

Creative Impact
Research Centre
Europe



Prototyping
Collaboration



Contents

What is CIRCE?	10
The Projects	48
The Research Labs	50
The Fellowship Programme	82
The Creative Impact Fund	124
Credits	178



Awareness note

The use of gender-sensitive and inclusive language along with respect for the contributors' self-identification were core principles in the creation of this publication. Our awareness efforts aim to address and take into account identities beyond the gender binary. Simultaneously, the socially constructed categories of "women" and "men", wherever mentioned, are understood to be inclusive of trans people. All participants in the CIRCE project were asked to provide their preferred pronouns, opt out of using any pronouns or decide not to state them. Please keep this in mind while referring to the contributors or their projects.

A message from Minister of State *Claudia Roth*, Member of the German Bundestag, Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media



The transformative power of the cultural and creative sector is of the essence. It challenges the status quo, breaks up established structures, and combines societal impact with sustainable business.

For many years, the United Kingdom played a leading role in researching the cultural and creative sector in Europe. After Brexit, it therefore became a priority to strengthen Europe's cultural and creative sector and to fill the gap left behind by the UK. It was not only necessary to preserve the

knowledge gained so far for the European area, but also to build on it and take it forward in a close European dialogue.

The Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE) project, working together with experts from across Europe, has achieved this remarkable feat in just one year. The project is sponsored by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media with funding from the European Commission. CIRCE is an international and diverse knowledge transfer network of leading academics and practitioners from Europe's cultural and creative sector. A total of 58 project groups from 18 countries worked on issues that have an economic and social impact on our community. Looking forward,

it is vital that these issues are pursued further. In the course of this work, CIRCE has challenged established structures, explored new avenues, and inspired new forms of transnational cooperation and research into the practical aspects of creative impact.

CIRCE illustrates the power of creative diversity in the cultural and creative sector to provide innovative answers to the pressing questions of today and tomorrow. The CIRCE project team has made all this possible, and I am very grateful to them for their dedication. I look forward to seeing where the network goes from here and hope that those reading this publication will find it inspiring.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claudia Roth".

Claudia Roth, Member of the German Bundestag
*Federal Government Commissioner for
Culture and the Media*

Overview



Creative Impact Fund

With the Creative Impact Fund, CIRCE offers practitioners from the cultural and creative economies the opportunity to implement their ideas or to take the next development step with their existing company. The Fund aims to contribute to the realization and further development of bold innovation projects and thus harness the full potential of the cultural and creative industries for dealing with current and future crises.



Research Labs

The research labs are located at five sites in Europe (Germany, the UK, Estonia, Switzerland, Spain) and explore specific issues linked to the creative economy. Negative consequences of Brexit for the industry are to be cushioned by securing know-how and expanding it on the basis of current problems.



Fellowship Programme

With its Fellowship programme, CIRCE brings together young academics and practitioners from the cultural and creative economies from all over Europe, with a particular focus on promoting exchange with young experts from the United Kingdom after Brexit. Based on the potentials of the cultural and creative economies, the fellows explore and test new ways and creative solutions for dealing with the challenges of our time.

Tags

CIRCE projects can be clustered into six thematic areas, each addressing a particular societal or/and political challenge. Although some projects focus on one problem exclusively, most of them touch upon at least two of fields. To provide thematic reference, the projects on the individual pages are tagged according to their main focus.

Technologies for empowerment and participation

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Ecological sustainability

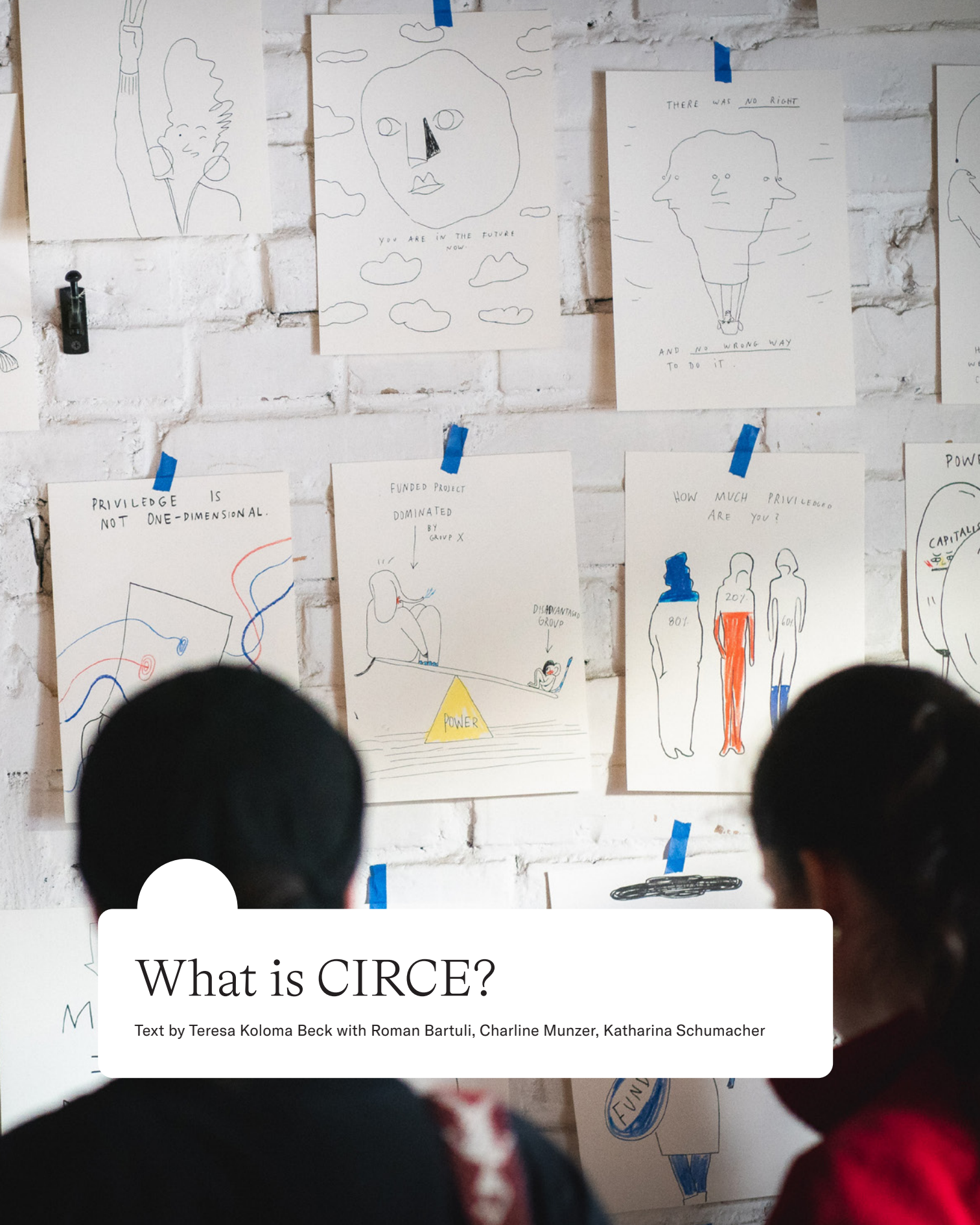
Education, skill development and matching

Transformative governance

Community-driven impact



What is
CIRCE?



© CIRCE | GLUT Berlin

What is CIRCE?

Text by Teresa Koloma Beck with Roman Bartuli, Charline Munzer, Katharina Schumacher

The Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE) is an interdisciplinary and international network of individual and institutional collaborators from various professional fields. It promotes and implements experimental and applied research on the cultural and creative economies (CCE) with a focus on public purpose-oriented activities. It brings together experts and institutions from academic research and technology development, from arts, design, and other creative occupations, and from social entrepreneurship and community organising. CIRCE was funded in summer 2022 by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media with resources from the Brexit Adjustment Reserve. It is headquartered, curated and administratively managed at u-institut, Berlin. Initiated in response to Brexit and its possible fallout for the CCE, CIRCE developed into a unique community of researchers and creatives spread across Europe, who work in a decentralised yet collaborative way on creative impact. It became an infrastructure for experimental research in network form, a prototype for facilitating and supporting creative impact ventures on a policy level, and a model for producing the knowledge needed to implement evidence-based policies in the creative ecosystem. Due to the density and intensity of transnational exchanges, CIRCE also enacted an ideal of Europe united in diversity.

Societies in crisis need creatives

CIRCE is built on the understanding that creatives in general and the CCE in particular have much to contribute as societies navigate present-day crises. These creatives are experts in working with uncertainty. Innovating is an integral part of their professional habits, as is a sharp analysis of their surroundings. Creatives, hence, wield skills and expertise that are particularly relevant in times of destabilisation. For this reason, CIRCE focuses on a particular segment of the CCE: creative impact ventures in which creative practices are deployed with the aim of generating social impact. They focus on both technological and social innovation that helps address today's 'grand challenges'. Such impact-

oriented CCE enterprises are particularly relevant to cultural policy because they combine a commitment to public purpose, which characterises much of the field of arts and culture, with efforts for economic sustainability. They underscore the broader relevance of creative, cultural and artistic practices. And by developing innovative, self-sustaining organisational and business models, they help secure spaces for creative, cultural and artistic production. In doing so, they contribute to the latter's resilience in the face of increasing austerity and the growing weight of anti-democratic politics in many countries.

Applied and experimental research in a European network

CIRCE brings together scholars and creatives from countries across Europe who are driven by a desire to better understand creative impact ventures – so as to make them more successful and sustainable. While research is at the heart of CIRCE, the approach to it is rather heterodox as it encourages transdisciplinary, collaborative work and brought traditional academic research perspectives into dialogue with creative research and experimental methods. CIRCE's activities unfold in a network composed of five research labs, 40 research fellows, 13 pilot projects, u-institut as the headquarter institution and a circle of critical friends. These activities start from the premise that Europe is a highly heterogeneous space and that analytical processes can therefore hardly be streamlined but rather unroll a diversity of problems and perspectives.

The Research Labs are CIRCE's institutional and thematic hubs. Each comes with a particular expertise and a specific set of questions. While they all conduct research, they represent different types of institutions and professional cultures within the creative ecosystem. Each of the labs is an influential actor in specific parts of the creative ecosystem – in Europe and beyond. Within CIRCE's research activities, they provide invaluable insights into institutional logics in the CCE while at the same time, gaining opportunities to expand their networks, perspectives and knowledge.



Research Lab London is hosted at City, University of London. At the heart of its inquiries is the concept of diversity and its relevance across London's cultural and creative industries. Institutionally, it represents the logic of an academic research institution committed to scholarly knowledge production. Many of its projects, however, create vibrant interfaces with the sector and integrate industry professionals as creative researchers.

Research Lab San Sebastián is hosted by Tabakalera, an internationally renowned centre for contemporary arts and a local cultural hub. Its work explores new forms of collaboration and co-creation between artists, techno-scientific researchers and citizens or communities. Institutionally, it represents the logic of a locally and internationally well-embedded arts and culture institution committed to creating conditions for artists and artistic production.

Research Lab Tallinn is hosted by Garage48, a hub in the regional and international start-up scene. This lab studies hackathons and explores their relevance within the CCE. In doing so, it builds on Garage48's experience in organising event-based innovation processes for more than a decade. Institutionally, it represents the logic of an impact-driven start-up hub committed to supporting emerging companies and entrepreneurs who have to strategise and prototype with little time and lean budgets.

Hosted by Zurich University of the Arts, Research Lab Zurich's research explores entrepreneurial strategies in the CCE context and tries to broaden perspectives on the issue. The aim is to identify or create entrepreneurial opportunities and conditions for creative professionals and creative production. Institutionally, the lab represents the logic of an arts university, where scholarly research on the one hand and training and education of future generations on the other go hand in hand.

Research Lab Berlin is hosted at u-institut, which also acts as CIRCE's overall hub. The lab's focus is on governance structures within the CCE, with a particular interest in transformative governance as a means of helping to overcome structural shortcomings in the sector relating to questions of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Institutionally, the lab represents the logic of an intermediary organisation in the creative ecosystem, committed to facilitation, institution building and agenda setting.



The Fellowship Programme brings together 20 scholars and 20 creatives who each pursue a research project on creative impact and related questions of policymaking. It was designed as a platform for the next generation's concerns and visions. Fellows were accompanied and mentored by the research labs and u-institut.

The Creative Impact Fund (CIF), CIRCE's site of entrepreneurial experimentation, has enabled eight teams to develop and test prototypes and five teams to scale and advance existing solutions. Like the fellows, these teams are accompanied and mentored by professional coaches and u-institut. The overall aim is to generate insights into public-purpose-oriented innovation and experimentation processes in the CCE and derive recommendations for funding.



Research Labs – The Institutional and Anchor Points

- Berlin: Transformative Governance
- London: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- San Sebastián: Collaboration and Co-Creation
- Tallinn: Grassroots Open-Innovation Events
- Zurich: Entrepreneurial Strategies

Fellowship Programme – The Next Generation

- A community of 20 young scholars and 20 young creatives pursuing individual research projects on creative impact and related questions of policymaking

Creative Impact Fund – The Laboratory

- Eight teams developing and testing prototypes
- Five teams working on scaling and advancing existing solutions

Critical Friends – The Sounding Board

- Established scholars and practitioners accompanying and supporting the development of the CIRCE prototype

The Critical Friends are a circle of established scholars and practitioners accompanying and supporting CIRCE's development. As a sounding board, they act as a corrective in an ongoing process of organisational prototyping as well as reflecting on past and current policy developments, strategies and necessary recommendations in the CCE. u-institut is the intermediary that organised CIRCE's network formation and curates ongoing activities. It is also the organisation tasked with governance and administration of the network and the overall programme. These activities are guided by the ideal of CIRCE as a place that enables not only collaborative knowledge production, but also the development of networks of belonging on a European scale. At the same time, CIRCE is more than just an agglomeration of individual or team projects; it is a veritable network with a high density of interactions and exchanges. While the latter were, initially, stimulated by u-institut as the organisational hub, CIRCE collaborators quickly developed their own connections and relations, expanding exchange, mutual learning and cooperation far beyond what could be deliberately planned and including joint future projects (see part II).

Joining from all across Europe, CIRCE collaborators produced profound, original and highly relevant insights into the dynamics of creative impact ventures, their importance in these currently troubled times, and the structural obstacles this CCE segment is still facing. Their findings could found evidence-based policies in the field. While recounting CIRCE's collaborative efforts and outcomes, this report also presents, in condensed form, some of the most important analytical insights along with recommendations for policymakers, funders and other intermediary institutions, as well as researchers and creative practitioners.

Why CIRCE?

The UK has been a pioneer in the field of cultural and creative economies (CCE) for over three decades, having recognised at an early stage that the sector holds immense economic and social potential. There is exceptional expertise in both the pub-

lic and private sectors, as well as a robust academic and research landscape dedicated to knowledge production on and for the CCE. For this reason, the UK has long been a major reference point in CCE research and policy debates and has played a prominent role in shaping international and European opinion leadership. In early 2020, Brexit radically changed the terms of cooperation between the UK and the rest of Europe. The idea for CIRCE was born out the concern about how this new constellation might affect CCE in Europe and what it means for the future of exchange and collaboration.

CCE in the UK

The UK's approach to CCE is multi-faceted, encompassing not only the promotion of creative practices, but also the development of evidence-based policies and tailored programmes. In terms of policymaking, it is characterised by forward-thinking strategies and a diverse range of measures and programmes that cater to the different facets of the sector. This innovative approach goes beyond pure cultural policy and is intertwined with urban and regional development, community empowerment, education, technology, labour market transformation and economic policy, for example. This integrated policy approach is rooted in a particular political culture and backed by years of systematic monitoring and scholarly research into the CCE's impact and potential. The UK's economic and cultural influence on the international stage was and continues to be considerable – not least due to its imperial history. The country prioritised international trade relations at an early stage, as exemplified by the 'Swinging London' export strategy in the 1960s. This strategy used the global appeal of British pop and rock music to promote international trade and services. It not only supported the British music industry, but also underlined the importance of CCE to wider social and economic development. Over time, the UK's CCE experts and policymakers earned a reputation as 'export champions', actively promoting public creative industry programmes and innovative funding approaches (e. g. creative funds, creative hubs, creative city-making, creative technology and creative bureaucracy).

The importance of research

This expertise is rooted in a creative ecosystem that has developed over the years and in which research infrastructure plays a crucial role and serves as a significant link between creatives, policymakers and funding institutions. The paradigm of evidence-based cultural policymaking is firmly established in the UK and backed by significant budgets. Since its inception in 2018 under the auspices of Nesta, the UK's innovation agency for social good, the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC) has established itself as a hub for research and evidence generation, which became essential for shaping CCE policies. Drawing on Nesta's experience and network, Creative PEC provided advice to policymakers at all levels of government on CCE-related issues, while also delivering valuable insights for other actors, especially funders, educational institutions and creative practitioners.

Nevertheless, Creative PEC is not the only influential institution, as there is a solid research infrastructure that includes university departments and institutes with dedicated chairs, PhD programmes and project-based research activities, as well as research institutions outside the university system. Long-established channels of communication between researchers and stakeholders in the creative ecosystem help to translate academic insights into practically relevant knowledge and skills. This rich research environment created not only a basis for evidence-based policymaking, but also spaces for critical reflections on developments in the sector. In the context of evidence-based policymaking, systematically identifying and analysing structural challenges and deficiencies are among its key contributions.

Since June 2023, Creative PEC has been hosted by an alliance of institutions led by Newcastle University and the Royal Society of Arts and funded to the tune of £11 million by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The research programme addresses a wide range of topics ranging from the geography of the sector, skills and education to DEI concerns and intellectual property regulation and challenges posed by the growing

influence of AI. In the wider CCE-related research environment, current social and societal challenges such as increasing social disparities and the climate crisis have led to a growing interest in CCE as leaders of transformation.

From crisis intervention to institution building: the story of CIRCE's origins

Post-pandemic Europe and Germany are undergoing a reorientation of their CCE policy. Numerous sector-relevant issues, including the role of culture and creative practices in addressing aspects of the current polycrisis, require strategic attention. In this changing landscape, the knowledge and experience generated in the UK are a major resource. After the UK left the EU, policies in the UK came to be oriented towards other markets and increasingly prioritised national, transcontinental or global concerns. CIRCE was initiated against this background to enable exchanges and collaboration in the new post-Brexit environment. Initially, it set out to preserve and maintain structures of collaboration between UK and Continental Europe. Similar to some other crises, however, Brexit was not only a moment of destabilisation and loss, but also one of re-orientation and change. While Brexit posed a crisis for European democracy and integrity, it also opened up a space to imagine and enact new institutional structures. The temporary crisis of established paradigms became a window of opportunity to raise the profile of principles such as justice, equity or environmental sustainability.

Instead of merely preserving existing structures, CIRCE became an engine for new connections and collaborations between people in the creative ecosystem on both sides of the Channel. Operating in a domain of strategic significance for the UK, the EU and Germany, the network consolidated into a new transnational infrastructure for research and collaboration within the CCE, carried by pro-European, transnationally-minded people. In doing so, CIRCE is also re-imagining and re-enacting the post-Brexit togetherness, cohesion and solidarity of people and societies in Europe.



© William Veder



© CIRCE | GLUT Berlin

Creative Impact

Creative impact, the principle at the heart of CIRCE, guided the selection of partners and collaborators. It was also the goal to which that their activities were oriented. But what does creative impact actually mean?

In the CIRCE network, creative impact is understood to be the social impact produced by creative practices. At its core are social and socio-technical innovations that are manifested in new products, services, business models or organisational forms. Creative impact enterprises are all about public purpose. Creative practices are not deployed for monetary gain, or at least not primarily, nor for artistic self-gratification, but with the aim of contributing to society.

Such impact-oriented enterprises in the cultural and creative economy (CCE) are of particular relevance to cultural policy because they combine a commitment to public purpose, which characterises the field of arts and culture, with economic sustainability efforts. By developing innovative self-sustaining organisational and business models, CCE enterprises also secure spaces for creative, cultural and artistic production that are independent of public funding, which is particularly important in view of shrinking cultural budgets and the rise of anti-democratic political forces.

Creative impact forms a specific segment within CCE but is not confined to particular sub-sectors of the industry. Instead, the idea of creative impact stimulates innovative activities across a variety of professional fields. Projects and activities in the CIRCE network vividly illustrate how creative impact inspires creatives in architecture and material design, publishing and filmmaking, games development and journalism. Creative impact enterprises also tend to create interfaces between the creative economies and other sectors and fields, especially those tackling social and societal challenges, e.g. public health, education or environmental protection. These enterprises also build bridges to professional arts and culture fields as well as to academic and applied research. In other words, creative impact engagement expands and transcends the boundaries of the CCE sector in various respects. Creative impact enterprises showcase the CCE's potential for innovation – not only within the sector, but also for society as a whole.

CCE methods and perspectives become an engine for social and societal transformation. They demonstrate that the skills, capacities and organisational forms that characterise CCE are relevant not only to the sector itself but can also be deployed to tackle major societal problems and create more just and sustainable futures.



The Museum of Homelessness (MoH), a community-driven CIF project, based in London¹, is working towards a national collection focusing on homelessness and the struggles of the poor, supports the local community in practical ways, engages in research and campaigning, and educates people about homelessness through art, exhibitions and events. The MoH is radically redesigning the concept of museums in a troubled present, and pioneering networks of care from within a vulnerable community.

¹ The examples given in this text have been chosen for their illustrative value and refer to projects that clearly reveal a specific aspect of general importance in CIRCE's work. However, these exemplary descriptions do not necessarily capture the entire breadth of the project and the aspect referred to is found in many other projects. For more details, please refer to the section of this publication presenting the individual projects.

A collaborative effort

Creative impact enterprises typically reach beyond sub-sectors, connecting and reconfiguring different professional fields and knowledges and cultures. To achieve this goal, creatives join forces with actors from beyond their own field of expertise. Creative impact, therefore, is rarely achieved in isolation. It typically is a collaborative effort – and such collaborations challenge, transcend and, at times, even transform the established boundaries of professional cultures, academic disciplines or social fields. In doing so, creative impact enterprises also contribute to a more general transformation of work culture, in which the complexity of problems and challenges demands collaborative skills that go beyond the confines of a particular profession.



The CIF project *Tend VR* brought together creative technologists, experienced mental health clinicians, university researchers and a public healthcare provider to develop and launch VR-based delivery of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), one of the most effective treatments for depression and anxiety.

A transformative force within the CCE

While cultural and socioeconomic privileges continue to shape and restrict access to jobs and opportunities across the CCE, otherwise under-represented communities are an important force in creative impact work. A significant share of public-purpose-oriented projects and businesses is driven by the concerns and needs of underserved or marginalised communities. This makes creative impact a segment that contributes significantly to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within the CCE. Creative impact enterprises not only contribute to transformations within the wider society; they are also a force of change within the sector. Moreover, their thematic concerns and demographic set-up turn them into important sites of organisational innovation, as organisations and business models are developed in the context of, at times, severe structural adversity. Community-driven projects in the CIRCE network are a case in point. They develop their structures and strategies not in the context of an abstract market, but of a particular, typically underserved community's needs. Such communities might be dispersed in spatial terms, but are frequently highly localised, and the projects in question aim to serve the needs of particular people in a specific place and time. Engaging with, responding to and growing with a community is a crucial part of work in all community-driven projects. Thus, community organising becomes a key entrepreneurial practice, and such ventures rarely grow by scaling up and expanding, but rather by scaling deep or spreading.

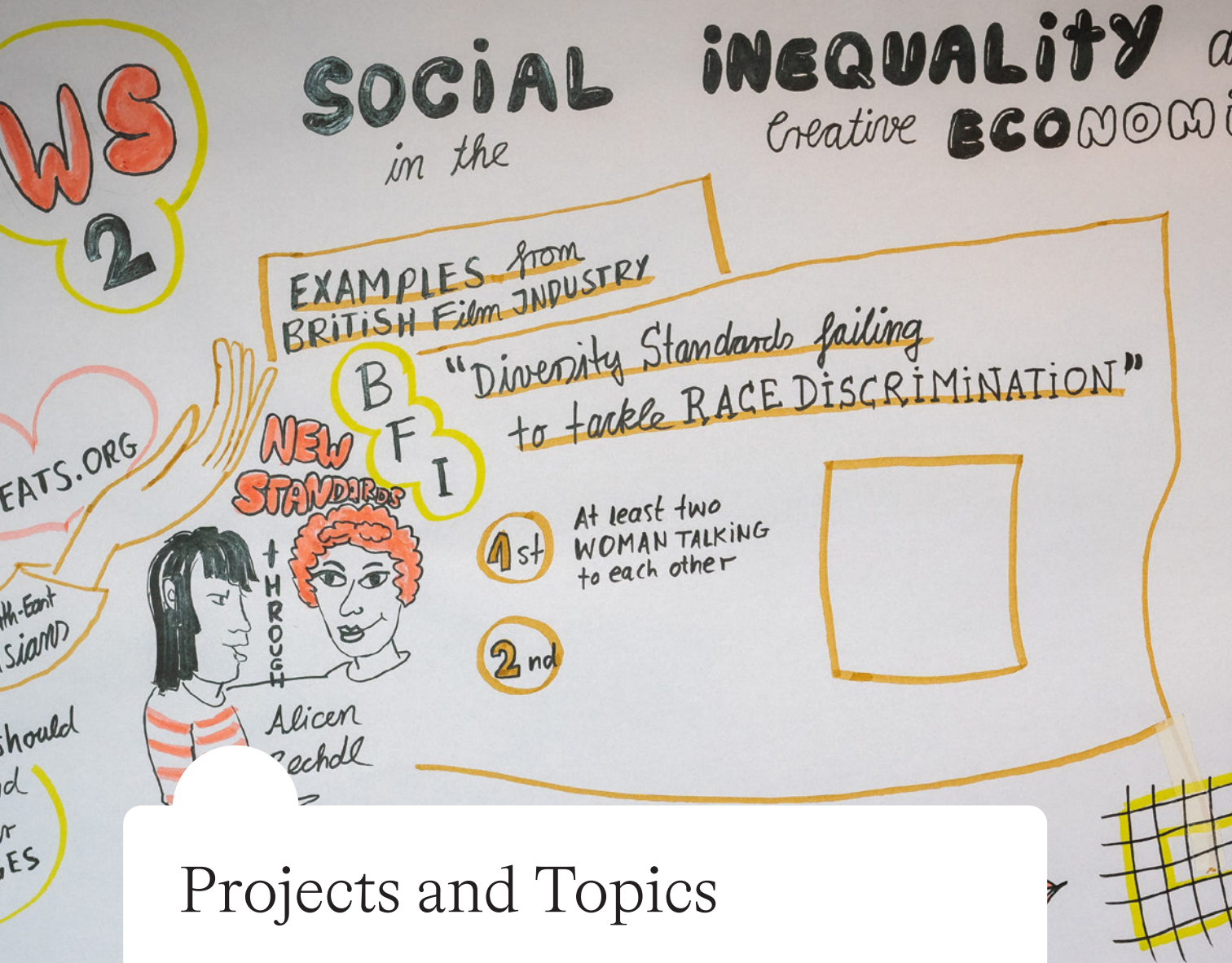


club coop, a Marseilles-based CIF project, is responding to increasing social stratification in the music industry and the respective socio-economic access barriers for live performances by taking the cooperative concept to the club sector. In an experimental organisational framework of shared ownership, the team is developing an alternative and ambitious nightlife model that is solidarity-driven. In this project, inclusion and accessibility are not only at the core of event programming; they also impact the organisational structure and business model.

Resilience for cultures under siege

Creative impact enterprises create spaces for creative, cultural and artistic production. In searching for innovative organisational forms and creative business models, they contribute to a greater independence of creative practice from public, and especially state funding. This creative impact entrepreneurship function is of particular relevance in politically troubled times, and most apparent in authoritarian contexts where arts and culture tend to be appropriated by the authorities and creative practices face serious restrictions. Under such circumstances, creative production within the CCE can become a safe haven for topics and discursive positions deemed too liberal or even insurrectionary (e.g. women's or LGBTQIA+ rights). With the increasing influence of explicitly nationalist and anti-democratic parties in many European countries, this CCE function will gain in importance.

As an activity at the intersection of creative professions and social impact entrepreneurship, creative impact is a framework that lends visibility to a substantial section of the CCE, the importance of which tends to be overlooked when applying traditional economic frameworks of reference. Creatives in this field develop CCE approaches to cultural production that enable greater independence from government funding. Strengthening creative impact contributes to the resilience not only of the CCE sector but also, more generally speaking, of creative and cultural production. As many creative impact initiatives are inspired by universal ideas such as liberty, equality or solidarity, they can also be seen as an important line of defence for democracy.



© CIRCE | GLUT Berlin

Projects and Topics

CIRCE's individual and institutional collaborators not only work in various countries across Europe; they also come from different professional fields and academic disciplines – researchers, artists, designers, activists, community organisers, technologists and entrepreneurs. Many of them have expertise in more than one field, combining experience in curation and scholarship, arts and technology or design and advocacy, for example.

