

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH CREATION

Carla Maria Kayanan



Social
Sciences
Institute

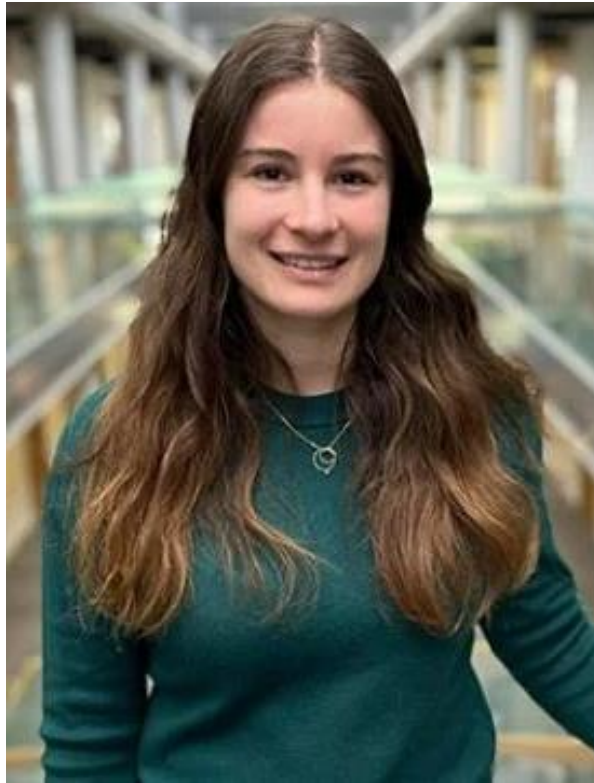


DATA STORIES
Research Creation Workshop
Maynooth University, 9 – 10 September 2025

Thank you!



Orla Dunne



Juliette Davret



Oliver Dawkins



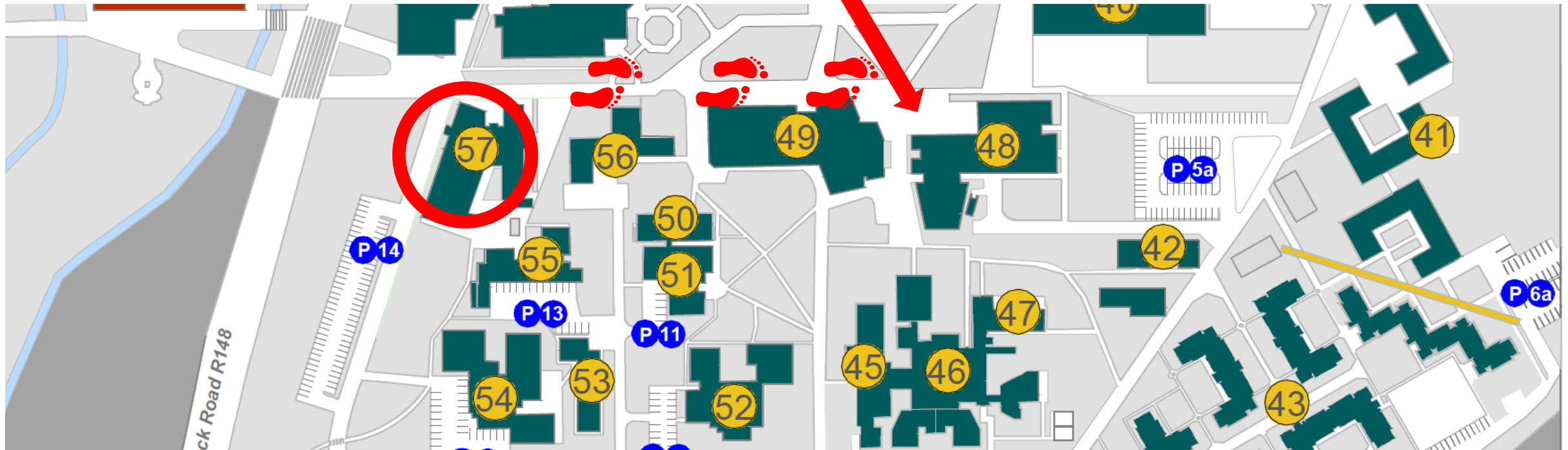
Rob Kitchen

Housekeeping

Lunch

Located in MUSSI kitchen

Iontas Building, 2nd floor



Housekeeping

- Who is research creation for?
- What is the necessary structure for research creation?
- How are boundaries between the researcher and the artist. (un)fruitful, (un)productive and (dis)enabling?
- Does research creation work?



Data Stories: Telling Stories About and With Planning and Property Data

Data Stories investigates the underlying evidence base for housing, property and planning

- Data are central to how places are understood and managed
- Inform government policy, shape public perception, and guide billions of euros of investment relating to land use and development, public and private housing, homelessness, commercial real estate, and infrastructure.

