Call for Research Papers - “Impact of COVID-19 on sustainability of Civil Society Organizations in the Western Balkan region”

IMPLEMENTATION OF WBF PROJECTS

One of the main challenges of WBF caused by COVID-19 pandemic is to mark the progress on the implementation of WBF funded projects always aiming for desired impact. On page 4-5 you can learn more about implementation phase of our funded projects.

National Visegrad Coordinators and WBF Senior Officials Meeting

Constructive discussion on the future, sustainability, the progressive growth of WBF and the continuation of cooperation between two Funds.

MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MONTENEGRO, H.E. MINISTER ĐORĐE RADULOVIĆ

Read on page 3

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. VIŠEKRUNA JANKOVIĆ ARTLINK BEOGRAD ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, AND REFLECTIONS SHARED BY DIRECTOR OF ARTPLUS AND CAMERATA’S CHIEF CONDUCTOR

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CALL FOR RESEARCH PAPERS - “IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SUSTAINABILITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION”.

WBF is pleased to Launch the Call for Research Papers - “Impact of COVID-19 on sustainability of Civil Society Organizations in the Western Balkan region”. This initiative is directly supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, through the Embassy of Japan in Tirana, with the aim to better comprehend the impact of COVID-19 to the activities and functioning of Civil Society Organizations in Western Balkans, to identify challenges, but also, the opportunities, lessons learned and recommendations that could provide bigger sustainable support for the CSO sector.

The Call represent another possibility for supporting the CSO sector in our region and, more specifically the much needed research work, analytical thinking and independent studies. WBF invites independent researchers, members of Think Tanks, academia, civil society networks and advocacy platforms from Western Balkans to apply! If you are a strong critical thinker with research skills, come and join us by submitting your works!

All necessary information is provided in our web page.

Deadline for applications is on 7 February 2021.
National Visegrad Coordinators and WBF Senior Officials Meeting

On January 21st, with joint efforts of Republic of North Macedonia, Chair in Office of WBF and Polish Presidency of V4 Group and with the support of both Funds, the meeting between the Western Balkans Fund Senior Officials (WBF CSO) and International Visegrad Fund National Coordinators (IVF NC) was organized. The meeting has solidified already existing partnership among WB6 and V4 Group. More than 25 participants from all ten MFA-s representing both Funds were present in the virtual meeting. The discussions were focused on the continuation of the cooperation between the two Funds in terms of sustainability and progressive growth of WBF, exploring potential new areas of collaboration and sharing practical experiences from the work of IVF, as a successful instrument of regional cooperation, which is about to celebrate its 20-th anniversary.

V4 Group representatives reaffirmed their support towards long-standing regional cooperation, stability, development and European perspective of the WB region. They reiterated their strong committed towards WBF, in building good neighborly relations, mutual trust across the Western Balkans, through enhancing people to people links and activities of Civil Society Organizations in the entire region.

Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro H.E. Ministér Đorđe Radulović

On January 27th, the WBF Executive Director Dr. Gjergj Murra paid a courtesy visit to the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, H.E. Mr. Đorđe Radulović. This meeting served as a great opportunity to share information on the WBF’s achievements through the years and mostly to discuss the current state of regional cooperation in Western Balkans Region. The meeting indicated the firm readiness of Montenegro to continue strengthening cooperation among WB6.

Meeting with H.E. Mr. Mitsuyuki Takada

On January 7th, the WBF Secretariat welcomed H.E. Mr. Mitsuyuki Takada, Ambassador of Japan to Albania. After fruitful discussions on regional cooperation, Ambassador Takada and Director Murra signed the contract for the project: “Impact of COVID-19 on sustainability of Civil Society Organizations in the Western Balkan region”.

Meeting with H.E. Mr. Dancho Markovski

On January 14th, H.E. Mr. Dancho Markovski, Ambassador of Republic of North Macedonia to Albania, paid a courtesy visit to the WBF Secretariat. Meeting focused on exchanging views on regional cooperation processes and good neighborly relations.
"Ohrid Running Weekend 2020" is the first project to finish the race of the WBF 3rd Call concluded projects!

