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Customer involvement in freelancer-led projects in creative industries

Alberto Gonzalez-Cristiano

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ABSTRACT

Creative industries (CIs) have attracted considerable attention from academic research in the last few decades and their economic impact and job-creation role is now indisputably acknowledged. These industries are rooted in individual creativity and exhibit distinctive features, such as high uncertainty, symbolic value, and the prevalence of small and micro-sized firms in the sector. Among these micro-sized firms, freelancers are at the core of the CIs workforce.

The purpose of this research was to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes. By focusing on freelancers, this research aimed to address a gap in the literature in which freelancers have been consistently ignored or only considered with larger organisations. As such, their distinctive characteristics—for example, the liability of smallness—have not been acknowledged as having a potential influence on how freelancers operate.

In a similar manner, the importance of knowledge and customer involvement for CIs have been extensively covered in the literature and they are regarded as crucial for creative industries. Despite this importance, academic research on customer knowledge transfer in the field remains limited, even though there is evidence that knowledge-transfer models from other sectors might be unsuitable for CIs.

In order to bridge this gap, this research was conducted as an exploratory case study in which cases from different sectors of CIs and two different countries were investigated. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and codified by using a three-step process and the Gioia method. This research resulted in three published articles and an introduction section.

The introduction section of this dissertation positions the study within the literature on knowledge transfer and customer involvement in CIs, reviews existing studies on these topics, describes the research strategy and methodology, provides the overall findings of this research, discusses the main theoretical and managerial contributions, and suggests avenues for further research. With regard to the published articles, Article I focuses on the knowledge acquisition activities used by freelancers in CIs. Article II provides an overview of knowledge codification activities by focusing on the use of boundary objects by freelancers in CIs. Article III changes the scope slightly to analyse barriers for knowledge transfer by focusing on a failure case.

Overall, this research conceptualised customer knowledge-transfer activities conducted by freelancers in product development processes in CIs. In doing so, the

data revealed that while freelancers in CIs engage in customer knowledge acquisition, conversion, and application, these stages are far less identifiable than traditional knowledge-transfer models may suggest. Traditional knowledge-transfer models appear to be applicable, but the process is highly fluid and iterative, shaped by the unique nature of the freelancers and by the characteristics of the creative products they are developing.

Moreover, this research brought together two theoretical concepts—shared understanding and shared spaces—by highlighting the significance of establishing a shared cognitive space during the early phases of creative product development. This shared cognitive space is a new theoretical concept that incorporates features of boundary objects and is also an initial outcome of the creative development process.

Overall, the extant literature on CIs has highlighted an extensive use of boundary objects for knowledge codification in CIs, but this research's findings were somehow contradictory. By breaking down the process of customer knowledge transfer, this research found that boundary objects are mostly utilised in the initial stages of the process and that their usage decreases after these initial stages.

This research also focused on how the dual nature of freelancers, as both artists and economic actors, had an influence on decisions regarding customer knowledge transfer. The freelancers' dual nature appeared to play a role in customer knowledge transfer by preventing customer involvement so the freelancers could preserve their style and maintain their role as experts. In addition to these artistic-driven reasons, freelancers also blocked customer input citing economic reasons, as they aimed to pursue faster revenues. With creative products having both artistic and economic value, blocking customer input had a negative impact on the artistic component and customer satisfaction with the end product.

Further, this research critically examined the use of an accelerated speed of development in CIs. The academic literature has highlighted the fast pace of the CI sector, and this research found that actively reducing customer knowledge transfer increased the speed of development. However, in doing so, this accelerated speed of development also had a negative effect on the perceived artistic value of the final product.

Overall, this research emphasised the urgent need to better understand how freelancers operate in the context of CIs. This introduction and the three published articles shed light on how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes. In addition, this research also highlighted a few managerial implications. One of the key aspects related to the need to use an appropriate amount of time for the creation of a shared cognitive space in the initial stages of development. Not allocating sufficient time for this activity hinders further stages of development by making dialogue difficult and damaging the overall development of creative products. Moreover, this research highlighted the importance of finding a project and personal match between the freelancer and the client. More specifically, freelancers emphasised the need to perceive the project as relevant and attractive and to have similar sensemaking processes as the client. The absence of positive matches between the freelancer and the client was also found to hinder understanding and active dialogue, thereby negatively impacting the final product.

KEYWORDS: Knowledge transfer, customer involvement, freelancers, creative industries

TURUN YLIOPISTO
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TIIVISTELMÄ

Luovat alat ovat viime vuosikymmeninä herättäneet merkittävää akateemista kiinnostusta, ja niiden taloudellinen vaikutus sekä rooli työpaikkojen luomisessa on kiistatta tunnustettu. Nämä alat perustuvat yksilölliseen luovuuteen ja niille on ominaista korkea epävarmuus, symbolinen arvo sekä pienten ja mikroyritysten hallitseva asema. Merkittävä osa alan työvoimasta on itsenäisiä ammatinharjoittajia (freelancer).

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli ymmärtää, miten luovien alojen ammatinharjoittajat siirtävät tietoa tuotekehitysprosesseissa, joissa asiakkailla on aktiivinen rooli. Tarkastelemalla ammatinharjoittajia tutkimus vastaa olemassa olevan tutkimuksen puutteisiin, sillä ammatinharjoittajia on aikaisemmin tutkittu vain vähän tai suurten yritysten näkökulmasta. Tästä johtuen heidän erityispiirteensä, kuten pienuudesta johtuva haavoittuvuus, ovat jääneet tarkastelun ulkopuolelle. Tiedon merkitys ja asiakkaiden osallistuminen on tunnistettu tärkeiksi teemoiksi luovilla aloilla, mutta tiedon siirtoa koskeva tutkimus on edelleen rajallista. Lisäksi on viitteitä siitä, että muilla toimialoilla kehitetyt tiedon siirtoa kuvaavat mallit eivät soveltuisi luoville aloille.

Tämä tutkimus toteutettiin eksploratiivisena tapaustutkimuksena, jossa hyödynnettiin aineistoa eri luovulta aloilta ja kahdesta maasta. Aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduin haastatteluilla ja analysointiin hyödyntäen Gioia -menetelmää. Tutkimuksen tulokset on julkaistu kolmessa vertaisarvioidussa artikkelissa ja lisäksi niitä on käsitelty väitöskirjan johdanto-osassa.

Johdanto-osassa tutkimus asemoidaan suhteessa aiempaan tiedonsiirtoa ja asiakasosallistumista koskevaan kirjallisuuteen, kuvataan tutkimusstrategia ja menetelmät, esitetään keskeiset tulokset, teoreettiset ja käytännön kontribuutiot sekä jatkotutkimuksen suuntaviivat. Artikkeleista ensimmäinen käsittelee ammatinharjoittajien käyttämiä tiedonhankintamenetelmiä, toinen tarkastelee tiedon koodauksen käytäntöjä ja rajapintaobjektien roolia, ja kolmas analysoi tiedonsiirron esteitä epäonnistuneen tapauksen kautta.

Tutkimus osoitti, että ammatinharjoittajat osallistuvat tiedon hankintaan, muuntamiseen ja soveltamiseen, mutta nämä vaiheet ovat huomattavasti vähemmän selkeitä kuin perinteiset mallit ehdottavat. Tiedon siirron ja asiakasosallistumisen prosessi on luonteeltaan joustava ja iteratiivinen, muotoutuen ammatinharjoittajien erityispiirteiden ja luovien tuotteiden ominaisuuksien mukaan. Lisäksi tutkimus yhdisti kaksi teoreettista käsitettä—jaettu ymmärrys ja jaetut tilat—korostamalla jaetun kognitiivisen tilan merkitystä luovan kehityksen alkuvaiheessa. Tämä käsite

sisältää rajapintaobjektien piirteitä ja toimii luovan prosessin alkuvaiheen tuotoksena.

Tulokset haastavat aiemman käsityksen rajapintaobjektien laajasta käytöstä luovilla aloilla: niiden käyttö painottuu prosessin alkuvaiheisiin ja vähenee myöhemmin. Tutkimus tarkasteli myös ammatinharjoittajien kaksinaista roolia taiteilijoina ja taloudellisina toimijoina. Kaksoisrooli vaikutti rajoittaen asiakasosallistumista tyylin säilyttämiseksi ja nopeamman taloudellisen tuoton saavuttamiseksi. Asiakasosallistumisen vähentäminen nopeutti kehitystä, mutta heikensi lopputuotteen koettua taiteellista arvoa.

Johtopäätöksissä korostetaan tarvetta varata riittävästi aikaa jaetun kognitiivisen tilan luomiselle sekä projektin ja henkilökemian merkitystä ammatinharjoittajan ja asiakkaan välillä. Näiden puute heikentää ymmärrystä ja vuoropuhelua, mikä vaikuttaa negatiivisesti lopputulokseen.

Avainsanat: tiedonsiirto, asiakasosallistuminen, freelancer, ammatinharjoittajat, luovat alat

Acknowledgements

As I reach the final stage of my doctoral studies, I cannot help but revisit the journey that took me here.

Before starting this process, I was very critical with the idea of starting a PhD. Why would I spend four years of my life researching a narrow topic when I could expand my knowledge into a completely different discipline within that time? I guess never say never proved right again, and my journey as a part-time doctoral candidate did not take four years, but ten.

Looking back, I can still remember the initial stages and my excitement with the multiple topics that presented themselves during the first year. It is also very enjoyable to now look backwards knowing everything was slowly crystalizing into a specific topic.

After the first year, the process was far from easy and far from straightforward.

As a part-time PhD. candidate, time to work on my research was precious, and every second spent reading or writing came on top of a full-time job, and meant sacrificing free time, and time with family and friends. It was a long process, and getting to this stage has required an immense amount of work, and an incredible amount of support. I would like to use this moment as an opportunity to thank some key people who have helped me throughout the process.

First, I would like to thank my supervisors Adjunct Professor Birgitta Sandberg and Professor Niina Nummela for their encouragement, their guidance and feedback throughout this lengthy process. Thank you for always being there when I needed something and for your flexibility in acknowledging the part-time nature of my studies. Your deep, thorough and thought-provoking feedback has shaped this dissertation in ways I would have never been able to imagine myself. The train, albeit many times delayed, seems to have reached its final destination.

Second, I would like to acknowledge how a great honor it has been to have Prof. Dr., Elmar D. Konrad and Prof. Dr., Christina Öberg as the pre-examiners for my work. Their critical feedback and comments were a breath of fresh air and I am forever in debt with them for taking the time and effort to evaluate my work. Special thank you to Prof. Dr., Elmar D. Konrad for agreeing to be the opponent and for making his way to Finland, in winter, nonetheless.

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Fourth, I would like to thank all the freelancers, and the client, who agreed to be interviewed as part of this dissertation. It was a strange feeling every time someone would make time in their busy schedules to contribute to this research. I felt honored but also felt a great deal of responsibility to make that time count. The interviews, and the coding, were the highlight of this research process and I want to express my gratitude to all the interviewees who contributed with their time.

Fifth, my deepest gratitude to my co-authors, Nicolas LeGrand and Adjunct Professor Birgitta Sandberg without whom this research would not have been possible. Interestingly, while I am forever grateful for their role in shaping the articles, their role in making me believe on the value of this research might have been ever more instrumental. Thank you so much.

Sixth, I would also like to extend my gratitude to Turku School of Economics, for giving me the possibility to conduct my doctoral studies, and to Turun Yliopistosäätiö for their support with travel grants. Also, I would like to thank The Finnish Doctoral Program in Business Studies (KATAJA) and Hanken School of Economies and Oulu University for hosting me in the context of their courses.

Lastly, to my family. To my parents, because their upbringing emphasized that effort leads to positive outcomes. They walked the talk, every day, and without the example they set, I would have thrown in the towel many times during my studies.

To my children, Koa and Mei, who were both born during the journey and who needed to understand that sometimes daddy needs to work and cannot come to the playground to play. Their laughs, and their cries and screams, have been an integral part of the process. They both have, positively and at times, managed to distract me from my work and reminded me that finding a balance is of the utmost importance. I'm also in debt to my Finnish family, and especially to my mother-in-law, because without her help, this dissertation would not have been possible.

And to finish, to my wife, who in many ways carried more load than myself and whose time and effort have allowed me to focus on this research, even when holidays meant doctoral studies. She was my rock throughout the process and the one who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. 'You will get it done; you are not a person who quits'. She was right again it seems…

December 2025
Alberto Gonzalez-Cristiano

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Figures

List of original publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I Gonzalez-Cristiano, A. (2017). Knowledge Acquisition in Product Development Processes by Freelancers in the Field of Creative Industries. *Proceedings of the Innovation and Product Development Management Conference 2017*.

II Gonzalez-Cristiano, A., & Le Grand, N. (2025). Achieving a shared understanding in the creative industries: freelancers' use of boundary objects in collaborative innovation projects. *Creative Industries Journal, 18*(2), 248-263.

III Gonzalez-Cristiano, A. & Sandberg, B. (2019). When running fast is not the best option: Failure of user involvement in design development processes. *International Journal of Product Development, (23)*4, 247-263.

1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation to study knowledge transfer in creative industries

The creative industries (CIs) sector has interested researchers for decades (e.g. Caves 2000; Gouvea et al. 2021; Lampel and Germain 2016; Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016; Stenholm et al. 2024) and their role in economy and job creation is now indisputably acknowledged (e.g. Boix-Domenech et al. 2022; European Union Parliament 2016; Hou et al. 2019). Specifically, in the European Union (EU) in 2020, CIs accounted for 5.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) and employed 8.2 million people (European Investment Fund 2023). In the United Kingdon (UK), 4 million people worked in CIs in 2023, this accounting for 11.8% of the total employment of the country (UK DCMS 2024)[1].

Defined in this research as 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill, and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property (IP)' (UK DCMS 2001, 5; see discussion on the definition of CIs in 2.1.1), CIs differ from organisations in other sectors in a variety of ways—for example, a high degree of uncertainty regarding consumer response, high levels of skill and talent involved, art-for-art's-sake orientation of creative workers, and the symbolic and economic value of creative products (Bérubé and Demers 2019; Caves 2000, 2003; Polido 2010; Protogerou et al. 2017). Moreover, CIs are, by default, small (Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Protogerou et al. 2017)—90% of them can be categorised as either being of a small or medium size (EY 2021).

This research focuses on the smallest economic actor, freelancers, defined as 'self-employed knowledge professionals ranging from engineers, consultants,

[1] As I will subsequently discuss, the definition of CIs is far from homogenous across reports and academic research. In this case, the EU/EIF definition differs from that of the UK DCMS, yet a sufficient number of similarities allow for a relatively fair comparison. Special attention was given to not include statistics from reports in which the definitions were too far from the one used in this research. This is, for example, the case with more recent reports such as the one published by UNCTAD (2024),

writers and information technology (IT) specialists through to members of liberal professions, such as lawyers and accountants' (Leighton 2015, 81). The importance of freelancers is known across sectors; freelancers accounted for 14.2% of the total employment in Europe in 2023 (Eurostat 2024a), which translates into 23 million self-employed workers in the EU20[2] in that year (Eurostat 2024b). As a large percentage of the workforce in CIs is self-employed and is hired on a temporary and project basis (e.g. Bridgstock 2011; Watson 2012), these freelancers comprise the very core of the sector (Banks et al. 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Mould et al. 2014).

Freelancers and other CIs rely heavily on knowledge as a critical resource due to the value that the organisations operating in the field place on the development and adoption of new knowledge (Potts and Cunningham 2008). Knowledge has been regarded as the lifeblood of the sector and as one of the foundations for its continued economic success (Granger and Hamilton 2010). Examples of the importance of knowledge in CIs abound from media firms (Banks et al. 2002) to arts and crafts organisations (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019) to video game development (Cohendet and Simon 2007).

Of particular importance is externally produced knowledge—more specifically, customer and client knowledge[3], which has been widely recognised as critical for the development of new products across sectors (e.g. Deane et al. 2024; Izogo et al. 2021; Franke et al. 2006; Jiao et al. 2019; Stojčić et al. 2024). Clients in CIs are seen as inextricably linked to their creative processes (Banks et al. 2002); the significance of client involvement can be observed in the sub-categories of CIs, such as design-related industries (Goodman-Deane et al. 2010), musicians and record labels (Caves 2003), theatre productions (Dempster 2006), or video game development (Tschang 2007). Further, importance given to clients goes to the extent that managers of CIs have their clients in mind even when they define creativity as 'having the ability to identify, distil and capture the client's problem and develop and provide an effective solution' (Banks et al. 2002, 258).

In this context, this research aims to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes.

[2] EU20: Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Finland.

[3] The diversity of CIs makes it difficult to maintain consistency in the use of either the term 'client' or 'customer' in this dissertation. Acknowledging this difficulty, I use the terms customer or client as synonyms and maintain the word used in the original source, when applicable, throughout this document.

Personally, knowing a relatively large number of people working as freelancers in the industry has enabled me to acknowledge their critical importance for the sector. I found it striking how very little attention has been given to them in academic research, despite their recognised importance. In addition, being an observer of how freelancers work in the real world makes it rather clear that their working activities differ from those of larger enterprises, thus making it imperative for academic research to investigate them. Specifically, when seeing these freelancers engage in creative work with customers, the critical importance of customer knowledge for the development of creative products becomes self-evident. As these freelancers engage in product development, they must ensure they understand what their customers want and need, as the final acceptance of the creative product depends on the freelancer being able to meet their wants and needs.

Overall, since CIs continue to be one of the fastest growing sectors in many economies, studying them is important in itself. More specifically, with freelancers being at the very core of CIs, and with knowledge and customer involvement being of critical importance in the sector, it becomes imperative to investigate how freelancers perform customer knowledge-transfer activities. Thus, the main motivation for this research was related to the fact that the relevance of freelancers as economic actors for CIs should no longer be overlooked by academic research. Moreover, the distinctive characteristics of freelancers must be taken into consideration, as specific research on how freelancers conduct customer knowledge-transfer activities is critical for their survival as economic actors, and—on account of their importance—crucial for CIs overall.

1.2 Research gap and positioning of this study

There is a plethora of research on the importance of knowledge as a source of competitive advantage (e.g. Grant 1996; Leonard 1998; Stejskal and Hajek 2019; Teece 1998). For over two decades, researchers have emphasised the need to focus on the formal practices organisations use to acquire, assimilate, transform, and exploit knowledge (Zahra and George 2002). Central to this topic is the role played by organisations in knowledge management (KM), knowledge creation (e.g. Grant 1996; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995), and, specifically, knowledge codification (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Ancori et al. 2000). This knowledge codification, or externalisation, concerns the transformation of tacit, context-specific personal knowledge—which is difficult to formalise and communicate (Polanyi 1966)—into explicit knowledge, which is easier to communicate and operationalise (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). In other words, knowledge codification concerns the inscription of knowledge in symbolic forms (Cacciatori et al. 2012).

Organisations play a critical role in this knowledge creation and codification, yet knowledge is regarded as a 'dynamic *human* process of justifying personal belief toward the truth' (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 58, emphasis added). Knowledge always begins with the individual (Nonaka 1991; Stejskal and Hajek 2019) and even though there appears to be an increasing interest in the topic of people in knowledge transfer after a peak in the year 2004 (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018), we appear to lack specific knowledge on the activities and practices of individuals in terms on how knowledge is transformed, integrated, and utilised (Thune and Gulbrandssen 2017).

In particular, this research focuses on knowledge transfer, which is defined 'as a process of exchange of explicit or tacit knowledge between two agents during which one agent purposefully receives and uses the knowledge provided by the other' (Ajith-Kumar and Ganesh 2009, 163). In this process, knowledge is not merely transferred but, rather, modified and translated into a different context, oftentimes including application, or use, of this knowledge (e.g. Foss and Pedersen 2002).

Specifically for CIs, the economic value of the industries that operate in the field evolves through transfers of knowledge (Potts and Cunningham 2008). Moreover, creativity—which can be considered the most personified and, hence, the most intangible form of tacit knowledge (Lee 2017)—is at the origin of CIs, together with skill and talent (UK DCMS 2001). The critical role and tacit nature of creativity indicates that a large amount of knowledge in CIs is personal and humane (as opposed to scientific and mechanic) (Lee 2017). In this regard, the literature emphasises that knowledge transfer models applicable to other sectors may not be adequate for CIs (Brindley 2008; Colette 2008; Collinge and Staines 2009; Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Weller 2007) and that CIs might be the perfect area for knowledge management research due to the variety of topics that are of critical importance for the sector and the overall knowledge economy—for example, 'strategic advantage coming from knowledge, human capital management based on the approach to specialists, work in terms and other flexible forms of organisational structure, knowledge sharing processes, organisational learning processes, and others' (Morawski 2017, 56). Despite this opportunity, research on knowledge transfer in CIs is rather limited (as will be discussed in 2.2) and customer knowledge transfer is even more scarcely studied in CI research (c.f. Collinge and Staines 2009; Kalogerakis et al. 2010; Sanders 2002).

As a further distinctive characteristic of this research, the focus is on freelancers, who are increasingly relevant economic actors who have been generally overlooked in the academic literature (Cross and Swart 2022: Kitching and Smallbone 2012; Leighton 2015; Skrzek-Lubasińska and Szaban 2019). Freelancers suffer extensively due to their liability of smallness, the fact that larger organisations have lower mortality rates (Aldrich and Auster 1986); moreover, there is proven record of the

relationship between this liability and knowledge management practices in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (e.g. Valentim et al. 2016). Specifically, it is essential for small CI firms to overcome the liability of smallness by using external sources of knowledge to identify innovative opportunities and complement their limited resource base with additional resources and new knowledge (Protogerou et al. 2017).

Overall, with the majority of firms in CIs being microbusinesses, we need to have more information regarding these smaller firms to truly understand the sector (Protogerou et al. 2017). However, despite this, and as we can see from **Table 1**, articles that specifically focus on freelancers in CIs remain relatively scarce and mostly focus on freelancers' struggles and, to a lesser extent, on learning and recruitment (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Gateau and Simon 2016; Genders 2022, 2025; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009; Hennekam 2015; Hermes et al. 2017; Kolp and Haitzinger 2023; Mould et al. 2014; Morris et al. 2024; Swords and Johns 2024). This scarcity of research on how CI freelancers operate is rather surprising because their importance for the sector has been widely acknowledged (Banks et al. 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Genders 2022, 2025; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013).

Apart from the exceptions described in **Table 1**, CI literature as well as public statistics mostly ignore freelancers and, when considered, are grouped together with the remaining organisations in the sector (e.g. European Cluster Observatory 2011; Hartley 2009; Long 2017; Müller et al. 2009; Stenholm et al. 2024), even though literature highlights the distinctive characteristics of CIs and the heterogeneity of freelancers (e.g. Caves 2000; Knapp et al. 2021; Jones et al. 2015a; Pratt 2015; Skrzek-Lubasińska and Szaban 2019). In other words, it appears that an implicit presumption exists that all CIs are essentially similar and that the methods used by freelancers, in this context, are indistinguishable from those employed by larger corporations. This assumption suggests that the unique features and limitations of freelancers are of little consequence, if any, to their modus operandi. As subsequently discussed in 1.3, these considerations problematise a field assumption (see Alvesson and Sandberg 2011).

