EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study on Audience Development - How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations

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"Audience Development. How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations"
is a study promoted and commissioned through an open call for tender by the European
Commission – Directorate-General For Education And Culture.

Partners: Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, Culture Action Europe, ECCOM Progetti s.r.l.,
Intercult

Experts: a group of additional experts in the field of Audience Development – with various
backgrounds and nationalities – contributed to the study.

Macarena Cuenca – Institute for Leisure Studies, University of Deusto (Spain)
Marcin Poprawski – AMU Culture Observatory, Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland)
Niels Righolt CKI – The Danish Centre for Arts and Interculture (Denmark)
Antonia Silvaggi – Melting Pro (Italy)
Iker Tolosa, Donostia – San Sebastian 2016 (Spain)
Anne Torreggiani & Jonathan Goodacre – The Audience Agency (UK)
Dea Vidovic, Kultura nova Foundation (Croatia)

Associate Partners: a group of relevant institutions, networks and entities associated and
committed to the project took part in the advisory board.

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Many thanks to all the Organisations which applied to the open call and to those who have
dedicated time for interviews

1. SUBJECT MATTER

Many culture makers have embraced the theme of Audience Development (AD); we all want audiences, preferably large and enthusiastic ones. But how can we demonstrate to our investors that we have taken the task seriously? How do we measure our efforts? Here, the key terms are: **cultural impact**; **immaterial indicators**; **shared knowledge; shared practice; people to people; citizen/visitor.**

What are the needs and the possible impact? What can public authorities, patrons, friends, sponsors and policymakers gain from a mapping of the Audience Engagement (AE) territory? Here, the key terms are: **creating conditions; making demands; challenging tradition.**

The study, carefully framed by the European Commission, can help guide in policy development, to create conditions for true AD.

It aims at:

- providing innovative approaches and methods in the area of AD to the European Commission;

- providing a basis for selection criteria in future calls for proposals framed by the Creative Europe Programme;

- equipping cultural leaders with developed means for making a convincing case, <u>within</u> an organisation, for a transition to an audience-centric approach;

- investigating common elements across the diverse European landscape, clear differences and potential peer-learning opportunities.

2. TASKS AND METHODOLOGY

Throughout the study the following tasks have been accomplished:

Task I – **Desk research**. It gave the consortium the foundation to work. Different approaches in the past have been referenced, re-inventing them to meet the special conditions of Europe approaching 2020. A glossary and a commented bibliography have been provided;

Task II - **Overview of praxis and creation of a catalogue**. An open call has been launched in order to gather examples of good practice in AD across Europe in different cultural sectors, and to analyse them in depth, focussing on small and medium-sized organisations. 87 initiatives have been analysed and a catalogue of 30 of them from 17 countries has been provided (chapter 3);

Task III - **Communication and dissemination**. This activity is still going on and it aims at disseminating the study to a broad spectrum of people, networks, governments and organisations. The Consortium is committed to see that last task completed, urgently and effectively, together with our partners, with the cultural organisations who engaged in the discussion, with the Commission and with local/national authorities throughout the EU.

Limitations of the study

The main limitations of this study are related to the call published to select the experiences: although the consortium put all its efforts to reach the whole EU area by promoting the call, the consortium struggled to detect case studies from some EU countries, achieving to cover 17 in the end. Due to the qualitative approach of this study, it's worth noticing that if countries are missing this doesn't mean that there are no interesting experiences there, but just that the consortium didn't reach them.

Other problems were related to the size of the organisations (when organisations were too small, it was more difficult to articulate strategies and organisational structure; some organisation were very advanced in AD, but too big to be part of this study) and to the criteria established to analyse the experiences (since the aim of the study was to find best practices, the criteria were possibly too sophisticated and narrow to detect good experiences that were possibly just at the beginning).

3. MAIN FINDINGS

The desk research and the case analysis confirmed that the link between artists and audiences is - at the roots - an immensely <u>local</u> phenomenon. Culture grows where people meet: in their neighbourhoods, in their cities, in their schools, at cultural centers often within a short distance of their homes.

The analysis of the different tools, methods and strategies that locally-based organisations are using to reach out to <u>wider</u>, <u>deeper</u> and <u>more diverse</u> relations with their audiences unveiled context-dependent strategies.

