

# Motivations, Modalities and Sustainability: small artists organisations and cultural ecologies

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"Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." - Simone Weil

## Abstract

This thesis engages with how the discourse of sustainability has developed in cultural policy to shape the sector's goals and how these may affect small organisations run by artists. In 2018, East Street Arts secured Arts Council England SSO (Sector Support Organisation) funding and launched GUILD. This four-year programme aimed to develop the sustainability of small organisations run by artists in England through innovative business models and entrepreneurial practices. This exploratory research takes as case studies eight organisations in Guild, contextualising the programme's approach in response to the discourse of sustainability developed in cultural policies in the UK. The thesis argues that sustainability is equated to the financial sustainability of the cultural sector, in other words, the capacity of arts organisations to be financially independent of public funding. To make the cultural sector more sustainable, cultural policy has engaged in a discourse that takes a business development approach through innovation and business model change. However, arts management and organisational research show the limits of this approach, pointing at the importance that the founders' values and motivations play in the development and management of arts organisations. This thesis contributes further to this strand of research by describing the organisations' business models and demonstrating the necessity to explore the motivations for artists to start them. The thesis discusses how the current approach to business development fails to capture the value these organisations add to the wider cultural ecology. Although, not all learning from business studies is to be rejected, exploring how artists set up organisations shows a need for artists to re-consider current practices and, for example, engage more with planning. Further, organisational studies may provide insights into how organisational structures and cultures may contribute to sustainability. In conclusion, a more nuanced understanding of sustainability emerges from the point of view of artists, which questions the current sustainability discourse in cultural policy.

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## Abbreviations

ACE – Arts Council England. English national development agency for creativity and culture.

DCMS – Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (UK Government).

DEPW – Double Elephant Print Workshops. One of the organisations in Guild.

ESA - East Street Arts. PhD partner and organisation leading on Guild.

NPO – National Portfolio Organisation. Regularly founded organisations by Arts Council England.

UN – United Nations. Intergovernmental organization whose stated purposes are to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, achieve international cooperation, and be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Specialized agency of the United Nations aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture.

## 1 Introduction

This PhD was initiated by the award of a collaborative doctoral scholarship in partnership between the University of Leeds and East Street Arts (ESA). The call-out welcomed proposals for doctoral research that could critically engage with the aims of the programme (East Street Arts, 2018a). Guild, an Arts Council England Sector Support Organisation (SSO), began a few months before the PhD, which meant that when I started to design my research, the participants were not recruited, and the programme of Guild was not finalised. I had little information available, so at the beginning of the research process, my attention was attracted by the description of Guild in the guidance for application as a project seeking “to transform the landscape of artists’ spaces through developing their resilience and sustainability. Achieving this goal will include new approaches to business modelling, embedding groups within their localities and advocating their impact on political and social environments” (East Street Arts, 2018c).

The connection between sustainability and business models has been championed in cultural policy in Europe, and the UK has seen a growing interest in the development of “new business models” and “business model innovation” (Rodríguez, 2016b; BOP Consulting, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2019). In particular, in England, making cultural organisations financially self-sustainable and less reliant on public funding is the strategy through which the sector should become more sustainable (DCMS, 2016). The economic framing of sustainability contributes to shape what “success” for arts organisations looks like in terms of longevity, size and growth (Markusen et al., 2011; Rex, 2019). The rhetoric of “innovation” brings a misconception, as Kimbell (2019, p. 117) comments:

“new business models, based on unprecedented ideas, may be rare. Instead of emphasising the ‘newness’ of business models, business model innovation can be seen as an activity or process through which a business model is changed and new organisational practices emerge”.

Similarly, “business model change” remains a vague idea: “It is easy to talk about the need for new business models, but it is much harder to outline what these developments entail for organisational practices, values and outcomes” (Rex, 2019, p. 92). The main critiques of the adoption of business model innovation in cultural policy lie in the “excessively inclusive nature” of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) umbrella (Rex, 2019), which overlooks different key orientations in the production and consumption of symbolic value between cultural organisations and creative industries (Oakley and O’Connor, 2015). Critics also argue for the importance of measuring success and sustainability in relation to how the people involved in the organisations define them (Poettschacher, 2005; Bogen, 2019).

By taking a multidisciplinary approach that draws from sustainability and system studies, research on cultural policy and studies on businesses and organisations, this thesis problematises the economic framing of sustainability by exploring how the small artists' organisations that are part of Guild are managed. This has implications both for the artists and for cultural policy on how sustainability is applied across the cultural sector and impacts small artists' organisations. If the understanding of sustainability in cultural policy looks at the financial sustainability of arts organisations through the development of business models, the aim of this research is to investigate how artists run their own organisations and question the application of an economic framing of sustainability in the context of small artist-led organisations.

### 1.1 Research Aims and Questions

In the cultural sector, sustainability has two main meanings: reducing the carbon footprint of arts organisations (environmental sustainability) or reducing their need for public funding (financial sustainability). Guild made specific reference to "business models" in connection to developing sustainability thus, it was clear that the programme would address financial sustainability rather than environmental. Drawing from the concept of "cultural ecology" (Holden, 2015), I decided to focus on sustainability as it facilitates strategic thinking around the development of the cultural sector as an ecosystem rather than focusing on specific events that trigger resilience (see Chapter 2). As the research was responding to Guild, a publicly funded organisation to support the sector, I reviewed the literature to understand what sustainability could mean in this context and whether the goals of developing sustainability and resilience were responding to policy's funding priorities. While being widely used in policy and academia, sustainability, resilience and the cultural ecology have been criticised for being too vague concepts (Holden, 2015). Thus, by researching what sustainability means in the cultural sector, I hope to contribute to a clearer understanding.

Though, from the literature review, it also emerged that research on arts organisations, creative enterprises and independent cultural centres points to a link between the different forms of values produced by - and embedded in - arts organisations with their sustainability (Poettschacher, 2005; Foster, 2018; Bogen, 2019; Kaszynksa, 2019). In particular, organisations run by artists have developed a specific artist-led culture around values that influence their nature, development, practices and operations (Szczelkun, 2002; Sholette, 2011; Coffield, 2015). Values are often discussed in academic debates concerning the nature of cultural work or the role they can play in clarifying the mission of arts organisations, but their implications on the organisation of work and organisational identities have not been addressed. This exploratory research leaves behind notions of artist-run spaces or artist-led initiatives to think instead of small artists' organisations (see 5.1.1 for a discussion on definitions). The literature review will explore how artist-run spaces are often characterised by certain

values and ways of working. However, this is still debated and there is not a consensus over a shared definition. As artist-led/artist-run organisations carry a variety of political, symbolic and practical meanings often developed contextually, adopting this umbrella term raised a series of contradictions. Data from this research finds that while all the organisations in Guild were founded by artists, not all artists-founders align with the artist-led culture (see Chapter 4.2). The organisations in Guild were funded by artists and have a turnover of less than £250,000 a year, which classifies them as small organisations according to Arts Council England, the main funder of Guild <sup>1</sup>. Thus adopting the terminology “small artists’ organisations” presents a conceptual shift that aims to put the attention on how the organisations work, what features they present as being founded and run by artists and what we can learn from contrasting them with other small organisations. Therefore I have designed the research with three aims:

- To understand how sustainability is formulated in the cultural sector at the policy level and particularly in the context of cultural organisations;
- To explore what artists' organisations are and their organisational practices and what sustainability means in this context;
- To critically engage with both understandings of sustainability to reframe how we think of it and bridge between policy and practice.

New research on ecological thinking applied to cultural and creative industries support the need to investigate across scales from micro (individual) to meso (organisation and interconnecting structures) and macro (broader policy framework) (de Bernard, Comunian and Gross, 2022; Heinonen *et al.*, 2022). This is also relevant in the context of Guild, which provides direct support at the meso level of the 20 participant organisations to have a much broader impact and transform the “landscape” on a macro level. This aim of Guild can be best understood in the context of a continuation of work from Arts Council England to develop sustainable ways in which the sector can thrive:

“The Arts Council’s role in [creating the conditions for a thriving cultural sector] has been to direct its investment in considered and sustainable ways, to benefit the whole arts and cultural ecology — the living, evolving network of artists, cultural organisations and venues co-operating in many fruitful partnerships — artistic, structural and financial. The metaphor of an ecology, of a living, balanced environment, expresses how nothing happens within this system without its impact being felt widely.” (ACE, 2014)

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<sup>1</sup> ACE defines the size of the organisations it funds from the total income field. The different types are: small size (less than £250,000), medium size (between £250,000 and £750,000), large size (over £750,000). (ACE, 2017).

Therefore, I researched the business models and the structures of the organisations (meso level), the founders' values embedded in the organisations' identities and the motivations that led to this form of enterprise (micro), and how they inform an understanding of sustainability that may challenge cultural policy (macro). This research answers these questions:

- What can we learn about artists' organisations from applying business models theory?
- What role do values play in the sustainability of artists' organisations?
- Why and how do artists set up their organisations?
- Can organisational cultures and structures affect the continuation of these organisations?

With one or two members of paid staff and turnover under £100,000 a year, the organisations engaged in Guild can be classified as micro-enterprises (UK Government, 2022) or small organisations (ACE, 2017). Therefore I draw from business and organisational studies to understand how business model innovation can be applied in the context of small organisations and to investigate how artists behave as founders/owners of small organisations.

To provide background for the discussion in this thesis, the following section will summarise how Arts Council England, in its role as the public body for the development agency for creativity and culture, has been funding the development of sustainable cultural organisations in the sector and how Guild can be seen as a way to fill a gap in the provision. The next section also provides some background information about East Street Arts to understand why they have undertaken the project, and it will give an overview of Guild.

## 1.2 Research Context: Funding the development of sustainable arts organisations

In the *Independent Review of the Creative Industries*, Sir Peter Balzagate (2017, p. 28), chairman of the Arts Council between 2012 and 2016, notes that the creative industries are "characterised by an abundance of SMEs, micro-businesses and individuals spread across the arts, design, cultural, digital, entertainment and media sectors" – something which means "they lack the capacity for strategic, cross-sectoral R&D which, if properly recognised and supported, could propel growth". And indeed, this was confirmed in consultation for the 2020-2030 ACE strategy, where comments highlighted:

"the need for strong and adaptable business models and that small organisations may need more support with this. Training provided or certified by the Arts Council in this and other areas was something that respondents noted could be of interest. Small enterprises [should] be supported and nurtured by ACE and NPOs to be sustainable and knowledgeable of business sustainability" (ACE, 2018c, p. 25).

However, as Holden (2007, p. 2) notes:

“one issue is the identification of policy intervention in this area, but another difficulty lies in the processes through which policy responds. Creativity is at heart about individuals; the creative industries sector is mostly made up of small-scale and dynamic enterprises. The large institutions of government find it difficult to engage with organisations that are micro, fluid, disaggregated – in many senses ‘dis-organised’”.

It seems that Holden rightly commented on the difficulty of policy to engage with micro and small cultural organisations, as the continued efforts in the past 20 years to improve the financial sustainability of cultural organisations show that ACE struggled to implement long-lasting change. Already in 1999, ACE delivered “Capital and Stabilisation” (UK Parliament, 1999), “Thrive! – Organisational Development” in 2006 (Laycock, 2011), “Sustain” funding in response to the 2008 financial crisis (Gardner, 2009) and “Developing Cultural Sector Resilience” was launched in 2014 (BOP Consulting, 2015). Consultant and former previous Executive Director of Arts Council England in the North East, Mark Robinson, commented in 2010 that despite such development programmes, “there are still not enough fit-for-purpose mechanisms to invest in the future of organisations we believe in passionately” (2010, p. 4).

In the last four years, other specific funds were directed to address diverse organisational needs. Funding streams such as “Catalyst Small Grants” were created to support organisations in building fundraising capacity, enabling them to attract more private giving. This fund is aimed at “small to medium<sup>2</sup> arts and culture organisations”; however, eligible organisations include already regularly funded organisations such as NPOs, museums, libraries and consortia receiving investments of £250,000 a year or below but with a turnover between £100,000 and £750,000 (ACE, 2019b). Another fund, “Capital Investment: Small capital grants”, aimed to support organisations’ sustainability and resilience through developing capital assets to support the delivery of their work and reduce their environmental impact.

However, these funds support cultural organisations that can demonstrate the capacity to generate income and secured premises, for which they already receive substantial regular funding. Compared to them, accessing funding opportunities to develop income streams and secure buildings can be problematic for other smaller, micro, “dis-organised” (Holden, 2007) organisations that are “abundant” in the sector and that operate at a local, smaller scale (turnover less than £100k year) and in temporary

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<sup>2</sup> See previous foot note.

spaces (leases shorter than ten years), such as the ones in Guild. They need to compete with larger and established organisations and may lack the skills to provide records and comply with all relevant governance reporting and accountability requirements (Thelwall, 2011). For example, the last survey conducted in 2010 by the National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers (NFASP) showed that in the UK there were 144 studio organisations managing 252 buildings and providing 5,450 studios for 7,250 artists (NFASP, 2010). The sector of studio providers is based on artists, that usually group together to sustain the economic investment, rent spaces to host projects and events, have studios or operate without a space by curating programmes in other venues (Cooke, 2007; Institute for Applied Aesthetics, 2012; Hebert and Szefer Karlsen, 2013; Coffield, 2015; Thatcher, 2017).

In recent years, there has been a growth in support of these kinds of activities with charities like East Street Arts on a national scale, ACME studios and Bow Arts in London and other local organisations, or companies such as Meanwhile Spaces, that broker the access to privately owned spaces for artists, taking advantage of the charitable rate relief for business rates (Edemariam, 2019). This means that groups of artists can access affordable spaces, often empty shop units and offices until the property is let again: arrangements that can last for a couple of months to a few years. Some of these spaces are taken up as test beds for cultural activity, and some are meant to be temporary, however, that is not always the case with other organisations that aim at existing long-term. In this regard, there is a growing interest from local authorities in the value that these spaces provide in their localities (We Made That, 2014; Creative Space and East Street Arts, 2021; Ferm *et al.*, 2022). The increasing adoption of short-term property occupation by artists is often a challenge to developing diverse income streams, which makes financial sustainability and resilience not only a priority for funders but for the artists operating in the sector too, as they engage with voluntary labour to manage the spaces (Scott, 2022). The fluidity of how artists operate individually and in groups, and their organisations, means that they often cannot provide enough security to receive loans or be backed by substantial private capital (Blessi, Sacco and Pilati, 2011; MTM, 2018). Investing in these organisations through one of the funds presented above is considered too risky because they cannot provide enough security to reassure funders that they will bring long-term value in return for an initial investment. Instead, these organisations often receive a series of "Project Grants" for the delivery of specific programmes and do not cover overheads, salaries and repeated projects (ACE, 2019a), which seem to contribute to their precarity by reinforcing a "project to project" mentality (Carnegie and Drencheva, 2019).

Further, Beirne *et al.* (2017) and Tbr (2018) report that artists lack work opportunities and financial returns, finding funding initiatives and applications highly bureaucratic with an instrumental approach to evaluating projects, often reinforcing precarious and not-remunerated forms of labour. To address this issue, since 2016, ACE has been awarding grants to support activities focused on developing

organisational capacity, such as “Elevate” (ACE, 2018b). Further, in 2018 it funded “Sector Support Organisations” (ACE, 2018a), whose remit is to offer support services to the broader sector and not directly produce culture. Guild is one of the new SSO led by East Street Arts to support the development of the sustainability of small artists’ organisations that struggle to access existing provisions for support.

### 1.2.1 Background to East Street Arts

ESA started in 1993 when two artists, Karen Watson and Jon Wakeman, decided to run a space that could provide studios for artists as, being artists themselves, they were struggling to find a suitable space to develop their ceramic practice. They rented a space in the East Street Mills on the edge of Leeds City Centre to set up studios for themselves and other artists. The two artists were inspired to create something that would be long-lasting as they witnessed many other organisations founded by artists that quickly disappeared (Gee, 2017). Their organisation quickly grew from renting to eight artists to fifty while Karen and Jon were also managing other artistic projects and events. In 1998, East Street Arts was formally registered as a charity. In the same year, they secured funding from Arts Council England, Leeds City Council and European Regional Development Fund to buy and renovate St Patrick’s Social Club in the East of the city.

Since 2004, ESA has operated from Patrick Studios, where they have office spaces for the organisation and about 30 studios for artists. In 2019, they secured other funding to purchase the convent next door to Patrick Studios and transform it into Convention House – a new venue for artists and audiences to explore technology, art and the environment. They have also purchased the old presbytery, which houses the Art Hostel, a 60 bed venue where the decoration of each room has been commissioned to different artists.

While ESA developed various strands of activity for income generation through their uses of spaces, they have also been part of the Arts Council England National Portfolio (NPO) for more than ten years. Throughout the years, they managed to acquire long-term leases of commercial space in Leeds, such as Union 105 and Vicar Lane and developed a national portfolio of around 300 temporary spaces using the charitable rate relief scheme. The revenue generated from studio rental only covers the costs related to the staff that run that part of the business, while the NPO funding allows them to work on a public programme of arts, events and exhibitions. East Street Arts now acts as an umbrella for a number of connected activities, including space provision, artist mentoring, adult learning and project programming.

Artists that occupy the temporary spaces use them in many different ways depending on their practices and context. For example, empty shops in malls are often set up as craft laboratories at the



back with a small shop front, empty office spaces are used as studios, and other commercial properties host events, workshops and exhibitions. These spaces host both commercial and non-profit organisations with the caveat that the leases are often renewed on a monthly-rolling basis. This means that the artists need to be able to move in and out of the spaces in short spans of time. However, short leases may also be renewed eventually for years. Orlek (2021) argues that ESA started as an “artist-led organisation” because around Karen and Jon formed a self-organised group of artists who dedicated their voluntary labour to run the organisation. Despite growing and becoming formalised (see Chapter 4 on why “institutionalisation” is an issue in artist-led organisations), ESA carries on its artist-led ethos by “doing things in-house and having a majority of artists in post throughout the organisation” (Orlek, 2021, p. 21). The online description of the organisation reinforces this ethos by stating:

“Our starting point will always be artists, as we believe they have the talent, energy, ideas and determination to change our worlds and we underpin all our work with artists support programmes including our SSO funded project Guild” (ESA, no date).

### 1.2.2 Guild

Through their management of temporary spaces, ESA has gained experience in supporting artists to achieve their projects, develop their practices and set up their organisations. So much so that, when in 2017 ACE launched the Sector Support Organisation funding strand alongside the National Portfolio organisations, the directors thought about applying only to SSO funding. Instead, ACE invited them to apply for both funding strands, which were eventually awarded to ESA. Thus, in 2018, Guild was established as a Sector Support Organisation, a project within the bigger organisation that had the ambition to extend the work that East Street Arts has already been leading to support artists and artist-led spaces. This support work is often invisible: it is not clearly advertised and organically happens when working with artists to support them in running their organisations in ESA’s temporary spaces or to deliver their project. However, ESA’s directors often talk about it publicly, inviting artists to “get in touch if they need help”. When the directors describe support for artists, they refer to various practices, from helping artists to review documents and apply for funding to “having a chat” about the future of their organisations or brokering relationships with local stakeholders.

In the Guild guidance for application, Karen is quoted to describe how direct experience of the artist-led sector brought to the fore the variety of challenges that artist-led face as they are historically self-organised, under-resourced and prone to burnout. Guild was born to respond to these conditions to create a support programme dedicated to artists’ groups and spaces. The name Guild refers to medieval guilds, associations of artisans that mutually supported and advocated for each other. Taking

inspiration from them, the programme aimed at creating a cohort of 20 artists' collectives and organisations from across England to network, share learning and support each other's to develop and become more sustainable. However, as a Sector Support Organisation, Guild also fills a gap by taking a specific position to represent artist-led organisations in the sector and collaborate with other organisations with specific remits, for example, to support other artists' networks, artists with disabilities and from unrepresented communities.

The project lasted between 2018 and 2023: the first two years were dedicated to planning and recruiting staff and participant organisations, and subsequent research on the development needs of these organisations. At the beginning of 2020, a programme of in-person and online training and networking opportunities were designed to start the delivery of the support programme, however they had to be readjusted as the priorities of the organisations shifted from developing their sustainability to trying to survive closure due to the limits imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The cohort was surveyed to understand what kind of training and support would benefit them at that time, and a series of online talks and workshops addressed topics such as making audience development programmes, making efficient use of data, improving accessibility and working with diverse artists. Guild' staff also provided one-to-one support wherever possible to help groups with funding applications and practical questions about managing spaces during the pandemic. In the last two years, the programme partially shifted back towards its original plans and awarded money through a series of programmes to which the cohort members could apply:

- Over £110,000 were awarded to 11 organisations as seed funding to develop feasibility studies to improve their uses of spaces or invest in a capital project;
- over £50,000 was spent on designed development activities (talks, workshops);
- over £75,000 was made available for one-to-one mentoring with professionals and consultants;
- Around £28,000 funded 22 commissions and virtual residencies, which allowed the artists/directors of the organisations to produce learning resources about the development of specific strands of their organisations.

### 1.2.3 Applications

Guild received 97 applications between the 6th of December and the 11th February. Figure 1 and 2 show the geographical spreads of all the applications and the selected participants. The areas with most applicants were: London (11), Bristol (10), Leeds (9), Lancashire (5), Manchester (5), Birmingham

(5) and Norfolk (4). Nine applicants were already engaging with ESA by renting out spaces and receiving direct support; three were chosen for the extra support Guild could give them compared to the current ESA provision. The Guild application form included a section on the self-identified barriers to their sustainability, and a review of the 99 applications highlighted these barriers:

- 35% Precarious building/rent security
- 21% Not accessing regular public/ACE funding
- 22% Staff burn-out
- 21% Support to build a board/ governance/ organisational structure
- 35% Support in business planning
- 21% Need to generate/ diversify income streams



**Figure 1 Map of all applicants**



**Figure 2 Map of selected organisations**

The cohort of 20 organisations was selected through an application process with a panel made up of peers, contributors and funders. Over two days, the applications were discussed using the following criteria as prompts:

- Potential and scope for development of the organisation or group;
- Articulation of needs - what they perceive to be their biggest challenges and what they aim to work towards with the support of Guild;
- Innovative approach to addressing development needs;

- Geographical spread;
- Potential benefit the group has to their local area and the commitment to embedding the group in the locality;
- Working as a group, in the visual arts and in England.

The 20 selected participants included 12 Community Interest Companies (CICs), 6 groups with no official status and 2 charities. Reported income generation for the year 2017/2018 spanned from a minimum of £3,151 to £104,703 with most groups operating with an income between £20,000 to £40,000 per year. The longest group has been in operation for 27 years, while the most recent group has been in operation for one year, with most groups being in operations between 4-5 years. Most of the organisations were managed by one or two members in their groups, about half of the organisations could pay for one or two days of their time.

The 20 selected groups would receive tailored, bespoke support to help them become resilient and sustainable. The programme of support would include the following:

- Developing a business model;
- Securing funds for physical and organisational development;
- Devising strategies and action plans to embed the groups firmly in their localities;
- Developing networks and contacts wider than just the arts sector;
- Masterclasses;
- Networking opportunities for the groups;
- Mentoring tailored to their specific needs;
- Guidance and support when making contacts within non-arts sector (local authority processes, private developers, finance raising, audience development and local community buy-in);
- Site visits and research trips within the UK and Europe.

### 1.3 Overview of chapters

This thesis explores how sustainability is understood in the cultural sector, what kind of meaning and practical applications this concept assumes in the context of small artists' organisations. Before engaging with how sustainability is used in the cultural sector, the "original" definition of sustainability is explained (Bell and Morse, 2008). The next three Chapters will review the literature drawn from different disciplines to widen our understanding of dynamics that can impact the sustainability of cultural organisations at macro, meso and micro scales.

Chapter Two introduces the meaning of sustainability in systems studies and it traces how the term was adopted first in international policy to evolve into “sustainable development” and finally trickle down into English cultural policy. From being used to describe the quality of systems and the equilibrium between economic growth and the finitude of natural resources, sustainability is now used in the cultural sector to talk about how the sector could continue to produce economic, social, cultural value while public funding are being reduced. Organisations should innovate their business models to generate income in different ways to sustain their activities. The sustainability of the sector at a “macro” level depends on the sustainability of the organisations at the meso level.

Chapter Three explores what business models are, the kinds of models are found in the cultural industries and discusses the limits of their applicability. Business models are used to identify how an organisation works and they can be used to make future plans and strategies. However, their function is descriptive rather than prescriptive, which limits their applicability. This chapter also explores how small business owners and social entrepreneurs’ attitudes to understand if parallels can be drawn with those of artists have in running small organisations. It questions whether the professional identities of small business owners bring about specific management challenges or they are common issues in small organisations. Drawing from organisational studies, this chapter introduces the theory on how shared values among organisations members help them to build coherent organisational cultures and structures which contribute to the persistence of organisations. Similarities between the behaviours of artists and small entrepreneurs start to emerge at a meso-scale. However, critics of the business model approach in the cultural sector argue that knowing artists' motivations and values is key to developing sustainable organisations (Poettschacher, 2005; Bogen, 2019).

Thus, Chapter 4 reviews literature on cultural work and entrepreneurship to explore what values are embedded in this kind of labour and in artist-led spaces.

Chapter 5 explores the research design, the adopted methodology and discusses the methods used. It also summarises how the pandemic has impacted the research and how the research was adapted in response to it.

From Chapter Six to Nine, empirical findings are presented and analysed. Since in policy sustainability is associated with the idea of business model change, Chapter Six tests to what extent exercises to map business models can be useful to gauge the sustainability of organisations. While this kind of mapping does not bring many solutions for change, it shows that most founders do not have economic ambitions due to their motivations for starting the organisations. This Chapter is positioned at the beginning of the analysis section of the thesis to show how a practical application of classification and description business models give limited insights on organisations if they are not understood in

relation to motivations, the ways in which they are set up and how they are structured. The value of considering these is explored in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

Chapter Seven discusses the motivations that drive artists to run their organisations and what values could be linked to these motivations. Chapter Eight explores how the organisations were set up, either by “chance” or through planning. Chapter Nine analyses what structures and cultures emerge from informal, fluid and semi-formal dynamics between the members of organisations.

Chapter Ten summarises the findings and briefly discusses how they may be interpreted at different levels and what implications they may have for policy, organisations and artists.

## 2 Sustainability and culture

International and national policies have made sustainability one of their primary goals, this approach has also trickled down into cultural policies that delineate an understanding of the concept and its applicability. This chapter considers the macro policy discourses around sustainability to discuss how international and national policies, particularly cultural policies, have shaped an understanding of sustainability that impacts how the cultural sector in England has adopted this goal and how organisations work to achieve it.

This chapter first presents the definitions of sustainability, sustainable development and resilience to trace their adoption and application in cultural policy. It will sketch out the current framing of sustainability in the cultural sector and provide a broad contextualisation for the debates around how the discourse of sustainability has been adopted in business and organisational studies, business models and planning (Chapter 3) and the artist-led discourse (Chapter 4).

The past 50 years have seen a growing interest from many fields in the concept of sustainability and its applicability. The “science” of sustainability introduces a systemic approach to thinking and problem-solving, which is alternative, but complementary, to the “traditional” reductionist scientific approach, which reduces whole systems into individual parts. Instead, the framework of sustainability uses system-thinking to group individual components into “self-contained systems”, sets of things that interact with each other as wholes rather than singular elements, and position them within broader systems (Bell and Morse, 2008, p. 109). System thinking allows to have a holistic view across scales of how micro and macro dynamics of systems are interconnected and impact each other to reach an equilibrium.

From the 1970s, the concept of sustainability snowballed from being used to reconcile economic growth and the depletion of natural resources, to a broad concept used as a goal in policy-making for cities, communities, organisations and different sectors (Mollica and Campbell, 2009; Mauser *et al.*, 2013; Sepe, 2015; Lew *et al.*, 2016; Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019). Sustainability entered the discourse of popular culture, and its meaning became “ambiguous enough to allow for consensus building, but devoid of much substance” (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019, p. 687). In particular, the term's ambiguity transforms into confusion when sustainability is used with concepts that seem to contradict it by implying change, such as development, growth and resilience.

Through this chapter, I will first explore how the concept of sustainability started to be used in relation to the economy and the natural environment, and how it expanded into sustainable development to include social and cultural domains. Section 2.2 clarifies the relationship between culture and sustainability to discuss how the growing interest in resilience is shaping the current focus of cultural

policy on business models and its implications for the sector and small organisations. This section draws from the analysis of academic articles and policy documents that precede the last Arts Council Strategy (ACE, 2013) and follows the development of the business models and resilience discourses in cultural policy through key texts such as The Culture White Paper (DCMS, 2016) and What Is Resilience Anyway? (Woodley et al., 2018) until the publication of the current Arts Council strategy in 2020. While English Cultural Policy has continued to develop during the time of research, this literature review focuses on the period between 2016 and 2020 to provide a detailed account of how the sustainability discourse has been developing before the Covid-19 pandemic, which started in March 2020 and ended in April 2022 shifting the focus of cultural policy to resilience, survival and recovery of the cultural sector (Sargent, 2022). In conclusion, I discuss how the meaning of sustainability is shaped by language, introducing the concept of cultural ecology and discussing why learning from system theory could be beneficial to learn alternative ways to talk about sustainability.

### 2.1. From sustainability to sustainable development

The concept of sustainability was first developed in scientific studies on systems and later adopted by the social sciences and in the broader language. Understanding the original definition provides the key to considering how the meaning of sustainability has been translated into other fields.

The “original” definition of sustainability relates to the notion of “carry capacity” that is “the capacity of an ecological system (ecosystem) to sustain a certain density of individuals because each individual utilizes resources in that system” (Bell and Morse, 2008, p. 6). In turn, if the resource demands exceed the carry capacity (i.e. becomes bigger than the resources available in the system), the system collapses. In particular, sustainability looks at the maintenance of a “system’s quality”: “a sustainable system equates to a situation where quality remains the same or increases. If quality declines, then the system can be regarded as unsustainable” (Bell and Morse, 2008, p. 12).

Even though sustainability means that an ecological system is stable over time, the development of the concept is linked to ideas of growth and development of the related social systems. Soon after the Second World War, Western countries started to see “economic growth” in a broader sense that could tackle social issues. The expansion of national economies meant an increase in the flow of goods and services and growth per capita income. In this sense, “economic growth” became synonymous with “economic development” as a means to address “basic needs” by satisfying the material well-being of people (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019).

The goal of economic growth in Western and “developing” countries meant increasing pressure on the planet's finite natural resources which, coupled with widespread media coverage of environmental disasters, gave rise in late 1960 to the modern ecological movement (Anguish, 2015). Sustainability



would be defined as “strong” if the financial performance of an industry stays the same or grows and “there is no trade-off between economic gain and environmental quality” so that the environmental impact remains the same or lowers. This definition contrasts with “weak” sustainability, which means that “environmental quality can be traded against economic gain” (Bell and Morse, 2008, p. 14). Bell and Morse (2008) comment, “weak sustainability currently dominates in the global economy”.

From 1972, with the first UN Conference on the “Human–Environment” in Stockholm trying to reconcile economic development with environmental sustainability, a series of conferences (e.g. Rio and Johannesburg Earth Summits) have been held, and international agreements signed to regulate the economic and human impact on the natural environment (Kyoto Protocol, Agenda 21, Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals, etc.) (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019, p. 683). Though, from the late 1970s, the concerns around sustainability expanded onto the social domain, Purvis, Mao and Robinson (2019, p. 683) argue that “the environment and quality of life issues came to the fore in the West at this point because “basic economic needs” had been met following the economic growth of the post-war period”. This brought a shift in focus from enhancing the material well-being of people to the “gross inequalities and poverties that still existed in many of these societies” (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019, p. 684).

Thus, in 1987 when the UN World Commission on Environment and Development published its report *Our Common Future* (the Brundtland Report), it called for “a new era of economic growth—growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable” (WCED, 1987, p. 7). It defined “sustainable development” as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 16). The different meanings of sustainability and sustainable development are often glossed over, with both now used to refer to sustainable development (Dovers and Handmer, 1993). While sustainability – especially as in the original definition – focuses on the carrying capacity of the natural world, sustainable development explicitly considers the sustainability of interactions between three pillars: the environment, the economy and society (Vallance, Perkins and Dixon, 2011). If grounded in system-thinking, this holistic approach should allow us to engage with the complexity of the interactions between these three systems (Barbier, 1987; Barbier and Burgess, 2017).

Although, the concept of sustainable development has been criticised for becoming “sufficiently vague to allow for a broad consensus [...] but too vague to ever be useful” (Daly, 1996, p. 3). With their review of historical sustainability and sustainable development literature, Purvis, Mao and Robinson (2019, p. 681) argue that both terms are ambiguous because the sustainability discourse arose from broadly different schools of thought. The different conceptions can be summarised in two macro approaches:

a holistic, integrated perspective of the economic, social and environmental pillars (Barbier, 1987; Cocklin, 1989) that argued for a shift in focus from economic development to a “system of economic activity that enhances human development while being environmentally and socially sustainable” (Hancock, 1993, p. 43); the other approach (Brown *et al.*, 1987; Goodland and Daly, 1996) proposed a view of the three pillars as interrelated, but separated, with different views concerning their relationship. Though, academic debates largely agreed on reviewing the role of the economic pillar by placing limitations on growth “by thinking of the ‘economy’ as subordinate to social wellbeing and environmental health” (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019, p. 690). In contrast with these views, the UN promoted a narrative of sustainable development where sustaining economic growth is the priority and “key to meeting the social and environmental goals through trickle-down effects” (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019, p. 690).

As a consequence of differing views, the lack of a “solid conception frustrates approaches towards a theoretically rigorous operationalisation” (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019, p. 681). Both concepts of sustainability and sustainable development describe the general idea of reaching a balance, but do not provide specific targets to achieve a particular level of quality for the systems considered. Indicators are worked out a posteriori on what “reconciling” or “balancing” the three pillars actually mean (Bell and Morse, 2008): in turn, governments need to make “necessary political value judgements to allow for application” (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019, p. 690), thus often shifting the desirable balance to meet political and economic aims and shaping how we understand and achieve sustainability and sustainable development (Mlitz and van den Hoogen, 2021).

#### 2.1.1. Culture and sustainable development

In 1992, the UN and UNESCO, promoted the creation of the World Commission on Culture and Development to expand on the understanding of “sustainable development”, broadening it from a limited focus on economic progress and environmental protection to a broader concept of human wellbeing (Margolin, 1996). The Commission published the report *Our Creative Diversity* in 1995, which went a step further from the Brundtland report, strengthening a rethinking of the notion of development to highlight the relationship between culture and development (WCCD, 1995). It presented “a bold vision of global development that attends to the needs of many cultural groups” (Margolin, 1996, p. 128) and an international agenda to include issues relating to the rights of women, children, indigenous people and the conservation of the world’s cultural heritage (WCCD, 1995). It included aims to facilitate cultural diversity and give communities opportunities for cultural expression by encouraging cross-sectoral partnerships as tools for supporting cultural activity (Duxbury et al, 2017).

Seminal work from economist David Throsby (1994a, 1994b, 2017) informed the report by shining a light on how cultural activities contribute to the economy and how economics could expose and analyse the specific problems posed by the production and consumption of the culture. Mirroring the definition of sustainable development, it presented “cultural development” as a way to balance social/cultural and environmental issues and economic policy objectives (Duxbury et al., 2017). Using a systems approach, Throsby (1995) defined economic and cultural activities as separate systems that interact and feedback to advance sustainable development. In *On the Sustainability of Cultural Capital*, Throsby (2005) drew comparisons between natural, economic and cultural capitals and referred to the original definition of sustainability to argue for the management of cultural capital<sup>3</sup> to achieve “strong (cultural) sustainability”:

“in any given period society would need to allocate a sufficient level of resources to utilising its cultural capital stock rather than to other (non-cultural) purposes, and would need to re-invest a sufficient level of the financial income stream so generated in the conservation and maintenance of the stock, in order to ensure no deterioration in the cultural value of the stock in the next period.” (Throsby, 2005, p. 11)

However, this conception is an example of how an approach to sustainable development that separates the four pillars, and that is informed by the UN imperative of economic growth, risks focusing on the relationship between the economy and another dimension, here culture, without considering the trade-offs with the other pillars. This separation contributes to the ambiguity of sustainability and sustainable development that, in recent uses, may not be referring to environmental sustainability at all but prioritise the economy as part of a broader neoliberal discourse (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014). However, Soini and Birkeland (2014, p. 215) argue that “cultural sustainability” should not be understood as a separate pillar but rather the “foundation or necessary condition for meeting the aims of sustainable development in the first place or as a perspective through which understandings of social, economic and environmental sustainability may appear”. Different understandings of the role of culture in sustainable development can be summarised in three ways:

- culture in sustainable development, considers culture as having an independent or autonomous role in sustainability: culture becomes the fourth dimension of sustainability. This approach views cultural sustainability as parallel to ecological, social, and economic sustainability, with all comprising interconnected dimensions of sustainability.

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<sup>3</sup> Throsby (2005, p.3) defines cultural capital as “an asset that embodies or gives rise to cultural value in addition to whatever economic value it might possess”.

- culture for sustainable development, stresses culture having a mediating role in achieving economic, social, and ecological sustainability.
- culture as sustainable development, considers culture not only as an instrument but a necessary foundation for meeting the overall aims of sustainability. In this approach, culture encloses all other dimensions of sustainability and becomes an overarching concern or paradigm of sustainability (Dessein *et al.*, 2015).

Dessein *et al.* (2015) reintroduced a holistic view of the pillars of sustainability, now including culture to have an instrumental role in promoting economic, environmental and social progress: “many if not all of the planet’s environmental problems and certainly all of its social and economic problems have cultural activity and decisions – people and human actions” (Dessein *et al.*, 2015, p. 14). By 2010, a policy statement adopted by the 3rd World Congress of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) recognised culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, calling on cities and local and regional governments around the world “to develop a solid cultural policy and to include a cultural dimension in all public policies” (UCLG, 2010, p. 4)<sup>4</sup>.

Similar to how Bell and Morse (2008) argue that, ultimately, the meaning of sustainability is shaped by economic and environmental indicators, policymakers need to define indicators for cultural sustainability and sustainable development, which otherwise could only be used as conceptual frameworks “against which things can be judged, rather than as a precise standard” (Throsby, 2005, p. 201). To the end of defining cultural sustainable development and making it more tangible, researchers (Kuka, 2011) and organisations started to sketch out how policy could view ensuring cultural sustainability as a goal “for the wellbeing of all” (IFACCA *et al.*, 2013, p. 3) and began to propose indicators (culture21, 2015; UNESCO, 2017) that could embed culture in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in 2015. UCLG, which remains a strong body for the advocacy of culture in the SDGs, presented a report describing evidence demonstrating how:

“cultural aspects, including active participation in cultural life, the development of individual and collective cultural liberties, the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritages, and the protection and promotion of diverse cultural expressions, are core components of human and sustainable development” (UCLG, 2018, p. 4).

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<sup>4</sup> For a summary of the UN and UNESCO work on culture and sustainable development between 1982 and 2013 see IFACCA *et al.* (2013) “Culture as a goal in the post-2015 development agenda”. Available [here](#).

Culture and participation in sustainable development are found to be important strategies to encourage creativity and positive responses to change, bringing people together and “inspiring new meaning and action” (Light *et al.*, 2018, p. 2). Light *et al.* (2018, p. 2) argue that a cultural shift towards sustainability can be brought by “creative practices” based around natural sciences, design and humanities, that span from communal gardening to craft and performance to engage people “in activities that set out to change orientation to the future” and “find a sustainable balance in resource use, lifestyles and ambitions for the planet”. Duxbury *et al.* (2017) summarise the four “key objectives” that emerge from cultural policy in relation to sustainability: 1) to safeguard cultural heritage and protect cultural practices (valuing the continuity of cultures over time and their diversity); (2) to “green” the operations and impacts of cultural organizations and industries; (3) to raise awareness and catalyse actions about sustainability and climate change through artistic expression and the meaning-making function of culture; and (4) to foster “ecological citizenship”, concerning the public and individual response to climate change.

## 2.2 Funding sustainability in cultural policy in the UK and England

While the previous section contextualises how the meaning of sustainability and sustainable development evolved to include culture, this section focuses on how sustainability is mobilised in English cultural policy to achieve specific goals. Sustainability in international policy is strongly connected to the role that culture and cultural organisations can assume to foster environmental and social sustainable development, while calling for governments and organisations to enact cultural sustainability through the protection of cultural heritage and diversity. Sustainable development, environmental and cultural protection are regulated by various international agreements, conventions and treaties, including principles and shared aims that can impact national law and policy-making (Historic England, no date; UK Government, 2019). Public bodies in England, like the Environment Agency and Historic England, and partnerships in the cultural sector, such as the one between Arts Council England (ACE) and Julie’s Bicycle, support the broader governmental effort to deliver national policy objectives and adhere to international regulations. As a distributor of the proceeds of the National Lottery, ACE needs to consider policy directions issued by the Secretary of State on how the funding are allocated, what they can be used for and report on how the directions have been met (DCMS, 2007). Since 2007, all ACE annual reviews have included a section on “the need to further the objectives of sustainable development”, which reviews the public body’s investments in capital spending and the footprint of these buildings (ACE, 2007). However, in broader terms, sustainability in the cultural sector has taken a prominent role as a way to talk about the financial sustainability of cultural organisations.

In 1956, the UK government published *A Policy for the Arts – the First Steps*, a White Paper setting out the “government’s obligation to sustain and strengthen all that is best in the arts and stated that “the best must be made more widely available” (DCMS, 2016, p. 5). After more than 50 years, *The Culture White Paper* (DCMS, 2016) updated the previous document, renewing the commitment to making arts and culture more accessible, focusing on the role of the cultural sector in place-making, bringing economic growth, enhancing the UK’s global reputation and soft power. The document explicitly considers sustainability mainly in relation to the financial sustainability of the sector, referring only twice to sustainability in terms of safeguarding local cultures and promoting sustainable development to protect heritage sites omitting any reference to environmental protection. Despite the renewed commitment to financially supporting the sector, the document indicates private donations and investments and the development of commercial revenues as the way forward to “navigate a challenging financial environment”(DCMS, 2016, p. 50).

In this light, the government presented a wider strategy to support the development of the financial sustainability and resilience of arts and cultural organisations, emphasising how “in recent years, many cultural organisations have responded to changing economic circumstances by reviewing their structures, governance and operating models and diversifying their funding streams” (DCMS, 2016, p. 50). In this context, “sustainability” is often used as a short-cut for “financial sustainability”, giving to “the sustainability of arts and cultural organisations” a twofold meaning: the capacity to become sustainable by relying less on public funding and developing long-term strategies that involve local partnerships and a range of stakeholders, and the resilient capacity to adapt to reductions in public funding by reforming business models and organisational structures (DCMS, 2016).

Throughout the document, there is a continuous commitment from the government to work with Arts Council England to support cultural organisations to achieve long-term financial sustainability and become more resilient so that the sector can perform its role, contributing to the economy and enabling people to “experience the well-being benefits of engaging with culture” (DCMS, 2016, p. 58). The final chapter, *Cultural investment, resilience and reform*, explains how public funding is used to support organisations in developing their business models to diversify their income streams. Public funding is viewed as an investment in the cultural sector to make organisations financially self-sustainable through earned income so that they can rely less on public funding while continuing to generate economic and social benefits:

“In order to thrive, the arts and cultural sector must be able to adapt to these changing circumstances without compromising its core values and the quality of its work. The sector

must develop new ways of thinking and working that will increase its resilience.” (DCMS, 2016, p. 51)

At the time of the publication of the White Paper, in 2016, ACE reported a reduction of 17% in funding (£236m) since 2010 (Artlyst, 2016), with a further cut between 2018-22 by £156m (Romer, 2018a). Considerable cuts came after more than ten years of previous Labour government’s policies and investments in the economic and social benefits of the “creative industries”, an umbrella term for various sectors, from IT and advertising to arts and culture (Oakley, 2004; Garnham, 2005). Cuts in public funding have not been limited to the arts and culture sector but extend to all areas of policy, and they are linked to the 2008 global banking crisis and the change to a Conservative majority in parliament since 2010, which entered the country into a period of austerity that is still ongoing (Newsinger, 2015; Wren-Lewis, 2015; Newsinger and Serafini, 2019; Rimmer, 2020). The joint publication between Arts Council and the New Local Government Network *Funding arts and culture in a time of austerity* (Harvey, 2016) reported that local authorities invest in culture more than the Arts Council and National Museums combined. Between 2008 and 2018, the combined public funding (treasury funding to ACE, National lottery, local government) for the arts per head of population fell by 35% and local government investment alone decreased by 43%, whereas financial inputs from private sources (including earned income, business contributions, trusts and foundations, individual giving) has seen a small but steady increase (National Campaign for the Arts, 2020). The publication forecasted growing pressure on public funding for culture and called for the Arts Council to develop stronger partnerships with local authorities to sustain arts and culture.

The *Culture White Paper* was published to update the government’s approach to public support for art and culture; however, the reviewed approach aligned with the work that Arts Council England has already been doing for the strategic development of the arts and cultural sectors. In fact, in its last strategy *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* for the 2010-2020 period, one of the public body’s goals was to make the arts, museums and libraries resilient (public funding independent) and sustainable (reduce environmental impact) (ACE, 2013b). Both the *White Paper* and the ACE’s strategy mentioned not only sustainability, but also resilience. While the next section will address the differences between them in more detail, their uses should be noted here with the purpose of understanding the shift in the framing of what a strategic development of the arts and cultural sector means. The White Paper’s wider aim is to develop the “sustainability” of the sector through resilience, and for this reason the ACE’s goal is to make organisations resilient. In the strategic paper *Great Arts and Culture for Everyone*, the Arts Council defined resilience:

“By resilience we mean the vision and capacity of organisations to anticipate 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, 2013b, p. 31).

The two terms have slightly different connotations in that sustainability, rooted in the idea of equilibrium, is used in the *White Paper* as goal for arts and cultural organisations to continue delivering their work by strengthening their financial viability due to some “potential challenges to funding” (DCMS, 2016, p. 51). In *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*, the discourse of development for the cultural sector was framed around resilience to respond to existing, rather than potential, challenges to public funding. The strategy explicitly addressed the present and future reductions in the budget: “public investment in arts and culture is under considerable pressure and is likely to remain so over the lifetime of this strategy” (ACE, 2013, p. 31). Deverteuil and Golubchikov (2016, p. 147) argue that in its original meaning, resilience is a “passive” trait, the ability to respond to shocks; however, “given the increasingly corrosive trends in neo-liberalism”, resilience has become an active stance that should be produced, or increased, in order to adapt to new conditions and imperatives and accept “the inevitability of change”.

The two strategic documents discussed in this section show the macro implications of an economic framing of sustainability in the cultural sector: arts and cultural organisations cannot rely on public funding therefore, they need to be supported to adapt their business models and be prepared to be resilient.

### 2.2.1 Resilience and sustainability

There are many similarities between the concepts of sustainability and resilience, and they are often used without clear distinction in meaning and purpose for various applications. First of all, resilience and sustainability are not “distinct entities themselves” but rather “descriptors of something else” (Marchese *et al.*, 2018, p. 1275). Marchese *et al.* (2018) found three dominant frameworks for organising sustainability and resilience in the literature: (1) resilience as a component of sustainability – where sustainability is the ultimate objective, increasing resilience makes a system more sustainable; (2) sustainability as a component of resilience – where resilience is the ultimate objective and sustainability makes a system more resilient; (3) resilience and sustainability as separate objectives – they can complement or compete with each other.

Even if consensus on the definitions and use of these two concepts is lacking, a broad distinction highlights sustainability as “focused on increasing the quality of life with respect to environmental, social and economic consideration” (Marchese *et al.*, 2018, p. 1276); whilst resilience focuses on the



response of a system to a disturbance and its capacity to bounce back to its original state before the disturbance, with much of it being rooted in “preparedness” (Linkov and Palma-Oliveira, 2017). Drawing from this understanding of resilience as the ability to withstand adversities, resilience’s contemporary meaning stems from its application in ecology studies developed by C.S. Holling (1973b) in his paper on systems’ ecology (Alexander, 2013). Holling (1973, p.14) defined it as “a measure of the persistence of systems and their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationship between populations or state variables”. Alexander (2013) notes that Holling’s main contribution is to use the term resilience to characterise a dynamic equilibrium to describe the stability of ecological systems. As Holling did not necessarily imply bringing back the “original” equilibrium, in the context of disaster recovery, Manyena et al. (2011), expanded on the notion of resilience not as the ability of a community to bounce back, but to “bounce forward” and move forward from a disaster. In this case, resilience is used with positive connotations, focusing on the strengths and resources of a community to recover following a disaster.

In the aftermath of disasters and in the community development contexts, sustainability initiatives focus on preserving traditional methods of resource use and livelihoods. In contrast, resilience initiatives tend to focus on adapting to new conditions and creating innovative uses of traditional knowledge (Lew *et al.*, 2016). Further, resilience tends to prioritize processes or features of systems, whereas sustainability prioritizes outcomes of that system (Park *et al.*, 2013). A literature review shows increased uses of resilience in many fields and many critics see the extensive appearance of resilience in governmental and non-governmental reports just as a “buzzword” replacing sustainability (Folke, 2006; S Royce, 2011; Wilson, 2012; Alexander, 2013; Brown, 2014; Deverteuil and Golubchikov, 2016; Meerow and Newell, 2016; Maclean *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, Davoudi argues (2012) that sustainability dominated discourses around socio-ecological systems since the second half of the twentieth century, but since 2010 it has increasingly started to be replaced by resilience. Unlike environmental sustainability, which tries to establish an equilibrium, ecological resilience is characterised by instability. In the face of a “world beyond our control” rather than resignation, we need to find a better way to survive through adaptation (Joseph, 2013, p. 43).

Similarly to how sustainability evolved into sustainable development, maintaining the imperative of economic growth, Walker and Cooper (2011, p. 144) argue that “the success of resilience in colonizing multiple areas of governance” reflects its ideological fit with neoliberalism. The “Big Society” programme in the UK is cited as one example of invoking localism and community, with the logic for them to rely on their own resources and provide the least amount of support needed for these changes to take place (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013; Cretney and Bond, 2014). In turn, this “resilience-oriented policy discursively and ideologically absolves capital and the state from accountability to

remediate the impacts of their practices and policies” (Mackinnon and Derickson, 2013, p. 263). DeVerteuil and Golubchikov (2016) argue that particular discourses have colonized the concept of resilience, however, it is inherently neither negative nor positive. The “bounce-back” and adaptability skills implied by resilience make it a powerful metaphor to “capture the essence of social processes” while the concept is flexible enough “to work for a variety of systems and temporal frames”, which would require otherwise to bring together “a lot of alternative concepts” (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016, p.144). They argue that resilience should be understood as a long-term process of learning and adaptation rather than a condition (*ibid.*).

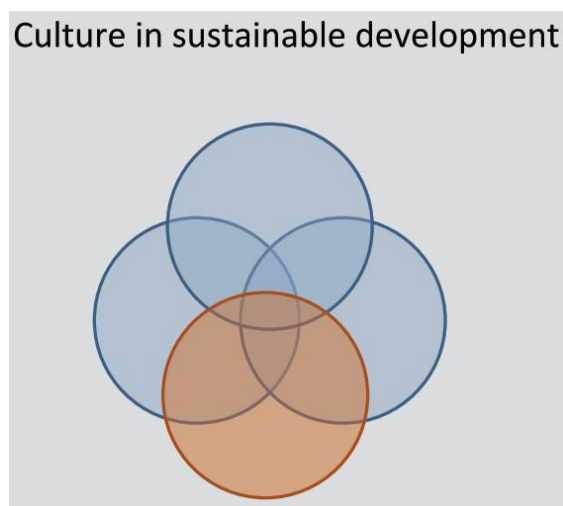
While sustainability was “everywhere”, its discourse was abruptly shocked by the 2008 economic crises, when governments started to introduce “resilience” in different fields of policy. Since then, the term has been used extensively in many reports and publications (Adger, 2000; Wilson, 2012; Lew *et al.*, 2016) due to the many other challenges that governments are adapting to and will encounter due to resource scarcity and wider changes (mass migrations, destruction of the natural environment etc.), including cultural policy.

### 2.2.2 Resilience in ACE policy

While resilience is used in the context of scarcity of resources, it is also used to indicate the need to adapt to the scarcity of economic resources (Cooper and Walker, 2011). This kind of use can be seen in how resilience is described in the last ACE strategy, *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*, and concurrent reports that provide guidance on how to become resilient (the latter are discussed in section 2.2.3). In the context of austerity, where public funding is still used to subsidise arts organisations, showing a resilient capacity adds value to arts organisations. Resilience has become a criterion for awarding grants and allocating funds, which are allocated to programmes that try to build resilience in organisations as a way to adapt and achieve long-term financial sustainability (independence from public funding) (Woodley *et al.*, 2018). While resilience has a long history and could be better positioned and contextualised in different fields that span from environmental to social sciences (Alexander, 2013), its wide application and popular use brought confusion to the arts sector. ACE commissioned a specific report *What is resilience anyway?* to clarify its meaning and uses (Woodley *et al.*, 2018). In this report, while recognising the connections between resilience and sustainability, resilience is identified as being a specific goal, separated from sustainability. In the arts and cultural sector, resilience is associated with the ability to innovate and cope during economic downturns and the capacity to “absorb the shock” of cuts in funds and survive or, better, “thrive” (Woodley *et al.*, 2018, p. 9). Indeed, the authors (Woodley *et al.*, 2018, p. 14) admit that resilience has become “a code for cuts, or for the imperative to respond to cuts”.

In *What is resilience anyway?*, emphasis is put on building resilience across scales: in order to achieve strategic development all different actors, from the individual artist to arts organisations, will need to adapt. However, the report only addresses resilience at the meso level of the organisations because individual resilience was deemed out of the scope of the research project. Differently from a sustainability approach, which may imply resistance to change to maintain equilibrium, a resilient approach goes further. It is not only the ability to “bounce-back”, but “bounce-forward” by exploiting the moment of instability to assess risks and opportunities to change direction. In the report, being resilient is explained as being able to rethink what is being produced and innovating business models, developing new ways of working to support longer-term adaptability and new products that ensure organisations and artists stay relevant to their public (Woodley *et al.*, 2018).

After years of building on and clarifying the notion of resilience, the current ACE strategy for the 2020-2030 period uses the term only once. With this strategy, ACE seems to have taken on board critiques of the lack of a coherent framework (McIntosh, 2008) and adopted a “sustainable development approach”, by visually representing their investment principles in a similar fashion to the sustainable development pillars (Figure 3). The ACE principles are visualised in Figure 4 as interconnected, overlapping, and functioning synergically to sustainably develop the cultural sector as a whole. While sustainability is only used twice in connection to the natural environment and sustainable development is never mentioned in the document, the national development agency's strategy for creativity and culture reflects a broad vision that encompasses different components of the sector. Among some specific goals, it refers to how the ACE will work to “sustain” communities, artistic activity and creative careers (ACE, 2020).



**Figure 3** Dessein *et al.* (2015, p.29) The role of culture (represented in orange) in sustainable development (the three circles represent the three pillars economy, environment, society). Culture here is added as a fourth pillar.

In the strategy, there is a clear correspondence between the investment principles and the pillars of sustainability: “dynamism” looks at the economic landscape for the organisations in the sector, the “ambitions and quality” looks at cultural outputs, “inclusivity and relevance” is linked to how different groups of society are represented in the industry and “environmental responsibility” with the preservation of the natural environment (Figure 4).

While this visualisation signals a more comprehensive approach, the strategy struggles to show an integrated approach to the sustainable development of the sector, as each element is addressed separately and without articulating how the different principles relate to each other. In terms of dynamism, the strategic vision to “sustain” the sector is conveyed by giving, by and large, unchanged advice to individual organisations: “Cultural organisations will need to become more entrepreneurial and develop business models that help them maximise income, reduce costs and become more financially resilient” (ACE, 2020, p. 49).

Ten years after the previous strategy, which argued for resilience, flexibility, adaptability, and proactive change are still key due to “ongoing pressure on public funding” (ibid.).

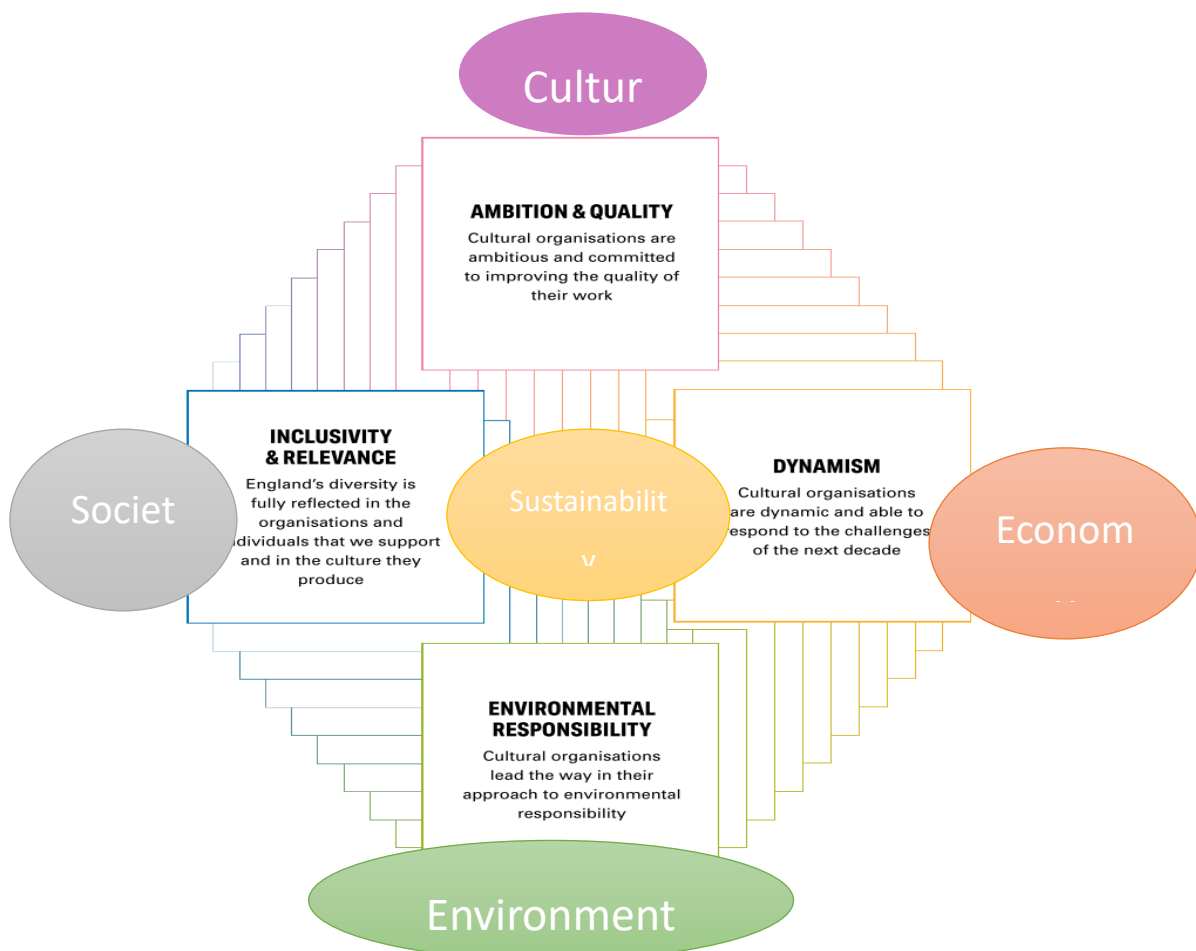


Figure 4 Arts Council England (2020, p. 29) Investment principles [with my notes in the ovals].

So, whilst resilience is only mentioned once, it assumes a significant role in this strategy, as it is embedded in the imperative of dynamism, one of the investment principles. Through these principles, the Arts Council implies a logic where the funding is given, “invested”, with the expectation of social and economic returns (Belfiore, 2002). Dynamism sees targeted investment to support cultural organisations to change their mission and their business models to make returns on investment last longer: through resilience, the capacity to find other ways to generate income, organisations will become financially sustainable and able to continue delivering the same economic and social impacts without resorting to public funding. From a systemic approach, the notion of sustainability in environmental terms implies a radical change in the modes of production and consumption to ensure that natural resources can last longer or be preserved (Tulloch and Neilson, 2014; Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019); in cultural policy terms, the radical change needed to ensure that cultural organisations can continue to exist is being identified at the level of the organisations’ mission and business models. By asking what sustainability means in the cultural sector, this thesis discusses the implications and applicability of business model change for cultural organisations and the efficacy for the wider system/sector.

Differently from the previous strategy’s goal, where resilience was defined as “the vision and capacity of organisations to anticipate and adapt [...] deploying resources effectively in order to continue delivering quality work in line with their mission” (ACE, 2013, p. 31), in the current strategy, dynamism “may involve organisations changing both their missions and their business models” (ACE, 2020, p. 49). On the one hand, mission change could be minimal, even beneficial in giving artists and cultural organisations a better sense of direction to achieve their goals (Stevenson, 2019). On the other, taken literally, this language is particularly problematic given the importance that missions and visions have in cultural organisations (discussed at the end of Chapter 3 and in Chapter 4). While this language frames the foundations of future funding and development programmes around the necessity for cultural organisations to change their missions and models to respond to market demands and ever increasing private interests, it also poses bigger questions about the public value of arts and culture, their independence and their wider accessibility.

### 2.2.3 (Business) Models of Resilience

In the 2011 *Business models in the visual arts* report, Royce was already concerned with sustainability and resilience and their usefulness (2011). Similar to how sustainability has been critiqued for being too vague, resilience’s contribution is limited by its theoretical foundation: “resilience comes from system theory and evolutionary biology and, as such, has much that is of value to say about resilient systems and ecologies but rather less about how individual components/organisms might function” (Royce, 2011). Further, Royce (2011, p. 13) argues that “we are in danger of ‘over-complicating’ the

issues we face by giving them ‘sexy’ sounding names”, rather a stronger focus should be put on “[business] models that work and what makes them work – we can call them successful, strong, robust, sustainable or resilient- what matters is that they deliver on their core purpose”.

