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RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

BaMuR

Baltic Museum Resilience: Resilient museums and memory institutions for resilient societies in the Baltic Sea Region

Pilots implemented and evaluated (EE, SE, FI)

Deliverable 1.3

JOINT EVALUATION OF PILOTS

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Introduction

To test some of the key solutions that have been identified and suggested for improving the resilience of museums in the Baltic Sea area, three pilots were implemented in three museums participating in the project, Estonian War Museum (PP1), Museum of Västervik (PP2) and Forum Marinum (PP3). Due to the limited scope of the current project, the pilots assessed and tested a limited sample of solutions. The emphasis has nevertheless been on solutions addressing some of the main issues identified during the previous phases of the project.
In the report, the work done with all the three pilots, the results achieved, and their progress through the peer review process is jointly discussed and evaluated.

1. The Process

The three pilots along three strands

Participation, inclusion and interaction

In the pilot by the Estonian War Museum (PP1), working with museum volunteers and crowdsourcing has been tested by digitizing the register of memoirs by past members of the Estonian military and building a relational database on these results. The pilot begun with the selection and training of volunteers for this work by museum professionals. It has allowed new information to be learned from process of crowdsourcing archival research work, with a view of finding out the possibilities such cooperation entails as well as the potential issues and limits of this work.

Organic connections and digital sustainability

In the pilot by Forum Marinum (PP3), the different preconditions for a new virtual exhibition were tested through gathering feedback about existing virtual exhibitions from different audiences. This provided information for planning for a new, improved exhibition, and trying out individual features of this exhibition by partnering with a private company (SME). This pilot has allowed us to arrive at a better understanding about virtual exhibitions as a tool in improving museum resilience, and both the positive sides and limits of using this tool.

Financial/economic sustainability

In the pilot by Västerviks Museum (PP2), the solutions for financial and economic issues caused by the COVID-19 crisis we are suggesting in the project Toolbox are compared with the innovative financial instruments and innovative schemes identified in the Interreg Central Europe project "ForHeritage" (4H) from 2021. Similarities and differences from a northern European (Baltic Region) versus a Central European perspective are contrasted and, where appropriate, changes to the Toolbox are suggested based on this work. As a case study of the comparative results, they are applied on to how Västerviks Museum, with the theme of the Vasa Kings' ships, is finding new ways to sustainably work with new business models.

Pilot methodology

The three pilots implemented in the project have been different in character with each other. This has allowed allows us to try out different approaches to testing solutions to improve museum resilience, even if in the context of a small project with limited time at our disposal.
It did, however, represent a methodological challenge for us: how do we apply a consistent methodology to all three pilots?
After looking into different options, we decided to base the joint methodology for our pilots on a model created by three Finnish researchers and educators, Lotta Hassi, Sami Paju and

Reetta Maila in their book Kehitä kokeillen. Organisaation käsikirja (”Develop through experimentation. A handbook for organizations”) published by Talentum Pro (Helsinki, 2015).

The methodological model proposed is based on an empirical circle of experimentation. including five stages:

1. Identifying the uncertainties
2. Setting for experimentation
3. Prototype
4. Collecting feedback
5. Reflection

In the first stage of a pilot, we identified the uncertainties we are addressing, to pinpoint what was the issue that we needed to learn more about.
In the second stage, a setting was created for experimentation, by determining how to create an experiment of the idea and learn from this experiment.
In the third stage, a prototype, a learning tool or device, was put together and tried out.
Then in the fourth stage, we collected feedback about fielding the prototype, to assess the experiences gained from different points of view.
Finally, in the fifth stage, there was time for reflection. Here we evaluate the process, to determine if we arrived at a good and workable solution.
It needs to be pointed out that this method was not a perfect fit for the pilots due to their differences. It could nevertheless be adapted to them with certain tweaks and adjustments. A high degree of commensurability needed to be upheld in the pilot process by all three partners in the interest of being able to reliably assess and compare the results of the pilots with each other.
As Hassi, Paju and Maila note in their book, the golden rule of developing by experimenting through this method is to achieve as much information as possible while having as little effort as possible. Our goal was to create small but smart pilots that would allow us to extract useful information from experiments that necessarily are limited in scale and time in the context of the BaMuR project.

