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Empirical and conceptual explorations

Nehl, Marthe

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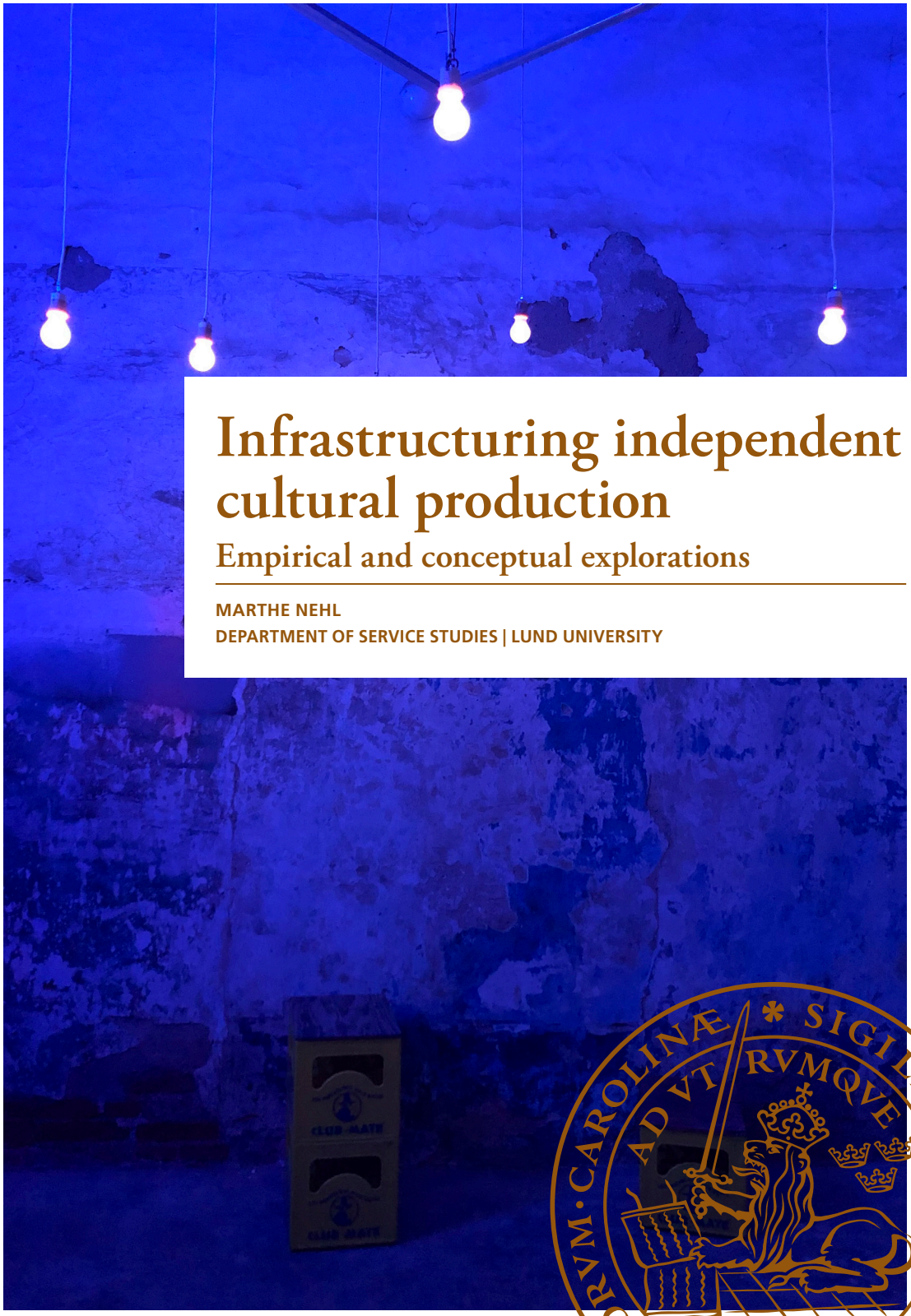

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MARTHE NEHL
DEPARTMENT OF SERVICE STUDIES | LUND UNIVERSITY

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract:

This thesis engages with the phenomenon of independent cultural production, which empirically shows itself as an idea(l) of self-determined cultural production and collaboration made possible through numerous different relationships. Independence, as a relational concept, achieved through in(ter)dependencies is what this thesis sets out to explore. Definitions of independence in cultural production are not set in stone, they allow and require cultural actors to organise themselves within a field of tension characterised by societal expectations and limited spatial, financial and personnel resources, with increasing political headwinds. Hence, turning to the conditions of independent cultural production is timely, given the rapid urban redevelopments, increasing budget cuts and curtailed freedom of expression. Theoretically, the thesis draws on the concept of *infrastructure* and its conceptions in both science and technology studies as well as urban and cultural studies. In the thesis, it is applied both to capture the phenomenon of independent cultural production with its conditioning relational context and to analytically unpack the processes and practices through which independence is jointly achieved, again and again. The concept carries a temporal orientation towards the long term and centres agents that maintain and care, thereby presenting a productive counterpart to the project-dominated present. Based on two case studies in the European context, and diverse datasets consisting of observations, semi-structured interviews, policy papers and archival documents, independent cultural production is realised through infrastructuring interdependencies at the local and transnational level, and the different papers examine their mutual dependence with peers and non-arts and cultural actors, in a residential neighbourhood, a transnational network, and in collaborative policy-making. At the neighbourhood level, artists and cultural workers infrastructure as they negotiate and stabilise their (spatial) conditions in service-entanglements (Paper I). At the transnational level, independent cultural centres activate and maintain communal ties as they engage in eventified network meetings, resulting in experiences of togetherness, which nourishes future infrastructuring and maintenance of a bi-annual meeting pattern providing continuity for advocacy (Paper II) and policy-making (Paper III). Paper IV draws the findings to a close and suggests the application of infrastructure through an analytical focus on practices of embedding and foregrounding, laying open the necessary and strategic practices of interrelating with people, politics, and spaces that constitute the conditions of independent cultural production.

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To friends and family, my infrastructure.

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Nehl, Marthe. 2024. “Creative Work and Working Space.” In Creative Work, by Erika Andersson Cederholm, Katja Lindqvist, Ida De Wit Sandström, and Philip Warkander, 1st ed., 62–77. London: Routledge.

Nehl, Marthe and Friederike Landau-Donnelly. 2025. “Infrastructuring togetherness: Exploring eventification of community and advocacy in a European network of cultural centres” Cultural Trends.

Nehl, Marthe. “From the bottom to the top? Problem representations in the case of Creative Europe’s “Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities” In review, *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*

Nehl, Marthe. “Infrastructuring independent cultural production” Submitted to *DIY, Alternative Cultures and Society*

Other relevant publications

Magkou, Matina, and Marthe Nehl. *“European cultural networks as epistemic actors: modes of research engagement and policy relevance”* in: "Cultural Diversity, Cultural Networks, and Cultural Policies: The Legacy of Biserka Cvjetičanin's Cultural Optimism." Culturelink (in review)

Abstract

This thesis engages with the phenomenon of independent cultural production, which empirically shows itself as an idea(l) of self-determined cultural production and collaboration made possible through numerous different relationships. Independence, as a relational concept, achieved through in(ter)dependencies is what this thesis sets out to explore. Definitions of independence in cultural production are not set in stone, they allow and require cultural actors to organise themselves within a field of tension characterised by societal expectations and limited spatial, financial and personnel resources, with increasing political headwinds. Hence, turning to the conditions of independent cultural production is timely, given the rapid urban redevelopments, increasing budget cuts and curtailed freedom of expression. Theoretically, the thesis draws on the concept of *infrastructure* and its conceptions in both science and technology studies as well as urban and cultural studies. In the thesis, it is applied both to capture the phenomenon of independent cultural production with its conditioning relational context and to analytically unpack the processes and practices through which independence is jointly achieved, again and again. The concept carries a temporal orientation towards the long term and centres agents that maintain and care, thereby presenting a productive counterpart to the project-dominated present. Based on two case studies in the European context, and diverse datasets consisting of observations, semi-structured interviews, policy papers and archival documents, independent cultural production is realised through infrastructuring interdependencies at the local and transnational level, and the different papers examine their mutual dependence with peers and non-arts and cultural actors, in a residential neighbourhood, a transnational network, and in collaborative policy-making. At the neighbourhood level, artists and cultural workers infrastructure as they negotiate and stabilise their (spatial) conditions in service-entanglements (Paper I). At the transnational level, independent cultural centres activate and maintain communal ties as they engage in eventified network meetings, resulting in experiences of togetherness, which nourishes future infrastructuring and maintenance of a bi-annual meeting pattern providing continuity for advocacy (Paper II) and policy-making (Paper III). Paper IV draws the findings to a close and suggests the application of infrastructure through an analytical focus on practices of embedding and foregrounding, laying open the necessary and strategic practices of interrelating with people, politics, and spaces that constitute the conditions of independent cultural production.

1 Infrastructuring independent cultural production

1.1 The paradox of independence

> Well, it's a…talking about independence, everyone in the network is dependent on collaboration and funding and some partnerships and being part of an ecosystem of a region and a city. But independence means that at the end of the day the centre [cultural organisation] decides over its own programme and its own governance, and who it exists for. (Interview May 12th, 2020)

This quote is extracted from an interview with a cultural organiser, who was asked why they call themselves 'independent'. The reply suggests that independent cultural production is characterised by the cultural organisations' freedom to decide over programming, governance, and ultimately their purpose in the world. Yet doing so, as the quote shows, depends on a multitude of relationships: with other cultural organisations, with funding bodies, and a variety of actors in the region or city a cultural organisation is interrelated with through its locational context. Drawing the pieces together suggests that independency of cultural production presents an orientation or idea(l) that requires the navigation of a myriad of interdependencies with others. What this thesis suggests doing is to investigate what in(ter)dependent cultural actors do, how they relate to neighbourhoods, cities and regions, and how they organise (collectively) to create and maintain their conditions (which I call infrastructure) and the possibilities to decide freely over the content and audiences of their cultural production.

A recent report addressing independence in the (European) cultural sector (Autissier & Kryzhanouski, 2024) stresses the importance of independence but finds that its meanings and definitions evolve continuously. Actors and organisations have different motivations for working independently, or towards independency, ranging from rather pragmatic to political and even ideological reasons. Central to attempts at definition, however, are economic,

political and aesthetic independence (ibid.), but these can be weighted differently. Independence is a relational concept used by actors themselves to signal a position of difference. The authors state that "opting for a particular mode of production and distribution in accordance with the principles of economic independence can also be linked to political choices or produce political effects" (ibid.: 21). If public funding for arts and culture is available, it comes with obligations and expectations that can be perceived as limitations (Bogen, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2010) curtailing independence in the sense of decision-making over programmes, governance, and purpose, as the interviewee above states.

Writing about independent (or indie) subcultures specifically, Kate Shaw (2013) speaks of self-conscious marginalisation to oppose what is considered mainstream culture. Besides the politically motivated differentiation of some actors, there are practical/pragmatic reasons such as the scarcity and increasing (political) uncertainty of public funding due to constant restructuring of budgets (Alexander & Bowler, 2014), intensified through political, environmental and economic crises parallelled with increasing right-wing political influence in many European countries and beyond. Further, the exclusivity of the institutional art world (Abbing, 2002; 2023) and the limited prospects of success and a long-term career (Pasquinelli & Sjöholm, 2015; Puletti et al., 2024) incentivise actors to organise differently, create their own communities (and markets) or enter different kinds of collaborations, including with other sectors.

Cultural production broadly captures the processes and practices through which cultural goods and related meanings as well as values are created, distributed, and consumed. It encompasses the work of artists, organisers, institutions, and networks that contribute to the production of cultural artifacts, such as visual art, literature, film, music, theatre and performances, as well as popular forms. In this work, cultural production is used as a collective term for various processes that artists and other cultural actors carry out in everyday life. Independent cultural production, as the title states, captures what in(ter)dependent cultural actors do and how they navigate the relationships they depend upon while maintaining the decisions over content and audiences of their cultural production. Furthermore, and the introductory quote speaks to this, cultural production always takes place in a context, in a place that influences the possibilities of production through various relationships. These can be at the neighbourhood, urban or regional level.

Independent cultural production has a material and spatial component. All forms of arts and cultural production take place somewhere and have spatial

requirements (Bingham-Hall & Kaasa, 2017; Bain & Podmore, 2023; Karimnia & Kostourou, 2023) concerning their production and consumption by audiences. The creation and maintenance of independent cultural production need to address when, where and how the material and spatial requirements are met. Independent cultural production can thus be understood as spatially embedded (Bain & Podmore, 2023). Recognising the spatial underpinning connects independent cultural production to questions of urban (re)development processes, which can both support and hinder the undertakings of independent cultural actors. Creating opportunities of independent cultural production, thus, addresses questions of temporality, space and the continuity of social relations needed to maintain these. Regarding these social relations, independent cultural actors operate in a field of tension between the external functions of art and culture in various areas of society and the internal paradigms of the art field, both of which they must position themselves in relation to.

Arts and culture, including independent cultural production, are functionalised in multiple spheres of society for various reasons. In the economic sphere, arts and culture are framed as drivers of economic growth, through urban development with effects for tourism and the creation of jobs in the creative industries (Landry, 2000; Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2011). In the political sphere, arts and culture serve as means of soft power in diplomacy and identity building (Belfiore & Bennet, 2010; Littoz-Monnet, 2013), whereas artists themselves often engage in activism and social critique (Hoop et al., 2022; Landau, 2019; Ratiu, 2011; Kirchberg & Kagan, 2013). In the social sphere, arts and culture are said to foster social cohesion, community identity, and inclusion (Belfiore, 2004). They create shared experiences, challenge social norms, and provide platforms for marginalised voices (Bain & McLean, 2013). Participation in arts and cultural production and consumption is often linked to civic engagement and well-being (Klinenberg, 2018), and even matters of health. In the context of education and learning, arts and culture play a role in knowledge creation and critical thinking. Arts education is valued for its impact on creativity, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary learning (Kagan et al., 2019).

Now, this is only a rough overview of the societal functions of arts and culture, which are commonly incorporated into public policy-making. Belfiore (2004: 184), for example, writes that the “subsidised cultural sector in the UK has come to be officially expected to contribute to social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal”. Within the narrower field of the arts, there are institutional norms that organise cultural production, such as autonomy. Historically, the idea(l) of the autonomy of art builds on a (mis)interpretation

of Immanuel Kant's "Kritik der reinen Vernunft", declaring art as free from moral imperatives or religious meaning, serving no end other than itself (cf. Belfiore & Bennet, 2010:178). Taking shape throughout industrialisation, the ideal 'art for art's sake' values art that cannot be exploited on a market. In today's late-modern society (and the creative imperative, cf. Reckwitz, 2013), more than the artistic product – i.e., the aesthetics of production itself as atmospheres, symbols, consumable lifestyles, and placemaking tools – are interesting from a market point of view and thus used with the differing kinds of (dis)advantages of the actors involved. Symbolic meaning serves, for example, both artists in arts districts in the short term (Valli, 2022) and developers and property owners in the long term. This makes independent cultural production processes potentially entangled with "multiple, even conflicting relationships with [arts-led] gentrification and displacement" (Grodach et al., 2018).

Independent cultural producers depend on available affordable space – a precondition challenged by urban renewal schemes (Bain & Podmore, 2023). While renewal of the built environment leads to radical displacement of cultural venues, gentrification processes proceed slower with varied contextual consequences. Offering a summary of the relationships between gentrification and displacement, Grodach et al. (2018) suggest that gentrification may evoke social tensions and often the displacement of low-income households and businesses. It can increase economic inequality, destroy community ties and reduce the stock of affordable living and working space. At the same time, gentrification may come with benefits for deprived neighbourhoods. If it occurs without severe displacement, it can improve access to housing, education and employment, when higher-income households lead to new investment and improved amenities. Comparing four American cities, the authors show that arts-caused gentrification unfolds differently and is more likely the case in metropoles with less concentrated arts and cultural activity (cf. ibid.: 823).

It is not uncommon for artists and cultural actors in the independent, self-organised sphere to engage in arts-led activism. Stemming from an awareness of their conflictual involvement in urban development processes or wanting to address societal inequalities, artists-led activism leads to new forms of collective organising and independent cultural spaces in cities (cf. Bain & McLean, 2013; McLean, 2014a; Valli, 2015), often explicitly formulating demands for alternative, intersectional, more inclusive and less exploitative politics (McLean, 2014a, NION, 2010).

Philosopher Dan Eugen Ratiu (2011: 44) wrestles with the role of artists in societal change, caught between critique and capitalist production. He asserts that "artistic creation is a work more than a free expression of inspired spontaneity, because it operates under constraint". The fact that the "autonomy of the artistic sphere is not uniformly accepted even by art world participants" (Zolberg, 2015: 897) shows that it is and remains a widely acknowledged conflictual issue in the field. The rigid institutional ideal of the autonomous artist is even said to nourish narratives that legitimise and justify the continuity of struggling actors in the fields of arts and cultural production (cf. Wesner & Woddis, 2022). Aware of this, artist Andrea Fraser (1994: 7) described this as the "contradictory principle" of an artist's life, which is that dependence conditions autonomy: "We may work for ourselves, for our own satisfaction, responding only to internal demands, following only an internal logic, but in doing to so we forfeit the right to regulate the social and economic conditions of our activity". While there is consensus that autonomy is relative (Abbing, 2002; Fraser, 1994; Hebert & Szefer Karlsen 2013; van Heeswijk, 2012), the rigid institutional ideal of the autonomous artist prevails (Abbing, 2023) and presents a seemingly unresolvable equation, to artists and cultural workers. "If we are always already serving, artistic freedom can only consist in determining for ourselves—to the extent that we can—who and how we serve" (Fraser, 1994: 7). In the same vein, rejecting the duality of being either instrumentalised or autonomous, Jeanne van Heeswijk (2012: 74) sees critical opportunities in the role of an artist to "promote self-organisation, collective ownership and new forms of sociability".

The ideal of arts and culture being independent is institutionalised and remains a crucial value informing governance in cultural policy and funding systems. Interconnected with the idea of freedom of the arts – as in freedom of speech and artistic expression – private funding, but particularly public funding, is in place to safeguard this freedom in, e.g., the Nordic welfare state (Lindqvist, 2022). Public funding is bound to, and made available in accordance with, ideas about artistic qualification. Evaluation of quality, formulated in cultural policies implemented by governments, is directed to expert groups at an arms-length distance. Cultural policy goals frame and guide the governance of both public and independent arts organizations (Lindqvist, 2024), resulting in numerous powerful relations and hurdles to overcome when accessing public arts funding. More precisely, public funding for independent cultural actors is provided to those fulfilling a list of criteria, such as being a non-profit, and is bound to agreements on outcomes and performance measures (Lindqvist, 2024: 22), creating a sense of confinements and controllability. Independence

in the sense of artistic freedom and autonomy is, according to some, realised elsewhere, outside of, or beyond the publicly funded system.

1.2 Independence as continuous navigation of interdependencies

Independence as a relational concept points to a range of important relations that, as many scholars argue, are undermined, downplayed or obscured in the economy of the arts and culture (Abbing, 2002; Alacovska, 2022; McCall, 2019; Scott & Woods, 2024). Arts and cultural production as collective processes (Becker, 1982; Wolff, 1993) depend on numerous things, people, ideas, and complex relations between them (cf. Kirchberg & Zembylas, 2024; Strandvad, Hoogen, Reyes, 2025). To explore these, the thesis investigates what independent cultural actors do; how they organise collectively, and how they navigate interdependent people, places and things in (dis)accord with societal expectations, shaping and reshaping their own understandings of independent cultural production in response to constantly changing circumstances.

Ideas of autonomy and independence can be expressed in the form of critical stances in opposition to institutions. Institutional critique was articulated from artists both inside (i.e., those acknowledged by this institutional context) and outside institutional frameworks. While many forms of institutional critique in the arts depend on the very institutions and infrastructures it intends to criticise, subversive practices and alternative ways of organising intend to make room for alternatives, opposing powerful institutions, and thereby gain independence in their decision-making and articulation of social critique (Fitzgerald, 2010). Chantal Mouffe (2013) describes the poles of critique as ranging from complete withdrawal from working with institutions to critical engagement with them. Drawing on autonomist thinker Paolo Virno, Mouffe (2013: 65) suggests engaging with institutions rather than withdrawing as well as using the potential of cultural work to explore "new forms of social relations in which art and work exist in new configurations".

Self-organisation, alternative organisation, autonomy or organising otherwise – the idea of creating a non-institutional environment has been given many names. Practices of self-organisation are usually understood as independent from institutional or corporate structures, as non-hierarchical or flatly organised, sometimes counter-economic alternatives to capitalism (cf. Blamey

in conversation with Hebert & Szefer Karlsen, 2013: 11). But leaving the institution of art also means leaving one socially organised sphere. Withdrawal is thus also an active decision to organise oneself differently in other spheres in society, implying other dualistic dependencies (ibid.). Ultimately, it is more productive to recognise the mutual dependencies of art production and consumption, as David Blamey suggests (in conversation with Hebert & Szefer Karlsen, 2013: 13).

To sum up, the navigation of interdependencies is central to the processes and practices of independent cultural production. In other words, the conditions for independent cultural production are established and kept stable through changing ways of connecting, always only being the product of relations so far (Massey, 2005).

1.3 Interdependencies as infrastructure

The focus is thus on what independent cultural actors do together to make something else possible. Focusing on actions, strategies, organising and the decisions to balance independence with the need for funding, partnerships, and institutional support, it is possible to speak of infrastructure and the practice of infrastructuring. Infrastructuring conditions various processes of life, including cultural production. AbdouMalique Simone (2004) and later Alison Bain and Julie Podmore (2023) suggest that people become infrastructure when they create possibilities together in the absence of, or beyond, formal planning and governance. Infrastructuring thus captures makeshift solutions as well as patterns of self-organisation that are about to become institutionalised, functioning as cultural infrastructure. Rather than simply being out there, infrastructure, the supportive underbelly of independent cultural production, is a shared accomplishment shaped by negotiations of interdependencies.

The infrastructure concept allows us to connect different scales for analysis. It can capture cultural infrastructures at small, grassroots levels and gradually scale up, sometimes becoming institutionalised, attending to potential tensions between independent, flexible practices and bureaucratic constraints or discrepancies. The fact that cultural actors at the transnational level (organised in networks) are assigned an increasingly important role in policy-making, while funding is scarce and social recognition limited (Delfin, 2012; Scioldo, 2024a), is interesting to look at from different angles, including that of local level practices, as this study sets out to do.

Thinking with and through infrastructure further enables us to understand the tensions between the increasing demands and expectations placed on cultural actors, such as providing services to society, and the often-unsuitable conditions for cultural production. Cultural actors are expected to contribute to social cohesion, economic development, and well-being, yet they frequently operate within precarious funding structures, unstable work environments, and fragmented support systems. Infrastructuring, as an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation, highlights how cultural producers navigate these contradictions, creating alternative networks, spaces, and collaborations to sustain their work. Rather than taking infrastructure as a given, examining its formation and maintenance reveals how cultural production persists despite, and sometimes because of, systemic limitations.

There is a danger in celebrating these infrastructuring practices as coping mechanisms without challenging what makes them necessary. By showing how cultural producers *manage anyway*, there is a risk of legitimizing exploitative mechanisms that rely on unpaid labour, short-term projects, and individual resilience instead of providing structural support. As a critical perspective, infrastructuring should not only reveal these precarious conditions and creative ways of doing things otherwise, but also advocate for policies that ensure adequate funding models, long-term sustainability, and equitable working conditions. The focus on people stresses the importance of responsibility being balanced between individual cultural workers and institutions and policy-makers, acknowledging cultural production as essential infrastructuring labour that requires stable support rather than survival strategies.

