



Study on Audience Development

How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations

Glossary

Glossary

Access

"Access to Culture is an essential right of all citizens but becomes fundamental in the case of those with economic and social challenges such as young people and the elderly, people with disabilities and minority groups. Supranational institutions such as the European Union as well as its Member States have come a long way towards incorporating strong cultural normative practices and principles in their policy-making. However, there is a notable gap and a lack of political and public debate on and between principles and commitments, and everyday practices of fostering Access to Culture".

The public funded cultural sector has been traditionally considered as an exclusive environment: they are products of the establishment and authenticate the established or official values and image of a society in several ways, directly, by promoting and affirming the dominant values, and indirectly, by subordinating or rejecting alternate values. The problem of access is a crucial one, since it is not only related to physical, economic or geographical access but, and probably in a less visible way, to cultural access (see 'Barriers to access'). Accessibility involves taking into consideration all citizens in their diversity, the creation and carrying out of cultural policies, the creation and management of cultural venues - their programs and audience policies - and the products made by cultural industries.

Audience

Audience is a collective term that includes a variety of different and often opposing points of view: there are many terms used to describe the cultural audience (spectators, visitors, members, customers, users, consumers, participants, paying spectators, attendance, rarely people). Public funded cultural players usually consider audience in terms of "attendance", "viewers" or "visitors", as receivers who seals a pact and, more or less implicitly, are part of a community. As a result, for differentiation and negative, there is a block, far from monolithic, definitely larger and diverse, made up of those who "are not" part of that covenant (the so-called "non-public").

In this vision the concept of participation (and non-participation) is based on an essentially passive and reactive vision in which people can decide whether or not to experience cultural offer, but only within a rigid and standard mechanisms of consumption and experience.

If, on the contrary, we accept the concept of participation within the larger domain of everyday life and citizenship exercised with forms, voices and diverse social dynamics, the processes in place are characterized by a greater degree of leadership and involvement of people.

All models offer an interpretation of the public distribution based on the nature of the relationship with the cultural practice. Several researchers have theorized models based on the nature of the relationship between audience and cultural institutions.

Audience development

Here below a selection of relevant and interesting definitions from the “early stages” to the last conceptual achievements.

“The aim of Audience Development Arts Marketing practitioners is to bring an appropriate number of people, drawn from the widest possible range of social background, economic condition and age, into an appropriate form of contact with the artist and, in so doing, to arrive at the best financial outcome that is compatible with the achievement of that aim”
(Keith Diggle, 1984)

“Audience Development is about quantitatively and qualitatively targeting new sectors in innovative ways to broaden the arts audience base, then nurturing new attendees, along with existing audiences, to encourage them to grow with the organization” (Rogers, 1998)

“Audience development is a planned process which involves building a relationship between an individual and the arts. This takes time and cannot happen by itself. Arts organisations must work to develop these relationships” (Heather Maitland, 2000)

“The term Audience Development describes activity which is undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences, and to help arts organisations to develop on-going relationships with audiences. It can include aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care and distribution. ‘Audience’ encompasses attendees, visitors, readers, listeners, viewers, participants and learners”
(Grants for the Arts, Arts Council England, 2004)

“Audience development is a strategic, dynamic and interactive process of making the arts accessible. It aims to engage individuals and communities in experiencing, enjoying, participating in and valuing the arts through various means including arts marketing.”
(Australia Council, 2005. Support for the Arts Handbook.)

“...a planned, organisation-wide approach to extending the range and nature of relationships with the public, it helps a cultural organisation to achieve its mission, balancing social purpose, financial sustainability and creative ambitions” (The Audience Agency)

“Audience development is a continual, actively managed process in which an organisation encourages each attendee and potential attendee to develop confidence, knowledge, experience and engagement across the full breadth of the art form to meet his or her full potential, whilst meeting the organisation’s own artistic, social and financial objectives”
(Morris Hargreaves McIntyre)

“Is the active and deliberate process of creating meaningful, long-term connections between people and an art organisation. Strategic AD goes beyond increasing visitor numbers, aiming to build community ownership, participation, relationship with, and support for the organisation, its programme and its people” (B. Lipps, Theatron, 2015)

“Audience development is a strategic, dynamic and interactive process of making the arts widely accessible. It aims at engaging individuals and communities in experiencing, enjoying, participating in and valuing the arts through various means available today for cultural operators, from digital tools to volunteering, from co-creation to partnerships. Audience development can be understood in various ways, depending on its objectives and target groups:

- *increasing audiences (attracting audiences with the same socio-demographic profile as the current audience);*

- *deepening relationship with the audiences (enhancing the experience of the current audiences in relation to a cultural event and/or encouraging them to discover related or even non-related, more complex art forms, thus fostering loyalty and return visits);*
- *diversifying audiences (attracting people with a different socio-demographic profile to the current audiences, including people with no previous contact with the arts)". (EAC/08/2015 Tender specifications)*

All these definitions show how the concept evolved from an almost purely marketing-oriented approach to a more holistic and processual vision of AD as a multi-faceted means aimed at deepening, strengthening and widening the relationship between cultural institutions and different audiences.

The working group conforms itself to the Creative Europe definition of what AD is, and considers it a trigger for institutional, social and artistic/cultural changes.

