

# Cultural Bridge Year 1 programme evaluation



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December 2022



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## Key findings

The aims of Cultural Bridge are:

- To develop socially engaged practice, across artforms, through exchange of experience and approaches.
- To build a network of organisations whose core focus is meaningful engagement and co-creation with their communities - giving them a creative voice to enable social change.

The greatest impacts in Year 1 have taken place with artists and arts organisations who are embedded in and regularly work within their communities. The programme 'participants' are best thought of as the artists and cultural professionals taking part in development and exchange activities.

That said, most projects also engaged 'participants' in their communities, whether young people, or individuals targeted for support based on the specialisms of the arts organisations involved. In some cases, work was also presented to 'audiences', although this was not universally a feature of projects nor a key area of impact.

The most important aspect of the programme was the opportunity for cross-disciplinary learning between artists and cultural professionals, in terms of artform, and 'sector' (i.e., education, health, youth work). . The cultural exchange between the UK and Germany was predicated more on learning about the working contexts and techniques of the exchange artists and organisations, rather than cultural or identity-based differences. Most projects reported that the social issues



they were dealing with in the UK and Germany were the same, but the programme enabled them to reflect on and develop their practice in response to them.

A key finding is that the programme enabled organisations and artists to **slow down** and not just feel they had to constantly deliver. **Spaciousness, relationship building, play, and experimentation** were cited as the most useful aspects of the programme. Covid-19 adaptation and budget restrictions were cited as the most challenging aspects of the programme.



One of the main impacts achieved by the programme was establishing **mutual care** between artists and professionals across the UK and Germany. The programme provided time for reflection on and sharing of approaches to practice, at a time when artists and cultural professionals were feeling under a lot of pressure.



The importance of having a fund that enabled time to demonstrate care (for self and other) when the social issues that many of these professionals are dealing with have been particularly acute should be central to the 'impact narrative' of the programme. This sense of mutual care was also reported as essential to the success of the partnership between the funders.



**Trust** was a core component of the success of the programme for the participating organisations, between the funded organisations and the funders, and between the funders themselves. **Building trust** requires time for understanding each other's context and objectives, recognising shared objectives, planning, understanding who is responsible for what, and regular opportunities for critical review. All of this takes time, which must also be resourced realistically.



In some cases, projects reported that budgets did not cover the time required for all this but that it was committed anyway to make the projects a success. For the funders, the time required could also be a challenge, but was likely critical to establishing trust, understanding roles and responsibilities, and managing expectations. This should be considered at all levels in advance for future iterations of the programme.

Grassroots community arts organisations liked being left to 'get on with it', building a project that met the needs of partners, participants, and communities. This must be enabled alongside the needs of funders to promote and profile the work. Unrealistic expectations on 'product' from funders may undermine the trust that was reported as essential to programme success. Promotion and advocacy in the future should consider this, building in 'promotional' activity to projects from the planning stage (e.g., articles, blogs, podcasts, local media), that can then be amplified by funders.



## What is Cultural Bridge?

Cultural Bridge is based on bilateral artistic partnerships between the UK and Germany through the collaboration between Arts Council England, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, British Council, Creative Scotland, Fonds Soziokultur, Goethe-Institut London and Wales Arts International / Arts Council of Wales.

The programme aims to act as a platform of artistic exchange, enabling others to discuss social issues, strengthen the exchange between the UK and Germany and foster collaboration and cultural democracy. This was considered especially important in a post-Brexit landscape and as the UK is no longer eligible for Creative Europe and Erasmus funding.

The 2021-22 pilot programme (December 2021 to October 2022) invited organisations to apply who embody cultural democracy through:

- Placing communities at the heart of their work
- Supporting people from across their communities to develop their creativity and discover their individual voices
- Empowering them to work together to shape local place, shared identity, and collective agency
- Exploring new ways of connecting arts and society, particularly through fostering co-creation between communities, artists, and other partners
- All of the projects funded aligned with one or more of the strategic themes identified for the programme:
- Re-invigorating post-industrial places/communities
- Places with fewer opportunities to engage
- Places and communities transformed by grass-roots activism
- Redefining the use of public space

## Who took part?

**Enter** - Kulturvilla Nellie and Creative Black Country worked with four female photographers, Henriette Simons and Laura Ablancourt-Maynard (Germany) and Deborah Stone and Kom Achall (UK) who looked at themes of identity, belonging and place and developed a body of work called ENTER. The photographers visited the cities of both organisations and shared ideas, and experiences and developed a work-in-progress exhibition in both cities.