The next section provides a short overview of current debates and understandings of cultural infrastructure. As it is this thesis' aim to explore cultural infrastructuring, there might be starting points and ideas to consider in the debates about cultural infrastructure as noun and object.

1.4 Cultural infrastructure

Cultural infrastructure as a term has increasingly been used since the year 2000 (parallel with Richard Florida's popularity), the purpose being to map, assess and evaluate the geographical distribution of cultural life in terms of facilities (cf. Ang et al., 2016; Duxbury, 2008; Weijmer, 2022). Opera houses, theatres, cinemas, culture houses, cultural heritage sites, public art and star-architecture

mappings are used to communicate a city's attractivity or, when they are lacking, to legitimise further investment in cultural infrastructure (Bryson, 2007; Campbell & O'Brien, 2019; Comunian, 2011). The common understanding of cultural infrastructure is thus the built environment where it forms a tangible resource. Culture and cultural infrastructure have also been framed as a resource and dimension of sustainable development (Soini & Birkeland, 2014; cf. Pekkarinen, 2025). Undergirding all these ideas is the idea of cultural infrastructure, or culture as infrastructure, enabling and serving societal needs of cultural production and consumption, and carrying a promise for societal transformation (Kaszynska & Purnell, 2023). Abigail Gilmore and Claire Burnill-Maier (2025) see the potential of an infrastructural turn to overcome the discourses around creative city policy, with infrastructure providing a relational lens that allows to turn to how value and power circulate in urban developments.

Returning to the beginning of infrastructure's rise, a useful distinction within debates on cultural infrastructure is that between 'hard' and 'soft' forms. Hard infrastructure, as illustrated above, typically refers to tangible, physical elements (buildings, venues, institutions) but also to formalised systems of funding or governance. Soft infrastructure, by contrast, encompasses the less visible social, relational, and symbolic components that sustain cultural activity: networks, trust, shared values, informal collaboration, and cultural knowledge. An early take on this distinction is provided by Charles Landry (2000: 133):

> "Hard infrastructure is the nexus of buildings and institutions such as research institutes, educational establishments, cultural facilities and other meeting places as well as support services such as transport, health, and amenities. Soft infrastructure is the system of associative structures and social networks, connections and human interactions, that underpins and encourages the flow of ideas between individuals and institutions."

The past two decades of critical engagement with cultural infrastructure have scrutinised the alleged duality of hard and soft. Arguing for the need to consider them entangled, Alison Bain and Julie Podmore (2023) understand urban cultural infrastructure as a "term that refers to a combination of buildings, facilities, spaces, practices, funding and legal frameworks, personal and institutional networks, and social media sites supporting a common localized urban culture" (2023: 15).

Bain and Podmore (2023: 255) offer an important re-conceptualisation, speaking of cultural infrastructure as a "relational and multi-faceted socio-material ecosystem" dependent on "the persistence of artistic lives livelihoods and practices at the core of urban cultural infrastructure" (2023: 255). This approach presents the idea that cultural infrastructure cannot be understood without considering what people, and primarily cultural workers, do; it also suggests thinking beyond the binary of hard and soft infrastructures. Within this realm of urban cultural studies, cultural production becomes a question of the study of people and contexts.

Renewed interest in cultural production infrastructures expands beyond the attention given "spaces of cultural consumption for performance or display of the arts" (Karimnia & Kostourou, 2023: 344). As an example, Karimnia and Kostourou (2023) use the metaphor of the cultural backstage to strategically analyse cultural production in often-hidden sites and less, or non-recognised and supported, "small-scale, independent artists, producers and businesses who operate from the margins of the creative industry" (ibid.: 344f.). Building on the perceived limitation of cultural infrastructure definitions outlined earlier, they move on from an understanding of a "set of physical spaces to a set of infrastructural conditions that build, support and sustain cultural production in cities" (ibid.: 346), including financial models, social networks, public interfaces and the adaptive capacity of their spaces and organisations (ibid.). The cultural infrastructure debate appears as an alternative, less exploitative or instrumental development policy, in which Anna Kim (2020) not only sees great potential in the question of whether cultural production conditions can be designed (see Bingham-Hall & Kaasa, 2017), but also an opportunity to address the social consequences that arise within conventional creative city planning (eviction, rising rents, displacement, exploitation, spatial precarity, etc.).

Thinking about arts and cultural production infrastructure does not end at available and affordable studio space, but is also a question of a city's housing market and employment structure, Bain and Podmore (2023: 30) remind us, placing the issue in the middle of everyday urban political challenges, making cultural infrastructure a topic in which municipal policy-making has great leverage. John Bingham-Hall and Adam Kaasa (2017) expand the conceptual understanding of the conditions for cultural production, spanning from material architecture and its affordances, the role arts and cultural production are given at the societal level, and the regulations of workers' rights (cf. 2017: 9). Their analysis has sparked interest and demonstrated that the question of the conditions for cultural production is an interdisciplinary challenge that

neither cultural policy nor urban development policy alone should address. Cultural production is "about collective and anti-speculative infrastructures that counter mainstream urban development by providing tangible access to essential needs, such as affordable homes, artists' studios and community facilities", according to Bas van Heur et al. (2022: 1).

For the remainder of this thesis, I develop cultural infrastructure as a productive context for an interdisciplinary scholarly discussion, in which studies of cultural work and cultural policy are combined with critical urban studies. This turns cultural infrastructuring into a situated yet ongoing relational practice.

1.5 Research Aim and Questions

Independent cultural actors operate within a landscape shaped by both structural constraints and creative agency. While they are expected to contribute to social, economic, and political agendas, the conditions under which they work remain predominantly precarious and fragmented. Cultural production relies on continuous infrastructuring across different scales, from local initiatives to transnational networks, yet these infrastructures are neither fixed nor neutral, but continuously shaped, maintained, and contested by those who engage with them. Responding to calls for new conceptual approaches to cultural production (Roberts & Strandvad, 2022) and cultural networks (Delfin, 2012), this thesis explores infrastructuring as a lens through which to understand how cultural actors navigate these dynamics. By investigating how infrastructures are created, sustained, and transformed, the research aims to bridge theoretical inquiry with practical concerns, offering insights into both the future organization of cultural work and its implications for cultural policy. The thesis is structured around the following questions:

i) How do independent cultural actors create, maintain, and defend the possibilities of cultural production within shifting urban and political landscapes?

ii) What are the temporal and spatial implications of infrastructuring independent cultural production?

iii) What insights does infrastructuring, as an analytical framework, provide for the study of cultural production and cultural policy more broadly?

The phrasing of the first question shifts the analytical focus from only describing the external conditions that constrain or enable cultural production, to examining the *possibilities* that actors themselves generate through everyday practices. It foregrounds agency, relational and infrastructural work, and acknowledges that these possibilities are both contingent and contested within dynamic urban and policy contexts. This aligns with the conceptual framing of infrastructuring as ongoing, situated practice (Star & Ruhleder, 1996). Further, against the backdrop of short-lived project funding and implicit demands to remain flexible in the cultural sector and among independent cultural actors specifically, the thesis further investigates how infrastructuring practices challenge the temporalities of organising cultural production. Infrastructure serves this purpose by being defined as outlasting single events (Star, 1999). Infrastructure is a productive yet tricky concept to work with, and it is important to clarify briefly how it is serving the thesis, seemingly as both an object of study and analytical tool. Infrastructure should not be understood as a given; it is always an achievement (Meyer, 2023; Volmar, 2023) that serves some people and processes more than others. Because infrastructure changes with perspective and contexts, it is difficult to use as a definite concept and is by its relational nature rather a sensitizing concept, "providing a direction along which to look, rather than a prescription of what to see" (Blumer 1954 cited in Bowen, 2006: 13). In other words, infrastructure and infrastructuring are placeholders for the processes and practices independent cultural actors employ to create and maintain the conditions and possibilities for cultural production.

1.6 Overview of the papers

This thesis, which is in the interdisciplinary realm of service studies, addresses current debates in different disciplines, including arts and cultural sociology, urban cultural studies, and cultural policy studies. The following table shows how the four publications interrelate with the overarching research aim and addresses the different audiences through specific sub-questions.

Table 1 Overview of publications included in the thesis

Aim of the thesis	**Understand independent cultural production and its conditions of possibility**			
Paper Title(Author)	I “Creative work and working space” (Nehl, Marthe, 2024)	II “Infrastructuring togetherness: Exploring the eventification of community and advocacy in a European network of cultural centres” (Nehl, Marthe & Friederike Landau-Donnelly, 2025)	III “From the bottom to the top? Problem representations in the case of Creative Europe’s “Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities” (Nehl, Marthe)	IV “Infrastructuring independent cultural production?” (Nehl, Marthe)
Journal/ audience	Anthology on creative work, Routledge series in the creative industries	Cultural Trends	European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy	DIY, Alternative Cultures & Society
Relation to research questions	1,2: Investigates local level cultural production through relational space	1,3: Explores the inner workings of a network of independent cultural centres	1,2: Analyses a collaborative policy making project between local, regional and EU level actors	3: Introduces infrastructuring as an analytical tool for alternative cultural production
Data and method	Interviews, documents, observations and walks, abduction with relational space	Archival data, interviews, observations, temporal lens	Policy projects official documents, interviews, observations, archival data, critical discourse analysis policy	Methodological paper, operationalising infrastructuring through urban cultural studies literature
Findings or Suggestions	Service-entanglements: Cultural work conditions stabilised through embedding in residential neighbourhood	Eventified project time of recurring meetings maintains community and secures infrastructure time for future advocacy	Beyond structural issues paper highlights overlooked infrastructural labour of local cultural actors in policy co-creation and soft governance	Infrastructuring as agential processes of 1) embedding and 2) foregrounding in day-to-day DIY and independent cultural spaces

Paper I is a single-authored book chapter in a Routledge anthology in the Creative and Cultural Industries series. In the anthology entitled *Creative work – conditions, contexts and practices*, the chapter illustrates how creative working space is enabled through neighbourhood-based collaboration of arts and non-arts actors, as well as local cultural policy.

Paper II is a co-authored paper in the peer-reviewed journal Cultural Trends. It presents an approach to the internal workings of the European cultural network of independent cultural centres, Trans Europe Halles (TEH), and sheds light on the activities, processes and outcomes in their temporal concatenations that constitute network organising and community building, as the possibility to advocate. It illustrates that cultural infrastructuring at the transnational level is entangled with local experiences of togetherness.

Paper III is a single-authored paper engaging in depth cultural policy as an important component of cultural infrastructuring, specifically in a process of cultural policy-making. The TEH led project under scrutiny here engages with the interrelationships of actors in the cultural sector with those in the broader public sector. A critical discourse analysis of project outcomes, taking the project itself as an infrastructuring device, unpacks how it discursively accommodates various actors' problematisations and proposed solutions to collaboration, and thus infrastructuring in(ter)dependent cultural production.

Paper IV is a single-authored paper targeting DIY, Culture and Society. Drawing a close to the empirical and conceptual exploration, it concretises the study of independent and DIY, place-based cultural production through infrastructuring as processes of embedding and foregrounding. Combining conceptual frameworks from urban cultural studies with science and technology studies, it proposes a framework that departs from the shortcoming of the concepts 'cultural ecology' and 'cultural infrastructure' as nouns, by centring cultural actors and their continuous work in cultural production processes as spatial and infrastructural phenomena.

The next chapter draws on developments in infrastructure theory from fields such as science and technology studies (STS), anthropology, urban studies and media theory. These perspectives offer a more nuanced understanding of infrastructure as shaped by maintenance, power, access, and social relations. By engaging with this broader theoretical field, the chapter sets out a conceptual foundation for a critical cultural infrastructuring approach that attends to how infrastructure becomes and for whom.

2 Infrastructure, infrastructuring: key concepts and definitions

How do independent cultural actors create, maintain and defend the possibilities for arts and cultural production (in the long term)? What can an infrastructural lens contribute to the study of independent cultural production? Laying the ground for these overarching research questions, the chapter starts by introducing infrastructure, its theoretical origins and development broadly, followed by a section that unravels how, in this thesis, infrastructure is operationalised to study independent cultural production as situated (Pratt, 2021) and hence spatial and infrastructural (Bain & Podmore, 2023).

2.1 Infrastructure as a diverse phenomenon

The first uses of the term infrastructure are reported to have been in France. Anthropologist Ashley Carse (2016: 27) points out that infrastructure, with its prefix infra- (meaning under, below), is a collective noun like network and system, accounting for several integrated parts supporting a "higher order project". When the French engineering term was introduced into the English language at the beginning of the 20th century, as Carse continues, it did not refer to the railway as a system, but to the organisational work of laying the foundations for the tracks of the railway (ibid.). Anthropologist Brian Larkin (2013) and sociologist Christian Meyer (2023) remark that the French translation of Karl Marx's Capital (published 1872-75) translated key terms like 'basis and superstructure' into *infrastructure* and *superstructure*. These two historical references already point to the broad applicability of infrastructure as initial support for what we colloquially understand as infrastructure today (using the example of railways), but with Marx's base as infrastructure, a first reference to people in production relations, materials and possible power imbalances emerges.

Larkin (2013: 329) condensed the essence of infrastructure, calling it “matter that enable the movement of other matter”. Besides infrastructure as a technical object, todays' everyday understandings of infrastructure are descriptive of the material and organising characteristics that comprise, and range from transportation, energy and digital communication infrastructures to public services institutions (cf. Pinnix et al., 2023: 13), civic self-organised services, such as environmental stewardship (Campbell et al., 2021) or local organic food distribution (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2022). As a ubiquitous and critical phenomenon, infrastructure can be said to impact the conditions of life and the planet (Krasny & Lingg, 2024). Urban regional scholars Addie et al. (2020: 14) more specifically mean that the infrastructure turn brings forth a “critical understanding of how infrastructures shape contemporary urban life, space, and place at multiple scales and in parallel locations”. As combined technological, digital, and social systems, infrastructures constitute “multifaceted and multilayered phenomena” serving critical societal needs (Pinnix et al., 2023: 13). As such, events like the global COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing wars make infrastructure the topic of public debates and political struggles. Infrastructure, according to Addie et al. (2020: 13), has become the “setting and stake of social struggle”.

As implied in the self-organised structures of stewardship or food distribution, people no longer play a role only as architects, creators or users of infrastructure objects, but become part of infrastructure functions themselves, or replace them completely. The anthropologist AbdouMaliq Simone (2004) has shown this prominently based on empirical studies of marginalised inhabitants’ activities in Johannesburg and has expanded our understanding of infrastructure materiality with the notion of ‘people as infrastructure’. Bain and Podmore (2023: 7) summarise this, stating that people become infrastructure “when they act collectively to create possibilities outside the generic intentions of formal planning and governance frameworks”.

While the (self-organising) practices of independent cultural producers are often precarious in their contexts, it is important to distinguish this from forms of precarity emphasised by Simone (2004, 2012) and Ash Amin (2014) and others, who initially framed people as infrastructure. Precarity in urban scholarship is concerned with how people make up for the (in)access to basic infrastructure in informal settlements, including water, sanitation, electricity and shelter, thereby claiming their basic rights. Yet while the circumstances of marginalised residents in segregated cities of the global South are of much greater, more fundamental urgency, the perspective has the conceptual potential to address the often-makeshift solutions and the ongoing

infrastructuring of cultural actors required to develop solutions in the absence of established, accessible cultural infrastructure.

Having outlined the broad spectrum of the infrastructure phenomenon and its diverse materialities, the next section engages with theoretical approaches and the influence of STS scholarship, which provides the basis for infrastructure as an analytical tool, presented thereafter.

2.2 Grasping infrastructure theoretically

Critical social scholarship since the 1990s, including the seminal work of Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder (1996), represents a shift from the material and systemic perspective of infrastructure to infrastructure as inherently relational. The shift in perspective means that it is less the systems (and their heterogeneous parts) that are understood as comprehensible objects, but rather the contexts and (social) interactions in which they have infrastructural effects. Via an ethnographic study on the construction of an information system for biologists, Star and Ruhleder (1996) explain that this system (information infrastructure) is experienced differently by actors depending on their interests, needs, and social status, whether they are a designer or a user of the system. While early fascination with infrastructure seized the hidden structures in the background, Star and Ruhleder (1996: 112 f.) remark that this perspective does not allow us to capture the "ambiguities of use", or the relational becoming of infrastructure as something useful to some and hindering to others. Infrastructure *is* when people relate to it, thus always differently, and infrastructure is always *of* something *for* someone (cf. Volmar, 2023).

Crucial to the later development of infrastructure as an analytical tool are eight infrastructural properties defined by Star (1999), and Star and Ruhleder (1996), which make infrastructure, despite its relationality, more tangible. Derived from the biologists' information systems study, the eight properties describe infrastructure among other things as embedded in other systems, transparent, reaching beyond a single event, as learned, practised, embodying standards, as well as being installed on a base, appearing upon breaking down, as fixed and modular (cf. ibid.: 114). In other words, infrastructure is contextual, relational, political and socio-material. Building on those characteristics, Helena Karasti and Jeanette Blomberg (2018: 236) added, and again speaking of information

infrastructures, *emerging* and *accreting* as well as *intervention* and *intentionality* to the infrastructure dimensions to underline aspects of design.

For infrastructure to persist beyond a single event (Star & Ruhleder, 1996), it must be understood as a process. Star and Geoffrey Bowker (2006) have been talking about infrastructuring as a verb, emphasising the relational practised perspective on infrastructure. Thus, infrastructure is not simply there, but a shared accomplishment of arranged bodies, spaces, ideas and material artefacts, not static but in process and changeable. "Infrastructures are built, maintained, repaired, used, worked around/against, appropriated" (Korn et al., 2019: 17) sometimes intentionally with a short-term or long-term vision, and sometimes casually, without a clear intention. Infrastructure as fundamental everyday practice (Star & Bowker, 2002) implies that people "infrastructure everywhere and all the time". A distinction can be made between practices of infrastructural work (making) and infrastructure work (maintenance), and to differentiate between these, it is important to begin one's analysis from the actors and their doings (infrastructuring), rather than from an attempt to define infrastructure.

Infrastructuring as practice thus has an inherent politics, which becomes particularly clear when it takes place in urban contexts, as always already contested (Bain & Podmore, 2023). Here, Colin McFarlane and Jonathan Silver (2017: 463) address infrastructure as a "practice of connecting people and things in socio-material relations that sustain urban life. It is not just a context or a noun, but a verb: social infrastructure is made and held stable through work and changing ways of connecting". In that sense, the use of social infrastructure as a lens to look at how people navigate urban life goes beyond the social relations captured by networks or social capital to include how people relate not only to other people but also to spaces, politics and their materiality. Thus, in contrast to fixed structures, infrastructures are not stable but stabilised through practices observable "in regard to their materialities and materializations as well as practices in time" (Meyer, 2023: 49). However, infrastructure – which is not only shaped, but also shapes – is used as a means of governance and control (Larkin, 2013) by employing promises of infrastructure (Anand et al., 2018) and has played prominently in colonisation projects and processes (Cowen, 2017).

2.3 Infrastructure as analytical tool

With increasing interest in the materialities and organising capacities of infrastructure, infrastructure studies include the exploration and use of infrastructure as an analytical tool. To apply infrastructure analytically, it is important to have a clear idea of ones understanding of infrastructure, yet not to get hung up on the definition, but being clear of what the purpose of using the concept is (cf. Volmar, 2023: 64). Lauren Berlant (2016), for example, compares infrastructure to structure and uses the living of the ecosystems to make an important differentiation: "Infrastructure is not identical to system or structure, as we currently see them, because infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. It is the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure" (Berlant, 2016: 393). I define infrastructuring as a practice connecting people and things in enabling, supporting or sustaining relations, sometimes as inherent to everyday life practices (rather unintentional), and sometimes as strategic moves. In arts and cultural production, as a non-standardised and highly contextual kind of practice, it is through actors' doings and their materializations that I aim to understand how arts and cultural production as an empirical phenomenon is made possible, both intentionally and out of necessity through infrastructure. Christian Meyer (2023: 49) brings the research intention to a point: "Thinking in terms of infrastructure (i.e., asking for the systems and operations that are generative for the phenomena under study) allows us to study cultural and social phenomena systematically as achieved and not as given" (Meyer, 2023: 49). Cultural production possibilities are thus not given, but collectively infrastructured (achieved), again and again.

To analytically explore infrastructures as achievements, Volmar (2023: 63) suggests that we:

> take different actor groups and their respective infrastructural needs and practices as a starting point for scholarly investigations. Obtaining a praxeological and situated understanding of infrastructure, which centres actors first before determining what may or may not count as an infrastructure in relation to these actors, is not least a politically motivated shift of the analyst's attention used to identify infrastructurally underserved and disadvantaged populations and to understand practices of "infrastructuring."

When and under which conditions does infrastructure take place? How can this framework be operationalised for the study of independent cultural production? Based on the above quote, infrastructuring can thus be understood

as an inquiring approach that first locates actors and then follows their practices over time. Meyer (2023: 48) summarises the potentials of infrastructure compared to structure as follows: (1) understand infrastructure social phenomena as achieved and not as given, (2) as practices in time in terms of materiality and materialisation, constituting what is perceived as self-evident and reified through the concept of structure, and (3) the epistemological twist: "Focusing on one infrastructure invisibilises others, upon which it is dependent" (cf. 2023: 48f.). In sum, the strength of infrastructure is that it is never merely technical/empirical/tangible but always has analytical implications – hence the perspective of infrastructure can be widely applied.

2.4 Analytical merits of infrastructuring

Infrastructure as a tool for analysis differs from the process-oriented organizational perspective. Tor Hernes (2014), for example, writes that viewing the process as disposition helps to deal with the phenomenon of 'eternally perishing' time in the understanding of organizing. Time, he means, enables a critical examination of aspects that are 'taken for granted' in organisational studies, but which stand in the way of understanding the world in constant movement. Hernes (2014: 1) emphasises that the aim is not to understand the flow of money, people and goods, but the flow of time. Infrastructuring, in contrast, is precisely about investigating 1) that which facilitates the flows of money, people and goods as representative of other social and cultural processes, and 2) aims to critically understand when and whom these processes serve. The infrastructure perspective is inherently temporal (Besedovsky et al., 2019), and 'infrastructure time' (Karasti et al., 2010) carries with it the idea of a long-term orientation, of durability and open-endedness (cf. ibid.: 385).

Time as ever-perishing is central in both perspectives, the process theory of organizing and infrastructuring, both of which attend to relationships of the past, present and future. The process perspective on organization, following Hernes (2014), grapples with drawing temporal distinctions between present past and future, to handle uncertainties due to increased speed and social acceleration (Rosa, 2010). The organisational present (event) concerns the now, but past (variously articulated and materialised) and futures (however

anticipated and thus articulated) play an important role. Infrastructure(ing), as Star and Ruhleder (1996) put it, reaches beyond this single event on a temporal scale (or single site on a spatial scale), and its orientation is to outlast the present with no specified end goal in the future. Building upon Star and Ruhleder, Karasti et al. (2010: 400) see infrastructure occurring

> "[…] when the tension between short-term and long-term is resolved. That is, an infrastructure occurs when here-and-now practices are afforded by temporally extended technology that can be used in an everyday, reliable fashion. Infrastructure becomes transparent when it exists as an accessible, ready-to-hand installed base that enables envisioning future usages."

What is not expressed here is the need for maintenance and repair, without which the temporally extended technology, or socio-materiality, cannot be considered reliable.

