Table of Contents

Exploring Cross-Border Cultural Policy in Practice, Special Issue Introduction
VICTORIA DURRER, JORDANA CORRIGAN, RONALDO MUNCK
p. 2-22

The Irish Cultural Borderscape
CATHAL MCCALL
p. 23-33

Reflections on the Context and Logistics of Cross-Border Partnerships
ANTHONY SOARES
p. 34-42

Working with the Presence of a Border: An Artist’s Perspective
DYLAN QUINN
p. 43-53

Cultural Gateways: The Role of Museums in Cross-Border Relations
GINA O’KELLY
p. 54-65

The Meaning and Importance of Working Cross-Border: A Local Authority Perspective
CATRIONA O’REILLY
p. 66-81

International perspectives on Cross-Border working
RICHARD WAKELY
p. 82-93
Exploring Cross-Border Cultural Policy in Practice, Special Issue Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER, JORDANA CORRIGAN, RONALDO MUNCK

Summary:

This article is an introduction to the Special Issue: Exploring Cross-Border Cultural Policy in Practice. It outlines the importance of considering cultural policy on the island of Ireland in a cross-border context and reflects on learning gained from an event on the subject co-organised by Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland, the Social Innovation Network and Dublin City University at The Garage Theatre in Monaghan in November 2018.

Key words: Cultural Policy; Republic of Ireland; Northern Ireland; Brexit; European Union

Cultural Policy in a Cross-Border Context

In recent years, attention has been paid to the specific role that cultural forces may play in building international relations and in reconciling societal conflict across political and territorial borders (Council of the EU, 2019a, 2019b; British Council and Goethe-Institut, 2018; Figueira, 2017). A range of supranational unions focus on the role of cultural traditions as well as commercial and non-commercial arts in facilitating economic and social integration, diplomacy and cooperation in addition to division and the assertion of political authority and competition within and among global regions and national territories (eg. Durrer and Henze, 2019 forthcoming; Council of the EU, 2019a, 2019b; Hayward, 2018; The African Union Commission, 2018; Dragičević Šešić, 2017; The ASEAN Secretariat, 2016; Teague and Henderson, 2006; Gualini, 2003; Keating, 2000; Nisbett, 2015).
This attention is also evident at local level. This level encompasses both formal and informal working practices and networking activities of local governments in inter-regional partnerships as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, educational, health and social institutes, and sports, heritage, arts and voluntary bodies and individuals (Durrer and Henze, 2019, forthcoming; Kuznetsov, 2014; McCall, 2014; Rösler, 2015; Rowntree et al, 2010; Keating, 2000). Importantly, such actions involve the traversing and negotiation of territorial, administrative, and ideological ‘borders’ that play out through everyday personal, social and professional exchanges (Durrer and Henze, 2019 forthcoming; McCall, 2014; Hayward 2007; Keating, 2000).

In this context, the ongoing negotiations regarding the impending process for how the United Kingdom (UK) will make its leave of the project of the European Union (EU), commonly referred to as Brexit, has brought to light the importance of the border on the island of Ireland (Hayward, 2018; Hayward, 2007). The founding of the EU was based on the “functionalist premise that cooperation across [territorial] national borders” provides an “optimal response to shared problems” (Hayward, 2018, p. 240; see also Haas, 1968; Hodges, 1972). More recent populist viewpoints have articulated borders as “lines of defence and distinction between what ‘belongs’ and what is ‘foreign’” (Hayward, 2018, p. 240). As demonstrated in the debates on Brexit, the Irish border complicates this conceptualisation. The only location at which the UK shares a land border with an European country, it is an international boundary, but also a ‘border region’ (McCall, 2011), argued to be simultaneously invisible, open, lived and contested due to the island’s long and complicated socio-cultural and political history (Hayward, 2018; Aughey and Gormley-Heenan, 2011). As Hayward (2018) explains, the Irish border exemplifies the conjoined nature of the symbolic, discursive and identity aspects of borders with their ‘hard’, functional aspects (p. 250; see also O’Dowd, 2002; McCall, 2011).
Cross-border public and organisational cultural policies is where all of these elements to which Hayward refers come together (see Hayward, 2004; Cunningham, 2001 on the island of Ireland; also Miller & Yudice, 2002; Dewey, 2008; Perrin, 2010). Cultural policy is often articulated as what governments choose to do (or not do) in relation to culture (Mulcahy, 2006), but it is far more complex than that. From our perspective, it involves policies initiated by both state and non-state bodies regarding symbolic expressions and signifying practices (Hall, 1997), such as

the fine and performing arts, voluntary, amateur and community arts, arts and education, creative expression, cultural and creative industry development and issues related to cultural identity and heritage (Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017, p. 189).

It is created by practitioners (artists, arts and cultural managers), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the community and voluntary sector, and political actors including public administrators, civil servants, and politicians (Schuster, 2003; Paquette and Redaelli, 2015). It is both written and not written (i.e. practiced) (Bell and Oakley, 2015), and takes place in and across meso, macro, and micro levels of government, business, public administration and citizenry (Paquette and Redaelli, 2015; O’Brien and Oakley, 2017). There is growing recognition that policy is embodied, temporal, territorial, spatial and scalar (Bell and Oakley, 2015; Paasi, 2004) and thus enacted and experienced personally, socially, physically, administratively, and particularly; that is, specific to a field or professional area (Knippschild, 2011), for instance in areas of planning, health, tourism, and / or the professional visual and performing arts.

Approaching a discussion on cross-border cultural policy in practice we take the view that cross border cooperation refers to relations residing between territorial / administrative authorities, which can take place, for example, through partnerships between local governments or through collaborative
activities involving local communities, groups, and organisations in close proximity along a territorial border via European Union funded initiatives (Wassenberg and Reitel, 2015; McCall, 2011). We equally consider cross-jurisdictional cooperation in our interpretation of cross-border cultural policy; that is, exchange situated more broadly across jurisdictions, and specifically, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Such activity exists via, but is not limited to, for instance, the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) (1998) and the associated North South Ministerial Council. Such relations are dynamic, personal, social, political, and complex. As Keating (2000) explains,

Goodwill at the political level may be undermined by an absence of common working on the ground. Conversely, regional cooperation may give rise to close working relationships and common interests on the ground as a way of circumventing political restrictions from national governments (p. 9).

Considering the relationship of the Irish border to cross-border cultural policy further emphasises this complexity. According to Mercer (2006) cultural traditions and

artistic forms: novels... folk tales, poetry, ... art and museum collections, ..., musical and literary traditions, national broadcasting systems, films – have constantly affirmed and re-affirmed, produced and reproduced, the deepest and most embedded sense of the nation and the national: what is inside and what is outside, the borders (p. 1).

In an Irish context, the notion of the ‘nation’ is not necessarily agreed (Hayward, 2004). In fact, cultural forms, like those to which Mercer refers, are the means by which “contact, communication, and cooperation” (Duff, 1997, pp. 65 – 66; Barnes & Duncan, 1992, pp. 5 – 6) as well as conflict and separation are demarcated, interpreted, imagined and realised across and beyond the Irish border (McCall, 2018; Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017). This
is not necessarily a unique situation, with circumstances in the Basque in Spain and Tyrol on the borders between Italy and Austria as two examples. Yet, either as a nation-state or a cross-border or cross-jurisdictional construct, cultural policymaking on the island of Ireland involves political overtones, historical hang-overs and critical reflections on cultural identity, citizenship or territory that are tangled up with post-colonial and unionist sentiments that remain at play (Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017, p. 189).

At the same time, cross-border cultural policy making comprises well-established partnerships and links that have fostered “cultural spaces” for exploring difference and commonalities along the Irish border (McCall, 2011, p. 201) as well as notions of an “all-island arts space” (McKimm and McAndrew, 2010, p. 105). These include connections and shared projects between local authority arts offices in the border regions and the island’s two Arts Councils, the existence of commercial cultural businesses and non-profit companies that work within both jurisdictions, and a number of arts and cultural development agencies and associations that engage explicitly on an all-island basis, such as Visual Artists Ireland and the Irish Museums Association, in addition to those organisations that do so less explicitly.

These networks and practices exist not only due to the institutional frameworks set out by the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and the European Union’s PEACE and INTERREG programmes (Teague and Henderson, 2006), but also through, for example, the regular movement of artists to create and showcase their work around the island (McKimm and McAndrew, 2010; Donlon and Ruane, 2004). In other words, cross-border working in the realm of creative expressions are forms of representation that interpret, produce, reproduce, and circulate “ideas, knowledge, values and beliefs” (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013, p. 188; Hall, 1997). As a result, Irish cultural policy in an all-island context is a significant site in which to consider, herald
and question, the socio-cultural, economic, political, and administrative sustainability of not only European, but also global cohesion, particularly among post conflict societies.

As an early part of this investigation, Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland and the North South Social Innovation Network through Dublin City University collaborated to host a discussion event in November 2018. Entitled ‘Invitation to a Dialogue: Exploring Cross Border Cultural Policy in Practice’, the event involved those engaging in the amateur, voluntary, commercial and publicly-subsidised cultural sector to explore a range of questions on cross border exchange in an informal, conversational setting.

The event took place at The Garage Theatre in Monaghan which is in the Irish border region, within Ulster and the Republic of Ireland. The exploration was structured over four sessions across which a lively and in-depth discussion was facilitated. The sessions set out an understanding of what cross-border working exists in practice, what frameworks and infrastructures enable and hinder this practice, and what might exist to better support this practice.

The morning session set the scene with a welcome from Professor Daire Keogh, Deputy President of Dublin City University, and Trevor Connolly, Monaghan Town Centre Co-ordinator. Professor Cathal McCall, Queen’s University Belfast, opened by reflecting on the social and political context on culture and the Irish Border. This was followed by Dr. Anthony Soares from the Centre for Cross Border Studies who provided background on the political and practical contexts that currently exist for cross border partnership.

The second session explored the question of what exists in the border area. This session was chaired by Cathy Bennet, Public Representative of Monaghan County Council and Operations Manager of The Garage Theatre, with contributions and perspectives from panelists; Joe Lowe, Head of
Enterprise, Leitrim County Council, Co-ordinator of the Harnessing Creativity Programme; Freda Manweiler, Producer and Company Manager, Smashing Times Theatre and Film Company; Seán Love, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Fighting Words; and Dr. Briege Casey, Assistant Professor in School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University. Panelists discussed where working relations happen, how and in what conditions. They also shared thoughts on how cultural and creative practice currently takes place by way of negotiating the border.

The third session facilitated a conversation around the frameworks and infrastructures that enable and hinder this practice and was chaired by Dr. Victoria Durrer, Co-founder of Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland. From the perspectives of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively, Dick Gleeson, (former) Dublin City Council Planner and Michael Donnelly of Perspectivity explored the importance of placemaking and cultural infrastructure, both tangible in the form of buildings, and intangible through the form of social and professional networks. Together, participants discussed how institutions and those involved with infrastructure might better support the spatial challenges of creative, cultural and artistic meetings, connections, and collaborations across the island.

Chaired by Tania Banotti, Director of Creative Ireland, the final session provided space for response and future thinking. Richard Wakely, Director of Belfast International Arts Festival opened the session and detailed the festival’s reliance on cross-jurisdictional relationships. Raquel McKee posed the following questions for group discussion;

What are some of the key values shared by both jurisdictions in terms of cultural identity and cultural practice?

What is our place? What is our role in the future?
What opportunities / roadblocks do government bodies see for dialogue about putting our region on the world stage?

How do we protect spaces for [those in] the margins and bring them into the centre of policy planning?

Some of the key points / learning gained from this final discussion are summarised below. The papers in this special edition further develop some of these thoughts and ideas.

**What Exists?**

The sharing of key values by practitioners, who identify their work as cross-border, was generally acknowledged. However, the differences in operational infrastructure and institutions between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was noted. There was consensus that the value placed by Government on arts practice in Northern Ireland is different and / or perceived to be lesser to the value that Government in the Republic of Ireland is perceived to place on this practice. There was a broad sense that there is an encumbrance on resources in Northern Ireland, due in part to successive austerity measures and a lack of a sitting government since January 2017 (NICVA, 2017; Durrer et al., 2019). It was considered that this discrepancy on either side of the border is likely to be widened as a result of the process of Brexit. It was also suggested that the collaborative cross-border and cross-jurisdictional work being done on the ground must be formally captured and recognised so that it can be monitored and developed and thus its value to citizens across the island better understood.

