
Evaluation of the International Opportunities Fund (IOF) and its impact(s) on the mobility of artists and cultural professionals based in Wales



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Executive summary

The evaluation of Wales Arts International's (WAI) **International Opportunities Fund (IOF)** was written by Elena di Federico with the support and assistance of Marie Le Sourd and Maxime Demartin, all three from On the Move (OTM), the cultural mobility information network active in Europe and worldwide. This research follows a commission from WAI - a member of OTM since 2010 - to evaluate its cultural mobility fund which has been running for eight years.

This report is divided into three main parts. The **first part** focuses on an introduction of the IOF, its objectives and the context of its implementation. This section highlights as well the indicators that were identified corresponding both to WAI's mission and OTM's fields of interest as regards to cultural mobility. The **second part** is an in-depth analysis of the answers to the questionnaires sent to the grantees (60 answers eg. 30% of the total), while the **third part** focuses on the answers given by 15 host organisations over the period 5th May till 10 August 2013 mostly. Only a few skype interviews and calls were made, the great majority of answers having been done through email correspondence via the questionnaires. The last part of this report includes a conclusion and some key recommendations in the context of the IOF and the overall EU cultural mobility framework.

First section: This section **introduces the International Opportunities Fund (IOF)** that forms part of Wales Arts International's **Creating 2013 strategy**, to nurture and grow the engagement of the arts from Wales in an international context.

IOF is the only direct grant that WAI offers and is based on an ongoing process of applications with no published deadlines. The fund supports overseas visits aimed at the development of international work (both in Wales and overseas) and the presentation and delivery of artistic activity outside the UK. Grant support is available **primarily towards travel and accommodation costs**, although costs relating to the delivery of project activity can also be considered.

The scheme is **competitive**, and the maximum level of support has been £3000, but is increased to **£5000 in April 2013**. Wales Arts International considers the level of financial support requested and makes a decision based on the priorities and criteria outlined below, together with the level of funding available. The fund priorities are to support artists seeking to present work at significant international venues, events and showcases (e.g. performances, exhibitions or readings) where the full costs cannot be met either by the artist, company or international presenter.

This general introduction on the aims of the IOF includes as well some **key statistics** made available in February 2013 by WAI to OTM.

Over the past 4 years, the IOF funded **193 travels in total** (from 2008-2009 to 2011-2012). The last edition counted with the highest number of travels funded, 63. The IOF grants mostly benefitted **individuals (72%** of the total grants allocated between 2008 and 2012), followed by Companies Limited by Guarantees (10%). As regards the **disciplines**, the projects benefitting from an IOF grant belong to several different disciplines and art forms. The majority of projects are from the visual arts field (31% of total grants) and the performing arts (music, dance, drama, theatre entertainment account for 39% of the total). **89% of the travels** are to **one country** only and **46% of the travels are within Europe**. The average grants allocated through the IOF during the last four years ranged from £1,272 to £2,083, corresponding to a percentage of the total budget of the projects between 43% and 47%. In total, **£331,937** was allocated to projects whose **overall budget amounted to £1,228,217**.

This first section lastly introduces the methodology used to collect the feedback from the grant recipients and the host organisations and the identification of indicators. For the purpose of defining **indicators of the impact of IOF on the mobility of its beneficiaries** (Welsh artists/organisations as well as host artists/organisations), the specific objectives of IOF and the general objectives of WAI valid for all projects can be summarised as follows:

- The project brings new work for artists
- The project has a sustainable / long term development value with partners / collaborators abroad
- The projects develop inter-cultural relations through the arts
- The grant allows the research for (the development of) international projects that will take place either in Wales or outside the UK

Based on these considerations, two tables were done to summarise the objectives of the IOF and of WAI, **relevant indicators to be used for the evaluation of the Fund's impact on Welsh artists' mobility**, and the questions to be included in the questionnaires to explore such impacts.

The set of indicators are:

- Purpose of the travels undertaken with support from IOF (for the grant recipients) / Expectations re. collaborations with Welsh-based artists/companies (for the host organisations);
- Fulfilment of expectations, actual effectiveness of the travel;
- Short and long term impacts of the mobility experience(s) funded by IOF;
- Unexpected positive effects of mobility in the short, medium and long term;
- Eventual negative impacts.

One shall highlight that to enrich this research, three types of indicators were added by On the Move in order to complement previous projects and researches on the overall issue of cultural mobility:

- The importance of the physical aspect of mobility,
- The eventual obstacles to cultural mobility (in particular administrative) and
- General considerations about cultural mobility.