Table 1. Extant research focusing on freelancers in the creative industries[4]

Setting and main findings	Reference
This article explores how self-employed creative staff on a German theatre navigate the tension between artistic passion and economic necessity by adopting a bohemian lifestyle. This lifestyle is characterised by spontaneity, artistic devotion, and a rejection of bourgeois norms, and enables artists to integrate self-management and self-marketing into their artistic practice. Further, this lifestyle bridges the art-business CI divide and is central to creative workers' artistic self-understanding, influences their working life, and enables the integration of artistic and self-management activities.	Eikhof and Haunschild 2006
This article focuses on the recruitment and training of freelancer clowns for Cirque du Soleil performances and stands at the intersection between knowledge and talent management. By analysing a clown bootcamp as an innovative activity to scout, train, and develop rare creative talent, the study introduces the concept of 'boundary practices' to describe how such a bootcamp enables co-construction of knowledge and talent development between the circus company and external communities. This bootcamp creates a shared learning space for organisational staff and freelance clown artists, thus fostering mutual knowledge transfer and the emergence of new creative material.	Gateau and Simon 2016
This article calls for a shift from the concept of 'placeless nomads' and towards 'creative placemakers', as freelancers' work is strongly placed in the local cultural, economic, and policy contexts of cities such as Bristol. Freelancers' careers are shaped by local networks, infrastructure, and community-based support, but the precarious nature of freelance work is constrained by structural inequalities, such as lack of affordable housing and accessible training. A holistic policy is needed to address aspects such as transport, housing, education, and other public sector concerns.	Genders 2022
This article expands on the work of Genders (2022) by emphasising that freelances in Cardiff's film and television industries are deeply place-based and that they are both shaped by and contribute to the local creative infrastructure. The article shows how these freelancers negotiate their precarious careers and emphasises the important role of place-based interventions, policy, and the support of public local agencies. Moreover, this article highlights a few positive developments in Cardiff driven by public investment (e.g. training schemes, collaboration with housing associations) but also highlights structural barriers, such as skills shortages and limited mobility.	Genders 2025

[4] Research examining the relationship of freelancers and organisations from the perspective of the organisations was not considered as having an explicit focus on freelancers (e.g. Tempest 2009)

Setting and main findings	Reference
This book chapter examines how freelance skills in the British film and television industry are developed through informal, community-based networks rather than formal training or stable employment structures. Freelancers in TV and film production are expected to learn on the job through observation, watching others perform tasks, discussing with peers, and participating in various temporary projects. While this model supports flexible and experiential learning, it also creates inefficiencies in skill development and reinforces exclusion and insecurity in the form of uneven opportunities often dependent on personal connections and unpaid work.	Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009
This article investigates older self-employed workers in CIs, their challenges, and how they overcome them. With a focus on the Netherlands, this article reveals that many of these freelancers are self-employed due to age discrimination and limited employment opportunities. It also identifies a vicious cycle by which these freelancers are increasingly pushed to non-creative work for income, which pushes them further from CIs. Many struggle with the double identity of being a freelancer and artist, and the ones who succeed do so by leveraging networks, reframing experience as an asset, and creating synergies between creative and business roles.	Hennekam 2015
This article examines the struggles and coping mechanisms among freelance creative workers in The Netherlands and how they construct identities through ‘maker freedom’ and a ‘new barter economy’. The study finds that these independent workers value autonomy, flexibility, and informal exchange networks over stability or status, and that they often accept insecure conditions in exchange for the ability to work on their own terms. The authors conclude that the freelancers are pragmatic navigators of neoliberal work conditions and that they craft meaning and community through informal practices and self-governance.	Hermes et al. 2017
This article investigates how COVID-19 and Brexit intensified the precarious careers of freelance dance artists in the UK and the effects of this on their finances, practices, and well-being. These effects were even more prominent on underrepresented groups, prompting a call for a ‘politics of small steps’ rooted in care, community, and structural reform. These ‘small acts of policy’ should address the systemic inequalities, administrative barriers, and insufficient policy support to create a more inclusive and sustainable freelance dance sector.	Kolp and Haitzinger 2023
This article highlights the hidden but crucial role of freelancers in London’s CIs as well as how these economic actors are largely under-researched. The article posits that there is a high propensity of CI firms to engage with freelancers in project-based work, yet that freelancers are integral to the creative economy and are often the ones who perform the more creative aspects of the work. In this regard, the article calls for more formal recognition and support from public policy.	Mould et al. 2014
This article investigates freelancers working in the British television sector and how they experience meaningful work where aesthetic considerations and the glamorous nature of the work act as attractants to the industry. Younger freelancers are particularly drawn by this artistic and creative appeal, but they face long hours and often unpaid and uncertain jobs. These young freelancers do not possess sufficient social capital and experience exploitation as they embrace work ‘for the love of their art’. The authors argue that, occasionally, celebrated meaningfulness can also paradoxically fuel self-exploitation and the precarious working conditions in the CI sector.	Morris et al. 2024

Setting and main findings	Reference
This article examines how the COVID-19 pandemic reproduced and intensified the precarious careers of freelancers in the UK television industry. This impact was felt the most among the most precarious freelancers due to access to work, government support, and networking opportunities being highly uneven, This situation reinforced existing inequalities around class, geography, and career stage. The study concludes that pandemic-induced pressures exacerbated systemic exclusion and exploitation, thus exposing how the industry's freelance model prioritises economic efficiency over equitable and sustainable labour practices.	Swords and Johns 2024
This article explores how creativity in the freelance economy occurs between equal and inherently creative freelancers and how this creativity is not a consequence of their individual traits or skills. The study finds that creative output is maximised when processes are formalised but is also constrained by individual stylistic choices and external parties, such as clients. The study covers three paradoxes: constrained creativity fostering innovation, collaborative processes being hindered by outsiders, and formalisation enhancing collective creativity.	Öberg 2024[5]

[5] Öberg (2024) does not explicitly mention CIs but does concentrate on a sub-category—the advertising industry.

With this in mind, and as depicted in **Figure 1**, this research bridges three research streams and its main contributions are in the literature on CIs and knowledge transfer. The research also makes contributions to the literature on customer involvement, with a focus on speed of development. These three research streams are brought into the reality of freelancers and their product development in CIs.

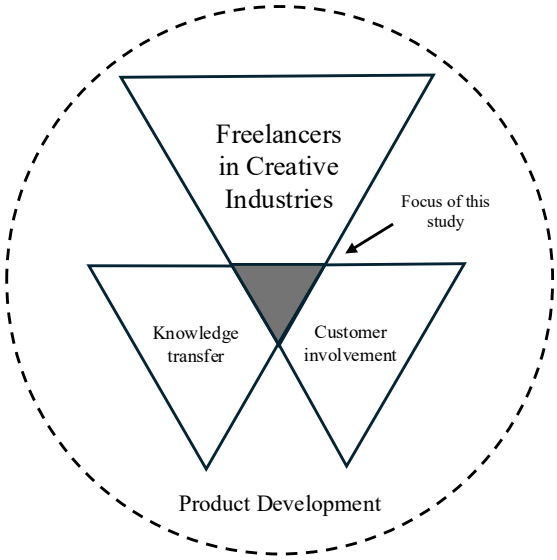

Figure 1. Positioning of this study in relation to existing research streams.

In addition to the contribution of this study to the areas described in **Figure 1**, this study aims to contribute, albeit in a limited manner, to the literature on international business. CIs are closely intertwined with global networks, are becoming an increasing focus of international agencies, and play a strong role in global trade and development (O'Connor et al. 2019; UNCTAD 2024). Despite this fact, there has been a clear UK, and to a lesser extent Australian, focus in the literature (e.g. Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Bridgstock 2011; Christophers 2007; De Propris 2013; Ensor et al. 2001; Garnham 2005; Genders 2022, 2025; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009; Hotho and Champion 2011; Mould et al. 2008; Moultrie and Young 2009; O'Connor 2004; Siebert and Wilson 2013; TSB 2009; Watson 2008; Weller 2007) and a rather obvious Anglo (UK)-centrism when it comes to CIs policy (Lee 2020). A few authors have gone as far as to regard the UK as if engaged in British neocolonialism with CIs (Prince 2010). By collecting and analysing data from two countries, Finland and Spain, this study aims to expand the focus by encompassing two countries that are not as extensively discussed in the literature.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This dissertation aims to bridge the research gap presented in section 1.2 and shed light on the knowledge-transfer activities conducted by freelancers within the CI sector. More specifically, the purpose is to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes. This purpose is achieved with three research questions, presented below in **Table 2**, that have been addressed through three articles annexed in this dissertation. Providing answers to these research questions required a review of the literature on the topic, data collection and analysis, and a review of the academic and practical implications of these knowledge transfer activities.

Table 2. Research purpose, questions, and main findings of articles included in this dissertation

Purpose	**Research questions**	**Main Findings**
The purpose is to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes	RQ1 How are activities related to knowledge acquisition conducted by freelancers in the field of the creative industries?	Article I highlights how, whereas ambiguity and contradictions negatively impact the effectiveness of knowledge-acquisition activities, making the development process often longer, they are needed for potentially creating more creative outcomes. Additionally, involving clients from the outset and selecting appropriate communication channels based on the development stage and level of ambiguity is crucial, with face-to-face interactions preferred initially and asynchronous channels better suited for subsequent stages.
	RQ2 How does knowledge codification happen during co-development processes led by freelancers in the field of the creative industries?	Article II's findings revolved around the importance of knowledge conversion for competitive advantage and the use of boundary objects to establish mutual understanding in development processes. Moreover, boundary objects were found to be crucial initially and, subsequently, freelancers primarily relied on dialogue after achieving a shared understanding with the client, highlighting the need for a good project and personal match for successful collaboration.
	RQ3 What are the main barriers to knowledge transfer between clients/freelancers in design development processes in the creative industries?	Article III found that accelerating product development by limiting customer involvement negatively impacted the final product's fit and artistic uniqueness in the creative industries, thereby highlighting the tension between speed and artistic value. This issue is exacerbated for freelancers, who, pressured by limited resources and the need for fast revenue, often prioritise economic demands over artistic value, thereby compromising the dual nature of creative products.

It is worth noting that, even though these research questions are presented here in the beginning of this document, they were created through an evolving problematisation process that was not completely linear but iterative (Alvesson and Sandberg 2011). The process began by selecting the literature domain of the creative industries. Due to previous work experience, the importance of freelancers for the sector was known and a preliminary look at academic research on these economic actors already provided a hint that they might have been overlooked in academic literature (e.g. Kitching and Smallbone 2012; Leighton 2015). An initial review of literature on creative industries and informal interviews allowed for a confirmation of this assumption. Moreover, acknowledging the importance of knowledge for the sector, the underlying identified assumption was that, by not separating freelancers from larger companies, their knowledge transfer process was to be similar, if not the same. As I continued to follow a problematisation process (see Alvesson and Sandberg 2011), an alternative assumption was developed. This assumption was that, due to their liability of smallness (Aldrich and Auster 1986), the processes followed by freelancers will be different. This alternative assumption was discussed with academics, mostly in the fields of design and business studies, as a further evaluation. Lastly, this research was undertaken to evaluate the assumption. Once again, and for the sake of clarity, this process is presented in a sequential order but, in line with Alvesson and Sandberg (2011, 256), the problematisation process was "considerably more iterative than linear in character" (see chapter 3.3).

1.4 Structure of this dissertation

This dissertation is divided into two main parts—the introductory essay and the original articles that are the results of this study. Each of these two parts includes chapters and sections. **Figure 2** provides a summary of the different chapters for the introductory part and how the articles contribute to the research questions.

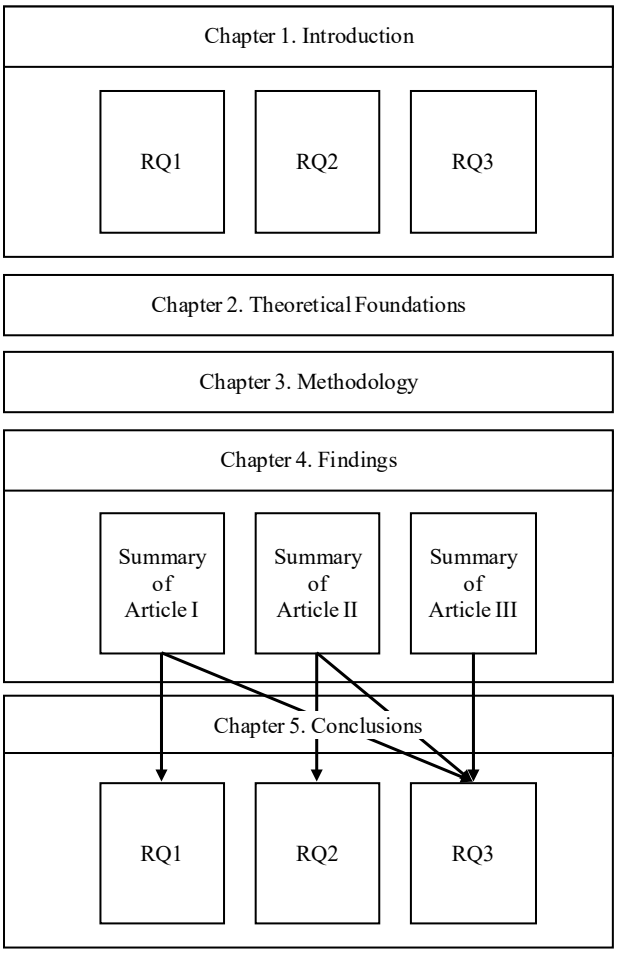

Figure 2. Focus and structure of the dissertation.

The first section, introductory essay, was written with the objective of providing an overall understanding of the purpose of this research by combining the findings of the three original articles. Five chapters comprise this **first part.**

The *first chapter* includes the background of this research and served to outline the objectives and the structure of this document. The aim of this chapter was to present the theoretical and practical relevancy of this research and to briefly present the research gaps in the literature. The overall purpose and the research questions were also presented in this chapter.

The *second chapter* describes the theoretical foundations that form the basis of this research's special focus on three aspects. First, the chapter concentrates on the matter of describing the field of CIs, including a review of how CIs are defined, the special characteristics of CIs, the associated labour market, and the importance of

knowledge for the sector. The focus then moves to a systematic literature review on the topic of knowledge management and transfer in the creative industries. Third, existing research on the topics of customer involvement and speed of development in CI is reviewed. This chapter ends with a synthesis of these theoretical foundations.

The *third chapter* concentrates on the overall methodology that guided this research. This chapter is structured as a funnel in which the different methodological choices are explained and justified. The chapter begins with a justification on the philosophical standpoint, critical realism, and moves towards more specific methodological decisions as it progresses. Overall, the chapter comprises philosophical standpoint, research approach and process, an outline of the cases, a description of data collection and analysis, a discussion on data management and ethics, and an assessment of the research.

The *fourth chapter* provides a summary of each of the articles included in this dissertation with a focus on their findings. The chapter ends with a synthesis of the findings to present the overall results of this dissertation.

The *fifth chapter* concludes this **first part**. In this chapter, the findings are linked to the research questions and the overall purpose of this research. The theoretical and practical contributions of this research are discussed and suggestions for further research are provided.

The **second part** of this dissertation comprises the three original papers developed during this research. Article I focuses on the knowledge-acquisition activities used by freelancers in CIs. Article II provides an overview of knowledge codification activities and the use of boundary objects by freelancers in the field of creative industries. Article III changes the scope slightly to analyse barriers for knowledge transfer by focusing on a failure case.

2 Theoretical foundations

2.1 The field of the creative industries

2.1.1 Defining creative industries

Providing a definition for CIs has been challenging for decades due to the wide range of heterogeneous activities conducted in this field (Innocenti and Lazzeretti 2019; Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016). With a few authors labelling the process of defining the creative industries as a "definitional nightmare" (Clark 2009, 219), and with even the wine industry being considered a CI by some (Croidieu et al. 2016), there is consensus on the vagueness, and even lack of clarity, regarding which industries are CIs (Cruz and Teixeira 2015; Cunningham and Potts 2015; Foord 2008; Lee 2017). With the term being an evolution from an already diverse set of industries labelled *cultural* and/or *cultural and creative* industries (CCIs) (O'Connor 2010; Kolsteeg 2014; Volkerling 2001), the main challenge arises from the fact that this eclectic mix of industries are grouped together mainly for economic reasons (Bridgstock 2011), thereby turning creative industries into a "catch-all" term (Banks et al. 2002, 262).

As a start, even the choice of words used to define these companies, *creative* and *industries*, poses a fundamental paradox rooted in exploration and exploitation (Knight and Harvey 2015; March 1991). On the one hand, the word *creative* implies lack of structure and spontaneity for individuals to be able to independently generate new ideas and concepts (Townley and Gulledge 2015). On the other hand, *industries*, as a term, is loaded with meanings of 'standardised and regulated practices, as well as efficiency and management behaviour, as embodied in organisational theories of leadership, change management and bureaucracy' (Knight and Harvey 2015, 810). As such, just with the word choice, we have an inherent tension in which creative organisations seek to produce novel, innovative conceptions, yet they are simultaneously called on to be efficient, repetitive, and exploitative (Knight and Harvey 2015). Moreover, even the term *industries* can be criticised as being a rather loose term and an abstract aggregation of firms, actions, prices, and *the rest* (Hartley 2009, emphasis added).

Choosing to ignore the word choice, and focusing on the overall definition of CIs, the first discussions on these industries can probably be traced back to Adorno's and Horkheimer's (1972)[6] analysis on the increased commercialisation and commodification of art and its absorption by the economy. In their work, Adorno and Horkheimer first coined the term *culture industry* as a means to emphasise a paradoxical linkage between culture and industry (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972). For them, culture referred to the expression of the deepest shared values of a social group, whereas the term *industry* was related to the economic concepts of commodification, commodity exchange, capital concentration, and worker alienation (Garnham 2005). As one can see, a tension between economic and artistic considerations has been present in the discussions of CIs from their very inception.

From this initial discussion, the categorisation of creative industries evolved towards a cultural-economic continuum in which products could be categorised as being cultural (symbolic meaning), creative (symbolic and functional) or economic (functional) (Kolsteeg 2014). This continuum forces industries into categories, such as the creative industries as those industries that produce creative goods and services, and cultural industries as those producing cultural goods and services (Kolsteeg 2014). Despite the differences between cultural and creative companies, maintaining a distinction between them became increasingly irrelevant (Kolsteeg 2014), as arts and the cultural industries began to be incorporated as a subset of CIs because they depend on creativity and derive value from this creativity (Jones et al. 2015a).

CIs as a formal sector began getting attention with the first usages of the term in Australia under the Keating government (1991–1996) (Lee 2016), with CCIs and CIs being interchangeably used in the country after an influential policy statement, Creative Nation, sought to combine arts with new communication technologies (Australia Department of Communications and the Arts 1994). Despite this previous usage, researchers appear to agree that the term CIs was formally coined and gained its relevancy in the late 90s after Tony Blair's UK Labour government needed a more subtle, but wider ranging, dimension of creativity to position CIs alongside other innovative industries in the knowledge society (Hartley 2009; Pratt 2005; Prince 2010 for a review of the evolution of CIs in the UK from 1998 onwards). With its efforts in mapping CIs, one could argue that the UK government created them as a discrete sector to be endorsed, managed, and exploited; it gave them form, boundaries and equivalences, endowing them with qualities that could be measured and regulated (Christophers 2007).

[6] Original in German from 1944. First translated edition in English from 1972.

After these first occurrences, a clear shift in terminology from cultural and creative (CCIs) to creative industries (CIs) began to occur (O'Connor 2010). CIs became a global phenomenon (Prince 2010) and policies expanded from the UK to other countries, such as New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, and back to Australia (Christophers 2007). In this context, cultural and creative industries began to be grouped together and called CIs, as cultural industries were considered a subset of the wider creative industries (Christophers 2007; Foord 2008; Hausmann and Heinze 2016; Throsby 2010) (more about the shift from cultural to creative industries is provided in Garnham 2005 and O'Connor 2010). However, this evolution from CCIs to CIs is not linear and straightforward, and we have examples of the coexistence of both terms—for example, in China in the late 2000s, with Shanghai embracing "creative industries" and Beijing clearly rejecting the term and using "cultural industries" instead (Ren and Sun 2012). Moreover, the consolidation of both terms is not without its critics as it could potentially increase commodification and expand the risk of CIs being esteemed only if they have an economic impact (e.g. Clark 2009; Garnham 2005; Prince 2010).

Despite the clear consolidation of CIs as the preferred terminology, there is no consensus regarding their definition and classification (Purnomo and Kristiansen 2018) and definitions of CIs still present differences. The most frequently used definitions, summarised in **Table 3**, are rather consistent regarding the main role of creativity and intellectual property in the sector (c.f. UNESCO 2015); the main differences mostly arise from whether the focus is on the creative or the cultural aspect of the industries.

Table 3. Most commonly used definitions for creative industries

Institution	Definition
British Department of Culture Media and Sports (UK DCMS 2001, 5)	'Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'.
United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD 2008, 4)	'Those industries with "cycles of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs; constitute a set of knowledge-based activities, focused on but not limited to arts, potentially generating revenues from trade and intellectual property rights; comprise tangible products and intangible intellectual or artistic services with creative content, economic value and market objectives; are at the cross-road among the artisan, services and industrial sectors; and constitute a new dynamic sector in the world trade'.
EU Parliament (European Union Parliament 2016, 8)	'Those industries that are based on cultural values, cultural diversity, individual and/or collective creativity, skills and talent with the potential to generate innovation wealth and jobs through the creation of social and economic value, in particular from intellectual property'
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2015, 11)	'Sectors of organised activity whose principal purpose is the production or reproduction, promotion, distribution and/or commercialisation of goods, services and activities of a cultural, artistic or heritage-related nature'.
World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO 2017, 5)	'The creative industries include a diverse group of activities, all of which rely to a greater or lesser degree on the contribution of original work and its protection through various IP rights. They link important elements of our shared artistic and cultural heritage with a future based around the digital transfer of ever-increasing amounts of information and content'.

As evident from **Table 3**, a few definitions focus on wealth creation (UK DCMS 2001; UNCTAD 2008), while others focus more on cultural aspects (UNESCO 2015; WIPO 2017), and one takes the middle ground (European Union Parliament 2016). In a related difference, a few definitions clearly emphasise the role of arts (UNCTAD 2008), cultural heritage (UNESCO 2015; WIPO 2017), and cultural

values and diversity (European Union Parliament 2016). A few others focus on the potention of CIs for job creation (European Union Parliament 2016; UK DCMS 2001). Further, a few of the definitions clearly outline the critical role of intellectual capital and/or talent and skills for the sector (European Union Parliament 2016; UK DCMS 2001; UNCTAD 2008). As we see subsequently, these definitions are already, per se, a good example of the overall tension between the artistic and economic aspects of CIs.

Emerging from these definitions, CIs end up being regularly defined according to industrial sectors (Potts et al. 2008), a fact that has created confusion and competing lists of what is or is not a CI (Jones et al. 2015a). There has been a constant disagreement regarding what should be included (Hartley 2009) and, as an example, the UK DCMS definition has been criticised for excluding heritage, archive, museum, libraries, tourism, and sport-related sectors (Chapain and De Propris 2009), but somehow including software development (Garnham 2005) with an alleged objective to present the size and growth of the sector as larger than it actually was (Cunningham and Potts 2015; Garnham 2005). In this regard, a few authors and institutions have focused on providing alternative categorisations of creative industries (e.g. KEA 2006; NESTA 2013; Throsby 2010), while others (e.g. Boix-Domenech and Rausell-Körster 2018; Cruz and Teixeira 2015) have focused on studying which organisations would be regarded as creative industries depending on the used definition. Particularly relevant in these categorisation efforts is the work of Jones et al. (2015a), in which a summary of the categorisations per definition is provided.

In addition to these categorisation issues, these definitions are not without additional challenges. As argued by Banks et al. (2002), defining industries as creative puts creativity in the hands of the individuals and the companies, disregarding the role of social context in the creative process. Creativity is at the core of the knowledge economy (Pettinger et al. 2018) but defining industries as creative assumes that creativity can be defined in terms of what the companies produce (output) rather than what they do (Banks et al. 2002). Overall, in CIs, as in any other business, the creative inputs need to be transformed into commercial products (Hauge 2012).

Specifically, in the UK DCMS case, some critics have argued that the industry-activity-based segments developed in conjunction with the definition were not consistent (Higgs and Cunningham 2008) and that the definition did not capture the complex structure of the sector, its dynamics, and operations (O'Connor 2008). Overall, a few authors have advocated for a move away from defining CIs as a subset of sectors—for example, graphic design, video game development, fashion, and towards 'markets negotiating symbolic goods' (Lange et al. 2008, 534). This proposition is similar to the approach suggested by Potts et al. (2008), as they took a stand to argue for moving away from defining CIs based on an industrial

classification. In their work, they arrived at a new definition based on 'market in terms of the extent to which both demand and supply operate in complex social systems' (Potts et al. 2008, 167), and defined CIs as 'the set of agents in a market characterised by adoption of novel ideas within social networks for production and consumption' (Potts et al. 2008, 171). This definition also appears rather aligned with classic views such as the one of Hirsch (1972, 641) when he defined creative industries as those 'producing cultural products that mean nonmaterial goods directed at a public of consumers, for whom they generally serve an aesthetic or expressive, rather than a clearly utilitarian function'.

Overall, Cruz and Teixeira (2015) and Potts et al. (2008) have provided extensive reviews of the limitations of the most frequently used definitions and we know that the fragmentation on the definition makes consistency difficult and has implications for the accuracy of CIs contribution to the economy and the creation of effective policy (e.g. Granger and Hamilton 2010; Long 2017; Prince 2010; Townley and Gulledge 2015). These varying definitions have caused information in different studies to be incomparable (Van der Pol. 2008) and made sizing CIs neither straightforward nor transparent (Christophers 2007). Overall, and as stated by Clark (2009, 217), 'the problem with creative industries is that we think they are good for the economy, but we just do not know how good they are'.

Having said this, I adhere to what was already expressed already two decades ago by Gibson and Kong (2005, 546) in their article on creative industries: 'there are myriad conceptions in the literature and the productive task ahead is not to sink into endless at defining cultural economy but acknowledge polyvalency and address specific research agendas from there'. In this regard, a number of academic articles focusing on CIs do not even provide a definition for the industries (e.g. Bakhshi et al. 2015; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Mould et al. 2008; Parker et al. 2017; Swedberg 2006); however, to avoid inconsistencies, this research uses the following UK DCMS definition of CIs:

> 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (UK DCMS 2001, 5)

The decision to use the UK DCMS definition despite its criticism was because it has proven to be highly influential (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009) and is regarded as the de facto world standard (Li 2020). It has also been claimed to be the 'most referenced definition' (Foord 2008, 94) and the most accurate way to define CIs (Morawski 2017). Specifically for this research, it is the definition most consistently referenced in the reviewed literature (e.g. Gouvea et al. 2021; Hadida 2015; Li 2020; Long 2017), including a few of the articles that focus on knowledge transfer in CIs

(Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019). Moreover, the definition aligns well with this research due to its emphasis on creativity—which, ultimately, can be considered tacit knowledge (Lee 2017)—and on talent and skills, which take the form of the freelancers in this research, functioning as the origin of CIs.

