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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Jones, S, Centrala & Ceglarz, J 2021, *In-between spaces: Inclusion and representation of Central and Eastern European (CEE) artists in the UK creative economy*. Centrala Space. <http://centrala-space.org.uk/event/in-between-spaces-research-raport-launch--webinar>

Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal

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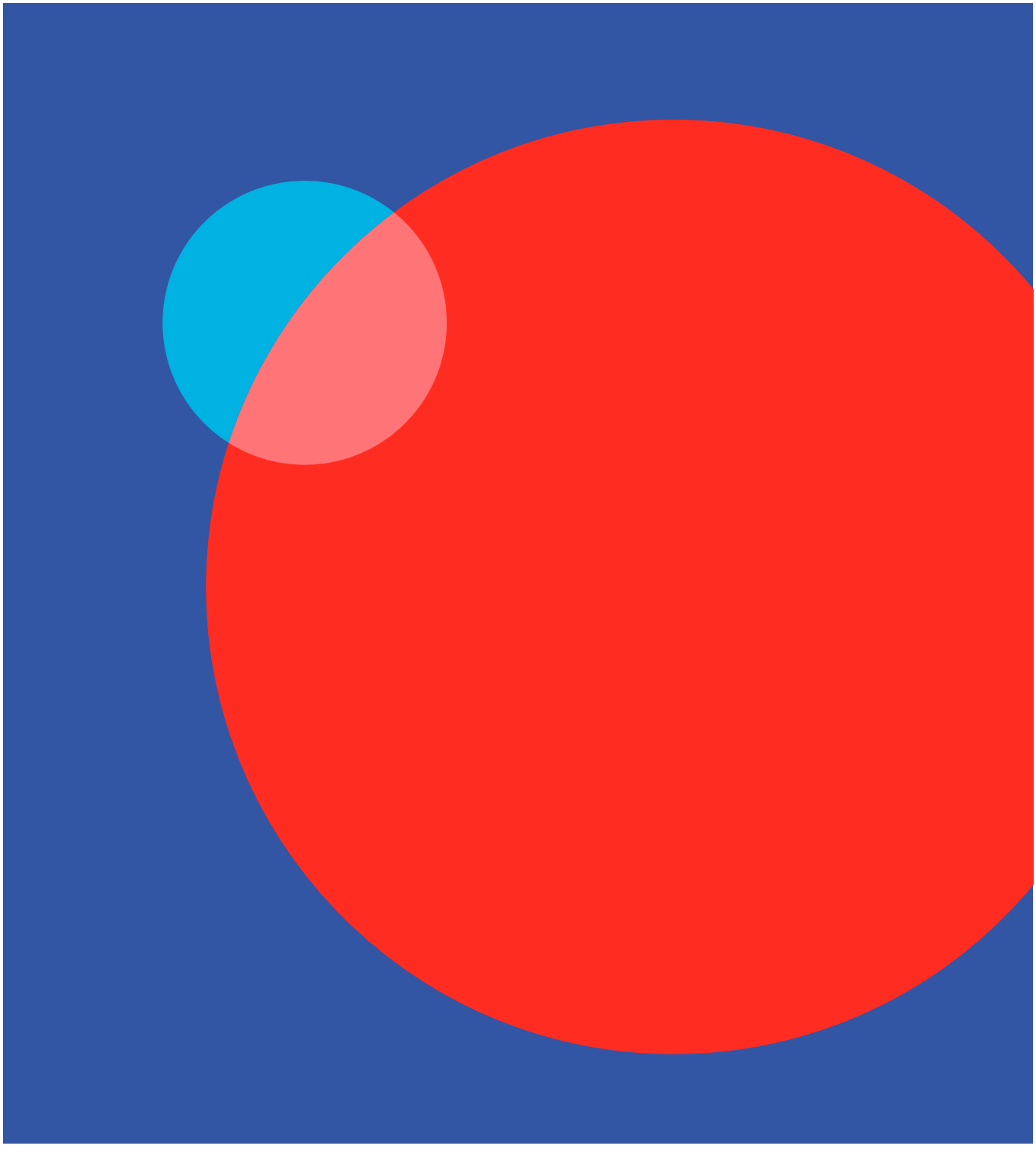
IN-BETWEEN SPACES

Inclusion and Representation
of Central and Eastern European (CEE)
Artists in the UK Creative Economies



Inclusion and Representation of Central and Eastern European Art and Artists in the UK's Creative Economies

This report was produced in a collaboration between the University of Birmingham (UoB) and Centrala Space. The project has its origins in an AHRC M4C Creative Economies Engagement Fellowship delivered by Dr Jakub Ceglarz with Prof. Sara Jones (Department of Modern Languages, UoB) as Academic Lead. The AHRC funds world-class, independent researchers in a wide range of subjects: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more.

Dr Ceglarz conducted six of the interviews analysed in this report. The remaining data collection (analysis of art spaces and festivals, communities survey, and 14 interviews) was carried out by Marta Marsicka, Art Programme Co-ordinator at Centrala Space. The data analysis and write up of the report was conducted by Prof. Jones in dialogue with Marta Marsicka and Centrala's Director, Alicja Kaczmarek.

We are extremely grateful to the interviewees and survey participants for giving up their time and sharing their experiences to support this research. We'd also like to thank Dr Kinga Goodwin and Dr Charlotte Galpin for offering peer review of the report and to Dr Goodwin for leading on its dissemination.

March 2021

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Key Findings

1 Art (visual and performance) by Central and Eastern European artists is underrepresented in Midlands' art galleries, spaces and festivals in comparison to that produced by artists born in Western Europe and North America.

2 This underrepresentation exists in a context in which Central and Eastern European migrants make up approximately 3.7% of the Midlands' population. This is significantly higher than the population of Western European migrants (1.8%) and North American migrants (0.5%).

3 The arts-interested Central and Eastern European communities in the region engage with art by Central and Eastern European artists; however, they principally find this in dedicated spaces (e.g. Centrala), rather than in major regional galleries and festivals.

4 These communities strongly support a greater visibility for artists from Central and Eastern Europe, citing a range of perceived benefits relating to well-being, identity, inclusion and countering stereotypes.

5 Central and Eastern European migrants — including migrant artists — are predominantly white and therefore benefit from the 'invisibility' of whiteness. However, they experience a complex form of racialisation in the UK based on negative media portrayals, cultural difference and stereotypes about the region. As a result, they are subject to discrimination and xeno-racism, including in their professional lives.

6 Migrant artists from Central and Eastern Europe frequently take on roles for which they are overqualified and find that the skills and experience they have gained in their country of origin are not recognised in the UK creative economies. This holds back their career development and even results in some abandoning their careers in the arts.

7 There is an intersection of migrant experience and socio-economic class. Migrant artists do not have the cultural and social capital of many of their UK-born (middle class) peers. Nor do they have the same access to networks gained through education in the UK and through parental support.

8 Migrant artists from Central and Eastern Europe find themselves 'in-between spaces'. They experience xeno-racism, including microagressions, verbal and even physical abuse; however, they frequently find themselves excluded from antiracist measures designed to support equality, diversity and inclusion and to provide opportunities for minoritised groups.

Recommendations

Funders, policy-makers, policy-influencers and policy-implementers should:

1 Raise awareness among art and cultural organisations about the position of recent migrants to the UK and the need for and value of cultural representation.

2 Encourage more representative art programming.

3 Promote decolonisation as a strategy in art programming with the aim of decentring Western European and North American art and culture. Currently, art and artists from this part of the world represent the 'core' and art and artists from Eastern Europe occupy the position of a semi-periphery.

4 Call for a wider review of the use of the BAME/BME categorisation.

5 Call for a review of ACE and other funders' approach to measuring diversity, particularly use of the 'White Other' category, which works to exclude CEE art and artists from diversity measurements and reporting.

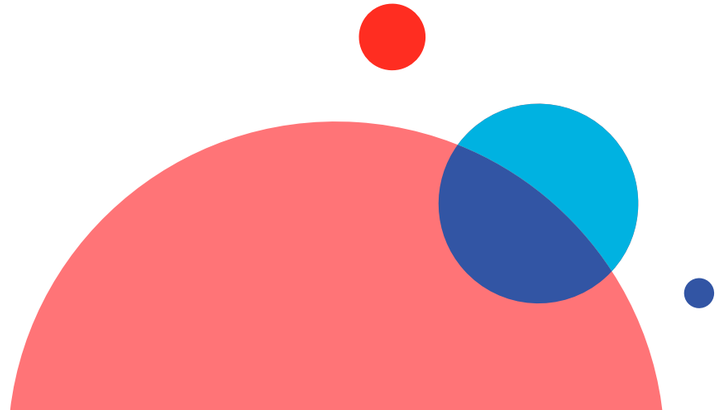
6 Raise greater cultural awareness to reduce negative stereotyping and unconscious bias, including against CEE migrants.

