

CULTURAL NETWORKS AT WORK

Working groups reports

EFA/ISPA Conference

7 & 8 June 2007

Flagey, Brussels

INTRODUCTION

The international Conference on 'Cultural Networks at Work' organised by EFA (European Festivals Association) and ISPA (International Society for the Performing Arts), in cooperation with the Flemish Radio Orchestra, the Flanders Festivals and the Festival de Wallonie in Brussels, Belgium on 8 June 2007 was a remarkable success. Held in the premises of the Flagey, an international multicultural arts centre, the gathering brought together 345 arts professionals including 40 cultural networks from altogether 50 countries. Intense and informative debates on the different facets of cultural networking, together with the diversity of individuals involved in the working sessions and the variety of backgrounds among the participants enabled encouraging encounters and a melting of ideas and projects. Participants had the opportunity to get involved in discussions on 5 themes around cultural networks and the challenges they are facing nowadays: efficiency, financial and economic, artistic, international and practical dimensions of a network's work were explored. Each session started with an in-depth research prepared by a presenter who was commissioned to reflect on the selected theme (the outlines of the presentations are available on the CNaW website at www.efa-aef.eu/cnaw). The Conference concluded with a remarkable declaration on the intention to create a 'European House for Culture' in Brussels (see attached document to this report).

This report represents a preliminary summary of the working sessions. Based on the notes taken during the sessions, we gathered the main issues raised during the presentations and the discussions which followed, clustering them into a series of sub-headings. We would like to emphasize that these reports aim to summarize the main ideas which were brought up in the different working groups highlighting the general remarks and conclusions about the phenomenon of networking. They do not go into detail with regard to the many case studies and examples which were presented. Or do not include the various nuances of discussion. They are preparatory work for a more extensive EFA/ISPA publication with comprehensive proceedings, reflections and evaluations we plan to edit in the frame of the EFA BOOKS series at the beginning of 2008. All updates as well as the further development of the European House for Culture may be followed on the webpage dedicated to the Conference.

EFA and ISPA would like to thank all chairs and presenters for the precious work, profound thoughts, thorough preparation and invaluable inputs they gave to the working groups; we also would like to thank all participants for their interest and engagement and all those who contributed to the success of the CNaW Conference.

WORKING GROUPS - REPORTS

THEME 1

How efficient is networking? *An analytical approach to a network's work*

The two parallel working groups were chaired by Ruth Jakobi, European Music Council, and Per Kvistad Uddu, St Olav Festival Trondheim.

Presentations were prepared and presented by Ugo Bacchella, Fitzcarraldo Fondazione, and Giannalia Cogliandro and Alessandra d'Angelo, ENCATC European Network of Cultural Administration and Training Centres.

Summary

Networks are growing very fast all over the world; they are developing as “mushrooms” with the idea that gathering and working together makes the individual member stronger and more visible. If networking is such present nowadays and is considered as a modern way of working, it is worth to wonder how efficient is networking and how we can improve it.

1. To evaluate, you first have to define

The ‘process’ is the outcome of cultural networks. Cultural networking is difficult to evaluate because of the nature of their work. Actually networks need to acknowledge that their goals, even if they are clear and accurate, are a process, a growing phenomenon. However the common way to evaluate a structure is to analysis the accomplishment of their goals. When evaluating cultural networks, one needs to remember that the major goal of networks is not to produce something material but to put people together, to share, exchange and collaborate.

The evaluation of cultural networks can therefore not be based on economic matters (number of projects which have been made, number of members...) Each individual path within the networking process represents one definition of networking, one point of view. To evaluate networking, we need to define the process and identify these individual paths and personal ways of belonging to a network and defining networking. One could say that networking is like the Italian “plaza”, a market place or a forum where one can confront and exchange ideas.

2. Efficiency in question

Cultural networks are efficient and their strengths are numerous. The high level of expertise ensures the development of competent organisations and guarantees a real quality of the work. Members of cultural networks are motivated and experts in one specific cultural field. Moreover cultural networks are described as the main organisation able to act as the “voice” of the sector. They are promoting, representing and influencing decision-making processes, which is necessary for advocacy on the political level.

