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Shaping Cities: How micro-organisations contribute to the ongoing development of creative districts across space.

DOI

by

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Abstract

The overarching aim of this thesis is to understand how micro-organisations (less than 10 staff, Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy 2023), contribute to the ongoing development of bottom-up creative districts across space, using the lens of trans-local scenes. Creative districts are spatial agglomerations of similar organisations which offer production and consumption opportunities related to the creative industries (i.e. record stores, music venues, art galleries, maker studios) (Santagata 2002; Mizzau and Montanari 2018). Current literature on the development of these districts focuses on the factors which lead to the initial development of these areas. There is a gap, however, for understanding how over time, creative districts across much of the western world have converged into the uniform model that we associate with them today; populated by micro-organisations with industrial 'DIY' aesthetics and practices which focus on supporting independent, emerging and local activity. This research aim has been investigated with a qualitative methodology of 44 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals running micro-organisations. These interviews were supplemented with participant observation undertaken in 27 micro-organisations, and qualitative content analysis of a select sample of the Instagram posts from 17 micro-organisations. Research was undertaken in four case study creative districts: the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool; the Northern Quarter in Manchester; Digbeth in Birmingham; and Shoreditch in London. The three empirical chapters of this thesis address three research questions. The first empirical chapter answers the question "what roles do micro-organisations enact in creative district scenes?". This chapter develops and unpacks a typology of the cultural, financial and social support roles through which micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes. The second empirical chapter addresses the research question: "how do micro-organisations interact with each other across space?". This chapter provides empirical examples of the physical and virtual mechanisms used by micro-organisations to enable trans-local flows; as well as the implications these have for the continued development of creative districts. The third empirical chapter examines the question "how can micro-organisations in creative districts be supported through the challenges they currently face?". Informed by findings on the impacts of the pandemic, gaps in government support and the use of informal support mechanisms, this chapter outlines three policy recommendations surrounding tax reform, local government relationships and improving grant guidance. These empirical findings contribute to the literature on scenes, trans-local scenes, economic geography, creative district development, micro-businesses and the creative industries.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: CHARLOTTE AMELIA CAMPBELL-NIEVES

Shaping Cities: How micro-organisations contribute to the ongoing development of creative districts across space.

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: ..... Date:

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand how micro-organisations (organisations with less than 10 staff, Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy 2023), contribute to the ongoing development of bottom-up creative districts across space, using the lens of trans-local scenes. This research aim will be explored in four different creative district case study locations in the UK: the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool, the Northern Quarter in Manchester, Digbeth in Birmingham and Shoreditch in London.

It is important to note that although this thesis refers to the case study locations as 'creative districts', others have used terms such as 'cultural quarters' (Brown et al. 2000; Montgomery 2004; McCarthy 2006,), 'creative quarters' (Andres and Round 2015) or 'creative clusters' (Armstrong-Gibbs 2016), to describe these types of areas. Despite the different labels, generally there are similarities between their definitions. Primarily, that they represent spatial agglomerations of similar organisations offering production and consumption opportunities relating to the cultural and creative industries (Mizzau and Montanari 2018; Santagata 2002).

I believe that the term 'creative district' is the most apt description for the case study locations used within this research, mainly due to types of organisations operating in these areas being closely aligned with the 'creative industries' as defined by the UK's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS 2023); such as art, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, music, performing arts and publishing. The cultural industries on the other hand, overlap with these industries, but typically include more of a focus on heritage and museums (DCMS 2023). This distinction is also recognised in existing literature on the difference between 'cultural' and 'creative' city areas (Evans 2009; Pourzakarya and Bahramjerdi 2019; Lazzaro 2022). Importantly, whilst I did interview organisations such as art galleries, craft studios and music venues, I also interviewed micro-organisations that weren't technically within the creative industries (e.g bookshops and coffee shops), but did support creative activity through, for example, their programme of events, or the products they stocked.

Bottom-up creative districts refer to districts which develop largely 'naturally' (Smit 2011), or 'organically' (Blackburn et al. 2014), on account of the actions of individuals and organisations outside of government and policy circles (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Mizzau and Montanari 2018). Current literature on the 'development' of these districts is, however, extremely narrow in focus,

examining development only in terms of the factors which lead to the very initial inception of these districts, such as inner city industrial decline (Mavrommatis 2006; Hartley 2018; Wise et al. 2022), and the consequent cheap rents that were attractive to artists and other creatives (Zukin and Braslow 2011; Blackburn et al. 2014; Alexander et al. 2020). The question that remains is how these bottom-up creative districts have continued their development into the successful, uniform model we can observe across space in much of the developed western world. It is this uniform model that the title and research aim of this thesis refer to in their use of the phrase 'ongoing development'.

To borrow from some well-known examples of this bottom-up model, creative districts such as Shoreditch in London, Brooklyn in New York or Kruezberg in Berlin are built upon a similar foundation of micro-organisations such as record shops, vintage shops, small galleries, music venues, vegan cafes and artisan coffee shops, to name a few examples (Hubbard 2016; Wallace 2019; Wijngaarden and Hracs 2024). We know why these creative organisations chose to set up in these districts; largely because of the cheap rents created by industrialisation (Zukin and Braslow 2011; Blackburn et al. 2014; Alexander et al. 2020). What is less clear, however, is how the micro-organisations across creative districts have developed a uniform bottom-up model with regards to the aesthetics and practices. With regards to aesthetics, given the histories of many of these areas, businesses tend to be situated within old industrial buildings such as re-purposed warehouses (Wijngaarden and Hracs 2024). This tends to reflect in the aesthetic choices for their interiors, leaning into preserving the exposed brick, steel beams, stripped wood and concrete floors as a stylistic choice. Interior design tends to follow a similar 'industrial' pattern, using palettes, steel drums, particle board and Edison bulbs as decor and furnishings (Chayka 2016; 2024). Beyond aesthetics, across space there also seems to be convergence in the wider practices of these organisations, which often have an emphasis on supporting grassroots and emerging activity, other independents, and supporting 'local' producers.

What is particularly interesting is that many of the organisations which occupy these districts are independent in terms of their ownership (Smit 2011; Chayka 2016; 2024). This means that the patterns of development we can observe between these creative districts are not dictated by the CEOs, or retail designers of large multinational companies (Chayka 2024), rather, this uniformity has arisen at the level of the individuals running these organisations. As such, this research has narrowed its focus to the roles that individual organisations play in the development of this uniform creative district model. The teams running these organisations can be defined as 'micro' in size, meaning they have less than 10 staff (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy 2023). From conversations undertaken with these spaces for this research, however, it was not uncommon for

these spaces to be run by only two people. Importantly, it was also established during the course of this research that some of the participants preferred the term 'organisation' rather than 'business' to describe their space, as some were community interest companies, not for profits, or simply felt the term didn't align with their ethos. As such, these spaces will be referred to as 'micro-organisations' throughout this thesis.

Investigating how micro-organisations contribute to the development of this successful bottom-up creative district model is important, because when these areas are able to thrive and continue their development under the right conditions, they can be attractive assets to their respective cities. Indeed, creative activity within cities have the potential to contribute to local economies through the production and consumption opportunities they afford (Montgomery 2004; Brown et al. 2010; Blackburn et al. 2014; Hubbard 2016; Wise et al. 2022), increasing footfall from residents and tourists (Santagata 2002), and creating new forms of employment (Evans 2009).

The key to unlocking these benefits is, however, understanding the how the 'ecosystems' of creative districts work, and implementing this knowledge to ensure that their development - both initial and ongoing is supported appropriately (Moss 2002; Santagata 2002; Lidegaard et al. 2017). Reflecting the sensitivity that is needed in nurturing creative activity in cities, there has been a long and rather unsuccessful history of policy making in this area. Over the years, policy makers have tried in vain to build creative districts from scratch, implementing top-down programmes led by local authorities to brand their cities as centres of creativity and culture (Moss 2002; Santagata 2002; Grodach 2017, Fenwick 2022). All too often, the policies behind these developments have been "light on theory or hard evidence" (Evans 2009, p.1005), with far more interest in place branding and consumption opportunities, rather than putting in the work to nurture meaningful and sustainable sites of creative production (Peck 2005; Markusen 2006; Pratt and Jeffcut 2009; Pratt and Hutton 2013; Grodach 2017; Scott 2006).

This research, in highlighting the contributions of micro-organisations as a key actor in the ongoing development of bottom-up creative districts therefore has the potential to increase policy makers' understanding of the operations of these districts as they happen through self organisation. With greater understanding, comes an ability to provide better support.

1.1 Introducing trans-local scenes

This thesis conceptualises the role of micro-organisations in the uniform development of creative districts through the lens of trans-local scenes, which influence the continued development of creative districts as a whole. This is because trans-local scene theory provides a useful lens to conceptualise and examine patterns of convergence and uniformity across space (Hodkinson 2004; Alim 2009; Reitsamer 2012; Jousmäki 2014; Kraemer 2014; Schoon 2016; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018).

Trans-local scenes generally start as local scenes; scenes associated with activity in a particular local area (Cummings 2005; Jousmäki 2017; Emms and Crossley 2018; Strombald and Baker 2023). The term 'scene' lacks a consensus on definition (Woo et al. 2017), however, in this thesis scenes can be understood as comprising of networks with a locational base (Straw 2004; Silver and Clark 2015), physical structures that support the scene (Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Drysdale 2015; Woo 2017), individual scene members (Andre et al. 2017, Silver et al. 2005, Straw 2001), and the shared interest which unites these scene-members (Straw 2004). A scene becomes 'trans-local' when scene-related activity 'transcends' its original local boundary and reaches new scene members spread out across space.

This thesis argues that micro-organisations in creative districts are part of globally connected trans-local scenes. Within these trans-local scenes, micro-organisations across the world communicate and interact with one another through different physical and virtual mechanisms such as festivals and events (Hodkinson 2004, Mbaye 2015, Reitsamer and Prokop 2018) , social media (Kraemer 2014, Jousmaki 2014, Schoon 2016) , messaging boards and email (Hodkinson 2004, Reitsamer 2012), which will be discussed further in Chapter 5. These mechanisms in turn allow for 'flows' of different scene-related information to pass between scene members, with the potential to influence the development of trans-local scene uniformity which manifests across creative districts.

Existing trans-local research focuses almost exclusively on music scenes, with discussions on uniformity surrounding fashion choices, music styles and values of individuals within a scene (Hodkinson 2004, Jousmäki 2014, Kraemer 2014, Mbaye 2015, Reitsamer and Prokop 2018, Reitsamer 2012, Schoon 2016). As such, trans-local theory, in particular surrounding patterns of uniformity is yet to be applied to wider spatial contexts such as creative district development. As such, a gap has been identified to apply this theory to the context of creative districts, to aid in

building an understanding of their seemingly uniform development across space. Indeed, my research has revealed that many scenes populate these creative districts, with examples including art scenes, craft scenes, music scenes as well as food and drink scenes. Trans-local theory provides a way to conceptualise the role of micro-organisations in facilitating flows within these trans-local scenes across space, which have the potential to contribute to the uniformity of aesthetics and practices we find in creative districts today.

1.2 Introducing the research aim, research questions and contributions of this thesis

This thesis addresses the following research aim:

'To develop an understanding of how micro-organisations contribute to the ongoing development of creative districts across space'.

This research aim will be explored using the conceptual lens of trans-local scenes. To answer this wider aim, a series of research questions have been designed:

1) What roles do micro-organisations enact in creative district scenes?

2) How do micro-organisations interact with each other across space?

3) How can micro-organisations in creative districts be supported through the challenges they currently face?

An overall qualitative methodological approach was taken to address these questions. The primary methodology was 44 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the individuals that were running micro-organisations in creative districts. These interviews were triangulated with qualitative content analysis of posts on the public Instagram accounts of a select sample of 17 of the micro-organisations interviewed for this project. This involved analysing the visual content of 263 different Instagram posts and their associated captions to study the ideas, values and practices that these organisations are sharing online, as well as looking for evidence (or a lack thereof), of uniformity in aesthetics and practices. Data was further captured from the 'like' and 'comment' section of each Instagram post to gather additional public information about the locations of the micro-organisations that were interacting with each other through this mechanism. Over 605 unique interactions between micro-

organisations across space were recorded through this data and converted into a series of maps found in figures 9, 10 and 11. Finally, observation was undertaken in 27 different micro-organisations to further study the surroundings, behaviours, aesthetics, practices and uses of the space.

The empirical chapters of my thesis make several key contributions that are directly tied to the above research questions. The next section will outline the structure of the thesis, how the research questions tie to each respective empirical chapter, and the contributions of these chapters.

1.2.1 Thesis structure and contributions

Following this introduction, the literature review engages with existing literature on topics central to this thesis including: creative district development; scenes; trans-local scenes; economic geography knowledge flow literature on local buzz, global pipelines, temporary clusters and virtual knowledge flows; micro-organisations in times of crisis; and the cultural and creative industries during COVID-19.

Chapter 3 unpacks the methodology behind this thesis: the overarching qualitative approach of this research; the primary method of in-depth, semi-structured interviews; the approach used for observation; qualitative social media analysis and corresponding map making in Kepler.gl.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter of this thesis, which examines the first research question of "what roles do micro-organisations enact in creative district scenes?". This chapter argues that through understanding the different supporting roles that micro-organisations fulfil, we can consequently understand how these spaces integrate themselves into their respective scenes. In relation to the overarching research aim, this chapter serves to set up the relationship between these micro-organisations and the scenes they are involved in. Currently, literature on scenes does recognise that physical structures (such as micro-organisations) are often key components of scenes (Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Drysdale 2015; Woo et al. 2017). There is, however, a gap for establishing the practices behind precisely how these spaces integrate themselves into their respective scenes. The literature that does exist on how physical structures support their associated scenes is extremely limited, often mentioning various types of support in passing, rather than diving into specific practices. Furthermore, the literature is rather siloed, tending to largely focus on just one facet such

as cultural forms of support (Gallan 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015), economic support (London 2017) and social support (Tironi 2012). There is a gap, therefore, to posit a typology which combines in one place the different types of support roles that physical structures provide for their respective scenes. This chapter contributes this typology to the existing literature on scenes, using the novel context of micro-organisations in creative districts. This typology builds on the cultural (Gallan 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015), economic (London 2017) and social (Tironi 2012), literature above, unpacking these terms in greater detail with further empirical examples from new contexts.

Chapter 5 addresses the second research question of "how do micro-organisations interact with each other across space?". Having established how micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes in chapter 4, this chapter contributes empirical examples of the physical (travel for scoping trips, travel for holidays, events) and virtual mechanisms (Instagram, email), utilised by micro-organisations to interact with one another across space and in turn facilitate trans-local flows, which shape the continued development of creative districts. This contribution is relevant to three different bodies of literature. The first is trans-local scene theory, which is critically under-developed and under-researched; in particular with regards to research on the mechanisms which enable trans-local scene uniformity (Griener and Sakdapolrak 2012). The findings of this thesis both confirm the continued importance of some mechanisms from existing research such as events (Hodkinson 2004; Mbaye 2015) and email (Hodkinson 2004, Reitsamer 2012), whilst also updating and developing the literature through contributing new empirical examples of mechanisms (travel for scoping trips, travel for holidays and Instagram). Furthermore, these findings demonstrate how trans-local scene theory on mechanisms and resulting uniformity can be applied to the new context of the continued development of creative districts; with existing research focusing instead almost exclusively on uniformity at the scale of individuals, within the context of music scenes (Hodkinson 2004; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018; Kraemer 2013).

These findings additionally contribute to the economic geography literature on knowledge flows, which are similarly rather siloed, with an overwhelming focus on the context of industrial firms (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2007; Bathelt 2008; Moodyson 2008; Esposito and Rigby 2019; Bathelt and Li 2020; Harris 2023). The novel empirical context of this research, and explorations of comparatively informal mechanisms for sharing knowledge across space, has resulted in challenging the dominant corresponding theory in economic geography; global pipelines. This existing theory argues that trust is a pre-requisite for sharing knowledge across space. My findings in contrast argue that this pre-requisite cannot be applied to all empirical contexts. In summary, I found that different sectors and the actors within them (such as micro-organisations), have different motivational drivers

(such as not being driven by profit), which negate the conceptualisation of exchanging information as risky.

New forms of temporary clusters are also unpacked within this chapter (Maskell et al. 2006), and economic geography theory on virtual knowledge flows is further updated (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Grabher and Ibert 2014), through my findings highlighting the capability of the social media platform Instagram.

A further overarching conceptual contribution of this chapter comes from the newly articulated concepts of 'flows' and 'mechanisms', which have specific meanings within this thesis, and have emerged in response to the existing 'restrictive' theory in economic geography. The term 'flow' is used, instead of 'knowledge' flow, as definitions of 'knowledge' in economic geography are overwhelmingly focused on categorising its contents as either tacit or codified (Lundvall and Johnson 2006; Howells 2012). This thesis rejects the tacit/codified binary as too simplistic, as well as not the focus of this study. This research instead examines how micro-organisations interact across space, and the impact of these flows on the continued development of creative districts. A deeper understanding of 'what' is flowing across space is enabled through the newly articulated concept of 'flow', which allows this research to transcend the tacit/codified binary and instead focus on more complex research problems (Bathelt et al. 2004).

The other newly articulated concept 'mechanism', was necessitated by the restrictive nature of the existing literature on global pipelines. Global pipelines are defined as "formal, structured and thoroughly planned linkages" (Moodyson 2008, p.451), that require specific conditions to be created. Importantly, this pipeline literature overwhelmingly focused on for-profit firms, meaning a newly articulated concept was needed to capture the vast, alternate range of ways through which 'flows' in their many forms can be exchanged across space. I employ the term 'mechanism' for this purpose, which can be understood as a means through which 'flows' can happen. This new term is broad enough that it can capture both physical and virtual means of facilitating flows (such as travel or social media); grouping together these two spheres that are so often referred to separately by their common purpose; to enable flows between actors across space. Importantly, the broadness of the term deliberately leaves room to explore the specificity of the contents of these flows in Chapter 5.

Finally, this Chapter 5 has implications for the existing literature on creative district development, which currently does not explore the processes which underly the continued development of creative districts over time, instead just focusing on their initial inception (Brown et al. 2000; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Blackburn et al. 2014).

Chapter 6 addresses the third research question, "How can micro-organisations in creative districts be supported through the challenges they currently face?". Having established how micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes in Chapter 4, how they interact across space and facilitate trans-local flows which impact creative district development in Chapter 5, this final empirical chapter contributes towards the overall research aim through providing suggestions for how micro-organisations can be enabled, through policy support, to continue their important roles in contributing to the ongoing development of successful creative district models going forward. Ultimately, informed by findings on the impacts of the pandemic, gaps in government support and the rise of informal sites of support, this chapter contributes three policy recommendations suggested by micro-organisations in creative districts regarding how they can be better supported by the UK government and its associated bodies going forward. These policy suggestions surround VAT and business rates reform, developing local council relationships and additional grant support.

This contribution is significant with regards to expanding the very limited existing literature on micro-organisations during times of crisis, as well as the creative industries literature, which often neglects these types of spaces. Indeed, existing research on the impacts of COVID focus on larger businesses and SMEs, rather than micro-organisations (Herbane 2010; Herbane 2012; Smallbone et al. 2012; Panwar et al. 2015; Herbane 2019; Arrieta-Paredas et al. 2020). Literature on gaps in government support during COVID-19 is largely focused on freelancers (Komorowski and Lewis 2020; Eikhof 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Snowball and Gouws 2023). Research on informal support also similarly focuses on SMEs (Hamburg and Hall 2013, O'Brien and Hamburg 2014, Rosyadi et al. 2020, Shah et al. 2016), and freelancers (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Campbell 2020; Karakioulafi 2022; de Peuter et al. 2023). Finally, there is another also a significant gap in existing literature for examining how micro-organisations can be better supported by the government post-pandemic (Henry et al. 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent et al. 2023).

Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter will review the bodies of literature which are necessary for setting up the empirical findings of this thesis. As outlined in the introduction, the overall aim of this thesis is to investigate how micro-organisations contribute to the development of creative districts across space. Section 2.1 of this literature review examines the current literature on creative district development, and is particularly useful for setting up this overarching research aim. In order to explore this aim, I have also devised several research questions, the first of which being "what roles do micro-organisations enact in creative district scenes?"; sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this literature review on scenes and the ties between scenes and physical spaces, will serve as a foundation for corresponding empirical findings in this area. Regarding the second research question "how do micro-organisations interact with each other across space?"; sections 2.4 and 2.5 on trans-local scenes and knowledge flows in economic geography will lay groundwork for findings relating to this research question. The third and final research question under this wider aim is "How can micro-organisations in creative districts be supported through the challenges they currently face?"; this research question will be addressed in section 2.6 which focuses on micro-organisations and the creative industries in times of crisis, with a focus on COVID-19.

2.1 Creative district development

2.1.1 Terminology

Creative districts have often been referred to using different terminology such as cultural quarters (Brown et al. 2000; Montgomery 2004; McCarthy 2006), creative quarters (Andres and Round 2015), or creative clusters (Armstrong-Gibbs 2016). Oftentimes these terms are applied without clear definitions and are used interchangeably (Ponzini 2009; Chapain and Sagot-Duvauroux 2020). Whilst there are similarities between these terms; all generally being understood as spatial agglomerations of similar organisations offering production and consumption opportunities in the cultural and/or creative industries (Mizzau and Montanari 2018, Sanatagata 2002); there have been calls for research to be more explicit in separating and defining these terms when applying them to different research contexts (Chapain and Sagot-Duvaurous 2020). I use the term 'creative' in creative districts, rather than 'cultural', as the activity associated with the micro-organisations which form the foundation of these areas is more closely aligned with the creative industries (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2023a).

Furthermore, I use the term ‘district’ to describe my case study locations rather than ‘quarter’ or ‘cluster’. This is because the term ‘quarter’, at times has been associated with areas which describe more planned, ‘top-down’ regeneration efforts (Moss 2002; Chapain and Sagot-Duvauroux 2020; Fenwick 2022), rather than the ‘bottom-up’ nature of my case study locations. Similarly, the term ‘cluster’ has generally been used to describe agglomerations of organisations associated with production within one specific industry (Chapain and Sagot-Duauroux 2020), such as the Hollywood film cluster, the Silicon Valley tech cluster, or the California wine cluster (Porter 1998). In comparison, the term ‘district’ captures agglomerations of organisations that are more diverse both in terms of the types of activity that goes on within them (for example; art, craft, music, food and drink), and their focus on both opportunities for production and consumption alike (Ponzini 2009; Chapain and Sagot-Duauroux 2020).

It is important to state that whilst this section of the literature review uses the phrasing ‘creative district development’, as a result of the inconsistency with which the terms ‘cultural’, ‘creative’, ‘district’, ‘quarter’ and ‘cluster’ have been applied in existing literature, not all of the literature used in this section has used this same phrasing. This is not a particular issue for this section, however, because the existing ‘creative district’ development literature has been divided more broadly by whether the area has developed in a ‘bottom-up’ or ‘top-down’ fashion, rather than being distinguished by whether it is describing the development of a district, cluster or quarter, as these terms have been used interchangeably.

Research on creative district development largely focuses on ‘development’ with regards to the conditions and factors which have led to the initial inception of these areas in cities. Beyond this very initial development, however, there is a considerable gap for research which examines the continued development of creative districts, in terms of how they have evolved into the model of synonymous aesthetics and practices we associate them with across space today.

Existing work has examined the development of both ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’ creative districts. By ‘bottom up’, I am referring to creative districts which arise largely from the efforts of independent individuals and organisations (de Peuter and Cohen 2015, Mizzau and Montanari 2018, Rabbis 2016), these are also referred to as grassroots districts (Wise et al. 2022), organic districts (Blackburn et al. 2014), endogenous districts (Hartley 2018) and unplanned districts (Zukin and Braslow 2011), in the

existing literature. These tend to be understood as the opposite of 'top down' creative districts, which are driven instead by policy regimes and local/national government initiatives (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Mizzau and Montanari 2018). All of the case study creative districts within this thesis can be broadly understood as 'bottom up' districts, and as such, existing research on these types of districts will be the focus of this section of the literature review.

It is important to stipulate, however, that these two types of creative districts – 'top down' and 'bottom up' – are not a strict binary or mutually exclusive. In reality, although most creative districts can generally fall into one of these two categories, they are generally a mix of both bottom-up and top-down (Zukin and Braslow 2011; Lidegaard 2017; Jeong and Patterson 2021; Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2022).

This is perhaps especially true for bottom-up creative districts; where it would be very difficult for a creative district to be exclusively bottom-up. To explain further, even the most 'bottom-up' of creative districts don't exist within a vacuum. These areas are still affected, for example, by 'top down' actions which shape activity within cities such as taxes, zoning laws and other regulations which can either encourage or discourage development (Zukin and Braslow 2011; Lidegaard et al. 2017; Jeong and Patterson 2021). This can be especially true for the very initial stages of development, where in addition to taxation and zoning, larger scale trade arrangements, labour practices and financial decisions/regulations inform where investments are made; resulting in certain areas and buildings diminishing in value and creating the cheap rents that are attractive to creatives (Zukin and Braslow 2011). Likewise, although in theory in the most 'pure' sense of the term, a 'top-down' district could be new constructed within an area that has no pre-existing social or economic fabric to support this development, the reality is that some top-down developments still do include resident engagement in the planning and execution of these districts (Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2022).

In turn, some existing literature recognises that successful bottom-up creative districts benefit in particular from light touch government involvement that supports ongoing activity in existing districts (Hitters and Richards 2002; Lidegaard et al. 2017; Hartley 2018); although there are only limited examples of the forms this light touch approach involves, such as assistance with creating a business friendly environment (Lidegaard et al. 2017), and place based marketing efforts (Chapple et al. 2010).

A useful graphic which captures the complexity of the top-down/bottom-up spectrum comes from Lidegaard et al. (2017); adapting a model originally focused on innovation clusters by Fromhold-Eisebith and Eisbeth (2005). I have adapted this model further for this research context below.

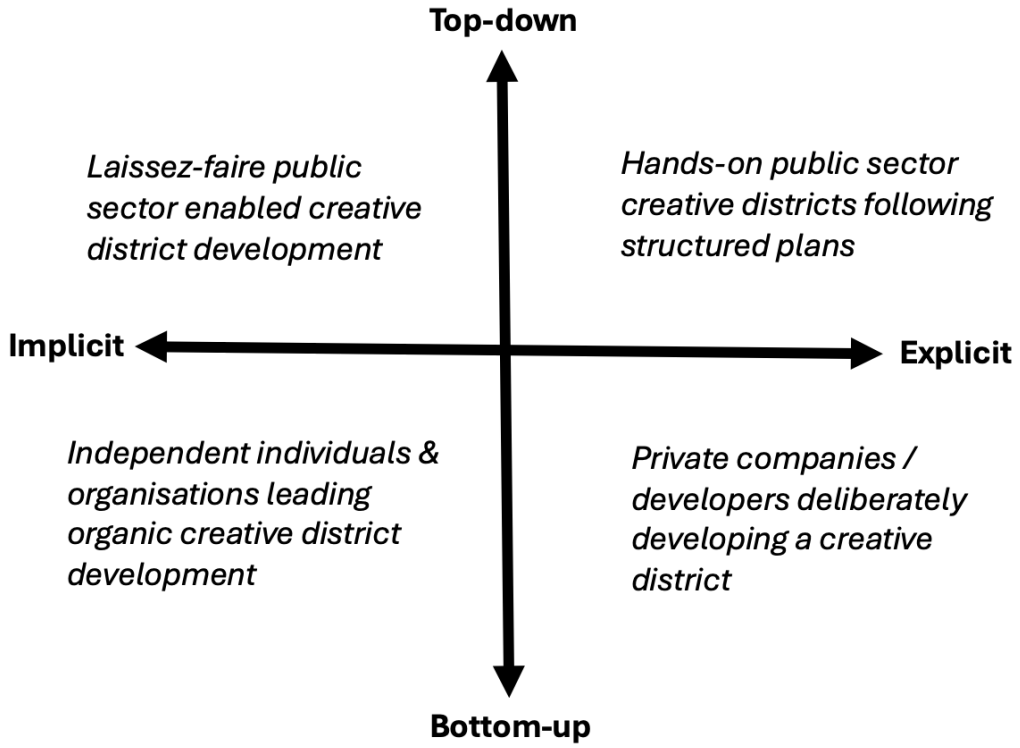


Figure 1 Development dimensions in creative districts, *adapted from: Lidegaard et al. (2017, p.4).*

Top-down and bottom-up efforts have been defined above, however, Lidegaard et al. (2017), further distinguishes these categorisations of districts through their ability to also be 'implicit' or 'explicit'. Explicit strategies have clear goals and objectives that are "well-defined" (Lidegaard et al. 2017, p.3). Implicit strategies are spontaneous, experimental and "laissez-faire" (Lidegaard et al. 2017, p.3) in nature.

Regarding the four case studies of this thesis, the Northern Quarter in Manchester, the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool and Shoreditch in London would be considered bottom-up and implicit in their approach. Digbeth in Birmingham would also be considered bottom-up, but a mix of implicit and explicit, through the influence of a private developer on a flagship development in the area. In-depth case study vignettes are provided in Chapter 3, section 3.3. Throughout this thesis, however, the case

study creative districts are simply referred to as 'bottom-up', as it is this property that unites all of the locations. This is also how such districts are commonly referred to in existing literature (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Mizzau and Montanari 2018).

Whilst this thesis therefore does focus on what are predominantly bottom-up creative districts, this is with the recognition that the terms 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' exist on a complex spectrum, and are often interwoven.

2.1.2 Bottom-up creative district development

From the existing bottom-up creative district literature, a general pattern can be discerned with regards to how bottom-up creative districts tend to emerge in Western developed cities. This pattern begins with the urban industrial activity in Western Europe and North America during the 19th century (Montgomery 2004; McCarthy 2006; Mavrommatis 2006; Hughes 2012; Blackburn et al. 2014; Andres and Round 2015; Armstrong-Gibbs 2016; Bouch et al. 2016; Fantini and Polizzi 2016; Foord 2016; Hartley 2018; Wise et al. 2022), with examples including raw materials warehousing (Miao 2021), furniture and textile production (Foord 2013, Wansborough and Mageean 2000). As inner-city industry in much of the western world declined during the latter half of the 20th century, these industrial districts fell into disrepair (Wansborough and Mageean 2000; Hitters and Richards 2002; Mavromattis 2006; Montgomery 2007; Bouch et al. 2016; Hartley 2018; Wise et al. 2022). This shift left behind a wealth of disused and dilapidated warehouse and factory spaces in inner city areas, encouraging a 'creative turn' as individuals in the creative industries were attracted to these cheap, flexible and large spaces (Alexander et al. 2020, Blackburn et al. 2014, Brown et al. 2000, Hartley 2018, McCarthy 2006, Zukin and Braslow 2011), where they were able to establish a variety of production and consumption spaces such as galleries, studios and music venues (Blackburn et al. 2014, Brown et al. 2000, Hartley 2018, McCarthy 2006, Montgomery 2004, Wansborough and Mageean 2000).

2.1.3 Top-down creative district development

Importantly, creative districts which are predominantly 'top-down' in nature do not follow this rather organic and unplanned pattern of development. Instead, top-down districts are largely planned, funded and executed the public sector (Chapple et al. 2010, Lidegaard et al. 2017). Generally, for North America and Western Europe, the policy interest in the cultural industries can be traced back

to the 1980s (Hitters and Richards 2002), where hopes of increased economic prospects (Santagata 2002; Evans 2009), employment (Hitters and Richards 2002; Santagata 2002; Evans 2009; Fenwick 2022), tourism (Hitters and Richards 2002; Santagata 2002) and social inclusion (Zukin and Braslow 2011), were pinned on the cultural industries (interest in the creative industries came later, particularly around the early to mid-2000s) (Chapain and Sagot-Duvauroux 2020). These rebranding and revitalisation efforts were popular with cities that were suffering from deindustrialisation looking to counteract this decline, with notable examples from the UK including Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow (Myerscough 1988; Miles 1997; Hitters and Richards 2002; Santagata 2002; , Zukin and Braslow 2011; Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2020; Chapple et al. 2022; Fenwick 2022; Wise et al. 2022). Indeed, there is potential for creative districts to bring benefits to their respective cities that policy makers would be interested in; particularly surrounding increasing production and consumption opportunities that are often found in successful bottom-up districts (Montgomery 2004; Brown et al. 2010, Blackburn et al. 2014, Hubbard 2016). The conditions under which these benefits can be unlocked, however, requires critical examination.

In more recent years, policy interest in creativity within cities has been spurred by the popularity of Florida's (2002) 'creative class' theory. Florida (2002) defines the creative class as those working in occupations which focus on addressing problems and generating value through the application of specialised knowledge. Florida (2002) argued that cities can attract this highly skilled labour pool by investing in amenities which can lead to a higher perceived quality of life, which included art spaces, venues, festivals, bike lanes, sports and leisure facilities (Wojan 2014). This theory further posits that in turn, high-tech employers will follow the creative class (Florida 2002). This idea, however, that jobs follow talent, has little conclusive empirical evidence (Evans 2009; Hansen and Niedomsyl 2009; Musterd and Marie 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011).

It is important, however, to contextualise the perceived benefits that inspired these top-down models. The presence of the creative industries does not simply equal economic development (Pratt and Jeffcut 2009). Investing in the creative industries can bring employment, but these jobs are often low-paid and precarious (Watson 2012; de Klerk 2015; de Peuter and Cohen 2015; de Peuter et al. 2023). Inequality is also rife in the creative industries, especially along lines of gender, race/ethnicity, disability, sexuality and class (Eikhof and Warhurst 2013; O'Brien et al. 2016; Finkel et al. 2017; Brook et al. 2018; Virani 2023; O'Brien and Arnold 2024). It is therefore unlikely that without deliberate intervention, that the presence of creative activity would address concerns around social inclusion within cities.

To develop the critiques of top-down creative districts further, it would be useful here to introduce the idea that these top-down models display another type of uniformity; one that is different from the finer grain aesthetic and practice based uniformity that is the focus of this thesis. Namely, top-down uniformity is discussed in the existing literature at the much more 'macro' scale of the broad types of amenities one might find in a top-down creative district, and how these are replicated across space.

For example, local government bodies have taken Florida's checklist discussed above of galleries, venues, bike lanes, and sports and leisure facilities (Peck 2005; Wojan 2014), as a continued license to construct large-scale creative/cultural facilities (art galleries, music venues, production spaces, shops) and host extravagant festivals and installations; a trend that has been popular since the 1980s (Peck 2005; Jeong and Patterson 2021; Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2022). Florida himself may not have advocated for such "mega-projects" (Jeong and Patterson 2021, p.1662), however, the reality is that this is how the creative city discourse over the years has continued to be translated into uniform city strategies, policies and practices that have replicated across the world (Comunian 2010; Peck 2005; Pratt 2010; Pratt 2011; Jeong and Patterson 2021; Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2022).

Indeed, many of the critiques of the top-down development process ultimately can be traced back to these "one size fits all" (Comunian 2010, p.1158), "cookbook" (Pratt 2010, p.123), and "off-the-peg" (Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2022, p.539) models of uniform development (Comunian 2010). Critics argue the narrow forms of culture and creativity that are reproduced lead to various forms of exclusion and inequality. This can in part be attributed to many top-down efforts being surface level, quick fixes; they either spring up new buildings or convert old ones and then declare the area as creative (Pratt and Jeffcutt 2009), without the underlying local culture, identity, conditions and socio-economic fabric to support this (Santagata 2002; Evans 2009). Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein (2020 p.524), aptly describe this process as "falsifying urban identity". In turn, the social fabric which pre-dates the newly declared creative district is disrupted, and existing residents are often displaced or alienated as development efforts focus on pandering to the middle class (Lidegaard et al. 2017; Hartley 2018; Gross et al. 2021; Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2020).

Critics of top-down development have argued that successful, sustainable districts need balance. Linking back to this quick fix theory, top-down creative districts also have a past of having failed to consider how to implement the entire ecosystem needed to sustain these areas long-term. Santagata

(2002) argues that successful creative districts need three different types of spaces: Activity based 'consumption' spaces such as galleries, venues, museums and shops; 'production' spaces such as art and craft studios, music studios and workshops; as well as 'complementary' spaces such as restaurants and coffee shops. Top-down developments have often risked neglecting an aspect of this ecosystem; whether consumption (Moss 2002), production (Hitters and Richards 2002) or complementary third places (Lidegaard et al. 2017). A particularly notable example from the UK comes from Sheffield's attempted cultural industries quarter, which failed to live up to associated plans to serve as national hub (Fenwick 2022). Instead, its rigid design was too narrow; lacking the diversity of businesses needed to build a sustainable urban 'ecosystem' of activity, especially with regards to opportunities for consumption to attract and involve members of the public (Moss 2002). Santagata (2002) argues, quite simply, that the most successful, long-lived creative districts are those which emerge in a bottom-up fashion, suffering a "painful incubation" (Santagata 2002, p.14), which involves a prolonged period of trial and error.

2.1.4 Creative district development literature: Implications for this thesis

Ultimately, however, the type of uniformity this thesis focuses on examining is within and between bottom-up creative districts across space.

As explored above, top-down creative districts often follow a uniform model, but this uniformity is discussed at the much more 'macro' scale of the 'types' of amenities these areas have, and how this blueprint has been replicated in cities around the world (Peck 2005; Evans 2009; Pratt 2011; Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2022). Importantly, we also know why this 'macro' scale uniformity in top-down creative district development happens. Ideas are promoted by consultants, academics and think tanks, through publications and at conferences; where these ideas are picked-up and implemented by local policy makers, politicians and local authorities (Peck 2005; Evans 2009; Comunian 2010; Jeong and Patterson 2021; Rius-Ulldemolin and Klein 2022).

We also know why this 'macro' type amenity uniformity happens within bottom-up districts; e.g through cheap rents being attractive to creative spaces (Blackburn et al. 2014; Hartley 2018; Alexander et al. 2020).

There is a further, very limited existing literature, however, which recognises that creative district uniformity can happen at the finer scale of homogeneity with regards to the aesthetic choices of organisations in these districts (Mommaas 2004; Lidegaard et al. 2017). This literature recognises that many of the examples of this finer scale uniformity can be observed within bottom-up districts in particular (Mommaas 2004; Lidegaard et al. 2017).

As is evident from the above section, the existing literature on creative district development overwhelmingly focuses on 'development' in terms of the initial conception of creative districts, and 'macro' uniformity in terms of the 'types' of amenities found in these areas. There is a considerable gap, therefore, to look beyond uniformity in the initial creation of these districts, and to instead explore how creative districts have continued to evolve into the model of homogenous aesthetics and practices between micro-organisations that we associate with these areas today.

It is possible that elements of this aesthetic and practice-based uniformity could be found in top-down creative districts. However, as mentioned above and explained in greater depth in the methodology section (3.2), all of the creative districts selected for this research would be considered predominantly bottom-up with regards to their development. These districts were chosen because they had the density and diversity of organisations required for in-depth research (i.e they were not chosen *because* they were bottom-up). This thesis can only, therefore, explore mechanisms for uniformity at this finer scale of aesthetics and practices within bottom-up districts. To what extent this 'finer' scale uniformity exists within top-down creative districts specifically, is beyond the scope of this study, but would make an interesting area of future research.

2.1.5 Creative district uniformity

As indicated above, literature on how creative districts have continued to develop and evolve is an extremely under-researched area of study. We know why micro-organisations associated with the creative industries set up in these areas (Alexander et al. 2020, Blackburn et al. 2014, Brown et al. 2000, Hartley 2018, McCarthy 2006, Zukin and Braslow 2011), however, we don't know how the micro-organisations which form the foundation of these creative districts, have continued to develop in terms of converging towards replicating the same aesthetics and practices across space. This is

surprising, given how well recognised this uniformity is, as exemplified by this quote from Zukin and Braslow (2011 p.133):

"We "read" a cultural district in nineteenth century four or five story, red-brick buildings with big windows and raw wooden or concrete floors, surrounded by tenement apartments and gritty streets. Is there a cultural critic alive today who would fail to recognise in this brief description the cast iron manufacturing lofts of SoHo, Williamsburg's warehouses, or Chelsea's art gallery hives?"

As the above quote suggests, the type of creative district uniformity discussed the most in the limited existing literature, largely focuses on the industrial buildings creatives choose to occupy, and how these are similar in appearance across creative districts throughout much of the western world (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Cremers 2012; Lidegaard 2017).

This type of uniformity is dictated, to some extent, by the type of buildings that creatives choose to occupy, which was at first determined by cheap rents following deindustrialisation (Brown et al. 2000; McCarthy 2006; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Blackburn et al. 2014; Hartley 2018; Alexander et al. 2020). Many creative districts are now, however, decades old, and yet the "industrial chic" style persists and hasn't been erased by following refurbishments (Zukin and Braslow 2011, p.133). Indeed, existing literature doesn't particularly mention economics as a factor for creatives not refurbishing industrial spaces, instead, they claim that creatives relish in this industrial style (Zukin and Braslow 2011), because of the perceived associated authenticity, which they find inspiring (Heebels and van Aalst 2010, Lidegaard et al. 2017, Wijngaarden and Hracs 2024). Authenticity here referring to something which is "real, true, genuine or original as opposed to fake a pretentious" (Michael 2015, p.167).

Creatives occupying these buildings ascribe authenticity to these buildings and this style on account of their associated history, which is intertwined with the development of the local area (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Cremers 2012; Lidegaard et al. 2017

As evidenced above, the limited literature on uniformity between creative districts is largely concerned with aesthetics with regards to the types of industrial buildings creatives choose to occupy, and their accompanying industrial fittings (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow

2011; Cremers 2012; Lidegaard 2017). There is a need to both continue building this evidence base and move beyond it, to explore the different types of aesthetic and practice-based uniformity that exist within the micro-organisations which form the foundation creative districts. Indeed, in this thesis I argue that uniformity transcends beyond aesthetics, to also encapsulate practices; with micro-organisations in creative districts across space also demonstrating homogeneity in their focus on supporting emerging activity, other independent freelancers or producers, supporting local activity, and emphasising inclusivity.

2.2 Scenes

The next section of the literature review examines the concept of 'scenes'. This literature is important to unpack, as within this research, creative districts are conceptualised as being part of globally connected trans-local scenes. To better understand what constitutes a trans-local scene, however, we must first unpack the concept of a 'scene' itself.

The term 'scene' has a long history, originating amongst journalists studying jazz in the 1940s, and carried forward as a popular term for describing various aspects of the music world (Bennett and Peterson 2004); before also evolving to being applied as a label for social spheres surrounding urban districts such as "the Seattle scene" and "the New York Downtown scene" (Barone 2016, p.22). More academic applications of 'scene', however, have only developed over the last 30 years (Bennett 2004). Indeed, it was not until the 1990s that the notion of 'scene' was applied with a more theoretical lens for academic purposes (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Driver and Bennett 2015). Straw's (1991) work was the first attempt to use 'scene' as a theoretical concept for analysis, describing the phenomena as "a particular state of relations between various populations and social groups, as these coalesce around specific coalitions of musical style" (1991, p.379). Although Straw's early definition here ties specifically to music, there have been many wider interpretations of what constitutes a 'scene'.

Perhaps the most revered interpretation of a 'scene' is a combinational definition; understood as made up from multiple component parts; scenes are complex - just like the myriad of activity that goes on within creative districts. Straw (2004) is one of the first applications of this definition, in which he suggests that scenes are built from: a consolidation of a locational base; a defining genre of "cultural production" (Straw 2004, p.412), such as a distinct musical style; and the specific social

activity which brings the scene members together. Silver and Clark (2016) take a similar approach in utilising a combinational definition of scenes, although they highlight locational bases as having to be neighbourhoods rather than larger urban settings. Their conceptualisation of scenes lines up with Straw's (2004) in terms of also encapsulating the physical structures or spaces which house participating scene members, and the activities through which scene members participate in their shared interest. A more applied example of literature which uses such conceptualisations of scenes includes Woo (2017), describing music scenes as being constituted by spaces such as bars, clubs, recording studios, as well as the individual scene members, such as musicians and their audiences. More recently, Straw (2017) has, however, expanded upon these earlier combinational definitions in his postface to the Cultural Studies special issue on scenes, to also include scenes: as collectives largely in bounded localities; as spaces of assembly which draw together cultural activity and phenomena; as workplaces, due to the production that is involved in sustaining a scene; as ethical worlds because of the implicit behaviours and values imbedded within scenes; spaces of traversal because of these ever changing practices and styles; and finally, as spaces of mediation, where they can both act to bring visibility to cultural activity, or act to obscure it, depending on the scene.

Other theorists have chosen to focus on only one specific element included in the above combinational definition of scenes for their own definition, such as Kortaba and LaLone (2014) and Drysdale (2015). For Kortaba and LaLone, a neighbourhood scene referred directly to the collection of amenities that were established within an area, such as a cluster of coffee shops, art galleries, venues and pubs. Drysdale (2015), however, took a simpler approach, defining the drag king scene in Sydney as a "set of institutions", notably LGBT+ friendly venues (Drysdale 2015, p.348).

Despite these examples, there is a distinct lack of academic articles which explicitly define the term 'scene' (Woo et al. 2017), with the vast majority relying heavily on the above definitions from Straw (1991, 2004). The issue is, however, that the crowning definitions of the concept have been criticised as being too ambiguous, leading to the concept being interpreted and utilised in entirely different ways (Hesmondhalgh 2005). Moreover, Silver and Clark (2015) argue that due to these vague definitions and wide applications of the term, the work which does exist on scenes does not constitute a 'literature' in the traditional sense, instead, articles have "largely emerged independently and in ignorance of one another" (Silver and Clark 2015, p.427), creating a considerable theoretical gap.

The very same ambiguity which has attracted this critique, however, has also been interpreted as a potential benefit of utilising the concept of 'scenes' for the purposes of this research. The flexibility that a loose definition of scene provides (Drysdale 2015) can be understood as allowing the theory to be applied to both micro and macro cultural flows, from global to local, as well as to different types of people, places and activities (Woo et al. 2017). Scenes can therefore be understood as a 'sensitising' concept, that is, it gives the user only a general reference and guidance for empirical work, and can be seen as a starting point for investigation (Woo et al. 2017).

In this sense, the concept of 'scene' for Barone (2016 p.23) perfectly encapsulates "the chaotic flux of city life". Despite the previously outlined disadvantages to utilising scenes as a concept, a scenes-based lens has been applied to this project for the very benefits outlined above. A flexible theory is required for studying multiple urban environment and the dearth of scenes this project will attempt to cover; from coffee shops to record stores and art galleries to music venues. Furthermore, by taking multiple empirical case study locations across a range of different examples of scenes which explicitly engage with existing theory, it is hoped that the study will aid in narrowing the theoretical gap surrounding the "ignorance" of existing literature (Silver and Clark 2015, p.427).

2.3 Scenes and physical spaces

As we have seen from the discussion of literature above, there has been some research which links scenes to physical spaces through scenes being understood as a collection of amenities or other structures (Straw 2004; Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Drysdale 2015; Woo 2017). There is even less literature, however, which breaks down the collections of amenities that constitute scenes, to look at how businesses and organisations are tied to, and support their associated scenes, at an individual level. From the limited literature that does exist, however, this section presents a typology of the cultural, social and financial supportive and facilitative roles individual businesses and other related organisations can play for their associated scenes. Once again, this section of the literature review will be particularly useful for Chapter 4, which utilises aspects of this typology to explore the supportive roles micro-organisations enact within their respective scenes.

Whilst still an understudied area, physical spaces tying themselves to associated scenes through enacting 'cultural' support roles were referenced the most in this limited literature. I am ascribing

the overarching label of 'cultural' to these following forms of support based on Gallan's (2012) theory of spaces such as music venues providing the "cultural infrastructure" for scene members to participate in their shared cultural interest (Gallan 2012, p.38). Brandellero and Pfeffer (2015) also mentioned the idea that spaces like bars and studios provide "supportive infrastructure" for their associated scenes (Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015, p.1575), and although neither Gallan (2012) nor Brandellero and Pfeffer (2015) expanded upon the forms this infrastructure takes, there are other examples from literature that can be drawn upon to illustrate this; despite not explicitly using this 'infrastructure' term themselves.

In the available literature, the main way spaces supported their scenes in a 'cultural 'sense was through offering scene members a dedicated space to participate and "pay their dues", as according to Gallan (2012, p.44). This idea of providing participatory space was also mirrored by Straw (2001), who similarly described bars and cafes as hosting places for Montreal's house music scenes. Literature by Drysdale (2015) and Deveau (2015) went one step further, however, to provide examples of what this scene participation facilitated by appropriate cultural infrastructure would look like. Here, Drysdale (2015), describes a hotel in Sydney providing the venue space to host drag king nights; whilst Deveau (2015) details how a bar and performance space in Toronto would provide a dynamic cultural venue for a variety of cultural scenes including literature and art.

