

# MODEL 'MOBILE ACTIVITY CENTRES'

## Table of Contents

<b>WHY ALL THIS: WHAT WAS THE AIM OF OUR PROJECT.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THE "MOBILE ACTIVITY CENTER" MODEL: WHO WE DESIGNED OUR SOLUTION FOR .....</b>	<b>2</b>
COLLECTIVE PROFILE OF THE KAZBEGI MUNICIPALITY COMMUNITY, ENTREPRENEURS, AND TOURISTS CREATED THROUGH DESIGN	
THINKING, INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN KAZBEGI, AND OBSERVATIONS OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTS - LOCAL RESIDENTS .....	3
1. <i>Adult Residents of Kazbegi Aged 20+ (Individual and Group Representatives)</i> .....	3
2. <i>Entrepreneurs</i> .....	4
3. <i>Tourists Visiting Kazbegi - Nature and Mountain Tourism Enthusiasts</i> .....	5
<b>HOW WE IMPLEMENTED THE SOLUTION: BRINGING THE MODEL TO REALITY.....</b>	<b>5</b>
STEP BY STEP – FROM CONCEPT TO IMPLEMENTATION .....	6
<b>DOES IT WORK: OUR CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION .....</b>	<b>8</b>

## Why All This: What Was the Aim of Our Project

The project titled "Mobile Activity Centres - Gergart and EMMA Foundation Partnership for the Development of the Local Community in the Kazbegi Municipality" was implemented between June 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024, by the EMMA Foundation (Poland) and the Gergart Foundation (Georgia). The project was co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation as part of the RITA - Region in Transition program, implemented by the Education for Democracy Foundation.

The project's objectives were based on:

- Close cooperation and exchange of experiences between the partners.
- Engaging the residents of the Kazbegi municipality in the project activities from start to finish.
- Seeking solutions that address the needs of the residents while considering the specific characteristics of the location where the project would be implemented.
- Utilizing the Design Thinking methodology, which centres on the needs of the people/groups for whom the solutions are being designed.

As a result, a model for the operation of a "Mobile (Without Premises) Activity Center" was developed. This model demonstrates how creating a "space" for learning, work, meetings, and discussions can:

- **Activate** the adult residents of the Kazbegi municipality.
- **Integrate** the local community, especially women who are less active in social and political life.
- **Develop** the vocational skills of residents, with an emphasis on alternatives to the tourism sector.
- **Increase the civic engagement** of residents in decision-making and consultative processes within the municipality.

The model leveraged the experience of the EMMA Foundation in operating the Local Activity Center - DuoSfera in the Wrocław district of Karłowice-Różanka, as well as the experience of the Gergart Foundation in working with the local community of the Kazbegi municipality.

The Kazbegi region is a place where various social groups intersect – village residents, the elderly, women, youth, local entrepreneurs, and tourists (both domestic and foreign) with diverse interests. Each of these groups has specific needs that can be met through appropriate social and tourist initiatives. It is essential that actions taken in Kazbegi support the social, educational, and vocational development of residents while also meeting the needs of tourists, contributing to the development of local entrepreneurship.

## Who Can Benefit from the "Mobile Activity Center" Model: Who We Designed Our Solution For

The "Mobile Activity Center" model is aimed at the adult residents of the Kazbegi municipality (direct recipients), primarily those living in Stepantsminda and the village of Gergeti, aged 20 and above, with particular emphasis on women and older adults who traditionally are less involved in social and political

life. Young people see their future in Kazbegi, but they do not want to be dependent on tourism and its seasonal nature. They seek ways to diversify their offerings so that they can provide services year-round.

Other groups that can benefit from the "Mobile Activity Center" (indirect recipients) include:

- Entrepreneurs operating in and outside the Kazbegi region as initiators, sponsors, and co-organizers of various activities aimed at residents and tourists.
- Tourists visiting these areas periodically as recipients of activities and purchasers of various regional products and services created by residents or local entrepreneurs.

## Collective Profile of the Kazbegi Municipality Community, Entrepreneurs, and Tourists Created Through Design Thinking, Interviews Conducted in Kazbegi, and Observations of Project Participants - Local Residents

### 1. Adult Residents of Kazbegi Aged 20+ (Individual and Group Representatives)

#### Anna (21 years old, student):

- **Profile:** A tourism student, socially active, dreaming of professional and personal development.
- **Needs:**
  - **Quality Education:** She desires to continue learning at a high level, obtain a good education, and develop her skills.
  - **Career Consulting:** She needs support in planning her career and consultations about her professional future.
  - **Social Engagement:** She wants to participate in social projects, meet people, and develop her talents.
  - **Leisure Space:** She dreams of places in Kazbegi where she could spend evenings, similar to Tbilisi, which would allow for greater social integration.

