

**Transcending Measurement:
Creative Impact as “Currency”
for Social Change**

Author: Dr Marisa de Andrade



Abstract

This working paper presents findings on the transferability, suitability, and applicability of existing approaches for measuring and evaluating creative impact. It synthesises data emerging from: two interviews with UK-based informants working with notable commissioners, communities, campaigners and social entrepreneurs; three interviews with Fellows from CIRCE's Fellowship Programme "Creative Impact in Practice"; a rigorous survey completed by all ten Fellows covering the impact of their particular projects as well as their understanding of evidence, measurement, outcomes and creative impact more generally; and ten project reports completed by Fellows.

Drawing from transdisciplinary grey and academic literature, it reflects on what lens or potential methodologies and frameworks CIRCE should use as a foundation for the practical testing and implementation of creative impact in upcoming formats. After reflecting on how creative impact can overcome noise in the measurement market, the working paper poses an age-old question: why are we measuring? It anchors creative impact evaluation in solid, consistent values and principles, and reflects on evaluation approaches that value freedom and flexibility over conformity and rigidity in measurement.

The paper presents a united creative impact measurement that is both "bounded" and visionary, taking a deep dive into one Fellowship project, *Körperkino: Embodied Cinema as the future of Storytelling*, proposing experiential collaborative storytelling as a vector for change. "Bounded" refers to each CIRCE Fellowship project being "measured" through a bespoke evaluation strategy appropriate to the sector it is positioned in, with its own set of guidelines and approaches compatible to the topic being explored. "Visionary", on the other hand, refers to CIRCE itself becoming a pioneering thought leader by advocating a vision of transcendence for creative impact measurement reflecting new conceptualisations of time and currency; reality and knowledge; and vulnerability and ethics.

Creative impact – and all the experiential and embodied knowledge it produces – emerges as "currency" for social change. This is *not* about reducing creative impact projects to transactional exchanges that only have financial value and are extractive. On the contrary, it's about building solid relationships with beneficiaries and stakeholders, who share similar values and principles and believe that the "*currency of relating is trust*".¹

¹ Tamber, 2019

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1. Overcoming noise in the measurement market

“Evaluation methodologies are also a market that is being sold to governments and philanthropic foundations so you've got evaluation. Methodologies themselves are competing for views of effectiveness, value for money and trustworthiness and... some of them are quite proprietary... things like “Collective Impact TM [trademark]”, a UK-based commissioner with a focus on systems transformation and inequalities told me in an interview (int1).

I'd asked them about the transferability, suitability, and applicability of existing approaches for measuring and evaluating creative impact,² and what lens or potential methodologies and frameworks the Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE) should use as a foundation for the practical testing and implementation of creative impact in upcoming formats.

My informant warned this thinking might result in a *“fractal”* – a pattern that repeats endlessly – leading to the *“whole evaluation thing kind of eating itself where you're evaluating evaluations. And then you're evaluating the evaluation of evaluations”* (int1).

A UK-based systems-level strategist working with communities, campaigners, social entrepreneurs and notable commissioners echoed these views in another interview: *“Measurement [getting the ‘right’ kind of metrics, measures or evaluation tools in order to gather the evidence that we would need to show impact] might not be that important... or certainly it's a much more nuanced question than what we might hope it would be”* (int2).

They stressed the importance of getting *“the right people leading, who've got lived experience of the particular issues and questions”* and ensuring *“everything about the whole process being done [is] in a way that is not exploitative or extractive in any way, and really provides benefits for everyone involved in that process at every stage”*. They added that people involved in delivering a project inherently *“know when you've contributed positively to the kind of issues that you're working on”,* and this *“represents a kind of consistent form of impact”* that is *“valuable”* at *“the pitch stage and the investment stage and the fundraising stage to show that who you are and the ways you work are authentic and values-led and non-extractive”* (int2).

These findings are unsurprising. The academic and grey literature across multiple disciplines including culture and the cultural and creative industries, health and social care, justice, policy, economics, social sciences, new public management, design innovation and participatory design is saturated with peer-reviewed papers and reports stating and re-stating the limitations of measurements; presenting an overwhelming amount of diverse evaluation approaches,

² In this working paper, I use the Creative Impact Research Centre Europe's (CIRCE) definition of [creative impact](#), “understood to be the social impact produced by creative practices”.

many of which are incompatible or grounded in different paradigms.^{3 4} Several of these publications point to one age-old question:

2. Why are we measuring?

Before initiating a measurement strategy, it's integral to deeply reflect on it. Knowing *why* you are measuring creative impact will determine the extent to which your approach is authentic, particularly if the desired impact is social change. Conceptualising measurement as an opportunity for improvement and learning rather than simply showcasing a particular cause to 'prove' something to a specific stakeholder is important, as noted by interviewee one: *"I think a lot of the time people measure because they think they should. Because they think it makes them look professional, because they think it makes them look trustworthy. Because it represents the careful stewardship of charitable or public resources. A lot of the time, it's for show.... It's really not always clear why they're doing it, or for whose benefit, or if or what they're going to do with the information that they get back... from a stakeholder insight survey to an entire programme.... why? Why are we doing this? Are we doing this in order to get any better? Are we going to do 'what'? What is up for change here as a result of the information that comes back?"*.

After further reflection, they added that *not* having a frame to hook creative impact onto is disadvantageous too as *"measurement and evaluation approaches have quite serious negative consequences as well, because people feel like they're floating around... there's such a thing as predictable consequences. You can't just call everything complexity and emergence... predictability isn't an illusion... you can't let yourself completely off the hook"* (int1).

3. Freedom and flexibility versus conformity and rigidity in measurement

This is something I've experienced first-hand when testing multiple community-led evaluations in various settings.⁵ There's palpable discomfort with a "blank sheet of paper approach" when asking communities, practitioners, commissioners and policymakers to collaboratively co-produce outcomes with intended beneficiaries unless there's a supportive "hanger" to guide their inquiry. In every project to date, the approach, framework or methodology needed to shift according to the wants and needs of community members, commissioners, practitioners and

³ Bakhshi et al, 2015; de Andrade and The REALITIES Consortium, 2024; European Commission, 2014; Harrison and Tamber, 2019; Liu, 2018

⁴ See 'Citation Tree' in Appendix 1 showing how Liu's (2018) paper on 'Measuring the Impact and Value of Culture' has influenced debates through repeated citations on impact measurement in this sector.

⁵ de Andrade, 2018; de Andrade and Angelova, 2018; de Andrade, 2022; de Andrade et al, 2023

policymakers; policies linked to the topic being evaluated; the cultural context the project was being applied in; and, importantly, the sector it was situated in.

