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RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

BaMuR

Toolbox with solutions for resilient museums in time of crises

Document information

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Introduction

The INTERREG Baltic Sea Region programme co-financed project “Baltic Museum Resilience: Resilient museums and memory institutions for resilient societies in the Baltic Sea Region” is aimed at developing solutions that will strengthen the resilience of cultural and memory institutions, focusing on resilience from three perspectives: governance and business model, digital sustainability, and economic sustainability.

The toolbox was jointly developed by the partnership in a cooperative process. Moreover, external stakeholders were involved in the preparation of the toolbox through national/regional workshops, and their comments/suggestions integrated.

The project partnership consists of five organisations from five Baltic Sea Region countries (Estonia, Sweden, Finland, Lithuania and Poland), having various backgrounds and experiences:

- *Estonian War Museum (EWM) - General Laidoner Museum, Estonia (EE)*
- *Museum of Västervik, Sweden (SE)*
- *Forum Marinum Foundation, Finland (FI)*
- *National Regions Development Agency, Lithuania (LT)*
- *Balteus Foundation, Poland (PL)*

The main target group of the toolbox are museums managers, heritage institutions and other cultural institutions managers, as well as policy makers responsible for culture. This toolbox is to provide guidelines for cultural institutions with the final aim of increasing their innovative approach and resilience.

The project and this document capitalize on the existing knowledge gathered from implemented three pilots in Estonia, Finland and Sweden:

- *EWM pilot focused on adjusting the museum's governance and business model as to involve more stakeholders and clients (i.e. final beneficiaries or visitors to the museum) to meet their needs and interests and contribute to the museum's resilience.*
- *The Forum Marinum Foundation pilot aimed at digitization of a coastal artillery fortress and historical items related to it, in cooperation with project partners, private enterprises, local NGOs and volunteers, oriented towards developing a model for participatory creation of digitized museum content using sustainable systems and platforms. The pilot focused on improving museum resilience through a wide inclusion of stakeholders, using established digital platforms, and increasing*

access to reliable historical information for different clients and audiences.

- *Museum of Västervik pilot was the improvement and increase museum resilience through a wide inclusion of stakeholders, using financial/economic experiences, solutions, and innovations from the pandemic and from previous projects.*

The toolbox consists of three parts, focusing respectively on the three strands of the project.

This toolbox is a set of examples and suggestions of what and how to do following the three strands according to implemented pilots:

1. *Participation, inclusion, and interaction (participatory governance)*
2. *Organic connections and digital sustainability*
3. *Financial/economic sustainability*

The videos on each pilot are available on the website:
<https://nrda.lt/bamur/>

1. Participation, inclusion & interaction

“A crisis does not always bring only negative consequences. The need to implement changes concerning the institution's activities may result in the development of new ways of reaching the audience of the offer and enriching the experience and skills of the team.”

Increasing the number of visitors

Today many museums are becoming more consumer oriented, focusing more and more on the visitors' experience and needs, as means to bringing more visitors to the museum, and expanding the museum activity.

Participation, inclusion and interaction part is orientated to new view of working with visitors, target groups, volunteers and etc. It is highlighted that there is a need time by time to review and understand museums and cultural institutions visitor: try to create your museums stereotypical visitor, explore their needs, understand their expectations, make them surprised.

Review (revision) visitor questionnaire and get a way to know you visitor more.

The more you know about your visitors, the more you can satisfy their needs. So gathering information about your visitors, such as interests in exposition, their leisure time etc., all serves to provide a clearer picture of the people you are aiming to please.

Use attractive way to measure portrait of visitor, for example visitors' circulation, use of signage and labels, interaction with exhibits and social interaction.

- *Find out what kind of experiences your visitors, current or prospective, are interested in.*
- *Analytical approach to your visitors. Who are they, what are they interested in, what kind of questions do they have and why?*
- *Use service design and plan your upcoming exhibitions/events in a way that address visitors' demand.*
- *Be open to the current demand or what's happening in the world. For example, recent crisis, especially in Ukraine, have increased public interest in military-themed museums and Ukrainian culture.*
- *Get to know regular visitors.*

The visitor's time and attention span are scarce resources, and they are one of the parameters by which a museum artifact and museum exhibitions need

to be assessed. Nevertheless, always remember that target groups are the main core of exhibition luck.