Critical Data Studies

- Kitchin 2014; Gabrys et al. 2016; Dourish and Gomez Cruz 2018
 - Data do not speak for themselves
 - Uses of data involve translation, interpretation and meaning making
 - Data narratives must be mobilised for interpretation and meaning-making

Data Stories: Research Team



Prof. Rob Kitchen (PI)



Carla Maria Kayanan
Research Lecturer



Oliver Dawkins
Creative Technologist

Postdoctoral Researchers



Juliette Davret



Danielle Hynes



Samuel Mutter

Phase 1: Mapping the data ecosystem



125 recorded interviews
(w/ 135 individuals)

38 state; 36 business; 22
civil society; 29 academic



78 organisations with
recorded interviews

23 state; 29 business; 16
civil society; 10 academic



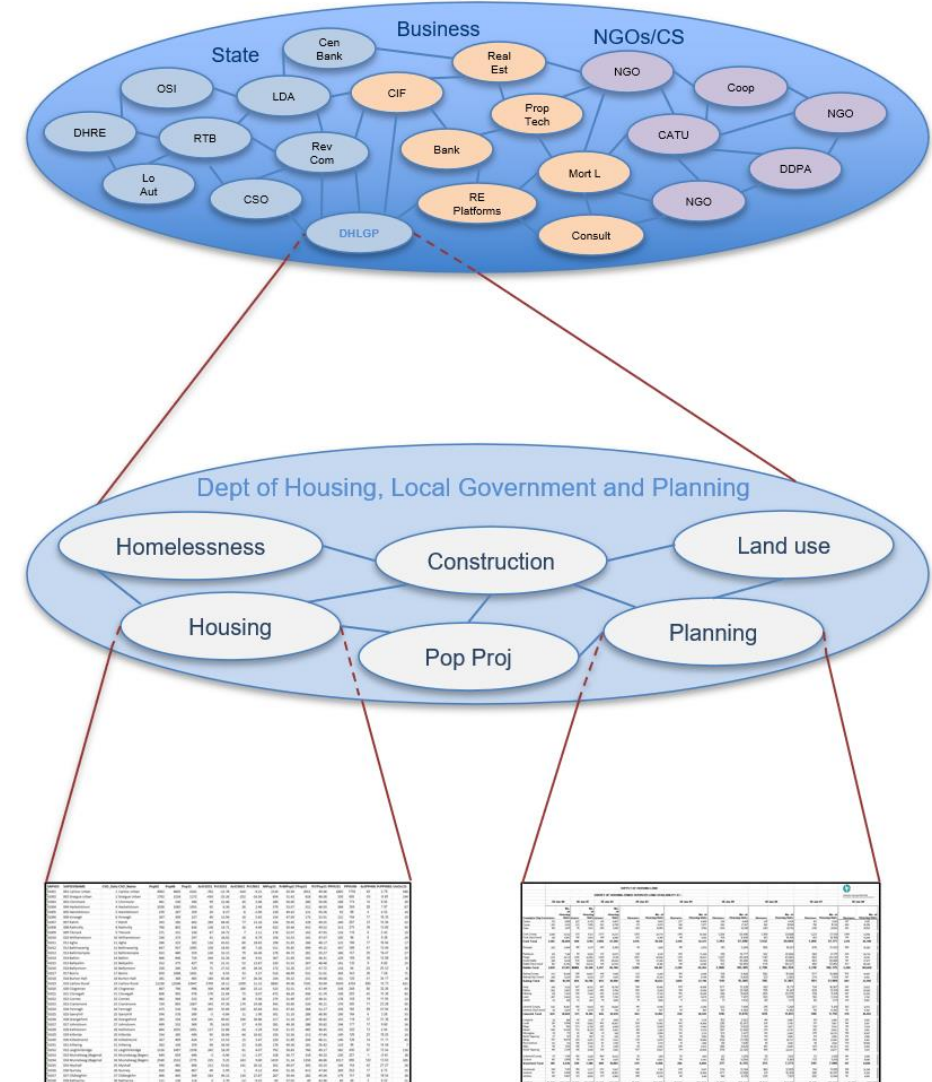
45 informal meetings (w/
84 individuals) with 13
organisations

