



Two Newcastles

October 2018

Contents:

Origins of the project
About the Artists
Newcastles of the World
Communication
Working together
Sharing and understanding each other's culture
Creative Process
About the Play
Sharing the Impact
Evaluation
Next Steps
Legacy

Origins of the project

Two Newcastles is Newcastles of the World's flagship cultural project supported by International Newcastle, bringing together theatre companies *Curious Monkey* from Newcastle upon Tyne, UK and *Newcastle Arts Development Organisation* from Kwa Zulu Natal in South Africa.

Curious Monkey theatre company and Newcastle Arts Development Organisation (NADO) met at the National Arts Festival of South Africa in 2015. Artists from the UK and South Africa had the opportunity to see theatre from the other Newcastle and learn about the processes that theatre makers in the UK and SA use. Both companies were fascinated to learn more. This sparked some brilliant conversations around arts and cultural exchange, which led to the idea for this project; and showed how much the artists had to gain from learning about each other's approach to making theatre and creative practices.

Through a series of exchanges, both companies have collaborated to create a new piece of theatre called 'This World Here...Nomhlaba Le'. The play explores cultural exchange and identity. It explores the questions: "what do you bring with you and what do you leave behind when you visit a new place?" The play was produced and performed in Newcastle upon Tyne in May 2018.

The project has had a number of phases:

- 2015: Artists met at the National Arts Festival in South Africa
- 2016: NADO visited Newcastle Upon Tyne
(See video here: <http://bit.ly/2eoM3vY>)
- 2017: Producers from both companies met on a preparatory visit in SA
- 2018: Curious Monkey visited NADO in Newcastle KZN to work on the research and development of the play
- 2018: NADO returned to the UK to rehearse and perform the play

More information about these exchanges and the play can be found here:
www.curiousmonkeytheatre.com/blog/portfolio/two-newcastles



About the Artists

NADO

Newcastle Arts Development Organisation (NADO) is the oldest community based arts organisation in Newcastle. The organisation was formed in 2002 but registered as a non profit organisation in 2005. NADO was formed in response to many talented Newcastle artists migrating to Johannesburg and Durban searching for greener pastures. NADO's aim is for artists showcase their talent within their shores. The company was formed to use theatre for education, development training, conflict transformation through entertainment; focussing on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building; Crime Prevention; and HIV/AIDS through theatre. Additionally working towards combatting poverty and unemployment through Arts.

Curious Monkey

Curious Monkey is an international award winning Theatre Company founded by artistic director Amy Golding. We create outstanding theatre inspired by the people we meet and connections we make in local communities and around the world, listening to people whose stories are rarely told. Collaborating with award winning artists locally, nationally and internationally, these stories are shaped into fresh, direct theatre that is rooted in the experiences of the people involved. Curious Monkey's work shares rarely told stories widely with audiences, decision makers and influencers; and deepens engagement with audiences and participants. Our artistic programme gives a voice to under-represented people, raising awareness of the issues that they face.



Newcastles of the World have supported the project from the start. Curious Monkey have put together the following information which we hope will be helpful to artists from other Newcastles who may plan to work together in the future. This describes the ingredients we feel are needed to create a successful collaboration. While each project will be different and have its own challenges and successes, we hope that sharing our experience is useful.

Newcastles of the World

Newcastles of the World unites people from over 100 places in the world who share the name "Newcastle" or "New Castle" through a programme that spans Arts, Culture, Heritage, Tourism, Education, Business and Youth Participation. Its programme is citizen-led and aims to connect people from all around the world and all walks of life. The network has been in existence since 2000. Newcastles of the World have been delivering projects across the wider network since 2015/16. By working with Newcastles of the World, we were able to gain insight into working in Newcastle KZN, learning from the experience of the team who had been there before. We were introduced to members of the municipality in Newcastle KZN, which was integral to the success of the project and helped to link NADO up with the arts and culture and tourism officials there. Newcastles of the World were able to support with invitation letters for the South African artists to support their visa applications to come to the UK and to create links both in the UK and SA to support and promote the project.