Set up target groups

- *Which are your main target groups? Do you reach them?*
- *Youngster and children (including as a part of children's school program), families with children, students, citizens, tourists, people with disabilities, domestic visitors, international and large groups.*
- *Families with children represent a group where there is room for growth. They might also increase the demand in other segments such as museums shops and restaurants.*
- *The main target group may vary depending on season. Local visitors and schoolchildren during spring and autumn and tourists during summer.*
- *Pay attention to local citizens who rarely or never visit. How can you attract them?*
- *Does people with special needs have access? This is a group that is at risk of exclusion.*
- *Do you offer service and information in multiple languages?*
- *Participate in national and international tourism exhibitions.*
- *Educational programs tailored for different age groups.*
- *Agreements with other organisations, for example educational institutions, associations, NGOs).*
- *How do you market to your visitors that exhibitions, events, and program change and that there often is something new to explore?*
- *To reach people better you can improve accessibility through, for example, digital and virtual exhibitions.*
- *Innovative use of social media and various digital platforms which people already use in their day to day lives can increase people's knowledge of museums and what they have to offer.*
- *Significant resources and long-term commitment may need to be invested in content and tools like virtual exhibitions and social media campaigns, which may be problematic for museums with limited budgets and staff. Thus, cooperation between museums is needed so that smaller museums can reap benefits from these advances.*
- *Be a meeting place for all generations. We have developed the work of making parallel exhibitions, both digitally and physically.*

- *Visitors will come back to the museum due to a combination of factors which includes both permanence and change.*
- *Museums need to be seen as stable, trustworthy institutions based on a solid foundation of historical knowledge and research, but ones that can always surprise people by telling them new kinds of things about the past.*

Offer positive experiences and emotions

- *Provide your visitors with positive experiences and emotions through targeted actions*
- *Tailor your exhibitions and events to audiences*
- *Be a part of increasing the spiritual resilience of the civil society by boosting trust in public institutions and the different authorities' ability to provide people aid in difficult times*

Use the premises of your institution in a different way

- *Rooms for children*
- *Develop interactive areas for children*
- *Workshops*
- *Visits to/from schools*
- *Outdoors and indoors festivals/events*
- *Walking excursions*
- *Online events*

Tickets & offers

- *Try new selling methods such as e-tickets through web page or external ticketing platforms or combined tickets*
- *Several countries offer different kinds of "Museum cards". The cards are organised by a national or regional institution or association. There is an annual fee, and it gives the visitor the opportunity to make short or multiple visits or visit, for them, new museums. The card can, for example, give the visitor free entrance, discounts, invitations to events or the opportunity to visit new exhibitions in advance of opening.*

- *Cooperation with providers of mobile exhibitions gives the opportunity to sell combined tickets*
- *Gift coupons at e-platforms*
- *Offer free or reduced entrance on Sundays or days with less visitors*
- *Cooperate with other museums nearby for mutual offers to visitors*

Communication and interaction

“Good communications are a key issue during a crisis, both inside and outside of the museum.”

There has been a change in the channels of communication with the stakeholders/visitors:

- *digitization of various areas of activity and different elements of the institution's programme*
- *introduction of online activities and online events*
- *introduction of a new offer available to the recipients remotely*
- *increasing the institution's activity in social media*
- *increasing the communication with the stakeholders/visitors via the institution's website (modernization of the institution's website)*
- *increasing the number of digitized objects*
- *increasing the number of outdoor events*
- *Reviewing Tripadvisor platform account and Google reviews*

Other comments

- *The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of cultural institutions and increased their focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and community engagement. These changes aimed to ensure that cultural experiences remained accessible and engaging while prioritizing the health and safety of visitors and staff.*
- *One theme that often came up in discussions with other museums was the fact that we still have only limited information on how people see new services like digital exhibitions, and what they expect from such offerings by museums. This is a theme that is connected to both participation, inclusion and interaction and organic connections and digital sustainability, and it would require gathering more information*

for example through questionnaires, analysis of user statistics and targeted interviews.

Conclusions of the pilot of the Estonian War Museum - General Laidoner Museum

Museum (EWM) - General Laidoner Museum implemented a pilot while the individual numbers of the “Soldier” have been systematized and made available.