**Staging the Hidden Words** - Focusing on addiction, recovery and the issues arising, Writing on the Wall (Liverpool) and Sommerblut Kulturfestival (Cologne) worked with communities in both Liverpool and Germany, supporting them to come together, write and create new work. Culminating in two digital installations at the end of April 2022. Both cities collaboratively designed interactive work that looks at how our stories, words and experiences impact the spaces around us. The pieces challenged ideas around addiction and how those experiences and stories shape us and our private and public spaces.

**Bridgit: Building better bridges** - By meeting regularly online and then in person, Bridgit focused on a shared intention of strengthening communities and getting to know each other to form a deeper bond. In the weekly meetings, the team members from Fine Arts Institute Leipzig (FAIL), Folkestone Fringe and Alchemy Film & Arts, Hawick, learned about their different structures, experiences, and expertise, histories, the political and social circumstances they are working in, and shared failures and successes.

**Northsea Neighbours** - Northsea Neighbours marked the start of a new partnership between Das Letzte Kleinod (The Last Treasure), an international site-specific ensemble based in Schiffdorf, and Shetland Arts, a multi-artform, multi-venue development agency based in one of the UK's most remote communities. Both organisations have a strong strand of work with young people and through Cultural Bridge they were



able to come together to explore practice, exchange ideas and develop new ways of working across a series of online meet-ups and in-person exchanges.

**Rewired** - Both S27 (Berlin) and Govanhill Baths (Glasgow) work for a circular economy, using creative workshops and programmes for the wellbeing of the diverse communities in which they operate and are committed to artistic-activist experiments in their cities. At the centre of their exchange was making music with creative and sustainable approaches. They were jamming, conducting and improvising, while crafting, upcycling and repairing. They were collectively thinking about a better future with a mixture of play, innovation and discipline.

**Ode to Earth** - A collaboration between Die Villa, Leipzig (Germany), Beyond Skin and DU Dance, Belfast (Northern Ireland), Ode to Earth connected 12 young people from Northern Ireland and Germany in a cultural exchange and environmental awareness campaign. Participants brought their skills (music, dance, and activism) to design and create a multi-disciplinary campaign bringing awareness to the climate crisis, its impacts in their local and global communities, and calling their communities to action.

**Mind the Gap** - Mind the Gap was a partnership between the University of Music Lübeck and Emanuel Geibel-Schule and Valleys Kids, Penygraig, Wales. The project gathered emerging artists to work together across a hybrid project to explore their practice, challenge the 'status quo' of delivery and look at how they work within their settings and disciplines - theatre and music. Across both the German and Welsh organisations, the sharing of practice and methodologies that they were exploring and exchanging was heavily informed by the young people they work with.



<b>Project</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Artforms and themes</b>	<b>Key take-aways from the project</b>
Enter	Kulturvilla Nellie, Lörrach, Baden-Württemberg + Creative Black Country, West Bromwich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photography</li> <li>• Identity, place, young people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the cultural sector in another country/context</li> <li>• Strong and lasting connections between the practitioners in each country</li> </ul>
Staging the Hidden Words	Sommerblut Kulturfestival, Cologne + Writing on the Wall, Liverpool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing</li> <li>• Addiction, departure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the term 'recovery' instead of addiction as a humanising factor</li> <li>• Language difference didn't extent to experiential differences between participants in UK and Germany - common ground was established in approach and experience</li> </ul>
Bridgit - Building better bridges	Institute Leipzig (FAIL), Leipzig + Folkestone Fringe, Kent and Alchemy Film & Arts, Hawick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversation, play, exploration</li> <li>• Borders (institutional, physical, psychological)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deeply understanding each other's context through a slow and considered pace of sharing and building relationships</li> <li>• Making time and space to explore ideas in an open way, being vulnerable together</li> </ul>
Northsea Neighbours	Das Letzte Kleinod, Schiffdorf, Niedersachsen + Shetland Arts, Shetland Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theatre, performance</li> <li>• Young people, sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep relationship building and exchange of practice</li> <li>• Young people discovering shared passions and concerns in relation to climate and environment</li> </ul>
Rewired	S27, Berlin + Govanhill Baths, Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music, sound, performance</li> <li>• Sustainability, circular economy, intercultural dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked from the creative process 'outwards' moving on to issues of spatial justice once relationships had been built through shared practice</li> </ul>
Ode to Earth	Die Villa, Leipzig + Beyond Skin and DU Dance, Belfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music, dance, multi-artform</li> <li>• Youth activism, environment, common humanity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New approaches to youth work from different disciplines</li> <li>• Empowering young people to lead complex and creative conversations on the climate and environmentalism</li> </ul>
Mind the Gap	University of Music Lübeck and Emanuel Geibel-Schule + Valleys Kids, Penygraig, Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music, theatre, multi-artform</li> <li>• Youth engagement, exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a methodology together, bespoke to each other's contexts but drawing on each's experiences and artistic backgrounds (drama and classical music)</li> </ul>

