

Prototyping Futures: Creative Impact Research Centre Europe reveals their results

One year, 58 projects, countless ideas and innovations: After approximately one year of research, the innovative results of the Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE) network are published. In international European cooperation, 12 of the projects were created or continued in the United Kingdom. One additional project is based in Ireland.

Berlin, 14.12.2023 – The Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE) is an interdisciplinary and international network of individual and institutional collaborators from various professional fields. It promotes and implements experimental and applied research on the cultural and creative economies with a focus on public purpose-oriented activities. It brings together experts and institutions from academic research and technology development, from arts, design, and other creative occupations, and from social entrepreneurship and community organising. Initiated in response to Brexit and its possible fallout for the cultural and creative economies, CIRCE developed into a unique community of researchers and creatives spread across Europe, who work in a decentralized yet collaborative way on creative impact.

CIRCE was funded in summer 2022 by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The project's activities unfold in a network composed of five research labs (London, San Sebastián, Tallinn, Berlin and Zürich), 40 research fellows, 13 pilot projects. It is headquartered, curated and administratively managed at u-institut, Berlin.

The **final publication "Prototyping Collaboration"** summarises the insights and conclusions of the network's research and creative projects. You can download the **digital publication** [here](#). The **detailed final reports** can be viewed on the website in the section on the respective projects.

About a year on, CIRCE now counts 140 participants from 18 European countries. Below we have listed the projects that have been initiated in the UK and Ireland:

Esther „Estée Blu“ Lenda Bokuma is an R&B/ jazz singer and songwriter, producer and activist from London, UK. The study she aims to conduct as part of CIRCE is partly based on the findings of a poll carried out by the organization Black Lives in Music in 2021: three out of five (63%) Black music creators have experienced direct or indirect racism in the music industry. The purpose of Esther's study is not only to find out about the health of the artists, but also to explore alternative ways of ensuring their well-being.

“While BLU WAV is open to all artists, I created an exclusive series for Black musicians and professionals entitled The Embodying Liberation Series. This was a community intervention in collaboration with four practitioners in the holistic, spiritual, artistic and psychology sectors.

The workshops and the meaningful conversations I had with peers formed a part of my ongoing research into the mental health, wellbeing and working conditions of Black artists.”

Founded by people who had personally experienced homelessness, the **Museum of Homelessness** has pursued a wide-ranging strategy since it opened its doors in 2015. It encompasses creating a national collection documenting homelessness, independent research and campaigning as well as boosting awareness and understanding of the topic through art, exhibitions and events. **The museum is set to open in 2024.**

“Real, meaningful trauma-informed work requires us to explore and interrogate the roots of the polycrisis and offer alternatives through our collections and our creative and practical work. We are creating a culture on the site that is the opposite of what is happening in our political and economic systems. Together, we will be flexible, reciprocal, generous and compassionate.”

Merje Laiapea is a cultural producer, curator and researcher from Estonia. With CIRCE, she documents the work of collectives and organisations that plan and build life-affirming infrastructure. In city districts and communities that are often overlooked by institutions and politicians, experts test out new ways of **breathing new life into precarious community structures** and building the capacity for **new types of cultural space**. The project examines organisations such as MAIA, Freedom & Balance and Kin Structures in the UK and case studies from throughout Europe.

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

Hoyee Tse is a social art historian with a special interest in the meaning-making of art and cultural objects as well as the politics of cultural representation. Her project focuses on the **employment of Asian professionals in the museum sector** and examines whether museums are restricting their employment of Asian staff to certain positions and projects. Her project will help stimulate the discussion about **diversity in the museum sector** and **identify potential inequalities in employment**.

“My data demonstrated that visa policy and racialised tasks and positions formed the main barriers to entry. While understanding the advantage of bilingualism, some saw the English language as a challenge. More importantly, the monocultural work environment facilitated racialisation of their identity. I recommend that organisations like CIRCE initiate a network to organise mutual support and training for ethnic minority professionals and their colleagues.”

The **Black European Academic Network (BEAN)** was founded in 2010 to overcome the **challenges of institutional racism in education** and beyond. In light of the social and political climate in Europe and the significance of cultural diversity, including the experiences of Black Europeans, the organisers of the book *Mapping Black Europe: Monument, Markers, Memories* are developing an **online remote learning course** based on their findings.

“Tailoring content to our audience’s specific needs has become a key hallmark of this work and represents an innovative learning strategy. Our flexibility allows participants to retain

and apply knowledge in more effective and improved ways. When participants have a say in what they learn, retention is improved.”