The main issue: The database solution has been developed through a continuous PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle, including the input from the volunteers. Training programme for the volunteers is being developed and training conducted.

Data concerning about 450 individuals from different numbers of the “Soldier” have been already entered into the database (including the relations).

PDCA aspects from the process:

P: future possibility to link the platform with other databases (as listed on p1 or similar, also see <https://esm.ee/kogud/andmekogud>) and to include besides “Sõdur” also other related journals / newspapers (“Kaitse Kodu” 1925-1940, “Eesti Politseileht” 1921-1940, “Eesti Arst” etc + also those from the Soviet era and 1991+ era)

D: this presupposes sufficient number of persons entered into the current database and system analysis of the different platforms;

C: too early to draw major conclusions at the current stage, continuous improvement along the way;

A: too early to pose any specific improvements at the current stage, continuous improvement along the way.

No matter how wise and profound you think you are in the planning phase, a lot of new ideas and solutions emerge during the process, including how the technical solution should look like and what should be its functionalities.

Pilot disclosure such aspects as planning process with plenty of time available, allow times for reflection and discussions between different partners (museum workers, historians, ICT etc); selection of a technical partner who “cares” about the project, i.e. its is no just a task that he is paid for, but he thinks along the way.

Pilot showed that there is no limitation to military heritage, but this approach would help to improve the accessibility and quality of data in any historic field (medicine, agriculture, education, etc.).

- *There is importance to have a well-functioning and flexible work structure in place, so that you can handle major crises, such as the one we are experiencing now with a heightened threat level.*
- *One of our clear strengths lay in team, which proves to be extremely committed and creative when it comes to finding innovative solutions.*
- *Cooperation with other museums. Work together on very different issues such as opening hours and how to protect objects in the event of an armed conflict.*
- *Ability to quickly adapt to new circumstances.*
- *There has certainly been a shift towards creating more virtual exhibitions, but it is yet to be seen if this is more of a temporary than permanent change. The answers we have received about the future of virtual exhibitions have been rather different based on the respondent, ranging from enthusiastic to pessimistic.*
- *The priorities of our visitors have probably changed less than was expected during the COVID years. It rather seems that the crisis time has only made people's existing priorities stronger. When museums could open their physical exhibitions again, people returned in great numbers: apparently, the periods of closures had created penned-up demand rather than a change in people's priorities regarding museum visits.*
- *The COVID years were long enough to create a major disruption for the museums' ability to provide services and communication to their visitors and stakeholders, but they were probably not long enough to create a major change in their priorities. Rather vice versa, they may have served as a boost helping them to remember that functional and strong museums are important. Museums are not something they should take for granted, but that they require a strong commitment from the society and public authorities in good days to keep going also when the times get bad.*

2. Organic connections and digital sustainability

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of cultural institutions and increased their focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and community engagement. These changes aimed to ensure that cultural experiences remained accessible and engaging.

Lessons from the COVID-19 crisis in terms of digital sustainability

Many of the systems and platforms that were used during the crisis had been adopted already before the crisis started, but they had been used only in a limited way. What happened during the COVID crisis itself was that museums started using those systems heavily, and they became much more central to their work than they had been previously. Remote work gained much more prominence than before, and new tools have been made available for it, and familiar to museum staff besides. Meetings facilitated for example by tools like Teams or Zoom gained a much bigger role than before.

When museums were physically closed to the public during the crisis, resources were often directed from customer service to work with collections, and to planning. This move towards using more digital tools in museum work included more emphasis on the digitisation of objects and making them better available to the public through joint platforms.

There was a certain tendency in museums to reduce investments and acquisitions during the COVID crisis, but investing in digital tools was one field where acquisitions even increased in some museums during the crisis years.

The opinion has been expressed by museum professionals that even more experimentation with digital tools could have been made during the crisis, as that might have led to new, fruitful discoveries. It was also noted that this might have required more resources than was practically available in the event, though, so it might not have been as realistic as it seems in retrospect.

No museum or memory institution responding to our questions said that the choices made to tackle the crisis with the help of digital tools would have been mistakes, they were rather seen as a logical response to a situation where museums' choices for amending the effects of the crisis were quite limited.