## What is new or different about the programme?

The 'pilot' nature of the programme is threefold:

1. This is the first time that this diverse range of funding partners have collaborated on a single fund
2. The focus on socially engaged arts practice and grassroots arts organisations is relatively rare in international exchange programmes which are often more performance focused
3. The funding of international peer-support, experimentation, and risk-taking, with open-ended outcomes is also relatively rare

## What did the programme achieve?


The programme intentionally did not set prescriptive impacts or outcomes for projects to achieve, instead, funded organisations had to demonstrate how their work aligned with the following parameters:

- Re-invigorating post-industrial places and communities
- Creating more opportunities to engage
- Places and communities transformed by grass-roots activism
- Redefining the use of public space

These 'parameters' are quite place-focused and respond to complex and overlapping social forces. The programme did not seek to achieve 'transformational change' within these parameters, but it was assumed there was value in supporting organisations and artists focused on these concerns.

The topics therefore featured as a focus of exchange activity, although projects reported that, given the timeframe, the costs of exchange activity and artists fees, and the complexity of these challenges, the Cultural Bridge programme provided a platform for discussion and the opportunity to share and develop socially engaged practice relating to these themes rather than measurable change against them.

In this respect, the funded projects agreed that the programme was primarily concerned with artist development and exchange, while there may be spill over and public benefits through participation and engagement of audiences.



*We have artists whose practice is community engagement and that we are allowing that to come together properly, and to talk about artistic development in that context is actually talking about community development at the same time or co creation at the same time.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

It feels more like how you would manage a commission for an art project, rather than, you know, a social engineering or community outcome project. And that's, that's great. And that's the way it should be, you know, because I think that the trust that we're giving to the artists that are part of it, in forming projects, which they are confident will have an impact, but still allowing them through their artistic process to either find that or, or to make it as diffuse or specific as they choose. I think that's vital for this project, to continue in the way that it is without those big goals of social transformation. (Project lead organisation)

In discussion with each of the funders and the funded organisations early in the evaluation, we co-designed some high-level outcomes that appeared common across the programme by which to frame the evaluation.



7 projects were funded including 16 organisation (7 in Germany and 9 in the UK)

187 total community participants - an average of 27 per project

70 total artists and practitioners - an average of 10 per project

The average spend on artists per project was £5,000

Projects made on average 4 new organisational contacts each

Around 750 people were engaged as audiences across the programme

9

out of 10

Cultural Bridge enabled us to make meaningful connections to organisations we would not have otherwise

9

out of 10

We better understand the practice and context of the work of colleagues in UK/Germany as a result of the project

Cultural Bridge enabled us to make meaningful connections to artists and practitioners we would not have otherwise

8

out of 10

Cultural Bridge enabled us to develop our practice in ways that we would not have otherwise

9

out of 10



## Outcomes for the organisations and artists



Improved understanding of another cultural context



Stronger bilateral working relationships



Opportunities to continue or grow partnerships are established



Improved models of practice are established

This was reported across all projects. Most, although not all, projects were able to complete an in-person exchange, in many cases preceded by online discussions and 'getting to know each other' sessions. The exchanges were particularly used for artists to discuss the context of their work and how their practice was being used to meet the needs of their communities. These relatively 'open and exploratory' sessions were about sharing the information necessary to understand the communities the organisations were working in.

*We learned how to work effectively with partners overseas using both digital and live activities. It's extended our knowledge and skills both on working internationally and online*

*(Project lead organisation)*



All projects reported strong working relationships between themselves and their exchange partners. Six of seven projects indicated that they wanted to continue the partnership beyond the project period, in some cases through applying for further funding from Year 2. In other cases, projects indicated that they would maintain the relationship with their exchange partner, but not hurry into another funded project, instead keeping in touch and exploring what other opportunities may appear over time.

Most projects were able to describe ways in which their models of practice had developed in the programme. The main elements of this are presented in the following section, but all projects indicated that the collaboration with organisations in a different country, alongside the resources to commit time to reflection, enabled them to develop their practice in a way that would not have happened otherwise.