2.1.2 The characteristics of creative industries

Despite the definitional nightmare (Clark 2009)[7] of CIs, creative industries have become an increasingly important sector for the economy (Boix-Domenech et al. 2022; European Union Parliament 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Potts and Cunningham 2008) and terms such as 'creative economy' (Higgs and Cunningham 2008; Howkins 2001) and 'creative class; (Florida 2002) are now widely acknowledged and recognised in academic literature (cf. Cunningham and Potts 2015; Peck 2005; Flew 2010 for a short review on the criticism of Florida's work). These CIs are well-known contributors to economic growth, job creation, and internationalisation and are widely regarded by firms and governments as highly dynamic (Protogerou et al. 2017) and as hubs for managerial innovation and experiments (Lampel and Germain 2016). Moreover, these industries have become pioneers in new organisational and business practices (Lampel and Germain 2016) and are also seen as an increasingly attractive investment opportunity (BAE 2024; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013).

The importance of CIs extends beyond their direct economic impact, as they contribute to overall technological progress (Boix-Domenech and Rausell-Köster 2018; Potts and Cunningham 2008), improve local competitiveness (Apitzsch and Piotti 2012; Cruz and Teixeira 2015), and influence innovation throughout the entire economy (Bakhshi and McVittie 2009; Cunningham and Potts 2015; Morawski 2017; Rodríguez-Gulías et al. 2020; Santoro et al. 2020; c.f. European Cluster Observatory 2011). Moreover, these industries also make non-economic contributions, such as building national identity, community cohesion, humanistic integrity or, even, social justice (Cunningham and Potts 2015; European Union Parliament 2016).

Specifically, CIs are responsible for a strong supply of creative professionals into the wider economy (e.g. Bakhshi et al. 2015; Müller et al. 2009) and they drive the demand for new and rapid advances in technology innovation (e.g. demand from

[7] As already indicated, this research adheres to the UK DCMS definition and special attention was given to not cite statistics from reports in which definitions were not compatible. However, and as also already stated, I acknowledge the polyvalency of the different definitions, and this research adopts a broad view of CIs. In practice, this implied accommodating previous research with a variety of definitions, which may have had an influence on the heterogeneity of the findings.

cutting-edge digital applications such as high-end games or technologies used in advertising) (Cunningham and Potts 2015; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Müller et al. 2009; Öberg 2016; Stejskal and Hajek 2019), even though adapting to these technologies is not necessary positive for their artistic creativity (Öberg 2016).

Moreover, these CIs oftentimes provide services to other organisations (Moultrie and Young 2009) and certain subsectors of the creative industries, such as advertising and design, contribute directly to the innovation of businesses in other sectors by inputting into their production processes (Bakhshi et al. 2015; Müller et al. 2009; Öberg 2016). Overall, businesses with stronger links to CIs appear to be more innovative (Bakhshi and McVittie 2009), and, as we have seen, CIs' spillovers affect the economy through indirect, induced, and evolutionary mechanisms (Boix-Domenech and Rausell-Körster 2018, for a review).

Due to these close economic relationships with firms in the wider economy and their complex and fragmented nature, CIs are occasionally difficult to distinguish from other industries (Long 2017). Notwithstanding, these creative industries differ in several ways from other industries and do not fit the generic model of industry due to the uncommon ways in which they operate and are organised (Pratt 2015). Their distinctive characteristics were extensively covered in the seminal works of Caves (2000, 2003) and are summarised in **Figure 3**.

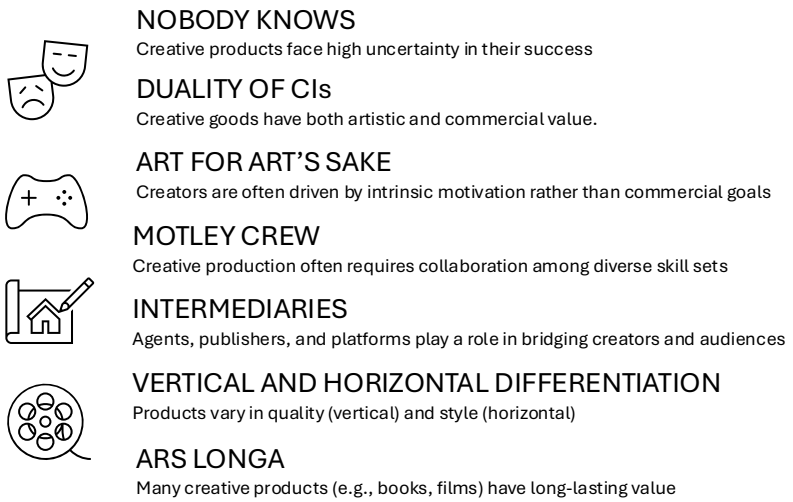

Figure 3. Summary of the characteristics of CIs (adapted from Caves 2000, 2003).

Specifically, first, creative industries are characterised by the uncertainty faced by the producers of creative goods (Caves 2000; Polido 2010; TSB 2009)—for example, very few video games becoming hits (Tschang 2007) and less than 10% of

new music releases reaching a break-even point (Ordanini et al. 2008). Labelled as *nobody knows*, this first difference relates to the fact that the customer, often the only customer, has the final say on how relevant a final product is. Even though uncertainty is considered a characteristic of all economic production (Townley et al. 2009), most CI products are usually unique and subject to individual innovation processes (Knetsch 2017, in Koch et al. 2023), thus making it impossible to salvage or reuse them if an individual customer rejects them (Caves 2003). Moreover, a client's or customer's satisfaction with a creative product will often be a completely subjective reaction (Caves 2000; TSB 2009) based on tastes and interpretation (Purnomo and Kristiansen 2018).

Second, these creative products also make these industries differ from those operating in other sectors. CIs are diverse and span a range of products (Jones et al. 2015a) that stand between pure art—with no immediate economic value—and pure instrumental products (Caves 2000; Townley et al. 2009). These CIs have blended culture and economy or art and commerce (Banks et al. 2002), and their products are located on a spectrum between artistic (symbolic) and instrumental (economic) value (Caves 2000; Polido 2010). In other words, this *duality of CIs* makes both the aesthetic, but also functional, characteristics of creative products relevant (Hauge 2012).

Third, this duality also has a substantial influence in CIs due to the attitudes of the actors in the field towards their own works. CIs use creative workers to generate products and services and such reliance on personal creativity, skills, and talent makes them different from other industries (Hou et al. 2019). Moreover, creative workers care about their products, have an artistic orientation (Caves 2000), and measure success by values other than economic ones—for example, passion, pride, commitment, or peer recognition (TSB 2009). As certain workers follow an *art for art's sake* philosophy (Caves 2003; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007), a tension often arises between producing output which is personally satisfactory versus generating output for which there is a market demand (Chaston 2008; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006).

Overall, in CIs, there is a tension between art and commerce (Gilson 2015; c.f. Pisotska and Gurses 2023) and balancing this tension is a key challenge of CIs (Tschang 2007). Creative workers need to alternate between their business head and their creative flair (Marcella and Rowley 2015) and, in certain instances (such as in game development studios), monetary incentives are not the main motivator and professional and personal fulfilment appear to be more important (Teipen 2008). In the publishing industry, publishers need to juggle between the fact that books must generate revenue; however, books also function as cultural capital (Townley and Gulledge 2015). Thus, a tension is created because, in many instances, these two aspects might be in opposition with each other; does a publishing company aim for a bestseller with a large audience or does it engage in small prints with an appeal which is more related to literary and intellectual heritage? Or does it, like many,

occupy the grey area in between and balance both symbolic and economic value? (Townley and Gulledge 2015).

Similarly, in another example of this tension, musicians, driven by their love for music, are known to give away their work and expertise for free, and they openly consider reducing their quotes if a project runs over budget (Coulson 2012). For these musicians, getting paid is secondary to being involved with music (Coulson 2012). In general, we have artists who take economic aspects into account, artists who mostly want to make money, artists who reject the economy, and all those in the grey area in between (Swedberg 2006).

The fourth distinctive characteristic of CIs revolves around the unique manner in which these industries structure productions—for example, a movie, a TV drama series episode, a book, or a piece of music—as individual projects (Vicentini and Nasta 2017). Each product is created through a distinct, time-bound project that requires specific skills and the formation of a dedicated project team (Caves 2000, 2003; Cohendet and Simon 2007; DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Jones et al. 2015a; Vicentini and Nasta 2017). Specifically, creative productions may need to mobilise 'creative artists (artists, musicians, actors, writers); brokers acting on their behalf (agents, managers, promoters); technical craft workers (sound engineers, camera operators); producers (publishers, studios, record companies); owners and executives; distributors and media outlets (broadcasters)' (Townley et al. 2009, 942). These individuals, or *motley crew* (Caves 2000; DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Svejenova et al. 2015; Townley et al. 2009), come with their own art-for-art's-sake beliefs and creative tastes, a fact that often creates tensions among them (e.g. Caves 2000; DeFillippi 2015; Pisotska and Gurses 2023; Powell and Dodd 2007); this has implications on the management of CIs (e.g. Hauge 2012; Tschang 2007).

In this regard, the management of CIs is a well-established stream of literature (e.g. Bérubé and Demers 2019; Cohendet and Simon 2007; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007; Hauge 2012; Hotho and Champion 2011; Jeffcutt and Prat 2002; Jiao et al. 2019; Jones et al. 2004; Knight and Harvey 2015; Lampel and Germain 2016; Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016; Öberg 2016; Powell and Dodd 2007; Towley et al. 2009) in which the traditional view has been one in which the managers are the enemies and art and artistic egos rule (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Hotho and Champion 2011). Managing the *motley crew* resembles the popular description of managing professionals as 'herding cats' (Abfalter 2013; Mintzberg 1998) with artistic and business competencies traditionally seen as incompatible (Lampel and Germain 2016; Svejenova et al. 2015). However, in certain instances, such as in the film industry and media organisations, we have seen integrative and symbiotic approaches to the artistic/economic dichotomy, rather than seeing them as opposite or conflicting (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Knight and Harvey 2015; Pisotska and Gurses 2023). Similarly, Schediwy et al. (2018) examined the careers of young musicians and found

that they did not perceive tensions between artistic (bohemian) and business (entrepreneurial) demands but rather integrated them in a synergetic manner.

A discussion on whether to couple or de-couple, separate or integrate, creative and routine/economic work still remains, but the boundaries between aesthetic and utilitarian logics have been blurring for quite a few years now (DeFillippi et al. 2007). Overall, over the years, there has been a realisation that management can be a virtuous tool that can be used to ease the tension between creative work and business (Bérubé and Demers 2019; Knight and Harvey 2015; Lampel and Germain 2016), as bridging these two views is particularly critical when, as it often happens, different professionals come together to work on a specific project (Endrissat et al. 2016).

What we do know is that the creative character of CIs requires a different form of management and leadership (Abfalter 2013; Knight and Harvey 2015; Mintzberg 1998; Townley et al. 2009). Artistic and business competencies are increasingly considered essential complements that are relevant for creatives and managers alike (Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013) and managers need to strive to find the right balance between artistic and business orientation (Bérubé and Demers 2019; Lampel and Germain 2016). As already mentioned, there is a need to balance exploration and exploitation (March 1991), as CIs aim to both generate new ideas and operate under standardised and efficient processes (Knight and Harvey 2015). In this context, managers can address conflicting tensions by engaging in organisational processes that concurrently enable differentiation and integration (Knight and Harvey 2015). Generally, too much emphasis on the business aspect would kill creative work and innovation, and too much emphasis on creative work would lead to chaos, lack of productivity (Bérubé and Demers 2019; Cohendet and Simon 2007; Endrissat et al. 2016), or even the creation of products that do not appeal to customers because they are too innovative or different (Pisotska and Gurses 2023; Tschang 2007).

Fifth, the need for *intermediaries* in many subcategories of creative industries—for example, an artist needs a gallery (Caves 2000), a fashion firm a retailer (Hauge 2012), a game study a publisher (Tschang 2007), and a moviemaker a distributor (Hartley 2009)—has also been highlighted as a distinctive characteristic. This is arguably not a characteristic of all CIs, particularly as steps are being taken towards disintermediation in, for example, books, music, and movies (Hirsch and Gruber 2015). Digitalisation has reduced barriers (Parker et al. 2017; TSB 2009), artists are getting closer to their fanbase owing to digital platforms and social media (Hirsch and Gruber 2015), and crowdfunding is extensively used to finance cultural products (Hobbs et al. 2016; Quero and Ventura 2015). As an example, music is being produced and launched through direct releases, without intermediaries, by using digital channels and fan-funding (Foster and Ocejo 2015).

In any case, and despite these trends and evidence of a significant decline in the power of the global media conglomerates (Hirsch and Gruber 2015; TSB 2009),

other types of intermediaries—in the form of aggregators such as YouTube, Spotify or Netflix—are increasingly shaping the relationship between consumers and CIs (Hagiu and Yoffie 2013; Hartley 2009). In other instances, such as in mobile games, online app stores such as Apple Store or Google Play are a monopoly for distribution (Parker et al. 2017) and publishers play a rather influential gatekeeping role and have strength in negotiations with studios due to their advantage in resources (Tschang 2007). Nevertheless, to this date, it makes little sense for a painter to undertake a dealer function (Caves 2003) and—even despite the lower cost of self-publishing games and apps—publishers have proven to be more successful in terms of net revenues and higher relative market performance (Schmidt et al. 2018).

Sixth, Caves' (2000, 2003) seminal studies emphasise how *vertical and horizontal differentiation* affect the inputs and outputs of creative goods, respectively. Creative inputs are vertically differentiated, with certain creative workers considered better—for example, in terms of quality level, reputation, or market value (Merger 2015). This interpretation creates a preferred 'A list' and a 'B list' of workers/artists (Caves 2000). Similarly, the output of CIs is horizontally differentiated, and creative products are often evaluated in comparison with other creative products (e.g. two action movies). These two differentiations have an influence on the already subjective customers' reactions to these products, as customers are constantly comparing and ranking creative works (Merger 2015). As examples, there is a trade-off between selecting from A or B list for creative inputs, the comparison of outputs might not always be fair, and there are also subjective A/B lists on the client's side (e.g. a better-regarded architect).

Lastly, Caves (2000, 2003) emphasises that many creative products are durable, a property he labels as *ars longa*. This characteristic highlights the fact that cultural or symbolic goods—such as music, screen narratives, or printed stones—remain alive for indefinite reconsumption (Hartley 2009). This *ars longa* has an influence on copyrights and enables royalties to be obtained long after the creation of the creative product; however, monitoring their sales is troublesome (Caves 2000) and collecting is challenging (Townley and Gulledge 2015).

Overall, on the topic of intellectual property and despite its importance—including being a main component of the UK DCMS definition—creative products are complex and demanding from the perspective of making an adequate choice regarding legal protection by IP (Polido 2010). Moreover, the boundaries of the copyright privilege retained by the artists are occasionally problematic (Caves 2000), and there are concerns regarding the appropriation of knowledge goods, cultural expressions, and folklore (Macmillan 2015; Polido 2010). Further, digitalisation has made the enforcement of copyrights appear relatively unfeasible for CIs (Jones et al. 2015a; Townley and Gulledge 2015). Even from its inception, copyrighting does not immediately appear to fit with the traditional values embodied in creative and artistic

industries (Polido 2010); certain authors (Arewa 2011) have gone as far as to calling for an analysis of the prohibited effects IP has in creativity for CI subsectors, such as music composition.

As we have now seen and described in **Figure 3**, CIs differ from other industries in a variety of ways. An additional difference is the special characteristics of their labour market, a topic which is covered in detail in the next section.

2.1.3 Labour market, freelancers, and the working environment in creative industries

Creative industries are a pioneering field for new working relationships (Hermes et al. 2017) as they symbolise the contemporary transformations of work into an expanding workforce of freelance, casual, and project-linked people (Bridgstock 2011; Watson 2012). Creative labour is often considered largely individualised labour, and CIs emphasise the virtues of self-reliance, unique talent, and personalised performative modes of work (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009). Freelancers are at the very core of the sector (e.g. Abbasi et al. 2017; Banks et al. 2002; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013) and project-based work, characterised by creative workers who have numerous and brief transactions with several employers (Menger 2015), is the industry-standard (Bridgstock 2011; Caves 2000; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Lampel and Germain 2016; Watson 2012).

In general, the creative industry sector comprises a large number of small companies, and a small number of large enterprises (Jones et al. 2004; TSB 2009). As much as freelance-job relationships with clients have been fought off by unions for years (Caves 2000), the 2008 crisis witnessed an increase in the numbers of freelancers that almost perfectly mirrored the drop in the number of employees in certain subsectors of CIs, e.g. advertising and television and radio (De Propris 2013). Overall, 90% of businesses operating in CIs are small or medium in size (EY 2021), and, in the EU, freelancers accounted for 31.7% of CIs workforce (ELA 2024).

As previously highlighted in the literature, SMEs suffer from the liability of smallness (Aldrich and Auster 1986), a reality also evident in CIs (de Berranger and Meldrum 2000; Hotho and Champion 2011). Large firms in the industry have adopted a project-based model driven by cost reduction, maximisation of use of resources, and outsourced risk (Öberg 2024; Tempest 2009; TSB 2009; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015). On the other side of this collaboration, suppliers have challenges extracting sufficient value from their work due to the uneven playing field and the absence of bargaining power (Parker et al. 2017). With project-based work being one of the main characteristics of the creative field, used in, for example, films, TV drama series episodes, books, music production, and festivals or advertisements (DeFillippi

and Arthur 1998; Ensor et al. 2001; Schüßler and Sydow 2015; Vicentini and Nasta 2017), individual creative workers bear more risk and responsibilities than the firms (Vinodrai and Keddy 2015) and have project-based careers that lead them to habitually move from one project to another (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998).

Even so, creative work is increasingly showcased as a desirable and flexible alternative to working in traditional organisations (Lampel and Germain 2016). For certain creative workers, the precarious and uncertain nature of the work can be viewed as exciting, cool, and as a means to stimulate creativity (Vinodrai and Keddy 2015). With this being said, people attracted to the glamour of CIs are less sensitive to the exploitation of unpaid work (Morris et al. 2024; Siebert and Wilson 2013), and the fear of not being called for future work may force creative workers to take any job that comes their way regardless of how uninteresting it is or how little pay may be offered (Vinodrai and Keddy 2015).

In this context, a large percentage of CI workers have taken unpaid work in the hope of securing a permanent job in the future (Siebert and Wilson 2013); overall, flexibility and agility are regarded as a valuable characteristic that workers must have to advance in their career (TSB 2009; Vicentini and Nasta 2017). In general, workers in the CI sector suffer from low wages; long working hours; structural job insecurity; unusually high levels of mobility; the need to work part-time in addition to their work in CIs; highly unequal earnings and activity levels; and even discrimination, ageism, and exploitation (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Benhamou 2003; Caves 2000; Cohendet and Simon 2007; Hennekam 2015; Jones et al. 2004; Menger 2015; Peltoniemi 2015; Stenholm et al. 2024; Teipen 2008; Watson 2012).

In this regard, a link can be drawn between a few of these labour conditions and the distinctive characteristics of CIs presented in section 2.1.2, with creative workers being, for example, willing to accept lower salaries for creative work as long as it is fulfilling and as long as they can have a strong influence on how the work is performed or produced (Caves 2003). A strong artistic identity may cause creative professionals to implicitly accept that they may not generate enough income (Stenholm et al. 2024) as their willingness to forgo adequate remuneration is partially due to the intrinsic rewards of creative work (Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013).

Furthermore, the ranking of creative workers introduced in section 2.1.2 also contributes to the remarkably high-income variation in CIs, which is exacerbated by stardom, star jobs (Currid-Halkett 2015; Menger 2015; Rosen 1981), and celebrity effects (Caves 2000). This high variation results in a winner-takes-it-all market (Bakhshi et al. 2015; Currid-Halkett 2015; Frank and Cook 1995), in which a very few make millions, while a great majority struggles to make ends meet (Caves 2000; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013). The highly publicised stories of the very few celebrities and stars who manage to achieve stardom, exceptional remuneration, and

bargaining power, reinforce the optimism and determination of the rest (Lampel and Germain 2016); paradoxically, celebrating personal or others' successes can also fuel the poor working conditions and career insecurity of CIs (Morris et al. 2024). Overall, despite these celebrity exceptions, for the majority, working in CIs can be summarised as precarious (Farr-Wharton et al. 2015; Leung and Bentley 2017; Morris et al. 2024; Hennekam and Bennet 2017 for a review).

Despite freelancers being among the most affected by CIs job market characteristics, global corporations and sole traders have been consistently considered together (Hartley 2009) and studies focusing exclusively on freelancers remain limited to a few studies. An illustrative example of the most common approach followed in CI research is the one made explicit by Müller et al. (2009). In their work, they acknowledge their focus on enterprises (including sole traders) and furthermore make explicit the fact that their 'survey was aimed to target creative enterprises of any size' (Müller et al. 2009, 153). In a similar fashion, Stenholm et al. (2024, 270) defined creative professionals as 'practitioners with creative or cultural occupations, working in or outside of creative and cultural sectors, and maintaining any employment status (employee, self-employed, or both)'.

With regard to the exceptions that focus on freelancers and are summarised in **Table 1**, it is worth mentioning the work of Eikhof and Haunschild (2006). Eikhof and Haunschild (2006) explored the self-employment situation of the creative staff in a German theatre and how their bohemian lifestyle was central to their artistic self-understanding, influenced their working life, and enabled the integration of artistic and self-management activities. With regard to skills, Grugulis and Stoyanova (2009) focused on freelancers in TV and film production and how they are expected to learn on the job through watching others perform tasks, discussing with peers, and participating in various projects. This has been the reality of junior crew members in film production for decades (e.g. DeFillippi and Arthur 1998).

Grugulis and Stoyanova's (2009) study presented multiple examples of learning on the job through apprenticeship. Their study further highlighted how the majority of entry-level jobs were unpaid and, as they occurred in the context of short-lived projects; this brevity limited learning. Moreover, the fact that freelancers lack formal training opportunities makes their learning process a hit and miss (Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009).

Another field in which formal education is lacking is that of clowns in circus performances; this field was the context for Gateau and Simon's article (2016). Their research was at the intersection between knowledge and talent management and investigated freelance clowns with a specific focus on their special characteristics and how their recruitment and training is implemented. In another study focusing on freelancers, Hennekam (2015) focused on older self-employed workers in CIs, the challenges they suffered, and how they overcame them. In a similar fashion, Hermes

et al. (2017, 97) gave voice to freelance creative workers in The Netherlands and ended with an interesting reflection by stating that 'they are not entrepreneurs and hardly artists, although perhaps, in a sense, bohemians'[8].

When one turns their attention to works outside academia, the lack of acknowledgement of freelancers in CIs becomes even more apparent and, thus, worrisome. As already mentioned, freelancers are often considered only as part of larger groups in public statistics, and doubts exist regarding an under-representation of the number of freelancers in the sector (Jeffcutt 2004; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013). As an example, and despite freelancers being the 'mainstay of the creative sector and central to its growth and innovation potential' (Foord 2008, 96), certain reports—for example, European Cluster Observatory (2011, 5)—are clear that their data 'covers only employees but not sole traders or freelancers'.

In this context, national data on employment tends to undercount SMEs, microbusinesses, and sole traders (Foord 2008). Specifically, back in 2008, Higgs and Cunningham (2008) put the underestimation for employment in CIs to be in the realm of 25%–40% In another example, policies and documents using industrial Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes to categorise CIs in the UK have excluded microenterprises and sole traders operating below the value added tax (VAT) threshold (Long 2017). They also failed to consider CIs which do not have a matching industry classification, as is the case with visual arts (Granger and Hamilton 2010). In contrast, not everyone working in CIs can be regarded as a creative worker and, even though the inclusion of non-creative profiles is unavoidable, this might exaggerate the creative nature of jobs in CIs (Foord 2008). In any case, and in many instances, CI freelancers are not only not considered *as part of* other larger enterprises, but just simply not considered.

Overall, certain authors suggest that the project-based and contractual models of CIs are becoming the dominant paradigm for the broader knowledge-based economy (Arthur et al. 2008; Vicentini and Nasta 2017; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015) and that the precarity of the sector—underemployment, temporary and short-term contract work, freelance work, low earnings, lack of social security, and so forth—are now transferring across many other economic sectors (Lee 2017). With similar contractual agreements expanding into other sectors, such as sharing economy platforms in the sector of online food ordering, artists and writer–actors are among the strongest advocates of the adverse effects of, for example, limited insurance and sick-leave payments (Geissinger et al. 2022). As CIs play a central role in shaping the future of management (Lampel and Germain 2016), the investigation of how

[8] As already described, this research focuses on freelancers, who cannot necessarily be categorised as entrepreneurs; but references to literature on cultural and creative entrepreneurship are used throughout the work. This usage is discussed in section 5.3.

these industries work is becoming even more relevant. Specifically, there is a need to focus on the importance of knowledge as the main value driver for CIs and other sectors of the knowledge economy.