However, networking is still a growing process and there are several weaknesses avoiding cultural networks to be as efficient as possible. Indeed the financial situation of networks is one of the main problems. Budgets are often insufficient to allow great cooperation projects among members and promotional activities. The diversity of the membership is

usually seen as richness within the network but at the same time it represents a weakness because no answer can fit all members' expectations and it can slow down the working process. Another example is the lack of flexibility of the networks structures which are usually too traditional and organizational.

3. What could be improved?

Many studies on cultural networking underlined the strengths and weaknesses of this working phenomenon. Some aspects of networks should and could be changed in order to improve their efficiency.

Before creating a network, research should be done on the topic they are working on in order to see what is already done about it, who is already working on this subject... This necessary work will allow networks to clearly define their identity and their "raison d'être" to get separated from others and express their specialty and particularity.

We should not take for granted a common sense that arts and culture are vital for society. Networks need to concentrate energy to demonstrate this inherent value of arts and culture by first convincing society, and then the political sphere. To be convincing, networks have to explain the sense and the aim of networking and involve for instance also local actors in networking events since often networks are blamed because they gather the same people. Connect with local media and press to raise awareness.

Furthermore, networks are often blamed for their lack of democracy and transparency. The structure should be more open and the working process transparent (nominations of Board members...) to avoid negative outside impressions.

A clear separation needs to be made between membership and secretariat. Members are the heart of the network. The strengths of a network come from the diversity of its membership. To be a part of a network, you need to invest: "Give, get or get off". The secretariat of a network needs to be acknowledged as a major body of the organisation which integrates and motivates members, facilitates them to develop cooperation projects... Most of the secretariats are composed only of 50% full time jobs. This lack of continuity is a real weakness for networks. Moreover training is one option to increase efficiency of cultural networks. Staff and secretariats need to follow training programmes to broaden their skills and competences.

Mobility in this context plays a crucial role which often is linked to a problem of generation: young generations are more used to move.

Conclusion

When asking the question whether a cultural network is efficient or not, we should first underline that the meaning of the efficiency is not the same for the members, the secretariat, the funding bodies, society, the politicians... Efficiency criteria are very broad and depend on the person who is evaluating the network.

It would be useful if networks put together convincing evaluation tools and criteria to evaluate the efficiency of cultural networking. But networks are also afraid to define accurate criteria which would put an end to flexibility of the evaluation process.

THEME 2

How do networks survive? *The financial and economic dimension of a network's work*

The two parallel working groups were chaired by Stef Coninx, IAMIC International Association of Music Information Centres, and Angie Cotte, Les Rencontres.

Presentations were prepared and presented by Jeroen Mourik, IFEA International Festivals & Events Association Europe, and Colm Croffy, AOIFE Association of Irish Festival Events.

Summary

Because of their distinctiveness and their definition as trans-national and/or international structures promoting collaboration and mobility, networks have always struggled with economics and finances and many of them do not survive very long.

In order to become more efficient on funding research, it is very useful to learn from successful platforms in other networking sectors, adopt their efficient strategies, understand their mistakes and gain from their valuable experiences.

Different opportunities exist to increase the budget of a networking structure.

1. The crucial question of the membership fee

Membership fees represent the main and most common income for a network. There are usually different rates for the members according to financial capacities. Sometimes a membership fee is heavy burden. Is this fee really necessary?

Membership fees could be described as a commitment to the network. Members need to receive something back from the network. Are the members running the network or using it? The idea that in a network, you give, you get or you get off is essential. Members need to evaluate what they want to get out from the network and whether they receive back the value of their fee. Staff is central to allow members to develop their projects, understand why they are members and explain them how to use the network. In some networks, if members do not actively participate to the network's activities, they are excluded, even if they pay, and other interested members register on a waiting list. Membership fee can be a tool to motivate members.

How to determine the amount of the fee? If the service or the product that the network is offering is worthwhile, members are happy to pay for it. Benefits from a high membership fee could be the exclusivity of belonging to the network and having access to its private resources. Some networks define a (very) low fee so that everyone can join the organisation in order to increase representativity. High or low membership fees do not represent the success of the network but different philosophies and definitions of a network, as an exclusive club for cooperation or an open collaborative structure.

