



Cultural Bridge

Round 4 Evaluation Report

Evaluation Report

Research conducted by tialt // there is an alternative

June 2026

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Executive Summary

Round 4 of Cultural Bridge funded 20 partnerships between socially engaged arts organisations in the UK and Germany, including more than 40 organisations across diverse geographical areas. Funded activities took place between April 2025 - March 2026. The main outcomes reported in Round 4 were:

- Artistic methods are being applied in new contexts
- Partners are learning ways of working with different communities and responding to diverse and shifting needs
- Partners are critically reflecting on their own practice, seeing it through a partner's eyes
- Slowness and time are preconditions for successful work and rarely supported by funders
- Partners described lasting friendship and solidarity beyond transactional relationships
- Continuation is happening in a range of formats (e.g. other funding opportunities, advanced civic and operational connections)
- Cultural Bridge is enabling international cooperation that would not be happening through other routes

Key learning includes:

- Post-Brexit operational constraints are causing real budget issues
- Time and capacity required for successful partnership working can exceed what budgets cover
- Sustainability can be in tension with cost and access requirements
- 'Community' has broad definitions in the context of Cultural Bridge and the programme enables investigation of these themes

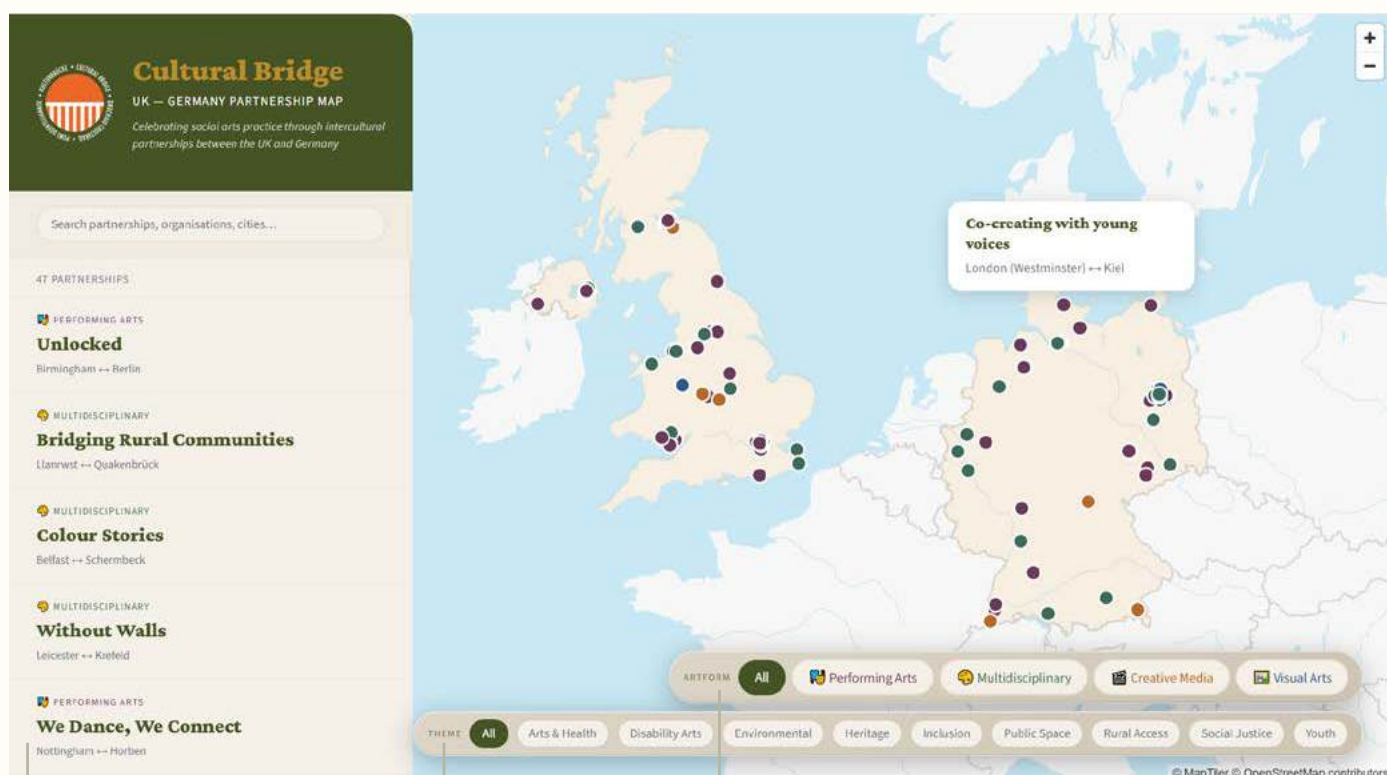
Recommendations moving forward include:

- Consider the impact of post-Brexit operational costs and enable flexibility to cover these where possible.
- Support the development of guidance that indicates how access and sustainability can be considered together in travel arrangements, or broader FAQs.
- Continue to offer more relational forms of evaluation
- Explore further whether Cultural Bridge exchange is different to other forms of international working.



