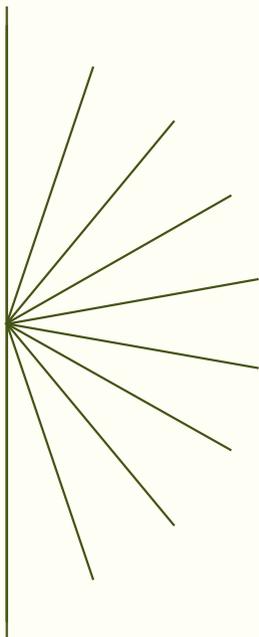# Cultural Bridge Round 2

Evaluation Report 2024

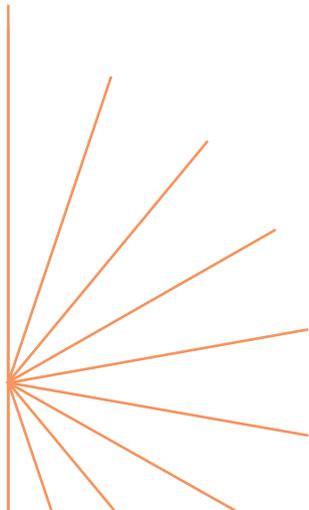### By TIALT - There is an alternative

How to read this report?

This report is an interactive pdf. At the top of each page, you'll find a clickable menu that allows you to easily click through to relevant sections of the report based on what you want to find out, rather than scrolling all the way through.

Click on this ☰ to go back to the contents page.

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Contents

© ENTER A collaboration between Creative Black Country (England) and Kulturvilla Nellie (Germany)

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Cultural Bridge provides funding for bilateral partnerships between socially engaged and grassroots arts organisations in the UK and Germany.

Round 2 (2023–2024) provided funding for

15
partnerships involving:

335
artists

186
cultural professionals

and over

1,000
community participants

Building on learning from the pilot year, Round 2 of Cultural Bridge split the funded partnerships into two 'Tiers'. Tier 1 was for new partnerships to explore and understand each other's contexts and practice (11 grants of up to £10k awarded). Tier 2 was for those with existing relationships to deepen their exchange and focus on tangible outputs for their organisations and communities (4 grants of up to £30k awarded).

Across all Cultural Bridge activity, the focus is on supporting organisations who are:

- Placing communities at the heart of their work

- Supporting people from across their communities to develop their creativity and discover their individual voices

- Empowering them to work together to shape local place, shared identity, and collective agency

- Exploring new ways of connecting arts and society, particularly through fostering co-creation between communities, artists, and other partners

Main outcomes of Round 2

A deeper understanding of mutual contexts:

- Cultural Bridge has enabled partners to take time to deeply understand another context and consider how this learning can influence their own work

- Understanding communities was an important use of time before and during project exchanges

For those funded at Tier 2 there were clear outcomes for the mutual communities they work in, particularly in developing international connections and cultural understanding, as well as using art as a tool to engage with complex social issues. **Co-creating with communities in this way, in some cases, led to an increased sense of agency.**

Taking a slow and steady approach is necessary for deep understanding:

- Partners focused on building trust, clarifying objectives, and adapting project plans as needed to meet shared goals

- Activities and projects focused on exploring new approaches to cultural practice and conversation, as well as creating environments conducive to co-creation and community engagement

- Activities and approaches remained joyful and enjoyable wherever possible to achieve outcomes

- All partners reported learning new methodologies, techniques, and approaches to inform their ongoing work

A flexible and trusting funding approach was welcomed:

- Most partners reported that as small organisations they generally don't have access to funding approaches like Cultural Bridge which encourage 'exploration over outcome', which was mentioned by many partners as being liberating

Expected and unexpected collaborations were built over time:

- The grants fostered a sense of community among those funded and encouraged further collaboration beyond the partnerships

- These unexpected collaborations often became emergent throughout the life of partnerships and extended the impact of planned activities (e.g., through local advocacy, activism or profile-building)

Partners intend to develop their work together:

- Almost all partners indicated that they intend to build long-term partnerships and continue their learning together, some through funding and others not

© AT THE TABLE A collaboration between The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) (Northern Ireland) and coculture e.V. (Germany).

Emerging impacts

- Cultural Bridge is enabling the development of meaningful and mutual relationships between organisations and practitioners between the UK and Germany that would not be happening otherwise

- Through additional collaborations and activities that 'emerge', the programme is having a greater impact than is generally expected when grants are being awarded

- The programme is enabling the development of long-term relationships based on shared aims and values (i.e., not just in response to a funding opportunity)

- Remembering and celebrating the importance of international collaboration, particularly on questions of politics, environment and sustainability remains vital at this point in history

- Partners are celebrating the visibility, recognition and profile that participating in Cultural Bridge has brought them

- Partners have also reported that Cultural Bridge has improved their ability to tell their stories and provided a vital opportunity to share their practice and its value
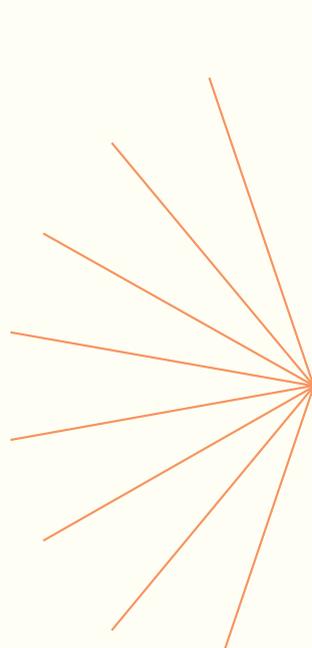
Key learning

- Given the locally specific context of much of the work and the additional attempts to understand the impact of regional and national policy on ways of working, combining a hyper-local focus and international relevance is challenging for some partners

- Some partners reported that they would have appreciated extra time or resources for admin and evaluation activities

- Some partners reported that changes in travel costs and conversion rates meant they had to significantly reallocate budgets and plans

- This is linked to an ongoing funding precarity experienced by many organisations making planning for long term collaboration or exchange difficult

- Keeping up with emerging ambition as projects evolve and opportunities emerge would benefit from some level of flexible funding and support, whether from Cultural Bridge funding stakeholders or other sources

Executive Summary

What is Cultural Bridge?

Who took part?

Key programme
outputs

Main outcomes reported
by partnerships

Emerging impacts

Key learning for the future

Methodology

Cultural Bridge_Round 2

© Femxle Spaces A collaboration between vier.D Germany) and ACCA_ Slung Low (England) Image_ Tim Dunk

What is Cultural Bridge?

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

In Round 2 the Cultural Bridge programme received 98 partnership applications, requesting over £1.1m in funding, demonstrating a clear demand for the programme and for international exchange opportunities. The funding stakeholders were able to fund 15 partnerships in total (£220k)

The programme acts as a platform of artistic exchange, enabling cultural professionals to discuss social issues, strengthen relationships between the UK and Germany and foster collaboration and cultural democracy.

