

HW CRAIC

Covid-19 and Creative Clusters

A real-time study of the impact of Covid-19 and associated support measures on the creative business community in Hackney Wick and the QE Olympic Park.

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#HW CRAIC

Graham Hitchen

Federico Vaz



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Loughborough
University
London

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1. Introduction

This project investigated the impact of, and recovery from, the Covid-19 pandemic on the creative communities in and around Hackney Wick, Fish Island, and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in East London. It combined quantitative and qualitative research and pursued a design for policy methodology to inform London and UK-wide policy on creative clusters.

The Hackney Wick/Fish Island (HW/FI) and Olympic Park (QEOP) cluster brings together small and micro-creative businesses with large and significant creative employers (such as BT Sport and Sadler's Wells Theatre) in a very small physical footprint. It is also home to Loughborough University London and parts of University College London (UCL), Staffordshire University London, and Liverpool Media Academy. However, despite being an area with a large number of creatives and a designated Creative Enterprise Zone¹, HW/FI's organic creative economy has been at increased risk for several years².

From the available literature on the emerging impact of Covid-19 on the Creative Industries, a clear pattern was emerging of significant disruption on a sector made up of a very large number of under-capitalised small and micro-businesses. Some sub-sectors thrived – particularly games and software and digital services— others, like film, initially struggled but revived, but most other sectors ceased working or pivoted into new activities³.

According to research conducted in December 2020 by the Centre for Cultural Value, in collaboration with the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (ibid), the six months following the beginning of lockdown saw the collapse in working hours across the creative industries, including 55,000 job losses in music, performing and visual arts, and drastically higher than average numbers of people leaving creative occupations compared to previous years⁴. Meanwhile, the number of freelancers in the sector declined by 38,000 between the end of 2018 and the end of 2020⁵, which is of concern given the creative industries high reliance on freelancers⁶.

The existing and ongoing research provides invaluable insights and macro-level evidence to inform national policy-making on creative clusters. However, there is still a need for understanding

¹ The Mayor of London's Creative Enterprise Zones initiative launched in 2018 and designated seven areas in London (Croydon, Haringey, Hounslow, Lambeth, Lewisham, Waltham Forest, and Hackney and Tower Hamlets) where artists and creative businesses could find permanent affordable space to work, supported to start-up and grow, and access localised help to learn creative sector skills and pathways to employment: <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/arts-and-culture/culture-and-good-growth/explore-creative-enterprise-zones/about-creative-enterprise-zones>

² Creative Enterprise Zone. (2018). Hackney Wick & Fish Island Creative Quarter: A Creative Enterprise Zone Research Study.

³ Owen, G., O'Brien, D., Taylor, M. (2020). A jobs crisis in the cultural and creative industries. *Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre*. Online: <https://www.pec.ac.uk/blog/how-covid-19-is-impacting-the-cultural-sector-with-the-loss-of-55-000-jobs-in-the-arts>

⁴ March 26, 2020: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/timeline-lockdown-web.pdf>

⁵ Florisson, R., O'Brien, D., Taylor, M., McAndrew, S., Feder, T. (2021). The impact of Covid-19 on jobs in the cultural sector – part 3. *Centre for Cultural Value*. Online: <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CV/resources/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-jobs-in-the-cultural-sector-part-3/>

⁶ Easton, E., Beckett, B. (2021). Freelancers in the Creative Industries. *Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre*. Online: <https://pec.ac.uk/policy-briefings/freelancers-in-the-creative-industries>

creative economy dynamics at micro and mezzo levels to develop insights for specific and localised support measures.

Working with businesses and community partners over 12 months from September 2020, this project sought to understand how Covid-19 had affected creative community activities and business models and people's changing attitudes to their future prospects. The project was led by a steering group of local partners and brought together national and regional advisers specialising in creative cluster development. It also included a programme of collaborative workshops to develop and test new interventions and support measures.

These were carried out following a design-led approach to developing public policies. Through this approach, and taking account of the research objective to understand the experience and impact of Covid-19 on activities, business models and changing attitudes, the research addressed itself to the following questions:

- How has the Covid-19 experience changed community and business interactions?
- Which (national and local) interventions have worked?
- What can we learn to shape future support/interventions to help build a more robust and agile creative cluster?

Moreover, the project aimed at co-developing:

- A shared understanding of the factors that make the creative community resilient;
- A set of recommendations for UK-wide interventions to support other creative communities.

To address these questions and achieve the research aims, the researchers refined and adopted a specific approach based on immersion and design for policy. This is represented in a four-phase model consisting of capturing insights, co-designing futures for the local creative communities, co-designing preliminary policy ideas to achieve those futures, and developing a prototyping framework for local authorities to test them before implementation. Each of these phases is accompanied by an independent report⁷. The approach allowed for the researchers' immersion within the local creative communities to co-develop insights that could help local agencies in developing more effective support mechanisms.

The following four sections describe the project's research approach, the methods utilised, the findings from each phase, and its conclusions.

2. The Research Approach

In addressing the project's research questions, the researchers looked at

- Assessing how businesses in the cluster were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and their plans for recovery and future growth;
- Evaluating the impact of Government and other interventions to support small businesses;
- Providing insights into the impact of Covid-19 on entrepreneurial attitudes among the creative business communities;
- Providing insights into the impact of Covid-19 on the broader ecosystem including local support networks;

⁷ See HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights; HWCRAIC Report 2: Design Futures; HWCRAIC Report 3: Policy Design Workshop; and HWCRAIC Report 4: Policy Prototyping Framework.

- Capturing secondary research of the impact of Covid-19 on other businesses and clusters in London and nationally;
- Influencing future policies to support more resilient creative clusters;
- Working with the GLA and other regional partners to inform policy and interventions in London over the coming years.

To conduct this research whilst navigating the particularities of the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP, a four-phase iterative model was developed (see Figure 1).

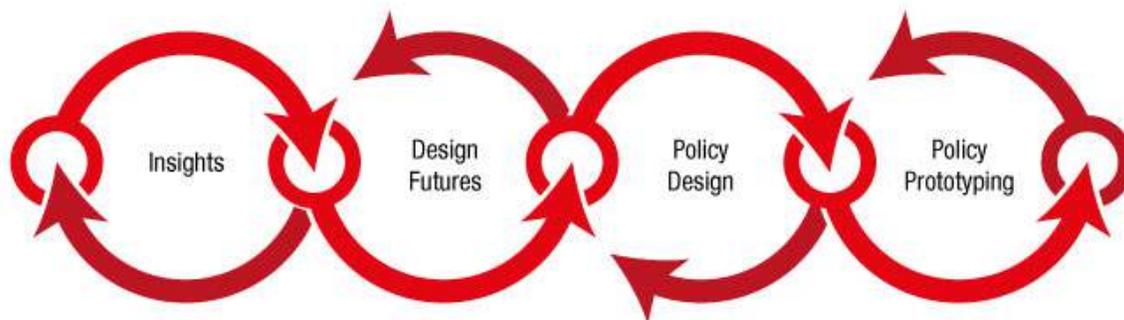


Figure 1: Four phases of the developed design for policy approach.

This model visualises the different stages in the research project while emphasising their iterative nature. Each of these phases implies different levels of immersion within the creative community, as well as actions and expected outputs.

1. **Phase 1 | Eliciting information and insights on the situation creative businesses face and their post-pandemic perceptions and outlook:** This first phase, significantly influenced by the strictures associated with lockdown in the UK, entailed the immersion of the researchers in the local communities by observing and participating in diverse activities and forums. Individual and group interviews with various actors were conducted at this stage, and a Citizen Science survey of c.100 creative practitioners and business leaders was conducted. In addition, a review of the emerging literature on the impact of lockdown on the creative sector nationally provided contextual insights and perspective against which to assess the challenges for creatives in HW/FI and the QEOP. These activities, undertaken over an extended period, offered a set of preliminary insights⁸ to inform the second phase.
2. **Phase 2 | Develop shared, preferred futures for the communities:** In its second phase, and through a series of activities involving actors in HW/FI and the QEOP, the research looked at developing shared future visions of the creative communities moving into post-pandemic scenarios. The purpose was to find common narratives that allowed for the alignment of desires, ambitions, and resources towards attaining what the communities understand as preferred futures. In this phase, future thinking was used to invite participants to move beyond the issues currently affecting them and envision prospective scenarios for the local creative communities. The conceptualisations and imagery generated at this stage were used to initiate policy conversations and as a framework for their desired outcomes⁹.
3. **Phase 3 | Design intervention and policy ideas:** The third phase involved co-designing preliminary policy instruments and interventions that could facilitate the realisation of the preferred futures envisioned in the previous phase. To achieve this, a series of activities,

⁸ See HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights.

⁹ See HWCRAIC Report 2: Design Futures.

including a co-creative workshop with diverse actors of the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP, and policymakers and representatives of the local agencies and authorities, took place. In this phase, the insights elicited at previous phases were used to frame challenges that could be co-creatively addressed by the members of the local communities. Once validated, these provided guidance into the specific areas the policy interventions should target. The co-design activity in this phase aimed at bringing together different local actors to embed themselves and actively contribute to the development process of interventions and support mechanisms that could be implemented locally. This agile process aimed to enhance policy interventions' success by increasing their legitimacy and addressing nuances in policy issues through the input of varied relevant actors¹⁰.

4. **Phase 4 | Developing a policy prototyping framework:** The fourth and last phase centred on the development of a prototyping framework to aid local agencies in the testing and validation of policy ideas moving forward. The objective of this work was to create a model which would enable policymakers to incorporate situated knowledge obtained from the previous stages into practical solutions to alleviating some of the issues faced by the local creative communities whilst enhancing their resilience. Modelled on best practice, this framework aims to support the development of a series of prototypes to test potential solutions to help develop the preferred futures for the creative communities within HW/FI and the QEOP.

The four phases of the approach developed and adopted for this research project were based on the researchers' immersion within the local creative communities and the pragmatist principles of design for policy. The following two sub-sections provide further details into each of these pillars.

2.1 Immersive research

This research project looked at shedding light on the impact of Covid-19 on the creative communities in-and-around Hackney Wick, Fish Island, and the Olympic Park. It started by inquiring:

- How has Covid-19 changed community and business interactions?
- Which (national and local) interventions have worked?
- What can we learn to shape future support/interventions to help build a more robust and agile creative cluster?

Shortly after kickstarting the project, it became apparent that the planned research approach, which was heavily reliant on surveys, would not grant the expected results. Amongst other reasons, this related to the particularities of the population of this study during a period of extended lockdown. Consultation fatigue and different levels of vulnerability hindered data collection through surveys, especially those that could expose the creatives. Moreover, various organisations, including the HWFI Creative Enterprise Zone, were already conducting or had recently conducted quantitative studies over the same target population. Furthermore, and no less important is the fact that Loughborough University in London is a moving part of the ecosystem where the research occurred. Therefore, it puts the researchers in a particular position regarding the development of research activities to inform policy.

These difficulties in accessing reliable data and recognising themselves as part of the broader community subject of study led the researchers to adopt a different approach. Instead of focusing on

¹⁰ See HWCRAIC Report 3: Policy Design Workshop.

establishing an ‘objective’ assessment, the approach would be that of co-creating interventions informed by design research.

Loughborough University London is located in Here East, in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (see Figure 2). Besides being inside the geographical border of this study, its location enabled the researchers to visit the area to capture observational data regularly.

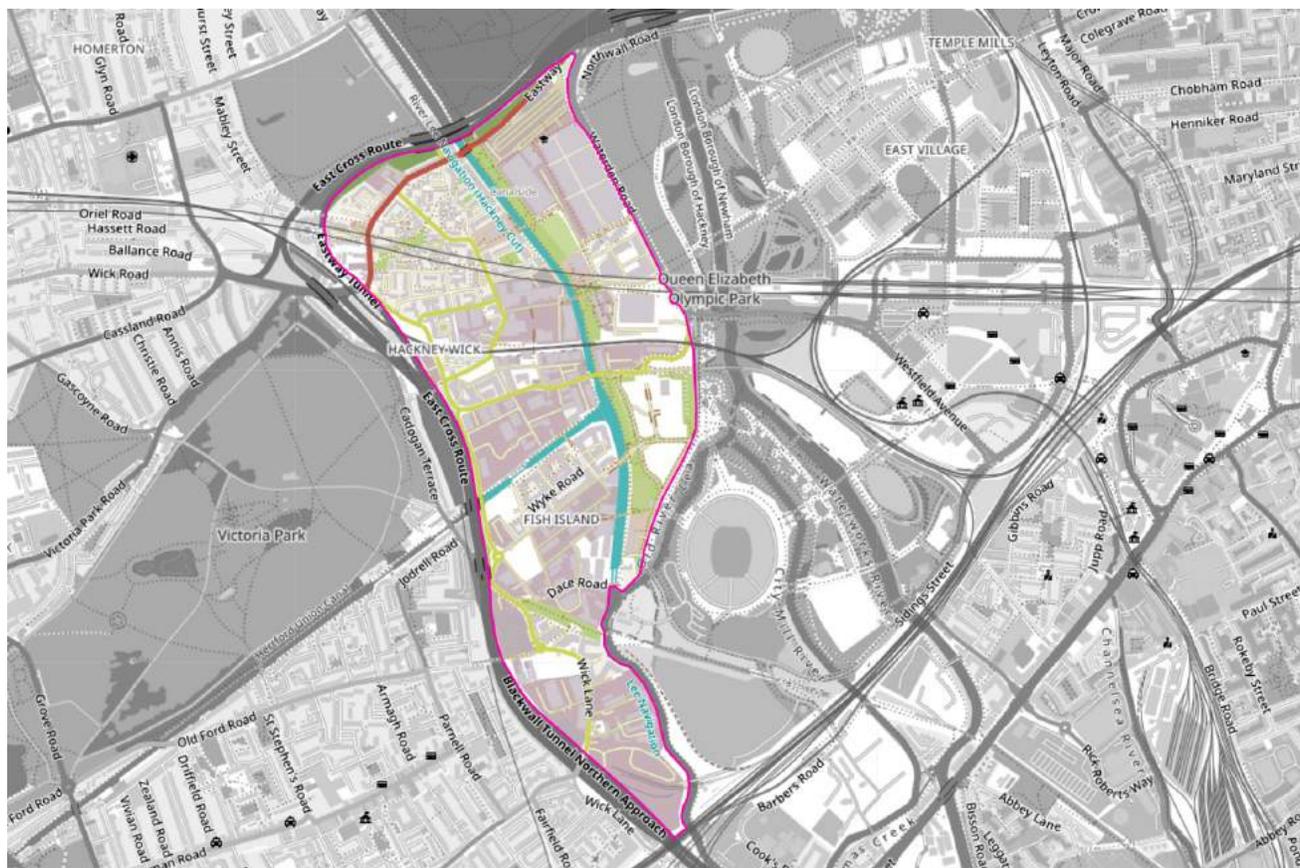


Figure 2: Geographical boundary of the study.

The immersion also responded to a certain sense of urgency to some extent. Not only that the creative communities require immediate aid for their survival, but a delay in capturing the learnings of the pandemic as it unfolded might have meant a lost opportunity. Therefore, this was a real-time study. However, in spite of the possibility of capturing learnings about the ongoing events, it also presented the researchers with specific barriers. Amongst them are:

- Limited social interactions in public spaces that complicated collection of observational data;
- Online meetings fatigue added to the consultation fatigue already present in the target population;
- Changing governmental advice and restrictions continuously disrupted planning research activities.

To overcome these issues, the researchers opted for pursuing a multi-method approach that draws on participatory research¹¹:

¹¹ Lennie, J., & Tacchi, J. (2013). Evaluating communication for development: A framework for social change. Routledge.

Seven key components underpinning this framework:

- Participatory;
- Holistic;
- Critical;
- Realistic;
- Learning-based;
- Emergent;
- Complex.

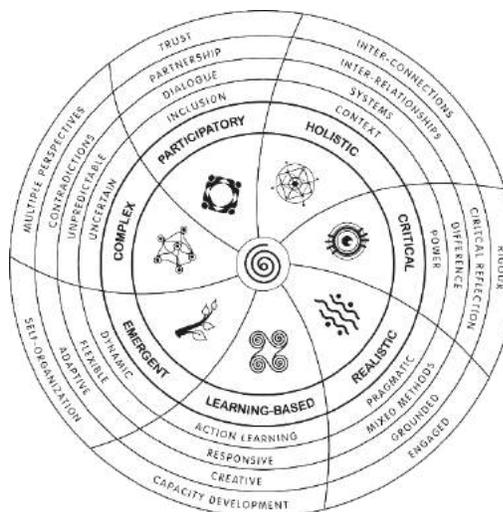


Figure 3: Communication for Development Evaluation Framework, Lennie and Tacchi (2013).

Likewise, it takes inspiration from Ethnographic Action Research¹² (EAR). This methodology combines research with project development through three research approaches:

- Ethnography;
- Participatory techniques; and
- Action research.

Adopting this approach is relevant for this project since an EAR is recommended:

- When there is a desire to understand and involve users or target groups and understand their social, cultural, economic and political environments;
- When an initiative is flexible and will respond to research findings in order to become more relevant to its users;
- When the initiative team will value research as an essential and ongoing component of their initiative’s development.

(Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003).

In practice, this meant engaging with the creative communities in and around HW/FI and the QEOP to investigate the effect Covid-19 has on their creative practices whilst jointly developing understandings of how to enhance their robustness and resilience. To articulate the needs and desires of these diverse communities into actionable policies and support mechanisms, the research adopted a design for policy approach.

2.2 Design for Policy

The research approach to this project was based on ‘design for policy’ (DfP), an emerging yet growing field of research and practice that utilises design tools and methods to provide new understandings of policy issues while co-developing interventions with diverse actors affected by those same policy issues¹³. Several design-based approaches are being deployed within policy-

¹² Tacchi, J., Slater, D., & Hearn, G. (2003). Ethnographic action research.

¹³ Whicher, A. (2020). AHRC Design Fellows Challenges of the Future: Public Policy.

making and government services resulting from growing recognition of their capacity to understand and address complex societal issues¹⁴.

Core to the design for policy approach is capturing insights and developing situated understandings of socio-cultural and economic problems. In this way, the actions oriented to strengthening a particular sector or community are primarily based on the protagonists' understanding of their issues and knowledge about potential solutions.

This creative, user-centred approach to problem-solving involves engaging users, stakeholders, and delivery teams at multiple stages of the policy process. This novel approach to policy development is gaining momentum at the local and central level, and there is currently "growing interest in government on what design can achieve for policy-making and priority agendas like innovation, digitalisation, creative economy, circular economy and health" (Whicher, 2020, p3.).

More generally, design is an inherent pragmatist discipline, thus aiming at changing reality. It is based on four principles¹⁵ that can be implemented in a variety of solution-oriented projects:

- People-centricity;
- Visual and inclusive collaboration;
- Co-Creation;
- Iteration.

Therefore, design research often acts as the 'armed wing' of social research¹⁶. For this project, the adoption of a design-oriented approach implied:

- Shape and test approach on the ground;
- Consultation and co-development with communities affected;
- Engage policy and research communities to test potential solutions.

In practice, this immersive approach to design for policy was implemented through various complementary methods.

3. Methods

The investigators opted for a research design that favoured community engagement and used this approach to elicit learning and provide a platform for co-creating policy instruments and support measures.

To achieve this, the research project implemented three established research methods¹⁷:

1. Observations;
2. Interviews and focus group; and
3. Citizen science.

¹⁴ Bason, C. (2014). *Design for Policy*. Surrey, UK: Gower Publishing Limited.

¹⁵ 'What is the framework for innovation? Design Council's evolved Double Diamond'. Design Council, 2015: <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/what-framework-innovation-design-councils-evolved-double-diamond>

¹⁶ This was a phrase adopted in the steering group meetings, first used by Professor Andrew Chitty, to illustrate how the research method adopted led to the researchers becoming activists in a process of change.

¹⁷ For a detailed account see HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights.

Besides complementing each other, these methods looked at progressively and iteratively refining the project's research questions.

3.1 Observations

As a research method, observations have the potential to generate more valid data than inferential or mediated methods¹⁸. Therefore, conducting studies in the field is crucial to understanding what participants are saying contextually.

Qualitative observation occurs when the researcher takes field notes on the activities and behaviour of people in their context¹⁹. In doing this, the researchers document the activities at the research site in an unstructured or semi-structured fashion, based on questions relevant to their inquiry (ibid). These observations are usually open-ended since the researcher “asks” questions of the participants permitting them to provide their answers freely (ibid). The observations are then summarised into more significant descriptive generalisations that aim at describing their context and interactions. Finally, after collating the gathered data, the researchers develop subjective descriptions based on several generalisations to move from the specific to the general²⁰.

For this project, observations were conducted between September 2020 and March 2021 and ranged from walks in the area and talks to local creatives and shopkeepers, to participation in local forums and events. Some of these visits were coordinated with members of the local communities, whilst some were impromptu walk rounds that allowed capturing glimpses of the area's activity under different levels of Covid-19 restrictions.

3.2 Interviews & Group Discussion

As in other forms of qualitative research, this investigation had the researchers as the primary instrument for data collection and inductive analysis of the meaning and understanding of the phenomenon²¹.

For the project's Phase 1, a number of open-ended interviews were conducted with key participants to clarify certain aspects of the observations or answer specific questions. These qualitative interviews typically involve unstructured questions intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants and are usually conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or in focus groups with a small number of participants⁶. All three types were conducted for this study, including online focus group interviews.

Between October 2020 and March 2021, 21 unstructured interviews were conducted with 24 relevant actors of the local creative communities. These included: agencies, workspace providers, cultural and educational institutions, local businesses, and researchers.

In addition, in November 2020, a group discussion was held online. This one-and-a-half-hour-long session included a maker resident of Fish Island, a Hackney Wick social innovator, the COO of a

¹⁸ Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge

¹⁹ Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. London: Sage publications.

²⁰ McNabb, D. E. (2018). *Research methods in public administration and nonprofit management (Fourth ed.)*. New York: Routledge

²¹ Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

creative company in Here East, a Hackney Wick workspace provider manager, the director of a creative company in Hackney Wick, and a representative from an arts HEI in Here East.

In pursuing the above, the researchers systematically interrogated participants about three main aspects:

1. How have you and your business activities been affected by Covid-19? What are you doing differently? What are your plans for the future?
2. What support programmes have you accessed? What has and what has not worked?
3. How can we do things better to support a strong and vibrant creative community in the future?

To overcome the difficulties of reaching certain members of the creative communities within HW/Fi, the research also appealed to more participatory methods to allow the community to produce part of the insights informing the project.

3.3 Community participation: citizen science

To further engage the communities in the development of this project, the researchers partnered with Creative Wick's Living Lab²². This collaboration involved the co-commissioning of a survey based on the principles and practice of public participation and collaboration in scientific research known as 'citizen science'. This implies the public's active involvement in scientific research by executing tasks normally conducted by scientists²³. A citizen scientist "is a volunteer who collects and/or processes data as part of a scientific enquiry. Projects that involve citizen scientists are burgeoning, particularly in ecology and the environmental sciences, although the roots of citizen science go back to the very beginnings of modern science itself"²⁴.

This approach served two primary purposes. On the one hand, it helps gain new insights by gathering large-scale or hidden data inaccessible to researchers²⁵. On the other, it increases participants' interest and knowledge about the subject matter²⁶.

For this collaboration, the Living Lab recruited and trained 16 HW/FI residents to understand some of the issues affecting the local creative communities. In this project, we refer to these collaborators as 'citizen scientist'.

The section below summarises the main findings from each phase of this study.

4. Findings

The following sub-sections offer an account of the main learnings and insights of each of the project's phases.

²² Creative Wick's Living Lab: creativewick.com/living-lab/

²³ Bonney, R., Ballard, H., Jordan, R., McCallie, E., Phillips, T., Shirk, J., & Wilderman, C. C. (2009). Public Participation in Scientific Research: Defining the Field and Assessing Its Potential for Informal Science Education. A CAISE Inquiry Group Report. *Online Submission*.

²⁴ Silvertown, J. (2009). A new dawn for citizen science. *Trends in ecology & evolution*, 24(9), 467-471.

²⁵ Raddick, M. J., Bracey, G., Gay, P. L., Lintott, C. J., Murray, P., Schawinski, K., ... & Vandenberg, J. (2009). Galaxy zoo: Exploring the motivations of citizen science volunteers. *arXiv preprint arXiv:0909.2925*.

²⁶ Land-Zandstra, A. M., Devilee, J. L., Snik, F., Buurmeijer, F., & van den Broek, J. M. (2016). Citizen science on a smartphone: Participants' motivations and learning. *Public Understanding of Science*, 25(1), 45-60.

4.1 Phase 1: Insights

The project's first phase aimed at eliciting insights about the perceptions and the post-pandemic outlook for creative businesses in HW/FI and the QEOP. For this, the researchers looked at immersing in the communities. This took different forms, including:

- Observations;
- Interviews;
- Group discussion;
- Citizen Science.