In terms of working remotely, as soon as the COVID crisis seemed to have passed, most museums saw a quick reduction in work hours done outside its physical premises. As of late, though, there has been also a backlash aimed at reducing remote work. It takes time until a new balance for remote work is reached.

The shift to using digital tools has happened faster and more forcefully in museums as it would have otherwise. But while the crisis period boosted museums' use of digital tools significantly, often it appears not to have changed their priorities in using them. It has rather reaffirmed views and priorities that were already in existence just prior to the beginning of the pandemic.

Digital sustainability: Improvement accessibility and audience engagement

Many museums have prioritised digital accessibility in the recent years, and especially bringing collections and materials available through the joint platforms. This is to improve their national and international availability, and to enhance accessibility for everyone interested in this content. This effort can make museums more resilient in the face of different crisis situations and disruptions, as it allows the audience engage museum services and content in various ways that are not necessarily dependent on their physical collections and exhibitions.

This effort includes different sides. Examples of improving accessibility and audience engagement includes:

- *Introducing new online activities*
- *New offers available for recipients remotely*
- *Increasing the activity of the institution in social media*
- *Modernizing the institution's website*
- *Increasing the number of digitized objects*
- *Purchasing equipment needed to record and stream events online*
- *Transition to remote communication (inside and outside the organisation)*
- *Acceleration of the digital circulation of selected documents and remote implementation of selected procedures*
- *Increasing employees' digital competences*

Forum Marinum Foundation implemented a pilot with a special focus on virtual exhibitions as a tool for improving digital sustainability from the point

of view of audience engagement. The pilot on virtual exhibitions yielded different lessons on how audience engagement can be improved when planning, creating, and using virtual exhibitions.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that museums should outline their goals for creating exhibitions in advance, setting up metrics for how the success of a virtual exhibition can be determined. It may be for example the number of users reached, a marked increase in audience satisfaction, or an increase of the museum's visibility online. Virtual exhibitions are not an end-all, but a means to an end, and it is important to see how they fit and complement the museum's general goals and the array of services provided by the museum.

Key recommendations for creating virtual exhibitions based on pilot:

- *Know your target audience(s): take into account who you are creating the exhibition for*
- *Know your audience's preferences in terms of subjects, content type, platforms, and systems (technologies) used*
- *Make exhibitions as accessible and easy to use as possible, taking into account that different audiences have different capabilities in using digital content, systems and platforms*
- *Choose a sustainable platform for the exhibition, with an emphasis on a high degree of continuity and institutional stability*
- *Choose reliable partners for creating the exhibition, and make sure that the terms of the partnership are agreed upon in advance (to ensure the visibility of digital services, as the survey showed, they would be used more if people knew about them)*
- *Be prepared to market new digital exhibitions in various platforms, as they are still a rather new concept, they do need more boost for their audience to find them*
- *Keep in mind, that although the costs of creating a virtual exhibition might not be as high as a regular exhibition's, one should also take in consideration the possible costs of the upkeep in the long term*
- *Make sure the museum has enough qualified staff appointed for managing the virtual exhibitions*

Focus on preparedness

Museums can only use digital tools to overcome crisis situations and times of disruption if they have adopted and created resilient digital systems before the onset of crisis. This demands resources to be used for choosing well-

functioning systems, for training staff in their use, and for maintaining and updating these systems regularly.

Create a digital strategy for using different kinds of digital tools in both ordinary times and crisis times. This strategy includes organising responsibilities for using, developing and maintaining digital tools in the museum, and making plans to improve information security and for example the long-term storage and management of data and information on the museum's collections. Such a digital strategy would preferably go hand in hand with practical crisis planning in the museum, for such things as fire preparedness or the evacuation of staff and collection items during dangerous situations.

Improving museum employees' digital competences across the board is a good and perhaps necessary way to improve digital resilience for both ordinary days as well as times of crisis and disruptions. This includes ensuring a level of basic competences for practically everyone in the organisation, as well as specialised competences for those employees who are in charge of systems as administrators. Digital competences are also important on the level of decision-making, as they allow the museum leadership to better determine what kinds of strategies and tools the institution can and should wield to improve its preparedness and resilience.