The Arts Council report *Making Adaptive Resilience Real* published in 2010, focused on the application of this idea to arts organisations (Robinson, 2010). Arts organisations’ resilience capacity would be based on different resources and skills for change while keeping a greater sense of direction in line with their mission (Robinson, 2010):

- Social capital (organisational culture, predictable finances, strong networks, intellectual, human and physical assets);
- adaptive skills (ability to change and innovate, leadership, situation awareness, management of key vulnerabilities) and ability to respond to changes in the environment external to the organisation;
- internal innovation(changing structure, becoming more efficient, developing their business model and products).

The report highlights two perspectives: the one internal to arts organisations, which requires an investment of both money and human resources to develop organisational capacity and provides “time to think deeply about the organisational direction and the basic business model” (Robinson, 2010, p. 36); the other one, the “ecological” has to do with the exchange between the organisations and the external environment. First, arts organisations “seem limited in their ability to develop strong arts products and organisations” due to a lack of “right models for investment and funding, and, indeed, an acknowledgement that there may be a distinction between the two” (Robinson, 2010, p. 4). The risk identified is that the Arts Council, while supporting organisations through development funding, also becomes their “biggest customer” by regularly funding programming (ibid, p. 41). Eventually, organisations regularly funded by ACE make their financial sustainability more vulnerable to changes in funding policy.

In this regard, Robinson (ibid, p. 8) suggests that funding programmes “are shaped to consciously develop adaptive resilience, recognising the distinction between building organisations through investment and buying activity through revenue support for programmes of work”. This is an important distinction that sheds light on the sustained effort from the government to invest in building organisational development and self-funding capacities on the one hand and, on the other, to promote partnerships between cultural organisations and the private sector to pass on to other stakeholders the ACE’s “buyer” role.

Secondly, to build resilient organisations, a “far more detailed mapping” (Robinson, 2010, p. 26) of the arts ecology is needed as certain parts of the sector may adapt at different speeds, while the interactions between organisations, artists and their locality are crucial to understand how economics, population change, and transport can impact the sector.

After having explored the evolution of the meanings of sustainability and resilience as currently bearing an economic framing in the culture sector, the next section discusses how their original meanings may open to other ideas about how the cultural sector works and what sustainability may mean in this context. The next section introduces the idea of the ecology of culture to think through the interconnections and interdependencies within the sector and with the wider socio-economic ecosystem. It provides an example of how using sustainability and resilience through a systemic approach, may offer different explanations for recent dynamics

### 2.3 Framing sustainability: A matter of language?

Sustainability lost terrain, becoming an adjective of development and the expression “sustainable development” was adopted not only to reconcile the need to support economic growth without damaging societies and the environment but rather to find ways to bring positive growth to the latter two. This framing implies a conception and functioning of the economy in a linear direction and has been adopted since the second half of the last century, with tangible implications for socio-economic ecosystems. The underlying assumption is that growth could provide the solution to economic inequalities and issues, in turn ameliorating the quality of life of people (Banks, 2018). However, what happens when we change language? Other words suggest different directions that the economy can take; from circular to doughnut economies, from gift to sharing economies, these alternative framings have implications for how growth can be achieved (Wilson *et al.*, 2020), for how wealth is created and distributed and the subsequent cultural, moral and political decisions that affect how humans live on this planet (Davies, 2017; Hammond *et al.*, 2017). For example, the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP) offers an alternative framing to growth; sustainable prosperity:

“is one in which people everywhere have the capability to flourish as human beings—within the ecological and resource constraints of a finite planet. A prosperous society is concerned not only with income and financial wealth, but also with the health and wellbeing of its citizens, with their access to good quality education, and with their prospects for decent and rewarding work. Prosperity enables basic individual rights and freedoms. But it must also deliver the ability for people to participate meaningfully in common projects. Ultimately, prosperity must offer society a credible and inclusive vision of social progress” (CUSP, no date).

In the framing of sustainable prosperity, culture and creativity are considered key components as “the constituents of people’s everyday participation in social life” (Oakley, Ball and Cunningham, 2018, p. 1). Banks (2018, p. 376) argues that while the perspective of sustainable prosperity “recognise(s) some of the limits to growth”, its application has several limitations that have to do with existing inequalities to access and engage with cultural and creative economic activity. Different ideas of prosperity may be exclusionary or discriminatory or rely on hidden costs at the expense of others (Oakley and Ward, 2018). Negotiating and resolving structural tensions and conflicts of interest “at scales beyond the local, in ways that account for national socio-economic priorities, and the wider role played by the creative economy, remains a challenge for any kind of holistic and grounded approach” (Banks, 2018, p. 375).

### 2.3.1 The Ecology of Culture

While recognising the challenges of a holistic approach, as part of the research project DISCE (Developing Inclusive and Sustainable Creative Economies), Wilson et al. (2020) and Gross et al. (2020) argue that an ecological/systemic research approach is fundamental to inform how policy can develop inclusive and sustainable creative industries in the future. In this approach to cultural policy, cultural infrastructure is emphasised as having a role to play in enabling the conditions of “trust and ongoing democratic practice [...] to meet the challenges of climate change” (Gross *et al.*, 2020, p. 8). Cultural and creative organisations can contribute to inclusive and sustainable economies taking advantage of technologies to innovate their business models and create value. However, Gross et al. (2020, p. 3) argues that “innovation is much broader than a technology-driven process. It can involve many forms of community and social innovation”, in fact “within an ecological understanding of creative economies, innovation takes place in many locations, involving many kinds of novelty and value” (Gross *et al.*, 2020, p. 5).

Taking an ecological approach to understanding the creative industries broadens perspectives beyond a sectoral or industry lens, focussing on the interdependency and interconnection of cultural resources to the broader ecology (Wilson *et al.*, 2020). Data from a DISCE pilot case study in Enschede, Netherlands, shows the need to gather data regarding housing stock, health and social care systems, transport systems and the availability and costs of further and higher education to effectively inform creative economy policy (Gross *et al.*, 2020). For example, an ecological approach to conceiving the creative economy could help to overcome the current fragmentation that overshadows the diverse kinds of innovations happening in the cultural sector. At the level of small arts organisations, this means “pooling the know-how and ambitions of smaller-scale creative actors” and involving new actors to enable them to share the resources to respond to social, community and digital innovations



(Gross *et al.*, 2020, p. 3). Holden (2015) reports that the expressions “ecology of culture” or “cultural ecology” have been used in reports from the DCMS, the Arts Council and by researchers and practitioners; however, in view of the lack of agreement about what they mean there is little evidence and the field is poorly understood.

The lack of shared vocabulary that could capture the diversity of actors, exchanges, nature of work and value creation inside the cultural ecologies has, in turn, contributed to a narrow mapping of the sector. Therefore, “existing creative economy policies are not responsive to the full range of cultural resources and their systemic interrelatedness” (Gross *et al.*, 2020). Part of the research in DISCE aims to develop new approaches to mapping that:

“do justice to the many kinds of tangible and intangible cultural resources that matter to how a creative economy functions (from arts organisations, to finance options, to the histories of a place) and the systemic conditions that mediate the interconnections between cultural resources” (Gross *et al.*, 2020).

Markusen (2011, p. 8) adopted a similar methodology to map the interconnections between commercial, non-profit, public and informal organisations in the cultural sector in California, arguing:

“A wide variety of factors—separation by distance, arts disciplines and missions, size of organizations, and organizational form—make it difficult for creators, advocates, policymakers, and the public to appreciate the prominence and contributions of the sector. Californians know very little about the state’s arts and cultural ecology as a whole or about the sector’s intrinsic and economic benefits and why these are central to California’s quality of life”.

The ecology metaphor brings attention to two specific dynamics: the relationship between organisations and their locality and how value is created. Markusen’s (2011) perspective is relevant here as she puts particular attention to the non-profit and informal organisations (surveyed 10,746 organisations, with 85% of organizational budgets falling under \$250,000 and 48% under \$25,000), similar to small artist-led organisations. While DISCE researchers argue for a mapping that includes participatory approaches and involves a diversity of actors, Markusen (2011, p. 8) described the Californian cultural ecology as consisting of relationships among organizations, people, and places which “encompasses the many networks of arts and cultural creators, producers, presenters, sponsors, participants, and supporting casts embedded in diverse communities”. Places have particular importance as being the site where political and civic leaders implement policies that nurture arts and culture. At different scales, from neighbourhoods to cities, and from regions to states “artists, cultural leaders, community builders, and arts lovers, they build organizations that nurse creativity from conception through production, presentation, and participation” (Markusen *et al.*, 2011, p. 2).

Putting similar attention on place, Gross (2020, p. 3) argues for a more inclusive mapping of the creative economies to understand “where” they happen. Instead, Robinson (2010, p. 6) emphasizes how “an arts organisation positions itself in its locality and ‘how the place works’, which also means being aware of the wider economic and social dynamics that affect the whole ecology. We have seen that part of the government strategies for developing a resilient and sustainable sector are based on fostering local partnerships and networks. While this makes sense from an ecological point of view, Durrer, Gilmore and Stevenson (2019, p. 317) suggest that national arts councils in the UK, not only England’s, should play a focal role in fostering local relationships but, as the councils themselves rely on networked governance to facilitate their relationship to the local context, they risk “reproducing national interests, limiting the localised agency of place-based approaches and contributing to a culture of competition within cultural policy”.

The history of Arts Council England as an “arms-length” body has been characterised by ongoing restructuring, expansion of remit and tension between a centralised, national and regional strategy (Durrer and Miles, 2009, p. 322). In the *Review of Arts Council England’s RFO investment strategy 2007/08*, McIntosh (2008) reported conflicts between the autonomy that regional ACE offices had and how this created conflicts both in their localities and with national council offices. In 2010, Robinson (2010, p. 4) found that a more resilient sector would need more work done by ACE, but he described officers with “controlling behaviour”. In the same year, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) was abolished and museums and libraries were assumed by ACE, which at the same time lost 50% of its administrative budget (Durrer, Gilmore and Stevenson, 2019). The contemporary expansion of ACE’s remit, with the halving of its resources, is a strategy that will unlikely bring ACE to a better position for negotiating relationships and conflicts with its clients and the public it serves. The last restructuring, which included museums and libraries in the National Portfolio and introduced specialist funding streams for development, such as the Sector Support Organisations, has “significantly diminished alignment with the nine English regions, and reduced organisational capacity for relationships with local authorities” (Durrer, Gilmore and Stevenson, 2019, p. 322).

In its “arms-length” role, ACE receives a lot of criticism however, taking an ecological look at the wider ecosystem and “how the place works” (Robinson, 2010, p. 6) becomes crucial to understand the dynamics affecting the cultural sector: Harvey (2016) and the National Campaign for the Arts (2020) reported the importance that, even if decreasing, public funding has when distributed from local authorities to support active local cultural and creative ecologies. In this regard, Rex (2021) argues

“Ultimately, it’s central government, not ACE, which is responsible for the overall financial framework in which organisations managed by local authorities operate. So we should be wary

of looking to ACE to provide all the answers to the inequities and inequalities facing the sector. But councils are an important part of local cultural ecosystems, remaining substantial investors in cultural provision, which crosses museums, libraries, theatres, archives, arts development and heritage, even after more than a decade of austerity”.

If an ecological approach is needed to understand the relationship between cultural and creative organisations and their localities, then it comes as consequence that a better understanding of who these organisations are and how they function in their ecosystem is also needed. In “Making Adaptive Resilience Real”, Robinson (2010) was concerned with conceptualising the cultural ecology in the UK and how resilience could be applied in that system, therefore he called for future research to map the sector. Bakhshi and Cunningham (2016) called for separation between the cultural and creative industries to have a better understanding of the sub-sectors, and DISCE researchers are working on new methodologies for this kind of mapping, which responds to a considerable gap of data to better understand the cultural ecology in the UK.

In particular, in light of Markusen’s (2011, p. 2) research, attention should be focused on non-profit small arts organisations as she argued that they “have a much larger footprint than monetary revenues and expenditures convey, because they engage volunteers and receive in-kind contributions that are not common in public and for-profit sectors”. Similarly, Gordon-Nesbitt (2012, p. 7) argues that small arts organisations struggle to capture economic value because they generate a kind of intangible social and artistic value that often “manifests itself in a long-term contribution to the sector, without which larger-scale organisations could not thrive”.

While these views bring an integrated conception of the value of small arts organisations, much of the agenda that dominates the creative industries discourse focuses on economic growth and the implication that investment in cultural organisations’ sustainability leads to long-term financial returns, longevity, increase in size and growth, attributes which have become synonyms with success (Banks and O’Connor, 2009; Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2009; Campbell, 2019). However, small organisations have different ambitions and goals, for example, to expand programming, pay collaborators more and reach new audiences, whilst others plan to change focus, constituency and location, and others have long-term planning based on maintaining current size, mission and working style: “small budgets and few paid staff do not mean low impact” (Markusen *et al.*, 2011, p. 13). Re-thinking “success” and how economic and other values are created is key in the context of small arts organisations (Thelwall, 2011; Gordon-Nesbitt, 2012): “When in-kind donations of space, equipment, services, and materials and the value of volunteer time are taken into account, arts organizations’ collective arts productivity and economic impact are much larger than reported budgets convey” (Markusen *et al.*, 2011, p. 24).

In this regard, thinking of the cultural ecology as comprising multiple systems that generate diverse creative economies, within DISCE, Gross et al. (2020, p. 7) argue that their research has demonstrated the need for a multi-dimensional approach “beyond the limitations of GDP and crude employment measurements”. Researchers are working on the development of a Cultural Development Index (CDI) that could be responsive to the breadth of factors that constitute a flourishing cultural eco-system, not excluding economic measures but taking a capability approach and using established measures that can account for prosperity and human development too (Wilson *et al.*, 2020).

Crucially, Wilson *et al.* (2020, p. 30) argue that taking an ecological approach would not only help us understand the interconnections and interdependencies involved in the creative economy but direct “us to better understand how such open systems are ‘managed’” more precisely:

“thinking ecologically – and addressing the challenge of how to actively manage ecosystems – requires ways of conceptualising practices across scale. It also requires ways of understanding how to manage the interdependencies of multiple parts of complex, adaptive systems that may or may not have precisely aligned interests” (Wilson and Gross, 2017 in Wilson *et al.*, 2020 p.30).

### 2.3.2 Learning about systems, researching sustainability

Using an ecological framework, Wilson et al.(2020) and Gross et al. (2020) describe some dynamics of the creative industries, which can open the sector up to a series of different ideas that could be useful in shaping how we think about how organisations behave in a sustainable or resilient system, therefore critically engaging with existing assumptions and expectations. Though the ecological framing of the cultural and creative industries is currently a matter of research, action and debate in academia and cultural policy, one of the first uses of sustainability and resilience in relation to the ecological view of the cultural sector dates back to 2004, when Holden (2004, p. 37) argued that concepts used other disciplines, such as environmental studies, can help us describe the intangible value of culture:

“Non-renewable natural resources and some of our common cultural assets, such as the contents of museums and folk dances, share a common characteristic. They are finite resources, and once destroyed they cannot be remade. This fundamental fact has implications for the way we treat both, and it follows that concepts used in debates about the environment are useful in discussing aspects of culture.”

Interestingly, while sustainability and resilience have become general goals, we have seen that different understandings create a prolific debate on how they can be applied in different spheres of society and what, in practice, the resulting goals can be. Sustainability and resilience were first introduced to describe systems therefore, part of the issue with their vague uses is, in different fields,

the missing leap to the system-thinking approach. Even though system theory is about broadly applicable concepts and principles, as opposed to concepts and principles applicable to one domain of knowledge, not all ideas relating to systems can be transferred between different fields (Alexander, 2013). For example, the application of system theory and resilience in the field of sociology and human geography has been criticised as communities are complex entities and general systems characteristics are less identifiable (Alexander, 2013). Among all fields, this is even more evident in the research on the cultural and creative industries and in cultural policy, where the ecological formulation of the cultural sector and the creative economy have seen a surge of interest in the last few years.

For example, in Holden's (2004, p. 38) first conception of the cultural ecology, he described the need for the funding to be managed as a "homeostatic" system:

"In a homeostatic system, individuals will compete and cooperate but will maintain an overall systemic balance through processes of complex adaptation. In the world of culture, analogous arguments can be made about the need for diversity in funding. A vibrant culture needs a rich tapestry of historic buildings, archives, landscapes and artefacts to sit alongside libraries, theatres, galleries, concert halls, rappers, buskers, fashion colleges and so on. The broader and deeper the overall cultural 'system' the more resilient it will be in adapting to the changing needs of the society which it both forms and reflects. Funders must therefore pay attention not just to diversity in the sense of social diversity, but also cultural diversity. The small, experimental, emergent practices that seem to lie at the margins of current concerns about culture needing to be economically and socially useful are vital for the sustenance of our cultural health".

This conception of how funding could work gains striking relevance if we look at important figures that have described the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the cultural sector. From an economic point of view, the global public health crisis brought most industries to a halt, damaging economies worldwide and forcing many creative industries and cultural organisations to close down. The crisis exposed many inequalities and forced most spheres of society to rethink how they function. In the cultural sector, it has exposed the flaws with how sustainability and resilience have been applied. Samuel West, the chair of the National Campaign for the Arts, said, "it was "bitterly ironic" that the arts sector's "resourceful response" to the 2008 financial crash has exposed it during the Covid-19 crisis" (Bakare, 2020) and ACE CEO Darren Henley has also spoken "of the irony that normally resilient organisations with a high proportion of earned income" are the ones "most likely to need our help" (Hill, 2020).

Much of the irony here lies in the fact that after many years of cultural policy investments in developing the sustainability and resilience of arts organisations as economically independent, to develop their

preparedness for future shocks, they could not withstand the shock from the covid crisis. “Resilient organisations” have changed their business models to rely primarily on earned income (to withstand the reduction in public funding) but when, in the case of a crisis like the pandemic, they were forced to stop operating, they did not demonstrate financial resilience as much as other funded-organisations did. This could be an interesting clue to the fact that there has been a narrow engagement with the concepts of sustainability and resilience. In 2018, when I first started researching the meaning of resilience, I wrote in my notes:

“Ultimately, my aim is to ask whether the language that we use to shape our understanding of reality is useful to describe it. This research serves me personally to understand where the language of resilience comes from and the dynamics that are implied when describing the role of arts and culture in society as an ecosystem. Resilience can only be used as long as we think in systemic terms. I wonder then if this is a fruitful way to think about arts and culture and whether we could imagine something different, or what else we could imagine once we have built a solid knowledge of how systems work”.

With this perspective in mind, the impact of the covid crisis on the cultural sector could be rethought. Kaszynska (2018, p. 23) argues that ideas “drive policy, not evidence per se” over long periods “by gradually changing the way actors think about particular issues”. The idea of sustainability is about the quality of a system and resilience about the responses of a system to a “shock”; in cultural policy, sustainability then should be more about the general characteristics of the sector (e.g. thriving, accessible, equitable, inclusive, democratic). However, more attention is given to resilience as it describes how cultural organisations can change to require less public funding.

A multidisciplinary engagement with sustainability and resilience could have possibly shaped a different strategy for the development of the sector, for example, observing how different systems show resilience responding to shocks has been described in different fields from bio-chemistry to psychology and environmental disaster reduction studies. It has been demonstrated in other fields that the lack of resilience at one level can undermine resilience at other levels (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000) and it is not a two-way relation as it is not possible to equate individual resilience to the resilience of a community or society (Alexander, 2013). From this, if we see the cultural sector as an eco-system, we can re-think the extent of the impact of covid on the sector as a consequence of the fact that much of the development work has focused on the organisations’ individual resilience, overlooking factors that impact on the health of the overall cultural ecosystem (for example, how public and private fundings are organised or the working conditions of individual practitioners). Robinson (2010, p. 24) also argues that:

“No matter how detailed or correct any framework is, if it fails to consider how, say, the Arts Council’s regularly funded organisations relate to the whole of the arts, culture or society, it will only be useful in shaping a particular part of the system. Systems thinking would suggest that this in itself can have negative, unintended consequences for the whole system”.

In particular, the application of resilience in connection with system theory sees limited application in many fields, as the concept is used to generalise and simplify complex situations and dynamics (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012; Alexander, 2013). In response to this, this research proposes that a better understanding of systems in other fields could perhaps help us to develop a vocabulary to describe different dynamics, while it could also prompt researchers and policymakers to critically engage with ideas like resilience and sustainability, to question whether, or to what extent, they are applicable in different specific and complex contexts.

We have already seen that resilience is criticised for being used as an instrumentalised concept that “fits” the neoliberal discourse and serves to reproduce hierarchical power structures (Joseph, 2013, p. 39), with Cretney (2014) ultimately asking whom resilience is for. Alexander (2013) notes that the problem with applying the concept of resilience is the attempt to make it a paradigm in different disciplines. This seems to be the case in cultural policy, where resilience - in the form of business model innovation and developing strategies for self-funding – has become a paradigm for the “sustainability” of cultural organisations. As we have seen, sustainability is often used as a synonym for longevity, growth and “success”. To achieve sustainability arts organisations should adapt to changes, re-developing their business models and stay relevant to their audiences by producing high quality and ambitious works. However, given the lack of understanding of the sector itself as a system, I wonder if these ideas can be applied at all scales of the cultural ecology and whether they imply assumptions about cultural organisations' work and what they do.

Looking at the theory behind system theory and ecological systems, we can, by analogy, try to think of the relationship between different cultural organisations and the wider ecosystem. For example, Von Bertalanffy (1950, p. 27) describes the different paces that we can observe on a macro level and micro level in systems: “every organic system seems stationary if considered from a certain point of view; but if we go a step deeper, we find that this maintenance involves continuous change of the system of the next lower order”. This seems to reflect the different speeds at which different levels within the “arts ecosystem” work, from individuals to institutions. Innovative solutions resulting from resilient processes of adaptation are usually tested first and implemented by small organisations and artist-run spaces (Eltham and Ryan, 2019). These are slowly adopted by other organisations and the sector, to the point that they become embedded into the overarching infrastructure (Schofield, 2018). At the

same time, there is a risk that the business model change with the imperative of economic growth would flatten the diversity of the sector since, for example, artist-led organisations claim to use alternative structures and ways of working (Murphy and Cullen, 2016). In systems, “panarchy” indicates the self-regulation (self-organisation) across scales, where different systems depend on each other to achieve sustainability for the whole system (Holling, 1973a). Could alternative practices be validated and sustained, for example, even when they run at market-failure, as they are key to sustaining the wider cultural ecosystem of a place?

Moreover, organic systems run at “steady-stated”, which means that they are continuously changing to preserve their equilibrium. A steady state can be reached in many different ways, this behaviour is called equifinal (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). These ideas have been adopted, for example, in management, where equifinality is used to describe the many different ways different businesses manage resources and capabilities and still reach the same goals (e.g. in terms of profit). This could make us re-think what the final goal of programmes for organisational development is, how they are delivered and whether the management of arts organisations could be thought of in terms of equifinality. If equifinality tells us that there are many different ways to reach sustainability, independence from public funding as well as relying on public funding could be both valid ways to reach sustainability for arts organisations and to sustain the broader cultural ecology.

Von Bertalanffy (1950b, p. 27) describes organisms within systems following a path of “growth, development, senescence and death”. It should be of no surprise then that in many reports (Knell, 2005; Robinson, 2010; Woodley *et al.*, 2018) the life cycle of arts organisations means that they will have to die. “Death” is a necessary part of a system’s sustainability, however this may just be that things will stop in a certain form and take another, as resilience is the ability to proactively accept “the inevitability of change” while adapting to “new conditions and imperatives” (Klein, Nicholls and Thomalla, 2003, p. 39). This positive outlook of resilience, can prompt fruitful change and transformation to create, or re-think, institutions and organisations that can work better and are better positioned in society. In light of the impact of covid, social entrepreneur and arts consultant Kevin Osborne (2021) wrote:

“Some organisations which have received CRF (Culture Recovery Fund) funding will unfortunately not survive lockdown measures. They need to be let go and space must be created to explore what the new future looks like. We can then invest in new systems, new structures, and new organisations to deliver this. Some smaller and not yet formed organisations will emerge and thrive in a post-Covid world. They will be the engine for growth of the UK’s new creative and cultural industries.”



The Arts Council and the government have been criticised for letting some cultural organisations, that play important roles in their localities, “die” while it continues to support other organisations of which the cultural relevance has been questioned (Gardner, 2014). In a similar crisis context to Osborne, after the 2008 financial crisis, Gardner (2009) commented:

“This scheme (the Stabilisation Fund) will have to be extremely transparent in its decision-making to avoid any suspicion that this is a backdoor way of getting money to organisations that are already failing, but which ACE feels can't be allowed to fail for political reasons. My preference would have been for a far greater chunk of the money to go into the already pressured Grants for the Arts pot, which supports the theatre ecology from the bottom up rather than the top down, funding work directly rather than supporting bureaucracies.”

Indeed, Gross et al. (2020, p. 4) argue for more participatory approaches to leadership and governance within creative economies where “a top-down, bird’s-eye view is implausible and inadequate to the task of effective policy making”. Eventually, they ask “What kind of story is currently being told, and might there be different kinds of stories? Where and how should the story be told? And what are the consequences?” (Gross *et al.*, 2020, p. 4). These are questions that have to do with sustainability in terms of intergenerational equity and duty of care, which require moral and critical judgements to be made on the type of culture we pass on to future generations and the kind of sustainability we argue for (Holden, 2004, p. 37).

## 2.4 Summary

This chapter started by providing an overview of the meaning of sustainability and how, through its application in international policy, sustainability has given way to sustainable development. In international policies, sustainable development has been used to respond to complex social, economic and environmental needs of society that have to do with the relationship between how humans live on this planet and how they affect and are also affected by global economies (Vallance, Perkins and Dixon, 2011; Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019). Proponents argue that culture has a role to play in facilitating a shift towards sustainable development, for this reason, cultural organisations should work to preserve local cultures and identities, to raise awareness of climate change and foster ecological citizenship (Duxbury et al., 2017; Light *et al.*, 2018; UNESCO, 2021) .

In the UK cultural policy, the role of culture towards sustainable development is maintained, however in this context, sustainability has become a way to talk about the capacity of the sector to become financially self-sustainable and rely less on public funding. From a macro-lens point of view, the (financial) sustainability of the sector is ensured by the resilience of the organisations that make it up.

This thesis questions the applicability of the strategies to develop sustainability in the cultural sector in the context of small artists' organisations. Support and funding strategies are designed for "big" enterprises, and that can evidence more than £100,000 or £250,000 turnover. However, many self-employed creatives and micro/small organisations like the ones in Guild fall through the gaps of support provision and continue to exist in precarious conditions (discussed further in Chapter 4). The chapter then looks at how resilience was introduced in cultural policy to specifically address the capacity of arts organisations to respond to change and, arguably, to offset further cuts in public funding (ACE, 2013b, 2020; Woodley *et al.*, 2018). The idea is that individuals should be equipped to recognise opportunities for change and develop business models that can be flexible and adaptable. However, while cultural policy promotes a culture of resilience to prepare organisations to adapt to changes in funding, in the event of a disruptive event such as the pandemic, many organisations that have been resilient by finding other income streams have been damaged the most.

I discuss the importance of language to shape how sustainability and resilience are understood and applied in cultural policy and, subsequently in cultural organisations. The metaphor of the ecology of culture has been introduced to consider the interconnectedness between organisations and not only the wider cultural infrastructure, but wider social, political, economic and infrastructure factors that should be accounted for when trying to sustainably develop the cultural ecology and economy (Robinson, 2010; Markusen *et al.*, 2011). In conclusion, I introduced key language and concepts from system theory to imagine, re-think and expand on current notions of cultural ecology. These ideas are important to be able to interrogate the literature and the data of the following chapters. Since a lot of importance has been placed on business model change, I will discuss the applicability of this idea in the next chapter. The diverse understanding of sustainability, the concept of cultural ecology and systems theory will provide a framework to understand the benefits and limitations of business models and shed light on the complexity of artist-led organisations.

### 3 Business models and organisations

The previous chapter offered some definitions of sustainability and highlighted how, in the context of cultural policy, sustainability is understood as achievable if, at the meso level, organisations are financially sustainable, which improves the sustainability of the cultural sector at a macro level. In cultural policy, changing or innovating business models seem to be the key to achieving financial sustainability. Similarly to how I find it necessary to introduce definitions and discussions around the meaning of sustainability and resilience from scientific literature, which can contribute to a better understanding and guide their applications in the cultural sector, in this chapter, I introduce management and business literature to understand what business models are. This chapter problematises the power of business models to bring innovative solutions or be the key to sustainability, as they are conceptual models that can help to highlight areas for development or change but do not bring change themselves (Baden-Fuller and Morgan, 2010). This chapter is broadly divided into two macro areas: theory from business and management literature and the discussion of the adoption of business models in cultural policy.

First, I introduce the concept of business model, which revolves around the concept of value, how a business creates, captures and delivers value and it is associated with growth and future planning and strategy. Section 3.1.1 presents a possible categorisation of business models of arts organisations (Kimbell, 2018b) while the following section introduces the Business Model Canvas and the Social Business Model Canvas as tools to map business models out. The Social Business Model Canvas has been implemented as part of Guild and will be used in Chapter 6 to discuss what we can find out about the organisations by using this tool. However, section 3.1.3 will discuss the limits of business models. One of the most evident limits of business models is that it is often confused with business planning and strategy, but it is actually one of the first building blocks, used as a conceptual tool to then build future strategies and operations (Teece, 2010). Another limit is in the fact that the original idea of business models looks at the individual business and its inner components, struggling to capture system-wide interactions. Sustainable business models have been introduced to overcome this limit; however, new boundaries around the business would need to be set in accordance with relevant stakeholders, which could give rise to tensions within the organisations due to conflicting views.

The third section draws from entrepreneurship and organisational theory to identify the attitudes of small business owners towards business planning and the informal internal processes of innovation and dynamics among members of organisations that contribute to sustainability. As the construct of business models has been adopted widely in cultural policy and in the sector in association with financial sustainability, and this thesis looks at small arts organisations, this literature review provides

keys to engage with the next section, “Policy, business models and innovation” and the arising tensions that involve issues of sustainability and arts organisations. This section discusses the view that the language of business models projects on arts organisations and how business and management literatures could help overcome prejudices and provide useful insights both for policy and practitioners.

### 3.1 Business models

Like sustainability, the “business model” idea has been used widely from academic to policy texts and in the public domain, prompting different uses and understandings. Casadeus-Masanell and Ricart (2010) and Fjeldstad and Snow (2018) trace its origins back to the writings of Peter Ducker, while Wirtz et al. (2016) connect the first conceptualisation to Bellman et al. (1957). Magretta (2002, p. 87) defined business models as “stories that explain how enterprises work”. From this perspective, the definition of a business model revolves around the structural aspects of its components, in other words, the company activities that “should lead to keeping the promise of service, the satisfaction of needs, and profitability, which can be subsumed under the assurance of a long-term competitive advantage” (Wirtz et al., 2016, p. 40). The general idea of business models is linked with notions of taxonomies and kinds. Models of businesses are constructed on typical kinds of organisations that show common features and behaviours in such a way that different kinds can be categorized and individual organisations are classified accordingly. Categorising businesses can help researchers and practitioners to understand business phenomena and “ideal types” (Baden-Fuller and Morgan, 2010, p. 157).

In an extensive literature review on the origin and development of business models, Wirtz et al. (2016) found consensus among authors about two main ideas concerning business models: that is the way, the logic, in which a business captures and delivers value for its stakeholders (Baden-Fuller and Morgan, 2010; Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010; Teece, 2010); that is a conceptual model of a business, not a financial model and a distinct concept from strategy, organization theory and business planning (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2016). Though business models are often associated with strategic planning or management, providing “holistic description of a company activities in aggregated form” (Wirtz et al., 2016, p. 38), they can rather function as a link between future planning and operative implementation. Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010, p. 196) argue that :

“business models refer to the logic of the firm, the way it operates and how it creates value for its stakeholders; and strategy refers to the choice of business model through which the firm will compete in the marketplace; while tactics refer

to the residual choices open to a firm by virtue of the business model it chooses to employ”.

Business models work as “role models” or “scale models”, offering either exemplary features to be copied or models that can be copied or replicated at different scales (Baden-Fuller and Morgan, 2010, p. 146). They can be understood as “recipes” that can be followed but also open to variation (Baden-Fuller and Morgan, 2010, p. 157). Linked to the notions of scale/role models and recipes, the literature offers two perspectives on the operational and dynamic dimensions of business models. The operational dimension refers to how a firm conducts its business, for example scaling up or down and “copying” the choice that other firms make about their core components (e.g. products, customers and operations) (Wirtz et al., 2016; Fjeldstad and Snow, 2018). The dynamic dimension considers how business models change in relation to their environment to maintain their competitive advantage (Wirtz et al., 2016; Fjeldstad and Snow, 2018). Voelpel et al. (2004) distinguish between business model change, understood as incremental or continuous improvement, and business model reinvention, based on disruptive innovation, and argue that the latter is conducive to sustainable competitive advantage as it allows to respond to quick changes in other companies and industries. Differently, Demil and Lecocq (2010, p. 234) favour an incremental view, arguing that a business model can remain successful over time by revising the “interactions between and within the core components” (e.g. changing the value proposition, creating new combinations of existing or add new resources, etc.) (Garud et al. 2013).

Wirtz et al. (2016) argue that the dynamic dimension of business models has received increased attention in the last 20 years. It can be argued that the growing attention on the dynamic perspective of business models, which associate them with change and innovation, fits wider discourses in policy on innovation, entrepreneurship and growth (Audretsch and Link, 2011; Mazzucato, 2013; Perren and Sapsed, 2013). “Business Model Innovation” and “Business Model Change” have become specific fields of study and the capacity to innovate and change desirable characteristics of managers.

### 3.1.1 Business models of arts organisations

Notwithstanding the need to understand how traditional business models apply in different organisations' contexts, the business model logic has been adopted by Arts Council England and the arts and cultural sector with a range of toolkits and reports that investigate the existing business models and the development of new ones (Bolton and Cooper, 2010; Robinson, 2010; Royce, 2011; McCullagh, 2017; BritainThinks, 2018; Hoyle et al., 2018; Woodley et al., 2018). As part of her contribution to the final publication of Creative Lenses, the European research project on the development of innovative business models for the sustainability of arts and cultural organisation, and

building on work by Baden-Fuller et al. (2017), Kimbell identifies (2018b) six archetypes of business models in arts and cultural organisations as illustrated by Figure 5.

<b>Business model variant</b>	<b>Example activities and assets</b>	<b>Underlying business model activities &amp; assets</b>
<b>Performer mode</b>	Activities include creating a show or performing in a show. Assets include creative and production expertise. Revenues might come from ticket sales or artist fees.	A solutions model in which creator and audience are present during the performance.
<b>Product model</b>	Activities include writing music or creating a physical artwork. Assets include creative and production expertise. Revenues might be from artist fees, licensing intellectual property or sales.	A product model in which a creator generates an artwork but is not directly involved in the audience experience.
<b>Commissioner model</b>	Activities include commissioning a show, cultural programming, connecting with audiences. Assets include expertise, relationships and data. The commissioner typically pays a fee and receives income from funders and/or ticket sales.	A match-making model – the cultural organisation is a mediator putting on a programme/show by creators and engages/ finds audiences and other partners.
<b>Landlord model</b>	Activities include renting out studio, office or co-working space. Assets include access to a venue and expertise in facilities management. Revenues come from rental income and/or non-financial income.	A solutions model in which venue and tenants and other users of the space are involved.
<b>Hub model</b>	This involves running a venue, platform or festival with multiple intersecting activities. Assets include expertise in cultural programming, audience development, staff expertise and data. The hub receives income from funders and/or ticket sales but also provides access to others without payment.	A multi-sided model which convenes more than two participants in generating value, although not all of them pay.
<b>Service model</b>	Activities include delivering an event for a customer; running workshops or courses; running a café or bar; providing services to tenants. Assets include expertise in teaching, training or providing catering or bar services. Revenues include income from delivering services.	A solutions model – provider and customer are present during the service.

**Figure 5 Kimbell, L. (2018,p. 14) Table of common business models types in arts and cultural organisations.**

In the table, business models are listed separately to distinguish how arts organisations can create a different kind of value. However, Li (2020) found that many organisations in the creative industries adopt a “portfolio of models” to enable multiple co-existing ways of value creation and capture. Being based on the archetypes found in the business literature, the models proposed by Baden-Fuller et al. (2017), and adapted by Kimbell (2018b), are based on conceptual studies or on empirical studies of commercial, often corporate, businesses. As a result, these models present some limitations as they are abstracted from how organisations develop or change their business models or how managers use

the business model construct (Kimbell, 2018b). More than providing specific solutions to a challenging economic environment, business models are used as “narrative devices or stories rather than a detailed plan” that can surface discussions about how an organisation creates and realises value (Kimbell, 2018b, p. 19). Business models, by linking activities and assets inside the organisation to those beyond its boundaries, can help organisations to understand what “kinds of value or outcomes” result from different models (ibid.).

For example, Figure 6 is used to visualise the idea of portfolio of models and the mutual dependencies between the organisation and external actors. This organisation has several models running concurrently: commissioner, landlord and service models and a hub model. The last model brings all the other ones together and mutually reinforces a network for the co-creation and realisation of value. For simplicity, it represents only how the venue gives access other actors access to three assets, which are: the venue itself, the reputation of the organisation and product expertise. The other actors participate in co-creating and realising value across a network of organisations and individuals with other assets. For example, towards creative practitioners, the venue adopts a landlord model, the practitioners use their funds to pay for access to the venue and its co-working spaces. Towards the performance group, the venue adopts a commissioner model by accessing as an asset the groups’ creative expertise to create and co-create experiences for audiences, in exchange audiences fund the commissioner model by buying a ticket etc.

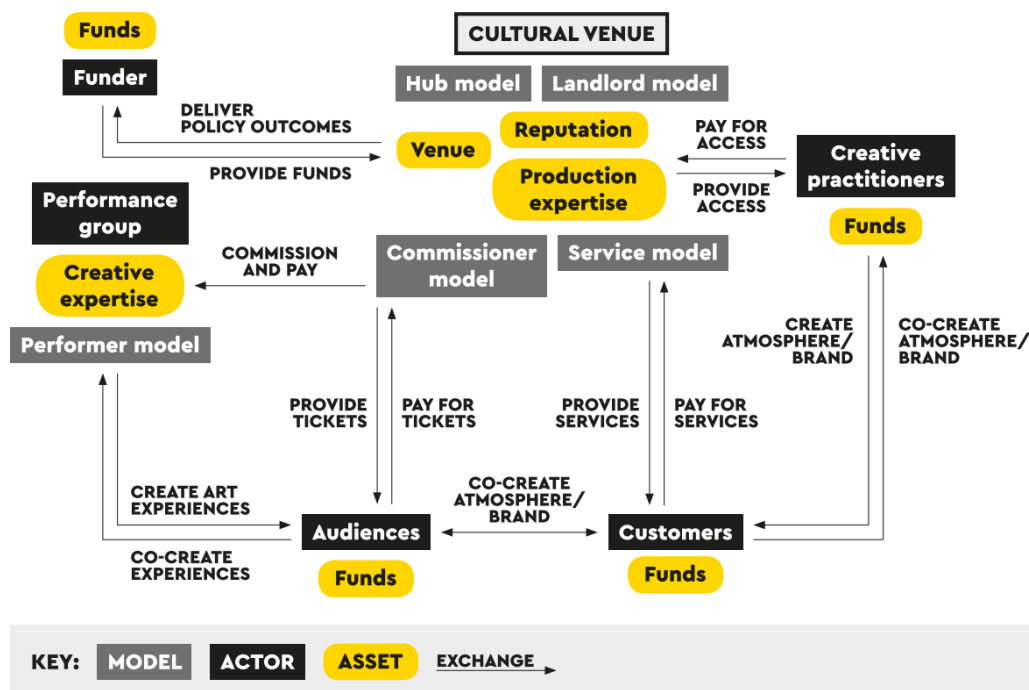


Figure 6 Kimbell, L. (2018b, p.16) Business models for a venue-based cultural organisations.

In turn, this kind of mapping may help to identify and identify opportunities for innovating the way they operate. However, Kimbell (2018b, p. 22) suggests that “rather than importing the business model construct wholesale into discussions of arts organisations, the intersections between these concepts might produce new lines of research”. Arts management and humanities research offer “pluralistic accounts of value”, which combined with research on customer experience and organisational anthropology, could provide insights into how arts organisations integrate different stakeholders in their structures and design value propositions (Kimbell, 2018b, p. 20). For example, to address multiple forms of values and the engagement with different actors, research in service management proposes the notion of “value constellation” to indicate a networked, systemic approach to value propositions and creation instead of linear “value chains” (Kimbell, 2019, p. 117). To develop a pluralistic accounts that do not rely on definitions and applications of sustainability in cultural policy, this thesis combines business, organisations and management literatures, primary data from small artist-led organisations to understand how values can orient artists to run organisations and, consequently, what kind of values their organisations create.

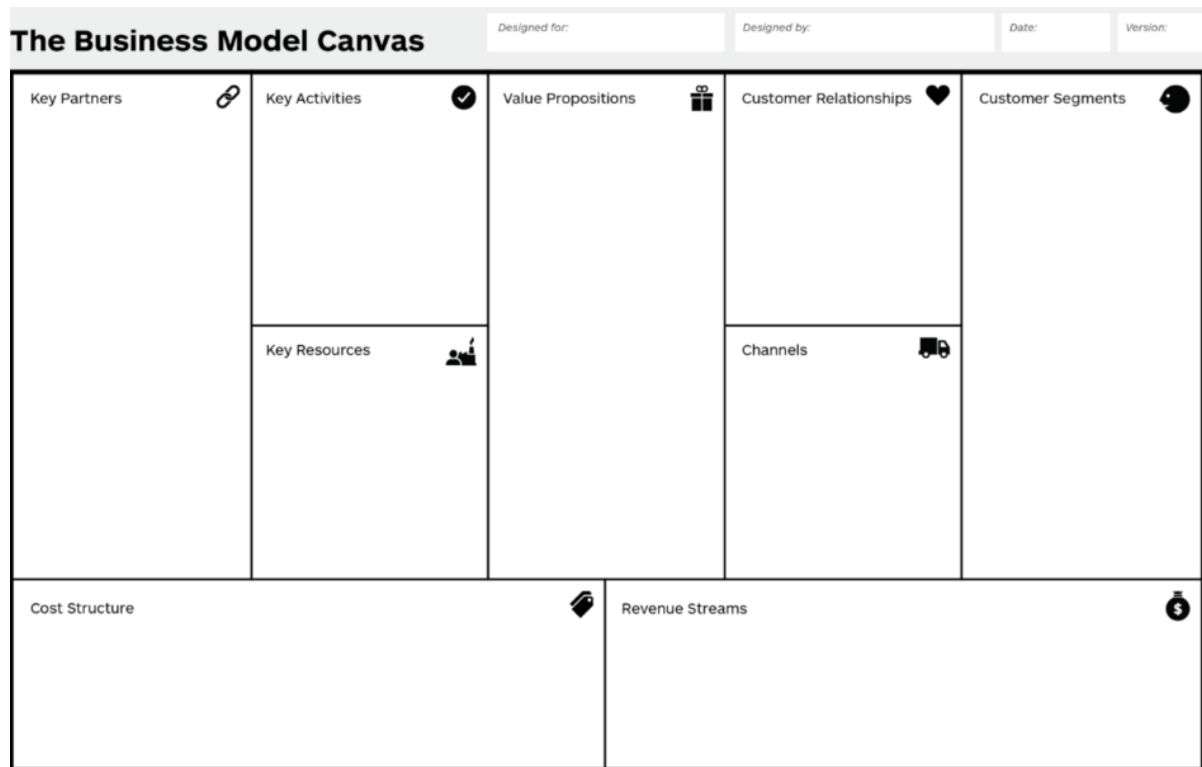
Taking a multidisciplinary approach is needed to be able to recognise the potential that cultural values and assets could have on the development of more sustainable business models for arts organisation. An example of cultural values and assets are those included in Kimbell’s analysis of a cultural venue’s business model, such as reputation and production expertise and audience engagement via co-creation. They are often key to understanding wider dynamics that interest the cultural sector as an ecology and the mutual interdependencies between the organisations and their ecosystems (Gross *et al.*, 2020). If the impact that arts organisations create is “much larger than reported budgets convey” (Markusen *et al.*, 2011, p. 24), being aware that developing sustainable business models come with a series of tensions (van Bommel, 2018), funders and organisations will need to develop an ecosystemic view that allows to see what kind of values are created and how they are distributed to balance out the economic, social and environmental impacts. An exploration of different kinds of values created would bring a definition of sustainability less circumscribed by business models and financial goals: “The concept suggests that sustainability is a state to be achieved and clung onto whereas, in truth, successful value creation happens at the interface between the organisation and the outside world; success is fluid, fleeting and elusive” (Royce, 2011, p. 11). New understandings on what kinds of values are created, who is involved and how could recontextualise the demand for arts organisations to be “sustainable”.

### 3.1.2 The Business Model Canvas

To help organisations map their operations and ways in which value is created, captured and distributed, Osterwalder, Pigneur and Clark (2010) developed a diagram, the “Business Model Canvas”



(BMC), to visualize the key features of businesses. It has nine basic building blocks, as shown in Figure 7. The business model canvas can be utilised to describe what Demil and Lecocq (2010) define as the three core components of business models: resources and competencies (internal and external), organisational structure (the organisation’s activities and relations with other organisations), the value proposition (the service or product that the business deliver).



**Figure 7 Business Model Canvas.** Available at <https://www.strategyzer.com/canvas/business-model-canvas>.

Language is an important factor for social and creative enterprises to differentiate from other businesses, and slightly different canvases have been designed to address this. Other versions exist, such as those developed by The Social Enterprise Institute, where they added the “Social Innovation” block to clarify the novelty of a certain service and speak of “Key Allies” instead of “Key Partners”. Below I briefly explain how to use the Social Business Model Canvas as it was utilised in Guild (see discussion in Chapter 6).

The Social Business Model Canvas (Figure 8) has 13 building blocks, and some of the components and layout are different from the original canvas to map social enterprises more precisely. “Type of intervention” has been added to reflect the nature of social enterprises. It describes the kind of activities, services or products responding to a particular social need (Burkett, 2016). They differ from “key activities” as they generally describe the activities of the organization. They can also include operations and activities supporting income generation that enable interventions with more explicit social remit, which go instead under “intervention”. The “surplus” block is relevant for social

enterprises which don't pay dividends but re-invest all surplus in the business. The "segments" component has been divided in two, the customers are those who pay for the service, and they may also "use" the service. Instead, the "beneficiaries" are those that often do not pay anything but are crucial for social remit of the business model. The "value proposition" has been divided into three sections, the "user value proposition" refers to the business's main value proposition, similar to what a mission or vision statement would be, the "impact measures" bring the issue of evaluation and measure in the framework of the business model, hence thinking about it as an integral part of running the business, and the "customer value proposition" is about those who would buy the service.



**Figure 8 Social Business Model Canvas. Available at <https://www.socialbusinessmodelcanvas.com/>.**

The last difference is the addition of "stakeholders" in the partners' block: stakeholders are organizations and groups for which value is created. This can include audiences (customers and beneficiaries), staff members and the board (Rodríguez, 2019) considering their direct or indirect interest in the business (e.g. customers benefitting from a service and staff and board being invested in it) and can play a role in value creation and as brand value co-creators (Wang and Sengupta, 2016). Differently from stakeholders, partners are external organisations and individuals that contribute with resources (financial, in-kind, contacts, marketing) to help the organisation deliver services and value, often, partnerships are used to mutually enhance the organisations' reputation with stakeholders (Money *et al.*, 2010). Canvases are usually completed starting from the customer segment, which

should help to clarify the value proposition and then resources, cost structure and the other blocks are filled in accordingly.

The core idea of business models and the canvases lies in the value that businesses deliver to their customers and stakeholders. Authors put different emphases on the notion of value, which Velu, Smart and Phillips (2016) distinguish between the value proposition, value creation, and value capture. They summarise:

“The value proposition component identifies what markets and customer groups (or other beneficiaries) will be targeted, and what products and services will be provided to meet the requirements of the customer group. [...] Value creation focuses on how products and services will be created/provided ... [and] value capture relates to the benefits that are realized” (Velu, Smart and Phillips, 2016, p. 9).

For example, the value proposition of a studio provider would primarily target artists and creative workers. The value creation will look at studio space as the main product and add value through services like lockable spaces, controlled access to the building, and selling of materials and supplies on the premises. Value is captured by charging for the use of the space and benefits are delivered to artists by providing safe and convenient workspaces. Business model innovation has become a prominent idea to indicate the process that businesses undertake to remain competitive by changing their value propositions to customers while changing operations to support new value creation (Chesbrough, 2007).

### 3.1.3 Limits of business models and innovation

At the start of this chapter, I tried to sum up coherently different perspectives on the idea of business models, providing general definitions and uses of the term and related concepts. The synthesis of the ideas around business models was facilitated by relatively recent literature reviews and research (Carayannis et al, 2015; Wirtz et al., 2016; Kimbell, 2018a, 2018b; Bocken, Boons and Baldassarre, 2019; Rex, Kaszynska and Kimbell, 2019; Rex, 2021). Kimbell (2018a, p. 11) comments: “unsurprisingly, reports, conference panels and websites often use the term business model quite loosely and sometimes conflate business models with strategy, organisation design and innovation management”. Much of the existing research is conceptual or focuses on commercial businesses (often very large firms operating internationally) which have established structures and strategies that allow for the identification of business models and subsequent changes or innovations (e.g. Demil and Lecocq, 2010; Carayannis et al., 2015). However, empirical research on how organisations develop or change

their business models, how managers use the business model construct and how the institutional or external factors shape them is still limited (Wirtz et al., 2016; Kimbell, 2018a).

Further, Fiel (2014) argues that the classification of business models according to “archetypes” misses underlying criteria, making these categorisations not theoretically or empirically grounded. On the contrary, arguing that a number of underlying core models can be identified, Baden-Fuller et al. (2017) distinguish four types: a solutions model, a match-making model, and a multi-sided model. Still, this categorisation is presented as a cognitive device for scholars to understand how businesses work and for practitioners to orient actions, but it is not linked to empirical research on how business models are used in practice. In reality, organisations that have similar business models can present differences in the value proposition, internal organisations and governance (Kimbell, 2018a), making it difficult to draw generalisations and correspondences between theory and practice. Though the idea of models can be applied to find categorical distinctions between businesses, the practical differences call for inductive approaches to planning, strategy and operations in the development of business models (Siggelkow, 2002; Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010; Demil and Lecocq, 2010).

To identify areas of development, business models can be seen from an “activity system perspective” which can offer a holistic view of how a business operates and can be compared over time to identify innovation in its components (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010; Zott and Amit, 2010). Some authors suggest that business models can help to draw the boundaries of firms so that they can be understood in relation to other systems to highlight the internal and external factors that shape change and innovation in relation to their context (Brooks *et al.*, 2018; Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020). Boons and Bocken (2018) introduced the idea of an “ecology of business models”, arguing that business models would need to be understood in their wider context. For example, taking an ecological perspective on business models accounts for how they are shaped by the institutional context, which provides rules and legislation, but also by the interactions with other businesses that compete with, or complement, them for resources, partners and customers (*ibid.*). Attention to the wider contexts in which businesses operate has gained increased importance due to the increased attention on how businesses can contribute “in an effort to resolve the sustainability challenges of our planet” (Dentchev *et al.*, 2018, p. 695).

To this end, the concept of “sustainable business models” has been introduced “as a vehicle to coordinate technological and societal innovations with system-level sustainability” (Bocken *et al.*, 2014, p. 44). From this perspective, the notion of value itself, as discussed in the business model

literature, has been outgrown by an increasing “interest in other-than-economic outcomes of business” (Kimbell, 2018a, p. 20) that considers wider societal and environmental needs (Dentchev *et al.*, 2018; Bocken, Boons and Baldassarre, 2019). Kimbell (2018a, p. 25) argues that these models provide an opportunity to “shift to thinking about the shared value that is co-created and realised as a public good, rather than “captured” through such interactions to achieve competitive advantage”. Innovating a business model to make it sustainable would need that the boundaries around what constitutes the business are set with other stakeholders, who may have different interests. Since the outcomes of the new “sustainable” model are difficult to predict, and its implementation can lead to rebound effects. For example, innovation of one component could make more sustainable an aspect of the business while making less sustainable another one, in turn surfacing the internal and external tensions.

However, managing innovation in sustainable business models is a complex challenge as they need to perform to simultaneously intrinsic tensions between stakeholders’ demands at various levels (individual, organizational, systemic) and deliver social, environmental and economic value. It is particularly challenging for models of not-for-profit, social enterprises, cooperatives and collectives, which are founded on the integration of different groups and stakeholders in the value proposition, creation and capture. Van Bommel (2018, p. 830) argues that often these tensions are “paradoxical” as they deal with contradictory interests. For example, developing a more sustainable business model could present “belonging tensions”. This kind of tension evolves from conflicting individual and collective identities and values and the ambiguity on what an organisation is about if a profit motive and a more socially oriented mission coexist. “Organizing tensions” arise when organisational design, employee profiles and culture need changing to combine the requirement of the new business model. Reconfiguring businesses models towards sustainability can trigger competition among organisational structures, practices and processes also in light of the fact that “learning/temporal tensions” emerge from the fact that shifting to sustainable business models requires long-term time horizons that must be juxtaposed to short-term results to allow for change or growth in the future while maintaining stability in the present (van Bommel, 2018).

### 3.2 Attitudes in small organisations and their cultures

After having introduced the theory on business models, I would like to problematize for who this idea delivers value and its applicability. Business models and sustainable business models can be useful conceptual ideas, but in practice, the limits of their applicability do not only lie in the clarity of both constructs but it is also rooted in the intentions of those who run the businesses. The idea itself of business models provides a tool to map out a business however, engaging with this exercise would be

meaningless if it was not attached to how the business works in practice. Much of the traditional literature and guidance on the use of business models focus on competitive advantage (and continuous growth) as the ultimate goal. In fact, business models are understood as a tool to bridge future strategy and operative implementation, often leading to other strategic tools like business planning and review of operations (Wirtz et al., 2016). While business planning is frequently seen as one of the important factors in business success, the applicability of tools that are rooted in corporate and strategic management, such as business models and plans, has been questioned by research on small firms founders and/or owner-managers (Richbell, Watts and Wardle, 2006).

In contrast to most research on organizations that has focused on structure and stability (e.g. operation of business models), Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann (2020, p.4) argue that an evolutionary approach “treats origins and persistence as inseparable issues”, linking “emergence” (how organisations came to be that way) with sustainability (why things persist). I will focus on this approach for the integrated learning that it offers, as well as because it points at a version of sustainability that may be understood as a discrete notion in terms of “persistence”: untied to notions of growth, longevity or radical change/innovation. This is similar to the scientific notion of sustainability, where the goal is in itself to maintain the equilibrium of an eco-system, which may include the expansion, shrinking, death and generation of parts within it, rather than specifically aiming for its own expansion or growth. Persistence can be associated with something that continues to exist, linking it to longevity. Instead, I focus my attention on persistence as a verb indicating to be able to continue doing something in spite of difficulty (n.b. different from resilience, which indicates the capacity to respond to difficulties), as the way in which organisations continue to exist to achieve their goal, which may also imply that at some point that will cease to operate. The parallel here is used to understand organisations as activity systems that are part of a wider cultural ecosystem, a notion discussed in Chapter 2.

Crucially, to research emergence, they consider organisations starting up, focusing on micro and small enterprises. This has two reasons: the fact that most organizations are small (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020) and that much of the business research and organizational studies are built on a selection bias. Selection bias in organisational studies research results in theories built on large and successful organisations, which eventually conditions expectations and how organisations are constructed (Clegg and Hardy, 1996; Denrell, 2005).

In the UK, 99% of businesses are SMEs and account for approximately 50% of all private sector employment and turnover (DIT, 2020). The UK government's definition of SMEs encompasses micro (less than 10 employees and an annual turnover under €2 million), small (less than 50 employees and

an annual turnover under €10 million) and medium-sized (less than 250 employees and annual turnover under €50 million) businesses (UK Government, 2022). Notably, Lobel (2016) found that small businesses' survival rates are as high as 91% after one year of trading, but after five years, just four in ten small businesses will still be trading. Reviewing the mortality risk factors in micro and small businesses, Garcia et al. (2022, p. 2) found that SMEs “are fragile and are exposed to risks in the initial years of operation, a period in which entrepreneurs are learning to operate a new business”.

For this reason, business models and the subsequent planning are positively associated with growth and entrepreneurship (Brooks *et al.*, 2018) but in a similar way in which, sustainable business models surface organisational tensions that have to do with the interests and values of internal and external stakeholders (van Bommel 2018), the idea itself to use business models to maintain competitive advantage may clash with the intentions of the owners of small business owners.

Literature on small businesses highlights key differences in attitudes between small business owners and entrepreneurs towards growth and strategic management (Carland et al., 1984; Beaver, 2003b, 2003a). Studies on entrepreneurs have grown out of the interest in small businesses (Blackburn and Smallbone, 2008) as entrepreneurs set up new ventures that start relatively small. Often, the entrepreneur “is portrayed as an economic hero with special and particular responsibility for wealth creation through new commercial activity” (Beaver, 2003b, p. 177). Entrepreneurs present distinct inclinations towards risk-taking, growth, innovation-oriented and strategic management behaviour (Schumpeter, 1934; Carland et al., 1984; Baumol, 1990).

Instead, owner-managers are defined as individuals that set up a business to further personal goals, often as a form of income alternative to a job (Carland et al., 1984; Beaver, 2003b). After the start-up phase, small firms' owner-managers tend to avoid engaging with business planning as they are mainly concerned with the survival of the business and do not show a propensity for growth (Beaver, 2003b; Richbell, Watts and Wardle, 2006). The business tends to consume the owner's time and resources, and it is intertwined with the owner's personality, often bound to wider family needs and desires (Carland et al., 1984).

While in bigger organisations, charts can map out structures and hierarchies, in small businesses and organisations, structures and roles often overlap, making it difficult to distinguish specific components (Hasle et al., 2011). Rather than specialised staff that can respond to defined roles, founders tend to employ “generalists who had substantial experience in their industries and were willing to accept relatively undefined jobs” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 111). In the uncertain time of emergence, the organisational structures “bears only a remote resemblance to the pictures painted in management or human resources textbooks” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 110).

Idiosyncratic jobs often emerge as organisations put together their initial teams and are “created around individual people, rather than in the abstract” (Miner, 1990, p. 195).

Further, these organisations lack the resources needed in terms of knowledge and economic capital to implement changes and strategies that allow for change. Different from entrepreneurial personalities, which are comfortable with risk-taking, change in small organisations involves a degree of risk that owner-managers do not have an interest to engage with (De Zoysa and Herath, 2007). Instead, in small organisations, Aldrich, Ruef and Lippman (2020) favour the idea that incremental changes are more likely to emerge over disruptive innovations that affect the whole business model. Small changes and adaptations that can be implemented without disrupting the work of the organisation may result in innovations in the practices of small organisations.

Most founders tend to reproduce the characteristics of the organizations that they perceive successful, but mistakes in copying are frequent (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 21). When mistakes are not fatal, they can be proven fruitful in bringing a degree of variation from routines and traditions, which may bring innovative changes and solutions. A traditional view of this process is based on the idea of bounded rationality. In organisational theory, rationality is the guiding principle for effective decision-making to maximise gain. However, Simon (1976, 1991) introduced the idea of bounded rationality: the optimal choice is bounded by organizational actors and their institutional practice. However, founders and managers face challenges posed by uncertain environments, coping with irrationality in decision-making, reconciling differences in opinion (Kaufman, 1985) and often acting in a firefighting mode (Mintzberg, 1974). In fact, most founding attempts appear complex, chaotic and compressed in time (Duncan and Douglas, 1994; Reynolds and White, 1997). The narrow time frame between conception and execution during the founding of a new organization requires managers in small organisations to “improvise”, whereas managers in large organisations “often have the luxury of contemplating their options” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 77).

In new organisations, founders go through a phase of steep learning and lack the time and resources from planning and strategic management, for example, neglecting to formalize jobs “in the interests of getting on with the work” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 104). While new organisations may seem disorganised at first, what is key to their “persistence” is the ability of the founders to share a coherent vision and build the boundaries of the organisational culture accordingly (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020) accordingly. Boundaries between the founders’ identity and their organisations come to be defined with the development of the organizational structure through the division of labour and the emergence of the organizational form: a recognizable identity both internally and externally to the organization. The construction of organisational forms is key to positioning and



recognising organisations in their broader ecosystems, and it also provides a cultural framework for members to associate with it. Schein (1984, p. 3) defines organisational culture as

“the pattern of basic assumption that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal adaptation and that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members”.

Basic assumptions are shaped by the founders’ values and ways of thinking about the world (Schein, 2010; Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020). Maintaining the boundaries of the organisations requires the delicate management of the people who work for and associate with the organisation, as “there cannot be a culture without a group that owns it” (Schein, 1984, p. 5). A group is defined as a set of people:

“(1) who have been together long enough to have shared significant problems, (2) who have had opportunities to solve those problems and to observe the effects of their solutions and (3) who have taken in new members” (Schein, 1984, p. 5).

Maintaining organisational boundaries requires clear leadership and structuring so that the goals of the organisation, knowledge and culture are shared by members. Founders’ ambivalence about their ambitions risks producing “divergent interpretations and organisational identity tends to become transitory and subject to opportunistic definition” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 127). Founders can shape how members orientate their participation in the organisation, though members themselves also have an active role in shaping the organisational form (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020).

The emergence of an organizational form refers to “patterned social interaction between members that sustains organizational knowledge and orients participants to a common identity” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 102). Swanson (1971) describes two models of members’ orientations towards an organisation: as “users” or “supporters”. Users associate with the organisation primarily for personal benefit, as self-interested parties (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020). Instead, members that can be identified as “supporters” perform the reproduction of “organization-sustaining behaviours that are not linked to self-interested outcomes” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 95). Supporters, by identifying with the organisation, have a stake in passing on organisational knowledge (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 97), which contributes to the formation of strong legacies from their founders and the likelihood of long-term survival (Ahn, 2018, p. 1). Internal recognition of an organisational structure and form is key to establishing externally recognised boundaries. External recognition is key as it contributes to shaping the organisational form by attracting specific audiences, customers and partners, which bring further resources to sustain the function of the organisation.