In the immersion process, the researchers undertook in-depth discussions and observations with a variety of local actors. Some of these are highlighted in the project insights captured below:

- **The Exchange (The Yard Theatre)**²⁷: During the pre-immersion stage, the researchers interviewed The Yard theatre's local producer, Katherine Igoe-Ewer. During the interview, Katherine explained The Yard's role in developing a project called 'The Exchange', aimed at "delivering weekly packages to households in need of a little extra support" in Hackney Wick and the E20 area. Interestingly, Katherine explained that they already had "more volunteers than jobs" shortly after starting the project". This is a fascinating example of how an organisation in the creative economy developed a project to support the community in which they are located by mobilising people and redistributing resources within it. Moreover, despite being hit hard by the pandemic, The Yard Theatre is one local cultural organisation that has kept on transforming its offering. Furthermore, The Yard Theatre has recently been able to secure a 125-year lease in a building close to their current location in Hackney Wick and are currently raising capital to reuse the existing industrial building to increase their seating capacity by 80% whilst maintaining the original aesthetic of the place.
- **The Wick newspaper**²⁸: In their own words, "the purpose of The Wick is simple: to celebrate the creativity, the industry and the people who make this place special". Against the trends, in November 2020, The Wick newspaper launched its first issue - a published newspaper, circulated (mainly by hand) to a broad range of creatives, various retail outlets and stakeholders across the area. This inclusive, collaborative, and open newspaper - featuring and contributed to by local people - is an excellent example of how the community can locally produce high-quality publications and the appetite for such initiatives.
- **Hackney Wick Underground**²⁹: Hackney Underground is a new community-led coworking space in the heart of Hackney Wick. Located opposite the Hackney Wick Overground station, this new space takes advantage of an unused key asset. At the same time, this new endeavour is led by some of the community members who recently faced the closure of Stour Space —one of the most emblematic workspaces in Fish Island— due to the non-renewal of their lease. This is a salient example of the community's ingenuity and drive to foster and nurture its creative potential despite the vicissitudes. This case shows both the community's entrepreneurial spirit and the precarity of their conditions, especially in relation to the exploitation and ownership of the space in the area.

²⁷ For more information on The Yard Theatre's The Exchange see: <https://theyardtheatre.co.uk/events/the-exchange/>

²⁸ For more information on The Wick newspaper see: <https://thisisthewick.com/>

²⁹ For more information on Hackney Wick Underground see: <https://hwunderground.co.uk/>

- **Studio Wayne McGregor³⁰**: Studio Wayne McGregor (SWMG) is the world-class creative art space at Here East in QEOP by multi-award-winning British dance choreographer Wayne McGregor. During the first lockdown, their three dance studios (including two of the largest in London) had to be closed. However, SWMG pivoted their offering by adapting their studios for film productions that were allowed to continue. At the same time, they reached an agreement with their landlords to make use of idle space in Here East, which they transformed into space to train dancers to go back to work once the restrictions eased. This case shows the adaptability of some organisations that go beyond their own survival to also consider the implications for the creative community to which they belong.
- **Cell Project Space³¹**: Cell is one of the many workspaces in HW/FI and the QEOP. Contrary to what might be expected, the workspace maintained 100% occupancy of its office and study spaces. However, this is not the norm. Understanding the strategies implemented by Cell is key to capturing what has worked and extracting lessons learned that could be adopted by other workspaces. Moreover, Cell Project has partnered with the Creative Land Trust (CLT) to manage up to 180 artist studios in the Telford Homes developed space at Stone Studios, Hackney Wick, in the historic CLT's first studio acquisition.

Each of these examples gives an insight into the ways in which the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP were responding and adapting as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and helped inform the research questions and processes in the following phases.

Furthermore, during Phase 1, a piece of complementary research in the form of 'citizen science' (CS) was conducted in partnership with local, community interest social enterprise Creative Wick³².

The results³³ show that –much like the national trend identified by the Centre for Cultural Value and the PEC— the music, performing, and visual arts sub-sectors appear to have been hit the hardest. Most significantly, however, as a result of the restriction measures, nine out of ten participants have adapted their activities, with about half working from home during the pandemic. This relatively swift adaptation is reflected in responses to questions regarding new business activity, with almost 40% of the respondents declaring to have developed new services during the crisis. In addition, the CS research revealed that half of those people and businesses surveyed claimed to be better prepared to deal with future Covid-like challenges. Meanwhile, in terms of accessing Government and other support, one of the most problematic aspects highlighted by the surveys is the lack of awareness around the government support services offered (local or central).

There was a marked difference in impact between businesses in HW/FI and those in Here East. To a large extent, these differences in impact are linked to the organic vs artificial growth in the local creative businesses. Whereas the majority of creative businesses in the QEOP have been located or relocated to the area as part of different efforts to revitalise the Park and its environs, including infrastructure development, and diverse support measures, the creative communities in HW/FI (especially those in live/work spaces) pre-date these developments and form part of the area's original organic growth and the availability of large spaces for developing varied creative expressions.

³⁰ For more information on Studio Wayne McGregor see: <https://waynemcgregor.com/>

³¹ For more information on Cell Project Space see: <https://www.cellprojects.org/>

³² *Creative Wick* is the trading name of Hackney Wick and Fish Island CIC, an independent non-profit, social enterprise, Community Interest Company "established to help preserve Hackney Wick and Fish Island as a permanent, sustainable creative cluster": creativewick.com

³³ The complete results obtained from this complementary piece of work are available on the Living Lab's report 'We need each other more than ever': <https://creativewick.com/living-lab/>

That is, whereas the former can be linked to specific redevelopment policies, the latter developed for lack of them.

From this first phase, several preliminary insights were distilled to refine the research questions further. Highlighted amongst them are

- The area is not a 'cluster' so much as a community or group of communities;
- The existence of a large informal economy;
- There is a physical and cultural divide between some of the communities;
- There is an existing interplay between local and non-local actors;
- The impact of Covid-19 amongst creative sub-sectors was uneven, including on living as well as working conditions;
- Some local creative communities are tired and financially stretched;
- Many local creative people and businesses had been able to adapt and change their business models and practices;
- Especially in HW/FI, adaptability was possible due to self-help networks, which, on many occasions, proved more effective than official government networks;
- The last decade has seen an increase in pressure on affordable workspaces for creatives in HW/FI, which threatens the survival of some of its creative communities. With the arrival of new creatives (especially to the QEOP), the physical requirements for these workspaces have also changed.
- These new creatives also bring new knowledge and specific skill sets that are not always abundant or available locally. In the future, there will be a need to ensure local talent is developed to feed these new creative sub-sectors. Big organisations, including local HEI, will need to play a role to strengthen the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP.
- This will require strengthening the current and development of new local networks that facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources.
- Crucial to the flourishing of social and business local networks is the existence of appropriate spaces to work, meet, trade, exchange, learn, and live.

4.2 Phase 2: Design Futures

The three sessions conducted during the Design Futures phase offered valuable pictures of how the creative communities see themselves moving forward. Focussing on the notion of 'space', three main themes were identified:

- **Workspace:** The creative communities see HW/FI as an inspiring area that offers plenty of development opportunities. They aspire to see affordable workspaces in which knowledge, ideas, and resources are available and shared.
- **Living space:** The rising housing prices added to the demolition of warehouses to build new apartment buildings puts increasing pressure on creatives that have suffered significant financial drawbacks due to the Covid-19 crisis. The participants involved in this project clearly stated the need to guarantee affordable housing whilst safeguarding the remaining work/live spaces. The latter not only responds to the need for affordable housing but also to preserving the area's ethos and aesthetics.
- **Public space:** The influx of capital in the area has been beneficial for developing green areas, which proved vital for the residents during lockdown periods. These, however, are located mainly in the QEOP, and there is still a divide between it and HW/FI. Furthermore, in terms of the creative businesses' health, mobility restrictions and social distancing measures have negatively affected the interactions and flow of ideas and resources that used to take place in

HW/FI. However, the participants expressed their confidence in incorporating the lessons learned during the lockdown period, where social support networks and online forums made a significant difference for the subsistence of residents and local creatives.

4.3 Phase 3: Policy Design

The third phase of the research centred on co-designing potential interventions that could facilitate the realisation of the preferred futures envisioned in the previous phase. Four themes were developed from phases 1 and 2 that helped guide the work during the policy design workshop with diverse actors from the local creative communities and agencies:

- **Change:** This theme relates to the seemingly constantly changing nature of the area:
 - Creative people and businesses have been remarkably agile and resilient, able to adapt and change their business models and practices.
 - In some respects, the last 15 months (March 2020 - June 2021) may not have been as challenging and destabilising as initially thought, with research suggesting creative community resilience and adaptability.
 - HW/FI has always been a site of change.
 - Change was happening all around and did not stop for the pandemic (building developments, people, interactions); change is a constant.
- **Space:** The notion of 'space' (its conditions, uses, resources, constraints) was rendered central by interviewees and participants throughout the project:
 - Lack of dedicated play spaces
 - HW/FI as one big play-space.
 - Pressure on the (affordable) workspace.
 - Demand for collaborative spaces.
 - New spaces are required (post-pandemic), and an imaginative approach is needed. The issue is not simply about more affordable workspace; it is about different spaces, catering for changing communities and needs, and the changing living and working patterns of all communities.
- **Knowledge:** The high concentration of creatives in a small footprint has implied the development and concentration of specific knowledge. In the last five years, this has increased significantly due to the arrival of several cultural and academic institutions:
 - A big pool of local history and community connection.
 - Extant strong self-help knowledge networks were particularly valuable during the pandemic.
 - Trust issues hinder the flow of knowledge and information within and across the local creative communities.
 - Five HEIs established on the QEOP make up for an extraordinary knowledge hub.
 - There is a need to ensure that the knowledge in these HEIs is generated with and for the local communities.
- **Networks:** Despite not being treated as a 'cluster', local communities have over the years developed networks to exchange information, knowledge, and resources. These comprise

both bottom-up (organic) and top-down (agency interventions) networks with a diverse scope, legitimacy, and effectiveness.

- Most effective support interventions during the pandemic have been locally oriented and locally delivered.
- There is a proliferation of successful 'self-help' networks, such as ECHO, the CIG, the Exchange, the Wick Newspaper, and now Library of Things.
- New cross-Park networks are needed (connecting HW/FI and the rest of the QEOP).

4.4 Phase 4: Policy Prototyping Framework

This phase focussed on developing a framework for prototyping early-stage policy ideas to support the creative communities in Hackney Wick, Fish Island (HW/FI) and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP).

Prototyping is a common practice in many disciplines to develop, test, and improve ideas early before committing resources at large for its implementation³⁴. In the design field, prototyping is an iterative cycle (Build-Run-Analyse) with a major role in its process³⁵. Designers prototype to get an answer to that question before moving to the next iteration in the design process.

Given that this project adopted a design for policy approach, the notion of prototyping was introduced as one of the fundamental stages. Based on several prototyping toolkits, the proposed framework allows policy teams in local agencies to follow a guided approach to exploratory and developmental prototyping to help them test policy ideas at different levels of conceptualisation with diverse stakeholders. Acknowledging that not all policy teams are necessarily familiar with the notion of policy prototyping, the framework facilitates the process through a series of questions for all skill levels, differentiating between *exploratory prototyping* (utilised to test the demand and viability of policy ideas) and *developmental prototyping* (implemented to test specific components of a policy).

To illustrate its use, Report 4: Policy Prototyping Framework describes the step-by-step application of the framework for an *online hyperlocal creative directory*, one of the preliminary policy ideas co-designed during Phase 3.

5. Conclusions

Through this project, the researchers looked at gaining an understanding of how the Covid-19 crisis changed the community and business interactions, the effectiveness of national and local interventions on the local creative businesses, and generating insights into how to shape future support mechanisms for a more robust and agile creative sector.

For a number of companies and sectors, the strictures on physical interaction accelerated a trend towards digital, with companies seeking to provide services and experiences remotely. Indeed, as became evident in Hackney Wick, Fish Island and the Olympic Park, the pandemic facilitated the development of new practices and services and, in some cases, new business models, as companies

³⁴ NESTA's prototyping framework: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/prototyping-framework/>

³⁵ Villa Alvarez, D., Auricchio, V., and Mortati, M. (2020) Design prototyping for policymaking, in Boess, S., Cheung, M. and Cain, R. (eds.), *Synergy - DRS International Conference 2020*, 11-14 August, Held online. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2020.271>

adapted and developed entirely new ways of working. Similarly, a report by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre focusing on museums and galleries highlights a trend that became a feature of a number of other sectors:

“Some people reported that this pivot forced their organisation to change for the better, transforming how they engage with audiences and plan for the future.”

Kidd, Nieto McAvoy, Ostrowska, 2021³⁶.

That process of adaptation was very evident among the group we engaged with, and there is considerable evidence of business re-orientation and a remarkable positivity about the future. Nevertheless, it is important to state that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic and mainly negative impact on the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP. The creative communities in the area of study have also been subject to increasing pressure from the redevelopment associated with the 2012 Olympic Games and its consequent gentrification process (see figure 4), which has continued unabated. However, this impact has been substantially different for the creatives at each side of the Hackney Cut. Whilst many of the creative businesses at the QEOP have managed to adapt their business models, a large number of the creatives in HW/FI have struggled to pivot their businesses fully.

Although this does not mean creative businesses in the QEOP have not suffered from the pandemic, in many cases the nature of their activities and other factors has meant, in general, a very dissimilar impact to those in HW/FI, with some companies in the videogames sub-sector, for example, doubling in size during this period³⁷.

³⁶ Kidd, J., Nieto McAvoy, E., Ostrowska, A. (2021). Pivot to Digital: How Museums and Galleries Responded to COVID-19. *Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre*. Online: <https://www.pec.ac.uk/discussion-papers/pivot-to-digital-how-museums-and-galleries-responded-to-covid-19>

³⁷ See Delancey. (2021). Here East Impact Report 20/21. Online: <https://hereeast.com/news/here-east-launches-impact-report-2021/>



Figure 4: Graffiti outside the Hackney Wick Overground station, August 2021.

What's clear, however, is that the way in which businesses adapted was not necessarily assisted by government intervention. Some blanket policies failed at addressing particular issues of the local creative communities, primarily by ignoring that their creation is linked to very specific contextual conditions in the first place. For example, some of the creatives in HW/FI currently operate in precarious conditions and are ineligible for some specific forms of governmental support, such as the Job Retention Scheme. A more profound understanding of the characteristics of these communities is needed to provide support measures able to alleviate their shortcomings. An example of how this can be tackled is 'Wick Freelancers', "a new free peer-to-peer business support programme for creative freelancers based in and around Hackney Wick & Fish Island who want to

- Adapt and thrive post-lockdown
- Build a supportive network of like-minded freelance and self-employed creatives
- Create space for strategic thinking and problem solving"

(HWFI Creative Enterprise Zone, 2021)³⁸

The programme launched by HWFI Creative Enterprise Zone in collaboration with ECHO³⁹ in August 2021 implicitly acknowledges the deficiency of the national measures in supporting some of the local creatives and looks at complementing them by offering a specific programme resulting from the understanding of the local conditions and the synergies between local organisations. Launched

³⁸ Wick Freelancers: <https://www.hwfi.zone/wick-freelancers>

³⁹ ECHO ('Economy of Hours') is part of Civic Ltd, a not for profit company, where members exchange the skills, services, and resources they have for those that they need: <https://economyofhours.com/>

some 17 months after the first lockdown was announced, it reflects the understanding of local creative communities needs and proposes an innovative solution.

Furthermore, the programme was communicated through official and unofficial channels, especially in local forums and networks, thus ensuring reaching members of the local communities for which the source's legitimacy is often as relevant as the message itself.

This intervention and the way in which it has been devised and communicated is an example of a more effective measure aimed at facilitating the adaptation and re-orientation required as a result of the various pressures and challenges brought about by the pandemic. Within this, recognition of the existence of gatekeepers and valid local interlocutors within creative communities is crucial to fostering constructive dialogues and strengthening their resilience. Moving forward, agencies such as the CEZ are likely to play a pivotal role in supporting creative community resilience and growth. Meanwhile other local actors, such as the Hackney Wick and Fish Island Community Development Trust, could have a more prominent role in articulating and amplifying the local creative communities' voices and acting as a civic forum.

The central difficulty agencies face in supporting local creative communities in areas such as HW/FI is recognising that the precarious conditions in which they have grown organically are often at odds with existing regulation. To overcome this barrier, special regulatory frameworks could be adopted, such as those that might be feasible within designated Creative Enterprise Zones. This would allow for a higher degree of policy experimentation whilst acknowledging that some of the factors that made the formation of those creative communities possible are linked to market failures and other difficult-to-replicate contextual conditions. To that extent, adopting more agile and experimental policy-making skills and resources, and making more effective use of vehicles such as CEZs could help develop more effective policy instruments and interventions.

Immersion Insights

Phase 1

Covid-19 and Creative Clusters

A real-time study of the impact of Covid-19 and associated support measures on the creative business community in Hackney Wick and the QE Olympic Park.

DECEMBER 21

#HWCRAIC

Graham Hitchen

Federico Vaz



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council



Loughborough
University
London

1. Introduction

This report offers an account of four aspects of the first phase of the HWCRAIC research project: **Insights**. Through a series of activities involving actors in Hackney Wick (HW), Fish Island (FI), and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP), this phase aimed at immersing in the area in order to:

1. Engage local creatives and agencies in the research project;
2. Gather preliminary qualitative data;
3. Refine the project's research questions based on the obtained insights.

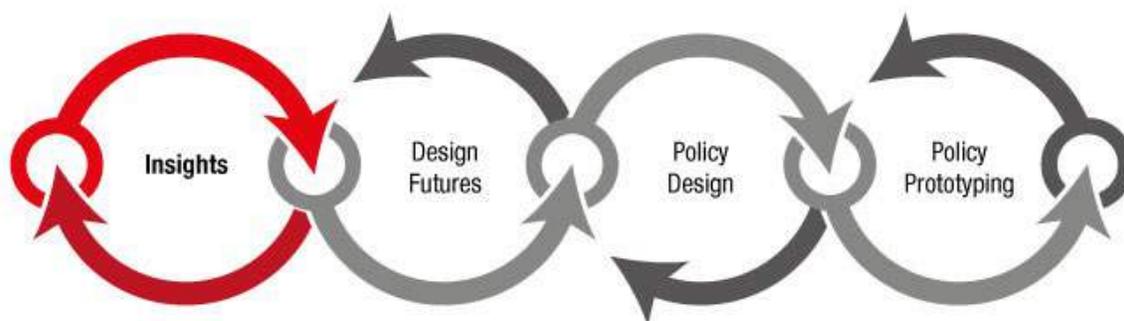


Figure 1: Four phases of the research approach

This phase is the first of four in the design-led approach (Figure 1) adopted by the researchers in the attempt to simultaneously gain a rich understanding of the pandemic's impact (embedded and situated) whilst informing future creative industries support policy. This is the most extensive of the four phases, providing underpinning data and information on which the following three phases were developed. In effect, it provided the real-time information on the extent to which the creative community had been affected by the pandemic. In addition, this phase aimed to:

- Monitor how businesses in the cluster have been affected by the Covid-19 virus and their plans for recovery and future growth;
- Monitor the impact of Government and other interventions to support small businesses;
- Provide insights into the impact of Covid-19 on entrepreneurial attitudes among the creative business community;
- Provide insights into the impact of Covid-19 on the broader eco-system, including supply-chain partners, investors, and local support networks.

This phase's activities extended from September 2020 to March 2021 and included the immersion of the researchers within the local creative communities by participating in diverse activities and forums. In addition, individual and group interviews with a range of various actors were also conducted at this stage.

Including this introduction, the report is divided into seven main sections. Section 2 introduces the notion of immersion and the methods used for this purpose¹. Section 3 reports on the insights gained from conducting observations; these are further divided into four subsections.

Section 4 covers the unstructured online and face-to-face interviews with diverse actors within the local communities conducted from October 2020 to March 2021. The four themes emerging from these interviews are presented in this section.

Section 5 reports on the insights captured from an online group discussion with a number of local creatives and relevant actors facilitated in November 2020. The section offers a synthesis of the five main topics discussed with the group.

From these activities, a number of themes were elicited. Namely,

- Change;
- Space;
- Knowledge;
- Networks.

Section 6 introduces the Citizen Science work and its main insights. The full report, 'We need each other more than ever'², is presented as an annexe.

Lastly, section 7 collates and offers a summary of the most salient insights gathered in this phase.

2. Immersing

Besides following a design for policy approach, the ethos of this investigation is based on active participation and immersion³. Methodologically, the project followed a multi-method approach that draws on participatory research⁴.

This implied engaging with the creative communities in and around HW/FI and the QEOP to jointly explore the effect of Covid-19 on their creative practices whilst simultaneously developing understandings of how to enhance their resilience. These communities consist of creative businesses based in studios and workshops, local workspaces, live/work spaces (mostly industrial units & warehouses), and other non-profit organisations and individuals that interact and overlap in different ways (see Figure 2).

¹ For a more detailed account of these methods, see 'HWCRAIC: Covid-19 and Creative Clusters' report.

² Machado, M., Chamberlain, W., Hitchen, G., Vaz, Federico. (2021). We need each other more than ever, Creative Wick Living Lab 2021. In Hitchen, G. & Vaz, F. (Eds.), *HWCRAIC*. Loughborough University London. (Forthcoming)

³ See 'HWCRAIC Covid-19 and Creative Clusters' report.

⁴ Participatory, holistic, critical, realistic, learning-based, emergent, and complex. Lennie, J., & Tacchi, J. (2013). *Evaluating communication for development: A framework for social change*. Routledge.

Naturally, these communities were affected differently by the Covid-19 pandemic, and their circumstances required specific engagement methods. This report covers four aspects of the research approach that aided in engaging with these communities:

1. Observations;
2. Interviews;
3. Group discussion;
4. Citizen science work.

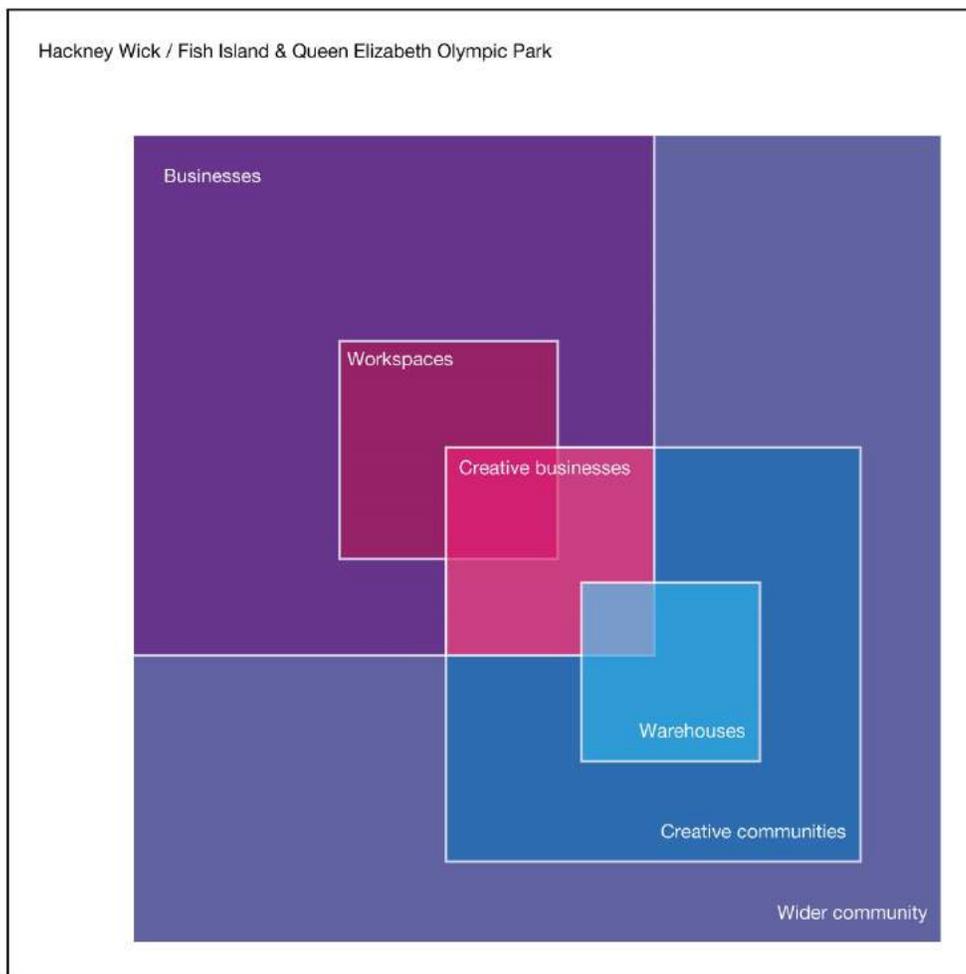


Figure 2: HW/FI & QEOP creative communities within the larger local community.

Although these communities overlap in different ways, capturing insights from each of them utilising the same data collection method proved difficult. For instance, whilst representatives of local workspaces would participate in fortnightly council-led meetups, and therefore, were relatively easy to engage with in those settings, some local creative freelancers work from their homes, making it difficult to identify them. Likewise, whereas some of the local creatives participate in community forums and are happy to engage with researchers, some others occupying live/work spaces are less prone to share information due to their precarious situations. Therefore, observations helped collect data from settings where certain communities gathered, as well as from public spaces. Similarly, interviews helped capture insights from members of the local communities who were easily identifiable and keen to engage in open conversations either 1-to-1 with the researchers or group

dynamics. Likewise, the citizen science approach proved helpful in accessing more secluded pockets of the local communities.