Materiality 'enables the stabilization of organisational life', writes Hernes (2014). Infrastructuring, if understood as the "practice of connecting people and things in socio-material relations that sustain urban life" (McFarlane & Silver, 2017: 463), can partly be understood as repair and maintenance work. Repair and maintenance have analytical potential, too. Geographers Stephen Graham and Nigel Thrift (2007: 19) place these activities at the core of societies and suggest attending to the epistemological potential; while still acknowledging the difficulty of making visible the hidden labour (part of infrastructuring), they see an emancipatory capacity in the possibilities of organising repair and maintenance differently (cf. ibid.: 17). Infrastructuring can thus be understood as a continuous engagement with materiality, and the production of socio-material arrangements sustaining cultural life and independent cultural production. Using the idea of materiality as stabilizing organising practices, Boukje Cnossen and Nicholas Bencherki (2019: 1073) have empirically engaged with organising of creative work in physical spaces of former industry and find that "[…] space provides endurance to practice [and] if space can be actively tinkered with, the interplay that emerges between material assemblages and organizing practices can provide fruitful soil for some form of organisationality".

Interrelations between temporality and materiality can further be scrutinised from the perspectives of organizing and infrastructuring. Hernes (2014: 138) suggests studying the "performative qualities of material devices in articulating organisational arrangements over time", which is interesting in the context of creative work with its "future oriented temporality" (Alacovska, 2019) and the infrastructuring perspective. Creative workers are known to put

up with precarious conditions while accumulating social and symbolic capital for future careers (Alacovska, 2019; Wesner & Woddis, 2022;), also in the built environment (cf. Valli, 2022). At the same time, there is an effect in the present, and space infrastructures and is infrastructured while cultural and creative work is done. Cnossen and Bencherki (2019: 1073) emphasise a capacity to socially infrastructure, stating that: "If possible, creative hubs should allow users to work with the space, not because it guarantees a sense of collectivity, but because in the absence of so many other forms of stability, independent creative workers can at least reap the benefits of a collectively assembled social fabric" (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019: 1073). Lastly, taking organising in the present, as the 'higher project' as Carse (2016) put it, infrastructuring is the additional work of making sure that the conditions for this and other higher projects are provided through a functioning infrastructure. Using the network to think about this process includes the bundling of resources towards specific goals (cf. Castells, 2009). Infrastructure, and the infrastructure time perspective, adds another layer by asking whether and how these resources become temporally stabile, and thereby potentially enable future possibilities.

For the development of critical approach to cultural infrastructuring, it has been essential to engage with broader infrastructure theory. Rooted in STS, anthropology, and media theory, infrastructure has been conceptualised not merely as material support systems but as relational, often invisible arrangements that enable and shape social, cultural, and political life (Star & Ruhleder, 1996; Larkin, 2013). The body of theory outlined in this chapter foregrounds key dimensions such as maintenance, visibility, temporality, and uneven access, offering a vocabulary that can critically interrogate who builds, sustains, or is excluded from infrastructuring. Nuancing cultural infrastructuring as an analytical lens allows understanding the ongoing, peopled processes that make culture in cities durable, legible, and governable, moving far beyond the static accounts of culture buildings or institutions. As such, infrastructure theory offers the conceptual grounding needed to articulate infrastructuring as an active, contested practice within cultural policy and production. The next chapter introduces the two case studies and their contexts, as well as related concepts of importance to understanding them.

3 Empirical contexts of the thesis

The primary function of this chapter is to introduce the two case studies and their relevance in relation to the research questions. It introduces the concept of cultural centre as the cases' common denominator and, thirdly, it provides further background on the post-industrial context and the link to the interdisciplinary discussion of cultural infrastructure, to which both cases' organisations differently relate. After the cases' introduction follows a brief discussion about their different possibilities as well as limitations to inform the research questions.

To investigate what independent cultural actors do, how they organise (collectively), to maintain their conditions and the possibilities of cultural production in the context of increasing demands and challenging conditions, I chose two very different organisations: a transnational network of independent cultural centres *Trans Europe Halles* (TEH), and a local neighbourhood arts collective, REHAB Kultur (hereafter only REHAB). What the TEH member centres and the local artist studio collective REHAB have in common is that they are characterised by multidisciplinary forms of arts and cultural production and civil-society orientation, rather than the global fine arts scene. This profile indicates proximity to non-arts actors and the likelihood of collaborative and supportive relationships and interdependencies that the thesis aims to explore. To get a handle on independent cultural production contexts in the two cases, I review literature on *cultural centres*, which are multifunctional kinds of spaces for cultural production, consumption and various kinds of civic engagement.

Cultural centres as a type of cultural organisation resist being classified or typologised, but attempts at classifications have been made, whereas researchers agree that cultural centres present an under-researched kind of cultural institution (Eriksson et al., 2017; Pfeifere, 2022). Dita Pfeifere's (2022) literature review captures three rather broad but common aspects, such as cultural centres 1) having a venue in and through which activities are developed, being 2) multi-functional and multi-disciplinary and 3) primarily address their local context as audience. She summarises the state of research

as follows: “Cultural centres are multifunctional interdisciplinary cultural institutions that provide access to culture and a wide variety of cultural services, promote citizen participation in culture, offer lifelong learning opportunities and perform various other functions” (Pfeifere, 2022: 28). Pfeifere’s characterisation of cultural centres overlaps with a parallelly conducted quantitative study on independent art spaces by Maria Vorobeva (2022). According to the study, independent or alternative arts spaces commonly share that they are “running on a non-profit basis, self-organisation, a combination of local, national, and international art and cultures, provision of public platforms and places for artists to work, and involvement of artists in collaborative projects” (Vorobeva, 2022: 422). Building on the samples’ strong narrative of the idea of experimentation, Vorobeva (2022: 427) argues that independent arts spaces are able to drive social change. Independent cultural centres can thus be understood as societal infrastructure, enabling citizen participation and co-production, and thus overall social well-being (Kaszynska & Purnell, 2023).

With a focus on participation and the intent to differentiate cultural centres further, Birgit Eriksson et al. (2017) produced a report introducing a non-exhaustive typology that distinguishes four types of cultural centres in Europe. The results are produced through participatory action research and the involvement of twenty cultural centres. The first result is the one-(wo)man centre, with one key actor and a rather strong artistic profile and independent programming. This type is economically vulnerable, and project driven, making it difficult to serve a diverse audience and engage the neighbourhood, so that the centre serves a rather closed community (cf. p. 26f.). The second type is the artist/activist group centre, which is characterised as having a strong artistic as well as a political focus, contributing to local development though arts-led bottom-up practice. Also economically vulnerable, the group centre depends on voluntary work, and the organisational challenges include balancing freedom and responsibility and relating to the non-artist neighbourhood (p. 28). The third type is the neighbourhood centre that, in contrast to the other two types, works closely with the neighbourhood, is professionally organised and collaborates with municipalities and local authorities (cf. p. 29f.). Its reach does not exceed the neighbourhood it is embedded in, and tensions between the community and artistic goals are likely. Also struggling with its economy, it serves through educational offers and local relevance. The last type is called the new creative city/regional hub and is often of interest to local and regional authorities as a development tool. The economy of this type of centre is often more stable and professionally run and administered, which coincides with difficulties in working with novel or less

established art (cf. p. 30f.). Such centres experience conflicts related to gentrification and the risk of becoming exclusive with time. Overall, and the typology illustrates this, most types of cultural centres struggle to maintain a stable economic situation and depend on volunteering to varying degrees, while they all fulfil important functions as spaces for active citizens and arts-based (political) discussion and education. Cultural centres are portrayed as, and at least in the selective overview of literature above, never being addressed out of their local context. While TEH presents a transnational network, it is important to bear in mind that the activities of the network take place, for the most part, in such locally based cultural centres, working individually towards independence as a condition dependent on internal governance models and their external relations (Fitzgerald et al., 2010).

3.1 Addressing the multiple scales of cultural infrastructuring

A spatial scale constitutes the geographic level of social activity and most commonly includes neighbourhood, the city, the district, the nation, the region and the global (cf. Spicer, 2006) but also the European level. Inspired by interdisciplinary debates on cultural production, and small-scale cultural production particularly, independent cultural production is dependent on a) local space as part of a supportive infrastructure, b) local and international networks of people and c) policies at different scales, which pay attention to the complex relationships through which independent cultural production is realised. As a network organisation of independent, self-organising cultural actors, TEH is particularly interesting as a case of organising independent cultural production from below that increasingly meets European institutional structures throughout time (Scioldo, 2024b). TEH's history (and continuous becoming) as a merging of bottom-up, civil society initiated cultural centres is informed by the localised struggles of its members, representing the conditions and demands of the grassroots, hence 'below'. They are the backbone of the supportive structures at the transnational level in terms of policy and an activist level in the local contexts. To explore cultural infrastructuring in the case of TEH implies paying attention to the interrelationships between the network members, their network coordination, and the European cultural policy domain (Scioldo, 2024a, 2024b). In other words, TEH can be understood as meso-level cultural infrastructuring.

REHAB, on the other hand, offers the possibility to understand the implications of the local embeddedness of independent cultural production in the context of a post-industrial city. Here, the case allows us to scrutinise the interrelationships that constitute infrastructuring at the micro-level. Combined, REHAB Kultur and TEH present cases on their own, but REHAB offers a possibility to capture aspects that resemble the TEH member centres. Every independently working cultural centre is tasked with navigating contextual relationships at the local level to maintain its conditions as an active and independent cultural production environment. These include relationships with a landlord or property owners, with local cultural politics and local audiences, as well as other societal actors in the neighbourhood or city at large. Among the TEH members, there are cultural centres that rent their premises and thus have this dependent relationship to navigate. They are also, as pointed out earlier, embedded in a local, sometimes regional, context consisting of neighbourhood relations, cultural and urban development policy and politics to which they are necessarily related, regardless of whether they openly contest them, actively formulate outspoken demands, or silently accept their conditions.

REHAB is first and foremost an artist studio collective. Looking at its local relations and the possibilities of use of REHAB's premises in the context of the neighbourhood, it displays strong local relevance, which is characteristic of various cultural centres (Eriksson et al., 2017). REHAB is used regularly by a group of elderly people, and on a project basis, serves as a project space for collaborations with neighbouring schools and as a workshop space for summer holiday activities for local children. Additionally, it is available for rent and hosts a variety of corporate, municipal and private family events. But most importantly, the spaces serve the members of the studio association, which is diverse and includes artists, cultural workers, and increasingly also other related small associations, such as a regional network of musicians.

Combining the cases REHAB and TEH covers three different spatial scales of cultural production: the local, the transnational, and the ideational scale of policy. TEH, a transnational network organisation, and its coordination office maintain communicative relations to the European level cultural governance in Brussels. REHAB, the TEH coordination office, as well as the TEH member centres are all politically, organisationally, socially, and spatially embedded in a local context (Bain & Landau, 2019b). At the same time, the local is always also enmeshed with globally circulating ideas (Bell & Orozco, 2020; Massey, 2005). This becomes particularly visible in the REHAB example, at the local scale, located in Malmö as a post-industrial city, with an ambitious cultural

policy inspired by the creative city blueprint (Rosler, 2010) as well as research produced around gentrification.

3.2 Situating independent cultural production

Both cases are firmly grounded in the context of post-industrial, and deindustrialising cities in different places in Europe. Many urban landscapes bear witness to once flourishing industrial economies, as they often offer centrally located derelict industrial zones (cf. Amin, 2010: 61). These sites mirror the ongoing transformations of cities from places of material manufacturing to sites of immaterial production (D'Ovidio, 2016: 7) and service-based economies. Many derelict factory buildings have been "activated by cultural labour" (Bain, 2023: 33) and converted into lively cultural scenes and new urban work-scapes (Beyes & Metelmann, 2018) or are being targeted for such development in the future. Based on the chosen cases, it is in these post-industrial urban landscapes that I primarily situate and make sense of the phenomenon of organising cultural production.

The history of TEH, the network of independent cultural centres, is intricately entangled with the transition of post-industrial cities across Europe, and with it the development of urban visions for culture. Along the lines of TEH, one can trace the development of how once countercultural practices gain attention (Markusen, 2006; Shaw, 2013) and then traction as mainstream practices designating sites for the new economy (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2004). The availability of empty space in central locations, which post-industrial cities provide, presents a precondition for cultural production and experimentation and is where the idea for TEH was born; today, the normative approach to creative cities shapes its current operations. Initially, such transformations began with bottom-up activity: Squatted by artists, activists and other visionaries, buildings were turned into something 'different' or experimental. What once appeared rule-breaking seems rulemaking today, where "cultural or creative milieus count both as central resources for urban development and as promising, even necessary forms of organisation for innovations and creativity, be they of artistic, technical, or scientific nature" (Heßler & Zimmermann, 2008: 16), in other words, cities where there is no economic pressure and, thus, no risk for cultural actors to be displaced, are rare (Bain & Podmore, 2023).

Bearing in mind that intensified efforts to generate creative milieus and to promote the cultural economy of cities already began in the 20th century (Heßler & Zimmermann, 2008: 32), it is noteworthy that perspectives of cultural production (and questions of working in the field of cultural production) remain secondary, if they are considered at all, while investments in larger-scale cultural consumption infrastructure gains priority, to increase the attractivity of a city as a destination for tourism, leisure consumption and mobile work (Comunian, 2011; Pratt, 2011). Local populations, including cultural producers, compete for increasingly less resources and available, affordable workspace. It is thus common, as recent studies in the case of Berlin show, that "artists are often left alone to negotiate the practical and banal dimensions of urban spatial politics as well as the instabilities, risks, and insecurities of cultural production" (Bain & Landau, 2019a: 3). The following section provides an overview of previous studies and the discussions around cultural infrastructure, as an interdisciplinary object of study, so far.

3.3 Independent cultural production: actors and contexts

Raymond Williams (1976) has called culture a difficult term and problematic concept, with at least two different broad meanings. Used anthropologically, culture accounts for human development and ways of living, including language, traditions, ceremonies, on the one hand, and secondly, in a narrower sense as an aesthetic term of culture, in which culture means art, which is divided into different disciplines (fine art, music, theatre, dance, performance) forming the cultural sector. Referring to the latter, I use artistic and arts and cultural production interchangeably and refer to the individual and collective activities involved in a cyclical understanding of cultural production that consists of the development, production, dissemination or consumption, sometimes storage and preservation of artistic or cultural forms, without differentiating between high or popular arts or between avant-garde and mainstream. Independent cultural production, as a societal phenomenon, relates differently to (art) markets, policy and spaces and their respective actors, which the two cases stand for as examples.

All forms of arts and cultural production have spatial requirements (Bingham-Hall & Kaasa, 2017; Bain & Podmore, 2023; Karimnia & Kostourou, 2023), and the extent to which these are available and accessible to cultural actors is

crucial for their existence. Derelict industrial buildings provide spaces at low cost (initially) and conditions, sometimes access to materials, allowing for productions requiring experimentation and sometimes produce noise and dirt. They allow for different kinds of experiences and encounters with audiences. At the same time, they present challenges regarding safety and security, electricity, heating, all depending how much regulation is in place. Such 'leftover' industrial spaces, like in Norra Sorgenfri, the oldest industrial area in Malmö, Sweden's third-largest city, fulfil many important criteria. They are affordable, relatively central and yet separated from housing areas, allowing relative flexibility for adaptation to the needs of production. Yet, these spaces, like in Norra Sorgenfri, which is home to the cultural production of around three hundred artists between 1980 and today, are threatened by large-scale redevelopment (Baeten, 2023; Bain & Podmore, 2023); some quarters have been entirely rebuilt, and artists were evicted. This is a common phenomenon, and scholars align in identifying an imbalance between cultural and creative production and consumption in the popular creative city approaches or urban economic development strategies implemented after 2000 prominently represented by Charles Landry (2000) and Richard Florida (2004). Without an understanding of the "connections between the urban space and the systems of local cultural production and consumption" (Comunian, 2011), new developments favour signature architecture, and the newly built infrastructure is no longer accessible for arts and cultural production, especially not for small-scale, alternative or independent cultural production (Karimnia & Kostourou, 2023).

Case I: REHAB Kultur, Malmö Sweden

Woven into cycles of post-industrial renewal of inner-city districts, REHAB results from a 'typical' process of arts and cultural actors' displacement through large-scale redevelopment schemes that fail to simultaneously present a functioning strategy for supporting cultural production (Bain & Podmore, 2023; Comunian, 2011). Under the name Circulationscentralen (CC), predecessors of the later REHAB Kultur (*2017) ran a studio association and exhibition space starting in 2004, a time reminiscent of the 1980s when the art scene was artistically motivated and driven to self-organise (Möller, 2021; Söderholm, 2009). The decision to demolish the CC premises (Image 1 single pink dot) led to some actors moving to other studio collectives (Image 1 larger pink dots), while a group around a key actor with deep roots and good local relations searched for an alternative concept that would present the opposite of a precarious artists space: a well-maintained, long-term available space for

cultural production. The result, REHAB (Image 1 yellow dot), is referred to as many things, as a studio association (ateljéförening) or arts space, cultural centre and neighbourhood arts and culture hub. It is located on the adjacent residential neighbourhood (Östra Sorgenfri) separated from Norra Sorgenfri by a large cemetery.

Image 1 Sorgenfri area and REHAB location (yellow dot)[1]

REHAB is realised as a collaboration between the studio association of arts and cultural workers CC and a municipal housing company (MKB). But what does collaboration in this case imply, and potentially obstruct? MKB owns the premises and rents them at a reduced rent to the association CC, which rents studio spaces to its members. With the intent to keep the rents affordable, the CC and its members in turn rent the meeting and event space (see Image 2) out to third parties. With these revenues, studio rents are refinanced, and customers are approached to *Support their local artist*. Depending on how well this financial model works, reduced rents are negotiated with MKB once a year.

1 © OpenStreetMap: https://schwarzplan.eu/en/figure-ground-plan-site-plan-malmoe/ (2022/02/15, 18:03)

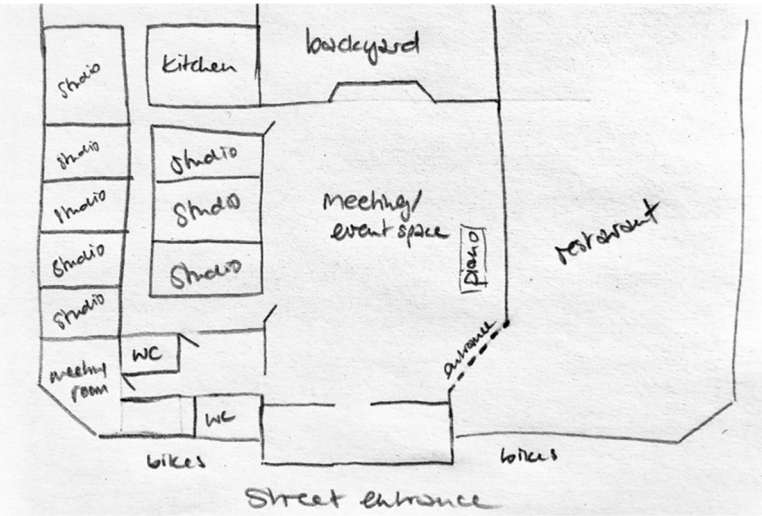

Image 2 REHAB floorplan, author's sketch

REHAB is located on the ground floor of a residential building. The physical space of REHAB today has been planned and created with the assistance of architects, based on the needs expressed by the artists and cultural workers and incorporates the concept of REHAB as a studio collective and cultural work hub. The floorplan (Image 2) is a sketch from a field visit and is not fixed to a scale but illustrates the functional division of space. To the left is a closed-off space only accessible to members of the association, which allows for privacy and concentration in the individual studio spaces. It has a kitchen and a back entrance, through which people and materials can move in and out, without disturbing any events in the publicly accessible and visible meeting/event space. The meeting space has a large entrance and foyer with large glass doors, facing the street and a public playground across the street. It is flexibly furnished, and a large grandstand on wheels can serve as a divider of space and fits an audience. The available furnishing comprises a piano, a projector and screen, dining tables and chairs, couches and armchairs, a bookcase, plants, carpets and a flexible bar-desk, which serves as both a speaker's podium and a buffet where coffee and refreshments are served. The fact that the space was never intended to be an art gallery alone is visible in the absence of a white-cube situation, and instead wooden panels dampen the sounds and invite multi-purpose use. REHAB provides an example of independent cultural production at the local scale, where the physical space with all its features and relations of proximity in the neighbourhood allow for collaborations with the local public

housing provider, with schools and other local associations, now and in the future.

The second case of independent cultural production is the organisation *Trans Europe Halles* (TEH), an international NGO and Europe-wide cultural network and support structure for cultural actors, with a particular profile of artist- or citizen-initiated cultural centres in industrial or other repurposed buildings. While Bain and McLean's (2013: 94) critique of creative city discourse is that it "neglect[s] grassroots struggles to produce spaces of collective artistic experimentation", TEH has a long history of collecting precisely these struggles. Early narratives describe TEH as counter-cultural and 'do it yourself' (DIY) activities. Since its origins in the 1970s, DIY has gained significance globally as a "more commonly embraced language of action and intent among an increasingly broad range of cultural producers and their audiences" (Bennett & Guerra, 2019b: 9). "Once used as a means of denoting pockets of resistance to mainstream forms of music and broader cultural production […] DIY has now become synonymous with a broader ethos of lifestyle politics that bonds people together in networks of translocal, alternative cultural production" (ibid.). DIY, according to Amy Spencer (2005), is a form of production in which forms of expression are created with whatever is available, and actors appreciate the process rather than the product, countering commercial mainstream positions. Here, the interest is primarily in independent cultural production as a persisting phenomenon in society today.

Rooted in the idea that cultural production is constitutively spatial and infrastructural (Bain & Podmore, 2023: 31), I intend to pay close attention to who, where, and what is infrastructured through continuous engagement in place-based cultural production, using the two cases as examples. Like the DIY idea of cultural production, I focus less on the *product* and more on the *processes* of practices relating people, places and ideas, the collective work that cultural production requires when organised independently, at the margins or outside of the publicly funded cultural sector.

Case II: Trans Europe Halles, Lund Sweden

TEH is about people, arts and buildings, stated the official website (2020)[2]. These three TEH founding pillars are no longer featured the same way on the

[2] "People are at the heart of our network. People are both the driving force of our centres and their primary focus. We work hard for the benefit of our communities. Our ultimate goal is to build a society where all people can thrive. Buildings are our micro-universes. We

new website, but they give shape to the abstract notion of the organisational form of a cultural network. Beginning as "informal cross border gatherings of cultural professionals" (Scioldo, 2024a :2) and bottom-up initiatives in the 1980s, networks like TEH aimed at facilitating cultural production through direct cooperation and support, avoiding hierarchical organising and the limits of cultural institutions at the time (cf. Minichbauer & Mitterdorfer, 2000: 8). First and foremost, the six founders of TEH, all representing an independent cultural centre in a different European country, have campaigned for the preservation and accessibility of former industrial buildings to provide space for experimental cultural production, at a moment when the location of their first meeting in Brussels was threatened (Figure 1). The name Trans Europe Halles was chosen after the album "Trans Europa Express" released in 1977 by the electronic music group Kraftwerk, and the place of the first meeting, les Halles de Schaerbeek in Brussels. Representing the zeitgeist of the Kraftwerk era, TEH and other cultural networks facilitate cultural communication and cooperation, mobility and knowledge exchange (Cvjetičanin et al., 2011).

