

ARTS

MANAGEMENT:

CHALLENGES AND LEARNING FROM
7 CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS
IN BANGLADESH, INDIA AND PAKISTAN



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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

ARThinkSouthAsia is a management, policy and research programme in the arts and cultural sector, dedicated to founding and supporting a cadre of arts managers in South Asia.

The scope of this publication is limited to seven organisations across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. An attempt has been made to examine relatively small but key organisations that are representative of the diverse cultural, and often difficult, socio-political contexts within which they operate. The cases highlight both the challenges as well as the often entrepreneurial methods of working in the cultural sector in South Asia.

We aim to continue building on this research to develop a significant pool of resources to further the pedagogy and practice of arts management in the South Asian region.



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AASAKTA KALAMANCH

RUNNING A REGIONAL-LANGUAGE ARTS INSTITUTION IN INDIA

Dealing with the problems of the ‘niche’, this case outlines the challenges faced by Aasakta Kalamanch, a regional-language arts institution that works in experimental theatre and is based in Pune, a vibrant cultural city located in the western-Indian state of Maharashtra.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

NAME

Aasakta Kalamanch

LOCATION

Pune, Maharashtra (India)

HEAD OF THE ORGANISATION

Mohit TAKALKAR

CONSTITUTION

Public Charitable Trust (not-for-profit)

TEAM SIZE

8

KEY PARTNERS

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), Vinod and Saryu Doshi Foundation, and Vinod Doshi Festival

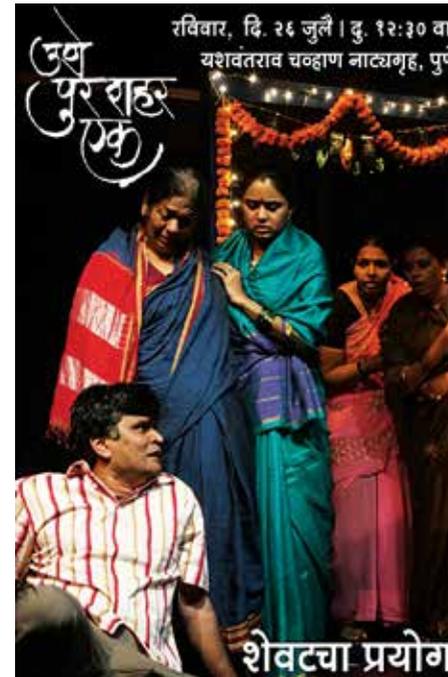
URL

www.facebook.com/Aasakta

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Aasakta Kalamanch is a group of contemporary theatre performers based in Pune. Started by actor-director Mohit TAKALKAR, Aasakta Kalamanch has worked since 2003 to support young performing artists to come together to experiment with theatrical forms and tackle new themes. In 13 years of its existence, the group has delivered over 550 performances of plays in Marathi (the language of the state of Maharashtra, where Pune is located), Hindi, (the official language of the Republic of India) and English.

Marathi theatre has a long, rich history, from mid-1800s to contemporary experimental theatre, spanning mythological plays, experimentation with world theatre forms, folk theatre, political and social theatre, and a variety of drama movements.¹



A poster for the Asakta production “Une Pure Shahar Ek”

Over 175 years, Marathi theatre has reflected a socio-political consciousness and creativity with practitioners and theatre groups producing a colossal body of sub-genres such as Satyashodhak Jalsa (1890s) - a political and reformist variation of the traditional folk theatre tamasha characterised by singing and dancing, forerunner of today’s street theatre; Ambedkari Jalsa (1930s) - a form of protest theatre derived from Satyashodhak Jalsa; Workers’ Theatre (1945-60); Sevalal Kalapathak or Socialist Theatre (1960s) and Dalit Theatre (1980s) a form of folk/oral/street performances developed after India’s Independence in 1947 to raise awareness on social and women’s issues.²

While theatre groups, performances and theatrical activity traversed the state of Maharashtra, it was in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Pune where much of the work around experimental theatre coalesced. In Pune, experimental theatre received a boost with the Theatre Academy in the 1970s, formed by a young group of artists who wanted to produce innovative experimental work. However, over the next three decades, as these actors moved on to commercial plays and Marathi cinema, there was little experimental theatre activity in the city. The crisis assumed critical proportions in the 1990s for over a decade, with experimental Marathi theatre facing dwindling audiences and little money.³ It was against this background that Aasakta Kalamanch was started in 2003, with the aim to experiment with both contemporary form and content. With productions like Matra Ratra (Legitimate Hooey), Tu (You), Garbo, Tichi Satra Prakrane (the Marathi adaptation of Martin CRIMP’s Attempt’s on Her Life), Anandbhog Mall (Hedonistic Mall), Bed Ke Neeche Rehne Wali (The Girl Who Lives Under The Bed) and so on, Aasakta has consistently pushed the envelope with innovations in form and technique.⁴



CHALLENGE 1: OF BEING A REGIONAL LANGUAGE THEATRE GROUP

Being a regional language theatre group in India comes with its own set of challenges: a split audience owing to a diversity of languages, migration-related population swing and genre-centric challenges.

Indian theatre is performed in 24 major languages and around 50 folk theatre forms.^{5,6} With this kind of diversity of languages, it is highly likely that an Indian may not be able to decipher the language of a neighbouring state. The 2 main spoken languages in India with official status are Hindi (at 551.4 million) and English (at 125 million).^{7,8} Any theatre work created outside these 2 languages will typically be accessed only by those who primarily speak that language or live in that region. Marathi is spoken by nearly 73 million people in India,⁹ a figure that has been declining steadily mainly due to migration of other language speakers to the state of Maharashtra.¹⁰ These dynamics do impact the numbers of audience for Marathi theatre. Moreover, between the urban and the rural, Maharashtra has a rich tradition of popular musical theatre, commercial theatre and folk theatre (tamasha), which continue to draw huge audiences. As Ashish MEHTA, Administrative Head at Aasakta



Play reading at Ringan, a series of monthly literature-based activities

says, “Experimental theatre will always have limited visibility, as compared to commercial theatre. Add to that the overwhelming amount of film and TV content, and you have pressing problems”.

According to Ashish, among significant challenges that a group like Aasakta faces are: shrinking financial patronage; popularity of TV and film and cannibalisation of these genres into the audiences of theatre; limited opportunities to create a financially sustainable theatre company; and audience building. The fact that the group is in a city like Pune that has a rich history of nurturing a steady tradition of experimental theatre does help but audience building continues to pose a significant challenge.



CHALLENGE 2: AUDIENCE BUILDING AND CREATING SUSTAINABLE WORK

Aasakta has been rather conscious of big gaps in its performance calendar through the year, which makes it harder to get a sustained audience for its various shows. “There are months that pass by as we create new work. Until 2010, we would create pieces which could fit into small places like Sudarshan Rangamanch, an intimate theatre space and organisation in Pune. From 2010 to explore larger spaces, we produced plays for bigger prosceniums. By 2014, we realised that the audiences were dwindling in the larger spaces rapidly. So while the opening show of any new piece will attract a 1000-member strong audience, by the fifth show we had little audience left. We decided to strategically balance out our productions – we would do some plays for smaller spaces (like Sudarshan Rangamanch), which would guarantee a better distribution of audience across more number of shows, thus giving us a chance to perform more”, says Ashish.

Also, to deal with this conundrum, Aasakta developed in 2014 the Ringan programme, a series of monthly literature-based activities. Along with presenting talks, performances, readings around literature and theatre,

Ringan keeps the audiences roped in between major productions. Aasakta also regularly offers production services to other theatre groups visiting Pune to perform, which helps the members stay on top with audience responses.