Similarly, Carayannis et al. (2015) have found that different stakeholders, predominantly customers and partners, play an important role towards business model innovations that contribute to organisational sustainability. In this sense, the shared values and practices that constitute the culture and identity of an organisation have been discussed in organisational studies as one of the factors contributing to the success or failure of organisations (Serpa, 2016). Basic assumptions are shaped by the founders' values and ways of thinking about the world (Willcoxson and Millett, 2000; Schein, 2010; Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020), however communicating a coherent and consistent vision can be particularly problematic in hybrid organisations like social enterprises, which try to balance contradictory social welfare and commercial logics (Chandra and Shang, 2017).

Founders of social enterprises may express this tension in a "sense of dissonance" at the identity level when they try to compromise between a narrative of social entrepreneurs as heroic individual actors who enact social change and that of community-driven agents of change (Chandra and Shang, 2017). Scholars have argued that successful social entrepreneurs are those that are able to combine multiple identity narratives and institutional logics (Wry and York, 2017). To understand how that is possible, existing research highlights the importance of push and pull factors (Christopoulos and Vogl, 2015; Bacq, Hartog and Hoogendoorn, 2016). Chandra and Shang (2017) propose to research the biographical antecedents of social entrepreneurs to explain how they are able to combine different logics and overcome the binary narratives of heroic/community-driven individuals and of the push and pull factors. Investigating past personal experience, the social context and the personal characters of social entrepreneurs can inform a holistic view of how social enterprises emerge. The idea is that the individual's previous experience and exposure of social problems, collaboration and collectivism, entangled with personal beliefs and shaped by the social context are mixed to different levels of prior business management and leadership experiences, access to financial and social capital and higher education (Chandra and Shang, 2017). Biographical antecedents, such as higher level of education, previous work experience in a medium/large firm and running a business, have also been found to determine the inclinations of small firm business owners to growth and business planning (Richbell, Watts and Wardle, 2006). Both in social enterprises and small firms, growth strategies and business planning have been associated with the requirements of external support agencies such as financial institutions and charitable foundations that encourage innovation in their business models (Richbell, Watts and Wardle, 2006; Di Domenico, Haugh and Tracey, 2010).

Similar to how social entrepreneurs struggle to reconcile different narratives, Down and Warren (2007) found that small business entrepreneurs use entrepreneurial stereotypes and clichés to deal with the precariousness of their situation, the mundane reality of their work but also the challenges of running a firm. The construction of entrepreneurial identity is shaped by a series of expectations

and business owners resort to clichéd narratives of entrepreneurship to maintain a successful sense of self that remains achievable, not extraordinary or “heroic” (Down and Warren, 2007). For small business owners, constructing and maintaining their identities as entrepreneurs often bring conflicting attitudes towards risk, ambition and autonomy. For example, while they distinguish themselves from others who are not prepared to take the risk of starting up a new venture (Anderson and Warren, 2011), they also acknowledge that it was not just bravery but learning through previous work experience in other companies that made them feel more prepared to start-up a business (Down and Warren, 2007). Down and Warren (2007, p. 17) argue that “clichés are a discursive means by which to explore the possibilities of incorporating new or otherwise unfamiliar experiences into the individual’s ontological narrative”. Entrepreneurs are often perceived to pride themselves on their self-sufficiency and both their ability and desire to be autonomous, however they recognise how this autonomy needs to be negotiated and compromised with the external environment and changes.

### 3.3 Policy, business models and innovation for arts organisations

The growing interest in cultural policy in Europe and in the UK in the development of “new business models” and “business model innovation” (Rodríguez, 2016b; BOP Consulting, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2019) can be connected to the changing “funding landscape for the arts and the digital age” (Rex, 2019, p. 86). As shown in the previous chapter, policy texts introduce the concepts of business models and business model innovation when inviting organisations to develop sustainability and resilience by diversifying funding streams, reviewing their structures or changing their missions (Robinson, 2010; Royce, 2011; DCMS, 2016, p. 50; Rodríguez, 2016b; Woodley *et al.*, 2018; ACE, 2020). The last Arts Council England (ACE, 2020, p. 49) strategy makes it clear: one of their investment principles is dynamism which “may involve organisations changing both their missions and their business models”. The emphasis on business models reveals an economic framing of sustainability in cultural policy where “sustainability” means for arts organisations “financial sustainability”, in other words decreasing their reliance on public funding. The economic framing of sustainability contributes to shaping what “success” for arts organisations looks like in terms of longevity, size and growth (Markusen *et al.*, 2011; Rex, 2019). Rex (2019, p. 86) critically reads the recent policy’s interest shift to business models as a way to devolve responsibility to organisations for responding to wider infrastructural problems “cultural policy does not consider that these are changes beyond their control nor that it could take more than capacity building and skills for an organisation to make up for public funding they have lost”.

The cultural sector still lacks a systematic mapping of the different organisations that make up the sector, which makes it difficult to direct specific cultural policy (Bakhshi and Cunningham, 2016; Gross *et al.*, 2020). This may especially be the case for understanding business models where, according to

Rex (2019, p. 89), cultural policy texts have an “excessively inclusive nature”. They describe business model innovation for the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs), which include a wide range of sectors, from the visual arts to performance to the gaming and software industry. This overlooks different key orientation in the production and consumption of symbolic value between cultural organisations and creative industries (Oakley and O’Connor, 2015). Rex (2018, p. 12) comments that the possibilities for self-generated income are not the same for cultural and creative industries and “financial sustainability without public subsidy may be unrealistic for many cultural organisations, particularly those considered as part of the cultural sector before it expanded into the ‘creative industries’”.

In this context, the rhetoric of “innovation” brings a misconception as Kimbell (2019, p. 117) comments,

“new business models, based on unprecedented ideas, may be rare. Instead of emphasising the “newness” of business models, business model innovation can be seen as an activity or process through which a business model is changed and new organisational practices emerge”.

While the entrepreneurial dimension of innovation (which leads to the creation of new products and markets encouraged in policy through the business model discourse) may be a rare phenomenon in the cultural sector, other kinds of innovation should not be overlooked for their potential to develop sustainable organisations. As we have seen, disruptive, bold changes in business models are often too risky, or not even desired, by owners of small businesses (Beaver, 2003b; Richbell, Watts and Wardle, 2006). By promoting an entrepreneurial dimension of innovation in the cultural and creative industries, a sector “characterised by an abundance of SMEs, micro-businesses and individual” (Balzagette, 2017, p. 28), policy-makers and funders may just encounter similar attitudes to that of small business owners. Therefore, if the understanding of the attitudes and values of small firms founders and/or owner-managers shows the limited applicability of business planning, much the same could be argued here that expectations towards the performance, longevity or sustainability of organisations in the cultural sector, and related funding and support programmes, should be re-thought in light of population of organisations of this size behave. Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann (2020, p.238) argue that:

“Norms and values influence nascent entrepreneurs’ understandings of current conditions and help shape the way in which their ambitions are expressed – for example, toward traditional lines of actions or toward actions that challenge the status quo. Will ambitious people become government officials or independent entrepreneurs? Will upward mobility be interpreted as a function of nepotism, bias, good luck, or ability?”

If arts organisations are “underpinned by value” with “people who work for and with these organisations have specific value orientations, principles and beliefs” (Kaszynksa, 2019, p. 52), then

understanding what sustainability means is further complicated by exploring the motivations that led their founding. For example, a group of artists may run an organisation to create a reliable source of income for themselves, which perhaps implies an element of longevity, while others may decide to temporarily run an organisation as a way to step up their career and move on to other projects. Internal and external factors could still impact the evolution of the organisation, eventually steering the direction of founders' and members' goals and attitudes. Having a clear understanding of the potential to persist and the risks of mortality of arts organisations could help both policy-makers and artists to re-frame cultural norms, values and expectations surrounding the social role of artists as entrepreneurs and the nature of social and economic opportunities. Vice versa, understanding the norms and values of artists' organisations in the cultural sector could help to reframe what it might mean to be sustainable or resilient.

While Rex (2019) traces the adoption of business and management tools in the creative industries back to the rise of the creative industries discourse in EU and UK economic and cultural policies, Poettschacher (2005) argues that the public image of creative microbusinesses plays a role in the way that policymakers have supported creative organisations. Micro creative businesses are seen as “semi-chaotic organizations positioned halfway between an artist’s studio and a business running on the management principle of ‘self-exploitation’” (Poettschacher, 2005, p. 177). Partly as a response to these “chaotic” organisations, we can see a growing interest not just in business settings but also in higher education institutions in offering arts management and curatorial courses to provide efficient means of managing cultural production (Chong, 2010) and including elements of “professionalisation” in the fine art curriculum (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015; Wyszomirski and Chang, 2017). According to Poettschacher, the public image of creative enterprises leads to a paradox where policy and research experts advocate for business support programmes “for a target group whose main ambition is to break the broadly accepted rules of business” (2005, p. 178). Moreover, there is no acknowledgement of the fact that artists may not want to change their business models “given that this may clash with organisational values and priorities” and presupposes that the existing business models of individual organisations “require intervention and suggest that people working in arts and cultural organisations lack the financial and managerial skills to adapt their models. Hence this is why they have struggled to adapt to changes in technology and funding systems” (Rex, 2019, p. 86).

The above quote from Rex about the financial capabilities and skills of arts organisations makes current something that Holden (2004, p. 26) was already commenting on nearly 20 years ago:

“The language currently adopted in the cultural sector, by the funding system, and in the media is defective not just because it fails to provide an adequate means of talking about

culture, but because it is a language of supplication and dependency that fosters relations of inequality. The vocabulary of culture reinforces the notion that money given to the arts, museums, libraries and heritage is a hand-out.”

While the adoption of the business model language is used to encourage the financial independence of arts organisations, it also seems to reproduce the idea of arts organisations as “semi-chaotic” (Poettschacher, 2005) and “disorganised” (Holden, 2007). Similar to how sustainability and resilience are criticised for being used to indicate vague targets, business model change and innovation have been made essential goals for cultural and creative organisations, yet the use of the idea in policy and broader debates has made business models a “catch-all term relating to strategy, entrepreneurship, organisational change and economic growth” (Kimbell, 2018a, p. 11) The general use that we see in the sector and the grey literature of business models and innovation is connected to specific goals in regard to financial success, however the disconnection from business and management literature fails to recognise the struggles and tensions that commercial businesses and arts organisations face alike. As noted by Kimbell (2018a), these publications seldom refer to management and business literature.

Therefore, drawing from existing literature and current research on organisations and small businesses could shed light on prejudices against arts organisations. This could be relevant for artists, who can be challenged to re-think their practices, as well as funders, who can review goal-setting and their funding streams. For example, Boyle and Oakley (2018, p. 12) compare the specific dynamics found in the literature of family businesses to small arts organisations, arguing “the economic structure of much of the creative industries is still based on partnerships or founder-ownership [...] as a result, the same dynamic found in family-owned firms pertains”. Kets de Vries (1996) argues that specific tensions between individual and organisational goals are present in family businesses, these can be used productively for the sustainability of the enterprise, as well as determine its end. For example, for organisations run by artists, a challenge lies in the long-term running of these organisations, as there are specific belonging and performing tensions (van Bommel, 2018) regarding their legacy, institutionalisation and future development (Detterer and Nannucci, 2012). In this respect, Oakley and Boyle (2018, p. 9) ask, “who will run this business in the way we have run it successfully and remain faithful to the values that have driven our success, particularly in respect of retaining the business as a worthwhile place to be employed?”.

Most of the efforts from public policies and funding aim at making cultural and creative organisations more sustainable from a financial point of view to ensure the continuation of their economic and social impacts. However, as much as researchers and practitioners have been criticising the “impact agenda” and advocating for alternative metrics to capture the impact and value of cultural and creative

organisations beyond their contribution to the economy or instrumentalised social benefits (Reeves, 2002; Oakley, O'Brien and Lee, 2013; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016; Dovey *et al.*, 2016; Kaszynska, 2018; Romer, 2018b), they have also been stressing the importance of measuring success and sustainability in relation to how the people involved in the organisations define them (Bogen, 2019).

Similarly, Poettschacher refers to "sustainability" saying that "without knowing the basic assumptions of the founders, it is almost impossible to support their business in a sustainable way" (2005, 178). While business models and management literature can be useful to understand some practices adopted in arts organisations, they struggle to capture some of the dynamics in cultural organisations, proposing strategies and tools to achieve "sustainability" that are hardly accepted by practitioners who see them clashing with their visions and motivations (Woodley *et al.*, 2018; Kaszynska, 2019). Arts organisations' missions and visions express the values which serve to orient the overall strategy of the organisation and, consequently how organisations deliver their mission through their business model (Royce, 2011). Kaszynska (2019, p. 52) argues that they not only produce value for their stakeholders but "are also underpinned by value": "people who work for and with these organisations have specific value orientations, principles and beliefs", in turn, "value, value relations, organisational norms and practices come to interact and compete in any single organisation, and this has profound effects on how this organisation behaves". Ultimately, Rex, Kaszynska and Kimbell (2019, p. 86) comment: "we are not saying that arts and cultural organisations need external support because they are lacking in capacity. Rather, the day-to-day pressure of managing an organisation often takes priority over self-examination and reflection about the nature of the value co-creation in which organisations are involved".

### 3.4 Summary

This chapter explored what business models are and their function as a "holistic description of company activities in aggregated form" (Wirtz *et al.*, 2016, p. 38). Two main dimensions of business models emerge an operational one, which describes the activities of the business, and a dynamic dimension which sees the business models as changing and adapting. In the dynamic dimension of a business model, the business maintains a competitive advantage by implementing change. This could either be incremental or, through a reinvention of the model, based on a disruptive idea of innovation it entails changing the value proposition or other key components.

However, Kimbell (2018b) shows that arts organisations have complex models that produce and co-create different kinds of values for and with different stakeholders. The Business Model Canvas and the Social Business Model Canvas are presented as one of the tools offered to organisations to map the different strands of activities of organisations. These kinds of tools and business models

themselves should be used to formulate business plans that can implement change. The dynamic dimension of business models is grounded in theories of problem solving and organizational learning (Simon, 1991; Fjeldstad and Snow, 2018), but Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann (2020, p. 63) argue that “because much of the work in organizational theory is grounded in social psychological and cognitive theories of human behaviour, it allows researchers to formulate clear propositions about the conditions under which people act as agents of their own fate”.

Thus, the different attitudes of small business owners and entrepreneurs have been explored. Small business owners need to manage all aspects of the organisations, which does not leave time to engage with planning and strategies. Moreover, they tend to prefer keeping the business stable and avoiding the risks associated with growth (Richbell, Watts and Wardle, 2006). Instead, social entrepreneurs struggle with the idea of expanding their business as they struggle to reconcile profit making with their social mission (Chandra and Shang, 2017).

Furthermore, various tensions within organisations related to their mission, ways of working or the time required for change may create conflicts within organisations and disrupt individual and collective identities (van Bommel, 2018). In turn, these tensions need to be accounted for when planning for change and managed by managers to keep members engaged.

However, Aldrich, Reuf and Lippman (2020) focus on the dynamics of emerging small organisations to provide a different point of view on how change happens in organisations and what contributes to their persistence. They argue that founders and managers need to create strong boundaries around the organisation so that members can support the reproduction of the organisational cultures and identities. The formation phase of organisations is key to establishing boundaries, roles and structures that have an impact on the sustainability of organisations.

In cultural policy, business model innovation is seen as a way to improve, even ensure, the financial sustainability of the organisations in the sector. In turn, tackling financial sustainability at a meso level, should contribute to sustainability at a macro scale, for the whole sector. However, this approach is being criticised for being indiscriminately applied to both cultural organisations and creative industries, without considering their different models, remit and different possibilities to generate income (Rex, 2019). Similar to small businesses, arts organisations show resistance to engaging with business planning and place a lot of importance on their missions and values, which can make them even more resistant to drastically changing their business models (Rodríguez, 2016a; Fitzgerald, 2019).

Putting the pressure on organisations to innovate and change their business models fails to account for the wider infrastructural changes and dynamics of the cultural ecology, which may affect how artists are employed, what public funds are used for, how digital technologies can impact the



production and distribution of cultural products etc. (Holden, 2015). Bogen (2018, p. 106) is also cautious with the adoption of business model theory, as they are “great on paper [...] but often have little or no relevance and applicability to the real world”. Studying models and trying to replicate them “does not work when it comes to the arts” as the context in which arts organisations operate shapes and influences how they operate: “originality, expression, creativity, values and views cannot be taught or learnt through studying management theories or models” (Bogen, 2018, p. 106).

Considering that “within an ecological understanding of creative economies, innovation takes place in many locations, involving many kinds of novelty and value” (Gross et al., 2020, p. 5), given their limited resources, arts organisations may be more often engaging with small incremental innovations at other levels. For example, in the development of sustainable business models, the majority of innovations happen at the organisational level (Bocken et al., 2014). This type of incremental innovation often requires managers to learn by doing and time to develop organisational cultures and re-establish boundaries around the organisation. While van Bommel (2018) already identifies this as a challenge for the organisation itself, which may be destabilised by the prospect of seeing results in the long term, the “learning/temporal tension” could also be an issue for public and private funders, such as the developmental programmes mentioned in the previous chapter by ACE, which would invest funding expecting organisations to become sustainable in a relatively short-term timeframe. Rex, Kaszynska and Kimbell (2019, p. 86) advocate for policy to move away from a “prescriptive approach” to a more “open-ended” form of support that can help “practitioners ask themselves what their role in a broader system of cultural activity is, how it might be best sustained and what a sustainable business model would look like in their context”.

To this end, the next chapter will contextualise the work of artists and cultural entrepreneurs in the broader system of the cultural sector and explore how this work “underpinned by value” (Kaszynska, 2019, p. 52) gives shape to artists’ organisations.

## 4 Artists' organisations

This is the final chapter of the literature review, and it positions my research in the context of artists' organisations. The previous chapters considered broad theory, research and discourse on sustainability, cultural policy, business models and arts organisations more generally. Chapter 3 showed how business models could be used as a conceptual tool that can help practitioners and researchers to identify how value is created, captured and delivered by businesses. It argued that much of the potential for entrepreneurial innovation to maintain the competitive advantage of business models, or to make them sustainable, is linked to the motivations, attitudes and values of founders and managers (Carland *et al.*, 1984; Beaver, 2003b; van Bommel, 2018). This is a delicate subject in arts management and cultural industries studies, where researchers have pointed out the potential for personal and organisational values to clash with business models that entail the re-definition and change of organisations' visions and missions (Poettschacher, 2005; Foster, 2018; Hoyle *et al.*, 2018; Kaszynksa, 2019; Rex, 2019). Organisations are made of individuals thus, this chapter presents some of the characteristics of cultural labour that can affect how artists shape their identities and their values.

The first section draws on cultural work and entrepreneurship to look in more detail at the relationship between artistic and entrepreneurial identities. Artists and cultural workers are described as "model entrepreneurs" for their capacity to innovate and often working as self-employed or setting up their enterprises, however this view is criticised as a way to shift the attention to individual capabilities from the forms of precarious labour that exist in the sector (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Cultural work is always seen as precarious either under the light of a Romantic stereotype that conceives artists as pursuing total autonomy in their work or as cultural workers are forced into entrepreneurship by the instability of jobs in the sector (Bain, 2005; Oakley, 2014, p. 145). But on the other, recent research shows that cultural entrepreneurs who run their organisations successfully are able to manage their work in a way that it can give stability to their lives (Banks, 2019). However, stability at the micro level, that of the life of the cultural entrepreneur, does not necessarily correspond to the stability and longevity of their business. This perspective questions an understanding of the sustainability of cultural organisations that implies their longevity and shows the necessity of understanding how artists' values and motivations shape how they manage their organisations. The last section of this chapter focuses on the values and cultures of artist-run initiatives and artist-led spaces. It explores historical examples, principles and values behind groups of artists running organisations and spaces together. It also clarifies the role that these organisations play in broader cultural ecology.

## 4.1 Cultural work and entrepreneurship

The relationship between work, labour and the value of what artists do, has been researched in many fields, such as philosophy, sociology, history of art, economics and cultural studies. In the exploration of this relationship, several critical issues have been considered and can be interlinked: the division of labour under capitalism, post-Fordist economies, technological advancements, social and economic changes, the importance of skill and the psychic rewards of making, aesthetic judgments, recognition of professional status, the construction of identities, and exclusion in terms of race, class and gender (Garnham and Williams, 1980; Ezzy, 1997; McRobbie, 2004; Bain, 2005; Banks, 2007, 2010, 2014; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Bryan-Wilson, 2009; Baker and Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Oakley, 2014; Naudin, 2017). While this is not the place to cover all aspects of this complex object of enquiry, this section will provide an overview of some aspects of cultural work that are useful to sketch a context of artists' organisations.

Critical social scientists have been looking at underlying issues regarding the nature of cultural work itself across sectors and existing research on this subject includes fashion (McRobbie, 1998, 1999), music (Coulson, 2012; Scott, 2012), writing (Cohen, 2012), graphic design (Banks, 2019), community arts (Beirne, Jennings and Knight, 2017; Belfiore, 2021), visual artists (Bain, 2005). One of the most discussed aspects of cultural labour concerns the extent to which artists and creatives can maintain autonomy and actualize the possibilities of "good work" (Ezzy, 1997; Banks, 2010; Oakley, 2014). Bain (2005) argues that the roots of autonomy and good work that still inform the contemporary construction of artistic occupational identities can be traced back to how the myth of the "artist" came to formation during the Romantic era. The intellectual movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century solidified the image of the artist as a Bohemian rebelling against established norms, who thrives on solitude and sacrifices "status, money and material comfort for supposed freedom [...] to pursue individual creative expression" (Bain, 2005, p. 29). In this stereotype, artists value autonomy as a way to be able to manage their own labour and it is a fundamental characteristic of providing them with "good work", which is to be self-fulfilled and self-expression through creativity in work rather than outside of work (Ezzy, 1997; Banks, 2010). These characteristics are still persistent and shape attitudes to working lives (Oakley, 2009a) and the idea of a "creative class" (Florida, 2002; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; Oakley, 2009b).

In the late 1990s, taking advantage of the development of new technologies and finding alternatives to increasing uncertainty of employment, rather than cultural workers, self-employed "cultural entrepreneurs" are described as "reshaping" the cultural industries (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999, p. 11). Around this time, Florida (2002, p. 17) would describe the "economic need for creativity" to give

rise to a specific grouping of workers, the “creative class”, “whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and new creative content” and “share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit”. Under this light, Ellmeier (2003, p. 3) comments that the shift from “cultural worker” to “cultural entrepreneur” can be problematic in that it erodes the distinctions between worker and entrepreneur as part of a transformation from a “Keynesian welfare state to a Schumpeterian performance state”. This shift sees a “forced economisation of societal welfare-state fields such as health, education and culture” and it is guided by the concept of the “*entrepreneurial individual*” (Ellmeier, 2003, p. 3).

Similarly, Oakley (2014, p. 156) argues for a rhetorical function of the notion of the cultural entrepreneur “pressed into service in the global spread of the creative industries or creative economy idea”. The development of creative industries policies and their absorption into a wider set of innovation policies (Banks and O’Connor, 2009, p. 366) sees cultural workers as “model entrepreneurs” at the service of a rhetoric of economic growth, in which risks and responsibilities must be borne solely by the individual (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

As seen in the previous chapter, there is a tendency in policy to highlight the lack of know-how when it comes to managing arts organisations or the professionalisation of artistic careers, with business modelling being one of the tools of support and training programmes (Poetttschacher, 2005; Chong, 2010; Wyszomirski and Chang, 2017; Chung, Yang and Cauldwell-French, 2018).

However, Naudin (2017, p. 37) reflects “this perspective tends to ignore the context in which cultural entrepreneurship has developed, the specificity of cultural work as a distinct form of labour, the policy environment and the role of culture in contemporary society”. Oakley (2014, p. 145) brings the example of media industries where she describes cultural entrepreneurship as “often of the forced, or at least adaptive” phenomenon that happens “not under self-selected circumstances” but rather in response to vertical disintegration, technical and regulatory changes. Precarity, project-to-project, and portfolio careers dominate the cultural and creative industries (Ross, 2008; Brook, O’Brien and Taylor, 2018; Tbr, 2018; Snijders *et al.*, 2020). This economic context is not unique to them, with Kautonen *et al.* (2010) finding “involuntary self-employment” responses in other sectors of the economy and Adkins (2009) arguing that the general erosion of conventional working arrangements has brought a shift from “clock-time” (fixed working hours, standardized careers paths and established business cycles) to “event-time”, more disorganised, flexible working conditions.

Though, differently from other jobs, the Romantic idea of the artist and the role of culture in society can function as enabling factors to reproduce these working conditions. For example, recent research on precarity in visual arts careers shows examples of artists “sacrificing” stability and security, or still

being forced into it, but finding positive attributes, such as a pace of making art according to their “own autonomous tempo” (Serafini and Banks, 2020, p. 368). Part of what drives artistic autonomy does not only have to do with the potential for self-actualization in work, but also has to do with ideas of what artists believe is “good” (Banks, 2006; Naudin, 2017, p. 49). Banks (2010, p. 264) argues that creative work is often dismissed as individualistic and seldom seen “as a means for self-aware human subjects to try and influence art and culture, the workplace or the wider social world in ways that might be viewed as self-realising or socially progressive”.

In this regard, Naudin (2017, p. 44) argues that “becoming a cultural entrepreneur is a relational process” for cultural practitioners are embedded in a geographical and social space, a relational milieu. Both entrepreneurship and cultural work studies highlight two implications of this relational milieu. The social contexts in which entrepreneurs exist can play a significant role in defining their organisations, the opportunities to markets and the values which shape the character of enterprises (Swedberg, 2000; Chell and Karataş-Özkan, 2010). Similarly, the embeddedness in the local cultural milieu can provide cultural entrepreneurs with opportunities to build different forms of capital that are key to the functioning of their organisations. Social and cultural capitals built through personal networks can contribute to the establishment of arts organisations and enterprises and compensate the lack of economic capital (Naudin, 2017).

For example, Scott (2012) describes how DIY music producers that start with low economic capital can be able to transform symbolic capital into a “buzz”, which may later lead to economic capital. This characteristic of cultural entrepreneurs brings a re-imagining of the artist as a “lonely genius” into a “collaborative individualist” (Hinves, 2012), where the artist negotiates a hybrid identity between the commitment to a wider community, personal aspirations and to a community of cultural practitioners (Naudin, 2017). Researching visual artists, Ravetz and Wright (2015) found that, for artists working outside gallery contexts, maintaining networks and relationships with peers and supporters is crucial to achieving artistic and professional validation. One of these non-gallery contexts are artist-run initiatives which act as “key sites” for the production of shared cultural values and professional artistic identities (Coffield, 2015). In his study of cultural clusters in Manchester, Banks (2007, p. 14) also suggests that “alternative economies to flourish in discrete, and often marginalized, urban milieux—ones populated by workers committed to a diverse array of aesthetic, communitarian and ethical (non-economic) values”. A sense of community based on trust, collaboration and strong relationships with place (Bilton and Leary, 2002; Scott, 2012) can open up to the possibility of “alternative” models of work such as social enterprises (Banks, 2006; McRobbie, 2011).

The “significance of place” in shaping cultural and creative enterprises (Naudin, 2017), and promoting innovation and industry spill-overs (Dickinson and Tuck, 2017), have been recognised with the designation of “creative clusters” and co-working spaces in urban and rural areas (Mommaas, 2004; Molina-Morales and Martinez-Fernandez, 2009; Harvey, Hawkins and Thomas, 2012; Banks and O’Connor, 2017; Avdikos and Merkel, 2019). Co-working hubs have played an important role in the development of social enterprises and for cultural workers developing micro-enterprises or working as freelancers (Naudin, 2017; Merkel, 2019). Informality characterises co-working spaces (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Gandini, 2015), where cultural and creative practitioners can socialise and meet professionals from other industries to exchange contacts and information. They promote the opportunity for “serendipitous encounters” (Olma, 2014) thus, foster creativity and innovation (Bilton and Cummings, 2010; Zhu, Bilton and Cummings, 2014).

However, it has been suggested that these co-working spaces have morphed into more professionalized environments to respond to the demand for flexible working spaces (Naudin, 2017). Critiques consider how the values of social innovation and community, that permeated the working ethos of co-working spaces, have lost their initial change-driving traction to become means of branding (Gandini, 2015). Naudin (2017, p. 21) comments that this evolution shows “how two very different imperatives can be entangled: on the one hand, selling desk space, and on the other, a mission to tackle social issues by creating innovative solutions”. The previous chapter has already addressed the conflict that social entrepreneurs need to negotiate, trying to balance contradictory social welfare and commercial logics (Chandra and Shang, 2017). It should be noted that Naudin (2017, p. 48) clarifies that her research on cultural entrepreneurship focuses on “the lived experience of cultural entrepreneurship” to examine a dynamic relationship between identities and values such as those associated with socially responsible work or with artistic concerns”. Both Banks (2006) and Naudin (2017, p. 49) argue for “the need to collect further empirical data to reveal the complexity of cultural work including the motivations which support cultural entrepreneurship”. Further Naudin (2017, p. 48) argues for “sector-specific research can enrich and challenge our understanding of entrepreneurial identities by combining different academic disciplines and presenting new positions”. Approaches from different disciplines can have implications for the cultural sector and for entrepreneurship studies, and other professional identities like small enterprises.

Interdisciplinary links of this kind are the ones sought in this thesis, with the aim to critically engage with theory, practice and policy. For example, the limitations of an understanding of sustainability and support programmes promoted through cultural policies for small artist-led organisations have started to emerge in the previous chapters, while a further link can be made here. Being able to manage motivations and values becomes key when trying to develop sustainable business models and

avoid “belonging tensions” (van Bommel, 2018).

Following the co-working spaces example, we can start to see how values and motivations can challenge organisational sustainability. More importantly, the overarching question of this research about what sustainability really means, in theory and practice, and for whom, starts to become more evident. Naudin (2017, p. 21) reports nostalgia from founders and supporters of the “early days of the co-working movement” and that “the co-working movement has become too polished, a means of superficially enticing entrepreneurs and freelancers to the new workspace by presenting them with an attractive “trendy” environment. If co-working spaces lose their informal nature in favour of corporate management, and consequently, early supporters become disenfranchised from the idea, building a coherent organisational culture becomes more challenging and eventually poses the risk of disbanding (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020). Belonging tensions of this kind can undermine the sustainability of organisations.

Likewise, a similar attitude towards prioritizing organisational goals based on values, rather than growth is also found in arts organisations (Foster, 2018) and in small firms entrepreneurs (Carland *et al.*, 1984; Beaver, 2003b; Richbell, Watts and Wardle, 2006). The importance of values in cultural entrepreneurship characterises it as often adopting a “non-linear process” (Naudin, 2017, p. 47) where, in the process of constructing their identity and organisations, creative entrepreneurs are more concerned with cultural production than entrepreneurship itself (Poettschacher, 2005). The work of Chell and Karataş-Özkan (2010) on Bourdieu’s notion of habitus suggests that cultural entrepreneurs “have a common system of references” (Naudin, 2017, p. 62) that would create a shared belief system, certain attitudes based on shared values and eventually influence practical choices. Hall (1996) argues that identities are constructed across different contexts and there is a tendency to focus on behaviours which follow cultural principles or norms. An example of this could be the reproduction of dominant ideas such as the romantic view of the artist. Another example is the ethnographic work of Coffield (2015) on artist-run initiatives, which reveals the process of identity construction and the emergence of a shared culture among artists that together run studio and exhibition spaces. Drawing from Hall (1996) and Chell and Karataş-Özkan (2010), Naudin (2017) questions whether the culture of the social context in which cultural entrepreneurs are embedded would lead to predetermined outcomes. This view of entrepreneurs “trapped within structures” is contested in favour of an emphasis on their agentic activities based on the capacity for reflexivity, on subjective experiences and on their context (Naudin, 2017, p. 63).

While most of the critique of cultural labour revolves around the precarity of working conditions externally reproduced (e.g. through contracts or funding structures) or internally (e.g. myth of

bohemian artists sacrificing stability for creative freedom), recent work from Banks (2019; Serafini and Banks, 2020) offers a new perspective on the capabilities of cultural entrepreneurs of escaping “event-time” logic. Owner-managers of small creative firms can navigate the uncertainties of cultural work by planning, projecting and reflecting: “situating oneself in external events, while abstracting oneself from them in order to ensure the continuation of the company” (Banks, 2019, p. 549). Banks (2019) shows that while the dominant idea is that of cultural entrepreneurs bound in the “event-time”, they can bend that narrative by running their organisation in ways that not necessarily follows a linear evolution but suits them and builds a more standard “biographical time” -“a linear experience of manageable and controllable time”- (Banks, 2019, p. 542) for themselves. However, much of the ability of cultural entrepreneurs to manage and reclaim temporalities lies in their existing privileges and often, their security is ensured at the expense of others, hence operating through “patterns of social difference embedded in a capitalist division of labour and in class reproduction” (Banks, 2019, p. 553). Similarly, other research critically analyses the values and attitudes of cultural workers, questioning their positioning in challenging inequality (Taylor and O’Brien, 2017) and how cultural workers may be supporting austerity by performing the “resilience discourse” (also rooted in the romantic idea of the artist) (Newsinger and Serafini, 2019).

Eventually, if research on cultural labour has focused on the externally or internally induced precarity of cultural workers, in particular self-employed, recent research start to reveal other scenarios where cultural entrepreneurs are able to “sustain” their livelihoods through reflexive choices that add layers of complexity to the dynamics within cultural work. Artists show reflexivity rooted in their value system when they opt for less stable financial conditions to reclaim their “tempo” for creative work (Serafini and Banks, 2020). Others follow the trajectory of “typical owner-managers of small businesses, albeit ones more successful than most” (Banks, 2019, p. 552), running their businesses through peak and downtimes and showing that “even in precarity, there are *some* cultural workers (in this case, owner-managers) who are more significantly endowed with the capacity to control time, to map out stages of life, and secure themselves against the contingencies of the event” (ibid). For example, Banks (2019) brings the example of a small business owner of a design agency who makes redundancies and does not renew contracts with freelancers to be able to keep their business viable during downtime. On the one hand, this example of owner-managers displays a narrative of “coherence, continuity and control” (Banks, 2019, p. 552). On the other, it brings into question the values underpinning the idea of “sustainability” and eventually brings to one of the main questions in this thesis: how is sustainability understood in the cultural sector? The “sustainability” of this cultural enterprise was traded-off with the precarity of other cultural workers. It also meant this business did not follow a linear trajectory but it involved times of downsizing or even closing down a company to



pre-empt its folding, which allowed to start again after few years.

It is important to note how the discourse of resilience in cultural policy and the new Arts Council England's Investment Principle on "dynamism" seems to welcome this kind of "sustainability" based on change. However, this understanding of sustainability also involves a degree of risk that the same "resilience" and "dynamism" discourse try to prevent with reassurances in their funding applications from arts organisations incentivising planning and business models. Further, it should be considered that those "successful" examples of owner-managers of small businesses still "represent unusual or anomalous cases" in the sector. Hence, the focus of this thesis is to research what drives artists to start their organisations and how they work to be able to uncover personal and organisational meanings of "sustainability". This question also needs to be addressed in the light of arts management literature advocating for the prioritization of artists' values and purposes (as seen at the end of the previous chapter), which is epitomized by Kenneth Foster (2018, p. 44) in *Arts Leadership: Creating Sustainable Arts Organizations* when he argues that the development of arts organisations "can take a different turn, away from growing the size of the organisation and towards sustaining the purpose".

If the sustainability of certain business models, the ones that are supposed to change, and organisational forms can present several limitations in arts organisations due to their founding values and ideas. Then, it is important to start by asking what values inform the artists' notion of sustainability. It is for this reason that to investigate what sustainability can mean at an organisational level, the collected data focus on the perspectives of founder-owners. However, this research also needs to be positioned in the context of Guild, which was opened to "artists' spaces" identified as "studio groups and artists' workspaces or collaboratives working in the visual arts nationally" (East Street Arts, 2018c, p. 4). The focus on "groups" and "collaboratives" brings another set of values that, then, needs to be analysed from an organisational point of view. Moreover, we have seen the centrality of the relational milieu in which cultural entrepreneurs are embedded, so if organisations naturally evolve and sustainability is linked to change, in so far as organisations (as activity systems see section 3.1.2) need to respond to inevitable changes in their ecosystems, what are the practical implications of managing changes of values and evolving organisational cultures?

While Naudin (2017, p. 40) defines cultural entrepreneurs as running "small businesses with a few employees and are self-employed, sometimes working freelance and selling their services as hired hands", this thesis draws from research on cultural entrepreneurship to position the similarities found in the founders of artists' spaces both with cultural work and entrepreneurship studies. However, the focus of this research is on the "artists' spaces" recruited through Guild, which signalled a particular narrative:

“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, 2018c, p. 3)

Founders and supporters of artists’ spaces draw from a specific culture to build their organisational culture, therefore the next section provides a context for this historical positioning of organisations run by artists and delves into the particular set of values and culture associated with them.

#### 4.2 Artists’ organisations: artist-run spaces and artist-led initiatives

From the 1970s, groups of artists started to position themselves as “alternatives” to the museums and galleries system by collectively occupying or renting cheap spaces that were left empty in post-industrial cities like London, Paris and New York, Amsterdam, and Barcelona,. As these spaces were managed and run by artists, they came to be called “artist-run spaces”. Duncan (1993) and Wallach (1998) see museums and galleries as the embodiment of institutionalised authority, sharing aims and objectives with neo-liberal agendas, in contrast, artist-run spaces were then characterised by artists’ demands for self-determination and control over their work (Sholette, 2011; Detterer and Nannucci, 2012). Using their own resources (associating with DIY cultures and self-management), they often functioned to support recent graduates and gave visibility to other artists, promoting innovative and experimental artworks (Smith et al., 1994; Burrows, 1998; Hale, 2002; Mommaas, 2004; Sholette, 2011; Hebert and Szefer Karlsen, 2013; Nesbitt, 2014).

Accounts of artist-run spaces describe them as the product of the artists’ response to “drastic economic changes and profound technological transformations”, such as the economic downturn after the post-war economic growth and the commercialization of computers in the 1970s (Detterer, 2012). Schofield (2018) argues that in the UK, a pattern of cyclical resurgence of artist-run spaces can be identified. This pattern is linked to a “boom and bust economic model”, with cyclical busts in the mid-1970s, early 1980s, early 1990s and 2008 caused by issues such as the international oil crisis, decline of industry, move to a service economy, followed by periods of economic recovery and growth. In this cyclical model, where bust periods usually involve a reduction of resources for artists, artist-led practice (this term used by Schofield which will be discussed later, though often used as a variation of and encompassing artist-run spaces) “gains strength” by “remaining relatively strong and reaching a certain level of public output whilst being exploited by external actors before the next bust occurs, when the work done by most practitioners to that point is undone and the cycle starts anew” (Schofield, 2018, p. 4). Schofield (2018, p. 4) argues that whilst being long-term is not a feature

desirable for all projects and spaces, “the capitalist system in which their activity exists is forcing the premature cessation of an overwhelming number of projects and organisations rather than coming to a natural and theoretical conclusion”.

Since the 1980s, governments have taken key decisions in the art and culture sector and implemented strategies in order to stabilise the wider economy, “regardless that the results actually worsened conditions for practitioners in the visual arts” (Schofield, 2018, p. 2). Though during the New Labour governments (1997-2010), there was an increase in funding, this was part of a broader response to the country’s economic shift from a manufacturing to a “knowledge” and “information economy” (Garnham, 2005). Rather than objects, the knowledge and information economy are based on knowledge and information exchanges, which translate into business services including research and development activities, legal activities, consultancy, advertising and more traditional activities such as cleaning, photographers, designers, translation, etc. (Knight, 1995).

On the one hand, to boost economic growth in this type of economy, the government focused on the development of the “creative industries”, a wide sector encompassing a broad range of creative activities (arts, music, film, TV and radio, software, advertisement, etc.) (Pratt, 2005). On the other hand, New Labour’s strategy built on the previous government’s neoliberal approach to maximise returns on investment (Oakley, 2011) and pushed for the creation of a mixed public/private funding model (Schofield, 2018, p. 2). This period was accompanied by the use, from industry and governments, of the idea that artists are “model entrepreneurs”, desiring autonomy and flexible working conditions (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Jackson (2011, p. 25) argues that “this discourse of flexibility” was brought to the fore by counter-culture movements in the 1960s, with social and artistic movements rebelling against hierarchical traditions as well as bringing forward the rejection of aesthetic traditions by avant-garde movements. Cooke (2007) and Jackson (2011) review contemporary criticism of the avant-garde and alternative, showing the discourse of the “alternative” to be an ethical discourse about artistic practice. Similarly, Detterer rejects (2012, p. 24) the term “alternative space” because alternative is too vague and it is often associated with political movements, environmentally friendly production processes, cultural events, and unconventional lifestyles and does not sum up “the special attributes and specific character of collectively-run art spaces”. The author finds the term “artist’s organization” as an “unsuitable designation” as the formal structure, management bodies, power to direct or take decisions, division of work, target control, pay and sanctions are features that are only to some extent applicable to the artist-run space they consider (Detterer, 2012, p.25).

Further, Detterer and Nannucci (2012) argue that artist-run spaces promoted a “communal spirit” by connecting the interests of individual artists towards a communal project, collectively run, where material resources, as well as contacts and information, were shared to support both the artists’ practices and the running of the spaces.

Though with different organisational structures, artist-run spaces often had the common goal of engaging with experimental art practices through the idea of free affiliation and exchange (Institute for Applied Aesthetics, 2012; Hebert and Szefer Karlsen, 2013): “artist’s role and identity expanded beyond the act of individual imaginative creation and the artist came to the fore as a social being and a participant in collective decision” (Detterer, 2012, p. 11). Detterer (2012, p. 26) argues that “a high degree of cooperative self-organisation” is a “constant” found in all activities of artist-run spaces:

“The members of an artist-run space jointly implement the recognition and establishment of art tendencies by way of exhibitions, action, and publications, and implement the program of their artist-run space by working there themselves, making practical contributions, including financial support”.

In their book *Artist-Run Spaces. Nonprofit Collective Organizations in 1960s and 1970s*, Detterer and Nannucci (2012) present nine case studies based in Canada, the USA, Hungary, Switzerland and Italy. Detterer and Nannucci (2012, p. 7) recognise the geographical spread of artist-run spaces and their volatility, however the aim of their publication is to “demonstrate the way in which (and the strategies whereby) artist-run spaces successfully conveyed artistic attitudes and art practices, and how the inner life of the cooperatives evolved dynamically”. Their definition of artist-run spaces is built on many factors, which are exemplified in the criteria for the selection of their case studies. Though recognising that artist-run spaces are often temporary, Detterer and Nannucci (2012) focus on those spaces that were able to evolve and run in the long term. Table 1 summarises the criteria for the selection of their case studies and the parameters that determined the running of these artist-run spaces in the long run.

Criteria for case studies’ selection	Parameters for long-term running
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nonprofit organisation</li> <li>2. Independence and autonomy of the programme</li> <li>3. Self-governance</li> <li>4. Anti-hierarchical</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge and know-how</li> <li>2. Programming</li> <li>3. Functional breakdown of the organisational structure</li> <li>4. Internal and external communication/networks</li> </ol>

5. Mutual aid and responsibility for social relations	5. Economic resources
6. Avant-garde exhibition program	6. Increase of social and symbolic capital
7. Publishing and distribution of artists' books, magazines and editions	7. Social cohesion and integration
8. Networking	8. Solidarity and fairness
9. Continuity over a number of years	9. Equitable distribution of the stock social capital.
10. Accessible archives	

**Table 1 List of selection criteria and parameters for long-term running based on Detterer and Nannucci (2012)**

Based on the case studies, Detterer (2012, p. 40) argues that “continuity over a number of years” is linked to the successful transformation of artist-run spaces, including changes to the form of organisations and associations. She concludes that a “model of collective self-organisation with a rational administration and formally organised structures and with roots in communitarianism” benefits these groups’ social cohesion and longevity in the US, “compared with the European artist-run spaces documented here, which were shaped much more by forceful, single personalities” (Dettner, 2012, p. 44). Conflicts and inequalities in artist-run spaces can be resolved by leadership and charisma demonstrated by the management team and “clearly articulated formal organizational structure can likewise gradually alleviate latent conflicts regarding objectives and ethical values” (Dettner, 2012, p. 41). Even though changes from informal to formally regulated structures are usually dictated by the necessity of fundraising, these “articulated formal organizational structures” are, for Detterer and Nannucci (2012, p. 5), an essential part of the longevity of artist-run spaces, making them established organisation and bringing their founders and members on the “winning side”.

#### 4.2.1 The politics of artist-run spaces

In the UK, from the artist-run spaces of the 90s’, only some have managed to become long-established organisations. East Street Arts, Castlefield Gallery, Beaconsfield, and Studio Voltaire are examples of artist-run spaces that transformed into formally registered companies or charities, attracting public or private funding and structuring their organisations with directors and employed staff (Castlefield Gallery, no date; Studio Voltaire, no date; Beaconsfield, 2018; East Street Arts, 2018b). One of the most notable examples of artist-run space, though registered as a charity and publicly funded, still actively run by a rolling committee of volunteers is Transmission Gallery in Glasgow (Transmission, no date). The longevity of some artist-run spaces and their transformation in established organisations brought into question the oppositional ideological position underpinning artist-run spaces, which often causes groups of artists to disagree and move on to other projects. A common critique argues

that these spaces started as an alternative to the commercial art world and as a form of institutional critique to eventually become part of the wider economics, art market and institutional infrastructure (Pruijt, 2003). Strategies of self-organisations developed by artists in artist-run spaces get praise for their entrepreneurial ethos and potential to become independent from public subsidy, performing according to the neoliberal ideology of the free market:

“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 fear is that when artist-run spaces become professionalised institutions, they inevitably lose their distinctive character and become absorbed into wider infrastructural and power dynamics, which nullify the artists' critique and undermine “the potential artist-led self-organisation holds for resistance” (Schofield, 2020, p. 10). However, the literature on the political power and the nature of these spaces is divided and often based on the review and experience of individual cases, linked to individual members' motivations, personal desires, social dynamics and different viewpoints of the researchers. In fact, similar to Detterer and Nannucci (2012) also Satinsky (2009) argues that artist-run spaces “sometimes are meant to be temporary and other times they can grow to become professionalised institutions”.

Although, also in the field of public institutions such as museums, sustainability is linked to narratives of institutional resilience and distinctiveness. Moldavanova (2016) argues that these narratives complement and contradict each other: institutional resilience calls for adaptation and change that emphasise reinvention and maximizing productivity but institutional distinctiveness call for the maintenance of specific characteristics in order to fit into specific niches. Distinctiveness is prominent in the public and non-profit cultural organizations “because their survival as well as intergenerational sustainability would be impossible without the unique and distinct character that each of these organizations seeks to establish, and indeed the unique value that cultural organizations contribute to society” (Moldavanova, 2016, p. 530). Even though the erosion of boundaries between the public and private sectors poses challenges for cultural organisations, Moldavanova argues (2016, p. 537) that short-term strategic management (“What is my mission, and what are my goals?”) combined with long-term sustainable thinking (“What is important for my organization, and what kind of legacy would it leave for the future?”) could bring strategies to ensure the sustainability of institutions.

An example of this combination of narratives and the fear of “institutionalisation” is epitomised by a blog article by Airspace a gallery, project space and studios in Stoke-on-Trent. Titled “Does NPO mean the end to artist led? What is In-Situ’s thinking and how has it changed the organisation?” (Airspace Blog, 2019), the article discusses the strategy adopted by In-Situ, an organisation based in Pendle, Lancashire, to deal with the change brought by the “NPO status” (4 years funding between 2018-2022 amounting to £556,000) (a-n, 2017). A key strategy to manage the change follows a personnel change in the directorship lies in finding a balance between members of the organisations who enjoy and can take care of administration and fundraising and those who thrive on the delivery of artistic output. This meant the creation of specific roles for themed activities and “hiring people who have arts practices - and in this way, maintaining the artists’ perspective at the heart of the organisation” (Airspace Blog, 2019). The directors of the organisation explain that the new funding will allow them to get paid full-time for working full-time, a change that increases institutional resilience, while the targeted hiring practice will allow them to keep their institutional distinctiveness (a-n, 2017).

While institutionalisation haunts the development of artist-run space, a reconciliatory perspective is presented by Shannon Jackson (2011). Questioning models of political engagement that measure artistic radicality by its degree of anti-institutionality, Jackson (2011, p. 9) argues for a general change in the attitude of the critical discourse towards “infrastructural avowal” as in fact: “our critical language only values agency when it is resisting state structure, then we find ourselves in an awkward position when we also want to call for the renewal of public institutions”. Autonomy for artists, in both aesthetic and ethical discourses, is defined as “self-governing opposing itself to objects and subjects, who are heteronomously governed by external rules” (Jackson, 2011, p. 15). Heteronomy, in this sense, is often seen as invasive or oppressive, compromising the autonomy of art with external claims of communities, special interests, audiences, governments, bureaucracies, and other social entities. Jackson argues, instead, for artists to recognise art’s relationship to heteronomy as an interdependent “support system”:

“the entire range of practices that make it possible for images to be embodied in the world as pictures- not just the canvas and the paint, in other words, but the stretcher and the studio, the gallery, the museum, the collector and the dealer-critic system” (Mitchell in Jackson, 2011, p. 33).

It is through this expanded sense of art’s “support system” that she calls “to avow the supporting acts that sustain and are sustained by social actors is to avow the relational systems on which any conception of freedom rests. It is to make a self from, not despite, contingency” (Jackson, 2011, p. 36). An example of coming to terms with political values and the running of an organisation can also be

found in the stories of the artists involved in Backstory, a café and social centre in Chicago. One of the artists, Robin Hewlett, reclaims the running of a small business as an artistic medium to engage the local community, but she comments:

“Now our situation is a tangible example of its shortcomings. The world of conventional business offers no workable model for how to relate the diverse resources we each bring to our collective effort. Nor do utopian visions of non-monetary, autonomous zones provide acceptable alternatives. Our journey necessarily begins within the infrastructure of capital, yet we struggle to build relationships that might break that mold” (Hewlett, 2009, p. 11).

However, it is not possible to generalise an antagonistic position for all artist-run spaces, as Sholette comments (2011, p. 162) “the choice of organizational form appears strictly tactical, neither holding any clear ideological or long-term significance to the group members, nor taken seriously”. For example, City Racing was an exhibition and studio space run by five artists between 1988 and 1998 in an abandoned betting shop in south London (Hale, 2002). It is key to notice how the members of City Racing claimed that the space was established only with the purpose of showing their own artworks. For this reason, the space was as gallery-like as possible, with a strong white cube influence (Burrows, 1998; Hale, 2002). To run City Racing in a squatted building was a choice dictated by the limited resources available to the artists and not the expression of an ideological stance.

Similarly, artists may decide to incorporate into a company or a charity and still “operate under non-hierarchical rules of conduct suggesting they are also essentially meta-legal structures who perform prescribed roles as necessary for groups survival” (Sholette, 2011, p. 166). Sholette (2011, p. 163) brings the example of Group Material, a collective based in New York between 1979 and 1996. The collective incorporated only to receive tax exemption and apply for funding, while they had a “semblance of professionalization and hierarchical salaried staff structure (on paper) in order to be eligible for grants” but decided to “keep minimal overheads, operate on an ad hoc basis, and never have salaried positions in order to avoid any conflict of interest” (Ault, 2010 cited in Sholette, 2011, p. 163). Therefore, while Detterer and Nannucci (2012) argue that formalising organisations can bring longevity, it is still in question whether formal structures are also adopted, or they have a perfunctory function to secure funding. Organisational tensions produced by discrepancies between formal structures and organisations and the internal dynamics in small arts organisations could impact their sustainability in the long run (van Bommel, 2018).

#### 4.2.2 Definitions and cultures of artist-run initiatives

Another definition of organisations run by artists is offered by Emma Coffield in her doctoral thesis *Artist-Run Initiatives: A Study of Cultural Construction* (2015), in which she reviews the artist-run



spaces literature and offers, instead, “artist-run initiatives” (ARIs). She argues against “portraying ARIs as fundamentally ‘similar’ and as belonging to and drawing upon a singular artist-run ‘culture’ or ‘community’ of some kind” as this dominant mode of understanding fails to account for the multiple forms of practice and thinking that animate artist-run practice (Coffield, 2015, p. 42). Through her research, Coffield argues that different artist-run spaces would develop their own culture, which helped to inscribe roles to members of those organisations and worked to modify their attitudes and behaviours to a certain extent. However, those cultures were not fixed and could be seen as “subject to constant, active negotiation by those involved” (Coffield, 2015, p. 208).

In this regard, Thompson (2005) argues that contemporary ARIs draw from certain kinds of terminology associated with the “communal spirit” of artist-run spaces (e.g. by using words such as “support”, “encourage” and “mutual benefit”), in practice, they are set up with different political and ideological reasons to the political and ideological motivations of the predecessors they cite as role models. Coffield (2015) employed the term “artist-run initiatives” to describe any practice, group or organisation run by and for artists, focussing specifically on ARIs identified as involved in the production and display of contemporary visual art. Using this term, she constructs a boundary between forms of practice by excluding what are perceived as non-contemporary visual practices (e.g. watercolour groups) while trying to be inclusive in other respects arguing in the thesis how the term “ARI” neither calls for a particular function, as “artist-run gallery” does, nor implies an underlying ideology, as mobilised by the term “co-operative”. In contrast with Coffield’s argument that all ARIs are run either by or for artists, Thompson (2005) argues:

Even organisations that have only the most tenuous or peripheral relationship to visual art (cafes, for example) are cited in the press as ARIs purely because they have been established by arts graduates (who have often long since ceased to be practitioners).

This generalisation by the press and the range of definitions that artists’ groups self-identify with “oppositional”, “marginal”, “alternative”, “independent”, “DIY”, “not-for-profit”, “parallel”, “cooperative” or “grassroots” galleries or spaces, or as “artist-run centres”, “institutions by artists”, “collectives”, “self-organised” or “counter- cultures”, does not help to fix one definition. Moreover Coffield (2015, p. 14) reports a lack of academic research on ARIs, she found “only seven journal articles, four of which were published by the same authors between 2013 and 2015, and are generally offered as critical reflections on past practice, with empirical research largely focusing upon source material produced contemporaneously (e.g. manifestos and pamphlets)”.

Indeed, much of what has been written about artists' organisations, either from historical or contemporary perspectives, has been on websites, in self-published zines and publications, or in the context of a critique of socially-engaged art practices. The recent "Artist-led Symposium" (October 2018 at the University of Leeds) and events such as "More than Meanwhile Spaces" (October 2018–January 2019, Newcastle), in which organisers made the case, respectively, for the adoption of "artist-led initiatives" and "artist-run initiatives" as advancements from the artist-run discourse, are just examples of how, just in the North of England, the debate around definitions is ongoing.

However, it needs to be noted that this debate is contextual to art-related literature in the UK. For example, in North America "artist-run centres" and "artist-spaces" are most prevalent (Temporary Services, 2009; Blessi, Sacco and Pilati, 2011; IIAA, 2012); while in other fields such as sociology and urban studies in mainland Europe, and partially in the UK, there is a wide literature on artists' organisations, often referred as "art-squats", "independent cultural centres", "social centres" (Platt, 1980; Szczelkun, 2002; Martínez, 2004, 2007; Mommaas, 2004; Martí-Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2011; Waldo and Odegaard, 2011; Moore, 2012; Michelini and Méndez, 2013; Navarro, 2014; Borch, 2018; Martínez López, 2018). Social centres are grassroots, non-profit arts and cultural organizations defined as a "smaller subset within a general framework of independent cultural centres" (Waldo and Odegaard, 2011, p. 49). Most of these spaces are multi-disciplinary or multi-purpose and are located in re-purposed buildings. While this literature is useful to describe the spatial engagement in the city and politics of cultural centres in Europe managed by artists and activists, they are the product and respond to a very different context from the UK, starting from a political rather than artistic premise. In this respect, as argued by Coffield (2012), most of the literature on artist-run spaces remains the product of non-academic, self-published stories and accounts and paraphernalia.

Similar to the argument by Detterer and Nannucci (2012) of self-management as an element of sustainability in artist-run spaces, Waldo and Odegaard (2011, p. 49) identified three key factors of sustainability in "social centres":

- Self-management  
 "Self- management is a non-hierarchical and consensus-based form of management with its roots in participatory democracy. Social centres have weekly assemblies that are open to the public in which management, operational, and other decisions are made";
- Self-finance  
 "Self-financing means that these organizations earn enough money from their activities to at least break even and these campaigns form an essential feature of

social centres. Events such as dinners, poetry readings, concerts and others all form what might be called socialized fundraising, where contributions are directed by the bar or free offer”;

- Self-production

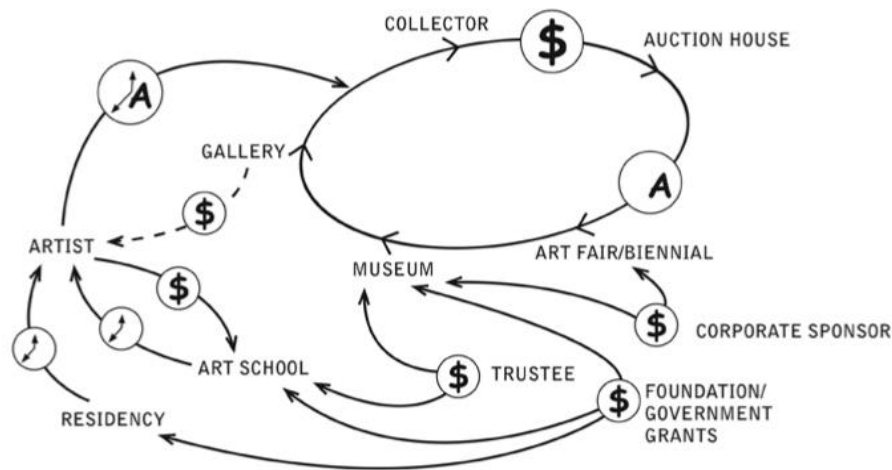
“Self-production comes from a general Do-It-Yourself(DIY) ethos whereby the artists and activists take control over the organization’s management and event production”, which ensures their “independence” from the demands of external funders.

Though “art-squats”, “independent cultural centres”, “social centres” have similar, if not the same, operational and ideological characters of “historical” artist-run spaces/initiatives, they exist in very different political, cultural, economic and social contexts. Contemporary artist-run spaces may seek support from external funding to the point of legally formalising their organisations, but complete “independence” is paramount for social centres, as they are grounded in oppositional politics (often inspired and emerging from the same anti-authoritarian critique of the sixties to which artist-run spaces are historically linked) (Martínez, 2007). In this regard, Banks argues that

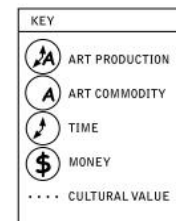
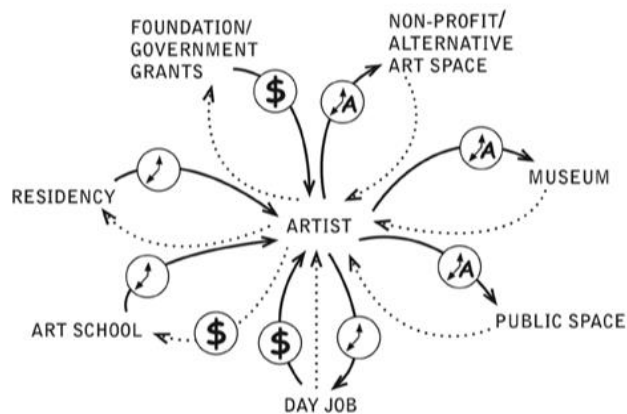
“It is important not to exaggerate the extent to which the remoralization of cultural work might be rooted in a desire to usurp capitalism. Despite the identification here of some radical interests, ethical imperatives and collectivist tendencies, it appears [cultural] entrepreneurs were mostly concerned with negotiating a space to work within the capitalist system rather than rejecting it outright” (2006, p. 470).

The diagrams in Figure 9 , by Lize Mogel (in *Temporary Services*, 2009), show the different dynamics and transactions between artists working commercially and having a “non-profit art practice”. In the “Non-Profit Art Practice”, the “non-profit/alternative art space” is a site for artistic production from which the artist and their practice gain visibility and validation (Ravetz and Wright, 2015). Opposite to “The Business of Art” where the artworks become a detached commodity from the artist, increasing its economic value, in non-profit art practices, the artist, their practice and their artwork gain “cultural value”.

## THE BUSINESS OF ART



## NON-PROFIT ART PRACTICE



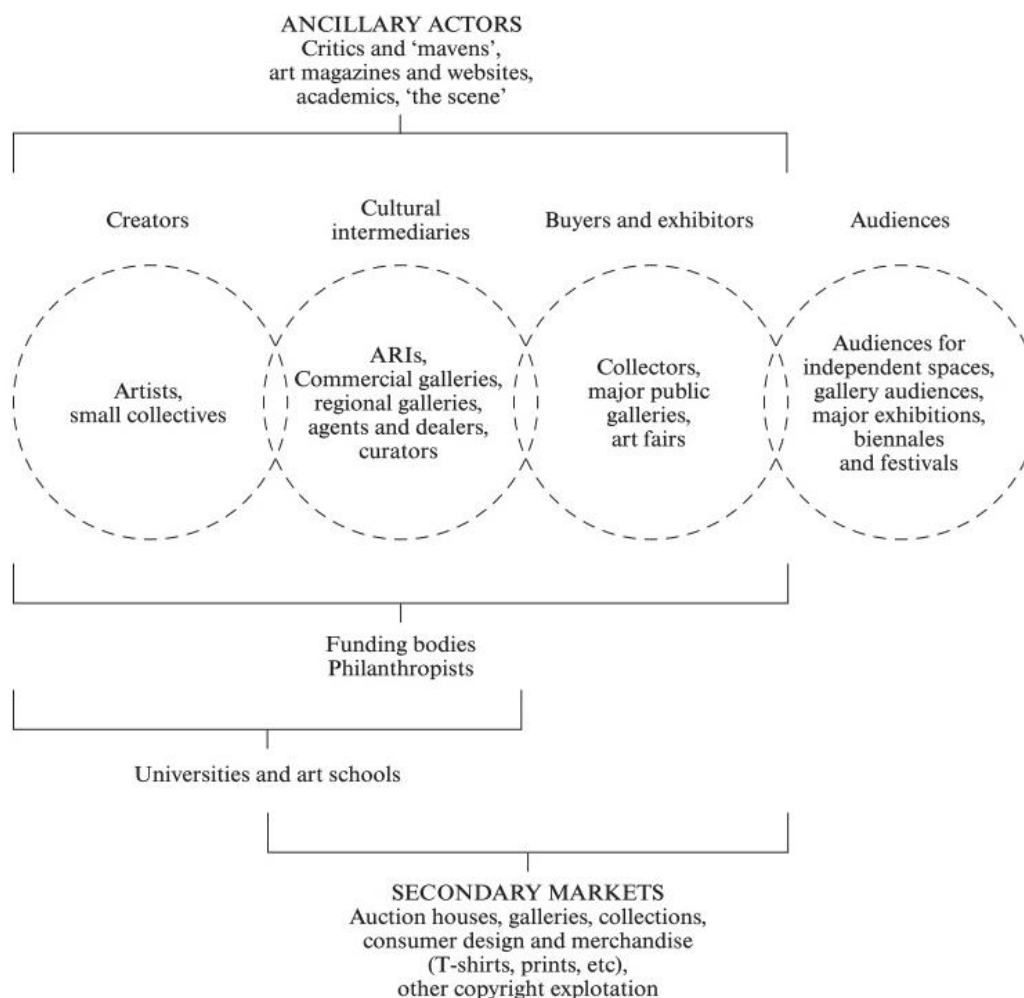
LIZE MOGEL 2009

Figure 9 Mogel, L. (2009, p.6) "The Business of Art" and "Non-profit Art Practice".

