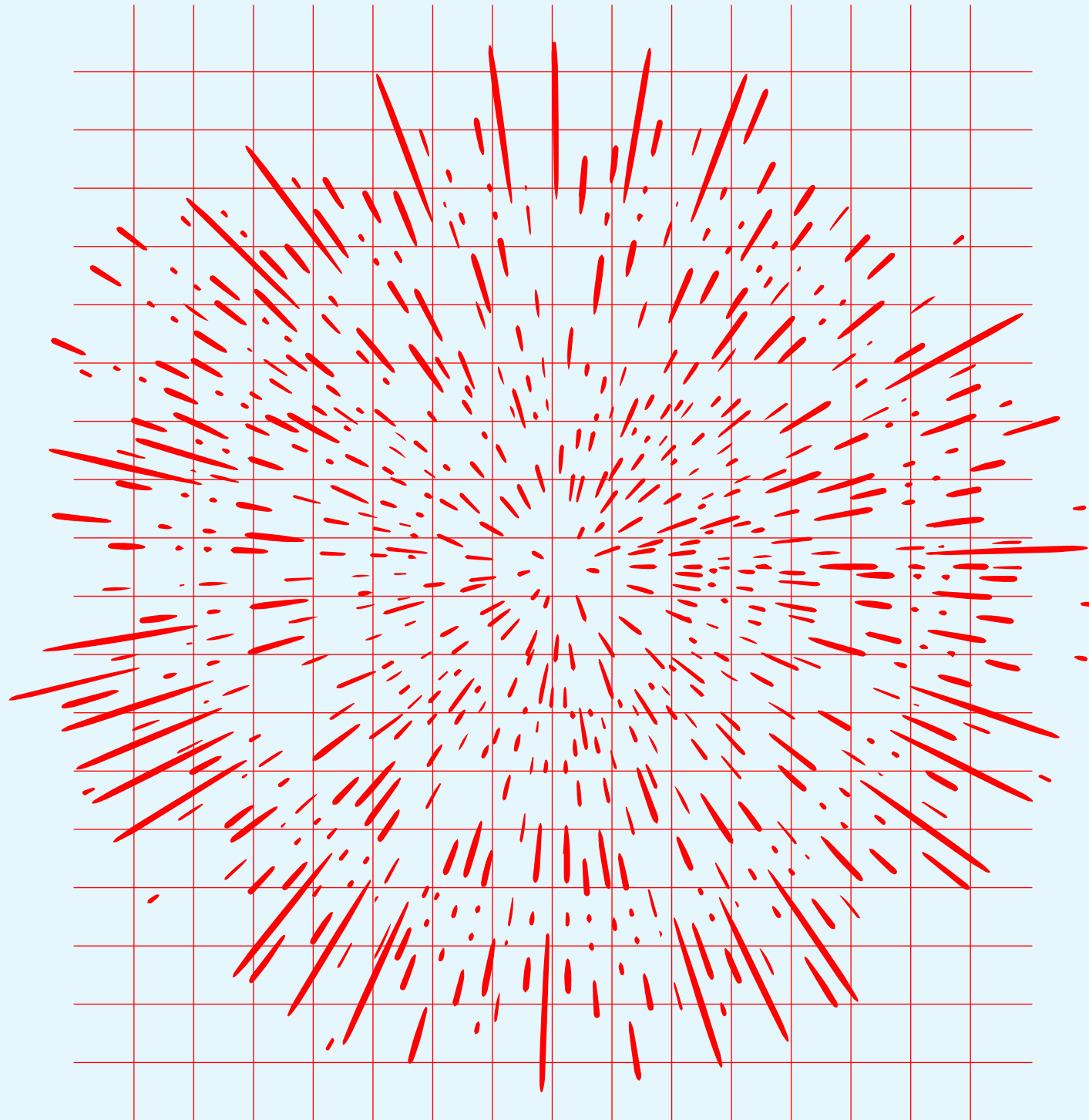


UK/Poland Cultural Season 2025: Imagining Future Collaborations

Report from a study regarding potential cooperation between Polish organisations from the arts and culture sector and their UK counterparts under the UK/Poland Season 2025. New models of cooperation and recommendations for the British Council

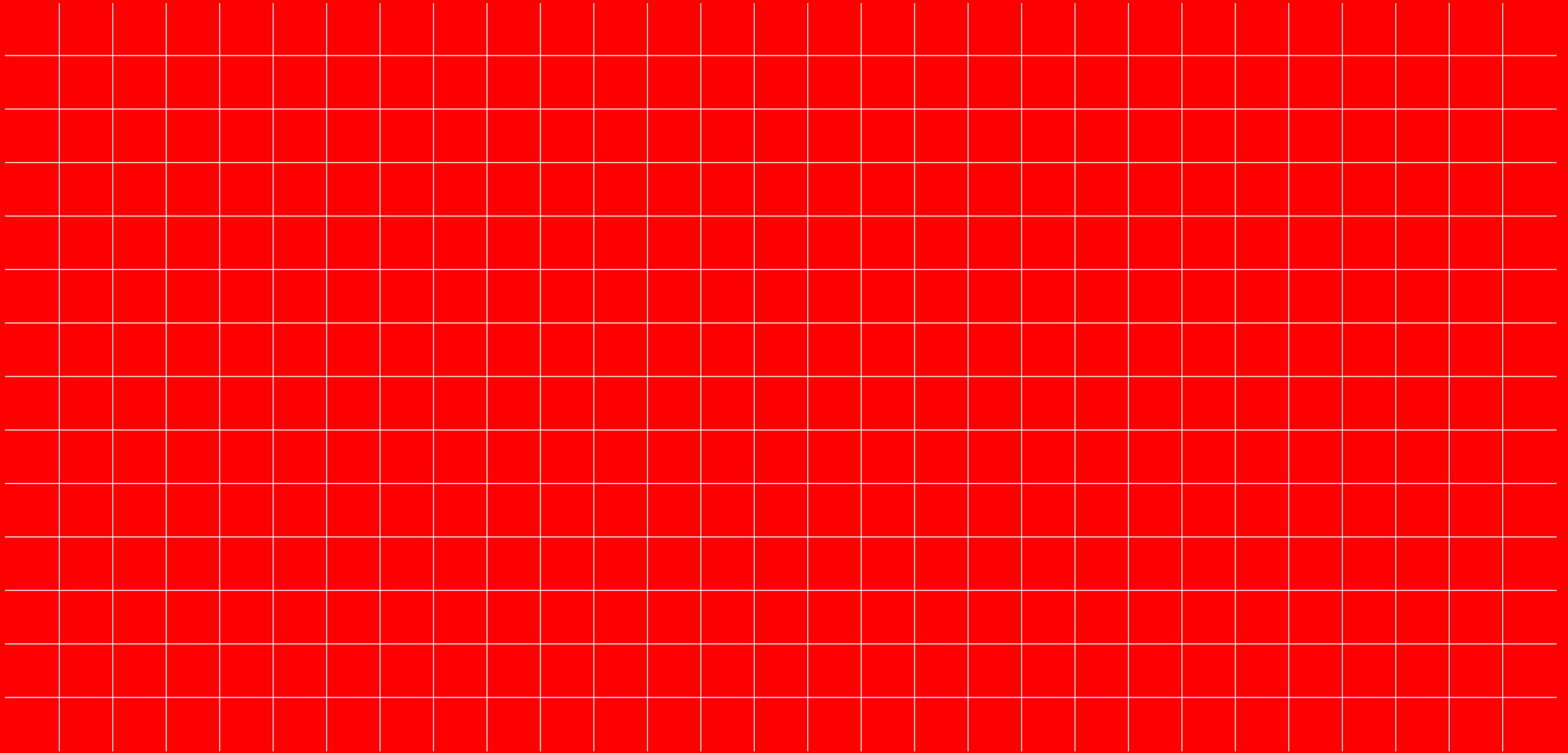
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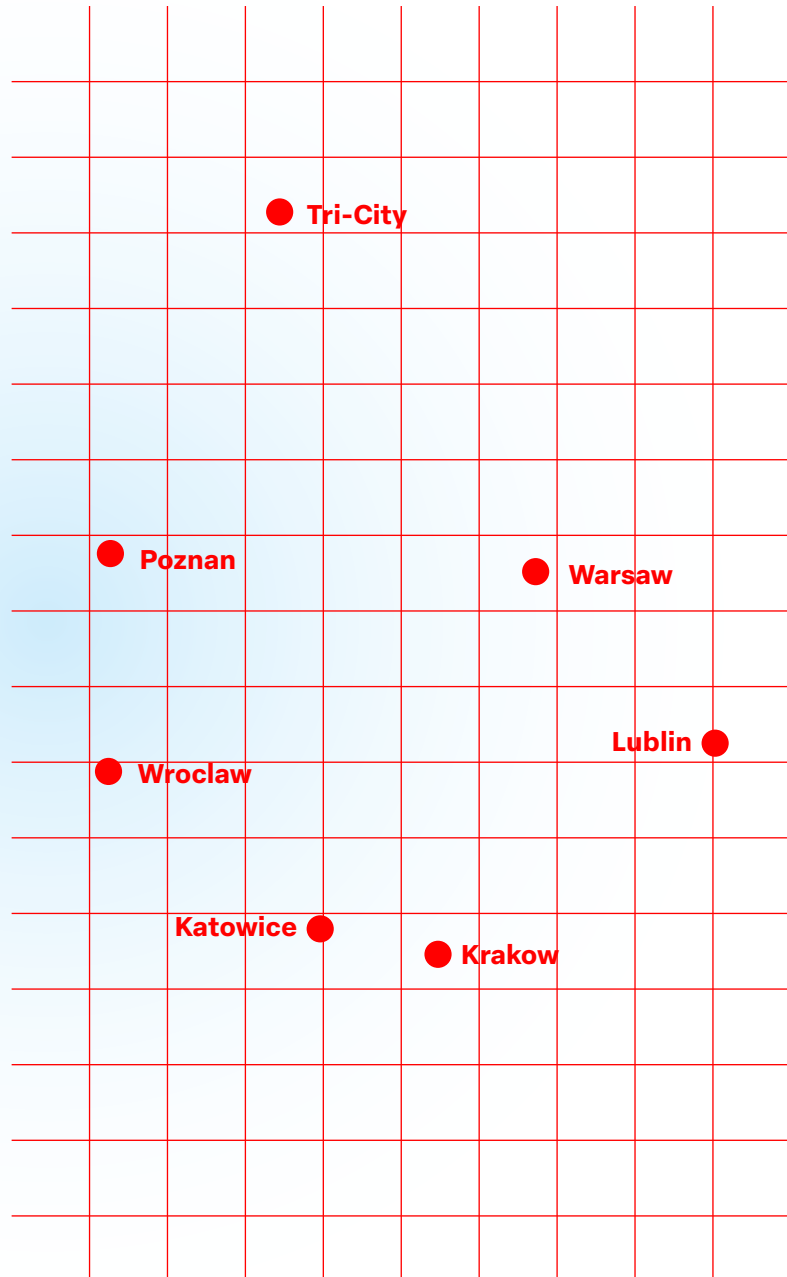
Contents

3.	1. Introduction	14	Images and associations related to popular culture	39	Art education
6.	2. Profile of the studied group	15	Transcending established schemes: art in society and politics	41	Long-term cooperation, long-term echoes and outcomes, lasting relationships and networks
7	Organisational formula	15	A new beginning	43	Social and political engagement of art
7	Formats and scopes of activity	16	Images of new cooperation	45	5. The UK through the eyes of Polish arts and culture practitioners
8	Areas of activity	17	Local organisational ecosystems: Mapping collaboration with the UK based on potential and resources	46	The map
8	Job titles and professional profiles of study participants	18	Trends and weak signals: Challenges, opportunities, and possibilities	48	6. New versus familiar formats (but viewed in a new light)
9	3. Methodology and study stages	21	4. Models and areas of cooperation. Practices, relationships, values, themes	53	7. Participants' needs vis-à-vis the British Council
10	From past experiences to new models of future cooperation	22	Locality and beyond	54	Field mapping
10	Online survey examining past experiences, current plans and needs	24	Process, not products	54	The door is closed
11	In-depth interviews with representatives of arts and culture organisations (recommendations based on past experiences to 2035)	26	Curiosity and trans/interculturalism	55	Filling the gap after Brexit
12	Collaboration lab: imaginary figures, future scenarios, designing and prototyping new models of cooperation	28	Accessibility and inclusiveness	56	Forms of funding
13	SUPERNOVA as a source of imaginary figures related to cooperation and its goals	31	Decentralisation	58	8. Summary
14	Seemingly obvious associations	33	Transdisciplinary and innovative solutions		
		34	Migration/inclusion of third countries/postcolonialism		
		36	Project symmetry (reciprocity)		
		38	Intergenerational dialogue, young people, and audience development		

1. Introduction



1. Introduction



The majority of respondents representing organisations that took part in our study stressed that the old formulas for international cooperation were no longer adequate in the face of the current reality. In their view, crises have become the new normal. The **COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, and inflation** have radically changed and continue to impact the way people work, feel, create art and culture, and approach collaborative initiatives.

The present report outlines the plans, needs, potential, and perceptions that arts and culture institutions and organisations have reported with regard to cooperation under the British Council's **UK/Poland Season 2025**. It also relays their **experience of various crises** as well as **ideas on how to deal with them** and plan **new models of international cooperation**, including **adaptation** and **resilience** mechanisms so as to cope with our **fragile, anxious, non-linear and contradictory** reality.