Whereas the observations, interviews, and group discussion activities are respectively presented in sections 3, 4, and 5, the Citizen science (CS) work is treated independently, with section 6 offering a summary.

3. Observations

Conducted from September 2020 to March 2021, the observations carried out in this phase took different forms, ranging from walks in the area and talks to shopkeepers to participation in local events and forums (virtual and otherwise). Since the Covid-19 lockdown implied many activities were taking place virtually, the researchers complemented their observations with extant online content ranging from social media posts to websites and meeting minutes. These aimed at gaining an understanding of the existing dynamics within the area’s creative communities and how these are evolving with and because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Loughborough University London is located in Here East, in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Besides being inside the geographical boundary of this study, its location enabled the researchers to regularly visit the area to capture observational data.

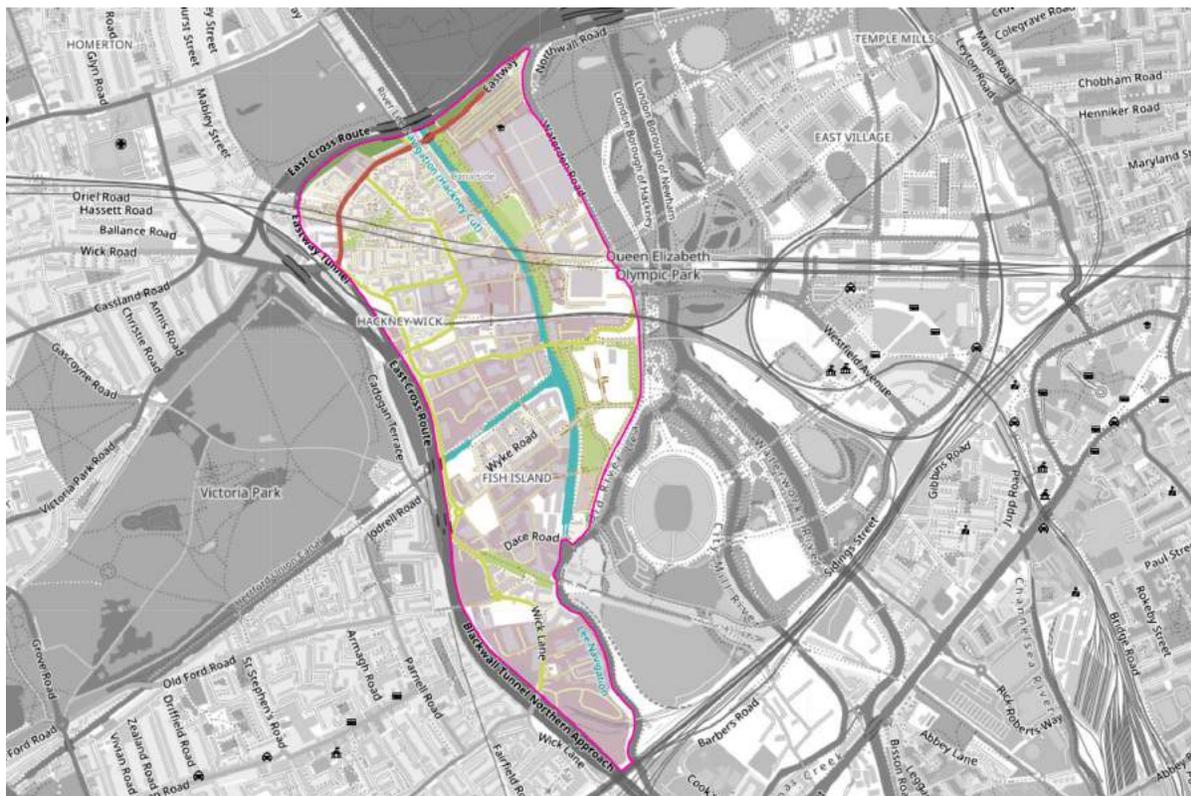


Figure 3: Geographical boundary of the study.

Some of these visits were planned and, when possible, in coordination with members of the local communities, and some were impromptu walk rounds. The latter enabled capturing of the area’s activity under different levels of mobility restrictions. Naturally, much of the activity in local hostleries was significantly reduced during this period. However, the area was far from idle.

Sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 present the observations captured in the area according to three identified themes: spaces, property development, and markets. Section 3.4 offers insights from the researchers' participant observation of local community forums and events.

From these activities, a number of themes were elicited. Namely,

- **Entrepreneurialism;**
- **Resignification of outdoor and public spaces;**
- **Community identity.**

Section 3.6 offers a summary of the most salient insights from these observations.

3.1 Spaces

The pandemic and the subsequent restrictions imposed on mobility and social interactions had a significant impact on the use of public and private space. A 2020 Gehl Institute's report⁵ claims that as a result of the pandemic, central urban districts were largely deserted, but local meeting places have seen a significant increase in their visitors, reflected in the number of people spending time in public space, exercising and playing. HW/FI and the QEOP has not been indifferent to this global phenomenon.

Street art and graffiti continue to dominate the area's aesthetics, and even during the most stringent months of the lockdown, new murals were being painted (see Figures 4 and 5).



Figure 4: Street art mural in Hackney Wick, September and November 2020.

⁵ Gehl, J. (2020). Public space and public life during Covid 19. Copenhagen: Gehl Institute.

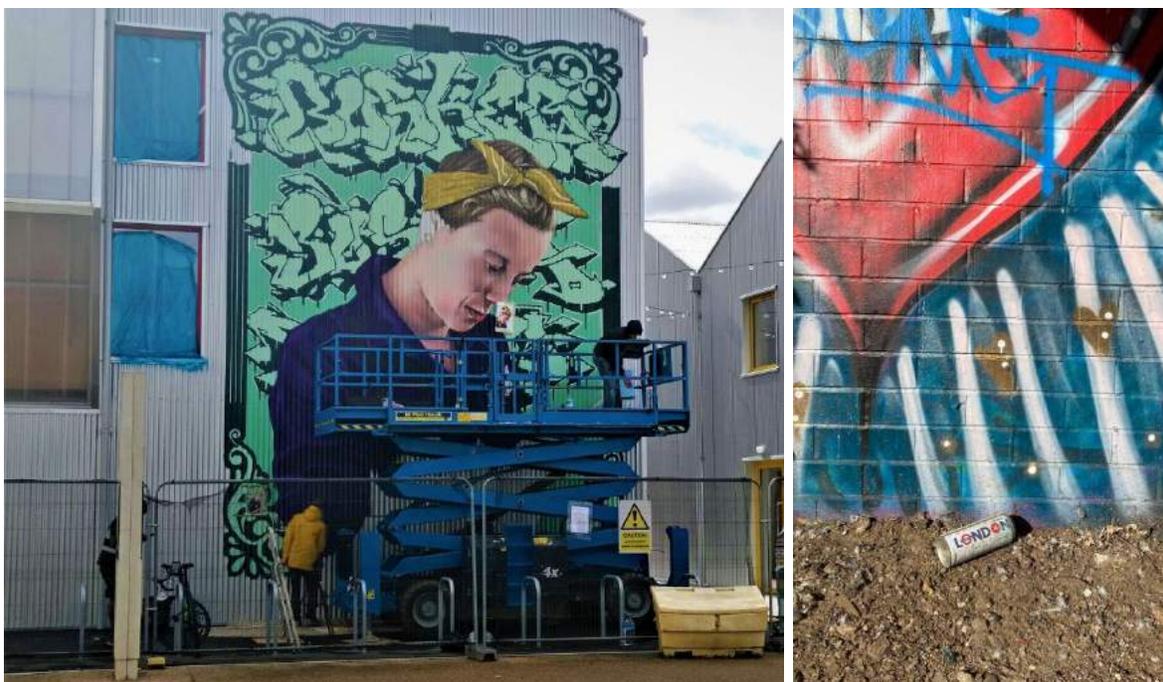


Figure 5: Street art mural being painted on Hackney Bridge for its opening, September 2020 (left); empty spray paint can in Eastway underpass, March 2021 (right).

Similarly, the idea that the pandemic negatively impacted all sectors does not appear to be reflected in the area. For instance, some manufacturers not only continued producing their goods but saw a boost in sales. Local family-run mirror manufacturer Yearn Glass & Co. is one such case (see Figure 6). When informally asked about how business was, an employee suggested that spending more time at home was pushing people to spend more money on furniture, resulting in increased sales of their products. Although anecdotal, this is aligned with some reports and news articles indicating a surge in home furnishing sites spending and visitation⁶, along with unprecedented sales⁷.

“How are we doing? We have never worked so much”.

Yearn Glass & Co. employee, November 2020.

⁶ Lane, C. (2020). As millions stay home, home furnishing sites see record spend and visitation. *ComScore, Inc.* Retrieved 15 March 2021, from <https://www.comscore.com/Insights/Blog/As-millions-stay-home-home-furnishing-sites-see-record-spend-and-visitation>

⁷ Collinson, P. (2020). 'It's crazy good': Covid boom leaves UK furniture firms sitting pretty. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 15 March 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/10/covid-boom-uk-furniture-firms-sitting-pretty>



Figure 6: Products waiting to be shipped outside Yearn Glass & Co., Lion Works / Liquid Studios, HW, November 2020.

Likewise, Here East saw its forecourt transformed into a filming location (see Figure 7). Although this is not necessarily unusual, it was still interesting to see these activities continuing during the pandemic.



Figure 7: Filming crew setting up equipment in Here East's yard, November 2020.

In the past year, other locations within HW/FI and the QEOP, including public spaces, were also utilised as filming locations. For instance, Studio Wayne McGregor —located in Here East and whose performing arts and dance activities were severely disrupted because of the pandemic— repurposed and rented out some of their studio space for film and photoshoots.⁸ The continuing level of activity

⁸ “Studio Wayne McGregor is open during lockdown for approved activity”:
<https://waynemcgregor.com/space-hire-1/>

for filming highlights the varying impact Covid-19 has had in this sub-sector of the creative industries (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: Music video filming in Eastway underpass, March 2021.

Comparably, local hostelry, ranging from pubs and restaurants to coffee shops to party venues, transformed their offering to different degrees. Those that were able to began offering a variety of take-out services from pizza and pastries to coffee, beer, and cocktails. Moreover, for some of these local businesses, closing their services to the public did not mean entirely shutting down their operations since their venues are indeed production facilities that supply other sales channels. For instance, this was the case for some local breweries and coffee roasters.

Naturally, these business model changes imply different levels of effort and the incentives to carry out the required adaptations also varied mainly depending on the business reliance on footfall (see Figures 9 and 10). For instance, when attempting to engage with local business owners, many excused themselves based on their need for dedicating their time and energies to ideating new ways of keeping their businesses afloat.

“...my focus is fully on restructuring our business for lockdown.”

Local brewery owner, November 2020.



Figure 9: The Colour Factory cocktail take-out, Queen's Yard, Hackney Wick, December 2020.



Figure 10: Ethical Bean Co. coffee take-out, Fish Island, December 2020.

Beyond the business adaptation, residents and visitors alike also started showing different behaviour patterns, especially in regard to the use of public spaces. In the absence of sitting areas in local pubs and cafés, crowds began moving towards the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. For instance, the green patch at the junction of the Lee Navigation and Hertford Union canals (see Figure 11) which is one of the few green areas in the proximity, has become a place for meetings and gatherings.

Similarly, the recently opened green area between Hackney Bridge and the Lee Navigation (see Figure 11) has become a picnic and leisure space for residents and visitors. Notably, there are no green spaces or leisure areas in Hackney Wick and Fish Island.



Figure 11: Green area in QEOP where Lee Navigation Canal joins the Hertford Union Canal, March 2021.



Figure 12: Green area between Hackney Bridge and River Lee Navigation, March 2021.

Despite the restricted public social interactions during the lockdown, the walk-rounds also offered a glimpse into the residents' sense of community. Because of its extensive waterways, the area has a considerable house-boat community. These residents seem to develop a different community spirit, often reflected in the use of the space surrounding them (see Figure 13). In addition, due to the proximity between the moored boats and the towpaths, these residents naturally share closer encounters with one another as well as with other residents and visitors. This results in particular community-led initiatives that foster a sense of unity and cooperation.



Figure 13: “Give what you can, take what you need”. Community Pantry set outside ‘The Jungle Boat’ under the Eastway Bridge, November 2020.

3.2 Property developments

Just as various creative and retail activities carried on during the lockdown, so other sectors appeared unaffected; this was no more apparent than in property development, with much building activity ongoing throughout the period of the pandemic.

Housing developments in the area are frequently perceived as part of a broader gentrification process that might damage some aspects of the creative communities (see Figure 14).



Figure 14: Sign painted in bar and restaurant Number 90’s entrance. Main Yard, Hackney Wick. March 2021.

Our observations during the immersion noted diverse impacts, with new homes being built and advertised alongside buildings in disrepair (see Figure 15). The new housing developments are perceived as having a paradoxical effect: whilst many people are drawn to the area because of its creative communities and distinct look and feel, the former are being priced out of the area, and the latter sometimes simply erased to build the housing these newcomers will occupy. This perception was borne out by some of the feedback in the Citizen Science work, featured below.

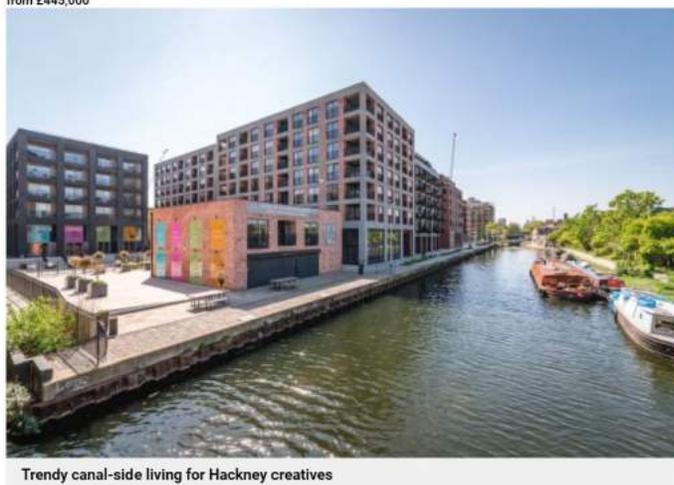


Figure 15: Fish Island Village Sales & Marketing Suite overlooking Hackney Wick, December 2020 (left). National Barge Travellers Association "Stop the extension of gentrification" sign in Eastway underpass, March 2021 (right).

Developers in the area are well-aware of its industrial heritage and creative communities living within it. This is evident in the housing being built, which often resembles some of the warehouses and factories demolished for their construction.

Fish Island Village, Hackney Wick E3

from £445,000



Trendy canal-side living for Hackney creatives

“The final phase in this creative, canal-side community, a ten-minute walk from Hackney Wick station, launches this Saturday and consists of 42 one, two and three-bed apartments designed to reflect the site’s industrial heritage”.

(Dean, 2021)⁹

Likewise, most developers explicitly emphasise Hackney Wick and Fish Island as thriving cultural creative hubs in their advertisements and brochures. For instance, Fish Island Village developers Peabody and Hill state on their website that “this thriving, cultural creative hub will comprise modern apartments and unique spaces to live and work, making it the ultimate place for like-minded people to collaborate. [...] Ideal for both budding entrepreneurs and anyone looking to embrace the creative vibe of this hidden gem”¹⁰.

⁹ Dean, A. (2021). New builds for first-time buyers on sale with Help To Buy – in London and beyond. *Metro*. <https://metro.co.uk/2021/04/06/new-builds-for-first-time-buyers-on-sale-with-help-to-buy-in-london-14348789/>

¹⁰ Fish Island Village website: <https://www.fishislandvillage.co.uk/>

Despite the charge of erasing parts of the creative heritage, some developers are working alongside creative companies. For example, one major project on Fish Island aims:

“to create a waterside community that captures the creative vibe of this bohemian borough of London, whilst being true to the spirit of Fish Island. Building on the area’s legacy, this bold vision of a village fuses traditional industrial architecture with forward-thinking design. The creation of a sustainable and supportive environment for all that live and work here is front of mind and this vision has been conceptualised in partnership with The Trampery. [...] This inclusive nature combined with the energetic atmosphere, means that this will be a place where you can be yourself and feel inspired to achieve whatever you put your mind to”.

Fish Island Village’s Vision¹¹

This is interesting as it belies the notion that the new developments are excluding creative companies. According to Trampery¹² founder, Charles Armstrong:

“Fish Island Village is the first development of this kind in the UK with facilities that are affordable and essentially priced at the same rates that people are paying now. [...] I really believe that what we are doing is establishing a foundation for the creative community to continue for the next generation.”

Charles Armstrong. Founder, The Trampery

The Fish Island Village development is a striking example of maintained activity during the pandemic – with building work ongoing, while creative businesses were struggling, but with the intention of creating new spaces for creatives in the longer-term. Perhaps the most significant development during this period was the Creative Land Trust (CLT) first studio acquisition. As part of their goal to secure 1,000 affordable workspaces for London’s artists and makers¹³, the CLT announced in March 2021¹⁴ the acquisition of a 33,000 square foot space to provide “long-term, genuinely affordable studios and ensure that artists can continue to flourish in one of the capital’s creative hotspots”¹⁴. In doing so, the CLT invited studio providers to tender for the management of up to 180 artist studios in the Telford Homes developed space at Stone Studios¹⁵. Workspace provider Cell Project has

¹¹ Fish Island Village website: <https://www.fishislandvillage.co.uk/our-vision/>

¹² The Trampery is a workspace provider operating in six locations in London, including two in the geographic footprint of this study: The Trampery on the Gantry in Hackney Wick, and The Trampery Fish Island Village.

¹³ Mayor launches ground-breaking Creative Land Trust: <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-launches-groundbreaking-creative-land-trust>

¹⁴ Creative Land Trust announces its first studio acquisition: <https://creativelandtrust.org/press-stone-studios/>

¹⁵ Creative Land Trust invites studio providers to tender for Stone Studios: <https://creativelandtrust.org/tender-stone-studios/>

partnered with the CLT to manage the space. In doing so, Cell Project¹⁶ returns to its former site in Hackney Wick¹⁷.

2020 also saw the opening of a new creative workspace provider in the QEOP. Make Shift Community Ltd., the platform behind Pop Brixton¹⁸ and Peckham Levels¹⁹, launched Hackney Bridge in October 2020 (see Figures 16 and 17). The space located on the east bank of River Lee Navigation “close to Hackney Wick”²⁰ offers workspace and studios for artists, makers, and small businesses, as well as space for food businesses, retailers, markets, events, and a community garden. Notably, Hackney Bridge defines its location in terms of the proximity to Hackney Wick instead of its actual location in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Likewise, for its inauguration, a Hackney Wick-like graffiti mural was painted on its façade (see Figure 5). Perhaps, this could relate to the positioning pursued by Hackney Bridge and their ambition to bring to life a cultural destination for local people to use and enjoy²¹. In this scenario, the graffiti could be aimed at bridging its proximity to Hackney Wick by means of aesthetic assimilation.



Figure 16: Hackney Bridge Housewarming event – interior. October 16, 2020.

The existence of murals and graffiti are seen as an important part of the creative community, and – throughout the pandemic – there was ongoing activity and debate. For example, in March 2021 a petition campaign²² was launched asking Hackney Council and London Borough of Tower Hamlets to consider developing a paint area for the artists to continue to express their creativity for locals and visitors to appreciate. Similarly, during the April 2021 CIG meeting, one participant asked a housing development representative about their plans to keep the street art in the facades of the Dace Road property acquired for the development. The answer indicated that no provisions were taken to preserve the artwork.

¹⁶ Cell Project is a non-profit gallery and artist studios, with a mission to provide affordable workspace for artists through Cell Studios.

¹⁷ Creative Land Trust Partnership with Cell Studios: <https://www.cellprojects.org/content/creative-land-trust-partnership>

¹⁸ <https://www.popbrixton.org/>

¹⁹ <https://peckhamlevels.org/>

²⁰ <https://hackneybridge.org/>

²¹ It should be noted that up to the opening of the East Wick + Sweetwater (<https://www.eastwickandsweetwater.co.uk/>) development in 2021, there were no local residents in the QEOP, and the closest lived in Hackney Wick or in boats mooring alongside the Hackney Cut.

²² Save Hackney Wick Street Art: <https://www.change.org/p/hackney-council-save-hackney-wick-street-art>

Street art is part of the lifeblood and identity of Hackney Wick. It draws people to the area and developers should have to make an effort to retain that identity, knowing that it will also benefit their marketing of Hackney Wick as a trendy area.

User comment on the Save Hackney Wick Street Art petition's webpage



Figure 17: Hackney Bridge Housewarming event - exterior. October 16, 2020.

3.3 Markets

Echoing a localised approach to empowering and creating more resilient communities in a post-Covid era²³, the move towards localism had already been palpable during most of 2020. In Hackney Wick and Fish Island, this has meant, amongst other things, the opening of several markets, especially during the festive season. Amongst them, we find:

- White Post Lane Makers Market;
- Barge East's Wick Wonderland;
- White Post Café Vintage Market;
- The White Building Market;

²³ Walker, A., Diamond, P. (2020). Power down to level up: resilient place-shaping for a post-Covid world. *Local Government Information Unit*.

- Hackney Wick Underground Market.

In conversations with local artists and creators, the need for spaces to display and sell their work emerged repeatedly. However, given the area's size, a number of visitors greater than the number of residents is required for local markets to thrive. Fortunately, due to the area's increased popularity, which has also attracted hundreds of new residents, the likelihood of successful local markets has risen. Yet, the idea of fixed street makers' markets has been resisted by some of the oldest residents in the past. Naturally, this poses a dilemma between local growth and the protection of the area's existing communities.

In an attempt to exploit available space, some businesses successfully repurposed parts of their venues during the past year. For instance, with the Michelin 'Green Star' restaurant²⁴ unable to operate, Hackney Wick saw the opening of a new marketplace in its iconic White Building (see Figure 18). The boutique shop claims to have "scoured the country to bring you some of the UK's most innovative designers, skilled makers and local producers. All with a drive and focus on sustainable living"²⁵. It is surprising to note the emphasis on sourcing from all around the country, given that it is in an area with such a large concentration of makers, producers, and designers – implying that there are not enough local creatives offering a wide range of sustainable products.



Figure 18: The White Building, Hackney Wick, November 2020.

Conversely, the White Post Lane Makers Market set up in the run-up to Christmas showcased gifts from some of the borough's makers, artists, and designers (see Figure 19). This market had the

²⁴ Silo: <https://guide.michelin.com/gb/en/greater-london/london/restaurant/silo-1183942>

²⁵ The White Building Market: <https://cratebrewery.com/venue/the-white-building-market>

support of local authorities, including the Creative Enterprise Zone and allowed local creatives to increase sales after months of lockdown.



Figure 19: White Post Lane Makers Market, December 2020.

In April 2021, with the easing of the restrictions, two new markets opened: Hackney Wick Underground Market and Hackney Bridge's 'Spring in the courtyard' (see Figure 20).



Figure 20: Hackney Wick Underground's digital flyers for their Makers and Flea markets.

Hackney Wick Underground's Makers and Flea markets occur in a space in White Post Lane, opposite the Hackney Wick Overground station (see Figures 21 and 22). These are part of the offering of Hackney Wick Underground, the recently launched grassroots non-profit organisation led

by social enterprise Civic State²⁶. This space, and consequently the markets that take place there, seek to reflect the ‘grungy’ atmosphere of Hackney Wick. This unapologetically aesthetic pursuit appears to present itself as a response against the area’s gentrification process.

“We are practically exploring our rights to use land, to organise, to empower and to influence. To practice our rights as citizens.”

Neil McDonald, Co-Founder²⁴

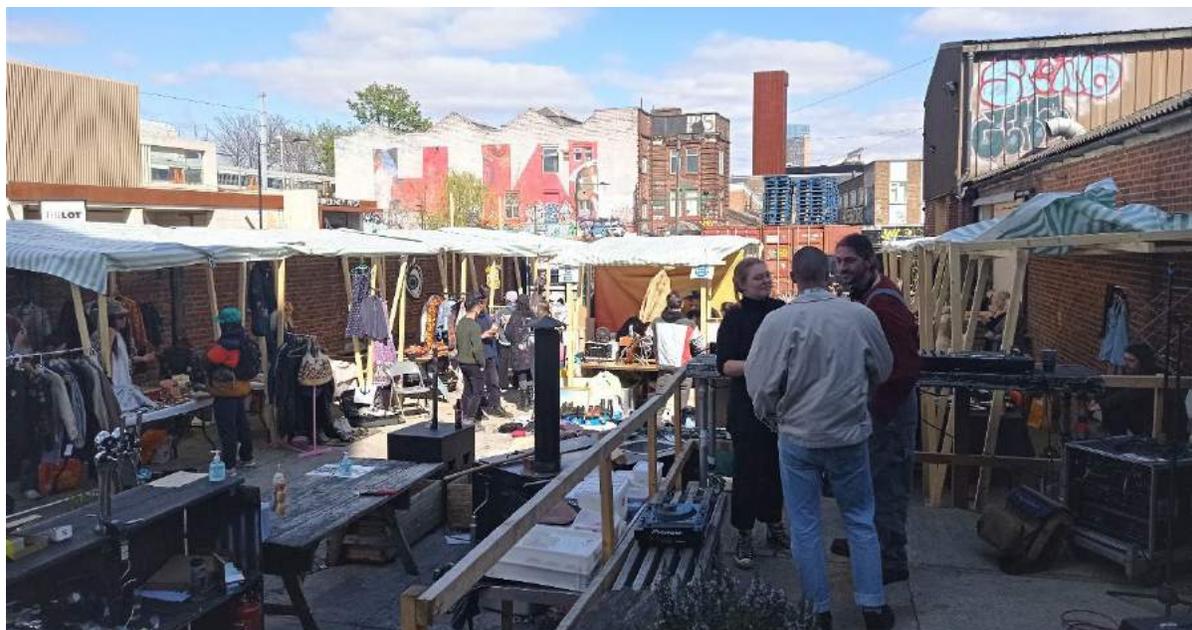


Figure 21: Hackney Wick Underground's Flea Market, April 2021.