**Frameworks and Infrastructures?**

Participants explored the existing and potential frameworks and infrastructural supports that facilitate and hinder cross-border working. They expressed a need to improve regional transportation infrastructure between Northern
Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, both north / south and east / west. Improving networks and speed of transport was felt to have the potential to increase the ease and efficiency of movement and to reduce the perception of distance and division. At the local authority level, it was suggested that there is a need to take a step away from buildings–led cultural planning, and to develop our local authorities’ understanding of cultural planning and assets outside of physical regeneration type projects.

With regard to the management of existing cultural assets The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon’s (2019) Review of Arts Centres and Venues was welcomed. Seminar participants questioned whether the consumption-value of such venues is emphasised over their value as ‘making’ spaces. It was stated that there is an apparent demand for more spaces for engaging, meeting and creating, and that there is a need to strike a balance between managing and protecting these physical assets / venues and rethinking what we see as ‘community’ venues (halls, pubs, libraries) as also being spaces for creative production.

**Future Thinking?**

Quite apparent from the final discussion was that while the challenges of working in a post-Brexit environment were acknowledged, there was a strong consensus that continued collaborative working and maintaining established relationships on the ground, and locally, will be essential to bolstering and implementing the political will in each jurisdiction, which is imperative for maintenance of all-island links. The discussions surrounding the border and the potential for divisionism were described as being more prevalent than twenty years ago. The process of Brexit was viewed as having the potential to reinforce separated cultural identities to the detriment of established relationships, thus further highlighting the importance of maintaining and developing existing Northern Ireland-Republic of Ireland collaborations and relationships.
However, it was also suggested that there is a different atmosphere in both jurisdictions, with an arguable perception that the Republic of Ireland is in a ‘better’ position. A perception was shared by those attending from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that individuals working in the arts and cultural sectors in the Republic of Ireland are operating with the support of stronger national cultural frameworks and policies and funding alignment than their colleagues in Northern Ireland. This examination prompted the question ‘do those working in the Republic of Ireland need to embrace those working in Northern Ireland?’ While this question raised much concern among those attending, it nonetheless points out that perceived divisions do exist and thus require attention. Whether or not more could be done from those working in the Republic of Ireland to assist those working in Northern Ireland was also posited. While different views on the issue were expressed, it was clear that the notion of all-island working must be addressed if we are to achieve harmonious development in Ireland.

Finally, there was a discussion as to how we create consensus on common themes and values in relation to cultural policy on the island and if so, how might we move forward. More questions than answers were raised and a need for further research was clearly established: participants wondered if there is scope for bi-lateral agreements; where opportunities to network and discuss ideas and opportunities might exist; what may be preventing cooperation across the border and can more be done; why is there not more support by the Arts Councils for cross-border work; is there a need for an All-Island Cultural Engagement Framework; and is there potential for a Cultural Heritage Alliance.
Summary of papers

The papers selected for this special issue reflect the diversity and breadth of perspectives and experience of the participants that attended the conference in Monaghan in November 2018, and more widely, those working within cultural and/or all-island policy frameworks. The papers make a significant and very timely contribution to our understanding of cross-border working and policymaking in changing political circumstances. These contributions develop some of the ideas which were initially discussed at the event in Monaghan. They begin to explore the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead, and the resources and energy that will be demanded from our key stakeholders and institutions in adapting to the changing environment as we navigate the process of Brexit in a unique social, political and spatial context. As an ever-changing situation, the pieces herein reflect hopes and concerns at a particular moment in time.

Cathal McCall discusses the Irish cultural borderscape. He describes how the EU is a producer of this borderscape, which is the epicentre for the development of cross-border cultural policy. The borderscape is stated as providing the opportunity to escape territorial conflict and advance peacebuilding with cultural differences and commonalities being explored at a local level, through a process of ‘contact, communication and cooperation on a cross-border, cross-community basis’. Where PEACE projects have funded efforts that encourage the search for commonalities and a respect for difference, the Brexit process is a destructive one which threatens the peacebuilding process and nature of the borderscape by disrupting ‘mobility, contact, communication and cooperation across the border’. McCall posits that the Brexit process reasserts the differences that the Irish borderscape has been challenging for twenty years.

In the second paper Anthony Soares describes the discrepancy between the political context within which cross-border working operates and the
practicalities of cross-border cooperation and the partnerships this entails. He describes the institutional spaces which have promoted increased and improved cooperation and cross-border working in recent years. He queries how we take cross-border working forward and who funds it in a changing socio-political context. While these considerations pose challenges, the experience to date identifies the reasons for, and opportunities to harness and develop this valuable cross-border work. Soares describes how it is more important now than ever to continue cooperation across the border given the provisions for post-Brexit north-south cooperation. As a reproduction of the thoughts he shared with us in Monaghan in November 2018, some post-script reflections by Jordana Corrigan are provided at the conclusion of his piece.

Dylan Quinn provides a unique practitioner’s perspective of working in a border region in the third paper. He describes the experience and learnings of the Here & Now project which promoted engagement in the arts by a community, and in a physical location, shaped and influenced by the history and culture of the border. Quinn describes the unique aspects of relationship-building and community engagement in a cross-border, cross-community context. He describes how unique times require unique solutions and the arts, and by extension artists, have a key role to play in giving voice to those excluded from mainstream discourse, prompting new conversations, among new communities in a creatively-engaged future. However, he outlines how this requires systemic change, specifically with regard to agency and power in policymaking in addition to long-term funding practices.

In the fourth paper Gina O’Kelly from the Irish Museums Association looks at the shared education and cultural policies among museums that have encouraged cross-border partnerships, and the role that museums have played in supporting intercultural dialogue and inclusion. The impact of new policy frameworks and EU funding programmes are also addressed. The paper concludes that despite the wealth of activity amongst museums, the wider impact of this work remains largely undocumented and arguably
undervalued. The challenges posed by Brexit are described – specifically for partnerships and networks. However the author highlights the opportunity that exists for the NI sector to approach Brexit from a position of authority, providing knowledge and expertise from which the regions can draw, taking the role of museums in supporting intercultural dialogue and inclusion from objectivity to activism.

Catriona O’Reilly reflects on her extensive professional experience of cross-border working in a local authority. She discusses the meaning and origins of cross-border working, and the importance of this work and the relationships which are formed in resourcing and nurturing the arts. O’Reilly’s contribution also includes the views of artists, senior council officials and community leaders which adds greatly to our understanding of the practicalities and challenges of working in a local context and the ways forward for ensuring a sustainable approach to arts development.

To conclude Richard Wakely provides an international perspective on cross-border working through his experience as CEO and Artistic Director of The Belfast International Arts Festival. Richard reflects on the policy frameworks which promote cross-border working at the macro level, and the projects which operate at the local level, whereby border communities consider matters of global political significance, and explore the themes of cultural diversity, tolerance and inclusivity, particularly in respect of the entire island. Richard suggests that the potential impact of Brexit on cross-border working and collaborating will be wide-ranging and concerning artist mobility, funding, government policy, and managing competition in a market with currency fluctuations. However, he posits that the most urgent issue to address is how to prevent Brexit from dismantling the complex and multi-layered notions of identity in Northern Ireland and how we articulate our common European heritage.

Conclusion
While the question of cultural difference can be an emotive one, particularly in the border area, it is clear from the contributions made that there is an overwhelming desire to protect the collaborative and cross-border work done to-date and the associated relationships from the destructive process of Brexit. There is also an understanding of the important role that culture and cultural policy can play in addressing the challenges posed by changing socio-political contexts and international relations.

While there are more questions than answers as to how that protection can be afforded, and there is a clear need for further research, there is no doubt that there is significant willingness on the part of those practitioners, academics, and policymakers engaging in and with the cultural sector to work towards protecting the significant collaborative work done, relationships established and the shared identity and respect for difference that has developed over time.

The editors wish to thank the attendees of the event in Monaghan in 2018 that shared their thoughts so generously. We are grateful to Kerry McCall Magan, Co-Founder of Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland who co-curated and organised the event. We would also like to thank the authors of the papers, which provide a range and depth of experiences and perspectives.
Introduction

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Victoria Durrer is Senior Lecturer in Arts Management and Cultural Policy at Queen’s University Belfast, UK. From January 2020, she will be an Ad Astra Fellow in the School of Art History and Cultural Policy at University College Dublin in the Republic of Ireland. She is co-founder of Brokering Intercultural Exchange, an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research network on arts and cultural management, and the all-island research network, Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland. Among publications in academic journals, she is a contributor and co-editor of the Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy and Managing Culture: Reflecting on Exchange in Global Times, forthcoming from Palgrave.

Jordana Corrigan is the co-ordinator for the North-South Social Innovation Network at Dublin City University which is dedicated to the sharing of knowledge and learning across sectors (health, education, justice, culture and the economy), and promotes cross-border engagement in the area of social innovation. She was co-editor of the publication Social Innovation in Ireland; Challenges and Prospects (2017).

Professor Ronaldo Munck is Head of Civic Engagement at DCU and a Visiting Professor of International Development at the University of Liverpool and St. Mary’s University, Nova Scotia. His publications focus on globalisation, international development and social movements. He has led research consortia around social engagement / innovation themes funded by a number of research councils and organisations, including The British Academy, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), The Nuffield Foundation, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Horizon Fund (EU), and EU Peace and Reconciliation and the HEA/Irish Aid Programme of Strategic Co-operation.
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The Irish Cultural Borderscape

CATHAL MCCALL

Summary:

This paper discusses the Irish cultural borderscape, or border region, as the epicentre for the development of cross-border cultural policy. Where PEACE projects have funded efforts that encourage the search for commonalities and a respect for difference, the paper posits that the Brexit process reasserts the differences that the Irish borderscape has been challenging for twenty years.

Key words: Brexit; Cultural Policy; Ireland; Peace; Border

Introduction

An exploration of cross-border cultural policy on the Island of Ireland could begin with a survey of cultural organisations and resources that traverse the Irish border. In this regard, John Whyte’s The Permeability of the United Kingdom-Irish Border: A Preliminary Reconnaissance (1983) remains a valuable starting point. Religious, historical, sports, arts, and music organisations and resources would loom large in such a survey. In this essay culture is broadly conceived as a space for discussion, argument and debate, through the media of cultural resources such as histories, sports, and music, and in the contexts of national identity and peacebuilding. In these contexts, the central claim of the essay is that an Irish cultural borderscape was forged across the threshold of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Moreover, the Irish cultural borderscape may be regarded as the epicentre for the development of cross-border cultural policy. However, it is also argued that this cultural borderscape was threatened by political neglect and the ‘bubbling, frothing and foaming’ of the protracted Brexit process.
Culture

‘Culture’ is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down. The sociologist Raymond Williams (1976, p. 86) suggested that it was one of the most difficult words in the English language. In cultural theory, culture is commonly understood to be a portmanteau of values and beliefs, social relations and a way of life (Highmore, 2002, p. 30). That’s a big bag. For the literary critic Terry Eagleton (2002, p. 32) the word ‘culture’ was ‘both too broad and too narrow to be greatly useful’. However, culture is omnipresent in everyday life. Therefore, the consideration of its multiple meanings remains important for advancing understanding of our lives and the world in which we live.

In the quest to grasp the meaning of a culture its substantive resources offer a good starting point. The resources of history, ethnicity and religion are significant but they are open to interpretation and are responsive to changes in the wider world. By virtue this shifting threshold culture itself may be regarded as a repository of discussion, argument and debate on these resources that can influence the manifestation of identity.

The cultural substance of national identity on which discussions, argument and debate are based includes the resources of history, ethnicity, religion, but also those of sport, language, music, art, literature, drama, film, food, and customs and rituals. So, the nation is not just imagined through the printed page as Benedict Anderson (1983) established it is also imagined on the screen, on the stage, on the canvas, on the field of play, in the public house, in the street and via social media. Therefore, culture may be regarded as a multidimensional site of daily struggle and ongoing contestation wherein the meanings of multiple resources of identity and belonging are continually negotiated through communication. In effect, culture is underpinned by communication. It is shaped by discussion, argument and debate. In the national arena important players in this communication are local, national and international politicians, journalists, academics, and cultural entrepreneurs.
Borderscapes

Borderscapes may be understood as sites displaying cultural and political complexity, contested discourses and meanings, and struggles over inclusion and exclusion, involving multiple actors (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2008, p. ix-xl). However, the borderscapes concept also resonates with the idea of borders having been reconfigured as networks that enable flows of mobility and communication. The anthropologist Chiara Brambilla (2015, p. 111-122) suggests that

‘... the borderscapes concept is mainly inscribed in the opportunity of liberating political imagination from the burden of the territorialist imperative while opening up spaces within which the organisation of new forms of the political and the social become possible’.