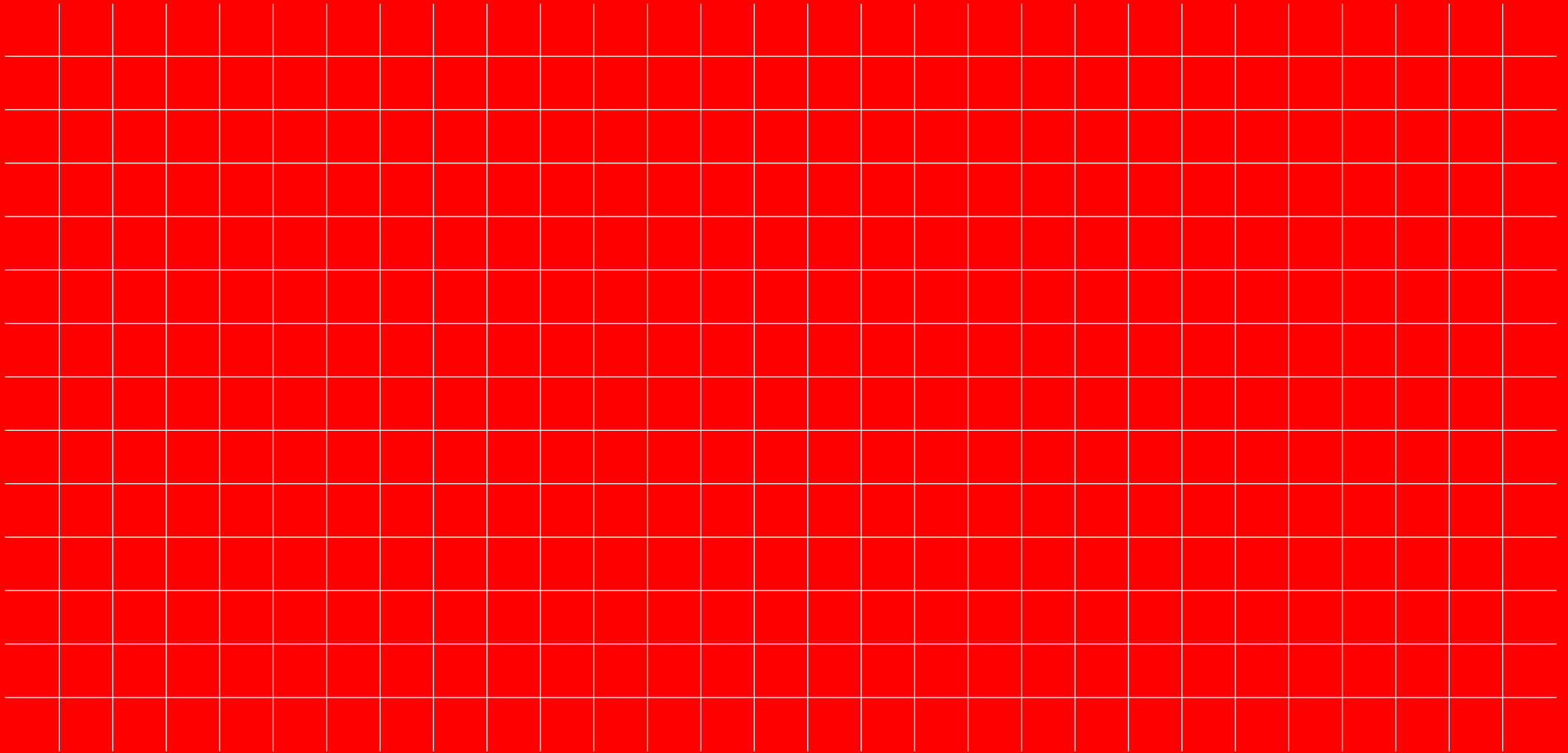
The study was conducted on behalf of the British Council in **7 Polish cities** (Katowice, Krakow, Lublin, Poznan, the Tri-City, Warsaw, and Wroclaw) and involved 70 institutions and organisations. Its objective was to identify plans related to cooperation between Polish organisations and British partners within the framework of the planned UK/Poland Season 2025 as well as the needs related to this cooperation implemented in a changing, uncertain, chaotic and fragile reality, and desired scenarios for this cooperation.

A remarkable number of people from the organisations surveyed stressed that relationships that had worked well before the pandemic were severed during lockdowns. A representative of an institution from Katowice said: "Since the pandemic, our international relations have died down." Brexit has become another factor hampering cooperation for many. A representative of the Silesian Theatre described the problem in the following manner: "A gap connected with financial and organisational changes has emerged. And Brexit has added a new level of complexity." A respondent from one of the Tri-City art institutions stated quite unequivocally: "We have ceased to think [of the UK] as a potential partner."

Many organisations stated that certain things **would need to change**, indicating that they are willing to develop new cooperation formats and models based on a new set of values and principles, adapting them to the new reality, e.g. “I could use a nudge from the outside showing that it’s possible to do things differently,” said an employee of one of the Katowice institutions. A representative of Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin stressed the need to “redefine cooperation after the pandemic” as well as to “rebuild broken relationships.” Many pointed to “post-pandemic burnout in the culture sector” and the need to come up with a new formula in response to the situation. Our report is an attempt to articulate and conceptualise these new needs.

2.

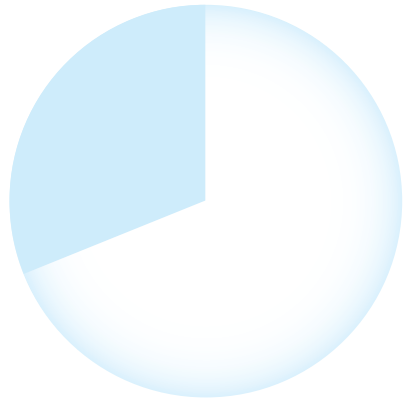
Profile of the studied group



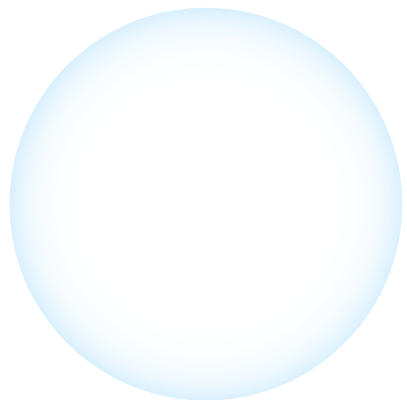
2. Profile of the studied group

70

organisations
accepted
the invitation



69% organisations had
previously implemented
collaborative projects
with UK partners



100% organisations
stated that they were
willing to start new
collaborations or to
continue initiatives,
building on already
established contacts

During the first stage of the study, **we contacted 190 organisations** and invited them to participate in our research, specifying its objectives, purpose, and the stages of the process. The organisations were **diverse** both in terms of their **organisational structure, format, and scale of operations**, as well as their **areas of activity**, hence the **study explores a variety of programme and organisational perspectives**. It maps out both **fields of commonality and divergence** when it comes to preferred modes of cooperation and strategies for building relationships with UK partners. Key thematic and organisational ideas, expectations and needs addressed to the British Council, the initiator of the UK/Poland Season 2025, are also spelled out.

Seventy organisations accepted the invitation. 69% had previously implemented collaborative projects with UK partners as part of their activities (or had employed staff who had been involved in such projects), and 100% stated that they were willing to start new collaborations or to continue initiatives, building on already established contacts. We conducted in-depth online interviews with 59 people. A total of 63 respondents, representing 51 organisations, also took part in seven workshops across the country. In total, 93 persons were involved in the study.

Organisational formula

The organisations studied included third sector organisations, i.e. foundations and associations, local, national and co-managed public institutions, as well as private business entities.

Formats and scopes of activity

The respondents represented organisations with year-round programme activities, as well as those implementing single recurring events such as festivals. The group included both organisations pursuing their own programmes as well as umbrella institutions bringing together several initiatives under one banner. We also wanted to survey

organisations of different sizes, thus both institutions with more than a hundred employees as well as single-person NGOs were included.

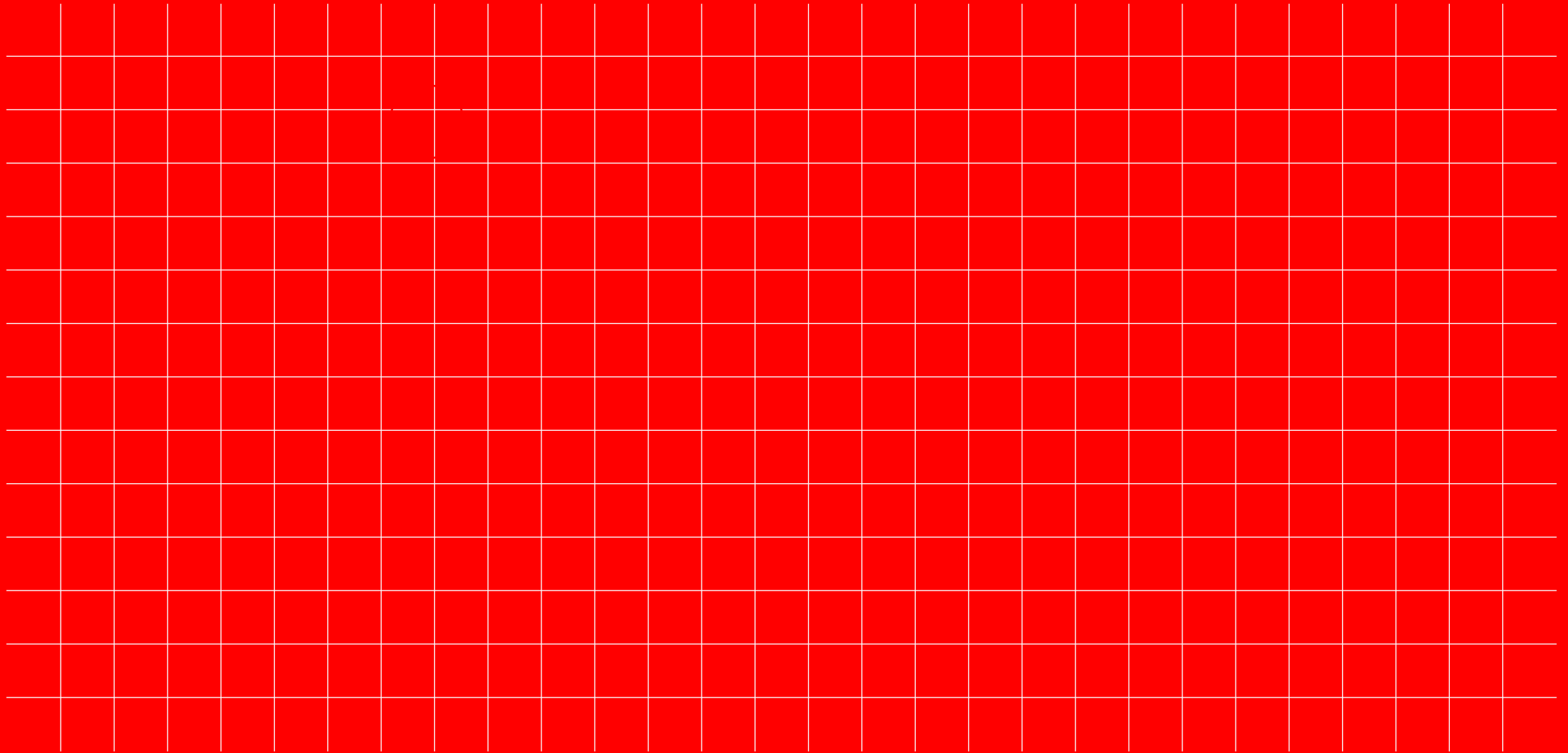
Areas of activity

The invitation was addressed to organisations and individuals working in the field of performing arts (theatre, dance, contemporary circus, performance), film, literature, music, design and applied arts, contemporary and ancient art, architecture, photography, ethnography, social history, tangible and intangible heritage, implementing inter- and transdisciplinary projects, research and research-artistic activities, running educational programs as well as creating computer games.

Job titles and professional profiles of study participants

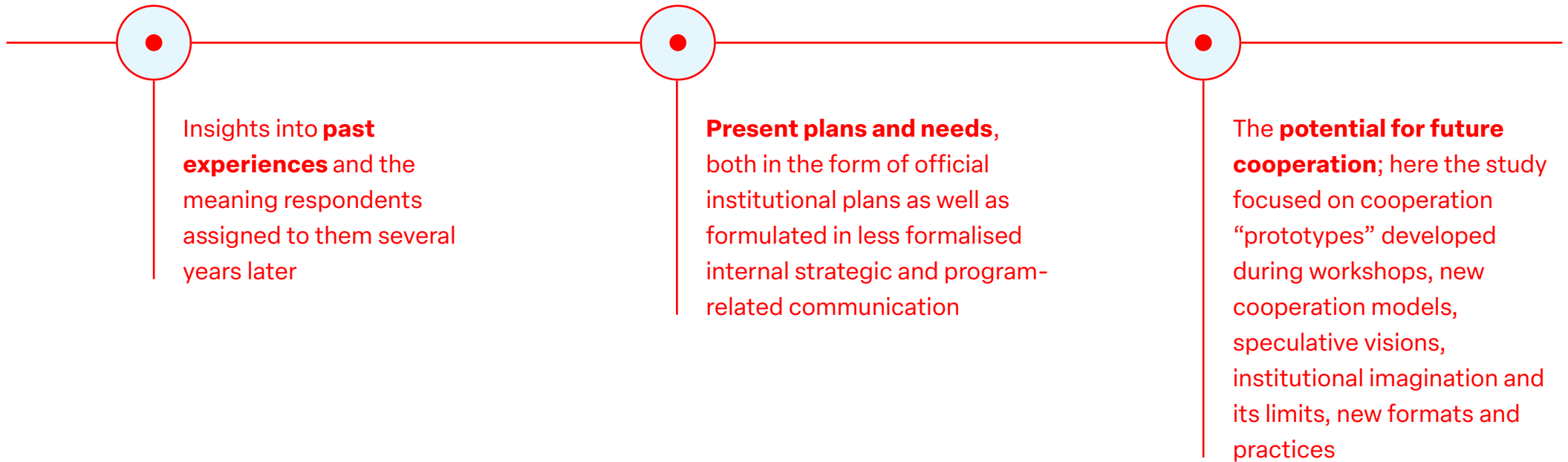
Study participants included persons involved in core, organisational, administrative and accounting activities in their respective organisations, i.e. directors and managers, professionals working in programming and educational departments, curators, coordinators, as well as project producers, custodians, accounting specialists, artists, and persons combining several areas of activity and expertise. The invited organisations delegated between 1 and 4 representatives to participate in the research process, and in several cases different people from an organisation took part in different stages of the process, relaying information about the study to each other. Since people working in the arts and culture community in Poland very often have several professional affiliations simultaneously (i.e. institutional activity, freelance artistic activity, academic activity and work in the third sector in various configurations), the study covered a very broad spectrum of activities, including non-formal ones.

3. Methodology and study stages



From past experiences to new models of future cooperation

The study focused on three temporal perspectives, namely:



Each of these temporal perspectives informed the research methods and tools applied in the course of the study.

Online survey examining past experiences, current plans and needs

An online survey was sent out via email to selected organisations and institutions in order to collect information about their past experiences and current plans. The answers to the survey questions – subsequently elaborated on during 45 to 60-minute online interviews – became the starting point for developing recommendations with regard to designing future collaborations. We sought to understand the challenges of past collaborative efforts, as well as to determine their particular impact on long-term

changes. Participants were also asked about what stayed in their minds, had given them satisfaction, pleasure, a sense of meaning, or an opportunity for synergy.

In-depth interviews with representatives of arts and culture organisations (recommendations based on past experiences to 2035)

During the 45 to 60-minute in-depth online interviews, the past was only a starting point to discuss current intentions and needs. We wanted to inspire thinking about the future and imagining possible scenarios for cooperation. Hence, we began by trying to **capture the past experiences of participants in the form of recommendations** that could be implemented in the future. Another goal was to determine where partnerships and “inter-institutional friendships” existed (whether active or inactive), whether there was a chance to reactivate them, and if so, how this could be achieved. We also asked about any tensions and challenges that organisations faced. This allowed us to develop a list of recommendations.

A key step in the interviews was talking about organisations’ present plans and needs. We asked about existing official programs and plans, as well as about less binding ideas that are not yet “mature,” but have emerged in conversations within the organisation. An important topic raised in this part of the interviews were values and criteria for good cooperation.

During the interviews, it was also important to create a framework for participants to identify their individual and organisational **resources** and **potential** to build future relationships with the UK. We were keen to identify ways of creating better, higher-quality, longer-lasting partnerships, instead of focusing on existing shortcomings or deficits. Hence, we asked questions about the teams’ strengths, the organisation’s potential to establish good relationships and implement rewarding collaborations, and explored what to look for in UK partner entities. The topic of resources and potential

3. Methodology and study stages



was also introduced with an additional purpose in mind: to inspire thinking (but also imagining and fantasising) about new cooperative possibilities and opportunities, which were then refined during the workshop.

