

Cultural Relations in Action

A research study on
the British Council's
International Collaboration
Grants programme

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Illustrated by Eileen Lemoine



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Foreword

In October 2021, when we launched the first edition of the International Collaboration Grants (ICG), the world was still being rocked by Covid-19. Cultural venues and organisations globally were working hard to respond to the immense challenges and pressures they were under. Important questions were being asked about what a new normal post-pandemic world might look like, and how to navigate this.

At the British Council, we wanted to support arts and culture sectors globally with much needed funding to encourage and support continued collaboration and connection. The then £4.9m International Collaboration Grants programme was created to provide this support through an approach openly and clearly rooted in cultural relations. It supported 94 UK arts and culture organisations to connect and collaborate with 94 international peers from around 41 countries and to support artists to make and develop creative artwork.

At this time, the British Council was also looking at its role in cultural relations through Arts. This report explores some of the big questions we were asking: what is the added value of a cultural relations approach and the British Council? Where does a programme like the ICG sit within the global landscape of grants for international artistic collaboration? Can we evidence the impact of cultural relations within this particular programme to better understand the impact of a cultural relations approach overall? And who else is working in this space and how? My hope was not only to answer these questions but along the way to find exciting examples of practice, different ways of working, and to clarify our understanding of where these types of grant programmes sit within a global and UK ecosystem.

Through the example of the ICG, this report looks at how the cultural relations approach benefited grantees and led to cultural relations impacts: connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue. It also provides clear pointers for arts and culture organisations who are currently or are planning to work in the space of international collaboration, on what helps a positive and successful international collaboration and relationship, as well as laying out the types of benefits that this can lead to at an organisation and individual level.

Carried out across 2022 and 2023, the report is split into two distinct parts. The first section evidences cultural relations in action through ten collaborations and partnerships. It explores how projects experienced cultural relations, and the benefits experienced from the approach. It clarifies whether the cultural relations aim of the ICG was clear, responding to feedback from artists and organisations in the sector that they want the aims of the programmes they are involved in to be clear. The second section defines the cultural relations approach to grant giving within arts and culture. Through this we see the soft and nuanced difference in approach to grants programmes between cultural relations organisations and arts councils within the UK.

In planning this piece, it was important to us that we were able to share the learning with a wide audience and as accessibly as possible. One of the ways we have done this is to work with Eileen Lemoine, illustrator and comic artist, to interpret the report and five case studies through illustrations, which feature throughout the report and as a standalone resource.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who participated in this research; Goethe Institute, EUNIC, Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Creative Scotland, Wales Arts International, Eileen Lemoine, British Council colleagues including Angelica Burrill, and importantly researcher Floresca Karanàsou and INTRAC for this piece.

Chantal Harrison-Lee

**Global Programme Lead Culture Connects
British Council**

Abbreviations

ACE	Arts Council England
Adapting Work	Adapting Work for Young People with Complex Needs, an ICP project
EUNIC	European Union National Institutes of Culture
ICP	International Collaboration Grants Programme
KKMN	Kenyan Kymsnet Media Network, an ICP partner in the Reveal! project
NVF	Native Voice Film, partner in the ICP Khartoum Bites project
Shared Encounters	Shared Encounters for Emergent Intercultural Sonic Practices, an ICP project
SFF	Sudan Film Factory, a partner in the ICP Khartoum Bites project
UoSC	The University of Sheffield Concerts, a partner in the ICP Shared Encounters project
WAI	Wales Arts International, the international agency of the Arts Council of Wales

Summary of Findings

This is a study on how and what kind of cultural relations develop among partner organisations collaborating internationally in different art forms with funding from a cultural relations organisation, the British Council, and what constitutes an ‘international cultural relations approach’ in giving grants for this kind of collaboration.



The study is based on the British Council's International Collaboration Grants Programme (ICP) during its first round of grants for projects which were active in 2022-23. This programme provided grants to organisations based in the UK and in 42 eligible countries to collaborate internationally on joint projects to produce art work together.

It first explores the quality of relationships that were formed between international partners funded by the programme and the factors that contributed to developing such relationships. It identifies evidence of cultural relations outcomes, defined as:

“greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue.”¹

The study then identifies the distinct features of an ‘international cultural relations approach’ to giving grants for international artistic collaboration by contrasting and comparing the ICP, on the one hand, with similar funds of two other international cultural relations organisations – EUNIC's European Spaces of Culture and the Goethe-Institut's Co-Production Fund – and, on the other, with funds of the four UK arts councils.

The research was conducted in 2022 and 2023 and it involved a desk review of published material on different collaboration funds and interviews with staff of the British Council, the four UK arts councils, EUNIC, the Goethe-Institut, and 20 grantee organisations of the ICP.

¹ This definition comes from British Council & Goethe-Institut, Cultural Value: Cultural Relation in Societies in Transition, 2018, 7

Benefiting from international cultural relations

The benefits that were cited the most by the 20 ICP partners interviewed were new contacts, joining new international networks and establishing new professional relationships at home or outside their own countries.

Many partners learnt new things not only about the subject matter of their collaboration but also about international collaboration. They also learnt about how other organisations work by seeing from close up how they operate within their own contexts, stimulating some partners to think of new ways of working or to develop their own approaches. The collaborations also helped staff in some partner organisations acquire new skills by working alongside more experienced professionals. Many ICP partners learnt something new about the art form or theme of their project in their partners' countries. The experience of this collaboration has influenced how most of these partners would approach other international collaborations in the future.

For some ICP partner organisations collaborating internationally and becoming associated with an institution like the British Council boosted their reputation at home and gave them international visibility and access to new audiences. In the aftermath of the pandemic, the ICP also provided an opportunity to reconnect with the world or a necessary injection of funding.

Apart from the benefits for their organisations, many of the individuals who managed the ICP projects also felt personal benefits: acquiring professional experience or feeling more confident in certain inter-cultural skills – such as building networks and having professional conversations with people from different cultural backgrounds. This experience also increased the desire for another international collaboration for most of the interviewees.

Experiencing international cultural relations

The vast majority of relationships in this study were characterised in positive terms by partners despite – or perhaps because of – some of them having faced (and overcome) difficulties together.

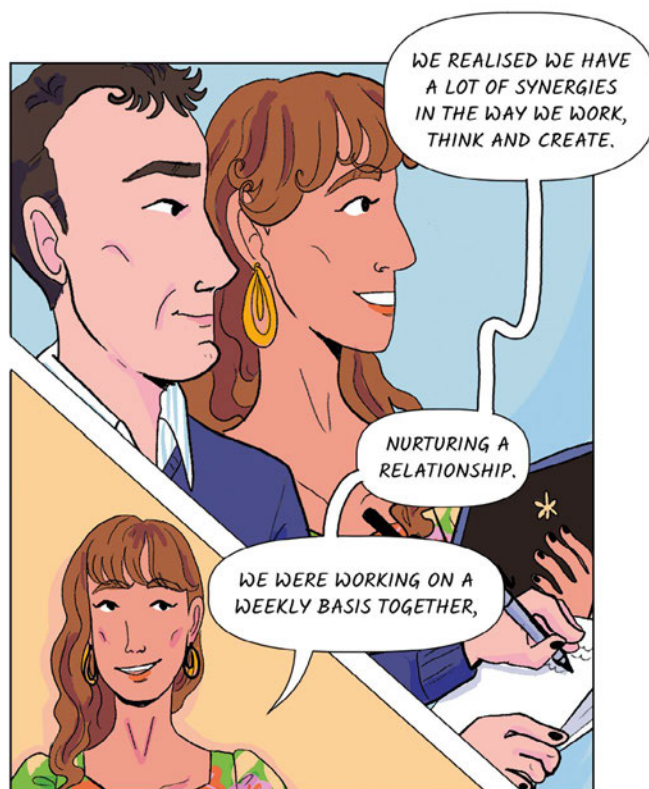
Interviewees identified a number of factors that they thought had contributed to this outcome, including:

- ◆ having worked with the other organisation or knowing each other before this collaboration
- ◆ complementarity in what each organisation brought to the project
- ◆ openness and transparency in communication
- ◆ being like-minded in their field or project theme or having common values, backgrounds or positions on core issues

In all four collaborations where partners knew each other or had worked together before, partners felt that their relationships had deepened during this collaboration. In one partnership difficulties in the relationship were not overcome.

Mutuality and reciprocity were present in most of the partnerships in this study. This mutuality was manifested as ‘mutual respect’, ‘mutual support’, mutuality in learning, sharing ideas and co-creating, joint decision-making, trying to find common ground and negotiating, ‘reciprocity of welcome and generosity’, a kind of ‘reciprocal forgiving’, or the fact that partners visited each other’s countries during the project. Some interviewees thought that their partnerships were based on a division of labour rather than mutuality.

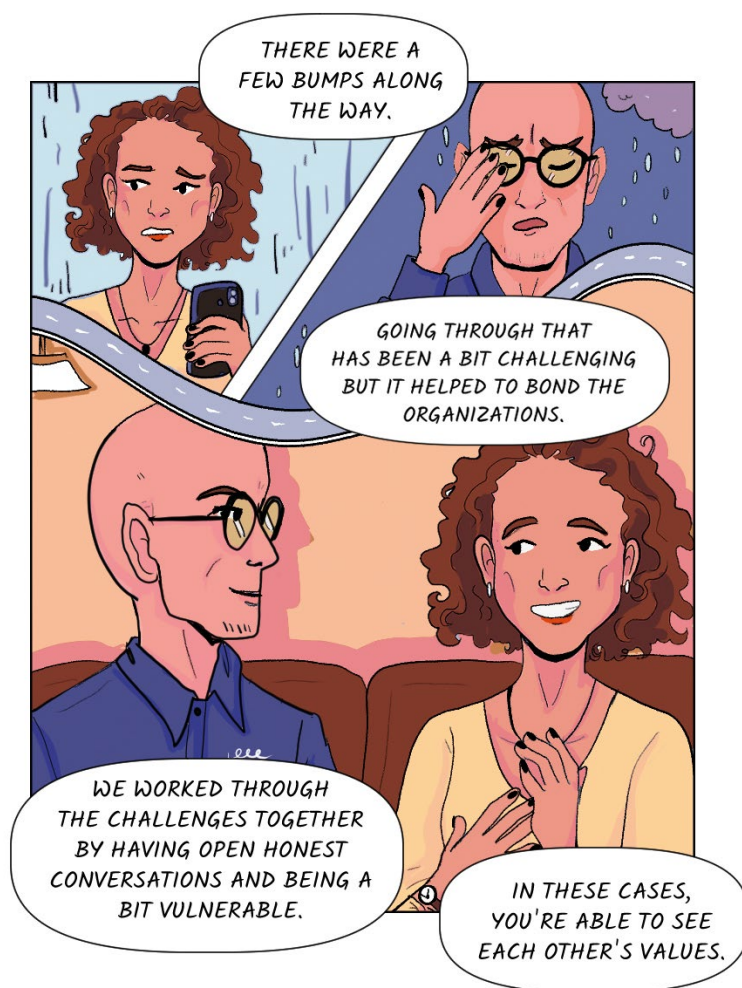
In most partnerships in this research both partners stated that **trust** had been built between them. This had happened gradually during the collaboration process or even earlier, when partners were preparing their funding application together. In two partnerships there was loss of trust either because one partner felt excluded from decision-making or because the other partner was not delivering on what had been agreed.



