

“Just Happy Faces”:

Cultural Resilience and Circularity in Rotterdam

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Abstract

With the prevalence of resilience and circularity in academic studies and policymaking, there is a need to explore their relationship for sustainable development. Within these two fields, attention to culture and its potential roles has been lacking. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the experiences and circular practices of the cultural sector in Rotterdam. It seeks to understand their adaptive tactics for building resilience and their connection to urban circularity. Guided by a theoretical framework analysing artistic gentrification, circular city discourse, and cultural resilience, the research utilises 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews to identify coping tactics employed by cultural organisations in response to social, economic, and spatial challenges. The analysis reveals three key areas of adaptive tactics: the importance of networks and collaboration, the role of community engagement in strengthening resilience, and the utilisation of circular practices to rationalise limited resources. The discussion highlights the nuances surrounding resilience and circularity in the cultural sector, questioning their grounded reality and emphasising their selective nature. It underscores the intermediary role of the cultural sector in connecting with communities, enhancing the right to the city, and promoting place-based collaborations and neighbourhood learning. Based on the findings, five policy recommendations are proposed: establishing place-based collaborations, facilitating grassroots initiatives, fostering inclusive area development, promoting transversal collaboration within the municipality, and building a multi-value system beyond market-oriented value measurement.

Keywords: Cultural Resilience, Circularity, Adaptive Tactics; Place-based Collaborations; Inclusive Urban Development

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1. Introduction

1.1. Envisioning a Resilient and Circular Future in a Tumultuous World

“In Olinda, if you go out with a magnifying glass and hunt carefully, you may find somewhere a point no bigger than the head of a pin which, if you look at it slightly enlarged, reveals within itself the roofs, the antennas, the skylights, the gardens, the pools, the streamers across the streets, the kiosks in the squares, the horse-racing track. That point does not remain there: a year later you will find it the size of half a lemon, then as large as a mushroom, then a soup plate. And then it becomes a full-size city, enclosed within the earlier city: a new city that forces its way ahead in the earlier city and presses it toward the outside.” (1974/2010, p. 100).

In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Olinda, one of the imaginary cities, undergoes a distinct process of growth and expansion. It continuously extends outward from its core, enveloping the older quarters and making space for new ones that emerge from the centre. This process creates concentric layers that preserve the characteristics and essence of the preceding ones, like tree trunks that grow one more ring each year. Olinda's growth embodies a circular progression, where the past influences the present, the present lays the foundation for the future, and eventually, the future becomes the past.

The story of Olinda can be seen as a metaphorical exploration of resilience and circularity in urban contexts. The increasing prevalence of resilience building and circular development in cities in recent years is not arbitrary but reflects the urgent need to address resource depletion and ecological breakdown. What connects the concept of resilience and circularity is their inherent connection with sustainable development. The circular economy is regarded as both a subset of and a means for sustainable development (Reddy, 2020; Kuzma et al., 2021), while resilience is considered complementary to sustainable development (Metaxas & Psarropoulou, 2021). Together, these concepts promise potential solutions and practices to foster sustainability.

However, as Section 2 will demonstrate, the development of both resilience and circularity brings forth its own set of challenges. The emphasis on material circularity within the circular economy has faced criticism for being driven by technocratic politics (Gregson et al., 2015, p. 235). Similarly, the construction of resilience has been scrutinised as an excuse for

state disinvestment and necessitating the active acquiescence of neoliberal subjectivity (Neocleous, 2013; Pratt, 2015).

At the same time, from Hong Kong to New York City, Amsterdam to Melbourne, the creative city discourse has shaped city development policies ever since Richard Florida's concept of the creative class gained prominence among policymakers (Peck, 2005). However, this pursuit of economic growth and attracting the creative class has frequently resulted in the stimulation of gentrification by the state, with culture being assigned the role of creating an appealing environment (Ley, 2003). Consequently, the creative city discourse, while adopted by cities worldwide, has often come at the expense of existing communities and cultural expressions. Gentrification, driven by state-led initiatives, has become a prevalent strategy to transform urban areas into coveted creative hubs, leading to concerns over the displacement of artists and the erosion of authentic cultural practices.

Under these conditions, the resilience of the cultural sector has gained attention in light of its ability to withstand challenges, including often being the first victim of budget cuts (Pratt, 2017). However, existing resilience studies often overlook the experiences of the cultural sector and fail to acknowledge its resilience in the face of adversity. Similarly, whether it is the broader sustainability discourse or the more narrowly focused studies of the circular economy, the roles of arts and culture have been overlooked to a large extent (Soini & Birkeland, 2014).

Hence, this study brings together the concepts of resilience and circularity in the cultural context, with the hope to address the following knowledge gaps. Firstly, it brings to the fore the consideration for immaterial circularity, particularly in relation to the role of culture in city development. By exploring how the cultural sector perceives and practices circularity, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of circular cities that encompasses both material and immaterial aspects. Secondly, existing resilience research tends to prioritise top-down approaches to resilience building, primarily focusing on policy-level interventions. However, there is a lack of emphasis on understanding the resilience practices employed by (subaltern) social actors, including cultural organisations (Newsinger & Serafini, 2021). By examining the resilience tactics employed by cultural sectors, this study seeks to contribute a critical perspective to the prevailing discourse on resilience, highlighting the importance of grassroots resilience strategies and their potential to inform and enrich resilience frameworks.

In this light, the study is guided by the following questions:

Research question: *What adaptive tactics do cultural organisations employ to enhance their resilience in the face of social, economic, and spatial challenges in urban contexts?*

Sub-question: *How can their experiences and insights be effectively translated into actionable strategies and policies that promote urban circularity and enhance cultural resilience?*

To examine the interplay between resilience, circularity, and the cultural sector, this study turns its focus to the city of Rotterdam. Rotterdam serves as a case study due to its unique trajectory and efforts to navigate the challenges posed by deindustrialisation and changing socio-economic dynamics. As a historically industrial seaport city, Rotterdam faced the imperative to adapt and reinvent itself, leading to the implementation of urban cultural policies aimed at transforming itself into a creative city. By investing in cultural infrastructure and urban redevelopment, Rotterdam sought to attract the creative class and foster a diverse cultural and creative sector. However, these developments were not without their challenges, with issues such as gentrification arising in tandem. Moreover, Rotterdam's commitment to resilience-building and the promotion of circular economy principles further underscores its significance as an intriguing case to explore the relationship between cultural resilience and urban circularity. By studying the experiences and identifying the tactics employed by cultural organisations in Rotterdam, this study seeks insights that can inform actionable policies and practices and contribute to the enhancement of both cultural resilience and urban circularity.

1.2. Thesis Outline

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and provides a comprehensive literature review on resilience and circularity. It also introduces three levels of perspectives that situate the research inquiry. Section 3 contextualises the study by providing background information on the case study, Rotterdam. In Section 4, the research design is explained, including the rationale for methodological choices, as well as an overview of data collection and analysis procedures. Section 5 presents the findings, drawing from 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Section 6 offers in-depth discussions of the findings, including policy recommendations, and addresses research limitations and future possibilities. Finally, Section 7 concludes the paper by summarising the main points discussed throughout.

2. Literature Review

This section aims to provide an overview of the key concepts explored in this thesis, namely resilience and circularity, in the context of the cultural sector. It begins by reviewing scholarly discussions of these concepts and discussing the significance of these concepts and their relevance to cultural organisations. The discussion then shifts to two major macro-level developments that partly shape the resilience of the cultural sector: the phenomenon of cultural gentrification and the emergence of the creative city discourse. Understanding these macro-level frameworks is crucial for comprehending the subsequent analysis of meso-level factors and their interaction with the micro-level conditions of cultural organisations. Furthermore, the examination explores the dynamic relationship between cultural organisations, circularity, and resilience-building. By considering the enduring importance of place in a globalised context, it investigates how cultural organisations navigate and adapt to the challenges they face. Finally, this section concludes by proposing a micro-level approach to understanding resilience and circularity in the cultural sector, shedding light on the specific dynamics and tactics employed by cultural organisations.

2.1. Resilience and Its Discontent

2.1.1. The Discourse of Resilience

Resilience-building has taken on significance as a key strategy and guiding principle for cities and governments to devise future-looking schemas in the areas of environmental protection, city and regional planning, etc. (Coaffee, 2019; Pitidis et al., 2023). A notable example is the Resilient Cities Network, which was launched in 2013 as part of the 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) programme initiated by the Rockefeller Foundation. In its “city resilience framework”, urban resilience is defined as the “capacity of cities to function, so that the people living and working in cities—particularly the poor and vulnerable—survive and thrive no matter what stresses or shocks they encounter” (ARUP, 2014). In this sense, resilience is seen as a response and remedy to deal with the uncertainty of the future (Christopherson et al., 2010).

Resilience, while by no means a new concept, has transformed over the years through interpretations and studies in various fields. Resilience can be traced back to its application in physical sciences to describe a material’s capacity to resist external shocks (Davoudi et al., 2012). The concept entered the field of ecology in the 1960s. Ecologist Holling (1996) makes a key distinction between engineering resilience and ecological resilience. Engineering resilience

refers to the ability and speed of a system to resist disturbance and return to a stable equilibrium, whereas ecological resilience is the ability of a system to adapt and transform in response to change or disturbance, rather than just bounce back to the same state (Holling, 1996; Davoudi et al., 2012). The measurement in the former resilient system emphasises return speed, while the latter focuses on the magnitude of impact the system can endure. Holling (1973) argues that ecological resilience is essential for the long-term sustainability of ecosystems and human societies.

Davoudi et al. (2012) point out that despite the differences in measuring how a system bounces back (engineering) or bounces forth (ecological), both views of resilience assume the existence of an equilibrium (p. 301). The engineering-ecological distinction of resilience is essential to understanding the later applications of resilience in other fields. For example, in economics, resilience is interpreted in terms of an economic system's capacity to achieve "a fixed and narrowly defined equilibrium" (Christopherson et al., 2010, p. 3). Similar applications can be found in social science disciplines including disaster studies, economic geography, and urban planning. Davoudi et al. (2012) further relate this discourse of the bounce-back-ability of resilience to governmental strategies to deal with national security threats such as terrorist attacks and natural disasters, referring to resilience as "a buffer capacity for preserving what we have and recovering to where we were" (pp. 302). However, the underlying issue with the emphasis on bouncing back is that the "normality" is not questioned, making the equilibrium that a system strives to return to "illusory" in nature (Davoudi et al., 2012, p. 301).

In the 1990s, the notion of resilience emerged in city-regional planning as a means to adjust social and institutional frameworks in consideration of emerging challenges (Spaans & Waterhout, 2017). Pitidis et al. (2023) state that resilience-thinking bridges ecology and city planning, and a strategic resilience framework allows policymakers and other stakeholders to monitor and measure the impact of environmental changes on the social and urban fabric and vice versa. Coaffee (2013) points out that, compared to the US and UK, where urban resilience emerged to deal with major shocks such as terrorist attacks and natural disasters, the emergence of resilience in city planning in mainland Europe sprang from climate change adaptation. In short, resilience-building is heralded as "beacons of hope" by governments to devise and implement plans and policies that emphasise an urban future equipped with holistic hazard management and integrated institutional responses (Pitidis et al., 2023, p. 699; Coaffee, 2013; Simmie & Martin, 2010). In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a stark

reminder of the inherent unpredictability of disasters and the fragility of urban society, thus emphasising the significance of proactive resilience-building initiatives.

2.1.2. Critiquing Resilience

Despite the promise of resilience for a future-proof society, the introduction of the concept and its subsequent applications in urban planning have prompted criticism concerning its capacity to effect change. A number of studies have cautioned against the proliferation of resilience narratives and called for a critical engagement with the concept (Meerow & Newell, 2019; Vale, 2014; Torabi et al., 2018). Hurlimann and March (2012) identify three major obstacles to spatial planning efforts for adaptation: first, the need to establish strong conviction and commitment to this approach; second, the challenge of ensuring equitable processes and outcomes for all stakeholders involved; and third, the transformation of existing planning systems from passive and reactive to proactive and forward-looking. Brand and Jax (2007) expressly note that resilience has undergone significant normative and descriptive transformations, resulting from diverse interpretations and elaborations across various disciplines. Despite this increased conceptual vagueness, the authors (2007) contend that it has facilitated communication between different disciplines and strengthened the link between science and practice. However, without addressing the underlying socio-spatial inequalities, the transformative capacity of resilience-building is in question and may fall victim to "business-as-usual" approaches that lead to maladaptation (O'Hare et al., 2016; Pitidis et al., 2023).