Tend VR is an innovative treatment based on virtual reality which uses **mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) to treat depression and anxiety**. In cooperation with renowned medical experts and creative technologists, University College London (UCL) and The Retreat have developed a more affordable and scalable VR-based MBCT. Within the scope of CIRCE, the project has been developed further and improved through iterative testing before a major clinical study is carried out to assess the effectiveness of the new version. *„Perhaps the greatest impact was understanding that the users’ need to inhabit realistic environments was of utmost importance, as it allowed them a true sense of escape from their immediate surroundings. We then assigned significant development time to this process and ultimately came up with a wholly new technology that has revolutionised how 3D environments can be rendered in VR.“*

Civic/The Possible is a project that holds citizen assemblies across **Ukraine to rethink and redesign humanitarian responses and create blueprints for re-building**. In collaboration with various partners, a fund has been set up to provide grants to impact-driven entrepreneurs as well as social investments for their humanitarian projects. The project aims to support innovative entrepreneurial approaches that help rebuild Ukraine. *“We have come to believe that harnessing the skills, ingenuity and resilience of entrepreneurs is essential in responding to the socio-economic challenges faced by towns like Voznesensk. [...] The Possible Lab resulted in a strategic focus on supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that provide crucial income for vulnerable families.”*

Kristina Gavran, PhD is a writer, theatre-maker and researcher from Croatia who is currently living in England. Her project **“Birth stories: arts for health and wellbeing“** is interdisciplinary, combining art, health and technology. It uses **digital storytelling** to explore various **childbirth experiences**, paying special attention to migrant mothers who often face particular challenges. In light of the fact that many women in Central and Eastern Europe leave their jobs after giving birth, the project hopes to find new ways to give this target group improved access and co-determination.

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

Gaming for climate change: The young players enter the Minecraft worlds of Frozen Planet II, a 3D online game, and take on the role of a polar bear, bee or other animals to learn more about their habitats and the challenges being posed by climate change. The worlds and their learning resources are designed to boost the knowledge and engagement of young people. In close cooperation with the developers of the game, the London-based researcher **Dr. Madeleine Arber** is exploring how the game affects climate awareness in children. *“Findings from interviews with educators show that the Minecraft Education worlds do inspire*

climate-positive behaviours in children beyond game play. [...] Longer-term impacts seem to be apparent, with the children applying sustainable thinking to their projects beyond the game worlds.”

Gemma Milne is an author and researcher based in Glasgow. Her research and publications focus on the interactions between technology and society as well as the impacts on the future of innovation and science. By exploring creative practices designed to enhance imagination, she will investigate the role the cultural and creative industries can play in imagining a **‘prefigurative politics’ for the space sector**.

“This research looks [...] at the artistic process and in particular, the ways in which those in the cultural and creative economies utilise creative skills and mindsets to come up with new ideas, provoke, disrupt and interrupt hegemonic thought-processes.”

Dany Garcia-Solano is an experience researcher & designer and media producer from Colombia who is currently based in London. His research focuses on reimagining conventional experiences using embodied, situated and participatory design. In his project ‘The Experience of Democracy’, he explores creative ways for citizens to participate in policymaking, social debates and ultimately democracy itself with a view to fostering creativity and community participation. This project aims to help **redefine the relationship between people, democracy and design** and deepen our understanding of the experiences and nuances of democracy.

“The Design Picnic offers an open, horizontal and intentional research method that employs generative participation and relationality. It provides a space for individuals to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and emotions through tangible objects that they create. [...] This is the journey of a design researcher towards a more caring democracy.”

Cheryl Kwok is a musician and cultural policy researcher. Her project focuses on the challenges of the **uncertain employment situation in Central and Eastern European countries**, which are often associated with institutional problems. Her goal is to research the reasons and barriers that could prevent young professionals from pursuing and remaining in a career in the cultural and creative industries in these regions. She plans to develop initiatives that pave the way to a sustainable career in these sectors, regardless of background or socioeconomic profile, and offer equal opportunities.

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

Anastasia Platonava is a PhD student at the Technological University of the Shannon in Ireland. Her focus is on investigating the **synergy of blockchain technology and artificial intelligence** and their **potential to reduce the skills gap in Europe**. In light of the rapid pace of technology and the difficulty of finding qualified workers for companies, her project strives to develop innovative solutions.

“I uncovered blockchain and AI’s potential to help cultural and creative industries not only to survive but confidently navigate through an unpredictable future.”

You can find more detailed information about CIRCE’s background and results in the **final publication ‘Prototyping collaboration’**, which is available as a print copy on request. We also arrange interviews with all stakeholders, actors, researchers and members of the network.

PR & communications

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