Discussing potential provided inroads into discussing the future. In this part of the interviews – which laid down the basics and inspired the workshop – we offered an imaginary journey into the future, first to 2025, asking about how respondents imagined their cooperation with the UK until that time horizon. The aim of this intervention was to go beyond the formalised grant-related language which often informs the cognitive framework of those working in the arts and culture sector, and to situate collaboration within the field of everyday human experience.

At this point we analysed the **organisational imagination**, its current references, boundaries, as well as opportunities to expand these boundaries. Sometimes the conversation also touched on future-related assumptions, e.g. what the respondents took for granted and the things they weren't at all certain about, as well as how these certainties and uncertainties informed the design and planning of new collaborations between Poland and the UK in 2025. Uncertainty factors were discussed as well as the phenomena likely to hamper or occasion desired future outcomes. Ultimately, in order to understand the imagined long-term impact of the collaboration ideas developed by the participants, we sometimes also asked what would be left of this cooperation after 10 years, in 2035, assuming that everything worked out and their assumptions, plans and goals (as they saw them "here and now") were achieved.

Collaboration lab: imaginary figures, future scenarios, designing and prototyping new models of cooperation

The final stage of the study consisted in a 7-hour workshop, which we called the ethnographic cooperation lab, carried out live in each city. The purpose was to inspire attendees to design innovative models, formats and practices related to collaboration,

The world is what I dream it to be.

Gaston Bachelard

set in imagined future realities. We defined the future not as a determinate, linear series of events, but as a variety of alternative, hypothetical ramifications – many different futures that could be influenced or shaped. This part of the study was informed by systems design and foresight methods (working with trends and weak signals in the short-term timeframe until 2025).

Our aim was to explore perceptions, needs, fantasies, visions, and practices that do not belong in an institution's official narrative or self-definition, but often determine actual directions of cooperation, success, atmosphere, and the experiential layer. Finally, we also wanted to initiate a creative process of designing new models of cooperation in a safe, non-judgmental and critical environment, outside the daily organisational routine.

SUPERNOVA as a source of imaginary figures related to cooperation and its goals

The working title of the UK/Poland Season proposed by the British Council is **SUPERNOVA**. The organiser has suggested that the term could be understood as something bright and new, like an explosion of creative activity. We decided to verify how this term resonated with our workshop participants from the Polish arts and culture sector. We began by offering **five scientific definitions** that we found interesting, inspiring and far from obvious. Our aim was **to trigger the participants' imagination and to explore various interpretative paths**, including any that transcend the traditional schemes. Taking inspiration from the **concept of imaginary figures** developed by Gaston Bachelard, who maintained that **"the world is what I dream it to be,"** we wanted to see what imaginary figures the participants would come up with when thinking of the supernova as a metaphor, and how they could then **re-imagine models of cooperation** between Polish and British arts and culture organisations.

Do we need more explosions or more stillness and quiet?

📍 Poznan

The title was also **subjected to critical analysis**. Some participants did not find it inspiring, while others described it as “old-school,” something reminiscent of the aesthetics of 1980s and 90s technicolour. Other associations included allegedly obsolete forms of activity in the field of culture and art, popular before the COVID 19 pandemic, such as organised thematic seasons, large festivals, and one-off events with big funding, with no plans to continue and without thinking about any long-term distribution of the knowledge and artistic ideas generated.

The emerging imaginary figures were then grouped into several thematic blocks, starting from direct associations, through socio-political contexts, to new models of cooperation.

Seemingly obvious associations

The first group of emerging images referred directly to an explosion and the universe, including terms like **explosion, energy release, dispersion, big bang, light, and brightness**. Supernova was also associated with power and a universe full of possibilities. Some of the associations involved criticism of practices in the field of culture and art. Participants of the workshop in Poznan identified a supernova with **fireworks, a momentary event, something short-lived and soon extinguished**. On top of this, it was said, exploding fireworks leave behind ugly cardboard waste. Questions were also raised such as whether “we need more explosions or more stillness and quiet?”

📍 Poznan

Images and associations related to popular culture

Associations with popular **culture** included British singer David Bowie, Star Trek, and science fiction images of “superpowers” as something linked to the future and superheroes.

Transcending established schemes: art in society and politics

An interesting interpretative motif for the supernova involved the idea of **redefining how art and cultural institutions function**. This was expressed as the need for **something fresh** or a **new beginning**. One curator spoke of the supernova as a **re-configuration**, a shift **from the old order to a new one**, acknowledging the position of female artists in art history. Additionally, participants highlighted the revolutionary nature of such a change, how it would “smash old habits,” put a stop to inviting the same artists and institutions, or to promoting names that no longer need publicity. Participants expressed the need to invite “artists from the UK who haven’t been shown in Poland yet, [and] to carry out co-productions that provide **opportunities for the mutual popularisation of works unknown in the other country**”. [Warsaw](#)

Transcending the established order also means “**overcoming centre-periphery polarisation**” and “going beyond the centre and reaching out to local communities not commonly associated with the UK” [Katowice](#), as well as **moving beyond narratives based on national identities and beyond neoliberal strategies**. Some participants suggested “blasting the current models of culture and resource distribution which is centralised and based on the interests of narrow groups.” [Warsaw](#) An analogy to the supernova and the new reality after Brexit was raised, wondering “whether the UK is ready and open to collaboration (beyond the saviour complex).”

A new beginning

The term “new” was used to label another group of associations. After all, the “big bang” gives **rise to a new beginning** – a phrase that came up repeatedly in each city. Hence, the supernova should serve as **leaven for generating new ideas**, a symbol of hope that **a new, better and more diverse reality can be built**.

3. Methodology and study stages

Here are some examples of interpretations:

“A NEW opening, relationships, images, faces, generations, needs, new questions, new tasks, new friendships, new technologies”

📍 Sopot

“The end of the old and the beginning of the new. **The potential for the birth of new entities, new structures, constellations**”

📍 Poznan

“**New relationships**, the fusion of thoughts and fields”

📍 Warsaw

Images of new cooperation

Most participants associated the category of the new with various forms of cooperation. There were many associations with energy, movement, and action **to form new constellations, connect potentials, create new networks of cooperation, influence a new and better quality of work.**

“A new view of international cooperation, no longer just events, but authentic partnerships.” 📍 Lublin

The vision of new cooperation triggered deeper reflection regarding ways in which institutions and organisations could transform. This was seen as possible through **the exchange of practices on well-being, sustainability or via inspiring executives.** “It’s also a chance to design unfamiliar experiences.” 📍 Sopot An essential reflection recurring at various stages of the workshops involved **the need to put process at the centre of this new collaboration.** “The process, more emphasis on the process rather than the outcomes.” 📍 Wroclaw

Respondents discussed projects driving **long-term cooperation** beyond the 2025 horizon: “activities that result in contacts, friendships, and cooperation until the end of the world,” [Lublin](#) as well as “**multidimensional and long-term effects**” [Katowice](#) and “creation of new configurations conducive to systematic cooperation.” [Warsaw](#)

Local organisational ecosystems: Mapping collaboration with the UK based on potential and resources

At this point group members joined forces to develop a map of islands symbolising organisations that collaborate (if they want to) with one another and with the UK. Participants were asked to imagine their organisations, institutions or initiatives as islands, and then draw them, highlighting the following aspects:

- What is your island’s resource? What is its source of power?
- How do you build relationships with UK entities? What UK-based entities do you work with?
- What makes your island stand out?
- How do you invite people to work with you? What makes you attractive? What can you invite others to do with you?
- What are you willing to give?
- What is the landscape of your island? What is its climate?
- What do you need from UK entities?
- What do you do during this collaboration? Think of specific activities and put them on the map.
- What communities, tribes, or groups populate your island? What new communities will emerge from this collaboration? With whom are you engaged?
- What can you give each other as a local archipelago? What kind of system are you creating?

The visual metaphor was supposed to get participants to reflect on their resources and potential and to activate an associative creative process, unhindered by the linguistic habits that are part of official cooperation-related narratives. We wanted to trigger

a process of exploring new possibilities in a free, intuitive, and non-logocentric visual manner. This part of the workshop was also important in revealing ways in which **local arts and culture ecosystems** operate and the potentialities that emerge from collaboration and exchange at the local level.

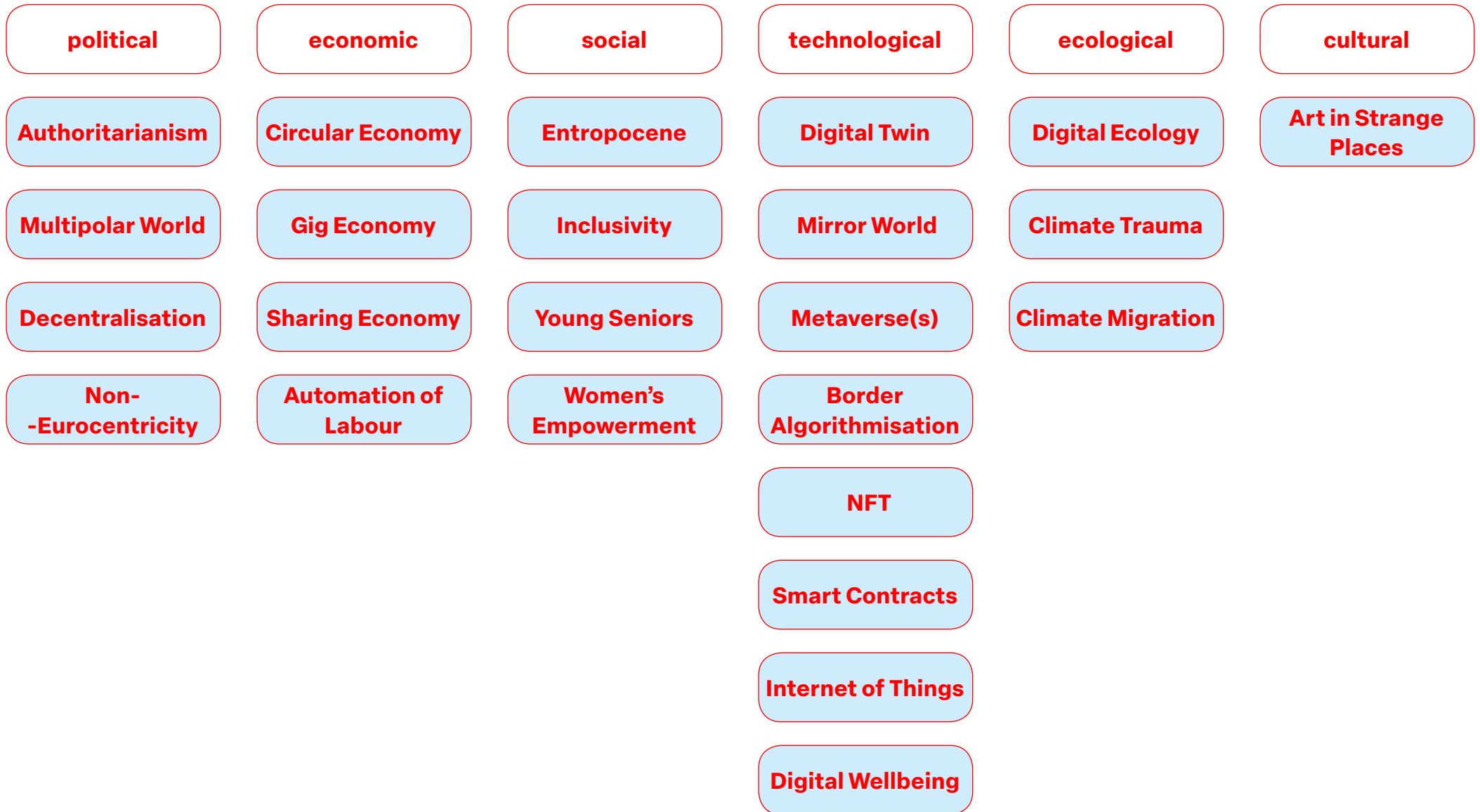
It turned out that for many institutions the framework of collaboration with the UK provided inspiration for a new way of looking at one another and at other organisations operating in the same city. Ideas were generated for exchanges, doing things together, establishing a long-term “sharing economy” drawing on one another’s competencies and resources.

Trends and weak signals: Challenges, opportunities, and possibilities

By placing the topic of cooperation in the broader context of trends and changes affecting future relationships between Polish and British entities, our aim was to **understand possible futures scenarios** – to identify opportunities, possibilities and risks so as to **prepare for tomorrow’s challenges**; to find the **energy to shape the future** and to **create a system of adaptation to change**. While the work with visual metaphor - drawing archipelagos of islands - was aimed at digging deep into our own organisations and local cultural ecosystems, the work with trends was aimed at placing the UK collaboration in a broader context and understanding its **systemic conditions, the various opportunities, possibilities** and **challenges** that may arise in the future. This journey into the future by means of analysing interconnections between trends that are already discernible and weak signals of change was also intended to generate new ideas about cooperation by imagining how it would work under specific circumstances in the future.

3. Methodology and study stages

The identified trends were characterised by varying degrees of maturity and involved varying geographic references. They also represented different areas and domains:



***We would like
to introduce
themes
concerning
the ecology of
contemporary
art, and how
to avoid
overproduction***

Gdansk City Gallery

Each workshop group identified a set of 6-8 trends which served as a starting point for a conversation about the systemic determinants of collaboration. Individuals were asked about what new collaborative practice each trend inspires, how it might influence or transform existing or projected collaborative formats, and what challenges it might present. We were also interested in discovering an unexpected future, one that is radically different from our present, despite assuming a not-too-distant time horizon. This task made it possible to identify, name and verify implicit assumptions about the future of cooperation in the field of culture and art.