2.1.4 The importance of knowledge in creative industries

Knowledge is now clearly outlined as one of the main sources of competitive advantage, and a shift towards knowledge-intensive activities has been a main driver for economic growth for the last few decades (Leonard 1998; Millar et al. 2016). For many sectors, production of knowledge has become relatively more important than the production of tangible products (Sawhney and Prandelli 2000; Teece 1998).

Indeed, there is little doubt regarding the importance of knowledge as a primary asset in the modern economy, particularly when it refers to CIs (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019) in which knowledge transfer and ideas are regarded as the lifeblood of the sector and the basis for its continued economic success (Granger and Hamilton 2010). Over two decades ago, Seltzer and Bentley (1999) emphasised the role of knowledge as a primary resource of the 'creative age' (which is how they defined the current historical period) and, by now, the critical role of knowledge is well documented in CIs such as media (Banks et al. 2002) or video game development firms (Cohendet and Simon 2007; Plum and Hassink 2014). More specifically, CIs in the arts and crafts subcategory, consider knowledge—spanning from their history and tradition and embedded in their craftsmen—to be a powerful and unique source of organisational performance and a real financial resource that enables companies to foster growth and market visibility (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019). We also know knowledge management has proven to be linked to a reduction in negative innovation outcomes (such as customer dissatisfaction, employee resistance, or increased costs) in CI SMEs (Games and Rendi 2019, 2).

Overall, knowledge is the main resource for CIs because the value of the organisations operating in the field lies in the development and adoption of new knowledge (Potts and Cunningham 2008). Creative industries are generative engines of emergent knowledge (Hartley 2009) and, for them, it is a strategic organisational resource that can be systematised, managed, and transferred to become a source of competitive advantage (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019; Plum and Hassink 2014). In CIs, as in other sectors, the actual production activity is only secondary (Bakhshi and McVittie 2009) as their defining feature lies not in their products but in the use of the creativity of their workforce—the most personified form of tacit knowledge—to produce them (NESTA 2013).

Despite this importance, and as already mentioned, we know that knowledge in CIs tends to be tacit (Venkitachalam and Busch 2012) and the literature highlights that knowledge transfer models applicable to other sectors are likely not to be

adequate for CIs (Brindley 2008; Colette 2008; Collinge and Staines 2009; Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Weller 2007). Creative organisations very often turn to external sources for inspiration (Powell and Dodd 2007) and for the small, and often young, CIs, it becomes essential to overcome the liability of smallness and newness by using 'external sources of knowledge and networking to identify innovative opportunities and complement their limited resource based with additional resources and new knowledge' (Protogerou et al. 2017, 595). For example, this is the case in video game industries where organisations are required to integrate different bodies of specialised knowledge (Cohendet and Simon 2007; Plum and Hassink 2014). In this scenario, it becomes paramount to investigate knowledge transfer in CIs and to specifically answer the general call to identify the routines and processes that organisations use to acquire, assimilate, transform, and exploit knowledge (Zahra and George 2002).

As the importance of knowledge for CIs is at the very core of this dissertation, I decided to conduct a systematic literature review on knowledge transfer activities in CIs as part of this research. The methodology for the systematic literature review is described in section 2.2.1 and the results and recommendations for future research in section 2.2.2.

2.2 Systematic literature review on knowledge transfer and management in the creative industries

2.2.1 Systematic literature review methodology

This systematic literature was conducted to ensure the literature on the main theme of this dissertation, knowledge transfer activities in the creative industries, had not been overlooked and also to serve as a specific contribution of this dissertation introduction. Overall, the purpose was to ensure an up-to-date understanding of the field by providing an overview of the existing research, grouping research streams and summarising the main findings. I also aimed to build on existing knowledge and propose suggestions for further research.

In this regard, the aim was to 'order knowledge infrastructure' (Krlev et al. 2025, 386) and two-fold:

1. To take stock (Krlev et al. 2025, 394) by providing a comprehensive and an up-to-date summary of the main theme of this dissertation.
2. To provide perspectives by ordering but also engaging in gap spotting (Krlev et al. 2025, 393), with the latter translating into suggestions for further research.

As suggested by Krlev et al. (2025, 386), ordering knowledge infrastructure is suitable when a 'field's knowledge infrastructure is very diverse, scattered, or ambiguous' as might be the case with fields with, for example, competing definitions'. This is very much the case with research on CIs due to the diversity of the field and also the 'definitional nightmare' (Clark 2009, 219) described in section 2.1.1.

From a practical standpoint, this systematic literature review was conducted in five stages, as suggested by Von Brocke et al. (2009) and as also used by Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018). The specific process is described in **Figure 4**.

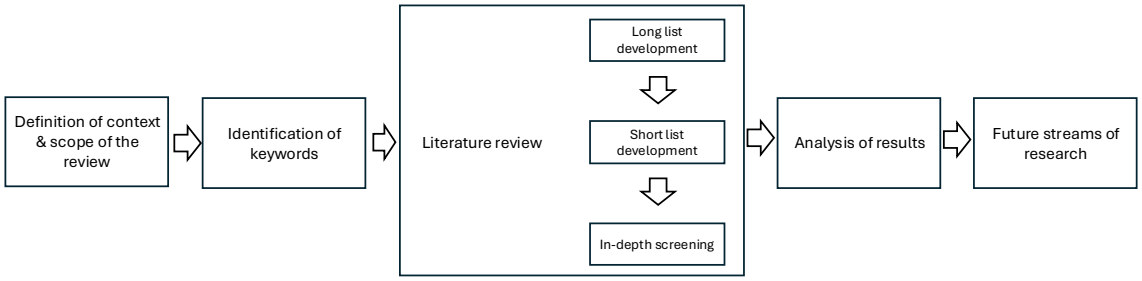

Figure 4. The five-stage approach of the literature review (Adapted from Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018, 1313)

The process began with the *definition of the context (and scope of the review)* which, as already introduced, represented knowledge-transfer activities in creative industries. Aiming to ensure a minimum number of false negatives, research that focused on knowledge management was also considered.

There have been previous efforts to produce a systematic literature on the role of knowledge in CIs, with Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018) being the most notable. Specifically, Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018) divided their review into two time periods— 1990–2000 and 2000–2016—and initially focused on knowledge and performance in general and then on the application of this general literature to a subset of creative industries, the arts and crafts organisations. Specifically, for the arts and crafts organisations, the focus was on internal organisational knowledge management and transfer and its effect on the role and performance of craftsmen in the process. As such, my systematic literature review expands on this work by examining the totality of CIs, with a specific focus only on these creative industries, and by covering any type of knowledge transfer/management activity.

With regard to this latter aspect, the focus on activities, it is important to acknowledge that pieces of research which did not focus on how to or what to do with the knowledge were not considered as part of the review. As an example, multiples pieces (e.g. Banks et al. 2002; Hartley 2009; Jiao et al. 2019; Lange 2008; Lee 2016,

2017; Morawski 2017; Pettinger et al. 2018; Potts and Cunningham 2008; TSB 2009) mention the importance of knowledge for CIs but do not go into details on what to do with the knowledge, or/and how to manage, convert, transfer, or apply it.

After the context was established, the process of this systematic literature review continued with stage two, *identification of relevant keywords,* which aimed to limit false negatives while guaranteeing that the number of papers remained manageable. The selection of keywords was not without its challenges due to the different terminology that can be used to label what I termed 'knowledge transfer'. This is the reason why knowledge management was also included in the literature review queries. As a result of this stage, a preliminary research string was developed that was used in different databases. The exact search string was

> *"Creative Industries" IN TITLE AND "knowledge" AND "management" OR "transfer" IN FULL TEXT*

The creation of this search string marked the end of the first two preliminary stages, and the third *literature review* stage began with the development of a long list of articles to be used as the initial pool of this literature review. The list was developed using different academic databases and its development process is described in **Figure 5**.

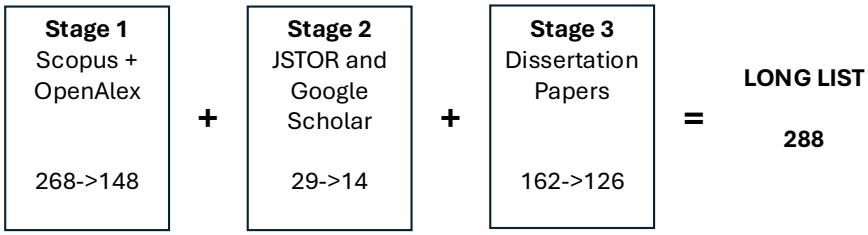

Figure 5. The long-list development process-

The first step utilised the database aggregator software Public or Perish and used the research string described above in two databases, Scopus and OpenAlex[9]. Only articles and reviews published in peer-reviewed academic journals and published

[9] Scopus was selected as one of the databases mainly due to its comprehensiveness in terms of multidisciplinary research and to ensure a good coverage of high-quality journals; OpenAlex was added because of its extensive open access coverage and its wide range of disciplines. Moreover, both databases have advanced search capabilities and extensive metadata and information, which made it easier to screen papers in the results.

books and book chapters were considered. Further filtering of the results was achieved by focusing only on high-quality publishers from the list of results. The following publishers were selected due to their reputation for high-quality research: Elsevier, Emerald, Inderscience, Oxford, Routledge, SAGE, Springer, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley. In addition, only articles in English were considered. The search returned 268 results, of which 212 were published articles, 17 were books or book chapters and 3 were categorised as reviews. The other results were labelled as conference papers (27), conference reviews (7), dissertations (1), and paratexts (1).

After applying the filtering described above, the final number for this first step was 148 entries comprising 133 articles, 11 book chapters, 2 books and 2 reviews.

A second step of this long-list development regarded a search in JSTOR and Google Scholar[10] that aimed to identify overlapping papers. The main objective with this extension was to broaden the search and to make sure as few papers as possible remained unchecked. Due to the searching capabilities of both databases, the search needed to be slightly modified to fit the limitations regarding the search fields. Specifically, for JSTOR, the search string maintained 'Creative Industries' for the title, but knowledge management and transfer were searched in the abstracts. The exact search string for JSTOR was

> *"Creative Industries" IN TITLE AND "knowledge" AND "management" OR "transfer" IN ABSTRACT*

For Google Scholar, the original search string was used.

JSTOR search returned 19 articles and Google Scholar 10 results. After applying the same filtering as above, and excluding one overlapping article, the Google Scholar search contributed four more articles to the long list. The same filtering by publisher and result type, and identification of repeated papers, translated into 10 papers from JSTOR being incorporated into the list of articles.

Overall, after a quick check on the titles, the relevancy of the papers from both JSTOR and Google Scholar appeared to be minor. This was also revealed by the slight overlap with previous searches. Despite this first impresion, there was some more overlap when considering authors, including key ones in the CI literature (e.g. Jason Potts).

As the last step of the development of this this long list, I also decided to double-check the entire database of papers used in the three articles included in this dissertation. This last step served as a final check for the level of comprehensiveness

[10] JSTOR was selected due to the large number of contributions it contains; similarly, Google Scholar was included due to its comprehensive results in terms of academic and practitioner literature.

and to ensure no relevant sources had fallen through the cracks. In this last step, every piece of research used in the three dissertations papers, excluding conference papers and one doctoral dissertation, were added to the pool. Overall, this accounted for 128 articles, 31 books, and 3 book chapters; however, papers which cover freelancers but not knowledge and those on research methodology were eliminated. This resulted in the first pool of 288 items, labelled 'long list', that was considered for the literature review.

With this long-list of 288 items as a starting point, a short list of papers as input for this systematic literature review was developed as the last part of the *literature review* stage. This development process is described **Figure 6** and explained thereafter.

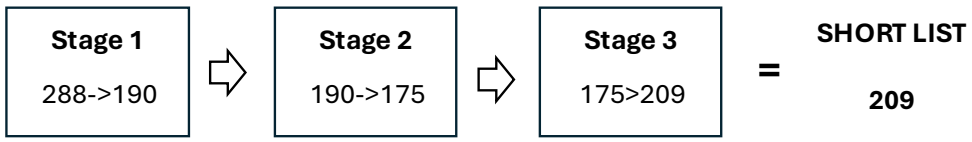

Figure 6. The short-list development process.

The first screening of the long list was regarding the focus of the piece. Items which were not focused on CIs, or at the very least a subset of these industries, were eliminated from the pool of papers. This step was conducted by first examining the title of the paper and, in case of doubts on its focus, reading the abstract to ensure the article had the necessary focus on CIs. After this first step, the number of papers was reduced to 190.

With this initial list, I proceeded to locate and download, when available, all the items. During the process, an additional 10 papers were deemed as unsuitable for the review—seven were wrongly categorised and were, in fact, conference papers; two were not specifically on knowledge management; and one was a book review. Out of 180, 5 were published in outlets to which I did not have access. I proceeded to request the full text from the authors; none of them, unfortunately, agreed to provide this.

The remaining 175 items were read one by one and, as defined in the objectives, those that did not specifically focus on knowledge transfer or management activities in CIs were filtered out. While conducting this thorough screening of the literature, I also proceeded to analyse the sources of all the 175 pieces of research. I also treated two pieces of research differently due to their potential relevance for this research. First, Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018) was considered a key source due to it being the most notable effort to conduct a literature review on the topic of knowledge in CIs; all the sources in the article were individually reviewed. Second, the Oxford

Handbook of Creative Industries (Jones et al. 2015b) is a key compilation of CI articles, including a few by the most prominent authors in the field (e.g. Jason Potts, Robert DiFillippi, Barbara Townley, Stuart Cunningham, Paul Hirsch, and Andy Pratt), and all chapters were read. After this review, the final pool of papers with an alleged focus on knowledge transfer/management activities in CIs, labelled 'short-list', amounted to 209 papers.

A first immediate finding, which confirmed what had already unfolded during this research process, was the limited number of articles that specifically focus on knowledge transfer activities in CIs as understood in this research. Even after the screening phases described above, reading the selected pieces made it evident that a majority of the selected papers did not explicitly focus on knowledge-transfer activities, even when approached through a broader lens. The final number of papers which did so, at least to a certain extent, was 58. Moreover, as expected, very few of the papers specifically concentrated or even mentioned freelancers (c.f. Lee 2015; Tempest 2009), and references to customer knowledge were limited to very few studies (e.g. Collinge and Staines 2009; Kalogerakis et al. 2010; Sanders 2002).The variety of journals and publishers, summarised in **Table 4**, provides an idea of how overarching the topic is, with only nine outlets having more than one paper on the topic.

Table 4. Journals with more than one article included in the literature review.

Outlet	Number of occurrences
The Oxford Handbook of Creative Industries	6
International Journal of Cultural Policy	3
Industry and Higher Education	2
Industry and Innovation	2
Arts and Humanities in Higher Education	2
Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space	2
The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society	2
Creative Industries Journal	2
Journal of Knowledge Management	2

The results of this literature review and recommendations for future research are presented in section 2.2.2.

2.2.2 Knowledge management and transfer in CIs

The main topics identified in this systematic literature review, selected references per theme, and key insights are summarised in **Table 5** and described thereafter.

Table 5. Summary of articles in the literature review.

Theme	Subtopics	Selected studies	Key insights
Education institutions and knowledge transfer to younger generations	Educating the younger generation Knowledge sharing between higher education institutions (HEIs) and CIs	Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) Colapinto and Porlezza (2012) Ferguson (2014) Gu and O'Connor (2019) Harte et al. (2019) Rodríguez-Gulias et al. (2020) Turnbull et al. (2012)	• Universities are at the heart of knowledge production systems and play a key role as originators of knowledge, education of creative workers, and application of knowledge through venture creation (e.g. incubators or CIs originated as university spin-offs) (e.g. Rodríguez-Gulias et al. 2020) • Importance of curriculum design to ensure graduates have the appropriate skills and competencies (e.g. Turnbull et al. 2012). • Higher education institutions play an important role in knowledge transfer/sharing in creative clusters yet this transfer is limited due to cognitive distance, lack of common knowledge and understanding, and different languages (e.g. Harte et al. 2019)
Creative workers	Codification of tacit knowledge Educating the younger generation Role of intermediaries in knowledge transfer	Harte et al. (2019) Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018, 2019) O'Connor (2015) Svejenova et al. (2015) Tempest (2009) Vicentini and Nasta (2017)	• Tacit knowledge in the mind of creative workers is a main ingredient and source of competitive advantage in CIs (e.g. Manfredi-Latilla 2018, 2019) • Role of mentorship, apprenticeship, and learning on the job for knowledge transfer for educating the younger generations of creative workers (e.g. Vicentini and Nasta 2017) • Codification of knowledge plays a critical role in generating material for educating the new generation of creative workers (e.g. Manfredi-Latilla 2018, 2019) • Traditional CI intermediaries (as described in section 2.1.2) but also higher education institutions, and their industry liaison offices and incubators, play a critical role in translating knowledge and linking producers and clients (e.g. Harte et al. 2019) • CIs rely on key knowledge relationships and intermediaries, as they bring together diverse contributors and expertise and connect the originators of novel ideas with the consumers of novel experiences (e.g. O'Connor 2015)

Theme	Subtopics	Selected studies	Key insights
Creative industries clusters, cities, and spaces	Knowledge sharing/transfer potential of clusters Knowledge transfer between creative industries and other industries Policy building Urban planning/ development Creation of shared spaces for knowledge transfer	Banks et al. (2002) Bakhshi and McVittie (2009) Brindley (2008) Chapain and De Propris (2009) Comunian et al. (2015) Felton et al. (2010) Flew (2010) He and Gebhardt (2018) Innocenti and Lazzeretti (2019) O'Connor (2004) Plum and Hassink (2014) Prince (2010) Schüßler and Sydow (2015) Weller (2007) Watson (2008)	• CI clusters play a critical role in knowledge transfer and sharing among themselves but also between CIs and other industries (e.g. Bakhshi and McVittie 2009; Chapain and De Propris 2009; Felton et al. 2010) • Urban planning, location choices, and agglomeration of CIs are means for urban regeneration (Plum and Hassink 2014). • Rich urban environments have a special type of knowledge, a buzz, and the ability to stockpile knowledge, traditions of memories, and act as a source of inspiration (e.g. O'Connor 2004). • There is a strong emphasis on policy-building to develop CI clusters (e.g. Prince 2010) • Spatial proximity positively affects tacit knowledge exchange, but international connection is critical for CI clusters—for example, global pipelines (e.g. Watson 2008) • Importance of shared spaces (i.e. HEIs, libraries, or events) as arenas to facilitate knowledge transfer and foster a sense of belonging (e.g. Brindley 2008; Comunian et al. 2015) • (Informal) Networks are used for the development of knowledge and as a means for knowledge transfer (Banks et al. 2002)
Knowledge management and project-based organisations	Communities Boundary objects/ spammers/shakers Project-based organisations Organisational memory and creative workers	Cohendet and Simon (2007) Collinge and Staines (2009) DeFillippi and Arthur (1998) Ensor et al. (2001) Gateau and Simon (2016) Knight and Harvey (2015) Parmentier and Mangematin (2014) Pershina et al. (2019) Ordanini et al. (2008) Souni et al. (2016) Vinodrai and Keddy (2015) Watson (2008)	• There is a wide use of boundary objects, spammers, and shakers for knowledge sharing and integration (e.g. Gateau and Simon 2016) • Communities are critical for informal (tacit) knowledge sharing (e.g. Ensor et al. 2001) • Relational proximity as even more relevant than spatial proximity for knowledge exchange (e.g. Watson 2008) • Need for project-based organisations to reconcile temporary creative workers and organisational memory without negatively impacting creative freshness (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Ordanini et al. 2008; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015)

Theme	Subtopics	Selected studies	Key insights
Typology of knowledge and customer knowledge	Varied categorisations of knowledge types Client /user/customer knowledge	Cacciatori et al. (2012) Collinge and Staines (2009) Hauge et al. (2018) Kalogerakis et al. (2010) Sanders (2002) Tempest (2009)	• Different typologies of knowledge are used to categorise knowledge in the creative industries (e.g. Collinge and Staines 2009; Plum and Hassink 2014; Tempest 2009) • Knowledge in the creative industries is mostly symbolic and synthetic (e.g. Hauge et al. 2018) • Client/user/customer knowledge is under-researched and limited to a few pieces of research (Collinge and Staines 2009; Kalogerakis et al. 2010; Sanders 2002)

As evident from **Table 5**, articles in this systematic literature review were clustered into five different categories: (1) education institutions and knowledge to the younger generation; (2) creative workers; (3) creative industries clusters, cities, and spaces; (4) knowledge management and project-based organisation; and (5) typology of knowledge and customer knowledge.

As a first step that can shed some light on what constitute future streams of research, I performed a short analysis on publication dates with the aim to identify the most contemporary topics. As a starting point, it is evident that there were no articles before 2000. This is very much in line with the findings of Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018), who also concluded that 2000 was the first time scholars studied the concepts of creative industry and knowledge-based economy.

Specifically addressing the main themes summarised in **Table 5**, the core of the research focusing on HEIs and clusters is clearly clustered around the change of the 2000-2010 decade (cf. Gu and O'Connor 2019; Innocenti and Lazzeretti 2019; respectively). In contrast, interest in the topic of creative workers appears to have been covered more recently (e.g. Gateau and Simon 2016; Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018, 2019; Vicentini and Nasta 2017). The topic of management of CIs is more widespread over time (Cohendet and Simon 2007; Collinge and Staines 2009; Ensor et al. 2001; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014; Pershina et al. 2019; Souni et al. 2016), although, as we will see, its focus might have changed over time (e.g. separation of artistic/economic activities vs. integration). Lastly, the topic of customer/client/user knowledge in CIs was limited to only a few studies (Collinge and Staines 2009; Kalogerakis et al. 2010; Sanders 2002).

This chapter now continues with individual examinations of each of the categories, including suggestions for future research.

2.2.2.1 Education institutions and knowledge transfer to younger generations

The first topic that quickly emerged from the literature review was the role of education institutions in preparing the younger generation for jobs in CIs, often labelled knowledge transfer or knowledge spillovers (e.g. Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009, Breznitz and Noonan 2018; Gu and O'Connor 2019; Long 2017; Roodhouse 2009; Turnbull et al. 2012), as well as the role of these institutions in knowledge sharing with CIs (Comunian et al. 2015; Ferguson 2014).

A majority of the discussions in this category revolved around curriculum development, education design, skills development and policy (e.g. Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Turnbull et al. 2012) as well as the important role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in creative clusters (e.g. Ferguson 2014). In addition, as we will soon see in 2.2.2.2, these HEIs also contribute to the literature focusing

on the role of CI intermediaries and their role in knowledge sharing/transfer (e.g. Colapinto and Porlezza 2012; Harte et al. 2019; Hauge et al. 2018). Overall, the role of these institutions in CIs is a prominent focus of research and was also found to be a guiding theme in a substantial number of studies which were not selected for this literature review, as they did not specifically focus on knowledge (e.g. Carey and Naudin 2006; Gong and Hassink 2017; Pettinger et al. 2018).

With regard to the knowledge transfer to younger generations, in addition to the stream of research on education institutions, the work of Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018, 2019) in the arts and crafts organisations calls for special attention. They emphasised tacit knowledge transfer among craftsmen as well as between other craftsmen and future craftsmen. Mentorship and apprenticeship as well as ad hoc (video) repositories and procedures were some of the tools used to codify and foster knowledge transfer and act as a source for achieving competitive advantage (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019). Similar findings were presented by Vicentini and Nasta (2017) as they analysed the production of music and TV drama series. Vicentini and Nasta (2017) categorised workers in these productions as belonging to either a subset of old-timers—with years of experience and sufficient knowledge of their work—and new-timers, who do not possess sufficient knowledge to do their job. These new-timers are expected to acquire the knowledge for their tasks through self-learning, which, at least in the beginning, involves accessing the knowledge of old-timers (Vicentini and Nasta 2017). In a similar manner, the advertising industry focuses on informal mentoring and learning on the job and considers these approaches to be more relevant than formal training (Ensor et al. 2001). Similarly, in the film industry, learning on the job is the most common approach to learning (e.g. DeFillippi and Arthur 1998).

Within this category, one suggestion for further research would be to integrate other research streams into the topic of training and educating the younger generation. In similar efforts to the work of Vicentini and Nasta (2017), exploring specific knowledge transfer between organisations and freelancers, and among freelancers themselves, is a promising under-researched area due to the relevancy of freelancers in the field and the overall evidence of the importance of on-the-job and informal learning. This topic is discussed in a few of the articles on freelancers in CIs (e.g. Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009); however, approaching this topic from a knowledge transfer perspective could shed light on the specific mechanisms employed and extend the work of, for example, Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2019) to self-employed temporary workers.

2.2.2.2 Creative workers

Creative workers are at the core of CIs and their knowledge and overall importance are extensively researched (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Gateau and Simon 2016; Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018, 2019; Svejenova et al. 2015; Tempest 2009; Turnbull et al. 2012).