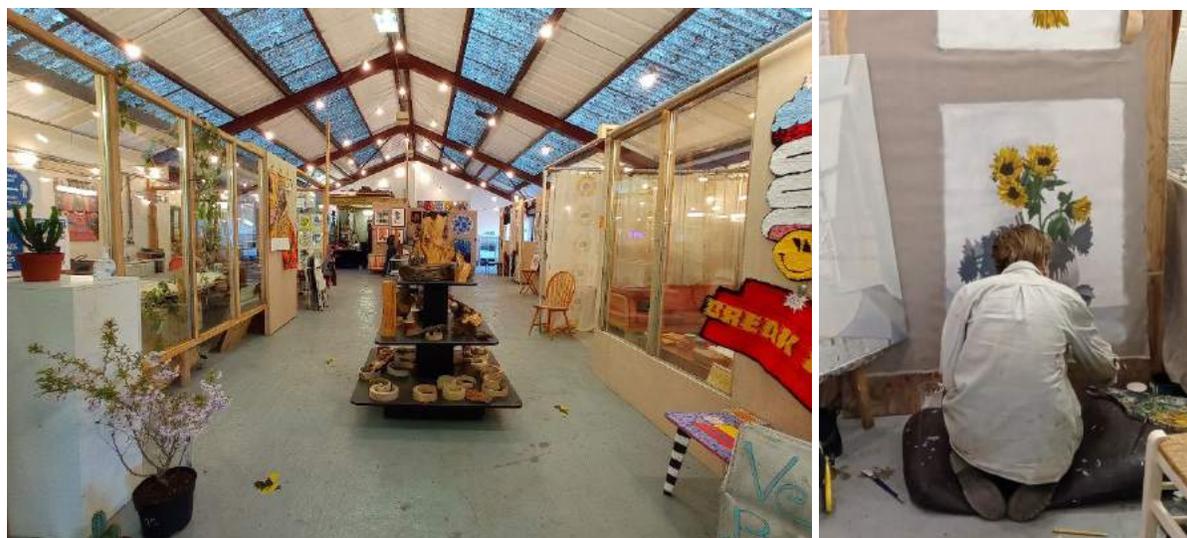


Figure 22: Hackney Wick Underground's central hall (left), and resident artist Emily Hana painting (right), April 2021.

²⁶ <https://hwunderground.co.uk/about/>

Newcomer Hackney Bridge, on the other hand, transformed its open space into a food market (see Figures 23 and 24). In April 2021, Hackney Bridge launched ‘Spring in the courtyard’. The programme offers a bar (which is destined for Hackney Bridge Kitchen’s street food market) and a number of street food traders operating in the outdoor courtyards with seating until the end of July²⁷. In this way, Hackney Bridge complements the local offering instead of directly competing with the existing markets. This is an interesting new addition to the local economy since previously, the closest food market operated in Victoria Park, west of Hackney Wick.



Figure 23: Banner included in the CIG April's newsletter.



Figure 24: Hackney Bridge's 'Spring in the courtyard', April 2021.

²⁷ Hackney Underground’s Spring in the Courtyard: <https://hackneybridge.org/spring>

3.4 Community Forums

As noted above, participant observations were also carried out in local forums. Two, in particular, offered valuable insights into the local creative communities: Hackney Wick & Fish Island Cultural Interest Group (CIG) and the Hackney Wick and Fish Island Workspace provider drop-in meetings.

3.4.1 The Hackney Wick & Fish Island Cultural Interest Group

The CIG was founded in 2010 to advance the arts and culture within Hackney Wick and Fish Island by facilitating a sustainable creative local community. The CIG supports the local creative economy by encouraging links between: Local creative practitioners; Creative practitioners and the local residential population; and the local, regional, national and international creative community.

This is achieved through engagement, partnership building, resource sharing and collaboration”²⁸.

The CIG typically meets fortnightly at various venues in Hackney Wick and Fish Island. Though, due to the pandemic, these meetings have been taking place online since April 2020. The researchers regularly joined the CIG meetings since August 2020. Although in most opportunities, the participation has been limited to that of a mere observer, on occasions, the researchers have used the forum to present the project’s progress and to engage with its participants by, for instance, inviting them to take part in workshops or focus groups.

On a usual meeting, the hour and a half long session follow the agenda shared in advance in a rather organised and timely manner. Creative Wick’s founding director, William Chamberlain, chairs the CIG meetings. These involve a diverse range of actors, including residents, local artists and creatives, businesses, representatives from housing developers working on the area, and authorities from the local councils, including the Hackney Wick Ward Councillors.

In conversation with the CIG’s chair, he commented these are invaluable sources of insights as “the community holds the knowledge”. Likewise, regarding the area’s makeup changes, he expressed “new creatives coming to the area are willing to join and preserve the community”.

Although the sense of community is always palpable in the CIG meetings, it is under specific circumstances when the collective spirit becomes more apparent. The CIG meeting of December 11th, 2020, presented one such moment, triggered by the announcement that from January 1st, 2021, Stour Space — a staple of Fish Island— would no longer be in its historical location due to the landlords’ decision not to extend the lease²⁹. Stour Space was deemed the most affordable studio provider in HW/FI, and having operated in the area for twelve years, it represented its spirit.

After the announcement, many CIG participants expressed strong feelings in what they see as another blow against their livelihood and spirit of the area:

²⁸ Hackney Wick & Fish Island Cultural Interest Group website: <https://hackneywick.org/beta/>

²⁹ December 2021 CIG Notes and Actions: https://mcusercontent.com/e62fa9be788c0593fca695e87/files/f96acc77-de1b-4bfa-b33a-72a3283c8009/CIG_Meeting_Notes_Actions_December_2020.pdf

*“Can't even articulate the symbolism of this. If the Overground is the hopeful future, then this is the same old story playing out. "Yeh, we'll keep the good stuff, honest..." From Hackney to Berlin to New York - capital kills creativity. It's not just for the old guard - the new incomers have been sold on a 'vibrant' neighbourhood. Why are landlords never accountable? Why are *they* never here? No apologies for the rant, this is a massive loss. My jewellery maker friend is in a state.”*

CIG meeting participant.

“Stour has been the greatest pillar of community building in HW. We are here to support you.”

CIG meeting participant.

Similarly, representatives from other workspaces in the area expressed their solidarity:

“Shocking news [...]! Let us know if we can help anyhow.”

HW/FI workspace representative during CIG meeting.

“Such sad news! Our members adore Stour so much & know the importance of its place in the local cultural community. Pure love [...].”

HW/FI workspace representative during CIG meeting.

Shortly after the news was broken to the CIG participants, a group decided to take immediate action. Making and putting up posters in the area was one of the proposed initiatives. Once again, the communities' support was evident here, with local businesses even offering to print these posters free of charge.

This instance was particularly valuable, as it showed the interaction between the officials participating in the CIG and the local creatives and artists. Whereas some expressed their concerns about what they saw as tokenistic behaviour by the bodies tasked with preserving the area's creative value, some voiced their support to the authorities:

“Politically, how does it look for the new CEZ to have the rug pulled from under by a single landlord???”

CIG meeting participant.

“I know some of you have to wear your official personas here but are doing what you can in the background for Stour, so thank you for your efforts. We see you.”

CIG meeting participant.

Besides the anecdotal, this episode was substantial as it clearly represents the fears held by many within the creative communities. Moreover, it highlights the highly politicised arena in which the local creatives interact where land represents the central resource at stake.

This type of discussion takes place somewhat regularly. Only in the past months, new entrant Hackney Bridge found itself at the centre of a contentious issue around the impact of a proposal that came before licensing and emphasised the high proportion of entertainment venues in the new space. Diverse concerns ranging from potential conflict with current trade, community, and consultation, to the lack of engagement with local councillors were raised. This prompted Make Shift's CEO and Community Growth Manager, along with Hackney Bridge's Engagement and Partnerships Manager, to participate in a CIG meeting, where Make Shift's CEO apologised and promised to include more consultation going forward³⁰.

Similarly, the Manager of the newly opened Sainsbury's shop in Hackney Wick was confronted by a local Councillor regarding the installation of an advertising totem on the sidewalk. According to the Councillor, this installation was in breach of mobility and accessibility regulation in a pedestrian path, and the forum was used as an amicable warning towards its removal. As a result, the totem was removed shortly after³¹.

3.4.2 Hackney Wick and Fish Island Workspace provider drop-in meetings

Organised by Hackney Wick and Fish Island's Developer and Business Engagement Manager³², these fortnightly sessions are an opportunity for workspace providers to receive updates and raise issues relating to workspaces on Hackney Wick and Fish Island.

The regular attendees to these drop-in meetings are representatives of:

- [Arbeit Studios](#);
- [Cell Projects](#);
- [Grow Hackney](#);
- [Plexal](#);
- [Space Studios](#);
- [Stour Space](#);
- [The Trampery](#);
- [V22 Collection](#).

³⁰ Issue addressed on the CIG meeting of Friday 11th September 2020. See CIG's Notes and Actions: https://mcusercontent.com/e62fa9be788c0593fca695e87/files/cf7c173f-0328-4f8e-98f4-289091b78072/CIG_Meeting_Notes_Actions_September_2020.pdf

³¹ Issue addressed on the CIG meeting of Friday 12th February, 2021. See CIG's Notes and Actions: https://mcusercontent.com/e62fa9be788c0593fca695e87/files/79ca67cd-8a9d-483a-9f0a-12000d1835f1/CIG_Meeting_Notes_Actions_February_2021.pdf

³² This role is jointly employed by the London Legacy Development Corporation, London Borough of Hackney and London Borough of Tower Hamlets, to deliver appropriate workspace in Hackney Wick and Fish Island and support the local business community throughout a large-scale Olympic regeneration programme.

During these half-hour sessions, the attendees can liaise directly with a local council representative where their businesses are based and receive first-hand information about changes in regulation, policy, and other aspects relevant to their businesses. Especially during the pandemic, it served as a direct channel of communications between the boroughs and some local businesses mediated by the workspace provider representatives. Likewise, this communication channel has worked both ways, allowing the workspace representatives also to provide feedback based on their tenants' needs about the instruments and support mechanism offered by the authorities.

For instance, during one meeting, a specific point was raised about the financial support to businesses that had not been able to access support previously, that are not part of the retail/ leisure/ hospitality sectors but can demonstrate links to those sectors (e.g., graphic designers working in events). This feedback was then passed onto the officers outlining the details for discretionary Grant 4³³ to consider accommodating those requirements.

Likewise, it has helped the authorities in disseminating some of their activities in a gradual manner, mediated by the workspace providers. For instance, the 'Love Hackney, Shop Local' campaign³⁴ where Hackney Council partnered with online platform My Virtual Neighbourhood³⁵ allowed businesses who have had to close their premises by law under the new restrictions but were still able to sell their goods online or through click-and-collect to add themselves to the business directory free of charge. This initiative which was promoted to the borough's 280,000 residents as a convenient way to purchase goods from local retailers while their shops are shut, was also shared with workspace providers during the drop-in sessions in an attempt to include their tenants in the business directory.

Similarly, free third-party business advice, such as the [Property Advice Service](#) offered by [London Business Hub](#), is also typically shared in these meetings.

3.5 Observations summary

In sum, the observations regarding the natural and built environment highlight a number of issues some of the communities currently face. Whilst some of these are longstanding and have been deepened by the Covid-19 pandemic, some appear as a consequence of the pandemic or at least have only recently reached an acute level. Likewise, the observations offered insights into the behaviours of the local creative communities during the first year of the pandemic and their resilience and adaptability in the face of hardship under different levels of restrictions. Amongst these, we find:

- **Entrepreneurialism:** The continuation of certain commercial activities and the transformation of others to both cover existing demand and cater for new needs. The observations have shown how the communities have adapted their offering to respond to a newly generated local demand. Besides the new or adapted business models from new and existing businesses, the communities' entrepreneurial drive can be seen in the repurposing of existing space and the development and reinforcement of support networks. The latter not only

³³ London Borough of Hackney Business Grants: <https://hackney.gov.uk/business-grants/>

³⁴ <https://www.lovehackney.uk/shop-local>

³⁵ <https://www.myvirtualneighbourhood.com/>

speaks of the goodwill of residents and local organisations but also about how the pandemic reconfigured the purpose of some of these, which have since reinforced their local focus. Moreover, it is worth remarking on the fact that during the period of observation there were a number of new creative workspace developments taking place, even under the difficulties and constraints imposed by the pandemic. Despite Stour Space closing, in one year Hackney Wick Underground and Hackney Bridge were opened, the CLT acquired new space, and Fish Island Village developments started to open.

- **Reorientation of outdoor and public spaces:** Residents and visitors seem to have adopted new behaviours regarding the local area and their relationship to public spaces, forced by the restrictions on mobility but reinforced by a new sense of belonging. Likewise, this has revealed deficiencies in terms of the availability of recreational spaces for residents and local communities. New local developments, the majority of which are in the gastronomy and hostelry sector, have reshaped the movement of people. Interestingly, the green spaces in the east bank of the Hackney Cut have seen an explosive increase in their use. This phenomenon that started with opening the pubs and restaurants in Here East’s Canalside has now been accompanied by the green areas next to Barge East and Hackney Bridge, shifting the area’s centre of gravity further east.
- **Community identity:** Localism appears to have heightened during the pandemic. This is reflected in the community-led support networks and individual activities, but also in the preoccupation to maintain a specific look and feel to the local area (ethics and aesthetics). Despite the reduced mobility, graffiti continued to be painted on walls across the area. However, there are now fewer available surfaces for artists to intervene in due to the significant development of new housing in former industrial buildings. To some extent, the struggle for Hackney Wick’s identity is evidenced in the ratio between street art and new buildings. This also highlights the influx of new residents to the area and its impact on the local communities’ make-up. The opening of chain supermarkets in the area also accounts for changing reality. Grassroots movements such as the one petitioning to protect Hackney Wick’s street art or the National Bargee Travellers Association “Stop the extension of gentrification” campaign are examples of how different communities in the area are opposing some of these changes. Nevertheless, the continued support to local creative networks and forums throughout the pandemic, such as the Cultural Interest Group, not only legitimates their existence but accounts for a group of individuals committed to work towards a permanent, sustainable, creative economy in Hackney Wick & Fish Island.

4. Interviews

As part of Phase 1, 21 unstructured interviews were conducted with 24 people³⁶ between October 2020 and March 2021. These interviews were conducted with different members of the local communities, including:

- **Agencies:** Creative Enterprise Zone, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, London Borough of Hackney, and the London Legacy Development Corporation.
- **Workspace providers:** Stour Space, HW Underground, Here East, Plexal, The Trampery, Here East, Cell Project.

³⁶ The mismatch between the number of interviews and interviewees refers to instances where more than one person were simultaneously interviewed.

- **Cultural and education institutions:** The Yard Theatre, Studio Wayne McGregor, Liverpool Media Academy, V&A.
- **Local businesses:** Colour Factory, ECHO, This Big Adventure, Revolution of Forms, SI Games.
- **Researchers:** Loughborough University London, Creative Industries Federation, PRD.

These interviews looked at gaining a situated understanding of the realities faced by the local creative communities. In particular, they aimed to carry out a preliminary assessment of the ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic affected local creatives and other relevant stakeholders whilst inquiring which support instruments and mechanisms had contributed the most toward the communities' subsistence.

From these interviews, three main themes were elicited:

- The existence of diverse and incohesive communities within the area;
- Precarity and vulnerability of many local creatives;
- Physical space as the battlefield.

4.1 Diverse and incohesive communities

According to Porter's definition,³⁷ "[a] cluster is a geographically proximate group of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities". With this in mind, the research's initial framing considered the creatives within HW/FI and the QEOP as part of a cluster. Very early on, however, it became apparent that the term was not welcomed by all actors. Instead, some of the interviewees claimed they felt part of a creative community. Yet, when the researchers tried to adopt the term, some were explicit in the existence of several communities in the area, as well as various creative communities.

Although this point seemed anecdotal at first, it became apparent that there are significant discrepancies among local creatives. This is relevant because the conflicting political and personal agendas of some members of these communities have adverse effects on achieving the synergies and complementarities typical of a cluster. In turn, this is because clusters operate across networks between a variety of actors familiar with each other's expertise, trustworthiness, reliability, and willingness both to share relevant assets and engage in normal business relationships based on market exchange³⁸.

Moreover, the interviews also highlighted the existence of gatekeepers within the communities. These, for instance, act as intermediaries between other members of the community and different agencies and other stakeholders. Although this may appear as a natural development of the dynamics in a certain social group, given the characteristics of these communities, the existence of these gatekeepers hinders the flow of information and resources.

³⁷ Porter, M. (1998). *On Competition*. Harvard Business School Press.

³⁸ Cooke, P. (2001). Clusters as key determinants of economic growth. *Cluster policies-cluster development*, 2, 23-38.

To some extent, these dynamics appear to arise from the fact that some members of the creative communities also live in the area. This dual condition seems to foster certain defensive attitudes by resident creatives toward changes that could affect their livelihood and way of living.

4.2 Precarity and vulnerability

Linked to the previous theme, the interviews also showed that the survival of some of the local creative communities is threatened by the precarity of their work and living conditions. Many of the local creatives, such as those in live/work spaces, are subject to insecure contracts and agreements whose cancellation would mean not only the need for a new workspace but, in some cases, also their complete relocation outside the area.

Especially during the pandemic, the precarity of the conditions of some local creatives added another layer of vulnerability to them since many were not able to claim certain benefits nor support instruments due to their unregulated living or working conditions. This suggests precarity is an intrinsic condition of the makeup of some of these creatives since the live/work spaces which first attracted many creatives to migrate into the area³⁹ are not only being redeveloped but do not offer their tenants legal security.

Despite the arrival of new creative and potentially more secure workspace, in the short term there is real pressure on space; this and rising housing prices in the area puts these creatives in a vulnerable position with some feeling being pushed out. Despite research showing the size of the live/work community⁴⁰, two interviewees from organisations on the QEOP questioned the value of policies to support what they considered to be a very small community. Moreover, they asserted that creatives from specific creative economy sub-sectors, such as the musicians, “are all gone from Hackney Wick [...] even London”. Along with the arrival of new heavyweights in the area, such as Sadler’s Wells and the V&A, this poses questions about the reconfiguration of the local creative make-up in the area, and the shifting geography - with the creative centre of gravity moving away from HW/FI.

4.3 Tensions for physical space

The question of physical space appears to be an unavoidable topic. This is somewhat predictable since the study’s scope is based on a specific geographic footprint, thus driving the interviews toward issues about space. However, most of the interviewees refer to housing and workspace affordability as the main issues affecting the local creative communities, which also appear highlighted in the Creative Enterprise Zone’s 2018 baseline report⁴¹.

Moreover, tensions between some of the local creative communities and the area’s post-2012 Olympic games redevelopment also surfaced during the interviews. Besides driving the area’s urban development and gentrification, the influx of new firms and organisations has also meant that the spaces (and other resources) for new creative businesses significantly differ from what was

³⁹ Virani, T., Piza, A., & Shiach, M. E. (2018). Creative clusters, social inclusion, and sustainability: The case of Hackney Wick and Fish Island. *A Report for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, the London Borough of Hackney, and the London Legacy Development Corporation*.

⁴⁰ Virani, Piza, and Shiach, (ibid) claim over 33% of residents’ dwellings in HW/FI are live/work spaces, making it an important part of its identity.

⁴¹ “Disproportionate recent increases in industrial and office rents (over 200% since 2012)”: Hackney Wick & Fish Island Creative Quarter: A Creative Enterprise Zone Research Study 31/07/18.

previously required. For instance, once an area of printers, publishers, distributors, binders, and other print suppliers due to the affordability of large spaces close to Central London, Hackney Wick and Fish Island have lost an important proportion of these businesses in the last fifteen years⁴². Instead, new creative businesses have moved to new buildings in the QEOP, where they can access the required infrastructure to develop their digitally intensive business models.

5. Group discussion

Besides individual interviews, a group discussion was conducted on November 6, 2020. This session was run online over Zoom from 9:30 to 11hs with a number of local relevant actors.

Invitations to participate were sent directly to local creatives part of the research's database and through referents in the community and existing networks such as the HWFI Cultural Interest Group and the HWFI Workspace provider drop-in meeting. Participants were invited to join an online group discussion with various actors from the creative community in HW/FI and Here East to exchange opinions and help build an understanding of the HW/FI and QEOP creative community's experience of Covid-19. In particular,

- How Covid-19 changed activities, behaviours, and business models?
- Which interventions have worked?
- What can we learn for future interventions to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of the community?

On this occasion, six members of the local communities joined the call:

- A maker resident of Fish Island;
- The Head of a social innovation agency based in Hackney Wick;
- The Chief Operating Officer of a video game company in Here East, QEOP;
- The Studio Operations Manager of a workspace provider in Hackney Wick;
- A Further Education Lead at a Higher Education Institution in Here East, QEOP; and
- The Director of a Creative company at a studio in Hackney Wick.

From this group discussion, four high-level themes were identified.

5.1 Need for investing in local skills longer-term

Upskilling and developing local talent is a requirement to guarantee the sustainability of local creative businesses. Proximity to work was highlighted by Covid, and there is a need to think about opportunities that can be created for people locally.

It is acknowledged that Brexit will have a significant impact on recruitment for firms that depend on foreign talent; thus, investing in skill development will be crucial - this includes apprenticeships and internship schemes, as well as new ways of incorporating talent.

Participants identify clear opportunities for more collaborations between HEIs and companies at Here East and between these and local schools.

⁴² Muf Architecture/Art. 2009. CREATIVE POTENTIAL: Hackney Wick and Fish Island. *Design for London*.

5.2 Physical Space

There is a need for rethinking the use of public spaces that enable new forms of interaction in the area. Participants think making better use of the expansiveness of the QEOP and the open spaces in Here East will be important to create a more liveable environment for residents and people working in the area. Conversely, they see open spaces in HW/FI are rapidly reducing, although ways of reclaiming these should be sought after. Likewise, they believe that moving forward, new ways of arranging the built environment will be required, such as hybrid spaces for social-distancing activities – i.e., covered open areas (e.g., Here East’s yard; at/near Hackney Bridge; in the park), as well as exploring the possibilities of hybrid activities (e.g., open markets, crafts fair, etc.).

5.3 Future of work

The work experience has changed significantly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants believe there is a seemingly permanent change in working dynamic towards more hybrid modes (home/office). Furthermore, they recognise that all of the businesses at Here East (and some on HW/FI) will be thinking and experimenting with new ways of working. Post-pandemic, understanding what the best arrangements for their staff are will be key for lots of companies.

Participants also mentioned there is currently a concentration of immersive/digital and other companies in Here East, which means there might be scope for some collaboration to develop new types of business and home experiences. According to the participants, this should not be just digital. New ways of working should also consider how physical spaces are used to create new types of interaction (e.g., outdoor markets, as above). During the group discussion, the participants became excited about the possibility of discussing with Here East and Plexal’s management about creating a working group on ‘the future work environment’ - so that they can offer it as a service to their tenants, but also use it as a way of finding out what their tenants want in the future. A similar approach could be taken by the workspace providers in HW/FI.

5.4 More precise support instruments and mechanisms

During the discussion, participants also emphasised the need to move from research focusing on policy recommendations to action-based engagement. This, they claimed, is rooted in the need for understanding the requirements of makers and creatives in terms of their survival as businesses, as well as understanding the importance of face-to-face interactions for some sectors and the power of narratives in closing deals and making sales. Likewise, they mentioned the need to foster local networks to develop and strengthen the local economy and the possibility of exploiting existing networks and developing business opportunities with prominent new actors entering the area. The idea of operating as a unified front to negotiate conditions for the commissioning of work from local creatives was also discussed.

6. Citizen Science

The researchers’ observations and participation in different forums indicated that many members of the local communities were experiencing ‘consultation fatigue’. Naturally, this hindered not only the research’s data collection process but also local authorities and agencies’ capacity to comprehensibly understand the communities’ needs and thus develop effective support measures.

Therefore, the Citizen Science (CS) work aimed at minimising its effects by actively engaging members of the communities in the research process.

