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Artist-led Spatial Production in the City: East Street Arts as Urban Activator

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Artist-led Spatial Production in the City:
East Street Arts as Urban Activator

Catalina-Elena Ionita

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2024

Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 90,475.

Signature:

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the potential of artist-led space to be an urban activator in response to the social, political, and economic challenges faced by urban environments in England in the 2020s. These challenges include the continuing rise in property development such as commercial investment, which generates low-quality, high density urban spaces, without concern for the negative impacts of gentrification on existing occupants such as exclusion and marginalisation. This trend has been exacerbated by central government austerity policies and top-down urban regeneration strategies. My research explores the potential urban activator role of arts organisations within the context of declining state recognition of arts and humanities, the persistent labour migration triggered by economic and political instability in the UK, and the growing shortfall in financial support from Local Authorities.

The term ‘urban activator’ is used in academic discourse and refers to modest, often temporary interventions in urban settings aimed at promoting responsible development, enhancing community engagement, and reinforcing communal ownership of spaces (Atelier Kempe Thill, 2009; Bishop & Williams, 2012; Haydn & Temel, 2006; Pogačar, 2014; Rosa & Weiland, 2013; Spatial Agency, n.d.f). However, the correlation between urban activators and artist-led spaces remains unexplored in scholarly literature.

This research addresses this gap, proposing a nuanced definition of artist-led spaces and their role as urban activators, using East Street Arts (ESA) as a case study. ESA is a recognised not-for-profit artist-led organisation that supports artists through initiatives embedded in local communities, particularly targeting diverse, lower-income areas to mitigate aggressive gentrification and raise climate change awareness.

The thesis posits artist-led spaces as catalysts for change in economically and socially declining urban contexts threatened by dense development, advocating for growth that aligns with local identities and integrates into the community fabric. The research methodology incorporates embedded techniques including participant observations, interviews, archival research, mapping, and field journaling, drawing on the works of Michel de Certeau (1984), Doreen Massey (1994, 2005), Doina Petrescu (2010; 2017), Jeanne van Heeswijk (2007), and Jane Rendell (2020; 2010b). These methods emphasise the importance of ‘research by design’ and ‘designerly ways of knowing’

(Cross, 1982; Luxemburg, 2013; Mattern, 2016), positioning them as fundamental to the production of knowledge within this field.

By examining artist-led spaces as critical agents in urban dialogues and as facilitators of diverse urban activations and community participation, this research contributes to the understanding of their potential role in addressing contemporary urban challenges.

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Dedication

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Varvara Josephine Ionita, my beloved grandmother and teacher. From an early age, she nurtured my interests, opening the gates to creativity and a lifelong passion for the arts. Her indomitable spirit and generous heart gave me the imagination and freedom to pursue my dreams without bounds.

Glossary of Terms

ACE – Arts Council England

AFK – Amsterdam Funds for the Arts

ALBs – Arm’s-length Bodies

AAA – Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée

CCLOA – Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association

DCMS – Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport

DCMSC – Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport Committee

DLUHC –Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

ERDF – European Regional Development Fund

ESA – East Street Arts

ESG – Environmental Social Governance

HE – Historic England

HQ – Headquarters

HSHAZ – High Street Heritage Action Zone

LA – Local Authority

LCC – Leeds City Council

LGA – Local Government Association

NPOs – National Portfolio Organisations

SHU – Sheffield Hallam University

SRB – Single Regeneration Budget

1 Introduction

In a world dominated by rising commercial investment focused on churning out ‘fast-food’ urban densities aimed at quick economic returns, the future of urban environments sits at a crossroads where thoughtful, creative responses to urban matters are drastically undermined, leading to the production of spaces which exacerbate the negative impacts of gentrification and ignore existing and historical uses and users.

Amidst political turbulence characterised by leadership changes and fiscal austerity, the Government’s Levelling Up White Paper (2022) outlines ambitious, yet vague goals exploring the concept of ‘pride in place’ within urban policy. As Julian Dobson (2022) critiques, this policy taps into populist sentiments of decline and unfulfilled promises of the 2016 Brexit and the 2019 general election without adequately addressing the complexities of place and identity, thereby simplifying and potentially misdirecting the emotional attachments that people have with their spaces, which extend beyond factors such as vitality of high streets or the aesthetics of buildings. The White Paper’s absence of clear, actionable commitments falls short of meeting its objectives, and alongside severe resource limitations faced by Local Authorities (LAs),¹ highlights a critical gap in understanding and engaging with the complex, lived realities of communities across the United Kingdom.

¹ Reduction in funding by 23% between 2010/11 and 2024/25 (Cerulli et al., 2024).

At the same time, within the private property sector, the notion of place making is becoming increasingly elusive, often wielded as a tool to standardise and commodify spaces, subjecting them to value-engineered cost plans that demote the urban designer's voice and influence, as well as the communities at stake. In the post-pandemic UK context, the term 'cultural placemaking' has become key in revitalising high streets, yet discussions often prioritise retail and commercial value, overlooking the important role of arts and culture in regenerating public spaces (Cerulli et al., 2024).

Over the last five decades, the UK has witnessed significant shifts in retail, leading to the decline of speciality stores in favour of large supermarkets and the rise of multinational retail chains and online shopping, notably impacting local high streets. For instance, the significant closure of department stores, with 388 stores shutting down between 2016 and 2021, highlights a broader trend of retail obsolescence (Cerulli et al., 2024). Changes in UK planning policies allow commercial developers to convert empty retail spaces into residential units, which, while potentially beneficial for the property market, risk draining the vitality from high streets, and hindering local pride (The Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2022; The University of Warwick, 2022; Wrigley & Lambiri, 2014). This shift diminishes the cultural and social dynamism of these areas and also impacts their economic health.²

Furthermore, property ownership has increasingly become a tool for financial investment rather than community development, resulting in high rents and practices like land banking that exclude small and start-up businesses and prevent effective use of properties. This presented an opportunity for collaboration between the public and private sectors, through long-term agreements, where LAs often relinquish control of key urban areas to commercial developers, potentially creating homogenised urban spaces that cater to specific demographics at the expense of inclusive community development.

To disrupt this cycle, there is a pressing need to expand the perspective of place making, pushing against the prevailing norms to promote inclusivity and rethink city masterplanning in a way that aligns with contemporary issues and practices. This thesis

² Research indicates that the presence of cafes and other food establishments on high streets significantly boosts spending in nearby retail stores, with patrons spending up to 48% more than those who do not visit such venues (The Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2022; Wrigley & Lambiri, 2014).

seeks to present a new understanding of urban space positioning the arts as a catalyst for change, analysing the contributions of the artist-led sector - ranging from resilience to agency and community engagement tactics - that remain largely underutilised in the property sector. Departing from traditional place making, this thesis proposes the concept of urban activation, with a specific focus on the artist-led sector.

East Street Arts, referred to here as ESA, is introduced as a key case study to investigate the notion of urban activation through the practice and tactics of an artist-led organisation. This selection is not arbitrary; it stems from a pre-established institutional collaboration between Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and ESA (2021), an artist-led organisation from Leeds founded in 1993 by two artists, Karen Watson, and Jon Wakeman, from a necessity to find 'the support and infrastructure they required to develop their art practice'.

This prearrangement presented a unique research perspective, enabling a profound engagement with ESA's multifaceted world, from its studios and archives to its diverse portfolio and community of artists. This embedded experience was essential, providing the rich, nuanced learnings necessary to further the understanding of urban activation and its potential for stimulating meaningful urban change.

This thesis seeks to respond to a diverse audience, aiming to engage with academic discourse and the arts discipline, as well as with the public and private property sectors where I actively contribute as a practising architect. As an architect and researcher with an arts background, the exposure to both fields enables an exploration of the intersection of these disciplines, amplifying my interest in the potential crossovers and the opportunities they present within the urban context. My professional journey, shaped by my regular participation as a speaker at property conferences and symposia, shapes the narrative and approach of this thesis, offering the argument a conscious awareness of its potential impact and relevance to key actors and agents in urban development. These engagements allowed me to develop an understanding of the perspectives and challenges faced by the property sector such as LAs striving for urban regeneration and private investment in times of austerity, alongside the interests of commercial developers acquiring urban development sites through various legal mechanisms. These collaborations are of particular interest to me as they represent a growing trend in urban development, where the combined efforts of public and private

sectors materialise through specific legal frameworks aiming to catalyse a transformative impact on urban spaces.

At the same time, this thesis seeks to provide a link between the private and public sectors to the artist-led sphere using ESA as a tool of analysis, and as an attempt to highlight its potential agency in urban transformation. By defining and exploring the concept of urban activation, this thesis aims to demonstrate the potential of arts in the urban discourse, by linking to real examples and practices employed by artist-led entities, as well as to highlight the potential synergies across the different sectors. This thesis is, as such, intended as a resource for those at the forefront of urban development and regeneration, providing perspectives that might inform and inspire tangible changes in the way we approach the design, development, and revitalisation of urban landscapes in the UK.

1.1 Research Questions

This PhD seeks to investigate the role of artist-led space as urban activator within the UK context³. The research questions currently explored within this work include a central inquiry and two sub-queries relating to the main one as following:

What is the potential role as **URBAN ACTIVATOR of artist-led spatial production in the city?**

Objectives:

- To develop a working definition of an urban activator within the context of artist-led spatial practice.
- To explore and articulate the concept of artist-led space as urban activator.
- To analyse a selected range of artist-led spaces and their contribution to spatial production (modes of working, tactics, understanding of space etc.).
- To conduct an in-depth analysis of ESA's spatial production and its processes and modes of working in the city.
- To investigate the current policy landscape (private and public sectors dynamics).

1. What types of **SPACES AND ECONOMIES** are **ACTIVATED** through artist-led spatial production?

Objectives:

- To analyse the potential of artist-led spaces through a series of case studies.
- To examine the relationship between artist-led spatial production and its stakeholders.

³ The work will focus on the UK artist-led scene, but also introduce European examples, particularly those ones that played an important part in the development of ESA. The non-UK examples included in this work will be used as references for scanning the wider artist-led environment, for analysing their modes of operating as well as for understanding the evolution of ESA as a response to their European mentors and influences.

- To investigate the spaces and economies activated by ESA's spatial production, comparing these to other artist-led organisations' approaches and tactics.

2. What are the **TENSIONS** and **TRADE-OFFS** between artist-led spatial production and key stakeholders? How do these dynamics contribute to the wider cultural economy and urban sustainability?

Objectives:

- To analyse the relationship between artist-led organisations and their key partners (i.e., funding entities and beneficiaries) using ESA as a primary case study.
- To explore the strategies and operational methods of ESA in response to the current unstable economic environment, focusing on their agency, adaptability, resilience, and innovative approaches to sustainability.
- To investigate how artist-led spaces like ESA navigate the complexities of funding relationships, addressing the tensions and trade-offs involved in maintaining artistic integrity, financial stability, and community engagement.
- To assess the contribution of artist-led spaces to the wider cultural economy, with a specific focus on their role in nurturing urban sustainability and resilience in the face of economic challenges.
- To investigate perceptions of artist-led spaces and their value in urban settings from the perspectives of various stakeholders, including funders, developers, artists, and residents.

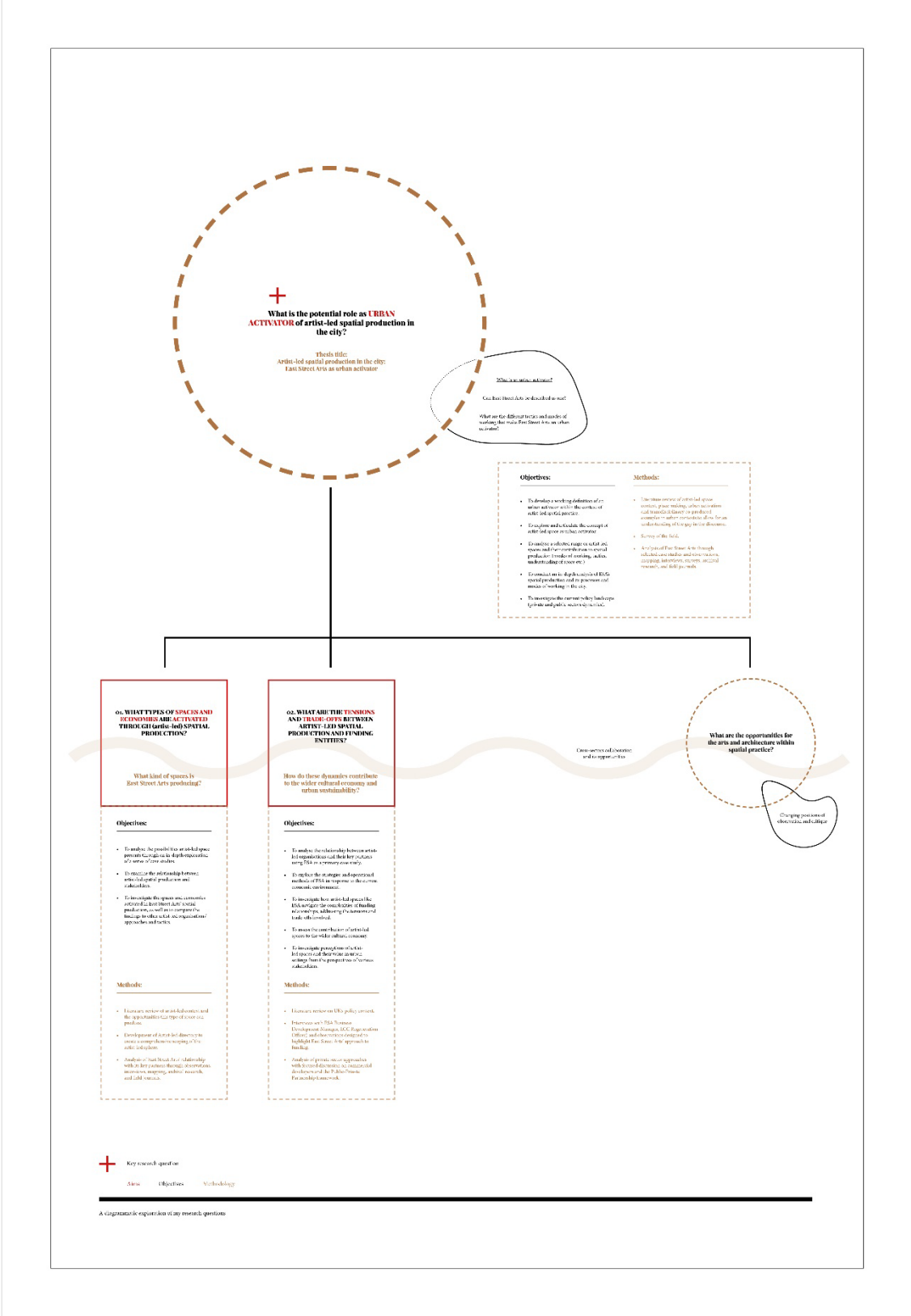


Figure 1 - Research questions diagram (high resolution version in 8.2 - Appendix 2)

1.2 Thesis overview

This thesis explores the potential of artist-led spaces to act as urban activators in response to the social, political, and economic challenges faced by urban environments in England. The thesis is structured in seven chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a concise overview of the thesis and outlines the research questions that guide the study.

Chapter 2 examines the neoliberal urban policies in the UK, focusing on the Conservative Government's Levelling Up agenda (2022) and its implications for place making and the role of the arts in urban transformation. The chapter sets the research scene, emphasising the importance of the arts and culture in urban transformation and connecting to the policy landscape that frames the study. Additionally, this chapter provides an in-depth analysis of place making, exploring its intersections with concepts of space, place, and agency. Drawing on insights from feminist geographers like Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) and Ruth Fincher (2016), it critiques the prevailing practices of 'professional place-makers' and calls for a recognition of everyday community interactions in developing vibrant urban spaces. By integrating personal experiences as a practising architect, the chapter aims to present a nuanced understanding of place making, highlighting its capacity to create inclusive urban environments, and advocating for more participatory approaches in its implementation.

Chapter 3 outlines the framework and processes that underpin the thesis, beginning with a review of the research aims and objectives. It provides a comprehensive description of the research design and methods tailored to these foundational perspectives, including the rationale behind the case study selection and the approaches to data collection and analysis. The exploration of 'designerly ways of knowing' (Cross, 1982) is key to this study, guiding the research of ESA through various tools such as archival research, observations, interviews, mapping, and notably, field journals.

Chapter 4 investigates the complex and evolving practices of artist-led initiatives, exploring their emergence, governance dynamics, political structures, and funding challenges. It critically examined the term ‘artist-led’ and its complex interpretations, particularly focusing on how these initiatives respond to power structures and nurture collaboration, thus highlighting their potential as urban activators. The chapter expands the understanding of urban activation by analysing diverse applications and conditions through detailed case studies and literature reviews.

This chapter advocates for a shift from traditional place making to urban activation, emphasising the agency of artist-led spaces in harnessing local contexts and specificities to drive urban transformation. Through the means of a developed artist-led directory of examples such as *Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée* (2007a), *Resolve Collective* (n.d.-a), *Park Fiction* (2013b), and *Jeanne van Heeswijk* (2007), the discussion highlights how these spaces act as catalysts for embeddedness, cultural exchange, and community engagement, positioning artist-led initiatives as key facilitators of meaningful urban transformations and community engagement.

Chapter 5 examines the intersection of theoretical framework and empirical analysis, with the aim to demonstrate how ESA acts as an urban activator. This analysis is contextualised through three ESA projects: ‘A Christmas Pudding for Henry’, the ‘Art Hostel’, and ‘Hidden Histories of New Briggate’, each project reflecting a different phase in ESA’s history, with an aim to highlight the transformative role of artist-led spaces in urban regeneration.

The chapter further explores situated knowledge production, investigating how archival research and field journals could enrich the understanding of urban activation. These methodologies help to uncover both the tangible and intangible legacies of urban activators, highlighting the various interactions between artist-led spaces and their urban environments.

Chapter 6 synthesises the understandings evolved throughout this thesis, offering a comprehensive analysis that aligns theoretical frameworks with the empirical evidence, with an aim to demonstrate that ESA operates as an urban activator. This chapter

showcases ESA's qualities as an urban activator, emphasising economic resilience, addressing precarity and uncertainty, whilst nurturing embedded community engagement and participation.

Chapter 7 summarises the key findings and reflects on the implications of this research. It presents a new perspective on how these conclusions could influence future strategies in urban design, development, and regeneration, offering insights for policymakers, urban designers, planners, and the broader artist-led community. The chapter also acknowledges the limitations of the research and proposes directions for further scholarly inquiry to further evolve the understanding of the role of artist-led spaces in urban activation.

1.3 Context: ESA and the collaborative research

ESA began in 1993 when two artists, Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman, unable to find the necessary support and infrastructure for their art practice, founded the organisation to improve livelihoods for local artists and address economic and commercial decline in towns and cities. Since becoming a charity in 1998, ESA (n.d.d) has emerged as a leader in the artist-led sector, empowering artists to be self-determined, influence decision-makers, and positively impact people's lives and environments.

The artist-led organisation is governed by a voluntary board of trustees whose expertise covers property, planning, governance, education, marketing, and finance, all tailored to the needs of the artists and the community it serves. Since 2023, ESA has been led by co-founder Jon Wakeman and Executive Director Anita Kumari, following the retirement of Karen Watson. Supported by staff, freelance contractors, and collaborative PhD students, ESA actively pursues interventions in art, education, environment, public spaces, and regeneration projects, aiming to support artists and communities in creating positive change and rethinking the models and ethics of working and living.

ESA actively engages in research and mentorship, collaborating with regional institutions to offer placements, apprenticeships, and support PhDs, taking an active role in the local ecology of cultural practices and networks. In 2021, ESA partnered with SHU School of Architecture, SADACCA, Regather Cooperative, and Foodhall to host the 'AHRA PhD Symposium 2021 – Researching (in) the City', with an ambition to explore how architectural research can be entwined into various urban contexts. I had the privilege of speaking during the Spaces/Memory session, curated by Jonathan Orlek and Tania Sengupta, where I discussed my embedded (and removed) research within ESA, further highlighting its impact on shaping urban environments.

Operating from grassroots principles, ESA values talent, ambition, and innovation from a position of inclusivity and opportunity. With a fundamental aim to provide professional support for working artists, ESA embraces a broad definition of visual arts, encompassing traditional disciplines such as painting and sculpture, along with public art, socially engaged practice, crafts, and digital mediums like film, sound, and radio.

ESA has significantly expanded its studio offer since 1993, and while its main sites are based in Leeds, its scope extends nationally through temporary studios of different sizes

and characters. ESA (n.d.c) has expertly transformed former offices, industrial units, shops, and other vacant properties into vibrant, functional spaces for artists and creatives, becoming the largest UK operator of meanwhile space for the creative industries outside of London. According to the Public Assets Report (Creative Space Management & East Street Arts, 2020, pp. 1–2), ESA has significantly influenced the arts sector by supporting over 20,000 artists in establishing sustainable careers, transforming 500 temporary spaces, and creating 79 permanent studio spaces, including the development of the Art Hostel on Leeds' Kirkgate, catalysing the regeneration of the city's oldest street and reinforcing ESA' role in urban cultural development.

The strategic acquisition and management of property, including the purchase of ESA Headquarters (HQ), Patrick Studios in 2004 and later, Convention House and the Art Hostel, highlight its commercial acumen and commitment to organisational sustainability and resilience in a time of economic uncertainty. The organisation secured capital support to develop its property portfolio from Arts Council England (ACE), Leeds City Council (LCC), and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

ESA's path aligns with that of many other artist-led organisations; originating from a modest, self-organised group of artists who revitalised an existing, neglected building in an area overlooked by commercial developments. To ensure growth, the artist-led organisation built upon the dedication and volunteerism of its collaborators, reaching a stage where through sustained growth and funding, it transitioned to a more structured charitable organisation. However, despite its formalisation, ESA has remained true to its roots by managing operations internally, employing a predominantly artist-centric workforce, and functioning on a controlled budget (Orlek, 2021, p. 23). Under the leadership of Watson and Wakeman, the artist-led organisation has carved out a significant legacy with aspirations for further growth, allowing ESA to grow a team of roughly eighteen employees.

ESA has an international reach, developing activities with partners both nationally and across Europe, and forging new relationships globally; founders Watson and Wakeman have been key in developing these relationships, driving the organisation's network and collaborative projects worldwide.

1.3.1 Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman

The contributions and practices of Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman are essential to the legacy of ESA as well as to the scope of this thesis, their account of the organisation being crucial for understanding the notion of an urban activator within the artist-led context. This thesis merges their narratives, collected from interviews, with my own analytical perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding of how ESA operates as an urban activator.

Wakeman (2021f) traces the genesis of ESA to the political turbulence of the 1980s and the optimism of the 1990s, the narrative beginning with Watson's personal response to the economic fallout of the Miner's Strike, which left her father unemployed. Her parents pioneered a community space in Kinsley, supported by Wakefield Council, where miners and locals could learn crafts or share conversations, transforming hardship into a community resource. Influenced by his Quaker upbringing and a drive to make an impactful change, Wakeman joined Watson in Leeds in 1989. Settling in Meanwood, this key moment led them to plant the seeds of what would grow into their joint vision for ESA.

As Wakeman (2021f) recounts, the search for a suitable studio led them to East Street Mills, a spacious, yet dilapidated Victorian textile mill near Leeds' city centre, which also inspired the organisation's name. This journey mirrors that of many artist-led organisations, which often find studio space by revitalising neglected buildings in areas overlooked by commercial developments (Orlek, 2021, p. 22). Recognising its potential, they leased the 2,000 square-foot top floor, spending over six months transforming it. Initial improvements included a kitchen and kiln area, and an advert in the Leeds Other Paper attracted a strong response, quickly filling the initial eight studios. As interest grew, they gradually expanded the space and secured an extended lease.

Operating East Street Mills (Figure 2) was an educational journey for both artists, who quickly had to adapt and develop administrative skills to manage the facility and increase its affordability for artists. They actively engaged with the artist community to understand their needs, even taking a project management course to better support their collective vision. Innovative approaches, such as allowing artists to define their own studio boundaries with chalk, facilitated autonomy and creative expression. This engagement was fundamental in shaping ESA's mission to support artists, bridging the

gap between grassroots efforts and decision-makers, and developing spaces where artists and audiences could come together. This initiative fulfilled a local need, perceived by many as a lack of resources in Leeds for emerging artists, and also laid the groundwork for a transformative artistic movement within the city.

Figure 2 - Image of East Street Mills. Photograph: ESA. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Supported by Claire Medley from Leeds University who partnered with them for the first two years, Watson and Wakeman took part-time jobs and used the government's Enterprise Allowance Scheme to sustain their dream. Their efforts led to the formal registration of ESA as a charity with Leeds City Council, highlighting their commitment to the studio and artist support, which has significantly defined the organisation's evolution and influence.

Figure 3 - Photograph showing the entrance of East Street Mills featuring a payphone wall where Watson and Wakeman's home number is scribbled, along with other useful numbers. Photograph: ESA. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Under Watson and Wakeman's leadership, ESA experienced significant growth, truly redefining its organisation and ethos. By 1999, East Street Mills hosted over 50 artists across 12,000 square feet, marking a significant evolution in Watson and Wakeman's management and fundraising capabilities. As the organisation gained momentum in Leeds and attracted national and international attention, it responded to the artistic community, significantly raising its profile in the region through evolving networks and an expansive portfolio of events. Facilitating major projects such as the Year of Photography and Electronic Image in Yorkshire and ArtTranspennine 98, ESA expanded its network within the national artist-led sphere, leading to collaborative projects that shaped the visual arts landscape whilst also solidified the organisation's evolving position as a leader in the artist-led sector.

As recounted by Watson and Wakeman (personal communication, 3 August 2022), as 1999 drew to a close, a unique collaboration was forged under the guidance of Robert Hopper from the Henry Moore Institute. The project, titled 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry', initiated by Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, marked a significant shift in the organisation's approach and modes of operation. This is also one of the three ESA case studies explored in this thesis in Section 5.3.1. Influenced profoundly by Van Heeswijk's work, Watson envisioned it as a compass pointing towards ESA's future trajectory. It highlighted the value of multidisciplinary collaboration and the power of social engagement, introducing new methodologies and perspectives to the organisation. Sadly, the project faced a heart-wrenching ending with the sudden death of Hopper just a day before the planned finale. Despite this, Van Heeswijk's influence remained a guiding force and source of inspiration and direction within ESA, profoundly shaping Watson and Wakeman's approach and practice.

In the years following their initial successes, ESA continued to secure funding for a variety of socially engaged projects, yet it grappled with ongoing financial challenges, particularly in maintaining its facilities and covering rent. Recognising the need for a more sustainable base, the artists collaborated with architects Bauman Lyons and the West Yorkshire Playhouse to identify St Patrick's Social Club as a potential venue. With financial backing from entities such as LCC, ACE, and the ERDF, ESA acquired the club around 1999/2000, transforming it into Patrick Studios, a hub exclusively for visual artists. Officially inaugurated in 2004 with artist-in-residence Pippa Hale, Patrick

Studios celebrated a new chapter for ESA, revitalising a once-vibrant community space into a vibrant artist venue representing Watson and Wakeman's vision for ESA.

Figure 4 - ESA's Artistic Directors Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman, alongside artist in residence, Pippa Hale. Photograph: Lorne Campbell/Guzelian. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The relocation of ESA to Patrick Studios was a milestone, highlighting the ambitious vision of Watson and Wakeman for the artist-led organisation. Although the move initially received mixed reactions, leading to some vacant studios, over time, artists began to fill these spaces, energised by the new opportunities ESA could provide for them. Ken Stratford's subsequent appointment brought energy and expertise, helping to manage the challenges associated with the organisation's expansion and allowed Watson and Wakeman to redirect their focus on other important aspects of ESA, leading to a very prosperous era for the artist-led organisation.

According to Wakeman (2021g, 2021h), in the following years, ESA focused on securing more funding, developing long-term partnerships, and forging international connections through research trips to Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, and France.

The organisation's ability to utilise available properties creatively, supported by funding from LCC, highlighted its innovative and entrepreneurial approach to growth. Despite the challenges, the establishment of Patrick Studios was just the beginning. In 2009, Watson and Wakeman expanded further, leasing an Edwardian three-story building on Chapeltown Road, and transforming it into Union 105, a vibrant art space that integrated into the community with initiatives like Tahera Aziz's poignant '(Re) Locate' installation inspired by the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence (Figure 5). This period became a decisive time for the artists as they adopted a more entrepreneurial and commercially focused approach, looking at building a property portfolio to sustain ESA's artist support infrastructure. The expansion was instrumental in defining the ethos of the ever-evolving organisation and highlighted that ESA was now officially on a considerable expansion path.

Watson and Wakeman's real estate approach highlights a clear focus on securing assets that provide ESA with a stable and resilient foundation, allowing the organisation to evolve its practices and expand its artist support infrastructure in a sustainable manner. This resilience enables ESA to spend its time and efforts on remaining true to its core ethos: developing community-focused projects that utilise art to combat aggressive gentrification and address climate change. At the heart of ESA (2018a) lies a strong appreciation for local nuances and the diverse voices within communities, positioning it as both a pillar and caretaker within the art landscape.

The localities that we and our artists are based within are important to us. We know that without the artists developing site-based work we cannot create sustainable, resilient, creative and thriving communities (East Street Arts, 2018a).

Figure 5 - Photograph of the Tahera Aziz exhibition for Stephen Lawrence. Photograph by ESA. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

This thesis presents a detailed examination of ESA, focusing on the contributions of Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman, and its significant role as a catalyst for urban transformation and community engagement. It investigates the artist-led sphere, exploring its foundational principles and practices to highlight the potential of artist-led spaces as urban activators. Through rigorous analysis of relevant case studies and a comprehensive literature review, this study introduces ESA and also illustrates the transformative agency and wider implications of artist-led spaces in shaping urban environments.

Figure 6 - Photomontage from ESA's 30th Anniversary. Image: ESA. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

1.4 Situating the architect-researcher

Commencing this PhD journey, I brought along a rather unique blend of experience as a practising architect and an arts foundation gleaned from my formative education in Romania. As I traversed this academic path, it became a conduit for professional and academic growth. This evolution presented abundant opportunities for collaboration on city-wide projects across the UK and internationally, courtesy of my association with the global studio, Chapman Taylor, these opportunities significantly contributing to my evolution as an academic and educator, enriching my knowledge and understanding of my field.

Throughout my career, I've found myself perched on the edges of the disciplines I engage with, fluidly transitioning from arts to architecture, then urbanism, and onto planning. This way of operating has fuelled my creativity as well as reshaped my perception of the city, developing an understanding of its intricate layers. My professional ethos is largely anchored in the concept of existing at the boundary, a liminal space ripe with creative potential and opportunities for exploration. In this

constantly transitioning landscape, I find inspiration from the adaptable nature of ESA, an artist-led organisation that refuses to be hemmed within a singular dimension. This unfettered fluidity informs my professional pursuits, infusing them with dynamism and curiosity.

In the dual arenas of academia and professional practice, my work has enabled me to engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, political landscapes, economic dynamics, spaces, and contexts. This exposure has developed a unique knowledge base that responded to both scholarly and professional circles, occasionally bridging the gap between the two. However, over the past decade of practising architecture, I've observed a distinct separation between these spheres with limited dialogue, highlighting a space of untapped potential.

This gap encouraged me to carve a niche within the property sector, recognising that the current knowledge producers are predominantly motivated by commercial viability and fast financial returns that often sideline the urban contexts and communities at stake. This realisation became a stimulus for me to develop a distinct voice that questions conventional commercial narratives, introducing academic knowledge into my work, challenging the practice of place making and starting to evolve a notion of urban activation. My active participation in conferences, symposia, roundtables, and other industry events has been key in introducing new knowledge to property networks, refining my understanding of space and place, and developing professional dialogues with commercial developers, property professionals, LAs, and other public entities. Concurrently, this PhD created an opportunity to engage with the academic sphere, and conversely with the art world through the collaborative research with ESA.

‘The Future of Build-to-Rent and the Impact on our Cities’ Chair, Bisnow 2022. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

My approach embraces Donna Haraway’s (1988, 1991) position of ‘situated knowledge’, advocating for a mobile vision where our understanding is shaped by direct interactions within specific social, cultural, and biological contexts. This perspective emphasises the importance of recognising the biases and limitations inherent in any perspective, a realisation that becomes increasingly apparent as I move across the disciplines. As such, this thesis seeks to present findings in a creative and engaging manner that mirrors my approach to research, spanning across robust knowledge of the field to strong expressions of affect and care exemplified through practice-based research forms. Whilst maintaining a balance between the procedural and explorative nature of research, my aim was to maintain a level of flexibility and unplanned investigation within the academic writing as an expression of personal and introspective narratives evolved through the research journey.

The thesis embraces a writing style that fluidly transitions between theoretical literature and practice-based observations, weaving together stories and fieldwork. Where the literature proved scarce, I contributed with professional experience, and more

importantly, with live productions expressing potentiality and histories of place. These productions evolved in the form of field journals bringing different threads together in a manner that was unplanned and evolved organically from the process of embeddedness into the artist-led organisation. The methodology employed focused on these field journals, serving as a record of my research within the artist-led spaces of ESA, both whilst being embedded and at times, detached.

1.5 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to knowledge by creating an expanded definition of the urban activator within the artist-led context by examining the unique conditions and attributes that artist-led spaces manifest when they engage with urban settings. This exploration will seek to offer a new lens of exploration that diverges from the traditional place making strategies prevalent among urban practitioners, promoting a profound and embedded understanding of urban environments that is attuned to each context and its social infrastructure. By advocating for an alternative to place making practices, this work positions artist-led spaces as key agents at the heart of urban transformation, suggesting a paradigm shift that could redefine the conventional approach to urban design.

This thesis will also seek to bridge the gap between several disparate audiences such as academia, the artist-led sector, and the public and private sectors, emphasising the potential for transdisciplinary collaboration and the valuable learnings to be gained from alternative approaches of urban activation.

2 Review of literature

2.1 Challenges in the contemporary urban context

The UK is confronted with some of the most place-based injustices in the developed world, manifesting across regions and subregions and also within LAs themselves (Davenport & Zaranko, 2020; Fransham et al., 2023; M. Jones, 2019; McCann, 2020). According to a 2022 Resolution Foundation survey of the British population, more than 60% believe that the inequalities between regions are one of the most worrying types of inequality in the country (Judge & McCurdy, 2022). In ‘Decentering the nation: A radical approach to regional inequality’ (2003), Amin, Massey and Thrift argue that without addressing the underlying power dynamics that favour London and the South East, regional inequalities will continue to worsen. The authors critique the centralisation of political power in London, describing it as a ‘courtly’ structure that isolates itself from other regions, primarily functioning to bring information back to the capital rather than promoting genuine nationwide integration (Amin et al., 2003).

These disparities have attracted Government attention, with efforts to address them dating back to the early twentieth century (Fransham et al., 2023; M. Jones, 2019), the Conservative Government’s Levelling Up initiative, introduced in 2019, becoming the focal point of recent policy efforts. Described as a ‘key political mantra’ (Martin, 2021, p. 147), the Levelling Up White Paper (2022) delineates rather broad goals alongside 12 Missions set to be achieved by 2030, such as increasing job availability, improving public transport to match London’s standards, expanding access to high-quality skills training, reducing crime, and restoring ‘pride in place’ - particularly in communities that have felt neglected for decades (Telford, 2023).

In 2022, the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove introduced the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which seeks to classify the Government’s 12 Missions into law, reform the planning system, and empower local governments to revitalise high streets and develop infrastructure and services (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Section 3.4 of the White Paper (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), 2022, pp. 206–232) articulates a vision to ‘restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging’. This vision echoes the community-focused

goals of the Blair Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal initiated two decades earlier, however, as Dobson (2022, p. 170) notes, it comes with a significant oversight: the term 'pride in place' is not explicitly defined anywhere in the nearly 300-page document. This omission suggests a disconnection from the very communities these policies aim to support. Often, when communities have engaged in self-organised measures, it has been in a spirit of resistance, asserting their right to influence their futures and to claim local assets.

As part of the Levelling Up agenda, funding has been directed to various initiatives:

- The **£3.6 billion Towns Fund** targets improvements in 101 towns across England.
- The **£830 million Future High Street Fund** aids 72 towns and high streets in pandemic recovery efforts.
- The **£2 billion Cultural Recovery Fund** assists cultural organisations affected by COVID-19, with ESA receiving £118,421 to mitigate losses at the Art Hostel and Convention House, as well as other impacts on their artist studios (Wakeman, 2021). Melody Walker, ESA Business Development Lead, acknowledged the significance of this support for the artist-led organisation:

This is a significant boost from the Culture Recovery Fund which will help us to get back on track and move the organisation forward following the pandemic.

We are grateful to ACE and DCMS who have helped secure our future, COVID has had a devastating impact on the arts and tourism and we hope with the phased opening of two important capital projects, Convention House and the Art Hostel we can continue to play a key role in the life of our city and our local economy (Walker in Wakeman, 2021c).

- The **£4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund** is designated for infrastructure development.
- The **£150 million Community Ownership Fund** enables local stakeholders to reclaim control of assets with significant local cultural value. (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), 2022, pp. xii–xiii)

While the Levelling Up agenda has received a generally positive response from its beneficiaries, there are notable concerns regarding its implementation and policy clarity. A 2021 poll by the Centre for Cities (2021) indicated that 53% of respondents from Labour constituencies - areas which shifted their support to the Conservative Party in the 2019 general election - do not understand what Levelling Up entails, a sentiment echoed by academics and media commentators (Martin et al., 2022; Pope, 2022). This confusion is compounded by the frequent changes in leadership, with Rishi Sunak's appointment as Prime Minister in October 2022 not alleviating concerns, as many voters view him as disconnected from the working class (Adu, 2022; Crerar, n.d.).

Various arm's-length bodies (ALBs),¹ including ACE, have noted that similar developmental initiatives were in place well before 2019.² Historic England (HE) has also been active, managing £95 million in Government funding through its High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) programme. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and heightened existing socio-spatial inequalities, raising doubts about the feasibility of such ambitions within the context of a capitalist economy (Hudson, 2022).

The Institute for Government (n.d.) has criticised the consistency of Government efforts to reduce regional disparities, noting that frequent policy shifts and institutional changes have historically undermined such initiatives. The DCMS's (2016, p. 9) Culture White Paper from March 2016 articulated two main objectives: to ensure equal cultural opportunities regardless of background and to spread cultural benefits across the country.

¹ DCMS collaborates with a number of pertinent ALBs, such as executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) like ACE, British Film Institute, HE, and several other national arts and cultural institutions; advisory NDPBs like The Theatres Trust and The Advisory Council on National Records and Archives; public corporations and public service broadcasters like the BBC, Channel 4, and S4C; and regulators like the Gambling Commission, the Information Commission, and the Federal Trade Commission (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022c, p. 6).

² For instance, ACE (2022) has been involved in several longstanding programs such as the Great Place Scheme, Creative Local Growth Fund, Cultural Destinations Programme, Creative People and Places project, and the Cultural Development Fund, with substantial investments across these initiatives (Arts Council, 2022; BBC, 2022). Furthermore, ACE administered £1.14 billion through the Cultural Recovery Fund and an additional £160 million through its Emergency Response Fund (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022c, p. 7).

However, the implementation of the Levelling Up programmes has faced significant scrutiny; in November 2020, the Public Accounts Committee criticised the Towns Fund for a selection process that was deemed not impartial and lacked transparency.³

Additionally, the DLUHC has been questioned about the extent of local engagement, its methods for measuring success, and how well the Fund aligns with other similar programmes, raising concerns about the efficacy and transparency of these initiatives (House of Commons & Public Accounts Committee, 2020, p. 5).

DLUHC's (2021, p. 45) December 2021 'Supporting our high streets after COVID-19' report highlighted concerns over the Government's strategy for funding town centre regeneration as overly complex, short-term, and disjointed. Criticism intensified in June 2022 when the Committee of Public Accounts (2022, p. 5) found it unacceptable that principles for awarding the first round of the Levelling Up Fund were finalised only after the identities and scores of the bidders were known. This led to ongoing confusion about how performance would be quantified and how funds, procedures, and responsibilities for local economic development would be managed by LAs. In response, a new policy paper titled 'Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the Levelling Up agenda' was released by DCMS Committee (DCMSC) (2022c), receiving substantial written evidence from various sectors including arts and cultural organisations, academia, and LAs, including LCC which highlighted the contributions of ESA to local decision-making and planning of place in the city (Leeds City Council, 2022). In the context of the Levelling Up agenda and the long-term deterioration of public spaces and high streets, 'cultural placemaking' emerges as a key theme and will be discussed in detail in Section 2.3.1.1 – Cultural placemaking.

³ The Government announced in July 2019 that it would use the £3.6 billion Towns Fund to assist a number of economically disadvantaged towns in England in building and maintaining robust local economies. (House of Commons & Public Accounts Committee, 2020, p. 4).

2.3 Understandings of place making

This section introduces the complex and often contested notion of place making and the role of arts and culture within this process. Place making is a multifaceted concept that has been the subject of extensive investigation from various fields such as planning and urban design, architecture, geography, and sociology since the mid-1960s. Historically focussed on the physical transformation of a place as the outcome of a project by urban designers, place making is currently shifting into a process of transforming physical and social elements of places by various actors outside of the planning profession (Akbar & Edelenbos, 2021).

In ‘The Death and Life of Great American Cities’, Jane Jacobs (1961, p. 238) argues that ‘cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody’. A similar idea is reinforced by Project for Public Spaces (PPS) in their definition of the term:

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximise shared value (Project for Public Spaces, 2018).

In recent years, the concept of place making has gained significant attention and prominence. The contemporary urban landscape is saturated with place making discourses, with different actors claiming and deploying the notion for different purposes. Often, place making is presented as a solution to urban problems or as a means to achieve the aspiration of living in a vibrant city. Its connotations range from physical transformations of spaces to the intricate process of creating meaningful and vibrant places for communities to engage with. However, place making is strongly entwined with politics and power dynamics, influencing urban policies and initiatives. The Government’s Levelling Up Agenda, for instance, puts a spotlight on the role of place making in addressing regional disparities and supporting inclusive development. Initiatives such as ‘A School of Place’ (Ijeh, 2022) have been proposed, yet they often lack direction and fail to offer clear, actionable commitments to address regional

disparities, raising more questions than solutions (Dobson, 2022). It is, therefore, imperative that place making is discussed within this thesis, highlighting the politics inherent in its practice and its implications in the urban context. Matters such as potential marginalisation and exclusion of vulnerable groups are exposed to highlight that there is a need for a more inclusive participatory process when engaging with places. Similarly, the notion of place-keeping is being brought to attention to highlight the challenging politics around place management and the private-public sector dynamics in relation to it.

The section concludes with a critical examination of space and place, expanding the discourse to the notion of agency and the roles of various actors and their capacity to shape and influence the place making process. By investigating these complexities, the chapter highlights everyday understandings of place making and lays the foundation for a deeper exploration of urban activation in the subsequent parts of this thesis.

2.3.1 Theories of place making

To understand the role of the arts in urban matters as well as to make the case for urban activation, an analysis of place making is essential. The term has evolved into somewhat of a buzzword, and within my professional work, I frequently encounter various interpretations of the concept among industry professionals, each shaped by their unique experiences and engagement with urban environments.

The place making literature provides a wide range of definitions of place making that converge and diverge in different ways depending on their corresponding context, offering various perspectives on the theme and its particularities. The popularity of the term can, however, lead to a lack of clarity.⁴ The contemporary urban landscape is

⁴ The lack of clarity in understanding the concept starts from the very spelling of the term. As debated by Lew (2017), there are three versions of spelling this popular concept, and even though various definitions of the term exist, it is still unclear if each spelling variation corresponds to a particular understanding of place making, adding extra ambiguity to the interpretation of the concept effectively. It is also perhaps that case that those deploying the term are not necessarily thinking too deeply about this semantic matter. In 'Tourism planning and place making: place-making or placemaking?', Lew (2017) reviewed 62 publications that use at least one of the three spellings: 40 of them (64.5%) using "place-making", 16 (26%) using "placemaking" and 9 (14.5%) using "place making". Following Lew's assessment, there was no distinct pattern that distinguished the usage of each spelling. Lew decided to use 'place making' as the

getting increasingly saturated with place making discourses, often promoted as a solution to urban problems or a means of achieving the ambition of living in a big city (L. Platt, 2021, p. 143).

Starting with the semantics of the term, geographer Alan Lew's (2017) view is that 'place-making' and 'placemaking' are two extremes in a continuum of possibilities with local and international components present in most places. These components also span the tangible (found in urban design) and the intangible spectrums (peoplescapes and imaginations). According to Lew, both organic place-making and planned placemaking use fundamentally the same tools, but the objectives and results might differ significantly. I argue that there is a more nuanced approach to place making beyond Lew's understanding and curator and urban researcher Cara Courage's (2016)⁵ work in this field highlights the diverse range of applications that place making encompasses.

The definitions explored by Lew (2017) suggest that place making is an 'innate human behaviour', ranging from spontaneous and unplanned activities of individuals, defined as 'place-making', to planned and complex global theming by governmental and tourism authorities, defined as 'placemaking'. Even though there is no consensus on how to spell this deliberate and planned approach among the literature reviewed, there are publications (Maruksen & Gadwa, 2010; Wyckoff et al., 2015) using the term 'placemaking' to describe Government-sponsored efforts in the US to enliven the economic and cultural character of neighbourhoods and cities. For the purpose of this debate, I will use Lew's terminology criteria.

all-inclusive concept that incorporates the whole range of meanings and definitions encountered in the literature because it is the least frequently used of the three spellings. Kolås (2004) draws a similar comparison between a wider 'placemaking' and a narrower 'place-making'.

⁵ Cara Courage (n.d., 2016) is an arts and urban researcher, curator and commentator, specifically investigating arts-based place making practice and public engagement in the urban landscape. Courage's views are relevant for the artist-led debate as they highlight the potential of public art to produce meaningful and inclusive public spaces.

Place making	
All-inclusive concept that incorporates the whole range of meanings and definitions encountered in the literature (Lew, 2017). In ‘Tourism planning and place making: place-making or placemaking?’ (2017), Alan Lew reviewed 62 publications that use at least one of the three spellings: 40 of them (64.5%) using ‘place-making’, 16 (26%) using ‘placemaking’ and 9 (14.5%) using ‘place making.’	
Placemaking	Place-making
<p>Wider, more complex application (Kolås, 2004).</p> <p>Government-sponsored efforts (in the US) to enliven the economic and cultural character of neighbourhoods and cities (Maruksen & Gadwa, 2010, Wyckoff et al., 2015).</p> <p>Masterplan scale interventions, typically part of a formal urban design process enacted by city or national administrations (Courage, 2016).</p> <p>Planned and complex global theming by governmental and tourism authorities (Lew, 2017).</p>	<p>Narrow, focused, intimate application (Kolås, 2004).</p> <p>Projects focused on user or community consultation throughout the decision-making process (Courage, 2016).</p> <p>Organic process implying an ‘innate human behaviour’, ranging from spontaneous and unplanned activities of individuals (Lew, 2017).</p>

Figure 7 - Diagram synthesising the literature understandings of place making.

Courage (2021) expands on the topic in her Introduction to ‘The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking’, describing the term place making as a multifaceted process that goes beyond physical transformations and takes into account the social and cultural dynamics of a place.

For me, what differentiates placemaking from other built environment sectors, and should be central to any understanding or definition of it, is that placemaking is an approach and a set of tools that puts the community front and centre of deciding how their place looks and how it functions. There is a community imperative in placemaking (Courage, 2021, p. 2).

As Courage (2021, p. 2) argues, the effectiveness of place making relies heavily on the active involvement and empowerment of local communities; rather than being just recipients of urban developments, these communities actively participate and contribute, enriching the decision-making process with their knowledge and lived experiences. This engagement allows architects, urban designers, and planners to develop designs that are

meaningful but also responsive to community needs and aspirations, highlighting a process that is inherently collaborative and dynamic, unleashing the true potential of spaces. Courage further advocates for a shift in urban planning and design paradigms, moving from a traditional focus on buildings and large-scale urban forms to prioritising public spaces and the human activities they nurture, highlighting the essence of place making as about what occurs in these spaces, why it happens, how it unfolds, and crucially, who is involved.

For this discourse, the relationship between art and place making is key, epitomised by the notion of ‘creative placemaking’, a term coined by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa in ‘Creative Placemaking’ (2010) White Paper. According to the authors (2010, p. 3), ‘creative placemaking’ is a process that combines public and private investment, offering financial, social, and cultural benefits while using arts and culture as fundamental instruments for making places. Since 2010, Markusen and Gadwa’s (2019) term has been critiqued by several theorists, including the authors themselves, who have revisited its implications on race, power, and its ties to urban regeneration and the risks of gentrification

2.3.1.1 Cultural placemaking

In the UK context, the term ‘cultural placemaking’ has emerged as a key tool in revitalising high streets, discussions often centred around complex policy domains that disproportionately emphasise the value of retail and commercial activity, overlooking the fundamental role of arts and culture in revitalising these public spaces (Cerulli et al., 2024). A 2017 report by the Local Government Association (LGA) and Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association (CCLOA) (2017) defines ‘cultural placemaking’ as the role of arts, culture, and heritage in shaping the neighbourhoods we live in, emphasising its significance in revitalising urban environments.

Evidence gathered by Institute of Place Management (IPM)⁶ suggests that investments in culture and heritage can significantly accelerate recovery in urban centres (Millington

⁶ The Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) is the professional organisation and learned society for individuals who work in the field of place management. In addition

et al., 2022).⁷ To structure the evidence, IPM has developed a widely-used regeneration framework, endorsed by the High Streets Task Force (HSTF),⁸ which promotes methods that strengthen high street revival (Millington et al., 2022; Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019). This framework, evolving from IPM's High Street UK 2020 initiative, focuses on increasing the vibrancy of high streets across the UK by making academic knowledge more accessible and directly applicable to these environments (Theodoridis et al., 2020). The resultant framework is based on 4Rs: Repositioning, Reinventing, Rebranding and Restructuring:

1. Repositioning is the process of gathering and analysing local data, trends, and evidence in order to better understand the difficulties high streets face and generate place visions that reflect the communities' aspirations. The development of the visions should evolve organically from local forms of culture, thus ensuring the outcome is ultimately underpinned by a shared aspiration (Institute of Place Management, n.d.; Millington et al., 2022).
2. Reinventing is a central topic for revitalising high streets, focusing on transforming places through integrating arts and culture to activate spaces, utilising methods like temporary installations, pop-up events, and cultural festivals to inject vitality into underused areas (Institute of Place Management, n.d.; Millington et al., 2022). IPM

to consultants, academics, and policymakers, IPM also represent professional place managers and leaders working for LAs, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and other place partnerships. IPM runs post-graduate training programmes in addition to publishing an international peer-reviewed journal called the Journal of Place Management and Development (Institute of Place Management, n.d.; Millington et al., 2022).

⁷ The lead partner of the DLUHC-funded HSTF, IPM, presents evidence showcasing that people want their high streets to be more than just places to shop. More than 50% of visitors to the virtual high street platform 'this place [of mine]' said they would like more opportunities to create art on the future high streets. This was further exacerbated during the pandemic when 57% of survey respondents highlighted that they missed taking part into cultural events, and 81% indicated interest in participating in outdoor arts and cultural events (Millington et al., 2022).

⁸ The High Streets Task Force (HSTF) (2020) was established to provide local leaders with the resources necessary to make the decisions that are in the best interest of their community and high street. It provides dashboards of data sources from the ACE, which enable stakeholders to analyse investment in arts and culture, adult engagement with the offer, and the economic contribution of the arts and culture. Also, the HSTF is handing out hundreds of free data dashboards to assess the impact that cultural events have on activity levels and foot traffic. The use of this data by various stakeholders in the development of change visions that include cultural placemaking is encouraged. In turn, this will help to ensure that high streets form the heart of their communities and possess a strong identity as well as a distinct sense of place (High Street Task Force, 2020; Millington et al., 2022).

(2020) research presents examples of both top-down and bottom-up approaches highlighting how investment in art and culture have allowed places to reinvent themselves.⁹ An exemplary bottom-up approach is The Withington Walls initiative in Manchester which adopted a place-making programme utilising crowd-funding and micro-grants to beautify building facades, including the well-known Marcus Rashford painting that was featured on national television. This initiative improved the visual presence of the high street and also shifted public perception, leading to commercial development and the revival of vacant units, thereby nurturing a rekindled sense of community pride.

Other tools for reinventing high streets are of temporary nature. Festivals, for instance, are a tested approach, though they often present challenges such as social exclusion (Finkel & Platt, 2020). Research indicates that festivals rooted in community efforts are most effective, promoting local pride and ownership and contributing significantly to place branding (Berger & Herstein, 2013; Derrett, 2004; Jago et al., 2003; L. Platt & Ali-Knight, 2018; Son & Arcodia, 2011).¹⁰ Furthermore, pop-up and temporary interventions are used as means to provide retailers greater flexibility in where they choose to locate their businesses, allowing them to occupy empty retail spaces in town centres (Millington et al., 2022). For instance, the ‘50 Windows of Creativity’ (Bee in the City, n.d.) intervention transformed vacant Manchester shopfronts into vibrant art displays, while in Sunderland, the HSHAZ has repurposed several derelict buildings for creative uses (Garzillo, 2021; Millington et al., 2022). Similarly, the Spode site in Stoke on Trent has seen abandoned spaces reborn as thriving hubs for artists and cultural events, demonstrating how art can revitalise urban centres beyond traditional retail activities (Samuel & Quality of Life Foundation, 2022). This increasing interest in ‘cultural

⁹ Two examples are Bristol and Holmfirth. Whilst Bristol City Council has taken a top-down approach to add new attractions to the city centre, Holmfirth followed a community-led initiative where art, culture and music events became the catalysts for change (High Street Task Force, 2021; Millington et al., 2022).

¹⁰ The Prestwich Arts Festival in Bury, for example, has successfully engaged local social capital and community involvement despite modest economic impact (Millington et al., 2022). Contrarily, more prominent initiatives such as the UK City of Culture face challenges due to stringent bidding processes and tight deadlines, which can hinder meaningful community interaction and co-creation. Platt and Cunningham (2019) suggest a need for more robust strategies to support local volunteer networks and sustain community-led festivals, ensuring they are inclusive and beneficial to the high street’s long-term vitality.

placemaking' is attracting support from independent traders, who recognise its potential in the development of the local arts infrastructure. Research by The Booksellers Association (Gregory et al., 2022) indicates that 92% of independent bookshops encourage non-retail activities, with 99% engaging in innovative community events, highlighting that this approach diversifies the economic potential of high streets and also transforms them into vibrant community hubs.

3. Rebranding focuses on transforming public perceptions of the high street, using place branding and marketing to develop a place-based identity rooted in local art and culture. This process supports the revitalisation of high streets but faces challenges in sustainability and legacy; for example, while tiny communities like Hay on Wye have seen success by investing in infrastructure to support local festivals, high-profile projects like Liverpool's year as the European City of Culture often struggle to sustain their initial momentum, with stories of the city's restored pride left in question (West, 2022). Yet, place branding through culture does not always have to build up on high-profile projects, research showing that local cultural practices, like celebrating music heritage in Withington,¹¹ Blackpool Illuminations or knitting groups in Liverpool, can significantly improve social cohesion and community pride, even if they don't directly result in economic returns (Edensor & Millington, 2009).

4. Restructuring involves aligning local networks and governance to effectively support the strategic vision for high street development. Nonetheless, there are instances when places become resistant around the process of decision-making. The 2019 Booksellers Report (Gregory et al., 2022) revealed that a significant percentage of bookshops actively contribute to local planning, highlighting the importance of integrating cultural and art professionals into regional partnerships. Such involvement can facilitate collaboration, as seen in Withington, where arts and culture are integral to the high street's strategic vision and framework.

¹¹ In Withington, for instance, using local pop-music heritage and iconic graphic designs associated with Factory Records has helped develop a vibrant community brand, engaging residents and promoting local businesses through digital and physical media. This work was done by the IPM for Manchester City Council as part of an INTERREG project (ABCitiEs Interreg Europe, 2020; Millington et al., 2022).

Local state initiatives, such as the restoration of Blackpool’s promenade, are expansive physical regeneration projects that incorporate cultural elements to promote community interaction and celebrate local heritage. The Comedy Carpet, Britain’s largest outdoor artwork, was developed as a unique place making intervention in public space and its installation may act as an example for other communities looking to rethink their local high streets and centres in a more creative way (Millington et al., 2022).

IPM (n.d.) has concluded that the potential for ‘cultural placemaking’ to revitalise high streets and improve their image is significant, however this can only be achieved through organised efforts linked to broader strategies aimed at regenerating high streets and ensuring their long-term viability.

As introduced in Section 2.1 – Challenges in the contemporary urban context, the DCMS’s ‘Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda’ White Paper (2022c) follows the Culture White Paper (2016), highlighting many benefits of cultural initiatives, and emphasising their role in celebrating the identities of urban contexts. These benefits range from advancing education and learning to boosting community engagement and economic growth,¹² whilst others include the positive impact of cultural place making to the wider Levelling Up Missions particularly Health, Wellbeing, Pride in Place and Local Leadership. According to the evidence (Arts Council, 2022; Chetwyn & Urban Vision Enterprise CIC, 2022; Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022b; Leeds City Council, 2022), local cultural initiatives, infrastructure, and activities can nurture a sense of place, alter how people view their neighbourhoods, and strengthen ties between residents and the places they call home. They can also help promoting civic engagement, social cohesion, diversity, and inclusion, improve general wellbeing and address issues with isolation, loneliness, and exclusion.

¹² For instance, programs such as the Bradford Film Literacy programme have significantly improved literacy and attention amongst pupils, illustrating the positive impact of cultural education (Bradford UNESCO City of Film, n.d.).

Professor Dave O'Brien from Sheffield University Management School advocates for a place-based cultural policy approach that leverages local cultural dynamics (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022b). Echoing this sentiment, Professor Judith Mossman from Coventry University emphasises the richness of community-driven cultural activities and suggests improving visibility and exchange among these initiatives to develop broader community engagement. This perspective recognises that arts, culture, and heritage are already vital forces in enlivening public spaces, though their value may not be fully appreciated or visible on a national scale. Further supporting this view, Patrick Duggan and Stuart Andrews (2022) of *Performing City Resilience* highlight the proactive role of arts organisations in local governance and urban planning. They cite the example of Slung Low Theatre Company in Leeds, which during the COVID-19 pandemic transformed from a performance venue into a community lifeline, providing essential services like a food bank and initiating public art projects to offer relief and engagement to the residents of Holbeck.

Figure 8 – Image of Slung Low Exhibition. Photograph: Simon K Allen, Alan Lane, Slung Low, Malcolm Johnson, Yorkshire Post. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Economically, ‘cultural placemaking’ can stimulate job creation in creative industries and boost local businesses, from food and beverage to tourism, encouraging private sector investment and long-term business opportunities. However, implementing these initiatives can be challenging, especially in large-scale projects where art and cultural elements are often value-engineered due to financial constraints. Researcher Emily Hopkins (n.d.) argues that cultural policies can overpromise transformation, while others warn against seeing culture simply as a tool for economic gains, highlighting the risks of neglecting the strategic role of arts in urban revitalisation and the dangers of gentrification from top-down cultural policymaking.

O’Brien and Shepherd (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022b) caution against viewing culture as a solution for solving economic inequality and emphasise that one-size-fits-all approaches often fail, even though they have proven successful in specific contexts like Liverpool, Manchester, and Newcastle.¹³ They argue that this can lead to instrumentalising the arts and culture, focusing solely on their benefits without considering their strategic role and purpose in place making (Duggan & Andrews, 2022). Such approaches risk alienating communities if they appear top-down or misaligned with local needs, potentially leading to project failure.¹⁴ Furthermore, as Claire Reddington (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022a) highlights, the emphasis on economic returns may overlook the intrinsic and intangible values of arts and culture, potentially dismissing their broader social and cultural benefits, such as supporting community wellbeing and social cohesion.

Public sector funding is essential for supporting the ‘cultural placemaking’ agenda, and many LAs have deployed programs dedicated to promoting public art, urban design, and community development initiatives, aligning with the Levelling Up ambitions (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2023). However, disparities in funding distribution across regions persist, highlighting a need for reassessment to ensure

¹³ O’Brien notes that Liverpool, Manchester, and Newcastle have all built strong, sustainable cultural economies, but it took three decades of policy thinking, planning, and building cultural infrastructure, huge cultural offers (music, heritage, sport, etc.), and public sector capital investment (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022b, 2022c, p. 11).

¹⁴ This is supported by written evidence from various entities (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership & Cornwall Council, n.d.; Create Gloucestershire, n.d.; Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022c, p. 11; Local Trust, n.d.; National Museum Directors’ Council, 2022; WMCA Cultural Leadership Board, n.d.; Wright, n.d.).

equitable support for both national and local cultural institutions. The DCMSC (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2023, p. 7) recommends a new funding model to better balance support and prevent the marginalisation of smaller, local institutions crucial to the cultural ecosystem. As ACE (2013) notes, sustaining public investment in culture, despite budget constraints, is fundamental for developing productive partnerships and improving the sector's impact on community and economic development.

The 'cultural placemaking' White Paper (2022c) stirred a lot of discussion which highlighted that there is also a need to consider the complex dynamics and potential biases in commercially led place making initiatives. Cultural and creative place making strategist, Tim Jones (2023) shares views on the White Paper's shortfalls, arguing that its largely focusing on distributing public sector resources, failing to align with the broader, integrated roles of arts and culture in urban planning and building environments, which he and many professionals believe should harness arts and culture as fundamental drivers of development. Jones emphasises the need for a re-evaluation of how commercial developers are seen not just as funders, but as independent cultural patrons integral to urban cultural ecosystems.

This perspective challenges top-down approaches and stresses the importance of involving developers in creating spaces that truly reflect and respond to community values and needs, suggesting that they are important, yet often overlooked stakeholders. Recognising these roles can lead to more inclusive, well-rounded discussions and strategies for urban development such as the emergence of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs),¹⁵ avoiding the pitfalls of gentrification and developing genuine community engagement.

To understand the notion of place making and the value of arts and culture to urban transformation, it's essential to develop a nuanced understanding of space, place, and the inherent political dynamics involved.

¹⁵ Public-Private Partnerships are becoming increasingly prevalent in urban planning, serving as collaborative frameworks between government entities and private sectors for financing, building, and managing public projects like transportation networks and parks (Local Government Association, 2022).

2.3.2 The politics of place making

The politics of place making are defined by a somewhat critical dimension where the principles of community engagement and art and cultural identity clash with commercial interests. There is a lot of critique on the prevailing practices of ‘professional place-makers’ (Fincher et al., 2016), arguing that these often bypass the essential everyday encounters that shape and enliven urban spaces. They stress that an overemphasis on professionalised interventions may overshadow the valuable contributions and experiences of local communities, disregarding their agency in the process of place making, thus highlighting the need to recognise and include the diverse perspectives and interactions that contribute to the vibrancy and activation of urban spaces, and challenging the dominant narrative of top-down place making practices. This approach to place making, which sometimes serves as a façade for more disruptive agendas, raises significant ethical questions about inclusion, exclusion, and the true beneficiaries of urban transformation. Artist Jeanne van Heeswijk’s (2013) critique that sometimes ‘progress’ may actually mean taking a step back highlights the complex dynamics at play, emphasising that genuine progress should involve learning and adapting, not just imposing new developments on communities.

This discourse introduces the concept of PPPs (Local Government Association, 2022), gradually becoming a common legal framework established between LAs and private sectors for financing, delivering and sometimes, operating large-scale projects. This is particularly relevant considering the position of the researcher at the fringe of different spheres. According to LGA (2022), these partnerships increase project feasibility and efficiency that might not exist otherwise, however, they also risk blurring the lines between public interest and private profit, potentially leading to exploitation through self-dealing and rent-seeking. One specific form of PPP is the Corporate Joint Ventures (JVs), an increasingly adopted tool aimed at high capital and high-risk projects that call for more flexibility and where outcomes cannot be measured at the procurement stage (Local Government Association, 2022).¹⁶

¹⁶ Prominent urban regeneration projects such as Kings Cross (Argent-Related and London & Continental Railways) and Northern Gateway (Manchester City Council and Far East Consortium) have utilised JVs to capitalise on long-term value growth while addressing strategic public goals such as housing and job creation.

Whilst this model presents a significant advantage to LAs seeking to retain control over the delivery and management of the projects over time, it is imperative to note that there is also a risk of expansionist public privatisation of public space, which in turn, has a much wider impact on the way our cities are activated and utilised (Minton, 2006).

Writer and educator Anna Minton (2006, p. 10) talks about the alarming privatisation of public space in the UK, noting that land and property is a ‘patchwork of leasehold and freehold arrangements’ often controlled by a mix of traditional landlords, global finance institutions, and Government entities. This shift is especially evident in post-industrial areas, where large sites left by defunct industries are now prime opportunities for development, often leading to a centralisation of ownership, with a single private landlord.¹⁷ This centralisation, while it facilitates streamlined decision-making, it also reflects the changing dynamics of urban development with increased influence of private actors in shaping urban environments. Furthermore, this ties into the broader discussion of place making, which is often seen as a ‘panacea for urban ills’ (L. Platt, 2021, p. 143), and as researcher Louise Platt argues, requires a nuanced and context-specific approach to ensure it does not simply become a tool for development that neglects real community engagement and public benefit.

Where placemaking is seen as something that can be ‘intelligently’ done to a place is illustrative of the very problem of placemaking (L. Platt, 2021, p. 143).

Platt highlights noticeable opposition towards top-down placemaking approaches adopted by developers or City Councils, where strategies often blur with neoliberal urban development narratives, reducing them to simple branding exercises or ‘place wash’ (Courage, 2016, p. 66; Legge, 2013). Public scepticism around place making roles and strategies reflects a critique of superficial applications, as seen when a new role in Bristol was dismissed by the media as nonsensical (L. Platt, 2021; Stevens, 2011, p. 143). Similarly, environmental claims by developers under the badge of ESG

¹⁷ Liverpool, for instance, has embraced the single private landlord model, with developer Grosvenor assuming ownership over 34 streets (42.5 acres) through a 250-year lease granted by the City Council.

(Environmental Social Governance), frequently do not align with their actual impact, illustrating a broader trend of ‘greenwashing’ (Flecher & Oliver, 2022).¹⁸

A recent Policy Exchange report (2022), authored by critic Ike Ijeh and introduced by Rt. Hon. Michael Gove, critiques the current standards of place making and built environment quality in the UK, particularly in housing developments. It proposes the creation of a Government-backed ‘School of Place’ to improve urban design skills and promote best practices among architects and planners, aiming to improve the quality of new developments and boost economic confidence. This initiative is linked to the Government’s Levelling-Up Agenda, although it has been criticised for overlooking deeper structural issues such as land ownership and the impact of neoliberal policies. The report fails to acknowledge the effects of dismantling the design watchdog CABE, which has contributed to a shortage of place making skills within national and local governments, a point made by Matthew Carmona (2023) at the EURA2023 Conference discussing the detrimental impact on the quality of the urban space. The report also fails to mention The Prince of Wales’s Institute of Architecture, which previously explored traditional architectural design and place-focused urbanism.

Examples of successful place making demonstrate that when an appropriate strategy is explored, the result is very compelling. Historian Charles Saumarez Smith (2022) brings the attention to the King’s Cross development in London, where a sympathetic blend of old and new structures coexist in a sensitive manner. Similarly, Stirling Prize winners, Goldsmith Street in Norwich and Accordia in Cambridge illustrate that high-quality housing is achievable with the right support and strategy. As noted by architectural editor Ben Flatman (2023), the report’s focus should be on raising the standard of place making, rather than solely on design skills, thus bridging the gap between architects and planners, and considering the broader implications of public sector involvement and economic pressures on urban development. The goal should be to educate a broader audience, including those without formal design training, about the principles of place making and its application in urban settings.

In the private sector, amidst the prevalent superficiality, Alexandra Notay and Shannon Conway stand out as examples of meaningful contributions to place making. Alexandra

¹⁸ A report by climate think-tank InfluenceMap (2021) exposed significant discrepancies between the marketing of climate-themed funds and their actual alignment with the Paris climate goals.

Notay, Placemaking and Investment Director at PffP Capital, is a recognised placemaking thought leader in the property industry, promoting socially responsible developments, primarily in the residential and mixed-use sectors. Notay holds several leading roles,¹⁹ including serving on the board of the Creative Land Trust (n.d.), a charity collaborating with public and private sectors to support creative practitioners by providing affordable workspaces and developing community connections through art and culture. This involvement highlights the evolving relationship between the arts and the property sector, a connection that is still in its nascent stages in the UK context.

Notay (n.d.) is a keen advocate for the ESG agenda, stressing its dual role in risk mitigation and promoting positive change within real estate. According to the 2020 JLL European Living Investor Survey (Colthorpe et al., 2020), 77% of investors now integrate sustainability criteria into their investment strategies, although challenges persist in meeting these standards fully. Notay's focus on the 'S' in ESG highlights the importance of the social agenda in real estate, advocating for greater attention to these aspects to improve urban resilience and sustainability. This approach aims to align real estate practices with broader societal benefits, including of the creative sector, to improve urban spaces' adaptability and community value.

Shannon Conway, Co-founder of development company Picture This, focuses on inclusive place making in residential sector, with a focus on addressing the needs of the elderly, a demographic often overlooked in new urban developments. Highlighting the UK's aging population, which is expected to increase by 25% over the next two decades, Conway (n.d.) promotes urban designs that support independent living and improve overall well-being, potentially reducing healthcare and social care costs (Insider Media Limited, n.d.).

Increasingly older people are criticised for “underoccupying” family homes. I believe people have the right to live and use their home in whatever manner they choose, however research suggests that many would move if the right property were available. Unfortunately, the UK tends to build for first time buyers or

¹⁹ Notay occupies an array of roles, varying from Chair of the British Property Federation (BPF) Working Group on ESG and Residential, Member of AREF ESG and Impact Investing Committee to Independent Commissioner for the UK Geospatial Commission.

families. Later living schemes are typically based in smaller towns or rural areas and are predominantly age-exclusive (Conway, n.d.).

Conway's approach goes beyond simply accommodating the elderly; it involves developing intergenerational spaces that cater to all ages, thereby encouraging community integration and improving social cohesion. She advocates for collaborative planning and design processes that involve LAs, development partners, and the community to ensure that urban spaces meet the holistic needs of their residents.

Her commitment to this approach was demonstrated in her role in the 'Stockport8' redevelopment masterplan bid, as part of a JV between developers Glenbrook and Bruntwood, with Chapman Taylor as the architect. This project highlighted Conway's approach to place making, emphasising the importance of public consultation and active community engagement as key design tools. By collaborating with local artist-led organisations like Grit Studios and Stop in Stockport, Conway ensured that the redevelopment plans were not just about building structures but also about creating community engagement and ensuring that the spaces created were welcoming and beneficial to all future residents. As Andrea George (2022), Bruntwood Director of Town Centres and Consumer Brands contends, 'public consultation is key – investors and developers [...] get under the skin of the community to understand the priorities. This can then be coupled with the council's priorities – economic, social and environmental'. As Conway notes:

Collaboration is absolutely key. By collaborating with development partners, Local Authorities and place-based impact investors we are able to look at larger regeneration projects where we can make a real difference. (Conway, 2024).

My involvement in the 'Stockport8' project provided a valuable learning experience, offering insights into the legal frameworks of PPPs and the dynamics between the public and private entities, especially evident during consultation meetings and negotiations. Despite the unsuccessful bid, this collaboration was a practical lesson in the strategic planning and negotiation processes employed by both sectors, highlighting critical focus areas and potential stress points that influence the evolution of such

projects, including the feasibility in terms of returns, long-term project management, and division of responsibilities. Importantly, this experience stressed the critical role of integrating local perspectives into place making, advocating for spaces that support community activities and the arts, thus positioning them as central elements of the development proposal.

2.3.3 Critiques of place making

Typically regarded as a solution to addressing social issues, the literature (Edwards, 2021; Edwards-Vandenhoeck, 2021; L. Platt, 2021) also points out place making's potential for exclusion and marginalisation if not implemented with an awareness of power and politics, as well as care. This is a feeling often experienced within urban contexts where place making has been done to a place, rather than emerging from it.

The result manifests in 'non-places' (Augé, 1995), environments characterised by their sterility and homogeneity, often criticised for their lack of distinct identity, and a risk-averse approach, adhering to a narrow set of design aesthetics and language that exert forms of control. More concerningly, they perpetuate social inequalities by marginalising and dominating the very communities they are supposed to serve, effectively creating spaces that, while physically occupied, fail to support meaningful social interactions, or reflect the diverse identities of their inhabitants.

Issues around accessibility in place making are raised by Claire Edwards (2021) in 'Un/safety as place making. Disabled people's socio-spatial negotiation of fear of violent crime'. Studies or understandings of place making have generally ignored disability and the experiences of disabled people. Place making, however a contentious and politically charged phrase, frequently implies an inherent agency, the capacity to shape, mediate, or even reject articulations of place, whether in the context of official planning procedures, community engagement processes, or localised meaning-making. This agency has never been presumed for disabled people, whose lives have been defined by numerous socio-spatial exclusions. Spatial configurations have served to keep disabled people 'in their place' while at the same time making them feel 'out of place', whether through lack of access to the built environment or public transportation, inappropriate housing, or discriminatory attitudes that result in commonplace and everyday acts of oppression in public space (Edwards, 2021, p. 159).

Edwards examines the fear of aggression that can be propagated in public areas when place making initiatives fail to address the needs of particular groups. The lack of access to places is not just a point of exclusion, but can be a trigger for disorientation, anxiety and fear, especially where parts of an assemblage align such as ‘a failure of public transport to arrive on time, an absence of people, or conversely, threatening interactions with strangers’ (Edwards, 2021, p. 159). As part of the composition of the urban experience, Edwards challenges the relationship between place making and the perceptions of disabled people on place through reworking ‘un/safety as event’. In this context, ‘un/safety’ refers to an embodied and affective manner of experiencing a place that is entwined with place making processes from both an everyday and interventionist perspective. Prioritising safety in place making entails focusing on the variety of human and non-human connections that contribute to the localised sense of fear and safety in disabled people’s lives. As a result, Edwards promotes Friedmann’s (2010, p. 162) ‘small and ordinary’ approach by listening and learning from the diverse sensory voices and narratives around us, an approach that is typically missing from a top-down discourse of place making.

On another level, Samantha Edwards-Vandenhoeck (2021), brings the attention to ‘the voices of indigenous communities’ often marginalised in accounts of place making. In ‘More than a Mural. Participatory Placemaking on Gija Country’ (2021), the author introduces an art-led place making project – ‘Art in the Streets of Warmun’ - used by the Gija community in Australia to negotiate identities of place as a result of crisis. The very concept of ‘place’ is questioned here, noting that ‘this research contributes to understandings of the complex, political and locally nuanced discussions around place making connected to place-related meanings in First Nations community development, as there was indeed no ‘place’ to be made here, but rather enacted, reinforced and made visible’ (L. Platt, 2021, p. 145).

Edwards-Vandenhoeck (2021, p. 171) uses this initiative as a tool to highlight how the Gija community could reclaim a positive relationship with their environment through the visual activation of public spaces in the wake of the 2011 famine that ravaged the township and Government-led rebuild. This work investigates the function of socially inclusive participatory public art in promoting belonging, trauma recovery and pride, cultural continuity and regeneration, and community building. It is based on the idea that First Nations identities may be incorporated into public art and architecture, giving

people the chance to realise their power and reject externally imposed structures, systems, and procedures. As such, the messiness of place as an idea that is socially constructed needs to be reflected in the process of place making.

The work of Edwards-Vandenhoeck stimulates a reconsideration of what place means for marginalised communities that have been through times of conflict and tragedy in terms of the significance of geography. The connection between place and people is an incredibly strong one and, in order to evolve a practice where local voices are heard and included, ‘becoming a part of the community and being part of the whole process of neighbourhood change is key’ (Van Heeswijk, 2012, p. 81). Jeanne van Heeswijk notes:

We have to understand how, at a deeper level, we can face today’s broken circuitry between people, culture, and the political process. Then the energy generated through people acting out in their own environment will lead to a network of support a critical reading of one’s own surroundings, and involvement in the changes that take place. This is a process of collective learning - about how to unleash the potential of people to engage with different creative energies for collective action in order to become a shaping force in our immediate environment (Van Heeswijk, 2012, p. 81).

Place making has the potential to inadvertently contribute to the process of gentrification within the environments it seeks to improve; this can be observed in cities like Liverpool, where a top-down placemaking approach has been implemented to challenge the negative perceptions associated with the city, particularly on a national scale (L. C. Platt, 2019, p. 3). Liverpool’s history as a port city and its geographic position on the edge of the country have shaped its identity. Once a prosperous trading centre and later renowned for its music culture in the 1960s, the city faced significant economic and social decline by the late 1970s. Since the 1980s, Liverpool has undergone various regeneration projects, including the International Garden Festival in 1984, the revitalisation of the Albert Docks, and its designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2008 (L. C. Platt, 2019, p. 3). As covered in Section 2.2.2, a significant part of the city (42.5 acres) has been signed off to a single private landlord model over a 250-year lease granted by the City Council, highlighting potentially challenging long-

term outcomes for the city in terms of its activation and social inclusion (Minton, 2006, p. 10).

Minton (2015) discusses the devastating impact of housing market renewal policies and gentrification on communities, drawing attention to a troubling reality faced by post-industrial cities globally: knocking down and redeveloping low-income housing has a severe effect on communities being uprooted and neighbourhoods destroyed.²⁰ This results in the displacement of those local residents to other areas of the city, often suburban, and the substitution of their affordable homes with more expensive properties. This process is referred to as ‘social cleansing’ by critics, as it often forces out those on low incomes and replaces them with wealthier residents (Minton, 2015). Scholars Robyn Moran and Lisbeth Berbary (2021) raise the question:

If placemaking is meant to encapsulate a community-driven process of collaboration that “incorporates the perceptions and voices of residents” in design processes, what becomes of the perceptions and voices who have long been displaced and dispossessed of their lands? What is forced to be (un)made to facilitate this new “making?” (Moran & Berbary, 2021, p. 645)

Minton (2015) draws parallels between the experiences in Liverpool and London, pointing out that similar policies are being carried out in both cities. For instance, despite its high property prices, London is witnessing the demolition of council estates and their substitution with luxury apartments. The effects are rather significant and include the loss of affordable housing and the displacement of low-income residents, putting pressure on already burdened councils and aggravating the housing affordability crisis. This reflects a process of cleansing that transforms vibrant and diverse urban spaces into homogeneous and exclusive enclaves where local identities and narratives are lost and silenced.

In ‘Big Capital’ Minton (2017) challenges the term ‘gentrification’, arguing that it has lost its true meaning over time. The term was originally coined by sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) to describe the process of middle-class invasion into working-class

²⁰ The Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder in the UK had the goal of boosting property prices by demolishing and reconstructing homes in areas where there was little demand (Minton, 2015).

neighbourhoods, resulting in the displacement of original residents and a change in the social character of the area. Conversely, the author claims that gentrification has been influenced by capitalist urban land markets since the commodification of housing began in the 19th century (Engels, 1970).

The debate around gentrification has been dominated by discussions on whether it is driven primarily by the consumer of space or by the developer (Minton, 2022, p. 11). As explored by Minton, consumer-driven gentrification refers to the economic and lifestyle changes brought by middle-class individuals who choose to live in post-industrial cities, often attracted by the availability of trendy living spaces. On the other hand, developer-driven gentrification emphasises the role of capital in attracting developers to areas with the potential for high profits through redevelopment. The author argues that both consumer-driven and developer-driven gentrification can coexist and impact urban environments.