Pilot timeline

The preliminary work with the pilots was practically started at the beginning of September 2023 as per the Project Work Plan. Subsequently, a joint methodology for the pilots was established in the project meeting hosted by Västerviks Museum (PP2) in Sweden in early November 2023, and the final version of the methodology was agreed upon at the end of November 2023.
The work done with the pilots in the three museums took place until late February 2023, when the preliminary reports of the work done so far were delivered to Forum Marinum (PP3). A peer review was conducted with the participation of all partners, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the pilot reports, and suggesting ways to improve upon them. The peer reviews were discussed together in the project meeting held in Turku, Finland, by Forum Marinum at the end of February.
Based on the peer review, new final reports were created during March 2024 and a joint report of the pilot process was put together based on them by the end of March.

2. The Preliminary Results (February 2024)

Preliminary reports and peer review

The three pilots resulted in preliminary reports by late February 2024. All three partners conducting pilots presented a report of what had been done that far, and peer reviews were put together by all partners for them.
Below are presented some of the key comments for the preliminary reports in the peer reviews, as discussed in the partner meeting at the end of February.

Estonian War Museum (PP1)

Strengths
There are clear objectives and good information for pilot background. There's also a detailed process description and a practical approach to the pilot process.

Weaknesses
Lack of specific data was noted, and also a lack of description of stakeholder and volunteer involvement. There was very limited analysis. A reflection section was lacking, and pathways for adaptability to other institutions could be identified in more detail.

Västerviks Museum (PP2)

Strengths
The report provides a detailed overview of the collaboration between Västerviks Museum and its partners, highlighting the evolution of the project from its inception to the present, effectively captures the collaborative efforts and the positive outcomes achieved through the partnership, inclusion of stakeholder perspectives, clear presentation of success factors, graphic representation of the Mars model.

Weaknesses
There is a lack of detailed financial information, limited discussion on challenges, limited impact assessment, limited future outlook, more detailed description of the interviews and their results would make the report stronger, reflection of the model with the challenges presented by times of crisis could improve the results.

Forum Marinum (PP3)

Strengths

There is a practical approach to the pilot process, the report demonstrates active engagement with various stakeholder groups. There are clear objectives: the goals of the pilot project are clearly stated, providing a clear direction for the initiative. The report includes a reflective

section showing a critical evaluation of the project. The report describes the process of evaluating the museums digital efforts very well.

Weaknesses

There is a lack of specific data and quantitative data, and also a lack of key findings, and detailed insights. The report could benefit from providing concrete recommendations, lessons learned, and potential areas for improvement. The report as would also benefit from skipping some details and be more summarized.

3. The Final Results (March 2024)

The comments and suggestions for improvements gained from the peer reviews were considered very useful by all the three partners conducting pilots. In the first three weeks of March 2024, new versions of reports were created, incorporating several improvements prompted by the feedback from other partners. In general, the peer review process led to the final pilot reports being significantly more useful for the project at large.
Below, results presented in the final reports are summarised for each project partner conducting a pilot.

Estonian War Museum (PP1)

In their final pilot report, the Estonian War Museum summarises the work done with their pilot, and the results reached.
In the pilot, in the framework of Strand 1 of the toolbox, PP1 EWM focused on the crowdsourcing, more specifically how the museum could involve volunteers (very often the visitors of EWM or final beneficiaries themselves) in the museum's daily activities, by contributing to the museum's resilience. The purpose of the volunteer involvement is to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship between parties with the intention of both strengthening museum's capacity and bringing stakeholders and clients closer to the museum's daily activities. Therefore, common ground between museum and volunteer was defined - the improvement of online register of historic material, the Estonian (bi)weekly military journal "Sõdur" ("Soldier", 1919-40).
The goal of the pilot project was then to improve the situation by making an online register of the persons mentioned in the journal, with the help of volunteers. The final objective was to bring into the active, searchable, and relational use of historic material that will allow to expand the focus and scope of researching Estonian military heritage. Besides directly contributing to the improvement of military heritage research, the database would also provide a valuable source for researchers outside the military focus.

