# W24.1.2. RESILIENCE AND MUSEUMS
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| Abstract: | In this unit learners are confronted with the relevance of resilience competencies in the cultural sector. We present different theories as well as some specific tips to improve museums resilience were given. The role of museums in the society also demands, or at least create an opportunity, to explore their capacity as community resilience facilitators/ promoters and, acting on this way, a situation win-win is possible. |
| Keywords: | *resilience, 21st century competencies, museums* |

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## Aim and objectives

The aim of this unit is to understand how museum can be resilient institutions and fundamentally how they can build resilient communities.

## Learning outcomes

After studying this resource, you will be able to identify the use of resilience in the museum field, from a theoretical and practical point of view

## Keywords

Resilience, 21st century competencies, museums.

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# 1. Introduction

As we saw on the first unit of this course, the word "resilience" has different nuances depending upon the lexical field of its particular disciplinary use (see Figure 1); the concept is multidisciplinary and that it has greatly spread outside of its original disciplinary fields[1].



Figure 1. Multidisciplinary aspect of Resilience (adapted from https://journals.openedition.org/cybergeo/docannexe/image/25554/img-1.png)

In the museum sector, it is useful to concentrate on two main aspects:

→ first, as institutions, museums must adapt the methodology used by organizational science to be more resilient regarding their specific mission and survival.

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$\rightarrow$ secondly, as civil society institutions, they must also help their communities to build their own resilience as individuals.

The need for skills development was also one of the key conclusions of a report for Arts Council England on resilience in local museums: "Skills remain a barrier to change. People and skills are crucial to achieving change. 'Traditional' approaches to working are noted as incompatible with changes to governance and management structures and, more fundamentally, the business model of the organisation. Active workforce planning is essential if museum services are to build resilience[2].

## 2. The Characteristics of a resilient heritage organisation

On the study "Heritage Organisations and Resilience", from BOP Consulting (UK), from 2012 [3], the authors summarize some characteristics that can be used to create a checklist to understand the strengths and weaknesses of any heritage organisation. So, a resilient heritage organisation:

1. **Combines stewardship with business acumen**:

   - Has a strong understanding of how the organisation functions as a business, backed up by a formal business planning process;
   - Balances investment in its heritage assets, with efforts to understand its customer and supporter base, and to develop new products and offers that unlock income and support;

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[2] Tuck, Fiona, Pirie, Victoria and Dickinson (2015). Scott, Research to understand the resilience, and challenges to this, of Local Authority museums. Newcastle upon Tyne, TBR.
[3] https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2012/bop-heritage-organisations-resilience-pdf/

- Reviews its legal status and considers the merits of alternative models (e.g. trust status, shared services, trading arm, outsourcing);

2. **Applies its business acumen to exploit its assets commercially**:

- Identifies its unique selling points that make it stand out from purely commercial competitors;
- Seeks to attract diverse income sources to avoid dependence on any one source (where possible, avoiding public sector dependence);
- Shares services and ventures with partners where this makes for more efficient delivery;
- Measures the true cost of income generation;
- Assesses risks and seeks to minimize them, where possible testing new products and services at a small scale before scaling up.

3. **Makes time for communication**:

- Identifies and draws on staff members' passions and their full range of interests and skills, connecting staff across departments;
- Supports staff but is realistic about when change is needed, and is not afraid of change;
- Has a management style that is approachable and transparent, welcoming debate with staff and sharing performance information;

4. **Is visible and connected**:

- Is championed by its Director and Board –they are advocates for the organization in other public forums.