All of them responded to CIRCE's call to explore creative impact in terms of its relevance for contemporary societies, significance within the CCE, internal mechanics and possible stimulation through policymaking. Across all CIRCE's various project components, such explorations took the form of scholarly studies, creative research or experimental undertakings. Thematically, they address major challenges to contemporary societies as well as problems within the sector. As work on the projects and conversations within the network unfolded, six topics emerged as common focus areas, although it has to be added that most of the projects fit into more than one category. These six topics are outlined below.

C Preserving a liveable planet

This cluster covers challenges relating to the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and other ecological emergencies. All the projects have worked on technological and socio-technical innovations that address resource consumption problems or uses of nature or space. They have developed and tested alternative practices, products and services, looked at the ways societies navigate and cope with

these challenges, and investigated world views, imaginaries and forms of knowledge that are contributing to preserving the liveability of our planet.

Projects in this cluster demonstrate how creative CCE work plays a crucial part in dealing with an existentially threatening global crisis. They also contribute to making CCE production processes more ecologically sustainable.



In the Slovenia-based CIF venture Z.O.P. (Institute for Spatial Design), designers and researchers are promoting earth as a sustainable, CO2-friendly building material. They are working on an easy-to-use and cost-effective method in which a modular formwork system allows the necessary elements to be made on a building site from local soil.

Research fellow *Madeleine Arber* investigated how a popular video game affects climate awareness and the well-being of children. Originally trained in psychology, she worked with game designers and educational institutions to understand the impact of Minecraft Frozen Planet II on young players.

In his research project "Festival Futures", research fellow *Rafael Dernbach* explored how festivals, as major sites for creative co-production, can become more sustainable, inclusive and resilient. As a curator and media and future studies scholar, he is particularly interested in the skills needed to work towards this transformation.

C (Infra-)structures and ethics of care

The projects in this cluster have responded to the need for more just and socially sustainable relations in organisations, business processes and public life in general. They explored what more careful and more ethical relations might look like in professional teams, organisations, communities and collectives. Their understanding is that care is not limited to interpersonal relations but is a principle of systemic relevance. The projects asked what it takes to embed professional and public relations more systematically into (infra-)structures

oriented towards justice and care. Many of the ventures addressed the concerns of underserved or marginalised communities, designed strategies for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and engaged in social and socio-technical innovations.

The projects in this cluster illustrate the relevance of CCE in creating laboratories for inclusive and democratic coexistence. And they mobilise the sector's expertise in creating and curating social contexts and redesigning relations for transformative interventions.



Kuulu, a CIF project based in Finland, has developed a digital tool that empowers organisations to create and implement comprehensive diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategies. The aim was to help create organisational cultures in which people can belong and be heard – and that is what the Finnish word *kuulu* means.

Research fellow *Taoyuan Luo* explored collective zine-production as an empowerment and healing practice. In East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) feminist communities in the UK, she studied the role of zine-making workshops as collective therapeutic sessions and explored how they foster solidarity and gender and race awareness. The research also highlights how these workshops have helped to develop strategies to combat racism and sexism in the aftermath of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The CIF project *embrace3* explored the aesthetic and ergonomic breast-support clothing needs of individuals affected by breast cancer. In a participatory design processes, the project especially developed garments for individuals who, post-mastectomy, were looking for support clothing that was not mainly designed to re-establish the visual symmetry of a female body. The pioneering garments have enhanced awareness of gendered body norms in fashion and advanced the idea of wearer-centred clothing design.

The CIF-project *Vollpension* is an Austria-based social enterprise that facilitates intergenerational dialogue through cafés and a baking school. During the CIRCE project they expanded their operations to include a senior influencer agency that supports businesses and other organisations in intergenerational collaboration and learning and in generational change processes.

C Community-driven impact

This cluster covers projects driven by the needs of particular communities and an entrepreneurial commitment to them. The projects were developed in response to current economic, social and ecological emergencies, which have affected some people more than others. The focus of the work was on structurally underserved or marginalised sections of the population – communities plunged into crisis by current events. These ventures' protagonists typically share the experiences of the people they want to serve. The projects have addressed

socio-economic marginalisation, isolation and exhaustion, as well as problems relating to stigmatisation and discrimination. They have also explored the needs of particular communities, analysed their relationship to wider society, and developed new approaches rooted in community organising.

The projects in this cluster demonstrate how creative production within the CCE can empower communities, stimulate exchange and knowledge transfer between them, and in doing so help build resilience.



The CIF project *CIVIC* deploys creative methods to redesign humanitarian responses in Ukraine and create blueprints for rebuilding. In a collaborative effort between UK funding and humanitarian relief specialists and leading experts from the start-up and social impact entrepreneurship ecosystem in Ukraine, *CIVIC* has staged local citizen assemblies to decide on the allocation of funds to local impact-driven entrepreneurs. In doing so, *CIVIC* is promoting (social) entrepreneurship in times of crisis and creating ownership in a context in which relief from outside has become increasingly important.

In a qualitative research project, creative fellow and designer *Aiwen Yin* investigated the conditions that determine the success of creative collectives. In a comparative case analysis she developed an original reconceptualisation of collectives in which their interfaces and interactions with their wider environment play a crucial role. This “wetland” approach to collectives delivers insights not just for creative practitioners, but also for funders and policymakers.

The goal of the *Black European Academic Network (BEAN)*, a Germany-based initiative, is to help overcome the challenges of institutional racism in education and beyond. Within CIRCE's CIF programme, they developed and designed an online course for distance learning based on their extensive research into the everyday lives and concerns of Black communities in different European countries.



Technologies for empowerment and participation

The projects in this cluster responded to the challenges facing today's democracies and pluralistic societies that were caused by oligopolies of technology and power. They also looked at the participation and inclusion problems that can be mediated by means of technological and socio-technical solutions. The projects address the issue of unequal access to information and democratic processes as well as the problems linked to the dominance of particular technology-embedded world views and experiences. They also investigated the design and uses of technology that promotes the empowerment and inclusion of marginalised pop-

ulations or strengthens democratic institutions. This is achieved by facilitating broader participation, improving democratic monitoring, supporting the self-organising capacities of civil society actors, and raising the visibility of marginalised or excluded people and experiences.

The projects in this cluster showcase the CCE's particular capacity for socio-technical impact innovations. They merge the sector's expertise in curating social relations with its expertise in developing and working with material objects while adding a commitment to public concerns and principles.



Vertical52, a CIF project based in Germany, is strengthening investigative journalism by developing methods and building skills for working with open-source satellite data. This approach is particularly fruitful when tracing large-scale habitat changes and researching contexts that are difficult to access for geographical or political reasons. Documentation of climate change and environmental crimes is among its most important applications.

Research fellow and human-computer-interaction (HCI) expert *Alexandra Tzanidou* explored how technology can facilitate immersive theatre and art experiences for people experiencing disabilities. The aim was to understand how inclusive productions can be used to promote the representation and inclusion of underrepresented communities.

In an experimental participatory project, research fellow and deep-tech scholar *Gemma Milne* investigated which imaginaries of social and political order inform innovation and design processes in the space sector. She employed creative practices designed to enhance imagination and explored the role they could play in a prefigurative politics for the space sector.

Education, skill development and skill matching

The lack of skilled labour in the CCE is at the heart of the projects in this cluster. This includes the challenges posed by the rapid evolution of what are considered to be standard practices in the sector. The projects address gaps in training and education for CCE careers, problems of joblessness and low income in the sector, and inadequacies in the markets and mechanisms connecting those with creative expertise to those searching for it. The projects explored the skills needed to future-proof specific creative practices and investigated how education and training institutions can

become more adaptive to changes in the CCE sector and in society as a whole. They also developed new approaches to supporting skill development and skill matching, in which the removal of barriers for talent from underrepresented and marginalised communities plays a crucial role.

The projects in this cluster demonstrate how the long-term development of craft and talent in the CCE is possible and indeed necessary to secure a high quality of output from this sector. In doing so, they also work towards securing CCE's important social and societal contributions.



Lezo, a CIF project based in Ukraine, is a personalised AI career guide and chatbot designed to empower IT and creative professionals. It aims to facilitate and accelerate professional reorientation, especially for people in the early stages of career development and those who want to change or expand their professional profile to include new skills and fields.

Research fellow and designer *Jessica Guy* investigated how design education can build skills and competencies contributing to resilient futures. Inspired by the Bauhaus approach, they undertook participatory action research to develop new frameworks for learning that better align academic design education with design needs in contemporary society.

Research fellow and scholar *Anastasia Platonava* investigated how blockchain technology and AI can contribute to addressing skill shortages across Europe. The aim was to explore how these complementary technologies can provide new opportunities for collaboration, creativity, innovation and value creation.

Transformative governance

The projects in this cluster addressed the need for better fitting, more just and more effective governance and funding structures in the creative ecosystem. They also looked into the problems created by the concentration of resources, agenda-setting power and unequal access to funding. They examined resource cycles and administrative and bureaucratic hurdles in the CCE sector. And they explored how governance structures and policymaking in the CCE can better reflect the particularities of a creative ecosystem mainly composed of freelancers and micro-enterprises. A shared concern is how to rethink governance as a

transformative practice. The projects were also interested in the specific roles particular actors and institutions – policymakers, intermediary organisations, foundations and other non-state funders, etc. – can or indeed have to play.

The projects in this cluster rethought the creative ecosystem from within. They explained the expectations of CCE's freelancing and micro-enterprise majority regarding just and inclusive funding, support and administration. And they elaborated on what is needed to better reconcile administrative necessities with creative dynamics.



Research fellow and policy analyst *Luiza Moroz* investigated novel policymaking techniques that might help to enhance CCE's global competitiveness. Starting from the observation that Europe's CCE cannot keep up with major competitors in Asia and the US in terms of exports, revenues and innovative business models, she explored three tools for evidence-based policymaking: intergenerational analysis, big data analysis and so-called regulatory sandboxes in which new approaches are tested under real-world conditions.

The experimental research pursued by the creative fellow, singer-songwriter and producer *Esther Lenda Bokuma* focused on the working conditions of Black musicians and industry professionals in the UK. A recent study revealed that racism is one of the workplace realities for many of them. She explored models of collective care and holistic well-being as an alternative governance approach that can benefit not only industry professionals, but also the wider community.

Research fellow, scholar and policy-learning designer *Nyangala Zolho* studied pathways into careers in creativity and innovation. Her project was particularly interested in how social inequalities play out in (un-)successful CCE career paths, e.g. the impact of gender, race or parents' education. By looking at two municipalities in different European countries, the research aimed to understand the driving forces and mechanisms supporting local creative and innovative economies.

Synergies and collaboration

CIRCE is more than a collection of projects. After all, this network transcends the dynamics of individual ventures through synergies and collaboration. Some of them were part of the programme's original design, which linked fellows and research labs through mentoring or facilitated exchange and shared learning experiences in online and in-person meeting, for example. Yet, much of the

network's vibrant dynamic emerged from the extraordinary initiatives of a wide circle of CIRCE collaborators, who quickly started to engage and exchange bilaterally or in small groups, who visited each other, or who even embarked on practical collaboration. CIRCE's organising team at u-institut accompanied these activities curatorially and, wherever possible, tried to provide practical support.



In an experimental research project, creative fellow *Nevena Yovcheva* explored the potential of creative practices to revive economically and culturally impoverished rural regions. In Oslen, Bulgaria, one of the EU's poorest regions, she organised a rural summer festival that cautiously engaged local needs and populations and stimulated fruitful collaboration and co-creation processes with externals. Three other fellows joined in with this project: creative fellow *Fabian Frey*, whose experimental research project explored the community-building effects of sharing food, organised one of his participatory sessions during the festival, while research fellow *Nyangala Zolho* and creative fellow *Anna De Mezzo* ran a workshop on the future of rural areas. This kind of interaction and support amongst fellows happened quite frequently.

Samuel Huber, a researcher at the *Zurich Research Lab*, spent lengthy periods of time at the Research Lab in Tabakalera, as both institutions shared a common interest in exploring the intersections of their thematic foci: collaboration and co-creation on the one hand, and creatives' entrepreneurial strategies on the other. He summarised his insights in a working paper.

During the final month of the fellowship programme, a dozen fellows came together for a writing retreat to support each other in the final stages of analysis and report writing. The *Tallinn Research Lab* hosted the group.

From the summer of 2023 onwards, a number of CIRCE participants started planning how they could continue networking and collaborating beyond the duration of their programme. This process was led by fellows but quickly attracted people from other project components as well. Several meetings were held online and in person, and a communication platform set up.

CIRCE as a
prototype
→ measures, architectural
design, working
together

CIRCE – a Prototype Experiment in Transformative Governance

© William Veder

International institutions and platforms of CIRCE's size typically emerge either as the progressive evolution of an existing interpersonal or inter-institutional network over a longer period of time or are the product of a political decision after months or even years of consultations. CIRCE, in contrast, was established in a short period of time. The project was financed for 18 months by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media with funds from the European Commission's Brexit Adjustment Reserve (see part 1). Within less than a year it had evolved from an idea on a few pages of paper into a highly dynamic infrastructure for research involving about 150 people. How was this possible? While the first two parts of this analysis explained the why and the what, this part will take a closer look at the how. Institution building at this scale and pace was a challenging task and required a fine balance of focus and flexibility. Planning had to go hand in hand with improvisation, top-down action with bottom-up dynamics. This was only possible by relying on the professional cultures of the cultural and creative economies (CCE), where fast-paced production processes in newly formed teams and many fields are part and parcel of their everyday business. In this sense, it was not only set up for, but also by the CCE sector.

This institution building process has lessons for the wider creative ecosystem as well as for policymaking. In the language of the sector, CIRCE can be understood as a prototype for knowledge production in the CCE and the creative ecosystem – a prototype created with an ear to the ground and therefore of political relevance to policymakers and other institutional stakeholders. This prototype is now coming to the end of its initial test phase. The following sections will take a closer look at how CIRCE was set up, how it worked and what insights can be drawn so far.

Committed to experimentation

CIRCE started out to explore creative impact at the crossroads of creative practice, research and social entrepreneurialism. As a research-oriented

project, it aimed to produce knowledge on this particular CCE segment and its importance in the current polycrisis. CIRCE was meant to contribute to a better understanding of as yet uncharted terrain. The idea was to study the logic of creative impact – not only in theory, but also as it unfolds in the real world. In addition, CIRCE wanted to disseminate its insights and raise awareness for the relevance of creative impact among stakeholders in policymaking and the cultural, artistic or non-profit spheres. As an organisation or institutional body, CIRCE was meant to be not only new, but also original.

This approach implied that CIRCE would need to allow and facilitate experimental research processes – a requirement that sounds rather familiar in the CCE. The need to enable experimental approaches has long been at the heart of debates on innovation policy within and outside the creative ecosystem as well as in related academic fields. Research and innovation call for extremely focussed action, while at the same time, these processes are deliberately open. Searching for a better understanding of or a practical solution to a given problem is a learning process on a path shaped by continuous adaptation. Failure is understood to contribute to the overall goal, as much as success is. And the path of the actual research may well change in response to new insights.

Yet, such fundamental openness does not rhyme easily with project funding rules, which expect grantees to project outputs and outcomes and deliver on their promises. While the internal logic of innovation and research knows how to value failure, the funder's gaze tends to force grantees into continuous success-oriented performance. Was it possible to approach things differently within the CIRCE framework? This question always accompanied the prototyping process. In engaging with it, CIRCE at times pushed the boundaries of what is expected and possible in a publicly funded project of this size and type. Experimental approaches were not only at the heart of the projects facilitated by CIRCE, but also became part of its governance structures, which was most evidently manifested in the collaborative approach to institution building facilitated by u-institut as the institutional intermediary.

Heterogeneous collaboration

Productive heterogeneity is at the core of CIRCE's internal set-up and processes. CIRCE collaborators are different types of actors coming from various professional fields within the creative ecosystem: public institutions (research labs), individuals (fellows, critical friends) and (emerging) entrepreneurial organisations (CIF projects, research labs). Hence, the network transcends established boundaries of professional fields and academic disciplines. It is also highly diverse in national and regional culture terms, as it involves people from Eastern, Southern, Western and Northern Europe, exiles and other recent migrants from outside Europe, and Europeans with family histories of migration from former colonies. CIRCE collaborators also come from different socio-economic and class backgrounds and most of them are under 35, with young people dominating the Fellowship programme (which had a formal age limit) and also heavily represented in research lab and CIF project teams.

In other words, CIRCE brought together people and institutions with distinct yet dissimilar experiences and expertise. Inspired by the idea and ideal of creative impact, they joined forces in a heterogeneous collaboration experiment. Both their thematic and organisational variety and the diversity of professional expertise, generational and personal experience were a source of synergies, cooperation and innovative co-creation in the research projects and CIF's experimental pilot projects. This facilitated knowledge transfer and learning, as experts from rather distant fields came to engage with each other. Besides research and knowledge production on and for the cultural and creative economies, CIRCE also became a network for capacity building and skill development.

The intermediary's crucial role

The organisational hub for all these processes, the CIRCE team at u-institut, was tasked with designing and managing the network, and supporting and advancing its activities and actors. Building on its

previous experience, the u-institut's role was that of an intermediary in the creative ecosystem, i.e. translating a general policy impulse to counteract Brexit's fallout for the CCE into tangible measures, and in doing so contributing to agenda-setting in this field. As an intermediary, u-institut was positioned between policymakers and funders (i.e. the European Commission and the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media) and various creative ecosystem stakeholders, including researchers, creative practitioners, entrepreneurs, cultural institutions, companies and universities.

CIRCE's prototyping journey hinged on designing and launching the various project participants: research labs, fellows, CIF pilot projects and critical friends. Each measure was meant to invite stakeholders with a particular interest in creative impact and European collaborations to join the CIRCE network. As the overall idea was to use the network to explore instead of predefining creative impact, the invitation was intended to be broad and allow for a variety of perspectives and expertise. Projects concerned with problems of policymaking on a European scale were to feel as welcome as projects engaging a particular local context or community. These general ideas needed to be translated into tendering procedures, i.e. calls for proposals, submission and selection processes.

As the project components unrolled and the work of the various collaborators took off, the intermediary's role shifted from design to governance. Beside coordination and administration, this also meant curating collaborative learning processes and network relations. Collaborators were not just to be instructed on their deliverables and then left to carry on with their work. The idea was rather to accompany them through regular meetings (labs and CIF projects), events organised to address particular problems and questions (fellows and CIF projects) and general responsiveness. Yet, the exchanges between the intermediary and CIRCE collaborators were not limited to such project-related exchanges. Collaborators' input and feedback also shaped CIRCE prototyping in its entirety. At an early stage, for example, collaborators drew attention to the stress and psychological burdens social impact work frequently creates. In

response to this, the question of how to implement care structures and practices became a major topic throughout the prototyping process.

This process was full of challenges and the results far from perfect (as outlined in the next section). Despite these shortcomings, however, the process set the scene for the emergence of a new and original model for enabling applied and experimental research in and for the CCE on a European scale – and one whose organisational culture was shaped by a new generation of CCE professionals. It also evidenced the strong resonance of the concept of creative impact in the creative ecosystem, as mirrored in the numerous applications for the fellowship as well as the CIF programme, for example. Furthermore, the collaborations that emerged emphasised the power of this concept to productively connect different CCE sub-sectors.

In all this, u-institut was constantly negotiating between the CIRCE collaborators' needs and the public funders' expectations. The aim was to design processes and structures that serve the needs of creative ecosystem practitioners to the greatest possible extent. In this way, CIRCE itself became an experiment in transformative governance and creative bureaucracy. While u-institut was the driving force behind most of these developments, the experiment only became possible because CIRCE's institutional collaborators and partners, including policymakers, decided to join in. Throughout the CIRCE network's work, the administrative authorities involved displayed an exceptional degree of responsiveness and adaptivity – and thus contributed substantially to CIRCE's success.

Key challenges

While remarkably successful, these developments were not a frictionless process. CIRCE prototyping implied rolling out the programme, facilitating experimentation and holding space for a highly diverse set of people and institutions while operating in the framework of public procurement legislation and under severe time restrictions. This was extremely challenging. Time and again, CIRCE collaborators and the organising team were confront-

ed by the limitations of innovative bureaucracy, the impossibility of accelerating trust-building and the increasing risk of disappointment when a promise of change is in the air. In this context, four areas of action proved particularly challenging: access, rethinking control and success, trust and power, and redistribution of risks.

Access

Whatever the intentions of the designers of a collaborative project, it is ultimately shaped by the participants. A brilliant concept is worthless if nobody is inspired by it. For this reason, access was a primary concern in CIRCE prototyping. To truly explore creative impact in the CCE and its relevance for societal transformation, CIRCE needed to be open to creatives and researchers from different professional fields and epistemic cultures and with differing socio-economic profiles. While in many parts of Europe, the notion of creative industries is linked to conventional businesses, CIRCE also wanted to invite creative social businesses and artists or creative activists who relied on entrepreneurial strategies. The application and selection processes were therefore meant to ensure high-quality work in creative impact terms, but also to value different kinds of skills, professional experiences and entrepreneurial approaches. However, this inclusivity goal faced a number of obstacles, most obviously language. Despite being inspired by ideals of European diversity, the speed of the prototyping process did not allow for multilingualism. CIRCE's working languages, e.g. for calls and application procedures, were therefore German and English, which significantly restricted the pool of possible collaborators and also made active participation in the prototyping process conditional on certain language skills. Access was additionally shaped by technology. The tendering procedures were handled online, and the legally compliant systems available for this purpose in Germany are few in number and lacking in stability and user-friendliness (e.g. support for different

OS and more languages than German, general UX design, etc.). First-time users need to invest a substantial amount of time to navigate them. For the fellowship tendering procedure, it was possible to make an exception to the rule and use a simple online form instead of the clunky platform. This clearly made for a more inclusive process.

Rethinking control and success

Another major challenge in the prototyping process was the question of how to set up administrative procedures that are responsive to the needs of experimental creative impact projects. As explained above, experimental approaches clash with the common ideas of project management and evaluation, which assume the work will take place in order to produce a specific pre-defined and tangible goal. This work, however, is processual and adaptive, with failure feeding into its success and goals being modified in the face of new insights. But the logic of project management is not only at odds with experimental approaches, but also with social impact work. The latter frequently takes place in real-world laboratories and affects people as it unfolds. Its impact, therefore, is generated not just through its final output, but in the course of the project as well. In other words, process as impact is a principle that holds for experiments as well as for public-purpose-driven projects.

CIRCE tried to account for these specific dynamics by putting innovation processes at the heart of tendering procedures and contracts. For all of CIRCE's project participants, the main deliverable was not the innovation itself, but the insights gained in and about the innovative process. In this way, it was possible to acknowledge process as impact. Yet in practice, it meant that CIRCE collaborators had to extensively document their work processes. Across the different project components, collaborators had to hand in regular project updates. For the research labs and CIF projects these written reports were supplemented by regular meetings. The guiding idea was that reporting was not only a measure of documentation and control, but also

one of reflection and an opportunity for the u-institut team to better support the collaborators. These ideas played out very well in some cases, e.g. in projects conducted in crisis zones where there was an even greater need for adaptability. In general, however, the reporting duties created a significant additional workload for the CIRCE collaborators and also bound significant resources in the CIRCE team. Given the short time horizon for all CIRCE activities, many were pushed to their capacity limits. While the prototyping processes proved the viability of processes-based funding approaches, they also drew attention to the required resources.

Trust and power

Rewarding funding for innovation processes and not their outcome is a pioneering and highly productive approach. However, it demands not only time, but also trust. As process-based funding for experimental projects implies documentation and reporting, a process needs to be made transparent for it to be acknowledged as a deliverable. Such a move is not only at odds with conventions in the world of publicly funded projects; it is also counter-intuitive in many regards. CIRCE prototyping revealed that transparency on ongoing work is not something that can be naturally expected. Although the u-institut team was sincerely committed to an approach that valued process insights, regardless of whether they were the product of successful or unsuccessful steps en route, this commitment was not easily believed. As a result, building up trust between CIRCE collaborators and the u-institut team turned out to be one of the major challenges in the prototyping process. It also became apparent that cultural conventions weigh heavily on these dynamics. Reporting required being open about problems and difficulties. While this is common in professional cultures in Germany and the UK, it is considered insensitive, impolite or rude elsewhere. Historical experiences and political cultures also played an important role. As u-institut was handing out funds supplied by the Federal Government of Germany, it was perceived to be a German instituti-

on, evoking histories of tension and conflict. Some also perceived it to be a state-like institution, and their behaviour towards it was shaped by the fact that state institutions are not always trust-inspiring. CIRCE prototyping showed that trust can be built by responsiveness and dedication to improving the quality of relations. Such processes need substantial investments in personnel and time, and even with sufficient resources, cannot be accelerated at will. It turned out, for example, that the resources allocated to the Fellowship programme were insufficient to adequately respond to all the demands. And that efforts to build trust across project components risk being undermined by the need to enforce formal regulations.

Redistribution of risks

Experimental projects are risky by definition and their outcome is unsure, which is why funders frequently prefer other formats. Such projects change shape and goals as they unfold. And they are deliberately open to failure. CIRCE prototyping was successful in finding a format to facilitate experimental projects in the framework of public funding and created conditions in which creative impact-related activities could be tested. But what about the risks?

To sincerely invite and promote experimental work on creative impact, the burden of risk could not be left to the collaborators. Neither could it be placed on the funder handing out taxpayers' money. Mediating and redistributing risk became one of the main tasks for u-institut as the intermediary and in this process, it became the main risk bearer. Designing project governance structures and procedures that valued process over output meant that collaborators were safe even if their innovation processes were unsuccessful. But it also generated the need to monitor and document that failure, and how the innovation processes for which u-institut was responsible were actually taking place. The success of this approach hinged on the collaborators' cooperation and trust, which in turn were mediated by factors outside u-institut's control, e.g. time, historical experiences, culture, etc.



A Model for Collaborative Research in the Creative Ecosystem

Bottom-up momentum

Whereas the CIRCE process was set on track by a single entity, u-institut, and based on a policy and funding decision, the momentum was generated in a bottom-up process. The norms and habits of a purpose-oriented professional context became an important resource in CIRCE's evolution, as the interest in creative impact typically came with an interest in the work of others, cooperation skills, and an affinity for out-of-the-box thinking and action. People who came to be involved in CIRCE were not only passionate, dedicated and rigorous, as highly competitive programmes participants typically are; they also shared an openness towards boundary-crossing collective engagements, which allowed them to become true collaborators, despite the short time frame.

As the work with CIRCE unfolded, people started to pool resources and exchange knowledge or expertise far beyond what had been expected and planned during the project's design phase. CIRCE collaborators met independently of the official programme and across different project components. Fellows visited research labs or CIF projects. In some instances, crossovers between different projects or components emerged (see Part 2, Synergies and Collaboration). CIRCE facilitated exchange and collaboration even in highly specialised CCE niches (e.g. creative deep tech or rural culture), thus testifying to the integrative power of the concept of creative impact within the sector. As CIRCE's initial phase draws to a close, these collaborative practices and experiences have forged a community of creative impact practitioners. At least parts of it will outlive the duration of funding.

The importance of community-driven processes for creative impact work is reflected not only in the dynamics of the CIRCE prototype, but also in the research enabled by it, where community-driven impact emerged as one of the key topics (see part 2)

Learning from a new generation of creative professionals

Work on the CIRCE prototype was strongly driven by the concerns and expectations of a new generation of professionals in the creative ecosystem. The same was true for CIRCE's organising team at u-institut. While an age distribution of mainly under-35s is generally consistent with that of CCE in Europe – according to Ernst & Young data, the workforce in this sector is younger and often better qualified than the overall workforce in most EU member states – larger institutions and organisations are usually dominated by long-term incumbents. In CIRCE, in contrast, the experiences and social, political and ethical concerns typically associated with late millennials and early Gen Z shaped the character of and the atmosphere in the network. They also defined the thematic profile of CIRCE's activities. The need for change – not only in society, but also within the structures and practices of the creative ecosystem itself – became a core influence in CIRCE's organisational culture. And in this sense, the atypical generational balance also contributed to CIRCE's overall inclusivity, creating space for others who have struggled to find a foothold in well-established institutions because of structural marginalisation and exclusion. The need for structural reform within the creative ecosystem and the demand for greater respect for diversity, equity and inclusion is not only reflected in CIRCE's day-to-day work, but is also a key area of research explored, in particular, by projects relating to transformative governance (see part 2).

© CIRCE | GLUT Berlin

Care and psychosocial sustainability

One of the most fiercely discussed reform issues among creative professionals is the need to ensure psychosocial sustainability within the CCE. Creative professionals have to constantly navigate insecurity. While some of this is intrinsic to creative processes, it is also produced by the organisational and financial models governing the sector, where short-term contracts for freelancing specialists are the norm. Engaging in creative impact projects adds to this general burden of insecurity. The projects presented in part 2 illustrate that commitment to public purpose frequently translates into commitment to particular places, communities and people. Creative impact work unfolds in dense relational networks and typically goes with a sense of obligation and responsibility, which can become a factor of stress in its own right. Given this background, reflections on care were a major issue throughout the prototyping process. How to set up a caring organisational culture and caring administrative practices were recurring questions that went hand in hand with considerations about experimentation and trust. CIRCE's commitment to experimentation helped to implement a culture of responsiveness and an openness towards adaptation that, in certain instances, helped to dissipate unduly burdens. Yet throughout the prototyping process, the tightly woven net of documenting and reporting duties, which operationalised CIRCE's process-oriented funding, turned out to be an additional stress factor. The experimental approach both facilitated and constrained care-oriented project administrative practices so that while the ideal of care was not easily reconciled with the need to closely monitor experimental innovation processes, it did become a hallmark of personal relations between CIRCE collaborators.