This piece of complementary research was conducted in partnership with local, community interest social enterprise Creative Wick⁴³. The report titled “We need each other more than ever” documents the work carried out utilising a ‘citizen science’ approach through Creative Wick’s Living Lab’s⁴⁴ first research project. It implied the recruitment and training of 16 community members to conduct a series of structured interviews with artists, makers, creative practitioners, and businesses in the area, capturing data about their experiences. Unlike the core of this research, the CS report is primarily based on quantitative surveys conducted between February and March 2021.



Figure 25: 'We need each other more than ever' cover

The results show that the music, performing, and visual arts sub-sectors appear to have been hit the hardest. Likewise, nine out of ten participants have adapted their activities as a result of the restriction measures, with about half working from home during the pandemic. Moreover, almost 40% of the respondents declared to have developed new services during the crisis, and half of them claimed being prepared to deal with future Covid-like challenges. Conversely, one of the most problematic aspects highlighted by the survey is the lack of awareness around the government

⁴³ Creative Wick is the trading name of Hackney Wick and Fish Island CIC, an independent non-profit, social enterprise, Community Interest Company “established to help preserve Hackney Wick and Fish Island as a permanent, sustainable creative cluster”: creativewick.com

⁴⁴ Creative Wick’s Living Lab: creativewick.com/living-lab/

support services offer (local or central). This is despite the majority of the interviewees claiming they have used government support services during the pandemic (see Figure 26).

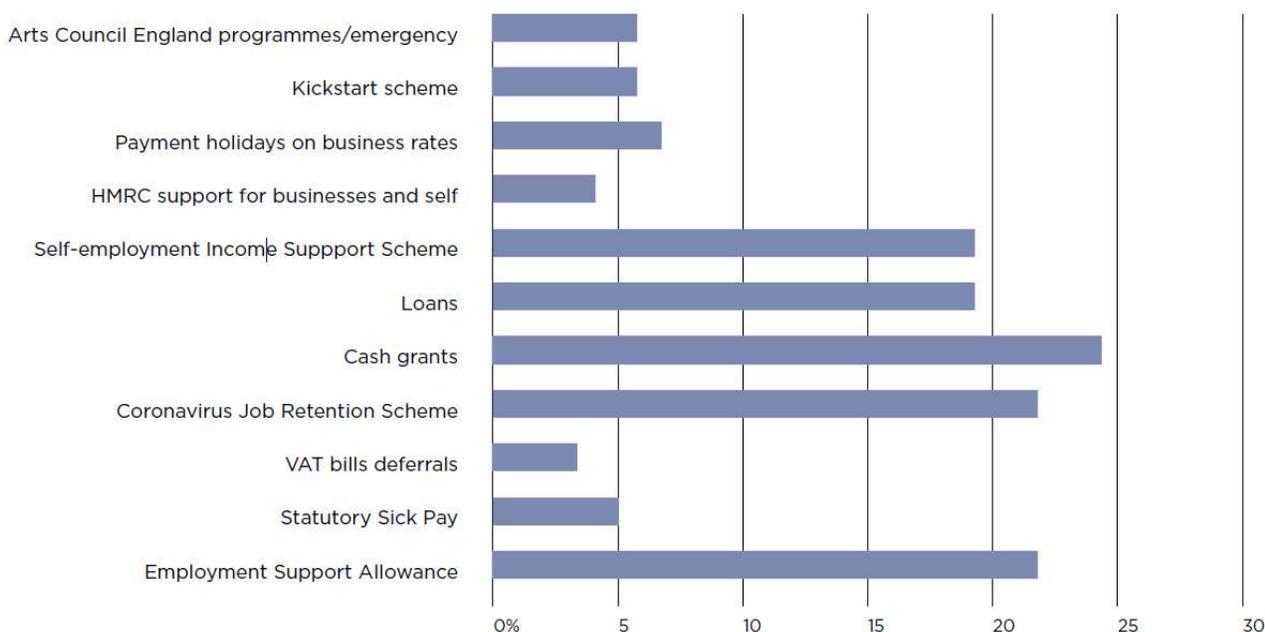


Figure 26: UK government schemes accessed by Citizen Science interviewees (Machado, Chamberlain, Hitchen, Vaz, 2021)

The issue of support mechanisms and where to get this support from is a relevant one, since 28% of the interviewees had accessed support services from businesses and organisations in their local area, and 81% considered their local community’s role in providing support to businesses and creatives during the lockdowns level as ‘important’ or ‘very important’. This highlights a disparity in the need for support and the awareness of governmental programmes and how to apply for them. Similarly, the results indicate a lack of awareness about the available support instruments in highly demanded areas such as access to affordable work and living space.

Moreover, the citizen science work also underscored the value of good communication, reliable information, and access to trusted networks and community groups not only to survive during the periods of hardship but also to come together in acts of mutual support and to produce social innovations. Once more, hyper-localism appears as a key driver to the sustainability of the creative economy in the short-term.

The work and results obtained by this complementary piece of work are available on the Living Lab’s report⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ <https://creativewick.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CWLL-We-need-each-other-more-than-ever-March-2021.pdf>

7. Summary insights

The iterative nature of this project allowed for the refinement of the insights generated as the investigation progressed. This meant reframing the research questions and revising the methods deployed to achieve the research objectives adaptively.

The first interviews and observations offered several preliminary insights that the researchers used to refine the approach. These early insights comprise:

- The area was not a ‘cluster’ so much as a community or group of communities;
- The existence of a large informal economy;
- There was a physical (the canal) and cultural divide between some of the communities;
- The existing interplay between local and non-local actors;
- The impact of Covid-19 amongst creative sub-sectors was uneven, including on living as well as working conditions;
- Some local creative communities are tired and financially stretched.

These early insights from the pre-immersion stage informed the research methods, which in turn offered a new set of themes. Table 1 presents these themes organised by the method applied during Phase 1.

| Observations | Interviews | Group discussion | Citizen Science |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Entrepreneurialism | Diverse and incohesive communities | Upskilling investment | Resilient and adaptive creative communities |
| Resignification of outdoor and public spaces | Precarity and vulnerability | Physical space | Key role of peer support networks |
| Community identity | Tensions re: physical space | Future of work | Mistrust of the development sector and the area’s regeneration process |
| | | Need for bespoke instruments | Low take-up of some of the formal support offers |
| | | | Lack of security of tenure and informal living arrangements |

Table 1: Themes generated from activities in Phase 1 & 2.

Amongst the main takeaways from these themes, we would highlight the following:

- Many local creative people and businesses were able to adapt and change their business models and practices, which some consider the only constant in the area;
- To a large degree, this level of resilience and adaptability was possible due to solid self-help networks, which, on many occasions, proved more effective than official government networks.
- A new approach to workspace is required. The last decade has seen an increase in pressure on affordable workspaces for creatives in HW/FI, which threatens the survival of some of its

creative communities. With the arrival of new creatives (especially to the QEOP), the physical requirements for these workspaces have also changed.

- These new creatives also bring new knowledge and specific skillsets that are not always abundant locally. In the future, there will be a need to ensure local talent is developed to feed these new creative sub-sectors. Big organisations, including local HEI, will need to play a role to strengthen the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP.
- This will require strengthening the current and development of new local networks that facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources.
- Crucial to the flourishing of social and business local networks is the existence of appropriate spaces to work, meet, trade, exchange, learn, and live.

New street art
since 3 days ago

Design Futures

Phase 2

Covid-19 and Creative Clusters

A real-time study of the impact of Covid-19
and associated support measures on the
creative business community in Hackney
Wick and the QE Olympic Park.

operating
lock gates

ZAKI

Lock gates as
multifunctional bridge

NOVEMBER 2021

#HWCRAIC

Graham Hitchen

Federico Vaz



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council



Loughborough
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London

1. Introduction

This report offers an account of the HWCRAIC research project's second phase: **Design Futures**. Through a series of activities involving actors in Hackney Wick, Fish Island, and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, this phase aimed to develop visions of the creative community beyond its immediate future. The purpose was to find a common narrative that allows for the alignment of need and resources towards attaining what the communities understand as a preferred future after the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic.

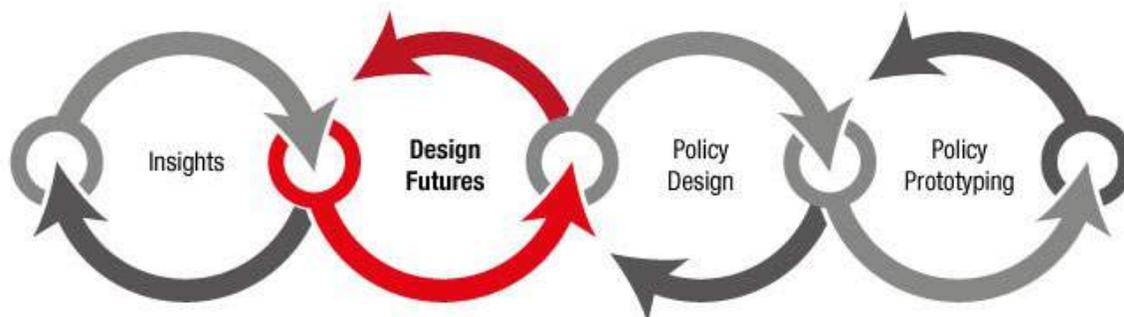


Figure 1: Four phases of the design for policy approach

From Phase 1, the concept of *space* systematically emerged as a preoccupation for the participants. This broad concept was the guiding theme during the participatory activities, which included online foresight workshops with diverse members of the local creative communities. In particular, during the workshops, the participants engaged in activities and discussions around the question:

What does the future hold for ‘spaces’ in HWFI and the QEOP, and how can we shape and develop these so that the creative communities in the area thrive?

Following this introduction, this report comprises four sections. Section 2 briefly explains the motivation to implement a design and foresight approach during this project phase. Section 3 provides an account of the two online workshops with local creatives that informed this phase. Section 4 jointly discusses the themes emerging from these two workshops. Lastly, section 5 offers a conclusion to the research project's second phase.

2. Why design and foresight?

“To design is to devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.”

Herbert A. Simon¹

In contexts of upheaval, policymakers often function as ‘policy-fixers’ constantly patching existing policies in response to ever-changing conditions. This sense of urgency operates as a barrier for long-term thinking and may also hinder the development of innovative policy instruments. This has

¹ Simon, H. A. (1969). *The sciences of the artificial*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

led many governments at the local and central levels to adopt diverse approaches to policymaking, including service design and design thinking, as well as futures thinking and foresight². The latter is defined as

[...] the capacity to anticipate alternative futures, based on sensitivity to weak signals, and an ability to visualize their consequences, in the form of multiple possible outcomes. It is a means to visualize, rehearse and then refine in the mind, actions that would otherwise have to be tested against reality, where the consequences of error are irrevocable.

Fuerth, 2009³

As a discipline, foresight is based on established principles and methodology that employ future analysis to address complex issues and provide strategic options for decision making in business, policy, and the public sector. Knowledge gained through foresight enables evaluating different possibilities, assessing diverse courses of action to invest in possible futures and developing informed strategies towards shared objectives. It also allows the identification of the relevant forces influencing future developments and how they interact to shape a given system's future. Especially in the face of increasing uncertainty, foresight can be used to augment the resilience and readiness of an organisation or community. In the past decade, the use of foresight has ceased to be an activity reserved for military organisations to be appropriated by decision-makers at different levels of government, including the UK's⁴.

Likewise, several design-based approaches are currently being deployed within policymaking and government services resulting from growing recognition of their capacity to understand and address complex societal issues. Interestingly, there are synergies in the joint introduction of design and foresight approaches. For instance, design plays a significant role in imaging, understanding, and visualising futures by utilising various tools and methods. Thus, design provides a creative and experimental space to explore and assess potential solutions by bringing people's experiences to the forefront as they interact with systems.

Given the project's adoption of *design for policy* as its methodological underpinning⁵, during its second phase, researchers looked at integrating notions of foresight to co-imagine with members of the local creative communities their preferred futures beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. Practically, this was implemented through a focus group and online workshops.

3. Workshops

The ethos of this investigation was based on immersion and active participation. In practice, this meant engaging with the creative communities in and around HW/FI and the QEOP to inquire on the effect Covid-19 has had on them whilst jointly developing understandings of how to enhance their

² Kimbell, L., & Vesnić-Alujević, L. (2020). After the toolkit: anticipatory logics and the future of government. *Policy Design and Practice*, 3(2), 95-108.

³ Fuerth, L. S. (2009). Foresight and anticipatory governance. *Foresight-The journal of future studies, strategic thinking and policy*, 11(4), 14-32.

⁴ See Gov.UK Foresight projects collection: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/foresight-projects>

⁵ See 'HWCRAIC: Covid-19 and Creative Clusters' report.

robustness and resilience. During the second phase of this project, face-to-face and online engagement activities were carried out with diverse members of the creative communities.

Initially, all activities in this phase were planned to be conducted as face-to-face workshops at different venues in HW/FI and the QEOP. However, this was not always possible due to the ongoing circumstances around the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, three activities were carried out as part of this phase:

1. Futures focus group at the Colour Factory, December 15th, 2020.
2. First online Design Future workshop: March 19th, 2021.
3. Second online Design Future workshop: March 26th, 2021.

The time between the first and the following activities reflects the researchers' original ambition to conduct these activities face-to-face. Yet, in order to avoid further delays in the research schedule, the Design Futures workshops were conducted online, utilising digital platforms for communications and interactions (Zoom and Miro, respectively).

A range of participants attended the three sessions, stretching from local creatives in different creative practices, researchers from local universities, new housing development and warehouse residents, and recent and long-standing artists and makers in the area. Invitations to participate were sent directly to local creatives through referents in the community and existing networks such as the HWFI Cultural Interest Group and the HWFI Workspace provider drop-in meeting. Attendees were not paid for their participation but were offered a voucher to spend in a local hostelry for the equivalent of their time dedication according to the London Living Wage⁶.

3.1 Futures focus group

The first *design futures* workshop was planned for December 15th, 2020. The two-hour workshop was intended to be a face-to-face session with members of the creative communities at the Colour Factory⁷, a live music venue, food court, and multi-functional events space located in Queen's Yard, at the heart of Hackney Wick.



Figure 2: The Colour Factory, Queen's Yard, Hackney Wick

⁶ The London Living Wage is the only UK rate based on living costs: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

⁷ Colour Factory: <https://www.colourfactory.com/>

Due to fewer attendees than anticipated, the workshop was transformed into a focus group inquiring about the ‘future of spaces in HW/FI and the QEOP’.

In the run-up to the workshop, a significant number of attendees sent their apologies as they no longer felt comfortable participating in a face-to-face event. This is explained mainly by the rising number of Covid-19 cases and the changes in local restrictions imposed in London during December. The workshop was due to take place at a Covid-secure location in Hackney, which along with the rest of London, had entered *Tier 2*⁸ as of December 2nd after the end of the national lockdown. However, the rapidly deteriorating pandemic situation resulted in London moving to *Tier 3* restrictions from December 16th, the day after the proposed workshop, and *Tier 4* shortly thereafter. Consequently, some members of the communities felt uneasy about meeting in person indoors.

“I’m so sorry to do this at short notice, but I don’t think I can attend tomorrow, there’s some discomfort around looming Tier 3.”

In-person workshop invitee.

The rapidly evolving context meant the constant adaptation of the research approach. Although the first workshop was not conducted as planned, the participants who joined agreed to participate in a two-hour unstructured focus group. Since the workshop would have aimed at exploring the notion of the future of spaces for the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP, the discussion focused on the same topic. Three primary strands emerged from this:

- Spaces for trading;
- Spaces for sharing;
- The space between the physical and digital interactions.

3.1.1 Spaces for trading

The participants agreed on the need for spaces to trade.

“Visibility is the main issue.”

Focus group participant.

Despite the renewed momentum of hyper localism caused by the pandemic⁹, mobility restrictions significantly impacted creatives’ ability to sell locally. Especially for artisans, makers, designers, and artists that produce material objects and pieces, the area does not offer them window-shops to showcase their work. Some suggested a need for a local creatives ‘directory’ to increase potential sales and foster interactions and collaborations between creatives who may not be aware their outsourcing needs could be locally covered. There was strong support for solutions that could both provide an online marketplace and a resource network.

At the time when the focus group was being convened, a new open-air market was set to open in the heart of Hackney Wick. White Post Lane Makers’ Market was meant to be a Christmas market showcasing unique gifts from some of the borough’s makers, artists, and designers.

⁸ Formal tiering review update: 30 December 2020: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/formal-tiering-review-update-30-december-2020>

⁹ See HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights.

“The market is located two minutes from Hackney Wick station, in the centre of one of the most significant creative communities in Europe. Designated one of the Mayor of London’s first ever Creative Enterprise Zones in 2018, the talent here is world leading.”

Tower Hamlets press release: ‘White Post Lane Makers Market’¹⁰, December 11th, 2020.

The market would pilot on the 18th - 20th of December from 10 am-6 pm, subject to safety checks and government guidance. Unfortunately, new restrictions came into force on December 19th, moving London into *Tier 4*: ‘Stay at Home’ alert level¹¹, which meant the market’s premature closing.

3.1.2 Space for sharing

Knowledge exchange appeared as a concern amongst participants. Even though there is a general recognition of community members who act as brokers facilitating transactions and the flow of knowledge/information/resources between people within the communities, some claimed that when it came to their creative practices, they do not necessarily know where or to whom to turn locally to seek advice or ask for help. Although some creative communities within the area appear to have strong personal and professional networks, some are unaware of the possibilities and opportunities available to them.

“[Creatives are] especially dependant on networks for the next job opportunity.”

Focus group participant.

This was presented as problematic since it is common amongst creatives to identify and exploit synergies between different creative practices. Moreover, participants reflected that these spaces for sharing (experiences, knowledge, resources) are key to building trust, which they pointed out as the cornerstone of healthy community development. One participant mentioned that, especially during the lockdown, Masterclasses were offered by and for members of the local creative communities. This seems to have had good reception amongst the participants, although not all were aware of these or how to sign up. Another participant mentioned the possibility of having a mentorship programme for new creatives in the area to integrate them better. Linking this back to the idea of a creatives’ directory, one participant mentioned the possibility of establishing a rotating open-house programme, where local creatives could see and experience first-hand what other creatives in the area do.

3.1.3 The space between the physical and digital interactions

To different degrees, the participants expressed feeling comfortable moving their creative practices online. Whereas some develop their creative practices entirely online and being located in the area simply provides an appropriate environment or context in which to work, some were keen to find alternative ways of interaction within the local community. However, they all agreed on the need for establishing interfaces to bridge the physical and digital divide. Having said that, some participants voiced their concern about being part of a virtual community that will inevitably not reflect the area’s diversity. Similarly, those still working from dedicated workspaces in the area felt they were still able

¹⁰ White Post Lane Makers’ Market: Festive Edition! <https://www.hwfi.zone/makers-market>

¹¹ Prime Minister announces Tier 4: ‘Stay At Home’ Alert Level in response to new COVID variant: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-tier-4-stay-at-home-alert-level-in-response-to-new-covid-variant>

to benefit —to some extent— from the interactions and exchange of ideas occurring in these spaces, with the caveat of also being a particular representation of the creatives in the area. Interestingly, The Wick newspaper¹², whose first issue was published during the lockdown, seems to have acted as one of the material elements reminding people of the communities’ vibrancy.

3.2 Online Design Future workshops

Although the original intention was to convene face-to-face workshops as lockdown eased, to avoid further delays in the project’s progress, the researchers decided to carry out the design future workshops online. As a result, two online workshops were conducted in late March 2021. These 1.5-hour long workshops were identical in structure and consisted of 4 activities (see Table 1).

| | Activity | Duration |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Intros: how did we get here? | 15:00 – 15:25 |
| 2 | Analyse the Present | 15:25 – 15:45 |
| | Break | 15:45 – 15:55 |
| 3 | Explore the Future | 15:55 – 16:20 |
| 4 | Wrap-up | 16:20 – 16:30 |

Table 1: Online Design Futures workshop agenda

The first online design future workshop (DFW1) took place via Zoom on March 19th, 2021. Invitations to participate in this workshop were sent to 23 creatives working or living in the HW/FI QEOP area. Eight confirmed their participation, and finally, only two attended the session.

The second online design future workshop (DFW2) took place online via Zoom on February 26th, 2021. On this occasion, invitations were sent directly by the researchers and through our partners at Creative Wick’s Living Lab to a group of 16 residents who had previously joined the research project as *citizen scientists*¹³. From this, 13 people confirmed attendance, and six joined the session.

Notably, on both opportunities, participants were offered vouchers to spend in local hostelry for the equivalent of their time dedication according to the London Living Wage. Although this was well-received, it appeared that online meetings fatigue might have played a role in the low attendance levels.

3.2.1 Intros: how did we get here?

During the introduction, the researchers explained that the project was less focused on the impact of Covid-19 and more on what can be learnt from it going forward. Thus, the design futures workshop was about understanding where local creatives would want to see themselves in 5-10 years and the steps that would need to be taken to make the community more resilient in the future. Likewise, it looked at the government measures that have worked over the last year, those that have not necessarily worked as expected, and what can be learnt from this experience.

In this first part, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences, look back and forward, and particularly think about ‘spaces’ (see Figure 3). Being an exploratory session, participants were told that the definition of the term remained entirely up to them.

¹² The Wick newspaper: <https://thisisthewick.com/>

¹³ See HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights.

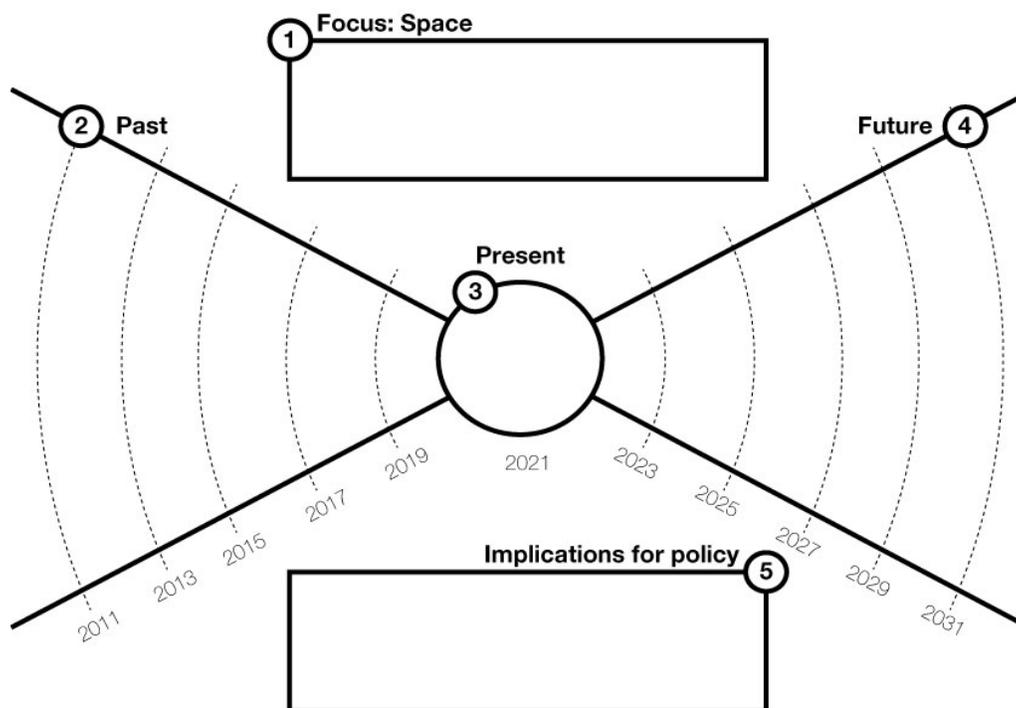


Figure 3: Model utilised during the online design future workshop based on the ‘Janus Cones’.

3.2.2 Analyse the Present

After the introductions, and before moving to the more forward-looking parts of the workshop, participants were asked to analyse the current situation regarding their creative practices and the issues around spaces affecting HW/FI and the QEOP. To ensure an organised discussion, participants were invited to conduct a PESTLE analysis.

Activity 1: PESTLE analysis

The PESTLE analysis is a framework utilised by different types of organisations looking at identifying the key drivers influencing them. It disaggregates an organisation’s macro-environment into the *political, economic, sociological, technological, legal* and *environmental* factors affecting it. Being a flexible analytical tool, it was used during the online workshops to elicit the participants’ understanding of the forces currently shaping the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP.

To conduct this analysis, participants were invited to join a pre-designed board on an online visual collaboration platform (Miro). In this way, the researchers facilitating the session were able to translate participants’ comments into digital notes, whilst other participants added their own directly onto the digital board (see Figures 4 and 5).

