

CIVIC+UEA

The Creative Book



OPEN SPACE EVENT

December 2022 | University of East Anglia | Norwich

The Creative Book is a summary of the conversations that took place at the King's Centre in Norwich, where participants discussed ways in which higher education could work in partnership with the creative and cultural sectors, to ensure that creativity flourishes within East Anglia.









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PREFACE

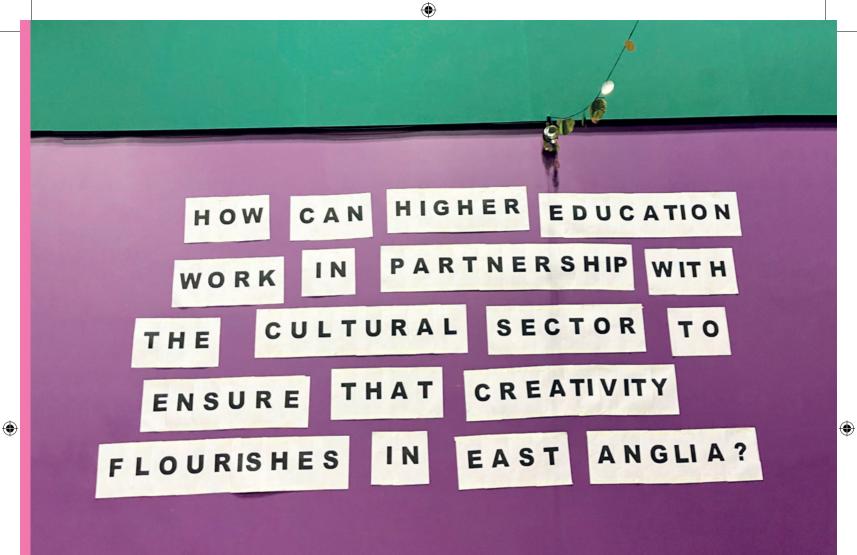
If you are reading this document, you have some investment in the idea of universities as institutions that help to nourish and nurture life in their local area. You may have a strong sense of what civic activity should look like and be an active member of the community in which you live. You could also have a Norwich, Norfolk, or East Anglian focus: a keen attachment to the geographical area in question. You may work in the creative or cultural sectors, or be a passionate arts enthusiast. Most likely, it will be all the above.

On 14th December 2022, CivicUEA and CreativeUEA hosted an Open Space event in collaboration with National Centre for Writing and Norwich University of Arts, with the aim of provoking discussion around how universities can help creativity flourish within our region. More than 60 participants attended the session

at the Kings Centre in Norwich, ranging from freelance creative practitioners, to academics, to local authority representatives. These attendees were asked to set the agenda using the Open Space method, a democratic and collaborative meeting format that enables the participants to decide what should be discussed. After an introductory speech,

the participants were asked to take a moment to consider 'How can higher education work in partnership with the cultural sector to ensure that creativity flourishes in East Anglia', leading to a full agenda of topics provoked by this question. The participants were asked to take notes during these discussions, either handwritten or submitted





via a digital form, and at the end of the session, everyone reconvened in a plenary circle to reflect on the morning's proceedings.

This book is the result of the notes; edited and summarised, but distilling the essential points made in each of these dynamic conversations.

It is the work of many hands, but any errors are that of the CivicUEA team, so please direct any queries to us, at

civic.university@uea.ac.uk.

This book will be joining similar documents, resulting from other Open Space events we have co-ordinated, to be published on our website so that anyone with an interest in the UEA's

civic efforts can see the ideas and suggestions raised at events throughout the region. Finally, we will condense the core values that have emerged through the creation of these books, to produce a statement that will form a Civic University Charter for East Anglia. All event participants will be invited to comment upon, and later sign, this statement.

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EQUALITY, INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Retaining artists and creatives in East Anglia

Utilising underused spaces in the city

Talking about race in East Anglia

Collaborating around heritage and history

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Keeping artists and creatives in East Anglia – how can we create a sustainable creative ecology?

This group discussed ways to nurture creative careers within the region, whilst developing networking opportunities at a national level.

How can we make connections between artistic producers, higher education and organisations accessible? There needs to be diversity in education/courses. Showcasing local talent, and making it accountable, is important. What attracts creatives to the region, and encourages them to stay? Transport, mobilisation, infrastructure, student visibility are all small constituent parts that contribute to the bigger picture. We need to reframe 'success' for emerging creatives - but also ensure there are financially sustainable pathways to that success - could spaces be opened/held for low-stakes/ experimental artmaking?