[T]he rentier economy, driven by the financialization of housing, land and commercial property, has produced a structural change in the economic processes associated with gentrification in a city like London. The sheer speed and scale of capital flows into the secondary circuit in London constitute a new phenomenon, which, while sharing key characteristics with gentrification and the consequent displacement of communities, is qualitatively different (Minton, 2022, p. 13).

According to Minton (2022, p. 13), the financialization of housing and the rentier economy have played an important role in defining the contemporary dynamics of gentrification. Capital flows into the secondary circuit of real estate, driven by financial speculation, have accelerated the process, resulting in the displacement of communities and the transformation of neighbourhoods. Minton (2022, p. 14) suggests that the term ‘sterilisation’ may better describe this process, highlighting the production of sterile, homogeneous luxury apartments and privatised public spaces that characterise post-industrial cities. While acknowledging the importance of the term gentrification in capturing the displacement of communities, Minton argues that additional vocabulary is needed to capture the sterilisation and homogenisation of urban spaces, also suggesting that alternative plans for development, such as community-led initiatives, have the

potential for rebirth and offer hope in the face of devastation caused by property market forces. However, such alternatives are often rare and face numerous obstacles. Minton calls for proactive measures to prevent the destruction of communities and the subsequent need for painstaking rebuilding, emphasising the need to challenge the power dynamics of out-of-control property markets that contribute to these issues.

Moran and Berbary (2021, p. 656) advocate for scholars to recognise their ‘complicity in (intentionally and/or unintentionally) upholding these inequities’. They suggest a different approach where place making is explored as a means to challenge the traditional boundaries between place and space, scrutinise the perpetuating systems of inequality, and question the linear progression of settler-colonial narratives. This perspective urges a re-evaluation of terms like ‘revitalisation’ and ‘renewal’, which, while suggesting progress, they often conceal the negative impacts of displacement. (Moran & Berbary, 2021, pp. 645–646). Rethinking place making requires a profound understanding of and a prioritised focus on the communities involved, actively addressing, and reflecting on the inherent inequalities in practices, which could potentially alter scholars’ complicity in the legacies of colonialism and gentrification.

In an interview with Design Indaba (2013), Jeanne van Heeswijk emphasised the importance of engaging with community narratives through unique, context-specific interventions like talking to trees, organising fashion marches, or making bread. These activities are designed to spark new interactions and dialogues carefully tailored to the needs and aspirations of the community. Van Heeswijk highlighted the critical role of spending time to understand each context and ask relevant questions, noting the importance of designing inclusive public spaces that remove physical, cultural, and economic barriers, allowing all community members to participate, regardless of their background. Her approach reveals that initial community contacts often represent a narrow view of the community’s dynamics, and spending more time can uncover a broader range of perspectives.

This process allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the community’s needs and aspirations, which can inform the design of public spaces and amenities that truly meet their requirements. By prioritising community engagement, urban design, public art, and funding, the public sector can ensure that space and place are harnessed effectively to shape community life and improve the quality of life for all residents.

Furthermore, it highlights the necessity to develop a strategy that looks at the management of the place after the place making process is completed. In that sense, in urban landscape planning and design, place making has long occupied the centre stage. Capital investment is used to shape and make prominent places in towns and cities all around the world (Roberts, 2009). A park, a city square, riverside promenade, or bustling street, are all examples of places that attract interest and therefore associated funding for transformation. Through the process of place making, the consequent high-quality public spaces benefit local communities economically and socially and improve users' quality of life and wellbeing (Dempsey et al., 2014, p. 3). It is therefore not unexpected that planners, developers and designers seek to develop such places and that significant sums of money are spent on creating them. What is astonishing, though, as raised by scholars Nicola Dempsey, Mel Burton and Harry Smith (2014), is how little attention is paid to 'place-keeping' or long-term administration of such locations after the process of place making has taken place.

Initially introduced by Wild, Ogden and Lerner (2008) the term place-keeping encompasses the idea of sustaining the positive attributes and values that a place offers over the long-term so future generations can enjoy them. Dempsey and Burton (2011) describe place-keeping as the ongoing maintenance and enhancement of a place's qualities after its initial development. They note that many place attributes, such as biodiversity, develop and mature over time, for example, as trees reach maturity or as spaces become focal points for community events like festivals. These processes contribute to a growing sense of community and place attachment over time.

The extent of place-keeping after the investment has been spent can affect what makes a place successful, evidence showing us that place-keeping is the reason why people repeatedly return to places (Dempsey et al., 2014, p. 3). Philosopher Henri Lefebvre's (1991) work has made it possible for urban studies to better comprehend the role of power in the creation of urban space as well as the ways in which the inhabitants of the environment both shape and are influenced by it. The power Lefebvre talks about lays within the various bureaucratic and politically driven policies defining England's planning system, and throughout the years, policy interventions have played a significant role in shaping design quality. Currently, the primary national instrument for influencing design is planning policy and guidance, particularly the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), along with associated national guidance such as the

National Design Guide (2020) and the National Model Design Code (2021). These documents provide the framework and standards for design practices in the country.

The NPPF (2021) outlines the Government's planning policies for England and how they should be implemented, laying out that planning policies and decisions should be made with the goal of creating safe, accessible, and healthy environments that encourage social engagement. Additionally, it recognises that planning policies and choices are essential in guaranteeing the delivery of social, recreational, and cultural services that cater to community needs and aid in the implementation of local strategies to improve the health, social, and cultural wellbeing of all community members (Leeds.Gov.UK, 2021). According to the NPPF:

Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics. Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, both through their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021, p. 38).

Furthermore, the NPPF stresses that policies should ensure that developments will improve the quality of an area over their lifetime, emphasising the legacy of place and the impact it can have over a community (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021, p. 38). Starting late 1990s, Europe has seen the adoption of various area-based initiatives aimed at addressing issues with local and neighbourhood-scale socio-economic problems in underprivileged neighbourhoods, viewing place making as a strategy to combat urban poverty and encourage economic growth (Carpenter, 2006; Dempsey & Burton, 2011, p. 12; Urban Task Force, 1999). This aligns with the global liveability agenda, which promotes the provision of clean, safe, and green public places and streets (Carmona, 2007; Dempsey & Burton, 2011, p. 12; A. Jonas & McCarthy, 2009). In the UK, there is a wealth of prescriptive urban design guidelines available, for instance, on 'the art of designing places for people' (CABE Space, 2005; Dempsey & Burton, 2011, p. 12; Homes and Communities Agency, 2007; Urban Task Force, 2006).

Research across Europe (Dempsey & Burton, 2011; Hansmann et al., 2007; Newton, 2007; Schipperijn et al., 2010; Ulrich, 1979) highlights that encouraging people to spend time in local green spaces can help improve mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as that the closer people are to green spaces, the more likely they are to use them. Other social advantages associated with green space include a sense of place, identity, and spirituality (Irvine & Warber, 2002; Konijnendijk, 2008), as well as the opportunities created for social interaction and engagement with people we might not encounter otherwise (Dempsey & Burton, 2011; Gehl, 2001; Whyte, 1980). Also, wider literature (Amin, 2008; McIndoe et al., 2005) emphasises the importance of public spaces that are accessible and usable to all, as well as highlights that public parks and open areas in cities can have a beneficial effect on civic pride, a sense of community, and a sense of place.

Findings from empirical research (Irvine & Warber, 2002) conducted on soundscapes in green spaces suggest that opportunities to access quiet, natural places in urban can be increased by improving the ecological quality of urban green spaces. As such, it is argued (Haughton & Hunter, 1994) that ecological environments in a variety of locations, including urban, peri-urban, suburban, and rural areas, must be provided, protected, and maintained. However, conflicting demands on these contexts, such as pressure to create more housing and commercial development and, together with, the encroaching urban infrastructure, may threaten the availability and quality of such environments, which in turn can have a negative impact on biodiversity and habitats (Barber, 2005). Dempsey and Burton pose an important question:

If the importance of open and green space for urban social life is clearly shown in a growing body of evidence, why are some places left to deteriorate through lack of maintenance and investment in place-keeping? (Dempsey & Burton, 2011, p. 12)

The authors note that much of the urban design and planning guidance heavily emphasises place making, advocating for well-designed, safe, and inclusive places that are environmentally sensitive and durable (Burton & Mitchell, 2006; DCLG, 2006; McIndoe et al., 2005). Such ‘assets’ ought to be managed effectively and appropriately, yet there is a noticeable lack of practical evidence on how to achieve sustained

management, often only suggesting having the ‘right skills and resources in place to manage [...] for the foreseeable future’ (Homes and Communities Agency, 2007, p. 180). The concept of place-keeping often emerges as an afterthought to place making, predicated on the unsubstantiated assumption that it will naturally follow from successful place making. However, in reality, effective place-keeping is challenging, especially when funding is limited (Dempsey & Burton, 2011, p. 15). This highlights a broader issue within the field: while place making is a well-documented priority, place-keeping lacks the same depth of understanding, despite its critical role in the longevity and functionality of urban spaces.

According to Dempsey and Burton (2011), between 1997 and 2000, significant funding cuts amounting to £1.3 billion for public space management were registered. These cuts resulted in a reduction in the number of skilled workers available and had a negative impact on the quality and use of Local Authority-managed public spaces. The reason behind these cuts is that public spaces are not legally mandated services and are therefore considered less politically important compared to areas like health and education. However, such budget cuts do not necessarily lead to efficiency gains, as evaluation and funding for place-keeping are often not prioritised, making it difficult to measure their impact.

As further noted by the authors, the funding for the creation, regeneration, and maintenance of public spaces primarily comes from the traditional state-centred model through allocations by LAs. This public sector model where a LA takes sole responsibility for planning, delivering, and maintaining public spaces with limited external input, is often criticised for its inertia, excessive bureaucracy, and lack of responsiveness to changing needs. To guarantee a suitable public space is generated for residents, the NPPF requires private contributions from developers where planning permission for development is contingent on agreements to support infrastructure such as public spaces.²¹

In response to a shift in thinking and the liberalisation of rules governing public service delivery, alternative urban management partnerships have emerged (Dempsey &

²¹ These are known as Section 106 contributions (amended as the Community Infrastructure Levy or CIL) (DCLG, 2010).

Burton, 2011). As explored in Section 2.2.2, PPPs have become increasingly prevalent in open space management, exemplifying a market-centred model where these partnerships involve a profit-driven private organisation contracted by the public sector, sometimes with access to resources beyond the public sector.²² However, there are increasing concerns (Dempsey & Burton, 2011) about the quality of place-keeping when services are contracted out to the lowest bidder, as payments may not be linked to performance, potentially leading to under-resourced maintenance and management. Furthermore, as inquired by Minton (2009) whilst these partnership models can alleviate the financial burden on the public sector, they have also been criticised for prioritising economic interests over social wellbeing, particularly in housing projects.

Another model is the user-centred approach, which devolves responsibility from the state to user-based organisations such as ‘Friends of...’ groups, local interest and community groups, charities, and non-governmental organisations (Dempsey & Burton, 2011). These organisations, driven by their own interest in the quality of public spaces, primarily contribute for their own use value. In this model, networks play a central role, utilising formal and informal connections and local knowledge to promote collaboration and enthusiasm.

Other funding models for place-keeping include endowments and support from the charity sector (Dempsey & Burton, 2011). Endowments provide monies through interest gained on initial investments and can contribute to long-term sustainable management. The charity sector, represented by organisations like the Heritage Lottery Fund, allocates funds for place-keeping through independent distribution bodies. However, it should be noted that funding for place-keeping is often limited compared to funding for place-making projects, and resources may need to be compromised across different open spaces over time.

As explored by Dempsey and Burton (2011), and further emphasised by Carmona et al. (2004) achieving effective place-keeping relies on strong partnerships and efficient governance and decision-making processes. Securing long-term funding and ensuring a balance between place making and place-keeping remain ongoing challenges for practitioners and policymakers in maintaining the quality and functionality of public

²² Examples of PPPs include large-scale town centre management programs as well as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) (Carmona et al., 2008).

spaces. There is a widely held belief in theory and policy that a partnership-based approach to public space management is effective, with a combination of the state-, market-, and user-centred models could prove most advantageous for achieving effective public space management.

Effective place-keeping coordination can be achieved when collectively stakeholders have both a strategic and a local focus on long-term quality and efficiency, which is underpinned by reliable resources with a monitoring process in place. There is also a need for knowledge transfer among and between stakeholders which can help raise the profile of place-keeping. In this way, it is hoped that such an approach to place-keeping can bring about political commitment and real policy change (Dempsey & Burton, 2011, p. 18).

Scrutinising place making highlighted the notion as a multilayered concept spanning across various disciplines such as planning, urban design, art, architecture, geography, and sociology. This approach represents a paradigm shift in urban design, emphasising the importance of public space and human activity in shaping the built environment. However, place making is not immune to power dynamics and political influences, and can inadvertently contribute to gentrification, marginalisation, and exclusion if not implemented carefully. This analysis highlights that the UK's urban environment calls for a balanced approach that prioritises community wellbeing, alongside the adaptability and resilience of public spaces. LAs and commercial developers, often collaborating through PPPs, are instrumental in shaping these environments, yet it is crucial to nurture active community involvement and prevent potential inequalities.

Whilst place making remains a prevalent term and practice central to the operations of entities (including ESA), the discussion in this thesis will now transition to explore the concepts of space and place, two foundational notions, critical across multiple academic disciplines, offering an opportunity to expand the critique beyond everyday conceptualisations of place making.

2.4 Space and place

Space and place are conceptualised as dynamic entities that continuously shape and define the urban landscape, as well the interactions within it. Understanding the processes and agencies involved in spatial production is crucial to developing a comprehensive understanding of these foundational aspects. While existing literature (Berleant, 1997; Canter, 1977; Cresswell, 2015; Jacobs, 1961; Proshansky et al., 1973; Tuan, 1977a) offers extensive discussions on the topic, a clear and universally accepted definition of place remains elusive. However, in the context of this discourse, Dempsey, Burton, and Smith's (2014) understanding is pertinent:

There are spaces and there are places. We become attached to places. We identify with a place and people from that place. Having a sense of place is different to a sense of space. It's more personal and it has meaning for users (Dempsey et al., 2014, p. 5).

The notion of place is a complex concept that spans across a wide range of spatial and non-spatial dimensions as it allows for an extensive understanding of context as more than physical, but also economic, social and environmental, thus benefitting from a multifaceted transdisciplinary approach (Berleant, 1997; Carley et al., n.d.; Cresswell, 2015, p. 1; Dempsey et al., 2014, p. 10; Hague & Jenkins, 2005; H. Smith et al., 2009). In 'Space and Place', geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977b, p. 54) defined space as lying open, suggesting 'the future and invit[ing] action' and place as a calm core of founded values, an 'enclosed and humanised space'. Tuan asserts that 'space' and 'place' are mutually dependent for their definition. However, this concept can be cryptic and both enlightening and obscure, as the meaning attributed to space and place is culturally constructed. For instance, Jonathan Raban (1999) recounts how white explorers and indigenous people perceived the land and sea differently during Captain George Vancouver's explorations along the Pacific coast of Canada in 1792. Vancouver was puzzled by the natives' seemingly aimless movements across the vast, undifferentiated ocean, unaware of their navigation through friendly and unfriendly spirits (Bodenhamer, 2015, p. 15). While the ocean held cultural significance as a place for the indigenous people, Vancouver perceived it as space devoid of such cultural meaning. In this

instance, the concepts of space and place mirror each other within and across cultures, shaped by cultural interpretations.

Psychologist David Canter (1977) saw place as a holistic entity emerging from interactions between physical attributes, behaviours and beliefs. Jeanne van Heeswijk talks about her understanding of space:

For me the people's behaviour in everyday spatial conditions is important. Most predominantly, if I think about space, I think about the local. Not as a fixed community, but as a condition, as a marked territory in which people exercise understanding of or a relation to the space. When I talk about space it is not only about the physical, but also about the emotions and narratives that reside in that space. So beside the local as a physical condition is also relational and emotional (Van Heeswijk, n.d.b).

Henri Lefebvre (1991) highlighted in the opening of his seminal work 'The Production of Space' the common tendency of authors, despite their logical rigour, to overlook the need for a clear definition of the term 'space' in their epistemological studies. He observed that while the term is regularly mentioned in numerous works, its meaning is often taken for granted. Lefebvre (1991) argued that there should be a discussion and exploration of the various interpretations and implications of this widely used but ambiguously understood concept, insisting on 'the importance of considering not only what might be called "the geometry" of space but also its lived practices and the symbolic meaning and significance of particular spaces and spatializations' (Massey, 1994, p. 251).

In 'The Right to the City' (1968), Lefebvre challenged the traditional approaches to understanding space and argued for a more inclusive analysis of spatial practices by coining the concept of 'the right to the city' to emphasise the democratic control and active participation of citizens in shaping urban space. Nonetheless, the notion of 'the right to the city' cannot be understood without first questioning the social construction of urban spaces. For Lefebvre, the city emerges from the interactions of various dynamics, and its spatial form is a consequence of these interactions. In this context, the possibility of asserting a right to shape the city is analysed in terms of power relations,

encompassing collective action, economic influence, and political power to varying degrees (Lecoq, 2020).

The transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of space founded on the permanent participation of the “interested parties,” with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests. It thus also presupposes confrontation [...]. On the horizon, then, at the furthest edge of the possible, it is a matter of producing the space of the human species—the collective (generic) work of the species—to create (produce) a planet-wide space as the social foundation of a transformed everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 422).

Lefebvre (1991) laid ‘the foundations of a new kind of urban thinking that is intrinsically political’, proposing a triadic framework for spatial analysis which consists of perceived space (representations and mental images of space), conceived space (planned and designed spaces), and lived space (everyday experiences and practices in space) (Lecoq, 2020). Alongside this multidimensional approach to investigating space, the philosopher adopted a temporal perspective, tracing historical development of spatial relations and analysing the transformations recorded over time. This emphasised Lefebvre’s extensive scale of analysis that placed space and place at a broader societal level that sought to investigate the role of capitalism, urbanisation, and the state in the production of space.

Building up on Lefebvre’s work through adopting a multidimensional approach, Doreen Massey (1994), a feminist geographer and sociologist, examines the intersections and exchanges between space and place, contending that they are both dynamic entities that continuously transform and evolve. While both Lefebvre (1968, 1991) and Massey (1994, 2005) emphasised the relational and political nature of space, they had distinct conceptual frameworks and focused on different scales and temporal perspectives in their analyses. Lefebvre and Massey challenged the idea of space as a uniform and predetermined entity, highlighting the diversity and multiplicity of spatial experiences and meanings. Furthermore, both scholars highlighted the political nature of space and how power relations are embedded within spatial arrangements, arguing for the need to

consider the social and political struggles shaping and contesting the production of space.

Massey (1994, 2005) diverged from Lefebvre's concept of the production of space by stressing the significance of relationality in spatial dynamics and the crucial role of networks and flows. In contrast to Lefebvre's focus on societal-level analysis, Massey investigates the dynamics of space and place at a more localised level, examining the interconnections between place-based identities and local communities. Her research explores the intricate dialogue between space, place, and social relationships, offering insights into the nuanced dynamics of spatial phenomena at different scales. Through her work, Massey argues that space and place are mutually constitutive, with each influencing the other, stressing how crucial it is to understand how space and place interact with one another, as well as with other spaces and places in order to fully comprehend their complex dynamics. In 'Space, Place, and Gender' (1994), Massey notes that:

“Space” may call to mind the realm of the dead or the chaos of simultaneity and multiplicity. It may be used in reference to the synchronic systems of structuralists or employed to picture the n-dimensional space of identity. Likewise with place, though perhaps with more consistency, it can raise an image of one's place in the world, of the reputedly (but as we shall see, disputed) deep meanings of “a place called home” or, with much greater intimations of mobility and agility, can be used in the context of discussions of positionality (Massey, 1994, p. 1).

In response to the wider humanist understanding of place as a vessel of culture that is emphasising its inclusive nature and rejecting the idea of exclusive control by any particular class or group, Massey looks closely at the notion of time and its relationship to space and place. As explored by David J. Bodenhamer in 'Narrating Space and Place' (2015), places are seen as unique and encompassing, characterised by the organisation of meaning and shaped by experiences, emotions, and memories. Unlike space, which exists only in the present, place transcends temporal boundaries, blending spatial and temporal qualities. Through her work, Massey (2005) refers to this conflation as time-spaces, highlighting the essential fusion of attributes that define distinct places. Time

and space are intertwined when discussing space, often using time as a proxy for vicinity or distance, but both attributes are necessary to comprehend the sense of place. Place depends on the simultaneous connection of time and space, with each attribute contributing to its definition; while space can exist independently of time, place is inherently tied to time, which provides it with specificity. The association with the past imbues space with particularity, transforming it into a meaningful location characterised by fixed coordinates, material and visual surroundings, and historical and emotional characteristics (Bodenhamer, 2015; Cresswell, 2004).

This work positions itself between the dimensions of space and place, shifting focus to the concept of ‘genius loci’, a concept derived from Latin indicating that people have experiences that go beyond a location’s tangible or perceptible features (Norberg-Schulz, 1979; Relph, 2015). Architect Christian Norberg-Schulz contends that:

[T]he spaces where life occurs are places...A place is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the genius loci, or spirit of place, has been recognised as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with his daily life (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, p. 5).

This suggests that the ‘structure of a place is not a fixed, eternal state’ and very often the ‘genius loci’ does not involve exceptional landscapes and buildings (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, p. 18). Jacobs (1961) further disputes that the provision of space does not suffice, a sense of place being radically influenced by the social structure of a community as well as how its members use the space. This theory lends credence to the Proshansky et al.’s (1973, p. 5) hypothesis that ‘the physical environment should be considered a social environment and vice versa’.

The term ‘genius loci’ is frequently used in the space and place discourse to suggest that a space may possess a unique energy or identity separate from its physical attributes. This idea emphasises the significance of a place’s intangible characteristics, such as the memories and experiences connected to it, and how these might influence how we interact with the actual space. Furthermore, it creates an opportunity to discover the distinctive qualities of each place and to recognise and appreciate the various ways in which space and place overlap and interact (Massey, 1994; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977b).

Geographer Edward Relph (1976)²³ argues that places are more than just physical locations; they also include an ethereal quality that he refers to as ‘place identity’. He contends that memories, experiences, and associations that give a place meaning shape place identity, and that this can increase a sense of connection or belonging to a place. Furthermore, Relph explores the idea of placelessness, which he describes as the absence of a meaningful connection to a place, and how this can result in feelings of isolation and disorientation. The geographer contends that placelessness is a result of the built environment becoming more homogenised, with the same kinds of structures, roads, and other elements appearing in numerous locations. He argues that this diminishes one’s sense of place because they lose the ability to notice and value each place’s distinctive qualities. This point is further emphasised by Marc Augé (1995)²⁴ and his work on the notion of non-place, a theory examining how modern cities are becoming progressively more anonymous, resulting in a profound impact on our place identity and connection to a place.

In the contemporary context, a recurring trend surfaces as a result of place making, focusing on creating mass-produced environments that often lack distinct identity and character. This is particularly evident in new residential developments that advertise themselves as place making initiatives, yet primarily focus on maximising density. These strategies typically employ standardisation to increase efficiency and delivery speed, rather than promoting a genuine sense of place. The resulting neighbourhoods often feature uniform building heights and repetitive designs, with street frontages dominated by car parking. Such homogeneity relies on the use of signage and wayfinding to mitigate the disorientation and sense of placelessness experienced by pedestrians. Responding to Relph’s concept of placelessness, this thesis seeks to shift from place making, by introducing the notion of urban activation (as explored in Chapter 4 - Artist-led space as urban activator), proposing it as a mechanism that

²³ Relph’s (1976) research explores the idea of place identity and the significance of place in daily life. His book ‘Place and Placelessness’, in which he makes the case that places are more than just physical spaces but also possess an ethereal quality he refers to as ‘place identity’, is his most well-known work. Relph is a key voice in the place debate because of the way his writing highlights the value of appreciating the distinctive qualities of each location as well as the connections and interactions between space and place.

²⁴ Augé (1995) is a French anthropologist and philosopher contending that people’s sense of identity and commitment to place are being negatively impacted by modern cities’ rising anonymity.

naturally evolves from a place's inherent qualities rather than being artificially imposed to manufacture a sense of place.

Ensuring an appropriate response to a context and its community also implies agency, emphasising the role of the facilitator (i.e. architect) in the process. This will be discussed further in Section - 2.4 Agency. Norberg-Schulz (1979) suggested that the architect carries responsibility in visualising the spirit of a place and creating spaces that improve human experiences, underlining the critical role of architecture in establishing a sense of place. Wider literature (Courage, 2016; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Giesecking, & Mangold, 2014; Jóhannesson & Bærenholdt, 2009) discusses how linking 'who we are' with 'where are we' involves a wide spectrum of networks that highlight the interdependence between the physical environment and the human perception and experience. Bringing together the geographical setting with the human experience leads to a 'mutually-sustaining past-to-future loop' defined by attachment to place and belonging (Bulmer, 1969; Courage, 2016; Seamon, 2014). According to Courage (2016), communities strongly connected to their locales often emerge when local residents engage in grassroots political activity, independent of external corporate or governmental influences, developing a vibrant and diverse micro-public (Amin, 2008; Bresnihan & Byrne, 2014; Gosling, 1996).

Bodenhamer (2015, p. 16) conceptualises place making as a continual process of interacting within a configurative complex of things, suggesting that place is made by the acts of living in space, a notion echoed by Massey (1997) also who describes place as an open and hybrid concept, shaped by interconnected flows, not as static or predetermined. These places, filled with personal and collective significance, exhibit both universal and unique characteristics, highlighting the diversity and complexity of human experience. This spatial mutuality is captured within Lefebvre's (1991) seminal work on the 'social production of space' and according to him, space, 'and we can also infer architecture' (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017, p. 3), mould society, and are moulded by it. Examining his work in the contemporary context of space and architecture as 're(productive)' forces (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017), Lefebvre (1968) wrote that citizens of any society have a right to mould that society in and through its spaces. He later claimed a 'right to the city' as a fundamental right of all citizens. This notion implies participation, nonetheless, as Petrescu and Trogal (2017, p. 3) note, 'the contemporary

conditions demand that we go beyond participatory or “socially engaged” approaches to work with more radical forms of politics and values”, claiming a ‘right to architecture’.

Petrescu and Trogal (2017) emphasise that the ‘right to architecture’ extends beyond participation in urban development to encompass material rights such as housing, public space, and spatial access. Marxist geographer and anthropologist David Harvey (2008) talks about ‘the right to the city’ as something far more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is a right to transform ourselves by transforming the city. He continues arguing this right as a shared one as it requires mutual power to restructure the process of urbanisation (Harvey, 2008). Jeanne van Heeswijk (2012) echoes this in her practice, noting the intensive, often challenging collaborative efforts required to engage communities sustainably:

It [...] involved all of us learning together how to take collective responsibility in order to make the information gathered operate significantly in the social and political context. These processes are always long and sometimes painful, as we have to learn about each other’s ideas and different viewpoints (Van Heeswijk, 2012, p. 81).

The spatial mutuality can also be observed over time where demographics, social, and economic settings can have a significant impact on how two physically comparable environments develop, with one site having the potential to ‘succeed’ while the other has the potential to ‘fail’ (Habraken, 1998). The production of space can become a form of power that according to Lefebvre (1991), is used to generate opportunities but also to create and preserve inequalities. This understanding prompts us to critically examine the role of agency in the production of space and to explore how various actors, including communities, architects, urban planners, and policymakers, can exert agency to develop more inclusive and equitable urban environments.

2.6 Agency

The notion of agency encompasses various concerns that are currently prominent in architectural debates, although they may appear disconnected at first glance. These concerns include the role of architects in instigating social and political change, the performative power of architectural objects, and the effectiveness of theory in shaping the world. Theorists Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet (2014) contend in ‘Agency and Architecture: How to Be Critical?’ that their objective is to initiate a dialogue that explores the multifaceted concept of agency, examining its intersections with these seemingly disparate concerns. They explore agency’s relationship with structure, a fundamental concept in understanding modern society and highlight its association with the notion of ‘acting otherwise’. This implies a deliberate and critical approach, which holds significant implications in the architectural discourse.

Historically, the development of agency theory can be traced back to seminal works such as ‘The Modern Corporation and Private Property’ (Berle & Means, 1932). In the 1970s, scholars revived and expanded upon these ideas in various fields, laying the foundation for the modern perspective of agency theory: economics (Spence & Zeckhauser, 1971), accounting (Demski & Feltham, 1978), finance (Fama, 1980), marketing (Basu et al., 1985), sociology (Eccles, 1985; H. White, 1985), political science (Mitnick, 1986) and organisational behaviour (Eisenhardt, 1985, 1988; Kosnik, 1987). However, despite the breadth of research, the concept of agency theory remains a topic of controversy. Business author and educator Kathleen Eisenhardt (1989) provides an assessment and review of agency theory in her work titled ‘Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review’. She points out that advocates of the theory argue that it holds revolutionary potential and lays the groundwork for a robust theory of organisations. On the other hand, critics dismiss it as trivial, dehumanising, and even ‘dangerous’ (Perrow, 1986, p. 235). Mitchell and Meacham (2011) note that:

Agency theory is based on the relationship between one party, the principal, who designates certain tasks and decisions to another party, the agent. The focus of agency theory stems from assumptions that the agent will behave opportunistically, particularly if their interests conflict with the principal (Mitchell & Meacham, 2011, p. 151).

An early definition of ‘agent’ describes someone who exercises power or produces an effect. The language used in this definition is significant, as it suggests that power is exerted by one person over another, which is not aligned with the notion of responsibility. Furthermore, the use of the word ‘or’ implies a dichotomy, suggesting that one can either exert power or produce an effect, but not both simultaneously (Giddens, 1984, p. 15).

Bendickson et al. (2016) highlight how conflicts between principals and agents often emerge the lack of shared interests, leading to what is known as an agency problem. This issue is prevalent in various spheres, including the built environment, and resolving these conflicts necessitates the implementation of governance mechanisms to ensure congruence and shared risk (Arrow, 1971). However, quantifying these disparities is challenging. Contracts often fail to cover all contingencies, and monitoring an agent’s actions can be costly, leading to difficulties for principles in enforcing their property rights (Bendickson et al., 2016, p. 176; Eisenhardt, 1989). Modern economic and technological shifts require a broader recognition of stakeholder power and corporate responsibilities towards the community, highlighting the critical role of human capital in organisations as essential for sustaining competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 1998).

Bendickson et al. (2016, p. 189) suggest that a broader perspective that considers the influences and demands of various stakeholders is required. Managers must navigate the complexities of balancing multiple interests and address potential problems with workers, as they have the ability to enforce their property rights by withholding effort. This highlights the importance of stakeholder management and the need for managers to pay attention to the concerns and expectations of stakeholders beyond just the principal.²⁵ Although originating from a different discipline, these ideas are highly relevant to agency theory in architecture, especially within the context of socially produced spaces that require collective stakeholder responsibility to impact urban environments meaningfully. Jacobs (1961) suggests that a sense of place is radically

²⁵ In the business sphere, the significance of stakeholder influence is further emphasised by the widespread inclusion of ethics courses in business schools and the government’s mandate for ethics programs. Education and training play a role in shaping managerial behaviour, and institutions influence executives’ awareness of how to handle conflicts between stakeholders. For instance, conflicts may arise between owners, government, and workers regarding issues like minimum wage, reflecting the diverse perspectives and interests of stakeholders (Bendickson et al., 2016, p. 189).

influenced by a community's social dynamics and stakeholders' use the space. Nonetheless, considering multiple perspectives can complicate agency problems, as ethical considerations urge managers to prioritise stakeholder interests over shareholders, signalling an important shift in traditional agency relationships towards greater accountability to a broader range of stakeholders.

In architecture, there are two prominent voices analysing the concept of agency as well as the challenges behind it; according to architects and theorists Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2009), the notion of agency in architecture is closely intertwined with social and political power.

The word “agency” is becoming increasingly used and with this perhaps abused. In standing for almost anything, the idea of architects acting as agents can be associated with the most conservative of actions. In the worst-case scenario, agency just denotes “acting on behalf of”: on behalf of a contractor, a client, developer, etcetera. So, what - if not that - may the notion of agency mean within architectural production if it is to gain a more empowering sense? If we take “agency” in its transformative sense as action that effects social change, the architect becomes not the agent of change, but one among many agents (Schneider & Till, 2009, p. 97).

The architect is most often seen as the person with agency and ideas, playing the role of an author with authoritative control over projects. This view, often essential for establishing professional credibility, suggests a direct and uninterrupted process from conceptualisation to the completion of the final architectural works. Schneider and Till (2009) discuss how this perception is reinforced by media representations and further perpetuated within educational systems that idolise architects as heroic figures of their projects. This notion is rooted in the historical narrative of the discipline heavily centred around individual architects seen as idols. While starchitects such as Rem Koolhaas, Norman Foster, and Zaha Hadid are widely celebrated, the reality is that most built environments have little association with any specific architect.

In contrast, Schneider and Till (2009, p. 97) portray an alternative image, that of the architect as the ‘anti-hero’, someone who collaborates and relinquishes authority,

someone who operates in the background whilst actively participating in the process but not always initiating it. This ‘story’²⁶ thus aims to advocate for architecture as a form of agency that is socially and politically conscious, emphasising the importance of understanding architecture within the broader context of the world, and highlighting the need for critical examination of the social and economic structures within that setting. By doing so, architecture can effectively engage with these structures in a manner that is transformative and emancipatory.

As a response, Schneider and Till (2009, p. 98) challenge the prevailing internalisation of architectural discourse and put forward the idea of ‘spatial agency’, which aims to question the architect’s role as a neutral expert. As evidenced in their work, the authors propose this new term as a notion that inherently raises questions about power dynamics, particularly how power can be wielded and potentially abused by architects acting as agents in shaping space. Linking to the work of sociologist Anthony Giddens (1987), the concept of agency is closely connected with power:

The basic shortcoming of most discussions of agency and structure [...] is to suppose that either the individual has a primacy over society (modes of production/ social formation) or the reverse [...]. We should resist this dualism and instead understand it as a duality – the “duality of structure” (Giddens, 1987, p. 220).

Giddens’ conceptualisation of agency stands as a significant counterpoint to the self-serving understanding of agency prevalent in the field. According to the sociologist, agency assumes the capacity to act differently, a notion that challenges the conventional mindset of architects who are trained to rely on established knowledge leading to predetermined solutions. The professional domain operates on the assumption of certainty, and to entertain the possibility of alternative actions is viewed as a sign of vulnerability, reminiscent of an amateurish approach. According to Schneider and Till (2009), embracing Giddens’ perspective on agency entails redefining the role of an

²⁶ The authors are using the term ‘story’ to signify a departure from the introspective and exclusive discourse that has largely characterized contemporary architectural theorizing (Schneider & Till, 2009, p. 98).

architect, wherein the absence of a preconceived future is seen as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Challenging professional norms does not imply disregarding the value of professional knowledge, but rather advocating for its integration with other modes of action. According to Giddens (1993, p. 76), purposeful agency cannot be exclusively defined by the application of learned procedures; it is also shaped by intuition, negotiation, conditioned reflexes, and experiential understanding gained through one's professional and personal encounters. The sociologist (1984, p. 4) highlights the significance of mutual knowledge, which is embedded in these encounters, even though it may not be readily accessible to conscious awareness. Mutual knowledge, characterised as practical in nature, coexists with discursive consciousness, which deals with explicit and explainable matters. Giddens asserts that the boundary between discursive and practical consciousness is fluid and permeable, suggesting that they mutually inform and influence each other. Schneider and Till (2009, p. 99) note that this challenges the prevailing professional norms in both academia and architecture, where authority is often claimed through explicit articulation. Consequently, discourse takes precedence over action, leading to the marginalisation of practical knowledge, and as discourse becomes increasingly self-referential, it spirals inward, feeding off itself, and gaining autonomy. Moving beyond discourse does not entail dismissing discursive consciousness but rather harnessing its potential to facilitate practical transformative action.

Schneider and Till (2009) however note that Giddens' theory of agency encounters a fundamental challenge when applied to architectural production: unlike Giddens' agents who directly intervene in the world, architects exert their agency indirectly through buildings. The impact of a building is highly contingent on external factors beyond the architect's control, rendering the architect's intent compromised or even disrupted. In response to this dilemma, the formulation of agency by sociologists John Law and Bruno Latour (1999) offers an alternative perspective, seeing architectural production as a network of actors, both human and non-human, in which architects and buildings assume roles as agents alongside numerous other actors (Jallinoja, 2000, p. 15). However, according to Schneider and Till (2009), this construct lacks intentionality and fails to capture agency's transformative potential, which is considered essential by the authors.

Schneider and Till (2009, p. 99) contend that in order to address this limitation, it becomes necessary to assert the central role of human purpose in architectural agency. This purpose is then manifested in a spatial context, which, in a Lefebvrian sense (1991), is synonymous with the social realm. The distinction between spatial production and building as agency lies in their temporal nature and while buildings are often perceived as static entities refined through taste and technique, social space is dynamic and continuously evolving. Spatial agency perceives the entire process as a continuum driven by intent and open to adjustments and alternative actions as it unfolds over time. The authors continue emphasising that:

In treating the human and non-human as separate agents, there is always the possibility that responsibility of one for the other is lost. Once the building is handed over to the client (service completed according to the architect's contract), so by implication is 'responsibility' for it handed over. In contrast, spatial agency, when read as a continuity of action and occupation, means that all agents involved in the production of a building have to face up to their social responsibility because they are always tied into a temporal chain and so must always be alert to events further down the line over which they have some (but not total) influence (Schneider & Till, 2009, p. 99).

The point is critical in the discourse on agency, particularly when reflecting on the issues of power defining the spatial production within urban contexts. In environments where the agency is unevenly divided between numerous stakeholders (LAs, developers, architects etc.), the notion of 'power exerted is the power of one person over another, which is hardly consistent with the notion of responsibility' (Schneider & Till, 2009, p. 99). Perhaps a more appropriate definition of agency in the context of spatial agency is one that emphasises the agent's ability to bring about change by empowering others. Empowerment, in this sense, involves enabling others to have control over their environment and it entails a participatory approach that is not opportunistic but proactive, allowing individuals to take an active role rather than being reactive recipients of decisions made by others. Tina Saaby (2014), Chief City Architect for Copenhagen, refers to Zygmunt Bauman's perspective:

I think at the moment if you think about making society better you have to count mostly on this level of human integration. ... You architects and urbanists should consider yourself as liberators, animators, inspirers who inspire people to do interesting things (themselves) and who help develop their potential which otherwise would be stifled (Bauman, 2014).

To effect a change to the contemporary neoliberal context where building activities and the labour of architects and construction workers have been commodified, there is a need to shift focus from simply responding to short-term market demands to considering the long-term desires and needs of those who engage with urban space. Schneider and Till (2009, p. 100) argue for a new method of spatial production that challenges the globalised capitalist system currently in turmoil and that resists environmentally damaging and socially destructive aspects of capitalist urban development.

Adopting alternative approaches in the present moment signifies a departure from the architect's conventional field and it allows for the expression of something positive that goes beyond sheer opposition (Schneider & Till, 2009, p. 100). Rather than being an antithesis to something such as post-capitalism is to capitalism, it involves developing affirmative agency from within and, as such, it is important to acknowledge that significant efforts have already been made to challenge capitalist hegemony and open up possibilities for a liberated concept of labour and space (Charley, 2008, p. 160). In the wake of the 2009 crisis, which compelled institutions to reconsider their values, these critical practices are seen as radical alternatives as well as visionary precursors to new ways of action. Following a transdisciplinary approach, these alternative practices operate across disciplines, (art, architecture, urban planning), and they advocate for a more thoughtful application of agency theory that is grounded in the specific (political) realities of the urban landscape. Examples of these practices include Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (AAA), Jeanne van Heeswijk, Park Fiction, CHORA, muf art + architecture, Transparadiso etc.²⁷

²⁷ A more comprehensive analysis of such examples will be included in Chapter 4 – Artist-led space as urban activator.

With the understanding of place as a basis for activation, the urban activator is the closest reflection of what we refer to as ‘sense of place’. A sense of place is a complex, often challenged phenomenon due to the diversity of users and their different principles, needs, and perceptions. This is primarily due to the public nature of most urban places, which can serve a variety of purposes (i.e. a public square, for instance, might host politically charged protests one day and a busy traffic roundabout the next; it might be a parking lot during the day and a bustling market at night) (Dempsey et al., 2014, p. 10). Such examples are everyday urban places that are often not scheduled, and the characteristics or elements that contribute to their sense of place are not always intentionally built in.

As emphasised by Dempsey et al. (2014), in order to preserve, maintain, and improve a place’s ‘genius loci’, it is essential to think of it as a place that is constantly changing and evolving (Habraken, 1998). Similarly, this thesis will explore the process of urban activation as one that evolves organically, aiming to establish a reciprocal dialogue between space and its users (Chapter 4). The emergent social ecosystem has as a basis the process of engagement and participation between space and the different actors involved, irrespective of the economic value of space. Therefore, creating sense of place implies participation, the kind that engages human actors, but also the non-human ones; as Huybrechts (2014) argued, those can facilitate dialogue between people.

Building upon similar practises, the process of urban activation is one that encompasses a wide range of involved actors, promoting the expression of both concerns and opportunities surrounding urban space, assessing stakeholder reactions, and acting coherently and maturely toward space, context, and society (Pogačar, 2014).

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter delineates the methodological procedures and approaches used in this thesis. It starts by revisiting the research aims and objectives from the conceptual framework, providing context for the methodology, and then outlines the adopted epistemological perspective. Next, it introduces the research methodology, followed by a detailed description of the research methods and the rationale for the case study approach. It also discusses the case study selection process and concludes with an overview of data gathering, analysis processes, and ethical considerations.

The methodology provided insights into ESA and its case studies, using creative techniques to explore space through ‘designerly ways of knowing’ (Cross, 1982).¹ This expanded my understanding of artist-led space and highlighted the critical and propositional potential of the spaces and materials examined.

¹ Explored in more detail in Section 4.8– Transdisciplinarity.

3.2 Aims

This thesis is concerned with investigating the role of artist-led space as urban activator within the UK context and pivots around three central research aims (Section 8.2 – Appendix 2):

- **Definition in context:** the first aim is to formulate a definition of the urban activator in the context of artist-led spatial practice through a series of strategically chosen artist-led spaces operating across the disciplines of art and architecture. ESA stands as the focal case study, with its socially engaged initiatives and urban strategies being dissected via an array of methods: observations, interviews, mapping, archival research, and field journals.
- **Spatial production and economies:** next, this thesis aims to analyse the spaces and economies activated through artist-led spatial production. In doing so, a robust literature review and analysis of the relevant policies in the UK context has been undertaken. Emphasis has been placed on understanding stakeholders' relationships and social dynamics within urban environments through capturing a wide range of perspectives from academia, artist-led sphere, to the public and private sectors.
- **Navigating tensions and trade-offs:** the final query explores the intricacies and potential tensions between artist-led spatial production and their respective financial partners. This involves an in-depth investigation of funding approaches and common challenges, both through literature review and interviews. This investigation is critical to understanding ESA's agency within the local governance and to offering insights into perceptions of artist-led space from varied stakeholders including funders, commercial developers, and LAs.

3.3 Epistemological stance: The designerly approach to urban activation

In this thesis, I define my position as more than a detached observer, but as a researcher and actively involved practitioner and citizen, a dual role that reflects, to some extent, the artist-led spaces I study, although there are also clear distinctions.

The exploration of artist-led spaces and their modes of working led to the adoption of a social epistemology derived from relativist and pluralist stances (Goldman, 2011). Social epistemology explores the nature of understanding, where such comprehension is rooted in both the subject's beliefs and the societal factors shaping those beliefs (Goldman, 2011). The relativist stance recognises the existence of diverse realities and interpretations and is shaped by both internalist and externalist viewpoints. The internalist view posits that something is justifiable to an individual if it aligns with their beliefs, while the externalist perspective considers views beyond an individual's immediate cognitive frame (Landesman, 1997, p. 74; Vahid, 2011, pp. 144–154). Social epistemology paves the way for deciphering group consensus-building processes through reasoned disagreements (Courage, 2016, p. 93), and recognises that while groups are constituted by individual members, they also exist separately, serving as hubs for shaping perspectives, which may diverge from those of individual members (Courage, 2016, p. 93; Goldman, 2011). This idea aligns with the concept of the micropublic (Amin, 2008). Jeanne van Heeswijk (n.d.b) talks about her site-based approach:

Normally when I start to do my research I go to reside for a while in the location, sponge information and I try not to have an idea. I don't think it is important to stay somewhere for 2 or 3 months but it is important to come back repeatedly – making repetitive insertions, as I call it. During these visits I do what I normally do in my life (go shopping, visit a library, go to a community meeting, see a show, go to the hairdresser). I try to set up a schedule of meeting all kinds of people in the city. Every person I meet I ask him or her to introduce me to another two or three people to talk to. I listen about what it means to live in the city. At some point during these visits a location emerges that is a location of interest. I try to set up a camp, a working space there. After that I create a working structure, I try to find people with whom I can start collaborations. So

*normally both the point of conflict and the location emerge from the terrain
(Van Heeswijk, n.d.b).*

As discussed in Section 4.8, this thesis adopts a transdisciplinary methodological perspective, emphasising that the process of urban activation arises when moving across different disciplines, drawing knowledge from each and encouraging collaborative syntheses. This process allows the urban activator to evolve not from forceful intervention but rather from a natural emergence ingrained in its specific context, linking to the idea of situated knowledge and embeddedness as key tools of reading and understanding the city. This work also emphasises the importance of research by design exemplified through ethnographic mapping and field journals, advocating for a transdisciplinary approach to art and architecture (Findeli, 1999, p. 3) where relation and affect are introduced as tools of exploring urban contexts. This bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, while also recognising ethical considerations.

This study adopts a broader situated knowledge approach, exploring both the methods of knowledge creation and the specifics of conducting research as an architect-researcher who is also a committed participant and observer in the field. This perspective enables me to investigate the concept of embedded ethnography and illustrate how it has shaped my research approach within ESA. I also explore how implementing embedded ethnographic methodologies within an artist-led space adds depth to the ongoing discourse surrounding the ‘ethnographic turn’ observed in art practice (Orlek, 2021, p. 96; Rendell, 2010a). This discussion sets the stage for me to present the specific ethnographic techniques I employed while examining ESA: I transitioned from a passive observation of space, artists, and activities within ESA to a more proactive role, instigating activities and situations within the artist-led organisation. Key techniques such as collaborative mapping and field journals have been instrumental in presenting my findings to ESA and placing myself contextually within the artist-led organisation. These methods offer a distinct, but interconnected perspective for creating knowledge.

This methodology captures my transition as architect-researcher from an objective observer to an involved participant in the research, allowing for a holistic understanding

of ESA, whilst also stimulating a more nuanced understanding of urban activation, blurring the lines between the observer and the observed, and between a context's past and its potential future. Like the ever-changing urban landscape, this research journey demonstrates continuous growth and transformation, emphasising the limitless possibilities when venturing into unexplored terrains with curiosity.

The following diagram (Figure 9) represents an early mapping I devised to traverse various roles I embraced during the research process, navigating between theoretical understandings of artist-led space, urban activation, and archival theory. Through embedded research, specifically through field journals and mapping, I developed a strong situated knowledge that evolved organically from observing ESA. By employing these methods to document interactions and understandings of space, my stance as a researcher morphed depending on the methodology, each approach unveiling unique discoveries, whilst collectively serving as critical tools in defining the concept of the urban activator.

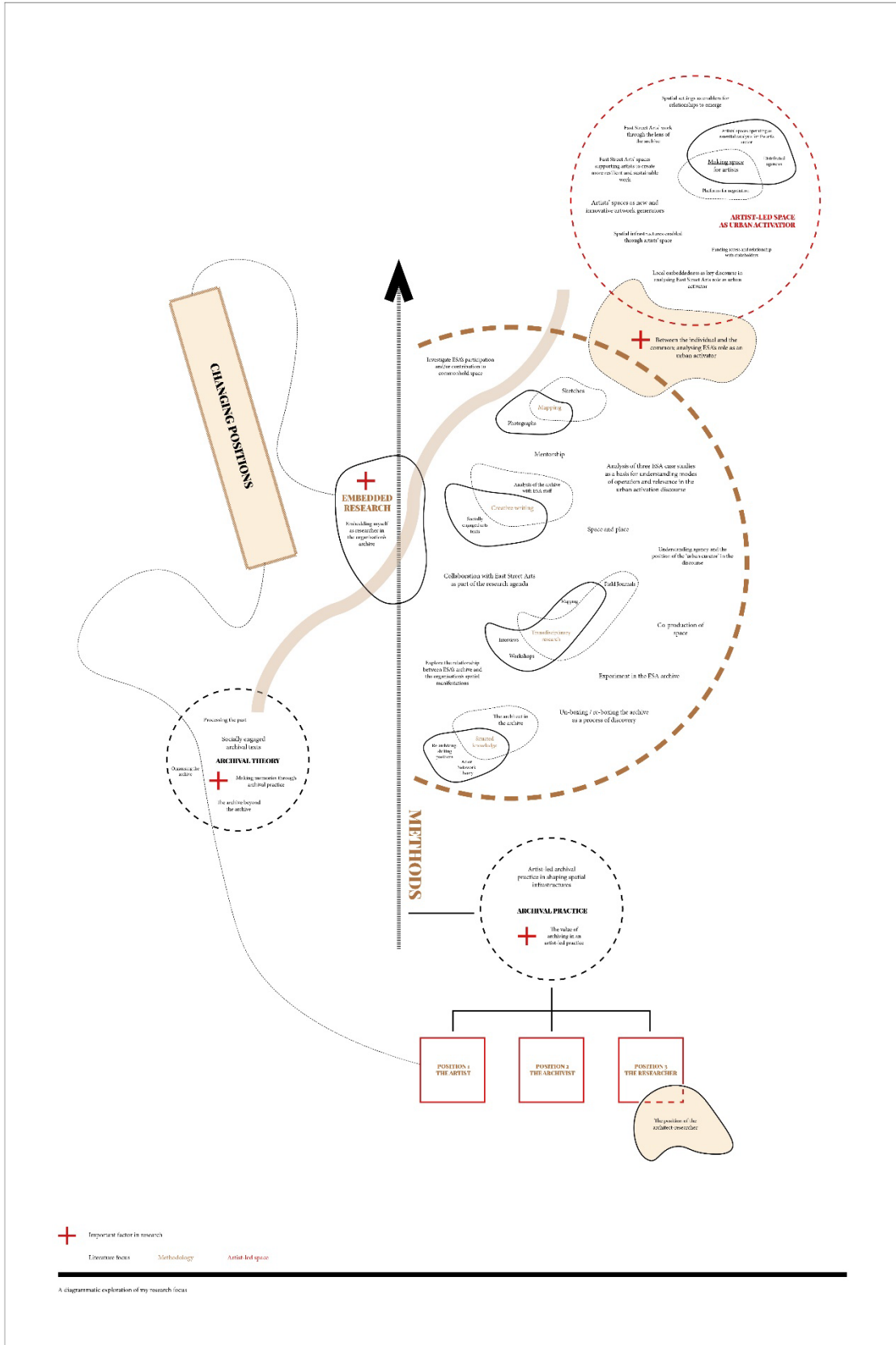


Figure 9 - Diagram exploring different research positions and themes (high resolution version in Section 8.3 - Appendix 3).

3.4 Research design

The adopted epistemological approach necessitated the collection and synthesis of diverse evidence sources to encapsulate varied perspectives of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2014, p. 121). The simultaneous collection and analysis of data was undertaken to discover emerging themes from a parallel observational and inductive process. The primary aim was to shape data categories that focus on social processes and, subsequently, to weave these categories into a cohesive theoretical framework (Yin, 2003, 2009).

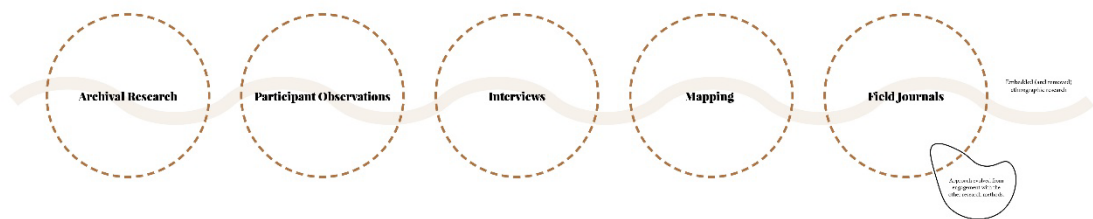


Figure 10 - Diagram of research methods explored (high resolution version in Section 8.4 - Appendix 4).

An early mapping of literature has also been developed to allow for a broader understanding of the themes and positions explored throughout the thesis. This can be found in Section 8.5 - Appendix 5.

A harmonised application of case study methodologies, archival research, participant observation, interviews, mapping, and field journals was developed to align with the mission of exposing deeper meaning from the epistemological stance. Whilst the case study approach offered a clear and detailed overview of the artist-led sector, the archival research enriched the historical context of this study, and provided a more nuanced understanding of ESA, which characterised its evolution and innovative modes of working as an artist-led organisation. In terms of participant observation, they contributed with a reflective sensory and cognitive understanding of the artist-led space, while interviews allowed for an ongoing and focused investigation. The field journals became critical tools of situated knowledge exploration, enabling the understanding of artist-led spaces within the urban context, and more profound relationship with the space that may otherwise remain unestablished. Initiated as simple observational tools to document ESA's case studies, the field journals evolved into complex, reflective and

propositional instruments that captured the multi-dimensionality of artist-led spaces and facilitated my growth as an architect-researcher. Mapping complemented the journals by adding a spatial layer to my exploration of ESA, reflecting a recurring approach in my architectural, supporting in rationalising and visualising urban contexts and ideas. In this research, mapping served as an important tool for understanding the spatial dynamics of ESA and effectively integrating my analytical perspectives into the thesis.

3.5 Embedded ethnographic research

The methodology has evolved organically from my engagement with ESA's members of staff, artists, and collaborators, and from discussions with its other collaborative PhD students, Jonathan Orlek and Benedetta D'Ettorre.² The COVID-19 pandemic posed a difficulty in my engagement with ESA and my ability to conduct on-site research. The impact on my embedded research was significant and I found myself unable to engage with the artist-led organisation as much as I planned.³ This opened up the opportunity to engage on a deeper level with the organisation's archive (Figure 11).

Figure 11 - Photograph of an archived postcard introducing ESA and its early work.
Photograph: Ionita (2021). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

² Jonathan Orlek completed his PhD in 2021 and Benedetta D'Ettorre in 2023, both providing great insights into the artist-led organisation and its administrative dynamics.

³ Patrick Studios were closed to the public and most staff members, including Karen Watson (my main point of contact), have been placed on furlough. As such, the communication has been considerably reduced for over six months.

Orlek's use of embedded ethnography provides a critical foundation, especially when direct embeddedness was challenging or not even possible. In his research on ESA's Artist House 45, Orlek transitions from informal to performative approaches, employing techniques such as collaborative mapping and 'multivoice' writing.⁴ These approaches enable him to continuously integrate his findings back into ESA, effectively positioning himself within the artist-led organisation and in relation to Artist House 45. Building on this groundwork, Orlek and other fellow researchers later establish the embedded research network – Plant.⁵ As explored by Plant (2021), embedded research projects are developed within non-academic host organisations and they involve observing or shadowing actions within the organisation over a prescribed timeframe, to permit 'live and reflexive methods' (Jenness, 2008) to guide and inspire current activities. This approach aligns with sociologist Valerie Jenness' embedded research which was used to describe research practices moving across places, hosted arrangements, and forms of study:

What do I mean by embedded researcher? [...] I use the term embedded researcher to talk about something much more robust, something that provides multiple vantage points from which to view the scene: occupying multiple locations within and under the control of a single field of play while also moving from one site to another, one host to another, one level of analysis to another, and one constituency to another—ultimately having a presence as a didactic

⁴ Orlek explores positioning 'voices' in 'Multivoices: a script by researchers' (2018). In this context, 'voice' refers to individual verbal expressions, literary compositions, and viewpoints. It provides both abstract and tangible structures to envision, express, and appreciate the creation of a united ensemble or chorus. As noted by Orlek (2018), 'the act of giving a voice to a group or idea has brought into question power relationships and how collective claims are negotiated and supported', a critical question within the collaborative research, particularly considering my own position within East Street Arts.

⁵ Presently, Plant (2021) focuses on the role of embedded research within art and artist-led organisations, focusing on the use of artistic research methods and residencies within a series of embedded projects. There are three categories of embeddedness organised by Plant:

- To plant: introducing reflexive practices, both theoretical and creative, into the studios of groups or institutions.
- To be planted: research that naturally develops within dynamic organisations, fostered by people, their ideas, and interactions.
- To be a plant: conducting research in the ambiguous space between being an insider and an outsider, either discreetly or openly, while navigating the spectrum between academic and practical standpoints.

participant throughout a field of play. My story about becoming an embedded researcher begins in “the suites” and ends in “the streets” (Jenness, 2008, p. 6).

Using a ‘cats and dogs’ analogy, Jenness (2008, p. 15) makes a distinction between embedded research and ethnographies in which researchers ‘go native’ to uncover cultures, debating that the embedded researcher’s position also involves ‘the translation of work and advice back to the organisations in which they have been embedded’ (Orlek, 2021, p. 97):

[C]ats choose their location, but are not defined or owned by it. In simple words, they work for themselves. [...] I think researchers should proceed like cat people – domesticate their environment, but not be beholden to those who comprise it. [...] The irony here is that the animal that never goes far from home – the cat – is smart and has the qualities and characteristics needed by the researcher who is embedded in relations outside the Ivory Tower (Jenness, 2008, pp. 15–16).

Researchers Susan Lewis and Andrew J. Russell’s (2011) investigate embedded research using ethnography within a ‘host’ organisation. Lewis and Russell (2011, p. 400) describe embedded research as ‘a situationally appropriate way of “doing ethnography” that is founded on the principles and practice of immersion fieldwork while being responsive to working with reflexive collaborators’. They claim that there are two key elements characterising embedded research: the first is that the research is performed as ‘some kind of team member’ who works alongside ‘co-workers’ in the community to deliver activities, and the second speak about the dialogue between the researcher and the ‘co-workers’ and the researcher’s acquired depth of knowledge and capability to feedback research rapidly and efficiently to collaborators, so that it can impact present activity (Lewis & Russell, 2011, p. 400).

This thesis extends the ethnographic frameworks previously established to situate my own research within ESA, exploring both embedded and removed positions.

3.6 Case study rationale

A case study methodology has been explored to facilitate a detailed, context-rich empirical investigation capable of handling multiple variables and employing a range of evidence sources that converge through the lens of theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014, pp. 16–17). Inspired by social scientist Yin's (2014) 'Case Study Research: design and methods', the case study research design involved several key components, starting with questions and propositions exploring the subject matter in depth. A review of the research aims was required to develop a rationale for identifying suitable case studies. The questions and propositions were followed by establishing measures of analysis, and connecting the gathered data to the research aims through methods like pattern matching, explanation building, and cross-case study synthesis (Yin, 2014, pp. 29–36). To interpret the findings, the study used a systematic strategy that involved identifying alternative explanations drawn from the contextual review, which were then addressed sequentially.

The process of choosing the case studies involved both practical factors such as evidence availability, relevance, and utility, as well as substantive factors focused on the uniqueness or distinctiveness of the practice in question, played a role (Yin, 2009, p. 255). The case studies were selected based on their alignment with the research's conceptual and analytical framework, which addressed issues related to urban contexts, art and spatial practices, and governance and economic structures (Andres & Grésillon, 2013, p. 46). This alignment was further guided by themes that evolved during the review of the current policy and governance landscape defining the UK artist-led sphere. Furthermore, the selected case studies needed to display a range of approaches and applications to ensure the research would occupy a distinct position and have a meaningful impact and contribution to knowledge.

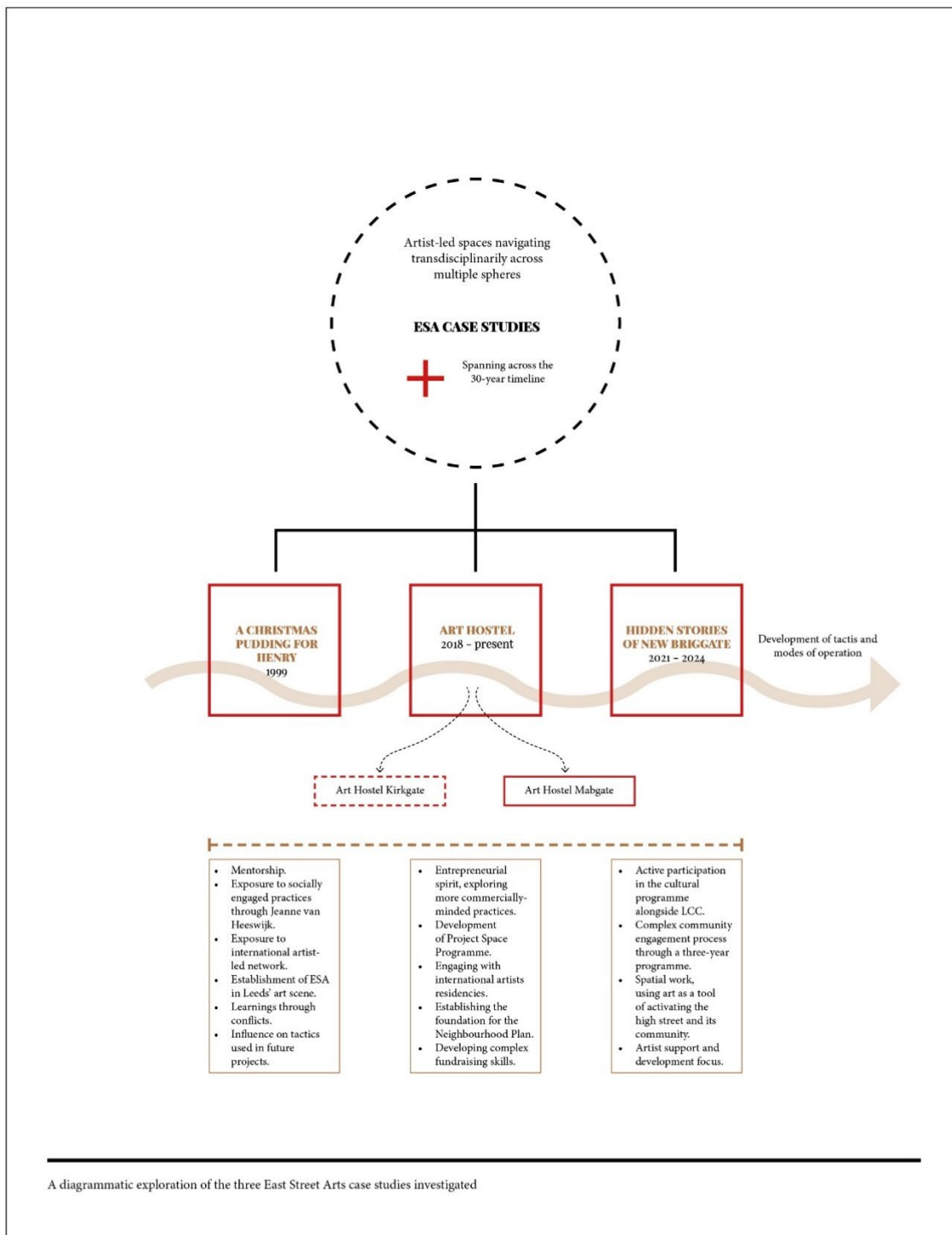


Figure 12 - Mapping of the three ESA case studies explored in this thesis (high resolution in Section 8.6 - Appendix 6).

The research aims and propositions that influenced the selection of case studies served to narrow down the range of data to be collected and allowed for the scrutiny of various theoretical interpretations (Yin, 2003, 2009). A case study selection rationale has been

explored to allow for the development of a longlist of artist-led spaces relevant to the research study. Whilst the scope of this study sits within the UK context, several international examples have been referenced to offer a contextual comparison in the data, with examples from the Netherlands in particular seeking for inclusion for their significant contributions to urban activation theory, thereby ensuring that the research project has relevance for the artist-led sector.

Inspired by Carl Grodach's methodology employed in his study 'Art Spaces in Community and Economic Development: Connections to Neighbourhoods, Artists, and the Cultural Economy' (2010) and Gavin Murphy and Mark Cullen's classification work in 'Artist-Run Europe' (2016), I have developed an Artist-led Directory (Section 8.7 - Appendix 7) to guide the inquiry and to use it as a tool for contextualising ESA among a wider network of artist-led spaces. This rationale allowed me to understand the wider context within which ESA operates, and also to look more closely at the tactics and modes of operations that might influence the artist-led spaces' contribution to urban activation. The rationale started scoping wide, and progressively narrowed the focus using a series of key descriptors:

- Size: number of people / reach of work (mission statement).
- Location (immediate environment to ESA or further away).
- Longevity.
- Types of spaces.
- Funding.
- Tactics and modes of operating in the city.

This selection mechanism enabled the creation of a focused shortlist for a more detailed analysis. A key criterion for inclusion was the prospective depth of data collection offered by these artist-led spaces. Specifically, the selected case studies were required to be rooted in the artist-led sector and to operate with processes and approaches emphasising local embeddedness, community engagement and participation, self-organisation and transdisciplinarity. Furthermore, they needed to demonstrate innovative repurposing of space, as well as to exhibit acts of caring and resilience in their specific settings. The inclusion of these case studies was based on the expectation that they would provide new perspectives into urban activation, highlighting the unique role that artist-led spaces can play in regenerating and activating urban environments.

3.7 Methods

3.7.1 Archival research

My relationship with ESA was not prescribed prior to starting the PhD, but a level of engagement with the artist-led organisation's archive was encouraged by the two collaborating institutions, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic when other means of embedded research were not available. Exploring ESA's archive became a revelatory experience, uncovering nuanced relationships and organisational dynamics that might have remained undiscerned otherwise. This archival research became so much more than a secondary method of inquiry, but a strong tool that significantly enriched my understanding of the artist-led organisation and its place within the wider art and urban landscape.

The seminal work of Jacques Derrida (1995) provided a robust theoretical foundation for the archival research. Derrida posits that the archive is not just about recording the past; it is dynamic and open for future possibilities, extending an invitation for exploration and interpretation. Furthermore, Hal Foster's 'An Archival Impulse' (2004), Gabriella Giannachi's 'Archive Everything' (2016) and the collection 'All this Stuff: Archiving the Artist' (2013) edited by Judy Vaknin, Karyn Stuckey, and Victoria Lane were instrumental in shaping my perspective and approach to exploring ESA's archive.

In 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', historian Pierre Nora (1984) contends that in contemporary times, memory is fundamentally archival. He remarks that while the archive carries the weight of 'the responsibility of remembering', it's crucial to differentiate between an ever-fluid memory, which moves between the acts of remembering and forgetting, and history, a continual effort to rebuild what once was but is no longer (Nora, 1984, p. 8). Nora emphasises that today's memory hinges on tangible remnants, instant documentations, and vivid imagery. Consequently, the act of collecting, structuring, and safeguarding these imprints within the archive becomes the backbone of our mnemonic functions (Giannachi, 2016). This intensified emphasis on memory, coupled with a global shift towards 'memorialism', often results in a revisitation or even re-enactment of personal memories and those of others in the archive (Giannachi, 2016, p. 101).

Building on Nora's insights, my own experiences within the ESA archive, including my interactions with Karen Watson and other staff proved truly meaningful. Throughout this PhD, I had access to Patrick Studios during pre-arranged visits with the ESA team. Upon arrival, I would often brew a cup of tea before immersing myself in 'the Tube'⁶ - a timeless space filled with remnants and artifacts from the artist-led organisation's past projects. This area became a capsule for self-reflection as well as discovery, allowing me the opportunity to reflect about my own impact on the material I was studying. Inside 'the Tube', time seemed to pause, marked only by the tender glow from the small window overlooking the open studio hinting that the day was ending.



Figure 13 – 'The Tube'. Photograph: Ionita (2021).

I approached the archive with excitement, travelling through the material in chronological order, each box offering its own set of discoveries. The experience was

⁶ ESA's archive is located in what the staff members are calling 'the Tube', a cantilevered corridor sitting above the office and kitchen space at Patrick Studios.

educational as well as inspiring, painting a clear picture of ESA's evolution over the years, as evident in the diverse projects documented. It was particularly intriguing to witness the evolution of ESA's graphical style across projects, clearly noticing the refinement and attention to detail in the representation, as well as to discern the nuanced shifts in the language used in communications with various stakeholders. A pattern emerged from my exploration: ESA's vocabulary seemed to mature and become more structured over time, especially evident in project proposals and funding applications.

Figure 14 - Postcard of 'In House' project, 1998. Photograph: Ionita (2021). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 15 - Art Hostel Kirkgate flyer, 2018. Photograph: Ionita (2021). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

While the archive was well-curated, Karen Watson utilised her furlough period to refine its organisation further.⁷ This could have been influenced by her knowledge of my and Jonathan Orlek's engagement with the materials or perhaps in preparation for her impending retirement in 2023. As we explored the archive, Watson and I became transient activators, leaving subtle marks for the other to discover - be it notes, post-its, or even the occasional coffee ring on a table; there was a certain warmth in recognising that she, too, was reacquainting with these projects, even as I was discovering them anew. Our interactions often included virtual discussions about our archival discoveries, and these conversations, alongside the rich archival material, highlighted an inherent

⁷ This process of almost moving out of consciousness allowed Watson to revisit the archive and reflect on it and its potential legacy.

motive behind preserving the archive: the aspiration to establish a lasting legacy. Given Watson's upcoming retirement and the transitional climate induced by the pandemic, ESA was undergoing significant changes. From my perspective, it seemed like the Artistic Directors viewed the archive as a means to record and celebrate the artist-led organisation's journey and evolution. More importantly, they hoped to shape a lasting organisational memory that would be carried forth by the next wave of art practitioners.

Figure 16 - Magazine extract capturing an interview with Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman as part of the FKA project, 2000. Photograph: Ionita (2020). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 17 - Archived correspondence from LCC highlighting the positive feedback received by ESA for the FCAA project, 2000. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The archival methodology followed a straightforward yet impactful approach as illustrated in the following photomontage (Figures 18-20). It began with the selection of a box, carefully placing it on the small table, ready for its contents to be revealed. This process served as a gateway for me to engage with the vast knowledge within each box, subsequently guiding the evolution of further research techniques, such as mapping and field journals. After a thorough examination of the material, I restructured the content chronologically, developing an intuitive narrative flow. This streamlining ensured that someone unfamiliar with the content could grasp the storyline effortlessly. The inclusion of visual material, which have been thoughtfully sequenced, deepens the understanding of the written content, elevating the archive's overall experience for future explorers.



Figure 18 - The archival process started with selecting a box. Photograph: Ionita (2020).

Figure 19 - Photomontage of the archival process capturing the engagement with the material, from opening the box, to exploring its contents, and reassembling them.

Image: Ionita (2020). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

In one of my observations in the archive, I reflected:

In the murmured ambiance of 'the Tube' at Patrick Studios, I found myself surrounded by stacks of duck-egg cardboard boxes with delicate pencil handwritten titles and annotations. They are all the same, yet different, each carrying a different weight, age, and story... They are neatly organised since they are all the same format, yet, upon closer inspection, there is a disorder that catches my eyes.

I pick a box and take it to one of the big tables in the Studio, carefully unpacking it and arranging everything so I can get an overview of its contents. It resembles a display; a mystery impatient to be solved and I, an amateur detective.

I start reading.

It's frustrating... How is this making any sense? Where is this coming from?

Oh.... I see it now!

In my attempt to solve the mystery, I would reassemble the box by organising the contents chronologically or thematically, effectively reassembling changing the archival experience for those who will explore it after me. This made me realise the disorder was somewhat justified as it quietly tells us more about the archive than the archive itself; it denounces the secret of humans interacting with it and exposing their agency.

It's fair to say that I found a sense of joy in the exploration; this exuberance might be evident in the playful selfies taken in 'the Tube' or perhaps quantified by the many cups of tea drunk during the process. Most importantly, my engagement with the archival material moved beyond the understanding of the artist-led organisation's past and mirrored the broader dynamics between memory and history that Nora (1984) talked about. As I followed the traces of past projects and shared conversations with Watson, I couldn't help but feel a part of a larger process - a dialogue between what was remembered, what was forgotten, and what was being actively reconstructed.

This expedition into the archive inspired and stimulated me to reflect about my own role within the archival process. As I engaged with the archive, I became aware of my own agency in the process, noticing how the research process influenced me to restructure and reorder the archival material in a manner that was specific to my thinking and perhaps distinct from the original intent. Anna McNally (2013, p. 97) notes that 'few researchers are aware of the archivist's hand in the process' of engaging with an archive. Citing Ernst van Alphen (2008, p. 66), she emphasises that the act of archiving weaves 'meaning, order, boundaries, coherence, and reason' into what might otherwise be disjointed or muddled (McNally, 2013, p. 103). While I do not claim that my involvement brought clarity or coherence to ESA, it did provide a more comprehensive understanding of the archive. Through my engagement with the material, I inadvertently took on the role of an archivist and during the process, I developed understandings about ESA spanning across the spatial and temporal dimensions, allowing me to create a much clearer picture of the artist-led organisation and the different forms of knowledge production evolved through this method.

3.7.2 Participant observations

According to anthropologist James Spradley (1980, p. 54), participant observation serves a dual function: initially, it requires the researcher to partake in situational activities and, subsequently, to monitor the activities, individuals, and environmental components involved. Simply being an observer without participating is insufficient for fully grasping a situation (Kawulich, 2005, p. 8). The researcher improves understanding by reflexively contemplating the context and the subjects to decode

social actions within that context (May, 1997, p. 139). This reflexivity also acts as a data collection tool (Courage, 2016, p. 95; May, 1997, p. 147).

The method of participant observation allows the researcher to grasp the ongoing process of 'reflexive rationalisation' (May, 1997, p. 138) exhibited by subjects, which aids in the production of meaning and knowledge. Consistent with this epistemological approach, participant observation was chosen to immerse the researcher in the field, gather ethnographic data from case studies, and gain insights into the social dynamics and relationships within the projects (Courage, 2016; May, 1997). According to social scientist Tim May (1997), certain factors must be considered when employing participant observation. These include the duration of observation, with longer periods yielding more comprehensive results; the place, to understand how physical surroundings influence behaviour; and social circumstances, in order to engage with subjects across various social settings to deepen researcher-subject relationships and overcome language barriers, thereby confirming inter-relational social consensus. Initially, due to my unfamiliarity with the research setting and ESA's members, an overt observer-as-participant role was expected (Gold, 1958; Kawulich, 2005, p. 8). Over time and with increased familiarity with the context and the artist-led organisation, I have transitioned into a participant-as-observer role, becoming more actively involved in group activities and situations (Adler & Adler, 1994; Kawulich, 2005, p. 8).

Key activities included creative walks around the case study sites, collaborative explorations using drawing and clay-modelling, focused groups conversations, building tours, food sharing experiences and vibrant carnival festivities. Each event was meticulously developed to encourage dialogue within the respective communities and highlight the locale's rich heritage and past narratives. Fashion designer Yaku Stapleton's interactive walking tour around New Briggate stood out for me; it wasn't simply a narrated journey through the street's hidden histories, but also a creative exercise. We were encouraged to reimagine the past community and envisage their attire based on their societal roles, professions, and interpersonal interactions. These imaginative provocations of picturing past fashion trends unexpectedly unearthed many inherent biases and presuppositions we harbour about societal hierarchies. Within our diverse group, each participant produced distinct images, interactions, and interpretations. Upon unveiling our creations, Stapleton juxtaposed our imaginings with the true historical context that defined the area. This exercise was an epiphany; it

emphasised that to genuinely appreciate history and grasp a place's identity, one must expose themselves to broader and diverse perspectives to achieve a truly inclusive and representative understanding.

The selected case studies employed a qualitative approach grounded in participant observation, which aimed to develop both theoretical and empirical insights into the subject matter from an insider perspective (Yin, 2014, p. 117). This methodology was developmental, adaptable, and continuously reflexive (May, 1997, p. 143). The level of participation adapted to the specific context of each field setting, and ranged from non-participation or passive observation, where data was solely gathered through watching; to moderate participation, which straddled the roles of being both an insider and outsider, to active participation, wherein the researcher engaged in the same activities as the subjects to gain deeper insights; and finally, to complete participation, where the researcher fully integrated as a regular participant in the artist-led organisation's activities (Bogdewic, 1999; Landesman, 1997; Spradley, 1980). This multi-level approach to participation increased the depth of the research process by allowing for in-situ observation, listening, and questioning (Courage, 2016; Gray, 2009).



Figure 20 - Yaku Stapleton leading the 'Walk, Talk, Make' tour at New Briggate.
Photograph: Ionita (2022)



Figure 21 - Collaborative drawing and clay-modelling explorations of New Briggate's fashion over the years. Photograph: Ionita (2022)



Figure 22 - Comparing the clay-modelled experiments with other participants. Photograph: Ionita (2022).

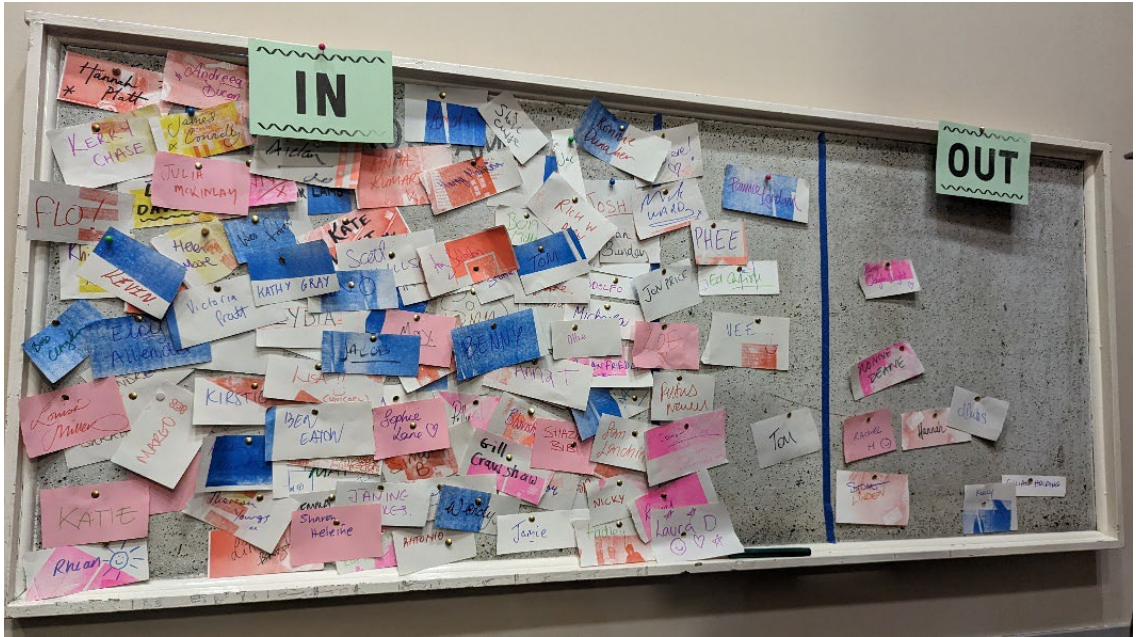


Figure 23 - Photograph of 'In/Out' board from ESA's 30th anniversary celebration. Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 24 – ESA's 30th anniversary celebration bringing together artists, collaborators, students, family, and friends. Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 25 - Artist-led vending machine with postcards and lapels for ESA's guests.
Photograph: Ionita (2023).