Existing literature also presents a limited discussion on how spaces are tied to their associated scenes through the 'social' support that they offer. This category of the typology was in part inspired by Tironi's (2012) statement that some establishments such as pubs, venues and restaurants can act as "socialisation spaces" for the scenes they are involved with (Tironi 2012, p.193). Although Tironi's (2012) work itself does not expand upon the social support spaces can offer, other literature provides some illustrative examples, such as Gallan (2012), who describes one music venue as facilitating the development of social networks between cultural producers, which in their case pertained to the intermixing of different bands in the same music scene. The other paper found to discuss the social role of spaces within their associated scenes was Molotch and Treskon (2009), who similarly highlight the ability of spaces such as arts venues to facilitate networking within a scene, however, rather than focusing just on cultural producers within a scene, they note that a space can become a hub for socialisation and networking for all members of a scene; both those who produce (i.e. bands) and those who consume scene based products (i.e. fans).

Finally, there was one paper that was found to discuss how spaces can be tied to their scenes through the 'financial' support that they offer, although this precise labelling was not used to describe these practices. This was London (2017), with regards to music scenes in Portland, Oregon. London (2017), described how one coffee shop would support their local music scene by providing flexible contracts for the musicians who worked at their store, approving them to take time off to tour with their band whenever they needed to; in turn allowing them to continue their participation in their music scenes without jeopardising their employment status. Here, the business is taking a financial risk for the sake of supporting their associated scenes, and as such can be understood as providing a financial supportive role.

As can be seen by the limited discussion above, there is a large gap for research which examines how spaces are tied to and involved with their associated scenes through the supportive roles that they enact. Importantly, however, the limited available literature almost exclusively discusses the types of spaces that often fall within the 'micro-organisation' category - although this literature doesn't explicitly refer to these spaces as such. Furthermore, whilst the above literature begins to explore how spaces support scenes, there is a considerable gap for exploring the motivations behind why they enact these supporting roles, particularly the types of organisations that one wouldn't typically associate with this kind of activity. The available literature therefore provides a very preliminary theoretical foundation for the results of this research to build upon.

2.4 Trans-local scenes

As stated above, this thesis conceptualises micro-organisations in creative districts as being part of globally connected trans-local scenes, which influence the development of creative districts as a whole. This is because trans-local scenes as a concept, are useful for examining how patterns of uniformity are established across space. The second empirical chapter of this thesis, Chapter 5 explores how micro-organisations interact with one another in their respective trans-local scenes across space, and the implications this has for the apparent uniform development of creative districts. To set up the empirical findings, this section of the literature review will focus on outlining the current literature and research gaps on trans-local scenes.

Trans-local scenes represent a promising, yet underdeveloped concept (Griener and Sakdapolrak 2013), especially for framing the often geographically dispersed nature of scenes (Cormany 2015,

Jousmäki 2014), and the development of scene-related uniformity across space (Hodkinson 2004; Reitsamer 2012; Kraemer 2013; Mbaye 2015; Schoon 2016; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). Indeed, there are only a limited number of articles surrounding the topic as a whole, and comprehensive definitions of the term are even more difficult to find. This review will therefore, engage with the finite literature that is available.

Within trans-local literature, for a trans-local scene to exist, there must first be an originating local scene. Much like the wider concept of 'scene', the term 'local' in local scenes is often not unpacked, or is defined in broad terms. Emms and Crossley (2018), for example, describe local scenes as neighbourhoods, towns, or even countries. Similarly, a seminal book by Bennett and Peterson (2004), describes local scenes as taking place simply within "a delimited space" (p.8). As this thesis discusses similarities across city districts, generally I refer to 'local' as activity that is happening within a city's bounds I recognise, however, that local can also refer to activity that happens at a smaller geographic locations (2018).

It is important to clarify this, as trans-local scenes, by definition, are created when scene-related activity 'transcends' an original local boundary, reaching new scene members spread out across space, and in turn generating ties to several dispersed localities (Jousmäki 2014; Mall 2020; Strombald and Baker 2023). Sustained by regular interaction surrounding their uniting scene interest, it is these local to local, networked web of connections which provides the most common theme among existing definitions (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Kruse 2010; Rogers 2011; Emms and Crossley 2018).

Within this limited literature, there is some studies which have explored patterns of scene-based uniformity to a limited extent: for Hodkinson (2004) this was aesthetic uniformity amongst the goth scene; for Mbaye (2015), Schoon (2016), Jousmäki (2014) and Reitsamer and Prokop (2018) this was musical style similarities and interests amongst scenes; and for Reitsamer (2012), Kraemer (2013), and Mall (2020), value and practice alignment in music scenes. This next section will focus on both the physical and virtual mechanisms for knowledge flows which encourage and facilitate said uniformity.

Mbaye (2015) and Hodkinson (2004) are the only two papers which go in-depth on how festivals can act as mechanisms for trans-local uniformity. For Mbaye (2015), festivals represent an important

educational opportunity for scene members, where older, more established members of hip- hop scenes in Western Africa can pass on production skills to willing learners from other locales, in doing so, passing on scene specific knowledge developed in a particular area. Hodkinson (2004) ascribes a different influence to festivals; namely that uniformity is facilitated through opportunities for consumption at such events. Hodkinson highlights in parituclar the role of specialist market stalls at the Whitby Goth Weekend in the UK. Here, proprietors from across the country congregate and are influenced by the products sold by other vendors, bringing back ideas with them for future stock in their own locality. Indeed, Hodkinson (2004) recognises the potential for this to encourage the development of a uniformity of taste within a scene, noting the consistency of style among Goth scene members, regardless of place; especially with regards to clothing, accessories and records owned.

The second physical mechanism referenced in literature is event nights held for scene members. For Reitsamer and Prokop (2018) this took the form of gigs within D-I-Y style Austrian hip hop scenes. Here, dispersed local scenes would be drawn together through joint participation in gig nights. Often at these events, artists from across Europe would interact with each other and take the opportunity to network with the intention of developing projects with one another, providing key sites therefore, of scene-based information exchange. Reitsamer (2012) finds similar occurrences in trans-local electronic dance music scenes, where club nights are seen as important sites of trans-local networking amongst key actors within a scene such as DJs and producers; where they can develop relationships and exchange information which can lead to professional collaboration. Both of these papers, therefore, demonstrate how these event nights can lead to a convergence in musical style across space through the opportunity to network and collaborate with distant scene members (Reitsamer 2012; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). Hodkinson's (2004) work corroborates these above two accounts of event nights as mechanisms for uniformity. Within the Goth scene, club nights are also seen as critical sites networking; again, especially for influential scene members like DJs who interact with Goth's who have travelled from across the country to attend the event. Here, they develop new social ties and picking up new ideas and influences, which in turn have the potential to also contribute towards developing homogeneity in musical styles.

Two older mechanisms for trans-local uniformity that appear in the literature are the use of messaging boards and email lists; Hodkinson's (2004) work, using empirical data from the late 90s on trans-local goth scenes can once again be utilised here. Hodkinson (2004) recognised the potential of the internet to connect dispersed scene members in the early 2000s, namely through email lists

allowing essentially for an “online form of word of mouth” (Hodkinson 2004, p.142), allowing individuals to engage in group discussion from afar, and learn about the latest goings on within the scene. Online messaging boards played much the same role for Hodkinson’s (2004) study subjects, enabling the posting of information regarding gigs, bands and shops of interest. Over time, both mechanisms allowed for a convergence in the activities and interests practiced by dispersed scene members (Hodkinson 2004). Reitsamer (2012) also found that members of a trans-local electronic dance music scene used both email lists and messaging boards for trans-local information sharing, only for slightly different subject matters. Indeed, like Hodkinson (2004), artists, DJs, and regular scene members would frequent email lists and messaging boards to find out about events and to stay up to date, but they’d also use this mechanism to facilitate deeper conversations surrounding the underpinning philosophies of their scene. They would tie in examples of their own experiences and learning from more experienced scene members, allowing for a confluence of foundational ideology and values within the trans-local scene (Reitsamer 2012).

Virtual spaces, have, however been transformed by the development of the Web 2.0, rendering the above literature somewhat outdated. Web 2.0 can be understood as the technological shift from early, static and rudimentary webpages towards to a technologically advanced internet which can facilitate two-way communication and exchange of user-generated content (Cabiddu et al. 2014; Grabher and Ibert 2014). The advancement of the internet towards this more collaborative, democratised network has influenced how information is shared globally, and as such, how its associated technologies have been harnessed by trans-local scene members who (often unwittingly) contribute to uniformity, largely through using social media.

Social media can be understood as participatory applications, facilitated by the internet which allow for users to connect, interact and build a network, through the content that they are accessing, creating and editing themselves (Majchrzak et al. 2013; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase 2017; Quan-Haase and Sloan 2017). Social media can be utilised by users for different means through what is known as it’s ‘affordances’ (Laestadius 2017). Affordances can be understood as the different types of “action potential” that a particular technology can provide, depending on what purpose the social media is being used for (Majchrzak et al. 2013, p.39). Examples of affordances from social media platforms might include pictures, comments, search bars, explore pages and following/follower lists (Laestadius et al. 2017). This next section will explore how in the limited associated literature, scene members utilise affordances related to Web 2.0 and social media to sustain trans-local scenes and their associated uniformity of practices/aesthetics.

Kraemer (2014) writes about how Facebook is utilised by a trans-local electronic dance music scene. Here, scene members from across Europe use the platform to both stay connected with geographically dispersed friends made at scene-related events, but also to extend their social connections by reaching out to other scene members. Acting as nodes in a virtual social network, these scene members share status', photos, videos and events, encouraging discussion and further scene engagement. Similar to Hodkinson (2004) and Reitsamer's (2012) older work, these mechanisms allow for a wealth of scene-related information to be shared across great distances through an updated form. Long-distance scene members can still stay up to date with scene-based happenings, see what other members are wearing, what they're up to, what activities they're engaging in and what events they're going to. In turn, this can lead to alignment in practices and interests, through a larger collection of scene members attending the same events, and consuming the same media (Kraemer 2014).

Schoon (2016) briefly mentions the use of Facebook by trans-local hip-hop scenes based in South Africa, however, the platform is used for a slightly different purpose; the sharing of music tracks. Schoon (2016) also highlights the use of WhatsApp for the same reason, the distribution of new music to those outside of the local area. Jousmäki (2014) notes a similar use of the social media platform YouTube for a trans-local Scandinavian metal scene; here, artists have been uploading music videos which other scene members can comment on, ask questions and engage in discussion through. As a result of the capabilities of these new platforms, music associated with a trans-local scene can reach wider audiences than previously possible, developing uniform tastes across considerable distances as larger numbers of scene members are exposed to the same material (Jousmäki 2014; Schoon 2016).

Finally, although not typically classed as social media platforms, a small number of papers also mentioned music distribution sites as a mechanism for trans-local scene uniformity. These include sites such as Soundcloud (Schoon 2016), Bandcamp (Schoon 2016), Open Sounds (Reitsamer 2012), eMusic (Kruse 2010) and Pitchfork (Kruse 2010) which are accessible worldwide. Like Schoon's (2016) description of Facebook and WhatApp, and Jousmäki's (2014) work examining Youtube, Sargent (2009) Reitsamer (2012), Schoon (2016) and Kruse (2010) found that these sites play a key role in assisting in extending promotional networks and redistributing music to wider audiences.

As mentioned at the start of this section, trans-local scenes as a concept are significantly under-developed (Griener and Sakdapolrak 2013). There is lack of literature surrounding the topic, and even fewer articles which delve into the mechanisms underpinning these scenes and their associated uniformity. Similar to the gaps associated with scene literature more generally, this project will help to narrow theoretical gaps surrounding trans-localism by looking at a multitude of trans-local scenes in a variety of urban contexts, paying particular attention to the mechanisms which sustain them. Furthermore, there is a distinct gap for examining uniformity and its causal mechanisms at the scale of micro-organisations, with existing literature focusing overwhelmingly on uniformity at the scale of individuals (Hodkinson 2004, Jousmäki 2014, Mall 2020, Reitsamer 2012, Reitsamer and Prokop 2018, Schoon 2016) .

2.5 Knowledge flows in economic geography

Although the above literature on knowledge flow mechanisms within a trans-local uniformity context are useful to understand the landscape of scenes research, this knowledge flow canon of literature is still very much under-developed (Griener and Sakdapolrak 2013). To gain a thorough theoretical grounding in knowledge flow literature, the economic geography concepts of local buzz, global pipelines and virtual flows can be useful in this regard. This geographical perspective is important because knowledge is inherently spatial, as according to Tranos (2020, p.408) “it is embodied in individuals who still have fixed addresses”; the process of how knowledge is shared across space in turn, becomes a geographical question.

Once again, this section of the literature review will be particularly useful for empirical chapter 2, which examines how micro-organisations interact with one another in their respective scenes across space.

2.5.1 Local buzz

One of the key theoretical concepts in economic geography literature on knowledge flows is local buzz. The empirical findings of this thesis are largely focused on extra-local flows, and as such, local

buzz theory is not engaged with in this thesis as much as concepts such as global pipelines and temporary clusters. It is, however, important to outline this literature to set up the discussion of these other forms of knowledge flows.

Local buzz as a theory emerged from earlier discussions on tacit vs codified knowledge. 'Knowledge' is a concept which is rarely defined per say in economic geography; its definition is often taken for granted. A useful definition, however, comes from Howells (2012), who defines knowledge as a framework through which "information can be stored, processed and understood" (Howells 2012, p.1003). Lundvall and Johnson (2006) instead define knowledge through the forms it can take; 'know-what' (facts), 'know-why (principles), 'know-who' (relations), 'know-how' (skills).

More commonly, however, knowledge is distinguished by this tacit/codified distinction introduced above.

The 'tacit' knowledge referred to in economic geography draws upon the work of philosopher Polyani (1958; 1966), who argued that there are two dimensions to tacit knowledge: The first is that tacit knowledge is not something we are conscious of (Polyani 1958; 1966; Gertler 2003); the second dimension of tacit knowledge is that, even if one was aware of it, it would defy both verbal and written communication - it is communicated through 'doing' (Polyani 1958; 1966; Gertler 2003).

Over time, however, the term has been used in a more "loose and indiscriminate" fashion (Gertler 2003, p.76). Some employ the term without even defining it (Moodyson 2008; Martin et al. 2018; Ville and Wright 2019), and where definitions do exist, they are rather simple and surface level. Indeed, tacit knowledge is often discussed simply as being 'sticky'; highly contextual and tied to a particular person/ place (Bathelt et al. 2004; Gertler and Vinodrai 2005; Communian 2017; Corradini et al. 2022). Other rather simple definitions include tacit knowledge as highly complex (Bathelt and Henn 2014), or the opposite of 'codified' knowledge (Communian 2017; Corradini et al. 2022; Ren et al. 2023). Local buzz as a concept arose out of exploring the tacit nature of certain types of knowledge, and the importance of 'being there' (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.31; Tranos 2020).

Codified knowledge, conversely, is defined by its ability to be shared easily across space (Bathelt et al. 2004; Torre 2008; Comunian 2017; Martin et al.2018). Communication of this knowledge can be

verbal, but it is more often referred to in terms of text, drawings, figures and photographs (Torre 2008; Grabher and Ibert 2014; Comunian 2017). It is, however, acknowledged that the distinction between tacit and codified knowledge is not a strict binary, knowledge instead exists on more of a spectrum between the two (Tranos 2020). This latter argument will be unpacked further throughout section 2.5.2.

Local buzz is defined within the literature as a form of information and communication ecology (Bathelt et al. 2004; Mould and Joel 2010; Bathelt and Turi 2013; Henn and Bathelt 2018), facilitated by face to face contact and the co-location/presence of actors (Corradini et al. 2022), usually tied to a firm or business (Bathelt et al. 2004; Mould and Joel 2010), and often applied within the context of industry agglomerations, or clusters (Bathelt and Turi 2013; Henn and Bathelt 2018). Buzz is constituted by rumours, gossip, updates and recommendations (Bathelt et al. 2004), as well as more immediately strategic information that is of specific interest to a firm (Maskell et al. 2006), such as information about new technology and market performance (Bathelt and Turi 2013).

With regards to how buzz works, most literature stresses that firms gain the advantages of this knowledge diffusion just from "being there" (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.31; Corradini et al. 2022; Grabher et al. 2018). Indeed, Bathelt et al. (2004) posits that there are no required investments to participate in buzz; that it is simply a result of being surrounded by an unavoidable web of information. The spontaneous nature of this form of knowledge flow can be observed, for example, through firms engaging in local buzz in the form of talking to neighbours, having lunch with co-workers, visiting office hours, participating in community activities (Bathelt et al. 2004), or attending industry related associations and social clubs (Bathelt and Turi 2011).

Bathelt and Turi (2013) do, however, posit some conditions which need to be present in order for local buzz to occur. The first is co-presence; firms should ensure they are able to engage in face-to-face contact with other members of their specific field to allow for convenient sharing of knowledge through both planned and unplanned exchanges. Bathelt et al's (2004) theory is relevant here, which explains that co-location also contributes toward the development of a shared language and attitudes toward technology between firms, aiding in any potential information exchanges.

This leads into the second condition for buzz put forward by Bathelt and Turi (2013), that firms in a cluster share traditions and values. If firms develop aligned routines and problem-solving approaches, then new information received through the buzz ecology should be easier to implement and benefit from. The third condition for buzz pertains to the development of relationships. A diverse array of relationships between firms in a cluster can strengthen trust, and in turn, flows of knowledge. Indeed, individuals in competing firms may be old colleagues, friends or neighbours, encouraging knowledge transfer from personal relationships to professional ones. The work of Bathelt et al. (2004) can again be borrowed here, which explains that knowledge flows and buzz can be blocked if the social relations between the firms looking to exchange information have a negative past and residual distrust. The fourth condition for buzz, shared history, again flows from Bathelt's et al. (2004) aforementioned work; If these past relationships between firms are positive, rather than negative, a long timeline of shared ties likely will result in heightened compatibility between firms.

It is important, however, that the critiques and weaknesses that have been recognised surrounding local buzz are also addressed. Increasingly, local knowledge flows cannot be perceived in isolation from wider scale flows whether regional, national or global; instead, the two spheres should be understood as intertwined (Bathelt and Turi 2011). The knowledge bases behind local economies are likely not able to survive without successfully integrating external, diffusely located information channels (Bathelt and Turi 2011). Here, aspects of path dependency theory can be integrated to understand how a stagnant local knowledge pool can lead to negative lock in (Bathelt and Turi 2013, Ren et al. 2023). Significant problems can develop for firms who develop in-flexible and in-ward looking communication channels (Bathelt and Turi 2013). Without allowing in knowledge from external sources beyond their cluster, firms are unable to quickly and suitably adapt to rapidly changing markets and technological advances, held back by only having access to local knowledge exchange, which is limited and insufficient in isolation (Bathelt and Turi 2011). This potential weakness of local buzz leads directly to the need for global pipelines, addressed in the following section (Ren et al. 2023).

Although local buzz as a concept is widely revered and accepted, there is a substantial gap existing in its foundation; that there is a need for more empirical studies attached to the concept (Mould and Joel 2010; Corradini et al. 2022). Local buzz has found considerable theoretical attention, yet is missing a diversity of applied real world examples, particularly in sectors such as the creative industries and hospitality, which this thesis focuses on. Furthermore, the vast majority of existing literature on local buzz simply discusses this phenomena at the scale of 'firms' - often not specifying

whether the findings apply to micro, small, medium, large or all of the above (Bathelt et al. 2004; , Maskell et al. 2006; Bathelt and Turi 2011; Bathelt and Turi 2013; Henn and Bathelt 2018). A study of knowledge flows within trans-local scenes will both allow for sustained engagement with developing empirically based theory on local knowledge flows, but will also grant application of this theory to a situation external to the traditional examples of industry and firms to instead look at smaller scale, micro-organisations specifically.

2.5.2 Global pipelines and temporary clusters

This section reviews the existing literature on 'global pipelines' and 'temporary cluster' theory. It is important to note here that the empirical contents of Chapter 5 (sections 5.4.1.1 and 5.4.1.2) in this thesis challenge the global pipelines concept, and therefore this section has a comparatively greater focus on this theory.

2.5.2.1 Global pipelines definitions and origins

Following on from these critiques of local buzz, we can understand the need for firms to implement global pipelines as mechanisms for knowledge flows. Indeed, as mentioned above, in isolation, local buzz is limited in its impact (Bathelt 2008), and it is increasingly understood that by establishing and sustaining extra-local professional relationships, firms strengthen their ability to receive important knowledge flows critical to the success of their business (Bathelt and Henn 2014), and competing within a global marketplace which requires interconnectivity (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010).

At a foundational level, global pipelines can be understood as inter-regional connections, often discussed as being between different for-profit industrial firms (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2007; Bathelt 2008; Moodyson 2008). Whilst much of the literature uses this simple definition, or defines pipelines through their function, the most comprehensive theoretical definition of the subject comes from Owen-Smith and Powell (2004). For these authors, pipelines represent the "plumbing" of global markets, so-called because they "channel and direct" flows of information (Owen-Smith and Powell 2004, p.5). Owen- Smith and Powell (2004) further divide these pipelines into either 'open channels' or 'closed conduits': the former describing leaky pipelines which imperfectly transport knowledge from one location to another, spilling information along the way, acting somewhat as a "sprinkler" (Owen-Smith and Powell 2004, p.7; Ren et al. 2023) for knowledge amongst the wider community.

The latter represents tightly controlled knowledge flows, benefitting only the nodes, or firms, on either end of the transfer (Owen-Smith and Powell 2004). Practical, 'formal' examples of these pipelines have been outlined by researchers, including contractual partnerships (Owen-Smith and Powell 2004; Bathelt et al. 2004; Maskell 2014), mergers with firms based in disparate locations (Bathelt and Turi 2013), and building satellite branches (Bathelt and Li 2020), all to assist in the establishment of knowledge co- development and retrieval.

Bathelt et al. (2004) describe how the global pipeline concept emerged out of a dissatisfaction with knowledge-based theory on spatial clustering and the "tacit = local" versus "codified = global" argument (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.32). Within this literature, a central argument had been that the more codified knowledge is, the less need there is for actors to be located closely together (Bathelt et al. 2004). Conversely for tacit knowledge sharing, the resounding argument had been that this is reliant on the close co-location of actors (Bathelt et al. 2004). Specifically, it was argued that similar firms benefit from co-locating as this "more subtle" knowledge is exchanged through meeting consistently face-to-face in a shared local environment (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.32).

To expand upon the debates on tacit knowledge sharing that pre-date global pipelines, Gertler (2003) has highlighted three distinct positions from the literature at the time. The first comes from the learning region literature, which echoes the "tacit = local" argument mentioned above (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.32). Learning regions can be understood as spatially clustered linked industries, where knowledge sharing between firms and institutions is understood to facilitate learning and economic growth (Florida 1995, Asheim 1996, Morgan 1997, Simmie 1997, Rogers et al. 2013, Gregory et al. 2009). This theory argues that tacit knowledge cannot "travel easily" (Gertler 2003, p.84). Instead, it is reliant on face to face transmission, between actors that share commonalities such as the same language, codes of communication and norms; supported by a shared history of collaboration and established trust (Morgan 1997, Cooke and Morgan 1998, Lawson and Lorenz 1998, Maskell and Malmberg 1999, Gertler 2003).

Literature on Communities of Practice (CoP), however, provides an alternate argument. CoPs are comprised of informal groups of workers, in established alliances (Moodyson et al. 2008), that possess shared "experience, expertise and commitment to a joint enterprise" (Gertler 2003, p.86); typically coming together to solve problems within an organisation. Within CoPs, commonalities such as shared organisational "cultures, customs, routines and conventions" (Gertler and Vinodrai 2005, p.33) create a degree of 'relational proximity' between members (Amin 2000, Allen 2000, Gertler

2003). This theory argues that tacit knowledge can be shared across both within and outside of an organisation, should the actors all be a part of the same CoP (Gertler 2003). Although CoPs had traditionally been conceived of as face-to-face communities (Amin and Roberts 2008), with this idea of 'relational proximity', should it be strong enough between CoP members, it is argued that tacit knowledge can be shared at a regional, or even national scale (Amin 2000, Bunnell and Coe 2001, Gertler 2003). Ultimately, CoP theory argues that it is relational proximity that is important for the effective sharing of tacit knowledge, rather than geographical proximity (Allen 2000, Amin 2000, Gertler 2003, Gertler and Vinodrai 2005).

The third distinct position on tacit knowledge sharing comes from theory on knowledge enablers (Gertler 2003). This theory argues that it is extremely difficult to share and utilise tacit knowledge, even within the same organisation it was produced in (Gertler 2003). Knowledge enablers, however, constitute a solution to this bottleneck; as individuals who diffuse tacit knowledge across large organisations through face-to-face engagement, typically through business travel or satellite offices/branches (von Krogh et al. 2000, Gertler 2003). This theory argues that through knowledge enablers, tacit knowledge can not only be shared across large distances, but also beyond the confines of a specific organisation (Gertler 2003).

It is evident, therefore, that whilst 'tacit = local' (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.32), had been a dominant line of argument in the literature on tacit knowledge sharing that preceded pipelines, there had also been other arguments which examined the conditions through which tacit knowledge is able to be shared across space (von Krogh et al. 2000).

Bathelt et al. (2004), in what is considered the seminal paper on global pipelines, claim that tacit knowledge can be shared across space, but only under certain conditions; one of which being trust. Bathelt et al. (2004, p.41) argue that trust needs to be built in a "concious and systematic way", starting with low risk engagements, before gradually progressing into higher risk ones. Similar to the CoP literature mentioned above, over time, "common institutions and procedural rules are established" (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.42), allowing for more detailed knowledge sharing on complex topics. An important disclaimer is, however, that despite using the terms at the start of their paper, Bathelt et al. (2004) state that they do not believe that tacit and codified forms of knowledge can be separated into binary categories. Instead, they argue that these types of knowledge are dependent on one another and interwoven (Bathelt et al. 2004).

2.5.2.2 Debates on tacit knowledge sharing from global pipelines onwards

Just as there have been debates on the specifics of tacit knowledge sharing before global pipelines were coined, these debates have continued afterwards.

At a broader scale, beyond pipelines, authors such as Torre (2008) and Grabher and Ibert (2014) when discussing virtual knowledge sharing have corroborated Bathelt et al. (2004), that tacit knowledge can be shared across space and is not just limited to face to face interaction. Sharing Bathelt et al.'s (2004) logic, they argue that tacit and codified knowledge cannot be reduced into separate categories (Torre 2008, Grabher and Ibert 2014). Instead, they support the argument that there is a "tacit dimension [to] all knowledge" (Grabher and Ibert 2014, p.99); with the capacity to share and receive tacit knowledge depending on the extent to which the underlying assumptions of actors are either similar or dissimilar, rather than geographical proximity (Meusburger 2009, Stark 2009, Ibert 2010, Hautala 2011, Grabher and Ibert 2014, Rutten 2016).

Despite the critiques of the tacit/codified binary, debates on the ability of tacit knowledge to travel have continued. For those that have argued that all types of knowledge (including tacit) have the potential to be shared across space, this is typically with the same kind of stipulation as Bathelt et al. (2004); that this can only happen under certain conditions (Esposito and Rigby 2019). The 'proximities' approach, for example, although generally discussing knowledge creation (rather than knowledge sharing), has continued to argue that tacit knowledge can travel if actors share proximities such as (but not limited to): cognitive proximity (knowledge); organisational proximity (working relationships); social proximity (personal relationships); and institutional proximity (ways of operating) (Boschma 2005; Knoben and Oerlemans 2006; Faulconbridge 2007, Touburg 2011, Mattes 2012; Rutten 2016).

There is still some recent research, however, which ultimately still stresses the need for geographical proximity to disseminate tacit knowledge. Such research argues that tacit knowledge is shared more effectively face to face (Ville and Wright 2019, Corradini et al. 2022), as it is highly dependent on local context (Comunian 2017, Corradini et al. 2022). The relationship between tacit knowledge and learning by doing is also stressed here, and the importance of observation and practice (Comunian

2017, Ren et al. 2023). Perhaps this research takes a more literal understanding of tacit knowledge, as it was originally conceptualised by the philosopher Polyani (1958;1966); with tacit knowledge "exist[ing] in the background of our consciousness" (Gertler 2003, p.77), defying articulation in spoken or written words (Gertler 2003). This is in contrast to how the term has also come to be employed more widely in a much more superficial, flexible and less precise way (Gertler 2003). Indeed, many use the term 'tacit' when talking about knowledge flows, but don't define it (Moodyson 2008, Martin et al. 2018, Ville and Wright 2019). Or, when provided, definitions are overly simplistic with tacit knowledge being described as "highly complex" (Bathelt and Henn 2014, p.1413), "difficult to transfer" and (Gertler and Vinodrai 2005, p.33), "sticky" (Comunian 2017, p.331).

2.5.2.3 Global pipelines and tacit knowledge: Positioning this thesis

Ultimately, although this thesis is not directly focused on exploring whether tacit knowledge has the ability to be shared across space, the above overview is still useful for understanding the debates that have surrounded global pipelines. Indeed, global pipelines have been a central concept in economic geography for understanding the means through which knowledge is shared across space, however, the term is simply not suitable for all manifestations of knowledge exchanges.

There are aspects of the global pipeline concept that are useful for this thesis. For instance, Bathelt et al's (2004) dissatisfaction with the binary categorisation of tacit vs codified knowledge, but also the "tacit = local" and "codified = global" association (Bathelt et al. 2004, p.32). As mentioned above, Bathelt et al. (2004) begin their seminal paper outlining the existing 'tacit' vs 'codified' dichotomy of knowledge in existing literature, however, they do not employ the use of these terms when describing the operations of pipelines. In their words, this is "in order to move on to a more developed argument" (Bathelt et al. 2004p.49). Positionally, this is where this thesis also lies on the subject of tacit knowledge. I do not use the term 'tacit' or 'codified' to describe the contents of the knowledge flows discussed in this thesis, because I do not feel as though these terms - as they have been employed in existing literature - are suitable. The types of knowledge I have found to be shared between micro-organisations in this thesis would not qualify as 'tacit' in the traditional, Polyani (1966), sense of the term (Gertler 2003), because I found that they can very easily be put into either spoken or written words; like codified knowledge. This does not mean, however, that the contents of these knowledge flows are completely codified, either, as they also can be specialised, technical and complex; properties that have been associated with 'tacit' knowledge in more recent years (Bathelt and Henn 2014).

As the above paragraph exemplifies, neither the terms 'tacit' nor 'codified' fit perfectly, here. Ultimately, however, whether the content of the flows between micro-organisations discussed in this thesis are tacit or codified does not matter; and this is reflected in my choice not to use these terms going forwards. This is because my thesis is not concerned with whether the content of flows between micro-organisations across space are tacit or codified; what matters is that the flows this thesis examines are valuable. Although 'valuable' has had some association with 'tacit' (Bathelt and Li 2020), this is not how I use the term in this thesis. In the context of this research, 'valuable' flows refer to flows which are useful for micro-organisations in some way, and in turn influences the way they run their organisation (e.g advice about products or practices). Consequently, these flows go on to shape the development of trans-local scenes and creative districts across space (whether technically tacit or codified).

2.5.2.4 Global pipelines: New articulations

Global pipelines are a useful concept for understanding how knowledge sharing across space has been conceptualised by economic geographers; and there are useful aspects of the pipeline model to use for this thesis. The theory, however, also has substantial limits. This section outlines how this thesis has interpreted the above literature, and in turn contributes the two newly articulated concepts of 'mechanisms' and 'flows'.

One of the aspects of global pipelines that this thesis borrows from is its rejection of the tacit/codified binary categorisation of knowledge (Bathelt et al. 2004), as outlined above. As detailed in section 2.5.2.3, the contents of the exchanges between micro-organisations discussed in this thesis do not fall neatly into these 'tacit' or 'codified' categories; but this also doesn't matter for the research aim and questions of this thesis. What matters is not whether the knowledge flowing between micro-organisations are tacit or codified, what matters is that the content is valuable.

What is needed for the new empirical context of this thesis is, therefore a 'new' articulation which allows for the focus of investigation to be on the content and impact of these exchanges, rather than whether they are tacit or codified. In economic geography, the term 'knowledge' is rarely unpacked and defined beyond this tacit/codified dichotomy that this thesis rejects (Lundvall and Johnson 2006; Howells 2012). I have therefore opted to use the term 'flows' rather than 'knowledge flows' in this thesis, as this allows more specificity with regards to the contents of exchanges between micro-

organisations. With this term, discussion is not at the abstract level of 'knowledge', instead there is room for additional specificity surrounding what flows contain, e.g flows of 'advice' or 'practices'. This allows a deeper understanding of what types of information is flowing across space; much like Bathelt et al. (2004, p.49) rejecting the tacit/codified binary to move on to more "developed argument[s]".

Despite the above similarities, there are also some important critiques of global pipelines that are relevant to this thesis; and also particularly pertinent toward the need for the new articulations that this thesis contributes. Interestingly, research critiquing global pipelines has found the concept to be both too broad in some respects, and too restrictive in others. One of the most recognised critiques comes from Trippl et al. (2009), which argues that the global pipelines concept requires greater specificity (Sotarauta et al. 2011, Esposito and Rigby 2019). Here, Trippl et al. (2009) takes issue with the pipeline concept being applied to non-local knowledge sharing at both the national and international scale; arguing that these differ too substantially. On the other hand, the global pipelines concept has also been found to be too 'restrictive' in its lack of diverse empirical examples, and overwhelming focus on pipelines as formal partnerships between for-profit firms in sectors such as manufacturing and tech (Bathelt et al. 2004;Owen-Smith and Powell 2004; Zhu et al. 2020); in turn neglecting the potential for pipelines to take informal forms (Martin et al. 2018, Esposito and Rigby 2019).

This is true; global pipelines are not a catch-all concept for all types of knowledge sharing practices that go on at a national and international level. Specifically, they are "formal, structured and thoroughly planned linkages" (Moodyson 2008, p.451)(Morrison et al. 2013, Bathelt and Li 2020), and they need particular conditions to form: non-overlapping knowledge pools (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2008; Ville and Wright 2019); a shared institutional context (Bathelt et al. 2004, Bathelt 2008, Bathelt and Li 2020, Harris 2023); and preferably, an existing relationship with a potential pipeline partner (Bathelt et al. 2004; Maskell 2014; Ville and Wright 2019). This requirement for a pre-existing relationship is linked to the establishment of trust between partners; which was argued by Bathelt et al. (2004, p.42) as necessary for sharing "fine-grained" knowledge. However, not all knowledge sharing practices fit the above criteria.

A newly articulated concept was therefore needed that can capture the vast range of different means through which flows in their different forms are exchanged between micro-organisations across space. I therefore use the term 'mechanism' for this purpose. A mechanism can essentially be

defined as a means through which a flow can happen, and can capture both physical or virtual flows such as travel or social media.

As this literature review demonstrates, at times economic geography has tended to separate knowledge sharing activity into different categories; local knowledge sharing through local buzz; sharing across space as global pipelines ; and online knowledge sharing as 'virtual' flows. In contrast to the terms currently used in economic geography, the newly articulated concept of 'mechanism' is broad enough to group both 'physical' and 'virtual' exchanges together. Having a term that can encapsulate both spheres at once will be extremely useful for the empirical chapters of this thesis.

Of course, within this greater 'mechanism' concept, there could be forms of knowledge sharing that could resemble pipelines in some limited ways. However, the mechanisms in my empirical findings are typically far more informal and low-risk than one would typically associate with global pipelines. Examining the 'informal' examples from empirical findings in relation to the traditional global pipeline concept will therefore have implications for challenging the dominant understanding of how knowledge is shared across space; in particular, the conditions needed for knowledge to be shared and the centrality of trust for sharing valuable and at times, complex information (expanded upon in section 5.4.1.3).

2.5.2.5 Temporary Clusters

As mentioned above, the focus of this section has been on global pipelines; as it is this concept which the empirical content of Chapter 5 (sections 5.4.1.1 and 5.4.1.2) directly challenge. It is important to also acknowledge, however, the concept of temporary clusters, which are a form of knowledge flow associated with global pipelines. Temporary clusters act as hubs for international flows of knowledge (Bathelt and Turi 2013), contributing towards the development of global pipelines through providing opportunities for geographically dispersed firms to connect with one another (Maskell 2014, Zhu et al. 2020). With regards to definitions, the most comprehensive comes from Maskell et al. (2006), who describes temporary clusters as portraying all the characteristics of a permanent cluster, yet in a temporary and intensified manner. This idea of temporary clusters acting as temporary platforms for knowledge flows is certainly one that has been picked up within the literature (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Bathelt et al. 2017).

The most recognised form of temporary clusters in the existing literature are trade fairs (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Bathelt and Henn 2014). These events essentially act as a temporary microcosm of their respective industry (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Bathelt and Henn 2014), whilst sustaining a global reach(Schuldt and Bathelt 2011; Maskell 2014, Zhu et al. 2020) and encouraging face to face communication and professional interaction (Bathelt and Schuldt 2008). Within temporary cluster literature, however, there is a large gap for empirical examples of how specific industries use various types of temporary clusters (Ren et al. 2023), particularly outside of more traditional manufacturing industries (Henn and Bathelt 2023). This gap is especially pronounced regarding the types of industries typically found in creative districts, namely hospitality and creative industries. Whilst there have been some exceptions for research which has looked at knowledge flows through beer festivals (Christensen and Andersen 2023), art festivals (Comunian 2017), music festivals (Jansson and Nilsson 2016) and fashion weeks (Brydges and Hracs 2019), these studies are still few and far between (Comunian 2017).

These temporary clusters whether trade fairs, conferences or festivals generally enable the dissemination of knowledge at these events through various different mechanisms including the exhibition of products/work (Brydges and Hracs 2019, Comunian 2017, Henn and Bathelt 2023, Jansson and Nilsson 2016, Wu and Coe 2023), demonstrating production processes/technology (Henn and Bathelt 2023, Lin 2018, Wu and Coe 2023), workshops, presentations and seminars (Henn and Bathelt 2023). More informal means of sharing knowledge may also happen over coffee breaks (Henn and Bathelt 2023), and at out of hours dinners (Maskell et al. 2006). Importantly, there is also a form of buzz written about which is specific to these forms of global pipelines, global buzz. Like local buzz, this can be considered a knowledge ecology (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Bathelt and Henn 2014), consisting of a similar concoction of information, rumours, experiences, and advice (Bathelt and Turi 2013). What distinguishes global buzz from local buzz however, is that it is temporary, and includes globally dispersed actors (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Bathelt and Turi 2013).

There are still important theoretical gaps in literature, however, for both global pipelines and associated temporary clusters. Indeed, the vast majority of focus in economic geography literature has been on covering proximate knowledge relations, rather than understanding the mechanics of distant flows (Grabher and Ibert 2014; Bathelt and Li 2020). This has meant, similar to local buzz, there is a lack of diverse empirical studies which focus on these far flung knowledge sharing practices. Sharing another commonality with the literature on local buzz, the majority of work on global pipelines and temporary clusters again refers to their unit of analysis simply as ‘firms’ (Bathelt et al. 2004, Bathelt 2007, Bathelt 2008, Bathelt and Henn 2014, Bathelt and Schuldt 2010, Bathelt

and Turi 2013, Maskell 2014, Zhu et al. 2020); not explicitly defining the size of these organisations. Further, the studies which do exist focus almost exclusively on industry and firm contexts such as manufacturing (Zhu et al. 2020), bio-technology firms (Owen-Smith and Powell 2004) and high-tech Silicon Valley firms (Bathelt et al. 2004), rather than the creative industries and hospitality sectors associated with the micro-organisations engaged with in this research. Applying this theory to a trans-local scene context will both help to build the literature discussing distant knowledge flow practices, but also, akin to developing local buzz, expand the application of this theory beyond traditional industry contexts to the scale of micro-organisations. Finally, surprisingly, there is a very significant gap for economic geography literature on temporary clusters to examine the impact of these events on the attending firm in their home location, in particular, how the knowledge they take from these events translates into the subsequent operations of the business (Henn and Bathelt 2023).

2.5.3 Virtual knowledge flows

The third and final main mechanism for knowledge flows as written about in economic geography literature is the role of the virtual environment. Virtual knowledge flows are an especially interesting concep, as there is a tradition in economic geography that “proximity matters” (Grabher and Ibert 2014, p.97). This view, especially for knowledge flows, is even more increasingly contested, not least due to the ongoing technological developments (Bathelt and Turi 2011, Grabher and Ibert 2014, Grabher et al. 2018, Tranos 2020). The move to a Web 2.0 which surpassed earlier, static websites and allowed for mass two-way communication (Grabher and Ibert 2014, Tranos 2020) was one of the first steps in revolutionising the potential for information transfer (Bathelt and Turi 2013), and as such, has opened up endless new channels for knowledge flows, some of which have been covered in the wider economic geography literature, which will now be discussed.

Despite continued technological advancements, however, there is still a considerable gap for research in economic geography that examines virtual knowledge flows (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010, Sarmento and Simões 2018), especially when compared to studies which focus on local flows (Grabher and Ibert 2014). As with other types of knowledge flows in economic geography, there is a notable lack of specific empirical examples of virtual knowledge flows. A couple of notable exceptions include: virtual trade fairs (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Sarmento and Simões 2018); online forums (Jansson 2019); and online communities (Fitjar and Huber 2015, Grabher and Ibert 2014). I

will now briefly unpack how knowledge is shared within these virtual mechanisms, as well as the contents of these knowledge flows, as unpacked in the limited existing literature.

Virtual trade fairs, which have existed since the mid-1990s, enable the sharing of knowledge through hosting online exhibition halls, and virtual stands which enable participating companies to share their products (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010, Sarmento and Simões 2018). Virtual trade fairs also enable further knowledge sharing between exhibitors and attendees through instant chat features and video-calling features (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010, Sarmento and Simões 2018). With regards to the content of these knowledge flows, attendees both share and receive information about products, market trends, and professional contacts, with the eye to establish potential business partnerships (Sarmento and Simões 2018). An underlying aspect of these virtual knowledge flows is a virtual form of 'buzz'. This is a term used to label the knowledge ecology which surrounds purely virtually mediated mechanisms for flows, such as virtual trade fairs (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010). This virtual form of 'buzz' has, however, received far less scholarly attention than its 'local' and 'global' counterparts.

The second type of virtual mechanism as discussed by economic geography literature is online forums (Jansson 2019), or hybrid online communities as they are referred to by Grabher and Ibert (2014); so-called hybrid because they include both professional and lay-person users of the virtual space. These platforms, which often take the form of message boards, frequently surround a specific interest or theme (Jansson 2019, Grabher and Ibert 2014), and allow participants to share knowledge through creating posts which are accessible to read and respond to by people who visit the forum (Jansson 2019). These posts may consist of questions, opinions and photographs of products (Grabher and Ibert 2014, Jansson 2019). As with virtual trade fairs, with regards to the content of these flows, oftentimes this takes the form of specifics surrounding products of interest – whether hi-fi audio equipment in the case of Jansson's (2019) research, or Ikea furnishings, Nikon cameras or BMW vehicles (Grabher and Ibert 2014). Grabher and Ibert (2014) provides some further specificity about the different types of product related knowledge that is shared: describing usage knowledge as the expertise that is gained through intensified usage; and design knowledge which surrounds the construction of the product and technical details.

There is a significant gap, however, for economic geography literature on virtual knowledge flows through social media (Tranos 2020). Social media has been defined a number of different ways, but can generally be understood as a range of online platforms which allow users to share information,

collaborate, network and build communities (Grant 2016). Perhaps the most comprehensive exploration of social media from an economic geography perspective comes from Tranos (2020), who explores how social media enables knowledge flows at various spatial scales. Tranos (2020), touches on how varying social media platforms can enable knowledge flows. Twitter, for example, through its hash tagging feature can lead to logs of chats under specific themes, which enable collaborative brainstorming and idea development (Tranos 2020). Twitter is additionally mentioned alongside Facebook and Linkedin as enabling professional networking through the option to 'follow', 'connect' or 'friend' specific users they would like to follow updates from more closely (Tranos 2020). Tranos (2020) doesn't go into depth on the content of these flows passed from user to user under within these professional networks, other than allowing for the dissemination of skills, ideas and advice.

It must be recognised, therefore, that whilst these new virtual spaces present a wealth of opportunities for new modes of knowledge transfer, they are still significantly under researched (Grabher and Ibert 2014, Martin et al. 2018, Sarmento and Simões 2018). Indeed, as mentioned with regards to gaps in literature surrounding global pipelines, different forms of distant knowledge exchange are neglected within literature, leading to the virtual knowledge flow theory remaining underdeveloped (Bathelt and Turi 2013, Sarmento and Simões 2018). Further, as time passes, the literature which does exist on the subject is becoming increasingly outmoded; key theory on virtual trade fairs was published in 2010 (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010), and online forums/communities are increasingly being replaced by social media platforms which can perform much of the same functions.

2.6 Micro-businesses and the creative industries in times of crisis

Chapter 6 of this thesis examines the research question of 'what challenges do micro-organisations face, and how can they be supported through policy reform?'. Due to the timing of research data collection, the 'challenges' discussed in this chapter largely pertain to the COVID-19 pandemic, within the wider context of the poly-crisis scenario which combines Brexit, COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.

Indeed, it became apparent during data collection that because of the ongoing poly-crisis scenario, micro-organisations were at risk of being able to perform their critical roles in supporting scene-

related activity and shaping the continued development of creative districts. To set up the findings of this chapter, it is useful therefore, to examine literature which is relevant to creative districts during times of crisis, particularly COVID-19.

There is a dearth of literature which looks at the impacts of COVID-19 on creative districts as a unit of analysis. However, useful insight into existing research on similar topics can be gained by exploring the available literature on the experiences of micro-organisations more generally during the pandemic, as well as the experiences of those working in the creative industries.

2.6.1 Micro-organisations during COVID-19

To begin with micro-organisations (or micro-businesses, as they are more commonly referred to), the literature which examines these types of spaces during COVID-19 is extremely limited (Chikweche and Chaora 2023, Fzlinda et al. 2020). Indeed, existing literature is far more focused on multinational corporations and Small/Medium enterprises (SMEs) (Miklian and Hoelscher 2022), in turn neglecting businesses that are 'micro' in size (Miklian and Hoelscher 2022). Sometimes, micro-businesses are included in the same category as SMEs; this can cause issues, however, when examining how businesses within this very broad category fair during times of crisis. Indeed, the experiences of micro, small and medium businesses have the potential to be very different from one another on account of their size differentials (Miklian and Hoelscher 2022). Different definitions of SME exist in different contexts, however, the UK government defines medium businesses as having less than 250 employees and a annual turnover of less than €50 million, small businesses as having less than 50 employees and a turnover of less than €10 million, and micro businesses as having less than 10 employees and a turnover of less than €2 million (Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy 2023). According to existing work on SMEs during times of crisis, the smaller in size an organisations is, the more vulnerable it is (Smallbone et al. 2012; Herbane 2012; Eggers 2020; Calderón et al. 2021; Miklian and Hoelscher 2022; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al. 2023). Of course, based on the above criteria, businesses that are medium in size, or even towards the top end of small are typically going to have far more resources at their disposal to cope with shocks than the organisations which are micro in size (Miklian and Hoelscher 2022). Indeed, both Gherhes et al. (2016) and Miklian and Hoelscher (2022) posit that the 'SME' category is often too broad; with micro-organisations facing their own specific challenges in recovery that require separate, targeted research efforts; (Miklian and Hoelscher 2022).

The limited research which does exist on the experiences of micro-businesses specifically during COVID-19 highlights economic impacts in particular, such as: loss of income through business closure (Fzlinda et al. 2020; Kassa 2021; Chikweche and Chaora 2023); bankruptcy (Ramli and Yekini 2022) and labour shortages (Chikweche and Chaora 2023). The most attention, however, was given to the impact of supply chain disruption, influencing business' ability to operate due to mandated production shutdowns (Fzlinda et la. 2020; Ramli and Yekini 2022; Chikweche and Chaora 2023). Interestingly, despite the diversity of geographic contexts from this literature, which ranged from Malaysia (Fzlinda et al. 2020, Ramli and Yekini 2022), to Ethiopia (Kassa 2021), to Zimbabwe (Chikweche and Chaora 2023), there were similarities in the impacts felt by micro-businesses. This is because government responses across the world were similar, as many shut down movement and non-essential businesses (Fzlinda et al. 2020, Ramli and Yekini 2022, Kassa 2021). Of course, the severity at which these impacts are felt and the rate at which businesses recover would depend on the specific measures introduced by different governments across space.

At first glance, these impacts may also not seem too different from those reported by the wider SME category, which similarly found that COVID-19 disrupted their supply chains (Cai and Leo 2020; Evans 2020; Ivanov 2020; Sharma et al. 2020; Singh et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2020; Hossain et al. 2022; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al. 2023), reduced income (Dayour et al. 2020; Lai et al.2020; Calderón et al. 2021; Krasniqi et al. 2021; Lu et al. 2021; Winarsih et al. 2021; Hossain et al. 2022; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al. 2023) and led to job losses (Calderón et al. 2021). Importantly, however, as discussed above, the size of a business is one of the main indicators of how vulnerable it is to shocks, the intensity of which it experiences the impacts of these shocks and its ability to 'bounce back' (Herbane 2012; Smallbone et al. 2012; Eggers 2020; Calderón et al. 2021; Miklian and Hoelscher 2022; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al. 2023); with more research needed to understand the specificities - particularly regarding long term implications of this pandemic for micro-organisations (Chikweche and Chaora 2023, Fzlinda et al. 2020, Miklian and Hoelscher 2022).