Methodology and Round 4 in Numbers

The evaluation draws on six-weekly online meetings with partners; end-of-project survey responses from the partnerships; in-depth conversations with selected partnerships; in-person visits to project activity of five partnerships; and a review session with Cultural Bridge programme managers. Deep-dive case studies for Round 4 are published separately on the Cultural Bridge website and can be accessed via the links below. This year we have also mapped the partnerships from Round 1 to 4, which can be explored [here](#). Quotes throughout this report are drawn from partner survey responses and review conversations unless otherwise noted.



SEARCH BAR

A feature to find organizations by name, location, or project-related keywords.

THEME

Arts & Health
Disability Arts
Environmental
Heritage
Inclusion
Public Space
Rural Access
Social Justice
Youth

ARTFORM

Performing Arts;
Multidisciplinary
Creative Media
Visual Arts

Six in-depth case studies from Round 4 partnerships are available in the Appendix of this report and can also be accessed by clicking on the partnerships in the map.

CULTURAL BRIDGE - PROGRAMME SUMMARY

Round 4 *in Numbers*

20

Funded bilateral partnerships

12 Tier 1 · 8 Tier 2

40+

Organisations involved

100+

New contacts & partnerships
established

1500

People engaged as project
participants

AROUND

340

Artists & cultural professionals engaged
in Cultural Bridge activities

AROUND

£8000 / €9700

Average spend on artists'
fees per partnership

AROUND

25800

People engaged as audiences
(including approx. 21000 online & live
audience reached by one partnership)

Key outcomes of Round 4

Practice sharing is at the core of the Cultural Bridge programme. In Round 4 organisations reported that this occurs in three main ways:

- 01 Artistic methods being applied in new contexts** – This included aufBruch in Berlin integrating mask work into their work in prisons due to learning from Geese Theatre Company; FUNDUS Theater have implemented a new initiative (Performance-Intervention-Team) based on their learning from Common/Wealth; Anjali Dance Company and com.dance developed a shared symbol system during their exchange as a way of working across language and ability differences, creating *“a transferable method that can be applied in different contexts, from community settings to professional training.”*
- 02 Ways of working with different communities and responding to diverse and shifting needs** - Common/Wealth are integrating *“learning by doing and handing over creative control to young collaborators”* drawn from FUNDUS’s Theaterberater:innen model. Stellar Quines’ Young Quines Constellations group, *“inspired by MPower to explore political education as a key part of their project”* is now developing feminist educational tools for younger members. Anjali Dance Company and com.dance describe how *“workshop practices were shared and exchanged between the two partners, in which we picked up new practices, exercises, games and approaches and have started applying them to our respective work”*.
- 03 Critically reflecting on your own practice, seeing it through a partner’s eyes** - TIN Arts and Perform[d]ance suggest: *“Seeing practice that is different to your own can enable you to reflect on your own work and think about how you may adapt, change and progress”*. Bright Shadow described their exchange with Raum der Künste as *“a rare and precious opportunity to step back and look at our work alongside a visitor perspective”*.

Importantly, partners also reflected that tensions and limitations within their own practice was also highlighted, which they described as useful and generative.



Slowness and time are preconditions for successful work and rarely supported by funders – this was reported by several partners as being essential, enabling trust-building and reflection without being ‘output driven’ and responsive to emergent opportunities. Disability Arts in Shropshire (DASH) and Berlinklusion describe how the slow unfolding of trust across many meetings, informal meals, and careful attention to access at every stage created what they call ‘access intimacy’ considered by both partners as fundamental to the quality of what they made. They moved their planned event later in the year specifically to make space for this. Circusful and Coraggio note that *“allowing time to get to know each other’s organisations without the pressure of having to deliver a joint project was very welcome and means we would be better able to plan a follow up project”*. Dyffryn Dyfodol and Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften built slowness into their working approach explicitly, treating slow travel between Wales and Germany as part of the artistic content and keeping plans ‘open and emergent’.

Some partners also reported that they found the budget didn’t quite cover the amount of time they would have liked to spend with each other, and that if ‘co-production’ and ‘deep collaboration’ are the aims of Cultural Bridge then the budget and timeframe available may need to be considered further, as this was not always possible to the desired extent.

Partners described lasting friendship and solidarity beyond transactional relationships

– several partnerships reported making deep and meaningful friendships, some describing their ‘growing family’, based on deep trust and mutual respect. One partner noted: *“Having such a strong and reliable partner in crime abroad feels especially important in today’s world, where connection, openness, and solidarity are more needed than ever”*.

