

Culture & Creativity

EU-Eastern Partnership Programme



INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Participatory model, change
of approaches to decision-making*



This Programme is funded
by the European Union

Introduction

The term “participatory governance” can be understood either as a process by which authority is released and empowerment ensured or as a process which allows for the adoption of management models whereby responsibility is shared and decisions are taken by communities rather than by individuals. In the wider sense, and within a cultural context, participation should be seen through a Web 2.0 perspective. This term was popularized by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty in 2004, and it refers to how web pages are being made and used. Web 2.0 represents a fundamental, cultural shift in user's behaviors, a transformation from content consumers to content co-creators and active participants. This shift has also laid a strong foundation for social media development. Liking, sharing, commenting, uploading content, writing blogs and creating vlogs are everyday activities for many of us. Having the possibility to participate in content creation, which is enabled to a large extent thanks to social media tools, is often taken for granted. Social media is in the core of cultural organizations and institutions' communication strategies. Many of these institutions and organisations are also developing audience development programs, which is an approach that places the audience at the heart of everything the organisation does - participatory governance included. In the introduced context of attention towards participation and its different forms, museums and private and public cultural institutions are not remaining silent. During the last twenty years, museums have radically changed. Below there is a short outline of the main features of new museum's approach towards participatory models:

- Visitor-oriented model
- Marketing departments and effective communication campaigns.
- New collection set-outs; more playful, entertaining, and appealing.
- New technological tools to enhance the visitor experience.
- New and interactive web sites, offering free resources and digital content, plus informal profiles on social networks.
- New spectacular buildings, with the function of urban landmarks, designed by famous architects.
- A variety of activities and structures, either culture-related or not, offered in the same building – the function of a new city square.

Museums are constantly redefining their functions. They are no longer a fancy warehouse where art objects are presented. Exhibitions are just a part of their activities and everything which is connected to it must be modern and engaging. Museums are no longer selling tickets, they are selling a unique, deeply involving experience. But cultural institution's audience-engaging strategies are only one side of the participatory coin. The other one, a far broader concept, is to involve cultural organisations along with their experience and knowledge about their audiences in participatory processes that are cross-sectoral orientated.

CASE 1

Coal Market (Targ Weglowy)

The City Culture Institute as the intermediary between City Council and inhabitants

Context

As decided by the City Council of Gdansk since June 2013, the Coal Market - a square located in the historical centre of the city - has been closed from road traffic. The initiative to rearrange the Coal Market was inspired by the series of newspaper articles devoted to the issue of public spaces in Polish cities. By that time, there were different cultural events taking place. But besides those occasional moments the Coal Market was just an empty, paved area. In order to change that situation, the City Culture Institute (CCI) asked the City Council to allow a consultation process among the city's inhabitants that would come forward with recommendations for further square development. The reason why CCI decided to initiate and coordinate this process was the lack of NGOs that were focusing on city space matters and at the same time had enough capacity to facilitate such complex activities. CCI had enough manpower, budget and knowledge to run the consultation process. Moreover, it had direct access to the city's decision makers. What is also worth underlining, is the fact that CCI never had to try to act as an NGO does and surprise city officials with propositions of what the square could be in the future. From the very beginning it was important for CCI that city officials were deeply and actively involved in the process.

As it is a strict city centre area, Coal Market should be designed for people.

— Opinion of the survey participant.

Facts & Figures

- A participatory model introduced by the CCI has changed City Council's approach of decision making regarding public urban spaces.
- Over 11 organizations and 2 local universities were involved in the process.
- During the project, 3 surveys consisting of 2000 respondents had been collected, 7 focus group interviews have been conducted, and 6 workshops and seminars with city inhabitants had been made.
- The city's inhabitants have regained a sense of influence on their surroundings.

The Challenge

The City Culture Institute decided to change the empty square by temporary rearrangement of the space and for 10 days (August 2013) invited different people related to the Coal Market to discuss and share opinions concerning potential functions of the square. Citizens and visitors were positive about changes made to the square. They gave different opinions and suggestions concerning potential functions of it. During that period, over 600 surveys had been collected.

We wanted to discuss not only the fact "how the Square should look like" but also its functionality and what we, the citizens, need it for. How we can in fact create the public space as its users. We wanted to come back to the correct order of making administrative or infrastructural decisions so they would result from a series of public consultations and research, not a post factum discussion.

— Aleksandra Szymanska, director of the City Culture Institute.

The entire citizen consultation process took place between August 2013 and March 2014. After the pilot survey in 2013, the consultation agenda has been arranged. Various actors such as Gdansk University of Technology, University of Gdansk, Academy of Fine Arts, NGO's, public libraries, theatres, cultural institutions and local newspapers were invited to be a part of the process.