2. Politics, a funding source to investigate

Another central source of income is the public funding from governments and supra-national public authorities. Getting funding from national governments is not an easy task as networks are usually supra-national structures. Cultural networks need to underline the benefits of their work for the country and local communities and prove to politicians that they are promoting local arts. Governments need to understand that, by funding a cultural network, that they would support creativity and invest in research and development, even if there isn't an immediate financial return and the guarantee of a result to the local situation. Networks should not disregard to cultivate good relationships with local

politicians. Until now cultural networks tend to be powerless towards local politicians although they might focus more on this point.

The European Union represents a special case. It is not simple to receive funding from the European Union because cultural networking does not represent a clearly defined sector and because of a limited EU cultural budget. Networks are in competition with each other to receive European grants.

Cultural networks have to play the role as advocates. They are the representation of their sector, the voice of its wills and projects. With this aim in mind, networks have to lobby and influence the political world regarding the cultural decision-making process but also cultural budgets, especially in the EU. Manipulating the political agenda is an essential question.

3. Complementary funding opportunities

Whether the membership fee is central or whether the public funding is important, these sources are never enough to fully fund a network. There are other opportunities that can be developed to expand the network's budget.

Sales represent one of these additional funding sources which are still not well developed. They cover different practices and possibilities: it could mean selling books, offering services to non-members, organising conferences... A network using sales as a funding source does not mean that it is a 'selling' network, by opposition with a 'sharing' or 'learning' one. Of course selling is not their essential aim but cultural networks can be selling platforms in order to raise money that they need to achieve their artistic goals.

Moreover corporate fundraising and sponsorship practices with companies and media exist as models and are well developed in the US and Canada. Europe could implement these strategies. It shows that networks should focus on the less known companies and brands which are keener to develop relationships with the cultural sector, especially with cultural organisations established on an international level.

Cultural networks may also encourage individual contributions and donations from the inside or the outside of their organization as an extra source for funding.

Conclusion

Funding a cultural network represents a real challenge nowadays. The first funding is usually the hardest to get, then it becomes easier. It requires a strong involvement into finance questions. Permanent office and specialized staff are necessary to coordinate and develop these efforts and be creative and flexible to find funding opportunities for the structure. This work need to be done through a transparent and open process.

Because of their inherent definition, cultural networks have difficulties receiving funding as they do not produce, but rather represent a process or an idea. Funding improvement requires spreading a better definition of what cultural networking is, what it aims at, which different levels it works at... Cultural networks should lobby to underline the benefits of culture and arts in civil society, for instance with the definition of cultural rights. Moreover cultural networks should gather all together for better lobbying actions in order to deal with financing, defend their actions and advocate their rights.

THEME 3

From the local to the European and back: Cultural networks as facilitators of cross-border collaboration. *The artistic dimension of a network's work*

The two parallel working groups were chaired by Henk Heuvelmans, ECPNM European Conference of Promoters of New Music, and Gavin Henderson, Dartington International Summer School.

Presentations were prepared and presented by Jelena Jankovic, BEMUS Belgrade Music Festival, and Cristina Farinha, Utrecht University.

Summary

There are different kinds of networks according to their specialties. Some networks put the emphasis on advocacy, production, promotion, sharing... But finally networks are all aiming at the same: gathering people to make them stronger; usually people from diverse backgrounds and cultural origins. The primary aim of networks in the field of arts and culture remains an artistic one.

1. How cultural networks facilitate artistic collaboration and cooperation?

Cultural networks are acting as initiators and facilitators of artistic cooperation projects.

The first objective of networking is to gather people. Networks enable arts professionals to be aware of artistic productions from all over the world. Networks help countries in difficulties to reach the international cultural scene, to establish and maintain contacts with other cultural organisations in Europe and beyond. Networks are a solution to follow international evolutions. Networks help to know other colleagues. The aim is to do something together, to gather, to share and to exchange, not necessarily to produce a certain product in the first place.

This objective of gathering also implies the notion of exchange. Indeed cultural networking allows people to share their experiences, knowledge and know-how and to exchange in a creative way. Thanks to networking, professionals may gain time and energy because they learn from other practices. It is also a way to educate people. People are gathering to develop stronger structures. Projects establish bridges between countries, between old and new generations via artistic exchange, touring projects, composers' seminars, classes...

From an economic point of view, networks and co-productions can be seen as a way to gain/spare/share money and audiences, to facilitate touring...

