Cultural Diversity Laboratory • Creative Industries and Cultural Diversity: Part 2 - Crises, Diversities and the Cultural Ecosystem

Introduction: Taking "Cultural Diversity" and "Polycrisis" into the Laboratory

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Published on: Jun 11, 2024

URL: https://circelablondon.pubpub.org/pub/h58kn3ea

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The London Cultural Diversity Lab was based in the Centre for Culture and the Creative Industries (CCCI) at City, University of London for the duration of 2023. City is a practitioner-facing university in the creative heart of Islington, central London, with a 130-year history of educating for the professions. CCCI has its roots in the founding of the first formal training and education programme in arts management and policy in 1976, in partnership with the Arts Council of Great Britain. The CIRCE project offered an opportunity to consolidate and build on the work that members of the Centre had already undertaken in recent years: in the UK, with the likes of Department of Culture, Media and Sport, local cultural development offices, national trade bodies, and the East and Southeast Asian diaspora; abroad, with UNESCO, the British Council, and community organisations in India and West Africa. As one of five CIRCE research labs, we sought to interrogate how rising attention to questions of "diversity" in the sector relates to compounding social and economic crises, embedding our combined research expertise – drawing from cultural sociology, economic geography, gender studies, media and communications and the broader humanities – within the "natural laboratory" of London's cultural ecosystem.

This chapter lays out the initial broad-scale objectives that motivated this project. It then moves to a critical reflective discussion around the key terms and emerging challenges that arose throughout - and the approach we took in response. Beyond the most immediate thematic concerns with cultural and creative industries practice and policy, we consider the latter, more processual dimensions, to be secondary (but crucial) outcomes of the lab's work.

STARTING QUESTIONS

The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union has, broadly speaking, posed a significant challenge to the project of developing a coherent "creative industries" policy arena over the past 25 years. It also formed a starting point for the Creative Impact Research Centre Europe (CIRCE) and the project that motivates this report. Behind this motivation, however, lies the widespread sense within European policy and intellectual communities that this was only a symptom of a more complex conjuncture. By the closing stages of 2023, we might name: a crisis of liberal democracy, with multiple electoral upsets bringing about so-called "democratic backsliding"; a crisis of inequality, with widening extremes of wealth and opportunity; military crises, with the flaring up of long-running conflicts on the borders of Europe into full-scale wars; and the unfolding environmental crisis of anthropogenic climate change. Responses to each of these rely on collective action at an international scale which have, to date, been found wanting, contributing to ongoing pressures on access to energy, with rising interest rates and costs of living, as well as the intensifying prospect of mass migration as governments of various stripes seek hubristic levels of control over borders. Such failures and unrealistic promises fan the flames of dispute among citizenries, fuelling further crises of political legitimacy – and so on.

A more “creative impact” might therefore be required – defined by CIRCE (2023: 21) as “the social impact produced by creative practices”, manifesting “in new products, services, business models or organisational forms” that “combine a commitment to public purpose, which characterises the field of arts and culture, with economic sustainability efforts”. One central recommendation of this report is to offer cautious support to this proposal. *Support*, insofar as it is clear to us that cultural and creative practices are not simply decorative add-ons but fundamental capacities for generating a range of values, which are not always recognised as such – there is no Sustainable Development Goal for “culture” in and of itself, for instance (see Mondiacult 2022). Equally, however, we urge *caution* insofar as such prescriptions can sometimes take a mechanistic tone, in which creativity is viewed as an inexhaustible resource that can be simplistically applied to socio-economic problems: ‘creatives’ as heroic firefighters and experts in crisis-response. Care is needed not to take the cultural-economic ecosystem underpinning such creative practices for granted, overlook its internal complexities and challenges, or its interactions with the broader social world. To explain what we mean by this, here we take London’s cultural and creative industries as our example.