European Union (EU) borderscapes may be thought of as potentially liberating spaces for intercultural contact, communication and cooperation that interrogate binary distinctions between ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, and ‘include’ and ‘exclude’.

The act of crossing the border presents challenges to cultural, political and social meanings, as well as opportunities to examine alternatives. Borderscapes embody the fact that these multifarious dynamics stray beyond the borderline. Borderscapes emphasise borders as gateways, areas of opportunities, zones of contact, communication and cooperation and, if not ambivalent identities, then self-reflexive ones.

An Irish cultural borderscape began to flourish in the 1990s. The EU has been a generator of Irish borderscape development, initially through the removal of border customs posts after the introduction of the European Single Market on 31 December 1992. That development was supported by cross-border, cross-community cooperation initiatives mostly funded by the EU’s
INTERREG and PEACE programmes. The EU-wide INTERREG programmes support cross-border economic cooperation. Peacebuilding is not a programme priority, though borderscape peacebuilding across the EU may be regarded as a by-product of such cross-border cooperation. As the name suggests, the Ireland-specific EU PEACE programmes have peacebuilding as their core mission. Overall, since 1995, the INTERREG and PEACE programmes have been the main EU channel for the flow of over €2 billion into the island of Ireland resulting in more than 23,000 infrastructural, economic, environmental, educational, training, social, cultural and other projects (Pollack, 2011, p. 137-138).

Advances in the Irish Peace Process and institutionalised North-South cooperation on the island of Ireland were also intrinsic to Irish borderscape development. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement’s provision of cross-border institutions was the key infrastructural element. After the Agreement, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), one of the North South Implementation Bodies attached to the North South Ministerial Council, was given responsibility for the management of the PEACE II programme as well as INTERREG IIIA and their successors. Pat Colgan, the Chief Executive of the SEUPB, stated that 130,813 individuals had participated in PEACE II (2000-2006) sponsored cross-border activities alone. Overall, he claimed that, between 1995 and 2008, 450,000 individuals had participated in EU PEACE and INTERREG funded projects - a high level of participation from a population of approximately 2.5 million in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

The Irish cultural borderscape has provided the opportunity to escape the cage of territorial conflict in Northern Ireland and thus underpin and advance peacebuilding. In that borderscape Ulster British unionist and Irish nationalist cultural differences and commonalities have been explored at a local community level. The process has involved contact, communication and cooperation on a cross-border, cross-community basis.
The communication aspect is crucial because language does not just inform, but it may also impact upon, emotions—something that is integral to peacebuilding. The communication that thousands upon thousands of EU PEACE programme projects have generated have enabled a loosening of the shackles of binary distinctions between self and other, us and them, here and there, inside and outside, and include and exclude. Those binary distinctions had been forged by bordering from 1921. They were hardened further by decades of violent conflict after 1969, mainly in Northern Ireland but also spilling over the border on occasion.

EU PEACE programme projects have challenged stereotypes, explored diversity and commonality, and consequently, have been important peacebuilding objectives of the Irish cultural borderscape. Examining Irish histories has been one way of achieving these objectives. For example, a cross-border, cross-community project examined the meaning of 1916 for Ulster British unionists/loyalists (the Battle of the Somme during World War I) and for Irish nationalists/republicans (the Easter Rising). Out of that discussion the sacrifice of the Ulster Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers at the Somme was revealed comprehensively.

Cross-border projects for young people have been plentiful. The sociologist Dirk Schubotz (2014, pp.128-149) has argued that the future of the Irish peacebuilding process depends on young people. EU PEACE programme projects for young people have included the Cultural Pathways project that brought together young people from Protestant East Belfast and ‘Southern’ Catholic Ballybofey to play music and sport, as well as to discuss issues that interest them and visit each other’s homeplaces (McCall 2011). Another project involved 12 primary schools (500 pupils aged 9 to 12 years) from border regions in counties Louth, Cavan, Down, Armagh and Tyrone for local history, local environment, drama, sport and music activities. The project ended with an exhibition in the Market Place Theatre, Armagh City, of all work undertaken including presentations, drama, songs and stories (Burke, 2007).
The emphasis of cross-border projects overall has been on a search for commonality and the acceptance of difference, and on the promotion of diversity rather than attempting to narrow political and cultural differences. Respect for difference is a prerequisite. The anthropologist Anton Blok (2001, p. xi) has written that people need to be respected to survive emotionally, socially and even physically. Without respect, violence becomes the default position in a quest to assert cultural reputation.

For many involved in cross border, cross community encounters the Irish borderscape became synonymous with culture as a figurative site of communication and contestation wherein meanings are continually negotiated through communication rather than challenged by violence. However, sustaining and developing these physical and figurative scapes depends on favourable economic and political circumstances on both sides of the Irish border and between Britain and Ireland.

**Brexit**

After 2008, Ireland’s economic collapse and the United Kingdom’s austerity programme meant that ‘soft capital’ enterprises like sustaining the Irish cultural borderscape faced a vulnerable future. The EU’s continued commitment to the PEACE programmes alleviated economic vulnerability. However, it is debateable whether a British-Irish political commitment to the peacebuilding process generally remained steadfast in the years after the Good Friday Agreement. Degrees of complacency by British and Irish governments towards Northern Ireland and the Irish Peace process were increasingly detectable as the years went by. However, the threat to the Irish cultural borderscape posed by political neglect was as nothing compared to the political thunderbolt delivered by the United Kingdom’s Brexit referendum on 23rd June 2016. It resulted in a majority of 52 per cent in favour of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland exiting the EUii.
For leading Brexeters, like Westminster Members of Parliament Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Liam Fox, Brexit was akin to the marvellous medicine brewed by young George Kranky (Dahl, 2016, p.33). It is a brutal and bewitching smell, spicy and staggering, fierce and frenzied full of wizardry and magic. Whenever he got a whiff of it up his nose firecrackers went off in his skull and electric prickles ran down the backs of his legs. It was wonderful to stand there stirring this amazing mixture and to watch it smoking blue and bubbling and frothing and foaming as though it were alive.

In contrast, the years of Brexit ‘smoking blue and bubbling, frothing and foaming’ after the referendum created alarm and trepidation among Irish borderlanders and across the island of Ireland. Soothing words from the Brexeters in Westminster that there would be ‘no hard border’ on the island of Ireland cut little ice when the evidence from the negotiation on the UK withdrawal suggested that a ‘no deal’ Brexit would lead inevitably to that very thing. In Candide by Voltaire (1991, p.18) the protagonist complains that ‘Pangloss most cruelly deceived me when he said that everything in the world is for the best’. Irish borderlanders were not deceived by the ‘no hard border’ soft soaping of Messers Johnson, Rees-Mogg and Dr Fox. Indeed, many mobilised under the banner ‘Border Communities Against Brexit’.

Brexit bordering potentially entailed: the reintroduction of customs, agri-food inspection and immigration checkpoints on Irish cross-border arterial routes; the closure of hundreds of secondary cross-border roads (that were reopened in the 1990s through the support of the EU’s INTERREG programme); and the establishment of a border security regime to support vulnerable customs and inspection officials and infrastructure in isolated border terrain. The deleterious consequences of such bordering for cross-border contact, communication and cooperation in the Irish cultural borderscape were clear.
In the context of two decades of painstaking peacebuilding work the post-referendum years of Brexit ‘bubbling, frothing and foaming’ had already damaged the Irish cultural borderscape and the respect that it nurtured for British and Irish identities. Binary distinctions between Remain and Leave (the European Union), ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, and ‘include’ and ‘exclude’ began to reossify as the quest to withdraw the United Kingdom from the EU continued on an elongated and tortuous path. This was precisely the opposite direction of travel from the one that had been pursued in the Irish cultural borderscape wherein a genuine effort was made to explore commonalities and differences and celebrate identity complexity – ‘both/and’ rather than ‘either/or’.

Conclusion

The Irish borderscape may be regarded as the epicentre of cross-border cultural policy building on the island of Ireland. Its genesis lies in the reconfiguration of the border after the launch of the European Single Market at the end of 1992. EU funding programmes, principally the PEACE programmes, have been the drivers for its development. The British-Irish peacebuilding process has provided the all-encompassing commodious political context.

In the Irish borderscape culture is a platform for communication across communal and territorial divides. The search for commonality and respect for difference have been fundamental to the thousands of cross-border, cross-community projects funded by the EU PEACE programmes. EU support has been essential.

The Brexit process, beginning in 2016, threatened to harden the Irish border with the establishment of a border customs, inspection and security regime. The implications of such a regime for the Irish cultural borderscape, and the peacebuilding process, were ominous because such a regime disrupts
mobility, contact, communication and cooperation across the border. Moreover, the Brexit process vigorously reasserted binary distinctions that the Irish cultural borderscape had challenged for two decades. As such, the Irish cultural borderscape was presented with the wanton defacement and destructive force of Brexit.

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i North South institutions included the North South Ministerial Council, six North South Implementation Bodies, as well as Tourism Ireland Ltd, a semi-official body established to promote the island as a tourist destination.


iii In Northern Ireland 56 per cent voted ‘Remain’ with 44 per cent voting ‘Leave’
Reflections on the Context and Logistics of Cross-Border Partnerships

ANTHONY SOARES

Summary:

This paper is reproduction of thoughts shared by Anthony Soares, Acting Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies at an event exploring cross-border cultural policy in practice, held in November 2018. It describes the discrepancy between the political context within which cross-border working operates and the practicalities of cross-border cooperation and the partnerships this entails on the island of Ireland. It describes the institutional spaces which have promoted increased and improved cooperation and cross-border working in recent years and queries how cross-border working may be taken forward and who funds it in a changing socio-political context, particularly in light of Brexit. A post-script reflecting on the piece at the time of this publication is provided by Jordana Corrigan.

Key words: Cross-Border; Partnerships; Good Friday Agreement; Common Chapter; Brexit; Ireland

The Centre for Cross-Border Studies, the organisation that I represent, and which was one of those behind the creation of the North-South Social Innovation Network, has, since its foundation in 1999 dedicated itself to the promotion and support of cross-border cooperation as part of the ongoing peace and reconciliation process on the island of Ireland.
Our experience over the last twenty years has shown that the practice of cross-border cooperation and the partnerships it entails can often be in dissonance with the political context in which it operates, especially when we take that political context to be at the national level.

The business of the cross-border is in many ways transgressive, going beyond neat administrative boundaries to join with another to fashion something new or to overcome a challenge shared by those living on either side of national dividing lines.

Whilst the same may not always be true at the regional or – even more so – at the local level, the policies and therefore the resources that go with them, which arise from the national political context often have difficulty keeping up with the multi-directional and multi-layered relations produced by cross-border partnerships.

There is a rationale for practical cross-border partnerships – the mutual benefits of co-creation, the sharing of resources and learning, the joint resolution of common problems – that is not dependent on (or at least not entirely) the legitimising effect of national policy.

A lot of everyday (and the not so everyday) cross-border activity has taken place without necessarily seeking to have itself inscribed into national legislation.

People here on the island of Ireland, where and when they have identified an opportunity, have engaged in cross-border cooperation, even at the height of the Troubles.

Where it makes sense this will continue to be the case.

However, there’s no doubt that the political, and therefore the policy and resource context for cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland was
given a renewed impetus following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, which would allow us to take greater advantage of the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland’s membership of the European Union (EU).

It would allow for the scaling-up of cross-border partnerships from the piecemeal, isolated and under-resourced, to more strategic, connected and better funded partnerships.

Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement meant that, alongside six new dedicated North South Implementation Bodies, there was now an imperative for the newly devolved institutions in Northern Ireland to engage in cooperation with their counterparts in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland, most notably through the North South Ministerial Council.

This in turn meant there was renewed interest in the EU’s cross-border cooperation programmes, namely INTERREG and PEACE, whose development would now be assisted by Ministers in the devolved administration in Belfast rather than UK Government ministers, working with their colleagues in Dublin and the European Commission, as well as a range of local stakeholders.

The involvement of the administrations in Dublin and Belfast in accessing EU funds for cross-border cooperation has encouraged them – in line with the EU’s Cohesion Policy – to think about policy development as an exercise that in certain circumstances is best undertaken in collaboration with, and mindful of, those in the neighbouring jurisdiction.

Perhaps one of the clearest manifestations of the impulse EU policy and funding provided to the administrations North and South on the island of Ireland for collaboration in policy-making was what became known as the Common Chapter.
This was a chapter of agreed text that appeared in Northern Ireland’s Structural Funds Plan and Ireland’s National Development Plan for the period 2000-2006, which identified areas of cross-jurisdictional cooperation.