10 state; 2 business; 1 civil
society



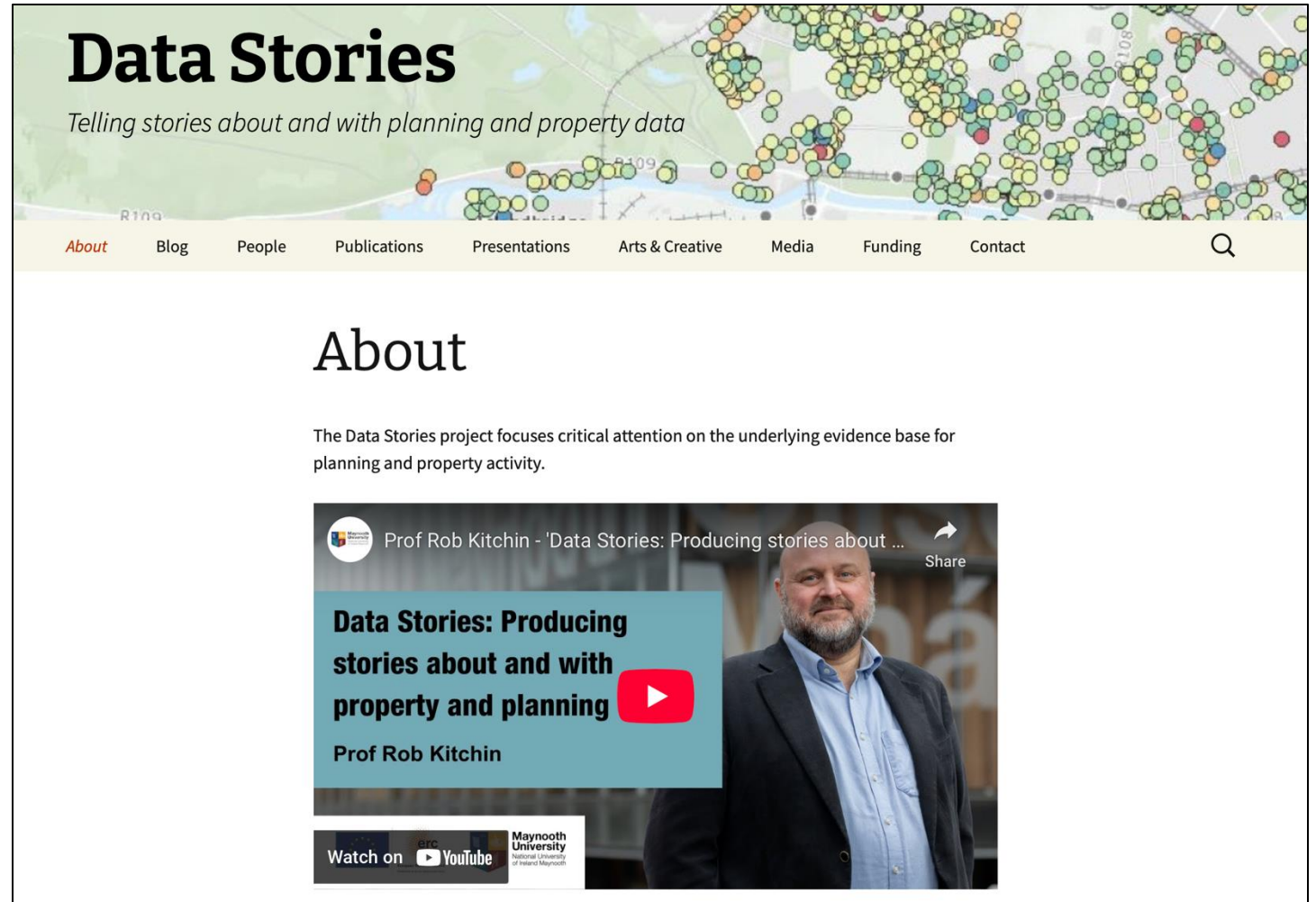
97 Data audits

79 state; 4 business; 4 civil
society; 4 international



Phase 1: Mapping the data ecosystem

<https://datastories.maynoothuniversity.ie>



Phase 2: Research creation

Definition of research creation

The SSHRC (2016) definition “an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expressions”

Truman (2021) highlights the importance of artistic practices as well as needing to read and engage with theory (read, think, experiment)

Gordon (2008) - using arts-based methods to open up expanded ways of seeing that are "less mechanical, more willing to be surprised and to link imagination with critique"

Phase 2: Case studies

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{traditional social science} \\ \text{research methods} \\ \text{(academic researcher)} \end{array} + \begin{array}{l} \text{arts-based} \\ \text{methods} \\ \text{(artist)} \end{array} = \text{Research creation}$$

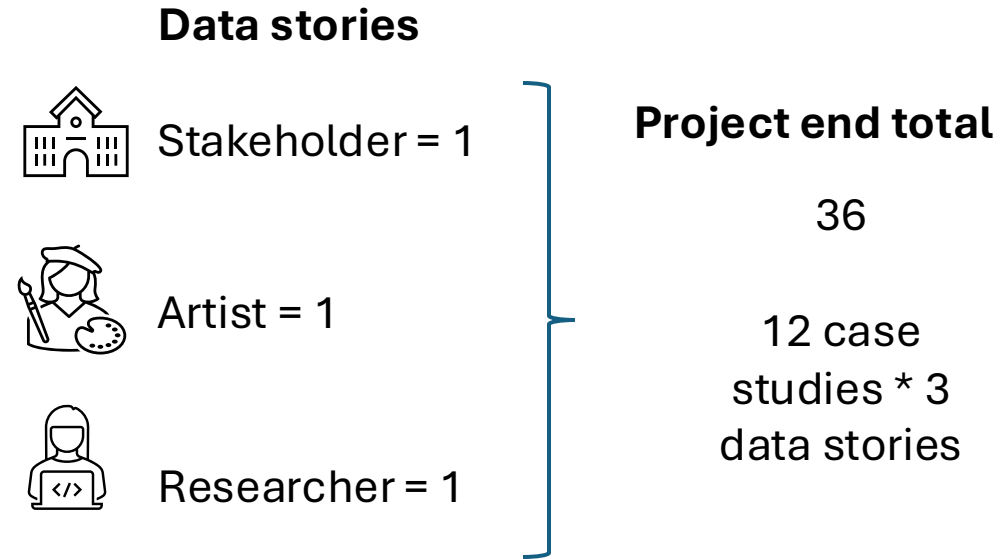
practice-based research, practice-led research, research-based practice, research-led practice, creative-praxis, arts-driven inquiry, arts-based research, artistic methods, arts-based methods, artistic research, research creation, research-creation, etc.