In addition to uneven resilience, the embedding of resilience in urban policy and management runs the risk of being absorbed into neoliberal agendas (Pratt, 2017; Davoudi et al., 2012; Welsh, 2014). Such a critique is threefold. Firstly, the resilience narratives, often bundled in sustainable development discourse, propose solutions that rely on capitalist market mechanisms such as green growth and green consumption (Ziervogel et al., 2017). Such market-based solutions that promote ecological prosperity by linking them to economic prosperity not only convey implicit optimism about market mechanisms, but also demonstrate the capacity of neoliberalism to align itself with such ecological objectives (Reid, 2012). Viewed through this lens, resilience narratives replace development for security with adaptation for market prosperity, perpetuating the neoliberal agenda rather than challenging it.

Secondly, resilience is criticised for reinforcing neoliberal subjectivity (Reid, 2012; Pratt, 2017). While cities have become strategic arenas for neoliberal reforms and institutional restructuring in the past few decades (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), resilience narratives have permeated not only the systemic and organisational levels but also the individual level (Ziervogel et al., 2017; Pratt, 2015). Resilience is increasingly interpreted as "a state of being able to withstand external acts that will threaten the integrity of a subject" (Pratt, 2015, p. 61). As a result, the ideal resilient subject is adaptive rather than secure. Neocleous (2013) sharply points out that this type of resilience narrative accentuates "a politics of anticipation" and requires active acquiescence rather than resistance (p. 5). The resilient subjects are prepared for adversity and imminent threats and ready to accommodate themselves to the world rather than "a political subject which can conceive of changing the world" (Reid, 2012, p. 74). This view resonates with Davoudi et al.'s (2012) observation of the implicit backing for self-reliance in resilience literature.

Finally, while some may argue that neoliberal resilient subjectivity is a subjective experience, the positive consequences of resilience narratives built on market optimism and individual responsabilisation may spill over to wider aspects of society. The post-2010 recession and the subsequent budgetary cuts and austerity measures, as Pratt (2015) argues, have contributed to the characteristics of resilience measures that resonate with Klein's (2007) notion of the shock doctrine. Resilience is interpreted as "making do with less," which involves disinvestment and outsourcing social commitments to reduce costs (Pratt, 2015, p. 62). As a result, the attainment of resilience often involves imposing precarious working conditions on subcontractors, self-employed individuals, and employees (Pratt, 2017). In other words, the emphasis on self-reliance in social systems justifies rolling back state support and absolving the state from providing security against both internal and external threats to vulnerable communities (Swanstrom, 2008; Davoudi et al., 2012).

2.1.3. Culture as "the Poster Child for Resilience"

Culture is described as the "poster child for resilience" for its capacity to endure hardship and turmoil (Pratt, 2017, p. 127). This "quality" of culture is particularly notable in times of state funding cuts, as the cultural sector is often the first victim to face budget cuts, followed by the education and social sectors. Pratt (2017) pinpoints the strange phenomenon that the cultural economies in both the global North and South have not only survived but even thrived in the face of economic recession and austerity measures. A similar trend can be observed in the

Netherlands. The Dutch cultural sector has struggled since the budget slash in 2011, when arts and culture faced a 20% national budget cut and an average of a further 9% cut in municipality budgets (with Rotterdam and the Hague heavily cutting 14% of their arts and culture budgets, respectively) (Van Meerkerk & Van den Hoogen, 2018; DutchCulture, 2012). However, according to the Arts Index Netherlands, in the period between 2005 and 2017, while government contributions dropped, cultural infrastructure and the overall income of the cultural sector (excluding government contributions) increased (Boekmanstichting, 2020). While there are multifarious factors that contributed to such a trend, the argument here is not that cultural organisations and artists do not need state support; rather, it is to suggest that the cultural economy at large has displayed the capacity to employ adaptive practices and demonstrated resilience.

Meanwhile, it is crucial to avoid romanticising the cultural sector as an ecosystem with the ability to effortlessly recover from challenges. This perspective does not acknowledge the potential shortcomings of the organisational structure of the cultural economy. Moreover, there is a contention suggesting that austerity measures could be perceived as desirable, as they potentially eliminate organisations and individuals who are unable to navigate and adapt to challenging circumstances, thereby enhancing the overall resilience of the sector. Such a view perpetuates an asocial tendency by detaching resilience from broader social structures and relationships. This disconnect disregards the broader implications of budget cuts targeting cultural initiatives. It is essential to recognise that resilience is not solely the responsibility of individuals but also relies on the support of wider societal frameworks and considerations. Such a perspective also has significant implications on a personal level. In their study of the consequences of austerity on culture in the UK, Newsinger and Serafini (2021) argue for the potential danger of artists and creative workers internalising the resilience discourse, whereby resilience becomes "a dominant trait or attribute in the contemporary identity and social imaginary of the artist." (p. 603). Therefore, it becomes critical to adopt a critical lens in order to decouple resilience from neoliberal discourse and counteract the influences of survivalist and social Darwinist thinking (Davoudi et al., 2012; Pratt, 2017).

In light of these considerations, a closer look at the organisational structure of the cultural sector suggests that its ostensible resilience is much more complex than it first seems. Pratt (2017) describes the cultural sector as "born resilient," but with a big asterisk. As he (2017) argues, the core of resilience is not the strength of the system, but an adaptability developed

from the capacity to reconfigure and reorganise itself. This is why the cultural sector demonstrates resilience: its organisational structure is represented by networks of small firms and self-employed workers. These components of the networks are characterised by relational ways of communication, interconnectedness and interdependence on resources and thus decision-making, joint productions, and most significantly, cooperation (Powell, 1990). Potts et al. (2008) take a step further and argue that the cultural and creative industries are "social network markets", in which the flow of cultural products, ideas, and resources is shaped by social connections, collaborations, and exchanges, rather than supply and demand. Rather than being governed by the "market-hierarchy continuum," the networked cultural sector primarily functions through contractual arrangements centred on project deliverables, enabling it to easily reorganise and navigate the inherent market uncertainty associated with cultural product demands (Powell, 1990, p. 296; Caves, 2003).

However, as Pratt (2017) emphasises, the resilience of the cultural sector comes at a cost. According to Pratt (2017), there are at least two problems undermining the resilience of the cultural sector. Firstly, the economic costs of constantly reconfiguring are high (see Coase, 1937). While enhanced collaboration reduces transaction costs, network dependence introduces additional costs for maintaining and managing complex networks. Moreover, the barriers to entry into a cultural market are high for new entrants, making it challenging for the market to diversify, especially if a cultural barrier and other informal barriers also exist (Pratt, 2015). Secondly, and more problematically, the network dependence—perhaps inadvertently—encourages an affective attitude of self-exploitation that is an "entry requirement" to the sector (Pratt, 2017, p. 136). Indeed, the volatility of the artist labour market has long been deliberated and discussed (Abbing, 2002). Recent studies have pointed out the prevalence of self-employment in the cultural sector as "forced entrepreneurship" (Oakley, 2014). Deresiewicz (2020) sharply criticises that artist-entrepreneurship emerged as false empowerment and to disguise the vulnerable "precariat" (a neologism blending the words "precarious" and "proletariat") class position they are in (p. 279; see also Standing, 2014). This is not only a result of the excessive supply in the cultural sector, but also an effect of network dependence that paradoxically enhances and limits immaterial flows of talents, resources, skills, etc. at the same time. As Pratt (2017) puts it, "the strength of flexibility comes with the cost of network cultivation" (p. 136). As a result, part of the burden of resilience is shifted to flexible and freelance workers, who bear the costs of uncertainty, making the sustainability of such a mode of resilience questionable.

Not unexpectedly, the resilience of the cultural sector is a complex and contested phenomenon. A better understanding of the resilience tactics of cultural organisations, while bearing the sector's inherent complexity in mind, is crucial in filling the knowledge gap about how cultural workers make use of their resources for resilience-building (Newsinger & Serafini, 2021), which is what this thesis aims to achieve.

2.2. Urban Circularity

2.2.1. The Emergence of the Circular Economy

The circular economy concept has become widely considered a necessity for a more sustainable future, and thus, gained widespread attention from policymakers (Fratini et al., 2019; Weetman, 2020). Considered an alternative to the “linear” economic system, its core principle focuses on “closing the loop,” which means that the values of materials are retained and circulated through continuous processes of reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling (Russell et al., 2020, p. 1904). In such processes, materials that would have become waste return to the system as resources. An abundant number of initiatives have emerged to put the concept into practice. Notable examples include Braungart and McDonough's (2002) conception of the cradle-to-cradle design and the UK-based Ellen MacArthur Foundation's extensive efforts in accelerating the realisation of the circular economy. Thanks to its promise of a greener future, the circular economy also gains traction among policymakers. Increasingly, international and national policies take the initiative to incorporate the circular economy model into their plans for sustainable futures. For example, the European Commission implemented an action plan in 2015 to promote and speed up the development of the circular economy in Europe, which was then renewed in 2020 as one of the keys to sustainable growth in the European Green Deal (European Commission, n.d.).

However, this promise of the circular economy has been questioned (Gregson et al., 2015; Zink & Geyer, 2017). The criticisms follow two trains of thought. The first perspective points out the overwhelming concentration on technologies and industrial progression and business model development (Fratini et al., 2019). On this point, Gregson et al. (2015) state that the EU discourses are steered by “technocratic politics”, which overlooks place-specific elements that could potentially contribute to urban sustainable transitions (p. 235; Fratini et al., 2019). The second perspective concerns the idea of “growth” underlying the circular economy discourse. Charonis (2021) contends that as an industrial model, the circular economy

discourse is expected to work within a growing economy, thus, strictly speaking, it is an “alternative growth discourse” rather than an “alternative discourse to economic growth” (p. 80). This highlights the tension between the current circular economy's aim of achieving sustainability within a growth-oriented system and the degrowth movement's call for a fundamental transformation away from the pursuit of endless economic expansion (Hickel, 2020).

2.2.2. The Circular City: Expanding the Scope of Circularity

Despite these current limitations, Charonis (2021) asserts that the basic principles of the circular economy are highly complementary to discourses that repudiate the neoliberal paradigm of continued growth, specifically degrowth and a steady state economy. The concept of “circular society” arises along this line of thinking, envisioning a transformative approach to sustainability that is “beyond growth, technology, and market-based solutions” (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2021, p. 1). This transition to a circular society not only entails rejecting the linear economic system that promotes consumerism and a throwaway mentality, but also involves embracing a broader approach to value creation and retention encompassing economic, sociocultural, and ecological dimensions (Ghisellini et al., 2016; Jaeger-Erben et al., 2021).

While circular society is still a young concept, policymakers in many cities, including Rotterdam, have begun building a “creative city” that adopts a circular approach to urban development (Williams, 2021). Although a number of cities self-identify as circular or heading towards a circular economy, the application of circularity in cities has been equivocal (Prendeville et al., 2018). Policymakers commonly place their trust in businesses to spearhead the implementation and innovation processes, leading to a potential disparity in terms of involving other stakeholders, such as citizens, in the development of a comprehensive vision for a circular city (Prendeville et al., 2018). The concern raised by Prendeville et al. (2018) extends to the potential loss of credibility and the risk of being diluted into mere buzzwords or greenwashing practices. In a similar vein but addressing wider urban development, Lavanga and Drosner (2020) observe indications of artistic gentrification in Amsterdam North and question whether the ongoing controversial narrative of the creative city will persist under the guise of a sustainable or circular city, leading to the displacement of existing residents and the precarious creative and cultural workers. This issue will be further discussed in Section 2.3.2.

To make sense of such development of the circular city, it might be helpful to return to the fundamental concept of circularity. While circularity exists in natural systems where resources are continuously recycled and reused since time began, it is also the governing principle of mankind:

Human capital—people, their skills and creativity combined with a caring attitude—is the basis of this circular society. Caring for and sharing of stocks—natural, cultural, manufactured and social capitals—has been the engine of the circular society of the past and the basis of our sustainable future. (Stahel, 2019, p. XIV)¹

On this note, it is crucial to recognise that the concept of circularity encompasses the deeper notion of relationality, which brings to the fore not only the materiality of a product, but also the immaterial aspects. As Pratt (2022) argues, “relational networks focus on the flows,” and the value of goods and services is “as contextual as it is intrinsic” (p. 7). In short, considering both circularity’s material and immaterial dimensions enhances our understanding of the intricate dynamics involved in value creation and exchange within a circular city.