Measuring an idea or a “*clever little intervention around a particular problem*” needs to “*fit into a particular industry sector ecosystem. And, actually, your knowledge of how that sector or ecosystem industry works is so important. It only really works if you spent 10 years 20 years operating within it,*” interviewee two elaborated. “*You want a really good, evidence-based theory of change that you can use to demonstrate. You know, track and observe and measure and demonstrate impact, so that impact is... distinct and meaningful.* For transformational change to happen, you have to be “*part of the system... in order to reduce... harm and cost in another part [of the system] later on*” (int2). This is challenging, however, and only possible if different sectors or parts of ‘the system’ are integrated in some way rather than being siloed. For instance, measuring the impact of a health intervention might involve assessing its effects on social care, justice, and education systems, rather than focusing solely on health outcomes.

Care must be taken when each project being evaluated is so distinct, and comes from such different sectors, as settling on a “blanket” evaluation framework or measurement strategy for a portfolio of work – such as the [CIRCE Fellowships – “Creative Impact in Practice” programme](#), which covers an extensive range of ventures and approaches cutting across Communities & Care, Sustainability & Environment, and Democracy & Participation – could result in a meaningless or contrived evaluation.

Instead, it would be helpful for creative impact to reflect on the extent to which it seeks to resist unhelpful assumptions about *what evaluation and measurement is*, particularly when applied with marginalised communities, as a core part of its measurement strategy. For these communities, text-based evidence may not be appropriate as a form of data collection or knowledge generation due to language barriers, cultural differences or being transient, which would make it difficult to track longitudinal impact.

This measurement strategy would begin by recognising some of the consequences of holding one fixed attitude or another towards criteria, measures, metrics or indicators – and how a more pluralistic approach can liberate us from ways of acting, strategising and evaluating that is opposed to addressing timely challenges. Seeing the relative nature of our conceptions of measurement – the notion that even this basic building block of our reality is itself constructed – can help us loosen attachments; undo hindering conventions. This approach also has powerful potential to contribute empowering perspectives, which can sustain our efforts and

contribute to a more conscious approach to our social engagement evaluation in creative impact.⁶

4. Anchoring creative impact evaluation in solid, consistent values and principles

Design process impact models, which follow the principles of empathising, defining, ideating, prototyping, and real-world testing, are valued by funders for their human-centred approach. These models foster collaboration between designers and users and embrace non-linear processes. Interviewee two noted how these models offer *“some consistent layers of impact which, in some ways, might be valued more highly now... because the chance of having impact with the output is so much harder”*.

It’s important to ensure that the Research & Development of an idea or product fully embraces and delivers impact at *“every interaction, every stage... [at] every process... [and doing] that really consistently.”* This thinking centres principle-based and value-led impact evaluation ensuring, for example, that people are always appropriately paid for consultation and engagement in community research or when they offer their insights; and *“always working directly with groups who are most affected by ensuring they’re getting really tangible benefits from that process, empowering them, equipping them”* (int2).

Interviewee one—again reaffirming what we already know from research and applied practice on this topic⁷—added that *“the kind of values revealed in action”* is the truest test of impact: *“We want to behave like this. We want to be an organisational intervention that values diversity; that is open and transparent.”* The key question here is: how are you going to deliver that? This involves a measurement strategy that is much more than just *“packaging that up”*—*“there needs to be some back and forth as to whether... you mirrored the principles because **principles outlast practices**... it’s about people trying to do their best and hold themselves and be held to account for the principles that they say that they are espousing”* (int1).

There also has to be recognition that *“no method is people proof either... you can’t just be ‘this is our evaluation method TM’. If you are talking to people, particularly people involved in complex social change, of course it matters who is delivering it, and how they receive it... you’re not pressing buttons on a computer. You are a human attempting to work with others, to learn to work through what they’re doing, to kind of crack through some of the ceilings ... honestly [admitting] what’s going well, and what’s going badly here”* (int1).

Interviewee two further emphasised how crucial *“quality relationships”* and *“the role and value of those relationships”* are in devising measurement strategies and enacting them:

⁶ I’m indebted to Ecodharma for their sustainability teachings that inspired me immensely in 2017.

⁷ For example, see Revaluation [Revaluation: Measuring... | Tavistock Institute of Human Relations](#)

“Relationships, for example, can be a principle. Inclusion can be a principle, and we can see how those show up within particular processes or experiences or... a particular product or a service” (int2).

Key questions for CIRCE in relation to its creative impact measurement strategy therefore are:

- what values and principles are being used as measures of best practice?
- what processes are being enacted and embodied at an organisational level to enable people-centred evaluation?
- how can the organisation be an authentic pioneer in creative impact evaluation for social change?

Efforts need to go into advocating measurement and evaluation approaches that are revolutionary for creative impact, generally, and CIRCE as an organisation, specifically, so that creative impact can go from strength to strength: *“having impact over many years over many product cycles, over many kind of phases of work”* and *“maybe using some of that [strategy] to demonstrate more widely how you're committed to and continue to come back to some kind of key values and principles when it comes to... designing particular products and services and trying to take them to market and trying to generate impact and trying to prove that impact” (int2).*

This, interviewee two continued, suggests the need for an *“entirely fit for purpose evaluation strategy”* as they *“can't imagine being able to go to a commissioner or an impact investor or a client with a kind of generic impact model or a principles-based impact model framework and strategy... to evaluate a particular product and service” (int2).*

5. A united creative impact measurement that is both 'bounded' and visionary

While synthesising data from the two abovementioned interviews; three additional interviews with CIRCE Fellows on the Creative Impact in Practice 2024 programme;⁸ reviewing ten reports from all of this year's Fellows; and analysing data from a rigorous survey completed by all ten Fellows covering the impact of their particular projects as well asking about their understanding of evidence, measurement, outcomes and creative impact more generally, clear patterns began to emerge along with an idea for a two-tiered approach to measuring creative impact.

⁸ This supports pilot projects from the European cultural and creative economies that transfer research and knowledge into creative practice. Further details here: [Fellowships 2024 | CIRCE](#)

In all ten projects, there was a clear desire to do more than conduct activities with beneficiaries – to do more than simply think about themes, measures, indicators, outcomes and impact – but rather to evidence **transformational change** in a specific sector.



Figure 1: A word cloud of concepts and approaches emerging from data synthesis

The first tier involves razor-sharp focus on a specific project and treating it as a “bounded” evaluation with its own “terms and conditions”. This starts by positioning the project in the sector it’s trying to influence and ensuring all evaluation decisions in that specific project are led by people with lived experience working collaboratively with explicit stakeholders, who are interested in intended change.

