

CIRCOM Regional Activity Report 2003 – 2006

Introduction – Why an Activity Report?

Considering that CR was founded in 1983 – what makes 20 years of existence, that it started with 48 regional public TV member stations and today has 380 members, that at that time the member stations were from 4 different countries and today are from 38 European countries, then one thing is absolutely sure: CIRCOM Regional had great past and certainly there is future for it.

In order to make this future less open to speculations it is high time that after 20 years of existence we revise all the activities, set our goals and objectives, recognise our new potentials, recognise specific needs of each particular member station, develop new activities, yet stick to the specialities that give CR its singularity.

CR is probably the unique international organisation that is acting without permanent staff, that has no bureaucratic machinery. The organisation is based on volunteer work, free will and knowledge of individuals who are integrated into CR. All that has been done in CR has been done out of desire and love, and certainly not out of duty. On one hand, such an organisation has incredible advantages, offering a flexible and quick way of coming to decisions; yet it has its limiting factors that become evident in the effectiveness of its activities. However, by keeping even such an organisation that is founded on “heart and emotions”, and not on rational good sense, we can do more and we must do more. Media world that we live in is changing at a frightening speed. In twenty years of CIRCOM's existence several formats have changed, several technologies have changed, the number of television channels and platforms has been increasing on a day to day basis, and in all these changes there has been one non-changing need – the need for quality programmes. Each and every Editor-in-Chief will ask for low-cost quality programmes. The network of 380 regional TV stations in Europe can certainly offer that.

Circum Regional needs in general a mid and long-term strategy, a vision for at least next three years, which will easily identify key advantage of having Circum Regional as a partner using its “unique network”, key membership benefits that will keep old members and attract new ones (including solidarity, co-operation etc.) and last but not least benefits for CR members viewers because at the end everything we do should reflect on the screens.

Activity Report is an attempt to make a step forward for the period of next three years. This is an attempt to define together our priorities and find the way to realise them. This is an attempt to ascertain whether all of us - the Executive Committee, the European Board - fulfil our tasks up to defined standards. This is an attempt to bring some order into the creative disorder. This gives a guarantee that all member organisations get a proper value for their money.

Activity Report is neither a prescription that would guarantee the success and the answers to all the questions; nor is it a doctrine that would not be subject to changes. It is a work material that has to be reverted to and amended. Actually this is an attempt to make the next twenty years equally successful as the first twenty.

This is a Draft that is to be circulated to the members of the Executive Committee for the September Meeting and to the members of the European Board for the November Meeting. I do hope that after discussion at the EC and EB we shall come together to basic guidelines for future development.

Namely, the Activity Report sets a number of questions and the answers should be reached through the joint discussion on following issues:

1. Statute
2. Executive Committee
3. National Co-ordinators
4. Annual Conference
5. Training
6. Prix Circom
7. Euromusica
8. Co-productions
9. Presentation and Public Relations
10. Internet
11. Archive
12. Financing
13. Long-term Contracts with Organisations and Institutions
14. Relations with other organisations
15. Sponsors
16. Relations with members
17. Calendar of events
18. Annual evaluation of all activities

1. Statute

The only question related to the Statute that might influence the future of CR is the question related to Article 6 of the Statute – Membership. Namely, who/what are all the “entities and individuals who are committed to its aims and objectives”. What are the criteria that would positively establish that since the very concept of a public service became very wide and the advertising became the predominant financial source for public broadcasters as well.

At this point we come to the question of Associate Member as well, because according to the Statute, it is open to sister organisations around the world and to organisations facing a legal transition period or distress.

Question:

1. should we define better the criteria
2. should we aim to a larger membership and consequently open CR to production companies
3. should we define better the notion “Associate Members”
4. should we plan financial obligations (for example, participation fee for the Conference) for Associate Members

2. Executive Committee

As for the EC, I think that we should adhere to what is written in the Statute:

- 1) EC is “day-to-day management”
- 2) EC Members shall be allocated responsibility for a specific field of activity
- 3) Each candidate shall provide official approval in writing from his organisation enabling him/her to take the responsibility for tasks allocated by the EC.