7 Raise awareness of discrimination and xeno-racism experienced by CEE migrants.

8 Review the widespread practice of non-recognition of CEE education and professional experience.

9 Review antiracist and diversity strategies to ensure wider inclusion of discriminated groups.

10 Encourage strategies that recognise the impact of intersectionality when promoting diversity and inclusion.



Context and Background

Migration from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK is not a new phenomenon; however, the successive post-Cold War expansions of the European Union in 2004 (including Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia), 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria) and 2013 (Croatia) extended the right to live and work in the UK to large numbers of people in the region and saw significant waves of migration from those countries. The most recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicates that in 2019 there were approximately 389,000 people born in Central and Eastern European countries who have made their lives in the Midlands alone.

These migrants come from diverse national contexts, both within and outside of the EU; they have a range of migration trajectories in terms of, for example, age, motivation and length of stay. They include both blue- and white-collar professionals. In short, they constitute part of the UK's 'superdiverse' (Phillimore and Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2020) communities: this study does not aim to homogenise them into a single group. Its goal is rather to highlight some of the common (in the sense of frequent) experiences of migrants from the region operating within the UK's cultural sector. It thereby hopes to contribute to a better understanding of if and how cultural institutions in the UK support the 'representation of diversity' in relation to this large migrant community (Martiniello, 2015).

Recent research suggests that Central and Eastern Europeans in the UK frequently experience various forms of discrimination, including physical and verbal abuse. The representation of Central and Eastern European migrants in the UK national press is overwhelmingly negative and draws on racist tropes to present these groups as a threat to the way of life in the UK (Spigelman, 2013). The discourse surrounding the referendum on Britain's membership of the EU and its aftermath had a substantial focus on EU migration, particularly from Eastern Europe (Rzepnikowska, 2019: 65-66). In the wake of the vote to leave the EU, there was an increase in hate crimes directed against European migrants in the UK, and Central and Eastern Europeans were particularly affected (Narkowicz, 2020; Tereshchenko, Bradbury and Archer, 2019: 54).

A key discussion in the literature is how this discrimination can be understood and described. The majority of Central and Eastern Europeans are white. The form of discrimination that they experience is therefore different to the racism encountered by visible minorities in the UK: it is sometimes termed 'xeno-racism'. As Fekete (2001: 24) explains, xeno-racism 'is a xenophobia that bears all the marks of the old racism', but it is not 'colour-coded'. In this sense, 'it is racism in substance, but 'xeno' in form' (see also, Sivanandan, 2008). Xeno-racism in this context is based on the construction of cultural difference that nonetheless draws on narratives and images produced in previous migrations (Fox, Moroșanu and Szilassy, 2012). In the case of Central and Eastern European migrants it is underpinned by Western European stereotypes of Eastern Europe as exotic and backward — a process that is often understood through the concepts of Orientalism or Balkanism (Narkowicz, 2020; Samaluk, 2016). The Eastern expansion of the EU after the end of the Cold War was framed as an opportunity for the newly capitalist countries of the East to 'catch up' with the West and 'return to Europe' — Eastern European migrants were, following this logic, presented as fleeing poor and underdeveloped societies to make better lives in the affluent countries of Western Europe (Narkowicz, 2020; Samaluk, 2014, 2016). Taking this nexus of factors into account, this report defines 'Central and Eastern European' in political terms to mean those countries geographically in Europe, but which were located in the 'Eastern bloc' prior to 1989, including the Soviet sphere of influence and the former Yugoslavia.

Central and Eastern Europeans find themselves in a place 'in-between'. The majority identify as white, but they are perceived as 'not quite white enough' and are consequently subject to xeno-racism and discrimination (Narkowicz, 2020). They experience the privilege of invisibility as white migrants, and (at least prior to 2021) those coming to the UK from EU member states enjoyed freedom of movement not granted to migrants from other parts of the world. However, this privilege is diminished when they do not have the cultural capital to 'perform "whiteness" in the way white British people do' (Tereshchenko, Bradbury and Archer, 2019: 54; Samaluk, 2014). At the same time, as they are (self) categorised as white, they do not generally have access to the support of antiracism, equality and diversity measures, e.g. in the workplace (Samaluk, 2014).

The xeno-racism experienced by Central and Eastern European migrants in the UK is exacerbated by and intersects with issues of socioeconomic status and class (Samaluk, 2014). The framework within which many Central and Eastern Europeans came to the UK meant that a large proportion came to take up low-skilled and low-paid employment (Fox, Moroșanu and Szilassy, 2012, 2015). Many migrants from the region 'downskilled' on their arrival to the UK, that is, took up employment that required lower skills and qualifications than they possessed at that time (Bulat, 2019). Research suggests that they frequently find that the qualifications and experience they gained in their countries of origin are not recognised in the UK, meaning that Central and Eastern European migrants are far more likely to be overqualified (and underpaid) for their jobs than either Western European migrant or UK-born workers (Johnston, Khattab and Manley, 2015; Samaluk, 2016).

Central and Eastern Europeans thereby came to be stereotyped as low-skilled migrants, deemed undesirable by a large sector of the host population, despite the valuable role they play economically (Bulat, 2019). The stereotype of the low-skilled Central and Eastern European migrant simultaneously contributed to the xeno-racism experienced by these groups (Tereshchenko, Bradbury and Archer, 2019). This is particularly important in the context of arts and culture because socio-economic status is a key determining factor in cultural participation (DDCMS, 2019).

Understandably, these experiences of discrimination and xeno-racism can lead to feelings of exclusion and non-belonging. This is particularly the case since the referendum on Britain's membership of the EU (Tyrrell, Sime, Kelly and McMellon, 2019). Cultural participation and representation becomes particularly important in these circumstances. The AHRC Cultural Value project (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016) highlighted key benefits of participating in culture for minority groups, including finding a voice and expressing identity, and promoting community cohesion and a sense of belonging. There is also emerging evidence that cultural engagement and representation can actively improve well-being, including reducing incidents of ethnic and racial harassment and promoting empathy and understanding with and for marginalised groups. At the same time, the Cultural Value report highlighted that the portrayal of different groups in art and the media 'can serve to entrench or undermine existing inequalities'.

One particular issue in this context is that Central and Eastern Europeans are not visible as a separate group in the data collected by Arts Council England (ACE), or indeed other surveys measuring participation in the Arts. Most often they are encompassed in the ethnic grouping 'White Other', which would include all individuals who are white, but not British; for example, white Western Europeans, North Americans, and Australians. Notably, this is the case for the large-scale 'Taking Part' survey commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2019), which

assesses the cultural participation of different groups in the UK. The summary of the recent *Migrants in Culture* survey (2020), which explores the impact of the hostile environment in the cultural sector, divides respondents into EU/non-EU, but does not disaggregate by country of origin. As described above, Central and Eastern Europeans, whether EU citizens or not, are racialized in a quite different way to white individuals from Western European and Anglophone countries.

An analysis of the ACE data report *Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case* highlights the 'in-betweenness' of Central and Eastern Europeans within the UK's creative economies in this regard. The report explicitly states that the category 'White Other', 'includes people from all other [i.e. not British] white backgrounds (including, for example, those from other European countries' (ACE, 2020b: 4) — white Central and Eastern Europeans would evidently fit into that categorisation. However, the 'White Other' category is not included in the report's overview discussions of diversity, which, in each section, focuses on the inclusion and representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), disabled, female, and LGBT artists and audiences.[1] Where the data is reported in full in each section, 'White Other' is recorded as a separate category to BME; as white Central and Eastern Europeans (alongside white Western Europeans, North Americans, Australians etc.) are included in the first group, they are not taken into consideration in the second, and therefore not included in the assessments of diversity. The term BME (or BAME) has been strongly criticised for incorporating into a single grouping multiple ethnicities, nationalities and geographies (e.g., Inc Arts, 2020b). We might note that 'White Other' has a related effect, as it works to conceal different experiences of privilege, discrimination and xeno-racism.

