

# Cultural Communication in the Information and Knowledge Society: Dimensions, Challenges and Transformations of the Communication Process between the European Cultural Organizations of the 21st Century. Case Study: The Communicative Planning of the Athens Concert Hall

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## Abstract—

**N**owadays in the information and knowledge society the design and the implementation of a successful policy in a cultural organization like a concert hall continues to be a complex task. The development of new business approaches that combine new ideas and procedures via the use of modern technologies emerges as a central issue for the successful implementation of the objectives of such organizations. In this paper, initially is described the theoretical framework taking into account the cultural communication in the information and knowledge society. Accordingly, cultural organizations may reshape their communication strategies by completing their goals in new ways and promise to make the picture of future halls more predictable, attractive and satisfactory with the support of modern communication tools e.g. Web Sites, e-mail, search engines and e-membership abilities, e-shop, RSS, podcasts and podcasts services, electronic sponsorships and donations, work opportunities, virtual reality and social networks etc. and modern applications combined them with new methods of quantifying personal preferences and subjective quality. Then a detailed description of this framework used in the Athens Concert Hall is presented as a case study of application of good practices in relation to these technologies. Accordingly, the Athens Concert Hall becomes an essential entity in the digital ecosystem and actively responds to the challenges of our time by now having the most immediate comparison with similar cultural organizations.

**Keywords—** Cultural communication; Information and Knowledge Society; Athens Concert Hall

## I. CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is now generally accepted that today, communication is a complex, ongoing process that includes many non-verbal, and verbal elements [1]. The communication process is characterized as a dynamic, interactive relationship that affects the transmitter and receiver as communication is defined as one where the transmitter receives his own message from the receiver in a reverse form.

Therefore, the following are common features of communication:

- the existence of at least three key factors of communication: source-transmitter-communicator<sup>i</sup>, message, receiver
- the alteration of the transmitter's and receiver's roles during the communication process
- the effect of the transmitter and the receiver on each other (e.g. change of attitudes and behaviors) from various variable factors
- the perpetual process of encoding and decoding symbols
- the necessary existence of feedback that makes the communication process complete.

Based on the rapid development of communication and media, cultural organizations of the 21st century are invited to shape their image and their communication strategy.

In particular, with the emergence of new information and communication technologies in all facets of human life, the cultural sector could not remain unaffected, as new forms of artistic expression emerge, the public becomes an active participant in the communication process and cultural organizations have the possibility, with the use of modern communication tools, to disseminate their activities in new and dynamic ways, thus reshaping their communication strategies by completing their goals in new data.

Consequently, in a constantly changing interactive communication environment, with the emergence of new tools and communication interface channels, such as websites, e-mails, blogs, social networks, etc., new communication approaches are created both between individuals and cultural organizations with target audiences. Thus, cultural institutions become more extroverts and the public acquires more opportunities for information and communication about products and services of organizations.

Today, communication is carried out from one moment to another and from one side of the world to another through audio, video or digital data[2]. With the development of various communication techniques and means there is a significant contraction of space and time of communication that leads to the change of the communication conditions. In the Information Society the innovative features that are assumed by the communication process and the changes occurring in this case, and the basic terms of the communication system in the case of cultural communication, are associated with the following [3]-[11]:

- **Interaction:** it relates to the cyclical succession of orders, actions and outputs. Interactive communication makes the public a dynamic part of the communication process as it acts and interacts with all parties involved. It concerns not only the production of content, but also the many choices of consumption generated.
- **Individualization:** communication is formed with reference to the specific characteristics of the recipient and can be adapted accordingly to smaller audiences or to a specialized audience.
- **Space-time changes:** shrinking the time and spatial decentralization of information changes the communication process.
- **New and even more communication channels:** with the convergence of Media & Computer, more channels of information distribution are created and the options for informing the public are increased.

A communication approach that is more suitable for the cultural organizations, especially in complex or non-verbal ways of communicating, related, for example, with art exhibitions, dance, music, theatre and even the premises of organizations as sites of communication, is one in which, according to [12], focus is not given to communication as a process, but to the production of meaning. Indeed, in the recent decades, the traditional practices of cultural organizations are significantly modified, as they take into account the needs of visitors by ceasing to treat them just as passive recipients, but as transmitters, who through their feedback, send information to the original transmitter [13].

Thus, communication is perceived as a meaning because the message prompts the recipient to produce its own meaning, which relates to the original meaning of the transmitter. Consequently, based on the premise that everything can be taken into account as a point, the semiotic communication model finds fertile ground of application in art as its recruitment and interpretation is open to multiple versions, including issues such as shape, space, light, colour, motion, dynamics and expression, which are related to subjective factors dependent on visual perception, emotional state, etc.

At this point it is necessary to further develop some key features of the processes of interaction, interactivity and individualization, which are, indeed, the hallmark of digital communication.