- Is networked beyond its immediate local area and the heritage sector (and considers recruiting from other sectors);
- Horizon scans for changes in its operating environment and for new opportunities that fit its vision and help deliver its business plan;

5. **Maximises the value of its volunteers and supporters**:

- invests in coordination, training and support for volunteers, and for the staff members who volunteers and work with volunteers;
- Analyses its volunteer and supporter base to identify what motivates and rewards them, using this knowledge to tailor opportunities;
- Audits Board skills, regularly reviewing the Board and recruiting to fill any gaps;

The authors are aware that this classification can be understood as very business oriented, and they recognise that this can be possible because of the public-sector culture witch regards the social and community value at least as important as its commercial value; another issues can be the lack of confidence about networking outside the sector, or the difficulty of having staff able to the needed changes in communication, or lack of time to carry out change programmes, and of some requisite skills.

# 3. The concept of adaptative resilience on the cultural sector

Despite the fact that the concept of resilience was originated in environment studies and ecological systems, the principle was, as we saw, adapted also to the cultural sector. One of the most important authors is Mark Robinson, that made a report on 2010 for Arts Council England, where he argues that resilience is not simple self-defence or self-preservation, but also includes continual adaptation and redesign in pursuit of core purpose, involving acceptance of the idea that change is normal and necessary, creating the notion of "**adaptative resilience" as the capacity to remain productive and true to core purpose and identity whilst absorbing disturbance and adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances**[4].

This adaptative resilience cycle has four phases (see figure 2):

1. **Growth**: characterised by innovation and high demand for products or services and resources to meet demand; resources move around as a result. Duplication of activity, organisations or staffing may arise. Networks develop very rapidly, often informally, again with some duplication.

2. **Consolidation**: Over time, resources become more fixed, but also externally in terms of demand becoming predictable. Capacity is built, in terms of structures of organisations and networks, and things become more 'efficient'. Budgets are more fixed. During the late consolidation phase, systems can become vulnerable to unforeseen disturbance if they are either too fixed or not paying enough attention to their operating environment. Some may fall into the 'Rigidity Trap' of hanging on to structures and ways of working that need to adapt to changes in the environment or internal changes.

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[4] Robinson, M. (2010) Making Adaptive Resilience Real, Arts Council England

3. **Release**: This phase usually begins when a disturbance, or set of disturbances, creates the need for change. This may be internally or externally driven and seemingly either positive or negative. Resources are necessarily freed up and can be reallocated. this is usually quite rapid, as it is a less productive phase for any system.

4. **Reorganisation**: Release leads into renewal and redesign, which create new potential and stimulate fresh innovation, carrying some of the learning from the previous cycle. Although this and the release phase can feel traumatic, they are also creative and full of possibility.