#### 4.2.3 The role of artist-run initiatives in the broader ecology

As more research becomes available on artists' organisations and artist-run spaces, the attention is shifting from the artists' self-accounts and debates on the nature and function of these spaces to a key element: their position in the wider ecology. Recent research commissioned in 2019 by All Conference, a "national organising network comprised of 17 artist-led, experimental and cross-disciplinary arts organisations" in Australia (All Conference, no date), has produced the report *Artist-run Initiatives Sub-sector* by Ben Eltham and Catherine Ryan (2019). Eltham and Ryan (2019) built their work on the report *S2M: The economics of Australia's small-to-medium visual arts sector* (Campbell et al., 2017), which they praise for mapping into six groups the small-to-medium visual arts sector in Austria and including the ARI sector. Though, they argue that the report's analysis of the sector "omits some other crucial players in the sector, notably artists themselves as well as major state capital art galleries, visual arts audiences and training institutions, such as universities and collectors" (Eltham

and Ryan, 2019, p. 28). In Eltham and Ryan’s report, the visual art sector is conceptualised through a value chain analysis, where artist-run initiatives as a sub-sector of the cultural industries.



**Figure 10 Eltham and Ryan (2019, p.33) A value chain for artist-run initiatives in Australia.**

The diagram in Figure 10 brings a distinction between artists as “creators” and ARI as “cultural intermediaries”, which is key for how this thesis approaches the research about the sustainability of artists’ organisations. Artists’ organisations as artist-run spaces and artist-led initiatives have been mainly researched through the lens of political and artistic practices (Schofield, 2020) and the possibilities of collective creation of artworks (Wright, 2019). This can also be seen in Coffield’s (2015, p. 10) research which focused on the artistic identity of the artists where she argues:

“that cultures constructed within ARIs have a bearing upon the objects that come to be understood as ‘art’, the persons who can claim the position of ‘artist’, and the values and meanings attached or denied to both”.

While the approach taken by Eltham and Ryan (2019, p. 28) means that ARIs are seen as organisations which:

“operate both within and outside capitalist art markets, sometimes selling works for the profit of their exhibiting artists or to fundraise for their own activities, but more frequently providing cheap and accessible opportunities for artists to make and exhibit work outside the constraints of more aggressively for-profit commercial galleries and dealers”.

Quantitative findings show that in Australia artists who run independent spaces are subject to:

“both inexorable market forces, such as surging rent for commercial properties, and to evanescent sociocultural trends, such as the changing nature of their local art scenes and the fads and fashions of the national and international art markets. A constant supply of young artists from universities and art colleges provides fresh ideas and new members of the creative workforce, while also forcing down the fees and wages of artists. Because ARIs typically (but not exclusively) exhibit the work of artists at relatively early stages of their careers, they cannot produce blockbuster exhibitions for mass audiences, even if they wanted to. They are also unlikely to sell work for high prices, for which they might be able to take lucrative commissions. Although, quantitative findings suggest, they represent a vital and remarkably innovative source of artistic production in Australia’s cultural industries. [...] ARIs in Australia support diverse and vibrant communities of practice; they are a keystone element of the visual arts ecology”. (Eltham & Ryan, 2019, p. 34)

Positioning artists’ organisations as part of a broader cultural ecosystem is a key element in thinking about what sustainability means for these organisations and for the rest of the cultural sector. In fact, without a precise understanding or mapping of this specific sub-sector, why would we argue for and invest in its sustainability? In asking this question, I do not want to take an instrumental view of the arts or artists’ organisations but actually invite more research to explore what artists’ organisations are and what they do in order for cultural policy to understand the role that these actors play in sustaining the ecosystem at large. Artists’ organisations exist in the larger cultural ecology, hence they are already part of the system. According to sustainability studies of systems seen in Chapter 2, for a system to be sustainable, the parts that make it up need to be sustainable. This means that to sustain a thriving cultural sector, we need to understand how to sustain its parts. This has strategic repercussions which involve sustainability thinking across many levels: the role of arts and culture and their public understanding, how the cultural sector is funded and can be sustainably financed, the working conditions, practices, motivations and ambitions of artists, the relationship between small artist-led organisations, public institutions, the art market and private actors and how the cultural and creative industries feed into each other and into the economy at large. Concurrently, I am arguing for a nuanced understanding of sustainability that allows for investment that recognises both the intrinsic

and instrumental values of arts and culture and enables artists' organisations to persist in order to "sustain their purpose", whether it implies longevity or not.

While information, data and research exist, which I have also tried to include in this thesis, these bits of information need joining up. While at this stage, I cannot offer a solution for how to approach this question (though Chapter 1 shows how research in the UK is moving towards that direction), and I could only give an overview of some aspects through this thesis, I aim to make a contribution to understanding why artists decide to run organisations and how small artists' organisation function. Sholette (2011) calls this complex, evanescent system of artists and organisations "the dark matter" that makes up the art world. I hope that my research can function to an extent as a negative image of the cultural sector. In turn, by including different approaches, I hope that by changing various lenses (cultural policy, business and organisational studies, sustainability thinking, artist-led cultures) to understand the data that I have collected, it is possible to re-frame sustainability in a way that serves artists' organisations and bridges theory and practice.

#### 4.3 Summary

The previous chapter showed the limitations of applying the idea of business models to understand how to make organisations more sustainable. From the literature review, it also emerged that research on arts organisations, creative enterprises and independent cultural centres points to a link between the different forms of values produced by - and embedded in - arts organisations with their sustainability (Poettschacher, 2005; Foster, 2018; Bogen, 2019; Kaszynksa, 2019). However, the values embedded in organisations and shared cultures play a fundamental role in ensuring that organisations' members and founders work together to keep cultural organisations persisting.

Opposite to a Romantic view of artists that see them as isolated, rebellious individuals, Naudin (2017) argues that cultural workers and artists to become cultural entrepreneurs need to be embedded in a relational milieu to be able to draw social and cultural capitals that can compensate limited economic capital. Moreover, through specific spaces (e.g. co-working spaces) and patterns of work creatives and artists share cultures of work that contribute to the identity construction of cultural entrepreneurs. In the academic debates about the mechanisms and ways in which cultural labour takes shape, precarious patterns of work seem to characterise the work of artists and creatives. On the one hand, like the Romantic stereotype suggests artists are seen as aiming to the highest level of autonomy. On the other, this means renouncing to financial stability and navigating free-lance work.

Further, the Romantic characterisation of artists may have an impact on how their organisations are also viewed. Cultural organisations and creative enterprises are described as "chaotic" and "disorganised" (Poettschacher, 2005), however this view is projected to them due to the artistic

identity of their founders rather than as understood as a common trait of small organisations. The state of emergence of small organisations in which founders need to “improvise” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020) share many similarities with how cultural entrepreneurs are often seen to adopt a “non-linear process” (Naudin, 2017, p. 47) in the development of their organisation.

However, Banks (2019) brings the example of cultural entrepreneurs that manage to achieve financial stability for themselves by downsizing, closing and opening their organisations again. In this sense, cultural entrepreneurs may manage in non-linear ways their organisations and ensure their own sustainability at the expense of the organisations and other cultural workers. These dynamics highlight how an ecological view of the cultural sector allows questioning how sustainability works across scales and whether the sustainability of organisations is, in reality, always desirable for their owners.

Naudin (2017, p. 62) suggests that cultural entrepreneurs “have a common system of references” that would create a shared belief system and certain attitudes based on shared values and motivations, which eventually influence practical choices. To better understand the frame of reference of artists’ organisations, I have looked at the cultures and values of artist-run spaces and artist-run/led initiatives. Much of the literature on these kinds of organisations focuses on their political power, approaching them from an aesthetic and ethical point of view.

Ravets and Wright (Ravetz and Wright, 2015) that for artists working outside gallery contexts, maintaining networks and relationships with peers and supporters is crucial to achieving artistic and professional validation. Artist-led organisations/artist-run spaces are often described as using their own resources (associating with DIY cultures and self-management) to support recent graduates and give other artists visibility, promoting innovative and experimental artworks (Smith et al., 1994; Burrows, 1998; Hale, 2002; Mommaas, 2004; Sholette, 2011; Hebert and Szefer Karlsen, 2013; Nesbitt, 2014). Gordon-Nesbitt (2012, p. 8) argues that “the value of small visual arts organisations manifests itself in a long-term contribution to the sector, without which larger-scale organisations could not thrive”. While the role of artist-run spaces in the wider ecology has been invisible, recent research (Eltham and Ryan, 2019) frames artist-run initiatives as a sub-sector of the broader cultural and creative industries ecosystem. This is an important point to understand how artists’ organisations contribute to the wider cultural ecology, and re-think how future research and policy can develop.



## 5 Methodology

This chapter explains the development of my research methodology. Readers of this chapter should know that it tries to account for the fact that the reality of research projects seldom follows a linear model, and while researchers strive to provide “tidy accounts”, I have embraced the fact that “the reality is very different and infinitely more complex” (Burgess, 1991, p. 31). In this respect, it is important to understand that the research presented in this thesis needs to be contextualised in the framework of a collaborative doctoral award. East Street Arts, the research partner, was seeking to work with a doctoral student to investigate themes related to Guild, a new Sector Support Organisation they lead. As Guild started just before my PhD, I developed a contextually responsive methodology to be able to find ways in which the research project could work alongside it. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018, p. 329) argue that reflexivity happens on different levels of reflection (on the interaction with empirical data, interpretation, on knowledge production and authority) while a reflective practice would focus on one level, for example, evaluating one specific method. As I was working alongside a “real-life project”, I tried to develop a reflexive practice that would help me to become self-aware and self-monitor my progress in relation to “real life” developments.

Differently from other collaborative doctoral awards that, for example, engage with more “fixed” objects of studies (e.g. collection-based research, see Arnold-Forster, Reynolds and Smith, 2015), I dedicate my first year to survey the literature while waiting to understand how the project developed and what kind of artists’ groups would be recruited. Sections 5.1 present my research question and aims as they were refined when I was able to access more definite information on Guild and its participants. Section 5.2 argues for the adoption of a case study approach and provides a reflection on adopting interviews and observations as data collection methods. In the middle of my research I had to re-think the possibility of carrying out the research as I initially set out and related practical and ethical problems (section 5.3). From this moment of reflection, I developed another strategy for analysing the primary and secondary data I had already collected and eventually adopted a multi-case study cluster analysis. Section 5.4 provides a reflection on my positionality as a researcher and, in particular, in the context of the collaborative doctoral award.

### 5.1 Research Aims

The research design was influenced by a review of the literature and the available information, engagement with Guild, its staff and later by getting to know the participant organisations. Therefore, the research focus has been refined during the initial research period as organisations were recruited and the programme evolved in response to various different factors (organisations' needs, staff's skills, funding objectives, covid). At the beginning of the research process, my attention was attracted by

the description of Guild as a project seeking “to transform the landscape of artists’ spaces through developing their resilience and sustainability. This will include new approaches to business modelling, embedding groups within their localities and advocating their impact on political and social environments” (East Street Arts, 2018c). Why the focus on developing resilience and sustainability? What did this focus mean for artists’ spaces?

From an initial literature review on sustainability and resilience, it emerged that these concepts were criticised for being too vague in their use in various fields of policy (Alexander, 2013). Though the original definitions provide some clarity: sustainability was developed in studies around systems to describe their quality; instead, resilience was used to describe the capacity of systems to respond to shocks, an ability that appears when triggered by a disturbance (Norris *et al.*, 2008). I conceive resilience to be a more narrow concept linked to specific events of disturbance, which will need to need to be addressed as part of the general sustainability of a system (Marchese *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore, I decided to focus on sustainability as it facilitates strategic thinking around systems development rather than focusing on specific events that trigger resilience. Critical engagement with the uses of sustainability in cultural policy means understanding how sustainability is formulated as a policy goal and strategically applied in the cultural sector. As the research was responding to Guild, publicly funded through Arts Council England, I searched the literature to understand what sustainability could mean in the context of this sector support programmer and whether the goals of developing sustainability and resilience were responding to policy’s funding priorities. As discussed in Chapter 2, sustainability has been used in cultural policy to point at the goal of reducing the carbon footprint of arts organisations (environmental sustainability) or their need for public funding (financial sustainability). Guild made specific reference to “business models” in connection to developing sustainability thus it was clear that the programme was going to address financial sustainability rather than environmental.

Though, from the literature review, it also emerged that research on arts organisations, creative enterprises and independent cultural centres points to a link between the different forms of values produced by - and embedded in - arts organisations with their sustainability (Poettschacher, 2005; Foster, 2018; Bogen, 2019; Kaszynksa, 2019). In particular, as seen in Chapter 4, organisations run by artists have developed a particular artist-led culture around values that influence their nature, development and operations. Values are often discussed in academic debates in relation to the nature of cultural work or the role they can play in clarifying the mission of arts organisations, but their implications on the organisation of work and organisational identities have not been addressed. Banks (2006, p. 467) discusses how cultural entrepreneurs may display at the same time instrumental and

non-instrumental values in relation to their work, and he argues for further “unpacking of the heterogeneity of motives and actions that underpin economic activity” and Naudin (2017, p. 49) argues for “the need to collect further empirical data to reveal the complexity of cultural work including the motivations which support cultural entrepreneurship”. Building on these recommendations, I have designed the research with three aims:

- To understand how sustainability is formulated in the cultural sector at policy level and particularly in the context of cultural organisations;
- To explore what artists' organisations are and their organisational practices and what sustainability means in this context;
- To critically engage with both understandings of sustainability to reframe how we think of it and bridge between policy and practice.

Instead of researching the financial sustainability of artists' organisations, as it is talked about in cultural policy, the research asks whether sustainability could be understood in more complex terms: for example, as something linked to the founder's and members' values, the role of their organisations in the sector and in their localities and including the relationship between entrepreneurship and creative careers. Secondly, by situating the understanding of sustainability in the context of artists' organisations, it aims at contributing to an understanding of what artists' groups are and how they work to achieve their version of sustainability.

Guild was open to “Studio groups and artists' workspaces or collaboratives working in the visual arts nationally” to avoid a specific label or specific characteristics and to attract a variety of organisations with a common trait: being managed by a group. By describing these organisations, the research also contributes to an understanding of the similarities and differences between these organisation from arts organisations, artist-led spaces or cultural enterprises. I will address later in this chapter issues around definitions, although exploring the characteristics of artists' organisations aims to provide a contribution to the gap in knowledge regarding the mapping of the sector. The conceptualisation of values in artists' organisations and how they might influence how sustainability could be framed in this context serves to reframe the understanding of sustainability in a way that could bridge between policy and practice. Rather than accepting a singular definition of sustainability, this research wants to problematise it and contextualise it to reflect an alternative point of view that has remained unexplored. These aims and the research design that follows are grounded the research in social constructionism and interpretivism (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2018); currents of thought that argue that individuals construct meaning from their own individual experiences but within the context of their social environment (Patten, 2019).

To research how sustainability can be understood in more complex terms, I found particularly useful to engage with the notion of “cultural ecology” (Holden, 2015), discussed in Chapter 2. New research on ecological thinking applied to cultural and creative industries support the need to investigate across scales from micro (individual) to meso (organisation and interconnecting structures) and macro (broader policy framework) (de Bernard, Comunian and Gross, 2022; Heinonen *et al.*, 2022). Thus, to reflect the refinement of the research focus, I proposed the title “Understanding sustainability in the cultural sector: its meanings and practical applications in small artists’ organisations”. Through this process, I reframed the research question to ask: What can business models, motivations, modalities and organisational structures and cultures tell us about the meaning and application of sustainability in small artists’ organisations? This question also emerged to address a gap as I found research on artists managing organisations. However, their focus was on the artists themselves rather than the organisation (e.g. Coffield, 2015; Naudin, 2017), or looked into organisations with similar structures, such as independent cultural centres (Blessi, Sacco and Pilati, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2019) but not led by groups of artists.

Therefore, I researched the business models and the structures of the organisations (meso level), the founders’ values embedded in the organisations’ identities and the motivations that led to this form of enterprise (micro), and how they inform an understanding of sustainability that may challenge cultural policy (macro). This led to related research questions:

- What can we learn about artists’ organisations from applying business models theory?
- What role do values play in the sustainability of artists’ organisations?
- Why and how do artists set up their organisations?
- Can organisational cultures and structures affect the continuation of these organisations?

The following chapters are organised following these questions: first, I tried to research organisations through their business models. As I will explain in the next chapter this categorisation brings forward several limits. The next three chapters explore the individual motivations of artists for running their organisations, then how the organisations were set up and how they function through collective management. In my conclusions, I draw together the learnings from these chapters to answer my research about the meaning and applications of sustainability in small artists’ organisations.

In terms of the outcomes of this research, I acknowledge the limits of the research in terms due to the limited sampling, bias, the problems with conducting the interviews and the experience itself of fieldwork which include non-systematic observations. However, the aim of this research is not “verify the assumptions related to the theory” but rather to “provide a tentative idea of what theory can look like” (Rashid *et al.*, 2019, pp. 4–5) by generating theory in the form of phronesis (Flyvbjerg, 2006), in

other words, “exemplary knowledge” used to gather insights on a subject of research (Thomas, 2010, p. 578).

### 5.1.1 Definitions

One of the main initial problems with engaging with this research project is about defining the organisations I was researching. After I started the research, Guild (East Street Arts, 2018c, p. 4) published the guidance for application to the programme aimed at recruiting “Studio groups and artists’ workspaces or collaboratives working in the visual arts nationally. We will create an adjustable service that ensures it responds to the groups’ needs and capacity from new, small and emerging organisations to more established enterprises”. The programme’s main goal was to transform the “landscape of artists’ spaces” by developing their sustainability and resilience.

Initially, I found it curious that the programme was not directly addressed to artist-led spaces or organisations, as East Street Arts itself was often self-defined as an artist-led organisation. I was familiar with the literature on cultural entrepreneurs and artist-led spaces, presented in Chapter 4, though I struggled to locate academic literature exploring “studio groups”, “artists’ workspaces” and “artists’ spaces”, as these seem too broad definitions. For this reason, I was not sure I could ascribe the Guild participants to “cultural entrepreneurs”, “artist-run spaces” or “artist-led initiatives”. Among artists, these definitions are debated and often carefully chosen, so I have asked the East Street Arts directors if there was a reason why the call out did not make use of a specific terminology while signalling to artist-led culture by writing: “Visual arts groups are more likely to be self-led and self-managed which can lead to vulnerability, as well as diverse models of operation”. The director explained that to avoid any specific label or definition, they tried to adopt a general wording and provided in the application guidance various examples of applicant organisations that did not necessarily function like artist-led spaces. They wanted to keep the programme open to formally established groups as well as just “groups” of visual artists, but also to artists running a space and those operating without a fixed space, therefore also appealing to artist-led initiatives or artist-run spaces. What mattered to being selected for Guild was that when applying, a group of visual artists was working together to advance their practices, run a space for studios or cultural activities or produce cultural programmes for different venues.

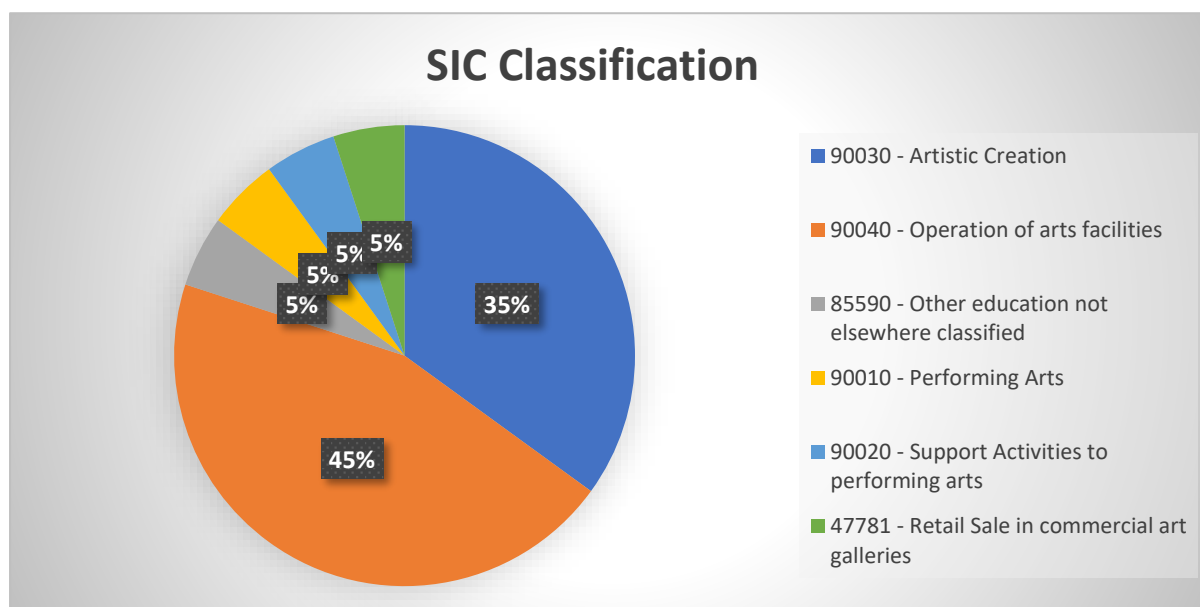
In the literature, “arts organisation” is a general term to describe organisations working with any art form. Specific contexts of study would reveal whether these are, for example, galleries, theatres, multi-artform cultural centres or music venues. Hesmondhalgh (2019), for example, describes business features of the cultural industries taking examples from film, music and different media, while others focus on cultural labour (Cohen, 2012; McRobbie, 2016). However, these studies did not

directly address the organisations of artist groups in visual art. Though Guild was aimed at supporting “business development” for groups of visual artists, did this mean that these groups could be understood as businesses or organisations?

When finally the participants were selected, I decided to collect quantitative information on the groups to understand their features. Since the first definition of creative industries emerged with the DCMS mapping document in 1998, mapping and classifying cultural industries and the creative economy has been a central argument for researchers to support evidence-based policy.

In Chapter 2, the development of mapping efforts and recent avenues has been discussed. Even though mapping cultural industries through Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) has been criticised for empirical and conceptual reasons (ACE, 2013a; Gross, 2020), SIC codes are still utilised to collect data on the numbers of enterprises and their impact on the economy. Therefore, to find out as much as possible about the Guild participants before interviewing them, I have also mapped them out utilising SIC codes and types of business incorporation. I have also tried to find out data on the employment and income of the organisations, however the data were fragmented and incomplete.

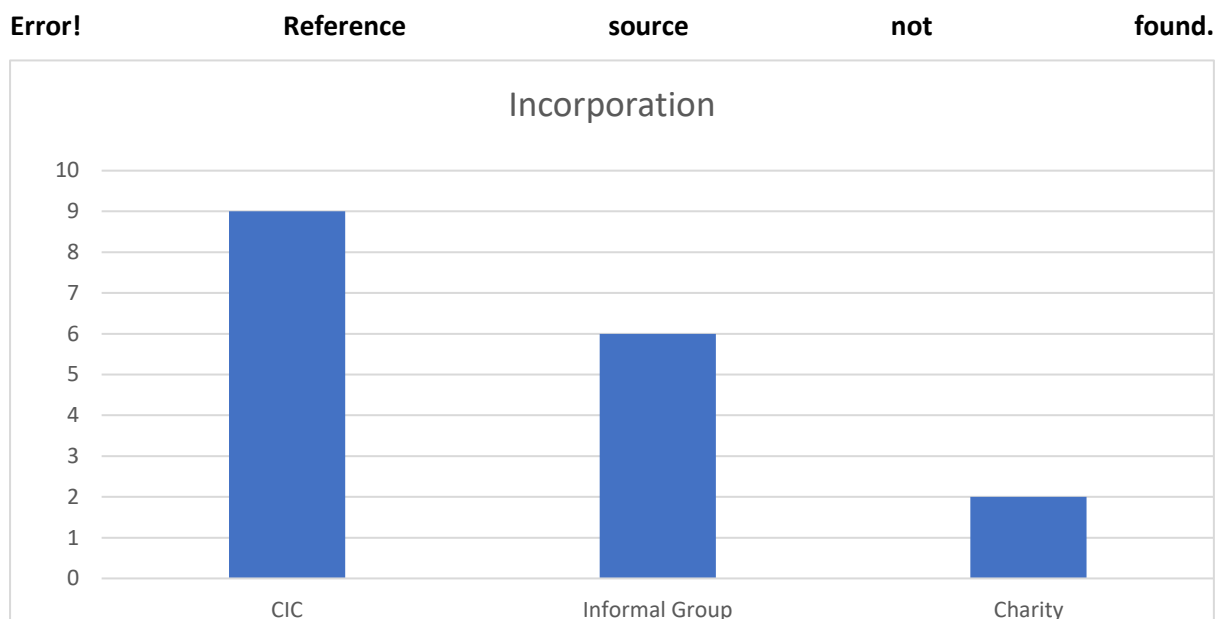
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**Figure 11 Guild Participant SIC classification (2019).**

Figure 11 represents the industry classification chosen when incorporating the businesses, with 45% choosing “Operation of arts facilities” and secondly “Artistic Creation”. It should be noted that multiple SIC codes can be chosen, with most organisations having two and others having up to four. Figure 12 instead shows the distribution of the organisations in terms of incorporation, with nine registered as Community Interest Companies (CIC), six with no formal incorporation and two as charities. It should

be noted that these were collected in 2019, Since then some organisations have changed their legal status.



**Figure 12 Guild participants incorporation category (2019).**

Initially, I found this classification unhelpful as under the same SIC code are registered organisations with very different remits and finding similarities seemed an impossible task without having a deeper knowledge of the organisations' missions. Similarly, once we find out that the majority of participants incorporate their organisations as CIC, what does this tell us about how these organisations work or their sustainability? All applications tried to articulate "collaborative working", however, many were rejected on the basis that this kind of organisation of work was not evidenced in the rest of the application. Though many of the selected participants clearly presented their organisations are led by one or two directors. For this reason, I deemed it necessary to interview founders/directors to gather qualitative data on their understanding and interpretation of their work and collective management.

Though, in the applications of selected participants seven self-defined as "artist-led". In the literature on artist-led spaces, their formalisation is usually given little attention as they are understood as a strategy only to allow artists to access funding: "the choice of organizational form appears strictly tactical, neither holding any clear ideological or long-term significance to the group members, nor taken seriously" (Sholette, 2011, p. 162). However, was this the case for these organisations?

In Chapter 4, I discuss in more detail the culture and ideologies of artist-led/artist-run spaces where the focus has been on political and artistic ambitions. Though, I found a dissonance between, on the one hand, the idea that artists in the context of artist-led/run act on the periphery of the economy to be able to sustain "alternative practices" and, on the other hand, the fact that they wanted to engage

with Guild to develop their business models through a “bespoke support service to help them become sustainable and resilient” (East Street Arts, 2018d, p. 4).

Moreover, specific boundaries and mapping, specifically around artist groups or artist spaces have not been addressed systematically. But, by being registered as companies or charities, they enter the statistical surveys, which, in turn, may explain why at policy levels, there is not really a way to distinguish them from creative entrepreneurs or other businesses in the cultural and creative industries. This reflection brought up the realisation that much of the literature on artist-led organisation was focusing on the “artist-led” side, hence the artists’ values and attitudes, and often considered artists collectives through a lens of “resistance” (Detterer and Nannucci, 2012; Coffield, 2015; Schofield, 2020). Similarly, research on cultural entrepreneurs focused on the conditions of labour in the cultural and creative industries for artists. Thus to respond to the second aim of my research, I designed the research to focus on the organisational dimension, considering issues around labour and the politics of artist-run spaces within this context.

Therefore, in my transfer proposal, I suggested defining my object of study “small artists’ organisations” to focus the attention on the fact that all applicants and selected participants identified as collectives of visual artists that worked together and can be understood as organisations, in that they are “goal-directed, boundary-maintaining and socially constructed systems of human activity” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 4). For the aim of this research, I find useful to focus on the organisational dimension to address the gap in research on the hybrid nature of visual artists in running organisations as artists and as founders/directors. Given the similarities between the artist-led/run literature and the artists’ spaces and groups described in Guild, I do not exclude that the legacy of the ideological positions found in artist-run spaces and initiatives may affect how artists organise today. Switching the focus from “artist-run spaces” on the “artists who are running spaces”, to “artists’ organisations” allows to consider the phenomenon of organisations run by artists to clarify how they function and perhaps understand if they should be understood or treated differently from arts organisations and even more in general from other organisations. Approaching artists’ spaces as organisations, I can consider how other factors and actors enable/hinder the running of these organisations and their sustainability in systemic terms rather than on individual aspects of cultural labour (Jackson, 2011; Tomka and Kisić, 2019). Initially, I wanted to avoid the word “artist” to distance myself from the Romantic notion of “the artist” (Bain, 2005; Mcguigan, 2010) and only refer to “small arts organisations”. However, Kaszynksa (2019, p. 53) argues that “even if arts organisation are managed just like any other commercial business, the romantic values attached to being an artist/craftsman can still be shown as performatively important from the point of view of the organisation identity”. My



research suggests that the artistic identity plays an important part in the organisations' identities and therefore I adopted "artists' organisations" rather than the generic "arts organisation".

Moreover, I distance myself from the "initiatives" as in "Artist-Run Initiatives", which suggests something that can be initiated but not sustained and risks imbuing a sense of short-termism. In fact, "sustainability" in the context of artist-run initiatives is often associated with being able to sustain long-term organisations that started as projects (Coffield *et al.*, 2019). The aim of the research project is to explore not only how artists initiate spaces and projects but re-frame an understanding of sustainability that goes beyond temporality and includes short and long-term projects. Then, a sense of longevity that goes beyond an "initiative" can facilitate an understanding of artists' organisations that can be something sustainable and remunerative, different from the myriads of "projects" that artists initiate or work on to make ends meet (Ross, 2001; Cohen, 2012; Beirne, Jennings and Knight, 2017; Tbr, 2018). "Artists' organisations" it is not normative in the sense that implies a legal structure, as I want to include all kind of formal and informal structures, those are run by a collective group, self-managed or through a hierarchy as well as for not-for-profit organisations. "Artists' organisations" also want to open up to the range of artistic practices and cultural production found in these spaces that include contemporary and traditional visual art, performance, art education etc., as they emerged from an initial analysis of the applications to Guild.

In addition, while at the application stage, I lacked precise data to determine this, the data from the interviews have allowed to determine that these organisations are "small" (income less £250,000 per year) according to Arts Council England (2017). This reflects the size of the organisations I am engaging with, and it refers to the turnover, geographical scope, number of people running the organisation, audience numbers as well as institutional recognition. Coffield (2015, p. 44) argued against the use of the adjective "small", which has been previously used in association with "alternative spaces", as it portrays them as "lacking influence and cultural authority, and as pitted against, and thus providing an "alternative" to, a dominant "other", in this case museums. However, as seen in the literature review, Guild seeks to address a gap in provision for the development of artists' organisations, which needs to be recognised as "small". This is because the existing support programmes and many of the documents that are currently available on developing sustainable and resilient arts organisations (Bolton and Cooper, 2010; Robinson, 2010; Royce, 2011; Woodley *et al.*, 2018), though they provide useful pieces of advice and models, are more suited to "medium-big" art organisations. To give an example, arts organisations are often invited to review their internal structures and staff roles however, the organisations that I am studying are managed by one or two people and often neglect to formalize jobs "in the interests of getting on with the work" (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 104).

## 5.2 Case Study Approach

To research how sustainability can be understood in the context of these organisations, I decided to adopt a case-study approach as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context” (Robson, 2002, p. 178). Yin (2003) highlights the importance of context to clarify the boundaries around the phenomenon researched. The exploratory nature of case studies matched the aims of the research to understand better small artists' organisations through micro, meso and macro units of analysis. To select the case studies, I researched the organisations participating in Guild to inform my research design by visiting the organisations' websites, related articles and information based on their accounts. However, my main point of departure were the applications to Guild, which included relevant information on what they saw as obstacles to developing sustainability and descriptions of their ambitions for development through their engagement with the programme. The insights from the applications led me to adopt purposive sampling in order to carry preliminary interviews and observations with eight organisations from which I would have selected three final case studies (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2018). A second round of in-depth interviews and an extended period of observations would then be carried out with three selected organisations. The purposive sampling was based on three main criteria:

- Organisations that adopt collective practices in managing the organisations (e.g. non-hierarchical organisations/ flat structures);
- Organisations situated in the context of urban development and gentrification, in particular dealing with “temporary spaces”;
- Organisations that show strong links with local organisations and communities.

Due to the restrictions imposed by covid, which will be explored later in this chapter, I could only carry out the first round of interviews and observations during short visits with the eight identified possible case studies. The data from the interviews and the visits were going to be triangulated to sample three final case studies that would be comparatively analysed to understand the benefit and weaknesses of certain ways of working, different understandings of sustainability and different causal events that impacted their development. Hammersley (2006, p. 9) argues that interviews can be used in two specific ways as interviewees participate in constructing their context:

- as a source of witness accounts about settings and events in the social world, that the research may or may not have been able to observe her or himself;
- as supplying evidence about informants' general perspectives or attitudes: inferences being made about these from what people say and do in the interview situation.

I wanted to carry out interviews in three phases before, during and after doing the observations. The initial interview phase was needed to inform my case study selection, and I could have used the interviews to clarify aspects emerging during the observation period. I could have used the material collected during fieldwork to understand how Guild's development activities may have impacted on artists' views on sustainability, their organisations and structures. The final case studies were going to be researched through a period of participant observation in order to learn how organisations are actually run and establish a correlation between data from the interviews and the real life experience of these organisations. Participant observation has the advantage of being able to ask questions to enhance my understanding and perhaps provoke analytic reflection of the artists on the process in which they are involved (Saunders et al., 2009). This kind of observation would be used to follow the work of those running the organisations and their interactions, for example, taking note of decision-making processes and operations. Observations may also be useful during the day-to-day running of the organisations and events open to the public to establish how the values and interests of volunteers, the public, stakeholders and members interact with the organisations.

I planned to immerse myself in the three case studies organisations for a month each. However, doing preliminary site visits and interviews would inform if this strategy was more useful than repeated short observations over time. Some groups do not operate on a day-to-day basis, and I could use the time to observe and research their local context. Suryani (2017) argues that long-term involvement and observation are considered necessary to understand the complexity of people's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

However, this research design had to be re-assessed and adapted as the pandemic not only made it impossible to carry out observations, but impacted the organisations in a way in which the focus of the research on sustainability and the framing around development felt problematic also for ethical reasons. Up until the pandemic, I did not fully consider the data that I already had available: first came the applications to Guild, and I had a general idea of who the participant artists groups were. By reviewing the applications, I understood that seeing the groups as organisations could be a way of studying them.

Thus, I chose to visit and interview them to better understand the organisations, which, building on their applications, started to draw a picture of their structures, goals and visions. As I could not further explore the day-to-day ways of working, which were disrupted by the pandemic, I started to re-think the range of data that I already had. Until then, my research included primary and secondary data: online searches and visits to the organisations' websites and social media accounts; I had the Guild applications but also access to preliminary research and notes from the away days and other data

collected through the programme (e.g. the budgets, business model canvases); I had my fieldnotes and observations during the visits, the recorded interviews and off the record chats while visiting the spaces and other Guild meetings, as well as company and charity reports and accounts and even data from the Arts Council England on the funding allocated to the organisations. This reconsideration shifted my perception of the interviews not as conducive to the selection of the final case studies but actually being one of the data that I have been triangulating to make sense of these organisations.

I approached each one of the interviewed organisations as a case study and re-designed the research as a multiple-case study in which the relationships between the cases are established through their relative similarities and dissimilarities under emerging thematic clusters (Uprichard, 2009): business models, motivations, modalities and structures. Occasionally data from other Guild participants collected through the programme may be used as means to compare and contrast how similar organisations behave, as it is difficult to find existing data on organisations of this kind and size.. Drawing from the theory and the various source of data available to me, I re-engaged with the materials of the interviews, noticing that much of the accounts on how the organisations work and are structured were connected to why and how artists run organisations. In the meantime, I have also continued to read and research the literature, which gave me new ideas and ways to look at my data. It became evident that if I originally thought that the research was designed to follow a linear inductive approach, I was now analysing data with an abductive approach interpreting existing theory and empirical data in light of each other (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Inductive reasoning aims to build theory from specific information, for example, accounts of lived experiences, and “consists of “fact” searching that verifies the assumptions associated to theory” (Rashid *et al.*, 2019, p. 5). Instead, abductive reasoning is described as the analysis of empirical data “combined with, or preceded by, studies of previous theory in the literature, not as a mechanical application on single cases, but a source of inspiration or the discovery of patterns that bring understanding” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018, p. 5). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018, p. 4) argue that “abduction is probably the method used in real practice in many case-study-based research processes”. Indeed, abductive reasoning seems to reflect a reflexive practice as I re-coded the interviews by going back and forth between the empirical data and the literature (presented in Chapter 2, 3 and 4).

### 5.2.1 Interviews

The construction of the case studies lies on many different kinds of data available through the applications, existing documents and online information. However, immersion in the field through interviews and observations was key to problematise statements and descriptions with the complexity of individual narratives and the day-to-day reality of running an organisation. This research mostly

relies on data from the interviews, particularly as this method promotes a conversational form of engagement and participants can provide accounts and construct narratives about themselves and their organisations. However, the observations have had a great impact on my thinking as I travelled around the country and saw many different realities. Each context had its own idiosyncrasies but commonalities started to emerge in terms of founders' motivations, feelings and values.

In the first round of interviews, I carried out in person eight semi-structured in-depth between November and December 2019.

The interviews were based on open questions with the directors/management staff of the organisations to allow respondents to explore the relationship between particular sustainability strategies and core organisational values. In case volunteers or other members would have an impact on the governance and direction of the organisations, they would be invited to participate in the study. Four interviews were carried out only with one founder/director, the other four were carried out with two. For the interviews, I prepared some questions to prompt further discussion from the respondent and as a means by which I could ascertain that all major themes had been covered. The themes to be covered were derived from engagement with extant arts management and organisation studies literatures. The broad themes included in my interview schedule were under the headings:

- How did you start? Why did you choose to start this organisation?
- Can you describe your organisation? What is the structure?
- What's your mission? What would you like to achieve? Long-term?
- Who are the key people in the organisation? How did you choose your colleagues?
- How do you make it work? How do you work together?
- Can you describe your business model?
- What does sustainability mean for your organisation?

The interviews started with a reflection on the formation phase of the organization and then proceeded with a set of questions that allowed the artists to contextualise their start-up motivations and narrate features that characterise the boundaries around their organisational identity (e.g. talking about the motivation for them to run their organisation in opposition to a local institutionalised or commercial art space). Thereafter, I asked about management structures and daily ways of working, including formal and informal communication processes. The final part of the interview was concerned with assumptions about the future of the business and their roles as founders-directors. I decided to carry all preliminary interviews in person to experience first-hand their specific context, see their spaces and hopefully make some initial observations on their ways of working.

### 5.2.2 Observations

Elavsky and Jansová (2021) reviewed the methodological challenges associated with researching the cultural industries. In their case, they were researching organisational perspectives related to production practices and the decision-making processes in the televisual media industries of the Czech Republic. They argue that research on cultural industries is absent in regard to the “structuring structure” of imperatives and activities (mission, routines, operations, etc) which determine organisational practices (Elavsky and Jansová, 2021, p. 227). To research this, they wanted to find “the right person” however, creative entrepreneurs were reluctant to take part in the research as they felt uncomfortable disclosing information due to research being conducted among competitor organisations. In my case, recruiting participants for the interviews was made easier thanks to the collaborative doctoral partnership but collecting data through observations on structures and collective ways of working did not seem possible and I would like to present the limits of this method to further contribute to understanding methodological issues in the cultural industries.

I carried out my visits one after the other, spending between half a day to two days with the organisations. I was not sure what to expect in terms of the setup of the organisations. Therefore, I arranged the interviews to last for roughly an hour and then “hang out” until my train for the next visit letting the participants know that, if possible, I would be curious to follow them as they worked or to get to know them better if they had time. This led me to various different experiences, from delivering portable hobs for canvassing outside of polling stations with the director of Fish Factory, to sewing pantomime costumes and “keeping an eye on the space” while the manager of the Rising Sun Arts Centre had to suddenly leave as something came up. I also went on a 3 hour walk around Bristol as one of the directors of Caraboo wanted to show me where their space was and show me “their context”; in other instances, I paused the interviews as founders-directors received calls about “family emergencies”, were asked for help from studio members doing screen printing or went to look for a third portable heater as the room we were sitting in was too cold.

During my visits, I wanted to see how feasible it would have been for me to be immersed in these organisations, as I gained some experience in this while at East Street Arts. Although, pre-pandemic East Street Arts resembled a “normal office” where observation of collaboration and staff interactions were facilitated by the space being open plan. Instead, when I visited the organisations, the founders usually would show me around common spaces, private studios or gallery spaces and eventually sit in any of these rooms when they were empty. It became clear through the interviews and in those settings, that the idea of collaborative working that was key to Guild had to be further explored as, in reality, most responsibilities and work were only put in by the sole founder or a couple of founding

members/ directors. Often they would receive help from members, the artists renting the studios or other people that participate in the organisations' activities. However, most often, they could only be paid ad hoc for a project and just “be around to help” the rest of the time. So while sitting in the interview or looking around their spaces, it was clear that there was not a designated “work space” or time of work, but all collaboration was rather informal:

“I need to think about doing longer periods of observation, these are the situations I found : Caraboo - it would be difficult to follow them, since they do not have a space anymore and we had the interview at home of one of the directors. However, they mentioned having a board meeting at the beginning of December, so they are still meeting with the rest of the group somewhere.

Ort Gallery – the director was alone in the gallery and it is not clear when the community manager works, would I spend a few weeks to observe how the group works when it’s just Josie? Every now and then there would be activities and probably the community manager visiting but it looks like a lot of their work is done through phone calls and email. It would be weird if I just sat here to listen to her phone conversations.

Bon Volks – Ross is the one in charge but always seemed in a rush. I am not sure when I could observe him run around between family, his job and running the space.. He said that he comes and goes from the studios and he is not always around. If I catch him at Bon Volks I could see how he engages with the members. However, since the studio holders can get in by themselves I am just wondering how much does he go in regularly, I think depends on what is needed?

Rising sun - Could possibly observe this as the volunteer manager seems to spend time at the venue, although this is not regular but based on what’s needed. I could observe the self-led activities at the centre as volunteers come in to “run” the space and external artists get access by renting the rooms for workshops.” (Nvivo Memo “Methodology”, 9/12/2019 entry)

My short preliminary visit made evident the “dis-organised” and chaotic nature of the organisations. If the work was distributed and operated through such loose spatial, time and role boundaries I questioned how I could arrange to observe the “organisations at work”. It felt like a lot of the work was actually carried out “on the go”. These observations brought into question the “collaborative working” of the organisations while it backed up research on cultural entrepreneurs juggling different jobs due to the precarity of their working conditions. In fact, the founders explained how running their organisations was one of their jobs or projects. In March 2020, as I was reflecting on how to best immerse myself as a researcher to observe my selected case studies, perhaps relocating for a month

in each context and, rather than observing specific events collect data through “deep hanging out” (Walmsley, 2018). Although, my reflection on this trajectory was brought to a halt as the pandemic changed my perspective on what was possible to research and how to re-approach my participants.

### 5.2.3 Data Analysis

I first reviewed the applications according to the criteria suggested by the selection panel to which I was invited as advisor:

- The artists involved (committed, innovative & range of visual arts practices, all stages of career)
- Potential and scope for development of the workspace or group
- Articulation of needs
- Innovative approach to addressing development needs
- Geographical spread
- Potential benefit the group has to their local area and the commitment to embedding the group in the locality

This first approach allowed me to familiarise myself with what applicants wanted from the programme and I was able to discuss them what we could learn about these organisations with other panel members. I was later able to merge my notes with the ones summarised by the Guild research assistant and I discussed what general themes were emerging across all applicants and what they could tell us about the applying artists’ groups. While she produced a summary of all the self-perceived obstacles to sustainability (Appendix D), I used the applications to map structures, years of activity locations, precarity of the spaces and the artforms practiced by the applicants and have an overview of comparable data from all the successful applicants.

I re-read the successful applications as I was trying to familiarise myself with the organisations, and initially open-coded them on NVivo. This process involves applying nodes that are derived from the text, for example emerging from the grouping of recurring events, and produce a first list of broader codes (Blair, 2015). This approach to coding created more than 40 nodes and many of the codes I generated could be grouped into the macro-themes identified at the application stage:

Name	Description
Audience Development	Awareness of public not currently engaged with and plans
Audience Engagement	Current engagement with audiences and organisations
Managing Instability	Landlord, spaces, funding
Obstacles	Spaces, funding, team, development
Steps for development	



Name	Description
Support needed	Explicitly asked
Value proposition	What are they offering

**Table 2 Table of first-cycle of codes. Only the macro-themes are presented here, for the full list see Appendix E.**

I reviewed these codes according to the criteria I set for the sampling to individuate the organisations to interview. At the Guild launch, I was able to meet all the participant organisations and meet their representatives. In the informal context of the event, I was able to meet the directors and ask them questions about their collectives and, in a way, have a six-month update after the original application. It was difficult to gauge to what extent collective practices and links to the local organisations and communities played considerable roles only from the applications. After the launch event, I reviewed my selection and added two organisations for the first round of interviews because those informal encounters made me re-assess my interpretation of the applications according to the other information I found out about the organisations (e.g, a clarification from Bon Volks on the involvement of their members).

In November and December 2019, I completed my first round of interviews and I analysed the data using Nvivo and manually coded the organisations to map out how the organisations were structured and functioned. I created a case for each interviewed organisation and set up a classification system of their attributes that represents a structural summary of the organisations (Appendix C) (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). I started to look again at the literature and discuss the data with supervisors. To monitor the developing interpretations and constructions, I kept journals and notes throughout the process.

Before going to do the interviews, I joined the Guild staff to visit other groups and one that I selected, to start to observe how they approached meeting the organisations and getting to know them. I wrote my notes and observations which helped me to reflect on how I could approach meeting the different participants. Throughout the research process I went back to the field notebook and re-read the description of different events and look for recurring questions that I would then note on sticky papers and have in my notes and around me in my work environment. In the first year, this was a useful go-to process to think about how the research question was getting shaped through a zig zag dynamic, similar to the one described by Rivas (2012), between what I was learning about Guild and what I found meaningful to research to contribute to existing gaps in knowledge. Later, when I accumulated reflections from conferences or conversations with other artists and organisations, it helped me to

adapt my question to the pandemic while keeping it relevant to the Guild and see the interconnectedness and relevance with the sector beyond this support programme.

I arranged the first two interviews one after the other and agreed with my supervisors to use them as pilots to discuss the quality of data. I underestimated the time for transcription and only managed to write up the first interview. I read it and summarised the key points from the text, adding a commentary on how that interview went and comparing it with the second one. I had a debrief session with supervisors which supported recognition of research bias and provided advice on how to approach the next interviews and continuing data analysis. I decided to carry out the first round of interviews one after the other to speed up the process and take advantage of the different geographical links to make the visits more economical. This was an interesting process that allowed me to process the data and the interviews through my notes as I went from one to the other. While this approach did not leave me enough time to process the interviews systematically and fully analyse the data during the phase of collection, it was a prolific time of reflection to understand the research process (Saunders et al., 2009). I reflected on my initial interpretation of the applications and research on the organisation, thinking about what I was expecting to find and what I found, on my performance in carrying the interviews and the disposition of participants, on the different contexts that I was encountering while I was keeping three main kind of notes: practical aspects that could affect future observation and selection, specific elements to one organisations and similarities with others.

I transcribed all the interviews and printed them out however, as I was trying to familiarise myself with the data, I was also getting lost in the data as I was finding difficult to visualise the different emerging themes and I needed to have an overview of the data. In January 2020, I decided to use NVivo to code the interviews and added more nodes to the ones created from the applications. It was interesting to see the different accounts given around activities and on the organisation, directly from the directors in comparison to something they had the time to prepare and write to apply to Guild. As they described their organisation and the interviews happened around a year later from the submission of the application, the interviews also provided an update on the organisations. I kept familiarising myself with all the data I had as I was evaluating which conditions would allow me to observe the organisations and collect new data during observations. However, instead of asking advice to my supervisors on how to make the final selection, we had to discuss how I was going to adapt my research to the pandemic.

Terry et al. (2017) argue that coding is an “organic and flexible process” and “gets better through immersion and repeated engagement with the data”. Thus, if my first analysis of the interviews focused on identifying the characteristics of the organisations to contrast this information with the

applications (how long they have been running, how many people work there and their roles, what is the funding structure), I re-approached the interviews to understand what common themes would emerge from the accounts of founders/directors in their experience of running the organisations. NVivo gives details of when nodes were added, it is interesting to see three main phases of coding and analysis, first in April 2019 when I analysed the applications, then January 2020 when I analysed the interviews with a thematic approach to allow different themes to emerge (Braune and Clarke, 2017). Reflexive thematic analysis can be used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices; Braun and Clarke (2017, p. 297) call it "experiential research which seeks to understand what participants' think, feel, and do". Here, as I reflected on how themes have emerged and I analysed them, I recognised making abductive inferences based on a recursive process of "double-fitting data and theories". My analysis and interpretation with emerging themes led me to research and read more on the experience of entrepreneurs and small business owners, which, conversely, impacted on how I analysed the transcriptions (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p. 179).

These new nodes and analysis brought up fresh ideas to which I did not pay much attention before around the start-up phase of the organisation and what influences it, which give insights to understand how they evolved. The final coding was in April 2020 when I re-coded the interviews with a more focused, reflexive approach and eventually added two main broad nodes: "Organisation" and "Beginning". At that time I also re-organised some of the nodes under "Sustainability" as I was making links between the organisational theory and the practice of these organisations. For each organisation I interviewed, I analysed the data to map what I knew about the organisation and follow reflexive thematic analysis within the case study (Vohra, 2014). I created case study profiles of all the organisations I interviewed with the information below that I gathered from the data I had from interviews and applications, from company accounts and from the research done by Guild and the materials they used like the BMC:

- SIC codes
- Beginning and foundation
- Legal form with rationale if any
- Staffing
- Building
- Key partners and stakeholders
- Key activities
- Value proposition
- Key resources
- Channels
- Segments
- Cost structures
- Revenue
- Surplus

Then, I did cross-case analysis using papers and whiteboards to make columns to compare the information I had about the different organisations to see if there were any similarities (Vohra, 2014; Maher *et al.*, 2018). NVivo codes helped me with this kind of analysis by visualising coding strips on

the transcript so that I could see how I have interpreted the different strands of the interview and where different themes were overlapping. For example, the node “beginning” would bring up all the sections by organisation in which they talked about how they started, which I then brought together under the modalities chapters. Similarly, the “sustainability” node would appear in the same paragraph with “value proposition” and “steps for development” which informed my thinking around the interdependencies of what would make the organisations sustainable. Eventually, I organised the data according to thematic clusters that are reflected from Chapters Six to Nine.

#### 5.2.4 Ethics

The Guild application process informed potential participants of this research and that by applying to the project they would agree to be part of it. During the induction day in May 2019, I was able to introduce myself and the project. As I initially researched general aspects of Guild, I explained that I would be able to access the data collected by Guild but I would also collect my data, independently of the project.

I contacted the organisations I selected for data collection and shared with them a brief summary of my research, asking their availability for an interview and attaching the interview sheet and consent forms. Prior to each interview, respondents read a project information sheet and were required to complete the consent form, which had been approved by the University of Leeds Ethics Committee (reference LTSPCI-051). During the interview, I clarified that I would clearly make reference to Guild in my research project and participants are listed online, therefore I could not ensure anonymity.

Before recording, I explained to the interviewees that I may quote parts of their interview in the analysis and that this could be shared by Guild however, they would not have access to the original file and full transcript. I discussed with participants the consent forms and made sure they understood that I was interested in their organisations and in their development journey rather than on their engagement in Guild. I encouraged them to speak freely as I would not share any information or feedback on Guild and that their participation in my research would not jeopardise their involvement with Guild as they were separate projects. Their involvement in my independent research was extra to the project and they could choose whether to take part or not, without repercussions.

Once the data analysis chapters were drafted, participants were individually sent copies in which all participants had a pseudonym and disguised locations to ensure that each organisations could re-evaluate whether or not to be anonymised. Pseudonyms and the alteration of identifying information are commonly employed techniques to safeguard confidentiality of the data (Ali and Kelly, 2012). However, as this thesis makes use of respondents’ organisational information, it felt that offering anonymity would require extensive alterations to identifiable information and ultimately create

fictional accounts. I shared with each organisation their pseudonym, checked if they had any concern around anonymisation and asked for feedback and the option to review sections of the thesis in which they were quoted. All participants have taken the option to review the thesis and engaged with the material positively offering further reflections, correcting a few details or providing better pictures. They all agreed not to be anonymous beside one participant who asked for some of the detail surrounding their context to be disguised. These processes were implemented with the objectives of securing participants' informed consent and upholding my responsibilities as a researcher to ensure the welfare of participants both during and after the interview process.

### 5.3 Case studies

A short summary of the selected case studies is provided here, however this is complemented by in-depth discussion of their business models, founders' motivations, the modalities in which they were set up and the organisational structures in the following chapters. As the thematic analysis is carried out through clusters, the description of the data and the relative analysis will focus only on a few representative organisations and may, when needed, address all organisations.

#### ***Ort Gallery***

Ort Gallery was founded in 2012 by Josie and Ridhi in Balsall Heath, Birmingham. They incorporated Ort Gallery as a Community Interest Company in 2013, and until 2015, they ran a café and a gallery space on two floors. After 2015 Josephine was the sole executive director, while Ridhi has stayed in an advisory capacity. At the moment of applying to Guild in 2018, Ort had a monthly rolling lease to occupy the upper floor only. They were offered to take a 35 year lease, but the director was also considering giving up renting a space to experiment with alternative models through a "space-less approach" (e.g. curating exhibitions at other venues). A year later, at the end of 2019, when I visited for my first interview, they moved to a room in the next door building. Having a "regular" space was considered necessary to continue engagement with their audience, as the gallery aims to engage their local community and promote the work of unrepresented artists from diverse backgrounds. They have developed a relationship with the local audience through informal networks, WhatsApp groups, and community ambassadors. Ort's work is centred around the engagement and representation of ethnic minorities, which make up the majority of the population in the neighbourhood. They have a small shop and put the artworks for sale, but the major source of income comes from fundraising to produce the exhibitions. Due to a lack of funding, between 2012 and 2018, the gallery went into hibernation twice, which meant that they stopped producing any events or exhibitions. Regular funding and organisational capacity are seen as obstacles to sustainability. In 2016, they were awarded ACE "Elevate" funding as a strategic investment for 18 months to support the development of business

plans to manage and produce larger projects, helping to build long-term sustainability. Josie is the main person to look after the overall management with some help from the community engagement lead. The turnover moved from just over £12,000 in 2016 to just over £59,000 in 2017 and £32,000 in 2018.

### ***Bon Volks***

Bon Volks is a Community Interest Company founded by Ross Walker and Rachel Boot in 2015 in Margate. With a ten-year lease, Bon Volks occupies a 3000 sq. ft former printing press and provides different spaces five studios for visual artists, a carpentry workshop, six makers bench spaces, eight desk spaces in an open plan office and two separate office rooms, photography studio and dark room, project space. The organisation can have up to 20 artists as studio holders simultaneously and some of the equipment can be used externally on an ad-hoc basis through booking. Their application describes as an imperative that the property in which they set up the studios is centrally heated. While it was “structurally sound”, it took them about three months of renovations to build the creative workspaces. In the application, the directors explain that starting up the organisation “was driven by our core aim to found a studio that we would want to be a part of”. This kind of studio would provide working spaces for artists that could be affordable, safe, comfortable and warm. They also wanted to ensure that other studio members could feel invested in the organisation and form a community, create spaces that could accommodate a range of practitioners and have a programme of visiting artists in residence to enrich the local cultural ecology. In their application, they explain that the profit they make through renting is enough to cover the costs of running the space and set aside around £500 a month that Ross may use to pay himself for the time he spends on the maintenance of the space. Ross is mainly responsible for the management of the organisation though he tries to engage studio holders in sharing roles and responsibilities.

### ***Fish Factory***

After graduating from photography, Rose organised a few exhibitions and enjoyed the process. She then decided in 2010 to rent a warehouse in a wharf in Falmouth and open Fish Factory. The space hosted around 20 artists and a project/exhibition space. Rose collaborated with artists and other people in town to put on events and exhibitions and made the space available for a hiring fee or in exchange for labour (invigilation, help with marketing or repairs in the space). A key group of supporters formed around the venue that helped Rose to run the space and could use it to host their own projects. The initial lease was for three years on a low rent as the landlord was waiting on planning permission to redevelop the area. Eventually, the redevelopment did not happen and the site was sold to a shipping company. This new activity brought a lot of noise, which disrupted the events hosted at Fish Factor and affected the willingness of studio holders to keep a studio there. After the initial years

of “hype”, the space was losing its appeal to artists and visitors, so Rose decided to look for a new space to move in that could be more accessible, warm and quiet. In 2018, she was offered to take on a warehouse in Penryn, but it required an investment of £20,000 to create studios and refurbish the space. She resorted to the network she created in the previous years to fundraise half of the target through crowdfunding. The engagement with the fundraising campaign reassured her that there “the Fish” had supporters and followers that would support it going forward. With the move to the new space, the founder wanted to formalize Fish Factory so she incorporated it as a community interest company. The space now has a café, individual studios and a darkroom and photo studio, it hosts artists in residence, a project/event space and a shop for zines, prints and other objects made by artists. The space hosts community-led events run by local residents which include free meals, a music club and other events and workshops. Studio members and volunteers are consulted on decision making, Rose works full-time for free and supports herself through other freelance jobs while she pays a person for programming (1.5 days per week), part-time café staff, and one administrator (1 day per week).

### ***Caraboo Projects***

After moving to Bristol from London, Jack struggled to find a local community of artists to connect with and a space that could bring it together. With seven other artists, in 2018, he decided to rent a former printing factory in Bedminster so that they could share the cost of the deposit for the space. As they were investing their personal money, they built eleven studios and refurbished the space as quickly as possible. After one month, they opened the space as Caraboo Projects to rent out the studios to artists. The ground floor space also has a workshop, project/gallery space and small shop/reception. They rented the space for one year at low rent through a local charity that offered them a discounted price through the business rate relief scheme. The site is owned by developers who are applying for planning permission, however the proposed development was facing a lot of objections and the artists anticipate that it could be a slow process and that they could continue occupying it after the end of their contract. The studio rental covered the cost of the space and the group developed links with artists and other artists’ spaces in Bristol to run their programme of exhibitions. They have also received ACE funding to run their exhibitions and commission artists to develop work that explored the local area, they also collaborated with local charities and groups to run workshops for young adults with learning disabilities. While studio members and the original founding group of artists contributed to the space, Jack and Jane were the key members that took care of the overall management of the project. At the end of 2019, their contract was not renewed and the group was considering whether to rent another building or focus on the development of their practice as a collective. At the end of 2020, the artists in the collective decided to take a break from Caraboo Projects.

### ***Double Elephant Print Workshop***

Double Elephant Print Workshop was founded in 1997 by Lynne Bailey and Simon Ripley in the Old Bakery Studios. They collaborated with other artists who described themselves as a cooperative. They incorporated in 2002 as a company limited by guarantee, but after having moved to the current premises at Exeter Phoenix in 2008, they incorporated as a CIC in 2011. The organisation has kept the cooperative structure and currently has nine appointed directors that share the management of the Print Workshop on a voluntary basis. To support them, there is a paid manager and course tutors who are paid freelance. The organisation mainly earns income through their membership scheme, course fees, selling of materials and fundraising for outreach projects and services such as “print on prescription” for mental health service users. The yearly income is about £100,000, and while this allows to pay for a space manager, a lot of the time that the directors put in the organisation is not remunerated, which causes a capacity issue to develop strategic plans. On the one hand, the directors describe the organisation as solid; on other, they think that the amount of unpaid time that they dedicate to the organisation puts them at risk of burn-out which also puts the organisation at risk.

### ***Bricks***

Jack and Kim met while attending the Clore Leadership Programme and realised that together they shared experience and expertise to set up together an organisation that reflected their ambitions of supporting local artists and having social impacts. Jack used to run a commercial “nomadic” gallery in Bristol with a permanent online base and producing exhibitions in temporary space. He developed contacts and expertise in distributing artworks and supporting artists to get commissions, but after 7 years running a nomadic gallery, he also realised that he wanted to create a permanent space in Bristol that could support emerging practices and provide affordable studios. Kim runs Take a Part a socially-engaged arts organisation in Plymouth, but she lives in Bristol. By collaborating with Jack, she wants to support the development of an arts organisation with a strong social remit in Bristol. Together, they want to combine their expertise in generating income through commercial avenues and fundraising. At the moment of applying to Guild, Jack received research and development funding to map the context in Bristol and understand the feasibility of setting up an artist-led space. Through this project, they convened a consortium of artist-led spaces in Bristol, the “Bristol Independent Visual Arts Spaces”, to understand the challenges of the other spaces and pull resources together: “Bricks is also emerging from a wider question in the city about how we support artist-led practice”. In November 2019, they were in the process of registering as a charity but had already secured a board of trustees and were tendering to purchase a Police Station to open mixed-use space that could host studios, exhibitions, events, workshops and various creative and community tenants.