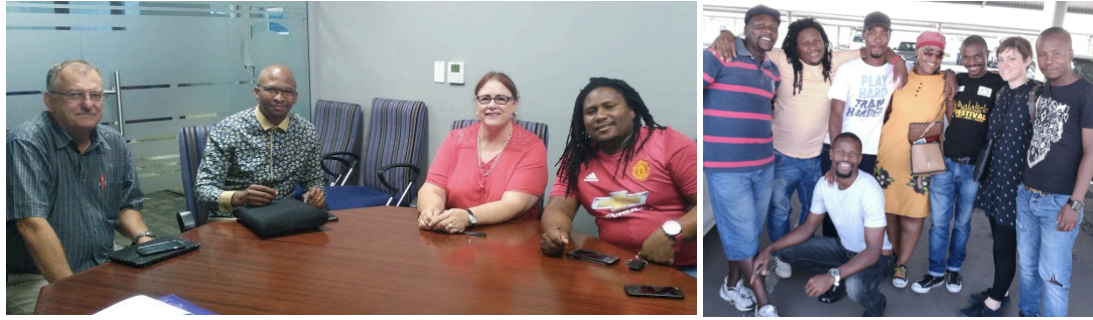
Newcastles of the World helped to broker partnerships with International Newcastle who also supported the management of the project in the UK, relationships with a number of schools that we worked with in the North East and links to funders who supported the project on the UK side. International Newcastle facilitates international relations, by hosting international visitors including dignitaries, officials and businesses, representing the City and North East overseas. IN works with clients to equip them with the skills to get the most out of international relations and develop productive international relationships. IN provide cultural briefings on working with other nationals, to help in gaining that competitive edge, as well as delivering workshops on cross-cultural communication skills. Through partners such as Newcastle University IN also support International students to integrate into the city and raise cultural awareness.



Communication

Regular communication between the groups has been key to the success of this project. Following our first meeting at Grahamstown National Arts Festival, the two groups of artists spoke regularly using WhatsApp and other social media channels, they are still in touch and chat regularly. This helped to create social bonds within the group as well as allowed time for the artists to find out more about each other's lives and culture.

We were able to arrange a preparatory visit to South Africa for our producer to go and meet NADO's producer, to look at accommodation, meet with officials from the municipality and work out the logistics ahead of the whole group visiting SA. This allowed for face-to-face meetings with our partners, which was extremely beneficial to the process.



In this case, we were fortunate that both partners speak English and so we were able to communicate easily. Where possible phone or face-to-face communication is valuable as it reduces the risk of misunderstanding through emails or written documents.

Working together

In order to make sure that both of the companies involved in the project were in agreement and shared a mutual understanding of the project, we made a collaboration agreement, which laid out what each partner could commit to doing and how we wanted to work together. In this case, we split the roles between the two organisations, so that when artists from NADO visited the UK, Curious Monkey organised events and activities, and when Curious Monkey visited NADO, they did the same. The collaboration agreement was written in phases so that we could be clear about how much time and resource each organisation could commit to the project for each phase. We felt that it was important to explore the following in the creation of the collaboration agreement:

Aims: We agreed on the overall aims of the project

- This collaboration aims to act as a catalyst for other international collaborations between different Newcastles in the World.
- Artist development. Through the project the artists will explore their different approaches to making theatre, they will learn from one another and have the opportunity to reflect on and develop their own practice.
- The project aims to strengthen links between the arts and other sectors regionally and internationally, linking local authorities, schools, health care and arts organisations in both the UK and SA.
- In Newcastle KZN, the project aims to create stronger links between artists working there, build the profile and visibility of the work NADO do across their whole programme, and build stronger communication and strategic links between NADO and the Newcastle Municipality.

- In Newcastle UK, the project aims to introduce artists to new ways of working, build the profile of the project, Curious Monkey and Newcastles of the World, and continue to build on international links.
- Working with a culturally diverse group of artists helps to promote diverse role models for young people in the North East of England, and to support Curious Monkey's values of promoting diversity and inclusion, aiming to broaden horizons for audiences, participants and artists.