Recently, Aasakta has forayed into productions in languages other than Marathi, with the Hindi play *Mein Huun Yusuf Aur Ye Hai Mera Bhai* (I Am Yusuf And This Is My Brother). “Though we had created a multilingual production in the past (like Flat Number F-1/105 in Marathi, Hindi, English and Gujarati; and Kashmir Kashmir in English), it was only with Yusuf that we realised we can reach out to audiences beyond our regular set and perform widely across India and the world,” explained Ashish. Creating a repertoire of multilingual plays is not a new phenomenon. In fact, popularising what Usha THAKKAR – prominent scholar of Women’s Studies, Gandhian Studies and Indian Politics - calls “intra-cultural theatre” was a conscious move by the State in the 60s. She writes, “In the 1960s, the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) (India’s first national academy for music, dance and drama) held a competition of regional play-texts, with the winning



Aasakta production “Flat Number F-1/105” by director Mohit TAKALKAR

text to be translated in 13 languages, which garnered a great response. With availability of translated plays, a movement of inter-regional language plays gathered momentum – initially under SNA, and later independently”.¹¹ Such initiatives allowed for crossing of language barriers at the time. Today, such initiatives are far and few in between.

Ashish is also a production manager involved in country-wide initiatives such as SMART (Strategic Management Course for Theatre Practitioners). This association with other partners such as India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), ARThinkSouthAsia and India Theatre Forum, helps create a wider network of access and support for Aasakta’s regular work. “This peer-to-peer network of theatre groups allows us an insight into other groups’ work, their capacities and their innovations across India. It helps us generate synergies for our own work and for the theatre sector in general”, says Ashish.

WAY FORWARD

Aasakta’s future plans include strategising around creating an outreach programme to build audiences for its events. This includes expanding the scope of Ringan, and creating more meaningful ways to connect with the varied audiences that Ringan brings. Aasakta also plans to create a performance network across India for its Hindi play, Yusuf.

LEARNING:

Regional language and experimental theatre productions sometimes struggle with reaching wider audiences, and producing multi-lingual work can be an effective audience building strategy.

BISTAAR: CHITTAGONG ARTS COMPLEX

BUILDING AN ARTS INSTITUTION IN CHITTAGONG

This case outlines the challenges of setting up a professionally run, self-sustaining arts centre. Bistaar aims to act as a catalytic agent in radically and positively changing the environment and culture of both practice and patronisation of visual arts in Chittagong. Institute director Alam KHORSHEED speaks of his journey.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

NAME

Bistaar: Chittagong Arts Complex (BCAC)

LOCATION

Chittagong (Bangladesh)

HEAD OF THE ORGANISATION

Alam KHORSHEED

CONSTITUTION

Public Charitable Trust (not-for-profit)

TEAM SIZE

4 fulltime, 1 part-time

KEY PARTNERS

AK Khan Foundation PHP Family, Continental Group, Ispahani Group

URL

www.facebook.com/chittagongartscomplex

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Bistaar: Chittagong Arts Complex (BCAC) is a multidisciplinary and multifaceted arts facility based in the seaport city of Chittagong in Bangladesh. Started in 2014, the organisation aims to create a space for a range of quality multi-arts programmes and exhibitions,¹² with the intention to promote the local arts in the national and international arena. In over one year of its operations, BCAC has hosted exhibitions, multimedia presentations, talks, dance and music performances, and festivals.

Chittagong is an ancient port city (evidence points to trade activity in the region since 4th Century BCE),¹³ located in south east Bangladesh that fostered exchange and trade with many cultures.



BCAC is a multidisciplinary arts facility

Historically, the city's culture was transformed by its varied encounters with traders, mystical Islamic Sufi saints, Hindu intellectuals and Buddhist monks. Once a flourishing centre of medieval Bengali literature, Chittagong continues to impact cultural production in Bangladesh. Chittagong is regarded as the "birthplace of Bangladeshi band music scene", and boasts of a vibrant contemporary visual and performing arts scene.

Chittagong is home to a range of arts institutions such as: the Theatre Institute Chittagong;¹⁴ the Chittagong Performing Arts Academy;¹⁵ the Institute of Fine Arts; Chittagong University, Ethnological Museum; and a slew of art galleries and international cultural centres like Alliance Française de Chittagong, the American Center and British Council. The Government-run art gallery rents out space for

private exhibitions, while the local Art Institute Gallery organises occasional exhibitions of the works by its students and faculty. "But these exhibitions were rarely professionally organised and weren't consistent enough to have much of an impact on the ecosystem", explained Alam. In this light, the need was to create a "permanent and viable venue for the local arts community equipped with exhibition room, studio and performance space; a well-planned regular event menu including workshops, lecture series, educational courses and above all a vibrant and stimulating meeting place for the creative minds".¹⁶ Foregrounded against this need were the challenges of setting up.



CHALLENGE 1: CREATING BISTAAR

Though Chittagong is the second biggest city in Bangladesh it is still far smaller with a population of 2.6 million against the capital Dhaka's 6.7 million (as per the census of 2011). This balance is also reflected in their respective culture budgets. "While discussing the annual budgets allocated for cultural activities by the Government, my friend, the Director of the National Museum, Dhaka, informed me that only 5-10%



Home for exhibitions, multimedia presentations, talks, dance and music performances, and festivals

of the annual 350,000,000 Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) (approximately USD 4,470,000)¹⁷ goes to Chittagong Division, while a much bigger percentage is allocated to the capital Dhaka", said Alam. Moreover most corporate headquarters are also located in Dhaka, leaving little room in their Corporate Social Responsibility or marketing budgets for Chittagong.

According to Alam, the budget allocation is directly related to the scale of cultural infrastructure in Chittagong. While the public cultural infrastructure is bursting at its seams ("we have to wait months to get a booking at the Theatre Institute") the private cultural infrastructure in Chittagong is limited to small cultural organisations that operate on a shoestring budget and organise small events. "Furthermore, sustained cultural activity in the private institutional sector, in terms

of practice and exhibition, is limited to seasons or major festivals. This doesn't exactly make for a holistic, visible cultural sector with high energy of activity all year round," he says.

It is in Chittagong that for nearly a decade, Alam along with some friends and colleagues ran Bishaud Bangla (BB), a small-scale arts organisation



Started in 2014, it was sponsored through a successful crowd funding campaign

housed in a rented space. While Alam believed what Chittagong needed was an arts complex that suited its varied needs, the tipping point came in the form of his own personal ambition. Through operating a few parallel income-generating projects under the same roof, Alam was raising funds for meeting the recurring expenses of BB, which left him little time to focus on his cultural ambitions. “I decided to take the plunge fulltime, raise money to build an arts complex and run it for at least next three years”, he explained.

The biggest challenge that Alam faced was raising the start-up capital required to start BCAC. Alam assessed the funding market. “The State had no schemes for cultural organisations who were just starting out and private funding bodies were

far and few in between. I therefore decided to raise the money entirely through individual donations”, he said. Alam sat down with some friends and drew up a budget keeping in mind establishment costs and running costs for year. “BB had cost BDT 1,500,000 (approximately USD 19,000) as start-up capital. I doubled that figure in line with inflation. I added an additional BDT 150,000 (approximately USD 1,900) for rent, salaries and other infrastructure. I was looking at a figure of BDT 5,000,000 (approximately USD 64,000) for the first phase”, outlined Alam. He started a crowd funding campaign,¹⁸ with a goal to raise USD 50,000 towards renting a space and developing basic infrastructure.



CHALLENGE 2: USING NETWORKS TO RAISE FUNDS

Over the 2 months that the campaign was live, Alam pulled in all strings within his networks, both artistic and corporate. Alam, a mechanical engineer by training, comes from what he calls “the illustrious set of educational institutions in Bangladesh”. He studied in Faujdarhat Cadet College,¹⁹ a prestigious boarding school in the country.²⁰ He later attended “Bangladesh’s best engineering university”, the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Dhaka, and went on to work for 2 of the world’s largest companies, namely GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals, Chittagong and Canadian Aviation Electronics, Montreal.²¹ Alam’s networks, therefore, spanned many groups. He returned to Bangladesh over a decade ago to develop arts practice in his country, while he continued to stay in touch with alumni and colleagues from all over the world. Moreover, he had access to a wide network of the expatriate community living in Chittagong, foreign visitors and tourists who would frequent BB, which turned out to be one of the largest group of funders.