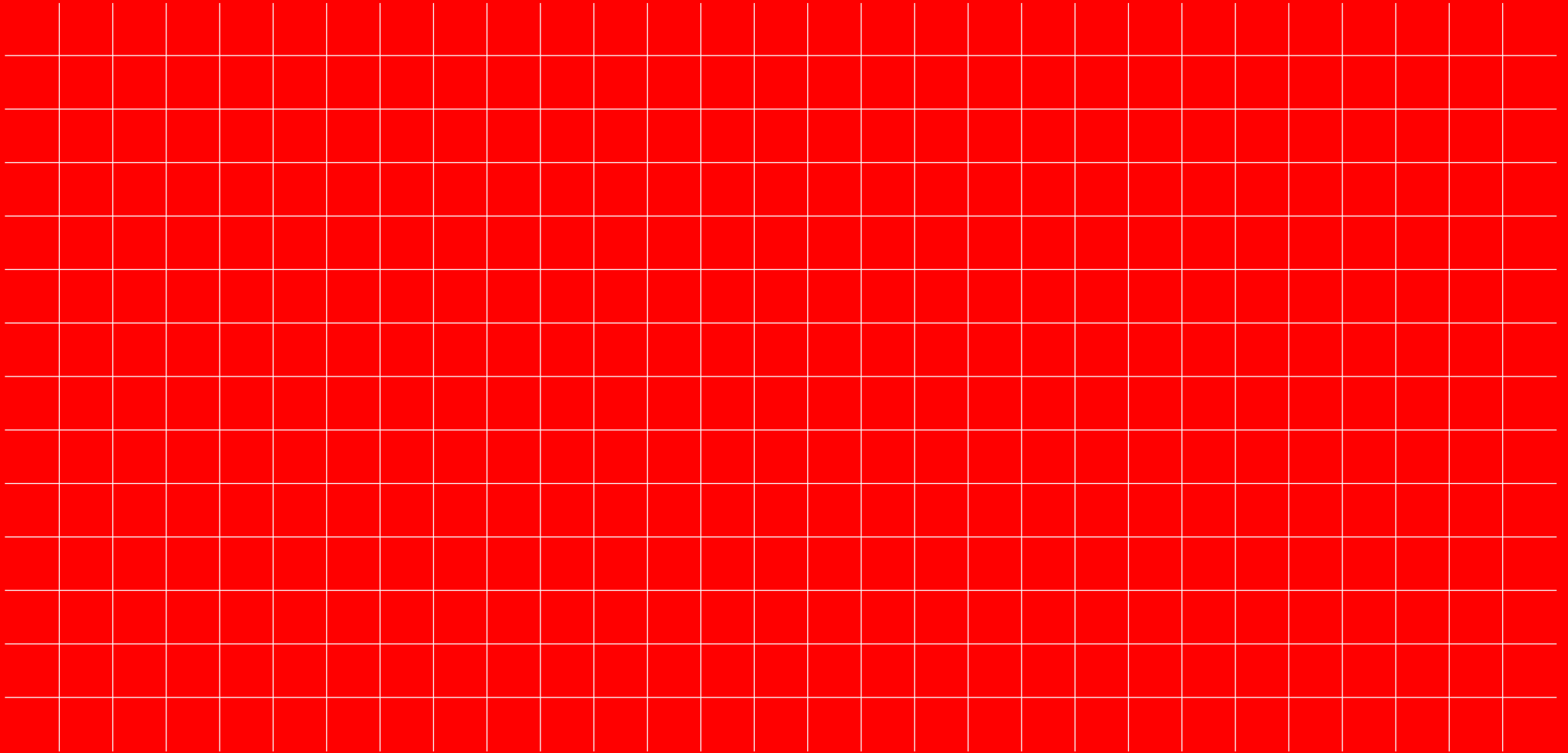
One recurring theme in the trend analysis was the call for cooperation based on sustainable, regenerative principles to be included in the British Council's grant announcements and emphasised in the UK/Poland Season 2025 narrative. Some organisations also pointed to the **circular economy** and **sharing economy** as a set of values, methods, and rules that could inform the entire season. Digital ecology and reducing the carbon footprint associated with our use of digital technologies was an important new context that emerged during several discussions of trends.

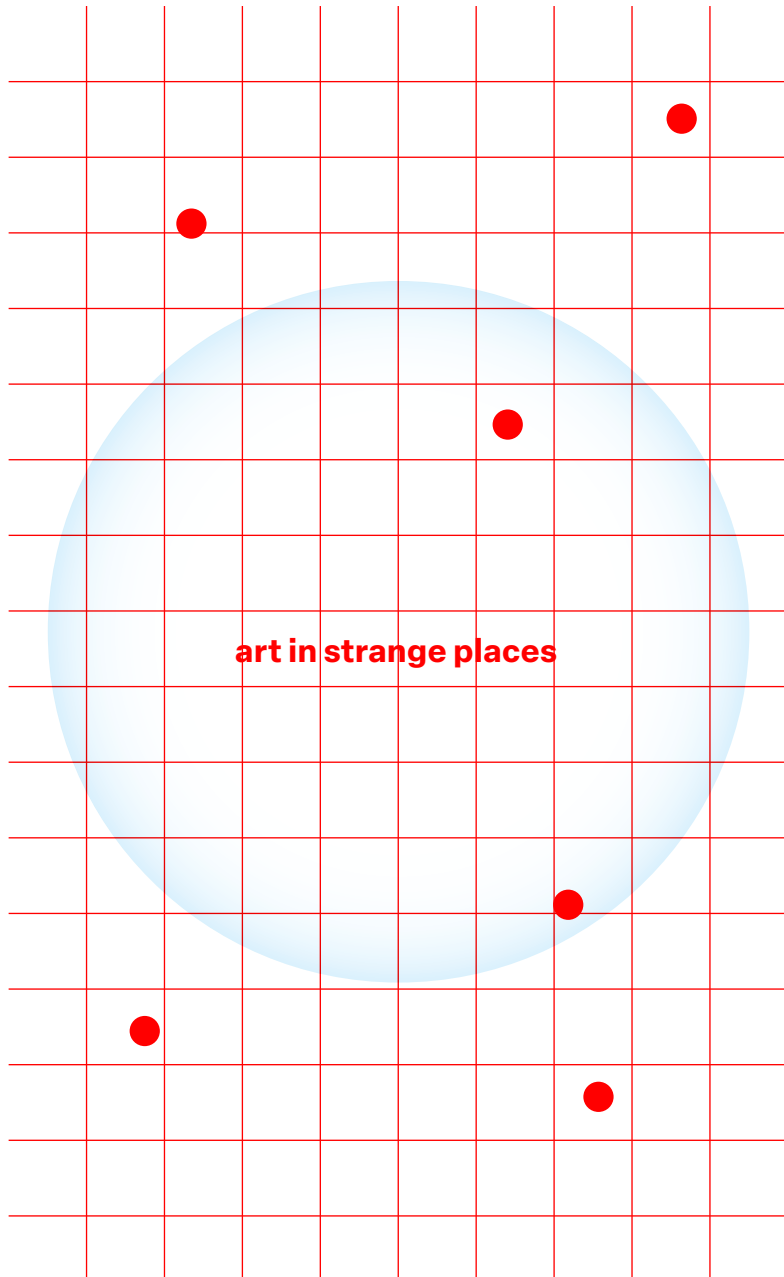
A representative of the Goyki 3 Art Inkubator mentioned the British organisation Julie's Bicycle which certifies and supports arts and culture institutions in the context of climate change. Gdynia Design Days would like to frame its cooperation around the topic of the circular economy and invite an expert in this field from the Design Council and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. On the other hand, the representative of Gdansk City Gallery directly stated their need for **art ecology**: "we would like to introduce themes concerning the ecology of contemporary art, and how to avoid overproduction."

4.

Models and areas of cooperation

Practices, relationships, values, themes





Locality and beyond

“By definition, locality is their [British] theme. What does being local signify today? For us, locality is relevant in an international context. Can localism be inspiring or stigmatising?” asked a representative of a gallery from Gdansk. The theme of looking at one’s own locality in order to see it in a new light or from a new perspective came up in many conversations. On the one hand, the need to invite artists for residencies was expressed, so that they have the opportunity to learn about the local context and refer to it in their works. The same representative also suggested that “British artists could address Polish and Tricity situations.”

What resonated strongly during the workshop in Katowice was the theme of **linking localities together**, building relationships not based on national identities i.e. *Britishness* and *Polishness*, but by understanding how various local phenomena or processes – cultural, social, ecological, economic or political – resemble and differ from one another. One example is the experience of post-industrial regions. Silesian organisations, such as the Silesian Museum, which is located in a former mine, could exchange practices, competencies, knowledge and experiences with organisations from post-industrial areas of the UK, such as Manchester.

A representative of Goyki 3 Art Inkubator pointed out that **locality constitutes an ecosystem**. She spoke about the park around the Sopot villa where her institution is situated. “We work with ornithologists and beekeepers.” Some artists carry out projects right in the park, embedding them in natural conditions. The theme of the **biodiversity of local ecosystems** can provide an interesting context for linking localities. The material layer of nature can become a basis for artistic exchange and relationship-building.

A representative of Propaganda gallery and Warsaw Gallery Weekend drew attention to a specific kind of locality when he referred to a trend he called **art in strange places**. According to this idea, well-known artists give up working and displaying their art in large

urban centres and arrange artistic situations outdoors, in peculiar spaces, often hard to access. This is not community art, as there is no constant activity involving the local community, nor is it a simple site-specific intervention. Travelling “to an inaccessible place where art happens will be the new practice of experiencing art,” he predicts. He observes this trend in the UK and increasingly in Poland, and would like to understand how such projects are implemented. He himself is thinking about the Poludnica project, which would take place from the summer solstice to the equinox in Warmia, in a forest, on a lake, at a State Farm, in Lidzbark Warmiński, Ostrołęka, or Olsztyn. He would be willing to work on the project together with Popular Front, a medium dealing with modern war and hidden, undescribed conflicts, in cooperation with British journalist Jake Hanrahan.

Not all respondents, however, valued locality, placing their idea of Polish-British cooperation not only outside of large identity categories, but also outside of Poland and the UK. In one map, created in Lublin, one can see lines connecting the Lublin ecosystem (depicted as a “cosmic” model of orbits on which satellites and “celestial bodies” move) and the UK as a flat area with a huge blue cloud. Its authors described it as an **extraterritorial metaverse** where cooperation takes place independently of national identities; the cooperating entities are not pars pro toto of a nation or national culture. Splinters of this cooperation do reach the places from which the cooperating entities come but this is of secondary importance.

Another interesting representation of cooperation as a no-man’s land involved a drawing of island-organisations forming wave-like relationships. The system is based on a sea platform from which, its author said, a pirate radio station is broadcasting. The concept was actually inspired by the existing HM Fort Roughs platform built by the British during World War II as a military fort within international waters, in the North Sea, about 6 1/2 nautical miles off the Suffolk coast. A pirate radio station did actually broadcast from it in the 1960s. The platform then became a territory of the self-proclaimed micro-state Principality of Sealand. In the picture we see three island-organisations sending waves out into the ether. The waves interfere with each other,

and behind the veil of this interference is the United Kingdom, a territory that can be reached semi-legally, bypassing the official system, concessions, and beaten paths. **The pirate nature of cooperation** negates the formal system and operates on the margins, within an autonomous, freedom-based system.

Process, not products

“Everything boils down to **knowledge** and **curiosity**, and relationships that are marked by **trust** and **understanding**. It takes time and space to engage in a conversation,” said a representative of an organisation from Lublin during an online conversation. “To go somewhere, to get to know each other [...] Then usually [cooperation happens] very quickly. The most interesting things come out when people meet in less formal circumstances and can hang out with each other.” That is precisely when “non-obvious discoveries” occur and meetings become “less air-tight.” The theme of focusing on and prioritising the collaborative process recurred time and again during many conversations and at several workshops. A processual approach to a project implies **great attentiveness to what arises at specific meetings, out of unpredictable situations, in a spontaneous atmosphere.**

This perspective stands **in opposition to formalised projects** in which conditions are rigidly pre-determined, preventing any modification of assumptions and/or goals in response to changing external circumstances or the internal dynamics of the process. The new way of thinking about projects is premised on **openness to change and flexibility** – both enable great collaboration. “Non-obvious discoveries,” trust and understanding become possible when non-linearity, unpredictability, time to talk and be with each other are incorporated into the project. There is no pre-determined set of project outcomes; they are subject to change and emerge out of the encounter under specific conditions. “I like situations where I don’t have control over what is happening. I just set the process in motion,” said the representative of a Warsaw gallery. For him, it is of great importance to “be open to ignorance.”

In fact, this theme resonated strongly during a workshop conducted in cooperation with organisations and institutions from Lublin. During the course of the workshop we inquired about the **criteria and conditions required for a good, qualitative process**. What needs to happen so that the process is not chaotic and creates value? How does one know if it does? Those who attended the workshop pointed to a sense of security that allows people to build trust and engage in open communication.

They also talked about a **different concept of time** which is necessary for such a project. Instead of rigid frameworks and inflexible schedules, a need was articulated to **slow down**, to “**give each other time to be with each other**,” to meet without a fixed goal or direction. Such a situation could give rise to a **community** to whom cooperation will provide a **sense of meaning**. According to many, meaning arises precisely from coexistence without a strictly defined task, when there is no precisely defined framework and outcomes that must be delivered. Such a set-up provides room for **returning to different stages** of the project, successive iterations, **non-linear activities, leaps**, organising time in reaction to what is created in the process.



This kind of process also leaves room for space and time for **potential mistakes**. As one participant emphasised, it was important to “create the conditions for the possibility of failure.” A mistake from this perspective is not a failure actually, as it does not result from a lack or deficit, but is understood as a **potential resource**: “Success was when I was able to overcome it, or we have the right to change, we have the right to make mistakes.” Asked about outcomes of the UK/Poland Season 2025 collaboration that would still be seen in 2035, a representative of an institution from Sopot said: “In 2035, collections of good practices and failures will remain on the timeline.” Failures, meaning **mistakes one can learn and grow from**, and which did not unravel the project. A **mistake is also seen as a source of innovation**. In fact, more interesting movement or language structures

can emerge from a stumble or a slip of the tongue than from the perfect execution of a set plan. Similarly, very interesting, qualitative and innovative outcomes can arise from a mistake that occurs in the course of collaboration. Workshop participants stressed that if the funder allowed for making mistakes, the beneficiaries would have more breathing room and tension would be reduced.

Furthermore, the processual nature of collaboration, as our interlocutors claimed, requires “**experiencing daily routines**” and “**working every day.**” “In the international environment, we rely on events,” one participant noted, before adding, “and not on daily work.” The vernacularity of practices was contrasted with “event-ness, spectacularity, [and] highlights.” One Krakow art curator noted that looking at cultural seasons, “everything is geared [to attain] some effect, no one is interested in what’s coming next.” The same curator spoke of his need for a study visit to the UK: “I could sleep on a sofa as long as I had the freedom to meet people. To go out and have a beer with them. Then I could animate any type of cooperation.” A paradox mentioned by the participants is that things created in **emergent, spontaneous, improvised** and **authentic conditions** often pave the way for a more sustainable network of cooperation as compared to outcomes based on rigid structures and closed agendas.

A representative of Lublin Dance Theatre pointed out that **choreographic practices** could be an excellent source of techniques and skills for building trust and closeness in collaborative environments. This idea did not apply to dance projects only, but to any other projects in which choreography could become a useful method for building relationships based on trust and closeness.

Curiosity and trans/interculturalism

For process to prevail over product, both collaborating parties must be interested in each other. Actually, **being interested** emerged in many conversations as an important category giving meaning to collaboration. Often it was curiosity about another culture,

other practices, other ways of seeing, other ways of feeling and experiencing the world, as well as making sense of them, that drove the ideas for collaboration. Interestingly, curiosity was seen as something unusual in the Polish context, as Poland is often seen as closed to what is different, as inbred and focused on its own locality. One person noted that “we are so self-interested in Poland,” while another said that “we are so hermetic, homogeneous, that every bit of fresh air is of significance.” Cooperation with the UK is seen here as a way to enrich our knowledge of other cultures, to break out of homogeneity, and to take a breath.

One of the themes raised in the course of the workshop in Katowice had to do with looking at Silesian locality from a distance, i.e. through the filter of another culture. Artists-in-residence could help redefine what people living in Silesia no longer noticed; they could look at that which is domesticated and natural from another perspective, viewing it as a cultural peculiarity. One possible practice for such a residence program, as suggested during the workshop, could be walking together on a spoil tip.

The participants also highlighted the need to create a systemic cooperation mechanism that would allow for the “mutual recognition of each other’s biases,” i.e. to experience how the British see us, as well as reveal how we see them, and then verify what in these “mutual projections” is correct and what is merely a prejudice. The importance of trust and personal relationships that allow people to comment on each other’s behaviour, including prejudices and stereotypes, on a meta-level, in a friendly and safe atmosphere, was also stressed in this context.