There are three implications of such consideration for a circular city. Firstly, both material and immaterial flows should be on the agenda of a circular city. For a circular economy to flourish, circular systems need to be developed considering the interconnectedness and relations of a good or service within ecosystems, and the experiences, meanings, and cultural significance attached to it (Palm et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the values created through immaterial flows of social and cultural capital should also be retained and fed back into the systems. Secondly, as advocates of the circular society suggest, the active involvement of various societal actors is a requisite in the transition to circularity (Calisto Friant et al., 2020; Jaeger-Erben et al., 2021; Melles, 2021). One approach within the discourse focuses on bottom-up innovation, social participation, and collaborative efforts at the community level to transform modes of production and consumption (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2021). Thirdly, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant role of culture in the transition towards circularity, which is currently being overlooked. Culture assumes a pivotal position in this process for two fundamental reasons: firstly, all actors and their behaviours are deeply influenced by cultural

¹ Stahel (2019) perceives “circular society” as societies throughout history in which resources were shared and exchanged through material and immaterial circularity, such as a barter economy. This understanding is distinct from the aforementioned circular societies, which aspires to building post-growth societies governed by principles of circularity.

factors, and secondly, culture can act as a catalyst for sustainable values, facilitating the exploration, alignment, and actualisation of these values through cultural production and active social participation (Duxbury & Jeannotte, 2011, p. 3; Soini & Dessein, 2016).

2.2.3. A Circular Future for Resilience-Building

Connecting to the previous section on resilience, it is argued that circular practices—both material and immaterial—are a significant part of resilience-building in sustainable development. Their connection is both conceptual and practical. On a conceptual level, both concepts emphasise sustainability, adaptability, and long-term viability and recognise the need to move away from linear and unsustainable models. On a practical level, circularity strategies contribute to resilience-building by promoting resource efficiency, reducing vulnerabilities, and fostering adaptable systems. What is particularly relevant here is the immaterial aspects. For example, Palm et al. (2021) argue that integrating an immaterial approach in the fashion value chains, such as incorporating diverse knowledge systems, contributes to a holistic circular system, while focusing solely on the material aspects of the industry's environmental impact risks eroding resilience. However, as touched on above, while the immaterial aspects of a circular system play a significant role, these processes are still underexplored.

2.3. Macro-level Developments

In addition to budget cuts and the inherent uncertainty of the cultural economy, the cultural sectors in cities the world over face a similar problem: gentrification. These tales of cultural displacement have a familiar ring: old warehouses and studios brimming with cultural expressions are replaced by trendy cafes, upscale boutiques, or luxurious apartments. And gradually, a once-vibrant neighbourhood becomes lost in urban transformation. Moreover, gentrification in recent years is closely connected to the creative city discourse. This section discusses artistic gentrification and the discourse of the creative city as a macro-level perspective to understand the challenges facing the cultural sector in urban contexts.

2.3.1. Artistic Gentrification

Before exploring artistic gentrification, gaining an understanding of gentrification as a widespread phenomenon allows us to better grasp its underlying dynamics. Ruth Glass's (1964) seminal work on the displacement of former working-class residential areas by middle-class shops and residences in Islington, London, laid the foundation for the study of gentrification. As

similar changes in class compositions in neighbourhoods became prevalent, scholarly debates began to gain consensus that gentrification is no longer limited to isolated instances of rehabilitation (Hamnett, 1991). Hackworth (2000) summarises three waves of gentrification in North America and Europe. The first wave, which started in the 1950s, can be described as "sporadic gentrification," similar to what Glass (1964) observed. The second wave refers to the "anchoring phase" of gentrification when the phenomenon became a consistent part of urban restructuring throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Its widespread occurrence marked the third wave, "gentrification generalised," which has become an integrated urban policy (Smith, 2002).

Increasingly, gentrification has been systematically integrated into broader urban processes, often engineered and accelerated by state authorities. For example, in the Netherlands, state-led gentrification is perceived as a successful urban regeneration strategy by the national government, benefiting both higher-income groups in acquiring housing and lower-income groups in accessing resources brought by the former (Van der Graaf & Veldboer, 2009). However, Van der Graaf and Veldboer (2009) conclude that such an urban policy has modest effects on social mobility and place attachment, with limited benefits for disadvantaged residents in deprived neighbourhoods. In addition to government policies and interventions, other catalysts for gentrification are well-discussed, including mega-events such as the Olympics (Shin, 2009; Watt, 2013), large-scale cultural festivals such as the European Capital of Culture (Doucet et al., 2011), and transit-oriented development (He et al., 2021).

What is of concern here is the role of arts and culture in urban spatial restructuring. Zukin (1989) pioneered the study of artistic gentrification by examining the transformation of industrial lofts in Lower Manhattan's SoHo neighbourhood into artist studios. However, within only a few years, these affordable artist spaces were replaced by upscale housing cooperatives, with artists inadvertently contributing to the rise in property values and the development of high-end consumption in the area. Ley (2003) examines the phenomenon of artistic gentrification through the lens of Bourdieu's concept of cultural production and the exchange of cultural and economic capital. He posits that artists play a pivotal role in the reconfiguration of urban spaces by facilitating the transformation of marginalised areas into desirable centres. This process involves the transfer of cultural capital (of artists and existing residents) to generate economic capital (captured by property developers), resulting in the displacement of existing residents and the subsequent displacement of artists as they seek more affordable spaces elsewhere (Ley, 2003). These dynamics create a linear progression of value loss for the parties

involved, with economic considerations outweighing other forms of value, perpetuating a "vicious cycle of artistic gentrification" (Pratt, 2018, p. 350). In this light, circular thinking in value preservation may contribute to the remediation of such forms of displacement.

Moreover, the emergence of artistic gentrification is accompanied by the phenomenon of hipsterisation, where local neighbourhoods undergo a transformation characterised by the proliferation of aesthetically similar shops that cater to a specific demographic, namely young, educated individuals with substantial purchasing power, commonly referred to as "hipsters" (Hubbard, 2016). This process of aestheticisation, or as Peck (2005) phrases it, the "hipster embourgeoisement," contributes to an increase in property prices, alters the neighbourhood's identity, and displaces original local businesses that traditionally served the daily needs of residents (p. 745; Hubbard, 2018; Jackson & Butler, 2015). Notable examples include Brick Lane in London, Williamsburg in Brooklyn, New York, and Kreuzberg in Berlin. The introduction of artistic and cultural elements creates a new identity in these areas, which can become detached from the local neighbourhood. For instance, the district of Sham Shui Po in Hong Kong was hailed as the new Brooklyn, raising questions regarding the target audience and the necessity of such a transformation (Yip, 2020).

A paradox emerges in the context of artistic gentrification, wherein artists find themselves simultaneously acting as both perpetrators and victims of gentrification. Some argue that although artists may have to relocate after a certain period, they have benefited from low rents and the influx of visitors and tourists they attract. Thus, their displacement is a natural consequence of urban development and their being "progressively economically 'out bid'" (Pratt, 2011, p. 127). However, Pratt (2011; 2018) astutely points out that this perspective conflates cultural producers with cultural consumers. While cultural consumers enjoy the vibrancy and aesthetics of the gentrified areas, many cultural producers and artists continue to live in a state of precarity. This precariousness is not solely attributable to the inherent nature of the cultural economy and the volatility of the artist labour market, but also to gentrification and displacement.

In a broader sense, artistic gentrification serves as a symptom of the implications of the creative city strategies adopted by many post-industrial cities in their quest for a new urban identity. This discourse envisions the creative class as the new frontier for urban development, while culture itself is instrumentalised (Peck, 2005). The subsequent section will shift the focus

to the creative city discourse and delve into how the creative class is envisioned as a catalyst for urban progress, even as culture remains subservient to utilitarian aims.

2.3.2. The Creative City

The discourse surrounding the role of creativity in urban development dates back to the 1980s, but it gained significant traction in academic and political circles with Richard Florida's proposal of the "creative class" in 2003 (Scott, 2014). Despite growing scholarly scepticism about Florida's claim that the presence of the creative class leads to spontaneous urban growth, policymakers have embraced the creative city discourse (Trip & Romein, 2009). A number of cities, including Rotterdam, have adopted the creative city concept as a means of rejuvenating deindustrialised urban areas. In this context, culture is seen as a valuable building block of the creative economy, with the potential to revitalise former industrial spaces and other neglected districts (Catungal et al., 2009).

While the creative class discourse has been extensively reviewed and criticised, the focus of this thesis is not to reexamine those debates. Rather, the aim here is to explore how the creative city discourse shapes the relationship between creative workers and the city. Pratt (2008; 2011) highlights that Florida's conception of the creative class draws heavily from Glaeser's (1998) idea of human capital mobility, which emphasises the ability of cities to foster productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship by attracting individuals with valuable knowledge and skills. While the composition of Florida's "creative class" as a social stratum remains ambiguous, Pratt (2018) argues that the core of the creative city discourse lies in attracting foreign investment. As a result, cities vying to establish themselves as creative cities tailor their policies to appeal to the creative class, which consists primarily of workers in the knowledge industries, thereby privileging this group in terms of resources and support (Pratt, 2011; Catungal et al., 2009). In this sense, Lees et al. (2016) describe the creative city discourse as a recast of urban competitiveness.

The consequences and implications of this development are twofold. Firstly, in order to attract the creative class, creative city policies inevitably facilitate the relocation of the middle class to inner-city areas, driving out existing residents who do not fit the creative class category in the process. In other words, the creative city discourse insidiously legitimises gentrification as an integral aspect of transforming a city's economy. Secondly, beyond human capital, the economic capital possessed by the creative class is equally desirable for urban development. To

tap into the consumption power of the creative class, culture is instrumentalised in a manner similar to artistic gentrification, aiming to aesthetically transform neighbourhoods and attract the creative class. Once again, the focus is primarily on cultural consumption rather than cultural production. Artists and cultural producers who do not conform to the capitalist economic model are often excluded and exploited in the process. As Peck (2007) argues, creativity within the creative city discourse becomes subsumed into a growth-oriented market discourse. Or as Pratt (2018) succinctly concludes here,

The paradox, or rather stark contradiction is of a city, promoting itself as ‘creative’ whilst at the same time limiting access to culture, focusing on consumption, and not simply neglecting but actively undermining cultural production through a super-fuelled gentrification of commercial and residential properties. (p. 357)

2.4. Meso-level Challenges: Locality for a Hopeful Future

When considering the discourses of resilience and circularity, a common factor emerges—locality. Alternative interpretations of resilience have emerged with the vision of contributing to sustainable living. Pratt (2015) delineates the differences between the two modes of resilience. Mode A is comparable to the resilience narrative governed by neoliberal doctrine: it is atomistic, closed, and views growth as normative, whereas Mode B is social, open, and aims at “thriving” instead of growth (Pratt, 2015). Rather than developing a one-size-fits-all solution to maintain business as usual, Mode B resilience’s configuration of processes emphasises locality, flexibility, and adaptation to the flow of resources (Coaffee & Lee, 2016; Pratt, 2015).

This premise casts light on the significance of locality because it recognises that different places and communities face distinct challenges and opportunities. Despite the substantial transformation of urbanism brought about by the Global City paradigm (Sassen, 2001), locality remains relevant. On the one hand, the processes of globalisation have resulted in places and regions becoming more susceptible to the impacts of processes that were once considered external to them (Christopherson et al., 2010). On the other hand, global networks are constitutive of local processes, or as Pratt (2015) puts it, “the global is always local” (p. 65). An emphasis on locality in resilience-building resonates with an evolutionary approach that integrates path-dependent causes distinctive to a region, considers the historical trajectories of

changes, captures geographical diversity, and addresses the unevenness of resilience (Christopherson et al., 2010; Pike et al., 2010).

Along the same line of thought, Wahl (2016) argues for a unique requisite for sustainable development: sensitivity to local scales. A place-based approach enables us to conserve local knowledge as a unique cultural expression of a long-term connection with distinctiveness in different spatial and temporal dimensions (Wahl, 2016). Beyond the preservation and exchange of place-based knowledge, experimentation with a resilience system, when limited to a local level, allows for faster feedback and the identification of ecological limits, which facilitates transformative innovation. This is also the reason why the local level is key to circular practices. Local contexts play a critical role in shaping the experimentation and implementation of circular economy practices. In this view, before scaling up to the regional, national, and global levels, policy and governance should support local problem-solving by considering the unique conditions of ecosystems and cultures, rather than enforcing generalised regulations (Wahl, 2016).

As such, local capacity building is considered a necessary policy response to build Mode B resilience (Pratt, 2015). Local capacity building encompasses the allocation of resources towards enhancing skills, providing training and education, and developing infrastructure that allows industries to scale up (Eade, 1997). On top of the capacity to absorb shocks and bounce back, adaptability and transformability are equally important for the resilience of a system (Folke et al., 2010; Horgan & Dimitrijević, 2018). In this sense, Horgan and Dimitrijević (2018) identify the importance of nurturing the community's ability to develop the necessary tools and capacities to address evolving needs effectively and respond to emerging challenges. One way to do so involves identifying historical trends in innovation to study the economic growth cycles and the subsequent societal and communal transformations they bring about (Horgan & Dimitrijević, 2018). Local capacity building is, thus, crucial in encouraging transformative development from within regions and moving away from a placeless and decontextualised discourse of competitiveness (Bristow, 2010). Precisely, in the cultural economy, the emphasis of local capacity building is placed on cultivating essential skills and competencies, primarily centred around artistic and creative expertise (Pratt, 2015).