Agreed Outputs: As each stage of the project was reliant on each organisation raising funding in each country, it was important to agree on the outputs for each phase, and to understand that if either partner was unsuccessful with funding, we would need to postpone or adapt our plans.

Finances: We made an agreement about how the artists would be paid, as each company has a different structure, and there are different rates of pay and regulations to consider in each country. We decided that each company would pay their own artists at their agreed rates. This meant that there were no payments between the companies for fees, but that we were able to support each other in other ways for example through accommodation, support on the ground in each country on visits.

Accommodation: We worked together to find suitable accommodation for each group on their visits and agreed on who could cover the costs depending on the restrictions of funding in each country.

Exchange Costs: We outlined budgets for each exchange and agreed on how we would split the costs between the companies. Again, this was shaped by the restrictions of the funding in each place.

Insurance / Policies: Each organisation was responsible for ensuring they had adequate insurance for their team and that their policies and plans around health and safety, safeguarding etc. were suitable for use in each country. The responsibilities of each organisation and expected code of conduct for individual artists were laid out in the agreement.

Schedule and activity: The two organisations worked together to create a programme of cultural exchange in each Newcastle. As well as spending time together in the rehearsal room, this included visiting cultural venues and attractions, visiting each other's homes, meeting other artists and officials from each place, seeing performances by local artists, delivering workshops in school and community settings and supporting the other company at their events.

Credits: It was important to make sure that all parties were represented in the credits for the show, as it was devised by the whole group, we agreed on how to credit each artist and organisation fairly.

Intellectual Property: The agreement outlined that we would share the IP for the project between the organisations and partners involved.

Fundraising: As part of the collaboration agreement, we agreed that each organisation would be responsible for fundraising for the costs of paying their artists and we split the costs of accommodation and travel depending on which group was travelling. While fundraising has been challenging on both sides, this agreement helped us to maintain clear communication about how the financial responsibility for the project was shared. In the UK, Newcastle of the World was supported by Arts Council England through Grants for the Arts and the Community Foundation. In South Africa, the project has been supported by the Department of Arts and Culture and The Newcastle Municipality.

Sharing and understanding each other's culture

It was important to build trust among the group through regular communication, allowing the artists getting to know each other so that they felt comfortable to ask questions and even to make mistakes and talk about them in order to learn. Some of the challenges and things to think about included:

Customs – It was important to be able to communicate openly about cultural customs and logistics when visiting each country. This could be about how to buy a ticket for a metro, how much to tip, customs around eating and sharing food or words/phrases or actions that could be misinterpreted. For example, we played a drama game where participants touch one another's heads – this is not customary for Zulu men/women. We were able to talk about this and find a way to change the game.

Language – the South African artists spoke in English during rehearsals. As English is an additional language for them, this was an additional challenge and something to consider when sharing ideas and working together, it was important to recognise this and allow time for people to talk in their own first language and to share stories and songs in Zulu.



Food / Accommodation / Free time – The devising process can be intense and sometimes overwhelming. Also people react differently to travel, especially for an extended time, or to a whole new culture. It is important to build in time in the day and the overall schedule for people to have free time, to have space to be alone, which may be at the accommodation or elsewhere. It is important to consider the food that is available to people so that they feel comfortable and can have some time to relax. It is just as important for the artists to try new things and to explore and to be challenged, as long as this is balanced with down time to recuperate. Each participant will have their own needs, it is important to plan with each individual to make sure they have what they need. In this case, the managers of each company were responsible for their team and working out logistics for them.

It is really important to make sure that each artist feels safe by making sure people are aware of any risks, places they should avoid etc. or taking extra steps such as providing mobile phones so people can be more independent.

Reflecting - Each day on the South African residency, one of the UK team was asked to fill in a diary entry describing the day and any challenges and successes that had arisen. This helped the artists to reflect on their experience. The group also wrote a blog that was more public facing, describing the journey and their experience. These are available here: www.curiousmonkeytheatre.com/our-blog

Creative Process

The creative process happened across three residencies (two in the UK and one in South Africa) and online conversations in between. The actors were introduced over skype and WhatsApp initially, where they asked each other a question every day about the other Newcastle and life there.