University spaces could be opened up for professional creatives as well as students. We want to see open conversations between universities and organisations (such as festival organisers) could products be created that tangibly facilitate this? University placement schemes could result in more bands/artists/theatre companies etc, coming out of higher education and staying in Norfolk (but potentially tour nationally or internationally). Audiences also need to be mobilised to grassroots events/ exhibitions/performances across the country - existing companies and organisations could utilise their own platforms and audiences to promote these, collaboratively fostering a creative network.

HE and established cultural institutions could help by seeking to invigorate existing audiences, and people who live/work in the area, to take a greater ownership of culture in the region dissuading them from leaving but also creating a legacy and transparent platform for it to flourish. Creating links for locals to establish relationships with creative mentors, and providing spaces for these developments to happen, would also be beneficial.









Buildings and more people – facilitating the habitation of underused spaces in the city

Affordable workspaces for freelance creatives can be difficult to find - could underused buildings be utilised for this purpose, and could higher education institutions offer assistance in facilitating this?

Where in Norwich can creatives go to meet, to build community and lower barriers to access? There are too many 'silos of art' currently, and a lack of galleries and opportunities for public engagement - who owns the city, and could higher education institutions play a role in breaking down bureaucracy to enable access to long term low cost venues for the creative community? Creatives can help academics to communicate their messages/work effectively, so these relationships are mutually beneficial.

How do you use a city for learning? UEA buildings are full, and there are many more academics, staff and students working across the city/region in other spaces already, with many young people utilising Norwich's café culture. Quality of space is also key for wellbeing - if there's going to be a space it needs to be suitable for the purpose. Piloting 'working hubs' could provide vital spaces - and encourage more people into the city. Could a collective be brought together to raise funding to investigate ways of working with venues that could be utilised by creatives?







How to talk about race in East Anglia

This group discussed how higher education and cultural institutions can use their resources and influence to help instigate open conversations around race throughout the region.

How could higher education and cultural institutions and freelance artists create an umbrella framework to continue and expand conversations about race in the region? There is a need to think beyond important moments like Black History Month and to continue these conversations on a more

permanent and consistent level. There's a need to think about diverse histories and experiences in the region but also to think about and interrogate whiteness - particularly in more rural areas. Perhaps there's also different ways of training and working with students to think about anti-racist politics and engagement with

cultural institutions. We need to signal and connect the good work that is going on and to keep people engaged and informed - can local institutions assist by facilitating a network, mailing list and/or bespoke sessions on race in the region?





How can higher education and creative sectors collaborate around heritage and history in East Anglia, including bringing in new audiences?

What is Norfolk's 'heritage', and how can it be communicated?

This discussion raised a lot of questions about what engaging with history and heritage in the region might mean. What is our 'story' - what do we want to communicate about Norfolk? Lots of different stories -'micro-histories' - but how do we combine these with making wider links and stories about the region? We discussed the need to develop a sense of civic entitlement for all members of

the community, to instil a sense of belonging. How do we avoid reducing a place to one story or identity, while making links between past and present - new retellings from new perspectives? How do we form connections between higher education and creative/cultural organisations when they have complex infrastructures and operate according to different timetables (and funding needs)?

There's also a need for interdisciplinary connections creativity shouldn't mean only one thing. Furthermore, some people feel heritage or culture is 'not for me' or 'for posh people' - language can create a barrier, with words like 'heritage' or 'history' being off-putting for some young people - how do we prevent this?









COMMUNICATION, CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION

Mentoring

Business and creativity

Exporting creativity outside the region

Talking and connecting

Getting local government on board







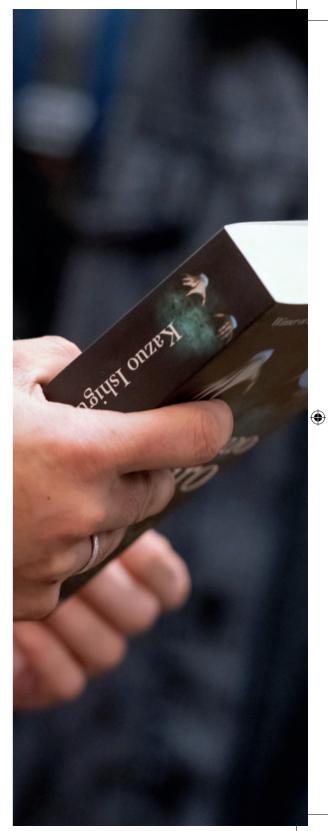
Creative mentorships

Mentorships can be an important influence on the personal development of early career professionals, as well as being a rewarding experience for the mentors themselves. Could institutions help bring together those wanting and offering mentorships by facilitating opportunities for connection?