Many partners thought of their partnerships as being among equals, but their understanding or experience of **equality** varied and, in many cases, these pointed more to **equity** than equality. In some collaborations partners felt equal in certain aspects and not equal in other aspects. Words used by partners included: ‘equally involved’, ‘creatively equal’, or equal in decision making. Others spoke of relationships having been ‘balanced’ or ‘proportionate’, ‘fair’, or about having ‘shared power’, or not pushing their own agendas.

Just as there is variety in how partners understand equality, there is also variety in how inequality is perceived or was experienced by different partners. Despite the fact that the British Council paid the grants to UK-based partners potentially creating inequality in partnerships, most interviewees thought that this did not impact on their relationships negatively even if it affected how projects were managed.

Partners faced various **challenges** in their collaborations, which tested relationships. Challenges that were sometimes couched as ‘cultural differences’ by partners were those around different ways of working, working at different speeds - for example, how quickly partners would respond to emails — different approaches to how to do things in projects; or how to deal with conflict. These caused tensions at times. When these challenges were overcome this happened through discussion, open communication, owning up to one’s own mistakes, showing understanding and keeping focused on the work. All partners except one would like these relationships to be long-term.



What is distinct about the ICP in relation to other international collaboration funds in the UK and Europe?

The ICP is the largest fund dedicated to international artistic collaboration within the UK and possibly also in Europe.

Unlike the ICP, most funds by UK arts councils are not dedicated to international collaboration, but also fund other kinds of (international) activities, such as exchanges, residencies, travel and showcasing. Another distinct characteristic of the ICP is that it gives far more grants per year than either EUNIC or the Goethe-Institut, the two other cultural relations included in this study.

When ICP grantees were asked about the distinct characteristics of the ICP as a fund, they identified a number of practices that they thought distinguish it from other experiences they have had with project funding:

- ◆ Giving freedom to partners to direct and design their projects the way they want by being 'hands off' or 'light touch'.
- ◆ There was sufficient time for project partners to develop their relationships - many of which partners wish to continue – because projects were not short term. Most of them were year-long.
- ◆ The online 'Meet Ups' bringing together ICP grantees to help them connect with organisations outside their own specific projects.
- ◆ The support given by British Council staff, including the assigned 'relationship managers', who proved helpful especially at times of need.

What is distinct about the ‘international cultural relations approach’ and how it adds value to international artistic collaboration

As stated earlier, this research tried to identify the main features of an international cultural relations approach by comparing the British Council’s ICP to other funds supporting international artistic collaborations in the UK and outside it.

It was possible to identify a number of commonalities in the funds of the three cultural relations organisations (British Council, EUNIC and Goethe-Institut) in contrast to grant giving by the four UK arts councils:

- ◆ The British Council, EUNIC and the Goethe-Institute focus on relationship building far more than the UK arts councils, which focus primarily on strengthening the UK arts sector. The three cultural relations organisations have this focus because they see their grant giving as being about building and supporting long term trust, understanding and relationships – the outcomes of cultural relations.
- ◆ For this reason, the support cultural relations organisations give to grantees and individual international collaboration projects, apart from the actual grants, is far greater than that given by the arts councils. It is here that the added value of the cultural relations approach primarily lies — in the ‘accompaniment’ of grantees during their collaborations: the cultural relations organisations, including the British Council, organise gatherings of grantees to meet and explore partnering together or to develop further relationships or a sense of community; their staff support grantees when they encounter difficulties during the implementation of their projects and they provide grantees with various additional resources.
- ◆ Pursuing fairness or equality in international partnerships is at the core of the cultural relations approach and these principles are also what make the cultural relations approach innovative.
- ◆ They are committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and linking the outcomes of their work to them.

These similarities make up what we can call an ‘international cultural relations approach’. This approach is different from the grant giving by the UK arts councils in terms of the purpose, priorities, and modalities of giving grants:

- ◆ Arts councils support new, individual artists more than the British Council, which mainly gives grants only to established organisations.
- ◆ Arts councils prioritise the strengthening of the UK arts sector and developing the art form.
- ◆ One of the motivations of arts councils is to help UK artists reach international markets.
- ◆ They also want to promote UK artists and their nations’ profiles to the outside world.
- ◆ Whereas all funds explored in this study monitor how their funding has been spent, arts councils seem to focus more on identifying the outputs of the funded collaborations, namely, their artistic products, while cultural relations organisations are more interested in the outcomes of international collaborations, namely the quality of relationships that have developed and what has changed for the grantees, as a result of their collaborations.

Admittedly, the contrast between arts councils and cultural relations organisations over the why and how of giving grants for international collaboration is not always a sharp one. It is sometimes a matter of different emphases — UK arts councils too encourage and promote international relationships and partnerships among artists, but not with the same emphasis as cultural relations organisations do.



Why are the British Council and other cultural relations organisations well placed to do this work?

There is another aspect to the British Council's added value in grant giving in the arts, which is common to the other two cultural relations organisations included in this study – EUNIC and the Goethe-Institut: the networks these organisations have in other countries.

During this research, all UK interviewees — all UK arts council and British Council staff — agreed that there is something unique that the British Council brings to this kind of grant giving in the UK: its in-depth and up to date knowledge of what is new or interesting in the arts and wider cultural sectors in the countries where the British Council has offices, coupled with government contacts in these countries. This is an asset that the British Council has built over a long period of time. It is also one that UK arts councils lack and draw from through their strategic partnerships with the British Council. Within the UK this British Council asset is unparalleled, but outside the UK, EUNIC and the Goethe-Institut also use their network of members or offices around the world to provide extra support to the grantees of international cultural collaborations. This is an important asset for doing cultural relations, because it enables international cultural connections and relationships to be formed and international cultural relations to develop.

Introduction

This is a study on cultural relations in the arts through grants and specifically in the International Collaboration Grants Programme (ICP) of the British Council. It addresses the following research questions:

- ◆ What cultural relations impact has the ICP had on funded organisations? What has changed for the ICP partners, as a result of these collaborations?
- ◆ How does a cultural relations organisation foster international cultural relations through grant giving?
- ◆ In what way is the ICP different from other international collaboration funds in the UK and in Europe?
- ◆ What does the British Council bring to grant giving for international collaboration and why is it well placed to do this? Is there an added value to the UK and international landscape by taking a cultural relations approach to grant giving?

This report presents first the findings of this research related to the first two questions by showing the evidence of ‘cultural relations outcomes’ that was gathered from interviews with 20 ICP partners – how they benefited from, and experienced, cultural relations while working in ten ICP collaborations/projects. By ‘cultural relations outcomes’ we mean:

“Greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue”² between people and cultures.

The report then discusses the findings related to the last two research questions and it identifies certain characteristics, which could constitute a ‘cultural relations approach’ to grant giving, by comparing and contrasting the ICP to similar funds run by two cultural relations organisations and to funds of the four UK arts councils.

Funds supporting international artistic collaboration

The following funds or programmes supporting international artistic, or more broadly, cultural collaborations were included in this study:

International cultural relations organisations:

- ◆ The ICP of the British Council
- ◆ The International Co-production Fund, Goethe-Institut
- ◆ European Spaces of Culture, EUNIC

UK arts councils:

- ◆ The Four Nations International Fund of all UK arts councils, but administered by Creative Scotland
- ◆ The Open Fund of Creative Scotland
- ◆ National Lottery Project Fund of Arts Council England (ACE)
- ◆ The Artists’ International Development Fund Northern Ireland, British Council and the Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI)
- ◆ International Opportunities Fund of Wales Arts International (WAI)
- ◆ The Wales – Quebec Fund of WAI and the Government of Quebec
- ◆ Cultural Bridges, all arts councils but administered by ACE

These are not the only funds supporting this type of collaboration, but they are the most relevant to this study.

Annex 2 presents the budget, size of grant, eligibility criteria and sources of funding for each of the above funds.

² British Council & Goethe-Institut, Cultural Value: Cultural Relation in Societies in Transition, 2018, 7)

Methodology

The research for this study adopted an iterative approach and a qualitative methodology, which involved structured remote interviews and a desk review of published material on different British and European funds supporting international artistic collaboration.

It was carried out in two parts. The first part was conducted between July and October 2022, and it looked at what is distinct about the ICP in relation to other funds supporting international artistic collaborations in the UK and other countries and, ultimately, what is distinct about the cultural relations approach in funding such collaborations.

For that part, data was collected from interviews with:

- ◆ staff from the four UK arts councils (Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Creative Scotland and Wales Arts International of the Arts Council of Wales)
- ◆ staff of the Co-Production Fund of the Goethe-Institut
- ◆ staff of the European Spaces of Culture programme of EUNIC and
- ◆ British Council regional directors in the four UK regions

as well as from internal and published documents of the four arts councils and information on funds on the websites of the above organisations. All sources are listed in **Annex 1**.

The second part of the research was conducted in April and May 2023 involving 20 online interviews with partners of a selection of ten ICP-funded international collaborations. The research and interview questions for the second part were informed by the findings of the first part. All interviews were recorded following permission by the interviewees. They were conducted in English. Interviewees chose the level of confidentiality they wished to have for their interviews.

Sampling

The ICP partnerships interviewed in Part 2 of this research were sampled to include:

- ◆ partners from different continents and countries (partnering with the UK organisations)
- ◆ partners from all four nations in the UK
- ◆ new and pre-existing relationships/ partnerships

- ◆ partnerships that are known to have faced challenges in their collaboration and partnerships that do not seem to have faced such challenges
- ◆ partnerships that have not already been selected by the external evaluators for in-depth exploration
- ◆ partnerships funded with large and smaller grants (over and under £20K)
- ◆ collaborations on different themes or art forms

The ten partnerships were identified by British Council staff out of a total of 94 ICP partnerships funded by the British Council in 2022 so as to fulfil the above criteria and particularly to ensure that the collaborations were already in advanced stages and relationships had had enough time to mature. The 20 partners interviewed are listed in **Annex 1**. Partners' participation in the research was optional, so some partners declined or did not respond, and other partners were then invited to participate. The British Council offered a stipend to partners for the time they would give to the research.

Out of the ten selected collaborations three of them involved people who knew each other before the collaboration and one where the partners had collaborated before. The other six collaborations involved new relationships.

As this is a qualitative inquiry, findings are illustrative rather than representative of the whole ICP cohort of grantees and, therefore, any figures mentioned in the analysis that follows should not be regarded as statistically representative.

