

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE ADESTE PROJECT, Audience Developer: Skills and Training in Europe

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Foreword

This article aims to illustrate the main key findings of the ADESTE - Audience Developer: Skills and Training in Europe project running from November 2016 till April 2016. The content is drawn from the several reports that have been drafted by the partners during the project lifetime. In particular the e-book “Steps towards a good audience practice: following the learnings of the ADESTE project”¹ edit by Giulia Fiaccarini, Alessandra Gariboldi and Niels Righolt tells the journey behind the ADESTE project, told through a collection of articles and personal reflections from the people involved in the project; researchers, trainers and experts from our team, participants in the training programmes, and external experts.

I would like to thank all the ADESTE partners. All materials are available on the ADESTE website www.adesteproject.eu and are @adeste.

Cultural organisations across Europe and beyond have been and are still going through a critical phase. Challenged by the economic, social and digital change cultural managers must find innovative and sustainable strategies, policies and practice to ensure the survival of arts and cultural organisations and the sector at large. One key component for sustainability in arts and culture is to increase, diversify and reinforce audience participation. Professionalising the role of cultural managers in charge of audience development by creating a new occupational profile is therefore essential for the future of the cultural sector.

The ADESTE - Audience Developer: Skills and Training in Europe project funded by the European Union’s Lifelong Learning Programme, Leonardo Da Vinci – Development of Innovation, stems from the need to fill a gap in the education and

¹ Retrieved from the project website
http://www.adesteproject.eu/sites/default/files/ADESTE_Step_Towards_FINAL.pdf (Downloaded November 2016).

training in developing specific expertise related to audience development and aims to support cultural organisations and practitioners to face the big challenges of building wider audiences, deepening engagement and increasing accessibility to arts and culture.

The ADESTE consortium brought together a range of experienced and skilled European organisations that reflect the latest developments in audience development based on workbased learning, research on real trends and needs of cultural organisations and audiences.

The project consortium made up of seven partners in 5 different European countries, 2 international partners from India (India Foundation for the arts IFA – Bangalore) and the United States (Los Angeles County Museum of Art LACMA – Los Angeles, USA) and 5 associate partners is a rich mix of higher education institutions, independent and national research centres, national audience development agencies, cultural associations and organisations and networks.

Led by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, Italy the consortium brought together distinguished organisations such as the Institute of Leisure Studies – Bilbao, Spain, the European Network of Cultural Administration Training Centre - Brussels, Belgium, the The Audience Agency - London, UK, MeltingPro. Laboratorio per la cultura – Roma, Italy, the Danish Center for Arts and Interculture – Copenhagen, Denmark and Goldsmith, University of London – London, UK.

Running from November 2013 till April 2016 the ADESTE partners worked together on various strands of activity:

- Pooling resources and expertise;
- Identifying the skills required of people working in audience development;
- Mapping and collecting audience development best practice;
- Designing and testing formal, informal and innovative training methods for audience development in line with the needs of the cultural labour market;
- Promoting cooperation and exchange between different stakeholders through a pan-European and cross-sectorial approach;

Starting from the objectives originally set out by the ADESTE partnership, after the researches and testing undertaken, the consortium came to the definition of an ADESTE approach to Audience Development as a strategic element in which different roles and positions of the organisation should be involved. The set of

competences identified as key to Audience Development should be part of the strategic capability of the organisation, and be split among different roles. In fact, we refer to "audience developer" as an ideal type for whom a set of knowledge, skills, and competencies are required and that they should reside in several people to be fully active and effective, rather than relating to a job position to be occupied by only one person.

As a result, the goal of creating a new professional profile was re-designed as the aim of enhancing the whole strategic management of cultural organisations by training a staff member able to trigger a systemic change putting the audiences at the centre of the organisation.

“The conclusions stress that it makes no sense to hire an audience developer if the organisation is not embedded in an audience development philosophy and that AD should be part of the strategic purpose of the cultural organisation.”²

Concerning the position, the report concludes that the AD role is a senior position. On the one hand, because a profound insight into and understanding of the cultural organisation and its surrounding community is needed. On the other hand, because the audience developer should be in a position to influence the organisation.

Based on the research findings³ the training approach then, recognised the importance of ‘hard’ and ‘soft skills’ and looked in particular to encourage participants to learn in an experiential way that drew on their own experiences and those of fellows. The intersection between the techniques chosen to promote hard and soft skills was a critical element in the success of the programme.

² Amaia Makua & Macarena Cuenca “In search of the ideal set of skills. The issue of research: Why and what we did” Retrieved from <http://www.adesteproject.eu/steps-towards-good-audience-practice-following> (November 2016).

