

## **Letters to Creatives from Claire Wilson – How to be an independent who works across borders? (Part 2)**

### ***How to attract meaningful opportunities in the sector?***

I think a key part of working as a freelancer or perhaps any kind of position working in creative international projects, is to really think about the relationships that you are building and to really concentrate on the people that are involved.

So I think a lot of my work, particularly more recently has been gained through word of mouth and through doing certain types of projects. Working well, finishing a job well and being cooperative in that process, I think has really helped. And also maintaining those good relationships, whether that is something in the way that you work or whether it is kind of keeping in touch with people and kind of reminding them that you are there and reminding them of the type of work that you are doing. But also thinking about what their needs and pressures are as well, to think if there is a way that you can help with what they need in a way.

I think in writing and editing it is really great to have connections who are also writers and editors so that if you have extra work, you can kind of recommend someone else or you can pass work their way. So I think those kind of reciprocal relationships as well can really help particularly if you are kind of short of work or if you need something to sort of fill a gap.

I think another thing that I have learnt and perhaps I am thinking, reflecting more on it recently, is that it is not necessary to chase every opportunity and every possibility and every relationship there is out there. There is so much fantastic work going on in this sector and in the area that I work in, that it can feel a bit exhausting. And it is kind of a matter of finding your path and finding the way you like to work, the type of people you like to work with.

### ***Does your work feel monotonous? How do you break the spell?***

Working as a freelancer, particularly as I do from my home, I am working on a lot of text and a lot of writing and research. I guess it can feel a bit like you are stuck doing the same thing every day. Personally, I am really interested in the projects that I am writing about.

For example, in culture360, the cultural platform of the Asia-Europe Foundation, it gathers together opportunities, events and news items from Asia and Europe. And I think the interesting part for me, even though the process of the writing and the posting and all of that technical side is very much the same, the projects themselves are really fascinating. So for me it is a chance to really see what is going on and also to explore perhaps countries that I do not know as well.

I am quite lucky because the content in a way is always new and the topics are new and there is always artists or organisations sort of taking a new perspective of how they will do an open call or how they will do the methodology for a project. So for me, I feel quite lucky that there is this diversity.

And I think that is perhaps why I am also drawn to working as a freelancer, because you do have that chance to choose your own projects in a way.

***What are the best ways to build international industry connections and make these connections last?***

I think one thing I have learnt is that it is not as difficult or as complex as I first imagined it was when I started out. So when I was first working in arts management in Australia and I saw these fantastic big collaborations. Festivals would invite these big projects, and you would have this co-creation happening. And I thought, 'Oh, that is amazing, that must be so complex.' But I think what I have discovered is often starting this or building them in certain ways does not have to be that complicated, you know. Like I think for me, often it started with a conversation with me approaching someone saying, 'Hey, I have got this idea, what do you think?'

And then it might lead to something and then say, 'Oh, I know this person and let us involve them.' So just in some ways, it can kind of grow. We are all people and individuals behind these projects as well. So that is something that I have been reminded of time and again, that you see this big project and you think, 'Oh, I cannot contact them', but then when you send them an email, you think, 'Oh, this person is actually really lovely'. So I think that is been a great discovery as well, and just being able to get in touch with different people and have really interesting conversations, even if a project does not develop after that.

***Over the course of your career, what are some things you have learned, or unlearned about working across borders as an independent?***

I think another important thing that I always try and remember is that working internationally, it is always an ongoing learning process. I think no matter how many international collaborations, or co-productions or projects that you have done, each one is new, and each one has different variables.

So I think often I need to remind myself to think, 'Okay, is there something that I am missing here?' Particularly, I think this happens with the you know, with communications within teams, I guess, particularly for the work that I am doing, which is sort of mostly remote, and I am commissioned to do something.

What I try and do is keep communication open, and if anything, over communicate. Because I think there can be a lot of nuance and misunderstanding hidden within these communications sometimes, which can derail a project. So not necessarily the project activities or outcomes itself, but the way we talk with one another, the expectations that we have about a project, about how quickly the project should or should not be done, about how much reflecting process there is or there is time for the consultation processes.

This is something that I am always reminded of, that every context is so different. And within you know, within a country context, there is also so many different levels of complexity and ways of working, which can vary quite a lot. So even if you have had a partner within a particular context and think, 'Oh, I know the way it works', but then you kind of work with another partner and it is entirely different.

So I think it can be very exciting, but then it can also be a bit of a challenge when you have something to deliver on a timeline. Particularly working internationally, taking this time to communicate well, and to think about the ways that everyone is working is really vital.

***Share 2 things that can inspire young people interested in working in the arts sector as an independent***

I think what is really exciting about working as a freelancer across international projects is that there is no one way of working, there is no one way of kind of putting your career together, which can be a challenge. But I think it is a great opportunity for everyone to kind of lean into their strengths and their way of working and really find the path to that. I think it can potentially take some time.

It is a bit of a process to kind of find where you fit, what kind of work you like doing. But I think there is flexibility and there is the ability to kind of choose your projects in a way that helps you discover that perhaps more quickly than if you are within an organisational structure.

I think when I first started working in arts management and I am thinking about how I really wanted to work in this field and how can I work internationally and how can I work in an interdisciplinary kind of way and how can I do this working on cultural platforms or research projects? I think I definitely did not think it would be possible to be doing exactly that full time.

So I think having persistence and kind of slowly gaining the experience through smaller jobs that turn into bigger jobs, finding the organisations that you like working with, and kind of getting commissioned a couple of times. Building on that and finding your path, you can kind of get to a place potentially where you can do that kind of work that you really enjoy 100% of your day. And I think that is what is really interesting and exciting about working as a freelancer.