

# Engaging New Audiences: Innovative Tools for Museum and Gallery Development in Slovakia

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## Abstract

*The concept of audience development has taken a main role in current situation among cultural institutions. After the coronavirus disease, COVID-19, a lot of cultural institutions have a problem with financing of their activities and re-engaging with their audience. The aim of this paper is to analyse the state of audience development tools among the cultural institutions and galleries in Slovak Republic. This article relies on quantitative research to examine the complex of tools used by these institutions to achieve their goals and reach their target audiences. The research question focuses on identifying the types of tools used by these organisations to engage both potential and current audience. The research primarily highlights the significant role of social media and other digital tools in reaching younger audience.*

**Keywords:** *audience, development, process, social media, digital tools*

## Introduction

Audience development has been important issue in a research and studies in all cultural institutions (Kawashima, 2000; Wautl, 2006; Arts Council England, 2015). Based on the Kawashima (2000) the sustainability of the cultural institutions in the cultural market is dependent on the establishment of a new management processes and audience development strategies to foster citizen participation. Audience development is crucial for all institutions aiming to enhance attendance, expand their digital user experience database and disseminate the value of culture between potential audiences. Some of them engage their audiences with providing the grants for the institutions to fund outreach programs and so on (Wiggins, 2004). In Germany, publicly funded high-arts institutions often use this concept as a tool to increase visitor attendance (Mandel, 2018).

Broadly defined, audience development refers to the process of building and expanding audiences for a specific product, service, or organization. This process involves the understanding of the audiences. It is not possible without the identification of their needs and based on the results of the analysis developed the strategies to engage it more effectively (Ayla, Cuenca-Amigo, & Cuenca, 2019; Aizpuru, Cuenca-Amigo, & Cuenca, 2024). The success of this process is dependent on careful planning and implementation (Savage, 2015).

This paper is divided into a few parts. The first part contains a theoretical background of this approach. The second part deals with the research objective and methods. In the third part and the final part of this paper present findings of the quantitative research with some recommendations.

## **1. Theoretical background of audience development concept**

Cultural institutions should achieve increasing numbers of audience and engagement of audience by strategic activities adjusted to audience's needs. This process included "marketing, commissioning, programming, education, customer care, and distribution" to reach new audiences (Arts Council England, 2015).

According to Walzl (2006), audience development requires a coordinated approach, that involves all activities of cultural institutions to achieve the cultural institution's goals with higher quality. Also, this long-term process is focused on the identification of audiences' needs (both potential and current). This process helps to cultural institutions understand their audiences and build relationships with them. In this approach, the audience is at the centre of the institutions' activities. Key elements of audience development include engaging people, address their needs and interests, and create environments and experiences that appeal to them. (Vargová & Hladký, 2014)

The term "audience development" extends beyond the strategy or concept. Anderson (2005) emphasizes that visitor's experience with the cultural offering is the most important concept. This is achievable only when the roles of curator, educator and marketer are integrated. Furthermore, through innovation, cultural institutions can attract new audiences and enhance the quality of life (Cerquetti, 2014).

The European Commission underscores the growing importance of audiences, noting that museums are becoming more community-focused, prioritizing "*audience development as a strategic and interactive process of making the arts widely accessible through cultural organizations.*" This concept integrates cultural, economic, and social dimensions related to target groups, aiming to develop or increase audiences, deepen relationships with existing audiences, and diversify audience demographics. Cultural institutions may focus on one or all of these dimensions (European Commission, 2012, p. 3). Similarly, a study by the European Cultural Commission describes "*audience development as a multifaceted concept connected to democratization, access, participation, co-creation, organizational innovation, leadership, and policymaking*" (Hadley, 2017, p. 275).

Effective audience development depends on factors such as place / city and must be tailored to meet unique requirements of their audiences (also potential) and cultural institutions. However, understanding common themes can help to these cultural institutions to make long-term commitments to increase engagement and growing their audiences (Deakin, 2022).

Cultural institutions try to reach and engage local audiences through the various art activities designed for new audiences and offering a broader portfolio of art activities for existing audiences. These activities also take place in their strategy with aim to achieve higher participation among current audiences and cultural organisations. (Connolly & Hinand Cady, 2001; Deakin, 2022). The primary goal is to reshape the composition of the existing audience structure, encourage the trust and loyalty among current and potential audiences (Hayes, 2003).