### ***Rising Sun Arts Centre***

The Rising Sun Arts Centre started in 1992, when a group of artists squatted a Victorian temperance house in Reading and to run events and exhibitions. In 1997, they set up a charity and the group collectively managed the centre on a voluntary basis, and on the principles of self-management and self-financing. Volunteers could join the centre to support its activities and to put on their own events. Around 2010, the trustees started to disagree about how the centre was operating and its future prospects: complete self-management was not working anymore and the group struggled to balance power among the group. To better support the volunteers and ensure that power could be delegated, trustees looked for a volunteer manager. Since then, the Centre has found a point of reference in Larry, the volunteer manager paid three days a week who strives to support existing volunteers and put in place provisions and training for new volunteers. Around 30 volunteers are currently involved so that they can use the space but also facilitate the use of the space from other 45 groups and projects. Larry's role makes him accountable to the board of trustees and the group, which means that he is often negotiating boundaries around power and autonomy with the other volunteers so that they can lead on their own involvement while coherently fitting the rest of the group. The majority of the income is generated through the operation of a café and bar during the day and events and the hire of space. The centre currently operates on a ten-year lease, the landlord was part of the original founder group and still supports the Centre, which seems to guarantee that the Centre will be able to continue to rent the space. In 2018, the Centre was going to invest in refurbishing the space, which would involve modification of the physical space as well as the nature of the work they do and in their application to Guild, they explain how engaging volunteers in the process of development will be key to ensure their ownership over the organisation is not diminished.

### ***Two Queens***

Daniel Kelly studied Fine Art at De Montfort University and had to deliver a group "professional project" as part of his course. With his group, he set up a gallery for 2 months in an empty shop with the condition to return the space as found for the next occupant. Through that experience and his studies, Dan met other students and together they had exhibitions in venues around the city. At that time in Leicester, many artist-led spaces were closing down and the artists wanted to set up a space that could host them after graduating with studios and exhibition spaces. In 2011, the local authority arts officer helped them to find a building in a part of Leicester that was being redeveloped to become the cultural quarter of the city. At the beginning, a group of twenty-five artists came together to run the warehouse with studios and a programme of exhibitions. Four members of the group were appointed as directors of the company limited by guarantee named Two Queens that they set up to run the space.

The lease was on a three months rolling basis and they struggled to programme exhibitions and plan long-term, though they had run the space on low rent. In 2014-2015, they thought they were going to lose the space but eventually took on a more secure lease at commercial market rent. Around that time, members of the group moved on and eventually, Daniel and Gino were the only two left with the responsibility of managing the space. Now, Two Queens houses around 50 artists though the space is not fully open during the winter months as the building gets uncomfortably cold. The directors negotiated with the landlord their lease until 2025 with the aim of securing the tenure of the building for at least five years to be able to apply for ACE capital projects funding. They applied to Guild while in the process of planning their application, although the ambition for the capital project is challenged by the reduced capacity at which directors and the administrator work, all paid one day a week. Two Queen regularly collaborates with the local university to host students' exhibitions and regularly gets ACE project funding to run a public programme of events and exhibitions.

#### 5.4 Impact of the pandemic on research

This section provides some reflection on the impact of the pandemic on the research process. By February 2020, I compared the data collected through the interviews with the applications and I went back to the literature to inform my final selection for the case studies with the aim to contact the organisation in March and start the observation period in April.

However, as I engaged through that process, the news on the spread of the Covid-19 virus started to become more worrying as in China the first lockdown was imposed in late January and in late February the first city in Europe, in Italy was entering lockdown. In March, the situation quickly developed and by the end of the month, most European countries, including the UK were in lockdown. Lockdown measures meant that the British population was instructed to stay home, except for exercise once a day shopping for essential items, any medical need, providing care to a vulnerable person, or travelling to work where the work in question was vital and could not be done from home.

I considered observation an important stage for the research as I wanted to immerse myself in the organisations to understand how they worked "in reality", how they were structured and how sustainability could be understood in their contexts. However, the pandemic meant that observations were not possible and also Guild stopped as it was to get redesigned to better support the organisations as the situation was unfolding. Things were evolving rapidly and general life was dominated by uncertainty, so I decided to pause the data collection and wait to observe how both Guild and the organisations were responding to the crisis. My research deals with the sustainability and resilience in the context arts organisations, so while this crisis put to the test the organisations' resilience, I felt that as a researcher, I had to consider my duty of care towards participants and not

bring any more stress during this uncertain and challenging time. The Guild team started to have online check-ins with the participants and reported to me that they were struggling to reach some of the participants. The ones they were in touch with expressed general stress, confusion and anxiety. Many of them worked freelance jobs while running their organisations, the possibility of work were reduced and for those artists running studios, this also impacted on the capacity of their members to pay rent. I joined some check-in meetings organised by the Guild team as an observer and listened to evolving situation the different organisations were dealing with. The Guild team shared a survey with the cohort which had 10 respondents out of 20. The survey revealed that:

- 50% of the artists involved in running the organisations was home-working (with a large number unable to work due to illness or lack of equipment). The majority of directors were in self-quarantine with little or no staff support for continued operational needs;
- Five organisations allowed access to studios according to the government guidelines. Most have seen a severe drop in use of the studio;
- 90% of the artists in the studios have lost paid work;
- 90% of the organisations said they can't continue to work without extra support;
- 33.3% had made redundancies;
- 66.6% are unsure whether redundancies will have to be made;
- 100% respondents had picked up additional working hours to access funding, assess risks, support artists and networks and to sustain and secure premises;
- 63.6% staff are home carers or caregivers;
- 72% are parents or guardians of children being homeschooled due to COVID;
- 36.4% of staff have secondary jobs as key workers;
- 63.3% have had to cancel or postpone contracts with freelance staff- only 36.4% of those are confident they will be able to honour fees/payments;
- 35.6% don't understand how to access the support from the Government enough to utilise it;
- 80% predict they may have to close within 12 months. Of these 7 predict they will fold within 6 months.

As a result of this data and feedback from the cohort more, the approach to development and the activities planned for Guild had to be drastically changed, disrupting over 50% of the four year support programme. The team operated at a reduced capacity and Karen, one of the ESA's artistic director and external supervisor for this project, had to step away while on furlough for six months.

The Guild team struggled to maintain communication with all members of the cohort, mainly maintaining contact with the survey respondents. Even if I could interview the participants online, I

worried that asking questions about the current situation and the future of their organisations would only add pressure and stress to already existing concerns. I could change the research focus on the pandemic, or I had to reconsider the data already in my hands. I excluded researching the impact of the pandemic as it would mean completely changing my research and I was not sure of how relevant the work already done would be. The main aim of the research is to understand sustainability in the context of small artists' organisations, however this was also contextualised in the Guild framework. Therefore, I was originally interested in looking for events or moments of change that could be connected to specific development, whether they were directly or not caused by the engagement with Guild. I intended to track the trajectory of the development to inform whether it helped artists to achieve what they thought was sustainability for their organisations. It did not seem appropriate to ask how they were working towards development and sustainability when, like many other business owners, they were considering folding the business or trying to navigate business support from the government. Even though folding the organisations could be understood as a way for the artists to be financially sustainable, this decision was impacted by an extraordinary event and therefore be circumscribed to this particular situation rather than a dynamic that can be observed in the ordinary sector's dynamics. I also had time concerns as the pandemic hit halfway through my second year of PhD and re-designing the research from scratch would have been challenging considering the time constraints and maybe not even possible due to University regulations.

I considered my next steps and how I could make use of the situation to advance the research, but times scales concerned me; in fact, it was not clear for how long the lock-down would go on and to make sense of the impact of the crisis I would have had to wait probably another six-months to research the aftermath of the crisis. The impact of the pandemic would skew the focus of my data and would have meant completely restructuring my research and methodology, and I now know that I was underestimating the impact of the pandemic as it went well beyond six months. As I was not sure whether I could resume the planned fieldwork, for some months, I worked on adapting my research to the situation. I reviewed the data I already had and that collected through Guild during that period to understand how I could feasibly progress the research. I concluded that the point in which I was with my research, looking at the founders' motivations and the organisational development from the start-up stage, could actually cast some light on the pre-crisis scenario and help clarify the factors that impact sustainability and later support a better understanding of the organisations' resilient responses to the crisis and its different impacts.

5.5 Positionality

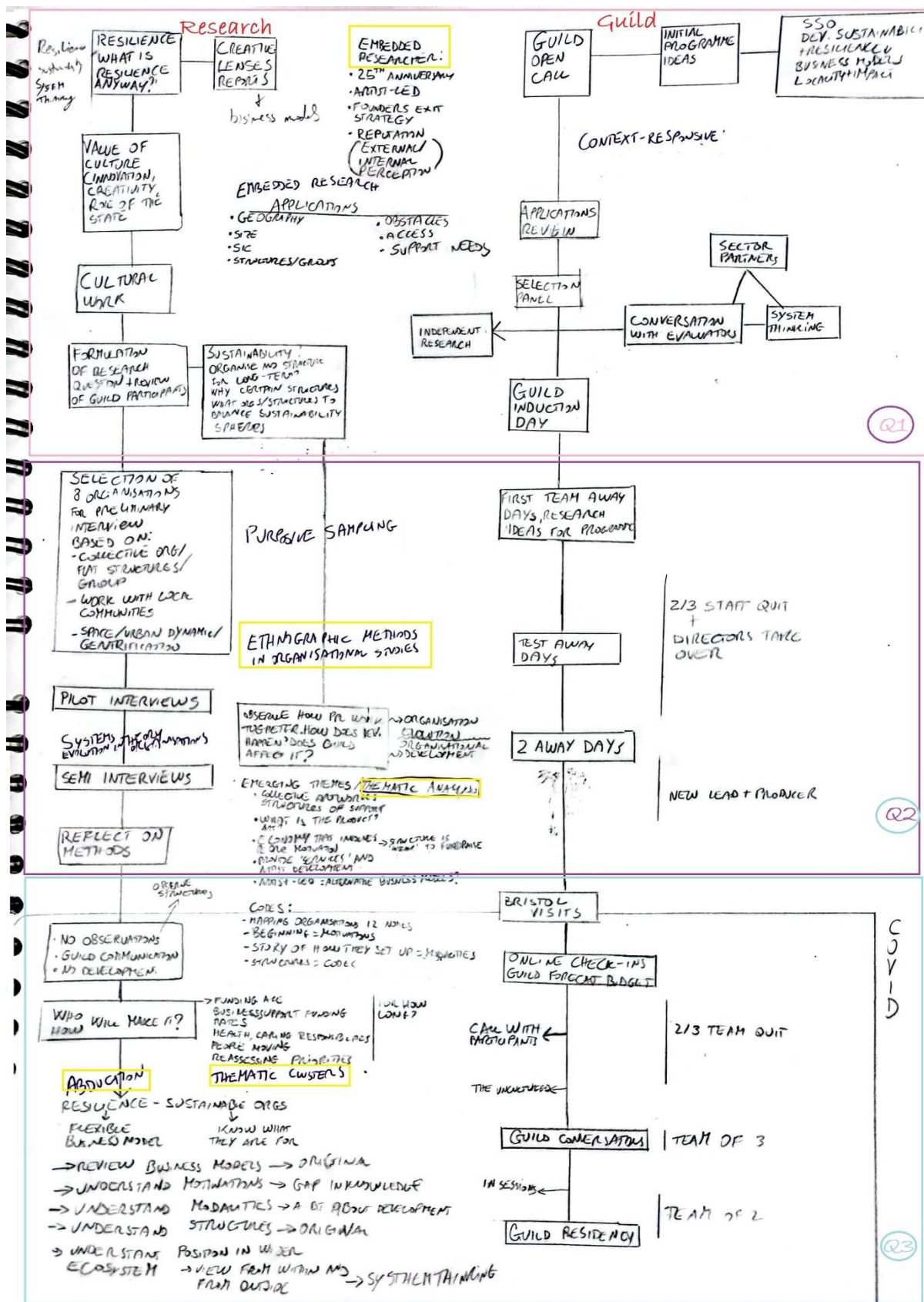


Figure 13 Map of the development of the PhD research.

This section summarises key reflexive moments on how I negotiated my position as a researcher with the Guild team and with the participants and how I navigated my own experience and biases towards the research itself. This section of the methodology has been under ongoing revision as I have tried to make sense of the events that have impacted my thinking and actions during the research process. My reflexivity is built on hindsight, which provides an understanding of a situation or event after it has happened. However, hindsight can also produce bias related to cognitive and motivational inputs that can distort the recollection of events and the causal connections between events (Roese and Vohs, 2012). The above map shows how I approached different phases in the process of negotiation of my research position in parallel to the development of Guild. These phases are organised into three quadrants: the first quadrant shows how I developed my research question drawing from the literature review and the initial elements of Guild (initial plans and the applications); the second quadrant shows how the cohort started to engage with the project and how I have experienced the fieldwork; the third quadrant addresses the pandemic, how the programme evolved and how I have adapted my research in response to the pandemic, the development of Guild and what I have learnt from the field work. What this allowed me to do was building an evolving, iterative and reflective picture of the complex research process.

In regard to positioning myself as a researcher with the Guild team and the participants, a reflection is needed around power dynamics. For me, the access to the Guild was mediated through East Street Arts and, in particular, through the Guild team, who acted as gatekeepers. My very first conversation with the Guild manager was oriented on the dissemination of findings, and while I still had to design and implement the research, that created a moment of reflection around the aims and scope of the collaborative doctoral award. Between October and November 2018, my initial meetings raised some questions about the impact of the research:

“I have met with the team a couple of times and I feel a sense of frustration coming from them as perhaps there is an expectation for a more ‘hands-on’ research. But they are not sure how the project is going to develop, they have some ideas about what could be needed. So I am also not sure how to respond because at the moment reviewing literature while waiting to see how they take it forward. I am not sure how much I should be involved to be able to keep some distance. They seem very busy with the practicalities of everything and because I am not officially part of the paid staff team to work on this, I think they are also not sure how to engage with me.” (Researcher notes, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018)

For a short while, I evaluated whether it was the case to develop an action research design to be able to impact the programme (Greenwood and Morten, 2003, p. 145). However, I felt that I was not being

included in developmental conversations, which prompted a meeting with my supervisors. During that meeting, we reviewed the aims of the collaborative doctoral research and established that the research was going to run alongside the project, independently from Guild. I explained this approach to the team and since then, I have kept having regular meetings with the research assistant. She clarified that after they reviewed the applications to Guild, they would be able to have a better idea of how to take it forward.

By the end of November, I started to notice how by hanging out, I was able to “catch” conversations on different bits of ESA’s programme but not really on Guild. I also noticed that the staff was dynamic as they sat down in an open space office where people would sit for a while but also engage in conversations, answer phone calls, make coffees or come in and out to go to different spaces to have meetings. I found that I could not really concentrate there to read and study, and when I was doing that I felt like I was disrupting the atmosphere by being “too quiet”. If I was going in to immerse myself and get to know people, I had to take a different approach:

“At the moment I am not working too often at East Street Arts, I rather be in the library or near the University where I can access different resources and not having to carry around books and materials all the time. I go to ESA once a week for the staff meetings and share what I am doing about the literature review with the Guild assistant but this is not really reciprocal, I will just wait for the programme to be more public.” (Researcher notes, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018)

After few months, I also started to feel a little uncomfortable as I was conducting a desk-based review of themes that could be relevant, though without a clear programme of events or participants organisations I was not sure which direction to take. With hindsight, I wonder what dynamics were going on and whether the staff were wary of sharing too much too early or trying to retain the creative direction of the programme and therefore selecting their interlocutors. Meanwhile, I understand that we had different objectives and worked on different levels: I was sharing initial reflections on cultural policy and theories based on literature review which were very abstract, while they were busy with the practicalities of producing the project.

Nonetheless, I find relatable the experience of Bob Simpson (2006, p. 129), who describes his experience doing research 20 years apart in a similar research setting and he is able to reflect back on his initial experience as a “novice fieldworker”. His reflection revolves around the possibility of accessing the field and how the gatekeepers of the community he wanted to engage with turned into “gateblockers”, revealing a dynamic between notions of objectivation and subjectivation (Simpson,

2006, p. 125). Simpsons' research attempted to objectivise the relationship with the object of study however, the relationship between the researcher and the object could also be subjectivised to

“remind us, first, that the research is not simply observing from precise coordinates within space, time and individual biography and, second, that these play a part in the way that our various interlocutors make sense of us in their worlds” (Simpson, 2006, p. 127).

Through the years, the Guild staff had a high turnover, with the three team members being replaced three times. Each time I found that I had access to some of the information about what was going on, the staff was always kind and as open as possible. However, my position as a “familiar” face as an “external researcher” rather than a collaborator has become fixed. Perhaps “full insider knowledge” was never possible, or even desirable, however I wonder whether there have been instances in which the staff could have acted as “gateblockers”. Simpson's reflection on his PhD research and the realisation of being a “novice” resonates with me as I feel that I embarked on the research with some ingenuity. Now I have a better understanding of my agency in managing interactions and a clearer understanding of the influence that they can have on the course that a research programme takes (Burgess, 1991).

The notions of subjectivation and objectivation are also useful in understanding my interactions with the participants. I had the chance to meet most of them and introduce myself personally during the induction day and I think it was clear that my main affiliation was with the University. I did not interact with the participants again until I joined the directors during away days. During these visits, I would introduce myself as the “researcher from the University of Leeds” and clarify that I was only there to observe the sessions. However, this changed when I visited the participants during my fieldwork, even though I tried to maintain that I wasn't a “representative” of Guild.

Usually, I would always start the interviews with founders and directors by explaining that I was interested in how their organisations worked rather than in their direct engagement with Guild. I also explained that I was going to review the interviews and focus on a smaller number of organisations and understand how they developed, and I'd be interested in their engagement with Guild only if it had an impact on their development. For most of the interviews, I could see that the participants were interested in understanding the connections between my questions and what I could get from them. But they would also be quite open in sharing personal thoughts and circumstances as on a few occasions they commented that the interview was a “nice moment for reflecting on what I've done” (Fieldwork notes).

Even though I did not ask specific questions on Guild, part of their reflection on their development included hopes and frustrations with the programme. On various occasions, participants expressed



the fact that they were not sure how much to share as they wanted to reflect on Guild and the away days, and did not always completely trust my “detached” position. On the contrary, I also found it was easy to quickly establish a friendly relationship during the visits as I would spend between half a day to almost two days with the participants, or become a familiar face as I would meet them a few times during the away days. On those occasions, participants would ask me how I saw East Street Arts, or “the gossip” around the staff changes, or other information related to funding. In this sense, becoming acquainted with the participants became a “double-edged sword” (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000, p. 98) as I wanted to keep their trust without getting involved without the micropolitics and different interests in the project. In this sense, I believe that not being fully integrated with Guild played in my favour as I could not do differently from honestly replying that I was not aware of many dynamics within the project and between Guild and ESA.

Developing a friendly relationship with the participants was often easy as outside of my research work, I work as a curator and often collaborate with artists and organisations. Rather than as an outsider, I am familiar with the jargon, social processes and dynamics. Thus, it was easier to find common ground and establish a friendly relationship through a shared language. However, my own bias towards some institutions or way of behaving or thinking about cultural policy could have affected participants’ responses as I made reinforcing comments (even a simple “hmm-hmm”) or body language (Hildum and Brown, 1956). While I tried to keep a neutral position, the researcher bias through interaction during interviews needs to be acknowledged when considering qualitative data (Arksey and Knight, 1999). However, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, my own background and bias were also challenged, for example, when discussing artists’ development. As a curator, I thought of development from an institutional perspective in terms of the knowledge artists needed to advance professionally in their careers, while for artists “development” I had a much more practical understanding related to the possibility of experimenting with their practice. While I was not able to observe over a period of time my case studies, my professional experience and personal interest in arts and curating drove me to immerse myself in the cultural scene in Leeds. Informal conversations about spaces, careers and networks with artists, curators and arts managers, friends and colleagues, not only in Leeds but around the country, have also influenced my thinking. These personal relationships have sometimes provided access to anecdotes and reflections on personal and organisational experiences in similar contexts to the ones I was researching and that were worth keeping in mind as they also participate in the wider cultural ecology.

My background has also influenced my way of thinking framework around the research as I have always been interested in sustainability from a multi-sided perspective and it is clear that this interest has guided my literature search and the development of the theoretical framework of this research.

Similarly, I had a particular interest in critically investigating definitions and cultures of artists' spaces and organisations. This comes from the fact that growing up in Italy, I experienced "independent cultural centres", "social centres" and "art-squats" where value systems and political beliefs were explicit and mixed with cultural and artistic activities. In the past ten years in the UK, I found echoes of certain cultures and values that draw from the same value system on which those Italian spaces were built. For socio-political, cultural and economic reasons, they developed differently. However, a similar language around "alternative practices" and "independence" remain. Therefore my interest to critically engage with definitions has two reasons: on the one hand, I tried to keep a critical stance and encountered it as a problem when trying to set some boundaries around the organisations I was researching. On the other hand, I am also aware that I need to critically engage with my own bias towards definitions, attitudes and how they are reflected in the cultures and practices of artists running organisations.

## 6 Business models

In Chapter 3, I have described how the ideas of “Business Models”, “Business Model Change” and “Business Model Innovation” have been adopted in the creative industries discourse, their limits and how they have been championed as the key to sustainability and resilience. Extensive literature exists on the models of commercial businesses, while Rex (2019) argues that the adoption of the language of business models in EU policy from the UK Creative Industries discourse is relatively recent, and this has also pushed for “models” to be developed for arts organisations. This language has been subsequently championed by the Arts Council (Robinson, 2010; Royce, 2011; Woodley *et al.*, 2018; ACE, 2020), and private and public-funded organisations (Bolton and Cooper, 2010; DCMS, 2016; Rodríguez, 2016b; McCullagh, 2017; Rex, 2020), suggesting that building resilient, innovative, business models is key to sustainability, equating sustainability to financial stability and resilience to the capacity to survive cuts in public funding (Gupta and Gupta, 2019; Newsinger and Serafini, 2019). I will use the first section of this chapter to discuss how the rhetoric on “business models” has been internalized by the organisations who applied to Guild to the point that they see their business model as one of the “obstacles to sustainability”.

In the second section, I will explain how the language used in different versions of the Business Model Canvas affects how the organisations describe their mission and the relationship with their stakeholders and partners. In the third section, a selection of canvases submitted ahead of the “Away Days” are used to show how the Canvas is used to translate the idea of “business models” and present a sample of the kind of models they have adopted according to the models proposed by Kimbell (2019) (see Chapter 3).

As seen in Chapters 2 and 3, the idea of business models has been associated with the idea of developing financial sustainability to push organisations to adopt models that do not rely on public funding. Speaking of a “model” blurs together the different strands of income generation activities and so, in Section 6.3, I analyse the organisations according to their “sustaining activities” and show how earned income and funding impact the financial sustainability of the organisations. In the last section, I discuss the usefulness of the idea of business models, criticizing the limits of the discourse around “business model change” and “innovation” but re-evaluating the contribution that this language and framework can bring to the internal analysis and external communication of the organisations. What this chapter will demonstrate is that the idea itself of developing a business model for making profits can be limiting for those running arts organisations, to the point of becoming “an obstacle to sustainability”. The business model itself becomes a barrier to making organisations more profitable (more sustainable) because they are founded on principles and values that clash with that

aim. The chapter also challenges the idea that arts organisations could be “more resilient”, as they already show resilience in their daily existence and if the financial aspects of the organisations do not make them sustainable, then there is more than financial stability to what makes these organisations sustainable (Newsinger and Serafini, 2019).

## 6.1 The business model as an obstacle

The idea of business models revolves around the concept of value: how a business creates, captures and delivers value and it is associated with growth and future planning and strategy. Business models are also mentioned in the application guidance for Guild (2018c, p. 3), where the programme is described as aiming:

“to transform the landscape of artists’ spaces through developing their resilience and sustainability. This will include new approaches to business modelling, embedding groups within their localities and advocating their impact on political and social environments”.

Business models were also mentioned in the example applications for Guild, describing how applicant groups could have “a lack of experience in business modelling or audience development” or would need “advice on temporary spaces business models and recognise organisational development is required to move their operations on from the current model to the next stage” (East Street Arts, 2018c, p. 9). Consistent with the programme aims and language, one of the main self-identified obstacles to sustainability by most of the groups in Guild was around building organisational capacity and knowledge around business modelling and strategic planning. Overall, from the applications emerged that five areas are recognised as “obstacles to sustainability”:

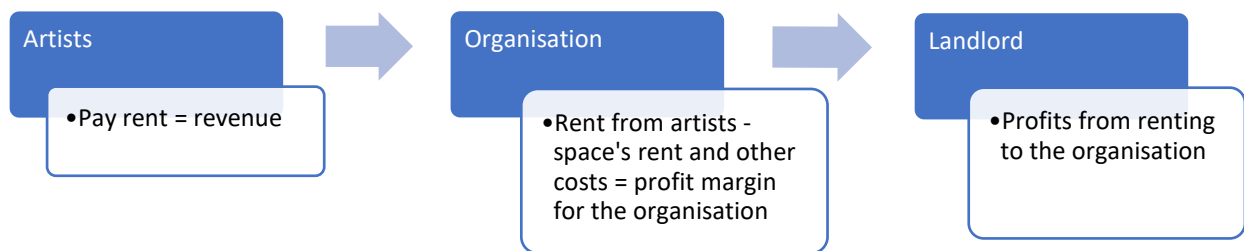
- Business: Support with business model/planning/strategy, support with building a board/governance, need to generate/diversify income streams;
- Premises: rent security and building requiring renovation;
- Funding: lack of regular funding and needing support for fundraising;
- Staff: staff burnout, time-poor staff, inability to employ staff regularly;
- Network: Sector networking and business-to-business mentoring.

In the applications to Guild and interviews business models were discussed as something layered, given the embedded values and the specific value creation processes of arts organisations. Often, participants discussed their “model” or “model of working” through different layers: how their group members collaborated, how they worked with artists and the local community, their programme, their

practices and guiding ethos. In a few applications, a direct link was made between income and guiding ethos, for example, Bon Volks, who rent studio space to artists, wrote:

“Our commitment to keeping rent as low as possible makes our business model precarious. Although we increased our rent last year, to bolster our contingency funds, we still feel we may be vulnerable to sudden financial change. We feel we would benefit from further advice and ideas on creating a dynamic financial model that can weather various storms” (Bon Volks Guild application).

In this case, they identified their business model as “precarious”, something that is rooted in the mission of the organisation: to provide affordable studio spaces.



**Figure 14 Bon Volks Business Model.**

This business model has been adopted by many organisations that provide studio spaces: it is straightforward to make it work as the organisation need to calculate the aggregate rent revenue from each studio to cover overheads and wages (Figure 14). However, the model itself was presented as one of the “obstacle to sustainability” as it struggles to work in line with the mission of providing affordable studio spaces: this model, entrenched with a specific ethos, cannot bring surplus that guarantees a salary for the director or accumulate reserves, making it unsustainable from the point of view of the director that manages it. The main goals for the director of Bon Volks are to provide affordable studio spaces to avoid becoming “part of the gentrification, process, but something that in the future will interrogate that” and create an organisation that is collectively led by its members/studio holders.

Another interesting example is Proforma, an organisation that took on the challenge to develop a model “outside of the traditional artist-gallery-agency model” to support the career development of emerging artists (Proforma application). They argue in their application that in the area where they operate there are enough studios available to support a large number of emerging artists but “there are very few artist-led galleries bridging the emerging and mid-career transition” (Proforma application). They aim to bridge this gap by providing opportunities for artists to make and show work. The business model is designed so that if any of the artists’ work they commission is sold, only nominal

production costs are recovered. To raise funds to commission artworks, they develop merchandise and other products so that any profit made can go directly to support artists and overheads. Their strategy is to develop “new models of income and payment structures” by establishing partnerships with local businesses to produce/sell their products (Proforma application). The development of new streams of income comes from the understanding that “being reliant on funding bodies is not the best way to start an organisation” (Proforma application). Therefore, the development of this model comes from trying to deviate from starting up an organisation that relies on public funding. It could be argued that developing their own ways of income generation is built into their mission and part of Proforma’s strategy to ensure continuity and thus be able to sustain the delivery of their services. However, Rex (2020, p. 133) is critical of the effect that the discourse of sustainability and particularly associated with resilience pushes publicly funded cultural organisations to adopt certain practices “not because they are necessarily the most effective way to achieve internally determined goals or meet externally-driven demands but because of shifts in what is considered appropriate behaviour”.

In their application, Proforma listed as “obstacles to sustainability” three main points: funding, organisational structure and specific professional skills. Even though they are trying to develop “alternative” revenue streams they need to apply for funding to develop them. Funding is the biggest issue as they argue that, being seen as a high-risk project or not “funding ready”, Proforma struggles to fundraise the start-up capital needed to scale up their alternative funding model. Lack of funding limits their capacity to establish a solid organisational structure that can rely on a remunerated team rather than volunteers, in turn limiting their capacity to develop and expand. Robinson (2010, p. 34) also notes this problem around innovating business models:

“Innovative organisations without the resources to turn their innovation into sustainable organisational capacity – perhaps due to lack of investment or lack of certain skills – can be productive, but can also become frustrated in their ambitions. This is a typical situation for organisations who see their development as dependent upon receiving regular funding – although that is often not the best way of investing in them”

To overcome financial and staffing issues, Proforma is “transient with no fixed site” (Proforma application). At the moment of their application, the organisation did not have official status, but members were working on setting it up as a community interest company to allow it to apply for more funding opportunities. Part of their motivation to join Guild was that they were seeking mentoring to manage the transition to this new legal structure and support the development of professional skills to manage the new legal and administrative challenges.

In another case, the directors of Navigator North are aware of the “fragility of their model”:

“We have been managing temporary arts space for 8 years and are aware of the fragility of this model of working. For example changes in government policy might impact on how business rates are implemented, which could have a serious impact on our group’s sustainability” (Navigator North Application).

However, the development of the business model itself is an obstacle to sustainability due to the lack of resources to work on this:

“We therefore want to diversity our business model to explore how we can become sustainable. We have ideas about how we can do this, but we need the expertise, knowledge and time to enable us to reflect on what we have achieved so far and use this to understand how we can become a sustainable organisation” (Navigator North Application).

Eventually, most of the organizations struggle between being “affordable” and paying for staff time, with a heightened sensibility towards trying to stop relying on the work of volunteers for core tasks. After years of running Fish Factory as a sole trader, Rose, the director decided to establish it as a CIC to be able to employ staff and not rely on volunteers: “I find it a lot to manage all those volunteers that stay for a short-period of time and I needed to always train and check on them” (Fish Factory Interview). The need for this change also came with the relocation to a bigger space and the development from a “landlord model” to a “service model” (as in Kimbell’s taxonomy, see Kimbell 2019), where they went from renting studios and managing a project space to operate a bar and café, studio spaces, events and exhibition space for hire, a small shop with prints and artworks, and a residency programme. The move to a company also helped to formalise working relationships:

“So after we moved to the new space, I knew that I needed to formally make it something other than myself, and also kind of emotionally do that to offer it to other people, to formally have a part in it” (Fish Factory interview).

Interestingly, when asked about their business models, the founders and directors talked about their organisations’ activities and the way of working of the members. From these examples start to emerge a cycle where there is a model in place that somehow needs to be developed to be able to pay for people’s labour, but lack of funding, knowledge and organisational structures limit the members’ capacity to develop the model to pay for their own labour on development. However, the volunteered time and the collaboration between members and their sense of ownership seem to be key elements that keep these organisations going. For Fish Factory, studio rental is the only predictable and stable source of income which is used to pay rent. Being able to rely on paid members of staff that can work

for the cafe takes the pressure off the director, but having to secure wages for the staff from all the other activities (café, hires, shop, residency) that are not the studios, means that the director may not always pay themselves a fixed monthly amount and it is difficult to secure extra resources to have time to develop the business:

“We aim to have all the studios full all the time for the rent, but it’s not so easy to run a profitable café, especially a vegan café in Penryn, also I had very little experience of running a café, so that was quite a big challenge to even think about starting that so up until recently that’s been running at a loss because of the wages. It’s just really hard to sell enough coffee and cake in an hour to pay someone’s wages and the electricity and everything else. Sometimes I cannot pay myself. [...] I’d say that mostly, up until fairly recently, I’ve been delegating a lot, so telling people what I think we should be working on or how they can help to work on the things we’ve decided together that we are going to do. More recently that’s felt a little less necessary, because we’re like 2 years in we’ve got quite a good team people are taking responsibility and taking things on a bit more personally, so that’s really nice for me” (Fish Factory interview).

As a CIC, not only is the company finally able to employ people that before were just “helping out” and “volunteering”, but the director spent time on training and cultivating a certain organisational culture so that the staff can work more independently. This new legal setting requires taking care of extra administrative tasks and new staffing costs. Thus, while the formalisation of a company may bring extra support for the director, it also requires extra learning and time away from delivering their artistic vision. In all cases, whether running an existing model or testing a new one, the data from the interviews and the applications show how the adopted models are perceived as obstacles to actually having the resources to develop the organisational practices they need to be more sustainable.

In summary, the business model itself can be perceived as an obstacle for various reasons, for example, when reaching financial stability seems to conflict with the mission of the organisation, as in the case of Bon Volks. This conflict between founders’ values and economic activities will be analysed more in-depth in the section below and in the next chapter in connection to the founders’ motivations for starting-up their organisations. Royce (2011) argues that this conflict is rooted in the “disavowal of the economy”, for which artists’ believe that art-related activity and the economy exist in separate spheres. Coming up with a new model is also an obstacle when the assumption is that they would need public funding to make it work, but they are trying other ways to generate income that still need start-up funding and expertise. More than ten years ago, Bolton and Cooper (2010, p. 5) argued that



cultural organisations were not “living well” due to increasing costs and demand. Rather than investing in organisational capacity, they have added pressure to deliver more: “public and private funders have tended to provide revenue for the artistic programme rather than building financially resilient organisations”. This dynamic remains a current issue where the interviewed organisations receive funding for delivering programmes but struggle to fundraise to add capacity and implement new structures. While the organisations are trying to find ways to not be public funding-dependent, there still seems to be a structural gap in the support offered to manage these shifts both in terms of risky investments from funders and in terms of the practitioners’ knowledge and know-how.

## 6.2 Language and structure of the Business Model Canvas

As previously introduced, language is an important factor for cultural organisations to differentiate from other organisations and slightly different business model canvases have been designed to address the discomfort of many cultural organisations with “language of business” (Fleming, 2017, p. 21). Guild adopted the Social Business Model Canvas (SBMC), developed by Tandemic<sup>5</sup>, introduced in Chapter 3. In Guild, the canvases had two functions: they were sent in advance of the “Away Days” to be completed as “homework” by the participants to invite them to get together and think about their business and its make-up components; the canvases would help the groups being clear and precise when presenting their organisation to Guild so that they could make the most out of the one-day visits. The SBMC was chosen as a visual, collaborative and easy-to-use tool, in particular, this “social version” of the business model canvas would help the participants to overcome language barriers. The canvases were presented to the Guild cohort in the first webinar session, reassuring the cohort that the chosen tools were a way to describe their business “placing your audiences at the heart of the work that you do” (Webinar 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

Nevertheless, as expected from previous experiences of using the BMC in the cultural sector (Rodríguez, 2016a, 2016b; Fitzgerald, 2019), the canvas found some initial resistance from some of the participants, who were not familiar with the marketing terms such as “segments” utilized in the canvas and it did not reflect the aims and language used in the organisations (Guild induction day), using profit-oriented categories like “paying customers” and “users” (for existing examples in the literature of similar resistance to language see Bolton & Cooper, 2010; Hoyle et al., 2018; McCullagh, 2017; Royce, 2011; Woodley et al., 2018). In this section, I will discuss some examples of the canvas from my case studies.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.socialbusinessmodelcanvas.com/>

### 6.2.1 Ranges of business models

I have selected the canvases from Bon Volks and Caraboo to show how the information in a SBMC can be translated in “models” according to Kimbell’s classification (see Chapter 3). I will also present a diagram drawn during the interview with one of the directors of Two Queens, as an example of portfolio of models. The analysis of these canvases shows that while the advice from policy is to operate business model change and expand their models, often artists’ organisations already adopt models that deliver different services and products to various stakeholders.

The business canvas below, Figure 15 **Error! Reference source not found.**, it was completed by the director of Bon Volks with support from the organisation’s affiliated “members”. In this instance, the value proposition and the type of intervention speak about the development of the organization and securing “long-term future of organization” and “affordable work space, within an organization that reflects the founding ethos”. This canvas is centred on the development of the venue (value proposition) and of the organizational culture, great importance is given to cultivating the agency of the members/studio holders under “type of intervention”. The business model is based on providing studio spaces (value creation) from which rent is collected (value capture), that is the main source of revenue and used to cover the overheads. This business is best described by the “landlord model” in the Kimbell’s (2019) taxonomy of common business model types in arts and cultural organisations. In this model, assets include access to a venue and expertise in facilities management, while the revenues come from rental income.

This canvas partially reflects the current picture of the organization while it also includes their plans for the future. In the conversation during the Away Day, the Guild team explained the different uses of a business model canvas and a business plan, inviting the director to think about the growth of the business strategically. First, by mapping out the current picture of the business through the canvas and using it to assess opportunities, resources and missed links on which a business plan can be developed to strategize the further development of the business. However, the references to the ethos and the future plans for the organization stimulated a conversation on the transition to a new business model based on the expansion of the space.

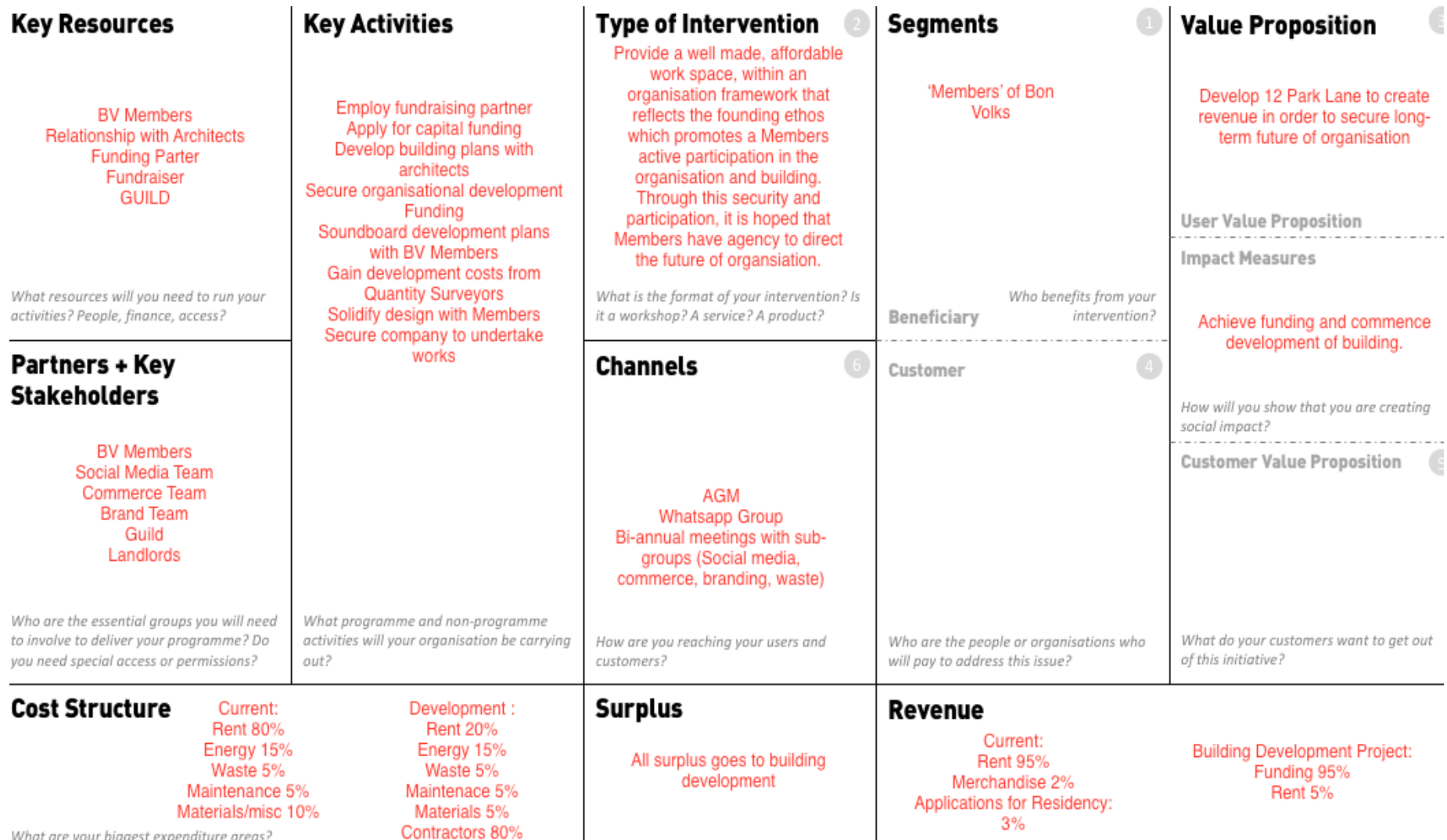


Figure 15 Social Business Model Canvas - Bon Volks (2019)

Secondly, I want to present the business model from Caraboo. Different members worked each on their own canvas, which were discussed during the Away Day and brought together in the one shown in Figure 16. This organisation sits in between the gallery and the studio-provider. This model can be identified as the “service model” in Kimbell (2019). As presented by Kimbell (2019), a service model includes delivering events for customers, running workshops and courses, and providing services to tenants. Compared to Bon Volks, this organisation has a more complex business model that aimed at bringing together a value proposition that had three main goals “create a supportive network for artists to develop sustainably”, provide an “accessible and inclusive space” and a “participatory and comfortable environment”, and produce “relevant, exciting and engaging arts from emerging contemporary artists”. Letting studios to artists is the trading activity which generates enough revenues to cover the basic costs and keep the business going (Interview Caraboo). Producing relevant artworks and engaging with artists is part of the model that attracted a considerable amount of extra funding to enable other activities (performances, podcast, engagement with schools etc). Kimbell identifies only in the “hub” model a “multi-sided” model in which activities are organised to generate revenues through partnerships and the interactions of different partners. However, in Li’s research (2020), the multi-sided business model is just one of the possible variants that a “portfolio” of models can take. The adoption of multiple business models in one organisation is called “portfolio business model” and it is increasingly adopted in the creative industries as a way of innovating business models (Kimbell, 2019)t. In the interview with Caraboo, directors explained how they thought of building audience development to expand their reach and how they engaged with multiple stakeholders through the delivery of various events that engage different groups (families, young artists, local residents).

Renting the building for studio spaces and the activities associated with the space are classified under “revenue streams” in the canvas, while the “key activities” are enabled by the fundraising that is based on the main activities connected to the space. On the one hand, considering studio rental as the main form of revenue generation, the model of Caraboo could be identified as a “service model” as the financial sustainability of the model is guaranteed by providing studios to artists. However, when speaking with the directors, it was clear that running the studios was not their objective, instead they are a means to an end of having a space that can be used to deliver a programme of events:

“we run studios that support us to run the space because having a community of artists as part of the organisation is really beneficial to what we do. We run a main programme of exhibitions that, within each of those that are linked activities, workshops working with schools, film screenings, talks. We are also developing our links with the community in Bedminster delivering workshops and classes in schools” (Caraboo Interview)

<p><b>Key Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Space/building</li> <li>*Team</li> <li>*Funding (ACE, BCC, Power To Change, Kickstarter, Membership, workshop/classes, donations)</li> <li>*Equipment</li> <li>*Networks</li> <li>*Advisory Board</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Activities</b></p> <p><small>What Key Activities do our Value Propositions require? Our Distribution Channels? Customer Relationships? Revenue streams?</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Exhibitions</li> <li>*Open call artist film screenings</li> <li>*Week long Scratch Lab residencies</li> <li>*Workshops/talks/events by exhibiting artists as part of wider programme</li> <li>*Create work collaboratively</li> <li>*Studio skill sharing sessions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Type of Intervention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Exhibitions</li> <li>*Film evenings</li> <li>*Workshops &amp; talks</li> <li>*Residencies</li> <li>*Facilities/space</li> <li>*performances</li> <li>*Collaborative art projects</li> <li>*Artist networking opps</li> <li>*Podcasts</li> <li>*Skill shares</li> </ul>	<p><b>Segments</b></p> <p><b>Beneficiary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Artists (Exhibitors/participants)</li> <li>*Families/children</li> <li>*Schools</li> <li>*Local visitors</li> <li>*National/regional visitors</li> <li>*Talk/workshop attendees</li> <li>*Other art groups</li> <li>*Online audience</li> <li>*Members</li> </ul>	<p><b>Value Proposition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Create a supportive network for artists to develop sustainably. Provide engaging creative workshops for children in schools.</li> <li>*Accessible and inclusive space to be within.</li> <li>Relevant, exciting and engaging arts from emerging, contemporary artists.</li> <li>*Exhibitions and events of consistent quality.</li> <li>*Engaging and stimulating content in a participatory and comfortable environment.</li> <li>*Consistent and challenging programming in with artists are encouraged and free to take risks and connect with audiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Partners &amp; Key Stakeholder</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ACE</li> <li>- BCC</li> <li>- Power To Change</li> <li>- Artists</li> <li>- Local schools</li> <li>- Studio members</li> <li>- Members</li> <li>- VASW</li> <li>- PROPS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Host local arts groups</li> <li>*Podcasts</li> <li>*Studio artist led workshops</li> <li>*Venue &amp; studio operation</li> <li>*School workshops</li> <li>*Local event workshops</li> <li>*Marketing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Channels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Open calls</li> <li>*Social media</li> <li>*website</li> <li>*networks (VASW, DIY Arts, Bristol arts monster, Bristol Creatives, Bristol Artist Led Forum)</li> <li>*Taking part in local &amp; national activities (Od Arts, Art Licks, WMHCF, East St Summer Fayre, Centre of Gravity)</li> <li>*Talks at University</li> <li>*Newsletter, radio, media, marketing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Customers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Artists (studio holders)</li> <li>*Members</li> <li>*Workshop attendees</li> <li>*Space hirers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Impact Measures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Testimonials/case studies</li> <li>*Documentation</li> <li>*Accessible visitor feedback forms</li> <li>*Growing attendee numbers</li> <li>*Increased media coverage</li> </ul> <p><b>Customer Value Proposition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Participating in support of arts in Bristol</li> <li>*Skill developing in a social setting</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cost Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Staff team</li> <li>*Rent &amp; building maintenance</li> <li>*Artist fees</li> <li>*Programme costs</li> <li>*Administrative</li> <li>*Marketing</li> <li>*Refreshments</li> </ul>	<p><b>Surplus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Facilities</li> <li>*Equipment</li> <li>*Commissions</li> <li>*Training</li> </ul>	<p><b>Revenue Streams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Public funding</li> <li>*Studio rent</li> <li>*Class attendees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Membership scheme</li> <li>*Bar income</li> <li>*Kickstarter</li> <li>*Space hire</li> </ul> <p><small>*Space at competitive rates whilst associating with arts org</small></p>	

Figure 16 Caraboo Social Business Model Canvas (2019).

Similar to Bon Volks, the rent from studios only covers the costs of renting the space, while the programming of Caraboo relies on fundraising and voluntary labour from the artists. The aims of these organisations are to address unsustainability in the arts ecosystem related to affordable spaces for artists, create networks and communities. However, addressing these issues requires adopting a model that itself can lack financial sustainability as their models for revenue generation only allow to keep the space open but do not cover the time needed to run the space or programming.

In both canvases, I want to highlight the value propositions: for Bon Volks this is about securing the space to ensure the sustainability of the studios and for Caraboo, in particular, the first point “to create a supportive network for artists”. Often arts management books and sectoral reports stress the importance for directors of cultural organisations to have a clear vision/mission: understanding “what” the organisation is about in response to the why and for whom (Chong, 2010; Royce, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2019). In the next chapter, I will discuss how founders have developed these value propositions and how they are responsive to their ecosystems, the contexts in which the organisations operate.

Instead of using a canvas, the last business model was drawn, Figure 17, as a diagram during the interview to show the financial structure of Two Queens. In the image, we can see that the studio rental income covers the rent of the building and the overheads and pays for one day of the studio coordinator. The studio coordinator works two days a week, so the other day is half paid by the funding to manage the exhibition programme and half from the learning programme. The learning programme also covers one day a week for the learning co-ordinator. The directors are paid one day and a half a week and one day a week to work on the exhibition programme. According to Kimbell’s classification, this model could be understood as a “commissioner model” where the organisations’ activities include commissioning and managing a cultural programme. This model functions through “match-making”, a dynamic where the cultural organisation is a mediator between the cultural programme and engages/finds audiences. However, similarly to Caraboo, here we can see an example of the “market portfolio model”, another type of Li’s (2020) portfolio business model. In this model, an organisation adopts one or two business models to tap into different audiences. Each business model might not be new and the financial returns in some markets may be modest but, by sharing all components, the total cost can be contained and the model can be financially sustainable.

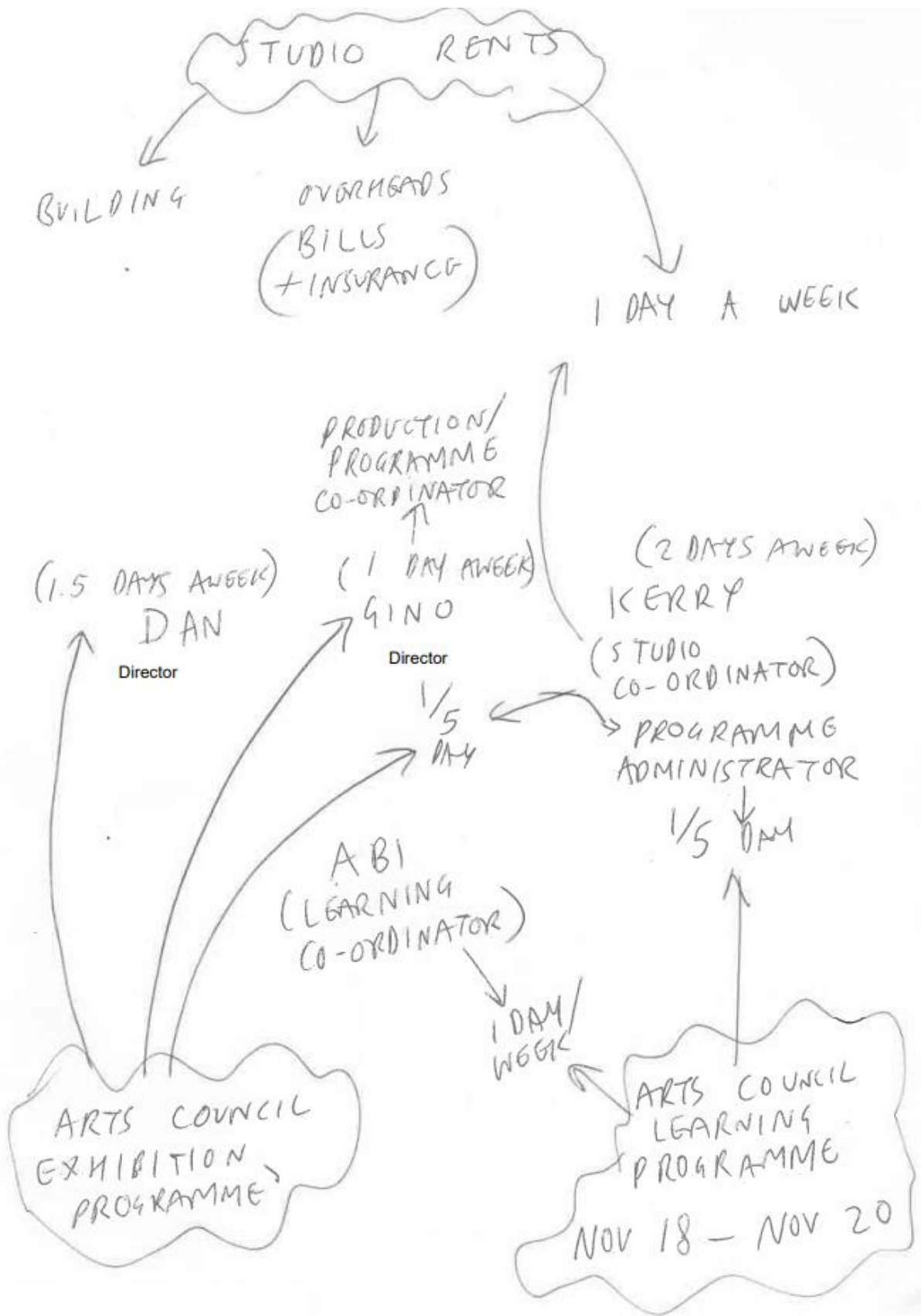


Figure 17 Diagram of how revenues are generated and allocated - Two Queens.

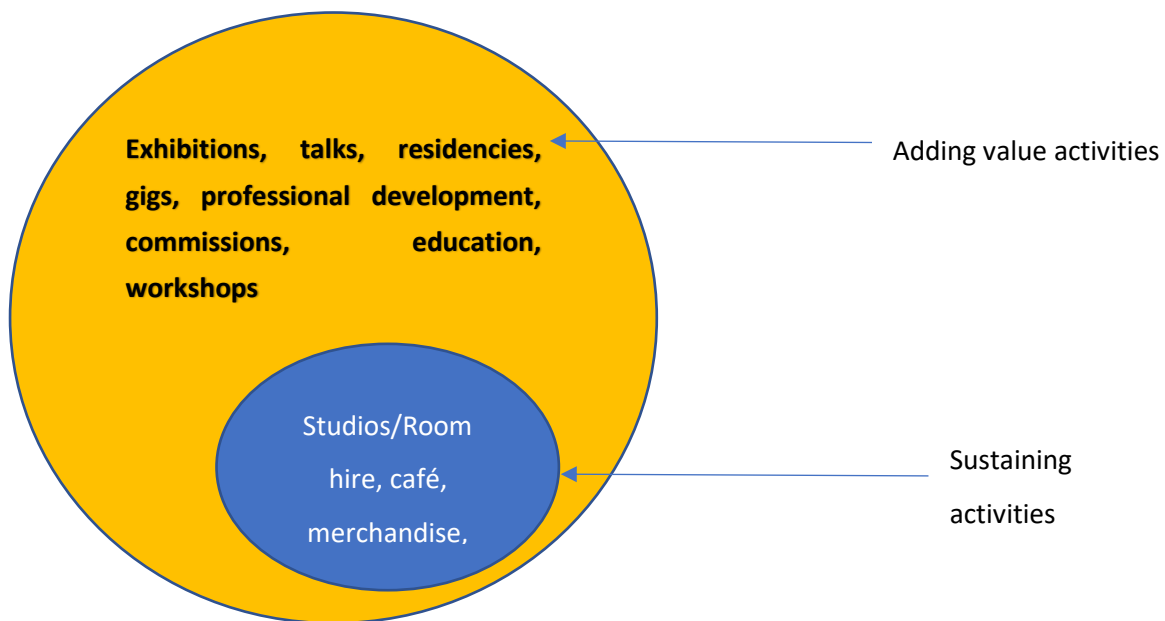
Although this model is simplified in the drawing, in the interview, the director explained that the three forms of income relate to how the organisation targets three main audiences artist/studio members, university students and young people through the learning programme. Differently from Caraboo's model, here the funding to generate the cultural programme seem to have equal weight. It is important to remember that all organisations that run studios have waiting lists for people that are looking for studios, which means that studio rental is a stable income as they easily fill the studios. To understand some of the complexity of these organisations as they balance the need for sustainability with their aims, we might aim to identify their "sustaining activities", reliable sources of earned income which sustains their operations. While "value adding activities" are those that are funding dependant and add value to the organisation performing a social or cultural mission.

However, the adoption of portfolio of models in these small organisations is an interesting finding as it shows that business model innovation and the diversification of income streams are already part of these organisations business models. These forms of dynamism should be appreciated by funders and policy-makers, which have been calling for business model innovations and diversification of income. However, both Caraboo and Two Queens list public funders, like Arts Council England, as their major source of income that enables all value-adding activities rather than the development of activities through earned income. Section 6.5 offers a more detailed analysis of the activities of the organisations in Guild and how the reliance on public funding may be locking the organisations in what Robison (2010, p. 33) calls a "poverty trap". Another point to consider is that Guild has utilised the canvas to engage the organisations with the business model idea, however feedback from the organisations has also shown the limits of the applicability of the concept to drive development or change (Guild Feedback 2021). Canvases were used to present the organisations to the visiting teams, however they were not revisited or built on to create business plans, which left artists dubious about the utility of engaging with the concept. In a similar way, identifying the type of models according to Kimbell's classification showed that the proposed models are applicable to artists' organisations, however the idea of the business model per se does not bring any particular clarity around what sustainability may mean. Considering studio rental as their sustaining activity, these organisations may be financially sustainable. However, these activities do not generate a lot of economic value, while the activities that add social and cultural values rely on public funding thus making the organisations unsustainable.



### 6.3 Description of sustaining activities

A gap seems to exist between how the artists see their organisations and how they function. From this reflection, I draw two units of analysis to look at the activities of these organisations, what I call “sustaining activities”, which are reliable forms of earned income that and are used to cover overheads and basic costs, the rent of space or part of the time of management staff. Adding value activities are instead the activities that require fundraising rather than self-generate income (Figure 18).



**Figure 18** Activities' units of analysis.

By identifying the “sustaining activities”, I identify the services/products they offer to keep the organisations running by generating income. Participants would probably find this approach reductive because it does not fully represent all the activities and purposes of their organisations. Both in the applications and in the interviews, they tried to convey the added value that it is provided with, and on top of, the sustaining activities. However, it is also true that for some organisations, the main form of income generation depends on fundraising. However most organisations may also have membership schemes and other small income that is often negligible. Robinson argues “organisations often define themselves by their regularly funded status, rather than their activity, and are essentially only as sustainable as their next (or last) grant” (2010, p. 33).

For example, Caraboo rented a 3500 sq. space across two floors: the ground floor with a reception/shop, a workshop space and a project/gallery space. In 2019, it made just over £3000 profit from renting the studios, covering rent and overheads for the whole building, and received over £14000 ACE project grant funding for their programme of exhibitions and events in the gallery space. Often sustaining activities are the financial foundation of the organisations, they also provide a basis

for applying for match funding or extra funding to expand on these activities and deliver activities that add value to the organisation.

However, when asked about their activities Caraboo directors saw running studios as a secondary activity and focused on their public programme. As Robinson says, directors described the identity of the organisation around their funded programme and their networks rather than the studio management. However, there may be an overlap between sustaining and value adding activities. For example, the sustaining activity for Bon Volks is studio rental, however providing studios at affordable rates is also what adds value to the organisation in line with its mission.

In Table 3, I have marked with an X the sustaining activities that generate some form of earned income for the 20 groups in the Guild. Most of the groups may engage with all the activities listed, however they are not considered when happening occasionally: “sustaining activities” are defined as those with material and consistent levels of income generation. That is, while an organisation may generate income through the sale of, for example, artworks, the amounts are often small and sporadic, generated as a by-product of other core activities (such as renting studios). Sustaining activities happen without public funding but often they are the basis for attracting funding both to support and increment the number of other activities and cultural programming. For example, a group of artists want to produce exhibitions and they rent a gallery space. To generate income, they hire the space to other groups and organisations, but hiring can also be the basis for applying for funding in collaboration with other organisations to produce events. With F, I have marked all the other activities delivered only with the support of external funding.

I have identified the sustaining activities from the organisations’ description of activities in their applications to Guild, the yearly financial accounts available on the Company House and Charity register websites, my interviews, business model canvases submitted to Guild, the organisations’ websites and the cashflow breakdown submitted as part of the Guild’s Covid-19 impact research. The sustaining activities identified are:

- Studio provider/Membership – Most of the groups/organisations offer studios for artists to rent. Many organisations offer professional development opportunities to their studio holders, these activities are made available to studio holders-only or also to the wider public via the payment of a membership scheme. K6 and Ort Gallery do not have space for studios but offer a membership scheme. DEPW does not have studios but offers access to equipment and courses for printmaking and these are their core activities, being the ones that generate most of their income.

Groups	Studios/ Membership	Exhibition / Events Space hire	Commissioning	Courses/ Workshops	Café/ Bar	Artworks/ Merchandise/ Materials	Residency
Abingdon Studios	X	F					
Artworks	X	F		X			
Assembly House	X	X	F		X		
Bon Volks	X						X
Bricks		F	X				
Caraboo	X	F		F		F	
CIWA	X	F	F	F			
CLAY	X	X F			X		X
DEPW	X	F		X F		X	
DYAD Creative	X	F	F				
Fish Factory	X	X		X	X	X	X
Haarlem Artspace	X	X					
K6 Gallery	X	F					
Navigator North	X	F	F				
Ort Gallery	X	X F	F	F		X	
Proforma		X F	F X			X	
Rising Sun		X F		X F	X		
Shy Bairns		F	X	F		X F	
The Penthouse		F	X F	F		F	
Two Queens	X	X F	F	F	X	X	

Table 3 Organisations' sustaining and funded activities.