The collated results of this activity in both workshops are presented below:

- **Political:** On the one hand, the expectation is that the upcoming London Mayoral election will result in the incumbent's re-election, which will imply the continuity of some support policies, such as the CEZ designation for the area. Conversely, participants were concerned with politicians' and elected officials' understanding of the make-up of the creative communities. They claim the inconsistent awareness of their realities has adverse effects, which, for instance, has resulted in a lack of specific support measures for freelancers that, in fact, make the most significant proportion of creative businesses in the area.
- **Economic:** It appears the concerns in this area are manifold and the most prominent. The rising prices of living and working spaces in the area seem to be the first and main preoccupation. Some participants claim creatives have been "priced out" and therefore are moving out of the area. Conversely, the developers' corporate social responsibility actions in the area have resulted in the funding of diverse community-led activities and the construction of new affordable housing. Secondly, the pandemic has pushed the government to divert funds to cover different needs, which means less funding is available for creative industries. On the other hand, various authorities and funding bodies have made many grants available. Thirdly, many local businesses had been quick to re-orientate their strategies to better serve the locals and exploit emerging needs. With the prospect of easing restrictions and more cafés and restaurants opening in the following weeks, a capital inflow was expected.
- **Sociological:** The central societal aspect highlighted by the participants was the accelerated change in the area's demographic. The gentrification process means wealthier tenants occupy the new developments, and many residents, including creatives, are moving out of the area. This has the paradoxical effect in which the increased demand to live in an area with a particularly "grungy" look and feel puts pressure to demolish some of the old warehouses where many local creatives work and live, not only forcing them to leave but also significantly changing the area's aesthetic. Although some new local developments offer affordable workspaces, the perception is that locals are not occupying these.
- **Technological:** Some of the more recent developments, such as Here East and the Copper Box Arena, are seen as spaces to attract technology-intensive organisations, especially in the form of software and tech start-ups and events taking place in the area. The last five years have seen a significant increase in traffic and movement of people commuting to work and study in this area, translating into new bus routes and infrastructure development (e.g., bridges, parking spaces). However, these are seen as primarily disjointed from the creative communities in HW/FI. Similarly, some participants pointed out that whereas the area now has companies such as BT Sport, some residents remain digitally excluded, a condition that has further isolated them during the lockdown.
- **Legal:** The main point raised around the legal factors influencing the area is the lack of rights protecting creatives living in work/live spaces and the precarity of their conditions arising from this. The closing of Stour Space, an iconic workspace and gallery in Fish Island, is seen as a reminder of their fragile conditions.
- **Environmental:** Currently, the numerous construction sites in and around HW/FI and the QEOP appears as the leading environmental concern. These are not only detrimental for those currently living in the area due to the increase in noise and air pollution but will also, once finished, further contribute to changing the "grungy" looking spaces for "shiny new buildings". On the other hand, the QEOP was highlighted as a green haven that made the lockdown months significantly more bearable for the residents.

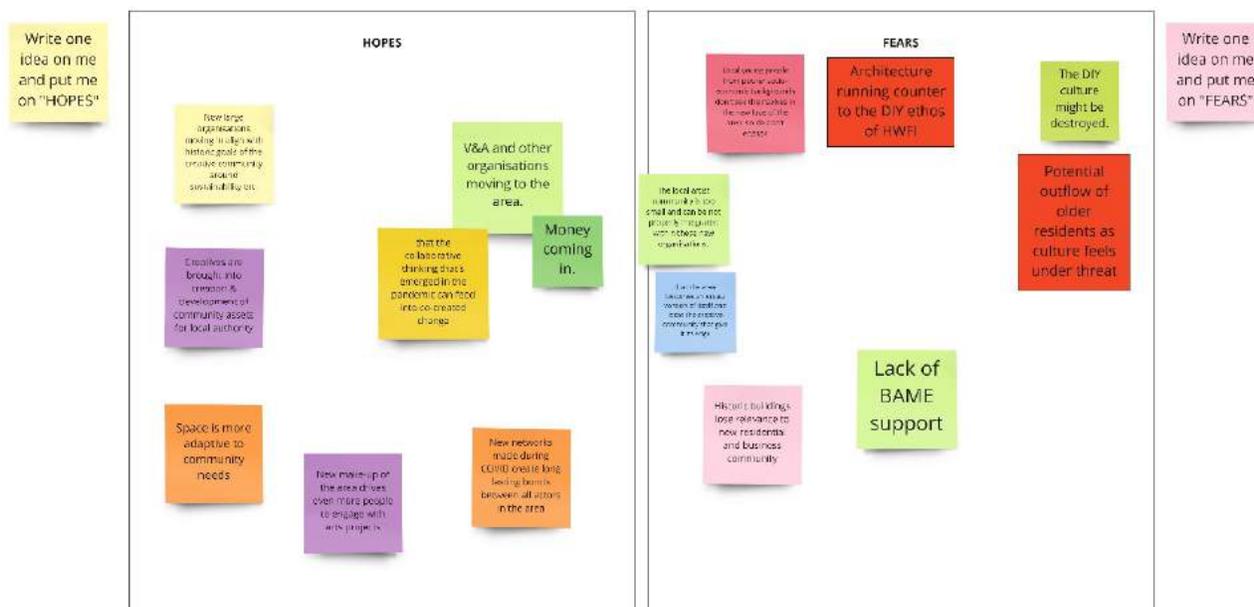


Figure 7: FDW2 Hopes & Fears Miro board

The collated results of this activity in both workshops are presented below:

- Hopes:** The hopes captured in this exercise can be summarised in the idea of ‘local re-appropriation’. Most comments referred to the notion of the local community learning from the pandemic and strengthening its social fabric to make better use of the resources available and exploit future opportunities. Residents would be empowered and drive the area’s development in a more ‘horizontal’ relationship with local authorities. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and cultural organisations entering the area would foster local development whilst offering collaboration and job opportunities to residents. Likewise, capital poured into the area would help ensure current residents will not have to leave the area, thus helping to preserve its identity. Also, HW/FI’s characteristic ‘grungy’ look and feel would remain dominant despite new developments. As a result, the local communities would become self-sustained, and the area recognised as a global creative powerhouse.
- Fears:** The main worry for the future is the disintegration of the creative communities in the area. This would take many forms, including the cost-driven expulsion of creatives and waves of new residents disengaged from the creative communities. Likewise, current residents from less favourable socioeconomic backgrounds would feel more disenfranchised, thus less likely to become active community members. Furthermore, the built environment will continue to change until there is no resemblance to the current post-industrial atmosphere, deepening the area’s identity crisis. The ‘new shiny buildings’ would further contribute to residents’ isolation within their apartments, severely damaging the area’s social fabric. Finally, large chains would take over the local businesses extracting capital from the area whilst standardising their offering.

Activity 3: Roadmap to a Dystopian future

The road mapping exercise visually identified when and how major events and decision points could influence the area’s future, particularly in relation to the notion of space and the creative communities. This is a well-known method utilised by many organisations, including government

bodies, to combine known events with speculative ones to deepen understanding of the complex relationships between them and build a holistic picture¹⁵.

Once more, pre-designed online boards to work collaboratively were utilised (see Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 8: FDW1 Dystopia – Roadmapping Miro Board

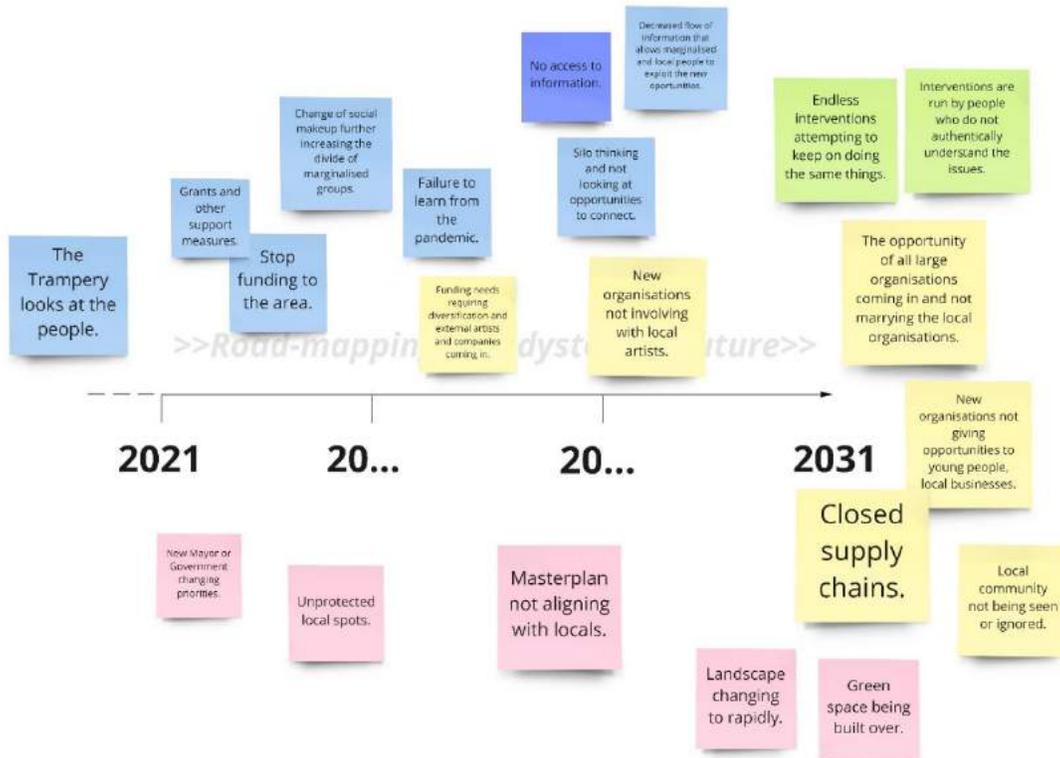


Figure 9: FDW2 Dystopia – Roadmapping Miro Board

¹⁵ Government Office for Science (2017). *The Futures Toolkit: Tools for Futures Thinking and Foresight Across UK Government*: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674209/futures-toolkit-edition-1.pdf

Participants found the roadmap to a dystopian future to be a relatively easy path to envision. This was mainly associated with a lack of or a weak sense of agency by the current residents and local creatives. In other words, the roadmap to the realisation of their fears is seen as directly related to their capacity to influence authorities' decision-making. In some regards, some of these fears are seen as the inevitable outcome of gentrification, for which explicit actions should be taken to avoid it. For instance, the recent opening of a chain supermarket store in Hackney Wick is seen as the precursor of other chains moving into the area and eventually out-competing local businesses.

Similarly, the redevelopment of old warehouses currently used as live/work spaces being converted into apartment buildings is a concern not only for the inevitable displacement of the current occupants but also because of the aesthetic change associated with it. Furthermore, participants imagined the prominent cultural organisations coming to the area disregarding the existing creative potential and bringing with them closed supply chains, which would mean locking out local creatives and driving new and existing audiences to consume the new cultural offering. At the end of this process is a perceived inability to produce support mechanisms that help the existing communities to survive by systematically misunderstanding their needs.

Activity 4: Backcasting a Utopian future

In a back-casting exercise, participants connect a given scenario (in this case, a preferred future) with the present whilst identifying the key milestones leading to it. This approach aims to pinpoint what is in the decision makers' control, and thus can be delivered, and what is beyond their control and then needs to be managed¹⁶.

For this activity, participants were also invited to collaboratively work on pre-designed online boards (see Figures 9 and 10).

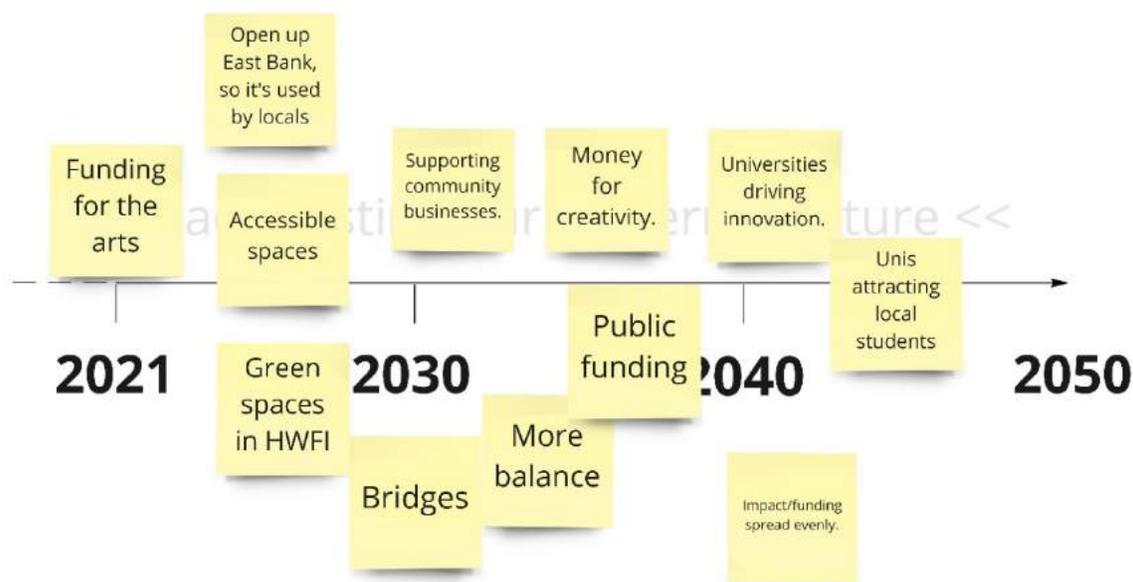


Figure 10: FDW1 Utopia – Backcasting

¹⁶ Government Office for Science (2017). *The Futures Toolkit: Tools for Futures Thinking and Foresight Across UK Government*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674209/futures-toolkit-edition-1.pdf

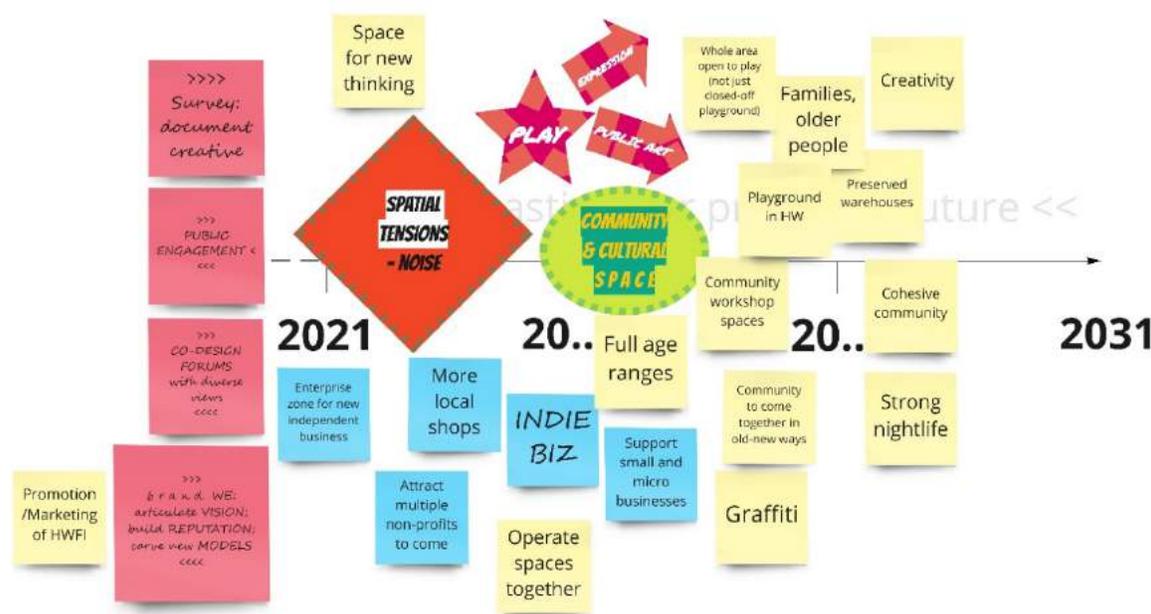


Figure 11: FDW2 Utopia – Backcasting

The utopian future envisioned from the *Hope & Fears* activity is one where a cohesive and empowered local community is in charge of its own destiny. The elements that once made HW/FI a lively area, such as vibrant nightlife, remain strong and coexist in harmony with families and the elderly in the area. The warehouses and other live/work spaces have been preserved, and HW/FI is an area for creative experimentation that transcends the workshops, studios, and ateliers spilling over the streets and public spaces. To achieve this, the newly established HEIs play a role in channelling funding into the area, driving innovation, and benefiting the local communities from these developments. The steel bridges are followed by metaphorical ones that unite both sides of the canal, thus building and widening a customer base for local creative businesses. As a starting point, participants see the creation and strengthening of local forums that enhance resident participation and foster local engagement in decision-making forums and processes.

4. Analysis of the workshops’ themes

As intended, the notion of *space* dominated the conversation when looking at the creative communities’ future in the area to different degrees. Perhaps the first point to make is that moving to or locating their creative practices to HW/FI/QEOP is for these creatives a very conscious decision taken to a large extent based on the prospect of embedding themselves in the local creative atmosphere, becoming part of its communities, and enjoying the benefits that come with a lively creative network.

“I like that sense of being around people who are doing creative things [...] I wanted to put myself in the middle of that”.

FDW2 participant.

From the three sessions carried out in this phase, three main facets of ‘space’ were identified:

- Workspace;
- Living space;
- Public space.

4.1 Workspace

Unsurprisingly, gentrification was highlighted as one of the most salient threats to the local creative communities’ survival. Although housing developments are often seen as the most obvious risk, the arrival of large cultural organisations is also perceived as both an opportunity and a threat. For example, during the *Futures focus group*, concerns were raised about the East Bank development¹⁷. The fear is that this ambitious culture and education district will “parachute” into the Olympic Park, ignoring the local creatives. This worry was echoed in both subsequent *Future design workshops*, indicating that the participants see themselves as mere spectators of these changes that will undoubtedly significantly impact the area. Some, however, are hopeful about the impact this might have and see it as an opportunity to strengthen the local creative communities.

“The Southbank is a good example of a big cultural institution which has helped spawn a big, really vibrant local creative community, and there’s a potential to do something like that in Hackney Wick.”

FDW1 participant.

Irrespective, all participants agreed on a preferred future where ventures such as the East Bank are co-designed with the residents and local creatives to preserve and strengthen the existing communities.

Participants also expressed their concerns about workspace affordability and the demolition of warehouses that provide special conditions not only for developing certain creative practices but also for exploiting synergies in these settings.

“Beyond emotional support, for resource sharing, for knowledge sharing, a good example that I like to use is that I’ve had situations where I’ve had to fix things in my room, fix my bike, fix my guitar, and I’ve never paid for a tool, I’ve never paid for someone to do it for me because I always know someone who has that tool or has that knowledge and is able to help me do it.”

FDW2 participant.

Although most participants do not live in the remaining live/work spaces in HW/FI, most show explicit support for their existence as they see them as staples of the creative communities in the area and an intrinsic part of its identity.

4.2 Living space

Space seems to be the central resource in dispute in HW/FI. This is a contentious issue for the creative communities since they believe it is their interventions in the built environment and creative practices that make the area unique. However, the large majority – and especially those in live/work

¹⁷ What is East Bank? <https://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/east-bank/what-is-east-bank>

spaces— are not the landlords or freeholders of their accommodation and find themselves at the mercy of what is perceived as an inevitable gentrification process.

Moreover, the issues around living spaces are intimately related to a particular way of living and an ethos that some claim is quintessential to the area.

“I really see Hackney Wick and other warehouses and communities like that as a model for not only sustainability, but as a model for community-led living, and I think that oftentimes there’s a big focus on creativity when people are discussing the area but something that is very important about this community is the grassroots kind of DIY ethos but also the support network, which is intimately tied with the space in which people live.”

FDW2 participant.

In a way, and not unlike many other gentrified areas worldwide, it is the creatives’ success at making a unique place that eventually expels them from it.

Moving forward, participants envisage safeguarded pockets within the area where work/live spaces remain a reality and continue to offer an alternative way of living for creatives wanting to reap the benefits of the flow and influx of ideas and resources.

4.3 Public spaces

The pandemic has made clear the need for different kinds of public spaces. It became clear for the residents that having the QEOP on their doorstep enabled a significant improvement in their quality of life since HW/FI does not have green areas for leisure and recreation besides the nearby Victoria Park. The participants clearly expressed their views of a more localised community that enjoys the newly developed park and green areas whilst also appropriating it.

Furthermore, the government-imposed restrictions on mobility had a direct effect on residents’ use of local public spaces and amenities.

“...as a resident, the thing that has changed during Covid is that the area is alive in a way that it wasn’t before, especially during the week”.

FDW2 participant.

Participants remarked on the fact that, even during the lockdown, new local businesses opened, thus taking advantage of captive consumers. They also signalled the need for markets that allow local creatives to showcase and trade beyond the pandemic. However, there were concerns about a well-known supermarket opening in HW, which is seen as a potential invasion of commercial chains that would displace local businesses (interestingly, this is despite residents’ complaints about the lack of competition and consequent high prices in local off-licenses).

Lastly, the notion of public spaces was highlighted in terms of forums for debate and exchange. In this regard, one participant referred to the importance of the Cultural Interest Group meetings as a way of becoming part of the local creative communities:

“...the CIG meetings have been really helpful because you get to see who is part of that ecosystem and it becomes more of not just satelliting in but being part of the Hackney Wick / Fish Island communities”.

FDW1 participant.

Similarly, another participant expressed how the rotating venues in which these meetings used to take place¹⁸ facilitated the creatives discovering and occupying local spaces:

“[the CIG meetings were] never in the same place twice during the time that I was physically attending. Which was great because that would be in cafés or the workspaces or in rooms for hire or whatever, and it was a really nice way of getting to know back rooms at the brewery and things that I hadn’t been into.”

FDW1 participant.

It became apparent that this type of exchange is crucial to businesses in HW/FI. The geographic proximity of one another in the area has enabled people to more or less casually meet, which in turn propitiated the exchange of ideas and gave place to business opportunities.

5. Phase 2 conclusions

Hackney Wick and its surrounding area are presented as a creative hub of global dimensions. Evidence of this is the Creative Enterprise Zone designation, which aims to secure London’s “future as a cultural capital and ensure artists and creatives continue to call this place their home”¹⁹. Despite these efforts, local creatives face precarious living and working conditions, often resulting in their relocation outside the area. From insights gathered in the previous stage of this research, the notion of ‘spaces’ appeared as a central feature of the creatives’ narratives during the Covid-19 crisis.

The three sessions conducted for the second phase of this research offered rich pictures of how the creative communities see themselves moving forward. From them, three main aspects of ‘space’ were identified:

- **Workspace:** The creative communities see HW/FI as an inspiring area that offers plenty of development opportunities. They aspire to see affordable workspaces in which knowledge, ideas, and resources are available and shared.
- **Living space:** The rising housing prices added to the demolition of warehouses to build new apartment buildings puts increasing pressure on creatives that have suffered significant financial drawbacks due to the Covid-19 crisis. The participants involved in this project clearly stated the need to guarantee affordable housing whilst safeguarding the remaining work/live spaces. The latter not only responds to the need for affordable housing but also to preserving the area’s ethos and aesthetics.
- **Public space:** The influx of capital in the area has been beneficial for developing green areas, which proved vital for the residents during lockdown periods. These, however, are located mainly in the QEOP, and there is still a divide between it and HW/FI. Furthermore, in terms of the creative businesses’ health, mobility restrictions and social distancing measures have negatively affected the interactions and flow of ideas and resources that used to take place in HW/FI. However, the participants expressed their confidence in incorporating the lessons learned during the lockdown period, where social support networks and online forums made a significant difference for the subsistence of residents and local creatives.

¹⁸ The Cultural Interest Group meetings have been taking place online since March 2020.

¹⁹ Creative Enterprise Zones. <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/arts-and-culture/culture-and-good-growth/creative-enterprise-zones>

Naturally, the issues around each of these types of spaces are intertwined, and their assessment should be considered systemically. For instance, the fact that the area has been transitioning from its industrial heritage to a more residential destination means appropriate living and public spaces are just being developed. Conversely, the limited available space means new homes will be built in the former industrial buildings that attracted the creative communities in the first place. Arriving at a healthy balance will require conscientious planning. Notably, the participants preferred future for the area involved a high degree of autonomy of the local communities and the prospect of creating an area to live and work where creative experimentation is at its heart.

Policy Design Workshop

Phase 3

Covid-19 and Creative Clusters

A real-time study of the impact of Covid-19 and associated support measures on the creative business community in Hackney Wick and the QE Olympic Park.

DECEMBER 13

#HWCRAIC

Graham Hitchen
Federico Vaz



1. Introduction

This report offers an account of the HWCRAIC research project's third phase: **Policy Design** (see Figure 1). This phase focused on co-designing potential interventions that could facilitate the realisation of the preferred futures envisioned in the previous phase (Design Futures). A series of activities, including dissemination presentations with local agencies and community members, was conducted to achieve this. These led to the facilitation of a co-creative workshop with diverse actors of the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP and policymakers and representatives of the local authorities and agencies¹ to produce preliminary policy ideas.