#### George (40 years old, married, three children):

- **Profile:** Works as a taxi driver and rents horses to tourists. A traditionalist involved in the tourism sector, he cares deeply about his family's security and well-being.
- **Needs:**
  - **Stable Income:** He needs a steady income to ensure financial stability for his family. Economic security and opportunities for professional development are crucial to him.
  - **Professional Development:** He wants to develop his skills in digital marketing to attract more tourists and increase his income from tourism-related activities.
  - **Children's Education:** He values good education for his children as he sees it as the key to their better future.
  - **Health and Activity:** He takes care of his health and physical fitness, wanting to remain active and healthy to work effectively and support his family.

### Mariam (40 years old, housewife, two children):

- **Profile:** A mother of two, she manages the household. She values family but feels overwhelmed by daily responsibilities. She wants to provide her children with good conditions for learning and development.
- **Needs:**
  - **Children's Education:** She worries about her children's educational future and wants to ensure they have the best opportunities for development.
  - **Personal Development:** She needs support in personal and professional development and would like to acquire new skills that would allow her to be more independent.
  - **Social Integration:** She feels the need to participate in social life, meet with other women, and find her place in the community.
  - **Emotional Support:** She needs emotional support and a sense that her efforts are appreciated both by her family and the local community.

### Seniors (people aged 60+):

- **Profile:** Older individuals often less engaged in social and political life. They are a valuable source of knowledge about local cuisine, traditions, customs, and authenticity.
- **Needs: Social Activity:** They require emotional support, access to health services, places for meetings and integration, and opportunities to showcase their talents and knowledge.

### Women:

- **Profile:** Women of various ages, often more engaged in household duties than men.
- **Needs: Professional Development:** They need opportunities for professional growth, support with daily responsibilities, social integration, and education for their children.

## 2. Entrepreneurs

### Tourism Entrepreneurs:

- **Profile:** Owners of hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, tour guides, and tour organizers.
- **Needs: Marketing Skills Development:** They need access to new technologies, support in promotion and advertising, improvement of tourism infrastructure, customer service education, and brand creation to diversify their portfolio.

### Artisans and Local Producers:

- **Profile:** Individuals engaged in handicrafts and the production of local goods (food, beverages, souvenirs).
- **Needs: Market Access:** They need access to markets, financial support for business development, education in entrepreneurship, and the promotion of local products.

### 3. Tourists Visiting Kazbegi - Nature and Mountain Tourism Enthusiasts

#### Jonas (29 years old, from the Czech Republic):

- **Profile:** An enthusiast of mountains, hiking, wilderness, and photography. He enjoys discovering new places and making acquaintances.
- **Needs:**
  - **Information about the Local Community:** He needs more information about the Kazbegi community to better integrate and make contacts.
  - **Safety:** Feeling safe during his stay in Kazbegi is important to him.
  - **Personal Development:** He wants to develop his skills and passions such as hiking, wilderness exploration, and photography.
  - **Making New Friends:** He wants to establish new friendships and find companions, which will help him better understand and feel part of the Kazbegi community.

#### Families with Children:

- **Profile:** Families looking for outdoor places to spend time and activities suitable for different age groups.
- **Needs: Attractive Recreation with Children:** They seek tourist attractions for children, places for recreation and rest, and quick access to information about local attractions.

## How We Implemented the Solution: Bringing the Model to Reality

For any organization undertaking a social project, it is crucial to integrate well with the community. Social work largely relies on trust, which is particularly important in small, close-knit communities like the Kazbegi municipality. Gergart, founded in 2015 in the village of Gergeti, Kazbegi municipality, gained nine years of experience working in the region. The local nature of the organization and the involvement of local founders helped Gergart gain the community's trust. However, trust alone is not enough. The organization's activities must align with the community's needs and are often initiated by the residents themselves. Gergart has consistently adhered to this principle, ensuring that their work is rooted in the local context.

Understanding the community's needs, Gergart initiated the establishment of a local activity centre. There was a need for an easily accessible, well-equipped meeting space for all generations in the municipality. When local authorities and other NGOs could not meet this need, Gergart took on the responsibility of creating the local activity centre.

Starting such a significant project required various resources. The first challenge was securing land or a building for the centre. Despite years of efforts to lease land from local authorities, it proved impossible. Gergart believes that local authorities should be the first point of contact for projects of public importance, as creating accessible and comfortable social spaces falls within their responsibilities. The next attempt was

to approach local businesses as part of their corporate social responsibility, but this also failed. Ultimately, one of the founders of Gergart provided his own land for the centre.

The next challenge was financial resources. Building and equipping the centre required significant funds. Gergart adopted an innovative approach, striving to achieve great things with limited resources. They conceptualized a mobile training centre, using existing resources such as a tent, projector, and sound system. The mobile centre was seen as an appropriate idea, especially since the Kazbegi municipality is a mountainous region without a public transport system. This mobile approach allowed Gergart to reach even the most remote villages, increasing the effectiveness of their work.

