twenty years of lobbying donors - they've finally realised it's not necessary to have their logo and disclaimer

on everything!

**6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?**

We've shifted the narrative from activists as martyrs to leading by example. We've stopped using intersectionality, diversity and inclusion as just sexy words. But I think the biggest change came from just talking with people. And doing a lot of listening. I didn't feel that we were listen-

ing enough twenty years ago. The more we connect with people, the more basic human respect and dignity we have. For many decades wherever I went, whenever I spoke with someone, I was always the trans queer guy, and I was proud of that, but it was also a burden; the criminalisation, the stigma. We needed respect, we needed dignity and we weren't getting it. Now I can forget about being a trans queer guy sometimes and just be respected as me.

**Jovan Ulicevic is a trans activist of color based in Montenegro, active since 2011. He has been one of the founders of LGBTIQ Association Queer Montenegro, only trans-led organisation in Montenegro "Association Spectra", and an only trans-led organization in Balkans region "Trans Network Balkan". He is also a co-chair in TGEU Board. He has been involved in community mobilising, capacity building and mentoring of emerging trans activists and groups, advocacy and media. He is passionate about public speaking and campaigning.**



Sarajevo Pride 2019, Bosnia and Herzegovina first pride. Photo: BiH Pride March



# Henriette Dennis

*African lesbian, mother, migrant, art  
curator, activist, community worker,  
sports-lover*

*At home: in Vienna*

*Enjoys: her children, music and feeding her  
curiosity*

## **1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?**

We've taken away selfish interests in organising events. It's not only organisations that organise events. We don't just "include" the interests of smaller organisations; migrant organisations, small organisations are doing the planning. And we no longer do things to satisfy the donors. We have events where we socialise and make things work. We don't do so much talking. We prioritise the mental health of activists. We talk about the need to stay healthy. And parties help us stay healthy. We socialise more and people trust each other because they see each other's non-working side.

## **2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?**

Activism isn't just about being trendy anymore. We embody it. For me, activism

has always been just existing. As a black lesbian from Africa, what I do, what I talk like, the friends I have is activism. That's the change. It's no longer just another hashtag.

## **3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?**

It still comes down to funding. But we have richer LGBTI people so we have money for projects. We don't need to beg funders from outside. White supremacy culture used to call us marginalised when we have historically been the majority. We just do things differently. For example ILGA has become a water company that puts the money back into food, housing services for LGBTI communities. We've been able to decentralise funding and make resources available. We have enough resources to go around so we don't have to lure people in to fund us.



Funders in the past were very 'now, now, now' while the activists were trying to build a future. Now we don't have to work according to what they want. We don't have to abide by their rules. There are enough pots to make different funds accessible to enough people. And we trust them. They know what they

“Funders in the past were very ‘now, now, now’ while the activists were trying to build a future.”

#### 4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI movements?

White people make it their responsibility to educate themselves on “marginalised” problems. They do their research first and don't come to me to teach them what the problems are. So we're able to have more honest conversations. And we've stopped using some countries as a standard for other countries and prioritising

what's happening in some countries above others. Even during the height of Black Lives Matter in the 2010s and 20s, there were no protests for all the black LGBTI people who were dying in Nigeria every year. Did their lives not matter?

#### 5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?

We don't start from the idea that you should 'treat people how you would want to be treated'. We treat people how they want to be treated. Even twenty years ago, organisations were organised based on the needs and fantasies of the funders. The white saviourism in the LGTBI movement was killing us. And more radical organisations couldn't get enough funding.

We are implementing more authentically now. Not running through a checklist. Not reshaping what people have asked for. Before, if asked for bandages, people would tell me I needed plasters. Now we just give people exactly what they are asking for. We've learned to trust people more.

#### 6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?

Every voice is heard. We've learned to really listen and not just listen for the solutions.

“We don't start from the idea that you should ‘treat people how you would want to be treated’. We treat people how they want to be treated.”

The founder and Executive Director of Afro Rainbow Austria, Henrie Dennis, is a Nigerian born human rights activist who continuously works on improving the lives and realities of LGBTIQ+ communities in Africa as a continent, Austria and the diaspora. She's currently a Curative Director in Wienwoche, an art and activist festival. She is also the co-Chair of Planet10, a redistribution network that encourages sharing privileges and an Advisory Board Member for Frida, consultancy on asylum and aliens law.