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

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

Understanding bridge

Reflective practice bridge

Testing new approaches bridge

Disproportionate impact on socially engaged artists/practitioners/organisations

Disproportionate impact on already deprived communities

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

‘What bridges are being built?’
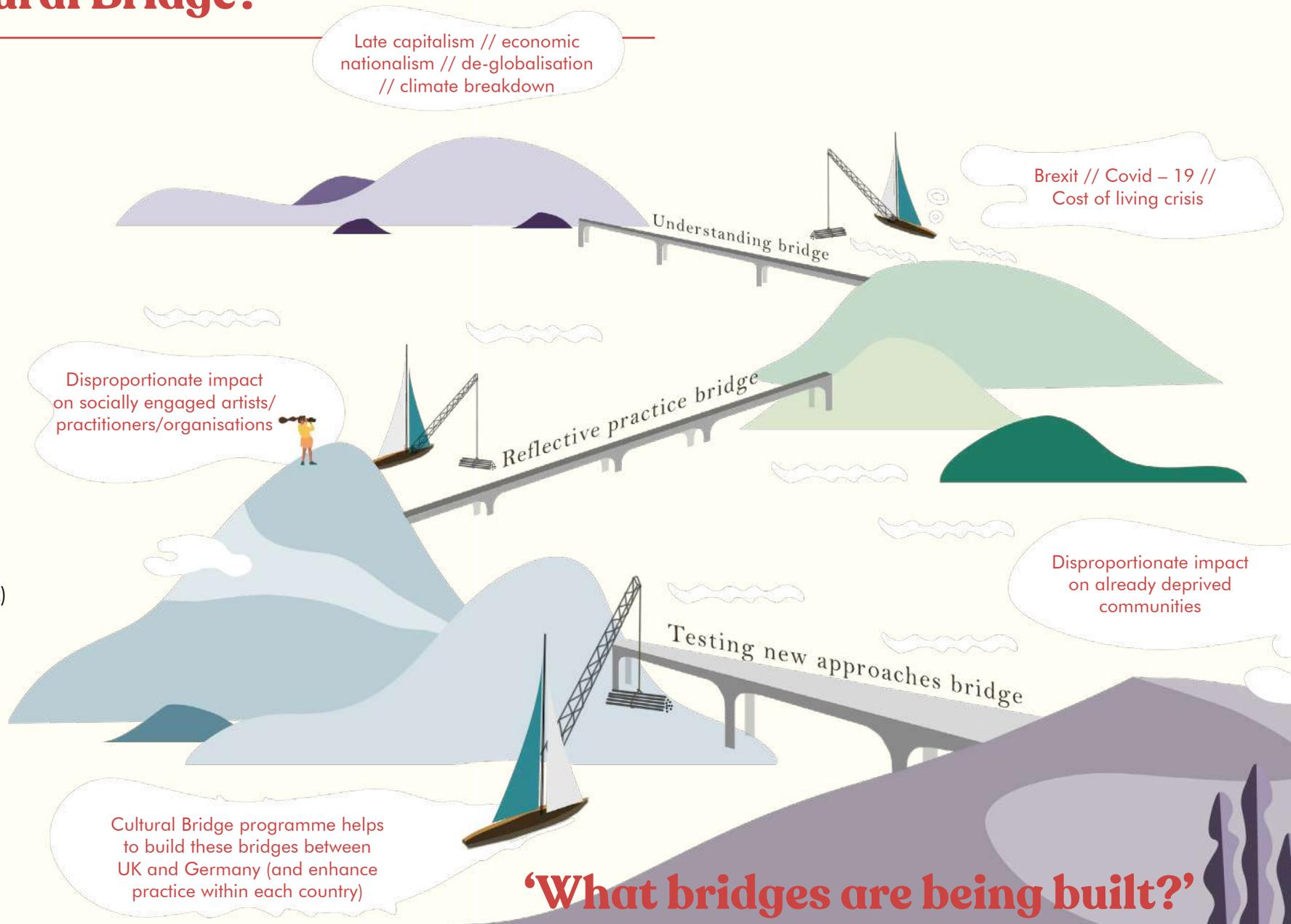
Round 2 of the programme, building from the pilot in Year 1, invited organisations to apply who embody cultural democracy through:

- Placing communities at the heart of their work

- Supporting people from across their communities to develop their creativity and discover their individual voices

- Empowering them to work together to shape local place, shared identity, and collective agency

- Exploring new ways of connecting arts and society, particularly through fostering co-creation between communities, artists, and other partners

All of the projects funded aligned with one or more of the strategic themes identified for the programme:

- Re-invigorating post-industrial places/communities

- Places with fewer opportunities to engage

- Places and communities transformed by grass-roots activism

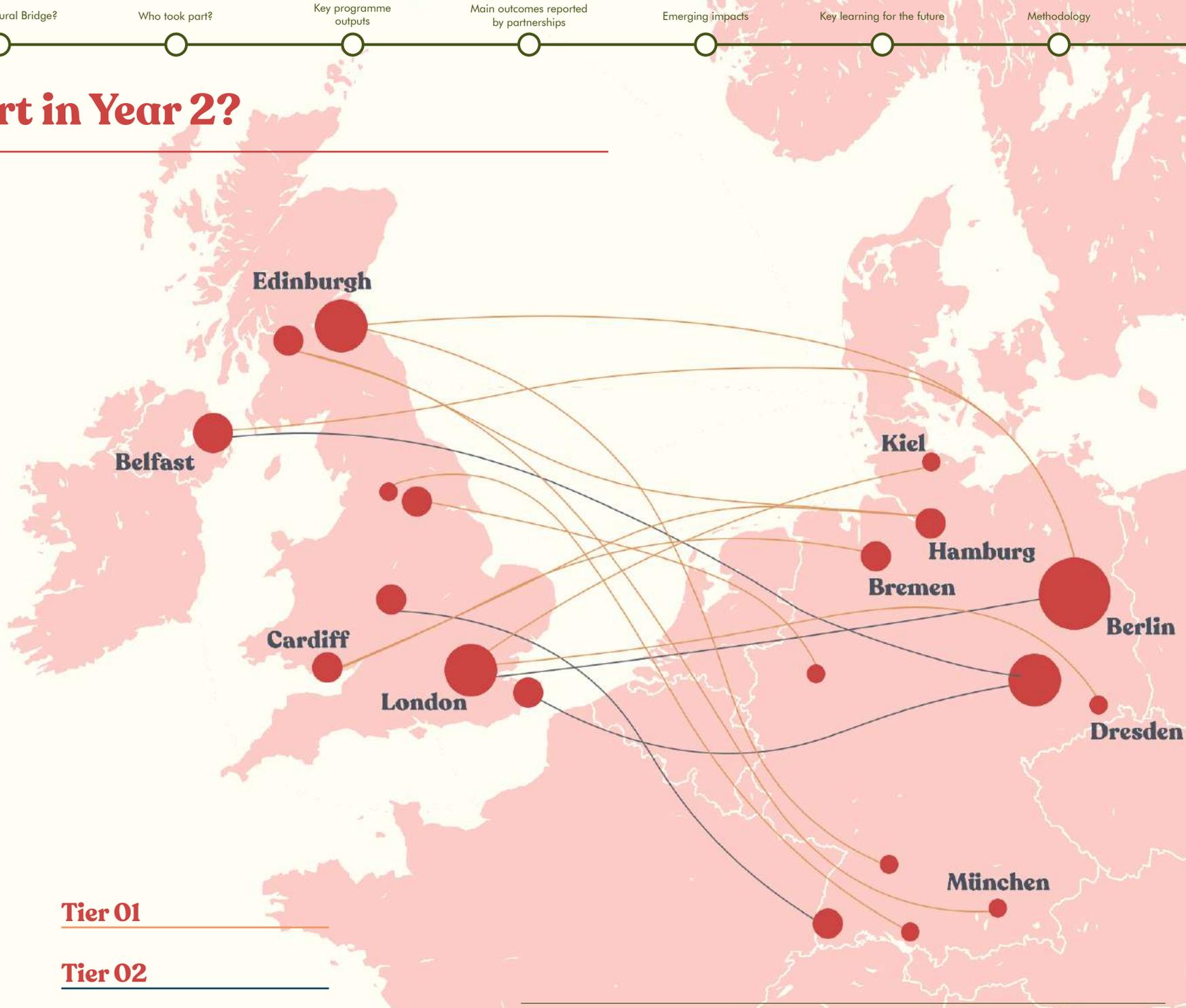- Redefining the use of public space

© ODE TO EARTH A collaboration between Die Villa Leipzig (Germany), Beyond Skin and DU Dance Belfast (Northern Ireland)

Who took part in Year 2?

In Year 2 the full cohort was split into two 'tiers'. Tier 1 partnerships focused on establishing and developing new relationships between organisations in the UK and Germany. The focus was on practice exchange and there was not an expectation for projects to develop or present public-facing outputs. Tier 2 partnerships were funded where organisations had an existing relationship (whether from the pilot year or separate from the Cultural Bridge programme). Tier 2 projects were expected to demonstrate more concrete outputs and outcomes. Eleven Tier 1 partnerships and four Tier 2 partnerships were funded.

The table below indicates the Tier 1 partnerships funded and a brief description of their projects.

Tier 01

Tier 02

Edinburgh
Belfast
Cardiff
London
Kiel
Hamburg
Bremen
Berlin
Dresden
München

Title	UK partner	German partner	Brief description of project aims
Illuminate Together	Handmade Parade (Hebden Bridge,UK)	Kapuziner Kreativentrum (Ravensburg, Germany)	Exchange of approaches focussed on development and creation of community led large-scale artworks and engagement in procession (e.g. puppetry, wearables and lanterns).
Co-creating with young voices	Mahogany Opera Group (Eng,UK)	Frequenz_Festival (Kiel,Germany)	Interrogating and sharing approaches to working with communities, including writing for young voices, expanding both the repertoire and introducing a new approach to making music for/with children. Ambition to deliver joint International Snappy Opera Festival in 2025.
Going spaces: forming new connections and fostering collaboration	SET studios London (Eng, UK)	Motorenhalle (Dresden, Germany)	Learning exchange to discuss issues of social engagement, neighbourhood work, relevant societal questions and working with wide and diverse audiences, supporting artists and integrating art into daily lives. Both have experience in use of meanwhile spaces facilitating social projects.
Femxle Spaces	ACCA/ Slung Low (Eng, UK)	vier.D (Dortmund, Germany)	Dortmund and Leeds CoC twin. Together partners wanted to artistically explore female perspectives in urban metropolises, learn about women's biographies and female-dominated spaces (safe spaces) in Leeds and Dortmund.
Bespoke	Make Works Scotland 'Paved with Gold' (Scot, UK)	Kulturzentrum LUISE (Germany)	Exchange of approaches, development of creative community model in new culture. Scottish partners, Make Works has a replicable model of access to local making / manufacturing and continues to support grassroots creative communities. Partnership explored the growth of a local community and network, as well as broader awareness and potential of craft, sustainable practice, circular economy principles in Munich.
Playing with Audio Walks: Storydive meets Produced Moon	Produced Moon (Glasgow, Scotland, UK)	Storydive (Hamburg, Germany)	This project was a collaboration between Produced Moon (PM) and Storydive, companies working at the intersection of storytelling, socially engaged practice and creative technologies. Partners wanted to explore how their practices could be combined to develop a new approach to participatory work. Specifically, how Produced Moon's experience in interactive play could meet Storydive's audio walk practice.

Growing together to facilitate community stories	Open Past (Scot, UK)	THE bEAR e.V. (Berlin, Germany)	Partnership formed via Cultural Bridge seminar event. Two non-profit organisations similar in size and age, with a strong commonality: whether it is by producing and sharing knowledge (Open Past) or presenting workshops and open stages for people to tell their true, personal stories.
Strictly Scottish and Schottish	Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland (TDFS) (Scot, UK)	Folk Dance Society of Germany (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkstanz e.V.)	Introduced by Goethe Institut, both organisations are set around a growing membership base of individual dance artists, practitioners and groups which demonstrates a commitment to participatory cultural activities using dance as a socially-engaged practice. Both are interested not only in Scottish traditional or German folk dance but in the international trad dance forms of the diverse diasporas.
Our EARTH Hour	Head4Arts (Wales, UK)	MOTTE eV. Stadtteil & Kulturzentrum (Germany)	Head4Arts, a community arts organisation based in the South-East Wales Valleys, and MOTTE, a community arts centre in Hamburg. Both share a passion for using the arts and cultural activities as the catalyst to create change in their communities. Both organisations are based in post-industrial locations and used this opportunity to explore how participatory arts projects can highlight local and global challenges and empower community members to take positive action to address them.
In Each Other's Company	National Dance Company of Wales (Wales, UK)	Of Curious Nature (Germany)	In Each Other's Company focused on the exchange of ideas and practice around social inclusion and social justice. It will explore notions central to the relationship between art making, culture and society, and the engagement of communities (geographic and interest driven) in the making and shaping of participative and co-created work.
At the Table	The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) (NI, UK)	coculture e.V. (Germany)	Some history between two staff who have reunited via the organisations they now work for - coculture (Berlin) and the MAC (Belfast) both provide cultural programming which supports cultural democracy through socially engaged arts practice. Collectively both partners (i) address issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees (ii) support campaigning for changes to national immigration rules (iii) combat negative stereotyping of migrants (iv) work to improve the integration of migrants into wider society. You can see a short film of the work here.

The table below provides details of the Tier 2 partnerships funded and a brief description of their projects:

Title	UK partner	German partner	Brief description of project aims
ENTER	Creative Black Country (Midlands - England, UK)	Kuturvilla Nellie (Lorrach, Germany)	Building from a strong pilot partnership with ambition to develop learning - what emerged from the R&D is that the majority of the local people that the artists were in touch within Wolverhampton and Lorrach/Manheim were expressing environmental interests and sharing concerns about climate change linked to their neighbourhoods and daily lives. The partners explored this theme further with young people in both places, particularly those whose voice is often unheard.
FAILSTONE	Folkestone Fringe (Folkestone, UK)	Fine Arts Institute Leipzig - FAIL (Leipzig, Germany)	FAILSTONE was a co-creation with specific communities to contribute to festival and exhibition programmes taking place in public space. FAILSTONE created inclusive spaces for gatherings and creative expression outside of the institutional realm with the intention to share this learning with the funders and institutions.
Between Moons. Spree~Channelsea Transmissions	Soundcamp CIC (London, UK)	Archipel Stations (Berlin, Germany)	This partnership brought Soundcamp together with Archipel Stations' floating broadcasts: mobile, layered transmissions along the river Spree and its banks. It allowed the organisations to understand these regions better, share different practices, and develop them in response to ecologies / situations in each city.
Ode to Earth (Phase 2)	Beyond Skin & DU Dance (Northern Ireland, UK)	VILLA Leipzig (Leipzig, Germany)	Project allowed cultural engagement on multiple levels, including engagement with youth from another country, travel and new cultural experiences, as well as interaction with music, dance, theatre and civic engagement as cultural mediums. Enabling young people to build a global network, feel more connected to the global community and other countries, and experience art as a medium for creative, cultural, and political expression. This political expression ties into transforming the community through grassroots activism - participants created awareness and advocacy about environmental issues that all their communities face. You can see a video of the work here.