The thinking behind this is that there is no “one-size fits all” approach to putting evaluations of beneficiaries’ experiences “in a box”.⁹ Generally, our assumptions about measurement and evaluation are the ones that we have been socialised into. The ones that have most conditioned by our current socio-economic structures. Many of these views can have unhelpful consequences. Many have underpinned the damaging practices of our current industrial growth society contributing to *a lack of Care in Communities*; practices *in opposition to Sustainability and the Environment*; and systems that *exclude Democracy and Participation*.

This *deficit approach* to thinking about evaluation-measurement has *done little* to promote inclusion and justice, with *limiting response* to the climate crisis and *weakening* of democratic principles. An *assets-based approach*, conversely – focused on the needs, wants, voices, strengths and resources (not always financial) of people and marginalised communities – has been gathering momentum in transdisciplinary research (for example, through the UK Research and Innovation funded programme [mobilising community assets to tackle health inequalities](#)). This approach *centres co-production* – the equal and active involvement of (marginalised) communities, beneficiaries, practitioners, policymakers and the voluntary sector in the evaluation of projects that seek greater possibilities for change.

⁹ de Andrade and Angelova, 2018

If the primary focus of creative impact ventures is serving public good rather than pursuit of profit or artistic self-indulgence, the ultimate evaluation-measurement strategy is contributing positively to society. The starting point is therefore to understand what “serving the public good” means to those involved and benefiting from a *particular* project. *What* does “positive” mean to them? And *who* exactly is “society” as defined by them? Who is “them” anyway? What is the very particular composition of a specific group being evaluated? Time is also important. *When* did this project happen? And *why*? What policies were being implemented at that time of the political cycle? Which practitioners were responsible for implementing them? What about the voices of the so-called beneficiaries? Were they active? Passive? *How* did they engage in the project? Were beneficiaries’ perspectives central? Or on the periphery – their views being reported by a more “powerful” community champion or entity? How were their voices captured? Did project participants decide on what evidence and data collection means to them, recognising the limitations of language and text? Data can be statistical. It can also be creative. It is always relational.

This first layer of evaluation essentially means handing control of the evaluation process to those involved in the design, delivery and engagement of each project – and acknowledging that *ten, different community-led* measurement strategies with their own methodologies, sets of co-produced outcomes, indicators or metrics (though only if Fellows and participants deem them to be relevant and useful to their project’s impact strategy) might follow. These bespoke evaluations will need to be supported by CIRCE, and also adequately resourced, and may benefit from the following guiding learning questions and existing evaluation approaches.

6. Creative impact’s evaluation toolbox

A review of a multiplicity of tools, theories (at the systems level and theories of change) and frameworks used by governments and charities around the world to plan, measure, monitor and report impact leads to a key finding. They’re all more or less saying the same thing and based on similar principles – namely collaboration and community-led evaluation leads to authentic impact and “real world” change.

They start with a simple question – **what does success look like for**, in this case:

- a specific CIRCE Fellowship project? or
- creative impact, generally, for CIRCE (see tier two below).

All approaches tend to start by identifying the key need, aim or problem, while unearthing fundamental – sometimes dormant – enablers, barriers, opportunities and evidence. These, in turn, facilitate a process of spotting and prioritising key activities – that will subsequently lead to outcomes and impact – and, ultimately, meaningful change for intended beneficiaries.

Other questions for project evaluators are included below:

- Whose impact story is being told in this project?
- Who will benefit from the need or problem being solved?
- Will anyone benefit if the need or problem stays unsolved?
- Will a story-based narrative be “enough” to evidence the success of this project? Or do you need numbers and more “traditional” approaches to evidence “real-world” change?
- Are there any particular policies or frameworks that the project can be explicitly hooked onto to make the evaluation meaning-making process more meaningful?
- Do those involved in a specific project evaluation have skills or expertise in a particular methodology that would make their impact assessment more authentic and supported?
- Outcomes are the changes or differences you expect your project to make. What are the outcomes of your project?
- Indicators are the things you measure to find out if you have made the differences you hoped to make (your outcomes). Do you have evidence for any hard outcomes following your project? These are usually measured in numbers and quite straightforward. For example, X people from X community improved their sense of belonging by X%.
- Do you have evidence for any soft outcomes following your project? These are more difficult to measure, so think about what feels sensible. For example, X community's attitude towards X; body language; willingness to do X etc.
- What is “evidence” in your project? This could be statistics or any art medium, interviews or conversations. It could even be a felt sense or moment of collective consciousness. Tell us as much as you can about this evidence.
- Are there any intangible aspects of your project that are difficult to measure or evidence? What are they? Why are you struggling to measure or evidence them?
- What does “value” mean in the context of your project? If you had to put a “value” or “price tag” on the work you are doing, what would it be? It need not be financial.
- Creative impact work happens in a context of other actors and forces. Which other actors and forces have you collaborated with in your journey and why?

7. A creative impact assessment smorgasbord

The needs being addressed by 2024 Fellows range from people needing to participate in decisions over spaces, architectures or infrastructures that are part of their lives and memories; to supporting sensory needs of neurodivergent communities in the context of

clothing; supporting LGBTQ+ nightlife and cultural practitioners in learning to launch and operate nightlife spaces; the need for in-person, real, local conversations and relationships; the provision of digitally available resources for victims of violence that are appropriately designed to enable them to find the information and help services they need; the need to collaboratively tell our own stories and perspectives; for people, especially with BIPOC backgrounds, to become involved in shaping their local environment, specifically regarding green spaces; and the need to create new, positive, hopeful and desirable stories about the future.

Some are methodological problems, others environmental; a few address place-based concerns, while certain projects tackle specific issues by designing innovative products. No single measurement framework would be fitting to cover all the projects as a collective, but bounded evaluations for each project drawing inspiration from some of the impact strategies listed below could result in ten, co-produced, context-specific evaluations that could dovetail into tier two:

The Ideas Fund Impact Framework funded by a noteworthy UK commissioner, which was co-designed with a variety of partners. Its ethos centres on being “ambitious and aspirational – capturing emergent outcomes and also those that collaborators believe are possible; an adaptable “living framework” that evolves as learning progresses; and a “reflective tool” to understand how the fund is influencing change.