My opinion is that these three directions are very important, that we should adhere to them and that they make the more active work possible and thus bring better results. Namely, CR being a voluntary organisation highly depends on commitment of individuals in specific areas of work and on assistance of our television organisations. Therefore, when electing / selecting members for the EC, we should take into account the affinity and the competence of individuals for particular areas of activities.

As the EC consists of 6 members, the areas of activities could be divided into the following:

1. Finances
2. Annual Conference
3. Training
4. Co-productions, Euromusica, Prix Circom, EBS – 2 members
5. PR and Sponsors, CIRCOM Report

When knowing precisely who is in charge of a particular area, then better contacts with National Co-ordinators are possible, better preparation for the meetings is possible, members can take part in weekly phone conferences with the President and the Secretary General. In such a way a group work is stimulated, and this is a kind of work that is with the organisations with such an internal structure, of particular importance.

3. National Co-ordinators

If you look at the CR National Co-ordinators list, the situation is as follows:

- out of 38 National Co-ordinators, 17 of them did not take part at all in the work of CR during the last year (40%)
- out of current 4 Individual Members, 1 of them did not take part at all in the work of CR during the last year
- out of 4 representatives of European Institutions, 1 of them (Council of Europe) does not take part. Among the Institutions that have the right to participate in the EB is the European Ethnic Broadcasting Association, which is not included in the official list of Institutions; therefore, the status of this Institution should be discussed.

So, the conclusion is that out of the total number of 51 members of the European Board, 20 of them do not take part in the meetings, meaning that 40% of members do not work actively in the European Board, what certainly reflects to other CR activities.

The issue of National Co-ordinators is to my opinion, one of the key issues since most of the activities, even the future of CR, rest with National Co-ordinators. CR Statute defines that National Co-ordinators are recruited among producers, directors, editors or managers actively involved in production or scheduling, but it does not define what are the duties and obligations of National Co-ordinators. How can we aim at stronger dynamism, fostering the quality of all our activities if the basis, the starting point is not set firmly? It is true that most of our activities, even timely fulfilling the financial obligations, does not reflect such a situation. However, before taking any further step, I think that we have to deal with this problem first.

Our activities should go into two directions:

1. for Member stations, whose National Co-ordinators do not participate actively for some time, to contact their Management asking them to appoint a new National Co-ordinator;
2. for passive National Co-ordinators, examine what problems they are faced with, and if there is no understanding within their own organisation, then find the way CR could help them in their work.

Further more, as the work of CR President, of Secretary General, of Deputy Secretary General, of the EC has to be evaluated, as each one of our activities has to be assessed, I think that for the EB meeting in November each National Co-ordinator should make a brief written report on his activities during the current year, which would include the number of programmes sent to Prix Circom, participation at Trainings, his working with other CR members in his country, etc. What good is to have 376 members if most of them are not even involved in any of CR activities? Such a report would not only show the results achieved but would also give an insight into the problems and needs of all our members.

4. Annual Conference

Generally taken I think that the last Annual Conference in Košice could be assessed as a step forward if compared to the Porto Conference. Regardless of a slightly reduced number of participants, attending the Workshops was considerably bigger firstly due to the speakers of high quality, then to the good choice of themes and the good proportion of workshops in plenary sessions and in smaller groups. Media coverage of plenary sessions was excellent.

Of course, there were mistakes that have to be amended. So, for future Conferences it should be **forbidden** to offer excursions during working hours of the Conference. No more! Good aspects of the Conference are to be developed further, and the not-so-good ones are to be changed.

1. The host and the place

of the Conference is to be known in advance. By knowing a future host it is then possible to include him in some aspects of organisation of the current year's Conference. With future hosts the situation is the following:

2003 – RAI

2004 – TVP (?)

2005 – BBC (?)

So, in case TVP and BBC are still interested to host the Conference, they should submit a written proposal.