Robinson considers that no system is an island, and the was aware that one can extend this model, by exploring how different cycles are interconnected.
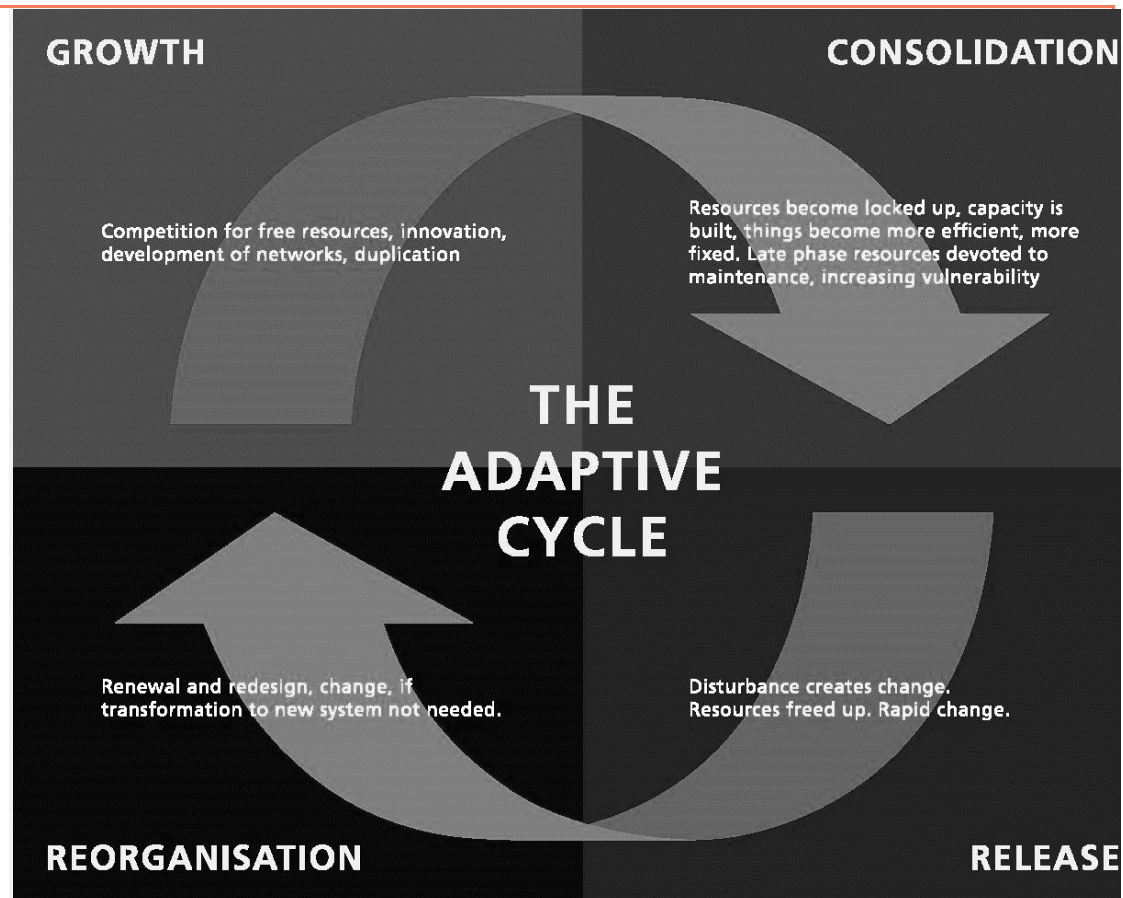
Figure 2. The adaptative Cycle (from Robinson, M. (2010) Making Adaptive Resilience Real, Arts Council England)

Robinson also suggests there are four sets of resources and four adaptive skills that characterise a resilient arts organisation. They are:

### a) Resources

• a culture of shared purpose and values rooted in a strong organisational memory, avoiding mission drift but consciously evolving;

• predictable financial resources derived from a robust business model and a range of activities and 'customers', allowing some financial flexibility to be retained;

• strong networks (internal or external), with an absence of 'silos', and collaboration at all levels to make the organisation vital and connected;

• intellectual, human and physical assets used to maximise impact in pursuit of core purpose, with appropriate investment in the creation and exploitation of new assets;

## b) Adaptive skills

• adaptive capacity: innovation and experimentation are embedded in reflective practice, with change seen as natural and actively prepared for;

• leadership, management and governance provide clarity internally and externally, with clear roles and responsibilities and strong improvement focus;

• situation awareness of environment and performance, with good gathering, sharing and consideration of intelligence and information to inform decisions;

• management of key vulnerabilities is regular and integrated into planning and preparation for disruption.


After Robinson, some authors[5] consider that, instead of consider resilience just as bouncing back, it is very useful to consider it also as bouncing forward. They that this takes into account that, instead of consider resilience as bounce back from shocks, or as the ability to absorb' shocks, resilience can be a positive adaptability' in anticipation of, or in response to, shocks, a system adapting its structure, functions and operations in the face of new conditions.

To resume:

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[5] Woodley, Sophia, Towell, Patrick, Turpin, Richard and others (2018) What is Resilience anyway? A review. Arts Council England. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/What%20Is%20Resilience%20Anyway.pdf

- **Bouncing back** is about: surviving, enduring, strength, returning to prior state, preserving core mission and goals.

- **Bouncing forward** is about: thriving, evolving, flexibility and adaptation, changing, developing mission and goals considering changed circumstances and needs.