THE UK EXAMPLE

Since the late 1990s, London and the wider UK has been fêted as a creative economy success: an example of how jobs, regeneration, and place-making could be combined in an apparently unending stream. As we discussed in our first report, the UK has developed a relatively established institutional ecosystem of evidence-based policy and critical discourse over the past twenty-five years, targeted both at the cultural and creative economy and to diversity, inequalities and social mobility, and to their inter-relation – albeit not one without its challenges (Easton et al. 2023). This is nonetheless an institutional setup that bears the stamp of being embedded in longer pre-existing histories. Notably, this includes a post-war moment of Keynesian reconstruction, with a paternalistic welfare model of cultural funding – that sought to both support forms of artistic creation subject to ‘market failure’ and ‘democratise’ access to elite arts – perhaps best embodied in the formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain (of which Keynes himself was the first Chair).

This moment was also characterised by decolonisation, motivating large-scale immigration of former imperial subjects from Caribbean nations (the so-called “Windrush Generation”, named after the arrival of the HMT Empire Windrush boat), as well as India and Pakistan, many by government invitation following the 1948 British Nationality Act. As well as contributions to national reconstruction, these new arrivals made cultural contributions, via music, fashion, food, fine arts and film, developing distinctively localised hybrids that fuelled the burgeoning commercial cultural and media industries. The latter developed apace from the late 1960s onwards, forming the dynamic obverse face of broader processes of deindustrialisation and globalisation. With mass industrial manufacturing increasingly displaced and relocated to production sites overseas – notably, in the former colonies of South Asia and, later, East and Southeast Asia; and, especially from the 1980s onwards, a China that was in the process of implementing reforms that would “open up” to

global markets and supply chains – unemployment and unrest became a significant challenge for those in the UK.

Cultural industries came to be positioned as something of an antidote here. They were viewed both as sources of rewarding employment and of leisure spending, as well as drivers of local regeneration and tourism, typically clustered and place-marketed in urban cultural districts linked to the management of heritage and to vibrant (if rather less manageable) night-time economies of clubs, bars and do-it-yourself scenes. This municipal turn accompanied the devolution of the Arts Council from a UK-wide arts funding body to constituent national levels, while an emphasis on small-scale cultural enterprise chimed, to some extent, with a more market-oriented spirit of the era and on individual popular expression rather than the preservation of elite arts. This spirit was channelled as part of a national “creative industries” strategy from the end of the 1990s.

Initially “Creative Britain” could essentially be summarised as a nation-branding strategy: a shop window display for the globalised age of exports. Increasingly, however, it also sought to analyse, understand and support the operations of commercial cultural industries at home. In particular it focused on those activities reliant on intellectual property protection in an expanding information economy; more implicitly, it was viewed as a sector more attuned than most to processes of multicultural drift and to so-called “niche markets”, such as young women and what might now be termed LGBTQ+ communities. It also took up the post-1980s turn to “neoliberal” forms of accountable governance, tying an increase of state spending on public-funded culture to sweeping public-sector management reforms. The latter required institutions to adopt commercial business sensibilities: diversifying income streams, outsourcing non-core provision, developing customer-service functions and, crucially, rigorously monitoring and justifying expenditure through regular auditing exercises – including “access” metrics of social inclusion and diversity.

GLOBAL CHALLENGES

This, then, forms the basis of a relatively stable but evolving institutional arrangement over the early years of the new millennium, in which creative industries gained a sense of self-awareness, representation and voice within and without the halls of government policymaking. Since the global financial crisis of 2008, however, the sector has experienced successive challenges: an extended period of public funding reductions over the 2010s; the impact of the country’s exit from the European Union from 2016-2020; a global pandemic in the early 2020s. Despite these “A-B-C” (Austerity-Brexit-Covid 19) shocks, creative industries have been positioned at the centre of a national “2030 vision” to revitalise growth, work, wellbeing, international influence and green transition.