Unfortunately, during that same period we saw the collapse of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, and when devolution was eventually restored in 2007, the experience of the shared development of a Common Chapter was not repeated.

The absence of a devolved government in Northern Ireland then – as at other times – meant the absence of meetings of Ministers of the Belfast and Dublin administrations at the North South Ministerial Council, while also requiring the introduction of emergency legislation in Westminster to safeguard the operation of the six cross-border implementation bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement.

Therefore, whilst North-South cooperation at the political level may have ground to a halt following the collapse of Stormont in 2002, the six implementation bodies were able to continue their work – even if they were unable to develop new initiatives – as were EU-funded cross-border projects...

... A favourable political context wasn’t there, but the practice of existing cross-border partnerships nevertheless carried on.

History is – to a certain extent – repeating itself.

We have no functioning Northern Ireland Assembly or Executive.

There have been no meetings of the North South Ministerial Council since December 2016.
But, while the political context isn’t favourable, the practice of existing cross-border partnerships carries on.

Where it makes sense, people are still engaging in cross-border cooperation.

And it appears to make sense in such a wide range of areas that – given the very nature of cross-border cooperation – they are often overlapping and interlinked, making it extremely difficult if not actually impossible for the UK’s and EU’s Brexit negotiators to publish a completed version of their joint mapping exercise of areas of North-South cooperation which, at the last count, had apparently reached 142.

In some ways it would be preferable for them never to complete this task, as coming to a definitive number on the areas of cooperation would place an artificial limit on the richness of cross-border partnerships.

But, of course, looming ever larger on the horizon is the UK’s imminent departure from the EU.

So…

…while after March 2019 there may still be a rationale for people and organisations to cooperate across the border and to form cross-border partnerships, the post-Brexit context may present us with significant challenges to how we take that cooperation forward, not least in terms of who funds it.

Nevertheless, those potential challenges should not prevent us from continuing with existing cross-border partnerships or, where it makes sense and opportunities are identified, to establish new ones.

Indeed, I would argue that it’s essential at this time that we don’t retreat from cooperating with each other across the border.
And I say this based on some core principles.

One of these is the fact that the draft Withdrawal Agreement’s Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland makes specific provisions for the post-Brexit continuation of North-South cooperation.

Another is the repeated offer made by the EU to support the post-Brexit continuation of its funding for cross-border programmes on the island of Ireland.

But perhaps most importantly of all, the Good Friday Agreement, of which the UK will continue to be a co-guarantor whatever its relationship to the EU, has established the framework and impetus for North-South and cross-border cooperation.

We need to make maximum use of that framework and ensure we advocate wherever necessary for the appropriate mechanisms to be in place for its smooth operation.

That is why, to give you one concrete example, we at the Centre for Cross Border Studies have been making clear that the UK Government’s proposals for a UK Shared Prosperity Fund to replace EU Structural Funds must include a cross-border dimension.

To retreat now from existing cross-border partnerships or the creation of new ones would be to relieve certain politicians and decision-makers from the need to think about the cross-border dimensions of policy development, or even to make the path smoother for those who have always been inimical to the idea of North-South cooperation to place obstacles in our way.

To retreat now from cross-border cooperation would be to risk seeing it survive Brexit in fossilised form through the formal institutions under Strand
Two of the Good Friday Agreement, with the loss of the full richness of cross-border partnerships that provide the lifeblood of the 1998 Agreement.

Now is the time for us to be brave and to lead in the creation of the cross-border partnerships that will make the policy and the resources follow.

Cross-border cooperation and partnerships will still make sense, so let’s not turn our backs on each other.

Dr Anthony Soares is Acting Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS). His role includes the development of policies at regional, national and European levels that support sustainable cross-border and transnational cooperation. Since 2016 this has meant coordination of CCBS’s responses to the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union.

Commentary
JORDANA CORRIGAN

At the time that this speech was delivered in November 2018 the UK had been expected to leave the European Union on the 29th of March 2019. Subsequently, there have been two extensions to Article 50 granted, pushing the exit date to the 31st of October 2019. During the intervening period there has been a change of leadership with Boris Johnson elected as leader of the Conservative Party, replacing Theresa May as Prime Minister. There have also been three unsuccessful attempts by the UK Parliament to approve the agreed Withdrawal Agreement. The events which have transpired have resulted in increasing uncertainty as to whether an agreement can be reached, and concerns that a no-deal Brexit could become a reality.

Brexit is a process rather than an event (Rogers, 2019) which creates new problems for the institutions and processes of territorial governance to deal with, including how to implement the changes that Brexit itself requires.
This is further compounded by the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly or Executive.

This piece contributes to our understanding of how institutional spaces have evolved to promote increased and improved cooperation and cross-border working in recent years. The Good Friday Agreement and mutual membership of the EU allowed for the scaling-up of informal cross-border relations to more strategic, better funded and resourced partnerships.

However, the question which now arises is how do we take cross-border working forward and who funds it in a changing socio-political context? The experience to date identifies some opportunities to harness and develop this valuable cross-border work, for example, as recommended in this contribution, the inclusion of a cross-border dimension to the UK Government’s proposals for a UK Shared Prosperity Fund to replace EU Structural Funds. The contribution also refers to the Common Chapter which was a successful collaboration in policy-making prompted by joint-working under EU policy and funding.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Rural and Community Development Report *Brexit and the Border, The Impact on Rural Communities* (July 2019) outlines thirteen recommendations, one of which is the adoption of a ‘Common Charter for Co-operation’. The report describes the charter as a ‘framework to drive North-South and East-West community co-operation from a grassroots level’ (Oireachtas 2019, p. 16). This recommendation has been developed as a result of the work carried by the Centre for Cross Border Studies who have engaged in a process of consultation with community organisations from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It recognises the importance of understanding the place-based contexts that shape successful cross-border and cross-boundary cooperation and that communities must set their own priorities and advocate for their inclusion in regional and local strategies. This will allow for
communities to shape policy at local and regional level, encouraging productive relationships which can identify and exploit north-south and east-west cooperation for the betterment of communities (Centre for Cross Border Studies, 2019).

Institutions are important to underpin the trust required for cross-border working and those found at local and regional scale along the border have a significant role to play in building grassroots community cooperation and improving policymaking to solve shared problems and promote the best use of common resources.

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1 The UK and EU27 agreed to extend Article 50 until 31 October 2019 at a meeting of the European Council in April 2019.
Working with the Presence of a Border: An Artist’s Perspective

DYLAN QUINN

Summary:

Dylan Quinn provides an artist’s perspective of working across the border region in the island of Ireland through discussion of the Here & Now project by Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre. Quinn describes the unique aspects of relationship-building and community engagement in a cross-border, cross-community context and calls for greater recognition of the voice of the artist in developing long term policy change for the arts and cultural sector.

Key words: Artist; Pettigo; Border; Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre; Cultural Policy; Ireland

Introduction

What? We have just crossed it … when ? I didn’t see anything, what, when?

These words from Chris Warburton, Radio 5 Live presenter for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) resonated as we weaved our way through the border lands, discussing the reality of living and working in, between, and across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The narrative of the border appears like a trilogy running throughout my life: it was there, it was not there, and now, it is considering a return. I experienced the first instalment with the towers and check points, the second with open roads and easy transactions, and I now await the release of the third version with apprehension.
Whilst the border has been ever present throughout my personal and professional life, its physical dominance has diminished significantly since my youth. The same cannot be said, however, for the psychological, emotional and cultural impact it continues to play. I cross the invisible line on a weekly basis. I regularly put my hand in my pocket to pay for something and have to sort through coins to identify legal tender for the region in which I happen to be present. Whilst its existence does not directly prevent me from undertaking work, it has an impact in a variety of ways which are not always apparent.

In compiling this piece, I had intended to explore the workings of one specific project that I am currently delivering: Here & Now. However, there are interesting lessons to be considered from exploring the experience of delivering not only a specific project but also of investigating the experience of operating as a professional artist in this location and within this context. As a result, the reflection presented here is perhaps less about the process of cross-border work and more about the process of working with its presence.

The Context of Cross-border Work and Relationships

My location in large part defines my personal experience and my professional work, and that location is one that is defined by the border. I have worked as a choreographer / facilitator / dancer for over twenty-five years, across the UK and Ireland and internationally. For the past seventeen years I have been operating in and from my native Fermanagh, primarily facilitated through the establishment of Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre (DQDT). The work involves a broad mix of dance, physical theatre, and creative arts projects, delivered locally, nationally and internationally, and includes a range of professional and participatory programmes. My background is in peace and conflict research and as such, my work has a particular interest in and focus on exploring projects that engage in social and political discourse through various creative methods.
DQDT is a small company, consisting of me, five board members and a team of freelance facilitators, artists, technicians, programmers and community organisations. As is common with many other arts organisations, the work involves balancing short, medium-, and long-term objectives with the need to earn a living whilst staying true to artistic and social aims. Based in Northern Ireland but traversing the rural border regions of Ireland north and south, DQDT faces unique opportunities and challenges. The challenges are many and varied, not least the lack of investment in infrastructure, innovation and public services. A quick look at a map representing the railway, motorway and or broadband networks on this island reflects the sense of abandonment many people here feel. The opportunities that I refer to spring ironically from that lack of development. Communities that produce new ideas, new approaches and new solutions, in the face of systemic challenges will only grow further with investment in people, ideas and potential.

Indeed, in undertaking any exploration of cross-border work we must be cognisant of these broader financial and social circumstances within which we work; that is, the border communities across Ireland are facing serious social and economic challenges. In Northern Ireland, continued under-investment compounded by population and youth flight restrict development and growth. It is apparent to me as a professional living and working in the region that repeated attempts to tackle these various issues have been of limited success.

The reality of the border is particularly apparent when investigating the different value artistic practice plays in the cultural narrative of a society. Clear contrasts can be found on either side of the 310-mile border in relation to: financial support, confidence of an arts sector, community support for professional arts activities, and government policies. This is evident in the development of the Republic of Ireland’s first (draft) national cultural strategy, *Culture 2025* (DCHG, 2016) and its active implementation programme, *Creative Ireland* (2016). Contrastingly in Northern Ireland, there is the stalled
attempt at a similar strategy, along with a lack of executive level government since January 2017 and massive cuts to the arts in recent years (NICVA, 2017; Annabel Jackson Associates Ltd., 2018). The disappointing reality is that if and when we, as artists based in Northern Ireland, attempt to have a conversation with our colleagues in the Republic about partnerships, we are having two very different conversations.

Everyone can highlight the need for change in their local system. However, the differences on the island clearly bring into focus the invisible line and the reality of the border. As an individual dance artist living in the Republic of Ireland the maximum I could apply for, to develop a project is €50,000. In Northern Ireland it is £3,000. In the Republic, venues will pay a (modest) fee for the presentation of dance performances, in Northern Ireland dance organisations and artists pay a fee for the hire of the venue… I could go on.

I do not wish to focus on the financial issues, however. These are easy, really, for anyone to highlight. For me it is of equal, if not of more, importance to recognise the value placed on the work, as a part of the cultural framework and how the historic and current context of Northern Ireland can undermine the positive role ‘culture’ can play. Culture Ireland, Creative Scotland, The British Council, and Wales Arts International are organisations which all play an important role in promoting regional communities to international audiences. Their messages appear to be supported by executive levels of government and are viewed as an important tool in cultural promotion. In Northern Ireland there is no agreement on cultural identity and no agreement on the formation of a government. Furthermore, there is no agreement as to how to explore the complex, but vital, shared conversations that need to take place in order to reach a resolution on these matters.

It is in this context that I continue to create, deliver and present various professional and participatory projects in and around the rural western border regions of Ireland. Here & Now is one such project.
Navigating Cross-border Work and Relationships

*Here & Now* officially commenced in late 2018, but grew from work and relationships established much earlier. It takes place across west Fermanagh and south Donegal: specifically, within the border village of Pettigo. Pettigo is a village divided by the border. Literally, the border runs directly through the middle of the village following the path of the river. The part of the village in the north is Tullyhummon, with Pettigo in the south. The project seeks to gather and explore experiences of living in and around the border and present these experiences through film and movement. The range of activities have been delivered by me along with community dance artist Anna Treanor, writer Carlo Gebler, and filmmaker Róisín Loughrey. *Here & Now* follows a format aimed at supporting community participation in the arts. The project has four activity programmes: Dance with older people, youth dance, creative writing/story collection and a final community event entitled, The Big Border Brunch, all concluding in the creation of a short film.