Beyond traditional research

CIRCE's particular productiveness was ultimately enabled by the way it approached research. Knowledge production was at the heart of CIRCE's activities. But in a heterogeneous network like this one, it was impossible to conceive research solely along traditional academic lines. Instead, it was framed so as to include different forms of research (scholarly and artistic/creative) and different methods (data-driven and experimental, original and secondary studies, etc.), to value different forms of knowledge (conceptual and empirical, academic and experiential) and to allow for differently scaled perspectives (micro, meso or macro and local, national or transnational). How was it possible to practically engage with each other across those many differences? In this epistemologically diverse space productive conversations were enabled and stimulated by a common interest in creative impact, a shared dedication to applied research approaches, and the general openness of CIRCE collaborators to knowledge outside their own field of expertise. This constellation was also supported by the organising team at u-institut who monitored activities in the network for emerging topics or concerns, arranged special sessions on particular topics, and brought together collaborators who shared interests or problems but were unaware of each other's existence.

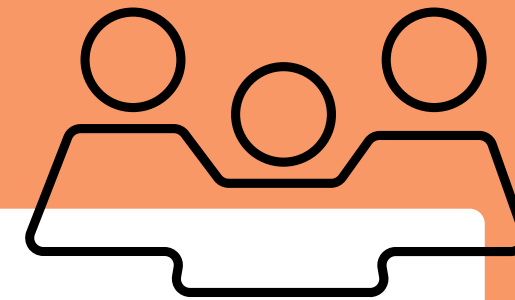
Insights gained

In this curated collaborative process, CIRCE generated original empirical insights on creative impact and the CCE as such. It would be possible to feed the latter into evidence-based policymaking at different levels of national and transnational governance. At the same time, this networked research facilitated a collective learning process. Many collaborators not only produced insights and gained new knowledge; they also developed their skills and capacities in research and facilitation methods or in producing evidence-based policy advice, for example. This was even true for some of the collaborating institutions, as some of them decided to integrate what they had learned in their CIRCE experiment into the portfolio of their regular activities.



Insights and Conclusions

CIRCE was set up as a pilot project. The aim was not only to initiate projects and deal with Brexit's potential fallout in the creative ecosystem, but also to better understand how to promote and support the CCE's contribution to navigating current crises. While the success of the project is also due to factors beyond its control – most importantly the spirit of the creative ecosystem itself and serendipity in the process – the experience gained from CIRCE prototyping holds insights for CCE funding and policymaking, as summarised below.



Network facilitation as institution-building – via intermediaries

While many agree that current crises call not only for technological, but also for social innovations, the infrastructures facilitating the latter remain weak. This also remains true for the CCE. CIRCE is a model for facilitating bottom-up institution building in and for the creative ecosystem. Instead of designing something from scratch, CIRCE prototyping relied on existing structures, practices and skills. It harnessed the energies of a sector that relies on networks of professionals and micro-enterprises rather than corporations and large institutions for many of its activities. A crucial factor in this process was u-institut, the intermediary that facilitated, curated and managed the network's establishment and consolidation. The deliberate incorporation of individuals and institutions turned out to be key to CIRCE's success, as some institutional collaborators (e.g. Research Labs) became intermediaries in their respective context. In doing so, they not only contributed to the overall density and stability of the network, but also expanded their own capacities.

In other words, CIRCE prototyping created institutional structures out of networks in a process facilitated by the intermediaries. At this specific moment in time, such an approach seems particularly significant. For policymakers and other funders, it is a model to support institution building in the creative ecosystem – particularly in the face of shrinking budgets that make large-scale infrastructure projects more unlikely.

Furthermore, the facilitated network approach to institution building can contribute to a more inclusive creative ecosystem – providing awareness for this topic is incorporated into the process from the beginning. Thus, promoting DEI in the CCE sector, strengthening intermediaries and supporting the emergence of new ones could be a policy approach in its own right. By relying on the innovation and production logics within the sector, this networked institution has been responsive to its environment and adaptive in its structures – and therefore particularly suited to promoting and supporting CCE activities dealing with ongoing or emerging crises. While many agree that today's crises call for both technological and social innovations, the infrastructures to facilitate the latter are still weak. The CIRCE prototype can inspire institution building for both creative impact and more general social impact.

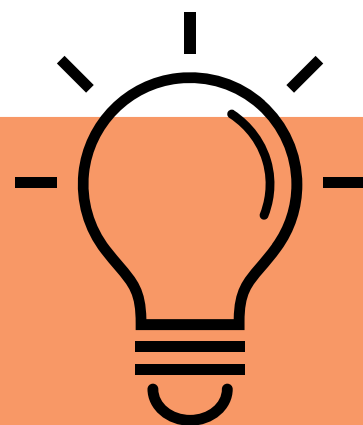
Overall, CIRCE's success highlights how intermediary organisations that assume a curating rather than a mere managing role can turn creative impact project funding into a vehicle for institution building and the establishment of a new and highly relevant field of expertise. In the context of today's crises, individual impact projects seem like a sandcastle built to withstand an incoming tide. In a curated network, however, they can become part of a dam – providing policymakers and funders commit beyond short-term engagements.

Creative impact – the power of ideas

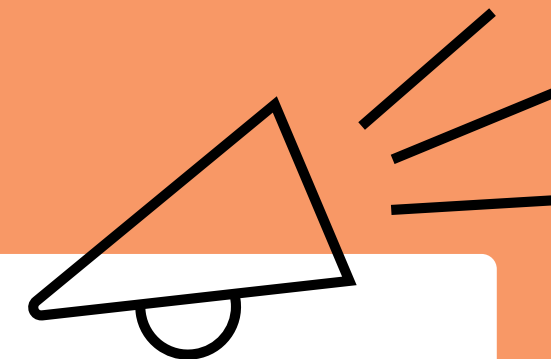
CIRCE prototyping also demonstrated how a powerful idea can become the catalyst for both institution building and new narratives within and for the creative ecosystem. At the heart of CIRCE was the idea of creative impact, whose meaning was initially and deliberately left open. Instead of pre-defining this phrase, CIRCE used its calls for participation to better understand how the idea resonated in the creative ecosystem. This inductive process revealed that creative impact is an idea that speaks to professionals in many different contexts and around which people with quite dissimilar expertise and experiences can productively assemble. Thanks to the integrative power of the idea of creative impact, CIRCE excelled at heterogeneous collaboration and became a highly heterogeneous network in terms of professional

cultures, expertise and skills, while at the same time staying extremely focussed in purpose terms.

The idea of creative impact drove both the content of CIRCE's work and the network's social dynamics. Commitment to public purpose and societal concerns in the polycrisis affected the demographic profile of CIRCE collaborators, as people from places and communities that are particularly vulnerable to current developments were expressly invited to contribute. The fact that CIRCE is a network of impact-driven collaborators also contributed to an organisational culture in which openness, mutual respect and the ideals of collaboration and sharing not only played a crucial role but also facilitated co-operation and synergies.



Normalising experimental approaches



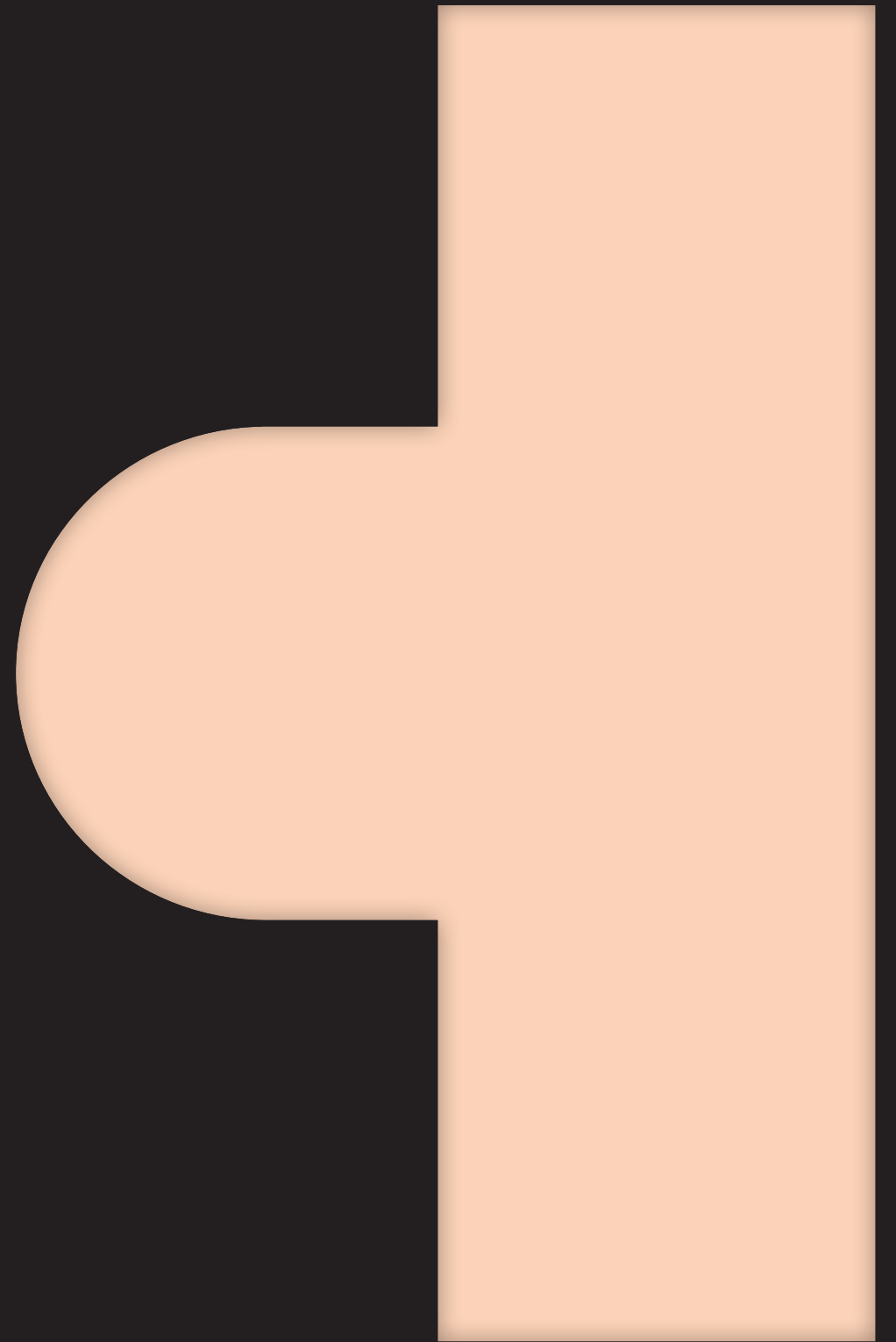
As an experiment in facilitating experimental projects, CIRCE prototyping demonstrated that process-based funding approaches are a viable instrument for supporting open innovative processes. But CIRCE also highlighted the associated challenges. Process-based funding is based on closely accompanying grantees in order to gain insights into the development of their projects and facilitate support where required. Openness to the outcome does not, however, mean indifference to the quality of the actual process. In fact, the degree of tension in this equation needs to be navigated by the parties involved.

Trust is a crucial factor in such processes. Sharing details of one's progress, inadequacies, frustrations and failure is essential if learnings are to be gained from experimental processes. But it is not something that can be taken for granted. A humble approach to governance that remains reflective of its own practices and open for input from network collaborators can help to achieve this goal. CIRCE prototyping clearly showed that process-based funding for experimental projects needs additional resources, and that more time is required to accompany such innovative processes. While the faster pace of CIRCE prototyping created intense working processes and new practice-related relationships, establishing trust is a something that

cannot be accelerated at will. Besides the need for more time, process-based funding approaches also require particular skills at the intermediary institution that accompanies the grantees and the ongoing operability of communication processes in a spatially spread-out network. CIRCE prototyping also highlighted that process-based funding for experimental projects creates additional risks that have to be distributed. The commitment to open innovative processes requires that the burden of these risks must be shifted away from the grantees – and that implies it needs to be shouldered elsewhere. Much of the risk in the CIRCE prototyping process was assumed by the intermediary u-institut. But to make such approaches sustainable, the risk involved would have to be shared with the donor institution.

Last but not least, CIRCE vividly demonstrated that funding formats for experimental projects are also capable of organically facilitating creative production in times of crisis. CIRCE involved people and projects operating in some hot zones of today's political and social conflicts, not least the war in Ukraine. While the increased need for adaptation created by such volatile conditions is a problem in more traditional funding formats, it can easily be accommodated in the process-based, experiment-oriented approach adopted by CIRCE.

The Projects



The *Research Labs* are CIRCE's institutional and thematic hubs. They are located in Berlin, London, San Sebastián, Tallin and Zurich. Each of the labs is an influential actor in specific parts of the creative ecosystem – in Europe and beyond. While they all conduct research, they are all different types of institutions and professional cultures within the creative ecosystem.

Institutionally, they represent the logic of an academic research institution committed to generating scholarly knowledge (Research Lab London), of a locally and internationally well embedded arts and culture institution (Research Lab San Sebastián), of an impact-driven start-up hub (Research Lab Tallin), of an Arts University where scholarly research and training of forthcoming generations go hand in hand (Research Lab Zurich) and of an intermediary organisation in the creative ecosystem (Research Lab Berlin).

Each comes with its particular expertise and its own set of questions in line with their specific role as institutions – be it generating scholarly knowledge, conditions for artists, exploring the relevance of hackathons, entrepreneurial opportunities for creative professionals or facilitation and agenda setting for the cultural and creative economy (CCE). In addition to their own research efforts within the project, they have provided knowledge-sharing spaces for the CIRCE community, as each Research Lab has supervised eight Fellows. In this chapter, you will get some insights into their research work.



The Research Labs

Zurich Centre for Creative Economies at Zurich University of the Arts

Unlocking the potential of the creative economies to address our most pressing societal challenges through a new understanding of strategies.



The Zurich Centre for Creative Economies (ZCCE) is a centre of excellence for research, teaching, incubation and consultancy, and part of Zurich University of the Arts, where art education, design, film, fine arts, music, dance, theatre and transdisciplinary studies are all taught under one roof. In 2023, our research lab has been focusing on entrepreneurial strategies in the creative economies. Our multidisciplinary team of researchers, communicators and administrators has been involved in the production of papers, workshops, artworks and the organisation of exchange formats across five sub-themes. Closely related to these activities is our annual Creative Economies Forum, which brings together creative professionals, entrepreneurs, researchers, students, alumnae and politicians.

Our aim is to establish strategising practices of the creative economies as an important approach to solving challenges between culture, business, education, politics and society.

© Ali Zigeli



A new understanding of strategies for the cultural sector

In order to unlock the potential of the creative economies to address our most pressing societal challenges, we need to develop a new understanding of strategies in and for the cultural sector. Three key takeaways from our theme of “Entrepreneurial Strategies within the Creative Economies” are that we need no four-year strategic plans, but ongoing strategic processes; no ex ante determinations of results, but risky projects; and no narrow understanding of resources in terms of financial means, but a holistic view including values, governance and stakeholders. As a result, we need to rethink the concept of strategy within the creative economies by focusing more on the actual practices of the actors (strategising) and how they recurrently create the conditions for creating something new (entrepreneurial). We also need to think beyond the boundaries of established sub-markets and activate interfaces with other industries

concerned about desirable futures for Europe. Furthermore, we need to rethink governance processes to adequately reflect the dynamics of the creative economies and thereby develop increasingly open and risk-taking funding strategies. And last but not least, we need to redefine assessment and evaluation schemes to measure the impacts of the creative economies.

We are working on five related sub-themes that are all interconnected: (Entrepreneurial) Skills, Risky Projects & Uncertainties, Organising & Company Creations, Entrepreneurship in Contexts, and Value Creation & (E)valuations. Along these sub-themes centred around entrepreneurial strategies, we want to find out at different levels of granularity how creative actors, organisations within the creative economies and public (funding) institutions develop their strategies. We are focusing on the processes and practices of relevant actors (zooming in), as well as on the framework conditions provided by the state and the creative industries (zooming out).



Strategising in practice

In this preliminary report zooming in and out on strategies in the creative economies is illustrated by these three sub-themes:

Risky Projects & Uncertainties: A team of researchers asked how actors in the creative economies manage uncertainties while often participating in risky projects; how creative actors repeatedly create the conditions to be artistically and commercially successful; what practices and processes they strategically use to be recurrently creative; and what are their evaluation criteria.

Value Creation & (E)valuation: Another research team was interested in what new data would be needed to redefine government funding criteria in the current era of shrinking budgets. They were looking at what (statistical) bases would be needed to define robust measures, and how heterogeneous the income situation of creative actors is. These two perspectives also gave rise to the idea of taking a closer look at the situation of Zurich University of the Arts students and alumnae and their opportunities to earn a living through the arts – both within and outside the cultural sector. It has become clear that the skills taught at art universities are highly relevant to the labour market – beyond buzzwords such as “future skills” or “creative skills”.

(Entrepreneurial) Skills: Four researchers have therefore been addressing the question of whether and how the curricula of art universities could shift from discipline- to skills-oriented education programmes. The aim of this sub-theme is to strategically reframe the content taught in higher art education institutions. We are interested in how we can use self-learning matching algorithms to bridge the gap between art universities and the corporate world across Europe.

In the forthcoming in-depth research report we will look at three other research projects within the sub-themes of Organising & Company Creations by analysing strategy prototyping, and of Entrepreneurship in Contexts with a project on novel



governmental cultural funding strategies and new impact strategies using the example of street protests in Hong Kong.

Zooming in and out on strategy

Through observations, interviews, workshops and conference visits, we have immersed ourselves in the private and creative moments of creative economy actors (zooming in), while quantitative research methods have given us a holistic view of the creative economies (zooming out).

Risky Projects & Uncertainties: In this strand the researchers zoom in on the most intimate and creative moments of a creative process. They explore the work of music producers and their artists in the

studio, where new tracks and albums are created and tomorrow's mainstream is born. Through field observations, interviews and action research approaches – one researcher is actually a member of a researched band – they can answer research strategising questions while improvising.

Value Creation & (E)valuation: For this study the research lab is working with different data sources – public, private, experimental – and distinguishing between a focus on occupations/activities, industries/sectors, and real-time job advertisements, for which we have opened a new source of analysis with the Job Radar.

(Entrepreneurial) Skills: We undertook a comprehensive comparison between selected Zurich University of the Arts courses and the prevailing job

profiles in the Swiss labour market. This comparative analysis was conducted at the skills level and provided valuable insights into the alignment between academic offerings and professional requirements. In collaboration with a software start-up we then began to implement an AI solution, Skill-Matcher, which seamlessly matches the skills outlined in study programme curricula with real-time job postings in the corporate world. In the current phase, we are designing a pioneering non-profit business idea as a European project. This concept aims to promote a dialogue of equals, facilitating cooperation between stakeholders from the creative industries, politics, business, education and society. The envisioned venture aims to create a platform for joint action and cooperation.

Towards strategising: insights from creative economies

When zooming-in across the sub-projects, we have uncovered a nuanced and intricately patterned interplay of strategic activities among actors. Understanding these patterns is crucial at both a detailed, project-specific level and when translated into broader contexts within creative economies.

Risky Projects & Uncertainties: In pop music creation, improvisational techniques continually generate novelty. However, simply creating something new is not enough in art – pop music should be both connectable and distinguishable from other music. During the production process the actors oscillate between mainstream and uniqueness. They circumvent this uncertainty by strategically switching to a “what if” mode to search for new possibilities and perspectives.

Value Creation & (E)valuation: Meaningful discussions on the cultural sector demand indicators that complement existing data. In Switzerland, a strategic and thus sustainable discourse on the income of cultural and creative workers is currently being hindered – either in isolation or as part of an overarching (cultural) policy debate. There is a lack of more robust data on second jobs, voluntary work, atypical forms of employment and freelance

income, as well as sector-specific data on the composition and development of income flows, e.g. by gender. Supplementary online data sources, e.g. from online job advertisements, data from social and digital media platforms, industry associations, collecting societies, etc. must be considered.

(Entrepreneurial) Skills: An analysis of specific Zurich University of the Arts study programmes reveals untapped potential in certain areas that align with overlooked occupational profiles. This presents a dual challenge of effectively evaluating these programmes and placing them with prospective students. The SkillMatcher prototype addresses this by intelligently matching students' skills with diverse job opportunities, even beyond their presumed industries, and suggesting additional beneficial skills for specific roles. Given the fascinating universality of the skills approach to a wide range of industries and cultures across Europe, it could be of great interest to the community of European art universities.

Linking insights back to CIRCE

During the project we realised that we needed to define for whom we are measuring impact and how we do it. Our zooming-in methods help us to describe **impact** on the concrete actions of creative economy actors. Using zooming-out methods, we look backwards at the impact in the creative economies. Claiming that impact does not play a role in the cultural sector is not a solution. Our understanding of **research** in the creative economies implies processes and practices of creation and experimentation, curation and entrepreneurial engagement. Accordingly, we see research as a field of action in the creative economies that enables the description and interpretation of key dynamics, practices, strategies and transformations. CIRCE has taught us to include the great diversity of **Europe(s)** in our research projects. By building projects around skills, it will be possible to develop a broader understanding of diversity. Our project uses skills to empower and connect creative economy actors beyond job titles and roles – and thus contribute to a diverse and resilient sector.



© Ali Zigeli

Claudio Bucher
he / him

Dr. Hanja Blendin
she / her

Prof. Dr. Simon Grand
he / him

Lucienne Gürtner
she / her

Nadia Holdener
she / her

Dr. Samuel Huber
he / him

Roman Page
he / him

Andy Schwendener
he / him

Katrin Stowasser
she / her

Prof. Christoph Weckerle
he / him

Justin Wong
he / him



Tallinn, Garage48

Uncovering the science behind hackathons and understanding how and why hackathons work among a wider audience.



For the past 13 years, Garage48 has organised hackathons and other open-innovation events centred around co-creation globally. We genuinely love hackathons and are passionate about creating an understanding of how and why hackathons work among a wider audience. We also want to educate different stakeholders involved in the process about the actual outcomes of hackathons to bridge the gap between their expectations and reality.

Garage48 is located in Palo Alto Club in Telliskivi Creative City. Palo Alto Club, where most of Garage48's Estonian events are organised, is also home to 15 start-ups and numerous freelancers from various fields.





Hackathons and the pandemic

Hackathons are among the most common places for the birth of innovative ideas and collaboration projects in the creative and cultural industries. During the worldwide COVID-19 lockdown from March 2020, hackathons enjoyed a sudden surge in popularity and became known to a wider audience. Garage48 was one the first to respond to the pandemic's challenges by organising the first #hackthecrisis event in Estonia. Several countries followed our lead and organised independent nationwide hackathons to react to the COVID-19 outbreak. In all, the 58 #hackthecrisis events run in 53 countries from March to July 2020 attracted more than 100,000 participants. This movement marked the start of the hackathon's transformation to the virtual realm – and the growing popularity of online hackathons was a positive side effect of a global pandemic.

As hackathons continue to ride the wave of popularity, they are often viewed through the lens of numbers: participants, teams, ideas, solutions and funding raised. These expectations are misaligned with reality. The magic of the hackathon goes way beyond the data and what is visible. Simply organising hackathons to get more start-ups with groundbreaking ideas or new innovative solutions to complex challenges is insufficient.

We certainly like to celebrate the successes of the start-ups that have grown out of the hackathons. We have had a few of these over the years, but Garage48 is not a start-up factory. 2-3% of successful businesses from our teams are by-products. We know that developing a business takes much longer than building a prototype over the weekend. Most participants join hackathons to boost their skills, expand their networks and efficiently test their ideas in a safe and creative environment among like-minded peers and experts from various fields.

Uncovering the science behind hackathons

CIRCE opened a rare door for collaboration between Garage48 and seasoned researchers and their students from Tartu University and Copenhagen University. Our research lab wants to uncover the science behind hackathons, identify their unique qualities and identify best practice guidelines for organising a successful hackathon.

We are going about our research in the spirit of hackathons – learning through testing and experimenting. To gain deeper insights into how hackathons function, we are concentrating on analysing their collaborative aspects and employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Collaboration and co-creation are core elements of hackathons, and our research aims to shed light on how we can enhance collaboration in both work and education settings. Our current understanding of how small groups work together during hackathons is mainly based on observations, interviews and surveys. That offers only a limited view of these dynamic events. But scaling up to cover numerous groups has proved challenging. In addition, relying on individual perceptions raises significant concerns about interpretation bias and potentially leads to skewed results that do not accurately represent participant behaviour across different phases of an event.

Our research aims to gain a new understanding of how people collaborate in hackathons by combining qualitative methods with new quantitative tools. We used Internet of Things technology that allows real-time or near-real-time tracking of participant activities across varying modalities to develop the mBox system. This system captures human interactions, such as people's movements around the hackathon space, who they work with and conversations patterns. mBox is built around smart badges that people wear and uses the appropriate technology to recognise other people's badges and capture with whom and where people spend time working. It also tracks conversation patterns, such as the amount of time people speak. The badges do not invade personal privacy; they analyse patterns, not individuals. The re-



search part of our lab work is led by Associate Professor Alexander Nolte from Tartu University. The technology was developed by Associate Professor Daniel Spikol and his team of researchers from Copenhagen University.

Kick-off at Empowering Women Ukraine hackathon

After months of hard work, onboarding the research team, preparing the technology and getting the research study approved by Tartu University's

© Andrei Ozdoba





Ethics Committee, we were finally ready to kick things off during the Empowering Women Ukraine hackathon on September 9–10. Garage48 has been organising this programme since 2019. The programme initially supported women in eastern Ukraine who were affected by the Donbas conflict. It then grew into a fully online digitalisation support programme, reaching internally displaced women across central and eastern Ukraine who were in vulnerable situations due to the ongoing war. The event took place at Garage48’s headquarters in Palo Alto Club in Tallinn’s Telliskivi Creative City. All the participants were free to either participate in the research or not. The Ukrainian research

team members, Kateryna and Viktoriia, were there to observe the Ukrainian or Russian-speaking teams and were invaluable in engaging people with the research and collecting consent forms. A total of 35 individuals in four teams took part in the research. Two of the teams were Russian/Ukrainian-speaking, one English-speaking and one English/Russian-speaking. In view of the language barriers, the researchers were divided into teams according to their language skills. The mentors and the event management team supported the research work throughout the event.

Key findings

Since the event took place just a few weeks ago, we have not yet had time to conduct a full analysis of the collected data and put our findings in a paper. We have, however, managed to gather some overall insights. Some of the key findings are detailed below.

- The innumerable details involved in organising successful open innovation events often remain unnoticed even by more experienced hackathon organisers, but they can be determined through external observation. The details may seem to be of minor importance but they can significantly influence a participant’s hackathon experience. This realisation confirmed the need for Hackathon Organisers’ Guidelines that would collect and share these findings publicly.
- Language barriers during a physical event can interrupt the teamwork dynamics and mentoring flow. If a team cannot communicate with each other, they will need a translator who will help them throughout the event. Otherwise, the work might stop entirely when the mentor is not present.
- Participants like to be in the middle of the buzz. During the hackathon, there were phases where participants split into smaller groups and worked independently. The participants whose working stations were not in the main area mentioned that they felt isolated and missed out on collaborating seamlessly with other teams.
- The physical setup of the venue is often more

important than we had estimated. The room needs to be large and open, with some secluded options available if needed. The best tables for teamwork are round, and chairs should have a swivelling function to allow the participants to communicate with each other more freely.

- Mentors serve as the organisers’ ears on the ground. They are not only important in guiding the participants but also act as an important communication channel between organisers and participants.
- The mBox system, a multi-modal analytics toolkit, provided a proof of concept for quantitative research on collaboration. By enabling close to real-time support for the organisers through wearable technologies (smart badges) that allow for alert mechanisms for potential team disruptions, the system is a transformative solution for enhancing organisational activities. Furthermore, the insights gained from data analysis are poised to enrich our understanding of the mechanisms that drive the success of hackathons. They will also lay the groundwork for more informed and effective future iterations of these events.

Looking ahead

We have many exciting things ahead of us as a CIRCE Research Lab. The first crucial step is to finish analysing all the data gathered during the hackathon. The data came from multiple sources, including the information collected through badges, observations and post-hack interviews. We anticipate uncovering more detailed insights and fascinating patterns that align with our mission of educating a broader audience about the fundamental mechanics behind successful hackathons. We have submitted a research paper about the technology and how it was developed and evaluated for the Learning Analytics and Knowledge 2024 conference: <https://www.solaresearch.org/events/lak/lak24/>.

