February newsletter of the CEXP Project

The project in brief:

This two year project kicked off on 1 July 2013. The CULTURe EXchange Platform (CULTUR-EXP) project is now over six months old. Funded by the European Union's Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Program (http://www.blacksea-cbc.net), it is now an opportune moment to see how the project has developed in these first six months, and sound out the views and opinions of the partners on the project's progress, the challenges it has overcome, if any, and what added value the partners see in this project, especially for artists and culture organizations, and also for the partners themselves.

Some basic information about the project: it involves organizations from five countries: Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece and Moldova and it is to receive in total EU funding: 295K EUR.

The project's overall objective is to enable the cross-border exchange of culture by providing an innovative, multi-lingual IT platform, based on available open source social platform solutions and adapted for culture producers (artists), culture operators (museums, festivals, etc.) and other actors of the culture market. The platform will therefore serve artists and culture operators an online tool, allowing them to advertise, discuss and organize cultural assets and events in the region. In this way the platform will become a "first port of call" for artists and cultural operators seeking partners to start new projects find information on vital legal issues like copyright and fair contract, and information on funding opportunities. In addition, the platform will be an important source of information about cultural events for the culture consumers.

Regarding the specific objectives, you can read about these in the first newsletter. It suffices to say that there are three specific objectives, the titles of which are:
1. To provide the platform with the following functionalities: User presentation, event scheduler, culture browser, collaborative tools, announcement boards and thematic discussion/reflection spaces.
2. To provide rich content on the platform.
3. To ensure the uptake of the platform by the users.

M.Kanellopoulou (ERFC), his Excellence the Ambassador of Georgia in Greece Mr Bakradze and Embassy Counselor Ms Malazonia.

View of the partners

• **Ramaz Kvatadze, Georgian Research and Educational Networking Association (GRENA)**

Considerable progress was made in these six months. First of all, the creation of the database for culture and arts stakeholders in all participating countries. This has been done and now the data is being updated regularly. We have now selected the appropriate social networking software on the basis of work performed by partners AMAP (Armenia), BURGAS (Bulgaria) and GRENA (Georgia). The process of platform implementation is already started. Also, during these six months, the project has developed good international links. As for any unexpected problems, the main difficulty is to abide by the reporting procedures of the Joint Management Authority (JMA), which has to enforce much stricter rules on reporting and auditing than other European programs like research project in the FP7 program. The rules include a lot of micro-management. Nonetheless good working relations have been established with the project monitoring officer of the JMA, and all the partners are working well. As for the views and expectations of the culture sector, it seems to GRENA through the contacts it has made that the sector is positive. But it is difficult to talk with stakeholders when the platform is not yet up and running. It has been queried that a project such as this one over-emphasizes information and communication technology (ICT).

But one must bear in mind that a lot of young people use ICT and therefore projects like these are needed because increasingly culture is being accessed through the Internet. Of course as the platform is not yet running it is not easy to be certain about saying the culture sector needs this, but when it is running, one can be sure that this platform will be a valuable tool for artists and cultural professionals.

• **Maria Kanellopoulou and Pyrrhus Mercouris, European Regional Framework for Co-operation (ERFC)**

ERFC is responsible for visibility of the project and in this respect the project has been presented to stakeholder organizations in the partner countries and internationally. ERFC has carried out interviews and discussions with artist and cultural operators in Athens, Thessaloniki and in Brussels, and even with cultural attaches in various embassies. Letters of support by important artists have been signed and patrons have been found. The feedback has indicated a positive view from stakeholders. Furthermore, in Greece ERFC has carried out a comprehensive mapping of the culture landscape. Indeed, all the signs indicate that in Greece the CULTUR-EXP platform would be well positioned to develop into a useful tool for artists and cultural professional to engage and interact with each other. At the moment nothing unexpected has happened. The project is moving according to schedule. Perhaps, it is safe to say that ERFC did not expect so many comments and observations from stakeholders and for so many requests to see the platform up and running. The sector has been positive and shown some impatience about when the platform is functioning. Regarding whether or not this project focuses too much on ICT, the answer here is that the Internet and related multimedia technologies are the way forward. Until recently radio, TV and cinema were the primary media in which culture and art were transmitted. Increasingly, arts and culture is migrating online, and cultural professionals are adjusting to this reality. The final remark is that this project has a lot of potential. The partners are realizing that follow-up and further project developments are possible, and this realization is creating networking possibilities between the partners who are already examining new projects.

• **Richard Ney, Armenian Monuments Awareness Project Cultural NGO (AMAP)**

In the last six months two things can be stressed. Firstly, AMAP has been involved in identifying the type of Internet platform to be used, especially regarding the specifications. To do this, an, in depth, study lasting six weeks was needed, and then the other partners checked the results and chose the software. Secondly, AMAP has started contacting and identified stakeholders. At the moment three hundred possible cultural users have been identified, and in co-operation with Burgas, AMAP is writing a guidebook for potential users of the platform. The guidebook will be exhaustive, as it covers all the possible areas of interest to the arts sector. The guidebook is not yet finished. For example, information on legal and copyright issues, like how do you protect up-loaded content, and which international legal standard does one use, are not yet included in the guidebook.