Definitional debates matter more to publishing within academia than they do to making research-based art

Phase 2: Case studies

Inreach workshop format

- The ‘foil’
 - oversees the research-creation process and co-designs the workshops
 - acts as the workshop facilitator.
- The ‘catalyst’
 - a member of the community taking part in the workshop
- The foil and catalyst co-develop a ‘seed’ for the workshop – the issue that is to be explored – and co-design the methods to be used and associated instructions and constraints.



Phase 2: Case Studies

Creating data stories

- Through workshops, participants actively reflect on their own data infrastructures, processes and practices, and consider how they might transform their data practices to address concerns.
- Provides a different perspective for interrogation
- Allows people to illustrate power dynamics they might not want to explicitly name
- Exercise reveals something to the stakeholders that they already knew but could not see.

Phase 2: Case Studies

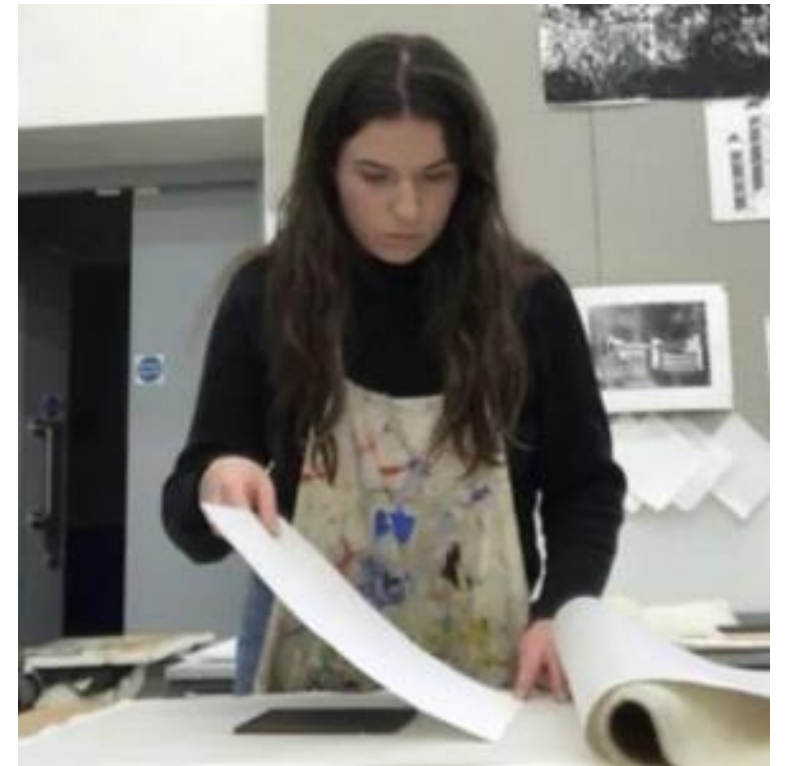
Year 1 artists/writers
in residence



Augustine O'Donoghue
Multimodal artist



Joan Somers Donnelly
Visual artist



Mel Galley
Creative writer

Phase 2: Case Studies

Year 2 artists/writers
in residence



Sean Borodale
Artist and writer



Helen Shaw
Documentary maker and
digital storyteller



Ella Harris
Digital creative and
creative researcher



Hannah Mumby
Artist and creative
facilitator



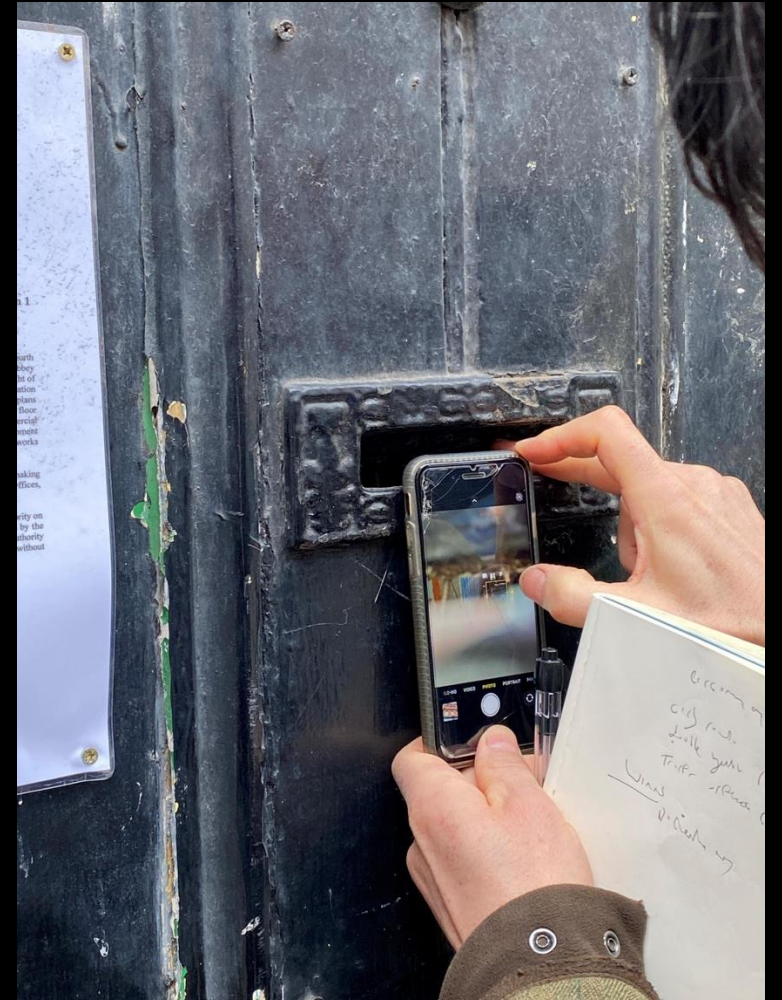
CSO Case Study
Artists: Ella Harris & Hannah Mumby
Researchers: Rob Kitchin & Danielle Hynes



