1. **Why a Benchmark Tool for amateur arts and voluntary culture?**

The main output of the BOOST project is the development and provision of an online Benchmark Tool for actors in the field of amateur arts and voluntary culture. The question that arises in this context is why are we introducing an instrument that originates in the economy into the cultural and social sector? The goal of an (economically) oriented benchmark can be described as such:

*“The goal of benchmarking is to identify the weaknesses within an organization and improve upon them, with the idea of becoming the "best of the best." The benchmarking process helps managers to find gaps in performance and turn them into opportunities for improvement. Benchmarking enables companies to identify the most successful strategies used by other companies of comparable size, type, or regional location, and then adopt relevant measures to make their own programs more efficient.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

But are actors in the field of amateur arts and voluntary culture also about being the "best of the best"? It is probably not the case for many, but it is very much about achieving one's own defined goals and reaching the relevant target groups with offers of amateur arts and voluntary culture and thus also securing one's own organisational existence and acting socially, culturally and economically sustainable. Therefore, this instrument is not much about increasing one's own financial profit through benchmarking, but about increasing the social benefits that the organisation wants to achieve through a tool that is mainly used for self-reflection:

*The project supports the sector by the development of a not yet existing, innovative and applicable Benchmark Tool for self-reflection, in order to make social inclusion through amateur arts and voluntary culture more successful.” (BOOST Project Bible)*

1. **What are the so-called social benefits?**

In former EU projects, some of the partners have worked with different aspect of key societal benefits, such as **social inclusion**, **social cohesion**, and **active citizenship**:

Typically, the meaning of “**social inclusion**” [[2]](#footnote-2) in the field of arts and culture implies:

* to ensure *equal opportunities* for all to have access to and enjoy arts and culture
* to enable full and *active participation* of every member of the society in all aspects of life, incl. arts and culture. (*counter discrimination* due to social background, education, income, ethnicity, gender, or mental or physical disabilities).
* to *empower* (and cultivate) poor and marginalized people to take advantage of burgeoning global opportunities, also in the area of arts and culture. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Typically, the meaning of “**social cohesion**” [[4]](#footnote-4) implies:

* To promote *mutual recognition* between different social groups
* To ensure *mutual trust* between the citizens
* To enable *co-creative* artistic and cultural activities

Furthermore, we have other key concept for social change or societal benefits that are important in the field, namely “**active citizenship**” [[5]](#footnote-5) also in the field of arts and culture that implies:

* To be engaged in activities that sustain and promote*democratic values and attitudes,*
* To be *involved in communities* and democracy, from local to national and global levels.
* To be *committed to the common good* and the welfare of society.

1. **Where does the BOOST Benchmark Tool come from?**

The Baseline Survey “Encouraging inclusive culture. Baseline Report of the EU project BOOST” conducted in all five partner countries Slovenia, Denmark, Poland, Austria and Ireland served as the starting point for the Benchmark Tool. The Baseline Survey aims at researching concrete success factors and challenges of promoting societal benefits with stakeholders from the sector.

The Baseline Survey identifies pre-conditions, success factors and main barriers of social benefit promotion in amateur arts and voluntary culture activities in order to define categories and levels that need to be considered in a benchmarking system.

The interview questions and the standardised questionnaire were designed to ask about the social benefits defined in the project.

Methodologically, data collection in the survey included literature review but has mainly included at least 30 expert interviews (6 per country) and 5 focus groups (1 per country) with selected experienced learning providers in the field of amateur arts and voluntary culture on their perspectives concerning the research questions.

The collected data are summarized along the research questions about providing recommendations on which factors we need to assess to clarify their added community values, including social inclusion, social cohesion, and active citizenship.

1. **How was the BOOST Benchmark Tool developed?**

Based on the evidence-based success factors and challenges in this particular cultural field questions were formulated, which should cover these different topics. So, with this, the responses and gained data from the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires were inverted into, again, questions designed to encourage users to self-reflect on each topic area. An attempt was made to work as holistically as possible in order to include all statements made in the different countries. Without providing specific benchmarks directly, the tool now manages to indirectly communicate good practices from the European area in questions that allow users to compare their own organisational structure, program and activities, and networking with other actors from the field in Europe. It is important to emphasise that this access does not fuel the idea of competition, which is actually the basic idea of an economic benchmark tool, but rather aims at the exchange of experiences and the comparison of different success factors and challenges.

1. **How does the BOOST Benchmark Tool look like?**

Along the results of the survey a Benchmark Tool was developed which

1. appears as a visually presented and user-friendly online questionnaire,
2. starts with initial explanations, a glossary and introductory questions,
3. is divided into the three main topics „Structure of the Organisation“, “Programme and Activities“ and „Networking”,
4. and is subordinated in various sub-topics below the main topics,
5. aims to evaluate and reflect on the social benefits “social inclusion, “social cohesion” and “active citizenship”.