The pilot has included different stages. First, the platform for the database was created together with an Estonian ICT company, Codelinestudio LLC, through an iterative process building on new ideas and technological possibilities along the way.
The crowdsourcing element (involvement of the volunteers) was introduced after the platform was already functional. A practical training was held where EWM team explained the rational of the project ("why"), while the main focus was on the "how" side, working with the journals and entering the data into the database.
After that, training materials for the volunteers were developed, and volunteers started to improve the database together with the staff of EWM and conducting training. At the same time, information about the database was disseminated, including information about how one can participate in the effort.
The results of this effort in general are presented below, in a somewhat shortened form.

Findings from the Estonian War Museum's pilot

Through participation in the pilot volunteers were able to see how they would be able to contribute to the museum and what the museum stands for. The pilot has demonstrated that volunteers have skills that can be useful in various aspects within the museums' departments. The volunteers come from a wide range of organisations - from voluntary national defence organisation Estonian Defence League, SME Codeline Studio LLC, genealogy web-platform Geni.com, Hiiumaa Military Heritage Society, an so on.

In parallel, EWM has gained very valuable first-hand experience on how to work with volunteers. Among others, it means that the museum has to think through the overall approach to volunteers' involvement, including possible topics/themes, roles/division of tasks of volunteers, networking/ communication methods, etc. Also the range of possible areas for co-operation was expanded - volunteers can help with new tasks such as cataloguing objects, evaluating exhibitions and delivering learning programmes.

During the pilot, the individual numbers of the "Soldier" have been systematized and made available. The database solution has been developed through a continuous PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle, including the input from the volunteers. Data concerning about 450 individuals from different numbers of the "Soldier" have been already entered into the database (including the relations). A training programme for the volunteers is being developed and training conducted.
Future possibilities have been planned to link the platform with other databases and to include besides "Sõdur" also other related journals and newspapers, also those form the Soviet era and since 1991. More data still needs to be added to the system about different individuals, and this additional work will allow making further conclusions and suggesting specific improvements.
It has been found out during the pilot process that despite what would have been done during the planning the planning phase, a lot of new ideas and solutions will emerge during the process, including how the technical solution should look like and what should be its functionalities. This has led to the recommendation to plan efforts with plenty of time available, and to allow times for reflection and discussions between different partners (museum workers, historians, ICT etc).
It has also been noted that it is important to choose a technical partner who "cares" about the project, is invested into it: it is no just a task that they are paid for, but will include a positive

input along the way. Through such a dynamic, it is better possible to create a database that has improved functionality and that is more user friendly.
What has been considered is the question if the process and technical solution could be applicable to similar projects? In EWM's opinion, the answer is "yes". And we do not see the limitation to military heritage, but this approach would help to improve the accessibility and quality of data in any historic field (medicine, agriculture, education, and so on). Another question is if the process could have been conducted in a different way by the EWM? The realistic answer is that there would not have likely been much difference, only the time-factor has been critical. Likely the same historical and societal partners would have been consulted and an ICT partner with similar qualities chosen for the work.

Västerviks Museum (PP2)

In their final pilot report, Västerviks Museum summarises the work done with their pilot, and the results reached, which are given in the form of describing what is called "The Mars model". Generally, the pilot included three parts. The main effort was interviewing eight people had worked together with each other in a many-sided project connected with the theme of the wreck of the 16th century Swedish warship Mars Makalös (Mars the Peerless) in between 2011 and 2024. This included interviewees from Västerviks Museum and from among the museum's collaborators. The questions were connected with describing the Mars project in general, from their points of view, and describing how the collaborative effort worked out. They were also asked to say how the understood the success of the project, how they saw its future, and what issues they saw with the collaboration. The second part of the pilot included a survey presented to museum visitors, asking them among other things what they thought about the Mars exhibition in Västerviks Museum, and how they understood the financing model of the exhibition. The third part of the pilot was comparing the tools created during the current project with the results of an earlier project, ForHeritage.
As a result of these efforts described above, what is called the Mars model is presented in the report. Below is a description of the model in a somewhat shortened form.