Communication in digital environments, depending on the extent of interaction as emphasized by [14] can be described as:

- a) **one-way:** when the digital information is static and addressed to all users in the same manner and the same content.
- b) **partial interaction:** when there is some potential for personalized communications.
- c) **total interaction:** when web applications offer the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive and fully interactive digital environment.

On the other hand, the process of individualization, according to Kobsa et al. & Pierrakos et al. (as mentioned in [15], can be categorized into four basic functions<sup>ii</sup>: a) memorizing, b) guidance, c) configuration and d) support for preparation work.

## II. THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The application of information and communication technology changes both the methods and systems for planning, organizing, producing, distributing and preserving the cultural goods [16] that are implemented by the organizations in their internal structure and external dimensions for communication with the public. The technology and new communication tools add interactivity and non-linearity to the artistic creation, the cultural goods of the organization and also to the organization in general.

Consequently, these changes are transforming the process of cultural communication which now brings "the recipient -the public- to the forefront, not as a stock unit that is part of an impersonal and crowded audience, but as an entity that is actively involved in an aesthetic experience" [17].

According to the Swedish scholar Björkegren [18] there are two business communication strategies: the commercial and the cultural one. The commercial strategy sees the artistic creation in accordance with market conditions, controlling its distribution to the public, adopting a strong marketing and aiming at the immediate financial gain. The cultural strategy sees the artistic creation under the terms of art and selectively invests in the work of certain artists or artistic trends, with the belief that they will ultimately have an impact on the public and, possibly, commercial success.

In order for the communication strategy of cultural organizations to be effective, it should be balanced between the two communication directions. Also, according to Yesmin an effective communication strategy must be a co-existence of four factors, which are the following: a) to be long term, that is, they must be durable and stable b) to pursue clear and specific goals, c) to be accepted by the company's management and d) to ensure the involvement and commitment of the employees.

In conclusion, the cultural organizations use the communication technologies during the design process and implementation of the communication strategy in the Information Society, in order to attract and mobilize the existing

but also the potential audience, so that by actively participating in cultural activities of the organization, it will obtain entertainment and educational benefits. Additionally, the communication strategy aims to increase the volume of the public that ensures sustainability and development in cultural organizations.

### **III. WEB, SITES AND VIRTUAL REALITY AS NEW COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The media, according to [11] and [19], are complementary and not necessarily competitive, and neither has the radio replaced the newspapers nor has TV replaced the radio etc. Consequently, modern communication means are transforming the traditional means and highlighting new digital communication channels, for example, electronic marketing, online public relations, etc., which operate in parallel and complementary to the real environment in the new dimension of cyberspace.

The Internet, as the largest operator for the distribution of information, combines the advantages of a single message, the media and personalized information, giving a new range of possibilities for communication, penetration and growth to cultural institutions, as it enables connections to information, entertainment and communication anytime and anywhere.

Two types of communication are performed on the web: the simultaneous (synchronous) and asynchronous [20]. With its unique communication features, it remodels communication of the organization with the public-user giving it a series of innovations and advantages in the communication process [7], [14], [20]-[23].

Additionally, sites must function as a complete representation of the organization, the physiognomy and the cultural objects as a whole. A website with little information creates the impression of a lean organization in information and value. Poor or inappropriate style creates an unsightly organization image. Lack of interaction or insufficient usability of the site refers to an organization that does not serve the public [24]. More specifically, an effective web design should include the seven Cs [10].

Moreover, the information that may be provided by the cultural organization from the online measurements using various measurement tools such as hits, requests or page views, users or unique IP addresses and request duration, is very important for the effectiveness of electronic communication of the organization and are related to the following issues: user identity, space-time visit, user behavior before visiting the site, user behaviour on the site and traffic of the website page and are also related to applications and e-marketing surveys.

Another area of marketing communications, which are reshaped due to the technology and the Internet, is the management of customer relationships which now acquire a digital dimension.

The activities described as electronic public relations include, among others [22], [25]: a) communicating with the media over the Internet, b) link building, and c) blogs, online communities and shows.

With the development of the Internet there is also a change in the advertising sites, which are divided into four categories [26]: a) mass attendance, b) content distribution sites, c) trade sites, and d) a hybrid combination of the above.

The advertising of an organization and its products with the assistance of the technological characteristics of the Internet can be performed in the following ways [15], [26],[27]:

- **Banners:** graphical images associated with the advertiser's website.
- **Scrolling ads:** they look like banners but instead of being fixed at a predetermined point on the page, they follow the movement (scrolling) of the user.
- **Pop-up windows:** they are "windows" that pop-up when the user browses a web page, when he tries to leave from the web page or when he wants to stop browsing the Internet.
- **Splash screens:** this advertising medium requires the viewer to see the ad before going to the site requested.

Also, the emergence of electronic commerce transforms the model of consumer activity. Due to the passive action (wait and see), consumers become dynamic factors of the commercial process, because of the interactive nature of the Internet. This explains the development of the energetic response model (*cannot afford to wait*) [22], [28].