Audience development can also be seen as *“a strategy pursued by an arts or cultural organization to increase its audience quantitatively, strengthen relationships with existing audiences, and expand audience demographics”* (Alnasser & Yi, 2023, p. 2). Khan (2010) controversially suggests that this approach stems from a mercantilist perspective, linking strategies to cultural marketing. Audience development strategies often include tailoring cultural content for different age audience. A lot of institutions prepare and attract new personalised offerings and experiences for their visitors. (Tešin et al., 2021). Romanello (2013, p. 62) highlights that the term broadly implies *“a democratizing intent and a strong participatory spirit”*. With its emphasis on participatory experiences, audience development has become increasingly significant. The term *“participatory culture”* emerged in 1992 when Henry Jenkins described fandom as a form of social exchange (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2016).

In museum and gallery practices, participation serves as an umbrella term, encompassing activities related to social activism, audience development, and empowerment. This aligns with Hooper-Greenhill's (1997) critique of audience development strategies that aim to cater to minority audiences. For theatres, it is an economically viable way to use existing resources and build stronger relationships with key stakeholders (Hazelwood, Lawson, & Aitken, 2009).

Audience development focuses on sustaining a core audience, expanding reach, attracting diverse groups, and building community connections. The primary goals according to Reussner (2003) are broadening the audience base and encouraging repeat visits. To achieve these goals, cultural institutions have to analyse current and potential audiences, their preferences, and competitors' strategies. These analyses help institutions identify target segments, develop specific engagement strategies, and establish unique identities (Reussner, 2003). Not merely about increasing the size of a museum's visitorship, “audience development” is a deliberate strategy aimed at cultivating new audiences, usually with a focus on those previously under-represented at the museum (Black, 2005, p. 47). Success often involves breaking down barriers and offering visitors meaningful activities (Waltl, 2006).

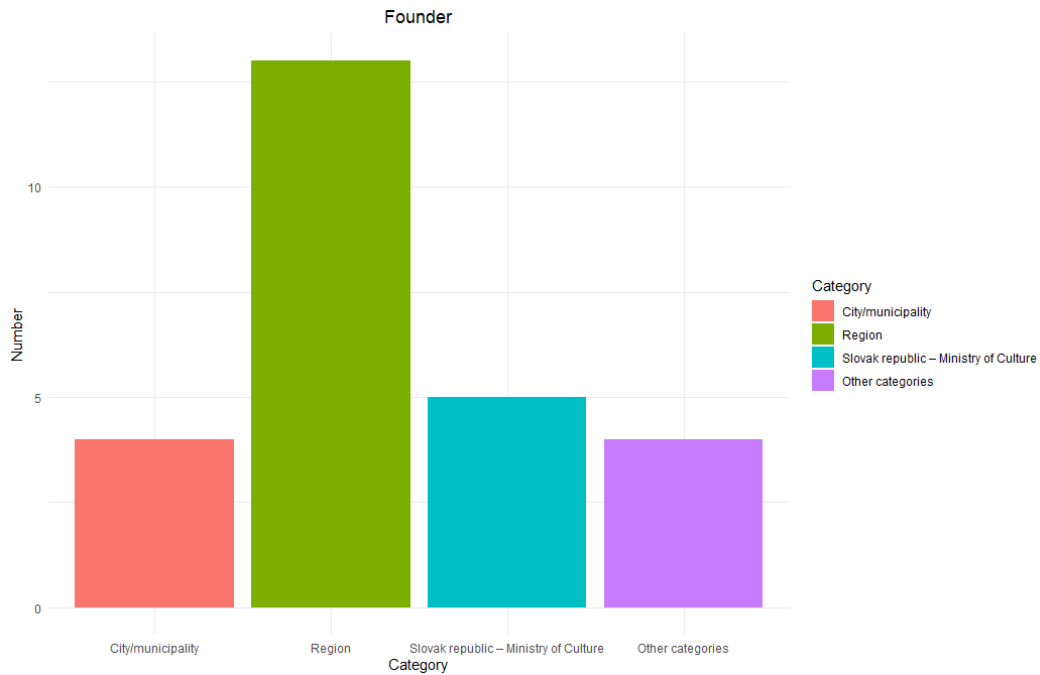
## 2. Objectives and methods

Hooper-Greenhill (1994, in Anderson) observed that museums and galleries have historically lagged behind audience studies in mass communication and cultural studies, both in developing concepts and adopting methods. However, the current situation changes the view of the importance of digital technologies into this sector too.