Limitations

In the first part of the research some key informants were not very familiar with how the ICP gives grants and a few key informants did not understand the concept of international cultural relations.

In the second part, it was not possible to include any of the three Northern Irish ICP grantee/ partners and therefore it was not possible to have at least one partner from each of the four nations of the UK, as initially intended. This limitation occurred because participation in the research was optional and the scope of projects involved did not include those already interviewed as part of the separate external evaluation.

In the project Shared Encounters, it was not possible to interview either the partner organisation or the participating musicians in Nepal, because of lack of availability. As a result, both interviewees from that partnership were affiliated to one partner - the one based in the UK.

In the project Adapting Work, only one partner was interviewed because the relationship had not yet had time to develop sufficiently because the project was still in its early stages.

Findings – Benefiting from cultural relations

1. Benefits of the collaboration

1. For organisations

The most cited benefit for ICP partner organisations was the fact that this international collaboration had brought new contacts, helped them establish new professional relationships at home or outside their own countries, or join new international networks.

For example, Kenyan Kymsnet Media Network has established a relationship with a cartoon festival in the UK, which has led to contact with another one in the US. UK-based Native Voice Film (NVF) ‘cemented relationships and png trust’ in Sudan with Sudanese media makers whereas their partner, the Nairobi-based AYIN Media Network, which came from a background in news stories and documentaries, gained many connections within the arts world by collaborating with NVF and Sudan Film Factory over the production of a feature film. (Phil Cox and Tom Rhodes) Plato Cultural was offered the opportunity to expand their project at home, in Brazil, with government funding whereas their partner, The Necessary Space was able to build a professional relationship with Education Scotland.

Learning about the subject matter but also about how to collaborate internationally

In Pen Pal Connection, artists with disabilities in Nigeria, Indonesia and the UK were able to share stories of their work and lives and learnt from each other. (Donald Unanka)

In Soil Futures, British partner Arts Catalyst values greatly the fact that they were ‘able to build a body of knowledge together with these different organisations, in a very democratic and open way’ giving them the opportunity to explore more their subject matter — environmental change. They were also able to learn ‘a lot in terms of being able to be in dialogue, to collaborate, to develop programmes together while being situated in very different geographies and while coming from very different backgrounds.’ (Anna Santomauro)

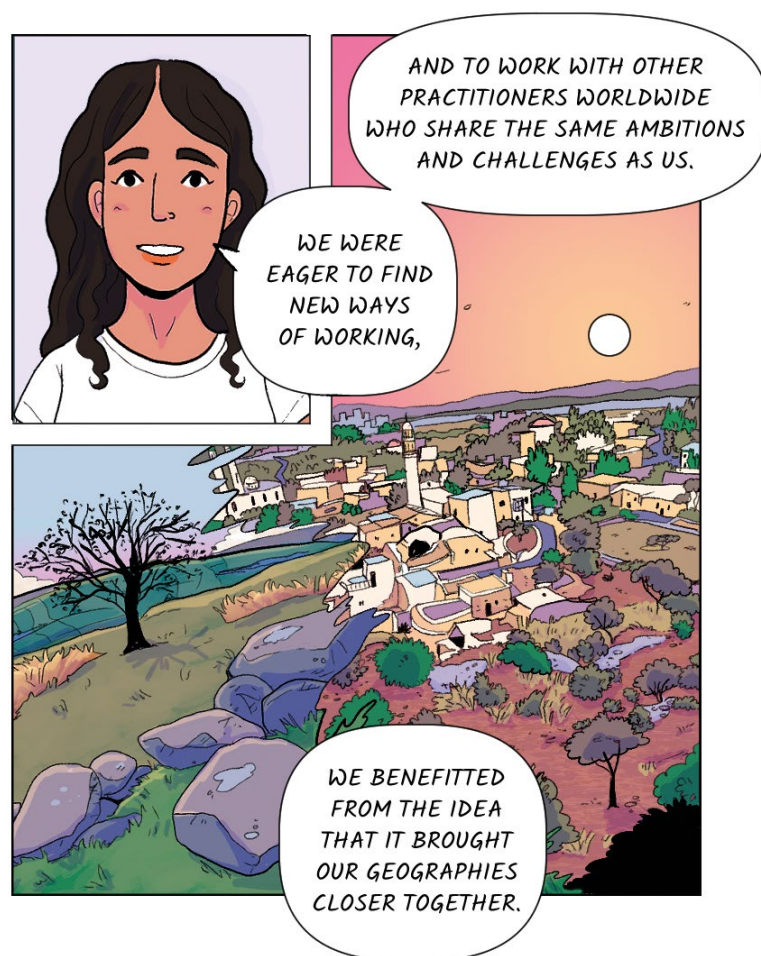


For Mark Fell, an independent musician, who learnt about the music scene in Nepal by collaborating with Nepalese musicians in Shared Encounters for Emergent Intercultural Sonic Practices, the collaboration also ‘clarified a few things ... we need to feel like shared owners of the project... It reinforced some ethical positions.’

For Liverpool-based DaDa – Disability and Deaf Arts, the learning was huge in terms of many project management practices that are necessary in an international collaboration taking place solely online. (Rachel Rogers)

For Nick Potter of UoSC the learning was about best practice in international collaboration:

‘... we learn about what best practice should be or we learn about things to keep an eye out for, we learn about what we should be striving for...’



Learning about how other organisations work

Seeing from close up how their partner organisations operate and work within their own contexts, and learning about their artistic practices, their communities, and their values was another important benefit for some ICP partners. This exposure stimulated partner organisations to think of new ways of working or to develop their own by experimenting and exploring. (Arts Catalyst, DaDa, Dance Base, Hawiyya Dance Company, KKMN, Lintas Bantas, Sudan Film Factory). For Dance Base in Glasgow, Scotland, who collaborated with Lebanese dance organisation Yaraqa, the learning was about *‘how to be much more responsive and ... how to listen a bit more to artists’ needs. ... Also discovering another sector on the other side of the world, in the Middle East and in terms of how Lebanese artists and Lebanese organisations, like Yaraqa, are being really agile, really determined... In Scotland, we can certainly learn a little bit about that ... a little bit about ... resilience ...’*

Hakan Silahsizoglu, Adapting Work for Young People with Complex Needs: *‘It’s definitely a kind of a capacity building, for us to work with different companies to understand how they are. So, we really learned from them in terms of how we can deliver things in a different way or better and take the good examples and try to apply them here in Turkey.’*

Dana Abbas, Riwaq: *‘... this idea of soil and taking care of our ecosystems and nature... it brought our geographies closer together... And each institution had its own understanding of this, like from very different contexts and very different kinds of practices. So, it was really enriching to see how we all approach one certain topic, through our own tools, our own understanding of our contexts.’*

Learning new skills from their partner

Staff in partner organisations learnt new technical and professional skills from their partners. (AYIN Media Network and Sudan Film Factory and Native Voice Film; Lintas Bantas from 4 Pi Productions; UoSC)

Influence in how organisations may approach future international collaborations

The experience of this international collaboration has influenced most of the partners interviewed on how they would approach such collaborations in the future. A few of them regarded this collaboration as a benchmark for future ones (The Necessary Space, Sudan Film Factory, Hawiyya Dance Company, Dance Base) whereas others understood how to do things differently next time round. (Arts Catalyst, Yaraqa) Two partners realised that it is possible for a collaboration to work well even if the partners have never worked or met before. (Rachel Rogers, Msanii Kimani) Instead of seeking to work internationally without partnering with another organisation, Nicola Streeten, LDComics, would now be looking for an international partner with good knowledge of what is happening on the ground in their country having seen the benefit of that from her work with Msanii Kimani and KKMN.

Romy Assouad, Yaraqa, Lebanon: ‘... there are things that I realized we could do differently. ... what it made me realise is whenever we're collaborating with other cultures, we absolutely need to give time for that ‘lab’ — not to rush straightaway into work, but create that space for conversation.’

Mark Fell, musician, UK: ‘My feeling is you just engage in these projects as a human being meeting another human being. ... What I am aware of is that ... I am not meeting representatives of some culture... I am actually meeting a person.’



Rachel Rogers, DaDa – Disability and Deaf Arts: ‘It’s given me confidence to believe again that not having previous relationships and not knowing a lot about context is not a reason for not doing things. It can make things exciting. When issues do arise, there are ways to manage these as best as possible.’



The experience of this international collaboration has influenced most of the partners interviewed on how they would approach such collaborations in the future. A few of them regarded this collaboration as a benchmark for future ones

Understanding better the artform or project theme in the other partners' countries

Some ICP partner staff already knew something about the artform or theme of the collaboration in their partners' countries, but, with this collaboration, they felt that they learnt and understood it better. (Jamila Boughelaf, Phil Cox, Msanii Kimani, Anna Santomauro, Simon Sharkey) Others also learnt about the particular theme or artform in their partners' countries, but they had not had any previous knowledge before entering this collaboration. (Romy Assouad, Mark Fell, Francine Kliemann, Tony Mills, Rachel Rogers, Nick Potter) For Romy Assouad, Yaraqa, learning about the dance scene in Scotland made her feel that there is something that Lebanese dancers can contribute to the Scottish scene: *'...[T]here's definitely always this perception ... in Lebanon or in the region that ... the... situation of dance in the West is ... definitely much better ... And it was very interesting to see that ... we managed to see that there are gaps actually in that [Scottish] ecosystem ... and [that]... some of them are shared gaps... which felt a bit, I would say, comforting... It also showed us gaps that we are able to contribute to and we saw ourselves to be valuable ... and actually our partners saw that in us...'*

Sharing new knowledge with others

KKMN can share what they learnt in their visit to the UK with colleagues back home in Kenya and 4Pi Productions will take what they have learnt from working in Indonesia with Lintas Bantas in their own creative journey going forward.

A boost in organisations' visibility and reputation

For some ICP partner organisations collaborating internationally and becoming associated with an institution like the British Council boosted their reputation at home, and gave them international visibility and access to new audiences. (Arts Catalyst, El Founoun, KKMN, LDComics, The Necessary Space, Plato Cultural, UoSC).



'Decolonising'



For Plato Cultural, the fact that its pilot project had happened first in Brazil, and then its methodology was taken to a country in the global north, Scotland, and not the other way round, was particularly significant – 'like decolonising a little bit'. (Francine Kliemann)

Becoming stronger institutionally

By working with an international partner in SIB Arka Kinari, Lintas Bantas, Indonesia felt that they had ‘become stronger institutionally’ because prior to this project they were not as structured as was required by dealing with a partner organisation. ‘...[T]his is like gaining more confidence in a way for the organisation itself to run further than what we have today.’

(Nova Ruth)

Opportunity to reconnect with the world after the pandemic

The Necessary Space, Scotland, felt that their collaboration with Plato Cultural in School of the (Im)Possible enabled them to ‘reboot’ as an organisation after Covid, while for Riwaq, it was a ‘a very great way to reconnect and also to open up after these hard times,’ which had caused a kind of disconnection and crisis in funding.