2. Duration

of the Conference - I do think that the Conference, together with EC and EB meetings, is too long. I see no reason why the Closing of the Conference has to be postponed for the next day and not have it at the end of the last conference day. Therefore, the suggestion is that the Conference starts on Thursday, goes on through Friday and finishes on Saturday. Sunday is for departures or for excursion. Wednesday would be for the EC and the EB meetings, namely the Executive Committee in the morning and the European Board in the afternoon. If it is necessary to have longer EC and EB meetings, then the EC could start on Tuesday afternoon and the EB on Wednesday morning.

Wednesday – the EC & the EB meetings
 Thursday, Friday, Saturday – the Conference
 Saturday – Closing the Conference
 Sunday – Excursion, departures

3. Executive Producer

should be a member of the EC responsible for the contents of the Conference. At the same time he should preside the Group - Vice-President, three members for the programme, a representative of Prix Circom and Training - that defines the programme and the contents of the Conference.

4. Programme

has to be defined in November and the key speakers known and agreed by February. If the themes and the speakers are known in February, then those three months can be used well to advertise the Conference. The programme has to be such that every participant of the Conference goes back home fully aware that he has learned something and that he can apply at least one item from the Conference. The programme should have a good proportion of theory and practice; have provocative speakers, direct workshops. Therefore, instead of having a workshop in a plenary room it might be better to have several smaller rooms for the workshops.

5. Presenter

through the Conference proved good, so I think we should stick to it.

6. Involvement of journalists

from the Training to be more active. To do so, they could procure a ten-minute daily summary that could be used for Closing of the Conference and it could be put on Web sites or even given to the sponsors.

7. Finances

To avoid possible misunderstanding I think that the EC should decide that travelling and accommodation costs are to be paid to those speakers who are not from Circom member organisations; then, accommodation costs are to be paid to National Co-ordinators from organisations that cannot afford for it, provided these organisations pay their membership fee regularly. CR, of course, pays the accommodation and travelling cost for participants of Prix Circom.

5. Training

Training is certainly one of CR activities that sets an example by its professionalism, dynamism and results. It seems to me that after one year it is obvious that the contract between CR and Thomson Foundation proved justified. Now, Training is facing only 2 problems:

- 1) Training developed as a real CR Brand that guarantees the quality
- 2) Financing

High standard of quality achieved in Training offers a possibility of further exploiting it and with a good promotion it could be offered beyond the CR framework. The basis we started from was one Training per year; then the number of trainings expanded to three per year, even more; besides the general training, it was expanded to specialised trainings for professions like producers, cameramen, and middle management. My conclusion would be that along with having the training attached to the Conference, CR could provide specialist courses and specialised training for

members' staff. CR is capable of offering 3 to 4 specialised seminars each year with highly skilled professionals to get together for two days and exchange experience, share problems and come up with possible solutions to common problems. These workshops or seminars should be located at the premises of those members that are most successful in the field chosen.

Financing is becoming a growing problem, since it seems that we are already using the maximum of the possibilities available (CR, EP, COE). Increased number of activities certainly affects the CR budget. However, I see no reason why some trainings should not be a user-payer activity. This would mean that CR provides quality tutors and covers their expense, that the host of the Seminar – a CR member, arranges favourable financial conditions in a hotel, and the participants themselves cover their accommodation and travel expense. Most of the trainings should be for all the member organisations. We should promote better our trainings with European institutions, particularly EBU. In spite of all our efforts, the industry is not keen at sponsoring, they hardly borrow their new technology equipment for Trainings. The fact is that all our trainees work on most modern technology, though I do not think that this is the decisive factor. Perhaps, a way of reducing the cost of a seminar would be to use a technology that the host of the Conference can offer.

6. Prix Circom

Prix Circom is an activity of extremely high professional standards that needs only minor adjustments:

- 1) long-term planning:
 - of the judging place so that the technical support could be planned better. The 2003 judging will be in Romania; we do expect the offers for 2004 and 2005.
 - long-term contract with prize sponsors. The agreement with Council of the Regions and the three-year contract is the best proof for it
- 2) analysing again the categories and fixing them for a longer period; reconsidering the prize money (particularly for the News)
- 3) resolving the Statue problem
- 4) the issue of participation of all the members, namely why certain National Co-ordinators did not send any programme or sent only a few
- 5) the Archive issue. Prix Circom rules should stipulate that the awarded programmes and those with a special commendation should deliver a clean master tape with the script. It should also be decided who is paying technical cost for copies of the awarded programmes requested by the members.