Cooperation and networking with other institutions/museums are essential for retrieving new information and knowledge. Networking in finding solutions that have been proven useful and adopting the best practices already in use in other organisations.

Strengthen institutional capabilities and organic connections

Digital systems and platforms will often become inadequate or obsolescent in time and need to be replaced with new and more advanced, more widely adopted, or easier to use systems. The financial and organisational strain of doing this is a challenge for museums, and the smaller a museum is, the more demanding it will be to keep its digital tools up to date and functional. Thus, museums with smaller resources of their own, and a smaller staff that might not be well-versed with the demands of IT systems would benefit significantly from institutional support from public and state authorities.

For example, when museums move to use new systems of collection management, often several different such systems are being used within a country or even a city. There would be room for consolidation in collection management systems, so that a smaller number of systems could be used as something of a national standard.

Working with different stakeholders like NGOs and volunteer associations provides museums structural support in ordinary times, and it allows them to also draw upon these organisations in times of crisis when museum staff might be short-handed or their opportunities to continue their ordinary work is limited. Getting the support of volunteers will also help for digital resilience, as additional pairs of hands are potentially as useful online or using various digital tools as they might be physically in museums.

The role of different museum associations and joint organisations should be to contact and put pressure on the authorities to improve their ability to support museums in getting ready for extraordinary times.

The national, regional, and local authorities are in a central role for making plans and preparations for times of disruptions and crises. Museums' own preparation can only go so far if the institutional basis provided by the authorities is not strong and consistent.

“The most important thing about digitisation and virtual exhibitions is increasing accessibility.”

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of cultural institutions and increased their focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and community engagement. These changes aimed to ensure that cultural experiences remained accessible and engaging.

Increase digital sustainability:

- *Introduce online activities.*
- *New offer which is available for recipients remotely.*
- *Purchase of equipment needed to record and stream events online.*
- *Increasing the activity of the institution in social media.*
- *Modernizing the institution's website.*
- *Increasing the number of digitized objects.*
- *Transition to remote communication (inside and outside the organisation).*
- *Acceleration of the digital circulation of selected documents and remote implementation of selected procedures.*
- *Increasing employees' digital competences.*

- *There are some signals that institutions will decrease the number of digital events since the audience is no longer interested in them. They would like to organize more outdoor events or expand publishing activities instead. On the other hand, some institutions stated that the online activity should be expanded even further.*
- *Directing resources from customer service to work with collections, and to planning. This was part and parcel with an ongoing shift towards digitalization. A move towards using more digital tools in their work, centring on.*
- *More emphasis on the digitization of objects and making them better available to the public through joint platforms.*
- *A move towards more remote work during the crisis*

Many of the systems and platforms that were used during the crisis had been adopted already before the crisis started, but they had been used only in a limited way. What happened during the COVID crisis itself was that museums started using those systems heavily, and they became much more central to their work than they had been previously. Remote work and meetings facilitated for example by tools like Teams or Zoom gained a much bigger role than before.

There was a certain tendency in museums to reduce investments and acquisitions during the COVID crisis, but investing in digital tools was one field where acquisitions even increased in some museums during the crisis years.

No respondent said that the choices would have been mistakes, they were rather seen as a logical response to a situation where museums' choices for amending the effects of the crisis were quite limited.

There were some comments to the effect that even more experimentation with digital tools could have been made during the crisis, as that might have led to new, fruitful discoveries. It was also noted that this might have required more resources to begin with, so it might not have been as realistic in the event as it seems in retrospect.

In terms of working remotely, as soon as the COVID crisis seemed to have passed, most museums saw a quick reduction in work hours done outside its physical premises. Remote work has gained more prominence than before, and new tools have been made available for it, and familiar to museum staff besides. As of late, though, there has been also a backlash aimed at reducing remote work.

Conclusions of the pilot of the Forum Marinum Foundation - pilot

Pilot at Forum Marinum Foundation proved issues that have serious importance of using digitalization in sustainable way.

During the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, Forum Marinum sought new ways to reach its audience digitally. The museum partnered with Digimuseo, a digital platform for virtual exhibitions, which expanded from hosting two museums to 24 by 2024. Forum Marinum created four virtual exhibitions and a separate Coastal Artillery Museum website, also commissioning a virtual tour of fortress islands. The pandemic accelerated digital engagement, but questions arose about audience reach, usability, and the long-term impact of digital content on museums.