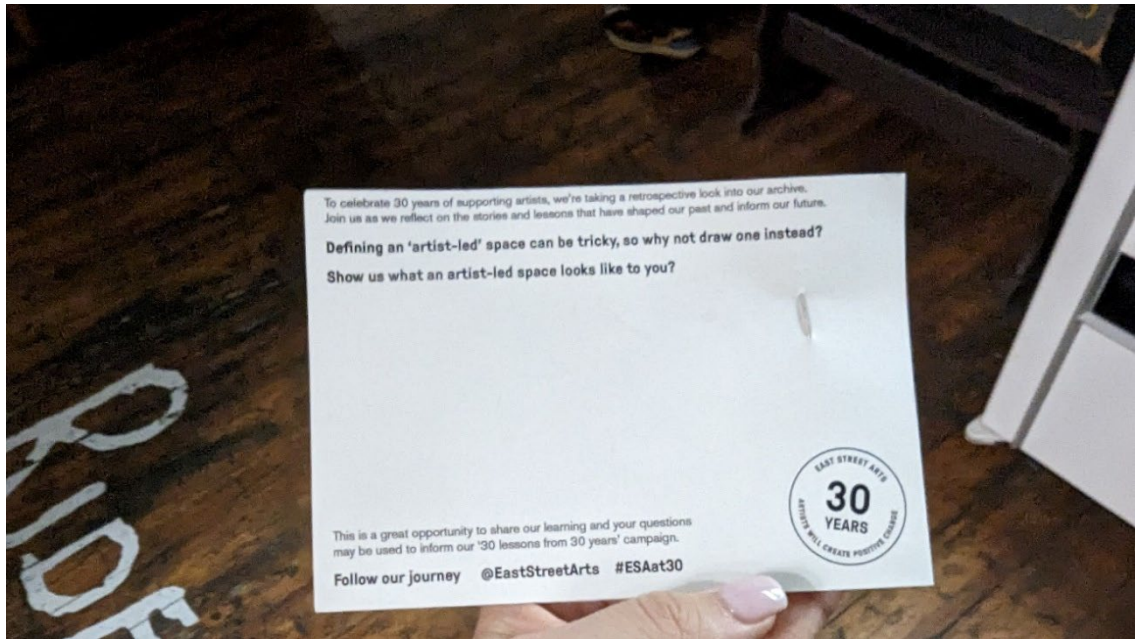


Figure 26 - Image of the postcard I picked out of the artist-led vending machine, asking for a task and memory to leave in the ESA postbox. Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 27 - Trying out the props for some funny memories for the next ESA archival box. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

3.7.3 Interviews

Interviews were conducted more as ‘guided conversations’ than formal queries to provide in-depth insights into subjects’ experiences, beliefs, goals, and emotions (May, 1997, p. 109; Yin, 2014, p. 110). The nature of the interviews varied depending on the context, timing, and level of familiarity between the interviewer and interviewee. They ranged from structured and semi-structured interviews to more empathetic and free-flowing conversations (Courage, 2016; Fontana & Frey, 2005; May, 1997). The choice of interview type was also aligned with the social epistemology, recognising interviews as collaborative, socially situated events (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Different interviewing methods were employed to gather a range of data: statistical, factual, and narrative. The interviews were iterative, progressively focusing on specific topics and allowing for open-ended questions (Charmaz, 2002; Courage, 2016; Gomm, 2008; Rapley, 2001; Warren, 2002; Yin, 2003, 2009). Key actors like ESA’s staff members and artistic directors, artists, and LA members were among the interviewees, recruited through direct contact or intermediaries based on their relevance to the project (Gilchrist & Williams, 1999; Odendahl & Shaw, 2002).

Adopting an approach based on May’s ‘Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process’ (1997), an interview schedule was developed with overarching questions pertinent to each case study, tailored for different categories of interviewees. Semi-structured interviews employed thematically organised questions but left room for spontaneous questions to clarify or elaborate on the interviewee’s statements. Focused interviews were more open-ended, allowing subjects to explore topics on their terms, thereby helping the researcher understand the interviewee’s perspective better. Group interviews or ‘cluster interviews’ were also conducted depending on the context. These were particularly useful for gathering diverse viewpoints on the same issue and for understanding group dynamics (Courage, 2016, p. 96; Stewart et al., 2009, pp. 594–604). This approach was flexible, and it helped provide a rich, multi-layered understanding of the subject, capturing data quickly and allowing for deeper levels of meaning and expression.

3.7.4 Mapping

This thesis is using mapping as a method of exploring different ethnographic positions and constellations emerging around ESA and the wider artist-led sector. Inspired by Counter Cartographies Collective's (3Cs) *Counter (Mapping)* (2012), I started exploring with mapping very early days as a means of stimulating conversation and collaboration between myself as architect-researcher and ESA. I saw mapping as a companion to my research journey and a tool used to incite exploration and potentially help produce new, alternative knowledges and practices.

The study of autonomous cartography serves as a critical lens for assessing the inherent power constructs within the practice of mapping and geographic knowledge. This method of learning and perhaps un-learning is not new to me; I have been using it throughout my academic years and professional career. Building upon the principles of critical cartography and counter-mapping, this field incorporates the methodologies of militant research and the theoretical frameworks of autonomous politics (Collective et al., 2012, p. 441). This approach aligns with Michel Foucault's (1995) understanding of power as not just restrictive but also productive. Mapping is a situated activity embedded in social, political, and cultural contexts, each with distinct objectives and implications (Collective et al., 2012; Edney, 1993; Crampton, 2010; Harley, 2001; Pickles, 2003; Wood & Fels, 1992). Maps are not just neutral instruments; they act as 'technologies of power', shaping and reflecting societal power dynamics power' (Harley, 1992, pp. 243–247). This nuanced understanding emphasises that maps can serve dual functions: they can either guide and inform or interrogate and challenge prevailing social power structures (Pinder, 1996, p. 409).

Critical cartography further expands the understanding of how this power-knowledge manifests, asserting that Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are not solely technical tools but also involve a constellation of social practices affecting a wide range of stakeholders (Collective et al., 2012, p. 441). These practices can involve the agency of users with diverse types of subject positions, thus highlighting its ability to act as a navigation tool through complex urban contexts and networks of relationships. This became particularly obvious during the pandemic when embeddedness was not possible; mapping served as a critical tool of making sense of the intricate social constellations defining ESA's practice.

In support of defining mapping as a social process, geographer John Pickles (2003) proposes a Deleuzian-inspired outline that aims to conceptualise the role of mapping and social transformation. He argues that a map is an ‘inscription that does (or does not do) work in the world’ (Pickles, 2003, p. 67). The process of mapping is key to investigating complex social methods that simultaneously contribute to the production of geographical environments and their visual representations (Chrisman, 2005; Sparke, 2005; Collective et al., 2012).

When investigating the process of counter-mapping, Harris and Hazen (2005) formulated a definition that focuses on challenging the prevailing norms and power relations in traditional cartography. They describe it as ‘any effort that fundamentally questions the assumptions or biases of cartographic conventions, that challenges predominant power effects of mapping, or that engages in mapping in ways that upset power relations’ (Harris & Hazen, 2005, p. 115). Innovatively, 3Cs’ (2012) autonomous cartography synthesises elements of critical cartography, autonomous political theories, and militant research. This integrated approach aims to revolutionise the field of counter-mapping by bringing a more nuanced and multifaceted perspective to the practice.

A key reference in developing the mapping methodology was the ‘go-along’ approach (Kusenbach, 2003). Jennifer Mack (2020) highlights in ‘Working the Field: An Interdisciplinary Methodology for New Research’ Kusenbach’s (2003) ‘go-along’ ethnographic method⁸ described as a:

[H]ybrid between participant observation and interviewing.... What makes the go-along technique unique is that ethnographers are able to observe their informants’ spatial practices in situ while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463).

This approach, together with Mack’s mental mapping ethnographic approach to understanding the city, are methods of research I have also employed as part of my

⁸ She offers five themes for ‘go-alongs’: perception, spatial practice, biographies, social architecture, and social realms (Kusenbach, 2003).

embedded (and removed) research within ESA. They allowed me to define a framework of analysis of the artist-led organisation that is constantly evolved and influenced by the actors and agents engaging with it. In ‘Architectural Ethnography’ (2018), Momoyo Kaijima, Laurent Stalder, and Yu Iseki explore the multifaceted nature of architectural drawings:

Besides being simply instructions for a coming building, [architectural drawings] are also an ideal instrument to document, discuss, and evaluate architecture in a critical feedback-loop. Moreover, as in ethnography, they allow usages, needs, and aspirations to be investigated through the lens of the various actors—both human and non-human (Kaijima et al., 2018, p. 7).

As Noortje Marres (2012) argued in ‘The experiment in living’:

[W]hat is distinctive about the living experiment as a device of social research is that, as it circulates, it can be said to organize actors, practices, data for social research in particular ways (Marres, 2012, p. 90).

The mapping explored throughout this thesis adapted and evolved in many ways, varying from hand drawn diagrams and sketches to mind maps and schematics, to digital maps and algorithms, all the way to digital coding. These methods allowed me to transgress from more conventional drawing techniques to an evolved mapping approach that gave me the freedom to explore research themes and relationships in an innovative way.

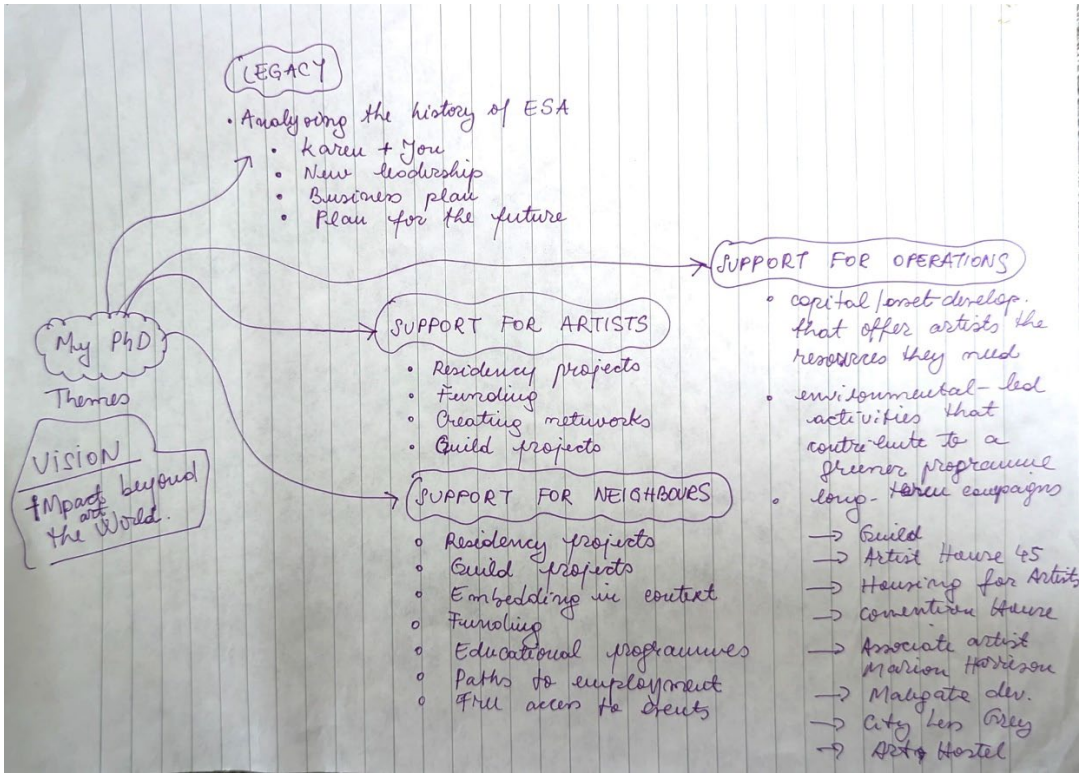


Figure 28 - Initial mapping of ESA to allow for an understanding of the organisation and its approach. Image: Ionita (2019).

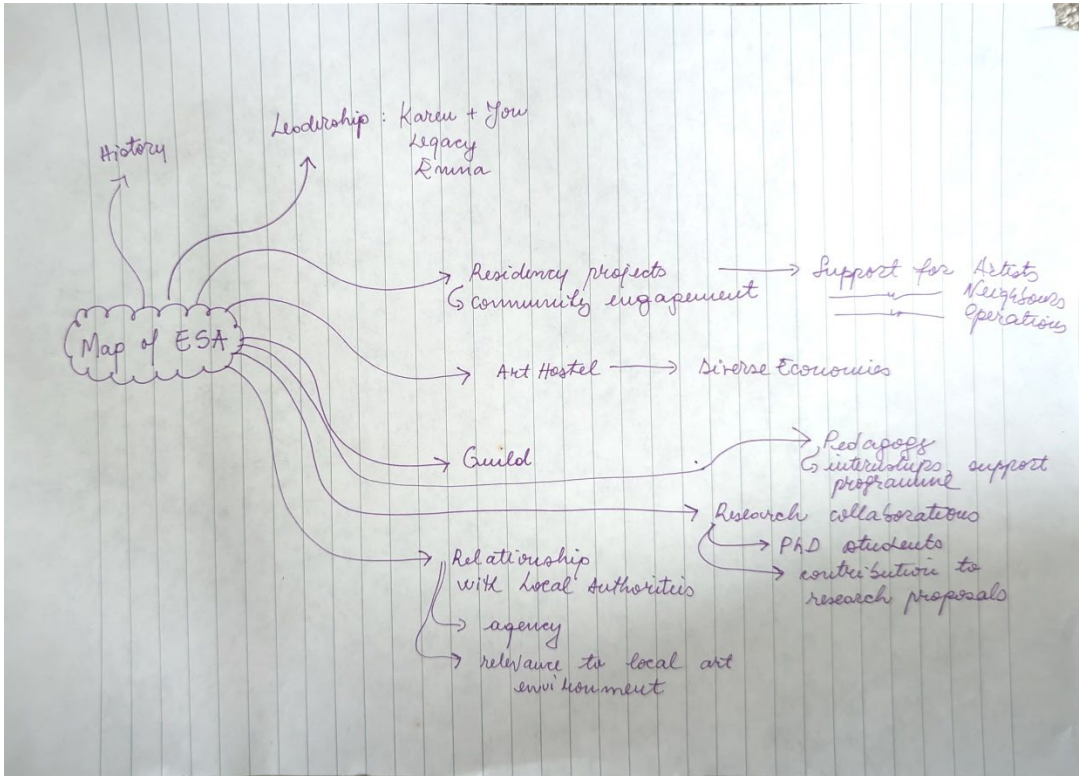


Figure 29 - Initial mapping of themes and potential avenues for exploration within ESA. Image: Ionita (2019).

The mapping techniques I employed evolved in a spontaneous, organic manner, without the constraints of formal strategic planning. This rather improvisational method proved to be an effective and familiar tool of stirring and nurturing a relationship between myself as architect-researcher and ESA. The usefulness of mapping came into sharp focus when I embedded myself in ESA's archival material, allowing me to understand and cross-reference projects and situations, thus facilitating a more articulate understanding of the artist-led organisation and its modes of operation. The archival exploration sparked the development of more specialised mapping techniques such as coding. The complexity of the artist-led organisation's multi-layered networks and diverse portfolio required a level of technical nuance that was informed and enriched by my initial archival work. In this way, mapping surpassed its traditional boundaries to become an adaptable instrument for intellectual synthesis, helping me navigate the intricate interconnections inherent in ESA's organisational structure.

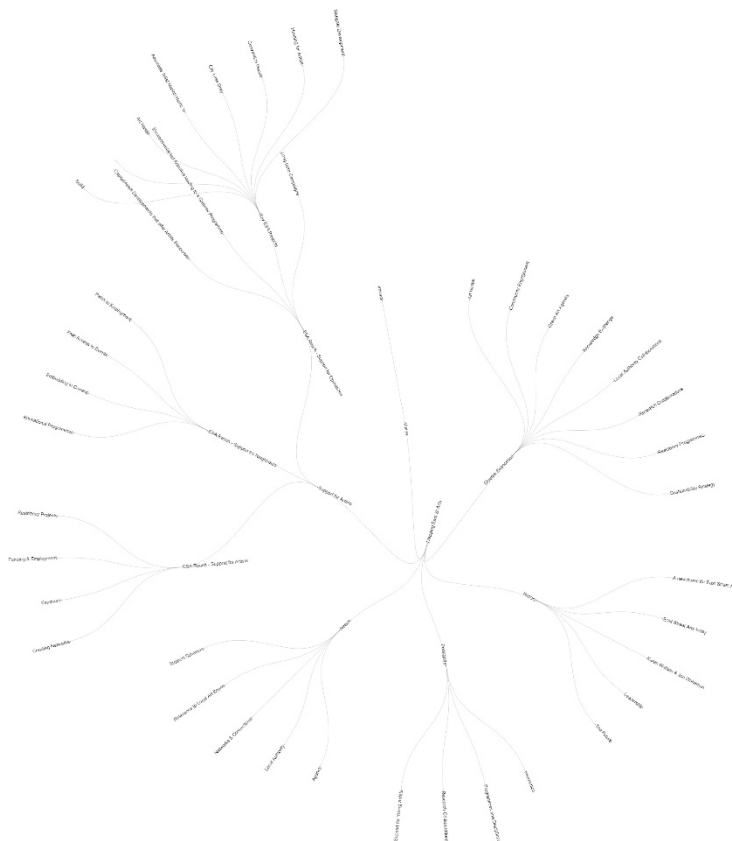


Figure 30 - Mapping using coding to test different emerging themes and modes of operation within ESA. Image: Ionita (2019).

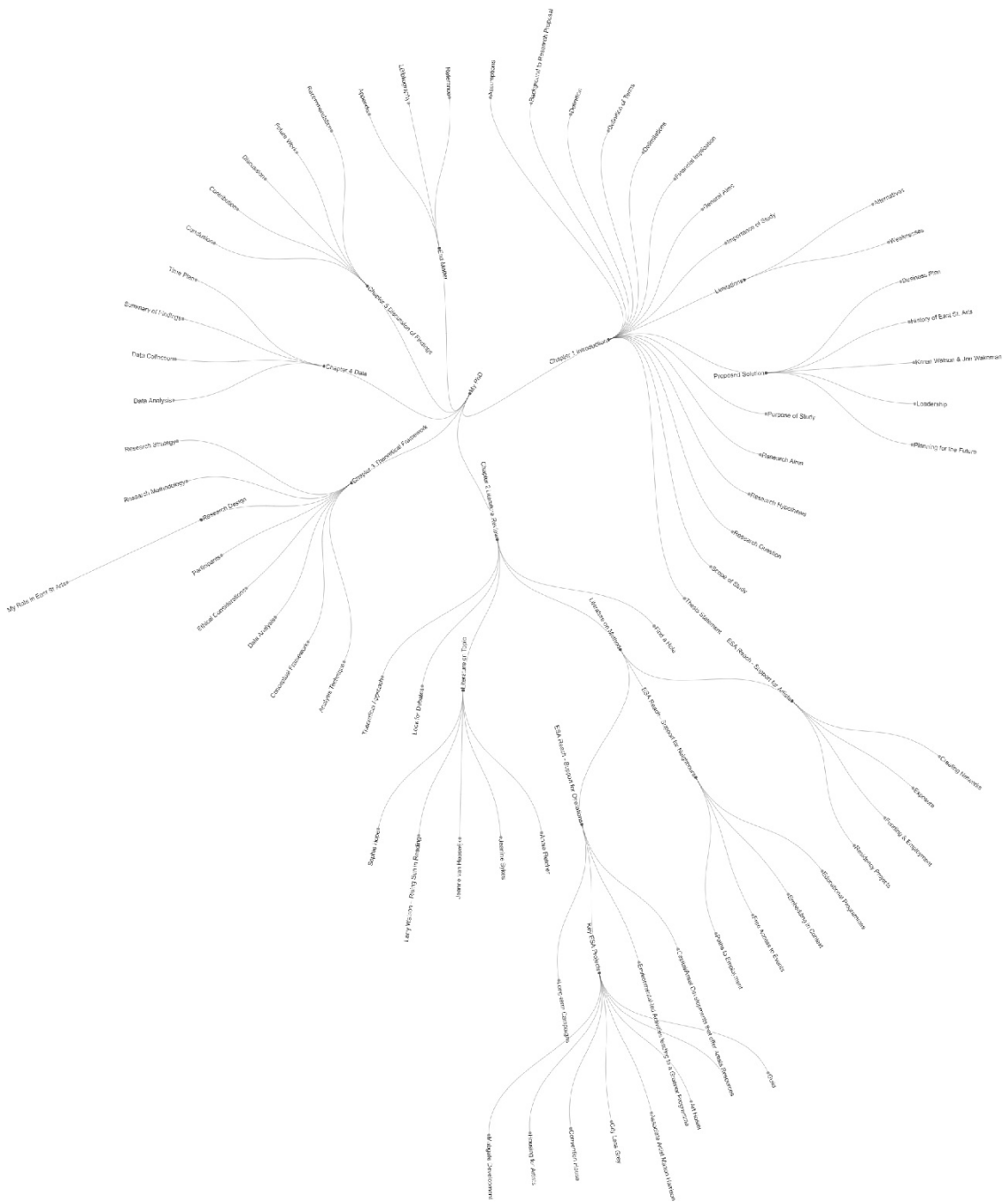


Figure 31 - Early mapping using coding of the PhD structure. Image: Ionita (2019).

As articulated by the 3Cs (2012), mapping is more than a technical exercise, but a dynamic platform that can catalyse new forms of knowledge, artistic expression, production, and crucially, social and political transformation. This type of militant research proposes ‘radical, situated methods of producing knowledge as political

practice' (Collective et al., 2012). By employing this approach, it encourages new perspectives as well as serves as a catalyst for the development of new social links and the conceptualisation of alternative geographies. Using the 3Cs' methodology as a starting point, this thesis explores ideas through mapping, seeking to actively integrate new learnings directly into the foundation of political and social understandings of space. This approach involves active participation, making mapping a transformative tool that doesn't just represent the urban context but actively contributes to its reconfiguration, enabling the development of new forms of knowledge.

3.7.5 Field Journals

In my attempt to understand my own position in the process of demonstrating that an artist-led space can act as urban activator, I explored a socially engaged methodology to learn and connect to the places I investigated. The method sought to explore fieldwork as a tool to capture my embedded (and also removed) research within the ESA artist-led spaces researched. As companions to my explorative journey, the generated field journals became more than tools of observation: as I started unfolding the case studies through the process of documenting them in the field journals, I realised that the experiences recorded can be incredibly transformative for me as researcher also as they reveal an understanding and perception of the urban environment, whilst also have the ability to challenge preconceived beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions we naturally have as human beings. Resonating with social anthropologist Susan Lewis (2004):

Journeying to one's fieldwork site is a peculiar experience. Leaving behind the security of familiar surroundings, the neophyte anthropologist steps out into what feels like an experiential void. Everything is open to chance, for no amount of proposal writing and planning can anticipate whom one will encounter, what one will see, or how one will feel. And, at that point of leaving for the field, any 'formal' training one has received suddenly seems wholly inadequate for what the imagination is dreaming up (Lewis, 2004, p. 24).

This allowed me to view space for more than it visually seems, and to understand the dormant potential for urban transformation that is possible when looking beyond the

visible layers of an urban setting. The thesis therefore presents a series of field journals for each ESA case study investigated, drawing inspiration from three thinkers, each contributing with a distinct lens of examination:

- Shannon Mattern's (2015, 2016) exploratory work on 'Cloud and Field' explores the intersection between the digital and physical environments.
- Jane Rendell's (2004, 2010c, 2017) work, embedded in anthropological social sciences, focused on the social and cultural nuances of space.
- Rosa Luxemburg's (1968) renowned herbarium and emotionally echoing letters offer a distinctively personal yet socially impactful perspective on the relationship between the individual and the urban landscape.

Jane Rendell (2010a) notes that the 'emergence of a new term – "field" – in architecture is given value in relation to a more established term – 'site' – by virtue of its potential as a location of learning and for its indefinite qualities'. Rendell suggests that fieldwork in design draws inspiration from the social science of anthropology and its 'ethnographic turn' that has influenced various disciplines. Anthropologists conducting fieldwork typically adopt a participant-observer role, utilising all their senses to comprehend the environment (Mattern, 2016). They undergo continuous reflection on how their actions impact the 'others' they engage with and how their presence constructs the field. The field is not a pre-existing territory that researchers enter; rather, they bring it into being by conceptually defining and actively working within it (Mattern, 2016; Rendell, 2010a).

Rosa Luxemburg's (1968) work presents a unique way of documenting reflections and observations through the use of notebooks and letters. Such practices go beyond the notion of documenting, serving as a link to access and understand nuances of space and time that might remain unknown and obscured otherwise. The very act of recording becomes a dialogue between the human and the nonhuman, forming layers of interwoven stories, emotions, and interpretations. Through writing, Luxemburg transitions from a passive observer into an active participant, shaping a profound relationship with the environment she is investigating. Thus, the field journals, when evolved as part of such an introspective process, go beyond their research nature, transforming into profound ways of engaging and embedding oneself into a setting. This

allows the researcher to become a part of history, to connect to the space in a much deeper way, celebrating the intricate network of relationships defining our shared existence.

Mattern (2015, 2016) continues by linking to the notion of Cloud, noting that the fieldwork methods employed by contemporary Cloud explorers are rooted in the traditions of colonialism, with their particular modes of observation, collection, and documentation. However, not all Cloud explorers in the present day pay significant attention to the ‘ethno’ aspect, the people within the Cloud. If they do consider people, they often view them at an aggregate level, such as crowds or corporations. These explorers draw from field-based practices used in disciplines like geology, archaeology, geography, botany, ornithology, and even 18th-century naturalism, and embark on journeys to distant and exotic regions of global networks, publishing field guides that may include Linnaean classification. These methods aim to bring the Cloud into focus by training us to observe it and position ourselves in relation to it. However, these methods also tie today’s Cloud chasers to the legacies of colonialism and its specific modes of observation, collection, and documentation. While many practitioners approach these traditions with irony, it is challenging to entirely escape or subvert such enduring ideologies.

Ethnographers are ideally self-reflexive about their roles as researchers, their potential impact on the field, and their obligations to research sites and subjects. Many of today’s Cloud explorers identify as fieldworkers and think critically about their methods and modes of documentation (Mattern, 2016).

In the three years since Mattern’s (2016) initial exploration of the topic, there has been a proliferation of ‘Infrastructural Tourism’ with various artists, designers, and journalists boarding on grand tours to significant sites in the history of telecommunications or nuclear facilities worldwide. The purpose of these activities ranges from raising awareness about the hidden operations that shape political and economic systems to advocating for improved infrastructure maintenance and equitable resource distribution (Mattern, 2016). Some even aim to educate themselves and others on how to create their own DIY networks.

As Mattern (2016) expands, Cloud infrastructures, in particular, have inspired more radical approaches, including what can be termed ‘extreme fieldwork’. The Unknown Fields Division (n.d.a), a ‘nomadic design research studio’ led by Liam Young and Kate Davies at the Architectural Association in London, organises expeditions to remote locations to witness alternative worlds, unfamiliar landscapes, industrial ecosystems, and precarious wilderness. Their destinations encompass both renowned and overlooked places, such as the lithium fields of Bolivia and the Atacama Desert, which yield a vital element for electronic devices facilitating our interactions within the global Cloud. These tours aim to demystify global flows and Cloud logistics, recognising the interconnectedness of distributed landscapes and systems that shape our cultural experiences and relationships (Mattern, 2016; Unknown Fields, n.d.a, n.d.c, n.d.b).

Another example is Dark Ecology, an art-and-research practice that organises annual journeys along the Arctic Rim, from Kirkenes, Norway, to Murmansk, Russia (Sonic Acts, 2017), with an objective to confront the irony, ugliness, and horror of ecology, acknowledging the entanglement of all living and non-living entities. During these trips, participants study the life and land of the Pasvik Valley, including its darker aspects such as pollution, poverty, and extinction. The explorations involve various methods of aesthetic engagement, from sound installations to theoretical lectures, indicating a transdisciplinary approach to understanding these complex realities (Mattern, 2016).

Mattern (2016) raises critical questions about the broader politics and ethics surrounding these explorative practices, arguing that the aesthetic and narrative associated with these expeditions often echo colonialist and gendered ideologies. The traditional portrayal of fieldwork is one of strength, endurance, and machismo, a narrative that often oversimplifies the complex realities of these explorations. Furthermore, the expeditions often condense complex phenomena into quick, digestible media pieces, reducing the depth of these explorations. Mattern also points out that the ability to undertake such journeys is a privilege tied to the very infrastructural systems these expeditions seek to expose (Mattern, 2016). This unacknowledged privilege, therefore, may perpetuate the systems supporting global tourism and private education, highlighting that the Cloud continues to be an evolving domain that inspires exploration and investigation.

The field journal methodology also builds upon Michel de Certeau's (1984) 'The Practice of Everyday Life', emphasising the importance of the strategies of everyday life in shaping the city. De Certeau argues that the routine activities of urban dwellers such as walking, talking, and looking are critical to the production of urban space and the development of a sense of place. The field journals developed for this thesis capture the everyday routines defining ESA and the ad-hoc interactions and situations defining the artist-led organisation's mode of operation. The journals evolved organically from my own embedded research within ESA and as a result of interacting with the organisation's members of staff and various collaborators. The three ESA case studies selected for this work have inspired corresponding field journals, each curated and developed in a unique way:

- **A Christmas Pudding for Henry:** this project defines the beginning of ESA as an artist-led organisation. Its associated field journal is hosted by an old, limited edition ESA Members sketchbook that Karen Watson gifted me when we were opening the project archival box. This is a small, pocket-size journal that captures thinking and observations on my interview with Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman, as well as insights gathered from the project's archive. Much like ESA in its emerging stage, this journal embodies a sense of tentative curiosity and exploration, serving as a first expedition into a new methodological approach.



Figure 32 - Image of the Field Journal for 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry'.
Photograph: Ionita (2023).

- **Art Hostel:** this project marks the evolution of ESA into the established artist-led organisation it is today. Spread across two sites, Kirkgate (temporary, closed its doors in 2018) and Mabgate (permanent, opened in 2021), this project is explored through two field journals to capture each stage of the evolution of the hostel and its transition to its permanent home in the Mabgate Complex. Developed from repurposed materials sourced from the hostel's surrounding environment, these journals evolved from a collaborative process of dialogue and curation with ESA staff and hostel guests. Most importantly, the field journals evolved from an in-depth, embedded research methodology I applied within the Mabgate Art Hostel,

where I was not just an observer but an active participant in its day-to-day operations and social interactions. This experience allowed me to situate myself in the space as a researcher, developing profound thinking and observations about the project and its philosophy. Engagement went beyond passive notetaking; throughout this PhD, I interacted closely with various members of staff and guests and fully experienced the hostel's spaces, even spending several nights to deepen my understanding of the project. This approach helped me draw a multi-dimensional representation of the project that enriched the research and ultimately allowed for a more inclusive and considerate view of the hostel's social and spatial dynamics.

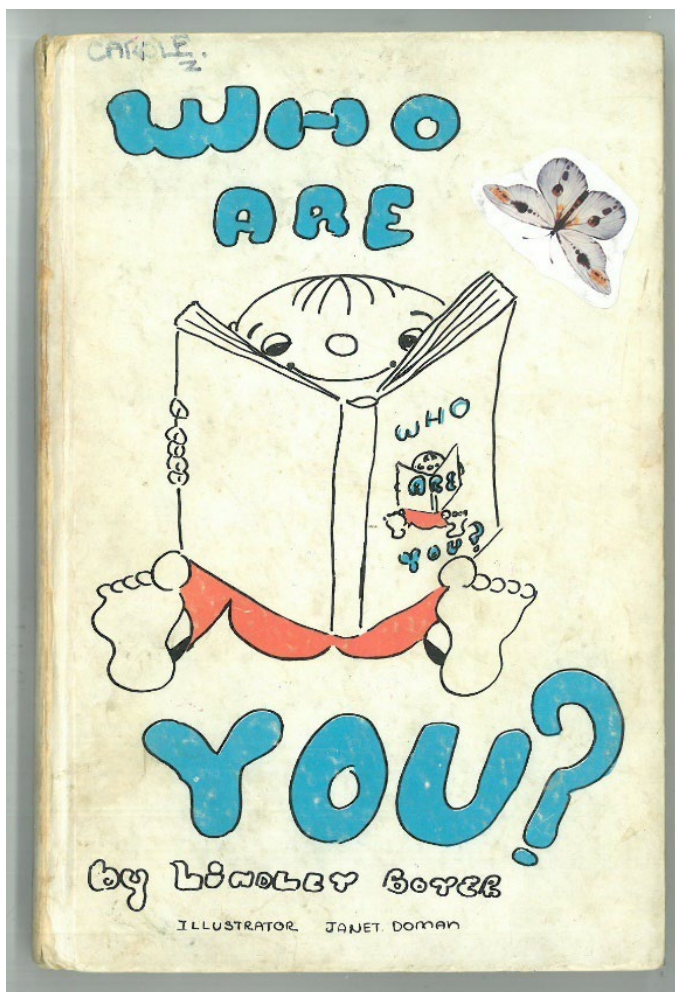


Figure 33 - Image of the 'Art Hostel Kirkgate' Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

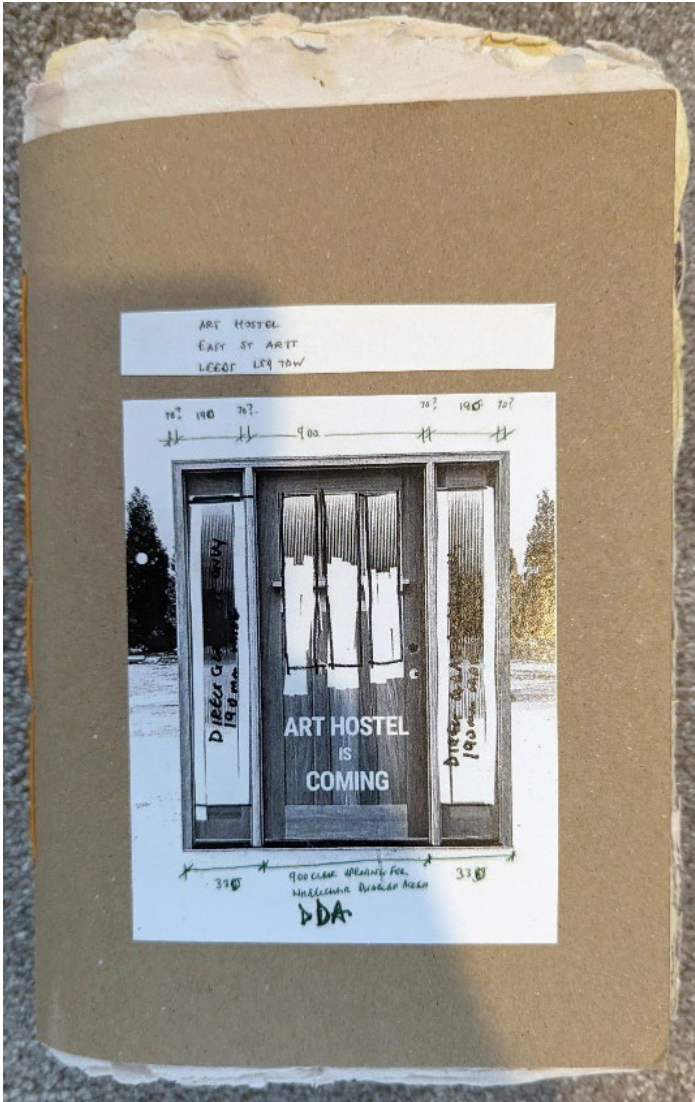


Figure 34 - Image of the 'Art Hostel Mabgate' Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

- **Hidden Histories of New Briggate:** this project exhibits the ongoing high street activation work ESA is exploring on Leeds' historic street, New Briggate. Hosted in a pink, leather-bound sketchbook purchased from a local record shop, this field journal extends beyond ESA projects to include a diverse array of narratives. This field journal captures a wide range of stories and observations varying from ESA commissions to interactions with stakeholders and LA members through various Open Day Events and celebrations. This journal captures ESA's spatial work on New Briggate and it brings attention to the hidden histories of the high street, in an attempt to resurrect some of the rich cultural and community ethos of the area.



Figure 35 – Image of ‘Hidden Histories of New Briggate’ Field Journal.
Photograph: Ionita (2023).

The field journals became more than simple tools for navigating urban contexts, acting as real platforms for embedded engagement with the case studies analysed on a personal and experiential basis that would otherwise not be possible. Far from being passive observers, these journals managed to capture the nuanced and subjective experiences of engaging with artist-led space in such manner as well as the various dynamics at play, emphasising how different actors and agents interact with, perceive, and are shaped by their surroundings and exchanges. They act as a tool for exploring the city’s less visible, often subversive qualities that might otherwise go unnoticed. This methodology allowed the field journals to become a method of reaching a much deeper, multi-faceted understanding of ESA and the urban locales within which they operate, and helped uncover the intricate dialogue between the personal experiences and observations captured by the journals and the wider social and spatial infrastructures in which they appear.

3.8 Data analysis process

During the data analysis phase, an inductive approach was employed to identify key concepts, thereby forming a more focused analytical trajectory, and suggesting avenues for further conceptual exploration, as indicated by Yin (2014, pp. 136–138). Aligning with a social epistemological stance, the research methods also drew parallels with interactional theories of space and place, as well as agency. In these theories, the notion of place carries both the physical setting and its symbolic and social dimensions (Lefebvre, 2006; Milligan, 1998; Schneider & Till, 2009). Furthermore, the personal narratives of the participants are integrated into the broader history, setting, and sense of place within the community, reflecting a constructivist polylogic stance (Courage, 2016, p. 106; Seaton, 2008, p. 293).

To cross-verify the findings or identify discrepancies, data from various methods were juxtaposed, compared, and contrasted (Yin, 2009, p. 265). The analytical framework incorporated multiple units of analysis within each setting, resulting in the formation of embedded units for a more nuanced investigation (Yin, 2009, p. 266). This layered approach enabled a rigorous process for pinpointing and integrating relevant data to improve the clarity and depth of both analysis and interpretation (Yin, 2009, p. 274).

4 Artist-led space as urban activator

4.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the artist-led space context, exploring its emergence, evolution, and the diverse interpretations of what it means to be ‘artist-led’. It critically examines the key dynamics, political intricacies, and funding challenges that influence these initiatives, exploring the power structures and collaborative processes that define their operations. Special attention is given to the impact of the current political and economic climate on funding, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges artist-led spaces face in securing financial support.

The discourse transitions from conventional place making approaches to focus on urban activation, highlighting the key role and agency of artist-led spaces in urban contexts. By presenting a variety of examples, this chapter aims to provide a thorough exploration of how artist-led spaces act as urban activators, demonstrating their capacity to transform urban landscapes. The discussion contributes to the broader discussion on the role of artist-led initiatives in promoting creativity, cultural exchange, and community engagement, ultimately nurturing a sense of place, and reshaping the urban environment.

This chapter also emphasises the role of the urban practitioner as a discipline boundary-crosser adopting a transdisciplinary approach, recognising the interconnectedness of various factors in shaping the urban environment. It underlines the importance of collaboration and co-creation as key elements in the process of urban activation.

4.2 Artist-led definitions

To recognise ESA as urban activator it is critical to first start looking at the artist-led context and ESA's position within it.

The terms 'artist-led space'/'artist-run space' (Besson, 2017), 'artist-led organisation' (S. Jones, 2012; Murphy & Cullen, 2016), 'artist-run centre' (Douglas, 1991), and 'alternative space' (Ault, 2002) amongst others are all labels used to describe self-organised, not-for-profit, collectively founded and managed artist groups (Hebert & Karlsen, 2013). Christian Besson (2017) indicates through examples¹ from as early as the beginning of the 19th century that the term 'artist-run' has been created as a replacement for other well-known names such as 'alternative space' or 'independent space', being strongly linked to the 'shift of focus' within the art scene and specifically emphasising initiatives coming from artists. Artist-run research started emerging from 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s marking the very beginnings of artist-run initiatives and their evolution as a response to the 'rebellious spirit' of the 1960s and concomitant avant-garde advance of artistic frontiers (Detterer & Nannucci, 2011, p. 6; Orlek, 2021, p. 42; Schofield, 2020, p. 38). This militant ethos intimating a rather DIY character is captured by Sarah Lowndes (2018) in 'The DIY Movement in Art, Music and Publishing':

Do-It-Yourself grew out of the desire for both thrift and self-reliance in the post-war years that presaged a wider shift in the 1950s and 1960s—from the dominant 'top-down' cultural model toward self-directed and self-realised modes of expression...Since the 1960s the DIY movement has developed and diversified as participants across the world worked collaboratively to redress the feelings of alienation and mystification engendered by late capitalism (Lowndes, 2018, p. xiii).

This movement of learning-through-doing intimates the notion of self-organising which, according to curator Barnaby Drabble (2013, p. 19), it might mean 'both a process of self-determined organising (as opposed to being organised by someone else) and an entity, an organisation of subjects created by the participants on their own terms (as

¹ Such as the Kunstvereine of the Germanic countries.

opposed to one created for them to operate within)’. As further disputed by James Schofield (2020, p. 39), this highlights the undeniable link between DIY and self-organisation, and their clear fitting within the evolution of the ‘artist-run’ and ‘artist-led’ terms and their ‘implicit opposition to social hegemony’. Art historian Lane Relyea (2017, p. 5) associates DIY with punk autonomy which highlights self-reliance and independence from mainstream institutions, emphasising that the DIY culture has evolved as a response to the dominant cultural and economic dynamics, advocating for individual agency and the rejection of conventional hierarchical structures. Relyea also connects DIY (as a culture that praises the notion that truly creative individuals exist within naturally developed social undergrounds) to the concept of authentic artistic production ingrained in subcultural settings, celebrating the significance of self-expression, personal authenticity, and the freedom to create outside of the confines of traditional art institutions.

In the contemporary landscape, Relyea (2017) argues that DIY has become the central attribute of a subject that has to navigate constant chaos and uncertainty. The DIY ethos aligns with the requirements of a modern networked society, which values flexibility, self-reliance, and the ability to negotiate and collaborate in fluid associations. Gabriele Detterer (2011, p. 12) in ‘Artist-Run Spaces’ highlights how the artist’s role and identity have evolved significantly beyond just individual creative acts, positioning the artist prominently as a social entity involved in collective decision-making. Detterer (2011, pp. 24–26) contends that the artists tied the art form and practice to the operational model of collective self-organisation into a single entity, thus emphasising the transformative nature of an artist-run organisation where ‘the boundaries between the useful and rational orientation of activities, and the definition of group life as an artwork as well as a social synthesis tends to be fluid’.

In ‘More than Meanwhile Spaces’ (Butler et al., 2019), a collaborative research project involving Newcastle University and the NewBridge Project, it is noted that artists hold distinctive views on the nature and purpose of artist-run spaces. The authors (Butler et al., 2019) argue that this variability is a strength, asserting that the concept resists a simplistic, universal definition. This is still the case nowadays. Nonetheless, as noted by James Schofield (2018, p. 41), all terms seem to indicate ‘some sort of oppositional stance to dominant institutions of power’. Artist and curator Gavin Murphy described the artist-run model as:

[O]ne which perpetuates alternative - and often non-hierarchical – modes of organisation and economies of exchange (knowledge and resources). A non-commercial approach to producing art and culture, it supports and develops experimental or unrepresented forms of practice and discourse, and proposes a model of social and cultural interaction that could be seen to eschew the roles of producer and consumer (Murphy, 2017, p. 5).

While the ‘artist-run’ term is more common on a worldwide dimension, in the UK ‘artist-led’ has replaced it ‘to become more synonymous with contemporary practitioners’ and to suit their particular conditions and aspirations (Orlek, 2021, p. 16; Schofield, 2020, p. 40). Jonathan Orlek (2021) also notes that in the UK ‘artist-led’ is a preferred prefix for many artist groups and researchers, and the term ‘artist-led organisation’ is one that is largely used by national visual art membership organisations (i.e. A-n: The Artists Information Company) and national development agencies (i.e. ACE). Emma Coffield (2020) notes that the relationship between the two terms has caused confusion among practitioners and commentators. As a result, this terminology muddle may lead to a lack of explicit engagement in self-organisation of thoughts and actions, fundamentally resulting in a homogenisation of these concepts by both practitioners and governing resources (Schofield, 2018, p. 40).

Both phrases suggest that the artist is in command, but the specific implications of ‘led’ and ‘run’ influence how the term is understood and represented. Individual interpretations of each term, however, frequently cross over or obfuscate, making the distinctions between them even more hazy (Coffield, 2020; Schofield, 2018). Furthermore, due to the inherent centralisation and hierarchy of the compounds ‘run’ and ‘led’ in their organisational logic, both prefixes are rather problematic in terms of self-organisation, which further complicates their purported meanings and intended uses. Schofield expands:

In my understanding, ‘artist-run’ takes on a more managerial and processual underpinning, with ‘artist-led’ a slightly more wistful and arguably somewhat romanticised one. It could be inferred ‘artist-run’ is more didactic and ‘artist-led’ slightly more enigmatic within the pair; ‘artist---run’ (communally) managing outputs and production whereas ‘artist-led’ – in a distorted

channelling of the spirit of the avant-garde – positioned at the forefront of experimental or underrepresented cultural production setting a trail for others to follow (Schofield, 2018, p. 41).

In ‘Artist-Run Initiatives: A Study of Cultural Construction’, Coffield (2015) expands further, providing a different description altogether: ‘artist-run initiatives’ (ARIs). She makes the case against ‘portraying ARIs as fundamentally “similar” and as belonging to and drawing upon a singular artist-run “culture” or “community” of some kind’, since this prevalent mode of understanding does not consider the various forms of practice and thought that underpin artist-run practice (Coffield, 2015, p. 42). According to Coffield each artist-run space evolves its own culture, shaping member responsibilities and influencing their attitudes and habits. However, she emphasises that these cultures are not static but continually renegotiated by those involved, reflecting their fluid and transitory nature.

Furthermore, the term ‘artist-run initiatives’ was used by Coffield (2015) to refer to any practice, group, or organisation operated by and for artists, with an emphasis on ARIs that were recognised as being involved in the creation and exhibition of contemporary visual art. She argues the term ‘ARI’ does not demand a particular function, as ‘artist-run gallery’ does for example, or imply an underlying ideology, as mobilised by the term ‘co-operative’, but rather draws a line between forms of practice by excluding what are seen as non-contemporary visual practices, while trying to be inclusive in other respects

Responding to Coffield’s understanding of artist-led initiatives, art historian Susannah Thompson (2005) critiques the conventional understanding, suggesting that while contemporary ARIs employ terminology intimating the collective ethos of artist-run spaces, they often serve distinctive political and ideological reasons compared to their predecessors. Contrary to Coffield’s contention that ARIs are exclusively managed by or for artists, Thompson argues that even entities with minimal connection to visual arts, such as cafes founded by arts graduates who may no longer practice art, are labelled as ARIs in the media. This is a very current condition that contributes to the confusion over terminology and definition of artist-led space in the contemporary art scene. This is further highlighted by Benedetta d’Ettorre (2023) in her thesis and presentation at the

Hive Conference, indicating that the debate around these definitions remains unresolved and active.

The limited academic research on ARIs (Coffield, 2015, p. 14), alongside the broad lexicon being used to define artist-led space contribute to a generalisation of the matter which, in turn, might lead to confusion around the value of artist-led space and the role it can play in the urban context. This uncertainty can have an impact on artist-led spaces' ability to establish professional, long-lasting relationships with stakeholders, LAs and funding bodies who typically require a much higher level of clarity before engaging with a partner (M. Walker, personal communication, 23 May 2023). The following section will focus on the politics of artist-led space, exploring their significance through this lens.

4.3 The politics of artist-led space

In a rather ambiguous landscape of lexicons, certain interpretations stand out for their relevance in understanding artist-led spaces as urban activators. Schofield's (2020) and Butler et al.'s (2019) distinguish between 'artist-run' and 'artist-led' initiatives: the former being managed daily by artists, often at the expense of creative practice, while the latter is driven by artists but operated day-to-day by a dedicated team. This distinction was further discussed at the Hive Conference Cross-Pollination Session led by artist Chris Biddlecombe (2023), where it was noted that cultural perceptions about artists' role and function significantly influence the acceptance of these terms. Generally speaking, in other nations, the practitioner will typically have confidence in their ability to recoup some level of compensation (usually correlating with the level of philanthropy or public subsidy present in the relevant country), and so they will associate more with the business sense or acumen relating to self-organisation that is seemingly implied in artist-run practices (Schofield, 2018, p. 42). This is prevalent in parts of Northern Europe, where governmental funding is common and artist-run associations are heavily institutionalised to, among other things, give practitioners more security. Many of these organisations are modelled after the German Kunstverein (Gavin, 2015).

During the Hive Conference (Biddlecombe, 2023; d'Etorre et al., 2023), there were discussions on the value of the arts in societies across Europe, which, in turn impacts on

people's perceptions and likelihoods of engaging with art and buying it. Practitioners noted that continental Europe generally exhibits a higher appreciation for the arts that is organically instilled through education and culture, but also, a more entrepreneurial approach to it, thus highlighting that the role of the artist can expand beyond its natural environment.² They further posited that in the UK achieving a financially rewarding artistic career remains a challenging ambition for many due to unique socio-economic conditions and differing levels of state support and societal recognition of artists. These observations are crucial for understanding the role of organisations like ESA within the artist-led sphere.

In her collaborative PhD with ESA,³ d'Ettorre (2023, p. 83) investigates the politics and the organisational forms of artist-run spaces at the intersection of entrepreneurialism and institutionalisation. While d'Ettorre employs the term 'artist-run' in her analysis, this thesis will adopt 'artist-led space' and 'artist-led organisation' to align with the vocabulary employed by ESA (Wakeman, 2021a; Watson, 2023) for describing its internal organisation but more importantly, to reflect an evolving understanding of the artist-led terminology as substantiated by prior discussions and the literature reviewed earlier in this chapter (Butler et al., 2019, p. 4; Orlek, 2021; Schofield, 2020).⁴ Karen Watson (2023) notes:

Myself and Jon have always seen East Street as an artist-led organisations and this has been important to us. There are a huge amount of definitions of what artist-led means so maybe first thing to say is there isn't one agreed definition in the sector and many people would view us as an institution and not artist-led. Or because we are not seen to have artists at governance level (although we do) we can't be artist-led. Mine and Jon's definition has always been about the focus of the organisation. You might need a whole range of experience and skills in your

² An example was given by one of the Cross-Pollination Session contributors, mentioning examples from Italy and France where artist-led spaces operate alongside a commercial enterprise such as a community café or co-working space, thus ensuring a steady income to the artists, alleviating pressure from constantly needing to chase funds to support their practice.

³ D'Ettorre completed her thesis titled 'Understanding sustainability in the cultural sector: its meanings and practical applications in small artists' organisations' in 2023.

⁴ This terminology choice also aligns with Jonathan Orlek's understanding of artist-led research as evolved through his collaborative PhD with East Street Arts.

governance and work-force but for us [...] this is focused on artists and their development - and therefore we would say we are artist-led (Watson, 2023).

D’Ettorre (2023) explores the politics of the artist-led sector in the UK, noting that from the 1990s to now, only a few have succeeded in becoming established organisations. Examples such as Castlefield Gallery (n.d.), Beaconsfield (2018), Studio Voltaire (n.d.), and ESA (2018b) have formalised into registered companies or charities, securing public or private funding and structuring with directors and employed staff. Transmission Gallery (n.d.) in Glasgow stands out as a charity and publicly funded entity, organised around a rolling committee of volunteers. The notion of endurance and the ability to evolve into established organisations are important factors in the discourse (particularly considering ESA’ evolution as an artist-led organisation) and the ever-perpetuating oppositional ideological stance of artist-led spaces; this notion can cause disagreements within the arts community, ultimately influencing some to move on to other opportunities and ventures (d’Ettorre, 2023, p. 83). Artist-led space is often criticised for emerging as institutional critique and alternative to the commercial art world, but later assimilating into larger economic and institutional systems, including the art market. Artists’ self-organisational practices are frequently commended for their entrepreneurial spirit, ability to operate without government support, and alignment with neoliberal and free market ideas.

It is this starting point of practitioners basing their alternative stances on values propagated by the socio-economic regime they generally oppose, whilst implicitly being trapped within its machinations, that creates a paradox central to artist-led self-organisation and regularly causes tension along political and ideological lines between those that enact it (Schofield, 2020, p. 10).

The Cross-Pollination Session led by Biddlecombe (2023) debated the divergent views on organisational models within the artist-led sector. Practitioners who favour ad-hoc, self-organised structures argued that such arrangements are crucial for maintaining artistic freedom. Conversely, larger groups advocated for a socio-economically aware model that provides under-resourced artists with access to necessary infrastructure and

space. This discussion also questioned the precarious nature of artist-led spaces and the challenging conditions under which artists operate, often perceived as the undervalued cogs of contemporary art practice (Murphy, 2017, p. 7). According to the Footfall Research Report (Laws, 2015) conducted by 126 Artist-Run Gallery:

Notions of precarity being “necessary” for “creativity, risk and edginess” were raised on several occasions, signalling debate on whether creativity can be stifled by “too much funding”, presumably referring to the bureaucratic restraints which accompany the funding processes. The position was unilaterally disregarded by the assembled group. The idea that good art comes out of struggle and constant reinvention due to capricious funding is “highly damaging” for artist-led organisations, with one contributor stating: It is dangerous to aspire to, fetishise or idealise precarity’ (Laws, 2015, p. 58).

Figure 36 – Conference material asking thought-provoking question, Hive Conference.
Image: ESA, 2023. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Laws (2015, p. 58) suggests that precarity in artist-led spaces may be situational, necessary for their inception, yet artists do not need to be deprived. This discussion acknowledges that short-term spaces often become the norm, pointing to an urgent need for a broader conceptual framework for sustainability. Interdependence between precarity and institutionalised models supports the call for sustainable practices, questioning the longevity and resources of artist-led organisations, often pushing them towards more structured, institutional forms.

Curator Anne Szefer Karlsen (2013, p. 11) contributes that the field of self-organisation is complex, transcending simple boundary dissolution between ‘institutional and non-institutional platforms to create new possibilities’. Similarly, Murphy (2017, p. 11) notes that for sustainability, artist-led spaces may need to standardise their organisational structures, potentially distancing artists from operational roles, raising concerns about maintaining distinctiveness and addressing cultural gaps as they evolve. There is fear that artist-led organisations could unintentionally mimic the attitudes and methods of corporate and institutional institutions in their quest for stability and longevity. This can be interpreted as a propensity to miniaturise the institution, undermining the initial DIY and alternative attitude that characterised its early years (Murphy, 2016, p. 11; Orlek, 2021, p. 44). Nonetheless, taking deliberate alternative positions to established institutional forms continues to perform as a valuable and necessary distinction for understanding artist-led practice. There is a significant challenge when artist-led spaces are compelled to emulate established institutions in order to ensure their sustainability, and it can stir a real identity crisis – ‘though not necessarily of artists’ own making – and one that has yet to be adequately addressed’ (Murphy, 2017, p. 12).

From an observational position, there is a palpable fear among artist-led spaces of being co-opted by mainstream structures and assimilated by prevailing cultural and economic frameworks. This concern was evident during interactive sessions at the Hive Conference, where practitioners from across the UK expressed their views on the positionality of artist-led space and the challenges around it. Many echoed Murphy’s view (2017, p. 11) that a successful artist-led space is often one that transitions into a more institutional form to survive current economic pressures. However, linking to Orlek’s understandings (2021, p. 44), this transition might be excessive. Instead, artist-

led spaces should strive for a balance between stability, financial viability, and preserving their grassroots ethos.

Crossing the pressures of institutionalisation requires ongoing critical reflection, self-awareness, and a commitment to maintaining their distinctive identities. This situation raises the question of whether a new definition of artist-led spaces is necessary to reflect contemporary conditions and the emerging ecologies in which they operate. Building on these discussions, the upcoming sections will explore the societal value of artist-led spaces, examining their interactions with local state and stakeholders to understand the governance dynamics. This analysis aims to demonstrate how artist-led spaces can act as urban activators, performing as hosts for critical spatial practices (Rendell, 2020) without necessitating radical transformation or departure from ‘commercial, artistic, and urban institutions’ (Orlek, 2021, pp. 44–45).

4.4 Governance dynamics

In her keynote address at the virtual event ‘Razing the Agenda: a public workshop about artists’ priorities for/in place’, Susan Jones (2023) explores the contemporary nature and value of artist-led space as a connector to artists’ own self-worth and wellbeing under current economic struggles. Jones argues that artists’ beliefs and values are formed early in life and are critical to their emotional wellbeing and professional drive. She notes the great diversity among artists (including a significant demographic disparity related to neurodivergence, dyslexia, gender, and ethnicity) and uses it as a tool to categorise them into several types, such as self-expressive artists, entrepreneurial artists, artists dedicated to stimulating creativity in others, and visionary artists motivated by social conscience.

Jones critically examined current art policies, arguing they often view the arts economically, which blurs the distinctions between different practices and approaches and complicates the recognition and funding of artist-led spaces. This economic perspective undermines the unique contributions of artists, treating them as simple tools for political agendas focused on growth and job creation, which impacts the sustainability and resilience of artist-led spaces.

Highlighting the economic influence of arts and cultural organisations, research commissioned by the ACE found that the arts and culture sector has a significant impact on local, regional, and national economies (Moyce, 2022). For every £1.00 generated by the sector, an additional £1.24 is created in the wider economy, and for every direct job, 1.65 jobs are supported elsewhere (Cebr, 2020; The Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2022).

Furthermore, creative sectors are often mistakenly thought to be concentrated only in urban centres (i.e. Shoreditch in London, the Northern Quarter in Manchester, or the North Laine in Brighton). Data from Nesta's Policy and Evidence Centre (2020) paints a more nuanced picture, identifying over 700 'micro-clusters' (areas comprising of over 50 creative organisations) across the country (Mateos-Garcia & Bakhshi, 2016; The Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2022). Josh Siepel (2020) from Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre noted that that these micro-clusters, though small, have substantial growth potential and face significant risks from disruptions like COVID-19 and Brexit uncertainties. Supporting these clusters is crucial for building economic resilience and is an opportunity for Government 'level-up' intervention, particularly through initiatives like extending the Creative Scale-Up Scheme in policy reviews.

In exploring the value of artist-led spaces in the urban context and their role as urban activators, I engaged with Claire Easton, LCC Regeneration Officer. During our interview, Easton (personal communication, 2 August 2022) shared her experience working with ESA:

[...] working with ESA has been fantastic, from my point of view, because personally, I didn't really have that much experience of community events and cultural projects. So that's been amazing. I think for the project's point of view, it's been brilliant, because it has given us that different perspective on things. And I think sometimes the way the council would look at a street, occupiers, the uses, in one way, and I think it's really interesting that the ESA come to the project from a completely different point of view. And they very much come to the project from quite a celebratory overview. Whereas I think the Council tends to be perhaps a bit more traditional about the way it's approached. And I think combining that quite traditional approach, [...] kind of conservation, regeneration and building works with a far more creative, kind of artistic,

celebratory response to the street; this kind of culture has been really valuable. I think it's making a huge difference in terms of how the project works, and how it's probably viewed by locals. I think ESA connection has really helped us kind of build those links with the existing kind of occupiers and groups in the street (C. Easton, personal communication, 2 August 2022).

Easton's interview insights emphasise the potentials of developing partnerships between artist-led spaces and local governance as such collaborations create an opportunity for community engagement, but also align with more ambitious cultural and economic objectives. As outlined in the Written Evidence to DCMS's Culture White Paper (2016), and reinforced by LCC (2022), cultural integration should be a strategic element of local development rather than a peripheral addition. As noted by LCC:

To support places to be "investment ready", all local authorities should be actively encouraged by central Government to have cultural policies and/or strategies in place – and a locally relevant definition of what Culture means in relation to the demographics and aspirations of a place, thus being reflective of local needs and local ambitions too. [...]

Planning policy needs to better recognise the role Culture has to play in place-making. It should be standard that Culture is integrated within our high streets and public spaces; it should not merely be opportunistic and ad hoc, but rather acknowledged within policy itself. Proportional allowances and requirements for such cultural integration and cultural enterprise within commercial and housing developments, for example, is needed so that Culture is not simply a "nice to have" or "add on" – or worse, decided on the basis of assumptions of social class. Section 106, and similar, policy needs to be reviewed and refreshed for this purpose too (Leeds City Council, 2022).

LCC (2022) also highlights that while there is a strong market for premium office space for creative and digital businesses, there is a real provision problem with affordable start-up and maker spaces. Across the city, several spaces are facing closure as an effect of the high demand for residential development. This has a big impact on the ability of

artist-led spaces to operate sustainably, the need of affordability becoming vital in this situation, as the majority of providers work on a non-profit basis to advance the interests of their members. As noted by LCC, this can be seen as a market failure. Without public funding support, providers are unlikely to step forward to create the much-needed maker spaces. Nonetheless, while it is inevitable that temporary spaces will come and go, LCC has taken steps forward to address this issue by making available public sector funding to allow the not-for-profit sector to take freehold ownership of and renovate buildings in order to operate them as accessible maker spaces. One example of these projects is ESA's Patrick Studios. By securing public sector funding from LCC, ACE and ERDF for the purchase and renovation of St Patrick's Social Club, ESA (n.d.d) established a durable and supportive environment for local artists, demonstrating a model for sustainable cultural infrastructure. As further emphasised by LCC:

If we believe that a city cannot be sustainable without a resilient and varied cultural offer, and that offer cannot exist without the architects of it, then we must enable the conditions for the creators of culture to not only exist here, but to flourish here.

Leeds has long been a city where culture is made, a city in which artists, makers, creators and innovators have found the space and creativity to break boundaries. Whether through our culture of entrepreneurialism in our factories, mills and now our digital co-working spaces, in theatres, galleries, and studios or through our culture of community, volunteering and belonging.

Organisations such as Duke Studios, ESA and FutureLabs are holding space for individual artists, designers, illustrators and producers, helping their creativity and businesses to thrive (Leeds City Councils Executive Board, 2017).

4.5 Funding and sustainability in artist-led space

Who am I working for:

Myself? My peers? The common good? Funders?

And why am I doing it:

I can't remember, I'm too busy doing it!(Murphy, 2017, p. 16)

The governance dynamics of artist-led spaces warrant a focused discussion, particularly concerning funding and economic stability, which considerably influences the sustainability of artist-led organisations and the wellbeing of artists. Artist Mark Cullen (2017) talks extensively about the matter when describing Pallas Studios in 'Artist-Run Europe':

There is the issue of funding an arts organisation – where it comes from and what one must do in order to get it. Most artists [...] do not make their money solely from the sale of artworks or from receiving fees. Artists engage in myriad jobs that enable them to continue their practice. We were chefs and builders at different times, others are teachers, invigilators, installers, administrators. When either of the directors were awarded public art commissions through our own practices, we channelled 70% of the profits through the studio to keep it buoyant. Every year we applied for Arts Council revenue funding. The first 4 years of our existence we survived without it, apart from small exhibitions grants. Consequently, we had part-time jobs to keep the show going. As we got more funding we concentrated more of our time on the artistic programme at Pallas, and as we did that we got still more funding which plateaued in 2007 then begun a nose dive in 2011. We would like to think that we have the vitality to survive without public funding, but I fear that is not the case, as cultural organisations such as Pallas do not operate on the same manner as ordinary commercial businesses, and there is not enough significant interest from the

private sector to keep the game going by investing in vulture (Cullen, 2017, p. 59).

The ‘Open Doors. The Real Cost of Artist-Led Spaces’ report (2023) published by the Uncultured and ESA presented findings from a 2021 survey exploring barriers to sustainability in artist-led spaces in England.⁵ The report highlights that the funding environment in England is getting more and more instrumentalised, and in order to fill the gaps created by the lack of state funding elsewhere, artists end up acting as de facto social workers and mental health advocates, tasked with restoring the public’s happiness under the banner of a statistic about the link between participation in the arts and wellbeing. As a result, an increasing number of artists are being urged to substitute time spend on art production, an activity often unpaid or underpaid, with community outreach and engagement, which is similarly rewarded. This situation jeopardises the very foundation of socially engaged practices by experienced artists and limits the ability of those skilled artists who do not typically operate in this way, exposing concerns over safeguarding, safety, and ethics in the wider artist-led ecology. As exposed in the report:

As artists are encouraged by funders and commissioners to focus more on the decommodified practices of community engagement and participatory outreach, there will be fewer “things” made. Fewer paintings to sell, fewer shows to book. As fewer artworks are produced, diversified or continued or sustainable income streams are harder to build. So if, as this survey indicates, artists are paying for their sites of production (studios), through cash or labour exchange, and their labour is being increasingly decommodified, is the notion that the job of an artist is only for those who can afford to do it, being increasingly solidified?

The alchemy of running something with nothing is not sustainable. With higher bills, reduced access to funding, fewer artworks to produce and an increasingly

⁵ The report was produced by The Uncultured (2023) and commissioned by ESA as part of the artist-support project, Guild. 269 survey respondents with 4750 unique responses were recorded, with Trust Impact analysing the collected data.

financially and mentally exhausted workforce – will artist-led studios be able to keep their doors open?(The Uncultured, 2023, p. 6)

The ‘Open Doors’ report (The Uncultured, 2023) highlights significant concerns regarding the prevalence of unpaid labour in artist-led spaces. Over half of the survey respondents reported engaging in unpaid work, which they deemed essential for the operation of these spaces; indeed, 44% believed their studios would not exist without such contributions. This reliance on unpaid labour risks making the sector inaccessible to those who cannot afford to work without compensation, potentially leading to economic exclusivity and further marginalization. Furthermore, the persistent concern of unpaid labour challenges the sustainability and resilience of artist-led space at a time when artists feel unable to see their practice as anything more sustainable than a temporary ‘passion project’ as no strategic planning can be possible without some sort of financial security behind (The Uncultured, 2023, p. 5).

The discussion recognises more established artist-led organisations such as ESA, which continue to operate and evolve despite the harsh funding conditions. As explored by Susan Jones in ‘Cracking up: the pandemic effect on visual artists’ livelihoods’ (2022),⁶ there are some sobering realities that define the access artist-led space has to funding (depending on the organisation and longevity of the space), emphasising the need for more inclusive support systems to better account for the unique circumstances artists are facing, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Two fundamentally distinctive conceptions of how the arts sector should operate and evolve become evident:

1. The traditional view sees the arts operate as a top-down system where authority and funding are centralised in well-established organisations, and adjustments are made within pre-existing structures to resolve imbalances and inequalities. This view considers that improvements can be made within the current system to address workforce diversity issues and economic inequalities (S. Jones, 2022, p. 13).

⁶ ESA is quoted several times in the paper to highlight the artist-led organisation’s ambition to make a change in the working conditions artists experience (S. Jones, 2022).

2. The alternative view, on the other hand, sees the arts industry as a naturally diversified and localised ecosystem that must be responsive to the unique requirements and specificities of distinctive local communities, thus rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach. Focused on promoting diversity, experimentation and grassroots innovation, this perspective suggests that keys to improvement sit in addressing a systemic transformation, the localisation of power and resources, and the promotion of an inclusive, egalitarian, and participatory arts environment (Banks, 2023; Centre for Cultural Value, 2022; de Bernard et al., 2022; S. Jones, 2022, p. 13)

This debate echoes wider discussions in social theory and public policy concerning the relative virtues of institutional stability against systemic change and centralised versus decentralised institutions. Important matters such as the place of artists in society, the importance of diversity and local cultures, as well as the effects of economic models on the prosperity of communities and artists are key concerns arising from the integration of funding (S. Jones, 2022, pp. 9–11). There is increasing criticism of ACE’s long standing policy of directing investment on large, permanent arts organisations, disputing that this approach fails to fully recognise or capitalise on the dynamic, grassroots aspects of the artist-led sector (Holden, 2015; Markusen et al., 2011).

The arts ecology is delicate, and any support forthcoming must recognise the contribution of small, community, experimental and emerging practice as much as it does the drivers of economic growth—one does not exist without the other, and the wider creative industries are reliant on this pipeline (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, n.d.).

Devolving arts policy and funding from centralised bodies like ACE to LAs could enable a more localised and nuanced production of art and culture that is perhaps more responsive and specific to cultural contexts and their narratives. Jones (2022, p. 10) suggests that direct commissions from local artists could help in understanding and responding to the place and locality where knowledge and expertise exists, with the results of the creative process being ‘relatable and instinctive’. A major factor in

maintaining thriving, inclusive, and diversified arts ecologies is art that is imbued with a sense of place, reflective of local variances, and specific effects.

ESA exemplifies this model by acting as an infrastructure support facilitator for local artists, functioning as a funnel between funders and artists. Through its practice, ESA enables artists to access opportunities and navigate the complex dynamics of large funding bodies that might otherwise be out of reach for grassroots practitioners (Wakeman, 2021a). Furthermore, moving away from ACE's traditional focus on National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) toward substantial investments in LAs could create a more accountable, bottom-up framework for sustaining localised art ecologies and communities, developing long-term sustainability and diversity within the arts sector (S. Jones, 2022, p. 10).

The ongoing debate about the sustainability of artist-led space highlights the urgency for structural reforms to protect small, emerging artist-led spaces by focusing on improving artists' economic circumstances through creating a financial environment that is more accessible and responsive to the current state of the arts, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic. ESA (n.d.e) has actively participated in this discourse by submitting written evidence to the DCMS's Inquiry on the 'Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS sectors' (Committees, n.d.). In the submission, ESA highlighted its commitment to improving the livelihoods of artists and the local community, articulating the actions it has taken to mitigate the pandemic's adverse effects on its operations and on the artists it supports. As noted by ESA:

In order to generate a well-evidenced response to this call, we have consulted with our wide network of individual artists, artist-led spaces and artist collectives. At present, ESA supports up to 1200 artists. For the purpose of this call and due to its short turn around we have consulted with 220 artists who are participating in GUILD, a Sector Support programme funded through Arts Council England, and via our studio network of 100 properties across 35 local authorities.

We have focussed our response to the call for evidence on their needs, as opposed to our own as an organisation which will face significant hardship over the next four years due to the crisis. Our primary beneficiaries and customers are artists – we can't survive if they don't. The lack of support for individuals

and groups who have fallen between the cracks of the governmental emergency provision is our primary concern (East Street Arts, n.d.e).

The pandemic has led to significant hardships for ESA and the artists the organisation supports. To assess the impact of COVID-19 on the artists, ESA (n.d.e) conducted two national surveys in April and May 2020 that reveal that the pandemic has led to considerable loss of work, a decline in studio rental income, and inability to sustain working from home operations in the absence of additional support. The surveys highlighted that 33% of the artists operating as registered organisations had to make redundancies, and 66.6% saw redundancies as a likely future possibility (East Street Arts, n.d.e). In response to the financial hardship faced by studio holders, ESA has provided considerable support, including rent holidays, reduced rents, and clearing historic debts for 40% of its studio holders, with an overall studio rental income projected loss of 75%.

Because of their mixed income sources⁷ many artists struggle to access Government and ACE funding due to existing financial structures focused on competition, rendering them ineligible for furlough or self-employment support. Looking ahead into the post-pandemic era, the evidence indicates terrible long-term effects to the sector with 80% of surveyed artists anticipating closure within a year due to COVID-19. This data provided ESA with critical insight into the state of the arts sector, and it highlighted the need for significant change in how self-employed and freelance artists are treated and considered by funding entities. Using the DCMS Inquire as a communication platform, ESA advocated for a comprehensive support system and a thorough review of funding available to organisations supporting artists that prioritises the inclusion of marginalised artists and the consideration of universal basic income. ESA (n.d.e) stressed the need for a ‘review of the finances made available to organisations that are committed to supporting artists through studios, opportunities, advice and training. These organisations develop infrastructure and opportunities for artists through a wider ecology including health, education, housing and the art sector’.

⁷ Such as art-time work on zero-hours contracts, delivery of classes and workshops as self-employed and through commissions.

In response to the DCMS's Inquiry, Susan Jones (2022, p. 15) calls for an equitable distribution of funding across the sector that is focused on top-down approaches benefiting the institutions whose intimidating support economy weakens freelancers' sustainability but also on 'demonstrating and contextualising sharpened interest across broader arts constituencies for forging granular, particularised, localised ecologies', thus reasserting the artists' wellbeing as of equal importance (Woodley et al., 2018, p. 1).

Following the DCMS's Inquiry, ESA was among the 1,385 cultural and creative organisations in the UK to benefit from the Government's Culture Recovery Fund (CRF), receiving £245,000 of the £1.57 billion allocated (Wakeman, 2020b). Melody Walker,⁸ discusses the impact of this financial support:

We are delighted with the news that we have been offered support through the Cultural Recovery Fund. The funds will assist us to implement a phased opening of two important capital projects, Convention House and the Art Hostel. These two cultural assets are important to the cultural economy of the city, especially the less recognised grassroots and underground Leeds arts scene.

We are grateful to the Arts Council and DCMS for enabling us to resuscitate Convention House and Art Hostel, so we can continue to place artists and audiences and users at the heart of the work we do (Walker in Wakeman, 2020b).

To support the ambition for an equitable access and distribution of funding, Walker (personal communication, 23 May 2023) emphasises the benefits of having a designated internal resource to set-out and manage the fundraising strategy of an artist-led space. The artist-led organisation had to undertake a thorough process of developing its fundraising strategy, an ongoing procedure led by Walker as a tool of articulating the organisation's scope and needs to external bodies. Her expertise is particularly important in managing the complex bureaucratic landscape of fundraising, often

⁸ Business Development Lead at ESA, Melody Walker has 25 years of experience working in NGOs, the philanthropic, and creative arts sectors in business development, fundraising, and programming for a variety of cultural, social, and historical activities. She has worked as a development consultant for Leeds West Indian Carnival, grassroots arts groups and artists. Currently, she serves as the Business Development Lead at East Street Art (Arts Fundraising & Philanthropy, 2021).

daunting for those unfamiliar with its vocabulary and processes. This approach aligns with discussions at the Hive Conference and is further supported by the DCMSC's (2023) recommendation to the 'Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda' report:

Consistent with the ambitions of Levelling Up, we recommend that local communities and stakeholders are given a greater role in decision-making. This could be done by building on the Community Ownership Fund, reducing the bureaucracy in funding application processes, encouraging more localised decision-making (as with the Arts Council's area council, who could be appointed by and answerable to local government) and looking beyond just competitive bidding to incentivise collaborative, democratic, grassroots-oriented processes (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2023, p. 14).

The Government's response to the DCMSC's (2023) recommendation acknowledges the barriers identified by the Committee, recognising that the current challenges such as the pandemic and Brexit, have further exposed these issues. The Levelling Up White Paper outlines the Government's intention to simplify local growth funding and streamline the overall landscape, aiming to reduce inefficiencies and bureaucracy while granting local leaders the necessary flexibility to drive economic growth at the local level (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2023, p. 15).

In our interview, Walker (personal communication, 23 May 2023), talked about her experience as a fundraiser within ESA, during which she was also completing a Fundraising Fellowship focused on two important theoretical paradigms: organisational coherence and organisational complexity, with ESA as a case study. Walker identified a deficiency of coherence within the artist-led organisation's fundraising history which she associated with a diffused responsibility amongst ESA staff members. This finding reflects ESA's horizontal, non-hierarchical organisational structure, which, while promoting a more spirited entrepreneurial approach, also introduces a higher level of complexity compared to more traditionally structured artist-led spaces.

An important aspect of this research was understanding the dynamics between ESA and its funders; Walker noted that funders frequently misinterpreted ESA's funding

applications, prompting them to adjust their language to meet financing requirements. This occasionally caused internal uncertainty over the purpose and direction of the organisation:

The funders were not flexible in understanding what ESA does. It meant that East Street had to change the way it talks about itself, in order to meet the funding, in order to fit into the funding box. So that then had an impact on staff because what you generally have is that staff... and that's what I talk about in terms of organisational coherence, staff don't know what ESA does. And so, [...] when Karen decided that she was going to step down, she went through this whole process of succession planning. And it was through that strengthening of the SMTs⁹ and making sure they advocate and talk about the organisation [...] that everybody realised that it was an artist support organisation. We all had different ideas as to what it was, and that was not clear. So that's sort of because we've tried to fit themselves into the funding criteria which then had a negative impact on the organisation itself (M. Walker, personal communication, 23 May 2023).

Walker emphasised the importance of how an artist-led organisation pitches to potential funders to ensure a balance between adhering to the organisation's mission, whilst meeting the financial criteria. She noted the competitive nature of arts funding, where other causes often take precedence, making it particularly challenging for artist-led organisations to secure funds in an unstable socioeconomic environment. Despite these challenges, Walker commends ESA for showing competence at generating income using innovative methods such as their strategy for meanwhile spaces and partnership fundraising.¹⁰ These truly highlight the organisation's entrepreneurial ethos as they seek to develop a strategy for generating income that does not rely on public funding.

⁹ Senior Members of Team.

¹⁰ ESA explored various financial sources, such as real estate developers and international collaborations, albeit doing so also presented additional difficulties in their work and organisational structure (M. Walker, personal communication, 23 May 2023).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ESA demonstrated resilience by quickly securing emergency funding¹¹ and adapting to new working models, highlighting its capacity to adjust and transform and sustain operations under crisis conditions. The Garfield Weston Foundation, which granted over £30 million to more than 100 cultural organisations across the UK, lauded the creativity and entrepreneurial approaches demonstrated by recipients like ESA during the pandemic. These organisations successfully ‘adapted and engaged their audiences and communities’, illustrating their capacity for innovation and resilience (Wakeman, 2021b).

ESA’s (2018a) funding strategy includes four important points:

- Looking into semi-commercial and commercial developments including studio leases, temporary space donations, and bed nights.
- Increasing the organisation’s capital asset base as the main strategy to create spaces for artists.
- Utilising grants strategically to test concepts, create experimental projects, and lessen the reliance on grants for primary income.
- Diversifying resources and increase support for artists, create initiatives and collaborations outside of the arts industry, such as housing and place making.

These strategic points are integral to ESA’s ambitious business plan aimed at securing greater financial stability and developing resilient, meaningful growth.

Resilience, sustainability, and meaningful ambitious growth have been part of our ethos since we achieved a key milestone and a stable base when we purchased and refurbished our headquarters, Patrick Studios in 2004 (East Street Arts, 2018a).

ACE (2013, p. 13) presented its own definition of resilience in its strategy paper, ‘Great Art and Culture for Everyone’, as the ‘vision and capacity of organisations to anticipate

¹¹ Although the pandemic has presented them with numerous obstacles, ESA has been able to overcome these obstacles with the support of generous funds from the ACE, LCC, and the Garfield Weston Foundation (M. Walker, personal communication, 23 May 2023).

and adapt to economic, environmental and social change by seizing opportunities, identifying and mitigating risks, and deploying resources effectively in order to continue delivering quality work in line with their mission'. ACE asserts the need of arts and cultural organisations to adapt to the ever-changing environment, stressing the importance of being in tune with their local communities, understanding their needs and supporting and encouraging co-creation. The use of technology is being mentioned as a key opportunity to explore in order to develop digital platforms to reach new audiences, both nationally and internationally.

Well established artist-led organisations such as ESA are essential to the art sectors' resilience as they have a strong understanding of their role within their localities and actively collaborate with others to grow a sense of place in their respective communities. As depicted by ACE (2013, p. 32), such organisations often earn significant recognition within their local sphere by acting as catalysts for transformation through enabling their communities to articulate their hopes and aspirations. Artist-led spaces have a positive impact on the development of local identities and community bonds and relationships by developing an environment where local conflicts can be resolved, and social capital nurtured.