Cross-border cooperation is also a way to skip the political divergences between partners and focus on artistic issues. Networks gather small and big countries on the cultural scene. Networks can highlight small projects and help them to get known. Networks are also artistic promoters and bring diversity. As meeting places and facilitators of collaboration, cultural networks are efficient tools for artistic cross-border cooperation.

Finally networks are acting as advocate of the arts. Arts professionals are stronger all together to influence the political decision making process and fight for artistic favorable conditions and supportive policy.

2. Cultural networks as promoters of mobility

Nowadays mobility becomes a common phenomenon usually included in the careers developments. Going abroad and tour allows artists to increase the freedom of expression, learn, train and meet colleagues. Artistic mobility creates a flexible artistic labour market place where entrepreneurship and innovation need to be taken into consideration.

However there are still many obstacles to mobility, co-production and touring. Administration and legal issues for instance: Even if frameworks for mobility to allow and promote the free movement within the EU are settled regarding questions such as taxation, copyright, social security, employment benefits...(yet to be applied by each member state), they do not exist outside of Europe. Without these facilities mobility is weakened.

Qualification recognition can be another problem since there is no universal programme based on a common, general set of quality norms. The issuing of visas is very often a huge obstacle for artists who want to move, in particular from outside to the EU, from the United States for instance because of the administration pressure. Mobility seems the privilege of only some artists who have to get through a long process.

Besides these material obstacles, there are also some mental obstacles. The background you come from (including education, nationality, country or region of origin) has a role in the definition of your vision and your mindset. To be mobile, you have to adapt your way of thinking. Moreover mobility seems a question of generation. Though cheaper, more accessible traveling opportunities have increased they are quite recent and often older generations are not used and ready to use them.

Since obstacles are numerous, artists understand that they are not self-sufficient and that networks can be a useful tool to be mobile. Mobility is not the norm yet and thanks to new technologies it can be achieved without moving. But networks broaden the possibilities. The art sector needs to network, to learn from each other, discuss and gather resources regarding mobility. Networks can bring the support for mobility that artists are missing. Mobility is a choice and involves risks; networks are the facilitators of this choice.

Mobility requires some conditions. Even if mobility represents expectations (for artists who want to broaden their horizons), it also requires a specific set of skills. Mobile artists should have the capabilities of being mobile and touring, the abilities to co-produce, co-create... Communication, languages and mindset are important factors. There are also organisation and financial issues: artists need to plan their project on long term including a financial budget. Education and training seem essential for artists to get mobile as it is not easy to face all these requirements, especially for a small organisation; this is why networks can be very useful.

Conclusion

Mobility is an expression of artistic cooperation. Networking in this framework represents an efficient tool to improve artistic mobility and co-production since obstacles are numerous and sharing allows better and faster development. Mobility seems to become more and more common, almost an indispensable step. Cultural networks can act as facilitators of cross-border cooperation.

THEME 4

Europe, Asia, Africa, the US, South America... the world! *The international challenges of cultural networks' work*

The two parallel working groups were chaired by Linda Bukhosini, Durban Playhouse Company, and Sydney Selepe, Pretoria Department of Arts and Culture.

Presentations were prepared and presented by Tisa Ho, AAPAF Association of Asian Performing Arts Festivals, and Claudia Toni, Sao Paolo Secretariat of Culture.

Summary

Cultural networks have been growing in the past years. They first appeared in developed countries and grew on as a modern and new working process all over the world. But as an international phenomenon, differences and obstacles exist in the practice. Are these challenges preventing cultural networking to improve and develop all over the world? Or is it one of the particularities of cultural networking?

1. Cultural networks as an expression of diversity

Multiculturalism exists in different ways and culture is characterized by its diversity. To face multiculturalism, relationships have to be engaged with respect and need to be based on understanding and reciprocity. Cultural networks are a good mean to acknowledge the diversity of cultures all over the world. We are all facing diversity in our communities, on different levels, local, national or international. We have to get to know each other and try to rediscover the diversity of the world. Diverse audiences are present all over the world. Arts professionals need to be curious in other parts of the world and look for everyone's interests, not only theirs. Cultural networks cannot be flourishing without diversity; we have to bring diversity into cultural networking. Networking seems meaningless unless all regions of the world are involved.

