



CONTRIBUTION FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Let's change the system! Yes, for real.

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In cultural cooperation projects there is a dangerous gap between what we say and what we do. The words we use for our applications - 'open', 'long-term', 'collaboration', 'participation', 'inclusion' and 'innovation' - rarely match the harsh daily realities of cultural managers competing in closed, short-term systems based on rivalry and territorialism. For structural reasons, we miss a lot of opportunities to learn from each other and make a better society.

The Global Grand Central partnership, that builds an inverse reporting platform, argues that our contradictory behaviours are rooted in a broken project-cycle and top-down power dynamics. However, we also claim that now is a historic time to transition into something more constructive. As our partnership celebrates its first year of formal existence, our initiatives are beginning to yield results.

Wikipedia is the best-known example of a bottom-up 'inverse infrastructure'. There is a user generated knowledge platform that is the starting place for almost half a billion information seekers every month. Texts shared on Wikipedia shape public knowledge, and universities, galleries, libraries, archives and museums are assigning resources to keep its contents relevant and factual. Wikipedia has become one of the world's great commons. However, they are just one of many inverse infrastructures built to address systemic problems.

In the cultural sector, a prime challenge relates to flaws in the "project cycle." Its power dynamics define the competitive short-sightedness described above. All cultural managers know the drill: We first listen for funding calls by governments and philanthropies, based on their conditions we attract partners, write applications, compete, win, and carry out actions. At the end of successful bids, we spend energy, time and money writing careful reports and

producing important evaluations to detail what might be learnt from our actions, and how we might do better next time. These reports are then sent straight into the deep and protected archives of our funders' basements. That is where learning ends. There is no system to share our lessons. And if we do anyway, in seminars or on websites, our efforts expire with the end of project funding. So, we go back to the start again, fundamentally unable to connect learnings from ourselves and others.

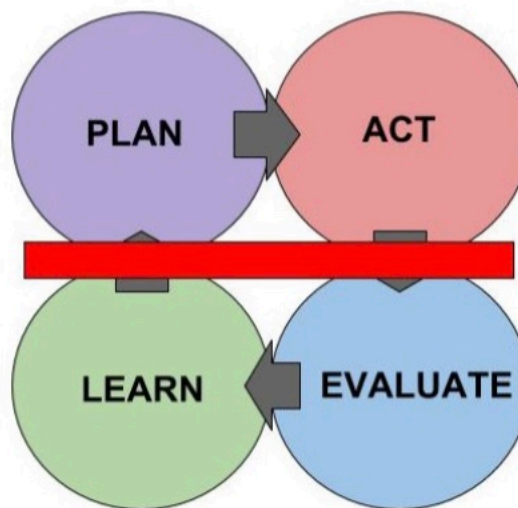


Figure 1 The project-cycle is broken

Now, instead of reports disappearing into funders' closed archives, imagine a "Wikipedia of project knowledge." An open, alive, and dynamic depository of first-hand experiences, evaluations, tool-boxes, and discussions from



the practitioners of artistic, social and cultural actions around the world. A well-built library of practices, actors, successes, and – importantly – failures. A genuine attempt at tying words with action and a durable space co-designed by peers for mutual learning that would enable us to do better work, together.

GlobalGrandCentral.net is the embryo of that platform. It has similarities to Wikipedia with its inverse and open structure, but the comparison stops there. Where Wikipedia is governed by a global movement and funded by donations, Global Grand Central is a non-profit hybrid organisation. It is controlled by practitioners of cultural activism with added perspectives of policy and research collaborators. By offering submission of official reports (valid as end results of projects) we simplify managers' workflows and extend funders' budgets in support of monitoring, evaluation, archiving and grantee relations. The added benefits from combining efforts includes both making our knowledge available and freeing up resources to work for the common good.

Building Global Grand Central is partly a technical endeavour. We deal with issues of coding, open-source, co-design, openness, and archival versus very serious privacy needs. But our main challenges are political. Rebuilding a structure to work for its own ideals has proved just as challenging as could be expected. Nevertheless, we just won our first procurement, we have conditional funding in place, and work under a three-year consolidation plan.

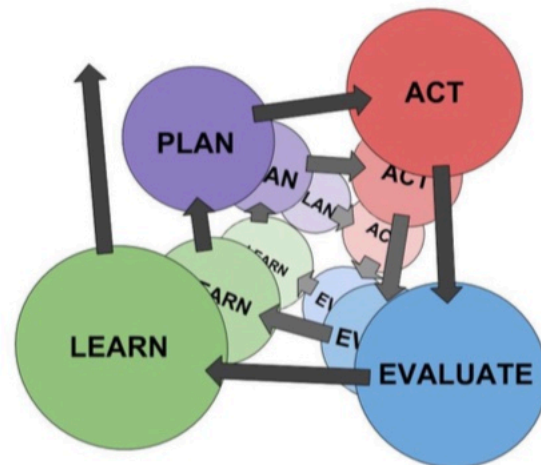


Figure 2 The vision of Global Grand Central

The trick is that changing the system requires legitimacy gained from strong and united momentum amongst practitioners; financial independence gained through a critical mass of funders as customers; and credibility earned through rigorous review by researchers. All these factors must occur simultaneously. It is a delicate long-game in a world used to the contradictions of the project cycle. It is an exciting adventure.

FACTS:

The www.GlobalGrandCentral.net platform is currently in beta development. It is open source and activity reports are publicly accessible serving double functions of reporting and portfolio building. The current platform grew out of the Creative Europe co-funded project 'Europe Grand Central' (2015-2017) where 34 "cultural inclusion" projects were organized in 12 countries by seven partners - and self-reported as the start of the platform (see: bit.ly/2xYwu0D). The governing body 'Global Grand Central non-profit' has representatives from cultural organisations in USA and Europe and is chaired by Ferdinand Richard of the Roberto Cimetta Fund. Read more on: www.globalgrandcentral.net/about

The analysis behind Global Grand Central was presented in the paper 'Mobilising networks through web-based archival practice', at the 25th ENCATC Congress in Brussels in 2017 (available here: bit.ly/2sMMnt6).

FIVE CHALLENGES, AND CORRESPONDING PRIORITIES FOR GLOBAL GRAND CENTRAL

Challenge	Priority
Closed databases	Open, accountable and safe
Reporting fatigue	Simplified workflows
Positive bias	Safe enough to share "failures"
Siloed networking	Cross-sectoral approach
"Sorry this page is not available"	Long-term reliability