Cultural institutions may also use the communication potential of virtual communities and provide a wealth of benefits such [20]: a) precision-attracting the young and targeted audience, b) an inexpensive way to display the image as it is advertised for free to the members of the community through the comments of satisfied customers, c) creation of content that interests the visitors and motivates repeated visits, d) direct interaction with the public that can express their views on subjects concerning the organization.

Thus, virtual communities, addressing the need of belonging, combined with the benefits of interaction, can be used by cultural organizations as new channels of communication, due to the fact that they are an economic tool to promote their image and build trust between the organization and the public<sup>iii</sup>.

The ease, the immediacy and the economy inherent in e-mail as a service, make it an important and particularly developing asynchronous communication tool that allows users to send messages from their computer to other computers using the Internet infrastructure [5], [20].

Cultural organizations can apply the e-mail service to the communication process to promote their cultural products, to inform the public of the organization's news (newsletters) and send their cultural programs.

To complete the list of the electronic communication channels that a modern cultural organization can use, we will refer to new communication technologies that can, depending on the targeting of the organization, provide useful communication tools. The most important are:

- **Webcasting** [26], [29]: the automatic downloading of customized information to computers of the recipients, which offers an attractive channel through which organizations can transmit their advertisements or other information.
- **Podcasting**<sup>iv</sup>: a method of distributing media files (audio & video) via the internet using RSS for playback on computers and "mobile" devices that provide this capability.
- **RSS Technology** Summary [30]: it is used to promote content to the user's computer from other sites and is a valuable information tool as it can, among others, include tips, information about products and services, newsletters, podcasts.

In conclusion, we must focus on virtual reality or in other words the development of realistic three-dimensional representations "that provide the user with interactive features, through which he can perform operations similar to those that characterize the real world" [31]. This is achieved with the technology of Virtual Reality, which according to Demetropoulos (as mentioned in [31] is distinguished by three features: the display in three dimensions, interactivity <sup>vi</sup> and the ability of the user to immerse <sup>vi</sup> into the virtual world.

The integration of Virtual Reality into the body or in some of the organization's actions can bring many advantages both to the public and to the organization. In reference to the visitor these are related to the increase in interest in the cultural information, the interactive relationship with the object, the reinforcement of experiential learning, the active participation and the individual presentation of cultural material. In reference to the organization the advantages are related to the strengthening of its scientific image, the attraction of younger audiences, easily finding sponsors from the world of technology and the multi-faceted coverage of cultural information (analog and digital field). Respectively, if it is used superficially with the intent of impressing, it distracts the public from the cultural information and thereby undermines the cultural dimension of the organization resulting in a rather technocratic and not humanitarian way.

#### **IV. ATHENS CONCERT HALL: SURVEY METHODOLOGY: A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE ORGANIZATION, ITS TARGETING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

The case study on the Athens Concert Hall, aims to investigate both the communicative design of the organization as well as the form and application range of the traditional and digital channels in its action and, ultimately, to investigate the degree of adaptation to the data of the Information Society.

The methodological tools that implement the investigation of the case study are the choice of research methods applicable to the humanistic and social sciences and that is because the data of the study refers to the attempt to determine a true institutional phenomenon, which, however, interacts with the society in which it is part of and thus is defined primarily as a manifestation of a social activity, whose criteria primarily require an empirical attitude.

Therefore, based on these dimensions, the method of approach is structured as follows:

- use of a historical method, at the points where the subject in question deals with conceptual approaches. This process takes place through the investigation of the historical development of conceptual clarifications, which arise from the presentation of theoretical currents around the contents which set the theme using primary literature.
- subsequent use of the comparative method used in the points where the subject concerns the lateral presentation and comparative presentation of the communication of the Concert Hall, and which is implemented through both the observation and the study of secondary sources – international literature, catalogs, articles, published reports, websites and digital documents.

More specifically, research tools, such as participatory observation, field research, qualitative interview (*telephone interview with Mrs. Rania Vougioukalakis, representative for the press on behalf of the organization*), collecting and processing data from the Internet (*web sites of the organization and websites with informative - cultural content*), archival material from the organization (printed programs, brochures, tickets) and newspaper articles.

The organization of the Athens Concert Hall was founded in 1981. It is a non-profitable organization and is managed by a board whose members are appointed half by the Ministry of Culture and the other half by the Association "Friends of Music", which is also a non-profitable organization.

The aim of the Hall is always high quality events. Its programming is centered mainly on classical music and opera, but emphasizes on the contemporary musical repertoire from around the world, young artists, dance, theatre, cinema and visual arts (<http://www.megaron.gr>).

The development of the communication strategy of the organization is the responsibility of the Directorate of Publicity and Communication, which includes three sections: Press, Advertisements and Publication of Programmes. However, according to Mrs. Vougioukalakis (interview, 2010), the field of communication of the Concert Hall is undergoing restructuring as three autonomous divisions will be created as follows: a) Press Department (reporting to the General Management), b) Department of Advertising and Sponsorship and c) Department for the Publication of Programmes.

