

# Development of Public Cultural Services Management: Study of the Night of Museums

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## Abstract

*This paper addresses the issue of public cultural services management by the example of event organization in cultural institutions. The Night of Museums event has been held annually in St. Petersburg and attracted more than 100 000 visitors for its fifth edition in 2012. A multistage study on this event has been organized aiming at exploring the potential of the large-scale event in development of public cultural services management both from the side of audience and cultural entities. The findings of the study indicate audience development within the event, implementation of innovative solutions through application of creative methods by cultural institutions and develop recommendations for effective provision of public cultural services.*

## Keywords

*public services, culture, museums, events*

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## Introduction

This paper studies management of public services in cultural sphere by the example of the *Night of Museums*. This event is annually arranged in St. Petersburg (Russia). The starting point is the following: services produced within this particular event are both typical for museums and of cross-sectoral nature. Within this event various types of cultural institutions such as museums, libraries and galleries, and lofts offer innovative solutions for audience development. Through organizing special events devoted to one theme they develop public cultural services. Within the Night of Museums libraries and other non-museum institutions present themselves with different types of exhibiting activities. For this reason these are studies on museum's activities that are considered within the research.

Much of academic literature highlighted the changing role of museums in post-modern society and discussed main challenges for their further development (See: Kotler, 2001; Van Aalst, Boogaarts, 2002; Burton, Scott, 2003; Anderson, 2004). Increasing museum audience is a key issue in this respect. One of a specific approach used by practitioners for this purpose is organization of events. Events can contribute to audience development in different manner. They strengthen community ties, enhance a sense of belonging and raise interest among public (Kotler, Kotler, 2000, p.283). More informal atmosphere created by the events (Tobelem, 1998, p. 339) encourages newcomers for visiting museums (Barbosa, Brito, 2012, p.10) and in general attract wider audiences

(Kolb, 2005, p.39; Gyimothy, 2009, p.201). Most commonly museum audience is characterized as well educated and wealthier than average citizens (Kawashima, 1999, p.23). However, some

specifications in characteristics of visitors occur when it concerns events. Frequent event visitors, who are interested in culture, also set a value upon leisure and socialization (Prentice and Andersen, 2003, p.27). Furthermore, those event visitors, who come to museums for entertainment or social activity can't be automatically considered as museum visitors (Barbosa, Brito, 2012, p.15).

The impact of Night of Museums event on a city has been studied by a few international scholars. Jiwa et al. (2009) explore economic, cultural and social benefits of Light Night and Nuit Blanche, as it is called in the UK and France, on community cohesion, tourism and regeneration. The authors use a case study approach to demonstrate an effect of such an event for revitalization of town centers. Krause (2007) studied this event as a tool for city marketing in Germany. This paper explores the approaches used for management of public services in cultural sphere by the example of the Night of Museums event.

In May 2012 an annual event Night of Museums was held in St. Petersburg for the fifth time. The idea of the event organized annually throughout 157 countries originated from Germany, where the Long Night of Museums (Lange Nacht der Museen) was arranged in Berlin for the first time in 1997. This distributed event (Schaller et al. 2012) is characterized by a number of single events arranged in the same time and devoted to the same theme during late hours (some part of institutions stay open till 6 a.m.). For the last five years the number of cultural institutions (i.e. museums, libraries, lofts etc.) taking part in the event in St. Petersburg has increased from 33 to 77 entities and the number of visitors has increased from 24 000 in 2008 to 100 000 visitors in 2012.

Despite of the high popularity of the event among visitors and cultural institutions and the fact that the event is held in more than twenty Russian cities, to author's knowledge, none of studies has been done on this particular event in Russia. However, innovative solutions offered by different kinds of events have been addressed by scholars taking the example of St. Petersburg (Gordin and Matetskaya, 2010). The purpose of this research is to contribute to an understanding of management of public cultural services. The objectives of the study can be described as follows: to explore the effect of the Night of Museums on audience development; examine approaches of St. Petersburg cultural institutions in raising their attractiveness; provide recommendations for effective provision of public cultural services.

Getz (1997) points out two main traits of special events organized in museums: they are occasional and usually differ from typical organization's activities. This is partially relevant for the Night of Museums as once a year cultural institutions arrange different kinds of activities connected to their main theme using more creative approach.