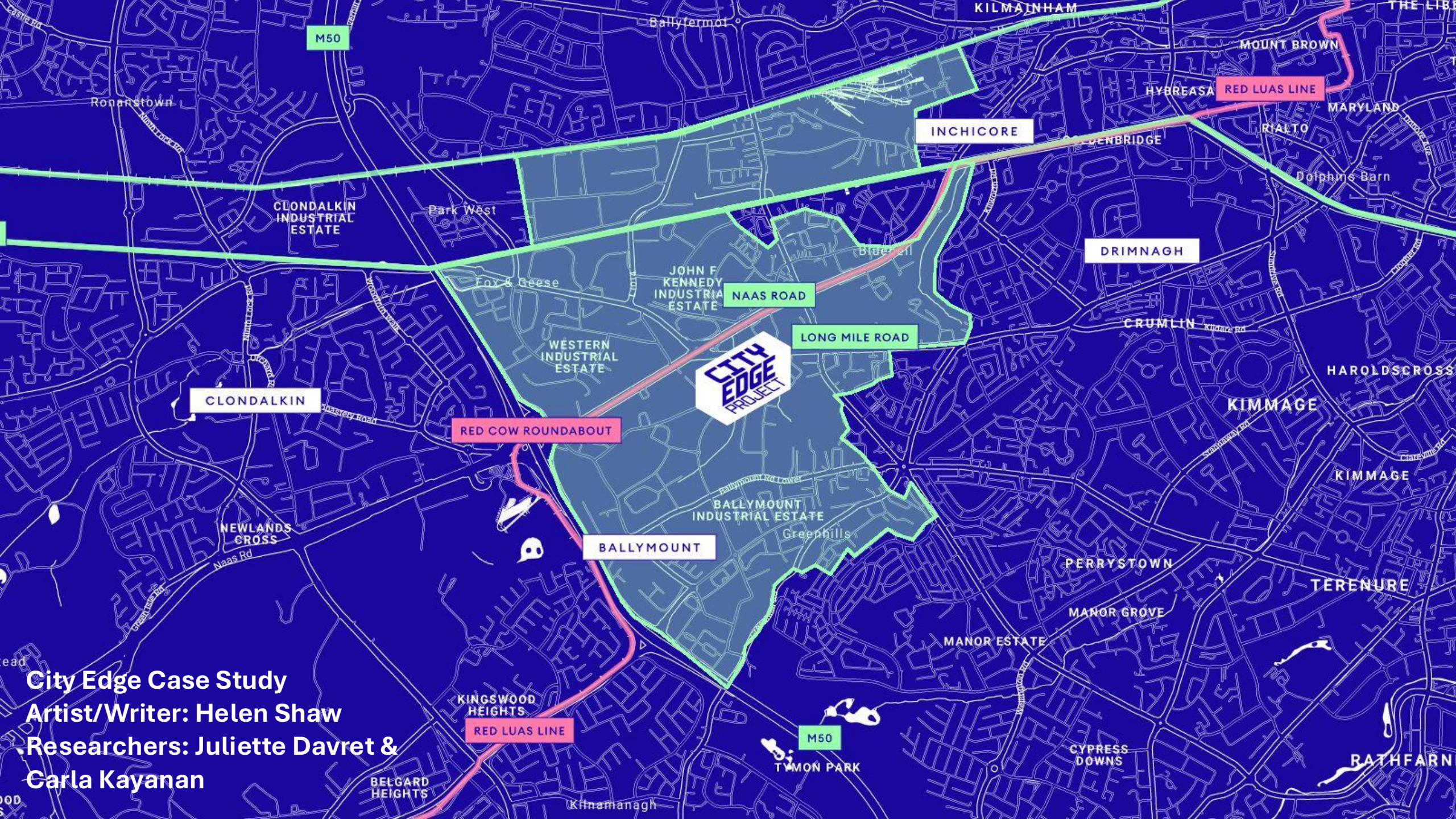
HNDA Case Study
Artist: Joan Somers Donnelly
Researcher: Carla Maria Kayanan



Data Aggregator Case Study
Artist/Writer: Mel Galley
Researcher: Juliette Davret



Situated Practice Case Study
Artist/Writer: Sean Borodale
Researcher: Danielle Hynes