Research continues on the development of the mBox system while continuing to analyse the data collected from the research team. We are

putting together the data from the system and the observation team to look for patterns of how people collaborate. Our understanding of how people creatively collaborate will be enhanced by this research and enable an improved organisation and experience of these events. In November 2023, we are hosting our annual Hack the Hack Vol 3 workshop for hackathon organisers and researchers. This year’s workshop will be held in Geneva and welcome hackathon enthusiasts worldwide. The insights gathered from our research findings, combined with the collective knowledge and best practices shared at Hack the Hack Vol 3 will be consolidated into the Hackathon Organisers’ Guidelines, a publicly accessible resource that will be updated regularly.

Last but not least, we are happy to share the great news that Alexander Nolte and his Tartu University team have received funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (USA) to study the sociotechnical preparations for and execution of hybrid hackathons. We expect the insights gained from this work to further enhance the participation possibilities in hackathons.

Mari Hanikat
she / her

Kadri Tiisvelt
she / her

Assoc.Prof.Dr. Alexander Nolte
he / him

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Spikol
he / him

Karl Rapur
he / him



Tabakalera, San Sebastián

Scientific and technological research centres in Basque Region see benefits of working with creatives and new professional opportunities arising from collaboration.



© Tabakalera

Tabakalera is an arts centre in a former tobacco factory in San Sebastián, Spain. It is open to a wide and diverse audience and welcomes 700,000 visitors a year, who enjoy access to a rich cultural programme. At the same time, it is also a centre for artistic production with internationally renowned residency programmes and a media lab. The centre already acts as a dynamic interface between artistic creation and a wide and diverse audience. We decided to start collaborating with the scientific and technological research centres in our region in order to engage other forms of knowledge and collaboration.

We already see ourselves as a lab. That is why we thought we could also act as a lab for the CIRCE initiative to research new forms of collaboration between creatives and scientists in order to catalyse a potential that can help tackle the major challenges of our time, while creating new opportunities for the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). At Tabakalera we believe that artists can and should play a crucial role in generating knowledge and innovation, not least in science and technology. In the face of today's increasingly complex challenges, responses must include diverse voices, such as those of artists and civil society or communities. An arts centre can act as a platform to boost new forms of collaboration to make that possible. Tabakalera already had some experience in curating experimental collaborations, and we built on that to launch our research as a CIRCE lab.



Engaging with techno-scientific researchers

Before this project began, we were already a meeting point for artists and communities interested in societal innovation. Given the rich network of research centres in our region, we saw the potential to engage top-level techno-scientific researchers as well. What if we successfully launch collaborations between techno-scientific research centres, creatives and engaged citizens to together address key questions relating to the influence of technology in our lives, and to sustainability and care?

Could such collaborations generate insights and innovations valuable enough for the techno-scientific sector to be motivated to engage in similar projects in the future?

If successful, this would give artists and communities new access to resources, cutting-edge knowledge and technology, as well as empowering and enabling them. Moreover, it would create new professional opportunities for creatives, cultural managers and curators to carry out collaborative projects. Finally, it would create awareness for the relevance of the participation of society and creatives in dealing with seemingly technological challenges.



Collaborative research and creative process

We set about this task by using a facilitation and translation methodology that safeguards each participant's role and launches a collaborative research and creative process led by an artist. The outcome is an art installation for a wider public that offers insights on the challenges addressed. Being a CIRCE Lab gave us the resources, network and framework to engage relevant partners and start an intensive 11-month process to test the methodology and find answers to the above-mentioned questions. The large exhibition at the end of the process has brought together all the insights and is accompanied by a video documentation featuring interviews and a making-of, as well as by a wide public programme.

Co-development of four art installations

We invited four research centres to develop with us an artistic and research project that would result in an art installation. Each of the four projects would be a case study, in which an interdisciplinary team (creative/artistic and scientific/technological) would work on a socially relevant topic. The case studies also served to test our hypotheses about the benefits of collaborations and to gain insights into the methodologies and skills necessary to make collaborations successful.

In the first few months of 2023, we worked with the scientists to identify topics that fulfilled three criteria: being of scientific interest, showing artistic potential, and being socially and politically relevant. Most of the topics selected engaged critically with technology, care and sustainability. After the selection process, we identified artists to launch the research and concept phase hand in hand with the scientists and us. The research process led to the concept for an art installation. Here are some examples of our case studies:

The Basque Culinary Center proposed taking the omnipresence of sugar and people's addiction



to it as the problem and stimulating different senses as a way of reducing sugar consumption. We invited the artist Elsa Yranzo to develop the very suggestive "Sugar Detox" installation together with researchers and chefs.

Tekniker, a technological research centre for advanced manufacturing, was interested in inclusive robotics, in design for everyone, and in human-robot interaction in the context of functional diversity. We invited artist Amaia Vicente, who, motivated by her own MS condition, had worked with exoskeletons before. She turned into the leader of an ambitious project engaging engineers, researchers, exoskeleton manufacturers and a science-fiction expert who rethinks the boundaries of body, mind and machine. Once the concept and the elements of the installation were defined,



we opened a call to invite makers and citizens engaged in societal innovation to work on partial solutions to the projects. In our Summer Sessions in August 2023, we brought them together with the engineers, artists and researchers involved in the respective projects.

The Donostia International Physics Centre (DIPC) was concerned about the ecological implications of massive-scale data production and storage. We invited the artist Marina Otero to work with Txomin Romero, who heads the DIPC Supercomputing Centre. The installation shows footage of data storage in endangered ecosystems and proposes ideas for sustainably using the heat generated by these facilities. The makers' community developed a vermi-composter powered by the heat generated by data calculations to rapidly ferment food waste from Tabakalera's restaurant and turn it into nutrients for their vegetable garden.

During summer 2023, the artists worked on the formal development to turn the respective concept into an art installation. The exhibition's curator supported this production process and worked to guarantee the quality and consistency of the work. A film team documented the concept and production processes. The videos will be part of the exhibition and help to further disseminate

the project. November 2023 is the opening date of a large-scale exhibition showcasing the four art installations resulting from each case study, including documentation, mediation and a public programme. This is the opportunity to share the topics with a wide audience and to engage them in discussions.

What did we learn?

The process confirmed our initial hypothesis that an arts centre can be a platform to boost unusual and innovative collaborative projects. The partnering non-cultural institutions have agreed to continue to participate in creative projects in future. Participating artists and civil society actors also made a very positive evaluation of the projects. By the end of the project, the techno-scientific networks in our region were more open and aware of the benefits of working with creatives and the new professional opportunities that can arise from collaboration.

- The process is the key, as most of the relevant questions, knowledge and impacts are not incorporated in the final outcome, but generated

as the project unfolds. The role of the facilitator is therefore crucial.

- Clarifying roles and expectations is a fundamental condition for making collaboration and co-creation work.
- The arts centre – or, in future, cultural managers or curators – acts as a mediator and facilitator.
- The techno-scientific partner identifies topics, engages in the process through personnel and resources, and gives the artists access to its knowledge and technology.
- The artist has to translate a scientifically, technologically and socially relevant topic into the core of an artwork and develop it in conversation with the partners. The artist is the leader and has artistic autonomy but needs to have specific skills in order to elaborate complex scientific and technological topics and work in an interdisciplinary team.
- The relationship between the creative and scientific/technological partners is based on an equal exchange of knowledge under the leadership of the artist, who is the owner of the final work. It is not a sponsorship relationship nor one of arts patronage, and the artist is not there to find formal solutions but to open up new questions and insights.
- This approach brings research centres new insights and opens up new perspectives on topics of concern to them, while also bringing new working methods, disruptive thinking, innovation and creativity into their teams. Furthermore, collaboration introduces a new public dimension as the process culminates in an exhibition in an arts centre.
- Thanks to this positive evaluation, the research centres are open to continuing the collaboration, which means the following for the cultural and creative industries (CCIs):
- Artists get new commissions and access to cutting-edge expertise and technology and can work on the frontline of knowledge production and innovation. Creatives, curators and cultural managers are needed to carry out the projects. Within the CCI, a new funding model has been established, which can help reduce dependency on public arts' funding and contribute to more sustainability.

European dimension and CIRCE principles

In a changing world marked by rapid technological advances and ecological challenges, the inclusion of artists and societal innovation in innovation processes is crucial. Complex challenges need to be approached from different perspectives, and artists should be present wherever knowledge and futures are generated. To make this possible, creative impact – at the core of CIRCE – needs to be given more space in European policies, not only in cultural policies, but also in adjacent fields, e.g. by reinforcing and facilitating a creative, humanistic and participatory dimension in the Horizon research funding schemes, especially those focused on sustainability and technology. Besides, the participation and inclusion of creatives to address techno-ecological challenges also resonate with the principles of the New European Bauhaus: Beautiful/ Sustainable/Together.

Creating frameworks of collaboration, sharing governance with artistic and societal actors, and enabling diverse voices and communities not only contribute to the sustainability of the CCIs; they also create a Europe more aligned with its core principles.

Clara Montero
she / her

Arkaitz Olea
he / him

Ibai Zabaleta
he / him

Ane Agirre
she / her

© Tabakalera



Research Lab Berlin

A platform to explore how administrative structures can support creative enterprises more efficiently.



© Gerngross Glowinski

Research Lab Berlin is part of u-institut, an agency dedicated to strengthening the creative economies (CE) and their potential for shaping the future of politics, economy, culture and society in Germany. As a platform institution, we bring together engaged practitioners, institutions and policy-makers. Hosting Research Lab Berlin complements u-institut's overarching role as initiator and organiser of CIRCE.

Research Lab Berlin is interested in CE governance structures. Our focus is on transformative governance. We aim to understand what structural changes are needed to support impact-orientated people in creative ecosystems in a better and more inclusive way. By building up on observations u-institut has made from working in this field for many years and setting up CIRCE, the Lab hosts three research projects carried out by partners with specialised expertise to suggest evidence-based recommendations in answering this question.



How can administrative structures support creative enterprises?

Research undertaken at Research Lab Berlin explores how administrative structures can support creative enterprises more efficiently so that they can unlock their unique potential to address pressing contemporary challenges. As societies face significant ecological, political and social challenges, public policies should encourage and prioritise contributions to ecological, social and economic sustainability. Creative economies play a leading role in crafting innovative solutions and generating ideas. Moreover, they often collaborate with other sectors and employ specialised methodologies such as prototyping, storytelling, design thinking and speculative/future design. As creatives help to navigate new meanings and envision alternative futures, particularly during crises, this sector is of central importance for transformative processes. Public governance structures and administrative procedures are crucial in supporting creative impact. That is why one of the biggest challenges in creative economies is the need to transform fund-

ing and governance structures in the creative ecosystem to become more just, fitting and effective.

For the past decade, u-institut's work has focused on bridging the gap between CE policy, administration and practitioners. Adapting governance structures and the administrative framework remains an ongoing task. Further efforts are needed to account for the heterogeneous and interdisciplinary nature of the sector and to ensure better and fairer access to support and funding of a sector mainly composed of freelancers and micro-businesses. Against this background, Research Lab Berlin has placed the idea of transformative governance at the heart of its activities. We explore how political and administrative structures can better support individuals, businesses and other organisations within the creative ecosystem, especially those whose primary aim is to contribute to society, the environment and the economy. That involves re-evaluating political and administrative strategies, competencies and structures to address ever-changing circumstances and contexts, and to provide space for experimentation and continuous learning.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are essential considerations in examining this transformation. Structural barriers and unequal representation in design and governance processes often fail to consider diverse and marginalised viewpoints, leading to insufficient or inadequate outcomes. When elaborating more inclusive governance structures, it is imperative to actively address and dismantle structural discrimination and provide a safer platform to involve the entire spectrum of the population. That is why Research Lab Berlin decided to specifically address how more inclusive CE governance could function.

Exploring the relationship between CE and administrative structures

As an institution experienced in close collaboration with practitioners, we invited three institutions with expertise in scholarly and/or artistic research and experience with public sector innovation pro-

jects to generate insights that test and expand our initial observations. These research initiatives focus on exclusion mechanisms in accessing funding, the development of equitable cultural policies and the transformative potential of collective imagination practices. A central aspect of these collaborations is the practical orientation of our research efforts. All three projects have embraced this approach while using different qualitative research practices, relying on knowledge from lived experiences and including interactive components such as future design or design thinking workshops. The lab work produces actionable findings geared towards informing policymakers and decision-makers to provide specific recommendations for action. As interdisciplinary collaboration is at the core of Research Lab Berlin's methodology, we emphasise the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders from the creative economies, administration/decision-makers and DEI experts. This approach aims to design an inclusive, participatory and effective process. In this context, u-institut has actively sought partners who apply such an interdisciplinary approach themselves. These partners are:

• Oyoun

Reimagining the role of intermediary organisations centring on care and trust: Oyoun is an anti-disciplinary critical cultural collective for unconventional and innovative artistic and cultural approaches, practices and productions. The project team consists of eleven members with plural academic, practical and lived experiences. With the lab project "Imagination as a cultural right", Oyoun aims to develop recommendations for decision-makers to make (public) structures of cultural policy and administration more equitable. Based on their own CE experiences, community work and confrontations with public administrative structures, the focus is on further analysis of participatory funding approaches, transparent knowledge transfer and empowerment. Oyoun works in an interdisciplinary way and cooperates with stakeholders at various levels to explore alternative models and transformative solutions through prototyping, speculative design and storytelling.

Oyoun

More ↗

Nina Martin
any pronoun

Louna Sbou
she / they

Sophia Schmidt
any pronoun

Dami Choi
she / they

Madhumita Nandi
she / they

Ihisa Adelio
she / her

Lara Chahal
she / her

Nora Roho
she / her

Mithra Nezhad
she / her

Tariq Bajwa
he / him

Gregor Dühr
he / him

© William Veder



• Metaplan

Exploring the influence of intermediary organisations in the promotion of CE: Metaplan is an organisation combining research with consulting for public administration. Their expertise lies in dealing with issues specific to administrations, especially in the fields of transformation and innovation. Their lab project explores organisational exclusion mechanisms in the promotion of CE. From an organisational sociological perspective, they try to identify mechanisms that produce exclusion as well as levers to reduce discrimination. A particular focus is on intermediary organisations that act as interfaces between funding providers and funding recipients and not only take on coordinating functions for projects, but also play an active role in shaping them.

Metaplan Gesellschaft
für Verwaltungs-
innovation

More ↗

Dr. Judith Muster
she / her

Alexander Heindl
he / him

Bernd Eckstein
he / him

Mascha Nolte
she / her

Celine Geckil
she / her

• Urban Heat Studio

Exploring governance decision-making through narrative and experiential approaches: Urban Heat Studio is a collective for transformative climate resilience and collective imagination. This interdisciplinary research team brings together experience in climate adaptation, collective imagination and experiential futures, as well as in innovation and change processes in local government, non-profits and social innovators. With their design research project HeatCon – a half-real, half-fictional conference and a gathering for climate practitioners, policy makers and creatives to embody wildly resilient futures – they explore how narrative and experiential approaches such as experiential futures and climate fiction can support exploration and decision-making on climate adaptation and resilience as well as expanding the collective imagination of what is considered possible in becoming more climate-resilient in Europe. The results are gathered in a toolkit for policymakers to help bridge the temporal gap, engage and align diverse stakeholders, and advance a collective imagination practice.

Initial insights

Linking back to the overall CIRCE questions, our preliminary insights can confirm some aspects. Creative economies have a relevant part to play in exploring better futures and involving decision-makers in establishing new collaborative processes. Their significant role also requires fairer, more accessible and hands-on-focused governance frameworks. The research conducted by Metaplan indicates the essential role of intermediary organisations that serve as links between state or regional institutions, CE practitioners and civil society. These entities act as crucial mediators but also hold significant potential for experimenting with new funding mechanisms and providing opportunities for communities that might otherwise lack access to support structures. When looking at these entities in the context of cultural policy and funding, Oyoun's research shows how a common understanding of trust and care play an essential role in the relationship between funders and fundees.

One aspect all project participants and experts repeatedly mentioned throughout the project is a need for experimental space for policymakers. Urban Heat Studio's methodology delivers insights into the use of fiction as a creative approach to providing that space. Using fiction and immersion in experiential futures has the potential for exploring uncertainties and informing decision-making within policy spaces on top of communicating towards civil society and creating new ideas and measures – for policymakers and practitioners alike.

Derived from these initial insights, one central hypothesis of Research Lab Berlin regarding levers for transformative governance surrounding the creative ecosystem lies in the configuration and utilisation of the “between”: bridging gaps and translating and opening space between top-down public policy and bottom-up community-based approaches between policy professionals, community organisers and practitioners on the one hand and imagination and daily-business constraints on the other.

Urban Heat Studio More ↗

Juli Sikorska
she / her

Francesca Desmarais
she / her

Jelka Wickham
she / her

Franziska Lindner
she / her

Rishikesh Tirumala
he / they

Peca Ştefan
she / her

Janna Jung-Irrgang
she / her

Dr. Stuart Candy
he / they

© Gerngross Glowinski



u-institut More ↗

Charline Munzer
she / her

Katharina Schumacher
she / her



City, University of London

Embedding research expertise in cultural sociology, economic geography, gender studies, media and communications and the broader humanities within the natural laboratory of London's cultural ecosystem.



© Ikin Yum

The London Cultural Diversity Lab is based in the Centre for Culture and the Creative Industries (CCCI) at City, University of London. City is a practitioner-facing university in the creative heart of Islington with a 130-year history of educating for the professions. The CIRCE project offered an opportunity to consolidate and build on work that members of the CCCI had already undertaken: in the UK, with the likes of Department of Culture, Media and Sport, local cultural development offices and diasporic communities, or national trade bodies; abroad, with UNESCO, the British Council, and organisations in India and West Africa. As a CIRCE lab, we sought to embed our combined research expertise – drawing from cultural sociology, economic geography, gender studies, media and communications and the broader humanities – within the natural laboratory of London's cultural ecosystem.

The task the Cultural Diversity Lab set itself was to interrogate how rising attention to questions of diversity relates to the compounding social and economic crises of recent times. A challenge and opportunity here was to unpack a deceptively simple, everyday term describing a hugely complex topic – both in scholarly and policy literature and at the level of practice. Multiple crises have drawn attention to this interlocking complexity. Yet, the resilience of London's creative ecosystem is a delicate balance that cannot be simply assumed. Polycrisis requires the active protection and promotion of cultural polydiversity: a plurality of diversities – not just demographic representation or marketable products but strategic approaches, collaborative spaces and economic models.





Problem

Since the late 1990s, the UK has been fêted as a creative economy success: jobs, regeneration and place-making combining in an apparently positive feedback loop. Since the 2008 financial crisis, the sector has experienced successive challenges: an extended period of public spending reduction; the impact of the country's exit from the EU; a pandemic; and ongoing global disruptions. Despite the shocks of austerity, Brexit, Covid 19, etc. (ABC+), creative industries continue to be placed at the centre of a national 2030 vision to revitalise growth, work, wellbeing, international influence and green transition.

Underpinning this so-called resilience is London's position as a global city and node of global migration. Population flux has gifted the capital with a seemingly unending stream of new knowledges, ideas and trends, facilitating an innovative mix of ideas and a relatively safe space for experimentation. Yet this growth has often been at the cost of fundamental social inequalities. The past decade has seen growing recognition that those who work in the sector do not reflect the wider populace – neither in what gets seen, read, heard or performed nor in who gets funded, employed or

promoted. Besides intrinsic injustices, persistent structural imbalances restrict the very creativity that such industries depend on. This apparent paradox lies behind the rise in diversity rhetoric in popular discourse, organisational strategy and public policy.

Within this critical conjuncture, our concern was to explore what, if any, relationships exist between the rhetoric and practice of diversity and the experience of compounding ABC+ crises within London's cultural production ecosystem; and to consider what lessons policymakers might learn from this particular example for supporting the resilience and impact of cultural ecosystems elsewhere and amid other crisis conditions.

Process

Our approach was primarily synthetic, aiming to assemble and triangulate multiple information sources, generating dialogue and conceptual innovation that could potentially inform better governance in this arena. After reviewing existing scholarly literature, we assembled a corpus of industry/policy reporting and other formal diversity inter-

ventions in the UK's cultural and creative industries in recent years and identified around 80 such documents since 2015. Checking this against the evolving reality of life on the ground in London in 2023, we supplemented this literature search with small-scale exploratory qualitative research with around 40-50 key practitioners and informants working in this field. We also held two workshop events, leveraging existing networks to gather academics, practitioners and other experts to discuss the issues at stake. Organising this wealth of information, we identified five core themes addressing the diversity of diversities: the creative workforce; organisational form; spatial distribution; cultural representation; and transversal policy.

A central aim of CIRCE is to retain and develop links between UK/EU creative economy expertise, building awareness and potential pathways to exchange and collaboration. Assembled from CCCI academics, the lab drew from existing creative community, industry, academic and policy stakeholder links from the UK and elsewhere. Far from an incidental aspect of lab setup and structure, the nurture of interpersonal relationships and development of focused spaces for interaction and exchange became increasingly key. The centrality of active (often invisible or overlooked) intervention and administration applies not only in the context of Brexit but as a particular feature of the diverse knowledges and practices that define the creative economy, especially given the considerable uncertainty in the academic labour market faced by emerging researchers. This equally speaks to the mundane challenges of connecting the informal world of short-term project working by freelancers, micro-businesses and loose-knit collectives to the very structured formality and lengthy timescales of the university – both in terms of building trust and aligning goals as well as processing contracts and payments.

Analysis

In the 2010s, creative careers – once seen as a model of good work – were placed under huge pressure by ABC+ crises: efficiency savings in lo-

cal cultural provision driving income diversification and a proliferation of ROI accounting; existential uncertainties and divisions over national and regional identities; live performances shut down amid a growing digital platform economy while support packages failed to reach non-standard workers on multiple short-term contracts.

Such trends intensified the gulf between large organisations with multiple funding sources and small, nimble, often volunteer-led enterprises. They revealed how resilience is contingent on hidden unpaid labour and irregular income, debarring access to health insurance, sick pay and maternity leave, as well as credit, loans and mortgages. This favours the young, the wealthy and the able-bodied with available free time, pre-existing financial resources and access to social networks, disadvantaging those with caring responsibilities and who are not already on the inside.



© Ikin Yum



As such, the sector has been a fertile testing ground for diversity interventions and considerable research and reporting, particularly since the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. This has fuelled the demand for consultancy that combines expert advice and training with expertise in creative fields. These initiatives suggest that existing inequalities are now being acknowledged and addressed. Yet experiences of overload and burnout are common as such efforts to address systemic inequities fall on overburdened and often already-marginalised individuals.

Demands for income diversification feed an extremely competitive funding landscape. Contractual compliance – where recipients must meet diversity and social impact targets, for instance – is now a key mechanism of governing culture; equally, such bureaucratic requisites can deter non-traditional applicants. Interest in alternative models of organisation, ownership and governance has also grown. Social enterprises such as

worker cooperatives and community interest companies (CICs) or blockchain-driven decentralized autonomous organisations (DAOs) emphasise a participatory community beyond employees and customers, bound by common purpose. Again, the considerable volunteer labour needed here does little to shift a demographic monoculture. Such issues are exacerbated by the substantial living costs of London, motivating efforts to rebalance or level up regional inequities through high-profile relocations (BBC, English National Opera) or commercial investments (EMI North). Within London, one innovation since 2018 has been the Creative Enterprise Zones (CEZs) – local coalitions of creatives, businesses, residents and property developers bidding to lead affordable, community-engaged development efforts, with secure housing, co-working space and funding. These often uneasy partnerships are positioned as an answer to gentrification and displacement – with some success, although this remains tricky territory.



© Ikin Yum

Finally, tensions remain between the quantity and quality of visibility. Some underrepresented communities have become hyper-visible in recent years (e.g. on-screen) and the UK’s relatively fine-grained data collection regime monitors a range of hybrid categories (e.g. Black-British). Yet much nuance – the diversity within diversity – still remains obscure. Government agencies recently abandoned the acronym BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) for this reason; another – (B)ESEA (British/East and South East Asian) – has enabled a crucial collective voice to emerge in return, particularly given anti-Asian violence prompted by Covid-19 – one equally debated as a term of measurement. The quality of understanding prompted by such terms matters more than correct accounting.

Implications

Creative impact often appears in policy prescriptions: “add creativity to increase X” (X = growth, employment, tourism, wellbeing, social cohesion, etc.). We see impact in a bidirectional, not linear, mechanical way, but impacts on the underlying ecosystem must not be overlooked. A key implication simply concerns first the recognition and then the governance of an open cultural and creative sector in and for itself – albeit one which is irreducibly diverse, hybrid and dynamic. There is much to learn from the UK experience in terms of joined-up policy experimentation, demanding institutional work to mediate and translate between multiple government departments, industry actors and civil society across spatial scales. But tying the centrality of cultural value to a concerted industrial strategy, together with the underlying importance of social infrastructure, is an ongoing task to embed policy innovation within a national, cultural and institutional context.

Prof. Andy Pratt
he / him

Dr. Anubha Sarkar
she / her

Dr. Diana Yeh
she / her

Hannah Curran-Troop
she / her

Dr. Jenny Mbaye
she / her

Dr. Paromita Saha
she / her

Si Long Chan
they / them

Dr. Toby Bennett
he / him

Xanthia Mavraki
she / her



The Fellowship Programme gathered twenty scholars and twenty creatives from the cultural and creative economies from all over Europe, with a particular focus on post-Brexit exchanges with young experts from the UK.

Each of the Fellows pursued a research project on creative impact and related questions of policy making. The Fellowship Programme supported people who, despite the multiple crises of our time, are working towards a just, inclusive, diverse, sustainable and crisis-resistant future as well as actively reimagining and reshaping it using the tools and potential of the cultural and creative economies. Moreover, it was designed as a platform for the concerns and visions of new creative professionals under the age of 35.

With a wide range of voices and perspectives, the Fellows have highlighted, questioned and reshaped the innovative power of the creative economies. From over 300 submitted concepts, 20 young academics and 20 young entrepreneurs and creative professionals were selected as Fellows. During a six-month period, they explored and researched their topics, with a focus on scientific research or the development of creative products or services. The fellowship included both financial support and a mentoring programme with experts from the Research Labs. In this chapter, you will learn more about the variety of topics they dealt with.



The Fellowship Programme

Creative Fellow 

arjunraj

no pronouns / arjunraj

Technologies for empowerment and participation

Education, skill development and matching


Decolonial Filmmaking Methodology

I have been imagining how to create stories that hold the many singularities of our diverse lived realities by fracturing the colonial dichotomous psyche. Decolonial filmmaking aims to transform storytelling and filmmaking methods by looking at how technologies of othering and stories of violence are passed on to us intergenerationally. It urges acknowledgment of the internalised violence caused by historical traumas by shifting the focus on to the body and the many stories it holds. This methodology has been concurrently evolving during the development of my film "Liminality", a docufiction feature that intertwines my search and my sister's quest to break the chain of intergenerational pain by collectively imagining a mystical land in which we meet trans*gender individuals from Germany who find solace from pain by being liminal. Recognising the profound stresses of othering, decolonial filmmaking employs tenderness, humour and collective imagination to explore embodied traumas and triumphs, thus paving way for mutual healing. The methodology values oral narratives from stories of communities living on the margins to ensure true collaboration between storytellers and collaborators. This approach, exemplified by the practice of Körperkino – a concept describing the expansive feeling of telling the story carried in our bodies by sharing it with someone and finding a moment of mutuality – foregrounds critical reflection, conscious creation and long-term transformation. This paves the way for an interconnected understanding of human existence and explores how to hold together the pluri-complexity of the human condition.



As a filmmaker, audio-visual artist and pedagogist I am on a long-term journey studying the profound impacts of the intergenerational stories that are passed on to us. Using collaborative storytelling methods I am making films, multimedia art and thought models that make one feel, not just think, about how to overcome interpersonal barriers to transform our behaviours towards mutual acceptance.

[More ↗](#)

Creative Fellow 

Katja Blazheichuk

she / her

Community-driven impact

Ukraine In Colour

Ukraine In Colour aims to revitalise Ukrainian heritage through vintage photo colourisation and foster a global community of artists, historians and enthusiasts. Ukrainians are striving to reclaim their history and illuminate past cultural achievements erased or misappropriated by imperialists through exclusive historical visual materials and storytelling. This platform aims to uncover treasures, celebrate diversity, challenge stereotypes, combat disinformation, showcase Ukrainian contributions, foster knowledge sharing, support global research and tech solutions, revive cultural memory and empower cultural catalysts. Ukraine In Colour bridges cultures to create a global community gallery, promoting self-acceptance, reframing migration as an advantage and fostering culture creators. Launched in August 2023, we are preparing for a full release with "1000 stories" campaigns to empower communities to decolonize, resurrect history, challenge coloniser labels and showcase global contributions. This platform recognises cultural actors with migration backgrounds, demonstrates culture's transfer, fosters dialogue through events and cultivates communities through cultural awareness. Ukraine In Colour celebrates culture's resilience, art's power and human diversity, thus inspiring global citizens to use technology to share heritage and forge connections across time and space.



