

The future of cross-border cooperation in the arts

Policy briefing and executive summary

Commissioned by ARINS
Produced by The Audience Agency
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Introduction to the research

ARINS (Analysing and Researching Ireland North and South) is a joint project of The Royal Irish Academy, an all-island body, and the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs, a research institute of international standing. The project engages recognised experts across the spectrum of disciplines, perspectives and points of view, inviting contributions in the form of academic papers, blog posts, and proposals for partnerships.

The primary aim of ARINS is to generate research into questions about the future relationship of Ireland and Northern Ireland beyond Brexit. The ARINS project commissioned The Audience Agency to write a review of *The future of cross-border cooperation in the arts* to investigate the interconnections between the arts sectors in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The purpose of the review is to provide a starting point for further research and policy development to enable greater cooperation between the arts sectors in both jurisdictions. In mapping cross-border cooperation, the full review offers an assessment of the existing policy landscape and practice on the ground. This document is an executive summary of the findings and recommendations. The full report will be made available at www.arinsproject.com.

Alongside providing a brief commentary on the cultural economy in Northern Ireland and Ireland, the report maps cross-border cooperation in the arts at three levels – the local, national and international. It involved both extensive desk research and a mixed-methods study including semi-structured interviews, focus groups and discussions with artists and practitioners, academics, consultants, policymakers and staff at a range of levels in both Arts Councils.

Why engage in cross-border cultural cooperation?

The **Cross-Border Cooperation in the Arts (CBCA) Development Model** was produced as part of this work. It presents a typology of the varying reasons, drivers and rationales for cross-border cooperation in the arts that were expressed to us during our research. The table both summarises and interrogates some of the rationales as to why such engagement might be important.

Area	Focus	Benefits
Professional Development	Artist and Arts Manager	Skills & knowledge transfer; networking, exchange of best practice,
Artform Development	Theatre, music, dance and other art forms	New work, artform hybridity, genre exploration
Audience Development	Attendance, engagement, participation	Different and new audiences: diversity, scale, frequency
Economic Development	Revenue generation, economies of scale	Income, efficiency savings, shared risk
Civic Development	Social realm, public sphere	Empathy, mutual understanding, better relations within and between traditions

Findings of the review:

- **Learning from/impact of Brexit and COVID-19** Both have a major impact on current cross-border cooperation, so require addressing in this context. It was difficult for many interviewees to see past their impact when discussing barriers to cooperation.
- **Absence of a policy framework** Cross-border cooperation in the arts is signalled at various administrative levels, yet it lacks clear formalisation. An overall framework or stand-alone policy document for cross-border cooperation in the arts is absent.
- **North/South ambivalence** Perceived attitudes of ambivalence and indifference between communities and arts sectors suggest the need for increased cross-border cooperation is not a given. This was especially apparent amongst those with direct experience of working and living on both sides of the border.
- **Cultural value** Culture is understood as a resource, source of pride, social tool, tourism vehicle and an integral element of national identity. However, differing approaches – north and south – reveal questions of cultural value to be subjective, political, and highly contextualised.
- **Psychogeography of the border** 'Cross-border' activity takes place on a capital-to-capital basis, in the borderlands as part of daily life, and via relationships between other parts of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Policy responses should recognise these very different dynamics and that 'cross-border cooperation' is not commonly used terminology.
- **Resource disparity** Funding disparities between Northern Ireland and Ireland at a departmental, Arts Council and local council level - and resulting resource challenges in Northern Ireland - create ecological differences between artforms on the island.
- **Structures, mechanisms and platforms for exchange** Formal structures to facilitate cross-border cooperation in the arts would be welcomed by the arts sector. Knowledge and information exchange, sharing of learning and identifying opportunities for creatives would assist in network development for those without pre-existing contacts.
- **Lack of data** There is a lack of data available to inform a thorough understanding of the current and potential benefits of cross-border collaboration in the arts sector. The focus of currently available data is on quantitative outputs, not qualitative outcomes and on production rather than consumption (including audience experience).
- **Mobility and visibility** Mobility of audiences is a key concern for commercial concert promoters of scale, whereas for jointly funded Arts Council schemes mobility of the artist is paramount. Several interviewees articulated the importance of creating a visible public profile for cross-border collaborations, perhaps by operating at a much larger scale.
- **Audience focus** Reconciliation (or what we more broadly call in the CBCA Development Model, 'Civic Development') was not considered to be a driver for cross-border cooperation in the arts. Any future policy that sought to align funding for these activities with a broader social development agenda should focus on outcomes, not outputs. If the purpose of cross-border cooperation is civic development, then the question of cultural consumption - who is engaging and participating - becomes important.