Second section: this section highlights - through comments, charts and selected quotes - the key findings of the results of the questionnaires answered by 60 grant recipients eg. 30% of the total grant recipients over four years.

Key finding 1.: The grant recipients undertook their travels with multiple purposes, mainly related to establishing or strengthening of professional networks and collaborations, gaining international visibility, developing new projects – also in collaboration with local artists – or exhibiting/performing an existing work. Less frequently the grant recipients travelled in order to attend a residency (despite the fact that in most cultural mobility related projects funded in other countries – at least in Europe and Asia, residencies are among the top types of mobility supported) or to deliver or attend training.

In the great majority of the cases, all the initial aims of the travel were fulfilled, and additional benefits were also experienced. 23% of the respondents indeed mentioned that besides fulfilling their initial expectations, other unexpected benefits were also experienced, including additional networking and working opportunities, professional development, long-lasting friendship and opportunities to develop work in socially engaged contexts (e.g. working with children).

Key finding 2.: The mobility experiences funded by the IOF grants had a multiplicity of positive impacts on the beneficiaries, including strengthening or enlarging the professional network, professional and artistic development, raising the profile of the artists in Wales and abroad, getting visibility for the Welsh arts sector abroad, developing one's audience and market. **Benefits are**

shared with other artists working with the grant recipients and with the Welsh arts sector at large, either directly (sharing of experience etc.) or indirectly (raising awareness and interest for the Welsh arts abroad, opening the way for other Welsh artists etc.). Almost all the respondents (98%) acknowledge that the international travel experience funded by the IOF grant(s) allowed them to enlarge their professional networks (developing new contacts) and to increase the visibility and profile of the Welsh arts sector internationally (97%).

However this part highlights the difficulty in evaluating precisely the gained benefits: for instance it is difficult to say if **certain results have been achieved as a direct result of the international experience**, in particular the possible additional income earned in Wales (30%) and abroad (27%) as a result of the international experience.

Interesting are also the **additional benefits** the grant recipients had experienced thanks to the IOF-funded travels. Most of the additional responses had to do with **professional advancement, personal links and gaining new perspectives on one's own work and artistic practice in general**, thanks to the confrontation with a different/new/international environment, which also can benefit other Welsh artists and organisations.

Finally, the **continuity of the exchanges** and the possibility of **establishing deeper and stronger relations** with another country / artistic scene, thanks to repeated visits, is acknowledged as a particularly important feature.

Key finding 3.: **The benefits deriving from the international travels are likely to be experienced in particular either during the stay abroad or in the long term, one year or more after the travel.** Only to a lesser extent the artists can experience the benefits of the travel in the short and mid term (less than one year after the travel). Of course these results change according to the specific benefit: the connection with new audiences and local communities in the places visited are experienced mainly during the stay, "on the spot", while other benefits like the enlargement and strengthening of professional networks is more likely to happen in the long term. Specific charts highlight the nature of the benefits gained for the grant recipients over different types of timeframes.

Key finding 4.: **Mobility is crucial for Welsh artists for several reasons, and only "real" travels can bring artists the many benefits mentioned.** "Real" mobility is key to benefitting from a fulfilling personal and professional experience, which is likely to have positive impacts – as mentioned in other key findings – on the artist and on its community in Wales. This seems also to have all its relevance as Wales is a relatively small nation and cultural mobility seems to prevent it from isolation and disconnection, with the artists acting as "Ambassadors".

Key finding 5.: International mobility also entails professional **challenges**, but these mostly turn into **opportunities** for personal and professional development. A few respondents however highlighted the challenges to keep the contacts with some artists and professionals after their return to Wales.

Key finding 6.: **Administrative obstacles** encountered by the IOF grant recipients when travelling were **rare** and mostly had to do with taxation rules. In most cases, most of the problems encountered are more related to logistical issues and could be solved thanks to the help and cooperation of the host organisations.

Third section: In total, **15 international host partners** replied to the questionnaire throughout June 2013. Most of them provided extensive information and interesting feedback about their

experience. As a mirror to the second section, the key results are highlighted and enriched with comments, charts and quotes.

Key finding 1.: International artists and organisations mainly hosted Welsh artists they already knew in order to start or continue a collaboration or co-production; hosting them was also a mean to know better the Welsh artistic scene and develop new projects. To a lesser, but still significant, extent, the international hosts expected the networking with Welsh artists to be a tool for market and audience development for their activities (reaching the Welsh audience) and to enrich their programmes (festivals, exhibitions etc.).

Key finding 2.: By hosting Welsh artists funded by the IOF grants, the international partners have experienced a **number of impacts ranging from networking to professional development, from audience development** – both in their own country and in Wales to profile raising internationally.