I am a cultural manager and activist involved in projects in Kyiv and Berlin. My work centres on cultural diplomacy, mobility and community development. My projects include the Sanatoria conference, the eco-activist festival Station Kyrylivska, the artist residency Rubacava in Kyiv, the Ukrainian Culture Station and the Ukrainian Sound Garden with Vitsche Berlin.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Anjana Shakeela Natarajan, right: Sinopa



Creative Fellow 

Sergej Bogatinoski

he / him

Education, skill development and matching



SkillGenius

My project aimed to revamp the traditional job-matching paradigms within cultural and creative economies (CCE) through advanced AI. This addressed the inadequacies of existing platforms by focusing on nuanced skill-job matching instead of broad categories or titles. The purpose was to craft a more inclusive, effective and personalised job-matching platform. Utilising the extensive ESCO dataset, AI-driven semantic search systems were developed, employing advanced AI models along with a hybrid search system to facilitate meaningful matches between diverse job roles and skill sets. Despite the significant data and multilingual challenges, meticulous data cleaning, quality assessment and linguistic optimisation enhanced the model accuracy and reliability. Emphasis was placed on ethical compliance, user privacy and transparent algorithmic decision-making.

The project unveiled the importance of high-quality data and user-centric design, emphasising the language and context for precise job matches, and tackled multilingual challenges to mitigate linguistic bias. It highlighted how technological innovation in skill-job matching can foster societal well-being and economic growth, with implications across various sectors, such as education and HR. Future work may expand on the efficacy of semantic search in diverse domains, tackle algorithmic bias and explore new datasets and markets.

I am a computer science and engineering student with a focus on artificial intelligence (AI). My journey with the CIRCE project was motivated by my goal to make AI simple and beneficial for everyone in their daily lives. Within the CIRCE set-up, I was able to explore and develop practical AI solutions to real-world problems, gaining invaluable insights and knowledge along the way.

[More ↗](#)

Creative Fellow 

Esther Lenda Bokuma

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Transformative governance



Embodying Liberation – for Black Artists in Britain

In October 2021, Black Lives in Music (BLiM) published the results of the largest survey ever conducted of Black British musicians and music industry professionals in the UK. The BLiM report revealed that 63% of Black music creators have experienced direct or indirect racism in the music industry and 71% racial microaggressions. 31% of Black music creators believe their mental wellbeing has worsened since starting their music career, rising to 42% of Black women. 38% of Black music professionals earn all their income from music compared to 69% of white music professionals.

This data accurately expresses my own lived experience as a Black British female musician. This influenced my activism and desire to collaborate with UK-based organisations like BLiM to tackle these issues through my artist profile.

In my CIRCE project I launched BLU WAV as a new platform focusing on artistic and holistic wellbeing for musicians. While BLU WAV is open to all artists, I created an exclusive series for Black musicians and professionals entitled The Embodying Liberation Series. This was a community intervention in collaboration with four practitioners in the holistic, spiritual, artistic and psychology sectors. The workshops and the meaningful conversations I had with peers formed a part of my ongoing research into the mental health, wellbeing and working conditions of Black artists.

I am a singer, writer and founder of BLU WAV artist wellbeing from London, UK. I grew up singing in church with R&B, jazz and Afro-fusion music as my main influences. Since 2015, I have been supported by Help Musicians, AfroPunk, the MOBO Awards and Camden Roundhouse. I sit on various executive boards promoting equality. In 2022, I was nominated as a Music Week Rising Star.

[More ↗](#)

© links: Mihaela Pavleska, right: Shakira Palmer



Creative Fellow 

Manik Chander

she / her / they

Community-driven impact



We Do We Serve our Communities Better?

In 2019, my co-founder Melisa and I took a leap of faith and self-published our first book, “Mama Superstar”, which swiftly became a bestseller. The book celebrates the stories of 11 migrant mamas from the perspectives of their daughters. Having sold over 30,000 copies and received positive feedback from readers and extensive media interest, it was clear that “Mama Superstar” hit a gap in the German book market. While our first book was a success, we recognized that a strategic approach could help to establish our social business, “My Migrant Mama”. In undertaking research through the CIRCE initiative, I aimed to navigate the complexities encountered by social businesses that engage with their communities as customers in the creative and cultural industries. My main research question was “How do we serve our communities better?” My research was twofold: first, identifying the topics that move millennial women in their relationships with their migrant mamas; second, providing recommendations on appropriate tools to determine communities’ needs. The outcome was also twofold: first, millennial women have a profound yearning for a deeper connection with their migrant mamas and intergenerational communication is the tool of healing; second, communities are the biggest asset for social business and it is crucial to understand which communication format is most fitting for them to freely give the information a business is looking for.

I am an activist, social entrepreneur and above all the proud child of migrants. In 2019 I co-founded “My Migrant Mama”, the first-ever publisher with the goal of changing the migration narrative, run by a community of migrant women/female creatives. In addition to this, I serve as chairperson of the board of *korientation e.V.*, a network for Asian-German perspectives.

[More ↗](#)

Research Fellow 

Dr. Rafael Dernbach

he / him

Education, skill development and matching



Festival Futures: Prototyping Peer-to-Peer Foresight Mentoring for Festival Makers

How can foresight practices help festival makers to create more sustainable, inclusive and resilient festivals? This research question was explored via a mixed methods approach, including a literature review and qualitative interviews with festival makers from European and Canadian festivals. The project gathered insights about the challenges of festival makers during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. As a main outcome, a peer-to-peer foresight mentoring prototype was developed and tailored to the needs of festival makers. The project could show that festival makers actively reconsider their practice after the pandemic and look for new formats and platforms to learn from each other. The proposed process combines methodologies such as narrative foresight, narrative strategy and collaborative design to foster new forms of collaboration between festival makers and their festivals. It proposes peer-to-peer foresight as a way to formulate transformative narratives. These narratives can challenge existing beliefs such as a problematic growth imperative in the sector. A particular focus of the workshop is on the challenges of festivals to become more sustainable, inclusive and resilient. The project also highlights that festivals can act as laboratories for social transformation. As places where temporal communities form, festivals are often testing grounds for emerging micro-practices. They can play an important role in making futures experienceable and promoting more sustainable and inclusive forms of living together.

I am interested in improbable encounters of people and ideas in an increasingly customised world. My research and curatorial projects explore contemporary phenomena such as the attention economy via their historical formation and potential futures. I hold a PhD on anticipatory realism from Cambridge University and was a post-doctoral researcher at *Universita della Svizzera italiana* and I helped to open *Futurium, Berlin* as a research associate and strategist.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Jana Nita Raker, right: Alena Schmieck



Research Fellow 

Christine (Tine) Essling

she / her


Technologies for empowerment and participation



Potential for Innovation? Towards Hybrid Events – A Curator's Approach

This project examined the potential for hybrid events to generate innovation in the cultural and creative industries. Hybrid events have the potential to create opportunities for bringing people together in innovative ways, but only if their conceptualization is well thought out from the earliest planning stages. The decision to host them should be based on more than simply increasing the number of participants who can be reached. And what if we were to stop using the term altogether? It might be preferable to use the term to describe a phenomenon rather than as a label identifying a distinct category of events. In this descriptive sense, hybrid emerged in response to a pivotal shift that occurred during the pandemic era. This was when hybrid events suddenly began appearing on programmes and calendars. But what exactly was meant by hybrid events? Firstly, the term is used to refer to a vast spectrum of formats, thereby serving more as an umbrella term than one denoting a distinct category. While hybrid events ostensibly combine the digital with the analogue to create a purportedly enriched experience, the concept inadvertently implies that the two realms are indeed separable. This assumes a binary order that has become too simplistic to encapsulate the multi-dimensional interactions and experiences now integral to everyday life.

I am a Berlin-based curator with a theatre, film and museum background, MA in Art Studies (TUB) and Curation Certificate (UdK) and interested in cutting-edge forms like media art and experimental performances. I have experience in directing, special effects (TC Effects) and mixed-media art event curation; formerly at Stiftung Humboldt Forum, I co-curated a hybrid event series: "Hello Hybrid" toolkit creator.

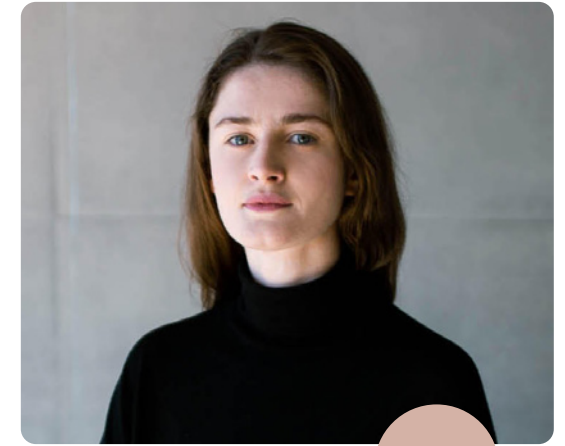
More 

Research Fellow 

Judith Fassbender

she / her

Technologies for empowerment and participation



Zooming In on User-Positions in Menstruation Tracking Apps

When the first Covid-19 vaccination campaigns had been conducted to get a grip on the pandemic, anecdotes about irregular menstrual cycles and shared thoughts about a possible connection with the vaccination lingered in private conversations amongst people with menstrual cycles. A study on this topic published in April 2022 found that within the cohort, the menstrual cycle was on average 0.7 days longer after the first dose of the vaccine and 0.9 days longer after the second dose. The data on the 3,959 study participants came from a menstruation tracking app (Edelman et al., 2022).

Menstrual cycles and the associated health of people with menstrual cycles are poorly studied. This reality is part of the gender data gap. The exemplified study suggests that data from menstruation tracking apps can help to narrow the health data gap. At the same time, questionable data gathering, security and privacy practices are a well-known phenomenon in our datafied society – and menstruation trackers are no exception.

In my fellowship I looked at the position of users in the use of health data from menstruation tracking apps for scientific health research. I did this on a case basis and focused on the inclusion of user preferences relating to data collection and privacy, as well as patient/user perspectives in the process of granting access to data for scientific research purposes.

My name is Judith Fassbender, I am a PhD student at the School of Computer Science at the University of St Andrews in Scotland and a researcher at the Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) in Berlin. I have a background in design and the social sciences. My work focuses on public interest technologies and research into the promises and challenges of participatory methods in this field.

More 

© left: Studio 23 Ines Meier, right: Samuel Groesch



Creative Fellow 

Fabian Frey

he / him

Community-driven impact

(Infra)structures and ethics of care



Sandwiches – Community Building through Shared Food

The project explores the potential of communal food and its use as a community-building method, especially when establishing new communities that have yet to create strong relationships, structures and shared values. In an intense, personal and practice-based approach I actively worked in sociocultural communities and organised shared lunches, observing the subtle interventions that can be made to guide and start certain aspects of community building. The sandwich itself works as a conceptual device that can be used to discuss and teach about community building, is accessible to be made by anyone, and can be easily shared in any context – on the go or when sitting around a table for hours. Over the course of six months I held workshops, events and longer formats to build new communities and understand the forms of mediating through shared meals. As a tangible outcome of this process I developed the zine Sandwiches which brings together many of the recipes developed during the process and proposes a scaffolding for other practitioners when looking at food while working within communities. New and engaging formats for community care, open discussion and relationship building can help the creative and cultural sectors in building stronger and longer-lasting networks.

I am Fabian Frey, a design researcher based in Zurich. My research has led me from activating non-places and collaborative design efforts to questions about dialogues between humans and non-humans. I often engage as an active member in base-democratic sociocultural spaces.

More ↗

Creative Fellow 

Dany Garcia-Solano

he / him

Technologies for empowerment and participation



Design Picnic – Fostering Reimagination

How can user experience design and service design serve as catalysts for social transformation? This question inspired my project, which aims to explore the role of these emerging design disciplines in reimagining how we express, debate and make decisions in democratic societies. Acknowledging the complexity and relevance of the issue at hand, I approached this project as a starting provocation to dialogue around democracy through design research. This approach led the project to evolve into the development of a new design research method known as the Design Picnic.

The Design Picnic offers an open, horizontal and intentional research method that employs generative participation and relationality. It provides a space for individuals to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and emotions through tangible objects that they create. The ideation process involves hands-on design activities such as collage, drawing, low-fidelity prototyping, and building with blocks to address specific research questions. This is the journey of a design researcher towards a more caring democracy.

I am an experience researcher and designer as well as a multimedia producer. My research explores ways to reimagine conventional experiences using embodied, situated and participatory design. I consider myself to be a facilitator rather than an expert, and above all, someone who is curious about the future of design and its positive impact on the planet.

More ↗

© left: Duy Bui, right: César Martínez-Casas



Creative Fellow 

Dr. Kristina Gavran

she / her

Community-driven impact



Birth Stories: Arts for Health and Wellbeing

Birth Stories explored personal childbirth narratives, connecting art and wellbeing. The project began with my own experience of giving birth during the fellowship and reflecting on it. Through my own practice and creation of three birth stories, I set up a framework with exercises to help other mothers create their own stories. Workshops held in England and Croatia united mothers from diverse backgrounds, ages and birthing experiences. The workshops incorporated creative media such as writing, storytelling, movement, drawing and improvisation. Through talking with other mother artists and autoethnographic reflection on my own artistic practice, I explored mothers' problems of navigating creative economies and maternity. The creative industries are often inaccessible to parents if cultural spaces are strongly delineated as 'for' either grown-ups or children, and/or the working culture causes mid-career mothers to give up their artistic practice due to financial difficulties, poor work-life balance, lack of opportunities or loss of a sense of purpose.

Birth Stories shows the transformative potential of sharing personal childbirth narratives and their contribution to mothers' wellbeing and social resilience. The workshops enrich maternal experiences, suggest improvements to maternal care and societal birth perceptions, and empower and transfer knowledge between mothers of all ages.

I am a writer, theatre-maker, storyteller and researcher as well as a mother of three and a migrant, which greatly influence my work. My novel 'The Palisander Guitar' was a European Literature Award finalist. My PhD from Loughborough University was in True-Life Storytelling. My recent projects focus on migration, building communities, motherhood and world-schooling.

More ↗

Research Fellow 

Maeve Gerding

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Transformative governance



Doing Solidarity: But How?

Imagine a world where solidarity is not just a fleeting response to crises, but a dynamic and enduring force that weaves its way through both European and global cultural institutions and collaborations. The research project "Doing Solidarity: But How?" delves into this realm, seeking for more questions to unravel the idea of cultivating, institutionalising and sustaining innovative solidarity practices.

In recent years, we witnessed a significant shift in the cultural and artistic sphere, where concerted efforts were made to dismantle traditional hierarchies and global inequalities. However, a lurking danger is inherent in the quest for change – the risk of inadvertently perpetuating new forms of hierarchy and paternalism. Against this backdrop, the project explored Manifesta 14, a European art biennale in Pristina, Kosovo. This unique event became a location and example for investigating the potential for solidarity in international cultural cooperation. Through a variety of methods, the project examined Manifesta 14's investments in attention, content and material resources on the ground in Pristina. What emerged was not a simple set of answers, but a rich tapestry of questions, like: How can international cultural cooperation effectively safeguard the integrity and stability of local structures? Or: How sustainable is the redistribution of attention if material resources are not considered in the process? This tapestry invites to further exploration and contemplation.

I study sociocultural studies and am interested in the power dynamics in (cultural) institutions and their (political) responsibility. During my studies at Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen, the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), and the University of Ghana, I focused on sociological theory and cultural studies. My work is shaped by queer-feminist and postcolonial perspectives.

More ↗

© left: Anish Sebastian, right: Maeve Gerding

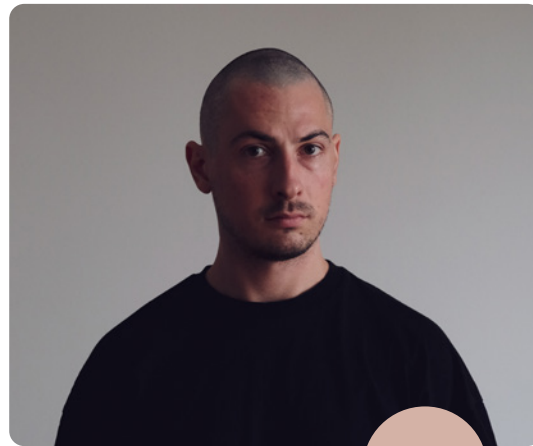


Creative Fellow 

Žan Girandon

he/him

Ecological sustainability



Techre

The Techre project aims to address the urgent need to find new ways of processing materials that already exist but are discarded too quickly. Focusing on technical textile cuttings, which are often discarded at the production stage in the shading industry, the project seeks to find a useful format in which cuttings can be reused as new material. The main focus is on do-it-yourself experimentation with the material and rapid iteration, and on applying the lessons learned to a thermoforming technique that allows the cuttings to be reassembled in a new format where two new shapes – a panel and a round profile – are used to make new prototypes of products that demonstrate the strengths and potential of the material.

During the project, a dialogue between education, design and production was established and new insights were gained. They showed that the creative industries should work harder to integrate themselves into the production of goods, as they can be a link in the rapid adaptation of companies towards more sustainable production, and that creatives should work in a local context where they can have a great impact with the least emissions, as local learning can be applied globally.

I am a product designer based in Slovenia. The focus of my professional work is on addressing the contemporary challenges relating to sustainable production and consumption. I am a co-founder of the Pjorkkala design association, where our goal is to integrate vernacular knowledge and materials with modern technologies and innovative practices to tackle new problems.

More ↗

Creative Fellow 

Amelie Graf

she/her

Ecological sustainability



Mattering – Paste & Pour

By acting at the intersection of creativity, sustainability and technology, the Mattering Project challenges traditional ideas of “matter”. The project results are innovative biomaterial formulations from waste and residual materials that offer sustainable alternatives to conventional resources by combining experimental work, artistic practices, and iterative methods. These biomaterials, in combination with paste extrusion 3D printing technology, are proof of the transformative power of a reconsidered concept of matter, and they embody circularity and regenerative potential, thus aligning with the United Nations’ sustainability goals. One of the developed materials is crafted from sawdust, displaying a creamy white appearance and a pliable yet robust texture. Its versatile nature makes it suitable for a range of applications, including furniture, sound-absorbing panels, and various accessories. After their use products made from this material can simply be composted. Mattering is an exciting glimpse into a world where biomaterials play a central role in transforming towards optimistic future scenarios, and it invites further research, collaboration and innovation to harness the opportunities it unveils. The project is a beacon of hope for a more sustainable and creative future that offers a model for sustainability across various sectors. Together, we can embark on a journey towards a circular and regenerative world driven by the fusion of creativity and sustainability.

I am a skilled tailor and product designer focusing on bio-materials and circular design. I gained an M.A. in product design from the University of the Arts in Berlin, specialising in conceptual design. In the past few years, I have developed various biomaterials, their production techniques, and a philosophical design identity.

More ↗



Research Fellow 

Jessica Guy

they / them

Education, skill development and matching



Design Education for the Pluriverse

This research project explores the influences of Bauhaus on design, art and architecture and its impact on contemporary design education. The dominant Bauhaus legacy significantly shaped design perceptions, concealing biased ideologies within its aesthetics. Viewed uncritically, this further perpetuates power structures and narratives, limiting the exploration of alternative design paradigms.

While the Bauhaus emphasis on material and technological experimentation remains pertinent, contemporary challenges demand a diverse range of interventions that can be seamlessly integrated today. Ideally, learning environments will offer space to develop designer skills and competencies that are relevant for collective resiliency.

This research highlights democratic, context-aware and modular curricula, co-created by students and educators. Drawing from the pluriverse concept, this approach promotes the integration of emerging themes, ontologies and epistemologies in the curricula design process, depending on the unique context. It emphasizes interconnectedness and the existence of multiple, valid worldviews. The objective is not to seek one monumental systemic singular reform. Instead, the reflections encapsulate a series of critical interventions that educators, learners and institutions can enact today, and thus open up pathways towards a design education aligned with the demands of our rapidly evolving society and ecosystem.

I am a designer, maker and strategic research lead of distributed design at Fab Lab Barcelona. My work focuses on researching ontologies of design through alternative perspectives in education. They design and curate annual programmes for learning experiences, knowledge exchanges and publications in EU-funded projects such as Distributed Design Platform and Make Works.

More ↗

Research Fellow 

Lorena Junghans

she / they / none / Lorenzo

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact



The Artistic Revolution – Ecosystems of Care

This research project looked into the experiences of marginalised artists in collaborations between Germany and the UK, while exploring the influence of traditional and queer social structures on cross-border cultural production. Its focus was on providing practical recommendations for supporting diversity and fostering inclusive collaborations – an exploration that unveils the transformation of the arts through a creative impact lens. The project is based on the individual and collective experiences of artists and industry leaders who are juggling tradition and innovation, and reminds us of the urgent need to reconfigure old norms.

The arts landscape is at a cusp of change, where traditional practices often cloud creative expressions – but there is hope. One key discovery was that ethically driven companies deserve more resources. Another was that as streaming has reshaped the industry, marginalised artists need more support than ever before. A change-makers' playbook would involve companies adopting a culture of accountability to empower emerging artists and rethink funding. Moreover, institutions and support structures need to diversify their own structures, advocate for change, back innovative partnerships, endorse collaborative residencies and focus on mental well-being. And artists need to embrace the digital age, collaborate and tap into futuristic revenue models, e.g. creating their own structures, building support systems around them and finding ways to reinvest in their own community.

I am an impact producer, founder and structural innovator who collaborates with a network of artists and partners, bringing collective expertise to projects across music, film and VR. I have received various scholarships and awards and am an “Empower Now” participant and a SOAM resident.

More ↗



Research Fellow 

Kübra Karataş

she / her

Transformative governance



Transforming Cultural Funding – Alternative Instruments for Financial Sustainability

In a landscape of declining public subsidies for the CCI, my research delved into the efficient allocation of public funds and innovative funding strategies. By analysing transformations in public cultural funding in the UK and the Netherlands, I examined various instruments through the lens of financial sustainability. Two pivotal arguments emerged. First, the emphasis on evidence-based cultural policy underscores the importance of aligning funding decisions with empirical data. This approach empowers policymakers to allocate resources effectively, catering to the specific needs of cultural initiatives. Second, the research advocates for measuring the impact of cultural endeavours to better justify cultural public spending.

The study also explores the role of social impact investments as a viable alternative to public subsidies. These investments enable supporters to back creative projects grounded in measurable impact objectives, fostering innovation and financial resilience within the CCI. Moreover, crowdfunding emerges as a promising avenue for CCI funding, especially when combined with public funding. The study concludes by emphasising the complementarity of public and private funding sources and promotes capacity-building programmes to assist cultural enterprises in diversifying income sources.

I am a cultural economist and currently working in the copyright division of the World Intellectual Property Organization. My research interests encompass cultural funding, regulation and copyright as well as digital transformations in the cultural and creative industry (CCI). I hold a MA in Cultural Economics from Erasmus University Rotterdam.

[More ↗](#)

Creative Fellow 

Naja Kikelj

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Technologies for empowerment and participation



UX Research Service for Architecture and Urban Design

Unlike in digital and product design, the scope of and importance given to UX research in architecture and urban design have been relatively limited. My research focused on three key research questions: Why is UX research so well developed in the design of digital products and services, but not in spatial design? Which UX research methods could be transferred to the spatial design process? How can a service be designed to bring the UX closer to clients in the architecture and urban design sector?

A six-month study, involving in-depth work with clients, a focus group with architects, sociologists and representatives of local communities, and an analysis of more than 420 methods led to the development of a holistic UX research service for the spatial sector, along with a comprehensive overview of methodologies suitable for every phase of the spatial design process. I conducted research to understand the needs, preferences and behaviour of users in relation to the built environment and employed various methods to explore existing conditions, identify user needs, create urban design concepts, test designs and educate formatively. By considering short-term user needs and long-term factors like user satisfaction and environmental sustainability, the service aims to create attractive and resilient spaces that meet the diverse needs of users and adhere to urban regulations.

I am a psychologist and researcher based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. After gaining a master's degree, I worked as a researcher at the Poligon Creative Centre, and later as a user experience (UX) researcher at Ljudje design studio. I am currently working in the urban design studio Prostorož as a project manager, researcher and participation consultant, focusing on transferring citizens' wants into urban design briefs.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Enrico Corvi, right: Klemen Ilovär



Creative Fellow 

Anna Kint

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact



Coconuts Space

Coconuts is an innovative initiative that conducts research on mental health recovery. As a creative space located in Leuven (BE), it is designed for young adults who are sensitive to psychosis and searching for direction. We provide them with a space to (re)discover their place in society and showcase their zest for life through art, design and social entrepreneurship. Together, we are the editors of a new magazine, Coconuts, for everyone seeking imagination, fresh perspectives and inspiration. Each magazine is a work of art – a first step we are exploring in our journey towards our ultimate goal of developing a creative space, a site where treatment and creative services go hand in hand.

Our operation is characterised by an organic, yet well-founded way of working. Intuitive and associative work are at the core of our operation. Besides, we also attach importance to pausing to evaluate and to exploring how we can concretise our approach so we can pass on our accumulated knowledge and experience within our organisation and share it with other external parties. What makes Coconuts special? If you take the blue pill, the story ends here and you wake up believing whatever you want to believe. You won't discover anything new, and you can continue enjoying what you were doing. The world you know will remain intact. If you take the red pill, I will show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Welcome to Coconuts!

I am a Belgium-based social designer with a strong belief in the power of social innovation, social entrepreneurship and design as an answer to today's societal challenges. With my social design agency freckle I help organisations to imagine and develop new concepts with a positive societal impact. In 2020, I co-founded Coconuts, a creative space focusing on recovery in mental health care.

More ↗

Research Fellow 

Tonderai Koschke

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact



Anchor Places

Subaltern communities that are integral to the social fabric of European cities continuously navigate precarity successfully, despite being often underserved by urban architectures. This project examines the spatial dimensions of minority community hubs in two European cities, probing how such communities shape the urban experience, and how their histories and identities are reflected in the built environment. Three case studies in Berlin and London highlight grassroots movements with a disputed claim on city infrastructures.

The Thaipark in Berlin faces ongoing political contestation, while Wedding's Afro-diasporan community is made up of extensive public and private networks, and yet has no comparable gathering place, rendering it less visible in the built environment. In contrast, the Latin Village market in Tottenham successfully formalised its claim on the space it occupies, although concerns about the sanitisation of its character persist. It serves as both a success story and a warning about formalised responses to community needs. Comparing these cases reveals the challenges subaltern communities in European cities face in terms of access to space and visibility and representation in architecture, while simultaneously highlighting their significance in enriching urban life and contributing to creative and cultural economies.

I am an architectural researcher and educator, and a guest lecturer at Weissensee School of Art and UdK, focusing on post-colonial urban identities. I studied at TU Munich, EPFL Lausanne and Harvard GSAS/GSD, and have worked at Archiangle publishers, Boltshauser Architekten and as a curatorial assistant. I also co-founded Isusu Ffena, a pan-African collective in Berlin.

More ↗

© left: Eva Beazar, right: Andrea Avezù



Research Fellow 

Cheryl Kwok

she / her

Education, skill development and matching



Should I Stay or Should I Go?

'Should I Stay or Should I Go', a song by The Clash, encapsulates a sentiment most of the cultural and creative industries' workforce has grappled with at some point in their career – should they 'stay' working in the industry, or 'go'?

The cultural and creative industries have always been subject to all kinds of crises. The main aim of this report is therefore to future-proof the cultural workforce by better understanding and exploring their motivations and challenges. Interviews with young freelance creatives and support organisations in the UK revealed key motivations: turning passion into a career, investment in skills and qualifications, a 'sunk-cost fallacy' mindset based on a skills recognition issue, and challenges including financial instability, mental wellbeing and damaging industry norms. Three key pillars – funding structures, skills and education, and mental wellbeing – emerge as opportunities in which structural change should occur.

Using these pillars as a starting point, this report argues that prioritisation of structural support for the talent pipeline – through the provision of the necessary conditions, infrastructure, skills, and opportunity for talent to continuously learn and adapt as the industry evolves – is critical to enhancing the industry's resilience and robustness within an ecosystem of constant polycrisis, and enabling it to thrive and grow sustainably.

I am a musician and cultural policy researcher with an interest in cultural place-making, culture tech and arts accessibility. I read Music at the University of Cambridge and Education in Arts & Cultural Settings at King's College London, specialising in music for mixed media and digital cultural policy respectively. I am currently a Fellow of the European Music Council and Trustee of Culture&.

[More ↗](#)

Research Fellow 

Merje Laiapea

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact



In the Image of All of Us

This project explores new approaches to building and sustaining cultural infrastructure. It documents the work of collectives and organisations visioning and building life-affirming infrastructures. In neighbourhoods and communities often underserved by institutions and policy, practitioners are trialling ways to reenergise precarious community structures and build capacity for new types of cultural space. The work is propositional, imagined through creative curricula, community link-ups and publications that rewrite the narrative.

Art and culture are seen as tools with which to rehearse just and equitable futures. MAIA, Freedom & Balance and Kin Structures are organisations operating in the precarious conditions of post-industrial urban neighbourhoods in London and Birmingham. They are responding to the harm caused by an exclusive cultural sector, urban regeneration and austerity. While scholars are calling for a reset of policy to articulate a socially just vision, there is a lack of research on practical examples from the intersection of cultural practice, education and public health.

Rooted in radical hospitality, care and non-hierarchical governance, these experiments demonstrate a path towards a deeply regenerative, non-extractive and polyvocal cultural landscape. They are localised propositions of differently built or repurposed cultural containers that nourish and grow capacity for lives worth living.