Continuation is happening in a range of formats – Six partnerships in Round 4 were progressions from previous Tier 1 funding and three have progressed from Tier 1 to Tier 2 in Round 5. Other partners report developing projects together that they are scoping out additional funding sources for. Several partners describe extending partnerships and relationships with local civic representatives. For Intercultural Roots and Making Culture this included connections with Coburg’s city council and Coventry’s international cooperation committee. In one case the German partner is now represented on the UK organisation’s board.



Image © Hella Sinnhuber, artpark Hoher Berg - Colours Stories

More specifically, methodologies and models of practice developed as part of Cultural Bridge partnerships are being further developed and applied beyond partner organisations and the timeframe of the project:

- Raum der Künste artists in Heidelberg are planning to start a Zest-inspired programme for people with dementia, with a new local contact (a dance movement therapist at the University of Heidelberg) drawn from connections made through Bright Shadow.
- Berlinklusion's Kate Brehme is curating an event at HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt) on crip epistemologies that she directly attributes to the DASH partnership, describing it as *"career-changing and life-changing to have witnessed how DASH draws on embodied and crip knowledge in its practice"*.
- FUNDUS's new Performance-Interventions-Team, inspired by Common/Wealth's site-specific work, will operate as a strand of their own programming beyond the partnership.
- Stellar Quines' Young Quines Constellations programme is being developed as a longer-term in-house offer drawing on MPower's political-education methodology.
- Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften have changed their normal practice of not returning to the same place twice; they are now planning to return to Meppen in 2027, having learned from Dyffryn Dyfodol about the impact of sustained residency in one geographical area.

Cultural Bridge is enabling international cooperation that would not be happening through other routes – Several partnerships report Cultural Bridge as the only available route to the international working they have done, either because of organisational scale, because of the demographics of their participants, or because no other funder is supporting the kind of slow, exchange-based work the programme prioritises. One partner suggests it is the shared values that sit at the heart of the Cultural Bridge ethos that felt different to other conventional funding routes: *"the establishment of a genuinely values-aligned international partner in a sector where that congruence is rare - supporting two companies who actually 'get' each other"*.



Image: Unlocked © Thomas Aurin

Key Learning

Post-Brexit operational constraints are causing real issues – Several partners reported practical and operational constraints that affected budgets, timings and the quality of people's experience, these included:

- Visa costs and unexplained rejection
- Swift bank transfers
- Currency exchange rate fluctuation
- Dynamic pricing on air fares and accommodation
- Complex airline check-in procedures

Cultural Bridge stakeholders may wish to consider if a programme-level response could be useful (e.g., guidance, FAQs, crowd-sourced recommendations for troubleshooting etc).

Time and capacity required for successful partnership working can exceed what budgets cover - Across the cohort, partners reported investing significantly more than the funded amounts in unfunded planning, relationship-building, and contingency time. Building from the finding above about slowness being a core enabling factor, the conditions required for this should be properly resourced. If budgets cannot be increased, organisations should be given support to adapt where possible. This was especially reported in relation to access support costs, with one partner noting: "Access funding is essential to cover additional support, assistants, accessible transport, and realistic travel options. There is concern that access costs are still not fully understood or valued by funders, and that organisations may feel penalised for requesting what is genuinely needed". Organisations can apply for access costs at application stage, and Cultural Bridge has a ringfenced pot to support this. However, funding stakeholders may wish to consider how this can be provided flexibly throughout the course of a project as needs change and costs fluctuate.

Sustainability can be in tension with cost and access requirements – Several partners reported that slow travel options for exchanges were exponentially higher cost than flights. Others indicated that the time required for slow travel would also need to be costed for. In some cases, access needs meant that flights were the only realistic option available. There may be scope for Cultural Bridge funders to consider developing guidance and recommendations for international travel and cooperation in this context, particularly as several partners indicated a discomfort around having sustainability as a core theme of their work (and shared value across exchanges) with few options but to fly for in-person work.

'Community' has broad definitions in the context of Cultural Bridge – Some use 'partnership as community' language, indicating that the networks of artists, organisations and collaborators around partnerships are the direct community of interest. Others consider the publics that engage in work as their community of focus. Others defined community as a combination of these, and something that fluctuates around the project period, with various overlapping layers. Some described how the funding had created a community that didn't exist before. Across all of these Cultural Bridge is showing that it is creating a space for what 'community' means in socially engaged practice to be critically explored.

Recommendations

Consider the impact of post-Brexit operational costs and enable flexibility to cover these where possible. Several partners reported that they met unexpected costs in exchange activities that they had to absorb into overheads. If flexible funding is not an option, explore the scope to produce a crowd-sourced troubleshooting guide from across the cohort.

This could also form part of the development of guidance that indicates how access and sustainability can be considered together in travel arrangements, or broader FAQs that could be helpful, particularly for those organisations with limited resources or less experience in international exchange.

Continue to offer more relational forms of evaluation; opportunities for partnerships to share their learning, project visits, and conversational options for end of year reporting. These mirror the values central to the Cultural Bridge programme.