Cultural differences, however, do not only relate to locality broadly understood, but also to **ways of working in cultural and arts organisations** and **approaches to representation in art**. This perspective was introduced by a representative of one of the Warsaw’s theatres. She believed that there was a need to have a conversation about “tools of representation” with British partner entities working in theatre. In her opinion, Polish and British theatres approach artistic representation differently, because

“in Poland there is no self-censorship due to political correctness. The outcomes of cooperation with a British partner are normally very sanitised. And this is to the detriment of the art. After all, political correctness is a kind of censorship,” she added.

Other participants, on the other hand, stressed the need for **transcultural experiences**, mixing elements of different cultures without having to attribute them to a particular cultural source or milieu. For them, *Britishness* or *Polishness* do not matter; what matters are elements from meso- and microsystems that do not necessarily relate to the state or national levels.

Accessibility and inclusiveness

“On how to speak using a more inclusive language.”

The topic of **accessibility emerged as a priority** for many Polish organisations, especially in Silesia, but also Lublin or Krakow. Various collaborative **activities with those excluded, both physically and mentally**, were proposed. Some of them involved providing a venue for **people with disabilities** at renowned institutions, e.g. allowing them to showcase their works in exhibition halls as full-fledged artists. Participants were interested in co-curating exhibitions with representatives of British organisations that specialise in **Art Brut**, or recognize art collections located in psychiatric hospitals. BWA Katowice proposed cooperation with Outside In from Brighton, an organisation that helps artists whose access to the art world is limited due to their health condition, disability, social situation, or isolation. The Lublin Dance Theatre referred to its collaboration with British dancer Claire Cunningham, while the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice (NOSPR) mentioned chamber concerts designed for persons on the autism spectrum.

The Silesian Museum in Katowice referred to its own experience with running projects **involving minority groups**, such as the exhibition *Głusza* (Deaf Land) curated jointly

4. Models and areas of cooperation

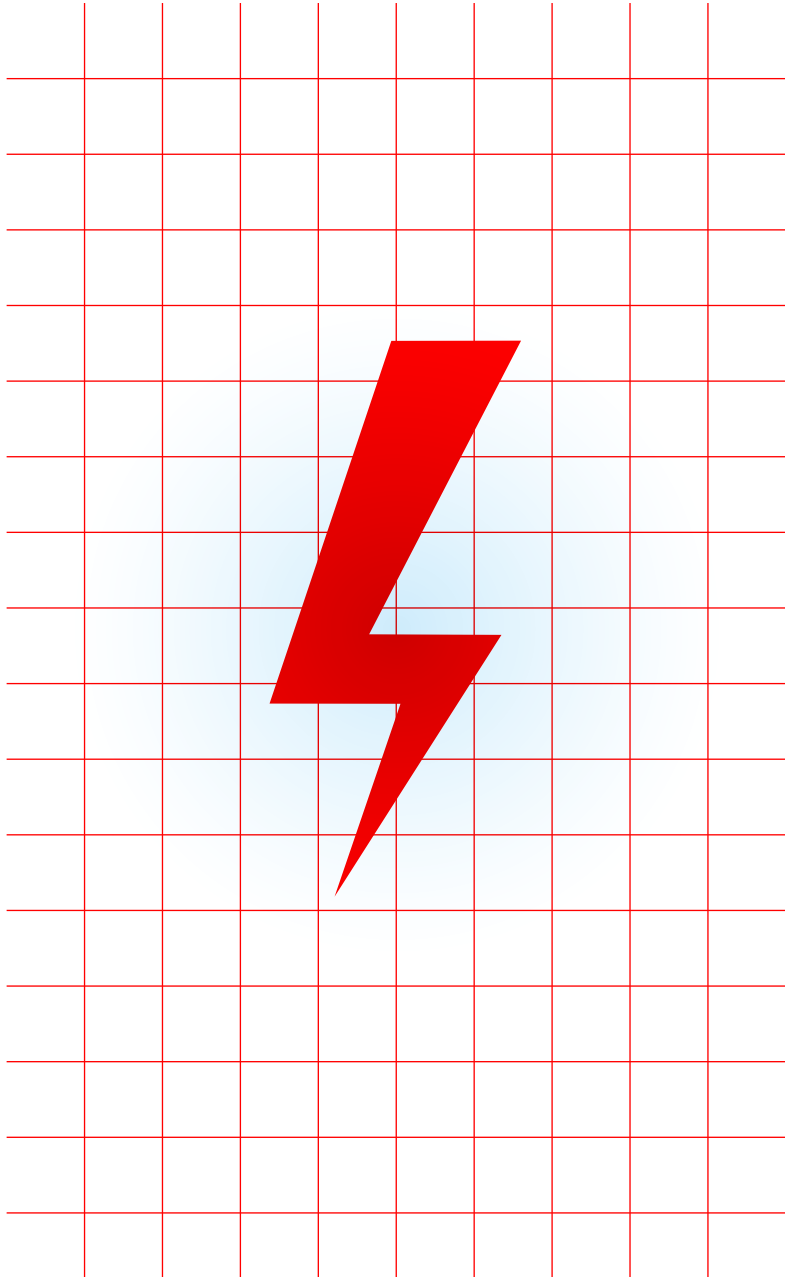
by hearing and deaf persons. The exhibition referred to deaf culture and art, showcasing a world of signs and images, as well as the role and importance of language. The museum also has a permanent programme of quiet tours taking place at specific hours when excessive sound stimuli in the exhibitions are eliminated, and one can additionally obtain noise-cancelling headphones at the entrance. Anyone who feels uncomfortable in crowded environments or needs down time can also use special retreat rooms, where books, stress balls, and blankets are available.

When respondents referred to their experiences and considered the possibility of cooperation with organisations from the UK, they placed emphasis on a **partnership-oriented exchange of experiences and knowledge** which would take place during mutual visits (of UK representatives to Poland and Polish representatives to the UK). The purpose would be to **increase the accessibility of programmes**, but also to establish personal relationships between staff in order to keep up to date on inclusivity issues and new solutions.

In Krakow, together with Bunkier Sztuki and the Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor, we discussed accessibility in the form of guided tours in sign language, introducing SubPac devices for sound projects, subtitles in Polish/English, or events using audio induction loop. Sharing already existing tools like typhlographics was also suggested. These should be assigned to the original work and rented along with it so that each borrowing institution would not have to create its own typhlographics from scratch. Participants from Warsaw came up with the innovative idea of **allocating funds only towards construction investments** that make venues accessible to members of the public and artists with mobility-related disabilities. Adapting buildings would make it possible to change programmes in ways that are not possible now due to architectural limitations. “I can bring the most brilliant theatre or performance groups to Poland, but so what if we don’t have the conditions and adapted spaces for them to do their work?”

📍 a representative of an organisation from Warsaw

4. Models and areas of cooperation



Another idea was to **include representatives of a particular group in the planning and creation of artistic activities** in order to learn about the needs of certain minorities. Opportunities offered by the Metaverse were cited in connection with the need to understand the perceptions of those with different aptitudes. Workshop participants suggested carrying out a **simulation of sensory limitations** using virtual reality (VR).

Moreover, Polish organisations indicated that their British counterparts had long-standing practices and experience in integrating **EDI (Equality, Diversity, Inclusion)** procedures. Hence, partners from the **UK could be role models** in this regard. The EDI standards laid down by the Equality Act of 2010 aim to **protect individuals and/or groups against prejudice** on account of age, disability, gender status, marital status, pregnancy or maternal role, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. Most British employers have equality and diversity policies and strategies in place, ensuring a sense of security and tolerance in the workplace. Workshop participants showed great interest in introducing such standards in Polish workplaces and new arts events. Live Art Development Agency in London was cited as an example of an innovative venue with an exemplary equality policy.

While dealing with equality topics, **feminist** (Warsaw) and **queer** (Lublin) issues were also raised. Organisations such as lokal 30, the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation and the Warsaw Cultural Observatory highlighted the need to establish contacts with British centres **promoting women's rights** and to share tools for **moving away from patriarchal reality**. Ideas emerged for building joint Secondary Archives and for creating both research and art projects, taking into account, for example, the promotion of Polish **immigrant women artists**, who are now more recognised in the UK than in Poland, and the promotion of women artists who still have not obtained the international recognition they deserve. The Museum of Sculpture in Warsaw, meanwhile, is planning a major exhibition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Polish women sculptors for 2025. Since these female sculptors often drew on the legacy of their foreign predecessors, the exhibition is expected to include a French context. A representative of

the institution admitted that “looking towards France is an obvious and established way of thinking for us art historians. However, **if we could additionally introduce an English theme** (and I’m thinking of very important, influential figures such as Barbara Hepworth, for example), **then surely our exhibition would be a breakthrough**, also in terms of new and important contexts, which for some reason have not been highlighted so far.”

Decentralisation

“Great to see that it’s not so Warsaw-centric.”

While addressing the topic of inclusivity, participants called for art institutions to open up to artists from marginalised groups, looking at their work through the lens of excellence rather than shortcomings. This demand for redefining accessibility is directly linked to the **exit of famous artists from renowned cultural institutions**. Some of them have opted for less obvious places outside important centres or big cities, moving to small towns or unpopulated areas: forests, lakes or fields and meadows. Jacek Sosnowski of Propaganda Gallery called this trend **art in strange places**.

This thematic area highlights the need to **break out of elitist, inbred and inaccessible art environments** available only to a specific group. Participants from Katowice and Lublin underlined the importance of **opening up to new audiences**, so that every person has access to the institution’s programme and feels safe and at home. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, from using the tools of **contemporary popular culture** (such as Tik Tok), making galleries available for **street testimonials** (exhibitions of photos and banners from protests) (Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin) or **mixing low- and high-brow culture** (concerts mixing classical music with hip-hop) and taking chamber concerts out of **concert halls into urban spaces** (NOSPR in Katowice). NOSPR runs a number of activities premised on accessibility which consequently allows art to open up to ever wider contexts and audiences. The institution regularly offers free of charge

access to pre-concert rehearsals (a great opportunity for those who can't afford them or want to learn more about conducting). They also offer a *music kindergarten* for children whose parents want to attend a concert, thus giving people with young children the opportunity to take part in music events.

The Impresariat of the Centre for Culture in Lublin believes that outdoor concerts are of great value, allowing audiences to encounter and experience music without any special effort or planning. Their interests revolve around **urban artistic activities including local communities**, resulting in permanent functional changes to the space. For example, as part of the Lublin Jazz Festival, concerts have been held inside a Catholic church, an Orthodox church and an open-air museum. In the context of the UK/Poland Season 2025, they point to the **vacant post-industrial buildings in Lublin** (e.g. a former sugar factory and a dye manufacturing plant) which are currently unused and forgotten. Here, one could draw on the long history of **squats as places of artistic ferment and pop-up initiatives** for which the UK is known. The Greenwich+Docklands International Festival was cited as an example of outdoor activities taking place in the streets of ten UK cities, integrating passers-by, benefiting local communities, integrating people with disabilities, and working in collaboration with artists from diverse backgrounds. The National Museum in Warsaw, on the other hand, proposed to use the empty spaces in its main building (main lobby, passages, and currently empty exhibition halls) to host temporary, ephemeral, performative activities. It would be interesting for them to implement such a programme modelled on **lesser-known British entities, smaller cities, young artists, and artists with disabilities, and to reach out to people experimenting with different forms of expression**.

Participants repeatedly stated that they are interested in finding partners outside of major UK cities and recognisable institutions. It emerged that there is a need for projects involving establishing **relationships with institutions from cities of a similar size** (Unsound Festival suggested Kent or Leeds, for example), and of a **similar nature or profile**, moving away from familiar formats (exhibitions, fairs, presentations), and

opting for projects that require a day trip to less accessible locations. The purpose of these activities would be to gather and produce knowledge on fringe topics. Nowy Teatr wants to establish contacts with artists who have not performed in Poland to date. On the other hand, organisations such as the Propaganda gallery and the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation emphasised that it would be interesting to **draw on the differences between the UK and Polish art communities**, focusing on non-obvious themes (avoiding currently fashionable topics or formats), and taking a **critical approach** to their environment or heritage.

Transdisciplinary and innovative solutions

“Relevant initiatives are those that allow to dismantle old structures and include pro-social activities.”

Going beyond a single art field and integrating non-artistic disciplines into institutional activities was another significant theme raised by the participants. The Lublin Cultural Centre mentioned **combining new technologies with music**, citing the abundant British electronic music scene. They tap the artistic potential of events, DJ sets or concerts in the form of music and visual events set in non-standard arrangements (e.g., by turning the stage into the audience). As respondents said, it is worth **drawing on the multiculturalism of the UK** which has influenced the diverse musical genres emerging there. **Art therapy** was another important theme raised by the Lublin Dance Theatre. Their programme puts great emphasis on the **social role of dance**, such as integration, the inclusion of diverse communities and generations (children, seniors, people with disabilities, etc.), and psycho-physical benefits (movement, health, fitness). For them, these values matter much **more than high-brow art in the broadest sense**.

The Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin creates its programme in response to what is happening around them, **while striving to make their exhibitions alive** (e.g. by allowing new works to be added to already running shows). They would like to enter into cooperation

with British institutions that are equally **open to change, experiments** and **going digital** using the latest social media. The Rozdroża centre in Lublin, in turn, emphasises **linking art and science and exchanging inter-institutional experiences**. They are in the process of identifying alternative ways of keeping bees in the UK and are following **environmental topics** with great interest. Their goal is to make a sustainable difference here in Poland. They would like their cooperation with a UK entity to result in a **joint publication with a prominent social dimension**.

Migration/inclusion of third countries/postcolonialism

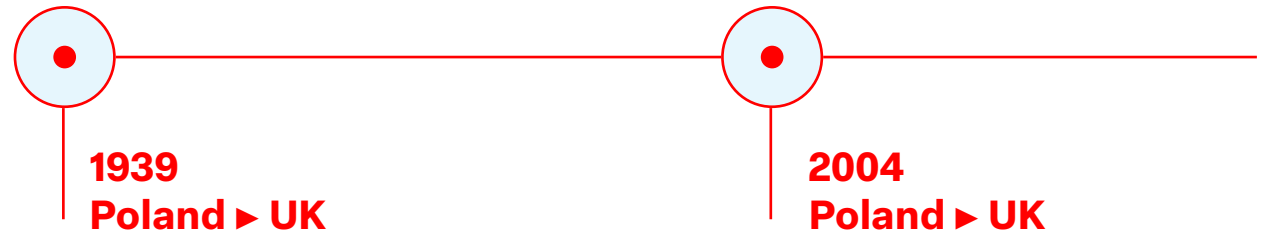
When working with a country that has a long history of colonisation it is impossible to avoid discussing the consequences. Unsound Festival (Krakow) suggests that it would be appreciated to **include post-colonial countries** in the UK/Poland Season 2025 programme by inviting artists from Uganda, Kenya, or Tanzania. A representative of the International Cultural Centre in Krakow spoke of a **troublesome heritage**, mentioning signs of the times or resources found in urban space or in the possession of a country but currently without a homeland. These include the *heritage of hatred*, as seen in the demolition of ancient monuments, or Britain's post-colonial history exemplified by stolen artworks and artefacts belonging to other cultures.

The Lublin Cultural Centre, on the other hand, has been following expatriates from Zimbabwe and Ukraine, who are perceived as **members of national minorities** in Lublin. A new band has been formed, combining music styles from regions of both countries and Poland. The Labyrinth Gallery has also embarked on collaboration with migrants of African descent which it would like to continue under the UK/Poland Season 2025.