The Mars model
The Mars model involves collaboration between partners from business, academia and museums built around a common interest. The partnership originates from the fundamental, common interest from which the collaboration is built around (as opposed to building a collaboration around the economy). When a specific interest is identified, collaboration can gradually be extended with new partners as the process requires additional expertise.
Starting from the common interest guarantees a long-term sustainable partnership based on the fact that all partners gain something from working together. The partnership is based on a win-win relationship which in itself creates an incentive for all partners to share their results and achievements, as well as overcoming potential difficulties. As long as all partners have motivations of their own, they are likely to be willing and able to participate.
Collaboration does not take place through just one single project, but through several parallel, partially overlapping projects from which the collaboration can both gain specific funding but also contribute in the shape of participants' hours spent by working with the common interest. However, a significant portion of the resources is derived from the invested hours contributed by the participants in the collaboration. These hours are given voluntarily or financed by their

employers or other projects. When all participants contribute with their own time and share their results and resources with all participants, the value increases for all.
The findings from the ForHeritage-report give us an insight that the Mars Model may be a fifth type of instrument, or an extra layer to the previous ones, in a way of working with a non-formal “sharing economy”.
A hub for organising and for keeping all partners informed and updated about what is happening in the cooperation is a crucial part of the set of the Mars model. The structure of the organisation needs to be non-bureaucratic and thresholds for participating should be low. Decision-making paths should be simple and ensure that partners have the possibility to act fast if needed. It is important however to point out that the cooperation cannot be too loose either, formalia needs to be there in terms of laws and obligations. But in other aspects formalia should be minimal in order to promote creativity.
The collaboration is characterised by a great openness towards all partners, as well as honesty, good will and trust. New partners are welcomed throughout the process and all partners collaborate, share and offer their results and data freely. This creates added value and synergy effects for everyone along the way. Resources from different areas are shared with everyone and can thus create a large added value for the partners.
Funds are for example used to produce information and technology which then can be used for various purposes by different partners. Everyone shares and therefore everyone benefits. 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. Trust is also important in order for partners to ignore personal benefits in favour of what's best for the common interest, if needed.
In the Mars-model work is not done within only one large project, but by several projects financed in various ways, through direct sponsorship, project financing or investments. When working this way it's important to be open for new angles and side tracks. If a partner has a side track that is not directly connected to an overall project, it can still be beneficial for the whole. By being responsive, share with others, one can get unexpected benefits in return. The openness is also reflected in being open and innovative in testing new technology and new ideas. Furthermore, the openness is reflected on an extra layer of cooperation, outside the actual hub of long-term partners. In the cooperation individuals or groups with special interests are welcomed to join part or parts of the process even though they don't have a specific interest of being in a long-term commitment. In the example of Mars it was volunteers in divings and crafts, but it could also be artists or NGOs with a special interest, among other things.
The possibility to work with different projects and more than one financier often makes a project more interesting for external financiers, since it often leads to synergy effects and a good potential for levelling up funds. But when working with different financiers, it is important to recognise that the financiers often have different purposes for supporting and different requirements of what they want to gain from a certain project. It is important to recognise the different financiers' main goals and follow their statutes and always remember to keep close contact with the financiers and keep them updated if there is a need for changes in the project.

Forum Marinum (PP3)

In their final pilot report, Forum Marinum describe the work done and results reached with their pilot effort. In general, the pilot included two phases.
In the first phase, three surveys were conducted for different target audiences, and four history and museum professionals interviewed, about the subject of virtual exhibitions with regards to digital resilience.
In the second phase, further steps were taken based on the first phase: an existing virtual tour was expanded with new content and included in a physical museum exhibition with the help of a VR headset, virtual museum tours were held in local nursing homes, and a workshop was held with museum stakeholders on virtual exhibitions. Different kinds of feedback was collected about the virtual tour that could be accessed both online and with the VR heads. Finally, the data collected during both phases was put together, anaylysed and reflected.
The results of this effort are presented below, in a somewhat shortened form.