Key recommendations for policy and future research

A strategic framework document – developed jointly by both arts councils and with departmental level input – would ensure a more consistent and impactful approach to cross-border cooperation, and address concerns from the arts sectors in both Northern Ireland and Ireland.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶ Develop a strategic framework for cross-border cultural cooperation

Local government is an important tier in the subsidised arts ecology in both Northern Ireland and Ireland that has not received adequate attention in research studies.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶ Engage in depth with Local Authority Arts Officers and Arts Managers to understand attitudes and practices

Different artforms have different structural models and therefore encounter different realities when engaging in cross-border work.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶ Map the administrative and logistical issues that arise for different artforms in undertaking cross-border cooperation to provide an understanding of the scales and ranges of support needed

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶ Explore the dynamic between on-island and off-island opportunities for collaboration and cooperation

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶ Fund identified supports within the context of the strategic framework

The cultural sector exists within the wider context of the creative industries. Whilst a full mapping exercise would be a very significant undertaking, some initial steps should be taken to inform cross-border cooperation in the arts.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶ Map the ‘ecology’ within which the subsidised arts sector sits, and the current and potential synergies between public and private cultural enterprise. Questions to be addressed should include access to, and comparability of, data re: cross-border cultural consumption

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶ Establish clear parameters for the use of conceptual categories, so that terms such as ‘arts’, ‘culture’, ‘cultural industries’ and ‘creative industries’ are used in a consistent and coherent manner

Knowledge and information exchange and sharing of learning and identifying opportunities for creatives would all assist in network development for those without pre-existing contacts. A key element of this work would be a comparative analysis of the networks, touring consortiums and bodies working on an all-island basis (see e.g., Visual Artists Ireland in the Case Study section of the main report).

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶ Map existing supports and networks to assess and understand whether there are imbalances of funding and/or provision by artform

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶ Create formal, regular and funded structures and mechanisms to facilitate cross-border cooperation in the arts

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶ Provide direct funding provision for artistic project development on a cross-border basis

Enabling cross-border partnerships within EU-level funding opportunities would help the Arts Councils to put their joint approach onto a new footing and may off-set implications arising from Brexit.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶ Both arts councils to jointly enable and facilitate cross-border collaborative opportunities for client organisations within schemes such as Horizon Europe and PEACEPLUS

As the relative lack of an evidence base overall is an important issue for understanding the subsidised arts and cultural sector, the establishment of a robust, empirical base for understanding the audience for the subsidised arts is crucial.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶

Jointly scope and implement an all-island audience data infrastructure for both Arts Councils

Large-scale arts events can engage the general public beyond the typical arts audience and prompt wider conversations about the big cultural and social issues of the day.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶

Devise a pilot funding scheme for a small number of cross-border events of significant scale, which incorporates a rigorous and adequately resourced evaluation scheme

Working and travelling across national boundaries involves onerous bureaucracy which stifles innovation, creativity and collaboration. Digital (non-material) cross-border collaboration presents challenges and opportunities for cross-border cooperation in a reshaped digital economy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶

Produce guidance on the legal, data, technological and other considerations pertaining to digital cross-border cooperation, especially in light of Brexit

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶

Map and explore the challenges and opportunities for cross-border cooperation in a reshaped digital economy to assess the potential for cultural exchange

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶

Investigate broader conceptualisations of what is meant by 'cross-border' collaboration in the arts via, for example, shared streaming platforms or online repositories of recorded performance to devise new models of cultural engagement

Given the shortfalls, variances, inconsistencies and discrepancies in funding across the two jurisdictions, a mechanism to align North-South support for cross-border cooperation in the arts would be welcome.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶

Support (through the funding of cross-border work) the development of long-term relationships, not merely one-off projects

A broader recognition of the value of both evaluation and qualitative research would be helpful at both an Arts Council and a departmental level. A programme of research into audience experience / reception to explore and understand the outcomes from an experience of attendance/participation in cross-border arts would be invaluable.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶

Examine in detail the question of 'cultural value in Ireland', as this appears as a cross-cutting theme in the report

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶

Jointly and collaboratively produce evaluation principles to guide and inform how evaluation is carried out and used in the cultural sector

Rural arts provision has been a long-standing debate in the cultural sector, not least because of the disparity between the contribution to arts subsidy from taxes and the disbursement of that subsidy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶

Reformulate the idea of cross-border cooperation in the arts at an all-island level, such that the concept extends beyond geography to consider psychogeography

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶

Analyse the data on funding (local/national/international) for cultural activity targeted at/provided to border counties to assess the rationales for such schemes

Most north-south cross-border cultural activity is likely to be informal and amateur, or professional but non-funded. This ‘invisible’ cooperation may be more important for understanding cross-border cooperation and reconciliation than is currently appreciated.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION ▶

Map the scope, scale and networks of amateur arts activity that operates on a cross-border basis

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ▶

Strengthen community networks of artists and arts workers operating on a cross-border basis

Research Team

The research team for the project was led for The Audience Agency by Dr Steven Hadley, academic and consultant, and included Sophia Woodley, Head of Innovation and Policy Research, Jonathan Goodacre, Senior Consultant International, Richard Turpin, Chief Research Officer, Oliver Mantell, Director of Policy Research, Anne Torreggiani, CEO and Penny Mills, Chief Consulting Officer, with support from Professor Justin O'Connor and Matti Allam.

ARINS Team

The commissioning of the review was led by Ruth Hegarty, Managing Editor, RIA and Dr Catherine Wilsdon, Notre Dame with an advisory group comprised of Valerie Bistany, Director of the Irish Writers Centre and two members of the ARINS Advisory Group: Colin Murphy, playwright and journalist and Professor Diane Urquhart, Queen's University Belfast.

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