I am a cultural producer, curator and researcher from Estonia and an alumna of SOAS University of London with an M.A. in Global Creative and Cultural Industries. My previous work was published in Sounding Out! and Screenworks.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Matthew Parkes, right: Kairi Laiapea



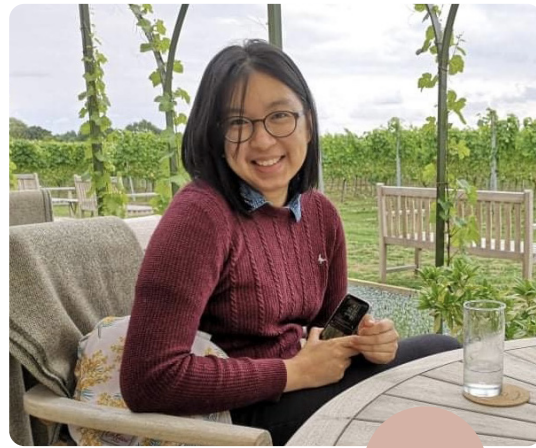
Research Fellow 

Taoyuan Luo

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact



Doing Feminism through Zine-Making

Zine, a small scrapbook-like booklet, is created by cutting images and words from various printed materials such as magazines, tabloids and newspapers. Zine-makers express their ideas through remaking and rearranging these images and texts.

In this report, a zine serves as an embodiment of the participants' experiences as queer feminists, Chinese diaspora individuals during the Covid pandemic, and migrants in the post-Brexit era. It documents 12 collective zine-making workshops in East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) communities and 21 individual zines featuring the stories of queer feminist migrants. This report shares the stories of 25 Chinese diaspora feminists and explores how this creative practice, infused with feminist ideals and anti-racial discrimination, becomes a community response to Covid-related racism and gender-based constraints that transcend borders.

In this report, I will articulate how zines function as a tool for resistance, i.e. resisting the surveillance of women's sex and sexualities. I will also discuss how zines transcend geographical boundaries to reflect the life journeys of migrants and their ongoing negotiations with immigration systems, racialised university bureaucracy, and the persistent challenges for migrants. I will highlight how this creative workshop forms a community space fostering 'shared pleasure' and a sense of 'feeling at home', using art to nurture community members, who in turn respond to this community with care and love.

I am Taoyuan, a feminist and a PhD student at the University of Leeds. My research interests are primarily located in gender studies, where I aim to explore the interrelationship between feminist theory, community care, popular culture, mediated texts, youth and identification. I am attracted to CIRCE because I hope to understand how cultural and creative practices generate community care.

[More ↗](#)

Creative Fellow 

Nina Martin

all pronouns

Technologies for empowerment and participation



UrbanFutures – Exploring Collectivity, Care and Imagination

The design of urban space is a powerful tool in constructing perceived truths; yet it structurally excludes marginalised groups in these processes of history writing and future making. This project advocates for increased investment into peripheral perspectives to unlock the pluralist potential of European urban centres. Over the past months in a multi-method, participatory, iterative and careful process I brought together over a dozen FLINTA/SLINTA* urban practitioners, artists and activists alike to uncover urban conflicts, identify resolutions and express desires. This culminated in the prototype of a digital experimental game for urban speculation and constructive exchange with feminist urbanism experts. Games are inherently queer as they facilitate worldbuilding, empathy through role-shifting and an empowering identity-first interaction modality. Playing and mapping are both a creative and strategic charting of environmental possibilities and suggest a fitting match to creatively address urban planning challenges.

This anti-monumental approach and research at the intersection of art, activism, urbanism and policy making provide initial insights into how pan-European grassroots trust-building, care-giving, strategising and knowledge exchange can benefit from experimental and creative means of facilitation and expression.

I am a Berlin-based design researcher and entrepreneur in socio-critical and curatorial collaborative projects. I have worked in the creative economy since 2008 with postgraduate academic experience in New Media (Aalto University) and Communication for Development (Malmö University). I co-founded Oyoun, a cultural initiative centring queer*feminist, neurodivergent, class-critical and decolonial perspectives.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Taoyuan Luo, right: Nina Martin



Research Fellow 

Dr. Madeleine McKay Arber

she / her

Ecological sustainability



Gaming for Climate Change

By working with Minecraft Education and BBC Studios, this fellowship study aimed to establish how gameplay could influence children's sustainable behaviour. The Minecraft Education Frozen Planet II game worlds were inspired by the BBC Studios' Natural History Unit's television series, Frozen Planet II. Through playing as polar bears, orcas, Lapland bumblebees and more, children directly experience how difficult life can be in our frozen worlds and how these animals are having to adapt to their climate-changing environments. In-game calls to action seek to educate and inspire children aged 8-12 years to reduce their emissions outside of the game worlds and make a difference.

Findings from interviews with educators show that the Minecraft Education worlds do inspire climate-positive behaviours in children beyond game play. Specifically, the Minecraft Education Frozen Planet II worlds had an educational impact on climate and animal awareness in children, including some children who had already experienced adverse weather events linked to climate change. Longer-term impacts seem to be apparent, with the children applying sustainable thinking to their projects beyond the game worlds. Future research is needed to understand the strength of this game-inspired behavioural change and how the gaming industry can target their sustainable impacts.

I am an Australian researcher based in London, UK, and particularly interested in how people think and how this translates to actions and behaviours. My work as a behavioural scientist at Simetrica-Jacobs, an economic research consultancy, involves establishing how the public values cultural goods in monetary terms and how these goods can influence people's behaviour.

More 

Creative Fellow 

Anna De Mezzo

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact




A Board Game Explores Privileges

"Where can you live?" is a board game set in the city of Zurich. The objective of the game is to find a place to live for each character. Players take on different characters with varying levels of privilege and are therefore able to obtain different types of housing. The dynamics of the game encourage discussions about privilege, stereotypes and societal structures. Players are invited to reflect and discuss the privileges that their character might have or not have, unveiling possible stereotypes and demystifying the role of certain privileges in today's society.

The game is a playful tool to foster social cohesion through a shared awareness on the topic of privilege. The project emphasises the importance of transparency and awareness regarding privilege dynamics to facilitate a paradigm shift away from oppressive systems.

In a society that is constantly alarmed by polarisation and extreme individualism fuelled by social media and populisms, this game aims to bring present and future generations together and help them deeply understand each other. The local aspect of the project stems from the willingness to spark a conversation on premises that are very close to the players, and most of all, to inspire discussions directed to tangible solutions.

I am a designer and researcher working at the intersection between design and futures research. I love to engage with various design practices to tackle the relationship between humans and uncertainty, especially the one related to the perception of the future. Anything related to the unknown makes me really curious and excited!

More 

© left: Madeleine Arber, right: Superlob by Ltd



Research Fellow 

Gemma Milne

she / her

Technologies for empowerment and participation



A Confident Friend to the New Space Sector

This project explored the potential of the cultural and creative economies (CCE) to shift imagination practice in the new space industry to guard against reproducing harmful power structures. The development of the new space industry is accelerating, and decisions made now will have far-reaching impacts in future. This research explored how the CCE can be a critical partner in navigating and avoiding future crises in this burgeoning field. The results point to the possibility of strengthening the CCE by diversifying audiences for its work.

Art is usually referred to as something that can inspire different ways of thinking about the world. But most theorising focuses on art outputs, i.e. the works themselves. This research looks instead at the artistic process and in particular, the ways in which those in the CCE utilise creative skills and mindsets to come up with new ideas, provoke, disrupt and interrupt hegemonic thought-processes. For the new space sector, the potential of these three elements is staggering, especially given the strength of infrastructural norms around financing, ownership and intellectual property, the sense of lack of agency new space stakeholders have regarding political imagination, and the hunger for more engagement with creative thought methods. This research found that CCE could act as a 'confident friend' to the new space sector because of the above-mentioned three elements.

I am a Glasgow-based researcher focused on narratives surrounding activism in the political economy of science and technology. I am the author of 'Smoke & Mirrors: How Hype Obscures the Future and How to See Past It', an Interdisciplinary Research Fellow in Digital Society and Economy at Glasgow University, and editor of The New Real Editions, a magazine on AI and art.

[More ↗](#)

Research Fellow 

Ieva Miltina

she / her

Transformative governance



Food as a Catalyst in Research Design for the Cultural and Creative Sector

The multifaceted nature of food, consciously shifting from mere nutrition to sentimental, tactile, sensory, political or cultural dimensions, presents immense potential for innovation, exploration and creativity across various domains, borders and sectors. Rooted in a commonality shared by every human being, food also possesses a unique quality that brings people together and encourages them to share their innermost feelings. In the context of the culture and creative sector, food plays a significant role as an agent of culture and a prominent element of the services offered, and in some countries is even part of the creative economy. This paper focuses on the exploration of the potential benefits, risks, if only because it is perishable and consumable goods, and opportunities food offers within the framework of arts-based research design. Alongside insights into the meaning of food and considerations relating to the design process, the paper serves as an appetising guide for further exploration and experimentation in this field. It gives insight in the aspects how food can be viewed besides its nutritional value, and refers to the corresponding authors for looking up more information about these aspects. Additionally, it provides information about benefits, risks, opportunities for using food in arts-based research – all of these elements give the first insight and links to the themes necessary to start working with such methodologies. In addition, it underscores the meaningful potential of culture and creative industries in addressing contemporary challenges.

My background is in non-formal education, communications and food, and I work primarily on the development and implementation of international social change projects. Just recently I discovered the exciting world of research, and CIRCE was a wonderful opportunity to get inspired by bright fellow visionaries and test my skills in this area while exploring novel and socially meaningful concepts.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Andrew Perry, right: Elina Jermolovica



Research Fellow 

Luiza Moroz

she / her

Transformative governance



Navigating Global Competition

European creative industries lag behind their global competitors in market capitalisation, revenues per capita and innovative business models. This issue becomes critical during a polycrisis, such as the war in Europe and economic downturns. This underperformance is partly due to a problem-oriented approach to policy-making that often overlooks the forward-looking nature of creative industries. This project proposes three policy techniques to prioritise creative sectors. First, intergenerational analysis could increase the visibility of creative industries by quantifying their impacts on adjacent fields and tracing the effects of new institutions, legislative frameworks and financing models. Second, big data analysis may give insights into cultural production and consumption patterns, digital behaviours and the long-term impacts of financial incentives on EU-funded creative projects. And third, existing blockchain or AI regulatory sandboxes provide opportunities for cross-sectoral innovation, including blockchain platforms that ensure equitable revenue sharing for artists, the use of intellectual property as collateral for loans, and the creation of foundations investing in stocks and cryptocurrencies to generate funds for investments in culture. These approaches can offer data-driven insights into the creative sector's impact, guide state and EU public investment strategies, and open creative industries to innovative solutions provided by the tech sector.

I am a policy analyst and researcher in the fields of culture and creative industries. My background includes working for the Ukraine Ministry of Culture and the Ukrainian Centre for Cultural Research, where I worked on research and policies in the field of creative industries. I am interested in the philosophy of culture, cultural analytics and EU creative industries policies.

More 



Research Fellow 

Anastasia Platonava

she / her

Education, skill development and matching



The Synergy of Blockchain and AI

This exciting journey begins with a big challenge – the skills gap at the heart of today's rapidly changing European job landscape. Wouldn't you like to discover jobs of the future? What about the skills needed in future? My project aligns perfectly with CIRCE's goal of boosting support for creative economies and making them resilient to future challenges. I wanted to understand the skills that people currently lack and identify future skills. When asked about their creative skills, all the creatives interviewed said they were satisfied with them but highlighted the problem of lacking entrepreneurial, social media or brand creation and marketing skills.

Now just imagine this: two cutting-edge technologies – blockchain and artificial intelligence (AI) – joined forces in my project to create several potential innovative solutions to tackle the European skills gap by shedding light on skills development and future competencies. Blockchain keeps all the data and information secure while AI analyses data and predicts trends. I created a plan that combined literature review and semi-structured interviews to dive deeper into the skills gap. I uncovered blockchain and AI's potential to help cultural and creative industries not only to survive but confidently navigate through an unpredictable future. The main insights from this research highlight the importance of collaboration between government, industry, society and academia.

I am Anastasia Platonava, a PhD researcher in blockchain technology and education at the Technological University of the Shannon, Ireland. With a background in finance, business and management, I decided to dive into the fields of IT and education to explore how these two domains intersect and create innovative solutions for the future of learning. I am passionate about EdTech trends.

More 

Research Fellow 

Antonia Rohwetter

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact




The Promise of Care – Facing Social Reproduction Crises in the Performing Arts

At this moment in time, there is no escaping the notion of care – at least not in the art world. In the independent performing arts scene in Europe, the research field of this project, we can increasingly witness performances taking the form of rituals or other participatory formats, in which the focus is on questions about how all human and non-human beings can be with each other. In this context, healing, resilience, vulnerability, relationality and care are being optimistically positioned as discursive, aesthetic concepts that can propose an alternative to a present in which lives based on extraction, exhaustion, social isolation and inequality seem to become unmanageable. When care is interpellated artistically, we are often confronted with aesthetics that produce a specific imaginary about what a more careful world might feel, sound or look like: soft, pastel, tender, cuddly, low-pitched, slow. These artistic interpellations of care are in stark contrast with the material realities of care. Up to now, care work has mostly been delegated to feminised, racialised bodies under exploitative conditions.

But could there be artistic practices of care that would allow us to imagine the transformation of the conditions under which we care? In tackling this question, this project undertakes a theoretical intervention into how we think and talk about care in artistic practices and beyond.

With an interdisciplinary academic background spanning philosophy, applied theatre studies, cultural and gender studies, I am currently working as a dramaturg, researcher and writer in contemporary performing arts and dance. In my practice, I am interested in engaging with and thinking along the forms of critical, sensorial and embodied knowledge that artistic methodologies can create.

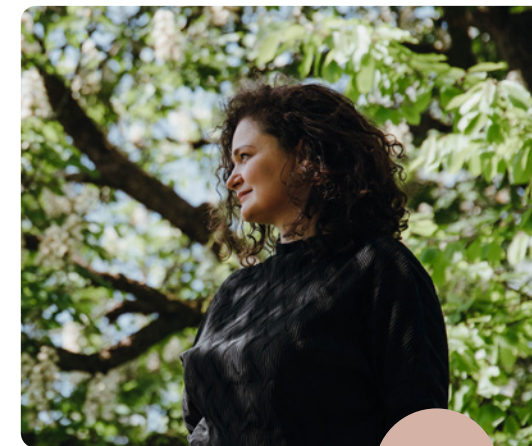
[More ↗](#)

Creative Fellow 

Danica Sretenović

she / her

Ecological sustainability



An Exercise in Feral Cartography

A map is ultimately an exercise in orientation. But what if the map is wrong and not the orientation? While dealing with various regimes of invisibility in self-sustained urban ecologies, the most unexpected strike occurred with the realisation that such areas are not coloured green in Google Maps, whereas golf courses are. This led me to question whether the practice of drawing maps could be anything but abstract, exclusive and incorrect.

In this study we investigated the capacity of a map to escape from its colonial heritage. We exercised escape through debunking Google maps, zooming into the unseen, soft guerrilla photography occupations of gentrified areas and by training urban memory in cycling tours across extinct, still persisting feral lands. This is an exercise in inventing the practices of drawings and formats of collective actions to insert the public realm back into administrative city maps.

Such actions position the practice of mapping outside its service role to denote ownerships and nationalities, to zone out and to disconnect. They tackle the problems of representing ecologies, as ever-more-complex sets of relationships surpass administrative notions of borders and cannot be captured within existing modes of representing space. The study correlates the unbearable lightness of the extinction of self-sustained urban ecologies with the incorrect, inefficient and colonial ways we use to omit information when drawing cartography.

I hope to re-condition the world-as-it-is-given by inserting public territories and collective forms, thinking unrests in exhibitions and curriculums, and creating workplaces other than those offered by dominant models. I work with urgent pedagogies, feral practices and the displacement of urban memory.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Magdalena Bichler, right: Amadeja Smrekar



Creative Fellow 

Charlie Squire

they / them

Community-driven impact

Slouching: A Field Guide to Art and (un-)Belonging in Europe

Slouching is an autoethnographic collection of essays, art and film photography. Made across 14 countries and 23 cities over the course of six months, it focuses on the affective qualities of geography through casual interviews, critical examinations of museums and personal reflections. The book also considers the author's role as the recipient of a CIRCE Fellowship and how political economies of creativity impact not just communities but individuals, defining what it means to be an "artist" or "creative". *Slouching's* central concern is both straightforwardly simple and unanswerably complicated: What is "Europe"? And what role do images play in answering that question?

The essays in *Slouching* are broad in scope, examining memory culture and Jewish identity in Lithuania, the ideological underpinnings of the IKEA Museum, France's relationship to its colonial empire, oysters on the half shell or dead horses. Essays are paired with ephemera, original illustrations and photographs made for this project. The author assumes the role of the flâneur, combining subjective narration with rhetorical analysis and drawing upon philosophical, sociological and literary traditions of placeliness. The book was written after four months of slow travel around Europe and countless impromptu interviews with strangers. *Slouching* probes questions of how identities are built and who has the power to build them. Perhaps most importantly, *Slouching* is about manufacturing things: images, ideas, places, connections and pathways for potential futures.



I am an artist, writer and occasional journalist living in Berlin. Originally from New England, I hold a BA in History and an MA in Cultural and Critical Studies. I am particularly interested in examining how identity intersects with aesthetics in both political and (supposedly) non-political spaces.

More ↗

Research Fellow 

Hoyee Tse

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact

Diversification vs. Racialisation – Asian Museum and Curatorial Professionals in the UK

My project examines the employment and work experiences of Asian museum and curatorial professionals in the UK. The lack of data about the ethnic minority workforce in this sector means we have not the slightest glimpse of how structurally diverse these institutions are. My research looks into the extent to which Asian museum and curatorial professionals find their specialisations and roles relate to their ethnic and cultural background, and their working experiences in the field are racialised. To identify challenges and barriers during job searching and working in the museum and curatorial field, I collected data from social media platforms and conducted interviews with Asian professionals.

My data demonstrated that visa policy and racialised tasks and positions formed the main barriers to entry. While understanding the advantage of bilingualism, some saw the English language as a challenge. More importantly, the monocultural work environment facilitated racialisation of their identity. I recommend that organisations like CIRCE initiate a network to organise mutual support and training for ethnic minority professionals and their colleagues. More research about the job search and work experiences of Asian and other ethnic minorities in this field is also recommended because of the cultural nuances and complexity of ethnic identity in relation to work experiences.



As a social art historian, I am always interested in the meaning-making of creative objects and the politics of cultural representation, especially in public arts and cultural institutions. I was the 2022 Design Trust Curatorial Fellow at the Royal College of Art and am currently a doctoral student in Transcultural Arts and Sociology at London Metropolitan University.

More ↗

© left: Charlie Kleinfeld, right: Jurianna



Research Fellow 

Alexandra Tzanidou

she / her

Technologies for empowerment and participation


The Inclusion Mille-Feuille

Traditional theatre faced unprecedented challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research delves into an intriguing solution – immersive virtual theatre. This is more than just an artistic shift; it is a pathway to embracing inclusion and representation's uniqueness. The imperative drove our exploration to propose guidelines to help practitioners in utilising immersive art during crises or for people facing access barriers for diverse reasons. These guidelines promote inclusion and expand artistic engagement, by providing the audience the opportunity to experience and interact with the artwork disregarding geographical distance and via multiple channels through access services. Simultaneously, we delved into the potential of avatars to enhance representation and inclusivity within immersive creative spaces. Conducting research with professional artists in and outside the sphere of inclusion expertise allowed us to uncover the potential to enhance representation and foster inclusion in creative spaces. The study's insights in a nutshell: The significance of collaboration; the role clarity plays in multidisciplinary projects; the pressing need to develop new curatorial professions who will support the smooth and productive cooperation amongst disciplines; the need to inform access policies in the creative sector and enhance inclusion through systemic organisational changes; and the fluidity of identity representation within immersive spaces. We want to envision a future where inclusion, informed policies and strategic technology converge to reshape the cultural and creative landscape into a vibrant, diverse and empowering creative environment before, through and after artistic expression.



I am passionate about technological advancements while advocating for responsible usage. My background includes an MSc in Applied Informatics and an MRes in Digital Civics. I am currently utilising my PhD in Human-Computer Interaction to bridge the gap between technology and inclusion through research in inclusive theatre practices.

[More ↗](#)

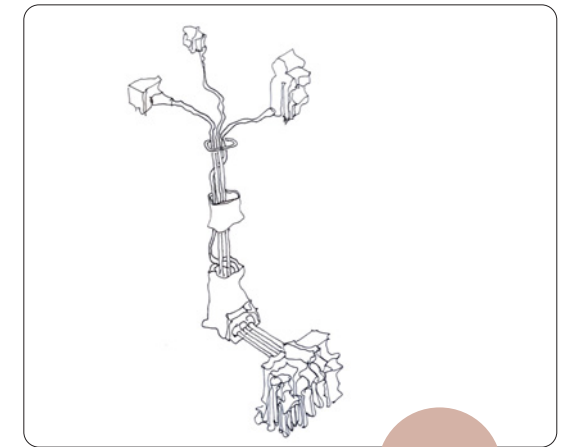
Creative Fellow 

Panagiotis (Pan) Tzannetakis

no pronouns

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Transformative governance



Designing Projects with Cultural Non-Profits through Collaboration and 'Unlikely' Partnerships

The starting point of this project was the question of how the provision of a facilitated platform and creation of 'unlikely' partnerships could enable non-profit actors from the creative and cultural industries (CCI) to design projects that spark the interest of donors outside this sector. This entailed mapping available funding opportunities as well as individual donors, and working with CCI actors to design new projects that address pressing challenges in both their respective localities and translocally. I worked with six different non-profit actors from varied disciplines across five countries of Europe as core partners to design three distinct projects. Besides the core partners, the three projects have engaged another 12 actors from the cultural sector and academia, who are supporting the project with their respective expertise. The outcome was submission of the three projects to three donors. At the time of publication, their decisions are pending.

Parallel to that and starting from the premise that CIRCE participants represent innovative creative and cultural economy actors from around Europe, I was part of a small team of fellows actively investigating the potential for creating an open collaboration platform to enable CIRCE participants to continue collaborating beyond the current CIRCE cycle.

I collaborate with non-profits in designing projects and processes. In the past eight years I have worked with more than 70 organisations and institutions in Germany, Greece, France, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo, N. Macedonia, Turkey and the UK. My BSc in Architecture is from the Bartlett, UCL, and my BTEC in Art and Design from the Byam Shaw School of Art, Central Saint Martins.

[More ↗](#)



Creative Fellow 

Aiwen Yin

she / her

Community-driven impact

(Infra)structures and ethics of care




Community Wetlands – Rethinking Community Ontology

Our research illuminates the ontology of communities, exposing its ecological nature and healing promise – if done right. Key insights include the solidarity trinity, which emphasises space, labour and relationship as an integral whole. We identify three layers of value in communities – solidarity trinity, symbolic value and observer value – which expose the complexity of organising a fulfilling community. We postulate a new concept called community wetlands, underscoring the co-dependency between communities, support networks and the larger societal environment. The community wetlands concept levers a new creative ecology that encourages rethinking roles in the arts such as curators, community organisers, directors, funders and policymakers as “wetland weavers” and leveraging strengths for a collaborative art ecosystem. Furthermore, we have outlined the five axes of the community: space, relationship, economy, labour and healing. These axes map out the status, or the ontology of a community and thus provide a holistic perspective to understand the well-being and sustainability of a community.

I am a designer, researcher and project developer. My work covers care work, alternative economy, creative institutionalism, system design and organisational technology. I am attracted to the CIRCE project because of their commitment to system change in a caring manner.

[More ↗](#)

Creative Fellow 

Nevena Yovcheva

she / her

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact



Rural Renaissance – A Tool for Revitalising Villages

This research offers a successful model with a plethora of insights that can significantly contribute to the field of rural revitalisation and creative economies. It explores the vast potential of rural areas as reservoirs of unique strengths, authenticity and invisible treasures. The research applies an innovative model in the least-developed and most impoverished area in the EU – Northwest Bulgaria.

But why is leveraging culture pivotal? The findings suggest that culture can be a potent tool in addressing complex societal issues from social inequality to the erosion of cultural identity. In doing so, it offers a response, underscoring the need for a holistic, multifaceted approach deeply rooted in community values and inclusivity, while emphasising participatory methods, community-driven impact, cultural engagement and systems thinking.

Culture’s systemic impact on a national scale is profound and transformative. Given that rural depopulation is a pan-European concern, we can justifiably ask why the role of cultural and creative economies is so crucial, and what innovative solutions they can propose. Concepts like the Artistic Social Campsite in Bulgaria call for deeper exploration. What is the intrinsic connection between trust-building and successful co-creation? Delving into the full report may well supply the answers.

I am a creative changemaker spearheading initiatives across social, cultural, educational and ecological domains. I support social transformation through community engagement, systems thinking and multidisciplinary approaches. As founder of an academy dedicated to the personal development of children and young people, I draw inspiration from a holistic approach, humane pedagogy and nature.

[More ↗](#)

© left: Aiwen Yin, right: Kiril Nachev



Creative Fellow 

Alice Zhuravel

she / her

Community-driven impact



TOZHSAMIST – Identity

This social initiative is at the forefront of exploring the intersection of diversity, national identity and community building in virtual reality (VR). These factors together can build belonging in society, which is critically important in handling a poly-crisis. I believe TOZHSAMIST can enable positive change, not only within Ukraine but beyond.

To learn more and reflect on the topic of building a strong sense of belonging in society we began conducting interviews: before CIRCE with people with Crimean Tatar and Kazakh backgrounds and Ukrainians with Cuban roots, and during CIRCE, with individuals of, among others, Dagestani, Ethiopian, Nigerian and Ghanaian descent. They all consider Ukraine to be their home.

My personal contribution to the project has been researching the intricate relationship between diversity and Ukrainian identity. I delved into the history of diversity, how it is defined in different contexts, and what it means in a specific Ukrainian context. I discovered that Ukrainian diversity is not just about people from diverse ethnic backgrounds living in Ukraine but also about Ukrainian emigrants. The diaspora from different waves of migration, all proudly identifying as Ukrainians, plays a significant role in shaping the nation's identity. Moreover, we are currently working on a VR platform that connects diverse Ukrainians, artists, activists, and anyone interested in fostering belonging and difference.

I was born and raised in Kharkiv, Eastern Ukraine. During the war in Ukraine I started researching the social field to learn about refugee experiences. This job and my own experience as a Ukrainian with Nigerian roots inspired to continue a journey in the social field and launch TOZHSAMIST as a response to the crisis in my country. *тожсамість* is the Ukrainian word for identity.

More ↗

Research Fellow 

Nyangala Zolho

she / they

Transformative governance



How Can Policy Support the Inclusive Growth of Innovative Sectors?

Taking a design and data-led approach to determine how policy might support diverse communities to participate and excel within the knowledge economy, this research uncovers key insights, such as the inability of catch-all policies, even those designed to engage marginalised groups, to reach those most vulnerable to exclusion; socio-economic background plays a significant role in who participates in the knowledge economy – both within the arts and sciences, and more so than in other disciplines/sectors.

The recommendations are based on open questions that would benefit from the experimental policy design approach detailed in this report. They include a call for design and test interventions that best serve those identified as the most vulnerable groups; the need to find out why STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) holds more barriers to entry than other disciplines; and a call to tap into the wealth of data unutilised in policy decision-making processes. Existing data infrastructures can help to map what worked and failed in the past and highlight how programme design and delivery might benefit from tweaks that optimise outcomes. Looking at the intersection of arts and science outcomes also offers the possibility of novel solutions. Finally, policy needs to enable cultures of learning and collaboration across disciplines, ministries and sectors to ensure innovative economies can benefit everyone.

As the Policy Learning Designer at the Innovation Growth Lab, I support policy-makers and wider policy communities in sharing and learning from new ideas and evidence. I am pursuing a PhD in Design at BAU, and previously worked for Nesta, the UK's innovation agency for social good.

More ↗

© left: Maryna Yarova, right: Kiril Nachev



The Creative Impact Fund (CIF) is CIRCE's entrepreneurial experimentation site. It enabled eight teams to develop and test a creative impact prototype and allowed five teams to scale and advance existing solutions from mid-April to the end of November 2023. Funding was provided to individuals and companies working on new solutions for the challenges of our time. Like the fellows, these teams were accompanied and mentored by professional coaches. The selected projects are anchored in different parts of the creative sector and deal with a great variety of economically and socially relevant themes and challenges.

CIRCE's aim was to contribute to the realisation of bold and innovative projects and thus support the full potential of the creative economies in dealing with current and future crises, as well as to generate insights into public-purpose oriented innovation and experimentation processes within the CCE. Analysing the teams' iteration processes was therefore crucial to derive recommendations that could then be shared and discussed with stakeholders from academia, business and politics.

In this chapter, you will get to know the teams and their projects, as well as learning about their innovation processes: What was their motivation to start the project? What did their innovation process look like? Which moments were of great importance to them, especially regarding the iteration process? How did this influence the project? And what did they learn in the process?