Generally, cultural networks are "decentralized socio-political formations consisting of arts and cultural organizations that work together" (Delfin, 2012: 240), and in the case of TEH, these cultural organisations are cultural centres specifically. Descriptions of what TEH is and how it works change with time and perspective. In 2010, it was referred to as "forum for ideas, collaborations, and mutual support in the pursuit of intercultural exchange, understanding and artistic freedom" (Fitzgerald, 2010). Yet, while cultural networks have standard functions, so to speak, they are agile and adapt to contingencies. Especially the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how the sector's needs could be voiced through networks as a means of crisis communication (Magkou, 2021). "In a context of multiplication of crisis and difficulties to find funding for artistic and cultural sectors, one of TEH's main goals is now to become more resilient as to better support their members through hardships" (Barcelloni Corte et al., 2024: 27). The challenges of recent years also include energy-related adaptation and renovation and the necessary financial resources, to which TEH is increasingly committed.

Throughout its forty years of existence, the network grew from initially seven centres (Figure 1) and then from 28 to 100 members during 2010 and 2017,

transform abandoned buildings with creativity and imagination into places where anything can happen. We use arts and culture to create spaces where people can have fun, feel empowered and get inspired. We believe in the power of arts and culture to change the world for the better. We use art to transform the reality around us and our perception of it." (TEH webpage 'about us' on May 27th, 2020)

counting 128 members in 2020, and 162 in 2025, at the time of writing. Until 2000, TEH grew slowly, but developed connections inside and outside Europe, expanded with members from Eastern Europe after the fall of the wall in 1989, and had received its first grant (Kaleidoscope, see Figure 1) from the European Commission and was asked to work with youth exchange as an early version of the European Voluntary Services (EVS, see Figure 1) programme today. This first wave of development coincided with recognition of the network's potential to serve as, e.g., intermediaries for the development of the European Union, and the institutionalisation of European cultural networks began in the 1990s.

Independent academic research on European cultural networks picks up slowly, while most studies today present commissioned reports and collaborations through European-funded projects (Magkou & Nehl, forthcoming). Since 2021, a few studies have addressed TEH specifically, but in comparison with other networks (Magkou, 2025). In a recent, comprehensive analytical study on cultural networks, Carlotta Scioldo (2024a, 2024b) illustrates how, by working with cultural networks as a soft policy tool, the EU has opened the cultural sector as an area of competence in which it has no formal mandate. Cultural networks in the EU thus must be understood as a product of dynamic relations between civil society bottom-up organising and top-down EU governance, assigning cultural networks a central role in EU governance (Scioldo, 2024a, 2024b). While relations between the EU and the different cultural networks certainly vary, Olga Kolokytha and Matina Magkou (2024)[3] speak of cultural networks not just as intermediaries, but as partners of European institutions for policy-making. Formulated differently, cultural networks "form a widespread organisational infrastructure in the cultural sector in Europe" that is continuously studied and documented in papers and reports describing their roles and functions (cf. Laaksonen et al., 2016: 5). A recent overview lists 37 cultural networks co-financed by the Creative Europe programme until 2027, which is an increase compared to 2019, when this report listed only 28 networks (European Commission, 2019).

[3] Unpublished conference paper, AIMAC 2024

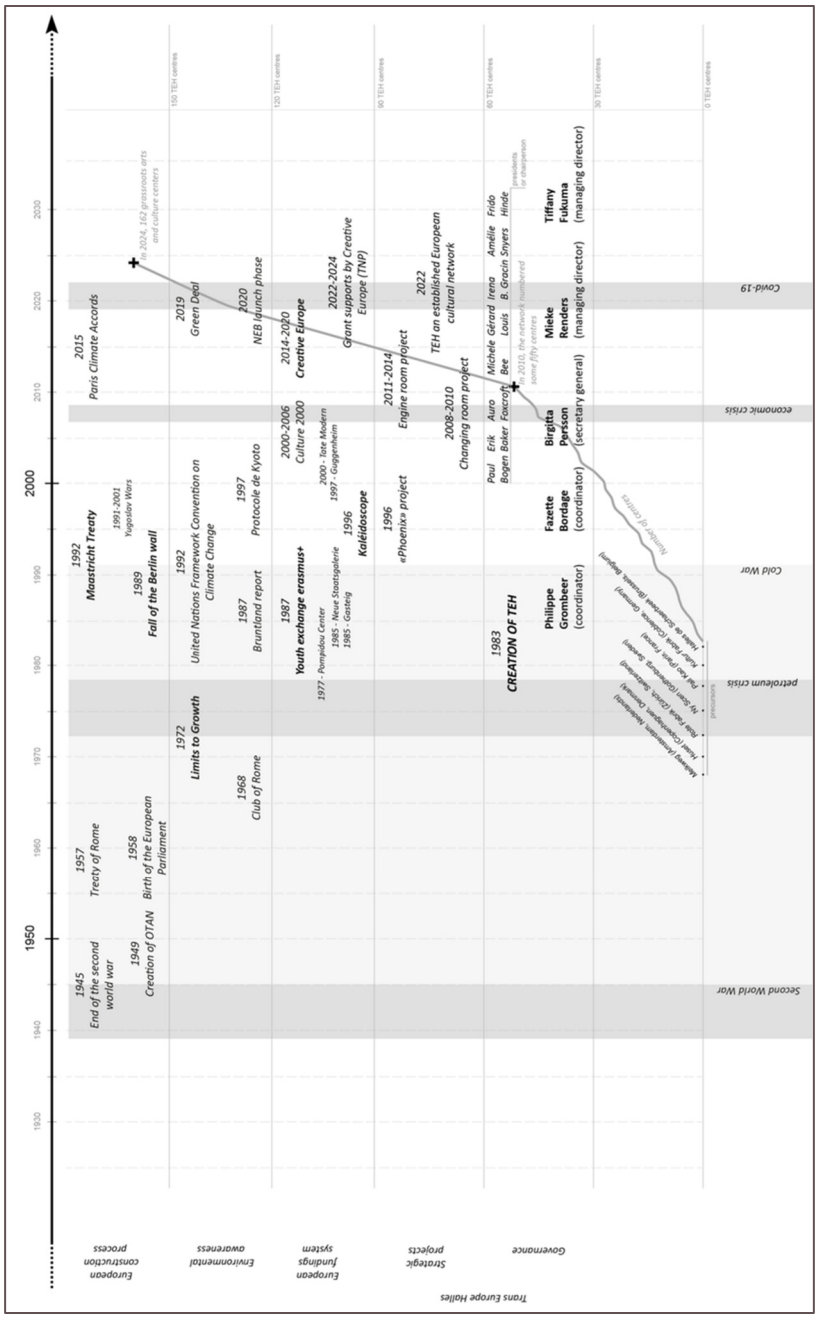

Figure 1“TEH/Times and Visions”, by Thibault Marghem (in: Barcelloni Corte et al., 2024: 9f.)

In the broader research on cultural networks, researchers agree that there is an imbalance between their social significance and the relevance such networks are attributed in policy-making and respective funding sources (Delfin, 2012; Scioldo, 2024a). More specifically, literature is scarce regarding networks' advocacy potential (Magkou, 2021) and their inner workings and experiences, which could be studied when understanding a network as a social space with stories and narratives (Delfin, 2012: 246). Overall, however – and Delfin's (2012) study stresses this – the scholarship on cultural networks remains rather descriptive and lacks in-depth studies capturing how such networks work. The remainder of the chapter gives room to the specificities of TEH, its membership policy, funding and governance structures.

The profile of TEH as a network of independent cultural centres is constantly worked upon. Independence implies having no direct relations of financial or decision-making dependence to (local) state or state-run institutions. However, a project report shows that many TEH members do receive public subsidies (Bogen, 2018), but aim to decide freely over cultural production, audiences and local connections. Membership, and thus access to the network and its programmes and activities, is not open to anyone. The process of member acquisition has changed over the time as the network has gained in popularity. The annual TEH report (2017) lists five membership criteria that need to be fulfilled. Those comprise being an a) independent and not-for-profit, citizen-initiated organisation with a legal structure, having b) an organisational policy that supports artistic multidisciplinarity, being c) located in an accessible building ideally one with industrial heritage, offering d) a 'high-quality' artistic programme with significance on a local, regional and preferably international level, and finally showing e) awareness of the socio-political context and a commitment to 'equal opportunities' (cf. ibid.: 20). Membership criteria today include: -being a 'European grassroots organisation, a non-profit but with a legal structure', - located in a 'repurposed building', - 'must have an autonomous, multidisciplinary social, artistic and cultural programme', and 'must support a democratic, pluralistic and equal society'[4]. Applicants not fulfilling all criteria may obtain associative membership. Associate members pay the lowest membership fee and are not allowed to vote. Evaluation of applicants and their admission take up to a year and require that an applicant demonstrate suitability by showing effort through representation and representability.

[4] https://teh.net/become-a-member/ (2020/07/31, 10:47)

As a non-profit, non-governmental, member-driven organisation, TEH aims for 'transparent, human-centred and democratic'[5] governance. Decisions are made 'all together' at the Annual General Meetings (AGMs), each member organisation having one vote, independent of their organisational size. There are three important organisational entities: the Executive Committee (EXCOM), the General Assembly (GA) and the Coordination Office (CO), which today employs a professional team. The biennially elected EXCOM, consisting of five to eight representatives from member centres, prepare policy documents, administer memberships applications, as well as the network's planning and finances. Since 2006, the CO is in Lund, southern Sweden, where it receives national, regional and local funding. Prior to its location in Lund, where it is hosted by the member centre, the CO has been moved from Brussels to Paris, from Paris to Helsinki and finally to Lund. While member centres pay an annual income-based fee, most of the project and network funding comes from large EU funds such as Creative Europe, Erasmus+, and Horizon. The CO applies for, and coordinates these large projects and grants, facilitates membership applications and processes, and supports organising the bi-annual TEH meetings. Further, there are so-called ambassadors, who function as advocates, advisors and are involved with external relations. Many of them held office before, belong to the founders, and are very familiar with TEH.

Among TEH's key activities are connecting, supporting and advocating. Since TEH's foundation in 1983, network meetings have been held bi-annually, hosted by different members, with support from the CO. The meetings provide space for social and political issues or challenges on a broader scale, practical aspects, and align with member's needs, by combining trainings, performances, workshops and most importantly networking opportunities for different kinds of collaboration. To its outward-oriented activities TEH counts advocacy and activism, cooperation, consultancy at an international scale, and fundraising, states its new webpage[6]. To facilitate the activities and foster cooperation between geographically proximate member centres, TEH established decentralised hubs. On the regional level, hubs are organised to catalyse partnerships and projects. While the network slowly began to acquire EU funding (through youth programmes initially and arts funding later), today TEH bundles expertise in its acquisition of EU funding. Besides creating connections and offering support, TEH advocates for the cultural and creative sector in Europe by influencing policy-making processes (signing position

[5] https://teh.net/about-us/ (2020/07/31, 10:30)

[6] https://www.teh.net/about-teh/ (2025/01/18, 08:54)

papers, declarations and petitions, as well as meeting with local, national and regional policy-makers).

Beyond the network's more traditional functions as an advocate for the scene, ideas about TEH's possible independence from EU financing are circulating in discussions about the future of TEH. With the growth of the network, its geographical reach and practice-based expertise increase, upon which TEH could develop into a provider of services to gain economic independence. The first steps were taken to launch a TEH business branch to be opened in 2024, including a job announcement for a CEO of the TEH company.[7] While the 'cultural engineering consultancy' remains a future vision at the time of writing, a recent report (Barcelloni Corte et al., 2024: 27) considers the possibility of "reframing the network as a common platform of services at the disposal of both members and network outsiders (policy-makers, researchers, ...)." Leaving open whether and when TEH will achieve financial independence through a service branch, TEH is and remains important as an active intermediary and representative of an ever-increasing number of grassroots cultural organisations in Europe and beyond.

[7] See https://www.teh.net/news/chief-executive-officer-ceo-needed-to-lead-our-for-profit-branch/ (24/12/03; 08:48).

4 Empirical data and methods

Framing (cultural) infrastructure as a joint achievement, it is best studied through people's doings (Korn et al., 2019; Pinnix et al., 2023; Star & Ruhleder, 1996; Star, 1999; Volmar, 2023) in the past, present and future. This chapter presents the design and analysis of infrastructuring understood as a relational ongoing processes and joint achievement at different spatial scales, in different places, at different moments in time. For this endeavour, a qualitative mixed methods design and an abductive approach allowed moving between theory and empirical data gathering and analysis. The guiding research questions asked:

i) How do independent cultural actors create, maintain, and defend the possibilities of cultural production within shifting urban and political landscapes?

ii) What are the temporal and spatial implications of infrastructuring independent cultural production?

iii) What insights does infrastructuring, as an analytical framework, provide for the study of cultural production and cultural policy more broadly?

The chapter will further address challenges throughout the process, such as mobility restrictions caused by contingencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as reflections on one's positionality as a researcher and related implications for the data and the research process.

4.1 Mixed-methods case study design

Cultural infrastructuring, as the process of creating and maintaining the possibilities of independent cultural production, presents a broad yet suitable phenomenon to be explored through a case study design. Following Robert Yin (2009, 2018), case studies explore contemporary phenomena in real-life

contexts without it necessarily being possible to say where to set the boundaries between the phenomenon and context. Here, openness is simply necessary to do justice to infrastructure as a relational phenomenon that is understood as effects of interactions in contexts (Star & Ruhleder, 1996).

The sampling decisions for the two cases, REHAB and TEH, is based on temporality, or the long-term orientation, and the possibility to cover different spatial scales. Temporality sits differently in the long-term orientation of both REHAB and TEH. TEH's long existence (celebrating its 40th Anniversary in 2023) would seem to imply knowledge about how to persist, as emphasised by a cultural organiser captured in a meeting report who stated "TEH has existed for such a long time [thus] must be doing something right" (TEH65)). REHAB, on the other hand, created only in 2017, presents a localised reaction to the consequences of fast redevelopments in post-industrial cities, which goes hand in hand with evictions from run-down industrial buildings and an experience of precarity imposed through temporal limitations.

Case study research is a relatively open approach, and hence the literature suggests many ways to go about it. While for Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) even a predominantly descriptive study, without attempts to generalise, may be valuable when it short "cut[s] a path toward scientific innovation" (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 227), Nicolaj Siggelkow (2007) argues that a paper "cannot just stand on its descriptive feet but also has to provide a conceptual insight" (2007: 21). In the geographical tradition (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2006), generalisation and theory building are not the only method, and the exploratory and inquiring undertakings carry value as such. A case study approach allows us to "tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories […]" (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 238). Whether theory and/or in-depth empirically oriented, immersing oneself in rich case data will ultimately bring new questions to the fore and inspire future research (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Siggelkow, 2007).

Initially without a clear theoretical contribution in mind, I set out to explore the possibilities to work with infrastructuring, reminded that important questions cannot be asked ahead of having a basis of knowledge about "what's going on in the field" (Yin, 2018: 4). Yet, TEH and REHAB present unique and rather under-researched cases to date. Among the few studies on European cultural networks, TEH is a network among others, but its individual long history and its inner social workings, not yet addressed as such, leave a lot to reveal. With the two cases, I choose a revelatory approach over comparative, evaluative approaches and questions regarding effectivity, or performance,

instead asking how TEH and REHAB continuously work, what it is they do that allows them to do what they do over time.

4.2 Creating two sets of data

To understand independent cultural production through the infrastructuring lens as practised and continuously achieved, I produced two independent sets of data. In both cases, the first step, if possible, was to get an impression of the sites where infrastructuring takes place and materialises to some extent. From the direct contact and face-to-face encounter (first participant observations), other kinds of access to data emerged, which allowed me to combine observations with interviews and archival data and gain deeper contextual understanding (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2018). Additionally, photographs, sketches and drawings were created during both planned observations, and spontaneously occurring, unplanned opportunities. In the following, I firstly outline how I created contact with both cases, and secondly engage with the different kinds of data, gathered through observations, interviews, and archived material.

Living within walking distance to REHAB, I took many walks past their premises. At the time, I had been familiar with the place and its story, having interviewed a co-founder in 2019 for a master's thesis on local cultural policy and sustainable development. Walking there I wondered what the space with the glowing letters R E H A B over a glass entrance (Image 4) looked like on the inside today, and how it was doing. COVID-19 recommendations in Sweden did not prohibit personal contact on site per se and supported my decision to make REHAB a second case in my study. Because the doors were locked and all public activity on pause, I reached out via email and shared my interest in engaging more deeply with REHAB, whereafter I was invited for a coffee and explained my interest in the local relationships and their long-term orientation. My interest was welcomed, and I was shown around the premises, the people and some studios and the first five interviews were scheduled only shortly thereafter. I interviewed artists and cultural workers according to their preferences, either inside the premises or while walking in the neighbourhood (Kusenbach, 2003). To understand how REHAB is understood from different points of view in a local cultural political and administrative context, I additionally interviewed the municipal housing company, the cultural department, and a social worker who had followed the development of the adjacent industrial area closely. Image 4, a photograph taken on one of the

many walksways, shows the whole façade upon the late arrival of spring and captures an artwork by Johan Lundin (2017), which reads “We all face loneliness - our answer is community”. Not only presenting a means of beautification, the artwork also underlines, if not displays, ambitions to employ arts to foster social coherence and well-being in the neighbourhood.

Image 4 Main entrance to REHAB and façade artwork by Johan Lundin (author, April 2021)

On the other hand, TEH – a multisite organisation – was not as easily approachable. I first heard about TEH in November 2018. Enrolled in a MA programme at the time, two TEH project leaders introduced a large EU financed policy project to me and my classmates in the context of a seminar on societal change and project management. While the focus was on the project itself (which is the focus of Paper III), I was intrigued by the multiple stories about TEH as a bottom-up actor (alternative, independent, activist) and its narrative as pro-active in the context of neighbourhood developments (converting buildings, transforming communities, creativity and creative city), reverberating with controversially debated cultural development and creative city approaches[8]. I lingered with the different narratives until 2020, when, a

[8] To illustrate, while the critique of Richard Florida’s *Rise of the Creative Class* (2004) was foundational and critical urban scholarship, the 91st TEH network meeting featured Florida

few initial interviews later, I understood that the network had found itself in an identity crisis, wondering who and what they are today and in the future. While the CO staff had completely changed (and continues to do so), I learned a lot about the broader seemingly mundane network practices, routines and ideas that keep people together and the network alive, despite the sometimes very conflicting ideas that are revealed in the ways people talk in and about the network.

Having decided to make TEH one of the case studies, I initially started email conversations with four people at the coordination office in Lund in February 2020, signalling my interest in TEH and in their roles and day-to-day work. They would introduce me to others, who would suggest still others, in a snowballing manner. When COVID-19 reached Europe in March 2020, I had my first conversation with the networks' managing director via Zoom. I was immediately given insights into network internal dynamics, such as the sudden death of a TEH founder and an online farewell gathering taking place just one week before our meeting. I noted words like 'bonds' and 'generations'. Asking about the managers' day-to-day activities at this moment in time, I was told how they had phoned every one of the over 100 members to see how they are, asking in what way the respective restrictions on their location were challenging their centres. Space-based cultural activities that TEH members produce had to be cancelled, audiences could not be met on site and bars were closed, thus all important economic activities were on hold for an uncertain period. That emotional, very welcoming first meeting left me with an immediate sense that this network consists of more than strategic connections between cultural producers across Europe, who combine resources to achieve goals they otherwise could not.

Interviews

Following this initial talk with the TEH managing director, I conducted interviews, as they would allow me to study infrastructuring as an actor-centred phenomenon (Volmar, 2023) and are common in case study research (Yin, 2018). Interviewing as socially engaged practice allows us to produce knowledge that is relational, conversational, contextual, narrative, or pragmatic and can inform us about lived, historical and continuously produced interaction between people (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), but also places and

as a keynote speaker, predominantly celebrated and only sparsely critiqued by the audience. From my critical urban research background, this was very unexpected.

ideas (Kusenbach, 2003). Reaching out to the people I had been referred or directly introduced to helped me gain an understanding of TEH as an organisation from the interviewees' perspective (Yin, 2018: 118) as infrastructural actors, who make and discuss decisions about the design of infrastructure (Star, 1999; Karasti & Blomberg, 2018). I spoke with people active in the network organisation, former and recent members and coordination staff, founders, and ambassadors. The ambassadors (an honorary position given to former important network actors) were very responsive, and the first interview with a former network secretary took place only a few weeks later.

I conducted semi-structured interviews, as this form gives the interview process some flexibility, allowing me to react spontaneously and refocus on important topics if needed (Brinkman, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their capacity to elicit rich and different actor-centred insights aligned with an infrastructuring approach (Volmar, 2023). I therefore adjusted the interview guides (Appendix 3) slightly to every interviewee, as this method supports a situated, praxeological understanding of infrastructuring by foregrounding participants' own articulations of experiences and practices. Nonetheless, interviews are said to take a person out of everyday life practices, interrupt their flow, and disengage them from 'natural' activities (Kusenbach, 2003: 459). However, the pandemic had already created a major interruption of the everyday for many actors, and the circumstances were supportive of studying infrastructuring, given that infrastructure is supposedly "visible upon breakdown" (Star, 1999), and now aspects could potentially be brought up that would otherwise have been overlooked.

Because the operations of TEH stretch over four decades, interviewing allowed me to capture both how actors reflected and how they made sense of the early(ier) and current practices, as well as organisational changes and challenges over time. In this way, semi-structured interviewing is not only an empirical technique, but also an epistemologically attuned mode of inquiry into how infrastructures are continuously achieved and negotiated. Recognising that interviews are not unbiased naturally occurring data, but constructions of the interviewer and the interviewee, make the interview a "construction site of knowledge" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 63). As such, it is important to understand that talking about their history might cause interviewees, dependent on their experience of it, to romanticise or aggravate their storytelling. Attentive to possible distortions, I reflected in a post-interview memo that "the interview was fun, long-term members seem to enjoy talking about the old times, about the parties, performances and how wild that time was" (October

2020). This observation sharpened my analysis, and from it I got the impetus for an event-oriented analysis regarding the experience of network meetings (Paper II).

Some interviewees appreciated being asked questions as an opportunity to reflect on their work, others experienced stress, knowing that time away from their work causes overtime hours, not uncommon on an already tight working schedule. Because TEH counted over 165 members and was continuing to grow, I pragmatically decided to stick to doing interviews with the coordination office staff and people formerly holding equivalent roles. As TEH has a network office with official roles, I began interviews by asking people about their persona, their (formal) role in network organising, what they do and how they came to work with TEH. In the main part of the interviews, I inquired about perspectives on the development of TEH as a network (growth, membership, successes and its challenges). The terms infrastructure or infrastructuring were not explicitly used in the interviews and data collection. While there is a general risk of imposing one's language or concepts on interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), infrastructure is relational and thus likely not the same for everyone.

In the case of REHAB, almost all interviews have been conducted face to face, in private offices, backyards, artist studios, a neighbourhood café, and in the common space at REHAB, where a large table provided sufficient distance for everyone to feel comfortable. Additionally, two interviews were carried out while walking in the neighbourhood (Kusenbach, 2003), allowing an alternative to spending time in closed spaces. Walking interviews have great advantages as regards inquiring into perceptions of urban change and resulting infrastructuring decisions. According to Kusenbach (2003: 475), the go-along method facilitates "uncover[ing] hitherto hidden dimensions of perception, spatial practices, biographies and the local social architecture". I found the walking interviews to provide some extra visible commitment to the knowledge exchange, and I asked interviewees to carry my second recorder to capture all spoken words despite the surrounding soundscape of the city. The REHAB interviews were guided by questions about the making of REHAB, about individual artists' and cultural workers' relationships to REHAB as a space now, and over time. Interested in their practices, I intended to find out how they work in REHAB as a spatial setting, and how REHAB in turn works for them. I asked how they learned about REHAB, how they experience it in comparison to other studio spaces (if they have experiences), and whether they have an official role in organising REHAB. Given my understanding of

REHAB as a locally embedded case of self-organised cultural workers, Kusenbach's (2003: 474) approach raised my awareness and attentiveness, as it aims at "lifting to the surface the implicit web of social relationships between individuals who live in, or use, a certain area", later framed as service-entanglements. The cases combined make up a total of 24 interviews (see Appendix 2).