Taking into account insights that have been already collected, experts focused on creating different scenarios to further the square's development. Among the discussion participants were architects, city planners, urban activists, artists, representatives of institutions that surrounded the Coal Market, as well as the NGO's activists. Within the collaboration of other cultural institutions and organisations like libraries, bookstores, theatres, cultural centres, student organisations, and cafes, the survey was filled out by 1,146 people, among which 94% were city inhabitants.

We hope that this newly designed space will meet the needs of our citizens and tourists and that the Coal Market will thrive every day of the spring and summer. Thanks to the CCI who consulted the citizens we now know how they want to spend their free time here, not just during the big events but everyday. The space that we prepared is aimed at a variety of activities. We count on the citizens to contribute. I encourage everyone to come, visit and use our new Coal Market.

— Paweł Adamowicz, president of Gdańsk.

During the realisation phase there was a number of challenges to be tackled by the CCI. Surprisingly, convincing inhabitants to be part of the consultation process was the easy part. According to the CCI director, Aleksandra Szymanska, the main concern was to meet the expectations of people that got involved in the process. The second most important challenge was to define who exactly was going to be the beneficiary of this new space. There were at least two groups that needed to be considered. The first group consisted of district inhabitants and people who worked there and run their business in areas located next to the Square. The second one was represented by tourists and district visitors. As it was already mentioned, the Coal Market was also a place that hosted different events like the annual St. Dominic's Fair, Christmas Fairs, and music concerts. That was another thing that had to be taken into account while planning a new role for the square. Dealing with such a complex place, trying to come up with a solution that combined all of those aspects and met all expectations was very challenging.

Results and Impacts

Each part of the public consultation process has been carefully documented. The final report as the result of this effort included detailed description of all actions that have been taken, research outcomes, and final recommendations. Facilitators of the project were satisfied with the feedback that they got from the inhabitants. In fact, many of the people engaged in this process are still monitoring the progress. Without a doubt the actions facilitated by the CCI brought new and fresh perspectives among different actors about how to design public spaces using the participatory process.

But there are still possible threats related to the already finished consultation process. The main actions have been done as of late 2014. As mentioned, City Council has declared that the implementation phase will start in the year 2017. This means that there is a significant interval between the time when the process has been launched and the time when it will be finished. This might be due to the fact that during the public consultation phase a lot of attention was given to the process itself and there was not enough questions raised concerning the implementation. Such prolongation can cause impatience and disappointment among people engaged in the process.

Summary

Most of the proposed ideas for the new square space are easily doable. They do not require spectacular and expensive infrastructure investments. Although, one of the most compelling recommendations that can be found in the report is the need for a new cultural organisation whose activity would be dedicated strictly to Coal Market's management. The culmination of the entire process was the City Council's declarations that the implementation phase will start in 2017 and that the report will become a guideline for an upcoming change.



CASE 2

Museomix

People make museums

Context

Museomix is an event that was invented and held for the first time in 2011 in France. Since then the initiative has gone global. Museomix is a community of creatives that meet together for three days and two nights during the international event in the heart of cultural institutions. The playground is the museum and its assets. The primary goal of the Museomix programme is to bring museums and creative society together. Museomix is part of a wider network which functions as a cultural co-creative laboratory, promoting the idea of an open, participative museum. Museomix is based on 5 principles for *"remixing the museum"*:

- Foster collaboration by creating transdisciplinary opportunities for new ideas and projects to emerge.
- Creating the conditions to experiment on and within museums - the museum as a laboratory.
- Bring new ideas to light - Museomix's experiments and meetups are organized so that new ideas are encouraged and pushed forward.
- Open access to experiment outcomes - sharing attitudes, knowledge and experiences.
- Participatory governance: promoting teamwork and independent thinking, combining the talents of different contributors.

Facts & Figures

- Since the project was started in 2011 over 50 museums from around the world have been engaged in this project.
- As the result of makeathons, 200 prototypes have been created and presented to the public.
- Each Museomix edition brings together approximately 800 participants.
- By being a part of the Museomix community museums can gain on different levels. Some of them are becoming more experimental and innovative by getting familiar with digital technologies and gaining some experience from mutual learning. But all of the project participants, thanks to the participatory model build new audiences.

The Challenge

During the three day event, creative teams around the world must create, in record time, new mediation tools and new approaches to challenge the current museum model and make the museum and/or its collection even more accessible. Museums are providing their space and collections to people from diverse backgrounds. By enabling a three day creative sprint, museums open themselves up further to new audiences. Besides creating a meeting platform for people from different communities, the Museomix initiative also creates a network of cultural institutions around the world and fosters collaboration among them.

