# Drivers for Resilience in Cultural Organizations: lessons from the Montreal festivals in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Abstract

Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic represent appropriate moments to innovate. Many organizations in the cultural sector have thus proposed numerous changes in their activities trying to develop new forms of symbiosis, bringing back the notion of resilience. Beyond its buzz word aspect, resilience has essentially been associated with a set of organizational capacities to adapt and innovate in the face of a disruption in the cultural environment, leaving little consideration to question the main drivers of resilience in cultural organizations.

We propose then to study the adaptation of the Montreal festivals offer, building on primary data from 8 interviews with festival directors or managers and secondary data from internal and external documentation. We therefore mobilize the concept of the business model to identify and discuss the drivers for resilience in cultural organizations. We show a trend for festivals to come back to their formal business model despite the deployment of different innovations and identify role and purpose as the two main drivers for the resilience of festivals.

Finally, we call for a comparison with other cultural organizations to discuss the preserving and reconfiguring aspects of their resilience.

## Keywords

Resilience, COVID-19 Pandemic, Festivals, Cultural organizations, Business models, Purpose.

## DOI

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions have generated a disruption in the offer and consumption patterns of cultural products[4]. The transition to online has allowed a favorable development for cultural sectors that did not depend on the physical presence of their public. On the other hand, very dependent sectors such as cultural events in a broad sense, have faced significant difficulties despite various innovations in the format and distribution of their cultural offer.[6]

Internally, the teams—with a high turnover rate in some cultural events—have been working intensively since the start of the pandemic to reinvent themselves while preserving their identity. This has led to the emergence of a tension between identity and constrained innovation.[10] We offer with this paper to clarify how this conflict was expressed within cultural organizations by questioning a well-known concept in management when dealing with adaptation under constraints: organizational resilience.

# Literature review

**Organizational Resilience as a development of capacities to adapt and innovate in crisis period**

From its original definition in material science to the first ones in psychology, resilience has been defined through the idea of a capacity of adaptation to a shock.[1] In management science, the development of the concept of Organizational Resilience followed the same logic. For instance, Gibson and Tarrant define resilience as an "adaptive capacity and how we better understand and address uncertainty in our internal and external environments."[3] This observation can be confirmed by systematic review on the concept of organizational resilience.[11]

The essential of the literature thus focus on the description of this capacity. Begin and Chabaud[1] propose a typology to describe the dimensions of organizational resilience:

– An 'absorption capacity' associated with the survival efforts of an organization.

– A 'renewal capacity' describing a reflective moment from the actors.

– An 'appropriation capacity' referring to the new knowledge developed from the crisis.

**Organizational Resilience as a reasoning moment for organizations**

However, building on Kraemer definition of resilience in social work studies[7], resilience can also be defined with a phenomenal lens rather than the notion of capacity. According to the author, an acceptable description of resilience depends on the context of your study (cultures, time, people, etc.) Thus, the fact that resilience involves a phenomenon and a cognitive process from the actors to tackle it, constitutes the common point between every form of resilience.

Organizational resilience can then be described through a succession of moments[2] illustrating successive cognitive processes.

By considering a psychodynamic approach of resilience, Winkler[12] investigate actors thinking and reasoning during a crisis period, leading to the consideration of individual drivers for resilience.

Yet, we lack such an approach of organizational resilience allowing us to identify the phenomenon of resilience[5] and discuss the main drivers for the reasoning of actors from cultural organizations in crisis periods.

# Methodology

**Field of study: Why considering festivals to reflect the phenomenon of resilience within cultural organizations?**

Among the variety of cultural organizations, we propose to study festivals. Their activities deeply depend on the physical gathering of publics and artists in a same place. Since the start of the pandemic, festivals have faced deep changes in their business models and modified their formats in digital forms or cancelled their editions and constitute then an interesting panel of forms of resilience. Moreover, festivals play a central role in the exhibition of several artworks and represent a real platform in the life of cultural ecosystems in general.

**Data collection**

We started by building a database registering most of the different festivals of Montreal (n=71) and information found on websites and social media such as attendance, followers, period of the year, duration, type of festival (i.e., music, cinema, visual arts, etc.), format of 2020/2021/2022 editions.

We contacted 68 of these festivals through direct mail to directors, contact mail, LinkedIn.

We interviewed 8 directors and managers between December 2021 and June 2022, with a variety within the festivals in terms of size, duration, and types. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour, we developed themes such as the adaptation of the festival team, the format before, during and after the pandemic, their relations with the different stakeholders.

We completed this primary data with internal documents (audience studies, annual reports, internal communication) provided by the directors and managers to complete our study. We also collected information from websites and local press articles.

### Data analysis

This study follows the principles of a grounded theory: we use data collected directly in our field of study to develop intermediate theorization. To do so, we proposed an open code of the interviews content.[8]

We identified two major categories in the content: one part referring to the business model of the festival (format, stakeholders, funding, etc.), a second one relative to remarks on the role of the festival, its purpose. Then, we proposed to encode the information on the business model in canvas format for business models.[9] We then identified several codes for the drivers of reasoning that we gathered into two concepts: "role" and "purpose."