2.5. Micro-level Analysis: Cultural Organisations and Their Ecosystems

While macro-level developments provide insights into the urban context and the meso-level discussion focuses on locality, this research zooms in on the micro-level perspective of cultural organisations as the unit of analysis. The study aims to investigate the resilience and circularity of the cultural sector by delving into the practices and experiences of individual cultural organisations. The concept of "culture" is understood in a broad sense, encompassing diverse art forms, cultural activities, and the intangible cultural values of society from an anthropological perspective. This broad view of culture aligns with the notion of cultural sustainability, which emphasises the intergenerational equity of all forms of cultural capital (Throsby, 1997). By exploring the experiences of cultural organisations and their interactions within their ecosystems, the research seeks to shed light on the dynamics and potentials of cultural resilience and circular practices. With the theoretical framework established, the next section delves into the case of Rotterdam, highlighting the key factors that make it a compelling case for this research.

3. "Rotterdam is Many Cities"

3.1. From the Industrious City to Creative City: Rotterdam's Urban Cultural Policies

Rotterdam underwent significant changes since the destruction during World War II, not least its urban cultural policy. A seaport historically, Rotterdam enjoyed the status of the world's busiest port in the late twentieth century. However, as containerisation became more prevalent, the majority of port activities shifted away from the city centre. This process of deindustrialisation had two implications for the city of Rotterdam. First, former port sites became vacant and awaited subsequent repurposing for new urban functions (De Martino, 2022). Second, the city was faced with the need to transform its image and adapt to a changing socio-economic landscape.

The transformation from a predominantly industrial and port-centric city to a more diversified and dynamic urban environment required Rotterdam to reposition itself. In this context, culture was identified as the catalyst of such a transformation and the establishment of a new identity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Rotterdam's urban cultural policy aimed to turn the port city into a creative city. In 1987, the municipality introduced the "Revitalising Rotterdam" policy, which aimed to enhance the quality of life and foster a creative economy through substantial investments in cultural infrastructure (Lavanga, 2013). Multiple urban and cultural

(re)development plans were realised to achieve these goals in the same period. For example, the plan for a museum park materialised with the establishment of cultural infrastructure such as the Netherlands Architecture Institute (now part of Het Nieuwe Instituut) and the Kunsthal. The old port area known as Kop van Zuid underwent redevelopment in the late 1980s and 1990s, transforming into Rotterdam's new business centre. The construction of the Erasmus Bridge during the same period connected this area to the city centre. The Kop van Zuid project included the creation of middle-class housing and office buildings to accommodate the emerging creative class (Aarts et al., 2012).

Buursink (1999) highlights that 1987 marked a significant shift in Rotterdam's cultural policy. Previously, the focus was on providing the city's residents, particularly the working-class population, with a suitable cultural environment. However, a significant change occurred, and the city adopted a market-oriented approach aimed at promoting itself on an international scale. The changes witnessed in Rotterdam exemplify a post-industrial transformation that occurred during the "age of city marketing" in the 1980s, as coined by Bianchini (1993) in his study of the historical evolution of cultural policy in European cities. Rotterdam transitioned from being an "Industrious City," characterised by its reliance on dockers and merchants, to a "Creative City." This shift was not arbitrary but a deliberate strategy aimed at realising the creative city concept and attracting the creative class. The cultural policy reforms and investments in cultural infrastructure played a crucial role in Rotterdam's designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2001 (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021).

Against this backdrop, the development of the cultural and creative sector in Rotterdam has been diverse. Besides the museum park, cultural quarters such as the Witte de Wittstraat and Het Schieblock host a number of arts and cultural organisations. The city also has a strong festival culture, hosting internationally renowned festivals such as the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the North Sea Jazz Festival. In recent years, the Merwe-Vierhavens (M4H) district, a waterfront area comparable in size to the Rotterdam city centre, has emerged as a significant waterfront regeneration project. Together with the Rotterdamsche Droogdok Maatschappij (RDM), it forms the Marker District, envisioned as a "testing ground" for innovation experiments (M4H Rotterdam, 2018). The revitalisation of former port buildings in M4H has formed breeding grounds for creative entrepreneurs. For instance, Vertrekhal Oranjelijn, a former port departure hall, was transformed into a collective space for design companies in

2008. Additionally, Keilewerf I and II are collaborative makerspaces in M4H that provide a home for artists, furniture-makers, and others.

While these developments have undoubtedly provided a significant boost to the creative economy and created new opportunities for cultural professionals and creative entrepreneurs, they also give rise to certain challenges. One prominent issue revolves around the representation and inclusion of diverse cultural expressions within the city narratives. Rotterdam, often characterised as a working-class port city focused on manufacturing and trade, has sometimes been portrayed as lacking in cultural significance. However, it is important to challenge this perception and recognise that Rotterdam has a rich cultural history that has often been overlooked. While the city's cultural strategy has contributed to the infusion of culture, it is not entirely accurate to claim that Rotterdam was simply a “hard working city without cultural life of any significance” prior to these cultural developments (Buursink, 1999, para. 1). For instance, Rotterdam was once the thriving hub of the Dutch jazz scene in the 1930s and the birthplace of Gabber music, a prominent subgenre of hardcore techno in the 1990s (Captain, 2021; Reynolds, 1999). Unfortunately, many of these culturally significant elements unique to Rotterdam have been forgotten or neglected over time.

Another issue stems from the city's broader urban development policy, which includes state-led gentrification as a significant factor:

“In Rotterdam, then, gentrification is a municipal goal, and is openly promoted as such as a way of counterbalancing the perceived problems of being an old industrial city dominated by lower income groups. The aim is to attract and keep footloose affluent residents in order to have the type of population seen as necessary for economic success.” (Doucet et al., 2011, p. 1446)

Artistic gentrification has been observed in Rotterdam, among other cities in the Netherlands (Lavanga, 2013). Controversies have arisen in response to this phenomenon. For example, the municipality specifically selected neighbourhoods like Oude Westen and Oude Noorden to stimulate gentrification through the development of the creative economy (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). Another instance of conflicting interests between urban socio-economic development and the cultural sector is the ongoing controversy surrounding the potential demolition of Het Schieblock for business and residential purposes. In the western part of the

city, the development of M4H poses challenges for creative and cultural organisations. Keilewerf, a makerspace in the area, has expressed concerns about the temporary nature of their leases, which hinders their ability to pursue long-term development opportunities (Prins, 2022).

Over the years, Rotterdam has indeed realised its slogan of "Rotterdam is many cities" which was used during its designation as the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2001. The city has continually evolved and transformed. The use of various slogans in city branding campaigns reflects the ongoing rebuilding and reimagination of Rotterdam from the perspective of the municipality, as seen in slogans such as "Rotterdam Dares" in 2003, "Rotterdam World Port, World City" in 2006, and the current slogan "Rotterdam. Make it Happen!" since 2013. While some deem that Rotterdam has built its reputation as an international city with booming creativity, vibrant culture, and super-diversity, academic studies have reflected reservations about the real impact of these developments. For instance, in their study of city branding and diversity, Belabas and Eshuis (2019) delineate that diversity is shaped as an economic asset in the city branding campaigns in Rotterdam while overlooking the lived experience of residents in this super-diversity. In as early as 1993, Hajer points out that the regeneration strategies aim to revive prosperity by specifically targeting the emerging middle class and placing significant reliance on the potential for creating a new social life in clearly demarcated zones. However, there is a risk that these strategies may inadvertently work against "city life as it is: chaotic, ambivalent and unpredictable" (p. 49).

3.2. Rotterdam: the Resilient City and Circular City

While urban cultural development has been a significant focus, Rotterdam's progress extends beyond cultural initiatives. Two other key dimensions of the city's development are its resilience and circularity. Rotterdam was one of the pioneering cities to participate in the 100 Resilient Cities Programme initiated by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2013. Given its unique geographic position below sea level, Rotterdam recognised the importance of preparing for climate challenges in advance. This participation reflects the city's commitment to building resilience and readiness to address various social, economic, and environmental shocks. Rotterdam's resilience planning encompasses diverse areas such as water safety, cyber security, infrastructure robustness, social inclusivity, and clean air and energy (Spaans & Waterhout, 2017). While this study does not evaluate Rotterdam's resilience framework and efforts, it is noteworthy that academic studies have found Rotterdam's resilience planning to be

relatively advanced compared to other cities (Metaxas & Psarropoulou, 2021). Furthermore, Rotterdam has utilised its developed resilience planning as a marketing image to promote sustainable development. Climate uncertainties are viewed as opportunities to foster a knowledge-based economy focused on climate-proof decision-making (Lu & Stead, 2013; Metaxas & Psarropoulou, 2021). By leveraging its resilience planning and development, Rotterdam positions itself as a desirable location for businesses, research institutions, and individuals interested in contributing to and benefiting from a climate-resilient and environmentally conscious urban environment. In this regard, caution should be exercised in examining these resilience-building efforts to address the potential discrepancy between city branding and citizens' everyday experiences, as raised by Belabas and Eshuis (2019).

Rotterdam has also made significant strides in promoting sustainability through the implementation of circular economy principles. The Netherlands, as a whole, is recognised as a pioneering country within the European Union in the field of circular economy. It is one of the first countries to formulate a nationwide strategy towards achieving a circular economy by 2050, with Rotterdam and Amsterdam identified as key hotspots for such development (Russell et al., 2020). Cramer (2020) points out that the country's long-term efforts in waste reduction, recycling schemes, and the promotion of eco-design have laid the foundation for its circular economy progress. In line with this, Rotterdam has identified the circular economy as a fundamental pillar of its sustainable development policy. The city aims to position itself as a leading circular city, setting the benchmark for circularity by 2030 and ultimately achieving full circularity by 2050 through the closure of material cycles (City of Rotterdam, 2019). Multiple municipal initiatives were put into action to accelerate the circular development in Rotterdam. Notably among these are the Rotterdam Climate Initiative, which is a collaboration platform involving the City Council, the Port of Rotterdam, and the Rotterdam Environmental Service, and City Lab 010, a funding project facilitated by the city government that plays a crucial role in supporting innovative endeavours, with a particular emphasis on circular economy projects (Prendeville et al., 2018).

The transition towards a truly circular city, as discussed in section 2.2.2, necessitates comprehensive social transformations that go beyond the implementation of "an ecological modernization project that builds on capitalist economic growth narratives" (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2021, para. 2). However, the current approach taken by Rotterdam reflects a lack of consideration in this regard. The Alderman for Sustainability, Air Quality, and Energy Transition portrays the circular economy as "the new economy" and places significant emphasis on its

economic benefits, suggesting that investing in circular activities will yield greater economic strength in the future (City of Rotterdam, 2019, p. 3). This economic-centric focus, coupled with a limited emphasis on socio-cultural-economic transformations, raises concerns about the genuine circularity and long-term sustainability of Rotterdam's development. These concerns are not unique to Rotterdam but are shared by cities worldwide. Despite the prevailing optimism surrounding the circular economy, it remains uncertain whether the current trajectory will lead to a truly inclusive and socially transformative circular future.

Rotterdam, as the second largest city in the Netherlands, presents a compelling case for research studies due to its dynamic and multifaceted development. The city's urban cultural policy, vibrant culture sector, resilience planning, and circular city initiatives provide rich dimensions to explore. Notably, Rotterdam stands at the forefront of cities in terms of its resilience and circularity efforts on a policy level. However, it is imperative to avoid the pitfalls of sustainability becoming mere buzzwords or serving neoliberal agendas. This necessitates a robust linkage between policy-level initiatives and community engagement, ensuring that these efforts actively involve and serve the needs of the people. It is argued that the cultural sector in Rotterdam is one such sector that can help us understand how we can bridge this gap. The following methodology section will present a comprehensive research design and elaborate on the rationale behind selecting Rotterdam as a case study.

4. Methodology

This section presents the research design and provides an overview of the rationale, methods, and procedures employed for data collection and analysis. It begins by contextualising the research within the case of Rotterdam and explaining its relevance. The subsequent discussion focuses on the data collection process, which involved conducting semi-structured interviews in conjunction with a mapping exercise. Furthermore, the section outlines the steps for coding and analysing the collected data.

4.1. Research Objectives and Research Questions

In the initial stages of the research design, a responsive and iterative approach was adopted. The study actively engaged with existing literature on the circular economy and resilience-building in the context of the cultural and creative industries. By starting from a broad perspective on circularity and resilience, the focus gradually became more refined and directed.

The aim of this approach was to unravel the complexities surrounding resilience and circularity. As highlighted in Section 2, the resilience of the cultural sector has received limited examination and its strengths and weaknesses are thus underexplored. At the same time, the discourse on circular cities has gained prominence. The principles of circularity as a concept and design solution hold the potential to illuminate processes of resilience-building and sustainability development (Pratt, 2022). Hence, this recognition underscores the need to establish a connection between these two concepts and an investigation into their potential interplay within urban contexts.