Ripple Effects Mapping recommended by interviewee one *“because it’s open, it’s long term, it’s non-judgmental and it’s receptive to kind of unintended and unplanned consequences. And it gives a sort of safe space to talk about”* what participants and stakeholders *“should have done... or shouldn’t have done”* helping evaluate *“what happened as a result? And how has that gone over time?”*

The Relationships Project recommended by interviewee two as it tracks impact through collaboration and transforming learning into practical tools and training for embedding relationship-centred practice intended to bring about meaningful change. This approach *“isn’t very focused on methods, but more on process”*, which would please interviewee one, who is also sceptical: *“as for methods, I’m a bit suspicious about those... particularly in social change work and complexity. It’s about the kind of relationships and interconnections, the ecosystem stuff, and how to particularly invest in sort of collective learning where the people engaged in the work can actually get through it together.”*

Measuring Humanity which seeks to capture the unmeasurable aspects of the human experience, initially by “measuring” health and inequalities through connectivity and creativity by co-producing new definitions of measures wellbeing and outcomes with so-called

“vulnerable” communities. As the framework was tested through varied creative methodologies such as music, theatre, crafts, drawing and environmental art, the framework evolved into a philosophical approach to measurement and meaning-making questioning the very nature of evidence, knowledge and reality. Its most recent iteration is the REALITIES in Health Disparities model that Researches Evidence-based Alternatives in Living, Imaginative, Traumatized, Integrated, Embodied Systems in multiple geographical hubs in Scotland drawing upon a variety of practices, methods, datasets and philosophies to expand existing approaches to tackling health inequalities.

The Personal outcomes evaluation framework is particularly used by services to assess contributions towards improving outcomes for people. This approach also reflects on the process of tracking the impact of a project by connecting with systems that “help tell the story” of change.

Human Learning Systems, which provides an alternative to the 'New Public Management' approach based on “Markets, Managers and Metrics” that “do not work when the world is complex”. Described by the creator as “a giant action research [or impact] process”, it was “created to link this paradigm with practice manifestations, using case study exemplars.”

The invitation is for each project’s beneficiary-led evaluation team to determine the values and principles grounding their inquiry; and pick a framework or draw inspiration from an approach in the creative impact assessment toolbox most suitable for sense-making which may be methodological using arts-informed, qualitative, quantitative data or both – or, alternatively, non-methodological with no data at all (if appropriate) instead focusing on the processes and mechanisms through which change happens. Stick to the approach authentically and wholeheartedly – but, if a particular aspect of the approach doesn’t “fit”, adapt it until it feels connected to the project’s success story; or “pick-and-mix” different features of the evaluation principles or guidelines across a few different frameworks until you arrive at the most appropriate evaluation strategy for your project. Your beneficiaries and key stakeholders will be your guiding light in this process. Don’t conflate approaches that have incompatible philosophical underpinnings – for example, turning storytelling into reductionism. Let the intended beneficiaries guide the “doing” and “success journey”. Finally, do not hold on to the approach too tightly. Play with emergent findings; treat them as learning questions to inform the next layer of knowing; allow yourself to admit when it is not working; and adapt it when the analysis takes you in a different direction.

8. A deep dive into one 'bounded' Fellowship project – Körperkino: Embodied Cinema as the future of Storytelling

I was not involved in the creation of particular project, and I wasn't a participant, so this section is already fundamentally flawed as its creator, Arjunraj, and the beneficiaries they engaged with, should be leading this writing and thinking. But if you'll indulge me for a moment, I'd like to take a deep dive into this fascinating project informed by an insightful interview with Arjunraj, an analysis of the report they completed for CIRCE and their survey responses. After much synthesis and reflection, I imagined what a creative impact evaluation might look like for [Körperkino](#) informed by the findings presented in this report so far.

My thinking quickly became very "meta" when I realised the project is, in itself, a comprehensive creative impact evaluation methodology with potential to be transferred and applied to measure and evaluate creative impact. Why lean on other evaluation approaches when Körperkino evidently could be positioned in the "measurement market", especially as it has already conducted and "practically tested" the experiential, embodied, collaborative workshops enabled through CIRCE's investment in the project?

8.1 Experiential collaborative storytelling as vector for change

Körperkino is an interactive toolkit and app prototype for collaborative storytelling. In [this video trailer](#), Arjunraj describes it as *"a new school of storytelling – one that allows you to unlearn the stories that hold you back – while learning to create stories to hold one another. This is an invitation to think with our bodies. To see the world with many eyes. To become liminal. To go beyond the binaries of us versus them. To embrace ambivalence. To make the invisible in you visible... an experience in storytelling. One where our ancestors speak through us."*

According to its creator, the project *"comes at an urgent time, as we are witnessing unprecedented levels of polarisation, division, and hostility in society. At a moment when dominant narratives aim to silence and fragment marginalised perspectives, my methodology offers a way for us to collaboratively tell our own stories and perspectives. It ensures that narratives from oppressed communities are told by and for those communities, focusing on their empowerment and upliftment. This approach supports authentic voices, providing a platform that honours and strengthens these narratives"* (survey).

The clear **need** is to *"challenge traditional storytelling by inviting those whose stories have been marginalised [**whose impact story is being told**] to co-create their own narratives, rather than having stories told about them"* (report). These collaborators – or project **beneficiaries** – are envisaged as *"bodies or people carrying stresses of othering, suffering, intergenerational trauma and discriminatory pain"* (interview). The **problem** is crisply

articulated as those who “*find ourselves in the margins of society, not having the power and the agency to reclaim the story the way, and say the way we want to, or not having the power or resources to tell the story the way we want to*” (interview). The overarching **aim** is “*to bring this practice to diverse audiences globally, with the vision of sustainably scaling the prototype into a fully functioning product*” (survey).

While travelling and teaching this methodology by facilitating workshops in cities across Europe,¹⁰ Arjunraj witnessed “*a profound impact on the participants with whom*” they shared it. Many beneficiaries are finding new ways to engage with storytelling, embracing the power of collaborative narrative-building within their own communities. It has become clear that **long-term impact or the success** of this project would be to “*decentralise the work further so that people can access the toolkit independently and integrate it into their own practices. In the long run, I hope that this methodology becomes accessible to a **wide range of audiences**, serving as a [digital, multimodal] resource for **anyone** seeking to use storytelling as a means of empowerment, agency, social connection, and genuine representation*” (survey).

Arjunraj notes that they will know they’ve achieved this impact through both **qualitative** and **quantitative indicators**. Qualitatively, by gathering “*feedback from participants, observing shifts in their confidence, storytelling skills, and sense of agency in sharing their narratives. I’ll look for evidence of participants adapting the methodology to their own communities and contexts, showcasing that the toolkit is empowering others to independently create impactful stories. **Quantitatively**, I’ll track the reach and accessibility of the toolkit by monitoring the number of downloads, workshops conducted by participants, and projects emerging from those who have used the toolkit. Additionally, I’ll seek feedback from facilitators who incorporate this approach, assessing how well it supports them in their own practices. When I see both individuals and communities using the methodology sustainably, expanding it into new contexts, and driving their own storytelling projects with confidence and impact, I’ll know this vision has been realised*” (survey).