**Ad. 1)** To make the benchmark tool as freely accessible and user-friendly as possible, it will be available as an online tool. This can be accessed under the following link: [www.boost-bt-eu](http://www.boost-bt-eu)

It appears not only as a "simple" questionnaire, but has been prepared in a graphically appealing way to motivate users to complete the tool.

**Ad. 2.)** Before the actual bench market test begins, users are first directed to subpages with an initial introduction/explanation/instruction. Secondly, a glossary is presented, which also explains the following terms via mouseover for a unique understanding: *„People with fewer opportunities/resources “, “Different/various social groups”, “Participation”, “Marginalised groups”, “Social inclusion”, “Social cohesion”, “Active citizenship”, “Critical social issues” and “Social Sustainability”.*

**Ad. 3)** The tool contains a total of 55 questions with 5 optional questions, which are assigned to three main topics. The three main topics were built after formulating questions based on the data of the Baseline Survey. According to the content of the questions, question clusters were formed, which were then given these topic titles:

* **Structure of the Organisation (16 questions)**: Under this topic, questions were assigned that asked about a specific management technique employed to arrange tasks within a group. It generally refers to the set of job titles, hierarchies and main responsibilities of different employees of an organisation.
* **Programme and Activities (29 questions + 1 possible questions):** This topic has been assigned questions that capture the overall programme orientation of an organisation, its content as well as its activities and dissemination measures.
* **Networking (10 questions + 4 questions):** This topic covers all issues related to networking activities with public, civil society and media actors.

**Ad. 4)** Since the main topics are very extensive and a substructure was necessary for a better overview, clustering was again carried out at the secondary level and sub-topics were defined for the main topics, to which questions were assigned. The following sub-topics were defined for the main topics:

* **Structure of the Organisation:** “Goals/Mission”, “Decision-making processes”, “Diversity of team/members” and “Sustainability “
* **Programme and Activities:** “Reaching out”, “Media channels”, “Planning”, “Activities”, “Location”, “Consistency” and “Critical awareness”
* **Networking:** “Exchange with other organisations”, “Exchange with community”, “Exchange with government” and “Exchange with media”

**Ad.5)** In order to be able to make statements on the social benfits "social inclusion" (i), "social cohesion" (c) and "active citizenship" (a) in the evaluation of the Benchmark Tool Test, an assignment had to be made here as well. The individual questions or, if necessary, the individual answer options within a question were assigned to the appropriate social benefit that the respective question or answer option is aimed at. Through this allocation, an assessment of the Benchmark Tool test can take place that is also oriented towards these social benefits.

On the following pages, the entire glossary and a tabular summary of the benchmark tool can be studied in detail.