##### **A. External communication of the organization**

Every cultural organization does not communicate with its public only through the services, activities or advertising and media, but also through its geographical position and even with the building itself. The recognition of the importance

of space in the communication process in the cultural field is largely reflected in the design of the buildings, the premises and the construction of parks, by increasing the degree of effectiveness of the communication process [32].

The Concert Hall is a building of modern architecture, which stands imposingly with its Doric simplicity on 38 Vas. Sofias Avenue. Outside the building of the Concert Hall there are large banners with information of the forthcoming cultural activities of the organization. The building is visible from a large distance; its white color adds brightness while Eleftherias Park is adjacent to the premises of the organization. According to the organization's targeting, the surrounding area will become a new green lung as a new original park will be created, with running water and cultural activities for children and which will be open all day for all citizens. Indeed, as of May 17th 2010, the organization has opened its gardens, 22 acres of land for the public and its ambition is for it to become an attraction for people of all ages, not just for relaxation but also for attending a variety of educational and artistic activities.

Also, since the garden of the organization is open to the public daily from 10 am until sunset this reinforces the view that the "open garden opens the doors of the Concert Hall to a wider public" [33].

Also important communication benefits of Concert Hall are the location of the organization (in the heart of Athens, at the junction of Vas. Sofias Avenue and Kokkali Street) and its easy access (the network of transport is right outside). In fact, the Concert Hall has its own "homonymous" stop on the Metro network. Additionally, the public's access is facilitated by the existence of a three-story underground car park, with a total capacity of 750 cars, which has been in operation since October 2008 with a special charge for ticket holders of the events of the organization.

In conclusion, the attractiveness of the building and its surroundings and the easy and secure access to the public, favourably predispose visitors, thus contributing to the principle effective communication process and revealing an organization that is willing to come into contact with the public via the natural environment and generally with its outer image.

Additionally, advertising, distributing cultural messages and presenting the activities to the media (i.e. radio, television, press, and internet) and also to public spaces through posters in airports, train and bus stations, can highly support the communication that an organization develops. It is a challenge for any organization to strengthen cultural relations and to ensure co-operation and positive promotion with the media, which is necessary for its communication strategy.

It is well known that the Concert Hall has very strong links with many television stations, the press and digital media (e.g., *Mega Channel*, the newspapers *Nea* and *Vima*, [www.in.gr](http://www.in.gr)). For example, *Mega Channel* presents the cultural activities of the Concert Hall almost on daily basis. There is also collaboration with the radio station, Athens 9.84 FM, which presents the events and performances of the Concert Hall every Sunday morning on an hourly show. Additionally, on a weekly basis, particularly in the weekend newspapers "*Vima*", "*Kathimerini*", there are advertisements for cultural activities of the organization.

Consequently, the organization has built a strong partnership with the media which is essential for the wider distribution of its messages, its actions, and ultimately, to strengthen its image.

On the other hand, public relations of a cultural organization include the broader image of relating, amongst others, with the premises, the conduct of staff, the relationship with the media and the information it distributes. Specifically, the production of high quality materials of public relations can serve as a supporting material for the approach of groups interested in the organization, such as journalists, donors and sponsors. This material may include [34]: a) a stylish logo, b) printed information on the organization and its activities, c) press releases, d) photographs.

The Concert Hall, in fact, largely produces important public relations material. For example, press releases of the organization that inform about upcoming cultural activities are sent to newspapers (especially to weekend newspapers), television stations, magazines and various informative-cultural sites while press conferences are conducted on the premises of the organization which aimed to inform about important cultural activities and new initiatives [35].

The Athens Concert Hall also gives special emphasis to this communicative practice as the brochures and the programmes of the events are an essential and timeless means of communication with the public. The printed programmes of the organization are intended both to inform the public about the activities of the Concert Hall and to culturally educate it as they do not merely give a simple presentation of the works, but extensive information about the contributors, the artistic types, etc., thus performing educational purposes. This is exemplified by the distribution of printed programmes in schools and educational organizations [35]. It is striking that for the period 1991-2004, the organization printed a thousand different programmes. Specifically, the Concert Hall publishes an elegant annual programme of events as well as quarterly programs for cultural activities that are primarily related to the artistic periods: a) January-February-March, b) April-May-June, c) October-November- December. Additionally, brochures are printed for the events of the Megaron Plus, for specific thematic groups e.g. "Great Performers-Famous Pianists" and for the performances of Kamerata-Orchestra of the Friends of Music.

The publishing activity of the organization is not limited only to programmes of events, but occasionally produces ([www.biblionet.gr](http://www.biblionet.gr)): programmes for specific performances, lists of exhibitions it has organized, concert programmes, one-act opera guides, poetry collections, theatrical plays, musical history books, interpretation and criticism of plays that have been presented within the organization. Most of the printed works are distributed for free at the beginning of the performance or by the sales outlet of the organization while in specific cases they are sold to the public proving that publishing is an important communication tool.