Nonetheless, achieving such resilience is challenging for smaller independent artist-led spaces, which often operate with limited resources and precarious means. This disparity stresses the importance of supporting these smaller organisations and individual artists, as they too can make meaningful contributions to their communities and vernacular settings. It also highlights the need for a re-evaluation of how resilience and sustainability are supported across the different scales of artist-led spaces across the sector, particularly in the context of climate change where arts and cultural organisations have to pay even greater attention to their long-term maintenance and preservation plans.

Artist-led spaces often employ more entrepreneurial pathways of funding in an attempt to gain some level of autonomy from the significant public funders and their rigid conditions. This kind of entrepreneurial approach isn't just about battling infrastructural gaps and keeping work flowing; it's also a recognition that the sustainability and longevity of artist-led initiatives extend beyond financial metrics. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy that doesn't exclusively concentrate on short-term gains is

necessary, as such a narrow focus could potentially undermine the resilience of the space (Arts Council England, 2013, p. 32).

In the case of ESA, the artist-led organisation is actively engaged in diversifying the funding streams outside of the main public entities in order to generate more financial stability and resilience. It is, however, important to note that even though these initiatives and ambitions to operate independently of the public funders were successful and are constantly evolving, they do impact the resourcing strategy of the organisation with the added workload placed on the current employees occasionally creating problems and frictions (M. Walker, personal communication, 23 May 2023). This happened at a moment when the artist-led organisation was experiencing a state of flux since a new executive director was appointed, and they have had to re-evaluate how they talk about and understand themselves. The approach entailed redefining the organisation's vision, mission, and values as well as completely overhauling the value proposition, business model, and programme delivery of the organisation. According to Walker (personal communication, 23 May 2023), some members of staff felt that the time and effort required for this restructuring and redefinition would be better used on producing high-profile works of art. Walker continues saying that 'for somebody like myself, it's kind of necessary, because the way I was writing about the organisation just wasn't the right way'.

I concur with Walker's view that ESA is operating in various complexities of growth and sustainability while striving to maintain its grassroots ethos, and as such, a careful balance between its commitment to the artist-led sector and required strategic planning and management need to be considered. Taking into account the expansive nature of the artist-led organisation throughout the years, with several tangible assets (buildings) under their current management, ESA would perhaps benefit from a clearer structure when it comes to fundraising, whilst trying to stay true to its self-organised, grassroots ethos.

[T]his [...] kind of approach to fundraising is linked to the organisation's management culture, where ESA repositions itself as a grassroots organisation, sort of outside of mainstream, one that aims to think and operate differently. And one of the things that we've kind of did have a discussion around was whether or not we used to [...] to be kind of what I describe as tinkering around the edges

of adhococracy, [...] and because adhococracy is kind of rooted in chaos and being able to be flexible to change and that kind of responsive way of working, because it takes bold risks with its capital purchases. [...] but the art in some ways directors don't always orchestrate. They don't orchestrate or lead on every aspect of the work. They try to make it sort of more organic (M. Walker, personal communication, 23 May 2023).

To conclude this section, it's essential to consider the trajectory of long-lasting organisations such as ESA within the artist-led sphere. This reflection is informed by James Schofield's notion of intention (2020, p. 239). Established artist-led organisations can ignite debate in terms of their alignment with the artist-led condition and historically, increasing formality has been perceived as a red flag, signalling a shift towards institutionalisation. However, adopting a formal structure with more defined roles and responsibilities like ESA is doing does not preclude an organisation from being artist-led. As Schofield argues, formalisation emerges generally as a response to seeking funding and stability, but what truly matters is the organisation's intention.

The perceived issues surrounding funding and resources do not inherently distance an organisation from the artist-led condition, but rather, it is often the expectations and conditions imposed by the gatekeepers of these resources that push organisations towards unsustainable growth and expansion. This expansion often ushers in increased hierarchical structures and specialised roles, leading the organisation away from its origins and identity. Nevertheless, Schofield suggests that an artist-led organisation, if conscious of its intentions and if truly committed to preserving its artist-led ethos, can successfully maintain its affiliation with the artist-led condition despite its formalisation and resourcing. In the case of ESA, the organisation continually reassesses its trajectory to ensure it aligns with its values and original roots, thereby preserving its artist-led status. This ongoing evaluation allows ESA to stay true to its original intent while skilfully operating within the complexities of growth and sustainability.

4.6 Existing understandings of urban activation

The literature does not offer an established definition of an urban activator. Nonetheless, this concept is mentioned in a few instances (Atelier Kempe Thill, 2009; Pogačar, 2014; Spatial Agency, n.d.f) and is identified as a relatively small, often temporary, physical intervention in an urban setting, which stimulates development and participation through its emphasis on social value and appropriation of space. The term is not clearly recognised within the fields of arts, architecture, and urbanism either, but occasionally occurs within these settings. Architect and educator Kaja Pogačar (2014)¹² defines an urban activator as not some ready-made structure, but something that is created within the community and the participatory tactic used before, during and after its development is critical to its success. Previously, the concept of urban activator was used in distinct conditions such as in 2004 in Rotterdam, to describe the process of spatial activation of the Grotekerkplein Square through a small multi-functional theatre pavilion (Atelier Kempe Thill, 2009), or in 2001-2003 in Berlin, to explore tactics for temporary use of left-over space in the city (Spatial Agency, n.d.f).

Pogačar (2014, p. 191) notes that the word ‘activator’ could be replaced by several synonyms including mediator or initiator. Similarly, she brings attention to the phrase ‘urban catalyst’ which carries comparable meaning in the sense of catalysing urban transformation (Oswaldt et al., 2013).¹³ Parallel concepts have been explored in publications including ‘Temporary urban spaces: concepts for the use of city space’ (Haydn & Temel, 2006), ‘Urban Pioneers: Temporary use and urban developments in Berlin’ (Overmeyer, 2007), ‘The Temporary City’(Bishop & Williams, 2012), ‘Handmade Urbanism: from community initiatives to participatory models’ (Rosa & Weiland, 2013), and more recently in ‘Co-producing neighbourhood resilience’(Stevenson & Petrescu, 2016), all emphasising the value of simple, bottom-up

¹² Kaja Pogačar is a Slovenian architect-researcher working at the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture, University of Maribor. Pogačar has written extensively about the role of art in urban planning, her work being centred around the concept of urban activation and community engagement. Pogačar (2014) defines the process of activation as a socially engaged practice aiming to transform urban landscapes through temporary interventions and other transient forms of artistic and cultural expression.

¹³ The term ‘urban catalyst’ was adopted as the name for the ‘Urban Catalyst’ office based in Berlin. This office has carried out numerous projects and released publications focusing on temporary spatial interventions, particularly in deteriorated and peripheral urban areas (Oswaldt et al., 2013).

and often temporary spatial production in the city as an effective and rapid response to society needs and changes within the urban environment.

Envisioned as mechanisms of protest against the veneration of permanence in urbanism, as well as the current hegemonic political and economic agendas, these urban activators ‘experiment with looser planning and design frameworks, linked to phased packages of smaller, often temporary initiatives, designed to unlock the potentials of sites now, rather than in 10 years’ time’ (Bishop & Williams, 2012, p. 3). These catalysts are defined by their responsive, roots up nature and their frequently transient condition as a result of their punctual reaction to an issue when other routes are not possible (due to lack of funding/ownership etc). In other instances, they are strategically used to increase property value before more permanent uses come in,¹⁴ in an attempt to develop relationships between stakeholders and methods to research resilience at a neighbourhood level (Stevenson & Petrescu, 2016).

In ‘The Temporary City’ (2012), Bishop and Williams uncover a series of conditions in which an urban activator can emerge including (non-hierarchical other):

- Political and economic insecurity (influenced by the current inflationary context).
- (Space) vacancy (i.e. derelict, unused space in the city, decline of the high street).
- The revolution in work (i.e. shifting working patterns, particularly relevant in the post-pandemic era).
- Intense use of space (i.e. multi-use of space heavily focused on certain key areas rather than distributed across the city).
- Counterculture and activism.
- Technology (i.e. use of devices and data, emergence of AI, digital control).
- Creative milieu (i.e. the creative sector is most predisposed to operating in vacant space).

¹⁴ Particularly explored within the contemporary development landscape through the use of meanwhile space as a tool for creating activation prior to the permanent use is established.

By examining these conditions, it becomes clear that developing a more precise definition of the urban activator, related to self-organised alternative practices and their responses to societal needs and urban matters, is essential. Furthermore, the concept of transdisciplinarity emerges as an important element in the urban activation discourse.

4.7 Self-organisation and ‘URBAN ACT/ing’

In the foreword to ‘Self-organised’, art historian Stine Herbert (2013, p. 15) claims that action must be taken immediately to realise economies different from the capitalist production paradigm. Herbert continues saying that claiming that self-organisation has the ability to transform itself is perilous since it could be interpreted for corporate management jargon and capitalism’s merciless ability to profit by assimilating the alternative. The current societal situation requires one to organise oneself, either alone or with others, as Jan Verwoert (2013) also indicates. This line of thinking, however, should not be interpreted as implying complete freedom, but instead, the need to survive drives the need to self-organise. It is a reaction to the current political environment and all of its effects on our altering economic circumstances.

While conventional frameworks of architecture and urbanism often limit the influence of local actors on the outcome of spatial production, self-organised practices offer an alternative approach. As noted in *Spatial Agency* (n.d.d), these practices trace a lineage through various forms of political activism, cultural production, and alternative modes of dwelling, such as squatting and autonomous communities. They share a common desire to challenge the status quo and develop fiercely independent approaches, and some spatial practices, such as *Centri Sociali* or the *Freetown of Christiania*, extend this narrative into the disciplines of architecture and urbanism.

Architects and artists have also begun to explore the potential of self-organisation as a tactic within their practice. Cedric Price’s experiments in the 1960s tapped into the creativity of building users and were influenced by the Situationists’ proposals for Unitary Urbanism (Sadler, 1999; *Spatial Agency*, n.d.d). The *ECObox* project by AAA

(n.d.b)¹⁵ transformed a leftover space in Paris over several years through a deliberately slow and collaborative process involving residents, artists, students, and designers. The Isola Arts Centre in Milan adopted a self-organised approach in resisting the demolition of the local neighbourhood and its own building for regeneration-driven development (Spatial Agency, n.d.d). This approach gained attention from architects, artists, and local residents, generating oppositional material and alternative proposals.

In architectural terms, self-organisation radically challenges the regulated and controlled nature of the profession, going beyond participation in externally controlled processes and actively establishes the desire and need for transformation (Spatial Agency, n.d.d). The action involves designing processes that empower people to transform their own environments, embedding the mechanisms within their local context. Self-organised projects emerge through negotiations among diverse actors, making them inherently relational practices that emphasise the collective production of space.

To further define this condition, this thesis will introduce the notion of ‘URBAN ACT/ing’ (AAA, n.d.b), a concept emerged from a collaborative European network project encompassing a particular form of activism and organisational tactic that challenges established ‘academic, professional, artistic, and political practice’ whilst emphasising the need for a new approach that integrates creativity and critical thinking into urban dynamics.

In 2006-7, AAA invited twenty-three groups¹⁶ from across Europe and Canada to contribute to the European Platform for Alternative Practice and Research on the City (PEPRAV)¹⁷ program in the form of a platform handbook aimed to formalise a shared critical investigation into contemporary alternatives to practice and research in urban

¹⁵ AAA is an interdisciplinary collective platform, which develops activities and investigations relating to urban transformations and cultural, social, and political emerging practices in contemporary urban settings. AAA (2007a, p. 143) noted that they ‘encourage the re-appropriation of derelict spaces and the creation of new forms of urbanity by local residents through reversible designs and lived everyday practices, which make use of their skills and knowledge’.

¹⁶ They include artist groups, architects, designers, researchers, students, media activists, cultural workers, software designers, neighbourhood organisations and city dwellers.

¹⁷ Project partially funded by European Union’s CULTURE 2000 which initially ran between 2006-2007 as a partnership between AAA (Paris), University of Sheffield – the School of Architecture, Recyclart (Brussels) and metroZones (Berlin) (AAA, 2007d, p. 13).

settings. The ‘translocal platform’ allowed participants to strengthen various existing and potential collaborations between the groups and individuals facing similar issues in distinctive local settings, as well as ‘to mutualise tools and to act reciprocally as experts to each other’ (AAA, 2007d, p. 13). The title of the publication is deliberate and very carefully selected through a collaborative process by all involved. The ‘ACT/ing’ can be expressed in a variety of ways, from outspoken resistance and criticism to more constructive and propositional acting that is ingrained in daily life. In support of this way of thinking, Jeanne van Heeswijk notes in ‘The Artist Will Have to Decide Whom to Serve’ (2012, p. 80) that:

Cultural interventions are a form of urban acupuncture (hit and run tactics) that will allow the sensitive places in our society to emerge and the blocked relational energies flow again. It is therefore important to ask how an engaged practice will not only address issues through debates but can at the same time mobilize existing local, physical, and socio-cultural capital, and use it as the “performative” basis for a city under development (Van Heeswijk, 2012, p. 80).

This thesis will introduce a series of examples of URBAN ACT/ing, aiming to highlight the tools and methods used to evolve these practices, as well as the conditions and networks within which they operate. In the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in bottom-up initiatives and associated projects operating as a mode of production within the field of architecture, which have paved the way towards a more instinctive and autonomous (sometimes illegal) response to spatial production, planning, and use of space in the city.

The practices navigating across this sphere encompass a wide range of actors, including artist groups, media activists, cultural workers, software designers, architects, students, researchers, neighbourhood organisations, and urban residents. While these groups are often labelled as ‘local’ and their significance minimised, they possess a distinctiveness that allows them to reinvent and reimagine urban uses and practices in ways that conventional professional structures cannot achieve due to their generic nature. Their local identities are complex and multilayered, involving active participation, local expertise, and collaborations beyond their immediate context. According to AAA (n.d.b), these actors redefine contemporary urban practice as ‘tactical’, ‘situational’, and

‘active’, relying on soft professional and artistic skills and informal civic structures. This adaptive and responsive approach enables them to explore critical, reactive, and creative urban situations, ultimately driving meaningful change and highlighting the importance of transdisciplinarity in the contemporary urban discourse. This perspective aligns with Zamenopoulos and Alexiou’s definition:

Co-design means that people come together to conceptually develop and create things that respond to certain matters of concern and create a (better) future reality. People come together despite, or because of, their different agendas, needs, knowledge and skills (Zamenopoulos & Alexiou, 2018).

4.8 Transdisciplinarity

Theorists Isabelle Doucet and Nel Janssens (2011) explore in ‘Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism’, different interpretations of the notion of transdisciplinarity, often contingent on how it is differentiated from inter- and multidisciplinary. As architectural historian and art writer Jane Rendell (2013, pp. 105–106) contends in ‘Writing transparadiso: across and beside’, the terms ‘interdisciplinarity’ and ‘multidisciplinarity’ are often wrongly used interchangeably. In contrast to interdisciplinarity, which requires individuals to operate outside the bounds of their own fields and challenges traditional working practices, multidisciplinary entails different disciplines maintaining their distinct identities while working together. This distinction becomes important when investigating the psychological, intellectual, and emotional challenges that interdisciplinary work presents, which may result in potentially unbalanced interactions with power systems and promote the formation of novel experiences, bodies of knowledge, and ways of understanding.

Even in the absence of an exact, fully framed definition of transdisciplinarity, there seems to be a strong sense of the type of knowledge production it involves. This process primarily revolves around three principal components: the synthesis of disciplines and professions in knowledge creation, ethical considerations, and the significance of explorative, ‘designerly’ modes of inquiry (Cross, 1982; Doucet & Janssens, 2011, p. 2). These components also form the core of the transdisciplinary research definition

provided by the 'Handbook of Transdisciplinary Research' (Hirsch Hadorn et al., 2007), noting that:

[T]ransdisciplinary research is needed when knowledge about a societally relevant problem field is uncertain, when the concrete nature of problems is disputed, and when there is a great deal at stake for those concerned by problems and involved in dealing with them (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008, p. 431).

This captures the essence of architecture and urbanism's complex agency and presence in the world, which is intrinsic to architectural and urban design. As explored by Doucet and Janssens (2011), the complex interaction architecture has with the world, simultaneously as a discipline and a profession, necessitates handling a wide array of disciplinary and practical forms of knowledge. Architecture purportedly strikes a balance between the two extreme poles of knowledge creation (i.e. arts and science), but also navigates between individual agency and client service, many thinkers thus suggesting that design leads the way when it comes to hybridising knowledge production and engaging with diverse knowledge types. Wolfgang Jonas (2004, p. 1) notably stated that design adeptly handles scientific and non-scientific knowledge, ambiguous knowledge, outdated knowledge, and even situations where knowledge is completely lacking. By functioning as both a discipline and a profession and incorporating a wide range of disciplinary and non-disciplinary knowledge forms, architecture and urbanism inherently exhibit a transdisciplinary behaviour (Doucet & Janssens, 2011, p. 3).

However, as Doucet and Janssens further argue, architecture does not consistently use its transdisciplinary output towards ethical or societal goals. The divide (rather than collaboration) between architecture as a discipline and as a profession has resulted in substantial ethical conflicts and democratic shortfalls. Architecture's critical approach has mainly been processed interdisciplinarily, within the architectural discipline, incorporating Critical Theory, social theories, and ideology, and transcendental utopias (Doucet & Janssens, 2011, p. 3). However, this critique often struggles to withstand the intricacies of practice. It is therefore pertinent, if not pressing, to question whether architecture might benefit from identifying itself as a transdiscipline. Jane Rendell

(2004) has posited that architecture, as a subject, amalgamates multiple disciplines, creating opportunities for multi- and interdisciplinary research. However, she has also defined architectural design as a unique form of practice-led research:

[O]ver the last decade research 'for' and 'into' design has developed non-problematically, partly because the work can easily be positioned within existing disciplinary modes in science and the humanities. Research 'through' design has produced more debate and is currently being further developed in discussions around the relation between theory and practice (Rendell, 2004, p. 144).

With this, Rendell alludes to the third element of transdisciplinarity, specifically the importance of research by design, or, in Nigel Cross' (1982) terms, 'designerly ways of knowing'. Therefore, advocating a transdisciplinary approach to architecture and urbanism is an attempt to examine what is unique to these fields, the 'specific[ity of] designerly way[s] of knowing' (Findeli, 1999, p. 3) and their complex world interactions. This connects both to the tensions between theory and practice, and to the ethical dimension.

One approach to this is 'research through (or by) design' (Findeli, 1999, p. 2). This method is different from 'research for design' and 'research into design' – with the former alluding to practice and the latter to theory – in the sense that it situates questions about the interchange of practice in theory construction and theory in practice at the forefront of the discourse (Doucet & Janssens, 2011, p. 4). This designerly approach is also implied by Hirsch Hadorn et al.'s (2007) transdisciplinarity definition, which describes the process of transdisciplinary research as comprising three stages: problem identification, problem analysis, and 'bringing results to fruition' (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008, p. 431). The designerly element pertains to the fact that these three stages don't necessarily transpire in the stated order, and 'bringing results to fruition' is not identical to problem-solving and may not always manifest at the end of the research process (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008, p. 431). Instead, it happens during the research process to facilitate learning processes and is realised 'in the form of real-world experiments', which is precisely what architectural design can be considered as (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008, p. 428).

This thesis aligns with the understanding that while interdisciplinary knowledge is found in academic environments, transdisciplinary knowledge production involves a blend of academic and non-academic knowledge, theory and practice, discipline, and profession. According to Julie Thompson Klein's transdisciplinarity is:

[A] new form of learning and problem-solving involving cooperation among different parts of society and academia in order to meet the complex challenges of society [...]. A practice-oriented approach, transdisciplinarity is not confined to a closed circle of scientific experts, professional journals and academic departments where knowledge is produced [...]. Through mutual learning, the knowledge of all participants is enhanced, including local knowledge, scientific knowledge and the knowledges of concerned industries, businesses, and non-governmental organisations (Klein et al., 2001, p. 7).

Concurrently, this thesis aligns with Jane Rendell's positionality at the fringe, and as such, it proposes to investigate the locale of artist-led space at the boundary between art and architecture. Rendell (2006, pp. 3–7) notes that the two disciplines have 'an ongoing attraction to one another', and whilst each entail a very distinctive relationship to 'function', one (architecture) more obvious than the other in a traditional sense, 'we could say that art is functional in providing certain kinds of tools for self-reflection, critical thinking and social change'. In her attempt to challenge the notion of 'public art' due to its polarity of views towards what classes as public (or private), and what public space means to different people (i.e. exclusion and segregation or invitation and opportunity), Rendell coins a new term: 'critical spatial practice'. This idiom 'allows us to describe work that transgresses the limits of art and architecture and engages with both the social and the aesthetic, the public and the private' (Rendell, 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, it emphasises the value of the critical, as well as the spatial, revealing 'the interest in exploring the specifically spatial aspects of interdisciplinary processes or practices that operate between art and architecture'.¹⁸ Rendell (2020) makes a critical

¹⁸ As further explained by Rendell (2006, p. 6, 2016, p. 336), the term 'critical spatial practice' defines 'modes of self-reflective artistic and architectural practice which seek to question and to trans-form the social conditions of the sites into which they intervene'.

note in her more recent work where she draws attention to the importance of time in critical spatial practice, asking:

If critical spatial practice [...] prioritised the role of the interdisciplinary, that I defined as a place between disciplines, to provide a critique of existing methodologies – including artistic projects which adopt architectural processes, architectural works which draw on fine art approaches, as well as art/architectural collaborations – how might the between of interdisciplinarity might relate to the across of transdisciplinarity today?(Rendell, 2020, p. xv)

These intricate positions and points of view are explored by others also. In her seminal work ‘Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics’(1996), art historian Rosalyn Deutsche coined the term ‘urban-aesthetic’ to describe the essence of interdisciplinary activities combining concepts of art, architecture, and urban design with theories revolving around cities, social space, and public space. Barbara Holub and Paul Rajakovics (2013) have taken this concept further by expounding on the intricate relationship between art and urbanism, advocating for the emergence of new urban practitioners. In this role, the practices of urban design and art become even more interconnected. In contrast with other transient and experimental urban practices, Holub and Rajakovics (2013, p. 169) introduce the term ‘direct urbanism’ to describe the incorporation of creative initiatives and methods into the processes of urban planning as tools of promoting long-lasting, socially, and societally inclusive urban commitments through artistic methods.¹⁹ They contend that:

To expand “instant urbanism”, which basically emphasises the temporary and ephemeral, direct urbanism focuses on long-term commitments and the durational as well as persistence. It does not limit itself-as “ambulant urbanism” does-to repairing “urban emergencies”, but combines tactical actions with strategic concepts. Direct urbanism overcomes the alleged

¹⁹ Holub and Rajakovics’ ‘direct urbanism’ draws inspiration from the concept of direct action espoused by Emma Goldman, direct urbanism involves incorporating artistic strategies and projects into long-term, socially, and societally inclusive planning processes (Charter for Compassion, n.d.; Holub, 2015, p. 21).

contradiction between urban planning/urban design and direct intervention by using artistic means (Holub & Rajakovics, 2013, p. 169).

This exploration makes the way towards Rendell's (2013, pp. 105–106) insightful investigation into transdisciplinarity²⁰ as a horizontal movement that goes beyond, across and through disciplines and its potential lies in its ability to radically critique and reconfigure existing fields of knowledge, thus allowing for a radical rethinking of relationships and the emergence of new viewpoints and positions. Responding to Félix Guattari's (1964) assertion of the notion of transdisciplinarity as debated in 'Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics', Gary Genosko (2002, p. 60) notes that 'it is transdisciplinarity that holds the potential of radical critique, related, in his own philosophy, to "transversality [...] explicitly a creature of the middle", where the "trans" is capable of transversal actions, which, in cutting across existing territories of knowledge, allows them to be experienced differently, thus providing new positions and perspectives'. As further analysed by Andrew Goffey (2016, p. 43) in 'Radical Philosophy', 'transversality allows Guattari to introduce the possibility of a kind of group practice within the institution that generates analytic effects regarding the circulation of desire within it, and the subjective possibilities of working with it'.

This thesis explores the transformative potential that transdisciplinarity introduces, particularly in urban environments, highlighting how reconfiguring existing domains of knowledge can fundamentally alter urban contexts, and revealing the profound impact of new ways of thinking and interdisciplinary approaches on urban development. This practice seeks to perpetually transform and evolve itself and the localities it encounters. To reflect on this condition, Jane Rendall (2013) talks about the notion of 'transparadiso' linking to Barbara Holub and Paul Rajakovics' (2013) practice:

With transparadiso we have a practice which desires to transform and is itself transformative, hoping to transform – through engagement – the situations and subjects it encounters – but not leaving the challenging task of change to others. Instead it also seeks to continuously transform itself in response to its own processes and products, folding ongoing self-reflection and institutional critique

²⁰ Linking to the work of Felix Guattari (1964).

into the process of making urban work. transparadiso is both transdisciplinary and transversal. Moving across art, architecture and urbanism, it calls into question institutional structures and the ways in which they become manifest at the crossings between different disciplinary contexts, and rather than back away from a stoppage, the artist-architects turn blockages into interesting opportunities and places for imaginative play (Rendell, 2013, p. 106).

Jeanne van Heeswijk (n.d.b) comments on the intersections between disciplines, emphasising that they remain crucial, as understanding how to employ a discipline's skill set and aligning it with others is key. The artist continues noting that:

Giving the complexity of our time we need to work together to get a better understanding of the local condition. And it is hard work to understand how we can work in teams. Autonomy is important, but I believe in what I call relative autonomy or related autonomy – that you use your specific skills and your knowledge in relation to others, so that you are able to assist in the larger complexity (Van Heeswijk, n.d.b).

These reflections point to the inherent dynamism and fluidity of transdisciplinary practice. The ethos of 'transparadiso' and 'relative autonomy' embody a transformative approach that emphasises collaboration, self-reflection, and innovation, revealing the potential to reshape the urban landscape through these continual intersections of disciplines (Holub & Rajakovics, 2013; Van Heeswijk, n.d.b). This transformative potential is not limited to the outcomes, but is ingrained in the processes, offering an ever-evolving space for learning, experimentation, and imaginative play.

Drawing on examples from the literature,²¹ in 'Planning Unplanned: Towards a New Function of Art in Society', Barbara Holub and Christine Hohenbüchler (2015) refer to various transdisciplinary studios situated across art, architecture, and urbanism, to

²¹ Over the last decade various publications presented practices and projects expanding on the transdisciplinary vocabulary including terms like "cross-pollination", "cross-sector collaboration", or "social (re)production of architecture", emphasising the fluid movement across the disciplines of art and architecture (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017; Zamenopoulos et al., 2022).

illustrate the position of what they coin as the ‘new urban practitioner’ and to develop a field of peer practices. The book displays an array of projects undertaken by various European studios, such as Public Works, AAA, and Jeanne van Heeswijk. Holub and Hohenbüchler (2015) pinpoint a distinct network of peer practices, many of which already develop a tight-knit relationship and collaborate on joint initiatives, highlighting that the majority of these practices expressly view their work as a continuous construction of urban commons (AAA, 2007a). Nonetheless, concurring with Jonathan Orlek (2021, p. 213), not much attention has been given to the roles that artist-led spaces are playing as urban practitioners and their position within the process of urban activation. This is a result of the limited cross-sector collaborations which lead to confining the potential of artist-led space in the city. According to the arts management literature (Grodach, 2010, p. 82), it is not that often that the networks and the social capital nurtured in artist-led spaces expand beyond local arts or even beyond individual art scenes to create programs that result in cross-sector prospects.

In a survey of twelve artist-led spaces in Dallas (of varied sizes, missions, locations and programming) Grodach (2010, p. 82) found limited support for artists in forging career links beyond teaching roles or curatorial work, highlighting a missed opportunity for art spaces to facilitate connections across various cultural and commercial sectors. By limiting access to visual and performing artists and often ignoring that fact that artists operate within and across multiple associated cultural practices, art spaces struggle to capitalise on the potential to develop ties between the sectors and commercial cultural industries, which can result in a collective benefit (Maruksen et al., 2006; Thorsby, 2007). Grodach describes this as a proficiency in building strong intra-group relationships rather than the weaker inter-group ties that might bridge diverse cultural sectors.

Similarly, in the architecture discipline, Holub (2012, p. 9) critiques the profession’s failure to expand beyond the functional and to experiment with poetics and a ‘floating, associative mind-set’. Discussing the motivation behind forming *transparadiso* with Rajakovics, Holub reflects on their shared desire to transcend the realistic constraints of their professions and explore a utopian vision. They sought to expand architectural thinking to include poetic elements, viewing the name *transparadiso* as a metaphor for a new approach to overcoming the challenges inherent in being an architect and broadening the field’s perspective. Holub notes that:

[I]f you look at how an architect works and how an artist works, for me it was always important to connect with aspects of literature and fiction, or to create a kind of associative mind-set. To ask questions rather than providing answers and fulfilling the expectations of the client or developer (Holub & Rajakovics, 2012, p. 9).

The idea that architects harbour a respect for poetics of design is compelling, yet as Rajakovics notes (2012, p. 9), it often seems that there is little room to integrate these poetic moments into everyday practice. The contemporary context, shaped by the economic strains and significant global disruptions, imposes considerable functional pressures on architects, these global challenges presenting a real obstacle to developing design ideas steeped in the poetics of space and rooted in their specific contexts. Despite these difficulties, it is crucial for architects to persist in finding ways to maintain the poetic essence of their work amidst these overwhelming pressures.

Linking to Maruksen (2006) and Thorsby's (2007) debate on cross-sector collaboration and its current challenges for artists and artist-led spatial production, this thesis aims to extend this exploration within the context of the Trans-Local-Act initiative.²² This initiative represents a temporary network of 'cultural practices within and across' – embodying 'trans-local networks and agencies' that connect in a non-hierarchical and ideologically unconstrained manner across diverse settings (both rural and urban), drawn together by specific commonalities among a variety of local practices (Petrescu et al., 2010, p. 21).

According to Petrescu et al. (2010), these practices orchestrate collaborations between existing and newly established formal and informal cultural institutions, positioned in rural areas, city peripheries, or at the juncture of various identity systems - be they political regimes, disciplines, territories, and so forth. They incite the emergence of new types of social structures, alternative economic systems, and ecological approaches. Furthermore, they express a keen interest in common resources and shared societal

²² Trans-Local-Act is a manifestation initiated by AAA and PEPRAV (European Platform for Alternative Practice and Research on the City) of cultural biodiversity brought into existence by architects, artists, activists, curators, cultural workers, educators, sociologists, geographers, and local residents (Petrescu et al., 2010).

values, and the collective production of knowledge. This dynamic dialogue of interactions and cross-disciplinary collaborations promotes an innovative, transformative network that transcends traditional boundaries and limitations. On a similar tonality, Barbara Holub (2012) notes in a conversation with Mick Wilson & Paul O’Neill that:

We both thought there would be this natural enrichment of both perspectives – art and architecture – but it turned out that in order for this enrichment to emerge, we often felt the urge to define our own disciplinary position and understanding, to defend the respective background from which we came. There was an ongoing discussion along the lines of: “Can we define our new, common practice?” “Would that not mean that we limit it at the same time?” “Isn’t it less about defining the practice and more about nurturing those different angles, allowing for a heterogeneous structure beyond the limits of defined professional fields?” At a certain point we came up with this differentiation: that an artistic practice typically doesn’t aim to reach a resolution or answers, but rather poses questions. Whereas the new urbanist – and by this I mean our practice, where art and architecture come together – always has this sense of trying to move forward towards some goal that may lead to another step as part of a processual approach. And so we gradually developed this change of perspective into a method – switching roles (Holub & Rajakovics, 2012, p. 10).

This thesis contends that transdisciplinarity is a central force in urban activation processes, and that artist-led organisations operating transversally across various disciplines, carry immense potential for urban transformation. These artist-led spaces possess the unique ability to converge actors from diverse backgrounds and fields, promoting collaborative and cross-pollinating practices that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and by working transversally, they can combine multiple perspectives (artistic, architect, environmental, sociological) to expand their capacity to engage and respond to urban challenges.

This argument is supported by a series of case studies situated at the intersection of art and architecture, where artist-led organisations demonstrate transdisciplinary practices, pushing the boundaries of their discipline, experimenting, and unlocking new

possibilities across sectors. As previously discussed, artist-led space carries an array of roles in community and economic progress in the city, operating as a tool for developing social networks that support both community regeneration and artistic growth. Globally, artist-led spaces have served as platforms for artists and communities to engage with each other and collaborate on projects that are aimed at activating and transforming public space. Pogačar (2014) notes that the urban activator experiments with looser planning and design frameworks, linked to relatively small and phased, often temporary initiatives, designed to unlock the possibilities of sites immediately rather than in distant future plans.

To further this investigation, an Artist-led Directory has been developed to place organisations like ESA within the context of other spaces, exploring their responses to urban issues. The analysis of these spaces employs a categorisation method influenced by Carl Grodach's methodology in 'Art Spaces in Community and Economic Development: Connections to Neighbourhoods, Artists, and the Cultural Economy' (2010, p. 77), and by Gavin Murphy and Mark Cullen in 'Artist-Run Europe' (2016, pp. 160–199).

4.9 The Artist-led Directory

Grodach's (2010, p. 77) classification categorises artist-led spaces into four key types: artist cooperatives, arts incubators, ethnic-specific art spaces and community arts or cultural centres.²³ Murphy and Cullen's (2016, pp. 160–199) 'Artist-Run Index' uses a similar categorisation system, but includes additional important parameters including: funding, mission statement and longevity, which I also incorporate within my own

²³ Grodach (2010, p. 77) classifies spaces in four categories:

- Artist cooperatives: These are art spaces that are established, managed, and owned cooperatively by artists themselves.
- Arts incubators: These spaces provide artists, arts organisations, and arts-related businesses with affordable access to technical, administrative, and professional resources. They often offer exhibition, rehearsal, and office spaces, creating a supportive environment for creative endeavours to flourish.
- Ethnic-specific art spaces: These are dedicated art spaces that focus on presenting and showcasing the history, art, and culture of a particular racial or ethnic group.
- Community arts or cultural centres: These multifunctional and multidisciplinary spaces cater to the arts consumption and participation of residents within a specific neighbourhood or citywide.

Artist-led Directory.²⁴ This approach highlights both the potentials and limitations of artist-led spaces to engage in community and economic development. As Grodach (2010, p. 75) notes, art spaces' primary contribution to neighbourhood development is that they act as a tool for creating social links and social capital that contribute to both community regeneration and artistic development. Still, issues around location, organisational form, and management of space 'may limit their community and economic development potential, especially in relation to making connections to other cultural clusters in the region'.²⁵

The debate around the value that artist-led spaces bring to cities is topical, especially during times marked by the rapid decline of high streets. The directory of UK-based artist-led spaces performs as a lens of observation for examining the role and agency of these spaces in urban activation. Envisioned as a tool to quantify and compare, the directory assesses the distinct characteristics, organisational modes, funding structures, and missions of a wide selection of spaces across the country, providing a comprehensive overview of their impact and operational strategies.²⁶

The main parameters for inclusion evolved from Grodach (2010), Murphy and Cullen (2016) and include:

- **Location** (immediate environment to ESA or further away).
- **Artist-led spaces with a dedicated programme** showing contemporary, alternative, and critically engaged art practices.
- **Arts incubator:** an art space that offers affordable technical, administrative, and professional assistance and exhibition, rehearsal, and/or office space for arts organisations, arts-related business, or artists.

²⁴ Refer to 8.7 - Appendix 7 for access to the Artist-led Directory.

²⁵ In line with Grodach's (2010, p. 75) categorisation of art spaces, while each type is in some ways a community arts space in the sense that they all work very closely with their localities and serve a defined community, for the purpose of this study, the community arts title is reserved for those artist-led spaces that uphold 'a place-based service area and mandate focusing more on audiences than artistic producers'. Furthermore, this work will seek to also introduce individual artists operating between the disciplines of art and architecture whose spatial manifestations are examples of urban activators.

²⁶ The information gathered in this index comes from the artist-led organisations' own online sources, literature review, and desktop research.

- **Non-profit/project:** this parameter has a dual function: in cases where a space clearly states that is non-profit, or in several cases to indicate a non-profit/project space that exhibit artist-led attributes.
- **Community arts:** multifunctional and multidisciplinary art spaces that usually concentrate on arts consumption and participation for residents of their immediate neighbourhood or citywide.
- **Studios:** offer to rent studio space within the artist-led organisation
- Longevity.
- Funding.
- **Mission statement** (including size: number of people/reach of work).
- **Tactics:** modes of operating in the city.
- Website.

A comprehensive analysis of the artist-led spaces listed in the directory has guided the strategic selection of a range of examples of URBAN ACT/ing for further investigation. These examples aim to provide a lens for investigating ESA and its position within the artist-led sphere.²⁷ The chosen sample encompasses a wide spectrum of UK-based practices, showcasing the diverse sphere of artist-led initiatives, varying from small, ad-hoc spaces, to large, institutionalised forces with long-lasting portfolios and applications. Although the focus is primarily on the UK context and particularly on ESA, the inclusion of examples from outside the UK in the analysis broadens the perspective, illustrating ESA's connections and engagement within the European artist-led scene. This approach aims to capture the networks and relationships that shape the dynamics of artist-led practices, highlighting the conditions within which the urban activator can emerge and evolve as part of its transformative role in the urban landscape.

²⁷ These key organisations are highlighted in red in the Artist-led Directory.

4.9.1 Self-organisation and circular economy - Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (AAA), Paris

AAA (Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée - Studio of Self-managed Architecture) (2007d), co-founded by Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou in 2001, is a recognised example of self-organisation within architecture, working across multiple disciplines, including art. AAA is an interdisciplinary collective platform based in Paris, engaging in urban transformations and emerging cultural, social, and political practices in contemporary urban landscapes. AAA operates as a self-organised, alternative model that involves collaboration between architects, artists, and local stakeholders, with an aim to empower communities to take control of their own urban locality and to construct alternative modes of urban life that meet their needs.

AAA (2007b, p. 143) devises 'urban tactics' that complement small-scale processes and promote disruptions within standardised urban contexts. These contexts are often governed by private economic interests or centralised policies that fail to accommodate the global, informal, and multicultural dynamics that define contemporary cities. AAA's aim is to promote the reclaiming of abandoned spaces and the emergence of new forms of urban life driven by local residents. The practice achieves this through adaptable designs and everyday practices that leverage the residents' skills and knowledge. By resisting the growing control imposed on the urban environment, these spaces retain their potential for accessibility and experimentation. In 'URBAN ACT. A Handbook for Alternative Practice', AAA emphasises:

We valorise the position of the resident/user as political condition and develop tools cooperatively to re-territorialise their spaces of proximity and empower their decisions and actions within the city. A "self-managed architecture" provokes assemblages and networks of individuals, desires and different manners of making. Such an architecture does not correspond to a liberal practice but asks for new forms of association and collaboration, based on exchange and reciprocity. Our architecture is simultaneously political and poetic as it aims above all to "create relationships between worlds" (AAA, 2007b, p. 143).

AAA (2007a, p. 144) began with a small group of architects and students, expanding to include artists, activists, researchers, filmmakers, and various community members such as families, shopkeepers, retirees, and social workers. The alternative practice has a strong stance regarding the impact of its work and involvement in local dynamics, noting that:

We have developed our practice in an area which faces a major top-down transformation. In this context, most of the residents are directly or indirectly excluded from the decision making process. We try to create conditions for residents to claim space for collective management (AAA, 2007a, p. 144).

In 2008, AAA launched the 'R-Urban' strategy in Colombes, a suburb of Paris, with support from the Colombes Municipal Council. This strategy spanned across seven years and aimed to address social challenges including youth crime and the prevalence of a consumerist, car-dependent lifestyle commonly observed in more affluent areas, and promote resilience through community-driven projects (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 723). Serving as an exemplary case and demonstrating the power of its impact, the process proved valuable for generating and testing the effectiveness of R-Urban as a potential strategy for developing commons-based resilience in other suburban towns across Europe (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The R-Urban model builds upon earlier approaches to resilient neighbourhood development, such as Howard's Garden City (1889) and Geddes's Regional City (1915), as well as the Transition Town model (2008) (Geddes, 1915; R. Hopkins, 2008; Howard, 1889). However, R-Urban does not simply replicate these theories; instead, it adopts an iterative and exploratory approach that connects practice and theory. This dynamic relationship ensures that both the practical implementation and the theoretical underpinnings continually inform and shape one another (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 720).

Figure 37 - Diagram of the Agrocité circular economy model. Image: AAA (n.d.a).

Image removed due to copyright reasons.

From 2011 to 2015, supported by a €1.5 million European Union LIFE program grant, AAA established three self-managed community facilities: Agrocité, Recyclab, and Ecohab (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 724). Agrocité focused on the production of ecological crops, Recyclab on recycling reclaimed materials for sustainable construction, and Ecohab on creating accessible and environmentally friendly housing (Bravo, 2018). Initiated in response to Saint Blaise's²⁸ lack of access to affordable fresh produce and the community's ambition to repurpose vacant land into active, shared spaces, the R-Urban network demonstrates how self-organised spaces can become powerful agents of urban and social transformation (Tribillon, 2015).

²⁸ As depicted by David Bravo (2018) in a Public Space article, the Paris suburbs act as a stark example that challenges the assertions of modern urban planning. In contrast to the rising prices in the highly sought-after nineteenth-century neighbourhoods within the densely populated city centre, the less privileged segments of society are concentrated in high-rise buildings in the recently developed peripheral areas. These standalone constructions were intended to provide wider access to green spaces, fresh air, and sunlight, but instead, they have become large, desolate, unsafe, and challenging to upkeep, creating a sense of drift in public space.

The R-Urban strategy embraces a pluralistic approach that encourages the active participation of diverse stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes (Sharifi, 2016). This is accomplished by establishing a network of citizen projects and grassroots organisations centred around collective civic hubs. These hubs act as spaces for economic and cultural activities, as well as productive practices that engage with local resources and contribute to enhancing resilience. As explored by Petrescu, Petcou and Baibarac (2016, p. 720) in ‘Co-producing commons-based resilience: lessons from R-Urban’, the civic hubs play a vital role in providing the necessary infrastructure to facilitate transformative change, offering physical space, training, and capacity building for the development of resilient practices that can strategically interconnect with one another. Acting as ‘urban transition labs’ (Neuens et al., 2013), they empower the community to actively respond to challenges, thereby enhancing its ability to adapt and thrive, a fundamental requirement for achieving resilience (Sen, 1999). Operating as locally closed systems initially at the neighbourhood level, this network holds the potential to expand and encompass the entire city. This is particularly interesting for the discourse on urban activation, highlighting the potential of transformative change these individual prototypes can carry across the wider urban context.

R-Urban valorises the valuable social capital existing in neighbourhoods. It achieves this by enabling all citizens who choose to become involved to participate fully in the implementation of the strategy. This includes participating in events and training programmes, to developing their own activities, and supporting and running the hubs. Citizens are thus not only participants but also agents of innovation and change, generating alternative social and economic organisations, collaborative projects and shared spaces, producing new forms of commons (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 722).

By 2014, Agrocité and Recyclab were operational, with Agrocité featuring a food garden, compost plant, and facilities for aquaculture and hydroponics (Bravo, 2018). Agrocité encouraged the formation of interconnected actor-networks, each dedicated to managing specific ecological systems such as the market garden, chickens, bees, compost, flea markets, disco-soup events, prod-actions, and the canteen. This network-

based micro-management approach effectively integrated economic, social, and ecological elements, linking them into a cohesive system (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 726).

Recyclab was a 400-square-meter wooden pavilion dedicated to storage space for recycled materials and workshops for their transformation into construction elements, with approximately 100 tons of rubble from the surrounding areas are recycled and repurposed at this centre (Bravo, 2018). The pavilion also provided co-working rooms for designers and local craftspeople, serving as a space open to all residents for repair workshops, cooperative design, and assisted self-construction. Notably, both buildings are designed to be reversible, constructed with temporary land-use permits. They consisted of reusable components, including containers, woodwork, and plank moulding panels, and are equipped with rainwater collection systems and photovoltaic cells to generate solar power (Bravo, 2018).

AAA's approach to urban development highlights its commitment to sustainability, adaptability, and community empowerment. Through its self-organised initiatives, AAA demonstrates how temporary structures can provide long-term benefits while promoting environmentally conscious practices and encouraging a sense of ownership among residents. This approach aligns with Lefebvre's (1991) recognition of the 'soft' aspects of a city, challenging the prevailing notion that architecture is solely concerned with physical form (Gottdiener, 1985, p. xv; Schneider, 2017, p. 26). According to Lefebvre (1991), space is not simply a visual or abstract entity, but it is intimately connected to people's lives and is continually shaped through their experiences. The social and spatial dimensions are interlinked and cannot be separated. As architect and theorist Tatjana Schneider (2017, p. 26) contents in 'Notes on Social Production', while many architects and planners have traditionally prioritised form as the primary means of expression, the concept of social production emphasises the need to consider both the spatial and social aspects in conjunction. Furthermore, as sociologist Mark Gottdiener (1985, p. xv) emphasises that for any intervention aimed at social liberation to succeed, it must create its own space. He asserts that life-enhancing social relations must be materialised through the social production of space.

This assertion is critical in the context of urban activation as it highlights that the kind of alternative practice AAA is proposing seeks to transcend the conventional approach to architecture by instead focusing on the social networks and relationships emerging

through spatial production. A key element of the R-Urban initiative is its self-organising nature, enabled by the active participation and engagement of local residents in all aspects of the project. Residents were involved in the planning, execution, and upkeep of the numerous interventions, ensuring that the project reflected the needs and preferences of the neighbourhood. The architecture and aesthetic of the interventions proposed were not the centre of the project, but rather the organic outcome of the community interaction and co-creation process facilitated and nurtured by AAA. During her keynote at the ‘Repurposing Places for Social and Environmental Resilience International Conference 2023’, Doina Petrescu stated:

Our role shifted in time. Initially, we were the initiators, then we became facilitators, and now they are fully self-managed (Petrescu, 2023).

In this context, philosopher Friedrich Engels’ (1892) explanation of the origins of social production holds significance as it describes the relationship between social relations and working methods, offering valuable understandings of the meaningful and transformative contemporary utilisation of social production. Lefebvre (1991, pp. 123–124) further argues that spatial design should be regarded as an integral aspect of the productive forces within society, thus acknowledging the potential for this productive force of ‘intervening’ to facilitate change. This perspective encourages a radical rethinking of the architect’s position as spatial agent in the process of ‘URBAN ACT/ing’. Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2009, pp. 99–100) contend in ‘Beyond Discourse: Notes on Spatial Agency’ that ‘the agent is one who effects change through the empowerment of others’, with ‘these “others” taking control and initiating different or “alternative” spatial processes including, but not restricted to, the making of buildings’.

When considering how to intervene effectively in the urban setting, Engels’ emphasis on the necessity of social appropriation assumes a crucial role, primarily due to its provision of concrete suggestions on how to conceptualise and realise such appropriation. As Schneider (2017, p. 26) further contends, social appropriation inherently encompasses the agency of social producers on a collective scale. It is through the concept of social appropriation, with its delineation of value systems, that the space generated through social production begins to take shape, specifically as one

that prioritises collective effort and cooperation, ultimately resulting in shared benefits. Hence, social production begins to refer to a mode of production wherein the producers of a product or space govern both the product or space itself and the means of its production.

Regrettably, the temporary nature of the R-Urban complex has led to its threatened dismantling, sparking solidarity and advocacy efforts to protect the socio-ecological commons. This marks a new phase in the co-production process of R-Urban, transforming it into an advocacy campaign and political battle aimed at preserving the established commons, confronting local state opposition, and demanding recognition of the project's achievements (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 732).

However, the success of the R-Urban complex in Colombes extends beyond its physical transformation of the urban fabric; it lies in the activation of the social fabric (Petrescu et al., 2016). The complex has contributed to the municipality by creating twenty jobs and engaging over five hundred residents annually in workshops, discussions, and assemblies. Through their involvement, residents have transitioned from frustration and isolation to active participants in a shared project. They have gained individual skills, developed teamwork abilities and ecological awareness, becoming citizens who contribute to the co-production of their own neighbourhood (Bravo, 2018; Petrescu et al., 2016).

Although the R-Urban experiment was blocked by politicians, it should not be considered a failure. The positive results and the extensive interest raised demonstrate its potential impact at several levels: society, the professions, and the policymakers. This attempt to produce a commons-based resilience can be understood as a 'generative institution' (Capra & Mattei, 2015), challenging existing public institutions to recognise communities 'responsibility with power' to prompt change at different levels and identify policy and procedural gaps (Petrescu et al., 2016, p. 733).

While the future of the complex remains uncertain, other municipalities in the Paris Metropolitan Area, such as Bagneux, Gennevilliers, and Montreuil, have expressed interest in adopting additional nodes of the R-Urban network. To facilitate this expansion, the 'R-Urban Cooperative Society of Collective Interest' is being established. This platform will coordinate associations inspired by the principles of self-management and solidarity, aiming to extend the R-Urban model of governance.

R-Urban served as an urban catalyst by encouraging fresh modes of interpersonal and commercial interaction, the project creating opportunities for communities to connect with one other and local food producers, promoting sustainable food practices and ecological awareness. AAA showcased the potential of self-organised spaces to become potent agents of urban transformation by using agriculture, art and design as means to activate underutilised urban spaces and to encourage community collaboration.

4.9.2 Local embeddedness and activism - Resolve Collective, London

Resolve Collective is a small London-based artist-led space led by brothers Seth and Akil Scafe-Smith and Melissa Haniff, who use architecture, art, engineering, and technology to address social issues in the built environment. Its work spans across different spatial settings, transversally moving between working locally in its home neighbourhood in South London, to working across Europe, but still thinking about how it centres local practice and local knowledge and ideas as the focus of its work. One of the key strengths of the artist-led space is its commitment to working in tandem with the communities it serves. This collaborative approach ensures that its projects have a real impact and respond to the needs and aspirations of its stakeholders. By actively engaging with local actors, Resolve Collective's work becomes a catalyst for social change and transformation. Resolve Collective notes that:

Design encompasses both physical and systemic intervention, exploring ways of using a project's site as a resource and working with different communities as stakeholders in the short and long-term management of projects. For us, design carries more than aesthetic value; it is also a mechanism for political and socio-economic change (Resolve Collective, n.d.-a).

In a recent interview with Dezeen (Tesler, 2023), Akil Scafe-Smith emphasised the collective's design philosophy, which places vernacular design at the core of Resolve Collective's practice by prioritising the utilisation of locally available resources and methodologies to address the specific design needs of the local context.

Amongst its most known projects is the temporary conversion of a derelict space underneath Brixton Station passageway into a platform for local artists and

entrepreneurs. The aim of the project was ‘to explore questions of “value” in urban markets today: how are our markets socially, culturally, politically and environmentally valuable in our increasingly valorised cities?’ (Resolve Collective, n.d.-b). Resolve Collective also developed ‘The Paradox of Suspension’ (MAIA Group, n.d.), an installation aimed at reimagining one of YARD Arthouse²⁹ bedrooms, using the symbol of the crane to investigate the link between development, labour and the movement and displacement of people (MAIA Group, 2021). This project evokes a connection to ESA’s Art Hostel particularly in how artists use the intimate confines of a bedroom to address societal concerns and to celebrate local knowledge. The innovative use of a bedroom as a canvas for space activation is evocative, but it also sets out a great base for analysis for ESA’s interventions such as Artist House 45, Convention House, and the Art Hostel.

Figure 38 - Image of ‘Paradox of Suspension’. Photograph: Scafe-Smith (2021). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

²⁹ YARD is an arthouse, residency space & cultural centre ran by artist-led group Maia Group, located within newly formed neighbourhood, Port Loop.

In 2023, Resolve Collective prematurely disassembled its ‘them’s the breaks’ exhibition at the Barbican in response to a series of censorship acts against Elias Anastas of Radio AlHara. This incident occurred shortly after Resolve Collective had communicated its disappointment to the Barbican Gallery Manager over several hostile encounters with the Barbican Front of House staff. As depicted by Dezeen editor Tom Ravenscroft (2023), these included hostility towards Resolve Collective’s members’ close family and friends at the exhibition opening, heavy-handed and overly suspicious treatment of Black and Brown artists, and public deprecation and infantilisation while being ushered out of their exhibition space.

Despite the Barbican’s apology, Resolve Collective decided to end its public program of events and dismantling the exhibition, making a powerful statement against the institution’s attempts to control and silence the artists’ voices. The empty gallery space became as a ‘physical reminder’ of the artists’ experiences, holding the institution accountable for their promises and failures (The Funambulist, 2023). Resolve Collective noted that:

Our experiences at the Barbican had led us to a frustrating, yet unsurprising, conclusion: that today, despite the best intentions of many good individuals within the institution, young Black artists such as ourselves and other peers who seek to platform their communities, cannot be guaranteed to be treated with respect and dignity when working there (Resolve Collective, 2024).

This conclusion, compounded by the unequivocal act of anti-Palestinian censorship against Radio AlHara, led Resolve Collective to halt all further events in its public program to safeguard its peers, collaborators, and co-conspirators from further institutional harm. By taking a stand against the Barbican’s oppressive policies, Resolve Collective demonstrated the transformative potential of artist-led spaces to challenge and reshape the cultural landscape, especially at the threat of silencing their voice and diminishing the struggles of a marginalised community.

This is particularly relevant to the debate as it highlights the power of artist-led spaces beyond artistic expression. Being embedded in a community means representing that

community and their needs through collective processes, with the ambition to reform existing policies to create a space where the community can exist and thrive.

4.9.3 Repurposing of space – 019, Ghent

019 (n.d.-a)³⁰ is an artist-led collective bridging between the field of art and architecture and operating in an old welding factory at Dok Noord in Ghent (Belgium) as a laboratory that constantly shifts directions and positions as a way of intensifying its sense of improvisation and reinvention of space. From 2013 onwards, Dok Noord became the focal point of 019's activities, a key point in the organisation's own identity and awareness of its works' impact. Using the factory as project space, 019 understood that the act of occupying and taking possession of the site was not the goal of its work (Van Imschoot, n.d.):

019 was never going to remain the only place we worked in. From the start, it's been a laboratory that swings us into unknown directions, constantly sharpening our sense of improvisation and reinvention on the spot [...] From the inside out, starting with a wooden construction in its interior and up to the billboard at an outside wall and a series of flagpoles on the roof, we gradually developed the place into an assembly of undergrounds for public and artistic encounter, an emerging space for collaboration that was grounded on the premise that all media at our disposal were common grounds to be rediscovered. That is when the work began. That is when things began to move, for real (Van Imschoot, n.d.).

³⁰ Artist collective Smoke & Dust started their 19th project in 2013, occupying an abandoned welding factory at Dok-Noord. Ironically, this project simply named 019 became so significant in scope and size that is eventually submerged the collective's name itself. Smoke & Dust still exist as a core organisation, how-ever this 'exhibition-cum-workspace came to be known by its adopted name, and so this initially temporary project continues to carry the torch for Ghent and Belgium's contemporary art scene' (019, n.d.-a).

Figure 39 - Image of 019's 'Utopia' Exhibition highlighting the reconfiguration of the project space. Image: 019 (n.d.-b). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 40 – 3D prototype 019's 'Utopia' Exhibition experimenting with elevated elements. Image: 019 (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

019 (n.d.-a) stands as a model of pushing the boundaries of traditional means of conceiving and engaging with physical spaces and architecture. At the heart of its practice is the fluid repurposing and adaptation of its foundational space. Rather than seeing the confines of the Dok Noord factory as a static entity and obstacle to its work, the artist-led organisation treats it as an ever-changing canvas that evolves and morphs in tandem with the commissioned artworks it houses. This rather dynamic interchange between the art practice and the architecture truly propels the space into a continuous state of transformation and metamorphosis, emphasising the transdisciplinary nature of the space.

Figure 41 - Image of adapted Dok Noord, highlighting the potential behind reconfiguring space. Photograph: Van Imschoot (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

With each commissioned piece and its unique attributes and perhaps demands, the building responds through adaptation and reinventing itself. The architecture's response

to the artwork is not just about accommodating; it's a dialogue wherein the physical space converses, challenges, and coalesces with the art. This ongoing conversation makes the architecture more than just a backdrop; it actually becomes an active participant, a dynamic entity that collaborates with the art to craft new narratives and experiences. This also responds to the current climate crisis and urgent demand to repurpose existing building stock; by continually repurposing and transforming the architecture, 019 reinforce the idea that all buildings, like all resources, should be fluid and allow transformation and recycling within their lifespan. Emphasising 019's stance to handle space through appropriation and dispossession, Tom Van Imschoot (n.d.) notes that with each project, Dok Noord becomes a site of a moving practice, a collaborative way of working ready to be moved, reproduced and reinvented elsewhere'.

Figure 42 - Image of adaptation works to allow for external walls' openings.
Photograph: Van Imschoot (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The methodology of 019 (n.d.-a) aligns with ESA's mode of operating, presenting a unique, socially driven approach anchored within the spatial opportunities and constraints of Dok Noord. This venue's physical layout undergoes frequent architectural metamorphoses, consistently reshaping access, circulation, and internal vistas. Such dynamic alterations compel its users to engage and interact with the environment in fresh ways.

The artist-led organisation's transdisciplinary collaborative spirit merges artists, architects, designers, and others into scenographers, regardless of discipline. They become co-authors of a scene constructed from margins and constraints, participating in a continuous game of give and take around a display that is frequently recycled (Van Imschoot, n.d.). The diverse range of projects commissioned within Dok Noord accentuates the transformative potential of architecture. Each new commission, with its unique demands and messages, attracts and engages a different set of stakeholders, ensuring that the space remains ever relevant and continually resonating with varied audiences.

4.9.4 Space provision and entrepreneurship – Space, London

Space (2021a) is a social enterprise and registered charity established in 1968 by artists Bridget Riley and Peter Sedgley from recognising a serious need of affordable studios for visual artists in London. The founding artists found inspiration for Space in their visit to artists' spaces in New York. Not long after, with the support of the Greater London Council and ACE, they manage to secure an empty warehouse space beside the Thames, opening their first studio site. Over the following years, Space's model of working with the real estate sector to secure new uses for empty space has been emulated elsewhere around the world. This example closely mirrors ESA's organisational and operational approach.

Space is a great example of innovative thinking, particularly in its relationship with funders. This approach is one of the key reasons it stood out when assembling the Artist-Led Directory. In its mission statement, Space declares that:

Our mission is to provide the space, resources and opportunities for people to create art, for people to engage with art and for people to develop their creative

potential. By providing affordable studio space, we support artists throughout their careers. We complement this with an arts and education programme of exhibitions, events, neighbourhood-based learning and participation projects and training for both young people and professional artists. Our activities support the growth of individuals, encourage ownership of creativity and nurture a creative society (Space, 2021c).

From 1975 to 1985, ACE provided various studio conversion grants that Space secured, regularly with preferential landlord agreements. These agreements reflected the basic state of the property, the temporary accommodation provided and the property market of the time. This model was well received by many landlords who were happy to have their properties occupied to avoid further decline (Space, 2021a). This led to Open Studios becoming an annual fixture and a creative way for artists to exhibit their work in their own space.³¹

During the 90s, Space (2021a) acted progressively more like a development agency, developing strong links between commercial firms, public bodies and a vast range of artists, arts, and cultural organisations. This led to several sites being developed across London, particularly in Hackney in partnership with Hackney Council. This trajectory highlights the versatility of the artist-led organisation, demonstrating its entrepreneurial capability through comprehensive real estate expansion strategies not often encountered in the artist-led sphere. Space's mode of operating underlines the potential for such artist-led organisations to transcend its niche in the artist-led sector, successfully making inroads into commercial development.

In 2003, Space (2021a) opened The Triangle, a new 40,000 sq ft HQ space in the centre of Hackney, supported by the London Development Agency, ACE and ERDF, which allowed the artist-led organisation to create a reputable gallery programme and learning facilities. Further partnerships between Space and Housing Associations, regeneration agencies and property developers facilitated the expansion of new studios across London. This steered the artist-led organisation to acquire freeholds and develop its own permanent studio sites: Deborah House, Hackney (2010), Haymerle Road, Peckham

³¹ Matts Gallery at Martello Street Studios emerged from this initiative.

(2012) and Brickfield Studios, Bow (2015), resulting in one-third of Space artist tenants being in freeholds owned by Space.³²

Figure 43 - Image of Space Ilford. Photograph: Space (2021b). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

During the last 5 years, the artist-led organisation started developing new studio partnerships with commercial property developer specialising in student accommodation, Alumno Developments (2021). This has resulted in the creation of Havil Street Studios and Aspire Point, both of which feature custom-designed studios of superior quality. In partnership with the London Borough of Redbridge, Space has also developed 34 artist studios, complemented by a creative workspace, gallery, and event

³² More recently, Space stepped outside London, working with Colchester Borough Council and Essex County Council to open 40 studios and desk space for creative enterprises in a listed town centre building which has been refurbished to a high specification.

space (Space, 2021a). Presently, Space operates more than 330,000 sq. ft of studio space with over 800 tenants and 20 studio sites and delivers widespread artist development and public programmes.

Space has been introduced within this discourse as a relevant example, especially when drawing parallels with ESA, due to their operational scale, enduring presence, funding avenues, and modes of operating. Both entities reflect a unique combination of artistic vision and commercial vision, demonstrating an entrepreneurial spirit evident in their art practice, but also in ventures typically outside the scope of artist-led organisations, such as property development and real estate. Space's expansionist drives and strategic alliances with funders and commercial developers have paved the way for sustainable growth and a broader community impact.

Furthermore, the artist-led organisation's collaborations with LAs and public bodies emphasise the evolving intersection of art with governance and public policy, suggesting a multi-faceted approach to its operations and a larger vision for societal integration. Despite its commercial interests, Space maintains a strong commitment to its local community, and its initiatives, while expansive, are not simply about acquiring more space or expanding their footprint, but instead, about providing artist support through affordable studio offers whilst nurturing relationships with local communities, understanding their dynamics, and collaboratively working towards enriching these neighbourhoods. This community-centric approach, juxtaposed with Space's entrepreneurial ventures, showcases a different, more contextually attuned image of what modern artist-led organisations can achieve, blurring the lines between art, commerce, and community engagement.

4.9.5 Research focus – Primary, Nottingham

Primary (n.d.a) is a Nottingham-based artist-led organisation and registered charity that occupies a large Grade II listed former school building. Similar to ESA, the organisation is an ACE National Portfolio Organisation, and it had a significant milestone in 2020 by acquiring its premises, thus ensuring the long-term sustainability of its visionary pursuits. Located in Radford, the artist-led organisation's ongoing efforts involve transforming its premise into a valuable cultural resource and through an initial phase of capital refurbishment, Primary has prioritised accessibility, ensuring a welcoming

environment that can effectively cater to the diverse needs and interests of its various communities.

Figure 44 - Image of Primary studios. Photograph: Primary (n.d.a). Image removed for copyright reasons.

Primary is a relevant example for this debate, creating an insightful parallel to ESA's organisational structure and modes of operation, both of which strongly focusing on offering artist support and infrastructure. With a mission to commission, produce, and present art that explores ideas driving societal change, Primary (n.d.a) serves as a dynamic space for creative research, the development of new work, and creative collaborations. The artist-led organisation actively expands the participation and engagement of diverse individuals in the art-making process while forging connections between local and global communities. This focus aligns closely with ESA's practice, which emphasises community engagement across all projects, regardless of their size or scope.

Notably, the two organisations collaborated recently. Primary (n.d.b) shares an annual mapping of its resident and member achievements through the use of an interactive map

designed by artist Saria Digregorio. The complex map highlights the connection between the artist-led organisation and its residents and members (and their associated projects) with the partners and collaborators, emphasising the wide circle of networks emerging around the artist-led space and its stakeholders.

As part of the unique environment created by Primary's (n.d.a) site and ethos, the organisation provides studio spaces and strategic development opportunities for artists. The premises feature a free public program comprising commissioned works, thought-provoking exhibitions, and a diverse range of events. With over 50 artists representing a broad spectrum of critically engaged visual arts practices, Primary's facilities cater to the needs of a vibrant artistic community. The premises also house dedicated workshops for various disciplines, including clay, weaving, and design, as well as inviting outdoor and garden spaces, independent galleries, a bookshop, and the renowned Small Food Bakery, which has garnered prestigious accolades for its culinary offerings. This broad offering illustrates the expansion of the artist-led space into more commercial activities to support the organisation's resilience and sustainability without predominantly relying on public funds. This entrepreneurial approach is a notable crossover between Primary and ESA, as both actively explore means of gaining stability and financial independence.

Additionally, Primary demonstrates a strong commitment to artistic research with a focus on participation and engagement; this is manifested through a regular program of commissions, community events, learning initiatives, and platforms for dialogue and knowledge exchange. By adopting a cyclical process of theory, practice, and reflection, Primary promotes collaborative relationships between artists, audiences, and the wider community, allowing its work to evolve and respond to various influences (Primary, n.d.a).

Figure 45 - Photograph of children workshop led by Primary. Photograph: Primary (n.d.a). Image removed for copyright reasons.

Figure 46 - Photograph of interactive workshop led by Primary. Photograph: Primary (n.d.a) Image removed for copyright reasons.

One particularly insightful research piece documented by Primary is ‘ART as/is SOCIAL: The Commons’ by cultural researcher Lianne Mol (n.d.). Mol initiated the ongoing discussion group ART as/is SOCIAL at ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics in Berlin, and its sixth session, co-hosted by Primary Engagement Curator, Rebecca Beinart, focused on the Commons by starting with two texts by Casco Art Institute in Utrecht.³³ The session sought to answer the question: ‘How can art and art institutions contribute to the Commons and take on practices of commoning?’ (Mol, n.d.).

Through this work, Casco establishes that the ability of artists, communities, groups, and institutions to engage in commoning practices is influenced by their relationship to the existing economic structure. According to Mol (n.d.), engaging in commoning necessitates an understanding of the varied contributions individuals can make; for instance, while some might offer their time and services, others might provide financial support. However, these variances in contribution can inadvertently establish hierarchies, which contradict the essence of communing. To counteract this, transparency about individual intentions, capabilities, and contributions is crucial. Furthermore, the prevailing competitive environment in the art sector, where artists are constantly pursuing opportunities for sustenance, needs re-evaluation. In a collective setting, questions like how to distribute income or the balance between personal and communal responsibilities often arise, and while such discussions can be uncomfortable, they’re crucial for a transparent and inclusive collective. Collaborations might not always imply perfect harmony; they can often uncover disagreements. However, disagreements shouldn’t deter collaboration. When addressed constructively, conflicts can be catalysts for growth, and collectives must be equipped to navigate them. As argued in ‘Spaces of Commoning: Artistic Research and the Utopia of the Everyday’ (Baldauf et al., n.d.):

The power of the commons [...] does not reside in the promise of a coming together free of friction. As different dimensions of power organise the terrain of the social, social movements are often caught between competing agendas, and in the gap between aims and everyday life. It is precisely the sites of these struggles that the book calls spaces of communing (Baldauf et al., n.d.).

³³ Also presented in Section 4.9.6.

These collaborations highlight that the urban environment is real evidence of diverse coexistence, a melting pot of cultures, ideas, and aspirations and here, the act of commoning is not just about sharing a space or resource, but about interweaving stories, values, goals and inevitably, conflicts. The resulting disagreements indicate various forces involved in the dialogue, each bringing their own unique perspective to the table. Such conflicts, arising from differences between overarching goals and the minutiae of everyday life open the way for negotiation, forcing stakeholders to communicate, evaluate, and adjust their strategies and in doing so, to uncover latent potentials and solutions that might have otherwise remained hidden. Any disagreement becomes therefore an opportunity to explore the priorities of the collective and find alternative ways of meeting them.

In the urban context, these disagreements signify more than simple differences in opinion; they become conversations where each voice is a representative of a particular urban experience, and as they negotiate, these voices evoke a rich sense of urban life, ensuring that the space they share is responsive, inclusive, and vibrant. Thus, far from being deterrents, disagreements and conflicts in collaborative urban spaces are the very elements that drive growth, inclusivity, and innovation.

4.9.6 Pedagogy and knowledge production - Casco Art Institute, Utrecht

Looking outside of the UK, Casco Art Institute (2020)³⁴ is an artist-led institution founded in 1990 in Utrecht running a ‘bold, daring, and affective vision’ of the manners in which society can be re-interpreted and re-shaped through an exciting program of activities (The Outsiders Union, n.d.).³⁵ Similarly to ESA, Casco (2020) explores different ways of studying, imagining, and collaborating with communities using a transdisciplinary project-oriented program known under the title ‘Office for Art Design

³⁴ Commonly referred to as Casco.

³⁵ This comprises of six-monthly exhibitions, an annual assembly, a School in Common, each occasion committed to the exploration of art through its relationship to the commons.

and Theory’. Through its unique repository of art practices,³⁶ Casco aspires to evolve into an institution that doesn’t simply discuss the commons but is intrinsically shaped by and for them. Here, the ethos and mechanics of collaboration are not just operational tools but are consciously scrutinised and developed collectively (The Outsiders Union, n.d.).

Casco’s (2020) pedagogical approach, which emphasises the relationship between art and the commons, offers a critical perspective in the dialogue surrounding artist-led spaces. This importance is further magnified when considering its long-lasting commitment to nurturing the commons, constantly probing its vitality, shared resources, traditions, and boundaries. As emphasised by Casco (2020), ‘art provides a visor for looking at the commons, while the commons see the world, and with it art’.

A notable manifestation of this dialogue is the ‘Center for Ecological (Un)learning’ (CEU), a collaboration between Casco and The Outsiders (2020), a collective offering services to various stakeholders, the environment, and the broader community with a focus on shaping sustainable alternatives by promoting innovative forms of community engagement. The Outsiders (2020) advocate that sustainability remains is an ever-evolving concept and believe that collective participation is the most effective method of learning. Through their work across public art and architecture, they curate spaces to better understand urban environments and their interconnected inhabitants.

Guided by the principle of experiential learning, The Outsiders (2020) engage in various projects, both long-term and ephemeral, indoor, and outdoor, partnering with diverse organisations and local residents. This initiative demonstrates the potential of artist-led spaces when framed within the paradigm of pedagogy and learning. Designed to meld the principles of ecology with artistic expression, the CEU project exemplifies the symbiotic relationship between transdisciplinary practices and the crafting of novel ecologies (The Outsiders Union, n.d.). Within the context of the Leidsche Rijn community, this project highlights the transformative power of urban activation and

³⁶ Including a mix of artistic genres – ‘artistic research, archival practices, public art, community art, relational aesthetics, performance, institutional critique, cooking, farming, speculative fiction, comics, carpentry, architecture, design, digital art, sound art, art pedagogy etc’ (The Outsiders Union, n.d.).

how it can encourage the development of new relationships and understandings between art and its environment.

Figure 47 - Image of Terwijde farmhouse. Photograph: The Outsiders Union (n.d.).

Image removed for copyright reasons.

The project's initial phase, Erfgoed (Agricultural Heritage and Land Use) involved temporarily occupying the abandoned Terwijde farmhouse in Leidsche Rijn, a growing new residential neighbourhood of Utrecht (The Outsiders, 2020). The aim was to turn the farmhouse into 'a space for gatherings of neighbours, diverse practitioners, and other beings – such as animals, plants, bacteria etc. – for exchange and collaboration, especially towards (un)learning ecological practices' (The Outsiders Union, n.d.).

The inquiries surrounding the project were strongly linked to the social and economic context of the Leidsche Rijn and aimed to engage the community in conversation by asking questions like:

Why is the farmhouse empty? Where has the farm relocated? If the farms in the area are gone, then where does the food for the residents of Leidsche Rijn come from? [...] What are the future possibilities of this farmhouse and how can “we” – in common – make it happen? (The Outsiders Union, n.d.)

In their attempt to answer these questions, Casco and The Outsiders, aimed to reanimate the farmhouse and make it a vibrant heart for the community of Leidsche Rijn. This project, fuelled by an eclectic mix of events and activities, drew in a diverse crowd, ranging from neighbours of diverse cultural backgrounds and demographics to local and distant artists, and even the natural inhabitants like animals and insects. The collective dream was to breathe life into the farmhouse, developing a space for learning and unlearning sustainable cohabitation practices, with the ultimate goal of establishing a resilient and lasting ecosystem (The Outsiders Union, n.d.). In their depiction of the project and linking to the role of the urban practitioner, the initiators note:

Together we slowly became urban farmers (The Outsiders Union, n.d.).

Figure 48 - Erfgoed Urban Plans. Photograph: The Outsiders Union (n.d.). Image removed for copyright reasons.

The project concluded with an exhibition at Casco Art Institute developed using ‘a collective build-up as a way to harvest and think together’ (The Outsiders Union, n.d.). Reflecting on their process, the collaborators noted:

We decided to work communally, with neither a traditional exhibition format, nor a traditional curatorial process, instead using a collective build-up as a way to harvest and think together. We cleaned up the farm, trying to dismantle the traces of our activity and interventions, and we brought these traces, as much as we could, to Casco. In just two days of production, using our traces of our many days of preparation, we built up an exhibition, reactivating the objects that we used at the farm (The Outsiders Union, n.d.).

Figure 49 - Image of community event organised at Ergoed. Photograph: The Outsiders Union (n.d.). Image removed for copyright reasons.

This project is particularly pertinent to this discourse due to its distinctive operational methods and strong engagement with both spatial and societal contexts and understandings. Its interaction with public funding, stakeholder consultations, and local

governance, along with its extensive reach within the Leidsche Rijn community, highlights its relevance and impact. Furthermore, this initiative stands out for its community-centric methodologies, varying from transdisciplinary research, collaboration, grassroots organisation, to developing community economies and networks, offering a rich foundation for analysing and investigating the role of artist-led spaces in urban activation.

A standout element of this project is its transitory nature, culminating in its reincarnation as a formal exhibition that leverages the project's remnants and collective memories (or its archive) as instruments for urban activation. This archival component is also particularly interesting as it serves as a memory vault yet also creates a legacy, suggesting that the project's footprints could evolve into a set of tools or a guidebook for urban activation.

The archival exploration and subsequent analysis through the exhibition harness a unique and transformative power, activating spaces in nuanced ways that diverge from conventional engagements with physical spatial elements, such as those witnessed in the farmhouse. While traditional methods often focus on tangible attributes, the act of archiving and re-enacting events catalyses spaces in an entirely different dimension. This isn't just about recollection; it's about activating space through layers of local knowledge and history, establishing a strong spatial and vernacular memory. This method places emphasis on the legacy of a place, transforming it into a centre of narrative, a form of storytelling that transcends time, allowing for reflection, introspection as a form of knowledge production evolving organically. More than that, it's a gesture of care: a commitment to preserving, reflecting upon, and cherishing memories and experiences, ensuring they're not lost in the sands of time but are instead passed down and shared.

Yet, what truly amplifies the importance of this approach in the context of the Erfgoed project is its inherent ephemerality; the transient nature of the Terwijde farmhouse, paradoxically, intensifies its lasting impact and its eventual metamorphosis into a formal exhibition, grounded in the project's residual fragments and communal recollections, serves as a potent tool for urban activation. Such an archive, born and moulded through the act of re-enactment, transcends its role as a simple repository of memories. It becomes a supporter of legacy, suggesting that the traces of the project

hold the potential to transform into actionable principles or even a toolkit for future urban engagements.

This reverence for archival processes, alongside their potential to innovate and guide, align with the exploration of ESA's archive, highlighting that such methodologies can uncover layers of interpretation, value, and application in urban studies and community engagements.

4.9.7 Initiative and programming - Jeanne van Heeswijk, The Blue House

Jeanne van Heeswijk is Rotterdam-based artist who focuses on facilitating collaborative production and engaging people in urban development processes. Through her approach of 'acting together', she creates opportunities for individuals to form interest groups and small communities that can effectively discuss and initiate change at the neighbourhood level (Spatial Agency, n.d.b). Van Heeswijk positions herself as a mediator, facilitating open actions and interactions among various stakeholders, challenging, and confronting everyone involved, from children to city officials, policymakers to planners, from 'insiders' to 'outsiders' (Spatial Agency, n.d.b). Her aim is to generate models that address the complexity of integration issues and do justice to diverse perspectives.

Van Heeswijk's inclusion in this discourse is intentional, as her work has significantly influenced ESA's evolution into its current form as an artist-led organisation is today, with a strong focus on socially engaged practice and methodology (K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

One of Jeanne van Heeswijk's notable projects is 'Het Blauwe Huis' (The Blue House), which began in 2005 in the IJburg area of Amsterdam. Collaborating with architect Dennis Kaspori and artist Hervé Paraponaris, Van Heeswijk initiated this project as a hub for research, artistic activities, and cultural production. The Blue House aimed to provide a space for messy and lived activities within a highly planned and controlled development, as well as to explore the outcomes of implementing a radical approach to urban planning and community development (O'Neill, 2012).

Van Heeswijk curated a detached single-family house that hosted international artists, writers, and architects, while also temporarily serving as a children's library, an affordable restaurant, and a flower shop. Over the course of four and a half years, the

project involved thousands of participants, transforming the house into an incubator and a platform for studying and intervening in the use and appropriation of urban space (Spatial Agency, n.d.b).

In an interview with Paul O'Neill, Van Heeswijk highlights the position of the artist as initiator within the process of 'URBAN ACT/ing':

I realise on location, I work from within and not from without.

People always think that I am commissioned, which, in nine out of ten of my projects, is actually not the case. I am quite often sort of half commissioned or I commission myself (Van Heeswijk, 2007).

The emergence of the project is particularly interesting. In 1996, Amsterdam City Council made the decision to expand the city by creating an artificial island called IJburg, designed to accommodate housing and amenities for approximately 45,000 people. By the end of 2009, the first phase of building on IJburg had been completed, with each housing block overlooking a central courtyard. The ratio of privately owned to social sector housing was set at 80:20 (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 22–23).³⁷

Figure 50 - Digital model of the Blue House in relation to the wider residential development. Image: Van Heeswijk (n.d.a). Image removed for copyright reasons.

³⁷ The Blue House was initially planned as a four-year project, with the artist-commissioner remaining actively involved in IJburg and its community during this period. Van Heeswijk identified two main reasons for choosing this timeframe: it allowed for a complex set of interactions to take place, and it coincided with the initial phase of development in IJburg (O'Neill, 2012, p. 50).

Figure 51 - Photograph of the Blue House in context. Photograph: Van Heeswijk (2005). Image removed for copyright reasons.

In 2003, Van Heeswijk was approached by architect Dorine de Vos to consider creating a more visible entrance for one of the blocks within a new housing estate within IJburg (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 22–23). However, the artist declined the invitation due to its limitations, and instead, she began exploring the planned development of the neighbourhood. Around the same time, public art advisor Tanja Karreman, in consultation with De Vos, asked Van Heeswijk to propose an artistic intervention that would reflect the future identity of IJburg and the role of art in the newly created environment.

Noticing the lack of space for the uncontrolled, unexpected, and unplanned elements, Van Heeswijk became interested in a large villa located in the central courtyard of Block 35. This villa would be surrounded by privately owned dwellings on one side and social housing on the other, making it a really interesting space due to its different tenures. Van Heeswijk approached Amsterdam Funds for the Arts (AFK) with a

proposal to acquire the villa and transform it into ‘a place for the unplanned, for the still to dream, for the yet to desire’ (O’Neill, 2012, p. 23). Although the cost of purchasing the building seemed prohibitive at €600,000, the artist pursued the idea and spent the next eighteen months searching for a buyer who would be willing to donate the house to the community.