“From London to Lublin.”

The stories of the people who stayed in the UK after World War II have never been properly told.

“The stories of the people who stayed in the UK after World War II have never been properly told.” A representative of the Silesian Theatre draws attention to two waves of **Polish migration to the UK**, namely Poles who stayed in the UK after World War II and those who migrated there recently (after Poland’s accession to the European Union). They would like to **focus on intergenerational relations and their consequences** in future UK-Poland art projects.



However, the topic of migration also included critical references related to the **ongoing war in Ukraine and the resulting new map of Europe**. The International Cultural Centre in Krakow noted the rapid declaration of alliance with Ukraine on the part of both Poland and the UK. The Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow expressed interest in artistic activities thematising the **migration crisis**, while the Warsaw Cultural Observatory expressed interest in research cooperation between institutions in response to current migrations. Labyrinth Gallery, meanwhile, supports **LGBTQ+ refugee communities** from Ukraine.

“The UK is like a Polish province.”

Project symmetry (reciprocity)

“To do something together. We bring the know-how, you bring the know-how. We don’t want to be like a poor sister to the British.”

When asked what might remain of the UK/Poland Season 2025 collaboration in 2035, a representative of a gallery from Warsaw answered: **“Warsaw will be seen as appealing. British artists will decide to move here for a while and take advantage of its unique perspective, competence and resources. And when they come here, they will no longer face a sneer by their colleagues. No one will say ‘Warsaw, how come Warsaw?’”**

Virtually every respondent stressed the importance of **partnership between the two countries**. Thus, once cooperation between the UK and Poland is established, there should be no **leading institution, but two (or more) equal entities**. The program representative of the Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow declared that one measure of successful cooperation would be the transfer of the knowledge and solutions developed by institutions in Poland to the UK. At the same time, practices and solutions from the UK should be brought to Poland. According to this participant, only when we see **lasting changes implemented in both countries** can we talk about satisfactory exchange and the success of the UK/Poland Season 2025.

What the two countries have in common are the following, repeatedly cited experiences and trends: **radicalisation of views, people turning to tradition, right-wing or nationalist allegiances**. These trends were understood to be a **driver of grassroots action, stimulating creative energy and the fight against exclusion**.

An example of an action that led to the transfer of good practices from one country to another was Filip Kijowski’s residency at the Labyrinth Gallery which resulted in the creation of an Asylum Library specializing in queer issues, inspired by British institutions.



A variety of good practices that Poland could adopt from the UK were indicated, including the **development of performing arts, storytelling, singing together, opening up to contemporary drama, spoken word, as well as well-designed grant programmes**. Other, more general references included:

1. Building a partnership through joint projects and deriving mutual benefit from them; building intellectual trust over time; creating a joint publication on heritage, in which authors from the UK and Poland would be treated as equals
2. Pursuing music projects involving close cooperation between musicians from the UK and Poland
3. Polish and British documentary filmmakers exchanging experiences

Despite sincere intentions, the respondents were not able to come up with as many practices from Poland that could be promoted in the UK. Instead, there were calls for Poland to be more active in shaping opinions and knowledge about our country's art and **eliminating British stereotypes** about us.

It is about “changing perceptions of Eastern Europe whose inhabitants are seen only as supplicants.”

“It’s hard for us to prove that what we have to offer is not inferior.”

“[Polish gallerists] never established permanent ties with London that could give rise to symmetrical relationships. They established them in Moscow. When they go to London, they are exotic. When they go to Moscow, they are partners.”

“For 15 years we have not been able to build any lasting relationship with the UK.”

Intergenerational dialogue, young people, and audience development

Many participants spoke of the need to reflect on and build cooperation and exchange with respect to connecting with **age-diverse audiences**. A conversation about the trend we called “Young Seniors,” indicating the growing absolute number and demographic share of **socially and professionally active senior citizens** in the Global North, triggered a critical discussion on currently available cultural offerings prepared with seniors in mind. Attendees of the Warsaw workshop pointed out that the current cultural offer for seniors has become outdated, primarily because it does not take into account the tensions and differences in attitudes within this age group. As an alternative, what emerged in the discussion were intergenerational projects where areas of interest and expertise, attitudes and values, a common diagnosis of the most pressing problems of the modern world, or complementary needs and resources become the common denominator rather than age. These factors must be taken into account in order to design an effectively targeted programme. These activities can also have a bonding role and remedy the issue of broken intergenerational ties in the

Polish post-transformation society. As one of the study participants stated: “[In Poland] we loved the country seen in commercials with no intergenerational relations. And it came at a price.”

Participants of the study also stressed that their activities should be addressed to the younger generation, especially **young adults**. The Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin has a programme, Labyrinth Cellar, to support young people in pursuing their own projects and give support to queer refugee youth from Ukraine. The respondents also see the need to create new activity formats responding to the needs and expectations of young culture consumers: “The world is changing; young audiences want special experiences. They prefer to go to a small concert where they can touch the artist, talk to the artist, be a participant. People expect special projects and expect to get something unusual out of them.” Expanding its concert offer, the NOSPR is eager to collaborate with artists and ensembles representing niche genres in order to reach new audiences, especially young ones.

Study participants emphasised that audience development is a well-established field of reflection and good practice in the UK, which opens up an interesting area for joint in-depth reflection and exchange. There was even a call for **audience development empowerment: thinking about the audience should come first, only then should one develop the programme.**

Art education

Art education, both **professional** and **addressed to the general public**, is another frequently mentioned field where Polish and British counterparts could cooperate. Organisations wishing to attract young people invite **younger artists** to create projects and works, providing them with substantive support and mentoring, also in the organisational and formal-legal sphere. Rondo Sztuki Gallery in Katowice, working in close cooperation with the Katowice Academy of Fine Arts, puts great emphasis on creating projects with young artists, implementing, for example, the **Rozbieg (Run-up) programme**

(a three-day convention of curators and artists) or the **Young Age Academy**. They are also planning an open call for thematic exhibitions addressed to students. Lublin's Labyrinth Gallery is organising **Video News**, an open-call review of video art by students from art schools which the organisers would also like to open up to British art schools. The **Krakow Photo Fringe** is an exhibition of works by approx. 30 people and could be carried out in a new form, involving students from Poland and the UK.

The curator of the Krakow Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts thinks it is particularly valuable to establish relations with **British art schools**; she also believes the **potential for cooperation and exchange lies in the different teaching profiles** of Poland and the UK. She considers universities in the UK to be a good example of interdisciplinary teaching, in contrast to Polish academies which are rigidly divided into disciplines and therefore lack an organic field of transdisciplinary activities and interdisciplinary cooperation in art education. In her opinion, joint inter-university activities could take the form of mirror exhibitions, where a British university could present the works of students, teachers and graduates from the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts and vice versa. A representative of OP ENHEIM identifies educational programmes for young artists entering the art market as an important area of her organisation's activity. At the same time here lies potential for cooperation on projects preparing artists to function in the art market. Such expertise is not offered by the academy; mentoring programs or job shadowing might be a way of providing hands-on experience through immersion in an artist's daily routine.

The NOSPR runs a scholarship programme for young musicians who are still studying, as well as educational activities for a wide non-professional audience (children, seniors). The institution is open to mutual education and joint concerts combining Polish and British pieces, following the example of the already existing cooperation with Stockholm under the *Culture Inspiring* programme.

Numerous other Polish organisations also want to cooperate with British partners in the educational field, having no developed projects yet. "Certainly education [matters],

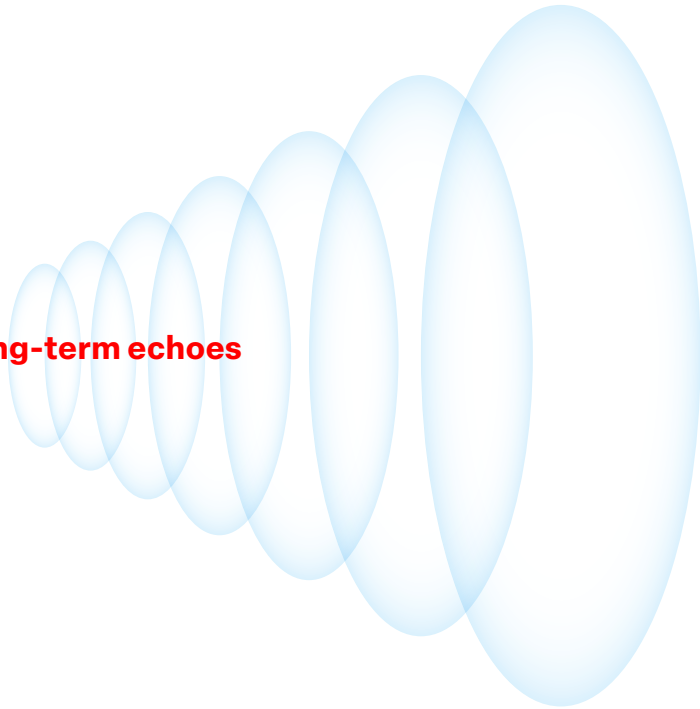
but in a broader sense, including non-formal education,” emphasised one of the curators.

Long-term cooperation, long-term echoes and outcomes, lasting relationships and networks

Because the study was conducted in the context of the UK/Poland Season 2025, the crucial time frame was defined as the broadly understood future, so the next three years and beyond 2025. During in-depth online interviews, the exercise involving associations with the supernova at the beginning of the workshops, as well as during conversations about new forms of cooperation, the participants showed **interest in long-term and sustainable cooperation** with British partners. A clear distinction was drawn between one-off, temporary outcomes and long-term, permanent ones. It was emphasised that only long-term activities could guarantee stability and sustainability. A representative of a theatre in Krakow wondered “how projects that build strategies and ties for the future could be done so that they become a long-term reference point.” Like many of the other interviewees, he was not interested in ephemeral “point” actions, **but in generating long-term, tangible impact**. Among other things, the interviewees understood long-term outcomes as a platform for ongoing exchange 📍Lublin beyond the 2025 horizon, ensuring the continuation of relationships and activities. As in the context of “new cooperation,” here, too, **reciprocity, cooperation and knowledge exchange in both directions** were emphasised. The atmosphere of cooperation, lack of pressure, and the freedom to program activities were also seen as significant. “We are talking about a project spread over many months, so its participants will have plenty of time to get to know each other, schedule joint activities, obtain appropriate funds and further partners, if appropriate, and then proceed to implement and promote their initiatives. Another important point is the time after the project is over, when, after taking a breather, it is worth looking back at what has been created and consider how the joint output as well as the potential for cooperation in the future could be further used.” 📍cultural manager from Wrocław

4. Models and areas of cooperation

long-term echoes



During the online interviews, we asked the participants to use their imagination and envisage the year 2035; to think about the legacy of their work ten years down the road. Respondents wanted to feel the effects of the event for the next decade. They wanted their institutions and organisations to “remain in the memory of people in the UK,” [participant from Gdansk](#) for both professional and private contacts to still be alive because “there is no point in pursuing something that will end after a single event.” [Lublin](#) A representative of a theatre in Wroclaw spoke about the networks of institutions and people that will have been forged which had a desire to continue working together, and imagined the social changes that will have taken place. A representative of another theatre felt that the most important thing was the **experience that remained** for the children, the youth, and the adults, and which continued, hopefully, to resonate. Desirable remnants included **intangible ties or new patterns for further cooperation**, so that “our regular partners in the UK” could be cited. Participants also expressed **the need to leave behind something tangible**; something that could serve communities in both countries.

“The most valuable projects seem to me to be those that leave something behind; art projects can always leave something behind. At one point we showed a work of art, and then we were able to leave a copy at our organisation; or, to mention another example, two birch trees containing microplastic were planted in front of the venue.” [Wroclaw](#)

“Looking further into the future, if it were possible to anchor, for example, a structure in schools, or for example, a community garden that stays and then it becomes close to life.” [curator from Warsaw](#)

One participant also cited very specific, possible **long-term echoes** of the implementation of a research and exhibition project, which could lead to **a reconfiguration of history**, dissecting Franco-centric thinking about women’s art education: “the optics of the project we are implementing are Franco-centric, and it would be great to show potential alternatives as well. If only we could break out of this rut a bit and raise

Great contacts remain and these things continue to happen, we develop them, this new world changes us; a change will emerge that can't be predicted because it will bring something new and surprise us. But I imagine it's cool, it's enjoyable, and we're grateful that it happened. Expanding the field makes the field itself change.

curator from Lublin

awareness that it wasn't only the relationship with Paris, but also with London and other centres in the UK that mattered.” [curator from Warsaw](#) The idea that the echoes of long-term cooperation would stay around for many years after the season ends, and that such changes would be experienced as a surprise was summed up beautifully by a participant from Warsaw: “great contacts remain and these things **continue to happen**, we develop them, **this new world changes us**; a change will emerge that can't be predicted because it will bring something new and surprise us. But I imagine it's cool, it's enjoyable, and we're grateful that it happened. **Expanding the field makes the field itself change.**”

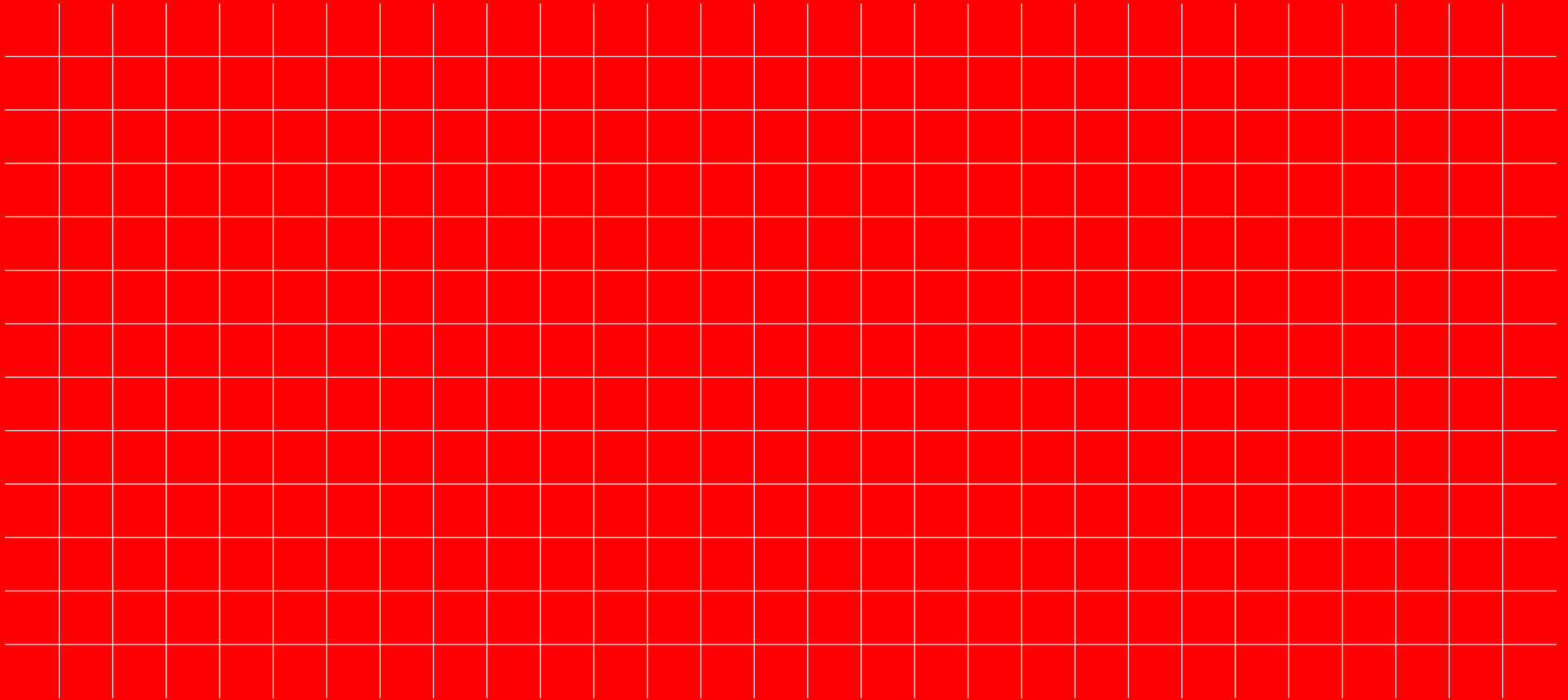
The words of a curator from Lublin may serve as a good summary of the need for long-term cooperation: “For me, what matters are long-term activities that build cooperation, **giving the local environment more value and knowledge**. Celebrations are usually one-offs.”