Fundraising in the arts sector is generally relying on personal networks and endorsements from the arts

ecosystem. Conscious of the role of his persona as a catalyst for support and change in the arts sector in Chittagong, Alam developed a fundraising strategy to reach out to these networks. Contacts were renewed of former colleagues and classmates who had moved to the West and turned to what was a burgeoning Bangladeshi diaspora. “I wrote thousands of mails to friends and acquaintances all over the world – each personal and targeted to get the potential donors emotionally involved. There were individual mails, tailored reminders and thank you letters”, he said. Additionally, Alam used his friends’ networks and social media to generate the ripple effect.

Alam managed to raise 60% of the amount targeted – USD 28,000 through online donations, and another USD 2,000 through cheque and cash donations. 165 donors from 15 countries donated to the campaign. Significant in this achievement was Alam’s own network and how he used it to raise funds.

As explained by Annie POLATSEK, an American Educational Consultant and testimonial on the fundraising campaign: “With his finger on the pulse of the artistic and artisanal energies of

the area, he (Alam) has single-handedly and consistently created exhibition and presentation opportunities in his hometown. The range is amazing - from explorers to flutists, from textile to paper crafters. Now is the time for everyone he has touched and supported to help establish an Arts Complex that will be self-generating and reach a wider audience". With the money raised, BCAC rented a spacious apartment in the heart of the city for three years and converted it to an intimate arts space. The organisation subsidises its running costs with income generated through membership fees, a bookstore, gift shop and café. Corporate event sponsorship, art sales and space rental provide additional income.

WAY FORWARD

There are 2 concerns that allay the institution, one of which is raising funds to build a permanent space for BCAC. Alam plans to reach out to the State for support under its various schemes. "One of these schemes requires an arts institution to be in operation for a year to be eligible for institutional funding of between BDT 100,000 to 200,000 (approximately USD 1,300- 2,500). The other is an Endowment Fund: I am in the process of writing to the Ministry of Culture to explore these options", said Alam. Moreover, Bangladesh's Culture Ministry has recently undertaken a project of building a cultural complex in the heart of the city comprising of several auditoriums to be built at the cost of BDT one billion.²²

Alam is also concerned about team building. "With so much of my focus on fundraising, I need support on other aspects of running the complex. We need to develop a team of committed trustees, curators and administrators to help run the complex", he concludes.

LEARNING:

The arts leader and her/his networks as a resource to generate support and raise funds can be a significant asset to a small organisation in Tier 2 cities.²³

GATI DANCE FORUM

STRATEGIC CHANGE AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN A CONTEMPORARY DANCE ORGANISATION

This case outlines the strategic and financial challenges faced by Gati Dance Forum. Covering the institution's growth from 2007-2015, this case addresses key concerns Gati and its Managing Director Mandeep RAIKHY face going forward.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

NAME

Gati Dance Forum (GDF)

LOCATION

New Delhi (India)

HEAD OF THE ORGANISATION

Mandeep RAIKHY

CONSTITUTION

Public Charitable Trust (not-for-profit)

TEAM SIZE

5

KEY PARTNERS

Royal Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi, Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Tata Trusts, SH Raza Foundation, Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation,

Ministry of Culture – Government of India, Sangeet Natak Akademi.

URL

www.gatidance.com

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Gati Dance Forum (GDF) is a contemporary dance organisation based out of New Delhi, India, which aims to create a sustainable environment for the development of contemporary dance practice in the country. Conceived and run by dance professionals, GDF develops and produces varied initiatives – the dance biennale (IGNITE! Festival of Contemporary Dance), advocacy project (Dance Union), dance publication (Gati Reader), curricula development

programme (360 Degrees), and a number of residencies, workshops and performances throughout the year. Each of these permeate India's contemporary dance ecosystem. GDF also runs a dance studio on its premises called Gati Studios.

India's dance sector encompasses 2 extremes: on one hand, pure classical and folk dance forms from a varied and rich tradition and on the other commercial film industry-driven dance styles (of which Bollywood forms a huge part). While the former comes with some state funding and policy support, the latter is based in a purely for-profit ecosystem. Contemporary dance lies in between, with negligible state support and funding for its work. This presents a unique challenge for GDF, which then has to create both the ecosystem for contemporary dance and a production construct to foster creation and exhibition of new work. In line with its vision and the anticipated challenges of working towards it, GDF has developed distinct projects to foster arts (dance) engagement with the key target groups – creating new work, building new audiences, engaging with pedagogy, dance advocacy, and fostering new writing in dance.

Over the last 8 years of its existence, GDF has engaged with hundreds of dancers, choreographers, theatre practitioners, visual/sound artists and dance institutions from across the world. Achievements include the IGNITE! Festival, which in its 2015 edition engaged 10,000 audience members. It was India's first crowd-funded dance festival and also



Made in Bangladesh by Helena WALDMANN, photo by Rahul GIRI 90ml Productions

engaged with key State institutions such as the national level Academy for Performing Arts Sangeet Natak Akademi, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and Ministry of Culture. However, the journey has not been one without trials: GDF has encountered numerous challenges in developing a sustainable model for long term operations, two of which have been fundraising and strategic planning.



CHALLENGE 1: AN APT FINANCIAL MODEL FOR GDF'S VARIED PROJECTS

An organisation with such varied projects requires sustained funding. GDF's financial strategy was traditionally skewed towards approving a project – sometimes even starting the project – and then raising money to fund it. Very soon, the realisation dawned that “to have the money up front is key to the health of any programme”. GDF decided to overhaul



Traitriot by Venuri PERERA, photo by Rahul Giri 90ml Productions

its funding model, with significant resource allocation to infrastructure expenses (administration and salaries), rent (dance studio) and programme.

Subsequently, each major cost head was outlined and funding resources divided up to manage cost heads. For institutional expense – salaries, rent, and basic project costs – GDF garnered support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy, which came in with 2 rounds of funding spread over 6 years. For Gati

Studio, its space where workshops, small performances and residencies took place, GDF launched a massive individual fundraising campaign, the “Donate a Dance Brick”, which raised INR 1,700,000 (approximately USD 25,000) from 150 donors.

Once the basic costs were addressed, the team turned its attention towards strategic

financial management for each project and developed a separate funding model with distinct resources for each one. IGNITE! Festival became a biennale in 2015 and was funded through institutional support, sponsorship and a successful crowd funding campaign which raised INR 1,500,000 (approximately USD 22,500) in 25 days, making it the most successful contemporary dance fundraising campaign in India.



oneframestory by Sangeeta BANERJEE, Archana KUMAR

International institutional support networks were used to rise funding for essays and writers workshops for the book Gati Reader. This meant involving the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, the Goethe-Institut New Delhi and institutions such as the SH Raza Foundation. The residency project (Gati Summer Dance Residency) adopted the patron model of fundraising. Its circle of individual patrons has been doubling every year since 2013 – from 2 in the first year, to 4 in 2014 and 9 patrons in 2015. The dance advocacy project requires only salaries, which is met from the institutional budget.

The 360 Degrees curriculum model metamorphosed into a 2-year, university-affiliated Master of Arts (MA) in Critical Dance Practice with the State-funded institution Ambedkar

University Delhi. The model proposes a 4-year incubation phase, with subsidy from Tata Trust (one of the oldest philanthropic institutions in India) and support from Arts Council England and Goethe-Institut New Delhi for archive development and documentation over two years. These 4 years are purported to help GDF create an apt model for long-term sustainability of an education programme with stakeholders as diverse as universities and corporate funders.



CHALLENGE 2: DELIVERING FIVE ORGANISATIONS' ACTIVITIES UNDER ONE UMBRELLA

In spite of a fine stitch approach to financial sustainability, the pressure to deliver 5 distinct and heavy projects is felt keenly, requiring an operational review after a milestone completion of every major project. “The last IGNITE! Festival in 2015 created a major dent in our resources and made us question the scope of each of the projects that Gati was running, many of which were started by our former key team members”, said Mandeep.