This also results in contradictions within diversity policy. The Polish Expats Association (PEA)/Centrala is a National Portfolio Organisation funded by ACE as an organisation supporting a minoritised community: PEA/Centrala's programming is focused on Central and Eastern European art and communities and their workforce is predominantly made up of Central and Eastern Europeans. The small-scale qualitative survey discussed below makes clear that it is an important site for Central and Eastern Europeans in terms of cultural representation. And yet, in the four-point scale measuring the diversity of its NPOs, the PEA is described by ACE as having only 'met' the requirements (ACE, 2020b: 76), rather than being 'strong' or 'outstanding' in this area (for context, this places the organisation in the bottom 44% on this scale).[2]

It is a stated aim of the Arts Council England (ACE, 2020a) to ensure that England's 'diversity is fully reflected in the culture it produces' (p. 6) and that the cultural workforce 'is representative of contemporary England' (p. 22). Given that Central and Eastern Europeans make up approximately 3.7% of the Midlands population (ONS, 2020), we might expect that this striving for diversity would include supporting this group and ensuring equality of opportunity for artists from these communities. For this reason, in-depth qualitative research is needed to explore their participation in art and culture and the barriers and challenges to that participation (Consilium, 2014: 78). It is just such evidence that this research seeks to provide.

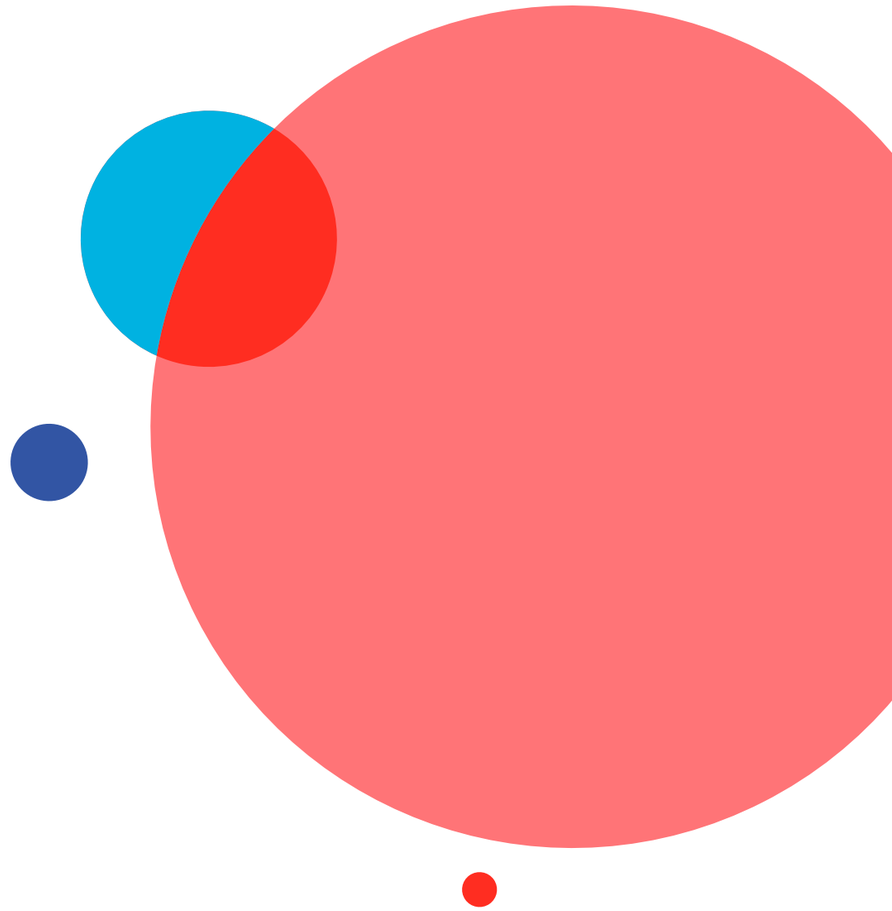
1 N.B. These are the terms used by the report.

2 The measurement took into account programming diversity, engaging diverse audiences, supporting diverse talent, prioritising resources to deliver diverse work, self-evaluation and sharing best practice, and driving initiatives to promote diversity (ACE, 2020b: 61).

Evidence and Findings

The following outlines the key evidence and findings from the study that underpins this report. The study combined multiple methods to approach the question of the representation of Central and Eastern European art and artists in the UK from multiple dimensions. The methodology is described in detail in Appendix 1.

In brief, it comprised a quantitative analysis of the representation of work by Central and Eastern European artists in Midlands art galleries, centres and festivals; a small-scale qualitative survey of culturally active Central and Eastern Europeans in the region; and 20 interviews with migrant artists and curators from Central and Eastern Europe living in the UK. The results will be presented in two categories: underrepresentation, and experiences and challenges.



Underrepresentation

Central and Eastern European Art in the Midlands

Figure 1 shows the results of the quantitative analysis of Midlands galleries, arts organisations and festivals. Data was collected on the country of origin of artists whose work was exhibited at a selection of regional galleries, arts spaces/centres and at a large regional film festival, or who were invited to contribute to selected regional performing arts festivals in the period 2012-2020 (see Appendix 1 for full methodology). The data relating to individual countries has been aggregated according to geographical region, in order to provide an overview of which world regions are best represented in the Midlands arts scene in these terms. This data is based on the country of birth/nationality of the artists or artist group and not on their ethnicity or heritage. It thus reports something rather different to the measurements of diversity undertaken by, e.g. the DDCMS and ACE, as discussed above. The data presented here relates to art brought to the UK from elsewhere in the world, or produced by first-generation migrant artists living in the UK.

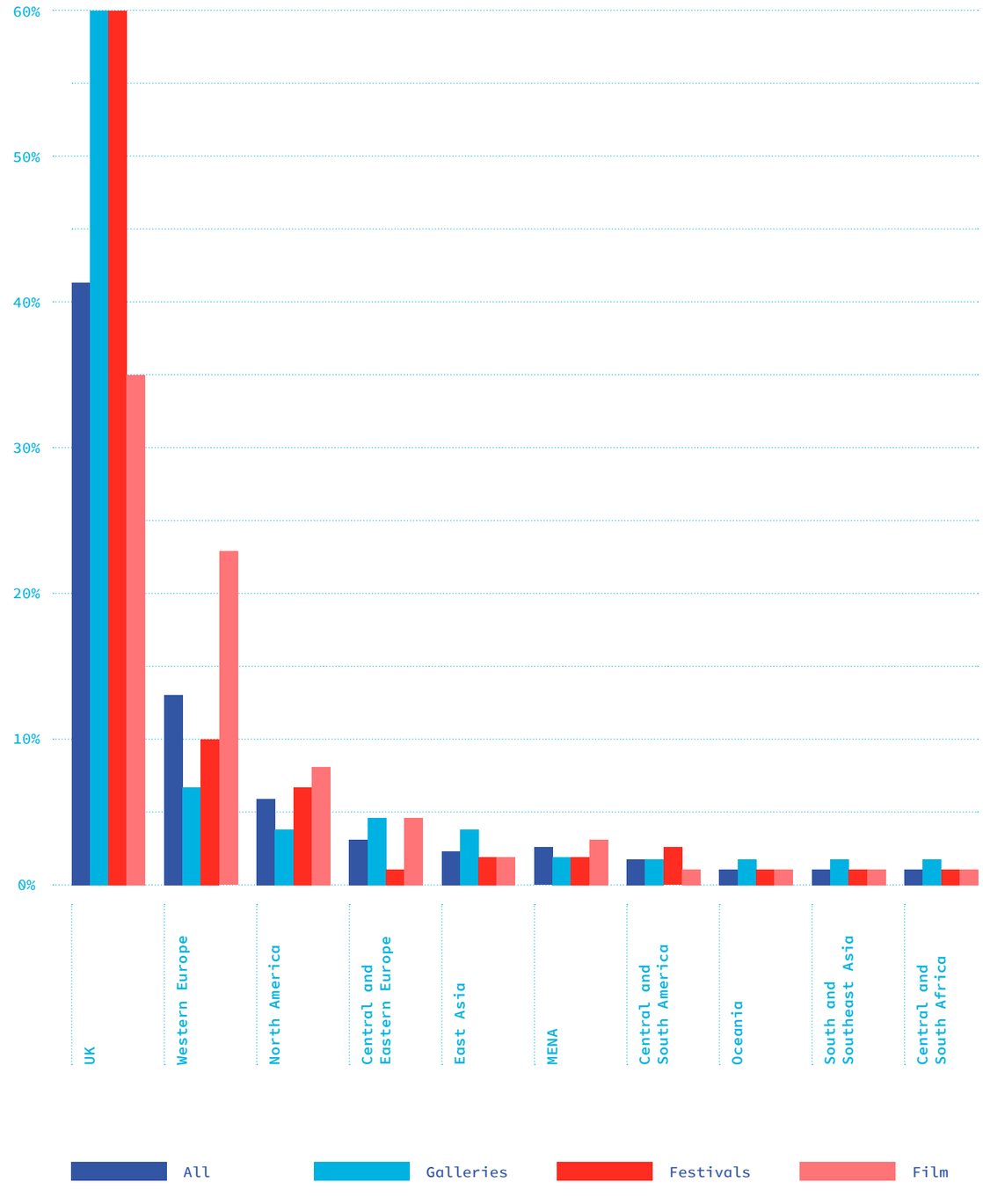
What we see here is a clear Western focus in the country of origin/nationality of artists represented in both the visual and performing art scenes in the Midlands region. 29% of artists and art groups are from Western Europe (excluding the UK) and 13% are from North America (principally Canada and USA). This compares to only 6% of artists and art groups from Central and Eastern Europe. These three regions have comparable population sizes;[3] and, importantly, there are significantly more Central and Eastern European migrants in the Midlands (3.7% of population) than Western European (1.8%) or North American (0.5%).