Networking in the field of culture has not been created to reflect diversity, but it has become one of its missions. One cannot say that cultural networks appeared because of business matters - networks are the place where people can learn from each other, where exchange and sharing of artistic points of views are facilitated and where collaborations starts. From this point of view, cultural networks can and should be an expression of international diversity. Through networking, people from one part of the world can learn and discover other parts of the world. Especially the Third World is looking at developed nations to use their experiences and learn from their strategies. Networks are essential to allow this sharing of knowledge and know how.

The expression "Let the entire village brings up the child" could be a good expression to describe the aim of cultural networking. Nowadays there is a real desire of diversity: Artists, professionals and audiences want to learn what is happening in all the parts of the world. We need the opportunity to meet and discover new people to get a broad perspective of culture. Networks are a solution and a good opportunity.

2. Challenges and obstacles of international networking

Several questions rise when speaking about international cultural networking.

On the one hand there is a problem of understanding. First of all the meaning of the world and its diversity is not the same for everyone. For instance, when developed countries speak about the Third World, they usually lack precision. They would speak about Africa as

a whole, whereas it is a broad and diverse continent. Or they would gather South America as one region without acknowledging the diversity and the richness of the different countries within this area. Regarding cultural networking, the first challenge is to practice the diversity, not only to talk about it, but to include everyone with all the diversity it covers. In order to prevent people to forget the diversity of the world, we have to understand the diversity and the richness of the world and its cultures. Education is of course necessary.

Another obstacle of networking is the definition of culture. Culture doesn't have the same meaning all over the world. Representations and expressions of culture may be really different. Oppositions exist, like the one against the American hegemony and the American definition of culture underlined with the definition of the "French cultural exception". As African culture is different from European culture for instance, is it really possible and feasible to network all together if we are not talking about the same things? We first need to understand the meaning of culture and find common grounds of understanding. Cultures within continents are also broad. Asia is immense and cultures are diverse within the continent. The influence of history is essential in the definition of culture.

On the other hand there are technical obstacles for the improvement of international cultural networking. Networking requires a minimum of organisation. However systems from all over the world work differently. How could we work with each others' system? Networking needs to face this diversity. Networks have to share resources in order to help people from different backgrounds working together. Communication within the network is in this respect essential and needs to be improved.

Moreover money is still a real challenge. Even with the improvement of online tools, long distances are still a problem in networking because face-to-face remains essential.

Conclusion

Cultural networking exists all over the world and is developed on different levels according to the region. Challenges prevent to match international practices on networking. But sharing and exchanging experiences, which is the aim of networking, are a good opportunity to make things improving. So by developing and multiplying cultural networks, networking techniques and practices will be improved all over the world.

THEME 5

Success stories of networked projects? *The practical dimension of a network's work*

The two parallel working groups were chaired by Dag Franzen, Jeunesses Musicales International, and Joanneke Lootsma, Felix Meritis Foundation.

Presentations were prepared and presented by Angela Plohman, Lab for Culture, and Sabine Frank, EFAH European Forum for the Arts and Heritage

Summary

Cultural networks represent a modern and quite young way of working in the cultural field and they are still growing. Cultural 'networkers' can learn a lot from already existing cultural networked projects. Experiences and practices of colleagues can provide essential lessons and strategies which could be implemented in the cultural networking field.

1. A specific kind of networks: Open networks

Cultural networks can be divided into two categories: exclusive networks usually with a high membership fee allowing their members to benefit from the privilege of belonging to the association, and open networks aiming to widen as much as possible their members and their field of action. From an historic point of view, it seems that the elitist networks closed to outsiders - or at least hard to integrate - are the oldest and most common ones, and by opposition open networks would have developed more and more in the past years.

According to members, networks broaden spirits and allow sharing of experiences thanks to the meeting of new people from all over the world and the discovery of new working techniques and strategies within your own sector. For these members, a network needs to be an open place, a forum, where people can freely and easily move, make contacts, discuss with and learn from fellow colleagues. The more members feel free and without limits in the organisation, the more they will invest and try to get out what they are looking for: cooperation.

Open cultural networks try to reach the whole community and function as a platform. They have to focus on their members without ignoring their audiences and provide everyone with answers and materials they are looking for. Informality - no statutes and formal membership - could be a way to open up the network to a maximum of participants. But formality can not be neglected regarding governance system and basic structure. A cultural network needs to find a balance here. Ensuring the transparency of the cultural network's work is also essential.