In my experience it takes time to build the necessary relationships you require for successful community engagement. This is especially true when asking individuals to share life experiences, particularly in relation to border life. The project illustrates the slow processes, conversational nature, openness to diversity of experience, and space for reflection that such cross-border arts experiences require. These are also critical aspects applicable to any aspect of cross-border working, outside the arts.

In many occasions, the building of relationships is best done at a slower pace. The relationship-building for *Here & Now* actually started two years prior to project commencement with the regular delivery of a programme of dance fitness classes for adults on a Tuesday evening. On cold winter nights I was taking a forty minute drive from my house to Pettigo to deliver workshops that did not always make a lot of sense financially but did enable me to build relationships, understanding and hopefully trust. The project-
specific activities began in Autumn 2018 (finishing August 2019) involving a series of dance classes with an older people’s luncheon group that meet in Pettigo twice a week in order to provide activities and social interaction for older people from across the area. The luncheon group organisers expressed an interest in becoming involved once they had become aware that the project offered opportunities for engagement in some physical activity. The dance classes were contemporary in nature and challenged the participants’ understanding of dance whilst helping to improve physical and mental wellbeing. Over the course of the classes Anna, our community dance artist, then I developed a rapport with the participants. The original plan was to deliver one hour-long classes in the local leisure complex, The Termon Centre. This required the members to travel from their luncheon group meeting point to the leisure centre. However, it quickly became apparent that by meeting the group in-situ, the requirement for travel (a barrier to participation) was removed. The plan was therefore adapted, thus increasing levels of successful engagement. I travelled to their gathering on a Thursday morning and after chatting, and having been almost force-fed tea and scones or biscuits (willingly), we moved the chairs and tables aside and created the space to dance.

Our methods have been playful and drawn from a diversity of experiences. Over the one-hour class we played with movement in a wide variety of directed and creative ways. Sometimes we explored games with balloons, created sequences of movement around doing the washing, did the Can Can dance and performed the Siege of Ennis dance, amongst many other things. The dancing was our means of initial engagement; it was an important element to help improve wellbeing but also a vital element in building relationships. We talked before, during, and after the dancing. Once the relationship was well established, I asked the group if they were willing to engage in a few conversations with Carlo, the writer on the project. The theme of these conversations was loosely around their experiences of living
in and around Pettigo and indeed the border. I stressed that everyone could participate in the dance activities but were under no pressure to share more than they were happy to share. Carlo and I attended a few Thursday gatherings together until Carlo was comfortable continuing the conversations with the group himself. Over the course of a number of weeks, the luncheon group shared experiences, considerations and thoughts about living in and around Pettigo.

The Meaning of Cross-Border Working

With the gift of time, the offer of lunch, and a willingness to chat, we gathered a fascinating insight into some of the participants’ fears and desires for the area. Personal and collective stories were shared: who played what part in the horror film that had been recorded in the village some years previously, whose home crosses the border, who moved in, and who moved away. Over the course of time one issue kept reappearing: a sense that the area had been abandoned. This sense of abandonment was voiced most emphatically in discussions exploring the impact of the railway lines closure in 1959. Indeed, this closure was talked about not in historical tones but in contemporary tones; the impact of which is still felt today. The participants felt that the reason for the closure of the railway line in Pettigo was in large part due to a decision by the Unionist-dominated Belfast government to cease financial support for the railway line.

It is interesting to note the particular impact felt by the closure of the railway because whilst countless roads were also closed for many years, those roads re-opened. The railway never returned and neither did the trade, the people, or the opportunities it offered. They voiced their views that this was a decision made by others elsewhere and without a full understanding or appreciation for the major impact on Pettigo and indeed the broader region. I and the people affected could see direct connections with the present dominant political issue: Brexit. Here we discussed shared experiences and concerns
for the future as well as the synergy between then and now and based upon the reflection of a decision made by others in faraway places with no real understand or concern about the impact on the people of this region.

The impact of such considerations was resulting in a fascinating evolution of the opinions expressed on a range of subjects political, social and cultural, not least the constitutional nature of Northern Ireland. A subject in the past avoided or at best referred to as something to discuss at a later date, was now becoming something that needed to be properly considered. The people of the border communities have for a long time felt that they were the last to be consulted on issues impacting them. They no longer wish this to be the case. As in places across Europe, creative voices are enabling people on the margins of our communities to be heard. Within this context, it is interesting to note that the European Culture Foundation (2019) has recently launched a second round of its funding programme for 2017 – 2020 entitled, Democracy Needs Imagination. This is a scheme of significant size that is promoting new and creative ways to engage the people of Europe in the democratic process. As artists we may be perfectly placed to support this call for new approaches, new voices and new forms of democratic engagement.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the importance of appreciating people and place cannot be under-estimated in navigating cross-border work and relationships; particularly in the current circumstances where some border communities feel they are being offered up as a sacrificial lamb. The experience of, and learning from, the Here & Now project demonstrates the importance of embedding the project in a local community through the development of interpersonal relationships. While this may not be a unique process when working in and with communities, the experience of this activity in and across the border brings new insight.
In my view, politicians and governments relish the opportunity to exploit images of creative activity and words of prose and poetry to demonstrate their intelligence, authenticity and cultural connections. However, their commitment to develop that which they utilise for creative creditably, and particularly in Northern Ireland, has been left very wanting. More importantly so has their ability to understand and appreciate the value creative artistic practice offers our society. This dearth is reflected in the fact that DQDT remains the only professional dance or indeed theatre organisation based in the rural border regions of the island. We are in extremely unique times politically, socially and culturally: the structures of government and the constitution of the United Kingdom are being tested to the limit and the island of Ireland is facing potentially the biggest constitutional debate since the formation of the state.

Unique times require unique solutions. Arts and by extension artists have a fundamental role to play in enabling and expanding the range of conversations we must have. If we require creative solutions in these times, then we require creative thinkers. This is the space that we as artists can fill. Not only can we give voice to those excluded from mainstream discourse but we can help begin to be a fundamental part of how we build new conversations, new communities and a new creatively-engaged future.

In doing so, we must be honest enough to recognise that the systemic change required involves long-term investment and many of the historical approaches have been too brief and narrow in their focus. This has not been helped by a serious lack of imagination in political developments within Northern Ireland. It has also been compounded on occasion by shortsighted decisions from state funders. Indeed, this in itself is an area that requires further unpicking when exploring sustainable forms of development for artists and the arts sector. It is clear that the questioning of decisions made by state funders such as Arts Council Northern Ireland is fraught with difficulties: ‘Don’t bite the hand that feeds you …’. Therein lies a fundamental problem in relation to agency, knowledge, experience and power. It is common practice
for decisions to be taken that impact directly on artists or arts organisations that fundamentally undermine years of work and future plans without having had a single conversation with the artists at the very coalface. It is vital therefore that we explore new ways of building relationships, for funders to talk to communities, to listen to artists, and to hear their experiences. It is about engaging in discussions to ensure that the development of the art form in particular contexts does not suffer as result of ill-considered or ill-informed decisions. This dialogue is particularly important in under-developed and under-resourced regions, and there are few less developed than those within the border regions. In light of this, the formation of public policy developed as a result of consultation with artists living and working in the region, would be a start. Whilst investment in art making, pay for artists and infrastructure is valid and important, improved communication and real understanding between those creating the work and those with the ability to enable the work is a necessary requirement for effective and sustainable development.

Dylan Quinn and has been working as a Choreographer, Dance Artist and facilitator for over 20 years. In 2009 he established Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre (DQDT) in his native Enniskillen. Dylan has extensive experience of working within community settings and specifically within a peace and conflict context.
Bibliography


Cultural Gateways: The Role of Museums in Cross-Border Relations

GINA O’KELLY

Summary:

This paper looks at the context of cross-border working on the island of Ireland through the lens of its museums. The policy frameworks and breadth of activity are discussed in addition to the challenges posed by Brexit – specifically for partnerships and networks. The author highlights the opportunity that exists for the NI sector to approach Brexit from a position of authority, providing knowledge and expertise from which the regions can draw, taking the role of museums in supporting intercultural dialogue and inclusion from objectivity to activism.

Key words: Museums; Education; Cultural Policy; EU Funding; Brexit; Ireland

Introduction

The role of cultural heritage in peace and reconciliation efforts in Ireland has been a key element of government policies in Northern Ireland (NI) since the 1970s. With museums undergoing deep transformation to become places to explore shared histories and cultures, as well as nurturing valued diversity on the island, this article examines some of the main education and cultural policies that encouraged cross-border partnerships among museums and emphasised the role of museums in supporting intercultural dialogue and inclusion. It looks at the impact of European Union (EU) funding programmes on museum practice across the areas of education, community engagement, exhibitions, and capital investments, bringing together communities from both sides of the Irish border.
Redefining the museum as vehicle of social change

The Irish Museums Association grew out of the International Council of Museums – Ireland branch in the 1950s as a response to calls to reflect an increased focus on Irish issues and, most importantly, embrace its role as one of a handful of cultural organisations with an all-island remit, encouraging cross-border relations and placing this at the centre of its activities as echoed by its new constitution in 1977, formalising what had already become second nature to museum practitioners in Ireland and Northern Ireland:

To define and support museums; to establish, reinforce and support the museum profession in Ireland, north and south (p. 1).

This signalled a nod towards what was a deep change to take place in museums in the following decades, taking its cue from the international museum sector on what was it that defined a museum: a move from passive repository of collections and temple of retreat to a space where it became an active cultural player and a neutral forum for discussions around identity and place (Witcomb, 2002).

With many of the museums along the Irish border corridor being established or redeveloped in the 1980s and 90s, it is no coincidence that the museum sector in both jurisdictions adopted the wave of change that refocused the museum towards a more audience focused programming, as a tool to promote cultural diversity, cross-community contact, and social inclusion. This embrace of the museum’s role as a positive vehicle for social change – while preserving its neutral setting - was advocated by New Labour’s government policies, most notably in the seminal policy guidance document Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for all (2000), which did not go unnoticed on the island of Ireland.
Museums, galleries and archives [...] can play a role in generating social change by engaging with and empowering people to determine their place in the world, educate themselves to achieve their own potential, play a full part in society, and contribute to transforming it in the future (p. 8).

The subsequent publication of *A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* by the Northern Irish Assembly in 2005 set out among its key aims and objectives to ‘encourage understanding of the complexity of our history, through museums and a common school curriculum’ (p.10), underlining the role of the museum as a vehicle for informal education and space for exploration of complex and overlapping identities. It stated that museums would contribute to the good relations policy by:

Ensuring that the collections are representative of the diversity which both have been and are present in the geographical area from which local visitors come and those places and domains which represent their interests, affiliations and concerns; ensuring that both permanent and temporary exhibitions represent and examine the interests of all the communities that the museum chiefly serves; devising exhibitions and supporting educational programmes / outreach work which address issues pertinent to the culturally diversity of the geographical area served (p. 33).

The influence of *A Shared Future* was apparent, with increased educational and outreach programmes within our museums reflecting this change in focus, and – with this change in narrative - museums in the border counties embracing the move from spaces that provided escapism from the conflict to spaces where a heightened awareness of the informal learning role of the museum allowed them to follow the lead of formal education curricula in
providing ‘safe spaces for unsafe ideas’, a concept coined by Elaine Heumann Guerin, in a keynote at the Museums Australia conference, 1996.

However, this change was still relegated mainly to community engagement projects and temporary exhibitions in museums, such as those promoted by the Community Relations Council and Northern Ireland Museums Council. Yet, discussions around the conflict were still slow to be addressed in the southern part of the border (Todd et al., 2006) and, overall, museums still had some way to go in terms of officially addressing the conflict through their exhibitions, with the Ulster Museum being one of the first museums to address this in 2009 through their Troubles gallery, albeit with some unease and to mixed reviews.

**Funding as driver of programming**

The influx of EU funding has also been one of the most significant drivers behind the development of cultural heritage as a tool for peace and reconciliation, most significantly through the INTERREG (€1.13 billion from 1991 to date) and PEACE I-V programmes (€2.2 billion from 1995 to date), both funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) since 1999. Funding under these programmes has been used to finance a multitude of projects that support strategic cross-border co-operation in order to create a more prosperous and sustainable region, promote peace and reconciliation, and promote economic and social stability in Northern Ireland and the border counties in Ireland: Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan, and Louth.

With their strong emphasis on reconciling communities and contribution to peace, along with building positive relations at a local level and creating shared neutral spaces and services that support this, it is no surprise that these EU funding initiatives have had a substantial impact on the culture and
heritage sectors and been a strong fit for museums as they repositioned themselves as nonaligned civic spaces (O'Kelly, 2019).