In many ways, this data indicates the 'in-betweenness' of Central and Eastern Europe: it is clear that art from this region or by artists born there enjoys better representation than art produced outside of Europe and North America or by other first-generation migrants from outside of the Western world. Nonetheless, Central and Eastern European art is also comparatively underrepresented by this measure. This is consistent with the observation by Piotr Piotrowski (2009: 53) that art history has tended to locate Central and Eastern Europe as a 'close other' (in contrast to the 'real other' outside of Europe), that is, on the 'margins of European culture, outside the center but still within the same cultural frame of reference'. This is especially significant in a context in which Central and Eastern European migrants in the UK represent a substantial minority who are (also) subject to xeno-racism and discrimination.

3 Estimated populations of 326 million for Central and Eastern Europe (including Russia), 359 million for Western Europe (excluding the UK), and 370 million for the United States and Canada combined.

FIGURE 1

Artwork by Artist Country of Birth / Nationality (Grouped by Geographical Region)



Communities and Underrepresentation

The results of the small-scale qualitative survey (63 respondents) indicate how this underrepresentation is perceived by Central and Eastern European communities in the region. The distribution of the survey through the Central and Eastern European arts space, Centrala, and the use of opt-in sampling, means that the majority of respondents are actively interested and participate in culture: 65% stated that they took part in a cultural event (broadly defined) at least once per month, with 24% participating at least once per week. The mean number of years that respondents had spent in the UK was 9, and the mean age at which participants had migrated was 24. The distribution of nationalities among the participants roughly mirrors the size of the respective communities in the UK, with Polish and Romanian being the largest groups (see Appendix 1); 8% of respondents held British nationality alongside one other.

Survey participants were asked to list the cultural events they could recall attending in the last year and whether those events included Central and Eastern European artists: 48% of respondents recalled seeing Central and Eastern European artists in that year. This number falls to 43% when respondents were asked about named regional events (see survey in Appendix 2).

The fine detail of where respondents recalled seeing Central and Eastern European artists indicates a clustering around exhibitions and performances at Centrala, or Digbeth First Friday (in which Centrala participates), or musicians (an art form not included in this analysis). Only 6% of respondents explicitly recalled seeing Central and Eastern European artists at any of the other named regional festivals.

Of the 82.5% of respondents who offered an opinion on whether they would like to see more cultural representation from their home country, 81% said that they would. The qualitative responses to this question reveal a sense of exclusion and discrimination, also within the cultural sphere. The following are some representative examples:

> I feel there is a lot of creative energy in the people from my country however very few have the chance to express it.

> I don't feel that my community (Romanian immigrants) which is quite prominent in Birmingham is being represented and acknowledged by the creative industries/art scene in Birmingham.

> Not represented enough in this country, but they are not encouraged to either ([…] constantly discriminating [Romanians] in all walks of life doesn't help).

Several respondents highlighted what they saw as the potential benefits of better cultural representation, including improved community cohesion, well-being, the fostering of diversity and tolerance and the promotion of new perspectives on British culture, politics and society. To give a few typical examples:

> It's extremely important for the cultural representation and well-being of CEE migrants in the UK. On top of that, it makes the cultural scene more diverse and equal when it comes to representation of different communities and their representatives.

> It would mean a lot to me to see a bigger representation of the Central and Eastern European culture in the Birmingham's cultural scene. It would encourage me to participate in these events and make me feel more like a part of the community.

> I know how hard it is for Central and Eastern Europeans to become visible on the cultural platform in a foreign country, but apart from wanting to feel included in the society, we have important things to say not only about ourselves but also about the British society and politics we live in.

A number of responses (both affirmative and negative) reveal a concern that any attempt to showcase art from the region would reinforce stereotypes; for example:

> Yes, but I am not too keen on political themes because I do not want my country and its culture reduced to our problems with ethnic strife.

> If it is just a cartoonish representations of what my country is about then absolutely no – I don't want to see anymore folk dances and traditional folk music […]; however – If I could see new and upcoming artists and performers from my country which are experimental/in tune with the latest developments/trends in their industry or alternatively very original then yes – I would like to see more of that.

As we will see in the next section, this connects to a perception by the artists themselves that they are, as Central and Eastern Europeans, restricted to particular exoticised themes.

Experiences and Challenges

The analysis of art in Midlands' galleries, arts spaces and festivals indicates an underrepresentation of artworks and performance by artists whose country of birth and/or nationality is located in Central and Eastern Europe. This data includes both artists who live in the UK and those who do not. If we drill down to look only at migrant artists in the UK, we get a similar result. In exhibitions and residencies in Midlands' galleries and arts spaces, Central and Eastern European artists based in the UK make up only 1.43% of UK-resident artists whose work is shown or supported. This figure is significantly lower than the percentage of the Midlands' population born in Central and Eastern Europe (3.7%). This section of the report picks up this thread and shifts the focus from the representation of Central and Eastern European art to the lived experience of Central and Eastern European artists. It draws on interviews with UK-based cultural professionals of Central and Eastern European origin to explore the experiences of these individuals and the challenges they face.

Discrimination, Xeno-racism and Orientalism

One of the common themes running throughout the interviews was the experience of discrimination and xeno-racism. Interviewees recounted repeated microaggressions alongside open xeno-racism and even physical abuse. Interviewee 6, a Lithuanian artist who came to the UK in 2010, describes how she was assaulted in the bar in which she was working:

> And that nearly ended really badly for me, but the bar people stepped in and stopped that. But there was always a sense that, you know, you can stay here, we will tolerate you, but don't push too hard and don't ask too much, basically. And I think that sort of feeling is boiling over and now the situation is, as we know, not very good for foreign nationals in the UK.

Interviewee 15, a Polish performing artist who came to the UK in 2003, portrays the xeno-racism she experienced during a street art performance:

> This guy came and I think he was from New Zealand funnily enough, I don't think he was even British, and he joked by saying 'oh, so this is your new actress. I thought that all of them were waitresses or cleaners'.

Interviewee 16, a Serbian artist who came to the UK in 2016, describes how she was called a 'foreign cunt' on a London bus. On obtaining some funding to support her work while studying at the Royal College of Art, Interviewee 17 — a Czech artist who came to the UK in 1998 — was asked by a fellow student: 'Why did you get the funding? You're not even British'.

Discrimination, xeno-racism and orientalism are also features of the interviewees' experiences as cultural professionals in the UK. The interviewees confirm the underrepresentation of Central and Eastern European art observed in this study's analysis of Midlands' galleries and festivals; several note that they only infrequently observe Central and Eastern European artists displayed in UK galleries, including those in London. Interviewee 14, who is of mixed Russian, Estonian and Dagestani heritage and has British citizenship, puts it succinctly:

> I think there's a couple of Russian artists now in contemporary galleries in London. But it's really, really a minority. Western European artists are much more represented and, of course, had much more opportunity.

Interviewee 2, a Romanian artist who moved to the UK in 2009, notes that she has noticed more representation now than when she first moved to the UK, but that it is still inadequate. She points out that Central and Eastern Europeans have been central as a referent in the media campaign around Britain's departure from the EU but argues that they are otherwise invisible in the public sphere:

> The thing that I always say is that we have caused this earthquake in this country and people decided to vote for Brexit because of us. Where are we? Right? We're not visible: where are we?

The interviewees portray their struggles looking for employment in the UK appropriate to their qualifications and experience. Interviewee 1, a Polish-born artist who had been in the UK for 14 years at the time of the interview, described her experience of constant rejection from applications for residencies or funding in terms of an unconscious bias against Central and Eastern Europeans:

> I think that's how the discrimination works that you can't really… it's done sort of sometimes without people even realizing that they are discriminating against people with certain names and certain accents from certain backgrounds.

