Knowledge Systems for Cultural Mobility

Executive Summary

1. Objectives

Mobility is the lifeblood of artistic and cultural activity. The exchange of ideas and techniques between people from different backgrounds has been central to the flowering of culture within Europe, and also to the development of understanding between peoples. For certain individuals the ability to move freely across Europe has been central to their careers and their artistic endeavours. In some cases mobility has changed the course of artistic history.

In the era of globalisation and easy travel, the European Union provides an historical opportunity for such exchanges and cross-fertilisation to take place on an unprecedented scale. But important obstacles remain. This study, commissioned by the European Commission and conducted by ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd, examined one of these obstacles – one, indeed that arguably plays *the* pivotal role in enabling cross-border mobility to happen: the uneven and inconsistent availability of information

Until this point little has been known or understood *systematically* about where cultural operators source the information that enables mobility to take place and how it might be improved to overcome the information obstacles that exist. This study aimed at addressing these gaps and developing practical solutions to how they could be tackled.

Although the Terms of Reference for the study spoke of 'information' it became clear during the course of the work that what artists need for their mobility is structured *knowledge*, not just information. They need to know when they travel that 'the following forms need to be submitted to this agency by this time, and in this language' (information), 'and this is how you do it' (knowledge). Knowledge, which is information structured into a form where meaningful action can be undertaken, often through the intermediation of experts, is therefore a key theme that runs throughout the findings.

It also became rapidly clear during the study that one of the key defining features of the current ways in which mobile professional source and use information is the use of complex *networks*, in which both formal *and informal* knowledge and information play key, and often complementary, roles.

A number of consequences flowed from these findings for the solutions that were being developed. First, it was plain that any attempt to build a single integrated information system would not only be hugely expensive and probably doomed to failure, but more importantly it would not be able to 'store' the knowledge and action practices that artists and networks use already to facilitate their mobility. Secondly, it was clear that

any solution needed to be *organic*, working with the grain of current practice, and *developmental*, building capacity over time to generate and share knowledge.

2. The method

Building on an initial review of the literature relating to the mobility of cultural workers, we undertook 85 interviews involving cultural operators across the cultural spectrum (making visits to four cities across Europe and carrying out telephone discussions in a further two), pan-European stakeholder organisations, and Cultural Contact Points (CCPs). We also carried out a review of formal information provision, covering 65 providers in total and 28 in-depth. Our team participated in a number of events where the issues were discussed, and we organised three workshops, two in December 2008 (with professional sector organisations and CCPs) and one in early February 2009 with a diverse range of stakeholders. We also made a presentation to the 'Expert Group on mobility of artists and other professionals in the cultural sector, established under the open method of coordination in culture' in February 2009. Here we were able to obtain the views of Member States on the emerging solutions. Sustained interaction with people and organisations involved in the culture sector was therefore central to our methodology. Whilst the conclusions and recommendations remain our own, the emerging options and final model were in no small part developed and tested with organisations most likely to be affected by the findings, should they be implemented.

3. What stakeholders and cultural operators told us about their needs and potential solutions

Our review of the current ways in which mobile cultural professionals obtain and use information revealed a number of important issues. Four **broad and distinct areas of information needs** were identified:

Main information topic areas for mobile professionals in the cultural sector:
1. **Regulatory issues**, including rules on taxation, social security, visas and work permits (including for non EU nationals), intellectual property rights.
2. **Funding opportunities** for cross-border projects and to cover the costs of cross-border mobility
3. **Job and training opportunities** abroad, including employment opportunities, co-production, touring and project opportunities
4. **Country and region profiles** explaining the structure and profile of the cultural sector

The **types of mobility information** that are needed relate to: the types of mobility (short-term mobility/long-term mobility, individual mobility/group mobility); the status of the mobile artist or cultural worker (employed, self-employed) and of the mobile operator who is employing or hiring a professional (e.g. profit-oriented undertaking, not-for profit organisation or association).

The division between the '**demand**' and '**supply'** sides in relation to cultural mobility information is by no means clear cut. Indeed, a number of the stakeholder organisations interviewed are active both in representing members' views and in providing them with information.