As we have seen, more experience workers play a crucial role in educating the younger generations (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Ensor et al. 2001; Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019; Vicentini and Nasta 2017), but creative workers are regularly employed as freelancers (Banks et al. 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Mould et al. 2014). In this regard, Tempest (2009) explored what TV production firms can do to enhance knowledge sharing from temporary workers. The main reflection was that, even to this date, firms are being told that in the knowledge age, their workers are a key resource; however, at the same time, and particularly in CIs, increasingly flexible arrangements, with, for example, freelancers, are making workers a more peripheral, transient, and mobile resource (Tempest 2009). In this context, knowledge sharing between flexible workers and the firm is rooted in genuine mutual gain and organisations combining temporary workers with more enduring learning relationships appear to be more successful in creating an organisational memory (Tempest 2009). These organisations utilise a variety of knowledge attachment relationships (Tempest 2009) that enable them to create this organisational memory (Walsh and Ungson 1991) and retain and retrieve ideas from the past to create innovative solutions. Overall, the impact of flexible work arrangements on knowledge development and creation has been a key concern in the literature on CIs (e.g. Caves 2000; DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Gateau and Simon 2016).

A different type of creative workers—intermediaries—are also known to play a key role in the CI sector (Breznitz and Noonan 2018; Colapinto and Porlezza 2012; Harte et al. 2019; Hauge et al. 2018; O'Connor 2015). For knowledge transfer, intermediaries play a critical role as enablers of the key knowledge relationships and interfaces CIs use to bring together diverse contributors and expertise (e.g. Caves 2000; Jeffcutt 2004). CIs connect the originators of novel ideas with the consumers of novel experiences (Caves 2000), and intermediaries play a mediating role between producers and their clients and link actors from different fields (O'Connor 2015). In the process, intermediaries actively transform the knowledge that is being transferred (O'Connor 2015).

Similarly, as a different type of intermediary, HEIs also play a critical role in knowledge transfer (e.g. Colapinto and Porlezza 2012; Harte et al. 2019). As an example, Colapinto and Porlezza (2012) studied the applicability of the quadruple helix model and systems theory to creative clusters, thereby emphasising the role of university incubators in sharing knowledge and building networks. Harte et al.

(2019) indicated that HEI's industry liaison offices reduce the cognitive distance between CIs and HEIs by acting as language, and analytic and synthetic knowledge brokers.

With regard to suggestions for further research, the role of HEIs as intermediaries on knowledge transfer and as originators of knowledge, away from educational programmes, is of definite interest. In their study of university CI spin-offs, Rodríguez-Gulias et al. (2020) relatively recently emphasised the role of universities as intermediaries of knowledge transfer in CIs and how it relates to their 'third mission' to focus on enhancing their technology transfer and commercialisation of academic research (Mould et al. 2008). Moreover, acknowledging that intermediaries play an important role in knowledge transfer in CIs (O'Connor 2015), some authors (Breznitz and Noonan 2018; Colapinto and Porlezza 2012; Harte et al. 2019) have recently, albeit briefly, touched upon the role of universities as intermediaries for the creative economy. More empirical work on this intermediary role and universities as originators of CI spin-offs is needed to ensure that the difficulties (e.g. Hauge et al. 2018) arising from these collaborations are identified and addressed.

In addition, as previously acknowledged in the literature on CIs (Protogerou et al. 2017), a large majority of research—included in but also beyond this review—focused on the macro, national, local, or regional levels (c.f. Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019; Tempest 2009). There is, to this date, a need to move from the macro level to what occurs at the micro-level in CIs (Protogerou et al. 2017; Rodríguez-Gulias et al. 2020); moreover, if knowledge truly begins with the individual (Nonaka 1991; Stejskal and Hajek 2019), more research is needed to unveil the internal processes related to creative workers' knowledge transfer.

Specifically, and even though freelancers are considered in a few of the articles covered in this literature review (e.g. Tempest 2009) they are, once again, looked at from a company perspective—for example, how their knowledge can be utilised. Despite some attempts (e.g. Lee 2015), specific research investigating these freelancers' knowledge-related activities, as their own micro-enterprises, is lacking. This dissertation will partially address this limitation by analysing how freelancers conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes in CIs.

Furthermore, there is a need to move the discussion from unidirectional knowledge transfer, from freelancers towards companies (e.g. Tempest 2009), to research acknowledging different transfer flows. More specifically, there is a need to investigate bi-directional knowledge transfer activities between freelancers and organisations and to focus on how they are implemented and how they can be mutually beneficial. In this regard, the concept of *boundary practice*, discussed in 2.2.2.4, could be a relevant theoretical construct (Gateau and Simon 2016). To

conclude, and as already mentioned, exploring knowledge-transfer activities among freelancers as well could also be a potential avenue for research.

2.2.2.3 Creative industries clusters, cities, and spaces

Knowledge-transfer activities are both situated and networked—sustained by diverse communities, project-based hybrid/virtual organisations, cultural quarters, or digital media hubs (Jeffcutt 2004). Creative enterprises access development knowledge and expertise through informal networks (Jeffcutt 2004) and, overall, networks are highlighted as a means for knowledge transfer (Lee 2015) Specifically, clusters, spaces, cities, and communities are of critical importance for CIs (e.g. Ensor et al. 2001; Lange 2008; c.f. Höllen et al. 2020).

A substantial area of CI literature investigates the potential of CI clusters for knowledge transfer and sharing (e.g. Apitzsch and Piotti 2012; Felton et al. 2010) and how knowledge is transferred between creative and other industries (e.g. Bakhshi and McVittie 2009; Chapain and De Propris 2009). Despite some criticism of certain (Chinese) CI clusters having 'failed to achieve important clustering functions (such as having access to knowledge and technology)' (Zheng 2011, 3577), the clustering of creative industries is a clearly identified research stream (Gong and Hassink 2017 for a review). Even studies that do not focus specifically on clustering, such as the already mentioned studies by Manfredi-Latilla et al. (2018, 2019), highlight the important relationship of the organisation with the territory where it is located.

A large number of studies within the CI clusters literature have approached the topic from a policy-building perspective (e.g. O'Connor 2004; Prince 2010) or have focused on urban planning and/or development (e.g. Plum and Hassink 2014). Regarding the latter, the interest and the long-standing tradition on urban planning and development may be related to the concept of CIs first emerging in the late 1990s as a model of post-industrial development coupled with urban regeneration (Cunningham and Potts 2015). Similarly, regarding the former, the focus on policy-building comes as little surprise because CIs have been regarded *a policy invention* (Hermes et al. 2017) and the UK DCMS definition of creative industries was purposefully meant to steer policy strategies and actions towards these industries (Chapain and De Propris 2009). Overall, the topic of location of clusters and location choices is a strong research stream in CIs and it is captured in this review with the studies that focus on knowledge transfer (e.g. He and Gebhardt 2014, O'Connor 2004; Watson 2008).

One subset of studies on the theme of creative industries clusters revolves around the need to create 'shared spaces', also known as 'third spaces' or 'places', to facilitate knowledge transfer (e.g. Brindley 2008; Comunian et al. 2015). In CIs,

'place' is frequently taken to be the city due to the knowledge effects it provides and the critical role it plays in learning and innovation through tacit, locally embedded skills and know-how (O'Connor 2004).

These cities have a *special type of knowledge* fuelled by dense transactional flows of information, tacit local traditions and practices, local scene, local cultures and networks, skills, know-how, the intensity of human contact, and the city life itself (O'Connor 2004). Cities are regarded as having a *local buzz*, defined as the 'frequently used networks of information and communication developed through face-to-face contact within a particular geographic cluster' (Watson 2008, 13). According to these views, the city is the 'vibrant metropolis where innovative consumption meets ear-to-the-ground production; where the ideas, skills, rivalry, part-time jobs, support networks and distribution outlets of the "innovative milieu", the "art world" and the "creative field", come together; and where creative work gets done' (O'Connor 2004, 4).

Nevertheless, and despite a consensus on the importance of clustering for CIs and their link with increased knowledge transfer, there is also a stream of literature that emphasises that clusters are not sufficient by themselves (O'Connor 2004; Watson 2008). Regardless of the importance of cities, market-leading CI innovative firms appear to be part of internationally distributed system of innovations (O'Connor 2004) and, in certain cases, rural environments might have greater advantages than those of the cities (Höllen et al. 2020). Moreover, successful clusters are increasingly reliant on the access to a range of formal knowledge—regarding global markets, larger companies, clients or distribution—and an overemphasis on tacit, locally embedded knowledge and local traditions can have damaging conservative effects (O'Connor 2004). This reality is also explored from the perspective of *global pipelines* as a conceptualisation of the globally stretched networks of knowledge transfer that occur simultaneously with, and are complementary to, local learning networks (Watson 2008).

Indeed, a large component of the knowledge inputs to local production may be drawn from outside the local cluster (Watson 2008), and access to local and international networks of knowledge and expertise acts as a clear enabler for success in CIs (Jeffcutt 2004). This reality was covered by Watson (2008) in his study of clustering of recorded music industry firms in London. One of the key findings of his study, which focused specifically on the need to balance internal cluster tacit knowledge and connection to global networks, regards the city in itself as providing an advantageous position within the intensified circuits of the global space economy (Watson 2008). In this regard, the article also focuses on knowledge management strategies to transfer knowledge across large geographical distances in relation to the internationalisation possibilities for artists (Watson 2008).

In addition to cities, Brindley (2008) emphasised the role of libraries as facilitators of knowledge transfer in CIs. Specifically, libraries can act as *spaces* where creative conversations and interactions can take place (Brindley 2008). Comunian et al. (2015) reached similar conclusions when discussing the role of HEIs as platforms, 'shared or third spaces', for knowledge transfer in CIs. Overall, locations, and the spaces within them, are, by themselves, an important source of knowledge as 'creative workers consciously or unconsciously absorb elements of the local culture and aggregate this knowledge into workable ideas' (Vinodrai and Keddy 2015, 260). Specifically, rich urban environments offer creative workers the ability to stockpile knowledge and traditions of memories as a source of inspiration (Vinodrai and Keddy 2015); in general, the topic of proximity playing a role in increased (tacit) knowledge exchange is widely acknowledge in the literature (e.g. Hauge et al. 2018; Rodriguez-Gulías et al. 2020).

This proximity materialises in these *spaces* in which face-to-face contact, networking, and codified and tacit knowledge transfer and spillovers can take place (He and Gebhardt 2014; Watson 2008); however, the context in which knowledge operates is crucial (Watson 2008). As an example, due to the spatial proximity of music companies in London to their competition, creative knowledge can be gained by observation and transfer by freelance skilled labour (Watson 2008). Conversely, competition driven by spatial proximity hinders knowledge transfer (Watson 2008). In this regard, Watson (2008) highlights how the community of practice concept challenges the primary role of spatial proximity in knowledge transfer and suggests the concept of 'relational proximity' as an alternative (Watson 2008).

Regarding this last topic, and as a suggestions for further research, there could be a need to further explore the intersection between communities and clusters in a similar manner as initially covered by Watson (2008). A reconciling approach to the topics of spatial and cognitive proximity, and how both are likely to positively influence tacit knowledge transfer, could be a potential first avenue for future research.

2.2.2.4 Knowledge management and project-based organisations

Overall, in CIs, there appears to be an agreement on the collective/networked/social nature of knowledge, with certain authors going as far as to state that 'knowledge in the creative industries is constituted in social interaction itself and it is from that engagement that value is derived' (Brindley 2008, 27). With collaboration with external actors being of critical importance for CIs, firms' boundaries need to become more permeable to knowledge flow (Gateau and Simon 2016). In this regard, there is abundant CI literature on organisational knowledge management, team knowledge, and the role of knowledge in accelerating innovation and creative

processes (e.g. Bélanger et al. 2016; Ensor et al. 2001; Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018, 2019); certain authors (Ensor et al. 2001 on advertising industries) go as far as to suggest CIs can be potential benchmarks on knowledge management for other organisations.

As we have already discussed, some of the knowledge that directly influences the success of CIs is found in the minds of creative workers (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018, 2019) but external knowledge and communities are also relevant and extensively researched (e.g. Cohendet and Simon 2007; Ensor et al. 2001). Specifically, communities of practice, as social networks that are formed within an organisation to assist in the transfer of knowledge, have been identified as critical to foster creativity and innovation in CIs (Ensor et al. 2001). These communities stretch knowledge transfer beyond scale-defined boundaries owing to their members having a shared social context, which is often developed in informal and social ways (e.g. Banks et al. 2002). These communities enable informal knowledge transfer even among competing firms (Watson 2008).

In addition to communities, boundary spanners and, similarly, boundary shakers are of particular importance for managing knowledge across boundaries (Gateau and Simon 2016). These boundary shakers and spammers initiate and stimulate knowledge flow and play a crucial role in translating new knowledge into the company (Gateau and Simon 2016). Furthermore, a special type of boundary object (e.g. Carlile 2004), *boundary practice,* was introduced by Gateau and Simon (2016) as a means that enables sharing knowledge and nurture creative and innovative capabilities by balancing outside-in and inside-out dynamics. This *boundary practice* can be defined 'as a joint set of activities—involving members of the organisation and external participants—including learning, training, and reflecting on the specific and evolving identity of the individuals and the hybrid group' and is of critical importance for managing knowledge flows with, for example, outside communities of knowledge (Gateau and Simon 2016, 9-10).

These knowledge flows often occur in the context of CIs as project-led organisations—a firm that uses projects in a growing part of its operation—and, even more so, project-based organisations—as organisations in which the scope and the duration of the project may extend over almost the entire organisation (e.g. Cacciatori et al. 2012; Hobday 2000). Projects have been the de-facto organisation structure for CIs because of their characteristics (see section 2.1.2) and because they are the organisational form of choice for new product development (Cacciatori et al. 2012).

Research on CI project-based organisations regarding knowledge transfer focus mostly on how their structures enable them to *forget* previous knowledge (Cacciatori et al. 2012) and foster the generation of new knowledge (DeFillippi 2015). Projects with actors who do not work together regularly are particularly effective at fostering knowledge exploration and discovery (DeFillippi 2015; Perretti and Negro 2007);

moreover, for example, in industries such as advertising or film making, the discontinuity of projects is valued as a means to respond to the creative imperative of *freshness* (Cacciatori et al. 2012).

As an example of how these project-based organisations deal with knowledge creation, management, and transfer, Ordanini et al. (2008) focused on the record label EMI and on how internal new product development (NPD) project teams are created for the release of new music. Among their findings was the fact that project-based organisations are effective at bridging cognitive distance—that is, the differences in the forms of thought that are typical of different organisational units—to stimulate knowledge socialisation (Ordanini et al. 2008). Similarly, in their study of CIs and HEIs cooperation, Hauge et al. (2018) emphasised the importance of cognitive proximity, defined as the extent through which knowledge-exchange actors share a common language or vocabulary (Boschma 2005), and how a cognitive gap creates barriers to collaboration.

In general, on the one hand, project-based CIs are expected to reuse knowledge previously gained in other projects (Ordanini et al. 2008; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015) as knowledge disperses within the organisation after a task has been completed (Vicentini and Nasta 2017). Moreover, as already mentioned, there is a need for CIs to develop an organisational memory (Tempest 2009), and the usage of old elements in new innovations has been regarded as positive in certain subcategories of CIs—for example, haute cuisine (Messeni Petruzzelli and Savino 2014). On the other hand, this memory is considered to have no place in some settings—for example, film production (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998); moreover, some empirical work has highlighted the limited use of old knowledge in CIs (Cacciatori et al. 2012).

With regard to this last topic, in their comparative study, Cacciatori et al. (2012) highlighted that only 36.4% of creative projects in their sample incorporated learning transferred through codification, compared to 59% of high-tech and 49% of engineering projects. Overall, there appears to be an agreement on the need to balance freshness and creativity unconstrained by the past, with the benefits of learning from experience and previous projects in the form of codified knowledge (in the form of text, drawings, templates, models, and similar media) (Cacciatori et al. 2012). As an example, in the advertising business, it is critical for account managers to have a solid understanding of their clients as well as their clients' business and their ways of working in order to respond to their needs (Cacciatori et al. 2012). In this regard, projects with more systematic and formalised project management routines, and with actors who are used to working together, perform better at using formalised and codified knowledge from past projects (DeFillippi 2015; DeFillippi et al. 2007).

To complete the review of papers in this section, it is important to highlight the efforts of certain authors to reconcile the literature on knowledge management,

project-based organisations, and the one on communities, by analysing CIs as having two levels of architecture—the hard architecture of projects and organisations and the soft architecture of communities and networks (Cohendet and Simon 2007). These communities provide indispensable social infrastructure for professional socialisation; they are arenas for an open exchange of ideas, for collective problem-solving, and to permit critical debate among professional colleagues (DeFillippi et al. 2007). Soft architecture, put briefly, generates new ideas; and hard architecture is more geared towards making money from these ideas (DeFillippi et al. 2007).

With regard to suggestions for further research, on the topic of knowledge management in CIs, there has been extensive focus on the integration of creative workers' knowledge into the organisations, particularly acknowledging the project-based nature of CIs (e.g. DeFillippi 2015). Most of the focus has been on either the integration of knowledge from temporary workers (e.g. Tempest 2009), employees' on-the-job learning (e.g. Vicentini and Nasta 2017), codification of knowledge (e.g. Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018, 2019), or how organisational teams deal with knowledge transfer and management in internal teams (e.g. Ordanini 2008). Little is said about the specific mechanisms for integration of the diverse sources of knowledge needed for innovation in CIs (Cohendet and Simon 2007; Plum and Hassink 2014; Potts and Cunningham 2008, Powell and Dodd 2007; Protogerou et al. 2017). Svejenova et al. (2015) touched upon the topic of the importance of collaborating with external partners in their study of business models of haute cuisine, yet specific focus on the mechanisms that CI project-based organisations employ to integrate diverse sources of knowledge is lacking.

On a related topic, there still appears to be room for further research on the topic of how project-based organisations develop company memory while maintaining creative freshness. The findings of research on this topic point towards the need to maintain a balance between company memory and fresh unconstraint creativity (Cacciatori et al. 2012); however, further research on the most effective organisational forms and mechanisms appeared to be lacking for specific sub-sectors of CIs and for CIs as a sector overall.

Furthermore, and once again to emphasise the need to move from the macro to the micro-level in CIs (Protogerou et al. 2017; Rodríguez-Gulias et al. 2020), and despite the focus on management of CIs (e.g. Cohendet and Simon 2007; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014; Souni et al. 2016) and on creative workers (e.g. Gateau and Simon 2016; Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019; Tempest 2009), more research is needed beyond the macro organisational level. Research on topics such as how to codify creative workers' tacit knowledge or how to integrate their knowledge into the organisation remain only partially investigated (c.f. Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2018, 2019), particularly when it comes to incorporating knowledge from external actors (c.f. Tempest, 2009).

2.2.2.5 Typology of knowledge and customer knowledge

As a last category, a few papers focused on different types of knowledge in CIs as symbolic (creativity-based), synthetic (engineering-based), and analytical (science-based) (Asheim 2007; Plum and Hassink 2014). Cacciatori et al. (2012) added procedural knowledge, as the codification of knowledge regarding how to perform a role and how to interface with others, to the typology. Tempest (2009) also touched upon this topic from the perspective of the different types of knowledge a flexible worker can contribute to an organisation as specialist knowledge, contextual knowledge, and talent knowledge. Regarding this theme, the work of Plum and Hassink (2014) using Hamburg's video game industries is of particular relevance due to its focus on knowledge networks but also because it touches upon many of the topics mentioned in this review—for example, clusters, communities, and the role of HEIs. Moreover, in the cooperation between CIs and HEIs, Hauge et al. (2018) emphasised that CIs are heavily based on symbolic and synthetic knowledge and that they face barriers caused by lack of common language and competencies. In this latter case, industry liaison offices (ILOs) were highlighted as potential brokers of analytic and synthetic knowledge (Hauge et al. 2018)

To conclude, specific references to customer, client, or user knowledge are rather scarce and dispersed. A few of the exceptions regard the work of Collinge and Staines (2009) in which they emphasised the importance of this type of knowledge in the knowledge-based economy and raise how, already then, insufficient attention had been given to the relationship between consumer and producer knowledge and how they complement each other in the creation of knowledge-based products and services. In a different field, participatory design, Sanders (2002) explored the topic of user's tacit and explicit knowledge as a source of customers' needs and wants and covered a few actionable tools on how to utilise them. She emphasised that, with listening, we only hear what people want to tell us and can express in words (explicit knowledge) (Sanders 2002). Observing what they do and seeing what they use, provide us with observable information; however, if we truly want to identify current and future needs, we need to go to the realm of what people think, know, dream, and feel (all tacit knowledge) (Sanders 2002).

Regarding this last category, as already introduced, the topic of customer knowledge has received only anecdotal coverage and mostly from the sub-category of design industries (e.g. Kalogerakis et al. 2010; Sanders 2002). This dissertation aims to address this limitation by specifically researching this topic not only from the subcategory of design, but with more holistic data covering a wider range of CIs. To begin doing so, this dissertation now continues with a short review of the literature on customer involvement in CIs.

2.3 Customer involvement and speed of development in CIs

2.3.1 Customer involvement in CIs

Companies need new knowledge to remain competitive (Stejskal and Hajek 2019) yet, for decades already, this knowledge has become more diverse, as markets have converged and industries collided (Powell and Grodal 2004; Sawhney and Prandelli 2000). Companies' boundaries have needed to become more permeable to external knowledge flows (Chesbrough 2003; Chesbrough and Crowther 2006; Gateau and Simon 2016), as enterprises needed to co-operate with their partners and customers to create and acquire this much-needed knowledge (Cui and Wu 2016; Jiao et al. 2019; Rodriguez-Gulias et al. 2020; Sawhney and Prandelli 2000). Of specific importance to remain competitive has been the need to incorporate customer knowledge in product development processes because of the impact this involvement has on generating more innovative products (Dean et al. 2024; c.f. Cui and Wu 2017), enhancing the likelihood of success of the innovation process (Stojčić et al. 2024), increasing customers willingness to pay a premium price (Izogo et al. 2021), or potentially improving NPD cost performance (Li et al. 2019).

For the last couple of decades, the concept of customer involvement has evolved from an involvement built on the basis of information provision—in which a company would acquire customers' preferences, develop a product or service according to these preferences, and dispatch it (Etgar 2008)—towards 'a perspective of knowledge co-creation with the customers' (Sawhney and Prandelli 2000, 31). Listening to the voice of the customer (Griffin and Hauser 1993) began to be regarded as not being sufficient and we experienced the birth of a variety of terms related to this customer involvement, such as co-creation (e.g. Öberg and Grundström 2024 ; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004), co-development (Cui and Wu 2016; Dean et al. 2024), co-production (e.g. Etgar 2008; Lusch and Vargo 2006), and co-design (e.g. Pals et al. 2008; Sanders 2002). The variety of concepts and multiple definitions for a few of the terms caused the literature on the topic to be relatively fragmented.

Regardless of this fragmentation, the involvement of customers in development processes has been acknowledged as crucial in CIs (Banks et al. 2002; Caves 2003; Dempster 2006; DeFillippi et al. 2007; De Propris 2013; Goodman-Deane et al. 2010; Hartley 2008; Jeppesen and Molin 2003; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014; Quero and Ventura 2015; Sanders 2002; Schmidt et al. 2018; Tschang 2007) and can be recognised in subsectors as diverse as interactive advertising, television, and video games (DeFillippi 2015), media (Hartley 2009) or fashion (Marcella and Rowley 2015). The products and services developed in CIs have become more

complex and value creation more specialised and dispersed; in this context, sharing knowledge, building networks, and co-creation with consumers were already considered paramount over a decade ago (Colapinto and Porlezza 2012).

In the media industry, the creativity and dedication of amateur users with self-produced media content has been, for decades, disrupting the status quo once dominated by the large broadcasters (Hartley 2009). Specifically, in digital media, with business activities dispersed across social networks, the separation between producers and consumers has dissolved, thus prompting consumers to become producers (Collinge and Staines 2009) through self-made media and user-created content (e.g. Hartley 2009; Jeppesen and Molin 2003).

In the design field, clients have been regarded as a central piece of development processes (Goodman-Deane et al. 2010), and client and user-driven methods have been the norm (Sanders 2002). Clients are a key source of information in design (Goodman-Deane et al. 2010), and the products and services in CIs are grounded in user-centred approaches (Protogerou et al. 2017).

In the video game industry, sites which allow users and consumers to co-develop new products, services, and new markets in novel ways have been used for decades (DeFillippi et al. 2007; Jeppesen and Molin 2003). Users, often called video game players or gamers, are the experts in the field and their knowledge is widely used for game development (Cohendet and Simon 2007). Gamers can simultaneously be both users and developers (Jeppesen and Molin 2003; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014) and some of them become employees of video game studios themselves (Tschang 2007). In this field specifically, the involvement of customers through their own developed content has been critical to the speed of product development and it has demonstrated to extend product life (Jeppesen and Molin 2003).