The inability to pinpoint if and where discrimination plays a role in struggles to find work or acquire funding means that some interviewees hesitate to explain their experiences in these terms, even if they do feel a sense of unfairness. Interviewee 13, a Croatian artist who came to the UK in 2014, describes how she found it very difficult to find appropriate employment despite her extensive qualifications:

> Probably during the… so when I was applying for all these jobs I felt… I mean… I think for all cultural workers or artists and curators it's very difficult to find jobs anywhere, I guess. But, yes, there were times that I… when I was thinking, 'Okay, there must be something wrong because no one is recognizing my degree'. There are lots of people that have only BA degrees. I have two MA degrees, two major MA degrees. So I remember that I felt, 'okay, is it because I'm from Balkans?'

Others are more certain that bias against migrants from the region has had a negative impact on their career progression and ability to participate in the UK cultural economy. Interviewee 3, a Croatian curator who came to the UK in 2014 with substantial previous experience, describes how she sometimes used her husband's (British) surname to conceal her identity:

> When I try to […] hide that I come from this part of the world – let's say by using my husband's surname – still when they saw my CV with experiences from Zagreb in Croatia, I was immediately dismissed.

This (unconscious) bias was — the interviewees noted — informed by stereotypes about Central and Eastern Europe and Central and Eastern European migrants. When asked if she felt that there was an underrepresentation of Central and Eastern European art in the UK, Interviewee 10, a Polish artist who came to the UK in 2001, stated:

> I don't think it (the art scene) adequately reflects the makeup of society and the way particularly, you know, if we're speaking about Britain here, the way British society sees particularly Central Eastern European migrants, who are often represented as fruit pickers and plumbers, and still as these stereotypes.

Such stereotypes, participants observe, are underpinned by ignorance about the region and its diversity on the part of British people; they are frequently lumped into one undifferentiated group labelled 'Eastern European', which is in turn often coded as 'Polish'. Interviewee 16 describes how a curator repeatedly used Polish words with her and her creative partner, despite knowing that they were from Serbia and Romania respectively. To add insult to injury, the same individual later rejected their proposed work that addressed the experiences of Central and Eastern European migrants, questioning 'whether there's any discrimination against Eastern Europeans' in the UK.

A further theme repeated across several interviews is the perception that Central and Eastern European artists were expected to produce work of a particular style and form, which conformed to the exoticised (or orientalised) and stereotypical images of the region. As Interviewee 3 put it: 'you need to fit into certain topics, which are hiding biased views and prejudice.' Interviewee 1 created work which attempted to subvert this expectation, but was disappointed by the result — it was successful, but not in the way she had intended:

> You know, it's (the work) like old women in the countryside in Poland wearing folk costumes, singing […] and obviously the whole kind of performance of the folklore there is purposely undermined by the lyrics that are about unemployment, the European Union, the impact of migration, and that performance of identity is broken up within the piece by the lyrics and the content of it, which is very much about politics and the economic situation. But still, because of the visual appeal, which kind of appeals to some stereotype of Eastern Europe and Poland, it was really successful, which pissed me off because I feel like people don't really engage with the work itself, but they just looked at it as this image that just confirms everything that they've ever thought about Eastern Europe.

Interviewee 12, a Polish artist who came to the UK in 2008, considered that this stereotypical portrayal was supported by the Polish institutions of cultural diplomacy within the UK:

> I'm thinking here about the role of the Polish Cultural Institute, that is, a cultural institution based in London representing Polish culture. And what can they do at the moment, they can only do whatever the government tells them, they have no freedom. They have stopped funding small exciting projects of unknown artists. They are just repeating the folklore, the classical music, you know, that just continues this stereotypical view of who we are.

This is particularly important because — as indicated in the above quotation — the Polish Cultural Institute is an important source of funding for many migrant artists from that country and therefore has a significant influence over what work is supported and displayed.

Overqualification

The majority of interviewees recognise the general challenges of pursuing a career in the arts in the UK (or indeed elsewhere). However, they perceive that these challenges have been exacerbated in a variety of ways by their status as migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Language is one barrier to progression noted by a number of interviewees; even when they are proficient in English, several observe what Interviewee 20 describes as 'accent racism', that is, prejudice based on their use of English marked as 'foreign'.

Several interviewees note the difficulty of having qualifications and experience gained in their country of origin recognised in the UK, often reporting that they have found it easier to gain access to and be successful in the creative economies abroad. Interviewee 1, for example, describes her experience of trying to crack the UK job market based on her extensive work in other European contexts:

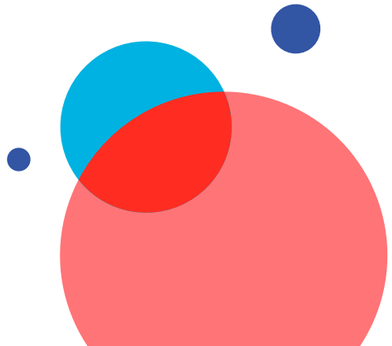
> I have had a lot of experience working with prestigious places around Europe, like museums and galleries, and I don't feel like people here actually acknowledge that… that it meant anything.

This lack of recognition regarding non-UK skills, experience and qualifications impacted on some individuals in terms of their confidence in and willingness to apply for funding from national bodies. Interviewee 1 explains:

> I would just not apply for Arts Council funding, just because I assumed I would not get it. Because if I couldn't even get into like a small group show, for which you have to pay to get in… or a crappy residency where you get £200. I mean, I just assumed I wouldn't get it, you know, maybe wrong, but it just didn't seem like the amount of time spent on an application was worth it, because I just couldn't believe I would actually be recognized as an UK artist.

The lack of recognition of qualifications and experience gained outside of the UK is in many cases mirrored by an initial lack of knowledge about how the UK art economy functions — a lack that several interviewees felt was not filled by their graduate or postgraduate level education in UK institutions. Interviewee 12 is relatively optimistic about the chances of Central and Eastern European artists in the UK; however, she notes that a lack of knowledge may hold some back:

> I have a feeling that my artist friends that are based in Poland, they are just not used to the idea of applying to international open calls. They've never done that because nobody told them about it when they were studying, or because they just don't need it.



As reported in research on Central and Eastern Europeans in other sectors, the difficulties for these artists to find a job appropriate to their level of qualification and experience led to many of them taking jobs for which they are overqualified, at least initially. Interviewee 6 explains:

> Unfortunately, I was seeking out jobs basically, according to my education, and professional experience, but these jobs were unavailable to me because employers did not recognize either my education or my experience, so actually I had to just work in jobs in bars and factories and whatnot.

Others made the decision to retrain or to refocus their skills in a new direction. Interviewee 8, a Russian performance artist who came to the UK in 2003, describes how her perception of her chances in the theatre sector shifted:

> I was top of my game when I moved and I thought: I'll get a job, no problem... I have a diploma, top marks, great experience. And it took me some time to realize that it's not that easy. […] And so in the end, I changed my path and I decided that I'd be better off working for myself.

The challenges experienced by the interviewees are also intersectional, with class and socio-economic status playing an important role in the ability of the interviewees to advance their careers. Interviewee 10 explains why she came late to her career as a photographer:

> But what stopped me going into the art sector at the age of 18, you know, when you choose kind of what you're going to study at university, was the lack of financial stability and clear career progression. I came from a family where we didn't really have a lot of security, financial security.

Interviewee 17's experiences at art school in the UK confirm this perception that the art world is dominated by white, British, and middle class groups:

> I don't know where it comes from but there is a surprising number of middle class English students in art school, especially white middle class English students who don't, who kind of just want to be an artist, and they're great, this is not judgment of the practice or anything like that, it's just there is a sense of privilege that comes with it, that sometimes you don't get when you're from Central Eastern Europe.

This connects with another common thread throughout the interviews, that is, the importance of networks. This might be networks of individuals who can help you in terms of the practicalities of the UK cultural sector, but also networks of individuals who can offer you opportunities. As in other sectors, the access to such networks is dependent on a range of different intersecting privileges based on socio-economic status, parentage and pre-existing connections (Inc Arts, 2020a). Interviewee 10 describes the importance of networks as follows:

> In the UK, a lot of the way jobs are created at arts institutions, or, you know, galleries, they often happen at private views, they often happen because you know so and so, or you and so and so went to school together, or, you know, your mom lives next door to so and so. So I do think there is this kind of sense of familiarity, which is definitely harder to break through, if you have just moved to the UK […] than you know, if you have been brought up here, for example.