This article will specifically present only finding related to audience development tools using for the achieving their goals and specific audience. For this research, following research question was posed: *“What tools should museums and galleries in Slovakia use for audience development?”*. To address the research question, we had used the quantitative research. A questionnaire survey was conducted among museums and galleries in Slovakia. Using the Register of Museums and Galleries from the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, a database of contacts for these cultural institutions was compiled (available at the end of January 31, 2023). All these cultural institutions were contacted via e-mail with the requirements to be included into this survey. From 153 cultural institutions, only 26 cultural institutions answered to our questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared based on the previous research and studies (Sanivar & Akmehmet, 2011; Alnasser & Yi, 2023; Mandel, 2018). The first section of the questionnaire was focused on gathering general information about the cultural institutions, while the second section addressed topics related to digitalisations, audience development tools and associated strategies.

## 3. Results of the questionnaire

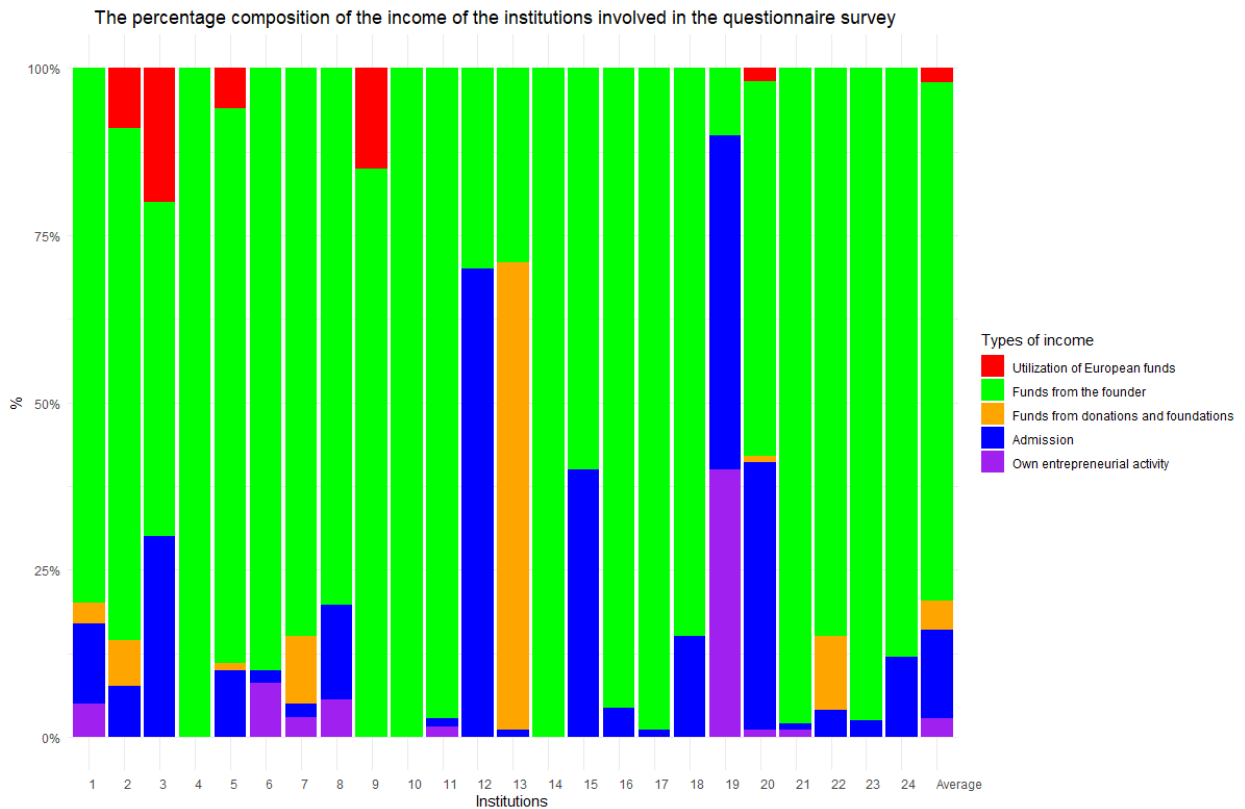
The process of collecting questionnaires began at the end of February and concluded in April 2024. This survey included cultural institutions from various regions, with the highest representation from the Prešov region (26,9%) and Banská Bystrica region (23,1%). 50% of the respondents reported that their founding entity is a Higher Territorial Unit. Around 15,4% of the institutions involved in the survey indicated that their founders are cities or municipalities, while one institution was founded by Slovak Post (3,8%). The remaining 30,6% respondents are under the jurisdiction of Slovak ministries, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic or the Ministry of Transport and Construction of Slovak Republic. **(Figure 1)**