What were the key programme outputs?

15
Grants made

£5,000
Average spend on artists and cultural professionals

335
Artists engaged

170
New partners created

186
Cultural Professionals engaged

1,167
Community participants involved

34,001
Audiences*

*Including 20,000 from one partnership event

Femxle Spaces: A collaboration between vier.D (Germany) and ACCA_ Slung Low (England) Image_ Lukas Staab

What were the key Tier 2 outputs?

4
Grants made

£8,100
Average spend on artists and cultural professionals

60
Artists engaged
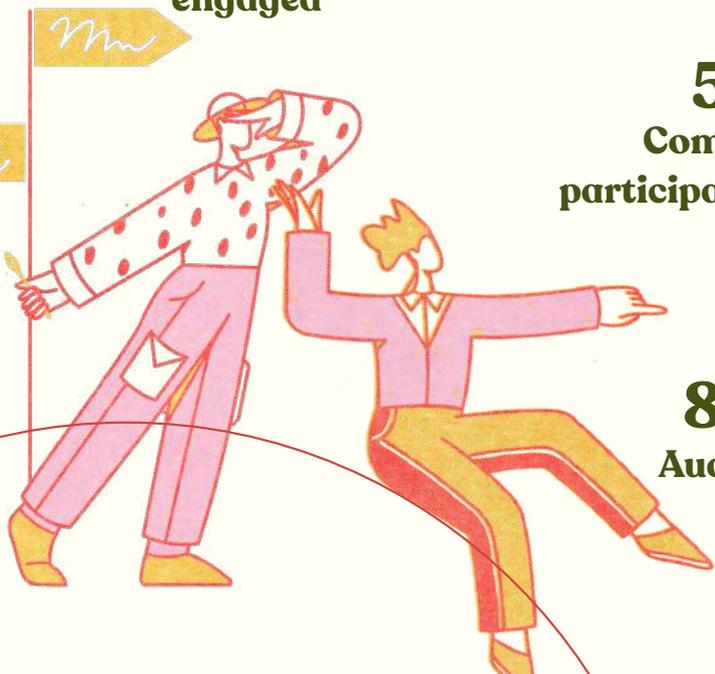
39
New partners created

54
Cultural Professionals engaged

555
Community participants involved

800
Audiences

AT THE TABLE A collaboration between The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) (Northern Ireland) and ... ture e.V. (Germany)

What were the main outcomes reported by partnerships?

A deeper understanding of mutual contexts

Co-creation work is highly dependent on the context of where the partners are based and the nature of their work. Many described how approaches to working and outcomes cannot be reproduced from one setting to another, nor expected to be. Instead, **Cultural Bridge has enabled partners to take time to deeply understand another context and consider how this learning can influence their own work.**

Many partnerships described the need to establish the similarities and differences that existed between partner contexts. Making time to connect remotely early in the projects enabled authentic invitations for people to build relationships, overcome fear of failure, and develop their growth and confidence.

For Tier 2 partnerships, building from existing relationships meant that they could co-design projects that would be relevant to the specific issues faced in their communities. As the 'deep dives' included below illustrate, this saw outcomes extend from exchanging practice and understanding, to **enabling engagement with communities fostering co-creation and greater agency.**

Engaging with communities and understanding their needs and challenges was also reported as vital for effective socially engaged practice. Several partners indicated that the work is taking place within communities which have unique histories and needs, and **understanding communities was an important use of time before and during project exchange visits.**

Taking a slow and steady approach is necessary for deep understanding

Investing time in building trust among team members and communities is crucial for successful collaboration. Aligning project expectations, managing project scope, and addressing differences in partner priorities required ongoing dialogue, flexibility, and compromise. **Partners focused on building trust, clarifying objectives, and adapting project plans as needed to meet shared goals.**

Understanding the dynamics of teams and individual personalities within those teams is important for effective collaboration. Being flexible and open to unexpected discoveries, relishing the unexpected, and allowing time for proper conversations was also described as important.

> **"I think it's ultimately a lot of collaborative meetings and making sure that there's a lot of time and energy spent talking with one another."**
>
> (Partner interview)

Tier 1 Deep Dive – Illuminate Together

Partners
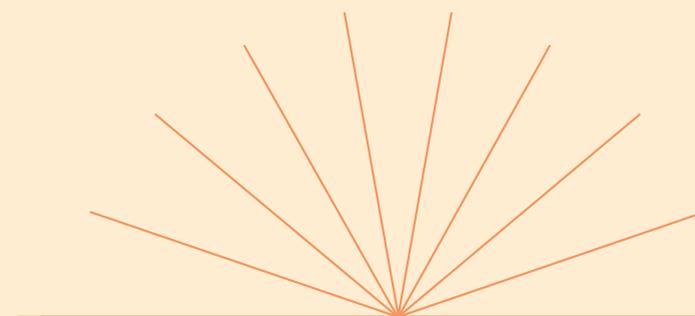
Handmade Productions
(Hebden Bridge, England)
is an arts organisation based in West Yorkshire, who specialise in producing community-focused parades and events. They bring artists into communities to create parades, festivals and celebrations. The team is made up of carnival artists, puppeteers, makers, musicians, stilt walkers and performers. Their events are created with the communities they work with, between professional artists producing their own work, and high quality, accessible, community-making and performing workshops.

Kapuziner Kreativzentrum
(Ravensburg, Germany)
is a community arts centre located in Ravensburg, South Germany. The former machine factory is now home to artists, musicians and the creative scene of the wider area. Their programme includes exhibitions, concerts and creative courses, all embedded in, and often co-created with, the local community. Since 2019, a lantern festival, the Ravensburger Lichterfest, is held biannually, which has become increasingly popular.

Key activities

- Handmade Productions were approached by Kapuziner Kreativzentrum to take part in Cultural Bridge, building from a previous connection and an awareness of shared interests and values.

- Several online meetings took place, each curated by a partner relating to key skills and learning that would support their mutual work. Guest artists were invited to share their expertise, including community filmmaking for outdoor spaces (Jack Lockheart), interactive electronic musical journeys (Brian Acton), an intro to "projection mapping" (Florian Dobler), and programming light and motion sequencing into artworks (Mick Chestertman).

- Handmade Productions artist Sue Walpole visited the KK team in Germany to teach artists and volunteers how to create a giant lantern puppet for the Lichterfest Ravensburger event. Three members of the KK team visited Hebden Bridge to meet local artists, visit a local light festival and participate in the Halifax Christmas Parade. Both trips enabled the sharing of expertise and a deeper understanding of their mutual contexts.