³ • EUROPEAN OCCUPATIONAL STANDARD PROFILE OF THE AUDIENCE DEVELOPER Retrieved from <http://www.adesteproject.eu/report-european-standard-occupational-profile> (Downloaded November 2016)

• REPORT ON NEW TRAINING NEEDS Retrieved from <http://www.adesteproject.eu/report-new-training-needs> (Downloaded November 2016)

Audience practice

(specialist, skills-based)

- *(Market) planning*
- *Use of data/ research*
- *Communications*
- *Mediation-facilitation*
- *Consultation*
- *Participation: project design*
- *Communications*

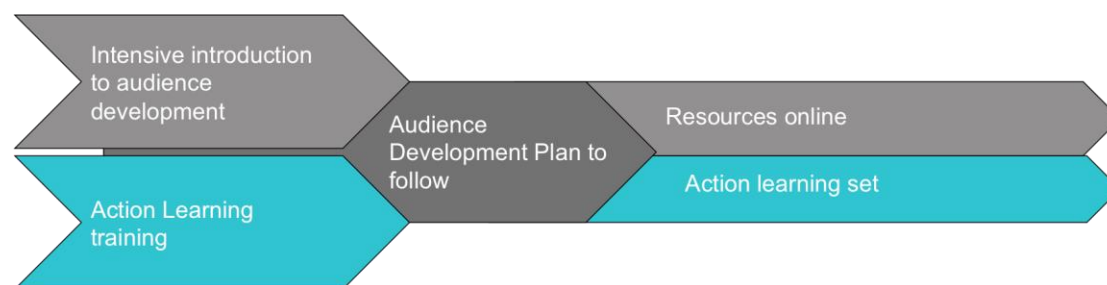
Leadership “in between”

(generic, transversal, personal)

- *Change agent*
- *Bridge-building*
- *Negotiation & persuasion*
- *Vision (mission)*
- *Cultural values*
- *(Influence “Manage up”)*

“The approach to training reflects this understanding, and is designed to equip trainees to use simple and effective strategy tools, whilst valuing their combined knowledge as audience practitioners, and recognising their role as change agents.”⁴

The training methodology was devised to support practitioners working in various cultural contexts, and to be flexible enough to support a wide range of audience outcomes.



The devised approach therefore has two elements ⁵:

1. **Development of an Audience Development Plan**
focussing on use of strategy tools, tried and tested in audience strategy and

⁴ “The training methodology for ADESTE How it was done and the thoughts behind” By Jonathan Goodacre & Anne Torreggiani, Retrieved from <http://www.adesteproject.eu/steps-towards-good-audience-practice-following> (Downloaded November 2016).

⁵ “Set of guidelines for an effective vocational training for the European Audience Developer”; <http://www.adesteproject.eu/guidelines-set-guidelines-effective-vocational> (Downloaded November 2016),

exploration of real-world activity, which delivers successfully on a range of audience objectives.



2. Support through participation in an Action Learning Set

Scheduled to enable participants to reflect and learn from their experiences (and those of fellows) to try to embed audience strategies within their organisations. Action Learning is a powerful co-coaching tool recognised for its capacity to enable learning by doing and to foster a collaborative approach to leadership.

Tested on 65 practitioners from 5 EU countries from May 2015 to February 2016, the testing process provided us with the necessary feedback, experiences and anchorage that allows the consortium to further sharpen and develop our trans-European methodologies in building audience development skills for the benefit of both the audience, the professional within the arts and cultural sectors and the public at large.

The evaluation carried out highlighted how training in audience development is relevant to organisations today that need to face the challenge of increasing and diversifying their audiences. Although the numbers in the ADESTE programme cannot be considered representative of the cultural sector in the 5 countries involved let alone the cultural sector in Europe, by and large they represent the need for cultural organisations to have the tools to implement their audience development strategy.

ADESTE developed a distinctive audience development approach or philosophy, which is a *holistic approach to AD, audience focused and entrepreneurial and a place where to think of others as collaborators and not competitors.*

The ADESTE training was highly innovative bringing together two distinct forms of training into one process, Knowledge Transfer and Action Learning. The combination

of the two provides a unique approach. This interaction between the two forms is of particular interest in this context as it could provide an advance on current forms of training.

A few conclusions came from the evaluations that need to be considered in the future:

- Help to restructure marketing/AD functions, departments within an organization;
- Embed Marketing/AD as a management function is hard;
- Support during change in organisations is required;
- Engage senior management and/or colleagues could be useful - Participants willing but others in the organisation often not willing to change;
- Reconsider the role of audiences;
- Instigate organisational changes with an evidence-based approach, which has generally resulted in an increased self-confidence for individuals.

Conclusions and Emerging issues

The ADESTE project highlighted that the underlying training philosophy must be connected with the broad concept of Audience Development, which is viewed holistically, as a responsibility of the whole organisation, not of one department.

A combination of different types of training is more appropriate, since each can contribute differently to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes needed in Audience Development.

On the other hand audience-centricity is still a new idea for many cultural institutions where conservation of the object, or production of the artwork, have been the exclusive mission. And once (if) the case is made, organisations will probably need to start working together in a quite different way, requiring significant change of focus, culture and practice.

Audience Development can happen in many different ways (one size does not fit all) and politics has a lot to do with it. However Europe cultural sector is rich in high skilled and motivated professionals who are keen to make the difference.