# Ingrid Thunem

Non-binary, gender fluid, lesbian, disabled,  
activist and sexuality advisor  
in disability rights

At home: in Tromsø in Northern Norway

Age: 32... but feels 25

Enjoys: swimming, drinking coffee and cats

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?

A big change happened when the UN put queer issues among their priority areas and especially the intersection of queerness and disability. This changed things globally. A human rights framework made it much easier to connect with other groups. Events became more inclusive. If you're at an event and you look around and only see people like yourself then something is wrong.

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

New digital tools helped enormously. Comms systems are accessible, affordable and easy to use for everyone. Everyone is much more conscious of human rights and politicians have understood this and responded.

## 3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?

Political leaders and decision makers are more diverse. It's easier to have a diversity of projects when those taking decisions reflect a diversity of experiences. And the UN making queerness and disability a priority area has made it easier to access funding.

Organisations are working together more to get the message across, not

*"It's easier to have a diversity of projects when those taking decisions reflect a diversity of experiences."*

just specifically affected groups, but a truly intersectional approach.

**4** How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?

The main change was recognising that all social justice issues boiled down to human rights. Once we acknowledged that, it was much easier to stand together. It's not a pie where different groups can have access to a certain amount of rights. You have to go back to the core centre of being human first. When we make progress in one area, we make progress for all. And we are better at realising that you always need to check who is missing, what barriers you're putting up because of your own privileges. This isn't a minority issue, it's a human rights issue.

**5** What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?

**"It has helped that administrations are no longer centrally-located in big cities. Now everything is digital, the administration can be wherever people are."**

Accessibility is better. It has helped that administrations are no longer centrally-located in big cities. Now everything is digital, the administration can be wherever people are.

Also, we see the effect of the implementation of 'nothing about us without us'. If you are discussing a topic you need to have someone who is affected. If they are unable to recruit someone, organisations know they need to ask themselves what's wrong, what barriers they are creating. If businesses don't respect social rights, they find it harder to find partnerships for cooperation. It's more typical to work with businesses that are inclusive.

Before we talked about LGBTI rights but we didn't always think of the rest. Now we have understood that all areas are interconnected. Intersectionality is a fact. We understand that every decision we

make matters because we are working together with other people who are more diverse instead of remaining in our circle.

**6** In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?

We looked at our privileges. Led by example. You need to show it, otherwise telling is not effective. We started a process that took 20 years. But if you don't start to observe your own privileges and to change, it's impossible to persuade others to do it. Change starts with you.

**"If you don't start to observe your own privileges and to change, it's impossible to persuade others to do it."**

**"Change starts with you."**

**Ingrid grew up in a small town in Norway. They uses a wheelchair and a vent due to a type of muscular dystrophy. They have a master degree from the Artic University of Tromsø in Sexual violence and disability. The last 15 years have they worked as an activist in sexuality and disability in various ways. Currently they is the leader in the Norwegian disabled LGBTQIA+ organisation "Skeivt Nettverk NHF".**





# Yasmin Yusuf

Activist black woman  
At home: in Helsinki and London  
Age: 32...and feels it  
Enjoys friends and travelling

## 1 What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?

In 2021, the pandemic year forced us to be more online, for big celebrations, for events, for global PRIDE. This lowered the threshold for more people to participate. And that fundamentally changed how we come together from that point on. It took away many barriers, including financial, but also other barriers to participation. I remember we had more young people from smaller cities participating that year, who only then had the possibility to be active as part of the LGBTI community. Technology aside, the whole movement is now much better at making accessibility and safety a cornerstone of gathering. It's no longer up to someone to remember to bring this to the table. It just happens.

## 2 How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points

### heard?

It's my own personal view, but I think in some ways, the struggle you saw in Poland and in Hungary in the 2020s ignited a new commitment. It ignited people in a way that we hadn't seen for a long time. Because we could see that the rights we'd fought for could be so easily taken away. So there was something clear to fight for. Like with the environment, a lot of people in Europe didn't really feel it was real until they started to see images of burning homes in countries like Greece back in the 2020s. So in some ways, the fact that problems and struggles were happening more visibly in Europe made it easier to get people to act.