## Results

Comparison of the Montreal festivals business models before, during and after the COVID19 pandemic: a trend for a "back to normal" Gathering our coding from each festival interviewed, we propose three general business model of Montreal festivals before, during and after the pandemic.

### Pre-pandemic business model.

We built the pre-pandemic business model (Figure 1 (1)) around a value proposal common to all the festivals we interviewed: offer a moment and a place for exhibit of specific artworks to a public. We identified a general trend for the revenue streams (public fundings, private sponsors, event sales) and the cost structure (rent of a physical place, equipment and furniture for the event, salaries). Both interviews and secondary data helped us to define the public of festivals, channels, and public

relationship management practices. We finally highlighted recurrent public and private partners, key activities (artistic program, event organizing, public management) and key resources (artists, representation place, festival team and volunteers).

### Pandemic business model.

The pandemic business model evolved on almost every aspect (Figure 2). Most festivals turned into a digital format, requiring a reconfiguration of resources and skills around online broadcast technologies. The value proposal remains unchanged, illustrating the lack of will to change the concept of festival and their identity. Nevertheless, the business model is only sustainable thanks to public support.

### Post-pandemic business model.

The post-pandemic business model regains almost all its pre-pandemic properties (Figure 3). The digital turn is hardly preserved. However, there is a desire to keep the public engagement tools that proved to be rather effective during the 2020 and 2021 editions, such as additional content or contests.

## Role and purpose as a driver for the resilience process

The comparison of the different business models reveals a clear absence of evolution in the value proposition of festivals. The festival directors insisted on their wish to preserve the identity of the festival, directly linked to the idea of "festival as a platform for artworks and artists promotion."

Some directors admitted that they think a festival mainly for artists rather than for the public. The willingness to keep strong links with the artists illustrates the role of festivals as a service for artists in both exhibition and socialization and its associated benefits (collaboration, inspiration, artistic movement evolution, etc.). As a result, the key point for the shift to online services delivered during the pandemic was to preserve both moments of exhibition for public and moments between artists and practitioners.

Nevertheless, online festivals remained an unsatisfactory solution (not only for economic reasons), revealing purpose as the second driver of the resilience of festivals. The directors associated the digital format to the lack of informal moments and places for both festival teams, artists and public. The significant part of

informality and materiality in these events leaves little adhesion for remote formats, making the physical format part of the festival purpose.

## Discussion and conclusion

Our results show that role and purpose are fundamental drivers of resilience within festival teams involving that:

– Business models are intended to preserve the value proposition that can then be described as representative of the festival's identity

– The will of the teams is to "return to normal" as soon as the restrictions linked to the pandemic are over

In sum, we were able to highlight a preservative dimension of organizational resilience in the case of festivals. This leads us to question the different forms of *preserving resilience* that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront in the cultural and artistic communities. Conversely, it is quite possible to imagine forms of *reconfiguring resilience* in other cultural sectors, the study of which could allow for an interesting theoretical confrontation.

Finally, we have seen that the business model is a suitable tool for diagnosing and discussing the phenomenon of resilience, and that rather than an approach based on adaptive capacities, we can think of resilience in terms of the drivers of the actors whose role and purpose constitute.

## (1) Figures of the business models are located at the end of this document
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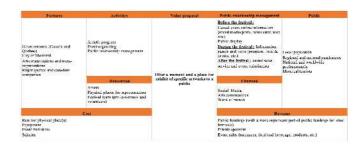
Figure 1: Pre-pandemic business model



Figure 2: Pandemic business model

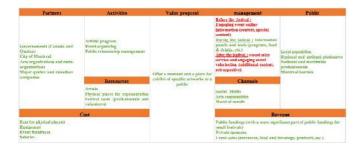| Partners | Activities | Value proposal | management | Public |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Governments (Canada and Quebec) City of Montreal Arts organizations and meta-organizations Major quebec and canadian companies | Artistic program Event organizing Public relationship management | Offer a moment and a place for exhibit of specific artworks to a public | **Before the festival :** Engaging event online information (contest, special content) During the festival : information panels and tools (program, food & drinks, etc.) **After the festival :** casual sales service and engaging event valorisation (additional content, retrospective) | Local population Regional and national spectators National and worldwide professionals Montreal tourists |
| | **Ressources** | | | |
| | Artists Physical places for representation festival team (professionals and volunteers) | | **Channels** | |
| | | | Social Media Arts communities Word of mouth | |
| **Cost** | | | **Revenue** | |
| Rent for physical places) Equipment Event furniture Salaries | | | Public fundings (with a more significant part of public fundings for small festivals) Private sponsors Event sales (entrances, food and beverage, products, etc.) | |

Figure 3: Post-pandemic business model