The Creative Impact Fund



More ↗

The Possible: A Community Action Lab for Recovery & Renewal in Ukraine

Harnessing the skills, ingenuity and resilience of entrepreneurs is essential in rebuilding towns in Ukraine.

Community-driven impact

The Possible Community Action Lab is a collaborative, place-based approach for tackling complex social challenges at their roots. It operates by convening a diverse group of stakeholders to work collectively towards systemic, sustainable solutions through an iterative and learning-oriented process. Moreover, the Possible Lab serves as a platform for ongoing engagement, innovation and collective action led by impact entrepreneurs at the forefront of rebuilding their communities.



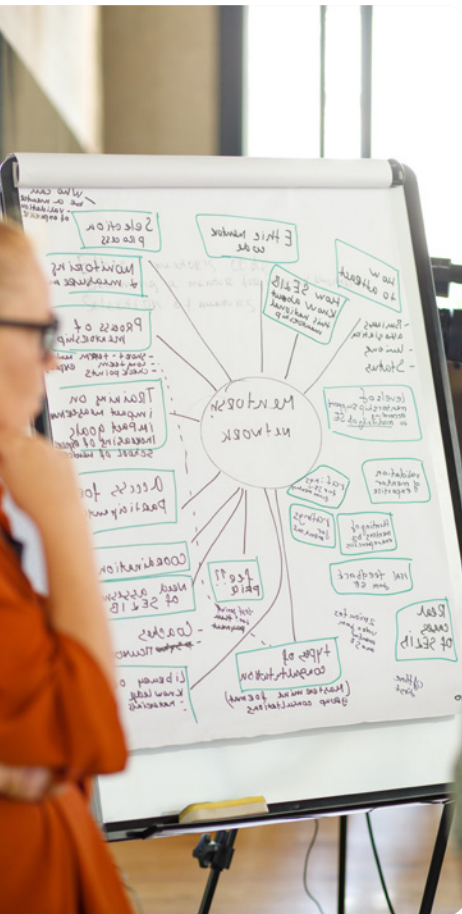
© CIVIC

How to rebuild a small town in Ukraine?

We are piloting this initiative in Voznesensk, a liberated small town in South-East Ukraine, in partnership with ReStart. Hand in hand with local leaders, social entrepreneurs, business owners, designers, urban planners, government officials and civil society organisations, we are prototyping, refining and launching initiatives that address our central question: How can we rebuild Voznesensk to be more inclusive, vibrant, nourishing and rich in opportunities?

The long-term impacts of the war in Ukraine present major challenges for every aspect of the social, political, economic, cultural and environmental fabric of society. Entrepreneurs have to adapt and respond to a whole new landscape and they desperately need flexible capital, relevant partnerships and a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem and institutions that can support the movement towards a more circular and inclusive economy.

Despite the massive response from the international community, it is difficult for international organisations to co-design solutions with local communities, the existing infrastructure and smaller-scale Ukrainian partners. Whilst billions of euros have been earmarked for rebuilding Ukraine, only a fraction of this money has gone directly to organisations registered in the country. This has resulted in the inadequate use of donor funding and ineffective development projects that fail to address the needs of Ukrainian citizens. There is often a lack of coordination between donors, which leads to a duplication of efforts, inefficiencies and suboptimal outcomes. Moreover, the institutional planning paradigms are ill-suited to keeping up with the constantly shifting opportunities for meaningful change. Designing solutions that work in a time of accelerated social disruption requires a holistic, iterative approach that involves the participation of diverse stakeholders.



U-Process methodology applied

The Possible Community Action Lab leverages the U-Process methodology to navigate these complex challenges and drive the rebuilding process through:

1. Understanding & Mapping: Unearthing the realities, challenges and opportunities faced by various stakeholders in the community and establishing a robust understanding of the landscape.
2. Synthesising Insights: Uncovering collective wisdom and innovation to shape a shared vision for the future.
3. Co-Creation & Agile Cycles: Bringing this vision to life by prototyping and implementing initiatives that rebuild systems, revitalise towns and enhance community resilience.

Entrepreneurs' involvement essential

We have come to believe that harnessing the skills, ingenuity and resilience of entrepreneurs is essential in responding to the socio-economic challenges faced by towns like Voznesensk. The first cycle of The Possible Lab resulted in a strategic focus on supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that provide crucial income for vulnerable families. The example prototypes included a renewable energy co-op, a farmer's market for local growers, a revolving loans micro-finance bank, rubble and concrete recycling for new construction, a pop-up childcare nursery for working families and an open-air cinema with programming geared to young people.

As a diverse group in a never-ending learning process, we are navigating discoveries across language, culture, worldviews, dimensions of time, the way we work, local and global wisdom, and how to balance bold ambition with practical reality. Fortunately, we have some incredible facilitators who open up space for deeper listening and connection, and thus create the possibility for us to actually be and do things a little bit differently. We hope to make the most of these learnings and scale this model to other recently liberated towns across Ukraine.

© CIVIC

Jonathan Robinson
he / him

Anastasia Sleptsova
she / her

Kateryna Davydiuk
she / her

Viktoria Mianovska
she / her

Angelina Adzhyiska
she / her

Anna Elliot
she / her

Alexander Svenchenko
he / him

Max Baiden
he / him

Gwil Purchase
he / him

Zaid Hassan
he / him



club coop

Exploring alternative approaches to the dominant models and assumptions surrounding nightlife cultural venues and their status in society.

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact

club coop is a product of the frustrations facing musicians, other workers and partygoers in Marseille's nightlife industry. Those from traditionally marginalised backgrounds or identities see this marginalisation extend to cultural spaces, with artists substantially underpaid and fans often denied the chance to hear the sounds they love in venues prioritising music and dance. club coop aims to disrupt this status quo by putting power in the hands of creatives, ensuring fairer prices for fans and artists, and eroding the rigid producer-consumer relationships typical of such venues. This approach is underpinned by the use of a cooperative decision-making system, allowing members to determine as much as possible the sounds, sights, and prices they experience at a venue. CIRCE funding has allowed club coop to commence a three-month bricks-and-mortar pilot on Marseille's Rue Curiol in the heart of the city centre.



© Ana Sanz

Social stratification in the music industry

Taking a lead from other cooperative initiatives in different sectors across Europe, club coop aims to respond to social stratification in the music industry in Marseille and Europe. This has led to an increasing scarcity of specialist venues, rising costs for hosting and attending events, and diminishing returns for the performing artists. The outcome is an ever-more hostile environment for musicians from working-class or otherwise marginalised backgrounds who are looking to forge sustainable careers in music.

Marseille is home to a vibrant creative scene, with numerous small- to mid-sized collectives across a wide spectrum of music genres. Events hosted by these collectives broadly fall into two categories: 'free parties' organised on the city's fringes and subject to police obstruction and security risks; and formal events with severe limitations on sound, capacity, and opening hours. The outcome is a precarious situation, with artists and local promoters financially restricted due to a lack of infrastructure in Marseille's nightlife economy. Given the low financial incentives from larger venues and lack of specialisation at small bars, which do not have the mechanisms and/or technical capabilities of conventional music venues, it is increasingly difficult to curate events that platform local talent.

Democratising endeavours in Marseille

We set out to formulate an approach that could address the above-mentioned challenges head on. Settling on a cooperative decision-making system initially inspired by research into the La Louve supermarket in Paris and cultural spaces across Europe (e.g. Club-commission, Space of Urgency and Sister Midnight), we began to prototype a model that suits Marseille's particular conditions. Though this might sound, at face value, like a rather convoluted way of running a venue, we quickly began to iterate on our initial ideas with the able guidance of our Community Advisory Board. Our work with them saw us settle on initial programming guidelines, a members' charter, and a tentative approach to membership and elections.

The next step in developing our solution is the ongoing input and guidance from our member base. Members meet regularly to discuss and revise the project's processes and decisions. They also have the opportunity to participate in programming and reflective committees dedicated to future planning, as well as to submit proposals to these committees online. Having established the rules of the game in the form of programming guidelines and key safety and conduct docu-

ments, we have now stepped back as much as possible. Members are now the ones innovating; we are just following their lead!

The creation and evolution of our Advisory Board provided the foundation and impetus for many of the specifics of the decision-making process we eventually settled upon. Drawn from across Marseille's creative and cultural communities, their judgement has been regular and robust, and impressed on us the importance of a system that allows simple, effective direction from all those who inhabit our space – artists, other workers and attendees.

High level of external interest

Receiving attention and coverage from several respected cultural media outlets in France and beyond, notably Mixmag, Underscope, Dure Vie and NTS Radio, was also significant. This not only amplified our audience and reach, but – more significantly for the project – demonstrated that the issues we had identified struck a chord within and beyond Marseille. Heightened coverage has also led to inquiries from collectives and organisations across the arts scene, with particular interest expressed in the participatory model we are developing. A guerrilla poster campaign that garnered nearly 400 signups also underlined the high level of interest in our initiative and led us to work on plans to share our findings with others who may be working toward more sustainable club ecosystems.

With the crucial iterative loop of our project still to come, i.e. opening night and the final two months of programming, it is too soon to draw conclusions on the project's success. Nevertheless, it has become clear that there is a great deal of interest in exploring alternative approaches to the dominant models and assumptions surrounding nightlife cultural venues and their status in society. Though it will take time to earn the trust of Marseille's myriad communities and convince them of the impact they can have on the project's development, we hope that the successes and missteps identified by our members will show how similar projects can run in (more) equitable ways in future. This will hopefully be a future iteration of club coop, perhaps on a larger and more permanent scale, but also of similar projects across Europe and beyond.

© left: Ana Sanz, right: Vincent Kulesza



Vincent Kulesza
he / him

Ana Sanz
she / her

George Trotter
he / him



embrace3

Developing a needs-based design framework for breast support clothing.

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact

embrace3 is the third iteration of *embrace*, a design research exploration of the aesthetic and ergonomic breast support clothing needs of individuals affected by breast cancer. Such people may have differently sized breasts, be single-breasted or flat (without breasts) following mastectomy surgery. And they may choose not to have breast reconstruction or wear external prostheses.

embrace3 was set up in a needs-based clothing design framework involving a multidisciplinary team of specialists: clothing wearer and model Jacobe de La Tour, product designers Robin Hoske and Felix Rasehorn of WINT Design Lab, fashion and textile designer Laura Krauthausen, and me as a clothing design researcher. We collaborated with the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology (Empa) on textile property testing and the character designer Nedim Šećeragić on creating a digital twin.





Motivation to start the project

embrace evolved as an investigative design practice from my PhD research. It was inspired by the experience of a friend who felt that her aesthetic and ergonomic breast support needs were underserved by the clothing industry. An increasing awareness of unmet clothing needs is a significant factor in the breast cancer spectrum, as changed body topologies are common following treatment and mastectomy. In the EU 27 member-states, breast cancer is estimated to account for 28.7% of all new cancer diagnoses in females and 13.3% of all new cancer cases. In other words, breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer. Those predominantly affected are between 45 and 69 years of age (ECIS, 2020).

Although earlier detection and advances in treatment are reducing mortality rates, breast cancer can cause significant disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs), with a greater and prolonged daily burden of living with less than full health. As average life expectancy rises, individuals are therefore living increasingly longer with breast cancer-related discomforts. As a design researcher, I am interested in understanding the clothing and breast support needs of people affected by breast cancer. As a clothing designer, I am motivated to examine the functional and aesthetic limitations of current breast support systems (bras) and explore alternative solutions based on wearer needs.

An innovative process

Conventional post-mastectomy bras are constructed to establish a visual symmetry of female breasts, thus catering to gender-associated bodies. *embrace3* aims to expand this interpretation of breast support clothing beyond normative sizing systems by translating unique body topologies and wearer-specific clothing needs into a needs-based design framework and by pioneering modularity in breast support clothing through additive manufacturing technologies and parametric support structures based on 3D body scanning.

As our design considerations are based on a wearer's clothing needs, design processes are undertaken from a collective position of designing with and on behalf of rather than for the wearer. This approach also leads to transformed perspectives on the clothing design process as such. The participating *embrace3* specialists, including the clothing wearer as the wearing experience expert, use dialogue and discourse towards an alternative, wearer-centred clothing design practice.



Moments of great importance

Prototyping processes in the clothing industry (and specifically the prêt-à-porter industry) are iterative by design. Clothing products are typically developed through repeated, evolving cycles of fittings and pattern corrections. During the *embrace3* project, we generally followed these established practices but deviated from them when we felt it was necessary to address wearer preferences and discuss design methods that differ between design disciplines and are sometimes entirely unknown to the garment wearer.

Sharing wearer- and breast cancer-specific experiences in non-work settings, such as team brunches, sitting around a table before prototype fittings, or recording and viewing prototype-wearing vlogs are new forms of team communication. They allow us to listen and witness from a place of empathy rather than pragmatism, and to bring personal impressions into our professional processes. By practising such integrative exchange and knowledge transfer alongside our prototyping process, we have emphasised active communication between all the specialists. This allows us to learn together and create a project-specific shared knowledge base, while at the same time educating each other and adding to everyone's experience and discipline-specific expertise.

Learnings from the process

Just how impactful and effective integrative exchange can be on prototyping processes is an unexpected learning that encourages me to intensify my interest in challenging current clothing design methods. Combining industry-tested engineering processes with aspects of ethnographic fieldwork, in particular sharing lived experiences and listening to specific wearer needs in the breast cancer context, seems to catalyse innovative product development and learning processes at a personal and professional level.

The investigative design practice and needs-based design framework practised at *embrace* will continue to develop – specifically in experimenting with forms of team dialogue and communal learning in alternative wearer-centred clothing design processes. These efforts are also aiming to enhance ongoing discourses around clothing diversity, particularly in relation to body asymmetry.

The development of *embrace3* as a clothing product is ongoing. An essential step towards validating the project-specific parametric support structure and the product's potential market relevance will involve conducting scientific tests through Empa's textile analyses.

© Arnaud Ele, Viktoria Prantauer

Silke Hofmann
she / her



PAM, Pitch AI Mentor

Helping women of colour and other marginalised entrepreneurs overcome systemic barriers through practicing and enhancing their pitch skills.

Technologies for empowerment and participation

We are building a secure haven for founders to practice and enhance their pitch skills. We are crafting this haven by leveraging the collective wisdom of our founder and investor network – enhanced by AI. This AI layer delivers instant personalised feedback on every pitch. It dissects a founder’s pitch and scrutinises content, slide-ware and delivery to uncover areas for enhancement.

Key features include a live pitch mode mirroring a Zoom-style presentation and a dashboard offering an in-depth analysis of the pitch. The dashboard includes tailored questions and curated Founderland links for educational content. In development terms, our minimum viable product (MVP) relies on two core technologies: speech recognition to transcribe the presenter’s pitch into text for analysis and ChatGPT APIs. We are training ChatGPT to evaluate pitches using highly specific prompts and enabling it to generate insightful feedback for the founder.



© Tim Foresta

Powerful systemic barriers

The systemic barriers women of colour and other marginalised entrepreneurs face have resulted in a pervasive lack of opportunity, including the resources, knowledge, and networks needed to secure the venture capital required to scale up their businesses. Despite recent efforts to increase gender diversity in start-ups, the staggering reality is still that little more than 2% of global venture capital funding goes towards women-led companies, and less than 0.5% to those led by women of colour. This profound inequality demands urgent attention, with an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach required to devise innovative solutions that address the root causes of the problem.

Innovative multi-phase approach

Our project followed a structured, iterative innovation process. In the initiation phase the focus was on defining clear objectives to improve the Compass programme for founders and assembling a cross-functional team. In the innovation phase we hosted a design thinking workshop with consultants, primarily women-of-colour founders. We identified the need to enhance one key aspect – the pitch. We conceptualised an AI pitch partners and put the emphasis on feedback-based iteration. In the validation phase we formulated hypotheses on creating a winning pitch. We then conducted user interviews with founders and investors to assess the feasibility of AI integration. We created structured interview scripts and survey guides and reviewed successful and unsuccessful pitches to learn from real-life examples. In the definition phase we refined the tool's design and features through user feedback from additional interviews and surveys. We finalised our desk research to align with market trends, identified the AI integration requirements and established a technical infrastructure. Finally, we selected the necessary tools and methodologies. The final phase involved developing investor personas from authentic interviews and creating virtual investors to obtain realistic feedback.



Pivotal moments

Dealing with iterative innovation processes was pivotal in the development of our project. Several moments were of great importance since they significantly influenced our project's direction and outcomes. Hosting the design thinking workshop marked a crucial starting point. Insights and feedback from experienced consultants, especially women-of-colour founders, proved invaluable. This workshop led us to realise the need for a more focused MVP centred on improving the pitch. And this pivotal moment steered our project toward a more niche-like and impactful direction. The decision to integrate an AI bot into our Compass investor readiness programme was another pivotal moment. Designed to serve as a pitch partner and companion, this AI bot had a profound impact on our project, as it transformed our programme into a more scalable and humanised platform, providing personalised guidance and progress tracking for founders working on their pitches. This decision significantly enhanced our project's potential to support and empower our founder community. Last but not least, integrating ethical considerations into our project was another critical moment. By acknowledging the biases faced by women-of-colour founders, we embraced a user-centred design approach to ensure our tool was responsive to their specific challenges.

Key learnings

While developing our project, we gained valuable insights that shaped our project's trajectory and future plans. We learned that user-centricity matters. The iterative process highlighted the importance of a user-centric approach. Engaging founders and investors revealed unique needs and challenges. This reinforces our commitment to tailor our tool effectively. We also realised that ethical design is key. Recognising bias and responsible design are vital lessons and we will be incorporating bias detection to ensure transparency and prioritise data privacy. Adapting to feedback and pivoting based on user insights are also invaluable, while an iterative approach keeps us agile. Last but far from not least, our project's potential to empower women-of-colour founders is a driving force.

Future plans involve seeking funding to further develop the project and transition it into an independent business entity. This strategic move will ensure the project's long-term sustainability and allow it to grow and thrive independently. We are excited about the opportunities ahead as we continue our mission to empower women-of-colour founders and make a lasting impact in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

© left: William Veder, right: Alex Bernatzky

Sophie Webber
she / her

Stephanie von Behr
she / her

Britt Davis
she / her

Dannerys Peralta
she / her



Kuulu.io

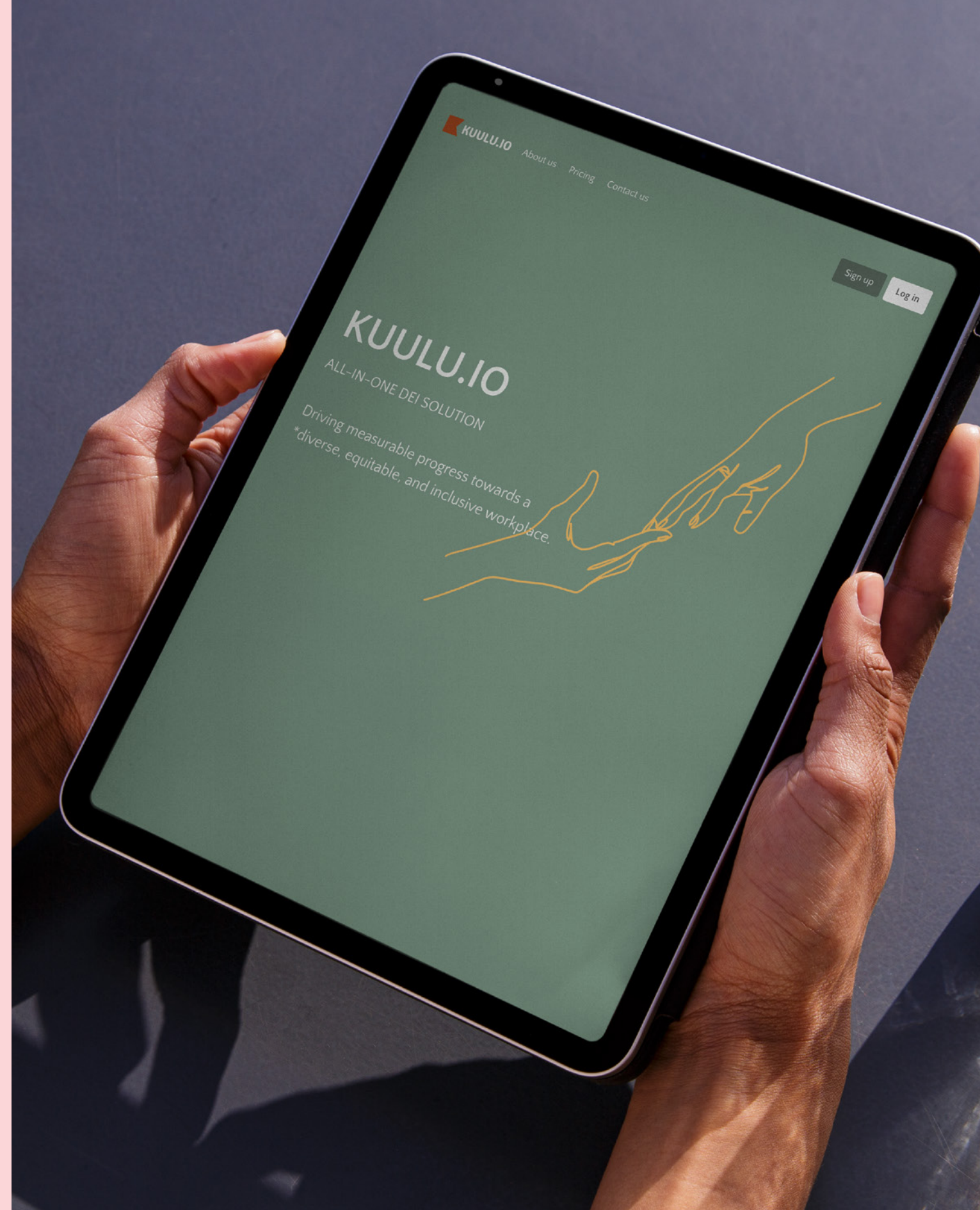
The problem-solving digital solution that empowers organisations to create tailored DEI plans for overcoming identity-related injustice.

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact

Kuulu.io is a digital solution that empowers organisations to create tailored diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) plans. Our innovative approach goes beyond strategic planning to tackle real-world DEI challenges, like engaging employees. With analytics, surveys and auditing capabilities, Kuulu.io drives meaningful DEI progress.

Rather than vague ideas, Kuulu.io offers businesses customised, actionable solutions for integrating DEI into their DNA. We believe that just as diversity strengthens our team, embracing diverse perspectives fuels innovation, performance and equality. With Kuulu.io, DEI becomes more than a box to check – it is a driver of belonging that empowers everyone. As female founders from varied backgrounds, we epitomise the power of inclusive leadership. Having navigated our own diverse journeys, we are passionate advocates for diversity and inclusion. Our shared vision and dedication are an inspiration to our team and form the compass that steers Kuulu.io's mission.



Tackling identity-related injustice

Our motivation for setting up Kuulu.io was the injustice we saw in the world, where people face discrimination, violence and unequal opportunities simply because of their identity. At the same time, we knew that embracing diversity unlocks innovation, financial performance and more equitable societies. Though DEI planning is a legal requirement for companies in many countries, the guidelines are unclear and the burden falls on HR teams who lack expertise. We envisioned a better way – a digital tool to make DEI planning straightforward and effective, utilising data to drive real culture change. Our diverse team was living proof of the power of inclusion. We were determined to make workplaces where everyone belongs – not just because it is right, but because it benefits everyone. Kuulu.io was born of our belief that equality and belonging allow human potential to thrive.

Problem-solving DEI planning tool

We knew that to create an effective DEI planning tool, we needed a deep understanding of real workplace needs. So we conducted in-depth interviews with HR professionals to uncover pain points in current processes. Luckily, we were also part of the start-up accelerator programme Kiuas, where we were able to consult mentors and experts to identify how we could turn the idea into a viable product. Armed



with these insights, we began designing an intuitive digital solution we want to use ourselves – with the focus on user-friendliness and creating real value throughout the process. Our team sparred over how to translate DEI expertise into engaging yet practical tools – always with the aim of developing an innovation that equips HR teams with concrete resources to drive strategic, data-based DEI progress tailored to their unique organisational needs. Feedback is continuing to shape Kuulu.io as we partner with users to build the DEI planning tool that we had always wished we had had.

A pivotal moment in the development process was our in-depth customer discovery process to intimately understand the unmet needs and pain points of HR teams. This human-centred foundation enabled us to translate our DEI strategy expertise into a digital tool that solves real-world problems and hopefully changes things for the better. We also realised that transforming something as nuanced as DEI into software required weaving the human element into the entire product. We had to think about how to motivate employees to commit to and engage during the whole process.

Throughout the process, we leveraged our networks to connect with mentors and build an early adopter community. Their feedback and encouragement gave us the confidence that we were on the right track. Having an inspirational and viable network of people to lean on and learn from is pivotal for an early-stage start-up.

Collaborative teamwork critical

During the CIRCE project, our team learned that things rarely unfold as expected. However, we also discovered that there is tremendous strength in teamwork, a quality we must continue to nurture. Our collaborative efforts taught us the importance of staying true to our purpose and enjoying the journey. We came to understand that approaching challenges with curiosity and a sense of lightness rather than succumbing to stress and anxiety leads to better outcomes. Challenges were met head on, and changes were embraced as opportunities for growth. Success in this project was driven by our unity and determination. Looking ahead, we intend to carry these lessons with us after the conclusion of the CIRCE project. Our future plans involve applying the skills and camaraderie we have developed to further the project, knowing that together, we can overcome any obstacles that come our way.

© Vincent Kulesza

Terhi Kesela
she / her

Senni Moilanen
she / her

Margot de Maulmont
she / her



LEZO

The AI-powered career platform that helps employers find specialists in the creative and tech fields.

Education, skill development and matching

LEZO is an AI-powered career platform that helps employers find specialists in the creative and tech fields. Its database now has more than 14,000 candidates and 400+ employers. Our product was founded in collaboration with the independent Ukrainian EdTech company Projector Creative & Tech Institute, which provides professional digital-format education for the IT and creative industries.

LEZO's AI-powered algorithm helps to simplify and optimise the job search process, which saves time and costs. It provides job seekers with personalised vacancy recommendations based not only on their job title, English proficiency level and salary preferences, but also on their skills. The algorithm analyses the CVs of candidates and the vacancy requirements, before displaying their degree of compatibility in percentage terms. In this way, job seekers can narrow down the number of vacancies and employers do not have to check hundreds of CVs, because the AI-powered algorithm has already done this job – instead of a recruiter.



Making a Museum of Homelessness in a Global Crisis

Reimagining the role of and possibilities for museums in a global polycrisis.

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact

What are the role and possibilities for museums in a global polycrisis? We set out to radically reshape museums into sites of healing and justice, led by trauma survivors and homeless people. Our project anchor was a new site, Manor House Lodge, in Finsbury Park, London, where many people live in tents and a locality with the highest number of homeless children in England. With CIRCE's support, our new museum site has been entirely designed by the community. During the project, we recruited a team of talented people, the majority of whom had experienced homelessness and/or addiction, to develop and run the creative programmes, develop mutual aid strategies and support the wider community to create the world's first Museum of Homelessness (MoH).



© Jessica Turrite

Dan Badger

Charlotte Chapman

Nathan East
he/him

Harry Gay
he/they

Benji Lain
she/it

Ellie Pritchard

Lorraine Gunter

Katie Langford

Lauren McQuistin

Lisa 'Ogun

Bekki Perriman
she/her

Society in crisis

Climate change, migration, austerity and increased social divisions are causing increased homelessness in the UK, an 80% spike in non-Covid-related deaths of homeless people, a distressing number of suicides in our community, and an addiction crisis. Much of this can be traced to the UK government's austerity, anti-immigration and anti-welfare policies. Since Brexit, we have seen an increase in racism and xenophobia that have also impacted our community. We are supporting each other and the wider community to navigate a failing set of health, social care and housing systems. We wanted to find better solutions and create a site where people can find sanctuary, experience nurturing and healing, connect with each other, share survival skills and educate others on the problems we face.

This project took our organisation to the next level. We expanded the crew as we worked towards our new site with a vision of a 'museum built by 100 hands'. We harnessed the talents we have and also brought in new people to fill skills gaps. Instead of employing architects, the community led the spatial design processes for the site. Our innovation process included various participation methods and processes. We held Meet and Dream creative co-design workshops with community members. And we went out into the community to simply spend time with people.

Building relationships

The importance of relationship building cannot be underestimated as part of the innovation process. Importantly, we recruited people with experience of homelessness or addiction into key paid roles to develop innovation processes. We also spent time with key people and organisations that are taking a different approach to the polycrisis, e.g. Decolonising Economics, Coffee Afrik and Autonomous Winter Shelter. They helped us to think about our organisation's leadership style and our response to the crisis. And helped push MoH to new places through this project.

Our most important decision was to slow things down and delay the planned opening of the MoH to the public by six months. We wanted to have more time and space to settle into the site and ensure local people are involved in MoH's development, especially people living in the park and local homeless people. Furthermore, we explored alternative ways of working with the museum's collection. Our Riotlab installation kept the museum and the collection alive in a time of transition. We worked with our collection to trial alternative mental health practices. We made a space where people who had experienced problems with the UK's failing health and social care



systems could teach each other survival skills and methods for emotional regulation. The Meet and Dream spaces were also important moments, bringing new ideas from the community to design the site and activities. An outdoor hot tap for drinks when the museum is closed, a sensory garden for traumatic overwhelm, the removal of a structural wall to create communal space and singing workshops for polyvagal healing are just some of the ideas from the innovation process to have enriched the new museum site.