- Exhibition/Events Space Hire – Hiring of a space different from studios, that is considered to be a gallery/exhibition space. Exhibitions are usually the most common activity taking place in the space. These can be hired out from artists to put on their own exhibitions, though they are mostly funded through restricted funding by public bodies. Space hire for gigs or private events tends to generate unrestricted funding. Activities that happen through hires can be both private, not included in the hosting organisation’s programme, as well as public, which usually benefit from shared promotion and enrich the organisation’s programme.
- Commissioning – Commissioning can be intended in two ways: Bricks and PROFORMA mediate between private organisations to recruit and curate commissions for artists. Shy Bairns, Caraboo, The Penthouse are artists’ collectives so they get commissioned to produce artworks. Abingdon Studios and Ort Gallery fundraise to commission artists to produce new artworks. In 2019-2020, Ort Gallery was commissioned to undertake a piece of research in collaboration with a University. Though all groups may consider these important activities part of their ethos (for Shy Bairns and the other collectives would be about promoting their work as artists and for Ort Gallery is about contributing to research on audience engagement) and what makes these organisations exciting, but they are funding dependent.
- Courses/Workshops – Most organisations offer some kind of educational activity in the format of workshops or courses, often artists that run the organisations deliver them directly and generate income through ticket sales. They also host other organisations or artists that deliver them, in this case, this income could be classified as “space hire” as other organisations hire the spaces to deliver the workshops. However, I classified them differently from event space hire as they have a particular remit with public engagement that not all organisations have. This is a sustaining activity for DEPW, of which business model is mainly based on the access to the equipment provided to their members, who often pay to participate in training courses, workshops or deliver through their “print-on-prescription” activities. Caraboo delivers workshops in schools, while Artworks offers in-house classes and an outreach programme in primary and secondary schools in their county.
- Café/Bar – Fish Factory has a café area, which is open during the day and in the evenings during events they offer food and drinks. Rising Sun also has a café/bar for drinks only; the other groups may set up temporary bars to sell drinks during events. In conversations with participants, they highlighted the importance of this activity to generate income that can be invested in projects and ameliorating the spaces.
- Artworks/Merchandise/Materials – Fish Factory is the only space with a dedicated “shop” area, they sell some merchandise and artworks from which they get a percentage and it

regularly generates a small income. Caraboo had a little space for displaying and selling artworks (mainly prints), Bon Volks has a case for displaying small objects and Ort Gallery has a small space for the sale of publications. Sourcing and selling materials to members generates income for Caraboo and Bon Volks. Selling merchandise at events is a considerable income for Proforma; Shy Bairns and The Penthouse rely on the selling of their commissions/artworks. Some groups may sell prints at exhibitions/online as part of or being the product of certain products, but this does not constitute a regular income.

- Residency – Some groups offer the possibility to artists to join them for a limited amount of time, CLAY and Fish Factory ask for a fee to take part in their residency programme and this generate some income. Others like Bon Volks and Haarlem Art Space have offered funded residencies.

Different organisations value “sustaining activities” differently, for some, they are a way to attract funding to deliver a programme of events. For others they are the reason why the organisation exists. Most of the time, though, they do not generate enough income to make the organisations financially sustainable in terms of remunerating labour, so directors need to fundraise through other projects. While project funding allows directors to be remunerated, it also means that they need to work on extra activities. None of the organisations is regularly funded, this means that an increment of resources to support existing activities or new ones is subjected to an award from a successful bid.

To show how funding impacts the financial structure of the organisations, I initially extracted financial data from their applications to Guild. This included an outline of income/expenditure for the 3 years prior to applying and the yearly financial accounts of the companies. From this, I hoped to access data about the income generated from “sustaining activities” and those from “funding” and how they balance out with the costs of the organisations but the documents provided partial breakdowns or inconsistent ways of reporting among the organisation. As such, I also reviewed cashflow forecasts between March 2020 and 2021 documents submitted to Guild as part of their research on the impact of Covid-19. They were more consistent as they followed the same template and provided a full breakdown of income and expenditure figures. Nine groups have decided to take part in the research, in this way, they are self-selected. Some organisations have provided two projections: a “healthy” one, based on historical data and normal conditions and a “crisis” one, based on a reduction in funding and lowered earned income. Table 4 shows that only four groups, highlighted in green, in a “healthy” situation forecasted enough earned income to cover core costs. Highlighted in red are the other organisations, which in a “healthy” situation need to rely on extra funding to cover their costs.

			Bon Volks	CIWA	DEPW	Fish Factory	Ort Gallery	Shy Bairns	Two Queens
Income	Earned	Healthy 2020-21	£18,985	£11,450	£38,466	£123,810	£6,692	£3,858	£42,427
		Crisis 2020-21				£16,340	£6,222	£3,858	£41,927
	Funding	Healthy 2020-21		£85,750	£54,378		£93,840	£4,620	£24,517
		Crisis 2020-21				£19,720	£67,023	£1,420	
	Total income	Healthy 2020-21	£18,985	£97,200	£92,844	£123,810	£100,532	£8,478	£66,944
		Crisis 2020-21				£36,060	£73,245	£5,278	£41,927
Expenditure	Core Costs	Healthy 2020-21	£23,690	£35,962	£22,605	£110,578	£22,045	£3,061	£31,278
		Crisis 2020-21				£82,869	£23,765	£3,061	£31,278
	Programme	Healthy 2020-21		£41,667	£53,808		£52,120	£1,020	£40,677
		Crisis 2020-21					£54,470		
	Tot Exp	Healthy 2020-21	£23,690	£77,629	£76,413	£110,578	£74,165	£4,081	£71,955
		Crisis 2020-21				£82,869	£78,235	£3,061	£31,278
Profit	Healthy 2020-21	-£4,705	£19,571	£16,431	£13,232	£26,367	£4,397	-£5,011	
	Crisis 2020-21				-£46,809	-£4,990	£2,217	£10,649	

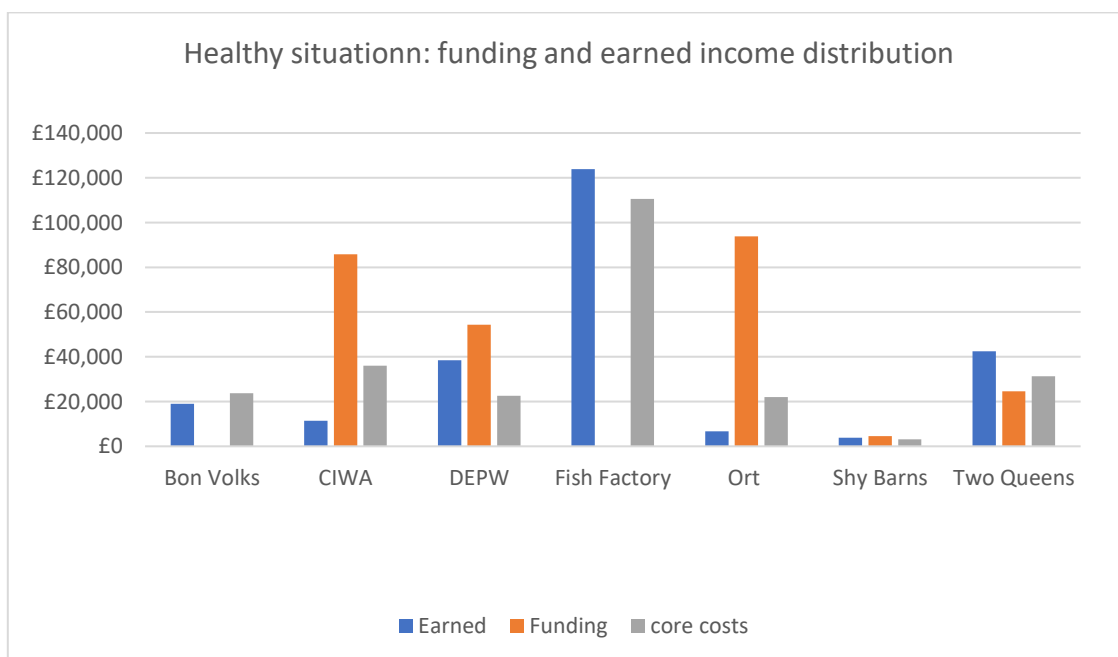
Table 4 Cashflow forecasts March 2020-21

The data is a forecast so it is not fully reliable, moreover in some of the cases where only the “healthy” forecast is provided, they already accounted for a loss in the activities that generate earned income, so it does not really reflect a “healthy”/ normal condition, but it partially accounts for impact of the Covid-19 restrictions. This is the case of Bon Volks, in which in normal conditions (as per the company’s accounts and explained in the interview) the rent paid by members for their studios would be enough to cover core costs.

The “shock” created by the pandemic has highlighted the precarity of this model, which does not have built-in a generation of surplus or reserves as the accompanying statement to the forecast comments:

“This crisis has highlighted that our current business model, or lack of, is probably unsustainable. We operate in a precarious way, in order that rents for the Members are kept as low as possible. In return, the Members provide a service to the organisation, whether it is maintenance or in an organisational role. These roles allow our outgoings to be as low as possible. However these roles have no intrinsic cash value to the organisation.” (Covid Contextual Narrative Bon Volks)

This forecast also give an idea of the difference between the income generated by sustaining activities and funding impact on the overall budgets of the organisations. The image below (Figure 19) shows how only three organisations have forecasted in their budget more earned than funded income in a “healthy situation”.



**Figure 19 Healthy situation: funding and earned income distribution.**

Funding is usually restricted which means that it needs to be spent on specific projects and it cannot be used as a buffer in time of crisis. Robinson (2010, p. 33) describes it as the “Poverty trap”:

“where a feeling that funding is never sufficient for aspiration comes to shape behaviours in a damaging way. No financial flexibility is generated, as all funding is put into activity, and therefore they are always vulnerable to disturbance, even success”.

While the situation may seem “unsustainable” for a lot of the organisations locking them in the poverty trap, with perceptions of their models as an “obstacle” or “fragile”, Bogen (2019, p.108) argues that:

“a definition of sustainability in the not-for-profit sector is that an organisation is only financially sustainable if its core work will not collapse, even if its external funding is withdrawn. If this were applied to the subsidised arts/cultural sector in Europe, practically all organisations would have to be considered to be unsustainable”.

Instead, he argues for a wider notion of sustainability that goes beyond the cashflow:

“If you want to be sustainable, you first need to define what this means for you. You should also determine what success means and would look like if and when you achieve it. As with vision, values and purpose this should be done organisation-wide with as many of its people involved as is possible. When defining sustainability, do not just include finances, funding and income, but look at all areas of your work and operation such as activities, audiences, artists, buildings and people” (Bogen, 2019, p. 110).

Both sustaining activities and funded activities generate complex layers of value and are able to attract other resources and draw on intangible assets, this combination of elements brings to play other factors, other than the financial, in the sustainability of these organisations. This is echoed by Robinson (2010, p. 33):

“Alongside such organisations [in the poverty trap] – which are usually this way not inherently, but because of a mindset of not adjusting to available resources – are a second group of organisations that are persistent and cope with whatever changes come their way. They will be inventive in gaining support when it is needed, drawing on strong networks and a very strong identity”.

Even though the cashflow budgets I have presented look “unsustainable”, these organisations have made it work before the pandemic, and it needs to be noted that the cashflows are forecasted based on the information available at the time of the projection. Therefore they do not account for other



funds secured or generated through the year. Moreover, by reducing activity and thanks to the emergency funding unlocked during the pandemic, some organisations did better than in usual conditions. If they persisted, this might be through intangible assets and thanks to the specific values and organisational cultures imbedded in the organisations. For this reason, it seems necessary to investigate the motivations and values that pushed the founders to start their organisations and how they have been integrated with their functioning. The next chapter will focus on the founders' motivations for starting their organisations and what success may look like for them.

#### 6.4 Summary

In Chapter 3, we have seen that models of businesses exist to support practitioners and academics in mapping how an organisation creates value. I have decided to try to classify the models of the organisations in Guild as proposed by Kimbell (2019) to try and understand what this kind of analysis can bring. As King (2019, p. 178) argues, it is important to remember that “we should understand ‘business models’ not in terms of a ‘rigid’ set of requirements but rather, as a flexible set of supports that can be adapted to meet the particular needs of specific organizations in certain situations”. As business model change and innovation are championed to be the key to making organisations more sustainable and resilient (Royce, 2011; McCullagh, 2017; BritainThinks, 2018; Woodley *et al.*, 2018; Bogen, 2019; ACE, 2020; Rex, 2020), the Business Model Canvas is often adopted in aid of this process (Fitzgerald, 2019). In Chapter 3, I have explained how the Business Model Canvas works, and I find the completion order, even if it's just a suggestion, and the logic behind thinking about the blocks that make up a business model interesting, in fact businesses are thought to have a “competitive advantage” when they address specific customers' needs and entrepreneurs should always think first about their customers/audiences (Wirtz *et al.*, 2016). However, besides a couple of examples, when asked to describe their business both in the applications to Guild and in the interviews, participants would start by describing the kind of activities they run, and then they would speak about all the external “disturbances” (both opportunities and threats), that affected the business development.

Rather than starting from the customers/audiences and their needs to which the organisations respond to establish their competitive position in the market, as the use of the canvas would suggest, participants started first by describing the type of intervention. When asked to retrace their history and the motivation behind starting their organisations, with the business model canvas exercise during the away day and the interviews, the groups were led on a self-reflexive process and were able to reconnect their stories chronologically and think about the interdependencies of the different elements (like the canvas' blocks), from the value proposition to how they evolved to deliver certain services and programmes of events.

So when we talk about business model change it is not just about identifying the business category and how it can be changed into another one, but understanding and connecting how pluralist values and experiences drive an organisation and orient its culture and practices. The lack of strategic planning that the volatile nature of young enterprises show is partially due to the lack of skills, experience and strategic planning on the one hand, but on the other, it also signals a cultural infrastructure not prepared to support these kinds of initiatives and invest in the strengthening of business models (e.g. the difficulty to get loans or funding for organisational development rather than delivery of activities).

Still, the idea itself of analysing arts organisations with traditional business tools helps to shed light between “sustaining activities” and the “adding value activities”. Most of the models for arts organisations are based on models of the service industry (Potts *et al.*, 2008; Boix and Soler-Marco, 2014; Horng, Chang and Chen, 2016; Madudová, 2017), funders and public policies have been adopting more and more a business language, hence overcoming the resistance that is usually found in art organisations towards this language and mechanisms could actually be beneficial. Tapping into different languages and frameworks (e.g. the innovation discourse and the creative economy) could support the business case and activities for arts organisations and highlight the potential for different areas of business development. The expression “portfolio of models” (Li, 2020) is used to indicate businesses that run at the same time multiple businesses models. This could efficiently describe how the Guild participant organisations work between core and added value activities. With most of the organisations operating on a project-to-project basis, the business model can quickly shift from one to a “portfolio” for a period of time and then down-size again. This is the case, for example, of Caraboo, where their sustaining activities are based on the “service model”, but by fundraising, they can expand to a “product” and “commissioner” models. For example, Bon Volks presents the most straightforward model as a studio-provider. However I wonder if they could better articulate the value their offer outside of the artist-led narrative. Bon Volks could use different languages to communicate this:

- To artists and practitioners: they provide affordable studio spaces for artists and creative practitioners;
- To public funders: by proposing the organisation as a key player in the local cultural infrastructure, offering affordable studios to practitioners that can start-up their business from there;
- To other businesses: they essentially operate a business-to-business (B2B), where the service provided is the business premises to other businesses (self-employed and other creative micro-companies that rent studios).

In the particular case of Bon Volks, the director already wanted to separate the organisation from the artist-led narrative, arguing that the make-up of their studio holders was a lot more varied with different practitioners that belong more generally to the creative industries. Is it artists that need to learn a business language and comply with “narratives of resilience and adaptation” (Newsinger and Serafini, 2019) or funders should be prepared to understand the multi-faceted ways in which these organisations operate and impact the industry, the market and the audiences?

While the knowledge and methods for analysing arts organisations from business studies and business tools like the Business Model Canvas can offer different points of view and vocabulary, those running arts organisations should be aware of the limits of applying these ideas. Bogen (2019, p. 106) argues that:

“The danger with overly using and embracing management theories, concepts and methodologies is that they may look great on paper, in a classroom, at a conference or on a PowerPoint presentation but often have little or no relevance and applicability to the real world and day-to-day realities of working in the sector”.

For example, trying to operate a whole business remodelling to achieve sustainability, aiming for “business model change”, organisations’ directors risk getting stuck around a fixed idea of a model, seeing their current model as an obstacle, however “attempting to reproduce other organisations’ models by a simple “copy and paste” does not work when it comes to the arts” (Bogen, 2019, p. 106). Moreover, sustainability cannot only be achieved “internally” but it needs to be understood systemically, as Bogen argues (2019, 106):

“locality, cultural traditions, history, environment, culture policies, legislation, economics, demographics, climate and national, regional and local politics are all particular and unique to each organisation and artist, affecting, shaping and influencing how it or they work and operate”.

In the following chapter, we will see how the entire foundation of these organisations responds to their context, hence affecting how they have been set up and considering their sustainability not only in financial terms but also according to their missions and values.

## 7 Motivations

As seen in the previous chapter and the literature review, the motivations and founding values of organisations and enterprises are important factors to be considered when devising business models and implementing strategies in all sectors (Royce, 2011; Perkmann and Spicer, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2019), and especially the cultural sector as founding values are strictly linked to the production of the symbolic value of culture. Business models and management literature struggle to capture some of the dynamics in cultural organisations, proposing strategies, a business language and forms of success that are hardly accepted by practitioners who see them clashing with their visions and motivations. This limit has given rise to a specific strand of arts management literature and production of handbooks based on the practical experience of arts managers and directors. They argue for an understanding of sustainability and resilience that goes beyond finances and look at what the individuals involved want to achieve and how values are embedded in what arts organisation do (Radbourne and Fraser, 1997; Bilton and Cummings, 2014; Brindle and DeVereaux, 2016; Robinson, 2017; Bogen, 2018; Foster, 2018; Hoyle *et al.*, 2018).

While Rex (2019) traces the adoption of business and management tools in the creative industries back to the rise of the creative industries discourse in EU and UK economic and cultural policies, Poettschacher (2005) argues that the public image of creative microbusinesses plays a role in the way that policy makers have supported creative organisations. Micro creative businesses are seen as “semi-chaotic organizations positioned halfway between an artist’s studio and a business running on the management principle of ‘self-exploitation’” (Poettschacher, 2005, p. 177). Partly as a response to these “chaotic” organisations and labour conditions, we can see a growing interest not just in business settings, but also in higher education institutions in offering arts management and curatorial courses to provide efficient means of managing cultural production (Chong, 2010) and including elements of professionalisation in the fine art curriculum (Wyszomirski and Chang, 2017). The romantic notion of the artistic identity (Bain, 2005; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; Gill and Pratt, 2008), is constructed on the idea of the artist as the chaotic, rebellious, creative individual that pursues their practice even if this leads to being overworked and precarious life, seems to have been projected on creative organisations too. According to Poettschacher, this public image leads to a paradox where policy and research experts advocate for business support programmes “for a target group whose main ambition is to break the broadly accepted rules of business” (2005, p. 178).

Critical analysis of cultural labour sees this “ambition” to challenge the “accepted rules of business” generating a twofold effect: it reinforces the romantic notion of the artist and the desirability of this kind of work; it has been hijacked towards a neo-liberal discourse of the creative industries that

equates creativity with innovation as a driver of competitive advantages in knowledge economies and marks a change in funding priorities in economic and cultural policies (Oakley, 2009b). Most of the efforts from public policies and funding aim at making cultural and creative organisations more sustainable and resilient from a financial point of view. However, researchers and practitioners have been advocating for alternative metrics to capture the impact and value of cultural and creative organisations beyond their contribution to the economy (Reeves, 2002; Oakley, O'Brien and Lee, 2013; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016; Dovey *et al.*, 2016; Kaszynska, 2018; Romer, 2018b). This includes work that stresses the importance of measuring success and sustainability in relation to how the people involved in the organisations define them (Bogen, 2019). Similarly, Poetttschacher refers to "sustainability" saying that "without knowing the basic assumptions of the founders, it is almost impossible to support their business in a sustainable way" (2005, 178).

In the context of my research project running alongside Guild, this chapter aims to shed some light on the motivations and values driving artists to set up their organisations. Business and organisational studies concerning organisational bricolage also focus on values to understand organisational dynamics (Duymedjian and Rüling, 2010; Perkmann and Spicer, 2014) and how culture plays an important factor in the evolution of organisations (Richerson, Collins and Genet, 2006). If in the previous chapter, I showed problematic the application of the business model as one of the tools adopted by business and management theories championed by policymakers to make arts organisations more sustainable and resilient, in this chapter I draw from the applications to Guild, observations and interviews with founders to understand better the founding motivations that artists have to start their own organisations and the ways in which they come to existence. This understanding can help to rethink business models and sustainability exploring the micro-dimensions of the founders' motivations.

The chapter is divided into three sections: in the first section, I highlight how the will to "do something different" suggests a reaction to the existing conditions and opportunities for artists to work (mainly lack of affordable spaces and support for emerging artists) and to the conditions of broader social contexts, the second section links the motivations to the values embedded in the modalities in which the organisations were set up (crowdfunding, strategic planning, the involvement of stakeholders). If, at first, the reactive character of artists' organisations seems to suggest that they should be framed in the context of resilience, in the last section, I discuss how taking together motivations and modalities could suggest that artists, through their organisations, strive towards achieving an ideal of sustainability that reflects their views and values on social, economic, environmental and cultural spheres. As suggested by Foster (2018), growth and financial sustainability are seen in arts organisations as a means to "sustain the purpose" of the organisation. This chapter also brings in the

foundations for the next chapter, which explores how the founders' value systems, which shapes the organisations at the beginning, affects organisational sustainability by shaping internal decision-making, organisational structures and culture.

### 7.1 Do Something Different

To understand motivations and values driving the organisations, all the interviews included a reflection on the formation phase of the organizations. Participants often tried to explain why they wanted to start their organisations by specifying what they wanted to do differently from other arts organisations in their local area. For example, claiming that they operate on a not-for-profit basis, that they are more accessible to emerging artists and deal with more "critical" or "experimental" artworks that would not be exhibited by other galleries. Poettschacher calls these diversifying characteristics "markers", "which allow entrepreneurs in the creative industries to develop a 'creative business identity'" (2005, p. 179). The narration of the beginning of the organisations is also tied to the practical ways in which they got to set up the organisations, how they secured space or initial funding. The modalities, addressed in the next chapter, in which the organisations came to exist, seem to reflect the will to practically try to embed funding values in the actions and steps that were taken to form the organisations.

Another part of the interviews focussed on exploring the relationship between fixed costs and income generation, with particular attention to those organisations that need to maintain a space and the conditions of rent of their premises. Income generation activities would usually include studio space rental for artists and the production of events and exhibitions. Founders were asked about various management situations for running the business (for example, who is involved and how is the decision-making process in regard to the selection of artists for a show or to become studio holders), that highlighted a set of values that linked to the founding aims and values. Questions followed about formal and informal communication processes and the day-to-day life of the organisation concerning patterns of work and what is needed to keep the organisation running. Another part of the interview was concerned with assumptions about the future of the business and what it would mean to "make it sustainable". From the viewpoint of the many participants, the questions had an insightful effect: more than once, I was told that taking the time of the interview to reflect on how the organisations started and how some things have happened was appreciated as it had led them to reconnect motivations and values to the development of the organisation.

Nuanced motivations emerged behind starting their own organisations or deciding to take up a space; what seems to be a thread running among all the organisations is that they wanted to "do something different". This implies a response to the "way something is", which concerned opportunities to access

the “artworld” and the conditions of creative labour, previous experiences in, and their perception of, arts organisations, institutions and artist-led organisations, and the lack of social and cultural spaces in their area or of “certain kind” of spaces. In all these instances, the artists aimed at opening spaces that would be welcoming to other artists and the public, offering opportunities for intellectual stimulation and collaboration, stimulating participation, and creating a community and sense of belonging.

I call the will to do things differently a “reactive driver”: it is “reactive” because it is a response to existing conditions of labour, representation of and support for artists in the cultural sector. It is a “driver” as it constitutes the driving motivation for starting their organisation. Reactive drives do not really come by surprise: being able to challenge the status quo is an inherent quality of creative labour as “good work” (Baker and Hesmondhalgh, 2011) and it is one of the main “markers” that historically distinguishes artist-run spaces from institutions and other arts organisations (Blessi, Sacco and Pilati, 2011; Detterer, 2012; Institute for Applied Aesthetics, 2012; Harbour, 2014; Coffield, 2015). Finding “alternative ways” to keep doing their work is also the very much celebrated aspect of resilience that make artists role models for entrepreneurs (Fletcher, 2008; Oakley, 2009b, 2014; Bilton and Cummings, 2010).

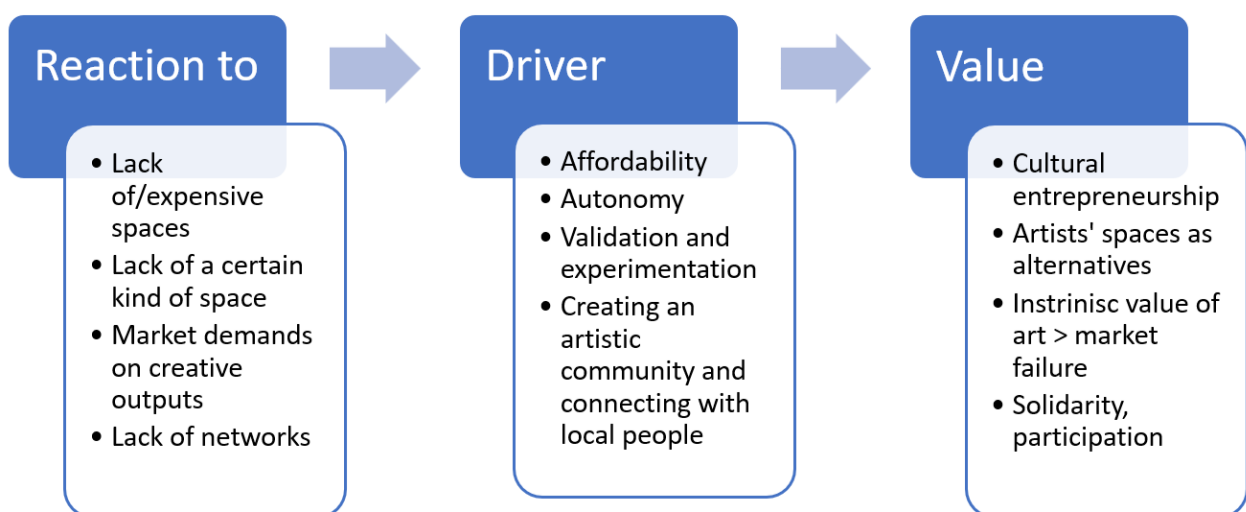
As seen in Chapter 4, authenticity, creativity, autonomy and self-determination are the most contested aspects among scholars (McRobbie, 2002, 2011; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Baker and Hesmondhalgh, 2011): some maintain that “cultural work is intrinsically autonomous”, while others contest this romanticised idea, asserting that cultural work is subject to the rule of capitalist markets and manipulated and instrumentalised by recent economic cultural policy (Banks, 2010, p. 252). Banks (2010, p. 252) tries to overcome this dichotomy proposing the idea of the autonomy of cultural labour as “negotiated” between it being a “foundational normative principle” for artistic work and as an essential feature “for the profitable commodification of culture”.

The primary data of this research clearly show the tensions that this negotiation produces between the foundational values of autonomy that underpin the organisations and the practical necessity to find ways to produce economic capital that can support their activities. For example, the main challenge for the founder of Bon Volks is to make the organisation “financially robust” while making sure the “core value” is shared and embedded in the organisation:

“I think sustainability in terms of the organisation is removing the precariousness in which it exists now, that is also my precarity. In terms of sustainability that's.. it is giving tools to exist further into the future. It would be sustainable by providing financial role to someone safeguarding it, so that it can move forward. I always use the term robust, which I suppose it's

almost like resilience, but for me sustainability means that the organisations has a robust structure in place that everybody knows. As opposed this of kind of amorphous thing that's based on something I said once, you know something setting stone, something written down: "this is its core value". And if I went, then, someone could take that core value and continue it, so then it becomes sustainable, a thing that can go forward potentially" (Bon Volks, interview)

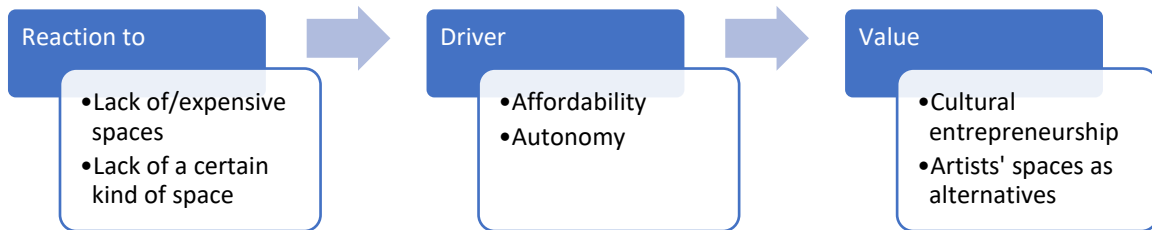
For the founder of Bon Volks, achieving sustainability means removing financial precarity to ensure the pursuing of a robust, shared, core value: the organisation cannot exist without one and the other. Interestingly, in the interviews, artists refer to values both explicitly and implicitly but never name specific ones; they rather speak about the activities generated by their motivation to do something different. Banks (2010) suggests that if artistic autonomy in relationship to commercial necessity is negotiated, it is important to remember that artists are constantly renegotiating their autonomy as individual subjects, tied to specific social structures and personal commitments. In this sense, artistic autonomy goes beyond the struggle between creative freedom and commercialisation, artistic autonomy becomes an ethical and social practice, which strives to produce cultural works that have a personal meaning and perhaps social impact (Oakley, 2009a; Banks, 2010). Thinking of reactive drivers as a heuristic to deconstruct the motivations for starting their own organisations, we can unearth "the values" by recognising the drivers/motivations as political and ethical re-actions that mobilise the values and beliefs of founders, and those involved in the organisations, in response to specific spatial, social, economic, cultural contexts. Figure 20 provides a summary of the reactive drivers and connected values explored in this Chapter.



**Figure 20** Reactive drivers as heuristic process based on primary data.



## 7.2 Something was needed – spaces for artists



**Figure 21** Reactive drivers, focus on affordability and autonomy.

Literature notes that many artists find a lack of spaces that are affordable or suitable. This often motivates artists to begin organisations that aim to deliver affordable spaces in which they can shape ways of working. This often leads to a kind of “entrepreneurial” working. This set of motivations was common across a number of Guild participants (e.g. Fish Factory, Bricks, Bon Volks, Two Queens.), and is summarised in Figure 21. This section will explore these in more detail to highlight how these motivations impact business models.

One of the main motivations for artists to start their organisation is to provide affordable studios as a reaction to the lack of studios or to their costs. This is, in particular, relevant to the founders’ experiences as graduates from fine art courses. I link the “affordability” driver to entrepreneurship, understood here as the activity that generates innovative services or products (Dew and Sarasvathy, 2007) responding to market demand for affordable studios. In her research on the notions of artistic identity and autonomy in art school graduates, Oakley (2009a, p. 288) finds that “scepticism about the possibility of external change for the better is deep, the notion of political/ethical responsibility on the individual remains and is seen to be connected to being an artist”. Opening their own organisations to better the provision of studios, artists take responsibility for “change” contributing to a form of “productive entrepreneurship” (Baumol, 1990; Aeeni *et al.*, 2019). However, this means also taking on the financial and management risks and challenges of starting a new creative business (HKU, 2010; Bilton and Cummings, 2014).

In particular, I think is useful to talk about cultural entrepreneurship as a kind of entrepreneurialism that Oakley (2014, p. 145) describes as “often of the forced, or at least adaptive” and happening “not under self-selected circumstances”. In this framing, we can see cultural entrepreneurship as the founding value of the driver to provide affordable spaces as a response to lack of spaces - for cultural entrepreneurs are like “revolutionaries, they are sometimes creating something that did not exist before, but in an environment of increasing precariousness and constraint” (Oakley, 2014, p. 145).

This section also explores the markers that are used to define “the kind of organisation” they want to run. Artists talked about being able to maintain their creative freedom through setting up a “kind of space” in contrast to other “kinds” such as National Portfolio Organisations and commercial galleries. They value behind this motivation is linked to how the politics of artist-led spaces and how these kinds of organisations based on self-management and DIY practices allow practitioners to take alternative stances on the values promoted by neoliberal logics (Schofield, 2020).

### 7.2.1 Availability and affordability

The Guild open call focused on the precarity of artists’ spaces, specifically referring to challenges around securing and refurbishing a long-term space, and the management, maintenance and use of temporary spaces. The application form included specific questions on this “If you have a regular/permanent space please tell us more about the physical space or venue you”, “Who owns your space?”, “If rented give details of your current lease”, “if you do not use a regular space please tell us how/where your group operates” (Guild open call document). In the application guidance document, East Street Arts was shortly described, including this particular sentence “The registered charity also manages a large number of temporary and semi-permanent spaces nationally; 300 over its 25 year history. The experience and expertise of East Street Arts will be a driving force of the Guild programme” (Guild open call document).

Given this particular angle of the project around space, the open call appealed to many groups currently looking for a space with the hope that ESA would help them to find one. It was made a note of this, so that the space team at ESA could pick it up and offer support to these groups. However, there was a tendency to stress the space factor and many applicants seemed to have misunderstood what was the aim of Guild and how they could have benefitted from the programme (Observations from the selection process). The focus on the precarity of spaces is one of the main contextual issues to which Guild, as a Sector Support Organisation, responds.

In terms of the sector’s advocacy remit of Guild, it can be considered a success to see a high number of applications, also geographically spread, that confirm literature, sector studies and the assumption from which the whole project stems from about the number and variety of these spaces (NFASP, 2010; We Made That, 2014; Creative United, 2016; Pearman, 2017; Tbr, 2018; Romer, 2019; Sharratt, 2019). While applications were spread across the country there was a concentration in particular cities such as London (11), Bristol (10), Leeds (9), Manchester (5) and Birmingham (5). They are England’s biggest cities and well-studied examples of cultural planning approaches to cultural policy and city regeneration (Evans and Shaw, 2004). The concentrated numbers of applications in these cities show the conflicting results of such policies, which positively impacted the branding of “creative cities” and

the development of creative clusters but where “local clusters and ‘creative ecosystems’ found it difficult to thrive and sustain” (Pratt, 2008; Harvey, Hawkins and Thomas, 2012; Banks and O’Connor, 2017, p. 644).

The founder of Fish Factory recalls that after renting the first warehouse to offer studio spaces and exhibition spaces, the demand for studios increased very quickly, “it became clear that what people needed was studio space so we just started dividing the space up in a really basic way and started building little units” (Fish Factory interview). Applicant groups also showed awareness of how availability and affordability were affected by the wider sector’s landscape and local cultural and social policy strategies.

This was particularly evident in applications from groups in Bristol where they were linking wider infrastructural weaknesses to their motivations for starting their own organisations or for getting support to make their organisational sustainable. This move was also informed by the Bristol Visual Art Review published by the Arts Council just months before the launch of Guild (March 2018). Showing awareness of this, the Brunswick Club described itself in direct relation to context of Bristol as evidenced in the Review:

“A “collective of collectives”, the Brunswick Club provides a space, platform and much-needed voice for artists in Bristol. Bristol is the British city with the highest density of working artists of all kinds after London and Brighton (ACE 2018 Visual Arts Review) yet the artist-led sector faces existential threat: “It is clear that a large number of practitioners currently living and working in Bristol are facing significant challenges because of the combined impact of factors that include the rapid rate of property development in the city, suspension of business rates relief, decreasing affordability of studio/ project spaces. Recent acute pressure on properties accommodating large groups of artists is resulting in a reduction in the number of artist collectives in the city” (Brunswick Club application, for the Review’s quote cited in the application see Arts Council England, 2018, p.11)

The review clearly admitted gaps and the need for shifting investments in the visual arts infrastructure in the city: “despite recent positive developments, there are concerns that Bristol’s visual arts sector is not as strong in some quarters as it should be” (Arts Council England, 2018, p. 3). In their application to Guild, the beginning of Bricks is positioned as a response to the climate in the city and the lack of affordable spaces:

“in Bristol right now there is a perfect storm with many different changes and uncertainties coming together to be a disruptive force in the visual arts ecology. Not least changes to

leadership in the city's anchor arts organisations, 40% drop in city council arts funding, NPO funding cuts to some of our major institutions, property market boom and wider societal changes. We are setting up Bricks to respond to the increasing trend of artist spaces being closed down due to lack of affordable, sustainable and accessible venues and arguably lack of robust mixed economy business models common among studio providers" (Bricks application)

Similarly, Bon Volks was established in another area that shows of signs culture-led urban regeneration process where local artists have been "marginalised or overlooked by a consumption-oriented policy" (Ward, 2016). From the 1990s, changes in the city aimed at supporting the growth of the creative industries have attracted a growing number of professionals, and studio providers have started to pop up too. Despite the number of organisations offering studio spaces, in 2015 when the founder moved to the city where there were no studios available, or at least of the kind of "messy" type he wanted:

"there were four studio buildings already but they were all full. Many did not provide actual like artists' studios, like just a couple of them.. the majority are just providing desks and stuff like that. So there was **a feeling**, and I needed a studio as well, and I could not get a studio anywhere, I asked around to see if I could (get one) because the idea for doing this was still in its infancy, perhaps if I got a studio then, it would have taken longer" (Bon Volks interview)

It is interesting to note how the founder reflects in hindsight about the motivation for starting the organisation. It seems that he practically took on the issue of not finding a studio space for himself by opening his own studios. However, if he had found a studio, perhaps the process would have taken longer as he would not have needed the pressure to start up his own project. When asked if finding a studio would have meant not having the need to start his own organisation, the director explained that for him, Bon Volks it is not just about finding a studio for himself or providing artists' studios, but offer, as we will see below, a different "kind" of experience.

Among the eight organisations interviewed, only three (Fish Factory, DEPW, Two Queens) founders were born and spent the majority of their life in the place where they opened their organisation. In their cases, the beginning of the organisation is strictly connected to the founders' experience of wanting to continue their artistic practice after graduating. In other cases, artists moved to another place to study and then stayed there, often starting their organisation only after having found some stability and grown their network in the city.

Recalling how they started Two Queens, one of the directors explains it was a response to the lack of spaces for artists in the city and infrastructural support, and if they wanted to carry on working as artists after University they had to set something up:

“while we were studying there was a gallery run by artists but it closed the year after we graduated. The City Gallery, which was run by the City Council, existed since probably the early 90s, so local authority funded contemporary art through this gallery space but that ended the year that we were graduating because of budget cuts.. so essentially we were graduating into a city where there is no curated contemporary art programmes at all. So at that point, **it really felt like it was something that was needed**” (Two Queens interview)

Similarly, Fish Factory started as a way for the founder to keep working as an artist outside of the commercial gallery system, so after graduating, she started organising exhibitions with her friends from University to show the work of other young artists:

“When I finished uni in 2009, I wanted to show my work so I started organising exhibitions with one of my friends and like fairly quickly just really enjoyed the organising part of it [...] I was doing that for a few years and just like building up a network and learning how to do it [...] because I really wasn’t in to doing commercial photography it turned out, it’s really horrible and competitive and just too commercial basically, so I started thinking about opening a gallery” (Fish Factory interview).

In the applications and interviews, it is made clear that many organisations aim at working with Universities, while this represents another opportunity for fundraising, their collaboration with universities also means that the organisations can support the practice of students and graduates. For example, Assembly House explained in their application that their

“core team and studio holders mostly graduated in 2013-15, our connections to current students now need to be more actively cultivated, so that we don’t lose touch with the thriving student creative scene in Leeds, or fail to address their current needs in terms of resources and opportunities” (Assembly House Guild application).

In the applications and interviews, almost all Guild participants explain that they are involved with local universities or directly with students, they offer placements, host students’ exhibitions and/or involve students in the programming of exhibitions and events. Blessi, Sacco and Pilati (2011) explain that independent artist-run organizations develop partnerships with local universities to promote artistic and research projects of mutual interest.

### 7.2.2 This kind of space

Many organisations were concerned with creating alternative, autonomous spaces. This was a key driver and discussed in contrast to the constraints of kinds of funding (e.g. NPO status). The impact of this was that it led to adopting particular structures (e.g. non-profit, artist-led), which in turn impacts

on the sustainability of their business models (Chapter 6) and particular ways of working (Chapters 7 and 8). Poettschacher “markers” can be useful to explore reactive drivers as they are used “in order to demonstrate a difference between creatives of the one kind and creatives of the other kind” (Poettschacher, 2005, p. 178). In the quotes above, we see how founders seem to describe their organisations in relation to them being like or not some “kind of space” they have in mind. Blessi, Sacco and Pilati (2011) and Coffield (2015) argue that a “model” for artist-run initiatives cannot be defined because each organisation is “unique” while at the same time, they show a number of common traits. In signalling a “kind of space”, the participants point to different characteristics positioning their organisations as alternatives to specific examples, as something they want to or not be like. They seem to indicate four macro-areas of reference: commercial galleries, institutions (established, regularly public-funded organisations), creative industries, artist-led spaces. The “kinds” of organisations are mainly shaped by founders’ motivations, “kinds” are also understood in relation to how founders view different organisations’ status. In the interviews, participants have expressed different personal judgments towards how organisations are perceived in relation to the ways they are funded, which affect their reputation and produce a certain status.

#### *7.2.2.1 National Portfolio Organisations*

For example, Two Queens is described as the only not “national portfolio organisation or council funded” organisation in the local area (Two Queens interview). Though, Two Queens’s programme is regularly funded through Project Grants by Arts Council England, the same body that funds National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs). Project Grants and NPOs have attached different expectations and requirements from cultural organisations (Arts Council England, 2016), with the latter requiring a tight relationship with the ACE’s Relationship Manager, a track record of activities and a degree of stability and financial security, since applications are open two years in advance from the investment period. For this reason, NPOs are usually seen as “established” and with more tights to the funding body, which affects their ability to work freely and their perceived status and reputation. Describing Two Queens as non-NPO or council founded, the director reinforces the independent status of its organisation (Two Queens interview).

Different from Two Queens, the director of Ort Gallery believes that their programming and public engagement should grant it NPO status, and the subsequent financial security through income streams, public and not privately funded, that “align with their work” (Ort Gallery Interview). Similarly, Two Queens value the fact that “as an independent space we are not tight to the council” or that they are not subject to an institutional framework, e.g. a University gallery, because they want to freely purpose their “political ambition” (Two Queens interview). For Two Queens, sustainability is tight to

being able to exist on the long-run while maintaining “political independence” and creative autonomy, in this context the director brings another example “like Ikon Gallery” as organisation that started as “artist-run” and is perceived as maintaining a certain freedom alongside its NPO status (Two Queens interview).

One of the directors of DEPW reflected on his personal development and the development of the organisation, suggesting that to apply for NPO funding the organisations would need to expand its plans and activities taking some risks. To acquire NPO status, the organisation would need to grow but because at the moment “they look after themselves well”, they would be just fine without it this kind of support and funding. Though, the director was also suggesting a vicious cycle for which being able to take risks and grow would also require staff to put more hours in to be able to develop the organisation to apply for NPO which, though, would require a scale of stability, funding and support that NPO funding can give.

#### *7.2.2.2 Creative industries/ commercial enterprises*

Most of the organisations sell artworks or gadgets however, in many cases, that is not an avenue to build a sustainable income. This is due to the fact the profit is limited and the majority of the income goes back to the artists, but also to the fact the organisations are not set up to be “commercial”. An example is Fish Factory, as quoted above, where they needed to find another way of generating income because they did not want to be “super commercial”. Similarly, the director of Ort Gallery explains:

“We basically don't sell and that is because we're not a commercial gallery. We spend no time setting up relationships with buyers because that's not what we do as a community interest company. When we plan our financial sustainability we know that is not really the route we want to go down” (Ort Gallery interview).

The directors of Two Queens’s identity is described in contrast to other “more commercial” organisations:

“In the last six months Space Y and Space X opened but people have a perception of how Two Queens and them are different. The artists there, perhaps, are more commercially oriented, or at least that their intentions are. Whereas here is seen as being somehow more conceptually invested or, like, critically rigorous, and that doesn't necessarily reflect the art that is being made in the studios here, we have a very wide range of people, but at least in terms of the gallery and the direction of us as the people running it” (Two Queens interview).

Being “not commercial” is understood differently by the interviewed organisations and it has to do with the founders’ values, motivations and the work that the organisations do through their exhibitions and public programming. Dan, the director of Two Queens describes Space X as “not a not-for-profit organisation” because it was started “an enterprise on behalf of two people”, while Two Queens started with “25 people, its origins are more a collective expression of needing a space” (Two Queens interview). The interviewed director of Two Queens recognises both organisations as “artist-led”, however, he sees the motivations for which they were set up, their “intentions”, marking the difference between Two Queens and Space X. He suggests that the public perception is different because artist-led spaces as they have a different “aura” (Two Queens interview). Though, Space X is registered as a community interest company and described as an “enterprise on behalf of two people”, while Two Queens is a private company limited by guarantee and it has two directors who shape the “direction” of the organisation (Two Queens interview). According to their legal structure and activities, the organisations look very similar but the director, by focusing on the external perception that Dan thinks his organisations and Space X have suggests a divide between them, bringing into question how the initial motivations, or “intentions”, are still acted on today and whether this could affect public perception and consequent public engagement, reputation and funding.

Ort Gallery is also self-described as not “commercial” and it has been linked to its legal status as community interest company, however the interview shows that the legal status does not really define these organisations. What is important for artists/founders are the reasons behind the work they do:

“We don't think that selling artworks is the best way of doing it (being financial sustainable) because there's a big disconnect between commercial galleries and artist-led spaces and that is because it doesn't align with the work we do on a day-to-day basis whereas there's other income streams that do align with it” (Ort Gallery interview).

Distancing themselves from the market and economic consideration of the artworks, artists show two different ambitions: wanting to find ways to secure income to fund artists’ labour (both those involved in running the organisations and creating the artworks) that align with their values, and protect cultural and artistic production “free from commercial taint” (Banks, 2010, p. 235). Being “commercial” is mostly used with a negative connotation and is often associated with negative conceptions of “enterprise” and “business”. Another point of reference for the interviewed organisations is the “creative industries”. Again here, we find contrasting positions, with Two Queens remarking the difference between their organisation as “messy”, “where we can do things quite freely”, as opposite to the Council-run Space Y “a kind of creative industries like, enterprise driven, version of art and design” (Two Queens interview).



### 7.2.2.3 *Artist-led spaces*

In most instances, the desire to do something different is linked to previous experiences in artist-run organisations. It can be animated by a positive connotation, taking inspiration from them to adopt a collaborative working ethos:

“I was part of another artist-led space before called Turf Projects, that was in London [...]. The founder kept driving it and she took it to a sustainable place. The whole kind of thing of openness and accessibility that I saw happen in Turf, that was something that I really wanted to see in our organisation” (Caraboo interview).

The “sustainable place” refers to the capacity of the organisation to be able to survive and financially support the artists running it, as well as achieving sustainability between being led by the founder and being flexible to keep it open and accessible for other artists to collaborate. Associating and juxtaposing “kinds of spaces”, founders expose their personal beliefs and values about what they want their organisation to be. Even when there are no points of reference besides commercial galleries and public institutions, trying to find a way to fund an “alternative space”/something different remains an objective:

“there wasn’t really anything to look up to or take reference from in my just local vicinity so I was thinking about this for a while and then started to think ‘well, if I don’t want to be super commercial, selling paintings, maybe I could do some other stuff with the space to be able to pay the rent and maybe that would work’” (Fish Factory interview).

After starting Fish Factory in a rural area, the founder found a homonymous space in Iceland that offers studios and residency spaces for artists. The two organisations got in touch and started to exchange knowledge and artists between the two places. This experience made the founder of Fish Factory more “attuned” to similar spaces and organisations, visiting them to see how they work (Fish Factory interview). Peer learning is recognised as an important factor in the development of artists’ groups (Robinson, 2010) and part of the Guild’s budget is dedicated to support groups to travel and visit other organisations in UK and abroad. This kind of support was particularly appreciated by groups in small/isolated towns where they may be the only organisation run by artists. Seeing or participating in other artists’ spaces and learning about them are recurring elements that shape the motivations for artists to start their own organisations and they provide examples to develop their own models.

Another example is the first iteration of Ort Gallery as an “art-café” was modelled on the “Berlin DIY café set up”, built and furnished with found, donated and recycled materials (Ort Gallery Interview). This choice had practical reasons, like keeping costs low, as well as bringing something different not

just to the neighbourhood, which the director describes as populated by corner shops and garages, but to the city:

“in this neighbourhood there are lots of garages, lots of corner shops, lots and lots of curries houses and lots of fried chicken shops but there was no... none of that independent, well, I guess, art related space. Even if our organisation was a coffee shop, there was always something else to it. [...] it is not something Birmingham has at all” (Ort Gallery interview).

Previous experiences in artist-led spaces also have negative connotations or example. Ross, the founder wants Bon Volks not to be like the kind of organisation he experienced, where artists work in isolation and in cold environments. Differently from Caraboo, which was founded with the goal of becoming “like this kind of organisation”, fostering openness and accessibility, the director of Bon Volks is trying not to replicate “this kind of space” and certain conditions conducive to hostile working environments:

“I wanted to make a space that I haven't seen existed and I wanted to prove that that space could exist. It's more like a personal project in a way, I hadn't been into a studio that had central heating, where people know each other or where they can potentially collaborate with each other, help each other out and people take care of the building... all these things I haven't found anywhere else, so I want to see if you could make that” (Bon Volks Interview)

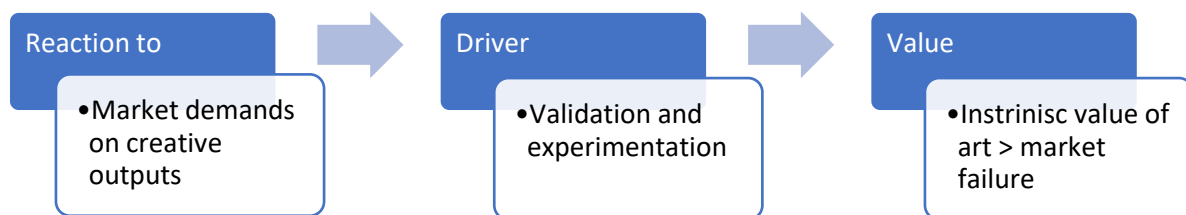
Ross marks a distinction between types of practitioners and spaces. He perceives “good” artists to have an “individualistic, careerist, self-involved nature” that drive their career (Bon Volks interview, see also Bain, 2005, on the artist as romantic genius). Even though the founder has graduated in arts and worked as an artist, the organisation can be technically understood as “artist-run/led”, however he would not associate Bon Volks to “artist-led spaces” and the relative culture, which “seems a bit vague” (Bon Volks interview). He expresses a more positive inclination towards the “creative industries” explaining that the studios are used by “creatives” and that “this organization may end up going not to be about artists” but people that work collaboratively and towards the “greater good” (Bon Volks Interview). He also takes references from previous experiences in “some spaces” where the atmosphere was “participatory”, which he wants replicate and “amplify and make it part of the funding ethos” (Bon Volks s interview).

#### 7.2.2.4 *Other kinds*

Two other “kinds” are used to describe the organisations: DEPW is self-described as a “cooperative”, even though it is registered as CIC, and Rising Sun, registered as a company and a charity, is “volunteer-led” (Guild applications). Understanding organisational forms as the legal forms in which artists’ organisations are set up, Sholette comments (2011, p. 162) “the choice of organizational form appears

strictly tactical, neither holding any clear ideological or long-term significance to the group members”. Value is put on the organisational structure and the kind of involvement expected by those involved in running the organisation. This resonates with DEPW where the term cooperative is adopted as a legacy of the non-formalised collaborative way in which the organisation was started by other artists. While this legacy is rooted in an artist-led approach, and highlights an “alternative” way of working from more traditional hierarchical structures, participatory and collective methods of decision making have been built in the ethos and way of working of the organisation developing their identity as a cooperative (DEPW Interview). Rising Sun followed a similar trajectory to DEPW, as it was collectively started and adopted from the beginning a flat structure where anyone could be involved to help run the organisation (Rising Sun Interview). In this case, the organisation was started by a collective with diverse members and carries a 25 years history of self-management and collective practices with an ethos similar to the social and independent cultural centre found in Europe (Platt, 1980; Szczelkun, 2002; Martínez, 2004, 2007; Mommaas, 2004; Martí-Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2011; Waldo and Odegaard, 2011; Moore, 2012; Michelini and Méndez, 2013; Navarro, 2014; Borchi, 2018; Martínez López, 2018).

### 7.3 Support for artists



**Figure 22 Reactive drivers, focus on market demands on creative outputs.**

This section exposes another motivation: the support that the organisations in Guild offer to other artists through their activities and the creation of social and professional networks. As seen in the previous section, maintaining creative autonomy is a major goal for these organisations. The desire for artists to maintain self-determination (Banks, 2010; Oakley, 2014), translates into the motivation to set up their own organisations. The interviewed artists founded their “kind of” organisations to support their own experimentation but also the creative freedom of other artists. This driver is connected to their refusal of commercialisation, as seen in the previous section, and it is a reaction to the limits they perceive are imposed by other organisations and the market (e.g. preference to commercial aesthetics, avoid funders’ intrusions in decision making) (Sholette, 2011; Detterer and Nannucci, 2012; Beirne, Jennings and Knight, 2017).

Artists' organisations support the work that would not be supported otherwise: "if it's the kind of artwork that shows in every other gallery in Cornwall then we just say I'm sorry there are hundreds of galleries that take that kind of work and we are just trying to do something different" (Fish Factory Interview). It is not a matter of whether who run the organisation personally like the work or not, precedence is given to the intrinsic value of the art giving to support different practices even when this involves risk-taking and market-failure:

"L: part of that value system of the centre is that we value things that are different, risk taking, we value experimentation so in some ways you can't second guess what they might or might not do.

N: I think that's important. Part of it is that one of the question we always ask in programming meeting 'is this unique enough? is anyone doing this?'. If no one else is doing this and it sounds interesting then let's go for it, even if we don't know if it's going to work" (Rising Sun Interview).

The interviewed directors of Caraboo explained that they started the organisation to have "a project space for experimental and community art projects". One of the founders wanted to focus on technology, innovation and working with universities but they say that the direction "changed because of the people who were involved" (Caraboo interview). Still, they stress that Caraboo, as an organisation, maintains its nature in being experimental and community-led. The use of "community" needs clarification as it is often used ambiguously to mean the community of "members", which are the artists paying for studios and the other affiliated artists, and the "community" of local residents. In the case of Caraboo, being led by the community refers mainly to the members and artists involved but they also explained their commitment to include the local public. This ambivalence can be seen in how Caraboo is described in the interview as a "kind of space" with "accessible language" to the wider public and that simultaneously provides "artists' development".

I find interesting that, with my professional and academic background in events management and curating, I initially misunderstood what they meant with "artists' development". For me, artists' development refers to talks and workshops around the professionalisation of artistic practices offered by large public institutions; they would generally include advice on how to promote their work, work with curators and institutions, applying for funding and managing taxes and accounts. However, what they meant is "literally" the development of "art": offering space and opportunities to produce and show artworks, as a reaction to the fact the many artists struggle to find spaces to make works as well as exhibit them. The different understandings of "artists' development" reinforces the reactive character of supporting artists as a motivation for starting artists' organisations: the fact that practising artists and professional artists outnumber the resources that the existing cultural

infrastructure is able to offer in regard to spaces for making, public recognition and commercial representation, artists open their own organisations to try and support more artists and those practices that they think would not be supported otherwise. Similarly, in Ravetz and Wright's (2015, p. 15) research "most respondents expressed the opinion that the commercial art world was potentially detrimental to the development of high quality and original artistic practice". In this sense, as Besson (2017) observes, "artist-run spaces have become instruments for validating and legitimizing the artistic career".

Ravetz and Wright (2015, p. 1) report that artists operating outside of the gallery "differentiate between their own value systems and those of galleries" and "do not view gallery validation as a good fit for their values and practices". Validation is understood as the external, public and institutional "recognition of the credibility of artistic work" (Ravetz and Wright, 2015, p. 2) and work "outside of the gallery system" describes "a diverse range of practices and approaches, including being a (professional) practice in its own right, a supplement to studio-based work, or a combination of the two" (Ravetz and Wright, 2015, p. 3). They have identified "a lack of critical writing, art reviews, mentoring, website exposure, commitment by organizations to artists as opposed to a commitment to fixed term projects, and lack of funding streams for those working outside galleries" (Ravetz and Wright, 2015, p. 1). Established models for recognition and routes to validation for artists working outside of the gallery system "remain uncertain" and that is where the activities of artist-run organisations seem to provide value to the local and the more wider national cultural ecosystems (Blessi, Sacco and Pilati, 2011; Sholette, 2011).

Opening their "kind" of organisations, artists seem to provide a route for validation to practices that are not supported otherwise, providing affordable studios for the production of art and exposure, with exhibitions, writings and reviews. The validation that artists' organisations can provide is limited, given that they need to be externally validated themselves and do not have the status that a public institution is generally recognised to have. The support they provide still offers some external validation and opportunities for exposure: to apply for residencies, projects, or commissions artists usually need to have a track record of work that has been shown publicly. In this way, established institutions and organisations rely on the fact that others have supported that work, as sort of "talent-scouts" (Blessi, Sacco and Pilati, 2011), and this gives them some reassurance in terms of putting at risk their own reputation and credibility when deciding to engage with artists. In turn, when artists start to acquire prestige by working with established institutions, and they are associated with an artist-run space by having a studio or an exhibition there, the artists' validation is partially extended to the organisation that can claim to have supported and worked with the artist before. Examples can

be found in the applications to Guild, where different groups named artists they collaborated with or those that they have mentored.

In the interviews, two main ways in which artists validate their own spaces and others' work were discussed: by adhering to standards for exhibition making, and by performing an instrumental role in supporting artists' projects and networking, which will be addressed in the next section. When organising events and exhibitions, artists try to reach certain standards for exhibition that are associated with professional artistic work:

"J1: On that first opening night there was almost 150-200 people and we hardly knew any of them. And I think that set.. that was a snowball effect to... keep pushing our work to that kind of standard. Expectations, changing people's perception... transforming the space, every exhibition we do, we would transform it physically as well so that felt kind of fresh when you walk into that.

J2: the standards we always expect of ourselves are pretty high and I think that a lot come from your background as a freelance person that puts on exhibitions for big institutions. Actually I think not just yours, I think a lot of us we knew we could do it to that level" (Caraboo Interview).

Linking the professional standards for exhibitions to the experience of one of the director as a freelance technician for "big institutions", artists seem to recognise and accept conventions around the presentation of artworks that aligns with what O'Doherty (1999) calls the "white cube ideology". This effort for recognition through adopting art world's standards could be an example of the negotiation that Banks (2010) describes between keeping autonomy and having to participate in the economy.



Figure 23 Ort Gallery 2015 (Courtesy of Ort Gallery).

When I went to visit Ort Gallery, I felt a discrepancy between the kind of space the director described when it was still an art-café, in the building next door, and the kind of space the gallery is now. The director emphasised how the café was a space for gathering that could offer an alternative for different community groups to socialise and spend time in line with the organisation’s mission to attract non-art audiences and be a community space (Figure 23 and Figure 24).



**Figure 24 Ort Gallery September 2012 when was based at the Old Printworks (Photo from Ort Gallery Facebook page).**

During my first visit, I did not see the previous space, however I felt a divergence from that narration and the space I was sitting in, a cold room with a white desk and a chair at the end, neat lighting and a general “white cube” feeling (Figure 25). It was a rainy day and the gallery was empty, so perhaps I would have experienced it differently if the gallery had been busier. However, the space still gave me a sense of rigour, not a setting that would invite people to be social, spend time and form a community outside of specific public engagement events. When I asked the director about it, she argued that now the space is more accessible to families and people with mobility disabilities because it has a lift and it does not have physical obstacles in the middle of the room:

“the space looks this way because it came like this, we needed a new space, we found it and have been here only since June.. and we are obviously also still finding our feet. I completely agree with you that we've lost part of the community feel and the safeness that the cafe brought and when we were still above the cafe, even when we didn't run the café anymore,

it provided that and the old space definitely had more of a feeling where people would spend longer” (Ort Gallery Interview).



**Figure 25** Ort Gallery, November 2019 at Moseley School of Art (Photo from Ort Gallery Facebook page).

However, in the interview, the director also explained her struggle for institutional recognition and consequent steady funding income, she linked this to the fact that she works with unrepresented artists from ethnic minorities backgrounds and part of her and the organisation’s mission is to validate these artists’ work:

“if you somehow diminish the quality of these artists then you're buying into something that is already happening across the country, where a black artist is just seen as someone who runs the community workshop. That cannot ever happen, we need to give them the same profile and I know that we're not Ikon or East Side project” (Ort Gallery Interview).

She also spoke about the fact that she has built a reputation for herself as a curator through her organisation. She describes the “art world” as “smoke and mirrors” and having to “look professional and making things professional like putting the Arts Council logo” to keep doing what she does (Ort Gallery Interview): with a more “professional look”, the new space validate her work and that of the artists she works with.



In the same way, a professional-looking space validates both the organisation and the artists, they also mutually “take advantage” of each other to back up their projects and fundraising strategies. For example, talking about a funded project that one of the directors of DEPW ran in the past, they described it as not exactly aligning with their practice but that it would bring mutual benefit for the organisation and the artist’s career:

“it was very much for the benefit of the organisation, so it helps the organisation and it was project, from my point of view, that kept me going for a while. It was a project I wanted to run and nobody would have funded it if it was me running it on my own” (DEPW interview).

As artists, the founders of the organisations may use it to run their own projects, however many expresses the desire to make their organisations open to other artists, trying to involve others in the running of the organisation and make it less of a personal project. Directors at Caraboo explain how the programming of the organisations has been influenced by engaging with the “community of artists” that formed around the organisation: “we worked on collaborative projects with people and studio members have run their own workshops that are part of the events happening with the programme, with the main programme, that we present” (Caraboo interview). Caraboo’s programme is usually organised by the artists running the organisation, which means that they choose and invite the artists they want to work with.

However, they relinquish some ownership over the programme by letting other artists produce events and workshops as part of the organisation’s programme. Often, these are occasions for affiliated artists to share their own work but also to invite other artists. When the event is promoted under the organisation’s name it could be understood as counterproductive for the artists involved. If the artists are not established, more attention is directed to the hosting organisation, however this can still function as a path for validating their work. They can, in fact, share later their activities as “organisers” or “curators”, or if they participated by sharing their own artistic work, they could include these activities in their record of activities, which is legitimised by the fact that is shown through an organisation. Representation through other organisations is key to legitimising and validating the work as worth of being shared in a public setting, rather than being a painting in someone’s studio. The founder of Bon Volks explains the instrumental role of its organisation in supporting artists:

“The way I see it is that I am part of this organisation, this organisation is bigger than me. It can be used as a tool.. because if, say for instance, someone wants to get funding to do something such a project or whatsoever, you know, if they were just in their house over there, and they said I want to do this etc...it might be a little bit difficult but they said I want to do

this because I'm part of this organisation that has this track record of art things and social things, it suddenly makes it a lot more...a lot easier" (Bon Volks Interview)

In the case of Bon Volks, the majority of the projects are run independently by artists that have a studio there. In other organisations (e.g. Ort Gallery, Caraboo, DEPW, Two Queens) the artists/founders directly curate projects which may also involve the showcase of artistic practice. Understanding whether these projects work more for the benefit of the organisation or of the artists themselves lies on a fine line.