In the music industry, there are also multiple examples of customer involvement (e.g. Flowers and Voss 2015; Jarvenpaa and Lang 2011; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014). For example, in the case of the NIN online community covered by Jarvenpaa and Lang (2011), this band offered its songs to its fans for remixing. With an objective to enhance the NIN brand and deepen its relationship with fans, the online community yielded 11,000 songs created based on the 100 shared with the community (Jarvenpaa and Lang 2011). Moreover, the band received inputs on what the fans might like, and fans felt an increased sense of belonging to the community (Jarvenpaa and Lang 2011). Similarly, a software for music notation called Sibelius is a proven example of how users can develop plug-ins to solve their own needs, make the plug-ins available for everyone, and, in so doing, help other users and increase the overall value of the software (Flowers and Voss 2015). User innovation is considered an integral part for Sibelius R&D, and allowing these developments is a recognition that certain users are likely to not have their needs covered by the programme and that they themselves may find ways to address them (Flowers and Voss 2015).

The importance of co-creation is such that the customer is regarded as the most important source of knowledge in certain studies of CIs (Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; c.f. Svejenova et al. 2015; Voss and Voss 2000) and certain creative workers identify themselves even more with their projects and/or clients than with their own employing organisations (Powell and Dodd 2007). Overall, innovation in CIs tends to occur in co-production with customers (De Propris 2013). At the same time, the fast pace of CIs (e.g. Hauge 2012; Hotho and Champion 2011; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015) calls for products to be brought to market at an accelerated speed (e.g. Banks 2010; DeFillippi 2015; Marcella and Rowley 2015).

2.3.2 Development speed and CIs

For decades, with user preferences changing rapidly (Delgado-Hernandez et al. 2007), companies have been expected to reduce the time required for developing and introducing their products in the market while ensuring quality and suitability to meet customer requirements (Leite et al. 2016). As product lifecycles became shorter and shorter, companies were forced to seek ways to reduce time-to-market, which is defined as the time between the initial concept and the market launch of their products (Graner and Mißler-Behr 2012; Harland and Uddin 2014; Menon et al. 2002).

Defined as 'the pace of activities between idea conception and product implementation' (Menon et al. 2002, 317), development speed is core to the competitive strategy of companies (Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero 2011; Wynarczyk 2013). Reducing product development time by accelerating development speed has enabled companies to achieve cost reductions, wider market coverage, and better corporate performance (Menon et al. 2002).

Despite these advantages, researchers and practitioners suggest that there may be potential trade-offs between new product development speed and other performance indicators (Chen et al. 2010). The challenge lies in developing products more quickly without compromising quality or skipping necessary steps (Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero 2011). In this context, it is being questioned whether faster development actually leads to new product development success in the first place (Cankurtaran et al. 2013).

With regard to CIs, it is evident that the demand for an increased development speed is also a constant for the sector and that cultural commodities are currently produced, circulated, and consumed at an ever-growing pace (Hauge 2012). The speed of the industries is accelerated and knowledge needs to be updated at an increasingly fast speed (Jiao et al. 2019) due to rapid shifts in consumer demand (Vinodrai and Keddy 2015). In the case of popular recorded music, consumer tastes change very rapidly (DeFillippi 2015) and fast-moving democratised digital

innovations play a rather important role in the overall music industry (Flowers and Voss 2015). Big budget films are very time-pressured (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998), and speed is regarded as core for digital creative industries (Leung and Bentley 2017). Similarly, the fashion industry is also in constant flux and requires flexibility and rapid response (Marcella and Rowley 2015). In this context, even craftsmanship needs to deal with the demands of increased velocity, shifting deadlines and tasks, time and budget constraints, and, overall, a logic where production is based on speed (Banks 2010).

In the field of video game development, SMEs have also been under severe pressure from ever shortening product lifecycles (Hotho and Champion 2011; Teipen 2008), a reality also experienced by the toy industry that has, for decades, been the subject of massive promotion and has consequently caused a shortening of the lifespans of blockbuster successes (Caves 2000). Similarly, in the field of advertising, the lead times for developing new advertising are shortening, in this case due to intense brand competition (DeFillippi 2015), which translates into immense and intense pressures within the sector (Ensor et al. 2001). The need for speed is even more urgent amid economic turbulence, when CIs need to swiftly decide when to break through with innovations (Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016). In general, in CIs, the timespan between the rise and fall of stardom is getting shorter (Currid-Halkett 2015).

The involvement of customers in the development has boosted product development speed, extended product life cycle, and influenced success in certain subcategories of CIs (e.g. computer game development) (Jeppesen and Molin 2003) and one could argue that conventional wisdom suggests a positive link between the speed of innovation and success. However, the limited literature on entry timing strategies in CIs presents mixed findings (Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016). Specifically, McKelvie and Wiklund (2008) found that in young media firms, introducing innovations to the market early grants creative businesses a first-mover advantage and enhances their ability to respond to customer demands. Conversely, Markides (2006) argues that in sectors such as music and book publishing, Hollywood movies, theatre plays, and art galleries; small pioneering firms frequently introduce innovations, while larger, second movers can wait and partner up or acquire them when it is time to consolidate the market. In this context, these larger firms can concentrate on refining the initial developments of the early movers and use their resources and their economies of scales (Markides 2006) with little risk, as described in 2.1.3.

Overall, while a relatively extensive number of articles—as referenced in the paragraph above—have touched upon the need for speed, little has been said about the implications of this accelerated speed in the final products in the creative industries. As introduced by Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans (2016), an accelerating

pace of change pervades the decisions regarding innovations in CIs; therefore, with accelerated speed being an industry requirement, there is a need to evaluate if there are any trade-offs. This research investigates this topic within the context of customer involvement in freelancer-led product development processes.

2.4 Synthesis

Academic research has investigated CIs for over 20 years (e.g. Caves 2000; Gouvea et al. 2021; Lampel and Germain, 2016; Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016; Stenholm et al. 2024) and the contribution of CIs to economic growth and employment is now widely recognised (e.g. Boix-Domenech et al. 2022; European Union Parliament, 2016; Hou et al. 2019).

CIs comprise a rather diverse and eclectic group of industries that have been clustered under one economic umbrella, often driven by political agendas and economic imperatives (e.g. Bridgstock 2011; Hermes et al. 2017; Jones et al. 2015a). The process of defining CIs has been labelled a 'definitional nightmare' (Clark 2009, 219), with some definitions including sectors such as software (UK DCMS, 2001), and with some authors going as far as to consider haute cuisine (Svejenova et al. 2015) and even the wine industry (Croidieu et al. 2016) as CIs.

The origin of the term traces back to Adorno and Horkheimer's (1972) critique of the 'culture industry', where art becomes commodified. Over time, CIs began to be placed along a symbolic and functional value spectrum (Kolsteeg 2014; O'Connor 2010). The terminology on how to label these industries converged towards 'cultural and creative industries' and thereafter to 'creative industries' (Kolsteeg 2014).

Despite the term creative industries becoming preferred (Christophers 2007; Foord 2008; Throsby 2010), various definitions—summarised in **Table 3**—and their related categorisation of what is and what is not a creative industry, remained (e.g. European Union Parliament 2016; UK DCMS 2001; UNCTAD 2008). This research uses the definition given by the British Department of Culture Media and Sports:

> Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. (UK DCMS 2001, 5)

These industries are difficult to differentiate from other industries due to their spillover effects and contributions to other sectors (Boix-Domenech and Rausell-Körster 2018; Long 2017), but they have characteristics that make them stand out from other industries, as evident in **Figure 3**. As an example of these characteristics, the creative industries have a *dual nature* and are located on a cultural–economic continuum (Caves 2000; Townley et al. 2009) that makes creative products'

aesthetic, but also functional, characteristics relevant (Hauge 2012). This creates a tension between artistic and economic logic (Gilson 2015) that is also shared with the creative workers who are located at the core of CIs (e.g. Manfredi-Latilla 2018, 2019). These workers have an artistic orientation (Caves 2000), and some have an art-for-art's-sake mentality (Caves 2003; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). In this context, a tension can arise between producing artistic relevant products and products for which there is a market (Chaston 2008; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006).

These creative workers operate in a labour market in which self-employment and temporary work are the norm (e.g. Bridgstock 2011; Watson 2012). The sector is also very fast-paced (Hauge 2012; Jiao et al. 2019; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015), a reality we see in music (Flowers and Voss 2015), video game development (Hotho and Champion 2011; Teipen 2008), fashion (Marcella and Rowley 2015), films (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998), digital creative industries (Leung and Bentley 2017), and even craftsmanship (Banks 2010). Moreover, a great majority of CIs are either small or medium sized (EY 2021; Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Protogerou et al. 2017) and are by default organised as project-based organisations (Tempest 2009; TSB 2009; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015). Overall, the CI labour market is characterised by low wages, long working hours, structured job insecurity, unusual high levels of mobility, creative workers' need to work part-time in addition to their work in CIs, highly unequal earnings and activity levels, and even discrimination, ageism, and exploitation (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Benhamou 2003; Caves 2000; Cohendet and Simon 2007; Hennekam 2015; Jones et al. 2004; Menger 2015; Peltoniemi 2015; Stenholm et al. 2024; Teipen 2008; Watson 2012).

Due to the market favouring self-employment, and with a great majority of companies organised as project-based organisations, freelancers are crucial for the sector (Abbasi et al. 2017; Banks et al. 2002; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013). Despite this importance and as depicted in **Table 1**, these freelancers have been relatively overlooked in CIs literature. I define freelancers in the following manner:

> Self-employed knowledge professionals ranging from engineers, consultants, writers, and information technology (IT) specialists through to members of liberal professions such as lawyers and accountants (Leighton 2015, 81).

A key resource for these freelancers and other actors in the field is knowledge, because the economic value of the industries operating in the field evolves through transfers of knowledge (Potts and Cunningham 2008). Knowledge transfer and ideas are regarded as the lifeblood of the sector and the basis for its continued economic success (Granger and Hamilton 2010). Moreover, the crucial role of knowledge is well documented in CIs such as media (Banks et al. 2002) or video game

development firms (Cohendet and Simon 2007; Plum and Hassink 2014). With majority of CI knowledge being personal, humane, and symbolic (Hauge et al. 2018; Lee 2017), previous studies have emphasised that knowledge transfer models applicable to other sectors may not be adequate for CIs (Brindley 2008; Colette 2008; Collinge and Staines 2009; Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Weller 2007).

In addition to knowledge, customer involvement is critical for CIs, and clients are considered inextricably linked to their creative processes (Banks et al. 2002). The importance of involving customers has been widely acknowledged in CIs, such as design-related industries (Goodman-Deane et al. 2010), musicians and record labels (Caves 2003), theatre productions (Dempster 2006), or video game development (Tschang 2007). Despite the importance of knowledge, the relevancy of customer involvement and indications that knowledge transfer might be conducted differently than in other sectors, literature on customer knowledge transfer in CIs remains rather limited (see **Table 5**).

Acknowledging all the above, the purpose of this research is to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes. This purpose is achieved by answering three research questions, presented below and described in **Table 2**:

RQ1: How are activities related to knowledge acquisition conducted by freelancers in the field of the creative industries?

RQ2: How does knowledge codification happen during co-development processes led by freelancers in the field of the creative industries?

RQ3: What are the main barriers to knowledge transfer between clients/freelancers in design development processes in the creative industries?

In order to answer these questions, the research described in Chapter 3 was conducted and the articles attached to this dissertation published as a result. This document continues now with this Chapter 3 in which the research methodology is described.

3 Methodology

In this chapter, the focus is on the methodological aspects of the dissertation. The specific methods used have already been explained in the three articles and, therefore, will not be covered extensively here. Rather, the aim is to draw attention to topics that were not covered in detail in the articles, including the philosophical standpoint, the overall research methodology, the entirety of the research process, data management and ethical aspects, and an evaluation of this research.

3.1 Critical realism as a philosophical standpoint

This research was conducted from a critical realism (CR) standpoint. Critical realism proposes that reality exists independently of our knowledge of it (Bhaskar 1998) or, in other words, that things exist even when they are not being observed. However, even though 'there exists a reality out there independent of observer', reality is socially constructed (Easton 2010, 120). Specifically, critical realism identifies the role of subjective knowledge of social actors as well as the existence of independent structures (Wynn and Williams 2012).

This duality enables critical realism to reconcile the ontological gap between the world and our understanding of it and to bridge the gap between positivist and interpretive approaches (Bhaskar 1989). Critical realism, as such, enables the sustaining of both (1) the social character of science and (2) the independence from science of the objects of scientific thought (Bhaskar 1975). Despite criticism of critical realism being too abstract or lacking empirical content, this philosophical standpoint has been widely adopted in the social sciences, particularly in the fields of sociology, political science, and economics (Danermark et al. 2002). On its own, it has become a viable philosophical paradigm for conducting social science research (Wynn and Williams 2012).

Further, this philosophical standpoint had an influence on shaping the research and how it was conducted. As a start, the very inception of the topic—which stemmed from previous work experience—already had a level of interpretation. This previous work experience appeared to be in conflict with existing theory and, as described by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), prompted an initial identification of an underlying assumption by which freelancers' knowledge-transfer activities were

implicitly regarded as equal to those of larger enterprises. Realising that there was a mismatch between empirical observations and existing theory triggered a process in which theorising became not a process of discovery but of conceptualisation (Sayer 1992). The aim of understanding the cases was brought about by working backwards from the events (Welch et al. 2011). At the same time, the very nature of the research called for investigating events in social environments in which thick descriptions of the cases, including actions and outcomes, needed to be analysed and provided (Wynn and Williams 2012). These complex social phenomena are not easily explained by simple cause-and-effect relationships and critical realism proved particularly useful due to its recognition of the role of emergent properties and the importance of context in shaping social phenomena.

Moreover, approaching this research from a critical realism philosophical standpoint had implications on the decisions regarding the research design and methodology. Specifically, and under the prism of critical realism, the overall aim was to understand (*verstehen*) how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes. This was done by focusing on the uniqueness of cases under study and not by attempting to find straightforward cause-and-effect relationships that would not have captured the complex reality of CIs and freelancers.

3.2 Research approach

As already introduced in section 2.1.2, CIs are an exceptionally diverse sector with a wide range of different activities (Innocenti and Lazzeretti 2019; Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016) and a highly fragmented nature (TSB 2009). Similarly, freelancers are a highly heterogeneous cluster (Blanchflower 2000; Knapp et al. 2021; Skrzek-Lubasińska and Szaban 2019); specifically in the creative industries, their self-employment can be influenced by push factors (e.g. necessity such insufficient family income, dissatisfaction with a salaried job, difficulty in finding work, or a need for more flexible work schedule) and/or pull factors (e.g. personal needs for independence, self-fulfilment, entrepreneurial drive or desire for wealth, social, status, or power) (Carey and Naudin 2006).

Despite freelancers and creative entrepreneurs being occasionally considered as one single entity in CIs (e.g. Koch et al. 2023; Stenholm et al. 2024), this equalisation might not be adequate for certain sub-sectors of the creative industries—for example, writing, recording, or performing—in which self-employment is often the only option (Coulson 2012). As an example, in the case of freelance musicians, they do not begin their career because of an entrepreneurial drive or to meet market demands, but out of their desire to be musicians (Coulson 2012). Furthermore, certain freelancers are self-employed due to age discrimination and limited employment

opportunities (Hennekam 2015). In brief, the overall motivation of these freelancers to be self-employed can be very close to those of entrepreneurs, but can also be related to needs and, hence, be very close to those of the unemployed (Earle and Sakova 2000; Coulson 2012; Hennekam 2015).

In this heterogeneous context, existing theories might not have adequately captured the complexity of the phenomenon (Creswell 2013) and, in line with the critical realism standpoint presented in 3.1, the focus was on particularisation, as the understanding (*verstehen*) of the uniqueness of the cases (Stake 2005). Due to these reasons, I decided to design this research as a qualitative exploratory study in which I could embrace the context, narratives, and personal engagement as part of the research (Stake 1995) to understand the particular rather than generate law-like explanations. This is also in keeping with the long-accepted view that quantitative measures might be 'utterly unsuitable for capturing the economic and symbolic value embedded in creative products or in a process where "creativity" occurs' (Granger and Hamilton 2010, 49; cf. Bridgstock 2011; Cacciatori et al. 2012; Farr-Wharton et al. 2015; Höllen et al. 2020; Hou et al. 2019; Koch et al. 2023; Konrad 2015; Müller et al. 2009; Protogerou et al. 2017; Stenholm et al. 2024).

Specifically, this research was conducted as a case study research. As identified by Wynn and Williams (2012), and supported by others (Easton 2010), the case study method has been regarded as the best approach for critical realism. A case study 'involves investigating one or a small number of social entities or situations about which data are collected using multiple sources of data' (Easton 2010, 119) and, in this case, a case study with multiple cases was implemented with the aim to obtain a broad and deep understanding of customer knowledge transfer by freelancers in the field of the creative industries. Overall, the objective was to generate theory through a deep understanding of the cases and as 'an explanation of observed reality' (Bryman 2001, 5) and, in the spirit of critical realism, reconciling understanding with explaining (Welch et al. 2011).

3.3 Research process

Although the findings of this research are presented in this document in a sequential manner, the research was conducted by following a process in which literature review and data collection were not conducted sequentially but rather interacted with one another. By following a 'non-linear and non-positivistic approach to case research' (Dubois and Gadde 2014, 1277), as represented in **Figure 7**, the research progressed as a cycle of interaction between data collection and analysis, literature review and case writing through which the final focus and findings unfolded. This circularity of research (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008), in which the research went back and forth from data to theory and vice versa, was the main vehicle by which the research progressed and the findings emerged.

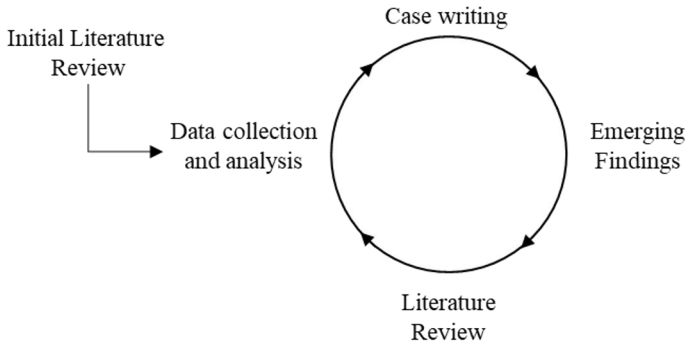

Figure 7. The research process.

Overall, in the spirit of systematic combining, this approached enabled me to 'constantly go back and forth from one type of research activity to another and between empirical observations and theory' (Dubois and Gadde 2002, 555). With preliminary knowledge of the importance of freelancers in CIs emanating from previous work experience, the first stage of the research regarded an initial review of literature on CIs and helped focus the theme on customer knowledge transfer. This review was also the first anecdotical confirmation of an overall lack of studies focusing on freelancers. After this review, efforts turned to engaging in conversations with different university professors and practitioners. These initial informal interviews and my previous work experience were the inputs that formed the basis for problematising the research questions as described in section 1.3.

With the preliminary research questions defined, a more exhaustive literature review on the topic of knowledge transfer in creative industries was conducted and data were collected. The first decision on data collection was regarding where the data was to be collected from. Due to my personal connection with creative industries in Valencia, Spain, data were initially collected in there. The Spanish CIs scene has been recently discussed in the literature (e.g. Rodriguez-Gulias et al. 2020), and the importance of CIs in the Valencia region was specifically confirmed by Boix-Domenech et al. (2022). To reduce the possibilities for findings ending up being too country-specific, further data collection was conducted from freelancers in Turku, Finland. The reasons for selecting this location were similar to that of Valencia: access to cases through personal and professional networks as well as the importance of CIs for the country overall (Business Finland 2023)[11].

[11] As previously introduced, there is very little consensus on the definition of CIs. While Business Finland's definition of CIs is not the same as the one used in this research, the overall importance of the sector for the country remains.

The decision to collect data from Finland as well was driven by the realisation that differences in culture, language, and my own characteristics—for example, social background, positioning and views—could play a role in this research (Langdal 2024). Recognising this possibility, I engaged in a reflexive process in which I acknowledged that I was an insider when interviewing Spanish freelancers and proceeded to also collect data from Finnish freelancers, a setting in which I was more of an outsider (Merriam et al. 2001 on insider/outsider).

These data-collection efforts were nevertheless conducted simultaneously with reviews of literature, as depicted in **Figure 7** and, in practice, the focus was on writing conference papers. The initial papers benefited from comments from opponents at conferences and their focus was slightly adapted to concentrate on the most important aspects arising from the data. In the final stage, and as papers made their way through reviewing processes in journals, attention was driven towards writing this document and annexing the articles.

3.4 Outline of the cases

Overall, the cases on which this research is based were selected by using a purposeful sampling process in which I examined 'which individuals could contribute to the evolving theory' (Creswell 2013, 158). Specifically, development projects were the cases used in this research.

The reason for selecting these projects as the cases was directly linked to the objective of investigating product development process. Furthermore, projects are limited in terms of space and time, and it is relatively uncomplicated to established boundaries (e.g. when a project begins and when it ends). These cases were consciously selected with the objective of identifying information-rich cases that could provide insights that could not have been gained otherwise (cf. Siggelkow 2007). However, the sampling method was far from being decided in a single, early decision and was revisited during the research process, as recommended by Fletcher and Plakoyiannaki (2011).

Initially, my personal contacts were purposefully used to identify information-rich cases. These personal contacts were contacted and asked if they wanted to participate in the research. A snowball sampling technique then followed by asking if these initial interviewees could recommend other contacts who might be willing to participate. This snowball method was used to maintain a certain level of homogeneity that could contribute to building the necessary codes for the analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and it was continued as the interviews were conducted. An overview of the selected cases is presented in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Overview of the selected cases.

Freelancer	Case	Country
Samantha	Corporate image for a yoga instructor	Spain
Samantha	Corporate image for a yoga academy	Spain
Robert	Wine labels for a family-owned vineyard	Spain
Robert	Wine labels for a large vineyard	Spain
Gary	Corporate image for a luxurious restaurant	Spain
Gary	Corporate image for a clinic offering a wide range of services	Spain
James	Corporate image for a digital marketing agency	Spain
James	Corporate image for a photographer	Spain
Anthony	Album cover and booklet	Spain
Johnny	Illustration for the walkthrough of a phone application	Spain
John	Music for an advertising campaign	Finland
John	Theme music for a series of historic documentaries	Finland
Raul	Writing and directing a theatre play for children	Finland
Raul	Editing a script to turn a series of children's books into a film	Finland
Gabriel	Entertainment show for TV	Finland
Gabriel	Pilot for a TV show	Finland
James and Maria	Development of a corporate image and naming for a company producing bags for yoga mats (Failure case)	Spain

After an initial set of interviews was conducted in Spain, a decision to also collect data from other country, Finland, was made. Relatively at the same time, a conscious decision to expand from mostly graphic design cases to other sectors within CIs (e.g. theatre play direction, script writing or music composition) was also taken. Both decisions were made consciously, and theoretical sampling enabled the identification of information-rich cases.

All the cases covered in the interviews were analysed to ensure they fit the definition of CIs used in this research and by ensuring that the interviewees worked on those projects alone as freelancers. Four projects were disregarded after applying these criteria. The final number of cases (16) was not decided in advance but, rather, came out to be through the process of data collection and by reaching theoretical saturation, as the point at which incremental learning was minimal because I was observing phenomena seen before (Eisenhardt 1989).

In addition to these 16 cases, a failure case was included to provide further insights into the topic of barriers to knowledge transfer between clients/freelancers. Extreme cases have proven to be particularly suitable for their insights (e.g. Flyvbjerg 2006) and this specific *deep case study* (Dyer and Wilkins 1991; Dubois and Gadde 2014) enabled me to take an in-depth look at a case in which these barriers

to knowledge transfer derailed the entire project altogether. This failure case was identified by adding a question at the end of the interviews in which the freelancers were asked to quickly reflect on failure cases.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection took place through the 11 semi-structured interviews described in **Table 7**. Except for the failure case, in which one interview was conducted with a client, the interviewees were freelancers due to their leading role in the development of the product and as a means to achieve the research objective to understand how these freelancers conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes.

In addition to the interviews, secondary data were also collected for triangulation purposes, when available. These secondary data are also described in **Table 7** and included presentations, mock-up designs, and informal interviews from four of the interviewees. Unfortunately, these secondary data were limited because the other interviewees did not share extra documentation despite attempts made before and after the interviews. A few of them referred to the fact that they wished to remain anonymous and, particularly, that they wanted their clients to remain anonymous.

Table 7. Interviews and secondary data overview.

Interviewee	Duration	Language	Secondary Data
Samantha (freelancer)	1:02:56	Spanish	PPT corporate image
Robert (freelancer)	1.23.37	Spanish	Images used for inspirations, final design, questionnaire sent to the customer
Gary (freelancer)	1.19.58	Spanish	-
James (freelancer)	1:20:50	Spanish	-
Anthony (freelancer)	1.03.52	Spanish	-
Johnny (freelancer)	1.07.54	Spanish	Drafts, sketches, final designs
John (freelancer)	1.06.56	English	-
Raul (freelancer)	0:58:37	English	-
Gabriel (freelancer)	0.55.39	English	-
James (freelancer)	0:46:43	Spanish	Sketches, final design ppt, naming process document
Maria (client)	0:40:36	Spanish	-

An interview guide, available as Appendix 1, was designed and used to guide the discussion in the semi-structured interviews. This guide was structured to ensure that

the knowledge acquisition, conversion, and application stages (e.g. Games and Rendi 2019; Stejskal and Hajek 2019) were individually covered in the interviews (more on these stages is discussed in section 4.1). Guiding questions were also developed and added to the guide but allowing room for extension and deviation was emphasised. As preparation for the interviews, the freelancers were sent general information regarding the nature and topic of the research and were asked to think of two recent projects they could remember clearly. Emphasis was put on the fact that they should select projects in which they had worked alone. Respondents were also asked to retrieve emails and any other material they could locate regarding the two projects. Moreover, as part of this introductory email, the freelancers were asked to book a time for the interview. Further, information regarding confidentiality was provided at the beginning of the interview along with an explanation of the nature of the research.