Overall, the **diverse and complex characteristics of the cultural sector** mean that is difficult to consider a single information system approach to solve all the needs. The sector has a high number of atypical forms of employment (project work, short-term contracts and voluntary or very low-paid activities), diverse forms of undertakings (e.g. not-for profit organisations), complex intellectual property rights, and the frequent employment of non-EU country nationals and their participation in mobile culture projects.

Stakeholders highlighted a number of messages to inform potential solutions to information problems.

- Finding solutions to the problems of **understanding national regulations** affecting mobility is the most critical issue for the sector.

- One size does not fit all, so **develop customised mobility information**, involving both online information and access to expert advice in 'one-stop shops' (websites are not *the* solution, only a means of helping better solutions to be developed).

- **Reinforce and enrich the information sources currently used** by mobile professionals in the cultural field which include both formal and informal, commercial and personal sources (a 'bottom-up' approach).

- **Raise the information handling skills of cultural workers**, and of employers' organisations, trade unions, professional education and training establishments and public authorities.

- Enable the **exchange of good practices** amongst professionals and public authorities.

4. Lessons from existing information provision

Generally, our review of existing information provision found that they **do not address the comprehensive needs of cultural workers.** Some provision is available through online portals such as EURES and MISSOC, but is general in nature, and in the case of MISSOC targeted at professionals rather than the general public. It is also not structured to respond to the specificities of questions such as 'I am a Latvian dancer and I want to travel to France. What should I know?' In relation to non-electronic sources of information, Cultural Contact Points exist but for a different purpose than to act as mediators between professionals and information providers.

Existing sources do nonetheless provide useful operational models, or could be adapted to address some of the key needs. From a review of information resources and services in general (for example some commercial services such as travel booking, and some information resources supported through EU funding, e.g. EURES, MISSOC, EURAXESS), and more specifically of resources that are developed to meet the needs of cultural workers, it needs to be acknowledged that :

- **Providing accurate, real-time, and targeted information is an expensive task**, and cannot easily be done by integrating information into single databases. There needs to be consideration of 'interoperability', where systems can communicate in real-time with the official information sources, for example in tax authorities.
- **Information services deliver value to the customer by integrating information**, not just providing raw information. For example, a database that has information about tax rules does not in itself help a cultural worker to understand the process, or to fill in the relevant forms.
- **Information changes in real-time**. Taxation rules can change rapidly in each country, visa requirements also can change at short notice, and the difficulty of being up-to-date is, more than anything, where so many information projects fail.
- **Centralised information** is seldom 'complete'. The overhead cost of checking and revising information means that database updates occur over longer time periods than the actual change in information.

Further, we found that in all cases effective knowledge networks, whether at European, national or regional level, benefit from similar features. They:

- Are driven by real needs in the user constituencies.

- Utilise a network of agents in all participating countries.

- Locate control of content with experts who can understand and interpret sources.

- Provide interpreted (added value) information to their users.

- Utilise a secretariat which is a service agency to its network.

- Benefit from European Commission facilitation that helps bring national interests together, and injects knowledge and experience, but without interrupting the free flow of dialogue, network control, and the evolution of practice.

In relation to the possible roles and responsibilities that might be played in any solution, three levels emerged as critical

The EC, which has an important role to play in improving information provision; and coordinating and supporting information provision at all levels.

National authorities which could: configure information provision to match the national (or regional) situation; commit strongly to improve information provision; and, support existing/create appropriate structures for information provision for cross-border mobility in the cultural sector (national/regional mobility contact points).

Professional organisations which could: develop dialogue and cooperation within the cultural sector; engage in dialogue with the EU and national authorities on mobility and information provision; and, target support to raise the sector's capacity to deliver mobility information.

5. The recommended solution

In order to develop a solution to the problems and issues set out above, it was important to establish some guiding principles based on what we had found out about the demand for and supply of information. From the research and workshops, we concluded that any solution should:

- build on the rich landscape of information that already exists, including the strengths of the sector as providers of their own information

- be decentralised to allow – and take advantage of – the vast heterogeneity in the sector so that solutions can be tailored, within an overall framework, to national or regional circumstances

- take into account the core differences between the types of information needed

- invest in the people component of the system as much as the technical electronic element

- incorporate networking opportunities for professionals as an integral component.