For instance, it can be expressed through organization of interactive sessions in those institutions that primarily serve for conserving and exhibiting. In other cases some changes in target audience can be observed (for more information see Results and Discussion section).

Events attract wider audience to museums (Kolb, 2005, p.39; Gyimothy, 2009, p.201) and diversify patterns of museum attendance (Barbosa, Brito, 2012, p.15). In this regard our first research hypothesis (H1) is formulated as follows: events organized in museums attract non-frequent visitors.

Our third research hypothesis deals with management of public services in big cities during organization of distributive events. St. Petersburg lacks synergetic approach in management of culture that in some particular cases is very relevant for organization of urban celebrations, festivals and etc. (Gordin, Khoreva, 2012, p. 163). Organization of an event not only contributes to development of public cultural services, but also to development of a cultural institution itself (H2).

## **Material and Methods**

For the purposes of the research a multistage study devoted to the Night of Museums was organized. The authors would like to emphasize that the study is still being processed.

In the first stage of the study a survey of visitors, who attended the event in May 2012, was organized in pre-selected 11 museum clusters of the city. Museums and other cultural institutions were assigned to a set of clusters based on primarily geographical factor guided by previously made research on cultural clusters in the city (Gordin and Matetskaya, 2010). Within these clusters institutions distinguish by the organizational (museums, libraries, lofts) and legal (state and private-owned) forms. In total 383 visitors (resulted in 370 valuable questionnaires) of 39 cultural institutions were interviewed. Every tenth visitor in each institution was interviewed. Due to high popularity of the event, almost at every institution there was a line of visitors waiting for entering a building. Interviewers approached visitors, when they were queuing. The survey consisted of 13 open-ended and closed-ended questions covering visitors' behavior (number of annual visits and to hosting institution), satisfaction (event satisfaction, public services satisfaction, expectation fulfillment) and demographic questions (age, gender). For the analysis of the survey results a correlation analysis was conducted. In case of open-ended questions the answers were first categorized and then recorded.

In the second stage an expert survey of cultural institutions managers' engaged in preparation and organization activities of the event was conducted. An expert survey consisted of 12 open-ended question covering motivation, expectations and impact of the event for the particular institution. At the present time 16 surveys have been

completed. A survey has two versions: for those institutions that take part in the event for the first time and those, which had participated before. The reason for this division is the assumption that motivation for participation in the event for institutions, which already participated in the event and which did not can be different in terms of their expectations and commitment.

Here we need to explain briefly what types of museums and other cultural institutions tend to take part in the Night of museums in St. Petersburg. According to Committee of Culture of the City of St. Petersburg there are more than eight thousand objects of cultural heritage preserved by the state, 182 of which are museums. The most popular museums among tourists are a few well-known across the world museums such as Hermitage, the Russian Museum etc. The significant part of museums is hardly ever visited by tourists, who usually come just for a couple of days and aspire to visit those sites that have become the brands of the city. Hence, the target audience for less popular museums is residents. Nevertheless, due to specificity of some museums (e.g. Museum of Pedology, Museum of Urban Electric Transport, and Military Medical Museum) local residents don't even know about their existence. Thus, for some of museums the Night of Museums is a unique opportunity to attract attention of potential visitors by means of advertising within the event.

As it was mentioned above the research is being continued and will be further developed by the study of the Internet discussions devoted to the event. The semantic analysis of visitors' posts on the event will contribute to achievement of the research objectives. Moreover, it is planned to organize a longitude research on the topic and to continue the research next year during the Night of Museums 2013.

## **Results and Discussion**

In this section we present findings relevant for an each of hypotheses stated above.

*(H1): Events organized in museums attract non-frequent visitors*

Results of analysis for visitors' survey don't strongly support the hypothesis about the attractiveness of the event for non-frequent museum-goers: the most part of respondents – 35% visit museums “once-twice a month”. However, the second most large group – 26% visit museums “once-twice a year”. Almost a half of respondents (49,5%) for the question “Why do you come to the Night of Museums?” ticked the answer “For interesting activities in museums”.