Often this causes frustration or a sense of dissonance in their identity as they struggle to reconcile their identities as artists and managers/directors. The management of studios and of organisation usually takes up most of their time, thus they struggle to dedicate time to their own practice. This was a key conversation in the Guild induction day and residency, where artists were discussing their identities and positions. In the interview with the directors of DEPW, they discussed the relationship between the work in the organisation and their own practice and agreed that lack of time to be devolved to their own practices would be the "main determinant" for stepping back from running the organisations. However, this changes from person to person, their history and involvement in the organisations and current opportunities. On this point, one of the directors said that he was inspired to look at their involvement with the organisation in different terms from how one of the directors of East Street Arts described their experience at the Guild induction event:

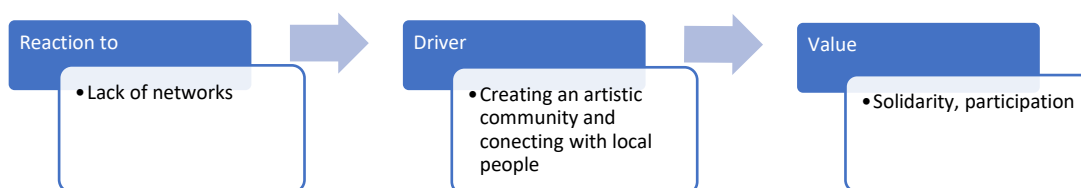
"there was a really brilliant telling point in Jon's talk at East Street Art, somebody in the audience asked "well how do you do that and still keeping up with you own practice?". He went "just give up on your own practice.. yeah you can't do both if you want to run an arts organisation fully" he said, if I remember rightly, "maybe one day I will go back to making pots, at the moment there's no way I can do both". Actually that really stuck with me that moment, when I went 'yeah actually I should stop beating myself up about the fact that I'm not getting on with my own practice because at the moment I feel a little bit like this organisation is my own practice'" (DEPW interview)

In various interviews, that moment of the induction was reminisced by other artists too, who feel that they were, in a way, reassured that running their organisations would not undermine their artistic identity. They are reluctant to be seen as "entrepreneurs" or even "directors" but not having time to make artworks and devoting most of their time to running the organisation, they wondered if they could still consider themselves artists (Calcagno and Balzarini, 2016). At the same time, in a similar way in which entrepreneurs use cliché to smooth out conflicts in the construction of their identity (Down and Warren, 2007), founders talked about themselves as artists to explain why they struggled to

engage with the business or administrative sides of running their organisations. During the induction days, artists discussed how running the organisations could be thought of as a different medium by looking at artistic practice as a different way of expression through organisational work. Running an organisation is, then, potentially seen as a creative act, sometimes this translates explicitly in curatorial work and producer roles, other times, keeping the doors open means facilitating the work of other artists:

“I won’t say I have abandoned my practice, it’s something that I think about...this [the running of the organisation] takes, this took over... and not just in a sort of like ‘oh, it took over my life’. I found it more interesting than making paintings that potentially no one’s going to see. Like, the idea of walking into the space and affecting physical change in the space in order that it makes people lives a little bit better, or more interesting, or starting something that could potentially.. could affect things socially, or whatever like that.. that to me was.. suddenly became far more interesting than going downstairs, where I was sitting worrying about whether I’d ruin something that I have been making” (Bon Volks interview).

### 7.3.1 Networks



**Figure 26** Reactive drivers, focus on the lack of networks.

Artists often choose to cluster together to combat isolation (Bain, 2005), artist-led studios and exhibition spaces then become key to promoting communication, networking and exchanges that favour the construction of artistic identities and the passing on of myths, stereotypes and artist-led cultures (Coffield, 2015). Creating an artistic community and establishing connections with local audiences was one of the recurring motivations for artists to start their organisations.

Bernie, Jennings and Knight (2017, p. 206) establish a direct link between networking, validation and economic gain by putting emphasis on networking processes as a way of cultivating personal economic ties: developing contacts is key “‘open doors’ for recognition and regular sources of income”. “Doors” seem to be a recurring trope, whether physical or metaphorical, both in the literature and in the interviews. To describe the experience of isolation of artists, Bain (2005, p. 36) describes accounts from her conversation with artists: “Doors would be closed, with artists hard at work behind them,

having deliberately chosen to remain invisible and anonymous to others". The physical distance caused by the separation of spaces and isolation of individuals through lack of networks, in turn, has an impact on the possibility of "opening doors" for artists' careers.

The founder of Bon Volks, having experienced a similar working environment, used the same language to describe the kind of space he wants to offer through the organisation: "A space that offers community. There are very few closed door spaces. Bon Volks promotes an openness and sense of ownership over the building as a whole for the studio members" (Bon Volks application). Cultivating relationships within the organisations seems to be key for the existence of the organisations themselves, when the group of friends, members, supporters, and volunteers surrounding the organisation steps in to fill the lack of funding and capacity.

While a survey conducted by Taylor and O'Brien (2017) with creative workers in the CCIs shows that people working in these industries show a marked meritocratic attitude, adding weight to accounts of cultural labour in which individualisation associated with theories of neo-liberalism, Schofield (2020, p. 6) argues instead that practices such as self-organisations associated with artist-led cultures "specifically supports this potential [to bring about social change], allowing for the formation of networked and localised forms of resistance to neoliberal governance in solidarity with one another". In the interviews, solidarity as a value was not explicated, but it is a value commonly discussed and advocated for in artist-led publications, conferences, meetings and in the artist-led literature (Institute for Applied Aesthetics, 2012; Coffield, 2015; Eggleton and Friedli, 2019; Wright, 2019; Schofield, 2020) and as a reaction to precarity and struggle in cultural labour (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Ward, 2015; Walmsley *et al.*, 2022).

For this reason, I identify solidarity as the value behind running organisations to promote artists' networks and communities in response to the lack of social and professional networks that artists need to support each other. One of the directors of Caraboo talked about the networks created inside the organisation between studio holders as playing a significant role in helping them:

"so we run studios, that support us to run the space, we also run the studios because having a community of artists as part of the organisation is really beneficial to what we do. I've personally been surprised and encouraged by how much the artists who were part of the studio community want to and are keen to see this organisation develop and actively want to take more of a role in doing that as well. Be that looking for space, talking to people or reaching out, you know..." (J1 Caraboo Interview)

In the interviews, directors and founders spoke about their membership programmes, networking events as vital to gain access to information and support. Studying and following the activities of artist-

led spaces and groups, I have often encountered formal networks (as for example can be CVAN and its regional branches) and more informal meetings where artists try to connect with each other. Often, these networks also follow the cycles of rise and fall of self-organised activities and artist-led spaces. Many of the Guild organisation participate in networks in their cities, in conversations, interviews and in their applications they recognise the value of opening their organisations as a meeting point for artists. This kind of value was important both for artists new to a city to connect with other artists as well as for those that stayed in the city. For example, Bricks (application) convened a consortium of artist-led spaces in their city “to join the dots in the grassroots arts ecology, to collaborate rather than compete, to be greater than the sum of our parts, and a louder voice to campaign for our collective aims”. Offering the possibility to be artist-in-residence and inviting international artists, and from other parts of the country, is also understood as an avenue to cultivate and expand networks with artists outside of the locale. Networking facilitates information exchange on employment, grants, source of materials, housing and new work emerging in the field. For example, Two Queens explained that their space was needed to broaden the visual art offer of the city which otherwise is “insular” and “inward facing” (Two Queens interview). The directors of Caraboo linked the building of relationships and networks to the sustainability of their organisation in terms of relevance:

“when I think about sustainability I think about networks and relationship within the city and more broadly, nationally. Our space as an arts space won’t be sustainable if we’re working with the same artists all the time. I suppose that with the ideas that are bubbling up have to keep growing and that’s our way to develop sustainability... to keep it interesting and relevant and alive for us as well as for audiences and communities with work with” (J2 Caraboo).

While the benefits of networking occur in two ways for individual artists through building their professional identity and providing validation and building economic ties, networking also brings benefit at organisational level. Bolton and Cooper (2010) propose that there should be public investment in peer-led and peer-organised knowledge transfer to make arts organisations resilient. Rodríguez (2016b, p. 6) claims that cultural organisation “that don’t collaborate are sentenced to perish” and, in fact, sharing insights on restructuring, financial planning and other knowledge gained through experience between organisation has also been recognised as vital for emerging organisations in the field of organisational studies (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020). In this regard, one of the main benefits of the network built through Guild was indeed the possibility of sharing information with formal organised meetings dedicated to asking questions and sharing practices such as the Guild Hall meetings and observed during gathering such as the Guild Induction and the Guild Residency. At the live gathering, participants would attend talks or workshops that mentioned structures, accounting systems, other practical operations or more broad questions about the value, the ethics

and politics of their work. I observed and participated in conversations with directors and representatives of the various groups where, after attending a talk or a workshop, participants would often take gather in small groups to discuss pieces of information on accounting apps, funding applications, how to work with volunteers. Informal feedback from participants seems to point to the possibility of meeting other directors and founders as one of the main benefits of joining Guild. This has also been discussed in conversation with Guild staff who, while they still need to formalise the evaluation of the project, also believe that bringing together the organisation through the Guild network was one of the best ways of supporting them. Support in the form of peer-knowledge sharing also came from Guild/East Street Arts as during my visits, some of the interviewees would be on the phone with a different staff of East Street Arts/Guild to ask for information about legislation, financing or managing leases and relationships with property owners.

#### 7.4 Summary

In the academic literature (see Chapter 3), critics of the business model rhetoric argue that the sustainability of arts organisations should be understood in relation to the ambitions and motivations of their founders. This Chapter explores the founders' motivations for starting their organisations are explored and begins to show an understanding of sustainability that values financial stability in relation to the pursuit of other goals such as providing affordable spaces for artists, validating different artistic practices and supporting experimentation, offering a space for "community".

I proposed that we look at these motivations as "reactive drivers," as the motivations seem to be a response to a problem or other organisations that already exist. The first section frames the motivations around the "need for something" to respond to three main things: lack of availability/affordability of studio spaces to all practitioners, and in particular recent arts graduates, and the lack of certain "kind of space". This approach aims to contribute to the research that positions artist-led spaces as part of the broader ecology (Eltham and Ryan, 2019) to articulate the different kinds of value they produce.

In regards to the limited availability and lack of affordable studios, artists explain the setting up of their own organisations as a reaction to the lack of cultural infrastructure that supports their practice. In key cities such as Bristol and Margate, this is also linked to strategies for urban regeneration that increase property prices which, in turn, pushes artists to open their own studio spaces with the goal of keeping them affordable to other artists. Almost all Guild organisations have a connection with local universities and a number of organisations were started by artists after they graduated from university as they struggled to find opportunities for exhibition and to make artworks.

The intention to provide affordable spaces for artists is connected to cultural entrepreneurship. I suggest that we look at the cultural entrepreneurship as a value because it reflects the implicit beliefs and value systems that artists attach to cultural work and that drive their entrepreneurial effort. While entrepreneurial activity is understood as starting a business to make money and it is connected to bringing innovation to satisfy consumers' needs, cultural entrepreneurship is used here to signify the entrepreneurial character of the artists that take the responsibility to set up something new by starting their own organisation according to their personal motivations and values.

While the lack of spaces and their affordability is linked to physical spaces, the driver to open "a kind of space" is connected both to the physicality of spaces and the idea of creating alternative spaces. The "kind" of space artists want to run is usually described in comparison to other kinds of organisations to express ways in which the organisation is experienced or perceived. Some "kinds" of organisations are described as open, participatory, collaborative, features that are also expressed in their characterisation as "volunteer-led" or "cooperatives." Most of the organisations, however, associate with the "artist-led" kind, which is often used to convey the variety of motivations and intentions that persists as a rationalised myth for artists' groups (see Coffield 2015, DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), as we saw in Chapter four.

Both in the interview and in the applications, 12 out of the 20 Guild participants either identify their organisation as an artist-led spaces. Artist-led organisations are often positioned as "alternatives" to the "market-oriented" ones, Blessi, Sacco and Pilati (2011, p. 147) describe them:

"there are associations and co-operatives acting as administrative subjects that manage independent arts spaces, whose main goal is producing and presenting experimental artistic research by member and non-member artists. These organizations are less interested in finding commercial opportunities for their members (and in some cases even prevent this possibility altogether), and operate as democratic organizations controlled by members, often sharing services and even resources with sister organizations"

These alternative organisations are often described as "independent" (Detterer and Nannucci, 2012), a recurring theme also in the interviews. This "independence" is contextualised in relation to funding sources and the possibility for artists "for self-determination and control over their work" (Sholette, 2011) detached from the pressures of commercialisation. Following the artist-led narrative, we can see how the quest for autonomy as described in the literature on creative labour seems to be the central motivation for artists to run their own organisations. Under this light, we can see how Sholette describes the choice of organizational form "as tactical" (2011, p. 162) resonates with the description given by the artists around their legal status. Choosing between a charitable status or setting up a

company limited by guarantee or a community interest company, the artists use legal structure to facilitate their work, getting tax-exemption or being eligible for funding with the aim to produce a “kind of space.” Though the “artist-led” definition is not accepted by all the artists, their organisations maintain their “alternative nature” (a distinctive character of artist-led spaces), as they are set up as a reaction to “kinds” of organisations such as commercial galleries, institutions, creative industries and other artist-led spaces.

If this Chapter focuses on motivations to understand how sustainability can be approached in relation to reactive drivers, the next chapter focuses on the modalities to consider how start-up dynamics could also be understood as “reactive”.



## 8 Modalities

In this chapter, I draw from the applications to Guild, interviews, Away Days and some secondary sources to understand better the ways in which the organisations came to existence. This chapter connects to the previous one as the modalities of setting up the organisations should be considered in relation to the motivations driving them setting up the organisations. The value system attached to motivations, but also personal experiences, can help to understand the modalities in which the organisation came to existence, in particular through aspects of solidarity and networking, crowdfunding and the degree of planning gone into the start-up process. This Chapter explores how some groups did some initial planning to set up their organisations, it remains in question to what extent they were incidental, driven by the founders, stimulated or hindered by wider dynamics in urban development and cultural infrastructure.

In the first section, “Finding a Space”, the artists that wanted to “do something” and quickly reacted to the opportunity made available to them to take over a space. While the generic motivation reflects on a lack of initial planning, we should read the experiences of situating their organisation in a locality and running the organisation as feeding in the narrative of their motivations, making them more specific in reaction to that experience: from wanting to “do something” to supporting artists in specific ways and engaging certain groups. While business planning and modelling are generally considered effective ways to ensure the sustainability of a business, here they seem to be neglected causing “obstacles to sustainability” of the start-up phase (lack of funding, unsecure lease, lack of networks or other people’s time) to reappear later on.

Similarly, the examples in “Planning” suggest that the planning done in advance to start the organisations is a reaction to previous personal and professional experiences as well as a response to the context in which they want to operate.

### 8.1 Finding a space

This section discusses one of the recurring ways in which artists set up their organisations, which is by finding a space. It brings together the experiences of four groups that seem to share similarities through fortuitous events, mostly in regard to finding venues or encountering a first opportunity that leads to more activities. For several groups, finding a suitable space was the element that kick started the organisations. However, while they have the intention of finding a space, eventually the choice of the space seems to have been channelled by the available opportunity rather than planning. The groups were approached by space providers to quickly take on a space: Fish Factory, Two Queens, Caraboo and Ort Gallery seemed to have similar experiences of finding a space that they would need

to take on “last minute”, which eventually impacted their ability put resources into a strategic development of the organisation.

Rose, the founder of Fish Factory, started to think about opening a gallery after having organised exhibitions in cafes, warehouses and other different venues. Not wanting to set up a commercial gallery, but thinking of a business model where she could use the space to make it pay for itself, she started to look at “bigger spaces”. Through her personal contacts, she describes it as “kind of lucky” that someone offered her to take on a warehouse in a wharf complex on the condition of turnover rent, which means paying a basic fee and a percentage of the revenue made. Even though she was not familiar with artist-led studio spaces, she found that there was a demand for studios and that could have been a way to pay for the space:

“it became clear that what people needed was studio space so we just started dividing the space up in a really basic way and started building little units out of like old stuff we found and so it started to have a little income and then started like hiring out the gallery and things...”

(Fish Factory interview)

The space was originally used to process scallops, so it had to be cleaned up and fixed. Rose relied on the help from “a network of artists, friends and various helpful people” with a “minimal investment, of a £1000 or less” (Fish Factory Interview). The original lease was for 3 years as the site was going to be redeveloped but the planning permission was not granted and she was able to run the studios there for seven years. However, after the first three years, the complex was sold to a shipping company which started to use the site for more heavy industrial work, which made the venue more noisy, busy and eventually “hostile” and feeling “forced” to move to a new space (Fish Factory Interview). In the next three years, Rose looked for a space to relocate the studios and when she was almost going to give up, she received a call to see the space Fish Factory is currently in. However, since the activities with the first warehouse were in decline, she felt “beaten down” and decided to set up a crowdfunding campaign to see if there was interest and support to continue Fish Factory. However, as she “wasn’t trying to get an income” from the previous space, that also meant that she did not have capital or reserves to invest in the new space. The move to the new space provided new motivation for continuing the organisation and using the space differently:

“I guess it was more like I suddenly.. I’d been thinking about different ways to use the space to be able to have a lot of activity and also to be able to pay the rent and then I was given a massive space which was like 5000 square feet, so I had a lot of space to play with and some of it was already rooms so it seemed obvious to have some artist studios and then I just put the word out, we had some newspaper articles, and I just put it out to my little network and

very quickly lots of people started arriving looking for studios looking for places to do things, so it was pretty organic really”.

Differently from the first space, where they incremented the number of studios due to the demand, this time the approach was more strategic in having a target number of artists to occupy the studios to be able to pay a higher fixed rent. The crowdfunding campaign only reached half of the £20,000 target and was described as “not that simple” but rather an “intense” experience to manage, it was nonetheless an opportunity to:

“reconnect with everybody and lots of new people got involved [...] people were emotionally involved with the story of it because we only just managed to make it in the last hour and everybody who put some money felt like they were part of it” (Fish Factory Interview).

Other artists donated artworks and helped to run workshops, alongside other live events and online publicity to promote the campaign. However, signing the lease at the end of the campaign and starting with half of the budget meant that they “had to lots of DIY stuff, there was no time because the lease book on this place was available like now... we’d need to do it in the next month” (Fish Factory Interview). The initial deficit of resources was partially compensated by the momentum created around the crowdfunding campaign which attracted supporters to donate money and their time. However, a year later when Fish Factory applied to Guild, arguing that:

“The main obstacle at the moment is managing cashflow, due to the variability of bookings it can be hard to manage this. We raised £10,000 in 2017 via a Crowdfunder to help with the process of moving in to the new premises but we are constantly finding financial shortages as our target for this was £20,000 and we have had to make up the difference for ongoing refurb of our new premises.” (Fish Factory Application)

Similarly to Fish Factory, one of the directors of Two Queens first started organising exhibitions, while still at University with a group of ten artists under the name of CUSP, through the meanwhile use of an empty shop owned by the Leicester City Council. They describe the area in which they currently rented the space at that time as going under redevelopment to create the city’s cultural quarter, so when they first looked at the space, the rent was too high. They were looking for “industrial units where we could have messy studios” and initially wanted to take on a space near the University to keep a closer connection with the students (Two Queens Interview). Since the cultural quarter still had many empty spaces and they already had a connection with the local council, through the use of previous council-owned spaces, a council officer brokered the relationship between them and the landlord to take the space on a three months basis rolling contract for cheaper rent. Even though they first thought it was going to be too big for them, it was suggested that CUSP could take it together

with another artists' group active in the city, Vanilla Gallery: "we were sort of brought together not by choice but through someone else instigating this relationship to begin with" (Two Queens Interview). Two people, representatives for each group, incorporated the company in September 2011, got the keys of the space in February 2012 and opened the first exhibition in March 2012. Here again, they describe the process has "happening very quickly" both in regards to finding a space for their project as well as the changes occurring in the city, with the new cultural quarter opening, and the gallery funded by the local authority closing and other artist-led projects dying out. They initially divided the space up into 18 studios and built more over the years, arriving at the current number of 51. This development was possible as they managed to keep the studios for 7 years, however at the beginning they "could not plan very far ahead because we did not know how long we'd be here" (Two Queens Interview).

In the application to Guild they describe their history with the lease "relatively tumultuous" as Two Queens started on a 3 month rolling basis and cheap rent, then after 2 years between 2014 and 2015, "it looked very likely that we would have to vacate the premises due to the consortium that owned the building winding up and looking to offload assets, this meant that we had a few years without any consistent public programming as we were unsure of the organisation's future" (Two Queens Guild Application). Since 2015 they have had a more secure lease but pay a commercial market rent; managing the building is still described as one of the biggest obstacles to sustainability as it needs refurbishing which they are not able to do due to the lack of funding. The studio income pays for the building and for one day a week of one member of staff, all other projects are made possible through recurring applications for grants from Arts Council England. The insecurity with the lease has meant that the organisation cannot apply for capital funding to improve the building, which causes them to interrupt public activity for 3 to 4 month a year due to how cold the building gets in the winter. Lack of funding means also that the studios that have been added were built "DIY", which poses limitations to what they can do with the space and the services they can offer; it is hoped that the time that the director put into building them will be paid after they are taken up by artists and surplus will be made through the new studios.

In the case of the artists involved with Caraboo, they were looking for a space to start their activities as a collective and were put in touch with a charity that, taking advantage of business rates relief, offered them to let a warehouse for a reduced rent for one year. However, they comment that they "did not anticipate that we would get hold of such a big building [...] when we started we did not have anything in the bank" (Caraboo Interview). With their collective made of 8 people and the deposit being £800, they thought they could take the space by splitting it putting £100 each. The main motivation to start their collective was to have a project space, "when we first set out, we did not

know how we were going to manage this but we just wanted the project space. We did not really, I don't think any of us, was really interested in running studios" (Caraboo Interview). Monthly rent was at £833 for the space, so they created 12 studios to use the income from the studios to pay the rent (£115/month) and have a little extra to keep the gallery space free of charge for exhibitions and events. However, this space too needed renovation, "a month of solid work", so while they were refurbishing the space, they ran an online crowdfunding campaign to raise money to kick start the programme of exhibitions (Caraboo Interview). Almost all the artists involved in Caraboo are not originally from Bristol, so they did not have strong social network but "marketed quite hard" the campaign to magazines, friends and local institutions and "before anyone knew us or anything we raised 5k" (Caraboo Interview). Eventually they raised £6,641 after working out that £6,000 was the minimum funding "to enable us to carry out our annual programme of events" (Caraboo Projects, 2018). However, at the end of that year of programme of events they raised £21,000 through Arts Council England and further £500 through National Lottery's Power to Change funding (Caraboo Guild Application). At the moment of applying to Guild, they envisaged that they could renew the lease as the building was subject to a planning application which they considered a "slow process". However the security of the lease was still considered the main obstacle to sustainability "due to the unique and politicised residential building programme" alongside income as the fundraising allowed to pay for artists but not for the management of the organisation (Caraboo Guild Application).

When I got to interview them, I found out that the lease was not renewed for Caraboo and they were searching for another space, so I asked them whether they thought they would be looking for a space in the same neighbourhood. Both directors agreed that if they had the chance to take another space somewhere else, they would and that, since Bristol is a small city, they still hope to keep the connections there. They explained that they feel that there is a north-south divide in the city, where much of the cultural activity is happening north of the river, while people living in the south (where Bedminster is located) do not engage much with arts institutions. They expressed concerns over the "very controversial development" of the area, but they would consider a space somewhere else if "there is no space there that's right or we can't afford it", adding that they have discussed the matter and:

"the feeling at the moment is that if we had to go somewhere else, we'd go somewhere else to carry on keep going. We've discussed what would we keep is our community focus in Bedminster because that's where we're starting to make connections and put roots down and is that because that's just where we work, and that's not where lots of other people are working?" (Caraboo Interview)

Both in the application to Guild and the interview, they talked about the fact that “it’s really important time to be there” and bridging between the existing community and the new residents. The director of Ort Gallery also talks about a “north-south divide” in Birmingham, where they believe that most of the people interested in the arts live in the south, which is well connected to the city centre. In terms of setting up the organisation, she describes it in this way:

“I guess when all your friends live there you move there.. so, you know, that was the reason why we're south and we literally met a girl, an artist in a pub, and we told her we wanted do a café and she said "oh I've got a studio space in the old printworks they're looking for someone to do a cafe" and the next day we came there and she said "Yeh, do you wanna start tomorrow?" like it was.. that's what happened, so quickly, because they were really desperate to get us in and we were really desperate to do something” (Ort Gallery interview).

Regarding the setup of the café, which comprises a room for events and exhibitions, the current director of the gallery and a friend each invested £30 in the food they made to sell at a fundraiser where they:

“auctioned off ourselves basically to do like gardening cleaning so we did all these kind of things, people donate stuff we could raffle off so all the other things we made money of were free. we raised I think a grand and that was the only money we invested” (Ort Gallery interview).

The setting up of the café in 2011 as the main business meant that the activities related to events and exhibitions in the gallery space were dependent on the ability of the directors to successfully run the café while managing the programme of events too. The café was run through a business partnership between the two individuals and Ort Gallery was incorporated as a CIC in 2013. After four years, the business partner of the café decided to leave the business but accepted to take legal responsibility for the gallery and has been acting as a volunteer director (Ort Gallery interview). Not being able to manage both activities, and wanting to focus more on the exhibitions, the other director has been running the gallery as her main job. The café was sold at a profit, which kept the gallery running for a while and, in 2016 and 2017, Ort was in receipt of large investments from trusts, foundations and strategic investment by Arts Council England (Ort Gallery, 2017). However, by the end of 2018, due to unsuccessful applications, the gallery ran a crowdfunding campaign to try and bridge the gap in funding as they found themselves in a “funding limbo - between funding bids unable to cover our base costs” (Ort Gallery, 2018). After raising £2450, they decided to close the gallery and vacate the building, thanks to local connections, they found a newly refurbished space next door and re-opened the gallery in the summer 2019. The gallery is currently rented on a rolling contract.

As seen in the chapter on the business models, most of the activities of Ort Gallery are based on

fundraising, with space hire being the biggest source of self-generated income alongside selling artworks which gives a minor contribution. Even though the projected budgets (both healthy and crisis, see section 6.3) show the space hire figure as covering the rent for the venue, the majority of the income relies on external grants to make exhibitions and events happen and for the director to be paid. For this reason, the identified biggest obstacle to sustainable is developing other avenues for money making: “The Arts Council are happy to support us in future but are putting increasing pressure on us to diversify our income streams” (Ort Gallery Guild Application).

From the interviews it emerged that the business is rarely thought and planned strategically beforehand, but developed out of trial and errors and responding to opportunities. While in business studies planning and strategizing are seen as useful and contributing to success of business models (Chwolka and Raith, 2012). However, similar to small business owners (see Chapter 3), artists lack the capacity to do when the business is established as they are immersed in the day-to-day running of the organization and having to respond quickly to external opportunities and threats (such as a cheap space becoming available and having to move in and start the business in a month or an unsuccessful bid).

## 8.2 Planning

If in the previous section, finding a building was identified as the main modality to starting some of the organisations, this section presents how Bon Volks and Bricks were set up with different degrees of planning and research in advance.

After his experience renting studios and joining a course from an alternative art school, the founder of Bon Volks was living in London with his partner while practicing as an artist and making a living by doing technical work in galleries and carpentry. He started to work as a technician by helping a friend and slowly learning new skills around building and renovating spaces. As a reaction to his previous experiences in studios that were expensive, cold, precarious and not welcoming, where people worked in isolation, he started to think about opening his own space “in my mind, I was like I’d like to start a space, I’d like to build it in a particular way, I’d like to set it up like this”. In the meantime, the acquisition of new building skills made him confident about opening his own space as “it suddenly became achievable”. His decision to move to out of London has both professional and personal reasons:

“I could not find anywhere and we were both doing really shitty jobs so it seems a no brainer to try and find somewhere we can have a nicer life, potentially, and also I could do something like this. So then yeah we came here (Margate), it was so fairly arbitrary. Turner was opened

here so that we knew that there was something happening and Resort (studio provider), just opened, so we came down to visit, and thought this is practical...”

They started to research around and visited Turner Contemporary, which opened a couple of years earlier, and they visited a studio provider which recently opened thinking, “so we knew that something was happening around here, we looked around and thought this is practical”. Finally they moved to Margate and a little more than a year later, they took over a 5 years lease with a 3 year break clause and incorporated the company in November 2015. Over 3 months they cleared the building and built 20 studios, investing around £6,000 of personal savings. In 2016, they successfully applied for the local council Arts investment fund (£1,200) to support their residency programme and commissioned artists to create designs for t-shirts and posters to sell as merchandise which provides a “small flow of income” (Bon Volks Guild Application).

Keeping the studios “affordable” means that only little surplus generated gets invested to ameliorate the building, with current plans that include building works to make more studios on the upper floor and make the occupation of the building energy efficient and cost-effective. In the application and interview Ross made clear that he is also a trained carpenter (Bon Volks Interview). So while his skills in construction and initial planning has helped him to start up the organisation, during the Guild visit he identified a lack of skills both in fundraising for the redevelopment works and applying for funding to support the residency and artistic programme (Guild visit notes). Keeping rent as low as possible means that there is no budget to allow him to dedicate time to strategically develop the organisation or invest in paying for someone else to support him. Differently from the other groups who have found their organisations with a group of artists, the relocation to another city meant that the venture was solely embarked by him and his partner. To resolve this issue of capacity the founder of Bon Volks is trying to develop ways to engage studio holders to take more active roles in the organisation. However, the initial planning and research meant that Ross was able to negotiate a three months rent-free period for renovations, had some capital to invest in the organisation and found a space with a much more stable lease if compared to the other organisations in Guild.

While all the selected groups for Guild have already started their organisation, and many applications were rejected on the grounds of being “too early in the development” or “too late” (in the sense they already had support and did not make a strong case for needing to develop sustainability), Bristol Bricks was selected still at the set-up phase of their organisation. Jack and Kim met at a training programme for fundraising and started to share their interest before quickly realising that they could work together to run their arts organisation. Both have previous experiences in running arts organisations, Jack run a commercial gallery for 10 years and Kim has directed a CIC that produces



socially-engaged projects in Plymouth. Before starting Bricks, Jack had received funds for a two-years research and development period to look at how to convert Antlers to a non-profit organisation:

“through like a mixed economy model, be that partly through sales, partly through funded projects, but also through driving an economy from a building, you know, a long-term rather than a short term space means that you can invest in the building maybe have a café or something else could drive income or rent out studio spaces, so you start to build an income on restricted funds” (Bricks Interview).

Out of the period of research came the specific need of looking at the sustainability of artist-led spaces in Bristol, “we are setting up Bricks to respond to the increasing trend of artist spaces being closed down due to lack of affordable, sustainable and accessible venues and arguably lack of robust mixed economy business models” (Bricks Guild Application). Through the research, Jack expanded his network, reaching out to other groups and started the “Bristol DIY Arts Network Cultural Spaces Workgroup” and convened the “Bristol Independent Visual Arts Spaces”, which bring together different organisations in Bristol with the aim to feed into wider conversation through the “Cultural Strategy Steering Group” (Bricks Guild Application). In the interview, Jack explains that in the time that he has been in Bristol, he has seen a high turn-over of artist-led spaces due to “organisational burnout, underfunding and skills deficit” and therefore, the necessity for them to be doing:

“a lot of prep work, putting in the roots and groundwork of an organisation that can then flourish rather than actually falling, and because we’ve both set up and run things ourselves before, that we don’t want to trip over ourselves to just get something out the door, but actually let’s put in something really solid and think that balance between organisation, we don’t have institutional ambition” (Bricks Guild Interview).

At the time of the application, they were tendering to purchase an ex-police station with the idea of investing in an asset: “the long-term legacy for this is open-ended as by having an artist-focused governance model and buying the building freehold it will be for artists, forever” (Bricks Guild Application). In the interview, they clearly expressed the aim of interfering with the “gentrification model” happening in the city:

“J: this place has got a good example about that in terms of that cycle of artists coming in as a front runner, and renting properties or using different communal places driving or showing desirability in an area, or creating a desirability and kind of being shoe horned to get in the next level of people so then, so they displace local communities and are then displaced by more corporate organisations or higher paid creatives like graphic designers or architects

K: that gentrification model wouldn't happen if the community had access to shaping it from the start as well, I think that's really crucial to the way that we're approaching this, there's going to be no argument... I think for a long time artists have been seen as really separate, in their living communities always seen as separate, and the spaces that they use and work in are impenetrable to general community, they feel it's not for them" (Bricks Interview).

To challenge that cycle and create a space that can be financially viable, they intend to "co-design a new form of arts centre with the artists of Bristol and the communities around the site" (Bricks Guild Application). Taking over the police station, they would create artists' studios as well as house a range of different activities:

"like a community nursery or a community-run bike project or a community run gym, those partners coming in with artist studios, or like a literature group, we don't want to just focus on creativity, and that links with the wider idea about gentrification and change and place-making" (Bricks Interview).

So in the process of putting together the bid they wrote a vision and business model "so that we could forecast income and expenditure on the space, to make sure that this is financially viable and bring key partners on board" (Bricks Interview) and managed to partner up with a local music venue and community-led organisations (Up Our Street, Artspace/Lifespace), attract pro-bono support to the property purchase (working with architects and getting it publicised on local newspapers and websites) and the registration as a charitable incorporated organisation and established links with university, having students to work on the visual identity (Bricks Guild application, Bricks Interview). In terms of the investment, they intended to fundraise purchase through crowdfunding, trusts and foundations, and a bank loan.

Eventually, the bid was unsuccessful but it helped them to form the organisation and access numerous networks, managing for example to bring together a number of trustees to set up the charity, something that many other groups would be asking Guild to support them to do. The importance of this formation process is also acknowledged on their website "although unsuccessful in that bid, it demonstrated a collaborative approach by our partners and stakeholders and has set the blue print for Bricks further work" (Bricks Bristol, no date). When I interviewed them in November 2019, they were in conversation with a number of organisations to run different projects and got awarded funding to support an artist to do a cultural mapping of a neighbourhood and commission artists for works in public spaces. In February 2020 they managed to move into a council-owned space, and three years later their annual report 2021/2022 for the charity commission states a turnover of over £150,000 for the year with seven part-time employees and six on casual hours.

Even though, artists tend to avoid engaging with business development and planning, research from business studies shows that planning can support founders “make a better start-up decision” (Chwolka and Raith, 2012, p. 385). Bon Volks and Bricks are examples of how organisations have benefitted from researching and planning before starting their organisation.

### 8.3 Summary

This chapter presents the modalities, the ways in which the organisations were set up, looking at how artists found their spaces and how they pulled resources together to start their organisations. In the first section, being offered to take on a space was the catalyst for setting up the organisations. The ways in which organisations are set up seem to be all linked by the fact that finding a space and setting up the organisation “happened quickly” and it is described by the founders as “happening to them” rather than being led with a clear strategy and plan. More than researching a location, designing a business model and looking for capital to invest in their ventures, chance and luck were determinant elements for starting up the organisations. The initial lack of planning in the start-up phase led to a series of obstacles (lack of funding, unsecure lease, lack of networks or time) to the current running of their organisations.

However, perhaps, this way of setting up the organisation, with patterns repeating over the different groups with initial lack of investment, things that “happened quickly”, resorting to “DIY” and crowdfunding, could be understood as reflective of an organisational culture based on shared basic assumptions among most artists.

As seen in the “Motivations” chapter, artists share espoused values and basic assumptions in relation to the “problems” they are confronted with, and the majority identify with being “artist-led”, a category imbued with a set of basic assumptions. Many of the artists have experienced, seen, or learnt about artists-led space from which they have learnt the basic assumptions that guide their way of doing things. In terms of building sustainability, the groups seem to reach an *impasse*, where the “response in a positive problem-solving situation” (Schein, 1984, p.8), which worked at the beginning to set up the space, continue to be used until it ceases to work. For example, most artists in Guild have taken part in other artist-led spaces before and they know that having to move in and out quickly of a cheap space it is an established practice. So while they replicated the same course of action, now the artists founders struggle to build sustainability into their organisations. The experience of artists trying out how to start-up, is not far from how other small business owners and entrepreneurs “learn how to make strategy by doing” (Szulanski and Amin, 2001). For example, Fish Factory, Caraboo and Ort Gallery have all been subject to “major discontinuities” mostly in regard to relocating to another space.

While the lack of planning goes against any classical teaching from business studies, the artists still show entrepreneurial qualities, or resilience, in dealing with risk and being able to quickly respond to the market demands and develop their business models (see the introduction of studio spaces as a way to generate income for Caraboo). It could be argued that if we can understand the motivations as “reactive” to what is there, the modalities are also “reactive” to dynamics external to the founders as the recurring element of “chance” in finding a building connects to wider external dynamics. All the groups started their organisations on the basis that the space was for temporary use. In neighbourhoods going under major re-developments, Caraboo, Fish Factory and Two Queens benefitted from the precarious future of their building to access them at cheaper rent. Finding a space helped the groups to concretize their motivations from wanting “to do something different” or “making exhibitions” to finding out specific needs related to supporting other artists, providing affordable spaces and engaging with the local community. While the founders talk about wanting to do something about gentrification in their areas, this motivation only forms after situation the project in the locality.

On the other hand, Bon Volks and Bricks showed how more initial planning connected to their start-up phase and, in particular, in relation to urban regeneration dynamics. Both organisations seem to have benefitted from their initial planning. Bon Volks opened in Margate because they found that “something was happening”, in terms of the opening of Turner Contemporary as a flagship project for culture-led regeneration and many grassroots activities sprouting around. Ross and Rachel researched the area, negotiated three months free rent period to renovate the space and save capital to invest in the venture. Compared to Fish Factory, Caraboo or Two Queen, Bon Volks occupies a space in better conditions and the organisation, while precarious, has had a stable life. However, they recognise that rapid changes in the city could also impact them in terms of competition from similar activities and rising property prices. Similarly, Bricks’ planning started in reaction to broader changes in the city and trying to respond to high-turnover of artists-led activity due to the temporary uses of spaces with a more secure investment in a building asset. Bricks joined Guild at the start-up phase and its founders were always cautious about doing something too quickly. Even though they did not buy the police station they tendered for, all the preparation work they have done to raise interest in the project was reapplied when another opportunity came up. Three years later, they have become one of the biggest organisations in Guild.

This chapter explored the ways in which the organisations started to understand how more, or less, reactive approaches may have consequences for the development of organisations. Without planning or a clear investment, the artists seem to be on the back foot, trying to catch up on making the space comfortable, fundraising or attracting new members and stakeholders. Being responsive could be

linked to the culture of artist-led spaces that resist engaging with business planning and run on scarce resources through DIY practices. However, the reactive quality of these modalities may also point at how the external environment offers opportunities or obstacles to building solid foundations for the organisations. To weak and unfixed building blocks of the organisations, strong organisational cultures and boundaries may compensate for and contribute to the persistence of an organisation. Therefore, the next chapter explores how founders build a group around the organisation and define its boundaries and cultures.

## 9 Structures and organisational forms

In the previous analytical chapters, data collected through this research have been used to approach the matter of sustainability in small arts organisations through the analysis of different aspects of the organisations taken as case studies. In Chapter 6, I discussed how the idea of sustainability can be applied to these organisations and how the groups understand their business models. Recent academic literature on the Cultural and Creative Industries and cultural policy push organisations to reassess their business models through “business model innovation” and “business model change” to achieve sustainability. The chapter put these ideas to test, highlighting how the application of the idea of business models for these organisations has limitations in grasping their complexities. The focus on business models is tied to an idea of financial sustainability that, however, is contested in the cultural sector with authors (Poettschacher, 2005; Bogen, 2019), who argue for an understanding of “sustainability” in cultural organisations in terms of the ambitions and motivations of their founders.

This perspective led to Chapter 7, where the founders’ drivers for starting their organisations are explored and begin to show an understanding of sustainability that values financial stability in relation to the pursuit of their varied initial motivations, such as providing affordable spaces for artists, validating different artistic practices and supporting experimentation, offering a space for community. Looking at how the organisations came into existence in Chapter 8, we can see how the founders’ value system affects the modalities in which the organisations are set-up and how external factors influence the process.

While an “ecological view” of sustainability starts to emerge, which moves on from merely financial aspirations of artists but includes social, cultural and professional aspirations and the relationships with their environments, questions still remain on how the organisations continue to exist given the “obstacles to sustainability” (lack of capital, skills, knowledge, planning) identified at the moment of the Guild’s application, which has also emerged with my analysis, and their resistance to a “commercial” approach. Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann (2020), analysing emergent organisations, write about the factors that affect the evolution of organisations and, recognising the many challenges that new organisations face, discuss what can contribute to their “persistence”. Defining organisations as “goal-directed, boundary-maintaining and socially constructed systems of human activity”, Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann (2020) direct attention to the relationship between founders and the people they work with to maintain organisational coherence, its boundaries and accomplish work. As organisations take form by establishing their boundaries, organisational knowledge starts to be constructed through shared routines, competencies and role differentiation. Founders can shape how members orientate

their participation in the organisation, though members themselves also have an active role in shaping the organisational form (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020). The purpose of this chapter, then, is to describe how the organisations are internally structured, and how members interact to support the organisations and what roles they play in their sustainability.

### 9.1 Two is company, three is a crowd. What makes a group?

Several studies from the perspective of strategic management and innovation in enterprises highlight the importance of social networks in organisations for their capacity to mobilise social capital and leverage existing knowledge (Starke and Tempest, 2004; Molina-Morales and Martinez-Fernandez, 2009; Sozen, Basim and Hazir, 2009; Jaber Jobair, 2018). Specific attention has also been given to social networks in the cultural and creative industries considering new forms of value generated by collaborations (Harvey, Hawkins and Thomas, 2012; Dovey *et al.*, 2016) and how they shape and reinforce the creative workers' identity (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Coulson, 2012; Coffield, 2015; Naudin, 2017). Much of the experience of artists' organisations is often described as collective endeavours (Detterer and Nannucci, 2012; Institute for Applied Aesthetics, 2012), which are rooted in a culture of informality, self-help and self-organisation similar to that of grassroots co-working spaces (Merkel, 2019). In recognition of this character of artists' organisations, informed by first-hand personal and professional experience by the directors of East Street Arts, Guild's main programme was open to artists' groups rather than organisations that were run by individuals.

Reading the different applications and listening to the feedback from the selection panel, it became apparent that some groups came together only to apply to the programme or that an individual was trying to apply as a group but, in reality, they were presenting a solo project. On other occasions, there were organizations started by two people who listed others in their applications, yet the narrative is of an organisation that primarily consists of the two founding members. Then the question arises: how many people make a group? How is the "group" and its boundaries defined? What is the relationship between the group and the organisational structure in place and how does it consequently impact on the organisations' sustainability? I have been asking myself these questions and what methods I could use to answer them (see Chapter 5).

Initially, when approaching the organisation, the relationship between founders, or the people with major responsibilities, and their group members was difficult to evaluate only from the applications. Guild's application had a section that addressed the "group" criteria, where applicants could indicate if the group was officially registered, for example, as a company or charity, how long the group has been in existence, listing who is involved and how the group is managed. To answer the last question,

they could choose among four options. The table below summarises the answers for the groups I have selected as my case studies:

Group	Paid designated staff	Most or all members share management responsibilities	One or two key members have management responsibilities	Other
Bon Volks			x	
Bristol Bricks				x
Caraboo		x		
Double Elephant Print Workshop (DEPW)	x	x		
Fish Factory	x		x	x
Ort Gallery			x	
Rising Sun	x			x
Two Queens	x	x		x

**Table 5 Group Management Responsibilities (derived from Guild applications).**

The first option explicitly refers to “paid designated staff” but the second and third option, whether most members share the management or just one or two people look after the overall management, offer some ambiguity in this respect. Do those that have management responsibilities get paid, for example as freelancers, but are not “designated” thus do not work on a regular basis? What “other” options are available? When one or two members look after the overall management, but there are not designated staff, how do they sustain their involvement? Only when I went to visit the organisations and had the possibility to speak with representatives of the groups (often the founders or people that take care of the overall management) some of these relationships were explained through the interviews and were manifest in the spaces. For example, when I visited Fish Factory, DEPW and Rising Sun the collective management, they claimed in their applications and interviews,



became visible through the presence and interaction with other people, who were involved in leading different activities.

Therefore, to explore the nature of these groups, the next section will explore how founders create boundaries around the group by sharing their ethos and motivations with members.

## 9.2 Building the group

Bon Volks is an interesting example as it was described as a project started by two artists (hence the selection of the option “one or two key members of the group look after the overall management”). However, since one founding partner has become inactive, much of the application focussed the other founder’s efforts to transition to a collective management system and the mechanisms for the collective involvement of studio members. In the interview, the founder/director, describes the organisation as collectively managed by him and the studio members. The founder’s vision is to create an organisation that is collectively self-managed by the studio members that can decide how to use the facilities, possibly support each other to collaborate on projects. In his “ideal world” there would be a paid studio manager that keeps the organisation running on the basic level, and a group of committed members that are involved in steering the organisation and hopefully make “a social impact”.

Starting Bon Volks with his partner after moving to the town meant that Ross did not have a strong network and had to build a shared understanding of his values and motivations with the members: “it would have been a lot easier if I had 10 people with me at the start who you were really like into this idea and then said we set up this way” (Bon Volks interview). From the setup of the organisation, he decided to include in the contract that artists need to sign to rent a studio, a commitment to be actively involved with basic tasks for maintaining the space, such as the cleaning of their own rented studio and shared spaces. He reviews the applications for those who want to rent a space to keep a mix of practices and bring in people according to their “cultural-fit” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 97), those who understand his ethos and show motivation to be part of the organisation. He tried to involve members in the decision-making process, but this is not something they want to be involved in, which is possibly a sign of how the studio members and the founder negotiate their responsibilities and define boundaries for their roles in the group.

The group communicates about the management of the space mainly via a WhatsApp group, Ross values it as a tool to keep an “open dialogue” and to keep in touch with all the members while leaving them a flexible use of the space, as they access it at different times. Yearly Ross holds an Annual General Meeting where all members are invited to participate in reviewing together how the space is working and discuss their participation and involvement. Prior to the last AGM, which happened about

six months before my interview, he circulated a questionnaire to understand how the members felt about “this system”, how it could be improved and other needs or feedback for changing and improving the space. Ross recalls that in the meeting, he was “trying to be honest with the members” and, in the interview, he pointed out how that while he has a specific vision for how he wants the organisation to run, he implemented “this system based on absolutely no experience at all, so it's sort of quite important to keep checking it's working”. At the meeting, he openly asked for support and direct involvement of the studio members in the management of the organisation as he intends to step away from it in 5 years. They identified a number of areas like administration, fundraising, marketing and social media, partnerships and networking, and growing the business and its brand, that Ross could not manage by himself both because it is too much for one person to take care of and because others with more experience in those fields could contribute. The discussion at the AGM led to a change in the system where members can trade their jobs for the general maintenance of the space with volunteer positions for the development of the business. During the Guild visit, Ross discussed with the Guild staff the possibility of creating a board of trustees to support him in establishing a local network, gathering information and expertise. However, he seemed uncomfortable with these “business ideas” admitting that he was not sure what their role would be, repeating that he is an artist therefore new to running an organisation and still learning. When I interviewed him the next day, I asked what needed to change to achieve sustainability and Ross argued that the organisation would need someone to spend time on it and “realise its potential by being run better” (Bon Volks interview). He added that in the last AGM he also asked whether anyone would join as a director of the community interest company, but again the members “are quite happy with how it is, which is fine because they didn't join this to be a director”. He also brought up again the idea of establishing a formal board of director/trustees but commented:

“I don't actually fully understand what the benefit would be of having a board of directors beyond it just not being one person. Is it just sharing the load? Maybe it's that, I don't know.. and also I don't know whether having external people be directors would work... or I don't have any idea what trustees are” (Bon Volks interview).

The Bon Volks example can be analysed using some of the concepts by Aldrich and Ruef (2020) introduced in Chapter 3. Though they resist ideas of “commercialisation” and “business”, artists that manage new organisations have similar experiences to those of “nascent entrepreneurs” managing start-ups. They both go through a phase of steep learning, and founders neglect “formalizing jobs definitions in the interests of getting on with the work” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 104). Schein (1984, p. 5) argues that a given group can be defined as a set of people:

“(1) who have been together long enough to have shared significant problems, (2) who have had opportunities to solve those problems and to observe the effects of their solutions and (3) who have taken in new members”.

When a group has shared enough common experiences they develop a culture that comprises the espoused values and shared basic assumptions that lead to finding solutions to problems, which become the basic building bricks of a shared organisational culture. From Bon Volks, artists rent studios for single-use or work in individual spaces in an open space office and, in this context, it seems that what could be considered “small actions” can turn into, in Schein’s words, significant problems for a group dynamic. When I went to visit the organisation for the interview and the Away Day, the founder of Bon Volks talked about the space and pointed out behaviours that could cause conflict or become “significant problems”. He talked about learning to spot small things that could become a problem or receiving complaints for example the fear of stolen belongings because the front doors were not locked a number of times properly, washing-up left near sinks or general “mess around the space”. The founder then facilitates communication within the group to discuss how individual members could take on different tasks, and responsibilities or think differently about their relationship with the space and the rest of the group. Considering that Bon Volks has been operating for three and half years, the emergence of roles for individual members at the last AGM was a product of the formation of an organisational culture in response to the problems encountered by the group. Eventually, the replication of competencies and routines in the organisations, as well as the construction of shared procedural and tacit knowledge, support the formation of organisational identities for the members who, starting to identify with the organisation, contribute to the establishment of organisational boundaries that distinguish it from other organisations (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020).

Studio members join the organisation primarily as “users” as their interest lies in using the organisational resources, in this case the studios, to pursue their own needs. However, from the beginning, Ross tried to re-shape the orientation of the members, including the caveat of active involvement in the maintenance of the space to try and kick start a mechanism of identification with the organisation as “supporters”. Aldrich and Ruef describe (2020, p. 94) “supporters” those members that “mold their behaviours towards supporting the larger whole”. In the interview, Ross gave examples of previous members that left once they understood the active involvement that was asked from them to be part of the organisation, clearly marking their orientation towards the organisation. He also noted that many of the members that volunteered for business development roles were actually new to the organisation, directing attention to the impact of his efforts to clearly present the organisational ethos:

“I think the majority [of the members who volunteered] were new, but I think I've got better at articulating the idea of the organisation to new people. I've honed over the years at being like this is, so they maybe bought into it a little bit more. If you don't want to do this, you don't have a studio here. This is really crucial, this is the corner stone of everything. Just.. showing a willingness to do this” (Bon Volks interview)

Alongside a better capacity to communicate the organisation's culture, two factors could contribute to new members taking a more active role in the organisation, the process of selection of the members with shared values, which at the moment tend to keep heterogeneity of practices but facilitate homogeneity of the artists' world views and values, and the cultivation and building of an organisational knowledge and culture that facilitate members to have a stake in passing on the “procedural” and “implicit knowledge” of how the organisation works to new members. Aldrich and Ruef (2006) note how new organisations tend to grow “opportunistically” as a result of the available resources. Opportunistic growth can threaten organisational coherence if members develop objectives at odds with those of the founders. Founders need to “temper” this tendency with practices that foster “supporters” orientations among members.

However, Bon Volks also shows tension in the forming culture of the organisation that shapes members' orientations. On one hand, the efforts of the founder to integrate his working ethos into the organisational culture brought some results in how members seem to take action on collectively valued purposes, establishing a community and organisational coherence (Selznick, 1984). On the other, the founder's ambivalence in willing to build the organisation, while openly expressing his intention to leave in five years, may be premature at this stage when the organisation still needs clear leadership and structuring. Aldrich and Ruef (2006, p.127) argue that such ambivalence in emergent organisations produce conditions under which the organisational culture risks fragmentation, bringing cultural manifestations that “are subject to divergent interpretations and organisational identity tends to become transitory and subject to opportunistic definition” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 127).

As a number of Bon Volks members have volunteered to take on specific roles in the organisation that did not exist before, it can be argued that these roles have been created around individual people, what Aldrich and Ruef (2006, p.103) call “idiosyncratic jobs”. A number of similar instances recur in many of the organisations interviewed where undefined positions are common “in the uncertain atmosphere of a startup” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 104), which tends to have a variety of needs and the structural flexibility to allow this type of recruitment. We can observe this in the organisational structure of Fish Factory.

### 9.3 How can structures and organisational forms impact on the longevity of organisations?

For the first seven years, Fish Factory was run by the founder, Rose, as a sole trader in the wharf area of Falmouth where she rented a warehouse to offer a space for studios, exhibitions and events. Throughout that time, she had another job and recollects that first iteration of Fish Factory as a “very free time, to be able to test things, meet many people and not have to worry so much about money... it was just a time for learning really”. In the interview, she described how different people would get involved with the space and propose ideas and projects. In particular, in the first three/four years, few people “turned up” and “were sort of instrumental in shaping the way things went” (Fish Factory interview). All these relationships would happen informally, with no specific fixed roles or employment prospects. Thus, all responsibilities and management work would fall on the founder who, when she took on the new space and expanded the business model, made the decision to formalise roles and build an organisation with dedicated members of staff that could take on “specialist” roles (jobs that have a limited scope of the task assigned, see Aldrich and Ruef, 2006, p. 103). The new business model meant new branches of the organisation and roles were formalised for bookkeeping, which became a prominent admin task under the new model, and staff working in the café. The current Fish Factory team is made up of the founder, Camilla, who manages the residency but also helps with the general management and development of the organisation, four people working in the café and the bookkeeper.

So, while for certain aspects, the division of labour came pretty straightforwardly in relation to the emergence of defined branches of the business with “specialist” roles for the café and accounting, still Camilla’s role seems to be idiosyncratic and “generalist”, as she supports the founder in most tasks around running the organisation. A generalist role involves a broad scope of tasks and is usually taken by someone who has “substantial experience in their industries and is willing to accept undefined positions” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 103). Aldrich and Ruef (2020, p. 105) argue that the “founders’ abilities to create abstractly-defined jobs are limited by their imperfect understanding of existing routines and competencies and how they relate to environmental contingencies”. In fact, Rose still acknowledges her lack of knowledge and experience on how to run all aspects of the organisation but it seemed obvious to have a number of people to cover shifts at the café (while she still learns how to market it for the local audience). She argues that a meeting with “key people” would involve the current four paid staff, some long-term volunteer (about the same number of paid staff), Camilla and some studio members involved in decision-making.

However, the division of labour is a sign of how the organisation has been evolving, Rose has been running Fish Factory for seven years and shows awareness of this process, commenting:

“when we moved, I made it into a CIC and I just knew it had to be completely different because what I was doing before it worked for learning and having fun but it was not sustainable as an organization and for me, personally. It wore me down quite a lot in the end, so I knew that I needed to, like, formally make it something other than myself. And also kind of emotionally do that, like, offer it to other people to have a part of it” (Fish Factory interview).

We can note from this quote how formalizing the organization within a legal framework, and the subsequent definition of roles, has helped the founder to “make it something other than myself”. This is a recurring theme in the interviews across the organizations that have one or two founders, but it can also apply to groups who, wanting to establish internal and external boundaries of the organization, still want to make it a distinct “more open” entity than being a “personal project”. The struggle that many founders face in trying to separate their identity from their organization’s identity eventually poses questions on the long-term survival of organisations. If the organization’s identity is dependent on the founder, then how will the organisation carry on if the founder goes away? This is a particular pressing question for many companies (an example is the evolution of Apple after the passing of Steve Jobs. See Bjarin, 2019 and Samarajiva, 2019) and cultural organisations that are internally and externally recognised in association to the founders’ persona, individual directors or artists for their accomplishments and artistic vision (for example see Ludel, 2020). It should be remembered that this is not always the goal for founders, as they would seek to sustain their organisation until it made sense for it to exist. In most interviews, founders would speak about their duty to make sure that other members or someone would continue the organisation. However, this was not always the case, with founders reflecting that perhaps it was not their responsibility to make sure the organisation existed and if they were to move on, it would be the members to keep it going. In terms of managing the programme of events and exhibition, the founder of Fish Factory describes how quite a few people “are in it and put a lot in because they want it to exist but also because they want to do their projects”. It seems like that given the limited funding, she retains a certain degree of control over the programme, however she cannot actively invite artists but rather:

“I wouldn’t say we are programming all of the program because a lot of it is just people coming to us with their ideas and then we have a kind of system for sorting out those ideas, where they fall within what we do, and we just try and make as many of those things happen as possible. Beyond that we do put on our own projects and things that we want to program but in reality we don’t really have that much time to do that because of all the mountains of admin we’re doing. Everybody from the studios is invited to use the gallery for free - the exhibition we are putting up this afternoon is a group show we do every year to try and encourage that

-, then the staff and the volunteers are also encouraged to use the space how they want to and then... yeah there's just a constant tide of people who want to put on exhibitions and gigs and events and it's just increasing [...] so yeah it's very, very open kind of thing" (Fish Factory Interview).

I have asked Rose whether she feels a frustration or a problem with the fact that she seems to have limited capacity to programme her own activities and whether, while opening it up to others it is something she wants for the programme, there would be a risk that she would lose ownership of the programme. Losing control or ownership of the programme could be problematic as many cultural organisations establish their organisational identity and forms through their activities. The kind of events, exhibitions and artists that cultural organisations produce and support carry various implicit and explicit values around art and culture, eventually defining what "kind of space" an organisation is. Not being able to control the programme could disperse the audience as well as interests from those that are invested in a certain idea of the organisation. Rose admitted frustration because she would like to be able to have a budget to produce more of her own programme and that often she is not able to do them, if not for the money, for the time because of the "mountains of admin". However, there is not really a frustration in terms of what events and exhibitions are hosted as Rose argues that after 7 years, people that want to put on their own projects have understood the "more experimental and contemporary" remit of the organisations and come with ideas, values and works that she shares and happy to support through Fish Factory. Eventually, Rose keeps control over the programme which falls under her artistic vision; however, while she needs to manage the mountain of admin, internal members of the organisation and external people can propose projects and events, dedicating their own time to their projects and generating revenue for the venue through tickets of bar purchase. When visiting the organisation, I stayed for a couple of days and I attended events and just hanged out in the café. I met about 15 people (artists that have a studio there, friends, "members") who were happy to tell me about their involvement with the organisation, how they like to help out by keeping the shop open or cleaning and also the kind of events they have contributed with. It seemed as if without that group of people, it would be impossible for the organisation to maintain the same level of activity.

This collaborative, networked, way of working is at the core of the organisations I have interviewed and observed. Then, I would argue that their sustainability, which implies the reproduction of the activities and knowledge contributing to the organisation's goals, is strongly connected to the involvement of members, who orientate themselves towards users or supporters' behaviours by holding and passing on organisational knowledge and culture. Using the associative membership model proposed by Aldrich and Ruef (2006), we can recognise in those people external to the

organisation a form of user-oriented behaviour as their engagement is “sustained by the rewards that autonomous participants derive from their association with the organisation” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 94). A similar reward can be identified in non-monetary exchanges when, for example, artists volunteer their labour to build their portfolio by putting on their projects for free. When achieving sustainability is associated with ensuring continuity, whether we are looking at organisations that employ a number of people or are run by individuals, founders must be able to draw boundaries between themselves and the organisation, so that the managing of the organisation can be transferred as a bounded entity for others to participate in and continue.

Boundaries between the founders’ identity and their organisations come to be defined with the development of the organizational structure, through the division of labour, and the emergence of the organizational form, a recognizable identity both internally and externally to the organization. The emergence of an organizational form refers to “patterned social interaction between members that sustains organizational knowledge and orients participants to a common identity” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 102). Members that can be identified as “supporters” reproduce “organization-sustaining behaviours that are not linked to self-interested outcomes” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 95). Supporters, by identifying with the organisation, have a stake in passing on organisational knowledge (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 97) which contribute to the formation of strong legacies from their founders and the likelihood of long-term survival (Ahn, 2018, p. 1). On the one hand, I would argue that attempts to actively involve members, as at Bon Volks, could be an effective strategy to ensure the continuation of the organisation after his departure. Compared to Fish Factory, Bon Volks is still at an earlier stage in the evolution of the organisation, as the group is interacting to define roles and it is in the process of shaping its organisational form through the building of a shared identity and the formation of organisational knowledge and culture. We can already see a partial transformation of members from “users”, who do not want to get involved as directors but only rent a studio space, to “supporters”, those who volunteer their time to run the organisation .

On the other hand, Fish Factory already presents an elementary division of labour and the legal formalisation of the organisation into a CIC solidifies the existing identity boundaries of the organisation. The forming of the organisational identity, different from that of the founder, could benefit both the founder’s capacity to run the organisation in the short-term but also ensure the longevity of the organisation too. Interestingly, Rose talked about an emotional motivation that led to the formalisation of Fish Factory into a company. While this could be interpreted from her subjective point of view, as she described the previous experience as something that “wore her down” emotionally, she also added that drawing organisational boundaries also meant “offer it to other people to have a part of it”. Notably, Aldrich and Ruef (2006, p.95) specify that their use of the



“supporter” only “refer to members’ behaviours, not their emotional state. Being a supporter carries no necessary implication of emotional commitment to an organisation”.

However, other authors (Kalleberg and Griffin, 1978; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990) argue that questions on members’ emotional commitment can be empirically explored in relation to their role, workgroup or industry characteristics. This is particularly interesting in the context of the creative and cultural industries, and in particular in the context of artist-run organisations motivated by the goal to guarantee artists’ creative autonomy. If artists’ engage with these organisations to maintain their creative autonomy, it means that they feel supported to produce or exhibit “authentic work”, which is, then, likely to carry emotional investment. While there is no evidence to argue that when artists position artworks they care about in a space, they subsequently will be invested in that space/organisation, data coming from the founders’ accounts on the interactions between the organisation and the members (not just artists), that led to the delivery of a project, show that this kind of participation can influence the kind of orientation that members have towards that organisation. How effective is the communication among members of an organisation, the degree to which they are involved in running it and how much they are involved in decision-making can facilitate a process of identification with the organisation and foster a sense of belonging.