Interviewing allowed me to become familiar with my interviewees, which resulted in further access to the field. I received an invitation to the TEH coordination office in Lund for co-working, possibly because Sweden's policies constituted an exception to the strict lockdowns in many other European countries.

Observations

My fieldwork was impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic, yet despite the roughly two-year-long travel restrictions, occasions that enabled me to participate and produce observational data were used. Attending social events allowed me to observe and interact with people and places, first online and then onsite, as a guest at the TEH coordination office in Lund, and as a participating guest at the network meetings in Prague in 2022 and Leipzig in 2023. Again, due to the exceptional nature of Sweden's COVID-19 measures, I could physically attend all occasions in Sweden, following regulations I will explain shortly, while international meetings and events were held online until 2021.

TEH Coordination office in Lund, Sweden

My first opportunities to enter the field in the case of TEH were in the coordination office in Lund, where I could co-work and experience glimpses of a 'behind the scenes' on an almost ordinary workday. Owing to COVID-19, the office team had a system in place to ensure only three people shared the office at a time. Joining every Wednesday, I encountered different people and their tasks in the office. Jotting is an interactional process as it is done in the field (Emerson et al., 2011), and when, where, and how we jot depends on our relationships with people, how we read the room and perceive our presence, and whether the note taking disturbs the practices and conversations we aim to observe (ibid.: 35f.). At the TEH office, the coffee or lunch breaks offered opportunities to talk, during which I sometimes felt taking notes disturbed the conversations. Instead of having a notebook or phone at hand while sitting together, I would sit down at an empty desk to write everything down

immediately following the conversation or take a walk and speak into my recording device. Being at the office allowed me not only to conduct interviews on site, but also to move around and experience the space and being together. There were posters and pictures on the office walls and magnets and other objects on the fridge that I could use to start inquiring conversations and gain insights. However, the embroidered emblem (Image 5) on the slightly yellowed background remained a mystery; "it was always there", but nobody knew who had made it, when and in what context. It was simply there, referring to the long TEH past and to the fact that there have always been actors who seem to hold onto it or want to materialise achievements, marking the ongoing process for future generations.

Image 5 Morning sun on TEH embroidery in TEH Office 2020, photograph by the author

TEH bi-annual Meetings and Conferences

In contrast to the co-working situation at the TEH office, jotting during the online events unlocked many possibilities. Being one of many online participants in the digital sphere, observing was less obtrusive than being on site, and I could participate actively when it felt right, for example, in break-out rooms, or in the meeting chat. Jotting during actual on-site participation in the bi-annual TEH meeting required more creativity. Resembling a festival, the programme of a bi-annual meeting stretches night and day, and only some of the different programme formats (keynotes, panel discussions, seminars, performances, concerts, coffee breaks, bar nights and parties) are suitable

occasions to take notes. Breaks between different parts of the programme presented important occasions to meet people and gain an understanding of the kinds of conversations network members have in the more informal, non-curated moments of the dense programmes. I took notes in situations whenever it was suitable to have a notebook at hand, otherwise I took pictures and created voice memos. At some point, I would join a well-attended session for practical reasons, sitting in the back of the audience to take notes about a relevant conversation I had with someone during the break. In other occasions, I left the conference premises to sit in my accommodation and jot down ideas before I would return for an evening performance or party, an appreciated highlight at each meeting. A fieldnote could look like this:

> Note 2 TEH meets Canada, May 26th, 2022
>
> City Hall in Prague. Arriving and registering as one of the first people on site at 9.20 am. Meeting architects from Canada, learned about the DiY Spaces project in Toronto and their ambitions to learn from TEH. At some point the managing director of TEH arrives, she says hi to us and excuses herself to prepare her speech and we continue talking while heading to the morning coffee and snacks.
>
> We talk more about why they are interested in TEH, and it's the "knowledge about repurposing buildings" and the support those initiatives get from local, regional, national and EU funds. "We need to take these examples to Canada and tell them "look what they do", one of the architects tells me, and I am reminded of the TEH origin story, where Brussels' city and cultural administration "needed to see how they do it in Copenhagen". Today, ideas and practices are to travel across the Atlantic.
>
> I sense that TEH is in a new phase of expansion to different continents and am curious about what I will hear throughout the day. New associate members will introduce their projects in Lebanon, Maroc, and Canada among others. Associates pay a fee and don't have to be accepted through the board. How and to what extent TEH can expand is the theme of the 'strategic development' session on Friday morning that I am recommended to join. The official opening programme was delayed and started only at 11.15, leaving plenty of time to talk.

Corresponding to the average age and being a white European, like most attendees, it was not difficult for me to blend into the crowd. Being familiar with most of the coordination office staff and some of the ambassadors, whom I had interviewed online two years prior to the first on-site event, and being

acquainted with previous meeting protocols, I could tell anecdotes and take part in conversations, acting like a long-time member in the moment. Further, as a paying participant (bi-annual meeting participation is ticketed), I could participate in both the programme and the conversations around it. These more informal conversations concerned the difficulties of navigating a tight event schedule, reflections and recommendations on what to attend, or perceptions of the artistic programme accompanying the conference. Naturally, in situations where members addressed challenges at their home cultural centre, I could not add much, but I could relate these challenges to my experience as a volunteer and co-organiser in independent cultural projects and activism.

Documents and archival data

The richest data collection source I used for understanding infrastructuring is the archived data, i.e., the meeting reports from TEH (Appendix 1). Commonly occurring in STS-inspired infrastructure ethnographies (cf. Star, 1999; Star & Ruhleder, 1996; Karasti & Blomberg, 2018), meeting reports and other kinds of archived data are also frequently used in case study research designs (Tight, 2017; Yin, 2018). Compared to the actively produced interviews and fieldnotes, the archival data were produced without my presence. Meeting reports are, however, purposefully produced materials and should be treated as such. In line with the relational theoretical framework or infrastructuring, I make use of a relational approach to document analysis (Prior, 2009), which understands documents as performative of and for organisations (Hall et al., 2014; Prior, 2009). According to Hall et al. (2024), documents make (ongoing) organisation visible by producing material artefacts (reports) of meetings held, which contain ideas and protocols of events, enabling us to understand not only that organising happened, but also what (events, concerns, ideas) it was that organised the doings and sayings of organisational members at different points in time, as well as their joint decision-making and negotiations of conflictual relations. Overall, documents, such as the meeting reports of TEH, provide a material 'proof' of the forty years of TEH's existence. In the REHAB case, mostly policy documents and project documentation allowed me to understand artists' involvements in different stages of urban planning and re-development in Malmö.

In a relational approach to document analysis, Lindsay Prior (2009: 172) puts forward that it is "relationships between things and their contexts that determine the shapes and appearances of the elements. Consequently, what it needed for work with documentation is a focus on relations rather than on

things in isolation." A TEH meeting report contains important contextual knowledge. It presents the hosting centre and its current challenges, and outlines important relationships at the local level, but also transnational (funding) relationships. With changing contexts over its forty years of existence, TEH meeting reports must be understood as primarily and initially internal documents for circulation among members. With time and growth in the number of members, but also with increasing execution of projects based on EU funding (Figure 1), the protocols have become more visual, less personal in tone and more professional, addressing the outside of the network (Image 6).

Image 6 TEH Meeting Report covers from 1983, 1993, 2003, 2009, 2013, 2022

Attending to the meeting reports more closely, there have been significant changes since 1983: from two or three typewritten pages, sometimes very personal documents in black and white, to strongly visualised, colour brochures supported by photographs and including up to 30 pages. The reports further have functions as internal knowledge infrastructure, as organisational memory, and increasingly also as representational material for the outside worlds and relevant stakeholders. In terms of language, a more professional tone emerges over time: Early reports (until the 1990s) include wordy transcripts, personal addresses, and calls for political action targeting specific members of the EU parliament, etc. (TEH18, 1988; TEH21, 1989; TEH30, 1992). The early, internal meeting reports contain individuals' emotions, such as frustration about failed efforts. In 1986, for example, a TEH representative addresses the members mentioning unsuccessful advocacy efforts and insufficient attempts to raise funds, and the report states: "the official answer from the European commissioner of Culture [name] is quite clear: nothing for 86 + very little hope for 87 + possibilities for 88! In short, political pressure must be intensified…" (TEH12, 1986) Communicating emotional states through protocols supports the experience of familiarity and closeness, as early network members reported in interviews.

Those early internal reports suggest transparent organising, as they lay open relationships, failed negotiations, or opportunities not yet realised. With TEH's increasing public outreach and influence on stages of policy-making, the personal language is slowly replaced by what some would call a 'success bias', which often seeps through in self-congratulatory or celebratory statements, such as stating that a conference "was all in all a huge success" (TEH72, 2011), or the "best attended events [so far]" (TEH72, 2011; TEH74, 2012; TEH93, 2022). While these statements are certainly necessary to honour the amount of (voluntary) work going into the meeting planning, they also meet the requirements of external stakeholders, such as sponsors and policy-makers. Initially being community-internal means for communication and exchange, reports increasingly serve as proof of outstanding network activities and performance.

Meeting reports present a rich source of information for understanding the creation and maintenance of conditions for independent cultural production in the long term. Meeting reports and other documentation allow us to take the past into consideration. TEH meetings are at the core of organising and doing the network (Hall et al., 2024) and are strategically hosted by members to address local issues during the first decades of TEH. Those issues are often related to the contestation of space, such as risks of displacement, economic difficulties, renovation needs, or other threads from the outside, against which the network members jointly organise, thereby meeting local political actors and neighbouring organisations. Hence, each meeting (as presented in Paper II) functions as an advocacy platform in which the hosting member and its local struggles are at the centre of all organising. The meeting reports can be read as a materialisation of that meeting (and its conditions), and the selected conversations, decisions, and knowledge shared that are considered representative and worth capturing for the future. TEH meeting reports contain time and place, the motivations for the choice of a meeting location, the situational context, and a programming in response to the perceived situation at the time. Paying attention to this information provides rich insights into the contexts in and through which the continuous organising of TEH takes place.

Supplementary visual data and opportunities for site visits

I went to see TEH member centres wherever there was an opportunity. My methodological focus in the study of TEH was on the networked relations constituting the network, and not necessarily the member centres. But as sites of bi-annual meetings, the member centres play an important role, and I was able to visit four of them:

> Studio ALTA, Prague, Czechia; Halle 14, Leipzig, Germany; Moritzbastei, Leipzig, Germany, La Station Gare de Mines, Paris, France; Maltfabrikken, Ebeltoft, Denmark (online)

Here, my participatory observations were made; I gathered visual material and photographs and explored the centres' surroundings. In 2021, there was a hybrid meeting held in Denmark, and the hosts ambitiously moved around with cameras to let the digital audience (that I was a part of) experience the premises. In this way, I could see several spaces from the inside and outside, including a kitchen, a conference room, a terrace and a brewery in a basement.

The members Mejeriet, Inkonst, Röda Sten, Konstepidemin, and Ifö Center and Not Quite are TEH members in Sweden, and I was able to visit all of them, attending to cultural events, conferences, or parties. Further, there are several centres at which I had the serendipitous opportunity to be around during a PhD mobility in Poland and conference and private travel in Europe. If possible, I would visit an exhibition or concert, and if the centres were closed, I took walks to explore the premises and got an idea of the building and its context, taking some photographs and collecting flyers if possible.

> Brunnenpassage, Vienna, Austria; Institute for X, Aarhus, Denmark; Kulturfabrik, Lodz, Poland; REX, Belgrade, Serbia; Magacin, Belgrade, Serbia

These visits, although only to the premises at times, give me an impression of the breadth of TEH members located in urban and but also rural areas, and in northern, central, southern and eastern European countries.

Photographs taken during fieldwork have several functions: I use them as part of my jottings in the field, later 'completing' my fieldnotes, when I am no longer in the field. Photographs can also communicate impressions of the fieldwork to the reader, evoking what being there might have been like. Moreover, photographs as supplementary material may have their own rather unpredictable effects in the research process (cf. Rose, 2007). As an example, the mistery around the TEH embroidery (Image 5) has been a side note in many conversation I had with CO staff. While the creator remains unknown, it seems apprechiated and has been placed into a frame.

4.3 Data analysis

This thesis is comprised of four papers, in which I combine different analytical approaches, focussing on stories and the relations between people, places, ideas and policy, inspired by the infrastructure heuristic and an analytical process best described as abductive. I entered this research using a lens of social processes, as always also spatial and political (Massey, 2005), and I understand infrastructuring as a spatial and infrastructural process (Bain & Podmore, 2023). Thus, agreeing with critiques of purely inductive approaches to analysis and possibly theory building, I resonate with analytical abduction (Atkinson, 2015; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), which considers "socially cultivated and cultivatable ways of seeing" a precondition (2012: 172). Timmermans and Tavory (ibid.) continue, writing that "cultured knowledge provides a way to conceive of abduction as socially located, positional knowledge that can be deepened and marshalled for theory construction". My way of seeing things, cultivated by the critical view described above, is further sensitised to the inequalities in the cultural sector and their reproductions through the ways arts and culture are necessarily organised in and though urban development politics.

Analysis in abductive processes begins already at the time of data collection and Paul Atkinson (2015) understands data collection and analysis as closely interwoven. Jens Rennstam and David Wästerfors (2018) locate the analytical starting point in the moment when one is in intense dialogue with the empirical material, which could be – even if not spelled out by the authors – upon entering the field. Thus, the dialogical production of data such as interviews or fieldnotes is always already analytical and informed by conceptual and everyday knowledge (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) as well as personal intuition and creativity (Atkinson, 2015). In other words, an abductive approach does not simplistically suggest that new theory is derived through induction or deduction alone, but necessarily through both. In the constructivist approach, theory "affects all parts of the research" and is not separated in the analysis (Mik-Meyer, 2021: 12). What does that mean for this analysis? How did infrastructure specifically inform the process?

Transcribing, according to Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann (2015: 63), is a productive process and thus also both a practical and analytical step in the Atkinson-inspired heuristic, which I carried out manually to engage in an intensive dialogue with the data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Immediately written reflections and transcriptions allowed me to rethink my own role in data production and could inform the next turn of interview production

practically as well as increase case background and context knowledge. Atkinson (2015) means that step-by-step instructions for qualitative analysis fail to do justice to the complexity of everyday life and emphasises the need for individual creativity and imagination to explore the data, considering "our detailed knowledge of the local, of the field" (2015: 67). The following section gives insights into my data handling, analytical steps and decisions, as an example of an abductive process.

The archive contained 1050 pages of meeting reports and 323 pages of annual reports. I downloaded the entire archive and familiarised myself with qualitative analysis software that would support organising and exploring the large amount of data. In a phase of early open coding (n=236), I focussed on network activities, identified larger projects, differentiated internal and external communication and funding. Exploring the relations between people, I created descriptive codes such as 'family friendship feel' to capture images of small gatherings around a kitchen table, or personal presents given to someone leaving office, or someone calling the funeral of a TEH founder a "large family gathering", and I wrote memos about aspects I found noteworthy. In later coding stages, particularly for Paper II, when infrastructuring had been introduced as an official analytical tool, it would, as a sensitizing concept, point to the temporality and time-related patterns, repetitions, long-term plans, and future oriented practices and relations.

This led to understanding the biannual TEH meetings not only as a fieldwork opportunity, but as an important unit of analysis, as they bundle many relational elements of the infrastructuring of TEH as a continuation. My analysis of the interview and report data, as I moved back and forth between it and theory, suggested that the TEH meetings should be understood as 'events', and instead of dismissing this as incidental, my co-author and I drew on additional concepts from critical event studies and urban studies. We used the terms 'eventfulness' and 'eventification' to refine the analysis of TEH's specific mechanisms of infrastructuring the network organisation internally (Paper II). To understand the interrelated mechanisms of infrastructuring and their temporal implications, we have applied analytic sketching to iteratively make sense of the data.

4.4 Reflections on fieldwork challenges and limitations of data

Fieldwork is generally a messy process that offers many opportunities to learn about the cases and doing fieldwork as such. Under the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was challenged to be extra flexible, as fieldwork in the cultural and creative sector required. The experiences in both cases varied, and in the REHAB case, geographical proximity benefitted the relations with the people I interviewed. Colleagues would introduce me to people and being present in the same space generated a sense of familiarity, comfort, and readiness to be interviewed. Having had a successful walking interview, I could ask where participants would prefer to be interviewed, and to my surprise, most people found the REHAB premises most suitable, which meant I became a regular visitor to the space, even though the public programme was on hold. This allowed me to see how REHAB residents made use of the joint event spaces, dividing it up, using walls for displays or co-work (Image 2).

Building relations at the TEH CO or at the bi-annual events were more difficult. In this case, most interviews were conducted online and thus arranged via email contact and not personal encounters on site. Reaching my interviewees, current and former members of the coordination office, was very different. Former members accepted requests quickly and eagerly agreed to be interviewed. Finding interview times with current staff at the CO was challenging and required several attempts, as their already high workload had intensified owing to COVID-19. Given the circumstances, interview times had to be postponed due to spontaneous emergency meetings with network members or policy officials. Because they were calculating concerning their time, I was quite straight forwardly asked ‘what it is that I want from them’ (fieldnotes, September 2020). The staff at the time had professional backgrounds in cultural management, communication and work in the non-profit sector; they were pragmatic and skilled project managers. My expressed interest in ‘how things work’ and ‘what their relationships with others’ looked like were difficult to communicate at an early stage, but once I had access, I could strengthen my relationships with a handful of people at the CO and explore TEH from the inside. However, the temporary nature of short-term contracts and projects in the sector was strongly felt and impacted my relations and, thus, access to TEH’s insides. Almost the whole CO team changed during the period of my research, and with the staff turnover, trusted relationships disappeared, and with them access to a network-internal strategic session at the second bi-annual meeting, a potentially important data gathering opportunity.

Having access to the archived data complemented the limited opportunities for interactive fieldwork. Being a research tool myself, data produced through direct social interaction depended on my own social and emotional capacities, which varied. Access to the archive allowed me to adjust my forms of interaction with the case. Furthermore, accessing the archived knowledge provided an informational advantage. While most CO employees knew about the archive, they would not necessarily know what could be found in it, as the archive has only been of interest when preparing for a special occasion, such as an anniversary. In conversations throughout the fieldwork process and especially at the bi-annual meetings, I could 'participate' and demonstrate belonging to the group to some extent, by sharing an anecdote or story I had read in the archive, which was met with interest and questions, and kept the conversation going.

Case studies are limited by their contextual nature. Thinking about TEH for a long time now allows me to provide a reading of its complex and ever-changing infrastructure of relations, people, places and ideas, aware that every TEH member has a different story to tell. Members have unique geographical and hence political and economic circumstances, in relation to which they organise themselves and their cultural centre, and it is also based on this unique context that they make sense of TEH (Atkinson, 2015). After one pilot interview with a member centre, I decided to focus on the bi-annual meetings as the joint activities of network member organisations and the CO, rather than having to make informed choices about which members to interview and which to exclude, thereby intentionally excluding other layers of complexity, leaving them to explore another time.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Conducting this research project in Sweden, I am formally guided by national norms, values and regulations stated in the ethical review act (Swedish Research Council, 2017), and I assessed any potential ethics issues in accordance with this act. An official review by the Swedish ethics review board is necessary if sensitive personal data (race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, sexual orientation, sex life, health, genetic information, and biometric data) are to be collected and analysed. This study considers individuals to be part of organisations, as actors who infrastructure collectively, and sensitive personal data was not collected. However, work in the cultural sector, and particularly in the independent

cultural sector, is characterised by high levels of precariousness. This structural issue is widely known in research in this field (cf. Bain, 2005, Bain & McLean, 2013). Further, this research addresses precarity as a structural problem, without disclaiming individual interviewees' standpoints, neither are these discussions systematically excluded. In the unexpected yet not unlikely case that interviewees do touch upon health-related aspects in the openness of semi-structured interviews, I handled this with great precaution. Such passages were neither transcribed nor otherwise developed in the research. Precarity and stress appear and are underlined serious yet commonplace phenomenon.

As a standard procedure, I collected informed consent before all interviews were conducted, recorded, and manually transcribed. A consent form (Appendix 4) was given to the research participants, and time for questions around the research project was allocated prior to and after the interview. Participants were given the opportunity to view the transcript and, if necessary, to withdraw their participation or specific statements at any time. No participant asked to withdraw or delete passages. Having considered different options, I finally decided to disclose the organisations' names, as this seems common and relevant to case studies in geography, though I did not disclose the names of interviewed individuals. This allows interested readers to find information about the organisations, but also to potentially identify individuals by searching the organisations' websites. Yet, in both cases, I witnessed high turnover. Furthermore, both organisations are societal actors with publicly engaged day-to-day activities, and individuals belonging to these organisations are likely to appear in newspapers, social media or other outlets.

5 Summarising the four papers

This thesis explores the phenomenon of independent cultural production through four different papers, summarised in this chapter. Following the original publications' respective abstracts, a summary and first reflections will be provided to create a basis for the consecutive discussion in Chapter 6. The section headings introducing the papers mirror the main concept or contribution of each paper. All papers provide an answer to the main research question, presenting a mode of independent cultural actors' infrastructuring practices in shifting urban and political landscapes.

Paper I introduces the concept of *service-entanglements*, which refers to a mode of organising cultural production spaces at the neighbourhood level in the Swedish City of Malmö. The paper was published as a chapter in Routledge's Creative and Cultural Industries series, in an anthology entitled *Creative work – conditions, contexts and practices*. It illustrates how cultural producers productively use unequal relations in their context and enable their own workspace by continuously negotiating the basis of their collaboration with non-arts actors at the local level.

Paper II is a co-authored research paper published in the peer-reviewed journal Cultural Trends. Leaving the local level, the paper explores the internal workings of Trans Europe Halles, an internationally known network of independent cultural centres. It adds to our understanding of infrastructuring by opening the blackbox of network organising activities and identifying the laboursome additional work of cultural producers. It shows that this work infrastructures *experiences of togetherness* and temporally concatenates practices that constitute network organising and the possibility to advocate.

Paper III is dedicated to policy-making projects as infrastructuring and asks about the leverage of cultural actors in EU-level policy-making. Through discourse analysis, it examines proposals made in an EU-funded, network-organised cultural policy experiment, indicating a gap of communication and the insufficient acknowledgement of the often-invisible labour of network actors that sustain a soft mechanism in EU cultural governance.

Paper IV addresses the third research question: *What insights does infrastructuring, as an analytical framework, provide for the study of independent cultural production and cultural policy more broadly?* It targets the journal *DIY, Culture and Society*, offering possibilities to study especially DIY, alternative or independent cultural production through infrastructuring. Combining conceptual frameworks from urban cultural studies with science and technology studies, it proposes embedding and foregrounding to understand cultural production as a spatial and infrastructural phenomenon using examples from the TEH archive.

5.1 Paper I: Service-entanglements

Nehl, Marthe. 2024. "Creative Work and Working Space." In Creative Work, by Erika Andersson Cederholm, Katja Lindqvist, Ida De Wit Sandström, and Philip Warkander, 1st ed., 62–77. London: Routledge.

Abstract

This chapter contributes to the socio-political debate on the roles, functions and conditions of the arts and of artists in the development of urban space. It describes the situation of a relatively young neighbourhood cultural space, and cooperation between art and cultural workers and a municipal housing company in the city of Malmö in southern Sweden. The initiative of the artists and cultural workers is rooted in the local shortage of studio space and represents a response to unfruitful conversations between the city, developers, and cultural workers. Using the conceptual lens of relational space, this chapter shows how actors—informed by local cultural strategies and their own very different needs and ideas—continuously negotiate the conditions of cooperation. The chapter identifies several relationships taking the form of neighbourhood-level service exchanges, stabilising the space over the long term. Since spatial politics are closely linked to conditions of art and cultural work, the case presents a possibility to conceptualise and organise differently.