2.6.2 Cultural and creative industries during COVID-19

Although there is a dearth of literature exploring the experiences of micro-organisations in creative districts, we can also turn to utilising literature on how COVID-19 has affected the creative industries more generally to build understanding of this research space. Existing research claims that the

creative industries were one of the hardest hit sectors during the pandemic, on account of their dependency on face-to-face operations (Flew and Kirkwood 2020; Belitski et al. 2021). Another critically important factor influencing the severity at which the creative industries experienced the negative impacts of the pandemic was the existing precarity that is rife within the sector (Butler and Russell 2018; Comunian and England 2020; Eikhof 2020; Genders 2021). The proliferation of inconsistent, short-term contracts amongst freelance individuals in the creative industries is one way in which this sector was already primed for vulnerability prior to the pandemic beginning (De Peuter 2011; Butler and Russell 2018; Comunian and England 2020; Chandler and Cuneo 2021; Snowball and Gouws 2023). Further precarious characteristics of work in the sector include limited unionisation and job protections (Butler and Russell 2018, Comunian and England 2020), as well as low pay (Butler and Russell 2018, Comunian and England 2020, de Peuter et al. 2023).

Given that many of the above examples of precarity are felt especially heavily by freelancers, it is perhaps no surprise that the existing literature on COVID-19 and the creative industries focuses in particular on the impacts of the pandemic on this group of professionals (Eikhof 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021; Gross et al. 2021; Joffe 2021; Crosby and McKenzie 2022; Khylstova et al. 2022; Flore and Hendry 2023; Li et al. 2023; Snowball and Gouws 2023). Alongside freelancers, there is also a tendency in existing literature to focus on the impacts of COVID-19 on larger cultural and creative institutions such as opera houses, theatres (Vitálišová et al 2021), galleries (Khylstova et al. 2022) and museums (Agostino et al.2020; Samaroudi et al. 2020; Raimo et al. 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022); leaving a gap for research which takes place at the scale of micro-organisations, as recognised by Eikhof (2020), Khylstova et al. (2022) and Snowball and Gouws (2023). This is perhaps not surprising, given that micro-organisations are a forgotten about unit of analysis in existing research, despite facing their own unique challenges (Herbane 2012, Smallbone et al. 2012).

Existing literature on COVID-19 and the creative industries also tends to focus on the immediate, short term economic impacts of the pandemic (Dümcke 2021, Khylstova et al. 2022). One of the largest impacts discussed, by both freelancers and large cultural/creative institutions was a loss of income (Khylstova et al. 2022, Gross et al. 2021). Mandatory lockdowns which largely confined individuals to their homes and shut non-essential businesses were enforced in many parts of the world (Khylstova et al. 2022, Snowball and Gouws 2023), reducing income for not only the organisations themselves, but also the freelancers that were working with them on a project basis through the halting of general operations, production and sales (Eikhof 2020; Flew and Kirkwood 2020; Gross et al. 2021; Joffe 2021; Klein and Todesco 2021; Crosby and McKenzie 2022; Snowball and Gouws 2023). Of particular note in the existing literature, is the cancellation of events such as

concerts, gigs, exhibitions and festivals which came along with these lockdowns, negatively impacting the financial situations of freelancers and larger institutions alike (Flew and Kirkwood 2020; Joffe 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022). The exiting literature also notes that in some cases, the economic impacts of the pandemic were so much that individual entrepreneurs and larger businesses were forced into bankruptcy (Popa et al. 2021; Torrès et al. 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022).

With limited funds coming in, another considerable impact discussed in the existing literature was the job losses and unemployment that resulted from these business closures (Florida and Seman 2020; Rashid and Ratten 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022; Snowball and Gouws 2023). Some notable examples come from the work of Banks and O'Connor (2021), who reported that with the cancellation of much of their programming, large institutions in the UK such as the National Theatre, the Southbank Centre and the Royal Opera House all had to make the difficult decision to lay off portions both permanent and casual staff (Banks and O'Connor 2021).

From this summary of existing research on the impacts of COVID-19 on the creative industries, some gaps have become apparent. It would appear that there is a tendency to focus almost exclusively on the acute, more immediate economic impacts of the pandemic, leaving a gap to examine longer term, non-financial impacts in particular.Indeed, within existing literature, there is some nod to potential lasting impacts of the pandemic - especially in terms of recovery times of affected business (Khylstova et al. 2022, Snowball and Gouws 2023). The actualities, however, of what these long-term impacts look like have not been unpacked with examples, with more research being required in this area.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the bodies of literature that are necessary for setting up the empirical findings of this thesis. As a result, this chapter has further outlined critical gaps in existing research that my findings will contribute towards addressing.

The creative district development literature was the first to be reviewed in Section 2.1. This literature is focused on 'development' only in terms of the conditions and factors which have led to the initial

inception of these districts; namely industrial decline and accompanying cheap rents (Brown et al. 2000; McCarthy 2006; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Blackburn 2014; Hartley 2018; Alexander et al. 2020). Beyond this, there is a considerable gap for research which examines 'ongoing development' with regards to how creative districts have evolved into the uniform model of micro-organisation aesthetics and practices that we associate them with today. Section 2.1.1 explored some limited literature on uniformity between creative districts, but this was sparse, and largely concerned with the types of industrial buildings creative choose to occupy, and to a lesser extent, their accompanying industrial fittings (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Cremers 2012; Lidegaard 2017; Wijngaarden and Hracs 2024). There is a need, therefore, to both continue building this evidence base and move beyond it.

Section 2.2 unpacked the more general literature on scenes, highlighting how this concept has been applied within research that has "largely emerged independently and in ignorance of one another" (Silver and Clark 2015, p.427). Vague definitions of the term with wide applications have resulted in a gap for research that explicitly defines its application in different study contexts. Section 2.3 then explores the limited literature on the relationship between scenes and physical spaces, outlining a gap for research which explores how physical structures, such as micro-organisations, tie themselves to their respective scenes.

Section 2.4 explores trans-local scenes. Whilst this concept is useful for conceptualising patterns of uniformity across space, it is still significantly under-developed (Griener and Sakdapolrak 2013). In particular, there is a large gap for examining uniformity and its causal mechanisms beyond the context of individuals in music scenes (Hodkinson 2004, Jousmäki 2014, Mall 2020, Reitsamer 2012, Reitsamer and Prokop 2018, Schoon 2016).

Section 2.5 outlines the existing literature on knowledge flows within economic geography. In particular, key theory on local buzz (Section 2.5.1), global pipelines, temporary clusters (Section 2.5.2), and virtual knowledge flows (section 2.5.3). Gaps arose surrounding a lack of diverse applied real-world examples for the literature on local buzz, global pipelines and temporary clusters. Furthermore, this literature tends to explore the knowledge flow practices of actors which are simply referred to as 'firms'; not providing any further specificity on their size (Bathelt et al. 2004; , Maskell et al. 2006; Bathelt and Turi 2011; Bathelt and Turi 2013; Henn and Bathelt 2018). A considerable gap further arose with the literature on virtual knowledge flows, which lacks research into the potential of more up to date mechanisms such as social media for enabling flows (Tranos 2020). There was a

particular focus on the global pipelines literature in Section 2.5, which most relevant for this thesis. In particular, justification was given necessitating this thesis' contribution of the newly articulated concepts of 'mechanisms' and 'flows'. The new term 'mechanism' arose in response to the restrictive nature of the global pipelines literature; and the term 'flow' constitutes a departure from the focus on tacit/codified knowledge, which positionally, this thesis seeks to move away from to capture more specificity and complexity in micro-organisation exchanges across space (Bathelt et al. 2004).

Finally, section 2.6 explores literature on micro-businesses and the creative industries during times of crisis. This literature was extremely limited, with literature on the impacts of crises overwhelmingly focusing on the scale of multinational corporations and SMEs (Miklian and Hoelscher 2022). Critical gaps also arose with the literature on cultural and creative industries during COVID-19, which also neglects the scale of micro-organisations, instead focusing largely on freelancers (Eikhof 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021; Gross et al. 2021; Joffe 2021; Crosby and McKenzie 2022; Khylstova et al. 2022; Flore and Hendry 2023; Li et al. 2023; Snowball and Gouws 2023). This research was furthermore overwhelmingly focused on the acute, economic impacts of the pandemic (Dümcke 2021; Gross et al. 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022), leaving a gap to explore longer-term, non-financial consequences.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Qualitative approach

An overall qualitative approach drives the methodology of this project. This refers to a research strategy which focuses on collecting data primarily in the form of the written word, rather than numerical data (Green 2005, Hammersley 2013). Qualitative approaches are further characterised through their orientation towards investigating how human actors "understand, experience, interpret and produce the social world" (Sandelowski 2004, p.893). As such, this type of approach is particularly useful for exploratory research questions, typically starting with the phrasing 'what' and 'how' (Hennink et al. 2011, Ormston et al. 2014); such as the research questions of this thesis.

Regarding the specifics of the qualitative methods used, the primary method employed was in-depth interviews with those running micro-organisations; the self described director/owners/managers of these spaces. In total, 44 interviews were conducted: 15 in Liverpool's Baltic Triangle; 13 in Birmingham's Digbeth, 12 in Manchester's Northern Quarter, and 4 in London's Shoreditch.

These interviews have been triangulated in a multi-method approach (Brannen 2007; Mik-Meyer 2020), which also includes observation and qualitative content analysis of public micro-organisation Instagram accounts. Some quantitative mapping was generated from this qualitative content analysis, however, the purpose of this was purely illustrative, and as such this methodology remains primarily qualitative. The phrasing of 'multi-method' here simply refers to the above combination of multiple qualitative methods (Creswell 2015, Mik-Meyer 2020). This multi-method approach was enacted primarily due to its applicability to answering complex research questions (Chamberlain et al. 2011; Mik-Meyer 2020). Indeed, each method investigates the research question from its own angle, providing unique insight that otherwise may not have been accessible (Chamberlain et al. 2011; Mik-Meyer 2020).

3.2 Case study selection

The case study aspect of this methodology refers to the approach taken to examine the research questions from several different locational perspectives (Thomas 2011). This focus will allowx for a more in-depth, rich picture which takes into consideration some of the many contexts in which trans-local scenes take place (Punch 2005; Thomas 2011).

During the research design and data collection phases of this project, COVID-19 was restricting travel outside of the United Kingdom. On safety grounds, but also to allow for the most realistic chances of conducting in-person fieldwork, the decision was made to keep case study selection restricted to cities in the UK. Ideally, this process would have been aided by in-person scoping visits to the various cities in question, however, due to the pandemic, this was digital.

The selection process for case study locations began with searching for key terms on google maps which would indicate the kind of city district I was looking for: concept stores, record stores, vintage stores, independent coffee shops, independent bookstores, small art galleries, venues and vegan cafes to provide some examples (Hubbard 2016; Wallace 2019, Wijngaarden and Hracs 2024). These types of shops tend to cluster together (Hubbard 2016, Maly and Varis 2016); allowing easy identification of a potentially relevant district in a city, if one exists. I then used the 'street view' function of google maps to scroll through these neighbourhoods to ensure any potentially relevant businesses hadn't been missed. Finally, I identified the type and number of relevant spaces in each district. Although this is a fairly novel approach to selecting case study districts, it is not too dissimilar an approach to that of Silver and Clark's exploration of urban scenes (2015). Indeed, they describe how downloadable digitised data on the amenities of an area allows one to "'visit' thousands of scenes from afar" (Silver and Clark 2015 p.434.). They do, however, take a slightly different approach by using business census data and online yellow pages directories for their quantitative study.

This selection process was conducted for this research on the top 10 UK cities by population, as they were likely to be large enough to have both the density (number) and diversity (i.e not just one type of business), of relevant organisations to interview. Importantly I recognise that creative districts

exist in many towns and cities outside of these 'top 10' cities, however, from my scoping exercise, they were less likely to have the critical mass of activity needed to conduct in-depth research. From this process, Shoreditch in London, the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool, the Northern Quarter in Manchester and Digbeth in Birmingham emerged as the top four creative city districts that had a large enough, and diverse enough pool of potential organisations to interview. All four of these creative districts also happened to be largely 'bottom-up', i.e, they have occurred organically, from grassroots actors and businesses, generally without intensive policy and local government intervention (Zukin and Braslow 2011; Mizzau and Montanari 2018). Importantly, it was decided for this study that the focus of data collection would be on these more regional case study locations of Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, as these regional creative districts have generally been somewhat more overlooked in the existing literature (Heebels and van Aalst 2010, Rabbis 2016, Lidegaard et al. 2017, Zukin and Braslow 2011, Watson 2024). There were also greater issues with recruitment in London, which will be discussed in section 3.4.2.2.

3.3 Case study vignettes

As mentioned above, this research has followed a case study approach, conducting fieldwork in four creative districts: the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool, the Northern Quarter in Manchester, Digbeth in Birmingham and Shoreditch in London. This section will provide a brief introduction to each of the case study areas, outlining their individual histories and transitions into creative districts.

3.3.1 Liverpool: Baltic Triangle creative district

Figure 2 Boundary of Liverpool's Baltic Triangle

Approximate boundary based on Google maps (Google 2025a) and interview data. Base map source: Ordnance Survey (2025).

Liverpool's Baltic Triangle is a creative district located just outside the city centre, on the edge of Wapping and Queen's docks (Historic England 2018; Martin et al. 2019; Miao 2021). The area was

given its name due to its industrial past in the 19th century as a timber yard and warehousing space for lumber and other imports from nations on the Baltic Sea (Historic England 2018; Miao 2021). Post war, some single-story light industry warehousing was added to the area (Armstrong-Gibbs 2016), however, in the latter half of the 20th century, Liverpool's position as a hub of maritime trade declined, leaving much of the area derelict (Wise et al. 2022).

Following this period of decline, the Baltic Triangle began to shift towards developing into a creative district. This happened primarily in a 'bottom-up' fashion - led by individuals and businesses, rather than local government (Blackburn et al. 2014, Wise et al. 2022, Santagata 2002). As is a common pattern in the 'bottom-up' development of creative districts, deindustrialisation in the area led to commercial spaces becoming available for cheap and flexible rents, an arrangement that was particularly attractive to those looking to set up businesses associated with the creative industries (Blackburn et al. 2014). Beginning in the mid 2000s, the first creative organisations began to set up in the area (Historic England 2018), however, it wasn't until the establishment of the Community Interest Company (CIC) 'Baltic Creative' that the area began to transition in earnest (Armstrong-Gibbs 2016, Wise et al. 2022). Baltic Creative CIC was founded by a group of local individuals who wanted to stop the cycle of creatives being pushed out of affordable areas by developers and other market pressures (Baltic Creative N.D). To combat this displacement, beginning in 2010, the CIC bought a series of warehouses in the Baltic Triangle to act as business incubators, and directly supply affordable rental spaces for the creative and digital industries, with the idea being that as property values rose, any profits could be invested back into the organisation and local creative industries (Armstrong-Gibbs 2016).

Over the years, Baltic Creative CIC have received some governmental help, benefitting from a £4.5m grant from the European Regional Development Fund and the Northwest Regional Development Agency to get started on renovating warehouses (Baltic Creative N.D). Liverpool City Council also approved of the new branding of the Baltic Triangle in their draft Local Plan and in 2019 designated the area for business purposes (Martin et al. 2019, Wise et al. 2022). Whilst this government backing has been helpful, it is widely recognised that the assistance has been rather 'hands off' in nature, allowing Baltic Creative CIC to take the reins with driving the push for the Baltic to fully transition into a creative district (Armstrong-Gibbs 2016; Historic England 2018; Wise et al. 2022). Indeed, at the time this research was undertaken, the CIC had rented out space to over 180 different companies, with over 600 staff (Wise et al. 2022).

3.3.2 Manchester Northern Quarter creative district

Figure 3 Boundary of Manchester's Northern Quarter

Approximate boundary based upon Google maps (Google 2025b) and interview data, base map source: Ordnance Survey (2025).

The Northern Quarter is a creative district located in Manchester, with the name derived from its location being to the north of the city centre. Historically, the Northern Quarter was a centre for wholesale fashion and textiles, with the area still retaining many of the associated disused warehouses to this day (Wansborough and Mageean 2000).

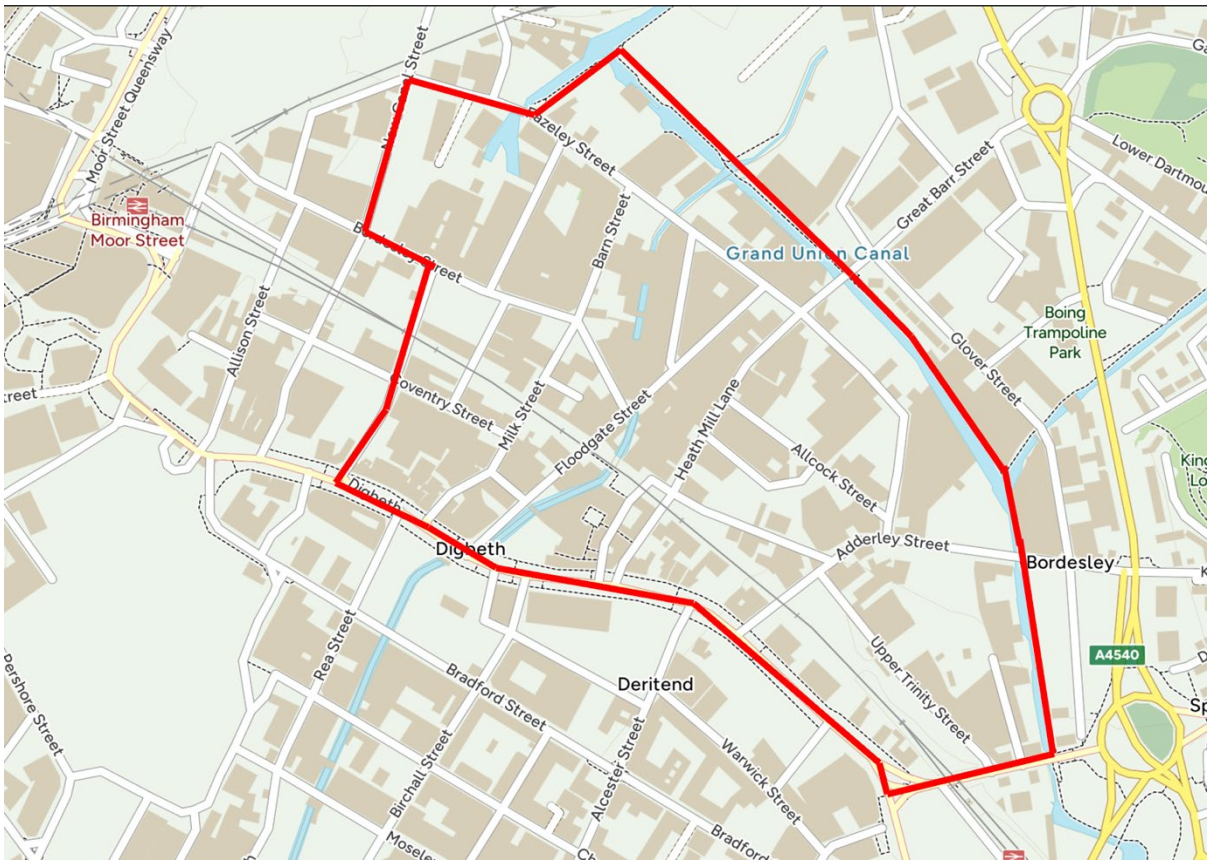
Over time, with the decline of the domestic textile industry, slum clearances and the relocation of Smithfield market, the Northern Quarter began to suffer. A cascade of businesses left the area, and by the end of the 1980s the quarter was largely deserted and left in disrepair (Wansborough and Mageean 2000; Montgomery 2004). Economic decline and high vacancy rates, however, led to cheap and flexible retail space, which in turn encouraged an influx of small creative businesses into the area (Brown et al. 2000; McCarthy 2006). This coincided with the birth of the ‘Madchester’ music scene,

which congregated around bars and venues in the Northern Quarter and saw the city's music scene gain national recognition (McCarthy 2006).

By the early 1990s, it was evident that the area had begun to develop into a creative district in a 'bottom up' fashion (Brown et al. 2000). Indeed, much of the pioneering efforts to develop and support the area as a creative enclave came from a campaigning group of local businesses, staff and residents in the early 1990s, later known as the Northern Quarter Association (Brown et al. 2000). Only once it was evident that the area was already developing into a creative district (around the mid 1990s), did the city council begin any targeted assistance (Wansborough and Mageean 2000). City assistance remained largely 'hands off' in approach, as was the preference of many in the local creative industries at the time (Brown et al. 2000), however, there were efforts to aid creative development in the area largely through supporting the use of buildings for the entertainment/evening economy (Wansborough and Mageean 2000; McCarthy 2006).

3.3.3 Birmingham: Digbeth creative district

Figure 4 Boundary map of Birmingham's Digbeth



Approximate boundary based on Google maps (Google 2025c) and interview data, base map source: Ordnance Survey (2025)

Historically, Digbeth was once considered the “industrial heart of Birmingham” (Fantini and Polizzi 2016, p.16), populated with brick factories, warehouses and other industrial units, many of which remain to this day (Andres and Round 2015). The area was perhaps best known for being the home of the Bird’s Custard Factory, a 12-hectare site which operated from 1837 until 1964 (Hughes 2012; Bouch et al. 2016).

With deindustrialisation, the Bird’s factory sat derelict for almost 30 years, until the early 1990s when it would once again become a hub of activity within Digbeth, this time given a new lease of life at the centre of a creative district (Montgomery 2007; Bouch et al. 2016). Indeed, the Custard Factory was one of the first regeneration efforts in Digbeth and is widely recognised as the main

driving force behind the area's transition towards creative activity (Hughes 2012; Andres and Round 2015; Bouch et al. 2016; Montgomery 2007).

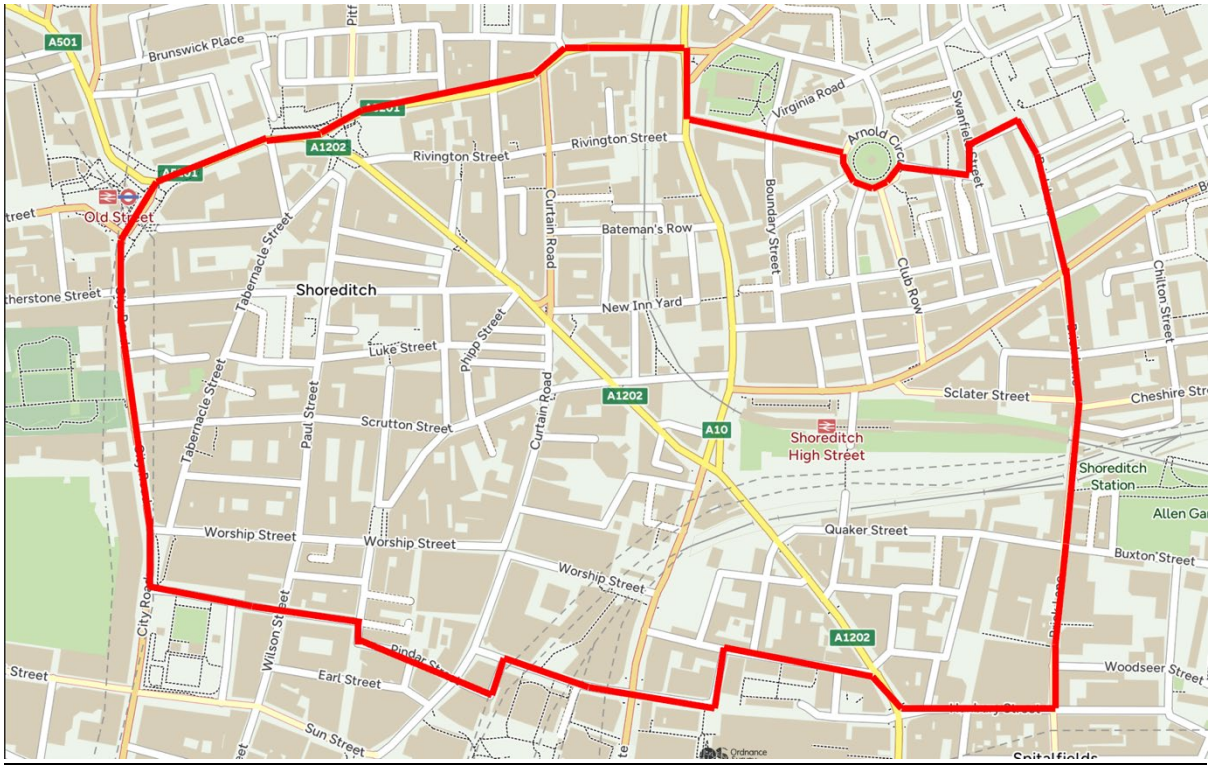
The development of the Custard Factory was primarily led by private developer and entrepreneur Bennie Grey (Montgomery 2007; Andres and Round 2015). In this sense, using Lidegaard et al's (2017) mode, it the creative district developed in what would be considered considered a bottom-up 'explicit' fashion (Lidegaard et al. 2017).

As we have seen from the above vignettes, 'bottom up' is a broad labelling, interwoven with elements of top-down development (Lidegaard et al. 2017), that can take many forms. Although 'bottom up' in the sense that they were an individual outside of government and policy circles, the investor/entrepreneur responsible for the purchasing and refurbishment of the custard factory could perhaps be considered less 'bottom up' than the other examples. This is because they could be considered 'top down' as development was guided not through government, but large means of investment capital.

The Custard Factory project has nonetheless been successful in overseeing derelict industrial space in Digbeth being converted into workspaces for businesses primarily operating in the arts and media spheres, with the first renovation being completed in 1995 (Montgomery 2007). Initially, the Custard Factory redevelopment was aided by some additional financial assistance from governmental bodies including European Union funding and a 'City Grant', a programme set up to incentivise the refurbishment of derelict industrial buildings (Montgomery 2007; Andres and Round 2015). Beyond this initial grant, however, Birmingham City Council, much like the above examples of Liverpool and Manchester have been rather 'hands off' in their approach to supporting Digbeth's creative transition, something Andres and Round (2015) attribute to the lack of cohesive vision and leadership in the area (Andres and Round 2015). In the years that have followed since the Custard Factory development, art galleries, music venues, clubs, restaurants and bars have opened up outside of the custard factory walls, culminating in the creative district we can observe in Digbeth today (Bouch et al. 2016)

3.3.4 London: Shoreditch creative district

Figure 5 Boundary of London's Shoreditch



Approximate boundary based on Google maps (2025d) and interview data, Source: Ordnance Survey (2025).

Shoreditch is located in East London, an area with a lengthy industrial history of furniture and textile production, jewellery making and clock manufacturing (Foord 2013). With deindustrialisation in the latter half of the 20th century and manufacturing moving abroad to cheaper labour markets, East London saw a dramatic decline in economic activity, further compounded by the decline of the River Thames as backbone of the city's trading (Mavromattis 2006). With this, the warehouses that populated East London fell into decline, in turn leaving vast amounts of cheap space (Foord 2013). Attracted to the affordable and flexible property, artists began flocking to Shoreditch in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Foord 2013). Soon, Shoreditch became the home of the Young British Artists (YBAs) movement, centred around galleries such as the White Cube in nearby Hoxton Square (BOP Consulting 2010). Around this time, the Old Truman Brewery in Shoreditch was also converted into workspaces for artists, a project that was instrumental in the transition of the area into a creative district (Mavrommatis 2006).

Once it was clear that Shoreditch was on its way to becoming a hub for creativity, there was some local authority interest in supporting this development. Despite this local government interest in Shoreditch's creative turn, the transition was largely unplanned and 'bottom-up' led in nature (Mavrommatis 2006; BOP Consulting 2010; Foord 2013). Indeed, local government did introduce some policies to incentivise growth in the area and conduct mapping exercises to understand this transition, however, this was only done once it was clear the area was already emerging as a creative hub (BOP Consulting 2010).

3.4 Interviews

The primary method employed for this research was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In total, 44 interviews were conducted: 15 in the Baltic Triangle, Liverpool; 13 in Digbeth, Birmingham; 12 in the Northern Quarter, Manchester; and 4 in Shoreditch, London. These interviews were with individuals who were running micro-organisations, oftentimes the owners/directors of these spaces, or the managers, if they were unavailable.

Semi-structured interviews refer to interviews which are flexible in nature, directed in part by a pre-written topic guide (found in Appendix A), and in part by the responses of the participant in the moment, often prompting unplanned questions to be asked (Esterberg 2002; Braun and Clarke 2013). This specific method of interviewing was employed as with so little known about the role of micro-organisations in the continued development of creative districts, I believed it was best to employ a 'grounded' approach to data collection, which allows the experts on this process - the individuals running these spaces, to have a say in shaping the direction of data collection (Hennink et al. 2011; Rubin and Rubin 2012).

Through the open-ended questions asked, interviewees were able to describe their experiences, actions, beliefs and opinions in their own words (Esterberg 2002). In this way, exploratory semi-structured interviews are particularly helpful for shaping and constructing new theory (Aurini et al. 2016, Esterberg 2002, Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). This property of semi-structured interviews was especially helpful for this thesis, which utilises the concept of trans-local scenes; a theory which still requires significant development (Griener and Sakdapolrak 2013).

As alluded to above, in line with wider qualitative approaches, semi-structured interviews in their ability to capture detailed data surrounding experiences, actions, beliefs and opinions (Frankfort-Nachimas and Nachimas 2008; Punch 2014; Aurini et al. 2016) are well suited to addressing the further 'what' and 'how' research questions of this thesis (Hennink et al. 2011; Ormston et al. 2014).

3.4.1 Positionality

This next section presents a reflexive analysis of my positionality whilst undertaking this research (Bourke 2014; Bukamal 2022). In using the term positionality, I am referring to how the different facets of my identity intersect with the research I am undertaking (Edwards and Holland 2013; Kusek and Smiley 2014; Bukamal 2022; Phillippo and Nolan 2022).

Researchers have in the past, generally categorised themselves as either 'insiders' or 'outsiders' in relation to their research subjects (Widerhold 2015). There is, however, considerable opposition to this dichotomy by those who have argued that this should not be such a strict binary; with many individuals findings themselves existing in a space in-between insider and outsider (Kusek and Smiley 2014; Wiederhold 2015; Bayek 2022). Generally, past literature on positionality and the 'insider' vs 'outsider' spectrum has also tended to focus on demographic traits such as a researcher's race, ethnicity, nationality, age and gender in relation to their participants (Edwards and Holland 2013; Bourke 2014; Kusek and Smiley 2014, Phillippo and Nolan 2022). Importantly for this thesis, I didn't capture any demographic data about my participants, as it was not at all related to the research aims or research questions of this thesis – demographics will therefore not be discussed.

The different aspects of a researchers positionality that are most relevant to reflect upon varies by each research context (Soedirgo and Glas 2020). In the context of the research for this thesis, I believe the aspects of my positionality that were most relevant during data collection were: interest and participation in the subject area, the location in which I lived and my personal politics (or my participant's perceptions of my political beliefs). These do of course, somewhat intersect with my demographic information, but the demographic information is not the main focus in this instance.

As argued by Bukamal (2022), a researcher's likes, dislikes, pastimes and interests can all impact collected data. I will therefore begin this discussion of my positionality by starting with my personal interest and investment in this research area. Prior to beginning to collect data for this project, I was familiar with all four of the case study creative districts. With regards to Shoreditch, having lived just outside of London from the ages of 16 - 21, I was familiar with the visiting the vintage stores, record stores and miscellaneous markets on Brick Lane on my weekends and breaks from university. I was also familiar with Digbeth through visiting friends and family in Birmingham, spending time in the art galleries and entertainment venues in the area. Furthermore, at the start of 2021 I moved to Toxteth in Liverpool, just outside of the Baltic Triangle. As such, I often visited this district in my spare time. Similarly with Manchester, living not too far away I would sometimes visit the art and craft shops, bookshops and cafes in my free time.

Whilst I had spent considerable amounts of time in these creative districts prior to, and throughout data collection, I did not have any personal relationships with any of the individuals that I interviewed for this thesis. I believe this aspect of my positionality intersected with the collection of data because I would often inform the participant that I was familiar and had spent time in each respective creative district as well as, where relevant, whether I had frequented their space before. I believe this helped my participants view me as somewhat of an insider in terms of my personal interests. From a professional standpoint however, having never worked in the types of micro-organisations typically found in these creative districts, I would most definitely be considered an outsider. This speaks to researchers occupying the space in between an insider and outsider positionality, as discussed in the literature (Kusek and Smiley 2014; Wiederhold 2015; Bayeck 2022). I believe ultimately, this was positive; I was enough of an insider that my participants could tell I had a genuine interest in their business, however, I was still enough of an outsider that my participants would not assume I knew everything about the area or their business model. Indeed, were times for example, I was asked questions such as "are you familiar with the Young British Artist movement?", or "do you know much about the beginnings of the Northern Quarter?" in these instances, I would ask the interviewee to explain these topics in their own words.

The second way I believe my positionality may have affected data collection is through assumptions made about my political beliefs. Interviews discussed the impacts of COVID-19, support received from the government, gaps in said support, and suggestions for improved support going forwards. As such, the contents of my interviews became rather political. Participants were very open with me about their political beliefs, and their opinions on how the government handled the COVID-19 crisis, especially the negatives. Indeed, from what I gathered from the contents of our interviews, it would

appear that many of those I interviewed were very unhappy with the government at the time's policies. I remained as neutral as possible, as to not sway the direction of our discussions. I believe that perhaps due to my demographic characteristics that participants assumed I was an 'insider' with regards to my personal politics (Soedirgo and Glas 2020; Titelman and Lauderdale 2021; McKay et al. 2024), and as such, may have felt more comfortable expressing their opinions.

3.4.2 Preparing for interviews

3.4.2.1 Ethics

With regards to ethics, each participant was given a participant information sheet detailing the background of the research, why they were asked to participate, what taking part will involve, any benefits, the confidentiality of the research, what will happen with the results of the research, their right to withdraw and a notice about data protection. Prior to beginning the interview, each participant also signed a consent form. With regards to the confidentiality of participants, this was ensured through each micro-organisation that was interviewed being given a pseudonym at the point of transcription. This pseudonym involves the location and type of micro-organisation that was interviewed. If there were multiple of these types of micro-organisations in a district to where an individual micro-organisation would not be easily identifiable, the specific type of micro-organisation was retained in the pseudonym, such as Shoreditch Art Gallery 1. If the type of micro-organisation would be too easily identifiable, they have been given a more generic title such as Manchester Speciality Interest Store 1.

Table 1 Case study location and type of micro-organisation interviewed

Location	**Micro-organisation**
Baltic Triangle, Liverpool.	Art studios/gallery (1) Art studios/gallery (2) Art gallery (1) Art gallery (2) Street food business Bar (1) Bar (2) Retail space Music venue (1) Music venue (2) Music venue (3) Rehearsal room (1) Rehearsal room (2) Co-working Space Coffee shop
Northern Quarter, Manchester.	Entertainment venue Coffee Shop Craft beer specialist Lifestyle store Specialty interest store Florist Bookshop Crafts person (1) Crafts person (2) Crafts person (3) Crafts person (4) Crafts person (5)
Digbeth, Birmingham.	Art gallery (1) Art gallery (2) Art studio/gallery Art studio Arts organisation (1) Arts organisation (2) Craft studio Music venue (1) Music venue (2)

	Craft beer specialist Bar Music Organisation Multi-purpose venue Retail space
Shoreditch, London.	Bookshop (1) Bookshop (2) Gallery (1) Gallery (2)

3.4.2.2 Sampling and recruitment

A purposive sampling approach was employed to recruit potential participants for interviews and consequently observation and the qualitative content analysis of social media data; as the participants of these latter two methods are directly tied to the interview sample. Purposive sampling revolves around selecting the most informative participant possible for your research (Kumar 2014), and as such, often requires stringent selection criteria (Walliman 2016). In this case, the criteria were that interviewees should be the managers, directors, or equivalent, of the different types of micro-organisations which constitute creative districts.

When a potential participant was identified, I made contact initially through email, and followed up through a direct message on the organisation's public social media if necessary. Upon contact, each time the researcher would take care to ensure the potential participant was provided information on: my background as a researcher; institutional ties and funding; the research topic and significance; why the participant had been selected; and what was expected out of participation (Dunn 2010). Once I had started conducting interviews, a smaller portion of the recruitment was also undertaken in a 'snowball' style (London 2017; O'Brien and Arnold 2024), where participants were asked if they knew any other relevant micro-organisations that may be interested in taking part.

I began recruitment in February of 2021, in the middle of a national lock-down. Although that national lockdown was lifted in June, those working in the micro-organisations that I was trying to recruit from were still occupied with recovering from the lockdown. Indeed, many micro-

organisations had lost employees during the pandemic, meaning the managing and directing staff were often having to work several roles at once, and simply did not have the capacity to partake in an interview. This situation was only further compounded by these organisations already being micro in size and having very small staffing teams to begin with. To try to mitigate this and incentivise some participation, a £15 Etsy voucher incentive was implemented for participants, and a risk assessment was approved for face-to-face interviews as the pandemic risk had lowered, with both efforts working successfully to improve recruitment rates amongst this seemingly hard to reach sample group.

As can be observed in the division of the number of interviews between the case study locations, there is far more of an emphasis on micro-organisations in regional cities within this thesis. This is because these more regional case study locations have been comparatively overlooked in existing literature (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Rabbis 2016; Lidegaard et al. 2017; Watson 2024). After this decision had been made, it became apparent that there were also significant issues recruiting in the Shoreditch case study location; potential participants were simply not responding to requests to partake in interviews, even with the added incentive. It is difficult to say why this was, as requests that were not successful were often simply ignored, with no reason given. To speculate one factor could be that participants in Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester may be approached less to take part in research, leading to their willingness to engage with researchers when the opportunity became available; reflected in the existing literature on creative districts which tends to focus on larger cities (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Rabbis 2016; Lidegaard et al. 2017).

3.4.3 Conducting interviews

Due to UK government COVID lockdown rules, the University of Southampton health and safety pandemic procedures, and at the preference of participants even when restrictions were lifted, the vast majority of interviews for this research were undertaken online (36 out of 44 interviews). Around the spring of 2022, some participants began to opt for face-to-face interviews. When these took place, they would happen within the micro-organisation itself, often in a room that was hidden away from customers as to avoid any disruption. Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour.

These interviews began with a set of introductory questions to allow for the participant to settle in to the interview and for rapport to be developed through the asking of less intensive questions at the outset (Esterberg 2002). These introductory questions (topic guide available in Appendix A), typically involved the participant talking more about their role, the history of the organisation and the local area. The second batch of questions surrounded which 'scenes' each organisation found they supported, and how. The third round of questions slightly shifted the conversations towards the role of organisations in trans-local scenes and knowledge flow mechanisms. Finally, the fourth set of questions sought to capture the experiences of these micro-organisations during COVID-19 in terms of impacts and support received, as well as lessons to learn from the crisis.

With the constantly evolving nature of video-calling software, at the time these interviews were undertaken, there was very little comprehensive, up to date guiding methodology on how to conduct online interviews (Salmons 2012; Mirick and Wladkowski 2019). Despite this, I was able to switch to online delivery of interviews relatively seamlessly, as the actual enactment of online interviews was very similar to face-to-face interviews (Weller 2016). Indeed, potential participants were contacted in the same way; the same format of loosely guided semi-structured interviews was followed; the same questions were asked; and, depending on how strict lockdown measures were at the time, many participants still opted to take their video-call interview from a private office in their workspace rather than at home. The only tangible change in the switch to online interviews for the researcher was, therefore, that the interviewer and interviewee were not in the same physical space at once. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed within a few days of the interview taking place. Interview data was made confidential, being ascribed pseudonyms at the point of transcription. The audio recordings and transcripts were then secured in a durable format, with adequate metadata, documentation, regular back-ups and kept on a password protected computer in line with the University of Southampton data policy.

3.4.4 Analysis of interviews

Interview transcripts were analysed in the word-processing software 'Scrivener'. Analysis followed an open coding approach which involved assigning initial codes comprising of descriptions, tags, names and labels to the data (Punch 2005). Generally, I followed a grounded theory approach to coding; at least for the first few rounds, codes arose inductively, from the data itself (Hennick et al. 2011). This approach was utilised on account of the exploratory nature of the research project (Frankfort-

Nachimas and Nachimas 2008). Following these initial rounds, deductive codes were applied to the data, originating from the limited existing theory utilised to inform this research project (Hennink et al. 2011); such as 'trans-local' and 'global pipeline' for example. At the end of this coding process, the reoccurring tags and labels ascribed to the data were organised into wider patterns and themes that addressed the projects research questions and comprised the findings of this study (Esterberg 2002; Braun and Clarke 2013).

3.4.5 Interviews: Benefits and limitations

Benefits of in-depth, semi-structured interviews include flexibility to follow unexpected narratives and themes grounded in the data (O'Leary 2017), opportunities to dig deeper and collect more detailed, rich, and complex data (Hall and Rist 1999; Kumar 2014), and the suitability of interviews to collect data surrounding attitudes, behaviours, experiences and beliefs (Choy 2014). Further, the medium of online interviews specifically brings its own benefits: for the interviewee, video calls can happen wherever is most convenient, be that at home or in the office (Janghorban et al. 2014); and for the interviewer, with no travel they are far less financially and temporally costly (Mirick and Wladkowski 2019). Additionally, it is possible that some participants may find online interviews less daunting and intrusive when there is a degree of separation from the researcher, in a phenomena coined "pressure of presence" (Weller 2016, p.618), especially when recording equipment and note-taking tools are hidden behind the camera.

There are some limitations to this method too, especially regarding interviews which are undertaken online. There is the potential to lose richness in not undertaking interviews within the micro-organisations themselves, where participants may have otherwise been able to show me around their space. This limitation, however, was somewhat addressed through the observation that was undertaken in some of these spaces later. One of the most critical limitations of online interviews is difficulty building rapport with participants (Mirick and Wladkowski 2019, Weller 2016). Rapport is of course incredibly important for establishing trust and as such, the generation of rich data (Weller 2016). In face to face interviews, generally there is 5 - 10 minutes of small talk before the interview begins that can provide the researcher and the interviewee with further detail about one another's lives that helps to build this trust. To try to combat this potential issue as much as possible, I would always begin the online call with some small talk before jumping into formalities. The second limitation I found with this method was that there was the potential for technical difficulties (Jones

and Abdelfattah 2020, Mirick and Wladkowski 2019). Out of 36 online interviews, however, only 1 had severe technical issues, and the interview was still able to be finished. Finally, any discussion on the limitations of online interviews should acknowledge the debate on visual cues (Janghorban et al. 2014; Weller 2016; Mirick and Wladkowski 2019). In-person interviews are said to allow for the generation of thicker data, through the ability to read a participant's body language (Janghorban et al. 2014, Weller 2016). I found, however, that in my online interviews I was able to read just as much body language as I could in my face to face interviews; where typically a person is sat down behind a desk or a table.

Finally, a more general limitation of interviews is that they are a report of what people say they do, not necessarily what they actually do (Hammersley 2013, Hofisi et al. 2014). This may be due to factors such as a researcher's positionality (Edwards and Holland 2013), participants replying with what they think the researcher wants to hear (Hofisi et al. 2013), or even just due to the difficulty of accurately recounting experiences (Hammersley 2013). Partly to counter this limitation, the data from these interviews have been triangulated with the outcomes of observation and social media content analysis.

3.5 Participant observation

The second method of this multi method approach is participant observation, which was carried out in 27 different micro-organisations. It was not possible to undertake observation in every micro-organisations for a variety of reasons: some spaces had permanently closed down by the time the COVID-19 risk had lowered (9 in total); others were not open to the public at the times fieldwork was being carried out; and finally, some spaces were not suitable for lone researchers to be visiting, as was the case with most of the late night venues.

Participant observation can take many different forms. Within the context of this project, participant observation can be best understood as the deliberate and systematic watching, listening and interacting with a study place and population (Kumar 2014). This observation can be further defined through its supplementary, selective nature (Flick 2009; Gillham 2000), which is focused on finding evidence (or lack thereof), of the topics which are discussed in the in-depth interviews and related to the overall research questions of this thesis.

Participant observation as a method is well suited to collecting data relating to the research questions of this thesis. In particular, it is apt at adding depth to existing data through generating illustrative descriptions of the spaces studied in this research and the types of activity that is associated with them (Gilliam 2000; Hennink et al. 2011). As such, it is well suited to studying the first two research questions of this thesis in particular, surrounding capturing data on the roles micro-organisations enact in their respective scenes, and how they might interact with one another across space. This observation was particularly useful for identifying any uniformity in aesthetics and practices across space. Participant observation was further selected as a method to use in this thesis because it directly captures data (Snape and Spencer 2003), rather than the in-direct recounting through interviews (Hammersley 2013, Hofisi et al. 2014).

3.5.1 Preparing for participant observation

3.5.1.1 Ethics

Regarding the ethics of this method, it is important to state that this observation was undertaken in a covert manner (Esterberg 2002). This decision was made for several reasons. Firstly, there was no personal or sensitive data that was collected through observation. Instead, the type of data I was collecting through observation surrounded capturing more detail on the background of the space, evidence of scenes, evidence of trans-local interaction and the impacts of COVID-19 (the full observation sheet can be found in Appendix B). Secondly, it would be disruptive and unrealistic to ask each member of the public within a space individually whether they would consent to me undertaking observation in the space. Thirdly, if the members of the public knew they were being observed, they would likely have behaved differently (Kumar 2014).

3.5.1.2 Sampling

With regards sampling, this was the same as interviews, as discussed in section 3.4.2.2; this is because the sample for participant observation was quite simply the micro-organisations that had

already been interviewed for this project. As mentioned above, it was not possibly to undertake observation in every micro-organisation, as such, observation was limited to 27 different spaces.

3.5.2 Conducting participant observation

In-person observation began at the same time participants started to opt for in-person interviews, in the spring of 2022. In-person observation was delayed until this period as even in the winter of 2021, the UK was still experiencing significant waves of COVID-19 (British Foreign Policy Group 2022).

Where in-person observation was possible, conducting data collection involved the researcher walking around each micro-organisation, taking digital notes (Kumar 2014), this was the observation that was undertaken in 27 micro-organisations. For the remaining spaces, the researcher did the best they could to collect data from the plethora of online images of the exteriors and interiors of these public spaces that was available from Google. The observation scheme guiding this note taking generally followed the same structure as interview guides. I would begin by searching for further evidence of the mission statement, ethos or history of the space. Secondly, I would move on to looking for evidence of ties to respective scenes and how the space was being used by its patrons. The third area of investigation would be trans-local scenes, looking for evidence of collaboration and connections between businesses. For the fourth section of the observation sheet, I would look to see whether there was any remaining evidence of the impacts of COVID-19 on the space. Finally, I would also use observation to look at uniformity between micro-organisations across space, particularly regarding aesthetics, but observation was also able to generate data on uniformity of practices, too. With regards to aesthetics, I would look at aspects of the space such as what type of building they were in, what building materials are used? How was it furnished and decorated? This data on aesthetics was the most influential to the findings of this thesis.

It was more difficult to capture observation data on practices - this was largely captured in the interviews, but I was able to record some information that tied to practices by observing how the space might be laid out for different uses, how patrons were using the space at the time, the types of products the space might be using or selling and where these were from, or the types of events they were advertising through flyers, for example.

3.5.3 Analysis of participant observation data

Analysis of the observation data was characterised by more of a mix of inductive and deductive coding, compared to the analysis of interview transcripts. This was because I had already began analysis of some of the interview transcripts by the time I started observation. As such, whist some of the codes arose inductively from the data itself, other codes were added according to initial findings from the interview data (Punch 2005; Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 2008; Hennink et al. 2011). These codes were then analysed for patterns and organised into recurring themes. This observation data was particularly useful for identifying uniformity across space in terms of the aesthetics and practices of micro-organisations in creative districts.

3.5.4 Participant observation: Benefits and limitations

The main benefit of this method, and the reason it was implemented is that observation collects comparatively 'natural' data (Snape and Spencer 2003). The main limitation of this method within the context of this research, however, is that I was not able to undertake observation in all of these micro-organisations for the variety of reasons outlined in section (x). Some more general drawbacks of observation as a method, as argued by existing literature, is that observation has the potential to generate data that varies from case to case (Kumar 2014), and that those conducting the method need to take care not to collect data which is shallow and incomplete (Esterberg 2002; Kumar 2014). The aforementioned observation guide has been generated, in part, to combat these potential drawbacks.

3.6 Qualitative content analysis of Instagram accounts

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) of Instagram accounts was implemented as a supplementary, secondary method of data collection, with the aim of enriching the interview data by providing further illustrative examples (Hand 2017). As a strictly supplemental method, the decision was made to focus efforts on analysing the Instagram posts of the 17 different micro-organisations that mentioned using Instagram as a mechanism for enabling trans-local flows.

Instagram refers to the mobile phone application which allows users to share photos, videos and text accompaniments with other users of the app (Laestadius 2017). Instagram was chosen as the data collection site as it was overwhelmingly the most referenced (and largely the only referenced) social media application in interviews.