Opportunities to have a project or collaboration that would not have happened otherwise

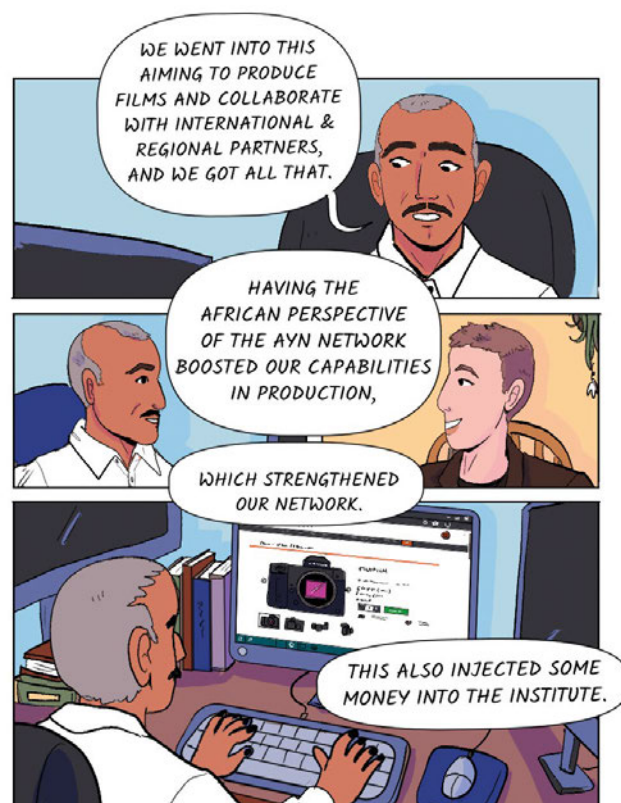
The AYIN Media Network was allowed to make a film production at a scale they had never done before nor thought possible for them. (Tom Rhodes) The ICP grant gave Arts Catalyst the chance to ‘solidify conversations that were already happening’ with organisations they found ‘incredibly interesting’ in a context – the UK – where they believe that there is not really much opportunity for small organisations like theirs to build international networks. (Anna Santomauro)

Opportunity to develop or expand existing work

A pilot project on children’s education on climate change in São José City, Brazil was adapted to a Scottish context through School of the (Im)Possible. (Francine Kliemann) Palestinian architectural conservation organisation Riwaq was able to expand existing work in rural Jerusalem through ICP project Soil Futures. The grant for Beyond the ‘Curfew’ allowed British partner Hawiyya Dance Company to involve more members to its *dabka* dancing and grow its production scale.

A needed injection of funds

Both Sudan Film Factory and Riwaq acknowledged that the ICP projects brought some welcome additional funding and resources to their work.



2. Benefits for individuals

Many of the individuals who managed the ICP projects felt a personal benefit from the experience. For Jamila Boughelaf ‘personal growth’ came from producing, dancing as well as doing all the project administration at this scale for the first time for Hawiyya Dance Company.

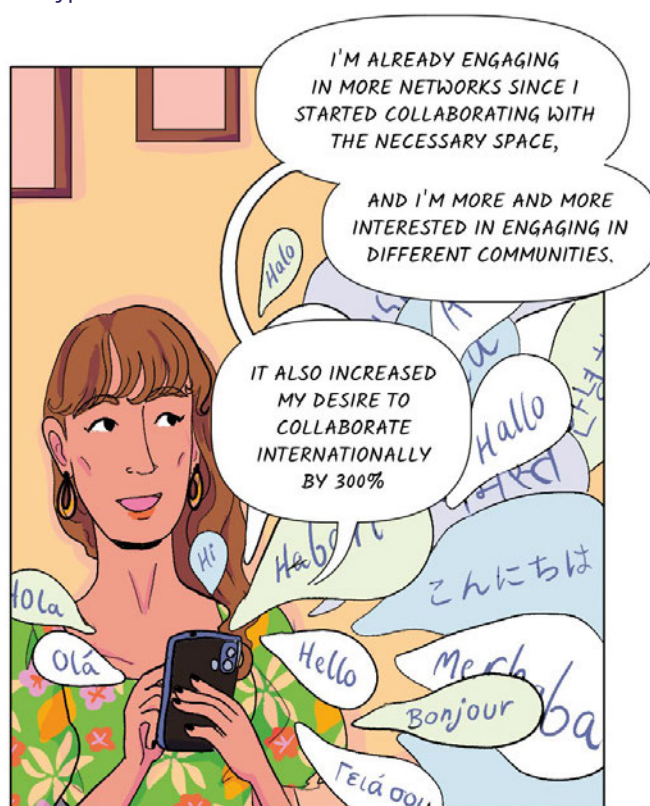
Msanii Kimani, KKMN, became more confident in pursuing international collaborations after making many contacts during his visit to the UK. Simon Sharkey, The Necessary Space, felt ‘revived and connected’ by working with younger artists from Brazil. Nick Potter, UoSC, developed his skills by managing a project of this scale and with international partners for the first time.

More confident in building networks and having a professional conversation with people from other cultures and more confident in sharing one’s own cultural perspective

A large majority of interviewees felt more confident in building networks with people from other cultures (15/20) and having a professional conversation (13/20) with someone from a different cultural background, as a result of this collaboration, with some interviewees also feeling that they were already experienced in this kind of collaboration and already confident in these intercultural skills. Many interviewees (8/20) also felt that they had gained confidence in sharing their own cultural perspective with those from other cultures, but some felt that their confidence level was already high previously and it had not increased with this collaboration.

Greater desire to have another international collaboration

This experience increased the desire for another international collaboration for most interviewees (14/20), whereas for a few others the desire was not diminished, but they would enter into another international collaboration only under certain conditions (e.g. depending on the partner or the type of theme).



Nicola Streeten, LDComics: *‘It’s about practising listening to other people, ... listening to other people’s stories, and ... not making assumptions, which I do all the time. And I’m constantly having to revisit the assumptions I make — and that’s how we learn. ... And it can inform your own practice and your own professional approach...’*

Findings – Experiencing cultural relations

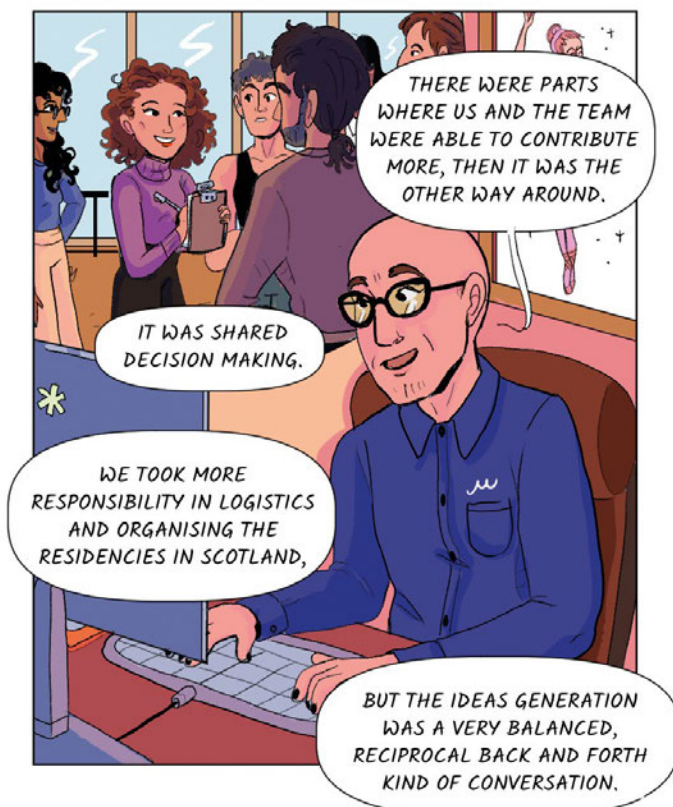
2. What relationships were formed and what made them so

In the ten partnerships explored in this research relationships were characterised by partners in positive terms, despite – or perhaps because of – having faced difficulties in some cases.

The words most commonly used to describe the relationships were: collaborative, supportive, long-term, positive, a learning relationship, fun/ enjoyable, and sometimes challenging. When asked what they thought had contributed to their relationship being like that they identified a wide range of factors.

The most common are the following:

- ◆ having worked with the other organisation before or knowing each other and how they work (SIB Arka Kinari, Beyond the 'Curfew', Khartoum Bites projects)
- ◆ complementarity in what each organisation brought to the collaboration (Janire Najera, Francine Kleimann, Nova Ruth, Simon Sharkey)
- ◆ openness and transparency in dealing with each other (Janire Najera, Anna Santomauro, Nicola Streeten)
- ◆ being like-minded in their field/project theme (Talal Afifi, Francine Kliemann, Simon Sharkey) or having common values, backgrounds or political stances on the core issue of their field/ art form (Dana Abbas, Sharaf Dar Zaid, Nick Potter, Nicola Streeten)
- ◆ shared enthusiasm about their project's objective or about learning new things or doing a good job (Talal Afifi, Phil Cox, Sharaf Dar Zaid, Francine Kliemann)
- ◆ meeting regularly or frequently (Anna Santomauro, Nicola Streeten)
- ◆ having fun or making it 'playful' (Msanii Kimani, Simon Sharkey)
- ◆ recognising that organisations in other parts of the world are facing the same issues and learning from how they deal with them (Janire Najera, Donald Unanka)



In the ten collaborations of this research, three partnerships involved people who knew each other before the collaboration (Adapting Work for Young People with Complex Needs, Khartoum Bites, SIB Arka Kinari) and one partnership where the partners had collaborated before (Beyond the 'Curfew'). In all four of these collaborations, the partners stated that the pre-existing relationships had deepened or improved with this collaboration.

As already mentioned, many partnerships faced challenges in their relationships, but having overcome them made them look back at the relationship in positive terms. This was not the case for one interviewed ICP partner who found the relationship unequal, with different understandings between partners about the project and each organisation's role in it, and with insufficient time given to the partner organisations to interact and learn from each other; in addition to language being a barrier.

3. Mutuality

The selection criteria for ICP applications included demonstrating projects' ability to benefit both the UK and international applicants 'mutually and equally' and 'shared use of the budget between the UK and international applicants'.

Mutuality and reciprocity are values that underpin international cultural relations. This research has found that both these values were present in partnerships, according to 12 of the 20 interviewees. This mutuality was manifested as 'mutual respect', 'reciprocity of welcome and generosity', a kind of 'reciprocal forgiving', an 'emotional understanding', 'mutual support', mutuality in learning, sharing ideas and co-creating, joint decision-making, trying to find common ground and negotiating, or the fact that partners were able to visit each other's countries during the project. For some partners their relationships were based on a division of labour among partners rather than mutuality. In one partnership involving three partner organisations, one partner felt that there was no opportunity for partners to find mutuality in their relationship, because they did not *'have much to do with each other'*.