The act of placing creative industries at the core of a national industrial strategy should be viewed as a renewed (post-Brexit) response to global challenges – arriving shortly after China’s “Made in China 2025” ten-year plan to upgrade technology and manufacturing industries, for instance. This is not entirely new: creative industries have long been framed as an engine of combined cultural and economic development for both Global South

and North. Attention to the role of culture in developing contexts overseas grew particularly via the role of United Nations bodies (UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO), cultural agencies like the British Council, and a range of consultancies, exporting strategic toolkits, ‘mapping’ local and national infrastructures, or running training and networking workshops, aiming to improve data-gathering and build stakeholder capacity. In urban contexts, these informed international ‘City of Culture’ programmes and ‘Creative Cities’ rankings, encouraging local authorities to compete for a label of recognition that would encourage tourism, trade fairs, film location shooting and foreign direct investment. Crucially, all these approaches responded to shifts in the core-periphery model, and so too in the global division of labour, as cities and nations sought sources of competitive advantage to reposition within international relations of trade and chains of production.

At a national level, some moved beyond the ‘soft power’ of nation branding to develop coordinated industrial strategies – notably South Korea’s various ‘Hallyu’ waves saw substantial exports in popular music, fashion, film and television production. The avatar of this global shift to national industrial policymaking is, however, China (Aiginger and Rodrik 2020). Loosened labour laws in the special economic zone of Shenzhen fed the vast product assembly hubs required by the growth in consumer electronics hardware, such as that required by Apple for the manufacture of the iPhone, while rising affluence saw its population develop into one of the most powerful global consumer markets. Accordingly, its own “creative industries” strategy, when it came, was a distinctively localised form that sought not to import models directly from the Europe or the US but to embed them within a more homegrown cultural production system that challenges key tenets of “creativity”, as viewed through the liberal-humanist lens of capitalist democracy, integrating them with advanced technological innovation (Gu and O’Connor 2022).

DIVERSITY AS A RESPONSE TO CRISIS

One way of conceptualising the last quarter-century might be as an experiment in breaking apart longstanding “culture versus economy” dualisms, sedimented in established institutions, ministries and funding models, to recombine them in generative new partnerships and innovative organisational forms. Underpinning London’s success and resilience is arguably its position as a global city and a node of global migration. Its population flux has gifted the capital with a seemingly never-ending stream of new knowledges, ideas and trends, facilitating an innovative mixing of ideas and a relatively safe space for experimentation. And yet, in recent years, this settlement has come under considerable pressure, to a great extent precisely because the dualism has remained firmly in place.

During the pandemic the sector was, in the words of Banks and O’Connor, “caught between a rock and a hard place; asking to be treated as an industry driven by profit maximisation and ROI, and as a public service viewed either [in terms of] mendicant “welfare” or self-funded human capital investment”, leading to a lack of coherent messaging over where its value actually lies (2021: 5). Meanwhile, its relative resilience has often been at the cost of internal fundamental social inequalities. This past decade has seen not only economic growth but also growing recognition that those who work in the sector do not reflect the wider populace: not

only in terms of what gets seen, read, heard and performed but also who gets funded, employed or promoted. Alongside the intrinsic injustices, persistent structural imbalances restrict the very creativity that such industries are founded on. Such an apparent paradox lies behind the rise in “diversity” rhetoric, in public discourse, organisational strategy and government policymaking.

“Diversity” is a deceptively simple, everyday term to describe a hugely complex topic, both in the scholarly and policy literature and, moreover, at the experiential level of what happens in practice. It is commonly used not only to recognise different identities, values and heritages as productive features of mundane cultural life in a range of settings but also (particularly in corporate or public policy contexts) to nurture and ‘manage’ it. UNESCO’s 2005 convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, for example, refers primarily to diversity *between* nations in the context of a globalised trade in cultural goods and services. Responding to a perceived need to recognise cultural practices as exceptional within international free trade agreements (that is, the outlook typically identified with the World Trade Organisation), the 2005 convention asserts the sovereign right for nation states to protect longstanding heritage sites and community craft practices alongside the rights of artists – and to enact cultural policies accordingly. The 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity on which it is based begins by drawing an explicit link between the importance of “cultural diversity” for (global) human flourishing with “biodiversity” for the natural environment. *Within* the UK, a related but different inflection picks up from turn-of-the century discourses of multiculturalism, associated with post-war decolonisation and processes of migration, and what is sometimes referred to as the “superdiversity” of global cities.