Qualitative content analysis can be understood as a method which systematically interprets the content of a text, image or video through coding (Cravens et al. 2015), in order to determine themes, meaning and patterns from the data (Saunders et al. 2018; Iosifidis and Nicoli 2020). Researchers employing qualitative content analysis may struggle with the distinct lack of literature available on conducting this method (Assarroudi et al. 2018); indeed, methodological textbooks highlight that there is no outlined consensus on procedures to carrying out this method (Saunders et al. 2018), and published articles using this method largely lack any depth or detail on how this method has been employed (Assarroudi et al. 2018).

Further, there is even less guidance available for those undertaking qualitative content analysis through social media data. As a relatively new discipline, social media research, especially involving visual platforms such as Instagram (Laestadius 2017; Rasmussen Pennington 2017), offers novel data sources for which you cannot universally apply a methodology designed for the analysis of traditional print media (Hand 2017; Mayr and Weller 2017; Quan-Haase and Sloan 2017). This made for a rather unchartered methodological landscape, where I largely had to develop my own approach to analysing these novel datasets through combining aspects of the few existing methods papers on qualitative content analysis, with other methodological steps generated out of necessity in response to the affordances of the studied platform and the unique dataset that it produces.

In particular, this method focused on collecting data related to the second research question of 'how do micro-organisations interact with each other across space?', through examining micro-organisations' uses of the most discussed social media platform in this project's interviews; Instagram. QCA allowed for detailed data to be collected on participant's use of this platform (Zeller 2017; Andreotta et al. 2019), and the extent of the networks facilitated through it.

3.6.1 Preparing for QCA

3.6.1.1 Ethics

The Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) working group is understood as providing the most comprehensive ethical guide for researchers wanting to conduct social media analysis (Ess 2002; Markham and Buchanan 2012; Franzke et al. 2019). To begin, the researcher must examine whether there are any ethical expectations laid out by the platform in regards to research (Ess 2002). In the case of Instagram, there was nothing in their data policy (Instagram 2021 b) or Community Guidelines (Instagram 2021a) at the time of data collection which either guide or prohibit research being undertaken on their platform.

The other two main ethical issues surrounding qualitative content analysis of social media are consent and anonymity. With regards to whether consent is needed, two main factors should be taken into account. The first is whether the data can be considered public, or private. This is a difficult area to navigate, as expectations and actualities of privacy are constantly changing as social media platforms are updated and evolve (Markham 2012; Markham and Buchanan 2012). Public data, however, is generally understood to refer to online data that anyone with an internet connection can access, similar to a physical public space, like a street or a park (Sveningsson Elm 2009). Indeed, this research only collected data from public business accounts, that can be accessed by anyone on, or off Instagram. It is important to state that no data was collected from personal accounts, or accounts that are privatised.

Akin to other methods like covert observation, because the data being used is public, it is generally accepted that as long as the data is low risk, this method does not require consent from those that created the data, i.e the accounts that generated the likes, comments and follows in the data being collected (Ess 2002; Markham and Buchanan 2012; Franzke et al. 2019). Whether collected data can be considered 'low risk' largely depends on two factors; the content of the data and the persons under study (Ess 2002; Markham and Buchanan 2012; Franzke et al. 2019). The first question the researcher needs to ask is 'will collecting this data harm the individual who created it?'; in the case of this research project, the answer will be no. As previously mentioned the data collected will be relatively "trivial" (Ess 2002, p.8), not addressing any sensitive topics, rather, it will only be looking at post content, likes and comments on public business accounts. This data will also not come from any vulnerable populations (Markham and Buchanan 2012; Franzke et al. 2019). Therefore, because this

data is public and low risk both in terms of content, and the studied population, according to the AOIR guidelines, I did not need to gain consent to undertake analysis (Ess 2002, Markham and Buchanan 2012; Franzke et al. 2019).

The second pressing ethical consideration of this research was ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. When collecting the data, the researcher saw the names of the public accounts that were engaging with the post under examination, meaning the data was confidential, rather than anonymous to the researcher. Data will be anonymous to any readers of this research, however, as the names of engaging accounts were not recorded. Similarly, whilst the location of accounts engaging with a post was recorded (if in their public biography), as outlined above, this location was recorded as the coordinates of the biggest town/city that the organisation was based in, rather than an identifiable address. Data will be completely anonymous to any readers of this research.

Ensuring final anonymity is an important ethical issue, as it ensures the individuals behind each social media account cannot be tracked down through search engines (Beninger 2017). Although the data collected is low risk, the study population has still not been asked for their consent, and as such, it is important that they remain anonymous (Beaulieu and Estalella 2012). Anonymity is of particular importance with the 'comment' data I collected, as this is the data where it is most likely that a source account can be identified. To combat this, the researcher ensured that there are no direct quotes used in the thesis, this is to prevent any reverse searching that would identify the creator of the comment, and the business account being studied (Markham and Buchanan 2012). The actual images posted on Instagram accounts will also not be included in the thesis to prevent reverse image searching.

3.6.1.2 Sampling

With QCA of Instagram posts being a rather novel method, this section will provide a detailed overview on the sampling approach. The pool of participants drawn from were the micro-organisations which partook in interviews for this project. Of this wider sample, only the 17 micro-organisations which mentioned using Instagram as a trans-local mechanism were analysed, due to QCA only being utilised as a supplementary method.

Within these selected Instagram accounts, however, a further sampling frame then had to be decided upon which determines a cut off point for how many posts are to be analysed from each account. The large volume of potential data on social media platform means that deciding upon a suitable sampling frame is extremely important as there are often no clear end points to stop collecting data (Andreotta et al. 2019). Although methodological literature does not offer any substantial frameworks for developing a sampling frame, one approach which has been covered in existing articles (Austin and Gaither 2016; Bravo and Hoffman-Goetz 2017; Iosifidis and Nicoli 2020), and has been deemed appropriate for this research is the creation of temporal sampling frames (Hand 2017).

Two sampling frames were decided upon for this research. The first sampling frame was the 1st of October to 31st of December 2019 and the second ran from the 1st of April to the 30th of June 2020. The first sampling frame was decided upon as it was useful to observe how social media was being used during 'normal', pre-pandemic times. The second sampling frame was chosen as during interviews, participants were consistently referring back to how helpful social media was during the pandemic, especially during lockdowns. As such, a sampling timeframe during the height of lockdown was selected so that social media findings would be in line with key themes that arose through in-depth interviews.

A further sampling issue the researcher encountered, however, was deciding upon the number of posts to analyse for content and interactions for each of the micro-organisations, within each of these temporal sampling frames. This was particularly difficult as whilst existing literature that analyses social media data does mention the number of posts they analyse within their studies, they often do not unpack or explain why they choose to analyse that number of posts (Assarroudi et al. 2018). Creating a cut-off point for number of posts analysed per business, per timeframe was especially important because the number of posts uploaded within each timeframe can potentially greatly differ between different businesses; so the researcher needed to ensure there was a degree of consistency in the number of posts analysed across each business, whilst also creating a cut-off point for analysis that was realistic and reasonable for a secondary method.

From my pilot study, it became apparently very quickly that by the 10th Instagram post analysed for each of the micro-organisations, within each of the timeframes, saturation had been met (Saunders

et al.2018). This was both in terms of the content of the posts, the types and locations of interacting accounts and the contents of the comment section.

As mentioned, the initial sample for Instagram QCA was the accounts of 17 different micro-organisations. However, when it came to analysing these accounts, one of the businesses hadn't opened during the first time frame, one of the businesses had their 'like' list put on private mode, and not every micro-organisation uploaded frequently enough to reach the 10 post cut off per timeframe. Despite this, saturation across the sample was reached, with the content of 263 different Instagram posts having been analysed in total. Furthermore, analysing the likes and comment sections of these posts resulted in the recording of 605 unique interactions between micro-organisations across space.

3.6.2 Conducting QCA

The researcher has largely had to develop this methodological approach through a process of trial and error, responding to the unique affordances that Instagram provides as a platform (Laestadius 2017). As such, the first 5 Instagram accounts analysed were treated as a pilot study to iron out any issues when developing this method.

This qualitative content analysis approach pulled several different types of data from each Instagram post: 1) the visual content of each post, 2) comment section data, 3) like count data.

Analysing the visual content of Instagram posts and their associated caption aided with capturing data on how trans-local flows are translated and enable uniformity across space, through analysing the ideas, values and practices micro-organisations are sharing with one another on their social media. Data gathered from the 'like' and 'comment' section of each Instagram post allowed additional information to be gathered about the micro-organisations that engage with one another through this mechanism.

Data was only collected from other accounts that were public and belonging to another micro-organisation or business, not private or personal accounts. This is because it is these organisation-to-organisation interactions which are the focus of this study. From the 'likes' on each Instagram post, the information that was taken was simply the type of organisation that had liked the post (i.e Coffee Shop, Record Store, Lifestyle store), and their location if they had listed it publicly in their biography section. This location was recorded simply as the coordinates of the biggest town/city that the organisation engaging was based in. For example, if a Coffee shop on Jamaica Street in the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool had liked the post of a Coffee Shop in Manchester, the location of the organisation engaging with the post would simply be recorded as 'Liverpool' and the corresponding coordinates to ensure they were not identifiable from the data set. Similarly from the comment section of each post, the type of organisation that had left a comment was record, their location, and the content of the comment. This data helped towards understanding the third research question concerning how different mechanisms are utilised by micro-organisations to potentially facilitate trans-local scenes and subsequent uniformity.

3.6.3 Analysis of QCA data

Regarding how the contents of social media posts were analysed, this was in a similar fashion to the observation data, which was characterised by more of a combination of inductive and deductive coding, when compared to the analysis of interview data. This was because, as with observation, I had already begun the analysis of interview transcripts prior to starting social media analysis. Whilst some codes arose from the contents of the Instagram posts themselves, other codes were influenced by the preliminary findings of the interview data. Patterns were then identified between these codes, and the data was sorted into wider themes.

From this social media data, a series of maps were also made illustrating the extent of connections between micro-organisations in the case study locations and other micro-organisations/businesses across the world. These maps, found in empirical chapter 3 are known as 'origin destination maps', which draw a line between an originating co-ordinate and an end co-ordinate, made using Kepler.gl.

3.6.4 QCA of Instagram accounts: Benefits and limitations

Although the primary method of interviews also has a role in answering the research questions, QCA of social media allows for the collection of extant data that is generated independently of any influence from the researcher (Latzko-Toth et al. 2017). In this sense, social media data allows for a more naturalistic data source which acts to enrich claims made in the interviews, and provide additional detail and information (Zeller 2017). Further benefits of social media data include that platforms such as Instagram act somewhat as an archive to store years worth of data for the researcher to sample from (Latzo-Toth et al. 2017). Participants can only remember and recall so much detail within an interview, and as such, social media offers a supplementary enriching data source of great depth and breadth (Andreotta et al. 2019).

Despite these benefits, there are also some drawbacks to using QCA of social media as a method. Drawbacks include potential ethical complications surrounding consent, as researchers are often unable to gain consent from every social media account they look at (Cravens et al. 2015). To combat this, the researcher has implemented the recommended course of action by the Association of Internet Researchers Working Committee (Ess 2002; Markham and Buchanan 2012, Franzke et al. 2019), that is, that providing all accounts analysed are public, do not belong to a vulnerable population, and do not involve sensitive content, no consent is needed to study the account. Finally, another important potential drawback is the sheer volume of data available for the researcher to analyse on these social media platforms, which could cause problems for selecting units of analysis (Hand 2017; Quan- Haase and Sloan 2017), and is made even more complicated through the lack of a framework for extracting subsets of data (Andreotta et al. 2019). The researcher has counted this by developing a tailored sampling strategy for their research, which was outlined above.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the overall qualitative, multi method, multi case-study methodology of this project. This qualitative approach was justified through its suitability for exploring ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ research questions (Hennick et al. 2011, Ormston et al. 2014). The four bottom-up case study locations of the Baltic Triangle, the Northern Quarter, Digbeth and Shoreditch were introduced and qualified according to the size and diversity of these creative districts for conducting research in.

Section 3.4 outlined the primary method of 44 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals running micro-organisations. The use of this method was justified through its ability to capture rich, in-depth data on experiences, actions, beliefs and opinions (Esterberg 2002). These properties also make the method well suited to constructing theory in under-researched areas, such as trans-local scenes (Esterberg 2002; Aurini et al. 2016; Griener and Sakdapolrak 2013; Hesse-Biber and Levy 2006). The supplementary method of in-person observation in 27 different micro-organisations was then outlined, in particular its ability to capture illustrative examples of points brought up in interviews (Gilliam 2000; Flick 2009), and data which relates directly to the research questions, rather than relying participants to recount all of the necessary information (Snape and Spencer 2003). Finally, the QCA analysis of Instagram accounts was detailed as the second supplementary method for this thesis, involving a focused analysis of the posts of 17 different micro-organisations. This method assists in particular with capturing data on what micro-organisations share with one another through this mechanism, and illustrating the breadths of these networks.

Chapter 4 ‘Behind the scenes’: The roles of micro-organisations in creative district scenes

The overall aim of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the role of micro-organisations in the uniform ongoing development of creative districts across space, using the lens of trans-local scenes. This thesis argues that micro-organisations are a part of globally connected trans-local scenes. Within these trans-local scenes, geographically dispersed micro-organisations communicate and interact with each other through various mechanisms (such as travel and social media, as explored in Chapter 5). These mechanisms allow for ‘flows’ of information in their different forms to spread across space, in turn influencing the continued development of creative districts. A central aspect of exploring this aim is encapsulated by the first research question of this study: “what roles do micro-organisations enact in creative district scenes?”. In understanding the different supportive roles micro-organisations play, we can in turn understand how they integrate themselves into these scenes.

Indeed, to understand how micro-organisations interact with one another across space in trans-local scenes (Chapter 5), it is useful to first establish exactly how micro-organisations in creative districts are tied to their respective scenes in the first instance. This chapter, therefore, provides an important set-up for the rest of this thesis. It is important to note for this chapter, that I recognise it is the individuals who run these micro-organisations, that are behind the practices which lead to a space’s integration into a scene, however, for ease I refer to them simply as ‘micro-organisations’ rather than ‘individuals within micro-organisations’.

Whilst scene literature recognises that ‘physical structures’ (Silver and Clark 2015), also referred to as amenities (Silver et al. 2010) and physical infrastructures (Driver and Bennett 2015; Mall 2020) are important components of scenes, there is seemingly a gap for research which examines the process of physical structures (such as micro-organisations), integrating themselves into their respective scenes.

In this chapter I argue that generally, micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes through performing various ‘support’ roles. Specifically, this chapter presents a typology of support roles which combines empirical findings with the limited existing literature on how physical

structures provide cultural (Gallan 2012), financial (London 2017) and social (Tironi 2012), forms of support to scenes.

It has been established that there is very little literature available on how physical structures in their many forms support associated scenes. There is seemingly even less literature available which looks at the role of micro-organisations in supporting creative district scenes specifically. To begin to explore this problem space, we must first look towards the literature that explains what a scene is. Importantly, there is a considerable gap for literature which explicitly unpacks the definition of scenes for different research contexts. Although there is recognition that the term 'scene' is fluid and fuzzy (Drysdale 2015; Finch 2015; Silver and Clark 2015; Woo et al. 2017), there is somewhat of an overreliance on definitions provided by Straw (2001; 2004). This means that many papers lack nuance by dissecting how aspects of the more 'traditional' definitions of scenes either apply or don't apply to different research areas. Regarding the structuring of this chapter, before jumping into presenting the typology of support roles, Section 4.1 will first explain what is meant by 'scene' within the context of this thesis. This is because as discussed above, the term 'scene' lacks a widely agreed upon definition in existing literature, with most studies on the topic being done "independently and in ignorance of one another" (Silver and Clark 2015, p.427).

Section 4.2.1 will then introduce the first pillar of the typology; micro-organisations integrating themselves within their respective scenes through the 'cultural' supportive roles they enact (Gallan 2012). Section 4.2.2 examines the second pillar of this typology, which is that micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes through the 'financial' forms of support they offer (London 2017). Section 4.2.3 proposes the third and final pillar of this typology; micro-organisations integrating themselves into their respective scenes through providing 'social' support (Tironi 2012).

4.1 Defining 'scenes'

Despite the popularity of the term 'scene' within academic research, there is a lack of consensus on any comprehensive definition (Silver and Clark 2015). This gap necessitates a critical and careful examination of the characteristics and processes which define a scene, which this section aims to contribute through the context of this research.

It is the same vagueness and variability, however, which has made the use of the term 'scene' attractive to implement within this study. This is because creative districts are bustling places full of different organisations, actors, activities and flows, and as such, a term was needed which was flexible enough to encapsulate this "flux of city life" (Barone 2016, p.23), in all of its component parts. Indeed, the limited definitions of scenes which exist in the literature lean towards what could be considered a 'combinational' definition. What is meant by this, is that scenes are comprised of multiple component parts such as different locales, physical structures, persons, activities and values (Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Silver and Clark 2015). Importantly the exact combination of these parts would depend on the phenomena you are researching, and what your research questions are.

Within trans-local literature, for a trans-local scene to exist there must first be a local scene, which is understood as a scene which is associated with a particular local area (Cummings 2005; Jousmäki 2017; Emms and Crossley 2018). This is because, by definition, a trans-local scene is created when scene-related activity 'transcends' it's original local boundary, reaching new scene members spread out across space, and in turn creating ties to several different localities (Jousmäki 2017). The mechanisms through which this process takes place are detailed later in Chapter 5.

I will therefore begin this chapter by defining what is meant by the term 'scene' within this thesis specifically. My conceptualisation consists of four main component parts. The first definitional component is that 'physical' scenes (as opposed to virtual scenes), need a locational base, or in the case of trans-local scenes, several locational bases (Straw 2004; Silver and Clark 2016; Jousmäki 2017). In the context of this research, this location or multiple locations, would be creative districts.

The second component of scenes highlighted in this research is that scenes need physical structures which integrate themselves into their respective scenes through the various cultural, financial and social 'support' roles they perform (Gallan 2012; Tironi 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015; London 2017). Within this research, the physical structures under investigation are the micro-organisations which form the foundation of these creative districts such as art and music studios, galleries, music venues and coffee shops (Hubbard 2016; Wallace 2019). A local scene would just have ties to physical structures in one location, whereas a trans-local scene would inhabit physical structures across multiple locations.

The third component of a scene are the individual scene members and their associated networks between one another (Straw 2001; Silver et al. 2005; André et al. 2017). Of particular interest for this are the individuals who run the micro-organisations mentioned above.

Finally, the fourth component of a scene would be the shared interest which unites scene members (Straw 1991, Straw 2004), either within a specific locality in the case of local scenes, or across space with trans-local scenes. These shared interests can take a great many forms. Examples from this research include art scenes, craft scenes, music scenes and various food and drink scenes. These scene interests can be further broken down into even more specific sub-scenes, with examples from this research including 'grassroots', 'DIY' and 'alternative' arts scenes, or 'Indie' and 'EDM' music scenes.

All of these components: the scene's location; its associated physical structures; individuals, their networks; and the shared interest that unites the scene combine together to make a whole scene. Despite this, it is also not uncommon for scenes to be referred to colloquially by their location/physical infrastructure/activity in particular individually – for example the 'Baltic triangle creative scene', the 'gallery scene', or the 'EDM' scene within a city. However, even when these individual components are singled out, they are still a part of this wider understanding of the whole scene system – referred to in parts of this thesis as the scene's 'ecosystem'.

This first empirical chapter is particularly interested in establishing how micro-organisations (as the physical structure component), facilitate the enactment of uniting scene interests (the fourth component).

4.2 Micro-organisation support roles

As highlighted above, my findings revealed that micro-organisations integrated themselves and built the fabric of their respective scenes through performing various cultural, financial and social supporting roles which will be explored in this section. Whilst this thesis largely focuses on trans-local scenes, this section will use the generic labelling of 'scenes' rather than 'local' or 'trans-local' scenes specifically, as in theory, these supporting roles can be performed for both types of scenes.

4.2.1 Cultural roles

The predominant role I found micro-organisation performing which supported the functioning of their respective scenes was a 'cultural' role. The use of the term 'cultural' here draws upon Gallan's (2012, p.38) work on physical spaces providing the "cultural infrastructure" for scene members to participate in their uniting scene interest. Brandellero and Pfeffer (2015, p.1575), mention a similar idea, that spaces can provide the "supporting infrastructure" for scenes to function. Whilst both works introduce this theory, it is not unpacked much further. There is a gap therefore, to explore the forms that this "cultural infrastructure" can take, and how it is enacted by the understudied actor of micro-organisations (Wise et al. 2022).

I address this gap in the below section, where based on my research findings and initial theory by Gallan (2012, p.38) in particular, I understand and apply "cultural infrastructure" as a term to describe the structures, equipment and facilities that a scene needs to happen and thrive.

4.2.1.1 Cultural role motivations: Supporting small scale, grassroots and emerging activity

Unsurprisingly, with there being so little literature on the physical structures which provide cultural support for their respective scenes in general (Gallan 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015), there is an even bigger gap for research which examines the motivators behind why different spaces enact these supportive roles.

During my interviews I asked the owners, directors (and/or) managers to explain the ethos' of their spaces and the mission statements that ultimately underpin their organisational models and practices. A common theme amongst the answers, which ties directly to the practice of providing 'cultural infrastructure' for associated scenes was being invested in 'nurturing' their respective scenes, particularly with regards to small scale, grassroots and 'emerging' activity. Some examples of this activity from my research included micro-organisations supporting early career musicians, artists, writers and crafts people, as well as newly starting out food and drink entrepreneurs.

Supporting this type of activity was central to the ethos' of a wide variety of different spaces that I spoke to, including art galleries, art studios, arts organisations, music venues, bookshops, and co-working spaces. An exemplary quote comes from a music venue in Liverpool:

> *"There still is the ethos of you know, supporting grass roots. We've expanded a lot, but to us, like any grass roots venue, it was to showcase and celebrate up and coming talent, and also, to have a good venue and be used as like, a tour venue"*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Music Venue 1)*

For some spaces, this passion to support small scale activity came from recognising the value that grassroots and emerging activity can bring in terms of pushing forward experimental and innovative practices. For others, it came from a place of understanding, with many micro-organisations being set up and run by people who have experience trying to navigate precarious early career landscapes themselves.

Across both of these scenarios, micro-organisations recognised the importance of providing 'cultural infrastructure' that is open to supporting this emerging and grassroots activity. One of the ways that micro-organisations enacted this ethos was through providing events space and production and consumption space to grassroots and emerging scene members, as will be highlighted in the section below.

4.2.1.2 Cultural supporting roles: Events

A key finding from my research was that micro-organisations provide critical scene-based infrastructure through the events that they hold. As defined in the above section, I interpret the term cultural infrastructure (Gallan 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015), as pertaining to the facilities through which a scene can exist. Micro-organisations holding events are crucial here; as they provide important opportunities for scene members to engage in activities that are directly related their uniting shared interest (Straw 2004; Gallan 2012; Drysdale 2015; André et al. 2017).

Indeed, the very limited existing literature does recognise the importance of events as critical sites of scene-members engaging with their shared interest, such as Gallan (2012), who posits that events can be important sites of scene members "paying their dues" as a part of their respective scenes (Gallan 2012, p.44). The sparse literature tends to focus on activity surrounding music scenes, and highlights spaces such as music venues and clubs, supporting scenes through the events we would typically associate with such spaces, like live music and club nights (Hodkinson 2004; Gallan 2012). Whilst those findings aren't necessarily surprising, they do act to emphasise how these physical structures are integral to the operations of the scenes they are embedded within.

Whilst my research found that spaces like music venues did support their respective scenes through offering 'typical' events such as live music, club nights and DJ sets, I also found that venues in creative districts offered training opportunities, film screenings, pop-up makers markets and art makers. Likewise, art galleries supported their associated scenes through the events we typically associate with these types of spaces such as exhibitions, but they also held art and design workshops, arts associated business training, networking events, pop-up makers markets and live music nights.

Below is a quote from a gallery in London, demonstrating the breadth of events that one micro-organisation can hold:

> *"Before lockdown, we hired out our gallery space over many occasions, for example, for photoshoots and filming, art and design workshops, pop-up shops and temporary exhibitions [by artists] not fully represented by us".*
>
> *(Shoreditch Art Gallery 1).*

In the case of the above example, this art gallery typically held these events to support associated contemporary art scenes, in particular graffiti and street art scenes. However, my research also revealed that it was not just the types of micro-organisations we would typically associate with holding scene-supporting events such as music venues and art galleries that engaged in this kind of activity. For instance, I found that bookshops, alongside their somewhat expected programming of book launches, readings and signings, also held events such as poetry open mics, pop-up makers markets, film screenings and live music.

This appeared to be a common finding across the micro-organisations that I spoke to. Indeed, I found that coffee shops not only supported artisan coffee scenes through tasting nights, but they also supported music scenes through holding gigs in their space, and art scenes through hosting exhibitions, painting classes, life drawing and craft pop-up markets. Similarly, I found that bars and a craft beer specialist supported craft beer scenes through hosting beer festivals, tastings and tap takeovers. They also, however, supported arts scenes through exhibitions, pop-up markets and film screenings, as well as music scenes through live music and food scenes through hosting pop-up restaurants. Further examples included a street food business hosting live music and makers markets, and a creative co-working space hosting art and design workshops and classes.

To answer the question of why so many micro-organisations held these events - especially spaces that might not typically be associated with this kind of activity – we just have to look back to these micro-organisations guiding motivations, as outlined in section 4.2.2.1. Part of the underlying operational ethos of many of these micro-organisations is a desire to nurture their associated scenes, in particular small-scale, grassroots and emerging activity. They view this practice as valuable, in part because of they view these groups as driving forward innovation and experimentation within scenes,

but also because many of those running micro-organisations are active in these scenes at a grassroots level themselves. Indeed, many of the events held by micro-organisations are targeted at supporting small-scale/grassroots/emerging scene members.

4.2.1.3 Cultural support events: Contributions to literature

The literature on physical structures supporting associated scenes through events is very sparse. Literature does mention that events can be considered an important aspect of scene members participating in the shared 'interest' that unites scene members, however, this is not unpacked further (Straw 2004; Gallan 2012; Drysdale 2015; André et al. 2017). The above findings therefore develop this theory by also exploring the motivations behind why micro-organisations provide this kind of support; particularly surrounding spaces that one might not typically associate with hosting certain events.

Scene literature more generally, is also overwhelmingly focused on music scenes (Straw 1991; Bennett 2004; Luckman et al. 2008; Taylor 2012; Driver and Bennett 2015; Finch 2015; Barone 2016; London 2017; Seman 2019; Everts 2021; Strombald and Baker 2023). The above findings demonstrate how micro-organisations provide cultural support in the form of events to a wide variety of different scenes including art scenes, craft scenes, film scenes, literary scenes and food and drink scenes.

Trans-local scene literature additionally mentions that physical structures support scenes through holding events, but they mainly focus on the role of these events in sustaining and creating trans-local scene networks, rather than enabling participation in scenes per say (Kraemer 2014; Mbaye 2015; Emms and Crossley 2018; Mall 2020).

4.2.1.4 Cultural support: Production and consumption space

The second way in which my research revealed that micro-organisations integrated themselves into their respective scenes, was by providing cultural infrastructure in the form of production and consumption space for scene-members.

There is currently a lack of literature which examines how physical spaces can support scenes through providing space for production and consumption. There is some research which recognises the importance of opportunities for consumption for scene members to be able to engage in some form with their 'uniting interest' (Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Silver et al. 2010; Straw 2017). Often, however, this element of scene enactment is mentioned in passing, and empirical examples are not elaborated upon as to how physical spaces facilitate this consumption. There is notably an even greater dearth of literature surrounding how physical spaces can support scenes through providing scene-related production opportunities. Indeed, existing literature recognises the importance of consumption within scenes, yet in order for there to be scene-based consumption, there needs to be the production of scene-related goods – which micro-organisations facilitate. This section therefore aims to address these considerable gaps through the lens of micro-organisations becoming integrated into their respective scenes by providing 'cultural' forms of support.

To begin with production, micro-organisations primarily facilitated production through providing the space, facilitates and equipment for scene members to 'produce' different outputs related to their uniting scene interest, some examples include: art studios, craft studios and co-working spaces providing work space for artists, craftspeople and other creatives; coffee shops and bars providing informal, flexible spaces for creatives to work; rehearsal rooms providing space for musicians to rehearse and record; and retail spaces, street food businesses and bars providing 'pop up' space for temporary restaurants to make their dishes from. An illustrative quote is supplied by an arts studio in Birmingham:

> *""[We're] just giving people that sort of space to create things that they wouldn't normally be able to working from home or working in a shed or something like that […] I think its one of the things we do, we've got an abundance of sort of resources or kit or things like that I've sort of*

collected. We just ask members to bring that in and make it available, so we've now got camera equipment and all that stuff, which is just there for anyone to pick up and go with […] So its that sort of opportunity, you've got that chance to use something that you generally wouldn't have the funds to buy".

(Birmingham Arts Studio)

The importance of micro-organisations fulfilling this supportive 'cultural' role should not be understated. Indeed, the facilitation of the production of scene-related products is critical to the functioning of many different scenes. To borrow from the above examples, the scene related 'products' which are created such as art works, music or food and drink, provide opportunities for scene members to engage with products directly linked to their shared interest: whether that is engaging through the actual process of creating products, or simply consuming them (Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Silver et al. 2010; Straw 2017).

Importantly, for the art studio above, but also for many of the other micro-organisations I spoke to, the production space, facilities and equipment that micro-organisations provided were largely geared towards supporting emerging scene members. In the case of the above quote, this art studio provided facilities such as desk space, but also equipment such as cameras that would enable those less financially established within the scene to still 'produce' outputs. Indeed, I found this focus on emerging scene members was mentioned especially by micro-organisations I spoke to in the arts sector such as creative co-working spaces, arts organisations, art studios and galleries, which often dedicated studio space and equipment especially for early career artists, as highlighted by the above quote. This is because micro-organisations operating in the arts sector recognised there were considerable gaps in support for early career artists; in particular surrounding finding workspace that was open to working with them, but also at an affordable price (as expanded upon in section 4.2.2). These driving motivations ultimately tie back in to the 'supporting small' ethos of many micro-organisations discussed in section 4.2.1.1.

With scene-based production, comes scene-based consumption. Many different types of micro-organisations facilitated scene-related consumption in some form. Coffee shops, bookshops and galleries described hosting temporary stalls for different arts makers through pop up markets. I also spoke to more permanent retailers and a street food market which offered stalls to different scene members on a more permanent basis. Other micro-organisations such as bars, venues, lifestyle

stores, coffee shops and a craft beer shop regularly kept certain items stocked, rather than hosting stalls. An exemplary quote comes from a craft beer specialist I spoke to in Manchester:

> *"We didn't think there was enough fresh and good beers in Manchester to try. At the time we did it, it was like early 2013, the craft beer scene was just, you know, just about established enough to be able to stock a whole shop with stuff, interesting beers, so nothing, no mass breweries and stuff, so pretty much all independent"*
>
> *(Northern Quarter Craft Beer Specialist)*

This quote highlights exactly why micro-organisations facilitating opportunities for scene-related consumption is so important. Without micro-organisations fulfilling this role, for many scenes, it would be harder for scene-members to engage with products related to their uniting interest (Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Silver et al. 2010; Straw 2017). Take the craft beer scene for example, the above specialist in Manchester was able to identify a gap for people to access products, and by stocking these, this space has enabled easier access to engagement with the craft-beer scene.

An important point to highlight is that the types of consumption facilitated by these spaces often tie back to their motivations of supporting small. In stocking the goods of small-scale producers, micro-organisations play an important role in facilitating scene engagement through the consumption of scene-related products that would otherwise be difficult to find. Micro-organisations further provided this support by offering stalls at both temporary and more permanent market spaces specifically for small-scale producers.

4.2.1.5 Production and consumption space: Contributions to the literature

The above findings have contributed to the existing scenes literature in several ways. Gallan (2012) and Brandellero and Pfeffer (2015) put forward this idea of spaces providing 'infrastructure', but further detail on the exact forms this infrastructure can take lack depth. I interpret and apply the term 'cultural infrastructure' to encapsulate the structures, equipment and facilities necessary for a scene to exist. The above findings therefore demonstrate how micro-organisations providing production and consumption space can be understood as cultural infrastructure. Furthermore,

existing scenes literature overwhelmingly focuses on the importance of consumption for sustaining a scene, in particular, how consumption allows scene-members to meaningfully engage with their 'uniting interest'; something my findings also reflect (Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Silver et al. 2010; Straw 2017)

Where my findings depart from the existing literature and provide a new focus is through 'production'. Indeed, in existing scenes literature, despite influential research which emphasises the importance of consumption within scenes (Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Silver et al. 2010; Straw 2017), production is comparatively ignored. There are a couple papers which claim that scenes as a concept encapsulate both production and consumption (Driver and Bennett 2015; Woo et al. 2017), but this is not reflected in the current body of literature. I find this to be rather contradictory, considering that for there to be scene-related consumption, there needs to be scene-related production. My findings contribute towards filling this gap by demonstrating how micro-organisations provide production space, facilitates and equipment; and recognise the importance of this role in sustaining scenes.

4.2.1.6 Cultural support: Training and mentoring

The third way I found that micro-organisations integrated themselves into their respective scenes was by providing training and mentoring opportunities. Many - but not all - of the micro-organisations I interviewed could be classified as part of the creative industries. The precarity of workers in this sector is well documented (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; de Klerk 2015; Campbell 2020; Haugsevje et al. 2022; Tanghetti et al. 2022), including around resource constraints (Komorowski and Lewis 2023). This lack of resources extends to a lack of formalised training and mentoring resources, which has led to a reliance on personal and professional networks to aid in professional development (de Klerk 2015).

Micro-organisations face similar forms of precarity, fragile economic conditions and resource constraints (Haugsevje et al. 2022; Komorowski and Lewis 2023), including a lack of training and mentoring (Rosyadi et al. 2020). My findings revealed that the more established micro-organisations in creative districts often stepped up to fill this gap in training. As mentioned in section 4.2.1.1, an ethos of supporting small scale activity in their respective scenes is central to the operations of many

micro-organisations that I spoke to; with most of those running established micro-organisations having experienced the precarity which comes with being grassroots or emerging themselves.

This training often surrounded topics related to business operations, with micro-organisations supporting other similar spaces with issues surrounding marketing or technical upskilling. A particularly interesting example comes from an Art Studio/Gallery in Shoreditch which, through an annual award scheme, provides an opportunity for a newly graduated artist to complete a residency programme in screen printing:

> *"These kinds of prizes and awards really give [the recipient] another project to work on outside of university, but it also opens them up to a whole new medium. So many of the artists that we've chosen have never worked with screen print before, so it's just really exciting that they can see how their work can be lent to the medium. It's kind of the idea of bringing in the younger generation into screen printing, and showing them it's not like, a really boring, traditional medium"*
>
> (Shoreditch Art Studio/Gallery)

Technical upskilling, as exemplified in the above quote, was the most prominent type of training discussed by the micro-organisations that I interviewed. This was particularly common amongst more established art studios/galleries, who would tutor emerging spaces or individual artists in the same scene on how to implement new techniques, mediums or equipment through more structured and formal workshops.

More informal guidance by way of mentoring was also conducted by more established or experienced micro-businesses; again usually to assist newer spaces or emerging scene members. This mentoring often took the form of giving informal advice, with this relationship being sustained over longer time periods. These mentoring conversations are also typically less technical than the 'training' previously discussed and were more about trying to guide the direction of other scene member's practice and help them to achieve their goals. Again, this mentoring was largely discussed by studio/gallery spaces that I spoke to, with a particularly notable example coming from a studio space in Birmingham:

"We've got one artist in here whose practice really lends itself to workshops, but she's really reluctant. She's really quite shy, right? So we've supported her and we got her to run a workshop with other studio members, in a safe, easy environment. We supported her along with it, so we sort of helped with the structure of the workshops, just so she knew what to do and what to come next. She got a lot out of that, and is planning workshops with the wider community over summer and now she's started doing stuff with Birmingham City University off the back of it, so it's really helped us build some confidence there".

Similar patterns of practice emerged across several different galleries and studio spaces I spoke to in case study locations across the UK. Indeed, from my conversations with micro-organisations, mentoring provided emerging scene members with the 'push' they needed to shape their work and move forward in their career. Training and mentoring therefore embeds micro-businesses within scenes by offering important 'cultural infrastructure' in the form of the knowledge these spaces can provide which develops the practice of other related spaces and scene members.

4.2.1.7 Training and mentoring: contributions to literature

As mentioned above, with regards to the 'scenes' literature, there appears to be very little research which looks at how spaces can support scenes through the provision of training and mentoring opportunities. A notable exception comes from Deveau (2015), who discusses the role of a bar and performance venue in providing a space where comedians can come to hone their style through a 'workshop' type element to the space (Deveau 2015, p.328); the cross-over with my findings, however, is limited.

Many of the micro-organisations interviewed were either in the creative industries, or performed affiliated activities. In the creative industries literature, there is also a large research gap for looking at how micro-organisations support one another through training and mentoring. One notable exception to this comes from de Klerk (2015), who finds that micro-businesses, entrepreneurs and small-businesses offer mentorship to one another in the creative industries, primarily through encouraging one another's creative development, with the long term aim of boosting their work prospects. De Klerk's (2015) work examines this through the lens of bricolage. They define bricolage as "something that is available at a given time which can be tapped into as needed to access diverse talents and resources to create what could not be otherwise possible in a resource and institutionally

constrained environment" (de Klerk 2015 p.831). My findings complement de Klerk's (2015), with both studies highlighting how micro-organisations can play important roles in their respective scenes, supporting the career development of scene members. My findings also fit within de Klerk's (2015) conceptualisation of mentoring as bricolage; with micro-organisations banding together to provide support in the absence of formalised resources.

Finally, a research gap for studies which examine how micro-organisations provide training and mentoring to one another was also identified in the wider training and mentoring literature. Here, research tended to focus on small and medium enterprises (Hamburg and Hall 2013; O'Brien and Hamburg 2014; Shah et al. 2016), which face much different issues than micro-organisations. Furthermore, all of the above literature focuses on mentoring, rather than training; which constitutes an even greater research gap. The above findings on micro-organisations providing training to one another through technical upskilling and mentoring to one another through aiding with career progression constitute novel findings to three different bodies of literature.

4.2.2 Financial support roles

Financial support is the second support 'role' through which I found that micro-organisations were able to integrate themselves into their respective scenes. The primary way this manifested was carrying out some form of profit sacrificing practices that were almost more in line with the actions of a social enterprise rather than a business. However, despite 22 different micro-organisations mentioning profit sacrificing practices in some form, only 5 of the organisations interviewed were formally registered as social enterprises or not for profits, making these practices even more significant.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, this typology was created in part informed by my findings and part guided by the limited existing literature on how different physical spaces provide support to their respective scenes. Though the literature on this topic is extremely sparse, one exception comes from London (2017), who examined financial support in a rather roundabout way. Whist paper does not use the words 'financial support', they do discuss how a coffee shop in Portland was able to provide some economic stability to members of their associated music scenes,

by providing musicians with flexible and understanding jobs when they're home from touring (London 2017).

Despite the lack of literature on financial support, this was still a significant theme in my findings. My research revealed that micro-organisations provided 'financial' support through subsidising costs to provide affordable products and services to scene members, as well as offering financial advice. My findings further revealed that these practices were underpinned by a desire from many micro-organisations to boost inclusivity in their respective scenes, as will be explored in the next section.

4.2.2.1 Financial support: Micro-organisations motivations of boosting inclusivity

When asking those running micro-organisations as to the underlying ethos and mission statements of their spaces, many mentioned a desire to improve inclusivity, both of their space, and the wider scenes they operate within. The largest facet of this inclusivity mission statement, however, is that many spaces wanted to encourage the participation of people from more diverse economic backgrounds.

Part of the reasoning behind this is that some of those running micro-organisations self-reported coming from working class, disadvantaged and other under-represented economic backgrounds themselves, especially when considering that many of my participant micro-organisations could be classed as part of the creative industries (O'Brien et al. 2016; Brook et al. 2022; O'Brien et al. 2024).

Personal experience therefore, alongside a more general passion for opening up the arts was key to motivating this supportive financial role. It is important to note, however, that this economic inclusivity, whilst popular amongst micro-organisations I spoke to in the creative industries, was not limited to this sector. Organisations as diverse as bookshops, florists and bars also mentioned a desire to improve the inclusivity of their associated scenes. Indeed, several different types of micro-organisations across the case study locations mentioned battling against stereotypes of snobbery and exclusivity imposed on them from the public who felt as though generally, the types of organisations that set up in creative districts are not "for them" to quote one participant.

A key way micro-organisations worked towards increasing this economic inclusivity was through sacrificing their maximisation of profits in order to provide affordable products and services to their associated scene members. The precise ways in which this happened will be discussed in the following section.

4.2.2.2 Financial support: Affordability

Beginning with affordable rent, some of the micro-organisations that I spoke to were art studios, craft studios and creative co-working spaces; which, despite only being 'micro' in size themselves, often housed other 'micro' organisations or independent producers. When this was the case, it was not uncommon for these micro-organisations to provide a purposefully affordable rent, often below market value. Oftentimes, this linked back to providing affordable space for scene members being a key aspect of these organisations' underlying ethos' as discussed in section 4.2.2.1. An illustrative quote comes from an arts studio/gallery in Birmingham:

> *"We support artists in the city. The rent is subsidised so the artists are supported, cause we're a charity, we became a charity two years ago, it means we can pass along those benefits, like, in order for us to have a thriving city, artists are such an important part of that and so, we don't want them priced out and we don't want them paying commercial rates because, frankly, none of them are making any money"*
>
> *(Digbeth Art Studio/Gallery)*

As the quote implies, generally, this practice was performed with the aim of reducing barriers to make a living from scene-based production. As economic barriers such as high rents are removed, the scene becomes more inclusive and grows through the intake of scene members from more diverse economic backgrounds. At times, I found that this practice was taken to extremes, with two micro-organisations that I spoke to describing that instead of evicting tenants who haven't been able to pay their fees, they made exceptional accommodations, discounting rent even further, or even allowing no rent to be paid at all. An example of this is provided by a quote from a studio/gallery in Liverpool below:

"One of our members started out and she was on 'the dole', we gave her rent for like £30 and she's doing well for herself now. She does workshops, she's really gotten herself out there. But she wouldn't have been able to do that if she didn't have that level of support from the beginning. There's a barrier to being an artist now. It's like, unless you're willing to fork out at least £100 a month to get a space and kind of get engaged with the art scene, you're not going to be a part of it".

(Baltic Triangle Art Studio/Gallery 1)

In addition to subsidising rents, further profit-sacrificing practices of micro-organisations that I spoke to included rehearsal rooms offering discounted hourly rates, venues offering affordable gig tickets, studios providing discounted equipment and alternate venues such as coffee shops, multi-purpose venues and bookshops offering free space for cultural/creative events like poetry nights, performances, art classes or craft markets. Once again, these practices within this context often tie back to the idea of removing barriers to scene-based production and consumption, as exemplified by this quote from a Rehearsal room in Liverpool:

"Music should be available to everyone to play really, but obviously at the same time, I've got a business to run. There's not a lot of money in rehearsal rooms, its never going to make me a millionaire, or even a 'hundred thousandaire', but its important that people are able to afford it. So we try and do things that are cheaper for under 18s, and we try and do some deals and bits to try and get as many people through the door as possible. The price should never be exclusive for people. So yeah, that's what we're trying to do".

(Baltic Triangle Rehearsal room 1)

Overall, motivated by a desire to make their own spaces and their associated scenes more inclusive, this section demonstrates how micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes through providing financial support in the form of making a conscious effort to provide affordable products and services to their patrons. Indeed, by offering these affordable products/services, micro-organisations ensure their scenes are more inclusive to those from more diverse economic backgrounds, and the scene grows overall as a result.

4.2.2.3 Subsidising costs: Contributions to literature

The biggest contributions of these findings would be towards 'scene' literature which focuses on how scenes are supported by their associated physical spaces. London (2017) provides seemingly one of the only studies which links the financial decisions of businesses with implications for supporting associated scenes. London (2017) describes a coffee shop in Portland, Oregon, that provides financial stability to musicians returning home from touring by offering flexible employment contracts. Whilst this paper doesn't explicitly frame this practice as 'financial support' it provides a useful starting point for understanding the different practices of business in supporting scenes.

My findings explicitly engage with the idea that micro-organisations consciously enact practices that provide financial support for their associated scenes, and in doing so, integrate themselves as important sites in the fabric of these respective scenes. In the above section, an empirical example of this practice is provided in the form of micro-organisations subsidising costs of scene participation for their patrons through the products and services they provide.

Beyond the scene literature, there are also some implications of the above findings for the creative industries literature on social inclusion practices. Only recently has the data become available to empirically ground the social inequality that has long been assumed present in the creative industries (O'Brien et al. 2016). We know that creative industries work is unequal along lines of gender, race/ethnicity, disability and sexuality (Eikhof and Warhurst 2013; Finkel et al. 2017; Brook et al. 2018; Virani 2023; O'Brien and Arnold 2024). There is a particular gap, however, for research surrounding exclusion following financial and class lines (O'Brien et al. 2016). Existing studies have looked at various aspects of this inequality, such as the composition of the creative industries workforce (O'Brien et al. 2016), opinions and experiences of inequality (O'Brien and Arnold 2024), as well as the practices (Eikhof and Warhurst 2013) and behaviours (Virani and Gill 2019) that maintain inequality. There is an even greater gap, however, for researching the practices that are in place to try and address this inequality, especially surrounding financial exclusion (O'Brien et al. 2016, Virani 2023).

Perhaps the most closely related work comes from Virani (2023), who explores whether social inclusion practices lead to financial growth and business longevity for SMEs in the creative industries, including micro-businesses. Virani (2023), however, focuses on the outcomes of these social inclusion

practices, rather than the actual forms that these practices take, a gap which they recognise as still critically under-researched. Furthermore, 'SMEs' as a category of businesses to include in a study is incredibly wide. Virani (2023) includes micro-businesses in his analysis and as such, is grouping together the practices of businesses which have less than 10 staff members (micro sized), with businesses that have less than 250 (medium-sized) (Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy 2023). My findings, therefore, demonstrating how micro-organisations specifically attempt to address inequality through subsidising costs of products and services provide important empirical evidence on the forms these practices take.

4.2.2.4 Financial support: Financial advice

The second way in which my research revealed that micro-organisations were integrating themselves into their respective scenes through providing financial support was through providing financial advice to other similar spaces, as well as individual scene members. There are some overlaps here, with the 'cultural' role of training and mentoring, however, the support discussed in this section is specifically addressing financial advice, as opposed to the more general training and mentoring. Providing support through offering financial advice was mentioned by galleries, studios and a street food business that I interviewed across multiple case study locations. The types of financial advice given included support with budgeting and rates in particular, as exemplified through this quote from a retail space that I spoke to in Liverpool:

> *"We say to them all when they come in [new tenants], they'll want this giant big shop space, but they'll only have a small kind of product catalogue, so we'll say start small and cheap, and we help them out with things like business rates and all the scary things"*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Retail Space).*

The above quote demonstrates how micro-organisations act as important financial advisors to one another, guiding them away from risky practices and assisting with some of the intimidating financial aspects of starting a business. From the perspective of the micro-organisations that were seeking this advice, my research revealed that it was also not uncommon for the individuals running these spaces to be first time business owners. In turn, many of the micro-organisations I spoke to explained just how important it was to have financial advice from more established micro-organisations during

these even riskier early stages (Gherhes et al. 2016, Rostamkalaei and Freel 2017). Below is an exemplary quote form a crafts studio I spoke to in Birmingham:

> *"I've been like, finding my way with this for a long time with like, no formal training, I've got no formal training in even like, the fundamentals of carpentry, which is kind of like the backbone of this business, let alone in like, business management, let alone in accountancy".*
>
> *(Digbeth Craft Studio)*

The above quote, taken from an excerpt of conversation where micro-organisation owner was discussing finding a mentor, demonstrates just how important micro-organisations providing financial advice to one another is to their success (Samujh 2008; Gherhes et al. 2016; Rostamkalaei and Freel 2017). I wrote previously about the gaps in training and mentoring that exist for micro-organisations (de Klerk 2015; Rosyadi et al. 2020), and we can see this challenge again with regards to micro-organisations feeling as though they are lacking useful resources for financial training outside of personal networks (Jay and Schaper 2003; Gherhes et al. 2016; Samujh 2008).

By helping one another to navigate precarity through providing peer to peer financial advice, micro-organisations ensure that key sites within different scenes are able to stay open. Indeed, without critical financial advice, scene members may have less sites to attend events, produce and consume scene-related products and receive critical training and mentoring, as mentioned in the cultural support sections of this chapter.

4.2.2.5 Financial advice: Contributions to literature

Through providing this financial advice, micro-organisations are able to ensure that their respective scenes are able to flourish, through helping to ensure that more micro-organisations are able to stay open and provide critical sites of engagement within scenes through hosting events, scene related production and consumption and provide critical training and mentoring; as discussed in the cultural support section of this thesis. In this sense, the integration of micro-organisations into their respective scenes through the financial support roles they play is intertwined with the cultural support roles they enact.

As outlined previously, there is very little literature available on how physical spaces support their associated scenes, and even less literature which looks at how these spaces provide financial support specifically (London 2017). My findings therefore present to the scenes literature a novel financial way in which micro-organisations provide support to their respective scenes, and in turn integrate themselves into the scene's fabric.