The Forum Marinum pilot focused on digital audience engagement through a structured study, consisting of two phases.

- Phase 1: Included a mass survey, targeted surveys for specific groups (schoolchildren, young adults, seniors, nursing homes), and interviews with museum professionals on digitalization and audience engagement.

- Phase 2: Involved collaboration with a partner to create a VR-based fortress island exhibition, outreach to nursing homes to gather data from virtual ship tours, and gathering feedback from VR headset users and online visitors.

The findings provided insights into audience preferences and digital engagement strategies, helping improve virtual exhibitions and enhance digital resilience in museums.

Key Insights:

- Younger audiences were more receptive to VR and digital content.
- Older users valued clear, text-based information and accessibility.
- Virtual content must be tailored to different user preferences and technological comfort and competence levels.
- Data-driven planning is essential for future digital exhibitions.

The survey results highlighted both similarities and differences among respondents. Across all surveys, participants were active internet users, typically spending 3-6 hours online daily. A generally positive attitude toward Forum Marinum's virtual exhibitions was common, with content seen as interesting.

Changed priorities

While the crisis period boosted museums' use of digital tools significantly, it appears not to have changed their priorities in using them. It has rather

reaffirmed views and priorities that were already in existence just prior to the beginning of the pandemic.

The shift to using digital tools has happened faster and more forcefully in museums as it would have otherwise.

“Digital solutions are not just a national matter; you have to see the audiences on an international level.”

Where do you find information?

- *In cooperative forums with other museums and collaborators. Cooperation and networking with other institutions/museums are essential for retrieving new information and knowledge.*
- *Networking in finding solutions that have been proven useful and adopting the best practices already in use in other organizations.*
- *Many museums have prioritized digital accessibility in the recent years, and especially bringing collections and materials available through the joint platforms. This is to improve their national and international availability, and to enhance accessibility for everyone interested in this content. Just pay attention that despite the interest in digital content among the young adults group, finding one's way to these services is always a challenge. The most significant barrier to using digital content was perceived to be a lack of awareness about its existence.*
- *Some museums are also moving to use new systems of collection management, and one negative issue brought up was the fact that several different such systems are being used. There would be room for consolidation in collection management systems, so that a smaller number of systems could be used as something of a national standard.*

“We could have tried out even more different digital tools during the crisis, perhaps new and even permanent solutions could have been found that way”.

Other comments

- *The importance of preparedness. Museums can only use digital tools to overcome crisis situations and times of disruption if they have adopted and created resilient digital systems before the onset of crisis. This demands resources to be used for choosing well-functioning systems, for*

training staff in their use, and for maintaining and updating these systems regularly.

- *Digital systems and platforms will often become inadequate or obsolescent in time and need to be replaced with new and more advanced, more widely adopted, or easier to use systems. The financial and organisational strain of doing this is a challenge for museums, and the smaller a museum is, the more demanding it will be to keep its digital tools up to date and functional. Thus, museums with smaller resources of their own, and a smaller staff that might not be well-versed with the demands of IT systems would benefit significantly from institutional support from public and state authorities.*
- *The national, regional, and local authorities are in a central role for making plans and preparations for times of disruptions and crises. Museums' own preparation can only go so far if the institutional basis provided by the authorities is not strong and consistent.*
- *The role of different museum associations and joint organisations should be to contact and put pressure on the authorities to improve their ability to support museums in getting ready for extraordinary times.*

3. Financial/economic sustainability

The crisis effect on the museums

The institutions have observed a decrease in their revenue. Due to the crisis the organisations had to cut back on the expenses and limit them to the necessary ones, increase investments in online activities and postpone events and costs related to them for the following years. Most of the institutions noticed a change in the ticket sales and the effect which crisis had on their other sources of income.

Other effects of the crisis on institutions' economic sustainability included:

- *Unplanned technological and technical investments (institutions invested more in digital services and digital equipment due to prior lack of this equipment).*
- *High costs of the abovementioned investments.*
- *Additional unplanned costs of introducing online activities and transferring events into virtual space.*
- *Reduce the work schedule.*
- *Implement savings due to decrease in income - research work was suspended, and the previously planned exhibitions weren't organised.*

The crisis had a major negative effect on the economic sustainability of museums, and this was mainly due to the loss of visitors and income due to COVID restrictions by the national and local authorities.