Such processes have been paired with a broader recognition of the need to be inclusive of gender and sexuality, physical and mental impairment, age and belief – whether codified and legislated as “protected characteristics” under the Equality Act 2010, or theorised and popularised using the language of “intersectionality”. It also includes reference to socio-economic advantage, regional imbalances, generational inequalities and – perhaps especially within creative contexts – the cognitive differences associated with neurodivergence. In this sense, “creative diversity” might be celebrated and encouraged as a resource for creativity, innovation and competitive advantage: a way to “think different”, be more sensitive to social complexity and cater to niche markets. Equally, notions of diversity have risen to the centre of a politicised “culture war” framing of heated public discourse, deploying nativist rhetoric amid a backlash to the perceived threats of globalisation by pitting the alleged values of a “left-behind” section of the population with those of a highly-educated professional “elite” residing in the metropole.

Within this critical conjuncture, the concern of the Cultural Diversity Lab was to:

1) explore what relationships exist, if any, between the rhetoric and practice of “diversity” and the experience of compounding “A-B-C” crises, and the continuing challenges over the course of 2023, within London’s cultural production ecosystem;

2) consider what lessons policymakers might learn from this particular example for supporting the resilience and impact of cultural ecosystems elsewhere and amid other crisis conditions.

POLYCRISIS - OR BUSINESS AS USUAL?

A present increasingly overdetermined by these *multiple Krise* – various overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises – has found a new label: “polycrisis”. This latter term was popularised by the economic historian Adam Tooze, taking up a phrase used during the Greek debt crisis by Jean-Claude Juncker, then president of the European Commission, as well as Edgar Morin, UNESCO Chair of Complex Thought. Updating these for a post-pandemic world, Tooze reflects on China’s pre-pandemic security philosophy which, as articulated by Chen Yixin (now Minister of State Security), directed attention to the movement and convergence of risks and crises across domains and scales – scandals circulating online suddenly escalate into full-blown social issues; ecological risks transform into economic risks; historic problems resurface to complicate the present; global interactions shape local communities; and so on – some of which appear as unpredictable shocks (“black swan” events), others as more predictable and slow-moving – and ignored for that reason (“grey rhinos”).

Ultimately, argues Tooze, the notion of “polycrisis” helps to place the contemporary language of “crisis” within the longer trajectory of global political economy – so that, if the turn of the 1990s inaugurated a period of consensus among major world powers, the turn of the 2020s is characterised by fragmentation and multipolarity. As such, it is indicative that this diagnosis of multiple, overlapping challenges and breakdowns has its roots in much earlier attention to the growing ecological crisis that accompanied increasing global interdependence. It equally signals a much longer-term disciplinary ‘turn’ away from a linear conception of history progressively unfolding and towards a more iterative and reflexive form of thinking, in terms of the delicate balance of complex mutually-embedded systems.

Among the multiple influences Tooze marshals to scaffold his framing of polycrisis thinking, he alights, briefly, on three thinkers who saw in the End of History a sense of messy uncertainty, rather than consensus and closure. The German sociologist Ulrich Beck diagnosed a social world increasingly shaped by reflexive recognition and risk calculation. The French “actor-network” theorist Bruno Latour sought to trace the irreducible interdependence of human and inhuman actors in hybrid nature-cultures. And, crucially for this project, the British-Jamaican pioneer of cultural studies Stuart Hall rebuffed an economic determinism that sees capitalism as the ultimate source of change, whether enlightened progress or crisis-ridden contradiction. His insistence on the need to articulate micro-processes of culture, identity and everyday meaning-making as equally powerful dynamic forces lie at the heart of the chapters that follow.

Hall shared with Latour and Beck a common frustration with standard analytic frames that carve up the world into neat categories – society over here, economy over there, nature probably underneath, while culture floats above – and then recommend courses of action and governance accordingly. If this disciplinary division of the

world has implications for our analyses, they are replicated and reproduced by the sorting of problems into distinct decision-making domains. *Problems* are made amenable to the work of *professional experts* (doctors, politicians, lawyers, artists, economists, engineers, psychologists) and the regulatory mechanisms of *agencies of governance* (ministries of health, industry, culture, food, education, defence). They are also congealed in the standard organisational routines through which 'business as usual' carries on. Resisting this ordered division of expertise, the polycrisis frame reminds us to foreground the everyday complexities of contemporary social life when attending to any policy domain but perhaps especially that of culture and creativity.