This group reflected on their own experiences of mentoring and being mentored, its importance in career development but also personal and creative development - the way in which it can also create role models, set examples and build confidence.

Institutions could help by organising 'speed mentoring' events, in which mentors can volunteer themselves, in a 'speed dating' style, to people that would like to have their creative or academic work/ ideas/thoughts reviewed by an industry professional.

These relationships may or may not naturally grow further but could at the very least give people valuable insight into specific industries, ways of working and open up new opportunities. Long term this could create a huge network of organic collaboration and wonderful projects.







Bringing in business - how can we use commerce to bridge the gap?

Creativity isn't limited to the arts - all businesses benefit from thinking differently. How can skills be shared and relationships fostered between institutions, businesses and third sector groups to benefit all?

Businesses always need creative thinking, it extends to all aspects of life - nothing is black and white - so creatives can help businesses find solutions, and in turn businesses can help creatives become more commercially aware.

Collaboration and 'doing it together' - whether it's between businesses, institutions, charities or individuals - is the only way forward. Developing relationships between businesses and universities could be beneficial, as businesses offers things you can't get from a classroom - extra skills, knowledge and expertise - and could offer mentorship and places for people to learn, while universities could provide space for businesses to trial ideas that might otherwise be risky and think outside of the box. Charities need corporate partnerships that could

assist with engagement and fundraising. While in the shortterm this could seem like 'one more thing to worry about' for businesses, engaging in socially responsible practises has long term benefits. Mental health training and wellbeing initiatives and awareness are also important for businesses - UEA could share resources to assist with this. Creative partnerships could also be forged to improve wellbeing.









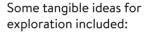
Export – how can we help creative people here find audiences, collaborators and markets outside of the region/country?

East Anglia has a wealth of creative producers, but how can they improve their outreach and find an audience beyond the region?

Some creative people and businesses get 'stuck' serving local markets and customers missing opportunities to grow outside their home region.

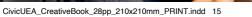
This group discussed possible reasons why - a lack of a mission/vision to grow nationally or internationally; lacking experience or skills in finding and retaining customers outside

the region; no NEDs or mentors to help plan and execute wider reach: defining the competition only as their small group of local rivals; a hand-to-mouth mindset preventing risk taking in seeking bigger briefs on the national stage. So how could more local creators get 'unstuck' in some of these areas?



- Articulate a vision for their company/ project which has ambition for national/ international growth.
- Develop their skills in sales and marketing and commit time to these activities. Convene or join communities that discuss how to find opportunities outside the region.
- Tell stories about success and celebrate successes - even those of local competitors.
- Look outside their own organisations for help, advice and experience.









Making more opportunities for conversations and connections

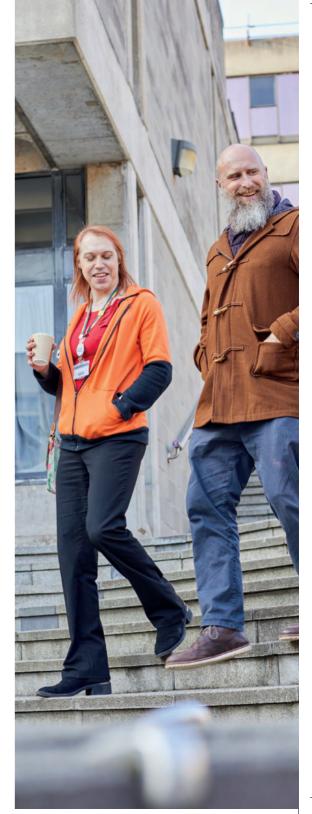
This group also talked about generating new methods of fostering relationships and networks - it's clear that communication was the key theme of this event.

There is huge potential for collaboration and connection to lead to new ideas and possibilities, but getting academics or students together with cultural organisations feels problematic due to issues of time, capacity and the problems around circumventing gatekeepers (and the difficulties of communication within larger organisations that evolve into many-headed beasts) and also sustaining relationships between academics and organisations over time.

Finding ways to build connections between the public and universities (like the UEA's public open day), students and cultural activities, as well as business and civic groups could lead to unexpected conversations and exciting collaborations.

But how do we do it? Perhaps finding places for congregation - where hotdesks can sit alongside exhibition space with a bar, food outlet, retail area and space for exercise can begin to connect different groups. Also finding ways to explore common interests and understand each other's languages - possibly exploring what we don't know together. UEA could help resolve these issues by organising trips for academics to visit cultural organisations.