GDF was started by Anusha LALL and Mehneer SUDAN in 2007, but Mehneer left the organisation in 2009 and Anusha in 2015. In between, its present Managing Director, Mandeep RAIKHY, picked up the baton. Between 2009 and 2015, numerous key members have joined and left, including Ewa FERRENS and Abantee DUTTA, with each one of them spearheading one of Gati’s present project strands. Dance Union was initiated by Abantee and Gati Reader by Anusha, while Ewa’s keen interest in festivals sparked IGNITE!. Their departures had already begun to impact knowledge transfer on these projects. “We realised that we were carrying the weight of different visionaries into the scope of our

activities and under one institutional framework, which was too much to bear forcing us to review our work over and over again”, explained Mandeep.

The pressure of running this scale of work had already seen its human costs over the years. Both GDF founders left in the first 6 years of its existence, with other key members having left after brief stints of 2-4 years. Moreover, the management team, comprising dance professionals, found it hard to balance various projects with their own artistic commitments. “We were burning out, we didn’t have time for our own practice”, said Mandeep.

GDF undertook a major strategic review in the second half of 2015. The review addressed two key areas: long-term impact that GDF was trying to create in the dance sector, and sustainability of its activities. It was decided that the MA programme would be used as the central focal point, that would seed stronger dance thinking, advocacy and learning in a sustainable fashion. Though GDF was initially unsure about committing to a University-partnership model, the strategic review generated some key insights. A university-affiliated MA would give contemporary dance

pedagogy and practice the legitimacy that GDF was seeking. “Suddenly an MA in Dance seemed like an idea to impact the profession in a much deeper way”, explained Mandeep.

Moreover, contemporary arts education in India is perceived as a dry field. There are no structured degree programmes in contemporary performing arts/film/design practice. Much of the work that takes place in this space occurs at institutions that are run by the Central Government – National School of Drama (New Delhi), Film and Television Institute of India (Pune), National Institute of Design (Ahmedabad), etc. “But there is no such centrally-run institution for Dance in the country, much less contemporary dance. This MA programme with Ambedkar University Delhi, therefore, seemed like the right way to move forward as it allowed us to root all our other work at GDF into a context (education) with direct impact on the ecology of the sector and its legitimacy”, says Mandeep.

WAY FORWARD

GDF has also taken cognisance of the long-term challenges of its endeavours – chief of which is foreign funding drying up. GDF seeks to engage with partners and funders traditionally not engaged with i.e. the Government via Sangeet Natak Akademi and the corporate via their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. The institution is also on the verge of signing final agreements and initiating the MA programme in August 2016. The first year’s intake will be 15-20

students. “Our focus will be to really zoom in on the MA and work on making it sustainable over the next 4 years”, said Mandeep. The other projects also changed some of their original shape. Gati Reader will be finished soon and will be used in the MA curriculum. Additionally, an annual journal will be started that will generate fresh critical writing on contemporary dance and feed into the MA programme. Dance Union gets absorbed into the MA as the course ‘Shaping Future Ecologies’, and will let students create their own advocacy groups. IGNITE! continues as usual as it will form part of the larger ecology of practice and direct interface with the national and international dance community. Finally, GDF is yet to take a call on the residencies. “We may get one of our partner organisation to take on the residency and enable them to do it, as we will be using our own studio to run the MA programme”, concludes Mandeep.

LEARNING:

In developing a financial model for an institution, diverse sources of funding and support can be tapped and matched to varied activities of the organisation. The importance of focus aligned to long-term impact of its activities is essential to the sustainable growth of an organisation.

GOA-CAP AND ALTLAB PHOTOGRAPHY RESIDENCY THE NEED FOR STRATEGY IN ARTS ORGANISATIONS

This case looks at the strategic planning challenges faced by artist-photographer P. MADHAVAN and his institution Goa-CAP, while starting and running the ALTLab photography residency.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

NAME

Goa Center for Alternative Photography (Goa-CAP)

LOCATION

Calangute, Goa (India)

HEAD OF THE ORGANISATION

P. MADHAVAN

CONSTITUTION

Not-for-profit Trust

TEAM SIZE

4 fulltime, 1 part-time

KEY PARTNERS

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), Japan Foundation, Aksagar Narrative Photography Magazine, Goethe-Institut, India.

URL

www.goa-cap.com

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Goa Center for Alternative Photography (Goa-CAP) was established in 2009 as an arts space dedicated exclusively to the promotion of alternative photography art in India. The organisation was created in an environment of never-seen-before democratic access to photography and picture-making augmented by the digital photography revolution and advances in mobile phone technology. It was an environment driven by a larger focus on learning spaces, photography workshops and art-making, and less on scholarship, research and experimentation with photography as a form, philosophy and process.

Goa-CAP emerged against this background, with an aim to create an ecosystem to advance knowledge,



Black and white photography workshops are some of the activities of Goa-CAP annual programme

to generate new ideas, research and scholarship in photography that will best serve an artist who must operate in an international framework of sectoral knowledge. To this effect, the organisation invited artists, scholars, and key cultural figures to work, exhibit, teach and present at the Centre. Goa-CAP created a robust annual programme of activity spanning the breadth and depth of scholarship and research in alternative photography that included pinhole photography workshops, contests, black and white photography workshops, talks, archival projects, a public library for photography, residencies, and a community darkroom. The target group comprised both professional and amateur photographers, along with visual artists, filmmakers, writers and performers who are interested in exploring and experimenting with photography as a medium.

THE PROJECT

One of the most significant projects at Goa-CAP is ALTIab – a 2-month residency for Indian artists that focuses exclusively on alternative photography. ALTIab started in 2011 with an aim to nurture photographers as well as artists of any medium who wish to explore and experiment with the photographic process. World over, pure photography (let alone alternative photography) residencies are rare. Most are visual arts residencies, with photography as one of the media of involvement. In 2011, there were just a handful of international residencies on photography, including Landskrona Foto Residency (Sweden) and Woodstock Artist-in-Residence Program (United States), and none in India. Parallely, mushrooming photography festivals such as the Delhi Photo Festival and Focus Photography Festival in Mumbai had created a larger community of photographers, photography enthusiasts, and audiences – the space was ripe for Goa-CAP to intervene with its residency. This was recognised by one of Goa-CAP's funders, India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), who, acting on the germ of an idea by Goa-CAP Executive Director, P. MADHAVAN – offered funding to run the residency for three years. MADHAVAN had previously been a resident at KHOJ International Artists' Association and had an understanding of how a residency is run. Subsequently, Goa-CAP drafted a plan, put together a budget and started off the first residency in 2011.



CHALLENGE 1: AMBIGUITY IN FINANCIAL AND ARTIST MANAGEMENT

ALTIab 2011 saw 4 photographers from Delhi, Mumbai, Goa and Bangalore, who stayed in Goa for 2 months working with 4 different alternative photography systems: cyanotype, daguerreotype, pinhole photography and kirlian.²⁴ The organisation faced significant challenges in the first year that ranged from artist management and financial management to project management. A major concern stemmed from unclear terms of agreement with artists on the amount of work to be created during the residency, which led to overuse and wastage of expensive photographic material such as silver nitrate and copper plates. Materials were provided whenever asked for, leading to extra costs and a severely depleted project budget. The artists had a broad structure for the residency and lack of clarity on the output to be generated. This led to communication issues with the artists on goals of the residency and challenges around showcasing the output. Though Goa-CAP was satisfied with the quality of the residency – especially with the processes of photography explored, some of which were being revived in India after many years – an unclear financial structure

of the project was rapidly draining its resources. By the end of the residency, the organisation faced losses of over 25%, later plugged from its own organisational budget.