As depicted by O’Neill in ‘The Blue House’ (2012, p. 26), the project drew inspiration from historical examples such as The Yellow House in Arles, which Van Gogh envisioned as a space for artists to gather and exchange ideas, and Frida Kahlo’s Casa Azul in Coyoacán, Mexico, where she lived, worked, and hosted various influential figures. These houses served as vibrant hubs that influenced their surroundings and inspired artists and thinkers. When explaining the concept of The Blue House to planners and potential buyers, Van Heeswijk (2007) initially emphasised its role as ‘a place where you could cook up everything that still had to come and actually follow along the growth of the island and force some kind of flexibility in the planning’.

In 2004, at the urging of Van Heeswijk, Marinus Knulst from the private housing corporation de Alliantie agreed to purchase the house (O’Neill, 2012, pp. 30–31). Van Heeswijk, in turn, funded the interest on the mortgage for the next four years, establishing the house as a centre for cultural activities and socio-cultural research during the urban renewal process instead of using it as a private residence. From May 2005, Van Heeswijk lived in the house for six months, during which she prepared it for habitation and built connections with the newly arriving residents of IJburg. By taking this approach, Van Heeswijk bypassed the original intention of engaging with the commissioning context and instead became a self-commissioned artist. The Blue House itself became the commissioner, inviting other practitioners to develop their own research-based projects as part of an ongoing process of research, intervention, and durational activity.³⁸

Van Heeswijk describes her role in The Blue House as a ‘participating embedded observer’, who, like other members, observed and guided the operational aspects of the

³⁸ The Blue House was established as a foundation, with Van Heeswijk serving as an advisor. It was not funded by city planners but received support from various sources, including AFK, ECF, de Alliantie, Stichting DOEN, the Mondriaan Foundation, the Prince Bernhard Culture Fund, and VSB Fonds. Commissioned participants also sought their own funding for specific projects and applied for residential support from the foundation (O’Neill, 2012, p. 30).

project, particularly focusing on public permission, legal considerations, and external forces shaping the house and its activities (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 30–31). This notion of being embedded implies an empathic operation, as described by the Italian architecture-research group Stalker, where being present involves sympathetic observation, suspending judgment, and attentiveness to processes (Spatial Agency, n.d.e). Through participation, one can activate a unified process that combines observing the place with contributing to its transformation.

Van Heeswijk and Kaspori were actively involved in facilitating various projects that addressed the absence of certain opportunities or activities in IJburg. One of their initiatives was assisting Nicoline Koek in overcoming trading regulations to establish a flower stand called Flowers for IJburg (Stanhope, 2013, p. 128). Operating every Saturday from 2005 to 2007, the flower stand became an iconic feature in the district, bringing visual beauty and serving as a social gathering point for residents.

Figure 52 - Image of 'Flowers for IJburg' shop. Photograph: Van Heeswijk (2005).
Image removed for copyright reasons.

Another project involved allocating the largest room in The Blue House to resident Maarthe van Eerdt, who created a weekly children's library to fill the gap before the official library was planned (Stanhope, 2013, p. 128). Additionally, a book exchange for adults was initiated by another resident ahead of the official service planned for the distant future. The members of The Blue House later supported these activities in finding new locations within the local area where they continued to exist and engage with the community (Stanhope, 2013, p. 128).³⁹ In 'The Challenge of Uninvited Guests: Social Art at The Blue House', Zara Stanhope notes that:

The projects conducted at The Blue House highlighted gaps in institutional planning, demonstrated local social attitudes, and created debate about the role of art in society. Many projects at The Blue House were relevant to global and local political and social environments in researching the nature of hospitality, understood as the relations between the guests and host that include the ethics of respect for strangers (Stanhope, 2013, p. 128).

Invited participants of 'The Blue House Housing Association of the Mind' were carefully selected based on their affinity and interest in experimental communities. Their engagement with the project was unconditional, requiring a willingness to embrace the concept of the community as a constantly evolving entity and to find their place within its changing organisational structure (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 31–32). The criteria for membership were flexible, ensuring equal decision-making rights and allowing members to invite others to join.

Van Heeswijk maintained a high level of involvement in the decision-making processes and remained informed about the decisions made by other members in her absence, highlighting that the self-organised logic of The Blue House was that of a networked model of sociality made possible by information and communication technologies, with responsibilities dispersed across the organisation (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 32–33). There was 'a prevailing consensus that experiences of sharing, feedback, flexibility, and

³⁹ In 2006, Van Heeswijk and Kaspori's urbanism project addressed the absence of a social or community restaurant on the island by introducing a weekly affordable catered meal at the Community Restaurant or Proeflokaal (Stanhope, 2013, p. 128).

friendship’, which are ‘primary to the culture of networks’, compel decisions to be made so that the network remains constantly operational and open (Rossiter, 2006, pp. 14–15).

The organisational structure and dynamics of the group were shaped by its members through discussions, debates and even conflicts and disagreements (O’Neill, 2012, pp. 32–33). The social art research generated at The Blue House became a reminder of Andreas Mueller’s understanding of Participatory Action Research as ‘a method that approaches a given situation through research activities, involving participants and existing local social networks’ without predetermined outcomes or results (Mueller, 2009, p. 7; Stanhope, 2013, p. 130).

What makes the project particularly intriguing is that, despite its four-year duration, it became both constrained and boundless: the certainty of its eventual end cast a shadow over the project, but paradoxically, this knowledge intensified the experiences, ideas, and discursive nature among the participants (O’Neill, 2012, pp. 32–33). The project’s finite nature served as a catalyst, driving a deeper engagement and exploration within the limited timeframe. Although there was no intention to extend the project beyond four years, it has managed to find continuity in other forms. Members of The Blue House have considered how its elements can be carried forward or adapted for other projects in different locations, allowing the project’s impact to disperse through individual endeavours that build upon what was accomplished during the four years (O’Neill, 2012, p. 50).

The Blue House became a meeting point for ongoing interactions between members and residents, a physical and mental space for discussions, research, and interventions in the public domain. Acting as an uninvited guest on the island, The Blue House fulfilled the role of a host organisation for other guests who were invited to interact and generate new forms of density and interactions within the community (D. Kaspori, personal communication, 12 March 2008; O’Neill, 2012, p. 46). While being part of the community, The Blue House maintained a relative autonomy, recognising its temporary presence and the eventual departure as a guest. This allowed for a distinct relationship between The Blue House and the local community similar to AAA’s approach in a sense where the initiator organically steps away from the space by transitioning responsibilities over to the governing community.

Before its conclusion in December 2009, The Blue House organised a symposium called 'Out of The Blue', which served as a farewell event to mark the project's departure from the local community (O'Neill, 2012, p. 57). The symposium focused on three themes: instant urbanism, hospitality, and accelerated histories, and aimed to evaluate experimental concepts of communities. It provided a platform for inhabitants to showcase their research work over the four years and discuss future directions for sharing their findings. 'Out of The Blue' took place at block eighteen, the future site of IJburg's community centre, during a period when the builders were on holiday and no regulations limited its use (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 57–59). The unfinished building became a temporary public facility, accommodating speakers and attendees in temporary accommodations and utilising the workers' canteen for meals. This event exemplified the engaged co-production approach of The Blue House, where participants actively contributed to the project and its activities.

Figure 53 - Image of an evening film screening at the Blue House. Photograph: Van Heeswijk (2005). Image removed for copyright reasons.

Throughout the project, sustainability and the dissemination of knowledge played essential roles. Participants within The Blue House network actively shared their experiences beyond the immediate boundaries of IJburg and the initial four-year scope of the project (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 57–59). This dispersed knowledge extended beyond the specific location and time frame, creating a network that aimed to continue the project's impact in various forms. This included websites, events, public discussions, publications, and ongoing research projects. The intention was for the project to evolve even after its official conclusion, with members continuing to share the accumulated knowledge from their time in IJburg. Igor Roovers, Director of Projectburo IJburg (the public planning agency responsible for IJburg), noted the project's long-term impact. The Blue House's presence for four years encouraged reflection on the planning process, evaluation of outcomes, and stimulated dialogue amongst residents (O'Neill, 2012, p. 52; I. Roovers, personal communication, 7 March 2008).⁴⁰ It also aimed to create more space for temporary and small-scale activities within larger-scale developments, indicating that city planners learned from the project which influenced the initial residents of IJburg. While it is uncertain whether the four-year commitment will have a lasting effect on the future life and infrastructure of IJburg, it provided enough time for unexpected results to emerge (O'Neill, 2012, p. 52).

The Blue House demonstrates the transformative potential of artist-led spaces in urban settings; it acted as a catalyst, prompting local stakeholders to consider their connections to others and their unique circumstances within uneven economic, social, and cultural conditions, thus making a valuable contribution to rethinking global communities (Stanhope, 2013, p. 133). This aligns with Nancy Fraser's (2007) perspective on the critical importance of a transnational public sphere that challenges normative models for democratic and emancipatory politics. The individual actions and interactions facilitated by The Blue House project generated potential for political agency and social creativity, allowing for local responses to the shaping of the global society. The project's dispersed and mobile members continue to promote ongoing opportunities for individual learning and the expansion of relationships beyond IJburg (Stanhope, 2013, p. 133). In doing so, The Blue House project illustrates how artist-led

⁴⁰ One notable outcome was the exposure of flaws in the planning system, which influenced the city planners to establish a permanent cultural centre in IJburg (O'Neill, 2012, p. 52).

initiatives can influence the creation of localised environments while simultaneously engaging and impacting wider global networks and infrastructures.

4.9.8 Community engagement tactics and participation – CHORA, London

Research and parallel architecture practice, CHORA (2001), founded in 1993 by Raoul Bunschoten in London, has pioneered the use of urban scenario gaming as a methodology to navigate complex urban and regional contexts. This approach was developed shortly after the establishment of a research office, and by the following year, an architectural firm under the same name was also launched. By integrating research and practice, CHORA has developed innovative methods focused on challenging urban environments, successfully completing projects throughout Europe and the Far East (CHORA et al., 2001; Spatial Agency, n.d.a), thus highlighting its ability to apply theoretical insights practically across diverse geographical settings.

As part of its research-based methodology, CHORA (2001) uses a four-step process that includes a database, prototypes, scenario games, and action plans. Prototypes are models of organisational systems that answer the challenges identified in the database, whereas the database compiles pertinent information about people, places, and organisations that are somehow related to a project (CHORA et al., 2001; Spatial Agency, n.d.a). Scenario games are a method of simulating and assessing the various circumstances in which the prototypes may operate. These, which frequently take the form of board games, are notable for the wide range of participants that CHORA manages to bring together to play the games, including locals, policymakers, government officials, business owners, and industrialists, among other groups with overlapping and competing interests. In this case, the game serves as a venue for testing concepts and circumstances as well as a connector, bringing these dissimilar but related groups together.

Figure 54 - Image of a scenario game in progress led by CHORA. Photograph: Spatial Agency (n.d.a). Image removed for copyright reasons.

The socially engaged methodology explored by CHORA (2001) seeks to assure that the viewpoints and values of all stakeholders are considered, increasing the likelihood that the initiatives that emerge will be successful and well-received by the community (Spatial Agency, n.d.a). CHORA's approach to urban architecture is particularly relevant for its use of diagramming and symbology to support its methodology and deepen understandings of place. This system uses project specific data as the basis for abstract representations that allow for comparison and manipulation of the collected data (CHORA et al., 2001; Spatial Agency, n.d.a). This technique allows CHORA to operate on a variety of scales, revealing hidden connections between even the most detailed local facts and larger, international forces, as well as how they may interact and impact on each other.

Furthermore, CHORA (2001), in collaboration with Jeanne van Heeswijk (n.d.b), redefines the role of the architect as an 'urban curator'. In this capacity, the 'urban curator' focuses on creating interactions, processes, and organisational structures, which

enables the architect to collaborate with a variety of people and develop urban strategies that can adapt to the dynamic nature of urban environments (Spatial Agency, n.d.a). This reimagined role challenges conventional architectural practices and prompts a re-evaluation of the architect's position within both the project and the broader discourse on urban activation.

4.9.9 Acts of caring and resilience - Park Fiction, Hamburg

Park Fiction⁴¹ (now Gezi Park Hamburg) is an artist-led form of 'URBAN ACT/ing' that evolved in 1995 out of a residents' association campaign, Hafenrandverein (Harbour Edge Association), against the development of a site in Hamburg's red-light district, St. Pauli (Czenki & Schafer, 2007; Spatial Agency, n.d.c). The association's ambition was to stop the erection of a mixed-use development on what was considered a significant, beautiful area overseeing the harbour. As a friendly response to the Council's development plans, the artist-led community network set up their own 'Parallel Planning Process' and came up with designs for a public park for the prominent site at stake (Czenki & Schafer, 2007). These initiatives or 'Platforms of Exchange' were aimed at engaging people from various different cultural fields such as 'musicians, priests, a headmistress, a cook, café-owners, barmen, a psychologist, squatters, artist-Interventionist Residents'⁴² including artist Christoph Schäfer, the filmmaker Margit Czenki, and Ellen Schmeisser, who was later hired by the city to communicate with the residents, guided the process, bargained with the local officials, and organised the campaign (Czenki & Schafer, 2007; Spatial Agency, n.d.c).

Park Fiction has a long history of protest, with the squatter movement of the 1980s playing a particularly significant role in the evolution of the place and its tactics. As a result of the LAs' extended disregard for the area and the comparative prosperity of much of West Germany, the 'URBAN ACT/ing' emerged as a call for public amenity rather than private development. As a result of the artists' engagement, financial support was offered from the city's culture department as part of the 'art in public space'

⁴¹ The name Park Fiction has been inspired from Quentin Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction* (Czenki & Schafer, 2001, p. 100).

⁴² When the project started, 70% of residents did not hold a German passport (Czenki & Schafer, 2007).

strategy (Czenki & Schafer, 2007; Spatial Agency, n.d.c). As such, the project's initial phase started and was focused on the idea of 'Collective Productions of Desires', a series of artist-led initiatives aimed at engaging the locals in discussions around their neighbourhood. One of the physical tools explored by Park Fiction was installing a container office on site, 'housing a Modelling Clay Office, a Garden Library, an Archive of Desires, and a telephone Hotline for people feeling inspired in the middle of the night. The Action Kit, a portable planning studio, was used for visits into the surrounding neighbourhood'(Czenki & Schafer, 2007). To expose the murky inner workings of bureaucracy, Margit Czenki's film 'Desire will Leave the Home and Go to the Streets' and a game about the planning process were both created as tools of community engagement and activation.

Figure 55 - Diagram of Park Fiction's 'Collective Productions of Desires' initiative.
Image: Park Fiction (2013b). Image removed for copyright reasons.

Additional tactics involved creating cultural engagement programmes aimed at connecting with stakeholders and putting pressure on the local governance to allow for urban transformation to happen. In its attempt to maintain control over its neighbourhood, the tactics employed by Park Fiction included showcasing the project at major international music and art festivals, such as 'Documenta 11', where the portable

planning studio was also taken, and a gathering in St. Pauli where organisations working on related projects were asked to share their experiences in the city (Czenki & Schafer, 2007). The publicity evolved from the activation programme made Park Fiction well-known and most importantly, made it challenging for the Government to thwart the proposals. In 2005, after a decade of hard work, the park was completed, leaving behind hopes for those aspiring for more from their neighbourhoods. Czenki and Schäfer (2007) noted that they ‘believe that the production of desires -as ideas and practice- should be the driving force behind the reshaping of cities’.

These participatory activation tools emphasise the power behind collaborative design processes exploring creative tactics and strategies that seek to organise and mobilise communities. These methods highlight the collective desire to reform existing oppressive policies and to create alternative space in the city. Furthermore, the initiatives highlight a critical point in this discourse: self-organisation. The self-organised nature of the artist-led community network established at Park Fiction is a key element in demonstrating the role of artist-led space as urban activator as it has evolved organically as part of a complex and socially engaged process led by the artists.

Approximately five persons worked on Park Fiction’s organisational structure between 1996 and 2000, with one social worker being paid and the rest working occasionally or on a volunteer basis. Two artists, Christoph Schäfer and Margit Czenki (2007), work full-time, voluntarily, and occasionally intermittently for pay on a project-by-project basis to manage the Institute’s organisational activities. The network occasionally expands, with up to 20 new members taking an active role and often, formative dialogue also involves an informal network of around ten persons.

Hebert and Karlsen (2013) note in ‘Self-organised’ that the current economic climate and declining public trust in institutions have necessitated a more creative approach to organisation among artists. In the case of Park Fiction, the societal condition was the stimulus for taking action and self-organisation became the means the artist-led space used to respond to the current political and economic landscape impacting the neighbourhood. This self-organised mode is critical factor for artist-led spaces to act as urban activators, enabling a bottom-up approach that empowers communities to take control of their localities and shape them according to their needs and ambitions. By being self-organised, artist-led spaces are able to function independently of

conventional hierarchies and power structures, which can often be constrictive and exclusive (AAA, 2007d; Althorpe & Horak, 2023; East Street Arts, 2021; Hebert & Karlsen, 2013; Lefebvre, 1991).

The flexibility and adaptability inherent in self-organisation enable space to be more responsive to the needs of its community. For instance, Park Fiction employed inclusive engagement techniques that facilitated accessible stakeholder participation in neighbourhood transformation. The planning process was structured as a cooperative game, allowing stakeholders to play out all the possibilities for the site (Czenki & Schafer, 2007; Park Fiction, 2013b), and echoing CHORA's approach, this method aimed to encourage community members to discuss their neighbourhood through 'Collective Productions of Desires' (Czenki & Schafer, 2007; Spatial Agency, n.d.c).

Through collaborative urban prototypes and scenario games, Park Fiction developed action plans and urban solutions that were both realistic and sustainable. This participatory process succeeded in stimulating collaboration and group decision-making, ultimately leading to building a strong sense of ownership and duty among community members, enhancing their involvement and attachment to the area (Hebert & Karlsen, 2013).

Figure 56 - Image of Park Fiction's 'Collective Productions of Desires' initiative. Image: Park Fiction (2013b). Image removed for copyright reasons.

Whilst Park Fiction would be difficult to recreate elsewhere due to how strongly it was ingrained in its particular setting, it is possible to use the methodology and tools that were created and explored during the planning and design process in other urban contexts. To this end, Park Fiction has established an Institute for Independent Urbanism including an archive of the project aimed at stimulating conversation and reflection and with an active purpose to develop projects locally and internationally aimed at connecting ‘the urban everyday to the imaginary’ (Czenki & Schafer, 2007). The Institute became incredibly passionate about supporting other similar initiatives around the world, in attempt to raise awareness around critical issues impacting our urban landscapes and as a means to share tools and learnings on how to develop social resilience.

Figure 57 - Photograph of the interactive workshop designed to create the Park Fiction archive. Photograph: Park Fiction (2013b). Image removed for copyright reasons.

On 15th June 2013, the Gezi Park in Istanbul was forcibly cleared. People were subjected to excessive brutality on the streets, in hotels, and in makeshift hospitals; terrible images of the savage police operation have been broadcasted all over the world. A particularly moving moment was marked by the police setting on fire Gezi Park's Wish Tree as a symbolic way to shatter people's hopes and to control them. In response to the situation in Istanbul, Park Fiction showed solidarity:

We've had enough. We're renaming the park.

Park Fiction has become Gezi Park Hamburg. [...]

We developed the park together in the nineties with our Turkish neighbors. The artificial tulip field was designed by a Turkish neighbor. We know from life in Hamburg how important it is to fight for free spaces that symbolize emancipatory movements, and how important these spaces are when desires congregate to take to the streets – to change the world.⁴³

Figure 58 - Image of the Gezi Park protest. Photograph: Park Fiction (2013b). Image removed for copyright reasons.

⁴³ The Tulip Patterned Tartan Field is a link to the tulip time in Turkey (Czenki & Schafer, 2007; Park Fiction, 2013a).

Park Fiction's response to the Turkish oppression was an incredible act of solidarity and shared resilience that highlights the power of social production activated within the city through interventions such as this one. The artist-led space became a stimulus for collective action where diverse groups of people were brought together by a common cause. In his article for FIELD Journal, Park Fiction initiator Christoph Schäfer notes:

More and more people of the initiative show up, most of them older than thirty, and I get an idea of the brave, bourgeois wing of the protests. A woman participant had dwelled on Park Fiction, St. Pauli the year before. Plain-clothes cops sneak around, but nobody is impressed. Three young football supporters pass by, two wearing a Beşiktaş, one wearing a Fenerbahçe jersey. They shout Çarşı's political, sarcastic slogans. Istanbul is indeed United—supporters of all clubs allied against the regime (Schäfer, 2016).

Park Fiction's collaborative effort increased the initiative's effectiveness, as well as helped the participants experience a stronger feeling of belonging (Czenki & Schafer, 2007). Effectively, by transforming the space into a platform for solidarity and demonstration, Park Fiction succeeded to reframe the artist-led space into an urban activator that carries social and political agency. Most importantly, this initiative became a space that used its agency and networks as amplifiers for the narratives of the oppressed minorities, effectively counteracting the governing discourses pursuing to disregard or erase their stories and voices (Schäfer, 2016). This highlights the powerful role artist-led spaces can play as platforms that elevate marginalised narratives and validate their experiences and identities.

Figure 59 - Illustration from the Bostanorama exhibition at Park Fiction. Image: Schäfer (2015). Image removed for copyright reasons.

The relationships and networks of engaged participation and collaboration explored by Park Fiction are raising some rather important questions about the notion of ‘the right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1968) and the social cohesion within urban settings, currently not greatly supported by the state (Petrescu, 2023). Park Fiction is an example of how artist-led space can contribute to the co-creation of spatial initiatives involving a wide range of stakeholders, intimating theories of urban activation and community participation explored by Doina Petrescu and Kim Trogal (2017) in the ‘The Social (Re)Production of Architecture’.

The artist-led space draws on a wide range of theories of urban activation spanning from Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘production of space’, David Harvey’s (2008) ‘right to the city’, to Michel de Certeau’s (1984) ‘practice of everyday life’ and the tools of resilience and appropriation strategies employed by ordinary people, all the way to the Situationist International’s theories on the construction of situations and the agency of art to change everyday life (Hemmens & Zacarias, 2020). Responding to Lefebvre’s (1968) view that citizens of any society have a right to mould that society in and

through its spaces, Schäfer (2016) sees the imagination of everyday life as a potential counterforce to global hegemony. According to the artist, urban squares, streets, and parks are arenas where local and global forces collide, with the city acting as ‘a production site of values’. He recalls how spaces like Gezi Park became hubs of societal reimagining, transforming private daily routines into collective public engagements:

During the weeks before and after Gezi the parks became platforms of exchange, spaces of collective reinvention of society. Gezi excitingly collectivised private daily practice and carried it into public space. This is a specification of the impending urban revolution—and an essential enhancement of the historic, by now blunt, weapon of the working class, the strike. Emergency brake and acceleration at once. We will have to learn to connect Beyoglu to St. Pauli, Tarlabasi to Kreuzberg, Esso houses to Kotti & Co, Schwabing to Marxloh, Liverpool, Sao Paulo, Copenhagen, Rio, Boston, Barcelona, Kiev, Tel Aviv, Billstedt (Schäfer, 2016)

Through collaborative creation and participatory decision-making processes employed by Park Fiction, the artist-led space becomes a strong embodiment of Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ (1968). Park Fiction uses space as a tool to decentralise power and challenge the normative power dynamics often associated with urban planning and urbanism, effectively asserting the right of all local stakeholders to shape their neighbourhood. This promotes a culture of diversity where local narratives are nurtured (as opposed to the uniformity that a traditional, top-down urban planning structure would encourage), whilst also allows for a united reclamation of public space where co-designed ‘Collective Productions of Desires’ can be explored (Zamenopoulos et al., 2022). The resulted ‘alternative urban imaginaries’ (Petrescu & Petcou, 2011) become a mechanism for local stakeholders to assert their ‘right to the city’ (Harvey, 2008) and to perform as platforms for local activism addressing important issues such as access to space (locally and internationally through the Turkish network), city privatisation, gentrification, and climate change (Petrescu & Trogal, 2017).

Schäfer (2016) also highlights how initiatives such as Park Fiction can reach beyond their local contexts, impacting urban conditions worldwide. The global network that emerges from such movements emphasises the universality of the notion of the ‘right to

the city’,⁴⁴ and magnifies the collective power of local communities in shaping their cities, particularly when threatened by change or exclusion. Park Fiction became an example of an active space of resistance and transformation that has emerged and survived as a result of its strong community and ambition to maintain control over the space.

4.10 Co-resilience and the right to the city: ‘URBAN ACT/ing’ as democratic space governance

Throughout the years, the networks developed around the different forms of ‘URBAN ACT/ing’ presented in this chapter evolved as democratic forms of governing space, continuously instilling and growing what Doina Petrescu (2023) calls neighbourhood ‘co-resilience’. The groups’ ability to come together in such different ways depending on their interventions and ambitions is a demonstration of the artist-led spaces’ determined and empowering motivators and leadership. More importantly, it is an indication of the resilience shown by all involved to keep going and fight for what they believed in. These examples stand out as a models of experienced ongoing resilience shown by the community in their journey to protect the commons and sense of place.

The concept of resilience is a contested and rather ‘elastic notion’ (De Carli, 2018, p. 88) and it has received a lot of attention in the last ten years, especially in the fields of urban planning, geography, and architecture (Powell et al., 2014). As explored by De Carli in ‘Micro-resilience and Justice in São Paulo’ (2018), while environmental sciences have drawn attention to its progressive ability, a number of discussions about the term’s broader usage, notably in the social sciences, have centred on the political meaning of the idea. In these discussions, critics have highlighted how resilience thinking can elude ideas of power and politics, and how resilience narratives frequently seem to avoid the potential that current (social, economic, political, and ecological) conditions generating uncertainty might be subject to a broader organisational critique. As a result, it has been noted that stories of community resilience run the risk of growing up in completely dysfunctional social contexts that are characterised by an unequal distribution of

⁴⁴ Shifting tonality from Lefebvre (1968) to Harvey (2008).

resources and authority (Cretney & Bond, 2014; De Carli, 2018; Joseph, 2013; Mackinnon & Derickson, 2013).

Building on the literature understanding of resilience, it can be argued that artist-led initiatives such as the ones captured within this chapter (i.e. AAA, Park Fiction and The Blue House) explore these conditions of thinking and planning through notions of community resilience or ‘resilience from below’ as De Carli (2018) calls them, as tools of direct action to protect their neighbourhood from change. These examples become representations of ‘resilient practices’ (Petrescu & Petcou, 2011, p. 65) initiated by artist-led community groups that were excluded from the decision-making process concerning their neighbourhood. The groups seek to challenge the imposed dispersal of urban resources within their locality or better said, the removal of such resources in this case, as well as to question the available opportunities in the city through framing ‘radically alternative urban imaginaries’ (Petrescu & Petcou, 2011) or the ‘Collective Productions of Desires’ (Czenki & Schafer, 2007; Spatial Agency, n.d.c). This ambition to radically reshape the city and protect the commons links back to Harvey’s notion of ‘the right to the city’, as well as to social justice and empowerment, with Petcou and Petrescu (2011) in particular articulating the ‘right to resilience’.

Beatrice de Carli (2018) opens her paper with New Orleans-based civil rights attorney, Tracie Washington famous quote:

Stop calling me resilient. Because every time you say, “Oh, they’re resilient,” you can do something else to me. I’m not resilient (Jackson, 2015).

There is so much power in Washington’s remark, and it intimates the notion of social justice (Soja, 2010), ‘the just city’ (Feinstein, 2010), and ‘the right to the city’ (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1968), all themes that recognise ‘that urban struggles for social inclusion and citizenship are both *struggles in space* – embedded in the physical fabric of the city – and *struggles for space* – striving toward a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities’ (De Carli, 2018, p. 89; Purcell, 2002).

‘The right to the city’ emphasises how the environment shapes social power dynamics and how urban residents have a right to actively contribute to the creation of the city they want and regard (De Carli, 2018, pp. 89–90). Purcell (2002) highlights two key

components of this right in his observations on Lefebvre's work on the theme: 'the right of appropriation' and 'the right to participation'. According to Purcell (2002), 'the right to participation' emphasises that living in a community rather than obtaining formal citizenship serves as the foundation for membership in society, including all of the rights and responsibilities that come with it. Those who reside in the city have the right to claim urban space, regardless of their formal position, as the production of the city is the condition establishing belonging. A resident's physical access to, occupancy of, and use of urban area is implied by 'the right to appropriation' (Purcell, 2002). This right is upheld not just by occupying existing space but also by creating new urban space that satisfies residents' needs and ambitions. 'The right to the city', in this dual understanding, offers a pertinent reorientation to the definitions of both urbanisations and justice because it connects democratic and human rights concerns to spatial production, highlighting power and agency as inherently embedded in the micropolitics and commonplace practises of urban transformation (De Carli, 2018, p. 89; De Certeau, 1984).

The usage value of urban space, as opposed to its market worth, is also strongly connected to these ideas, particularly relevant in the contemporary context of the decline of the high street where retail space is still wrongly being seen as the catalyst for change. This emphasises the acute need to reorganise the power relations that support the production of space in order to create more just cities (De Carli, 2018, pp. 89–90; Purcell, 2002). This need makes the case for Petrescu and Petcou's 'right to resilience' (2023; 2011). This is defined as the people's right to take an active part in the production and transformation of their city, as well as their ability to access and control the resources required for their existence and wellbeing in the face of current societal and environmental crises. Through their work, Petrescu and Petcou (2023; 2011) contend that building resilience is a political and social issue that includes challenging and changing current power structures and urban development paradigms, rather than just a technical matter of enhancing infrastructure and disaster response. They contend that 'co-resilience', which is built on collaborative knowledge, resource creation and participatory decision-making, may be a means of achieving more just and sustainable urban futures. As such, we can argue that 'the right to resilience' entails the right to have a voice on how the city is shaping, and to get access to the tools and information needed for responding and adapting to, social, economic, and ecological changes.

Transdisciplinary artist-led interventions such as the ones presented in this chapter are examples of applied ‘co-resilience’ as they build up on collective participatory democracy as self-organised forms of governance that seek to empower citizens to actively engage in the process of decision-making concerning their neighbourhood. This idea of collective action and participation is explored extensively by David Harvey (2008) also who talks about ‘the right to the city’ as something far more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is a right to transform ourselves by transforming the city. He continues arguing this right as a shared one as it requires mutual power to restructure the process of urbanisation. (Harvey, 2008) This can be an incredibly challenging process; Jeanne van Heeswijk (2012, p. 81) notes that through her own practice, she has learned how challenging it can be to create a collaboration with a community and to depend upon that community’s sustained participation for sustainability:

It [...] involved all of us learning together how to take collective responsibility in order to make the information gathered operate significantly in the social and political context. These processes are always long and sometimes painful, as we have to learn about each other’s ideas and different viewpoints (Van Heeswijk, 2012, p. 81).

In an interview with Kotryna Valiukevičiūtė, Van Heeswijk (n.d.b) highlights a crucial aspect of participatory projects - the necessity of defining a clear timeline to realise the project’s ambitions. This insight emphasises the depth of Van Heeswijk’s approach, which is evident throughout her extensive portfolio. Her work is participatory and strongly integrated within its context as well as meticulously organised, with a keen awareness of the financial, social, and environmental conditions it navigates. Similarly, this structured approach to programming and planning is something ESA also strives to embed in its practice, recognising these elements as crucial to the success of a project. Jeanne van Heeswijk (n.d.b) further remarks:

I think it is a problem when people start thinking about socially engaged practices as projects, with beginning and ends. The practice is about creating processes of change, these are durational, often very difficult and they really

need time. So you have to find ways in which you can create that time frame and allow it to come into being. [...]

For me there are forms of flow and continuity in which there are moments where things temporarily gel and some kind of discursive gathering appears. To me these are platforms for collective learning. It is a point of collision, a point of agglutination, where flows of energies materialise for a moment. It is a moment in which the collective knowledge about the site is condensed. That is the moment from which we could collectively learn what we need to do to take responsibilities for a place. These discursive platforms for collective learning are very important so they should be very precise. It can take any form: a discussion, a performance, a song, a book, a film, a game, a shop, or an art piece, but the execution of the format needs to be done well (Van Heeswijk, n.d.b).

Through a complex analysis of context and understanding of the multitude of forces at play, the urban activator has the ability to develop a sense of belonging and union to a place. The outcome are meaningful places that are visually appealing, socially valuable, and filled with associations and memories; this can support a feeling of place identity and belonging while assisting in the resistance to uniformity and placelessness (Pogačar, 2014; Relph, 1976).

4.11 Defining the urban activator

The process of urban activation explored within these practices evolved as one that includes a broad range of engaged actors, thus encouraging the articulation of both issues and opportunities around space in the city, examining stakeholders' responses, as well as acting cohesively and maturely towards space, context, and society (Pogačar, 2014). The communities of interest for urban activators are marginalised, often unheard and unrepresented groups from diverse backgrounds and lower-income brackets who struggle to find a voice in the ever-changing urban context. These groups are frequently sidelined and silenced in mainstream urban planning and development processes. The 'ACT/ing' within the city challenges the academic and artistic practice, but also the

political, addressing the creativity and importance of a new approach to urban space as well as the range of processes and modes of operating within it (AAA, 2007c, p. 11).

This highlights an important point about the adaptability of the urban activator as a particularly sophisticated agent spanning widely across a variety of different spheres of engagement, shifting from initiating to facilitating and stimulating discussion, all the way to building agency in places where it's scarce. The urban activator (or catalyst) becomes this tool or actor for mediation, motivation, and initiation of change in the city, which, as captured within the literature (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Haydn & Temel, 2006; Oswaldt et al., 2013; Overmeyer, 2007; Pogačar, 2014, p. 197; Rosa & Weiland, 2013), carries three main functions:

- The spatial manifestation can promote tactics and processes aimed at enabling previously underused space in the city by stakeholders.
- The collaboration and participation stimulated by the spatial production can enable the subsequently essential process of consolidating networks of local and broader (even global) communities of interest.
- The spatial production can prompt and spark interest towards the development of long-term resolutions to specific spatial and social issues, thus emphasising the urban activator as 'the mediator in the process' (Pogačar, 2014, p. 197).

The examples and practices captured within this chapter seek to demonstrate that the notion of the urban activator as it's currently defined within the existing literature, with meanings influenced by Kaja Pogačar's (2014) physical (often temporary) interventions aimed at stimulating discussion between stakeholders and enabling them to do things collectively (as a way of learning/transforming and making change), it's not entirely reflective of the wider potential and agency the term holds. This thesis posits that the urban activator is a much wider and sophisticated concept that emerges as a physical intervention in underutilised spaces in the city as Pogačar (2014) contended, yet also as a fluid and flexible approach to spatial production that works much deeper with the specificities of community dynamics and urban landscapes.

Drawing from the case studies presented, we can discern a rich range of emerging themes that serve more beyond categorising spaces, but uniquely encapsulating the very essence of the urban activator. These thematic constructs challenge and extend the existing literature on urban activation, specifically evolving from Pogačar's (2014)

scope, arguing that the following qualities are present and shaping an urban activator and its complex nature (in non-hierarchical order):

- **Self-organisation and alternative practice:** More than a mode of operation, this reflects an ethos, a responsive, ground-up approach that allows adaptability in unpredictable urban landscapes.
- **Transdisciplinary nature:** The intersectionality of art, culture, architecture, urbanism, and planning, signifying that urban activation is not confined to a single discipline but is a confluence of diverse perspectives.
- **Local embeddedness:** Rootedness in the locality ensures interventions align with the community's ethos, ensuring that the urban activator's role is not of an outsider but an active and engaged participant.
- **Space provision and strategic real estate:** A strategic framework enabling artist-led spaces to venture into the broader real estate sector, harnessing unused properties and repurposing them into affordable studio spaces.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Recognising urban activation as an innovative approach that blends creativity with enterprise.
- **Research:** Evolving spatial and social agendas that are informed, grounded, and contextually relevant.
- **Pedagogy:** Commitment to continuous learning and the dissemination of knowledge, as well as interest in knowledge production and cross-sector collaborations (such as this collaborative PhD).
- **Production of knowledge:** Valuing the legacy of interventions, documenting journeys, and creating repositories that inspire future urban activations and toolkits.
- **Engagement tactics:** Dynamic strategies to ensure wide-ranging and effective participation from varied stakeholders.
- **Participation:** The heart of urban activation, emphasising the role of community and stakeholders in shaping interventions.
- **Acts of caring:** Beyond tangible outputs, these signify the humane, nurturing essence of urban activation, emphasising empathy and compassion.
- **Resilience:** The capacity to weather challenges, adapt, and thrive, ensuring the longevity and impact of interventions in ever-changing urban landscapes.

- **Circular economy and climate awareness:** An acknowledgment of our environmental imperatives, highlighting a commitment to sustainable urban growth and ecologically conscious interventions.

This thesis proposes an expanded definition of the term that builds up on the explorative analysis of the artist-led spaces examined earlier in this chapter; a meaning that gives artist-led space the agency to assert itself as urban activator in urban settings. The urban activator, as posited here, is practice or mode of operating that emerges in urban environments marked by top-down approaches resulting in social and economic decline and uncertainty. It occurs in contexts where vacant spaces, indicative of urban neglect, are rife, in areas of restricted connectivity and reduced access to employment and resources, and where diverse communities are often sidelined by mainstream urban planning. All these matters lead to a significant distortion of local spirit and sense of place, impacting people's perceptions and experiences in their environments.

As seen in the examples in this chapter, the urban activator is characterised by its grassroots, bottom-up approach, addressing the multifaceted nature of urban decline, including economic instability, underused spaces, and shifts in work culture and behaviours, especially in the post-pandemic era. It is a tool catalysing change through approaches that seek to revitalise, not sanitise contexts. This concept embraces the unique character and needs of each urban setting, advocating for growth that is organic, considerate, and reflective of the local identity. Rather than imposing external visions, the urban activator seeks to amplify the intrinsic qualities and potential of a place through deep, participatory, and integrated engagement. It represents a proactive response to urban challenges, promoting transformations that are sustainable, inclusive, and attuned to the complexities of the urban landscape.

With this perspective, this thesis posits that artist-led spaces can effectively act as urban activators in the urban context, evolving as a construct that extends beyond established perceptions of art as purely a visual or expressive pursuit. This concept situates the artist-led space at the junction of multiple spheres such as art, urban planning and architecture, community engagement, cultural economy, and social justice, emphasising its transformative potential in the city, highlighting its transformative capacity in urban environments. By operating across these various dimensions, artist-led

spaces become amplifiers for individuals and communities' voices that are often excluded from the discourse concerning their urban settings.

In summary, urban activation is a process where a broad range of engaged actors work collaboratively to address urban decline and foster community engagement. The urban activators, often organised as grassroots, bottom-up initiatives led by artists, focus on transforming urban contexts suffering from social and economic decline due to top-down approaches. Activation typically emerges in contexts marked by vacant spaces, restricted connectivity, reduced access to resources, and marginalised communities.

Urban activators serve as mediators and facilitators of urban transformation. They facilitate dialogue between communities and local governance, promoting collaboration, participation, and local identity through creative, integrated engagement. Their efforts amplify the unique qualities of each place, fostering sustainable and inclusive urban transformations. This thesis highlights the important role of artist-led spaces, situated at the intersection of art, urban planning, and community engagement, in facilitating dialogue and driving urban change.

The architect-researcher's embedded knowledge is crucial in this process, adopting a transdisciplinary methodological perspective. By utilising socially engaged tools such as ethnographic mapping and field journals, the architect-researcher ensures that urban activation emerges naturally from its specific context. This approach links situated knowledge and embeddedness, bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, and emphasising the importance of research by design and the role of relation and affect in exploring urban contexts.

To substantiate this argument, subsequent chapters will investigate this notion further, drawing on a broad review of literature and field observations to enrich the understanding of artist-led spaces as dynamic agents of urban change.

4.12 Research motivations

My interest in urban activation and the integration of art and architecture emerged during my MArch (Master of Architecture) studies at SHU. Here, I explored the concept of a self-organised, alternative practice situated at the intersection of these fields. My thesis, 'District Shanghai: A People Power Game', addressed the complexities of

Šnipiškės, a district in Vilnius, Lithuania through a community engagement board game designed to enable stakeholders to actively engage in reshaping their neighbourhood.

Through gameplay, stakeholders actively participated in the process of transforming and activating their neighbourhood. The outcomes of the game influenced the emerging proposals, which spanned from small temporary interventions and community allotment spaces to public toilet facilities, affordable housing, a nursery, and a community laundrette.

By connecting art, architecture, and community participation, the project exemplified the potential of artist-led interventions in urban spaces. This experience profoundly shaped my thinking, emphasising the process of urban activation as a construct that evolves as an organic process emerging from the inherent qualities of a place, rather than something done to it.

The project also proposed a new image of the urban practitioner as a figure who transcends the confines of a specific profession, navigating transversally across multiple disciplines and embracing a holistic approach to understanding urban environments. This transdisciplinary method acknowledges the interconnectedness of various factors in urban development and underscores the importance of collaboration and co-creation in shaping urban environments.

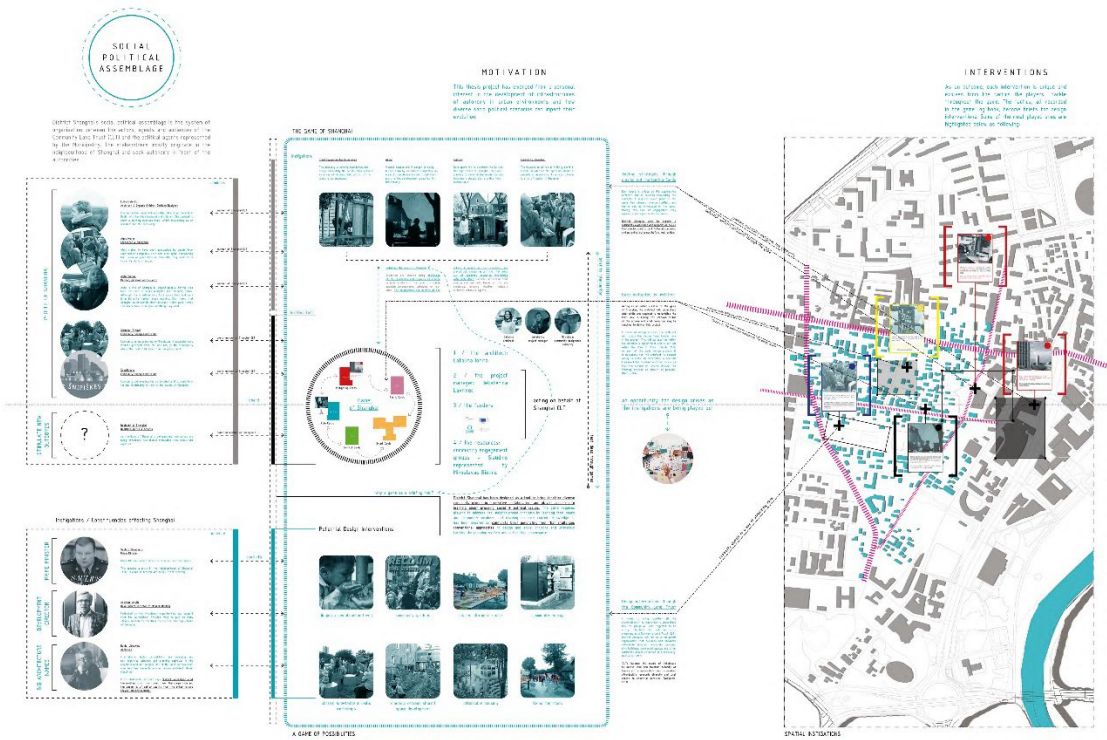


Figure 60 - Image of a social political assemblage developed as part of my MARCH thesis project 'District Shanghai: A People Power Game'. High resolution in 8.8 - Appendix 8. Image: Ionita (2018).

5 ESA as urban activator

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that artist-led spaces can act as urban activators, using ESA as the lens of exploration. The exploration is guided by a central inquiry: How do artist-led spaces, particularly ESA, function as catalysts for urban activation?

Expanding on the concept of an urban activator as defined in Section 4.11 - Defining the urban activator, this chapter outlines the theoretical framework used to evaluate ESA within the context of urban activation. It then proceeds with an analysis of the three ESA case studies selected for this thesis: 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry', the 'Art Hostel', and Hidden Stories of New Briggate'. The chapter concludes by discussing the significance of archival research and field journals, highlighting the role of the architect-researcher as an 'urban curator' in the process of urban activation. This approach emphasises the transformative potential of artist-led spaces in shaping urban landscapes.

5.2 Theoretical framework

Building on the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 4 – Artist-led space as urban activator, this chapter synthesises the insights from my embedded (and removed) research with ESA, along with the broader analytical findings emerging from the study. This framework will address the key qualities of urban activation identified in the literature review on artist-led space, which include:

Core qualities:

- Local embeddedness.
- Strategies for space provision.
- Production of knowledge.
- Research focus and pedagogical impacts.
- Active community engagement.
- Acts of caring.
- Long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, urban activators often embody additional qualities such as:

- Self-organised nature.
- Circular economy practices.
- Repurposing of space.
- Understanding of real estate complexities.
- Entrepreneurial mindsets that drive creative solutions.
- Dynamic programming that encourages community engagement.
- Resilience.

These attributes are not uniform; they may manifest in diverse configurations and synergies, reflecting the unique nature of each urban activator initiative. As such, the main aim of this chapter is to highlight how the theoretical paradigms of urban activation manifest within the artist-led sector, using ESA as a lens of exploration. By knitting these themes into the analysis, this chapter aspires to demonstrate how ESA responds to these key themes and employs intrinsic approaches of urban activation.

5.3 Case studies overview

This section investigates ESA by examining three key case studies: ‘A Christmas Pudding for Henry’, the ‘Art Hostel’, and ‘Hidden Stories of New Briggate’. These case studies are analysed through a combination of methods including historical context, archival resources, participant observations, mapping, interviews, and field journals. This extensive exploration serves a dual purpose: it accentuates the unique relevance of each individual case, while also emphasising their combined role in enriching the overarching thesis narrative.

Strategically, the case studies represent three distinct eras in the 30-year journey of the artist-led organisation. ‘A Christmas Pudding for Henry’ reflects the organisation’s nascent stage, highlighting key learnings and mentorships, the ‘Art Hostel’, an innovative and ambitious project in the artist-led sphere, embodies the principle of sustainability, defining a transitional phase and entrepreneurial spirit, and ‘Hidden Histories of New Briggate’ represents a contemporary initiative, focusing on activating the high street with a community-focused cultural program promoting active engagement and participation.

The case studies were chosen for their key roles in the transformation of ESA into the established artist-led organisation it is today. Spanning across different milestones in ESA’s 30-year trajectory, the three projects highlight distinctive moments in the organisation’s development, offering insights into its innovative modes of operation, evolving identity, and highlighting tactics pertinent to the thesis’ dialogue on the role of artist-led spaces as urban activators. These projects highlight varied aspects of urban activation, drawing connections to the literature review and knowledge evolved from developing the Artist-led Directory with an aim to demonstrate the role of ESA as urban activator.

5.3.1 A Christmas Pudding for Henry

Duration	18.11.1999 - 18.12.1999
Location	Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery, the internet, the façade of the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds
Participants	72
Visitors	600
Number of Events	30

‘A Christmas Pudding for Henry’ is an important project for ESA and its foundation as an artist-led organisation. Watson and Wakeman’s involvement in the project ‘extended their understanding of art-infrastructure beyond physical platforms to include social interventions’ and provided an opportunity to explore and discover their practice and focus (Orlek, 2021, p. 116).

The inception of the project had its roots in a broader ambition: making art accessible beyond the confines of London. The North aimed to be a platform where local artists didn’t feel compelled to travel to London to practice contemporary art. Robert Hopper, Head of Henry Moore Foundation External Programme, spread word of the upcoming ArtTranspennine event in 1998, emphasising its inclusivity, however, despite such promises, when the event materialised, local artists found themselves in familiar, supporting roles rather than at the forefront (K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022). Among these local talents were Karen Watson, then an invigilator at the Henry Moore Institute, and Jon Wakeman, a technician.

Feeling overlooked, a few invigilators including Watson and Wakeman, voiced their discontent to Hopper about the missed opportunity to be true contributors to the event (K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022). Recognising this oversight, Hopper introduced the idea of collaborating with artist Jeanne van Heeswijk to create a project tailored for the local talents and he chose Watson to acquaint Van Heeswijk with Leeds, its vibrant artist community, and its rich visual arts history. This interaction was key as it sowed the seeds for a partnership where Van Heeswijk expressed her interest in the project but on one condition: the involvement of ESA.

Figure 61 - Photograph of the project's archival box. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Although Van Heeswijk's invitation had a tinge of ambiguity, she envisioned Watson and Wakeman as more than affiliates of ESA, but as artists in their own right. She

strongly believed that their involvement posed questions about the very nature and scope of an artist's practice, thus challenging the conventional norms (K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022). The final agreement placed the project at Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery, adding another partner to the mix. As such, the project started in 1999 with a set timeline of two months, marking the beginning of an exciting and unique collaboration between Leeds' local arts community and Jeanne van Heeswijk.

Figure 62 - Collection of photographs highlighting different phases of the project. These are documented within ESA's archive. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Over thirty artists (a combination of artists and artist-led organisations from Leeds and artists from Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht) together with members of the public collaborated on creating a depiction of all facets of Leeds as an urban context (Orlek, 2021, p. 116). The artists involved were: Otiose, Leeds 13, Sarah Saunders, Mark Webber, Ben Cain, Christina Della Giustina, Danio Man, Stevan Vukovic, Cel Crabeels, Liesbeth and Angelique Raeven, Nasrin Tabatabai, Kevin Lycett (web designer) and Watson and Wakeman. (East Street Arts, 1999a). The programme included workshops, investigations, presentations, and conversations focused on inquiries into the nature of Leeds' cultural infrastructure, the presence of particular cultural links within the city, and the planning and usage of public space. As part of the group's exploration of the cultural infrastructure of Leeds they sought to respond to the question: 'What constitutes a cultural infrastructure in the city?' (Van Heeswijk, 1999). According to Van Heeswijk (1999),

The recipe for a traditional Christmas pudding was the essence of the project. A traditional Christmas pudding takes six weeks to prepare. Just like in the real pudding, different ingredients were used (the artists and artists groups from different backgrounds and disciplines); everyone in the household gave the pudding a stir (all participants gave the project a twist by creating an event); the pudding was simmered in a lot of spirit (critical guests and discussions) and kept in a capsule before being presented on 18 December (Van Heeswijk, 1999).

Within the scope of displaying the project, three distinct podiums came to the fore, though intriguingly, none found their place within the confines of the Henry Moore Institute. The first, a space at the Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery, was open seven-days-a-week, catering to an array of works, presentations, and discussions; each day, between six and eight o'clock, it became a hub where someone would engage the audience in lectures, artistic exhibits, film screenings, or even evocative performances, all echoing their unique perception of the city. The second podium was a digital platform, a website (www.henry-m.org) which offered a daily update in the form of a cultural magazine. The third, and perhaps the most avant-garde, was the very façade of the Henry Moore Institute. The group's commission brief responded with a clear call to action: create a bond with the city; Jeanne van Heeswijk (1999), interpreting this in her

distinct style, commandeered the institute's striking black marble façade, transforming it into a metaphorical blackboard. This space articulated numerous ideas about Leeds and illustrated various city-centric activities, encouraging an engaging dialogue with the wider community.

Figure 63 - Photograph of Henry Moore Institute's facade showcasing the artists' response to the project's theme. Photograph: Van Heeswijk (1999). Image removed for copyright reasons.

The two-month long project aimed to bring attention to the creative processes of artists by allowing untidy artistic processes to take over the Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery (K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022). Instead of curating a conventional exhibition or showcasing a set group of artworks, Van Heeswijk wanted the Gallery to give emphasis to vividly portraying the working practices of the artists. This attempt sought to shift public perceptions, directing

attention not towards finished art pieces, but towards the very journey of art creation – the raw, intimate, and sometimes chaotic processes that artists undergo (East Street Arts, 1999a). At the heart of the project was a unique approach to collaboration, driven by Van Heeswijk’s distinctive methodology. Her vision was clear; she wanted to create an environment that incites collaboration, and as such, she organised the artists into groups where six European artists and six from Leeds could engage in dialogue (K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022). This required undertaking a project every week of the first month, each with a specific focus. Integral to her approach were sessions that combined structured talks with more esoteric, interactive tasks, yet, for even seasoned artists like Watson and Wakeman, the purpose behind some activities remained elusive.

One especially memorable exercise for Watson and Wakeman (personal communication, 3 August 2022) involved participants throwing beans onto a map to pinpoint locations in East Leeds. Orchestrated by Raoul Bunschoten, founder of CHORA, this unconventional exercise, though seemingly random, was trademark Van Heeswijk. The locations indicated by the beans set artists on tasks of philosophical depth: tracing an object’s past, envisioning its future, and capturing its essence in the present. This activity wasn’t just about geographical mapping, but a deeper, more introspective form of exploration, that allowed the artists to truly connect with their contexts and their particularities. Revisiting the project’s intricacies, Watson and Wakeman called these creative processes an evolving journey of self-reflection, discovery, and partnership, allowing them to explore new approaches outside of the traditional art practice they were previously exposed to. Jon Wakeman reflects:

I think back now [...] it just felt to me so interesting and kind of liberating in terms of being able to use the Gallery space in that way [...] and to be so free flowing [...] because [...] we’ve both been visitors, [...] but I haven’t been [...] involved in this kind of rigorous kind of practice. [...]

And I think we sort of took it forward from that and it really liberated us from feeling like some way we had to either apologise or think like a box or a path (Wakeman in K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

Figure 64 - Archived programme of CHORA's Proto Urban Conditions workshop.
Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 65 - Archived collection of photographs from CHORA's workshop. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

For the second month of the project, the artists moved to the Gallery. The setup was dynamic and forward-thinking for its time, and while serving as a canvas for the artists, it was also equipped with a range of electronic devices – from computers, cameras and scanners to projectors and coffee makers. These tools were not just accessories but key

components, providing the necessary infrastructure to aid the artists, and facilitating interactions and collaborations leading to the emergence of a collective interpretation of Leeds as an embedded experience for both artists and observers (Orlek, 2021, pp. 116–118). The artists aimed to capture a more complex understanding of Leeds that went beyond an objective investigation of the city’s houses, streets, and institutions and included intuitively sensed energies, oscillations, and atmospheres (East Street Arts, 1999c).

Working both individually and collectively, they co-produced work in a variety of media including music, sculpture, film, video, and storytelling, with the intention of uncovering this hidden subjective terrain and experimenting with new ways of working, viewing, and participating in art. According to ESA (1999c), the artists used their practice as a tool to promote ‘new connections and relations between people, different institutions, works of art, performances, and many different kinds of human manifestation’, transforming the Gallery into a unique and highly experimental experience. Watson reminisced:

Not only were we introduced to a digital camera, and a website [...], Jeanne brought lots of artists together from across the world and encouraged local artists to work together. We were based in Leeds Met Gallery, which doesn’t exist anymore, and we used that space as a base. The first thing Jeanne said was, ‘this isn’t a gallery, this is a living room, this is an office, this is a meeting space’, and just turned it all upside down and said that this is whatever we need it to be. Jon and I really enjoyed seeing live art, visual art, sound art and film in the same place and how artists could work together like that (Watson cited in Connolly, 2023).

The untidy display of the artists at work filled the space and gave it life and purpose alongside a structured schedule of public programmes that included workshops, presentations, and luncheon talks. Running daily from November 18th to December 18th, 1999, the spectrum of events showcased immense diversity; a memorable instance for Watson and Wakeman (personal communication, 3 August 2022) was the artist twins, Liesbeth and Angelique Raeven, travelling through Leeds, vociferously inquiring: ‘Henry!? Has anybody seen Henry??’. As part of their involvement, Watson

and Wakeman organised an 'Art Pub Quiz' at the Adelphi Hotel pub designed to challenge participants on their familiarity with Leeds' art scene.

Over the two months, 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry' emphasised the power of collective artist-led decision-making which was central to its success and present in all aspects of the project such as the design of the marketing material, the creation of a mailing list, general daily project management, and the spatial arrangement of work within the exhibition space (Orlek, 2021, p. 118). This methodology required significant participation from the group in the form of collective decision-making, which took place throughout the project through regularly scheduled collaborative sessions.

Figure 66 - Archived photograph of Jon Wakeman working on the project exhibition. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

In preparation for the grand opening, the artists sent invitations to numerous art practitioners and collaborators with the aim to incite interest and curiosity about the project. Watson and Wakeman (personal communication, 3 August 2022) talked about

the power the invitations had on the recipients, being seen as important instruments for confronting and negotiating public engagement in the project. This is where the use of technology came into play and made a rather significant imprint on the artists' approach; work that was once ordinary, such as the design of a flyer, was transformed into work that was innovative, contentious, and experimental. This work questioned understandings of art spaces that were taken for granted and that were universalising in nature. According to Orlek (2021, p. 118), 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry questioned the status of white cube spaces as universally public or accessible, by problematising who was invited and hosted within them'.

As a provocation, the leaflet advertising the opening of the project stated:

The public opening of A Christmas Pudding for Henry [...] is for a select audience only. We are sorry to announce that you are not on our special invitation list (East Street Arts, 1999b).

Figure 67 - Archived leaflet sent out to curate the audience for the project. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Flyers, riddled with air gun pellet holes, came back to the team, accompanied by furious notes from arts professionals. While some of the participants in the group were uneasy about the frigid approach, for others it was a successful way of engaging viewers in direct and hilarious (as well as angry) interaction with the project and breaking from traditional Gallery procedures (Orlek, 2021, p. 118; K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022). One particular archived response (Figure 68) captured my interest, hinting at a unique mixture of emotions triggered in the recipient upon engaging with the material. Regardless of the exact sentiment, an emotion was stirred. It wasn't just another disregarded flyer destined for the bin; this piece stood out, compelling every recipient to reflect and emote.

Figure 68 - Archived response to the invitation capturing the complex dynamics within the art scene in Leeds at the time. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

For Watson, the invitation served as a good starting point for direct conversation:

I really liked the opening invite. I have worked in Leeds for a long time and see so many invites to openings mailed, many from projects I work on. But where do they go, there is no feedback, no reaction. This has created direct dialogue, mostly I would say of a curious nature but some dialogue is good (East Street Arts, 1999c).

Van Heeswijk' unconventional methods weren't universally embraced and occasionally clashed with the perspectives of Leeds Metropolitan University Curator, Moira Innes. This tension spilled over into interactions with the artists involved. Watson (personal communication, 3 August 2022) recounted a spirited disagreement she had with Innes during the project's course and how she turned to Van Heeswijk for guidance on the matter:

She knew somewhere in that project there'd be people clashing, Moira on this occasion, but she, she didn't panic about it. She's like, these are things that happen in these projects. And I can remember talking to her at length about this, because she was like, you just, you've just got to get into a position where you can deal with these things. Because if you're not going to deal with these things, you might not be in these kinds of projects. And I think I learned a lot around about that, and how to take obstacles and challenges and difficult people on (Watson in K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

Drawing upon their shared journey at ESA, both Watson and Wakeman (personal communication, 3 August 2022) recognise the profound impact Jeanne van Heeswijk has had on their artistic evolution; they frequently speak of her not just as a collaborator, but as a guiding mentor and driving inspiration. Her vision and approach have been instrumental in moulding the organisation's artistic direction, refining its ethos, and expanding its horizons (K. Watson, personal communication, 2 April 2020).

For Jon and Karen this show was an endorsement of how they were thinking about the direction of ESA. How Jeanne worked providing a steep learning curve. With a lot of collaboration and co-working, the performance became socially engaged. [...] the impact of Jeanne's work would start to shape the future of the organisation (Wakeman, 2021d).

Van Heeswijk's unique collaborative methods aligned with Watson and Wakeman, using 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry' as a learning experiment to push the boundaries of their traditional art practices and to embrace a more organic process like the memorable bean-throwing exercise, as a means to connect to their stakeholders and

localities in a deeper, more engaged manner. Under Van Heeswijk's mentorship, the pair began to see art as more than just Gallery exhibitions; they started viewing it as an expansive practice that could reshape societal narratives and perceptions and this transformative experience truly catalysed their passion for redefining what art could achieve and how artists could engage with their communities in meaningful ways. Jon Wakeman noted that:

[W]e've looked at this kind of work before Jeanne came and [...] we're kind of interested in [...] how people do work [...] But it kind of felt like we didn't know how to position it, we didn't know whether we were kind of doing the right thing. [...] but all that project just kind of went [...] It's good to see this kind of work, it's good to kind of see the extent of what an artist can do [...](Wakeman in K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

Wakeman continued making an important note about the process:

It just really highlighted how much the process was important. And what could be involved in the process. And again, it's something I still now carry on this talk about the process [...] and trying to make the process visible to people is by far the most challenging, but interesting thing (Wakeman in K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

Working with Van Heeswijk gave Watson and Wakeman the reassurance that their work and methods were not just acceptable, but essential. Initially mired in uncertainty about presenting their genuine involvements in art, Van Heeswijk's presence served as a robust affirmation. This discovery truly freed Watson and Wakeman, removing any perceived need to apologise for their unique approach:

[T]o have Jeanne come in and to really reaffirm [...] that this is okay, this is right [...] the practice was suddenly like okay, right. I get it and understand it. And I think we sort of took it forward from that it really liberated us from feeling like some way we had to [...] apologise (Wakeman in K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

‘A Christmas Pudding for Henry’ ended in a very unexpected and tragic manner with Robert Hopper passing away the night before the closing performance. Watson and Wakeman (personal communication, 3 August 2022) share a quiet reflection, the weight of that moment evident in their silence; Hopper’s death had broader implications beyond the project.

I don’t think there’s anybody else at the Henry Moore Institute that would have ever done that. He did bring her (Jeanne van Heeswijk) in for this particular reason he did care about the sector. I’m not saying they don’t care about the sector, but they’re the curators, and they care about what they are doing in the Gallery. Whereas Robert just had just a clearer view of the ecology of the sector (Watson in K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

Wakeman continued:

And you just, you could see it from somewhere else. And it was, you could really [...] properly listen out that sense of authority, which didn’t come with a sense of righteousness with, he came with an openness with that authority, which [...] is something [...] something that you’re trying to free something up and listen to what’s being said to around you, rather than ploughing through with your job (Wakeman in K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022).

Hopper’s sudden passing weighed heavily on Watson and Wakeman; they recognised his distinct and nuanced grasp of the artist-led sphere, standing apart from many of his contemporaries in Leeds. They were clued into potential dialogues between Hopper and Van Heeswijk, which hinted at ESA’s involvement in future projects beyond ‘A Christmas Pudding for Henry’. The realisation that these discussions would now remain unfulfilled, leaving the path ahead uncertain, was indeed disheartening, but nonetheless, the artists reflect on this project as a defining moment in their positionality and affirmation as an artist-led organisation. Their collaboration with Jeanne van Heeswijk

defined by rich engagement and unconventional methods, truly shaped their identity and mode of operation, whilst also acted as a catalyst for shaping ESA's approach, emphasising the need of a pedagogical focus and site-based research. This partnership highlighted the importance of being embedded in a context and dedicating time to truly understand its nuances, key insights that have been integrated into their practice, manifesting in collaborations with local educational institutions, including this PhD. Such engagements contribute back to the community as well as reinforce ESA's commitment to developing educational connections and learning opportunities.

Figure 69 - Archived photograph of the contributing artists to 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry', alongside the project initiator, Jeanne van Heeswijk. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

5.3.2 Art Hostel

Duration	2016 - present
Location	Leeds – Kirkgate (closed 2018) Mabgate (ongoing, permanent location)

8th August 2022 - Day at the Art Hostel

It's a sunny Friday morning with not a lot going on here at the Art Hostel.

As I step in, I am welcomed by the always smiling Rhian who invites me to take a sit in the cosy 'living room' or reception whilst she brings me a nice cup of Yorkshire tea.

I have my journal with me; but I am like a child on Christmas Day when all the presents are under the tree, excited to open them and have a play...

I sip through my tea and spend the first hour silently observing, looking at the eccentric objects around me; a cacophony of colourful displays, books, and flyers... I even attempt playing chess (not very well).

Rhian keeps walking by, chuckling at my childish excitement...

The Art Hostel is no ordinary place; the first social enterprise hostel in the country to truly transform space into artwork, the Art Hostel (2017) has made a significant impact on its locality. As one of ESA's most ambitious projects to date, the Art Hostel was created as a tool to actively support artists and their practice, whilst also offering overnight stays to Leeds' visitors in a unique, fun, and creative space.

Figure 70 - Photograph of Art Hostel Kirkgate. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Originally located in the Woodheads Seeds Headquarters building (Figure 70), the Art Hostel first opened its doors on Kirkgate as a pop-up in 2016. ESA had planned to operate the hostel for three years as a prototype to determine if a model like this one would work. Unfortunately, the hostel had to close its doors early in 2018 due to a disagreement with the building's landlord (R. Aitken, personal communication, 20 July 2023). Nonetheless, in less than three years of operation, the hostel recorded over 10,000 bookings from guests from 117 countries, hosted over 350 artists at more than 125 events, and enjoyed 18,282 brews over 4 kettles (Art Hostel, n.d.i).

Figure 71 - Infographic of Art Hostel Kirkgate. Image: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 72 - Infographic of Art Hostel Kirkgate. Image: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The original Art Hostel on Kirkgate was a pilot project which proved so successful it prompted the purchase of a new, and permanent, home for the Art Hostel. Owning the building has given us stability and has meant that we've had the freedom to make it a truly one-of-a-kind experience (East Street Arts, 2023).

The Art Hostel later relocated to Mabgate, once the red-light district of Medieval Leeds, where it now forms a key part of ESA's creative Mabgate Complex, next door to ESA's home, Patrick Studios, and art and tech hub, Convention House. This stands as one of ESA's crowning accomplishments, a monumental effort by the entire team involved. Located within the 1894 former presbytery for the historic St Patrick's Church, the hostel accommodates twelve individually curated rooms, each of them uniquely addressing issues such as politics, history and heritage, climate change, and nostalgia. As Lorna Parkes (2022) noted in a Guardian article, 'the outcome is nothing short of magical—a massive symphony of imagination unleashed'. In its reinvention, elements like objects, furniture, bedding, and knowledge were seamlessly integrated from the Kirkgate prototype, and anything that didn't find its place was allocated throughout the broader Mabgate Complex or kept in storage, awaiting its moment in an upcoming project.

Figure 73 - Photograph of Art Hostel Mabgate when commencing the renovation works.
Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The process of securing the building and converting it into the current Art Hostel was a challenging one for everyone involved; it began with a complex fundraising phase, compounded by inaugurating the hostel during the global pandemic, which diminished anticipated revenues. Additionally, post-Brexit visa constraints hindered international volunteers from working in the UK, and even though this changed with recent legal adjustments, these factors collectively made the hostel's initial years in its permanent location quite challenging.



Figure 74 - Photograph of the reception area of the Mabgate Art Hostel. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

In the midst of all these events, Watson was noting with hope that:

Our new Art Hostel will be a dynamic and inclusive place that will build financial sustainability for East Street Arts. It will help to make Leeds' creative economy more resilient and support diverse artistic practice in the wider region by connecting people right here in Mabgate (Watson in Art Hostel, 2022).

Figure 75 - Photograph of a typical 'Tuesday tea' at the Art Hostel. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

As part of the living experience, visitors to the Art Hostel are invited to contribute to the hostel's identity celebrating its locality and climate focused culture. The physical infrastructure offered by hostel aims to engage people 'to make, create, debate, sleep and explore, promoting ethical tourism and accessibility to the arts' (East Street Arts, 2016). Through a series of events, focused conversations or purely through sharing food, guests can learn about Leeds' art scene and ESA's response to climate change. To create an atmosphere where the sustainability agenda can emerge and flourish, as well as building on Leeds' grassroots and DIY art scene, each room has been uniquely designed to spark discussions and imaginations; as such, twelve beautiful rooms have emerged, including one focused on 1980s protest culture. The ones that stood out for me most are highlighted below:

'It's Up To You' by Mary and Jiem¹ is a six-bed dorm focused on 1980s youth protest culture, seeks to celebrate Leeds' long history of radical ideas and protest movements. To allow visitors to time travel through Leeds' recent and previous countercultural history, a large variety of posters, flyers, and graffiti are displayed on a permanent street-like installation. Mary and Jiem intended to provide visitors the chance to have a deeper understanding of Leeds' history and how it led to the present, as well as a broader perspective of the entire nation (Art Hostel, n.d.b). According to the artists:

We see ourselves and our interventions as tools for people and we define our duo as two lovers working as public artists. [...] Our main inspiration for the hostel room is the local History, the Leeds alternative movements from the 1980s, in both cultural and political levels..(Mary and Jiem in Art Hostel, n.d.e)



Figure 76 - Photograph of 'It's Up To You' room. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

¹ Originally from a graffiti background, Mary and Jiem of the Wanderlust Social Club are an artistic duo passionate about exploring local community histories and their work is very much focused on collective identities (Art Hostel, n.d.e).



Figure 77 - Photograph of 'It's Up To You' room. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

'Ziggy Wingle' by Alison Smith² is an eight-bed dorm collaboratively created by the artist and local school Shakespeare Primary. Based on the theme of 'Fun', the room has been designed to celebrate playfulness and creativity. The artist has previous experience with working with children and families as part of her role as Engagement Curator at the Henry Moore Institute where she 'often combines her skills to develop socially engaged projects and participatory artwork' (Art Hostel, n.d.a).

As part of the emergence of 'Ziggy Wingle', the children were invited to use toys, games, puzzles, and conceptual artworks as inspiration while learning about abstract shapes and how we perceive them through play and art. They experimented with patterns and shapes to construct an interactive play wall; a big pegboard wall covered in vibrant wooden shapes that can be rearranged to create various compositions. Also, they created a neon light that changes colours and playful shelving with wooden toys (Art Hostel, n.d.k). According to the artist:

I often work with light and recycled materials, making large sculptural light installations which are exhibited at festivals and events across the UK. Some pieces take inspiration from organic forms and biological processes, informed by collaborations with scientists, while some explore traditional craft processes, or the life cycles of materials and concepts of value (Smith in Art Hostel, n.d.k).

² Leeds-based artist and maker, Alison Smith uses a variety of materials and 3D methods to create immersive artworks and places through interdisciplinary practise. She frequently uses light and repurposed materials to create imposing light sculptures that are displayed at festivals and events all around the UK. While some sculptures address traditional craft techniques, the life cycles of materials, or conceptions of value, others are inspired by organic forms and biological processes and guided by scientific collaborations (Art Hostel, n.d.a).



Figure 78 - Photograph of one of the elements co-designed with the pupils. Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 79 - Photograph of one of the elements co-designed with the pupils. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

'Rooting' by Sayang Sound³ is a multi-sensorial room designed for those who will benefit from a grounded and nourishing experience in a space designed to be fully accessible. This means the room allows people with accessibility needs⁴ to enjoy their stay in a safe and visually enriching environment where every element is intelligently regulated by attentive voice controls and technology. As an architect, I particularly admire the artist's interest and diligence in researching their client; during the design stage of the project, Sayang consulted with fellow artists and industry professionals with accessibility needs to ensure the resulted space is responsive of their spatial requirements (Art Hostel, n.d.g). According to the artist:

My idea was to create a sensory, sound focused space, with sound and visuals creating a sense of comfort and respite. A predominant thought in its creation was, finding my sense of stability and ground again when I feel out of place, and out of sync in a new space (Sayang in Art Hostel, n.d.h).

Figure 80 - Photograph of 'Rooting'. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.h). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

³ In order to examine the intersections of gender, racism, queerness, and access, Sayang, a Malaysian British DJ and sound artist, mixes sound and space. They are particularly interested in discussing their reflections on their experiences with disabilities and post-colonial Trans identity in Malaysia (Art Hostel, n.d.h).

⁴ Visible and invisible needs, inclusive of mental health, neurodiversity, and chronic illness.

The design of the room plays on the sensorial experience, with sound, colour, and touch as key features; Sayang has created an audio visual and sensory experience that will feel different to each visitor with a focus on sensory respite. On selection, the lights will change, images will show up on the ceiling, and a soundscape will be played. This experience will interact with the entire space, and choices include sight only, no sound, headphones only, and no sound. This is a purely discretionary component of the space that contributes to its character through other factors like wall colour, fabric, feel, and design (Art Hostel, n.d.g).

Figure 81 - Photograph of the accessible bathroom provided withing 'Rooting'.

Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 82 - Photograph capturing the sensorial experience of the room. Photograph: Art Hostel, (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

'The Woolly Ewe' by Jesse Paul Wright⁵ is a thoughtfully designed six-bed dorm that is cosy and soft, practical, and quirky. The ceiling is covered with 380 beautiful woollen tiles made from recycled clothes from the neighbourhood's streets. The elegant windows are framed in vibrant blue teals sampled from copper patina, and copper walls pay homage to the local industry. Little shelves hold a row of small sheep dressed in patriotic colours. At the foot of a bed are old, discarded drawers that have been filled with hand dyed wool collected from local farms, whilst at the doorway is a woolly rag-made portrait of an Ewe looking over the room like some sort of glorified shrine (Art Hostel, n.d.j). Wright noted that:

I wanted to inspire others to see value in old textiles while giving a nod to Leeds woollen history. The ingenuity of mankind to process natural fibres into cloth amazes me, so the room is also a celebration of the sheep and our ongoing relationship (Wright in Art Hostel, n.d.c).

Figure 83 - Photograph of the textile exploration exhibited in the room. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

⁵ Jesse left Australia in 2015 to pursue a career as an interior designer and installation artist. Since then, his work has evolved and diversified to include street puppetry in Spain and the United States, theatre sets in South Korea, interior design in the UK and Australia, and carpentry in Italy, Israel, and Mexico (Art Hostel, n.d.c).

The artist used this room as a canvas to honour Leeds' industrial woollen legacy and to stimulate people to learn more about old textiles and their value (Art Hostel, n.d.j). This raises a valid point around nowadays fast fashion and its significant impact on the planet, and in keeping with The Art Hostel's repurposing theme, this room celebrates the idea of recycling used elements of textiles and fabrics that have been found in the locality of the hostel, thus re-affirming the strong bond between the art and the place and context within it emerged. Linking to the notion of urban activation, this room is much more than a great overnight stay option for a weekend in Leeds, but an example that highlights the power art can have over place when it emerges from an embedded contextual process.

Figure 84 - Photograph of the room's intricate ceiling made out of found textiles from the hostel's vicinity. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

This room became my temporary home during the Hive Conference; during my stay, I took the time to intimately explore and appreciate the meticulous details of its interior design and the intricate components it held. The sheer depth of thought and craftsmanship behind its creation was, at times, overwhelming, yet, amidst its artistry,

there was a palpable sense of warmth and familiarity. The room beautifully bridged my experience as a guest to the rich textile heritage of the city, making this a valuable learning experience. As the artist put it:

Using whatever material I can source locally, gaining understanding, testing its limits and playing also help me to feel a sense of ownership over my surroundings (Wright in Art Hostel, n.d.c).

Wright's work is a call to human's ever-present relationship to nature; from mankind's resourcefulness to convert natural fibres into cloth all the way to using this transformative process as an instigation to design space around it, this room is an invitation to remember how lucky we are to be here.

Figure 85 - Photograph of the artist's resourceful sheep footsteps made out of potatoes.

Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 86 - Photograph of the intricate 'Ewe's shrine' developed by the artist as an owe to the textile heritage of the area and a call to rethink the approach to fast fashion.

Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Ocean Galaxy by Mandy Barker⁶ is a private double room exploring ‘marine pollution through the medium of found footballs’ (Art Hostel, 2022). The room is designed around a galaxy of floating footballs and gives visitors the sense that they are living in a reimagined solar system. These footballs represent 992 pieces of marine debris retrieved from global oceans within just four months – encompassing ‘769 footballs from 41 different countries and islands and from 144 different beaches, by 89 members of the public’ (Art Hostel, n.d.f).

Figure 87 - Photograph of ‘Ocean Galaxy’ wallpaper. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.).

Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The room’s walls display collections from across Europe and the UK, including a single person’s recovery of 228 balls (Art Hostel, n.d.f). Looking up towards the ceiling while lying in bed reveals a collective effort by people all across the world to gather an incredible amount of footballs (Art Hostel, n.d.f). Together with a bespoke ‘guest book’

⁶ Internationally acclaimed photographer from Leeds who has won numerous awards for her work focusing on marine plastic waste over the past decade. She seeks to increase public awareness of plastic pollution in the oceans while highlighting its detrimental effects on marine life and, eventually, human beings (Art Hostel, n.d.d).

that displays the artist's photographs and notes made throughout the creation of the series, there is also a never-before-seen framed print of a marine debris Leeds United football shirt (replica 1978) that washed up on the East Coast of the UK in 2015 (Art Hostel, n.d.f). The artist included the sketchbook 'for people who stayed in the room to write down any notes connected to the plastic pollution issue, after they had first read about the concept behind the project' (Barker, 2023).

Figure 88 - Photograph capturing the Leeds United football shirt (replica 1978).

Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

This room builds on Baker's work 'PENALTY' evolved around the FIFA World Cup 2014; the series title 'PENALTY' refers to the price that we will all pay if we do not take care of our oceans by controlling the excessive consumption of plastic that enters them and taking responsibility for their design and recovery from the start (Barker, n.d.). The powerful message of the series is carried over into the interior design of the room. Barker (2023) noted that by incorporating the four images from the 'PENALTY' series on the room's walls and ceilings 'shows a collection by one person - to the world collection showing 769 footballs... there is no escape from footballs!'

Mandy Barker's (n.d., 2023) work is rooted in sustainability, and it fundamentally seeks to act as a platform for raising awareness over the significant problem we face globally in relation to plastic pollution and its harmful impact on marine environment and ultimately our lives. Responding to my question regarding her motivation to contribute to the Art Hostel, Barker responded:

The main reason I applied to create a room was because of the overall theme of sustainability. For my work to reach new audiences and to hopefully connect with the people that stay in the room about the issue of plastic pollution (Barker, 2023).

Building on the artist's long-standing relationship with ESA, Barker (2023) saw the opportunity to contribute to this project as a tool to further increase her audience at an international level. The artist's motivation and hope were to create a place that people would find interesting and thought-provoking, irrespective of them enjoying football or not. There is something rather powerful about the artist's ambition to have a global reach as a key aspect of the curation of the series; her process is embedded in the way she operates, the very project evolving from a wide engagement method she employed to source the leftover footballs. Using social media, she put out a call for people all over the world to collect and post footballs they found in the sea or on the shoreline. 89 members of the public responded to Barker's call, thus highlighting that the diverse scale of the collection (as captured within the created images) is not individual and site specific, but very much global.

There are numerous parallels between Mandy Barker and ESA's engagement processes and methods. It is no secret that Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman love football and are big collectors of footie memorabilia, therefore Barker's Leeds United shirt discovery marked a major contribution to the Art Hostel. Nevertheless, one particularly relevant parallel is marked by ESA's work in the Neighbourhood Plan where the Art Hostel acts as a catalyst for developing genuine social value in the Mabgate area.⁷ The complex community engagement process employed by ESA aimed to include and give the neighbourhood a voice, as well as to actively raise awareness about important issues

⁷ Please refer to Section 6.4 engagement for more information on the Neighbourhood Forum.

and discuss them on a much wider platform. With some imaginative input, the plan will empower local citizens, companies, schools, community organisations, and charity to have a say in how the area develops and regenerates. When looking specifically at the Art Hostel, Barker's room aligns with the project's ambitions and wider sustainability agenda, contributing to the creation of a place that challenges perceptions and aims to incite questions about our future on this planet. Barker noted:

For more than 20 years I have been linked to ESA through events, open days / workshops etc. The Art Hostel itself is such a fantastic concept to have artists stay with like-minded people in a stimulating environment whilst being affordable, whether they are travelling from near or far. I heard about the new Art Hostel when it was being renovated and about the plan to create bespoke artist rooms. I had a tour round the hostel when it was in its early stages and was impressed with both keeping the original features of the building combined with the considerations for working design. I then saw the opportunity to apply on the mailing list (Barker, 2023).