|  |
| --- |
| **GLOSSARY** |
| **People with fewer opportunities/resources:** People with fewer opportunities means people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, a migrant background, or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reasons, including those that can give rise to discrimination under article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the programme.[[6]](#footnote-6)  **Different/various social groups:** groups which have different social backgrounds/resources/experiences can mean different economic, religious, ethnic, gender, cultural, educational, and other backgrounds/resources/ experiences – and often limited interaction to other social groups.  **Participation:** the act of attending an event or activity; participation through active citizenship means taking part in democratic practices such as voting, attending protests, union democracy, engaging with politics at the local/regional/national level, and becoming involved in community decision making.  **Marginalised groups:** groups that are on the edge/margin of society; often excluded from mainstream/public cultural activities due to an “acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities”[[7]](#footnote-7) along socioeconomic characteristics such as income, educational background, gender, physical and cognitive abilities, ethnicity, culture, religion etc.  **Social inclusion:** the process of including more people in participation, particularly people who are disadvantaged/have fewer opportunities, through enhancing opportunities, giving access to resources, a voice to be heard and respect their rights.  **Social cohesion:** “the degree to which members of a society are willing to co-operate with each other to improve the quality of life and wellbeing for all”[[8]](#footnote-8). It also means mutual recognition between different social groups and mutual trust between the citizens.  **Active citizenship:** commitment to activities that uphold and promote democratic values, attitudes and cohesion between people. It also means involvement in communities and democracy at all levels, both locally, nationally and globally, just as it means commitment to the common good and the well-being of society.  **Critical social issues:** important societal issues that affect people and which society often seeks to solve or change. These are areas such as poverty, relations between ethnic/cultural groups, climate change, gender issues, mental health, etc.  **Social Sustainability:** “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”[[9]](#footnote-9) “Social sustainability is a process that aims to create sustainable successful places that promote wellbeing, by understanding what people need from the places they live and work.”[[10]](#footnote-10) |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **BENCHMARK TOOL SUMMARY** | | | | | |
| **Introductory Questions** | | **No.** | **Question** | **Multiple Answers** | **Benefits** |
|  |  | **I** | **In which country is your organisation headquartered?** | **no** |  |
|  |  | **II** | **In which civil society area of cultural activities does your organisation has its main activity?** | **no** |  |
|  |  | **III** | **Which type of civil society organisation do you represent?** | **no** |  |
|  |  | **IV** | **Which form of activity does your organisation mainly provide?** | **yes** |  |
|  |  | **V** | **Which content of activity does your organisation mainly provide?** | **yes** |  |
|  |  | **VI** | **Which financial resources does your organisation have?** | **yes** |  |
|  |  | **VII** | **Who is doing the main work in your organisation?** | **yes** |  |
|  |  | **VIII** | **What kind of spaces are available to your organisation?** | **yes** |  |
| **Topics** | **Subtopics** | **No.** | **Question** | **Multiple Answers** | **Benefits** |
| **1. Structure of the organisation** | **Goals/Mission** | **1** | **Which of these goals/missions does your organisation have?** | **yes** | **a,c,i** |
| **2** | **Does your organisation have an official mission statement?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **3** | **Do you have a monitoring procedure to assess the achievement of formal/informal goals?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **Decision-making processes** | **4** | **Do all the people working/volunteering in your organisation participate in making planning decisions?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **5** | **Does your organisation encourage the people working/volunteering in your organisation to take part in decision-making processes?** | **no** | **a** |
| **6** | **Does your organisation have meetings to reflect on whether your work is achieving its goals/mission?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **7** | **Does your organisation have procedures to consider and include feedback from participants/activities?** | **no** | **a** |
| **Diversity of team/members** | **8** | **Do people with fewer opportunities take part in decision-making in regards to function and structure of the organisation?** | **no** | **a, i** |
| **9** | **Do people with fewer opportunities take part in leadership of the organisation?** | **no** | **i** |
| **10** | **Is the team/are the members of the organisation balanced in terms of gender?** | **no** | **c,i** |
| **11** | **Is the team/are the members of the organisation ethnically diverse** | **no** | **c,i** |
| **12** | **Is the team/are the members of the organisation intergenerationally diverse?** | **no** | **c,i** |
| **Sustainability** | **13** | **To what extent is social sustainability/long-term continuation considered in your planning?** | **no** | **c** |
| **14** | **Does your organization take measures to ensure long-term continuation and social sustainability?** | **yes** | **c,i** |
| **15** | **How often do participants become volunteers or employees?** | **no** | **a,i** |
| **16** | **Does your organisation provide opportunities for further growth and education of team members?** | **no** | **a** |
| **2. Programme and activities** | **Reaching out** | **17** | **Does your organisation reach out to different social groups in order to ensure exchange between the groups?** | **no** | **c** |
| **18** | **Does your organisation reach out to specific groups with fewer opportunities/resources?** | **no** | **i** |
| **19** | **Are your information/communication/outreach activities...?** | **yes** | **c,i** |
| **Media channels** | **20** | **How many media channels (web, email, newsletter, IG, FB, etc.) does your organisation use to reach out to different social groups?** | **no** | **c,i** |
| **21** | **Is your organisation using social media for reaching different social groups?** | **no** | **c** |
| **22** | **Is your organisation using social media for reaching groups with fewer opportunities and resources?** | **no** | **i** |
| **Planning** | **23** | **Are needs/perspectives of local community members included in decision-making and planning processes in the organisation?** | **no** | **a,i** |
| **24** | **Does your organisation plan and implement its activities in a participatory manner, i.e. are participants and audiences able to take part in planning?** | **no** | **a,i** |
| **25** | **Does your organisation provide ways for participants to give feedback on their experience with your organisation?** | **no** | **a** |
| **Activities** | **26a** | **Do you have a pricing for your activities?** | **no** | **i** |
| **26b** | **Is the pricing for your activities … ?** | **yes** | **c,i** |
| **27** | **Would you consider your audience/participants of your activities diverse in terms of different social groups, vulnerable and marginalized groups and linguistic/cultural backgrounds represented?** | **no** | **c,i** |
| **28** | **Do your activities create a positive effect for individual participants?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **29** | **Do your activities create a positive effect in the community?** | **no** | **c** |
| **30** | **Do you measure or evaluate the impact/effect of your activities?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **31** | **What kind of education opportunities do you offer?** | **yes** | **a,c,i** |
| **32** | **How participatory are your activities?** | **no** | **a** |
| **Location** | **33** | **Are the locations of your activities attractive/inviting to different social groups** | **no** | **c** |
| **34** | **Are the locations of your activities inviting to people with fewer opportunities/resources?** | **no** | **i** |
| **35** | **Are the locations of your activities accessible for people with visible and non-visible disabilities?** | **no** | **i** |
| **36** | **Are the locations of your activities easily reachable (e.g. by public transport)?** | **no** | **i** |
| **37** | **Does your organisation change locations for different events to make them attractive/inviting to different social groups?** | **yes** | **c,i** |
| **38** | **Does your organisation cooperate with local organisations (e.g. from the municipality or other organisations) in terms of event locations?** | **no** | **c** |
| **39** | **Does your organisation implement outdoor events?** | **no** | **i** |
| **Consistency** | **40** | **Are the activities of your organisation regularly and repeatedly offered?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **41** | **Are you able to suit the length of your offer to the participants’ needs (i.e. as long-term or short-term as possible)?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **42** | **Are you able to suit the meeting time and/or duration of events to the participants’ needs?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **Critical awareness** | **43** | **Do your activities raise new (innovative) questions and perspectives for the participants/members?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **44** | **Do your activities raise questions and open discussions on important and critical social issues?** | **no** | **a** |
| **45** | **Does your organisation use tactful and sensible language when approaching/addressing vulnerable and marginalized groups?** | **no** | **i** |
| **3. Networking and cooperation** | **Exchange with other organisations** | **46** | **Does your organisation network with groups or organisations that work more closely with people with fewer opportunities/resources?** | **no** | **i** |
| **47** | **How much do you work or connect with organisations that have similar target groups as your organisation has?** | **no** | **c,i** |
| **48** | **How much do you work or connect with organisations that have different target groups than your organisation has?** | **no** | **c** |
| **49** | **How often do you link other organisations with one another?** | **no** | **c** |
| **50a** | **How often does your organisation cooperate on an international/European level?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **50b** | **What goals does your organisation pursue with such cooperation?** | **yes** | **a,c,i** |
| **Exchange with community** | **51** | **How often does your organisation cooperate with other organisations/public institutions in the local community?** | **no** | **c** |
| **52a** | **How often does your organisation attend/organise local community events?** | **no** | **a,c** |
| **52b** | **What goals does your organisation pursue with such cooperation?** | **yes** | **a,c,i** |
| **Exchange with government** | **53** | **How often does your organisation cooperate with the local/regional government?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **54a** | **How often does your organisation cooperate with the national government?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **54b** | **What goals does your organisation pursue with such cooperation** | **yes** | **a,c,i** |
| **Exchange with media** | **55a** | **How often does your organisation reach out to (local) media for coverage?** | **no** | **a,c,i** |
| **55b** | **What goals does your organisation pursue with such cooperations?** | **yes** | **a,c,i** |