The difference between the migrant experience in this regard and that of the individual born in the UK is particularly emphasised by Interviewee 11:

> I think the difference is enormous, because guys who are from here they are born with networks. Like I see how much easier it is for guys who are from here to just navigate and establish something because they have 50 friends from the primary school, secondary school, and then they, I think they make stronger connections on the university level here. And they naturally just have a vast network including parents and family and support etc. And you are just planted here as a person not knowing a single other person at the age of 20 something […].

We might note that this idea that British-born artists have a 'ready-made' network of individuals willing and able to support them in their careers would seem to assume that those artists grew up in a particular (middle or upper class) socio-economic milieu (see Inc Arts, 2020a). Nonetheless, the particular intersection of working class and migrant status is an important factor in the experiences of these individuals.

In-between Spaces

A number of interviewees explicitly discuss their experiences in terms of 'in-betweenness', that is, as visibly white, but part of a racialized group in the UK. Interviewee 11, a Polish artist who came to the UK in 2004, states clearly that she gradually came to perceive the discrimination she was subject to in the UK as a form of racism:

> Many of those issues related to race that people would consider racism or racist in accordance to other races, we also experience. I literally remember when I started working at this auction house or in any other, like, more art, social events, I saw shock horror in people's eyes when they realized I'm not there to serve them food.

Interviewees describe their experiences of in-betweenness as a challenge. They have a sense that they are subject to discrimination, but also that they are invisible in policies designed to promote diversity in the sector. Interviewee 11 explains that she has never even been invited to interview for the senior positions for which she has applied:

> I just feel that people who are getting these jobs, all of them, absolutely all of them were born here and sometimes looking diverse also means born here. Sometimes I just felt it's, maybe it's just completely irrelevant, but maybe the fact that I'm not born here actually makes me completely just irrelevant.

Several interviewees comment on the fact that they do not qualify for support as a minority group, even though they perceive their experience as structurally similar to other marginalised communities (see Samaluk, 2014). This does not mean that they don't recognise the importance of these efforts to promote diversity and inclusion and the existence of systemic racism against visible minorities — often referencing Britain's colonial history. However, they nonetheless feel that diversity might be more effective if differently defined. Interviewee 14 comments on the opportunities available to different groups in the UK:

> I've come across a lot of newsletters and things that people send for opportunities for funding and developing different projects, which just actively say we're looking for artists from communities of Caribbean or Asian British descent, and it's a very specific focus, understandably so, of course, because there's also a very long history of colonialism in the UK… whereas the Eastern European migration to Britain is a much more recent one. So there's not really anything that's directly supporting that… I've not come across any funds that are for, say, Eastern European artists living in the UK.

In this context, participants construct narratives of solidarity with groups in the UK who experience racism. Interviewee 2, a Romanian artist who came to the UK in 2009, recognises that these comparisons are complex and potentially problematic, but emphasises that Eastern Europeans do nonetheless experience discrimination:

> It's such a complex thing, because I think Eastern Europeans will never be on the same platform, because the majority of Eastern Europeans are white. You know, and I think, yes, we are discriminated against and yes, we have been racialized and yes to all these things. But we will never, ever, ever go through those systemic kind of discriminations in the system.

She argues for a differentiated understanding of the position of Central and Eastern Europeans in comparison to other marginalised communities. They are all fighting 'systemic oppression and racism and xenophobia', but coming at it from a different set of perspectives and experiences. However, in the course of the interview she reframes that solidarity as being underpinned by 'discrimination trauma'. She describes the response of an audience comprised principally of individuals whose parents had migrated to the UK from Nigeria to her work about Eastern Europeans:

> And then at the end, they all came to us to say, this is exactly how my parents feel in the country. This is exactly what they have always told us about the experience of segregation and discrimination. Thank you so much. I didn't realize that we had so much in common. And that was really when we started exploring this idea of how this discrimination trauma really does bring people together.

In this context, the interviewees were asked to comment on the effectiveness of diversity monitoring and reporting which tends to take a 'tick box' approach — that is, in which applicants and participants are asked to self-identify with a pre-determined set of categories of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation etc. There is a general sense among the interviewees that these boxes are inadequate as a measure of diversity and privilege, but that the picture is complex. Interviewee 12 notes the broadness of the 'White Other' category:

> And it's not really common and not as common as it should be, to specify the 'White Other', very often it's just a tick box without giving you really a chance to specify whether you're Polish, whether you are Ukrainian, whatever, you are just a 'White Other' […]. And it is sad because it turns out to be a really, really big box with almost leftovers.

Interviewee 9, a Polish artist who came to the UK in 2016, hesitates to explain how he feels in a 'grey zone' as a white, heterosexual man. He recognises that this places him in a position of privilege, but questions if that is the same level of privilege as experienced by his British-born friends:

> Theoretically… but in practice I don't really feel that way and obviously… they can you know, this is like, I'm seen as like… I'm standing next like my British friend and some may think we are theoretically equally privileged, but obviously in practice, I'm much less privileged than him. So comparing to his position for example, or even her position, which is also British and white, I think… I occupy this grey zone, that I really you know, I can't say I'm underprivileged because like my skin colour and my gender say that I am not, but my heritage… they come from Western Europe and this background is totally different.

Interviewee 1 similarly feels that the boxes are too broad to account for different layers and intersections of privilege and disadvantage:

> I'm white, and therefore, there's no like... White European yeah, but you know, I'm not a Swiss male artist. I'm a Polish female artist, working class background. That doesn't sort of appear as an option on those kind of diversity forms.

Interviewee 14 has a particularly unique perspective as an individual with Russian, Estonian and Dagestani heritage who also holds British citizenship. She explains her decision to switch from checking the White-British box, to checking White-Other:

> And so for ages, I used to just put white British… white British is in a sense true, but it doesn't describe who I am or where I'm from. Doesn't matter. […] And then at some point I switched, because the debate and discourse was becoming more and more prominent socially about the different ethnic groups and support for different ethnic groups, and I was feeling that there is absolutely no support for Eastern European-British minorities. I started clicking other and writing… so, like literally putting Russian-Estonian-Dagestani. And if asked for a reason – if you're not provided with a simpler format of saying: Eastern European – I will give all the details, because I guess I am white British, but I'm also white other and if it's an opportunity for British artists, then obviously I'm British, but I should show what type of other.

These interviewees thus indicate that they are unlikely to consider themselves as part of the BME or BAME grouping, even if policy makers would expect them to identify with this category. As discussed above, whiteness is a situated concept, and white migrants from Central and Eastern Europe are unlikely to have found themselves positioned as 'not-quite-white' or experienced xeno-racism until their migration to the UK (Ryan, 2010). The fixed categories provided by the UK census and echoed in diversity monitoring in multiple contexts, including the arts, cannot capture this complexity. As Burton, Nandi and Platt (2010: 1336) have noted, measuring ethnicity — a non-objective, multidimensional and dynamic concept — with surveys, which assume stable and objective categories is at best problematic. At worst, it potentially reproduces racist categories by representing pre-existing 'systems of power and authority' which decide how minority groups are to be defined and distinguished.

APPENDIX 1

Methodology

This report is based on a mixed methodology, combining an analysis of Midlands' art galleries/centres and festivals of film and performance, a small-scale qualitative survey with arts-interested Central and Eastern European migrants, and a series of in depth interviews with Central and Eastern European artists and curators active in the UK. The research was approved by the University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

Analysis of Midlands Arts Spaces and Festivals

Five art galleries and spaces, three performance festivals and a large local film festival were selected for analysis. An effort was made to cover a range of types of art and organisations with different foci (region or international, or targeted at particular groups). For each organisation, residencies, exhibitions and performances by single individuals or artist collectives were recorded over a period of time between 1 and 7 years, depending on a) the material available in their online archives, and b) the total number of 'acts'. Group shows or screenings were not recorded. The aim was to sample roughly the same number of acts for each art type (visual arts, performance and film) to avoid one art form or one organisation skewing the results. Table 1 shows the detail of the organisations, and the years and number of exhibitions or performances analysed. The total number of exhibitions, residencies, performances and showings included in the analysis was 787.

