

## Funding and Business Models for the Arts

### Post-Seminar (Nov 6-8, 2017) Notes

#### 1. General observations.

- The participants of the seminar have been actively engaged and only a couple of participants have not stayed till the end of the workshop.
- Despite having various areas of arts and culture present, various organizational levels etc. there was no stratification of the participants cohort<sup>1</sup>.
- Intergenerational and interregional profiling of participants (by design or ad hoc) has been very beneficial for the workshop atmosphere, with participants of different age groups, and from different regions (small towns and Yerevan alike) actively involved in group discussions.
- One of the participants was attention seeking catching most of the discussions. However, we (the trainers group) have managed to balance her interventions without alienating her or others.
- There is a strong potential (both in terms of viable business models and committed individuals) for self-sustainable cultural businesses, i.e. social enterprises or just general cultural SMEs. Examples include traditional creative skills school, movement school / ballet school, Sevan Festival and linked tea house, cultural hub / coworking in Gyumri, etc. There was a palpable sense of ownership of these projects / project ideas.

#### 2. Lack of policy skills.

- The day 1 of the workshop was designed to bring participants to the policy level discussion (e.g. role of state in supporting cultural activities, concepts of public and private goods etc.) to dissect the notion of public funding for culture.
- The participants have struggled in high-level thinking in terms of why the state supports the culture. There is a strong sense of alienation from the traditional role the state plays in culture, and almost in general towards possible role of state, regional or local authorities.
- However, the participants have slowly grasped the concept and started a lively debate on what actually constitutes public good in culture and to what extent. It was clear there is a lack of similar discourse in the media, in the professional groups and the state policy level.
- Providing policy debates (public debates, round table discussions, expert talks etc.) formats for cultural managers in Armenia could stimulate the public debate and raise competences of CSOs and individual professionals. Such events could slowly grow into a loose policy platform that would be beneficial for the cultural sector in Armenia (policy capacity).

#### 3. Crowdfunding skills development.

- Most participants have either no experience or negative experience with crowdfunding tools. It was rather surprising, considering that cultural projects top crowdfunding platforms both in EU countries and Ukraine. There is lack of crowdfunding skills, i.e. campaign planning and management, target group (esp. beyond Armenian diaspora or Armenians) selection and outreach etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike some of the EU Culture and Creativity Programme training seminars that the author has been involved, i.e. one group of the participants was very experienced whilst the other saw participants with very basic knowledge and experience.

- Considering large Armenian diaspora and involvement of AGBU in the project, a dedicated crowdfunding school could be organized, perhaps in conjunction with matching funding for selecting campaigns (1 euro funded by a donor for every 1 euro raised through crowdfunding). Supporting Armenian projects with international appeal and tailored for international crowdfunding platforms (e.g. KissKissBankBank platform) is recommended, i.e. reaching beyond the traditional Armenian-only bias (notwithstanding AGBU recommended involvement). Linking with relevant EU projects (<https://www.crowdfunding4culture.eu/>) and leveraging their training curricula etc.
4. Follow-on CSO development opportunities.
- There is a perceived lack of networking platforms for arts and culture CSOs in Armenia, i.e. no recognized platforms or focal points for networking (forums, events etc.).
  - Bridge for CSOs project could organize public lectures or other low-key events (in terms of logistics and preparation), with informal networking after the events. A one-day or even an evening-only format is recommended. Another format - policy debates (see above). Such events would stimulate peer-to-peer networking and mutual support among the workshop participants.
  - Some of the participants are clearly leaning towards social enterprise model and thus might be of interest to EU4Business projects and events. Overall, cultural and creative industries could be one of the focus areas (verticals) of EU4Business programme in Armenia, esp. In conjunction with tourism and cultural heritage industries.
  - Following the workshop (de-briefing session), the partners discussed the possibility to organize a joint training sessions on certain skills for participants of sector-related workshops (arts and culture, environment etc.). Such workshops should be tailored to both organizational needs (e.g. strategic planning, project management) and individual needs (leadership, communication etc.). Without strong CSO leaders there could be no strong organizations. However, one leader could not maintain a sustainable CSO. Thus, a balanced approach is recommended.
5. Support for cultural and creative industries in Armenia.
- There is a strong business case (i.e. intervention logic) for public or international donors support for cultural and creative industries in Armenia.
  - Possible forms of support could include development of tourism-related cultural products by CSOs or Quangos / Gongos, thus supporting both cultural and creative industries and linking them with tourism development.
  - Re-design of houses of culture in rural communities and the regions could provide a venue for supporting cultural and creative industries through regional development projects. Soft projects (art interventions, training seminars for locals, etc.) could be linked with the hard projects for actual retrofitting and reconstruction of houses of culture. Such houses should be linked to the community engagement, tourism promotion and cultural heritage (esp. intangible) promotion. 2018 is a Year of Cultural Heritage in Europe, and thus an event or a policy debate could be organized to explore such policy instrument as relevant to Armenian context.

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