Findings about the reception of virtual exhibitions

The responses to the surveys revealed both similarities and differences. Respondents in all surveys were mostly equally active internet users. A positive attitude towards Forum Marinum's virtual exhibitions was a common factor among respondents in all surveys, especially evident in the perception that the exhibition content was seen as interesting.
Differences among respondents in the surveys were identified in terms of internet usage habits and attitudes towards different content in virtual exhibitions. In the largest survey, where respondents had the highest average age, the most common internet uses were information search and consumption, and interaction with other people. In the other two surveys, there was a stronger emphasis on using the internet for entertainment. In the survey aimed at students, information retrieval remained prominent, while in the responses of schoolchildren, entertainment and gaming were highlighted the most.
When asked about internet usage habits and preferences, clarity of content and the importance of information were recurring themes in the mass survey. Respondents valued information in digital content more than visual appeal. This observation was also made in the workshop we organised for stakeholders. In contrast, the feedback collection for VR glasses emphasised the simulated experiences they provided.
Regarding the content of virtual exhibitions, the largest survey showed that respondents were primarily driven by the topics of the exhibitions. In the student survey, there was also interest in the presented spaces and objects, and the execution of the exhibitions was praised. In the large survey, respondents were most interested in the sailing ship Suomen Joutsen, which is also nationally the most well-known feature of Forum Marinum in both virtual and physical forms.
For students and schoolchildren, the most interesting object was the passenger ship Bore, which content-wise has the most extensive virtual exhibition. This was a somewhat surprising find, since it was the virtual exhibition of a barque Sigyn that the museum had particularly curated to suit the interests and needs of schoolchildren. In terms of content, respondents in the mass survey wished for more pictures and video material; students emphasised videos and interactivity, and for schoolchildren, the most important requests were the “wow-effect” and gamification. Particularly schoolchildren were averse to text as exhibition content.
The positive aspects of digital implementations were highlighted, especially the high quality of content, videos, and audio. Many found the usage easy and convenient, placing importance on accessibility and the opportunity to access places not normally reachable.

When asked about the drawbacks of virtual exhibitions, the responses showed some contradictions. Some saw that there was too little content, while others commented that there was too much to see and not enough time to take it all in at once. The difficulty of finding the exhibitions was also a point of criticism. The responses also echoed the view that virtual exhibitions cannot replace physical ones and do not evoke a similar atmosphere and experiences.

The results among the young adults and in the mass survey varied very little when asked what kind of digital content they would prefer museums to produce. Most preferred content that could be used from home and by oneself. This should mean that there is indeed a market for virtual exhibitions or some other type of web-based digital content. However, when asked what is the biggest barrier for using such digital content, the most popular answer seemed to be that there's too little information on what's available.

Feedback from nursing homes was mostly positive, with understandable developmental suggestions given that it was an experimental service. Most assessed the event as either very positive or cautiously positive from the residents' perspective. In terms of presentation, the responses were almost evenly split between cautiously positive and cautiously negative. In open feedback, the staff expressed that not all residents fully understood the nature of the event, causing restlessness. Comments also suggested that the execution could have been shorter to improve residents' interest and endurance. The majority of the staff would be willing to recommend the service, feeling that this type of service also supports their work.

In our workshop for stakeholders, accessibility and usability emerged as key themes. Participants emphasised the importance of considering users' diverse capabilities regarding digital content. The discussion also touched upon the suitability of different content types for virtual exhibitions and the possibilities of incorporating gamification to enhance the attractiveness and usability of exhibitions. There was also discussion on the wider implications of the sustainability of digital services in museums, both in terms of everyday challenges like choosing dependable platforms and partners, and problems connected to sudden crisis situations of different severity.