(How) Can cultural production be anchored in a fast-changing city? This phenomenon-inspired case study of a collaboration around a collective arts and cultural space explores the relationships between arts and non-arts actors at the local level of a residential neighbourhood in the city of Malmö. The context, the city of Malmö, provides an example of a growing post-industrial city whose

municipality is challenged (and failing) to provide and maintain sufficient cultural production spaces. Since the 1980s, available post-industrial sites have given rise to numerous studio associations, through which independent cultural actors are, and were, organised. These very spaces are under pressure, as are the associations still present in current redevelopment of the area, where affordable spaces are diminishing and the remaining are scarce and contested. Against this background, the chapter presents a rapprochement between artists and cultural workers and the municipal housing company [Malmö komunala bolag, MKB], forming an unusual collaboration that is based on negotiating the conditions and underlaying relations to secure creative working space in the long term, in the adjacent residential area.

The interview-based methodology and analysis along the lines of relational space (Massey, 2005) provide an in-depth account of the different actors' motivations and concerns as regards co-organising a space that is entangled with the mutual provision of services. On the one hand, there are artists and cultural workers with a need for stable, affordable studio space in decent conditions and the ability to build a social network and safety net inside, but also outside the studio association. The municipal housing company, on the other hand, aims to provide for its customers (the residents) an experience of living in an attractive and secure neighbourhood, and is obliged to achieve social sustainability goals (Gustafsson, 2021). For the housing company, the collaboration with artists provides a resource for inclusive development and community activity, whereas the artists and cultural workers are granted a reduced rent in return for an exchange of services, negotiated once a year. Underlaying the concept of the collaboration, with the official name REHAB Kultur, are principles of the local cultural policy paper (Kulturstrategi 2014-2020), which has been developed with significant contributions from the artists and cultural actors involved in the collaboration today. The strategy, presenting the overall vision of arts and culture as tools for sustainable urban development, suggests improving the conditions for artistic production in the city, and encourages fostering collaborations between arts and non-arts actors. These two aspects form the bottom line of REHAB Kultur (est. 2017).

The chapter shows that, through acknowledgement of the actors' very different positions of power, knowledge and skills, a relational space is created, which is constituted through these mutual, yet unequal exchanges and their ongoing negotiations. The term I suggest in the chapter to describe these relations as interdependencies and a means to safeguard long-term working space for artists and cultural workers is service-entanglements. In comparison to or as a continuation of service exchanges, service-entanglements point to evolving

relationships that likely reduce the risk of replacing a party: the cultural workers or partner MKB. Through, for example, the material and social investments made, the perceived stability increases, and the artists and cultural workers feel relatively safe(r) in their space. The chapter shows how the careful considerations of interdependencies of mutual, yet unequal, dependencies between actors open doors to constitute a relational space that does not neglect but builds upon the challenging lives of cultural workers by reducing the aspect of spatial precarity.

5.2 Paper II: Infrastructuring togetherness

Nehl, Marthe and Friederike Landau-Donnelly. 2025. "Infrastructuring togetherness: Exploring eventification of community and advocacy in a European network of cultural centres" Cultural Trends.

Abstract

Despite the numerous cultural networks within and outside of European contexts of culture-led urban development as well as transnational cultural policy-making, in-depth analyses of such networks remain scarce. In light of this, the article introduces the network Trans Europe Halles (TEH, est. 1983) as an empirical case study that illustrates cultural grassroots organising across its 165+ members throughout Europe. TEH works both inward-oriented towards the building of a community, and outward-oriented via practices of network expansion, eventification and collaborative policy-making efforts. Sensitised through the different temporalities of "project time" and "infrastructure time", as well as conceptual engagements with critical event studies, we identify and temporarily disentangle the intertwined practices of (1) infrastructuring a community and (2) infrastructuring cultural advocacy. Understanding the TEH network as a socio-material and continuously evolving, relational infrastructure, our infrastructural analysis offers a theorisation that helps to understand temporal concatenations in their local and contextual specificity.

This second paper offers an empirical analysis of *Trans Europe Halles* (TEH), a European network of independent cultural centres, to explore how cultural grassroots actors have created, maintained, and defended the possibilities of

cultural production beyond local contexts over forty years. The study of cultural networks is interesting here owing to their increasing activity since the 1980s, enabling the self-organisation and advocacy of independent cultural centres, even engaging in policy-making, and yet we know little about their internal workings. Building on the empirical observation that TEH consistently meets twice a year for event-like network meetings, the paper asks *How can TEH's cultural community and advocacy building be understood through the temporarily sensitive framework of infrastructuring?* To answer this question, interviews and archival material have been combined with observational fieldwork at network meetings.

Through an abductive analysis based on analytical use of infrastructure and temporality through the notions of 'project time' and 'infrastructure time' (Karasti et al., 2010), the paper identified *community* and *advocacy* as two facets of infrastructuring in the case of TEH. Analytically, we disentangled how the differently timed network activities, most importantly the bi-annual meetings, create and maintain the networked relations over time by enabling togetherness, a state of being active together (Taylor Aiken, 2017), which nourishes social relations and provides the basis for further work. Nuancing the study with the critical event studies' concept of eventification (Jakob, 2013), the paper traces how bi-annual network meetings increasingly progress in terms of eventfulness (Kern, 2016), evident in how mundane steps in the membership process came to be staged events. It suggests that eventification and togetherness are both not necessary in network organising, but spur commitment to the community and thus safeguard the likelihood of future infrastructuring happening. By tracing the eventification of network meetings, we could trace and make visible aspects of infrastructuring.

By conceptualising the network TEH as a dynamic, socio-material infrastructure, the paper shows how cultural actors shape the conditions of cultural production through practices additional to their everyday organising. Beyond highlighting this often-hidden labour of infrastructuring (such as network organising), the paper illustrates how this work is distributed among actors and spaces and organised around different temporal logics. Moving between short-term project cycles of eventified meeting organisation and longer-term community building effects, the paper offers an account of how infrastructuring, linking project and infrastructure time, sustains the network by fostering commitment. Ultimately, by illustrating this concatenation of temporal practices, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how independent cultural work can persist amid structural precarity and shifting

policy landscapes, linking important debates in cultural infrastructure and cultural production studies.

5.3 Paper III: "Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities"

Nehl, Marthe. "From the bottom to the top? Problem representations in the case of Creative Europe's "Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities" In review at *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*

Abstract

Cultural networks play an important role in cultural governance: facilitating cooperation between local and EU policy actors and shaping policy-making processes. The network-led, Creative Europe-financed project "Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities," (CCSC; 2018-2021) experimented with policy co-creation between civic, cultural and administrative stakeholders, addressing a variously discussed gap between these actors. Asking whether the concerns of cultural actors gain traction in EU-level policy-making, I use discourse analysis of CCSC publications to identify differences in projects stakeholders' problem representations. Underlining the importance of policy co-creation projects as discursive arenas and spaces of encounter, the cultural actors' local perspective problematises the responsibility and participation of citizens as contextual and ultimately structural questions. The essential work of local cultural actors in networks is not addressed and networks themselves recede in CCSC discussions. The paper adds to calls to more explicitly recognise and support the infrastructural labour enabling soft governance in the future.

This paper set out to explore how cultural actors participate in EU-level policy-making through cultural networks, empirically focusing on the Creative Europe-funded project Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities (CCSC, 2018–2021). Building on scholarship on the role of cultural actors in policy-making (Woddis, 2014; Landau, 2019) and the idea that policy itself becomes infrastructural when it materialises cultural actors' concerns into courses of action (Ahearne, 2009), the paper asks to what extent bottom-up concerns gain traction in and through collaborative frameworks such as CCSC. The analysis takes seriously the intermediary and dual role of cultural networks, using the

example of Trans Europe Halles (TEH) as a representative and advocate of cultural actors, but also a facilitator of soft governance dynamics in the European context. The paper further sheds light on the absence of discussions around the needs of cultural networks, despite their crucial role in EU cultural policy-making (cf. Scioldo, 2024b).

Methodologically, the paper employs Carol Bacchi's (2009) "What's the problem represented to be?" framework, a critical discourse analysis approach, to trace how different project stakeholders frame their challenges, materialised in policy documents and project outputs. It shows how problematisations differ across governance levels: EU-level actors highlight a "democratic deficit" to be addressed through greater citizen participation, while local cultural centres emphasise systemic issues such as insufficient funding, lack of recognition, and unequal distributions of responsibility. From the cultural actors' perspective, these can be framed as infrastructural problems: material and relational conditions that risk being normalised or overlooked in policy discourse, including the labour of mediation, the costs of participation, and the maintenance of spaces and networks that policy-making processes (and soft governance in a broader sense) depend upon.

By introducing the concept of *infrastructuring* to policy-making, the paper shows how CCSC policy processes are oriented around the spaces and concerns of cultural actors in their own contexts (relating to administrations). But what lasts once the project is over remains unclear. The paper further sheds light on the absence of funding security and sufficient recognition for cultural work, that involves maintaining spaces, relationships, and discourses on which policy-making processes rely. This includes not only physical infrastructure but also the social and discursive infrastructure necessary for collaborative policy-making. The observed absence of problematising the needs of a cultural network as a facilitator reifies the often-invisible character of infrastructural labour such as facilitation. The paper cautions about the potential consequences for the working of soft governance mechanisms when policy fails to account for them.

5.4 Paper IV: Infrastructuring as embedding and foregrounding

Nehl, Marthe. "Infrastructuring independent cultural production" Submitted to DIY, Culture and Society

Abstract

Alternative, independent, self-organised and DIY forms of cultural production make up a part of the cultural ecosystems in cities. Urban scholars across sociology, geography and cultural policy studies have expressed a lack of attention paid to independent actors at these alternative scenes, which risks overlooking not only the often-challenging working conditions, but also their overall role and agency in the social life of cities. In contrast to the sprawling literature on cultural life as ecosystems, this paper critically engages with the conceptual term of infrastructure and aims to unpack its capacities for the study of independent cultural production. Bringing together critical cultural geography with science and technology studies, this paper suggests that we understand independent cultural production through the lens of the infrastructure related processes of (1) embedding and (2) foregrounding. Ultimately, this framework explores the analytical potential of infrastructuring in place-based, independent cultural production. The paper concludes by suggesting that infrastructure questions and complements ecological approaches with a focus on the political, agential dimensions of independent cultural production.

The concepts of infrastructure and ecology both emphasise the interconnected nature of the people, objects, spaces, ideas, and politics that shape DIY and independent art worlds. Recognising the similarities, differences, and limitations of cultural infrastructure and cultural ecology, this paper introduces a process- and practice-oriented understanding of infrastructuring that emphasises people's continuous work. This approach engages with the politics of interrelationships that cultural ecology overlooks, and that a purely object-focused view of infrastructure fails to capture, yet these dynamics ultimately shape independent cultural production. While ecology highlights how actors interact, mutually benefit and depend on one another, infrastructuring centres cultural actors and asks how they navigate relations of power and restructure interdependencies, as well as under what conditions independent cultural production takes place. Infrastructuring extends the inquiry of

interdependencies by considering the distribution of responsibilities, addressing the labour of maintaining infrastructure and embedding itself within place-based DIY cultural production.

This conceptually oriented paper brings together an urban geographical perspective with STS scholarship and combines Star and Ruhleder's (1996) infrastructure dimensions, embeddedness and transparency, with Bain and Landau's (2019b) five embeddedness dynamics: political, organisational, social, ephemeral, and spatial. This approach examines how place-based independent cultural production, understood as infrastructural, is shaped by and shapes its spatial contexts through embedding. Building on infrastructural inversion, the second step emphasises foregrounding (and backgrounding), making the often-hidden resources and relationships in cultural production cycles visible, which is challenging in practice (Graham & Thrift, 2007). The exposure of hidden relations can be emancipatory in some contexts and dangerous in others. As such, backgrounding, the other end of a politics of mobilising (in)visibility (Larkin, 2013) emphasises the need for subtle support if the political context becomes a threat. Together, the processes of embedding and foregrounding nuance what infrastructuring entails as enabling (rather than simply assessing) place-based, independent cultural production. While the different processes of embedding make infrastructuring more comprehensive, their foregrounding provides knowledge and inspiration concerning how the organisation of independent cultural production and suitable policy could look alternatively.

With these suggestions, the paper ultimately encourages further discussion, as independent cultural production unfolds in a quickly shifting political landscape, with rising liberal, conservative, and right-wing political argumentation posing a threat to the freedom of arts and culture in society. Being alternative and independent calls for evolving relationships between people, places, and politics, which are best examined using process-oriented approaches. Viewing place-based independent cultural production through the lens of infrastructuring, with its focus on embedding and foregrounding, proposes an alternative approach to cultural production that should be further explored and expanded within DIY scholarship and beyond.

6 Infrastructuring in(ter)dependent cultural production

The four papers in this dissertation take different perspectives on the practices and processes of facilitating independent cultural production, which I frame as *infrastructuring independent cultural production*. The aim of this discussion chapter is to bring these papers into conversation, find similarities and differences, showing how they collectively contribute to understanding how cultural actors create, maintain, and defend the possibilities of their work within shifting political and urban contexts. The first part of the chapter returns to the three research questions and the related findings across the four papers, interpreting these findings conceptually and theoretically, focusing on the spatial and temporal implications of infrastructuring. Further, I position the contributions of the thesis within broader academic debates across cultural production studies, cultural policy, and infrastructure studies, illustrating how the papers add to ongoing discourses in dispersed yet thematically overlapping fields. In formulating my research questions, I did not explicitly ask *why* independent cultural actors create, maintain and defend their conditions of possibility. The motivation for the study was my experiential knowledge that they *do* things, they infrastructure because they *have to*. Jointly, independent cultural actors work against the odds they are facing: limited financial, personal, temporal and spatial resources, on the one hand, and increasing societal expectations, on the other.

6.1 Revisiting the research questions

Enabling possibilities of independent cultural production

The first research question asks *how independent cultural actors create, maintain, and defend the possibilities of cultural production within shifting*

urban and political landscapes. Being broad in scope, the question aimed at understanding what hides behind the attributions of the sector's 'resilience', while acknowledging a prevailing precarity. The infrastructural approach lends itself to this inquiry, as it, rather than looking at systems, starts with actor groups and their needs and practices, to discover what counts as infrastructure in relation to these actors (cf. Volmar, 2023). From the outset, my interest was in collective, rather than individual people's strategies. Even though the myth of the individual artist genius lives on (Abbing, 2023), in their everyday working environments, as theoretical overviews have shown, all cultural producers have relationships with supportive others (cf. Kirchberg & Zembylas, 2024; Strandvad, Hoogen, Reyes, 2025). Who these others are depends on contexts and personal social networks (Alacovska, 2018), but also on local policy frameworks (Paper I, II) and urban development processes.

As an empirical basis for the study, I identified two very different independent cultural actor groups: the Europe-wide network of independent cultural centres, Trans Europe Halles, and the neighbourhood cultural working space REHAB Kultur. Infrastructural analysis focusses on seemingly mundane activities to discover how they facilitate the phenomena under study. Building on the urban cultural studies perspective of cultural infrastructure as spatial, Paper I explored the relational spatial constitution between a cultural workers association and a housing company in enabling a neighbourhood cultural workspace.

With REHAB (Paper I), the first study engaged with the question of the role of space in cultural work and builds upon numerous studies highlighting space as a factor potentially reducing cultural workers' precarity (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Pasquinelli & Sjöholm, 2015; Puletti et al., 2024; Razzoli et al., 2020). The interviews not only supported the causal relation – spatial security reducing experienced precarity – but also showed how a sense of spatial security allowed establishment of a more socially supportive work environment (Paper I). While studies have shown how time-consuming writing applications is in the life of an artist (Abbing, 2002), the time and effort required to secure a workspace have been studied, if at all, in a separate analysis, according to Puletti et al. (2024: 14). A key aim of the thesis was therefore to recognise and integrate the struggles over space into the infrastructuring of cultural production, conditioning the everyday life of many, and cultural infrastructure in cities at large. Puletti et al. (2024: 12) furthermore explain:

> "Indeed, the sustainability of independent cultural production centres is first and foremost the sustainability of the people who work there, and the fact that the needs of the spaces prevail over those of the people is a significant problem to be solved because, without the creative energies of people, those spaces become empty again, losing their cultural meaning and function within the community."

The authors stress the interdependency of people and places, illustrating why people are so important to sustaining spaces as a foundation for cultural infrastructure (Bain & Podmore, 2023). Those "creative energies of people" (Puletti et al., 2024: 12) cover not only cultural production, but also the negotiations around it to safeguard its spatial foundation. The quote furthermore underlines how fragile their embeddedness in communities or neighbourhoods usually is. Service-entanglements (Paper I) suggest the potential to stabilise this relationship with benefits on both ends, with the cultural workers' livelihood and the neighbourhood stakeholders in mind.

In addition to urban social movements and activist approaches to art spaces in cities (NION, 2010; Valli, 2015), the thesis adds to work of more pragmatic approaches to access to space and presented service-entanglements as a form of relationship between cultural and non-cultural actors, which is aware of and yet trying to work through unequal positions to find a locally acceptable solution. Adding to Borén and Young's (2017) overview of mundane forms of dissonance, it can be understood as a "require[d] revision to how planning systems operate to open up new spaces and to encourage interaction between policy-makers, planners and the creative sectors" (Borén & Young, 2017: 26).

Looking at the network organisation TEH, Paper II has unpacked the multiple and evolving function of the bi-annual meetings, another seemingly mundane feature, taking place since the network's founding in 1983. Through the analysis of archived meeting protocols, interviews and participant observations, Paper II presents both stable and changing meeting functions related to the community and advocacy capacity of the network, specifically also the safeguarding of cultural centres and cultural production possibilities.

While the regularity of meetings as a rhythm and pulse has always contributed to the making and maintenance of a supportive community of independent cultural centres in Europe (infrastructuring community), the increasing eventification (Jakob, 2013) not only has the function of creating greater attention (advocacy capacity), both in the local setting of the hosting cultural centre and internationally, but it also intensified the experience of members' togetherness (Taylor Aiken, 2017), with the overall effect of safeguarding

people's commitment to the future of the network, visible through members' references to the network as family and friends. Whether at the local or international scale, "building, supporting and reproducing these networks means continuous work — without the enthusiasm and time investment of thousands of actors, most networks simply would not exist" (van Heur, 2010: 117).

Much of the work the papers captured as infrastructuring builds on relationships that fill a perceived gap between the realities of cultural workers and that of administrations and policy-makers (Paper I, Paper II, Paper III). As part of their work as intermediators, independent cultural actors provide the physical spaces for the encounters and exchanges of actors who otherwise would not meet. I will expand on this in the next section.

The role(s) of policy-making

Among the different infrastructuring practices considered across the papers, policy-making had surprisingly manifold functions in cultural infrastructuring processes. Cultural policy formed (a) an *object of critique*, (b) a *context and testbed for new actor constellations*, and functioned as (c) an *infrastructuring device*. Firstly, perceived insufficiencies or failures of cultural policy provision in different contexts led to actors creating something different. At the local level in the case of Malmö, interviewees perceived that political ambitions to integrate cultural workspace availability with post-industrial renewal schemes failed, and they decided to act and organise on their own (Paper I). In the case of TEH, a network founding member saw the need to ally with cultural centres in more progressive national cultural policy contexts to create leverage for policy change. Secondly, policy-making has provided opportunities and contexts in which cultural actors collaborated with local cultural political actors, administrative bodies and EU-level decision-makers to explore new spaces and constellations of actors, typical of new forms of governing culture (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). Collaborative policy-making as testbeds "[…] initially exist in an institutional void: there are no pre-given rules that determine who is responsible, who has authority over whom, what sort of accountability is to be expected" (ibid.: 9). In the two cases, REHAB and TEH, the cultural actors' engagement in policy-making provided opportunities to bring bottom-up needs to the discussion table and led to their materialisation in policy papers (Paper I, III). Both cases offer examples of cultural and creative locations that provide the physical spaces in which the different policy actors meet and act. The hard cultural infrastructure thus crystallises as

promising sites for infrastructural cultural policy, while demonstrating its societal function beyond that of cultural production. Lastly, and because of these new spaces and constellations, manifestations of cultural policy experimentations among different actors provide hard(er) infrastructuring devices. One example is the local cultural strategy in Malmö, which constitutes the ground for the organisation of REHAB (Paper I). By allocating time and energy to policy-making processes, cultural actors invested in the possibility of some cultural production safety in the future. Regarding the case of TEH, Scioldo (2024a, 2024b) illustrated how EU policy programmes shape and have been shaped by the activity of established networks, such as TEH, described as soft policy tools (Paper III).

In many cases, and the thesis reaffirms this, creating conditions of possibility for cultural production requires that cultural actors (self-)organise in collectives at the local scale and beyond, by mobilising scarce personal resources. The TEH example shows how actors create alliances with like-minded actors, collectively organise, often informally at first, but gradually formalise and even institutionalise with time (cf. Campagnari, 2024). The examples further showed that having reached a certain organisationality enabled the actors to create and maintain (strategic) relationships with local or EU public servants and politicians. Summing this first part up, my analysis has shown how infrastructuring as a phenomenon describes independent cultural actors as facilitators of cultural production beyond the here and now or there and then. Through, and on top of, mundane day-to-day organising, they have enabled the work of advocacy, intermediation and policy-making. Importantly, the actors and their organisations under study have aimed for improvements beyond their own needs. This is worth highlighting, given that the overall insufficient policy and funding landscape requires these actors to compete for the same money, and sometimes even the same spaces. The next section unpacks the temporal and spatial implications of this kind of infrastructuring in more detail.

Temporal and spatial implications of infrastructuring

The second question, *what are the temporal and spatial implications of infrastructuring independent cultural production*, aimed to unpack how infrastructuring practices and processes play out in both time and space, as well as how experiences of time and space, respectively, shape infrastructuring practices. The question is theoretically informed by the definition of cultural production as spatial and infrastructural (Bain & Podmore, 2023), and

infrastructure as characterised by outlasting a single event (Star, 1999). The choice of case studies presupposed relationships at the local and transnational level, yet it was unclear, and thus the purpose of the papers was to understand how they are interlinked. The question does not only ask what happens in space and time, but also intends to capture how independent actors (knowingly or unknowingly) create relationships between people, places, ideas and politics that facilitate the ability to work not only in the present, but also in the long(er) term. Building upon the primarily mundane practices identified through RQ I, I will expand on the findings in the following, beginning with the spatial dimension.

Organisations in both empirical cases are born out of concerns about space: REHAB about 'cultural workspace', and TEH's initial meeting in Brussels in 1983 to back up the performance art space Les Halles de Schaerbeek, which was facing demolition. Independent cultural actors self-organise initially to fill a void; they act out of a degree of urgency resulting from urban development politics coupled with short-term leases based on urban renewal causing evictions (Grodach et al., 2018; Kim, 2020). This is not a new finding, but it is worth illustrating how fundamental this practical struggle over space is in these processes. Paper I illustrates, concerning the case of REHAB, that the choice of a residential neighbourhood is carried by the hope of being able to secure a long-term location, as this rules out demolition. The interviewees interpreted the spatial adjustments of the REHAB premises as a materialisation of an investment in *their* future space, in this neighbourhood. The local case study of REHAB showed how being outspoken about utility to third parties (here the municipal housing company) and remuneration for this utility (or lack thereof) could be negotiated to become the foundation of a (rent reduced) long-term spatial agreement (Paper I).