Explore further whether Cultural Bridge exchange is different to other forms of international working. Many partners reported that they were building friendships, 'families' and deeply meaningful relationships, which is likely due to the trust-building made possible through the Cultural Bridge model. Explore the potential to extend this model across other activities supported by the core seven stakeholders.



Appendix

The Cultural Bridge Partnership Map

The Cultural Bridge programme has grown through four rounds of funding, bringing with it an ever-widening network of organisations, places and practices. To make this network visible and to celebrate the breadth and geographic reach of the partnerships — tialt developed an interactive map bringing together all funded partnerships from Rounds 1 to 4. The map allows users to explore partnerships geographically, with pins colour-coded by artform and theme, spanning locations across the UK and Germany. Clicking on any connection highlights the two partner organisations and opens a sidebar with key information including the project name, a summary, partner links, and — for Round 4 partnerships — a link to the full deep-dive case study. The map can be filtered by artform category and theme, and includes a search function to find partnerships by organisation name, location or project keyword.

The map is accessible at:

<https://www.cultural-bridge.info/map/>

Round 4 Deep Dive Case Studies

This appendix presents six in-depth case studies from Round 4 of the Cultural Bridge programme. Each explores a Tier 2 partnership in depth — drawing on conversations with the organisations, site visits, and survey responses to capture what was made, what was learned, and what comes next. The case studies are also available as interactive pages on the Cultural Bridge partnership map.

- [We Dance, We Connect](#) – Anjali Dance Company (Derby, England) and com.dance (Horben, Baden-Württemberg)
- [Unlocked](#) – Geese Theatre Company (Birmingham, UK) and aufBruch (Berlin, Germany)
- [Exploring Flows](#) – Dyffryn Dyfodol (Wales) and Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften (Quakenbrück, Lower Saxony)
- [Without Walls](#) – The Mighty Creatives (Leicester, UK) and Werkhaus (Krefeld, Germany)
- [Feminism and Migrant Activism](#) – Stellar Quines (Edinburgh, UK) and MPower (Berlin, Germany)
- [Colour Stories](#) – Brink! (Belfast, Northern Ireland) and artpark Hoher Berg (Schermbach, Germany)

Colour Stories

Brink! (Belfast, Northern Ireland)
& artpark Hoher Berg (Schermbbeck, Germany)

Research conducted by tialt – there is an alternative



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"At the end of the speed dating, you were just repeating yourself again and again — but we had this moment of thinking, yes, these people are like us."

– Stefanie, Artpark

2024 (T1) + 2025 (T2)

artpark Hoher Berg and Brink! built a partnership through shared work with colours and dye gardens, exchanging knowledge and discovering flax together, bringing traditional sustainable crafts into dialogue.

Environmental, Heritage, Public Space

PARTNERS

UK PARTNER
GB **Brink!**

Belfast, UK

A platform for discussion, education and action centred on the issues of climate breakdown, focused on innovative use of art and citizen science to consider new ways of living more connected, healthy, sustainable, and resilient lives.

➤ playthinkbrink.com

GERMAN PARTNER
DE **artpark Hoher Berg**

Schermbbeck, Germany

Located on the northern edge of the Ruhr metropolis, focused on uniting art and nature. An RCE-Ruhr-certified UN University branch, promoting sustainability and social dialogue.

➤ artpark.nrw

Overview

Brink and Artpark first met through Cultural Bridge's matchmaking sessions. Both organisations were already working across nature, heritage craft and community, and the alignment was almost immediate. Tier 1 gave them space to get to know each other properly, and the relationship deepened when Artpark travelled to Northern Ireland for Brink's Autumn Equinox Festival, harvesting, dyeing and exploring landscapes together.

Tier 2 built further on that foundation, growing into a project that both partners had not expected: flax growing, soil-to-fibre workshops, natural dyeing, and connections to a pan-European network of growers, makers and craft practitioners.

"It opened our eyes to what was already happening across Europe."

– Gawain (Brink)

"You can't do everything remotely. Until you meet people in their own place, you don't get a sense of anything back." — Gawain, Brink



Image © Brink!

Key outcomes

Hands-on activities

Community participants in both countries took part in hands-on activities across the whole journey from soil to textile: planting, harvesting, processing, dyeing and sewing. Involving people of all ages in the process.

New network connections

A cross-European fibre network has emerged through the project, building lasting new connections to organisations including Fibre Shed Ireland and Malin Linen, and opening both organisations up to a wider ecosystem of sustainability-focused makers and growers they hadn't previously known.

Organisational development

Both organisations grew in confidence, visibility and strategic direction, deepening their skills in cross-cultural workshop facilitation, event design and international partnership working.

Continued community interest

Community appetite carried well beyond the project's formal end — participants were already asking about future events before the programme had finished, with real enthusiasm for continuing the work together.

Looking ahead

Both organisations want to keep the momentum going. The European fibre network that emerged through Tier 2 is something both sides are keen to develop further, building on the new connections made with growers, makers and practitioners across Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia.