Our recommended solution is a Serviced Knowledge Network in which activity on two levels is critical: the Member State level and the pan-European level. The solution draws inspiration in particular from the EURAXESS network.

The role of Member States

The main focus of activity is placed on Member States, where Cultural Mobility Knowledge Centres (CMKCs) would act as the hubs of the networks that would develop (Member States may decide to have more than one CMKC depending on their national administrative organisation or size). In this decentralised model, Member States would have discretion to select organisations to act as hosts for their own CMKCs within a framework of guidelines, protocols and quality standards agreed and owned by the network as a whole. Professional organisations or Cultural Contact Points as well as public bodies might therefore act as hosts.

Each country would have its own particular configuration of players making up its network of information providers. Different countries would be starting from different points and some countries are clearly in a position where they have a 'head start' on others. Sharing of good practice is thus an important element of the model.

CMKCs would have responsibility for:

- making and maintaining working relationships with other CMKCs to provide the backbone for effective functioning of the network, through exchange of information and good practice

- making and maintaining relationships with national authorities with regard to regulatory matters in order in particular to provide the mediation required between authorities and individual mobile professionals, enabling queries to be answered efficiently

- bringing into their networks relevant sector organisations who can contribute to overcoming information obstacles and to improving the supply of information, especially in areas where there is strong sub-sectoral variation in information needs, i.e. health, safety, insurance, commercial law, qualifications and intellectual property rights, along with jobs, training, cross-border projects and co-productions and funding (e.g. through the provision of guides, resources and networking opportunities)

- maintaining national databases that interoperate with a European-level portal

- preparing country and regional profiles of the culture sector in partnership with national authorities and professional organisations.

The European level

Activity at European level is essential to complement and support the work at Member State/regional level. The two primary responsibilities of the European Commission would be:

- to provide a secretariat to service the network which would:

  - service the network as a whole, for example through directly supporting the development of CMKCs
  - coordinate the consistency of the 'brand' by setting design and other standards for the portal, and for national web sites that are built by CMKCs
  - facilitate networking and exchanges of experience among the CMKCs.

- to host (probably, like EURAXESS, through a contracted service provider) a web portal to provide a gateway to other services where there is information of relevance, which also has a resource of information specifically targeted to the mobility needs of artists and cultural workers, and which also supports communication mechanisms among users (blogs, discussion forums, and structured best practice). The facility could:

  - provide a general introduction for those wishing to undertake cross-border mobility in the sector (and hence be targeted principally at professionals new to the field and/or mobility)
  - host central resources for the network of CMKCs
  - link into relevant – and quality-controlled – provision, which might be provided by sector bodies.

6. Implementation

In order to implement the model, a number of factors need to be taken into account:

- the need for full backing and commitment from Member States: without it, the model will not succeed

- the fact that some countries have further to travel and will therefore need the support of others in the network

- the typically low levels of funding for cultural activities (which are likely to be under pressure during the current economic downturn) and the need to use existing funding mechanisms at Member State and EC levels, although the proposed solution is essentially a low cost approach in which funding is treated as an investment that prioritises the human rather than the electronic dimension (though both are important)

- the opportunity to draw on the lessons that will emerge over the coming months from the four pilot projects currently being funded, and especially the PRACTICS project

- the cost implications: EURAXESS provides a highly relevant comparator. Each participating country received €200,000 start-up funding for the setting-up of the service centres and there is ongoing support for training and networking. The EURAXESS portal has cost €1.6m since 2002 (including feasibility study, development, maintenance, external support and revamping), with the maintenance contract costing for example €230,000 in 2008.

- the potential synergies with existing information systems at EC level (e.g. EURES, EURAXESS). This is most likely to take the form of CMKCs utilising existing infrastructures and information sources when providing advice and support to cultural workers, rather than technical modifications.