Clare Danon, Han...   Simon

ILLUMINATE TOGETHER A collaboration between Handmade Productions CIC (England) and Kapuziner Kreativzentrum (Germany)

k Chesterman - Microcontrolers Cultural Bridge 4 27th Jun...

Key outcomes

- Exchange and learning of new technical skills

- Deeper understanding of mutual contexts

- Developing new ideas and responses to their communities

"I think both partner teams, because we're working on community parades are very much interested in how we can develop and increase engagement. We are genuinely interested in developing new skills and ways to create community cohesion through parades - music, technology, light and projection and all the things we've been studying. We have been looking at new ways forward to work together."

The future

The partnership not only achieved its goal of enhancing community engagement and enabling artists to develop new skills, but also fostered a deeper connection between the two organisations. The collaboration continues, with plans to explore new ways to develop engagement and create artworks for both events in the future. There are ongoing discussions about how and when to apply for funding for future partnership working.

ILLUMINATE TOGETHER A collaboration between Handmade Productions CIC (England) and Kapuziner Kreativzentrum (Germany)

Designing bespoke interventions with and for communities

Partnerships aim to co-create programmes, engage new audiences, and foster connections between communities in different locations. This includes **exploring new approaches to cultural practice and conversation, as well as creating environments conducive to co-creation and community engagement.**

> **"It's really important that artists have time for development... to have time to have those conversations was really valuable."**
>
> (Partner interview)

> **"Overall, the trip offered us valuable insights into different approaches to hybrid and co-curated spaces, the importance of accessibility and facilities, and the potential of sustainable and cooperative models. We are excited to continue building on these learnings and incorporate our findings into our future programming and management."**
>
> (Partnership blog)

Collaborating across cultures requires navigating language barriers, understanding different cultural norms, and building trust. It was also highlighted by partners that seeking to make plans (online and offline) **joyful and enjoyable** wherever possible was also a key element of success.

Overall, the partnerships reported that the exchanges were most useful for developing new understanding of their own and others' work. Participating in projects facilitated knowledge exchange, **learning new methodologies, techniques, and approaches** from collaborators that could be used and applied in their own contexts.

> **The trust and commitment FAILSTONE embodied by listening, evaluating and discussing what was happening during the exchange, their empathy towards nurturing a truthful and supportive artistic collaboration which emphasised the connectedness of German and British cultural democracy. It is the role of these bridges to explore and disrupt established spaces and this is FAILSTONE'S gift to our collective future.**
>
> (Partnership blog)

> **The trip itself was a vital mechanism that connected these communities and opened up pathways for sharing knowledge through joint activities and discussions. It sets up the potential to build on these relationships, to enable the participants to support and learn from each other, to develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems. The position of makers and artists in both communities are, perhaps unsurprisingly, defined by a shared set of aims and desires, whether it be to establish an artistic practice, develop a social enterprise or build a business from their particular areas of operation. Each group or individual faces many of the same challenges, whether it be in Scotland or Munich.**
>
> (Partnership blog)

Tier 1 Deep Dive – Playing with Audio Walks: Storydive meets Produced Moon

Partners

Storydive
(Hamburg, Germany) is a platform and multiplicator for artistic and literary audio walks, supporting artists and cultural/educational institutions throughout the production process of audio walks which are published in the apps Storydive and Ortspiel. They also create audio walks together with children and young people and train educators on the subject. Workshop topics cover urban development, culture of remembrance, empowerment and own voice narratives.

Produced Moon
(Glasgow, Scotland) is a Creative XR Theatre Lab. They create playful, unsettling and magical experiences with audiences at the centre. Their work ranges from game theatre to escape rooms, participatory digital storytelling to 360 degree film & more. They aim to advance the arts by creating high quality artistic events that centre the audience experience, through the creation and promotion of interdisciplinary events; working responsively with participants, either in workshops or as audience members, making them feel empowered.

Key activities

- The organisations connected via a callout for another programme that didn't feel like the right fit, but they said they would keep an eye out for other funding opportunities and Cultural Bridge seemed like a good fit.

- The collaboration began with a series of Zoom meetings to discuss plans, reflect on previous work, and explore new ideas for the collaboration.

- A week-long residency was held at Platform Glasgow in July 2023. The organisations shared past practices, ran an open workshop for young people and families, and explored possibilities with creative technologist Libby Odai. The open workshop saw participants imagining a multiverse of worlds through creative prompts, resulting in a collection of pictures, sculptures, and stories that built a mini multiverse.

- The collaboration continued with a visit to Hamburg in September 2023, joined by artist Esther Kaufmann. Partners experienced a selection of audio walks and reflected on the potential of live data in storytelling, including live podcasting.

- While in Hamburg the partners also created a podcast about a fictional show they made together - The F Walk

Playing with Audio Walks: Storydive meets Produced Moon_A collaboration between Storydive (Hamburg, Germany) and Produced Moon (Glasgow, Scotland)

Key outcomes

- Inspiration and new creative ideas
- Deeper understanding of mutual contexts
- Development of new skills and knowledge

The collaboration left both teams inspired and buzzing with ideas for new ways to explore public spaces and craft alternative realities. They are now focused on securing funding, partners, and support to explore their new approach of creating scavenger hunt audio walks and fostering collaboration between young people in Hamburg and Glasgow.

> "What has been incredible is the open nature of the fund, the opportunity for there to be something that is not so outcome driven. We've used it as an opportunity to really get to know one another's practice and to explore what a collaboration might look like for us, and to think about how we can learn and develop in response to each other… the flexible nature of this fund and the space for opening up dialogue has been really appealing to us, especially because we hadn't worked together before. And that's always tricky - when you're thinking we'd like to get to know you before diving into a huge project together, especially as we're in working in quite different contexts and spaces, Cultural Bridge has afforded us a really great way to do that."

The future

During the exchange, the organisations developed an idea for a future project, combining Produced Moon's scavenger hunts and world building with Storydive's audio walk and podcasting practice. This will now be funded as a Tier 2 project for Round 3 of the Cultural Bridge programme and there are plans to build from this into longer-term cultural and practice exchange.

Playing with Audio Walks: Storydive meets Produced Moon_A collaboration between Storydive (Hamburg, Germany) and Produced Moon (Glasgow, Scotland)

A flexible and trusting funding approach was

Projects reported that **as small organisations they generally don't have access to funding approaches like Cultural Bridge**, with a proportionate application process and ongoing support provided as needed. This was reported as being both welcomed and contributing to the success of partnerships.

The support for **'exploration over outcome' was mentioned by many partners as liberating**, and necessary for them to be authentically responsive to their local and cultural contexts.