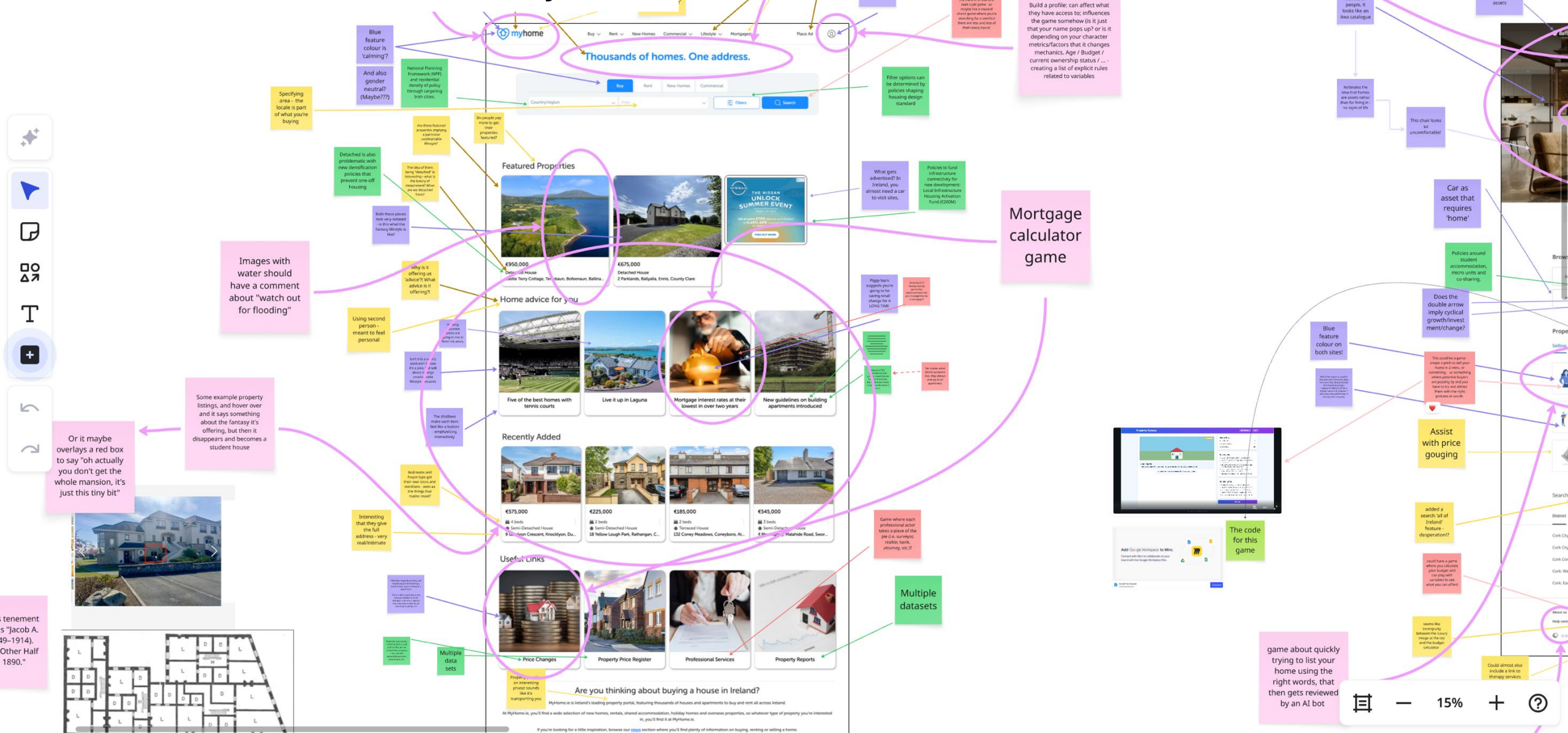


City Edge Case Study
Artist/Writer: Helen Shaw
Researchers: Juliette Davret & Carla Kayanan



Housing Activist Case Study
Artist: Augustine O'Donoghue
Researcher: Samuel Mutter

Researchers: Oliver Dawkins & Carla Kayanan



Data Narratives Case Study
Artist: Mel Galley
Researchers: Danielle Hynes &
Samuel Mutter



Phase 2: Case Studies

Creative methods used in workshops useful for reflection

- Draws attention to absurdity
- Giving stakeholders tools for how to reflect on their own practices