Appeals to "polycrisis", then, suggest a breakdown not simply of complex systems themselves but of their representation: those parts of the world that we can and cannot see. That is, they call up *epistemic* questions concerning the established techniques and methods, dominant ways of thinking, and modes of organising knowledge, that hold such systems together (or do not). This includes questions of *epistemic (in)justice*: whose expertise wields influence, and which experiences are recognised to be of value, in shaping the kinds of explanatory narrative that can inform action. Here again, the work of culture can play a crucial part. What stories can be told, what connections can be drawn, what understanding can be enriched, what imaginative limits can be transgressed, what actions can be stirred, by a renewed and well-supported creative economy worthy of the name? Locked into the routines of data collection, as much as those of the working day and the family unit, it seems hard to escape the institutional path dependencies set out by a post-war industrial era. The capacity for the kinds of unorthodox aesthetic interventions and genre-breaking experiments in novel collectivities that are needed in the face uncertain futures, we judge, rests on a certain level of fundamental security in which culture and economy cannot be viewed as a zero-sum game.

All this being said, the increasingly agitated concerns voiced by academic experts and policymaking communities prompt a common critical rejoinder: "crisis for whom?" As Chan's contribution to our collection notes in particular, for many – those with precarious working arrangements, without reliable access to housing, or in underdeveloped regions of the Global South – conditions of crisis have long been normalised into their own routines of coping. There are many for whom ontological insecurity is simply a way of life, whether or not this is recognised by European elites. Here again, perhaps a thinker like Stuart Hall, and others in that tradition, might help us to hold on to the ordinary dimensions of culture, and the difference that emerges from everyday convivial experience, alongside the culture that is produced and sold as works of art, media formats and performances.

LABORATORY LIFE IN THE LIVING LAB

The particular implications of polycrisis explored in this paper are located in the domain of cultural production in the United Kingdom, specifically in London. The "London Cultural Diversity Laboratory" named a team of researchers that was temporarily assembled over the course of 2023 to interrogate this domain and so to feed

into the broader questions around Creative Impact across Europe posed by the CIRCE project. The "laboratory" notion derived from the latter: the language of European funding required a "lab", comprising "scientists", who would disseminate "findings". Given the epistemic challenges laid out above, it is worth dwelling for a moment on our approach to knowledge production, and our effort to reframe it, as a more reflexive and co-creative process of listening and dialogue.

The scientific laboratory conjures up imagery of a particular space: of clinical, forensic measurement, of equipment set up for experimentation, of observations being made and hypotheses tested, and disseminated in research papers. This process is depicted in ethnographic detail by Latour and Woolgar in *Laboratory Life*, which redescribed science (somewhat controversially) as the production of an economy of texts: written inscriptions (i.e. research papers) emerge from a lab, to be put to the test by other scientists in peer review, and thereby temporarily stabilised as "facts", which then circulate as a kind of symbolic currency that can be traded in for career prestige that holds the system of knowledge together. The "lab" format has travelled beyond this setting however. The modernist programme of technoscientific development found a home in the media and communications (perhaps most famously MIT Media Lab), as well as the broader humanities and, more recently, digital humanities (Wershler et al. 2021). In line with this trajectory, but away from state-led modes of research and investment, smaller pockets of countercultural workshops and arts-school associated "labs" emerged in the 1960s, such as the Drury Lane Arts Lab, which made equipment available to film-makers and creative practitioners interested in aesthetic experimentation (Curtis 2020). But the more common home for such work to take place, from fine arts to recorded music to architecture, has been the "studio", lab-like spaces for assembling ideas and materials that can support and format collaborative creative processes and specific aesthetic objects that emerge as a result (Farias and Wilkie 2016). A similar ethic motivates the recent burgeoning of creative "hubs" and coworking spaces which have sought to overcome expectations that cultural production – from the performing artist to the freelance designer – must be a solo endeavour, instead engaging in a careful curation and management of dedicated spaces for creatives to gather, share knowledge, skills and contacts, and otherwise find mutual support (Gill et al. 2019).