> **"We loved the kind of flexible nature of this. And really, the space for opening up dialogue felt really appealing to us. This is not supported very often by funding"**
>
> (Partner interview)

> **"I've been struck also by that sort of giving attention on the part of the organisers [funding partners]... There's a need to enter a smaller political space and articulate why this type of work is important and significant."**
>
> (Partner interview)

> **"I've been to a number of [the online Cultural Bridge] meetings, and I've been struck also by that sort of giving attention on the part of the organisers, but also to the quality of the other projects, and just to use that word quality for what it's worth, it's nice that they're very varied. I was struck about the one that was working with refugees, and the one about making things in Scotland, they're really different, but they both have a lot of integrity. And I think what's quite nice, for me, is the idea that there's a place for us in there as well, you know, you can be you can be part of some kind of 'creative ecology' that is exploring different things with other people with a view to actually learning some stuff that could be useful to all of us"**
>
> (Partner interview)

Expected and unexpected collaborations were built over time

Encounters, discussions, and exchanges with other cultural organisations and grant recipients at a programme level (i.e., through the regular lunchtime learning sessions) provided valuable learning opportunities, insights, and connections that **fostered a sense of community among those funded.**

All project reports included experiences of exceptional hospitality, warmth, and respect from project partners, which contributed to a sense of camaraderie throughout the collaborations.

Collaborations with unexpected partners, such as cultural organisations, local policymakers, and advocacy groups, led to valuable additional opportunities for exchange, visibility, and support. **These unexpected collaborations often became emergent throughout the life of partnerships** (i.e., there was a balance between planning for these interactions and enabling them to happen organically).

Many organisations reported how surprising encounters with community members, decision-makers, politicians, and activists during events and exhibitions sparked meaningful dialogues, advocacy efforts, and potential for policy change.

Tier 2 Deep Dive – FAILSTONE

Partners

Fine Art Institute Leipzig (FAIL)

(Leipzig, Germany) believes in art as a common ground for honest encounters. FAIL Institute creates formats that are based on radically honest creation, mediation and reception of contemporary art. Understanding the tense atmosphere in (eastern) Germany, building bridges between rural and urban areas is a priority. With a focus on emerging artists, the organisation is based on the principle that failure is not only an option but essential to every instance of life.

Folkestone Fringe

(Folkestone, England) is an artist-led organisation committed to creating opportunities and projects which connect across communities, inviting people to be visible, celebrate diversity and make place together. They believe in the transformative power of art - both in a personal sense, and also as a way of highlighting societal issues and driving social change. In particular, they empower a younger generation to be the producers of well-considered, meaningful cultural activity locally.

Key activities

- FAIL and Folkestone Fringe were connected in Round 1 of Cultural Bridge where their project focused on practice exchange and developing knowledge of each other's contexts, priorities and ways of being and doing.

- For their Tier 2 project they continued to have fortnightly online discussions instigated during the pilot year of their partnership but focused on creating space for two longer residencies allowing for deeper opportunities to engage with communities.

- The partnership also created a publication of six 'coasters' with games printed on them to encourage incidental engagement with the work. These continue to be distributed in bars and venues as a way of creating broad access and connectivity among those encountering them.

- The first residency took place in July 2023 when FAIL joined the team in Folkestone for a month-long residency, setting up in the Urban Room and co-curating elements of the Festival of Looking, which included the Urban Room Takeover. The brief was open, ensuring the programme was responsive to the explorations and interactions with Folkestone communities. The Folkestone Fringe team then visited FAIL in Leipzig in October to understand how their work was being implemented and received locally.

FAILSTONE_A collaboration between Fine Art Institute Leipzig (FAIL) (Leipzig, Germany) and Folkestone Fringe (Folkestone, England)

Key outcomes

- Authentic connection between artists and with communities
- Shared understanding of the need for focusing on process over outcome to enable genuine socially engaged practice

- Deeper understanding of the potential opportunities and pitfalls of working in specific spaces with communities in the UK and Germany

The future

Having completed their pilot work and Tier 2 work, the partners intend to continue their relationship and establish what kind of project model may be most suited to their different operational contexts. All partners have reflected that they are already applying the learning that was enabled by their involvement in Cultural Bridge.

"And so to spend time with another organisation, whose practice is about how you engage with and talk to people, how you create a safe environment and invite people in, and what the quality of that invitation looks like. How you look after people and what the demands or expectations are, but on their turf in the third space - that was our experience in Germany. It's like someone holding your hand - it's not intentional 'teaching', but for you to see other ways of doing things that are also relevant in your own world and practice. We learn by doing and this is the most process led thing I've ever been involved in."

"We would like to take our idea of FAILSTONE (opening up a space to local communities for self-expression, sharing, joy) to a third place, that is new to all of us and see if and how the concept works there. Art can create spaces where the rules of societies can be re-imagined. If people were given this opportunity in an art space, this learning, and different attitude of curiosity, failing being ok, asking questions, inviting opinion in between different types of people, would be transferable into other contexts and situations. This would be empowering to so many people, inside and outside of institutions."

Partners intend to develop their work together

Partners valued learning from each other and developing their practices. They actively sought opportunities to exchange ideas, skills, and resources, and to support each other's growth and development. **There was a focus on building long-term partnerships and learning together.**

In their end of project reports most partners expressed a desire to continue collaborating, sharing knowledge, and developing practices over an extended period beyond the grant phase. Although organisations also highlighted the need of funded opportunities to develop emerging practices.

> **"I think neither of us thinks that our partnership is done with the end of [project], because it I actually can't imagine not doing projects with these guys again."**
>
> (Partner interview)

> **"We're definitely hoping to work together in the future to work together. And we'll, we need to kind of look at the we're a kind of, we've done the kind of through the ideation and start looking at the practicalities and what that looks like."**
>
> (Partner interview)

The programme focuses on the potential impact of collaborative projects on social change and community empowerment. Partnerships aim to address complex global issues, advocate for human rights, and empower marginalised voices through artistic expression and activism.

It should be recognised that this is a long-term outlook, and that Cultural Bridge has introduced ideas via partnerships, but that further funding and sustained ways of working will be necessary to achieve long-term impacts.

Dealing with difficulties

Partners described a number of challenges that arose. Finding time in busy schedules, coordinating travel schedules, and aligning timelines between partners were common challenges. Solutions included open communication, contingency planning, involving additional team members to distribute the workload, and implementing flexible scheduling arrangements.

Navigating communication barriers, particularly due to language differences, required solutions such as using translation tools, defining clear roles and responsibilities, and fostering open, trusting relationships to discuss and overcome misunderstandings. While some projects encountered unexpected logistical challenges, such as securing permissions for performances or navigating bureaucratic processes, these obstacles also presented opportunities for creative problem-solving and collaboration.

Managing budgets, dealing with unexpected costs, and navigating funding restrictions posed challenges. Solutions involved seeking additional funding opportunities, reallocating budgets strategically, negotiating payment terms with funders, and exploring cost-saving measures such as volunteer assistance. Some of these are discussed further in the key learning section below.

FALLSTONE_A collaboration between Fine Art Institute Leipzig (FAI – Leipzig, Germany) and Folkestone Fringe (Folkestone, England)

Tier 2 Deep Dive – Ode to Earth (Phase 2)

Partners

Beyond Skin
(Belfast, Northern Ireland) is an intersectional arts collective building peace and social cohesion at home and beyond. Established in January 2004, they have always maintained that arts and music are an exceptional tool for overcoming barriers in our society and fostering connection, understanding and community. They utilise the arts to address issues of racism and sectarianism and build trust, designing and facilitating innovative projects that strengthen community relations, nurture local peacebuilding, empower youth, and promote interaction between different cultures.