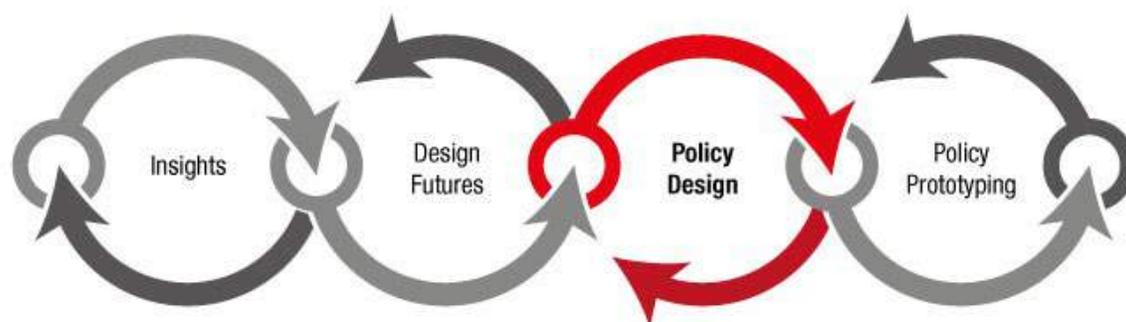


Figure 1: Four phases of the research approach

At this stage, a set of four themes (Change, Space, Knowledge, Networks) had been identified during the previous phases and were utilised to frame the challenges that the members of the local communities could co-creatively address. After validation, these provided guidance into the specific areas the design interventions should target. The co-design activities in this phase aimed to bring together diverse local actors to embed themselves and actively contribute to the policy design process.

The activities of Phase 3 can be divided into the workshop's preliminary dissemination activities and the workshop's four stages (see Figure 2). The researchers conducted the former in the runup to the policy co-design workshop and aimed at sharing some of the research insights generated in Phases 1 and 2; the latter took place in collaboration with 14 participants.

The rhomboids in Figure 2 borrow from the Design Council's Double Diamond² and symbolise the activities' divergent or convergent nature. For instance, the first stage (half-rhomboid), labelled 'Emerging themes & insights', is a converging stage in which the research insights from Phases 1 and 2 were distilled into the four themes. Conversely, the following stage involved engaging participants in interrogating these themes, re-opening, and re-interpreting them.

¹ London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), London Borough of Hackney (LBH), London Borough of Tower Hamlets, London Borough of Newham (LBN).

² Design Council 'The Double Diamond: A universally accepted depiction of the design process': <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/double-diamond-universally-accepted-depiction-design-process>

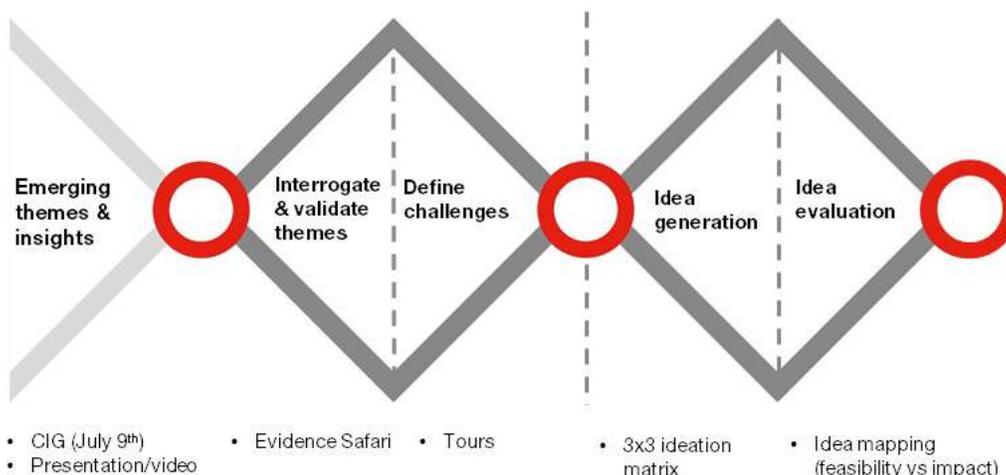


Figure 2: Workshop planning

This phase comprises a total of five stages, where the first one consists of the dissemination activities, and the remaining four are the activities undertaken in the policy design workshop.

1. Dissemination: Emerging themes & insights;
2. Interrogate & validate themes;
3. Define challenges;
4. Idea generation;
5. Idea evaluation.

The dissemination activities in stage 1 took place online, whilst stages 2 to 5 correspond to the in-person policy design workshop.

This report is structured in four sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 reports on the dissemination activities carried out during this phase in preparation for the policy design workshop. Then, section 3 delves into the co-design workshop conducted in Hackney Wick in July 2021, describing its organisation and activities. Lastly, Section 4 discusses the outcomes of this Phase and the next steps.

2. Dissemination: Emerging themes & insights

The iterative nature of this project allowed for the refinement of the insights generated as the investigation progressed. This meant reframing the research questions and revising the methods deployed to achieve the research objectives in an adaptive manner³.

The first interviews and observations offered several preliminary insights that the researchers used to refine the approach. These early insights included:

- HW/FI and the QEOP is **not** a ‘cluster’ so much as a community or group of communities;
- A large informal economy exists within the area;

³ See ‘HWCRAIC Covid-19 and Creative Clusters’ report.

- The natural (e.g., rivers and canals) and artificial (e.g., A12 road) environment offers a physical divide between some of the communities;
- There is an existing interplay between local and non-local actors;
- There has been a very uneven impact of Covid-19 amongst local creative sub-sectors;
- The effect of Covid-19 can be observed as much on living as working conditions;
- Some of the local creative communities are tired and financially stretched as a result of the Covid-10 pandemic;
- Many members of the local creative communities were unable to claim or make use of the available support measures;
- The local peer-to-peer networks were crucial in sustaining the communities.

These early insights from the pre-immersion stage informed the research methods, which in turn, offered a new set of preliminary thematics. Table 1 presents these themes organised by the method applied during the research’s Phases 1 and 2⁴.

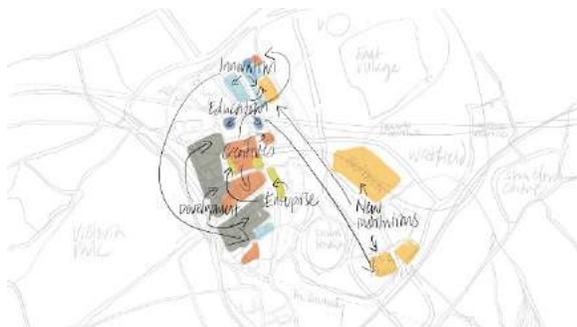
| Observations | Interviews | Group discussion | Citizen Science | Design Futures |
|--|------------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------|
| Entrepreneurialism | Diverse and incohesive communities | Upskilling investment | Resilient and adaptive creative communities | Workspace |
| Resignification of outdoor and public spaces | Precarity and vulnerability | Physical space | Key role of peer support networks | Living space |
| Community identity | Tensions for physical space | Experience | Mistrust of the development sector and the area’s regeneration process | Public space |
| | | Future of work | Low take-up of some of the formal support offers | |
| | | Need for bespoke instruments and interventions | Lack of security of tenure and informal living arrangements | |

Table 1: Themes obtained from activities in Phase 1 & 2.

These preliminary thematics were collated and further distilled into four themes:

⁴ For an account of the methods utilised at each phase, see ‘HWCRAIC Covid-19 and Creative Clusters’ report, HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights, and HWCRAIC Report 2: Design Futures.

NETWORKS: *Despite not being treated as a ‘cluster’, local communities have over the years developed networks to exchange information, knowledge, and resources. These comprise both bottom-up (organic) and top-down (agency interventions) networks with a diverse scope, legitimacy, and effectiveness.*

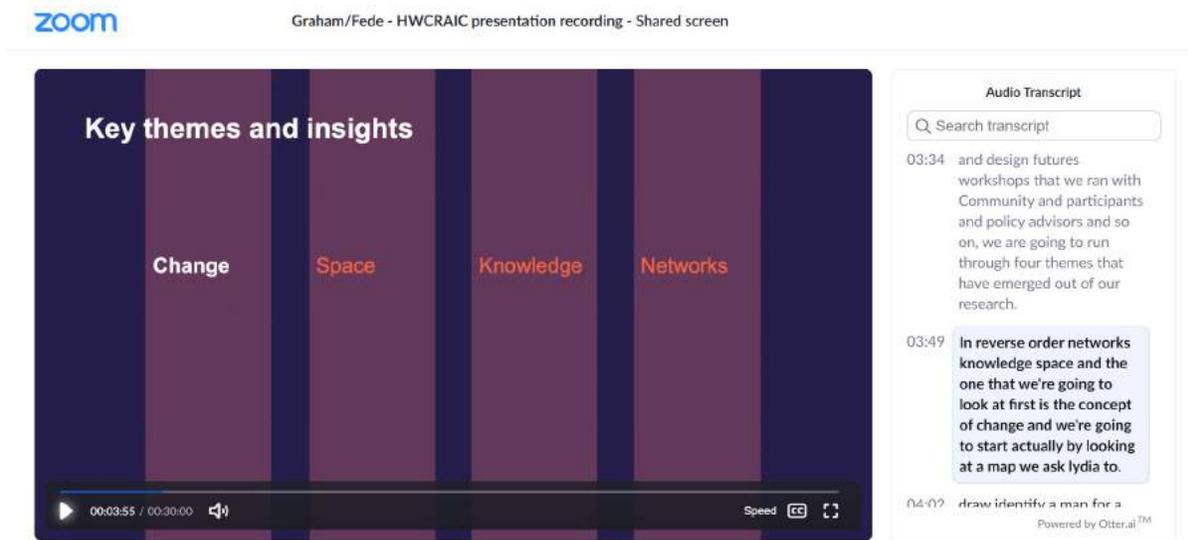


- Most effective support interventions during the pandemic have been locally oriented and locally delivered.
- There is a proliferation of successful ‘self-help’ networks, such as ECHO, the CIG, the Exchange, the Wick Newspaper, and now Library of Things.
- New cross-Park networks are needed (connecting HW/FI and the rest of the QEOP).

These four themes framed the challenges to be addressed during this phase, and in particular, during the policy design workshop. To ensure participants and other stakeholders knew about these prior to the workshop, the researchers opted for presenting the themes in advance and disseminating material online: a slide deck was created and presented to the HW/FI Cultural Interest Group’s (CIG) July meeting, and in addition, a video presentation was made and circulated to workshop participants and others.

2.1 Video presentation

In advance of the policy design workshop, and in order to allow for as much time as possible for discussion and exploration of new policy ideas during it, a 30-minute video was shared with stakeholders from the local agencies (see Figure 3). This video consisted of an update of the research conducted, the main insights obtained to date, and the four themes that would guide the policy design workshop⁵.



⁵ The password-protected (!7GM1gRT) [video presentation is available online.](#)

Figure 3: Screenshot from the video presentation.

2.2 Cultural Interest Group presentation

To engage with the local creative communities, on July 9 2021, the researchers, together with Cultural Interest Group's (CIG) chair, William Chamberlain, presented the preliminary research findings at the CIG monthly meeting.

The CIG meetings bring together diverse members of the local communities and allow for direct exchange on various topics related to the cultural scene in HW/FI⁶. Notably, the CIG is recognised by many local actors as a legitimate, open forum to discuss issues and find out about local news and developments (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Sketch of Design Future workshop's participant commenting on the value of the CIG.

On this occasion, more than 30 participants were involved in the meeting, and the researchers were allocated a 15-minute slot to share an update of the investigation, the main insights obtained to date, and the four themes guiding the policy design workshop. This live presentation allowed for comments and feedback from the participants who acknowledged and echoed some of the findings presented and even offered to contribute with policy ideas⁷.

"of course it's about space. Ownership versus precarity etc. The ability to plan versus insecurity etc. Landlords putting up rent 80-100% during a pandemic? It's affecting not just artists and residents, but small businesses too".

CIG meeting participant comment.

⁶ See HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights

⁷ A summary of the presentation is available on [July's CIG meeting online minutes](#).

Although at that point, invitations to participate in the policy design workshop had already been sent out, members of the communities at the CIG meeting were encouraged to get in touch with the researchers to join the workshop.

3. Policy design workshop

The policy design workshop aimed at bringing together different actors from the local creative communities and agencies to co-produce preliminary policy ideas that responded to the outcomes of phases 1 and 2, and which could begin to support the development of thriving creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP, as they emerged out of the pandemic.

The workshop took place at the Colour Factory, a venue in Hackney Wick’s Queen’s Yard (see Figure 5), on July 13 from 11 AM to 1 PM. Fourteen participants, including local creatives, artists, designers, and representatives from the local councils and planning authorities⁸ joined the session.



Figure 5: The Colour Factory, April 2021.

As shown in Figure 2, the workshop was planned to follow four stages:

1. **Interrogate & validate themes:** Exhibition;
2. **Define challenges:** Talking Tours & Two-stages definition;
3. **Idea generation:** Ideating 3x3x3;
4. **Idea evaluation:** Categorisation and prioritisation of ideas.

The following sub-sections describe the activities carried out at each workshop stage.

3.1 Interrogate & validate themes

The first activity aimed at unpacking, interrogating and validating the evidence shaping the four themes arising out of the first two phases of the research, which had been presented in the slide

⁸ London Borough of Tower Hamlets, the London Borough of Hackney, and the London Legacy Development Corporation.

deck presentation and video. The reason for doing this was to verify that the themes constructed from the research resonated with the participants, that the evidence was unambiguous, and that no major omissions had occurred.

Prior to welcoming participants, the researchers organised images, photos, excerpts, and quotes collected during Phases 1 and 2 in ‘evidence walls’ around the venue (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Part of evidence wall.

After a brief round of introductions, the participants were invited to examine and move through the venue, spending about five minutes with each theme, in a dynamic loosely inspired by UK Policy Lab’s ‘Evidence Safari’⁹. Noting that participants had been previously briefed about these themes, this activity’s main objective was not to inform but to allow participants to have a first-hand look at some of the evidence shaping and provide some challenge to or validation of the four themes.

To help participants interrogate the evidence, the researchers posed questions such as:

- Are there any unexploited opportunities in this area?
- Are there any barriers to supporting creative industries around this theme?
- What are the current policies in the different areas?
- What is the current experience of the policy?
- Who are the people that experience this policy?

⁹ Evidence Safari: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-policy-making-toolkit/understanding-policy-problems-and-user-needs>

- What are people’s views on this policy?

While moving around the evidence, participants collected their findings, views, and thoughts and left them on the worksheet of each theme on post-it notes (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Participants examining the evidence and adding their comments

This activity yielded a number of comments and reflections from the participants that were instrumental in the workshop’s following stage.

3.2 Define challenges

Having discussed the evidence, participants allocated themselves into four groups with the condition that at least one representative from the local agencies should be in each one. This decision was made to ensure local creatives would have the chance to interact with participants from the local agencies and vice-versa, thus fostering the emergence of diverse views and ideas. Then, focussing on a single theme (Change, Space, Knowledge, Networks), each of the four groups was asked to define specific challenges that could be tackled with a policy instrument. A three-stage process guided this process:

1. Validation tours;
2. Classified ad; and
3. ‘How might we?’

3.2.1 Validation Tours:

In the first of the three stages, participants were asked to list their assumptions regarding their specific themes. These could be based on the answers given to the question list or embedded in the evidence presented. Once completed, each group was invited to walk around the local area - looking, taking in and engaging with people, buildings, activities - and discuss with their group members whether those assumptions had solid grounds or required more evidence to be sustained.

In case some of their assumptions needed validation, the groups were asked to find evidence (pictures, testimonies, or other sources of information) to support them.

This activity lasted 30 minutes, after which the groups returned to the workshop’s venue.

3.2.2 Classified Ad

Once back, participants were asked to define between three and five policy challenges for their theme following the format of a classified ad:

The (user) needs (requirements) because (insight/reason).

In doing this, participants were asked to

- Characterise their users;
- Describe what needed to be fixed without considering the means (using verbs, not nouns); and
- Explain the user’s reasons to fix that issue.

To illustrate, the researchers provided the following example:

Chloe, a Fish Island 28yo pottery maker, needs an alternative way to showcase her work because the market where they usually sell their products remains closed.

By focussing on the problem space, participants put their minds to clearly define the problematic situation from the user’s perspective avoiding jumping to perceived solutions or fixes.

This activity lasted 15 minutes, after which each group was asked to select one ad to move to the third and last stage of the challenge definition process.

3.2.3 How Might We

The last step to defining the policy challenge utilised a method known as ‘How Might We’¹⁰. In this activity, participants were invited to transform their previously defined ads into opportunities for intervention (see Figure 8). The idea behind it is that framing the problematic situation as a ‘How Might We’ question suggests that it is indeed solvable, and many possible solutions could exist.



¹⁰ Design Consultancy IDEO’s How Might We: <https://www.designkit.org/methods/3>

Figure 8: Cards with 'How Might We' framings.

Following from the previous example, a potential phrasing could be

How might we help young makers in Fish Island reach their customers in a contact-less way?

Alternatively, Chloe's ad could be reframed as

How might we improve the visibility of local potters to reach new markets?

The aim in framing the challenge in this way was to enable certain solutions while deterring others. To help participants define a challenge that might lead to more substantial policy ideas, the groups were asked to come up with three to five alternatives 'How Might We'. In this way, the groups could discuss which phrasing would lend itself to a less constrained solution space. This activity also lasted 15 minutes.

3.3 Idea generation

Once each group had defined their policy challenges, the workshop moved toward the preliminary idea generation stage. This stage lasted 30 minutes, in which each group

1. Generated at least nine policy ideas per challenge;
2. Categorized and prioritised them according to two axes; and
3. Shared them with the rest of the participants.

3.4.1 Ideating 3x3x3

For the first part of the ideation process, each participant was given a worksheet with a 3x3x3 idea generation matrix (See Figure 9). This ideation technique allows groups to collectively generate ideas in a short period.

CHANGE

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | <p>Idea 1</p> <p>Community welcome groups for businesses in the area. help with community buy-in.</p> | <p>Idea 2</p> <p>Digital learning tools which capture knowledge & are decentralised/owned by all.</p> | <p>Idea 3</p> <p>More inclusive & signalled groups of peer-to-peer support for past & future business ecosystem.</p> |
|  | <p>Idea 1</p> <p>An outreach team who targets new businesses (local) local volunteers supported by The CDT.</p> | <p>Idea 2</p> <p>A digital "library" of case studies on HW site. ↓ CEE</p> | <p>Idea 3</p> <p>specific support for residential community entrepreneurs (eg. North Halloway Wick /nick ward estates)</p> |
|  | <p>Idea 1</p> <p>funding to support outreach team? → Greater need for cross-borough collaboration to bring ↑ increased awareness of change/growth.</p> | <p>Idea 2</p> <p>Need from all to take ^{direct community} responsibility to feed into the design of the library → Who is the are the different audiences?</p> | <p>Idea 3</p> <p>Peer to peer learning is key for business Big + small residents - old + new.</p> |

Figure 9: 'Change' theme group 3x3x3 idea generation matrix.

This simple technique was completed in ten minutes by following four steps:

1. Each person on the group will have a 3x3x3 worksheet, post its, and pencils;
2. Based on the challenge to be tackled, each person will have three minutes to write three ideas in the first row of the matrix;
3. Once the ideas have been written, each person will exchange their worksheet with their partner on the side, again having another three minutes to generate three new ideas that should be different from those written in the first row. Each participant will be able to create three ideas that are totally different or that complement the previous ones;
4. Then this action will be repeated one more time until the worksheet is completed.

Once all participants completed their worksheets, the ideas were shared within their groups.

3.4.2 Categorisation and prioritisation of ideas

In the penultimate step of the process, each group collected, sorted, refined, and selected their preliminary policy ideas based on two criteria: the potential impact and feasibility. The researchers defined the axes ex-ante to take advantage of the mix of participants. In this case, having a varied group of local creatives meant that their first-hand experiences could help assess the potential impact of the policy ideas. Similarly, having representatives from the local agencies and authorities meant they would be able to evaluate the ideas' potential of being translated into actionable policies.

Given a flipchart paper sheet with a drawn 2x2 matrix, the participants in each group wrote the policy ideas on their 3x3x3 idea generation matrix onto post-it notes and arranged them according to the two axes (see Figure 10).



Figure 10: 'Change' theme group 2x2 matrix.

Once all ideas were on the matrix, the groups clustered them according to similarity whilst discussing their positions. Through a process of testing and review, a total of 18 ideas were left on the matrices.

3.4.3 Policy idea definition

The last stage of the process and final activity of the workshop consisted of presenting the policy idea that each group deemed the most feasible and impactful to the rest of the participants.

In guiding these short presentations, the researchers asked participants a set of questions based on Policy Lab’s idea development sheet¹¹ (see Figure 11):

- What is the challenge?
- What policy idea have you come up with?
- How will it be delivered?
- What are the risks and barriers?
- What does success look like?
- Who will love it? And who will hate it?

Policy LAB Idea development

What is the challenge?

How will you develop your idea further??

What are your major pieces of insight and evidence?

What policy decision or design change will that insight deliver?

1. → 1.

2. → 2.

3. → 3.

4. → 4.

5. → 5.

How would you announce it?

Draw or describe your idea
Drawing an idea can help explain it in a more easy to understand and simple manner.

Who will help deliver it?

How will you test and scale your idea?
Testing and scaling are really important to make sure an idea will work in the real-world. Start very small and then grow and iterate from there.

What does success look like?

... how will you measure that success?

What are the risks and barriers?

| What are the risks and barriers? | Actions to avoid |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | 1. |
| 2. | 2. |
| 3. | 3. |

What would a key user say?

Who will love it? and who will hate it? (Place them on the line.)

Hate ←-----→ Love

Figure 11: Policy Lab’s idea development sheet.

4. Outcomes

Several policy ideas were co-created from this phase, ranging from designing and delivering a peer-to-peer digital skills training programme for local creatives to a local HEI charter committing to studentships for residents.

¹¹ Policy Lab, 2016: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-policy-making-toolkit/testing-and-improving-policy-ideas>

Some of the main ideas included:

- **Space:** Utilise monies from the Community Infrastructure Levy¹² on new developments in HW/FI and the QEOP to build multipurpose creative spaces (e.g. workshops, studios, stages) that local creatives can utilise on-demand.
- **Networks:** Develop an online hyperlocal creative directory supported by HW/FI CEZ and the big new players in the area (e.g., Here East, V&A, Sadler's Wells) to increase their visibility and reach.
- **Change:** Rise the profile, diversify funding streams, and provide official support to Hackney Wick Town Hall as a civic forum to exchange ideas on a rapidly changing community.
- **Knowledge:** Develop a programme of collaboration with new local HEI to develop affordable evening courses for residents that includes mentorship and traineeships in local creative businesses and the possibility of lending equipment and space to local creatives.

Although naturally, the above are high-level preliminary policy ideas, the project's Phase 3 managed to bring together diverse members of the local creative communities and representatives of the local agencies to jointly define a set of challenges and co-create potential solutions. Besides the value of the ideas and their potential to be carried forward, this is relevant because the project aims to affect change and not only describe the current situation. During the workshop, the representatives of the local agencies experienced first-hand and for the first time how a design for policy approach could help in tackling some of the policy issues they currently face. From this perspective, this phase contributed to sensitising both the local agencies and members of the local communities toward the use of co-creative practices to enhance the area's resilience.

Furthermore, in the spirit of a design-led process, the policy ideas generated at this stage ought to be tested before committing resources to their development. To that effect, this project's fourth and last phase presents a prototyping framework for policy initiatives aimed at supporting the creative communities in HW/FI and the QEOP¹³.

¹² Gov.UK Community Infrastructure Levy's guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/community-infrastructure-levy>

¹³ See HWCRAIC Report 4: Policy Prototyping Framework.

Policy Prototyping Framework

Phase 4

Covid-19 and Creative Clusters

A real-time study of the impact of Covid-19 and associated support measures on the creative business community in Hackney Wick and the QE Olympic Park.

DECEMBER 13

#HWCRAIC

Graham Hitchen
Federico Vaz



1. Introduction

This report offers an account of the CRAIC research project's fourth and last phase: **Prototype** (see Figure 1). This phase focussed on developing a framework for prototyping early-stage policy ideas to support the creative communities in Hackney Wick, Fish Island (HW/FI) and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP).

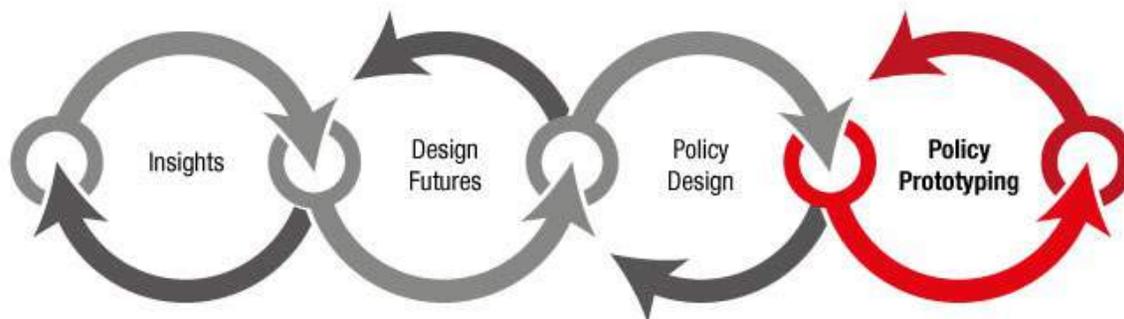


Figure 1: Four phases of the research approach

In a global scenario of increasing complexity, design has gained renewed momentum for its potential as a strategic tool to promote innovation in the public sector¹. While not generally understood in design terms, scholars argue that policymaking is essentially a design activity². In this context, design has become central to some public organisations, employing designers and introducing notions of design thinking across the stages of the policymaking cycle³. Already in 2014, the UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence report titled 'Design Thinking for Public Service Excellence'⁴ claimed the merits for such introduction on design thinking's core principles, namely

- human and user-centredness;
- empathic, co-creative, and iterative process; and
- experimental (testing and prototyping) approaches.