And yet – the "lab" metaphor's continued association with ideas of data production as an extractive process generated a degree of discomfort within our team. We were keen instead to learn from the above literature and emphasise the production and circulation of knowledge as a situated social practice, providing access to resources and critical encounters with one another, in ways that are embedded in particular spaces and locations. In many ways London itself might viewed as a laboratory of this kind – indeed, the Creative Enterprise Zone of Hackney Wick and Fish Island has set up a "living laboratory" that looks to bring researchers and creatives together in projects with shared goals, developing a practice community knowledge-sharing that reaches into the doctor's waiting room as much as the artist's studio and the university corridor. This is not a simple task, given that the incentives and timescales of these groups are not always in alignment. Nonetheless, we considered the expertise and experiences of practitioners themselves a crucial part of our evolving knowledge base. We sought to embed them within the "lab" by asking what kinds of questions

concerned them, to find ways to further their ambitions alongside our own (for example, using the university as a promotional platform), and of course to compensate them adequately for their contributions. We sought a continual "reflexive dialogue": in the relationships we established with practitioners, in the secondary data and reporting we've collected, our discussions around methods and the interviews and site visits we conducted, and in the events we hold, and the documents we produce. These kinds of relational goals demand a longterm engagement of the kind that is not possible to generate from scratch within the space of a year. An interrupted work-in-progress, we are not therefore satisfied that all this has been achieved. The lab concept nonetheless gave us permission to experiment with an ethic of responsible research – about, with and for the subjects of that research. What then became clear is that such aims – to make space, to reflect and to put the university institution to use in a productive way – require active management and a significant commitment to care.

The motivation here is not to collapse boundaries between different knowledges, or to submerge the university within activist or industry projects, but to recognise that expertise takes shape in different ways and to give value to the diversity of contexts in which knowledge is produced. This includes the more "academic" side of the equation, shaping the internal conduct of our work: from the design, conduct and dissemination of research, to the mundane elements of coordinating meetings, project planning and travel logistics, to more informal elements of support, mentorship and sociality. Here we learn not only from counterparts in arts, media and cultural production but from forebears who sought to rethink disciplinarity from the institutional margins. At the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, for example, intellectual projects were pursued through loose-knit collaborative working groups of teachers and students, both engaged with the urban community in which they were embedded, in "a laboratory characterized very heavily by a post-1968 leftist experimentalism" (Connell and Hilton 2015: 290-291). We might also draw from the feminist ethics of care that understand the practice of interdisciplinary work as one of mutual interdependence across institutional boundaries (The Care Collective 2020). Likewise, the tradition of Black Study takes a sceptical view of "interdisciplinarity", as a means of preserving, rather than transforming, existing disciplinary norms and structures, instead advocating knowledge that is made both *within and against* the university (Harney and Moten 2013; Myers 2023).

In such traditions, epistemic justice involves the care-ful consideration of space and boundary; of inside and outside. What these different traditions of inquiry share is an emphasis on nurturing, to use a more developmental psychodynamic vocabulary, a "transitional space" in which different ideas and identities can encounter and recognise themselves in each another, and so be transformed from within. This aligns with efforts to create "safer spaces" within education institutions and subcultural scenes, recognising that truly challenging forms of thinking cannot take place in contexts where participants feel (and in some cases are) in danger of attack. To "hold space" in this way is to suspend judgment, in order to allow uncertainty and vulnerability to surface. For us, then, the laboratory might be considered as a means of generating transitional spaces that straddle institutional boundaries, giving participants permission to experiment, to play, sometimes to improvise, in response to a wider environment in flux.