Moreover, while the concepts of supporter and social identity are related but not identical, thus supporters do not always identify with all values and attitudes of the organisation (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). These organisations are likely to attract people with similar attitudes, values and interests. This is sometimes actively operated through specific choices in terms of recruitment based on an assessment of cultural-fit (see Bon Volks). Other times it is more passive as potential members self-select themselves by recognising and aligning with, the organisational culture that is made explicit through the visible artefacts that characterise artist-run organisations (the “DIY look”, the building’s architecture) and the more or less hidden espoused values and basic assumptions of the organisation (communicated through texts on websites and social media or verbalised by founders and existing members).

So while Aldrich and Ruef (2006) introduce the “supporter” adjective only to define the attitudes of members towards sustaining the organisation and not imply an emotional commitment, I would argue that in the context of these organisations most members/supporters also share an emotional commitment to the organisation. This is based on the individual and personal commitment to their shared values and politics, as well as in the experiences of collective engagement in problem-solving, collaboration and initiative produced by the lack of resources. These shared experiences entail overcoming difficulties and sharing achievements (e.g. in supporting the crowdfunding campaign or

making themselves available to help on event nights) and engaging with the new people, the “tide of people” who want to engage with the organisation to put on their projects, give form to a group (as described by Schein, 1984) in which members can identify.

#### 9.4 Shaping organisational forms

In this section, I focus on Fish Factory to analyse how informal and more formal recruitment processes impact on shaping members’ orientations and how their interactions with the organisation give shape to an organisational form.

Before Fish Factory became a CIC, Rose relied mainly on those few people that “turned up”, who “were sort of instrumental in shaping the way things went”, and volunteers, mainly university students engaging with the organisation to gain work experience that counted towards their degree. While the volunteers were key resources to be able to keep the space open during exhibitions, Rose found it challenging to manage volunteers who would only stay for a limited period of time either to complete the number of hours necessary to gain the credits to pass a module, or because they would move away after completing their degree. The continuous cycle of engagement with new volunteers, meant spending time to train newcomers and establish enough trust to leave them to invigilate and be responsible for the space. These kind of relationships tend to weaken the organisational coherence overall and disperse resources as “uncertainty increases because of imperfect knowledge on both sides of the employment relationship” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 99).

Many of those initial “key instrumental members” came to the organisation through self-selection, they “turned up”: friends, colleagues and other artists interested in getting involved in the Fish Factory informally also began to associate with it. They played a key role in establishing the organisation by contributing to shaping the artistic vision, sharing their networks and reproducing the emerging organisational culture as they engaged with the programming of the space and became associated with it in the long-term. Some key members are still involved in the Fish Factory and regularly engage with it alongside the paid staff. For example, knowing that I was going to visit, I was told not to worry about finding any accommodation because they “would help me out”. One of the long-term volunteers offered to host me and I had the opportunity to speak with him about their involvement. Pretty much from the start of Fish Factory, he thought that the venue and its programme was “open” and wanted to help to put different shows and gigs on to draw to it more of the local people and connect them. The volunteer was determined to explain how he believes in the organisation and share its vision of openness and experimentation. He also likes to take on some of responsibility with arranging events and anything in connection to them: preparing the space, making connections with artists and organisations, hosting artists and finding equipment. As he supports as much as he can the

activities so that there can be a varied programme of events, he also acknowledges how supporting the organisation also keeps the venue available also for him to propose projects and “do his own thing”. As being of part of the key members, he is invited to development and general meetings where the running of the organisation is reviewed.

Organisational meetings would involve about 25 people, all the “key people”: paid staff, long-term volunteers, some studio members, and other “instrumental members”. Differently from short-term volunteers, who were more likely to show user-oriented behaviour, the engagement of these “key people” assumes the nature of supporters orientation. Rose highlighted that constant communication with the key members is needed to ensure everyone is always on the same page as they try to operate on a flat structure. Not having a hierarchy is a challenge and not always possible, but keeping up with communication and the joining of group meetings perform an important function in empowering members to propose changes, partake in decision-making, and put themselves forward for specific tasks which, in turn, validate their involvement in the organisation. Aldrich and Ruef (2006, p.99) note how founders that begin new ventures struggle to achieve a balance between user and support orientation in their workforce. Often user-oriented members are formally recruited on the basis of their skill to perform a job but they are linked to a higher exit rate; on the contrary, supporter-oriented members commit to the organisation and increase its coherence (e.g. having similar experiences, mindsets, beliefs), but this could limit the internal variation (e.g. different skills, attitudes etc) needed to respond to external changes (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 102). Fish Factory first business model meant that Rose could not rely on paid staff. Thus, one of the main tasks that required someone else, invigilating the gallery, was filled by recruiting volunteers who, often would move only temporarily to the city to study there. This kind of volunteers would become more or less active, ensuring that the space was open to the public and also having the possibility to contribute to the programme of the space, however their frequent change meant that Rose often had to spend time training and sharing the basic knowledge of the organisation with them.

In Fish Factory's current model, members individually decide how much of their personal resources (time, money, contacts) they want to dedicate to the organisation, this could make them less reliable as they have a less formal relationship with the organisation, but it also has potential for them to develop a “supporter” attitude and become more invested over time and build organisational coherence. Lack of time is one of the main obstacles that founders identified in relation to their capacity to develop the organisation. Hence, being able to trust others not only to delegate tasks but also to share attitudes and values becomes key to shaping organisational form. Since artist-run organisations are often founded on the premise of “commitment”, which translate into business

models that do not allow for paid staff time, artists/founders are incentivized to establish trust and involve members to increase capacity.

As an anecdote of how members get involved with the organisation in different capacities, Rose mentioned a member who “wants to be helpful” and would come to clean the space for free. Rose explained that she was relieved that she could delegate the cleaning to free time to work on anything else. The move to the new venue, and the consequent development of the business model with new strands of revenue generation activities, means that while he still offers his help for free, she is now able to pay him through the activities of Fish Factory. We can see here a type of commitment built on “solidary networks” where the “primary source of attachment for many members is friendship with their colleagues and a sense of personal belonging” (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 106). I think this anecdote gives an idea of how “formally make it [Fish Factory] something other than myself” into a CIC and “kind of emotionally do that, like, offer it to other people to have a part of it” means for Rose that she can move beyond informal relationships and formalise roles within the organisation and finally reward members’ commitment by remunerating their labour. Shaping members’ orientations is a delicate task and formalizing the cleaning job could risk in the long-run that the member’s attitude could shift to a more user-oriented one if his emotional involvement with the organisation is not sustained. Balancing financial rewards and delegating responsibilities, sense of attachment and the informality of these kinds of organisations has historically created conflicts among members. In the histories of artist-run spaces told by Detterer and Nannucci (2012), artist-run spaces would often dissolve as conflicts would arise around paid and volunteer labour, aspirations for the organisation and the compromises that more formal, institutional structures would bring.

Rose recognises as a challenge being able to sustain enough income to pay people, and remunerating labour is a core value across all the organisations interviewed that allows founders to “give back” to their members. While she is still not in the position to pay all “key people”, we can see an organisational form emerging:

“up until fairly recently, I’ve been delegating a lot, so telling people what I think we should be working on or how they can help to work on the things we’ve decided together that we are going to do. More recently that’s felt a little less necessary, because we are two years in and we’ve got quite a good team people who are taking responsibility and taking things on a bit more personally, so that’s really nice for me. We’ve built up more trust and everybody’s a bit more clear about what we’re doing because when we started it was all quite a rush as I explained. It did take quite a long time for everybody to be using the space, to know how it should be...” (Fish Factory interview)

The organisation takes form through frequent interaction among members, who have learnt their roles, their portion of organisational knowledge and how to use such knowledge. They have been developed a shared understanding that facilitates the reproduction of organisational routines and competencies that make the organisation self-sustaining and independent from the founder. In conversation during the interview, I asked what she meant by “everybody” being clear about what they are doing and she explained that not only internal members would be more empowered to work in the organisation but more customers and visitors started to recognise the organisation’s identity:

“When we opened, we were like an alien spaceship in Penryn, like people walking past would be like “what is that?!” ..looking through the window. Now it feels like all the people who come in, even if they just come in for a cup of coffee, they feel comfortable with it now, and they know how they want to use the space and when they want to use the space and we’ve all reacted to that and got used to it and it’s just all a lot more comfortable.” (Fish Factory interview)

From an ecological perspective, internal recognition of an organisation’s structure and form is key to establish an externally recognised boundaries. By drawing its boundaries, the organisation can organise its internal functioning and be recognised by people outside of it. External recognition is also key as it contributes to shaping the organisational form by attracting specific audiences, customers and partners which bring further resources to sustain the function of the organisation. External an internal recognition of how the organisation behaves, of what it does and what is for, can be crucial to make sure there organisational culture and knowledge is sustained and the value produced by the organisation is communicated.

### 9.5 Professional boundaries and rewards in the cultural organisations

The description of the emergence of the organisational form of Fish Factory seems to suggest that the group works mainly through a membership model based on commitment, where members identify with the group’s goals and invest their resources in the organisation. However, keeping in mind that members’ emotional commitment can be explored in relation to roles or industry characteristics (Kalleberg and Griffin, 1978; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990), it is important to investigate the reasons why members engage with these organisations in the context of the cultural sector. In the previous section, I argued that the interactions of members in the organisation influence the kind of orientation that members have towards that organisation. In this section, I explore how their engagement and orientation can also be framed in relation to individual and collective rewards. Aldrich and Ruef (2020, p. 106) argue that “to attract and hold members, organizations must reward them with an income or other inducements”. Rewards can be material incentives (salary, equity, benefits), purposive (derived

from the achievement of organisation's goals and do not benefit members directly) and solidary (derived from "the act of associating and include such rewards as socializing, congeniality, the sense of group membership and identification") (Clark and Wilson, 1961, p. 134).

For example, it can be argued that the member who offers to clean for free Fish Factory's space just because he "wants to be helpful" can lead to purposive and solidary rewards. We have seen how his commitment over time has also brought remuneration, a material reward. The rewards are contingent as they can be ascribed to the performance of a specific task "cleaning" and bring solidary and purposive rewards by bringing other members' attention on the individual contribution. By doing a job that ensures a clean and pleasant environment for members and visitors, the volunteer can be rewarded with a sense of purpose, recognition within the group for contributing to shared aims. However, much of the labour that takes place in artists-run organisations involves members' contributions towards the programming of the activities. For example, Camilla is paid three days a week to perform administrative tasks and support Rose in managing the space, however she also volunteers extra time:

"Camilla's kind of crossing both of those roles [volunteering and paid job], she does put in quite a lot of her own time and energy because she's really into it and wants to do her own projects there and then" (Fish Factory interview).

Other members too have been described with gratitude for all the support and help they have given, but while they do not receive material rewards, they get other kinds of individual rewards:

"he has built a lot of what's there and he's just been awesome, basically he's done a lot.. but he ... likes to put on his own projects as well, so that's part of his motivation beyond just wanting it to exist" (Fish Factory interview).

It could be argued then that a mix of reasons shapes members' orientations and interactions with the organisation. They gain purposive rewards by volunteering their own resources for a cause they believe in (they want to keep the organization alive), in turn the support they offer to the collective effort to keep the organization running means that they are also the recipient of collective purposive rewards contingent on performance (the organization continues to exist). The existence of the organisation and its space also offers opportunities for socialization and forming interpersonal bonds. These can be understood as collective rewards, not contingent on any specific performance. However, they also engage with the organization to put on their own projects, which means that they get a series of individual benefits based on their performance (putting on their event/exhibition). I will use another example from Double Elephant Print Workshop to illustrate this point.

DEPW is a CIC led by nine directors who share management responsibilities on a voluntary basis and employ a paid manager for administrative tasks and support business development. DEPW has been running for 22 years and it is described by its members as a cooperative. All the directors have personal artistic practices and from the initial two founders, the other artists were incrementally brought on board also with an eye for their wider skillsets (research, business, marketing, institutional roles). Directors engage more or less directly with the organization, depending on their circumstances. It needs to be noted that directors get paid only when they perform specific freelance jobs such outreach events, workshops, marketing, maintenance of the space. Therefore they may have other work and do not engage or engage less with the organisation. The interviewees described how there were four directors that engaged more actively, at the time of the interview, with the maintenance of the space and delivery of workshops and tutoring for members, the others directors would mainly on an “advisory role”. Directors can discuss payment for any amount of hours they put in the organization, for example, if they dedicate an extensive amount of hours on networking or writing funding applications. They argue that this work is needed for the development of the organisation however, it is never remunerated. For the directors that maintain an active artistic practice, they benefit from the involvement with DEPW by having access to the space and groups’ contacts.

However, the boundary between what directly benefits their own practice and the organization can often be blurred. When a director works as a technician for a day, the job directly benefits the organization as well as it benefits the artists, who also rely on this income for their own livelihood. While this could be understood as user-oriented behaviour, the wider commitment, even just by keeping the “director” identity, to the organization suggests that a supporter orientation is still prevalent. However, artists/directors can also benefit from the organisation in support of their projects: “I guess it's a more like eventually is a mutual relationship because you get paid and also get paid to use the space but because I don't know how know you could have done it I guess for by yourself” (DEPW interview).

For example, claiming the support of the organization for their project in funding applications, or reaching its members and audiences. In the interview, the directors cited examples of projects that they thought directly benefitted the organization as they were not reflecting their personal practice, but also noted how being able to present the organization as a partner meant they were awarded funding for their personal projects. In the first instance, the project would bring material rewards both for the individual artists running it (remuneration) and the organization (print workshop’s members subscriptions/workshop fees) but attention is brought to the collective rewards (leading/hosting activities contribute to different levels to the existence of the organization they are all invested in). When, instead, an artist/director delivers a personal project, which usually contributes to the

organization as they pay materials/use of the space, attention, here, is brought to material and purposive rewards that are linked to the artist's own career. Often the discourse around artist-led spaces is dominated by logics of resistance to neo-liberal practices, solidarity, collectivism, self-organisation etc. and often discussed as selfless practices. As artists reject commercial logics for their organisations and artworks, they often highlight the communal spirits of shared projects and enterprises, however the benefit that networking and association with an organisation bring to building artistic identities and validation should also be accounted for. It could be argued that artists (founders/directors/members) are drawn to engage with artist-run organizations for the range of rewards they offer. They can be solidary and purposive rewards linked to the shared values, politics and group engagement but this is may not be completely selfless they can also benefit artist from material rewards as well as professional perks such as building their own audience, reputation and portfolio.

While they work on their personal projects, artists still deliver them in the organisation's space, which, in turn, benefits the organization by adding to the events and exhibitions it offers. A varied and dynamic programme contributes to building the organisation's reputation, in turn this also benefits the artists who are likely to volunteer their time to sustain the organization and put on their own projects. This is particularly relevant for emerging artists as these kinds of organisations value experimentation (guaranteeing creative autonomy) and accepts external proposals. User and supporter orientations cannot be used as exact distinct definitions to describe how members engage in artists' organisation as they inevitably start to overlap when we consider the kind of individual and collective rewards that members' engagement produce. This is a characteristic dynamic in the cultural sector that can contribute to an understanding of the functioning of artists' groups through their members' emotional commitment in relation specific "industry characteristics" as argued by Kalleberg and Griffin (1978) and Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990).

## 9.6 Summary

In this Chapter, I address the collective nature of artists' organisations, trying to understand how to define groups and how and why artists work together in cultural organisations. Most organisations in Guild responded to a call for, and applied as, "artist groups". Even though this is a traditional form of thinking and organises artist-run spaces, I wondered how registered companies with one or two directors would define, include, and work with these groups. In the previous Chapter about modalities, how the organisations have started, for example, founders of Ort Gallery and Two Queens described how they set up together organisations with the groups they formed during their years at university.



Instead, in this Chapter, I focus on Bon Volks, Fish Factory and DEPW, which are trying to bring together a group or have already established ways of collaborating in the organisation.

Starting with Bon Volks, where the founder is trying to lead the studio-members to orient themselves as supporters around the organisation to help take care of different sides of the organisation: marketing, funding and business development. There are three main motivations for leading this group orientation: making it something other than himself so that members can develop some ownership of the organisation and take it in different directions, recognising his own limits in terms of capacity and experience in taking care in the different aspects of the organisation, making sure that the organisation could keep running if he was to take a step back. Bringing members together to take care of different aspects of the building also connects to the founder's motivation (as seen in Chapter 7) to make it an organisation with "doors open" and promote cohesion and collaboration between members. To become studio holders, artists need to agree to some form of commitment of their time to the organisation, whether it is by cleaning spaces or taking other organisational roles. In this way, the founder can control the recruitment of members and orient the make-up organisation towards a specific cultural-fit. By implementing this system, the founder of Bon Volks is also able to draw some boundaries around the identity and give shape to the values and basic assumptions that ground a shared organisational culture. The emergence of organisational boundaries is evidenced by the fact that some perspective studio holders prefer not to join the organisation and others have left, while new members are willing to take up the space and the commitment that comes with it. This process is also starting to emerge organisational roles as the founder has been learning how to share his ethos and the organisation and the group, in its almost four years of existence, with long-term and new members starting to develop a shared organisational culture.

This is different from Fish Factory, which instead has been running for eight years, where the founder had to learn how to share organisational knowledge, and how to work with her, a numbers of volunteer. In this case too, some volunteers have left while others have become "key members" part of the decision making. The transition to set up of a company and to a new space has also brought the opportunity to establish paid roles within the organisation and formalise its identity. The fact that paid staff and members are taking the initiative and Rose can delegate tasks as members have learnt routines and practices. In both organisations, founders admit the limits of their knowledge and experience in running the organisation and dealing with the groups. However, in both cases, the involvement of members in running the organisation could ensure that members orient themselves as supporters by acquiring skills and a feeling of ownership of the organisation. In turn, this engagement has an impact in the present by providing staff capacity with people volunteering their time to carry out different tasks and can create a legacy for sustaining the organisation in the future

where the knowledge and culture of the organisation is held by a number of people rather than the founder alone.

As members can play such a significant role, I draw from organisational studies to explore how different rewards (material, purposive, solidary) can impact members engagement. Aldrich, Ruef and Lippman argue that founders and managers of the emerging organisation go through a phase of steep learning through the emergence of roles, idiosyncratic jobs and managing people and the organisation. Differently from the other organisation, DEPW, which has been running for more than 20 years, presents instead clearer roles and ways of working. The organisation had two founders and evolved into a cooperative. While formally non-incorporated as a cooperative, the formalisation of a community interest company with nine appointed directors strives to find a compromise between legislation and actual ways of working. The directors are more or less involved with the running of the organisation and their involvement can span from a guiding role, similar to a trustee, or to making sure materials are stocked and courses delivered. Engaging with the organisation can be a way for artists, including the directors, to be employed as freelancers and deliver courses and workshops. In the interview with one of the directors, I explored the identity boundaries between the two professional identities, as an artist and the director of DEPW. Many founders/managers of the organisations in Guild, found it challenging to manage the organisation and keep their practices going as they spend most of their time trying to get their organisation going. When discussing the involvement of the directors of DEPW, the directors felt sometimes they had to step back from the organisation in order to focus on their practice. However, their engagement can also bring mutual benefits when they can deliver projects on behalf of the organisation. Therefore, bringing funding that supports the organisation's activities and their own artistic practice.

Much of the agenda that dominates the creative industries discourse focuses on economic growth and the implication that investment in cultural organisations' sustainability leads to long-term returns, longevity, size and growth, attributes which have become synonyms with success. However, small organisations have different ambitions and goals. Many aim to expand programming, pay more collaborators and reach new audiences, whilst others plan to change focus, constituency and location, others have long-term plans based on maintaining the current size, mission and working style: "small budgets and few paid staff do not mean low impact" (Markusen *et al.*, 2011, p. 13). Re-thinking "success" in this context and how economic and other values are created is key in the context of small arts organisations: "When in-kind donations of space, equipment, services, and materials and the value of volunteer time are taken into account, arts organizations' collective arts productivity and economic impact are much larger than reported budgets convey" (Markusen *et al.*, 2011, p. 24). With this perspective in mind, the impact of the covid crisis on the cultural sector could be re-thought.

Kaszynska (2018, p. 23) argues that ideas “drive policy, not evidence per se” over long periods “by gradually changing the way actors think about particular issues”. The idea that sustainability is about the quality of a system and resilience is about the responses of a system to a “shock”, in cultural policy, sustainability then has more to do with general characteristics of the sector (e.g. “thriving, “accessible”, “equitable”). However, more attention is given to resilience as it describes how cultural organisations can change to require less public funding.

## 10 Conclusions

This thesis set out to understand meanings and practical applications of sustainability in small artists' organisations and a multidisciplinary approach was taken to address this aim by using literature from organisational and business studies, cultural policy, cultural and creative industries, cultural labour, artist-run spaces and artist-led initiatives. The aim of this approach was to understand how sustainability in small artists' organisations has been discussed in different fields and how different players have cast their own understanding: from policy circles, to organisations in the sector, researchers and the artists themselves.

Chapter 2 starts from the original meaning of sustainability to understand how it has been adopted and formulated in policy, in particular cultural policy in the UK, and how it trickled down in the strategic papers and funding programmes of Arts Council England, the national body for the development of the cultural sector. The goal at the policy level is to make the cultural sector sustainable, in other words, to develop the financial sustainability of the organisations that make it up. In the last ten years, increasing attention has been given to this goal, which has resulted in a series of policy/sector-led and academic research that have informed funding allocation, knowledge and development programmes. However, it seems that this endeavour has not produced the expected results. At least, when we consider small artists' organisations, as we can see in the funding of Guild a renewed effort to support the sustainability of this part of the sector. However, this research argues that sustainability should be understood in systemic terms and that its framing in financial terms only makes a partial contribution to an ecological understanding of the cultural sector.

Existing literature points (Bogen, 2019; Fitzgerald, 2019) at the need to explore the founders' values, motivations and the practices and cultures of organisations to understand how they approach becoming sustainable and what sustainability may mean for them. Instead of researching the financial sustainability of artists' organisations, as it is talked about in cultural policy, this research asks whether sustainability could be understood in more complex terms: for example, as something linked to the founders' and members' values, the role of their organisations in the sector and in their localities and including the relationship between entrepreneurship and creative careers. A paucity of research exists on small arts organisations and, more specifically, from the organisations founded by artists. By situating the understanding of sustainability in the context of artists' organisations and taking eight case studies, this thesis contributes to an understanding of what artists' groups are and how they work to achieve their version of sustainability. This concluding chapter weaves together the threads explored in the thesis, contextualising them across scales from micro to macro units of analysis. This approach is needed to understand how the contribution to knowledge that this thesis has made in

systemic terms and how it can inform policy debates and the practices of artists and organisations. In particular, responding to the context of Guild, a Sector Support Organisation, interdisciplinary crossovers to apply different knowledges on small artists' organisations can provide insights about future support programmes.

Therefore, this chapter will summarise my findings according to micro (individuals) and macro (organisations) scales and illustrate how this research can have implications for debates in cultural policy and on the artists' practices. Methodologically, this thesis does not claim to make generalizable findings but to generate ideas in the form of phronesis to provide exemplary knowledge that can generate insights on the research subject. In the end, I draw from these contributions to formulate how they can feed understanding on a macro (policy) level that can critically engage with understandings of sustainability to reframe how we think of it and bridge between policy and practice.

### 10.1 Micro: Understanding the value of motivations and managing hybrid identities

As discussed in Chapter 2, at a policy level, the sustainability of the cultural sector is often understood in financial terms and can be achieved by making organisations more resilient by becoming less dependent on public funding (Robinson, 2010; Royce, 2011; DCMS, 2016; Rodríguez, 2016b; Woodley *et al.*, 2018; ACE, 2020).

However, critics argue that this approach clashes with the nature of cultural organisations and the value that they create:

“Once we abandon the idea that there is just ‘the’ economy of money, we can apply economic thinking to other patterns of valuing. Cultural organisations that are not (only) businesses are creating value in economies other than money. By keeping “money at the margins” it is possible to expand the space available for these other patterns to thrive, and also to create money downstream in the ‘conventional’ economy. (Bachmann *et al.*, 2012, p. 2)

Cultural organisations “are viewed to be socially and culturally valuable yet unable to survive the competitive realities of the market” (Rex, 2018, p. 12), therefore the last ACE strategy addressed this lack of sustainability, proposing that arts and cultural organisations change their missions and their business models (ACE, 2020, p. 49). However, there is no acknowledgement of the fact that artists may not want to change their missions and models “given that this may clash with organisational values and priorities” (Rex, 2019, p. 86). Similarly, Poettschacher refers to “sustainability” saying that “without knowing the basic assumptions of the founders, it is almost impossible to support their business in a sustainable way” (2005, 178).

While this strand of literature argues for building a notion of sustainability for cultural organisations that revolves around the values of the artists leading them, however what they are is not clearly addressed. This thesis contributes to this strand of literature exploring at micro level, that of the individuals running the organisations, what these “basic assumptions” are. This research found that the organisations included in this study are not driven by economic or profit-making motivations, which contributes to a multi-faceted understanding of sustainability as proposed by Bogen (2019, p. 110):

“When defining sustainability, do not just include finances, funding and income, but look at all areas of your work and operation such as activities, audiences, artists, buildings and people”.

Participants talk about financial goals as means to an end and clearly articulate a version of sustainability that involve “core values”, audiences and artists:

“for me sustainability means that the organisations has a robust structure in place that everybody knows. As opposed this of kind of amorphous thing that's based on something I said once, you know something setting stone, something written down: ‘this is its core value’” (Bon Volks interview).

“when I think about sustainability I think about networks and relationship within the city and more broadly, nationally. Our space as an arts space won't be sustainable if we're working with the same artists all the time. I suppose that with the ideas that are bubbling up have to keep growing and that's our way to develop sustainability... to keep it interesting and relevant and alive for us as well as for audiences and communities with work with” (Caraboo interview).

For many artists, the assumption is that of wanting to “do something different”. I have discussed how the proposition of doing something different can be understood as a “marker” of the identity of these organisations (Poettschacher, 2005) and how “doing something different” implies a response to the “way something is”. For this reason, the research proposes to understand the artists' motivations to run an organisation as “reactive drivers”, the driving motivations that lead artists to set up organisations to react to specific gaps in local cultural infrastructures. The recurring motivations that emerge from the accounts of the directors of the eight case studies considered have been clustered according to four broad gaps:

- lack of affordable spaces for making and presentation of artworks;
- lack of “alternative” to existing organisations with the aim to be not-for-profit, politically engaged and collectively run;
- lack of support for experimental practices;

- lack of networks.

Building on literature on cultural and creative labour and artist-led organisations, these motivations have been linked to specific values: the values of taking action and responsibility embedded in cultural entrepreneurship; the value of alternative spaces as not-for-profit, politically engaged and collectively run; the intrinsic value of arts and culture which support experimentation and risk-taking; the value of sharing solidarity among artists networks and increasing wider participation.

However, this thesis also wants to contribute to an understanding of the behaviour of artists as founders/directors of organisations, aiming to make a theoretical contribution to fields of research and knowledge that better match the dynamics and values of the organisation in the cultural sector. By exploring organisational and small business studies literatures, the research has found similarities between the attitudes of small business owners and founders, and social entrepreneurs. For example, the struggle that social entrepreneurs find to reconcile the hybrid nature of their companies (combining social welfare and commercial logics) (Chandra and Shang, 2017) is similar to how artists struggle to reconcile money-making with their values. A director of DEPW found a compromise by realising that their work as a director does not necessarily contradict his identity as an artist: “actually I should stop beating myself up about the fact that I'm not getting on with my own practice because at the moment I feel a little bit like this organisation is my own practice”.

Moreover, in a similar way in which entrepreneurs resort to clichés (Down and Warren, 2007) to create a coherent self-narrative that smooths over the “jarring juxtaposition” between the “extraordinary” aspects of their activity with the mundanity of running an organisation, this research argues artists often use a language that indicates their attitudes towards running the organisations like art projects to smooth out the challenges connected to running organisations. For example, one of the director of Caraboo described his ambition for the organisation: “I wanted it to make it kind of long-term, to have longevity, I did not see it like we would run it for a year”. Yet the end of Caraboo seems to be justified by the fact that “but anyway, even if it was for one year that was ok, we did not have anything to lose. When we first set out, we did not know how we were going to manage this, but we just wanted the project space”. This attitude creates difficulties because these “projects” quickly grow to involve the time and labour of directors and members of the organisations alongside other financial and legal responsibilities.

This idea of juxtaposing ideas can also be seen in the “disavowal of the economy” (Royce, 2011), characteristic of artists’ mentality and cultures associated with artist-led spaces, makes the artists/founders uncomfortable with business ideas. Though they all applied to Guild to receive support to develop structures and business models. Interestingly, when the artists talked of themselves as

directors of the organisation when explaining their role in the organisation, while they referred to themselves as artists when explaining why they were not so confident about running the organisation. Thinking of himself as an artist, the director of Bon Volks wishes that someone could realise the potential of the organisation by “being better run”.

Building on the similarities between entrepreneurs and artists, in the context of this research, the founders are motivated to start their organisations because “something was needed” and to “try things out” while continuing their work as freelance artists. Down and Warren found that the ambitions of entrepreneurs are not bounded by the company they set up and they often have ambitions to move to the next venture. The directors of Caraboo accepted the risk of running the space for one year because they did not have “anything to lose”, the founder of Bon Volks has also expressed the will to move on in the next five years and the nine directors of DEPW want to maintain their flexibility to be able to do something else. Therefore, drawing from organisational studies, the research argues for a version of sustainability that does not necessarily involve longevity as an attribute but rather “persistence” so that these organisations could come “to a natural and theoretical conclusion rather than forced to a premature cessation” (Schofield, 2018, p. 4). This thesis demonstrates the need to shift to a notion of sustainability that is not necessarily linked to ensuring that the organisations can keep running but rather linked “towards sustaining the purpose” of the organisations.

### **Implications for policy:**

Understanding the motivations of artists to run their organisations as reactive drivers can help policy-makers to identify gaps in the cultural infrastructure and the value that artists’ organisations provide by filling those gaps. Similar to the ways in which Chandra and Shang (2017) argue that understanding the values driving social entrepreneurs can improve relative teaching, so understanding the motivations of artists can inform how to better support the sector. This view is echoed by Rex, Kaszynska and Kimbell (2019, p. 86), who advocate for policy to move away from a “prescriptive approach” to a more “open-ended” form of support that can help “practitioners ask themselves what their role in a broader system of cultural activity is, how it might be best sustained and what a sustainable business model would look like in their context”. This may also imply that practitioners may not be the motivation to “be sustainable” and be bound to the organisation, which may bring them to “natural conclusion”.



**Implications for artists:**

Business owners deal with the contradictions of their identity through the use of clichés and social entrepreneurs struggle to balance their values with their activities in a similar way in which artists struggle to negotiate their identities between artists and directors of organisations. Artists need to learn how to switch hats with their identity as directors to manage the contradictions between the culture associated with artist-led spaces and running small organisations.

## 10.2 Meso: Understanding the value of business models, planning and the infrastructural constraints

Business models take a prominent position in the discussion around the sustainability of cultural organisations, therefore, this research has engaged with debates around business models to understand their applicability and significance for the sector. Rex (2019) traces the adoption of business and management tools in the creative industries back to the rise of the creative industries discourse in EU and UK economic and cultural policies. Critics point at the conflation of cultural and creative industries together as damaging both for cultural policy and the creative industries policies, as these sectors are informed by different priorities and interests (Bakhshi and Cunningham, 2016; Rex, 2018). The creative industries are characterised by an abundance of SMEs, micro-businesses and individuals in need of strategic sectoral support that can propel growth (Balzagette, 2017). Under this umbrella organisations are described as “dis-organised” (Holden, 2007), “semi-chaotic organizations”, “business outlaws”, “managed in irrational ways” (Poettschacher, 2005).

This research argues that not only that the conflation of cultural organisations and creative industries is not beneficial, but that the myths and Romantic views associated with creative and cultural labour have impacted the ways in which arts and cultural organisations, including artists’ organisations, are seen. The romantic notion of artistic identity (Bain, 2005; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005; Gill and Pratt, 2008), constructed on the idea of the artist as the chaotic, rebellious, creative individual that pursues their practice even if this leads to being overworked and precarious life, seems to have been projected on creative organisations too. This public image leads to a paradox where policy and research experts advocate for business support programmes “for a target group whose main ambition is to break the broadly accepted rules of business” (2005, p. 178).

However, the literature review has identified a gap of knowledge in the understanding of cultural organisations, in particular artists’ organisations, and demonstrated the need for a mapping of the cultural sector as separate from the creative industries. In the context of the cultural sector, the last two ACE strategies have argued that cultural and arts organisations need to develop resilience by

adopting flexible and agile models, similar to the “portfolio” models adopted by businesses in the creative industries (Kimbell, 2019). This research contributes to the understanding of cultural organisations by classifying the business models of artists’ organisations by finding that these organisations already adopt agile models, often as portfolios that can grow and shrink in accordance with project funding (see Chapter 6). However, while these organisations show flexibility and adaptation, they struggle to achieve stability due to the lack of the capacity and expertise to develop reliable strands of income generation activities. In this regard, Rex (2019, p. 86) critically reads the recent policy’s interest shift to business models as a way to devolve responsibility to organisations for responding to wider infrastructural problems: “cultural policy does not consider that these are changes beyond their control nor that it could take more than capacity building and skills for an organisation to make up for public funding they have lost”.

Moreover, while the discourse in cultural policy around business models is rooted in a view of innovation as disruptive, organisational and business studies argue that disruptive innovation is rare and incremental innovation is more likely to take place. This can be argued for artists’ organisations which constantly need to evolve and adapt. In the discussion of how artists’ organisations operate, there are examples of how organisations test ways of working with their members and which leads to changes in structures and practices. In this regard, Robinson (2010, p. 33) argues that organisations that can draw on “strong networks and a very strong identity” are able to persist and “cope with whatever changes come their way”. The research found that even in organisations that run studios for artists, usually considered a successful model for revenue generation (Airspace Blog, 2019; Fern *et al.*, 2022), they often rely on the attitudes of their members as supporters. This finding further contributes to the argument that studios rely “heavily on some basic fundamental infrastructural realities - namely stakeholder support, a critical mass of practitioners and a healthy and vibrant, dynamic and fraternal cultural eco-system” (Coffield, 2015; Airspace Blog, 2019). Chapter 9 explores how founders/directors of artists’ organisations actively engage with the lack of, or existence, of organisational cultures and identities. This chapter makes a direct link to organisational studies to understand how organisational cultures and identities can contribute to the persistence of these organisations.

Drawing on literatures of small business studies, this research has compared how founders of organisations and small entrepreneurs manage their organisations and found that they face challenges posed by uncertain environments, coping with irrationality in decision-making (Kaufman, 1985), which require them to improvise (Aldrich, Ruef and Lippmann, 2020, p. 77). Exploring the modalities (see Chapter 8) in which artists set up their organisations shows that artists often are also

required to “improvise”, taking on opportunities regarding the availability of affordable or suitable spaces. While local authorities are increasingly trying to understand the value of the use of meanwhile spaces (We Made That, 2014; Creative Space and East Street Arts, 2021; Ferm et al., 2022), laws and policies increasingly support the adoption of short-term property by artists. The exploration of modalities for starting-up the organisations shows that artists are often offered “last-minute” opportunities which come from their wider context and infrastructure (their specific localities, laws and resources), shape and influence how cultural organisation work (Bogen, 2019). However, this approach to working with artists poses challenges to planning and developing stable income streams which, in turn, contributes to the unsustainability of organisations.

However, similar to small business owners, artists are preoccupied with survival and the day-to-day running of the organisations and they both do not show a propensity for engaging with business planning. In particular, artists reject commercial logics and to engage with business language. Therefore, unsustainability is not just affected by external factors and their disengagement with developing strategies and plans for their organisations is not only caused by lack of capacity. Though, the research has also highlighted examples like Bon Volks and Bricks, whose ways of working and persistence benefitted from considering the steps to start-up their organisation’s and planning in advance.

### **Implications for policy:**

This research has found that engaging with business models theory can contribute to an understanding of cultural organisations, including organisations run by artists, through their classification. However, it has also found that engaging with the abstraction of business models is not very productive and, in reality, it is not conducive to business change or innovation. Business development is only possible with additional activities to support artists to efficiently engage with it, for example, mentoring and resources to make sure that they have enough capacity to dedicate time to it. This research provides insights into how organisational structures, identities and culture can make to the persistence of artists’ organisations. This may be an indication that other, similar, cultural organisations would benefit from an approach of cultural policy that supports organisational development, rather than business development as currently approached in the creative industries policy. The research has also found that cultural organisations are talked about in derogatory terms due to being disorganised. However, artists behave like other founders and small business owners and this thesis argues that their way of working is heavily influenced by the wider infrastructure. A systemic view of the cultural sector and the infrastructure can help policymakers to adopt a strategic approach for the development of the sector.

### **Implications for artists:**

As seen, the motivations that drive artists are reactive and this is influenced by the wider infrastructure. However, much of artists' attitudes to risk and bravery, ambition and growth, self-sufficiency and autonomy collide with that of entrepreneurs and small business owners. So while it is important to look at motivations as reactions to their experiences as artists, it is also important for them not to reduce their experience to the artist narrative and engage more with business language and support. Examples of embedding planning in the modality of starting up organisations show that this practice could benefit artists to be less "responsive" but rather, respond to the gaps they identify in the cultural infrastructure in ways in which they can contribute to the sustainability of their organisations.

### 10.3 Macro: Reframing sustainability

The idea of sustainability that has been adopted in cultural policy grew out of a formulation of sustainability and sustainable development that prioritises an economic imperative. However, this research contributes to an understanding of sustainability in the cultural sector that is more complex. The ACE strategy for the development of sustainability requires organisations to become financially independent of public funding. However, the unsustainability of artists' organisations is rooted in their motivations which respond to gaps in the cultural infrastructure. This poses questions about the sustainability of the sector in systemic terms rather than delegating it to individual organisations. These organisations do not have economic ambitions but create social and cultural values that are often deferred: Gordon-Nesbitt (2012, p. 8) argues that "the value of small visual arts organisations manifests itself in a long-term contribution to the sector, without which larger-scale organisations could not thrive".

Further Eltham and Ryan (2019) clearly visualise this in Figure 10, which represents a value chain analysis of the visual art sector, where artist-run initiatives as a sub-sector of the cultural industries. They argue that the initiatives and organisations that artists run:

"operate both within and outside capitalist art markets, sometimes selling works for the profit of their exhibiting artists or to fundraise for their own activities, but more frequently providing cheap and accessible opportunities for artists to make and exhibit work outside the constraints of more aggressively for-profit commercial galleries and dealers" (Eltham and Ryan, 2019, p. 28).

However, as discussed through this research, the financial sustainability of artists' organisations relies on public funding and even for studio providers, their sustainability is affected by the wider dynamics

of the cultural ecology. In this regard, Rex (2018, p. 12) argues “the conflation of the cultural and creative industries in financial sustainability without public subsidy may be unrealistic for many cultural organisations, particularly those considered as part of the cultural sector before it expanded into the ‘creative industries’”. As proposed here, organisational studies rather than business studies may be more beneficial to the sustainability and persistence of artists’ organisations. I want to echo the proposition made by Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt (2012, p. 8) when, in the context of small visual arts organisations, she argued that “rather than staking everything on individual institutional survival, perhaps new ways of thinking and working, are needed, which derive from, and depend upon, collectivist – rather than individual and competitive – organisational approaches.”

Therefore, I argue that the understanding of sustainability should be reframed in systemic terms, which can allow to see the interdependencies of dynamics across scales and the value of small artists’ organisations as part of the cultural ecosystem. Rather than a goal for individual organisations, sustainability should be understood as an objective for the sector, which should be framed according to the values and perspectives of cultural practitioners and the public value of arts and culture (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016). This thesis has focused on artists’ organisations because this is a point of view seldom explored, however, the insights provided by this thesis should be understood through an ecological approach. This means that this research needs to be understood in conjunction with other research on the wider cultural infrastructure, which should include - among the different ways in which the value of arts and cultural activities spill over and can impact positively and negatively the wider society, the economy and natural environment - the conditions of artists labour, the use of temporary spaces, entry points to the sector by emerging artists and the provision of higher education institutions.

#### 10.4 Future Research

This research presents various insights based on a limited amount of data. Speculations for theory and practice combine primary and secondary data; however, in order to verify these assertions and make generalisations, a systematic collection of data is needed on a larger scale. For this reason, I can only echo the existing call from academic researchers for a mapping of the cultural sector that includes different definitions of cultural organisations and businesses. Further, this research has taken a disciplinary approach drawing on the literatures of specific disciplines that have produced a series of contributions and speculations. However, this approach has provided an overview of the dynamics of artists’ organisations as part of the cultural ecosystem. The different facets of the components of a sustainable cultural sector should be addressed separately to understand how different disciplines can analyse specific dynamics and consequently provide specific contributions to policy and practice.

## 10.5 Final reflections

Undertaking this collaborative doctoral project required the development of a reflexive practice on the shared objectives and benefits of the challenges of collaboration. In addition to theoretical and practical contribution, this thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding and development of partnership research of this kind. The methodology chapter offers a reflection on challenges such as keeping integrity and independence in the research process and establishing boundaries around what the research could benefit to the East Street Arts and the push and pulls derived from developing a research question and methodology alongside an evolving project. It also provides accounts and critical reflections around navigating the relationship between the researcher and the Guild team, the benefits that this offered in regards to contacting participants and accessing data and the subsequent challenges around the limits imposed by my position.

The continuous relationships over the years allowed both the researcher and the organisation to understand each other's roles and positions in academia and the industry to progress further work for East Street Arts in the sector that was research-led. In July 2022, I presented my findings with the directors of the Guild Cohort during a four-days residency at East Street Arts and received positive feedback as something that both stimulated conversations and sharing, gave encouragement in taking ownership of their multiple identities (something they were not comfortable in doing) and steered reflection on their ways of working with their groups. In October 2022, when the research for this thesis was concluded and I was at the stage of editing and revising my writing, I was offered by East Street Arts the opportunity to conduct the evaluation of Guild. In this context, my in-depth knowledge of Guild put in me in the position of being a critical friend to the project. I carried out the research catching up with the participants on their developments and to assess the impact of the programme. As I have become familiar with the challenges that artists experience in running their organisations, I wanted to make sure the evaluation could be an opportunity not only to review the project but learn from it. I worked on a publication that could illustrate the breath of activities of the project, its impact on the participants and the sector and the external and internal evaluation. To enhance shared learning with the sector the publication was designed to be a self-learning tool through exercises and prompts for reflection and distributed at Hive, an international conference I have curated in May 2023. Combining my research and contacts in academia and the sector with East Street Arts generated a long-list more than 300 invited organisations and individuals based nationally and internationally. My experience in research and teaching informed my approach to the curation of the conference and its participatory design to improve the dissemination of research and peer-learning.

The evaluation has been a fruitful opportunity to test some of the ideas that I have discussed in the thesis. The evaluation was carried out too close to the submission of this thesis to be included here, however that piece of research shows connections to the study presented in this research. When I had to re-consider my approach to the research for this thesis due to the pandemic, I argued that focusing on the motivations and initial stages of the organisations would provide an understanding of the “ground work” for the sustainability of the organisations. Feedback from the participants of Guild shows that the small pots of funding released through it were one of the main useful things that the programme has delivered.

However, being “small pots”, often ranging between £500 to £3,000 they were not paramount for the survival of the organisations. Still, they provided essential match funding (another way in which the work of cultural organisations is validated) to enable bigger fundraising. Guild was always intended as a responsive programme of support for the development of the participant organisations. Interestingly, as a result of how founders re-evaluated what they needed to work on during the pandemic, most Guild money was allocated to support the time for artists to receive mentoring and work on the development of better models for governance, rewriting of policies that clarified the ethos and values of the organisations while defining their internal structures and procedures.

One of the biggest contributing factors that shaped new organisational practices was the innovation brought about by the peer-knowledge exchange on how to run the organisations. Thus, rather than developing business models the founders worked on developing more coherent organisational identities that could be reflected in their structure. Half of the organisations were able to create more definite structures and roles, which helped them to delegate tasks better and create cohesive working groups. Many organisations engaged with this process which has helped their members to internally recognise the boundaries of the organisations while being able to articulate them more clearly to external stakeholders. For example, the directors of Two Queens benefitted from the time during the pandemic and the support from Guild to research new structures. Other organisations, like The Artworks and Navigator North used the Guild dedicated to organisational development to map the cultural ecology of their region, explore connections and partnership they never had the time to cultivate and gather enough research to present bids for, and get awarded, multi-year project funding. However, artists also found the Guild network beneficial to gaining confidence in their roles as directors by sharing doubts, ideas and getting feedback and time to think through things. By sharing their experiences with the directors of the other organisations, and with paid mentors, they also gained more confidence in seeing themselves not just as artists but as managers and business owners

too. Directors of half of the organisations now believe to be more “stable”, though not necessarily more sustainable.

One organisation in a small rural village had to close due to an administrative error in paying business rates but a local resident got involved to see what they could do to avoid closure and spotted the error. His motivation was that the village did not have a “space like that” and it was needed for the economic and cultural value that it added to the locality. Five groups have ceased to collaborate together and their organisations no longer exist. A number of directors have moved on to secure their own financial stability during the pandemic and others are considering moving on from the organisations to “try something new”. However, the lack of direction is leaving the organisation’s members and supporters unprepared to take the organisation forward. Some have lost their space and are trying to understand whether their organisation is still needed, while others have been facing considerable challenges due to the increased cost of living, changes in the law regarding business rates and the wider dynamic of urban regeneration. Bon Volks is likely to not get their contract renewed and the founders are re-assessing what is needed and how to navigate the local cultural ecology as new studios have opened in Margate.

Eventually, reviewing the objectives of Guild and the programme of activities and funding, the team and the director of East Street Arts acknowledged that “developing business models” was something that ended up being overlooked as the cohort found it more productive to work on their governance, what they really wanted their organisations to work for and how to improve the internal collaboration among their members.



## Appendix A Participant Interview Information Sheet

### Interviews Information Sheet

#### **Sustainability in small arts organisations: structures and organisation**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

#### **What is the purpose of the project?**

The research investigates how formally and informally groups of artists organise and structure to run their organisations. Organisations and structures will be discussed to understand what organisational forms and structures benefit their long-term sustainability. The research looks at the organisations that will participate in the programmes and development activities aimed at sustainability by the Arts Council England sector support organisation Guild operated by East Street Arts. My research is funded by a scholarship from the Cultural Institute at the University of Leeds.

I have started the research in September 2018 and aim to finish it and publish my results by August 2021. For this purpose, I will be collecting data from August 2019 until June 2020. I will attend and take notes about what I can observe during Guild meetings, activities and events as well as relevant meetings, activities and events at your organisation. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will help further research on how to support the development, sustainability and resilience of groups and organisations like yours.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

I have selected my case studies based on the potential I have to investigate how they are currently working, their strengths and weakness (vision, space security, partnerships, etc), the potential for sustainable development and on the range of activities that they offer and the interactions with stakeholders (city council, artists, audience, general public, funders, landlords, other businesses). I would like to interview you as director/ key person/ manager/ co-ordinator of the organisation.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason. However, you cannot withdraw from participation once the results have been analysed or published (up to 1 year from the interviewing date). Should you wish to withdraw from the project please contact me.

#### **What do I have to do?/ What will happen to me if I take part?**

I would like to ask you some open questions about your work and your organisation, this should last for about 1 hour. I may ask you for another interview to speak about your and your organisations' development and changes, this may last for 40 minutes, but please note that agreeing for the first interview does not require you to agree to the second. I would like to know what obstacles you find

in securing sustainability for your organisation, what is sustainability for you, how you organise and structure your organisation.

#### **Use, dissemination and storage of research data**

In compliance with the data protection policy of the University of Leeds the signed hard copy of this form will be filed and locked in a cabinet, the recording of the interview stored on the online storage service provided by the University and deleted from the recording device. At the end of my research, I will publish my thesis and may use the data collected for this research to publish journal articles, give presentations and disseminate this work. I will take steps wherever possible to anonymise the research data so that you will not be identified in any reports or publications. However, this may not always be possible. If you require anonymity for any or all of your interview you can indicate this on the consent form, during the interview or later by email or in person.

The final output will be uploaded to White Rose eTheses Online (WREO) and data will be openly available from the University of Leeds Data Repository. A copy of the University of Leeds Research Participant Privacy Notice which explains how and why the University uses personal data for research can be available to you.

#### **What happens next**

Let me know if you'd like a copy of your signed consent form.

I will arrange a convenient date and time to meet you and carry out the interview.

Do not hesitate to contact me for further information:

Benedetta d'Ettorre

Jon Ward (Supervisor)

This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee 11th June 2019, ethics reference LTSPCI-051.

	Add your initials next to the statements you agree with
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [insert date] explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date*	

\*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

## Appendix B Guild Application form

**EAST ST ARTS****Guild Application for artist groups/spaces****Name of group/space:****Name of key contact:****Address:****Email:****Telephone number:****Website:**

Please provide as much information as you can for the following questions, there is no word limit:

**About you and your group:****What is your current status (please tick)?**

Company	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charity	<input type="checkbox"/>
CIC	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have no official status	<input type="checkbox"/>

**How long has your group been in existence?**


---



**Your space:**

If you have a regular/permanent space please tell us more about the physical space or venue you use, size, condition, any key issues regarding the space:

**Who owns your space or building?**

---

**If rented, please give details of current lease:**

---

**Tell us about the activities and resources you provide, for example, studio spaces, temporary project space, exhibition spaces, workshops, classes etc:**

**If you do not use a regular space please tell us how/where your group operates:**

**Financial Information:****Do you receive any funding (please tick)?**

Arts Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>
Philanthropic support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Earned income	<input type="checkbox"/>
Earned income is over 90% of our income.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please provide outline details of the income/expenditure for the last 3 years. If you would prefer you can provide this as a separate attachment.

<b>Income</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
<b>2016:</b>	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Total:</b>
<b>2017:</b>	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Total:</b>
<b>2018:</b>	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Total:</b>

**What connections does your group have to the local community? (Residents, businesses, local authority, education establishments, local groups etc):**

**What do you perceive are the biggest obstacles to the group's sustainability?**

**What do you see as the most important support Guild can bring to your group?**



**How did you find out about the Guild open call (please tick)?**

Social Media	
East Street Arts website	
East Street Arts newsletter	
News article	
Other, please state	

**Please add any further information you want to tell us about:**

**I have included a film/other documentation to support this application. Yes / No**

**I have included a separate finance sheet. Yes/ No**

**I would like to be added to the East Street Arts mailing list. Yes / No**

**Forward complete forms to [guild@esamail.org.uk](mailto:guild@esamail.org.uk) by 4pm Monday 11th February 2019**

**[www.eaststreetarts.org.uk](http://www.eaststreetarts.org.uk)**

Registered office: East Street Arts, Patrick Studios, St Marys Lane, Leeds LS9 7EH

+44(0) 113 248 0040 • [guild@esamail.org.uk](mailto:guild@esamail.org.uk)

East Street Arts • Company number: 03598612 • Registered in England & Wales • Charity number 1077401

Company limited by guarantee

## Appendix C Nvivo Classification of Guild Successful applications

Applications	Yrs Existence	Location	Funding	Space Security	Landlord	Number of studios
Abingdon Studios	4	Blackpool	Earned Income	Temporary spaces not precarious	Charity	10
Assembly House	5	Leeds	Local Authority	Temporary spaces not precarious	Commercial Landlord	Unassigned
Bon Volks	3	Margate	Not Applicable	10 year lease	Commercial Landlord	23
Bricks Bristol	Not applicable	Bristol	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Caraboo	11	Bristol	ACE, Philanthropic Support, Earned Income, Other funding	Temporary spaces	Charity	8
CIWA	Not applicable	Manchester	Earned Income	Temporary spaces not precarious	Charity	25
Double Elephant	22	Exeter	Arts Council, Philanthropic Support, Earned Income, Other funding	Lease not renewed but protected by law	Charity	100 members
Dyad Creative	5	Norwich	ACE, Personal Income	Temporary spaces not precarious	Commercial Landlord (ESA)	One
Fish Factory Arts	8	Penryn	Earned Income	Temporary spaces not precarious	Commercial Landlord	10
Haarlem Artspace	2	Wirksworth	Arts Council, Philanthropic Support, Earned Income, Other funding	3 years rolling lease	Commercial Landlord	20
K6 Gallery	4	Southampton	Unassigned	Secure space	Charity	Unassigned
Live Art Bistro	6	Leeds	Unassigned	3 years rolling lease	Commercial Landlord	10
Navigator North	9	Middlesborough	ACE, Local Authority, Earned, philanthropic	Temporary spaces not precarious	Commercial Landlord (ESA)	20
Ort Gallery	6	Birmingham	ACE, Local Authority, Earned	35 years lease	Charity	1
Proforma	1	Manchester	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned

Rising Sun Arts Centre	27	Reading	Unassigned	Secure space	Private Landlord	Unassigned
Shy Bairns	2	Manchester	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	1
The Artworks	11	Halifax	Local Authority, Earned Income, Other	Temporary spaces not precarious	Commercial Landlord	Unassigned
The Penthouse	6	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned
Two Queens	7	Leicester	ACE, Uni, Earned	waiting to be renewed	Pension trust	52

Applications	Management	Paid staff	Diversity of staff	SIC	Legal Status
Abingdon Studios	One or two key members look after overall management (4)	Not Applicable	Queer	90040	Company
Assembly House	One or two key members look after overall management	Paid Staff	Unassigned	90040	CIC
Bon Volks	One or two key members look after overall management (possible collective)	1 director paid freelance	Unassigned	90030	CIC
Bricks Bristol	Other	Unassigned	Unassigned	90030 and 90040	Charity
Caraboo	Most or all group members share responsibilities	Freelance	Unassigned	90030 and 90040	CIC
CIWA	One or two key members look after overall management	Not Applicable	Women and BAME	Unassigned	No official status
Double Elephant	Most or all group members share responsibilities	1 paid manager, 9 volunteer directors	Unassigned	90030 and 90040	CIC
Dyad Creative	One or two key members look after overall management	Not Applicable	Women-led	Unassigned	No official status
Fish Factory Arts	One or two key members look after overall management (possible collective)	Paid Staff	Women	90030, 47781, 90040	CIC

Haarlem Artspace	One or two key members look after overall management	1 director paid	Women	90040	CIC
K6 Gallery	Unassigned	Unpaid	No	Unassigned	No official status
Live Art Bistro	One or two key members look after overall management	Paid Managers no staff	Queer	90030, 90040, 90010,90020	Company
Navigator North	One or two key members look after overall management	Paid Managers no staff	Not Applicable	90030	CIC
Ort Gallery	One or two key members look after overall management	Paid Managers no staff	BAME led	90030	CIC
Proforma	One or two key members look after overall management	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	No official status
Rising Sun Arts Centre	Most or all group members share responsibilities	Paid manager	various people and gruops	90040	Charity
Shy Bairns	One or two key members look after overall management	Unassigned	Unassigned	Unassigned	No official status
The Artworks	One or two key members look after overall management	1 staff and freelance	Unassigned	Unassigned	CIC
The Penthouse	One or two key members look after overall management	Unassigned	Queer	Unassigned	No official status
Two Queens	One or two key members look after overall management (possible collective)	Paid staff	Unassigned	90040	Company

## Appendix D Guild Applications: Self-Identified barriers to sustainability

Self-identified barrier	Tally	
<b>Premises</b>		
Building unfit for use/ requiring renovations	14	14.43%
Accessibility/ disabled access / inclusive workspace	9	9.28%
Precarious building/rent security	34	35.05%
No space but want space	4	4.12%
Capital developments	6	6.19%
Unaffordable/unsustainable/rising rent/gentrification	5	5.15%
		0.00%
<b>Funding</b>		0.00%
Limited by restrictions of public funding/ project funds	9	9.28%
Not accessing regular public/ACE funding	21	21.65%
Need support accessing capital funds	2	2.06%
Need support fundraising	19	19.59%
Lacking financial stability	14	14.43%
		0.00%
<b>Staff</b>		0.00%
Cannot pay staff/ volunteer led	16	16.49%
Struggle to pay staff	7	7.22%
Staff burn-out	22	22.68%
Time-poor	16	16.49%
Diversity of workforce	3	3.09%
		0.00%
<b>Business</b>		0.00%
Support to build a board/ governance/ organisational structure	21	21.65%
Navigating contracts	2	2.06%
Need to generate/ diversify income streams	21	21.65%
Support in business planning/ business strategy/ business planning	34	35.05%
Evidencing value/ impact	2	2.06%
Expensive business rates	3	3.09%
Financial management/managing cashflow	7	7.22%
		0.00%
<b>Network</b>		0.00%
Business links/relationships/funders/ philanthropists/ local gov/ developers	17	17.53%

Develop meaningful community outreach/ embed within local community	17	17.53%
Business to business mentoring/ professional partnerships/ skills sharing	19	19.59%
Lack of local arts infrastructure/ advocacy at Local Gov	8	8.25%
Peer/sector networking	20	20.62%
Outside of contemporary art network	5	5.15%
Disconnected from emerging artist network/universities/ageing studio holders	4	4.12%
Arts advocacy	7	7.22%
		0.00%
Other		0.00%
Rural-based challenges (public transport/ local custom/ footfall etc)	6	6.19%
Marketing/profile/audience growth	18	18.56%
Curatorial direction/ Collective Artistic vision	4	4.12%
Group constitution/status (charity/CIC)	5	5.15%
Lacking business skills/ No access to training opportunities (HR/Marketing/Bookkeeping/Leadership)	15	15.46%
Artist/studio holders professional development	8	8.25%
Evidencing impact	2	2.06%

Source: Guild data set.

## Appendix E Nvivo codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
Audience development		5	17
Audience engagement		5	13
Beginning		3	5
Artschool		3	7
Capital		1	4
Doing something different		3	11
Inspiring examples		2	5
Local organisations		2	4
Motivation		4	8

Name	Description	Files	References
Chance		3	6
Doing exhibitions	help friends, continue established network and initiate things	2	4
Experiment		3	6
Venues		2	3
Managing instability		2	2
Dealing with landlord		4	7
Obstacles		0	0
Art sector know-how		3	4
Artist-led spaces		4	9
Building		2	8
Cold		2	3
Costs		2	3
Overheads		1	1
Staff		3	6
Lack knowledge-experience		4	9
Limited funding		6	12
Mobility issues		2	2
Regular funding		3	5
Change in funding		2	2
Space availability		1	2
Time		2	5
Capacity		6	18
Burnout		3	5

Name	Description	Files	References
Funding		3	3
Space		2	4
Validation		4	11
Organisation		2	2
Building		3	9
Business model		4	15
Legal form		4	4
Rent		2	2
Revenue		3	16
Culture		3	17
Artist-led		3	23
Risk taking		3	12
Evolution		2	15
Intentional variation		3	13
Blind		1	1
Management - evaluation - check in		4	16
Resilience	resilience is part of the orgainsation's evolution as they can adapt and change and die or survive (sustainability). organisations with more information are advantaged by social networks with strong (involving trust) and weak ties	2	6
Social network		4	39
Trust	stronger relationships	2	12
Location	clustering - description of the area	2	14



Name	Description	Files	References
Reflection		2	3
Structure		4	12
Collective management	devolving power/responsibilities/tasks?	4	25
Others' ownership		2	13
Communication		1	5
Formality		3	6
Roles		3	18
Informality	Describes operation before official status	6	23
Volunteers		2	9
Steps for development		4	17
Board		2	2
Carrying out evaluation		1	1
No space		1	1
Support needed		1	1
Business models		13	54
Connection with stakeholders		2	2
Financial sustainability		3	4
Governance		1	1
New revenue streams		4	7
Sector network		3	6
Social impact- evaluation		3	4
Space		2	2
Work-offsite		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Sustainability		5	20
Change		2	5
Founder-owner		3	9
How they see their business		4	11
Quality		3	3
Other jobs		2	8
Free-lance		1	2
Stability		1	2
Technology		1	1
Marketing		2	2
Online content&curation		8	11
Value proposition		3	6
Inclusion		2	3
Diverse artists representation		1	1
Ethnic diversity		1	1
Paid staff		4	5
Programme offer		4	16
Artists development		6	25
Membership scheme		5	8
Selling works		1	1
Community engagement		5	7

Name	Description	Files	References
Co-production		2	2
Volunteering		1	1
Co-working		1	2
Hire		2	4
Making facilities		1	5
Public engagement programme		6	12
Supporter scheme - donation		1	1
Residency		2	4
Studios		3	7
Studio holders		2	2
Vision - mission		4	8
Wider scenario		1	1
Collaboration with arts sector		6	14
Collaboration with local organisations		5	13
Collaboration with Uni		4	8
Community issues		3	4
Cultural strategy		2	3
Org reputation		6	18
Reputation		4	6
Rural arts&craft		2	3
Rural initiatives		3	11

## Appendix F Guild and Research Events

Interviews and visits	Date
Caraboo	08-Nov-19
Ort Gallery	09-Nov-19
Bon Volks	07-Dec
Rising Sun	09-Dec-19
Double Elephant Print Workshop	10-Dec-19
Fish Factory	11-Dec-19
Bristol Bricks	12-Dec-19
Two Queens	13-Dec-19

Guild Away Days	Date
Navigator North	09-Oct-19
CIWA	21-Oct-19
Ort Gallery	05-Dec-19
Bon Volks	06-Dec-19
Caraboo	10-Mar-20
Bricks	11-Mar-20

Guild Events	Date
Applications panel	05-Mar-19
Applications panel	06-Mar-19
e-meeting Stockholm Institute of Environment	07-May-19
Inductions day	20-May-19
Inductions day	21-May-19
Finance and BMC webinar	31-Sept-19
Guild Partners Meeting	19-Mar-20
Arts Council Webinar	01-Apr-20
Guild Partners Meeting	07-Jun-21
Financial Sustainability and Alternative Income Streams	30-Sep-21
Guild Partners Meeting	07-Apr-22
Seed Funding Applications round 1	02-Feb-22
Seed Funding Applications round 2	30-Mar-22

Guild Residency	4 to 7- Jul-22
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Other events	Date
Two Queens (Graduate Exhibition and Cultural Quarter night)	28-Feb-20
East Street Arts Staff Meeting	Weekly
Guild pandemic check-in: Bricks	16-Jun-20
Guild pandemic check-in: Abingdon Studios	29-Jun-20
Guild pandemic check-in: Two Queens	29-Jul-20

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