## **B. Internal communication of the organization**

The quality of the indoor environment where the public lives a cultural experience, the kind of cultural activity that it produces as well as the means that are used by each cultural organization to distribute its messages, play an important

role in the effectiveness of the communication process as any difficulty can act as "noise" and may even hamper its smooth operation.

Every cultural organization ought to communicate with the community, through its services, taking into consideration that the mental, the emotional and spatial orientation of the public.

The first impression the visitor gets from the interior of the Concert Hall is the existence of a clean, welcoming and bright area, all of which are elements to creating a good disposition. At the entrance of the building there are visible signs directing the public towards the premises of the organization. There are also ticket offices and the information center, with polite, smiling staff, which is basically the first direct contact of the organization with the public. In special displays (stands) there are printed programmes, as well as information material, which can be easily obtained by the visitor, who can come into direct contact with the activities of the organization and also consult the special board to see if there are available tickets or if the presale for the performance he is interested in has already begun.

The facilities of the Concert Hall cover various aspects of the cultural field (musical, educational, conference, entertainment) and are addressed to a diverse audience covering a wide range of cultural pursuits and interests by demonstrating in practice the important aspects of space architecture and of the facilities as an integral part of the overall communication process.

The interior facilities of the organization are divided as follows (www.megaron.gr):

- **basic halls of cultural activities:** these include the "Dimitris Mitropoulos Hall", the "Christos Lambrakis Hall" (formerly "Friends of Music"), the multipurpose "Alexandra Triantis Hall", the "Nick Skalkotas Hall", the "Banqueting Hall" and the Great Music Library of Greece "Lilian Voudouri".
- **supportive areas:** these include the reception hall, the foyer of the organization, the dressing rooms, the supportive areas of the artists, the recording centre, the video unit, the reception hall of the officials, the Terrace of the Muses and the central foyer.
- **entertainment areas:** they combine the need for "relaxation" of the public during the visit while covering the economic need of the organization. These areas include the C@feNet, the "Allegro" Restaurant, the Album Club and the cafeteria of the "Christos Lambrakis Hall.

By presenting all the interior areas and considering them a dynamic and integral part of the overall communication process of the organization, we can see that with the ideal sound and technical facilities, the variety in their use, their aesthetics, comfort, brightness, functionality, spatial orientation, security and the technological facilitations they offer (such as Internet access, audiovisual means, etc.) they make the experience of the public's visit and participation in cultural activities of the organization pleasant and fruitful. Additionally, the design and functionality of the areas gives particular emphasis on the contributors of the performances and the organization's staff, who are the connecting piece between the organization and the public. Finally, the integrity and functionality of the facilities largely eliminate any communication "noise" (e.g. poor lighting, technical difficulties and sound installations, feeling of insecurity and disorientation) that may undermine the integrated communication process between the organization and the public.

In conclusion, the interior facilities of the organization, contribute substantially to the effective communication process of the organization by having potential for different uses at a time, covering various cultural dimensions and different needs of a heterogeneous public. Thus, they become independent attractions and meeting points for a crowd of all ages and different cultural pursuits.

### ***C. Digital communication of the Concert Hall: application of digital technologies and communication tools***

Although the Athens Concert Hall uses a wide range of traditional communication channels, to a highly satisfactory degree, in order to attract a diverse audience, and even though it was a pioneer in the '90s regarding the integration of digital technology (website, online ticket booking), it appears neither to fully meet the requirements of the digital age nor sufficiently incorporate the digital communication tools into its communication dimension. Of course, it has begun to make significant progress in the right direction, as we will demonstrate below, but in fact, considering the size and prestige of the organization, it must make greater strides to be considered a fully modern organization compared to similar cultural institutions.

Just recently, in early 2011, it begins to incorporate technology and digital media into its dynamic communication strategy, with a range of activities and services as exemplified by the complete change of the website which should be the beginning of an integrated digital communication for each cultural organization.

1) *The new website of the Athens Concert Hall: an essential response to the communication data of the digital age:* Until late 2010, the website of the organization was missing important parts in order to be regarded as modern and interactive, thus obstructing it from the implementation of an holistic and effective communication process.

The Athens Concert Hall, having realized its digital delay in the restructuring of its communication strategy and responding to the dictates of the modern era, has fundamentally changed the structure and content of the website by taking on considerably the best communication practices of other cultural organizations. These are encoded as:

- ability to send by e-mail or print any page
- ability to form the web page
- e-membership
- e-shop for products and services
- video player
- search engines

- podcasts and vodcasts
- RSS services
- virtual reality
- social networks
- electronic sponsorship and donation
- ability to upload information (downloads)
- work opportunities
- my organization
- FAQ's

In fact, the new website of the Athens Concert Hall was launched as a trial from January 11th 2011. Indeed, according to the Executive Director of the Concert Hall Mr. Nikos Manolopoulos, the new website aims to «*be user friendly and tailored to the most advanced technological requirements of the Internet. At the same time, the new website will be open to the so-called social media (facebook, twitter etc.) especially addressing young people through interactive channels*».