**Figure 1: Funders of museum and galleries in our survey (in Slovakia)**  
 Source: based on research survey

The majority (88,5%) of surveyed cultural institutions operate in their own premises, while 11,5% use rented facilities. In terms of workforce, almost half (46,2%) of these institutions employ between 10 to 30 staff members. Other reported employing 5 to 10 employees (19,2%), 15,4% employing more than 30 employees, 16% employing 3 to 5 employees, and only 3.8% employing fewer than 3 employees.

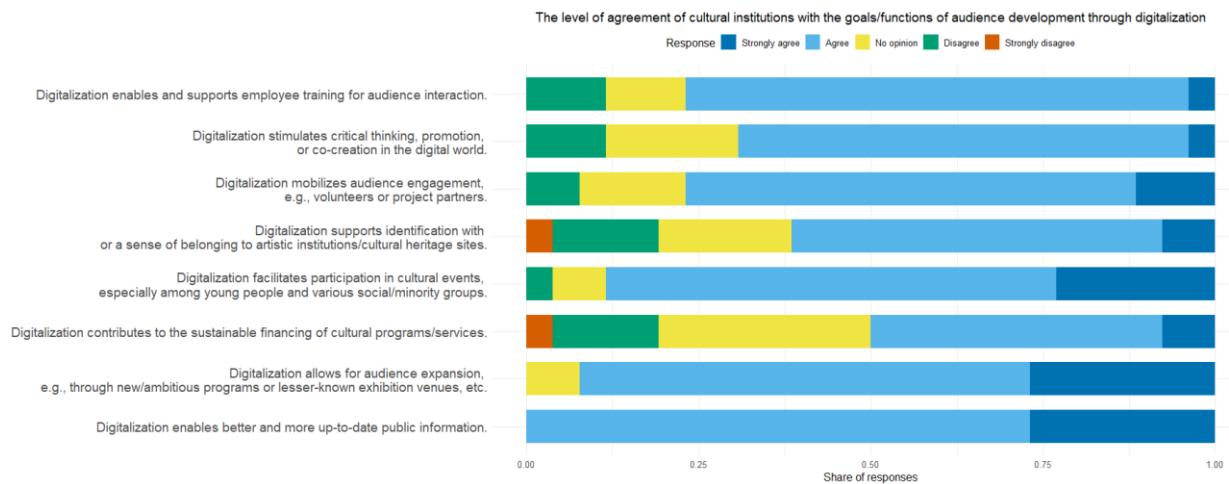
One survey question investigated the percentage contribution of different income sources to museums and galleries budgets. **Figure 2** illustrates that the largest income share, averaging 79,59%, comes from founder funds. Admission fees contribute an average of 10,88%, donations and foundations support 4,29%, business activities 2,67%, and European funding 2,58%. (Remark: Due to insufficient data, the chart reflects responses from only 24 out of 26 participants.)



**Figure 2: The percentage composition of the income of the survey's institutions**  
 Source: based on the research

Regarding audience development, the survey revealed that 92,3% of museums and galleries in Slovakia have never participated in European, inter-regional or national Audience Development programme.