There's a shared ambition for a sustained programme with multi-year funding — one that could support continued travel between partners, community engagement, and proper documentation of the work.

A dedicated alumni network for Cultural Bridge partnerships is something both organisations would welcome too, as a space for ongoing exchange beyond the programme itself.



Image © Hella Sinnhuber, artpark Hoher Berg

Exploring Flows

Bridging Rural Communities (Tier 1)

Dyffryn Dyfodol (Wales)
& Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften (Quakenbrück,
Lower Saxony)

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I don't think I've ever had a boring conversation with any of you or any member of Syndikat. It's not just a light conversation about something. It's digging deeper and questioning and challenging in a kind of friendly, kind way, where we're interrogating something about our practices or the world that we live in.

– Iwan, Dyffryn Dyfodol

2024 (T1) + 2025 (T2)

Dyffryn Dyfodol and Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften came together to develop and explore the integration of their practices across countries, focusing on empowering communities and addressing key issues shaping rural spaces. Through reciprocal visits and collaborative residencies, they aimed to instigate positive change in rural communities.

Public Space, Rural Access

PARTNERS



UK PARTNER
Dyffryn Dyfodol

Wales

Dyffryn Dyfodol (Future Valley) is an organisation based in rural Wales focused on creative engagement and collaboration to power positive change for their communities.

➤ dyffryndyfodol.com



GERMAN PARTNER
DE Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften

Quakenbrück, Lower Saxony

An artist collective that connects with rural spaces and communities all over Germany to explore ways of creative storytelling that invite a change of perspective and reveal interconnections with each other.

➤ gefaehrliche-liebschaften.de

Overview

Dyffryn Dyfodol and Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften share a commitment to socially engaged arts in rural communities — one rooted in the Conwy Valley in North Wales, the other connecting rural spaces across Germany.

Their Tier 1 Cultural Bridge project focused on exploring each other's practices through mutual visits, without a fixed program. The exchange "Bridging Rural Communities – People, Process, Places" was built around slow travel: reciprocal field trips by train between Llanrwst in North Wales and the Emsland district of Lower Saxony, using the journey itself as creative and social material. It produced a slow travel film, a bilingual podcast, collaborative blog writing and an audio documentary, *Wet in Wales: Someday we'll evaporate together*, that captured the spirit of an open, unhurried encounter between two communities separated by geography but united by their relationship to land, water and place.

Tier 2, "Exploring Flows", deepened this by moving from mutual observation to active participation in each other's work. Two reciprocal residencies formed the heart of the exchange: Katharina Backlas, a German artist connected to Syndikat, came to Wales for 12 days embedded in Dyffryn Dyfodol's Gofod Glas freshwater project, setting up a studio in the Dolgarrog Community Centre and building connections with local people, scientists and creatives.

Then Lindsey Colbourne from Dyffryn Dyfodol travelled to Hildesheim in November 2025, joining Syndikat for the final production week of the Hildesheimer Landschaftslese — a public Land Party at Literaturhaus St. Jakobi that brought together farmers, geologists, students, cooks, musicians and community members around a live-recorded audio drama rooted in 20 conversations about the Hildesheim landscape. Directly influenced by Syndikat Gefährliche Liebschaften's processes of a rose hosting conversations between people as part of their Rosige Aussichten project, she developed her work with the Conwy Oracle Coracle to include a wise salmon.



Image © Exploring Flows

Key outcomes

Two embedded residencies with unexpected community connections

By setting up a studio in the Dolgarrog Community Centre and joining existing activities, Katharina Backlas built relationships that felt natural rather than imposed. In Hildesheim, Lindsey witnessed a land party that brought together a remarkable cross-section of the community — directly influencing her work with The Conwy Oracle Coracle.

Learning about language, bilingualism and community

Working across English, Welsh and German surfaced important questions about how language shapes community, identity and inclusion. Both organisations were candid that English continues to dominate, and both expressed a genuine aspiration to give Welsh more space within the partnership. Dyffryn Dyfodol's experience of bilingual working is now directly influencing Syndikat's thinking as they start working with Turkish-speaking communities in Germany.

Cross-pollination of two distinct artistic approaches

Syndikat, who would previously not intentionally return to places in Germany where they had been resident for a project, are now planning to return to Meppen in 2027 — having learned from Dyffryn Dyfodol about the impacts of longer residency. Dyffryn Dyfodol have adopted more theatrical elements to their activity, now using more props, costumes and design in their public-facing events.

A lasting friendship, an evolving creative partnership, and a network in the making

Both organisations are clear that what has developed is not just a project-based relationship but a genuine, durable connection. Future ideas include a landscape performance in the Emsland moorlands with Welsh participants, a wandering 'collaboratory', and a new project in a third place, neither Wales nor Germany.