The research objectives are twofold. Firstly, by exploring the interconnection between resilience and urban circularity in the cultural sector, this research aims to enrich the theoretical understanding of these concepts. The study seeks to explore the intricate dynamics and mechanisms through which cultural organisations navigate social, economic, and spatial challenges and uncover how circularity is perceived and demonstrated in their practices. In other words, by investigating the in situ experiences of cultural organisations, this study aspires to shed light on how resilience can be fostered and enhanced in the context of urban circularity. Secondly, the investigation seeks to take a step further to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. By identifying the coping tactics employed by cultural organisations and translating the knowledge derived from them into actionable strategies and recommendations, this study aims to foster the integration of cultural practices within a sustainable and inclusive urban environment. By understanding and harnessing the experiences and insights of these organisations, policymakers can strive towards establishing supportive frameworks that facilitate the long-term success and impact of cultural initiatives. The ultimate objective is to contribute to creating an environment where cultural practices thrive and contribute to the overall vibrancy of urban communities.

Hence, following these objectives, the research is guided by the following research question and sub-question:

Research question: *What adaptive tactics do cultural organisations employ to enhance their resilience in the face of social, economic, and spatial challenges in urban contexts?*

Sub-question: *How can their experiences and insights be effectively translated into actionable strategies and policies that promote urban circularity and enhance cultural resilience?*

4.2. Case Study

A single-case study approach is adopted in this research to conduct an extensive analysis of contemporary phenomena (Yin, 2009). The cultural sector in Rotterdam is chosen as a case study for several reasons. The first reason concerns the creative city and gentrification policies in Rotterdam. The city's focus on the creative and cultural economy and urban revitalisation through gentrification policies provides insights into how cultural resilience is fostered amidst social and economic changes. Secondly, Rotterdam's strong emphasis on resilience building and circular economy development allows the investigation of the interplay between these initiatives and the broader urban-cultural developments. Thirdly, Rotterdam's historical transformation has brought about changes in social strata, such as the creative class as the new middle class, while maintaining its super-diverse character (Belabas & Eshuis, 2019). Exploring the experiences and insights of the cultural sector in this context allows for a deeper understanding of how resilience is shaped and cultural practices are integrated within a diverse urban environment. Methodologically speaking, the choice of Rotterdam is an information-oriented selection that is valuable in providing empirical data on cases or phenomena that are underexplored (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). Thus, Rotterdam serves as a suitable case study to achieve the research objectives and deepen the understanding of resilience dynamics within the cultural sector.

4.3. Data Collection

This section presents the data collection method and process, which involved conducting semi-structured interviews supplemented by a mapping exercise to gain deeper insights into the challenges, opportunities, and practices of the interviewed cultural organisations.

4.3.1. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research due to their flexibility and wide usage in qualitative studies (Bryman, 2012; Robson & McCartan, 2016). This method allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions, providing interviewees with the opportunity to express their perspectives in depth. In-depth interviews were specifically selected to facilitate an exploratory approach that enables a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, practices, and perceptions of cultural organisations regarding their resilience and circularity. The

interview guide (see Appendix 2) was developed in advance based on the research objectives, covering various topics such as organisational background, challenges faced, perceptions of circularity, experiences with circular practices, and future visions for the organisations and Rotterdam's cultural eco-system. Furthermore, the research aims to inform policy recommendations that promote urban circularity and enhance cultural resilience. In-depth interviews allow for in-depth discussions and enable interviewees to provide valuable insights into the cultural-policy landscape of Rotterdam. The flexible nature of the interviews permits adjustments to the wording and focus of questions during the interview process, as well as the opportunity to pose additional questions to capture diverse perspectives (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Interviewees were approached through a combination of snowball sampling and assemblage sampling. Snowball sampling, a form of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012), was used to identify non-probability samples of individuals within specific groups who could provide valuable insights for the research. This approach allowed for the inclusion of individuals who are knowledgeable and connected within the cultural sector under investigation. Additionally, the process of snowball sampling facilitated the exploration of relevant social networks associated with the cultural sector, which contributed to the understanding of its dynamics (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Furthermore, assemblage sampling was employed to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. Assemblage sampling involves intentionally including individuals or groups that represent different dimensions of the phenomenon being studied, such as varying roles, backgrounds, and experiences (Fox & Alldred, 2014). By employing both snowball and assemblage sampling, this research aimed to capture a rich and multifaceted view of the cultural sector in question, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of its coping tactics and resilience-building practices.

The in-depth interviews took place between 5 May and 1 June 2023 (see Appendix 1 for an overview). All 11 organisations interviewed in Rotterdam belonged to the cultural sector, with a diverse range of art forms including theatre, live music, multidisciplinary formats, new media art, visual art, and community art. Six of the organisations are located in the city centre, three in

the South, and two in the West.² The size of the organisations varied, with the smallest ones having less than ten employees and the largest organisation employing over 50 individuals. Eight of the interviews were conducted in person at the interviewees' workplaces, while the remaining three interviews were conducted online. The recorded interviews had an average duration of approximately 65 minutes, with individual interviews lasting between 31 and 85 minutes.

4.3.2. Mapping exercise

Alongside the interviews, a mapping exercise was implemented to support data collection. The use of mapping exercises aligns with Schön's (1984) notion of fostering reflective conversations and promoting organisational learning. The purpose of this exercise was not to quantitatively measure the level of resilience or circularity in the organisations, but rather to facilitate conversation and encourage interviewees to externalise their thinking. Mapping exercises serve as visual tools that assist in capturing and representing complex ideas, relationships, and patterns, offering interviewees a means to engage in reflective discussions about their experiences and practices.

The mapping exercise consisted of two charts (Figure 1). The Y-axis ranged from "resilient" at the upper end to "fragile" at the other end, while the X-axis ranged from "linear" on the right side to "circular" on the other side. One chart focused on the material aspect, while the other chart focused on the immaterial aspect. Interviewees were asked to map their organisations on each chart and provide a brief explanation of their mapping. The outcomes of the mapping exercises can be found in Section 5.3.1.

² To maintain anonymity, specific details about the locations of the interviewed organisations are not provided.

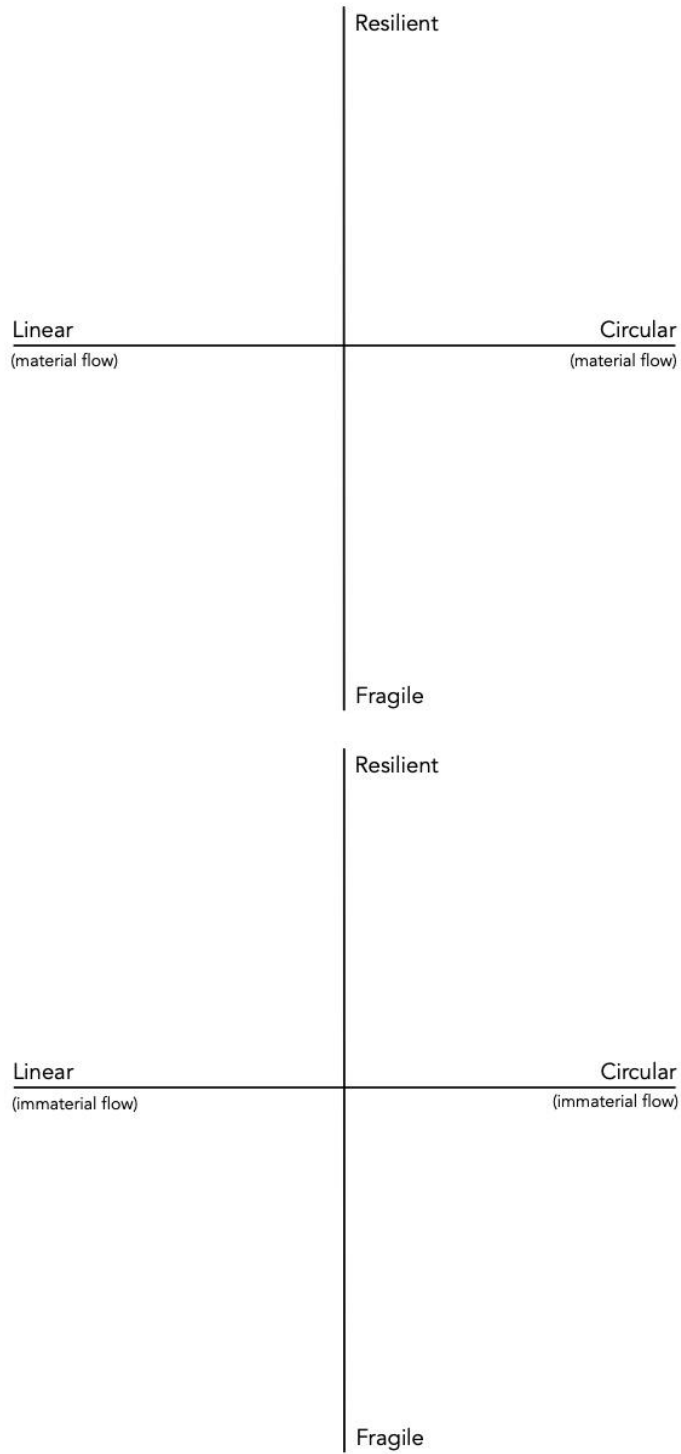


Figure 1

5. Findings

The analysis revealed two main themes: "challenges and opportunities" and "practices and coping tactics." The section will delve into these themes and also discuss the results of the mapping exercises. Additionally, it will provide insights into the future envisioned by the interviewees for their organisations.

5.1. Challenges and Opportunities

5.1.1. Insecurities about Funding

When it comes to the most significant challenges, most interviewees expressed concerns over securing funding and space for their organisations' survival. Financially, most of their concerns stem from the uncertainty over securing funding from the Cultural Plan, the four-year subsidy programme for the arts and culture of the municipality of Rotterdam (RRKC, n.d.). A cultural organisation in the Cultural Plan receives an annual subsidy for four years, after which a new round of applications is reviewed. For non-profit cultural organisations, subsidies from the Cultural Plan constitute a significant part of their funding sources.

If, for example, in the next round of the Culture Plan of the municipality, that will be in 2024, if they decide "we don't want to give any more money to [the organisation]", then it will be over.... I don't expect that now, but you can never be secure of your place in this whole ecosystem. (Interviewee 3)

There's only a very small amount of organisations on the level of Stedelijk Museum, or Boijmans van Beuningen that know that their future is secure. And everything that's smaller than that, and that's pretty much everything, has to work with the same insecurity there. Most organisations have to scramble their money together every year. So it's this constant. (Interviewee 11)

With the inevitably finite amount of funding available for the arts and culture, many interviewees acknowledged a sense of competition among organisations, particularly during the application period. The subsidy programme is "a divide and conquer system" (Interviewee 7), with its cyclic nature constraining them from making concrete plans for the future beyond four years. For them, running the organisation means "constantly hustling for money" (Interviewee 1).

5.1.2. Uncertainty about Space and the Linearity of the “Perpetual Machine of Temporary Solutions”

In addition to funding, space poses a significant source of insecurity for some interviewed organisations. While those with long-term rental agreements, and in rare cases, ownership of their space, enjoy relatively more security in this regard, interviewees facing uncertainty about space expressed unease and frustration. This is particularly evident for organisations located in anti-squat spaces or with temporary rental arrangements. As Dee (2018) notes, anti-squat in the Netherlands is rather underexplored in academic research. These temporary spaces are symptoms of “the lack of transparency and flexibility of real estate management both by public and private owners” (Patti & Polyak, 2015, p. 122). Renting organisations face limitations in making long-term investment decisions due to the temporary nature of their occupancy. Consequently, they often operate in inadequately maintained buildings, encountering problems such as leaks and electrical issues. This situation arises because neither the renters nor the owners prioritise investing in the maintenance of the building.

In this context, the majority of interviewees demonstrated awareness of the common occurrence of artistic gentrification in the city. While not all of them explicitly used the term “artistic gentrification,” their descriptions aligned with a process whereby creatives are displaced following the rise in real estate value attributed to their cultural contributions. Creatives (including squatters who use the squatted spaces for art) are “*just being kicked out like they're trash*” (Interviewee 6) in the “*perpetual machine of temporary solutions*” (Interviewee 1). This highlights an issue of linearity in relation to the value generated by artists and cultural organisations.

We make this whole area a lot more valuable because it's hip, and people like it....But we are not the ones benefiting from this value creation at all. (Interviewee 1)

Further exploring this matter, the interviewees provided insights that substantiate the concern raised by Pratt (2018) regarding the conflation of cultural producers and consumers. Interviewee 1 recounted an incident where a local, community-driven restaurant was replaced by a chain establishment, highlighting the issue of displacement. They expressed frustration with the lack of recognition from the municipality, stating, “[the location] should be a

development place for new Rotterdam grassroots entrepreneurs that want to try something out. But the municipality doesn't see the difference.”