8.2 From global reach to transformative change

At this point in the evaluation exercise, it’s worth reflecting on *how* the project can move from engaging “*anyone*” in the global audience to *targeted beneficiaries* in particular – and in what

¹⁰ August: Sofia, Bulgaria – Partnered with the Common Matters collective to work with people aged 15-25. The project had a group of 5-10 participants engaged in exploring collaborative storytelling techniques. October: Košice, Slovakia – Collaborated with Barbora, a 2024 CIRCE fellow, at her Inclusive Film Festival. This workshop included 10-15 young adults aged 15-25, representing the queer community, neurodivergent community, Roma community, and film school participants. Berlin and Bonn, Germany – Conducted sessions with Deutsche Welle journalists, collaborating with Nusrat Sheikh in Bonn and Joanna Gottschalk in Berlin. In Bonn, they had a focused group of 5 journalists, while in Berlin, Arunraj facilitated a larger session for 15 journalists. Paris, France – Led a session at the Connect2Create workshop organised by CIRCE’s Liv and Zoe on Creative Impact through Storytelling. This workshop brought together 20-25 facilitators who integrate creative practices in their work.

ways? How can the evaluation move beyond engagement with the toolkit and/or app by, for example, measuring downloads (as an indicator of reach) to evidencing actual transformative changes in behaviour, policies and practices as a direct result engaging with Körperkino? In other words, in what way has the download made a difference to the ‘downloader’?

These questions move the evaluation away from trying to objectify the subjective. As Arjunraj notes, there are several “intangible aspects” of the project that are “challenging to measure”, for example:

“Personal Empowerment and Sense of Agency: While giving participants control over their own narratives can deeply impact their sense of self-worth and agency, these shifts are internal and often difficult to quantify. Measuring personal transformation requires sensitive, qualitative approaches that may not fully capture the nuanced impact on each individual.

Cross-Cultural Empathy and Understanding: Although fostering empathy across cultural divides is a core goal, it is inherently intangible and subjective. Assessing this requires feedback from participants and audiences, but the depth of empathy and understanding developed remains challenging to gauge accurately.

Creation of a Supportive Community Culture: Building a network of ethical storytellers committed to collaborative practices depends on relationships, trust, and shared values—elements that don’t easily translate into measurable metrics. This sense of community often emerges organically over time, and its strength may not be apparent in quantitative terms.

Resilience and Adaptability of Participants: The project aims to support participants in facing social and cultural challenges through storytelling, but measuring the resilience or adaptability gained through this work is complex, as these qualities are intangible and unfold differently for each individual” (survey response)” (survey).

These reflections are deeply intuitive and authentic. It would be a travesty to game the evaluation strategy to somehow show changes in the attributes stated above through traditional measures and approaches. A transformational change approach would be to think differently – with collaborators and *specific target beneficiaries* – to show *how* they are changing the parameters of measurement for this project.

8.3 Shifting the measurement goalposts, changing perspectives

A focused evaluation for this bounded project could track impact across the three, distinct impact stories and beneficiaries – or storytellers – in Körperkino. Evaluators would need to pay attention and detail an impact pathway for each narrative thread and define these in concrete, specific ways to identify “measurable” markers of transformational change:

i) “The Overlooked Underdog: those with lived experience of Individuals with lived experiences of existing on the margins of society—often from disadvantaged backgrounds—whose perspectives have historically been spoken for, rather than by themselves. They possess powerful narratives that have remained untold or underrepresented” (report).

For evaluation purposes, each “Overlooked Underdog” would co-create a specific “definition” of “who they are”, as communities of “underrepresented” beings hold uniquely different lived experiences that are context-specific depending on geographical location and culture, amongst other characteristics. Collectively, all “Overlooked Underdogs” share and carry the oppression of being “othered” – these are structural, systemic realities that cut across space and time. By focusing on a specific “who?” we can move with specific communities’ stories and experiences over time. For example, a queer, neurodivergent, Roma community in Slovakia aged 15-25 may tell you a different “underdog story” to the one unfolding in a rural village in the Scottish Highlands populated with a mix of asylum seekers and refugees.

Let your specifically defined communities show you and tell you – in whatever way feels appropriate for them (methodology isn’t all that important here, though capturing the essence of their human experience is) – how re-telling their own story has given them power in some way. They will define what “power” means to them. They will determine the “Power & Resources” stemming from *“their positionality within social, cultural, and institutional structures”*; they will determine the evaluation strategy’s *“Values’ that are shaped by lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personal histories”* then use these to *“inform their perspectives and storytelling approaches, adding depth and authenticity to their narratives”*; and they will determine the *“Impact: The reach and influence of their storytelling are rooted in the communities they belong to and engage with. Their impact is defined by their ability to connect with and uplift these communities, creating resonance and creating meaningful change”* (report).

ii) “The Privileged Ally: Those who have access to networks, mentorship, resources, and platforms that shape which stories are told and how they are shared. They hold the power to amplify voices and influence the storytelling ecosystem, playing a pivotal role in either reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives” (report).

Again, map out a clear pathway for impact for each “Privileged Ally” and repeat the process above, though make it meaningful for “measurement” purposes by explicitly detailing named networks and platforms. If CIRCE is an example of this storyteller, work with the network transparently to elucidate exactly what and how they are a part of this change journey. Which “Overlooked Underdogs” are they connecting with, and how? How are they connected to stated “Megaphones”?

iii) *“The Megaphone: Institutions with the power and resources to uphold, gatekeep, and shape cultural narratives on a larger scale. They determine which stories receive visibility and funding, ultimately influencing what gets told and heard. These institutions play a crucial role in dictating which perspectives are amplified or silenced within the broader cultural landscape” (report response).”*

Similarly name and work with specific *“broadcasting agencies to museums, to academic institutions to universities”*, who *“have the muscle to actually dictate what sort of cultural memory is preserved, what form of stories are told, and who is telling the stories, and for whom?”* (interview). Each of their impact change stories will be different (for example a crowd-sourced, independent journalistic outlet focused on justice will have different processes and aims when compared to a state-owned, national broadcaster). For evaluation purposes, you’re interested in the granularity and distinctions between each collaborator. The task is to capture (in whatever way is meaningful for them) each storyteller’s change story specifically as they engage with the toolkit and/or app over time.