2. New technologies as efficient tools: how to work virtually but remain real?

As networks' nature implies the gathering of people from all over the world, new technologies including internet seem to be the best tools to achieve their goals. Cultural networks need to have a constant presence on the internet in order to have a permanent voice, to be reachable at anytime and to be able to react in real time.

The virtual way to communicate is a very efficient one in terms of information exchanges, working explorations and up-to-date relationships. But reality should not be forgotten. Virtual networks are not enough; off-line and face-to-face meetings are essential and still necessary.

On a practical level, online networks can not include and work with all worldwide communities; human communication is needed to reach some parts of the world, such as some regions of Africa, Asia and South America, where internet tools are not accessible and enough developed yet. This technological division should be taken into consideration.

Moreover the availability of internet tools does not mean that everyone among the members and audiences use them and make efficient use of them. Training and explanations are necessary to ensure a fully efficient tools using.

3. Necessary ongoing definition and analysis of the network

In order to develop good networks, participants and members need to trust the project. Trust is the result of a good relationship which takes a certain time. Sometimes networks are launched without even being ready, without this trust.

As all structures require it, a cultural network needs to keep in mind the project's primary *raison d'être* in order to focus on its original aims and goals. It is necessary to regularly take the time to do this definition work and underline what the network and its members are aiming at and which initiatives can be developed in this frame.

At the same time a follow-up and an analysis of the work needs to be scheduled regularly. This could be difficult to achieve because cultural networks are not really aiming to produce a product. They are rather based on an idea and their work is more a process; but they need to analyze the achievement of their goals and the different steps they are gradually climbing up.

Conclusion

Cultural networks are ongoing moving structures which need to constantly adapt themselves. Since their aim is to share resources, cultural networks should also gain knowledge on networks' work thanks to the success stories of other cultural networks.

CONCLUSION

The working sessions of the EFA/ISPA 'Cultural Networks at Work' conference held in Brussels on 8 June 2007 confirmed how important it is to gather and exchange, to confront with issues around a theme that concerns us all, learning from each others' experiences and develop ideas - the very essence of a cultural network at work after all! In this context the EFA and ISPA Brussels Declaration on the intention to create a 'European House for Culture' in Brussels is but one of the initiatives which emerged as a project and which will be developed further.

The themes of the five parallel working groups dedicated to 1/the efficiency of networking, 2/the economic dimension of networks, 3/the artistic task of a cultural network, 4/international challenges of networking and 5/networked projects were stimulating grounds for fruitful discussions and the basis for a series of issues, points of reflection and results which we gathered in this report.

Some tentative conclusions include:

1. networks, despite their flexible and changing structure being defined rather by the processes and dynamics they create than by concrete products they come up with, need to define their working methods and goals in order to allow qualitative evaluation.
2. networks, economically building on membership fees and other sources including sales, corporate fundraising, sponsorship or sometimes donations should define their added value and organize their fundraising models in a better, more structured way in order to lobby successfully for higher funding and support by local, national and European authorities.
3. cultural networks, in social, educational, artistic, integrative and international terms are incredibly useful platforms for developing and promoting artistic collaboration and mobility of the arts and the artists by bringing people with the most diverging backgrounds and ideas together to exchange, to facilitate mobility of the artists, to broaden perspectives personally and professionally and establish contacts beyond the own, local context.
4. international, inter-continental networking processes are a solution to cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding of each others' definition of the world and of culture and at the same time an opportunity which needs to be developed further to share and exchange networking techniques and practices and improve them across the globe.
5. cultural networks grow - as do the opportunities to network, exchange information and real-time communication via virtual communication paths. Yet, face-to-face contacts, trust, good relationships and an ongoing re-confirmation of aims and goals as well as an analysis of a network's work are essential to successful networking.

These first conclusions lie at the basis of a more in-depth research into what has been discussed during the four-hours working groups. The quality of the proceedings and results encourage us to edit these findings together with additional reflections in a more extensive EFA/ISPA Publication which will hopefully be ready for publishing by the beginning of 2008 - so keep an eye on it!

Responsible for report:
Kathrin Deventer kathrin@efa-aef.eu
EFA Secretariat - June 2007