Meanwhile, it is important to note that cultural organisations do recognise the advantages, such as affordable rents, that come with occupying temporary spaces. Interviewee 8 highlighted this by acknowledging that artists and cultural organisations seize opportunities “when there's not much there for a relatively small amount of money”. Similarly, Interviewee 10 provided a realistic perspective, stating that cheap rent often means temporary rent, reflecting the workings of capitalism. Interviewee 10 elaborates:

You need them, and neighbourhoods can be very grey and boring and horrible if you don't keep those creative entrepreneurs in all those cool spaces What you need as a city is to make an agreement on how much per cent in a certain district should be labelled as creative sector and allow them not to pay the rents that all these developers want. (Interviewee 10)

The identified problem revolves around the loss of value within these processes. Interviewees emphasised the significance of finding ways to reinvest the created value back into the communities that generated it. Among interviewees, a shift in perspective is proposed, viewing temporary spaces as platforms for experimentation (Interviewee 8). If these experiments prove successful, individuals who contributed to the space's improvement should be duly recognised. Additionally, communities within temporary spaces should have the opportunity to maintain their presence, thereby nurturing a broader socio-cultural system in a circular manner.

5.1.3. Relationships with the Municipality

Particularly for cultural organisations, many of which are not profit maximisers by organisational nature and hence primarily rely on subsidies, support from local governments plays a key role. Among the interviewed organisations, a majority of them characterised their relationship with the municipality as positive and described most civil servants they worked with as supportive. In general, there is a level of trust towards the municipality that they “*want to do right*” for the development of the city (Interviewee 3). A number of interviewees pointed out that in comparison to other countries in both the global North and South, where cultural

infrastructure is limited or inadequate, the availability of structural funding for the arts and culture in the Netherlands offers space for creativity and innovation among creative workers.

Nonetheless, engaging with the municipality does come with its own set of challenges, as emphasised by many interviewees. They pointed out the difficulties they faced when interacting with various departments within the municipality:

that's always a big maze and you have to know your way around it....They [different departments] don't even speak the same language....I'm being like a 24/7 translator between two worlds. (Interviewee 10)

However, despite the challenges, interviewees do recognise the individuals within the municipality who genuinely strive to make a positive impact:

It [the municipality] is a sort of bureaucratic monster. And civil servants working in the neighbourhood, they are here to do the same as we are, and they want to do good and then there is this sort of bureaucratic engine which is, well, I can't explain it, it's how it works. (Interviewee 9)

While the municipality is often regarded as a slow, huge, monstrous organisation that doesn't seem to listen to inhabitants, which is not perfectly true...there's a lot of people within the municipality that I see as allies, people that help us. (Interviewee 8)

The inadequacy of inter-departmental communication is indicative of a more fundamental structural problem of public institutions. Existing public institutions, as Pratt (2022) argues, are not fully aligned with the contemporary challenges they face due to a legacy system and outdated objectives. This mismatch is not necessarily due to internal shortcomings but rather the configuration and capacities set in a previous age. This issue resonated with a number of interviewees, who encountered obstacles when it came to categorising their organisations or programmes neatly within one category: “*We're a cultural institution, but we do some kind of education...that we don't really fit in the traditional boxes of subsidies or of the financial stream*” (Interviewee 2). On the other hand, there is a call to support cultural organisations or those with interdisciplinary goals from various angles. As one interviewee suggests,

the change in the municipality should be that we don't be just part of the Culture and Arts Department, we are part of the city, so also part of the Economics Department, Welfare Department, Education Department, etc. (Interviewee 5)

5.2. Practices and Coping Tactics

5.2.1. The Complexities of Collaboration and Networks

When confronted with insecurities and resource limitations, interviewees consistently highlight the value of collaborations and networks as effective strategies for adaptation. For some, collaboration naturally arises from being geographically close to one another, aligning with the clustering theory that suggests organisations' absorptive capacity contributes to the creation of new knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Cuérel et al., 2019). Additionally, collaboration is a key component for overcoming constraints. For example, one interviewed organisation faced severe budget cuts and had to adapt and restructure itself. In this process, they actively sought opportunities and collaborations within their local networks, reestablishing connections within the local community. Another interviewee emphasised the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing in the cultural ecosystem, noting that when knowledge is shared, *“we can do more with less money”* (Interviewee 5). This demonstrates the resilience of cultural organisations in overcoming resource limitations and their flexibility in adopting alternative working methods during challenging periods.

As such, the interconnectivity among creative workers and cultural organisations facilitates the formation of networks in the cultural ecosystem. A supportive and collaborative network could potentially fill gaps in the existing organisational structure and enhance artistic diversity as a result. This can be illustrated by Interviewee 6's collaborative relationships with various cultural platforms in Rotterdam. As a relatively more self-supporting organisation, they have the flexibility to host underground artists and showcase experimental or niche art forms. In some cases, cultural platforms facing financial pressure to prioritise ticket sales refer these artists to them. This type of collaboration bridges a gap in the cultural landscape and contributes to the diversity of the cultural scene, offering opportunities for unique artistic expressions that might otherwise be overlooked. Similarly, other interviewees attributed the collective efforts among small organisations, both on the regional and national levels, to their resilience and resourcefulness. In this sense, the robustness of networks contributes to the foundation of resilience.

Nonetheless, the establishment of networks in the cultural sector can have both positive and negative implications. On one hand, the existence of established networks can foster familiarity and mutual understanding among funders, artists, and cultural organisations, particularly in the realm of culture, where underlying values may not align with capitalist logic. While one interviewee described the challenges in explaining their work to funding agencies, stating the questions they received, "*Is it a social project? Is it culture? What is it? Is it low art?*" (Interviewee 4), another interviewee expressed that long-term relations with funders facilitated securing funding for their organisation. As Interviewee 11 remarked, a majority of cultural organisations and programmes do not follow "*a logic that you could compare to outputting and making money,*" making their impact difficult to measure through traditional yardsticks for profitability and economic potential (Interviewee 11).

On the other hand, there is a potential danger of these networks becoming exclusive and closed off to newcomers or those who do not conform to established norms. This creates a cultural barrier to entry, in addition to economic barriers, into the cultural market (Pratt, 2015), which resonates with Abbing's (2002) argument that "informal barriers not only confine, but also structure the economy of the arts" (p. 274). This danger also complicates the aforementioned notion that the cultural and creative industries are composed of social network markets proposed by Pott et al. (2008). Indeed, as they (2008) argue, the cultural and creative industries are a "system of activities organized and coordinated about flows of value through the enterprise of novelty generation and consumption as a social process" (p. 170). However, it poses the question: what is the practical reality of such social network markets? While more empirical studies are needed to answer this question, it is crucial to acknowledge the existing barriers and actively strive to create opportunities for newcomers, in order to cultivate a more inclusive cultural environment. As Interviewee 8 articulated,

I just know that there is a lot of talent, and a lot of creativity that's looking for ways to grab a stage, earn a buck, and get a spotlight. And I would like to help everyone to actually do that, achieve their goals. (Interviewee 8)

Or as Interviewee 6 succinctly stated, they do what they do just for "*happy faces.*"

5.2.2. Community Engagement for Empowerment and Resilience-Building

Another significant part of the finding is the community engagement practices adopted by a number of interviewed organisations. From the analysis, three purposes of community engagement practices emerged, reflecting the specificities of local capacity building for a resilient community: (1) using culture to overcome the “us versus them” mentality, (2) community engagement for empowerment, and (3) establishing roots within the community for organisational resilience.

First, an emphasis is put on overcoming an “us versus them” mentality and promoting mutual understanding through culture. While cultural non-participation can be attributed to a multitude of reasons, socio-economic differences strongly influence the level of participation in non-participation activities, creating a notable stratification (Heikkilä & Lindblom, 2023). Here, the reluctance to participate does not necessarily point to the so-called highbrow art, but also to alternative artistic subcultures. To overcome the divide, organisations actively engage with their local neighbourhoods to challenge normative perceptions, attract more people, and reduce frustration. One interviewee highlighted the use of diverse styles of music to create social occasions for connecting with the community, creating a shared experience that transcends boundaries (Interviewee 6). This approach breaks down barriers that may exist between different groups, contributing to a more cohesive cultural environment.

Second, engaging the community emerges as a crucial strategy for empowerment and thus resilience building. Several interviewees emphasised the value of connecting with local communities. For example, one of the organisations started organically through encounters with people from the local neighbourhoods. Another interviewee brought attention to creative placemaking and the establishment of a third place as crucial factors in facilitating community interaction, cultural expression, and overall well-being (Interviewee 5; See Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). For most of these interviewees, these initiatives are the efforts to rebuilding connections:

As you know, in Rotterdam, there is a big gap between the government and the people living in the city, citizens. There needs to be a sort of restoration of trust and we hope we can help with this to restore that a little bit, like bringing back ownership, and a sense of responsibility for your surrounding. (Interviewee 9)

In this regard, cultural organisations act as an intermediary that connects the residents, local government, and neighbourhoods. By shining the spotlight on local residents and bringing their stories to the fore, cultural organisations provide them with a tool and a space to articulate and reflect on the value of everyday life. This is a form of empowerment that helps to build resilience among residents:

More stories, more connections. (Interviewee 4)

Stronger and more powerful citizens, people living in the city...I think that's a start to having a sort of equal discussion with the municipality. (Interviewee 9)

Thirdly, on a different note, establishing roots within the community can greatly contribute to the resilience of cultural organisations. For the interviewees, their organisations' survival and success in the city require connections that extend beyond the realm of arts and culture. By continuously seeking feedback and having conversations with residents from various neighbourhoods, one interviewee states, the organisations gain insights into their needs and aspirations, and thus, understanding the community is of higher priority than only fulfilling the social goals set by funding agencies (Interviewee 5). Such an approach reflects the organisations' assertion of the importance of being an integral part of the community:

We become resilient when we can stay part of the community. (Interviewee 5)

Meanwhile, it illustrates the social functions and underlying social aesthetics of artistic and cultural practices, a perspective that has been long contested in the debate of art for art's sake (See Bell-Villada, 1986; Born, 2010).

5.2.3. Circular Practices

Overall, the interviewed organisations identified circular practices as a means for them to overcome resource limitations. For instance, organisations often engage in circular material practices by utilising second-hand or repurposed materials to save costs. In this regard, Interviewee 1 frankly stated, "*we are naturally circular, because we have no money.*" However, while driven by necessity, there is also an artistic angle to their circular material practices, as Interviewee 1 elaborated, stating that "*it's pretty cool to work like this because it also makes you inventive with weird old shit.*" On the other hand, as some interviewees expressed, they adopt

circular practices out of consideration for the immaterial values embedded within the creative process itself. For instance, the organisations exhibited a collaborative approach in some of their programmes by giving back the exhibits to the community. These exhibits, which were created with the active involvement of community members, were then shared with the local residents. In other instances, surplus food was also regularly shared with volunteers and residents in the neighbourhood after the programmes. In essence, what prompts the circular use of the material is not only the economic values but also the immaterial values embedded in the process of making. This perspective aligns with Pratt's (2022) argument that a circular economy should recognise products as assemblages of labour and resources, deriving value from their interconnectedness with broader ecosystems, including both the natural and cultural realms.

Another aspect of circularity observed is the adaptive reuse of heritage or old buildings, particularly in the context of preserving cultural spaces. Adaptive reuse plays a pivotal role in advancing the principles of a circular society at an urban level, as it introduces a "human-centred" dimension to circular economy strategies (Bosone et al., 2019, p. 11). In cases where the interviewed organisations are situated within adaptive reuse buildings, they contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage by repurposing existing structures in a manner that respects the history and collective memories associated with these buildings. Moreover, they demonstrate a creative adaptation of the spatial and architectural characteristics of these old buildings, incorporating them into their artistic processes. From a socio-cultural perspective, these practices generate significant value in terms of preserving cultural heritage by actively engaging the history and surrounding communities. By transforming the cultural capital of the city in the form of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, into social capital, they contribute to the enhancement of the intangible social infrastructure within urban areas.

5.3. Envisioning the Future

This section presents the results of the mapping exercise. It then summarises the entire section and provides insights from the interviewees regarding their visions for the future of their organisations.

5.3.1. Result of the Mapping Exercise

While the interviews delve deep into multiple perspectives of the interviewees' experiences, the mapping exercise served as a useful tool for externalising some of their thoughts and ideas. The result of the mapping exercises is as follows (Figure 2).

