



The project in brief:

This two year project has now passed its half way point. After one year, the time has now come to reflect on the project's achievements since its kicked off on 1 July 2013. The CULTUR-EXP project, funded by the European Union's Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme <http://www.blacksea-cbc.net>, is now at the vital stage when it must present its work, and that means results and outcomes to the culture sector. That is artists, like dancers, musicians, sculptors, actors and actresses, and any other person making a living from the arts. It is the time for cultural organisations like theatres, festival organisers, producers of film and TV programmes, museums and organisers of exhibitions to start using the platform in order to find new collaborators for up and coming projects.

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

You can read about the project's overall objective in the first and second newsletters. But what is important to stress at this stage, is that the project has now achieved some of specific objects. The project has now created a platform with specific functionalities for:

- User presentation - that means so that artists and cultural organisation can display and advertise themselves and their work to each other in a targeted manner;
- An event scheduler - which can act as a tool enabling artists and cultural organisation to 'exchange' information about their planned projects;
- A culture browser - which will enable users to find useful information;
- Collaborative tools - which will enable artists to establish 'groups' of collaborators throughout the regions and to 'exchange' ideas, topics and to plan on a cross border level new projects;



- Opportunities to make announcement boards and thematic discussions and have reflection spaces and reviews.

It is now time to ask the partners their views regarding the project's progress and what has so far been achieved.

Views of the partners

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

The project is slightly more than one year old and during this period we accomplished work on platform requirements definition, selection of appropriate open source platform, on its adaptation and implementation at RENAM data center. The URL of the platform is: <http://cultur-exp.eu/>.

Now we have to focus attracting cultural professionals and organisations to learn about the platform and to start using it.



According to the database that we have prepared during last year, we began to contact cultural organisations and artists and to explain them CULTUR-EXP platform possibilities. We learn from them how the sector has all kinds of diverse opinions, views and needs. Currently we have 14 culture organisations from Georgia who are registered, using the platform and providing information about events. This is quite good considering the platform has been on line only for one month.

We need to mention problem related to the very long time for obtaining audit report in some countries. This delays submission of interim report to the programme managing authority.

My last comment is that we must now actively work with the culture sector and promote platform usage. We are now entering the most important stage of the project.

• **Pyrrhus Mercuris, European Regional Framework for Co-operation (ERFC)**

After much hard work, the partners have now completed the creation of the platform. ERFC is responsible for visibility. An important contribution was the creation of an attractive video which presents to the user the platform. Also in the last year, communication with diverse cultural organisation, national and international, information on artist residencies and culture networks have been gathered. ERFC has also been in contact with artists and cultural organisations, mainly festivals. We now have a huge corpus of material that artists can use and that can be up loaded.

Now is the time for users to start exploring the platform and making use of its possibilities. Up load information about yourself, network with others, seek projects with other cultural operators or simply exhibit your work. These and other possibilities are now available.

So far, the project has run smoothly. Now that the platform is more or less ready, there are some teething problems on its user-friendliness, but this was expected and through more testing and more developing, the platform will evolve for the Black Sea culture sector as a vital piece of cultural infrastructure.

• **Armenuhi Ghazaryan, "AMAP" Human Development NGO**

This has been a wonderful year and working with the partners and stakeholders has been enjoyable. AMAP has already started contacting cultural producers and operators and introducing them to the benefits of this platform and how to make use of it. They are already registering, uploading their works and connecting with other users. This productive year has enabled the project to meet all its deliverables and, for sure, further outcomes are expected.

What is expected from the culture sector now is that they use the platform to the fullest for collaboration and partnership purposes, for creating artistic ties and connections. They now have an online tool which can serve them to engage and to find partners to plan new projects and work together.

So far there have not been any unexpected problems that could not be solved. Indeed, the project partners have worked together quite smoothly and effectively. Now that the platform is ready, it is important to get more people excited and interested in it, and this will soon be solved through increased communication strategy. Besides, this is a project issue that was envisaged at the planning stage of the project. Now the platform is ready, it can be put to use and hopefully even before the project ends we will already be able to see its results and those of effective cooperation between various artists and cultural operators.

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

Burgas' leading role has been in the implementation of Group of Activity 1 which is about detailed analysis of the functional and non-functional requirements of the platform. The team from Burgas together with the partners from AMAP extracted and formalized the relevant requirements. Another important area of activity was the collaboration between BURGAS and AMAP, to support external IT consultants and with assistance of the Lead partner, work on selection, process and upload of the relevant content to the platform.

Burgas has been very active in the last six months in presenting the project to the culture sector. On 17 January an official meeting between the Governor of District Burgas and the mayors of all 13 municipalities from district Burgas was held.



An official Memorandum for co-operation in the fields of culture and art, culture and art industries, preservation of cultural heritage was signed. The purpose of this Memorandum is to establish long-lasting co-operation in the fields of culture and art between the Governor of district Burgas and state and municipal culture institutions, municipalities, creative organisations and non-governmental organisations. The present Memorandum is open for adherence for all state institutions and non-governmental organisations that share the above mentioned purposes.

A press conference was held in Burgas on 20.02.2014. More than 50 different organisations signed the Memorandum and all the individual artists present at the conference expressed support for the platform and signed the official letter of support.

Taking into account that migration is one of the most important activities for successful implementation of the project, a content workshop was organised in Burgas. The workshop had two parts: Firstly IT expert from GRENA explained platform functionalities to the partners and trained them how to use the platform ("train the trainers") in order to be educated and able to support the culture producers and operators in the delivery of culture content. In the second part of the workshop IT specialist from BURGAS trained representatives of different culture organisation from the region, as well as individual artists how to use the platform.

We haven't experience any difficulties in the period. The only inconvenience was in the beginning of the project when the platform was still being elaborated. We had some meetings with artists and press conferences and tried to show and explain something which was not yet in action. I believe that now, when the platform is operational we will find it easier to find new followers.

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

A key achievement included the finalisation of the technical requirements, which means the platform is now working. The preparation to this work was complicated due to the diverse opinions and changing demands and what was initially called for by the project proposal. Because situations change and evolve, these changes need to be taken into account. Now at this stage we have to make adaptations as the platform is now being developed and needs to be enhanced. At the moment we need feedback from users not just project partners. Continue summarising feedback from users is essential for overall project success.

We could see while developing the platform that there are other platforms, but these are quite static, this one is more of an online service and able to organise 'groups' which will allow users to develop and make co-operations and thus to create new art and works, therefore artists should see about exploiting this new opportunities offered by the platform.

There were several problems; one of these was the need to adopt the platform to changing conditions and therefore the need carefully evaluate the tests. This made demands on the technical staff that had to assess all the demands and information coming to them and to adapt the platform.

In Moldova RENAM engaged with the culture community and a key source of feedback was the need to have a lot of space for the user. This even means including space for them to advertise their work. In addition, using information technologies is new and it was a learning process for them also.



Project funded by the
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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.

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, 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 environmentally friendly.

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 Caucasus 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 restoration.

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 organisation, 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 organisations 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.



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