"Having time for substance allowed us to build strong relationships that will last, fostering meaningful learning and deeper conversations that will have a ripple effect beyond."

– Katie Trent, Dyffryn Dyfodol

Looking ahead

Both partners are actively imagining what comes next. Immediate plans include finalising and releasing the Penmachno podcast and sharing the collaborative drawings and creative work produced during the residencies.

Beyond this, both organisations want to move from artist-to-artist exchange towards bringing the communities they work with into direct contact with each other. The relationship is now structural and creative — both sides describe it as a friendship that will hold regardless of whether further project funding materialises.

"At the end, our genre where we meet is called relational art." — Felix Worpenberg, Syndikat



Image © Exploring Flows

CREATIVE MEDIA

INCLUSION

SOCIAL JUSTICE

YOUTH

Feminism and Migrant Activism

Stellar Quines (Fife, Scotland)
& MPower (Berlin, Germany)

Research conducted by tialt – there is an alternative



Tier 1 gave us time to build trust without the pressure to produce.

Tier 2 has been transformative — it's given us the space to actually make something meaningful together.

– Caitlin Skinner, Stellar Quines

2024 (T1) + 2025 (T2)

MPower and Stellar Quines gave young women the opportunity to use film and theatre to explore the connections between feminism and migrant justice, sharing their experiences across borders.

Inclusion, Social Justice, Youth

PARTNERS

UK PARTNER
GB **Stellar Quines**

Fife, Scotland

An intersectional feminist theatre company based in Scotland, with a reputation for creating award-winning productions and championing gender equity within the performing arts.

➤ stellarquines.co.uk

GERMAN PARTNER
DE **MPower**

Berlin, Germany

A self-organized collective of girls and young women with migration and refugee backgrounds that develops and implements projects for political and cultural film education.

➤ mpower-fem.de

Overview

Stellar Quines and Berlin-based MPower came together through Cultural Bridge to explore displacement, identity, sexism and racism through film and song. Their Tier 2 partnership brought ten young women: five from Berlin and five Glasgow-based women of colour with lived experience of displacement, together for a four-day creative exchange at Glasgow Women's Library.

The workshop combined collaborative script writing with songwriting. Despite language barriers between participants, they worked to build a shared understanding and trust through creative play, co-writing, and reflection. The Glasgow workshop forms part of a developing collaboration that began in Tier 1, and culminated in a film project in Berlin later in 2025.



Image © Stellar Quines, Jassy Earl



Images © Stellar Quines

Key outcomes

Co-Writing Across Languages

Young women from Glasgow and Berlin worked together as creative collaborators, co-writing scripts and songs across a language barrier and building shared understanding through the creative process.

Expression Across Displacement

The project opened valuable space for expression, belonging and intercultural dialogue for Glasgow-based participants with lived experience of displacement.

New Perspectives on Leadership

The collaboration gave Stellar Quines a close look at MPower's decentralised, co-created leadership model, offering new perspectives for how their own Young Quines leadership programme might develop.

Still Collaborating

A collaborative film project — continuing the story of the partnership — is now in development, with Young Quines members travelling to Berlin to experience MPower's co-leadership approach in action.

Looking ahead

The next step is a film project in Berlin, where Young Quines members will travel to experience MPower's co-leadership model first-hand. Both organisations see the partnership as a site for mutual learning as much as creative exchange.

The experience so far has already begun to shape how Stellar Quines thinks about leadership development and participatory practice within their own organisation.



Image © Stellar Quines



Image © Stellar Quines

Unlocked

Geese Theatre Company (Birmingham, England)
& aufBruch (Berlin, Germany)

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“*The main impact for us has been the establishment of a genuinely values-aligned international partner in a sector where that is rare — two prison theatre companies who actually "get" each other — and the creative and organisational learning that has come from working inside each other's contexts.*

– Andy Watson, Artistic Director, Geese Theatre Company

2024 (T1) + 2025 (T2)

Geese Theatre Company and aufBruch explored their different methodologies working in criminal justice settings, learning how techniques work in different social and political environments. Two years of collaboration led to both companies integrating elements of each other's practice.

Theme: Social Justice

PARTNERS

UK PARTNER
GB **Geese Theatre Company**

Birmingham, UK

Founded in 1987, Geese Theatre Company is at the forefront of arts in criminal and social justice settings, renowned for creating innovative engagement projects and performances to improve wellbeing, rehabilitation and recovery.

➤ geese.co.uk

GERMAN PARTNER
DE **aufBruch**

Berlin, Germany

An independent Berlin theatre project, working for over 18 years in criminal justice settings, giving prisoners a language, a voice and a face through teaching them the craft of acting.

➤ gefaengnistheater.de

Overview

Geese Theatre Company and aufBruch began working together in a Tier 1 Cultural Bridge project in 2024. As two prison-based theatre companies working in very different contexts they immediately saw value in getting to know each other's work and practice. Tier 1 allowed these relationships to take hold and enabled a deep trust between the partners to develop based on shared values.