As already discussed, I acknowledge that language, culture, and my own characteristics may have influenced this research (e.g. Langdal 2024). In this regard, interviews were conducted face-to-face in either Spanish or in English, depending on the interviewee's preference; some time was used in the beginning of the interview to explain what certain terms—for example, knowledge (*conocimiento*), trust (*confianza*), metaphors (*metáforas*) or failure (*fracaso*)—implied in the context of the research. Other terms (i.e. contradiction) were explained through examples and I emphasised to the participants that they could ask me if anything remained unclear.

3.6 Data analysis

The data analysis process was conducted in a systematic manner, following the three-step approach recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and, despite recent criticism (Harley and Cornelissen 2022; Mees-Buss et al. 2022), utilising Gioia's method (Gioia et al. 2013).

Before initiating the analysis, first-order topics were established in keeping with my theoretical sensitivity, as proposed by Glaser (1978). These topics were derived from a preunderstanding of the overall theme and the previously mentioned work experience. These initially developed codes included topics such as the use of metaphors (e.g. Halpern 2012) or the importance of trust (e.g. Hauge et al. 2018; Lee 2015; Millar et al. 2016; Watson 2008). To ensure a rigorous analysis, QSR NVivo software was utilised for coding the initial interviews, which enabled the creation of a structured process for analysing, managing, and shaping the collected data (Creswell 2013; Sinkovics and Alfoldi 2012).

The first step of the analysis involved an open-coding process, where the data obtained from the interviews were carefully examined and fragmented. The objective

was to uncover new categories, identify fresh topics, and refine the previously established first-order topics. As I encountered new codes during the initial interviews and obtained a deeper understanding of the complexities of the phenomena under investigation, the focus of the analysis subtly shifted to concentrate on the most relevant issues (Sinkovics and Alfoldi 2012; Stake 1981). During this phase, several first-order topics emerged, which centred around the need to find a suitable project and client match, freelancers' economic pressure, and the significance of synchronous means of communication.

Following the open-coding stage, the second step involved axial coding. In this stage, the themes that had been previously developed were applied to the empirical data. This enabled the establishment of connections and relationships between the various themes and codes; overall, this facilitated a deeper understanding of the data. It also enabled the identification of patterns and associations. In this stage, and in line with Gioia's methodology, I began looking for similarities and differences among emerging themes and building a data structure (Gehman et al. 2018).

It is worth noting that the analysis process was not conducted in isolation but occurred concurrently with the data collection phase. Rather than following a sequential order, these two aspects of the study took place in a cyclical manner. As data were being collected and analysed, it was believed that a data saturation point, where the data were no longer providing new insights (Creswell 2013), had been reached after the completion of the Spanish interviews. In any case, and to ensure comprehensive findings, I decided to include interviewees from another country, Finland, and from different subcategories within CIs. These additional interviews did not yield any new or conflicting themes, and then I decided to proceed to the final coding stage.

In the last stage of the analysis, in which the data were translated into theory (Gehman et al. 2018), the previously developed dimensions were integrated and refined to construct theoretical frameworks and generate plausible conceptualisations. In other words, this last stage aimed at establishing key concepts and formulating statements to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions.

A detailed description of the codification can be found below in **Figure 8** and will be further discussed in section 4.5.

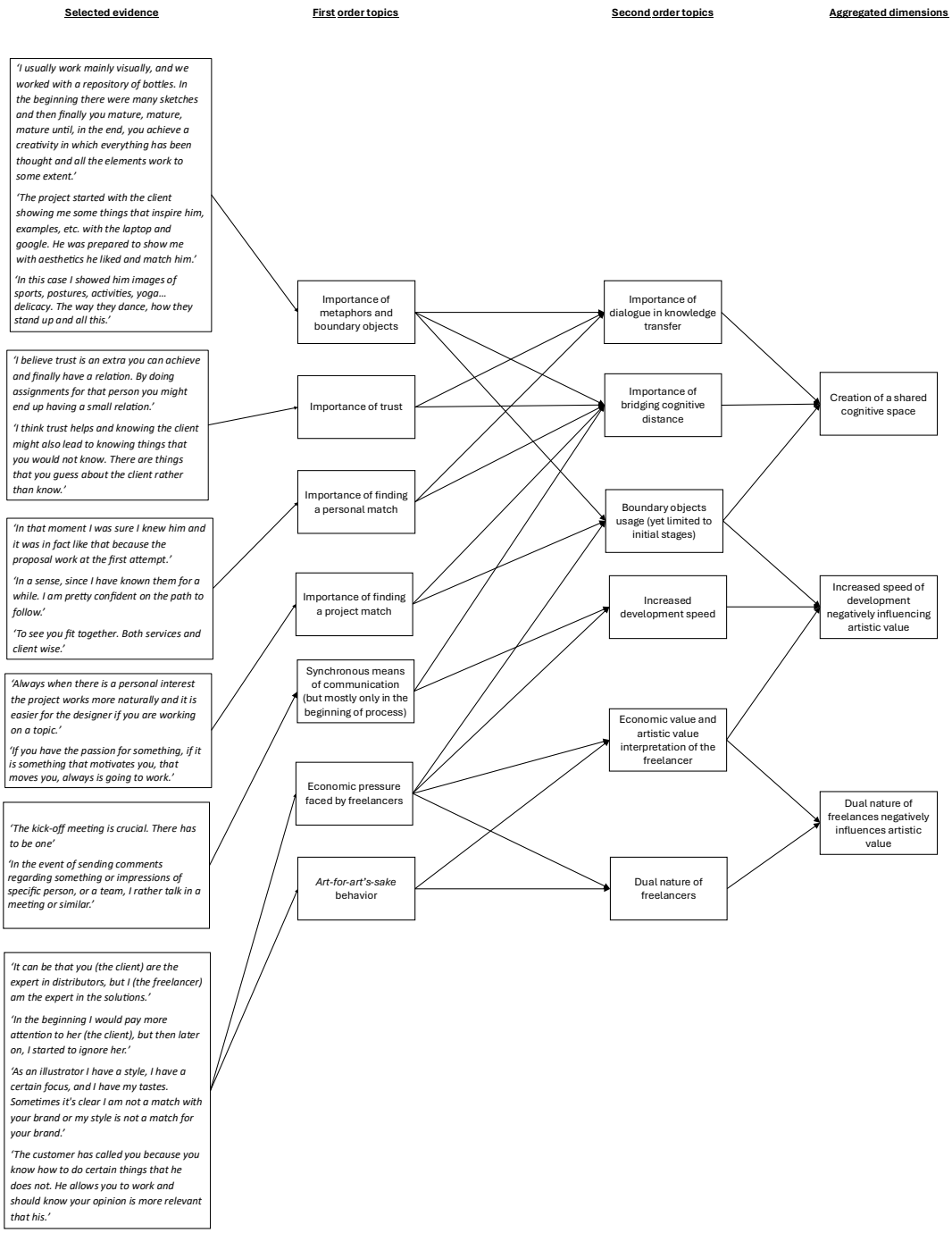

Figure 8. The codification process.

To summarise, the data analysis process followed a structured approach based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three-step process and the Gioia methodology (Gehman et al. 2018; Gioia et al. 2013). The initial use of QSR NVivo software facilitated efficient data management and analysis. By following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three-step process, meaningful themes were uncovered and connections made to finally generate plausible answers to the research questions. Moreover, by conducting the analysis concurrently with data collection, I aimed to ensure that the findings were grounded in rich and diverse empirical evidence and that a data saturation point had truly been reached.

3.7 Data management and research ethics

As part of the research process, and as already stated, qualitative primary research data were collected through 11 semi-structured interviews. To guarantee the integrity of this research, I adhered to the guidelines provided by the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD n.d.) and the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2023).

First, this chapter disclosed data collection and analysis to ensure readers have a complete view of the research process and can assess its integrity. An assessment of the research using the widely used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework will follow in Section 3.8. The results were also reported as transparently and objectively as possible both in these introduction chapters and in the published articles.

During the data collection, I informed the interviewees that their names will be pseudonymised. On the one hand, achieving the research objectives did not require extensive collection of personal data, and only what was needed was collected. On the other hand, relatively extensive background information regarding the cases needed to be collected to achieve the objective of understanding the cases in detail.

Regardless of the need to collect extensive background data, and throughout the research process, pseudonymisation helped to keep the identity of the interviewees confidential. The only case that required a more thoughtful approach was the disclosure of the brand 'Stork and Arrow', which was used in the failure study. In this situation, the name of the brand could not be pseudonymised, as it was key to understanding the case and could have eventually served to identify both the designer and the client. However, the company was short-lived and there is no current information regarding the brand or the company available online any longer.

With regard to data management, data were, from the very beginning, stored locally in a password protected computer and, as a back-up, in a secured, password-protected online environment. These data, in an anonymised form, are, and can be made, available in their original form after the publication of this dissertation. These include a) the transcripts of the interviews in their original languages, b) secondary

data collected as part of the data collection process, and c) the original coding files in QSR NVivo format.

In addition to these actions to guarantee the integrity of the research, and as is to be expected in academic research, the work of others has been cited appropriately even when they only served as inspiration. This was done with the objective of recognising the weight these references carried in the research process. Moreover, no sources of funding were used other than my full-time job, and there were no conflicts of interest to report.

3.8 Assessment of the research

For the assessment of this research, I decided to utilise Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria. Yet, before I begin with this evaluation, I would like to emphasise that this dissertation was built firmly on the conviction that understanding is more important than validity. This is not to say that validation was neglected but, rather, that the aim was to approach it from a broader perspective. The idea was to identify critical components and write plausible explanations in a critical–realist manner. In other words, the idea was to understand rather than convince (Creswell 2013).

Despite this focus on understanding, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria were used to assess this research due to its track record as a suitable methodology to evaluate the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Overall, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria can be used for assessing qualitative research using four different dimensions: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As expressed by Sinkovics et al. (2008), these four dimensions have strong connections with the assessment's dimensions that are conventionally used in quantitative research. Namely, credibility relates to internal validity, transferability is related to generalisability, dependability is related to reliability, and confirmability has strong links with objectivity (Sinkovics et al. 2008).

Beginning with the topic of *credibility*, several steps were taken to ensure confidence in the truth of the findings of this research. First, triangulation was applied when extra materials were available to reduce the subjectivity of the interviewees. Second, having co-authors—which implied the triangulation of researchers—for two of the three articles included in this dissertation, led to the minimisation of personal bias. Moreover, the rigorous processes followed while conducting and coding the interviews enabled an increase in confidence in how the results and findings were arrived at.

One possible limitation that requires transparent disclosure is the fact that the findings related to speed of development were based on a single failure case. Article I, based on 12 cases, hinted that ambiguity and contradictions make the development process longer and less efficient; however, reducing the time devoted to knowledge

acquisition could lead to reduced product–client fit and less creative final products. Article III dived into this topic and provided confirmation of this preliminary finding, but it did so with only one case in one field of CIs.

In addition to this limitation, the Gioia method has been lately criticised for not addressing the challenges of interpretation (Mees-Buss et al. 2022) or for not guaranteeing rigor (e.g. Harley and Cornelissen 2022). First, it is important to acknowledge that this research embraces the Gioia methodology as regarded by its authors—a methodology rather than a step-by-step template or cookbook (Gioia et al. 2013, 26). This research also followed Mees-Buss et al.'s (2022) recommendation regarding the challenge of interpreting subjective field data. In this regard, this research ensured that it addressed this challenge by triangulating researchers to reduce personal bias as well as by analysing multiple cases, thereby reducing the possibility of misinterpreting the respondents' accounts. Second, Mees-Buss et al. (2022) also warned about the challenge of confronting researcher subjectivity in the theorising process. This risk was mitigated once again by triangulating researchers and by, as already stated, following a circular research process, as part of which I came back and forth from the data to the theory and vice versa. Third, and lastly, Mees-Buss et al. (2022) emphasised the need to establish plausibility of the theoretical conclusions and ensuring rival explanations and conflicting findings were explored. As such, this research mitigated this risk by relying on multiple case, from different countries and from a diverse set of sectors within the creative industries.

Second, *transferability*—understood as the degree to which the findings have applicability in other contexts—was of critical importance due to the motivation to study freelancers in CIs. Since the heterogeneity of creative industries is well acknowledged, it was important to ensure transferability within CIs themselves. By having a certain level of heterogeneity of cases, the aim was to acknowledge the diverse nature of companies in the creative industries to ensure in-sector transferability.

Moreover, regarding transferability, the description of the research process was made as thoroughly and accurately as possible as to enable a repetition of the study in a different sector. All the steps taken, from sampling and data collection to data analysis, have been taken with the objective of enabling any researcher to replicate or extend this research. Specifically, all ingredients of this research—data, research methods, coding, analysis, etc.—are transparently reported, or can be provided upon request, to enable a replication of the research steps. The interview guide is also annexed to this dissertation as Appendix 1 and can serve as guidance for future researchers looking at, for example, replicating the research in other sub-sectors of CIs.

It is worth noting that, due to the diversity of the field of CIs and the fact that the freelancer population is extremely heterogeneous, any transferability efforts should

be made with caution. Moreover, freelancers were not asked for their self-employment motivations and, therefore, no distinction was made between freelancers who want to be freelancers and those who are freelancers because they need to be freelancers. This lack of differentiation is in line with previous research in CIs with, for example, Hennekam (2015, 876) acknowledging that old self-employed workers are often forced into self-employment yet using the terms self-employed, freelancer, and entrepreneur indistinctly throughout the paper; Carey and Naudin (2006) acknowledging that the terms entrepreneurship, self-employment, and enterprise are used interchangeably in their paper; Koch et al. (2023) relying on a sample of 149 independent self-employed individuals and firm owners for their study; and Mylonas and Petridou (2018) acknowledging that their sample came from female entrepreneurs or self-employed women in creative industries. In any case, one could argue that these trade-offs are of lesser relevancy than the larger issue of freelancers not even being sufficiently acknowledged or merely considered as part of other organisations in the literature.

With this in mind, and as I focused on particularisation, the findings of this research should be considered to be context-specific, and it must be noted that contextual descriptions are necessary to achieve an understanding of the cases (Stake 1995). Moreover, the literature on CIs has expressed doubts on whether findings from one industry can be directly applicable to other CIs due to their differences (e.g. film industry vs fashion design) (Gong and Hassink 2017; Jones et al. 2015a). Once again, and owing to the transparent disclosure of data and methods, potentially the best way to analyse the cross-sector transferability is to replicate the research design with freelancers in other sectors.

An additional relevant limitation emanated from the fact that data were collected from different types of CIs with the aim of reducing sector-specific findings. This caused heterogeneity on customer/user typology. Literature on design industries (e.g. Goodman-Deane et al. 2010) and other industries (e.g. Franke and Piller 2004) have differentiated between customer and (end) users in development processes. In some of the cases in this research (e.g. corporate images), one could argue that customers, and final users are the same people, but the differences become more apparent when moving towards, for example, wine labels and, even more so, towards theatre performances. This research did not acknowledge the differences and did not explicitly account for the intermediary role some of the customers might have played between freelancers and users.

Third, with regard to *dependability*, usually regarded as the equivalent of reliability for qualitative studies, my views are very much in line with those of Silverman (2005) in that reliability can be addressed in several ways in qualitative research. Plenty can be written regarding this factor, but, overall, the objective was to show that the findings were consistent and could be repeated. In order to achieve

this objective, a few actions were taken, such as recording and transcribing the interviews, following a structured method for data analysis, and also transparently reporting all the steps. Moreover, the already mentioned triangulation of researchers—having more than one author for two of the articles in this research—also aimed at increasing dependability.

Lastly, with regard to *confirmability*—which is understood as the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln and Guba 1985)—it must be noted that in this case, data triangulation served as a means to diminish biases. When available, secondary data—such as presentations and sketches—were collected from the interviewees. Although these were relatively limited, they provided confirmation of aspects mentioned in a few of the interviews.

In addition to data triangulation, and once again as already covered, this research benefited from the triangulation of researchers. Specifically, regarding confirmability, while all three articles began as conference papers solely written by me, the two articles published in academic journals were co-authored, thereby minimising the possibility of my own research bias. Moreover, and once again with the aim of enabling replication, relatively thick descriptions were provided for the reader to draw their own conclusions (adapted from Creswell 2013).

4 Findings

4.1 Initial setting and focus shift

In line with the objective of this research, the three articles that comprised this dissertation covered different stages of knowledge-transfer activities conducted by freelancers in the context of product development in CIs. A preliminary stage of this research concerned the definition of an initial structure for these articles. This process of defining the structure and how the data collected fitted these models revealed a few interesting findings in itself.

Overall, the literature on CIs emphasises that knowledge management and transfer models applicable to other sectors might not be entirely applicable to CIs (Brindley 2008; Colette 2008; Collinge and Staines 2009; Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Weller 2007), but we have instances of traditional knowledge-transfer models being used in the CI literature (Games and Rendi 2019; Stejskal and Hajek 2019).

Considering these conflicting findings, I decided to utilise a structure for the papers that stemmed from classic literature on knowledge transfer and its division into knowledge acquisition, knowledge conversion, and knowledge application. As presented in **Table 8**, slightly modified versions of the knowledge transfer division specified above have been used in the literature, including in CIs (Games and Rendi 2019; Stejskal and Hajek 2019). As already stated, this research was built on the assumption that customer knowledge-transfer activities led by freelancers in the creative industries were likely to differ from those of larger enterprises, and structuring the papers around this model had the underlying objective of analysing the applicability of such models to the work of CI freelancers.

Table 8. The origin of the division on knowledge acquisition, knowledge conversion, and knowledge application.

Knowledge transfer process stages	**Reference**
Assemble, interpret, and exploit knowledge	Teece (1998)
Knowledge acquisition and knowledge conversion	Nambisan (2002)
Knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploitation	Zahra and George (2002)
Knowledge creation/acquisition, knowledge refinement, knowledge storage, knowledge transfer/sharing, and knowledge utilisation	King et al. (2008)
Knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge application	Games and Rendi (2019)
Knowledge acquisition, knowledge transformation, and knowledge utilisation	Stejskal and Hajek (2019)

With this division in mind, the articles were initially envisioned to individually encompass these three stages. However, as the research progressed, the focus shifted. The final fit between the articles and the knowledge-transfer stages is described in **Figure 9**. Specifically, Article I focused on knowledge acquisition and Article II on knowledge conversion (codification), with a focus on achieving a shared understanding with the use of boundary objects. Article II also explored how this acquired and codified knowledge was used as an input for the final product (knowledge application). Article III investigated a failure case and focused on the overarching topic of development speed in CIs. This last article provided a general overview of the entire process from the perspective of the freelancer leading the project and the client.

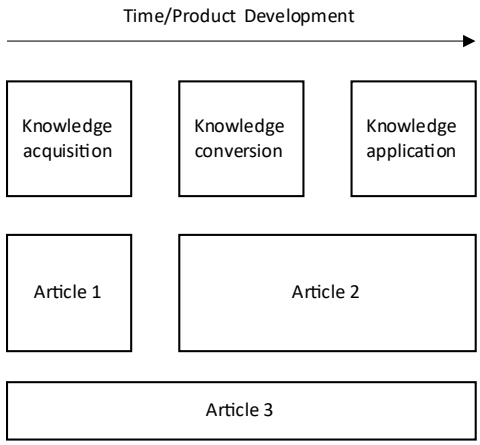

Figure 9. Overall setting and contribution of the articles.

As already introduced, the decision to divide the research into knowledge acquisition, knowledge conversion and knowledge application was grounded on classical knowledge management and transfer research. As an example, Teece (1998) established that knowledge can be a competitive advantage as long as companies have the capacity to assemble, interpret, and exploit knowledge. Similarly, Nambisan (2002) discussed knowledge acquisition, defined as the process of obtaining knowledge—which can be externally generated—and knowledge conversion. Knowledge conversion can, in this case, be defined as the activities undertaken to analyse, process, interpret, and understand acquired information (Zahra and George 2002). In addition to these two stages, certain academics (e.g. Games and Rendi 2019; Zahra and George 2002) also add a third stage by including the application of knowledge to commercial ends.

Before turning to the findings, a brief account of Article I is given to highlight its crucial role for this research. A brief discussion on how the knowledge transfer division evolved is also included.

It must be noted that Article I remained a conference paper and has been included in this dissertation in its original form. The reason for maintaining Article I as a conference paper stemmed from the already mentioned shift of research focus. As the research progressed, it became increasingly apparent that knowledge-acquisition activities were intrinsically linked to knowledge conversion and codification in the context of this research. In this regard, it became increasingly obvious that, by addressing the suggestions for further research put forward in Article I, the article could pave the road for the rest of the research. Overall, due to Article I's exploratory nature, its suggestions for further research came to be one of the most important inputs for Articles II and III and played a crucial role in this research. In the future, and based on some of the findings arising from this overall research, Article I can be further developed by addressing the knowledge-acquisition suggestions for future research covered in section 5.3.

Overall, when collecting the data that made this research possible, the data clearly pointed towards the fact that freelancers went through all three stages; however, it became increasingly obvious that it made little sense to focus on knowledge exploitation or application since it was intertwined with knowledge codification and conversion. Knowledge conversion and, more specifically codification, was indeed at the heart of the knowledge-transfer process (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995) and blurred the boundaries between the acquisition and exploration stages.

4.2 The findings of Article I

Chronologically speaking, Article I was the first article written for this dissertation and explored the product development process of freelancers in CIs by concentrating on knowledge-acquisition activities. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following research question: How do freelancers perform knowledge-acquisition activities in product development in the field of cultural and creative industries?

By analysing 12 cases, the study concluded that the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition activities is negatively affected by ambiguity and contradictions in the development process. On the one hand, the cases revealed that both contradictions and ambiguity can make the development process longer and that they are frequently encountered. Overcoming ambiguity was found to be challenging, as it often required persuasion of the client, which presented a paradox similar to that found in larger organisations (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

In contrast, while ambiguity hindered knowledge transfer, it is also known to be a source of new knowledge and alternative meaning (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Therefore, reducing the time for knowledge-acquisition activities may harm the outcome of the development process and effectiveness may conflict with longer knowledge acquisition, which could often lead to more creative and better-fitting products for the client. This was further explored in Article III.

The study's second set of findings highlighted the importance of involving the client from the outset through kick-off meetings but also choosing communication channels based on the development process stage and the level of ambiguity. Regarding the former, the kick-off meeting was regarded as a critical event for collecting key project-related knowledge (i.e. goals, company history, and values), clarifying the scope and budget, and establishing personal rapport, which helped interpret unstated needs or preferences. This use of the kick-off meeting is aligned with the findings of Halpern (2012), as she highlighted the role of first meetings as a means to develop a collaborative rapport and begin a conversation. This is also emphasised in different instances by the interviewed freelancers:

> You need to sit down with the customer; they need to get to know you (...) and you need to get to know them.

> The initial meeting is very important because by email it's very difficult to explain your doubts and thoughts.

> I don't like to work remotely, I prefer to talk to the person, do an interview, take notes… and use that to get to keywords, groups of images, concepts….

> The first meeting is essential. There has to be one.

Overall, face-to-face, synchronous communication channels were found to be preferable in the initial stages, while more asynchronous, electronic, channels appeared to be more appropriate for later stages of product development. These asynchronous communication channels were regarded as more efficient in the later stages, once project parameters had been established. Freelancers preferred these channels because it enabled them to optimise their time efforts, maintain a record of decisions and feedback, and reinforce clarity by having the communication in a written form. Despite this preference, the more ambiguous and contradictory the information, the more the need for face-to-face and synchronous communication channels.

In this regard, CIs literature on this topic has mostly emphasised the benefits of synchronous communication channels in CIs (Moultrie and Young 2009; Tempest 2009; Turnbull et al. 2012), and Article I expanded on this topic by suggesting that their real value and impact on project effectiveness should be analysed. Using synchronous communication channels enables complexity and ambiguity to unfold and be resolved, but they also make the development process longer.

The study also highlighted how freelancers rely on their external networks to acquire projects. Specifically, informal networks such as friends, acquaintances, and personal contacts were emphasised as critical for obtaining projects. Multiple instances of this reality were highlighted by the interviewed freelancers:

> In the beginning all the work came from my contacts.
>
> The projects come from my friends and contacts.
>
> This project came to me from my brother.
>
> The client was a contact, more of a friend really.
>
> It was through someone I knew… they put me in touch with them.