Another crucial resource was knowledge and experience in adult education and managing a local activity centre. Although Gergart had many local volunteers, most of them were teenagers, and the organization had limited experience in adult education. To address this, collaboration with the EMMA Foundation was essential. The EMMA Foundation, which manages local activity centres in Wrocław, brought valuable experience. Their support and expertise were key in helping Gergart create a well-organized centre in the Kazbegi municipality. EMMA's experience in working with local communities, recently expanded to other neighbourhoods in the city, was crucial. The foundation carefully assesses the needs of the community it plans to enter, adapting its offerings to the expectations of the area. As a result, their offerings receive high interest and attendance.

During the training sessions, which were conducted online and on-site by representatives of the EMMA Foundation, the team used Mural as the main tool and applied the Design Thinking method and Social Model Canvas (based on the Business Model Canvas). The structured training included discussions, group work, and team assignments aimed at aligning the team around the components of the centre. Design Thinking and Social Model Canvas helped the team understand the target groups, their needs, and expectations, providing insight into how to meet the needs of those visiting the centre. After the training, the team felt more confident, motivated, and believed in the project's vision.

While the training was ongoing, the project team arranged the centre's space. Weather conditions, with frequent snow and rain, posed challenges and delayed the design process. Weather conditions can be a major weakness of the mobile centre concept. However, the team adapted by organizing the first event, which combined a lecture on gender equality and a board game night in an alternative space. About 20 young and adult people participated in the event, and the second event—a movie night—was held in the intended centre. Both events were well received.

In accordance with the values of co-creation of the centre, participants were asked for verbal feedback and evaluations of the centre. The concept and activities were generally well received, with a few suggestions on how to make the centre more comfortable. The team will continue to work on refining the model and implementing the collected suggestions to make the centre fully functional.

## Step by Step – From Concept to Implementation

The creation of a local activity centre was one of the first initiatives undertaken by the Gergart team after the organization was registered. This initiative arose from the needs of the local community identified





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during various activities aimed at problem identification, carried out as part of different projects. Direct conversations with residents and discussions with local NGOs consistently highlighted the urgent need for such a centre. It took nine years of intensive work to fully understand these needs and develop the concept for the centre.

As a volunteer-based organization with many local volunteers working closely with the community, Gergart has always been aware of the changing priorities of the community. The need for a centre remained a constant priority. Before finalizing the concept and action plan, Gergart held discussions with local activist groups, NGOs, and community representatives. These stakeholders were informed about the plans and invited to co-create the centre project. Gergart believes that participation and co-creation are fundamental principles in the implementation of a social project.

In addition to consultations with local actors, Gergart reviewed all available resources and identified additional needs. With the land and basic resources already secured and a group of supporters, the team began searching for partners to provide financial and technical support. These efforts led to a partnership with the EMMA Foundation.

The Polish partner brought in experience and expertise, while Gergart provided knowledge about the local context and community needs. Together, they developed the final draft of the mobile local activity centre concept and planned the next implementation steps.

After securing financial support from the Polish-American Freedom Foundation under the RITA – Region in Transition program, the project’s implementation phase began. The first step was to form a team to start the project. Active and committed volunteers were selected, ensuring that all team members were local, as the effective operation of the centre required people to be on-site.

The next step was to work on the model and train the team. The sessions, conducted online and in-person by representatives of the EMMA Foundation, utilized Mural as the main tool and applied the Design Thinking method and Social Model Canvas (based on the Business Model Canvas). The structured training included discussions, group work, and individual team tasks aimed at aligning the team around the centre’s components. Design Thinking and Social Model Canvas helped the team understand the target groups, their needs, and expectations, providing insight into how to meet the needs of those visiting the centre. After the training, the team felt more confident, motivated, and believed in the project's vision.

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**The RITA – “Region in Transition” Program**

*Project co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation as part of the RITA – “Region in Transition” Program implemented by the Education for Democracy Foundation.*

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## Does It Work: Our Conclusions from the Project Implementation

The project itself was highly successful, achieving all its goals. Currently, the Kazbegi municipality has a motivated and trained team eager to initiate meaningful changes in society. The municipality also boasts a space equipped with basic furniture (computer, tables, chairs, tent) and gadgets (e.g., board games), effectively functioning as a local activity centre. The visibility of the centre grows with each passing day. After the initial activities organized by the team, participants began initiating their own activities. Initially, the project team used social media and posters to spread information, but now word of mouth also works effectively, creating a strong network around the centre.

However, much remains to be done. The space needs full furnishing and equipping with all necessary tools. The centre needs to reach more people; while the first two events attracted around 30 residents, this number must increase. Additionally, the centre must develop a sustainable growth strategy. As a non-revenue initiative, the centre's team needs to create a vision and action plan for long-term sustainability. Some ideas emerged during the training sessions, and two options are being actively discussed: transforming the centre into a training hub or a coworking space. Both options require appropriate infrastructure.

One thing is certain: the community centre will always stay true to its main mission — working together with and for the local community.

In summary, the project brought numerous benefits, including increased social engagement, development of vocational skills among residents, and strengthened community integration. However, the long-term success of the centre depends on the continuation of activities and ongoing support from local authorities and the community.



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