Since Prix Circom is also the CR high quality brand, the question of how to advertise it better and how to make better use of it in promoting the whole Circom Regional, is still open. Besides, it is still an open question whether we could make better use of Prix Circom during the Conference itself, namely could it become a sort of a festival open to the public. We should not forget the fact that Prix Circom is the sole European competition of regional television production. Could it become an event dedicated to the CR members, but also to the public, to the audience?

I think that invitations for participation at PC should be sent earlier. National Co-ordinators could put the information about PC on the web sites of their organisations.

7. Euromusica

It seems to me that this is an event that never had due attention, an event that was never fully developed. This is also the CR brand that could be developed further in the future:

- first, to set rules for participation, performing, kind of music and objective, set up the programme and the technical standards;
- nominate Executive Producer for three years period;
- prepare a Letter of intent to be signed by the Organiser in which minimum of production requests will be defined;
- set up Prix Euromusica – CR
- set up a small Committee that would pre-select (listen through) all the propositions and decide what will be performed
- consider producing CD possibly with some discography company
- organise a two-day workshop for the Editors who are in charge of that kind of music, so that in due time the Executive Producers and the Programme Editor could be selected among them.

8. Co-productions

When discussing the co-productions and being aware of all the possibilities, I think that it is necessary to consider two facts:

- 1) European television market never before did ask public broadcasters for so many high quality programmes allocating same budgets as before. Namely, in the course of past several years most of TV organisations increased considerably their transmission time and launched new digital channels, either supplementary channels or channels with their new profiles. Very often such an increased programme production is not followed adequately by an increased budget, meaning that budgets of new channels are very low or that these channels are financed through the savings done on already existing channels. Due to such a situation, co-productions are possible solution for filling-in the schedule with quality programmes on low budgets. Co-production is one of the strongest tools to present new original low budget programming while maintaining control over the content.
- 2) Co-productions that used to be an important segment of CR are now in crisis. For such a situation we are to blame ourselves, since we never dealt seriously with setting up a firm structure. Although we do have CoPro Office in Munich, we have never defined precisely its position and we never gave the executive power to the people working there. All the defects became evident in the EU projects. A lack of an Executive Producer and a lack of a real organisation turn actually these projects into a nightmare. Therefore before trying to revitalise co-productions, I think we first have to build a solid organisation: CoPro office with a Senior Executive Producer and the staff having responsibilities and being able to make decisions. Then, of course, we have to set up technical and programme standards.

As to the past co-productions, we could group them into 4 types:

- programme exchange – related to a certain theme, e.g. bank of clips that is free of charge to all the members. Besides, with this kind of exchange or a bank, it is possible to exchange the reports related to different programmes of magazine type

- production exchanges: produce 1 and get 10, 15 for free:
 - technical, programme standards, executive producers
 - co-productions with co financing
 - live events (Euromusica, Prix Circom event) – co-financing
- CR through CoPro office should help the members to make a bilateral co-operation even if it is not a CR co-production.

It is important that all the members can take part in co-productions, that the budgeting and the financing is transparent, programme and production quality has to be high and the cost has to be low.

As to the financing, co-productions cannot be financed from general activities, but through the user-payer system.

Of course that success and quality of co-productions depend on interest, participation and engagement of each individual member. But it depends also on how much the EC and the EB support and encourage such a co-operation, and motivate the members. However, co-productions certainly represent an additional value to what CR can offer to the members.

CIRCUM Catalogue for Co-productions appears to be a big one. However, its real value is a minimal one. Co-productions that after three years still have not found co-producing partners or co-productions that have been going on for 7 years and lost in quality and interest, should no longer be on the list of co-productions. So, it is not about the number of co-productions, but about the quality and the possibility to produce. Therefore, an analysis of existing projects is needed to establish the status of each one of them. It might be a good idea to establish a sub-committee for co-productions, a kind of BOG that would work on solid organisation, standards and criteria.

