

Engaging with Latin America for cultural and creative sector professionals

Resource prepared for the Latin America Centre of Asia-Pacific Excellence (LatAm CAPE) by Lee Davidson, Museum & Heritage Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, and Leticia Pérez, School of Conservation, Restoration & Museography, Mexico

Introduction

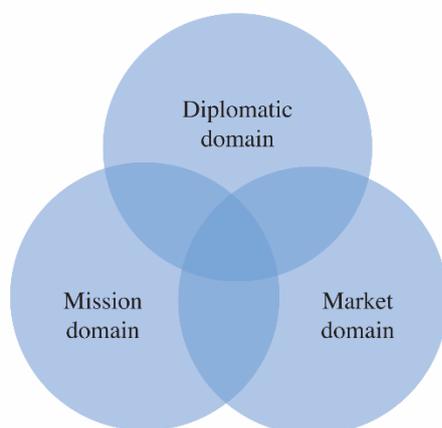
New Zealanders in the cultural and creative sectors are increasingly working internationally whether through exhibitions, creative projects, professional exchanges, internship programmes, joint research projects and digital media.

This resource was developed to assist professionals in the cultural and creative sector thinking about engaging with Latin America. It is based on research conducted by the two authors and their recent experiences on the Cultural Partnerships Project for Intercultural Understanding, funded by the LatAm CAPE. It covers:

- Why engage with Latin America?
- How to establish strong partnerships
- Intercultural skills for working collaboratively
- What is an “intercultural project”?

Why engage with Latin America?

There are a wide range of motivations for international engagement in the cultural and creative sectors. These can be grouped within three inter-connected domains – mission, market and diplomatic-related reasons for engagement (see Davidson and Pérez Castellanos, 2019).



Mission-related reasons:

- Reaching global audiences/enriching local audiences
- Developing audiences & increasing visitation
- Engaging new communities & stakeholders
- Enhancing institutional reputation/brand
- Strengthening international partnerships
- Scholarly exchange & professional development
- Innovations in practice

Market-related reasons:

- Revenue generation through developing new products and/or services
- Attracting other partners or alternative funding sources
- Wider economic impact, including employment and local tourism

Diplomacy-related reasons:

- Supporting government foreign policy goals
- Positioning yourself on the world stage
- Building communities of practice with others who share your mission
- Advancing intercultural understanding, social change, human rights (a cosmopolitan diplomatic agenda)

The LatAm CAPE's objectives are:

- To prepare NZers to engage with and do business with the countries of Latin America.
- To support and develop NZers' knowledge and understanding of Latin America.
- To build NZers' language competence and cultural skills.
- To excel nationally and internationally in dissemination of knowledge and skills relating to Latin America.

The Cultural Partnerships Project, funded by the LatAm CAPE, aims to:

- Facilitate enduring partnerships between cultural and creative organisations in NZ and Latin America with the goal of promoting intercultural understanding.
- Train existing and future leaders in NZ's cultural and creative sectors in the skills required to work collaboratively in Latin America.
- Deliver widely disseminated cultural and creative projects aimed at deepening New Zealanders' knowledge and appreciation of Latin America.

How to establish strong partnerships

For NZ cultural or creative sector professionals wanting to establish a partnership with a Latin American counterpart, some key considerations include:

- All collaborations and exchanges involve power imbalances and resulting tensions between mutual gain and self-interest
- It takes time to build strong relationships, to avoid misunderstanding and reach shared understandings

It can be helpful to:

- Establish clear and realistic expectations of the partnership model being adopted, its advantages and challenges
- Explore areas of commonality and difference
- Clarify perspectives and articulate a shared vision
- Explore how the partnership will work at different levels and throughout different stages of the project

- Involve as many different team members as possible when deciding how a collaboration will work
- See it as evolving over time
- Consider contingencies for institutional/ political change in longer timeframes

Intercultural skills for working collaboratively

Being intercultural involves:

- Openness to multiple perspectives leading to reflection and an enhanced understanding of one's own perspective
- Respect and tolerance of ambiguity
- The ability "to reconstruct the others' frames of reference and see things through their eyes"

An intercultural mind:

- Has an awareness of one's own cultural conditioning and a greater ability to understand the cultural world of others (Shaules, 2015)

Some key tips for working interculturally include:

curiosity

- Stay open-minded
- Be aware of cultural assumptions (and don't underestimate!)
- Be sensitive to different working styles, processes and timeframes
- Consider different communication styles, channels & frequency
- Recognise differences in cultures/practices as an opportunity for learning

empathy

- Be respectful and receptive to the feelings, perspectives and needs of others

patience

- Finding intercultural solutions take time - be willing to talk through different perspectives to find intercultural solutions to problems

flexibility

- Be prepared to re-evaluate your existing practices and the assumptions that underpin them
- Consider the benefits of adaptation and compromise

communication

- Face-to-face is particularly important for cultures that prefer a high context style
- Zoom is useful, but still misses opportunities for building personal relationship, establishing trust and learning about wider contexts that visiting in-person allows
- It's important to consider the range of language skills in a team and how this may impact the project

What is an “intercultural project”?

Intercultural spaces:

- Create situations of encounter that expose our cultural assumptions
- Create opportunities to develop intercultural understanding (through empathy, self-reflexivity etc)

Intercultural experiences enable audiences to:

- Embark on a “cross-cultural” journey
- Make connections and comparisons, looking for similarities and differences
- See the world from another’s perspective
- Better understand their own cultural perspectives
- Re-evaluate narratives of otherness and superficial stereotypes

When representing one culture to another:

- Personal connection with collaborators/stakeholders is very important
- Consider their perspective/worldview & how they would want to be portrayed
- It helps to have cultural mediators who understand both (cultural) contexts
- Have discussions about cultural representation early in the process
- Allow sufficient time for a back and forth dialogue to find intercultural solutions to problems

Thinking about audiences:

- What is their level of prior knowledge / preconceptions?
- What are their biographical/cultural lenses?
- How can you create connections while avoiding clichés & stereotypes

We found that audiences:

- Want to engage with the everyday “reality” of a culture
- Want to explore issues of relevance to their daily lives, to better understand themselves and the world around them
- Liked exhibitions/experiences with a clear purpose or message

Further reading and resources

Davidson, L. & Pérez Castellanos, L. (2019) *Cosmopolitan Ambassadors: International exhibitions, cultural diplomacy and the intercultural museum*. Delaware: Vernon Press.

Shaules, J. (2015) *The Intercultural Mind: Connecting Culture, Cognition, and Global Living*. Boston: Intercultural Press.

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<https://www.milpa-mesa.co.nz/>

<https://polycentralmuseum.com/>