A year later, MADHAVAN received the ARThinkSouthAsia fellowship in arts management (a capacity building programme for cultural managers in South Asia) for his ALTIab project. He developed an approach that allowed him to reflect on the failings of the residency and explore options to arrest them. A key learning from the fellowship was strategic management of the residency, where MADHAVAN outlined the vision, mission and goals of the residency. “This gave us a starting point to rationalise our key decisions and make choices that were aligned to a larger context”, he explained. Goa-CAP highlighted the goals as key points in artists' contracts, allowing for better communication with the artists and setting expectations on residency goals and outcomes. The organisation also created a stringent financial plan with dedicated resources under various heads such as material and personnel costs, residency costs, marketing and travel. This kind of precise planning



Goa-CAP activities are open to professional and amateur photographers

helped them ration the budget in ways that would maximise value for every penny spent on the project.

Goa-CAP also realised that artist management is a crucial aspect of running a residency. Hence, the team developed a residency rulebook and a structured schedule with timelines, which was communicated to the artists early on and was followed through with them till the end of the residency. This created better communication with the artists, reduced administrative hassles and confusion, thereby allowing the artists to focus more on the residency itself. “In the first year, we ran the residency purely on passion. So every artist need was met, because we wanted them to feel fulfilled and deliver their best during the residency. While this helped with the quality of the residency, we were unable to stem the expenses that emerged from this kind of a plan. From the second year on, we were much more focused and

that helped us marry both quality and stability. In the second year, the value that we had created and the production output was much better – and this for the same money as in 2011”, explains MADHAVAN. A strong project plan also allowed them to target more festivals and spaces for exhibitions of their artists’ work.

Strategic planning also allowed Goa-CAP to create a long-term financial sustainability model. Conscious that the IFA grant would run only three years, Goa-CAP sought to target other funders. In 2015, they expanded the remit of the residency to include international artists and approached foreign cultural organisations such as Goethe-Institut, Italian Cultural Centre and Japan Foundation to collaborate and invite artists from Germany, Italy and Japan respectively. Goa-CAP also started a paid residency model to widen the scope from selection to application.



CHALLENGE 2: GROWING COSTS AND UNCONTROLLABLE VARIABLES

After 6 years of being in Goa, the organisation is equally conscious of the continuous challenges and rising competition in the space. These include rising air conditioning costs to store equipment, the distractions of Goa as a ‘party place’, less nature and more ‘disturbance’.

WAY FORWARD

In 2015, concerned with changing weather patterns in Goa and quality of air (humidity, moisture), which had begun to affect photography equipment, the organisation moved the residency from Goa to Ootacamund (a hill town in South India, also known as Ooty). As MADHAVAN says, “Ooty has

better weather and light. The stability of the image is much better here. The landscape, too, has a lot to offer”. But how does that impact the brand of the organisation, where the idea of the residency is driven by the value of the space (Goa) in its name? “Goa-CAP will remain Goa-CAP – we will continue to do activities there, but we are shifting some projects to Ooty. We are still in discussion with the board about how to move forward. For now, as always, the quality of process and experience of the artists in the residency will be of key importance to us,” concludes MADHAVAN.

LEARNING:

1. The importance of strategic planning - outlining the vision, mission and goals - in guiding the management and communication of a project.
2. Finding a balance between the original values of the organisation and the need for adapting with changing circumstances.



The organisation runs ALTab, a 2-month residency for Indian artists that focuses exclusively on alternative photography

HAMDASTI - CHITPUR LOCAL

CREATING SHARED VALUE AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT

This case looks at the challenges faced by Hamdasti co-founder Sumona CHAKRAVARTY, while executing a community engagement project, Chitpur Local, which aims to create dialogue among the community using art, design and historical revival. With a large number of stakeholders and wide notions of value, community projects face varied, mammoth challenges that can derail the project. Hamdasti faced many such challenges including,

- sustaining morale within art collectives in community projects;
- engaging with artists and various local stakeholders to generate leadership of the project from within; and
- negotiating the notion of value among varied stakeholders.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

NAME

Hamdasti

LOCATION

Kolkata, West Bengal (India)

HEAD OF THE ORGANISATION

Sumona CHAKRAVARTY

CONSTITUTION

Public Charitable Trust (not-for-profit)

TEAM SIZE

4

KEY PARTNERS

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA),
Oriental Seminary School

URL

www.hamdasti.com/chitpur-local.html



Hamdasti uses art and design to create interactions, dialogue and social engagement

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Hamdasti (meaning 'partnership' in Persian) is a not-for-profit that develops collaborations between artists, designers, communities and government departments based in Kolkata, the capital of India's West Bengal state. Focused on developing cultural projects that involve participation from various groups, Hamdasti aims to enable interactions, dialogue and social engagement using art and design. Hamdasti's focus has been around the 400-year old historic neighbourhood of Chitpur located in north Kolkata, specifically Chitpur Road.

The neighbourhood, referred to as the nerve centre of the "Bengali Renaissance",²⁵ has a rich past being the hub of jatra (Bengali folk theatre), printmaking, publishing, jewellery making and several other cultural traditions (including the genesis of the tappa genre of the North Indian style of Indian classical music Hindustani, and Battala style of Bengali literature, which uses woodcuts art to supplement the text).²⁶ The rich history allowed for the development of a unique creative cluster that helped sustain frenzied art activity in Kolkata in the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁷ An area with a majestic past but derelict edifices and dissipating memories, presented the perfect site for Hamdasti and its artist collective to work with the local

community of residents, business owners and school students on a revival project. The aim was to embed artists within the network of local relationships and use collaborative artistic partnerships to reactivate the heritage spaces of this locality.

PROJECT PHASES

Hamdasti initiated the Chitpur Local project in 2013, with support from a grant given by the national not-for-profit grant-making organisation India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), and envisioned it in 2 phases.²⁸ Phase 1 involved an activity period of 18 months where the artists collective (Sumona CHAKRAVARTY, Varshita KHAITAN, Manas ACHARYA and Nilanjan DAS) engaged with the key target groups over a series of planned workshops and engagements. These included weekly interactions with middle school students (from Class 7th to 9th Standard, with kids from 12 to 14 years old) of the historic Oriental Seminary School, the earliest privately run, first-rate school for children of Hindu parents in Kolkata; regular workshops with printmakers, woodblock makers, jewellery designers, book binders, the Diamond Library (the neighbourhood's 139-year-old publishing house); and engagements with a few key, tuned in residents and a larger cluster of other local residents including artist Aditya BASAK. Through these sustained conversations, Hamdasti enabled the development of various engagement points between artists from outside and groups of stakeholders within the Chitpur area.

This engagement led to various activities that featured Chitpur's heritage-focused public art projects at diverse historic sites in the locality, developed in collaboration with the local community. Each of the projects were first tested with the community and then developed with their consent. It also featured memory games, story boxes with the Diamond Library, street performances, a weekend pop-up museum featuring objects sourced from residents in the locality and private collections, and a programme of films, walks, games, addas (Symposium of Intellectuals) and performances curated by partner organisations.



CHALLENGE 1: WORKING WITH A COLLECTIVE AND SUSTAINING MORALE



The Oriental Seminary School is the earliest privately-run school in Kolkata

One of the earliest challenges the Hamdasti team faced was getting a team of likeminded artists together and sustaining their interest in the project through its long duration and zero start up finance. Out of the co-founders – Sumona CHAKRAVARTY and Julene PAUL – the latter left the organisation within the first year. Other artists across genres were brought on board, some of whom left half way through the project for various reasons including time commitment, personal reasons and value mismatch. Since

the project was heavily dependent on artists from diverse genres, their arrival and departure often changed the complexion of the project. The core project team itself – especially Sumona – found it extremely challenging to keep the team's morale high and keep the project going.