The special COVID support given out by some states was a significant positive measure and improved the economic sustainability in the event. It has been generally understood that the extraordinary state support buffered some museums economically to a degree that they suffered no permanent negative effects, and for example rarely had to lay off their staff due to the financial losses caused by the crisis years.

This kind of a system did not exist in the beginning of the crisis, however, but it was created by the government while the crisis was ongoing, which then delayed the beginning of the economic crisis support regime. As a result of what has been learned during the crisis, our respondents have put a big weight on adequate crisis planning by the state and local authorities, so that they have systems in place to be used when a crisis strikes already before the beginning of the crisis itself.

Today's preparation for new crisis

The institutions now are more aware of the importance of flexibility in the way they operate. They know that it is important to adapt to the external changes and be ready to abandon old patterns of operating.

The authorities' level of preparedness was in many ways lacking when put to test in the last few years. It would therefore be very useful to push the government and local authorities towards looking at the COVID years critically and taking concrete measures to improve crisis planning and preparedness to avoid falling afoul of similar issues during the next crisis situations and disruptions, whatever they might be.

Museums now understand much better that different disruptions and crises can take place. This is to say that the level of crisis awareness has increased. This understanding grew significantly during the COVID years. In several museums there have been discussions about preparedness in expectation of future crises.

At the same time, though, several respondents commented that their museums don't have existing plans for different kinds of crises, and that the work for creating such plans is not seen as a central priority. The ending of the COVID crisis seems to have lulled many museums into a new sense of things being back to normal.

Conclusions of the pilot of the Museum of Västervik - pilot

For Västerviks Museum, the discovery of the 1600th century wreck Mars in 2011 was the start of a journey of development - from a local museum to a well-visited destination of national and international interest. During the last 10-15 years the museum has been the hub for a broad cooperation. But the cooperation has never been described, and we have not interviewed the participants. The pilot in Västerviks Museum gave us that opportunity to do this, and we call it the Mars-model. It is a way of financing cultural institutions with a strong focus on the common interest, as opposed to a focus on the economy. The common interest is the foundation on which everything is based, the theme around which all partners gather. The Mars model involves collaboration between different actors from business, universities and museums. When a specific interest is identified, the collaboration can be gradually expanded with new partners as the process requires additional expertise. With this working model, where participants contribute their own time and share resources, a project becomes less vulnerable

than projects with traditional financing models. If there is a lack of funding for a certain part, there can be alternative ways to proceed, either through other projects or through individual efforts.

The changes of investment plans

- *The areas of investment: organization of outdoor events, publishing activities, organization of online events.*
- *Museums are always seeking for a new option of development. More investments are foreseen for online, e-tools, outdoor programs.*
- *The main effect the crisis years had on museums' investments appears to have been a push to postpone them. A lot of work was left undone during the COVID years, and museums suffer for example from postponing different kinds of renovation and maintenance work in museum buildings and collection facilities.*
- *There has been a trend towards more investment into digitalization and for example new collection management systems.*

Solutions and offers for museums activity

- *New ideas for future: Thematic summer camps for pupils. Rent of premises for a theatre/actor for their performances. Areas for children care rooms. Educational programs for adults or combined. Teambuilding of staff. Restoration services (ex. Restoration of photographs).*
- *There were relatively few comments about gaining new sources of investment and funding for museums in preparation for crises, the bigger emphasis was placed on improving conditions for public crisis support, and some discussion centred on improving cooperation between museums themselves, as well as museums and public authorities. On balance, this might be a typically "Nordic" way to look at the issue of museum resources.*

In the previous parts of the BaMuR project it was found that the COVID-19 crisis led to significant economic problems in many museums. A need for new and different sources of income was identified.

In the pilot we have therefore studied how Västerviks Museum within the theme of the Vasa Kings' ship have found new ways to sustainably work with new business models.

The collaboration was built by private entities, NGO's, museums, and universities.

