**Cultural Relations in Action – Case Studies**

**International Collaboration Grants**

Illustration Transcripts

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Reveal!

Kenyan Kymsnet Media Network

A social enterprise that supports community arts projects. It aims to help transform Kenya as well as the Greater East African community through culture and the arts.

-Msanii Kimani

LD Comics

A women-led comics forum based in the UK. It strives to use comics as a tool to challenge injustice and inequality on a global scale.

-Dr. Nicola Streeten

Reveal! Sought to give voice to women’s experience of gender and climate change in comics form. The project was open to women artists from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda as well as UK-based women with an East African family heritage.

Entries were disseminated in the UK and in Kenya, with finalists participating in a 4-day online residency. The created outcomes were compiled into publications to showcase.

Dr. Nicola Streeten: Being associated with the British Council has been a real achievement for us. It’s taken what we do beyond the UK in physical form. We also have a sense of pride because there has never been a project focusing on East African women comic artists before,

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Msanii Kimani: The lesson that I took from this project is that planning is very significant for any international collaboration. A well-delivered program starts from a well-planned program.

Dr. Nicola Streeten: Initially we were only meeting on Zoom, and we got to know each other well in that time. But the relationship deepened when I got to Kenya. When I saw how Msanii worked and interacted with so many people, I understood him better.

Dr. Nicola Streeten: From the word go we started having an open discussion. We understood how we work and how we could best implement the project. It was effortless because we had fun! I also found out that it’s possible to be paired with someone you’ve never worked with before and develop a common understanding.

Dr. Nicola Streeten: There was reciprocity of welcome and generosity when we visited each other’s countries. This gave the relationship and aspect of equality.

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Dr. Nicola Streeten: The budget was divided equally, but LDC being the UK partner the money had to go into our bank account first. The money transfer to Kenya was a nightmare and took months. It made all of us very anxious.

Msanii Kimani: Printing costs in Africa were also an issue. The postal service is very expensive and takes a long time too, so the plan to have the candidates send their entries by post had to be abandoned.

Msanii Kimnai: I also missed the London project launch because my visa to go to the UK didn’t come through in time.

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Dr. Nicola Streeten: The British Council has been very supportive. It’s hands off until you need them. I also think those chats with the relations manager were so important.

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Precipitate

Yaraqa

Yaraqa is a Lebanon based socio-cultural enterprise which brings together movement artists with industry professionals to collaborate and create impact in their communities through movement and dance.

-Romy Assoud

Dance Base

A creative charity encouraging people across Scotland to engage in dance as an art form, exercise and a way of life. They harbour values of caring, collaboration, bravery and responsibility.

-Tony Mills

Precipitate is a bespoke creation lab pairing 6 dance artists from Scotland and Lebanon. Both Yaraqa and Dance Base share a sense of duty to address sustainability in direct conversation with artists. The lab focuses on facilitating dialogue, inspiring professional development and fuelling cross-cultural creative collaboration. The program consists of online encounters and interactive workshops culminating in an in-person residency.

Romy Assoud: The collaboration helped us to become better acquainted with the dance ecosystem in Scotland. It was refreshing to discover that we could contribute to, and be valuable in, that ecosystem. We also discovered structures and approaches that we don’t have. It was interesting to experience it and inform our practice in Lebanon.

Tony Mills: We’ve learned how to deliver a much more responsive artists development project. Also, discovering another sector on the other side of the world that is agile and determined made us reflect on our own approach to being resilient.

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Romy Assoud: One thing we did right was bring in a facilitator. This made us see where the real conversations needed to happen, and I realised whenever we’re collaborating with other cultures, we need not resort to work straight away, but also create space for conversation.

Tony Mills: We’re two different organisations that want the same thing. We are both passionate about making dance happen, so there’s synergy there. We care about doing a good job and doing our best to make sure that people we work with are looked after.

Tony Mills: There were parts where us and the team were able to contribute more, then it was the other way around. It was shared decision making. We took more responsibility in logistics and organising the residences in Scotland, but the ideas generation was a very balanced, reciprocal back and forth kind of conversation.