As for user interest, when approached, arts and culture organisation are positive. Everyone AMAP has talked to has said that they wished the platform was up and running. On this point of ICT, from an EU programme's standpoint it would be good if the European Commission's Joint Management Authority had more IT infrastructure. From the project's standpoint, the Internet is the future, and it is therefore bringing the culture sector up to speed. Indeed, this project, once completed, will be very useful tool which could be expanded, refined and market

• **Borislava Jordanova, District Government of Burgas**

In the first six months Burgas created a team to kick-start the project in Bulgaria. Once established this team took on further competencies. It has successfully researched into the first activity and provided data on functional and non-functional requirements for the platform. This was done in cooperation with the partner from Armenia, AMAP. Now, Burgas is working on the migration of the content to the platform. Currently, a lot of data on artists and cultural operators has been gathered. On 17 January, Pavel Marinoc (Governor of the Burgas region) signed an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with thirty local authorities in the Burgas region. Problems have been experienced. There was so much work to do during these first six months and unfortunately not enough people to do the work, therefore Burgas extended the work period from four to eight months. Nonetheless, it seems that all the views and opinions coming from the culture sector and from artists is positive. It is safe to say that the idea behind the platform is accepted by all those stakeholders who have been contacted. This project shows that the Internet is the way forward and the global online economy is expanding. Culture is the quintessential creative sector which gives the Internet that vital added value of cultural and artistic content, which cultural consumers are increasingly demanding and using. No artist can afford to be offline.

• **Petru Bogatencov, Research and Educational Networking Association of Moldova (RENAM)**

The biggest achievement so far has been to identify the best open source social networking software engine, which best suits the needs of the CULTUR-EXP. This was achieved by analyzing twenty open source software engines, which could satisfy the project's requirements. Eventually the ELGG platform was adopted. No unexpected problems have occurred, but of course close collaboration has to be established with the cultural organizations and with the diverse cultural stakeholders who are the ultimate beneficiaries. In addition, you need to check with other secondary stakeholders, meaning the technologists, about the usability of the platform, and this takes time, requires interaction with stakeholders, and patience. RENAM has contacted several organizations and in general their attitude has been positive. They want to cooperate, to know more about platform and they want to use the platform and to upload data. On this issue of sustainable development, for the culture community and for the arts, new technology like Internet is important, but most important is that ICT solutions and support can help culture as a communication tool.

One has to remember that young people are increasingly using online technologies, and culture must engage with the youth. However technology cannot replace existing methods for cultural creation, it can only supplement it.

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The Georgian Research and Educational Networking Association – GRENA was founded for the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and research field. The founders of GRENA are five major state universities, Georgian National Academy of Sciences and Open Society - Georgia Foundation. GRENA's activities focus on:
1. Providing Information and Communication Technology services to users and implementation of new, innovative services.
2. ICT education (Cisco Networking Academy; Linux Professional Institute Learning Center; Juniper Academy; Distance Learning Center and Pearson VUE Authorized Certification Center).
3. Preparation and implementation of international and local R&D projects; promoting and supporting ICT development in Georgia (currently GRENA is involved in several projects of European Commission Framework 7th Programme, Black Sea Basin

ERFC is a civilian routed NGO aiming at European integration to benefit citizens and to develop inter regional competitiveness. It was established towards the end of 2009. It has a strong presence in Aegion, Thessaloniki, Corfu and Brussels. To accomplish its mission, ever since its inception, ERFC has been involved in a number of cross-border projects. These projects relate to culture, agriculture, social and integrated regional development. However, all of them share a common goal which is to enhance cross-border co-operation for mutual economic benefit, peace and understanding and to exchange and promote better practices that are sustainable and

The Armenian Monuments Awareness Project (AMAP) was founded in February 2008. It employs 10 people. It is a non-profit organization with the aim of raising awareness at an international level Armenia's historic sites and monuments. To fulfill this mission, AMAP started to work with like-minded organizations in Armenia and also from other countries in the Caucuses and Black Sea region, specifically to enhance and promote Armenia's cultural heritage in a sustainable way, and this includes developing sustainable tourist strategies. Not just promoting conservation and

The Governor of District Burgas provides the state policy on regional level in all aspects of management, as well as the coordination of the national and regional interests. 13 municipalities are included in the territory of district Burgas. The Governor organizes the elaboration and implementation of strategy for regional development and of the regional development plan; coordinates the plans and investment projects of the technical infrastructure with regional importance; coordinates his work with the local authorities and performs the international contacts of the region – conducting of different official meetings, exchange of business delegations and business forums, and other diverse activities and European funded projects.

The Research and Educational Networking Association of Moldova (RENAM), is a non-governmental, non-commercial and non-profit organization, established to promote and support the development of communication and information infrastructure for the scientific and educational community (especially higher and secondary education, research institutions, libraries and public collections, medical establishments), as well as to governmental organizations in Moldova. The RENAM network offers connectivity to about 5000 scientists and professors (75% of all researchers), over 1000 Ph.D. students and more than 80,000 university and college students (85% of all students). All Institutes of Academy of Sciences, leading universities of Moldova, colleges, some hospitals and governmental establishments are connected to RENAM network access nodes. RENAM provides with wide range of services such as optical, leased line and wireless connectivity; websites and databases creation and hosting; issuing digital certificates; access to specialized computational resources; certificated education and community members training.

CROSS BORDER COOPERATION