Social and political engagement of art

“I'm interested in critical design, that is, design that helps to solve problems,” said one representative of an organisation from Poznan during the interview. Some of the participants defined their role in the culture and the arts as **critical and engaged**. This went hand in hand with a belief in a sense of agency, influence on local audiences, and a conviction that their actions could play an important **role in building civil society and make a real difference**. One of the maps created during the workshop in Lublin shows multi-sensory radars that are on alert, register the changing reality, and react immediately to these changes. For some people, this symbolises how they implement projects on a daily basis, hence they expect a critical and engaged attitude from their UK counterparts as well. **Redefining the force field**, the need to look at **postcolonial experiences in the collections of art institutions** or even at their own workplaces (“where did the coral reef at CK Zamek in Poznan come from?”) was a theme that resonated in conversations with representatives of an organisation from

Poznan. The role of institutions in **socialisation processes**, support for **grassroots initiatives**, cooperation with **communities** and minorities was emphasised in Lublin and Poznan. Respondents saw the opening up to **cooperation with** the fourth sector, i.e. **activists**, as something new and important. They view the UK as a country that is very conscious when it comes to public action, which could be an inspiration and call for the exchange of experiences. 📍Poznan “Perhaps it is worthwhile confronting social experiences, perhaps this topic could be addressed?” 📍Wroclaw Also recurrent was the desire to jointly address socially and politically relevant issues in a **global context** such as that of contemporary threats, war, nature and ecology, feminist movements, and migration. One of the curators from Warsaw was fascinated with the activities of the interdisciplinary collective Assemble, which combines research and social activities and “both creates things and makes them happen” (quoted from the collective’s website). This person would like to see a number of alternative ideas developed in the realm of art sprouted further and transplanted into daily human life.

5. The UK through the eyes of Polish arts and culture practitioners



The map

The UK seen through the eyes of participants was often reduced to a single point on the map. It is in London that most of the organisations with which they would like to collaborate or have already been in contact with are based. At the same time, participants indicated a **strong desire to go beyond London-centric thinking** and pointed to the need to decentralise cooperation – on the one hand by **including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland** on an equal footing with England, and on the other by incorporating partners from **different towns (with an emphasis on medium-sized and smaller communities)** as well as non-urban culture. “The UK is a union of many countries, it’s interesting, and we often fail to see these differences. There is also diversity there, cities of different sizes, villages. The UK outside of London.”

📍 representative of an organisation from Wrocław

Our interviewees often mapped out phenomena, themes or fields that they considered **emblematic of British arts and culture**, such as the **independent music scene, ancient (Shakespeare) and contemporary drama** and **dramatic text-based theatre, independent theatre, performance, non-urban culture, new institutionalism** and **post-artistic practices, anti-racist and multicultural society-building initiatives, inclusive art** and **practices of accessibility and inclusivity, community art, public art, green policies** and **deepening awareness of the climate crisis, interdisciplinary art education, activities for the professional development and well-being of arts and culture workers, audience development**, and expertise in **art conservation** or **modern archival science. Flagship institutions** or **events** also appeared as points of reference, including Tate Modern, The Place, Barbican Centre, Edinburgh Festival Fringe; those were seen as **desirable, yet hard-to-reach partners**. Participants also mentioned them in **critical reflection on strategies for building a new map of relationships**. “Maybe there are people doing great things, and they’re not at the Tate, so nobody knows about them.” 📍 workshop participant in Wrocław “I’m not interested in big institutions, Frieze fairs, I’m not interested in community art. [...] I’m interested in things

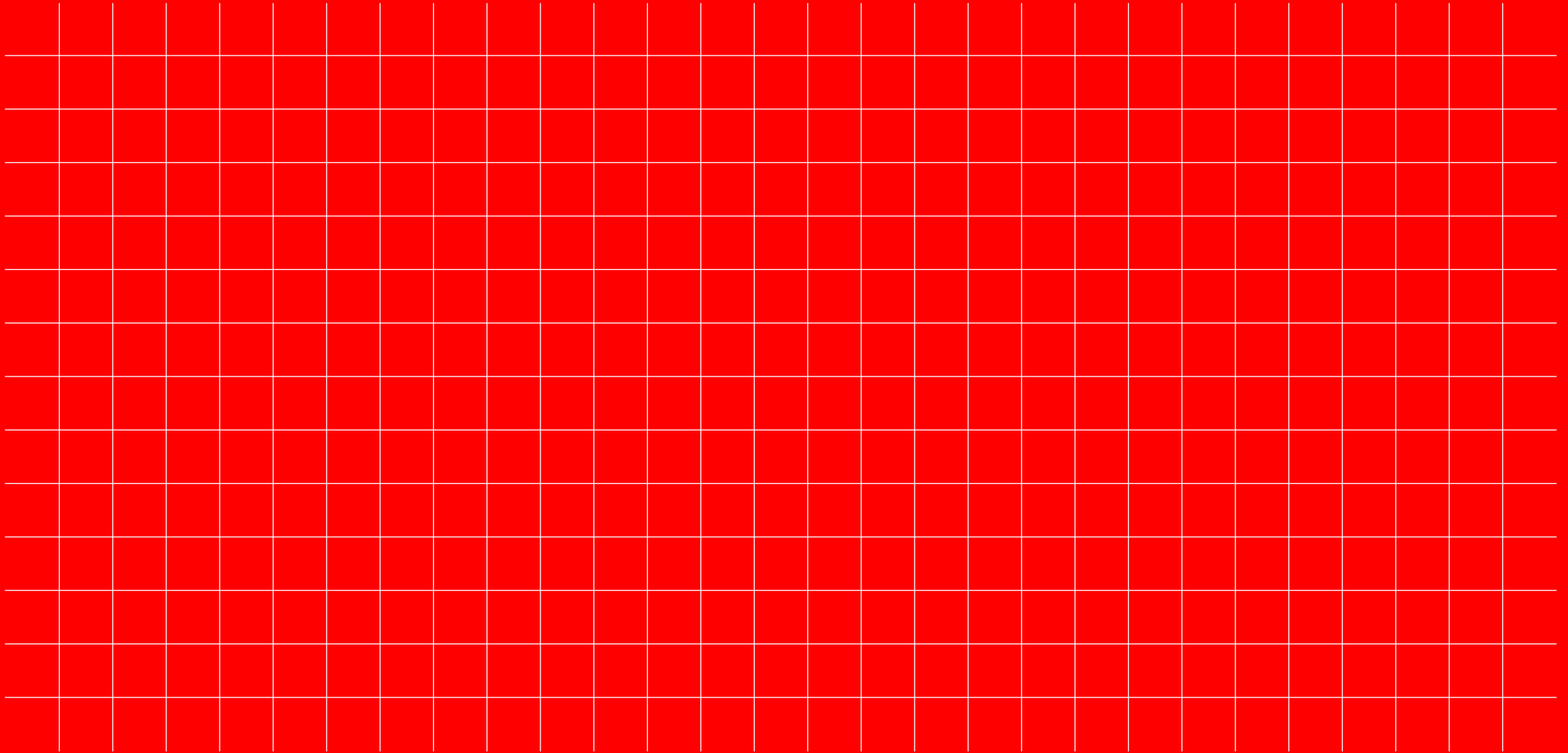
that are ignored in the UK, things that are messy, going against the grain. [...] I'm interested in people who won't look at me like the English elite, like Tate." 📍 Warsaw-based curator

At the same time, many participants admitted that **their image of the UK** did not stem from in-depth knowledge and **was often informed by more or less conscious projections**. "I would like to note that our map of the UK consists solely of stereotypical assumptions. It would be worthwhile to go there and see which of them are actually true."

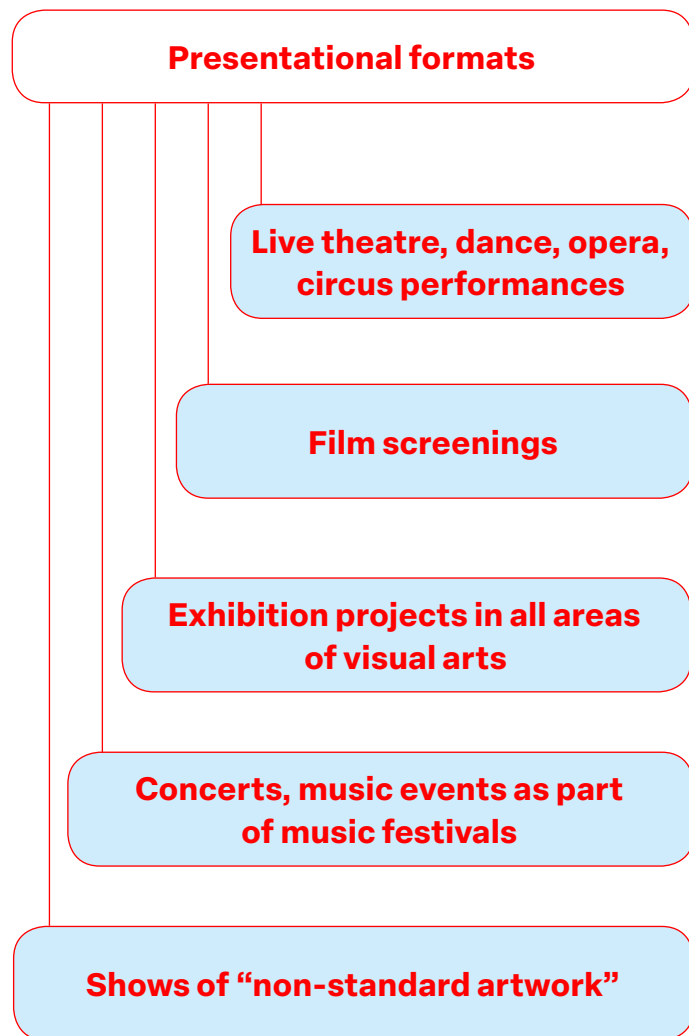
📍 Krakow-based curator Participants also pointed to the **need to verify each other's projections** as one of the important pre-conditions for building Polish-British cooperation.

This insight was **reflected in the imaginary maps of collaboration drawn by workshop participants**. In some cases, the UK did not appear on them at all, while at other times it was placed centrally as a white spot with a thick contour. Or it was unrecognised and reduced to a symbol on the map, where it was represented by a tiny crown icon placed in the corner of the sheet. Workshop participants also saw the UK as a cloud with scattered raindrops falling from it – interacting, but not setting directions. On another map, the unfilled outline of the British island-cloud was surrounded by rays showing an expanded field of influence beyond the country's borders. Borders could also be blurred or discontinuous, symbolising openness to cooperation and exchange. In another case, a UK without borders was an amorphous constellation of domains and thematic bubbles spilling across the page. Some of the islands representing Poland and the UK were conceived from a non-anthropocentric perspective: animals and plants accompanied people on an equal footing (the non-anthropocentric perspective was also present in specific ideas about building partnerships).

6. New versus familiar formats (but viewed in a new light)



6. New versus familiar formats (but viewed in a new light)



The formats mentioned by interviewees and workshop participants included those that are well known and frequently applied by the organisations. However, relatively often these were expanded to include **new, sometimes non-obvious aspects** or became more flexible and capacious, including some new contexts, and were to function as components of entirely new models of international cooperation. There were also calls for the “new cooperation” to use formats that support process rather than outcomes, and to **create space for working out what is not yet known** (non-colonial and non-patriarchal forms of cooperation) **in an equal manner**.

Depending on the scale and nature of each organisation, many arts and culture institutions and third-sector entities apply presentational formats such as:

- **Live theatre, dance, opera, circus performances** (as part of festivals or staged by institutions, including guest performances and co-productions). Most of the theatres and performing art festivals taking part in the study listed these formats as possible and relatively easy to implement within the framework of UK-Polish cooperation. “Traditional forms of projects are the most appealing.” 📍 participant from Katowice With regard to artistic theatre activities for children, representative of a theatre gave the example of performances without a text that could be viewed even by the youngest spectators.
- **Film screenings** (of single productions as well as reviews and retrospectives) within the framework of big film festivals, or at institutions with screening rooms such as museums.
- **Exhibition projects in all areas of visual arts** (painting, photography, graphic art, sculpture, new media, design, etc.) or ethnography. Also mutual lending of works, sharing artworks from the collections with the possibility of enlarging and expanding the holdings.
- **Concerts, music events as part of music festivals**.
- Interviewees also expressed interest in **shows of “non-standard artwork”** or projects of an **interdisciplinary nature**.

6. New versus familiar formats (but viewed in a new light)



The interviews indicate that the organisers would like such presentations to include some **side activities** such as **meetings with artists, debates, workshops, publications, or social and inclusive activities**. These kinds of activities strike them as more interesting and as providing learning and growth for both the teams and the audience. It is worth noting that for most interviewees, the **public presentation of art is only an element of a longer and much more crucial process**. This process can be preceded by **research and studies**, and involve **additional activities** that give people a chance to get to know each other better, **exchange knowledge**, or build more lasting relationships with the audience.

“Cooperation enabling us to gain know-how is more important to me than big events.”

“Sometimes such projects don’t quite work out, but the contacts are extremely eye-opening; they are priceless! The inspirations remain. It’s not about the theatre just performing, but about people co-creating the place. The most valuable thing is the time devoted to the other person.”

“I’m not interested only in the money to invite artists; instead I’m interested in solid communication that has the power to build partnerships.”

The interviewees and workshop participants focused chiefly on the **formats which require robust, long-term relationships** to strengthen institutions and organisations by investing in the **development of the competencies of teams and staff** at various levels as well as in the communities gathered around these venues. Some of these

6. **New versus familiar formats (but viewed in a new light)**

formats are already used by organisations and are well known to them, but during our conversations most **gained unexpected meanings** when set in this new long-term and processual context.

- **Study visits** that do not have an export-import nature, but provide actual opportunities **to spend time together**, getting to know each other, also with the possibility of industry-specific trips; combined, for example, with workshops and meetings that guarantee **in-depth discussions**, or group processes.