Projects delivered through PEACE-supported programming have been explored by both the Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC, 2009) and more recently through the Irish Museums Association-Ulster University collaboration, initiated following the decision of the United Kingdom (UK) to withdraw from the EU in June 2016 and which has been actively researching the potential effect of Brexit on the museum and cultural sectors under the overarching concept of ‘Bridge over Brexit’ (Crooke and O'Kelly, 2018)

These two bodies of research evidence how museums have invested in supporting and nurturing cross-border programmes in the two decades since the Good Friday Agreement, with one of the first formal partnerships being established in 2002 as a two-year cultural exchange programme between Newry and Mourne Museum and Dundalk County Museum. From the outset, this partnership stated its intent to use education methodology from the museum context to increase cross-border participation at the museums, especially from traditionally protestant areas, and promote and sustain greater mutual understanding between communities on both sides of the border and within local communities.

Primarily delivered through a range of events for schools and community groups, it included joint lecture series, re-enactments, workshops, genealogy courses and an oral history project that saw community groups working with schools, learning from one another and developing a greater understanding of their communities with each contributing to the history of their area. Following on from this programme, both museums were instrumental in developing the Cross-border Archives Project (2007-2008), enabling a vast array of archival material on the historical development of the region to be catalogued, interpreted, and placed online.
In 2007, following an earlier initiative in 2005 by the Tower Museum to explore the role of the museum in building community relations through the establishment of a Good Relations Programme, Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service launched an education and outreach programme comprised of ten cross-border, cross-community initiatives that focused on the anniversary of the Flight of the Earls. It aimed to raise awareness and understanding of this event - understood by many as the effective end of the old Gaelic order following the exile of its aristocracy in 1607 - as it related to cultural heritage, identity and diversity in the island of Ireland.

*Connecting People, Places and Heritage*, the partnership between Cavan and Fermanagh county museums, was launched in 2004 and continues today. This saw a number of heritage trails being developed in each county during the first stage of this programme (2004-2006), school and adult partnerships (2006-2008) which encompassed workshops, exhibition making and seminars that enabled participants to explore potentially contentious history, by promoting and facilitating an understanding of the histories, traditions and preconceptions of all those involved. Since 2008, this programme has been delivered by Cavan County museum and has seen its legacy presented in the form of a Peace and reconciliation gallery, the Peace Garden, and expansion works at the museum in 2019 that will provide a new shared space to host this cross border project (Cavan County Museum, n.d.)

Physical manifestations of committed cross-border partnerships have also seen the development of the F.E. McWilliam Gallery & Studio (2008) and the Highlanes Gallery (2006) as capital builds under the East Border Region Arts Partnership, established through the INTERREG-funded local authority cross-border network involving Newry, Mourne & Down District Council, Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council, and Ards and North Down Borough Council in Northern Ireland and Louth, Monaghan and Meath County Councils in the Republic Of Ireland. Over the last decade, museums within this partnership have worked together to curate and tour exhibitions, share
resources and expertise, and support one another to attract and engage audiences (Highlanes Gallery, n.d.).

Through their exhibitions, research and education programmes, museums have provided powerful evidence of their ability to bring diverse communities together and responded to the growing expectation of alignment between public policy and museum objectives with socially purposeful outcomes, to demonstrate public benefit in the areas of social and economic equality: the museum as a vehicle for social integration and regeneration, as highlighted by the Northern Ireland’s policy framework for the development of national and local museums over the period 2011-2021:

Museums can make a very important contribution to a shared and better future for all based on equity, diversity, interdependence and mutual respect. They can reflect and promote understanding of the history, culture and people of the region and beyond. They can be catalysts for bringing communities together both physically and through formal and informal opportunities to explore the complexities of history and culture. Museums can promote access, encourage participation and support the cultural expressions of the people and communities in Northern Ireland and bring diverse and hard-to-reach groups into contact with different aspects of heritage through innovative exhibitions and structured learning programmes (p 6-7).

Making histories

Recent initiatives such as the Decade of Centenaries (2012-2012) which commemorates significant centenary anniversaries in recent Irish history, have also underlined this cross-border approach and encouraged support for joint cross-border events, with a focus on local museums and broader cross-border cultural engagement. Under this initiative, we see border museums again rising to the challenge of addressing our difficult and complex past with
ambitious projects being carried out by Donegal County Museum, Monaghan County Museum, and Armagh County Museum that explore the lives of servicemen and the impact they had in the communities they served in.

New cross-border cultural programmes such as Making the Future (Making the Future, 2018), led by National Museums NI and Linen Hall Library among others, will aim to use museum collections and archives to explore the past and create a powerful vision for future change, to pose challenging questions about the past, and ‘take the temperature’ of where we are at currently as a society. Also EU-funded, the 'Derry Model' will offer the city’s experience in overcoming disputes in a number of areas to other groups. Described as a ‘conflict transformation and peacebuilding project’ (Museum of Free Derry, 2018), it places the museum as a seminal tool to tell the story of Derry’s role in the peace process through a series of breakthrough decisions that have tackled issues of contention since the mid-seventies such as power-sharing, agreements around parades and social justice campaigns.

Despite this wealth of activity, it has become increasingly apparent though that the wider impact of this activity remains largely undocumented and, to a certain extent, under-recognised. Much of the focus on Brexit has been preoccupied with logistical issues such as cultural and regional management, funding, collections and people movement; with less attention given to partnerships and networks and questions of identity, failing to recognise that the impact of Brexit will have a further-reaching effect on museums’ activities on the island.

The challenge for the sector is how it will continue to nurture these relationships, particularly when the current drive is towards EU funding partnerships, which may no longer be available, to what once was a natural partner for the Republic of Ireland. In the case of Northern Ireland, are we looking at adding issues of isolation to what is already a highly under- resourced sector or can the NI sector approach Brexit from a position of
strength, providing a body of expertise and knowledge from which other UK regions can draw?

With museums being seen as places to explore shared histories and cultures, as well as nurturing valued diversity on the island – it remains to be seen whether these principles will be diminished by changed politics or whether they will gain traction and there will be further emphasis on the role of museums in supporting intercultural dialogue and inclusion, taking it further and moving from the idea of neutrality to that of activism.

Gina O’Kelly has been at the helm of the Irish Museums Association (IMA) since 2011, responsible for leading and delivering the association’s advocacy work and vision in support of the museum sector. She sits on a range of cultural advisory groups and is a board member of Visual Artists Ireland.
Bibliography


The Meaning and Importance of Working Cross-Border: A Local Authority Perspective

CATRIONA O’REILLY

Summary:

This paper discusses the meaning and origins of cross-border working, particularly the importance of this work and the relationships which are formed in resourcing and nurturing the arts. It includes the views of artists, senior council officials and community leaders which adds greatly to understanding the practicalities, challenges and potentialities of working in a local context for ensuring a sustainable approach to arts development.

Key words: Local Authority; Cavan; Border; Communities; Arts Office; Arts Strategy; Cultural Strategy; Ireland; Cultural Policy

Introduction

Cavan County lies in Ulster, which is by its very nature a cross-border province on the island of Ireland. Ulster is made up of nine counties, six of which lie in Northern Ireland and the remaining three, including Cavan, lie in the Republic of Ireland. As such, the ethos and practice of Cavan County Council arts office means working with artists, communities and organisations in Cavan and neighbouring counties, particularly Monaghan and Fermanagh. The arts office works in collaboration with others when it makes sense culturally, geographically and economically. More specifically, the arts office is interested in working with our neighbours in arts and culture to learn, to understand, to experiment and to produce quality arts experiences in our hinterland and beyond. Cross-border work is fundamental to this process.
This piece reflects my professional experience of cross-border working. I suggest the meaning and origins of cross-border working, the importance of cross-border work and relationships for resourcing and nurturing the arts, and the challenges and ways forward for ensuring a sustainable approach to arts development. In doing so, I quote the opinions of artists, senior council officials and community leaders as these are the people with whom I work and share the lived experience of supporting and developing arts and culture in Cavan and the border area. I reference relationships and projects that have informed and shaped our work in Cavan and draw on our experience in the arts office as well as the artists and community leaders who have shared their insights of working in a sustained way across communities and borders.

The Meaning and Origins of Cross-border Working

Cavan is divided from the six counties of Northern Ireland by the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The border represents the legacy of a bloody conflict that has caused fear, hatred and division. People in these counties have been intimidated, injured and murdered because of the border and all that it represents. During the Troubles, natural hinterlands were cut off by roads closures and bombed bridges, which disrupted every aspect of life in this area. This legacy has had a real and lasting impact on personal, social and administrative relationships on the border. From a policy perspective this is often limited to approaching cross-community and cross-border work as being solely about crossing a Catholic / Protestant divide. However, working in cross-community and cross-border contexts and also with our neighbours in Fermanagh, Northern Ireland means more and requires more.

The work of the arts office and the cultural team in Cavan County Council is initiated by our desire to work with artists who are interested in exploring ideas from the deep well of their imagination and from externally motivated
themes. We work to develop relationships within our communities of place and interest, to be informed by and to explore cultural memory, and build understanding and capacity in the arts and the wider community. The role of the arts office is to enable, to facilitate, to advocate for, and to support artists and communities to grow and develop the arts. Acknowledging and working across our border with Northern Ireland is a critical part of this work.

This work includes supporting and connecting with artists, like Sally O’Dowd, a Cavan born artist who has travelled and studied in Ireland, England and Cyprus. Describing herself as a ‘border hopper’, crossing borders is a not only a lived experience for O’Dowd, but as such, it has impacted her professional perspective; as is the case for those of us working in the Council’s arts office. O’Dowd now lives in Belfast for personal and work reasons. She was a member of the artist collective Townhall Cavan Arts Space between 2015 and 2018, which had a strong ethos to work with artists on both sides of the border. O'Dowd (2019) reflects on making and experiencing quality arts as a key motivation for working in the border area:

>the selection of Array Studios' 20-year anniversary show, a Belfast based, artist-led studio group for the first exhibition at Townhall Arts Space, Cavan was important in terms of defining that political borders did not separate us. Belfast has an exciting arts scene to be celebrated, and we were interested in showcasing exciting, emerging creative talent.

According to O’Dowd (2019) learning about the common interests shared with artists across the border, have made the territorial separation that the border represents seems less divisive.

Developing the arts locally not only requires consideration of the personal, social, and professional experiences of our citizens and artists, but also of the wider arts context in Ireland and in Northern Ireland. Our current arts strategy
for Cavan County, *Inclusivity and Ambition: A Strategy for Cavan Arts 2018 to 2023* (2018a) identifies four key priorities for ongoing resource support and focus. These are: artists, audience, infrastructure and diversity. Our strategy was developed through a shared consultation process with the Cavan County Library Strategy, *Evolving Libraries: Cavan Library Service Development Plan 2017 – 2021* (2018b), the Heritage Office and the Creative Cavan cultural plan, *An Cavan Culture and Creativity Strategy, 2018 - 2022* (2018c). This joined up approach to consultation was adopted to reflect our strengths in working together as a cultural sector and to take an integrated approach to cultural development. These and other sectoral strategies in our local authority are informed by and fit within *The Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), 2016 – 2021* (2016) for Cavan. The LECP vision for Cavan is:

That Cavan 2021 will be a place that we can be proud of; a place where people can have a good quality of life; a better place to live, to work and to enjoy (p. ii).

This policy and the work of the arts office equally operates within a broader policy context that is both national and supranational. Our national context is informed by *Culture 2025* the Republic of Ireland’s draft cultural policy from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2015), the strategic framework of the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaion, *Making Great Art Work* (Arts Council Ireland, 2016a), and *Project Ireland 2040* (Department of Housing Planning and Local Government, 2018), the Republic of Ireland’s National Planning Framework. Wider European cultural policy has a range of priorities that include the value of culture in well-being, diversity and social integration, the need for mobility for artists and cultural organisations, networking, visibility for the arts, audience development and cross sectoral working. The European Union (EU) PEACE Programmes have similar core priorities of creating shared spaces and supporting tolerance and resilience in society (Haase and Kolodziejski, 2019). The PEACE Programmes have both
promoted as well as benefitted from the arts as a tool for effective development work in cross border and cross community settings (McCall and O’Dowd, 2008). While all these policies inform and contextualise our work, the people and places in which we engage are what shape our practice most.