*There is no substitute to meeting people in person. [It was] fantastic to see how other organisations work. It allowed me to reassess my own practice and see different ways of operating and meeting challenges*

*(Project lead organisation)*

## Outcomes for communities and participants



Deeper understanding of another culture



Deeper understanding of social issues



New ideas and intentions to build from their experiences

Projects varied in the extent to which they tracked and reported participant and audience responses to the work. 'Enter' and 'Staging the Hidden Words' both had public exhibitions of work produced in projects and indicated this was an important way to extend the conversations that had taken place between the practitioners and participants to broader publics. 'Northsea Neighbours' and 'Ode to Earth' both engaged with young people as participants and described several ways that they reported benefits:

*New sights, sounds, new tastes and food, working in the heat of a heat wave, traveling as part of a group and needing to accommodate others who moved faster or slower than themselves, who had a different framework for understanding or different reference points. The dancers needed to and were excited to work with musicians and community activists.*

*(Project lead organisation)*



As discussed above, where projects did not focus on engaging participants or public audiences it is likely that the main benefits and impacts on communities came from the opportunity for the artists and organisations to reflect on and develop their practice. This could be explored further in future evaluation, alongside any longer-term benefits from taking part observed for community participants in Year 1 (e.g., how they may have developed ideas or relationships further since taking part).

*Through participant surveys, we have gathered that the project did well to facilitate cultural exchange, connection to the environment, deeper understanding of climate change and its impacts. Through our two in-person exchanges, participants learned a lot about each other and their cultures. Additionally, participants reported they were able to improve their skills in cultural literacy, activism, creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem solving. The project gave each cohort of participants the opportunity to play to their existing strengths (music, dance, and activism) while developing new ones. Additionally, for many of our Northern Irish youth, the trip to Germany was a novel experience.*

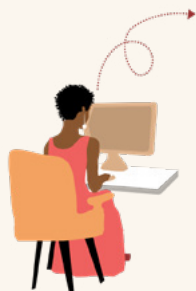
*(Project lead organisation)*



## Outcomes for the funders



Have established a successful UK-Germany funding model



Improved knowledge of each other's operational contexts and aims



Improved understanding of and commitment to more participatory funding approaches

Early in the collaboration process, the funders recognised an opportunity for 'economies of scale'. That there are many shared aims across all the funders, many of whom had worked together previously in a one-to-one relationship, and that collaborating in this way meant there could potentially be fewer individual relationships to manage, strategic convergence, and a broader representation of knowledge across the group.

Many of the funders have been dealing with ongoing crises related to Covid-19 and other political pressures. Despite this, funders described how impressed they were with the ease with which this programme has functioned, and how valuable the group has been as a source of peer support across the ongoing stresses and strains they have been dealing with outside of the programme. In this sense the funding 'stakeholder' group has become a community of practice in its own right.

Funders particularly highlighted how the programme allowed for deeper understanding of the funding models that were developing in response to Brexit, and in the context of ongoing political change in the UK and Germany, and at the UK nation and German state levels.

*Really, due to Brexit, I was thinking, 'Oh, we are losing connection'. And so there will be an image about Great Britain, which in the media, which is more and more conservative. 'Oh, god, what's going on? Nobody wants to be European anymore', and blah, blah, blah. That's kind of an image. And it was. But it's so good to meet and have a signal. We can stay connected. And there are people we can communicate with. It's been a very good experience. Kind of reminder, never trust any public media image of the country or things like that.*

*(Funder)*



Stakeholders described the value of having a much deeper understanding of each other's international programmes, plans and strategies. This related to understanding how each other operate and how this could be replicated in their own organisations, as well as how they could align and match plans across different stakeholders' programmes outside of cultural bridge specifically.

For the UK nations this felt like a logical extension from the four-nations working group that had been established in response to Brexit, although all partners were still adapting their strategies and practices in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Cultural Bridge provided another opportunity to share learning in this regard with organisations able to share their experiences and responses to the pandemic.

Some funders indicated that they were not so familiar with socially engaged practice and therefore found it difficult to discuss the programme in terms of what was actually happening in the projects and 'on the ground'. Likewise, to 'quality assure' the projects, some indicated that they felt too distant to say whether they were 'high quality' and 'achieving impact'.

This is linked to a point about the closeness of the funders to the projects more generally. Projects indicated that they really appreciated the trust they had from the funders and how they were initially concerned that there may be a lot of different agendas to answer to. They felt trusted to experiment, take risks, and fail, and liked how the programme was not particularly focused on 'showy outputs'. This may be at odds with some reports from the funders that they felt the projects were a bit distant and opaque, and that they were not necessarily providing much 'promotional content'.

A final consideration here, that one funder suggested, is that it could be the communities themselves who provide feedback on the quality of the projects, and that it was difficult in Year 1 to really understand what the communities and audiences were making of what projects were doing or producing. This is a valid point but should be considered alongside the idea that projects are not necessarily 'producing' anything, but are developing ideas, approaches, and processes.

It could be argued that the programme worked because there was one Programme Manager acting on behalf of the funders (based at Arts Council England). Having seven funders also necessitates a more 'arm's length' relationship than the funders may be used to with projects or organisations they fund individually. This also meant the funded organisations felt they had autonomy and trust, an essential ingredient to successful collaboration between the funded organisations, who felt they held a trusted space to take risks, be reflective, and be process focused.