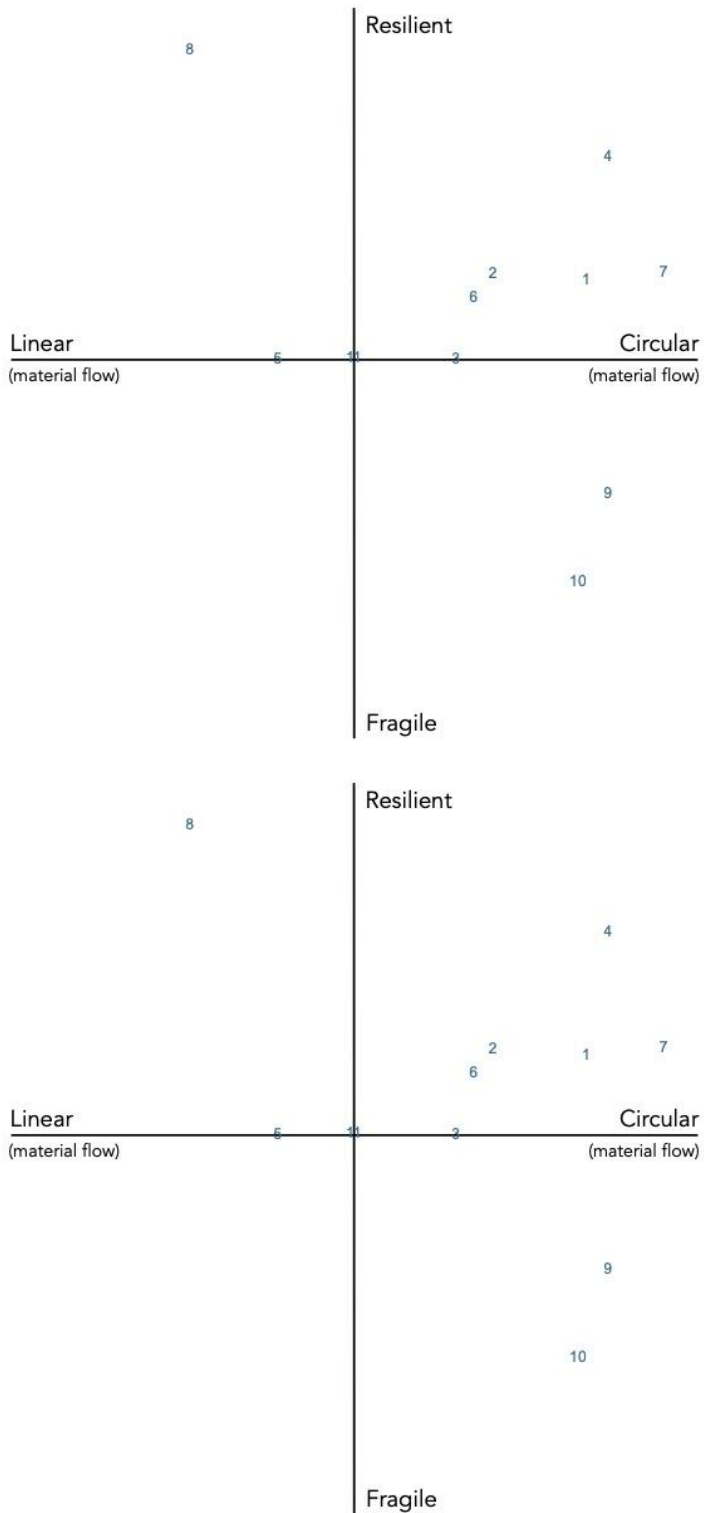


Figure 2

During the mapping exercise, it was observed that most interviewees regarded themselves as highly resilient in the immaterial sense. They expressed confidence in their ability to adapt and navigate challenges in the intangible aspects of their work. Similarly, most of them considered themselves circular in the immaterial sense, referencing the interactions and collaborations that foster knowledge exchange and value and skills retainment in their networks within the cultural ecosystem. However, when discussing resilience in a material sense, a different perspective emerged. Many interviewees voiced a sense of fragility in terms of material resources, such as funding and future security. This discrepancy highlights the nuanced nature of resilience and the significance of considering both material and immaterial, external and internal factors to understand such nuances.

In terms of material circularity, interviewees generally identified themselves as more circular than linear in their practices. They referred to their practices of reusing, recycling, and repurposing materials to minimise waste and environmental impact. However, their descriptions of material circularity also revealed limitations. While interviewees demonstrated awareness and commitment to environmental sustainability, their efforts were often confined within the framework of conventional circular economy principles. It is important to note that this observation does not imply a lack of progress or dedication to sustainability. Rather, it reflects that a truly regenerative and holistic approach to materials, encompassing the principles of regenerative design, is yet to be fully realised (Braungart & McDonough, 2009).

Overall, the mapping exercise revealed the complexities of resilience and circularity, the implications of which will be further discussed in Section 6.

5.3.2. Come What May

From the analysis, challenges and opportunities facing the interviewed cultural organisations are described, and their coping tactics are identified. The major challenges they face include financial insecurities and spatial uncertainties that affect their long-term planning and decision-making. Additionally, their relationships with the municipality, while generally positive, have room for improvement. Their coping tactics in the face of resource limitations and the lack of long-term stability include utilising networks and fostering collaborations, engaging with local communities to build resilience for themselves and the residents, and implementing circular practices to rationalise resources.

In the interviews, interviewees were also asked about their vision and expectations for the future of their organisations, which is summarised in Table 1.

The Meaning of Resilience	Factors to Thrive	Desired Transformations
Flexibility (to adapt) Diversity Resourcefulness Long-term vision Connections to the community (Access to) strong networks Acceptance of change as the status quo	Space and financial security Long-term visions Strong and connected community Strong networks Positive attitude Value recognition	Diversity and inclusivity Incentives for culture Learning from the past More space for experimentation Assertion of cultural value

Table 1

6. Discussions, Recommendations, and Future Research

This section moves on to a broader discussion of the concepts of resilience and circularity, as the analysis of the findings reflects the need for more nuanced ways of understanding these concepts to enrich discussions on sustainability progress. It then proposes policy recommendations and highlights the limitations of this study, as well as future research possibilities.

6.1. The Need for Resilience in the Cultural Sector

The cultural industries, as argued in Section 2, have demonstrated a high level of resilience in the face of various challenges. However, from the analysis, a number of significant conflicts emerged regarding the working of this resilience. The first conflict is the tension between resilience and self-exploitation within the cultural sector. Among the interviewees, there was a general agreement that in many cultural organisations, regardless of organisational nature, artists and creative professionals are often inadequately compensated for their labour,

describing that as “*both the strength and the weakness of the arts*” (Interviewee 11). Extensive research has studied this phenomenon of structural poverty in the arts and cultural sector. Notably, Abbing (2002) highlights that the low average incomes of artists can be partly attributed to artists’ orientation towards non-monetary rewards. Throsby’s (1994) work-preference model also indicates that individuals who prioritise creative expression and artistic autonomy are more likely to choose occupations in the cultural sector, even if they come with lower financial rewards or job security. On this issue, interviewees opined that the cultural sector in Rotterdam has struggled to effectively monetise itself and advocate for the sector’s interests. This unwittingly contributes to the perpetuation of unsustainable working models and the linear transfer of cultural capital to economic capital through capture by opportunistic sectors, often at the expense of diminishing the intrinsic value of cultural assets.

To complicate the issue further, the delicate balance between art and commerce suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to resilience-building overlooks the heterogeneous nature of arts and culture. Certain art forms, often niche or experimental in nature, require a significant amount of risk-taking to provide them with a platform. Risk-averse businesses may shy away from supporting such endeavours. However, as the experiences of the interviewees demonstrate, individuals within the cultural sector often embrace these risks, recognising that experimentation is essential for the emergence of new art forms. This nuanced perspective emphasises that different art forms possess varying capacities for resilience, particularly in terms of economic sustainability. Some art forms may be more adaptable and commercially viable, while others, due to their experimental or niche nature, may face greater challenges in securing financial support and achieving long-term sustainability. By recognising and understanding these variations, stakeholders in the cultural sector can develop tailored strategies and support systems to enhance the resilience and sustainability of diverse artistic practices.

Meanwhile, there is a perceived disparity between the expectations placed on the cultural sector and its actual capacity to fulfil them. While the creative city discourse assumes that creativity is the driver for the innovation economy (Peck, 2005), Interviewee 7 raised a reflexive point, contending that the cultural sector in Rotterdam itself may have contributed to the perpetuation of a romanticised image of boundless creativity and innovation. This concern is reflected in Newsinger and Serafini’s (2021) study of the politics of resilience, highlighting that romantic resilience, although important for sustaining the artistic identities of creative workers,

does not serve “as a resource of resistance to neoliberal crisis or the precarity of artistic labour” (p. 603). While the scope of this study does not encompass an in-depth examination of the self-perception and self-identity of creative workers, it is essential to emphasise that these perceptions can overlook the individual responsabilisation and serve to justify the absence of long-term support and stability, particularly in the context of post-crisis austerity measures. This highlights the urgency for more realistic and sustainable approaches to resilience in the cultural sector.

Therefore, it is vital to determine what a grounded reality of resilience entails for the cultural sector. The preceding discussion has shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the resilience mindset. At the same time, the contrast between immaterial and material resilience, as exhibited by the interviewees during the mapping exercise, underscores the necessity to shift our attention towards a more pragmatic approach to material resilience, encompassing both practical applications and theoretical discourse. How can the cultural sector translate the core aspects of their immaterial resilience into tangible practices that promote their long-term sustainability? What strategies can be developed to foster coherent ambitions for material resilience? By addressing these questions, the cultural sector can pave the way for a more balanced and sustainable approach to resilience, aligning their immaterial strengths with practical solutions for their future well-being.

6.2. The Natural Circularity of the Cultural Sector

Based on the analysis in Sections 5.2.3 and 5.3.1, cultural organisations in Rotterdam have showcased both material and immaterial circularity in their practices. Although not without imperfections, the inner workings of the cultural ecosystem exhibit a degree of natural circularity that is intertwined with multi-value systems. Considering that embracing multi-value systems and adopting less deterministic and reductive models are major challenges facing the existing circular economy (Pratt, 2022), a critical examination of the observed circularity in this study has the potential to illuminate key principles of circularity.

What stood out during the interviews and the analysis was the reflexive approach that is integral in the ways of working in the interviewed organisations. From reasons for founding the organisations to restructuring themselves after severe crises such as budget cuts and the COVID-19 pandemic, they engage in a continuous process of reflection and re-evaluation, striving to remain relevant and meet the needs of local communities. With limited resources,

they constantly rationalise their resources and leverage their networks to sustain themselves. However, their focus extends beyond organisational sustainability. They aim to ensure that the cultural value they create is pertinent and beneficial to local communities, aligning with societal desires and needs. While such identification may be subjective and localised, the reflective process helps them discern the value their work holds for local communities, artists, and themselves. Several interviewees even expressed their intention to address observed gaps in society, and once these gaps are filled, they will happily move on to new endeavours. This highlights how when profits are not the sole objective, opportunities and diverse content and formats flourish as civil society engages in their respective pursuits.

What is particularly relevant to the concept of circularity here is the nuanced understanding it brings to the forefront. Circular processes, by their very nature, involve selectivity. Merely preserving and retaining everything that has been created can lead to hoarding rather than embracing the true essence of circularity. Hence, an important question arises: What should be considered worthy of retention within the circular framework? The ongoing debate surrounding archiving provides insight into this matter. Steedman (2001) pinpoints that archival records “just sit[s] there until it is read, and used, and narrativised.” (p. 68). Its passive nature means that meaning-making through archiving relies on active engagement and interpretation by researchers, historians, or individuals. In recent years, archives have been evolving from being stagnant repositories of immense, motionless objects gathering dust as efforts emerge to open up archives and derive meaning from them (Carbone, 2020). Similarly, circularity should entail regenerative practices, where the value created is purposefully fed back into future activities, ensuring sustainability, meaningful engagement, and potential impact.

The intentional selectivity inherent in circular practices highlights the broader considerations of resource allocation, value creation, and preservation. Circular practices in the cultural sector serve as a means of managing resources while preserving their value, integrating both efficient resource utilisation and the retention of their inherent significance throughout the process. On a material level, initiatives such as waste reduction and material reuse enhance resource efficiency and resilience. On an immaterial level, circular practices acknowledge and value the contributions made by diverse societal actors. In the specific context at hand, this approach challenges the treatment of artists and creative professionals as disposable and marginalised entities in urban development. On a spatial level, the transformation of physical

locations is an inherent aspect of urban development. However, it is essential to approach this process with thoughtfulness and care. Reprogramming these spaces should take into account their diverse values, encompassing social, cultural, and economic aspects. By prioritising these values over exclusively economic considerations, the pitfalls of gentrification can perhaps be avoided. Furthermore, in addressing other societal needs, such as housing shortages, it is crucial to ensure that local cultural ecosystems are not uprooted but instead invited to actively participate and contribute to the development of subsequent communities. In other words, circular practices in the cultural sector involve deliberate decision-making regarding resource allocation and value creation to foster resource efficiency, resilience, and a more inclusive approach to urban development.