## 3 How do we direct resources to better reflect the collective but diverse needs of movement work compared to the 20s and 30s?

Until the 2020s, the status quo in Finland was a lot of public funding and private

sector funding. Now we have more diverse funding streams. We had to blow up the idea of just companies or just public sector funding. In some cases, this has meant more private individual funders, and in other cases, making our organisations smaller because we didn't have to use so many resources to manage the funding-related requirements. It's freed more time and emotional space to do our core work.

Another big change has been the availability of funding. In the Finnish context, we were always fighting for the same resources. When you had to struggle just to do the core work, you couldn't concentrate and collaborate in the way you'd

have wanted to. It also made it difficult to

“Now it's more natural to share spaces with other movements, on the environment, migration, borders, etc. It's all linked together. We don't really have a choice.”

be in solidarity with each other because everyone was in competition for resources. That also led some larger organisations to take some issues for themselves that weren't really theirs to take. Now there's more - and more diverse - funding available, you see those same organisations playing a mentoring and support role for smaller organisations. The basics are covered so we're in a better position to support each other.

In some ways, 2040 just resembles the status quo enjoyed by some mainstream organisations back in 2021. What I mean is that being publicly funded, and paid for the contributions you make meant some of us were able to be secure in the work. Now most organisations have what only some organisations had back in 2021.

#### 4 How did we get better at mobilising with others on social justice issues that - even twenty years ago in 2021 - were treated as disconnected from LGBTI+ movements?

I work with asylum seekers and refugees in the Finnish context. In the 2020s, the first marriage equality

act was still seen as the biggest milestone for LGBTI rights.

Yet, when you think about it, the focus was still on the rights of the most privileged groups within LGBTI communities, which meant mostly white, cis people. People just assumed that the act would serve everyone, but it didn't. Asylum seekers and refugees in same-sex couples didn't benefit from this when they applied for family reunification.

So when we would say “We won” - who was the “We”? Personally, I think LGBTI movements didn't want to touch certain issues that affected certain groups because things like the struggle around migration - which was a really hot potato back then - would take away from LGBTI activism. I don't know how we did it. I guess the strategies of movements like Black Lives Matter in the late 2010s and 2020s changed a lot of different movements. Maybe we learned from there that we didn't need to reinvent the wheel. The more of us we are, the more we have an effect.

Now it's more natural to share spaces

“Voicing criticism out loud isn't such a big deal. We're naturally in a place where people feel safe to identify problems without the feeling of internal struggle or the risk of personal cost.”

with other movements, on the environment, migration, borders etc. We've seen more environmentally-displaced people. It's all linked together. We don't really have a choice. If we don't take all the aspects into consideration, there can't be social justice. We don't have the luxury to treat these kinds of conversations separately anymore.

#### 5 What positive changes have you seen in civil society organisations and institutions compared with 20 years ago?

We're much more comfortable having public discussions about difficult topics. For example, analysing who gets funding, who makes decisions about hiring, who's



doing the brainstorming, who's participating in research, whose image is used, who's invited (and not) when certain topics are discussed in policy-making, politics and within organisations. Voicing criticism out loud isn't such a big deal. We're finally in a place where people feel safe to identify problems without the feeling of internal struggle or the risk of personal cost. It's a big change from the outdated idea of diversity as an after-thought. Now it's a no-brainer. We don't need that one person on the team is working on diversity anymore.

**6 In the past 20 years, what has made us more persuasive or more effective at influencing the practices of others?**

My personal view is that it's more about the generational shift. Certain things have just become the norm. They're no longer questioned. For example, when I came to Finland in 1994, I was part of the first group of Black people of colour. So by the 2020s, there were more young Black people who identified as Finnish. And so naturally, the idea of what 'Finnish-ness' was also changed. Likewise in the past twenty, thirty years, as the world has become less and less binary, so naturally self-identification has become the norm. It's no longer even a conversation. The young activists today look back at the 2020s and think: "Really? Were you really demonstrating against this shit?"

**Yasmin Yusuf in an activist, black woman.**



Paris Pride 2021. Photo: Norbu Gyachung



**1** What has changed about how people and groups from across LGBTI+ movements come together?

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**2** How have we got better at getting the message out and getting our points heard?

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