One possible solution to this tension is to provide more (ideally subsidised) opportunities for all stakeholders (i.e., funders and projects) to come together and discuss/exchange what the programme is doing, maybe once in Germany and once in the UK over the programme period. Another option suggested is to get projects to present their work to the monthly stakeholder meetings, although this would need to be designed carefully to not undermine the trusting 'arm's length' approach described as enabling success in Year 1.



Late capitalism // economic  
nationalism // de-globalisation  
// climate breakdown

Understanding bridge

Brexit // Covid - 19 //  
Cost of living crisis

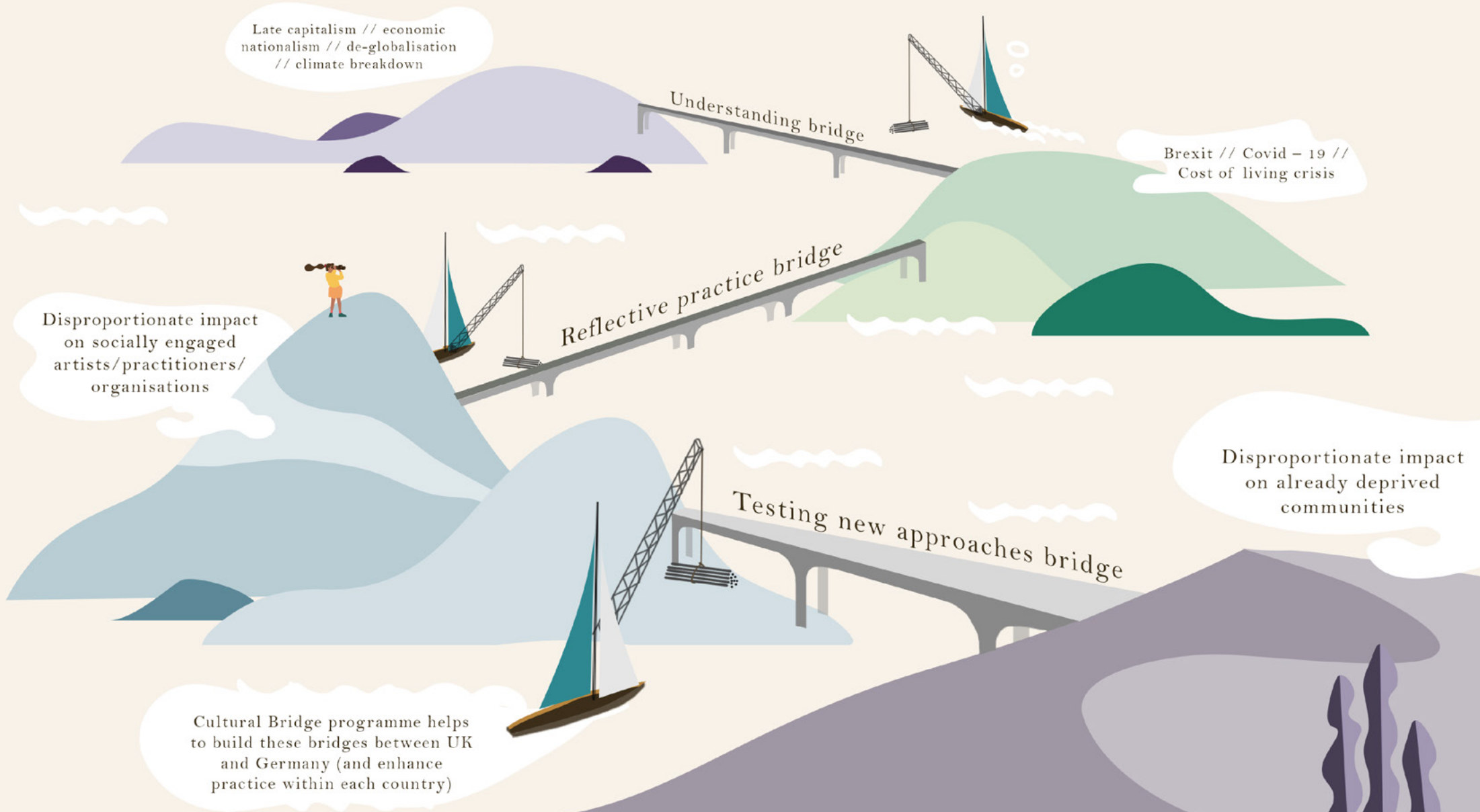
Disproportionate impact  
on socially engaged  
artists/practitioners/  
organisations

Reflective practice bridge

Disproportionate impact  
on already deprived  
communities

Testing new approaches bridge

Cultural Bridge programme helps  
to build these bridges between UK  
and Germany (and enhance  
practice within each country)