The long-term stability strategy in TEH builds on advocacy and benchmarking: By associating oneself with independent cultural centres across Europe, actors intermediated with local politics, created awareness, legitimacy and understanding, and infrastructuring connections without immediate materiality (Larkin, 2013). From 1983 until today, members of the network have come together in increasingly more eventful meetings (Paper II), or eventified space-time, representing the increasing number of independent cultural centres, in support of the hosting member, just as occurred initially in Brussels. Since the idea of revitalisation through culture has become well established, members now direct their advocacy towards more encompassing long-term needs, such as securing EU budgets, strengthening democratic values and participation, and enabling the sustainable redesign and renovation of cultural centres in

material terms, responding to local needs and the broader requirements of the Green New Deal.

The thesis has further explored *time as* infrastructure (Besedovsky et al., 2019) and conducted a temporally attuned analysis of cultural network infrastructuring (Paper II). Again, the analytical focus on the bi-annual meetings (documentation thereof and participation in) showed that pre-meeting, meeting, and post-meeting activities capacitate infrastructuring through temporary challenging circumstances: creating long-lasting impact in the context of project-based short-term funding. Considering the example of the membership process (crucial to stronger advocacy capacity through network expansion), one can illustrate that its steps, from early contact to acceptance, are embedded in the project-time logic. The case of TEH and in-depth analysis of meeting relations adds to studies of infrastructuring as affective (Berlant, 2016; Larkin, 2013; Smedberg, 2022). Meetings as events, as the TEH data show, are the space-time when the network embodies its values, as temporary spaces of care and support, knowledge exchange, learning and enjoying time with old and new friends, recurring moments of maintenance that safeguard the long-term survival of the network as infrastructure.

Next to the biannual network meetings, as temporary spaces of care, as enactment of community and experience of togetherness, TEH acts as a facilitator of longer, yet still project-timed periods such as policy-making projects, explored in Paper III. A three-year period, although comparatively longer and in project funding logic, remains a temporally distinct period of time. Policy-making, however, addressed above, is also a time-expansive activity. In Paper I, cultural actors explained in interviews how they have been involved in policy-making activities and collaborative practices at the local level in Malmö, not only as providers of expertise or advocates for their own needs, but also as hosts of such collaboration meetings and events. In the REHAB case, much of the knowledge produced in these processes materialised in the local cultural strategy, which in turn contains ideas later realised in the organisation of REHAB. Engagement in policy-making can now be understood as an investment of hope in a more stable future. While REHAB is by no means what the cultural workers envisioned during the planning process (different location, different agreement, different purpose), REHAB is a compromise that is supported by the local cultural strategy. In other words, the cultural actors' engagement in the negotiations of affordable work spaces in the past, materialised in the present, and again, potentially in the long-term when they guide action and infrastructure cultural production (Ahearne, 2009).

"Time", Bain and Landau (2019a: 5) write, "permeates all facets and phases of political life and decision making, yet the relevance of temporality has, thus far, been underexamined in administrative and policy research". Through the four papers, the thesis adds to cultural policy research that proposes we take time seriously because it is infrastructural. It identifies infrastructuring of independent cultural production as a set of practices that actively shape, and are shaped by, both challenging spatial and, for the most part, limiting temporal dimensions. Spatially, the findings show how cultural actors, driven by urban development pressures, variously create (occupy, negotiate) and defend physical spaces, and that networks cultivate trans-local solidarities, extending their presence beyond the local. Temporally, infrastructuring emerges through efforts that integrate long-term goals, needs and functions in day-to-day project-timed cycles and funding constraints. Connecting these findings, cultural infrastructuring is both reactive and actively creates relational processes of building alliances, shaping policy discourses, and investing in spaces and relationships that outlast individual events or funding cycles. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that infrastructuring independent cultural production cannot be understood apart from its spatial struggles and temporal negotiations: It is precisely through the interplay of urgent, short-term demands and long-term investments in places, policies, and relationships that independent cultural actors sustain the possibilities for their practices.

The advantages of infrastructuring as a lens

Lastly, the third question asks: *What insights does infrastructuring, as an analytical framework, provide for the study of cultural production and cultural policy more broadly?* With this question, the thesis invites reflection on both the empirical and conceptual explorations undertaken in the papers, but also points out how infrastructuring relates to evolving concepts such as ecologies and commons.

Infrastructuring presents a *process approach to cultural production*. While others have focussed on the role of the cultural product as shaping and being shaped in the socio-material production process (e.g., Strandvad, 2011, 2012), infrastructuring asks what materials, whose time, and what kind of relations are enabling such production processes in the first place (Paper II). As such, because it is socio-materially informed, infrastructuring attends to the hidden processes and practices, which are methodologically challenging, being by default invisible in the background (Star, 1999). As a relational analytical framework, it challenges the (in)visibility assumption and searches for

attempts to *make visible*, sensitising us to what otherwise goes unnoticed. Infrastructuring raises awareness by naming the processes and practices that cultural actors engage in alongside their production (Cnossen, 2022) and that are generative of cultural production and its possibilities. By doing so, and by taking the perspective of independent cultural actors, the analysis outlines what infrastructure constitutes for them, highlighting struggles that might otherwise remain disconnected or overlooked.

One such disconnected struggle regards the *spatial requirements* of cultural production (Paper I, II). Infrastructuring, as embedded practice, understands cultural production as place- or location-based practice, and connects the conditions of possibilities to urban politics. Van Heur (2010) identified the need to link cultural production studies with the political economy to attend to day-to-day struggles and inform policy (cf. p.13). Witnessing the need to integrate these struggles, infrastructuring considers the distribution of responsibilities among cultural and non-cultural actors, or artists and support personal (Becker, 1982), over time, especially in the context of increasing expectations of collaboration, the aim being to harness the potential of arts and culture as formulated in cultural policy documents.

The infrastructuring approach has also been proven to provide a *temporally sensitive means* (Paper II) with the possibility to pay attention to the micropolitics of place-based cultural production (Paper I). *Infrastructure time*, seen as open-ended (Karasti et al., 2010), attends to how policy, funding, and external expectations temporarily structure and are being structured in cultural infrastructuring processes, as illustrated in Paper III. It further addresses the temporal distribution of required labour to maintain infrastructure and embedding itself within place-based DIY cultural production, not just as an assessment of the present, but also anticipating a future (Paper II and Paper III). Infrastructuring entails the risk of excluding people, thus it requires effort to work towards being inclusive and serving the many, knowing that a network as infrastructure serves people and processes differently, and potentially never everyone at the same time, as Paper II illustrated with the example of cultural advocacy.

Infrastructuring cultural production, using the example of 40 years of TEH, shows that continuous maintenance is not necessarily conservative or against innovation. Seen in Paper II, the incremental adaptation of the bi-annual meetings or the membership policies illustrates how infrastructures renew themselves and constantly improve, perhaps even innovatively reinvent themselves, when the organisation is challenged externally (funding cuts, loss of space, relocation), but also internally (due to staff). Infrastructuring, as a

long-term processual approach, pays attention to the generative aspects. The maintenance integral to infrastructuring carries with it, following Graham and Thrift (2007: 5), promises of potential innovation: "when things break down, new solutions may be invented [as] this kind of piece-by-piece adaptation is a leading cause of innovation, acting as a continuous feedback loop of experimentation which, through many small increments in practical knowledge, can produce large changes".

Assessing interrelations of bottom-up cultural production, infrastructuring identifies not only enabling relations, but also those that hinder. In its capacity to foreground the agency of individuals and collectives, it holds emancipatory potentials. Drawing a parallel to entrepreneuring, understood as "efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or group of individuals" (Rindova et al., 2009: 2), infrastructuring can similarly create new possibilities. While it wrestles with institutional norms, it builds *upon* and navigates contradictions and conflicts at different levels. Returning to Fraser's (1994) notion of "dependence as the condition of autonomy", independence presents itself as always being in a state of dependence on other people, places, and things, as well as on flows of money, societal expectations, and temporal frames that can (be slightly bent) in turn provide orientation. Viewed this way, infrastructuring becomes an emancipatory approach rooted in identifying fundamental needs and exploring how these might be collectively met within interdependent cultural production contexts.

Just like the cultural ecosystem, cultural infrastructuring can be understood as a comprehensive approach, with the capacity to take into consideration multiple processes and practices between people and things at different scales, facilitating cultural production. The infrastructuring approach supports, extends and challenges previous conceptual approaches, especially to place-based cultural production. Commonly used ecosystems or ecological approaches address cultural phenomena as interdependent (e.g., Bertacchini et al., 2022; Dovey, 2016; Gross & Wilson, 2019). Ecosystems use the metaphor of nature, infrastructure uses that of technology. They both stress the importance of others, but with different intentions: "[Taking] an ecological 'approach' means, specifically engaging at an organisational or strategic level with emergent interconnections and interdependencies between cultural resources of many kinds" (Gross & Wilson, 2019: 11). Infrastructuring focusses on the quality of necessary connections to *enable* cultural production, the ecosystems approach maps interrelations and speculates about value generation (through cultural production ecosystems), asking how relationships

can be nourished to generate better outcomes (Holden, 2015; Gross & Wilson, 2019).

Cultural ecological approaches tend to stress the idea of encouraging self-organisation (cf. Bailey, 2024: 6) through, for example, incentivising partnerships, nourishing relations, and the activation of actors in the ecology (Gross & Wilson, 2019), while the relation of those who 'nourish' and 'activate' with those who enable and maintain seems unclear. Here hides the risk of naturalising systems and flows, while infrastructuring approaches the interdependencies as deliberate and situated work, such as organising, coordinating, negotiating. Thus, it stresses human agency and does not suggest that relations evolve entirely on their own (O'Connor, 2024). O'Connor (2024: 183) and others have cautioned that taking the cultural ecosystem as self-sustaining results in cultural policy that does not sufficiently addressing care and maintenance.

Because more material approaches to cultural infrastructure and cultural ecologies produce mappings and distances in locations, they provide an overview of cultural assets (cf. O'Connor, 2024: 182), which does not allow us to explain and understand the exchanges of value between the actors that sustain the interrelations as complex living network (Holden, 2016). Together, and interlinked, infrastructuring and ecologies condition one another, as "[l]ocalized conditions of cultural production and reception are microclimates for many ecological forms" (Bailey, 2024: 6). Mattern (2018) stresses the multiple and interdependent processes of maintenance, stating that maintaining a particular site, body or object, means maintenaning all ecological relations, such as supply chains, social infrastructures, and environmental conditions, on which the site, body or object depends.

Taking infrastructuring as a critical spatial approach, based on needs-oriented processes and practices, as well as on use and movement, Berlant (2016: 393) critically reminds us "that resilience and repair don't necessarily neutralise the problem that generated the need for them [infrastructures], but might reproduce them". Thus, rather than simply mapping interrelations (in itself a powerful act), turning to underlying needs allows us to ask whose everyday efforts make cultural life possible, whose needs and struggles remain marginalised? In doing so, infrastructuring draws attention to the question, who or what is considered part of an ecosystem or infrastructure, to then scrutinise the uneven distribution of practical capacities, temporal and spatial resources among cultural workers themselves, rather than assuming all parts of a cultural ecosystem can and should participate equally.

Witnessing interdependencies as ontological condition, both infrastructuring and ecology remind us to ask about the intentionality of relations and their possible implications. Most importantly – and this becomes prevalent in the empirical data, whether in local long-term, project-based international, short- or long-term contexts – independent actors address and negotiate responsibilities differently. Because contexts vary, independent cultural actors in eastern Europe would like to be acknowledged and in turn be given more responsibilities by authorities (Paper III), which is contrary to discussions in, e.g., Berlin, where Bain and Landau (2019a: 2) argue that "contrary to collaborative and participatory governance ideals, artists are often singularly responsibilised by civic leaders [working] for a community rather than with them, which creates a fundamental barrier to community engagement". This comparison shows that the involvement of cultural actors based on the hope of fostering active citizenship is complicated when the distribution of responsibilities is unclear in policy processes, as pointed out by Hajer and Waagenaar (2003), especially in collaborative processes associated with the cultural ecologies approach (cf. Bailey, 2024).

6.2 Synthesis, implications and ways forward

Taking a step back, this section's aim is to reflect on and interpret the thesis' contributions to primarily cultural policy studies, infrastructure studies and urban cultural studies, where I situate space-related cultural work studies as well, through which this work provides a cross-section. This work started from the premise that precarious working conditions in cultural production cannot be meaningfully examined in isolation from questions of space, just as space must be understood in relation to the socio-spatial politics of displacement. While this holds true broadly, it is especially salient for independent cultural actors, in the post-industrial cities across Europe forming the empirical cases of this study. Infrastructure proved helpful in this cross-sectional study, on the one hand analytically, in that it allowed me to place local collective micro-practices in larger, primarily temporal contexts, but also because cultural policy debates are still dominated by a material understanding of infrastructure to date, thus leaving untapped the potential and necessities for working with infrastructure as peopled.

Having applied infrastructuring as a processual, human-needs-oriented relational analytical tool (Volmar, 2023) allowed me to unpack joint achievements rather than givens. Independent actors' individual and collective

practices are entangled in a spatial politics of cultural production (Bain & Podmore, 2023) that they, willingly or not, shape and are shaped by. Numerous concerns about space (and its affordances), such as access to, and the stability of, affordability and location constitute the key motivation and initial cause for both studies' actor groups to collectively organise and *infrastructure.* Aesthetic ideals and societal values come second and develop in and through the concerns about spaces as the ultimate infrastructural condition for cultural production. This finding points to numerous, yet not necessarily only cultural, policy gaps. Actors (REHAB, and founders of TEH in Brussels, Amsterdam and Copenhagen) identify pressures on affordable workspaces caused by urban redevelopments and competition, but also by a lack of recognition and support for independent and non- or less institutionalised art forms, and hence found TEH, a networked infrastructure through which they can advocate for what they perceive to be missing. Adding to recent discussions of independent artist-run spaces (Karimnia & Kostourou, 2024; Magkou et al., 2025; Puletti et al., 2024), the thesis confirms that struggles over space (as conditioning) precede cultural production work. In practice, engagement with the spatial context is the reason for infrastructuring, but at the same time also a factor that induces precarity.

The infrastructural lens revealed that precarity and spatial insecurity are intricately linked. Addressing this, cultural actors tap into the gap produced by failing urban development and cultural policy, and test new constellations of policy-making or collaborations with actors outside the arts. This, once again, is not uncommon, and interdependencies take numerous forms and sentiments, from protest to tolerable dissonance (Borén & Young, 2017; Puletti et al., 2024); they are contextual and little systemised work exists to date (cf. Puletti et al., 2024). The study on service-entanglements (Paper I) provides a model upon which similar initiatives could build. Mapping and typologizing such locally embedded relationships of interdependencies, their added societal functions and values, has two perks: It demonstrates how much cultural actors' capacity is lost in making up for lacking spatial security, which, when turned around, could contribute to imagining fairer conditions and future societal development.

Despite increasing awareness that infrastructuring is essential, the status quo is that self-exploitation, unpaid work and their consequences remain normalised in the spatial politics of cultural production. While there is a risk of understanding infrastructuring practices as patch-working the holes and voids around decreasing public and other funding and the consequences of profit-driven urban development (Bain & McLean, 2013; Bain & Podmore,

2023; Zukin, 2011), every study raises our awareness of the issue and foregrounds the cultural actors' work.

Building on Bain and Landau (2019a) and Sharma (2014), the thesis' findings suggest that infrastructuring is a productive tool to advance temporally sensitive studies in cultural policy, as time itself is infrastructural and so-called chronopolitics determine in- and exclusions and thus how in- or exclusive infrastructuring and the processes it facilitates turn out. Introducing more developed infrastructure and temporality debates (cf. Besedowsky et al., 2019) from urban and urban cultural studies to cultural work and cultural policy debates, the thesis demonstrated the analytical capacity of infrastructuring to gain nuanced understandings of how cultural network organising unfolds, against and across different timescales, despite being dominated by limiting project time horizons and inherent competition against each other (and time itself). As the introductory quote of Paper II says, networks risk being misperceived. They are not doing anything by merely formally comprising a lot of members: (Social) nets need to be *worked*, and TEH uses spatial strategies that operate across scales. Infrastructural analysis (Paper II) laid bare how actors eventified work within short-term project funding cycles in the mundane shape of biannually recurring network meetings as spatially and temporally bounded events, thus maintaining their internal and external network relations. The meetings anchor trans-local connections to outlast those immediate gatherings. Here, short-term cycles are continuously embedded in longer-term goals of organisational sustainability, community building, and fostering hope for cultural policy influence grounded in fostering community as the basis of advocacy. Not recognising the complexity of such spatio-temporal maintenance work among independent cultural actors has network-threatening implications. The study contributes knowledge about how networks work internally (Delfin, 2012) and presents infrastructuring as an ongoing process transcending time and space, despite those dimensions being the boundaries for enactment of the network itself.

To illustrate the theoretical difference between structure and infrastructure, Meyer (2023: 73) explained "Infrastructure focusses on the conditions of possibility of phenomena, in terms of their *production,* and do not rely on the assumption of pre-established meanings, or entities, as putatively given". Independent cultural infrastructuring may not *rely on*, but is still impacted by, certain 'putative givens' presenting hard facts such as the notion of autonomy. How it appeared in the material provides a good example that illustrates the relation between structure and infrastructure. Acting as a powerful normative frame, it gives shape to funding priorities, definitions of value, and the

legitimacy of actors and practices. It is thus perceived as a 'harder' fact. Infrastructuring cultural production touches on institutional power, e.g., the autonomous artist, challenging new constellations and collaborations to be formed. Infrastructuring requires its negotiation, and infrastructural arrangements are made *around* this idea, although critically but always reifying it.

Responsibilities and obligations

Although not under the trope of infrastructuring, debates in cultural work and precarity, but also cultural policy regarding cultural networks point out that the non-recognition of additional infrastructure work, which is necessary to prevent harmful stress, causes mental health problems. Studies have shown that cultural networks like TEH take on work "that is undervalued by both the public and private sphere who profit from the growth generated by creative labour" (Dent et al., 2024: 575). One concrete example is the monitoring of the sector's needs in times of crisis (Magkou, 2021). For research ethical reasons and due to limited scope, this thesis did not explicitly engage with mental health data and the well-being of independent cultural actors. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, additional emphasis on cultural networks uncovered their sector-wide maintenance work, sparking a debate beyond their functions in cultural governance (Scioldo, 2024a, 2024b). When declaring that today's cultural policies are 'morally compromised', Belfiore (2022: 74) means that overcoming the status quo requires "demand[ing] those responsibilities of 'caring for' both those that deliver and those that are at the receiving end of publicly funded arts interventions be put at the heart of the decision-making process in policy development". Having analysed a bottom-up policy-making project, centred on independent cultural actors' needs, Paper III concluded that the facilitating networks' needs fall to the wayside. The thesis underlines the need to pay attention to the conditions of intermediaries as potential subjects of precarity.

Whether or not there is a direct relation between the difficulty of distributing responsibility fairly among interdependent infrastructuring actors and the structural remnant of the arts autonomy is not quite clear at this point. But for improved practices of collaborative urban development or policy-making, responsibility discussions are crucial, the aim being to ensure that precariously working artists and cultural workers are neither left alone and overburdened (Bain & Landau, 2019a) nor unrecognised and underestimated (Paper III). Again, while interdependencies as ontological reality bring about existences, interdependencies are not universal and require contextual attention and action. Responsibilities should thus be negotiated in context (Paper I), but such

negotiations require knowledge and understanding on both sides, to prevent exploitation of the economically weaker arts and cultural actors.

The recently emerging cultural infrastructure discussions point to a need for policy solutions to preserve cultural production as opposed to representational landmarks and heritage. It requires developments and the understanding that the "gathering of artists and cultural infrastructure in cities is an occupational, sectoral and creative imperative that has been inadequately addressed in urban planning and policy" (Bain & Podmore, 2023: 248).

Infrastructure in the context of new policy narratives

Without explicitly criticising the spatial politics of cultural production, there are new movements in cultural policy discourse relating to infrastructural functions and meanings, and the concerns infrastructural analysis puts forth. On the one hand, there is a focus on *commoning* (cf. Magkou et al., 2025), and on the other, one on *regeneration* (cf. Dâmaso & Rex, 2025; Duxbury et al., 2025; Figueira & Fullmann, 2025; Kaszynska, 2025; Lettau, 2025). At the core of both is the recognition of the need to rethink and attend to *enabling* cultural life in all its forms, and the ambition of more stable, enduring conditions for cultural production. Mafalda Dâmaso and Bethany Rex (2025: 409) propose to define regernerative cultural policy as:

> "[…] an approach that supports cultural practices of production and consumption which restore and enhance not only cultural ecosystems and communities but also their natural, social, economic and political contexts. Fostering net-positive dynamics in a logic of abundance rather than scarcity requires focusing on the long term and taking a holistic approach. Moreover, regenerative cultural policymaking places questions of equality and equity at the forefront of its objectives. It is a collaborative effort, prioritising co-creation to ensure policy goals embed multiple forms of knowledge and worldviews. Therefore, it requires different imaginaries of the present and of the future, questioning the tendency to commodify social relations and understanding development beyond the growth paradigm."

The narratives of regenerative cultural policies are hopeful and in line with the infrastructuring agenda, shown in the overlaps of restoring the productive contexts, the long-term orientation, concerns with equality and its links with past, present and future. Yet how can these visions be fulfilled when we still lack "investment in understanding the [cultural and creative] sector and supporting its needs" (Dent et al., 2024: 575)? Recognising that both analysis

and concrete visions need local contextualisation (Durrer et al., 2023), an actor needs-based analysis of cultural production processes, as proposed by the infrastructuring programme presented in this thesis, could help and serve as a basis for fleshing out such regenerative cultural policy visions.

7 Conclusion and Outlook

With an interest in the phenomenon of independent cultural production, the aim of this thesis was to explore cultural infrastructure(ing) empirically and conceptually. Asking: "How do independent cultural actors create, maintain and defend the possibilities of cultural production in within shifting urban and political landscapes?" I placed processes and practices, rather than buildings and materials, at the heart of the inquiry.

I have worked with two empirical cases where independence crystallises as an idea(l) and orientation for cultural production that is economically and politically unconstrained and leaves the actors freedom for aesthetic experimentation and political expression. A key feature, and the starting point of the research, is acknowledgement of independent cultural production as a spatial and infrastructural phenomenon – a process of interrelations between people, places, and resources, often occurring outside institutional frameworks – that this thesis set out to explore. Adding to discussions about cultural production today, the thesis experiments with infrastructure and infrastructuring, adding conceptual engagement with a common, yet in the context of arts and culture not yet exhausted, concept. Synthesizing previous literature in STS and urban studies, and urban cultural studies, I landed on a definition of infrastructure as a practice of connecting people and things in enabling, supporting or sustaining relations, sometimes as inherent in everyday life practices (rather unintentional), and sometimes as strategic moves. I explored what this looks like by studying two cases of independent organising.

7.1 Outlining the findings and contributions

This section is a distillate of Section 6.1; it briefly summarises the essence of the findings in this thesis, answering the three questions: How do independent cultural actors create, maintain, and defend the possibilities of cultural production within shifting urban and political landscapes? What are the temporal and spatial implications of infrastructuring independent cultural

production, and what insights does infrastructuring, as an analytical framework, provide for the study of cultural production and cultural policy more broadly?