For each exhibition and performance (and in the case of Primary, residencies and membership of the Advisory Board) the origin of the artist or group of artists was recorded. This was determined by place of birth — where this was identifiable by the artist's CV or website — or place of residence where it was not. When the national origin of the artist or group was included in the advertising of the event, this data was used for the analysis. The countries of origin were then grouped according to predetermined geographical regions: Western Europe (WE); Central and Eastern Europe (as defined above, CEE); North America (NA); East Asia (EA); Oceania (OC); South and Southeast Asia (SEA); Central and South America (CSAM); Central and South Africa (CSAF); Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The UK was kept as a separate category. The results of this analysis for each institution can be seen in Table 1.

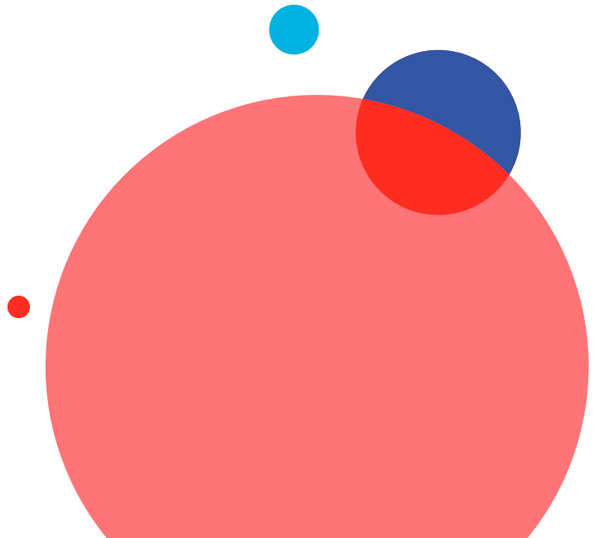


TABLE 1

Art work according to artist origin (percentages)

ORGANISATION	YEARS ANALYSED	TOTAL NO. ACTS	UK	WE	NA	CEE	EA	MENA	CSAM	OC	SEA	CSAF
NOTTINGHAM CONTEMPORARY	2012–2020	36	19.44	33.33	11.11	5.56	2.78	9.72	9.72	2.78	2.78	2.78
IKON	2012–2020	109	46.79	18.35	5.50	6.42	8.26	4.13	0.92	4.13	3.67	1.83
NEW ART GALLERY WALSALL	2012–2020	8	87.50	0	6.25	6.25	0	0	0	0	0	0
MIDLANDS ARTS CENTRE	2014–2020	39	67.95	17.95	7.69	1.28	0	0	0	0	2.56	2.56
PRIMARY [4]	ALL LISTED RESIDENCES, ALUMNI AND AB MEMBERS	82	89.63	6.71	0	1.22	2.44	0	0	0	0	0
FIERCE FESTIVAL	2014–2019 (EXCL. 2018)	99	34.85	25.25	22.73	3.03	0	3.03	2.02	7.07	1.01	1.01
BE FESTIVAL	2014–2019	129	24.03	62.02	0	10.85	0.39	1.55	1.16	0	0	0
SHOUT FESTIVAL	2019	37	83.33	0.90	11.71	0	0	1.35	1.35	0	1.35	0
FLATPACK FESTIVAL	2017–2019	248	24.53	31.99	22.98	7.86	4.84	1.81	3.23	1.01	1.21	0.54

4 The data gathered for Primary was of a slightly different kind due to the nature of Primary's work and the material available on its website. Here we collected information on artists supported by residencies or as board members. Each named artist was counted as one 'act'.

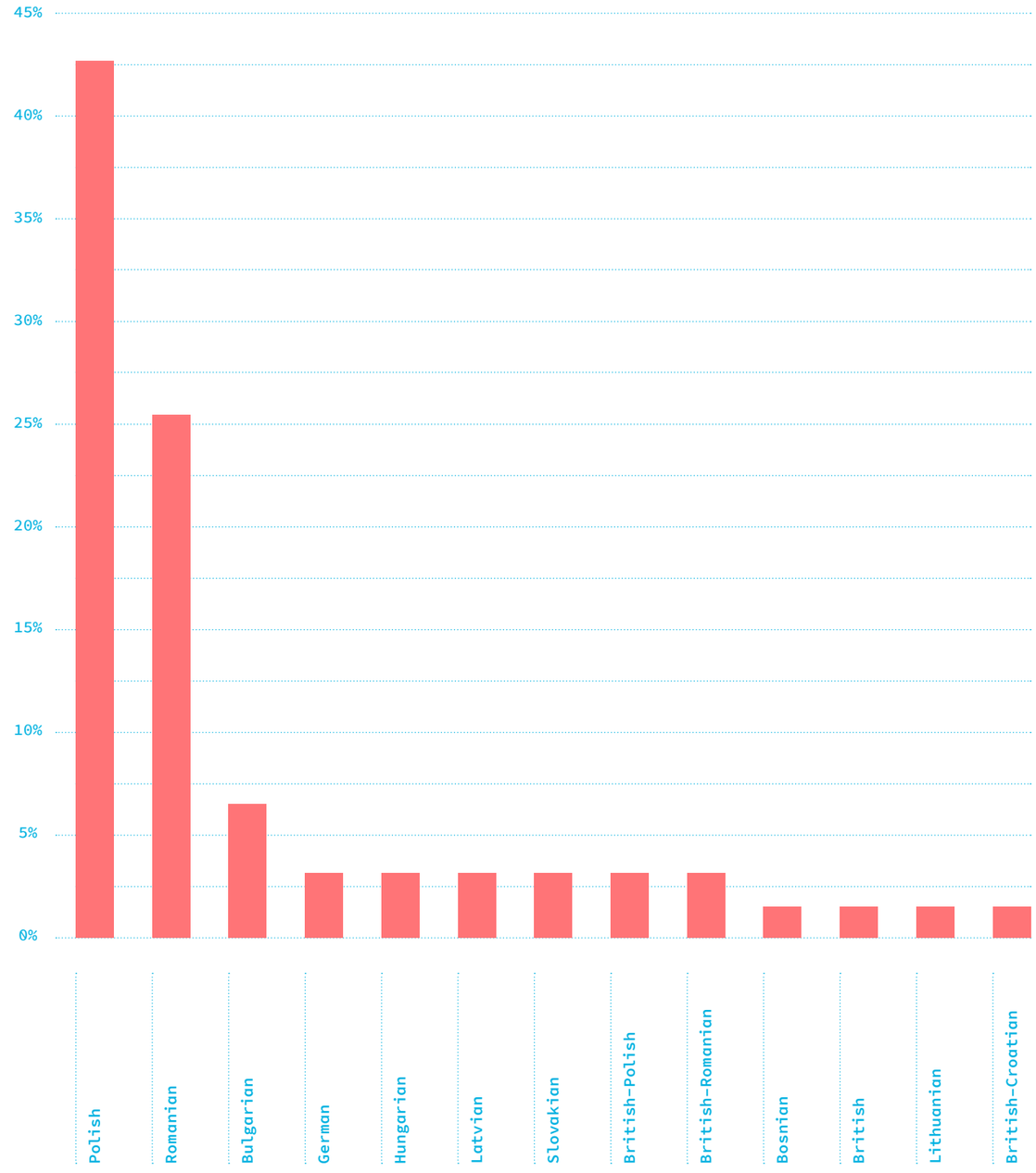
Small-Scale Qualitative Survey

A small-scale qualitative survey was used to collect information about the cultural participation of Central and Eastern European migrants (principally in the Midlands) and their experience of and views on the visibility of Central and Eastern European art in the region. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 2 below. The survey was created in Qualtrics. It was distributed through Centrala's social media and advertising channels and was based on an 'opt-in' approach. This means that the respondents are likely to be particularly interested in the topic and culturally active; the results cannot therefore be generalised to the broader population of Central and Eastern European migrants in the region. Respondents completed the survey online.

In terms of demographic data, the mean age of respondents was 33.75 (Median = 32), the mean number of years in the UK was 10.28 (Median = 9) and the mean age on arrival was 24.00 (Median = 23). 69.84% of respondents live in Birmingham, 19.05% in the rest of the Midlands, and 7.94% in other parts of the UK (6.35% in London). 3.17% of respondents did not complete that question. Figure 2 indicates the stated nationality or nationalities of the survey respondents. The survey results were uploaded to Nvivo and the qualitative free-text responses were analysed using inductive coding.

FIGURE 2

Stated nationality of survey respondents



One-to-One Qualitative Interviews

In depth qualitative interviews were conducted with twenty artists and curators from Central and Eastern Europe and living and working in the UK. Effort was made to recruit interviewees from a range of backgrounds and experience in terms of country of origin, time spent in the UK and career length. Table 2 summarises the interviewees' country of origin and the year of their migration to the UK. The researchers also attempted to recruit an even number of male and female interviewees. However, it proved extremely difficult to find male participants and 19 of the 20 interviewees identify as female. The research findings should be read with this imbalance in mind.