# 4. Tips to promote resilience on heritage organisations

The same authors from BOP consulting summarize some tips to promote organisational resilience for Heritage institutions. They make clear that you always need to be connected with others to improve resilience, even if also you need to look at your institution itself on a first moment and act according with best practices; summarising, institutions can promote resilience:

1. **The role of boards and management teams.** Within heritage organisations implies that Boards and leaders/management teams might:

   • Review and develop the skills of existing leaders, when necessary recruiting new leaders with suitable skills and experience

   • Make a greater priority of business planning, Board skills audits, horizon scanning, fully researching income opportunities, etc.

   • Review management structures and introduce new structures and tools where necessary to get the most out of staff

   • Use checklists to interrogate the strengths and weaknesses of their organization

In many cases improvements can be made within existing organizational resources and by drawing on guidance already available for free within the cultural and voluntary sectors. In some circumstances it will make sense to invest in training and consultancy, or to recruit new posts to lead specific improvements or new activities.

2. **Through networks:** several types of network which help them to improve and to lead effective organizations:

• Umbrella associations –which provide advocacy and policy input on issues that cut across the entire sector

• 'Trade associations' that bring together close peers to advocate the very precise needs of their type of heritage organization. these groups also provide opportunities to build deeper relationships between peers

• Regional and local networks for voluntary sector organizations, social enterprises and the tourism industry

• Boards – a couple of leaders found sitting on Boards to be useful to see how other organisations operate and achieve change

• Opportunities for all staff, not just leaders, to network and learn.

# 5. Resilience and museums

The London Museums Group for Collections Trust[6] assume resilience as an **organisation's capacity to anticipate disruption, adapt to events and create lasting value.** They focus on what we can learn from different types of things (organisations and creatures), that have turned out to be resilient.

After that, they make clear some **characteristics** of long-lasting companies:

- Value – They produce something people need and want
- Prudence – they don't grow faster than the market demands
- Symbiosis – they exist in a balanced relationship with their community
- Geography – their activity is optimised to their location
- Pride – they take pride in their longevity
- Heritage – they have a sense of cumulative investment and value.

When analysing organisms, they found also some **strategies** to achieve resilience:

- Toughness – they are over-engineered to optimise survival
- Diversity – they actively avoid homogeneity to maximise adaptability
- Pro-activity – they proactively propagate to survive
- Adaptability – they are in a constant process of adaptation
- Dormancy – they can survive drought by reducing activity.

Considering that resilience is about being optimised to adapt to disruption, some examples of what can be understood by the

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[6] https://www.slideshare.net/collectionstrust/resilience-and-museums

museum sector as disruption are done, such as changes in local authority funding model or competition, too much stuff and lack of leadership, being aware that sometimes the biggest threats aren't always external.

A lot of museum element need to be resilient to adapt to changes: buildings, collections, people, services, trading activities, brand, reputation and values must be strong and prepared.

The authors suggest that a resilient museum must be:

a) Optimised – in what concerns to delivers value, location/situation, core purpose, governance and standards;
b) Networked – engaged with audience, connected to profession and able to access influence;
c) Adaptable – with a positive working culture, being proactive and capacity to shrink.

# 6. The Museum sector as a community resilience promoter

Museums have a constant presence in the global cultural landscape for the last centuries, adapting itself to different temporal and geographical realities, as well as managing to maintain its prestige, even subject to different clashes for social, political, economic and even environmental reasons.

As resilient institutions, museums nowadays focus on their role with communities, understood on a broad sense and according with their mission as public-service oriented organisations dedicated to human heritage.

This can also help museums to get a larger audience and, therefore, more revenues: a dual focus on purpose and public benefit helps to connect performance and values. Achieving the desired relationship

with visitors, and at a secondary level with funders and business users, drives the revenue streams. It is in some ways a simple and classic model: satisfied customers who feel they are getting 'value' generate more visits but also greater secondary spend through trading and events. The purpose has shifted from maintaining a repository of collections and building assets to the active use of material in partnership with visitors, researchers or other users.