For Tier 2 they wanted more direct practice exchange, which took the form of two 'mini residencies'; one in HMP Oakwood in Birmingham in October 2025, and the other in Plötzensee Prison in Berlin in January 2026. In Oakwood, aufBruch demonstrated their approach to theatre making for an internally-focused performance, in Plötzensee, Geese introduced their use of masks into a performance of Waiting for Godot which was shown to local audiences of around 1,200 people.



Image © Thomas Aurin



Images © Thomas Aurin | © Unlocked

Key outcomes

Direct sharing and embedding of new theatre practice

Despite very different systems in the UK and Germany, both organisations learned new approaches they can use in future work. For aufBruch: the use of masks in performance. For Geese: rethinking text as a starting point and the potential for chorus-based approaches.

"There's something about their use of choral, chorus work... that idea of using chorus is something that we're thinking about and having to play around with ourselves as well."

– Andy, Geese Theatre

Thinking longer-term

Both organisations have long-standing relationships with the prisons they work with, but Cultural Bridge enabled them to think about how they could approach projects differently, embedding practice beyond time-bound project structures. Both also appreciated how the Cultural Bridge model allowed them to think longer-term about international partnership working.

Shared social understanding is as important as practice exchange

Moving from Tier 1 to Tier 2 enabled nascent relationships to become more meaningful. Through this trust, creative leadership in each prison was enabled, despite clear cultural and contextual differences. This was fostered through all the social exchange that happened around the residencies as much as what was happening 'in the room'.

Looking ahead

Both partners are actively imagining what a next collaboration could look like, including the possibility of extending the exchange into each company's community work beyond prisons — Geese's projects with people experiencing homelessness and in recovery from addiction in Birmingham, and aufBruch's community practice in Berlin.

Shorter-term, Geese colleagues are hoping to travel to Berlin to see aufBruch's next production.

Both organisations are realistic about the precarity of their funding environments and the reality that sustained exchange of this kind depends on continued investment. Nonetheless, the appetite, trust and curiosity to keep building together are firmly in place.



Image © Unlocked



Image © Thomas Aurin

We Dance, We Connect

Anjali Dance Company (Derby, England)
& com.dance (Horben, Baden-Württemberg)

Research conducted by tialt – there is an alternative



“As soon as we start dancing, there is a connection... I think there's something around improvisation and the ability to connect faster and more quickly.

– Anjali Dance Company

2024 (T1) + 2025 (T2)

Anjali Dance Company and com.dance initially came together to explore each other's unique, artistic ways of working with and for their communities of diverse artists. During their second year of partnership they produced a dance/mixed-art piece on the theme of (non-verbal) communication, culminating in performances and participation workshops across the UK, Germany, and online.

Themes: Disability Arts

PARTNERS

UK PARTNER
GB **Anjali Dance Company**

Derby, England

A small yet ambitious charity celebrating the extraordinary creative potential of people with learning disabilities.

➤ anjali.co.uk

GERMAN PARTNER
DE **com.dance**

Horben, Baden-Württemberg

Offers regular contemporary mixedabled dance training and intensive training for dancers with/without intellectual disabilities.

➤ com-dance.de

Overview

Anjali Dance Company and com.dance first came together through Cultural Bridge Tier 1, where they began exploring how their different approaches to inclusive dance could work alongside each other. By Tier 2, that early exchange had grown into a shared creative process. Rather than arriving with a fixed plan, the partners started with what Anjali described as "a blank canvas" — working to develop a shared system of signs and symbols collaboratively with the dancers as a tool for co-creation.

The signs the group developed together in Tier 1 worked to bridge a real language barrier between German and UK-based dancers, allowing them to connect, respond to one another, and create together. Through a series of residencies in both Leicester and Freiburg, learning-disabled and mixed-ability dancers worked alongside professional artists to shape a choreographic piece together based around the signs they had previously co-developed, culminating in a showcase at De Montfort University attended by over 50 people.



Image © We Dance, We Connect. Markus Pattern

Key outcomes

Shared Moves

Learning-disabled and mixed-ability dancers in both Leicester and Freiburg worked as genuine creative collaborators, with a shared choreographic work emerging from their collective process rather than being handed down to them.

Shared Language

A co-creation methodology built around the shared system of signs and symbols developed organically through the partnership. This is now a transferable tool applicable across settings.

Confidence

Dancers grew in confidence, curiosity and investment in the work, with families also reporting positive changes beyond the studio, particularly after the experience of travelling internationally as a team.

Looking ahead

Both partners are committed to continuing the relationship. Concrete plans include ongoing Zoom meetings, further development of the choreographic piece, and exploring funding opportunities in both the UK and Germany.

com.dance is actively seeking funding to present the work at a festival in Freiburg in late 2026, and both organisations see real potential for workshops that share their co-creation methodology with wider audiences.