4. Trust

In most of the partnerships in this research both partners stated that trust had been built between them

This had happened gradually during the collaboration process or even earlier, when partners were preparing their funding application together. In three partnerships, trust had been established from previous collaborations or relationships. In two partnerships there was loss of trust either because one partner felt excluded from decision-making or because the other partner was not delivering on what had been expected or agreed.

Msanii Kimani, Kenya Kymsnet Media Network: *'Trust, I think is built on small building blocks... And it starts with the way you approach the smaller things ... it began with a consultative process ... by virtue of the consultations that we had entrenched in our ways of working.'*



The factors that contributed to building trust included:

- ◆ regular online meetings/ calls and in-depth consultation with openness and transparency
- ◆ joint decision-making
- ◆ agreeing 'a generous collaboration policy' at the beginning of the project
- ◆ agreeing joint ownership of the project outputs
- ◆ adversity and bonding by overcoming difficulties together
- ◆ getting to know the other person or the partner organisations, their approach and thinking on the project theme
- ◆ shared commitment to delivering quality or 'being in it' for the cultural exchange rather than financial gain
- ◆ distributing the grant fairly

Dana Abbas, Riwaq, Palestine: *'Once we start knowing more about our programmes, our practices, like even listening to others and their approach to things, how they comment on certain things, makes you feel that you can relate to them or not, you can trust them on that. So, at the very first phases, I think we had a lot of talking more than doing and this talking was important.'*

Tony Mills, Dance Base, UK: *'...working through a little bit of challenge together having some very open honest conversations, being a bit vulnerable, as well in the process. Being a bit human and I think that kind of reveals your values, and then when you're able to see each other's values, it's like, oh, yeah! Then you can establish even more trust.'*

5. Equality, equity and inequality

Equity and equality

Many partners thought of their partnerships as being equal, but their understandings or experience of equality varied and, in many cases, they indicate equity more than equality. In some collaborations partners felt equal in certain aspects and not equal in other aspects.

When speaking about equality partners referred to feeling ‘equally involved’, or ‘creatively equal’, or equal in terms of decision making. Others spoke of relationships having been ‘balanced’ or ‘proportionate’, ‘fair’, or about having ‘shared power’, or not pushing their own agendas. Talal Afifi, SFF, preferred the word ‘equity’ rather than equality: *‘Sometimes it was not equal, but it was not a bad thing. It is good to feel that someone who has a grip is leading.’*

Nova Ruth, Lintas Bantas, Indonesia: *‘almost equally involved inside this project ... I can say that the weight of the tasks is being distributed fairly between us ... we feel like we are equally open to each other, equally listen to each other. Equally receptive. And equally eager to allocate time when we have to work on something.’*



Some partners explained how they saw equality in their partnerships more in terms of equity between partners. For example

For the sake of equality, in Shared Encounters the British and Nepalese musicians were paid the same despite the disparity in the cost of living between Nepal and the UK. In another project, however, where the non-European partners received more from the budget than the non-European partner - who also carried the administrative burden of managing the grant - partners thought that the partnership was based on equality nonetheless. One partner thought it was equal because of the division of labour among partners and the other partner understood equality as *‘more than an even separation of resources’*; rather it was based on *‘understanding the differences and the sets of conditions in which everyone operates within, and being able to respond to them.’* (Anna Santomauro) Similarly, in School of the (Im)Possible, the Scottish partner thought that he and his Brazilian partner were equal in the partnership even though the Scottish partner was more experienced. His partner, Francine Kliemann, also thought the relationship to have been between equals, because of the complementarity of their respective roles, despite the fact that she was the director of the project, and it was her pilot project that was being adapted to Scotland.

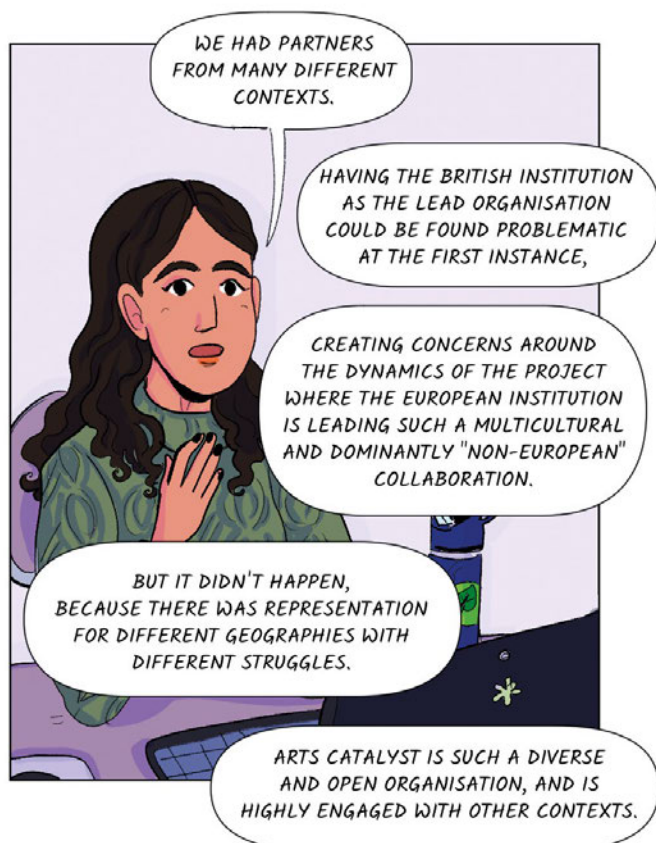
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Many partners thought of their partnerships as being equal, but their understandings or experience of equality varied and, in many cases, they indicate equity more than equality. In some collaborations partners felt equal in certain aspects and not equal in other aspects

Inequality

Just as there is variety in understanding equality, there is also variety in how inequality was perceived or experienced by different partners. Assuming that everyone in an international collaboration would be speaking fluent English was an example of the inequality that existed in the relationship, according to a British partner. In another project, a partner was aware that her collaborating partner was more dependent on the grant money than herself and in another collaboration British participants could easily afford to pay for a meal that their collaborating partners would have found far too expensive.

Another partner felt that they had not contributed to the project as much as their other two partners had.



Rachel Rogers, DaDa, UK: *'When you get the money, even if it's agreed by the other partners, it's still us having it and therefore, you're not really sharing power.'*

The impact of paying the grant to the UK-based partner

Most interviewees (11/20) thought that the fact that the ICP was set up in such a way so that the grants had to be paid to the UK-based partner did not impact on their relationships, even if it affected who had to act as the project manager and deal with all the administration involved. Three interviewees regarded this ICP requirement as something positive either because it was relieving them of the administrative burden or because it was giving them the confidence that they could account properly for project expenditure. Another three interviewees, however, saw it as an aspect of inequality in the relationship.

An unequal partnership

In one partnership the British partner thought that the fact that they had to receive the grant from the British Council, while the non-British partners could not, meant not only that they were placed by default in a position of having to administer and manage the project but also that the relationship was therefore not set up to be equal among partners – with connotations of a *'colonial power thing going on'*. In the same partnership another partner thought that they did not have much of a say in decision making, including the kind of capacity building needed by project participants. Despite this dissonance between the two interviewed partners, both seemed to agree independently that spending more time to understand clearly the expectations of each partner and of the project participants and to discuss any difficulties in the relationship could have helped in this case.

6. Challenges

Challenges that were couched as ‘cultural differences’ by partners were those around different ways of working, working at different speeds

For example, how quickly partners would respond to emails — or different approaches to how to do things also posed challenges to relationships; or how/ whether to give or take criticism or how to deal with conflict. These caused tensions at times. When these were overcome this happened through discussion, open communication, owning up to one’s own mistakes, showing understanding and keeping focused on the work.

Partnerships also faced different practical challenges. Some partners found it very difficult to send money to their partner. Transfers were delayed by banks and partners had to spend a lot of time trying to sort out this problem. This caused anxiety and frustration. Currency fluctuations and heavy bank charges generated some unpleasant surprises and losses in two projects.

Time difference between partners was another challenge, particularly when most of the interaction had to be online.



Delays in obtaining visas to enter the UK caused problems to two partners.

Dealing with all the administration around managing the grant or with logistics during partners’ country visits or discovering unexpected production costs were challenging for some partners.

7. Sustainability of relationships



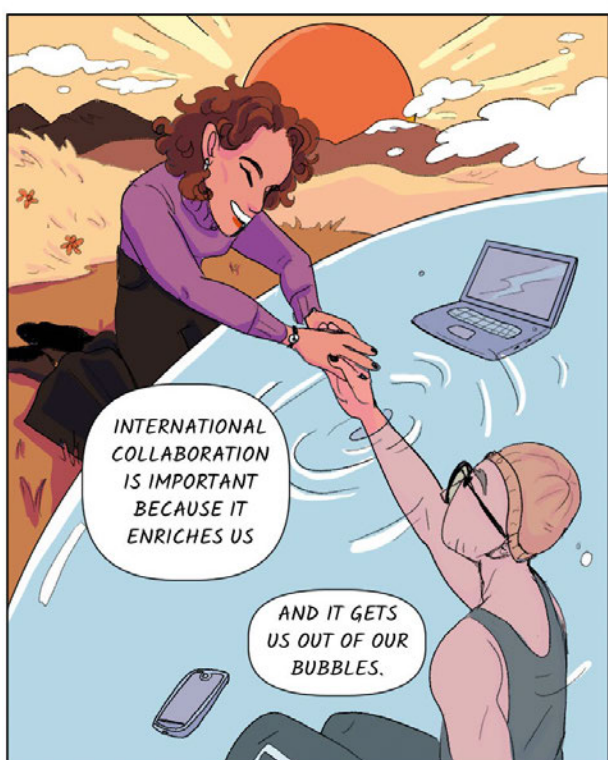
All partners except one would like their relationships to be long-term, partly because they were positive experiences and partly because of the time invested in them already.

One partner may collaborate again with their British partner only after discussing the issues that arose in this collaboration. **Annex 1** shows in detail of how partners plan to maintain their relationships.

For a number of partners, a successful legacy of their projects would be to maintain the relationship, if not the partnership, and to collaborate again. A few partners thought that a successful legacy would be if their project participants were able to continue the work of the project independently and without needing the help of the partners. And yet another small number of partners would like to repeat their project involving participants in other countries.

Findings – Understanding cultural relations

8. Why international collaboration is important to ICP partners



Romy Assouad, Yaraqa: 'We've always had this outlook towards outside because opportunities are limited in Lebanon. ... When there are limited opportunities, having these conversations, having these relations is what allows you to exist more here, [as opposed to leaving Lebanon] ... but also feed into and feel useful somewhere else and then bring it back.'

This question helps us understand the cultural relations element in the 'motive' of ICP partner organisations to enter into international collaborations.