This project aimed to establish a network between organizations in 3 different WBF Contracting Parties on the promotion of a healthy and active lifestyle. Grantee, in partnership with project partners, managed to organize the main event that was held in Ohrid from 28th to 30th of August, where over 500 participants took part in the 5k and 21k marathon races. As parallel activities to the main event, project partners implemented two workshops on the topic of challenges and advantages of organizing sports events in the light of a global pandemic and volunteering on sports events, where participants got actively engaged and shared their experience and know-how.

Grateful to “Ohrid Trcat”, “Association “Zdrav život – KINEZIS” and “Trail Running Albania” for successfully implementing such project.

“Balkans’ Spirit”. The same song interpreted in three different languages, shows that the artists and the language of music are one of the key elements in building bridges of cooperation in our region!

This artistic product is part of “Balkans’ Spirit", a project that WBF co-supported, which aims to promote cultural identity and intercultural dialogue through exchange of artists and artistic expression.

On the following link you can watch the video:

https://www.facebook.com/WesternBalkansFund/videos/1740065312822096
“Western Balkans Cookbook” will be soon available to all food lovers, who enjoy and practice traditional cooking. With this cookbook, the grantee Generator from Vranje and the partners wanted to contribute to preserving a similar gastronomic heritage within the WB region for future generations.

As part of the WBF Funded Project “Regional Cooperation on Global Consulting Day 2020”, Business Consultants Council (BCC), Management Consulting Association (MCA 2000) and Albanian Consulting Network (ACN), published the Digital Booklet, a documented report for the initiatives, activities and strategies implemented during 2020. The aim of this project is to build linking opportunities for future regional collaboration and empowering business community and management consultants. This Booklet highlights the activities undertaken by the three institutions and remarks on the digital perspective and digital transformation.

For more insights, please read the full report in the following link: http://www.bcc-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Digital-Booklet.pdf

The online course on circular economy, part of the WBF Funded Project “Partnership for circular economy – sustainable SMEs growth and regional development”, implemented by YES Foundation, ASET and INTERA, is now accessible online. This course was created with the idea to introduce the concept of circular economy in the business sector, focusing on the benefits of this type of economy and its influence on the business development, environment and job creation. Additionally the participants will learn more about key steps on its implementation, giving an opportunity to CSOs to work closely with different types of SMEs and help them recognize and implement circular economy in their business models.

For more info please visit the following link: http://pretpriemacedu.mk/?p=7151
WBF is pleased to share with you another success story from our 3rd Call for proposals, headed by the ArtLink artistic association from Belgrade in direct partnership with the ArtPlus from Tirana and the International Peace Center from Sarajevo. Camerata Balcanica – Western Balkans Youth Classical Music Chamber Orchestra, is a sustainable cultural platform for youth exchange across the entire Western Balkans, which contributes to reconciliation by altering the cultural narrative towards a common goal of joint creativity, and advances a positive image of the Region under the motto “United through Music”. Over 30 young artists actively participated in four weeks long master classes and workshops delivered by prominent mentors from EU and WB region, and up to 25 of the young artists performed at five live performances, conducted in September 2020 in Belgrade and October 2020 in Tirana. Despite all the challenges of the pandemic, this regional initiative provided an enormous potential for youth mobilisation, (inter)cultural exchange and career development within the WB region, as well as an added value beyond the Region in direct link to the European Festival Association Network. More on how important regional cooperation is and what values it brings follows below in an interview with Mrs Jovanka Visékruna Jankovic, the Artistic Director of the ArtLink, accompanied by reflections shared by Mr Mario Guralumi, Director of the ArtPlus, and Mr Benjamin Haemhouts, Camerata’s Chief conductor from Belgium.