**Resourcing and Nurturing the Arts through Cross-Border Work and Relationships**

Resourcing and nurturing the arts through cross-border work and relationships is possible and facilitated by dedicated funds as well as personal, social, professional and administrative relationships; all of which have a legacy for, not only how we relate to one another across the border, but equally how art develops despite the border—whether that border is cultural, ideological or territorial and administrative. For instance, the first European PEACE Programme provided Cavan County Council with seed funding to establish youth theatre in rural and urban settings in the county and along the border with groups in County Fermanagh. Youth theatre in Cavan was initially developed by the local authority arts office to work in cross-community and cross-border settings with young people between twelve and eighteen years old. As it developed, the youth theatre became embedded in local places—that is local communities—and continues to flourish in the county with ownership moving from the local authority to community leaders, youth theatre practitioners, parents and youth workers.

In addition to the EU’s PEACE programme, which has including the Building Peace through the Arts Initiative administered by Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI, 2015), Cavan artists, and communities and those of us working in Cavan County Council have taken advantage of other cross-border funding initiatives to support relationships and develop infrastructure, capacity and diversity in our work. These funds include the **International Fund**
for Ireland (2017), the Culture Connects programme administered by The Arts Council / An Chomharle Ealaion to mark Ireland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2013 (Arts Council Ireland, 2019a), and the Leonardo da Vinci Programme (2007 – 2013), now known as Erasmus + funded through Leargas (2019), a charitable body in the Republic of Ireland that manages national and international exchange programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training. These initiatives have provided additional financial resources at times when local resources were scarce. At the same time it has facilitated means for leveraging locally-based financial and in-kind administrative and promotional support. Additionally, securing the support of national and European funding and partnership has brought international recognition of the work taking place locally.

Cross-border relationships are also critical to resourcing and nurturing the arts in Cavan and across its border with Northern Ireland. In many cases these are daily, lived experiences for people residing and working at the border. Sharon Howe (2019), an experienced cross-border community worker, illustrates this point:

Cross border working is an integral part of our ethos. We are in a small village located two miles from the border. Cross border working is part of everyday life for local people from employment, farming, businesses, schools etc. Therefore, it is essential that this [experience] is reflected in running community programmes. SDA [Swanlinbar Development Association] deliver a range of programmes funded through International Fund for Ireland and PEACE IV. I have an advantage of being an example of a cross border worker. I reside and worked in the community sector in Northern Ireland. Now, working in Cavan County I am able to use my past personal and work experiences to network and work cross-border easily.
Like Howe (2019), individual artists and those who work in organisations have developed and progressed their careers through personal and professional cross-border relationships. Martin Donohoe is a professional traditional musician and the founder of Nyah Comhaltas Ceoltoiri na hÉireann (CCE) group, which promotes Irish traditional music (Comhaltas, 2019). He explains how his cross-border relationships started, have been maintained, and have nurtured his own development (Donohoe, 2019):

I get to perform in all six counties. CCE (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri na hÉireann) have a Centre of Excellence in Omagh Tyrone and we attend and perform there every month. Comhaltas held feadhs [competitions] and I [have] travelled down since 1979 and made friends since that. From 2009, I made friends with Ulster Scots Willie Drennan and his band members. This opened up engagements with them. Also, at the same time, Mullaghboy Marching Band started doing cross-cultural music with us. We first had IFI Funding (International Fund for Ireland), which brough the Mullaghboy Marching Band and Willie Drennan to Cavan for workshops / events and during 2010/11/12 PEACE III supported many performances.

A number of artists who are influential in Cavan and nationally first experienced the arts through the youth theatre established and funded as a direct result of the first PEACE Programme mentioned earlier. These include award-winning actor and director, Aaron Monaghan, Philip Doherty, award-winning writer and director and the artistic director of Fíbín, the country's only Irish language touring theatre company, and Kim McCafferty, artistic director of the Cavan Arts Festival and circus and spectacle artist who works internationally. While causal links may be difficult to ascertain, cross-border experiences have undoubtedly contributed to the cultural ecology and thus the development of the arts in and beyond our border region.
Challenges in Cross-border Work and Relationships

Shared and partnership-based approaches to arts and cultural activity bring the benefits and opportunities outlined above, but are not without their challenges. While new relationships and an awareness of new practices can be gained, cross-border activity can be met with suspicion, anxiety and administrative differences. Such challenges to cross border work can be a result of the complicated and difficult past that underpins the border. This complexity is succinctly described by Tom Sullivan, former Cavan County librarian who commissioned the project, *The Voices of the Troubles*. The *Voices of the Troubles* involved interviews carried out by Maurice O’Keeffe of *Irish Life and Lore* (O’Keeffe and O’Keeffe, 2019), an oral history collection and archive, on behalf of Cavan County Library Service. This unique oral history project archives the reflections of over 100 people from the border area of Cavan and Fermanagh who were interviewed in 2017 and 2018, who spoke about how ‘the Troubles’ affected their lives. In reflecting on the work, Tom Sullivan (2019) refers to the need to get beyond surface engagement to develop meaningful dialogue that may lead to understanding and acceptance:

> The challenge is to break down the suspicion that exists, to engage with individuals and groups who do not want to engage and to develop relationships that are more than surface engagements.

This essential work takes time and requires reflection, commitment, and the willingness to listen and to respond, adjust and change self and practice. Flexibility is often frustrated by legislative and governance responsibilities. Eoin Doyle (201), Director of Services for Housing, Corporate and Cultural Affairs at Cavan County Council explains:

> Cultural differences between the way local government in the North and South operate [exist: there are] differences in the [the] range of
functions. [Further, the] different relationships between Councillors and the executive [and] misconceptions on both sides as to our respective goals [are points of clash at times]. It is time consuming to navigate these], but I feel at this stage, it is now a core part of our work.

Addressing low aspirations, which exist in many border areas is also a key challenge. Speaking of the West Cavan Area, Sharon Howe (2019) explains:

Our area has been hit economically by the Troubles and there are large numbers of derelict properties and empty business premises as people stopped visiting the area due to border checkpoints. This [neglect] has resulted in the area being a ‘commuter area’ where everyone goes out to work during the day. Many people now have an apathy and an expectation that nothing good happens in the area. Many funders only provide basic funding for short term projects. The lack of funding for match funding / staffing and running costs is off putting to many groups resulting in many deciding not to engage with cross-border working.

A local authority arts office experiences issues where the demand and expectation greatly outweigh the resources and the capacity to deliver. The constant demand to deliver results, to develop and sustain relationships, to reach governance standards and to justify the value of the arts for their own merit—and in the multiple contexts required—threatens to overwhelm quality work. Different expectations are articulated by the various stakeholders. Senior management and funders require work to be delivered in public contexts on target, on budget and in line with national and EU governance standards while delivering a quality service for the maximum number of artists and participants. Elected representatives are interested in the value that has been delivered by and for the arts in their area. The public have expectations in line with their interests, be that classical
music, architecture, circus or quality immersive and fun experiences. Artists are interested in their own art form and how it can be developed to improve their ability to make excellent art and enjoy a quality standard of living. Time for critical thinking, analysis, evaluation and research feel like luxuries. This concern is often shared by arts officers who are members of the Association of Local Authority Arts Officers.

**Implications and Ways Forward for Arts Development on the Border**

Much work and joint decision-making is needed to support local authorities to connect with one another as well as citizens, businesses and voluntary and charitable organisations in meaningful ways that will deliver positive results in areas of shared concern. This importance is emphasized by Eoin Doyle (2019):

> A small rural authority cannot deliver its objectives in isolation, in order to deliver infrastructural and social change we need to collaborate with other local authorities, cross-border and across the EU.

A local authority that works on the border, such as Cavan County Council, can struggle to realise and sustain meaningful cross-border work without significant resources, a legislative framework, and ongoing personal and professional commitment to dialogue, all of which lie at the core of any successful partnership.

Leadership and alignment from central Government and from the Arts Councils of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are needed to support and guide local efforts in terms of arts development. Formal networks and frameworks, like the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) ii, founded in 1995 to promote cross-border cooperation and communication on common regional development concerns at local government level, or the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon *A Framework for Collaboration*...
agreement with the County and City Management Association (Arts Council Ireland, 2016b) as a start. Still, greater formal links between Arts Council Northern Ireland and The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaion that offer support to artists to develop work in and of this area that is sustainable, reflective and insightful of the border experience would be valuable. Such initiatives legitimise cooperation and partnership as a means to respond to what are ultimately shared concerns (Arts Council Ireland, 2019b).

Yet, even with formalised approaches, the work that has happened in Canva in a cross-border context has developed through the drive and deep thinking of individual artists, community leaders, and local politicians and officials. Yet, arts practice and policy will not be sustained on the good will of committed individuals alone. Deeper acknowledgement of, and investment in, border artists whose experiences are unique on the island, is also needed. An all-island approach with long term goals and a strong evidence base informed by longitudinal research on cross-border work in the arts will move arts practice beyond once, off, targeted initiatives into sustained work that can help to deal with any entrenched fear and prejudice. Furthermore, there is a need for funding agencies not only to recognise that work in this area is ‘slow work’, which requires thought, reflection, research and space, but also to resource this work with that recognition in mind.

Conclusion

Considering the context of local arts development, this piece attempted to outline the meanings and origins of cross-border work, the importance of cross-border relationships and work for resourcing and nurturing the arts, and the challenges and ways forward for ensuring a sustainable approach to arts development. As has been demonstrated, economics is a very important part of the border story. Funding provides the resources not only for connecting across the border, but it also allows for resources for some
initiatives and organisations despite and beyond the border, from jurisdictions outside the one in which an artist or organisation may reside.

The resources required for cross border work in the Brexit scenario will be far greater. While important, the need is not simply financial. I suggest that dialogue at a local, national and European level, supported by formal frameworks and legislation, and informed by research is needed to resource artists and local communities to be sustained along the border area. Slow, place-based, community-responsive work will provide for healthy and resilient communities.

Acknowledgement: The essay is informed by the feedback of artists, officials and community leaders who are committed to living and working on the border. I am deeply grateful to the people who have shared their knowledge with me and thankful for the invitation to be included in this publication.

Bibliography


Meaning and importance of working cross-border, a local authority perspective

CATRIONA O’REILLY


Meaning and importance of working cross-border, a local authority perspective

CATRIONA O’REILLY

International perspectives on cross-border working

RICHARD WAKELY

Summary:

This paper provides an international perspective on cross-border working and reflects on the policy frameworks which promote cross-border working through the lens of the Belfast International Arts Festival. It suggests that Brexit will impact artist mobility, funding, and market competition in the arts and proposes that the most urgent issue is the potential of Brexit to dismantle the complex and multi-layered notions of identity in Northern Ireland and how we articulate our common European heritage.

Key words: International; Collaboration; Belfast International Arts Festival; Brexit; European Identity

Introduction

The Belfast International Arts Festival (formerly known as the Belfast Festival at Queens) was reconstituted in 2015 as an independent company and registered charity away from Queen’s University Belfast, which had been its host for over fifty years. Its new remit placed significant value on the importance of global connectivity, community, access and participation and contemporary arts practice. In doing so it would attempt to involve, to a greater degree, communities across the city and not just those based in South Belfast as was largely the case in the past. Central to this new remit was an acknowledgment of the important role that arts and culture could play in promoting reconciliation, tolerance and understanding across the island and as a consequence of the Good Friday Agreement (1998). Consequently, since 2013 – my first year as artistic director – the festival has actively sought to regularly commission, produce and present projects and events that
involve artists and communities from across the border and to specifically address issues such as cultural identity, human rights and social justice.

**Belfast International Arts Festival and Cross-Border Working**

Throughout its fifty-seven year history, the Belfast International Arts Festival (the Festival) has faced serious curatorial and operational challenges. In the 1970s and 1980s in particular, these often centered on the event’s capacity to attract leading artists to the war-torn city of Belfast. In recent years, the nature of those challenges has changed significantly to reflect both new economic hardships (as a result of government austerity policies) and the need for the event to connect more meaningfully with its constituencies across a city that was rapidly changing in the wake of the Belfast Agreement (1998). Those challenges still exist today but have been compounded by the very real damage that the United Kingdom’s (UK) exit from the European Union, known as Brexit, could inflict on cultural relations across the island of Ireland.

The origins of our own cross-border relationships in respect of the Festival include for example, specific policy frameworks that on the macro level include the aforementioned Good Friday Agreement (1998) and Creative Europe, the European Union (EU) wide programme for promoting and funding culture with a budget of €1.46 billion from 2014-2020 (and which the Festival heavily benefited from in 2012/2013 and again in 2015, when it contributed some €150,000 to that year’s budget). Others have also been specifically supported through the EU’s PEACE III Programme.