There are also some important findings on audience development based on the results of expert surveys of those managers, who were directly engaged in preparation and organization of the event in cultural intuitions. A number of managers emphasized changes in demographic characteristics of visitors during the event and, consequently, shifts in target audience occur at particular institutions:

*“...Youngsters in contrast to our generation are not used to visit museums, but this form*

*of the event encourage them to discover this wonderful world” (Head of the Local Studies Department, Library “Old Kolomna”);*

*“...We try to organize everything in such a manner that everyone would find something interesting and enjoyable. Moreover, we are interested in attraction of visitors in the age from 20 till 40 years old” (Head of Cultural Programs Department, Central Municipal Public Library named after V. Mayakovskiy);*

*“...It is obvious that children are our main target group in day-time, especially during working days. During the Night of Museums there are much fewer children. Therefore, the main target group within this event is elder people” (Deputy Head of the Museum of Arctic and Antarctic);*

*“...In the first turn we wanted to see people, who rarely visit us. Our audience is the intellectuals of St. Petersburg, those who are pensioners or near this age, obviously creative intellectuals and students, especially of creative specializations. We wanted to see during the Night middle aged people, 25-35 years old, working in absolutely different spheres, not related to the art. And those people indeed came and there were many” (Art Director of the Fund of M. Shemyakin).*

Thus, we observe audience development within the event caused by increased interest among non-visitors and shifts in target audience for some of institutions.

*(H2) Organization of an event not only contributes to development of public cultural services, but also to development of a cultural institution itself*

Based on the results of the managers’ expert survey three main effects of the event organization for institution development were identified:

- Positive development of internal communication network:

*“...For personnel this is a creative and organizational cohesion, when everybody knows what happens and contributes to the common goal” (Director of the Literature Museum “XX century”);*

*“...For the positive effect I can name the experience of joint work of all the departments” (Head of Cultural Programs Department, Central Municipal Public Library named after V. Mayakovskiy);*

*“...Night of Museum is an excellent way to exercise team activity – almost everyone works for this event, all personnel, regardless the department” (Project Coordinator in Museum of Anna Akhmatova).*

- Extension of museum space:

*“...The fact that we by reclaiming the space around the yard and building, develop our communicate with neighbors, residents of the building and housing cooperative, gives*

*as the opportunity to reclaim more and more of non-museum space – this is our direction for further development” (Director of the Literature Museum “XX century”).*

*“...We’d like to utilize the space in front of the museum, but this bears against accommodation, because this territory doesn’t belong to us. We wished to put there some installations. We would be happy to have some simplified order of accommodation for these purposes and support of other institutions” (PR-manager of the Erarta Museum).*

The potential for museums to reclaim the non-museum space is very high in the city (Gordin, Matetskaya, 2011), but in the same time, as we can observe, it can be challenging. Nevertheless, such events contribute to tackling this issue.

- Development of cooperation with other cultural institutions

Within a large-scale event organization institutions also develop cooperation with other entities that positively affects internal development:

*“...I agree that every possible cooperation with other cultural institutions of other organizational forms is always useful, it is not harmful to learn how other entities work, which methods they use, which innovative solutions they can share” (Head of Organizational and Methodic Department of Central Library named after M. Lermontov).*

*“...Night of Museums is the event, when we can learn and share experiences” (Exhibition Project Manager in the State Centre of Photography RosPhoto)*

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to contribute to an understanding of management of public cultural services. Taking the example of the Night of Museums in St. Petersburg we explored the potential of the large-scale event in development of public cultural services management both from the side of audience and cultural institutions.

We have explored the effect of the event on audience development and found additional support for the results of previous studies. Events attract wider audience to museums (Kolb, 2005, p.39; Gyimothy, 2009, p.201) and lead to shifts in structure of target audiences for particular cultural institutions.

Further, we have determined three main effects that occur within preparation and conduction of the event: positive development of internal communication network; extension of museum space and development of cooperation with other cultural institutions. Intensification of activities in cultural institutions and between them on a routine basis will significantly contribute to development of public cultural service management.

At the end, we would like to highlight that the research is still in the process and we collect other qualitative and quantitative data to discuss further different approaches for management of public cultural services.

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