CHALLENGE 2: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY AND IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO LEAD THE PROJECT FROM WITHIN

The Hamsati team did not live in the Chitpur area – they were ‘outsiders’ for the locals. Some of the earliest conversations with the locals were met with surprise, nonchalance and even suspicion. As Hamdasti navigated through these trenches, it found its starting point into the community with the local Oriental Seminary School. Twice a week Hamdasti fellows started working with students and teachers, conducted workshops, lectures, walks in the area and reignited the students’ interest in the rich history of the 186-year-old school. The students were divided into groups and attended intensive workshops in jatra, printmaking and local histories. Researchers who had done their doctorates on Chitpur were called in for special sessions and artists from outside and within the community interacted with the students and took them through these processes. This helped mobilise the students’ investigative capabilities and generate dialogue between them – and through them with the community. As one of the teachers remarked, “I observed the discourse among students changed as well; they were more aware about the neighbourhood.”

The students also started tracing their own personal narratives and histories through the project. They started asking questions of their own families who lived in the area and through their neutral intervention raised the value of the project in the eyes of the rest of the neighbourhood. Chitpur Local started being perceived as a project for the benefit of the local students and their learning. This created confidence in the local community and opened new avenues for dialogue with other stakeholders, especially the local businesses and residents. The jatra print makers, book binders and jewellery designers opened up and participated in various events during the year. Local artists such as Aditya BASAK stepped up participation, a few residents helped in galvanising energies leading to other residents pitching in, supporting events and even donating objects from their home for the pop-up museum.



Chitpur Local creates dialogue among the community using art, design and historical revivals

In enabling these dialogues, groups of different social classes from the neighbourhood who had little prior interaction, came together to form common contexts of conversation. This led to avenues of dialogue where little existed prior to this year-long activity. Local participation however, was incremental and increasing it to

the desired levels continues to be a challenge. While many community members came together in the run up to the weekend of activity that also saw visitors from outside the community, it has been difficult to sustain that level of conversation since, and there have been few ways of tracking how these relationships have evolved.



CHALLENGE 3: NEGOTIATING VALUE AMONG VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

Despite all this activity, one of the greatest challenges the Hamdasti team encountered was in fixing a notion of value that appealed to the community at large. The stated agenda of the Hamdasti team was to use art and artists to embed themselves in the local network of relationships. Sumona explained further, “Artists would, through dialogue and civic participation, redefine the space and how the community looks at the future. This is what we had hoped to do.” But what the team didn’t expect was how this space was redefined by the community, and how different stakeholders from that community arrived at their own notions of value and capital from the project.

For the students, both past and present, their alma mater became a place with a rich heritage that allowed them to map its growth along that of the city and even the country’s history. For local residents, it allowed them to look at daily objects in a new light, and reinvestigate their own personal histories. Within both these groups, there was a perceptible rise in the ‘cultural capital’ of the community. Local business saw an opportunity (to a certain extent) for market expansion

and product innovation, thereby deriving economic value from this project. Hamdasti found it difficult to negotiate these varied values.

Furthermore, the value construction trajectory was certainly not uniform, and in most cases mutually negotiated at various levels. It is a change in value notion of ‘economic’ capital that Hamdasti serves to address in Phase 2. Most residents didn’t see the value in civic engagement, but they saw it “in supporting their children’s education”; or not in the history of the neighbourhood, but that people are asking about their trades (how I make these jewellery moulds). The value construction process is a far more complicated hegemonic process than it initially appeared and continues to present a challenge in defining outcomes for the project.

WAY FORWARD

In Phase 2, Hamdasti is working on leaving a legacy on the basis of these negotiated values. The students and teachers have formed a local history club, which Hamdasti hopes to guide through its initial phase. On the economic side of things, Hamdasti has been working with the local artists to design and develop a series of products for the urban market. A test sale has been arranged with the Centre of International Modern Art (CIMA) gallery in Kolkata. Depending on its successes and negotiated price points, Hamdasti will connect the local artists to other galleries in the city to enable new revenue avenues for them through the project.

LEARNING:

1. A community-led project involves multiple stakeholders. Generating key intervention points and identifying the leaders/champions from within the community to lead the project is critical.
2. A community project with varied stakeholders involves a complex process of value generation. The “value” of such a project, therefore needs to be open-ended and any expectation of output must be devoid of predetermined outcomes. One needs to be conscious of how such values can be appropriated differently by different stakeholders.

PEACENICHE

WHEN ARTS AND ACTIVISM MEET AT THE EDGE

PeaceNiche, a Karachi-based organisation that promotes democratic discourse and conflict resolution through intellectual and cultural engagement, walks the thin line between arts and activism in a city that is considered as the country's cultural hub, but also known for being "anarchic and dysfunctional".²⁹ This case underlines the unique challenges faced by such an institution in the light of a particular incident that led to a tremendous leadership and operational crisis.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

NAME

PeaceNiche

LOCATION

Karachi, Sindh Province (Pakistan)

HEAD OF THE ORGANISATION

Chairperson, Mahenaz MAHMUD

CONSTITUTION

Not-for-profit Trust

TEAM SIZE

9 fulltime; 1 part-time and interns

KEY PARTNERS

Open Society Foundation, TCS,
T2F Community

URL

www.peaceniche.org

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

"You'd forget you were in Pakistan," the New Yorker quoted³⁰ Sheba NAJMI in an obituary on Pakistani activist Sabeen MAHMUD. "It turned strangers into friends." NAJMI was referring to The Second Floor or T2F, a coffee shop and community space set up by Sabeen MAHMUD. T2F was one of the many initiatives under PeaceNiche, an institution aimed at creating inclusive, inspirational spaces for open debate and cultural exchange.³¹ It creates liberal, secular programming featuring a range of artistic and political contexts in its themes. Opened in 2007, T2F has hosted hundreds of events, ranging from poetry readings and film screenings, to vibrant debates on critical issues.

Karachi has always been an important cultural city in Pakistan, and home to cultural institutions such as the National Academy of Performing Arts, the National Museum of Pakistan and the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, among many other spaces for classical music presentation and film and television production.³² In the 1970s, Karachi boasted of a legendary teahouse culture which served as think-tank for poets and revolutionaries.³³ As the city continued on its path to financial decline, other significant socio-political-economic changes occurred that led to the city losing its pluralistic culture to extremism.³⁴ It was against this background that Sabeen MAHMUD started T2F, with an aim to create "a public space for free speech and creative expression".³⁵

The space was originally housed on the second floor of a small office. It hosted intimate public events with the same zeal for political and creative engagement evident in the founder's vision. By 2010 it expanded to a two-story building donated by a supporter at negligible rent. T2F was unique in the way in which it presented its programming. "It dealt with current issues, led on high curatorial quality, proffering a holistic and inclusive approach. Each event was presented with a fresh design with no compromises. We did not work on templates", explained Raania Azam Khan DURRANI, former manager for arts and programming at T2F. Events included open mics and lit labs, philosophy for beginners, science and technology sessions, classical and folk music concerts, book readings, folk tales storytelling sessions, panel

discussions, films screenings, debates, workshops, hackathons and more.

Over the years, T2F became a haven for artists and civil society members who wanted to use the space to discuss and debate freely. As the e-newspaper AsHT Mint noted³⁶ "it was one of Pakistan's rare liberal hangout zone for artists, writers, thinkers, and youth activists". It received tremendous patronage from a range of audiences in the city who responded both to its content and the breathing space it created. However, contextualised in a country with political complexities and strong militaristic power structures on one hand and religious extremism in the other, T2F's work across artistic freedom and political engagement could have also been seen with great hostility.³⁷

T2F aimed to be an inclusive space without any membership, so that people from all walks of life could come. To that end, its programming was open, free and could be seen as provocative. Financially, as Mahenaz MAHMUD puts it "Sabeen was extremely uncomfortable asking for money, donations, funding." Moreover T2F, in its fierce liberalism, disallowed government, corporate, or any kind of establishment-related funding, thereby minimising government influence in its programming and operations. It also produced a huge output of events that "ruffled feathers" across the board. This led to many critical operational challenges – of which the two significant ones are financial sustainability and conservative and political backlash.