Beyond the scenes literature, there have been some studies which have examined how micro-organisations access financial advice, however, this is still a critically under-researched area (Samujh 2008; Gherhes et al. 2016); despite calls for research in this area dating back almost 25 years (Greenback 2000; Jay and Schaper 2003). Comparatively, there has been far more research which looks at how SMEs access financial advice (Bennett and Robson 1999, Dyer and Ross 2007; Carey and Tanewski 2016; Rostamkalaei and Freel 2017; de Jong and Wagensveld 2023), with this research largely focusing on the role of professional business advisors such as accountants, banks, private business services, consultants and lawyers (Dyer and Ross 2007; Martin et al. 2013; Carey and Tanewski 2016) in providing financial advice; rather than the peer to peer support that is discussed in my findings.

Similar to this SME literature, the limited literature available on micro-businesses accessing financial advice also largely focuses on professional support. Importantly, existing studies found that micro sized organisations often felt let down by the professional support they received, which they felt was more targeted to larger SMEs, rather than the specific challenges faced by micro-organisations (Greenback 2000; Jay and Schaper 2003; Dyer and Ross 2007; Gheres et al. 2016). This may help to explain why my research revealed that so many micro-organisations turned instead to their peers for advice.

4.2.3 Social support role

The final role through which my research found that micro-organisations integrated themselves into their respective scenes was through enacting 'social' supporting roles. The use of the term social to describe the below practices is in part influenced by Tironi's (2012) theory that physical spaces can act as "socialisation spaces" for the scenes they are associated within (Tironi 2012, p.193). Although

this was the least mentioned way in which micro-organisations supported their scenes in my findings, it still represents a critical role which enables scenes to function and flourish, as discussed below. In line with Tironi (2012) I found that micro-organisations provided important socialisation space for their respective scenes, however, I distinguish between two different types of socialisation spaces; 'spontaneous' and 'planned'.

4.2.3.1 Social support: Micro-organisation motivations to build community

Before jumping into findings on how micro-organisations provide social support to their respective scenes, this section will first explain some motivating factors.

In my discussions with micro-organisation owners about the motivations which underpin the practices of their space, a theme emerged surrounding creating and sustaining 'community'. This was mentioned by many different types of organisations including rehearsal rooms, art studios/galleries, arts organisations, bookshops and coffee shops, across all case study locations. Much like the term 'scene', 'community' can be a fuzzy concept, with many different interpretations and understandings being present in academic literature (Warner et al. 2012). For the micro-organisations I spoke to, their idea of creating community surrounded a desire for their space to become a hub for connecting people, building relationships and strengthening networks within their respective scenes. An exemplary quote comes from a bookshop shop I spoke to in Manchester:

> *"Here [bookshop name] is about creating a space for conversation, sharing our knowledge and our expertise on art magazines, fashion. Everyone that works here has a very particular interest in different areas of what we sell, art, design, graphic design, photography, and fashion. Everyone that works here has very much an interest in one of those departments. So firstly, [we're] a space where people can come together and start conversations"*
>
> *(Northern Quarter Bookshop)*

Some micro-organisations, including the one above, unpacked this practice further, claiming that this desire to build community was based upon factors such as noticing there were less and less physical spaces for scene members to meet up, socialise and share knowledge (Oldenburg 2000;

Yuen and Johnson 2016; Cantillon and Baker 2019; Finlay et al. 2019; Littman 2021). Others, particularly micro-organisations associated with the creative industries, noted that networks were a vital part of succeeding professionally within scenes, and as such, wanted to facilitate the building these of these networks for emerging scene members. This latter reasoning also links back to the cultural support motivations in Section 4.2.1.1.

As the above quote demonstrates, a large aspect of building community through connecting people, building relationships and networks within scenes is through providing space to socialise (Tironi 2012). The next section will outline how this motivation to create community drives micro-organisations to enact certain 'social' supporting practices.

4.2.3.2 Social support: Socialisation space

The first way micro-organisations provided social support for their respective scenes was through providing space for unplanned, spontaneous gatherings of scene members. My research revealed that this could be for both scene-members that work within a space, or for scene members who are just passing through. In terms of providing social space for those working within certain micro-organisations, my findings revealed this often took the form of small co-working spaces and studios providing cafes or other designated 'social' spaces within their buildings, like a lounge or seating area. Below is a quote from a co-working space in Liverpool which describes such facilities:

> *"We've got a cafe on site, we call it the heart of our studio because its where everyone congregates in the morning and has a chat while they're getting their coffee and breakfast, and then similarly at lunch time it'll start getting really noisy again […] and we've got a community garden space as well, so in the sun yesterday everyone was just sat outside on the benches and it was beautiful, so I'd definitely say that we're really sort of community focused, and that's part of the reason that a lot of people join our spaces, so they've got that interaction with people and being able to like knock on people's door and have a chat".*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Co-working Space).*

The above quote highlights just how important this spontaneous gathering space is to the members of this co-working space, describing it as the "heart" of their studio, and "part of the reason" people join their space. Indeed, the co-working space above specialises in offering space to artists and craftspeople, and these spontaneous gathering spaces provide an opportunity for scene members in various arts and crafts scenes to congregate, socialise, network and build relationships with one another; in turn, helping to grow and sustain associated scenes (Straw 2001; Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Woo et al. 2017). Indeed, a similar arts studio space I spoke to in Birmingham described these sites of socialisation as "critical", especially for emerging artists within a scene, helping them to build a professional network which this studio space describes creates "momentum" and leads to wider recognition and career development opportunities.

My findings revealed that micro-organisations also provided spontaneous socialisation space for 'transient' scene members; people who are just passing through the space, rather than being based there. This could could take the form of seating spaces and cafes, but could also just be the actual 'space' of the micro-organisation itself; providing a physical place for scene members to drop in and interact with staff members (in particular), who are genuinely interested and invested in socialising and building relationships with other scene members; driven by their community building motivations (Oldenburg 2000; Jeffrey et al. 2009; Cantillon and Baker 2018; Finlay et al. 2019). Providing socialisation space in this way for transient scene members was mentioned by lifestyle stores, bookshops, coffee shops and bars that I spoke to across all case study locations.

Finally, although mentioned less than socialisation spaces which allowed for spontaneous interactions a couple of micro-organisations that I spoke to also mentioned providing more 'planned' socialisation opportunities. This largely took the form of dedicated networking events that were designed with the purpose of facilitating relationship building between different scene members in micro-organisations affiliated with the creative industries. One example of this practice came from a studio/gallery space I spoke to in Liverpool, which organised networking events to bring together members of a grassroots arts scene. Another similar programme of events was hosted by a co-working space, also in Liverpool, which organized dedicated networking events to connect women artists and craftspeople. The importance of these kinds of planned events is illustrated by a quote from the associated co-working space, given below:

> *"Just being able to start people off with that initial network, because being a small trader or owning a small business, networking plays such a massive part in your day to day, that's how you*

find new clients or collaborate with new people, so we've been doing a lot of that, I think we've supported nearly 30 people in just under a year".

(Baltic Triangle Co-Working Space)

The above quote demonstrates just how important these planned networking events are for micro-organisations associated scenes, in the above case, different arts and craft scenes. Similar to findings discussed above on spontaneous socialisation spaces provided by micro-organisations, these planned events allow for scene-members to build relationships with one another, growing and maintaining associated scenes through helping scene-members to find new clients or professional collaborators.

4.2.3.3 Socialisation space: Contributions to literature

Looking to formative theory, we know that socialisation between scene-members is key to sustaining a scene (Straw 2001; Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Woo et al. 2017), yet what is not entirely clear is how the physical structures within the scene enable this socialisation to take place. A limited exception comes from Tironi (2012, p.193), who's work states that various businesses can act as "socialization spaces" for their associated scenes, however, beyond just allowing scene members to talk and share information with one another, this term isn't unpacked much further.

This section has developed Tironi's (2012) theory further, demonstrating how micro-organisations provide space for unplanned socialising amongst scene members in cafes and seating areas as well as the actual space of the micro-organisation more generally. My findings have also outlined how micro-organisations facilitate socialising within scenes through holding deliberate networking events. By facilitating both unplanned and planned sites of socialisation for their associated scenes, micro-organisations enable scenes to grow through the strengthening of existing relationships and the forging of new ones. Ultimately, these practices were underpinned by micro-organisations wanting to build community, where their space would act as a hub for connecting people and building relationships within their respective scenes.

4.3 Chapter summary and conclusion

The overall aim of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the contributions of micro-organisations in the uniform ongoing development of creative districts across space, using the lens of trans-local scenes. This chapter has aimed specifically to answer the first research question: "what roles do micro-organisations enact in creative district scenes?". This research question is important, because it helps us to understand the relationship between physical structures and their respective scenes. In this chapter, this was done through exploring how micro-organisations integrate themselves into these scenes.

In the context of the scene literature which lacks an agreed upon, comprehensive definition (Silver and Clark 2015; Woo et al. 2017), this chapter begins by unpacking exactly what is meant by the term 'scene' within the context of this research. Here, I described how scenes consist of multiple component parts: a location (Straw 2004; Silver and Clark 2016; Jousmäki 2017); physical structures (which in this case are micro-organisations)(Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Drysdale 2015; Woo et al. 2017); individual scene members (Straw 2001; Silver et al. 2005; André et al. 2017); and a uniting scene 'interest' (Straw 1991; Straw 2001).

Existing scene literature also recognises that physical structures (such as micro-organisations) are key components of scenes (Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Drysdale 2015; Woo et al. 2017), yet what is not established, is exactly how physical structures become integrated within their respective scenes. The main contribution of this chapter is that it ultimately developed and unpacked a typology of the different supporting roles that micro-organisations enact for their respective scenes; and how performing these roles integrated them as important components of the scenes they are a part of.

The different types of 'support' offered by physical structures to their associated scenes is a critically under-researched area of scene theory. There are a few papers which examine this, such as cultural support (Gallan 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015), economic support (London 2017) and social support (Tironi 2012), however, these concepts are very rarely further unpacked and illustrated with

empirical examples. Furthermore, this literature is rather siloed, not discussing the multiple different supporting roles that micro-organisations enact for their scenes.

To briefly summarise, I posit that micro-organisations provide cultural support to their respective scenes, motivated by a desire to nurture small-scale, grassroots and emerging activity in particular. This cultural support took the form of events, such as gigs, markets and workshops, to name a few examples. There is currently some existing scenes literature which mentions events as providing opportunities to engage with their shared interest, however, this is not examined through the lens of physical structures providing support to their respective scenes (Straw 2004; Gallan 2012; Drysdale 2015; Andre et al. 2017).

I further found that micro-organisations provided cultural support through offering production/consumption space to scene members. With regards to production, this included providing workspace, facilities and equipment. Facilitating consumption happened through the hosting of temporary pop-up markets as well as stocking scene-related goods on a more permanent basis. Existing scene literature mentions consumption as an important facet of scene-members engaging with their uniting interest (Silver et al. 2005, Silver et al. 2010, Straw 2004, Straw 2017), however, there is a gap for examining how physical structures support their scenes by providing these opportunities. There is also a considerable comparative gap for researching the importance of scene-related production. Indeed, without scene-related production being supported, it is difficult to consume scene-related goods.

Finally, I found that micro-organisations provided cultural support through more established spaces providing training and mentoring to other micro-organisations as well as individual scene members. Training was provided mainly in the form of technical upskilling, whilst mentoring took the form of more informal conversations surrounding assisting other micro-orgs/scene-members with shaping their practice and achieving their career goals. There is a very large gap in existing scenes literature for looking at the importance of training/mentoring within scenes, particularly with regards to how physical structures support scenes through providing these opportunities (Deveau 2015). This gap surrounding research on micro-organisations providing training/mentoring extended beyond the scenes literature and into the creative industries literature more generally, with an exception coming from de Klerk (2015). Existing training/mentoring literature has a strong focus on how SMEs engage with mentoring (Hamburg and Hall 2013; O'Brien and Hamburg 2014; Shah et al. 2016), rather than micro-organisations.

The second typology role I outlined was micro-organisations providing different forms of 'financial' support through which they were able to integrate themselves into their respective scenes. Micro-organisations were motivated to provide financial support because of a desire to boost the inclusivity of their respective scenes, especially regarding the opening up of their scenes to members from diverse economic backgrounds (O'Brien et al. 2016; Brook et al. 2022; O'Brien et al. 2024). This practice took the form of micro-organisations subsidising costs and providing affordable products/services for their patrons, alongside offering financial advice to other micro-organisations and scene members. There is seemingly a very large gap with regards to scene-literature which looks at how physical structures provide financial support for their respective scenes, particularly surrounding subsidising costs and providing affordable products/services. These findings also contribute to the creative industries social inclusion research, which finds a particular gap for research surrounding exclusion on financial and class lines (O'Brien et al. 2016).

With regards to financial advice, I found that micro-organisations assisted other scene-members (largely other micro-organisations), with advice surrounding topics like budgeting, rates and general business management. There is a huge gap in 'scenes' literature as to how physical structures provide financial support (London 2017); but particularly around how financial advice can help to sustain scene activity. It would also appear that in literature on business advice more generally, there is a dearth of research which looks at how organisations that are 'micro' in size both provide and access financial advice, with most studies focusing on SMEs (Bennett and Robson 1999; Dyer and Ross 2007; Carey and Tanewski 2016; Rostamkalaei and Freel 2017; de Jong and Wagensveld 2023).

The third and final role micro-organisations enacted within this typology is social support. Motivated by a desire to create and sustain 'community', I found that micro-organisations provided social support to their respective scenes through providing space for scene-members to socialise. This was done both spontaneously through common spaces that enable interaction and deliberately through planned networking events. Formative theory on scenes acknowledges that socialisation between scene-members is critical to sustaining a scene (Straw 2001; Straw 2004; Silver et al. 2005; Woo et al. 2017), yet there is a gap for examining exactly how physical structures within scenes enable this socialisation to take place. A limited exception comes from Tironi (2012), whose work states that various businesses can act as "socialization spaces" for their associated scenes, however, beyond just allowing scene members to talk and share information with one another, this theory isn't unpacked much further. My findings therefore develop this theory further by providing examples of how micro-

organisations facilitate socialisation through dedicated space and events, distinguishing between both unplanned and planned socialisation.

The motivations discussed at the start of each of these typology sections also contribute an important perspective to the limited existing scenes literature on how physical structures support their associated scenes (Gallan 2012; Tironi 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015; London 2017). Indeed, the literature on this topic is limited in general, and seemingly neglects not just how physical structures support their associated scenes, but also why they do this – especially in the case of spaces that we don't typically associate with supporting associated scenes.

Finally, the general scenes literature is also overwhelmingly focused on music scenes, and the physical structures we associate with those types of scenes, in particular music venues (Straw 1991; Bennett 2004; Luckman et al. 2008; Taylor 2012; Driver and Bennett 2015; Finch 2015; Barone 2016; London 2017; Seman 2019; Everts 2021; Strombald and Baker 2023).The findings in this chapter have covered a wide variety of different micro-organisations; from the music venues we typically associate with supporting scenes from coffee shops to bookshops. In turn, the above findings have also covered a wide variety of different scenes including music scenes, but also expanding to art scenes, craft scenes, literary scenes and food and drink scenes, to provide some select examples.

Now that this chapter has outlined how micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes, we can explore in Chapter 5 how micro-organisations then interact with one another within these scenes across space.

Chapter 5 Trans-local ties and micro-organisations: Mechanisms facilitating flows across space.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the role of micro-organisations in the ongoing uniform development of creative districts across space, utilising the lens of trans-local scenes. Having established the relationship between micro-organisations and their associated scenes in the first empirical chapter, this second empirical chapter will examine the second research question, which is concerned with how these micro-organisations then interact with one another across space within these scenes, and the implications this has for the uniform ongoing development of creative districts.

To unpack this idea of uniform ongoing development in creative districts further, this thesis focuses on creative districts that are largely 'bottom-up' in nature (Santagata 2002; Blackburn et al. 2014; Wise et al. 2022), having developed in a grassroots fashion, spearheaded by independent individuals and organisations rather than strictly by 'top down' policy makers (Moss 2002; Santagata 2002; Fenwick 2022). At their core, most of these bottom-up creative districts are built upon a uniform foundation of micro-organisations working largely within the creative industries and hospitality sectors such as galleries, music venues, record shops, vintage shops, vegan cafes and speciality coffee shops, to name a few examples. Looking back at the creative district development literature, we know historically why these types of spaces, particularly ones in the creative industries have clustered in these typically ex-industrial areas, however, what is not clear is how beyond this initial inception, the micro-organisations which form the foundation of these creative districts have continued to evolve and develop into the uniform pattern of aesthetics and practices we can observe today; this type of 'ongoing' development has been almost completely neglected in existing literature.

Indeed, micro-organisations, by the nature of the areas they exist in tend to occupy old-industrial buildings such as re-purposed warehouses and factories, however, my findings reveal that they also appear to be making deliberate decisions to embrace the industrial fittings of their space, preserving the exposed brick, steel beams, stripped wood and concrete floors as a stylistic choice. They also appear to carry this industrial influence into their interior design choices, re-purposing and recycling old palettes, steel drums, particle board and Edison bulbs as décor and furnishings. Beyond

aesthetics, my findings reveal uniformity with regards to practices, with many micro-organisations within and across creative districts supporting emerging activity (such as grassroots artists or early career musicians), supporting independent activity (e.g through the products they stock), emphasising inclusivity in their space and supporting local activity.

What is particularly interesting about this uniformity, is that these micro-organisations are largely independent (Smit 2011). There is not a CEO or retail designer of a large multinational company telling these organisations how to set up their space or what practices they need to follow (Chayka 2024). This uniformity has therefore developed according to the decisions made by those running the micro-organisations that form the foundation of these creative districts. As such, this research has narrowed its focus to contribution of individual organisations in the development of creative district uniformity.

This research gap is surprising because, as mentioned before, this uniform model of creative districts is incredibly attractive for cities; they are important sites of production and consumption (Montgomery 2004; Brown et al. 2010; Blackburn et al. 2014; Hubbard 2016; Wise et al. 2022), they drive footfall (Santagata 2002) and create new forms of employment (Evans 2009). Therefore, if we can understand how this successful uniform model of aesthetics and practices develops, policy makers will be better informed to provide both appropriate ongoing support to these districts, and support the inception of similar, new districts. This contribution is especially important, given the long, rather unsuccessful history of policy making in this area (Peck 2005; Markusen 2006; Scott 2006; Pratt and Jeffcut 2009; Pratt and Hutton 2013; Grodach 2017).

This thesis conceptualises patterns of uniform development through the lens of trans-local scenes. Scenes become trans-local when activity previously found in one locality ‘transcends’ the boundaries of that particular place (i.e a city), reaching new scene members in other localities across space (McGee 2013; Jousmäki 2014; Mall 2020). I understand micro-organisations in creative districts to be part of these globally connected trans-local scenes. Within these trans-local scenes, micro-organisations based in different corners of the globe communicate and interact with one another through different ‘mechanisms’. These mechanisms allow for ‘flows’ of different scene-related information to pass between scene members. As micro-organisations are influenced by the content of these flows, this can lead to the aesthetic and practice-based uniformity we can observe across creative districts.

5.1 Introducing 'mechanisms' and 'flows'

In response to limitations within the existing economic geography literature (highlighted below and in section 2.5.2.4), this thesis contributes the newly articulated concepts of 'mechanisms' and 'flows'. Essentially, the process of scene-related 'flows' transcending local boundaries can be understood as being enabled by different 'mechanisms'. For the purposes of this research, I define a trans-local 'flow' as the act of a phenomenon transcending a local boundary (Jousmäki 2014). These flows can ultimately contribute towards the apparent uniform development of some creative districts. The phenomena that constitute flows have taken many different forms in my research. The term 'flows' can be applied to scene-related information, products, practices, and advice - any exchange which relates to the 'uniting interest' of scenes that micro-organisations are involved with.

The need for the use of the newly articulated term 'flow' here, emerges from issues with the more widely used 'knowledge flow' term in economic geography. Definitions of 'knowledge flows' are overwhelmingly focus on labelling this knowledge as either 'tacit' or 'codified'. As explored in section 2.5.2.3, in line with Bathelt et al's (2004) argument (discussing global pipelines), the labels of 'tacit' and 'codified' do not neatly fit the contents of the exchanges between micro-organisations discussed in this thesis. Perhaps more importantly, whether the knowledge being exchanged is tacit or codified is not important for the research aim of this thesis. What matters is capturing that the flows between micro-organisations across space are 'valuable'. Although 'valuable' as a descriptor is often associated with tacit knowledge (Bathelt and Li 2020), this notion is something that this thesis rejects. In this thesis, 'valuable' refers to the ability of these flows to be impactful and meaningful for micro-organisations through shaping the development of trans-local scenes, and consequently, creative districts, across space.

I therefore want to move away from the association of 'knowledge flows' and this 'tacit and codified binary' - in the words of Bathelt et al. (2004, p.49) - "to move on to a more developed argument". Indeed, dropping the word 'knowledge' and instead just using 'flows' signifies a departure from the tacit/codified debates, and allows for a focus on the content and impact of these exchanges between micro-organisations, rather than whether they are tacit or codified. The term 'flows' further provides an opportunity for more specificity, unpacking their contents as 'advice', 'practices', or 'scene-

related information', to provide some examples – rather than just labelling these flows with the broad term 'knowledge'.

As is demonstrated above, there are elements of Bathelt et al's (2004) seminal paper on global pipelines that are useful to borrow from. There are, however, also limitations of the 'global pipeline' concept that necessitate this thesis contributing the other newly articulated concept of 'mechanisms'.

In economic geography, 'global pipelines' have been the go-to means of conceptualising knowledge exchanges across space. Whilst this has worked for capturing the types of the typical empirical context of "firms" in industries such as manufacturing and tech (Bathelt et al. 2004; Owen-smith and Powell 2004; Zhu et al. 2020); global pipelines cannot be a catch-all concept for all of the many types of knowledge-sharing practices that take place at a national and international level.

As critiques of the global pipelines have argued, the concept is too restrictive; with an overwhelming focus on 'formal' exchanges, neglecting informal manifestations (Martin et al. 2018; Esposito and Rigby 2019). Furthermore, there are a rigorous set of conditions for global pipelines to form: non-overlapping knowledge pools (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2008; Ville and Wright 2019), shared institutional contexts (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2008; Bathelt and Li 2020; Harris 2023); and preferably, an existing relationship with a potential pipeline partner (Bathelt et al. 2004; Maskell 2014; Ville and Wright 2019). An further requirement, in order to share detailed knowledge on complex topics (Bathelt et al. 2004), has been the establishment of trust between those involved in the exchange (Maskell et al. 2006; Bathelt and Li 2020).

Of course, not all 'flows' fit into these narrow criteria. What is needed for this thesis, therefore, is a newly articulated concept, which can capture informal exchanges as well as other types which do not fit the stringent conditions set out above. This thesis employs the term 'mechanism' for this purpose. 'Mechanisms' can be defined as a means through which a 'flow' is facilitated.

Importantly, the term is broad enough that it can capture both physical and virtual means of facilitating flows (such as travel or social media); grouping together these two spheres (that are so often referred to separately), by their common purpose; to enable flows between actors across

space. The broad nature of the term further leaves room to delve into specificity in each of the respective sections of this empirical chapter.

Within this chapter, I have divided mechanisms into two categories, 'physical' and 'virtual'. It is important to state, however, that I recognise that these are not completely binary categories (Grabher et al. 2018). The reality is more complex, and these boundaries can blur at times, with mechanisms often being interwoven and dependent on one another (Grabher et al. 2018), as will be discussed in later subsections of this chapter.

The choice to divide this empirical chapter into 'physical' and 'virtual' mechanisms is two-fold. Firstly, the mechanisms which have the 'physical' labelling happen in the physical realm. They involve those running micro-organisations physically 'travelling' to other similar spaces; whether through planned scoping trips or on holidays; or physically attending events/festivals. The 'virtual' mechanisms, on the other hand in this chapter refers to flows which are facilitated by mechanisms which use the internet.

Secondly, the literature which this empirical chapter builds on, engages with and critiques is generally also separated into concepts which have the capacity to involve 'physical proximity' in some way – albeit temporarily in the case of global pipelines and temporary clusters, and those which often don't, in the case of 'virtual' knowledge flows.

To provide some further detail on the specific use of the term 'virtual', here I am referring to a mechanism which is 'simulating' something, or a 'synthetic' version of process (Shields 2003; Grabher et al. 2018). Instant messaging on a social media platform and email, for example, simulates face-to-face conversations. Additionally, the term 'virtual' is synonymous with activity that happens online, an attribute which all of the 'virtual mechanisms' in this chapter possess.

This is part of the research gap that surrounds trans-local theory; it provides a great lens to understand how patterns of uniformity across space come to be, providing a conceptualisation of the process of an idea starting in one location, before 'transcending' a local boundary and spreading across space through networks of dispersed scene members. Despite the promise this theory holds, however, trans-local scenes as a concept are still critically underdeveloped and under researched

(Griener and Sakdapolrak 2013). My research has revealed that the mechanisms through which micro-organisations enable trans-local flows are important to unpacking the development of creative district uniformity.

This chapter focuses on the mechanisms through which micro-organisations encourage trans-local uniformity. First, the physical mechanisms of travel and events will be discussed. Second, the virtual mechanisms of Instagram and email will be outlined.

5.2 A note regarding COVID-19

Before this chapter begins, there is an important stipulation to make surrounding COVID-19. That is, that the purpose of this chapter is not to compare how use of mechanisms for trans-local flows changed because of the pandemic.

Data collection for this research took place from March 2021 – July 2022. As I began my data collection, the UK was still experiencing lockdowns, which meant that many micro-organisations were closed. By May 2021, indoor venues began to re-open, and in July, most restrictions on social contact had been lifted (Pope and Hourston 2022), however, in my conversations with micro-organisation managers, waves of COVID-19 were still very much causing staff shortages and closures, and contributing to a general uncertainty and discomfort around 'returning to normal' from both micro-organisation staff and the general public.

From my findings, the main impact of the pandemic was that it had pressed a 'pause' button on micro-organisations using physical mechanisms to facilitate trans-local flows. This led to a temporary increased uptake of virtual mechanisms such as Instagram and Email during this time, however, this was not the focus of this research.

Interviews undertaken during lockdown in 2021 were close enough to pre-pandemic times that micro-organisations could easily recall their use of physical mechanisms during that time, and during my later stage interviews, some micro-organisations were even feeling safe enough to engage with

those same mechanisms once again. Interviews therefore focused on use of these mechanisms during 'normal' times. Ultimately, the research question this chapter is trying to answer was concerned with how micro-organisations interact with one another across space, not how the pandemic impacted this interaction.

5.3 Creative district uniformity

Creative districts, especially ones that have established themselves in a 'bottom up' fashion present a remarkable degree of uniformity across space through the ongoing development of both micro-organisation aesthetics and practices. The term aesthetic uniformity here is used to describe the similarities between different micro-organisations based on how they look: the type of buildings they inhabit and their interior (and exterior) design choices (Wijngaarden and Hracs 2024). Practice uniformity, on the other hand, describe actions that micro-organisations undertake which are similar to one another. It would be near impossible to dissect each individual practice a micro-organisation undertakes, as such, there are several overarching practice themes I found which were consistent across the micro-organisations I spoke to. These included micro-organisations supporting emerging activity, emphasising inclusivity in their space, supporting independents and supporting local activity.

The typical model of 'bottom-up' creative districts as described by the aesthetics and practices above is incredibly successful and can be observed in cities across much of the western world and beyond. Yet, despite the widespread acknowledgement of this phenomenon (Zukin and Braslow 2011), there is a huge gap regarding academic literature which examines how this homogenisation has developed and taken hold. The limited literature on creative district uniformity which does exist tends to focus on the industrial buildings creatives choose to occupy, and how these are similar in their external appearances across creative districts throughout much of the western world (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Cremers 2012; Lidegaard 2017). This handful of papers, however, only mention this uniformity in passing, rather than focusing their research on this.

5.3.1 Uniformity of micro-organisation aesthetics

Aesthetic uniformity in this section is concerned with similarities between micro-organisations in creative districts in terms of how they look.

As will be unpacked in exploring the multitude of different mechanisms through which micro-organisations interact with one another, micro-organisations are aware that they borrow ideas from one another, including around aesthetic influences. Indeed, some of the micro-organisations I spoke to explicitly acknowledged resultant aesthetic similarities between one another. This was the case for a Lifestyle store and a Florist in Manchester, a Coffee Shop in Liverpool, and a Coffee Shop in Manchester, An exemplary quote comes from the Manchester Coffee shop:

> "*Do you know much about AirSpace? Its like, the homogenisation of like, interior design and you know, like in terms of the aesthetics of places. If you type in AirSpace on the Guardian, there's a really great article about it, does a coffee shop need to look like a coffee shop? […] the Scandi[navian], kind of, or the industrial look..*"
>
> *(Northern Quarter Coffee Shop).*

Here the micro-business owner is referencing a Guardian article written by Chayka (2016). Chayka uses 'AirSpace' as a term to describe the homogenisation between different 'hipster' businesses based upon a uniform aesthetic of décor such as "long wooden tables, wrought-iron finishings, those lightbulbs that hang, [and] hanging plants" (Chayka 2024, n.p). While using coffee shops as the primary example of this aesthetic, Chayka's articles also recognise the potential of this aesthetic to influence other businesses that are also typically found in creative districts, such as beer halls, pubs and galleries (Chayka 2016, 2024). Some further empirical examples of this 'uniform' aesthetic taken from the observation that I undertook in Shoreditch, Digbeth, The Baltic Triangle and the Northern Quarter are displayed in Table 2, which I will unpack in this section to provide further context.

The first example concerns the types of buildings that these micro-organisations occupy, typically being found in former industrial buildings, such as old warehouse and factory structures (Wallace 2019). These buildings also tend to be decorated on the outside with murals that are commissioned by the organisations themselves, which help them to blend in with the 'gritty' aesthetic of the area they are situated within.

The interior décor of these organisations is, however, somewhat dictated by the type of buildings they inhabit. As mentioned by Zukin and Braslow (2011), these buildings typically are found to have exposed brick walls and concrete or stripped wood floors. Embracing these fittings, rather than covering them up, however, is a deliberate stylistic choice, as exemplified by this quote from a Bookshop shop in Manchester:

> "*Inspecting the area that we're in, we didn't want to come in and do a completely, like, you know, highly polished floors and perfect lighting everywhere... we wanted to keep in the brickwork, we kept all the original 1820s floorboards and just, you know, kept it a little bit grungy because that's what the area is"*
>
> *(Northern Quarter Bookshop)*

This was similar for the 'exposed infrastructure' embraced as a form of décor for micro-organisations that I interviewed in London, Liverpool and Birmingham; and across multiple sectors (the creative industries, hospitality and retail) (further detail provided in Table 2 below). This typically involved fittings such as piping, support beams and corrugated iron roofing. As well as embracing the concrete and brick structures highlighted previously, this quote from a coffee shop I spoke to in Liverpool explains how the enthusiasm for these fittings extends to these support structures:

> *"We came in and this building had been completely dilapidated. Trees out of the roof and everything […] when we came to see it, it was like a completely blank shell that was just bare concrete floor and brick walls, all the iron work, we just loved that, it had a really nice feel to it".*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Coffee Shop)*

With regards to the furnishings acquired by micro-organisations to fill their spaces, as detailed in Table 2, It was found that in Liverpool and Birmingham, some micro-organisations (bars, a street food business and a music venue), opted to in keep with the industrial, 'grungy', pre-determined environment of the districts they find themselves within, re-appropriating palettes, steel drums and even parts of shipping containers to be used as furniture. In addition to this, a popular material

within micro-organisations across all case study locations, and from both hospitality, retail and the creative industries sectors (table 2), was unfinished particle board, which was used to construct shelving, tables, and customer service desks. Similarly, for lighting (Table 2), a popular choice tended to be Edison bulbs or other forms of string lighting, whilst walls tended to be decorated with local contemporary art. Overall, the design choices of these micro-organisations culminated in what could be described as a "very DIY" look, as described by a Coffee shop that was spoken to in Manchester.

Figures 6 and 7 are two photographs, one of a coffee shop in Liverpool, and another of a coffee shop in London which encapsulate the uniform aesthetics discussed above: both in former industrial buildings with concrete flooring/ceiling, exposed beams, string lighting/Edison bulbs, iron roofing and particle board furnishings.

5.3.2 Aesthetic uniformity: Contributions to literature

Literature which explicitly unpacks examples of trans-local uniformity is extremely limited, and largely discusses this within the context of music tastes and stylistic preferences of different music scenes (Hodkinson 2004; Jousmäki 2014; Mbaye 2015; Schoon 2016; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018), rather than aesthetic uniformity. Hodkinson (2004) provides one exception to this, in his noting of aesthetic similarities amongst the fashion choices of the trans-local UK goth scene. Explorations of aesthetic uniformity beyond the scale of the individual and beyond music scenes are, therefore, extremely under researched in studies which engage with trans-local theory. My above findings on aesthetic uniformity amongst micro- organisations in creative districts consequently aids in addressing this gap.

Regarding the contribution of my findings to literature on the continued development of creative districts, there is a significant research gap for studies which unpack elements of uniformity (both aesthetic and practice based), between creative districts across space. The limited literature which does exist is largely concerned with similarities between the types of industrial buildings that creatives and creative businesses tend to occupy; (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Cremers 2012; Lidegaard 2017). One of the only exceptions to this is provided by Zukin and Braslow's (2011) work. Although only mentioned in passing, they describe the building stock in creative districts as possessing large windows, stripped wood and concrete floors. My findings

expand upon this notation and provide additional detail; in particular surrounding micro-organisations embracing these ‘exposed’ materials as a deliberate stylistic choice as a nod to the history of the area. My findings additionally go further in exploring uniformity in terms of interior design choices and how for many micro-organisations, this industrial, ‘grungy’ look also extended into the repurposing of palettes, steel drums and particle board to use as furnishings. This contribution is particularly notable, given that coverage on the uniform interior design choices of micro-organisations in creative districts has only meaningfully found coverage in grey literature such as online newspapers and magazines by journalists such as Chayka (2016; 2024).

Figure 6 Interior of a Coffee shop in the Baltic Triangle, Liverpool (researcher's photograph)

Figure 7 Interior of a coffee shop in Shoreditch, London (researcher's photograph)

Table 2 Aesthetic uniformity across micro-organisations in creative districts

Aesthetic	**Creative district**	**Type of organisation**
Former industrial building	London	Art gallery
	Liverpool	Art Studios/Gallery, Street food business, Rehearsal room, Retail space, Studios/Co-working space, Coffee shop, Bar
	Manchester	Craft beer specialist, Lifestyle store, Speciality interest store, Bookshop
	Birmingham	Arts studios/gallery, Craft beer specialist, Multi-purpose venue, Bar
Decorated with murals	London	Art gallery
	Liverpool	Art Studios/Gallery, Street food business, Retail space, Music venue, Co-working space, Rehearsal room, Coffee shop, Bar
	Birmingham	Craft beer specialist, Music venue
Exposed building material: Concrete/Brick/Stripped wood	London	Art gallery, Bookshop
	Liverpool	Art Studios/Gallery, Street food business, Rehearsal room, Retail space, Music venue, Co-working space, Coffee shop, Bar
	Manchester	Coffee Shop, Entertainment venue, Lifestyle store, Bar, Bookshop, Florist
	Birmingham	Craft beer specialist, Bar, Art Gallery, Multi purpose venue, Music venue
	London	Art gallery

Exposed infrastructure (e.g pipes, support beams, corrugated iron)	Liverpool	Art Studios/Gallery, Arts organisation, Street food business, Rehearsal room, Retail space, Music venue, Co-working space, Coffee shop, Bar
	Birmingham	Craft beer specialist, Multi-purpose venue, Bar, Arts organisation, Art Gallery
Industrial furnishings (Pallets, shipping containers, steel drums)	Liverpool	Street food business, Music venue, Bar
	Birmingham	Bar
MDF/Particle board furnishings	London	Art gallery, Bookshop
	Liverpool	Food/drink market, Rehearsal room, Bar
	Manchester	Coffee shop
	Birmingham	Craft beer specialist, Bar, Art Gallery
String lighting/edison bulbs	London	Art gallery
	Liverpool	Street food business, Retail space, Music venue, Co-working space, Coffee shop, Bar
	Manchester	Coffee shop, Entertainment venue, Florist
	Birmingham	Music venue, Craft beer specialist, Multi purpose venue, Music venue
Local art décor	Liverpool	Street food business, Co-working space, Coffee shop
	Manchester	Coffee shop
	Birmingham	Bar

**Sample sizes vary by location, London n=4, Liverpool n15, Manchester n=14, Birmingham n=13). Informed by participant observation and qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts.*

5.3.3 Uniformity of micro-organisation practices

Alongside observing aesthetic uniformity in micro-organisations across different creative districts, my findings also revealed uniformity in terms of micro-organisation practices.

My use of the term practices here refers to the actions that micro-organisations undertake in the running of their space. It would be near impossible to capture each individual practice a micro-organisation does day to day and compare these against other similar spaces. Therefore, in examining practice-based uniformity, my research has focused on the overarching themes that underpin practices. A couple of these practice themes map exactly on to the underlying ethos', mission statements and corresponding motivations underlying the support roles discussed in Chapter 4.. Nevertheless, it is the uniformity of these practice themes that are unpacked and highlighted here within the context of homogeneity across creative districts, rather than micro-organisation support roles. Informed by both observation and interviews undertaken as part of this research, these have been presented in Table 3 which will be unpacked in this section.

The first overarching practice theme in Table 3 is a focus on supporting emerging activity within scenes. This was one of the overarching practice areas which links to the micro-organisation guiding ethos' and motivations discussed in Chapter 4. This was observed in micro-organisations across all case study areas, in a variety of different spaces. Some examples from my findings of the types of practices which fall under this banner included organisations supporting early career artists and musicians by hosting dedicated exhibitions, performances and production spaces (de Klerk 2015; Campbell 2020). Micro-organisations also supported emerging craft makers and food and drink manufacturers through making efforts to stock their products.

Another practice theme was micro-organisations attempting to increase the inclusivity of their space. This was the other overarching practice area that links to the micro-organisation motivations discussed in Chapter 4, particularly surrounding boosting engagement from diverse economic

backgrounds (O'Brien et al. 2016). Once again, this was mentioned by a variety of different types of micro-organisations across all case study location. One way in which micro-organisations tried to enact this was through endeavouring to make themselves as affordable as possible, such as art studios and rehearsal rooms offering cheap production space for their scene members. Another large aspect of increasing accessibility was micro-organisations making efforts to include those from under-represented groups in their respective scenes along lines of class background, age, sexuality, ethnicity and gender (Eikhof and Warhurst 2013; Finkel et al. 2017; Brook et al. 2018; O'Brien and Arnold 2024). For example, arts organisations and galleries I spoke to made efforts to include more working-class artists in their exhibitions, and bring their work to more deprived areas – something that was also mentioned by a music organisation/record label that I spoke to (O'Brien et al.2016). Music venues, art galleries, performance venues and bookshops/cultural venues also mentioned including more LGBTQIA+, marginalised genders and ethnic minority creatives in their programming.

Supporting independents also emerged as a key practice for micro-organisations across all case study areas. One of the primary ways this was enacted was through micro-organisations either exclusively or strongly preferring to stock independent products. Examples included: craft beer shops only stocking independent brands, food and drink markets only having independent traders, coffee shops and bars only stocking independent beers and wines and lifestyle stores preferring to stock small-scale, independent makers.

Finally, another key practice of micro-organisations across all case study areas was efforts to support local activity. This is an interesting practice that appears contradictory to the homogeneity that can be observed across creative districts. Some examples of this, however, include art galleries and music venues emphasising providing programming for local creatives, as well as coffee shops and food/drink markets preferring to stock local products.

5.3.4 Practice based uniformity: Contributions to literature

There is currently a considerable gap for research that examines uniformity in micro-organisation practices across creative districts. As highlighted previously, the literature on trans-local scenes in general is very sparse. The literature which does examine scene uniformity is exclusively focused on music scenes, and largely surrounds uniformity in the interests and stylistic preferences of individual

scene members across space (Hodkinson 2004; Jousmäki 2014; Mbaye 2015; Schoon 2016; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). Whilst this provides a useful starting off point; there is still a gap for researching scene-based uniformity beyond music scenes. The above findings contribute to this gap by discussing how practice-based uniformity can manifest at the scale of micro-organisations rather than individuals, and span a multitude of different scenes.

Regarding the continued development of creative districts, the limited literature on uniformity between districts is focused on aesthetics, rather than practices. There is some tangential sociology literature, however, which examines uniformity in the practices of individuals within the 'hipster' subculture, who can often be found in areas similar to creative districts (Hubbard 2016). Within these studies, uniformity largely surrounds preferred consumption practices of individuals (Hill 2015; Hubbard 2016; Le Grand 2020). My findings provide empirical examples of how practice-based can therefore also manifest at the scale of micro-organisations.

Table 3 Practice uniformity across micro-organisations in creative districts

Practices (Themes)	**Location**	**Type of organisation**
Support emerging activity: (artists, music, performing arts, food/drink)	London	Bookshop, Art studio/Gallery
	Liverpool	Art Studios/Gallery, Music venue, Rehearsal room
	Manchester	Entertainment venue, Bookshop
	Birmingham	Art Studios/Gallery, Bar, Studios/Co-working space, Arts organisation
Emphasise inclusivity.	London	Bookshop, Art Studio/Gallery
	Liverpool	Art Studios/Gallery, Rehearsal room, Studios/Co-working space
	Manchester	Entertainment venue, Speciality interest store, Bookshop

	Birmingham	Art studios/Gallery, Music venue, Rehearsal room, Bar
Support independents.	London	Art gallery, Coffee shop, Co-working space
	Liverpool	Retail space, Music venue, Street food business
	Manchester	Craft beer specialist, Book shop, Lifestyle store
	Birmingham	Bar, Music venue
Supporting 'local'.	London	Bookshop
	Liverpool	Art studios/Gallery, Street food business, Music venue, Coffee shop, Rehearsal room
	Manchester	Entertainment venue
	Birmingham	Art Studio/Gallery, Music venue, Bar, Arts organisations, Craft beer specialist

**Sample sizes vary by location, London n=4, Liverpool n15, Manchester n=14, Birmingham n=13). Informed by participant observation and qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts.*

5.4 Mechanisms for enabling trans-local flows

The above section provided some important contextual information as to some of the different types of aesthetic and practice-based uniformity that can be observed across creative districts. This next section will dive into the different types of 'mechanisms' through which micro-organisations interact with one another across space and facilitate the uniform development of creative districts.

5.4.1 Physical mechanisms

This next section will outline the physical mechanisms that were found to be enabling trans-local flows between micro-organisations. There is very little literature which examines the mechanisms that enable trans-local flows to create and sustain trans-local scenes, with the literature which does exist overwhelmingly focusing on events (Kraemer 2014; Mbaye 2015; Emms and Crossley 2018; Mall 2020). Within this limited literature, however, even fewer studies discuss the implications that these mechanisms and flows have for uniformity across space (Mbaye 2015, Hodkinson 2004). The below findings therefore aim to address this considerable research gap.

Whilst this chapter primarily draws from trans-local theory, economic geography literature on extra-local knowledge flows is also relevant; in particular literature on temporary clusters (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Schuldt and Bathelt 2011; Bathelt and Henn 2014; Maskell 2014) and global pipelines (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2007; Bathelt 2008, Moodyson 2008; Esposito and Rigby 2019; Bathelt and Li 2020; Harris 2023).

My research has revealed that the main physical mechanisms which facilitated trans-local flows between micro-organisations were micro-organisations travelling (for scoping trips and holidays) and attending events. These two separate physical mechanisms will be explored in greater detail below.

5.4.1.1 Physical mechanisms: Travel for scoping trips

My findings revealed that micro-organisations travelling, specifically for scoping trips, was one of the most mentioned mechanisms for enabling trans-local flows. These 'scoping trips' involved the staff of micro-organisations intentionally travelling to a different city with the intent to 'scope out' or research another similar space. An exemplary quote comes from an arts studio/gallery that I spoke to in Liverpool:

> "*In 2019 we did quite a bit of research and we went to [Nottingham arts organisation], and that was more just to like, go and see what other studios are doing, what works for them and how they function".*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Arts Studio/Gallery 2)*

In the case of the above Arts studio/gallery, the ideas and best practice from these trips were then picked up and implemented in their own space back in Liverpool. Usually, these trips were pre-arranged and agreed upon in advance with the other micro-organisation in question. Further examples from my research included another Art gallery in Liverpool visiting an Arts organisation in Stoke-On-Trent and a Music Venue in Birmingham visiting other venues in Manchester. Additionally, a Bookshop in London, a Coffee shop in Liverpool and a Music venue in Liverpool also claimed they make these kinds of research trips to similar spaces (without mentioning exact locations). As illustrated by the examples above, within my research, the trans-local knowledge flows that were facilitated by this mechanism were national - all happening within the UK; largely due to budget constraints of being 'micro' in size.

Regarding the contents of these flows, when travelling for the purpose of these scoping trips, some organisations spoke more generally about the inspiration they gain from visiting similar spaces, as one coffee shop in Liverpool described:

> *"I need to get back to London again for a couple of days because you just need to see what's happening down there, I think its important because those flows do follow up north, it does almost feel like its homework as well"*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Coffee Shop)*

While this quote is useful to demonstrate the purpose and importance of these trips, other spaces I spoke to were more specific about the contents of the flows that were disseminated through this mechanism. Findings revealed that travel through scoping trips was largely used as a mechanism to allow for the trans-local flows of 'practices' between organisations; with other similar examples from my research including a bookshop in Shoreditch travelling to other similar spaces before they opened to learn more about the business, and the managers of music venues in Liverpool and Birmingham regularly travelling to other gigs and events to "see how people do things".

5.4.1.2 Physical mechanisms: Travel for holidays

A second important form of travel as a mechanism for facilitating trans-local flows was travel for holidays. Unlike scoping trips, this travel is arranged for the purposes of leisure, with any trans-local flows happening secondary to the original purpose of the trip, in an unplanned fashion. An exemplary quote comes from the owner of a coffee shop in Liverpool, who discussed the influence of past holidays:

> *"When we went to Seattle and Vancouver, we were influenced so much by there.. or I'd go to Berlin and like, cities that are very forward thinking, or very different from what we're doing, and get a lot of influence from that, you just stumble across spaces"*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Coffee Shop)*

The above quote demonstrates how micro-organisations often 'stumble' across inspirational spaces when travelling for a different reason (in this case, holidays). Conversations with other micro-organisations, however, provided additional insight on the contents of flows; with this mechanism

allowing for micro-organisations to pick up new aesthetics and practices to then implement in their own space. As the owner of a bookshop venue in Shoreditch described, he would always end up visiting bookshops to take inspiration for “new thinking and new ideas, new books, new displays”. In a similar fashion, the owner of a craft beer shop in Manchester also described how visiting similar spaces in Europe inspired him to set up his own business in the UK, transporting aspects of the European model to a new geographic context. Generally, these encounters between micro-organisations were less personable; visiting micro-organisation owners would simply walk into a space and look around - not necessarily always taking the time to chat with the staff at the space.

Though this form of travel was mentioned less than scoping trips, it is still an important mechanism for trans-local flows. The unplanned flows which take place whilst the staff of these organisations are travelling for leisure allow for flows to happen on an international scale, across greater distances compared to scoping trips. The empirical examples in this section illustrate how through micro-organisations travelling for scoping trips and leisure, trans-local flows in the form of practices are dispersed across space as they are discovered by new scene members. As a trans-local scene is developed and maintained between micro-organisations, so is a wider sense of uniformity across the different create districts they reside in; as aesthetics and practices are passed around and implemented.

5.4.1.3 Travel as a physical mechanism: Contributions to literature

Trans-local theory is useful for conceptualising and understanding patterns of similar development across space, however, the theory is still rather under-developed. This research gap extends to the mechanisms through which trans-local flows are enabled.

Certainly, in the existing trans-local literature, there is seemingly a lack of research on trans-local scene uniformity being enabled through travel for ‘scoping’ or research trips specifically. Considering this was one of the main physical mechanisms for trans-local flows mentioned by my participants, this gap is surprising and notable. There is some limited literature available on travel as a physical mechanism for trans-local flows, however, this is largely discussed within the context of scene members travelling for events. The most influential work comes from Hodkinson (2004), who mentions goths in the UK travelling to gigs, clubs and festivals, where they are influenced by the

music and fashion tastes of other scene members at these events. As they adopt these new music and fashion tastes and bring them back to their home locale, a consistency of style amongst the scene emerges (Hodkinson 2004). My findings revealed enough data, however, to separate travel and events into two separate mechanisms, and as such, the mechanism of events will be discussed in-depth in section 5.4.4.1. Whilst travel isn't an entirely new mechanism within trans-local theory, my findings on travel specifically for scoping trips and for holidays present two new novel conceptualisations of the ways in which micro-organisations use the wider mechanism of travel for enabling trans-local flows.

