Review of European Expert Network on Culture’s audience building and the future Creative Europe programme, 2012
Herzog, Christian; Fuchs, Mathias; Królikowski, Agata

Published in:
Cultural Trends

DOI:
10.1080/09548963.2013.819658

Publication date:
2013

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Review of European Expert Network on Culture’s Audience building and the future Creative Europe programme, 2012

Christian Potschka\textsuperscript{a}, Mathias Fuchs\textsuperscript{a} and Agata Królikowski\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} Centre for Digital Cultures (CDC), EU Innovation Incubator, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Scharnhorststraße 1, 21335 Lüneburg, Germany

The European Commission’s Creative Europe programme is due to replace the current programmes Culture, MEDIA and MEDIA Mundus in 2014, setting partly new priorities for supporting the European culture and creative sectors. In this context, the European Expert Network on Culture prepared a report on audience building across Europe, recommending that audience development should become a future assessment criteria for arts and cultural funding and that, for this purpose, a new European regulatory agency should be set up. It is noted that the report lives up to its objectives, though there are shortcomings. In particular, the evidence base is not sound and the sample of case studies does not appear representative. Notwithstanding, audience development will play a key role in the future Creative Europe programme.

**Keywords:** Creative Europe; audience building; audience development; European Expert Network on Culture (EENC); creative industries; cultural policy

**Introduction**

On 25 November 2011 the European Commission adopted its proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the Creative Europe programme. From 1 January 2014 onwards Creative Europe will bring under a single framework three, currently self-standing, programmes: Culture, MEDIA and MEDIA Mundus. The Creative Europe programme consists of three strands: a cross-sectoral strand, a Culture strand and a MEDIA strand. Its specific objectives are (a) to “support the capacity of the European cultural and creative sectors to operate transnationally”; (b) to “promote the transnational circulation of cultural and creative works and operators and reach new audiences in Europe and beyond”; (c) to “strengthen the financial capacity of the cultural and creative sectors”; and (d) to “support transnational policy cooperation in order to foster policy development, innovation, audience building and new business models” (European Commission 2011a, pp. 6-7). Audiences are mentioned twice in this. On the one hand, the programme aims to expand the audience reach of European cultural and creative works while, on the other, to foster audience building.
The report *Audience building and the future Creative Europe programme*, 79 pages in length, has been prepared to explore the role audience building could play in the Creative Europe programme. It was written between October 2011 and January 2012 by Anne Bamford, director of the Engine Room at Wimbledon College of Art, University of the Arts London, and Michael Wimmer, director of the Austrian consultancy Educult, on behalf of the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC). Following a public call by the Commission’s Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) the EENC was set up in December 2010 by the Interarts Foundation and Culture Action Europe. According to their mission statement, the EENC’s remit does not necessarily aim to “carry out primary research”, but to “provide expert advice to policymakers by synthesizing current research and relevant issues in a way which is useful for policy development.” When the EENC was assigned the task of preparing the report, DG EAC were already clear in their vision that audience building should play a prominent role in Creative Europe. The threefold objectives of the expertise are accordingly:

a) to present relevant trends and examples with regard to audience building in different cultural sectors,

b) to offer recommendations to European institutions on how to foster audience building within Creative Europe and
c) to determine if more detailed research into audience building should be commissioned. (EENC 2012, p. 7)

Implied in these aims are the following questions:

- How can a broader audience base be established for Creative Europe?
- How can the accessibility to and participation in Creative Europe be enhanced?
- Do audience development activities lead to a better public understanding of the intrinsic value of culture?
- Is there an optimal organizational framework and structure for audience development in Creative Europe? (EENC 2012, p. 7)

The report is structured in five parts. After a brief background section, which outlines the objectives of the study, provides for some definitions and describes the underlying methodology, part 2 stresses the importance of audience development in Europe. In part 3,
seven factors that influence quality audience building are outlined. Subsequently, part 4 introduces five areas in which the authors see a need for policy intervention. This is followed by a set of recommendations and 28 case studies.