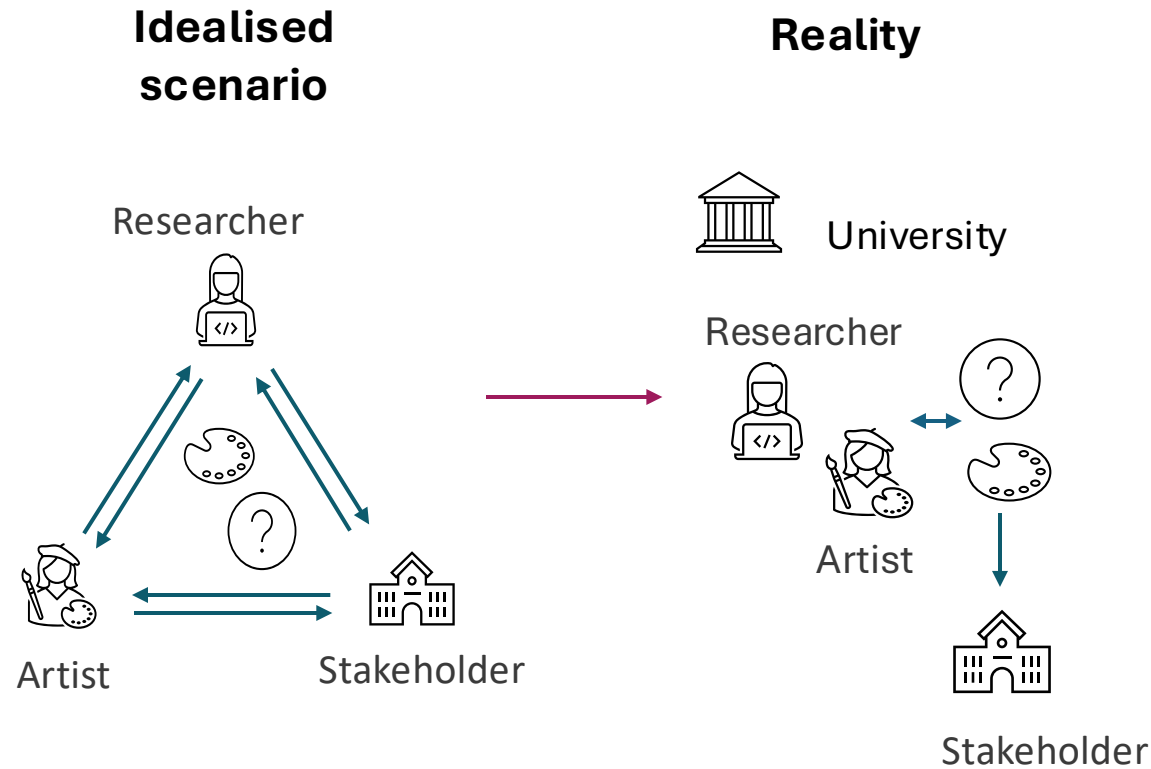
Artist methods useful for researchers

“Being provoked to try and respond in a different way and respond by things that I might write down usually anyway but I wouldn’t necessarily send to someone.” – Academic Researcher

Research methods useful for artists

- Intellectual stimulation related to concept versus discussing the material or physical aspect of work
- Engaging repetitive inquiry (interview methods, repeating exercises, reworking outputs)

Phase 2: Case Studies



Incremental change

Changed ways of thinking between Years 1 & 2

Moved far from initial model

- New artists but same 2 cases
- 2 researchers on case studies
- 2 researchers + 1 artist but no stakeholder

Invitation for your reflections



Who is research creation for?

Are there certain sectors more/less amenable to research creation?

What is the relationship between the artistic output and contribution to knowledge?

What do we make in research creation?
Does it matter and who does it matter to?

Who is research creation for?

“I think it’s more about researchers learning artistic approaches, learning artistic methods, so that they have a repertoire that they can apply things and it will give them more flexibility.” -Artist

Research creation can excel in fields that explore human experiences, emotions and complex social issues.

- Health – priority-setting, marginalised populations. The right artist can hold space in ways that are different from typical research practices
- Education – art is an event and not an object

Planning and policymaking critiqued for their increased culture of anti-intellectualism and the lack of time to think, read and experiment.

Lack of defined stakeholders with established relationships and familiarity

- Stakeholders time poor, churn, authority

Who is research creation for?

Loveless (2019)

- With research creation, it is less about the identity (who is doing what) or the act (what is being produced and how) and more about the output of the research (part research, part creation, part experiment)

Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013)

- “...shift research from an information society to an in-form-ation society, from being to becoming, from knowing the world to being in the world as one 'object' amongst many, and one species amongst many species: privileged certainly, but radically centered”(pg 17)

Bolt (2016) - Performative paradigm

- purpose of the performative paradigm is the knowledge generated by mapping the movements that arise in a research process (concepts, understandings, methodologies, material practice, affect and sensorial experiences)

Who is research creation for?

“Arts-based research feels more relevant because it has broader connotations and doesn’t incorporate creating.” - Artist

“[Creative/artistic/avant-garde practices] doesn’t necessarily generate new knowledge but provides new or simply different conditions for knowledge creation and creative practice.” –Academic Researcher

An artistic praxis can do a lot more than create artworks (relates to performative paradigm)

- McCormack (2008) - Learning to become affected, thinking-spaces for research-creation

Uncertainty around impact

Measuring impact of changing way of thinking

Recognising it might come much later, ‘planting a seed’

Who is research creation for?

Solve Problem/Research Question/Doing/Outcome	Explore/Find problem/Becoming/Process
Develop universal method	Build coalitions, practices, relationships
Collect data	No single answer
Efficient	Ambiguity and uncertainty
Arrive at answer	Facilitate growth, learning and transformation
Goal oriented	Situated and unique
Generalisable, scalability, applicability	Long-term
Extractive, reductive	Slow

What is the necessary structure for research creation?

How do we avoid research creation from being extractive?

How can you fit an arts practice into a research schedule with a pre-defined grant structure?

What are the biggest institutional barriers to research creation projects and how can we tackle them?

What is the necessary structure for research creation?

“Even the way the advert was written, it was written from a non-art point of view.”-Artist

Grant design pre-defined

- Workshops already built into model, artists as facilitator
- Research creation bracketed into 1-year periods

No studio space for artists

Researchers unaware of artistic practices

- Supporting the artist versus collaborating with the artist depended on researcher having clarity of the art practice
- Didn't shape expectations/desires around crits

What is the necessary structure for research creation?