## How were the outcomes achieved?

The importance of trust was highlighted across the programme:

- Between organisations, through being vulnerable with each other and being open about failure and experimentation
- Between the funders by recognising the limits of their knowledge and being open to learning from each other
- Between the funders and the funded organisations, that the fund is there to support experimentation and risk-taking and that anticipated impacts are realistic relative to the funding available

*The general aim of the programme has always felt amorphous, and I like that a great deal. It felt that the funders were trusting participants to find the nature of the project as well as the means, and their own goals.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

Some projects reported that initial interactions were open and (intentionally) playful, recognising this could allow a space for practice development and organisations to think differently and not have to 'force another project' on participants or to create 'content' for an international exchange programme.

*Just this idea that we treated ourselves how we would treat our communities, you know, so the kind of care and attention that go into a sort of community setting to deliver a project, you know, is usually already there's relationships and trust that exists for that for us to work in the way that we do. But what we did was to turn that in on ourselves and bring that way of working to our 'leadership', if you know what I mean? So, whilst there were team members in all of those meetings, it just felt like we were giving ourselves care, and sort of love, which I know sounds kind of a bit hippy-dippy. You know, we're all always jumping from one project to the next and this felt like we had room to slow down and think together.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

The opportunity to not be so outputs or outcomes focused enabled artists and organisations to feel less pressure and led them to new insights and understanding of themselves and each other as a result. The 'pilot' aspect felt like **projects had permission to experiment and fail**. It was also felt that this was relatively unique and should be maintained beyond a 'pilot' year.

*The significance of a project like this is just to breathe in space and, and that in order to have kind of trusting and respectful breathing space you need to have, you need to start with care, you need to start with relational interactions, which is what we've done through play and conversation and opening things up.*

*(Project lead organisation)*



*It was important to recognise that what we do is good enough - this is a space to share and reflect, not to change or improve, particularly within the constraints of a budget like this.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

Building on the centrality of play and experimentation, one project described how they worked creatively through language barriers using non-verbal approaches.



*We placed more of an emphasis on how can we use perhaps mime? How can we use sound? How can we use our bodies in a way to be able to communicate and have a conversation. And we were in a setting where people actually weren't able to communicate through language, but we were having a conversation through the creativity and through the art forms. And actually, that was a really kind of foundation for us to be able to build from there to be able to stop having language central to the facilitation, but actually, it felt like a natural progression.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

Projects suggested that practice like this enables activity to be more about shared human identity, focusing on communicating emotions, and enables people to connect more easily because there are not mutual expectations to be able to express yourself through language. This then extends to the communication about the social topics that the projects are also concerned with – it's not (just) about being able to articulate and understand these complexities in a different cultural context, it's about knowing what they feel like, and the extent to which this is shared. This was described in terms of content, as well as approach.

*It is difficult to experience each other's culture cognitively, and far more beneficial for the work and the growth of individuals and organisations to see, smell, taste, feel the differences ....and similarities.*  
*(Project lead organisation)*

A sense of identity was definitely a theme. Kind of who we are kind of how we work in areas of deprivation, how we kind of engaged through the arts in different disciplines in different ways. And I think the emerging artists have really, really benefited from the project. And the opportunities that have come from engaging in the project have been brilliant. It's been a really great opportunity for the emerging artists on both fronts to really identify where their avenue is moving forward, and a sense of kind of career path. And, and just having that opportunity to have conversations, have a chat, not forced, but the process has really enabled kind of the emerging artists in a peer-to-peer way to support one another, and to really build that network. (Project lead organisation)

All projects described how they learned about new artforms and sectors and enjoyed sharing the approaches they take to different groups and contexts with their exchange partners. Linked to this was a deeper understanding of planning tools and practice design (e.g., how to facilitate workshops with groups with different needs and experiences, new engagement techniques). Understanding other organisations' approaches to project planning was cited several times as a useful take-away from the exchanges.

*We focused on recovery as opposed to addiction and discussed how we are all in recovery from something at some point in our lives. This allowed the group to feel their experiences were humanized, improving their self-confidence, wellbeing, and self-worth. The sessions also explored ideas around how we display our private lives vs our personal ones, and how often we inhabit the spaces in between; between addiction and recovery, between private and public and the journey between our old selves and the new ones we wish to become.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

*As the pilot neared its end, we had established boundaries and understanding of different teams' capacities; we wouldn't proceed again without properly discussing each organisation's funding situation and what we feel comfortable with re time commitment - this is to avoid structural failures rather than embracing/romanticizing failure as an outcome.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

*Explaining our theory of change / community engagement strategies to artworkers who 'get it' on the one hand and don't necessarily specialise in experimental film on the other - we were productively compelled to question ways in which our own practice and expertise could expand into other disciplines.*

*(Project lead organisation)*



While in-person working and exchange was described as essential for fuller contextual learning to take place, online meeting has been normalised since the pandemic which is a great opportunity for remote exchange. Projects appreciated that rapport could be built before in-person exchange but suggested there is scope to provide further guidance and ideas for how to enable natural and enjoyable connecting in the online space, which could be the topic of programme-level sharing in the future.