Data mining gave us some concrete facts on how long the audience did spend with a virtual exhibition. While it could not measure the level of interest of each of the visitors, it did however show the minutes spent with the content. Some of the visits expanded to over half an hour, exploring every nook and cranny of the exhibition, while there were also visits which lasted but a half a minute and only included a small part of the exhibition, maybe just one information hotspot.

In the mass survey and in the survey of young adults, the most interest was shown for the option of remotely visiting digital museum content on their own devices at home. The next most liked option was guided and independent exploration of digital content, although in the survey of young adults, immersive spaces within the museum also gained popularity. Despite the interest in digital content among this group, finding one's way to these services is always a challenge. A lack of awareness about digital content's existence was seen as the most significant barrier to using it.

The responses from the surveys would suggest that many individuals interested in exhibition content prefer physical exhibitions over virtual ones. One reason for this may be the fact that current virtual exhibitions are often merely digitalised versions of real physical spaces. However, if virtual exhibitions are developed further and start gaining their own identities, their very own audiences may well be formed, too.

In light of this information, it would be recommended for museums to focus future digital content for and with potential target audiences, such as active enthusiasts, seniors, and schools. Different user groups have different needs, where ease of use, platform clarity, and content richness were undoubtedly crucial factors for older people. Simultaneously, for schoolchildren, attractiveness and gamification make it easier to engage them. Places and situations such as schools, nursing homes, and meetings, where people cannot physically visit the museum but would appreciate the expertise and stimulation brought by museum guided tours, could serve as potential growth areas for digital services, such as remote guided tours.

Analysis

For all three pilots, the comments and criticism received through the peer review process led to the improvement of the new versions of the pilot reports completed in March 2024. The suggestions for improvement were taken into account to make the pilots more comprehensive, and to summarise the results of the pilot in a more informative way to help the general goals of the project.
Some particular comments about the improvements and other changes effected in the new versions of the pilots are shown below.

Estonian War Museum (PP1)

The latest version of the pilot report by the EWM has improved from the initial version, and there are now more results received from the work done during the pilot. The limited time available for the pilot phase in the project has been something of an obstacle for the completion of this pilot, however, and thus there have been some issues with completing the pilot and its reporting by late March. In that regard, all the improvements and additions suggested in the peer reviews had not been yet implemented in the pilot report as of late March 2024.
The work with the pilot has continued during the project's further phases, and additional results of the pilot have been added to this version of the Joint Evaluation Report in May 2024.

Västerviks Museum (PP2)

The final pilot report from Västerviks Museum was significantly expanded from the first version. As per the comments received from other partners, the report now included more background information about building the "Mars model", for example interviews of the relevant people involved in the process, in the museum and among its different collaborators. Also some discussion about issues encountered during the Mars project have been added, as well as suggestions on how the model could be useful for museums during times of crisis. The process of the project has been explained in great detail, and might still have been possible to distil some of this information into a more succinct form.

Forum Marinum (PP3)

The final pilot report provided by Forum Marinum has seen improvements based on the recommendations gained through peer review. The description of the pilot process is given in a more systematic manner, and there is more effort to provide results for the surveys and interviews. Some concrete recommendations are also given on how virtual exhibitions, and

their better audience engagement, can be used to improve a museum's digital resilience. There would however also be more room for even further analysis and recommendations based on the good amount of data gathered during the pilot process, the limited time available for the work nothwithstanding.

Reflection

Through these three pilots we could find different solutions for improving museum resilience for all three strands of the project, and also establish limits for how useful these solutions could be for different crisis situations. It can be said that there were some challenges in conducting the pilots in the time allocated for them in the project plan, which suggests the need for better advance planning for similar projects in the future. Even if we were quite mindful of the limited scale and time span of the current project, these issues still made themselves known by the end of the time period reserved for the pilot actions.

One strength of the project pilots was that they were so different which each other. While it led to challenges with making the same methodology fit them all, it also allowed us to take quite different matters into account with regards to museum resilience, and enjoy the benefits of varied points of view for how museum could improve their ability to address situations and times when their resources are stretched and their resilience is put to test.