**INTERVIEW WITH MRS. JOVANKA VISÉKRUNA JANKOVIĆ, ARTLINK BELGRADE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, AND REFLECTIONS SHARED BY MR. MARIO GURALUMI, DIRECTOR OF ARTPLUS, AND MR. BENJAMIN HAEMHOUTS, CAMERATA’S CHIEF CONDUCTOR**

How important is for you and your partners is a regional perspective?

**Mrs. Višekruna Janković:** As far as I know, ArtLink is one of the first if not the first art association in the Region that has set as its goal the promotion of the best young artists - musicians in particular - from WB Region and their positioning on the European and international scene. Our initiative to establish cooperation among the musicians in the Region, back in 2004, was one of the first such initiatives. It was implemented through the project called NORBAL - Nordic-Balkan Chamber Orchestra, which we have implemented within a bigger framework – the Nordic-Balkan Cultural Switch Program supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Performing the demanding and very responsible role of the artistic coordinator for the WB, and cooperating closely with the Project Director Anders Bayer, who is the current director of the Bergen Festival in Norway, was a unique experience for me and at the same time an exceptional opportunity to witness first-hand the operation of one of the best organised models of regional cooperation – the Nordic model. Since then ArtLink regional classical music platform has grown through three projects supported by the International Visegrad Fund – the Balkan Visegrad Cultural Bridge, the Balkan Visegrad Youth Stage and the Balkan Visegrad Project for Young Talents that strengthened our inter regional network and provided the transfer of knowhow from well-structured Visegrad partners. Also ArtLink is an active member of the European Festival Network run by the European Festival Association (EFA) and has served as the Festival Hub for the WB since 2017 attracting more than 70 festivals to the Network. Through those projects and activities ArtLink has built a strong and reliable network of partners in the WB but also in the Visegrad countries and across the EU. Camerata Balcanica is the result of 15 years of investing and believing in regional cooperation in the field of classical music. It grew from the ArtLink Balkan Young Virtuosi ensemble (founded in 2017) and Western Balkans Sextet founded in 2018 and performed in Berlin as a part of the Youth for Peace project – 100 Years After World War I, 100 ideas for Peace – in the presence of the Presidents of France and Germany. Our partners who had an active part in the realisation of the Camerata Balcanica project and hosted the concerts of Camerata Balcanica are ArtPlus from Tirana represented by Mario Guralumi and the International Peace Centre from Sarajevo and the Sarajevo Winter Festival represented by Mr Ibrahim Spahić. Having in mind all that, I am proud to see today our network of partners and supporters, and our achievements in regional cooperation in the WB which are direct results of a long term partnerships, cooperation and dedication. Regional orchestra Camerata Balcanica is composed of the best young musicians from the Balkans, and as such it represents a high level artistic regional project that aims to show the artistic excellence from the Region and at the same time demonstrate the strength of joint regional

**If you could describe the desired success/es of your initiative in few words, what would you say?**

**Mrs. V.J:** Joint efforts, creativity, work, inspiration and togetherness brought us so much fun, happiness professional satisfaction and recognition, and made our whole year, despite of the COVID difficulties. It has also made our lives richer and gave us so much hope, new ideas and new energy for the future.
How important for you and the initiative itself is the support of the WBF – both financially and non-financially wise?

Mrs. V.J: Being active in regional cooperation in the field of culture for more than 15 years, investing a lot of energy and work in building the regional network and partnerships for the promotion of the best creative potential from the region, I think that the fact that the Western Balkan Fund has been created as a regional mechanism for strengthening and supporting the cooperation in the region is of essential value to anyone resolved to advance regional cooperation.

The existence of the WBF enables the recognition of the best regional initiatives and also the strategic and structural development of that regional cooperation. For us, the fact that Camerata Balkanica was recognised by the WBF Team as a project deserving of the Fund’s support and was then supported, brought not only funding essential for the realisation of the project but also an added value to the whole project concept in form of a “label of quality”. What makes me particularly proud is the fact that Camerata Balkanica was the first to receive the Award established by the WBF – The Champions of the Regional Cooperation, and that I personally received that special award on behalf of the project Team from Mr. Gjergj Murra, the Fund’s Executive Director, at Camerata Balkanica’s concert held as a part of the ArtLink festival at the Belgrade Fortress in September 2020. This recognition meant an enormous amount to all of us involved in this project.