This will lead to a better understanding of how the organisation operates and where they might connect and then they'll be more able to connect their students with opportunities. It would also be helpful to develop a database of contacts in organisations, academics that are interested in connecting, gatekeepers to be negotiated, etc so that networks can be established.







What is the role of the public sector in helping us answer this question?

Local authorities also play a key role in supporting the creative and cultural industries.

How can the public sector help cultural industries? The university helps the local government to sell Norfolk and Suffolk to potential business relations, bringing more industry to the area. The main aim of the council is to build relations between different industries in the region to help highlight the benefits and added value of working in Norfolk and to continue to make it better for future generations.

Where should funding go for these partnerships, should the council even get involved with relations between the creative industries and higher education? The government want to improve these industries to improve the image of the region to attract more international investors, so surely they have a duty to make sure they're thriving. The government has a focus on helping businesses that are sustainable and long-lasting.

Innovation and more classical creative industries (art curation. theatre production, etc...) are so different but fall under the same title of cultural industries - all must be given the space and funding to be able to work together to improve all areas of cultural industry. Universities could help by opening up more channels of communication between different sectors and organisations to ensure further improvement of the region.





UTILISING RESOURCES AND KNOWLEDGE TO BENEFIT CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

Education and creativity

Connection and collaboration between higher education and the creative sector

Supporting tech literacy in creative communities

Wellbeing and creativity



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How do creatives and higher education connect?

We know from the previous conversations that people want more opportunities to connect – so what systems and tools can higher education institutions produce to enable these networks?

There are barriers with policies – having to go through a lot of processes before actually reaching students. Practical digital forums could be created to alleviate this, where opportunities/callouts can be made both ways between UEA

and cultural organisations to get information to the right people, along with a creative network directory. More arrangements could also be made for students to have creative work placements as part of their curriculum.

UEA could support technology for the mapping of organisations, networks etc that would make accessing key contacts easier. More events could also be facilitated that give opportunities for creatives to link up and share projects.







Education and creativity

So far, there has been a lot of discussion about higher education's role in creativity, but creative development starts in childhood. What's the role of primary education in fostering creativity, and how can higher education institutions ease pressure on a system that is increasingly stretched?

Education is feeling the impact of multiple crises and underfunding, putting pressure on schools and on teachers, but to inspire creativity, education must stay creative. It's felt that there can be a 'STEM agenda', that can lead to a separation of young people being held to STEM subjects for their economic potential, which can discourage them from exploring creativity. Furthermore, some teachers may pigeonhole children to be one or the other - such as by saying "x is good at science, y is good at art" instead of taking an interdisciplinary approach. There's a danger that education can turn into a predetermined pathway when it should be about expanding the mind and affirming childrens' sense of self.

Finland has an excellent education system, with children not going to school until they're seven years old – politicians here ought to look at methods used in other countries – it's felt that in the UK the curriculum is decided without consulting those delivering it, with too much focus on testing.

In higher education, students who take a year abroad or in industry etc, tend to achieve better qualifications as well as gaining a sense of where and who they want to be – getting outside of the classroom is important. Systemic reform is needed, but in the shorter term, smaller scale interventions could help. Could higher education institutions deliver sessions to primary schools, or coordinate professionals to support teacher inset days?

Higher education buildings could be utilised for afterschool clubs, which could both inspire creative thinking and help to circumvent childcare barriers – as well as providing activity, warmth, food etc, to low-income families. These could also be open to the wider community, encouraging intergenerational communication.

More foodbanks and/or social supermarkets are needed, so could institutions help support the creation of these, or foodcentred initiatives with a creative element – such as 'creative breakfast clubs'? Helping to facilitate a directory of services like these available in the region would also help, allowing people to find appropriate resources.















This group discussed the development of tech infrastructure to benefit creative communities in more detail.

There are currently lots of disparate groups doing the same things, which leads to repetition and inefficiencies. There's a lack of transparency on how Norwich is networked, and a lack of agency over tech presence in creative and higher education communities - face to face, Twitter, and WhatsApp own the current infrastructure.

We want shared resources and community regardless of institutional affiliation, with transparent tech infrastructure that is maintained by, and for, communities. This would encourage pooling resources and knowledge between higher education and cultural institutions and community organisations. Tools that

could contribute to this could include a job board/freelancer database and an online calendar for shared community events listings. Developing Community Technology Partnerships similar to Manchester based 'Geeks For Social Change' could facilitate the development of these tools.