Tony Mills: There were a few bumps along the way. Going through that has been a bit challenging but it helped to bond the organisations. We worked through the challenges together by having open and honest conversations and being a bit vulnerable. In these cases you’re able to see each other’s values.

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Tony Mills: The time difference was a challenge for me. Sometimes I wasn’t respecting that Romy is 2 hours ahead of us, so if I suggested meeting at 3 o’clock because that suits me, it was 5 o’clock with her at the end of the day. I had a bit of that me, me, me point of view. It has been a reminder to be more considerate.

Tony Mills: Yaraqa like to talk a lot and ending meetings became quite difficult. All the conversation we had went into making an excellent project, but things could’ve been a bit more expedient. It’s something we’ll just have to deal with and accept that it’s not going to be an hour meeting. It’s going to be two hours.

Romy Assoud: We had a readiness to change things, not just with the timing but also with the program, but our partners weren’t as much. It’s a very cultural thing. Our life is based on change.

Romy Assoud: International collaboration is important because it enriches us and it gets us out of our bubbles.

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Romy Assoud: It was good that it was not a small fund. That gave us flexibility to adapt the budgets and also gave us a certain amount of time. The ICP didn’t have one way of talking about culture, and it didn’t impose a certain way of viewing and the model of how we should do things.

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Soil Futures

The Arts Catalyst

A visual arts organisation and charity based in the UK enabling people to engage in creative experiences that increase their ecological awareness and positive social action.

-Anna Santomauro

Riwaq

(Centre for architectural conservation, Palestine) An organisation which contributes to the cultural heritage of Palestine in order to help preserve and pass it on to future generations.

-Dana Abbas

Other partners

Sakiya (Palestine)

Vessel Art Project (Italy)

Struggles for Sovereignty (Indonesia)

Soil Futures is an online initiative bringing together artists, ecological activists, community organisers and soil caretakers to explore the ground beneath us.

Dana Abbas: Collaborating internationally through the ICP was a great way to reconnect and also to open up after these hard times.

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Dana Abbas: We were eager to find new ways of working, and to work with other practitioners worldwide who share the same ambitions and challenges as us. We benefited from the idea that it brought our geographies closer together.

Anna Santomauro: in the UK, small organisations like Arts Catalyst have less and less opportunities to build international networks. It gave us the opportunity to explore common ecological concerns with organisations operating in different contexts.

Dana Abbas: Arts Catalyst have been understanding, helpful and easygoing. We have a really positive relationship with each and every partner.

Anna Santomauro: Our collaboration was open, generous and flexible.

Dana Abbas: We had partners from many different contexts. Having the British Institution as the lead organisation could be found problematic at the first instance, creating concerns around the dynamics of the project where the European institution is leading such a multicultural and dominantly “non-European” collaboration. But it didn’t happen, because there was representation for different geographies with different struggles. Arts Catalyst is such a diverse and open organisation, and is highly engaged with other contexts.

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Anna Santomauro: There was a good level of mutuality and trust. We decided to have very transparent conversations from the outset, clarifying that everyone would be able to contribute in equal measure to decisions, and we would always try our best to find common ground and understand each other’s context and needs.

Anna Santomauro: We wanted to spend as much time as possible in conversation with the partners. Sometimes a one hour meeting wasn’t enough – a meeting ends when a meeting ends. The dialogue with the partners was as valuable as the outcomes of the project. This is a feeling that everyone in the network shared.

Anna Santomauro: We observed a ‘generous collaboration’ policy. We discussed a lot about terminology and how certain language is more Western centric, and how it should be translated, or if it needed to be shifted to be more inclusive.

Anna Santomauro: I feel like the very first meetings were very much about deadlines and the structure of the process. At one point, we realised there was a sense of rigidity, so we decided to turn the third meeting into a workshop with a shared space for questions, concerns and desires. Having these ongoing monthly sessions has been very valuable because they’ve given us the chance to adjust.

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Anna Santomauro: But we’re also aware of how important these kinds of collaborations are. It was amazing to see all the things we have in common, and how when we bring our contexts together, our struggles are really related.

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School of the Impossible

Platô Cultural

A Brazilian organisation specialising in creating immersive and educational experiences. They bring together new technologies, immersive theatre and gamification.