The interviews were largely unstructured and based on a set of topic prompts, rather than fixed questions. Interviewees were given freedom to direct the course of the interview and discuss the issues in which they were interested (within the subject area of the research), in order to allow their own perspectives to emerge. The interviews were transcribed and uploaded to Nvivo. The transcriptions were coded inductively for themes and topics relevant to the research. All text coded with a particular theme was then analysed together to identify emerging patterns and issues of concern. The reported quotations have been lightly edited to remove hesitation markers and ensure the spoken idiom is legible in written form.

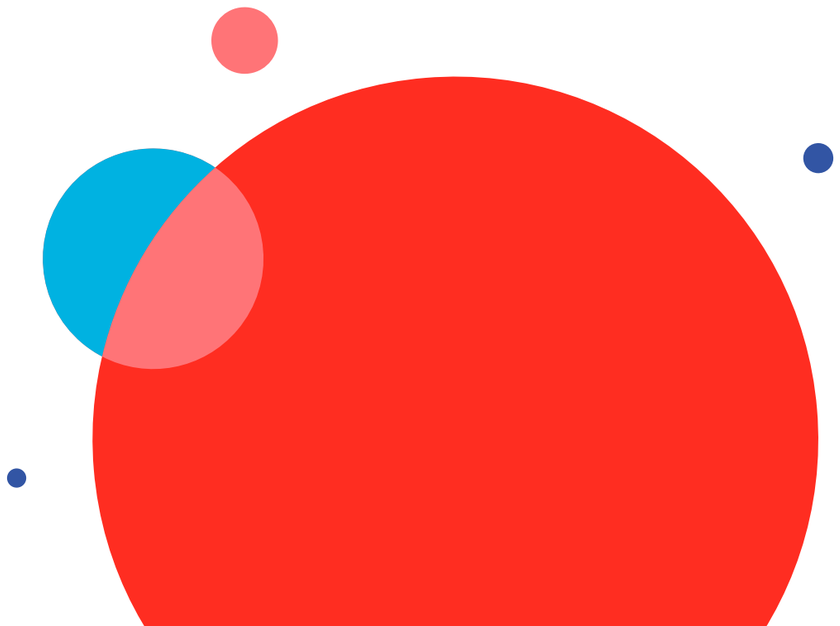


TABLE 2

Interviewee country of origin and year of migration to UK (where given)

INTERVIEW #	YEAR CAME TO UK	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
1	2006	POLAND
2	2009	ROMANIA
3	2014	CROATIA
4	2005	POLAND
5	2012	POLAND
6	2010	LITHUANIA
7	2015	BULGARIA
8	2003	RUSSIA
9	2016	POLAND
10	2001	POLAND
11	2004	POLAND
12	2008	POLAND
13	2014	CROATIA
14	NOT KNOWN	MIXED
15	2003	POLAND
16	2009	SERBIA
17	1998	CZECH REPUBLIC
18	2016	BULGARIA
19	2008	POLAND
20	NOT KNOWN	POLAND

Communities Survey

1 What is your nationality? (please list all)

.....

2 How long have you lived in the UK? (years)

.....

3 What is your UK postcode?

.....

4 How old are you?

.....

5 At what age did you first come to the UK?

.....

6 How often do you participate in cultural and art events? This might include watching a play or performance, visiting an exhibition, attending a comedy night, live music, local community events, craft workshops and anything else you would consider a cultural or artistic activity.

- ☐ Every week
- ☐ Every month
- ☐ Less than once per month
- ☐ Less than once per year
- ☐ Almost never
- ☐ Never

7 What cultural events have you attended in Birmingham or the surrounding area in the last year (list as many as you can remember)?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

8 Did any of the performers or artists listed under Q7 originate from your home country or from another Central and Eastern European country?

Yes ☐ No ☐

9 If you answered yes to Q8, please give details below.

.....

.....

.....

10 Did you attend any of the following in 2019? (tick all that apply)

- ☐ University of Birmingham Arts and Science Festival
- ☐ Birmingham European (BE) Festival
- ☐ Birmingham Weekender
- ☐ Flatpack Festival
- ☐ Birmingham International Dance Festival
- ☐ Supersonic Festival
- ☐ Birmingham Literature Festival
- ☐ Birmingham Comedy Festival
- ☐ Fierce Festival
- ☐ Digbeth First Friday

11 If you ticked one or more options under Q10, thinking back to those events, do you recall seeing any performers or artists originating from your home country or from another Central and Eastern European country?

Yes ☐ No ☐

12 If you answered yes to Q11, please give details below.

.....

.....

.....

13 Would you like to see more art and culture produced by artists and performers originating from your home country? Please explain your answer.

.....

.....

.....

.....

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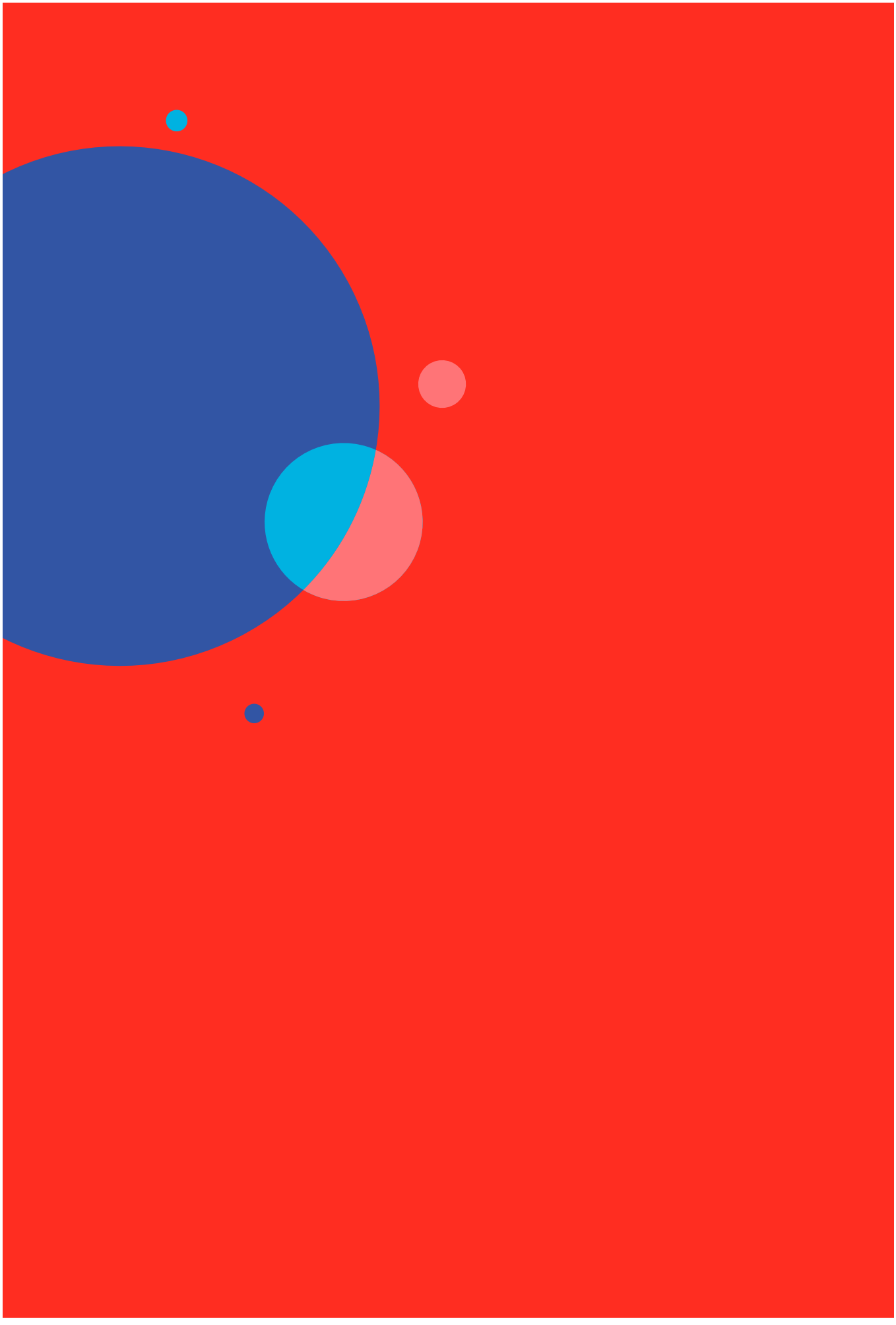

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