The above findings also challenge the dominant understanding in economic geography of the pre-requisite conditions needed for knowledge to be shared between spatially dispersed actors; with this theory stemming from the global pipeline literature. As explored in the literature review, global pipelines can be understood in simple terms as inter-regional connections through which flows of information are channelled and directed (Owen-Smith and Powell, p.5). They are often discussed in the context of connecting different industrial firms (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2007; Bathelt 2008; Moodyson 2008; Esposito and Rigby 2019; Bathelt and Li 2020; Harris 2023). Examples of the forms these pipelines have taken in existing literature include contractual partnerships (Bathelt et al. 2004; Owen-Smith and Powell 2004; Maskell 2014), mergers (Bathelt and Turi 2013) and satellite branches (Bathelt and Li 2020).

Global pipelines are not a catch-all concept. They are "formal, structured and thoroughly planned linkages" (Moodyson 2008, p.451) with particular conditions needed to form. These conditions include the trust that is built through existing relationships with potential pipeline partners (Bathelt et al. 2004; Maskell 2014; Ville and Wright 2019). Of course, building trust and professional relationships can lead to meaningful exchanges many contexts, however, I found that in empirical contests that are not typically explored in the global pipelines literature, a lack of this pre-requisite was not a barrier to micro-organisations taking the initial leap and risk to visit a space and have an exchange; whether in a pre-planned manner, or spontaneously.

Within the global pipeline literature, beyond simply stating that trust is necessary in order for pipeline partners to feel safe in divulging knowledge to one another (Bathelt et al. 2004; Ville and Wright 2019; Bathelt and Li 2020), very little literature unpacks exactly 'why' trust is necessary for knowledge sharing. Of the limited literature which does, 'trust' is necessary for exchanging knowledge because it mitigates risks. Bathelt and Henn (2014), for instance, note that sharing

knowledge with unknown actors from far away locations comes with greater risks of opportunistic behaviour. Bathelt et al. (2004) and Maskell (2014) explain how these risks are offset through knowledge sharing actors beginning by exchanging information that only has small associated risks, before incrementally building to 'higher risk' exchanges.

I found that micro-organisations in creative districts did not feel the need to build up trust prior to an interaction due to sector differences and underlying drivers. Indeed, many of the micro-organisations I spoke to were in the creative industries or hospitality sector, and were a mix of businesses, community interest companies and not-for-profits. In contrast, one of the critiques of the existing global pipelines literature is that it is extremely narrow. There is an overwhelming focus on for-profit firms in sectors such as manufacturing and tech (Bathelt et al. 2004; Owen-Smith and Powell 2004; Zhu et al. 2020); with examples of pipelines including firm partnerships (Bathelt et al. 2004; Owen-Smith and Powell 2004; Maskell 2014), mergers (Bathelt and Turi 2013) and satellite branches (Bathelt and Li 2020). Indeed, these pipelines very resource intensive and expensive to build, they are high-risk business decisions with the potential to cost first large sums of money should they fail (Maskell et al. 2006; Maskell 2014).

In contrast to these 'formal' manifestations of knowledge-sharing activities, I found that exchanges between micro-organisations were seen as comparatively informal and low-risk in nature. For instance, the micro-organisations I spoke to did not discuss intensive, expensive set-ups and contracts for knowledge exchanges even in the case of the 'pre-planned' research scoping trips discussed in Section 5.4.1.1.

Micro-organisations also did not express that they viewed these exchanges with one another as 'risky'. Conceivably, viewing knowledge exchanges through the lens of a 'for profit' firm could lead one to think that one micro-organisation taking inspiration from another for aesthetics, practices and products to implement in their own space could be 'threatening' to each other by competing in the same market.

This is where sector differences matter for whether 'knowledge exchange' partners view trust as a critical a prerequisite. As discussed in Chapter 4, many of the micro-organisations' ethos' and mission statements' are not driven by financial reward. Instead, many of the organisations I spoke to describe their motivation as coming from a place of wanting to support their associated scenes: making them

accessible; inclusive; and supporting emerging/grassroots activity more generally. Supporting associated scenes also means supporting other similar micro-organisations; indeed, as a micro-brewery in Birmingham described “together, we are stronger”. This has led to a mindset that is rather non-competitive with their peers, where they are more concerned with collaborating and supporting one another rather than gaining an economic advantage.

Ultimately, the global pipeline literature explains that the need for trust is driven by the ‘risks’ associated with sharing knowledge. In the context of my research, however, the underlying ethos’ of these micro-organisations negate the need for trust, because knowledge sharing with other similar spaces in the same scenes is not conceived of as a ‘risk’- they view this as supporting one another. This of course, stands in contrast to the global pipeline goals of industrial firms, who are largely concerned with gaining competitive advantage (Bathelt and Li 2020). The result is that when a micro-organisation approaches another similar space for knowledge sharing purposes, even without ‘trust’ having been established; there is a good chance they will be receptive.

In the literature review, critiques of global pipelines outlined how the theory lacks diverse empirical examples; and has largely ignored informal manifestations of knowledge-exchanges (Morrison et al. 2013; Bathelt and Li 2020). What this section has demonstrated, therefore, is that this dominant theory on trust as a pre-requisite for sharing knowledge across space cannot be applied to all empirical contexts. Different sectors and the actors within them (such as micro-organisations), have different motivational drivers (e.g not being driven by profit), which negate the conceptualisation of exchanging information as risky.

It is important to note, however, that this was an unexpected ‘side’ finding to this thesis. This means that the extent to which the conditions under which knowledge is shared in this new context can be unpacked is rather limited. This is because micro-organisations weren’t directly asked, for example, about the conditions under which knowledge is shared. Our conversations instead focused on the physical and virtual mechanisms through which knowledge was shared. This would, however, be an interesting avenue for further research.

5.4.1.4 Physical mechanisms: Events and festivals

Within trans-local literature, single day events and festivals are two of the only physical mechanisms mentioned for trans-local flows. It is Mbaye (2015) and Hodkinson (2004), however, who go into more depth on how festivals can contribute to uniformity in scenes through educational opportunities (Mbaye 2015), and consumption opportunities in particular (Hodkinson 2004). With regards to events, Hodkinson (2004), Reitsamer (2012), Reitsamer and Prokop (2018) all emphasise the importance of events as sites of trans-local networking, which can eventually lead to different forms of scene uniformity.

Perhaps the most considerable gap with regards to trans-local literature on physical mechanisms is the overall lack of research done in this area, with existing literature largely focusing on music scenes (Hodkinson 2004; Reitsamer 2012; Mbaye 2015; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). It is also important to revisit the work to assess whether it is still applicable in the modern context, with some of the most influential work on the topic coming from the early 2000's and 2010's (Hodkinson 2004; Reistamer 2012; Kraemer 2014). This section will aim to address these research gaps.

Festivals and events have been grouped together in this analysis as their function is similar; both providing opportunities for scene members to cluster temporarily in one space for a short period of time. For events, this clustering typically happens over the course of one day, whilst festivals can gather for multiple days in a row. In this sense, festivals and events are similar to the 'temporary clusters' mentioned in economic geography literature. Temporary clusters are defined as portraying all of the characteristics of a permanent industry cluster, yet in a short-term, intensified manner (Maskell et al. 2006). They are often discussed as providing temporary platforms for knowledge flows between organisations (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Bathelt et al. 2017), and through this, they demonstrate a clear connection with these research findings on events as physical mechanisms for trans-local flows.

Events and festivals both attended and hosted by the micro-organisations interviewed took a multitude of different forms including: art and craft fairs; food and drink fairs; music festivals; trade/industry shows; gigs; club nights; art exhibitions; and competitions. Research revealed that

festivals and events facilitate trans-local flows that can lead to uniformity in two ways; through facilitating networking, and through exhibiting products/practices.

5.4.1.5 Physical mechanism: Events: Networking

Networking itself represents a type of trans-local flow through exchanging of information in the form of details about oneself. What is especially important about networking in the context of this research, however, is that it also encourages further trans-local flows to take place. The type of networking that was mentioned the most within my research was micro-organisations connecting with other scene 'producers'. This was likely due to the nature of my research focusing on the experiences of micro-organisations, rather than other types of scene members.

The term scene 'producers' describes individuals who are actively 'producing' scene-related content, for example new products, practices or activities. An example from a craft beer scene could be that the manager/owner of a micro-brewery would be a scene 'producer', whilst someone who enjoys visiting a craft brewery every now and again may be considered more of a scene 'consumer'. It is important to note, however, that prescribing these labels is not meant to convey a rigid binary in these two types of scene members. Instead, these labels are 'fuzzy' and not mutually exclusive, for instance, in the aforementioned example of a casual scene 'consumer' being someone who enjoys trying new craft brews, they could also be 'producing' valuable content for a scene in other ways, such as leaving reviews of different beers they've tried on social media, for other scene members to engage with.

A quote taken from a specialty bar I spoke to in Digbeth provides an illustrative example of scene 'producer to producer' networking in the trans-local organic wine scene through events:

> *"We have annual get togethers, you know, where we talk about wine. There was 'VinItaly' last weekend. It's a huge international meet-up of wine people. So yeah, there's lots of that, and everyone knows each other".*
>
> *(Digbeth bar).*

Networking events, such as those mentioned above, allow for trans-local flows to take place through networking and the sharing of personal details (building and growing scenes), as well as information about scene-related products being shared through this networking. In the above example, festivals like VinItaly allow for disparate scene members to network and share information about scene-related products. A similar instance was also found with a music industry professional spoken to in Liverpool (Baltic Triangle Rehearsal room 1), who travelled to trade shows in America to network and share information about his products with other similar businesses. Through this sharing of scene-based information, there is the potential for micro-organisations that are part of the same trans-local scene to start using and stocking the same type of products. Figure 8 illustrates this phenomenon with a photograph of the interior of a lifestyle store in Manchester (this store was not interviewed). Many of these types of lifestyle stores specialise in stocking independent goods, and this photographs shows the type of stock that is often quintessential to lifestyle stores across the UK and other western countries, a curated selection of: enamelware; ceramics; candles; apparel and lamps; amongst other home goods.

Networking flows also gave way to further flows in the form of the sharing of scene-based advice and skills building. Indeed, a maker I spoke to in Manchester described how networking at craft fairs has led to the development of “peer to peer support and mentoring”; whilst an artist I spoke to in London described how networking at art shows could lead to opportunities for more experienced artists to invite junior artists to residency programmes. These development opportunities, enabled by networking, allow for the flows of advice and skills within a scene, and in turn can lead to the convergence of practices across space.

Figure 8 Photo a lifestyle store's stock in Manchester (researcher's photograph)

5.4.1.6 Physical mechanisms: events/festivals: exhibiting products/practices

The second way in which events and festivals act as a physical mechanism for trans-local flows is through enabling the sharing of products and practices. In economic geography literature on temporary clusters, firms would use these opportunities as a chance to learn about new products and developments in their respective industries (Schuldt and Bathelt 2011; Bathelt and Henn 2014). My findings revealed similar practices across a variety of different types of events/festivals including: art fairs; craft fairs; art exhibitions; trade shows; food/drink festivals; and gigs. Generally, micro-organisations discussed attending events that were closely related to the primary function of their space: art galleries attending art fairs; crafts studios attending craft fairs; and coffee shops attending coffee festivals, for example. Micro-organisations attended these kinds of events/festivals both to share their own products/practices, but also to be inspired by the products/practices of other attendees. Predominantly, however, the micro-organisations interviewed for this research attended events/festivals to share their own products/practices. The importance of attending events/festivals for this purpose is outlined in the below quote from a studio/gallery that was interviewed in London:

"Art fairs are like the best way to launch a new edition [of a print], because you're piggy-backing on their marketing, but also the amount of foot traffic, you know, the amount of people that see our artwork, when it's a new artwork especially. It's just like this massive platform to showcase new works"

(Shoreditch Art studio/Gallery).

This quote highlights how events/festivals can be catalysts for trans-local flows through allowing products/practices to be shared with other scene members, including scene 'consumers'. Specifically, they allow for a common space for scene members to interact and demonstrate their legitimacy as a member of the scene through this sharing and consumption of products/practices. Other similar examples from this research include crafts people attending craft fairs to sell their products to fair attendees, and art galleries hosting exhibitions where scene 'consumers' could both come to admire or buy the artwork.

Trans-local flows in the form of products and practices could also be shared on a producer-to-producer basis, similar to the producer-to-producer networking mentioned in the previous section. Here, those running micro-organisations attend events/festivals and are influenced by the products/practices of other organisations. An illustrative example comes from a manager of a music venue in Liverpool:

"We never really shut off, we've always got our little events management brain on. So basically, I can't go to another gig without thinking 'oh this is kind of cool, how do you do this?' Or 'you should do this thing a bit better, you can't stop. It's actually really annoying. You can't not think about the operations of it all, like a lot of inspiration comes from that".

(Baltic Triangle Music Venue 2)

This quote demonstrates how, similar to the producer to consumer flows mentioned above, events/festivals also allow flows to be between scene producers. In these cases, at events/festivals such as the gigs mentioned in the above quote, scene producers can be inspired by one another and can take back ideas for practices (or products) to their own organisation (Hodkinson 2004); which may be based locally, across the country or internationally. In turn, this has the capacity to contribute to observed trans-local uniformity across great distances (Hodkinson 2004). Further

examples from this research also include a florist in Manchester who had recently visited trade fairs in London for inspiration for products and displays, and a Craft beer bar in Manchester who discussed a recent trip to attend beer festivals in The Netherlands, to gain inspiration for stock.

5.4.1.7 Physical mechanisms: events/festivals: contributions to literature

Events and festivals provide opportunities for networking. My research argues that networking allows for flows of information in the form of personal details, which help to solidify and build scenes across space. Economic geography literature on temporary clusters similarly highlights events (trade fairs in particular), as important sites of professional partnership building (Maskell et al. 2006; Bathelt and Henn 2014; Bathelt et al. 2017). The limited existing literature on trans-local flows also mentions music events as key for developing personal and professional relationships (Reitsamer 2012; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). Hodkinson (2004), in particular highlights how networking at events can lead to exchanges of ideas which go on to influence the development of homogeneity within a scene.

Regarding my findings on the facilitation of flows through the exhibition of products and practices, supporting arguments can be found both in the existing economic geography and trans-local literature. For economic geographers exploring knowledge flows, events have been found to allow for firms to learn about new products and developments in their respective industries (Schuldt and Bathelt 2011; Bathelt and Henn 2014). In trans-local literature, Hodkinson (2004), found that the stock on display by vendors at events would assist in developing homogeneity within a scene as scene members purchase goods and take them back to their own locality.

Despite the similarities between these findings and existing literature, this research contributes to the existing knowledge base and addresses existing gaps in several key ways. Temporary clusters, as explored in the literature review, largely take the form of large firms attending traditional industrial trade fairs, conferences and conventions Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Schuldt and Bathelt 2011; Bathelt and Henn 2014; Maskell 2014, Zhu et al. 2020); with very little empirical examples outside of this (Jansson and Nilsson 2016; Comunian 2017; Brydges and Hracs 2019; Christensen and Andersen 2023). The above findings on alternate forms of temporary clusters such as food and drink fairs, craft fairs, art shows and gigs contribute to this limited pool of literature; demonstrating how alternate actors (micro-organisations in creative districts) utilise different forms of these mechanisms.

As mentioned above, in line with existing literature, I also found that opportunities for networking and the exhibiting of products/practices allowed for different 'flows' to happen (Maskell et al. 2006; Jansson and Nilsen 2016; Comunian 2017; Brydges and Hracs 2019; Henn and Bathelt 2023; Wu and Coe 2023). Importantly, however, economic geography literature often neglects to outline how attendance at temporary clusters can influence the operations of the firms that attend (Henn and Bathelt 2023).

The above findings have addressed this gap through a novel study context, demonstrating the impact of temporary cluster events on continued development and homogenisation of creative districts. In particular, my research has highlighted how these events encourage a convergence of practices amongst micro-organisations across space, especially with regards to the products they sell.

Finally, to revisit the trans-local literature once more; this body of literature focuses solely on events/festivals as mechanisms for uniformity across individuals in music scenes (Hodkinson 2004; Reitsamer 2012; Mbaye 2015; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). These findings have therefore demonstrated how events can result in scene-based uniformity both beyond the example of music scenes, and beyond the scale of individuals.

5.4.2 Virtual mechanisms

This next section will outline the 'virtual' mechanisms used by micro-organisations which facilitate trans-local flows in their different forms. The term 'virtual' has a long history with a multitude of different understandings and definitions (Shields 2003). For the purposes of this research, I am utilising the term 'virtual' in its capacity to describe digital technologies, in particular ones that utilise the internet and wireless communication (Batty 1997; Castells 2009).

As has already been established, there is very little literature on trans-local scenes in general, and as such, there is even less about virtual mechanisms for trans-local flows. Much of the literature that does exist is now outdated, such is the fast-evolving nature of technology. Influential earlier studies come from scholars such as Hodkinson (2004) and Reitsamer (2012), who discuss the use of

messaging boards in music scenes to share scene-based information about gigs, products and experiences. Other trans-local literature, such as research done by Kraemer (2014) and Schoon (2016) on Facebook, as well as Jousmäki (2014) on YouTube, demonstrate how social media platforms allow music scene members to share flows of content such as status updates, music, photos, videos and event information.

As with most of the trans-local literature, however, all of the above studies are exclusively focused on music, leaving a gap for research on alternate scenes. A lot has also changed in the social media landscape since the above articles were published. Indeed, my own research revealed Instagram as the main virtual mechanism through which micro-organisations engage with trans-local flows; a platform for which there is a dearth of trans-local scene literature.

This section will also cover a longer standing form of virtual communication, email. Although email existed long before social media, there is also a research gap for studying how this specific mechanism facilitates flows in trans-local scenes. Indeed, seminal research by Hodkinson (2004) very briefly mentions the potential of this mechanism for spreading scene related information but does not expand on this. Work by Reitsamer (2012) began to open up discussion on how listservs in particular can be used to enable socialising and the dissemination scene related information, skill sharing and events.

This section will additionally engage with economic geography research on virtual 'knowledge flows', as they are termed within this body of literature. Although not approaching research from a scenes perspective, this literature is still useful to conceptualise how different virtual mechanisms are utilised to facilitate flows. Although economic geography literature on knowledge flows is a long-established research area (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2007; Gertler 2008; Mould and Joel 2010; Bathelt and Turi 2013; Henn and Bathelt 2018), there are still major research gaps surrounding virtual knowledge flows specifically.

Investigations into different mechanisms for virtual knowledge flows are limited and spread across a multitude of different platforms such as online forums (Grabher and Ibert 2014), video conferencing software (Bathelt and Turi 2013), web based crowd sourcing intermediaries (Maskell 2014) and internet trade fairs (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010). Virtual mechanisms for flows in economic geography are overall under-researched, but there is an especially large gap for examining how mechanisms

such as social media and email as found in my research are utilized to enable flows in their different forms.

5.4.2.1 Virtual mechanisms: Instagram

Instagram was the social media platform mentioned the most by the micro-organisations that were interviewed. Other platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were largely only mentioned in passing, lacking meaningful engagement. As such, this section will focus on exploring the 'affordances' that Instagram has to offer, and in turn, how these affordances enable trans-local flows. Affordances can be understood as "actions made possible for users through a platform" (Laestadius 2017, p.578).

Instagram is a free mobile and web application where users can upload photos and videos to share publicly, or privately with their followers (Instagram 2023). Trans-local flows being facilitated by Instagram was mentioned by 17 different micro-organisations including lifestyle shops, coffee shops, craft studios, music venues and art galleries. This research has revealed that the two main Instagram affordances used by micro-organisations that facilitated trans-local knowledge flows were timeline posts and instant messaging. Before this chapter jumps into an exploration of the virtual mechanisms for trans-local flows, this section will provide some additional context in the form of a series of maps, which aid in visualising the breadth of these flows.

There is not a shortage of papers which attempt to 'map' scenes in some form, although, 'mapping' is often referred to in a somewhat more metaphorical sense, where theorizing the constituent parts of a scene is considered 'mapping' in itself (Brennan-Horley et al. 2010, Woo et al. 2014). When maps are created, they are often done so using the more abstract approach of 'mental mapping'. Often as a part of an interview, this involves participants drawing key sites associated within a scene through the perspective of a scene member (Brennan-Horley et al. 2010; Lashua et al.2010; Riches and Lashua 2014; Rochow and Stahl 2017). Other times, based on answers given in interviews, researchers themselves have composed maps, at times using GIS software (Brennan-Horley 2010; Cohen 2012), or Google maps (Riches and Lashua 2014). Most often, the mapping of scenes will be restricted to key sites of activity within one city (Cohen 2012; Riches and Lashua 2014; Rochow and Stahl 2017; Heng et al. 2024).The following maps, therefore, demonstrate a different approach to mapping than is typically seen in the existing scene literature. Rather than building upon interview

data, the data for these maps is taken from Instagram, and is mapped with GIS software Kepler.gl to demonstrate scene related flows across a vast number of different cities.

In this sense, the mapping approach in this thesis is perhaps more aligned with studies which map creative industries activity, despite this literature not necessarily being from a scenes perspective (Brennan-Horley et al. 2010, Watson 2012). This is because the approach taken for the maps in this thesis could be considered a somewhat simplified version of a social network analysis; in the sense that they display a set of nodes that are connected to each other across space through different flows (Prell and Schaefer 2024, Marin and Wellman 2009, O'Malley and Marsden 2008). Work by Watson (2012) for example, utilises a social network approach to map global networks of cities in the recorded music industry, visualising connections between the North America and the UK. I say that the maps within my research project are a simplified version of social network analysis, however, because other studies use more advanced analytical approaches to assess metrics of connectedness (Watson 2012; Watson et al. 2023) and centrality (Hoyler and Watson 2018). The simplified version of social network analysis utilised for the creation of the maps in this thesis is, however, very well suited to what these figures are aiming to achieve. Ultimately, my maps were created simply to provide an illustration and further context as to the breadth and reach of the trans-local flows enabled by virtual mechanisms.

As outlined in the methodology of this thesis, content analysis was undertaken on the Instagram accounts of 17 different micro-organisations that mentioned the use of Instagram as a virtual mechanism for trans-local flows. Data was only collected from business accounts that were public and belonging to another business. In line with ethical guidelines, no data was collected from private or personal accounts (Ess 2002; Sveningsson Elm 2009; Beninger 2017; Latzko-Toth et al. 2017). This content analysis pulled data from three different sources on participant micro-organisation's Instagram posts: 1) the visual content of each post 2) comment section data and 3) like count data. These maps were made with data from the latter two of these sources. From the 'likes' on each Instagram post, the information that was taken was simply the type of organisation that had liked the post, and their location if they had listed it publicly. Similarly, from the comment section of each post, the type of organisation that had left a comment was recorded, alongside their location if listed publicly, and the content of the comment (although comment content was not used for mapping purposes). This data was collected from the first 10 Instagram posts for each account across two sample timelines: the 1st of October to the 31st of December 2019; and the 1st of April to the 30th of June 2020.

Using the GIS software Kepler.gl, this data was mapped to illustrate the connections between a sample of the micro-organisations that I interviewed, and other similar professional accounts that were engaging with their posts from elsewhere in the world. The orange circles on the maps represent the multiple origins, or starting locations of a trans-local flow, and the blue circles represent the end location of a flow. The origin locations are the case study locations of this thesis: the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool, the Northern Quarter in Manchester, Digbeth in Birmingham and Shoreditch in London. This is because the data generated to make these maps comes from an analysis of the Instagram accounts of micro-organisations that were interviewed for this research.

As outlined above, this chapter discusses how micro-organisations use different affordances provided by Instagram, such as using timeline posts to share scene-related information and connect scene members, as well as instant messaging to share scene-related information. We can't know for sure exactly which micro-organisations are viewing one another's Instagram posts and there is certainly no way to see what accounts are messaging one another – but Instagram likes provide a suitable 'proxy' to understand which organisations are engaging with one another and where they are located.

Figure 9 focuses on these trans-local flows at a national scale. The highest concentration of flows in this map are between micro-organisations that are based in England, but there is evidence of trans-local flows to all of the other devolved nations in the UK as well as to Ireland. Figure 10 visualises trans-local flows are the European scale, where we can see that these interactions tend to be clustered around Western Europe, Southwestern Europe and Central Europe. Figure 11 shows these trans-local flows on a global scale. We can see that the highest density of these 'end' nodes are in North America and Western Europe, which is logical given factors such as language, shared culture and proximity. What is particularly interesting about the data behind these maps, however, is the reach of the trans-local flows stemming even from the regional case study locations. We would perhaps expect London to be very well connected, yet even micro-organisations that were spoken to in Liverpool had accounts based in places such as Hong Kong, Buenos Aires and Los Angeles liking their posts. It is hard to see individual interactions at this scale, however, we can see en masse flows reaching almost every continent, reaching locations as far away as Chile, India, China, Singapore, Japan and Australia.

Figure 9 Trans-local flows of Instagram 'likes' between micro-organisations (UK and Ireland)

Figure 10 Trans-local flows of Instagram 'likes' between micro-organisations (Europe)

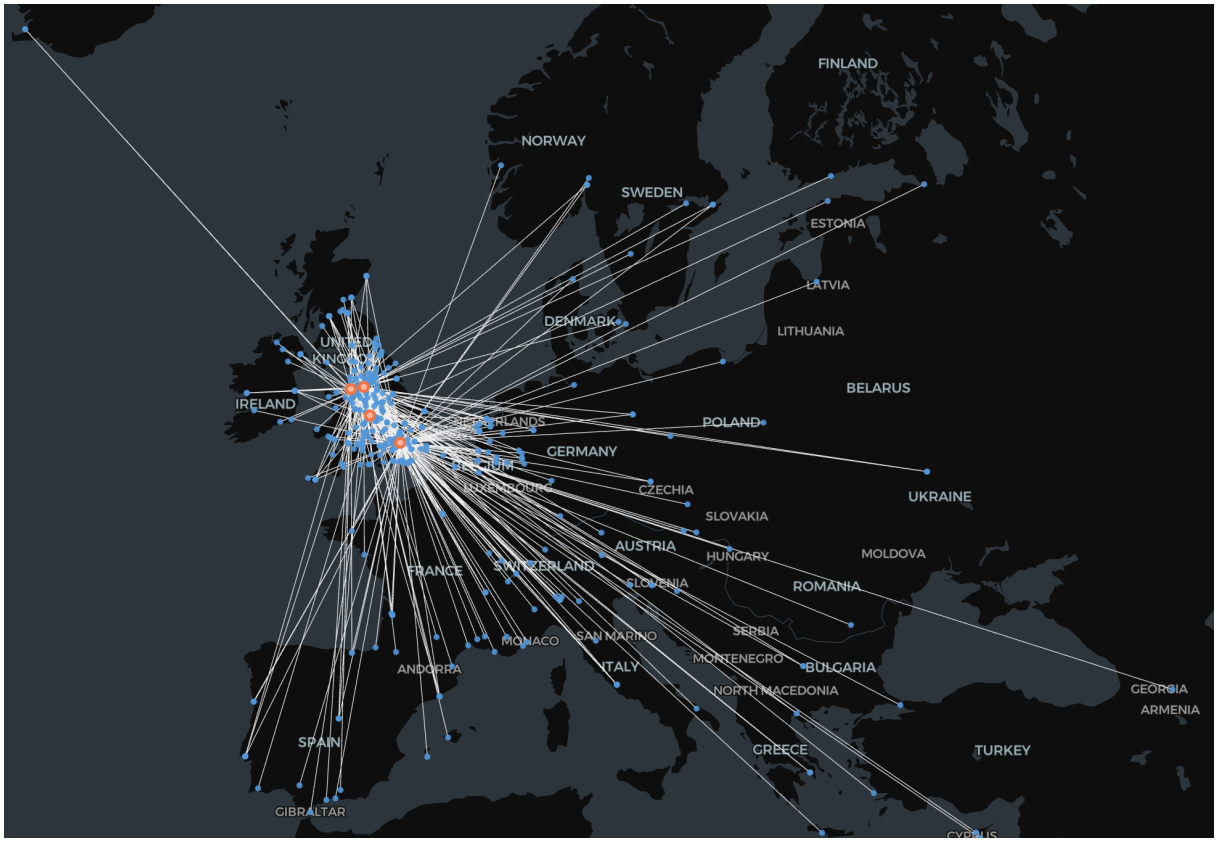
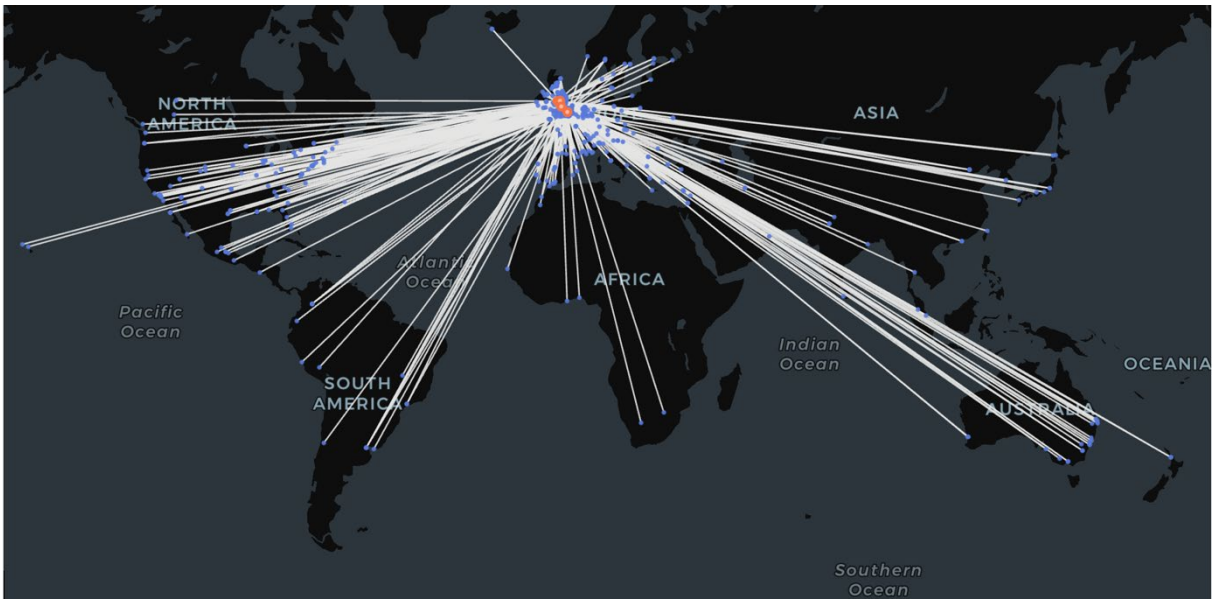


Figure 11 Trans-local flows of Instagram 'likes' between micro-organisations (global)



5.4.2.2 Virtual mechanisms: Instagram timeline posts

Timeline posts describe pictures and videos that appear on the uploader's Instagram profile. When uploaded, these posts are visible on other user's 'feeds', where they can scroll through the recent posts of accounts that they follow. These timeline posts can also appear on a user's 'for you page', a tab within the app which displays posts suggested by Instagram's algorithm, which showcases posts from accounts that users are not yet following. The micro-organisations that I spoke to predominantly described using the 'feed' section of the app to view posts from accounts they are actively following.

A couple of illustrative quotes regarding how micro-organisations use Instagram posts to enable trans-local flows of scene related information come from two spaces I spoke to in Liverpool:

> *"We use [Instagram] to follow artists, you find out about their releases and interesting things that they're doing that might be relevant to what we're doing, so we certainly use social media quite a lot".*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Music Venue 3)*

> *"We follow people that we like that do similar things to us, and we look at what they're doing, and then, if we go to that city, we make a point to visit those independents that are doing things similar to us"*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Coffee Shop)*

In the case of the above quote from the music venue, the 'scene related information' gained by from Instagram includes details about recent music releases and other goings on within their associated scenes. This was similar for the coffee shop in the Baltic Triangle, who also discussed how they would use Instagram to follow businesses "that do things similar to us", and keep up with their activity to follow new food/drink trends. In the case of this coffee shop, importantly, this sometimes led into them travelling to visit similar spaces. Micro-organisations also described exporting these trans-local flows themselves, with two galleries I spoke to in Liverpool and London describing how they would often share posts about upcoming exhibitions and projects their affiliated artists were working on.

5.4.2.3 Virtual mechanisms: Instagram instant messaging

The second Instagram affordance mentioned by micro-organisations in relation to trans-local flows was Instant Messaging. This Instagram feature allows users to message one another within the app with text, photos, videos and audio recordings. Use of this affordance was mentioned by a coffee shop/cultural venue in Manchester, a maker studio in Birmingham and a lifestyle style in Manchester. This section will focus on the use of Instagram's instant messenger for facilitating trans-local flows of information in the form of advice sharing. Although only detailed by a few of the micro-organisations that I spoke to, its impact should not be underestimated, as this series of quotes from a coffeeshop venue in Manchester demonstrates:

> *"I have long conversations about the treatment of dough on Instagram with people, how we look after the dough and ferment it. […] we don't give all our secrets away but yeah we certainly try to help"*

> *"There's a secret underground small cafe scene. You know, I'm friends with, I speak regularly to people like [micro-organisation] in Glasgow, [micro-organisation] in Nottingham, [micro-organisation] in Edinburgh, guys in London like [micro-organisation], you know, these kind of people, you befriend people with similar values"*
>
> *(Northern Quarter Coffee Shop).*

As these quotes illustrate, Instagram instant messenger is a valuable resource for supporting the trans-local scenes attached to micro-organisations. In the case of the above quote, the coffeeshop spoken to in Manchester also does specialty baking, and offers technical advice to other members of its attached culinary scene; connecting with scene members as far away as Edinburgh and Glasgow. A similar example came from a craft studio that was spoken to in Birmingham, when describing his community (or scene) of makers working on similar projects across the UK:

> *"Nowadays, it's fundamentally like an Instagram community of people, we will chat to one another, we will share advice and speak about tools and hardware and all that kind of stuff. That is what's really interesting to us, and what is like, fundamentally boring to everybody else".*
>
> *(Digbeth craft studio)*

The ease of being able to ask for advice quickly via instant messenger and take on the advice gained from one another, as opposed to the rather labour-intensive travel for research trips or attendance at scene-related events can perhaps serve to explain, at least in part, the uniformity we are observing across space.

5.4.2.4 Instagram: Contributions to literature

Both in trans-local and economic geography literature, there is very little up to date published research on virtual mechanisms for 'flows' in their different forms. On account of this, these findings both build upon existing research, and contribute towards filling significant gaps in knowledge on the subject. Economic geography literature, for example, tends to focus on older virtual mechanisms such online trade fairs (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010; Sarmento and Simões 2018) and forums/message boards (Grabher and Ibert 2014; Jansson 2019). In a departure from the existing literature, the above findings have focused on micro-organisations utilisation of Instagram, as this was the primary virtual knowledge flow mechanism these spaces mentioned using. The findings on Instagram as a virtual mechanism through the utilisation of timeline posts and instant messaging are particularly important, as social media represents a very under-researched area of study in economic geography literature on knowledge flows. A limited exception comes from the work of Tranos (2020) on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn allowing for professional networking; however, Instagram as a platform is left out of this analysis.

The differences between my findings and the types of virtual mechanisms explored in existing economic geography literature could be due to several different factors. This research project has been centred around micro-organisations, which are smaller than the types of firms which are typically written about in economic geography. The organisations spoken to were also typically part of the creative industries and hospitality sectors, both of which have limited representation in knowledge flow literature. A final factor is that a decade has passed since arguably the most influential work on this topic was published by Grabher and Ibert (2014), during this time, it is possible that the types of mechanisms used by organisations to facilitate knowledge flows evolves as tastes and trends develop. These differences only help to demonstrate the impact of these research findings, which have aided in the extension of our understanding of the different types of virtual mechanisms that can be utilised to facilitate flows.

This leads on to the discussion of how these findings contribute to the existing trans-local literature. Perhaps the largest contribution of this research is that it introduces a new platform to discussions on virtual mechanisms. Indeed, there is a notable dearth of literature on Instagram in the limited existing trans-local scene theory, which instead focuses on social media platforms such as Facebook (Kraemer 2014; Schoon 2016), Whatsapp (Schoon 2016) and YouTube (Jousmäki 2014). The focus of this research being on micro-organisations rather than on individuals in scenes may also play a factor in these differences, as could the focus on a variety of different types of trans-local scenes, rather than just music scenes which seem to dominate trans-local literature (Jousmaki 2014; Kraemer 2014; Schoon 2016).

Alongside contributing findings on the use of a new social media platform, this research has also added to understanding of how specific affordances can contribute to trans-local uniformity. In this case, findings on the importance of timeline posts for gaining details of scene related information like new music releases and food and drink trends, corroborate existing literature by Kraemer (2014), who found that timeline posts on Facebook aid in the sharing of scene-based information through providing photos, videos and event information about scene-related activities. Similarly, in line with existing work by Kraemer (2014) on Facebook, it was found that Instant Messaging was also a key affordance in micro-organisations' use of Instagram. In terms of the 'contents' of the flows enabled by this affordance, findings highlighted the importance of instant messaging for facilitating flows of advice and best practice across space, expanding upon the existing literature which tends to focus the capacity of this affordance to enable more surface level descriptions of networking (Kraemer 2014).

5.4.2.5 Virtual mechanisms: Email

Outside of Instagram, a prominent finding was that micro-organisations would still regularly use the older virtual mechanism of email to facilitate trans-local flows in their different forms. Email enabled several different types of trans-local flows between micro-organisations, one being the sharing of advice between spaces. Upon asking a Studio/Gallery in Birmingham if they ever receive emails asking for advice from other similar spaces, they provided the below answer:

"All the time. I get an email every month, and then the founding director, she's constantly speaking with people, I mean, we've spoken to [Gallery in Newcastle] at length, we've spoken to loads of folks up in Liverpool, I'm sure you've spoken to the same ones because we've been like a studio provider with a very distinct like aesthetic and model, we we're one of the first ones doing that […] so people would come to us for like advice around how we switched from being like a project funded organisation to becoming a portfolio organisation".

They expanded further..

"I just had an email last week from [gallery name redacted] up in Leeds, because they're trying to buy their building and they're thinking about studios, so we all, within like a visual art network, we do communicate quite a lot".

(Digbeth Art Studio/Gallery).

This quote demonstrates how email is used as a virtual mechanism for trans-local flows in the form of advice; in this case, pertaining business models, with the eye to replicate best practice elsewhere. Another studio/gallery in Liverpool similarly explained how email is a useful tool for getting in touch with organisations elsewhere to ask about "weird, obscure problems", that are specific to the niches and scenes that these micro-organisations occupy.

Beyond email acting as a virtual mechanism for trans-local flows of scene-related advice, other micro-organisations also discussed using emails to find new scene related products/content. A studio/gallery in London for example, described how they work with artists based in the UK, America, Europe and as far away as Japan; with artists oftentimes submitting works for the gallery to consider via email. Indeed, email offers an alternative way to send high resolution, large files in a way that is not as accessible with instant messaging over social media, which often compresses images. In the case of visual arts scenes, this is an incredibly important affordance for a software to have. This was similar story for a lifestyle store I spoke to in Manchester, where email was the primary mechanism for receiving submissions from suppliers about products (largely artisanal craft items), to stock in their store. These examples demonstrate how, through email, trans-local art and craft scenes are shaped by their contact with artists and makers outside of their locality. This collaboration, facilitated

in part by the 'virtual mechanism' of email, has the potential to explain some of the similarities in aesthetics and practices that can be observed between creative district scenes.

Within trans-local music scenes, music venues also found email convenient for communicating with other spaces and promoters to co-ordinate the performances of touring acts, as highlighted by this quote from a music venue in Liverpool about their use of email:

> *"We speak to other venue operators and promoters […] there's like a venue in Leeds called [name redacted], a venue in Manchester called [name redacted], because they're booking tours that kind of stuff.. cause you find, especially with touring artists, it's the same venues that pop up […] even [venue name redacted] in Leeds might be like "oh heads up, we're bringing so and so over from Germany or the USA on the 3rd of March, he's got the 4th of March available" and then we'll share the travel costs, but we also share price information and stuff like that".*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Music Venue 3)*

This quote is a particularly good example of how these trans-local flows of inspiration for scene-related products/content can lead to uniformity across creative districts. In this example, the use of email to co-ordinate acts between venues can lead to uniformity in the experiences offered across music scenes in different cities/creative districts.

5.4.2.6 Email: Contributions to literature

These findings on email provide some important contributions to both economic geography and trans-local literature on virtual mechanisms for flows. Despite email being a mechanism which has existed for a long time, economic geography literature largely neglects its potential for facilitating knowledge flows. This is perhaps surprising, given that some of the micro-organisations I spoke to still utilised email as a key mechanism for enabling trans-local flows.

This discrepancy could be explained by my research examining the alternate context of micro-organisations in the creative industries and hospitality; as opposed to the industrial firms that are

typically the focus of economic geography literature. Indeed, the content of the flows I am discussing in my research could be considered less technically complex than flows that are often discussed in economic geography literature (Bathelt et al. 2004; Owen-Smith and Powell 2004; Bathelt and Turi 2013; Maskell 2014), which may in turn lend itself to mechanisms other than email.

The above virtual mechanism findings also contribute towards trans-local scene literature in various ways. Hodkinson (2004) and Reitsamer (2012) also discuss the use of email by trans-local scene members, however, their work has a specific focus on email lists; utilised by scene members to both share scene based updates such as the occurrence of events, as well as for deeper discussions on the underpinning philosophies of respective scenes (Reitsamer 2012). There are, however, some key differences between my findings and this existing literature.

Notably, I found that micro-organisation used email slightly differently, opting for direct, peer-to-peer interactions, rather than sending emails out to larger 'lists'. The contents of these flows were also different, with micro-oragnisations placing a large emphasis on using email to ask for advice on niche problems, or for sourcing scene-related products to stock, for example. This could perhaps be because the contents of flows in existing literature on email, such as the sharing of scene-related updates (Hodkinson 2004; Reitsamer 2012), were instead revealed in my findings to be facilitated through other virtual mechanisms - such as Instagram. These findings therefore contribute to the existing literature on emails as a virtual mechanism by demonstrating its continued importance for the alternate purpose of advice sharing between micro-organisations.

5.5 Conclusion: Summary and contributions to literature

This empirical chapter has answered the second research question of this thesis, which is concerned with investigating how micro-organisations interact with one another across space. This research question is set within the wider context of the overall research aim of this study, which seeks to understand how micro-organisations contribute to the ongoing development of creative districts.

This chapter began by outlining how in response to the existing, restrictive economic geography literature on knowledge flows, it was necessary for this thesis to contribute some newly articulated

concepts. The first is that this thesis uses the term 'flows' rather than 'knowledge flows'. This is because definitions of 'knowledge' in economic geography are overwhelmingly focused on tacit or codified categorisations (Lundvall and Johnson 2006; Howells 2012). This thesis rejects the tacit/codified binary as too simplistic; but also not the focus of this study. This research is instead interested in how micro-organisations interact across space, and the impact of these flows on the continued development of creative districts. The newly articulated term 'flow' has therefore allowed this research to move beyond the tacit/codified binary to instead focus on more complex research problems (Bathelt et al. 2004), and the specific content that is being shared between actors. This allows a deeper understanding of what types of information are flowing across space.

The second newly articulated concept 'mechanism', arose in response to the 'restrictive' nature of the existing economic geography literature on global pipelines. Global pipelines refer to "formal, structured and thoroughly planned linkages" (Moodyson 2008, p.451), with particular conditions needed to form. With the existing literature overwhelmingly focusing on for-profit firms, a newly articulated concept was needed to capture the vast range of different means through which 'flows' in their different forms are exchanged across space. The term 'mechanism' was devised for this purpose; which can essentially be defined as a means through which a 'flow' happens. Importantly, the term is broad enough that it can capture both physical and virtual means of facilitating flows (such as travel or social media); grouping together these two spheres that are so often referred to separately by their common purpose; to enable flows between actors across space. The broad nature of the term further leaves room to delve into specificity in each of the respective sections of this empirical chapter.

The chapter then provided empirical evidence of what 'ongoing development' looks like in terms of the uniform creative district model that has emerged across much of the developed western world. For instance, with regards to aesthetics, micro-organisations can typically be found in ex-industrial warehouses or factory buildings, decorated with murals, embracing old fittings of concrete or stripped wood floors, steel beams and corrugated iron in the interior. They also often re-purpose old materials such as palettes, steel drums and particle board as furnishings. Practice based uniformity was additionally found to be underpinned by wider overarching themes of supporting emerging activity, inclusivity, supporting independents and local activity.

My research revealed that this uniform model of ongoing development is driven by micro-organisations, situated in distant creative districts, interacting with one another across space through

different ‘mechanisms’. These mechanisms facilitate trans-local flows of scene-related information, products, practices, advice and knowledge which spread across space and in turn, shape the ongoing development of creative districts. I found that these ‘mechanisms’ can broadly be divided into categorisations of ‘physical’ and ‘virtual’. Physical mechanisms included micro-organisations traveling for ‘scoping trips’ to learn from other similar spaces elsewhere, as well as picking up inspiration for best practice whilst travelling for holidays. Micro-organisations also enabled trans-local flows when attending scene-related events through networking opportunities and exhibiting products/practices. With regards to virtual mechanisms, I found that micro-organisations used timeline posts on Instagram to share scene-related information, activity and trends; and Instagram’s Instant Messenger to connect scene-members across space and share advice. Finally, I found that email was still a popular mechanism for micro-organisations to connect with one another, share advice and find scene-related products.

These findings provided several important contributions to existing literature. Firstly, they have implications for creative district development literature. As introduced at the start of this chapter, literature on the development of bottom-up creative districts is currently focused on ‘development’ only in terms of the factors which have led to the very initial inception of these areas (Montgomery 2004; Mavrommatis 2006; Bouch et al. 2016, Blackburn et al. 2014). Comparatively, there is a gap for research which examines ‘ongoing development’ with regards to how creative districts have evolved over time into the successful homogenous, bottom-up model of creative districts that can be observed across much of the developed western world.

Whilst this uniformity has gained some recognition in seminal works (Zukin and Braslow 2011), discussion of uniformity is typically limited to the types of industrial buildings these creatives and creative businesses occupy (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Cremers 2012; Lidegaard 2017), and to a much lesser extent, their associated fixtures (Zukin and Braslow 2011; Wijngaarden and Hracs 2024). To the creative district development literature, this chapter has therefore provided further empirical examples of how this homogenous, bottom-up model manifests in terms of micro-organisation aesthetics (Exteriors, building materials, furnishings, decor), and practices (supporting emerging activity, emphasising inclusivity, supporting independents and local activity). This chapter has also further extended theory on creative district ‘development’ by providing empirical examples of the processes through which this uniform model of ‘ongoing development’ has spread across space. In particular, this chapter has evidenced that geographically dispersed micro-organisations facilitate flows which have the potential to influence business ideas,

aesthetics and practices by interacting with one another through the aforementioned physical and virtual mechanisms of travel for research, travel for holidays, events, Instagram and email.

As stated in the introduction, understanding the ongoing development of creative districts is incredibly important in part, due to the attractive nature of this successful bottom-up creative district model. These districts have the potential to act as important sites of production and consumption (Montgomery 2004; Brown et al. 2010; Blackburn et al. 2014; Hubbard 2016; Wise et al. 2022), to drive footfall (Santagata 2002), and create new forms of employment (Evans 2009). Understanding the critical role of micro-organisations in the ongoing development of this uniform model helps to build an argument for both national and regional government to better support these actors.

The findings of this chapter have further contributed to two main influential bodies of literature which study mechanisms behind 'flows' in their different forms. The first is trans-local scene literature which is almost exclusively focused on mechanisms for uniformity at the level of individual stylistic choices in music scenes (Hodkinson 2004; Kraemer 2013; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). Economic geography also examines mechanisms for flows (of knowledge) across space, but with a particular focus on industrial firms (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2007; Bathelt 2008; Moodyson 2008; Esposito and Rigby 2019; Bathelt and Li 2020; Harris 2023). There is a very limited portion of this literature which engages with creative districts and activity in the creative industries, however, this tends to be focused on local flows (Drake 2003; Plum and Hassink 2014; Mengi 2020), rather than trans-local. The focus of this research being on flows between micro-organisations in different creative districts therefore contributes a rather novel study context to both bodies of literature, which in turn has revealed new mechanisms for flows; and further developed understanding of the use of enabling mechanisms in new contexts.

Mechanisms and their resultant flows are far more under-developed in trans-local literature compared to economic geography theory. Indeed, trans-local literature on flows is extremely limited, only mentioning the potential for events (Hodkinson 2004), some limited social media platforms and email lists as to having the potential to facilitate flows between scene-members across space (Hodkison 2004; Reitsamer 2012). As such, my findings on the physical mechanisms of travel for scoping trips, travel for holidays and the virtual mechanism of Instagram as a means for facilitating flows between scene members present new, novel mechanisms to the trans-local scene literature.

With regards to economic geography literature, although there is more theory on the mechanisms used by for-profit 'firms' for enabling flows of knowledge across space, flows between micro-organisations in creative districts provide an under-researched area of study. In my exploration of more 'informal' manifestations of mechanisms for sharing knowledge across space, my findings on 'travel' have challenged the dominant global pipeline theory on trust as a pre-requisite for sharing knowledge across space; demonstrating that these conditions cannot be applied to all empirical contexts. Different sectors and the actors within them (such as micro-organisations), have different motivational drivers (e.g not being driven by profit), which nullify the conceptualisation of exchanging information as risky in different contexts.