A range of steps need to be taken to implement the proposed model. The most critical condition is to ensure the political commitment of Member States to the establishment of the network and its financial implications (especially the co-resourcing principle) since without this the proposals cannot be achieved.

It is difficult to propose a definite timeline for the actions since they depend on so many issues. However, a natural structure to events is provided by three factors:

- the rhythm of funding opportunities provided through the cycle of the Culture Programme

- the development of the next Culture Programme

- the milestones of the currently funded pilot projects.

Lessons from the pilot projects will start to become available from 2010 onwards and these will provide valuable experiences to feed in to the development of the network. The new Culture Programme will commence in 2014 and work will begin in 2010 to define its focus in order that it can be accepted by the College of Commissioners in 2011.

All of these factors point to a process in which Member State commitment is developed and a way forward agreed during 2009 and into 2010, with lessons from the pilot projects being fed in during 2010 and 2011 to fine tune the way forward.

Depending on the rate of progress and degree of Member State commitment, some limited funding under the current Culture Programme could potentially be made available to support activity from 2011 or 2012 up to the end of 2013, with funding then being available through the new Culture Programme from 2014 onwards.

Much will depend on the pace at which Member State commitment is secured, but this timescale would appear to be realistic and reasonable. The following actions are recommended:

Member States

- **Establish a working group** to take forward the recommendations and examine potential models for national networks with CMKCs as the key information hubs. Since Member States are already working on this topic through the Expert Group on mobility of artists and other professionals in the cultural sector[1], we recommend that this is used as the nexus for this activity. This group could develop guidelines, protocols and quality standards for the network in cooperation with the Commission, including performance indicators for CMKCs, using the existing operational model of EURAXESS as the basis. Ideally, the charter and the guidelines for the network at national level could be one of the outputs of the OMC for the end of 2010 to coincide with the end of the triennial Work Plan for Culture 2008-2010.

Cultural organisations

- **Optimise existing funding streams -** Cultural organisations should make use of the existing opportunities under the Culture Programme and at national level to take forward the objectives embodied in the model. Sector bodies could explore ways of: jointly developing appropriate provision; organising networks at European level that might underpin the development of communities of practice; sharing practice and reflecting on learning within the sector; and finding ways to structure experiences into good practice.

Member States, European Commission and stakeholders:

- **Use the experiences of the pilot projects -** The PRACTICS project will seek to establish its four CMCPs during 2009 and agree a common framework, with activities starting during 2010. An interim evaluation will take place in mid-2010. Lessons learned should be drawn upon in order to provide valuable insights into how parts of the model might be operationalised.

European Commission

- **Ensure information for mobility is a priority in the next Culture Programme -** A strong mobility dimension should be incorporated into proposals for the next

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[1] Established under the Open Method of Coordination in culture

Culture Programme that will run from 2014 (and into the impact assessment process). Consideration should be given to whether and how the new programme might support the model recommended here. Depending on the progress made, the new programme should be used either to complete construction of the network or to add value through additional services. (The proposal would of course need the support of the Member States and the European Parliament in the decision making process). Depending on the progress and results of the PRACTICS project, and the necessary commitment and support from Member States, the Commission should examine whether any adjustments to the calls for proposals in the framework of the existing Culture Programme are necessary and possible to avoid a funding gap in 2012-2013. The financing would have to be planned and agreed in line with the committee procedure for the programme.

- **Establish the secretariat and online portal -** The European Commission should consider ways in which an online portal and secretariat services might be established to support a network.

- **Ensure quality** - A system of quality awards for provision of mobility-related information should be set up. A system of high-level awards has run successfully where DG INFSO supports an EU-wide competition for excellence in eGovernment and eInclusion where awards are made during Ministerial Conferences every two years. The awards receive substantial numbers of applications, they promote the activities politically at the highest level, and they maintain political buy-in to eGovernment and eInclusion. A similar scheme could be considered for innovative projects and services being developed in Europe to support and facilitate the mobility of artists and cultural workers.

If these actions are executed successfully, it should be possible from 2014 onwards to establish a fully operational network with complete EU coverage, which could include launching the next Culture Programme with a strong mobility component either to complete the network or to add value through extra services (depending on the rate of progress).