## How did the co-funding work?

All the funding partners were considered as open and flexible, happy to acknowledge that this was a pilot, and a lot of the work was untested. This flexibility also created equity across the group. There wasn't one dominant voice or dominating agenda, which also meant funding stakeholders felt able to be open and honest about ideas and concerns.

*It's great to have such a variety of funders. So you get a really different way, a different constituency of people engaging with your project in a whole kind of different knowledge of the cultural landscape than you get if you just go national cultural agency to national cultural agency, where, with the best will in the world, you're always going to be more exclusive than if you take a different approach that actively seeks to engage grassroots organisations.*

*(Funder)*



*I definitely felt that I was doing multiple forms and having to translate each document to be able to fit the different portals have the different kinds of setups, which creates time constraints, and I am a freelancer. So a lot of that time is just gifted time, that was never kind of planned into the original grant. So it's not it's not a massive challenge on my front. But those are the things that I think could really be improved, I almost feel like there needs to be a portal that is unanimous for the UK and Germany full stop that would kind of take away that element of needing to complete multiples.*

*(Project lead organisation)*

The Programme Manager (hosted by Arts Council England) was described several times as a core aspect of the programme's success. This neutral project lead organisation role was very important, and with a well-informed person with appropriate seniority at the helm, it fostered trust and ensured tasks were being followed up as needed.

It was apparent that four nations funders were closer to the projects in their nations. There is an opportunity to share more information about the projects more regularly across the funders, and for further partnerships to be developed by projects across the four UK nations, and/or between German states.

Linked to this it was also observed that there are expectations for the in-nation projects to be responsive to the strategic priorities of their national funders. The communication of the purpose and impact of the programme therefore needs to reflect bilateral, UK, German, and nation-level/state-level interests, which is understandably complicated. It was suggested by some projects that the reporting needs could be streamlined to ensure there was not 'doubling up' between the needs of the Cultural Bridge programme and the needs of individual funders.

This was linked to a related point that the resource implications for projects are different for organisations who have core funding and those that don't. Those relying solely on project funding have less flexibility in terms of time that can be committed. Likewise, lots of people working on the projects are freelance, so can end up working at a reduced rate or for free when there are unexpected demands made (whether by funders or project partners).

As discussed above, a tension was identified between the usual approach of funders to highlight and profile projects, and the needs of Cultural Bridge projects to provide resource for space, time, and exchange of ideas and practice between artists and grassroots organisations. One potential solution that was suggested is that these exchanges themselves could provide more 'content' to be shared by the funders in the UK and Germany in the form of blogs, short videos, podcasts, reflective diaries etc. Although this expectation should be made clear from the beginning and planned-in to project activities.

*I think, yeah, it's the tension there between saying, 'Okay, we trust you, we're not going to be overlooking, we're going to let you do what you want to do creatively, the important relationship is between the two sets of communities, and we trust you, and here's the grant and get on with it'. The tension is between enabling that but also saying, we are really interested, we really want to, you know, we really want to make as much of a fuss about what you do as possible. And I think that is a tricky one. Because when it comes to you know, probably most of our comms teams is funding institutions, it's like, well, yes. 'Can we send a minister down there? Or can we get a nice picture? Or is there some kind of interesting event that we can go to?' And no, there probably isn't because it's a real slow burn here. We are having a cup of tea in somebody's room kind of experience. And, and I think it's about, you know, as always with an awful lot of arts projects, more generally, just learning to tell the story better, in terms of how you talk about the impacts.*

*(Funder)*



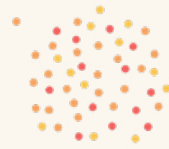
## What are the key lessons for Year 2 and beyond?

When trying to respond to complex social issues and challenges, and the needs of deprived populations, organisations and artists often just need space to breathe, talk and think together. Collective reflection was at the core of successful projects. However, the time this might take was not always factored in or budgeted for. Reflection as an activity therefore needs to be considered as such - not just as something natural or organic that will take place in the exchange that doesn't require explicit budget attached.