What does effective collaboration look like between higher education and the creative sector – how to find common ground?

What does effective, meaningful, sustainable collaboration look like?

It can mean different things depending on the people or organisations involved – developing mutual understanding is paramount to collaborative success. There is a real importance to taking the time to understand the priorities of each organisation, its values, its ways of working. Important also to ensure that there is a common understanding of key terms. Working with UEA is often daunting because of the scale of the organisation. In short it

is like working with a number of different partners who have different agendas. There is a real value in encouraging academics to join the boards of creative organisations to help communicate an understanding of the different ways of working.





This group discussed the intersections between wellbeing and creativity.

Creative clubs around a common interest – such as record clubs – could encourage discussion around mental health awareness

in the community, as well as providing a distraction. Training could be provided for people running these clubs to provide better support. Happy memories can be triggered by things like music which can be beneficial. Higher education can contribute

to research into healing the root causes of poor mental health. Creative industries have the power to tell stories, and find creative solutions – collaborating with higher education could communicate this to students.







THE ARTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Engaging with creative ecological thinking

Creating a positive narrative for a climate changed world



In the Earth crisis, what can higher education and the cultural sector do together to ensure the planet and its people flourish?

It's easy to feel helpless in the face of environmental issues but building communities and engaging with creative ecological thinking can instil hope and help to find innovative solutions.

Our big idea is the power of the imagination to involve people collectively in imagining it's thriving potential futures for this place. Distinct roles for both sectors: Truth, science and data as the key role of higher education institutions. Community creativity, inclusive methods and multiple methods of storying as the key role of culture. What can they do together? Encouragement of critical narrative literacy, to counter polarisation, disinformation and apathy.

Practicing possitopian methods to imagine adaptive and regenerative futures, that include people actively prefiguring futures, people most affected, people most disengaged, and more than human lives. Making data more warm - so we explore hopes and fears together, not just lines on a graph, but informed by them. Biophilic creative imaginations, as if more people know biodiversity the more imaginative ideas we have.

Mapping the intersecting frontlines of impacts: climate, biodiversity, people affected, people with solutions.

There are local networks like Culture Declares East and Climate Museum UK, and ideas to establish a regional, climateengaged creative network similar to Leeds-based SAIL, but they need support and funding.









Is there a place for positive stories of a future in a climate changed world

Arts and culture can provide the opportunities for the creative reimagining of our future world.

This group discussed examples of people/organisations already working in this area, including the 'Green Stories' at Southampton University, a creative writing competition based on the theme of a positive future with environmental projects tackled. More locally, a film project about coastal erosion in Happisburgh engaged with local residents affected by losing their homes.

Participants highlighted organisations that engage with positive climate stories, such as Sustain, an organisation working on active hope that raises climate change awareness while allowing people to normalise feelings of grief and loss, as well as local groups such as Norwich Writer's Rebel and Culture Declares East.

There are positives even in crisis. Modelling gratitude and being in nature are small things to help everyone.

However, these do not tackle the reality of global disparity, so global dialogic engagement is required. But what is on the other side of climate collapse? We have a cultural history of this story telling - it's the 70th anniversary of the 1953 floods in January - could this be an opportunity to bring the message for Norfolk to the forefront? Is it joy and positive modelling or fear that incentivise action? We need communication to activation to empathetic engagement to empowerment to make informed, effective change. The informed impact of spending carbon now for long term savings is no longer our solution. We need a model for a less consumptive world.







A concluding thought to the day

We were delighted so many people were able to join us at the King's Centre in December to help shape a shared creative and civic agenda. The views presented on the day made clear the power of culture and creativity to support our communities and demonstrated how different artistic experiences - from theatre, to literature, to visual art - bring us together, enrich our lives and are a central part of what makes our region unique, diverse, prosperous and outward looking. The day was also a chance to think about how we must reshape and refine our responsibilities to meet current and future challenges: around education, around mental health, and in relation to the climate crisis.

We explored the connection between higher education Institutions and creative careers and how we can work together, in partnership, to create a sustainable creative ecology for individuals and communities across East Anglia.

A commitment to diversity and inclusion were at the heart of the conversations at the King's Centre and are at the heart of this book, which is intended to be a living document. It is a document that renews our regional commitments to the creative and cultural sector, also providing a springboard for future discussions and partnerships.

Professor John Gordon

Academic Chair, CreativeUEA





Find out more about CivicUEA:

www.uea.ac.uk/civic or email civic.university@uea.ac.uk