The scalability then becomes process driven; a pattern of spotting and collating of the *“natural similarities across”* these storytellers’ impact pathways at local, regional, national and even global levels—but not *“becoming so ‘meta’ that you lose the granularity of findings for each particular”* storyteller and what success would mean for them in their context.¹¹ The intention is *not*, as interviewee one notes, *“to come up with a replicable, scalable, sellable evaluation model”* ending up with *“an economy of scale issue”* where you have to engage with X many storytellers and prove X many changes in X many ways, but rather collecting these carefully crafted and monitored impact stories in an *“assemblage”* or *“non-hierarchical relational territories and encounters of various... entities that influence, affect and are affected by each other”*. For these entities —or effective eco-systems to thrive —*“learning takes place between all different parts within the assemblages and is perceived as a non-linear and rhizomatic process”*.¹²

It’s also important to deeply reflect on the unintended consequences of scalability. For social innovation and impact investing, this involves thinking carefully about the business and evaluation model used to *“sustain and scale it”* recognising where an *“open source, donation-based model might be the only thing that could actually... survive and thrive within the markets, ecosystems, communities”* (int2).

This is particularly pertinent to the growth of the Körperkino app and digital platform, which seeks to dismantle *“gatekeeping”* that *“reinforces inequalities and restricts the diversity of*

¹¹ See de Andrade and The REALITIES Consortium, 2024.

¹² Ibid quoting Pappa and Daskolia, 2023.

stories in today's global, capitalist attention economy" (report). Given that this project exists within a landscape of *"very dysfunctional and broken markets"* (int2), where dominant power narratives and *"capitalist metrics"* are pervasive (Körperkino interview), the evaluation strategy or impact assessment would be less focused on *"the institutions"* or *"whole family of impact investors, which will take money through big society capital"*, as these *"often focus on different issues, different types of outcome, different markets, different audiences, and they're all seeking pretty competitive returns"* (int2). Rather, focus should be on *"individuals who are probably in impact, investing in between their commercial investment and their philanthropy, somewhere in between those two things... that's where you've got people who are... motivated by a great team and a great idea that claims to have social impact"* (int2).

For Körperkino, there's *"potential tension between its financial value and its social value"* (int2), so a **relational, process and value-driven evaluation** that engages ethically minded entrepreneurs, cultural and creative industry stakeholders, policymakers, institutions and funders interested in contributing positively to society through a **set of shared values** is likely to lead to transformational change in this space.

9. A vision of transcendence for creative impact measurement

Alongside bespoke evaluations tailed to the needs of each "bounded" project, creative impact, through CIRCE, has a unique opportunity to position itself as a visionary pioneer that transcends alternative and sometimes conflicting ways of thinking about measurement. This recognises the limitations of measuring the "value" of creative impact projects, as they are entangled in fluid systems that are in a constant state of flux and heavily influenced by external factors, such short-term government decisions, political cycles and cutting costs. As a result, capturing *"a relationship between an intervention that's happening here now and an impact that's happening over there in the future is very, very hard to do"* (int2).

Rather than being overwhelmed by that reality – or reproducing a measurement approach that games the system in a particular way to evidence healthy outcomes for investors and other stakeholders – see this as an opening to *transcend* current conceptualisations of creative impact measurement. Re-imagine a model based on recurring, existential pillars of evidence provided by all Fellows' projects pointing to a *"crystallisation"* of the assemblage of projects presented along the methodological *"continuum"* so you can encounter and make sense of data, evidence or impact stories *"through more than one way of knowing. Multiple ways of knowing are analogous to viewing an object through a crystal: "Crystals are prisms that reflect*

*externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions”.*¹³

The process of zooming in and out, within and across projects, unlocks a process reflecting a multi-dimensional, multiplicity of forms and shapes that can be explored through different types of ‘data’. You just have to look for entry points that keep opening up through the creative and relational inquiry. For me, by synthesising Fellows projects’ multiple datasets, these openings crystallised through the emergence of a transcendent vision for measuring creative impact.

Creative impact measurement would benefit from changing its relationship with current conceptualisations of these entangled constructs: **Time and Currency; Reality and Knowledge; Vulnerability and Ethics.**

Creative impact would also benefit from “measuring” changes in understandings, re-conceptualisations and the re-imagining of these concepts by entrepreneurs, cultural and creative industry stakeholders, policymakers, or institutions and funders, so these stakeholders don’t automatically default to statistical, mixed-methods-qualitative-quantitative methods, standardised surveys and cost-benefit analyses to evidence creative impact and the human experience. While this approach to measurement, largely grounded in “*reductionist principles’ that privilege positivist, desk-based evidence over our lived and felt experiences, has had a lot of traction in the funding, research, practice and policy landscape to date, there is now a shift towards ‘acknowledging and integrating our different ways of seeing, being, knowing and doing’*”.¹⁴

I put this thinking to interviewee two, who instantly replied: “*exactly, exactly, exactly, exactly that... I think you hit it on the head*”. They reflected on the ethical challenges of beneficiaries “*having to bring back up and be triggered by past experiences reliving trauma*”, and how their experiential knowledge required “*all forms of burden and bandwidth and resource... which is very different from the highly-paid professional [stakeholders without lived experience]*”. While an evaluator could bring “*particular research skills*” and “*quantify their time and their contribution in very normative ways*”, the beneficiary could see and experience value in radically different ways (int2).

9.1 The creative impact crystal reflecting the transcendence of measurement

9.1.1 Time and currency – how we relate to time serves a central role in determining our experience of reality, influencing the expectations and strategies we create and engage with. Contemporary socio-economic models, political ideologies and impact strategies are all

¹³ Richardson, 2000

¹⁴ Madgin and Howcroft, 2024, citing de Andrade, 2022.

influenced by assumptions about the very make-up of temporality and its entanglement with currency.¹⁵

Time and currency learning questions for transcendent creative impact measurement:

How do the diverse cultures and “marginalised others”, who engage with and are meant to benefit from our creative impact projects, attach different meanings to time? Is the linearity of time linked to progress and economic growth? Are they focused on “the future” and/or reminisce on “the past”? How do our beneficiaries value time? In their communities, with their families, in the office, in rural or urban spaces? Do they reflect on cyclical time, spotting patterns on a loop? Do they value the change of seasons as a sign of change? Do they notice growth and decay in the environment? Do they talk about wars repeating themselves? How is this linked to how they value “societal good”? How is this value linked to their livelihood?

The current position of creative impact measurement in relation to time and currency:

All Fellows reflected on how short timelines and limited funding restricted “*long-term impacts that will require several years to come to fruition*”. Scaling projects could “*pose significant risks*” due to “*funding insecurity*” (Lou&You, survey). Success was highlighted as “*a much, much longer road*” supporting “*long-term work of launching and sustainably operating*” with impacts “*measured on a timeline of 3-5 years*”, providing opportunity to track if and how beneficiaries overcame barriers “*especially around access to capital*” (Queer Space Project (QSP), survey).