A key finding was that the programme enabled organisations and artists to slow down and not just feel they had to constantly deliver. The space created in the funding stakeholder group for discussion and co-reflection was also described as extremely valuable. The challenge for Year 2 and beyond is how to build from the momentum of Year 1, but with realistic expectations on which time spent together in the future is 'essential' and which is 'nice to have'. Making the most of established relationships and providing opportunities for further collective reflection, but not feeling that everyone has to be involved in all opportunities.

Time is required upfront to enable relationship building and trust - particularly if the organisations and artists are expected to be vulnerable together. While planning and structured activities can be important, these won't be most effective until the partners know each other, it's important not to move too quickly into a 'delivery' phase.

It should be recognised and discussed on all sides that these kinds of experimental projects are less output-focused than some more traditional cultural relations projects. Expectations relating to marketing



and promotion should therefore be set accordingly. Projects need to feel they are trusted to take risks and create space for learning, which may also mean that plans are adapted and changed, or things do not work out as expected.

Covid adaptations created quite a lot of disruption and extended timelines in almost all cases. However, this also created more time for conversations and mutual plans to emerge, increasing the impact of some projects through greater thoughtfulness than a shorter timeframe would have allowed for. It is important that adequate lead-in and orientation time is built-in to projects for exchanges to have the strongest impacts.



Hybrid models to exchange were described as most effective, but these need to be planned carefully (i.e., not so responsive to covid) and facilitation/chairing should be rotated or shared to ensure equitable power relations between partners.

Projects suggested that they would like to work collectively on a practice sharing publication, multimedia output, or conference, to bring together emerging practice and learning from across projects. Organisations would also like more opportunities to mix with other funded organisations across the UK and in Germany. There is potential for conferences at different points in the process, which could also support (active) evaluation. This should either be encouraged to be resourced in budgets or 'topped up' by the funding stakeholder groups for those wishing to participate if possible.



The pilot is as much about UK-Germany relations as it is about how the funders can apply learning from the programme to other aspects of domestic and international strategies, including between the four UK nations. It was suggested by funders and projects that supporting socially engaged arts practice as a way to deal with ever



increasing global problems (i.e., 'think global, act local') could be further embedded in international strategies across most of the participating funders.

One option here is to encourage more international collaboration in large-scale domestic grassroots programmes (e.g., Creative People and Places, Culture Collectives etc.), using the learning from the Cultural Bridge programme to help scope the potential value and impact of further international exchanges between grassroots organisations and artists beyond just the UK and Germany.

*I think it is the right solution for now, because in a world impacted by Brexit and COVID, we do need to look to our near neighbours, you know, with the climate crisis being the next thing that we all have to look at tackling, it makes much more sense to me to be proactively trying to build relationships within Europe than it does to be, you know, starting to look again further afield. And I think it is interesting to move beyond the easier option of just talking to, you know, the Ministry of Culture and to try to build partnerships with different perspectives, who, you know, who are going to come to the table with a bit of co-investment but are also going to come with a whole different set of ideas and relationships.  
(Funder)*



## How was the evaluation done?

The evaluation was commissioned in Spring 2022 when projects were all at different stages of development, some had completed activities and others had experienced significant delays to their plans.

We began the evaluation by speaking to each of the projects and the funding partners to understand what they were hoping to achieve from their involvement in the programme. This enabled us to design a draft [evaluation framework](#) (including inputs, outputs, outcomes, indicators and methods) which we then sense-checked with the funding stakeholders and projects.

The methods we outlined in the framework were mainly qualitative, enabling several opportunities for the projects and funders to share their perspectives and experiences. These included:

- Evaluation framework review session with the projects
- Process review session with the projects (exploring how the grant management was working for them)
- Emerging model of practice session with projects (exploring how the programme was affecting their ways of working and what the key learning was)
- Impact review session with the funders

While not all funders or projects were able to attend every scheduled session, they were all consulted across these themes throughout the evaluation period.

Alongside these qualitative approaches we designed a short proforma for projects to report the project outputs (i.e., numbers of participants, audiences, professionals supported etc) and 'scaled' questions asking about the value of the experience. In light of the open-ended and experimental nature of the programme we tried to keep this as short as possible.

The proforma and the transcripts of the qualitative sessions were thematically analysed to identify the key impacts and mechanisms by which the impacts were achieved reported here.

Looking ahead we would recommend the following to enhance the role and value of evaluation in the programme:

- Share anticipated evaluation activity with projects in the grant offer letter to manage expectations, ensure buy-in, and participation.
- Set up 'evaluation moments' alongside any planned bringing together of projects either online or offline (projects valued the opportunity to share their learning with each other, not just with their exchange partners).
- Resource the evaluation adequately to ensure that more one to one and individual support can be offered to projects from the beginning and throughout the programme period to improve the quality of data being collected, shared and analysed and ensure that learning is being fed-back into project development throughout.



**tialt**  
there is an alternative