Literature on temporary clusters is also typically focused on industry trade fairs, conferences and conventions. My findings on events as physical mechanisms demonstrate how these same concepts can be applied to different contexts and take on new, more informal shapes and still reap the same benefits, such as food and drink fairs, craft fairs, art shows and gigs. Economic geography literature does discuss virtual mechanisms for knowledge flows such as online trade fairs (Bathelt and Schuldt 2010), video calling software (Bathelt and Turi 2013) and web forums (Grabher and Ibert 2014), however, there is a large gap with regards to the potential of social media and email specifically for enabling flows in their different forms to travel across space. My findings therefore address these gaps in the existing literature through providing a new study context.

Moving on from mechanisms for flows, another contribution of this chapter to existing trans-local scene literature and economic geography literature regards my findings on the uniformity that occurs because of these flows. I have already established that the literature on trans-local scenes is very limited in general, and as such, there is even less literature which explicitly looks at uniformity across scenes. A particularly large gap exists for research which demonstrates how uniformity can unfold beyond the scale of the individual, and beyond the existing focus on music. Surprisingly, given the amount of economic geography theory on knowledge flow mechanisms, there is also a gap in this literature for researching uniformity with regards to how firms learn, benefit and implement the knowledge they gain from mechanisms such as temporary clusters (Henn and Bathelt 2023). My findings on patterns of uniformity in the aesthetics and practices of micro-organisations as a result of these mechanisms and the flows they enable, therefore contribute toward addressing these similar gaps in both canons of literature.

Before this chapter finishes, I'd also like to acknowledge an interesting finding which appeared in my data, but is perhaps outside of the scope of the research question this chapter is addressing. That is, that despite the 'global' uniform pattern of developed that can be observed across space, many micro-organisations still expressed a contradictory desire to 'focus on the local'. It would appear that some micro-organisations are mixing trans-local ideas with local connections to build their business. This exact configuration of this depended on the organisation, but one example comes from a coffee shop in Liverpool which would stock natural wine and craft beer. This is a trans-local idea in itself, but the actual products utilised to execute these ideas can come from local sources. This mix of local and trans-local influences in each organisation varied and depended on the individual choices of each space. Not many of the micro-organisations I spoke to outlined why they had this emphasis on supporting the local. Some discussed local pride, others consumer demand. Ultimately, however, this chapter was focused on exploring trans-local connections, so the extent to which I can determine these underlying motives of supporting the local is limited. This is, however, an important area of study, as by researching organisations' motivations for supporting the local, government bodies can understand how to support these drivers and incentivise the growth of their local scenes, whether in the arts or more hospitality based activities, which can in turn translate into social, cultural and economic value for their cities. For these reasons, this could be an interesting avenue for future studies.

Chapter 6 Strengthening support post COVID-19: Impacts, gaps, informal approaches and policy implications for micro-organisations.

This empirical chapter will build upon the findings of the first and second empirical chapters to explore the third research question of this thesis: 'How can micro-organisations in creative districts be supported through the challenges they currently face?'. This research question is set within the wider research aim of developing an understanding how micro-organisations contribute to the ongoing development of creative districts across space, through the lens of trans-local scenes.

Chapter 4 of this thesis established the relationship between micro-organisations and their respective scenes in creative districts; namely, that they integrate themselves through the important cultural, financial and social support roles they enact. Building upon this understanding, Chapter 5 then outlined how these scenes can be trans-local, and micro-organisations can communicate with each other across space through various mechanisms. These mechanisms enable flows of scene-related information to travel between creative districts, ultimately contributing to this uniform model of ongoing development.

However, in exploring the above two facets of the wider research aim, it became clear that micro-organisations were at a tipping point because of underlying precarity and pressures which had reached a critical point during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, 9 out of 44 business that I had interviewed (20%), had permanently closed at the time of writing. As such, it would be amiss to not outline the challenges these important actors in creative districts are facing and provide policy suggestions for how they can be better supported going forward, so that they can continue their important roles supporting scenes and shaping the ongoing development of creative districts.

We know that micro-organisations comprise the foundation of many creative districts. Many of these micro-organisations, on account of their size already face precarity through factors such as resource constraints (Rostamkaalei and Freel 2017; Komorowski and Lewis 2023) and a lack of appropriate business support (Gherhes et al. 2016). Furthermore, being based in creative districts, many of the

micro-organisations that took part in this study also operated within, or tangential to the creative industries, which face similar forms of resource constraints (de Klerk 2015, Komorowski and Lewis 2023) and precarity through inconsistent, project based work (Watson 2012; de Klerk 2015; de Peuter and Cohen 2015; de Peuter et al. 2023).

Being particularly vulnerable on account of this precarity, bottom-up creative districts and the micro-organisations inhabiting them present a particularly interesting and important spatial unit of analysis during times of crisis. Indeed, over the course of the past few years, a 'poly-crisis' has been brewing, where the combination of multiple crises at once; Brexit, COVID-19 and the Cost of Living Crisis have "interwoven and overlap[ped]" (Morin 1999, p.74), amplifying the impacts of one another (Tooze 2022). This poly-crisis has threatened and continues to threaten micro-organisations' ability to stay open and continue their important work in supporting creative district scenes and shaping creative district development. Due to the timing of data collection, this chapter will mainly focus on the effects of COVID-19 on micro-organisations, as interviews were held in the depths of the pandemic and immediately afterwards.

To provide a brief timeline (Figure 1), 'Brexit' refers to the UK exiting the European Union (EU) Single Market and Customs Union, with EU law also no longer applying in the UK (Cabinet Office 2021). The UK voted to leave the EU through a referendum in 2016, although it was not until the 31st of January 2020 that the UK entered a transition period, leaving the EU Single Market and Customs Union officially on the 31st of December 2020 (Cabinet Office 2021). The effects of Brexit are, however, still ongoing; the economy is yet to fully adapt to the new trade regime, and by 2024 all legislation had still not yet come into effect (Wright 2023; Novy et al. 2024). Smaller sized businesses (such as micro-organisations) have also been hit harder by Brexit than their larger counterparts (Wright 2023; Novy et al. 2024). Indeed, on account of their size they have less resources to tackle rising export costs, administrative issues and disruption (Wright 2023). In speaking to micro-organisations, it was clear that the impacts of Brexit were felt especially hard around imports, exports and supply chain disruption, however, for some, it was difficult to discern exactly which impacts were from Brexit, which from COVID-19 and which from the 'cost of living' crisis.

With regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first national lockdown was announced on the 23rd of March 2020; the second national lockdown was announced on the 5th of November 2020; and the third national lockdown was on the 6th of January 2021. These national lockdowns restricted the gathering and movement of everyone except for essential workers (Independent Injuries Advisory

Council 2022). Schools were closed and working from home was strongly encouraged, with hospitality venues and non-essential shops also being required to remain shut (Independent Injuries Advisory Council 2022). These COVID-19 lockdowns began less than two months after the UK entered the transition period for Brexit and were still ongoing as the UK embarked on its formal exit from the EU on the 31st of December 2020. In between these national lockdowns, local lockdowns were implemented on a tier system, which were informed by the spread of the virus (Independent Injuries Advisory Council 2022). By May of 2021, indoor venues were beginning to re-open and in July of the same year, most restrictions on social contact had been lifted (Pope and Hourston 2022). Although businesses were not mandated to shut down after this time, many of the micro-organisations I interviewed still struggled and found themselves having to close intermittently, as they became short-staffed with following waves of COVID-19 as restrictions lifted. Many organisations also emphasised that despite official restrictions lifting, it took a long time for members of the public to feel comfortable in visiting their space again.

Shortly after restrictions were lifted, in mid to late 2021, it became apparent that cost pressures had increased (Hourston 2022), and the UK was fast approaching a 'cost of living crisis'. This crisis refers to "the fall in 'real' disposable incomes (that is, adjusted for inflation and after taxes and benefits)" (Hourston 2022, n.p). This cost of living crisis came to a peak in October of 2022, when the annual rate of inflation reached 11.1% (Hourston 2022; Harari et al. 2024). During this time, prices rose for a number of different reasons (Campbell-Nieves et al. 2022), including the pandemic driving up demand for consumer goods (Harari et al. 2024), and disrupting supply chains (Hourston 2022, Rodrigues and Quinio 2022). Russia's invasion of Ukraine additionally had a cascading effect, limiting critical Ukrainian exports of grain, sunflower oil and car parts (Hourston 2022; Smith 2022). Energy prices consequently also rose exponentially as Russia limited gas exports to Europe and forced the sourcing of more expensive alternatives on the global market (Barrett 2022). For the micro-organisations that I spoke to, the cost of living crisis was felt the most in terms of the general public's lack of disposable income to engage with the products, services and events happening within these spaces, compared to previous years (Campbell-Nieves et al. 2022).

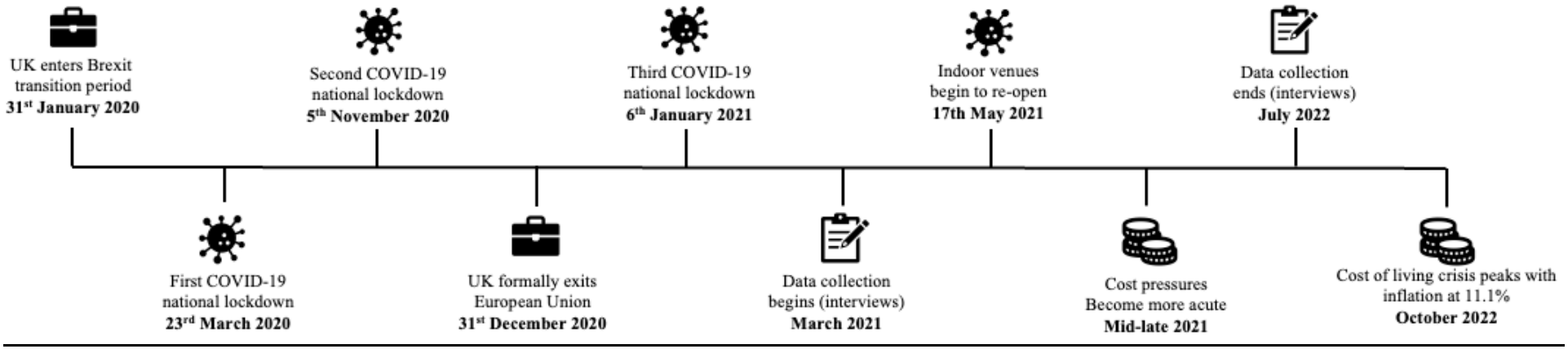
It is clear, therefore, that although the pandemic is the focus of the chapter, it is important to situate COVID-19 within the context of an ongoing, wider 'poly-crisis' scenario. Many of the effects of this poly-crisis have bled into one another and make them difficult to separate. Going forward, these findings will continue to be useful, as it is estimated that pandemics are likely to become even more frequent in the future (Caruso 2022; Haileamlak 2022), with research suggesting that the probability of another pandemic happening in our lifetime is approximately 17%, rising 44% in coming decades

(Williams et al. 2023). The findings of this research, therefore, are not only confined to helping us understand 'what went wrong' with the government's latest response, rather, this study has the ability to assist with the preparedness of inevitable pandemics and other exogenous shocks of the future.

Developing policy recommendations informed by the experiences of micro-organisations in times of crisis, as outlined in section 6.4, can both help to protect these types of spaces both from everyday forms of precarity (Rostamkalaei and Freel 2017; Komorowski and Lewis 2023), inevitable crises of the future and the lingering effects of ongoing and past shocks. Reforming policy so that micro-organisations receive improved support would be within the interests of regional and national governmental as well as 'arms length' bodies (such as Arts Council England). Indeed, Silver and Clark (2016) describes these more 'alternative' scenes within cities as "laboratories of consumption" (Silver and Clark 2016 p.14), through their participation in, and generation of innovative practices.

This chapter will begin by outlining the financial and 'creative' impacts of COVID-19 on micro-organisations, which will serve to then set up a discussion of the pitfalls that emerged in government support, and participation in informal support structures. The chapter will finish with some 'lessons for future support', outlining a series of policy recommendations for how local and national government support can be improved for micro-organisations, following the current poly-crisis scenario.

Figure 12 Timeline of the 'Poly-crisis': Brexit, COVID-19 and the Cost of Living Crisis.



Dates adapted from Harari et al. (2024), Hourston (2022), and Pope and Hourston (2022) .

6.1 The post-pandemic condition of micro-organisations: Financial and creative impacts

To understand the need for policy support , it is important to first establish the types of impacts that are felt by micro-organisations during times of crisis. Many of these impacts have also had long lasting effects and ramifications, as explored in Section 6.1.3. Although COVID-19 hasn't been the only crisis that micro-organisations have felt the effects of since research for this thesis began, it was the crisis that was felt most acutely at the time of data collection. The impacts of COVID-19 therefore dominated many of my discussions with micro-organisations.

There is a large gap in existing literature for studies which examine the impacts of COVID-19 on micro-organisations, especially the types that occupy creative districts (Khlystova et al. 2022). There is some limited literature on the effects of COVID-19 on creative businesses, however, this research tends to focus on the shorter term, more immediate impacts of the pandemic on larger scale cultural institutions including opera houses, theatres, (Vitálišová et al 2021), large galleries (Khylstova et al. 2022) and museums (Agostino et al. 2020; Samaroudi et al. 2020; Raimo et al. 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022). There is also a growing body of literature looking at the impact of COVID-19 on individual workers in the arts (Bailey et al. 2020, Pacella et al. 2020; Ratten 2020; Dümcke 2021; Crosby and McKenzie 2022; Flore and Hendry 2023, Li et al. 2023). Yet, a gap still persists for looking at the impacts of COVID-19 beyond the scale of individual, but smaller in size than large arts institutions. This chapter aims to address this gap by covering some shorter-term financial impacts on micro-organisations for context, before also outlining the longer term implications, and subsequent impacts on creativity.

6.1.1 Financial impacts

According to my participants, the primary driver of the financial impacts of COVID-19 were the recurrent lockdowns which stopped premises from opening. Later, government guidance which strongly suggested that patrons avoid hospitality type businesses, particularly in the winter of 2021, also had considerable financial impacts.

By May of 2021, indoor venues were reopening, and in July of that same year, most restrictions on social contact had been lifted (Pope and Hourston 2022). Although businesses were not mandated to shut down after this time, many of the micro-organisations interviewed still struggled and found themselves having to close intermittently, as they became short-staffed in following waves of COVID-19. Micro-organisations also emphasised that despite official restrictions lifting, it took a long time for members of the public to feel comfortable in visiting their space again.

At the start of the national lockdowns (March 2020), the physical premises of every non-essential business was shut down irrespective of whether it was a night club or a bookshop (Pope and Hourston 2022). During this time, some micro-organisations were able to shift some of their operations online in an extremely limited capacity. Examples I found in my research were galleries holding virtual exhibitions, as well as venues and record labels live streaming performances.

In May of 2020, the Prime Minister announced that those who cannot work from home can return to the workplace (Pope and Hourston 2022), this afforded some micro-organisations the ability to access their stock and start selling products online. Participants I spoke to with comparatively lower digital literacy found this a lot more challenging. Indeed, some micro-organisations recognised that there were many potential barriers to switching operations online - namely, the amount of time it would take to make the shift, the cost of doing so, and the significant digital upskilling that this would require. Work by Snowball and Gouws (2023) similarly found that this online shift was much easier for the large cultural institutions which had more resources to leverage behind this.

This recurrent closing and the subsequent extreme limitations on the practices these organisations were able to carry out led to large income losses. This experience was widespread across the different types of micro-organisations I spoke to, with rehearsal rooms and recording studios not being able to open to serve their clientele; art galleries suffering from a loss of sales with customers not being able to view pieces in person; and craftspeople not having access to the open workshops from which they make and sell their products. For other spaces, especially those interviewed that were affiliated with the music industry, large financial losses came from having to postpone and cancel events due to forced closures. According to the micro-organisations spoken to, this impacted both regular club nights and gigs, as well as large festivals. This was a similar story for the micro-organisations that were associated with the visual arts, many of whom detailed a mass cancellation

of planned projects, including exhibitions that were years in the making, and annual showcases which supplied much of their income for the year. One micro-organisation that is heavily involved in the visual arts detailed just how damaging these losses can be:

> *"When the pandemic struck, 80% of my future bookings were all artwork, and there was probably like £45-50,000 worth of work that was wrapped up in the arts then. There was a major commission for [London gallery], a major commission for [Dundee gallery]; there was something that was meant to go into [Liverpool gallery], and all of that just disappeared"*
>
> *[Micro-organisation type redacted due to sensitivity of the information]*

These financial impacts were not isolated to the immediate days and weeks surrounding the lockdowns (Flew and Kirkwood 2020; Florida and Seman 2020; Popa et al. 2021). Micro-organisations from multiple case study locations (Birmingham and Liverpool), from a variety of organisation types including galleries, a retail space, a multi-purpose venue and a rehearsal room were estimating that lost revenue will take months, or even years to recover from. A further compounding issue, was that in a couple of particularly bad cases, micro-organisations mentioned not bringing in enough funds to cover their base costs such as rent, leaving them with debt accrued with both their landlord and through government backed loans. Indeed, some micro-organisations described being up to £50,000 in debt to the government, and tens of thousands of pounds in debt to their landlord. Due to the sensitive nature of this information, I will not disclose exactly which micro-organisations these were, but in some cases, these extreme situations were linked to individual landlord circumstances which lacked flexibility during the pandemic; rather than being a sector issue, for instance.

Although there is a considerable gap in research at the micro-organisation scale, almost all of these spaces, especially those within the creative industries, operate in a state of continual precarity; as has been the case since long before the pandemic started (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; de Klerk 2015; Campbell 2020; Haugsevje et al. 2022; Komorowski and Lewis 2023; Watson 2024). The financial impacts of COVID-19, however, have left micro-organisations with an even greater sense of insecurity, that has prevailed long past the height of the pandemic, as exemplified by this quote from a retail space I spoke to which operated in Liverpool and Birmingham:

"There's so many businesses that have vanished without a trace, and there's going to be more because everyone's going back, obviously the complex we're on, and what we're doing in Digbeth is a lot of bars and restaurants, now you can't go back to the full capacity, so it's all well and good that we can reopen in a way, but, a lot of businesses you're still going to see for the next year or so businesses fold cause they're going back to these debts and we can't operate at full capacity"

(Digbeth Retail Space)

Importantly, some micro-organisations found it difficult to distinguish between financial impacts caused by the pandemic, and those caused by other ongoing crises, as illustrated by a craft studio in Birmingham:

"There's still so many COVID-19 related supply chain issues, price increases that happened under COVID that will never go down again, some of which are difficult to separate from, you know, the Suez Canal crisis, wildfires in America, the war in Ukraine, Brexit, and whatever else"

(Digbeth Craft Studio)

This quote highlights the 'perfect storm' of shocks that have shaken micro-businesses since the pandemic started, and how the impacts from one crisis are difficult to separate from the precarity ensued from another.

6.1.2 Financial impacts: Contributions to literature

My findings on the short-term impacts of the pandemic on micro-organisations corroborate existing literature, particularly surrounding impacts on the creative industries, which also discusses disrupted income through various factors such as: forced closures; inability to sell goods to customers; inability to access production space; and the cancellation of events (Flew and Kirkwood 2020; Florida and Seman 2020; Joffe 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022; Watson 2024).

One of the only discrepancies was that some of the existing literature on COVID-19 and the creative industries outlines job losses as a key financial impact (Eikhof 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021), however, this didn't emerge as a substantial finding in the context of my own research. Indeed, work by Banks and O'Connor (2021) which reports job losses as a key impact of the pandemic talks about this in relation to large cultural institutions such as the Royal Opera House, Southbank Centre and National Theatre. My lack of findings in this area is perhaps because I did not interview any larger cultural organisations, which with their larger assets, likely had different risk equations.

These findings on short-term impacts are important to outline, as they set up the discussion of informal sites of support and future policy reforms going forward, however, the most novel contributions of these findings come from highlighting the long-term implications of these economic losses. Indeed, there has been recognition in the existing literature that more research is needed on the longer-term financial impacts of COVID-19, both for the creative industries (Harper 2020; Joffe 2021; Popa et al. 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022), and smaller organisations more generally (Belitski et al. 2021). These findings on the long-term debt these micro-organisations have accrued as a direct consequence of the pandemic therefore help to contribute towards this gap, highlighting how these financial impacts are not just isolated to the immediate days and weeks following lockdowns, but rather take months, or even years to recover from; especially when accounting for building back the savings safety nets to pre-pandemic levels.

Exploring how different 'crises' impact organisations, particularly businesses, is not a new area of study (Panwar et al. 2015). Indeed, crises can take many forms: from extreme weather, to infrastructure failures to earthquakes (Herbane 2012; Herbane 2019; Panwar et al. 2015). In terms of

impacts on businesses, one of the most researched 'crises' in recent years has been the 2008 financial crisis and the recession which followed (Arrieta-Paredes et al.2020, Chen et al. 2018, Eggers 2020, Herbane 2010, 2012, 2019, Lee et al. 2015, Mills 2024, Panwar et al. 2015, Smallbone et al. 2012).

In line with my findings on the financial impacts of COVID-19, much of the research on the '08 crisis has also focused on the financial impacts. As different crises have different drivers, however, they also oftentimes have different impacts; with literature on the '08 crisis focusing in particular on business' ability to access finance/credit. (Smallbone 2012; Lee et al. 2015; Piette and Zachary 2015; Arrieta-Paredes et al. 2020; Eggers 2020; Mills 2024). A smaller number of studies also found wider impacts that were closer to my findings such as business closures (Panwar et al. 2015; Mills 2024), lost income (Mills 2024) and conserving resources (Smallbone et al. 2012; Panwar et al. 2015).

Importantly, however, in line with the wider 'crisis' literature, research on the '08 crash has overwhelmingly focused on SMEs and larger businesses (Herbane 2010; Herbane 2012; Smallbone et al. 2012; Panwar et al. 2015; Herbane 2019; Arrieta-Paredas et al. 2020), leaving a large gap for exploring how micro-organisations are impacted during times of crisis. This gap is particularly notable, given that research on crises recognises that the smaller the organisation is in size, the more vulnerable they can potentially be (Herbane 2012; Smallbone et al. 2012). My findings therefore contribute to this literature gap by outlining the experiences and types of financial impacts that micro-organisations face in times of crisis.

6.1.3 Creative impacts

Compounding financial insecurity from the pandemic and other concurrent crises have also bled into wider, longer-term 'creative' impacts. Indeed, with this research having taken place in creative districts, many of the micro-organisations that participated were affiliated with creative industries activity in some form. With COVID-19 acting as a catalyst for even greater levels of financial insecurity (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; de Klerk 2015; Campbell 2020; Haugsevje et al. 2022; Komorowski and Lewis 2023), micro-organisations affiliated with the creative industries felt as though they needed to minimise risk even further, with examples including a music organisation which also functioned as a small record label not putting out any new music from emerging artists,

and galleries not taking a gamble on new exhibitions or more experimental artists. This of course has negative implications, with risk taking being a key element of generating the creative and innovative ideas and practices that drives activity in the creative industries forward (Seddon 2005; Arewa 2011; Choi et al. 2018; Games and Rendi 2019; Kerrigan et al. 2020). One gallery in Shoreditch described this situation as follows:

> *"We aren't in a position to take any risks, whereas usually, we were so happy to take risks and be like, we really believe in this artwork, regardless of whether it sells, we love it. Whereas now, we have to start thinking, okay, we can only produce work that we know is going to sell"*
>
> *(Shoreditch Studio/Gallery)*

Further impacts were felt surrounding the risk taking practice of setting up new businesses, as exemplified by this quote from a bookshop in Manchester that was originally looking to set up a gallery space:

> *"My mission was always to open a gallery here in Manchester. So just pre-pandemic, we found a space, we went through the legal process, got planning, got permission, everything like that, and then the joys of the pandemic came. So, we pulled out of the space, and then during the pandemic, the cost of everything skyrocketed - from materials to new legislations that the government have introduced, we came back to it, and it was just far too expensive to open, and you know, the risk of the world being in the state it was, we just never opened the gallery"*
>
> *(Northern Quarter Bookshop).*

A bar in Liverpool summarised their shared position well by stating that *"instead of focusing on growth, they're focused on surviving, and that's a dangerous position"*. For micro-organisations I spoke to in the creative industries, this was the result of a combination of both their business finances taking a hit, as well as an awareness that the current arts funding landscape was not likely to support any new ventures. Regarding their struggles to find funding for setting up a new studio, one studio space in Birmingham further explained:

"We weren't established. It was probably 'pie in the sky' we'd get funding anyway. There does seem to be a reluctance to put money into non-established organisations at the moment".

(Digbeth Art Studio)

The above quote also demonstrates how this aversion to risk wasn't only being enacted by micro-organisations themselves, but also by the funders which facilitate their work in some cases. The above section has demonstrated therefore, how financial impacts can bleed into other spheres and create further follow-on impacts, as seen above with creativity and micro-organisations refusing to take risks or grow, stifling activity and innovation.

6.1.4 Creative impacts: Contributions to literature

The majority of literature on the creative industries context focuses on the economic impacts of the pandemic in terms lost revenue (Flew and Kirkwood 2020; Florida and Seman 2020; Joffe 2021; Khylstova et al. 2022). It would appear, therefore, that there is a gap for research which examines how the economic impacts of the pandemic have affected the wider creative landscape (Belitski et al. 2021). The above findings on economic impacts 'bleeding' into creative impacts through the minimisation of innovation and risk-taking behaviours helps to contribute towards this gap. These findings also have wider implications for the literature on micro-businesses and SMEs during times of crisis. As mentioned previously, in literature on the 2008 financial crisis in particular, research on the impacts perhaps unsurprisingly focus overwhelmingly on economic ramifications for SMEs (Smallbone 2012; Lee et al. 2015; Piette and Zachary 2015; Arrieta-Paredes et al. 2020; Eggers 2020; Mills 2024).

Indeed, if we can learn from the myriad of ways in which micro-organisations are impacted during times of crisis, it is possible to generate a more holistic understanding of how to better protect these actors and the value they create going forward. The next section will relatedly examine the ways in which the government failed to protect micro-organisations during the pandemic.

6.2 Issues with government support

Having demonstrated the main ways in which the pandemic impacted the micro-organisations that I spoke to, this section will primarily focus on highlighting some notable failures in the COVID-19 support provided by the national government, local authorities and their associated arm's length funding organisations; such as Arts Council England (ACE).

The government made available several different types of support to businesses in the UK throughout the pandemic, including grants, loans, furlough, business rates relief and VAT cuts. By the end of March 2022, an estimated £69 bn had been provided to businesses through various support schemes (Pope and Hourston 2022).

The most mentioned form of support received by the micro-organisations that I spoke to were grants. Most micro-organisations often didn't recall the specific names of the grants they received, but did note that although funded by the national government, the grants they received primarily came through respective local authorities. According to the Pope and Hourston (2022), some of the grants paid out by local authorities included: 'Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund' and the 'Small Business Grant fund', (April 2020 - September 2020), with £11 bn worth of grants dispersed to businesses; 'Local restrictions support grants', (September 2020 - March 2021), with a total of £5.3bn being paid out to businesses; 'Additional restrictions grants' (for businesses that require additional support/not covered by other schemes), (October 2020 - June 2021), with a total of £2.0bn paid out to businesses; the 'Restart grant' (April 2021 - June 2021), with a total of £3bn provided to businesses; and the 'Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant', (January 2022 - March 2022), totalling £456m dispensed to businesses.

Some micro-organisations also mentioned receiving support from Arts Council England (ACE) grants. ACE provided two main grant funds, the first was the 'Emergency Response Fund', making a total of £160m available for organisations that required immediate assistance (Arts Council England N.D). Following the emergency fund, in July of 2020 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2023b), ACE announced they would be assisting the government in distributing the a 'Cultural Recovery Fund' totally £1.57bn.

Another form of support which was often mentioned by micro-organisations was the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme or 'furlough' as it was otherwise called. Here, from March 2020 to September 2021, the government subsidised 80% of furloughed employees pay, up to a cap of £2,500 per month, with an estimated cost of £70.0bn by December 2021 (Pope and Hourston 2022).

It is clear, therefore, that the government had support on offer, but whether it reached everyone that needed it is another question. With regards to the micro-organisations I interviewed, most had received one of these forms of support, however, many were still barely scraping by. My findings revealed that groups that particularly suffered from a lack of sufficient government support were new/emerging organisations, organisations that conducted more 'behind the scenes' or non-audience facing work to support the creative industries, and freelancers associated with the creative industries. These will be explored in further depth below.

6.2.1 Issues with government support: New businesses left behind

My research revealed that some organisations which set up operations shortly before (or during) the pandemic found themselves ineligible for certain forms of support that were means tested, as they were still paying back investment loans, and/or did not have enough prior records to prove their income. This problem was mentioned by craft studios, a bookshop and a rehearsal room. An exemplary quote highlighting this issue comes from the rehearsal room in Liverpool:

> *"We didn't have established accounts, we're still shown as paying back the investment money, so you know, trying to claim all these different grants that were available, it's all means tested, and we didn't have any means to be tested".*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Rehearsal Room 2)*

The owner/manager of the same rehearsal room in Liverpool was further disadvantaged through his decision to draw dividends instead of a salary whilst his business was still in the early stages. Indeed, it would emerge that the government would not provide financial support for those taking dividends,

leaving the owner/managers of some micro-organisations to fall through these gaps in support (Excluded UK 2024, Henry et al. 2021). Though not about dividends, a similar story came from a coffee shop in Liverpool, who described their struggle to put together a 'proof of income', having only been open for 3 months before the pandemic hit.

The way in which the government calculated expected income for grants was therefore severely disadvantaging new and emerging businesses (Henry et al. 2021; Excluded UK 2024). Importantly, these are already some of the most vulnerable to closure due to their lack of established income, clientele, and being burdened with paying back investment grants.

6.2.2 Gaps in support for new businesses: Contributions to literature

There is very little existing literature which examines pitfalls in government support during the pandemic, especially work that is within the UK context and surrounds organisations affiliated with creative industries activity. The literature which does exist overwhelmingly focuses on freelancers in the arts (Eikhof 2020; Komorowski and Lewis 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Snowball and Gouws 2023), making the above findings on new organisations and owners paid on dividends being left behind rather novel.

One exception comes from Henry et al (2021), which recognised the exclusion of those drawing dividends as well as new businesses. This report highlighted the work of Excluded UK, a self described "grassroots volunteer run not for profit working towards bringing about an end to the exclusions in the UK government's COVID-19 financial support measures" (Excluded UK 2024, n.p). This organisation also recognises and advocates for new businesses and dividend paid directors who were left behind, alongside a comprehensive list of others who were excluded from what they term 'meaningful' government support: those who were newly self-employed; those earning less than 50% income from self-employment; PAYE freelancers; new starters; those made redundant before 19th of March; those denied furlough; Directors paid PAYE annually; and those on parental leave (Excluded UK 2024, n.p).

This list gives an idea of the scale of those who were left behind by government support - an estimated 3.8 million taxpayers, or 10% of the UK workforce (Excluded UK 2024). The above findings on new organisations and directors drawing dividends instead of a salary contribute towards the limited existing discussion of the groups that were left behind by government support.

6.2.3 Issues with government support: Non-audience facing work

The second way in which I found that micro-organisations were impacted by pitfalls in government support was more indirect and less widespread; being primarily associated with arts funding from the government arm's length body ACE. Specifically, I found that there were many 'behind the scenes' or 'non audience facing' freelancers - which provide critical support to the running of micro-organisations - that were let down by available support.

The types of freelancers that micro-organisations reported falling between the gaps included sound engineers, audio production companies, lighting engineers, roadies and tour crews. As I was interviewing micro-organisations rather than freelancers themselves, I was not able to gain insight as to why these groups were excluded, however, from existing research it would appear that factors such as contract relationships (Eikhof 2020), indeterminate employment statuses (Banks and O'Connor 2021), and intermittent periods of freelancing (Price 2021), left many ineligible for government support through the job retention scheme and self employment grants. De Peuter (2023), for example, found that individuals who earned less than 50% of their income from self-employment were not eligible for support.

From my conversations with micro-organisation owners, the exclusion of these freelancers from government support had very real effects on the operations of their business, as without these 'behind the scenes' workers, they are unable to deliver their regular programme of events. An illustrative example of this comes from a music venue that I spoke to in Liverpool:

> *"A lot of people in our supply chain and other businesses that we work with and artists that we work with haven't been supported. There are massive gaps that do also affect us because they affect key parts of the ecosystem that we exist within […] for instance, we rely heavily on, and*

work heavily with audio production companies and out of the 3 we work with, 2 haven't been supported, and its important for us that they are there, because we need them when we can re-open […] it seems like they've supported like, more of the public facing parts of the industry and not so much the ones that are kind of, not public facing".

(Baltic Triangle Music Venue 3)

Beyond freelancers, even some micro-organisations I spoke to that were more 'behind the scenes' in nature found themselves falling through gaps in support with regards to arts funding. A rehearsal room that I spoke to in Liverpool, for example, described how they were rejected from ACE funding as they found they didn't qualify for support. This judgement from the ACE ignores the vital role that rehearsal rooms play in the nurturing of music scenes, as highlighted by this quote from the same rehearsal room:

"If you're looking at the sort of journey of the musician to the stage, and beyond, we obviously play a very important role in that, this is like the nursery where they develop and write their songs and all that type of stuff. We are essentially, you know, if you take music shops out of the equation, we're the first step on the road to any bar in Liverpool or anywhere worldwide".

(Baltic Triangle Rehearsal Room 2)

It is clear, therefore, that criteria judgements by the government of who should and shouldn't receive creative industries funding in times of crisis were not entirely fit for purpose. Indeed, they ignored a significant number of freelancers and associated businesses which are critical to the functioning of creative activity. There needs to be a greater understanding therefore, at the government level of how creative 'ecosystems' operate, and an overhaul of the classification of different businesses for funding.

6.2.4 Gaps in support for non-audience facing work: Contributions to literature

There are very few studies which examine gaps in government support during COVID-19, especially regarding micro-organisations operating within or tangential to the creative industries in the UK. It is important that these misclassifications are highlighted, however, to ensure that policy is reformed, and support is more equitable going forward.

The limited literature which does exist, primarily on freelancers, corroborates my findings that many of these workers did not receive sufficient support (Komorowski and Lewis 2020, Eikhof 2020, Banks and O'Connor 2021, de Peuter et al. 2023, Snowball and Gouws 2023). My findings therefore contribute towards the growing evidence base that despite very large sums of financial support being available (Pope and Hourston 2022), a significant proportion of the UK workforce was still not able to access the support they needed; strengthening the case for policy reform in this area in the future. My findings further develop the existing literature by highlighting the 'domino effect' that excluding freelancers from support has on the wider creative "ecosystem" as one participant put it; in this case, the effects this has on micro-organisations and in turn the survival of creative scenes more generally.

6.3 Informal support efforts: Tackling inaccessibility

My research revealed that it was not only the government that micro-organisations sought support from during the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of 'informal' in this section refers to support that is organised and led by members of the same community that it is seeking to serve; (as opposed to government and arms-length support).

Within my research, I found that micro-organisations accessed two main of informal support throughout the pandemic: mentoring (by other micro-organisations); and intermediary support groups. Importantly, the idea of micro-organisations both inside and outside of the creative industries engaging in these types of informal support systems is not new (Campbell 2020; de Klerk 2015; de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Jamak et al. 2017; Lafortune et al. 2018; Rosyadi et al. 2020). What my research did reveal, however, is that micro-organisations were claiming that they were engaging with these informal supports more than ever before.

Importantly, I found that the informal support offered through mentoring and intermediary groups did not necessarily map neatly on to the gaps outlined above in terms of government support. Informal support was instead focused on different forms of 'gaps' - mainly a lack of accessible government support with regards to assisting with grant proposal writing and COVID-19 guidance (safety measures, risk assessments, COVID-19 restrictions and where to locate grants). The following section will therefore examine how both established micro-organisations and intermediary groups developed their own, more inclusive, informal practices to address the impacts of the pandemic, and the inaccessibility of certain government supports.

6.3.1 Informal support: Peer-to-peer mentoring and grant writing

Micro-organisations referred to one type of informal support as 'mentoring'. This primarily took the form of assistance with grant writing. This form of support was aimed at those applying for arts grants in particular, and as such was most relevant to micro-organisations whose primary operations were in the creative industries. As explored in the section above, some less established micro-organisations found themselves not qualifying for certain government grants that were available. Even micro-organisations that were eligible for grants, however, faced some difficulty in obtaining them.

Indeed, many of the less established micro-organisations had not yet applied for any grants prior to the pandemic beginning. Given the severity of the financial impacts of the pandemic, however, as explored in section 6.1, many micro-organisations were motivated to apply for grants for the first time. This was especially true for ACE grants, which already had the reputation amongst micro-organisations I spoke to of being difficult to secure funding from if you did not have the apparent insider knowledge of the language and arguments they were looking for. In this sense, there is evidently also a gap in support where newer micro-organisations felt as though they could have been better supported by the grant bodies themselves in applying for funds.

In response to this, some of the more established micro-organisations interviewed, who had prior experience of successfully applying for these grants took it into their own hands to mentor these less experienced spaces in grant writing, when they had capacity. This involved assisting with the writing itself of applications, answering questions and reviewing applications before they were submitted. An illustrative quote of these practices comes from a studio/gallery space in Birmingham:

> *"I was part of a cohort of people who were re-writing and checking over artist applications for that [ACE grants], I must have done about 40 of those, helping people submit emergency funding grants […] like, mentoring, because I felt like we were okay, I think we just tried to support other people".*
>
> *(Digbeth Studio/Gallery)*

As the above quote highlights, the more established organisations that felt they were 'okay' on the grant writing front therefore transferred some of their extra capacity to helping those who were less experienced. In terms of motivation for doing so, one craft studio in Birmingham described how oftentimes, micro-organisations operating in the same sphere recognise the importance of having a wider 'ecology' of others working in a similar field around them. Indeed, upon asking my participants about the value of their surrounding business community, many described knowing one another, having successful professional and personal relationships and collaborating together on events. This desire to help one another in times of crisis is aptly described by the following quote from a music venue in Liverpool:

> *"I'm competitive with [other music venue], but I work with them loads, and they're under threat […] I don't want to see any venue go because we all need to survive in order to create a scene, you want not just venues, but cafes and bars, you want people [to] come to the Baltic [Triangle], you want it to be a destination".*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Music Venue 2)*

As the quote demonstrates, there is naturally some competition with one's neighbours, but ultimately, I found a stronger desire amongst micro-organisations to see one another thrive for the good of the greater 'scene'. These findings also link back to the overarching motivations mentioned in empirical Chapter 4.. In particular, I believe these practices link back to an underlying ethos of wanting to nurture their respective scenes, in particular small scale, grassroots and emerging activity and scene members; many of which I found had no prior experience of grant writing. Support in the form of grant writing was offered by more established micro-organisations to other spaces both in their respective creative districts as well as on a national scale.

6.3.2 Peer-to-peer mentoring: Contributions to literature

There is very little literature available on micro-organisations utilising peer-to-peer mentoring as a form of support. The extremely limited literature on micro-organisations utilising mentoring is either non-specific about the forms this mentoring can take (Jamak et al. 2017), or is focused on structured mentoring programmes facilitated by bodies such as NGOs (Lafortune et al. 2018). In line with micro-organisations being a very under-researched area of study, generally literature on businesses seeking out mentoring from peers is discussed within the context of SMEs (Hamburg and Hall 2013; O'Brien

and Hamburg 2014; Shah et al. 2016; Rosyadi et al. 2020), rather than micro-organisations specifically.

The same gaps persist in the extremely limited creative industries literature on mentoring. Creative industries mentoring literature largely ignores micro-organisations use of mentoring, with the limited literature instead focusing on formal mentoring programmes with government consultants mentoring SMEs (Rosyadi et al. 2020), teachers mentoring students (Daniel & Daniel, 2015; Gaunt et al. 2012), or more established artists mentoring younger artists (Haugsevje and Henan 2024).

There are two noteable exceptions here, one comes from the latter paper from Haugsevje and Henan (2024), which presents an additional case study of a mentoring programme in which retired industry experts mentor emerging creative micro-businesses. Watson (2024) also discusses the demand for mentorship in regional music clusters. Whilst there is more of a focus on the formal opportunities that are available for musicians, particularly in Liverpool, Watson's (2024) research still highlights the importance and existence of informal mentoring relationships.

The mentoring structures presented in these findings which are informal and grassroots in nature, therefore present an alternate form of mentoring which contrasts the current literature on formal programmes run by government bodies (Haugsevje and Henan 2024; Rosyadi et al. 2020) and educational institutions (Daniel and Daniel 2015; Gaunt et al. 2012). Furthermore, writing was also rarely discussed as a form of mentoring within this existing literature (Haugsevje and Henan 2024), which instead focused on areas such as upskilling (Rosyadi et al. 2020; Haugsevje and Henan 2024), networking (Haugsevje and Henan 2024), career development (Gaunt et al. 2012).

My findings on micro-organisations utilising peer-to-peer mentoring does, however, link back to creative industries literature on bricolage and the idea of making do with the resources that are available (Baker and Nelson 2005; de Klerk 2015). Indeed, work by de Klerk (2015) recognises that mentoring can be a form of bricolage, through peer networks further building one another's skills, opening up career opportunities and creating working, collaborative relationships. In the case of my research, this skill development aspect of mentoring links to micro-organisations helping one another to build their grant-writing practice. These mentoring relationships also link to theory on "communities of care" by Campbell (2020, p.524), within the creative industries setting; describing

the loose, informal and often non-hierarchical support networks that exist in this sector, in particular surrounding nurturing relationships.

These communities of care, as noted with the empirical example above, are motivated through an ethos of collective solidarity and common struggles (Campbell 2020), as well as a desire to help others, and keep their organisations alive, which in turn, will help to strengthen the sector as a whole. Bricolage and communities of care within the context of organisations which operate within and adjacent to the creative industries is still a developing are of literature (de Klerk 2015; Campbell 2020), but these terms are still useful in developing our understanding of how these informal networks play a role in crisis mitigation. Ultimately, we can learn a lot about what support reforms are needed by looking at the gaps in support that these organisations have had to address themselves.

6.3.3 Informal support: Intermediary support groups

The second type of informal support mentioned by my participants was intermediary support groups. These intermediary groups, also known as facilitators (Haugsevje et al. 2022) or intermediary agencies (Munro 2017) in existing literature, can essentially be understood as networks of organisations and individuals that share a common interest or trait (Haugsevje et al. 2022; Tanghetti et al. 2022). An important distinction made by Haugsevje et al. (2022), however, is that unlike other intermediaries, the groups discussed in this section are focused on supporting 'producers' rather than 'consumers'. The types of intermediary groups engaged with by the micro-organisations that I spoke to tended to be founded by well-established community members, who have extensive experience in their respective scenes.

Most of the intermediary groups mentioned by micro-organisations existed prior to the pandemic, but pivoted to providing tailored COVID-19 support. Micro-organisations that I spoke to who fell through gaps in government support discussed finding these intermediary groups particularly helpful; especially with regards to discovering and accessing pots of funding they were potentially eligible for. The reach of these groups, however, and the nature of the assistance that they offered during the pandemic goes beyond the limited examples of gaps that were outlined in section 6.2.

Some examples from my research include groups for artists, hospitality businesses, rehearsal rooms and music venues. In existing literature, these intermediary groups can be facilitated either through meeting face to face (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Haugsevje et al. 2022), or communicating online (Campbell 2020; Karakioulafi 2022; Tanghetti et al. 2022). Within this research, however, the intermediary groups discussed by my participants were exclusively facilitated online through means such as email, Facebook and Zoom. This could perhaps be explained by the timing of data collection being at the height of the pandemic, when meeting in groups was prohibited. The scale of these groups could also be a contributing factor, as whilst some groups were focused on local activity, others were national in scale, meaning regular face to face meetings, even outside of a pandemic could be unfeasible.

These groups often act as a go-between for their community of interest and the government; one example is the Music Venues Trust (MVT). The MVT was mentioned as a key site of support by several of the micro music venues that were interviewed. Similar to the mentoring mentioned in above, a key area of aid regards these intermediary groups providing support by disseminating detailed grant guidance for more inexperienced organisations, as illustrated by the below quote from a music venue in Birmingham:

> *"We even got advice on how to structure our answers. Music Venues Trust had a full-time person that spent her time with Arts Council, on Arts Council applications generally, so, she knew how to answer questions, what they're looking for, and she gave all that advice. They even set up a service where your first draft submission, they will effectively mark it and give you feedback before you submit […] and that was all free of charge"*
>
> *(Digbeth Music Venue 1)*

Alongside assistance with grant writing, these intermediary groups were also key sites of support through their offering of wider COVID-19 guidance. This was often tailored to the specific area of industry that their community of interest specialised in. Micro-organisations I spoke to across the creative industries and hospitality sectors including venues, galleries, art studios, coffee shops and bars across multiple case study locations (Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester), engaged with these intermediary groups through regular zoom calls, where advice on pandemic health and safety, risk assessments; Covid restrictions and where to locate grants would be discussed. Importantly for

this chapter, one of the key reasons micro-organisations felt the need to seek out these intermediary groups was because they felt as though the official government support was so unclear.

Again, a variety of different micro-organisations (galleries, a rehearsal room, venues, coffee shop, co-working spaces, bookshops, craft beer specialist and bars) which spanned all case study locations felt as though they had to take the interpretation of these COVID-19 rules for businesses into their own hands, when they were already feeling stretched with having to furlough staff, navigate forced closures and figure out how to keep their organisation afloat. An illustrative quote comes from a bookshop in London:

> *"I felt like I've had to be very much on the front foot and say, 'right, if this is what they're rolling out in a week, how does that affect me? What do I need to do?' So for me, its been 12 months of a lot of thought and some sleepless nights"*
>
> *(Shoreditch Bookshop 1)*

In this sense it was felt as though crisis management had been almost completely shifted on to the individual organisation to navigate and seek support for, rather than the government offering sufficient support to ensure businesses understood how these rules would affect them. This was especially problematic as the cost of interpreting these rules incorrectly could mean huge fines or losing their license to operate. As one rehearsal room in Liverpool stated, it felt like they were dealing with their "own miniature crisis" regarding the lack of government help and guidance.

6.3.4 Intermediary support groups: Contributions to literature

There is a large literature gap for examining how micro-organisations utilise informal supports, including the use of intermediary groups. Relevant literature which does exist largely comes from the creative industries, however, even in this body of literature, there are still calls for there to be more research into the specific types of intermediaries which help to offset precarity through the "mutual aid" (de Peuter et al. 2023, p.383) they provide (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; De Peuter et al. 2023). Some of the different types of intermediaries that provide support in existing creative industries literature include unions (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Karakioulafi 2022; de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent

et al. 2023), professional associations (de Peuter et al. 2023), arts councils (Dent et al. 2023), as well as smaller and grassroots collectives/groups (Campbell 2020; Dent et al. 2023; de Peuter et al. 2023).

The types of intermediary groups in discussed in my findings are more in line with the latter smaller collectives, although there are only a few studies which focus specifically on support provided by these types of groups (de Peuter 2015; Campbell 2020). Additionally, many of these papers examine use of these groups by freelancers and individual workers (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Campbell 2020; Karakioulafi 2022; de Peuter et al. 2023), rather than micro-organisations. Prior studies highlight intermediaries providing support through organising protests (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Karakioulafi 2022; Tanghetti et al. 2022), policy lobbying (Tanghetti et al. 2022; Dent et al. 2023), fundraising (Karakioulafi 2022; de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent et al. 2023), data collection (de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent et al. 2023), skills development (Munro 2017; Haugsevje et al. 2022; Dent et al. 2023) and co-ordinating basic needs such as healthcare and meals for their members (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Karakioulafi 2022; de Peuter et al. 2023).

In contrast, the key supportive measures which emerged from this research centred around grant application guidance, interpreting COVID-19 rules, pandemic health and safety, risk assessments and accessing local grants; areas only also covered in the existing literature by de Peuter et al. (2023). Research done by Dent et al. (2023) noted that many intermediary support groups had to swiftly re-prioritise different forms of support to suit the changing needs of their members during the pandemic; which alongside my focus on micro-organisations rather than freelancers, could help to explain some of this variance. When considering that my research also exclusively examined intermediary support during the pandemic, these differences may have contributed towards the diversion that is evident between these findings and the existing literature regarding the types of support that these groups offer. The findings in this section could therefore help to build understanding of the continued critical importance of intermediary groups for supporting their members both inside and outside times of crisis.

6.4 Lessons for future policy reform

For public support to be both sustainable and inclusive in the long term, one option is to suggest reforms which incorporate lessons learnt from where micro-organisations were impacted the hardest, where gaps in support were found, what informal supports emerged and importantly, through asking those running these organisations what they need. Reforming support based on these findings can help to both aid in ongoing recovery from the pandemic and other concurrent crises, whilst also ensuring improved resilience against future shocks (Eikhof 2020; de Peuter et al. 2023).