2) *The new and old version of the website of the Athens Concert Hall: benchmarking:* The new website of the organization's website includes applications and practices of digital communication that significantly strengthen the communication process aiming at a wider audience. More specifically, the communicative potential of the new website, which was not apparent in its previous form, are encoded as follows:

- **Improvement of the overall interface and communication with the user:** the new website is contemporary art with a clean aesthetic, easy to navigate with updated, easy-to-use and faster downloading of information. For example, the change of the visual design of the organization's website is reflected clearly by comparing the new (Fig. 1) and the old form of the homepage of the organization (Fig. 2). Also, depending on user requirements, he can enlarge or shrink the font of the page.

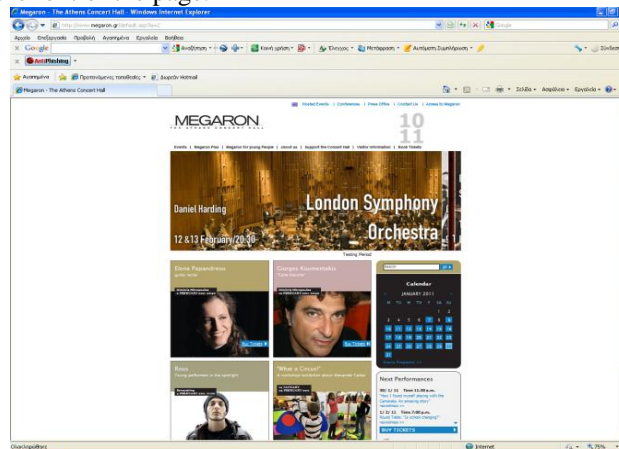


Fig. 1: The new form of the organization's website

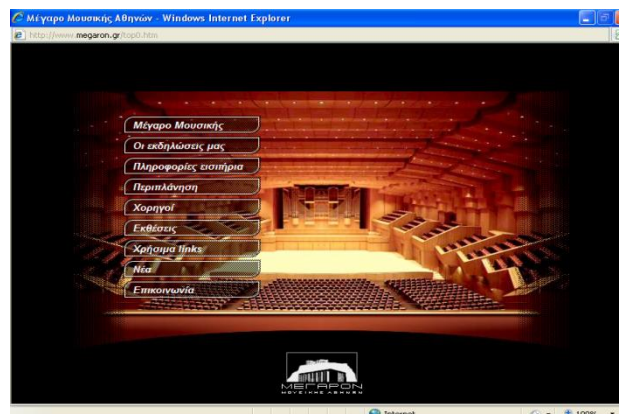


Fig. 2: The old form of the organization's website

- **Ability to send-print any page:** the user has the ability to send via e-mail the current information of any page or print the page.
- **Advanced information search:** for example, the user can identify the cultural activities of the organization with alternative search engines, for example, by indicating the date, searching for the hall, selecting the category or the cycle of cultural activity and, finally, using keywords. Also, through road and satellite maps or the use of the Google Earth, the user can easily identify the location of the organization and facilitate his access to its facilities.



- **Enhancement of digital projection of the organization’s sponsors:** the logo of the sponsor of each event is displayed on the website of the organization, with a shared link to the website of the sponsor, thus making it easier to attract sponsors as they obtain direct and digital projection.
- **Extensive use of e-mail as a digital communication tool:** the organization's website incorporates the use of electronic mail in the body of the communication process. More specifically, the public and generally all interested parties can contact various departments of the organization directly and easily via the respective e-mail. In addition, the media representatives have the opportunity to contact the Press Office of the organization through online registration while the public can subscribe to the newsletter of the organization by simply sending an e-mail and in this way be informed about the activities of the Concert Hall. Finally, the public can contact the “Fuga”, the Concert Hall’s restaurant, via e-mail.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's):** the organization’s website gives encoded answers to frequently asked questions from the public in order to facilitate communication and resolve problems before they arise.
- **Use of social contact websites (Facebook, Twitter):** in response to the challenges of digital communication, the Concert Hall becomes a part of the social networks, Facebook and Twitter, aiming both at young audiences and also at those who are familiar with technology. So, any user who is a member of these social networks is able to promote the events of the organization to the member-friends of his social contacts and distribute the cultural information.
- **Ability of uploading information (download):** the user has the option to download the annual program of events of the organization in pdf.
- **On-line ticket purchase:** the online system for buying tickets was also on the previous version of the website but now the application of the specific service is more simple and more sophisticated with the ability to record the user in the database service.

The above mentioned tools-practices of digital communication show a significant shift in the course of the Concert Hall in a part that was significantly lacking information and was a limiting factor for the application of a holistic communication. Naturally, with the trial period of the new website, the organization does not exhaust the possibilities for further application of the best practices in communication that the Information Society provides. These practices are already applied in quite a few similar cultural organizations as mentioned above.