Anjali described it as "really transformative on a personal, professional, and organisational level," and for com.dance the work carries a wider social significance: democratic, inclusive practice that feels especially important right now in the current political contexts.



Image © Elly Welford



Image © Jennifer Rohrbacher, e-werk Freiburg

Without Walls

The Mighty Creatives (Leicester, England)
& Werkhaus (Krefeld, Germany)

Research conducted by *tiAlt* – there is an alternative



“

It's centred on relationship building, not sightseeing. It valued co-creation, not observing. They were making things together and struggling through language and perceptions and all that stuff. People will remember this in 20 years' time.

– Nick Owen, The Mighty Creatives

2024 (T1) + 2025 (T2)

The Mighty Creatives and Werkhaus developed cultural programmes centred on children and young people in need, co-creating two immersive exhibitions in each of their home cities.

Inclusion, Social Justice, Youth

PARTNERS

UK PARTNER
GB
The Mighty Creatives

Leicester, England

An award-winning charity providing creative youth services for those who too often go unheard. TMC's vision is to fight for Social Justice for young people through arts, culture and creativity.

➤ themightycreatives.com

GERMAN PARTNER
DE
Werkhaus

Krefeld, Germany

A space for cultural and creative encounters and a place of holistic education and learning for children, young people and adults of all ages, focused on social disadvantage, poverty and disability.

➤ werkhaus-krefeld.de

Overview

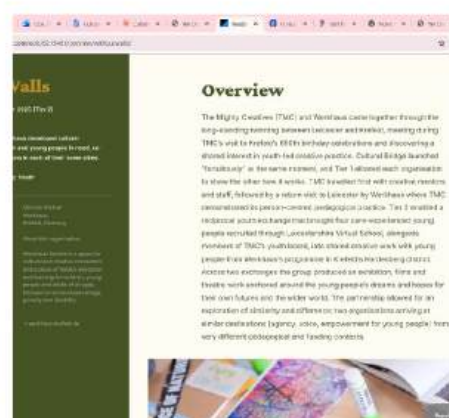
The Mighty Creatives (TMC) and Werkhaus came together through the long-standing twinning between Leicester and Krefeld, meeting during TMC's visit to Krefeld's 650th birthday celebrations and discovering a shared interest in youth-led creative practice. Cultural Bridge launched "fortuitously" at the same moment, and Tier 1 allowed each organisation to show the other how it works.

TMC travelled first with creative mentors and staff, followed by a return visit to Leicester by Werkhaus where TMC demonstrated its person-centred pedagogical practice. Tier 2 enabled a reciprocal youth exchange that brought four care-experienced young people recruited through Leicestershire Virtual School, alongside members of TMC's youth board, into shared creative work with young people from Werkhaus's programme in Krefeld's Hardenberg district.

Across two exchanges the group produced an exhibition, films and theatre work anchored around the young people's dreams and hopes for their own futures and the wider world. The partnership allowed for an exploration of similarity and difference; two organisations arriving at similar destinations — agency, voice, empowerment for young people — from very different pedagogical and funding contexts.



Image © The Mighty Creatives



Images © The Mighty Creatives

Key outcomes

Durable, self-sustaining relationships between the young people

The UK cohort stayed in contact through a WhatsApp group that is still active, several are continuing with other TMC programmes, and the Krefeld group came back with visible motivation to lead and recruit peers into future creative work.

"After three days, I thought the group, we were together like for three years... They came back with pride. They came back with a lot of motivation to actually continue, 'when can we do the next piece of theatre?'"

– Thyll, Werkhaus

A clearer articulation of youth voice, empowerment and cultural education

The recognition that shared language can mask very different starting points shaped by each country's funding, reporting and regulatory cultures.

"What it really brought into focus for us was the approach to working with children and young people with a child-centred pedagogical approach underpinning everything."

– James, The Mighty Creatives

A deeper organisational tie between the two partners

Thyll has joined TMC's board of trustees, and there are ambitions for Werkhaus young people to step into TMC's youth board when the time is right. This demonstrates a relationship developing from being project-based to being structural.

Hard-won practical learning about international youth exchanges post-Brexit

Both organisations encountered difficulties with visas, airline group bookings, Swift transfers, exchange-rate planning, and adult-to-young-person ratios at security. It's important to name and acknowledge these and enable others thinking of doing this work to prepare.

Looking ahead

Both partners have indicated that a next phase would need more time, and a deliberate focus on the practitioners' development. A future iteration would bring the practitioners together for sustained, mutual CPD alongside the youth exchange, so that co-production and shared methodology can move beyond the surface level reachable in a few intensive weeks.

Thyll's trusteeship at TMC and the possibility of young people moving onto the youth board give the partnership a connection that will hold regardless of whether further project funding materialises. At this point there is appetite, trust and a strong track record to build on.



Image © The Mighty Creatives



Image © The Mighty Creatives