Success factors Organisation and process

- *Collaboration between fieldwork, research and mediation as well as collaboration between business, academia and museum.*
- *A non-bureaucratic organisation with low thresholds, simple decision-making paths and the ability to be fast.*
- *Creative ways to overcome administrative barriers.*
- *A hub for organising and keeping all partners informed and updated.*
- *A process characterised by openness.*
- *A strong focus on the common interest, opposed to the economy. The common interest is in the basics from which everything proceeds). The interest is a theme around which people gather, a cauldron, instead of the funding itself.*

Collaboration/personal chemistry

- *The personal chemistry between collaboration partners is important.*
- *It is important that all collaborating parties respect each other.*
- *High level of trust in the cooperation and between participants.*
- *All partners have clearly defined roles, which means that all partners feel involved and secure in the collaboration. Everyone contributes with their specialist knowledge and everyone's participation is important.*
- *Prestige is set aside, removing the need to assert oneself.*
- *Personal conflicts are put aside and everyone works forward.*
- *It is particularly important that the leader or management is easy to work with and that someone assumes the role of diplomat when necessary.*
- *Collaboration is characterised by openness; new partners are admitted to the group if needed and interested.*
- *Committed and productive researchers manage the storytelling and are a sort of engine for a project of this kind.*
- *Speed. The faster you have the opportunity to act, the faster you end up at the forefront and become interesting to more people. Innovative thinking regarding collaboration and method development.*
- *Financing*

- *Possibility to apply for funding from different sources; local, regional, national, and international.*
- *Local funding that is levelled up with external, national, and international funding.*
- *Local financier who could make fast decisions when needed.*
- *The sharing of findings and results means that a smaller effort can be levelled up for a greater result when everyone gets to take part of everything that is done.*
- *Close, clear, and quick feedback to financiers and collaboration partners is important.*
- *After the pandemic, we have started a review of our economic structure and how to handle crises. We are now more aware of this and have reallocated our investments to technology. In addition, we own older buildings that require investment, and we are now allocating more resources to this purpose.*

4. Other areas

Solutions that worked for a short time

Different services that gained some interest and demand during the height of the COVID crisis, like remote guided tours or specialized podcasts might be a case in point. Here we need to remember that special conditions invite special solutions. Something that works in the absence of ordinary services may see some success in that moment but might well lose out easily when the ordinary logic of museum offerings returns after the crisis.

High-risk and low-risk solutions

Among the high-risk and low-risk solutions introduced were:

- *Working remotely.*
- *Changing the choice of channels of communication with stakeholders.*
- *Digitizing various activities and elements of the institution's programme.*
- *Introducing online activities.*
- *Increasing employees' digital competences.*
- *Implementing visiting restrictions.*
- *Introducing outdoor events.*
- *Reducing the work schedule and implementing savings due to decrease in income - suspension of research work and the previously planned exhibitions weren't organised.*
- *Introducing online activities.*
- *Introducing new offer which was available for recipients remotely.*
- *Purchase of equipment needed to record and stream events online.*
- *Increasing the activity of the institution in social media.*
- *Modernizing the institution's website.*
- *Increasing the number of digitized objects.*
- *Transition to remote communication (inside and outside the organisation);*
- *Acceleration of the digital circulation of selected documents and remote implementation of selected procedures.*

- *Increasing employees' digital competences.*
- *Cutting back on the expenses and limiting them to the necessary ones.*
- *Increasing investments in online activities.*
- *Postponing events and costs related to them for the following years.*

These changes were made mainly due to official regulations and restrictions issued by the government as well as the need to adapt to pandemic conditions and limited access to the public. Another goal was to maintain the relationships with the stakeholders and to keep the staff of the organisation employed as well as maintain the interest of visitors during periods of museum closure or during visitation restrictions. Other reasons for the implementation of these changes included: lack of funds, reduction of income due to visiting restrictions.

A good example of a high-risk solution would be putting a lot of resources in a short timeframe to an investment that would be potentially good, but of which we have very little actual researched information. A large and very cutting-edge digital exhibition would be a case in point, as not only is the potential number of users a very murky question, but it is also yet unclear how it would be best to get reliable income for a museum from a virtual attraction like this.

“One should not be afraid to abandon the old patterns of previous activities. New fields of action have made it possible to reach new audiences”.