The interpretation models available to untangle such a variety had become both complicated and not always relevant. It was therefore decided to search for a non-academic, intuitive and user-friendly model that reflects the sincere need by many cultural organisations to re-evaluate their relationship with the audience. Starting from earlier literature and theory, the adopted methodology tries to integrate previous approaches, at the same time shifting the perspective from "users" to "participants". The study identified three main audience categories:

- **audience by habit.** People who regularly attend and/or participate in cultural activities, whose barriers to access are relatively easy to overcome. Different strategies can pursue further aims: audience education; attracting audiences of the same kind but not currently participating; taste cultivation to deepen current audience's cultural practices.

- **audience by choice.** People who participate less, or in an intermittent way for reasons of life stage, lack of specific interest, opportunities or financial resources. For this group, participation is not a habit. They may rarely attend a show, an exhibition or a concert, but they don't share any particular social or cultural disadvantage. They also might be audience by habit of other cultural experiences, but not of *yours*.

- **audience by surprise.** People hard to reach, maybe indifferent or even hostile, who do not participate in any cultural activity for a complex of reasons, also related to factors of social exclusion. For this group, participation would hardly happen without an intentional, programmed and targeted approach.

At the same time four Key Action Fields that represent the main assets for AD strategies have been identified. Far from being rigid categories, these instruments are the prevailing action assets (in practices as in rhetoric terms) for developing audience, although with huge crossover characteristics:

1. The **Place Factor** is especially significant when the cultural organisation has a geographical and architectural venue, a physical space, where the core of the activities takes place. This is the arena of confrontation between the audiences and the artists. The act of "invitation" to join the gathering, to repeat the experience, to become regular visitors defines specific engagement tools. Place also meant the will to move outside the usual settings, looking for unusual and unconventional places and extraordinary circumstances in order to renovate old liturgies, to encourage as many people as possible to take part and to make culture resonate with their daily life;

2. The **Digital Factor** is crucial to maintain relations with a visitor both before and after the cultural encounter; to engage with people not in our immediate territory; to share information, experiences, performances; to activate participative and creative processes; to provide tools for analysis of audience profiles;

3. **Building Capacity** is a necessary step for cultural organisations dealing with heritage, tradition and stable audiences. Audiences by Habit need to be met appropriately by staff (communicators, ticket vendors, artists), continuously adjusting to the tastes, concerns and needs of the citizen/visitor. Actions which empower the capacity of the staff also lead to **embedding** AD into the fabric of the organisation;

4. **Co-Creation** has been identified as a field of action for cultural organisations, with diverse motives. For those with a stable and habitual audience, the intention might be to deepen the experience for all parts, to actively transform the artwork <u>with</u> the audience. Other, community-oriented organisations may find co-creation and active participation as an opening and a prologue to a longer relationship.

These categories have been extended after the field research phase of this study, which added some key action field such as **Programming** (Offer innovation in terms of format, programming, language, theme, place) **Organisational change** and implications**, Use of Data**, **Collaboration and Partnership.**

Finally, besides the selected small and medium sized organisations, the selection process also revealed a consistent group of agencies/resource centers/platforms whose aim is to promote AD at different levels and to build capacity in order to reinforce thematic and territorial systems for tackling the main audience challenges. Although those agencies were outside the original "parameters" of the present study, the consortium considers them an interesting field of analysis that should be further investigated, since they can increase the speed and effectiveness of change at the local level.

4. THE GUIDE: TOOLS AND RULES

The desk research and the analysis of the selected experiences led the consortium to the delivery of a Guide, composed by two parts: one of tools for cultural organisations willing to undertake their path to put audience at the heart of their activities (GUIDE-PART 1); and one of recommendations (GUIDE-PART 2), addressing policy makers but considering also that production methods used by artists, companies, directors, even arts trade unions, must be brought into question to seriously engage with new and more sophisticated audiences.

4.1. The Guide/Part 1 - Tools of Audience Development/Engagement

Starting from the main planning tools already developed in the management area to tackle the AD challenge, the consortium focussed on 5 steps, meant to support organisations' reflections over the process of finding their own sustainable way to become audience-centred:

1. **Who are we? Who do we want to meet?** The starting point for every possible approach to Audience Development is to be very clear about who we are, what makes us special and for whom we want to make a difference.

2. **Balancing priorities: Audiences and you.** How far do you want to go to achieve your audience goals? Is it coherent with your values and with your cultural and artistic vision?

3. **Focusing, Listening and Understanding.** Once you have agreed upon the role of audience within your priorities and you have identified the segments you are willing to reach, it's time to focus on those you want to primarily work for/with.

4. **Am I able to do that?** Facing an audience challenge might be beyond your possibilities. Are you able to do it by yourself? Does your staff have all the necessary skills and knowledge? Is there any competence you can grab from outside the organisation?