#### V. THE COMMUNICATION MODEL OF THE ATHENS CONCERT HALL (RESEARCH RESULTS)

Investigating the overall communication process that the Athens Concert Hall applies we result to Fig. 3 below[36].

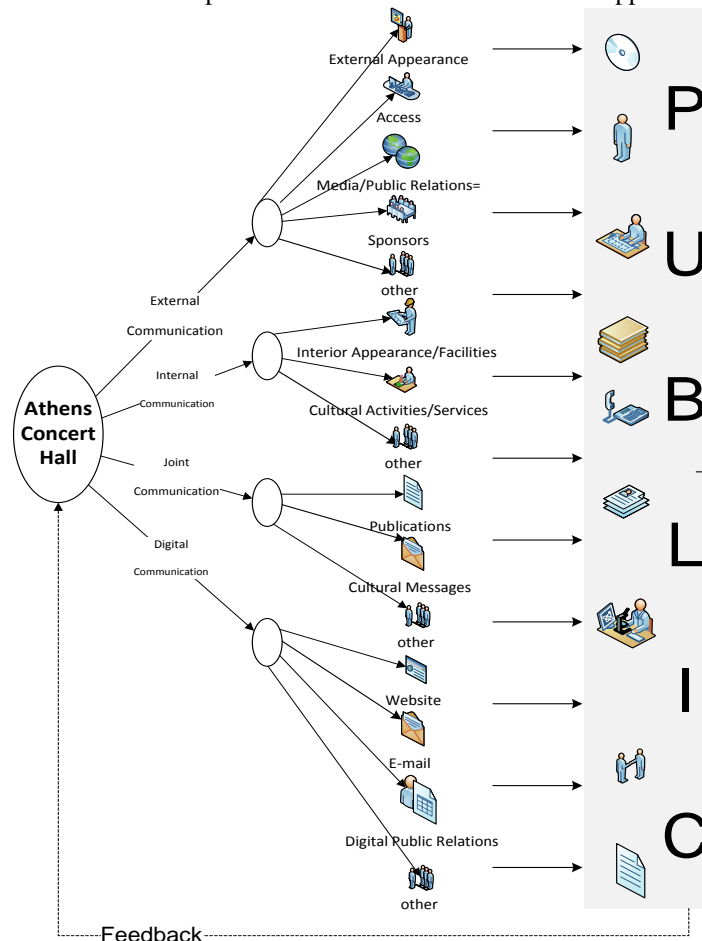


Fig. 3: The overall communication process that the Athens Concert Hall applies



Decoding this communication model, we conclude that the Concert Hall, in the implementation of the communication process, ultimately targeting the audience, essentially applies four basic communication modes: a) **external communication** related to matters of external appearance, access, development of bonds and public relations with the media, finding sponsors and partnerships with cultural institutions and networks in Greece or abroad, b) **internal communication** which is associated with matters of internal appearance and facilities of the organization which are key communication tools, the nature and extent of cultural activities-services that it generates aiming at a diverse audience, c) **digital communication** based on the website and the digital services of the Concert Hall, e-mail and digital public relations with the media as basic digital communication options with a view to the public and d) **the joint communication** which is related to information materials distributed by the organization, which find scope in all the three previous communication practices. Additionally, according to [20] the organization in the implementation of the communication process with the public is interested in the extent that it meets its overall activities so that the feedback is taken seriously and corrective actions are made where required, thus showing the practical application of interactive communication between the organization and the public.

Thus, based on the research approach to the communication planning of the Athens Concert Hall, the conclusions can be encoded as follows:

- **Thematic and artistic expansion of the organization's building**

Although the organization started with a basic artistic direction of music focused mainly on classical music and opera, it gradually developed thematically into more forms of art and cultural activities. Enrolled in the mainstream of its cultural activities, among other forms, are modern music (e.g. jazz, latin, etc.), theatre, dance, exhibitions, lectures and conferences. The thematic expansion urged the organization to a similar building expansion housing these new activities, with particular emphasis on aesthetics and functionality of the facilities, which are an essential part of the communication process of the organization. An example of the importance the organization places on expanding its facilities is its garden which hopes to attract a diverse audience. Thus, we now refer to a cultural multiplex that combines cultural activities, education and entertainment by communicating with a significantly expanded public and covering its different needs and expectations.

- **Addressing the wider public by attracting new audiences and focusing on young audiences**

Following the previous conclusion, the organization managed to significantly increase the public that watches its cultural activities and even to attract a particular audience, such as the young, which for many years was not a target audience. Thus, through the contemporary music festival, interactive exhibitions, thematic courses such as "*Christmas at the Concert Hall*," "*Bridges... with the young... the musical cultures of the world... with the other arts*" and lectures in the multicultural programme "*Megaron Plus*" as well as with its pricing policy that provides significant advantages to the young, the Concert Hall managed to become a benchmark by reversing the anachronistic image that it had for years.