The VILLA
(Leipzig, Germany) was created through the special commitment of people living in Leipzig. Their special history is still a driving force in their work: people have ideas; people have concerns. At VILLA, they take on concrete forms. For example, young people learn and experience commitment. Musical ideas mature in the band rehearsal room - theatrical ones on the stage of the event cellar. The work was split between two strands of the VILLA; Engagement and Politis, and the Youth Culture cellar – focusing on youth work via theatre and electronic music.

DU Dance
(Belfast, Northern Ireland) is a dance development company based in Belfast and delivering work locally, nationally, and internationally. The company's vision is to advance dance as an art form, build community connections and foster tolerance and respect. Its aim is to introduce young people to dance and related creative activities, and advocate dance as a tool for facilitating personal and social development. With a focus on intercultural, intergenerational and cross community development projects, the company has gained a reputation for its work at the cutting edge of dance and social and community development.

Key activities

- The partners met in Round 1 of Cultural Bridge where they took the opportunity to learn about each other's work and context. A lighter-touch exchange was arranged between the young people the organisations work with to explore creative responses to the climate crisis.

- In Belfast, the group also connected with the Northern Ireland Green Party who gave a presentation on some of the current climate issues and threats locally. This provided further context for the group's final performance.

- For Phase 2, in August 2023, five young artists from Belfast aged 17-24 travelled to Leipzig to share their skills in dance, circus and music with six young artists from VILLA Leipzig before welcoming them to Belfast for the second week of exchange. Exchange activities included masterclasses in dance, music, circus and theatre, as well as discussion on the climate crisis, and local cultural trips.

- The young people provided public performances at the end of each week in both cities, showcasing their work in front of live audiences across multiple sites.
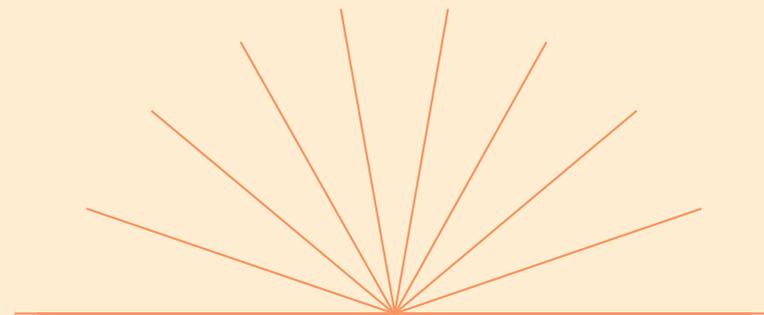
Key outcomes

- Learned about co-creation processes and new methods of co-creating with young people

- Gained knowledge on how to approach social activism, including handling difficult conversations with groups and audiences

- Developed strong, trust-based relationships during the planning, programming, and implementation of activities

- Discussed the potential to create a strong methodology model combining arts and social activism for community groups in both locations

"The project gave me an outlet to discuss these topics in an open space to my entire community so I definitely feel more equipped to discuss these issues further."

(Participant)

"The experience I have valued the most so far has been the opportunity to meet new people and learn more about the various perspectives on the topics discussed as we create our project together"

(Participant)

"I had a chance to practice speaking and listening to the German language. Participants from Leipzig helped me to understand German better. We exchanged words that were new for them in English and me in German."

(Participant)

"Participation in the project helped me feel empowered to make a change"

(Participant)

Ode to Earth_A collaboration between Beyond Skin (Belfast, Northern Ireland), DU Dance (Belfast, Northern Ireland) and The VILLA (Leipzig, Germany)

"It's the journey, the building of those relationships and establishing trust. Especially if people are going to make themselves vulnerable in terms of their performances and opening up about what they were talking about. I think because of those relationships we could work through any challenges. It's hard to gather the data on trust, but that's kind of what you're working towards - that when they perform you know, they're one unit of different voices. And both organisations were not afraid of really pushing creative boundaries as well, we really challenged and that could be crazy sometimes, but that's fine, there's definitely space for that. It's about making it fun as well as getting that message across and allowing people to be creative, whatever that may result in, but the underlying currency is to build the trust, that's what makes for the strongest outcomes."

(Partner)

"Ode to Earth has created awareness and advocacy productions about environmental issues - developing vital skills and confidence that will invigorate young people to continue activism and impact their communities."

(Partner)

The future

Both organisations report that they are already applying the learning that has come from the exchange, particularly in relation to co-creation, combining arts with activism and thinking about larger scale projects relating to climate change.

There has been talk of extending the work to young people with additional support needs and developing some kind of toolkit based on the methodologies developed to support even more organisations. There has not been an immediate approach for extended funding for the partnership, although this remains of interest, recognising the limitations caused by Brexit.

Ode to Earth_A collaboration between Beyond Skin (Belfast, Northern Ireland), DU Dance (Belfast, Northern Ireland) and The VILLA (Leipzig, Germany)

What are the emerging impacts of Cultural Bridge?

Based on research and reporting from Round 2, it is clear that the most significant emerging impact is the **development of meaningful and mutual relationships between organisations and practitioners between the UK and Germany that would not be happening otherwise.**

The division in Round 2 between Tier 1 and Tier 2 grants has been an effective way to enable deeper project working within existing relationships, as well as the development of new connections. In almost all cases partners reported making more new connections than they had originally anticipated. This indicates that **the programme is having a greater impact than is generally expected when grants are being awarded.**

The two-tiered funding approach also enables organisations to consider whether future project funding (from Cultural Bridge or other sources) is the most appropriate next step. In some cases, it was decided that further discussion and exploration was the best route forward rather than funding. This indicates the **development of long-term relationships based on shared aims and values**, rather than constant response to funding opportunities 'for the sake of it'.

Remembering and celebrating the importance of international collaboration, particularly on questions of politics, environment and sustainability was highlighted many times by partners. As grassroots and socially engaged practice is increasingly expected to deal with complex problems, the ability to be supported to develop practice in the context of international collaboration was described as vital and increasingly difficult through other means, particularly as the UK has removed itself from access to many other sources of international cooperation funding.

Many partners mentioned the **visibility, recognition and profile that participating in Cultural Bridge has brought them** and how this is welcomed for those engaged in grassroots and participatory work especially. Often Cultural Bridge partners' practice is overlooked, but the opportunity to share it in the blogs, promotion and cross-programme discussions and sharing has been enormously welcomed by most taking part.

Several partners indicated that Cultural Bridge has enabled **improved storytelling and increased ability to share their practice and its value** to a broader community of interest than previously. This indicates growing potential for Cultural Bridge to establish itself as a key point of convergence for those interested in socially engaged practice in the UK and Germany, as well as a catalyst for promoting the work of those it funds.

Tier 2 Deep Dive – Spree ~ Channelsea Radio Group

Partners

Archipel Stations Community Radio

(Berlin, Germany) is an itinerant web and FM radio occupying venues worldwide, from where events are broadcast and programmes from elsewhere are transmitted live. Since 2020, it has housed interventions by Radio Otherwise, an offshoot artistic research project with the intention to deal more explicitly with radio in an ecological framework, including a focus on listening and cybernetics. This has involved the development of microFM transmitters for both installation and workshop settings, as well as collective, durational transmissions and site-specific works for radio.