9. Presentation and Public Relations

Definition of strategy would enable further development of CR brands and creation of new ones. CR is still not widely recognised as valuable organisation among TV professionals and the first target would be them, along to key decision-makers in European organisations.

The existing CR branding lacks a bit of everything - no defined graphics standards in all common formats (printed and video materials), no common promotion among members of the key CR benefits (training, conference, PRIX Circom, Euromusica) so those are the first step to be done in this field.

- 1) Define common graphics formats and distribute them to all members and partners, as well as keep them up to modern trends in printed and video media (for example every CR awarded program should begin and end up with very recognisable CR video whenever it is aired to make this kind of recognisable brand of quality that follows for example THAMES, BBC production do not miss this opportunity.). This would also include eventual redesign of existing brochures or even designing of some new ones. Publish regularly CR Directory on CD ROM.
- 2) Define key CR brands and associate key values to them to make it easily understandable to every target audience. Most common question we have been asked so far is "What is CR at all?" - we have to make it know and we have to be able to explain it very efficiently in short formats.

- 3) Define rights and obligation of every member and national co-ordinators in promotion and presentation of every key CR project (distribution of Press Releases, eventual translation in their native languages if necessary, on-the-air promotion of Euromusica, Prix Circom for example, presentation of Prix Circom winners to the staff and interested public etc.)
- 4) Mailings to key decision members and professional public. Further development of CR Report is necessary improving its quality and professional standards, making it an irreplaceable and useful source of information - avoid publishing it just for sake of doing it. Internet mailing and mailing list should be improved since more proactive role of CR towards members is needed.
- 5) Promotion of strategic partners to CR is still not clear (on line and brochure is inadequate to funding they provide).
- 6) A Member of EC should be appointed to be in charge of promotion and public relations or this should be a direct responsibility of SG.

The example of new project and brand was given in the project under working name "Our Europe" which would position CR in Europe of Regions and in future enlargement scheme (creating a platform for involving Europe's citizens in European integration, promoting and sustaining solidarity amongst Europe's diverse peoples, explaining and promoting the role of the regions in Europe since people often feel very close to their own region and then a new role of regions in promotion of enlargement processes). From this various subprojects a brand could be developed, like proposed "My Region in Europe" (the working title for an unprecedented large-scale co-production on the various issues of European integration, the People's Europe, Enlargement, ... as well as a platform for discussion featuring in the broadest possible range of current affairs and magazine programmes.); "CircomNet" (the working title for Circom Regional's to-be-developed Intranet and Extranet that will facilitate co-operation within Circom Regional (including the prospective co-production) as well as with all participants in « Our Europe »), "Circom Training", "Prix Circom".

Project like this request a serious planning and a timetable as well as very concrete steps in its promotion (develop external promo document, presentations, individual contacts, public relations)

Question raised is some extra funding for these types of activities

10. Internet

CR web server should become a reference point to all members - kind of expert on line portal bringing news from the regions and members, with its "hardcopy" in monthly edition of Circom Regional Report which will be, along to electronic way, distributed in a hardcopy to key decision makers. The site should include CR Intranet (for communication among EC, EB and SG) and CR Extranet that would facilitate co-operation within members, co-ordination and control of current co-productions, as well as communication to CR strategic partners and general public.

CR mailing list should include as many professionals from member stations, since the best promoter of CR are those who are taking part in its activities and should regularly, even daily, bring news from the region and CR activities - proactive approach.

Video archive - after defining of the "what to keep" rule should be made available on line (PRIX CIRCOM winners entirely, the rest defining on the policy), available on demand via CR portal - question of investment in video server and server bandwidth to cope with demand and provide quality service.

On line forums and debates - develop Bulletin board to include possibility of debating in modern format (web newsgroups)

CR Directory should become to most detailed and precise source of information regarding regional reporting of public stations around Europe and like that inevitable reference point for many potential users.