Key finding 3.: The international hosts of the IOF grant recipients, in general, experience the benefits of these exchanges particularly during the stay of the Welsh artists. Only to a lesser extent benefits are perceived in the mid and long term.

These results reflect the responses given with regard to the specific benefits or impacts perceived by the artists, however for two kinds of impacts the responses are different. **The connection with new audiences in Wales or elsewhere becomes more effective in the long term**, more than 1 year after having hosted a Welsh artist; this probably happens because such connections are achieved by touring or exhibiting works resulting from the collaboration with the Welsh artists hosted, so it can take some time to programme these activities. **The creation of new links with local communities is achieved more often in the short term, up to 3 months after the IOF grant recipients left;** this probably has to do with the time needed to develop the links started with the presence of a foreign artist or company with local audiences in the place of the visit.

Specific charts come to illustrate the fact that specific benefits are gained within different timeframes and periods (as it has above been done for the grant recipients). As for the section related to the grant recipients, some impacts are difficult to be evaluated and explained in a very precise manner. For instance, it seems quite difficult for the respondents to evaluate to what extent hosting a Welsh artist has increased their recognition or visibility in Wales (from critics, curators, institutions etc.) and internationally. The same goes with the question of audience development in Wales.

Key finding 4: There is a general agreement of the respondents about the fact that **the benefits achieved through the visits of Welsh artists supported by IOF grants would have not been achieved without “real” travelling.**

Key finding 5: All the collaborations and travels run very smoothly, both from the artistic and the administrative point of view.

Key finding 6: There is a general agreement that artists’ mobility is extremely important for the artistic community itself but also for societies at large, **and that small funding like the one provided by the IOF grants is crucial to ensure small-scale but high quality projects happen.**

The **Conclusion** highlights the convergence of initial expectations regarding the mobility experiences funded by the IOF grants by the grant recipients and the host organisations: the main aims were the development or strengthening of collaborations and networking, the professional advancement and

the opportunity to gain a better knowledge of the cultural scene in the respective countries (Wales or host country). Overall, the great majority of the respondents – on both sides – stress the **richness of the human and artistic experience that such collaborations and meetings have allowed**. This is all the more facilitated by a smooth and flexible administration of the grants.

In terms of measuring the impacts of cultural mobility experiences, there are two main limitations: one related to the difficulty in evaluating the **earning and employability benefits** linked to one or more cultural mobility experiences and the other is the issue of the **timeframes and period** within which the **benefits of a mobility experience** can be felt for the grant recipients and by the host organisations. The length required for the artists' benefits seem longer but in any case, the great majority of respondents - both Welsh artists and their international hosts - agree that **whatever the benefits they experienced, these could have not happened without a "real" mobility experience**.

One other key finding is that the "mobility experiences" allowed by the IOF grants do not concern only the artists directly involved (the travelling artist - the grantee - and the host) but impact on a **much wider group of artists and audiences both in Wales and in the foreign countries**.

Such an overall impact is reached through a relative modest financial investment: the average IOF grants ranged between 1,200€ and 2,080€ (between 2008 and 2012), covering between 43% and 47% of the total project budgets, but they allowed very significant and effective experiences.

Considering the fact that most of the objectives of this fund are met and are in line with WAI's Creating 2013 Strategy, **recommendations** made in the final section of this report are more to further strengthen some key aspects of the IOF while also suggesting some developments at an EU and international level.

- 1) To **organise meetings and peer-to-peer exchange sessions** between former grantees and other Welsh artists to ease the sharing of knowledge, contacts and experiences and to bring inspiration to other Welsh artists;
- 2) To **provide specific information about administrative issues** in relation to certain countries, inside and outside Europe (e.g. about taxation, incomes, contracts, insurances, transportation etc.); although the issue was raised only by a few respondents to the survey;
- 3) To define, together with the former beneficiaries, **ways to foster the contacts with the international artistic community** – for instance by organising (real or virtual) meetings with the international hosts of the IOF grantees;
- 4) To strive a **balance** between providing cultural mobility support to **new and emerging** artists from Wales and continuing to support **past grantees and regular host organisations**;
- 5) To engage in a **few reciprocal types of exchange** to fund a limited number of foreign artists to come to Wales (in line with country-to-country agreements and/or the 2005 UNESCO Convention);
- 6) To develop joint in-depth research on the evaluation of cultural mobility on the **potential for employability** locally and at a EU and international level;
- 7) To initiate, participate and contribute at a EU and international level to discussions and fora on **the great impact of international cultural mobility support to a region / nation which is relatively small, eventually isolated and/or peripheral**.