In the following part of the questionnaire, we asked cultural institutions to what extent they agree with the stated objectives/functions of audience development through digitalisation. Respondents agreed most strongly (100%) with the statements that "Digitalization enables better and more up-to-date audience information" and that "Digitalization enables audience expansion" (92,31%). However, only 50% agreed that digitalization contributes to sustainable funding for cultural programs and services. (**Figure 3**)

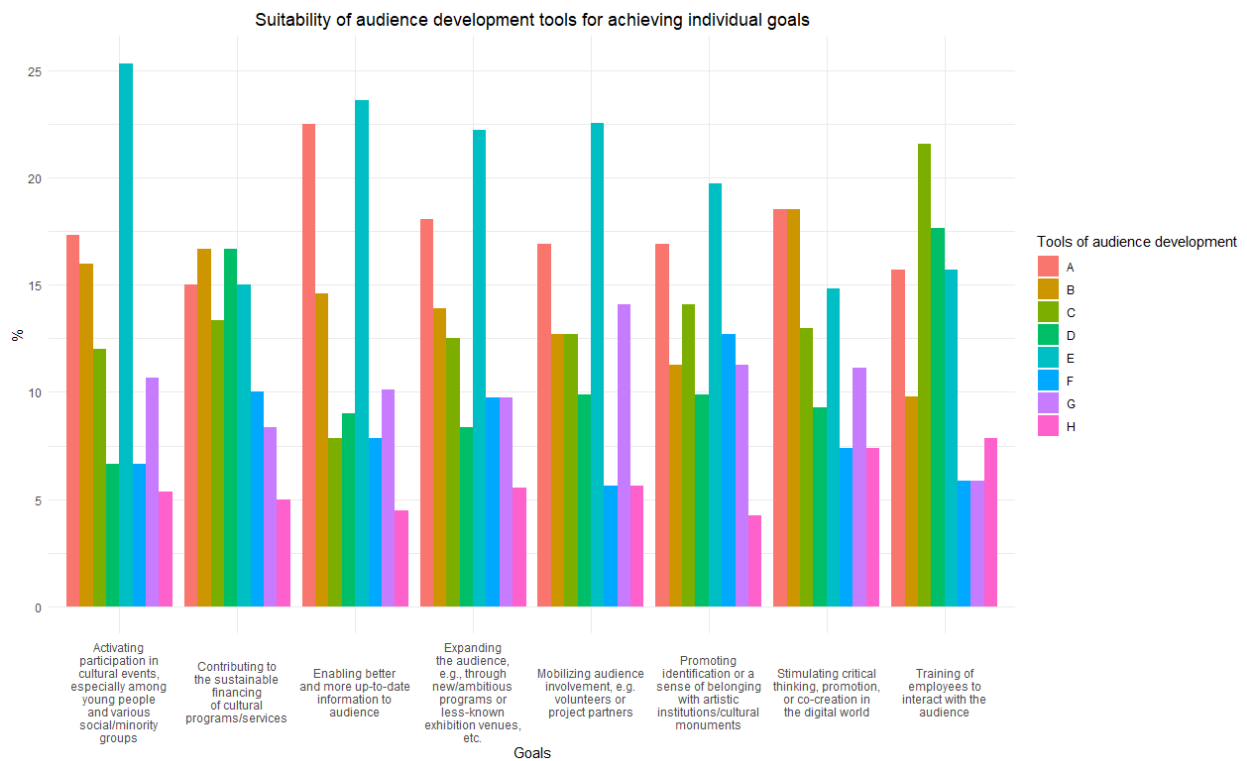


**Figure 3: The level of agreement of respondents with the goals of audience development through digitalization**

Source: based on the research

Respondents identified several tools for achieving audience development objectives (**Figure 4**):

- enhanced audience information: social media and networks (23,6%) and institutional website, applications (22,47%);
- audience expansion: social networks (22,22%) and institutional website, applications (18,06%) were highlighted.
- Sustainable funding: digital content creation and shared platforms (both 16,67%) were the top choices.
- For activating participation in cultural events, especially among young people and minorities: social networks (25,33%), institutional website, applications (17,33%), and digital content creation (16%).
- For promoting a sense of belonging to art institutions/cultural monuments: social networks (19,72%) and institutional website, applications (16,9%).
- For mobilizing audience involvement (e.g. volunteers or project partners): social networks (22,54%) and institutional website, applications (16,9%).
- For stimulating critical thinking, promotion, or co-creation in the digital world: digital content creation and institutional websites/apps (both 18,52%).
- For training staff to interact with audiences: a combination of digital and analogue methods, including workshops, training programs, and marketing campaigns via email or newsletters, as well as shared platforms (21,57%).