CHALLENGE 1: FINANCIAL PRECARIETY IN A TROUBLED CITY

PeaceNiche and T2F were famously started without a business plan and “with USD 9,400 of Sabeen’s grandmother’s health fund”. In the first few years the institution was largely self-funded by Sabeen. This wasn’t for lack of donations. “Many people wanted to give money. But Sabeen didn’t want to take money from the government or from corporates. She was against branding”, explained Raania. From 2007 to 2010, Sabeen resorted to various conventional and unconventional means to sustain the organisation including working through nights as a graphic designer and technology consultant to pay her and T2F’s bills.³⁸ Programme quality, development and execution was always given top priority at T2F, often at the cost of financial stability.

Over the years, T2F had developed a certain model of precarious self-sustainability. 50% of its operational budget came from its varied revenue streams such as the café, bookshop, merchandise and art sales. This helped inject some cash into T2F although the amount was not nearly enough to sustain it. Until 2010, Sabeen was putting in 15-hour work days at T2F without a salary in hand. She soon realised she couldn’t go on any longer this way.³⁹ In mid-2010, T2F made its first annual business

plan and budget and sought (and received) an institutional grant from the Open Society Foundation. T2F also hired additional staff in accounting and programming. This change in turn helped Sabeen focus more on programming and innovation, bringing the spotlight back to areas that were critical to her.

While Sabeen was conscious of the financial uncertainty, she was more concerned with the model of her institution: “It is still financially unstable but the model is workable and replicable,” she wrote.⁴⁰ However, this was not always possible. “Other spaces tried to replicate the model, but they didn’t have the same jazbaa (passion),” explained Raania.



“And They Say I’m A Dreamer” Tribute to Sabeen Mahmud - Surrounded By Many Of Her Favourite Things



CHALLENGE 2: MANAGING RIGHT WING AND POLITICAL BACKLASH

Perhaps the most significant challenge T2F faces is frequent backlash for its activities by various impacted parties in the eco-system, including the religious right, the military might and the political class.

Sabeen’s and T2F’s attempt to create a space for all kinds of creative engagement, including music, dance and performance

had previously attracted criticism and threats.⁴¹ In Karachi, the battles appeared to emerge from the most basic understanding of the arts which according to Raania “is anyway looked at rather skeptically – between appreciation and vulgarity.” In drawing these very binaries, Raania feels that “a line is crossed”. There were also reactions from the established arts community on one of T2F’s earliest projects, JummaHafta Art Bazaar (Friday-Saturday Art Bazar) that brought

art out of the galleries and onto the streets. This was also an attempt to bring some of T2F’s activities to the people in T2F’s galli (alley) so that



PeaceNiche, creates inclusive, inspirational spaces for open debate and cultural exchange

those who felt inhibited to enter could actually participate and understand what was going on indoors. Such initiatives threatened existing established structures of arts access,

leading to ideological differences with certain arts communities.

“The first time T2F faced backlash, we didn’t even know what happened. We were in our own bubble. We were a small space doing small events – we didn’t think our work amounted to that kind of visibility”, said Raania. The realisation grew over a period of time as T2F’s work intersected preoccupations of other institutional players in the political ecosystem of Pakistan.



Hundreds of events, ranging from poetry readings and film screenings are hosted at T2F space

T2F has also held events related to the military that drew both warnings from well-wishers and visits from security agencies. Once such event, in 2007, was a talk by author Ayesha SIDDIQA on her book *Military Inc.*, a report on Pakistan's military institution. As per media news, other controversial events included a film on the country's missing people.⁴² Sabeen was aware of the risks she was taking: "I stand up for what I believe in. But I can't fight guns. I know that much, and nothing is worth dying for", she said in an interview⁴³ in 2010. She further states: "We are talking about its [the blasphemy law's] repeal. It is important to talk about this. Those kinds of risks we are happy to take. More people need to stand up." The balance of Sabeen's position of standing up against all odds and yet being conscious of its risks, didn't always pan out as planned. "All her feeds were set to public visibility – her posts, tweets, settings. She had

no filter. All of her thoughts were accessible by these people," explained Raania. In battling for calculated risks, Sabeen adopted a "very cavalier attitude to fear". "I feel when the time comes the time will come," she was once quoted⁴⁴ as saying.

In maintaining the delicate balance between art and activism, the trick is to impact power through culture, while still being under the radar.⁴⁵ T2F, however, was very visible in its efforts, which attracted the attention of various agencies, which Sabeen was aware of.⁴⁶ This awareness filtered down to the immediate team and scores of well-wishers but Sabeen remained unfazed and unchecked even by her board. "The PeaceNiche board members were active to a certain extent but left the running and managing completely to Sabeen", explained Raania. Although, Sabeen often consulted with trusted advisors, including her

mother Mahenaz, about sensitive programming. Of equal concern were a range of events that directly engaged with extremely contentious political issues. Mahenaz adds, "She discussed the last Balochistan event with me a couple of times...even on the day itself."

On 24 April 2015, in an incident that sent shock waves across the arts sector in South Asia, Sabeen MAHMUD was shot dead by two gunmen in Karachi. The murder took place soon after T2F had organised a talk on Balochistan: 'Unsilencing Balochistan Take 2: In Conversation with Mama Qadeer, Farzana Baloch & Mir Mohammad Ali Talpur.' The event was originally scheduled to be held two weeks prior to the T2F event at Lahore University of Management Sciences, but was called off allegedly due to pressure from government officials. Sabeen had decided to host the event at T2F, in line with its vision of providing an open space for all voices and issues.

From Sabeen MAHMUD's New York Times obituary⁴⁷ by Sanam MAHER: "You have to be prudent and you need to make a judgment call," Sabeen told me at the time of Salman TASEER's murder (the former governor of Punjab Province killed for his reactions to the blasphemy laws in Pakistan),⁴⁸ as she planned events to pay tribute to the slain governor. "You have to consider whether your actions will help the cause or take away from it." She added, "I have to ask myself: 'Is this worth doing? Is this worth losing everything?' That's not foolish; that's fearless.

WAY FORWARD

T2F re-opened within 10 days of Sabeen's murder and continues to operate a range of programmes from its premises as before albeit lighter events and performances. The Chairperson Mahenaz MAHMUD leads the organisation and a new director, Marvi MAZHAR, has been appointed. Most of the team members who worked with Sabeen have since then left. In December 2015, World's reputed magazine *Foreign Policy* posthumously named Sabeen MAHMUD to their top 100 Global Thinkers List 2015.⁴⁹

LEARNING:

1. In an environment devoid of funding for arts activism, a strong business plan and budget enables the institution to achieve greater creative and financial sustainability.
2. Institutional structures and frameworks allow for certain checks and balances to be carried out by key stakeholders within the institution. The CEO/Director is usually locked into a delicate balance of power between all these stakeholders, including the board (whose members are usually empowered to fire the CEO/Director).

UNBOX FESTIVAL

RUNNING A FESTIVAL AND ITS FINANCES – FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

UnBox is an unconventional festival created at the intersections of multidisciplinary creative practices, co-owned by multiple partners, with content being co-created by over 100 participants from different disciplines. This case explores the various monetary, programmatic and festival management challenges faced by Avinash KUMAR in growing the Festival over the last four years.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

Research Council, British Council, Quicksand and BLOT!

NAME

UnBox Festival

URL

www.codesign.in/the-unbox-festival

LOCATION

New Delhi (India)

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

HEAD OF THE ORGANISATION

Quicksand and BLOT!

UnBox is an interdisciplinary new media, design and arts festival co-founded and organised since 2011 by the design & media companies and local art communities Codesign, Quicksand and Basic Love of Things (BLOT!). Articulating its tagline, “action at the intersections”, Unbox creates an annual programme of activities and events targeting the tangents between disciplines and practitioners from various creative fields. These include fellowships, collaborations with partner

CONSTITUTION

Public Charitable Trust (not-for-profit)

TEAM SIZE

6 permanent and an extended team of 8 project managers during the festival

KEY PARTNERS

Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan New Delhi, Arts and Humanities



Performance Canto Ostinato by Lodhi

festivals such as EyeMyth and the Technodrome Festival, and a month-long programme of city-wide events in the run up to the festival co-created with a wide range of partners. These activities culminate into a three-day festival comprising panel discussions, workshops, labs, performances, exhibitions, community meals and excursions into the city of New Delhi.