“There seems to be a tendency from the academic side to fall back and blame the structures as a reason for inability to make changes, perhaps this is from experience or perhaps academics are not natural rule breakers and have become accustomed to working within institutional structures...Artists in general tend to have more autonomy around their work practices so we can respond and implement certain changes quickly. I think there is also a natural tendency in a lot of artists to challenge things, to tear up the rules and an ability to reimagine different futures because that’s what we do within our art practice on a daily basis.” - Artist

Neoliberal, institutional, structured space of the university:

- What would research creation look like if an artist/art body held the grant rather than the researchers?
- What would research creation look like if the stakeholder held the grant rather than the researchers?

What is the necessary structure for research creation?

“One of the overarching challenges of working on the research project was the time constraints of the project and output driven nature of the university against the time and pace I wanted and needed to develop my particular work process.”-Artist

Certain arts practices require more relationship building

Extractive practices

- of stakeholder
- of artist
- of researchers on artists as facilitators and interpretation of material

Tension around whose/what agenda is prioritised

Precarity

How are the boundaries between the researcher and the artist (un)fruitful, (un)productive and (dis)enabling?

When is a researcher an artist and an artist a researcher?

In what ways are 'failure' and 'unknowing' part of the process of research creation?

How do we break the academic bubble and bring this kind of work and research to a broader audience?

What would allow, or better support, early career researchers to step off the hamster wheel of paper-writing and presenting and engage more deeply in different research modalities and thinking speeds?

How are the boundaries between the researcher and the artist (un)fruitful, (un)productive and (dis)enabling?

“This workshop geared almost exclusively towards an academic audience and not towards an arts or community audience.” - Artist

“I have the impression that there is a clear division between researcher and artists, I have felt I should ‘stay in my lane’, the research lane. I’d be happy to be more hands on with the creation side...I could set time for creative thinking, following creative ideas if they come to me, and considering this an important part of the work rather than an optional extra or distraction.” –Academic Researcher

“...research creation is set up as a meeting between two different worlds, but people don't normally fit neatly into one or the other. Which makes me wonder if there's a different framing that would generate different understandings.” -Artist

How are the boundaries between the researcher and the artist (un)fruitful, (un)productive and (dis)enabling?

Different working paces and depths of engagement between artists and researchers

- *“I don’t have time to read all that.”* –Artist
- Thinking in non-linear ways rather than reading academic papers
- Write up and send out for input vs sit down and write together
- Obtaining feedback, crits

Artists more accustomed to sit with ambiguity than researchers and have more autonomy around their work practices

- Ambiguous in the sense of working on a process without having (fixed) outputs

“Research [is], in some ways, a poetic enterprise, with its own architecture that could include enchantment, failure and unknowing as much as a ‘scientific’ mode of enquiry” (Pahl et al, 2022, p4)

Conclusion

Does research
creation work?

What advice would
you give for
developing similar
grants?

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Works cited

Gordon (2013).

Jagodzinski, J. and Wallin, J. (2013). Arts-Based Research : A Critique and a Proposal

Loveless, N. (2019) Making art at the end of the world

McCormack (2013).

Pahl, K., Steadman-Jones, R., Vasudevan, L. (2022) Collaborative Research in Theory and Practice: The Poetics of Letting Go. Bristol University Press

Testing the Waters: The value of artistic practices for societal challenges, Centre of Expertise Creative Innovation (2025)

Methodology OR Cooperative/Collaborative/Co- created insights

Shared literature review document

Comments on literature review developed into paper (Kayanan et. al. forthcoming)

Full day workshop with Phase 1 artists on research creation

- Workshop recorded
- Audio manually coded

Discussions with Phase 2 artists



Phase 2: Case studies

Year 1

**State planning
data ecosystem**

Multi-stakeholder

**Housing need
demand
modelling**

Multi-stakeholder

Data aggregator

Single stakeholder

**Grassroots civic
planning
organisation**

Single
stakeholder

**Grassroots civic
housing
organisation**

Single
stakeholder

Data narratives

No stakeholder

Year 2

Official statistics

Multi-stakeholder

**Planning and
urban
regeneration**

Multi-stakeholder

**Commodification
and real-estate
narratives**

Multi-stakeholder

**Situated practice
/ historical data**

No stakeholder

**European
housing/planning
data**

Multi-stakeholder

Critiques of research-creation

- Qualitative methods and approaches critiqued for lacking rigour, objectivity and reproducibility due to their openness, lack of standardization, and unrepresentative samples
- This critique is magnified for research-creation, where not only does the research process vary with each undertaking, but no process is repeatable due to its liveness
- Moreover, the experience of taking part in the process is important to being able to interpret what took place
- Further, research-creation is often overtly political, seeking to change the world in some way through its praxes
- Fails the central ambition of the scientific method; that is, to produce data that others can re-analyze and knowledge that is consistent, reproducible, and generalizable.
- Research-creation might be evocative and generative, but it does not produce conclusive, defensible findings or arguments

Defence of research-creation

- These critiques judge creative approaches on the terms of the detractors
- Fail to understand the aims and benefits to creative endeavours and that they are explicitly a challenge to the epistemologies of traditional approaches
- What others see as weaknesses, practitioners often view as strengths
- The process is just as, or more important, than the outcomes
- An engaging way to prompt communities and stakeholders to critically reflect on issues
- Perceived weaknesses do mean that persuading people to participate can be a challenge as there is often scepticism concerning the utility, integrity and validity
- However, those who take part usually find the process and the critical reflection it engendered useful and often ask for follow-on sessions
- Arts-based methods offer a viable means of researching social issues