**Figure 4: Suitability of audience development tools for achieving goals:<sup>2</sup>**  
 Source: based on the research

In addressing audience types, respondents recommended (**Figure 5**):

- young audience: digital content (28,71%), social networks / media (27,96%), and shared platforms (25%);
- older population: institutional websites / apps and audience research (both 22,67%);
- families with children: digital content (26,76%) and a mix of digital / analogue practices (26,9%);
- migrants and minorities: publicly subsidized cultural portals and institutional websites / apps;
- people with disabilities: digital / analogue practices (20,29%) and audience research (18,87%);

<sup>2</sup> A. Web site / application of institution / organisation with detailed information, interactive tools etc.

B. Customize digital content to attract (potential) audiences / users, such as digitised parts of exhibitions / collections available on the website, DVDs, YouTube etc.

C. Mix of digital / analogue exercises, e.g. workshops, educational programmes, marketing campaigns via mailings, newsletters, etc.

D. Shared platforms (with institutional collaboration) or portals of affiliates of professional organizations.

E. social media, e.g. Facebook, Instagram.

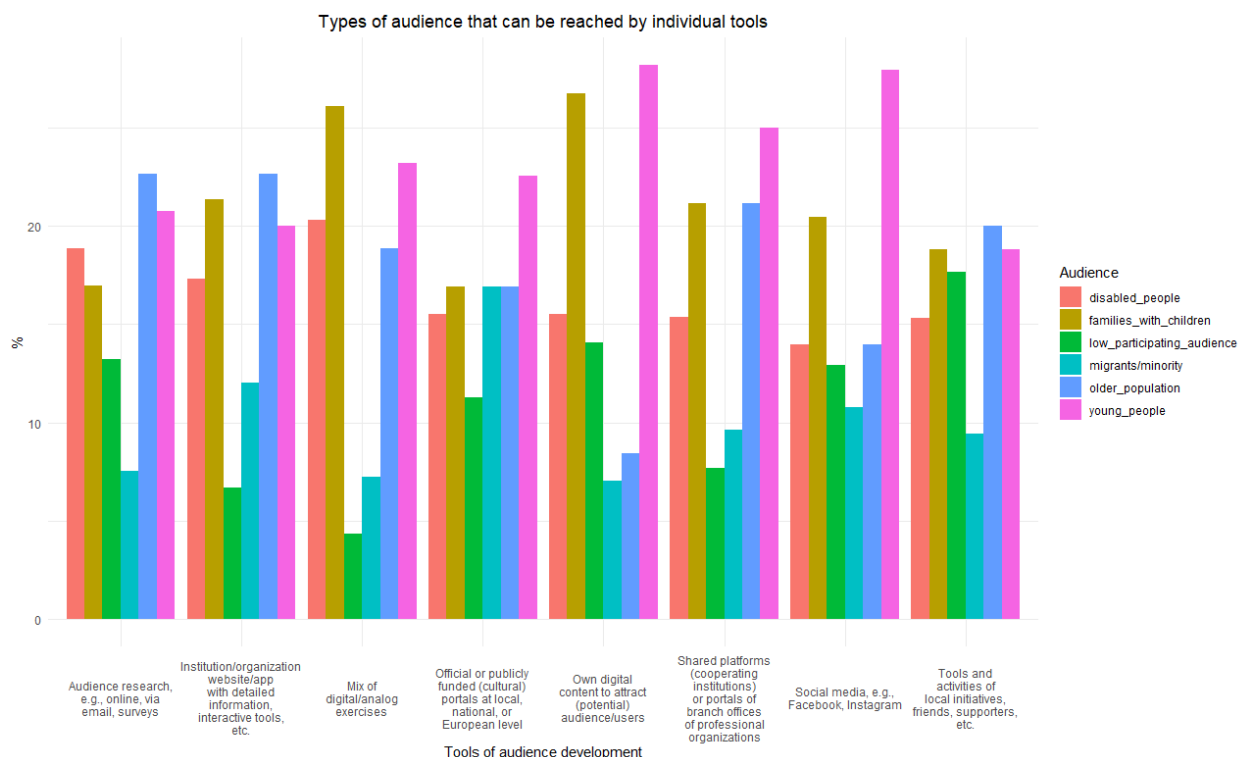
F. Official or publicly subsidiaries (cultural) portals at local, national or European level.

