

# HOW TO EXCHANGE IN A CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY?

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Report from the working group as part of the  
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## Overview of the situation

International cooperation inspires works out of the ordinary, stimulating both creators and audiences. Nothing enriches creative potential more than trans-border exchange and intercultural dialogue. Diversity and openness are at the heart of artistic projects and professional growth. Many European funds are initiated to foster experience exchange and sharing values on the international level.

When economically disparate countries are involved in the same project, however, the task is difficult and sometimes turns to be impossible. First of all, financial instruments for supporting performing arts vary in number and size in different countries<sup>1</sup>. This means that organisations from economically weaker countries cannot be leading in international projects. This often causes partnerships to develop on an unequal footing from the outset. Sometimes organisations are unable to take part in a project at all. Discrepancies in standard remuneration (for example per diems) make it impossible for financially disadvantaged countries to engage participants from richer countries. Further, national administrations of different countries do not work in a similar pace nor have the same capacity. Audiences are unevenly developed. The same applies to public-private partnerships. Some countries are more experienced than others in the field of international cooperation. All this may cause an impression of unreliability, feeling of frustration towards the partner organisation, and de-motivation. Therefore, economic and intercultural differences can deter communication and serve as counterproductive factors.

## Context

The working session was a sequel to a session of the same name which was part of the IETM Plenary Meeting in Montpellier, April 2014. The purpose of the session in Sofia was to continue this debate and advance further to new ideas on how to work internationally in the context of economic inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> The Nordic countries have a distinct advantage over the Southern countries.

## Approach

Being divided into five groups each headed by a Team Leader, participants were invited to share experiences, identify key issues and make suggestions based on the analysis of a case study provided by a Team Leader, and finally to elaborate **a list of recommendations** on how to avoid pitfalls and succeed while working internationally.

The Moderator attends each working group and intervenes at certain moments. The Assistant Moderator also attends the groups and constitutes his own list of principles based on the discussions.

## Recommendations

**The lists** presented by the five groups share many points of intersection. **The results** can be organised around **four principal recommendations**.

**I Miscommunication** is one of the most fundamental problems of international cooperation. A key to solving it is **investing in getting to know the partner organisation**:

- Take time to get to know each other – both formally and informally.
- Talk openly and honestly about each other's needs, views and goals.
- Realize your expectations from your partner and from the project.
- Determine the extent of each other's contribution, responsibilities and decision-making power.
  - Define all of the above as rules that all sides agree upon and revise them constantly.
  - Make sure that you mean the same things.

**II Financial issues aren't the most important; they shouldn't stop you from being active.**

- Inequality is not just economic, but also cultural; it depends on skills and a position of an organisation in the sector.
  - Identify your needs and meet them before resorting to money – regard money as the last resort.
  - Develop your networks – nationally and internationally. A lot can be provided through an exchange.
  - Contribute otherwise than with money. You can offer skills and services. Do not forget that a venue is an asset.

- Lobbying with politicians can help solve practical problems that otherwise cost money. Use the common EU legislation to cross barriers like: visas, VAT, differences in social security systems.
- Use time as an asset and as a tool for making partners equal.

### **III Psychological attitudes can predestine the outcome of a project.**

- Be honest with yourself about your capacities, needs and expectations.
- Be prepared to deal with cultural differences.
- Be ready to change.
- Be patient.
- Be generous.
- Keep your integrity. If you are from a less advantaged country, don't overestimate your partner and don't underestimate yourself.
- Understand that even if you don't have money, you still have a lot to give.
- Focus not on the problem, but on the solution.

### **IV Trust the art.**

- Let the artistic idea be the chief motivation. Avoid the trap of collaborating for the collaboration's sake. It produces a non-viable work and deepens miscommunication.
- Use art as an equalising tool between partners - it is your artistic contribution that matters.
- Good work brings more work; so do not get discouraged if your first try is not successful.

### **Tips on work process**

- Stop thinking linear, in a tree-like structure, which is a natural attitude, but **try thinking in circles**. Start with the core, where you put your goal, then draw the next circle, where you identify who you need to make it happen, then draw another circle – add other partners and ideas.
- **Evaluate** all the way through, in order not to lose control. Balance between **accelerating and consolidating**.

### **Practical suggestions**

- Use an Internet platform where people share their skills.
- IETM might create a [Timebanking](#) system for its members.
- Attend festival exchange of artistic work to know each other.

- Commercial arrangements – if there is a market demand for a specific national art, it could lead to a business partnership.
- Creating a list of possible sources of funding for international cooperation and publishing it on the IETM website – representatives from different countries create their own lists, so that partner organisations know what institution to address abroad.

## Conclusion

How can we exchange in a context of economic inequality? Answering this question, we should take an open and flexible approach – first, to review the problem from the psychological point of view and then practically, exchanging know-how and using digital tools and the opportunities provided by the European institutions.

The financial crisis can be seen as a positive change, since it brings partners from economically divergent countries closer – budget reductions help artists from richer countries to understand the working methods of their partners from economically disadvantaged countries and draw on their experiences. In this way austerity fosters consolidation and emancipation of the international creative community.

**Attached:** detailed **lists of recommendations** as presented by work groups with case studies.

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