The strategic objectives of several of our public funders also emphasise the importance of cross-border relations. For example, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Arts Council Ireland / An Chomhairle Ealaíon in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) have provided funding for cross-border touring across a range of art forms and arts practices. The two arts councils now co-support a joint touring scheme, Beyond Borders, with Creative Scotland and
Arts Council of Wales. Festival presentations in recent years by several ROI based artists and ensembles have only been possible through support from these shared funds including for example CoisCéim’s *The Wolf and Peter* (2015) and Timmy Creed’s virtuoso stage work, *Spliced* scheduled for October 2019. Whilst Belfast City Council’s (2019) latest draft for a 10 year cultural strategy does not specifically mention cross-border relations, this is hopefully implicit in proposed priorities promoting cultural diversity and cultural tourism (with ROI being a major market for short breaks to NI) as well as placing them within a greater international context.

The Government of Ireland also recognises the importance of cross-border cultural relations and particularly as a key aspect of its *Decade of Centenaries* programme, which aims to commemorate the significant events in Irish history that took place between 1912 and 1922. It has, in recent years, provided valuable financial support for specific Festival commissions and events both through the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs / An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade/An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála. In 2016 with the assistance of the Government of Ireland, we presented a series of performances and talks that explored the impacts of the Great War on the international system and specifically for the independence movement in Ireland. This included a very special event at the Grand Opera House in Belfast titled, *The Fever: Roger Casement In The Dark Places* (Fintan O’Toole, Olwen Fouéré Crash Ensemble with Robin Adams and Matthew Hargreaves). Performances included *The Dark Places* a new work by Colm Tóibín, and acclaimed composer Donnacha Dennehy performed by Crash Ensemble together with *The Nightmare of Empire/The Dream of Europe* by Fintan O’Toole performed by celebrated actress Olwen Fouéré. The evening also featured the premiere of a new short dramatic work by Fintan O’Toole, specially commissioned by Belfast International Arts Festival and concluded...
with an extraordinary dramatic monologue written for Roger Casement, a diplomat for the British Foreign Office who later became an activist and leader of the Easter Rising, by the most famous playwright of the day, George Bernard Shaw. This was a speech Shaw hoped to persuade Casement, who was facing the death sentence for treason, to deliver at his own trial. Shaw believed it would persuade the jury to spare Casement’s life. *Treason on Trial* had not previously been heard on stage in the UK until the Belfast International Arts Festival decided to address this as part of its continuing commitment to encourage a public discourse promoting a greater appreciation of cultural diversity, tolerance and reconciliation through creative practice.

Similar objectives informed a more recent commission in 2018 of *Across and In-Between* by renowned American visual and social practice artist Suzanne Lacy. Created in collaboration with communities in Ireland from both sides of the border, *Across and In-Between* explores the profound impact the border has on the lives of people who live there. The project is in two parts, *The Yellow Line* and the *Border People’s Parliament*. *The Yellow Line* is a three-screen film projection made with participants including farmers, horse-owners, scouts, hikers and villagers from communities across the Fermanagh, Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan border-line and was projected upon the front of the Ulster Museum over a six-day run in October 2018, supported by a temporary exhibition featuring documentary interviews. The *Border People’s Parliament* was a private event in Stormont’s Parliament Buildings for the participants in the project and through celebrating their involvement in making *The Yellow Line*, they created a border people’s parliament, a space where border voices were able to consider matters of global political significance that are also, to them, intensely local. This event resulted in the publication of *The Yellow Manifesto*, summarising their beliefs and hopes for the future. *Across and In-Between* was only made possible by
co-commissioning support from both 14-18 NOW World War 1 Centenary Art Commissions and the Government of the Republic of Ireland.

It is worth mentioning here the generous and sympathetic role that 14-18 NOW played not only in supporting the Festival but other specific arts events across Northern Ireland. This was the UK’s arts programme for the First World War centenary. Working with arts and heritage partners all across the UK, they commissioned and supported new artworks from 420 contemporary artists, musicians, film makers, designers and performers, inspired by the period 1914-18. This programme provided a unique context and indeed source of alternative funding for the Festival to continue its exploration of cultural diversity, tolerance and inclusivity and particularly in respect of the entire island.

Like the Government of the Republic of Ireland, 14-18 NOW completely understood the sensitivities surrounding this period of history in respect of Ireland and as such worked alongside them to support the Festival’s approach to working inclusively with communities across the city. Whilst jointly supporting the aforementioned events, they separately supported other events that more closely aligned with their own specific policy objectives including the Festival’s co-commission of Taylor Mac’s *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music: The WW1 Years and More in 2016*; our presentation of both a group exhibition featuring contemporary interpretations of women’s fashion during the Great War years called *Fashion and Freedom* (Darrell Vydelingum, Dr Miles Lambert and Jenna Rossi-Camus), and the iconic ceramic installation, *Poppies: Weeping Window* (Tom Piper and Paul Cummins) both in 2017 and all three solely supported by 14-18 NOW. For their part, the Government of Ireland provided generous financial support for Fearghus Ó Conchúir’s dance work *Butterflies & Bones: The Casement Project* in 2016 and Hughie O’Donoghue’s spectacular exhibition, *The Tempest: Ireland; Memory; Identity* in 2017. It is cross border support that has made this work possible. The Festival’s core funding is simply insufficient to
commission, deliver and present projects of this nature and scale. Without the additional and significant investment from both 14-18 NOW and the Government of the Republic of Ireland, none of these projects would have been possible.

Future Challenges

At the time of writing, Brexit has been rescheduled for 31 October 2019 and occurs at a critical juncture for the arts and cultural sector throughout the island of Ireland as it slowly emerges from over a decade of austerity. Funding cuts for the arts and cultural sector in Northern Ireland have been particularly severe. Against this backdrop it is even more remarkable that Northern Ireland’s arts and cultural sector has continued to not only maintain some semblance of activity but has also been able to both nurture some notable local talents such as dance maker, Oona Doherty and to promote new infrastructural initiatives including for example, rebuilding and consequent revitalization of the Lyric Theatre and MAC Arts Centre.

However, Brexit not only threatens this fragile recovery but also potentially jeopardises future cross-border collaborations and programmes as well as excluding Northern Irish artists and cultural institutions from EU cultural initiatives. Belfast and Derry / Londonderry’s joint bid for European Capital of Culture in 2023 quickly became ineligible as a result of the Brexit referendum (Irish Times, 2017).

All of the aforementioned cross-border projects reflect the deep and long standing relationships that I built up over many years with artists and institutions across the island. In a previous life, I was managing director of the Abbey Theatre and thereafter the Government of Ireland’s Commissioner for a major cultural exchange with China. I still live in Dublin but am fortunate to work in Belfast for the Festival. More than that though, the Festival – like most leading cultural institutions – has an identity and vision that principally reflects
the beliefs and values of its chief curator and/or chief executive and, in this respect, the Belfast International Arts Festival is no different. My personal vision has always been of a twenty-first-century Ireland that embraces and celebrates its Irishness, with its increasingly multi-layered cultural identities, secure in the knowledge that this is not only good for society across the island but also allows us to play a full and meaningful role as global citizens, that is, encouraging ourselves and our fellow citizens to be more aware of and understanding of the wider world within which we live and to take an active role within our communities to make our world more equal, fair and sustainable.

From my first festival programme in 2013 through to the present day, you will find many events that celebrate and explore this vision with like-minded artists from across the island and indeed from further afield as well. Practically speaking, programming cross-border collaborations of the scale and nature discussed in this piece rely heavily on an ongoing dialogue between artists and the Festival, sometimes formal but often informal. Whilst it is widely understood in the arts and culture sector that the Festival is a strictly curated event without open calls for proposals, we do encourage artists to keep us apprised of their forthcoming creation, production and exhibition plans. Moreover, there are several more established artists who we also use as a sounding board to help us to identify key emerging artists that we may wish to work with in the future. Certain key professional showcases and platforms also provide useful indications not only of current repertoire but also of works that may be in development to be realised at a future date. In the Republic of Ireland, the Dublin Fringe Festival, Dublin Theatre Festival and Dublin Dance Festival all have important showcases of new stage works. There are sadly fewer such showcases in Northern Ireland, despite the Festival’s ongoing, but to date failed, efforts to persuade its stakeholders of the value of investing in a similar approach for our own event. Credit therefore to Prime Cut Productions whose annual Reveal-ed programme provides a
valuable showcase opportunity for Northern Irish theatre and dance artists.

Conclusion

In the meantime, the potential impact of Brexit on cross-border cultural relations and artistic collaborations continues to preoccupy many artists and cultural institutions. Will the mobility of artists and artworks across the Irish border be hindered or restricted? How likely is it that the UK Treasury will boldly step-up to invest in arts institutions that previously received capital grants from the EU, and in our own case, funding from the Creative Europe programme? Will the government policy continue to financially support free entry into major museums? How will international programmes like our own cope with currency fluctuations and the worsening euro/sterling rate? A perhaps more urgent issue is how to prevent Brexit dismantling complex and multi-layered notions of identity in Northern Ireland fostered over many years, and a return to a more simplistic, black and white viewpoint based solely on national allegiance. In the same vein, how will Brexit affect how we see and articulate our common European heritage? And will this shared European heritage, nurtured over 70 years of vital cultural networks – both formal and informal – be diminished, thereby impacting upon our ability to attract the best minds to Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom to contribute to our cultural life?

These are vital questions that artists and cultural institutions across Ireland are addressing, often through creative programmes and projects such as the examples given earlier. Incidentally, there are some aspects of cultural life on the island that will not change if Brexit happens. In recent years, a central theme for the Festival has been to explore how cultures can maintain an identity despite permeable and changing borders. Connections spread constantly, and artistic ideas travel especially fast and frequently ignore any notion of borders. Arguably, the core creativity of artists working on the island...
will not disappear post any Brexit, and moreover, does not require any special deals.

Brexit could also conceivably lead to a recalibration of UK - Irish cultural bonds with—some think—the emergence of Northern Ireland as the main bridge between the UK, Ireland and possibly Europe. A potential opportunity, or an unrealistic expectation?

As a bare minimum, cultural workers on both sides of the border will expect the same freedom to travel to, and work in both jurisdictions post Brexit. A memorandum of agreement preserving the Common Travel Area (CTA) between Ireland and the UK after Brexit was signed by the Irish and UK governments earlier in the year. Although a non-legally binding understanding at the time of writing this article, it, for example, allows cross-border access to education and healthcare, and provides some comfort to artists wishing to travel to, and work across the Irish Sea. However, with the continued absence of devolved government for Northern Ireland and consequent lack of local political decision making, it is hard to see how other crucial issues for NI artists and cultural organisations, such as access to European funding post Brexit, can be adequately addressed in the limited amount of time left to 31st October. So much of Northern Ireland’s future continues to therefore hinge on the reinstatement of the NI Assembly. Without it, there is little political motivation, for example for the Arts Councils on either side of the border to consider and introduce meaningful measures – properly resourced by their respective governments – that not only underpin but build on cultural relations across the island.

There are other ways too to support enhanced cross border working in respect of arts and culture, including;

- A move towards developing an all island cultural economy that sees for example, greater strategic emphasis by the two Arts Councils on
the island to enable more cross border touring and joint commissioning and producing of new works.

- Support for cultural organisations and institutions to build capacity and knowledge of the nature and scope of artistic practice across the island

- Training in arts disciplines remains underdeveloped in NI in particular. There is an opportunity to partially address this gap through increased co-operation between the various third level institutions across the island, providing young people greater access to diversity of education and training in the arts. Such links would not only involve facilitating greater cross border mobility by students but also closer collaboration between university and higher education departments across Ireland to produce a complimentary set of courses that are both genuinely accessible and inspirational in creating the next generation of contemporary artists.

The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 in Section 10 (2) (a) *Continuation of North-South co-operation and the prevention of new border arrangements* states that

Nothing in section 8, 9 or 23(1) or (6) of this Act authorises regulations which—diminish any form of North-South cooperation provided for by the Belfast Agreement (as defined by section 98 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998),

Hopefully, this inclusion not only requires that the Northern Ireland backstop will stay in place until MPs reach an agreement that honours the UK’s obligations under the Good Friday Agreement (1998), but that it also allows the cultural sector across the island to map out a new future that respects and constructively builds on the status quo. In any event, Belfast International Arts Festival will continue to work positively with those of a like mind to ensure we
play our role in ensuring good cultural relationships across the island, irrespective of the outcome of Brexit.

Richard Wakely is the CEO and Artistic Director of the Belfast International Arts Festival, Northern Ireland’s leading annual festival event of contemporary arts and ideas from across the globe. Previous posts include Commissioner for the China–Ireland Cultural Exchange Programme for the Irish Government; Managing Director of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin and General Manager of Hampstead Theatre, London.
Bibliography