First and foremost, the thesis makes *empirical contributions* by investigating in-depth two cases that have not been subject to previous studies at all (REHAB) or to the same extent (TEH). In the latter case, TEH, based on an intensive archival study and a discourse analysis of a recent collaboration project, the thesis sheds light on how TEH works internally, highlighting the importance of an intact community as a basis for current and future advocacy work. TEH exemplarily shows how this European cultural network consists not simply of links and nodes, readily available when needed, but also of relationships carefully maintained through membership politics that are relatively exclusive (but inclusive enough) to maintain the network for the benefit of those (to be) involved. REHAB's value lies in not only illustrating an interdependent relationship between cultural actors and thirds (elaborated below), but also providing insights into how important the context, and especially the historical and contemporary urban politics were to REHAB's becoming.

Conceptually, the empirical case study of REHAB has enriched the vocabulary for thinking about the relationships between cultural actors and third parties. With the novel framing service-entanglement, I reconceptualise often existing binaries, making tangible a phenomenon of contextualised/contextualising cultural work in neighbourhoods, shifting the view towards the agency of cultural workers. Building upon this, I suggested looking at infrastructuring in DIY production contexts as explicit *embedding*, as ongoing and forward-looking practice aimed at creating and defending conditions for cultural production. Further, my co-author and I added conceptually to the study of cultural networks, providing a time sensitive infrastructural perspective, that can "[…] serve as a heuristic device to examine the ways in which a network juggles between short-term demands and pressures, and longer-term organisational idea(l)s and goals" (Nehl & Landau-Donnelly, 2025: 15), as we put it.

Theoretically, the thesis has added to the exploration of infrastructuring as a relational, processual, and people-dependent practice in the empirical field of arts and culture outside of publicly funded or institutionalised practices. Theorising infrastructuring as a practice that reconfigures space and time in independent cultural production, it weaves short-term constraints into long-term possibilities. It shows how such infrastructuring practices are

both emancipatory and interdependent, linking local spatial struggles with transnational solidarities.

Lastly, there are a few *methodological aspects* of the four papers to be mentioned. Analysing cultural networks as socio-material infrastructures (1) shifts attention to the (peopled) relational, material, and temporal processes that sustain them. This approach foregrounds the ongoing invisible and distributed labour of coordination and advocacy, attends to the socio-material conditions that enable networks to function, and situates these in relation to past investments (time and labour) and future-oriented strategies. In doing so, it enriches our understanding of how cultural networks do not merely support cultural production now, but also actively shape its conditions of possibility over time.

The thesis has grappled with the previously pronounced methodological challenge of (2) foregrounding the seemingly invisible aspects of infrastructuring, also called infrastructural inversion. Based on the argument to start infrastructural analysis from the needs of people, I have made use of critical discourse analysis to surface the problematisations of independent cultural actors in a collaborative policy-making project. Combining these two aspects, one could see this as an expansion of the methodological toolkit to study independent cultural production in networks on multiple scales though infrastructuring.

7.2 Open questions and future research

I began this inquiry with thoughts about independence presenting a paradox. I do not suggest that it is resolvable, accepting our relational being in the world, but its scrutiny has nevertheless proven fruitful in rethinking established understandings of the arts' resilience and continuing to question institutional norms like the autonomy of the arts in times like these. What all four papers have shown is that the infrastructural approach creates a need to grapple with art-field-internal values such as autonomy. Independence is linked with understandings of autonomy, how it is practised, expressed, granted or hindered. Paper I and III explicitly touch upon how the lack of separation of artistic work and infrastructural provision leads to confusion. To take the example of Paper I, does a rent subsidy from a semi-private company really mean a less autonomous artist/work? Since when does 'where art is produced' have implications for its quality? This confusion calls for a further entangling

of specific local contextual relations and cultural production. As an artist in the REHAB case explained, there is no secrecy about financial flows in their model, and that is an improvement, compared to the perceived lack of transparency concerning decision-making around grants. But thinking this through further, is infrastructuring a call to expose all supportive relationships and interdependencies? Is it too radical? Does it risk disenchanting the myth of the autonomous artist even more? Infrastructure somehow turns the questions of funding around. Instead of asking, what are cultural actors supposed to do (expectations) to be worthy of the funding, it asks what it takes to facilitate that (infrastructure), and that is the starting point for discussions of fairness and equity. In other words, the difference infrastructural analysis makes is that it is less speculative, because it does not seek innovation in promising collaboration but creates innovative potential through identifying, nourishing and sustaining relations. A needs-based infrastructural analysis, presenting a bottom-up approach, can assess what processes and practices are already in place and how they could be supported. Instead of mapping potentialities and promising links, infrastructuring attends to necessary enabling interdependencies.

In this thesis, the conceptual exploration of cultural infrastructuring in contrast to cultural ecologies has not been exhaustive. It has shown that both are more frequently used, whereas one or the other often remains metaphorical in its use: Infrastructure supports cultural ecosystems, or ecosystemic relations comprise infrastructure. By attending to relational work that underpins cultural production (organising, coordinating, care work), infrastructuring challenges ecological approaches that tend to, when applied in practice, focus on outputs such as value generation (Bailey, 2024; Dovey et al., 2016; Holden, 2015). Infrastructuring thus allows us to make power visible compared to ecosystems, but also in ecosystems. Ecological framings risk glossing over asymmetries (of large vs. small organisations, funded vs. unfunded actors), while infrastructuring looks at actors and needs, capacities, resources, or legitimacy to build and sustain cultural infrastructure, thereby potentially revealing how uneven relationships shape cultural ecosystems. In sum, while ecological metaphors lean on ideas of self-sustaining systems, infrastructuring in contrast draws attention to the processual, contingent and often fragile nature of cultural connections: how relationships, resources and spaces must be continuously re-made, maintained, or repaired to stay ‘alive’ (Mattern, 2018).

One shortcoming of this thesis, and thus potential for future studies, is the exploration of links between cultural infrastructure and cultural commons, or practices of *commoning*. The numerous overlaps of the notion of commoning in the context of independent cultural production and the study of networks (like the CCSC project in Paper III) indicate a need to explore these in more detail. What is infrastructural about commoning? Commoning rests on a few principles that have infrastructural capacities. First, it requires recognising one another as equals in a process of negotiating over what is understood as common, and what its maintenance, use and distribution require. Commoning can thus be said to infrastructure interdependencies with the potential to flatten power relations for the purpose of caring for a common. Having been mentioned as one of multiple economic strategies of artistic survival (Alacovska & Bille, 2021) commoning implies making careful collective use of resources. More specifically, a recent comparative study of independent cultural centres in Greece, France and Italy (Magkou et al., 2025: 13) shows how independent cultural actors' commoning practices "reflect counter-movements against austerity, privatisation of urban space, and the withdrawal of public cultural support". While the CCSC project suggested an EU-provided legal toolkit for commons, O'Connor (2024) argues that culture, like health and education, is best served through public, rather than private funding.

However, commoning practices have become more than mere experimentations, and deserve attention as "frameworks to understand the relationship between communities, urban spaces, culture, democracy and policy", as Magkou et al. (2025: 13) suggest, stressing how important democracy-enforcing practices are in times like these. Berlant (2016) addresses the *commons as infrastructure for troubling times* in an essay with the same title. Among many interesting considerations, they propose commoning as a countermovement to build new infrastructures for life and sociality that resist exploitation, often in spaces or relationships neglected or damaged by those same powers. Further, and this is interesting in regard to the experience of togetherness as infrastructure sustaining moment, Berlant (2016: 403) describes infrastructure as affectively charged: "Collective affect gets attached to it too, to the sense of its inventiveness and promise of dynamic reciprocity".

While this thesis has focussed more on collectives, a study that engages with individuals in different infrastructuring functions could reveal more thoroughly how individuals' daily infrastructuring involves the balancing of societal expectations, entrepreneurial motivations, intrinsic motivation and arts institutional values, and personal survival. With this in mind, it would be

interesting to explore the radical potential of entrepreneurial intermediaries emerging to facilitate independent cultural producers' lives by offering administrative support, tax advice, or professional portfolio development. There are also new support services that function as employment agencies, bringing arts and cultural workers as service providers into non-arts contexts commissioned by citizens (like Neue Auftraggeber). While these are necessary and appreciated, it is worth exploring to what extent these initiatives, or the actors in them, infrastructure alternative pathways and radical improvements of livelihoods in the arts and culture. Beth Perry et al. (2015) requalified cultural intermediaries as cultural actors with infrastructural capacity, identifying their performance of multiple roles "[…] crossing traditional boundaries between production and consumption … seeking not to intermediate between economic values and established cultural hierarchies, but to transform them" (Perry et al., 2015: 736). Infrastructuring has political and emancipatory potential, as it scrutinises hidden, overlooked, or invisibilised labour. But some of the practices might be invisible for good reason. Exposure could mean risks and needs careful consideration before the vulnerabilities exposed turn into opportunities and lead to new forms of exploitation without leading to improvements in independent cultural actors' conditions.

When approached through the lens of cultural infrastructuring, the conditions of possibility for independent cultural production reveal themselves as continually unfolding and deeply situated. Each case offers not only insight into, but also inspiration for how to embed, sustain, and maintain the possibilities of independent cultural production in the future.

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Marthe

Malmö, 30th September 2025

Appendix

Appendix 1 List of TEH meetings, hosts, locations and protocols from 1983-2023

Report No	Year	Location	Hosting Centres
TEH_01	1983	Brussels, Belgium	Les Halles de Schaerbek
TEH_02	1983	Brussels, Belgium	Les Halles de Schaerbek
TEH_03	1983	Copenhagen, Denmark	HUSET
TEH_04	1984	Koblenz, Germany	Kulturfabrik
TEH_05	1984	Unna, Germany	Kulturfabrik/Lindenbrauerei
TEH_06	1984	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Melkweg
TEH_07	1985	Koblenz, Germany	Kulturfabrik
TEH_08	1985	Zurich, Switzerland	Rote Fabrik
TEH_09	1985	Brussels, Belgium	Les Halles de Schaerbek
TEH_10	1986	Copenhagen, Denmark	HUSET
TEH_11	1986	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Melkweg
TEH_12	1986	Zurich, Switzerland	Rote Fabrik
TEH_13	1986	Koblenz, Germany	Kulturfabrik
TEH_14	1987	Brussels, Belgium	Les Halles de Schaerbek
TEH_15	1987	Poitiers, France	Confort Moderne
TEH_16	1987	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Melkweg
TEH_17	1988	Berlin, Germany	UFA-Fabrik
TEH_18	1988	Berlin, Germany	UFA-Fabrik
TEH_19	1988	Paris, France	EUROCREATION
TEH_20	1988	Bologna, Italy	BIENNALE JEUNES CREATEURS MEDITERRANNEE
TEH_21	1989	Barcelona, Spain	Transformadors
TEH_22	1989	Vienna, Austria	WUK
TEH_23	1989	Poitiers, France	Confort Moderne
TEH_24	1990	Arhus, Denmark	Huset
TEH_25	1990	Glasgow, Scottland	The Tramway
TEH_26	1991	Gent, Belgium	Vooruit
TEH_27	1991	Dublin, Ireland	City Arts Centre
TEH_28	1991	Vienna, Austria	WUK
TEH_29	1992	Geneva, Switzerland	Factory
TEH_30	1992	Koblenz, Germany	Kulturfabrik
TEH_31	1992	Lund, Sweden	Mejeriet
TEH_32	1993	Poitiers, France	Confort Moderne
TEH_33	1993	Bergen, Norway	Kulturhuset
TEH_34	1993	Brussels, Belgium	Les Halles de Schaerbek
TEH_35	1993	Poitiers, France	Confort Moderne

TEH_36	1994	Cambridge, England	The Junction
TEH_37	1994	Zurich, Switzerland	Rote Fabrik
TEH_38	1994	Helsinki, Finland	Kaapelitehdas
TEH_39	1995	Paris, France	Hopital Ephemere
TEH_40	1995	Ljubljana, Slovenia	Retina-Metelkova
TEH_41	1996	Mezzago, Italy	BLOOM
TEH_42	1996	Leipzig, Germany	Moritzbastei
TEH_43		-	-
TEH_44		-	-
TEH_45	1997	Labin, Croatia	Lamparna
TEH_46	1998	Barcelona, Spain	Atenu Popular Nou Barris
TEH_47	1999	Tilburg & Amsterdam, Netherlands	013, Melkweg
TEH_48	1999	Esch sur Alzette, Luxembourg	Kultur Fabrik
TEH_49	2000	(Poitiers, France))	(Confort Moderne)
TEH_50	2000	Brussels, Belgium	Les Halles de Schaerbek
TEH_51	2001	Belgrade, (Yugoslavia) Serbia	Cinema Rex
TEH_52	2001	Helsinki, Finland	Kaapelitehdas
TEH_53	2002	Lisbon, Portugal	Lugar Comum
TEH_54	2002	Bucharest, Romania	Toaca Foundation
TEH_55	2003	Dublin, Ireland	City Arts Centre
TEH _56	2003	Birmingham, England	The Drum
TEH_57	2004	Lund, Sweden	Mejeriet
TEH_58	2004	Berlin, Germany	UFA-Fabrik
TEH_59	2005	Castelfranco Veneto, Italy	Buenaventura
TEH_60	2005	Cambridge, England	The Junction
TEH_61	2006	Ljubljana, Slovenia	Metelkova Mesto
TEH_62	2006	Bremen, Germany	Kulturzentrum Schlachthof
TEH_63	2007	Vilnius, Lithuania	Arts Printing House
TEH_64	2007	Helsinki and Verkatehdas, Finland	Korjaamo
TEH_65	2008	Brussels, Belgium	Les Halles de Schaerbek
TEH_66	2008	Stavanger, Norway	TOU Scene
TEH_67	2009	Zilina, Slovakia	Stanica
TEH_68	2009	Cracow, Poland	Laznia Nowa
TEH_69	2010	Budapest, Hungary	A38
TEH_70	2010	Leipzig, Germany	Moritzbastei
TEH_71	2011	Tartu, Estonia	Creative Center Carnation, Culture Factory Polymer
TEH_72	2011	Bordeaux, France	TNT
TEH_73	2012	Kosice, Slovakia	Tabacka Kulturfabrik
TEH_74	2012	Gothenburg, Sweden	Röda Sten Konsthall

TEH_75	2013	Riga, Latvia	NOASS
TEH_76	2013	Marseille, France	La Friche Belle de Mai
TEH_77	2014	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Melkweg &P60
TEH_78	2014	Plsen, Czechia	
TEH_79	2015	Lecce, Italy	Manifattore Knos
TEH_80	2015	Budapest, Hungary	Bakelit M.A.C.
TEH_81	2016	Vienna, Austria	WUK
TEH_82	2016	Verona, Italy	Interzona
TEH_83	2017	Pula, Croatia	Rojc Associations Alliance
TEH_84	2017	Kyiv, Ukraine	IZONE
TEH_85	2018	Bilbao, Spain	ZAWP
TEH_86	2018	Bagneu, France	Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (PPCM)
TEH_87	2019	Dresden, Germany	Zentralwerk
TEH_88	2019	Ambasada	Timisoara, Romania
TEH_89	2020	(Ebeltoft, Denmark)	online pre-conference
TEH_90	2020	Nicosia, Cyprus	NiMAC
TEH _91	2021	Ebeltoft, Denmark	Maltfabrikken
TEH _92	2021	Bratislava, Slovakia	Nová Cvernovka
TEH _93	2022	Prague, Czechia	Studio ALTA
TEH _94	2022	Fengersfors, Sweden	Not Quite
TEH _95	2023	Leipzig, Germany	Moritzbastei & Halle 14

Appendix 2 List of personal communications/interviews and conversations

Role or function in TEH	***Date and place***	***Data format***	***No.***
Coordination office staff	March 25th, 2020, online	Conversation notes	1
Coordination office staff	April 22nd, 2020, online	Interview transcript	2
External researcher, UK	April 22nd, 2020, online	Interview transcript	3
Former CO member, ambassador	May 12th, 2020, online	Interview transcript	4
Coordination office staff	June 10th, 2020, online	Interview transcript	5
Coordination office staff	September 16th, 2020 TEH office in Lund	Conversation notes	6
Coordination office, project management staff	September 30th, 2020 TEH office in Lund	Conversation notes	7

Coordination office staff	October 7th, 2020, TEH office in Lund	Interview transcript	8
Founding member, ambassador	October 9th, 2020, online	Interview transcript	9
Former functionary, ambassador	October 29th, 2020, online	Interview transcript	10
Member based in Sweden	November 10th, 2020, online	Interview transcript	11
Coordination office staff, management	July 14th,2020, TEH office in Lund	Interview transcript	12
Coordination office staff, project management	July 14th,2022, TEH office in Lund	Conversation notes	13
Coordination office, senior project management	July 20th, 2022, online	Interview transcript	14
Role or function in REHAB			
(Artist at REHAB	May 8th, 2019, REHAB	Interview transcript)	
Artist at REHAB	May 26th, 2021 REHAB	Conversation notes	1
Malmö Municipality	June 16th, 2021, backyard/home	Interview transcript + drawing	2
Artist, Galleri CC	June 17th, 2021, neighbourhood walk	Interview transcript + map	3
Malmö Municipality	June 17th, 2021, nearby café	Interview transcript	4
Artist at REHAB	August 17th, 2021, REHAB	Interview transcript	5
Artist at REHAB	August 23rd, 2021, REHAB	Interview transcript	6
Artist at REHAB	August 24th, 2021, REHAB	Interview transcript	7
MKB employee	August 24th, 2021, MKB office	Interview transcript	8
Artist at REHAB	October 14th, 2021, REHAB	Interview transcript	9
Artist at REHAB	April 6th , 2022, neighbourhood walk	Interview transcript	10

Appendix 3 Interview guide

Interview Questions

2020

Intro

Ask for consent, start recoding

Thank you for taking the time.

- Would you mind introducing yourself?
- When and how did you first get involved with…?
- Do you have a formal role? What is your current role?
- Have you always had this role?
- What are your responsibilities?

Everyday

- What does your day look like today? What are your tasks?
- Who are you usually in contact with?
- Would you say today is a regular day, or is it different?
    - For artists:
- What do you do in your own practice?
- How do you experience REHAB?
- What do you do for REHAB?
- Do you work with others here? How?
- Who do you collaborate or exchange with outside?
- Do you work with the neighbourhood? How?
- May I ask, can you sustain yourself with your art?
    - Organising:
- How are you organised?
- How do you make decisions? (Meeting places, frequency)
- Funding?

BECOMING TEH

(for early members/co-founders)

- Can you tell me a little bit about the early days of TEH ?
- What was the situation like when you started?
- What drove you/motivated you to start with..?
- What would you say were the main challenges or needs?
- Who else was involved? Who were you working with?
- Today: What do you think makes TEH so successful (point to growth)?

Ask about split of group
- How are REHAB and Galleri CC related today?

Role of TEH/ REHAB

- What do you apprechiate at REHAB?
- How is it compared to other places?

- Do you miss/need anything?
- Does it matter that REHAB is here? Why?
- Do external people know REHAB?
- What do you think people expect from REHAB?
- Does that matter for you, if so, how?

- Why do cultural centers join TEH?
- Have members left? Why?
- How would you describe its main functions?

Membership

- Can anyone become a member?
- Have you always had criteria?
- When and why did you change them?
- How do you envision future members?
- How do members work together?

Possible challenges

- How do you experience the relationship with MKB?
- What are your current challenges? Do they feel manageable?
- What do you do to prepare/prevent?
- Can you think of a past challenge and how you managed it?
- Are there specific moments where you feel/felt powerless?
- Who are your most important partners or collaborations?
- What forms of support are missing but would make a difference?
- Do you think you have power to change things? (policy, advocacy, protest)

Past and present

- Would you mind sharing a typical TEH/REHAB moment?
- Looking back, what have been the most important moments?
    - Events, changes, policy, funding schemes etc?
- What do you wish you had known earlier?
- What would you have changed?

Closing and Future

- How do you think about the future — what do you hope for?
- Do you see yourself here, or somewhere else in another role?
- What do you wish policymakers or the public better understood about the conditions of independent cultural work?
- If you could change one thing in your environment (political, social, economic), what would it be?
- Is there anything we haven't talked about that you feel is important?
- (If fitting, what inspires you right now?)
- Who else do you think I should talk to?
- THANK YOU!

Appendix 4 Interview consent form

LUND UNIVERSITY

declaration of consent

PhD research project

Self-organization in the independent cultural sector in Europe

Researcher: Marthe Nehl, PhD Student (Lund University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Service Management and Service Studies ISM)

Supervised by Katja Lindqvist (main supervisor at ISM)
Friederike Landau-Donnelly (Radboud University Nijmegen, NL)

Purpose of the PhD research: To create a better understanding of the conditions and contexts of independent cultural work in the Europe, of organizational processes and forms, as well as the various relations to actors and politics at different geographical levels.

Interview: Your participation in the project would take place in the form of an interview. The interview is expected to take approximately one hour. With your agreement, I will produce a voice recording of our conversation and take notes by hand. Depending on the circumstances and agreement, the interview will take place physically or digitally with tools such as zoom, skype or teams.

Confidentiality: All information you provide during the interview will be kept with great precautions.
The recording will be transcribed into a text that is stored on password protected devices only. The data will be stored anonymously, without any direct reference to you. The interview will be analyzed and relevant quotes may later be used in scientific publications and conference presentations, again in anonymized form, unless you clearly state that you don't want to be anonymized.
Scientific publications may be co-authored with supervisors, and if you agree they will get access to the transcripts as well.

If you are interested, I will share both the interview transcript and/or text before/or after publication with you. Please tick the boxes below according to your preferences.

Additional options:

- o I want to receive the interview transcript
- o I would like to see the texts before publication
- o I want to receive a digital copy of publications

- I want to appear in future publications with my full name
- I want to appear in future publications with the following synonym_____

- I agree that the anonymized transcripts will be used for scientific publication and conference contributions by the researcher
- I agree that anonymized transcripts are accessible to the supervisors
- I agree that anonymized transcripts may be shared with interested research community

Other:

- _____
- _____

Voluntary participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time, without having to provide reasons. During the interview, you have the freedom to skip questions, asked questions and revise your answers if you want to.
If you would like to withdraw from the study, the interview material will be deleted entirely if you wish so.

Contacts: If you have questions regarding the research, the research process, your role and participation, or if you want to withdraw, please contact marthe.nehl@ism.lu.se

Agreement:

Hereby I,_____ declare my agreement to the participation in this doctoral research project. I have been informed about the project and would like to engage in it. With my signature I confirm my participation and I agree with the above-mentioned aspects and conditions according to my choices.

Signature_____ **Place, Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Place, Date**_____
Researcher

Infrastructuring independent cultural production

Independent cultural production does not happen in a vacuum and a closer look reveals that independent cultural actors work hard for the idea(l) of independence: They organise in social networks at the neighbourhood level and beyond, they search and secure alternative funding, and engage in urban politics to make sure they have a venue. In these seemingly mundane processes, the thesis intervenes by introducing the concept of *infrastructuring*, to not only shed new light on known struggles (difficult and insecure working conditions) but to provide orientation in a politically shifting Europe.

Through four papers, the thesis shows that independent actors always *infrastructure* alongside their day to day work – either because they can or because they have to – whereby service-entanglements, friendships and cultural political ideas arise and settle, which benefit not only those organisations who produce them, but independent cultural producers broadly.

Empirically, the thesis explores infrastructuring practices in a Sweden-based recent neighbourhood cultural work space, and a European cultural network organisation, with four decades of experience as an advocate for independent cultural centres. Both cases ultimately underline the importance of people's continuous activities and the ill-fitting project-timed structures in the cultural sector.

While the work emphasises the value and social relevance of independent cultural production in particular, it also highlights how fragile the arrangements of people-driven and maintained cultural infrastructure are, and that we should not take them for granted, despite their seeming resilience. *Infrastructuring independent cultural production* is a forward looking account of cultural producers' ways of self-organising and policy-making in the times we are in.

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