“First you need to get to know people, it’s easier to work with people you know.”

“In many cases we have lost our insights so study visits are needed.”

“We do have ideas, but we don’t have the necessary contacts, and such visits help to get to know each other.”

“We rarely have a chance to take part in such activities, as they are not standard, and we’re all thirsty for them, and due to Brexit these contacts have died down a bit.”

- **Residencies**, short- and long-term, where the process, not the outcome, is at the centre. There is also a lot of interest in residencies for artists in smaller, local, and specialised centres.

“We are generally process-oriented; when we invite people for residencies it is supposed to be creative work, not the production of something material.”

“I think our community should travel more and stay there longer.”

“Residencies are cool, but they have little meaning without a broader context.”

The role of the BC is to facilitate contacts, provide a framework for getting to know each other, as well as to financially support relevant projects and formats, i.e. residencies, study visits, job shadowing, portfolio reviews, showcases, conferences, etc. Our role, in turn, is to be fully open to possible cooperation: to contribute not only in terms of organisation and finance, but also in terms of knowledge and experience. We expect the same from our partners.

- Building partnerships through **networks and cooperation platforms** (including interdisciplinary and international working groups).

“It is of utmost significance for the future of European culture and society that people participate in the circulation of art.”

“Working groups involve exchange, cooperation, being together for a long time, eliminating window dressing.”

“I would like them to build together with us and for us as equal partners. That’s what appeals to me.”

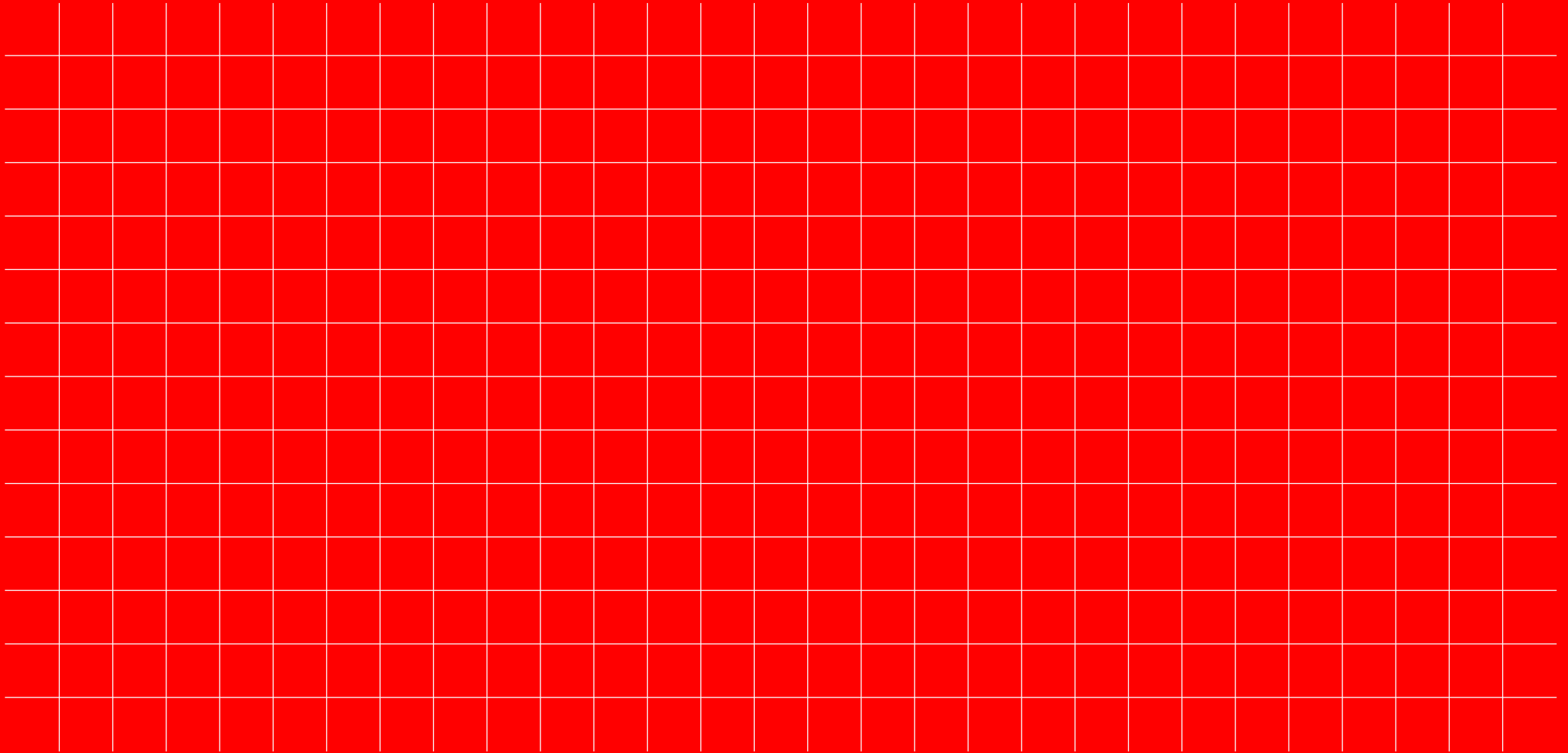
- **Educational activities, workshops, masterclasses, debates, lectures.**

“Theatre masterclasses, re-writing old texts together with British writers.”

- **Scientific and curatorial** research as well as academic internships.
- **Bilateral and multilateral staff exchanges** based on reciprocity that enable **employees and staff** at different levels to meet and learn other institutional practices (including job shadowing and artist placement), to exchange knowledge and get a chance to test non-obvious solutions together.

“This is what is missing: working in an international environment on a daily basis, instead of at events only.”

7. Participants' needs vis-à-vis the British Council



Field mapping


“I don’t know how to embark on research other than searching the Internet” – this is just one of many statements in which the image of the **“zero point” in Polish-British relations** was mentioned. The theme of **broken relations and lack of up-to-date knowledge** of the British environment resonated strongly in the surveys, interviews and during the workshop, including among those who had a rich history of collaborative projects. “My knowledge of the UK dates back years ago.” [Lublin curator](#) “Frankly, I’ll say that I don’t have a mapped partnership, because the last presence of our gallery in London goes back to 2009/2010, that was 12 years ago.” [Warsaw curator](#)

Study participants pointed to the **knowledge of the arts and culture community and the broad socio-political context of the UK as a key field of expertise for the British Council** which Polish organisations were short of. They saw and perceived the British Council as an institution that could not only **create a map of contemporary British arts and culture** (the idea of creating a database of British organisations open to co-operation, which could be consulted by those seeking a partner, was a recurring theme), but also **infuse it with in-depth contextual knowledge**. “I envision the British Council as a cultural intermediary, outlining the shape of the map, the political situation, the social and cultural aspects, giving us hints on what moves people, and what they consequently set in motion. Whether it’s about the energy sector or some anti-immigration movements.” [workshop participant in Wrocław](#) Some called for the “creation of a manual of the UK, giving insights into the new situation of culture and arts” [Lublin-based curator](#) which would provide better knowledge and contextualization both at the stage of searching for partner organisations and carrying out planned collaborations.

The door is closed

Representatives of Polish organisations view the very **establishment of contacts with potential partners in the UK** as a **potential difficulty**. “I would very much expect back-

7. Participants' needs vis-à-vis the British Council

ing in establishing contacts even if I find them myself. [...] It is possible to get more done from the level of an important institution like the British Council.”  Warsaw curator” The prevailing belief is that the intermediation of the **British Council can open doors** closed to organisations from Poland, but it is difficult to determine to what extent this is a projection and to what extent the result of prior unsuccessful attempts to establish relations. There is also a recurring sense of the inferiority of Polish organisations in their relations with British counterparts, which follows from the disparity in the budgets at their disposal. The person in charge of international relations at one theatre described it this way: “Talks about co-production end up discussing cooperation based on mercy, due to differences in ideas about our own contributions and financial commitment to co-production.”

During the Warsaw workshop participants also suggested that the British Council could organise **match-making for partner organisations**; similar needs were expressed in the conversations.

Filling the gap after Brexit

“We have a thriving coalition of European museums in which British institutions used to play an important role, and now they are gone, which is insane. MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art) – an important partner for us – has disappeared.”

“The British Council is still very active and supportive, but watching the personal stories you see that the ties are broken. Artists from Poland used to hang out in the UK, and today basically everyone chooses Berlin instead.”

Another important context is the **disappearance of UK entities from the EU subsidy programmes** and, consequently, **from the maps of European cooperation**. Under these circumstances, the **British Council's financial support becomes critical to sustaining cooperation**, according to the participants. “This is the role for the British Council: to fill

this gap (after Brexit), because now we cannot invite artists from the UK within the European platform.” As one curator summarised: “Lack of funding results in lack of cooperation.”

Forms of funding

Participants of the study suggested that the funding programmes of the UK/Poland Season 2025 should have the following characteristics:

- **Multi-year;**
- **Open to modification** in the course of implementation;
- **Separate small and large grants, differentiated in terms of timing and frequency of calls** (current call for small grants, call 2-3 years in advance for large grants) and maximum cap of funding requested;

“We would be interested in small grants; large grants make one lose sensitivity to small things.”

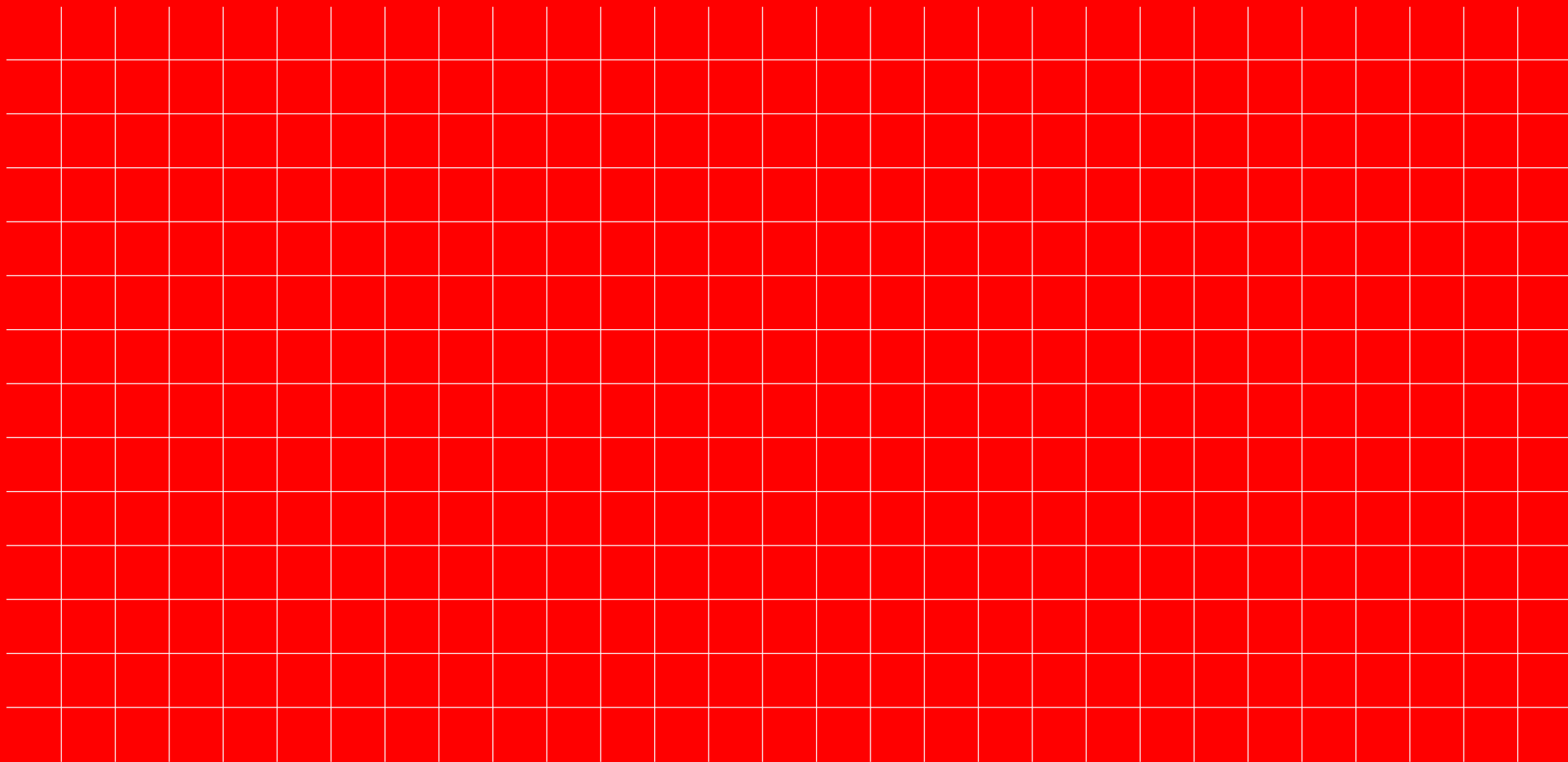
- **Allowing for processual and experimental activities;**

“In many cases such grant programmes are outcome-oriented, and the main problem is how to find funds for experimentation; the grant formats are still the same as before the pandemic – nothing has changed. More grants for development.”

- **Enabling the development of soft competencies for people working in the field of culture** in various areas and roles (study visits, queries and research, residencies, job shadowing).

The participants also called for a **systemic solution to obtain feedback from the British Council if funding is declined**. During the UK/Poland Season 2025, they considered it important to implement a **coherent communication strategy in Poland and the UK**, and to perform an **evaluation after the season ends**.

8. Summary



We encouraged the participants to exercise agency, take responsibility, find inspiration for their actions in a wide range of possibilities and unlimited ideas, to stay true to their values and be proud of their skills and potential. Most of them had previous experience in working with UK organisations or some knowledge about the UK's art and culture scene. What stopped them from continuing the collaborations or reaching out for new ones were outside factors such as travel restrictions (due to Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic) and financial difficulties (especially feeling unequal, with the Polish currency being worth about five times less than the pound). The majority of participants agreed that preparations for the UK/Poland Season 2025 are a great opportunity to build new connections and create long-lasting collaborations.

The major features of the new models of cooperation and topics that they were passionate about developing with a UK partner included: **combining locality vs extraterritoriality; process instead of outcomes; curiosity and trans/interculturality; accessibility and inclusivity; decentralisation; transdisciplinarity and innovative solutions, migrations / involving third countries / post-colonialism; intergenerational dialogue and young people, audience development; art education; cooperation symmetry (reciprocity); long-term cooperation, long-lasting echoes and effects, lasting relationships and networks; social and political engagement of art.** The significance of joint projects lies in gaining mutual knowledge and sharing experience between the two countries in order to bring about change. Quoting Adrienne Maree Brown: “The world we live in right now is someone else’s imagination. [...] When we deconstruct [existing] concepts in our lives, in how we love, in how we interact with other people, we are already imagining other futures into existence with every choice we make that is about being our whole unbridled, unfettered, and post-oppressed selves.” The idea behind the UK/ Poland Season 2025 is to imagine and create it in accordance with the areas of interest and new formats identified above, rather than as a reactive action to what is already around us. We believe that the conclusions and recommendations will be, on the one hand, **a source of inspiration for the organiser of the UK/Poland Season 2025** and, on the other, **contribute to the creation of new strategies and the implementation of new solutions in the area of international cooperation.**

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