Linked to continuous funding, a prolonged timescale would shift the focus of “*one-off events and workshops* to “*a ‘full’ program*” to measure “*sustainable growth of [the] project*”, as “*assessing this project so soon after its conclusion does not fully capture what will emerge from the learning in these sessions in the months and years to come*” (QSP, survey). Participants’ expertise was recognised as invaluable ensuring the project was not “*extractive, but rather provide[d] value to participants now—here, in the form of practical information from presenters and speakers, honoraria for presenters, and small stipends in recognition of cohort members’ time*” (QSP, survey).

“*Economically speaking*”, due to projects such as Lou&You “*being a non-profit*”, some creators “*weren’t able to attribute financial value to their project*”. They went on to highlight that, “*as so often is the case with creative and cultural work, the financial value and the value for the individual victim/society diverges grossly and can hardly be measured. Also, establishing value/impact will require time, so an answer is almost impossible to give*” (Lou&You, survey).

¹⁵ Inspired, once again, by Ecodharma’s teachings on sustainability in 2017.

*Action prompt: how could creative impact – and all associated entrepreneurs, cultural and creative industry stakeholders, policymakers, institutions and funders – **move from, and monitor changes in**, the current position of impact measurement in relation to time and currency, to a transcendent one?*

9.1.2 Reality and knowledge – our internal systems (individuals’ inner worlds, subconscious motivations, subjective experiences of reality) are linked to external systems (for example, complex, ecological creative impact) through multi-faceted, divergent views of reality and different forms of knowledge generation connecting people, places, processes, power, price and purpose.¹⁶ To transcend measurement, creative impact *“must go beyond replicating experiments to lock down a novel facet of reality, to accepting that the human experience offers a prism of realities that can be creatively and empirically navigated to produce new meanings in our understanding”*¹⁷ of the “societal impact produced by creative practices”.¹⁸

Reality and knowledge learning questions for transcendent creative impact measurement:

How do our projects’ beneficiaries lived experiences (or realities) compare to those of policymakers and funders? Will the most “marginalised communities” that we seek to engage with or create products for directly use and benefit from the digital apps we’re creating? Are there other forms of knowledge that may be more suitable for capturing beneficiaries’ experiences? How can our beneficiaries convince policymakers and funders to embrace creative, sensual, embodied and emotive non-textual experiences as evidence of impact?

The current position of creative impact measurement in relation to reality and knowledge:

[Lou&You](#), which seeks to solve “human problems” through “humane technologies”, shines light on “interdependencies between the creative aspects of humanising technologies and the technical implementation and underscored the importance of considering human needs when creating resources for impact” (report). Through a process of “designing enablement”, the project shows how people’s realities, in this case lived experiences of “victims of sexual and domestic violence”, and their ability to get the support they need, is inextricably linked to having their “emotional needs” met. Aided by a product that’s human-centred and “creatively and iteratively” designed, the impact unfolds by victims witnessing how the resource “makes them feel truly guided through their entire healing journey” (survey).

Most helpful to understand the project’s impact were unprompted, relational forms of data, for statements like “one person reached out to me [the creator] saying, ‘hey, I used it. It was really

¹⁶ de Andrade and The REALITIES Consortium, 2024

¹⁷ de Andrade, 2022

¹⁸ [Creative Impact | CIRCE](#)

helpful” and interviews where *“the same topics came up again and again and again”* (interview). Creative practices and embodied knowledge – through *“prototyping, journey mapping, sketching, mood boarding, copy writing, visual design, workshops, brainstorming”* – led to a product state and the *“right information architecture”* after *“several iterations”*, with expressions about how the product *“feels”* to beneficiaries was a *“good indicator”* of the *“more functional aspects”* being *“solved”* (interview).

Attention was paid to the *“fluidity of the process”* and *“ability to trust my gut at the results that I had gotten”* (interview). The creator also shared *“the most memorable moment of success during the project”* came from *“conversations in the end to receive feedback. Hearing how the user experience or individual aspects of it were described made me emotional. Working on the project had me focused on all the flaws, yet-to-dos, and problems. The descriptions, however, were inherently charged with (positive) emotions and hinted towards the subtle differences I had tried to aim at”* (survey).

In the [Queer Space Project](#), which provides emerging LGBTQ+ nightlife entrepreneurs the knowledge, networks, and tools to create new spaces, the process of knowledge generation included a relational digital design, where designing *“multiple platforms and formats were used (for example, Mural visual collaboration, typed session summaries and tools, breakout groups, chat modalities) to accommodate various learning styles of participants and offer as much flexibility as possible”*. Crucially, measuring impact was linked to the provision of *“space”* serving *“an irreplaceable need for people to convene, collaborate, and publicly share their work”*. This *“essential creative engine at the most grassroots level offers a context for interdisciplinary experimentation, innovation—and simply coming together”* (report). The project lead noted that when they *“think about metrics”* they link them to *“knowledge, motivation, personal perception of empowerment”* (interview).

*Action prompt: how does creative impact – and all associated entrepreneurs, cultural and creative industry stakeholders, policymakers, institutions and funders – **move from, and monitor changes in,** current conceptualisations of reality and knowledge impact measurement to a transcendent one?*

9.1.3 Vulnerability and ethics – creative impact needs to be underpinned by the concepts of relational vulnerability, ethics of care, relational ethics, and an ethics of recognition.¹⁹ Accepting vulnerability *“as part of the human condition”* implies that *“everyone is vulnerable and therefore it follows that everyone is also dependent”*. This moves us away from thinking about *“vulnerability as something which marks a person out as somehow ‘less than’ in a world*

¹⁹ Stenhouse and de Andrade, 2023

that values autonomy and rational thought".²⁰ All project beneficiaries should be treated as equal and active impact evaluators, and determine whether labels of vulnerability and at-risk apply to them.

Vulnerability and ethics learning questions for transcendent creative impact measurement:

Who decides if beneficiaries are labelled as “marginalised others”? How do we keep these collaborators engaged in projects, and also safe? Is any individual, system or institution speaking on their behalf? If participants say they *don't* believe they are vulnerable – but others say they are – what happens in the process of knowledge generation? Does being vulnerable include or exclude beneficiaries or participants from taking part in a project? Who decides? What does ethical engagement mean for each collaborator? What does informed consent mean for each collaborator? How is this monitored?

The current position of creative impact measurement in relation to vulnerability and ethics:

By embedding a *“unique, more humane visual design”* and appropriate *“tone of voice”*, which is *“less political and more focused on the individual's needs”*, Lou&You tapped into matters of ethics and vulnerability. The knowledge practices applied are *“visual design [and] copywriting, but more generally a collaborative, mutually supportive approach working with others”* make *“it easier for the general public to empathise with the problem of gender-based violence which is quite stigmatised”* (survey).