Partners identified a number of reasons why international collaboration in general (rather than the specific collaboration they entered into) is important to their organisation:

- ◆ wanting to learn new approaches, ideas, and different ways of working
- ◆ wanting to see other ways of thinking and forms of expression
- ◆ breaking out of one's 'bubble'
- ◆ breaking the isolation caused by the political situation in their country (e.g. Palestine and Sudan)
- ◆ realising how much one has in common or shares with people from the other side of the globe
- ◆ wanting to change the view that others hold of one's country or culture, as was the case with Sudan and Palestine.

Phil Cox, Native Voice Film: 'It's too homogenous in the UK, especially where we have a very formatted, quite homogenous storytelling in terms of broadcast, and we should delight in other ways of seeing, thinking and expressing.'

Mark Fell, musician: 'When I'm engaged in collaborative practices with people from very different cultures, it gives me a different perspective on the things that are quite close to me. ... I kind of feel like I grow as an artist...'



9. ICP partners' understanding of 'international cultural relations'

Most ICP partners interviewed were not only conscious of the fact that the purpose of the ICP was to develop international cultural relations, but they also understood various elements of a cultural relations approach.

ICP partners interviewed were asked how they understood the term 'international cultural relations' — not as a test of their knowledge, but as a way to see if they were aware of or understood the purpose behind this British Council programme. They gave various definitions and descriptions, which resonate with the British Council – Goethe-Institut definition (given earlier in the Introduction of this report) and which include those elements that distinguish cultural relations from other international relations:

- ◆ It is primarily about the relationship. Dialogue between people to achieve mutual understanding, but also outcomes from a collaboration, although dialogue is more important than the delivery of outputs.
- ◆ Exchanging, sharing and learning from each other, especially about how art is understood and translated, new ways of creating, new formats, cross-fertilisation.
- ◆ Respecting diversity, understanding of difference and acceptance of it, not imposing a certain way of viewing culture or of doing things.
- ◆ Meeting as people - beyond just the art form — and being able to see value in each other.
- ◆ Cultural diplomacy, or 'a kind of soft politics'.

Most interviewees thought that the British Council was clear about the fact that through the ICP's artistic collaborations they were trying to develop international cultural relations. Many of them stated that this was clear in the call for applications.

Findings – The ‘cultural relations approach’ and its added value to grant giving

10. What distinguishes the ICP from other funds



The ICP compared to other funders by the ICP partners

ICP partners identified a number of ICP practices and approaches that they thought distinguish this programme from other experiences they have had with project funding:³

- ◆ Giving freedom to partners to direct and design their projects the way they wanted by being ‘hands off’ or ‘light touch’ regarding the direction or content of projects gave partners a sense of ownership.
- ◆ Apart from giving a grant, the programme was also about developing relationships that have longevity and about mutual learning. Projects did not have to be short term, and this gave partners time to develop their relationships – that ‘sustainable dialogue’ - many of which partners wish to continue. Most projects were year-long and a few projects were able to receive follow up funding after their initial ICP grant.
- ◆ Another distinct feature was the Online Grantee Community Meet Ups organised by the programme to help grantees connect with organisations outside their specific projects.
- ◆ A few partners also identified as a distinct characteristic of the programme the support given by British Council staff, including the assigned ‘relationship managers’, who proved helpful especially at times of need.

³ ICP partners compared the ICP with any other fund they had received grants from in the past and not specifically with funds for international artistic collaboration.

The ICP compared to other international collaboration funds in the UK and Europe

This research has tried to identify the main features of an ‘international cultural relations approach’ by comparing the ICP to other funds supporting international artistic collaboration in the UK and Europe.

In this way it has been possible to identify a number of commonalities in the funds of the three cultural relations organisations (British Council, EUNIC and Goethe-Institut) that distinguish grant giving by cultural relations organisations from grant giving by the four UK arts councils (Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Creative Scotland and Wales Arts International). The contrast between the two approaches to grant giving for international artistic collaboration lies in different intentions and priorities as well as different ways of doing things, but it is not a sharp one. Nonetheless, it is possible to define a distinct ‘international cultural relations approach’ on the basis of these common characteristics. In this section we will elaborate on these distinguishing characteristics between the two approaches, in order to clarify what is different about grant giving by cultural relations organisations. (The full list of British and European funds included in this study is presented in the Introduction.)

First of all, a few technical characteristics that distinguish the ICP from other funds. In terms of size and focus, during its first round of grant giving (2022), the ICP was the largest fund dedicated to international artistic collaboration within the UK and possibly also in Europe. (See comparison of budgets and size of grants in **Annex 2**.) In 2022, the ICP gave far more grants than either EUNIC or the Goethe-Institut. Within the UK, most funds by the arts councils are not dedicated to international collaboration, but also fund other kinds of (international) activities, such as exchanges, residencies, travel and showcasing. For example, the Open Fund of Creative Scotland gives only a small percentage of its funding to projects for international work, including showcasing, and not only for collaboration. The Four Nations’ International Fund, which also gave small grants, was not only about UK artists collaborating with artists outside the UK, but also about bringing different nations within the UK into one collaboration. The ICP has a specific geographic focus when funding international collaborations, because it is part-funded by Official Development Assistance. It focuses on certain countries where the British Council has the capacity to help facilitate this programme, most of them being recipients of ODA⁴, whereas most of the funds of the UK arts councils do not have any particular geographic focus when funding international collaboration.

Differences in the support given to collaborating artists beyond the grants

The support given to grantees by cultural relations organisations (Goethe-Institut, EUNIC and the British Council) is far greater than that given by UK arts councils.

The reason for this is that cultural relations organisations are focused on the relationships that can develop among collaborating partners far more than the arts councils and therefore dedicate resources in their programmes of international collaboration to supporting project partners through various stages of each project and also to ensuring that there is adequate staff time to provide this support. For UK arts councils, which provide far greater and more varied types of funding for the arts and work across many different programmes, international collaboration is only a small part of their grant giving, and therefore they cannot dedicate staff time to support each international collaboration in the way that cultural relations organisations do. All arts councils interviewed acknowledged that limitation.



⁴ www.britishcouncil.org/arts/international-collaboration-grants-faqs

Arts councils support grant applicants with advice and information on eligibility, or may connect them with other artists, help them troubleshoot any problems (e.g. the Four Nations International Fund, the International Opportunities Fund of Wales Arts International, Arts Council Northern Ireland) and publicise certain projects through their communications departments (e.g. Wales Arts International and Arts Council Northern Ireland).

All three programmes run by cultural relations organisations (Co-Production Fund, European Spaces of Culture and International Collaboration Grants) are more active during project implementation by monitoring and ‘accompanying’ or supporting individual partnerships and by organising peer learning sessions remotely (the ICP’s International Collaboration Community Meet-Ups or the European Spaces’ on-boarding and peer learning sessions).

All three cultural relations organisations also provide different forms of support during the application process:

- ◆ Offering opportunities for potential applicants to meet and explore partnering together — the ICP’s match-making sessions; connections between German and foreign artists fostered by Goethe-Institut branches; the Co-Production Fund’s pre-pandemic physical platforms in different countries for artists to meet and get to know each other.
- ◆ By organising remote introductory sessions (European Spaces of Culture and the ICP) or webinars on safeguarding or monitoring and evaluation (ICP).

EUNIC’s support at the introductory/ application stage is the most thorough and tries to set the tone of equal partnerships within a cultural relations framework from the very start. It provides an ‘idea design toolkit’ as well as a Fair Collaboration tool kit to candidates before shortlisting, it runs two-day Creative Labs between the concept note and full proposal stages to help candidates develop their proposals and also brings alumni from the previous funding cycle. The British Council’s ICP supports grantees through inputs and contact by British Council staff in the UK as well as in the countries where foreign partners are based. British Council Arts Managers in the UK and abroad support grantees with partnership issues, local connections, communications, risk management, artistic advice and concerns and any changes in the projects’ scope.

It is this type of support offered to collaborating partner organisations by cultural relations organisations that is the added value of the cultural relations approach.

Focus on relationship building vs. developing the art form and strengthening the (UK) art sector

‘[T]he primary thing for us, and I guess that’s a contrast with the cultural relations approach, is more about ... supporting the artists to make new work and develop.’ **Nicola Smyth, Arts Council England**

The British Council, EUNIC and the Goethe-Institut see their grant giving as being about building and supporting long term trust, understanding and relationships, as opposed to the priorities of UK arts councils, which prioritise strengthening the UK arts sector or developing the art form. Arts councils are interested in developing partnerships and do promote them, but they do not prioritise these in the way cultural relations organisations do.

As much as the ICP would want an artistic output to come out of a collaboration, it would not give a grant unless it was clear that cultural relations would be underpinning the relationship. Similarly, the focus of the Goethe-Institut’s Co-Production Fund is on the collaboration between artists and less so on the end product of the collaboration. As one of its staff put it, taking a cultural relations approach removes the necessity of making the project a commercial success by reaching a large audience. It allows to focus on the collaboration itself, its depth and its long duration. In the same vein, the European Spaces of Culture programme sees itself as more than a funding programme producing outputs. Its expectations go beyond the product of the collaboration into the quality of the relationship, which should be based ‘on the principles of a fair partnership’.⁵

⁵ EUNIC, *European Spaces of Culture Lessons Learnt 220621*, 2021.



However, there is a risk to perceiving this contrast in monolithic terms, but the contrast between the two approaches is not a rigid one. An interest in international collaboration is not the monopoly of cultural relations organisations. For example, Wales Arts International, the international agency of Arts Council of Wales, ‘arts development’ goes hand in hand with international cultural relations – it’s not an either/or situation.

For WAI, one of their objectives in giving strategic grants for international collaborations is for Wales to be recognised on the world stage whilst the purpose of its artist-led International Opportunities Fund is ‘to support the development of relationships, collaborations and networks between Wales’s creative professionals and arts organisations and international partners’.⁶ Momentum, a programme co-funded by Creative Scotland and the British Council is about fostering long-term relationships and brings foreign arts people to Edinburgh to meet potential collaborating partners. A report by ACE acknowledges the importance of cultural relations outcomes.⁷ Moreover, the ICP too, like the UK arts councils, aims at strengthening the arts sector in the UK through international partnerships. Its general objective is to: ‘Strengthen the creative and economic development of the Arts, Culture and Creative sectors in the UK and internationally, to increase their contribution to social and cultural capital and to increase trust and favourability for the UK by building, deepening and extending international connections and partnerships.’⁸

⁶ wai.org.uk/wales-arts-international/funding

⁷ Arts Council England, *Arts, culture and creating international value – an evidence summary*, June 2020

⁸ Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services, *Evaluation of the International Collaboration Programme*, Draft Final Report, p.41.