Finally, the special benefit for us and for the project was the active participation and contribution by the Balkan Fund’s Team and their constant help and assistance throughout the realisation of the project. This open and dedicated relationship helped us a lot, and it also assisted us in learning a considerable amount from the Fund’s dedicated professionals.

How important is regional cooperation and partnerships (established or strengthened) is for you/partners and initiative?

Mrs. V.J: The strongest point is the level of established partnerships both within the Region and in the EU. Our partnerships have been built over past several years and we have all shared the same vision for the region and its EU perspective. The Sarajevo Peace Centre and Winter Festival have carried on for thirty-four years thanks to the indefatigable persistence and energy of its Director, Mr Ibrahim Spahić, and is not just a festival office. In its darkest hours the city depended on its artists to give expression to their plight and to show that shards of civilised life could still be found. Now the festival has become the main agent for bringing Sarajevo back into the mainstream of regional and European cultural activity. ArtPlus from Tirana and Mr Mario Guralumi, have been our partners since 2017 and had an important role in targeting and selecting young artists from the WB, as well as in building the team of the project. It is of highest importance that the project has gained recognition and acceptance by the European Festival Network and by our partner from Belgium – the Casco Phill orchestra and its chief conductor Mr Benjamin Haemhouts who has been our principal conductor in this adventure. It is also important that the project has been recognized and supported by City of Belgrade, and Belgrade Fortress – partner of ArtLink festival, Delegation of EU in Serbia and Albania, Ministry of Culture of Albania and partly by the Young Talents Project supported by the International Visegrad Fund.

Does your initiative contribute to a wider initiative, and how in specific?

Mrs. V.J: Indeed it does. The project is a role model for the artistic coproduction in the field of music in the Western Balkans. Together with the European Festival Association (EFA) and other partners including the Belgrade Fortress, RYCO, Ministry of Culture of Albania, and our partner festivals partner and based on the experiences tuned through the Camerata Balkanica project, ArtLink has initiated the creation of the Balkan Artists Hub – BAH, a structure that will enable cooperation across the Region including joint performances and co-productions to be presented both in the Region and the EU through the network of partners involved in this endeavour.

Reflections from Mr. Benjamin Haemhouts, Camerata’s Chief conductor

Having worked with many young talents in the past, the Western Balkans are commonly known as a spawning ground for the arts and thus for musical talent. I was thrilled and flattered to have received this invitation from Jovanka Višekruna Janković and experience myself how many talented young people are gathered in this orchestra. The rehearsal time was very intense and led to an amazing and impressive result. This is probably the most valuable and rewarding project I have been involved with in recent years.

Reflections from Mr. Mario Guralumi, Director of ArtPlus

For years ARTPLUS association in Albania contributes to the sector of culture with different artistic projects, with a focus on the promotion of young talents as one of the main objectives. As Artistic director of ARTPLUS and musician I was Invited by Mrs Jovanka Visekruna Jankovic to contribute to the ArtLink festival and Visegrad - Balkan Young Talents Project as a mentor and partner as well as to join WB Regional Festival Hub. ArtLink is one of the most renowned festivals in Belgrade (Serbia). The partnership with ArtLink introduced CB as an important platform for the promotion of young classical musicians from WB region. Being a partner and host of this initiative in October 2020 in Tirana (Albania) was a great responsibility but also a the opportunity to contribute to the successful implementation of the project with ArtLink and other partners.
Connecting the Western Balkans Region!

On the following link you may watch a story about WBF covered by DeutcheWelle.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiXTw7QYLgi&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR3GTn6J4onF1J4XNBo5Vd71onZT1y1pN08LmJaDXPSB7jCcYG PO8l

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