**From audience building to audience development**

Early on in the background section the report’s authors provide a definition of audience building that is vital for the contents that follow. They conceive audience building narrowly as getting more people to attend cultural offers, distinguishing it from the more holistic concept of audience development. According to the definition of the Arts Council England, the latter describes activity which is undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences and to help arts organisations to develop ongoing relationships with audiences. [Audience development] can include aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care and distribution. (Arts Council England 2011, p. 2)

Audience development thus encompasses both “mainstream” activities (focus on traditional arts attenders) and “missionary” undertakings (focus on traditional non-attenders) (Hayes & Slater 2002; Kawashima 2000; Maitland 2000, pp. 9-10). In that the authors focus on the broader parameters of audience development in the EENC report, they diverge from the wording in the Commission’s original proposal on establishing the Creative Europe programme (European Commission 2011a) and the respective Impact Assessment (European Commission 2011b; Potschka 2013). Specifying the definition of Arts Council England, the authors perceive audience/user engagements and quality visitor experiences as important elements of audience development (EENC 2012, p. 8).

**Methodology and analysis**

The report’s authors collected quantitative and qualitative data by means of stakeholder and network mapping, document analysis, expert consideration, survey and telephone questionnaires, structured interviews and some site visits (EENC 2012, p. 8). They do not go into detail about primary data gathering and analysis. There is no mention of the number of interviews conducted nor do they reveal which documents were analysed by means of which methodology.
Overall, the EENC report is based on the “axiomatic assumption” (p. 9) that the number of visitors to traditional cultural institutions is decreasing considerably. Later on in the study, this assumption serves as a basis for the authors’ call to build audience development capacity for arts organizations. Given that the report lacks a thorough outline of its primary and secondary data base, one must assume that, in the majority of cases, data on audiences for this study (most likely measured through surveys) was provided by the institutions that feature in the case studies. However, due to the political economy of cultural funding, which usually means that institutional support is linked to visitor numbers, administrators of museums and theatres or organizers of cultural events, in many cases, tend to adjust or exaggerate visitor numbers (Kirchberg 1999, p. 251). For example, they give away tickets to students when shows or events do not attract sufficient paying audiences. This questions the credibility of the data base.

The EENC report relies heavily on a diverse sample of case studies, which were selected according to miscellaneous criteria such as different art sectors and arts disciplines and diverse geographical backgounds (EENC 2012, pp. 8-9). In total, 28 case studies from 12 different EU member states (out of 27) and Norway were conducted.⁠¹ Eight studies treat cases from the UK where audience development is particularly well established. Two out of four leading institutions in terms of audience development are, accordingly, Tate Modern (UK) and the National Theatre (UK), accompanied by Müpa (Hungary) and Moderna Museet (Sweden) (EENC 2012, p. 26). Five case studies deal with cultural institutions in Austria, three relate to Germany and Hungary. Another two case studies are devoted to Spain and Norway. France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Poland, Latvia, Slovakia and Luxembourg appear in only one case study each. Clearly, the objectives of the EENC report did not specify carrying out a representative study but, still, the overall choice of countries appears as unbalanced and random.

With regard to each case study, a table indicates the art sector in which the organization under study operates, its location, political context (for funding) and communications strategy. Apart from that, there are another three boxes in which the authors collect the information about whether the organizations facilitate and monitor active audience participation, audience segmentation and if they use digital/social media. With regard to the last category in 25 out of 28 cases the corresponding info box contains one single word: “Yes”. It is obvious that festivals and museums in the twenty-first century use digital technology in one way or another (Giaccardi 2012; Gillard 2000). How this is accomplished and what the implications are for content, audiences and society would have been much more
interesting and challenging questions, but which, however, partially exceed the outlined objectives.