Blanc Sceol

(Stephen Shiell and Hannah White, London, England) are an artist duo living and working in London, with a socially engaged practice creating performances, compositions and participatory actions. They use deep listening, somatic and ritual gestures, and live streaming to encourage creative and tangible action, on behalf of, and alongside, urban ecosystems. In 2018 they co-founded Surge Cooperative on the Channelsea river in Newham, to build affordable moorings and advocate for river rights. Their research here seeks to live with, listen with and act with this vital ecosystem, finding new ways to tackle problems of neglect and misuse whilst navigating ancient acts of parliament to fight for the conservation of this waterway.

Soundcamp Cooperative

(London) are an arts cooperative based at Stave Hill Ecological Park in Rotherhithe and Work Shop 1 in Loughborough Junction, as well as in Glasgow, Berlin, Crete The Hague. As part of the Acoustic Commons network, we coordinate the long-form radio broadcast Reveil (2014–), and a series of sound and ecology events (soundcamps) on Dawn Chorus day each year. We are interested in diy infrastructures that can move live sounds between places and situations, and give attention to less heard human and non-human communities. Our work appears as broadcasts, workshops, sound devices and events. A full list of activities is at soundtent.org > news.

Key activities

- Archipel and Soundcamp knew each other from working together before Cultural Bridge and saw the Tier 2 funding opportunity as a way to formalise some of their ideas into a project.

- In preparation for the in-person exchanges, the partners formed a remote reading group to develop their thinking together with others, and gradually establish lasting bridges between people involved with each river.

- The group met monthly at the same time in each city. In Berlin, they worked with Zabriskie, an independent book shop with a history of hosting reading clubs. In London they met at the Lea Bridge Library, the floating Pier room at Hermitage Wharf, and the Long Wall Ecology Garden on the banks of the Channelsea river.

- The first exchange took place in London in July 2023, and the second in Berlin in September 2023. The exchanges set up a floating sound lab in each location, as a mobile platform to explore the social, organisational and environmental ecologies of the rivers, their shores and inter-tidal zones. During the exchanges they ran a series of live radio transmissions bringing the rivers and their people into contact.

- The project culminated in a joint radio broadcast from both rivers / cities at the end of September, and a publication reflecting on the process.

Key outcomes

- Enhancing their mutual practice through learning methods, principles and taking inspiration from each other.

- Development and testing of new technologies for simultaneous and interactive radio transmissions.

- Enhanced understanding of urban river infrastructures, legal frameworks, localised cultural contexts and justice and activism within these systems.

We identify as an ecological cooperative, focusing on three ecologies: selves, institutions/ social organizations, and the environment. We believe these cannot be separated. Our aim is to maintain the interconnectedness of these ecologies in all our work, though it's a challenge. We try to develop micro tactics to respond to situations, which may involve setting up a radio station on a boat, or listening to bats! If we find the right place, technology, and collaborators, we can create meaningful change, even though our interventions are small compared to larger, more vertical power structures.

This was a test to see if our work could engage with the unique social contexts of the Channelsea and Berlin rivers. We aimed to highlight the rivers' distinctive roles in urban space, their communities, ecosystems, and lesser-known aspects amidst intense urban development. We questioned how our listening practices could help explore and convey these aspects. Our project engaged with the idea of using these practices for the rivers and their communities, including advocating for the rivers' agency and personhood through sound. Although, it was all still quite experimental.
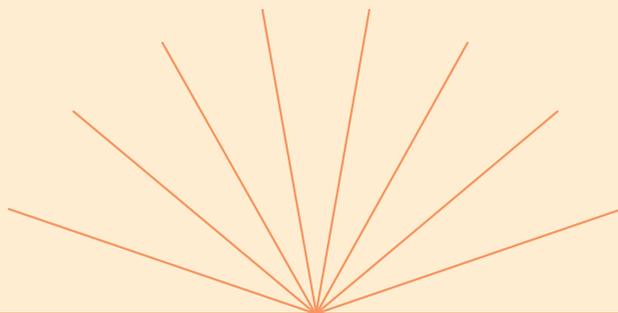
[Soundcamp Cooperative]

The future

The partners hope to further develop and explore their ideas, with ambitions to implement new approaches they've learned from each other. They are interested in developing a sharable approach to the 'transmission ecologies' methods prototyped in the project. They are also interested in potentially exploring partnerships in other places. There is an intention to continue meeting when they can and continue to explore funding opportunities outside

Additional Outcomes and Activities:

- The project was documented on a micro site developed throughout the project https://acousticommons.net/~

- The partners are producing a cassette with a selection of materials gathered during the project.

- The partners have produced a publication. This was printed live on the radio during a broadcast produced by Archipel Stations Community Radio.

- They are planning a 4th broadcast where we will hand bind the publication together, remotely.

- During the Berlin week of the exchange a textile piece Time is no river but a lake in which past, present and future flow into each other was produced

Syree – Channelsea Radio Group_A collaboration between Archipel Stations Community Radio (Berlin, Germany), Soundcamp Cooperative (London) and Blanc Sceol (Stephen Shiell and ... name, London, England)

What is the key learning for the future of the programme?

Partners reported that combining a hyper-local focus and international relevance is challenging. Some partners indicated that they felt that while practice could be exchanged, the policy context was so different (and in some cases volatile) that longer term change at a local level because of the practice exchange was difficult to predict.

Some partners indicated that they would have appreciated extra time for admin and evaluation activities. Initial budgeting did not generally account for the time it took to plan trips, adapt plans in response to unexpected changes, or for end of project reflection and reporting activities. Cultural Bridge funding partners may wish to encourage more realistic and flexible approaches to budgeting in future iterations on this basis.

Linked to this, some partners reported that changes in travel costs and conversion rates meant that budgets were put under pressure in unexpected ways. Retaining some programme contingency funds that can be distributed should partnerships encounter significant changes to planned budgets could be a useful mechanism in the future.

In one case a partnership was put under additional pressure and planned activities were put at risk by a loss of core funding. Funding precarity in general was mentioned by several partners as potentially inhibiting ongoing capacity to build from the partnerships and plan for the longer-term.

Keeping up with emerging ambition was also reported as challenging for some partnerships. While most welcomed the opportunities to expand and grow elements of the projects in response to opportunities emerging throughout, it was also recognised that this could demand capacity and resources that had not been planned for but was provided in the spirit of collaboration. Longer funding timeframes and access to incidental or incremental 'top-up' funding could enable a more responsive approach to project design and resource management.

Methodology

This evaluation is based on several sources, including:

- Regular online learning and reflection sessions with partners. These followed a sharing of project updates and used facilitated discussion methods to explore the learning and impact emerging within and across projects

- 'Deep dive' interviews with five projects. These were interviews of between 60 and 90 minutes with self-nominating projects to explore partner experiences in greater depth

- End of project reflection forms. Partners were encouraged to share reflections of key learning, impacts and challenges at the end of the project period via a short online proforma.

The findings shared here are based on a thematic analysis of these key sources of data, alongside the content of the blogs produced by projects at various stages throughout Round 2. The evaluation team is also in regular contact with the programme team throughout in order that any strategic changes that may affect the programme are accounted for.