Drawing from the experiences of cultural organisations in Rotterdam, it is indicative that the cultural sector operates within a natural circularity, embedded in a multi-value system. These organisations serve as intermediaries, facilitating local capacity building and contributing to the resilience of the community through active community engagement. By embracing arts and culture or simply by being in cultural spaces, individuals are afforded opportunities to participate, share their perspectives, and take ownership of initiatives. This active involvement strengthens the social fabric of the community and bolsters its resilience. Moreover, community engagement not only nurtures resilience but also enhances the sector's adaptive capacity in the face of changing circumstances. It fosters a sense of collective responsibility and shared ownership of cultural resources that empower individuals to shape their own urban environment. This resonates with the principles of the right to the city, which emphasise inclusive and participatory urban governance, ensuring urban dwellers access to urban resources and the ability to transform the city, as Harvey (2008) describes it, "a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (p. 24). Ultimately, it is crucial to recognise that at its essence, the production of culture is inherently resilient. Regardless of the economic capital available within a community, they will inevitably find ways to express and showcase their culture. By recognising and embracing the right to the city, cultural policies can further amplify the role of the cultural sector in fostering resilience, social cohesion, and the inclusive development of urban communities.

6.3. Recommendations

The findings and discussions presented in this study are derived from the experiences of cultural organisations and their approaches to addressing challenges. These experiences provide valuable insights that contribute to the artistic and cultural vibrancy of Rotterdam. Based

on the insights gained from the data collected and the literature review, the following policy recommendations have been formulated. These recommendations align with the three dimensions of governance: (1) policy formulation, (2) institutional implementation and facilitation, and (3) recognition of the value and underlying values in policy formulation and implementation (Pratt, 2022). Thus, the proposed policy recommendations address these three aspects, with the first three recommendations focusing on dimension (1), the fourth recommendation addressing dimension (2), and the final recommendation targeting dimension (3).

Place-based Collaboration. Focus on local partnerships and initiatives to develop place-based collaboration. Encourage cultural organisations, community groups and residents to collaborate and co-create cultural projects that reflect the unique characteristics and needs of the local neighbourhood. Working with local partnerships and initiatives, this approach can strengthen community engagement, promote social cohesion, and enhance the resilience of cultural initiatives.

Grassroot Initiatives and Neighborhood Learning. Direct attention towards existing grassroots initiatives and learn from their intermediary experiences in neighbourhoods. Recognise and support local cultural initiatives driven by residents, artists, and community groups. This engagement can contribute to the development of more inclusive and community-responsive cultural practices.

Inclusive Area Development. Ensure meaningful participation of cultural stakeholders in the planning and implementation of area development projects. Facilitate collaborative platforms where government, cultural actors, and market representatives come together to shape the city's development. Ensure that culture is consistently considered throughout the planning and realisation phases.

Transversal Collaboration. Foster transversal collaboration within the municipality by breaking down silos and encouraging interdisciplinary cooperation. Facilitate dialogue and collaboration between different departments, such as urban planning, arts and culture, community development, and economics, to ensure a holistic and integrated approach to cultural resilience and circular developments. This can help align policies, resources, and strategies to effectively support circular and resilient cultural practices.

Multi-value System. Move beyond neoliberal standardisation and develop a multi-value system to evaluate cultural and socio-economic impacts. Recognise and assess the diverse values generated by cultural initiatives, including social, cultural, and environmental aspects. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contributions of cultural activities beyond traditional economic indicators and inform decision-making processes accordingly.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research Possibilities

While this study closely investigated the resilience and circularity of the cultural sector in Rotterdam, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study takes a broad approach to arts and culture, encompassing diverse organisations and art forms, which may overlook the distinct resilience capacities and circular practices of different art forms. Future research could delve deeper into the resilience-building and circularity of specific art forms to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Secondly, the findings of this study are contextualised within the Dutch cultural landscape, which enjoys relatively great support and freedom compared to other countries. It is important to consider the variations in government support, citizen rights, and cultural development trajectories in different contexts to better comprehend the challenges and opportunities faced by cultural sectors in diverse settings. Future research could conduct comparative studies across different cities or regions to examine variations in cultural resilience strategies and practices for a broader understanding.

Thirdly, the sample of this study has a relatively high ratio of non-profit organisations, particularly subsidy receivers, within the cultural sector. Exploring the level of precarity experienced by different types of cultural organisations, including those operating under different financial models, would provide a more nuanced understanding of resilience in the sector.

Additionally, the study examines the cultural sector within the framework of neoliberal urban governance, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other governance frameworks. Future research should investigate how alternative governance approaches, such as a degrowth perspective, can influence the resilience and circularity of the cultural sector.

In terms of future research possibilities, it would be valuable to explore actionable strategies for building resilience in the cultural sector, both on material and immaterial levels, to ensure a holistic approach to resilience. Furthermore, investigating policy steps that facilitate the intermediary role of cultural organisations in local capacity building, as well as adaptive measures that communities can undertake in the face of shocks, would contribute to practical and effective resilience-building efforts.

There is also a need to develop indicators and measurement tools that can capture and assess the social and cultural value of art beyond the market-oriented value system, as well as explore how a multi-value system can be integrated into policymaking and evaluation practices. Incorporating a degrowth approach into these discussions could provide a valuable perspective.

Lastly, it is essential to acknowledge the artistic and aesthetic functions of art on a conceptual level, as the findings, discussions, and recommendations of this study are rooted in the potential social functions of art and culture. While the debate surrounding "art for art's sake" has been extensively discussed over the years, it is crucial to recognise the impact of reducing art solely to its social functions, particularly in the face of an uncertain future characterised by climate instability.

7. Conclusion

The study explored the experiences and circular practices of the cultural sector in Rotterdam in order to gain insights into their coping tactics and their relationship to urban circularity. Informed by a review of academic literature on resilience and circularity, both within and outside the cultural sector, and guided by a theoretical framework that considers macro-level perspectives of urban (re)development issues, such as artistic gentrification and the creative city discourse, the study contextualised the sources of precariousness faced by creative workers and cultural organisations in contemporary cities. The importance of locality was addressed from a meso-perspective that connects the larger urban context and the organisational level. The study conducts a micro-level exploration to examine the interactions of cultural organisations with their localities, their circular practices, and the processes involved in building resilience.

Through an iterative process of literature review and theoretical framework development, a research design was formulated to answer the overarching question: What adaptive tactics do

cultural organisations employ to enhance their resilience in the face of social, economic, and spatial challenges in urban contexts? The research conducted 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews to delve into the challenges, opportunities, and coping tactics of the cultural sector. Three themes emerged from the analysis: the significance of networks and collaboration for the long-term and collateral development of cultural organisations, the role of community engagement in empowering community inhabitants and strengthening social fabric while building their organisational resilience by taking root in communities, and the use of circular practices, both material and immaterial, to rationalise limited resources and contribute to resilience.

However, the notion of resilience in the cultural sector is complex and nuanced. While cultural organisations employ tactics to build resilience, the internal organisational structure of the creative and cultural industries reveals the precariousness of cultural workers and the existence of self-exploitation. Different art forms also demonstrate varying capacities for resilience. The study highlighted the need for a grounded understanding of resilience in the cultural sector, considering both immaterial and material aspects. Similarly, circularity requires careful consideration and reflection to determine what is fed back into the system. It involves resource management, value creation, and preservation for long-term sustainability. The natural circularity and resilience of the cultural sector, along with its multi-value system, underscore its intermediary role at the local level in connecting with communities and facilitating the realisation of the right to the city.

Resilience and circularity are both strategies employed to cultivate sustainability. While the study focused on the dynamics between the policy level, city level, and organisational level, it also emphasised the importance of place-based collaborations and neighbourhood learning at the community and individual levels. To promote resilience building and circular practices for a sustainable future, it is essential for the government to take stock of grassroots cultural initiatives and existing cultural assets within the city, and to connect these efforts at a policy level. In line with this thinking, the study proposed five policy recommendations: establishing place-based collaborations, facilitating grassroots initiatives and learning from their experiences in neighbourhood engagement, incorporating the cultural sector into long-term city development through inclusive area development, fostering transversal collaboration within the municipality to address multi-disciplinary initiatives, and promoting a multi-value system that goes beyond market-oriented value measurements.

Overall, the study contributes to understanding the dynamics of resilience and circularity within the cultural sector, highlighting the need for nuanced perspectives and policy considerations to foster sustainable cultural practices and urban development.

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Appendix 1
Interview Overview

Interviewee	Role(s)	Size of Organisation(s)	Organisation Description	Interview Duration
1	Director	< 10	A cross-disciplinary art space located in a temporary building.	75 mins
2*	Director	< 10	A cultural and education platform situated in a temporary building.	50 mins
3*	Director	< 10	A contemporary art exhibition space in a repurposed industrial building.	31 mins
4A & 4B	Founder; Coordinator	21–30	A multipurpose space that aims to connect people from the neighbourhoods through art and personal histories in a historic building.	70 mins
5	Director	> 50	A theatre, currently planning to transform their space to enhance community connections.	64 mins
6	Venue, Events & Board Member	21–30	An association that organises cultural events for the public in a historic building.	55 mins
7	Director	< 10	A cultural venue that hosts events on various social and cultural issues.	85 mins

8	Founder	< 10	An advisory entity focusing on an aspect of Rotterdam's culture.	80 mins
9	Director & Co-founder	< 10	An initiative to preserve immaterial cultural heritage.	82 mins
10	Entrepreneur	11–20 each	Multiple cultural spaces in Rotterdam for live music, performances, and festivals, located in different types of buildings.	66 mins
11*	Archive Editor	11–20	An interdisciplinary centre for art and media technology.	57 mins

* Online interview

Appendix 2

Interview Guide

1. Organisational background and challenges

- Can you tell me about your organisation? What do you do, and how did it start?
- What are some of the most significant challenges you or your organisation have encountered? How did you resolve these challenges?
- Where or who do you seek help from when you encounter the challenges you mentioned?

2. Collaboration across the cultural ecosystem in Rotterdam

- How would you describe the cultural ecosystem in Rotterdam?
- How do you think organisations in the cultural and creative sectors can support each other? Can you provide some examples?
- Do you find Rotterdam to be an open city for cultural development? How so?
- How do you think Rotterdam's cultural development has changed over time?
- Do you feel that cultural organisations in Rotterdam are adequately supported by the local government or other stakeholders? Why or why not?
- Do you think a circular city approach could help address some of the challenges facing the cultural and creative sector? Can you explain why or why not?

3. Circular practices

- How do you understand the "circular city"?
- Have you come across any initiatives by the Rotterdam municipality to implement the circular economy? How do you interpret these efforts?
 - Follow-up: How do you think this concept can be applied to the cultural sector?
- Are circular practices part of your organisation and programming? Can you provide some examples?
- In what ways do you see cultural organisations in adaptive reuse heritage buildings contributing to the broader goals of urban circularity? (If applicable)
- In what ways do you think the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings can contribute to the cultural vitality and vibrancy of a city? (If applicable)

4. Coping tactics, resilience and policy recommendations

- Do you feel secure about continuing your organisation in Rotterdam?
- Can you name 2 or 3 factors that are most important for your organisation to continue and thrive?
- What does being resilient mean to your organisation and you as an artist or creative professional?
 - Follow-up: Where do you see your organisation in five to ten years?
- In your opinion, what are some ways in which organisations in the cultural sector can support each other to become more resilient?
- Are you aware of any lobby or group that advocates for the cultural sector in Rotterdam? Can you share some information about their activities?
- What transformation would you like to see in the cultural ecosystem in Rotterdam?

Follow-up: What do you hope that more artists and creative professionals and the Rotterdam municipality will do to achieve that?

Appendix 3

Code List

Organising themes	Themes	Codes
Challenges and opportunities	Financial insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effects of funding cuts - Dependence on subsidies - Competition - Conditions for creative workers - Balancing artistic and commercial concerns
	Uncertainty about space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gentrification - Temporary locations - Difficulties in making long-term organisational decisions
	Relationships with the municipality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitudes towards the municipality - Communications with the municipality
Practices and coping Tactics	Collaboration and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relationships with other cultural organisations - Collaborations with other cultural organisations - The importance of networks - Geographical proximity - Familiarity
	Community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting mutual understanding - Empowerment for resilience - Establishing roots in communities
	Circular practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Material circular practices - Adaptive reuse - Immaterial circular practices

Envisioning the future	Aspired transformations (organisational)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The meaning of resilience - Factors required to thrive - Space for reflection
	Aspired transformations (external)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception of city marketing - Policy recommendations - Diversity and inclusivity - Unity - Space for experimentation
Multi-value systems	Value and functions of culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value of culture - Functions of culture - Different understandings of cultural value