1. **How to use the Benchmark Tool?**

The Benchmark Tool is easily to use as you are guided through the tool by a user-friendly interface and clear instructions. At the beginning, you can choose the language (English, Polish, Slovenian, German or Danish), maybe the country and to proceed with or without registration. Your registration offers the advantage that you can

* 1. save completed tests in your profile so that you can compare them with a repeated test at a later date,
  2. and share and compare test results with other colleagues from the same organisation to reach a larger sample from your own organisation.

The following benefits has a/no registration:

1. The unregistered version can be used anonymously by all, and still the result can be printed and saved by the user, but the data will not be saved for comparative surveys. Here we have no introductory section with questions about the user.
2. The registered version imply that the user must register with a username and a password, so the data can be saved not only for comparative surveys, but also so the user when making a new answer can compare any improvement compared with own former answers. Here we have the introductory section with user questions.

After this choice and the optional introductory questions, the actual tool begins. Depending on interest and time, it is possible for the user to either complete the test only on one of the main topics "Structure of the Organisation“, “Programme and Activities“ and „Networking” or to complete the whole test consisting all thee main topics with overall 55 +5 possible questions.

1. **How is the Benchmark Tool test assessed?**

1. Cf. https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/management/A-Bud/Benchmarking.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The definition used by United Nations is: “Social inclusion is defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.”

   See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/social-integration.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/social-inclusion/27360> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See the State of the Art survey from the BRIDGING project; or EU Commission about “social cohesion” in the context of culture and creativity: <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policies/selected-themes/cohesion-and-well-being>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See <http://lllplatform.eu/policy-areas/xxi-century-skills/active-citizenship/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. European Commission - Erasmus+. Glossary of terms - Common terms.

   <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-common-terms>) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. UNESCO.2010. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the Marginalized. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186606> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. The Arts Council. Glossary: Making Great Art Work.

   <https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts_in_Ireland/Strategic_Development/Making-Great-Art-Work-glossary.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. UNESCO. 1987. Report of the World Commission on Environment and

   Development: Our Common Future   
   <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000139369> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Saffron Woodcraft. 2015. Understanding and measuring social sustainability. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)