**Factors for quality audience building and types of intervention**

Part 3 mentions seven factors for quality audience building: education; outreach and accessibility; partnerships between the arts and the educational sector; user engagement; audience segmentation; pricing; and geography. When outlining these points, the authors principally refer to examples from the case studies and it seems that the factors were mostly derived from the input of informants from the cultural institutions under study. Though the factors are well-chosen and reflect the current state of knowledge, the methodology used appears questionable and, overall, the study would have profited from a closer examination of the relevant research literature. Subsequently, partly foretelling the recommendations, in part 4, the EENC report lists five areas in which the authors see the need for action:

- the use of media and the communication of art and cultural offers,
- research and data on audience preferences,
- capacity building for arts organizations and artists (with the help of initiatives and centres to assist audience research, marketing, customer relationship management and technology applications),
- resources and funding, as well as
- structures and responsibilities.

**Recommendations**

The report contains three sets of recommendations, addressing, first, the European Commission, second, national, regional and local authorities and, third, national, regional and local authorities and cultural institutions. The recommendations to the Commission target the integration of an audience-building component in the Creative Europe programme, differentiating between policy-, funding- and research level. On the policy level, the authors call for a clearer vision, priorities and policy for audience development within Europe. On the funding level, they stress that audience development should become one of the assessment criteria for arts and cultural funding. On the research level, the authors note the importance of a better collection of data and statistics, suggesting the setting up of a central agency within Europe that would collate and interpret the data and recognize trends to enable better evidence-based policy-making (EENC 2012, p. 30).
In the second set of recommendations, addressing national, regional and local authorities, the authors suggest a review of government policies, rules, regulations and current practices to facilitate more outdoor and “low threshold” arts activities. It is recommended to conduct exemplary pilot projects on audience development in cultural institutions and to consider free admission to museums for certain groups of visitors such as young children.

The recommendations to national, regional and local authorities and to cultural institutions are to offer professional development and training to staff in charge of audience-development activities. Furthermore, the authors recommend the appointment of audience managers in cultural institutions and the strengthening of co-operation between cultural institutions and the tourism sector. Last, the authors point out the importance of more in-depth research recommending conducting a further, more detailed mapping study on audience development across Europe.

**Conclusion and outlook**

The three objectives of the EENC report were to present relevant audience-development trends, make recommendations to European institutions and to determine if a further mapping study should be conducted. These non-too-ambitious goals were achieved, though the credibility of the findings suffers from the heavy reliance on a non-representative sample of randomly-selected case studies. Another shortcoming is that the report provides many examples, which serve as a basis for the recommendations, while not clearly differentiating between micro- and macro-level. There is no mention of macro socio-demographic and economic changes that may affect arts audiences’ sizes, composition and (changing) values.

In making recommendations to national governments and authorities, the authors overstep their remit. So far, the European Commission has extensive powers in the area of competition policy regulation, whereas culture is first and foremost a policy field in which national competencies prevail. In this light, the call for a central agency within Europe, charged with collating and interpreting audience development information to identify trends in data, appears as an attempt to increase EU prerogatives at the expense of national sovereignty. However, the EENC report does not provide sound empirical evidence that convincingly proves the need for another bureaucratic European body at a time when national governments are constrained by budgetary discipline in their room to manoeuvre. The British in particular are not inclined to accept a continuously-increasing EU budget and, following British demands, during the EU budget summit on 7/8 February 2013, the first cut in the EU’s budget in its 56-year history was decided. At the time of writing (February 2013) it is not
clear yet what, if any, implications the cuts to the EU Financial Framework 2014-2020 will have for the Creative Europe budget. It is possible that the proposed budget of €1.801 billion for Creative Europe will still be reduced. However, a possible reduction will most likely affect the cross-sectoral strand, sparing audience-development initiatives.

References


Notes

¹ There are 27 case studies from cultural institutions based in only one country and one transnational case study which combines Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands.