

Collective policy imagining – a bottom up approach for the future of CCI

The Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE) held its second Symposium titled '[Collaborative efforts - creative impact as a driving force for change](#)'. Marking the end of CIRCE's first phase of funding activities, we had just completed the fellowship programme that had embedded us within CIRCE's network through our individual research projects, and collective imagining and organising that had taken place as a result of us meeting over 100 CCI changemakers from across Europe. We decided to host a futures workshop to explore policy solutions that might result from the [40 fellowship research projects, five research lab activities and lessons from the innovation projects](#) that were part of the Creative Impact Fund. Earlier in the summer, a similar workshop was delivered in a small Bulgarian village in the northeast to support another fellows project, and to both our surprises opened up a web of possibilities and ideas related to societal development led through the creative and cultural industries (CCI). Why not try the same approach in Berlin with people from all across Europe who would join to discuss the potential of CCI as a vehicle to drive new solutions?

What is a futures approach?

A bit of a background: futures studies are part of a discipline that has grown in importance in the last decades, as it relates to possible developments of societies, technologies, ecologies and so on, while trying to assess their desirability too. The future can't be predicted, but there are elements around us which inform us about certain directions; be they positive or negative. Futures studies are transdisciplinary by nature. In addition, by centering the question of desirability, a futures approach implies a collaborative and collective elaboration of outcomes that we wish to achieve. As such, those who create and agree on decisions based on imagined scenarios can later go on to make better and more informed decisions that mirror the wants and desires of all. From scenario planning to foresight analysis, strategists and futures practitioners have supported private and public sector institutions to navigate uncertainty by exploring a variety of futures – stretching the imagination. Over the past decade, there has been an acceptance that in order to imagine sustainable and inclusive futures, futures work needs to become more participatory of all communities. Working with such methods needs to shift from supporting companies operating in the market place towards supporting grassroots groups driving societal transformation.

Imagining the future

The conducted workshop sought to explore possible evolutions of current CCI policymaking practices. Four scenarios set in the year 2043 were presented to participants, who were asked to reflect first on the scenarios themselves, and secondly on what policy challenges, solutions, capabilities and collaborations might be needed. Participants were prompted to take on the role of policymaker and imagine effective interventions that would work in that specific scenario. The timeframe was purposely set 20 years from now, so that the scenarios could feature significant differences from today, while still relatively linked to today's policy cycles, thereby connecting to today's practices in the sector.

The four scenarios combined six months worth of field work within the CIRCE network, building on conversations, interviews and two workshops previously organised and delivered by the same hosts. While we iterated our workshop structure to fit with time and space

constraints, the overall *scaffolding* remained the same. This workshop structure proved to be very effective for people to grasp the width and breadth of policymaking work. Participants came from different sectors, mostly connected to CCIs, and a few policymakers joined in as well. In the feedback round, policymakers especially welcomed the possibility to engage in bottom-up policy-imagining activities.

What next?

For six months we have tested futures approach in a CCI policy influencing context on three occasions that very naturally occurred. Therefore, we think that policy-imagining — based on a blend of scenarios that are informed by fieldwork, futures studies and speculative design techniques — brings an important added value to the work of policymakers. Two main reasons we observed included: (1) stress-testing policy horizons by combining policy brief objectives and questions with provocative or extreme scenarios very quickly allows for ideation to take place alongside deep reflective practice. (2) Allowing space for unconstrained imagination, albeit within the boundaries of a fictional scenario, quickly makes space for alternative ways of looking at how we might collectively solve problems or crises.

The scenarios we produced have a clear connection to “pockets of the future” found today, and build on trends identified through existing and emerging research. There is also a provocative element in each scenario which is meant to stretch both the imagination and the critical policy-making capabilities of participants. Our final workshop in Berlin generated outcomes that could lead to new policy ideas and ways of imagining the future landscape of CCIs – as one participant put it, “it is a bottom-up approach that brings a fresh and critical perspective on the classical horizon-based policymaking approach”.

From this context, we would want to both share and further develop the scenarios we shared in Berlin, and propose a series of workshops aimed at policy-imagining actions that involve diverse actors who are involved in policymaking and active in the CCI. CCI actors are well equipped to join the conversation at a policy-making level, bringing their expertise in navigating uncertainty, their process-flexibility and fervid imagination to the table. Our approach stems from the need to create new solutions to ever changing pressing matters, which can no longer be tackled by siloed approaches. In times of polycrises, there is a need to diversify the ways challenges are addressed, and networked ways of thinking across an ecosystem can bring both rigour and focus to the solutions proposed (while better meeting the needs of communities with strong ideas of what they wish for the future).

About us

Nyangala Zolho is a Policy Learning Designer for the Innovation Growth Lab (IGL). Nyangala is based in IGL’s offices at the Barcelona School of Economics. Here she designs and delivers learning experiences to guide policymakers and practitioners working on innovation and growth policies to become more experimental. A key area of interest for her is helping policymakers rethink how they support innovators from diverse communities to drive more inclusive forms of innovation. Her previous design research has focused on combining data and design methods to map pathways to innovative careers, with particular focus on who is marginalised in this process. Nyangala has also mapped the current and future role of innovation agencies, and compared prospects for these bodies in Europe and Latin America.

Anna De Mezzo is a Zurich-based designer with extensive experience in design research, futures studies and strategy. She holds a MSc in Design & Engineering from Politecnico di Milano, Italy, and works at the intersection between design and futures research. In her work, Anna focuses on various design practices as means to tackle the relationship between humans and uncertainty, particularly the one related to the perception of the future. As part of the 6-months fellowship at the Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE), she conducted research on the topic of privilege in local settings, designing a board game situated in the city of Zurich, Switzerland, focused on housing shortage. Currently, she is engaged in projects bridging futures, education and policymaking.