5. **Figuring consequences.** What impact will this have on your organisation on the short/medium/long term? Can you afford it?

For each step examples of "useful mistakes" and of good practices ("others did") are provided. A self-assessment tool is also provided to support the process.

4.2. The Guide/Part 2 - Rules of Audience Development/Engagement

The consortium defined a cluster of 8 concrete recommendations for adapting cultural policy to an audience-centric approach:

1. **Raising awareness about the AD concept among the different cultural sectors and stakeholders.** AD interpretation varies significantly from a sectoral, geographical and institutional point of view and it is often polarised (synonym of marketing and an expression of a "missionary" agenda, paying attention to marginal and hard-to-reach audiences). It is important to raise awareness among cultural operators that AD is a long-term process that embraces the whole organisation and is about positioning the different kinds of audiences in a strategic perspective.

2. **Raising awareness about the importance of adopting an evidence-based approach to measure advancements in the area of AD.** Evidence-based policy-making represents a fundamental opportunity to build decisions upon a rational basis and to support the policy process in addressing strategies and priorities in the area of access and participation. It is important to analyse the systemic impact of these new approaches on the main participation performance indicators (both quantitative and qualitative) and to stimulate the use of data and comparable assessment tools.

3. ***Reinforce the links with the education area. Promote a better integration between the cultural sector and schooling system.*** In a medium-long term perspective art education can be considered as a key precondition for enabling positive environments where to experiment AD strategies at different levels of intervention.

4. **Building capacity related to AD and AE among cultural institutions and professionals*.*** Cultural organisations need to empower themselves through the revision of competences and skills that are required to design and implement new AD and AE projects and tools. Some skills and competences are particularly lacking: data analysis, marketing, participatory project management, mediation, digital and social media management, evaluation, team working and lateral thinking.

5. **Promote the importance of stimulating new models of active participation in the arts.** According to the 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (and with the recent recommendations and reports of the European Commission), active participation is considered as an inclusive concept that embraces "cultural practices that may involve consumption as well as activities that are undertaken within the community, reflecting quality of life, traditions and beliefs".

6. **Enable conditions to secure and uphold long-lasting processes and projects.** To be fully effective AD processes require medium-long term perspective, devotion, continuity, sedimentation of internal competences, risk-taking and financial coverage. It is, therefore important to create the conditions to guarantee continuity and secure these processes. One long term effective approach might be the implementation of AE Resource Centers, cooperative efforts that make cost-effective initiatives possible.

7. **Establish clear and realistic guidelines for artists and artistic directors at cultural institutions supported by public funding to adapt their programmes and objectives to a more audience-centric perspective.** Artistic leadership for publicly financed arts organizations must develop a greater sensitivity to the long term development goals of any society. At the same time, policy makers must give legitimacy to serious audience development.

8. **Prioritize cultural venues and initiatives that mix audiences, bringing diverse ethnic, age and social groups together for common experiences.** A

strong motivation for Audience Development is to open cultural experiences to wider participation. It is also clear that cultural institutions and their venues are unintentionally often designed for "traditional" audiences, and don't reflect the actual (social) environment and complexity of their societies.

The final section of the GUIDE-PART 2 provides suggestions to refining definitions and award criteria for evaluating projects within the framework of the Creative Europe Programme.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study has highlighted examples of both successful initiatives and constructive failures. It focuses on what cultural organisations have managed to do until now, concrete actions leading to measurable impacts. This is not naive. On the one hand, arts and culture organisations throughout Europe have turned to the art of encounter, the two-way street that a cultural experience contains and some of them do it very very well. On the other hand, culture is partly a testing ground for social development. Behind every fruitful audience relationship, there is a river of failed messages, mistaken identities and hopes lost in translation. These "failures" are our background, our reminders. The embryo to new approaches is often grounded in a sincere but unsatisfying attempt at shaking the boat.

The study makes reference to cases that underline or inform us about what has been done: they are intended to be inspirational, not models or preferred methods. Simply proof that cultural organisations all over Europe are hard at work, imagining ways to surprise and serve their audiences.

As the study comes to a close, it demonstrates that **a strong attention to AD can re-frame a role for culture in a rapidly changing social and political context**.

An altered perspective by cultural operators, policy makers and artists towards a citizen/visitor perspective can **trigger the change**, in the organisation, in the community, in the entire social structure.

When cultural organisations open themselves to audience impulses, it makes great demands on the staff, on the cultural leadership and ultimately on the budget. The study tries to offer advice on how one might best **manage the change**.

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