Barker's contribution to the Art Hostel has been well received by those who engaged with it, from artists to hostel operators and volunteers, all the way to guests, ultimately supporting the hostel's environmental responsibility and ecology agenda. Embedded in its locality and aware of its condition (Mabgate was identified as one of the most underprivileged neighbourhoods in Europe at one point), the Art Hostel stands as a model for the art of repurposing. This ethos echoes in every nook and cranny, from its foundational bricks to its daily operations. Since its inaugural days at Kirkgate, there's been a firm dedication to repurposing, opting to harmoniously collaborate with existing structures, celebrating their idiosyncrasies rather than imposing a rigid vision. This approach isn't just an afterthought, but the very heartbeat of the project, hinting at the avenues the Art Hostel is poised to explore in its future endeavours, scouting locales where this spirit can breathe and blossom. The following map highlights the circular economy trajectory linking these projects, offering a glimpse into how the repurposing thread might take the concept further to other places.

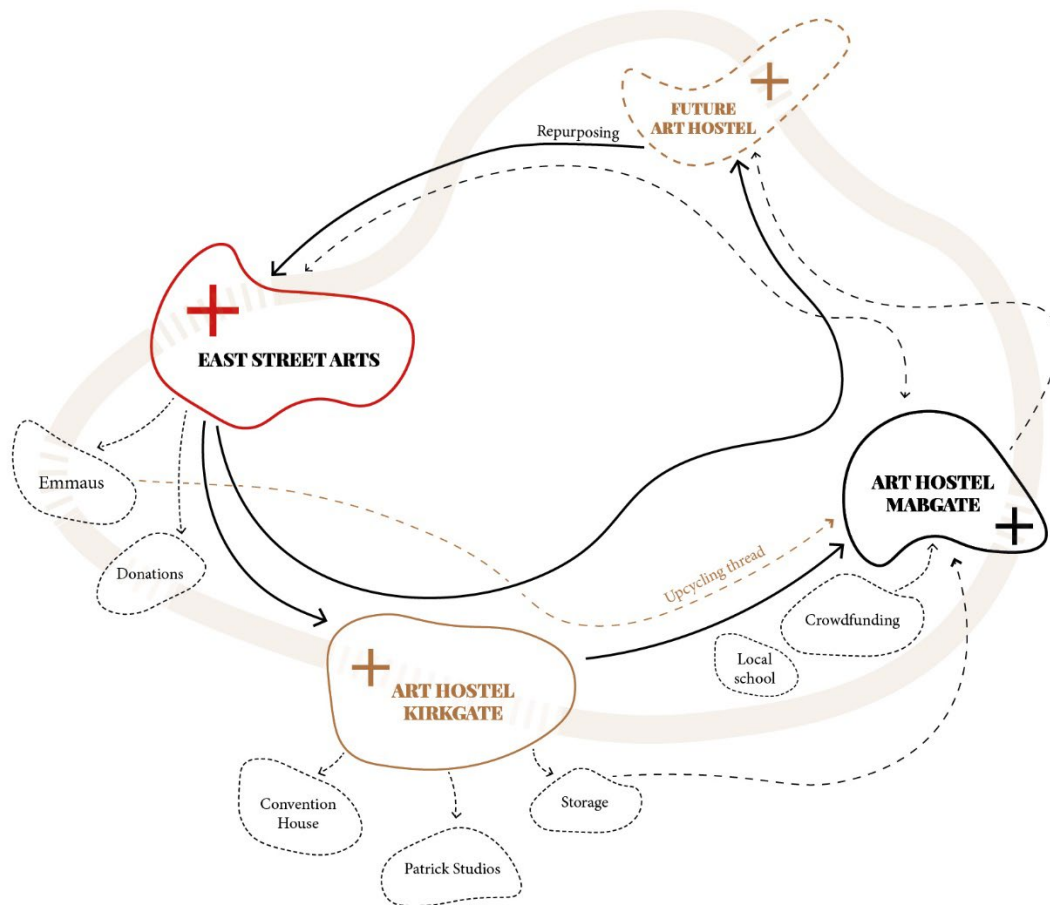


Figure 89 - Circular economy diagram exploring the relationship between ESA and the two Art Hostel projects, capturing future possibilities for encouraging circular economy. Diagram: Ionita (2023).

In a recent interview with *The Guardian*, Rhian Aitken talked about the hostel as a true ‘community hub for creatives’, celebrating Leeds’ ‘DIY attitude to arts’ (Aitken in Parkes, 2022). Aitken (2022) noted that ‘one of the rooms is completely made from reclaimed wood, and even the flooring in the lounge and some of the bedrooms comes from a gym in Poland’. The interiors are rendered with donated and half-priced, eco-friendly Earthborn Claypaints, resulting in a vivid cacophony of shades and designs. This canvas allowed artists to playfully innovate with the paint at hand, birthing a lively symphony of hues. The resulted spaces are out of the ordinary, they are engaging, fun and stimulating, emphasising the innovation and creativity that springs forth when working with existing structures and materials. The activation of the buildings tells

narratives embedded in its locale, whilst also responds to the wider artist-led sphere, linking the hostel with a broad infrastructure of care and sustainability.

Figure 90 - Photograph showing the repurposing of hardwood flooring. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.i). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 91 - Photograph showing the finished flooring during an event. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d.i). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 92 - Photograph of Earthborth Claypaints Testing. Photograph: Art Hostel
(n.d.i). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 93 - Photograph of Earthborth Claypaints Testing. Photograph: Art Hostel (n.d).
Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 94 - Photograph of creative way of using the clay paint. Photograph: Art Hostel
(n.d). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The theme seamlessly extends beyond the front door, encompassing the outdoor spaces as well. Due to its proximity to the A64 ring road, the hostel also benefits from a landscaped garden designed to reduce traffic noise, and a hot composting system, a wormery, and butts for water conservation are also supporting the environmental agenda of the hostel (Parkes, 2022).

This case study has been selected because it highlights a unique facet of ESA, illustrating the entrepreneurial spirit characteristic of artist-led space. Particularly notable is ESA's commitment to sustainability and climate awareness, which is both radical and essential in the current global context. Despite facing significant challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit, the Art Hostel has maintained stability through resourceful management and the opportunities driven by ESA, demonstrating incredible resilience and strength. This project highlights ESA's ability to develop skilled practices over the years and also reflects its strong strategic foundation and legacy, and as the organisation now aims to expand the Art Hostel's presence nationally and internationally, this case study illustrates the impactful and enduring influence of ESA's initiatives.

5.3.3 Hidden Histories of New Briggate

Duration	2021 - present
Location	Leeds – New Briggate

How do you tell the story of a street? Is it through the bricks and mortar? Or through the hands that laid them? Is it through a building's physical changes over time, or the people in events who changed them? I think that all of these stories are important. They are all interconnected and interdependent. Some are easier to find than others. Buildings, even ones long gone, tend to leave obvious and tangible evidence, things we can touch and feel. Most people however, echo more quietly through history, their voices often lost forever, and their stories forgotten (Page, n.d.).

A thought-provoking introduction by Shaun Page (n.d.) in the popular Leeds-based podcast 'Leeds Echoes', with a special episode to kick-off the three-year project, Hidden Histories of New Briggate.

Figure 95 - Poster of Leeds Echoes episode on 'Hidden Histories of New Briggate'.

Image: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Briggate is one of Leeds' oldest streets, boasting a history that spans almost a thousand years. In contrast, the name 'New Briggate' came into use around the 1860s, following significant widening of an existing road. Before this transformation, it bore the name 'St. John Street', influenced by St. John's Church at its northern tip. Rewind about 70 years to the early 1800s, and a pamphlet from 1800 refers to it as 'New Street End'. Interestingly, a letter from 1869 highlights the origins of New Briggate:

Gentleman in going along New Briggate tonight, I was glad to see that progress was being made in the alterations, part of the paving and flagging having already been finished. I was surprised, however, at the absence of standard for gas lamps. If these are not prepared, we shall find that as soon as the road is finished, it will be opened up again to fix up the gas standards. Is this an oversight on part of the council and letting the contracts or are the gas companies to blame for not putting them up before the road is finished? I am gentleman yours, a ratepayer, May 27, 1869 (Page, n.d.).

Figure 96 – Historic photograph of New Briggate in 1922. Photograph: Flickr (2010).
Image removed due to copyright reasons.

In the midst of an ever-changing cityscape, with Leeds' population rapidly growing, New Briggate became an important transport link, 'much about getting people to where

they needed to go as it was giving them a new destination' (Page, n.d.). Also, the street nurtured a rich entertainment history, where notable establishments such as The Grand Theatre, The Grand Arcade, The Tower Pitcher House, and The Grand Assembly Rooms cinema (which later became the Plaza Cinema, known for B movies and risqué continental films) found their home. The Plaza Cinema became a topic of contention as it predominantly screened content considered pornography. A notable event occurred in 1980 when women participating in a 'Reclaim the Night March' stormed the Plaza Cinema following Peter Sutcliffe's 13th murder (Page, n.d.).

Figure 97 – Historic photograph of Picture House. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 98 - Historic photograph of Oden. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.



Figure 99 - Field Journal extract showcasing the opening night of *Mondo Cane* at The Plaza.⁸ ESA revived these hidden histories of the high street through designing beer mats that were shared with the local community and visitors at New Briggate. Image: Ionita (2023).

Within the contemporary context, New Briggate stands as ‘an interesting dichotomy of truths. The east side of the street with the grand arcade and theatre is undoubtedly beautiful. The west side it faces only feet away, is in a more complicated situation. Conservation on one side gives way to a real lack of it on the other’ (Page, n.d.). Due to intense commercial use over the last decades, New Briggate has somehow lost its historic character, presenting itself as an assemble of multicoloured layers of shop signs and messy window fronts. Luckily, this hasn’t gone unnoticed, and in November 2017, LCC identified New Briggate as an area of special character and historic significance as

⁸ *Mondo Cane*, an Italian film released in 1963, sparked the rise of ‘mondo’ films—exploitative documentaries designed to shock viewers with bizarre cultural practices from around the globe. As the film premiered at The Plaza, it was met with protests, especially from animal rights activists in Leeds. The film’s disjointed style and provocative content divided critics and audiences alike, with some seeing it as a critical look at cultural diversity, while others dismissed it as sensationalism.

part of the national HSHAZ delivered by HE, working in partnership with lead partners, typically LAs.

The aims of the HSHAZ scheme are to transform and restore neglected and deteriorating buildings into new homes, retail spaces, workplaces, and community facilities. According to HE (n.d.), across the UK, £95 million will be invested in revitalising eligible sites by restoring their historic character, promoting sustainable economic and cultural growth. The program's success hinges on two important elements: preserving the area's historical character and encouraging strong community participation in the development process. According to LCC Regeneration Project Officer, Claire Easton (personal communication, 2 August 2022), 'there are three strands to this project: community engagement, the cultural program and the capital works'. Under this strategy, ESA has been commissioned to deliver the cultural programme of the project following a competitive evaluation process. According to Easton, ESA's spatial focus and its long-standing relationship with the Council likely contributed to the appointment.

The cultural program is ran by The New Briggate Cultural Consortium comprising of 'ESA, Leeds City Council, Leeds Heritage Theatres, Opera North, Age UK, North Bar & Brewery, Leeds Civic Trust and the Churches Conservation Trust, with each member contributing widely-acknowledged expertise in their own field and a passionate belief in the potential and personality of the high street' (Wakeman, 2021i). ESA involvement is strongly rooted in the artist-led organisation's embedded work in the city and understanding of the nuances of engaging with diverse stakeholders. According to ESA:

New Briggate is the gateway to the city centre of Leeds – the start of the busy and bustling commercial and cultural High Street. With the oldest Church in Leeds, Saint John's, bordering the High Street, [...] what makes this street special is the range of people who use it each day. It is home to a transient community. People using the frequent bus services, the night owls using the taxi ranks after an evening enjoying the independent bars, clubs, karaoke and take-aways, sex workers, lovers of live theatre, opera and music, and people seeking shelter in St John's Churchyard. All of this brings together a unique mix of people (often conflicting with one another) that you won't find on any other street in Leeds (East Street Arts, n.d.a).

The project initially started as a pilot scheme which explored the relationship between New Briggate and Leeds's renowned Burmantofts Pottery; the collaborative project involving 117 participants from Shakespeare Primary School, Burmantofts Senior Action, and the MAFWA theatre, under the guidance of independent artists Kremena Dimitrova and Rosie Todd commissioned by The New Briggate Cultural Consortium, resulted in the production of an illustrated storybook and a clay tile game (Wakeman, 2021i). According to Helen Moore, Programme and Engagement Lead at ESA:

We are very pleased to have the opportunity to take the lead with the New Briggate Cultural Consortium. Following the success of the pilot project we are excited at the prospect of three years of community-based, co-creative activity and the ability to work on a project that puts the people of Leeds at the heart of this story.

These events and activities will enable the local community surrounding New Briggate to investigate the high street's past and engage with future developments (Moore in Wakeman, 2021i).

ESA (2022) has meticulously crafted an Aims, Outcomes, and Outputs Framework to guide the project; this framework delineates the essential objectives, pinpoints the audiences and community stakeholders, and maps out the collaborative network of partners integral to the cultural programme's delivery. When compared with archival records from past projects, an evident evolution in ESA's approach becomes apparent, with a clear sophistication in their grasp of the intricate bureaucratic and administrative particulars necessary for developing a project of such scale.

Within the framework of the project's primary objectives and specified audiences, ESA (2022) aims to use this initiative as a tool to draw in diverse demographics who typically may not engage in heritage activities, therefore creating new opportunities for exploration and learning. The project seeks to encourage an intergenerational engagement, acting as a bridge between generations, stimulating a discussion about the historical trajectory and prospective future of the street. It also envisages curating a collaborative creative process through an array of participatory events and activities,

designed to co-create spaces in concert with the community. An educational emphasis pervades the project, with initiatives that facilitate community members' understanding of New Briggate's history, its impact on their lives, and its significance to Leeds as a whole.

Figure 100 - Photograph of the Leeds West Indian Carnival. Photograph: Michael Godsall (2023). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The project stands as an essential undertaking because it aims to preserve the historic character of New Briggate whilst also seeks to make heritage accessible and relevant to a wider group of people, therefore providing a collaborative space for community members of different demographics to actively participate in the stewardship and celebration of their local heritage. This project is a catalyst for cultural enrichment, educational opportunities, and the forging of a community identity that honours the diverse history and potential of New Briggate.

Figure 101 - Photograph of the Leeds West Indian Carnival. Photograph: Michael Godsall (2023). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The artists' commissioning process highlights the synergy between ESA and LCC; with £119,000 funding allocated to ESA to deliver the cultural programme, the project entered a strategic contractual collaboration, commissioning artists Yaku Stapleton and Harry Clayton-Wright (C. Easton, personal communication, 2 August 2022). This partnership was created to align with the three strands of the wider HSHAZ scheme: community engagement, cultural programme, and capital works. Easton (personal communication, 2 August 2022) regards the involvement of ESA as highly valuable,

recognising their position and experience as a key factor in their selection to lead the cultural programme. She highlights the necessity of a collaborative relationship between the three project strands, suggesting that connecting them is vital for achieving the scheme's overarching goals. Bringing together the physical improvements with cultural and community activation will benefit the physical appearance of New Briggate, as well as it will reflect the community's voice and grant them a measure of influence and control over their surroundings. According to Easton:

The idea is that a local community has a say and has some control in it and it's about building capacity in the local community so that hopefully the work that's done with the community kind of contributes to the kind of longevity of the success of the street (C. Easton, personal communication, 2 August 2022).

Figure 102 - Poster of 'Backstage at the Grand' walking tour. Image: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

There were natural crossovers between the three strands, particularly between the cultural and community engagement ones, meaning that LCC and ESA had to negotiate and collaborate on managing funds for those initiatives bridging the two focus areas.

Easton (personal communication, 2 August 2022) highlighted the importance of presenting these initiatives as a holistic project, and as such, she has diligently focused on nurturing a strong communication with ESA to ensure that the outcome is perceived by the audience as a well-integrated and unified project.

As part of my embedded research, I took part in a series of events organised collaboratively by ESA and LCC, including:

- 30th July 2022: ‘Walk, Talk, Make’ interactive tour led by Yaku Stapleton, focusing on New Briggate’s role in the city’s clothing and tailoring trade.
- 12th September 2022: Walking tour with architect Anita Rebaudo of Bowman Riley talking about the complexities and challenges of refurbishing existing buildings.
- 13th September 2022: Walking tour of New Briggate’s historic and architectural secrets, focused on key locations assigned for conservation and repair work.
- 17th September 2022: Archive film screenings presented by Hyde Park Picture House at St. John’s Church.
- 17th September 2022: Walking tour led by Steve Crocker tracing the history of jazz in Leeds.
- 6th July 2023: Backstage at the Grand walking tour
- 16th September 2023: 56 Years of West Indian Carnival
- 11th October 2023: Protest at the Plaza walking tour
- 12th October 2023: Light Night with installations by Yaku Stapleton and Harry Clayton-Wright

Figure 103 - Photograph of collage workshop led by Florence Simms, designed to stimulate community engagement and discussion about the future of the high street. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 104 - Photograph of collage of New Briggate developed during the community workshop. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

As part of his commission, Leeds-based artist and fashion designer, Yaku Stapleton, drew inspiration from the rich textile heritage that has long been associated with New Briggate and its surroundings (Chase, 2023). Stapleton collaborated with people of Leeds to co-create narratives of characters who traverse through various fashion eras of New Briggate. The artistic output, consisting of costume montages and models crafted from plasticine, were digitally transformed into augmented reality figures through 3D scanning. During the Light Night event, these creations were given life through live animation, moving across the exterior of St John's Church and its grounds, offering a dynamic and engaging interaction with history and fashion (Chase, 2023; Y. Stapleton, personal communication, 4 August 2022).

My connection to this project is more than just observational; it's personal, having participated in Stapleton's interactive walking tour in September 2022. 'Walk, Talk, Make' involved shaping plasticine into what we envisioned historical residents of New Briggate might have worn. In small teams of three, we pooled our creativity to design costumes influenced by the locale's past by sketching, sculpting and then assembling the proposals into a tangible piece of art. Developing these models atop the weathered gravestones of St. John's Church was a profoundly moving experience for me, bridging an unexpected connection to the place and its history. The churchyard transitioned from a place of visitation to a canvas for creation for me and in the act of moulding and shaping the clay, I felt as though I was leaving my very own imprint on this site.



Figure 105 - Photograph of the co-created clay model developed during the 'Walk, Talk, Make' tour led by Yaku Stapleton. Photograph: Ionita (2022).

The artist conducted a series of workshops that focused on the community's lived memories of New Briggate. Participants were encouraged by Stapleton to reminisce or creatively imagine the street's fashion evolution. These narratives and imaginings provided a rich understanding of local knowledge, allowing the artist to develop a unique portrayal and conceptualisation of New Briggate's fashion history and identity.

Figure 106 - Photograph of the co-designed workshop led by Stapleton. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 107 - Photograph of Stapleton and his digital art during the 'Light Night'. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

According to Stapleton:

I hope for my work's legacy to continue through ongoing conversations and [...] I hope it serves as a good example of how co-creation can be used to develop art. I hope that others can look at how this project went, and maybe notice any mistakes or things that can be done better within research projects that are similar to this one in the future. This project could show how to do things right or wrong, just as a learning point (Stapleton in East Street Arts, 2024, p. 58).

Figure 108 - Photograph of Stapleton's digital art projections during the 'Light Night'.

Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

During the Light Night, West Yorkshire based performance artist and writer, Harry Clayton-Wright also exhibited work, at 42 New Briggate, adjacent to Opera North's vibrant Howard Assembly Room. The neon installation, 'A Light at the Plaza', is a playful homage to the building's notorious heritage as Leeds' first adult cinema. The installation offers a playful take on the venue's history, echoing the vivid neon that once signalled its presence. Alongside Marlborough Productions, the artist investigates the

hidden Queer narratives rooted in this area with a mission to excavate them to understand how they can encourage change in the present day (Wakeman, 2021j). Through imaginative inquiry, they aspire to conceive what a truly secure and inclusive high street would encompass for the LGBTIQ+ community in Leeds, ensuring that history continues to evolve in a manner that is both proud and transparent (Wakeman, 2021j).

Figure 109 - Photograph of Harry Clayton-Wright and his neon art installation during 'Light Night'. Photograph: ESA (2023). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 110 - Photograph Clayton-Wright's high street installation during 'Light Night'. Photograph: ESA (2023). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

ESA's involvement in New Briggate's regeneration responds to the 'cultural placemaking' strategy promoted by the Government's Levelling Up agenda (Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2022c), highlighting the transformative role that art and culture can have on activating urban spaces. This involvement also underlines the complex dynamics often associated with collaborations between artist-led organisations and LAs, which are typically seen as entangled in red tape and hard to establish. As a recognised force in Leeds' arts scene, ESA's ability in handling substantial projects and funds likely contributed to their success in securing this commission (C. Easton, personal communication, 2 August 2022).

This project showcases ESA as a mature artist-led organisation, adept at organising the necessary resources and key personnel to make significant impact on its local setting. This marks a departure from its early years of existence, such as during the 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry' stage, characterised by experimentation and a search for identity, now, standing as a well-established organisation, competent in securing important projects for their locality. Despite the growth and complexity of its work, ESA's foundational commitment to supporting artists remains unchanged; as Stapleton (personal communication, 4 August 2022) reflected, his experience with the artist-led organisation has been fundamental, imparting management and communication skills that will extend far beyond the scope of this project.

The partnership with ESA has been particularly beneficial for Claire Easton (personal communication, 2 August 2022) too, noting that it brought a fresh, dynamic perspective to community and cultural projects, an area she had less familiarity with. ESA's approach, she notes, contrasts with the more conventional methods explored by the Council, and brings a celebratory, artistic energy to the table. This interaction between traditional urban conservation methods and the vibrant, creative vision offered by ESA proved to be a key driver in redefining the regeneration project by changing the physical space as well as shifting the perception of locals towards the project. According to Easton (personal communication, 2 August 2022), 'ESA's connection has really helped us [...] build those links with the existing [...] occupiers and groups in the street', thus improving the project's reception and reinforcing the social identity of the area.

Helen Moore, ESA's Public Programme and Engagement Lead notes:

Artists always create a catalyst for transformation and change, challenging and enabling people to look at a place through a new lens. I hope with this project that in some small way for the business owners, residents, theatre-goers, bar and takeaway customers and general passersby that they have felt some ownership, are more aware of their own history, and most of all that it made them smile (Moore in East Street Arts, 2024, p. 69).

5.4 Explorations of archives and field journals

This section of the thesis details my research journey through ESA, employing an embedded research methodology refined through interactions with ESA staff and collaborative PhD students. As outlined in Chapter 3 - Methodology, the pandemic significantly limited my physical engagement with ESA. Orlek's (2018) exploration of ESA's Artist House 45, which utilised performative approaches, collaborative mapping, and 'multivoice' writing served as a conduit, informing my research and positioning within the artist-led organisation.

This section draws from the embedded research network Plant (2021), exploring research practices traversing across places, mirroring sociologist Valerie Jenness' (2008) concept of embedded research, which emphasises the dynamics of hosted arrangements and study forms. According to Plant:

Embedded research projects are undertaken within a non-academic host organisation. They involve following actions within this organisation over an extended duration of time, so as to allow live and reflexive methods to influence current activity. Embedded researchers are immersed critically within a host organisation: researchers collaborate as part of a wider team and undertake independent research which evolves alongside and feeds into programme development, while not directly responsible for the delivery of core tasks (Plant, 2021).

The crux of this research is rooted in Watson and Wakeman's ambition to leave behind a legacy of their modes of working and operating within urban contexts. This idea of creating a legacy served as a fuel, propelling them to remain passionate and engaged within ESA and beyond, with a vast portfolio of projects spanning across diverse scales and spheres. In this spirit, I propose we turn to ESA's archive as a silent yet insightful partner in this research journey, starting in 'the Tube', the place where the artist-led organisation's evolution echoes through the hundreds of duck-eggs coloured cardboard boxes.

The research outcomes, shaped by informal conversations, meetings, observations, archival stories, mapping, and personal experiences, materialised in the shape of field journals, a practice-based research method evolved as a result of engaging with the artist-led organisation in such an intimate, yet diverse way. These journals developed as transformative tools, challenging preconceptions, prejudices, and human assumptions about urban spaces, enabling a new lens to perceive and activate these spaces.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, three key thinkers have shaped this exploration: Shannon Mattern with her 'Cloud and Field' inquiry, Jane Rendell's anthropology-based approach, and Rosa Luxemburg's herbarium and evocative letters. The intention is to explore the potential of ethnographic fieldwork, analyse participant-observer roles, and the impact of documenting personal reflections on urban spaces.

Doreen Massey's (1994, 1997, 2005) feminist theories of place and space, the Situationist International's (Hemmens & Zacarias, 2020; Sadler, 1999) practice of psychogeography, and Paula McCloskey's (2018) writing perspectives, are theories considered to further accentuate the transformative power of recording thoughts and reflections.

This section aims to demonstrate the role of artist-led spaces as urban activators by exploring ESA's archival legacy and organisational memory, and by utilising field journals to capture the evolving understanding and perceptions of urban spaces.

Through the act of recording in the field journal, this thesis posits that spaces can be activated beyond their visible layers, bringing forth their dormant potential for urban transformation.

5.4.1 The Journey into the archive

My research into ESA's archive marks a key point in my findings and understandings of the artist-led organisation, and as detailed in Chapter 3, this exploration unveiled two important themes: firstly, Watson and Wakeman's ambition to use the archive as a repository of organisational memory; and secondly, my unanticipated role in engaging with the archive. This engagement highlighted my role and agency within the archiving process whilst also raised questions about how this involvement might impact ESA's legacy.

The archive unfurled a depth of knowledge that simple observations and interactions with ESA couldn't match, unfolding complex organisational methodologies, modalities, and even tensions and disagreements between the artist-led organisations and its collaborators. Travelling through the archival material chronologically, each box surprised me with its own set of discoveries, however, a standout observation was the palpable evolution of the graphical material ESA produced over the years. This shift highlighted the transformation and refinement of ESA's style as well as its transition to a more technologically advanced era.

Figure 111 - Archived flyer of Leeds Fringe Festival, 1998. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 112 - Photograph of archived ESA postcard from 1999. Photograph: Ionita (2022), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 113 - Photograph of archived flyer of ESA project 'Clay Angels', 1999. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 114 - Photograph of archived Art Hostel flyer from 2018. Photograph: Ionita (2022), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 115 - Photograph of Guild project brochure, 2023. Photograph: Ionita (2022). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Similarly, there was a clear progression in ESA's vocabulary, with a growing sophistication and precision evident in project proposals and grant applications. This evolution, as gleaned from my examination, highlighted a clear shift towards more structured and nuanced communications over time; this was influenced by various factors such as Watson and Wakeman's continual professional progression fuelled by their engagement in business and administrative development training, as well as their strategic hiring of specialised staff members in key positions who further steered the direction and refined the trajectory of the artist-led organisation. One particular example that caught my attention was the correspondence between Watson and the Leeds Metropolitan University Curator, Moira Innes (as explored in Section 5.3.1 – 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry'); the archived dialogue highlighted Watson's professional judgment and managerial skill. After a disagreement with Innes, Watson took the high road, reaching out through an email to address the discord and mend fences; this written exchange offered a vivid glimpse into Watson's thought process, and I must admit, reading and examining it made me experience an overwhelming sense of connection to the material and the project.

Figure 116 - Archived correspondence and reflections. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The interaction with the archive also stimulated a deeper reflection about an artist's position within the archiving process, along with the underlying motivations. Seeking clarity, I reached out to the literature. The richness of the content, coupled with the approaching significant milestones - ESA's 30th anniversary in 2023 and Watson's impending retirement - added layers of urgency and significance to my exploration. These events provided a backdrop, emphasising the importance of recognising, celebrating, and preserving the history of ESA. It was evident that the archive wasn't simply a record; it was a tribute to the tireless contributions and vision of figures like Watson, who had dedicated three decades to moulding and nurturing the organisation. The dialogue of historical documents and the impending milestones brought forth deeper questions about how artist-led organisations archive their legacy and how these legacies shape their future trajectories; also, it brought into question the different positions present in the archival process.

Over the years, the settings in which artists engage with archives have significantly changed; some artists, operating independently, focus on their personal collections or archives, drawing inspiration from lost and found materials, others collaborate with recognised institutional archives, 'reshaping the taxonomies, classifications, and scales of organisation' (N. White, 2013, p. 47). As artist and researcher Neal White (2013, p. 47) notes in 'Experiments and Archives in the Expanded Field', a prime example of the former is the array of artists who, whether through fiction or reality, have developed profound artistic narratives using archival materials, such as the predominantly fictional work of Walid Raad with the Atlas Group.

This evolving terrain responds to Hal Foster's (2004) 'archival impulse', a space in which 'artists construct new realities for archives, even utopian visions, based on the logic of excavation of such sites' (N. White, 2013, p. 47). White contends that the contemporary art engagement with archives goes beyond superficial exploration, highlighting much deeper forms of knowledge production by the artist. The archival system, more than just a trend or inclination, is now being questioned, and emerging archival methodologies are taking shape without necessitating endorsement from major cultural establishments. Foster (2004) emphasises the need to reclaim a lost vision for the artist, author, and philosopher:

Perhaps the paranoid dimension of archival art is the other side of its utopian ambition – its desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia... (H. Foster, 2004, p. 22)

According to Jacques Derrida (1995, pp. 8–12), the responsibility now rests with the artists to envision what deserves archiving; they bear the mantle of discerning the intrinsic value of materials earmarked for the archive. This very worth may allude to the organisational memory that Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman hold in high esteem when talking about the legacy of ESA. Such dialogues also emphasise the intricate link between memory and history; in ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’ (1984), Pierre Nora argues that memory is synonymous with life, constantly evolving and transforming and is very much dependent on remembering and forgetting. History, on the other hand, is an always flawed and incomplete reconstruction of what no longer exists (Giannachi, 2016, p. 100). For Nora (1984, p. 8), memory exists in the present moment and is anchored in tangible realities such as spaces, gestures, and objects. History, however, is concerned with temporal sequences and relationships between events.

Nora notes that in modern times, memory has transitioned to something largely archival, necessitating more tangible elements such as documents, recordings, and images to exist. This particular focus on archival material has incredible potential, allowing us to create various versions of our past and potential futures. Furthermore, the growing dependence on archives has become a critical factor in the functioning of memory processes, succeeding in capturing the ongoing evolution of individuals and their interactions with their settings (Giannachi, 2016, p. 100). To this end, Nora (2002) traces this shift in the role of memory and archives back to the 1970s when ‘every country, every social, ethnic or family group’ experienced ‘a profound change’ in their rapport with the past attested by the rise of ‘criticism of official versions of history’, the ‘recovery of areas of history previously repressed’, and ‘demands for signs of a past that had been confiscated or suppressed’ (Giannachi, 2016, p. 100).

Nora (2002) emphasises the matter of ‘the (re-)performance of the memory of the self, as well as the (re-)performance of the memories of others, within the archive’ as highlighted by Gabriella Giannachi (2016, p. 100) in ‘Archive Everything’. Nora (2002) discusses how an ‘upsurge in memory’, together with an global increase in ‘memorialism’, is ‘a defining characteristic of our age, inextricably linked to our obsession with our presence, its capture, preservation, and replay in the archive’. According to Nora, this ‘upsurge in memory’ has contributed to what historian Daniel Halevy described as an ‘acceleration of history’, triggering a ‘distance’ between us and the past, meaning that our relationship with the past now mainly exists through its traces. As Giannachi (2016, p. 100) continues:

We construct memories – ours, as well as those of others – through these traces, as if a construction of the present moment could only occur by relating ourselves to the traces of the past. Memory, hence, is not so much responsible for a recollection of something in the past, as for the construction, or even reconstruction, of the past in the present (i.e. in relation to our presence) and for the capture of the present as something always already passed (i.e., accelerated into history) (Giannachi, 2016, p. 100).

The increasing compulsion to document ourselves signifies this evolving trend where the act of remembering compels us to act as curators or, as Nora (1984) describes, ‘historians of our own lives’. As Giannachi (2016, p. 101) emphasises, ‘it is through self-documentation that we the effect of our presence on what is around us, producing the traces that facilitate the creation of mnemonic plotlines’. These narratives subsequently place us amidst various potential histories, meaning that the generation and re-examination of these remnants become the bedrock for memories yet to form. Such reflections encourage us to consider the profound consequences of our work and the impact they might have on the wider narratives and the ensuing engagement with archival materials.

Watson and Wakeman harboured a strong desire to establish a lasting legacy and over the years, ESA has matured and evolved into a robust, recognised entity in the artist-led sector. A time comes when torchbearers like Watson and Wakeman must pass the torch to the next generation. this transition materialising with Watson’s retirement, leaving

behind shoes that are dauntingly large to fill. The ambition of creating a legacy became a driving force which kept the two artists engaged and passionate about their dedication and enthusiasm to their art practice and roles within ESA. This commitment was especially evident in the last decade, with Watson's approaching retirement. Wakeman shared at the 'AHRA PhD Symposium 2021. Researching (in) the City' that:

In 98-99 we were trying to leave East Street Arts, but the drive to leave a legacy, which became Patrick Studios, actually developed a whole new phase of the organisation's growing...a drive to leave something behind... work that is useful and meaningful (Wakeman, 2021a).

Figure 117 - Archived photograph of Karen Watson during the early days of ESA's existence. Photograph: Ionita (2020), ESA archive. Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The desire to leave a lasting, purposeful legacy is clearly evident in the archival material of ESA; there's a palpable meticulousness in the assemblage of the boxes. Jonathan

Orlek carefully numbered each archival box, improving its accessibility and reference points. As explored in Section 3.7.1, this intricate process was further expanded during the pandemic with Watson revisiting and reorganising the archive. It seemed as if, under her touch, the stories, narratives, and learnings from past projects were reawakened and given new life. Discussions about earlier projects resurfaced in the open studio space, piquing the interest of newer team members. A genuine knowledge transfer between Watson, Wakeman, and the members of ESA was observed, and it was informing to witness. The attention to the physical aspect of archiving becomes all the more compelling given that in recent years, the bulk of the archive transitioned to a digital format, this evolution calling into question the essence of tangible archiving and the physical remnants from projects. The advantages of a digital archive, especially in terms of accessibility, are clear, however, as Wakeman points out, discerning which materials are of value, and which can be discarded presents a challenge:

We had discussions about having a book for 30 years of East Street Arts, can the archive be used to generate that celebrative publication? ... Is it worth bothering? (Wakeman, 2021a)



Figure 118 - Photograph of ‘the Tube’, a newfound space of reflection and silent interaction between myself as researcher and Watson as archivist, and the archival material, steadfastly bearing witness to its enduring legacy. Photograph: Ionita (2020).

Jon Wakeman (2021a) evocatively drew parallels between the artist-led organisation's aspiration to establish a legacy and Brian Ladd's (1998) book 'The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape'. Ladd portrays Berlin as a haunted city where memories hold on to the physical context of events, allowing buildings and places to tell their stories throughout time. According to the author:

Buildings matter. So do statues, ruins, and even stretches of vacant land. Buildings provide shelter for human activities, but it is the activities, not the shelter, that make structures and spaces important to human beings trying to define their place on this earth. Buildings and monuments are also the visible remnants of the past: they often outlast the human beings who created them. How these structures are seen, treated, and remembered sheds light on a collective activity that is more felt than articulated (Ladd, 1998, p. 2).

Ladd's evocative portrayal of history's lingering imprints closely mirrors the practices at ESA; as the artist-led organisation navigates the ebb and flow of its existence, its disappearing traces encapsulate an ever-evolving narrative. Constantly in a state of flux, ESA integrates its storied past and lively present, drawing from the diverse actors and agents it engages with, creating an expression of itself that is vibrant as it is varied, reflecting its legacy, and envisioning its potential futures. The legacy of the artist-led organisation doesn't lay only in its archive, but also in its meaningful interactions and dialogues with its partners and collaborators. To this end, Watson and Wakeman are passionate about ensuring that everyone leaves a unique imprint, a personal legacy within the artist-led organisation's evolving narrative. Wakeman captures this sentiment, reflecting on the transient nature of these imprints:

The traces of old East Street Arts are disappearing, but we can look back into time and say: that was great! We did all these things; perhaps that was the golden era... and maybe in three years' time we could say the same about another time (Wakeman, 2021a).

Building a legacy through the archive can potentially be a real impossibility; ESA, with its dynamic and expanding nature, stands at the cusp of change, especially in the wake

of Watson's retirement. With new leadership emerging, the artist-led organisation will see a state of transition and adaptation, with potential avenues to explore and different challenges to consider. As an element of stability, the archive provides a robust foundation, capturing the artist-led organisation's rich history and evolution, whilst also raising inquiries about its undiscovered potentials. How can this archived legacy be meaningfully activated and utilised, aligning with what perhaps Watson and Wakeman had envisioned? How will it influence ESA's future while celebrating its past?

Donald Smith's (2013) text on artist Bruce McLean offers an interesting perspective on the impossibility of archiving in the mind of an artist still living; McLean chose to host his retrospective at the outset, aiming to conclude his art 'career' (a term he detests according to Smith) before it truly started, enabling him to chase unbridled creativity (D. Smith, 2013, p. 31). According to Smith (2013), artists Terry Frost and John Hoyland expressed their aversion to the concept of the 'Retrospective', viewing it as a curatorial tactic to celebrate an artist's past accomplishments while undermining the significance of their present or upcoming creations. This, they believed, signalled the art community to disregard the artist for the remainder of their career. These perspectives are indeed intriguing and might echo the dilemmas Watson and Wakeman grappled with concerning the archive's future and purpose. What emerges with clarity is that the delicate balance between honouring the archive and allowing room for growth and exploration become very important.

Drawing on Jane Rendell's (2010c, 2017) practice of 'site-writing' as critical spatial practice, I used the archival research as an opportunity to investigate how the distinct voices and positions captured within this exploration can generate conditions which 'make possible acts of interpretation and construction of meaning'. As explored in Section 3.7.1, this method enabled both a detailed analysis of ESA's collection and a critical reflection on my own role within the archival process, as well as on how future researchers might perceive the archive. Adopting the dual role of architect-researcher and archivist expanded my understanding and prompted a deeper consideration of my methodologies and engagement with the archival material.

In 'The Architecture of Psychoanalysis', Rendell (2017, p. 232) notes Dominick LeCapra's attention on Hayden White's argument for 'the position of a middle voice to operate between [...] two forms of history writing, as well as the time of the past event

and writing in the present'. Following an ethnographic storytelling, my engagement with the archive grew multifaceted. Through the field journals, which captured everything from observations to emotions, and from queries to doodles, I embodied this 'middle voice' and travelled through the temporal spectrum between ESA's past and its evolving legacy.

In one of my observations in the archive, I reflected:

Morning mist clung to the pavements as I made my way to ESA. There's a certain allure about mornings here; perhaps it's the silence before the hustle, or the soft golden hue that bathes the buildings. Arriving at the entrance, the familiar scent of aged paper and art materials greeted me, a reminder of the rich history and creativity that resided within these walls.

Once inside, I headed straight for 'the Tube'. There's a unique comfort in that space - perhaps it's the cocoon-like feeling it offers or the way it muffles the outside sounds, encapsulating you in its embrace. Settling down in a corner, I brewed myself a cup of Yorkshire tea. The aroma was instantly grounding, the steam dancing upwards in gentle spirals, intertwining with the lingering scents of 'the Tube'. That first sip, rich and robust, was always a ritual; it felt like I was drinking in the essence of the place.

Laid out in front of me was the archive. Page after page, stories from the past whispered their tales. Each paper, each photograph held a universe of its own, summoning me to look closer, to listen nearer. From events to projects, artist accounts to community narratives, there was an overwhelming sense of connection. The archive carried a vast agency, filled with creativity, struggles, victories, and the unique spirit of ESA.

As the morning sun began to pierce through the small windows overlooking the studio space, I found myself deeply absorbed in a trail of email correspondence between Karen Watson and Jeanne van Heeswijk in the 'Christmas Pudding for Henry' box. These tales were not just of events but of emotions, of aspirations, of a community coming together in shared purpose.

Hours seemed to blend into minutes, and before I knew it, 'the Tube' began to stir with the day's activities and other people were using it to store stuff or refer to boxes. But in

that quiet morning, with my cup of tea by my side, I felt a profound connection to the legacy of ESA. It was as if the stories from the archives had chosen me as their listener, bridging the past with the present, ensuring that their essence lived on.

I left 'the Tube' later that day, with knowledge as well as with a sense of belonging, a feeling of being a tiny thread in the large ESA constellation. The stories from the archive had left an indelible mark on me, a gentle reminder of the power of shared narratives and the magic they carry (Ionita, 2020).

The archival exploration became more than just a method; it served as a bridge to an intricate reservoir of knowledge that was otherwise inaccessible. The countless histories, varied practices, and multilayered narratives hid within the archive weren't just records; they were essential pieces of a larger puzzle, and when assembled, these fragments captured the unique character and essence of the place.

Experimenting with the archive propelled me into a self-reflective journey about my position within this framework; my engagement with the archive made me aware of my unique influence on the material, which involved more than reading or analysing, but actively reshaping, reordering, and interpreting the data in a way that might deviate from its original intent. With each document, my connection to the project and its participants deepened, transcending my initial role as researcher, and inadvertently becoming a part of the project's narrative.

This realisation highlighted the undeniable agency of the researcher within the archive. To better understand this dynamic, I mapped this sense of situatedness (Figure 119), which structured my reflections and thought processes. I began to draw parallels between the role of a researcher and a chef: just as a chef combines diverse ingredients to create a dish, a researcher integrates varied sources of knowledge - conversations at ESA, archival explorations, and academic literature. Yet, as in the culinary arts, it's not solely about the final dish but the meticulous process involved. A researcher, like a

chef, doesn't just mix ingredients; they analyse, experiment, and sometimes even deconstruct them to understand their essence. The real value lies in the analytical journey: the sifting, sieving, and synthesising of ideas, which becomes a container for knowledge evolution. The end product is important, but the knowledge gained through the process - the trials and errors – are invaluable. In this intricate dialogue of research and reflection, every step taken, every idea strained or retained, contributes to a richer understanding of the subject. This exploration brought me closer to the heart of ESA and its rich history, allowing me to view the artist-led organisation in a light that would remain elusive without such intimate engagement.

The archival journey fundamentally resulted in the development of situated knowledge, manifested in the form of field journals that emphasise a strong connection to place. This experience brought about the realisation that true urban activation extends beyond simple interventions in space; it requires an intimate dialogue with place, a dynamic that the archival exploration highlighted in unparalleled ways.

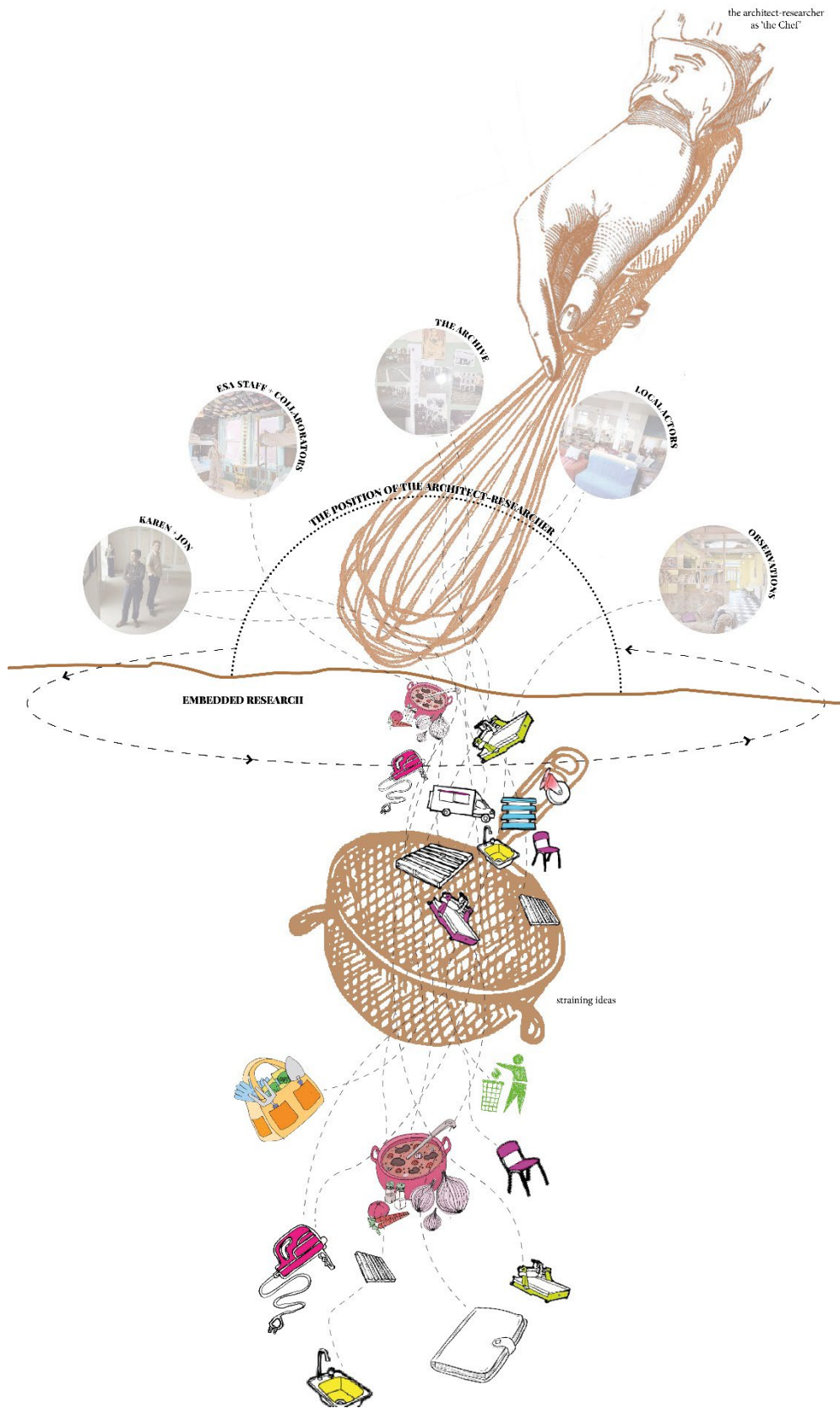


Figure 119 - Mapping of the position of the architect-researcher (high resolution version in Section 8.9- Appendix 9). Diagram: Ionita (2023).

5.4.2 Field Journals

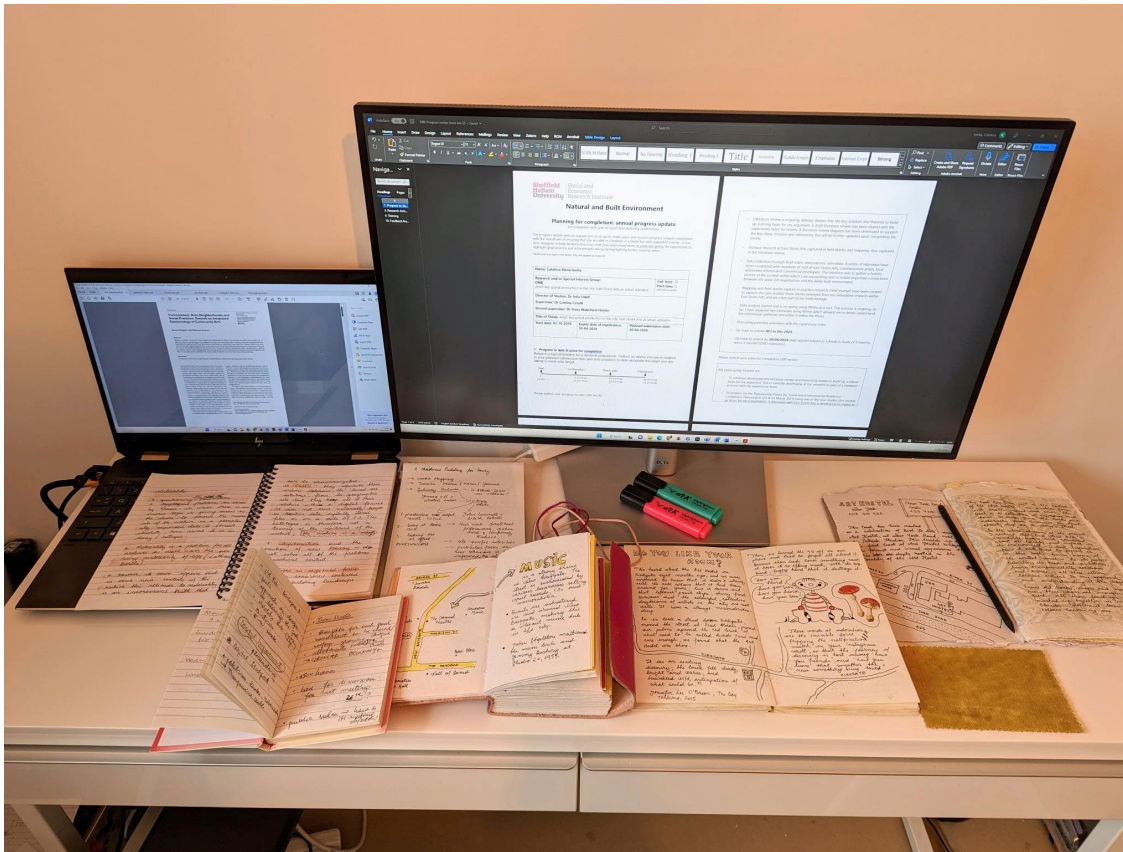


Figure 120 - Photograph of the field journals. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

Building on Michel de Certeau's (1984) work, the field journals seek to highlight the critical role that daily activities can play in shaping urban environments. De Certeau argues that seemingly mundane actions like walking, talking, and observing are integral to both the construction of urban space and the development of a localised spirit of place. This work also links to wider embedded research including Rosa Luxemburg's⁹ multisensory understandings of urban environments through the use of letters and notebooks (Lisiak, 2022). Luxemburg's descriptions of the city are profoundly embedded in their surroundings, paying attention to the sights, textures, sounds, and even smells that constitute the urban environment. The process of developing and preserving the journals was also personal and reflective, involving small acts of thought

⁹ At a time when having even one of such identities was difficult, Rosa Luxemburg, born Rozalia Luxemburg, was a Polish Jewish woman revolutionary born in 1871 in a small Russian-occupied Polish town, Zamość. (Lisiak, 2022, pp. 757–758).

and critical analysis of the city. Shortly after moving to Warsaw, in 1873, young Luxemburg developed a hip condition that was misdiagnosed, improperly managed, and finally left her with a chronic limp. Luxemburg spent a large portion of her youth in the cosy yet cramped family flat in the heart of the city, making observing and noting a recurrent activity. Many years later, in a letter to a friend, she recalled that she ‘used to sneak across to the window’ and ‘would open it quietly and peek out at the big courtyard’, and even though ‘there was certainly not much to see there’, Luxemburg would spend those early mornings intently observing how life unfolded in that confined territory, often focusing her attention on the tall figure of the caretaker (Laschitza, 2013, p. 176).

Antoni would always stand for some time sunk deep in thought, but he would come out of it all at once with a shuddering, crashing, widely reverberating yawn, and this liberating yawn invariably meant: time to get to work. Even now I can still hear the slurping, slapping sound with which Antoni dragged his wet, crooked, little broken-down broom over the paving and in the process always aesthetically and painstakingly formed elegant and uniform little circles around the edges, which could be taken for the finest Brussels lace trimming. His sweeping of the courtyard was a veritable poem. And that was actually the loveliest moment, before the dreary, noisy, pounding, and hammering life of the big apartment building woke up. The solemn stillness of the morning hour spread above the triviality of the courtyard’s paved surface; the window panes glittered with the early morning gold of the young sun, and way up high swam sweet-smelling clouds with a touch of pink, before dissolving into the gray sky over the metropolis (Laschitza, 2013, pp. 176–177).

Luxemburg (1968, 2013) reveals through her observations her enthusiasm for the nobleness and craftiness of one man’s physical labour, contrasting the delicate music and graceful choreography of Antoni’s morning duties with the subsequent chaos of her neighbours’ less graceful sounds, and realises that the peace will eventually be disturbed. Although the courtyard’s constant change is fascinating, the young Luxemburg found the cyclicity of its transitions to be too monotonous:

Back then I firmly believed that “life,” that is, “real life,” was somewhere far away, off beyond the rooftops. Ever since then I’ve been chasing after it. But it is still hiding behind some rooftop or other. In the end was it all some kind of wanton playing or frivolous toying with me? And has real life actually remained right there in the courtyard where Antoni and I read “The Origins of Civilization” for the first time?(Luxemburg, 2013, p. 177)

This relationality between space and place makes a rather interesting link to Massey’s (1994, 2005) feminist theories of place and space, where all places are the result of social relations, and this openness is necessary for the existence of politics and relationships. Perhaps the ‘real life’ Luxemburg talks about is still going on in that courtyard, where there isn’t much to see (or it may seem so to young Luxemburg). To me, these depictions, and introspective ways of looking at space are incredibly telling and rich as they highlight a new mode of thinking and understanding the city through the tales and experiences of the observer. As part of my embedded research of ESA, I followed a similar approach of capturing thoughts and experiences of place as I progressed through the PhD journey.

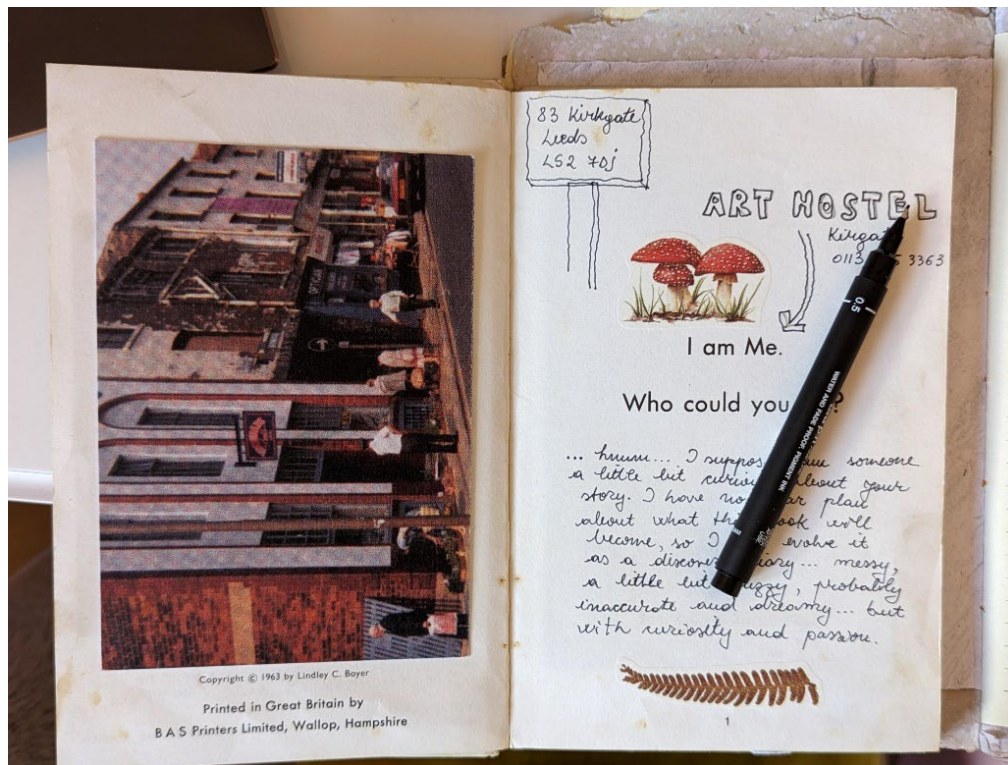


Figure 121 - Photograph of the Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

Through her observations of the courtyard, Luxemburg unknowingly emulates some of the actions of her ‘riotous Black girls, troublesome women and queer radicals’ contemporaries in New York City and Philadelphia, who ‘tirelessly imagined other ways to live and never failed to consider how the world might be otherwise’ (Hartman, 2021, p. xvii), sowing the seeds of a counter-narrative of the contemporary western city driven by experience, affect and care. The rebellious Black women and girls ingeniously discovered by Luxemburg recognised that ‘experience was capable of opening up new ways, yielding a thousand new forms and improvisations’ (Hartman, 2021, p. 230).

These experiences were lived on the streets, but also tucked away from the public eye, in the courtyards, highlighting the courtyard and the city as two entities pushed by two different dynamics: one of maintenance and care, and one of development and progress. Luxemburg (1968, 2013) challenges the maintenance-progress contradiction, arguing that real life can exist in both maintenance practises and development areas, and the latter may not be even possible without the former. Outside the ‘sleepy courtyard’, Luxemburg perceived the essence of real life, yet also faced genuine threats as

antisemitism was growing exponentially in the area (Lisiak, 2022, p. 759).¹⁰ As such, Luxemburg became a keen supporter of socialism because she saw it as the antithesis of barbarism and thought it would end both class injustice and antisemitism. Her political views are connected to how she views maintenance and care as ways of viewing and comprehending the world.

The maintenance-development dichotomy as captured by Luxemburg's stories of the courtyard intimates Massey's (1994, 2005) argument that we are always, inexorably creating spaces and places and that place transforms us via the practise of place. It is the very act of recording thoughts and observations on the 'event of place' that creates the coexistence and intersection of multiple trajectories and narratives defined by Massey (2005, p. 140) 'as 'throwntogetherness': the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres); and a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman'. Massey's notion of 'throwntogetherness' is fundamentally conflictual as it is formed by unequal power dynamics, and it often requires negotiation. The pogrom is just one instance of the violent conflicts over the uses and meanings of place that occurred during Luxemburg's existence. Although less dramatic (the sleepy courtyard), maintenance and care are less visible but equally important aspects of 'throwntogetherness' and, as such, unquestionably political practises that are necessary to the production and reproduction of places.

Luxemburg's inclusive practices of maintenance and care for the non-human reflect Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto's (1990) understanding of care as 'a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible'. Lisiak (2022) brings attention to Fisher and Tronto's four aspects of care – caring for, caring about, caregiving, and care-receiving, as particularly relevant for understanding Luxemburg's own care practices. Through her work, Luxemburg took responsibility for the health and welfare of plants, birds, and insects.

¹⁰ In the late nineteenth century, antisemitism was pervasive in the Russian Empire, affecting all aspects of Jewish life and frequently exploding in pogroms, such the one that occurred in Warsaw in December 1881, when an antisemitic mob plundered and destroyed Jewish homes and businesses. Although it is still unknown if Luxemburg saw the pogrom first-hand, we do know that the family's street, which at the time was predominately Jewish, was impacted by the violence. We can also picture the anxiety that comes from feeling unsafe even in one's own house, the guilt and rage that comes from being misunderstood, and the frustration at the societal and cultural constraints on individual and group development and freedom (Lisiak, 2022, p. 759).

She fed them, provided them with shelter, assisted in their growth, and meticulously recorded how they responded to her care. Beyond her love for all living things, she was also interested about understanding how things, such as then and now, here and there, us and them, and I and you, are interconnected.

Starting May 1913, Luxemburg ‘suddenly plunged into the study of botany the way I do everything, immediately, with all my fire and passion, with my entire being ... to be outdoors roaming about in the springtime fields, to gather plants until my arms were full, and then at home to put them in order, identify them, and put them between the pages of a scrapbook to dry’ (Laschitzka, 2013, p. 385). Luxemburg would collect notes, dried flowers, and leaves over the following five years, filling up 18 journals. Elm leaves blown into her cell through an open window, flowers sent by friends, a carrot leaf discovered in the prison yard and flowers she selected herself on her several walks around Südende were all part of her collection. Maria Theresia Starzmann (2021, p. 166) points out that Luxemburg used collecting primarily as a way to interact with the outside world as well as a means of categorisation. The herbarium serves as a tangible example of how Luxemburg incorporated her concern for all living things, including humans, into her political work. Luxemburg’s approach highlights a conceptualisation of space as a method of ‘ordering of the world, positioning ourselves, and others human and nonhuman, in relation to ourselves’ (Massey, 2005, p. 105). The herbarium becomes a tool of negotiating ‘throwntogetherness’ that is highlighting care for the environment whilst also showcases rigour and precision. It also brings the attention to the power of this method for the human-nonhuman interactions and colliding trajectories in the shared space, her letters steering away from the typical desire and capacity of humans to conquer and instead concentrating on the collective needs and challenges she shares with her nonhuman companions.

The story of the Romanian water buffaloes in the Breslau prison courtyard by Luxemburg is one of the most vivid examples of such depictions; as Luxemburg (2013, p. 457) was describing them, the wild animals were ‘spoils of war’, snatched from their natural habitats, brutally treated, beaten into submission, and hauled on carts pulling soiled sacks and blood-spattered military uniforms to be repaired by prisoners and then brought back to the battlefield.

During the unloading, all the animals stood there, quite still, exhausted, and the one that was bleeding kept staring into the empty space in front of him with an expression on his black face and in his soft, black eyes like an abused child. ... I stood before it, and the beast looked at me; tears were running down my face—they were his tears. No one can flinch more painfully on behalf of a beloved brother than I flinched in my helplessness over this mute suffering. ... We both stand here so powerless and mute, and are as one in our pain, impotence, and yearning (Luxemburg, 2013, p. 457).

This experience became a revelation for Luxemburg who started seeing the imperialist war machine fuelled by capitalism as the one to blame for both her and the buffaloes' plight. This became an important aspect of her future work and according to Gordon and Cornell (2021, p. 2), she 'connected human and ecological exploitation, framing the suffering of human and other-than-human animals as fundamentally related'. In her constant search to understand the world she adopted 'the perspective of the world's often hidden underside' and, in doing so, positioned herself 'alongside those who constitute that underside', irrespective of them being a tortured water buffalo, a frozen bumblebee, or a frail blue titmouse (Nixon, 2018, p. 102).

I am no more important than the ladybird and I am inexpressibly happy with this sense of my insignificance (Luxemburg, 2013, p. 393).

In the same way that she was committed to revolutionary socialism, Luxemburg's everyday politics became fundamentally based on a comprehension of the inherent interconnection of humans and other species. Although from a different sphere, the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT)¹¹ (Jóhannesson & Bærenholdt, 2009; Latour, 2007)

¹¹ Beginning in the 1980s, French and British studies examining the sociology of science and technology gave rise to Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT was initially developed by Law and Latour as a way to comprehend how innovation and knowledge production occur in science and technology. ANT was influenced by previous work in science and technology studies, research into complex technological systems, and the writings of some modern French thinkers. From 1990s, ANT gained popularity as an analytical tool in several disciplines outside of science and technology studies, including organisational analysis, informatics, health studies, geography, sociology, anthropology, feminist studies, technical communication, and economics (Nickerson, 2023).

shares a common thread in this acknowledgement of the complex relationship and interdependence between the human and nonhuman, also hinting to Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) rhizomes. ANT (Jóhannesson & Bærenholdt, 2009; Latour, 2007) proposes that both human and nonhuman entities identified as 'actants' carry agency and are interconnected in a network, thereby having the ability to influence and shape each other. This ANT principle, which acknowledges the reciprocal influence and interdependencies between various kinds of life, is echoed in Luxemburg's notion of the intrinsic connectivity between humans and other species. The non-hierarchical perspective of ANT and Luxemburg's commitment to revolutionary socialism are complementary. ANT rejects the conventional dichotomies of nature/culture or human/nonhuman, insisting instead on a network of relationships where no single entity maintains power, much as she sought a social revolution that would result in a more equitable and just society. Both ANT and Luxemburg's socialism advocate for a viewpoint change that moves away from hierarchies and towards an appreciation of the intricate, linked networks that support our communities and ecosystems.

Attending to Luxemburg's private writings is [...] an exercise in humility and patience, as a reader cannot help but realize that even the most comprehensive collections of her papers will forever remain incomplete (Lisiak, 2022, p. 757).

According to Feliks Tych (1968, p. xvii) Luxemburg's depictions captured by the letters are snippets, quick answers, or segments of longer continuous talks and should not be taken as a whole. They 'directly, "live," through the prism of Luxemburg's exceptional personal and political sensitivity, transmit the outcomes of her direct observations'. (Luxemburg, 1968, p. xvii) Annelies Laschitza (2013, p. xix) further contends that as 'primary sources, letters are highly contextual. They are written for the day or for the hour, born of particular moods and in most cases intended for only one recipient'. To this end, instead of attempting to piece together a unified narrative from the chosen letters, Agata Lisiak (2022, p. 757) uses Luxemburg's herbarium as a framework of investigation that is focusing on the individual details and consider how they relate to the revolutionary's life and work. Lisiak noted that:

The instantaneity of her impressions, her ostensibly unfiltered opinions, and rushed proclamations uncover much about Luxemburg's lived urban reality as it was unfolding (Lisiak, 2022, p. 757).

Luxemburg's work highlights the power of recording reflections and observations through the use of notebooks and letters as a tool of capturing the observer's reflections and understanding of space in a manner that is not perhaps possible otherwise. Through the process of recording her thoughts, Luxemburg activates the very space she is analysing, building a connection between herself and the nonhuman element, a bond of affect and care that will otherwise not exist. Through her notebooks, Luxemburg gives space a voice, a meaning beyond its present state.

In 'Multivoices: a script by researchers' (Orlek, 2018), the term 'voice' is explored as a means to describe different conceptual and concrete frameworks for imagining and articulating thoughts. Building up on 1950s Situationist International's (Sadler, 1999) practice of psychogeography and its affective and experiential dimensions, Paula McCloskey of 'a place, of their own' talks about the practice of writing as:

[...] writing about it, for me. This practice became the research, or at the very least informed it. There is a complete collapse. Philosophy about multiple belongings and becomings allows you to do that (McCloskey, 2018).

The notion of fieldwork has recently been showing renewed interest in field guides and ethnography with Professor of Media Studies, Shannon Mattern's article, 'Cloud and Field', published in *Place Journal* (2016), offering insights into this approach and its potentials. Mattern provides a rich history of fieldwork, starting with the era dominated by Carl Linnaeus, the renowned Swedish botanist, zoologist, and physician; his classification methods revolutionised the naming of new species, a practice that still persists today. Linnaean classification provided assistance to naturalists in organising their own discoveries but also gained widespread acceptance due to its rationality and practicality (Broberg, 1990, p. 47; Heilbron, 1990, p. 21). Scientists adopted this systematic approach to explore diverse fields, ranging from chemistry and diseases to machinery and algebraic forms.

As the Romantic era emerged, the fascination with classification extended to a remarkably diverse subject: clouds. French naturalist Jean Baptiste Lamarck and English chemist Luke Howard independently started investigating the classification of clouds (Hamblyn, 2001; Mattern, 2016), this undertaking garnering praise from esteemed figures like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who commended Howard for conceptualising and assigning appropriate names to the ethereal and ever-changing forms of clouds (Gedzelman, 1989, p. 381). Goethe's admiration was so profound that he even sought to commission a cloud atlas from the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. However, Friedrich declined the request, believing that imposing a rigid order and classification on the free and ephemeral nature of clouds would diminish their expressive potential and undermine the very essence of landscape painting (Carroll, 2010). Nevertheless, Friedrich likely recognised the allure of the endeavour. Artists had long observed the skies, but Friedrich and his English contemporaries, J.M.W. Turner, and John Constable, were among the first painters whose artistic vision was informed by Howard's cloud vocabulary (Mattern, 2016).

Today, the focus has shifted from classifying clouds in the sky to understanding the complexities of the digital realm, the fog of data, the algorithmic atmosphere, and the nebulous geography of digital intelligence (Mattern, 2016). This is the modern Cloud (Halpern, 2015, pp. 34–45). The National Institute of Standards and Technology defines cloud computing as a ubiquitous and on-demand access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources. However, the naming conventions in this age are much more flexible than those of Carl Linnaeus (Mell & Grance, 2011), and companies like Google and Oracle have created expansive Cloud platforms that encompass a wide range of technologies and services, from big data warehousing to machine learning (Mattern, 2016). Benjamin Bratton's (2015) concept of the Cloud is similarly comprehensive, incorporating geopolitical designs, forms of sovereignty and governance, energy flows, data centres, and vast amounts of data.

As debated by Mattern (2016), despite the challenges in understanding these technologies, the Cloud has become an encompassing amalgamation of information, capital, and geography, and while it hovers relatively low and serves practical purposes, many people living under its shadow have glimpsed its inner workings. Insights that were once groundbreaking are now widely known: the materiality of the Internet, the reliance on intricate logistical systems and exploitative labour practices for our

consumption habits, the influence of secret algorithms on search results and social feeds, and the traces we leave behind in the digital world. Similar to Goethe's desire to explore and understand clouds, we too seek to trace, map, classify, and comprehend the materialities, geographies, and logics of 'our Cloud'. As Mattern (2016) notes, 'we want to probe it to see if we can find any humanity — in the form of labour, affect, or ethics - hidden within the mist'.

Just as our predecessors used metaphors and models to make sense of the universe, there is a continued search for the right tools to guide the Cloud investigation. While previous metaphors included concepts like the 'great chain of being' or the 'circle' or 'tree' of knowledge, the contemporary world with its locative media, financial markets, real-time databases, and mobile borders is understood through concepts like lists, networks, clouds, fractals, flows, and assemblages (Broberg, 1990, pp. 70–71; Lury et al., 2012; Mattern, 2015, 2016). These new topologies have inspired various representational techniques, from animated maps to circuit diagrams, each offering a different perspective on what the Cloud is or could be. Exploration of the Cloud extends beyond visual representations, as scholars, artists, and designers engage with infrastructure through mapping, touring, listening, smelling, signalling, playing, and performing. The notion of fields has also gained prominence, contrasting the physically delimited site with the cloud-like networked conditions of reality (Mattern, 2016).

My immersion in the ESA archive significantly transformed my approach to fieldwork, as I sought to demonstrate artist-led spaces' potential as urban activators in the urban context. Initiated as observational tools, the field journals expanded into nuanced, complex portrayals of the artist-led organisation, depicting physical characteristics and spatial arrangements, as well as dialogues and interactions, engagements between various actors and observations. Importantly, the field journals reflected my evolving perceptions and interpretations of the artist-led organisation, materialising spontaneously, with no pre-established templates or anticipated outcomes.

Linking to the notion of Cloud, while site-based and ethnographic research on the physical and digital terrains of the Cloud have existed for years, a new wave of Cloud exploration is pushing the boundaries of fieldwork through explorative approaches such as drone spotting, algorithm forensics, and global infrastructure expeditions (Mattern, 2016).

The field journals document the daily rhythms and spontaneous interactions that characterise ESA, reflecting the unique operational style of this artist-led organisation. Stemming from my embedded research within ESA, these journals have been enriched by my engagements with its staff and collaborators, and each of the three ESA case studies explored in this work has resulted in its own distinct field journal, each uniquely tailored and shaped. The following sections will detail the field journals related to each specific ESA case study.

5.4.2.1 A Christmas Pudding for Henry

The field journal associated with ‘A Christmas Pudding for Henry’ is uniquely housed within an old, limited edition ESA Members sketchbook, a thoughtful gift from Karen Watson during our exploration of the project’s archival box. Petite and portable, this pocket-sized journal meticulously records reflections from my discussions with Watson and Wakeman, and knowledge extracted from the archival contents of the project.

Developing this journal transcended a simple methodological exercise; it became a poignant journey into introspection. Investigating the archival findings offered more than facts and events - it opened a window into the raw emotions, the uncertainties, the hopes, and aspirations that defined ESA in its initial phase. As I wove in my reflections, I also interlaced the fervour, hesitations, and the countless emotions that I believe Karen Watson, Jon Wakeman, and the project initiator, Jeanne van Heeswijk experienced.

This journal mirrors the curious, yet perhaps vulnerable spirit of ESA during its formative years, a mix of innocence, trepidation towards the unknown, and a dash of recklessness, stemming from the uncertainty of future outcomes. Such uninhibited risk-taking, perhaps driven by naivety or the thrill of venturing into uncharted waters, echoes throughout the journal’s pages. Encompassed within the neat, structured confines of a carefully designed sketchbook - much like how the project was originally situated within the Leeds Metropolitan University’s Gallery - the field journal is a demonstration of playful innovation. It challenges conventional boundaries, much like Watson, Wakeman, and Van Heeswijk did, often confronting barriers they didn’t even know existed. In creating this journal, I sought to emulate their pioneering spirit, attempting to embrace risks with the same innocence, enthusiasm, and optimism they held for a more liberated and vibrant artist-led space environment. This journal captures the beginnings

and highlights the care and affect invested in understanding and representing the evolution of ESA as a recognised artist-led organisation.



Figure 122 - Photograph of the field journal for 'A Christmas Pudding for Henry'.

Photograph: Ionita (2023).

5.4.2.2 Art Hostel

Art Hostel Kirkgate

Developing the Kirkgate Art Hostel journal was akin to starting on a personal expedition, exploring not just the world of ESA and the Art Hostel, but also discovering my own approach to fieldwork. This project, for me, is entwined with a sense of nostalgia as I had the opportunity of engaging with the Art Hostel Kirkgate physically before its closure in 2018. A vivid memory from my university days is etched in my mind when, as part of a review, my peers, tutors, and I utilised the communal spaces of the hostel to showcase our work. The atmosphere of the place added a layer of excitement and energy to our presentations, offering a canvas that was far distinctive from the somewhat sterile environment of our university studio space.

The hostel, with its imaginative aura, responded to the creativity captured within each one of us. There was an interdependent relationship at play; while we tapped into the energy of the space, our ideas and discussions breathed fresh life into the corners of the hostel. This setting was unconventional, but it was this very unconventionality that made our interactions so organic and authentic. It was during this experience that I first had the opportunity to engage with ESA. Those exchanges were an eye-opener, giving a glimpse of the heart and soul of the Art Hostel and the vision behind it, sharing stories of the hostel's beginnings, its journey, and its role as an inspiration for artists and travellers. I realised then that the Art Hostel Kirkgate was more than just a physical space; it was an idea, an emotion, a celebration of art and community.

I was also offered the opportunity to read and engage with the hostel's Guest Book, a fascinating collection of thoughts and feelings from a diverse range of people from across the globe. These provided a rich foundation for evolving the field journals as they allowed me to link to people's experiences in place and their motivations for engaging with it.

Figure 123 - Photograph of the Art Hostel Guest Book. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 124 - Photograph of the Art Hostel Guest Book. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Within the pages of the Guest Book lies an eloquently penned chapter dedicated solely to the volunteers, a testimony to the strong, entangled relationship between ESA and their collaborators. Each story, inscribed with genuine emotion, emphasises the bonds that have been lovingly developed over time; the hostel, with its welcoming walls and echoing laughter, serves not just as a dwelling but as a structure for these budding emotions and connections. At the very epicentre of this narrative, knitting together stories of collaboration, dedication, and a strong camaraderie, stands the enigmatic Rhian Aitken, a beacon that has guided these relationships to their profound depths.

Figure 125 - Photograph of the Art Hostel Guest Book. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The journey for the ‘perfect’ journal to capture the heart of this extraordinary project came with its challenges; the absence of the Kirkgate Art Hostel, which had once hummed with life and creativity, was palpable. As I roamed the site where the hostel once stood, nothing seemed to respond to its ethos anymore. I was at a juncture where I needed a tool that could connect me to the project’s spirit, and the answer laid in its very fabric - its repurposed nature. Just as the hostel had undergone a transformation, finding new purpose and life, I sought a journal that mirrored this ethos.

Rhian Aitken (personal communication, 20 July 2023), the Art Hostel manager, mentioned that much of the hostel’s furniture was sourced from the local Emmaus

charity shop. Adjacent to ESA's HQ in the Mabgate Complex, this shop became my frequent haunt. Despite multiple visits, the perfect sketchbook eluded me, or perhaps my expectations were misaligned with reality. However, serendipity struck during one visit when a repurposed children's book from Emmaus spoke to me. With its slightly juvenile charm, this journal epitomised the spirit of repurposing. Previously owned, this book was steeped in its own history, echoing the very essence of the Kirkgate Art Hostel.

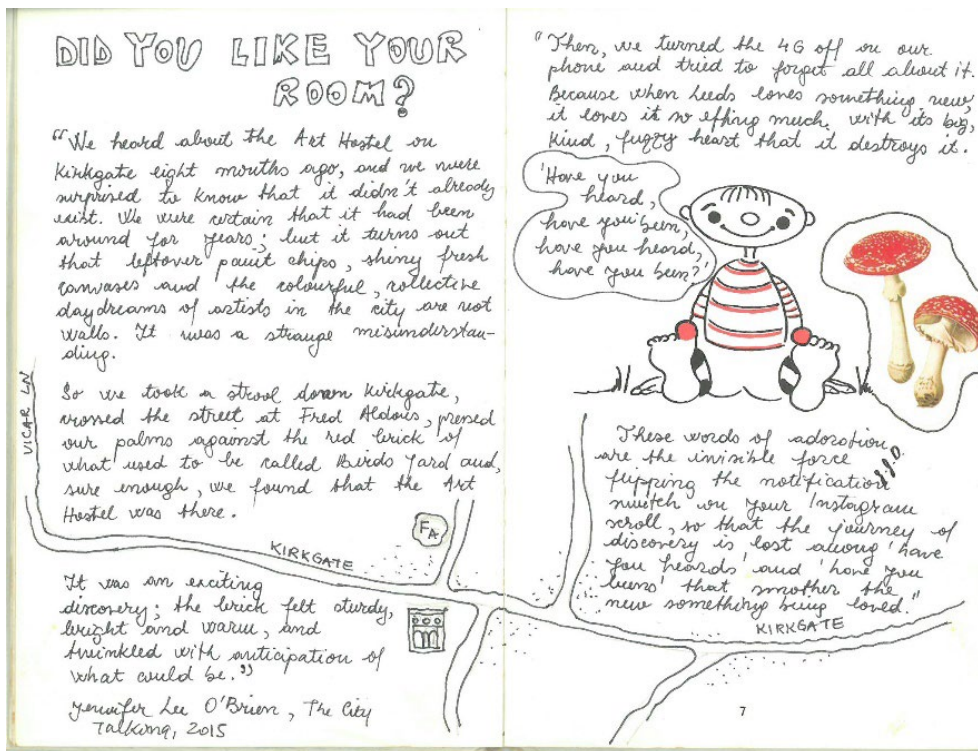


Figure 126 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

In choosing this children's book as the journal, I felt a profound connection to the project's ethos. The process of selecting a journal brought back many memories and the nostalgia weighed heavy, but it also provided clarity: the book had once belonged to someone; it was an archive of its own, a repository of memories, traces, and interactions. Similarly, the Art Hostel's legacy lived on through its many guests and the memories it had forged. The act of repurposing the children's book into a journal became symbolic, allowing me to continue its narrative just as ESA had done with the

Art Hostel. The process was truly transformative, not just for the journal, but for me as well. The repurposed children's book wasn't just a journal; it was a bridge connecting my past experiences with the present task at hand, and the act of developing it became an exercise in recollection, a homage to my early engagement with the Art Hostel and ESA, and a nod to the transformative power of spaces that actively support art and community.