International cultural relations as a new way of looking at international partnerships

Promoting innovation in collaboration projects by introducing new ideas, issues or approaches, is a common feature in both approaches to international collaboration and it is not unique to cultural relations organisations – many of the funds of the UK arts councils also seek to promote innovation. However, in the cultural relations approach innovation in partnership also includes the principles of fairness and equality in the collaboration. According to EUNIC, European Spaces of Culture *‘enable and facilitate new models of collaboration, where the basis lies in equality of partnerships and innovative methods of organising these consortia, without hierarchies.’*⁹

An international cultural relations approach is also about testing equal partnerships

Fairness, equity or equality in partnerships are at the core of the international cultural relations approach. Striving for equality in a partnership is not easy to achieve nor is there a clear understanding of what an equal partnership may look like. For example, as shown in a previous section of this report, ICP partners have different understandings of equality, equity or inequality in their relationships. For many actors involved in international collaborations practising equality is new territory and it requires certain experimentation with how you organize a partnership.

Staff of the Goethe-Institut’s Co-Production Fund often see that, at closer look, the relationship is not as equal as it appeared initially - the German partner may be using the project to serve their interests, e.g. to perform abroad. Or they realise that the initial idea for the project came from the German partner and it was not a *‘mutual idea’*. Artists interviewed for a recent evaluation of the Co-Production Fund expressed the need for some help with understanding what is meant by equal relationships in practice in these collaborations, esp. as the situation in each country and the fees paid to artists are so different.

Similarly, one of the lessons learnt from the first phase of European Spaces of Culture was that various stakeholders within the collaboration projects *‘had not fully grasped the cultural relations approach’* and that *‘not all pilot projects succeeded in involving the local partner organisations equally in the project management’*.¹⁰ Now in their third phase, European Spaces of Culture have seen progress towards more equal engagement, management and ownership of their projects since Phase 1. By communicating not only to EUNIC members, but now also to local partners and the European Union delegation concerned, they have seen evidence of greater equality in all facets of their projects.

‘If the ultimate goal is not the artistic product, but it is the relationship, trust and mutuality that matter, then one should also be open to the possibility that relationships may not work well.’ Co-Production Fund staff, Goethe-Institut

Another aspect of striving for equal partnerships in a cultural relations framework is an interest in **‘decolonising’** international work. The Widening Engagement Action plan and the incoming international strategy of the Arts Council of Wales aim to decolonise their international work whereas the Co-Production Programme of the Goethe-Institut is part of an internal discourse on colonial structures and how it may or not be contributing to these. For EUNIC, European Spaces of Culture is an instrument in the EU’s external relations to address a variety of topics of universal concerns, including decolonisation.¹¹ The British Council explored this topic with the study by J.P. Singh on the DICE (Developing Inclusive Creative Economies) programme. As shown in an earlier section of this report, ‘decolonising’ the relationship or at least ensuring that it is free of colonial baggage has been a concern of some ICP partners.

⁹ EUNIC, *European Spaces of Culture Lessons Learnt 220621*, 2021.

¹⁰ EUNIC, *European Spaces of Culture lessons learnt 220621*, 2021.

¹¹ As previous.

Commitment to SDGs by cultural relations organisations

A feature of the cultural relations approach, which is common to the British Council, EUNIC and Wales Arts International, is a commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and linking the outcomes of its work to them. In Wales, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act makes culture the official fourth pillar of sustainable development.

Differences in what is monitored and evaluated in the funded international collaborations

All funds included in this study monitor how their funding has been spent and receive end of project reports on the artistic/ cultural output of each grant. The distinction between arts councils and cultural relations organisations lies in that the former tend to focus on identifying project outputs whereas cultural relations organisations monitor and evaluate outcomes of international collaborations beyond project outputs. Their evaluation reports include evidence of cultural relations outcomes: exchange, knowledge transfer, expansion of networks (Co-Production Fund’s recent evaluation¹²) or ‘pooling’ of knowledge, the wider networks and connections, equality in partnerships among European and local partners, as well as evidence of partnerships where equality has not been achieved or has been lost. (EUNIC)

One of the motivations of the UK arts councils is to help UK artists reach international markets

For Creative Scotland and ACE funding international artistic collaboration is motivated by a desire to help those artists who need support to access international markets for their art and also understand what their peers are doing internationally, so that they can be successful. Arts councils support international work now more than in the past partly due to Brexit, which left a gap in international collaboration and exchange that needed to be filled.

UK arts councils want to promote UK artists and their nations’ profiles to the outside world

For example, ACE has to make the argument that its international funding has benefits for England, because its Charter requires it to fund work that would generate such benefit. The objective of the Artists International Development Fund Northern Ireland is *‘to support individual international developmental opportunities for talent and artistic excellence from Northern Ireland and, thereby, enhance Northern Ireland’s international artistic development, reputation and standing.’* (Whitefield, ACNI)



A feature of the cultural relations approach, which is common to the British Council, EUNIC and Wales Arts International, is a commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and linking the outcomes of its work to them. In Wales, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act makes culture the official fourth pillar of sustainable development

¹² Goethe Institute, *Empfehlungen_Evaluation*
Goethe IKF Endbericht [Evaluation Recommendations
– Goethe IKF Final Report], 2021.



Arts councils support new, individual artists as well as organisations whereas the three cultural relations organisations give grants only to organisations

For example, the International Opportunities' Fund of WAI gives grants not only to organisations but also to individual Wales-based artists to collaborate with artists outside the UK and do residencies abroad. The Artists' International Development Fund Northern Ireland funds international travel or workshops for emerging artists based in Northern Ireland and it is awarded to individuals as well as organisations. The Four Nations Fund supported individual artists as well companies or organisations for collaboration/co-production as well as exchanges and residencies. (See the comparative table in **Annex 2**.) The British Council mostly gives grants to established organisations. It sometimes gives grants to individuals, although not on the scale of the UK arts councils. The ICP only grants organisations, including artist led organisations.

Differences in who can receive the grant and how it can be distributed among collaborating partners

For international collaborations, UK arts councils can only give their grants to artists based in their respective parts of the UK due to the terms of the funding they receive from UK central or regional governments or the National Lottery Fund.¹³ Similarly, EUNIC will give grants for the European Spaces of Culture only to EUNIC members¹⁴, whereas the ICP gave grants to the UK partners during its first round of grant giving. (In all cases, grants would be then distributed among all collaborating partners, as agreed in project budgets.) The only exception to this rule of having to give the grant to a co-national or member organisation is the Goethe-Institut's Co-Production Fund. Despite the fact that its funding comes from the German government, it pays the grant to the foreign partner rather than the German one, in order to establish more balanced relationships, and to shift away from a common pattern of partnership whereby the German artists lead and may get all the credit for it. The jury is probably still out on whether paying the grant to the co-national rather than the foreign partner sows the seed of inequality in partnerships. As discussed earlier in this report, most of the ICP partners interviewed did not think that this impacted on their relationship with their British partner, who was receiving and also administering the grant. Nonetheless, at the time of writing, the British Council was looking into options to pay both partners (UK and non-UK) in future rounds of ICP grant giving.

¹³ National Lottery funding to Arts Council England has a cap of 15% for funding international projects.

¹⁴ This is not due to a 'philosophical' approach, but due to legal/technical reasons, because 90% of the funding for European Spaces of Culture is provided by the European Commission. The rest of the funding comes from individual EUNIC members.

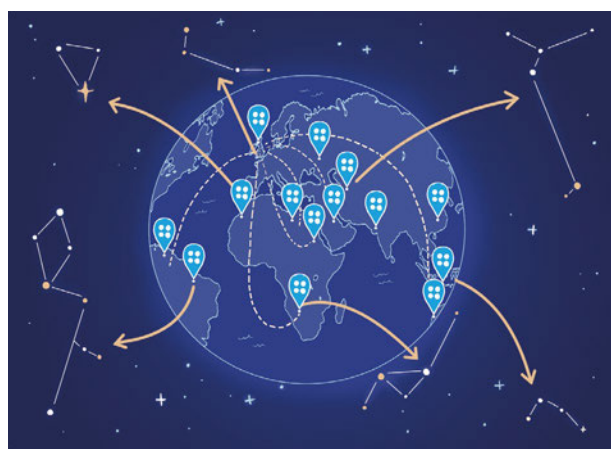
11. Why the British Council and the other cultural relations organisations are well placed to support international artistic collaboration

In the previous section, we showed that the attention paid, and support given by cultural relations organisations to grantee organisations is their added value to grant giving for international collaboration.

There is another aspect to the added value of the cultural relations organisations, which this research has found: the international networks that these three organisations (British Council, EUNIC and Goethe-Institut) have.

All UK arts council and British Council staff interviewed agreed that the British Council brings to this work its unique in-depth, up to date knowledge of what is new or interesting in the art and wider cultural sectors in other countries, coupled with their contacts in government in these countries. This is an asset that the British Council has built over a long period of time thanks to its extensive presence outside the UK. It is also an asset that UK arts councils lack but draw from through their strategic partnerships with the British Council. This is an important asset for doing cultural relations, because it enables international cultural connections and relationships to be formed and international cultural relations to develop.

This global network of British Council heads of arts and other staff based in different countries and its Arts Group in London can give ideas to regional British Council offices and to UK regional arts councils about who to connect with in different countries and who is who in the art scene there. They have knowledge that cannot be picked up from the internet. Arts councils and UK-based British Council staff can draw information from this international network, which can be valuable when deciding on international partnerships, grant applications and designing programmes.



This network helps UK arts councils, as British Council staff can act as a kind of intermediary, on the one hand, between artists in different parts of the UK or the UK arts councils, and, on the other, artists in countries where British artists want to connect. British Council staff can provide valuable information and advice to visiting British artists, including on practical issues. They are aware of local sensitivities, cultural differences and ‘things that might otherwise act as blocks for UK artists.’ (Laura Mackenzie-Stuart, Creative Scotland).

‘The most successful projects where the British Council has collaborated with Creative Scotland are those where British Council people in other countries have supported and been involved, alongside the funding provided to the projects.’ **Laura Mackenzie-Stuart, Creative Scotland**

The British Council network of offices abroad and its understanding of the local context in other countries also helps adapt projects and collaborations to changing circumstances in the countries where collaborating artists are based.

An example of how the British Council’s international artistic connections resource international collaborations fostered by UK arts councils and the British Council comes from the experience of a collaboration between Creative Scotland and the British Council on one hand and Japan on the other. Through British Council staff in Japan Creative Scotland and the British Council were able to understand the issues for artists in Japan, then take Scottish artists to Japan on scoping trips to meet people in the arts sector there, and give ‘subvention funding’ for the artists to pick up on the conversations they had started there. With another programme running in parallel, Momentum, with Japanese artists and curators coming to the Edinburgh Festival, they developed ideas and were able to seek funding.

Additionally, and specifically for British Council staff in the UK, who approach international partnerships with the cultural relations lens, when assessing grant applications, knowledge about the artists and other cultural actors in another country can help them make a more informed selection on the basis of how likely it is for an international partnership to become a mutual and equal collaboration between artistic partners.