11. Archive

The Archive has the value only if it is dynamic, only if it is used. The real value of CR Archive is rather low since only a small percentage of programmes can actually be used. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to set up the rules related to Prix Circom and to future co-productions: clean master tape, M&E track, and script. Also the rules about the transmission rights, time limits, are to be set up.

12. Financing

CR financing can be divided into two kinds of revenues: regular revenues and various subventions. Regular revenues come from membership fees and the subventions from European Parliament, EBU, Council of Europe, Ville de Strasbourg, Conseil Général du Rhein, Conseil Regional d'Alsace and commercial revenues. In the total annual budget almost 45% are regular revenues and 55% subventions. Due to such a ratio there is a certain financial insecurity that makes planning of future activities difficult. At the same time the number of activities has increased considerably in last several years and the budget in a way remained the same. Therefore if we want to increase and expand further our activities, we have to take the following actions:

- 1) clear the situation with the long outstanding membership payments
- 2) consider whether the category "Associate Member" should also include certain financial participation.
- 3) increase the membership fees for 5% as of the next year. This would be a minimum increase, but if by our activities we prove to the members that they are useful, that they get adequate value for the money they pay, then we could consider increasing the membership fees in the next five years
- 4) try to make long-term contracts with Institutions that are financing CR through various subventions
- 5) try to introduce also user-payer activities that are not financed either from membership fees or from the general CR budget (e.g. specific trainings)
- 6) try to investigate new sponsoring possibilities

13. Long-term contracts with organisations and institutions

Long-term planning is very important for all CR activities. Without knowing the situation 2-3 years in advance it is almost impossible to realise all the activities. Therefore, with all the organisations (such as European Parliament, European Commission, Council of Europe, EBU), as well as with all other organisations that co-

finance or sponsor any segment of our activities, reach an Agreement, or a Letter of intent at least for a period of two to five years.

14. Relations with other organisations

Along with a relation with European Parliament, Council of Europe and European Commission, I think that we have to have a permanent, very active relation with other organisations that comprise similar activities to those of CR. This means that we should have relations with EBU, COPEAM and URTI. If you look at the activities of each one of those organisations, then you realise that the activities are often similar or even identical. Particularly with EBU, I think it would be useful to have a better co-ordination, since it often happens that the organisations work the same and do not use the potentials and, of course, the differences of each of them. At the same time, through some of these organisations it could be agreed to do certain advertising for CR.

15. Sponsors

Is CR capable of finding sponsors? To be more precise, do we have a product, a brand that is of interest to the sponsors? To my opinion, the question of sponsors in the frame of CR was never elaborated from the strategic point of view; it was never well thought out, since apart from the brochure and the logo application we never defined our product, or the marketing potentials for possible sponsors. Of course, the question of sponsors was never decisive for CR and perhaps this time again we shall not come to results since it is rather hard to find pan-European sponsors. But it is certainly worth trying. Therefore, we have to define the brands, define marketing possibilities, define possible sponsors and all of us, by using the knowledge and experience of National Co-ordinators, try to explore this possibility for financing.

16. Relations with Members

When you look at the number of 380 member organisations then the question you ask should be how many of these members take an active part in CR activities. Therefore, a special task for each and every National Co-ordinator is to intensify relations of his organisation with all other member organisations and to promote better work and activities of CR in his country.

17. Calendar of Events

Time and place of all the meetings and activities of CR should be known in September for the whole next year. This calendar should include meetings of Executive Committee, European Board, Annual Conference, Judging Prix Circom, BOG meeting, Euromusica. Considering a huge number of events, festivals, conferences, by making such a calendar we would avoid possible collisions and secure satisfactory attendance and good planning for each individual. Once a year, at the European Board meeting, a Questionnaire for the events for which a host is to be determined, should be done.

18. Annual evaluation of all the activities

For each of the activities a Questionnaire is to be done in order to evaluate these activities. By doing so we could better discern the real needs of our members. Besides, for further developing of certain activities more time is needed, so we should follow the development of each segment. In that way the responsibility of each individual is stimulated.

I would like to thank the colleagues who by their remarks and propositions helped my making this Report:

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