

2022

# **TIME PERSPECTIVES: LONG-TERM BENEFITS FROM THE CULTURE - AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP**

**GUIDELINES FOR CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS IN THEIR WORK  
WITH AUDIENCES**

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An Intercultura Consult Project



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# INTRODUCTION

"*Time Perspectives*" 2021 - 2022 was a micro-incubator project on renewing and deepening the relationship of cultural organisations with their audiences. Four Bulgarian organisations partnered in it, each of them implementing cultural programs outside large urban centres. They worked with the support of mentors in four main phases:

**1.**

Analysis of team, resources, program and activities towards audiences;

**2.**

Setting individual goals and defining the target audience group for each organisation in this project;

**3.**

Prototyping specific experimental activities for reaching the target audiences and implementing them within the project;

**4.**

Impact assessment of the conducted experiment.

This publication presents key results and conclusions from the project activities.

## PROJECT PARTNERS:



**"HOUSE OF HUMOUR  
AND SATIRE"  
Gabrovo**

**CC\* „PROSVETA  
- 1881“**



**village of  
Kostenets**

**CC\* „ELIN PELIN  
1896“**



**Elin Pelin**



**NATURAL SCIENCE  
MUSEUM  
village of Cherni  
Osam**

The four organisations are deeply involved with their local communities. They work actively for the preservation and promotion of local intangible cultural heritage as well as natural heritage. They also carry out diverse initiatives related to sustaining traditions, promoting contemporary art and creativity, delivering environmental and educational activities including various topics of public interest.

\*CC stands for Community Centre – a form of cultural organisation in Bulgaria, known as 'chitalishte'.

# CONTEXT

Since 2020 there has been an aggressive and urgent adaptation process imposed on all cultural organisations. This process has affected both their programming and audience relationships. This transformation has required extra efforts on behalf of the cultural operators so that both their **in situ** and their **digital environments** serve them well in maintaining existing relationships or attracting new audiences for events and productions.

The new reality, although challenging and stressful, has raised awareness of the great importance that connecting with the public and making use of emerging opportunities have for them. This has resulted in positive and profound changes that have affected the work of organisations and their teams. **Access** to cultural content and events has also **improved for audiences - both in scope and quality.**

The need for change in the approach towards the audiences has been equally important for organisations of different calibres and geographical areas. The way it has affected cultural operators in large urban centres is, however, different compared to the context of smaller settlements. In addition, organisations depending on structural funding, and those of the independent cultural sector have different specific needs. This determines the large diversity of new approaches organisations have undertaken in the past two years to connect with their audiences.

In the following pages, you will learn about the stages of building an audience strategy and the most common challenges that all types of cultural organisations may encounter along the way. Aspects discussed include: assessment of organisational capacity, and significant factors from the organisation's local environment.

This publication is a summary of more detailed guidelines published in Bulgarian.

# SUMMARY OF FACTORS DETERMINING AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

This summary presents **the main factors that determine success in audience development strategies** based on the four cases of the project partners.

# AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY FACTORS

These factors were elaborated based on information collected from the partnering organisations through interviews, data and materials provided by them as well as from the results of the experiments they conducted within the project.

Information is consolidated and presented here as the average of the collected answers on a scale from 1 to 10.

## CAPACITY

insufficient team size



lack of skills



motivation



## LOCAL CONTEXT

relations with local government



competition with other organisations



acceptance of new activities by the local community



## NEEDS

skills development and / or team expansion



strategic and detailed planning



improvement in the financial planning model and in the financial flexibility



## RESOURCES

material base condition



effective use of materials and communication channels



sustainable partnership network



\* Additional funding sources



## GOALS

clarity and attainability of the set goals;  
team engagement with them;  
reasonable success indicators and deadlines



## RESULTS

target audience engagement and participation in the planned activities



new content with a potential for long-term vitality



new partnerships with a potential to grow



\* Sales of branded materials (t-shirts, tote bags, other); renting space; financing on a project base or through sponsorship, etc.

# GUIDELINES FOR CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

Based on experience from the project, three of the factors that influence the success of cultural organisations in the development and management of their audience relations, are:

- 1) the ability of the organisation's team to fully engage with the activities and processes involved;
- 2) the resources available to the organisation that can be utilised in audience engagement;
- 3) understanding and working with the context in which the organisation operates.

The moment when a given cultural organisation becomes aware and recognises the need to master these factors is pivotal for the development and implementation of a good plan for audience engagement.



# CAPACITY

Several main challenges stood out in the analysis of the partnering organisations in terms of the qualities of the team and its ability to work on activities and processes related to audience development:

- Need of a specialist in the team whose main function is communication and audience engagement; *or*
- Need of skills for communicating content and objectives in the digital or physical environment;
- The work motivation of the team towards routine activities and meeting new expectations is another important factor. Their positive or negative attitude affects the commitment and motivation of the people in the team to work on achieving the new goals which the organisation has set for itself.

## A Note for the Team Leader:

For the team leader, it is important to make an effort to **communicate clearly with the team and include other members early on in the process when planning the activities for audience engagement**. These efforts must continue throughout the process.

The leader should consult the team on their ideas and experiences and make sure the people in it understand the necessity for change as well as the intended effect of the activities: the impact on the organisation as well as on the team members themselves.

# RESOURCES

In building a plan for audience development, it is important to assess all resources. The team (human resources) discussed above forms only one of these assets of the organisation. Other resources to be reassessed are: the material and technological base, the communication channels, and the finance and business resources.

**The key goal of this (re)assessment** is not to check on the current state of affairs but to establish whether existing resources are being used effectively and efficiently. This implies also considering **specific needs** that have not been addressed before.