Importantly, as stated in previous sections, many of the reforms proposed in this section are tied to challenges that existed for micro-organisations long before the pandemic started. COVID-19 and the perfect storm of other concurrent crises like Brexit and the Cost-of-Living Crisis have only served to exacerbate these problems to a critical point (Comunian and England 2020). In line with 'bottom up' approaches to developing policy (de Peuter et al. 2023), I asked those running micro-organisations directly what support they would like to see from the government and related arms-length bodies going forwards. Three main themes emerged from the data: tax reform; improving council relationships; and improving grant support.

Although this was not necessarily intentional, the three main policy reforms suggested within this section also somewhat map on to the impacts, gaps, and informal support measures discussed above. Tax reform surrounding extending VAT discounts and lowering business rates will allow for micro-organisations to build their finances back and establish improved financial resilience against ongoing and future crises, following the devastating impacts of the pandemic discussed in Section 6.1. Regarding the policy recommendation of local councils improving their relationships with micro-organisations; had local councils better understood how these spaces operate and how their respective 'ecosystems' of actors and spaces works, perhaps so many freelancers and micro-organisations would not have fallen through gaps in government support, as explored in Section 6.2. Finally, the policy recommendation surrounding improving ACE grant guidance for micro-organisations through accessible workshops and communication opportunities in turn targets the 'inaccessible' elements of government support that informal support mechanisms discussed in Section 6.3

6.4.1 VAT and business rates reform

Micro-organisations struggling to thrive with their assigned taxes is a problem that has existed since long before the pandemic started, however, it is an issue that continues to be exacerbated through the economic conditions the pandemic has set. Within my research, tax reform through the introduction of further tax breaks and discounts emerged as one of the most frequently requested forms of support going forward. This was mentioned by micro-organisations across all case study locations, and by a variety of organisation types, including bookshops, coffeeshops, bars and craftspeople. Despite this, there is very little discussion of tax support for micro-organisations, including those associated with creative industries, in the existing literature (Ross 2007; Hearn et al. 2007; Drake 2013; Newsinger 2015; Hemels 2017). Combined with the myriad of other financial impacts that micro-organisations have faced on account of the pandemic and concurrent crises as explored in Section 6.1, these spaces have reached a critical point where their tax situation desperately needs to be reassessed.

The micro-organisations that I spoke to which were successful in securing government grants claimed they would rather have longer-term assistance with VAT and business rates going forward, as opposed to short term grants. This suggestion proved popular due to the holidays/discounts on VAT and business rates that proved so helpful for micro-organisations during the pandemic. We know this practice is possible and happens regularly for larger institutions operating in the creative industries, indeed, in March of 2024, for example, former chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced that film studios in England will be eligible to claim 40% relief on gross business rates until 2034, a tax cut amounting to £470m (Croft 2024). Extending assistance with VAT and business rates, especially within the context of the ongoing Cost-of-Living crisis, will help these micro-organisations to feel more secure - both in their recovery from the pandemic, and as they navigate concurrent crises; as explained by a bookshop I spoke to in London:

> *"I think business rates is the most crucial thing the government really needs to address […] if the government is serious about maintaining jobs, but also vibrancy in the local high-street, if you are of a certain size, you should have business rates waived completely […] right now, business rates are the difference between me breaking even and me being profitable as a business, and yeah, I think the government needs to scrap that".*
>
> *(Shoreditch Bookshop 2)*

Extending VAT discounts and lowering business rates for micro-organisations would therefore represent a meaningful step towards developing inclusive and sustainable support for these types of spaces, because as the above quote suggests, these payments are often the difference for breaking even. At the very least, these changes should be implemented until micro-organisations have been able to build back their finances post COVID-19, Brexit supply chain issues have been resolved, and the cost of living has been lowered.

Some micro-organisations further suggested that any further government grants during times of crisis should be tax exempt. This was mentioned by a coffee Shop I spoke to in Liverpool, and a craftsperson in Manchester who described having to take the precaution of putting portions of government grant money into savings, as they didn't know how long they would be suffering financially and weren't sure if they would be receiving further monetary support. This practice, however, led to having to pay unexpected tax on these funds in the proceeding months. This problem could have been avoided, had the government provided a clear roadmap of their expected financial relief efforts, or minimised the tax taken from grants.

The above findings therefore provide an example of when tax breaks were used during an economic shock event (the pandemic), to protect micro-organisations. Indeed, this measure was so effective that micro-organisations are continuing to call for the implementation of tax breaks going forward.

The above policy reform recommendation surrounding tax breaks for VAT and business rates going forward, targets the financial impacts discussed in section 6.1, as well as their implications for creativity. Indeed, as mentioned above, extending VAT discounts and lowering business rates will help micro-organisations to re-establish some level of financial security, and perhaps also help with the re-building of monetary safety nets.

6.4.2 VAT and business rates reform: Contributions to literature

As mentioned at the start of this sub-section, there is very little literature available on the use of tax relief as a support measure for micro-organisations. There is some limited relevant literature, but this

concerns the use of tax relief to support the creative industries more generally (Hearn et al. 2007; Ross 2007; Drake 2013; Newsinger 2015; Hemels 2017).

Hemels (2017), for example, explains that tax relief can be an effective form of support for both the recipient and governments when planned and controlled well. Ross (2007) also makes the point that tax credits have been used for a long time with larger institutions in the entertainment industry (particularly in Hollywood). Much of this literature, however, only mentions tax breaks as a form of support in passing; not going into any detail regarding examples of what this would look like or why it would benefit its recipients (Hearn et al. 2007; Drake 2013; Newsinger 2015). Ultimately, some believe that tax relief is a type of support that would greatly benefit both micro-organisations and other actors in the creative industries, as argued by my findings. This idea, however, is yet to be fully unpacked in existing literature.

6.4.3 Relationships with local councils

The second area of improvement recommended by my participant micro-organisations, was that local councils should work on proactively strengthening their relationships with these types of spaces. Despite this being a key theme emerging from this research, there is a large gap with regards to literature which looks at the importance of local councils building meaningful relationships with smaller organisations (Cohen 2002; Kenny 2011; Ashton et al. 2024). This section will therefore highlight how local councils proactively building relationships can be key to micro-organisations survival and recovery during times of crisis.

In my findings micro-organisations in multiple case study locations (Liverpool and Manchester) - particularly in the creative industries (including arts organisations, galleries, studios, venues and crafts people) - described having attempted to build relationships with their respective local councils for a long time leading up to the pandemic, yet they felt as though they had largely been ignored. These organisations argued, however, that had local councils been proactive in developing relationships with them, they would have better understood their “creative ecosystem”: as one participant phrased it; how these spaces operated, and how COVID-19 support could have been tailored to address their specific challenges (Ashton et al. 2024, Gherhes et al. 2016). Some micro-organisations reported holding the belief that there is an existing bias, where local councils favour building relationships with medium to large organisations over micro-organisations; creating a gap in knowledge of how to support these smaller spaces. Indeed, when describing the lack of support for

micro-organisations, one participant said the following [organisation type and location redacted due to sensitive nature of this quote]:

> *"I feel like the whatever they're called, the forgotten 3% or whatever of people decided what they were gonna be called of people who are small business small directors, is not necessarily like a pandemic problem. I feel like that's an agenda response that exists, its a bias within the government outside of just the pandemic, so, like yeah there could have been more support but I'm kind of not so surprised that there wasn't, because I'm so just, so used to, and so expectant of being like shafted by the government at every opportunity whilst trying to do things as fairly and justly as possible that, yeah. There could have been more support but like there was never going to be any more support was there.."*

This quote further illustrates how this is very much an ongoing issue that has existed far before COVID-19. Indeed, had local councils, prior to the pandemic understood how these micro-organisations operated, the impacts on these spaces during the current poly crisis scenario could have been somewhat mitigated. An interesting example, however, whereby a micro-organisation felt as though they had reaped the benefits of their local council being proactive in building relationships comes from Liverpool. Liverpool has a representative for music venues on their local council, whose job has been to advocate for small spaces in the city, as described by the director of a rehearsal room in the city:

> *"We've got a guy in Liverpool City Council, its' his job to lobby for music businesses and run various arts programmes, so he's heavily involved in the music experience […] so I think, if it wasn't for him, you know, he's calling the guys at the rates office and being like make sure you give the music businesses, the various recording studios and rehearsal rooms, make sure we're included, which is very, very useful, but I know Brighton council, rehearsal rooms haven't got a pencil from them"*
>
> *(Baltic Triangle Rehearsal Room 1)*

This quote is exemplary of how councils that were more proactive in developing local relationships were able to give more comprehensive and tailored support, whilst other areas of the country missed out. Going forward, local councils should aim to make proactive efforts to establish

relationships with micro-organisations in their respective areas, given their vested interest in keeping business in their city flourishing. Building these relationships will aid in understanding the needs and wants of these organisations/businesses as they recover from past shocks and struggle through current crises, as well as building resilience for the future.

I recognise, however, that local councils are still suffering the effects of austerity which have been ongoing since 2010, during which time the Local Government branch of the Department of Local Government and Communities was stripped of around half of its funding (Gray and Barford 2018; Hasting and Gannon 2022). In the face of these extreme cuts, however, the local council in Liverpool has begun to establish some meaningful relationships with different micro-organisations in the city. Where councils already have these positions, they should be ensuring that going out on field visits to build relationships with micro-organisations is a key aspect of their job role. I believe this would be a valuable area of study going forward, to examine what factors and funding models amongst cuts, have allowed Liverpool City Council to establish members of staff who can advocate for certain types of micro-organisations.

To link these findings back to the gaps in government support discussed in Section 6.2, had councils understood the operations of certain micro-organisations, in particular newer spaces, who were still paying back investment loans and did not yet have enough records to be fairly means tested, perhaps these barriers could have been anticipated and these spaces could have been assessed for funds in a more equitable fashion.

Furthermore, although the issue of some micro-organisations not qualifying for creative industries support was an issue specific to ACE, Liverpool provided a case study location where gaps in ACE support was somewhat mitigated by strong relationships between the council creative industries micro-organisations - demonstrating the importance of this policy recommendation. Indeed, work by Ashton et al. (2024) also recognises the importance of having a named point of contact within local government, within the slightly different study context of examining how creative practitioners wish to be better supported by local government officers.

Ultimately, had more local councils formed stronger working relationships with micro-organisations in creative industries, perhaps there would have been more of an understanding of their operations, financial situations and the critical roles these ‘behind the scenes’ freelancers and micro-organisation

types enact within the creative 'ecosystems' they exist within. This is an important lesson to learn from for inevitable future crises, where should local authorities have a better understanding of the organisations that they aim to support, they should also be able to provide more targeted and effective support.

6.4.4 Relationships with local councils: Contributions to literature

Out of all the policy recommendations in this chapter, local governments being proactive in building relationships with micro-organisations has the least amount of literature currently published on the subject (Gray and Barford 2018; Hasting and Gannon 2022).

One of the more relevant existing studies comes from Ashton et al. (2024), which examined the ways in which creative practitioners wish to be better supported by local government officers in the UK. Although Ashton et al.'s (2024), study focus was on freelance individuals, rather than micro-organisations, there were many similarities between our findings. Ashton et al. (2024) also reported low levels of understanding between creative practitioners and local government officers, yet desire a desire to establish stronger working relationships. They further argue, that improved consultation is needed between these two groups of actors to establish more effective support for freelancers. This finding is echoed in the main argument of Section 6.4.3, calling for local government to establish improved understanding of the creative ecosystems in their respective areas, through building meaningful working relationships with micro-organisations. The similarities between Ashton et al's (2024) work, and the findings of this thesis demonstrate the demand and importance for the policy recommendation of local government actively working to build relationships, both with micro-organisations and members of the wider creative industries. Kenny (2011) also discusses relationships between local governments and artists, in this case through residencies, grants, projects and showcases. Regarding literature on micro-organisations specifically, Cohen (2002) focuses on art organisations in Philadelphia, where they found that to develop partnerships, arts organisations initiated contact with government agencies 43% of the time, government agencies reached out 25.1% of the time, and 26.1% of the time the collaboration was initiated jointly. This existing literature further serves to demonstrate that there is great demand for local governments to be proactive in forging and strengthening relationships in the context of the creative industries.

Finally, there is very little literature currently published on developing 'bottom-up' policy recommendations based on the experiences and recommendations of those working in the creative industries during the pandemic. The work which does exist, interestingly does not mention building relationships with local government as a suggested outcome (Henry et al. 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent et al. 2023). This could be explained by several factors including there being very little research on this area in general, as well as other studies covering different actors (freelancers), in different locations including North America and continental Europe (de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent et al. 2023). These findings, therefore, on micro-organisations in particular having a strong desire to build relationships with their respective local councils are novel and applicable both inside and outside times of crisis.

6.4.5 Additional grant support

Despite it being well known amongst micro-organisations that ACE funding is incredibly difficult to apply for, both in terms of understanding the application process and having the capacity to apply, there is a distinct gap with regards to academic literature that addresses this issue. There is a more general literature on the need to improve competitive grant funding processes, however, this is largely focused on the context of researchers applying for funding (Herbert et al. 2013; Schnädelbach et al. 2016; Vaesen and Katzav 2017; Schweiger 2023). Although there is some literature which mentions the struggles of micro-organisations associated with the creative industries in attaining public funding in passing (Badham 2010; Bain and McLean 2012; McLean 2014; Greer 2021), there is a need to go into greater detail in highlighting the specific struggles of these types of spaces. Furthermore, there is an outstanding need to address these gaps through recommendations that are directly informed by discussions with micro-organisations themselves.

As demonstrated in Section 6.3, whilst wrestling with the severe financial and creative impacts of the pandemic, many new and emerging micro-organisations were additionally struggling with the competitive grants ran by ACE; in particular with the grant writing process. This in turn led to the emergence of informal support structures to assist with grant writing. It was, however, not just these new and emerging micro-organisations that struggled with ACE grants during the pandemic; these competitive grants have long-standing issues that many micro-organisations have struggled with since far before the pandemic began.

Indeed, ACE grant applications had the reputation of being incredibly difficult to apply for amongst the micro-organisations that I spoke to, with stringent criteria that was difficult for many to understand. In particular, micro-organisations felt as though they did not have the insider knowledge of how to answer in the correct "gobbledygook speak of the Arts Council" as one organisation described; this subsequently discouraged them from applying. Even those who had applied for ACE grants before described how emergency and Cultural Recovery Fund grants were especially difficult to apply for during the pandemic, as one micro-organisation described [organisation type and location withheld due to the sensitive nature of this topic]:

> *"I've done a lot of arts council grants over the years, but the cultural recovery ones were, I mean.. just mashed my head, and I thought, I've done loads of these in the past, I'm a lawyer, I can sit infront of a document for hours, [but] what about people who haven't done this before?"*

From my interviews, it was clear that there were many different types of micro-organisations within the creative industries, both emerging and more established, that had very little to no experience in applying to ACE grants until the pandemic began. This was mentioned by galleries, studios, music organisations and music venues in multiple case study locations (Liverpool and Birmingham); speaking about either themselves, or about micro-organisations in the sector more generally.

Some of these micro-organisations explained that even before the pandemic, they simply did not have the capacity to apply for ACE grants. This situation was made even worse during the pandemic, when most of their already small teams were furloughed. Indeed, from the interviews that I conducted, it was not uncommon for only one or two individuals to be running these spaces, whilst also trying to balance their own personal lives and health during a pandemic. This meant that writing a singular grant could take months to be completed by an inexperienced team with only sporadic availability to work on such tasks. My participants therefore expressed frustration that oftentimes, medium to large organisations in associated sectors will have team members dedicated to writing grants and securing funding with years of tailored experience, giving them what they believe is an unfair advantage.

It is clear therefore, that issues with grant guidance and application processes have existed long before COVID-19, but these have only been exacerbated in recent years. The demand for associated policy reform is reflected in section 6.3 in particular, which highlighted how informal supports such

as peer-to-peer mentoring and intermediary groups had been assisting more inexperienced micro-organisations with grant proposal writing throughout the pandemic.

To target this need, as an arms length government organisation, ACE needs to make their grant process more accessible to micro-organisations, especially ones that are new, emerging or inexperienced. Organisations that we spoke to suggested that there should be more proactive and guided support from ACE that is tailored to micro-organisations, through activities such as well advertised workshops and regular opportunities for direct communication. Furthermore, some organisations suggested that there should be more opportunities to apply for grants specifically tailored to them; they believe that they should not be forced to compete against the standard of medium to large sized organisations, as they do not have the same resources, experience or capacity to write comparable applications.

6.4.6 Additional grant support: Contributions to literature

Previously, I noted how there is a more general literature which critiques the current competitive grant funding process. I caveated, however, that there was a strong focus within this literature on the context of academic researchers competing for funds (Herbert et al. 2013; Schnädelbach et al. 2016; Vaesen and Katzav 2017; Schweiger 2023). There are some overlaps between my findings and this more general literature; in particular surrounding capacity to spend considerable amounts of time preparing proposals with no guarantee of securing funding (Herbert et al. 2013; Schweiger 2023).

My findings, however, focus on the rather novel area of improving grant support for micro-organisations; those which engage in creative industries activity in particular. As expressed at the beginning of this sub-section, there is little literature which critically examines the funding structures for the creative industries (Badham 2010; Bain and McLean 2012; McLean 2014), especially within a UK context (Harvie 2015; Greer 2021). The literature which does exist is limited in the detail it offers, and largely surrounds the very last point that was made in the above sub-section; that creative individuals and organisations feel as though they are pitted against competitors unfairly.

In my own research, the micro-organisations I spoke to felt as though they couldn't compete with larger or more established organisations which had far more experience or dedicated employees for grant writing. This is a finding corroborated by Harvie's (2015) work on UK arts funding being awarded disproportionately to larger organisations. Other literature in the Canadian context instead concentrates on this idea of 'unfair' competition in the context of community arts (rather than micro-organisations), competing against more 'profit driven' forms of art, which are typically favoured by funding councils (Bain and McLean 2012; McLean 2014). Work by Badham (2010) in a similar vein finds that in Australia, individual community artists are at a disadvantage through being pitted against more 'traditional' artists which are typically favoured by funding organisations.

Ultimately, there has been a lack of academic attention paid to potential reforms for the Arts Council England application process. The above findings of this research which outline why micro-organisations find ACE funding to be inaccessible, as well as how to mitigate this through workshops, regular communication and tailored calls for applications provide an original contribution to this problem area.

6.5 Summary and contributions

This chapter therefore sought to explore the third research question of this thesis "how can micro-organisations in creative districts be supported through the challenges they currently face?". Building upon findings on the impacts of the pandemic, gaps in government support and the types of informal support that was utilised by micro-organisations, this chapter ultimately contributed a series of policy recommendations, that would aid in ensuring micro-organisations are able to continue their important roles in supporting scenes and shaping the ongoing development of creative districts going forwards.

Throughout this chapter, micro-organisations in creative districts have provided an interesting spatial context for analysis. Micro-organisations on account of their size already face precarity through resource constraints (Rostamkaalei and Freel 2017; Komorowski and Lewis 2023), and a lack of appropriate business support (Gherhes et al. 2016). This precarity is only further compounded by being based in creative districts, as many of the micro-organisations in these areas also either

operate within, or engage in activities tangential to the already precarious creative industries (de Peuter and Cohen 2012; Watson 2012; de Klerk 2015; de Peuter et al. 2023).

Section 6.1.1 outlined the financial impacts of the pandemic, particularly the loss of income due to forced closures. This section additionally outlined long-term implications associated with accrued debt and re-building lost savings. Section 6.1.3 then demonstrated how these financial impacts can bleed into wider 'creative' impacts, with micro-organisations minimising risk which has the potential to stifle innovation and growth. This discussion of impacts laid the foundation for discussing pitfalls in the government's pandemic response, which left behind many new businesses as well as non-audience facing workers and organisations through limiting inclusion criteria. Informal support provided by mentoring and intermediary support groups; namely with assistance on grant writing processes and interpreting COVID-19 guidance also revealed elements of government support which were inaccessible.

Outlining these impacts, gaps in support and areas of work for informal support helps to provide context as to both why policy reform is necessary, and where this reform should be targeted. This chapter therefore culminated by contributing three policy recommendations, for supporting micro-organisations post-pandemic. The first area of suggested policy reform regarded tax, in particular extending VAT discounts and lowering business rates for micro-organisations (linking to financial impacts of COVID, this could assist with rebuilding finances). The second policy recommendation surrounded local councils proactively responding to the demand for them to build relationships with micro-organisations in their area (had local councils understood these actors better, they may not have fallen through the gaps in government support). The third policy recommendation surrounded improving grant guidance for the government arm's length body ACE through accessible workshops and communication opportunities targeted towards micro-organisations (targets 'inaccessible' aspects of government support that were offset through informal means of support). This contribution is significant in expanding the very limited existing literature on micro-organisations during times of crisis, as well as the creative industries literature, which often neglects these types of spaces.

Literature on the impacts of different crises, for example, has overwhelmingly focused on large businesses and SMEs (Herbane 2010; Herbane 2012; Smallbone et al. 2012; Panwar et al. 2015; Arrieta-Paredas et al. 2020; Herbane 2019), rather than micro-organisations, which often face their own specific challenges (Gherhes et al. 2016). Indeed, my findings departed from existing literature

in several ways: with less of a focus on employment losses; more of a focus on longer term financial impacts such as debt and a loss of savings; and a demonstration of how financial impacts can bleed into wider creative impacts through stifling of innovation and growth.

The existing literature on gaps in government support during the pandemic is also very limited, especially with regards to research which focuses on micro-organisations, and those affiliated with creative industries activity. The literature which does exist overwhelmingly focuses on freelancers in the arts (Eikhof 2020; Komorowski and Lewis 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Snowball and Gouws 2023). My findings expanded upon this literature to explore how freelancers falling between gaps in support had a 'domino effect', which further disrupted the operations of micro-organisations. Additionally, my research has highlighted how new organisations and those with owners paid by dividends were also let down by government support efforts. These findings support a small, yet critically important literature which found that these groups, amongst others, were left behind (Henry et al. 2021; Excluded UK 2024, n.p).

A further contribution with regards to understanding how micro-organisations cope in times of crisis and how to support them pertains to their use of informal support. In particular, their use of mentoring and intermediary support groups for assistance with grant writing and interpreting COVID-19 guidance. Indeed, with regards to mentoring there is very little literature on how micro-sized organisations use this informal peer-to-peer support in a bricolage fashion (de Klerk 2015; Campbell 2020), with existing literature on peer mentoring focusing largely on the context of SMEs (Hamburg and Hall 2013; O'Brien and Hamburg 2014; Shah et al. 2016; Rosyadi et al. 2020). Within the creative industries literature, micro-organisations use of mentoring is largely ignored, with an exception from Haugsevje and Henan (2024). Creative industries mentoring literature also tends to focus on formalised mentoring programmes (Gaunt et al. 2012; Daniel and Daniel 2015; Rosyadi et al. 2020; Haugsevje and Henan 2024), rather than the informal mentoring explored in my findings.

There is also very little literature available on how micro-organisations use other means of informal support, such as intermediary groups. This gap extends to the creative industries literature, which largely focuses on freelancers rather than micro-organisations, with a limited number of papers recognising their use of smaller grassroots collectives for support (Campbell 2020; de Peuter et al. 2023). I found, however, that at least during COVID-19, micro-organisations use support groups for different means than freelancers, as there was less of a focus on assisting with grant writing and

government guidance interpretation in the existing literature, with an exception from de Peuter et al. (2023).

Finally, there is a gap in existing literature for examining how micro-organisations can be better supported by the government (Henry et al. 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent et al. 2023), particularly post-pandemic in the areas of tax reforms, local council relationships and improved grant guidance. To begin with tax reform, there is some limited literature on the use of tax relief to support creative industries more generally (Hearn et al. 2007; Ross 2007; Drake 2013, Newsinger 2015; Hemels 2017), but not necessarily micro-organisations. Despite its popularity within my research, there is also very little literature available on local governments generating meaningful working relationship with micro-organisations (Cohen 2002; Ashton et al. 2024); perhaps reflecting austerity cuts (Gray and Barford 2018; Hasting and Gannon 2022). Finally, with regards to improved grant guidance, whilst there is a more general literature which critiques the current competitive grant funding process (Herbert et al. 2013; Schnädelbach et al. 2016; Vaesen and Katzav 2017; Schweiger 2023), this is not specific to the challenges that micro-organisations face, and how they can be better supported through tailored workshops and communication opportunities.

Chapter 7 Thesis conclusion

7.1 Summary of findings

The overarching research aim of this thesis has been to understand how micro-organisations contribute to the ongoing development of bottom-up creative districts, using the lens of trans-local scenes. To explore this wider research aim, this thesis employed and answered three supporting research questions, which corresponded to Chapters 4, 5 and 6. These research questions have been investigated through a qualitative methodology of 44 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals that run micro-organisations in creative districts. These interviews were supplemented with qualitative content analysis undertaken on the public Instagram profiles of a select sample of 17 of these micro-organisations, with a total of 263 different Instagram posts analysed. Participant observation was additionally undertaken in 27 of these micro-organisations.

Chapter 4, the first empirical chapter of this thesis, answered the first research question: "what roles do micro-organisations enact in creative district scenes?". Through exploring the roles micro-organisations fulfil in their respective scenes, this chapter has built understanding of nature of the ties between micro-organisations and the scenes they participate in. This chapter has therefore provided an important foundation for the rest of the thesis to build upon; as to understand how micro-organisations interact with one another across space, it is important to first establish exactly how these spaces are tied to their associated scenes in the first instance. Specifically, this chapter presents a typology of the different cultural, financial and social support roles that micro-organisations enact, through which they integrate themselves into the fabric of their respective scenes.

Motivated by a desire to nurture small-scale, grassroots and emerging activity in particular, micro-organisations provided cultural support in the form of hosting events such as gigs, markets and workshops, to name a few examples. Cultural support also took the form of offering production/consumption space such as dedicated workspaces, facilities and equipment; as well as hosting pop-up markets and stocking select scene-related goods on a more permanent basis. Finally, micro-organisations provided cultural support through more established spaces providing training

and mentoring to other micro-organisations and individual scene members. This training typically took the form of technical upskilling, whilst mentoring focused on more informal conversations surrounding best practices and career goals. Motivated by a desire to boost the inclusivity of their respective scenes, particularly from diverse economic backgrounds (Brook et al. 2022, O'Brien et al. 2016, O'Brien et al. 2024), micro-organisations further provided financial support in the form of subsidising costs, providing affordable products/services for their patrons, and offering financial advice to other micro-organisations and scene members. This financial advice typically took the form of assistance with budgeting, rates and general business management. Finally, driven by a desire to create and sustain 'community', I found that micro-organisations provided social support to their respective scenes by facilitating spontaneous opportunities for socialisation through dedicated common spaces, as well as pre-planned networking events.

Having established how micro-organisations integrate themselves into the scenes that exist within (and between) creative districts, Chapter 5 then expands upon this foundation to explore the second research question of "how do micro-organisations interact with each other across space?". This research question is the most directly aligned with the overall research aim of this thesis. To expand on this, the scenes that micro-organisations participate in aren't just isolated to their immediate surrounding creative districts; instead, they are trans-local (activity related to the scene has 'transcended' a local boundary), often having a global reach. Within these trans-local scenes, micro-organisations across the world communicate and interact with one another through different physical and virtual 'mechanisms'. These mechanisms in turn allow for 'flows' of different scene-related information (about products, practices, advice) to pass between scene members across space. As the contents of these flows are picked up and implemented by different micro-organisations, this can manifest in a degree of trans-local scene uniformity in the aesthetics and practices observed in bottom-up creative districts across much of the developed western world.

To provide more specificity on this uniform model of 'ongoing development' that manifests across creative districts, Chapter 5 begins by outlining empirical examples of homogeneity in micro-organisation aesthetics and practices. For instance, with regards to aesthetics, micro-organisations in creative districts across much of the western world can typically be found: in ex-industrial warehouses or factory buildings; decorated with murals; embracing old fittings of concrete or stripped wood floors; steel beams and corrugated iron in the interior; and re-purposing old materials such as palettes, steel drums and particle board as furnishings. Practice based uniformity was found to be underpinned by wider overarching themes of supporting: emerging activity; inclusivity; independents; and local activity.

Micro-organisations utilise a variety of mechanisms to interact with one another and facilitate the flows that can lead to creative district uniformity. Chapter 5 begins by outlining the 'physical' mechanisms, starting with 'travel'. Here, micro-organisations were found to travel for 'scoping' trips, to deliberately learn from the operations and practices of other similar spaces elsewhere. Micro-organisations were also found to pick up inspiration for new business ideas, products and best practice whilst travelling for holidays. Further physical mechanisms included micro-organisations attending scene-related events, where they would enable flows through networking with attendees and sharing their products/practices with dispersed scene members. With regards to 'virtual' mechanisms, I found that micro-organisations used timeline posts on Instagram to share scene-related information which included new releases and trends. Instagram's instant messaging feature was additionally utilised by micro-organisations for sharing technical advice about products and processes across distance. Finally, I found that email was still a popular mechanism for micro-organisations to connect with one another across space to share advice and find scene-related products. Linking back to the overall research aim, this chapter has demonstrated how micro-organisations interact with each other across space through various physical and virtual mechanisms. These mechanisms in turn facilitate flows, which contribute to the uniform ongoing development of aesthetics and practices that can be observed across creative districts.

In collecting data exploring the first two research questions, however, it became apparent that I couldn't discuss the important roles micro-organisations fulfil in creative districts; whether that is through the providing support to their respective scenes as discussed in Chapter 4, or their pivotal role in facilitating the continued development of creative districts in Chapter 5, without recognising that these organisations are under threat. The poly-crisis scenario which unfolded as fieldwork was taking place (and beyond), has left micro-organisations in a vulnerable position, where many are struggling to stay open and perform these vital roles. The third research question explored in Chapter 6 was therefore: 'how can micro-organisations in creative districts be supported through the challenges they currently face?'.

This chapter began by outlining the financial impacts of the pandemic, particularly the loss of income caused by forced closures. Long-term implications associated with accrued debt and a loss of savings were also highlighted. Section 6.1.3 additionally illustrated how these financial impacts can bleed into wider 'creative' impacts, with a loss of innovation and growth through micro-organisations having to mitigate risk. This discussion of impacts laid the foundation for a discussion of the gaps in

the government's pandemic response, which left many new businesses, as well as non-audience facing workers and micro-organisations to fall through the cracks of stringent inclusion criteria. In these difficult conditions, my research found that micro-organisations were turning to informal support through mentoring and intermediary support groups, which aided with grant writing and interpreting inaccessible COVID-19 guidance in particular.

Building off the back of these discussions on impacts, gaps in support and means of informal support, this chapter finished with a series of policy recommendations regarding how government support for micro-organisations should be reformed going forwards. Importantly these suggestions were primarily derived from the suggestions of those running micro-organisations themselves. The first recommendation regards tax reform, in particular extending VAT discounts and lowering business rates for micro-organisations. This policy recommendation links back to the financial impacts of COVID-19 explored in section 6.1.1, as these tax reforms would allow businesses to save money to address their loss of savings and accrued debt. The second policy recommendation surrounded local councils proactively building relationships with micro-organisations in their area to better understand their needs. This policy recommendation links to Section 6.2's exploration of gaps in government support; indeed, had local government better understood these spaces, perhaps so many wouldn't have missed out on the support they needed. The third policy recommendation addresses the need for improved grant guidance from the government arm's length body ACE, specifically through accessible workshops and communication opportunities with micro-organisations. This policy recommendation addresses the 'inaccessible' elements of government support that drove so many micro-organisations to rely on informal means of support during the pandemic.

The first and last research questions, and their corresponding chapters (4 and 6) have therefore acted somewhat as 'bookends' to support the second research question, which is tied most directly to the overarching research aim. Chapter 4 established the relationship between micro-organisations and their respective scenes, in particular, how they integrate themselves through the critical support roles they enact. Chapter 5 then built upon this foundation to explore how micro-organisations interact with one another across space within these scenes through various 'mechanisms', which in turn enable trans-local 'flows' and contribute to the uniform model of ongoing development observed between creative districts. Given increased vulnerability due to the ongoing poly-crisis, in particular the lasting impacts of COVID-19, Chapter 6 then provides a series of policy recommendations, which would help to ensure that micro-organisations are able to thrive and continue to fulfil their important roles in supporting scenes and the ongoing development of the successful uniform creative district model.

7.2 Contributions

This thesis provides three main contributions, each tied to a respective empirical chapter.

7.2.1 Chapter 4 contribution: a typology of micro-organisation support roles within scenes

The contribution of the first empirical chapter, Chapter 4, is that it develops and unpacks a typology of the different cultural, financial and social support roles through which micro-organisations integrate themselves into their respective scenes. This contribution is particularly relevant for the more general 'scenes' literature. Indeed, existing scenes literature recognises that physical structures, are key components of scenes (Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Drysdale 2015; Woo et al. 2017), yet what is not established, is the process of exactly how these spaces become integrated within their respective scenes. This chapter therefore argues that scene integration happens through physical structures (in this case, micro-organisations), enacting various 'support' roles.

There is some more general literature on different spaces 'supporting' scenes (which this typology was adapted from), but this is extremely limited. Indeed, there are a few papers which look at distinctly different types of support such as cultural support (Gallan 2012; Brandellero and Pfeffer 2015), financial support (London 2017) and social support (Tironi 2012), although they often do not use this exact phrasing. These types of support are also very rarely unpacked and illustrated with examples. Furthermore, this literature is very much siloed, with each paper only examining one form of support respectively. This chapter therefore brings together these support types into a typology, unpacking their meaning and providing empirical examples.

Finally, a further sub-contribution of this first chapter is that it provides a contextual definition of scenes, as the concept relates to micro-organisations in creative districts. This is significant because literature employing the concept very rarely defines exactly what is meant by the term 'scene' in different research contexts (Silver and Clark 2015; Woo et al. 2017). I define scenes within the research context of this thesis as consisting of multiple component parts: a location (Straw 2004;

Silver and Clark 2016; Jousmäki 2017); physical structures (Kortaba and LaLone 2014; Drysdale 2015; Woo et al. 2017); individual scene members (Straw 2001; Silver et al. 2005; André et al. 2017); and a uniting scene 'interest' (Straw 1991; Straw 2001).

7.2.2 Chapter 5 contribution: Empirical examples of mechanisms utilised to facilitate flows, and the implications these have for development.

The main contribution of the second empirical chapter (Chapter 5), is that it provides empirical examples of the mechanisms utilised by micro-organisations to communicate with each other. These mechanisms enable trans-local flows of information to pass between scene members, and ultimately impact the ongoing development of creative districts. This contribution has implications for three different bodies of literature: trans-local scene literature, economic geography literature on knowledge flows, and the creative district development literature, each addressed through various 'sub-contributions'.

Before jumping into these, however, it is important to also highlight the overarching conceptual contributions of this chapter through the newly articulated terms of 'flows' and 'mechanisms' which have emerged in response to the existing 'restrictive' theory in economic geography. The term 'flow' is used, rather than 'knowledge' flow, because definitions of 'knowledge' in economic geography are overwhelmingly focused on tacit or codified categorisations (Lundvall and Johnson 2006; Howells 2012). This thesis argues that the tacit/codified binary is too simplistic, but critically; also not the focus of this study. Alternatively, this thesis focuses on

how micro-organisations interact across space, and consequently, the influence of these 'flows' on the continued development of creative districts. This contribution of the newly articulated concept of 'flows' therefore allows this thesis to surpass the rather simple tacit/codified binary and instead focus on more complex research problems (Bathelt et al. 2004), and the specific content of exchanges between micro-organisations.

The restrictive nature of the existing literature on global pipelines further necessitated the creation of the second newly articulated concept for this thesis; 'mechanisms'. Global pipelines are commonly understood as "formal, structured and thoroughly planned linkages" (Moodyson 2008, p.451), with specific conditions required to be created. Not all exchanges across space fit the global pipeline

criteria, or take place between the for-profit firms that are commonly discussed in this literature. A newly articulated concept was therefore needed to encapsulate the vast, alternate ways through which 'flows' are facilitated between actors.

This is why the concept 'mechanism' was implemented; which can be defined as a means through which a 'flow' can take place. The term affords the flexibility to encapsulate both physical and virtual ways in which flows are facilitated, and importantly, groups together these two (often siloed) categories together through a common ability to enable flows across space. The concept is deliberately broad; to allow for the ability to delve into the specificity of the contents of these flows without restriction.

Firstly, micro-organisations in creative districts provide a novel research context to look at mechanisms for enabling flows in their different forms. The trans-local scene literature on mechanisms for uniformity, for example, is almost exclusively focused on individuals within music scenes (Hodkinson 2004; Kraemer 2014; Reitsamer and Prokop 2018). Similarly, economic geography literature which looks at knowledge flows is heavily focused on the mechanisms behind these 'flows' as they relate to more traditional industrial firms (Bathelt et al. 2004; Bathelt 2007; Bathelt 2008; Moodyson 2008; Esposito and Rigby 2019; Bathelt and Li 2020, Harris 2023).

Secondly, as a result of this new study context, this chapter also contributes examples of new mechanisms for enabling flows in their different forms. Trans-local scene literature in particular, is far less developed than economic geography literature on the mechanisms that enable flows. Indeed, trans-local literature only mentions the potential of mechanisms such as events (Hodkinson 2004), some limited social media platforms, and email lists (Hodkinson 2004; Reitsamer 2012). Consequently, my findings on the physical mechanisms of travel for scoping trips, travel for holidays, and the virtual mechanism of Instagram present new, novel mechanisms to the trans-local literature on facilitating flows. The virtual mechanism of Instagram is also new to the economic geography literature on knowledge flows, where there is a significant gap for studies which research any form of social media (Tranos 2020). Moreover, my novel study context and exploration of more 'informal' mechanisms for sharing knowledge across space has challenged global pipeline theory in economic geography with regards to trust as a pre-requisite for sharing knowledge across space; demonstrating that this condition cannot be applied to all empirical contexts. Different sectors and the actors within them (such as micro-organisations), possess alternate motivations (e.g not being

driven by profit), which in turn nullify the idea that all exchanges of information across space are considered risky.

Thirdly, this chapter has demonstrated how these flows can influence the ongoing development of uniform micro-organisation aesthetics (exteriors, building materials, furnishings, décor), and practices (supporting emerging activity, emphasising inclusivity, supporting independents and local activity), across creative districts throughout much of the western world. This is consequential for the trans-local scene literature, which, as argued above is limited to explorations of uniformity as it relates to individuals in music scenes. Likewise, there is currently a gap in economic geography literature to examine uniformity in terms of how 'firms' learn, benefit and implement the knowledge they gain from mechanisms such as global pipelines and temporary clusters (Henn and Bathelt 2023); whilst a different study context, the findings of this thesis assist with addressing this gap through outlining the implications trans-local flow mechanisms have for uniformity amongst micro-organisations.

Finally, these findings on uniformity amongst micro-organisations in creative districts have implications for the creative district development literature. Currently, literature on the development of bottom-up creative districts is focused on 'development' only with regards to the factors which led to the very initial inception of these districts (Montgomery 2004; Mavrommatis 2006; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Blackburn et al. 2014; Bouch et al. 2016). There is a gap, therefore for findings which examine creative districts' evolution into the successful, homogenous, bottom-up model that can be observed across much of the developed western world; which the findings of this chapter address.

7.2.3 Chapter 6 contribution: Insight into how to best support micro-organisations in times of crisis

The main contribution of Chapter 6 is that building upon findings on the impacts of COVID-19, gaps in government support and informal support mechanisms, three policy recommendations are presented regarding how the UK government can better support micro-organisations going forwards. This contribution is significant in expanding the very limited existing literature on micro-organisations during times of crisis, as well as the creative industries literature, which often neglects spaces of this size.

Literature on the impacts of crises, for example, is overwhelmingly focused on large businesses and SMEs (Herbane 2010; Herbane 2012; Smallbone et al. 2012; Panwar et al. 2015; Herbane 2019; Arrieta-Paredas et al. 2020), leaving a significant gap to research micro-organisations, which often face their own specific challenges (Gherhes et al. 2016). Indeed, my research on COVID-19 impacts revealed less of a focus on employment losses compared to previous literature, and more of a focus on longer term financial impacts (debt, loss of savings); and the stifling of innovation and growth.

There is also very little literature available regarding gaps in government support during the pandemic, especially with regards to the experiences of those working in micro-organisations, hospitality and the creative industries. The most relevant literature comes from the creative industries, however, this is focused overwhelmingly on freelancers (Eikhof 2020; Komorowski and Lewis 2020; Banks and O'Connor 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Snowball and Gouws 2023). My findings further developed this area of research by demonstrating how freelancers missing out on support additionally caused a 'domino effect', which in turn disrupted the ability of micro-organisations to function without contracted workers. My research also highlighted that new organisations, owners that drew dividends instead of a salary, and some 'behind the scenes' organisations were further let down by government support (Henry et al. 2021; Excluded UK 2024).

Another sub-contribution regards how micro-organisations access informal support during crises, such as peer-to-peer mentoring and intermediary support groups. Indeed, there is very little literature currently available on micro-sized organisations accessing informal peer to peer mentoring (de Klerk 2015; Campbell 2020), as existing research focuses mainly on the scale of SMEs (Hamburg and Hall 2013; O'Brien and Hamburg 2014; Shah et al. 2016; Rosyadi et al. 2020). The creative industries literature also largely ignores mentoring at the micro scale (Haugsevje and Henan 2024) and tends to focus on formalised mentoring programmes (Gaunt et al. 2012; Daniel and Daniel 2015; Rosyadi et al. 2020; Haugsevje and Henan 2024). There is additionally little available literature on micro-organisations use of informal intermediary groups. As with other creative industries literature, where informal support is discussed, focus has been largely on freelancers rather than micro-organisations (Campbell 2020; de Peuter 2023), as well as being more focused on formal support groups, such as unions and professional associations (de Peuter and Cohen 2015; Karakioulafi 2022; de Peuter et al. 2023). Importantly, however, I found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, micro-organisations used support groups for different means than freelancers, with more of a focus on grant writing and government guidance interpretation (de Peuter et al 2023).

Finally, the policy recommendations put forward by this thesis in the areas of tax reform, local council relationships and improved grant guidance contribute to the significant gap for research to examine how micro-organisations can be better supported by the government post-pandemic (Henry et al. 2021; de Peuter et al. 2023; Dent et al. 2023). Beginning with tax reform, there is a limited amount of research on the use of tax relief to support the creative industries, but this does not include micro-organisations (Hearn et al. 2007; Ross 2007; Drake 2013; Newsinger 2015; Hemels 2017). There is also little research available on local governments working to develop professional relationships with micro-organisations (Cohen 2002), though there is some relevant work on the alternate context of freelancers (Ashton et al. 2024). Finally, whilst there is some more general literature that critiques the competitive grant funding model (Herbert et al. 2013; Schnädelbach et al. 2016; Vaesen and Katzav 2017; Schweiger 2023), this is not tailored to the specific challenges faced by micro-organisations, in particular how they can be better supported through targeted workshops and communications.

7.3 Future research

Potential avenues for further investigation have been identified for each of the three research questions and their corresponding empirical chapters. With respect to the first research question, Chapter 4 examines the support roles that micro-organisations enact within their respective creative district scenes. The bottom-up creative districts that I investigated were primarily populated with these micro-organisations; whilst top-down creative districts, in contrast, tend to surround larger anchor institutions (e.g large galleries and theatres) (Chapple et al. 2010; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Rius-Ulldemolins and Klein 2020). In my conversations with those running micro-organisations, it became apparent that they believed they were providing more cultural, financial and social support to grassroots and emerging scene activity than their larger counterparts. It would therefore be interesting for future research to undertake a comparative study of the support roles enacted by micro-organisations in bottom-up creative districts verses larger institutions in top-down creative districts.

Chapter 6 examined the physical and virtual mechanisms utilised by micro-organisations that facilitate trans-local flows and contribute to uniformity across creative districts. My fieldwork began

during a COVID-19 lockdown (March 2021) and finished in July 2022, only 7 months after the height of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. As mentioned in Chapter 5, I was therefore not able to discern whether the COVID-19 pandemic had revolutionised the mechanisms through which micro-organisations were facilitating flows between one another. Now that more time has passed, a possible area of further study would be to revisit knowledge flow mechanisms post-pandemic, to determine whether this disruptive event has had lasting effects on the practices of micro-organisations.

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis examined how micro-organisations can be better supported by the government post COVID-19, within the context of the ongoing poly-crisis scenario. It would therefore be useful to revisit the poly-crisis scenario as it currently stands, to see whether there are further policy areas that micro-organisations would benefit from being reformed. Indeed, even 4 years on from the UK officially leaving the EU Single Market and Customs Union on the 31st of December 2020, there are still new regulations being implemented that have the potential to seriously affect the ability micro-organisations in the UK to sell products to the European Union (British Chambers of Commerce 2024).

7.4 Wider relevance

Understanding how micro-organisations contribute to the ongoing development of bottom-up creative districts undoubtably has wider policy relevance.

Indeed, creative districts which follow this uniform pattern of ongoing development are attractive assets to policy makers, largely on account of their potential to contribute to local economies through the production and consumption opportunities they afford (Montgomery 2004; Brown et al. 2010; Blackburn et al. 2014; Hubbard 2016; Wise et al. 2022). Vital to unlocking these benefits, however, is an understanding of how these bottom-up creative district ecosystems operate, and the implementation of corresponding knowledge which ensures key actors in their development (micro-organisations), are supported appropriately (Moss 2002; Santagata 2002; Lidegaard et al. 2017). The findings of this thesis therefore have the potential to demonstrate to policymakers: the importance of micro-organisations and the support roles they enact for creative district scenes; exactly how

these spaces contribute to the development of the successful bottom-up creative district model; and policy recommendations for how these spaces can be better supported going forwards.

Finally, regarding the political relevance of this thesis, the 2024 Labour Party manifesto pledged further support for small businesses, entrepreneurs and the self employed; which they recognised faced their own unique challenges (Labour 2024a). It is therefore likely that the findings of this thesis are in line with the policy interests of the current government. The Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy has additionally announced an independent review of Arts Council England, launching in 2025. Two of the key priorities from this announcement include evaluating ACE's role in developing a creative sector that supports grassroots activity, and the facilitation of local voices in decision making (Department for Culture, Media and Sport et al. 2024). The similarities between these policy priorities, and the findings of this thesis, particularly surrounding how micro-organisations support emerging and grassroots scene activity in Chapter 4, and the policy recommendation in Chapter 6 of building of local government relationships, demonstrates this thesis' wider relevancy and potential for further impact.

Appendix A Semi-structured interview guide

(Exact questions would depend on organisation being interviewed)

Introductory questions

- What is your role at [micro-organisation name]?
- Where did the idea for [micro-organisation name] come from?
- Does [micro-organisation name] have a mission statement or ethos?
- Why did you choose to set up in [creative district name]?
- Are certain types of businesses attracted to [creative district name]?
- What were the influences for the interior design of the space?
- How do you curate the stock you sell? (if applicable)

Scenes

(Define scenes to interviewee)

- Do you feel as though [micro-organisation name] supports any scenes?
- What is the role of [micro-organisation name] within these scenes?
- Are the scenes that you support local?
- Are there any events hosted in this space?
- Do you support your scenes financially in any way?
- Have you directly influenced/inspired any other organisations/businesses?
- How do visitors typically use your space?

Trans-local questions

- Do you get visitors from outside of [city name]?
- How do people tend to hear about you?
- Are you part of a business community locally?
- Are you part of a business community which exists outside of [city name]?
- Are you in touch with similar businesses outside of [city name]?
- Do you collaborate with any other businesses locally?
- Do you collaborate with any other businesses outside of [city name]?
- Do you attend any events or festivals held for your business community?
- Do you know of any examples where yourself or another staff member has been influenced/inspired by another business?
- Where do you typically source inspiration from?
- Do any other businesses come to you for advice or inspiration?
- Do you have an online presence?
- What do you use your website for?
- What do you use your social media for?
- Who engages with your social media?
- Do you follow any other similar businesses on social media?
- Do you interact with any other similar businesses on social media?

COVID-19 questions

- How has your organisation been affected by COVID-19?
- Have you felt any long-term impacts of COVID-19?
- Has COVID-19 affected your ability to support your associated scenes?
- What support have you received during the pandemic?
- Do you feel as though there are any ways this support could have been improved?
- What type of support would you like to receive in the future?
- Are there any types of support that would make your recovery easier?

Appendix B Observation scheme

Uniformity

- What kind of building is [micro-organisation] in?
- What is the building decorated on the outside?
- What are the materials used to decorate the inside?
- How is the space furnished?
- How is the space decorated?

Introductory observation points

- Is there evidence of a mission statement/ethos?
- Is there evidence of the history of the organisation?

Scenes

- Is there evidence of the space supporting different scenes?
- Is there evidence of supporting local scenes?
- Is there evidence of supporting trans-local scenes?
- Is there evidence of events?
- Is there evidence of stocking products?
- How is the space being used?
- What kinds of people are in the space?
- What are people using the space for?

Trans-local scenes

- Is there evidence of a local business scene?
- Is there evidence of a trans-local business scene?
- Is there evidence of collaboration with other organisations?
- Is there evidence of the organisation's virtual presence?
- Is there evidence of the organisation's use of social media?

COVID-19

- Is there evidence of the impacts of COVID-19?
- Is there evidence of adaption to COVID-19?
- Is there evidence of support received with regards to COVID-19?

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