-Francine Kliemann

The Necessary Space

A UK based enterprise with an ethos of stretching the possibilities of theatre and art as a space where magic happens, in order to help change the way people view the world around them.

-Simon Sharkey

School for the (Im)possible is an experience for 8 to 10 year olds. They interact with a ‘time travelling bookshelf’ in their classrooms. It engages them in sensory challenges and teaches them about climate change, while giving voice to their perspectives and visions for a sustainable future.

After a pilot of the scheme was commissioned by the International Teaching Artists Collaborative in 2021, the partners connected and decided to work together to adapt the project from Brazil to a Scottish context.

Simon Sharkey: The greatest benefit for The Necessary Space was to reboot the sector’s ambitions after its devastation during Covid.

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Simon Sharkey: It helped consolidate the position of The Necessary Space as a new company, and connected us with a new generation of artists.

Francine Kliemann: It gave us a perfect framework of how to translate it to different contexts. The project gave us the opportunity to expand the pilot in a new direction.

Francine Kliemann: The fact that the pilot happened in Brazil and then we expanded it to the UK and not the other way around is empowering. It’s like decolonising a little bit.

Francine Kliemann: I’m already engaging in more networks since I started collaborating with The Necessary Space, and I’m more and more interested in engaging in different communities. It also increased my desire to collaborate internationally by 300%.

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Simon Sharkey: I would describe it as a co-creating, co-producing, lifelong connection. We have a solid, productive, enjoyable relationship with Platô Cultural.

Francine Kliemann: We realised we have a lot of synergies in the way we work, think and create. Nurturing a relationship. We were working on a weekly basis together.

Francine Kliemann: Simon has been key in terms of deepening the project. His senior level knowledge brought a new perspective. I now see him as a partner of The School of the (Im)possible wherever the project will go.

Simon Sharkey: We had different roles, but I didn’t see there wasn’t equality in the way we were thinking: We had complementary roles. It was equal.

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Simon Sharkey: I have felt revived and connected through that. The sector has completely changed so it’s been really useful not to feel isolated. The ICP meet-ups and the support from the network of other people having these collaborations were hugely beneficial.

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Khartoum Bites

Sudan Film Factory

An independent art & film production house that builds the capacities of Sudanese talents, produces films, and exposes audiences to filmmaking and cinema.

-Talal Afifi

Ayin Network

An organisation whose mission is to provide the Sudanese public with access to reliable news and information in the form of films, in-depth journalism and social media content.

-Tom Rhodes

Native voice films

A collection of independent filmmakers from the U.K. who create innovative and interactive content for a global audience.

-Phil Cox

This unique collaboration called on Sudanese digital storytellers to create short documentary films.

They touched on global issues such as disability, environment, ageing and equality.

Tom Rhodes: In the beginning I was very naive about the whole process, and the costs involved.

I’d never made a full feature film before and I really didn’t have many connections in the arts world.

Tom Rhodes: The collaboration widened our scope and quality of production, as well as our understanding of film making techniques.

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Talal Afifi: We went into this aiming to produce films and collaborate with international and regional partners, and we got all that. Having the African perspective of the Ayin Network boosted our capabilities in production, which strengthened our network. This also injected some money into the institute.

Tom Rhodes: I wouldn’t say it was an equal partnership. I’m ashamed to say we haven’t done as much as our partners. We had confidence in them and their skills. I certainly don’t see it as necessary to be equal.

Tom Rhodes: International collaboration was important for the film. Western audiences have such a misconstrued view of what’s going on in Sudan. Sudan has been isolated for so long, and it’s one of our ambitions to get the story out internationally.

Talal Afifi: Sometimes it wasn’t equal, but there was equity. There are lots of things I led in these situations, and there were others where they led. It was always a good balance.

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Phil Cox: The main challenge was figuring out how to deal with partners on the ground when it comes to criticism and how we problem solve. There’s a greater sensitivity there as they aren’t used to working in the kind of professional environment that we are here. We both had to learn to adapt our expectations and avoid it becoming personal.

Tala Afifi: As cultural manager, curator and producer, I always need my freedom and in this project I felt it. I don’t remember anyone from the British Council trying to interfere with our vision, or to see the details. We’ve had this from other funders, but this wasn’t the case here.