Museums are organisations that tend to describe itself first in terms of the contribution they make to their reputation, and second, in financial terms. In fact, they can see resilience not simply as a matter of cash but of delivering cultural and wider public value, by taking a community asset-based development approach, engaging deeply with local communities and acting as a community resource. The win–win for arts and cultural organisations is to develop new ventures that contribute to mission and also generate extra income because they are a response to audience desires and preferences.

Much of the wider literature about the relationship between the arts and resilience highlights the importance of the arts and culture as a net contributor towards resilience. Although beyond the scope of the current review, it is worth noting the broad consensus that the arts can foster and nurture both individual psychological resilience and community resilience. Therefore, an investment in the resilience of the arts is arguably an investment in the resilience of society as a whole. Arts and cultural organisations that understand the role they play in their local communities, and work with others to build a sense of place, are crucial to the resilience of the overall sector. Such organisations can become highly valued by helping communities express their aspirations and develop their identities, by helping resolve conflicts, and by building the social capital of communal relationships. They can become part of the essential fabric of their communities – and demonstrate the public value of arts and culture[7].

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[7] Woodley, Sophia, Towell, Patrick, Turpin, Richard and others (2018). What is Resilience anyway? A review. Arts Council England.
https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/What%20Is%20Resilience%20Anyway.pdf

We can find different projects that ensure the contribution of museums to develop community resilience. One of them is the ICOM training programme "Museums for reconciliation", dedicated to the role of museums in processes of memory that aims to promote reflection on the museological and pedagogical challenges that contemporary Latin American museums are facing when developing projects linked to the construction of memories and to the processes of resistance, resilience, dialogue and reconciliation in times of conflict[8].

Another example is the "Citizen Science, Civics, and Resilient Communities" education project led by the Museum of Science, Boston in partnership with Arizona State University and Northeastern University will increase resilience to extreme weather and environmental hazards through citizen-created data, local knowledge, and community values[9].

Another example is the Happy Museum project 10, a network of cultural organisations that aims to challenge museums to use their position in society to promote well-being, sustainability and resilience. In the webpage you can find some case-studies where they **make clear that communities who learn together become more resilient,** and that museums enable individuals and communities to learn together. The Happy Museum Project defends that museum learning is already all the things much orthodox learning is not: curiosity driven; non-judgmental; non-compulsory; engaging; informal and fun. The people needed in the future will be resilient, creative, resourceful and empathetic systems-thinkers, exactly the kind of capacities museum learning can support. Museums have the potential to lead in developing our understanding of why and how education needs to change to bring about these capacities.

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[8] https://icom.museum/en/news/museums-for-reconciliation-an-icom-training-programme-highlights-the-role-of-museums-in-processes-of-memory-and-resilience/
[9] https://www.nisenet.org/CSCRC
[10] https://happymuseumproject.org/

## 7.    Synopsis

In this unit learners were confronted with the relevance of resilience competencies in the cultural sector. We presented different theories were referred, and some specific tips to improve museums resilience were given. After that, learners have been introduced to an approach to the  role of museums in the society.  It demands, or at least create an opportunity, to explore their capacity as community resilience facilitators/ promoters and, acting on this way, a situation win-win is achieved.

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The Happy Museum Project https://happymuseumproject.org/

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# 9. Further reading

**The Future Resilience of Herefordshire Council's Museum Service - Final Report of Findings and Recommendations (2018)**

This document is a resilience plan made for the Council by P+P Strategic planning and design consultants, specialising in cultural and natural heritage assets, programmes and projects. The document addresses governance, decision-making processes, partnering, comparators, possible implications and financial models.

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/13328/the_future_resilience_of_herefordshire_councils_museum_service.pdf