Museomix aims to change the nature of the museum in terms of mediation and governance. Each Museomix is a unique experience, therefore it is not easy to account for its outcomes in general terms. Museums participate in it out of curiosity, without pre-defined objectives and with no commitment to deliver specific results or products. This is what differentiates Museomix from any other service provision or mediation activity, which aims to produce digital tools¹.

Results and Impacts

Makeathons are annual events held every year, usually in 6-7 museums simultaneously. Every edition has a theme around which the digital mediations are being developed. Thematic themes like "How do you bring the city museum to life?", "Participation of the public", "WI-FI? Please talk to me" are just examples of subjects for prototypes creation. Since 2011, when the project was initiated, almost 50 museums around the globe took part in the Museomix. More than 200 prototypes have been created, and every annual edition of the project gathered up to 800 participants. Makeathons bring together participants with different profiles to design and prototype innovative experiences using digital and new media. Teams of six work together to invent a prototype in the field of mediation that offers the public a new approach to a selected subject. These teams are made up of people interested in museums, among them mediators, designers, developers, graphic designers, communicators, artists, writers, and scientists. The aim is to invite those that are usually museum visitors, but not necessarily, to imagine all the solutions to a problem, inventing new forms of mediation and offering new relationships with the institution, thereby placing innovation at the core of the museum process.

¹ European Expert Network on Culture. Mapping of practices in the EU Member States on Participatory governance of cultural heritage to support the OMC working group under the same name (Work Plan for Culture 2015-2018)

Summary

Museomix is a project open for all. It welcomes museums from around the globe to become project partners as well as new members with diverse backgrounds. The project offers a creative cooperation based on inclusion - there are no barriers to entry and sharing - every prototype created in a frame of the project is free to use and copy. There are no predefined outcomes from being a part of the Museomix. For some museums it can be a change in the approach to the way they work, they can start to be more innovative in terms of engaging their audience in co-creation of their organization, some are getting more familiar with new technologies, while others gain from the collaboration and knowledge exchange. However, the overall purpose and the reason to be a part of the Museomix community is to redefine the role of the museum in the context of reaching new and diverse audiences by engaging them in participatory process.

Recommendations

When considering museum's participatory strategies it is important to fully understand the potential of this approach. Executive Director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Nina Simon, in her book 'The Participatory Museum', states that participatory experiences should be integrated as one of the many available for visitors. She also gathered five points, to illustrate why she believes that participation is better than other models in addressing audience dissatisfaction with the institution:

- Institutions are perceived as far from individual lives and thus irrelevant. By contrast, promoting participatory projects can give an audience the impression that their opinions and activities are taken into consideration.
- Museums are perceived as eternal and always the same, so it is not necessary to visit them more than once. However, if visitors are invited to take part into their activity, they will return many times.
- Institutions are seen as too authoritative and disconnected from contemporary issues and culture, but if museums open up to people and their interests, this idea will change.
- Museums are perceived as far from creativity, leaving little room for self-expression. By promoting participatory projects, however, visitors will be able to make and not just watch.
- Institutions are seen as restrictive places, where behaviour is submitted to rules and social activities are not contemplated, which - one more time - can change if museums open up to interpersonal dialogue.

Building on the potential of local cultural centers and institutions can be beneficial on many different levels. People who work there know their communities. Involving them in broader, often parallel social changing processes is beneficial for all. The case of City Cultural Centre from Gdansk and their involvement in a collective effort of designing a new vision for the city's public space is a great example of cross-sectoral collaboration.

However, while engaging in such processes there are a few things that need to be acknowledged:

- **Site specific.** Every public space has its own specifics, which are strongly correlated with its background. Therefore, a simple implementation of best practices that worked in one place to another is definitely not a good solution. Of course, it does not mean that good desk research of what already has been achieved in a space-making field cannot be inspiring.
- **The research.** It is crucial to know exactly what kind of public space we are dealing with. Who are the main actors, what are their behaviours and what sort of expectation do they have. Finally the best way to engage people in the process is to give them a sense that their voice is important and that their involvement can bring a change.
- **From planning to implementation.** Participatory projects in public spaces are very exciting and fun to coordinate. Depending on the number of actors they can last quite a long time. It is important to plan this process in detail and to know what kind of budget is going to be needed. It is crucial to follow the plan, stay on track, and in the end, simply deliver what was promised. It is natural that not all ideas can be implemented - this is why it should always be clear what can and cannot be done.
- **Alliances are important.** When you are designing such processes it is good to have people that can support you. Make sure that city officials are on your side and that they are introduced to the plan and updated on a regular basis. When you have a lack of capacity or competences look for help among your partners.

Additional Resources

The Coal Market

<http://targweglowy.ikm.gda.pl/en/>

The City Culture Institute

<http://www.ikm.gda.pl/en/>

Nina Simon "Participatory Museum"

<http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>

Museomix

<http://www.museomix.org/>