However, during the early stages of this project, it became apparent that prototyping has not been necessarily embraced when designing policies to support the creative industries of the area of study. In this regard, the researchers looked at offering local policymakers and representatives from local agencies a brief introduction to the main concepts behind policy prototyping as well as a framework for its implementation in HWFI and the QEOP. Whereas the former took place during an online session on September 8, 2021, with participants from the London Legacy Development Corporation, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, and London Borough of Hackney, this report presents the latter.

The policy prototyping framework here presented looks at aiding in the formulation and implementation of support mechanisms by offering guidance on how to test the assumptions on

¹ Junginger, S. (2014). Towards Policymaking as Designing: Policymaking Beyond Problem-solving and Decision-making. In C. Bason, *Design for Policy*. Surrey UK and Burlington USA: Gower Publishing Limited and Ashgate Publishing Company.

² Junginger, S. (2013). Design and Innovation in the Public Sector: Matters of Design in Policy-Making and Policy Implementation. *Annual Review of Policy Design*, 1(1), 1-11.

³ Junginger, S. (2017). *Transforming Public Services by Design*. Oxon: Routledge.

⁴ Allio, L. (2014). Design thinking for public service excellence. UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence.

which the interventions are based and inquiry on the validity of the proposed measures. The potential prototypes can range from low to high fidelity and be tested with various stakeholders, including local creatives, policymakers, and frontline staff operationalising services and support instruments at local agencies. Likewise, this framework is based on the learnings from the project's first two phases and utilises the preliminary policy ideas co-develop during phase 3 as examples. In this way, the project's fourth phase looked at embedding the situated knowledge previously captured into practical solutions to alleviate some of the issues faced by the local creative communities whilst enhancing their resilience.

After this introduction, section 2 offers a brief note on prototyping in the context of policymaking. Next, section 3 introduces the suggested policy prototyping framework. Lastly, section 4 provides guidance in the framework's application and an example based on a preliminary policy idea from Phase 3⁵.

2. Prototyping and policymaking

Prototyping is a common practice in many disciplines. According to NESTA⁶, prototyping is an approach to developing, testing, and improving ideas at an early stage before committing resources at large for its implementation. In the design field, prototyping is an iterative cycle (Build-Run-Analyse) with a major role in its process⁷. In its most basic conception, a prototype is a question rendered as an artefact. Designers prototype to get an answer to that question before moving to the next iteration in the design process. In other words, prototyping is

“rapidly creating an approximation of a design so that you can quickly get feedback. Prototyping is the pivotal activity that structures innovation, collaboration, and creativity in design. Prototypes embody design hypotheses and enable designers to test them. Successful design results from a series of conversations with materials. It's not the artifact; it's about feedback and iteration. You build some prototypes, evaluate them, and then use what you learned to drive the next design.”

Scott Klemmer, 2016⁸

The basis for prototyping is that designers are unlikely to produce complete and effective solutions in a single iteration⁹; therefore, the trial-and-error approach allows them to learn in each iteration. Considering policymaking as a design activity, a similar premise could apply to those engaging in it. Although not necessarily a novel practice, policy prototyping has acquired a renewed momentum in the last decade. Its benefits for the field are manifold, including the communication, exploration, evaluation, and refinement of policy options before decision making and implementation. Interestingly, the notion of trial-and-error is not always welcome within a public sector, often

⁵ See HWCRAIC Report 3: Policy Design Workshop.

⁶ NESTA's prototyping framework: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/prototyping-framework/>

⁷ Villa Alvarez, D., Auricchio, V., and Mortati, M. (2020) Design prototyping for policymaking, in Boess, S., Cheung, M. and Cain, R. (eds.), *Synergy - DRS International Conference 2020*, 11-14 August, Held online. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2020.271>

⁸ The Power of Prototyping | HCI | Stanford University: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyMT91wUO54&list=PLlssT5z_DsK_nusHL_Mjt87THSTlgrsyJ

⁹ Wheelwright, S. C., & Clark, K. B. (1992). *Revolutionizing product development: quantum leaps in speed, efficiency, and quality*. Simon and Schuster.

described as being made of bureaucratic, hierarchical, and risk-averse¹⁰ structures. However, it is precisely to de-risk the solution development process that prototyping makes sense in the first place.

Furthermore, capturing and developing insights into prototypes early allows for more robust solutions to form as preliminary policy ideas can be tested, trialed, and refined in an iterative process¹¹. In this way, weak or unsubstantiated policy ideas show their flaws and are dropped earlier in the policy cycle, thus reducing the resources committed to them. Likewise, it can be helpful by mitigating the fear of failure to innovate by testing new policy options whilst offering a method to adapt the policy to its diverse targets¹².

Moreover, some design scholars argue that in engaging with prototypes, users can themselves spark new ideas overlooked by the designers¹³. In that sense, prototypes “can be agents that expand a conversation to be inclusive and reassert the relationship between designed objects and people”¹⁴. Also, in this regard, the evidence shows that participatory prototyping activities can help explore various perspectives and future implications of current and emerging policies by offering new foresight into the impact of potential solutions and resource allocation¹⁵.



Figure 2: Prototyping materials from a design for policy session at Loughborough University London, 2019.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to notice that prototypes can significantly vary in their fidelity (see Figure 2) and, consequently, so will vary the feedback that can be obtained from users. The lowest the fidelity of a prototype, the easiest it is to obtain candid feedback and insights into potential needs and characteristics the users would favour. Equally, with lower fidelity prototypes, users are less likely to

¹⁰ Sangiorgi, D. (2015). Designing for public sector innovation in the UK: design strategies for paradigm shifts. *Foresight*, 17(4), 332-348.

¹¹ Mintrom, M., & Luetjens, J. (2016). Design thinking in policymaking processes: Opportunities and challenges. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 75(3), 391-402.

¹² Clarke, A., & Craft, J. (2019). The twin faces of public sector design. *Governance*, 32(1), 5-21.

¹³ Cross, N. (2011). Design thinking: Understanding how designers think and work. *Berg*.

¹⁴ Roberts-Smith, J., Ruecker, S., and Radzikowska, M. (2021) Prototyping across the Disciplines. Designing Better Futures. Bristol: *Intellect*. P.30.

¹⁵ Nogueira, A., & Schmidt, R. (2021). Participatory policy design: igniting systems change through prototyping. *Policy Design and Practice*, 1-19.

understand the purpose or features of the proposed design fully. Conversely, the higher the prototype's fidelity, the easier it is for users to engage with it and designers to identify failures¹⁶.

3. Prototyping policies for the creative industries in East London

The research's third phase offered a range of preliminary policy ideas¹⁷. Likewise, these ideas were developed within four themes (Change, Space, Knowledge, Networks) identified during phases 1 and 2¹⁸, which framed the challenges co-creatively addressed by the members of the local communities. Despite the iterative co-design process that led to these ideas, none should be carried further without appropriate assessment. Without detriment to the usual appraisal procedures that each agency carries out, in the spirit of an approach based on design for policy, the researchers understand it necessary for the ideas generated through this process to be prototyped.

All prototypes have in common that they start with a question or hypothesis. Therefore, the first step in prototyping is defining what needs to be learned from this prototype or what will be tested. That will be the prototype's goal.

Once this question is clear, the next step is to define who would be able to provide an answer to this question or validate/refute the hypothesis. That is to say, who needs to be involved in prototyping? Notably, whilst some prototyping activities can be carried out internally within the project team, some will require a wider test group. Therefore, when deciding whom to involve in the testing, it is essential to consider:

- Who knows the target group well and would have the insight to share?
- Who has experience and knowledge that will build your understanding of the policy idea?
- Who might be involved in the policy in the future?

From the research's Phase 2, it became apparent that a number of existing formal and informal networks operating within HWFI and the QEOP could help answer the questions above¹⁹. Although this is likely to change in the future –especially given the area's rapid development– the researchers recommend engaging with these networks early in the prototyping process to ensure no users or stakeholder groups are overlooked. In addition, trusted links into networks and communities should be used to help in identifying and connecting with the right people.

Thirdly, the way in which this hypothesis will be tested needs to be defined. This can be done in several ways²⁰, but it is out of this report's scope to list a comprehensive set of prototyping methods. As a general note, it is important to emphasise that the prototype is not the policy and attachment to

¹⁶ Shafieyoun, Z., and Derksen, G. (2001). How industrial prototypes behave through structure, function, and material. In Roberts-Smith, J., Ruecker, S., and Radzikowska, M. (2021) *Prototyping across the Disciplines. Designing Better Futures*. Bristol: Intellect.

¹⁷ See HWCRAIC Report 3: Policy Design Workshop.

¹⁸ For an account of the developed themes, see HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights, and HWCRAIC Report 2: Design Futures.

¹⁹ See HWCRAIC Report 1: Immersion Insights.

²⁰ For specific guidance on prototyping methods, see Cabinet Office. (2016). Open Policy Making toolkit. Online: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-policy-making-toolkit/4-delivery-prototyping-and-improving-ideas>

it is typically counter-productive. On the contrary, these should be built in ways that ensure clearly communicating the hypothesis to the user who will interact with it whilst allowing them to provide an answer to it. This can be done by, for instance, building a small model with cardboard, paper, or children’s blocks. A hypothesis can also be tested by acting out parts of the interactions with the target audience in a simple role-play dynamic with or without props.

Similarly, the policy idea can be drawn in a storyboard and tested with potential users or delivery teams. In some cases, the policy team may require some degree of support to prototype. Currently, there is a growing corpus of prototyping knowledge within the UK government that civil servants can access²¹. Moreover, in the particular case of HWFI and the QEOP, a large number of local creatives could be commissioned to help develop prototypes. In this way, an additional layer of community engagement could be added to the policy co-design process.

However, since time and resources are limited in every policy programme, deciding which parts should be prototyped is crucial for their timely development. Besides its general feasibility, policies can be prototyped to test their different aspects and components (see Figure 3).

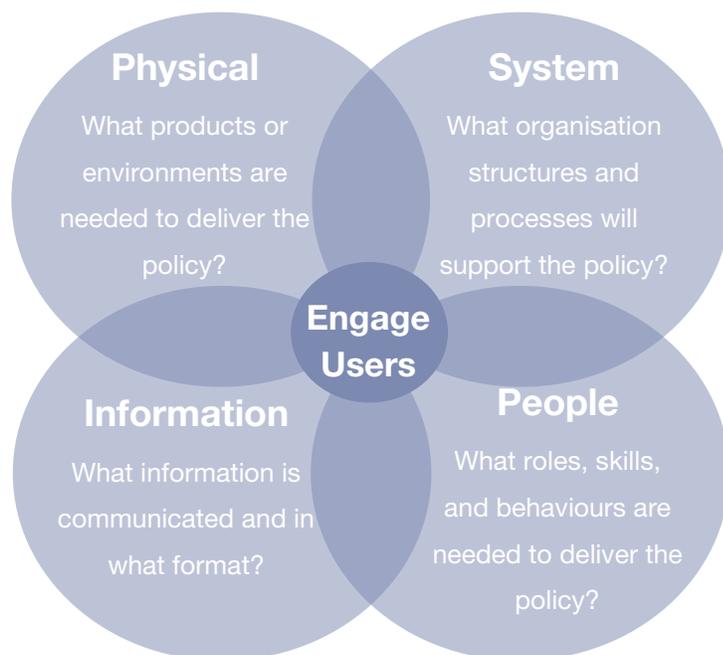


Figure 3: Aspect of a policy that prototyping can help test with users²².

Equally, and depending on the degree of advancement of a policy idea, prototyping can help in two main ways:

- **Exploratory prototyping**, by testing the demand and viability of ideas; or
- **Developmental prototyping**, by testing components of a policy.

²¹ Foale, E., and Bennet, S. (2021). Crowdsourcing policy: how can collective intelligence improve policymaking? Online: <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2021/11/04/crowdsourcing-policy-how-can-collective-intelligence-improve-policymaking/>

²² Adapted from Nesta. 2011. Prototyping Public Services. An introduction to using prototyping in the development of public services: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/prototyping-in-public-services/>

Although both types of prototypes are meant to learn about the policy problem and proposed solution, each tackle different aspects. Likewise, these two approaches to prototyping can be carried out sequentially depending on the stage of the policy process (see Figure 4).

Whereas in *exploratory prototyping*, the goal is to validate the need, demand, recipients, and challenge a policy is addressing, in *developmental prototyping*, the objective is to test different elements of a policy idea to develop a more precise specification for its implementation.

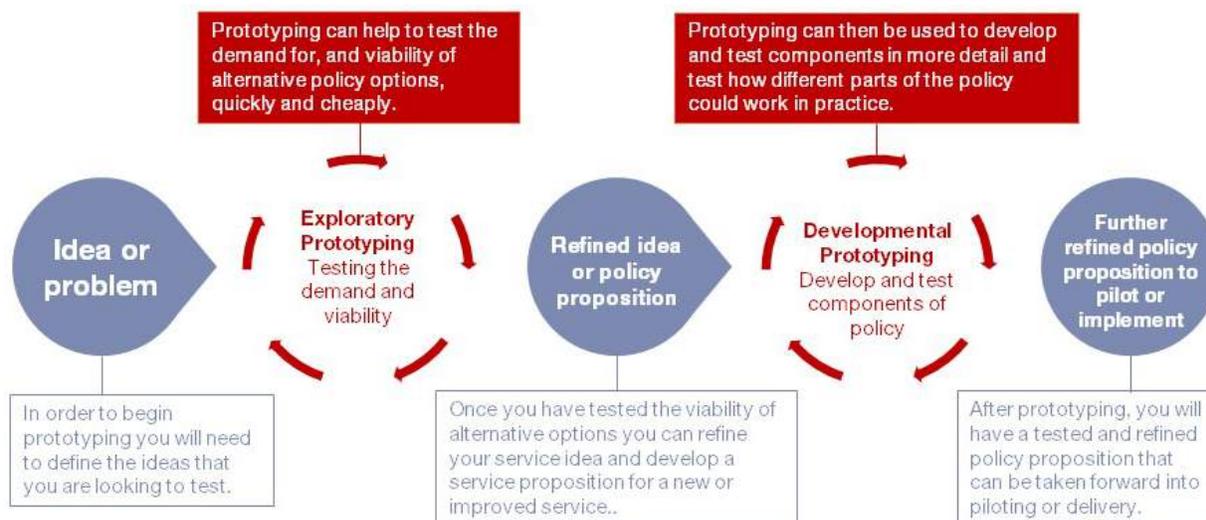


Figure 4: Exploratory and developmental prototyping, adapted from NESTA and ThinkPublic²³

With exploratory prototyping, the purpose is to use prototypes to test the fundamental building blocks of the policy idea to build a more robust and concise policy specification.

After deciding which elements of the policy idea require further clarification, the policy team should determine how to communicate and discuss them with other users and stakeholders. Although the policy ideas can be vaguely defined at this stage, it is essential to prioritise what answers will validate or refute the hypothesis sustaining it. In doing so, it is not unusual to break down policy ideas into their constituents parts to test them individually. However, the team should keep in mind that interacting with users and other stakeholders is often a demanding task, and these activities should be planned to ensure that the team’s questions are answered without making undue demands on them. This is of importance since the team may need to go through several iterations of exploratory prototyping before moving into the developmental stage.

Once the learnings from the exploratory prototyping have been gathered, and a validated policy specification achieved, the team can move towards developmental prototyping, where the policy components will be tested. Although developmental prototyping is not piloting, at this stage, the prototypes should provide people testing the policy ideas with more defined versions of it. In addition, with developmental prototyping, the team should be looking at getting more ‘real world’ feedback from the users, including observations of the users’ interactions with the prototypes as well as their verbal feedback.

²³ NESTA and ThinkPublic. (2013). Prototyping framework: A guide to prototyping new ideas. Online: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/prototyping_framework.pdf

4. Applying the policy prototyping framework

From the above, we have distilled prototyping guidelines to assist local agencies embarking on policy prototyping.

As a starting point, the policy team should begin by answering:

| <i>Is the policy idea fully defined?</i> | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| No | Yes |
| | <i>then</i> |
| Engage in exploratory prototyping | Engage in developmental prototyping |

Subsequently, in both cases, the policy teams should answer:

- What are the questions/hypotheses to be tested?
- With whom should the hypothesis be tested?
- How will the hypothesis be tested?

4.1. Exploratory Prototyping

For exploratory prototyping, it is often helpful to consider those aspects cross-cutting to all policy options, such as the actors involved in its ownership and funding. The questions in Table 1 could help determine the policy idea’s demand and viability:

| | Ownership: who should own and deliver the policy? | Funding: who should pay for the policy? | Liability: Who should be responsible for the policy and any safeguarding? |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| Individual citizen | | | |
| Informal social sector | | | |
| Formal social sector | | | |
| Private sector | | | |
| Public sector | | | |

Table 1: Initial questions for exploratory prototyping²⁴.

In many cases, the answers to the questions above are based on the policy team’s assumptions; therefore, part of the exploratory prototyping should look at validating those aspects of the policy ideas.

Likewise, helpful at this stage is listing the elements required to implement the policy, including

- Activities;

²⁴ Adapted from Nesta and ThinkPublic. (2013). Mapping the social business model for your new service idea. Online: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/prototyping_toolkit_mappingscales.pdf

- Resources;
- People; and
- Materials.

For each answer, the policy team should identify the implicit assumptions and determine if a specific prototype is required to test it.

4.2. Developmental Prototyping

As previously mentioned, developmental prototyping typically engages with more clearly defined policy ideas and prototypes that demand tailored testing propositions. However, some general aspects could still be worth testing at this stage. This process can be facilitated by looking at the users’ interaction with the policy at three distinct moments: before, during, and after becoming beneficiaries (see Table 2).

| BEFORE | DURING | AFTER |
|--|---|---|
| e.g., How do creatives hear about this policy? | e.g., How do creatives claim/use the proposed policy? | e.g., What are the obligations of the beneficiaries? |
| e.g., What are the requirements for creatives wanting to claim/use the policy? | e.g., How long does the application process take? | e.g., How are creatives expected to report the benefits/policy results? |

Table 2: Stages of interaction with the proposed policy²⁵

Often, what users say, think or do, is different from how they actually interact with the prototypes. Empathy maps help capture user feedback when using the prototypes. Empathy maps offer a more holistic glimpse into how a user interacts with a prototype and are not meant to be sequential or chronological in their reporting. Traditionally, empathy maps are used to understand users at the early stages of the design process and are split into four quadrants (Says, Thinks, Does, and Feels), with the user in the centre²⁶.

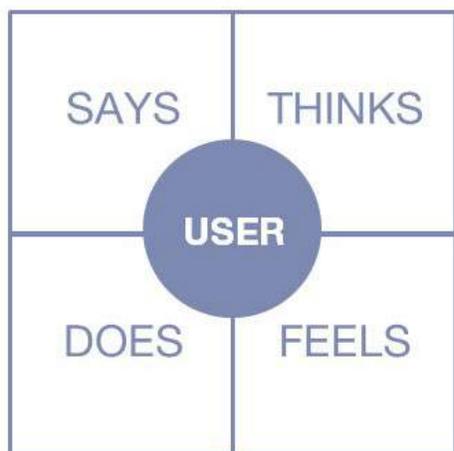


Figure 5: Empathy map

The ‘Says’ quadrant captures what the user says aloud during the testing session. When possible, it should include direct quotes.

The ‘Thinks’ quadrant is filled with what the user is thinking throughout the testing but may not vocalise. Naturally, this requires interpretation. Attempt to make inferences on the user’s intentions when interacting with the prototypes.

The ‘Does’ quadrant includes the user’s actions during the testing. What does the user physically do? To what extent do they interact expectedly?

The ‘Feels’ quadrant encloses the user’s emotional state during the testing session. This is often represented as an adjective plus a short sentence for context. Do they seem worried? What does the user get excited about?

²⁵ Adapted from Nesta and ThinkPublic. (2013). Prototyping Toolkit: Activity Sheet 2. Online: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/prototyping_toolkit_activity_sheet_2.pdf

²⁶ For a detailed account of the Empathy Map tools, see Gibbons, S. (2018). Empathy Mapping: The First Step in Design Thinking. Nielsen Norman Group. Online: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/>

4.3 Testing the framework

To exemplify the use of the policy prototyping framework, we will resort to one of the preliminary policy ideas generated during the policy co-design workshop in Phase 3. During the workshop, the group working on the theme of *Networks* proposed

Develop an online hyperlocal creative directory supported by HW/FI CEZ and the big new players in the area (e.g., Here East, V&A, Sadler’s Wells) to increase their visibility and reach.

As it stands, the policy idea is not fully defined since, for example, it is unclear how this directory would operate—Will it require software development, or could it be based on social media platforms? What type of support is expected from the CEZ?

Consequently, we will treat the policy idea as requiring exploratory prototyping to test its viability.

Next, we should respond to questions in three categories:

| <i>Online hyperlocal creative directory</i> | | |
|--|---|---|
| What are the questions/hypotheses to be tested? | With whom should the hypothesis be tested? | How will the hypothesis be tested? |
| Will an online directory increase exposure/sales of local creatives? | Potential customers | Desk research and an online survey. |
| What are the basic features the directory should offer? | Local creatives | Workshop |
| | Potential customers | Online survey through official local channels |
| How many local creatives are willing to join? | Local creatives | Online survey through CIG and workspace providers |
| | Workspace providers | 1-2-1 meetings |
| Are they willing to pay for the service? How much? | Local creatives | Online survey through CIG and workspace providers |
| | Workspace providers | 1-2-1 meetings |
| Does integrating the directory put creatives at risk? | Councils’ legal teams, HMRC | 1-2-1 meetings |
| | CDT | 1-2-1 meeting with Chair |
| | Local creatives | Open consultation through CIG and surveys |

Having determined the main exploratory questions regarding the policy idea, we can move towards determining its operating principles in terms of ownership, funding, and liability:

| <i>Online hyperlocal creative directory</i> | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | Ownership: who should own and deliver the policy? | Funding: who should pay for the policy? | Liability: Who should be responsible for the policy and any safeguarding? |
| Individual citizen | - | Local creatives to pay a one-off registration fee. | - |
| Informal social sector | - | - | - |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
| Formal social sector | Partner with The Wick newspaper to implement the directory in paper and digital version. | The Wick newspaper is in charge of making the hyperlocal creative directory sustainable beyond the pilot. | The Wick newspaper is partially legally liable during the first year of operation and fully legally accountable for the directory afterwards. |
| Private sector | - | Local workspaces are to be offered discounted rates for their tenants. | - |
| Public sector | The CEZ owns the programme but delegates its operation. | The CEZ funds the programme for a year (as a pilot), in which sustainable sources of income must be found. | The CEZ is partially legally accountable for the directory during the duration of the pilot. |

Lastly, we would aim at determining the *activities, resources, people, and materials* required to develop and implement the proposed policy idea:

| Online hyperlocal creative directory | | | | |
|---|---|--|----------------------------|---|
| | Description | Assumptions | Needs to be tested? | How? |
| Activities | | The CEZ can conduct this activity. | No | - |
| | Survey all creatives in HWFI & QEOP. | It is possible to capture all relevant data from the different creatives through an online form. | No | - |
| | Establish a contract with The Wick newspaper for the directory's operation. | The Wick Newspaper is interested in assuming this role. | Yes | Legal advice from the local Councils and 1-2-1 meeting with The Wick newspaper management team. |
| Resources | Funds to develop and run the directory. | CEZ funds for the pilot are available. | No | - |
| | | The partner will secure funding to sustain the directory beyond the pilot. | No | - |
| People | Local creatives. | There is a considerable mass of creatives willing to join the directory. | Yes | Through the survey. |
| | The CEZ Manager. | The manager has enough time available to undertake this project. | No | - |
| | The partner's staff. | The Wick newspaper has staff available or | Yes | 1-2-1 meeting with The Wick newspaper |

| | | | | |
|------------------|------------------------------------|--|-----|--|
| | | will find staff to operate the directory. | | management team. |
| Materials | Online domain. | The CEZ will be able to register an online domain for the directory. | No | - |
| | Online hosting. | The Wick newspaper has an online hosting capable of supporting the directory. | Yes | 1-2-1 meeting with The Wick newspaper management team. |
| | Visual material for the directory. | Local creatives will be willing to give up the image rights to their work to be part of the directory. | Yes | Through the survey. |

Having responded to the questions above, we are ready to engage in exploratory prototyping to develop an ‘online hyperlocal creative directory’. This exercise does not pretend to showcase an exhaustive analysis of the particular case but rather illustrate the steps to engage in policy prototyping.

As previously mentioned, adopting this framework does not imply abandoning other means of policy appraisal and due diligence the local agencies would typically carry out as part of their policymaking process. On the contrary, it looks at complementing their toolkits with an agile methodology aiming at ensuring support measures for creatives in Hackney Wick, Fish Island, and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park are co-design with users front and centre.