Audience engagement

Audience engagement is an expression used in practice and literature in a very different and not codified way, like the many expressions that belong to the semantics of AD (audience building, audience participation, etc). In particular, it is used to highlight the dimensions of involvement that sounds less explicit in the concept of "development" and more mechanistic in that of "building".

Audience Engagement is considered by the working group as one of the two phases of the more purely operative Audience Development, that is the phase of **reach** (ways to get in touch with the audience) and the phase of **engage** (engagement actions based on relations and mutuality).

It is, therefore, a phase made up of heterogeneous and articulated processes, actions and organizational behaviours that may include activities and mediation devices; active involvement through workshops, educational activities, digital devices, intercultural approaches; public participation in the planning of cultural activities and creating expressive, artistic and creative content (co-curation, co-creation, active spectatorship); outreach.

Barriers to access

Traditionally, issues related to access have been associated with physical and financial barriers (indeed, such barriers are still among the main obstacles compromising the accessibility of heritage institutions, especially in the case of "disadvantaged" groups), while only recently greater attention has been devoted to more "intangible" kinds of barriers, such as sensory and cognitive barriers, cultural barriers (i.e. individual interests and life experiences), attitudinal (having to do with the institution's culture and overall atmosphere), technological barriers (e.g. the inadequate use of ICTs to facilitate accessibility to the institution's programmes), psychological barriers (e.g. the perception of cultural institutions as elitist places, targeting the well educated and sophisticated people; the refusal of specific forms of cultural expression, perceived as uninteresting or offensive; the low priority given to cultural participation).

Other barriers belong to the domain of policy making, such as:

- lack of recognition (mainly in terms of national policies) of the many roles that culture can play in relieving the social exclusion, and thus the lack of resources for the development of accessible cultural services;
- failure in balancing territorial and social unbalances, which represents one of the main factors of legitimacy of public intervention in the cultural field;
- deliberate choice to keep the “elitist” trait of some cultural offers;
- acknowledgement by many public bodies of the number of visits as the only key success indicator (and not, for instance, other indicators such as participatory planning and the active involvement of communities).

Impact indicators

The word "indicator" means a quantitative or qualitative variable able to synthetically represent a phenomenon and to summarize the trend; indicators need therefore to translate evaluation criteria into observable and measurable elements.

The impact indicators, in particular, concern the project outcomes and allow researchers to verify whether and to what extent the results led to the achievement of objectives. They express the impact that the project produces in broader sense on the organizations, on the development of art and culture, and on the communities.

The impact assessments will be considered in the analysis of case studies.

Participation

The 2009 UNESCO framework for cultural statistics (FCS) defines cultural participation as including: *"cultural practices that may involve consumption as well as activities that are undertaken within the community, reflecting quality of life, traditions and beliefs. It includes attendance at formal events, such as going to a movie or to a concert, as well as informal cultural action, such as participating in community cultural activities and amateur artistic productions or everyday activities like reading a book. Moreover, cultural participation covers both active and passive behavior. It includes the person who is listening to a concert and the person who practices music. The purpose of cultural participation surveys should be to assess overall participation levels, even though it may be difficult to distinguish active from passive behavior"*.

For strategies aimed at promoting social and cultural inclusion to be fully effective, it is necessary to combine access development policies with policies focused on participation (in decision-making, creative processes, meaning-making processes...), recognising audiences as active interlocutors to be involved through a range of practices going from the occasional consultation to “empowerment-lite” forms of engagement, from collaborative meaning-making to participatory planning.

In order to remove barriers to wider participation, cultural institutions can adopt a variety of strategies and practices which, as different as they may be, share the common goal of making institutions less self-referential, more rooted in the life of the local community, and more open to the needs of audiences and other stakeholders.

Representation

A further issue for cultural institutions to address when dealing with audiences is representation - or, more precisely, the misrepresentation or non-representation of specific groups and cultures/“subcultures” (for example in theatre programming,

museum collections and displays, books and services in libraries) which has historically led to the promotion of dominant social and cultural values and thereby, albeit indirectly, to the subordination and refusal of alternative values.

Social exclusion

In the last two decades, within the context of the political debate about poverty that took place in Europe, social exclusion has become a synonym of poverty. Even in the academic world, there is a debate concerning the definition of social exclusion and its relationship with the concept of poverty.

Social exclusion represents a broader term compared to poverty and it defines those people who, whether living in poverty or not, do not participate in the different systems of society: it refers to the lack or rupture of relationships between individuals and their families, friends, community, state.

These differences in the understanding of social exclusion are also due to different cultural traditions of the countries which are coping with the problem of defining first and then combating social exclusion.

Notwithstanding the conceptual differences that underpin our comprehension of social exclusion, there are some elements within this concept that are common to all its definitions and understandings. First of all, social exclusion *“represents the opposite of social integration. Secondly, it refers to both a state and a process and thirdly the concept is multi-dimensional, extending beyond traditional definitions of poverty and deprivation”*. Social exclusion can be considered as a state and/or a dynamic process which prevents an individual from participating in the social, political and economic systems of his/her country. These dimensions can easily overlap because of their inter-related nature.

At the end of the 90ies, a fourth system has been identified, within which exclusion may occur and, consequently, be combated: the cultural one. There are three fundamental issues which represent the way heritage (and particularly museums) acts as agents of social exclusion: access, representation and participation (see Glossary).