- **Strengthening partnerships with cultural institutions and networks**

Having thoroughly understood the benefits that arise from the development of partnerships with cultural organizations and institutions, both in Greece and abroad, the organization dynamically enters this field by either renewing its partnerships (e.g. Centre Pompidou) or by signing new partnerships (e.g. La Scala in Milan). So, among other things, it manages to expand its operations and its resonance abroad, to ensure expertise, to adopt "good practices" from similar organizations and to organize better cultural activities. Therefore, it implements the expressed targeting, which refers to a double "opening": to the city and outside the Greek borders.

- **Dynamic use of traditional communication channels**

Over time, the Concert Hall has consistently applied all the traditional communication practices that ensure publicity and inform the public about its cultural activities. Thus, as its communication tool, it mainly uses both the printed cultural programmes and the benefits from the institution of sponsorship, as well as the strong public relations it has developed with the media.

- **Gradual integration of technology and digital communication channels**

Finally, the organization gradually consorts with the requirements of the digital age by integrating, into its cultural activities and communicative practices, interactive digital media such as website, social networks, interactive applications in cultural activities, etc. While, in the 90's, the Concert Hall was a pioneer in the integration of technological innovations, such as online ticket booking, website development, etc., in the early 21st century it shows signs of delay and reluctance to integrate the new interactive communication channels. However, according to the observation of its communicative design, the organization seems to be changing its communicative strategy, dynamically entering the digital age and recognizing the benefits that the integration of digital communication tools can provide, as exemplified by the change in its new web site.

## VI. EPILOGUE

It is a fact that the communication strategy of the Concert Hall is undergoing reconstruction, as various levels associated with the communication process are gradually being transformed, for example the changes in both the organizational structure of communication and in the more effective integration of the digital communication channels. The most important of these is the previously dysfunctional website.

In general, the cultural organizations operating in today's dynamically changing communication environment, such as the Athens Concert Hall, are on the borderline of this change as they are usually dominated by either trends of fear or adoration of electronic means, related to the decision to adopt new technologies and whether the integration is consistent with their nature. However, in no case should the effective traditional communication practices that can be applied to the cultural context be overlooked, as in combination with the modern channels of communication they can lead to better results.

In conclusion, the Athens Concert Hall with its corrective action and the creation of a modern and interactive website, manages to have its site in the centre of the communication process. In this way, it becomes an entity in the digital ecosystem and actively responds to the challenges of our time by now having the most immediate comparison with similar cultural organizations.

Therefore, every cultural organization, must apply the practices and communication methods that promote its mission, fulfill its cultural goals, match its temperament and ultimately distribute cultural information to a wider audience as the undeniable requirement in the Information Society is to treat the public as a dynamic part of the communication process. So the public via the feedback converses actively and creatively with the cultural unit, which, ultimately, has multiple benefits for all correlated with the cultural mainstream.

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## Notes

- <sup>i</sup>. For more details on whom acts as the transmitter or communicator, vide more in [32].
- <sup>ii</sup>. Memorizing is the simplest form of personalization in a web environment. The system records and stores user information (name and navigation behavior), guidance aims to assist the user to quickly and easily locate the requested information by providing the additional navigation options, configuration provides variants of a website so it can correspond to the knowledge, the preferences and the interests of each user while supporting the preparation work concerns the implementation of a series of operations by the system on behalf of the user [15].
- <sup>iii</sup>. Virtual communities can take various forms regarding the content, the structure, the degree of interaction and communication and the use they provide to the user. Those commonly found are the following:
- *Blogs*: these are online websites of information that are displayed in chronological order (like logs) and where authors submit their thoughts on personal, political or topical issues [38].
  - *Social contact web sites* (Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Youtube, LinkedIn): these are places where people, entertain themselves and communicate, and exchange views and information on matters of common interest. Cultural organizations can discreetly (based on demographic characteristics of users) place information, advertisements or create their own profile where they interact directly with the public. In particular, in web sites that support the use of videos such as Youtube, the organization or the public can upload videos of cultural activities.
  - *Chat rooms*: they are electronic "*places*" which are divided into "rooms", each with a different topic. Indeed, "in contrast with the communities the chat rooms are discussion places in real time [26].
- <sup>iv</sup>. This term was first used in 2004 and comes from the terms *ipod* (the brand of Apple's portable media player) and broadcasting [26].
- <sup>v</sup>. Interaction is a necessary quality for an environment to qualify as a virtual environment. If the environment cannot reproduce and respond, depending on the movements and actions of the user in real time, then we were talking about a static processing data model [37].
- <sup>vi</sup>. Immersion is the illusion of the user's existence in the virtual world and his severance from the stimulations of the real "external" world. The user's senses receive messages from the computer's environment and react to them. This also includes the feeling of presence that is usually mentioned by many researchers [37]. For example, we could cite corresponding output of a cultural institution, where through the experience of immersion in a virtual environment, one can interact with simulations of archaeological sites, buildings, three-dimensional objects, etc. [39].
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