**The material base and technology** should be actively used for events and creative production. Their existence should be tangible to all audiences, to the partners of the organisation and to the institutions on which it depends for support.

**The communication channels:** in order to keep audiences engaged, both physical and digital channels should be utilised in the process, from the conceptual phase to 'the day after', when the event or project has already ended.



[Guidelines for addressing digital audiences](#)

**New finance and business instruments** should be actively pursued by the leaders of the organisation, so it could become more flexible and adaptable to constraints imposed by the local context, and improve its capacity, including that to develop new relations with the public.

# CONTEXT:

## EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE ORGANISATION

Every cultural organisation is deeply rooted in its context as determined by the following principles: geographic, moral-aesthetic, political, and economic. The organisation's existence often depends on external factors and this affects its development, including its relations with the public.

### **Geographic Location:**

To a great extent where an organisation is situated physically determines its access to audiences: local and visitors.

### **Moral-Aesthetic Aspect:**

This aspect relates to a normative preference of the public towards existing cultural offers. There may be an established idea within the organisation on what the public dispositions or 'taste' are and this may inhibit the cultural provider from taking a risk and presenting new forms and content.

### **Political Principle:**

Organisations often depend on the political will of local or national institutions which provide financial support or promote cultural initiatives. This 'dependence' may also obstruct collaboration between cultural organisations and promote competition among them.

### **Economic Principle:**

The fact that cultural organisations are dependent on the general economic development is an obvious one, however, the focus here is on the financing model. This determines to a great extent the capacity of an organisation to plan its activities in the long term and to be flexible when needed. In Bulgaria most of the institutions or subsidised organisations rely on instruments that are short-term - up to 12 months. In addition, political turmoil may delay their start and cause further problems in planning activities.

# SETTING GOALS AND RECOGNIZING SPECIFIC NEEDS IN THE AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The goals an organisation sets relate to its current objectives and needs. Defining goals and writing a detailed outline to achieve them is the first step of creating a plan of action. This approach applies to goals such as audience development.

A well-known approach is to set the so-called SMART goals\* which frame the desired results. Analysing the organisational resources and the current circumstances defining its activities and audiences is the cornerstone of adjusting to new needs. To determine them, one compares the current state and achievements to the future ones the organisation is striving for. What are the necessary means and steps to travel this path?

Possible paths may include training the team, hiring an additional team member or a provider of a particular service, accessing particular facilities and materials, etc. It is important for these means to be recognized and addressed in order for the organisation to succeed in its goals.

## PILOTING A MODEL FOR AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

To reach this stage of the process, the organisation should have analysed its resources and the contextual setting. It should have established its needs and set clear objectives in relation to groups of the public it strives to connect to. The project micro-incubator presented here, "Time Perspectives", validated this process. The cultural organisations partnering in the project used each of the above steps as a basis for developing a solution for reaching and engaging the target groups of audiences.

In the course of 2022, the focus on improving relations with the digital audiences remained and there were multiple incentives for organisations to adapt and transform cultural content for use in the digital environment. However, reaching and connecting with target groups locally, in the **in situ environment, remains vital both for the cultural organisations and for their audiences.** Of course, the visibility of results and activities in digital channels is always important for cultural organisations. This, however, should not be at the expense of the authentic - unmediated - in situ connection, especially considering the mission and function of cultural operators.

\* Objectives should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (i.e. SMART).



Addressing audiences in the digital environment - results from micro0incubation project "Reconnect"

In the "Time Perspectives" project, the partnering organisations and experts tested several models for developing and deepening the relationship with key groups of their audience:

**1. Collaboration with diverse partners**

- with tourist sites and organisations: for example, creating an event / product that combines cultural and natural experience in one offer;
- with schools and educational organisations at the local level;
- with local businesses: for example, offering rooms for rent for business events;

2. Using **thematic platforms with an option for pre-registration** for the publication of information about and schedules of experiences;

3. Conducting **practice-based and educational events**: workshops, lectures, presentations that complement the already existing program or exposition of the organisation;

4. Bringing in **external CCI professionals** to produce new content, branded products for sale, or curate an experience;

5. Engaging **new artists and events** in the organisation's program and activities;

6. Conducting **volunteer and internship programs**.

This list is not exhaustive, but it sets out the key directions for a strategic approach in working with audiences beneficial to the development of cultural organisations. As it is based on evidence from the direct experience of four different cultural organisations: museums and community centres in smaller settlements, it may be useful guidance for others.

# SUMMARY

Audience development activities are at the heart of the work and success of every cultural organisation. The factors that determine the success of an organisation in the creation of new content or services are the same that affect audience relations.

These activities must be approached strategically and take into account the current state of development of the organisation, its context, goals and needs. In order to succeed in setting new goals, the organisation - its team - would need motivation and resources, including dedicated funds and time dedicated to professional development.

Cultural organisations are in need of dedicated support that allows them to undertake any risk, including ones related to innovation. Incubation projects such as “Time Perspectives” presented here achieve a tangible result in a micro format and send a message for the possible achievements in larger and systematic efforts in the development of cultural organisations.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. [\*Reconnect: Cultural Content and Audiences in the Digital Environment\*](#), Petya Koleva, Milena Berbenkova, 2021
2. [\*Reconnect: incubating cultural offers for the digital audiences\*](#), Petya Koleva, Milena Berbenkova, 2021
3. [\*\(RE\)-Engaging Digital Audiences in The Cultural Sectors - Improving Audience Data\*](#), Voices of Culture
4. [\*Reconnect: Hybrid Approaches Engaging the Public Across Genres and Regions\*](#), Petya Koleva, Milena Berbenkova, Yulia Bardun



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