Within the UK this British Council asset is unparalleled, but outside the UK, the two other cultural relations organisations explored in this research also use their networks of offices in other countries (Goethe-Institut) or network of members (EUNIC) to support international cultural collaborations. The Goethe-Institut’s network of offices worldwide fosters initial meetings or connections between German and foreign artists, which may lead to collaborations supported by the Co-Production Fund. This network may also publicise successful collaboration projects in different countries. In the European Spaces of Culture programme where EU delegations, EUNIC members¹⁵ and local cultural organisations partner in international cultural collaborations, EU delegations provide networks for communication purposes or project partners from outside the world of culture and the arts. They can also connect projects to EU policy priorities, EU funding opportunities, and add political weight where needed, or they can provide a safe space for activities and meetings in countries where certain topics are politically sensitive. Through the EU Ambassadors, EU delegations have been increasing high-level engagement in projects. Having a worldwide network is an added value for the British Council, EUNIC and the Goethe-Institut, but it also a crucial instrument for them to foster international cultural relations.



The British Council network of offices abroad and its understanding of the local context in other countries also helps adapt projects and collaborations to changing circumstances in the countries where collaborating artists are based

¹⁵ These are the local offices of EU national institutes of culture. The British Council is now an associate member.

Acknowledgements

Author

Floresca Karanàsou

Floresca Karanàsou is a consultant and researcher with many years of experience in international development programme evaluation and management and research in international cultural relations and human rights and accountability. As a Greek who has studied, lived and worked in different parts of the Middle East and the UK, and now based in Northern Ireland, she brings to this research her own long inter-cultural experience. This assignment was conducted through INTRAC (2022-23), where Floresca worked as a Principal Consultant from 2016 until 2023.

About INTRAC

INTRAC is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes positive social change. It does this by strengthening the wider ecosystems of civil society support and also by supporting civil society organisations themselves, so that these organisations are better able to develop, engage with others, and do what they want to do, better. It develops practical solutions to civil society challenges, combining ethical and values-driven consultancy, training, research and learning.

Illustrator

Eileen Lemoine

Eileen Lemoine is a French illustrator, comics artist and 2d animator based in Northern Ireland. She loves telling stories both in her self-authored and commercial work. She also has an interest in socially-minded practice with several of her stories conveying the importance of conservation and equality.

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Annex 1 — Sources

Interviews with UK arts councils, cultural relations organisations and British Council staff

All interviews have been conducted remotely from July to October 2022.

Cortina Butler, deputy director, arts
British Council England, 2 August 2022.

Norah Campbell, head of arts,
British Council Scotland, 18 July 2022.

Nathalie Feldmann & Isumi Rögner, Koproduktion
Fonds team, Goethe-Institut, 8 August 2022.

Eluned Haf, head, Wales Arts International,
10 October 2022.

Chantal Harrison-Lee, Angelica Burrill and Karla
Simpson, British Council, ICP team, 15 June 2023.

Robert Kieft, project manager for the European Spaces
of Culture programme, and Andrew Manning, director
of the EU National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC),
30 August 2022.

Laura Mackenzie Stuart, head of theatre,
Creative Scotland, 28 July 2022.

Natasha Nicholls, interim head of arts,
British Council Wales, 25 July 2022.

Colette Norwood, head of Arts, British Council
Northern Ireland, 26 July 2022.

Nicola Smyth, senior manager international,
Arts Council England (ACE), 15 September 2022.

Sonya Whitefield, arts development officer
for venues, festival and international projects,
Arts Council Northern Ireland, 8 August 2022.

Interviews with ICP partners / collaborating organisations

All interviews have been conducted remotely in April and May 2023.

Project	Art form	Partner organisation	Interviewee	Interview date
PRECIPITATE	Dance	Dance Base, Scotland, UK	Tony Mills , artistic director	15-May-2023
		Yaraqa, Lebanon	Romy Assouad , director & founder	11-May-2023
REVEAL!	Comics	LDComics CIC, England, UK	Dr Nicola Streeten , director	11-Apr-2023
		Kenyan Kymsnet Media Network, Kenya	Msanii Kimani , communication for development team leader	18-Apr-2023
Pen Pal Connection	Multi-disciplinary	DaDa - Disability and Deaf Arts, England	Rachel Rogers , co-executive producer	24-May-2023
		Potters Gallery Initiative, Nigeria	Donald Unanka , creative director	23-May-2023
Shared encounters for emergent intercultural sonic practices	Music	Univ. of Sheffield Concerts, England	Nick Potter , music programme producer Mark Fell , independent artist	25-May-2023
Beyond the 'Curfew'	Dance	Hawiyya Dance Company, England, UK	Jamila Boughela , founding member & member of the management group	23-May-2023
		El-Funoun Palestinian Dance Troupe, Palestine	Sharaf Dar-Zaid , volunteer dancer & choreographer	10-May-2023
School of the (Im)Possible	Education, immersive experience	The Necessary Space, Scotland, UK	Simon Sharkey , chief executive	21-Apr-2023
		Platô Cultural, Brazil	Francine Kliemann , director	9 May 2023
KHARTOUM BITES	Film, factual, creative documentary	Native Voice Film, England, UK	Phil Cox , director	16-May-2023
		Sudan Film Factory, Sudan	Talal Afifi , founder & director	27-May-2023
		AYIN Network, Kenya	Tom Rhodes , managing editor	10-May-2023

Continues overleaf.

Project	Art form	Partner organisation	Interviewee	Interview date
SIB Arka Kinari: Subversive, immersive and partially submerged	Immersive arts	4Pi Productions, Wales, UK	Janire Najera , creative director	8 May 2023
		Lintas Batas, Indonesia	Nova Ruth , founder & project coordinator	8 May 2023
Soil Futures	Visual arts, multi-disciplinary Architectural conservation	The Arts Catalyst, England, UK	Anna Santomauro , curator	17 May 2023
		RIWAQ- Centre for Architectural Conservation, Palestine	Dana Abbas , lead architect, Life Jacket project	9 May 2023
Adapting Work for Young People with Complex Needs	Dance	Barrowland Ballet, Scotland, UK Atta Festival, Turkey	Not interviewed because of the early stage of implementation of the project Hakan Silahsizoğlu , founder & artistic director	10 May 2023

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Arts Council England, Showcasing for international market development – final report, October 2019.

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Creative Scotland Annual Reviews

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Creative Scotland Ten Year Plan

www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/the-10-year-plan/ambitions-and-priorities/ambition-5

www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/the-10-year-plan/how-we-do-it

Cultural Bridge

www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/targeted-funding/cultural-bridge

www.cultural-bridge.info/funding/

Four Nations International Fund

www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds/four-nations-international-fund

European Spaces of Culture

europeanspacesofculture.eu/about

International Collaboration Grants programme

www.britishcouncil.org/arts/international-collaboration-grants

International Co-Production Fund

www.goethe.de/en/uun/auf/mus/ikf.html

International Opportunities Fund

wai.org.uk/funding/get-started/international

Khartoum Bites - trailer of upcoming film

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National Lottery Project Fund

www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Welcome_to_National_Lottery_Project_Grants_Easy_Read_Presentation_0.pdf

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/arts-council-national-lottery-project-grants/project-grants-time-limited-priorities#section-4>

School of the (Im)Possible video

vimeo.com/manage/videos/779595455

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Wales – Quebec Cooperation Programme

gov.wales/funding-wales-quebec-joint-call-for-proposals-2022

Annex 2 — Overview of researched funds

Funds

International Collaboration Grants programme – British Council

Annual Budget

£5m in 2021-22, its first year.

Size of grants per project

£5,000 to £20,000
or £20,000 to £75,000.

What is funded

International collaboration only. Arts & culture organisations; project to last up to 1 year; grant given to UK partner.

Source of funding

UK government: ODA and non-ODA grant in aid.

International Co-Production Fund – Goethe-Institut

Annual Budget

600,000 euros.

Size of grants per project

Up to 25,000 euros per project, which should last up to 2 years.

What is funded

International collaboration only. Performing arts organisations; non-European and 'transition countries' preferred; grant given to non-German partner.

Source of funding

German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

European Spaces of Culture - EUNIC

Annual Budget

750,000 euros per year.

Size of grants per project

Up to 60,000 euros per project.

What is funded

International collaboration only. Culture 'in the broadest sense'; grant given to EUNIC member.

Source of funding

90% European Commission – 10% EUNIC members.

Four Nations International Fund – administered by Creative Scotland

Annual Budget

£100,000 (2022).

Size of grants per project

Up to £ 5,000.

What is funded

International collaboration, but also exchanges and residencies; individuals and organisations based in UK receive the grant; each project must have 2 partners from different regions of the UK + 1 non-UK partner; priority area: Europe.

Source of funding

All UK arts councils.

Open Fund – Creative Scotland

Annual Budget

£5m in 2021-22.

Size of grants per project

For individuals: 3 funding levels: £500 - £5000, £20,000 and £100,000.

What is funded

Research, development and project activity of individual practitioners in the arts and creative industries in Scotland. It does not fund activity where the main beneficiaries are based outside Scotland.

Source of funding

National Lottery.

National Lottery Project Fund - Arts Council England

Annual Budget

£99m (2021-22).

Size of grants per project

£1,000 to £100,000.

What is funded

Various domestic projects and international collaboration; Individuals and organisations based in England; arts, libraries, museum projects.

Source of funding

National Lottery.

Artists' International Development Fund Northern Ireland – Arts Council Northern Ireland & British Council

Annual Budget

£50,000.

Size of grants per project

-

What is funded

International collaborations, travel, workshops; individuals and organisations; performing arts; grants go to the NI-based partner.

Source of funding

50% ACNI (NI regional government)
– 50% British Council (ODA earmarked).

International Opportunities Fund – Wales Arts International (Arts Council of Wales)

Annual Budget

£150,000.

Size of grants per project

Up to £7,500

What is funded

International collaboration and residencies; individuals and organisations; grants go to partner based in Wales; all over the world, with priority areas: Germany and Canada.

Source of funding

National Lottery.

Wales – Quebec Fund – Wales Arts International & the Government of Quebec

Annual Budget

-

Size of grants per project

Up to £4,800 + \$8,000 CAD.

What is funded

International collaborations and exchanges; organisations only; audiovisual, literature and publishing, performing arts.

Source of funding

Welsh and Quebec governments.

Cultural Bridge – administered by ACE

Annual Budget

-

Size of grants per project

£ 5,000 to £ 10,000 for new partnerships;
up to £ 30,000 for existing ones.

What is funded

International collaboration and exchange;
organisations based in UK and Germany.

Source of funding

All UK arts councils; German government.



British Council 2024

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

To find out more about arts and culture research please visit:

www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight, and for more on the International Collaboration Grants visit www.britishcouncil.org/arts/international-collaboration-grants