Beyond a general ethic, however, there is a more specific concern here, related to the way in which we conceive of our key concepts. What constitutes "diversity", is not something we can know in advance. The various disciplinary knowledges we engaged – from sociology, economic geography, arts and humanities, cultural studies, media and communications, psychosocial studies, business and management, political science and policy studies – all approach the term differently, reflecting the various ways in which it is valorised, abused or otherwise put to use, whether in contexts of artistic practices, inflammatory political rhetorics or organisational policies. Indeed, following Malik (in the previous volume) we might recognise that to *speak* of diversity, especially in a formal institutional context, can be a way of not *doing* diversity, or rather of doing something else (see also Ahmed 2012). Rather than defining our terms, we sought to "do" diversity by treating it as a transitional "boundary object": a term with interpretive flexibility, allowing different parties to come together under a loosely shared idea, recognising that they may not always understand that idea in the same way.

OUR INQUIRY

Our approach was primarily synthetic, aiming to assemble and triangulate multiple information sources and generate dialogue and conceptual innovation that could potentially inform better governance in this arena. We began by reviewing existing scholarly literature and then assembled a corpus of industry/policy reporting and practical initiatives addressing the need for diversity interventions in the UK's cultural and creative industries in recent years, identifying around 80 such documents since 2015. In order to check this against the evolving reality of life "on the ground" in London in 2023, we supplemented this literature search with small-scale exploratory qualitative research – drawing from interviews, focus groups and observations, as well as more informal conversations – with around 40-50 key practitioners and informants working in this field. Finally, we held two workshop events, drawing from our existing networks to gather together academics, practitioners and other expert professionals to discuss the issues at stake.

A key issue here was to organise and make sense of this wealth of information. We identified four core themes, addressing the "diversity of diversities", in relation to: the creative workforce; organisational form; spatial distribution; and cultural representation. Partially, this reflects disciplinary differences – respectively: the sociology of employment; management studies; human geography; humanities and cultural studies – differences that are, in part, reflected in the nature of public debate, which is often fragmented and disconnected. Clearly, however, each theme intersects with and inflects the other four and our goal is to explore and reveal these intersections in a holistic manner. A fifth theme therefore takes a cross-cutting view of policymaking implications, which are themselves transversal, requiring work across disciplinary and departmental siloes, public and private sectors, and at different spatial scales.

Coinciding with these primary research tasks, a central aim of CIRCE was to retain and develop links between UK and EU expertise around the creative economy, building awareness and potential pathways to exchange and collaboration. To this end, the lab, assembled from academics at the Centre for Culture and the Creative Industries at City, drew from existing links to creative community, industry, academic and policy stakeholders within the UK and elsewhere. Vice versa, the project's goals were leveraged to build new relationships: enrolling City's creatives in residence, for example, or commissioning a three-episode podcast from artist Laura Yuile on "culture-led housing". We were joined by four new early-career researchers, who were also encouraged to bring their own strengths and interests to the project, and supported to bolster their own professional development and networks, in interaction with the wider CIRCE community.

While at first seeming to be a relatively incidental aspect of lab setup and structure, the nurture of interpersonal relationships, and the development of focused spaces for interaction and exchange, became increasingly central to our work, requiring active (but often invisible or overlooked) intervention and administration. This processual observation applies not only in the context of Brexit but as a particular feature of the diverse knowledges and practices that define the creative economy, especially given the considerable uncertainty in the academic labour market faced by emerging researchers. It also speaks to the challenges of connecting the informal world of short-term project working by freelancers, micro-businesses and loose-knit collectives to the very structured formality and lengthy timescales of the university – both in terms of building trust and aligning goals as well as processing contracts and payments.

MOVING FORWARDS

In such ways, the London Cultural Diversity Laboratory acted as an organisation lens to examine and reflect on the ways in which macro-questions of "creative impact" and "polycrisis" are embedded in micro-practices of everyday administrative procedure and the collective sociality of knowledge creation. The same ethic is now shone on London's cultural ecosystem. Taking a lens in turn on work, organisation, spatiality, representation and governance, the remainder of the chapters in this report set out some of the key challenges and responses that have faced this ecosystem over the past fifteen years.