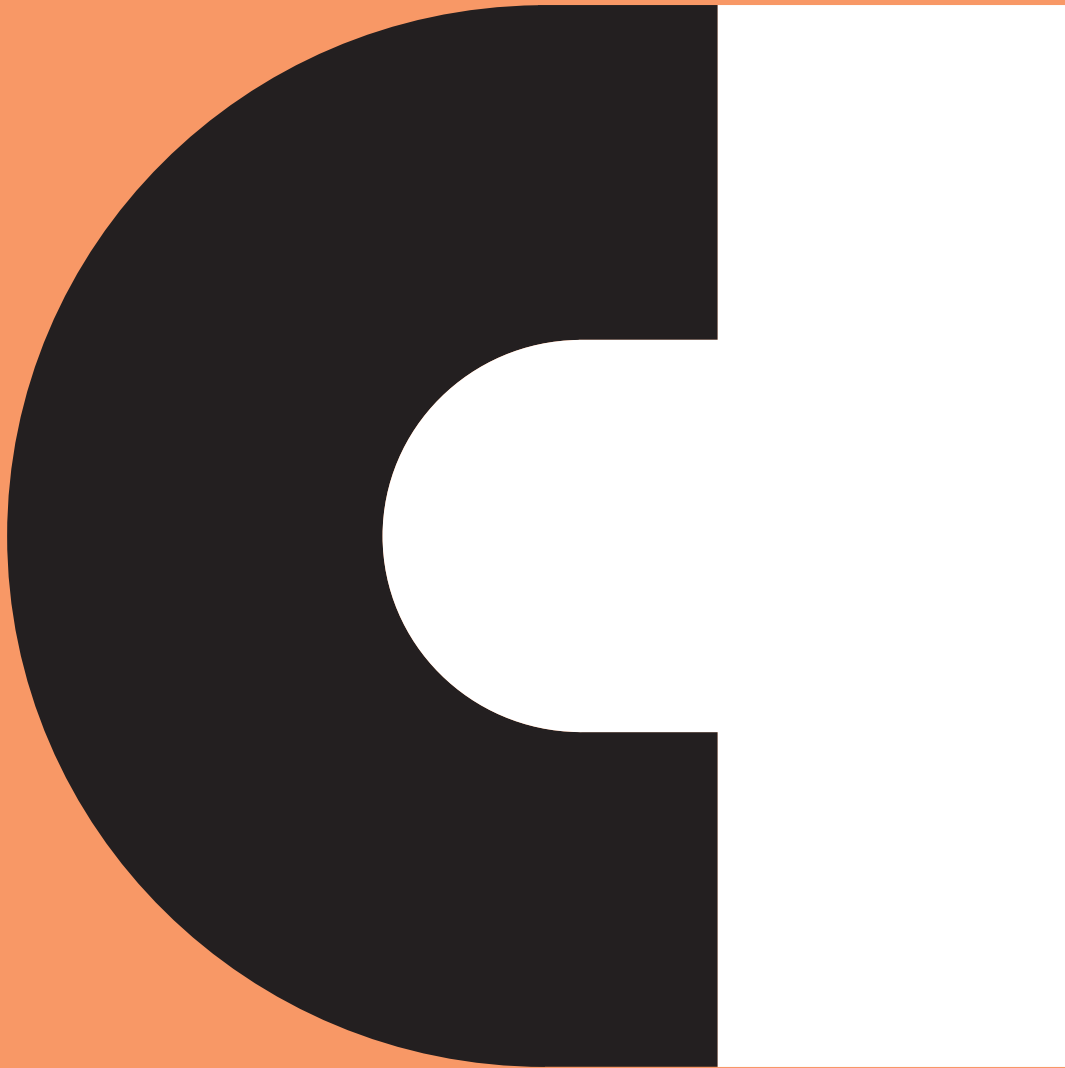


Creative Impact  
Research Centre  
Europe



Creative Impact  
in Practice

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## Social Change Lab

Creative, innovative and committed to social change – CIRCE fellows work on new ways to uphold and grow democratic structures, advocate for environmental protection and empower marginalised groups and their interests.

We've all been there: everyone has that pair of trousers where the waistband is too tight, a jumper with an itchy label or a shirt that doesn't sit quite right on the shoulders, and we all know the feeling that dealing with it all day can cause.

“Clothing is our closest environment”, says Maureen Selina Laverty, a fashion designer from Norway.

But through her research with neurodivergent people, Maureen has discovered that for autistic people or those with ADHD, the tactile or auditory stimuli that clothing can evoke are often a far more intense experience. Scratching against the skin, the rustling of fabric or the restriction of movement posed by some garments can in some cases become unbearable.

As a fashion designer and researcher, Maureen is on a mission to design trousers that meet the needs of neurodivergent people. Her clothes are cut in such a way as to prevent the item from digging into the skin, to offer plenty of room to move and to feel soft against

the skin. The aim here is to remove the barriers preventing people who experience hypersensitivity from going to work or participating in public life.

The 38-year-old is one of ten fellows on the CIRCE Fellowship Programme 2024. CIRCE, which stands for Creative Impact Research Centre Europe, is a Europe-wide network of experts, researchers and cultural and creative professionals as well as a fellowship programme that aims to bolster the cultural and creative industries. CIRCE is a project from Berlin's u-institut, an institution that tackles questions relating to the future, innovation and transformation of the industry. The 2024 fellowship is aimed at researchers, entrepreneurs and cultural and creative professionals, namely artists, designers and filmmakers, and is designed to enable its fellows to carry tangible project ideas through into real-world practice. The prerequisite here is that the pilot projects must have a creative impact, in other words they must invoke creative methods and techniques to generate substantive social benefit. The focus falls less on economic interest or artistic self-expression but instead on achieving a positive impact for the common good.

### Free, diverse and players in democracy

In addition to artists, the cultural and creative industries also include authors, filmmakers, freelance journalists, architects and designers, a sector the European Union reports as one of the most dynamic in Europe. According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the EU, the cultural and creative sector employs 8.7 million people, or 3.8 percent of all employees on the continent, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of self-employed, freelancers and small business owners who make their living entirely or primarily from creative work.

The cultural and creative economies put forward progressive ideas, innovative products and new economic and cultural goods to shape our society.

“The cultural and creative sector is a kind of laboratory for social change where creatives experiment with new concepts, break down existing barriers and introduce fresh ideas and alternative ways of thinking to social discourse”, says Katharina Schumacher, CIRCE project lead and executive at the u-institut.

Schumacher underscores that functioning democracies rely on these free and plural spaces for discourse. In a time punctuated by crises – the war in Ukraine, in



Gaza, the climate crisis, inflation, the rise of far-right parties – an active civil society and open discourse have, as she sees it, a vital role to play. A resilient cultural and creative sector, as well as appropriate support for the industry, are more important than ever:

“This is especially true at a time when anti-democratic parties are publicly questioning open cultural and economic funding and the participation of marginalised groups.”



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## Creating space and conducting research

Since its launch in 2022, CIRCE has built a network of 150 researchers, creatives and cultural-sector workers, providing financial and non-material support for 68 projects. The 2024 fellowship has been jointly funded by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM) and the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion.

CIRCE got off to a flying start with its impactful projects, including the fellowship programme for creatives and researchers, which saw 40 people take part, and the *Creative Impact Fund*, which supported 13 European companies operating in the creative sector. It furthermore ran so-called *Research Labs* at five European locations.

As CIRCE’s project work continues, the knowledge and experience gained from the projects held in 2023 are helping to improve support for further projects with creative impact, with experts, researchers and practitioners from last year involved in the current programme as active members of the CIRCE community. In 2024, CIRCE is centring its work around the fellowship programme and the academic support it provides, including selecting suitable fellows, supervising their research and assessing their project impact. In parallel, CIRCE is also evaluating its own work to further develop the framework for creative impact projects, open up research findings to the public and transfer knowledge into practice.

## Ten projects, a range of intentions

For the 2024 fellowship programme, CIRCE announced it would implement ten pilot projects over a period of five months. Each project would be assigned mentors to contribute their entrepreneurial knowledge and cultural expertise, with workshops also on offer. A public call for proposals was issued, inviting cultural and creative professionals from 23 different countries to apply from March onwards. The goal was to find ideas that aimed to improve social challenges in the following areas:

- Community & Care
- Social & Environmental Sustainability
- Participation & Democracy Building

What does that mean in practice? The Community & Care category includes projects that promote the participation, representation and visibility of marginalised communities. The second category includes initiatives for greater environmental protection and

sustainability. And the third and final category comprises prototypes that underscore democratic principles and, for example, empower citizens to use their voice in their own town or region. To take part in the CIRCE fellowship, the fellows must seek out partners with whom to cooperate either before or during the project phase. Partners could include universities, cultural centres, organisations, companies or cultural institutions. The CIRCE team is here to support the fellows with this and can call on their Europe-wide network spanning culture, politics and academia. The aim behind forming these institutional connections is to broaden the project’s target group reach, consolidate the project and achieve longer-term impact.

Care was taken in choosing the fellows to ensure that their project ideas were grounded in academic findings or long-term experience in the respective field. Ultimately, the project should see the knowledge acquired translated into practice with a tangible product, model or method, for instance an item of clothing,



a workshop concept, a website, an app or a social media campaign.

Berlin-based artist and filmmaker arjunraj, for example, is working with German broadcaster Deutsche Welle and other partners on an online portal for collaborative storytelling, a method developed by arjunraj themselves.

“This is about telling a story with someone, not about someone”, says arjunraj.

arjunraj conceptualises filmmaking as a collaborative process grounded in trust from and cooperation with a story’s protagonists, a process which necessitates spending time getting to know one another, including during filming. Marginalised groups should have the opportunity to tell their stories in their words and from their perspectives – a process that can help counter the persistence of stereotypes.

arjunraj is now working to make this method of storytelling, which has already been taught in workshops at universities and in editorial offices, available on a platform with educational videos, graphics and text. This way, filmmakers, journalists and authors around the globe will be able to access the method, irrespective of their resources. At the same time, the aim is for the platform to become a kind of media library for films or other media created using the collaborative storytelling method.

Other fellows, meanwhile, are working on strategies to consolidate the cultural scene in different local authorities, where funding has traditionally been somewhat precarious. They want to do this by designing workshops for local public administrations or cultural institutions. Another participant is designing a social media campaign that leverages creative content to warn against hate, misinformation and radicalisation, in doing so attempting to re-establish trust in democratic values.

## Trust and human contact

The ten projects for 2024 are all very different. CIRCE takes the approach that innovation cannot thrive without space for exploration. Being open and flexible to what is out there is essential for innovation with creative impact, a philosophy CIRCE is attempting to follow by designing a framework programme around the fellowship. CIRCE’s work with the fellows is, as a matter of principle, grounded in trust-based collaboration. CIRCE relies on an innovative approach to supporting and supervising project work that removes official accountability and control and instead operates on the basis of human contact and trust. The fellowship therefore offers a process-focused framework that runs in parallel with the project phase. Here, the focus goes beyond the end result to also consider the process and project development. For its part, the CIRCE team follows and supports

the projects’ development with regular face-to-face meetings, both in person and online. The theory behind this stems from previous project work, which was studied to conceptualise a learning system that should ideally continue to change and improve the partnership. It is worth mentioning that the fellows are drawing on many years of experience in the cultural and creative sector – both in their own communities and at international level – and are trusted by the project team.

June saw the start of the 2024 project phase with a joint kick-off meeting at CIRCE in Berlin, where the fellows presented their projects and got to know each other. From then onwards, the fellows and the CIRCE team have met monthly online to discuss challenges and offer mutual feedback. Each month, there has also been an online workshop with external experts,

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covering topics such as futuristic design, project planning, learning strategies, time management and entrepreneurial strategies.

“While each fellow is working on something different, they still face common challenges, which we have brought in expert input to address”, says Charline Munzer, CIRCE project manager and fellowship lead for the 2024 fellows.

In addition, each fellow is supervised by two mentors: they are given five hours of mentoring which they can use as they see fit. Plus, the fellowship programme is

also supported by awareness experts. At a joint meeting, the fellows were able to access advice on issues such as anti-discrimination in relation to their projects.

October 2024 saw the end of the five-month-long project phase. The fellows all returned to Berlin to present the conclusion of their ideas and a process from which we can all learn, whether that was a pair of trousers, an online portal, an app or a workshop concept. Ultimately, the projects have led to new prototypes and methods of real use to society and with the potential to adapt to further communities and places. The fellows also produced a ten-page report where they reflected on the process of the project phase, on how they can find real-world applications for their projects and on the social benefits they want to achieve with their work.

## Creative impact: Conceptualising the creative contribution

Now the project phase has drawn to a close, the second major task for the CIRCE team comes into play: the scientific analysis. This year, the focus of the analysis is on clarifying the concept of creative impact in order to define and conceptualise it more clearly across both theoretical and practical domains. CIRCE seeks to identify the areas of society where creative impact can be most effective. Similarly, there is also the question of transferability: Is creative impact usually context-specific, or can we translate successful approaches to further areas, regions, topics or communities? The analysis will also examine ways to communicate creative impact: How can we analyse the creative impact achieved and communicate this to relevant stakeholders, such as the cultural and creative sector, society, politics and supporting bodies?

The CIRCE team is now working alongside researchers to further develop the concept of creative impact, in particular to establish a theoretical foundation, improve its real-world applicability, raise awareness of its potential and make said potential more widely usable. CIRCE self-conceptualises as a

prototype and accordingly pursues ongoing self-development and improvement with the acquisition of new knowledge and experiences. As such, both the fellowship itself and the collaborative process with the fellows are also under analysis.

“We not only want to improve our understanding of how creatives bring about creative impact, but also to continue developing the necessary structures to support their impact”, says Roman Bartuli, lead of the scientific analysis at CIRCE.

CIRCE is using the knowledge gained in this way to formulate a series of recommendations. These action points will be open access and are intended to improve other funding programmes, thereby affording their own contribution to a more resilient cultural and creative sector.



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# Fellowships

The CIRCE Fellowships – Creative Impact in Practice programme provides support to ten pilot projects from the European cultural and creative economies that translate knowledge and research into creative practice. Over a period of five months, fellows harness the potential of the cultural and creative sectors and trial new ways of tackling the challenges of our time. The aim here is to create synergies and identify collaborative opportunities that ensure long-term applicability of results. Each pilot project falls within and between three thematic areas: Communities & Care, Sustainability & Environment and Democracy & Participation. Fundamentally, the projects promote inclusion and social justice, address the climate crisis and bolster democratic principles.

The fellows share an exemplary commitment to social engagement and the courage to experiment with new ideas. Each fellow is able to draw on their unique expertise while upholding a close connection to either their project mission or the communities

to which they have committed. In many cases, the goal is to create new participatory spaces, such as the inclusive cinema programme in Košice, organised by Barbora Andor Tóthovás to encourage increased, and more frequent, participation in local cultural life. Another such project is Diana Raisal's Europe-wide programme to furnish emerging LGBTQ+ club entrepreneurs with the knowledge, networks and tools to create new, safer spaces for the community to come together. Similarly, Nepo Schrade's work centres around both marginalised group participation in public spaces and climate action, while Jorinde Schulz's Berlin project considers how to improve specific decision-making involvement among city dwellers and local initiatives. In an alternative to gentrification, her project draws on creative methods to introduce memories to the collective imagination in order to create regenerative visions for the future of places steeped in history.

Projects like Maureen Selina Laverty's, where innovative product development builds on newly

acquired data, also rely on ongoing analysis and continued prototype development. Maureen's project explored the sensory experiences of neurodivergent people in wearing clothing. It then drew on cross-sector collaborations between research, design and digital technologies as well as with neurodivergent people themselves to translate these insights into a new trouser product. Aiwon Yin pursued a similar prototypical, iterative approach in developing a toolkit for socially engaged creative networks. Comprehensive community mapping should further support the groups in order to bolster their internal structures, thereby promoting collaborative work.

For all fellows, collaboration with other creatives but also institutions and relevant economic stakeholders is a cornerstone for the development of long-term creative impact. Certain projects, for instance, see different actors and resources brought together in new ways to achieve greater impact. One such example is Flore Beaumont's project, which unites impact investing and the film industry.

Similarly, the Empowering Democracy project is developing a concept which enables the corporate world to adopt a new role in democratic coexistence.

The fellowship programme also opens up access to the time and resources needed to make long-conceived-of projects into reality. This is the case, for example, with Lou&You, a virtual companion for survivors of violence and the brainchild of Isabel Henschen, or with arjunraj's Körperkino methodology, which rethinks storytelling, particularly in large museums and media institutions. Both projects are the result of long-term development and preparation, work which can now be substantiated within the framework of the programme.

By platforming such contrasting interdisciplinary pilot projects, CIRCE is evidencing the vast potential of the cultural and creative economies. At the centre of all this are the ten fellows and their projects; valuable examples of how creative approaches and collaborations can present solutions to pressing challenges and support transformation processes.





## Aiwen Yin

she/her

[More ↗](#)

I am a researcher, designer and artist. My work departs from the assumption that “the technological is institutional, and the institutional is technological”, and attempts to create a future system that can be established around the value of care and the organisation of mutual aid. My current focus is on an alternative funding mechanism for socially-engaged art that goes beyond the project-oriented framework.

# Survival Kits for Intentional Communities

What exactly happens when a community descends into questioning, struggles and conflicts? Most of the time, people blame each other for being lost. An intentional community is a group of people who choose to live or work together based on shared values, goals or ideals, and who formulate a critique of dominant social or economic structures.

Survival Kits for Intentional Communities offers consultations and insights for these communities that attempt to address social justice through art and collective actions, to help navigate and understand each other. The toolkit is designed to help intentional communities understand and reflect on their status and future potential. Unlike many organizational tools that focus on efficiency and productivity, the survival kits emphasise the activist nature and the care needs of intentional communities, covering a broader spectrum of considerations such as practising solidarity and transforming individuals and society.

Most of my time during the CIRCE project period is spent on prototyping and partnership development. I spent time with communities and organisations in Amster-

dam, Manchester, London, Kassel, Paris, Copenhagen, Shanghai and Guangzhou to discuss long-term collaborations while testing the survival kits with them.

Initially envisaged to function as a standalone self-help tool for communities, the survival kits are currently mostly applied in a workshop format. After testing with dozens of communities from different backgrounds, we recognise that the situated nature of our community model requires heavy engagement from an external facilitator. To be able to responsibly facilitate the workshop, the facilitator needs to combine the theoretical knowledge from the model with the local knowledge about and around the community. These requirements are hard to archive through a self-help tool format at this stage of prototyping.

Having said that, the feedback we received has been overwhelmingly positive so far, as the toolkits reveal a “powerful, constructive and insightful” perspective on the sustainability of collective practices. Plus, we have formulated new collaborative proposals with the majority of the communities and organisations we visited.

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arjunraj

all pronouns

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I'm arjunraj, a filmmaker, multimodal researcher and educator. Over the past five years, I've been developing a unique storytelling methodology that explores the politics of who tells whose stories and how we can collaboratively craft narratives to navigate cultural ambiguities. The CIRCE programme offered a fantastic platform for conducting this artistic research practice.

## Körperkino: Embodied Cinema as the Future of Storytelling

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In this contemporary era marked by the fragmentation of perspectives, where isolated islands of identity, cancel culture and echo chambers are bound by animosity towards the other, I present a distinctive storytelling toolkit in the form of a multimodal platform exploring how to collaboratively create stories of tomorrow through a profound comprehension of the 'self' today. Institutions within the cultural and creative economies (CCE) which create, archive knowledge and disseminate stories, such as museums and media houses, wield enormous power to choose which stories get told, who is able to tell stories about whom, and whose stories are heard. Körperkino aims to intervene in mitigating these challenges to holding plurality in thought. By

putting the methodology into practice as a comprehensive and accessible toolkit to 'Stop, Look and Reflect' on the extractive principles embedded in the storytelling practices of various CCE actors, the project proposes clear methods to adopt collaborative approaches. By bringing awareness to the need to pluralise thoughts and stories, the project creates opportunities of economic gain for historically underrepresented communities by telling their own stories. This innovative method enables its user to dive into personal histories, belief systems, limitations and worldviews to bridge the gap between 'self' and 'other'. The project underscores the transformative power of storytelling to reshape perceptions and create communities of resilience.



## Barbora Andor Tóthová

she/her

[More ↗](#)

I am a cultural manager and researcher with 10+ years of creative and cultural practice. I co-founded Kino Usmev, an arthouse community cinema in Slovakia, and am the author of their inclusive film and education programme. I am passionate about independent/grassroots cultural practice and am relentlessly curious. This is reflected in my research for my PhD studies dedicated to cultural impact and policy.

## Caring Culture

CIRCE fellowship gave me an opportunity to explore my passion projects and create my own platform, where I combine my main interests – care about communities and research on creative and cultural impact. The result is a unique project called CARING CULTURE.

I try to open up cultural experience – to communities that are usually excluded from cultural participation in Slovakia. After five years of the inclusive film and education programme of Kino Usmev, I was finally able to evaluate the project, discover its real impact on general audiences, and challenge my findings with real practice at the Inclusive film festival that was held in Košice as a final event from 24-27 October 2024. The fourth edition of the festival was titled “Connecting” and explored the difficult political situation in Slovakia. Political power actively targets minorities, especially the queer community. The programme was aimed at

young adults, their hopes, dreams and challenges – in contrast with a government that tries to erase anything outside of the ‘normal’. Together with communities, we created innovations to the regular programme formats, such as family sensory screenings or an industry programme addressing ethical representation of communities in film. One of the tools used at the festival was an audience evaluation survey around the sensitivity of the inclusive film programme.

Another activity I am involved in is policy workshops that highlight the values and benefits of grassroots culture for the local (urban) environment; these focus on public-civic cooperation that transforms paradigms and brings forward urban innovations through cultural and creative economies (CCEs) that create a multitude of possibilities for a sustainable future despite critical times. All of the activities will be presented under the project brand and website “Caring Culture”.

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## Diana Raiselis

they/them

[dianaraiselis.com](http://dianaraiselis.com)

More ↗

I am a writer-researcher, urbanist and facilitator using policy, culture and civic engagement tools to study and foster development of nightlife, third places and queer space in cities. As a past recipient of policy and arts fellowships in Berlin, Salzburg, Chicago and Los Angeles, I work regularly with arts and urbanism organisations such as VibeLab and Berlin Clubcommission.

## Queer Space Project

[@queerspaceproject](https://www.instagram.com/queerspaceproject)

[queerspaceproject.com](http://queerspaceproject.com)

© Ali Wagner

Nightlife and independent cultural spaces are crucial ‘third places’ in cities. They not only serve as incubators for new cultural and creative practices and actors, but also as key social infrastructure for LGBTQ+ and other marginalised communities. But research has shown that these spaces are under increasing pressure from development, rising costs and other urban factors – and that closures tend to disproportionately affect marginalised communities, who may already lack permanent venues run by and for them. A lack of sustainable physical space – and the operators committed to preserving it – puts the continued vitality of both creative industries and urban communities at risk. Queer Space Project aims to link LGBTQ+ nightlife creators with the knowledge, networks and tools to create new spaces. It seeks to make legible an often challenging, unclear

path to entrepreneurship for underrepresented creative practitioners, and to connect a new generation of cultural leaders to peers and current operators, to form intergenerational mentorship and knowledge-sharing relationships. This prototype edition consisted of an open roundtable convening and a four-session, application-only cohort learning programme, both conducted virtually and open to LGBTQ+ nightlife and cultural practitioners based in the 46 Council of Europe countries. The 2024 programme drew together seven presenters currently operating or developing venues, and a cohort of 16 culture and nightlife creators based in 13 cities, to learn from presenters and peers on topics such as developing venue concepts and business plans, building audiences, and community-owned and collectively-operated models of operation.

# Empowering Democracy: Corporate Strategies for Enabling Participative Social Media Campaigns

In my CIRCE pilot project, I tackled the growing political disillusionment and loss of trust in democratic institutions. Many people feel left behind<sup>1</sup> and have a need for belonging and security. Without it, they often turn to populist movements like the German right-wing party AfD, which exploits their alienation by offering identity and voice.

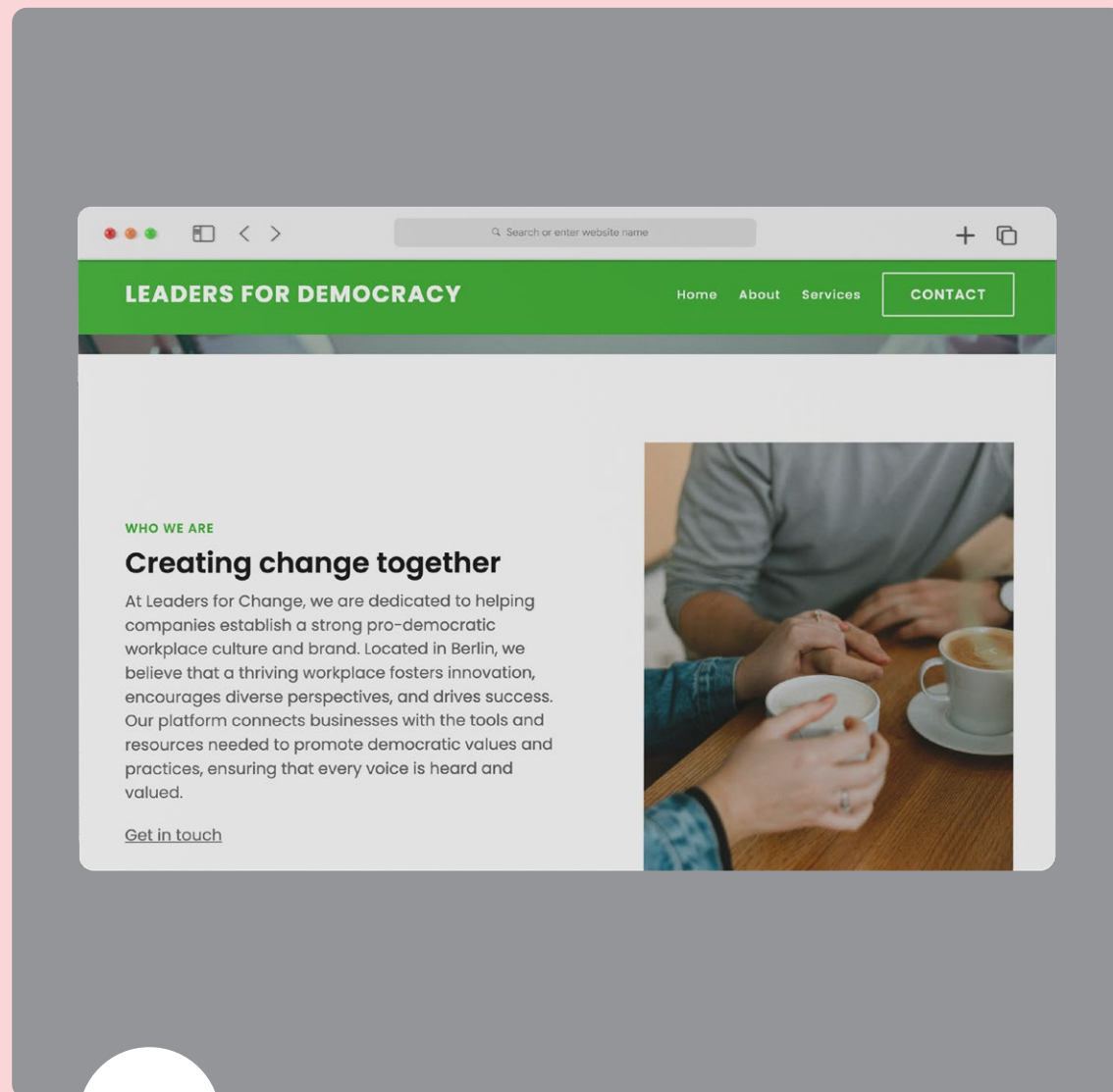
The AfD's dominance on YouTube, commanding 82% of political engagement, highlights this divide. Their success stems from addressing the emotional needs of undecided or swing voters, who feel neglected by mainstream politics. To counter this, we must reconnect these individuals through social media campaigns that rebuild trust and foster belonging. Initial findings from my project reveal that individual campaigns, while valuable, lack the scale to drive real impact. The true potential lies in enabling companies and organisations to act as platforms for wider participation. As trust in

state institutions erodes, companies are becoming trusted entities. This realisation has led to the development of participative models where companies not only contribute but actively lead social media strategies inspired by the cultural and creative economy.

I propose a platform that serves as both an internal educational hub and an external campaign resource. Internally, it offers workshops on conflict management, fostering inclusion and integrating international employees, thus helping companies create a strong, democratic workplace culture. Externally, the platform provides a toolkit for pro-democratic social media campaigns, enhancing employer branding.

By creating an impact-driven business with annual revenue, these strategies become scalable. Companies can then play a key role in this transformation, becoming trusted spaces where citizens feel connected and engaged.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/sd-2024-03-wohlstand-populismus-muench-et-al.pdf>



As a software entrepreneur from Berlin, I'm passionate about building companies and driving societal impact through innovation. My focus is on creating future-ready, AI-driven organizations. I believe entrepreneurship is key to addressing today's political and social challenges, and I'm committed to merging technology and social responsibility to foster scalable solutions.

More ↗





## Flore Beaumond

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With a background in impact investing and impact production, I noticed the lack of impact funding going to audiovisual projects. As a strong believer in the power of culture to drive social change, I joined CIRCE to bridge these two sectors, focusing on alternative ways to support engaging, solution-driven climate stories and ensure they reach mass and diverse audiences.

# A New Financial Model for Distributing Impactful Environmental Narratives

The Anthropocene has crossed critical planet boundaries, and the entertainment industry, with its reach to billions of viewers, bears a responsibility to create new narratives that enable us to collectively imagine new desirable futures. Research shows that climate stories are rare and often portray catastrophic scenarios, overwhelming viewers and diminishing their sense of agency. Furthermore, although most people recognise the climate crisis, they often feel powerless to act.<sup>1</sup> Representation of climate-related issues on screen continues to receive limited attention. The most watched content today not only overlooks environmental issues but depicts role models living in a world of infinite resources. Behavioral science demonstrates that on-screen stories can shape social norms and influence public opinion.

So what if we did it the other way around? Imagine if films and TV series could effectively drive audience behavior towards environmental action. Reimagining narratives

with positive, solution-driven themes, and showcasing role models with environmentally conscious attitudes, can inspire individual action and engagement. This CIRCE pilot project aims to harness this potential by leveraging storytelling to promote environmental change.

Producers of socially engaged films often struggle with distribution due to limited finances, network access, and marketing expertise. With public funding for culture on the decline, my project explores whether private impact funding could help expand the reach of new environmental narratives. Given the high risk associated with investing in cinema, I propose an Impact Bond, allowing impact investors and foundations to share this risk while providing financial incentives to distributors to support the distribution of new environmental stories. This model aims to connect impactful climate stories with a wide audience, transforming environmental storytelling and driving meaningful change.

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<sup>1</sup> Fondation Jean-Jaurès. (2023). Enquête climat : Les Européens et leur connaissance du changement climatique. Retrieved from <https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/enquete-climat-les-europeens-et-leur-connaissance-du-changement-climatique/>



## Isabel Henschen

she/her

[More ↗](#)

Informed by my background in contemporary art and ethnology, I work on the intersections of strategic social innovation, contemporary art, technology and design. With Lou&You, I founded an initiative that developed the first digital companion for victims of violence. The CIRCE fellowship allowed me to create an enabling user experience by applying a humane design approach.

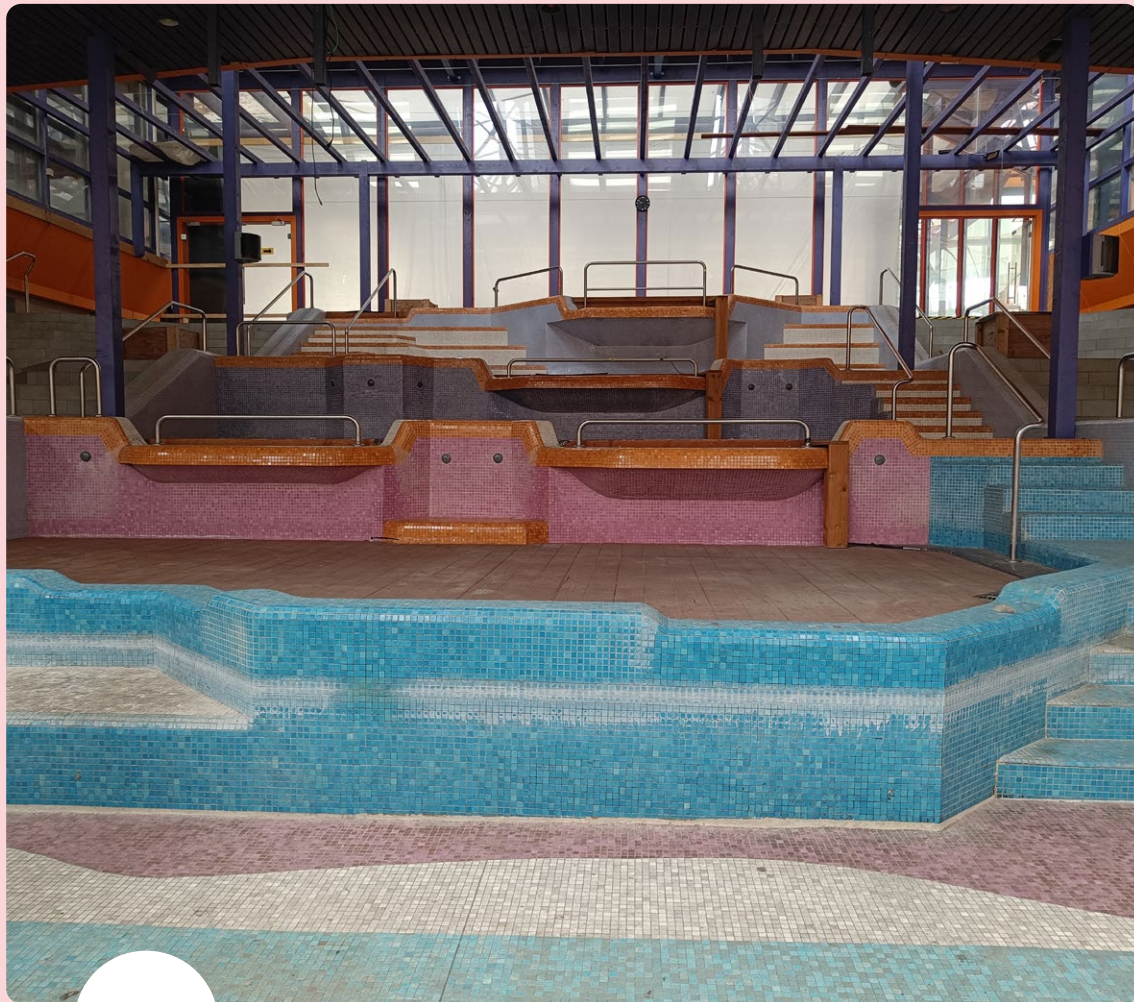
## Designing Enablement: Solving Human Problems with Humane Technologies

During my CIRCE fellowship, I focused on exploring how technology can be designed to better support individuals who have more complex needs than the typical tech user. In my case, this group is people who have experienced sexual or domestic violence. My project centred on enhancing the user experience of Lou&You by applying a trauma-informed approach and humane design principles. To solve societal problems – like 80% of victims of violence not finding the support they need – it is not enough to provide a practical solution, in this case the factual information. Understanding that trauma heavily impacts information processing, most interfaces are too complex. The language used often feels alienating and the visual design evokes distress, rather than calm.

During my project, I thus focused on making users feel emotionally safe and enabled to take another step on their healing journey. This led to many seemingly small but significant design choices, a restructured information architecture, adjustments to Lou's tone of voice and visual elements that support an intuitive experience. My aim is to enable more people to find the information and support services they need because they felt guided through their journey by Lou. The CIRCE programme offered the perfect setting for exploring these themes, allowing me to experiment with creative solutions to the hurdles our user group experiences. The insights gained in this process will not only inform my broader approach to design and technology, but also make a difference for those turning to Lou for support.

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## Jorinde Schulz

she/her

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I am an artist and activist. My book “Die Clubmaschine” is a literary essay exploring the myths and machinery of the legendary Berghain nightclub in Berlin. Last year, I co-edited “Generalverdacht”, a critical anthology about racist criminalisation. As a team member of the non-profit *Gemeingut*, I organise resistance against privatisation. One of my biggest joys is being part of the artist collective Spaceship Beben.

# Spaceship SEZ – A Toolbox of Creative Strategies for Participation in Urban Development Processes

Intervening at a crucial historical moment where a much-beloved public infrastructure is threatened by destruction, the pilot project seeks to explore and develop creative strategies to enable the participation of those affected and strengthen their resistance.

A first milestone has been reached for the community of neighbours and activists, academics and artists who have gathered around the vision to re-open the SEZ, a former sports and recreation centre in Berlin: a playful public protest that took place on 1 September. In a public meeting/workshop organised in collaboration with *Gemeingut*, demands and ideas for this public event were discussed and developed.

Based on numerous interviews with neighbours as well as experts, the spaceship has emerged as a central metaphor and vehicle of storytelling for the project. The idea of the spaceship connects to the architectur-

al legacy of the SEZ building as well as similar buildings in post-Soviet land- and cityscapes, and thus opens up to an imaginative encounter with them. The process of collaborative archiving is in full swing: we have created a photo archive of the SEZ as well as capturing the building in its current form. A public call for memories has brought forth personal stories as well as surprising treasures like forgotten climate-friendly technological innovation from the '80s. The material collection has been expanded to include image material from related architectures in Southeastern Europe which share similar histories of decay and imminent demolition – and at the same time encapsulate the hopes and visions that brought them to life. In two further workshops with artist collective Spaceship Beben, the collected materials and visions were assembled into a DIY exhibition and a science fiction narrative.

© Schulz/Sengupta



## Maureen Selina Lavery

she/her

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I am a designer and action researcher, co-creating with neurodivergent participants. I explore the physical, emotional and sensory experience of clothes and their nurturing qualities for diverse bodies and minds. CIRCE's support for creative and social impact provides the first step in translating the academic insights on this topic into meaningful and accessible solutions in the fashion industry.

## Trousers to Climb Trees

Trousers to Climb Trees is an investigative design practice. The pilot project aims to develop trousers for neurodivergent individuals who can be deeply affected by the tactile, sonic and kinaesthetic sensations of the clothing they wear.

For those on the autism spectrum, and many with ADHD, the sensory inputs from their environments can be experienced at amplified and often unbearable levels. Clothing is our most immediate environment. Scratchy seams, itchy textures and restrictive forms can be perceived by the body as threats. These fight-or-flight triggers can result in the body being stuck in a state of chronic stress, disabling a person's interactions with the world around them. They affect a person's ability to concentrate, self-regulate, and their ability to do the things they want to do. The title of the pilot project is inspired by my neurodivergent co-creators'

expression of how they wish to feel in their clothing. They do not desire sporty climbing gear or expansive sweatpants. The context of use is the office meeting, typing at a desk, grocery shopping, coffee with friends. As one co-creator explained, "It's not that I am necessarily going to climb a tree, but I would like to feel that it's a possibility". It's about freedom: freedom from sensory discord, freedom of movement, freedom of self-expression, freedom from judgement. It's about comfort: a balancing act between physical, social and emotional experiences. The key activity in the pilot project is a series of embodied design workshops, whereby neurodivergent participants explore how the fabric responds to the movement of their body as they climb trees. Together we shape the fabric as they move, then translate it into a kinetic pattern from which we construct prototypes to be tested.

© Model: Rannei Grenne, Photographer: Anders Myklebust





## Nepo Schrade

he/him

[More ↗](#)

I am an urban planner and designer with a passion for exploring the intersections of planning, green infrastructure and climate justice. CIRCE represents an opportunity for me to build on my previous research into these topics – specifically urban heat islands and their impacts on health and housing access. This way, I hope to be able to contribute to the formation of healthy, strong communities.

## Greening on the Verge: A starter kit for community-led public realm interventions

© Merle Burkhardt

The process of creating the toolkit has been a personal journey, as much as it has been about narrowing down which information to include to create a positive impact and provide value. At its core, the project has become about enabling individuals of marginalised communities in Berlin to shape the public realm and thereby set the basis for imagining alternative futures in the face of a myriad of challenges and disproportionate climate impacts.

Rather than, as initially planned, attempting to outline all of the steps required to, for example, adopt and tend to a piece of land with complete legal certainty, the toolkit therefore focuses on “rogue interventions” – what individuals and small groups can do immediately, without having formalised structures to fall back on – yet. The process behind this development has been an anal-

ysis of the guidance that already exists and dialogue and discussions with individuals of marginalised communities (whether active in collectives and groups or not). The hope is that small-scale interventions, such as seed grenading, planting and maintaining tree bases, or foraging can be repeated, and can inspire confidence and local involvement.

This approach also connects to the initial impetus for the project, which intends to put research into practice. The “just green enough” approach, which intends to secure green, cooler neighbourhoods while avoiding the gentrification effects often caused by prestigious and eye-catching landscape architecture and mobility projects, relies on small-scale, neighbourhood-led interventions to, on one hand, garner the involvement of local residents and, secondly, fly under the radar while enabling transformative impacts.

# Mentoring

The CIRCE Fellowship 2024 brings on board creative professionals firstly, to support innovative research and creative projects, but also to provide support to the people behind them on their learning journeys. The goal is to explore together what characterises creative impact and how it can make a positive contribution to social change.

CIRCE's mentoring programme is a central pillar on this journey. Fellows are offered individual support to help them translate their ideas into real-world social change. At the heart of the mentoring programme is the mentor-fellow partnership, a relationship based on trust, openness and equity. Each fellow is assigned two mentors, both with extensive experience in research and creative practice. Thematic orientation, individual needs and complementary skills are all considered in matching the partnerships so as to best support the fellows' research and practice.

The mentors draw on a wide range of backgrounds, including as researchers, independent curators, entrepreneurs, psychologists and ex-

perts in critical spatial practices. Their common denominator is their commitment and many years of experience working in the cultural and creative sectors. Bringing knowledge in areas such as feminism, digital culture, planetary strategies and participatory urban planning, the mentors open up a reflexive space for the fellows, allowing them to view their pilot projects through new lenses.

The idea behind the mentoring programme is not only for the fellows to advance their pilot projects, but also for them to grow personally. Ensuring direct contact between fellows and mentors was crucial for building trust, sharing knowledge and growing networks. While the European geography was not without its challenges, the partners were able to meet at the Fellow Summits and the fellows also visited their mentors. This fostered collaboration and created a consistent environment of curiosity and openness. This type of mentoring partnership was beneficial in helping the fellows to overcome obstacles, refine their processes and successfully implement their pilot projects.

© left: Gill Lavy, right: Daniele Kienzler

## Stella Sideli

she / they

I am a certified mentor and creative coach with extensive experience in artist development, curatorial practice, writing and access support across the UK, EU and Mediterranean. I have supported hundreds of artists and creatives through professional and personal transitions, focusing on empowerment, inclusivity and accessibility. My approach is shaped by my identity and academic research in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, bolstered by curatorial practice and training in relational dynamics coaching. At CIRCE, I combine professional expertise, lived experience, practical insights, research and commitment to EDI, to nurture individual growth in fellows while contributing to a more inclusive and democratic creative sector.



## Samuel Huber

he / him

Hi, I'm Samuel. Through the *For Planet Strategy Lab*, I'm on a mission to bring planetary perspectives to organisations. Joining CIRCE as a mentor in its first year gave me the opportunity to engage and learn from a wide range of creative practices from across Europe. I am excited to be part of it once again – to both support and learn. With my background in strategic entrepreneurship and sociological research, I focus on finding ways to sustain creative practice. Throughout the mentoring process, I help to take a nuanced perspective on the projects and their key questions, ensuring that the projects create lasting impact within the cultural sector and beyond. As this involves a high level of complexity, I try to provide a space for trust and vulnerability but also brave questions – all with the goal of crafting clarity and momentum.



## Naja Kikelj Širok

she / her

I am a psychologist, researcher and project manager in urban planning, based in Ljubljana. In my current role, I focus on translating citizens' needs into actionable urban design briefs. Through professional support and strategic mentorship, the mentees I've worked with have developed projects that deeply reflect their aspirations and values. By aligning personal goals with community needs, they've created scalable, innovative solutions that impact not only their local environments but also other sectors. Their work spans new storytelling methods, inclusive policy development, combating green gentrification and designing for neurodivergent individuals – all with the potential for profound social, cultural and environmental impact. Their dedication to creating meaningful change has been truly inspiring.



## Danica Sretenović

Drawing from my work in critical spatial practice and feral curatorial politics – focusing on places and concepts that hold transformative potential to alter the world as it is – and Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, I view mentorship as a collaborative exchange on questions equally unknown to both parties. Such collaboration is not service- or object-oriented; rather, it focuses on precise reading of societal, environmental and economical urgencies while relying on creative actions and critical thinking to surpass the inevitable by creating infrastructure for long-term, systemic changes. CIRCE is a unique initiative within the EU's cultural sphere where such complexities are given the place and time to be acknowledged and explored, without rushing into solutionism, while advocating for plurality of forms and means of creative impact.

© left: Naja Kikelj, right: Amadeja Smrekar

# CIRCE Community


[More ↗](#)

Since launching in 2022, the CIRCE network has grown into an active and vibrant community that can collectively call on a diverse range of knowledge, skills and experience. It has seen the conceptualisation and formulation of targeted measures – both by and for members of the CIRCE community – to spark conversation within the network and deepen understanding of the complex challenges at play in the creative ecosystem within this year's project.

Community-building actions have been a cornerstone of this work, primarily in the form of online workshops, an approach which proved essential to do justice to the CIRCE community's international network and facilitate full participation. The core CIRCE values, collaboration and community, were at the heart of every format, with a workshop series on participatory grant-making and a community mapping event on offer, among other things. Two participatory events further saw attendees discuss alternative, more liveable pathways for dealing with the often weighty structures of our social, economic and cultural systems.

The network's specialist expertise has also played a central role in enriching discussions and initiatives at all levels with a series of research articles. The five articles present research that uncovers a variety of perspectives on CIRCE 2024's central themes, with CIRCE members addressing a broad range of issues, from intercultural collaboration online to the use of creative approaches in overcoming body stigmatisation, the importance of valuing the creative process beyond just the end result, the role of creative methods in social and economic community regeneration and what AI technology means for marginalised creatives. Each article draws on authorial expertise and lived experience and offers both the CIRCE community and interested parties more generally a platform for further exchange and fresh momentum for best practices. Two of these contributions are set out as examples on pages 38 to 51; alternatively, head to the CIRCE blog to read the other articles.





# Navigating Murky Waters: The Impact of AI Technologies, Precarity and Inequality on the Lived Experiences of Underrepresented Cultural Entrepreneurs

Paromita Saha, PhD

© Ouzounis Georgios/Super G

The creative sector is where cultural entrepreneurs from marginalised groups are seen to possess freedom and autonomy to express their cultural identity and achieve equal participation (McRobbie 2018, p.24). Yet, extant scholarship documents how they face persistent patterns of inequality and discrimination because of the structural biases that exist within the CCI (Sobande, Hesmondhalgh & Saha 2023, Brook, O'Brien & Taylor 2020).

The emergence of disruptive technologies supposedly offers the potential for creatives from underrepresented communities to imagine as well as articulate emancipatory futures and narratives. Historically, marginalised groups face barriers of entry accessing disruptive technologies. There's the question of how machine learning systems (LLMs) and generative AI impacts productivity and sustainability, as well as the lives of those who work within the creative ecosystem (Black et al 2024). The livelihood of a creative is a delicate balancing act of developing one's craft while navigating the precarity due to the "fragmented and individualized nature of the work" (Comunian & England 2020, p.115).

This article asks if the incorporation of AI technologies in the work practices of cultural entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities contributes to creative impact, sustainability and equal participation (McRobbie 2018). I spoke with seven cultural entrepreneurs from the UK and Europe to find out how working with AI tools intersects with their lived experiences of precarity and inequality within the CCI.

## The paradox of using AI

The revolutionary capacities of disruptive technologies such as AI open up limitless opportunities for creativity and innovation (Siemon et al 2022). Participants find themselves in a paradox whereby they see the benefits of AI technologies on their creative practices. For example, tools such as Stable Diffusion and Midjourney can bring to life their stories in the form of creating immersive and multisensory art. London-based Saudi artist [Daniah Alsaleh](#) says "the integration of technology (coding and machine learning) into my practice has expanded my creative possibilities". It allows her to explore themes such as perception and memory in relation to her Middle Eastern identity as well as engage with audiences on multiple levels.

Yet, there is a frustration at how generative AI technologies such as Midjourney reinforce existing biases in the form of negative and harmful stereotypes. This is the result of large, biased data sets used to train AI programmes. Participants cite problematic





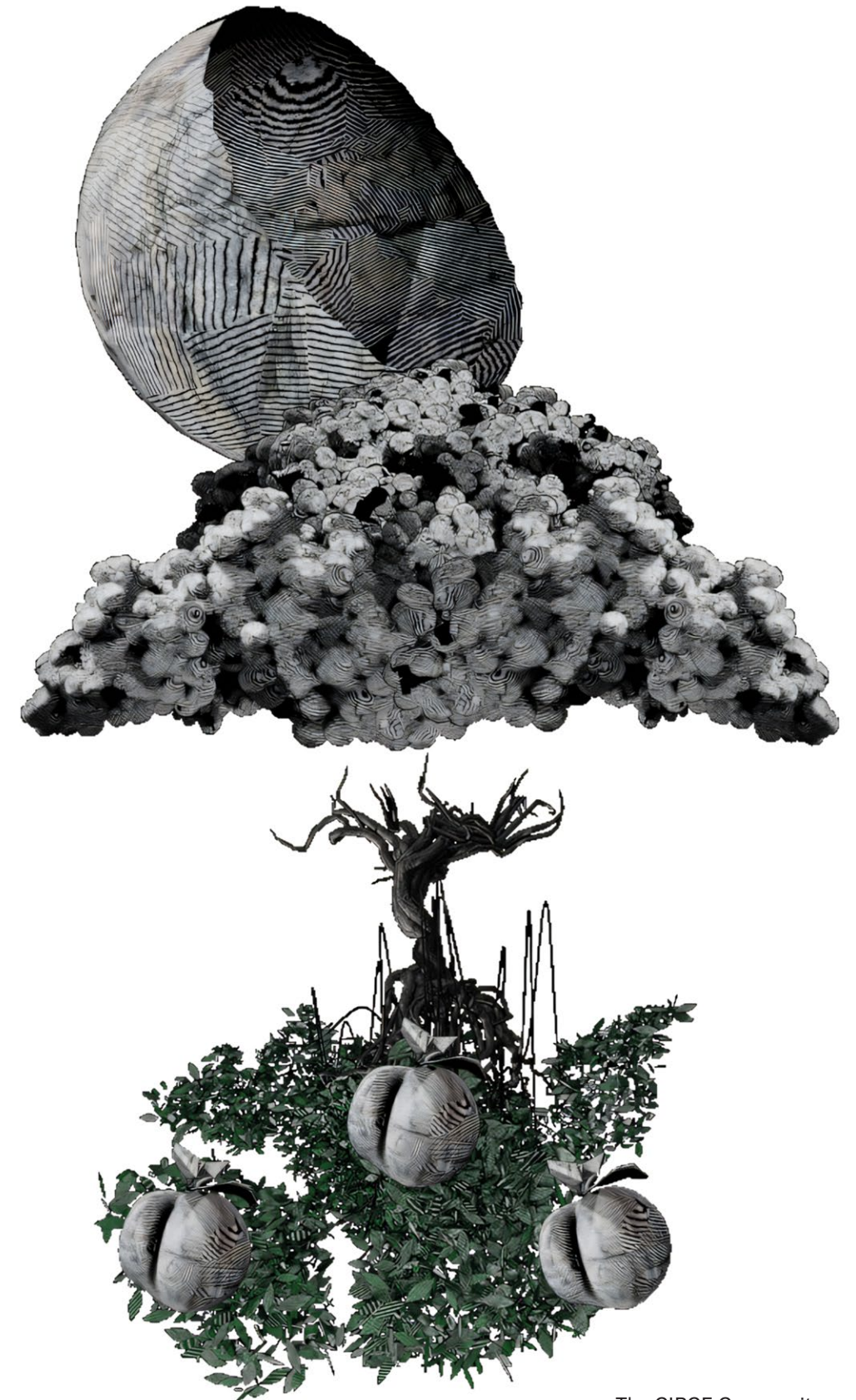
representations including the sexualisation of girls, hyper-feminine trans individuals and colonialist depictions of South Asian identities. Considerable effort is spent on the arduous and mundane process of iterating prompts, as Berlin-based filmmaker and visual storyteller [arjunraj](#) illustrates:

“It’s not like you click a button and it’s all done...having worked with it for one year almost. I’ve seen there is a specific way to engineer these prompts that will give me good results.”

Jeffrey Choy and [Hidden Keileon](#) take an informed approach – they understand the types of code and data used in generative AI. Consequently, the collective develops their own data sets of images using LoRA software for interactive exhibitions, including one that explored the traumatic global legacy of tear gas exposure.

### Navigating intellectual property

AI technologies challenge core concepts in intellectual property regarding “authorship” as well as “work”, since generative AI systems are trained on data sets comprising human-created works (Smits & Borghuis 2022). Creative users struggle to decipher which images are authorised or not. Consequently, interviewees develop complex workarounds to avoid potential copyright violations, given the vagueness of global IP laws on AI. British-Chinese artist [Donald Shek](#) takes “a very light touch”, preferring to feed his own images into generative AI programmes. Others undertake the time-consuming process of creating their own data sets, which can involve “using web-scraping software to find images from public domains”, or use non-copyrighted artwork when replicating visuals based on a specific style (Daniah Alsaleh 2024, Jeffrey Choy 2024). Some of the interviewees find safety using AI-generated images in the early stages of the creative process, from creating mood boards to conceptualising fictional characters for a book.



© left: Jane Lam, right: Han Xiangzi

## Impacts on cultural entrepreneurialism

Emotional labour and entrepreneurialism are integral to how creatives mitigate precarity in their lives (Ashton 2021). They expend significant amounts of time and energy on securing grants and income (Ashton 2021). AI tools potentially assist cultural entrepreneurs in developing those new work competencies that are integral to generating new opportunities. Uros Rankovic runs a theatre company based in Belgrade. ChatGPT and Midjourney help him source grant applications from afar as well as analyse complex funding callouts. He says, “I ask ChatGPT could you find me any grants related to these topics and it generates some links or websites...of course you need to check if these things exist”. However, “the quantity of applications may have increased”, but it does not guarantee funding (arjunraj 2024). Others draw on their own funds generated from projects or residencies to pay for monthly subscriptions to AI tools. It appears that maintaining usage and mastering these tools adds another layer to the arduous non-creative work that burdens cultural entrepreneurs.

## Obsolescence of human creativity?

There is the concern of how AI technology “robotizes mental labor”, potentially negating the role of human creativity (Jin 2020, p.23). Interviewees such as 3D conceptual artist Ouzounis Georgios ([Super\\_G\\_](#)) believe AI technologies cannot replace the uniqueness of the creative spirit. He/she says, “you still need human consciousness. You still need you because it’s your art”. Participants highlight that human collaborations and unique storytelling are more conducive to sustainability than AI technologies.

## What next?

Overall, cultural entrepreneurs find themselves in a double bind, as they see the necessity of adopting AI tools for creative impact. Yet there is the monotony of non-creative work that goes into the effective running of AI technologies (Ashton 2022). It remains to be seen whether AI technology can alleviate their lived experiences of precarity and inequality. Interviewees say underrepresented cultural entrepreneurs need to be highly visible in policy conversations about the development and regulation of AI technologies, so they can effectively challenge harmful representations and narratives. Interventions need to happen around governance, funding, training and access as well as implementing protocols and standards around usage (Black et al 2024). However, it’s vital that there is an awareness of the impact of AI technologies in tandem with precarity and inequality on the lived experiences of cultural entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities, especially when addressing what can contribute to a resilient and egalitarian creative economy.

With thanks to [arjunraj](#), [Daniah Alsaleh](#), Jeffrey Choy at [Hidden Keileon](#), [Sally Meeson](#), Ouzounis Georgios ([Super\\_G\\_](#)), [Uros Rankovic](#) & [Donald Shek](#)

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# Digital Cross-cultural Multidisciplinary Collaborations in the Arts: Navigating Pros, Cons and Organisational Strategies

Alexandra Tzanidou

Digital Cross-cultural Multidisciplinary (D2CM) collaborations in the arts are transforming artistic collaboration in the digital age. These projects unite creators from diverse cultural backgrounds and disciplines using digital technology, enabling collaboration across geographical boundaries. This article explores the unique challenges and potential of D2CM collaborations in fostering inclusive arts practices across cultural and geographical boundaries.

By examining these collaborations, we seek to answer the following questions: How can digital technologies effectively bridge cultural and disciplinary divides in artistic collaborations, and what strategies can be employed to overcome the inherent challenges?

The focus on D2CM collaborations is particularly relevant in today's globalised world, where the arts are crucial in promoting cultural understanding and inclusion. As a researcher working at the intersection of human-computer interaction, the arts and inclusion amongst different countries, I've observed firsthand the transformative power of these collaborations and the obstacles they face. This personal experience has motivated an in-depth exploration of D2CM projects, specifically focusing on their potential to advance inclusion in arts and society.

Through this analysis, we will examine a case study of the "Çarşema Zîpa: Voices of Tradition and Inclusion" project, exemplifying the complexities and opportunities inherent in D2CM collaborations. By exploring the communication challenges and organisational strategies employed in this project, this article provides insights for artists, cultural organisations and policymakers seeking to harness the power of digital cross-cultural collaboration for creative impact.

## Defining D2CM collaborations

Digital Cross-cultural Multidisciplinary collaborations are cultural projects that:

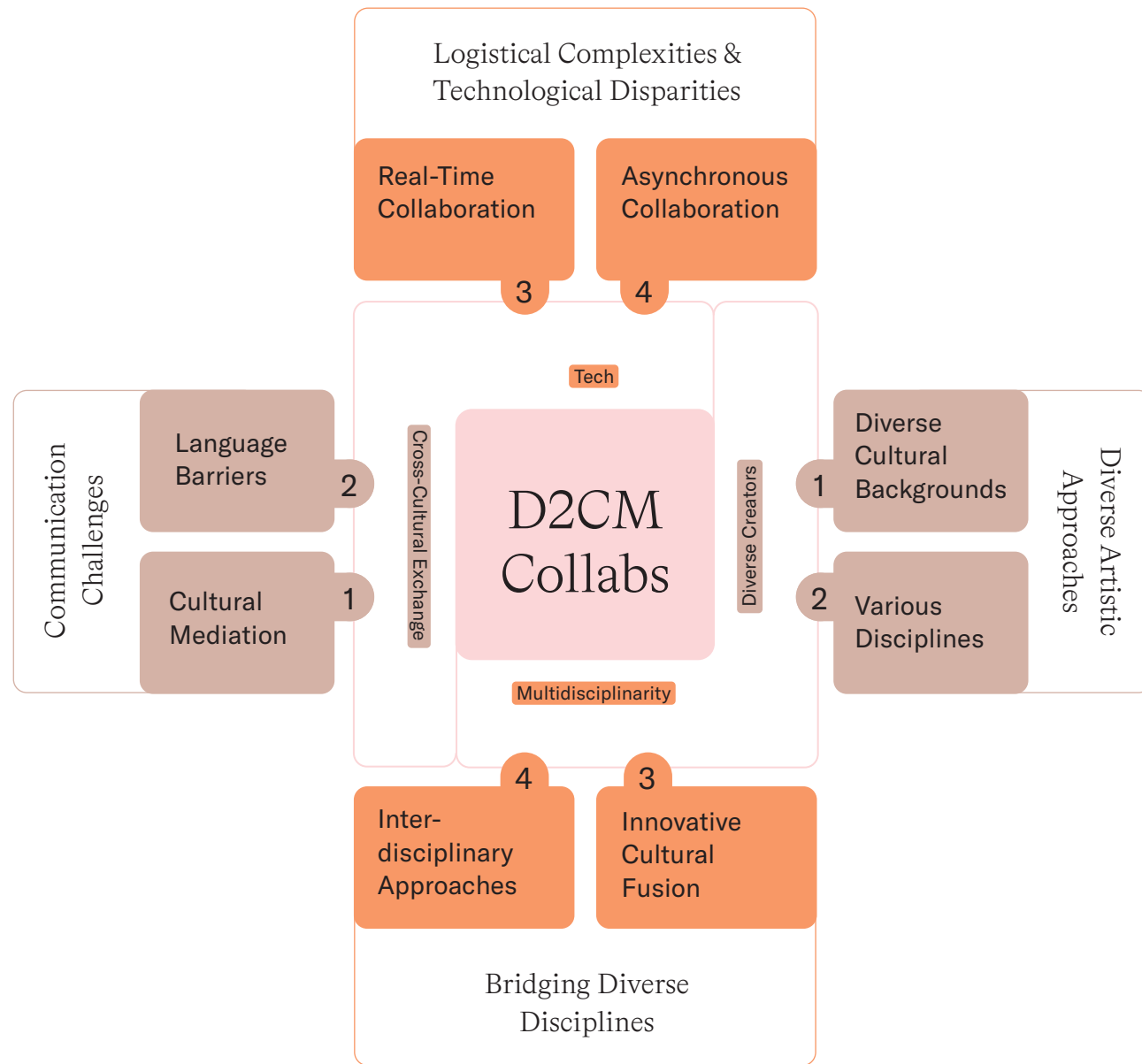
- Unite creators from different cultural backgrounds and disciplines.
- Use digital means to bridge physical distances.
- Enable real-time and asynchronous collaboration across continents and time zones.

Such collaborations offer significant potential as they allow diverse artistic teams to engage with practices and issues from other cultures, gaining inspiration, first-hand information and stimuli beyond their usual sphere of influence. For instance, how is the right to access and inclusion perceived amongst different cultures? What artistic practices does each team carry based on their cultural and societal background, and how could these be transferred to other settings or transformed based on stimuli gained through intercultural collaboration?

Moreover, these collaborations foster solidarity among cultural practitioners by creating opportunities for those from marginalised backgrounds or countries

© Alexandra Tzanidou, Negotiating the present and future of inclusion with the help of cards before going digital.





Structure of a D2CM collaboration

with limited arts funding to access resources from countries with more robust cultural initiatives. In this way, they provide a crucial bridge to sustainability for projects that might not otherwise exist.

While offering significant potential, D2CM collaborations face unique challenges, including communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings and logistical issues. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial for the success and impact of these projects.

This article explores the dynamics of D2CM collaborations, drawing insights from a real-world example: the “Çarşema Zîpa: Voices of Tradition and Inclusion” project realised under the umbrella of VAHA<sup>1</sup>. This initiative brings together three diverse partners: LabHub, a Cultural Hub from Turkey consisting of 3 artistic groups<sup>2</sup> that came together to focus on a project for preserving Kurdish culture through theatre THEAMA, an inclusive theatre ensemble from Athens<sup>3</sup> advocating for inclusion in the arts, and LESVOS Solidarity a grassroots innovation movement from Lesbos<sup>4</sup> working on refugee integration through recycled art. Çarşema Zîpa is based on the earlier artistic expression of LabHub for communicating and preserving a Kurdish ritual for welcoming Spring<sup>5</sup>.

Through this D2CM collaboration, we aim to explore the following:

- 1 How can this ritual be transformed or enriched through input from relevant rituals from other cultures (Greek, Italian, cultures of refugee populations)?
- 2 What could be the benefit of creating a common ground among so many populations with the help of a ritual?
- 3 How could this artistic expression be communicated in a sustainable, accessible and inclusive form that utilises various senses?

Before transitioning to digital collaboration, we had the opportunity to meet in person and initiate our partnership through a workshop to establish a common understanding of the issues we would address.

The workshop was divided into two parts:

- 1 First, the team explored the various connotations of ‘Access’ across diverse cultures to identify a shared topic of interest.
- 2 Second, using speculative design techniques, we worked in groups to develop narratives about the evolution of inclusion along three axes – past, present and future. This involved the use of ‘Fractured Signals’ cards<sup>6</sup>, a set of cards featuring futuristic and abstract images designed to inspire unconventional thinking and challenge everyday perspectives.

This face-to-face interaction laid a solid foundation for our subsequent digital collaboration. Having developed a solid ground of communication in the physical space, we proceeded into developing a project through remote, digital collaboration. In this article, by examining the orchestration of this project, we delve into the intricacies of D2CM collaboration, with a particular focus on the communication challenges encountered and the strategies employed to overcome them.

### Communication challenges

According to the Oxford Dictionary<sup>7</sup>, “Art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, [...], producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power”. According to Gauguin<sup>8</sup>, “Art is either plagiarism or revolution”, and to Warhol<sup>9</sup>, “Art is what you can get away with”. Based on these definitions, who is the person who is tasked with translating not just words but emotional power, revolution or the intangible essence of artistic expression in the absence of a common language?

### Language barriers and cultural mediation

We initially worked with a human translator to bridge the language gap in our collaboration. Moving forward, the Turkish hub chose a dedicated person to





Workshop for identifying common views and interests before going digital.

act as a project manager and translator. The focus on translating the language and identifying an issue of common interest, combined with the limited time for drafting a project proposal, resulted in documenting the main idea and leaving crucial aspects for the realisation of the project, such as the budgeting and the organisation, to a later stage. This situation guided us to a dead-end, lengthy Telegram-mediated dispute that concluded with compromises on all sides, which significantly reduced the initial creative energy, mainly due to the feeling that some sides lacked access to critical information.

Through this process, it became evident that the translator in a D2CM collaboration becomes more than a linguistic interpreter; they transform into a cultural mediator, an artistic liaison, and sometimes, a curator of ideas. Their role extends beyond word-for-

word translation to encompass cultural mediation, emotional resonance, artistic terminology, conceptual misunderstanding and non-verbal communication.

By this initial stage, the main learnings are:

- A need to include dedicated cultural mediators who will not directly associate with any creative groups and will accompany the whole project.
- Essential aspects of the project, such as the vision, an outline, the budgeting and the process, need to be written and agreed upon before initiating the project.
- A need for transparency in the entire process regarding the existing, available and future funding and resources for a specific project by all the stakeholders.

## Managing absence of core team members in remote creative collaborations

In any type of collaboration, it is unfortunate but expected, and in my view accepted, that absence for several reasons can happen. But how should the absence of a core member of the organisational chain of the project be handled primarily in remote collaborations that fall under the umbrella of creative industries, where, in most cases, the qualitative input of a partner cannot be substituted or neglected? In our case, this issue came early in the design process. Therefore, we established an ad hoc mechanism to mediate this sensitive issue by asking the absent project partner to provide the green light to one of the other partners to speak in their regard. In written messages, the dedicated project partner informed the absent partner of all the developments, and the silent contract stated that the absence of a reply meant an agreement. While flexibility was crucial during this phase, we recognised the need for more structured contingency plans. To address potential absences in future collaborations, we recommend incorporating two key provisions in project agreements:

- 1 Designated backups: Each participating organisation should identify at least one additional team member who is fully informed about the project. This ensures continuity if the primary contact becomes unavailable.
- 2 Handover protocol: Establish a clear process for transferring responsibilities in case of unexpected absences. This should include:
  - Identifying potential substitute stakeholders
  - Specifying preferred communication methods
  - Outlining the decision-making authority of the substitute

By implementing these measures, projects can maintain momentum and clear communication channels, even when unexpected challenges or absences of key team members occur.

## Navigating multilingual communication in D2CM collaborations

Despite the interest that accompanied discussions that enabled learning of diverse cultures and habits, navigating multilingual organisational meetings was always frustrating for all sides. As for participants who speak all the languages, this means listening repeatedly to the same information and for the rest to be excluded repeatedly from the discussion. Moreover, a consecutive translation significantly increases the discussion time.

Digital communication might not have achieved the best performance in real-time translated captions, but they can assist this type of communication. However, speaking either for asynchronous or synchronous communication, all participants must be aware that automated translation can potentially create misunderstandings. Our multicultural team mediated this productive mess by accompanying our statements with the intended feeling in cases where the discussion was becoming more intense. Focusing on the challenges of D2CM collaborations and the challenges relating to communication, the key insights derived from this study highlight several crucial aspects of them, such as:

- The role of cultural mediators
- Comprehensive project planning
- Transparency around resources and funding
- Development of contingency planning
- Effective multilingual communication strategies

As D2CM collaborations continue to evolve, it is clear that they offer immense potential for artistic innovation and cultural exchange. By implementing the strategies and insights discussed in this article, artists and organisations can create more robust, inclusive and impactful D2CM collaborations and overcome the unique challenges inherent in these complex partnerships.

## Dedicated Cultural Mediators

Accompany the whole process and provide interpretation and the cultural context behind artistic concepts that may not have direct equivalents in other cultures.

1

# Strategies Proposed

For smoother  
D2CM collaborations

## 2 Comprehensive Planning

Dedicate time to clear planning. Budgeting, vision, process and rights clearly defined before initiating the process. Use collaborative tools that all team members can access and understand.

2

## 3 Resource Transparency

Clearly communicate available resources and funding to all stakeholders and ensure equal access to financial info for all partners. Establish clear protocols for requesting and allocating resources.

3

## 4 Contingency Plans

Identify potential risks and challenges in advance. Designate backup team members for critical roles. Establish clear decision-making processes for unexpected situations. Create flexible timelines that can accommodate unforeseen delays.

4

5

## Multilingual Communication

Use visual aids and non-verbal cues (when possible) to supplement verbal communication. Provide written summaries of key discussions to ensure understanding. Allow extra time in meetings for translation and clarification. Use automated translation tools, but be aware of potential misunderstandings. Cultivate an environment where team members feel comfortable asking for clarification.

Recommended strategies for a well-functioning D2CM collaboration

## Endnotes

- 1 VAHA. <https://vahahubs.org/>
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## Imprint

### Publisher

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

### Production

u-institut GmbH & Co. KG  
Zoe Kornmann & Liv Nickel

### Design & layout

Grafikladen Berlin

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raumgeben  
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### Photo credits

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Very special thanks go to Lisa Ratering, 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.