At the first meeting we spent lots of time getting to know each other, sharing stories and taking each other to favourite places in our Newcastles, places with stories attached both historical and personal. We also used some children's stories that explore cultural exchange/cultural difference as a starting point to get people talking about these things in a distanced way that wasn't too personal to start with.

The final show we made included verbatim interviews with the cast intertwined with a fictional, magical story we created together through collective writing exercises; traditional music from both Newcastles and new music the group composed together. Learning from each other's approaches to making theatre was both brilliant and at times challenging. Everyone was out of their comfort zone at some point in the process. The South African performers were used to a script being delivered from a writer rather than devising (which involves a lot of experimentation and not always knowing where we are heading creatively) so found the devising process new, different, sometimes refreshing and empowering being involved in the creative decisions but also really hard work.

When creating music together the UK performers were used to western music notation and working with certain timings and rhythms whereas the South African performers worked much more by ear, finding harmonies and rhythms more organically together, which was more challenging for the UK performers to pick up straight away.

We had to find a common theatrical language to use and to meet somewhere in the middle. We learned that getting different performers to lead each part of the process worked well but we needed to be aware and sensitive of when people were struggling and needed more time to work on certain elements of the process.

Overall having a director for the piece was also really important to guide people through the creative process, setting up a safe and supportive environment in which people could experiment and try new things. Every day we had a 'check in' at the beginning of the rehearsals so people could share any concerns and thoughts. This helped people to understand what they needed from each other to work together in the most successful way.



About the Play

The play was performed at Alphabetti Theatre and The Exchange in North Shields in the UK in May 2018. Created with the whole cast, the play shares stories and songs from both cultures, mixing real testimonies and imaginary universal stories.

“Does it teach us anything? Yes, it shows us how diverse and yet alike people are, how we all have similar problems relating to our self-image, and that we can learn so much from others, no matter how different we may start by believing we are. Director Amy Golding deftly weaves together the different individual strands and, from this fusion of African and British experiences, creates a piece which is revelatory and ultimately joyous.” British Theatre Guide



Sharing the impact

Throughout the exchanges, we have engaged with communities to share the unique experience of working with international artists and to gather people's ideas about the project and what it means to be from Newcastle. Groups we have worked with in the UK include: Singer songwriters at the Sage Gateshead; young people at Hotspur Primary School, North Fawdon Primary School & Stocksfield Primary School; Patients in Hexham General Hospital and North Tyneside hospitals in partnership with the NHS Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust. Together we have shared the stories from the show, shared traditional and new music from both Newcastles, discussed cultural exchange and the commonalities and differences between the two places.



Evaluation

We have documented all of the activity so far through film, sound recordings and photographs. Artists have written blogs and diary entries and we have held evaluation workshops. More information is available on our website and YouTube channel:

www.curiousmonkeytheatre.com/blog/portfolio/two-newcastles

www.youtube.com/curiousmonkeytheatre

Next Steps

We are currently working with International Newcastle and Newcastles of the World to fundraise for the final leg of this incredible journey. The longevity of this project has allowed us to build long lasting relationships with artists from another Newcastle. We hope that the UK team will visit Newcastle KZN one more time to develop the play and perform for South African community audiences and for the artists to complete their personal and professional journey.

Legacy

The artists involved in this project continue to work together, and are using their experience in different ways to further their careers. Sam Bell and Samukelisiswe Kumalo are working together on a new piece of theatre – a two-hander about womanhood for which they have received funding from Arts Council England. They visited one another in the summer of 2018 to start development for this play.

Links

Partner organisations

- NADO - <https://www.facebook.com/Newcastleattrteartdevelopment/>
- Curious Monkey – <http://curiousmonkeytheatre.com>
- Newcastles of the World - <https://newcastlesoftheworld.com/>
- International Newcastle - <http://www.internationalnewcastle.org.uk>
- Newcastle KZN Municipality - <http://newcastle.gov.za/>