

In the following excerpt, Jennifer Williams of the Centre for Creative Communities (CCC) gives her impressions of the '[Networking the Arts in Europe](#)' mini-summit hosted by the Arts Council of Ireland. The excerpt is taken from E-Interchanges, no. 14, May 2004, published by the Centre for Creative Communities. More information on the Centre is at the end of the article.

## **Networking for the Arts in Europe - Cork, EIRE, 2004**

Hosted by the Irish Arts Council, Cork City Council and others, 60 people from 28 European countries gathered in a sun washed Cork for a three-day meeting about the mobility of artists in Europe. There was a useful balance between senior representatives of cultural departments and the directors of useful International networks including IETM (Informal European Theatre Meeting), EFAH (European Forum for Arts and Heritage), IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils) and EUNETART (the European Youth Arts network).

Ion Caramitru, from the Theatre Network in Romania gave a useful framework with which to approach the discussions. He spoke of two Europes: the economic Europe, which is the one with borders and the cultural Europe, which is the one without borders. Everyone agreed that although mobility for artists can be expensive (because of travel costs), it is one of the best ways to lessen isolation for artists and communities on the fringes of Europe. The discussions looked to new forms of partnerships and a new kind of commitment from national funders to help their artists with outward travel costs.

There was a useful full day looking at how the networks can collaborate more closely with national arts and culture departments especially on the needs of individual artists. Europe is lucky when it comes to networks. The quality and relevance to artists and to communities are the highest for years. This is due to very good leadership and a healthy nexus between collaboration and competition.

For CCC, an interesting feature of the meeting was seeing how confidence among the Eastern European representatives and their programming has grown in recent years. In addition, the representatives from 'western' Europe do not any longer treat the 'eastern' countries as 'the other'. A fascinating discussion revolved around the countries in SE Europe, mainly the Balkan states that were not included in the recent expansion of the European Union. (May 1, 10 countries joined the Union including Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Cyprus, Malta). The re-configuration means that new linkages must be worked out and the cultural structures of many of the countries also need reforming before they can reflect the new realities.

It is also evident that the departments of the European Union are simply not prepared to provide inclusive programming for the SE countries (such as Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, etc). It is the Council of Europe and the European Cultural Foundation that are taking the time to create programmes especially linked to issues of social inclusion and migration.

Many of the Eastern countries after the end of the cold war, looked to the West for ideas as if it were a dream realised. Some people were obsessed by the need to 'go west' for everything. More recently, the same people are remembering just how good many of the networks were before the wall came down and are keen to re-create them. "How do we restore the links with 'the old family'?"

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