G. Tools and activities of local initiatives, friends, supporters, etc.

H. Audience research, e.g. Online, via mails, surveys.



- audiences with low cultural participation: local initiatives, supporters and digital content creation.



**Figure 5: Types of audiences reached by selected tools**

Source: based on the research

## Conclusion and discussion

This paper analysed audience development strategies and tools in Slovak cultural institutions, identifying key tools for specific audience types. The research question was: “*What tools should museums and galleries in Slovakia use for audience development?*”.

Current development in cultural institutions after coronavirus disease (COVID-19) prompt us to reflect on how these institutions relate to the past in a digital culture. Digital innovation has influenced into the strategies of all institutions. The similar situation is expected in the cultural institutions.

This article focused on identifying specific audience development tools that museums and galleries in Slovakia should utilize. Audience development tools vary widely, encompassing both traditional and modern approaches. It is also depended on the goals of audience development in the selected institutions. However, our research has certain limitations. The most significant limitation is the composition of the respondents included in this survey. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to all museum and galleries in Slovakia. However, it should be noted as recommendations for their audience development strategies.

The questionnaire survey, which targeted museum and galleries in Slovakia, included questions about the tools these institutions considered most effective for achieving various audience development objectives.

The responses indicated that to provide more up-to-date audience information, institutions should leverage social media / networks and web site /app of the institution. For audience expansion, respondents identified social networks and institutional websites or apps as the most effective tools. If the cultural institution would like to find new sustainable funds for their programs, they will be more successfully through digital content shared by platforms with institutional cooperation or professional organization portals. Respondents also highlighted primarily social media and organisation website or application for the promoting identification or a sense of belonging with cultural monuments, also for recruiting volunteers or project partners and for the participation with audience. However, to train staff for audience interaction, cultural institutions should employ a mix of digital and analogue methods, including workshops, training programs, and marketing campaigns via email or newsletters. According to (Waltl, 2006; Vargová & Hladký, 2014), audience development requires coordination of all areas of cultural institutions, its tools to achieve the institutional goals.

Based on these findings, museums and galleries in Slovakia would emphasize the inclusion of social networks, institutional websites or apps, and digital content creation in their audience development tools. Social networks and websites are essential tools in today's digital age, and cultural institutions must not only adopt them but also use them actively and strategically. According to Brancato (2022), podcasting is one of the useful and trendy tools for the cultural institutions. Podcasting are very simple and cost-effective marketing tools for the interaction between the audience and availability of cultural institutions. Additionally, the ResSolution survey (2024) indicates that the audio format of podcasts is listened to at least once a week by more than a third of the Slovak online population. Several Slovak museums and galleries have already begun with their own podcasts, including the Slovak National Gallery, the Slovak National Museum, and others. In the context of leveraging social networks for more effective promotion, these institutions could also adopt another trend in museum marketing highlighted by Brancato (2022): user-generated content (UGC). UGC refers to authentic, brand specific content, such as images, videos, reviews, and testimonials. It will be created by users and shared on social media or other channels. This modern form of word-of-mouth marketing fosters connections and builds trust between audiences and cultural institutions.

However, for each cultural institution is crucial to conduct its own audience research to understand its specific audience demographics, challenges, and needs. This approach enables the development of customized tools and strategies that maximize effectiveness in

engaging diverse audience groups as was mentioned in theoretical background (Reussner, 2003; Black, 2005; Waltl, 2006).

Through this article, we suggest that museum and galleries in Slovakia should redefine their traditional tools for the audience development and moving beyond its traditional role. Organisations should encourage to consider the varied forms of participation and engagement.

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