The festival is targeted at those who work at the intersections of different creative practices and who seek to innovate within their own practices through collaborations, conversations and inspiration. These include designers, musicians, visual artists, performers, curators, researchers, urbanists and more. An unconventional or “unconference”, the Festival runs a crowd-sourced content project where participants become co-creators. As India’s leading publication on urban culture homegrown.co.in puts it⁵⁰, “Disciplines like design, culture, technology, social innovation and art eschew the trappings of boundaries here, bound together by the spirit of collaboration and the element of

interaction at its crux; a pulsating meeting point of creativity.” The possibilities generated by such a wide definition were immense in scope. Workshops and interactions crafts and new media, urban design and imagining future cities, design and food labs, public system design, disruptive innovation in technology, and other bespoke projects allow for a wide range of people to express multiple interdisciplinary paradigms that could inspire innovation and support on various levels. Various artists, creative entrepreneurs, institutions and brands come together to create multi-prolonged experiences between boundaries. For example while Absolut supported an experimental and interactive bar that allowed participants to make their own cocktails, the Arts and Humanities Research Council - UK, funded 4 UnBox Labs research projects that saw collaborations between UK and Indian creative practitioners and researchers. Deriving its strength from its many networks, a key concern of the Festival was to maintain the balance between sustainability of the festival and stakeholder expectations, all aligned with the theme of exploring intersections between disciplines.

However, these loose boundaries of a project that is for everyone but belongs to no one comes with its own set of challenges, two of which include a) financial planning and sustainability for a transient festival property co-created by various stakeholders, and b) creating a sense of ownership between stakeholders and giving their just due to various co-creators and the Festival team.



CHALLENGE 1: DEVELOPING PROGRAMME AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

UnBox deals with various stakeholders – corporations, institutions, the government, patrons, audiences, participants, volunteers and the core team itself – that come with different levels of investment and expectation. Additionally, the Festival itself is a property co-owned by 3 organisations, which came with varied monetary and non-monetary investments. The health of the festival in the first 4 years was significantly impacted by this balancing act, leading to a mini-mutiny within the programming team in 2013. Subsequently, the team charted out an expectation policy articulating priorities for each stakeholder and patterns of work and delivery.

So, while corporations expected return on investment, footfalls and generating brand experience, the government was motivated by generating public good, maintaining status quo and archiving impact. While participants expected public showcase, credit and appropriate remuneration, the core team craved high and evolving quality of programming, development and financial sustainability. The Festival programme and management evolved and projects developed keeping in mind these varied expectations.

Attempts were also made to align these various expectations with the vision of the Festival. Integral to this process was identifying complimentary and opposing needs, and key to this alignment was the financial sustainability.



The three-day festival comprises panel discussions, workshops, labs, performances, exhibitions, community meals and excursions into the city of Delhi



CHALLENGE 2: ENSURING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Unbox is run on a budget of INR 4,000,000-4,500,000 (approximately USD 60,000-67,000) (in 2014), comprising institutional funding (40%), corporate funding (25%), self-investment (25%), registration (10%) and food and beverage (10%). This was half of the budget of the earlier editions. It does not include a higher set of hidden costs such as subsidised and pro-bono work by participants, and pro-bono support by additional stakeholders. Additionally, the disproportionate investment within the 25% by the co-owners created differences of opinion among them as well as additional problems.

Arriving at a model that allowed them to be financially sustainable required understanding the building blocks of the way a festival is run on a human level, of everybody's revenue expectation from the project, and how to achieve this balance. The Festival relied on partner networks for curation, key financial stakeholders looking to derive brand mileage and public value, and audiences and volunteers looking for varied experiences. First, the festival was scaled down with a realisation that high quality collaborations require time, energy and other non-financial

resources. Attempts were made to scale back on other operational costs on venues and tech riders. This helped to focus on maximising value for the partners and participants rather than worrying about rising and recurring costs. Secondly, an afterlife for the Festival was created in the form of partner events through the year and fellowships, giving stakeholders a broader canvas from which to derive value. Simultaneously, brand partnerships have evolved into creative barter deals with some new financial stakeholders. Third, the Festival has also been registered as a not-for-profit, separating the property from the various other studios that co-owned the Festival. Lastly, each team member of the Quicksand team continues to work on a partner project (such as Eye Myth, UnBox Labs) through the two years that they bring to the UnBox Festival, thereby creating a sense of ownership for the team.



The Festival runs a crowd-sourced content project where participants become co-creators

WAY FORWARD

Moving ahead, the Festival team has decided to focus on sustainability, and from 2016, it will be run as a biennale. “We felt that lack of money meant lack of peace of mind. We were compromising on both the creative contribution and the quality of experience. It was important to be Okay with putting on a small show, a less amazing spectacle”, explained Avinash. It was equally crucial to let creative projects grow organically and one year was too short a time to let that happen. The Festival team now plans to continue to revisit vision, consolidate processes, deepen the scope, and focus on co-creation.

LEARNING:

1. Outlining needs and expectations of key stakeholders and developing indicators and programmes aligned to these help in managing and harmonising long term stakeholder satisfaction/relationship.
2. Financial sustainability of festivals is closely connected to balancing stakeholder expectations from the festival on both a human and Return of Investment (ROI) level.



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ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Rashmi DHANWANI is an independent arts consultant, curator and creative producer. With over 10 years of experience working across the arts, media, and communications sectors in India, she has developed expertise in conceptualising and executing cross-genre events and projects across the arts sector. In 2015, Rashmi founded The Art X Company which operates at the intersection of arts and access. She is committed to studying the needs and interests of cultural professionals and organisations, along with developing practice-led understanding of audiences and their engagement with the arts. Rashmi has an MA in Cultural and Creative Industries at King’s College London. She is an ARThink South Asia Fellow and a scholarship grantee of the JN Tata and Charles Wallace India Trusts.

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THE PIRAMAL ART FOUNDATION

The Piramal Art Foundation was founded in 2014 by the Piramal family. The aim of this foundation is to preserve the artistic heritage of modern & contemporary Indian art. The foundation will undertake the collection, preservation and documentation of artworks for public display as well as for research and education.

KHOJ INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS' ASSOCIATION

KHOJ. (to) search, hunt, explore, discover, discern, seek, inquire, trace, track, quest, research, investigate. Khoj began as a proposition: a space for artists, run by artists. From its modest beginnings in 1997 as an annual workshop, Khoj has established itself as a not-for-profit, contemporary arts organisation based in Delhi which provides a financial, physical and intellectual space for artists through its various programs. It has built an international reputation as outstanding alternative arts incubation space. It plays a central role in the development of experimental, interdisciplinary, and critical contemporary art practice in India – constantly challenging the established thinking about art. Through a variety of programmes including workshops, residencies, exhibitions, talks, and community art projects, Khoj has supported the experimentation of many leading Indian artists well before they went on to receive international acclaim. While catalysing a vibrant art-community in India, Khoj has also

actively developed the South Asia Network for the Arts (SANA). Khoj has also hosted over 400 international artists from countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Uganda, Kenya, Turkey, Pakistan, Japan, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Thailand, Korea, UK, Germany, France, Mexico and the US. With a focus on building such networks, developing alternative pedagogies, and learning through collaboration and exchange, Khoj programmes have created unconventional synapses between art and disciplines such as science, architecture and fashion. Khoj facilitates change by encouraging artists and audiences to engage with vital concerns such as ecology, sustainability and community participation. It is constantly expanding the understanding and development of cutting-edge contemporary art practice in India, thereby creating a legacy for the future.

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