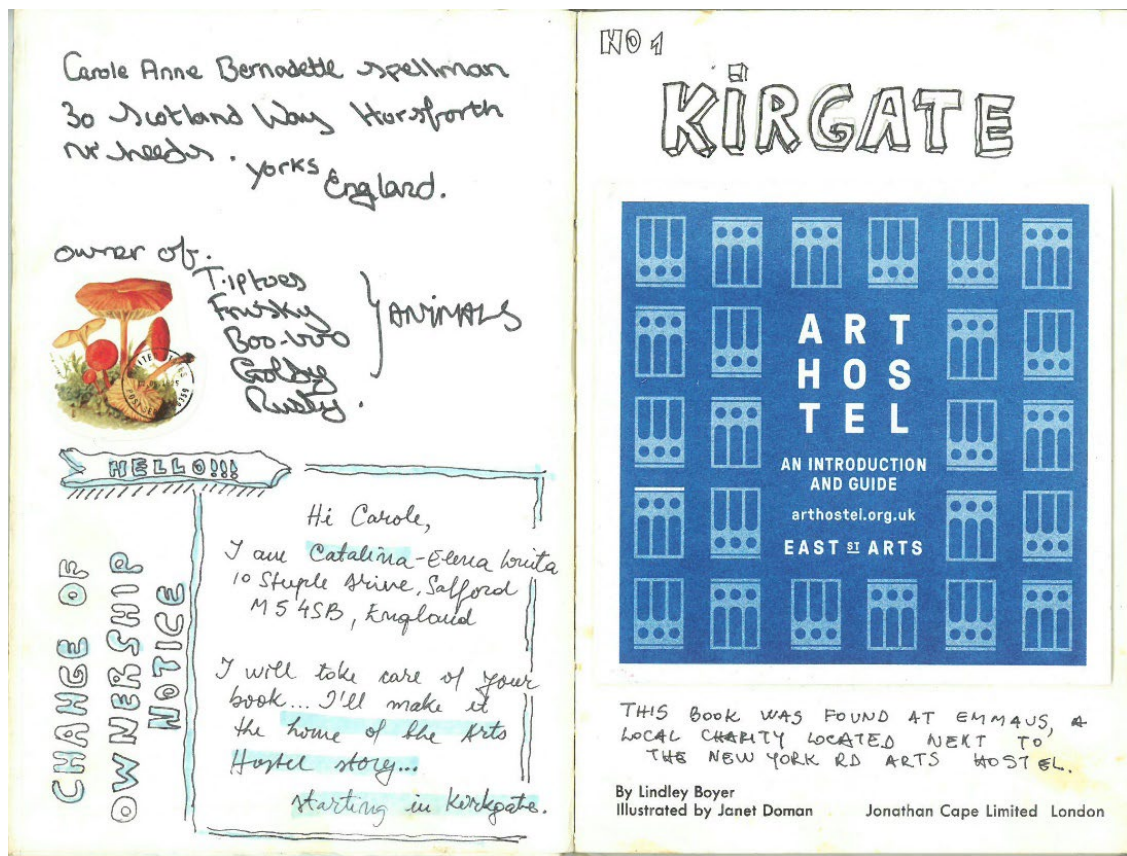


Figure 127 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal highlighting the response to the repurpose children's book. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

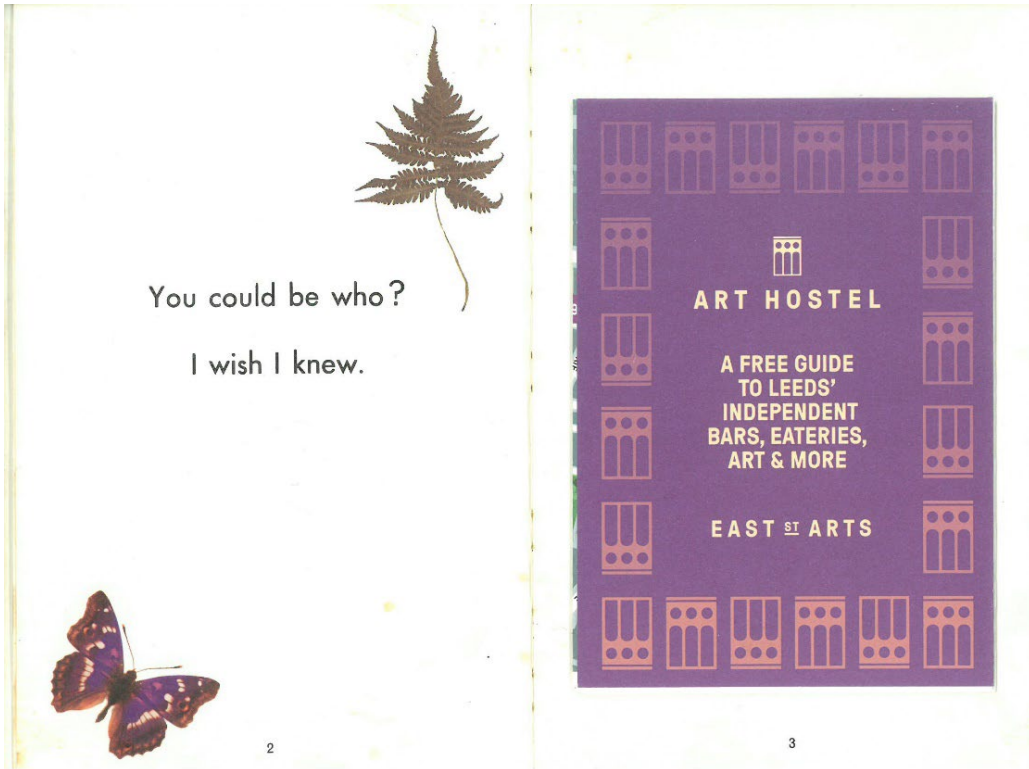


Figure 128 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 129 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

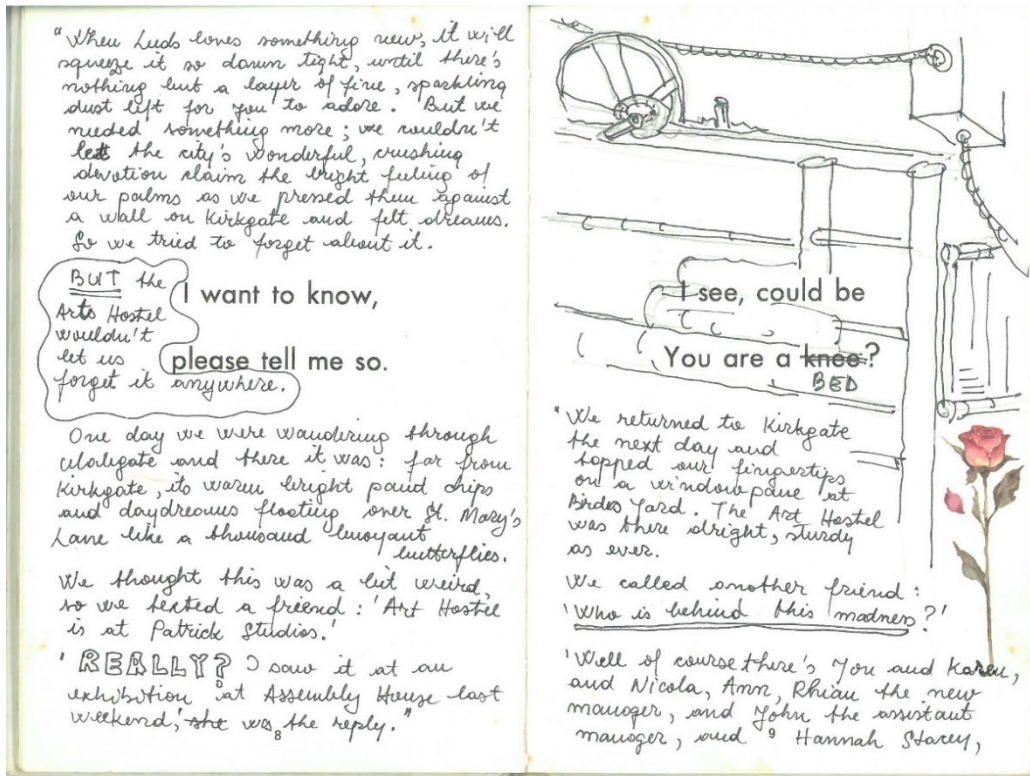


Figure 130 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

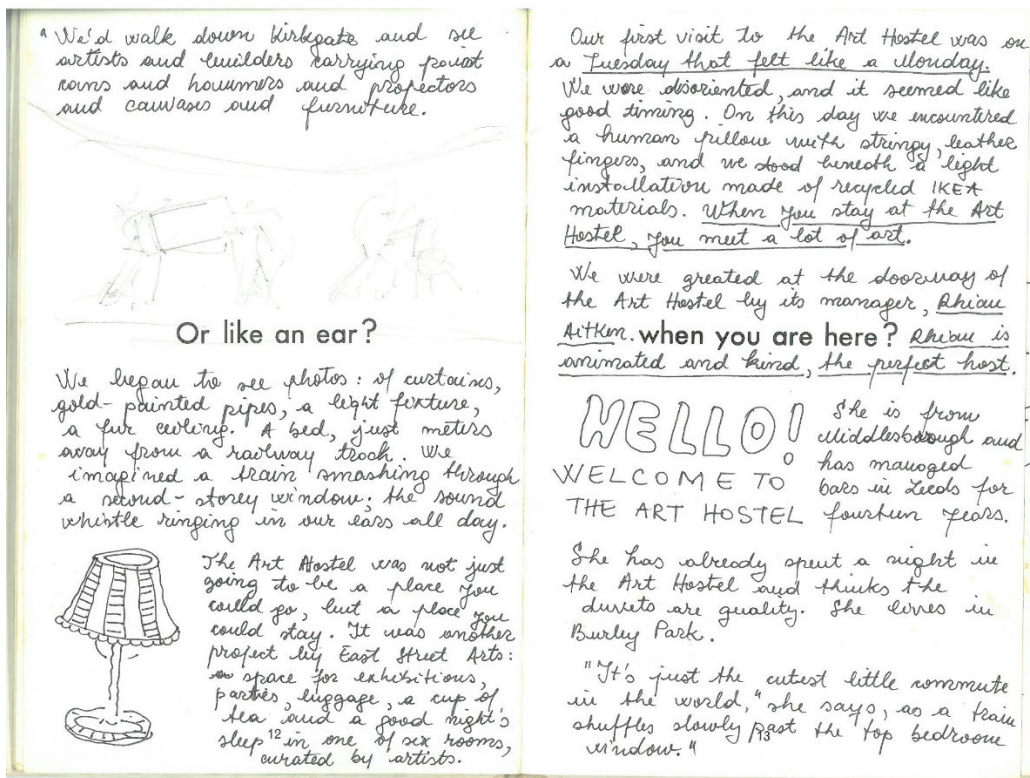


Figure 131 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

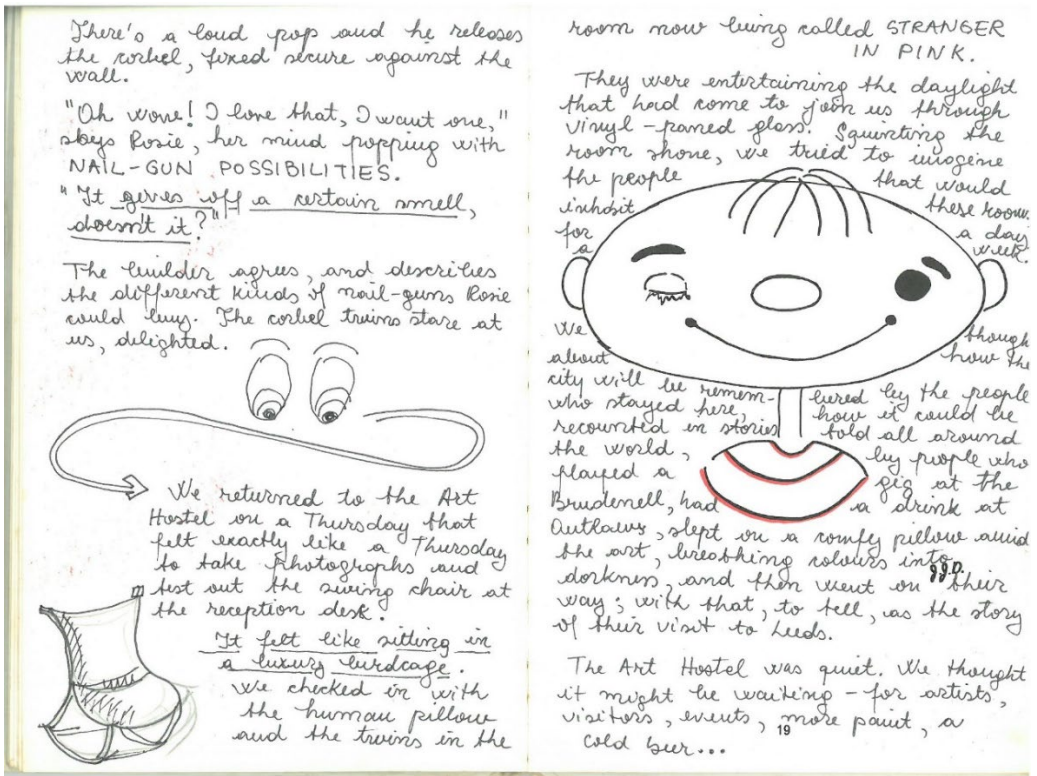


Figure 132 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

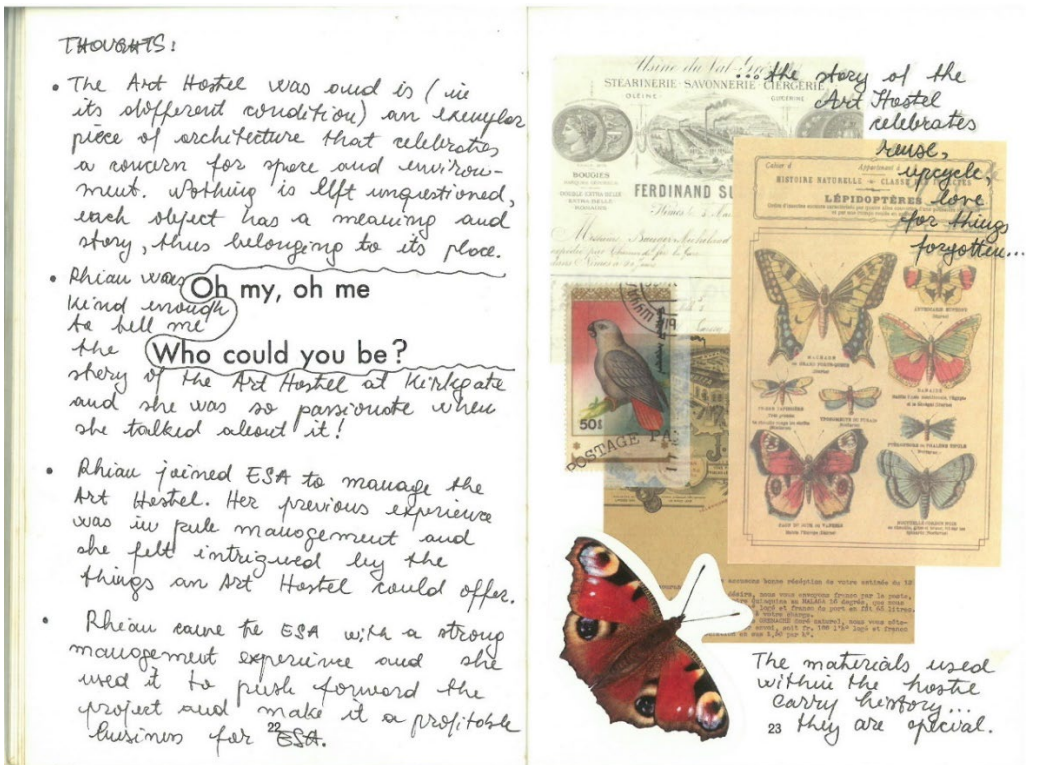


Figure 133 - Photograph of Kirkgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

Art Hostel Mabgate

The Mabgate Art Hostel journal, which serves as a repository for the memories and legacy of its predecessor, comprises a rich collection of stories, firsthand observations, archival discoveries, and engaging conversations. When it came time to curate the journal, another visit to Emmaus in the Mabgate Complex felt fitting. My quest for the perfect vessel to hold the memories of the new Art Hostel took me through familiar aisles, yet, this journal demanded its own character, one that reflects the current condition of the Art Hostel. The memories of the old Kirkgate hostel lived on, reincarnated in repurposed objects and ideas; items that did not make the transition from Kirkgate found new life through donations or purchases from Emmaus. As the bridge between the past and present of the hostel, Emmaus emerged as a profound dialogue partner.

Drawing from the Emmaus' trove of second-hand magazines, maps, and books, this journal underwent a metamorphosis. Other repurposed remnants collected from the Art Hostel were used in the process also. With intention and care, I transformed these items into handcrafted paper, which laid the foundation for the journal's pages. Under the adept guidance of my mother, a skilled bookmaker from the days of Communist Romania, the paper was crafted into a journal that embodies the Art Hostel's ethos: profoundly rooted, resourcefully DIY, environmentally conscious, and ever attuned to its social and ecological footprints. This journal, akin to The Art Hostel's restored residence in the refurbished presbytery, bears the imprints of its origins on its rugged pages.

The highlight of this experience was discovering a new way of producing knowledge through embeddedness in the Art Hostel, its buildings, and their users, all leading to a profound introspection about the transition of memories and objects from Kirkgate to Mabgate and their legacy. Transforming these materials into paper for the field journal was more than a creative act; it became a sentimental journey that connected me with my mother, offering a rare opportunity to renew our bond and exchange stories about the Art Hostel. This entire experience was imbued with nostalgia, echoing the hostel's core spirit: preserving the footprints of the past, shaping the present, and envisioning the future, all interwoven with acts of genuine care and emotion by everyone involved.

Figure 134 - Photograph of Emmaus charity shop. Photograph: Emmaus (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 135 - Photograph of process of making paper porridge. Photograph: Crawford (2019). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 136 - Photograph of moulding the paper. Photograph: Crawford (2019). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

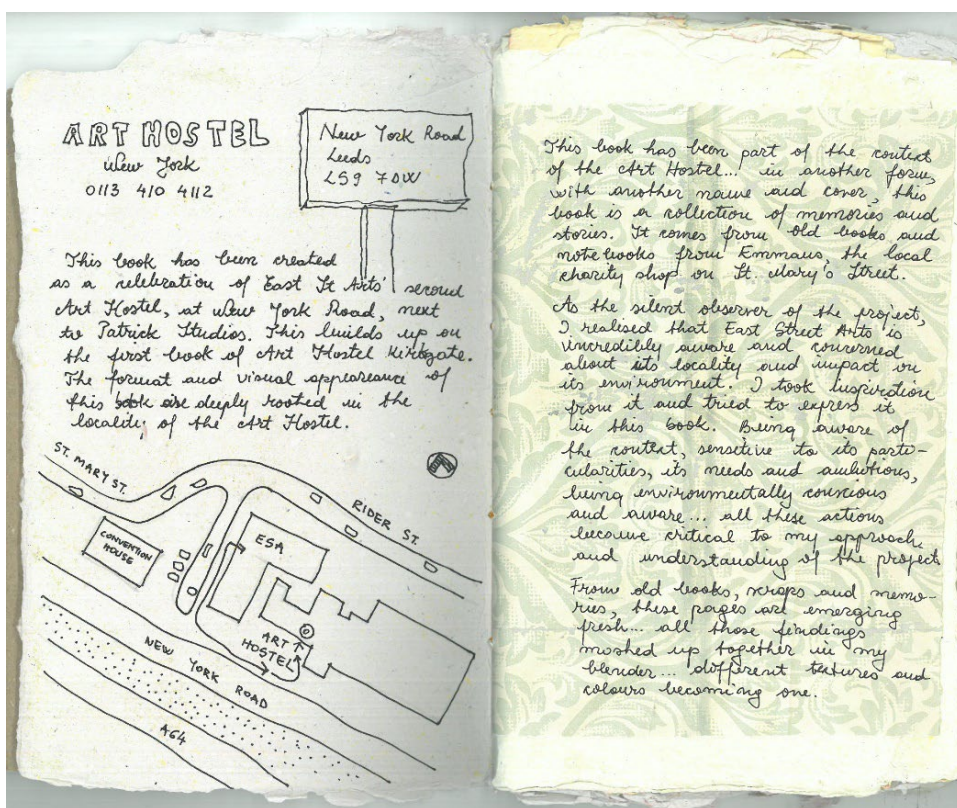


Figure 137 - Photograph of Mabgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

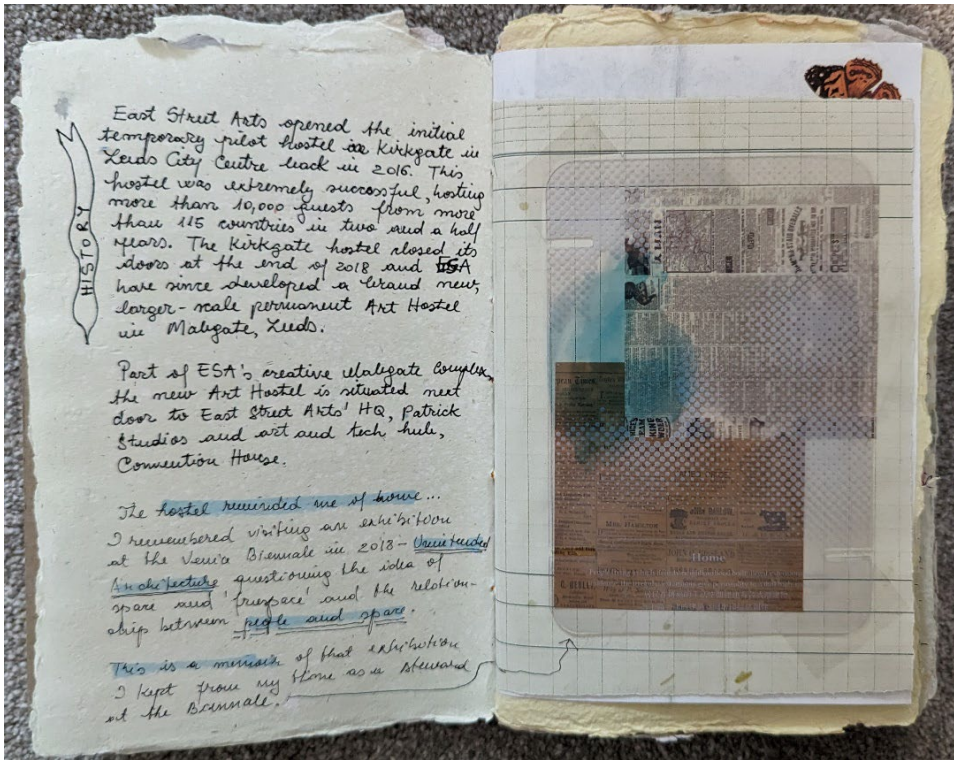


Figure 138 - Photograph of Mabgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

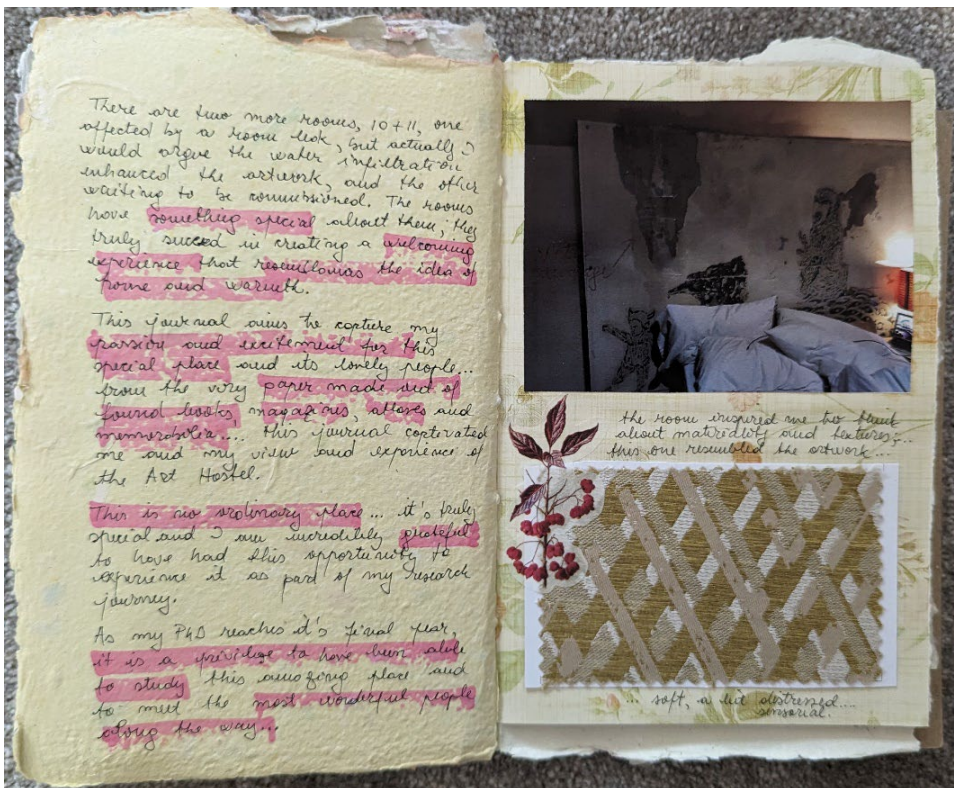


Figure 139 - Photograph of Mabgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

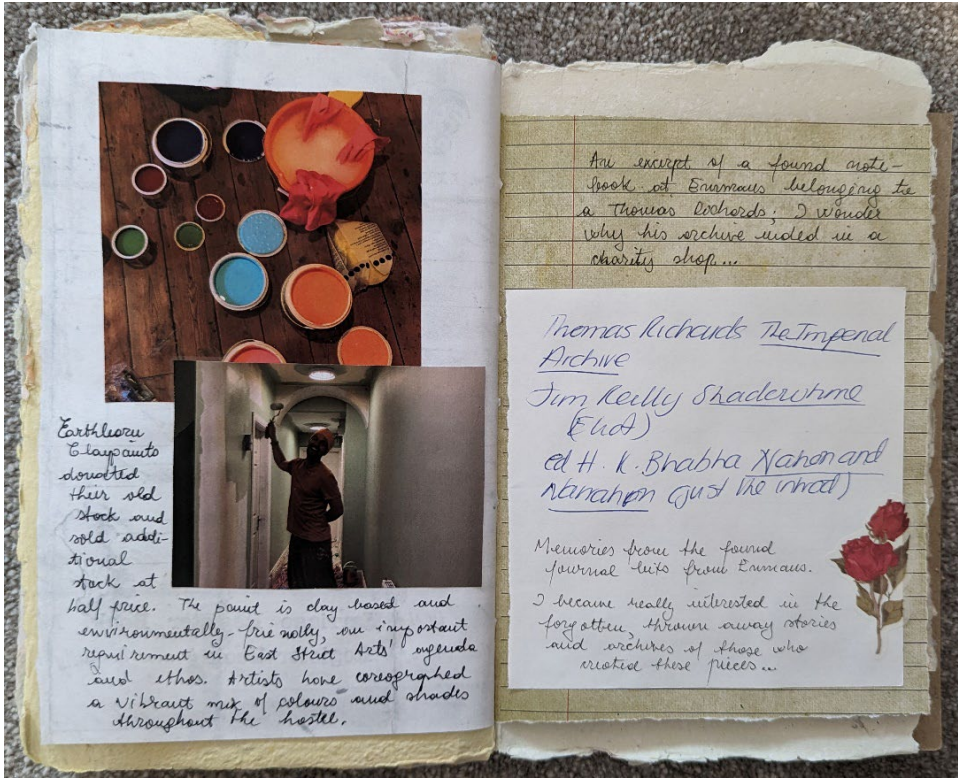


Figure 140 - Photograph of Mabgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

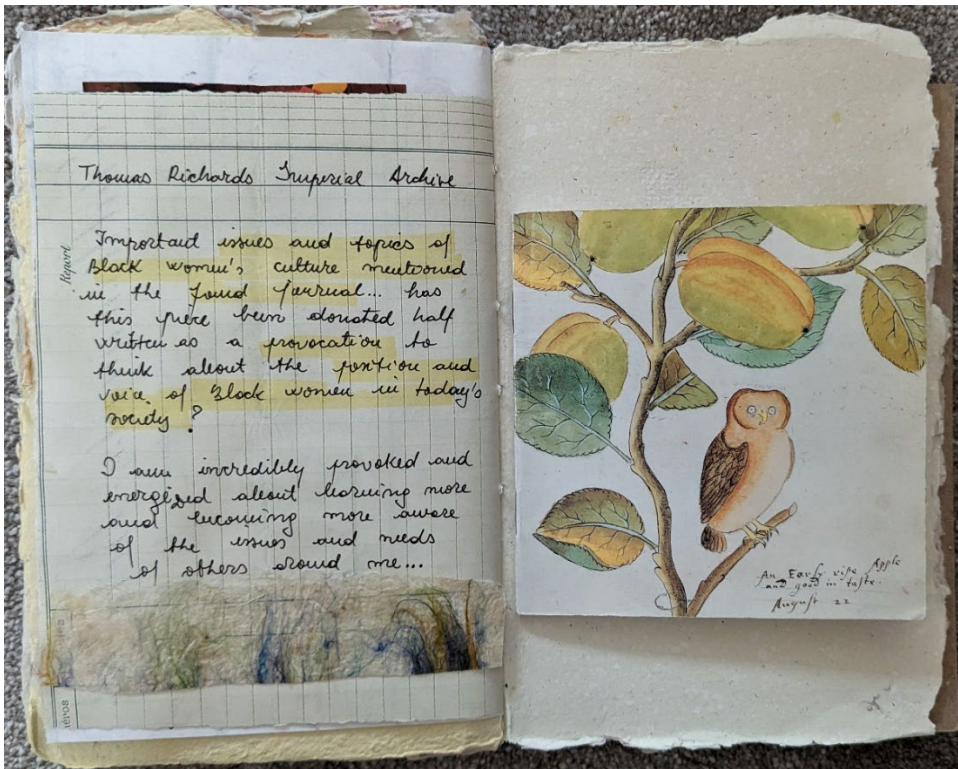


Figure 141 - Photograph of Mabgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

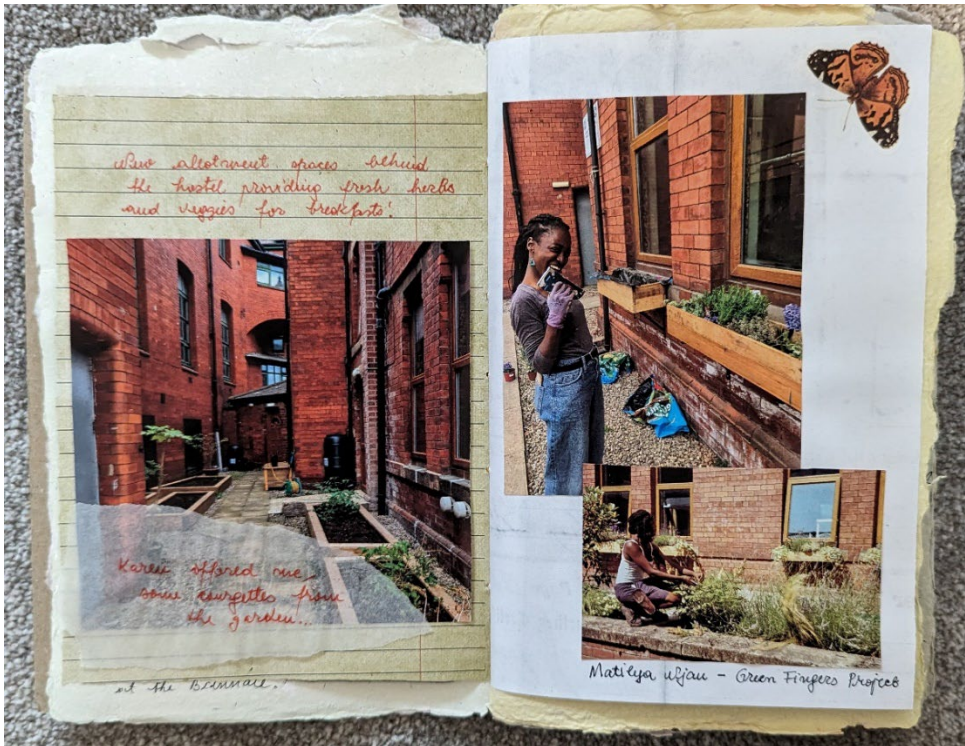


Figure 142 - Photograph of Mabgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 143 - Photograph of Mabgate Art Hostel Field Journal. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

5.4.2.3 Hidden Histories of New Briggate

This field journal took form in a manner rooted in its distinct locality and narrative. New Briggate, a street awash with history, has witnessed numerous evolutions over the years. With its eclectic mix of businesses, vibrant stories, and diverse communities, it stands proudly as a unique place in the heart of Leeds City Centre.

Interestingly, my bond with New Briggate predates my PhD journey: as an architectural assistant in Leeds, in 2015, my journey frequently took me to New Briggate's cobbled pathways, be it enroute to the train station or during visits to the nearby arcade. This street, with its unmistakable aura, starkly contrasts the modern and polished ambiance of places like the Victoria Gate or the Trinity Shopping Centre. Here, the businesses radiate an organic charm, characterised by their intimate scale, genuine exchanges, and untainted simplicity.



Figure 144 - Photograph of New Briggate. Photograph: Ionita (2022).

During the 'New Briggate Open Days' events, a window opened for me into the soul of the street; conversations with locals revealed a trove of personal stories, opinions, and a

rich subculture that often remains hidden from the casual observer. My quest for a befitting field journal led me to the nostalgic alcoves of Relics Records, a local record shop. Amidst the sea of vinyl records and nostalgic postcards, a gem whispered to me from a dusty shelf: a pink leather sketchbook with origins in India that had journeyed far and wide, only to find itself awaiting a purpose in that quaint Leeds shop. It seemed serendipitous to adopt it, giving it a renewed purpose as the field journal for this project.



Figure 145 - Photograph of Relics Records. Photograph: Ionita (2022).

Unlike the other journals, the curatorial approach for this one spanned a broader terrain, encompassing a more extensive array of information. Resembling the spirit of a traveller's diary, this journal archives my numerous encounters, experiences, and evolving understandings of New Briggate. The handmade paper pages exude a certain vintage allure, bearing subtle signs of the time it patiently waited a rightful owner on the shop's dusty shelf. Each page seems imbued with a quiet nostalgia, as if they've

absorbed the numerous stories whispered within the shop's confines. With every page, the journal became a canvas for the spirit of New Briggate. Beyond spatial mapping and depictions, it explores the layers of the street's very existence. It chronicles the tangible, the facades, the architectural nuances, and the visible transitions of the street over the decades, and also the intangible: the murmurs of past, the anecdotes shared over shop counters, the footfalls of generations that tread its paths, and the heartbeats of countless narratives that have shaped its identity. With each page, the journal highlights the various colours of New Briggate, bringing together its rich past with the more disguised narratives.

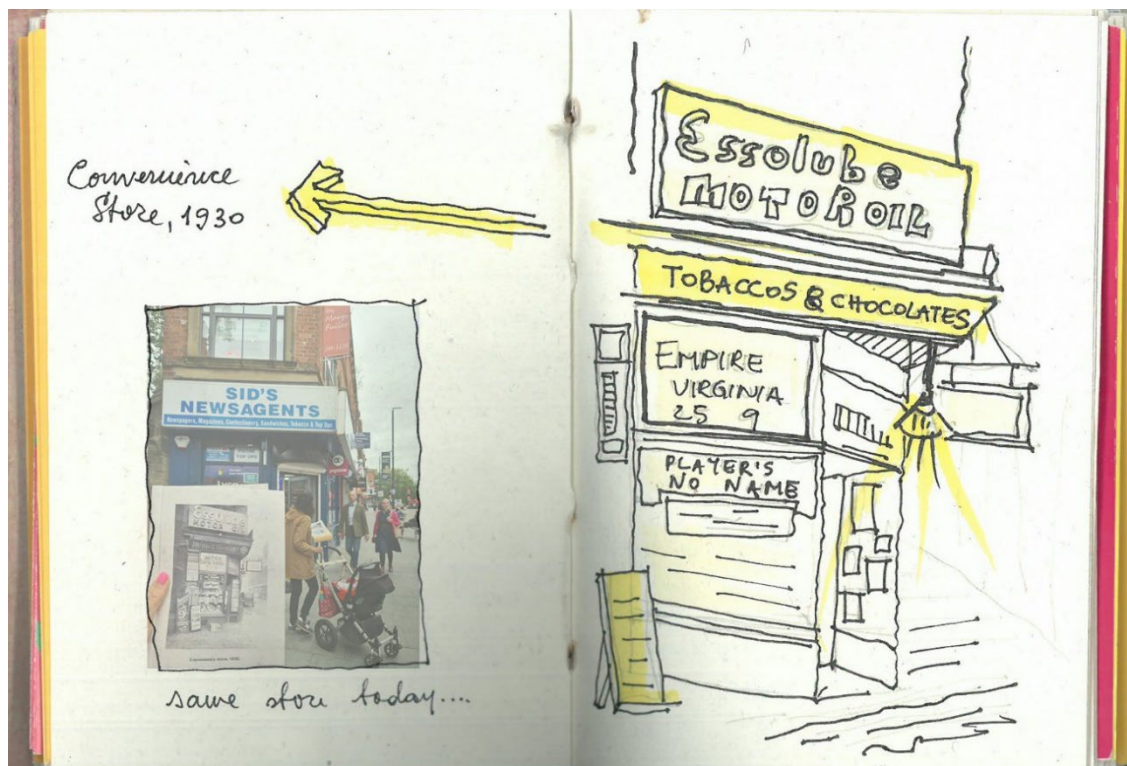


Figure 146 - Photograph of 'Hidden Stories of New Briggate' Field Journal.

Photograph: Ionita (2023).

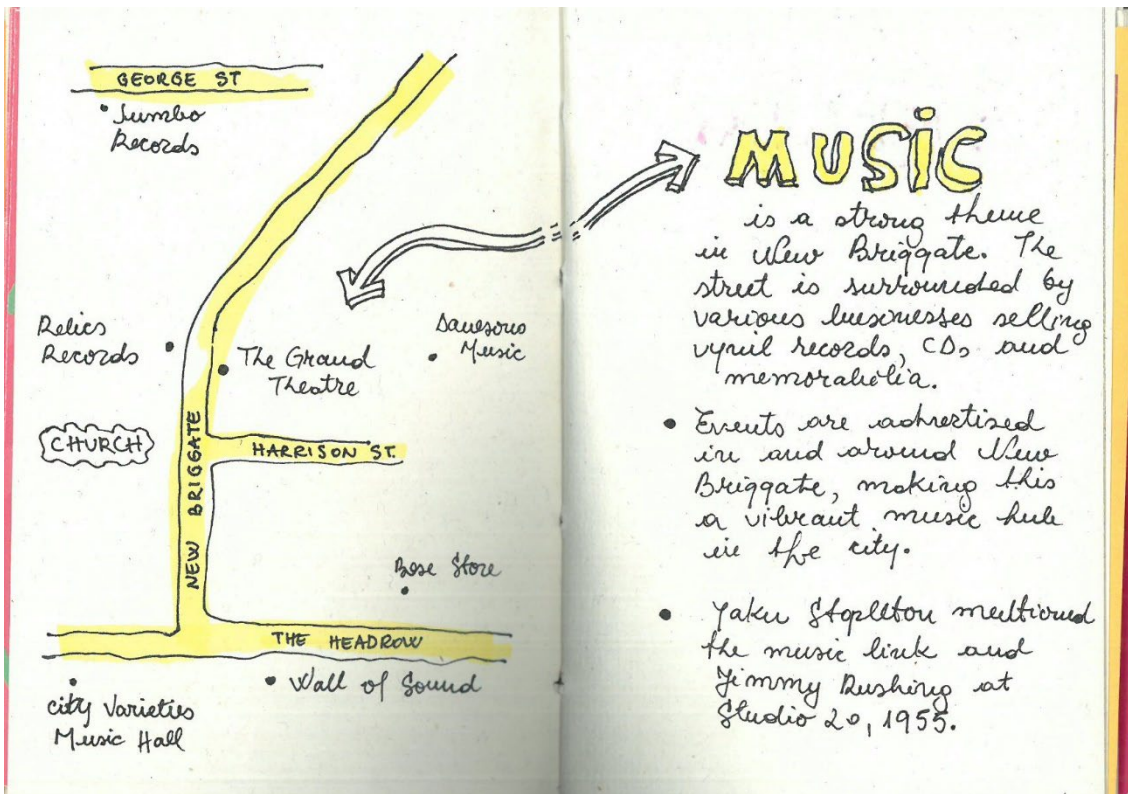


Figure 147 - Photograph of 'Hidden Stories of New Briggate' Field Journal.

Photograph: Ionita (2023).

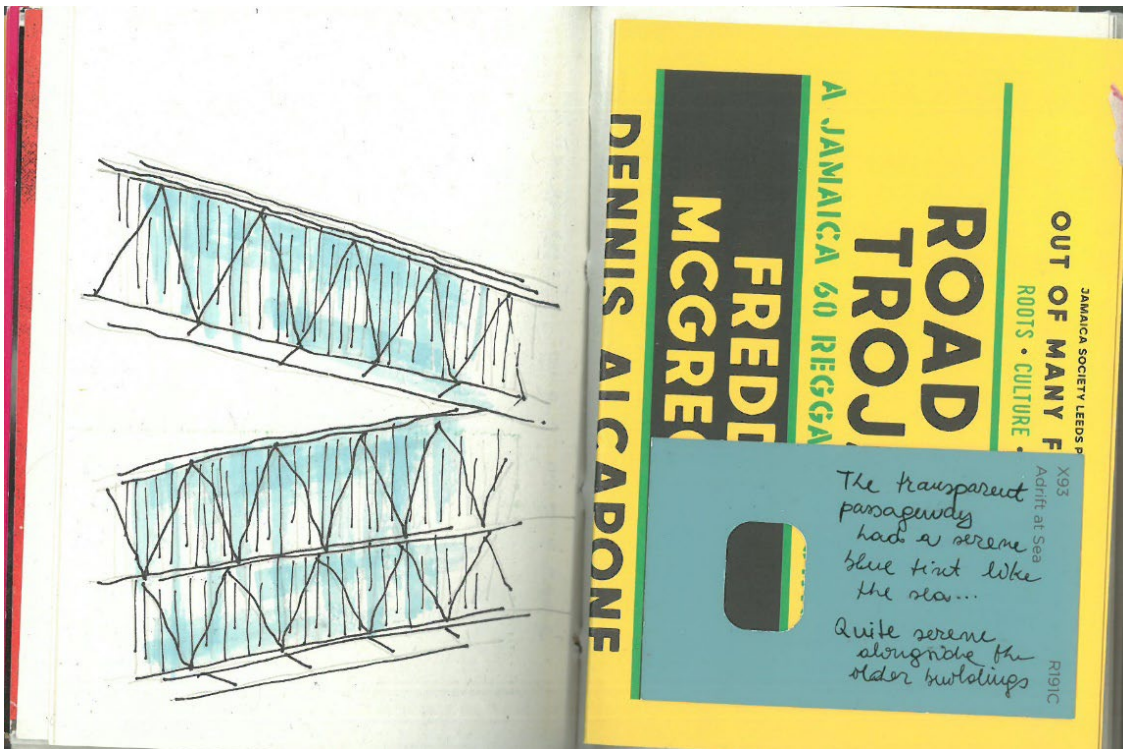


Figure 148 - Photograph of 'Hidden Stories of New Briggate' Field Journal.

Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 149 - Photograph of 'Hidden Stories of New Briggate' Field Journal building on Stapleton's tour of New Briggate. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

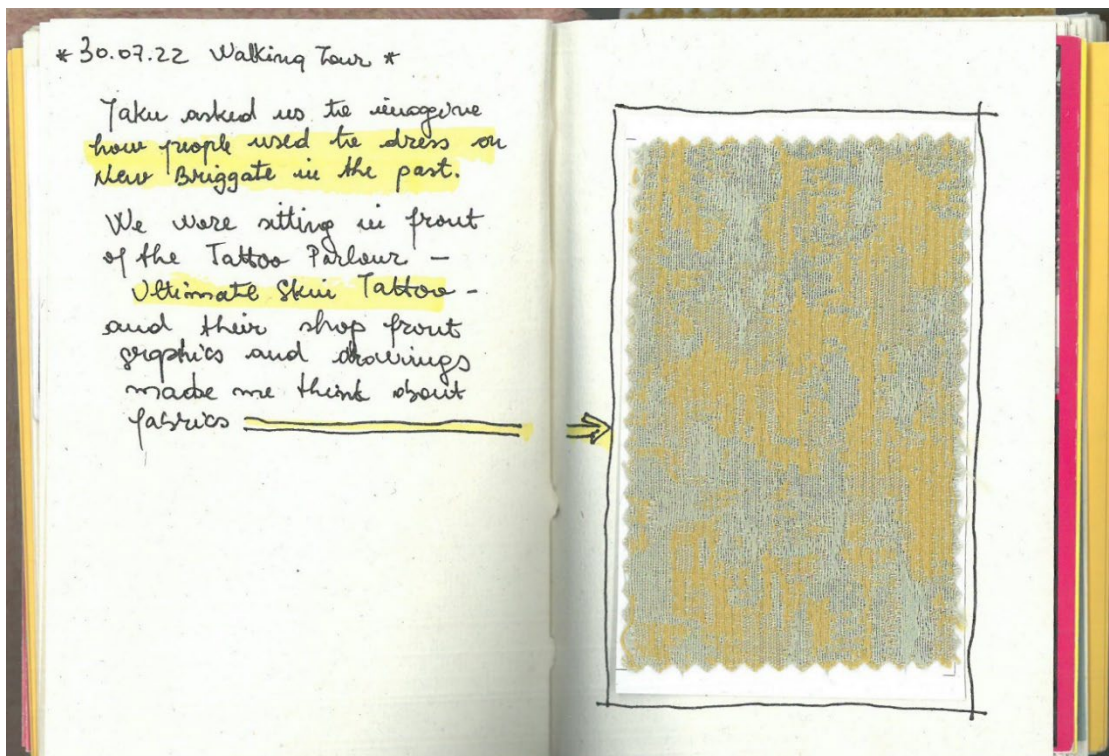


Figure 150 - Photograph of 'Hidden Stories of New Briggate' Field Journal capturing reflections on walking tour. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

For instance, one day during my stroll along New Briggate, I discovered a door that caught my attention. Once the entrance to the Central Hotel at number 35, the door now stands derelict, its decaying letters and weathered paint whispering tales of bygone times. This door, with its peeling layers, seemed to capture New Briggate’s rich textile past, each strip of paint resembling the accumulated history and countless stories that have unfolded at this threshold. As I meandered through the city centre, a piece of fabric found its way into my journal, a tangible keepsake tied to that door, which had now etched itself into my psyche. Later, in a conversation with Jon Wakeman about the street’s transformation, he expressed that his most cherished aspect of the project was, coincidentally, the very same Central Hotel door. Could this be serendipity, or does this door act as a portal into the hidden narratives of New Briggate?



Figure 151 - Photograph of 'Hidden Stories of New Briggate' Field Journal capturing reflections on Central Hotel door. Photograph: Ionita (2023).



Figure 152 - Photograph of Central Hotel door. Photograph: Ionita (2023).

These hidden histories - whether of love affairs initiated under its lamplights, clandestine business dealings, or stories of hope and dreams of immigrants setting up their first businesses - all find their voice within the journal's pages. The field journal became much more than documenting the street's evolution, but a tool to understand and revive the numerous experiences that have lent New Briggate its unique character.

5.4.3 The transformative power of field journals

The field journals can be understood as a tool of engagement with urban space that goes beyond functional navigation or objective observation, thus emphasising the personal and subjective experiences of the city, seeking to unfold the hidden and subversive qualities of urban settings (Hemmens & Zacarias, 2020; Sadler, 1999; Self, 2007). In my opinion, the process of becoming an urban activator is not a journey that can be started passively, but a highly personal experience that requires one to become embedded within the urban space they seek to activate. Like an anthropologist, the ‘urban curator’ (CHORA et al., 2001; Van Heeswijk, n.d.b) must observe the city from a distance, but also understand the experience from within, highlighting this process as one that goes beyond functional navigation, revealing complex nuances, tensions and possibilities in an urban environment that would otherwise go unnoticed by the casual observer. It also allows the observer to uncover hidden and subversive qualities of the urban context which can act as catalysts for urban transformations and change in the city.

Drawing on Rosa Luxemburg’s reflective approach to urban entanglements in her notebooks, I argue that while objective observation offers valuable data concerning the physical, social, and economic aspects of the urban environment, subjective experience poses a truly unique explorative lens of understanding urban contexts. This perspective can uncover opportunities for interventions that might not be apparent through objective analysis alone. Thus, the field journals act as tools for observation, reflection, and documentation as well as instruments for action, and the knowledge derived from engaging with urban spaces through the journals can identify and activate the context’s latent potential, guiding the creation of spatial opportunities.

Field journals are essential in urban activation research. Inspired by Luxemburg’s detailed sensory reflections, these journals become critical tools for documenting spatial changes and offer reflective accounts of the evolution of artist-led spaces and their role as urban activators. Profound engagement with the material in these journals transforms perceptions of space, turning introspection and reflection into acts of activation that endow spaces with distinct essence and purpose. This process infuses spaces with life and significance, enriching the experience for all who engage with them. Specifically, in artist-led spaces, the reflections, observations, and knowledge captured within the

journals can inform the planning and realisation of future initiatives, increasing their impact as catalysts for urban change.

Furthermore, the development of field journals challenges my position within the research, as maintaining a journal implies active participation and engagement with the urban context. This active stance aligns with Luxemburg's writing tactic, where she transformed her reflections into mechanisms for change. Echoing Jeanne van Heeswijk (n.d.b) and CHORA's (2001) concept of the 'urban curator', the creation of the journals becomes a creative and propositional tool for stimulating future transformations and for activating the spaces described within them as well as myself as a researcher engaged in the process of reflective observation.

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This study, supported by an in-depth exploration of ESA through its case studies and the reflective process of field journaling, leads to several key considerations and findings. ESA stands at the crossover of a variety of spheres such as art, architecture, activism, urbanism, and planning, and this transdisciplinary position compels us to reassess and broaden our understanding of urban environments, and crucially, to refine our definition of what constitutes an ‘urban activator’.

The three case studies examined within the thesis provide a rich portrayal of these interconnected dynamics, emphasising the symbiotic relationship between artist-led space and the urban environment. As our journey through the case studies unfolded, it became evident that the very essence of an urban activator is continuously being refined, reshaped, and ultimately redefined. The established parameters of this term as evidenced in this thesis, while insightful, require a recalibration in the light of the multifaceted dynamics exhibited by artist-led spaces, particularly as manifested by ESA. The urban activator, transcending its initial concept, emerges as an integral actor mediating, instigating, and catalysing change within the urban context. In demonstrating ESA’s role as urban activator, the following qualities are expressed:

6.2 Navigating self-organisation, economic resilience, and inclusive practices

Drawing on the literature captured in Section 4.7 - Self-organisation and 'URBAN ACT/ing', Herbert (2013, p. 15) posits that in order to address the pressing need for alternative economic systems beyond traditional capitalist paradigms, caution must be exercised when lauding self-organisation's transformative abilities, as it risks being misconstrued and appropriated by capitalist profiteering. As Verwoert (2013) concurs, contemporary societal circumstances mandate self-initiated organisation, though not necessarily epitomising absolute freedom. It's often a survival instinct, a response to prevailing political climates and their economic implications.

Figure 153 - Photograph of a classically DIY ESA exhibition sign, fashioned from available resources - here, a spray can and a wall. The initial years of assembling exhibitions and art pieces with a DIY approach significantly influenced the organisation's evolution. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Within architecture and urbanism, traditional paradigms can be rather restrictive, often sidelining local influences. Contrarily, self-organised initiatives, rooted in political activism, alternative cultural manifestations, and unique dwelling modes, emerge as potent challengers to the conventional. Renowned architectural initiatives like Cedric Price's innovative experiments and AAA's ECObox exemplify the infusion of self-organisation within the field, promoting inclusive, collaborative, and transformative spatial designs (Spatial Agency, n.d.d). In architecture, self-organisation is not just about participation, but implies a radical move towards enabling individuals to actively shape their environments, developing collective and relation-centric spatial productions.

When looking specifically at the artist-led sector, it is fair to assume that most spaces start as self-organised (East Street Arts, 2018b, p. 3); this can be linked to a variety of reasons, ranging from lack of resources, being alternative, or wanting to break free of institutionalisation. As explored in Section 4.3 and as further emphasised by D'Etterre (2023, p. 84), there is a concern that transforming artist-led spaces into professionalised institutions, may lead to their loss of their unique identity and merge with wider infrastructure and power structures. As a result, the artists' criticism is rendered ineffective, and the capacity for resistance held by artist-led self-organisation is compromised.

As detailed in Section 1.3, the artist-led organisation's beginnings were defined by a self-organised and alternative approach, with founders Watson and Wakeman establishing their roots in Leeds and contemplating their next artistic adventure. According to Wakeman (2021e), their search for a dedicated studio led them to East Street Mills, a property situated close to the heart of Leeds. Contrary to their expectations, artists weren't seeking a cooperative or decision-making structure, instead, they desired independence, alongside guidance and support. Watson and Wakeman agreed with these ideas, recognising a gap in Leeds for budding artists fresh from university or art institutions. This realisation informed the foundational ethos of ESA:

- Supporting artists to excel in their artistic practice.
- Bridging the dialogue between grassroots initiatives and policymakers.
- Developing platforms where artists and audiences can connect.

Jonathan Orlek (2021, p. 213) noted that ‘artist-led organisations such as ESA have messy relationships between individual and collective practice and do not have a consolidated aim of working towards pre-determined models for community self-management across their projects’.

From conversations with Watson and Wakeman (2021e), it became clear that nurturing this young and exciting venture was more than a pursuit; it was a real passion, and even though the journey was occasionally chaotic, it reflected its organic and unplanned growth. With resourcefulness and ambition, they embraced part-time roles and capitalised on the government’s Enterprise Allowance Scheme, determined to expand both the studio and its mission to support local artists. Whilst not clearly documented in the archive, I believe that this brave and adventurous spirit still sparking in both artists, and it shined through in our conversations or in the way they speak about ESA and its beginnings. There is a real fervour that the artists carry and that for me, captures the spirit of this place. It is so easy to forget about these innocent and tumultuous beginnings when looking at what the artist-led organisation is today. While many regard ESA as a cornerstone of the artistic community in Leeds, it’s important to remember its humble, vibrant origins; beneath its recognised stature lies the spirit of a maverick, reminiscent of its self-organised and alternative past, echoing the ethos of creating greatness from simplicity.

The current debate facing many art organisations of similar scale and longevity to ESA is their association to the artist-led sphere. Hive Conference’s Cross-Pollination Session (Biddlecombe, 2023) critically examined what it means to be artist-led in the contemporary context, challenging the increasingly institutional nature of organisations like ESA that have undergone significant expansion. This is a very timely discussion, linked to the notions of precarity and organisational resilience. ESA Ex-Co-Director, Emma Beverley’s (2020) Field Note stands out as particularly insightful and honest. In response to theatre maker Toni-Dee Paul’s questioning: ‘What are you willing to lose?’, Beverley (2020, p. 22) reflects on the precarious position of artists in contemporary society, emphasising the intensifying struggles artists have faced, especially during the pandemic. This precarious condition is no novelty, and it took a prime spot at the Hive Conference (Biddlecombe, 2023) also,¹ many practitioners noting the challenging artist-

¹ As detailed in Section 4.3 – The politics of artist-led space.

led space dynamics defining the sector post-pandemic. A prevalent sentiment, resonating with Murphy's (2017, p. 11) perspective also, articulated that the contemporary measure of success for artist-led practices is evolving into institutional structures. Beverley (2020, p. 22) critiques the higher education system and 'the institution', suggesting that they've strangled the essence of artist-led work. Toni-Dee Paul's query isn't intended as an accusation, but a serious inquiry into the sacrifices required to achieve genuine equity in the artist-led sphere.

Figure 154 - Illustration of conference themes. Image: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

The notion of self-organisation is linked to the notion of being radical and alternative; Beverley (2020, p. 22) remarks on the misuse of the term 'radical', pointing out that securing workers' rights and job safety for artists shouldn't be perceived as extreme. She's critical of the Government's £1.5 billion financial support package, arguing that it fails to prioritise artists directly, noting that the 'gatekeepers of that support made the deliberate decision not to include artists early on' (Beverley, 2020, p. 22). Anticipating

the typical ‘crisis management’ response, she predicts reliance on outdated models and an aversion to innovation, with the state again sidelining artists.

[T]hey’ll apply the models we already know, models handed down over generations that are riddled with the same inequalities and violent power dynamics. There will be nothing radical, nothing bespoke or new. That would be too risky – and we all know how the funders feel about ‘risk’ (Beverley, 2020, p. 21).

The matter of funding is a critical one in the debate of self-organisation, as it often determines whether initiatives succeed or face precarity. The interview with Melody Walker (personal communication, 23 May 2023), as captured in Section 4.5, highlighted the benefits of appointing a dedicated fundraising professional; such an individual, skilled in the complex language of funding applications, can alleviate the daunting challenge that funding acquisition often poses to individual artists (Biddlecombe, 2023). Walker also emphasised the significant role and power of data in fundraising efforts, pointing out how crucial metrics and monitoring are in constructing a persuasive argument to potential donors or sponsors.

[C]rucial to fundraising is some what we call data. So it’s the numerical and qualitative data that we collect about the work that we’re doing, sometimes, and it’s us measuring our impact. And that [...] falls within my remit [...], because I prepare these end-of-year reports, annual surveys that go to the two core funders, which are ACE, and LCC. And, what comes out of that, for me as a fundraiser is that I can use it to track progress (M. Walker, personal communication, 23 May 2023).

Walker discussed how data has been crucial in evolving the relationship between the artist-led organisation and its funders, noting that organisations such as ACE, LCC and Garfield Watson Foundation became key actors in ESA’s network, significantly influencing its functioning and financial stability.

Reflecting on my experience at the Hive Conference and interactions with artist-led practitioners nationwide, it is evident that ESA occupies a somewhat privileged position compared to the funding challenges faced by solo artists or smaller artist-led spaces. This perspective was reinforced during my interview with Claire Easton (personal communication, 2 August 2022), Regeneration Project Officer, who highlighted the long-standing relationship between LCC and ESA. Being established allows ESA to regularly access significant funding and participate in larger projects, providing greater stability and comfort in uncertain times. The nature of enterprise comes into play also, Walker (personal communication, 23 May 2023) noting that ESA adopts a unique fundraising approach by occasionally partnering with property developers, a strategy that allows the artist-led organisation to access funds that might not typically be directed toward the arts.

While ESA's commercial approach is commendable, it also presents a significant challenge in striking a balance between economic sustainability and maintaining inclusivity. Jon Wakeman (2021a) emphasises a common dilemma faced by many non-profit and community-focused organisations: on one hand, there's a need for economic sustainability, which often means relying on tenants who can afford regular studio fees, typically stemming from more affluent, white, middle-class demographics; on the other hand, there's a strong commitment to inclusivity and supporting artists from diverse backgrounds who may not have the same financial stability.

Wakeman (2021a) acknowledges that relying on a certain demographic for financial stability can be seen as a compromise. This approach might inadvertently sideline the very communities ESA aims to uplift. He highlights the challenge of maintaining operational viability while not losing sight of the organisation's foundational goals of diversity and inclusivity. As ESA expands and its structure evolves, there is an increased need for strategic risk management to influence how work is procured and operations are managed, and this strategic planning could potentially impact the essence of ESA, particularly in how it allocates its spaces and funds. Recognising this tension, ESA is strategically focusing its energy and resources on supporting artists and individuals from marginalised communities (people of different ethnicities, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds). The intricate collaborations between ESA and its funders highlight a critical phase in the artist-led organisation's evolution, where the success of these partnerships is not just beneficial, but essential for its sustainability.

In my observation, ESA is navigating a terrain where it must operate with the acumen of a commercial enterprise, balancing its ethos and community-focused objectives with the pragmatic needs of organisational longevity and financial stability, whilst also ensuring that the artists and communities at stake are not just passive recipients of ESA's resources, but active participants in shaping the artist-led narrative and landscape.

Emma Beverley's (2020) insightfully expands on the nuances of flexibility and adaptability in the arts sector through her Field Note. During her time at ESA, she came to appreciate the importance of maintaining a 'state of flux', advocating for artists to lead the industry due to their intrinsic understanding of the creative process over the final product (Beverley, 2020, p. 21). She expresses concern about the industry's resistance to change and the stark income disparities between artists and institutional leaders.

Beverley (2020, p. 22) points out the financial contrast, noting that while the average artist earns about £5,000 annually, a Director of a NPO might earn up to £800,000. She poses a thought-provoking question about the potential improvements if artists were utilised as consultants, suggesting that giving artists the space, time, and consultancy funds could revitalise buildings and their original purposes as creative spaces. However, she clarifies that this should not mean offloading responsibilities onto artists without adequate support, but rather utilising their expertise while ensuring fair employment.

Building on Beverley's perspective, it becomes clear that contemporary artists are often marginalised and overlooked, denied leadership roles, and thrust into inconsistent and inequitable compensation systems. The prevailing attitude seems to be: '[A]rtists just want to make art, right? We're doing them a favour' (Beverley, 2020, p. 24). Such a mindset creates a division between artists and venue dynamic. Beverley notes:

And I, as a Director of an NPO, am complicit in that. Which is why I need to be careful when I get that sickly feeling of discomfort at being asked, 'What are you willing to lose?' and remind myself that it is not an accusation. It is a genuine, important question. Not one set up to create a divide between the artists and the salaried people in the room - because that divide is already here. And we have stopped progress from happening by pretending it isn't a deep, inherent part of all of the conversations we have about the future of our industry. If we look at

that divide and accept it we can finally start to think about changes we need to make to bridge it (Beverley, 2020, p. 24).

My perspective on this matter is that such reforms ought to encompass a wide range of factors, from salary adjustments and payment methodologies to staffing hierarchies, governance protocols, consulting strategies, business models, ownership blueprints, and both project-based and continuous funding schemes. This is not about challenging organisations such as ESA and their membership to the artist-led sphere, but about recognising that we live in very different times, where perhaps employing a more entrepreneurial approach might be a positive to the art practice itself. ESA (2018b, p. 3) talks about the challenging art landscape, bringing attention to the acute resource issues artists encounter in their practice:

Artists' spaces across the UK are historically self-organised, under-resourced and prone to experiencing burnout. Their work is often time sensitive as they deal with rapid growth in some communities and crippling austerity measures in others. They generate new and innovative artwork, projects and public facing events and are essential catalysts for the art sector (East Street Arts, 2018b, p. 3).

Entering the discussion from a unique perspective, there is a legitimate concern that while fears of institutionalisation are valid, an excessive emphasis on preserving an independent spirit might inadvertently drive many artists and smaller artist-led spaces toward precarious situations, resulting in unsustainable livelihoods and even unemployment. Therefore, the fine line between staying true to one's origins and adapting to contemporary survival and growth needs is crucial.

Building on James Schofield's (2020, p. 239) perspective on 'intention', evolving into a more structured entity, as ESA has, doesn't necessarily negate its artist-led foundation. It's not just the search for funding that might divert an organisation from its artist-led roots, but rather the influencers of these resources, potentially setting the entity on a path of aggressive, and often untenable, growth. This expansion can bring with it more hierarchical models and specialised roles, potentially distancing the organisation from

its foundational ethos. However, my view aligns with Schofield's who asserts that as long as an artist-led organisation remains committed to its core intentions and preserves its founding spirit, it can maintain its alignment with the artist-led ethos despite its formalisation or the challenges of securing funding.

Jonathan Orlek (2021, p. 44) notes the delicate balance artist-led spaces must maintain between achieving financial stability and preserving their alternative roots. This process demands persistent introspection, a commitment to upholding their distinct identity, and resistance against unjustifiable institutional pressures.

From my vantage point as an embedded researcher, observing ESA has made it evident that even as an established organisation with somewhat defined hierarchical structures, it continuously strives to retain its grassroots and self-organised spirit. This applies to the organisation's approach to fundraising which according to Walker (personal communication, 23 May 2023), is intricately tied to its organisational ethos. The management culture ESA has nurtured throughout its history situates it as a grassroots entity, distinctively outside conventional norms. This approach leads to debates about 'tinkering around the edges of adhocracy', highlighting the artist-led organisation's commitment to flexibility and agility in response to change. Adhocracy, fundamentally rooted in the concept of organised chaos, values flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to embrace change. ESA's affinity for this approach highlights its courage in taking risks, particularly with capital investments, as well as its resilience to operate within the existing volatile environment, riddled with the residual impacts of the pandemic and ongoing economic uncertainty.

As Walker contends, ESA maintains an organic, bottom-up approach, with the leadership team allowing and encouraging processes and initiatives to unfold naturally. This view emphasises the artist-led organisation's commitment to maintaining its grassroots identity as well as solidifies its dedication to preserving an alternative, self-organised ethos at the core of their operations.

6.3 Space provision and strategic real estate: Addressing artist precarity

Since becoming a charity in 1998, ESA increased its reach internationally, establishing itself as a support artist platform with an aim to provide space, opportunities, services, and facilities' access for visual artists. This initiative focuses on how the artist-led organisation can influence policymakers to improve community and environmental conditions. Over the years, ESA (2021) has emerged as a leader in the artist-led sector, actively working to improve the livelihoods of local artists and community members, as well as addressing economic and commercial decline in the city

ESA is presently the leading UK operator of meanwhile space for the creative industries outside of London. Recognised by Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership & West Yorkshire Combined Authority (2020, p. 41), ESA has managed a successful 'meanwhile space for artists' program for ten years, accommodating over 500 artists in more than 100 buildings. In total, ESA has supported over 20,000 artists in building sustainable careers, reinvented 500 temporary spaces, developed 79 permanent studio spaces, and launched a pop-up Art Hostel in the historic heart of Leeds' Kirkgate, catalysing regeneration in the city's oldest street.

From the very beginning, ESA has been committed to offering studio spaces for artists, aligning this with initiatives in artist mentorship, adult education, and project curation. Over its 30-year life, ESA has experimented with various space provision models, ranging from leasing vacant properties like East Street Mills to establishing permanent facilities for studios, residencies, and art hostels, such as Patrick Studios, Convention House, and the Art Hostel in Mabgate. Additionally, the artist-led organisation has secured extended leases on commercial sites in Leeds, including Union 105 and Vicar Lane, and has ambitiously developed a nationwide portfolio of temporary locations through a business rate relief strategy, showcasing its resourcefulness and proactive approach.

Recognising that artists' need for a studio is linked with other essential aspects of their lifestyle, ESA has also ventured into housing projects to increase support for artists, such as Artist House 45 (Orlek, 2021, p. 23). Jon Wakeman (2021a) notes that artists often struggle to find affordable and suitable living spaces that can accommodate both their personal and professional needs, a challenge that is exacerbated in urban areas where the costs of living and studio spaces are prohibitively high. By focusing on

housing, ESA aims to address this critical need, ensuring that artists have a stable and supportive environment for both living and creating, thereby extending its support beyond studio provision.

Initiatives like Artist House 45 illustrate ESA's commitment to providing practical solutions to these challenges. These projects go beyond simply offering a roof over artists' heads, but creating a supportive ecosystem where they can actually thrive, this involving a consideration of the needs of artists holistically – from affordable rent to spaces conducive to artistic creation and embedding these elements within a supportive community structure. Wakeman's (2021a) vision hints at exploring various innovative housing models, including looking into partnerships with LAs and housing associations to create subsidised housing specifically designated for artists. These models could involve integrating artist residences within broader community housing projects, developing a dynamic relationship between artists and the wider community.

According to Wakeman (2021a), the ambition is to become a registered artist housing provider; this step would allow ESA to offer housing and also to have a regulatory framework to manage it effectively. This speaks to a long-term vision where the artist-led organisation can exert greater control and autonomy over how it supports artists, going beyond ad-hoc projects to more sustainable, regulated housing solutions. As an architect, I find this spatially oriented approach particularly compelling, as it presents innovative solutions to the array of urban challenges associated with underutilised spaces in the city.

Nevertheless, while ambitious, this approach isn't without its hurdles, and operating within the complexities of real estate, regulatory compliance, and sustainable financing are just a few challenges to mention. Wakeman acknowledges the complex nature of ESA's work, emphasising the need for self-honesty and recognition of their own vulnerabilities. He conveys that while striving to do their best, they must confront the reality that sometimes actions are driven more by personal desires than by what is truly needed.

This introspection leads to the realisation that ESA's investment in buildings, though financially demanding, is crucial for ensuring the organisation's legacy and stability, allowing it to serve future generations without being compromised by vulnerability. Securing ownership allows the artist-led organisation to dedicate its efforts and

resources towards impactful and meaningful initiatives, and by holding a property portfolio, ESA gains the autonomy needed to effectively address critical societal issues, such as combating aggressive gentrification. This approach enables the artist-led organisation to make a lasting and positive impact on the urban landscape, encouraging community resilience and cultural preservation.

ESA's strategic real estate plans are carefully integrated with ESA's artist support programme, with both elements complementing each other. In an interview with Yaku Stapleton (personal communication, 4 August 2022), the artist talked about the supportive nature of ESA, indicating a nurturing environment where he can evolve his practice freely, without the burden of administrative duties. Stapleton mentioned that the provision of affordable art spaces in urban settings can be a real lifeline for artists, suggesting that the role artist-led organisations such as ESA are playing in supporting artists is critical.

Orlek (2021, pp. 23–24) brings the attention to a 2016 survey titled 'Livelihoods of Visual Artists' conducted by the independent research firm TBR (2018) and sponsored by Arts Council England, pinpointing the hardships of sustaining solely on artistic practice. According to the study:

Only 3% of artists indicate that their art income is sufficient to live on comfortably, with a further 7% indicating that it is enough to live on but only barely. Therefore 90% of artists do not earn enough from art practice to support their livelihood (TBR, 2018, p. 2).

Recognising the struggle many artists face in juggling secondary jobs to support their creative practices, ESA is proactively addressing the need for affordable workspace and housing for artists. As Orlek (2021, p. 24) highlights, this artist-led organisation is aware of the barriers artists encounter, particularly the transition from student-like accommodations which often limit their artistic expression and hinder their ability to embed within a community. Through initiatives like Artist House 45, inspired by collaborations with Jeanne van Heeswijk and projects like The Blue House, ESA exemplifies a strong commitment to nurturing its community and the broader artist-led

sector. This approach reflects a sustained motivation and a defining operational ethos throughout its existence.

ESA's understanding of the unique economic challenges facing artist-led spaces has led to innovative and sophisticated strategies for space provision, including resourceful methods for sourcing and financing real estate, often forged through partnerships with LAs and arm's-length bodies. Such collaborative efforts highlight ESA's capacity to respond creatively and effectively to the specific needs of the arts sector, demonstrating an agile and empathetic approach to supporting artists and promoting their growth within the community. ESA's approach, which skilfully combines embedded art practice with commercial knowledge, acts as a valuable lesson for the wider artist-led community, marking a departure from traditional perceptions of an art organisation's role and demonstrating a significant, tangible impact on its operational contexts.

During the Hive Conference, I observed that many artist-led organisations and independent artists exhibit hesitation or apprehension about pursuing funding opportunities or exploring commercial avenues similar to those undertaken by ESA. This reluctance frequently results in economic instability and precariousness within their operations and livelihoods. However, there is a lesson to be learned from ESA's approach in the current context: adopting a somewhat commercial mindset, as it has, may not just be beneficial but also necessary for ensuring sustainability and resilience in the evolving landscape of art and culture.

6.4 Local embeddedness and community engagement

Throughout this thesis, which draws from a synthesis of literature and embedded research, the defining characteristic of an urban activator has been identified as its profound local embeddedness and intimate connection to its specific community. ESA exemplifies this trait, serving as a model of local engagement and community-focused practice. The organisation's philosophy, articulated in its 2018 manifesto, reflects a strong commitment to developing these local ties:

The localities that we and our artists are based within are important to us. We know that without the artists developing site-based work we cannot create sustainable, resilient, creative and thriving communities (East Street Arts, 2018a).

ESA's mission is centred on nurturing and supporting local communities through art. Positioned in the Mabgate Complex for almost two decades, with Patrick Studios as its vibrant home, ESA demonstrates a long-term commitment to its community; this enduring presence on the edges of Burmantofts, Mabgate, and Lincoln Green is more than a physical location, but a symbol of ESA's profound relationship with, and commitment to, the community it serves. The longevity of its presence testifies to its embeddedness within the locality and the care it holds for its surroundings.

Over the years the artist-led organisation has acted as a catalyst for numerous initiatives aimed at protecting the local vernacular and communities at stake, and projects such as the Neighbourhood Forum (East Street Arts, n.d.b) are an example for ESA's site-based work, highlighting its approach to engaging with communities through art, finding local partners (i.e. Burmantofts Senior Action, MAFWA, Leeds Refugee Forum and LCC) and creating an interactive programme of activities aimed at encouraging locals to engage in discussion about the future of their neighbourhood. Jon Wakeman (2020a) talks about ESA's approach to neighbourhood planning,² emphasising that 'art and

² Introduced in the Localism Act 2011, Neighbourhood Planning grants communities the legal authority to guide development in their area. Essentially, it's a community-crafted document determining where

creativity are some of the best ways to bring people together, have conversations about the future and dream about what we want the neighbourhood to look and feel like for the people who live here'. Wakeman further speaks about ESA's motivation in this project:

We've been based in Mabgate, Burmantofts and Lincoln Green since 2004 and we're aware the neighbourhood is going to change a lot in the near future – it already is, we can see it. We love this neighbourhood, and want to make sure that its residents are at the forefront of how it might change (Wakeman, 2020a).

Figure 155 - Photograph of the Summer School co-creating the Neighbourhood Plan.
Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

new structures, like homes and offices, can be established. It prioritises local knowledge over decisions by the Local Planning Authority and serves as a vital instrument to steer suitable development in desired locations (Wakeman, 2020a).

The Mabgate, Lincoln Green & Burmantofts Neighbourhood Forum AGM hosted at The Anglers Club, in February 2023, saw over 70 people who came together to elect a new Chair and Secretary for the forum. But beyond the roles and responsibilities, the most significant contribution was the Priorities Plan, a piece of legislation co-written by residents and supported by ESA and LCC, that outlines the foundational principles for the development of the neighbourhood (W. Foster, 2023). ESA has been a facilitator and crucial partner in organising and hosting the monthly, now community-driven, forum meetings, ensuring an ongoing dialogue for the continued development of the Priorities Plan. Once in place, ‘the neighbourhood will have the legal grounds to reject or amend planning requests in the area, as well as protect and strengthen what they already have’ (W. Foster, 2023).

Figure 156 - Photograph of ESA staff and participants to the Summer School co-creating the Neighbourhood Plan. Photograph: ESA (n.d.). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Creating a Neighbourhood Plan is a long term process, and can take up to five years. We've tried to lay the foundations for this plan so that it doesn't face too many challenges along the way by consulting with local residents, businesses, councillors and a wide range of stakeholders who are invested in ensuring our neighbourhood get the right kind of development, in the right place (Wakeman, 2020a).

The care for its locality is ever-present in all the work ESA does. While its reach is international, the artist-led organisation firmly believes in the value of locality, and this was emphasised by Wakeman at the 'AHRA PhD Symposium 2021 – Researching (in) the City', with a fictional anecdote:

I have this project in mind, [...] a 25-year project and it's a great way of illustrating where I feel we're at. I want someone that's born in the neighbourhood where we're working [...], that will go into a school, that will have culture as part of it [and] that we're working to help deliver that will go through their education.

[They] will see art as a serious career choice [...] because it has its career avenues, who will end up in the local college, which is next to us, and whether they go to university or not, is another thing, but they will come from the background or it could be mixed heritage, it could be whatever.

But that person [...] could then in 25 years' time [...] be running one element of this organisation. Because they've had the opportunities, and that cycle is possible. And that those opportunities have been there and put in front of them [...] That's the big 25-year project [...] we're here for [...], and I hope[...] that's the trajectory and hope the organisation [...] it's able to work with people. To make people's lives better through culture (Wakeman, 2021a).

Figure 157 - Cover of AHRA Zine. Image: AHRA (2021). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

While the vision is still in its formative stages, early indications of its fruition are evident in the connections and community ties formed through the Art Hostel project. Rhian Aitken (personal communication, 20 July 2023) emphasised the concerted effort to develop genuine social value in the Mabgate area, with the Art Hostel acting as the

catalyst. Leading the hostel, Aitken operates with an inclusive mindset, actively involving the local community in various capacities, including opportunities for locals to take on roles such as reception, guest care, cleaning, and gardening, providing them with valuable experience and references. This leads to a reciprocal relationship: while community members gain practical skills and a sense of purpose, the Art Hostel strengthens its ties with the local community, establishing a stronger position in its environment. As Aitken (2022) noted, this project is ‘not about gentrification. It’s not about the artists coming in and making things pretty; it’s about actually giving the people a voice and helping them make decisions about what’s happening to them and their families’ (Aitken in Parkes, 2022).

Furthermore, the Art Hostel while rooted in the local, is simultaneously developing international networks by actively engaging with volunteers from around the world, highlighting the hostel’s global connectivity and the rich cultural exposure it promotes (R. Aitken, personal communication, 20 July 2023). By sharing experiences across borders and working with international peers, ESA brings global knowledge back home and amplifies local voices on the global stage. However, as Wakeman (2021a) astutely observes, global interactions, though valuable, are not the sole measure of impactful work. ‘We can do all the international stuff’, he notes, ‘but we can’t make a difference with that alone’. Instead, true change is rooted in a commitment to the immediate environment. Wakeman emphasises the importance of returning ‘back to the local’, to embed oneself in the tangible realities that surround and ‘spend time with it’, and only then can one truly engage with, understand, and contribute meaningfully to a community. This ethos serves as a guiding principle for ESA, accentuating the enduring power and meaning of local engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.

The essence of an urban activator, as demonstrated through this thesis, lies in its embeddedness - a quality that is not just important but absolutely critical for genuine, organic, and long-lasting activation of space. Both literature findings and embedded research emphasise the significance of a grassroots approach, one that builds upon and improves the existing character of a context. ESA exemplifies this approach in its mission, which consistently stresses the centrality of embeddedness in all its operations, regardless of the project scale or scope.

6.5 Leaving a legacy

ESA has always championed a DIY ethos of spatial freedom and self-expression, harmoniously aligned with values of sustainability and climate consciousness. This approach was fuelled by a vision to establish a lasting legacy, ensuring that the artist-led organisation continues to positively influence its locality beyond the tenure of its founders Watson and Wakeman.

Originating from the modest beginnings at East Street Mills, a typical Victorian textile mill initially rented for just three months, Watson and Wakeman (2021e) recognised potential amidst the aging infrastructure. The emergence of their DIY spirit was partly out of necessity and partly a natural evolution, granting artists the autonomy to transform and appropriate the space uniquely to their practice. As detailed in Section 1.3, venturing into this new territory meant overcoming challenges and learning on the way and, in order to sustain affordability, Watson and Wakeman quickly sharpened their management skills, focusing on increasing the occupancy of studio spaces. In the absence of external funding, artists were encouraged to demarcate and personalise their areas using their resources, leading to a mosaic of individualistic and creative studio spaces. This environment created an atmosphere of collaborative individuality, their initiative setting a precedent for ESA for embedding the ethos of spatial freedom, and self-directed creativity continuing to guide the organisation's approach to community engagement and space management.