Tackling polycrisis-induced trauma

Our key learning was that to respond to the urgency of the ecological and social collapse we need to slow down and change pace. Real community relations that respond to trauma must be built gently. As museums are heavily involved with toxic colonial legacies, we have to change the way we operate – not only how our collections work but also our power structures and the way we distribute money and resources.

We are following the trailheads of a polycrisis, the dynamics of reciprocal violence that bring social division, policies based upon greed and fear, and inequality. These dynamics are how trauma is being manifested on a local and global level in the 2020s. Real, meaningful trauma-informed work requires us to explore and interrogate the roots of the polycrisis and offer alternatives through our collections and our creative and practical work. We are creating a culture on the site that is the opposite of what is happening in our political and economic systems. Together, we will be flexible, reciprocal, generous and compassionate. And thanks to the CIRCE investment, we are totally reimagining what a museum can be on our new site in Finsbury Park during 2023 and 2024.



© Matt Turtle

Surfing Sofas

Jess Turtle
she / her

Matt Turtle
he / him

David Tovey

Dani Vassall

Joseph Wilson

Mycelium Materials

Exploring the potential of mycelium to replace problematic materials in the construction and furniture sectors.

Ecological sustainability

Myceen is a unique biotechnology company that develops mycelium materials and products. As a team, we are engaged in the development of carbon-negative and environmentally friendly materials using and also valorising various organic industrial residues, for example sawdust, wood chips, straw, etc.





What makes mycelium so special

The new mycelium materials have the potential to replace problematic materials in the construction and furniture sector. After all, mycelium does not pose a threat to nature after the end of its use cycle and decomposes in a natural way. One of the main competitive advantages of mycelium production is the resulting resource savings – both in terms of the valorisation of waste and of its actual production. Not only do we utilise natural production processes; the material can be manufactured at only 25° C.

Moreover, as we use local leftovers as inputs for the production process, we are advancing the circular economy while lowering the overall footprint of the construction industry. Myceen is therefore one of the rare industrial projects of which you can say that the bigger it grows, the smaller the company's footprint will be.

Our team share the same vision and common understanding of the current situation in our world: we are over-consuming and surrounded by products that take up too much in the way of resources. However, we are not pessimists and hence started to look out for novel materials and solutions that would have the potential to make a positive change in this respect.

Pioneering research and development

Mycelium has some excellent inherent material properties, such as thermal insulation and material strength, and even displays natural fire resistance qualities. However, some of the material properties need to be researched in more depth and even improved in order to reach the point where mycelium is suitable for specific use cases. Our innovation process meant that we constantly had to apply the design-build-test-iterate model. This meant that we made tens and hundreds of tests during the project to learn about mycelium's material behaviour and properties. Not only did we research and develop the material; we were also deeply engaged in scaling our production processes and the in-depth development of new production methods. In practical terms, this meant that we needed to increase our production output, set up new production steps and develop new ways of minimising production errors and product defects.

So iteration was the key word and activity during our project. We set up a specific project and development plan for both developing the material and increasing production. And we followed through the iterations in that we constantly learnt something new and applied that to the next step. Thanks to the CIRCE project and funding we were able to carry out this entire iteration process since we now had the means to involve more scientists and production technology. In



essence, all of the progress we made this year in terms of material development and scaling up our production is of great significance.

Key learnings

What we discovered about mycelium materials and the production process and how we have improved in the course of the project are important learnings. Another crucial aspect is what we learned about team work and expanding the team in the course of the project. This has enabled us to try out team work in teams or solo, as well as exploring different communication tools and methods for project management. As we finish the CIRCE project we can safely – and happily – say that Myceen now has a very strong and capable team that has grown to twice its original size. We can also add that our production capacity has expanded many times over. Moreover, we have reached international markets with our products and have already planned our next steps for future growth.

Siim Karro
he / him

Karl Pärtel
he / him

Erki Nagla
he / him

Sabina Tatarytskaya
she / her

Gunnel Kalvik
she / her

Percy Festus Alao
he / him

© Myceen



Tend VR MBCT – A Radical Solution to the Global Problem of Depression and Anxiety

The less expensive and population-scalable VR solution for delivering mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) to treat depression.

Community-driven impact

Tend VR offers VR-based delivery of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), an already well-proven and highly effective treatment for depression. The use of VR enables us to provide MBCT at a much lower cost, and in a manner that is scalable and deployable at population level. Support from CIRCE enabled us to make technical improvements, confirm evidence of efficacy and make a valuable start on increasing access to our product for non-English speakers. Specifically, our project involved completing further research and development to improve our cutting-edge digital therapeutic; completing a 50-patient feasibility study with a write-up ready for academic publication; translating the Tend VR MBCT course into three new language versions: French, German and Romanian; and establishing links to European academic and clinical organisations to prepare for potential pan-European trials.





Pressing need to address depression and anxiety

As about 600 million people around the world suffer from depression and anxiety every year, there is a pressing need for innovative and effective interventions to address these disorders in the global population in an accessible and scalable way. Our solution is Tend VR, a radical new method for delivery of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) developed with a group of award-winning clinicians and creative technologists, alongside Professor Rebecca Gould from University College London (UCL) and The Retreat Clinics, Britain's oldest mental health provider.

Not only does MBCT reduce the symptoms and causes of depression by helping individuals change negative thinking patterns; studies also show that it is as effective as antidepressants for preventing relapse. Exceptional results from our initial proof-of-concept study suggest that our immersive VR has huge potential as an effective delivery method for MBCT, with significant reductions in patients' PHQ-9 depression and GAD-7 anxiety scores. By improving access to treatment for those who cannot attend in-person sessions, Tend VR will reduce treatment costs and improve outcomes for patients. To be in the best possible position to secure further investment and prepare to enter the marketplace, we needed to develop and refine our product and perform a larger study in a diverse population for clinical validation of VR as an effective delivery method for MBCT. The funding from CIRCE has allowed us to do that.

Feedback-based product improvements

To achieve our project goals, we adopted an iterative innovation process grounded in agile methodology. This facilitated the rapid and effective development of our product while maintaining a strong focus on user needs and experiences. Iterative improvements mainly focused on the user experience, interactive elements of the course, the virtual environment and accessibility. As part of our product development, we started by implementing improvements based on the feedback we received from the 12 participants of our original pilot study. We then used a beta testing team to report bugs in the programme, which needed time to get fixed. We also made changes to course content, which required re-writing and re-recording sections of our course, and tackled various technical problems that arose.

The freedom and encouragement from the CIRCE team to explore ideas has been crucial for the development of our company, as it gave us the confidence to embrace a cooperative model, which



resulted in an extremely positive impact on our project's success. Attending the CIRCE events has given us a true appreciation of the learning opportunities that can be gained from interactions within such a diverse group.

Key VR benefit for users

Observing people who were new to our product and using it for the first time gave us greater clarity in understanding the user journey and experience – from insights into how people understood the process of completing the therapy all the way to simple interactions with the menu system. Perhaps the greatest impact was understanding that the users' need to inhabit realistic environments was of utmost importance, as it allowed them a true sense of escape from their immediate surroundings. We then assigned significant development time to this process and ultimately came up with a wholly new technology that has revolutionised how 3D environments can be rendered in VR. In our trial, we will deploy headsets for 50 volunteers who will undertake the full course. This will provide us with additional vital information about the overall user experience and the Tend VR MBCT journey.

Looking ahead, we will start to place our MBCT product in the hands of those who need it most through initiating B2C sales, partnering with mental health charities and exploring how Tend could be implemented within healthcare systems. As for new avenues for Tend, we are aiming to complete the co-design of a relaxation tool for patients with psychosis in the near future. This is a significant spin-off from this project that could go on to help a large number of people at a time of incredible need in their lives. Working with CIRCE has highlighted the importance of maintaining the UK's links with Europe. With our product now translated into other languages, we hope to explore additional partnership opportunities in mainland Europe.

© Tend VR Ltd.

Matthew Hoad-Robson
he / him

Kathleen Wets
she / her

Dr. Kim Bevan
she / her

Matthew Cormack
he / him

Prof. Rebecca Gould
she / her

Declan Halton-Woodward
he / him

Fiona Viney
she / her



Black European Academic Network (BEAN)

Working to overcome the limited access to quality education available for Black Europeans.

Community-driven impact

We founded the Black European Academic Network (BEAN) in 2012 to overcome the challenges of institutional racism in Europe in education and other areas of life. Studies and findings by international and national bodies demonstrate that Black Europeans have limited access to quality education. In many cases, our societal issues also remain largely invisible, with insufficient visible recognition and respect given to our efforts to seek redress. Furthermore, Europe's socio-political climate has demonstrated the need for increased cultural diversity across Europe, including connecting around the Black European experience – whether that means between Black communities in Europe or Black communities with their White counterparts. When Black history and current realities are reported on without knowledge, it is from an objectifying perspective. Stereotypes and prejudices go unreflected. For this reason, we think it is important to provide a platform with stories by Black experts who have lived experience and can report from their first-hand perspective. By raising our visibility and productivity, our project contributes to a substantive advancement in the promotion and protection of Black lives.



Creating a learning management platform

Our project is focused on developing and designing a learning management platform and providing customised modules based on our groundbreaking book “Mapping Black Europe: Monuments, Markers, Memories” (2023). Written by Black Europeans and based on their own lived experiences, the book highlights fundamental tenets of society as they relate to Black Europe, including community organising, creative economies and philosophies. They are examined in eight European capitals: Berlin, Brussels, London, Luxembourg, Oslo, Paris, Rome and Warsaw. Our diverse target group ranges from the Black European communities themselves and academic scholars, teachers and students to workers in the cultural sector, e. g. museums, art galleries and studios, NGOs, archives, cultural ministries and government agencies, tourism, broadcasting and media organisations.

Trial module tested, feedback gathered

Through our work we are bridging the knowledge gap on Europe from a Black perspective in a variety of sectors, including higher education, politics, the cultural and creative economies, and transnational corporations. The publication of our book revealed an opportunity to reach a wider audience and delve deeper into the Black European experience by enhancing the published information with visits to the highlighted cities to gather audio-visual material. The idea of using technology as a tool to engage learners without geographical boundaries informed our idea to develop a trial module, which we tested through our personal connections and adjusted accordingly. After feedback, the revised module and a survey were sent out through our pan-European networks and social media channels to help develop proof of concept for this educational tool. As we continue gathering feedback from participants, we will adjust and refine the modules to better meet their needs and preferences, leading to an improved learning experience over time. The bonus of directly travelling to the profiled cities gave us a deeper understanding of each location’s Black communities, our potential audiences, as well as the opportunity to strengthen our network and establish new ties.



Customisable individual modules

As our European participants are mainly second-language English speakers, we were required to make adjustments to allow for more accessibility to potential participants in the course. With our growing understanding of the constraints of learning in a foreign language, we decided to adjust the initial idea of creating a full course to produce a more flexible model of individual modules that could be customised based on participants’ interests and skill levels. This customisation of modules allows us to target specific language skills and areas of interest that are most relevant and beneficial for each participant. We believe that this modality allows for a greater reach across social and educational lines. Tailoring content to our audience’s specific needs has become a key hallmark of this work and represents an innovative learning strategy. Our flexibility allows participants to retain and apply knowledge in more effective and improved ways. When participants have a say in what they learn, retention is improved.

Moving forward

We learned that our idea has huge potential to be developed into a learning management platform in future. Our next step is to build more modules based on our findings and eventually serve as a hub for other course builders. Our journey of discovery has shown that the concept of customisable modules tailored to our participants’ specific needs and interests is not only effective but also highly scalable. As we move forward, our vision is expanding to encompass a broader range of countries and topics, providing a diverse array of modules that cater to the diverse needs of Black Europeans. Our commitment to excellence in learning will not only benefit second-language English speakers but also serve as a model for course builders and educators across various domains. By continually refining and expanding our modules, we aim to create a dynamic hub that empowers both learners and course creators. Our success will be benchmarked through audience engagement and feedback as the cornerstones of this work.

Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to lifelong learning, we aspire to foster a global community of knowledge seekers and sharers, helping individuals achieve their educational goals and facilitating a global sharing of expertise. This journey is a testament to the limitless possibilities that await us in the realm of online education and personalised learning experiences.

Prof. Dr. Natasha A. Kelly
she / her

Assoc. Prof. Olive Vassell
she / her



© BEAN



More ↗

Vertical52 – We do satellite journalism

Enriching journalistic research by facilitating the use of satellite data.

Technologies for empowerment and participation

Where is the front line in my home country, Ukraine? Can I see from Berlin how Putin is rebuilding my hometown of Mariupol for his propaganda machine? Will I be able to detect from space his military aircraft at a civilian airport in St. Petersburg? How dry is the ground above the Kakhovka embankment? Can the Andromeda yacht be seen anywhere from space? Hundreds of stories can be forensically proven with data from space, intersected with other data sets, and then told spatially.



© Vertical52, Airbus, Planet Labs, Maxar Technologies



Journalistic potential of high-res satellite data

There are now well over 8,000 active satellites orbiting our planet – more than six times as many as eight years ago. Access to and analysis of satellite data were long reserved for intelligence services and the military. But at the latest since Putin invaded Ukraine, there have been more and more civilian and commercial applications that also enrich journalistic research, especially in places where journalists are exposed to repression and persecution or can only pursue their research in exile. However, most journalists cannot access high-resolution satellite data or the tools to carry out more complex analyses with this data, and so tell their stories spatially.

Strengthening the integrity of journalistic research

We supply journalists, publishers and broadcasters with images, data and topics from space. And help them to understand, analyse, visualise and use them to tell stories. Especially in times of fake news and AI, we want to use the possibilities of remote sensing to strengthen the integrity of journalistic research and thus its credibility. In a spirit of social entrepreneurship, we are particularly committed to journalism's social responsibility.

Enabling satellite journalism as a separate discipline

Thanks to the support of the Creative Impact Fund and with the web app <https://app.vertical52.org/> we have automated the ordering process for high-resolution satellite images for investigative research in three iteration loops with leading media companies in Germany as a first step. At the same time, we founded a so-called gGmbH – a non-profit limited liability company by German law. Funded by the European Journalism Fund, the JX Fund, and in partnership with Reporters Without Borders, this non-profit supports exile media with satellite and radar data for their research. With this project we want to make our contribution to establishing satellite journalism as a separate discipline of journalistic research and the existence of independent media in exile as an effective counterweight to propaganda and disinformation. We have also started developing a toolbox for satellite data. For 2024, we will also automate the analysis for six relevant use cases and their visualization via our platform.



Developing tools to democratise research

To sustainably integrate research with satellite and radar data into our users' everyday work, we plan to develop tools for relevant, temporally and geographically replicable topics that our users can operate efficiently and without prior knowledge via a simple user interface. We want to do this because we believe that we can use such a tool to democratise research with satellite and radar data and anchor it sustainably in everyday journalistic work.

The focus is on dealing with publicly available and non-commercial satellite images, especially those from the European Space Agency (ESA). Although these images have a low spatial resolution, they have better spectral properties for measuring soil sealing, flooding, deforestation, carbon biomass or even certain types of air pollution. ESA's twelve Copernicus satellites alone deliver 250 terabytes per day. The problem is that both technical (APIs) and professional knowledge (determination of sensors, specific parameters, etc.) is often required to retrieve suitable data. Our application is designed to provide easy access to this information. Users will be able to visualise data, examine them on an interactive map and export them in various image formats to integrate them into their publications. This promotes evidence-based reporting and helps journalists to present complex issues clearly. We want to build and offer the easiest and most convenient access to space. Users do not need any programming or prior knowledge of remote sensing.

Moving forward

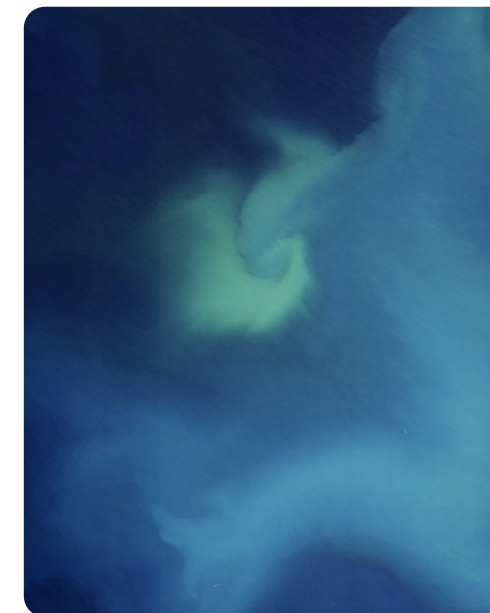
We are currently developing a minimum viable product (MVP) that supports the functions and visualisations described above. However, this visualisation platform for earth observation data offers many possibilities for further development. For example, different use cases can be developed that recognise AI-supported patterns (such as vehicles, ships, houses, or other objects) or include additional data (e.g. atmospheric data, greenhouse gases and geophysical values/ deformations of the earth's surface). Last but not least, other functions can also be implemented that will enable visualisations to be visualised or data displayed in diagrams in addition to map visualisations. We are also planning a kind of notification alert that informs users as soon as significant changes in the geographical area are being monitored, for example when a fire is detected on a satellite image in a defined conflict region.

© Vertical52, Airbus, Planet Labs, Maxar Technologies

Deana Mrkaja
she / her

Marcus Pfeil
he / him

Michael Anthony
he / him



Vollpension – More than a Generation Café

Tackling the challenge of demographic change through intergenerational dialogue and bringing senior citizens into the heart of society and business enterprises.

(Infra)structures and ethics of care

Community-driven impact

The Viennese social enterprise Vollpension has set itself the task of bringing senior citizens into the heart of society and interacting with other generations. Hence, the stars of Vollpension are our ‘grandmas and grandpas’. The aim of Vollpension is to combat old-age poverty and loneliness among older people and create intergenerational interaction. This happens at the Vollpension generation cafés in Vienna, where grandmas and grandpas bake and serve the best pastries using their family recipes. Half of the team consists of older people who earn something to top up their often too low pensions. By participating they are also embedded in a social network. Since 2020, a generational dialogue has also taken place in Backademie, the first ‘grandma baking school’ where senior citizens pass on their professional baking skills. Moreover, since the pandemic, Vollpension has been creating products and services for businesses that emphasise intergenerational dialogue. Thanks to CIRCE, we have expanded and sharpened our existing products in this field.

Following numerous discussions with companies in the post-pandemic landscape, we tried to collaboratively identify their challenges and requirements. Two primary insights emerged from these dialogues. First, companies are encountering difficulties in the seamless transfer of knowledge from experienced, older employees to their younger counterparts. Second, there is a significant labour shortage, and the fact that many people are nearing retirement means the challenge is steadily growing. With over a decade of expertise in intergenerational dialogue, we are well-positioned to assist companies in effectively engaging their older workforce as experts.



© Mark Glassner



Sharpening the offering

We have traversed various phases in our journey. Our approach has consistently prioritised the incorporation of external perspectives over internal ones, allowing us to continually solicit feedback from potential collaboration partners. Our journey commenced by contacting 30 companies of particular relevance to our goals and instigating meaningful dialogue. This led to nearly 20 meetings where we diligently ascertained these companies' needs and prerequisites. Armed with this invaluable input, we orchestrated a hackathon, the main objective of which was to revisit our existing product portfolio and align it with the insights gleaned from our research. We aimed to identify which products remained viable, which required expansion or modification, and which were slated for removal. Consequently, we embarked on the process of adapting and enhancing our products, with the ultimate goal of subjecting them to rigorous testing with select companies and readying them for the market.

Our conviction of the project's significance has remained unchanged since its inception. Demographic change poses a substantial, continually escalating challenge and we are far from having fully grasped its extent. The consistent engagement of prominent and influential companies who have readily engaged in straightforward discussions with us has consistently reaffirmed the validity of our approach. Our primary challenge lay in initiating this journey within an established company, which had thrived for over a decade, and in the relentless pursuit of its development – all while ensuring adequate integration into our daily operations.

Embracing a grander vision

A key takeaway from our journey has been the realisation that we have the latitude to envision grander horizons. While acknowledging that demographic change is a global issue, our initial focus had been primarily local in scope. However, with guidance from CIRCE and the mentoring sessions, we were inspired to think expansively and grant ourselves the freedom to explore the question of what could be the most ambitious vision we could conceive, while disregarding constraints such as budget and resources. This stimulus resonated profoundly with us, and we are committed to embracing this perspective as we move forward.



© Vollpension

Moriz Piffel-Percevic
he / him

Manuel Gruber
he / him

David Haller
he / him

Julia Krenmayr
she / her

Hannah Lux
she / her

Karin Hermann-Arnold
she / her



Modular System for Building with Earth

Developing cost-effective, light and efficient formwork for building with rammed earth.

Ecological sustainability

Earth is the building material of the past that was used for millennia in traditional buildings all over the world. We believe it is also the material of the future. After all, it has an extremely low carbon footprint, regulates moisture and warmth indoors, and is pleasant to touch and aesthetically pleasing. However, the comparatively high cost of constructing with rammed earth is preventing it from becoming more popular in the developed world.

Our mission is to make building with rammed earth easier and more cost-effective, and thus make it a feasible choice in a wide range of construction scenarios. Using our experience in the field of architecture, we are developing a smart system of modules built from rammed earth to simplify the construction planning process. The system is based on a module made using reusable, easy-to-work-with formwork, which will streamline building processes and shorten planning and construction time. An important component of our innovation process are student workshops which enable us to create a community.





Making the process cheaper

Our primary activity is publishing the Outsider magazine, which covers architectural and cultural topics. Ever since the first issue in 2015, we have been writing about the resurgence of earth as a contemporary building material. This movement was pioneered by the Austrian Martin Rauch and further developed by his students. We also fell in love with the material because of its environmental properties and aesthetic quality. We organised several events on contemporary earth-based construction methods and an architectural competition for a rammed earth house, for which we received more than 400 entries from all over the world. There is obviously a lot of interest for building with earth, so why is it not more popular? In our most recent interview with Martin Rauch, he pointed out the various challenges that have prevented its wider adoption. The main issue is a financial one: building with earth in Europe is about 30% more expensive than other construction methods. This immediately got us looking for novel, innovative solutions for making the building process easier and cheaper.

Before developing the module itself, we wanted to make sure that it could be successfully used in a variety of different scenarios. In July, we organised an international workshop for architecture students at our Centre for Building with Earth in Dobrava pri Škocjanu, Slovenia. Our goal was to thoroughly test our proposed construction system. In the course of the week, students were encouraged to develop different building typologies using the basic module, while taking into account the basic principles of building with rammed earth. The workshop was very successful. The wide range of proposed solutions points to the flexibility of the approach and its adaptability to the variety of use cases.

Developing cost-effective formwork

As we were satisfied that the basics of our system are feasible, we moved on to the development of efficient, cost-effective formwork for a single rammed earth module – the system’s building block. We consulted several major companies that develop and produce formwork to learn about the state-of-the-art technology and existing solutions. Having learned important lessons about the principles of formwork design, we developed a solution to suit our specific needs – with the emphasis on portability, simplicity of use and cost-effectiveness. We also acquired multiple machines that help us to speed up the construction process. We are now testing our formwork by building a pavilion using several modules and employing all the knowledge gained.

We were very satisfied with the workshop in terms of both the tangible results and the community that emerged from only one

week spent together. For us, the event highlighted the importance of community building in promoting and developing earth-based construction. Another important breakthrough for us has been our research into state-of-the-art formwork technology. Commercial concrete construction formwork has to be very durable and resistant to the forces of drying concrete, which are much higher than the forces present in rammed earth. Commercial formwork therefore has to be very sturdy but is also very expensive. Keeping this difference in mind, we were able to design a simple, light and efficient wooden formwork for our module.

We learned a lot during the development process – from the CIRCE community, our mentors and everyone we collaborated with along the way. In the process, we had to make a lot of difficult decisions about allocating our energy and resources, while keeping in mind our long-term vision. In future, we want to launch our independent brand and separate our publishing activities from our research in rammed earth technology. We plan to continue educating ourselves and developing our construction system and the module itself. We also have plans to enter the market with smaller rammed earth projects and objects, raise public awareness and pave the way for our main “product”.

Matevž Granda
he / him

Nina Granda
she / her

Patrik Benedičič
her / him

© left: Matevž Granda, right: Jana Jocič



Credits

Publisher

Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE)
u-institut GmbH & Co. KG
Jägerstraße 65
10117 Berlin

Editing, copy reading, fact checking & project management

Nansen & Piccard PartGes
Andrew Craston, Silke Probst, Benedikt Sarreiter, Lili Schleeback,

Production

u-institut GmbH & Co. KG
Zoe Kornmann & Lisa Ratering



Diversity & inclusion review

Rother & Williams The Impact Company GbR
Yolanda Rother, Shawn Williams

Design & illustration

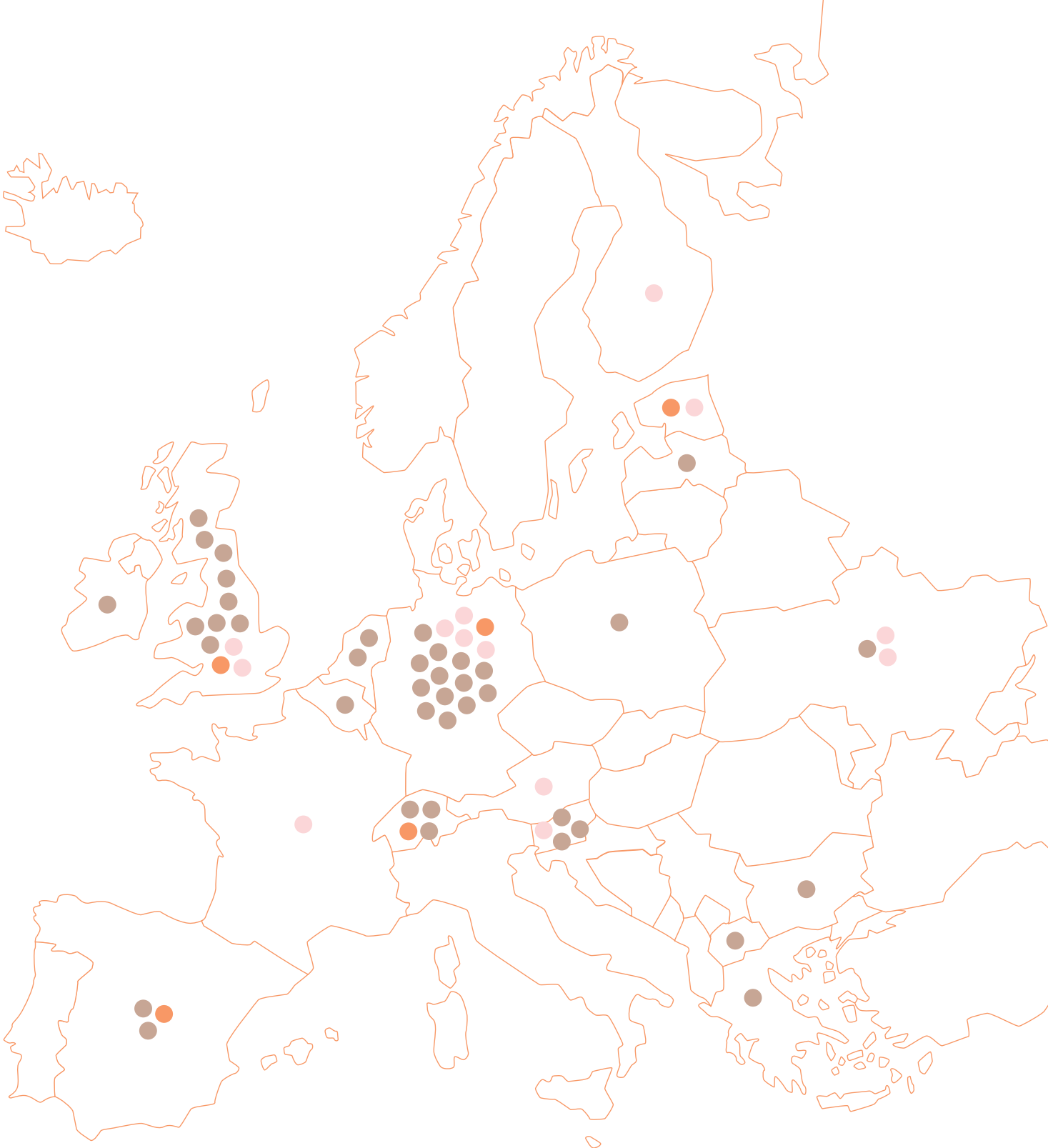
Grafikladen | Dreyer Weiss GbR
Johanna Dreyer

Photo credits

See photo.

Very special thanks go to Wiebke Müller, whose expert knowledge and generous advice were significant in shaping the concept and content of this publication.

We would also like to highlight the countless contributions in form and content made by the entire CIRCE project team with their in-depth expertise and outstanding commitment.



● Research Labs

● Fellowships

● Creative Impact Funds