For QSP, it was important to have *“an awareness team”* available to the cohort for the purpose of providing a safer space inside the group with support in the event that participants needed it. There were also multiple options for beneficiaries to *“confidentially seek support or anonymously offer feedback”* (report). The project lead also noted that safety is *“paramount”* for civic and municipal actors to ensure the basic safety of LGBTQ+ people in their cities or regions, especially for *“participants in regions where LGBTQ+ life is highly stigmatised”* (report). They added: *“There's responsibility, but also a certain power in the role of operating spaces. Research is still lacking, but some initial studies in a couple cities have found a lack of diversity in who runs night time venues, and that women, trans and nonbinary people, and queer and trans people of colour are missing spaces for and by them. So the question, of how a broader range of people can access the information and resources they need to take on this path of venue ownership, is an important topic”* (personal communication).

Quantitative measures of impact may not always be useful and may hinder ethical impact assessment. In Lou&You, the creator noted how they *“always prioritise the safety of users, so*

²⁰ Ibid, page 3

the cookie banner highlights to decline cookies, which have to be enabled for tracking, so we couldn't really track how many people were there" (interview).

*Action prompt: how does creative impact – and all associated entrepreneurs, cultural and creative industry stakeholders, policymakers, institutions and funders – **move from, and monitor changes in, current conceptualisations of ethics and vulnerability impact measurement to a transcendent one?***

10. Beyond metrics

To summarise, the Fellows' impact is evident in their collective vision to transcend our current understanding and limitations of "traditional" knowledge claims, measurement and evaluation. Their projects – whether focused on marginalised storytelling, human-centred designed or trauma-informed creative processes and practices in multiple contexts – tell us something profound about experiential and embodied knowledge as "currency". It's only a matter of time until economists start working with these different definitions of value to "measure" social impact through both tangible and intangible aspects of the human experience. This is *not* about reducing creative impact projects to transactional exchanges that only have financial value and are extractive. On the contrary, it's about building solid relationships with beneficiaries and stakeholders, who share similar values and principles and believe that the *"currency of relating is trust"*.²¹

Trust-based learning and evaluation is gathering traction in the quest for funder engagement, particularly in the UK, where the impact community as a collective is currently: challenging commissioners' preconceptions about measurement; highlighting the risks of linear approaches to evaluation that don't embrace complexity; framing learning as a governance issue; listening, learning and adapting; and creating the conditions for mutually beneficial relationships with funders to flourish, such as working through power dynamics and potential tensions.²²

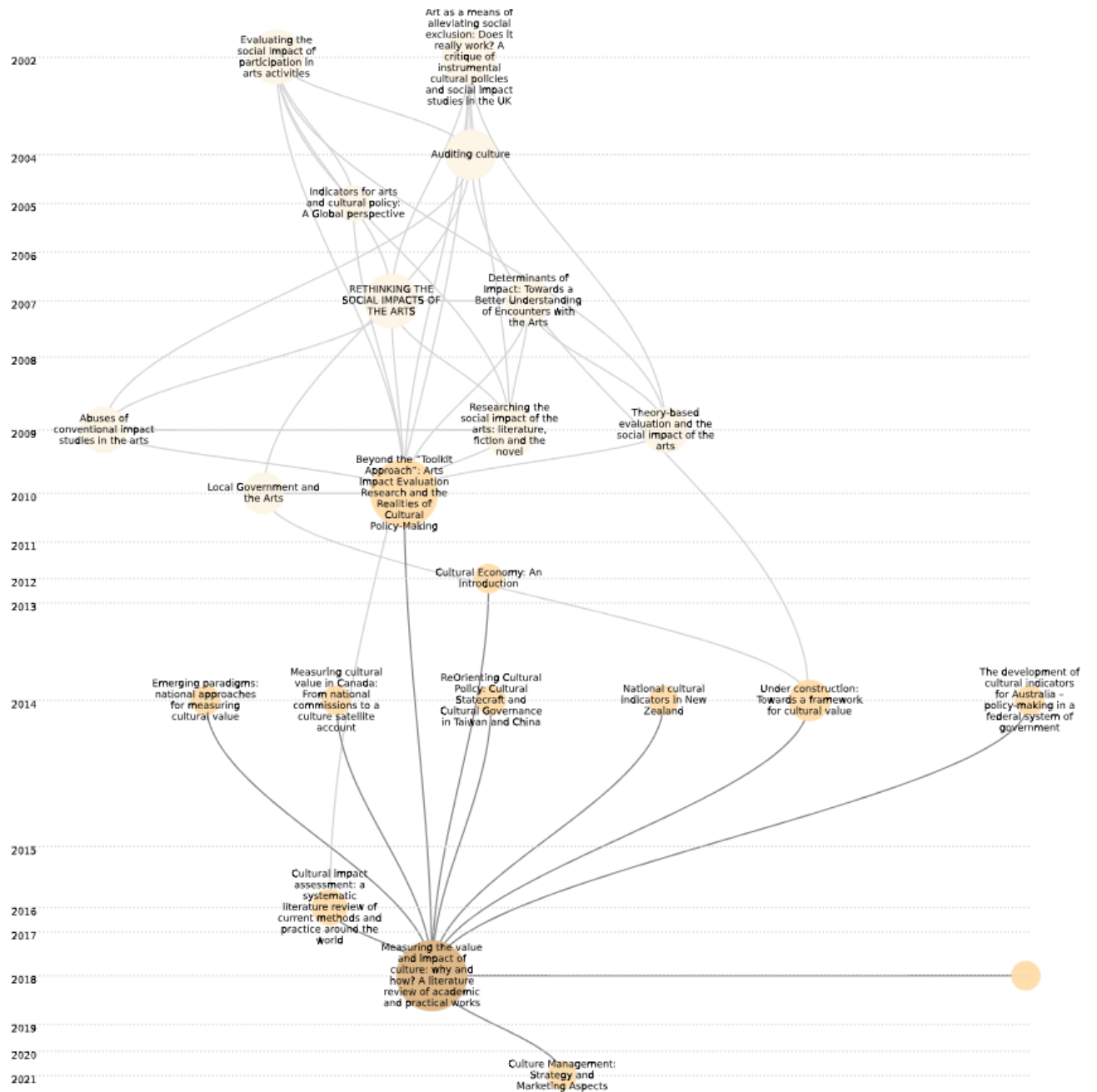
²¹ Tamber, 2019

²² Davis, 2024

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Appendix



Measuring the value and impact of culture: why and how? A literature review of academic and practical works

Jerry Liu

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