The same approach was followed starting 2004 when ESA relocated to its permanent home, Patrick Studios. With support from architects Bauman Lyons and the West Yorkshire Playhouse, St Patrick Social Club was offered to ESA as a venue. A successful capital grant application to ACE, ERDF, and SRB (Single Regeneration Budget), amounting to £1.6 million, initiated the next chapter for ESA when they acquired the social club between 1999 and 2000 (Wakeman, 2021d). ESA was intent on retaining traces of the social club's past, even at the architects' dissatisfaction (K. Watson & J. Wakeman, personal communication, 3 August 2022). As the renovation progressed, the building unveiled its character and hidden stories; one moving memory conserved was the wallpaper in the boardroom; this artifact, which Watson and Wakeman were passionate about preserving, stands as evidence to the building's rich heritage and cherished memories. Its conservation acts as a continuous reminder to all

who interact with the space, connecting them to the hidden histories of the place and the integral role they play in shaping the organisation and its ethos.

Drawing on the case studies, the Art Hostel is a representative example of nurturing a sustainable focus whilst creating legacy. Despite the shift in location from Kirkgate to Mabgate, its essence remained unchanged: a strong commitment to sustainability, climate consciousness and local heritage celebration, evident in every aspect of the project, from the reuse of existing derelict buildings to the inclusion and adaptation of pre-loved pieces of furniture and objects. As explored in Section 5.3.2, although most components found purposes in the new hostel, others took residence in different ESA locations like Convention House and Patrick Studios or await in storage for their eventual return, highlighting the delicate amalgamation of circular economies, emerging not out of force but naturally, as a response to each place. The Art Hostel's future may be anchored in Mabgate, but its reach could extend further (R. Aitken, personal communication, 20 July 2023), with the hostel's design and artist collaborations beautifully merging together local history and identity. The resulted spaces pay respect to and resound with their architectural setting as well as flourish in a harmonious, interdependent relationship with it, thereby ensuring the legacy of the organisation through a sustainable and embedded approach.

The reinvention of the Art Hostel in Mabgate represented more than just a physical move; it was a continuation and evolution of its pioneering spirit. The process of relocating the hostel into a new shell and context preserved its legacy in a transformed guise but also became a repository of resilience and adaptability, learned experiences and knowledge. These experiences have been carried over to the Mabgate location, infusing it with a heightened sense of purpose and understanding of wider societal matters. Situated within the historic St. Patrick's Church's former presbytery, the hostel responds to themes like politics, history, climate change, and nostalgia, influencing Lorna Parkes (2022) to describe it as 'a massive symphony of imagination unleashed'.

In this spirit, the field journals respond to the Art Hostel's rich identity and histories by deliberately mirroring the distinctive character of each hostel, whilst capturing the fluid transition from one to another. These journals document the physical transformations yet also symbolise the ethos of repurposing and upcycling, reflecting the ever-evolving life cycle of the spaces they represent.

Recently honoured with MBEs, Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman look back at their foundational goal for ESA: to ensure that ‘...artists deserve warmer, cleaner and more professional spaces’ (Watson in Connolly, 2023). This vision has shaped their ambition to create an enduring legacy that would transcend their personal involvement:

[I]f we were going to do something it had to have a legacy, and that legacy had to be something that no matter how long me and Jon stayed involved it would carry on (Watson in Connolly, 2023).

This philosophy is vividly evident in ESA’s journey: from its uncertain beginnings defined by a DIY, grassroots approach, and embedded and participatory nature to its formalisation and evolution into one of the most prominent artist-led organisations in the country. Each step has been carefully orchestrated to ensure that ESA is not just a fleeting presence but a sustainable, influential force in the UK art sphere. The legacy it aims to build is one of lasting impact, transcending generations, and continuing to support, inspire, and nurture the artist-led community long into the future.

7 Conclusion

As this thesis comes to an end, I reflect on the journey undertaken and the knowledge developed in pursuit of understanding the complex dynamics of artist-led spaces and their role as urban activators within urban contexts. This concluding chapter aims to synthesise the findings in response to the central research questions that have guided this exploration:

What is the potential role as **URBAN ACTIVATOR of artist-led spatial production in the city?**

This thesis presented an expanded definition of the urban activator as a practice or mode of operating that emerges in urban environments characterised by top-down approaches resulting in social and economic decline and uncertainty. It typically emerges in contexts dominated by vacant spaces, in areas lacking connectivity, access to employment, and resources, where diverse communities are often overlooked by conventional urban planning. Defined by its grassroots, bottom-up approach to urban decline, the urban activator acts as a catalyst for change through strategies that revitalise rather than sanitise urban environments. This concept evolves as part of an embedded approach advocating for growth that is organic, considerate, and reflective of the local context, amplifying intrinsic qualities and potentials of a place rather than imposing external visions, as typically seen in the process of place making.

In this framework, artist-led spaces are positioned as urban activators, extending beyond traditional art forms to traverse with spheres like urban planning, architecture, community engagement, cultural economy, and social justice. As synthesised through strategically curated examples captured in Chapter 4, these spaces amplify voices of populations who live, work and engage with local contexts, often excluded from urban discourse, acting as mediators and facilitators between them and local governance. Their socially engaged practice demonstrates how artist-led spaces can transform and activate urban environments, emphasising them key agents in shaping vibrant, sustainable urban futures.

To this central question, ESA functioned as primary lens for research and analysis, demonstrating the ability to operate and act as an urban activator through three case studies ('A Christmas Pudding for Henry', the 'Art Hostel', and Hidden Stories of New Briggate'). Across 30 years of activity, ESA has exemplified a bottom-up, contextually responsive approach to urban matters that is embedded and actively involved with the community. This builds on the theoretical framework defined in Section 4.11, highlighting that ESA illustrates the multifaceted ways an artist-led space can catalyse urban transformation. This includes elements of self-organisation, activism, space provision, entrepreneurship, resilience, and sustainability. While this model holds potential for replication by other artist-led organisations, the evolving landscape - marked by diminishing local state and arts funding - necessitates the exploration of new urban activation tools. These might include forging new partnerships, employing commercially minded real estate strategies to maintain assets, and expanding into other sectors through collaborations.

What types of **SPACES AND ECONOMIES** are **ACTIVATED** through artist-led spatial production?

The second line of inquiry focused on the types of spaces and economies that are activated through artist-led spatial production, with ESA serving as the primary lens for analysis. This aspect of the research examined the transformative impact of artist-led initiatives on urban settings, analysing how these interventions transform and repurpose space, thus influencing local economies and social dynamics. The research linked academic discourse with embedded research at ESA, highlighting the agency and responsiveness of artist-led spaces in urban contexts. These spaces often find themselves at crossroads - facing threats of homogenisation, gentrification, or other imposed changes that risk eroding the unique character and identity of local communities. This, alongside somewhat confusing legislation primarily benefitting the private sector (i.e. Permitted Development rights) can often undermine the vitality of high streets and diminish local pride and people's perceptions and experiences of urban contexts.

As synthesised in Chapter 4, the urban activator emerges within and activates a constellation of distinct, yet interconnected spaces and economies, reflecting the intricate and often challenging nature of urban contexts, especially amid shifting social, political, and economic dynamics. Several key circumstances conducive to the emergence of the urban activator have been identified, such as the significant retail shifts experienced in the last 50 years in the UK, with the decline of speciality stores and the rise of large multinational retail chains and online shopping profoundly affecting local high streets and their social fabric. Furthermore, continuous changes in work culture, especially post-pandemic, have led to a re-evaluation of commercial space usage and an increase in vacant space in urban contexts. Other factors connect to notions of counterculture and activism playing a significant role in challenging mainstream urban narratives through alternative perspectives and solutions that promote inclusivity and community participation. Technological advancements, including AI and digital tools, also provide new ways to understand and interact with urban spaces, pushing the boundaries of traditional urban planning and design.

These conditions, whilst in some ways can limit the urban activator's possibility to intervene in urban matters, also present opportunities for meaningful engagement and embeddedness that may not otherwise be possible. There is a real opportunity to repurpose vacant retail and commercial spaces in ways that benefit the communities and respond to their needs. ESA demonstrated this with its resourceful approach to repurposing vacant space such as the Art Hostel in Kirkgate (Section 5.3.2), evolved from an embedded approach and understanding of the specificities of its locale. Another example is the Neighbourhood Forum in Mabgate (Section 6.5), which emerged from a rich understanding of the context and its diverse community. This forum facilitated the development of the Neighbourhood Plan, a tool that represents the community's interests regarding their locality, whilst also celebrates its rich culture and diversity, demonstrating how artist-led spaces can effectively contribute to and evolve urban narratives.

What are the **TENSIONS** and **TRADE-OFFS** between artist-led spatial production and key stakeholders? How do these dynamics contribute to the wider cultural economy and urban sustainability?

Finally, the thesis addressed the complex relationship between artist-led spaces and their communities and stakeholders, exploring the tensions and trade-offs inherent in these relationships. This study synthesised how artist-led spaces respond to the challenges of balancing artistic integrity, financial viability, and stakeholder expectations, whilst contributing to the wider cultural economy and advocating for sector sustainability.

As explained in Section 4.5, artist-led organisations face numerous challenges in maintaining sustainability and resilience when dependent on external funding to sustain their practice. The complex and often inaccessible bureaucratic processes of fundraising can lead many artist-led groups and practitioners into precarious situations, forcing them to take additional employment to support their practice. Research into ESA evidenced the advantages of having an in-house fundraising expertise, illustrating a direct correlation between organisational resilience and the ability to support artists during financially challenging times (i.e. Cultural Recovery Fund during the pandemic). This necessity often leads to a fine balance between financial stability and maintaining creative independence and freedom of expression (Wakeman, 2021a). However, it remains unclear to what degree is the creative independence affected by funders' requirements and ambitions, and to what extent is ESA adjusting its practice and approach to align with funding criteria. Wakeman (2021a) refers to this process as an 'ethical dilemma' and it warrants further scrutiny.

ESA's transparency regarding fundraising and relationships with its stakeholders enforces my perspective of the artist-led organisation as something more than another cog in the system, but an integral and dedicated entity necessary in the artist-led sector and beyond. ESA's approach to funding is strategically aligned to its mission to provide artist support, influencing the development of a real estate portfolio that generates the necessary infrastructure to fulfil its mission. This strategy has proven effective in mitigating precarity and maintaining economic resilience, enabling ESA to expand its

property portfolio through various funding mechanisms, including local state funds and arm's-length bodies. The investment in real estate, while financially demanding, is essential for preserving ESA's legacy and ensuring its future stability. It also allows ESA the autonomy to respond to important matters concerning their locality such as aggressive gentrification and top-down neighbourhood initiatives, thus making a positive contribution and impact to its urban context. For instance, Artist House 45 is an example of ESA's commitment to providing affordable artist workspaces and housing for young artists struggling to sustain their practice whilst often transitioning from student accommodation.

Whilst many artist-led organisations tremble at the threshold of commercial engagement, ESA demonstrates an entrepreneurial, yet empathetic approach to supporting the artist-led sector and its locales, illustrating that embracing a balanced commercial perspective is not just beneficial but essential for its resilience and sustainability. This dual role is necessary in the contemporary context and may act as a model for other artist-led organisations battling the same issues. Critically analysing ESA's body of work within the context of other artist-led organisations (Section 4.9) allows for an understanding and recognition of its achieved stature that succeeds in retaining its essence and purpose, avoiding the trappings of institutionalisation. ESA's journey is not just an indication of organisational resilience but also a call to the artist-led community, demonstrating that with transparency and strategic adaptability to current times, one can thrive without losing one's ethos in the complex battle of art and survival.

7.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis makes an important contribution to knowledge by expanding the understanding of artist-led spaces as strategic, networked urban activators with potential impacts that extend regionally and beyond. It presents a new approach to urban contexts, challenging traditional paradigms of place making often used by the private sector as a transactional tool for branding new developments. In contrast, this work proposes urban activation as an embedded, contextually responsive process co-produced within communities, offering an in-depth understanding of community needs and urban dynamics, while recognising the significant contribution of artist-led spaces. Unlike conventional methods, urban activation generates knowledge through engagement across diverse locales, communities, and scales, facilitating the transfer of knowledge and adapting strategies to the specificities of each place. This evolved dialogue between space, practice, and place emphasises the importance of connecting with the context while also developing relationships with various organisations and environments, thus amplifying the impact and relevance of urban interventions.

This thesis demonstrates that ESA is an urban activator through a research timeline from 1993 to 2023, and synthesised under similar conditions, this model has potential for replication by similar organisations. However, as we look ahead, the ground will inevitably continue to shift, and with the continuous decline in local state and arts funding, innovative solutions are crucial. This study demonstrates that spaces and practices such as ESA are opportunistic and relational by nature. To sustain its role as an urban activator and effectively manage its growing asset portfolio, ESA needs to develop new partnerships and networks, and demonstrate resourcefulness in securing funding, nonetheless, as this thesis reveals, ESA has the capacity to adapt to shifting contexts – an essential quality in ensuring its long-term sustainability and resilience.

Furthermore, this thesis bridges gaps between traditionally disparate audiences - academia, the artist-led sector, and the public and private sectors - highlighting the immense potential for transdisciplinary collaboration. As discussed in Chapter 4, the study introduces new approaches for engaging and responding to urban contexts through cross-sector collaborations and co-production. As an active architect-researcher, I am excited by the prospects this research opens for cross-sector collaborations, realising their transformative potentials on urban spaces and their impact on

communities. This thesis emphasises the socially engaged role of the architect-researcher, where reflection and subjectivity, particularly evident in the production of field journals, have become fundamental to the contribution to knowledge. These elements support the process of urban activation as one that is deeply embedded, leaving powerful imprints on all involved. This demonstrates that urban activation is both possible and effective when actors are actively engaged and present, highlighting the importance and potential of the architect-researcher's subjectivity in understanding the places explored and their narratives. Recognising the complex challenges urban environments face in the UK, this thesis advocates for a transdisciplinary approach rooted in the strengths and agencies of each sector, developing innovative urban solutions, and paving the way for creating more inclusive, dynamic, and resilient urban futures.

7.2 Limitations and Further Research

This thesis acknowledges its limitations, particularly in fully addressing the question of change within local economies due to the circumstances under which the research was conducted and the embedded research approach employed. While the focus was on exploring how urban activators perform and operate within urban contexts, future research could investigate the specific impacts of urban activation. Additionally, further research could investigate the complex dynamics of distinct sectors collaborating through legislative frameworks such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).

There is a significant potential for the artist-led sector to transcend advisory roles and become active contributors in shaping urban environments that so desperately require more than retail and commercial space to evoke a genuine sense of place and belonging. This work has demonstrated that the arts, with their unique capacity to animate and humanise spaces, play a key role in this evolving urban narrative, significantly contributing to the collective memory and identity of cities, transforming our urban landscapes into places of economic exchange, culture, connection, and shared human experience.

7.3 Coda

As I draw this thesis to a close, my heart is full of hope and excitement for the next chapter in my professional and academic journey. It is my sincere wish that this work draws your interest whilst also provokes a spark for further exploration into the rich, transdisciplinary dialogue between the diverse audiences it seeks to unify. This conclusion is not an end but a threshold to a broader, more collaborative urban landscape where disciplines converge, learn, and evolve together, and where I continue to search for my own place, still somewhere at the fringe of changing realms, transferring from one to another, learning from all, sharing across, coexisting...

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Participation in conferences, symposia, and other property events

2020

- **8th October 2020: Approaching Research Practice in Architecture**
Presenting PhD Research Methodology
Participation in Six Module Workshop following the Conference investigating theoretical positioning, speculative ethics, methodologies, and architectural design histories.
- **4th December 2020: Research after COVID, SHU**
Presenting PhD approach and amendments required due to COVID-19

2021

- **31st March 2021: AHRA PhD Symposium Researching (in) the City**
Presenting PhD Research Methodology

2022

- **24th February 2022: Bisnow London**
Chairing the Panel Discussion ‘The Future of BtR and the Impact on our Cities’
- **5th May 2022: Place North-West Future of Residential Conference**
Presentation of the Role of Place making in BtR
Participation in Panel Discussion ‘The Evolution of the BtR Product in the UK’
- **17th & 18th May 2022: UKREiiF**
Presentation of PhD Research as part of MODA’s New Generation Futures
Talks Chairing the Panel Discussion ‘Diversity in Leadership’
Chairing the Panel Discussion ‘Vertical Integration in Casa by Moda’

- **26th May 2022: Bisnow Manchester**
Chairing the Panel Session ‘ESG & Place making Driving Growth’
- **28th June 2022: CIH Fringe Event / Women in Property**
Participation in Panel Discussion ‘SFR Market’
- **24th November 2022: Bisnow The UK's Living Sector Update, London**
Chairing the Panel Discussion ‘Lifecycle renting strategies, affordable housing and residential's role in community-led regeneration’

2023

- **25th January 2023: Engage 5 Place making Roundtable**
Participation in Panel Discussion ‘Value of Place making’
- **24th March 2023: Repurposing Places for Social and Environmental Resilience International Conference, London**
Presentation of PhD research
- **20th April 2023: Women in Property: What would a city designed by women look like?**
Presentation of Feminist research study alongside Chapman Taylor colleagues
Evanthia Simitsi and Anna Loasby
- **13th June 2023: Material Source Roundtable, Manchester**
Participation in Roundtable Discussion ‘Is BtR/Co-living going to be the bedrock of Manchester’s property sector?’
- **24th June 2023: EURA2023 Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland**
Presentation of PhD research
- **12th July 2023: CIH Fringe Event / Accoya Roundtable**

Participation in Roundtable Discussion ‘The Role of Place making’

- **30th August 2023: Accoya Spotlight Architect Video**

Participation in ‘Spirit of the Place’ Series through a Spotlight Video

2024

- **16th January 2024: Centre for Alternative Technology**

Presentation of PhD research

- **17th May 2024: Material Source Interview, Manchester**

Interview on PhD research and Future Career Aspirations

- **26th June 2024: Forum for Built Environment**

Leading a Walking Tour focusing on Urban Activation in Manchester

- **12th November 2024: ESG EDGE Property Week**

Judging the ESD EDGE Property Week Awards and Participation in Conference

Figure 158 – Chair of ‘The Future of Build-to-Rent and the Impact on our Cities’ Chair.
Photograph: Bisnow (2022). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 159 – Chair of the 'Diversity in Leadership' discussion. Photograph: UKREiiF
(2022). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 160 – Chair of discussion for ‘The Manchester Property Outlook’ Conference.
Photograph: Bisnow (2022). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 161 - Presentation of ‘The Future of Residential’ Conference. Photograph: Place
North West (2022). Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 162 - Place making Roundtable, Material Source. Photograph: Ainsworth (2023).
Image removed due to copyright reasons.



Figure 163 - Presentation of PhD Research, CAT 2024. Photograph: Serban (2024).
Image reproduced with permission.

8.2 Appendix 2: Research questions diagram

+
**What is the potential role as URBAN
 ACTIVATOR of artist-led spatial production in
 the city?**

Thesis title:
 Artist-led spatial production in the city:
 East Street Arts as urban activator

What is an urban activator?

Can East Street Arts be described as one?

What are the different tactics and modes of
 working that make East Street Arts an urban
 activator?

Objectives:

- To develop a working definition of an urban activator within the context of artist-led spatial practice.
- To explore and articulate the concept of artist-led space as urban activator.
- To analyse a selected range or artist-led spaces and their contribution to spatial production (modes of working, tactics, understanding of space etc.)
- To conduct an in-depth analysis of ESA's spatial production and its processes and modes of working in the city.
- To investigate the current policy landscape (private and public sectors dynamics).

Methods:

- Literature review of artist-led space context, place making, urban activation and transdisciplinary co-produced examples in urban contexts to allow for an understanding of the gap in the discourse.
- Survey of the field.
- Analysis of East Street Arts through selected case studies and observations, mapping, interviews, surveys, archival research, and field journals.

**01. WHAT TYPES OF SPACES AND
 ECONOMIES ARE ACTIVATED
 THROUGH (artist-led) SPATIAL
 PRODUCTION?**

What kind of spaces is
 East Street Arts producing?

Objectives:

- To analyse the possibilities artist-led space presents through an in-depth exploration of a series of case studies.
- To examine the relationship between artist-led spatial production and stakeholders.
- To investigate the spaces and economies activated in East Street Arts' spatial production, as well as to compare the findings to other artist-led organisations' approaches and tactics.

Methods:

- Literature review of artist-led context and the opportunities this type of space can produce.
- Development of Artist-led directory to create a comprehensive scoping of the artist-led sphere.
- Analysis of East Street Arts' relationship with its key partners through observations, interviews, mapping, archival research, and field journals.

**02. WHAT ARE THE TENSIONS
 AND TRADE-OFFS BETWEEN
 ARTIST-LED SPATIAL
 PRODUCTION AND FUNDING
 ENTITIES?**

How do these dynamics contribute
 to the wider cultural economy and
 urban sustainability?

Objectives:

- To analyse the relationship between artist-led organisations and their key partners using ESA as a primary case study.
- To explore the strategies and operational methods of ESA in response to the current economic environment.
- To investigate how artist-led spaces like ESA navigate the complexities of funding relationships, addressing the tensions and trade-offs involved.
- To assess the contribution of artist-led spaces to the wider cultural economy.
- To investigate perceptions of artist-led spaces and their value in urban settings from the perspectives of various stakeholders.

Methods:

- Literature review on UK's policy context.
- Interviews with ESA Business Development Manager, LCC Regeneration Officer) and observations designed to highlight East Street Arts' approach to funding.
- Analysis of private sector approaches with focused discussion on commercial developers and the Public-Private Partnership framework.

Cross-sectors collaboration
 and its opportunities

What are the opportunities for
 the arts and architecture within
 spatial practice?

Changing positions of
 observation and critique



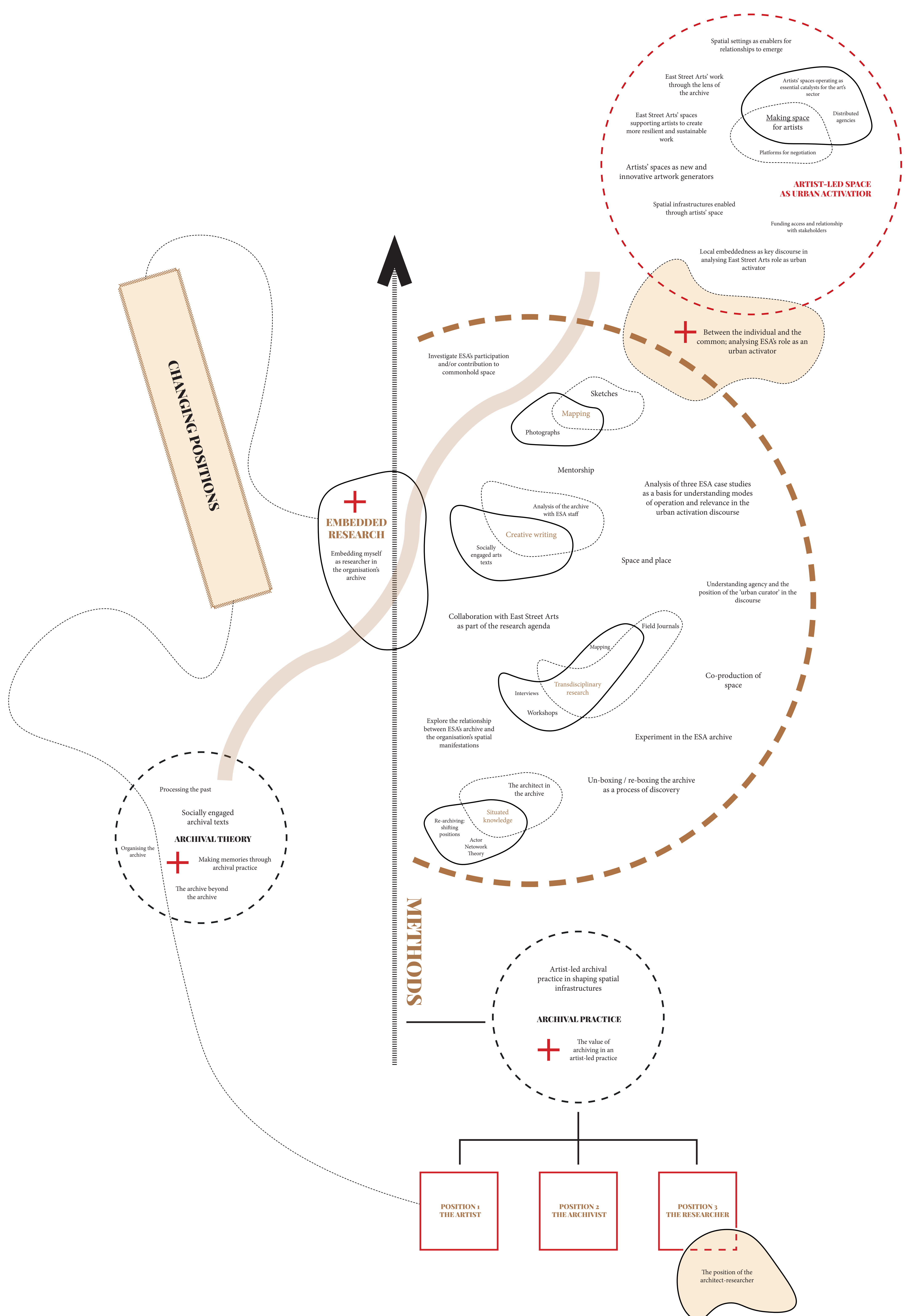
Key research question

Aims

Objectives

Methodology

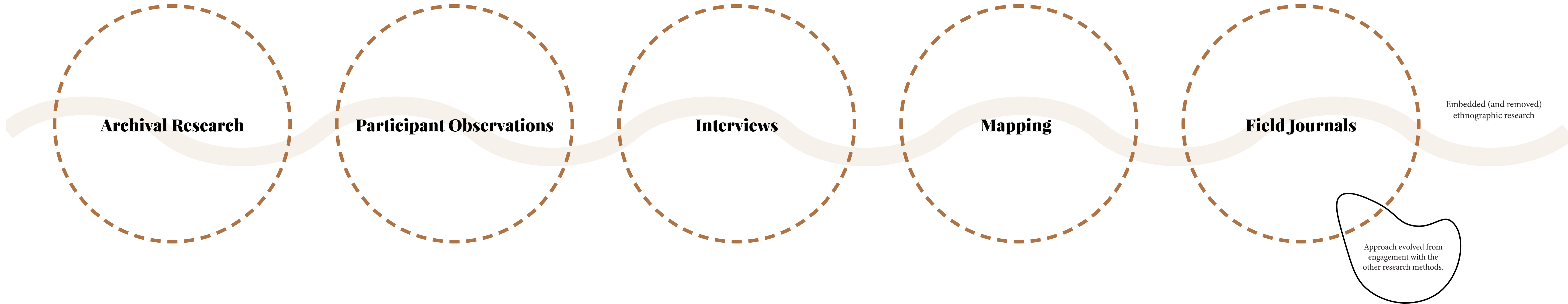
8.3 Appendix 3: Diagram exploring different research positions and themes



+ Important factor in research
 Literature focus Methodology Artist-led space

A diagrammatic exploration of my research focus

8.4 Appendix 4: Diagram of research methods explored



8.5 Appendix 5: Literature review diagram

Legend:

This map represents a visual exploration of my research concerns and literature focus. The map has evolved organically throughout the first year of the Ph.D. and it has been curated in such way that it emphasizes the idea of constantly being exposed to information that is funnelled into the discourse, dispersed and disseminated in different ways and further released into other thoughts ideas and reproductions.

- Critical position of research
- Important factor in research
- RESEARCH AREAS**
- RESEARCH THEMES**

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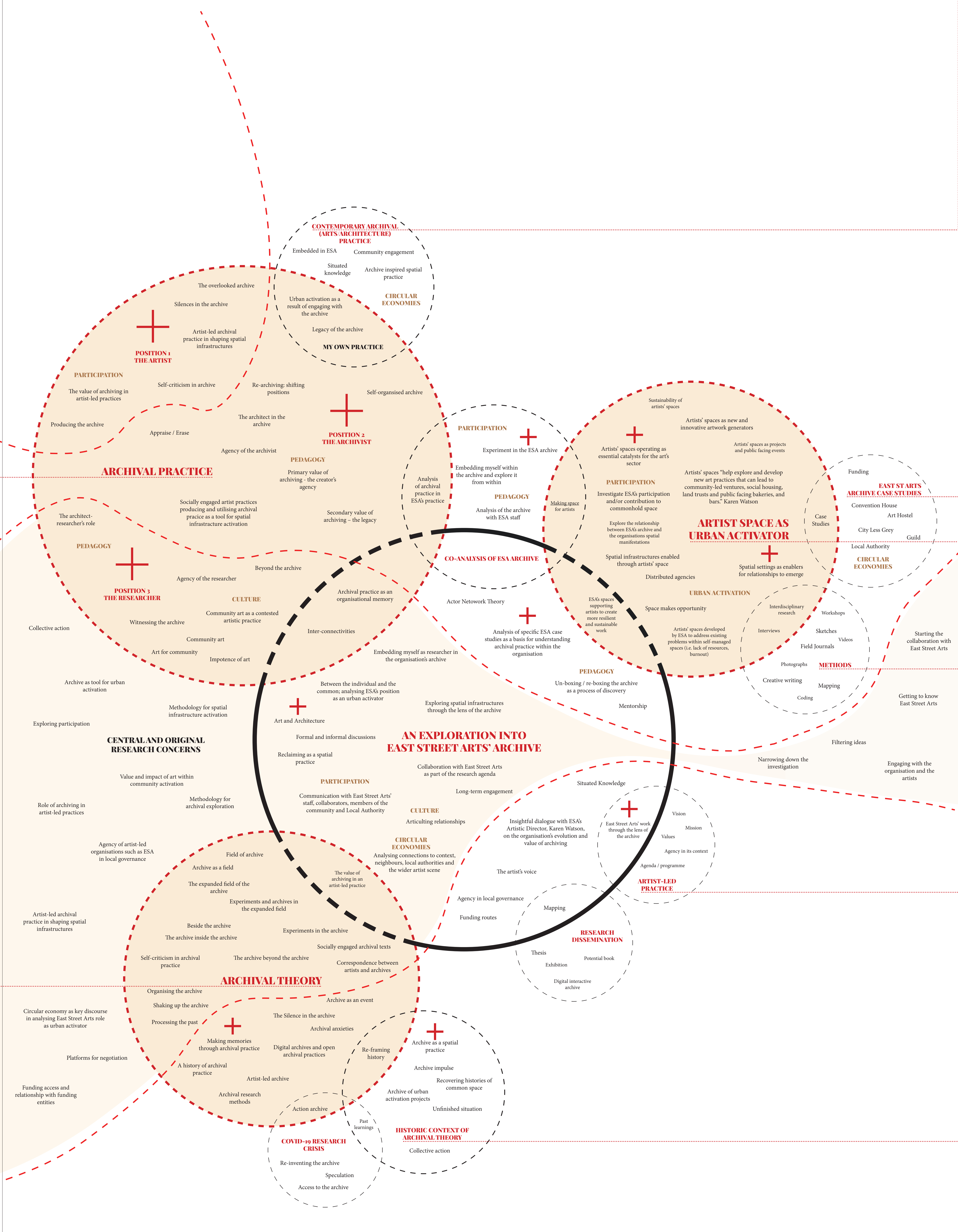
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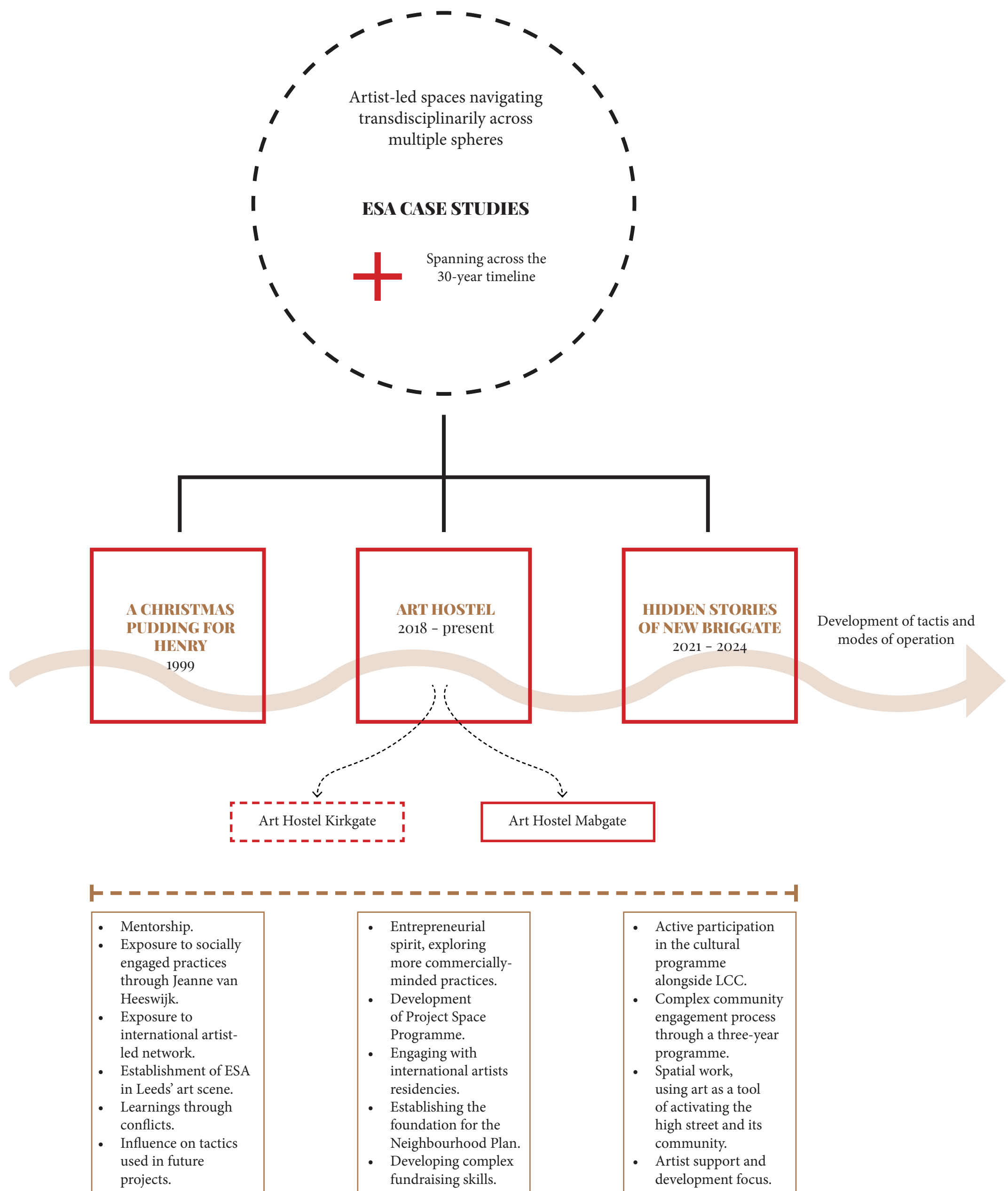
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A diagrammatic exploration of my literature and methodology review

8.6 Appendix 6: Mapping of ESA case studies



A diagrammatic exploration of the three East Street Arts case studies investigated

8.7 Appendix 7: The Artist-led Directory

UK-based Art Space	Location	Dedicated Artist-Led Programme	Arts Incubator	Non-Profit/Project	Community Arts	Studios	Founded	Funding	Organisational Status	Mission Statement	Tactics	Website
East Street Arts	Leeds	●	●	●	●	●	1993	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund, Local Councils	Company limited by guarantee, registered charity	The artist-led organisation develops projects that are community focused and primarily located in multicultural lower income neighbourhoods within the city or at its edges, in an attempt to use art as a tool to combat aggressive gentrification and address the climate crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling underused space; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Initiating temporary initiatives; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Facilitating discussion; Establishing robust links to funding and commissioning bodies; Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.eaststreetarts.org.uk/
Phoenix	Brighton	●		●	●	●	1995	Arts Council, Brighton & Hove City Council, The Chalk Cliff Trust, Foyle Foundation, public	Public, non-profit	A gallery, an education programme, residencies, events, and provides over 100 artists' studios.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Establishing robust links to funding and commissioning bodies. 	www.phoenixbrighton.org
Spike Island	Bristol		●	●	●	●	1992	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund, Local Councils	Public, non-profit	Splke Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design. A vibrant hub for production, presentation and debate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.spikeisland.org.uk
Eastside Projects	Birmingham	●		●	●		2008	Arts Council, Birmingham City University, Here for Culture	Public, non-profit	Eastside Projects is an artist run multiverse, commissioning, producing and presenting experimental art practices and demonstrating ways in which art may be useful as part of society. Eastside Projects provides vital infrastructure, supports best practice and works to expand the role of the artist run space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.eastsideprojects.org
Grand Union	Birmingham	●	●	●	●	●	2010	Arts Council England, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Birmingham City University, Bruntwood, Architectural Heritage Fund	Public, non-profit	Run by a small group of artists and curators, Grand Union is part of a growing artistic community with the production of new art and ideas at its heart. Grand Union provides high quality, affordable studios for visual artists in the heart of a supportive creative community, with frequent opportunities for members of the public to visit behind the scenes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Establishing robust links to funding and commissioning bodies. 	www.grand-union.org.uk
Workplace Gallery	Gateshead	●					2003	Private	Private limited	A contemporary art gallery run by artists Paul Moss and Miles Thurlow that represents a portfolio of emerging and established artists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.workplacegallery.co.uk
Red Gallery of Contemporary Art	Hull	●		●			1997		Non-profit	RED is an independent exhibition space and 'laboratory' for contemporary art. RED is a non-profit making initiative, run collectively by a small group of local artists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.red-gallery.com
Black Dogs	Leeds	●		●			2003	Not-regularly-funded, voluntary	Non-profit, voluntary, nomadic	Black Dogs is an art collective formed in Leeds in 2003. Black Dogs artistic and critical interests are broad and varied, underpinned by an interest in art's potential as a social practice. Black Dogs is maintained through the dedication of spare-time and a collective belief that time outside of paid employment can be used productively and enjoyably to problematise the capitalist constructs of 'work' and 'leisure'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing collaborative learning projects; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.black-dogs.org
The Tetley	Leeds				●	●	2006	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund, Leeds City Council, Arts Leeds, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Carlsberg UK	Public, non-profit	The Tetley is an organisation that engages creatively with the practice of contemporary visual art. An ethos of supporting, enabling and working collaboratively is central to our philosophy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.thetetley.org
Metal	Liverpool London Southend-on-Sea Peterborough	●	●		●	●	2002	Arts Council, Local Councils, Vivacity Peterborough Culture and Leisure, Northern	Public, non-profit	We work to provide the catalyst that can transform the potential of people and places through great art and inspiring ideas. We support artists, working in all disciplines, at all career levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Enabling underused space; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.metalculture.com
Static	Liverpool	●	●	●		●	est 1998	Static funds its projects through a combination of its own revenue streams (art, architecture and writing commissions, space hires, music events and sales of product) and a mixture of public funding (arts and academic) and private sector sponsorship.	Public, non-profit	The Static organisation is concerned with the processes of creative production, exchange and trade and the structures that support these things. Static are often commissioned to undertake art, architecture, academic and writing projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.statictrading.com
The Royal Standard	Liverpool	●	●	●	●	●	2006		Public	An artist-led gallery, studios and social workspace dedicated to promoting exchange, dialogue and experimentation, providing a supportive and critically engaged environment to work in.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Enabling underused space; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.the-royal-standard.com
Acme Studios	London-Bow	●	●	●	●	●	1972	Previously UK Arts Council, self-funded from March 2015	Public, non-profit	Acme supports over 700 artists and manages 573 studios in 15 buildings in Greater London, offering a wide range of high-quality, long-term and professionally-managed space including permanent new-build studios.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Enabling underused space; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.acme.org.uk
Bows Arts/ Nunnery Gallery	London-Bow				●	●	1994	Self-funded 94% Arts Council 3% Foundations 3%	Public, non-profit	Our mission is to support community renewal in East London by delivering Arts and Creative Services through our financially sustainable social enterprise model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Providing artists' mentorship and support. 	www.bowarts.org
The Showroom	London-City of Westminster				●	●	1983	Arts Council	Public, non-profit	We commission and produce art and discourse; providing an engaging, collaborative programme that challenges what art can be and do for a wide range of audiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.theshowroom.org
Almanac Projects	London-Dalston Lane	●			●		2013	Arts Council, Borough Councils, UK Lottery Fund	Public, non-profit, nomadic	A non-profit space dedicated to showing art in various forms and engaging with ways art can become a part of the daily rhythms of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.almanacprojects.com
Banner Repeater	London-Hackney	●					2009	Arts Council, Borough Councils, UK Lottery Fund	Public, non-profit, nomadic	Project space and reading room.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.bannerrepeater.org
Electra	London-Hackney	●		●	●		2003	Arts Council, British Council, Contemporary Music Network, Daiwa Foundation, Elephant Trust, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, Goethe-Institut London, Henry Moore Foundation etc.	Public, non-profit, nomadic	Electra is a contemporary art organisation which curates, commissions and produces projects by artists working across sound, moving image, performance and the visual arts. Electra's core aim is to foster a dialogue between a range of disciplines of contemporary artistic practice, to provide a platform for debate and engaged, dynamic investigations of urgent social, political and cultural questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.electra-productions.com
muf architecture/art	London-Hackney	●			●		1995	Private, grants	Private Limited	muf is an internationally recognised practice whose work is a collaboration between art and architecture – simultaneously pragmatic and endlessly ambitious. Projects range from urban design schemes to small-scale temporary interventions via landscapes and buildings – a continual dialogue between details and strategy. Interested in the design of public spaces, and in making spaces public, muf engage with, and build on, the capacity of local communities to deliver high quality and sustainable outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Facilitating discussion; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.muf.co.uk

UK-based Art Space	Location	Dedicated Artist-Led Programme	Arts Incubator	Non-Profit/Project	Community Arts	Studios	Founded	Funding	Organisational Status	Mission Statement	Tactics	Website
SPACE	London-Hackney	●	●	●	●	●	1968	Arts Council, Bloomberg, London Development Agency, ERDF, Local Councils.	Social enterprise, company limited by guarantee, registered charity	Our mission is to provide the space, resources and opportunities for people to create art, for people to engage with art and for people to develop their creative potential. By providing affordable studio space, we support artists throughout their careers. We complement this with an arts and education programme of exhibitions, events, neighbourhood-based learning and participation projects and training for both young people and professional artists. Our activities support the growth of individuals, encourage ownership of creativity and nurture a creative society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling underused space; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Initiating temporary initiatives; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Facilitating discussion; Establishing robust links to funding and commissioning bodies; Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.spacestudios.org.uk
Standpoint Gallery London	London-Hackney	●			●	●	2001	Arts Council England, Arts Council Wales, Chisenhale Studios, the Fenton Arts Trust	Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'limited' exemption, registered charity	Standpoint Studios is a registered charity comprising five large studios providing creative workspace for 15+ artists and makers, an Education Studio, and education and outreach workshops or events focused on providing direct, high-quality art-making opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Facilitating discussion; Establishing robust links to funding and commissioning bodies; Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.standpointlondon.co.uk/
Transition Two (previous Transition Gallery)	London-Hackney	●					2002		Public, non-profit	Transition is an independent gallery and publisher founded by artist Cathy Lomax. The gallery shows work by both emerging and established contemporary artists as well as producing publications and periodicals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.transitiongallery.co.uk
Lima Zulu	London-Haringey	●					2008		Public, non-profit	Project space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.limazulu.co.uk
Usurp Art	London-Harrow	●	●		●	●	2010	Arts Council, British Council	Registered charity	Usurp Art, a BAME led arts group, launched its arts space and studios in 2010, the first public art gallery and affordable artist studios in Harrow. We create experiences for culturally and neurodiverse communities, artists, musicians, scientists, poets, filmmakers, activists, writers, performers and designers to come together and create.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Engaging with audiences with diverse and risk-taking arts practices; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.usurp.org.uk
Kingsgate Workshops	London-Hampstead	●	●	●		●	1978	Public	Registered charity	Kingsgate Workshops is a multi-use art space housed within a labyrinthine Victorian factory, providing affordable workspace for an exciting mix of artists, makers and designers. Kingsgate Workshops' Public Programme encourages experimentation, production and critical discourse. We support a crossover between disciplines, an exchange of skills and the development of critical and timely conversations about process, image making and object making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.kingsgateworkshops.org.uk
Cubitt	London-Islington	●	●	●	●	●	1991	Arts Council, Outset (philanthropic arts funding)	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	Cubitt is an artist-led co-operative built on a belief in the value of art and artists in society. Cubitt enables contemporary visual arts practice to thrive as a critical, peer-led activity. This is achieved through the provision of co-operatively run studios in central London and unique development opportunities for curators interwoven with curatorial and artistic programmes, driven by an engagement with learning, participation and the social possibilities for art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.cubittartists.org.uk
Beaconsfield	London-Lambeth	●	●		●		1994	Public	Registered charity	Beaconsfield is a space for contemporary art based in the former Lambeth Ragged School. Beaconsfield is conceived as a concept rather than a place and offers a programme of artists' residencies and exhibitions, talks and interdisciplinary events curated by founding-directors David Crawforth and Naomi Siderfin who work closely with incoming artists to realise their creative objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.beaconsfield.ltd.uk
Block 336	London-Lambeth	●			●	●	2011	Arts Council England, Arts Council Ireland, Culture Ireland, Foyle Foundation, GIRLPOWER Collection, Lambeth Council, Mayor's Trust, Simmons & Simmons Charitable Foundation, Sky Arts and Wellcome Trust.	Registered charity	Block 336 is an artist-run project space, studio provider and UK registered charity that was founded in 2011. Our core purpose is to support artists by providing time, space and support to develop ambitious projects. We encourage artists to make new, site-specific work that they may not be able to realise elsewhere. We offer artists the freedom to experiment and push the limits of their studio practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.block336.com
Gasworks	London-Lambeth		●	●	●	●	1994	The Triangle Network, Lottery Fund, Arts Council	Registered charity	Gasworks is a non-profit contemporary visual art organisation working at the intersection between UK and international practices and debates. We provide studios for London-based artists; commission emerging UK-based and international artists to present their first major exhibitions in the UK; and develop a highly-respected international residencies programme, which offers rare opportunities for international artists to research and develop new work in London.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.gasworks.org.uk
RESOLVE Collective	London-Lambeth	●			●	●		Private, grants	Private limited	RESOLVE Collective is an interdisciplinary design collective who use architecture, art, engineering, and technology to address social issues in the built environment. Their work spans across different spatial settings, transitioning between working locally in their home neighbourhood in South London, to working across Europe, but still thinking about how they centre local practice and local knowledge and ideas as the focus of their work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.resolvecollective.com
Space Station Sixty-Five	London-Lambeth	●				●	2002		Registered charity	At artist-led Space Station Sixty-Five, we continue to curate the contemporary art we love in accessible venues, unswayed by fashion, trends and the whims of government funding. The project involves ongoing research into the placing of contemporary art, its audiences and its relationship to the everyday. We foster a large and diverse audience, which comes from a wide range of backgrounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.spacestationssixtyfive.com
Studio Voltaire	London-Lambeth	●	●	●	●	●	1994	Arts Council, sponsorships, public funding, charitable trusts and foundations	Registered charity	Studio Voltaire was founded in 1994 by a collective of twelve artists, who set up a studio space in a disused tram shed on Voltaire Road, Clapham. An artist-centered approach remains at the core of our work. We are creating an essential artists' community and resource in South London; our current site on Nelsons Row affords a significant level of support, providing much-needed affordable and accessible studios for a diverse range of individual and collective practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Establishing robust links to funding and commissioning bodies; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.studiovoltaire.org
Enclave Projects (incl. News of the World and Res)	London-Lewisham	●	●	●	●	●	2012		Registered charity	Enclave is an experimental artist-run infrastructure in Deptford, South London, that aims to promote contemporary critical art practice. Enclave hosts and supports eight rolling independent spaces in an incubator set-up, where artists and curators can establish mid-long term projects and benefit from physical space, shared audiences, group momentum, peer networks and knowledge sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Establishing robust links to funding and commissioning bodies; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.enclaveprojects.com
ALISN	London City	●			●		2007			The Artist-Led Initiatives Support Network (ALISN) was founded in May 2007 with the aim of fostering community and collaboration between artist-led and other art galleries and projects. ALISN works across diverse platforms to deliver innovative exhibitions, events, performances, open submissions, talks, residencies and art networking events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing artists' mentorship and support; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.alisn.org

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Arcadia Missa	London City	●		●	●		2011	Fundraising, studios		Arcadia Missa focuses on contemporary art with intent, independent research and curatorial projects emerge both as parallel programming to the main gallery programme, within the publications and in off-site projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.arcadiamissa.com
Form Content	London City	●					2007	Art in General (NY), Beirut (Cairo), British Arts Council, Brukenthal National Museum, CCA Derry-Londonderry (Derry), CIRCA Projects (Newcastle), David Roberts Art Foundation (London), Eastside Projects (Birmingham), Elisa Platteau Gallery (Brussels) etc.		Form Content was established with the intent of experimenting with exhibition formats and fostering collaborations that challenge artistic and curatorial roles. FormContent's practice spans from exhibition making to independent publishing, commissioning new works and the production of events and performances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.formcontent.org
Furtherfield	London City	●		●	●	●	1996	Arts Council, Haringey London, fundraising	Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'limited' exemption	We believe that through creative and critical engagement with practices in art and technology people are inspired and enabled to become active co-creators of their cultures and societies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.furtherfield.org
Square Art Projects	London City	●							Nomadic	Square Art Projects is an independent nomadic artist-led initiative which presents contemporary art exhibitions in non-gallery spaces on an international level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.squ-arc.com
The Old Police Station	London City	●		●		●	2009	Studio rents		This do-it-yourself art centre is housed in the old Edwardian Deptford Police Station, with 42 artists studios, a gallery, independent project spaces, a radio station, band rehearsal space, and pop-up cocktail bar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Enabling underused space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.theoldpolicestation.org www.lewisham.gov.uk/organisations/the-old-police-station
Assembly Point (now Staffordshire Studios)	London-Peckham	●				●	2015	Studio and gallery rents		Contemporary art space encompassing a gallery and studios (initially ran collaboratively by artists James Edgar and Sam Walker)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.assemblypoint.xyz www.staffordshirestudios.com
ASC Gallery and Studios	London-Southwark	●		●		●	1995	Artists Studio Company		Founded by two artists, Peter Flack and Jonathan Coombes. We provide affordable studio space for artists, providing a place to work to over 700 practitioners across Greater London.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.ascstudios.co.uk
Auto Italia South East	London-Southwark	●	●		●	●	2007	Arts Council, Tower Hamlets	Registered charity	Auto Italia is an artist-run organisation and project space that commissions new work, bringing together international networks of artists committed to the development of emerging practices and discussions in contemporary art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Enabling underused space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.autoitaliasoutheast.org
Cafe Gallery Projects	London-Southwark	●			●	●	1984		Registered charity	CGP London is an artist led initiative providing exhibitions of contemporary art, at two venues in Southwark Park. Cafe Gallery is a modern purpose-built space comprising three interlinked 'white room' spaces and a patio garden.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	https://counterproductions.me/collaboration/cafe-gallery-projects/
Vulpes Vulpes	London-Southwark	●		●	●		2009	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund	Private limited Company	Vulpes Vulpes is an artist collective interested in social histories, the built environment, notions of community, education and social structures. Through running an artist led space together since 2009, hosting exhibitions, performances and workshops, we became involved in each other's individual practices and in 2011 began collaborating alongside our programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling underused space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.vulpesvulpes.org
DOPLH	London-Streatham Hill	●		●			2014	Arts Council		DOLPH aims to engage with artists, the public and neighbouring community by staging thought-provoking exhibitions and talks that explore the vagaries and complexities of contemporary art practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.dolphprojects.com
Cell Project Space	London-Tower Hamlets	●	●	●		●	2000	Self-funded, donations	Registered charity	Cell Project Space is a non-profit gallery and artist studios founded in 1999. The gallery was originally set up as an artist-run space and formed a registered charity, Cell Foundation, in 2014. Throughout the 20-year history of the organisation, Cell Studios has provided affordable workspace for artists, which in turn supports the gallery's on-going programme of exhibitions, special projects and events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.cellprojects.org
Matt's Gallery	London-Tower Hamlets	●	●	●			1979	Arts Council, RHEA	Registered charity	Matt's Gallery is a contemporary art space. Its director, Robin Klassnik OBE, opened the gallery in his studio, before moving premises to Bow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.mattsgallery.org
No.w.here	London-Tower Hamlets	●		●			2004	Arts Council	Registered charity	no.w.here is an artist run project space which expands and examines film within contemporary arts practice. Our lab and training courses provide production facilities to practitioners and educate a new generation of artists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.no-w-here.org.uk
Studio 1.1 London	London-Tower Hamlets	●		●	●		2003		Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	studio1.1, an artist run, not for profit space began in April 2003 with no particular battle-plan. We have evolved with a range of shows as diverse as possible, presenting artists at any stage of their career, from any country, in any discipline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.studio1-1.co.uk
Studio One Gallery	London-Wandsworth	●	●			●	2009	Gallery rent	Nomadic	An artist-run, not-for-profit enterprise, Studio One Gallery has been running since early 2009. Its physical form has changed over the years, from an old minicab office, to the ex-boardroom of the British Olympic Committee, to a box room at the top of a Georgian house in East Putney. Unfortunately, the pandemic hit us hard, and we lost both our gallery space and our artists studios. We are currently looking for an empty building in our home city of Brighton, where we can once again host exhibitions for early career artists, with profits from sales going to our chosen charities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Enabling underused space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.studio1gallery.co.uk

UK-based Art Space	Location	Dedicated Artist-Led Programme	Arts Incubator	Non-Profit/Project	Community Arts	Studios	Founded	Funding	Organisational Status	Mission Statement	Tactics	Website
Castlefield Gallery	Manchester		●	●	●		1984	Arts Council, Manchester City Council	Registered charity	Castlefield Gallery is Manchester's first public contemporary visual art gallery dedicated to the advancement of contemporary visual art and artists. We are focused on developing visual artists' practice and careers whilst creating opportunities for the public to engage with the art of our time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk
PAPER Gallery	Manchester	●	●				2012	Self-funded, commercial, Arts Council	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	<p>PAPER is an artist-led, commercial gallery based in Manchester and represents a range of emerging and mid-career artists whose practice is based around the medium of paper. This ranges from drawing, painting, and printmaking to artist's books, video, and performance.</p> <p>In 2013 PAPER instigated an Artist-in-Residence programme, Exploring PAPER, and in 2014 a mentoring scheme for artists based in the North-West of England, funded by Arts Council England.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.paper-gallery.co.uk
Rogue Artists Studios & Project Space	Manchester		●	●		●	1995		Private company limited by guarantee without share capital Community Interest Company (CIC)	Established in 1995, Rogue is an artist-run Community Interest Company providing accessible studio space close to Manchester city centre. Rogue is the largest independent studio group in the North West with more than 85 artists working in 57,000 square feet of space at the former Varna Street school buildings in Openshaw.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.rastudios.co.uk
The International 3	Manchester			●				Arts Council, Trusts, Foundations, Patrons	Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'limited' exemption (dissolved 2019)	The International 3 is an exhibition and project space in Salford, Greater Manchester, U.K. With emerging and established artists, independent curators, galleries and organisations we produce a year round programme of new commissions, solo shows, group exhibitions and events both on and off-site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Developing collaborative learning projects; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.international3.com
The Penthouse	Manchester	●	●	●	●		2012		Non-profit	Established in 2012 as an experimental art studio and project space in Manchester's Northern Quarter by artist / curators Rosanne Robertson & Debbie Sharp (not just good friends) The Penthouse built its foundations on experimentalism, DIY attitude, action and as a test bed for over 300 artists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.thepenthouseq.com
Drop City	Newcastle	●					2014	Public & private	Unincorporated organisation, nomadic	<p>Drop City is a gallery established in Newcastle upon Tyne in Autumn 2014. The original space has been redeveloped and Drop City now operates nomadically, between Newcastle & Dusseldorf.</p> <p>Developing a model that capitalises on the varied experiences of its founders; an independent curator and three artists, Drop City's programme explores the gaps and potential plasticity between several models of exhibition space and gallery, revolving around the individual work of each founding member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Developing collaborative learning projects; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	https://archivesofheartistled.org/projects/drop-city
Gallery North	Newcastle	●					2009	Public		Complimentary to the prestigious University Art Gallery, Gallery North's specific brief relates to the distinctive needs of the Department of Arts providing a quality learning experience, dynamic research environment and professional exhibition space. The gallery also has a smaller dedicated experimental space, Gallery North Projects for smaller and shorter exhibitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing gallery space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/arts/galleries/ https://gn.northumbria.ac.uk/
Locus +	Newcastle	●			●		1993	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund	Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'limited' exemption	Locus+ is a visual arts commissioning agency that works with artists on the production and presentation of socially engaged, collaborative and temporary projects, primarily for non-gallery locations. In each project place or context is integral to the meaning of the artwork.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Developing collaborative learning projects; Initiating temporary initiatives; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.locusplus.org.uk
The Globe Gallery	Newcastle	●		●	●		1994	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund, Newcastle City Council, Newcastle University, Northumbria University, Durham University	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	From day one, we have made every effort to make art accessible to all and aspired to engage with as many people from different backgrounds as possible; our work has never been defined by the boundaries of gallery walls and we have always been keen to take art out into the community. By taking an open-door approach with artists and audiences, we endeavour to cultivate a socially-connected practice that is dynamic, responsive and engaging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating discussion; Developing collaborative learning projects; Initiating temporary initiatives; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.globegallery.org
Vane	Newcastle	●	●			●	1997	Arts Council	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	Vane represents a group of critically engaged artists from the North East of England, across the UK, Europe and the USA through projects at the gallery and elsewhere. The gallery exhibition programme also provides a platform for the work of invited artists at all career stages, often working in partnership with other regional, national, and international galleries, festivals and guest curators, including hosting projects developed by artists themselves. These are accompanied by a series of talks, performances, workshops and other events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.vane.org.uk
OUTPOST	Norwich	●	●		●	●	2004	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund	Registered charity	OUTPOST is an artist-run charity, based in Norwich, committed to the uncompromising presentation of contemporary art. The charity runs a gallery which currently facilitates a programme of 5 exhibitions per year, alongside a series of offsite projects, events, and artists editions. The charity operates a membership scheme which is open to anyone to join and offers an annual members exhibition, residencies, and other member only opportunities. OUTPOST also runs an affordable studio complex, OUTPOST Studios, for over 80 artists and practitioners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.norwichoutpost.org
Backlit Gallery	Nottingham	●	●	●	●	●	2008	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	Our ethos is deeply connected to its roots of the building's past. Samuel Morley—the original building commissioner—radically pioneered progression in human rights, anti-slavery, industry and adult education. Continuing Morley's Legacy, we are committed to enabling and continually improving an accessible, equal, educational and safe space for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.backlit.org.uk
One Thoresby Street	Nottingham	●			●	●	2008	Arts Council	Non-profit	Since 2008 One Thoresby Street has existed as an evolving not for profit community of 30+ freelance sculptors, photographers, designers, academics, model makers, painters, product designers, technologists, event producers, curators, musicians, film makers, woodworkers, researchers, activists, consultants, ceramicists, performers, writers...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.onethoresbystreet.org
Primary	Nottingham	●	●	●	●	●	2012	Arts Council, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	Registered charity	<p>Primary is an artist-led contemporary visual arts organisation. We prioritise artistic research, provide studios and residencies to artists, and run a free public programme of exhibitions and events.</p> <p>We believe that artistic research is a public process, so we encourage participation in artistic production. We've established an engaged and outward-looking community which supports artists to experiment and develop their practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects; Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.weareprimary.org
Surface Gallery	Nottingham	●	●	●		●	1999	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund	Non-for-profit social enterprise	We are a not-for-profit social enterprise that exists to support early and mid-career artists, largely through professional exhibitions and events, and also residencies. Volunteer-run, co-operative and contemporary, we provide an affordable space for artists to exhibit their work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing space; Facilitating discussion; Providing artists' mentorship and support; Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.surfacegallery.org

UK-based Art Space	Location	Dedicated Artist-Led Programme	Arts Incubator	Non-Profit/Project	Community Arts	Studios	Founded	Funding	Organisational Status	Mission Statement	Tactics	Website
Art Space Portsmouth	Portsmouth	●	●			●	1980	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund	Registered charity	As a provider of low-cost artist studios, and through a wider network of off-site artist members – both early career and established creative practitioners – Art Space Portsmouth represents a dynamic and diverse community of artists. From practical support to peer-to-peer networking and opportunities for wider public engagement, membership also offers wide range of membership benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing space; • Facilitating discussion; • Providing artists' mentorship and support; • Developing collaborative learning projects. 	www.artspace.co.uk/
Bloc Projects	Sheffield	●	●		●	●	2002	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund	Registered charity	We focus on the support and development of contemporary artists at pivotal points of their careers. We provide a safe and stimulating environment that is free for the public to explore ideas and creative practices. We work closely with other local art organisations, universities and charities to ensure that our activities welcome a diverse and intergenerational demographic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing space; • Facilitating discussion; • Providing artists' mentorship and support; • Developing collaborative learning projects; • Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.blocprojects.co.uk
S1 ArtSpace	Sheffield	●	●		●	●	1995	Arts Council, UK Lottery Fund, Sheffield City Council, Heritage Lottery Fund	Registered charity	S1 ArtSpace is an arts organisation based in Sheffield that actively supports the production and presentation of new work and ideas. We provide studio space for artists at varying stages in their career, from recent graduates to established artists working internationally. Through the exhibitions programme, we have commissioned over 85 new works and presented work by over 500 artists, including six Turner Prize winners and a further seven nominees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing space; • Facilitating discussion; • Providing artists' mentorship and support; • Developing collaborative learning projects; • Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.s1artspace.org
Airspace Gallery	Stoke-on-Trent	●	●		●	●	2006	Arts Council, City of Stoke-on-Trent	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	Through a dynamic, critical and evolving programme of exhibitions, residencies, events, social and off-site projects, we provide opportunities and developmental support for artists across the career spectrum - delivering engaged and engaging contemporary visual arts. While maintaining a thoughtful, ideas-based and critical approach to our activities, our programme seeks to open up the gallery and its processes for all. Public engagement is always central to what we do, as we strive to create a thriving, inclusive and democratic communal space for artists to mix with those maybe less used to the arts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing space; • Facilitating discussion; • Providing artists' mentorship and support; • Developing collaborative learning projects; • Developing long-term solutions to specific spatial and social issues; • Consolidating ties of local and wider communities of interest. 	www.airspacegallery.org/

8.8 Appendix 8: Social political assemblage

SOCIAL POLITICAL ASSEMBLAGE

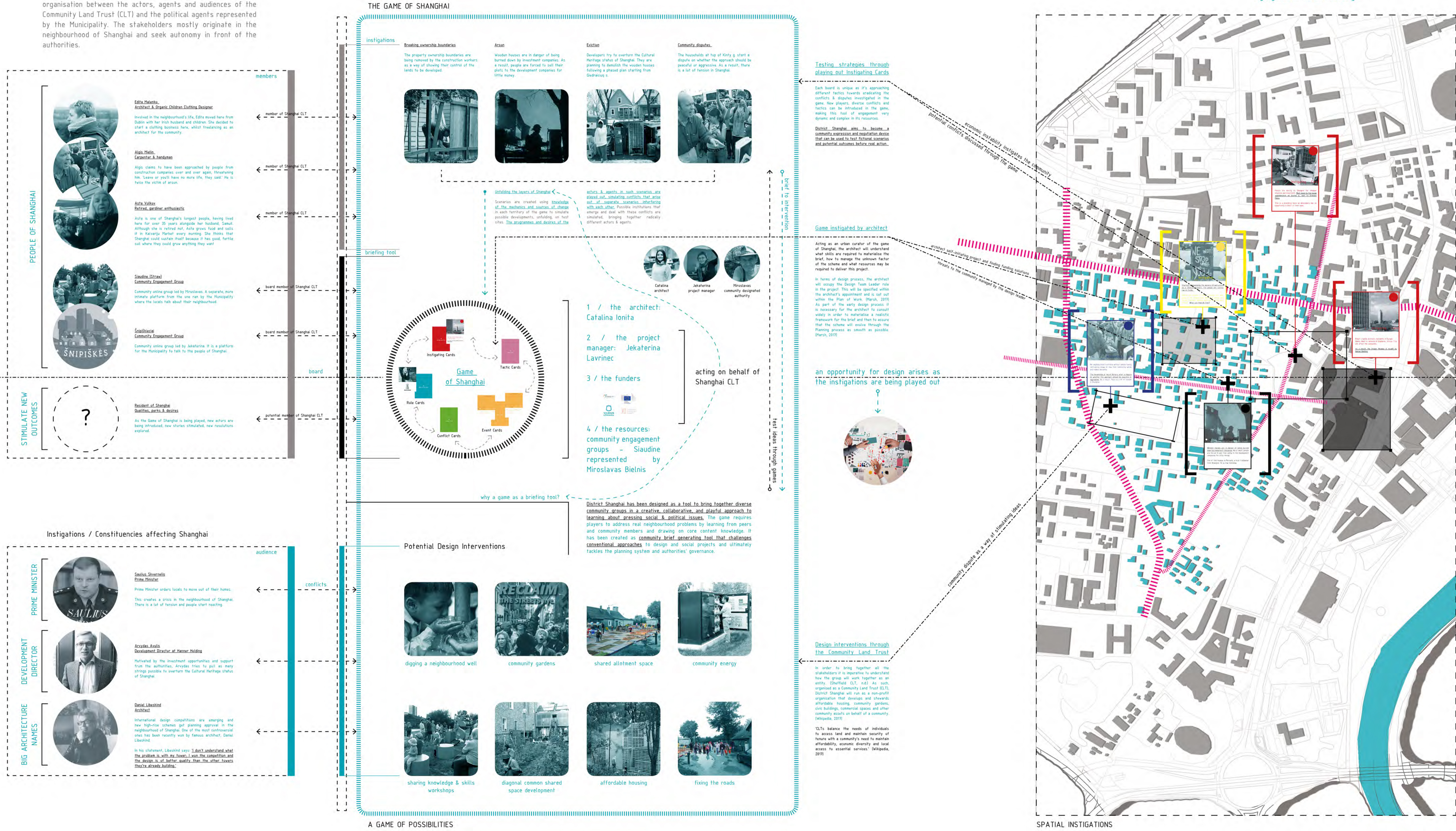
District Shanghai's social-political assemblage is the system of organisation between the actors, agents and audiences of the Community Land Trust (CLT) and the political agents represented by the Municipality. The stakeholders mostly originate in the neighbourhood of Shanghai and seek autonomy in front of the authorities.

MOTIVATION

This thesis project has emerged from a personal interest in the development of infrastructures of autonomy in urban environments and how diverse socio-political scenarios can impact their evolution.

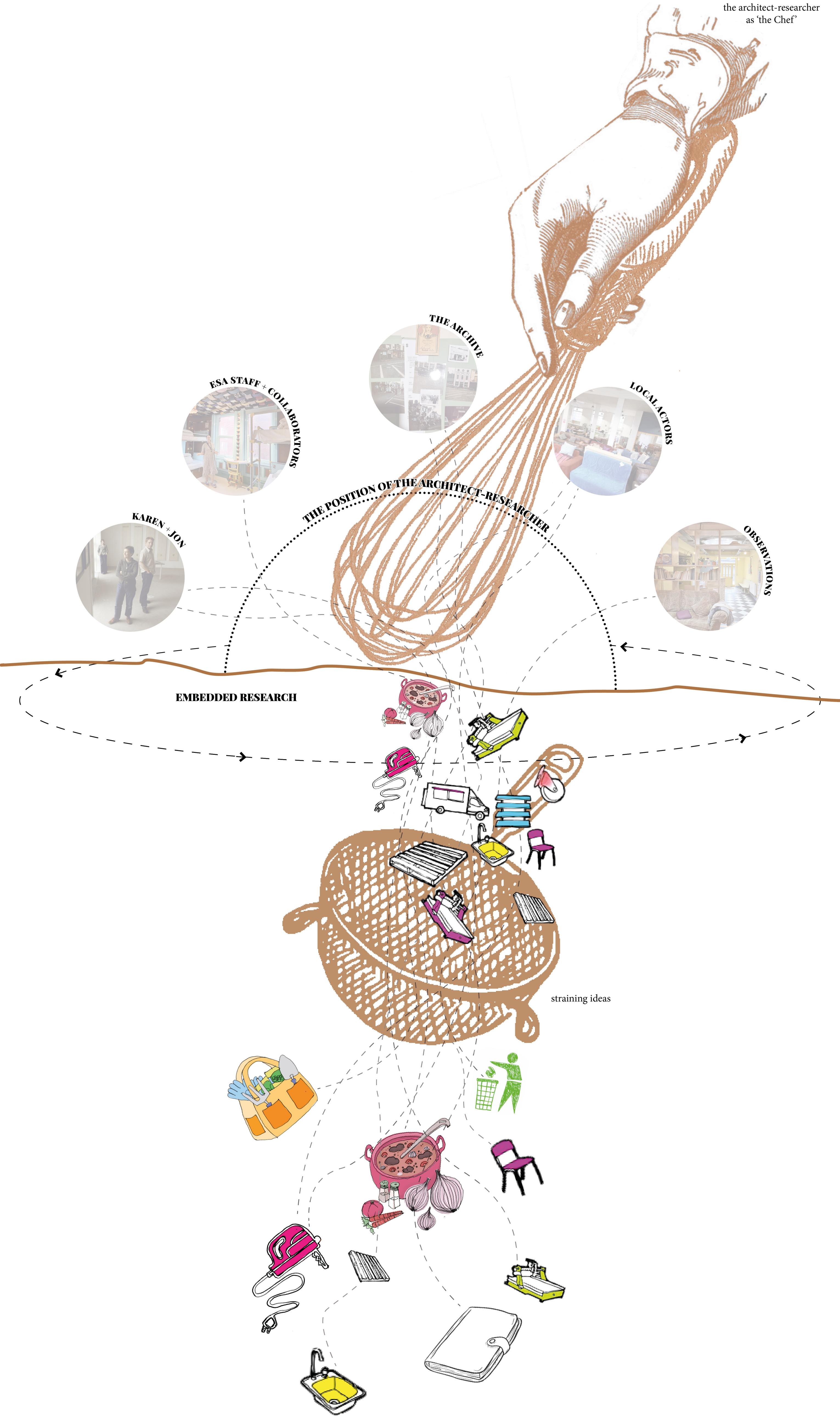
INTERVENTIONS

As an outcome, each intervention is unique and evolves from the tactics the players tackle throughout the game. The tactics, all recorded in the game log book, become briefs for design interventions. Some of the most played ones are highlighted below as following:



8.9 Appendix 9: Diagram exploring the position of the architect-researcher

the architect-researcher
as 'the Chef'



8.10 Appendix 10: Ethics forms

The following forms are provided in this appendix:

- Participant Information Sheet
- Participant Consent Form
- Participant Consent Form for Use of Images

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1. Title of Project

Artist-led spatial production in the city: East Street Arts as urban activator

2. Legal basis for research for studies

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of **public tasks that are in the public interest**. A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER20451839. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

3. Opening statement

This PhD seeks to investigate the role of artist-led space as urban activator within the UK context. The research questions currently explored within this work include a central inquiry and two sub-queries relating to the main one as following:

1. What is the potential role as URBAN ACTIVATOR of artist-led spatial production in the city?
2. What types of SPACES AND ECONOMIES ARE ACTIVATED through artist-led spatial production?
3. What are the TENSIONS and TRADE-OFFS between artist-led spatial production and funding entities? What is their contribution to the wider cultural economy?

4. Why have you asked me to take part?

You have been asked to participate as a member of the arts community/ potential stakeholder to provide a representative illustration of the influence an artist-led space / arts organisation such as East Street Arts has within its local setting and the importance of art in placemaking.

5. Do I have to take part?

To take part in the research, we ask that you complete a Participant Consent Form. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep, along with the consent form if you do decide to take part. If at any time you do not want to take part in the research project, you are free to withdrawal without any consequence. You are also not obliged to answer questions in the interview if you do not want. If after your contribution you no longer want your data to be used, please contact the researcher by (*1st November 2021*) to withdraw from the study.

6. What will I be required to do?

As part of this research, you will be asked to share your opinions about the value of art in placemaking and development of new neighbourhoods, the local agency and decision-making role of artistic organisations (including East Street Arts), as well as the power of archival practice within artistic practices through a one on one or group discussion, depending on your preference. Any visual material that you might supply as part of the research will be used, with your permission, to support your statement.

7. Where will this take place?

The interview will take place in an organised setting (i.e. East Street Arts' Patrick Studios at St Mary's Ln, Leeds LS9 7EH) or online via Zoom / Teams, depending on your preference. Should the preferred option be the face-to-face one, Patrick Studios will perform a Covid-19 Safe Space Induction prior to the interview in order to ensure safety to all participants.

8. How often will I have to take part, and for how long?

It is expected that one interview that will be no longer than one hour will suffice. However, should the participant be willing to further contribute to the research, follow-up discussions could be explored.

A series of discussions at different stages of the research would be appropriate with the East Street Arts' Artistic Directors due to their relevance to the collaborative research.

9. If deception is involved in the study

Deception is not expected to be used as a method of conducting research for this work.

However, in the unlikely situation that this should be explored as part of this process and some information may be initially withheld, you will be fully informed after the experiment. The researcher will consult with the relevant user group about the likely acceptability of the deception to research participants.

10. Are there any possible risks or disadvantaged in taking part?

Considering the current Covid-19 pandemic, it is fair to say that any place outside our own homes can have a potential risk to the health and wellbeing of both the researcher and the participant. However, it is completely up to the participant to decide if they would rather undertake the interview on a digital platform (i.e. Zoom). Should the participant prefer a face-to-face discussion, the researcher will recommend that all Covid-19 safe measures are respected precautions (i.e. wear a face mask, maintain a 2m distance from each other / other people) in order to protect the participant's health and wellbeing as well as that of the researcher.

11. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This research will provide an opportunity to discuss valuable themes within the artistic sector and potentially incite the development of artistic work that responds to them in creative and thought-provoking ways. This research will support the exploration of an important subject and could provide the background for further research.

12. When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?

All participants will be debriefed prior to the interview in order to check for any potential unanticipated effects and discuss any potential concerns with the scope of this work.

13. Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?

Throughout the entirety of the research, your personal details, data, and any potential visual material will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. The data will be held securely and can only be accessed by the researcher.

After the data has been analysed, your personal details will be deleted in line with the General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Data protection allows the researcher to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacynotices/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER20451839. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethicsintegrity-and-practice>

14. Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?

The researcher will be primarily responsible for the management of the collected data. Nonetheless, the University's Research Data Management Policy says that the

responsibility for research data management “lies with the principal investigator or in the case of a PhD project, the Director of Studies” (Dr Cristina Cerulli). It is their duty to ensure that all members of the research team with access to the research data adhere to good research data management practice. The researcher will implement the Data Management Plan and ensure it is constantly reviewed and revised with their Director of Study.

15. Who will have access to it?

The University's Research Data Management Policy states that making research data openly available is considered good practice. Considering all data (raw and analysed) will be deposited in the SHU Research Data Archive (SHURDA), the default license is a Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY). This license allows others to use your datasets as long as they acknowledge the researcher and contributor's work. The only exclusion from this raw data to be shared will be the audio from the 1:1 interviews, given the potential of voice recognition, thus threatening pledges of anonymity of data, which has been given to all contributors to the research.

16. What will happen to the information when this study is over?

All data (raw and analyzed) will be deposited in the Sheffield Hallam University Research Data Archive (SHURDA) at the end of the research project. The data will be retained in the archive for a period of 10 years since the last time any third party has requested access to the data. When depositing the data, no further changes to data formatting will be required as all necessary actions will have been conducted as the research progresses.

The researcher is planning to place this work on an embargo period at the completion of the study. The embargo period typically lasts for 2 years. All 'raw' data (with appropriate documentation), and the analysed data will be deposited with the Sheffield Hallam Research Data Archive (SHURDA) and made available under a CC-BY licence after a period of 2 years to allow for exclusive use of the data to support publications. This approach to open access will ensure the legacy of the project by enabling follow-up and/or longitudinal studies to be compared with these initial raw data sets.

While a robust approach to ensuring consent is received from all respondents in the study to allow raw data to be shared, should some respondents refuse permission, these data will be removed before depositing the data in the SHU Research Data Archive (SHURDA). The researcher will keep the Project Director (Dr Cristina Cerulli) informed during data collection of those respondents refusing permission for data sharing. The responsibility for ensuring extraction of data from those declining will ultimately be the Project Director.

17. How will you use what you find out?

All findings will be used to explore the above-mentioned themes as part of this PhD study, as well as for any publications, reports, or presentations on the subject as part of the research programme at Sheffield Hallam University.

18. How long is the whole study likely to last?

This study will end in January 2024.

19. How can I find out about the results of the study?

Should you have any questions about this research, please see below the **Researcher/ Research Team Details**:

- Catalina-Elena Ionita, Researcher, Sheffield Hallam University: b5034372@my.shu.ac.uk
- Dr Cristina Cerulli, Director of Studies, Sheffield Hallam University: c.cerulli@shu.ac.uk

Details of who to contact if you have any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study are given below:

You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

DPO@shu.ac.uk

You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Ann Macaskill) if:

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk

Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT Telephone: 0114 225 5555

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

Artist-led spatial production in the city. East Street Arts as urban activator

Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies

- | | YES | NO |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Contact details: _____

Researcher's Name (Printed): CATALINA-ELENA IONITA

Researcher's Signature:

Researcher's contact details:
CATALINA-ELENA IONITA

Address

Phone
Number

Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF IMAGES

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

Artist-led spatial production in the city. East Street Arts as urban activator

Photographs taken of you would be used to add interest and exemplify the research findings. For example, they may be used as illustrations in website summaries, research reports, summary leaflets, newspapers articles and/or conference presentations. They will not be used in any way that would show you in a bad light.

To be completed by the participant:

- | | YES | NO |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I agree to have my photograph taken. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my questionnaire responses will not be linked to the photograph(s). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my name will not be linked to the photograph(s). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I understand that I will not be given credit for my appearance in photograph(s). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I give the project team permission to: | | |
| - put my photograph(s) on websites | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - use my photograph(s) in printed material (e.g. reports, leaflets, newspaper articles, news releases) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - use my photograph(s) in presentations (e.g. at conferences or seminars) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Name of participant (block letters): _____

Signature of investigator:

CATALINA-ELENA IONITA

Address

Date: _____

8.11 Appendix 11: List of interviews

- Rhian Aitken, Art Hostel Manager – 20/07/2023
- Melody Walker, Business Development Lead East Street Arts – 23/05/2023
- Mandy Baker, Artist – 09/05/2023
- Karen Watson, Artistic Director East Street Arts – 21/03/2023
- Karen Watson, Artistic Director East Street Arts – 21/03/2023
- Rhian Aitken, Art Hostel Manager – 18/08/2022
- Yaku Stapleton, Artist – 04/08/2022
- Karen Watson, Artistic Director East Street Arts – 03/08/2022
- Jon Wakeman, Artistic Director East Street Arts – 03/08/2022
- Claire Easton, Regeneration Project Officer Leeds City Council – 02/08/2022

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