These findings are consistent with the articles that highlight the importance of networks in CIs (e.g. Cattani et al. 2015; Jones et al. 2015a; Lee 2015; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Mylonas and Petridou 2018; Protogerou et al. 2017; Townley et al. 2009). Networks are important to find employment in CIs (DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Lee 2015; Siebert and Wilson 2013; TSB 2009; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015) and, specifically for the freelancers under study, their networks provided efficient access to projects. Moreover, freelancers emphasised that, when informal connections became clients, it was easier to agree on flexible timetables and to build

trust. Moreover, the very same networks acted as a proxy for credibility and quality, which is particularly relevant in these creative fields where portfolios are subjective.

Overall, as we have also seen when discussing the importance of creative workers and intermediaries (Caves 2000; Colapinto and Porlezza 2012; Harte et al. 2019; Jeffcutt 2004), these freelancers played the role of knowledge brokers. They translated client information into creative concepts, used boundary objects to mediate understanding between themselves and clients, and overall managed the entire customer knowledge flow into developing the final creative product.

Due to its exploratory nature, Article I put forward a few recommendations for further research, which were pursued in Articles II and III. The specific suggestions that were addressed are reviewed in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

4.3 The findings of Article II

Article II specifically looked to answer the following research question: how do freelancers in the CI field capture and distil their clients' needs and wants in collaborative innovation projects?

With a focus on examining the development activities in collaborative innovation projects and to specifically investigate how clients' needs are transformed into tangible product features, Article II acted as a response for one of the calls for further research expressed in Article I. As previously acknowledged (e.g. Teece 1998), in order for companies and freelancers, in this case, to use knowledge as a competitive advantage, they need to possess the capacity to assemble, interpret, and exploit knowledge. Therefore, knowledge conversion—as addressed in Article II—is the only possible continuation of the knowledge acquisition activities covered in Article I if knowledge is to become a competitive advantage.

As previously suggested in the literature, Article II dealt with knowledge codification, structured as analysing, processing, interpreting, and understanding acquired information (Zahra and George 2002). The article also covered how this knowledge served as an ingredient for the final product, thereby covering the application of knowledge for commercial ends (Zahra and George 2002). In order to do so, Article II concentrated on the conversion stage and the use of boundary objects in externalising the clients' needs (Carlile 2004; Star and Griesemer 1989).

The article's objectives were also achieved by answering the call for more diversity of cases put forward in Article I. Following Creswell's (2013) suggestion, we added additional cases from an additional country and covered other subsectors of CIs. As preliminary conclusions had already been reached in Article I, Article II extended the number of cases to 16, from 2 different countries (Spain and Finland), and also expanded from mostly graphic design cases to cases that covered the development of TV shows, music composition, and theatre play scripting. These

extensions aimed at better representing the heterogeneity of CIs and reducing any country or sub-sector specific nuances.

Our study of these 16 product-development projects led by freelancers portrayed an accurate picture of how this innovation collaboration took place. As previous research suggests (e.g. Bechky 2003; Cohendet and Simon 2007), the initial focus was on creating a common ground and developing a shared understanding, which was followed by the development of an abstract concept that was mostly developed by the freelancers alone with a focus on informative dialogue with the client. The use of boundary objects mostly occurred at the beginning of the development process, and dialogue became the focus after achieving a shared understanding with the client.

In principle, these findings appeared to be in line with the emphasis the literature places on the use of boundary objects in creative processes (e.g. Gateau and Simon 2016; Halpern 2012; Mahmoud-Jouini and Charue-Duboc 2008). They also appear to be consistent with boundary objects being widely used in CIs (e.g. Cohendet and Simon 2007; Gateau and Simon 2016; Jarvenpaa and Lang 2011; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014). However, the interviewed freelancers did not use these objects extensively after the creation of the shared understanding and focused on dialogue, as they independently developed the final product.

Previously, literature concerning boundary objects had emphasised their vital role in establishing a common ground (e.g. Halpern 2012). In the projects analysed, boundary objects were crucial for achieving mutual understanding and initiating meaningful dialogue. If freelancers and clients would have failed to attain mutual understanding through boundary objects, they would not have been able to engage in a meaningful dialogue and progress in their innovative collaboration. Additionally, to these findings, the study emphasised the importance of a project match, where freelancers perceive the project as relevant and attractive but also, a personal match, where the freelancer feels that their and the client's sense-making processes are similar. As some of the freelancers put it:

> It was easier with her because we were on the same bandwidth. We know each other and we are similar.

> Always when there is a personal interest, the project works more naturally and it is easier for the designer.

> If you have the passion for something, if it is something that motivates you, that moves you, it is always going to work.

Overall, the literature has highlighted the importance of individual characteristics and enthusiasm as the most important features that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning in CIs (Lee 2015). The data clearly shows that positive personal and project matches ensure active participation in the dialogue, while a lack of them can hinder understanding and negatively impact the final outcome.

In addition to these findings, the article also discussed the applicability of results to larger organisations and industries beyond the CI sector. Due to the focus on particularisation (e.g. Stake 1995), the unique characteristics of CI (e.g. Caves 2000), as well as the diversity of the freelancer population (Blanchflower 2000; Earle and Sakova 2000), the article cautioned regarding any effort to generalise or transfer the results. Specifically, Article II highlighted the tension between creative work and business in CIs (Bérubé and Demers 2019) and emphasised that freelancers' liability of smallness and economic pressure place a burden on freelancers (Gonzalez-Cristiano and Sandberg 2019). Overall, the article called for an acknowledgement of how these tensions and pressures are of relevance when analysing the applicability of the findings to larger enterprises because they might be the very reason behind the limited use of boundary objects. Regarding the applicability of results to freelancers in sectors other than CIs, article calls for the special characteristics of CIs—that is, for example, their dual nature (Caves 2000), their special organisational forms (Protogerou et al. 2017), and the industry dynamics (Peltoniemi 2015) —to be fully acknowledged.

4.4 The findings of Article III

As part of the original interviews conducted for Article I, I asked the freelancers whether they could think of any development project they would categorise as a failure in terms of final product, time used, or not being able to understand the client. I used this question to find a failure case for Article III with the objective of identifying additional insights to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes. Specifically, the article aimed to answer the following research question: what are the main barriers to knowledge transfer between clients/freelancers in design development processes in the creative industries?.

The decision to select a failure case was influenced by the already mentioned characteristics of extreme deep case studies (Dubois and Gadde 2014; Dyer and Wilkins 1991; Flyvbjerg 2006) and due to its appropriateness with the objective to explore barriers to knowledge transfer. In addition, this extra case allowed for data collection from a client and to break free from the mostly positive conversations that took place in the first set of the interviews.

Specifically, Article III aimed to contribute to improving the understanding of a designer's failure to involve users by showing how this failure emerges during the development process in CIs. Moreover, Article III, as the rest of the research, focused on freelancers and contributed to the literature on how actors with restricted resources deal with failure. Third, Article III aimed at addressing the paradox faced by freelancers in their pursuit of effective product development. Article I specifically called for an analysis of how a reduction in ambiguity and contradictions in the process of product development may have an impact on knowledge creation, and Article III answered that call.

The main finding from Article III highlighted that, in the case of freelancers in the field of CIs, the usually positively regarded accelerated speed of development (e.g. Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero 2011; Menon et al. 2002; cf. Cankurtaran et al. 2013) can occasionally have a negative impact on product development. Our analysis of a single failure case revealed that a conscious decision to accelerate the development, by limiting the involvement of the client, had a negative impact on the final product. Specifically, the freelance designer, Raul, believed that this accelerated development speed increased efficiency, but this efficiency came as a result of minimising client involvement and knowledge transfer. This eventually came at the expense of a significantly reduced product–client fit, artistic uniqueness, and how the client saw the final product. Overall, in the investigated case, speeding up the development was the ultimate reason for the project's failure.

We have examples in the literature that warn about a predominant focus on either business interests (i.e. billable hours) or productivity-oriented processes (i.e. accelerated speed of development) and how it may compromise creativity (Tschang 2007). Raul's actions appeared to be closer to those of managers of creative firms that understand that 'it is more important to deliver on time and within budget and avoid unnecessary complications usually associated with freer, more artistic designs' (Banks et al. 2002, 261).

As Article III specifically examined this phenomenon through the prism of a freelancer, it concluded that his lack of resources aggravated this situation. As freelancers suffer from their liability of smallness, they are under pressure to achieve fast revenues. This incentivised a concentration on optimisation and prevented the freelancer in the study from extensive client involvement. Using an analogy, Raul was focused on exploitation rather than exploration (March 1991), a tendency often observed when designers become fixated on a concept too early in the design process (Page 2016).

Further, this attitude also reflected a 'not-invented-here' syndrome (e.g. Katz and Allen 1982), which is defined as 'the negative attitude towards the utilisation of external knowledge' (Burcharth et al. 2014, 150). Customer knowledge was dismissed because Raul regarded himself as the expert and put all responsibility on

himself to create the final product. In this regard, we have instances in the literature in which experts have issues recognising novel solutions that do not come from them; these experts might tend to block external input, regard it as ambiguous, overly simplistic, or as lacking technical sophistication (Matthing et al. 2004; Olson and Bakke 2001).

Overall, this limitation of client involvement is particularly critical in the creative industries because of the dual nature of creative products. As already highlighted, these products have both instrumental (economic) and artistic (symbolic) value and the accelerated speed of development caused the symbolic value to suffer in the investigated case. Raul emphasized economic concerns (time, billing hours), while Maria focused on symbolic meaning and personal connection. This misalignment in priorities led to a product that, while technically sound, lacked the authenticity and emotional resonance Maria desired. Moreover, literature supports the idea that users feel more attachment to products they help shape (e.g. Schreier 2006; von Hippel 2005). Because Maria's participation was superficial and constrained, she never developed a sense of ownership, thereby contributing to her dissatisfaction with the final product.

Article III concluded with a reflection on how these freelance designers who are concerned with time and focus on maximising profit might appear in opposition to the logic of *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake) (e.g., Caves 2003; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007), which is a common characteristic of workers in CIs. These freelancers have a dual nature in which they must find a suitable balance between artistic aims and economic demands.

4.5 Synthesis of the articles' findings

In this section, I aim to synthesise the articles by addressing them as one piece of research. I argue that in this manner, when the findings of the articles are considered together, a more detailed analysis of emerging themes can be executed.

4.5.1 Freelancer-led customer knowledge transfer in product development in CIs

The main objective of this research was to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities. The context was customer involvement in product development processes.

As already described, the initial theoretical decision of structuring these knowledge-transfer activities around acquisition, conversion, and application was based on the wide use of these stages in the literature (e.g. Games and Rendi 2019; Zahra and George 2002). While the empirical data supported this structure, the fact

that knowledge conversion and application were difficult to decouple was evident. Moreover, as already discussed, the interconnected nature of the activities also made it difficult, and in some ways artificial, to separate knowledge conversion from acquisition.

One of the starting points of this research regarded the assumption that, due to the special characteristics of CIs and the heterogeneity of freelancers (e.g. Caves 2000; Jones et al. 2015a; Knapp et al. 2021; Pratt 2015; Skrzek-Lubasińska and Szaban 2019), customer knowledge-transfer activities led by freelancers in CIs were likely to differ from those in larger enterprises and other sectors. In this regard, the interviewees emphasised differences between the model they use when they work as company's employees and the one they follow when working as freelancers. Gary describes this when comparing his process as a freelancer and the process he follows when engaging in work as a full-time employee at a design study:

> They're very different contexts, because in my full-time job at a design studio we're talking about a very specific process, a very particular methodology. It's another world. As a freelancer, you reduce things to something purer, simpler. You don't complicate it.

According to another freelancer,

> The process in an agency is bigger, or more structured, it's divided among a lot of people. Here that's not the case. Here, you do it all by yourself.

While these experiences resonate with creative entrepreneurs who 'often have to deal with everything by themselves' (Koch et al. 2023, 282), and even though creative industries indeed 'rely on processes that are mysterious if not inexplicable to outsiders' (Lampel and Germain 2016, 2328), the process can be structured. As an interviewee puts it,

> The process is really intense, very eclectic, very chaotic, but in the end, it does have a certain order. It's actually quite simple because it's about gathering information—basically flooding oneself with information, then translating that into creativity, and then turning that creativity into a final design.

Despite the nuances, the data analysis clearly points towards a semi-structured process, as described in **Figure 10**.

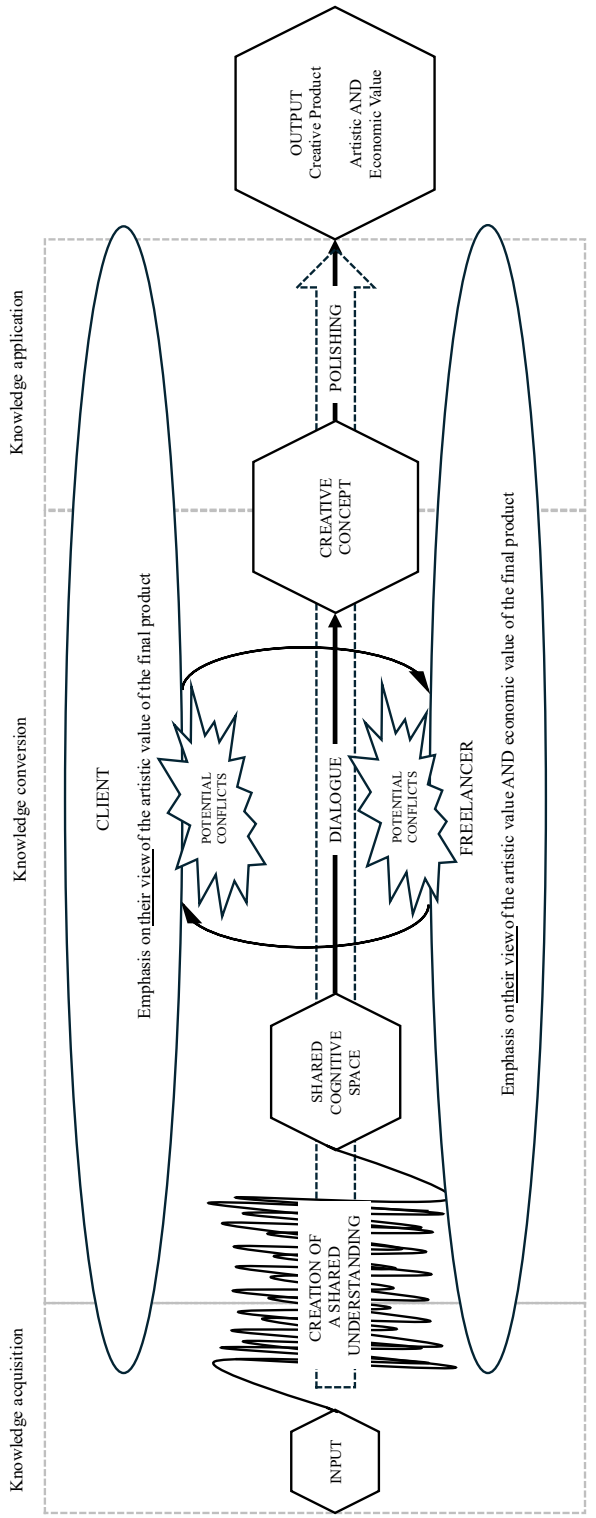

Figure 10. Knowledge-transfer activities by freelancers in the context of product development in Cis.

The process begins with the clients sharing the *main input* for the product in the form of references/images/music, characteristics of the project, characteristics of the company behind it, and/or the commercial objectives. As we discuss later, a few of these materials can function as boundary objects. As one of the freelancers mentioned,

> What I did was to talk to her. Which things she liked because she had a very clear idea for aesthetics, and she (the client) shared magazines, images, and a bit like a list that we summarised in an email. (…) I prepared a short pdf where I highlighted some keywords, concepts, and images so I could use it to discuss with the customer.

The development process continues with a stage entitling the process of creating a *shared understanding* between the freelancer and their clients, which is fuelled by the material shared as an input. This process culminates with the creation of a *shared cognitive space* that acts as a means, but also as a first output, of the creation process. This shared cognitive space is used as a stepping stone that enables a dialogue between the freelancer and the client, which is eased by a decrease in their cognitive distance. As expressed by of the freelancer,

> As we already had a kind of base, it was really about convincing ourselves that this proposal could fit, that it could work, and then applying it, finding further justification, adapting and refining it.

The dialogue process is finalised with the creation of a *creativity concept* which can be considered an intermediary product between abstract ideas and the next milestone—the final product. After the initial stages, the freelancer engages in an individual process of polishing to create the final *creative product*. This overall process is better explained in the words of one of the freelancers who worked on the design of the corporate image for a digital marketing agency. The initial concept for this digital marketing agency was shaped by the client's enthusiasm for steampunk as a dystopian vision of a baroque, futuristic world, combined with the idea of embedding emotion into technology. The freelancer explained that both he and the client felt that digital agencies at the time lacked emotional depth in their work, a feeling that resonated with the client's passion for steampunk. These thoughts triggered the creation of a shared cognitive space, thus providing a shared foundation for collaboration, which led them to draw inspiration from the Tin Man in The Wizard of Oz:

> A romantic machine one does not seem to understand completely because it is a man in the form of a suit of armour. One does not really know what's inside, but it works. The only thing missing is the heart; it is deprived of emotions.

These insights guided the freelancer in designing a logo where the heart became the central motif, thereby symbolising both emotional presence and the client's thoughts on steampunk aesthetics.

As we will see subsequently, the knowledge-transfer activities in development processes are plagued with paradoxes that trigger conflicts between the clients and the freelancers. What is particularly relevant in this regard are the main motivations underlying the client's and the freelancers' involvement in the process. On the one hand, we see how freelancers face a paradox as they struggle to reconcile artistic development with economic pressure. They see themselves as expert artists and hold strong views on what the final product should look like. At the same time, they are under high pressure to extract economic value from their work by delivering quickly so they can move on to the next project. On the other hand, albeit limitedly, the data analysis from Article III emphasises that the clients are driven by a desire to be involved in the process and have their own views on the artistic value of the creative product. The clients may have economic concerns, but for them, the value for money is strongly influenced by the final product–client/company fit and its perceived uniqueness.

What we know from the literature is that being driven by an artistic imperative while developing creative products has proven to positively affect bottom lines, increased attendance, and revenues in theatres (Hadida 2015). Developing products sought by customers has not produced the same results in this context (Hadida 2015). In this regard, it may appear that a precedence of customer preference over the artistic imperative could be detrimental to both commercial performance and artistic merit (Voss and Voss 2000). Moreover, Koch et al. (2023, 281) found a 'significant relationship between creative orientation and innovation' and that 'business orientation does not significantly relate to innovation'. In contrast, we already established the importance of customer involvement in CIs (e.g. Banks et al. 2002; De Propris 2013; Goodman-Deane et al. 2010; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014; Quero and Ventura 2015; Schmidt et al. 2018; Tschang 2007); they are the ones who have final saying on the artistic value of the creative product. With the customers' evaluations being highly subjective and based on their own views, tastes, or opinions (Caves 2000; Purnomo and Kristiansen 2018, TSB 2009), taking their input into account is critical for potential product success.

As the literature highlights, creative products must have symbolic value to appeal clients; to be viable, they must address the economic value (Townley and Gulledge 2015) and to be successful, they need to meet both (Hadida 2015; Townley et al.

2009). One of the main struggles these freelancers faced was related to the uniqueness and fitness of the final product. We know that, in craftsmanship, this uniqueness is rooted in knowledge originating from the craftsmen; it is difficult to transfer this to the final customer, so they are aware of the complexity and uniqueness of the final products (Manfredi-Latilla et al. 2019). This resonates with the freelancers interviewed in this research and, as such, one can already see how potential conflicts are likely to arise in these situations. This is evident when one of the freelancers described her ideal customer as someone who

> …appreciates the work process because, at times, it is difficult for customers to understand how much effort goes into the work we do. They do not see that it is not only pretty letters and a colour…

In the words of another freelancer,

> The customers do not realise how many hours are behind a logo. A logo is not only a logo, but it has a foundation behind, it has values, it has a development path… and they do not see it.

Or, as another freelancer emphasized,

> People think that in the end, design is just about making little drawings; many times, they only realise it's not like that when they actually try it and see the process behind it.

The remainder of this chapter concentrates on the other themes that emerged from the data analysis—that is, the use of boundary objects in the context of product development and how it is influenced by the dual nature of freelancers in CIs. I also discuss the tension among ambidexterity, speed of development, customer knowledge transfer, and the artistic/economic nature of creative products.

4.5.2 Freelancers' use of boundary objects in CIs

One of the main aspects covered in the articles regarded the use of boundary objectives as part of the freelancers' knowledge transfer activities.

As a starting point, one of the findings of Article I was regarding the existence of contradictions and ambiguity during the knowledge acquisition process and how, as acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995), these ambiguity and contradictions are needed for knowledge creation. Article II continued with this line of research and concentrated on the need to codify tacit into explicit knowledge

with the objective of using it as an input for product development. In general terms, boundary objects, understood as mechanisms for transferring and integrating knowledge across organisational boundaries, and bridging these different worlds, (Carlile 2004; Star and Griesemer 1989), were used for this codification.

The use of boundary objects in CIs is well-documented (e.g. Cohendet and Simon 2007; Gateau and Simon 2016; Halpern 2012; Jarvenpaa and Lang 2011; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014) and freelancers reported their use as part of the creation process. However, the details on how these boundary objects were used require further explanation.

As highlighted by Brindley (2008) in his study on the role of libraries in creative industries, to facilitate knowledge transfer in CIs, there is a need to create *spaces* for creative conversations and interactions to take place. Similar findings were put forward by Comunian et al. (2015) with regard to the role of HEIs as platforms, 'shared or third spaces', for knowledge transfer for CIs. I argue that one of the key findings of this dissertation is regarding how freelancers do specifically this but applied to customer knowledge.

While the creation of *shared spaces* is somehow limited to physical, or digital, places in the literature on CIs, the freelancers and their customers appeared to achieve similar results by creating a *shared cognitive space* that enabled dialogue to take place. The literature, including research on CIs, often refers to the need to have similar levels of understanding and the need to create a shared understanding, as prerequisites for knowledge creation, transfer, or development (e.g. Gateau and Simon 2016; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Öberg and Lundberg 2022; Szulanski 1996). The findings of this research extend this importance by further emphasising the relevance of this *shared space*, not only as a means to reduce cognitive distance and as an enabler of dialogue but as having a key role in the inception of the creative concept. As such, this shared cognitive space is not only the means but also the first outcome in the process of developing a creative product.

As highlighted by Halpern (2012), a variety of boundary objects can be used in the development of creative products. In this research, what I observed was first the use of what Halpern (2012) labels as 'appropriated objects', which are objects that existed before the development process and had specific meanings, but were used to create new meanings. These objects are shared as an input that contributed to the creation of the shared cognitive space; it is exemplified by the account given by the client in the failure case:

> I remember a day in which I saw a documentary of women in the 20s. It was about the flapper movement, women in the 1920s that were a bit rebel, they smoked, they would ride motorcycles or they would have their skirts a bit higher than usual (…) We (the client and the freelancer) opened Pinterest panels in

> which I added documents about what I wanted the brand to be (…) as well as pictures of women, handbags, information about my fabrics, the intention I had with my product… A lot of material… What I wanted to transmit was the idea of women's strength in different cultures because my idea is that there is a social project behind the handbags and this is how the conversation about the name, the idea, started.

Despite the extensive literature on the use of boundary objects in CIs (e.g. Cohendet and Simon 2007; Gateau and Simon 2016; Halpern 2012; Jarvenpaa and Lang 2011; Parmentier and Mangematin, 2014), sketches, or prototypes, built objects in Halpern's (2012) terminology, were not intensively used by the participants in this research, with the exception of the initial stages. While the reason for the limited use of built boundary objects is further explored in the next two sections, Article I already made it evident that freelancers had a defensive view as them being the main experts in creativity. This was seen, for example, in Anthony's interview when he defined an ideal customer as someone who knows that 'you are the visual communication professional and that respects your decisions'; it was also evident when one of the freelancers stated,

> It can be that you (the client) are the expert in distributors, but I (the freelancer) am the expert in the solutions

Another freelancer said,

> The customer has called you because you know how to do certain things that he does not. He should allow you to work and should know your opinion is more relevant than his

A freelancer in music said,

> I'm my best critic anyway, if I know that it's good then I don't really listen to what other people say. (…) I think basically with music you just have to listen to your professional instincts. You just know what sounds right and it is probably what they want.

Another freelancer said,

> I think I had an artistic vision and I wanted to do that. I wasn't particularly listening to the client.

The CI literature indicates that, in the art world, boundaries protect autonomy (Halpern 2012) and 'being true to oneself' is a precondition of artistic work in performing arts (Abfalter 2013, 302). In this context, it might appear as if some of the freelancers consciously blocked the input from their clients to preserve their style and autonomy. One could argue that the client was seen as a blockage for creativity that needed to be taken far from the creative process. This is a practice anecdotally acknowledged in the literature on CIs (e.g., Banks et al. 2002) and also in other design disciplines, such as industrial design, in which the client is often excluded after the initial input (e.g. de Beer et al. 2009). Overall, these freelancers clearly positioned themselves as the experts but also had very strong opinions regarding their style, as can be expected by creative workers with a strong *art-for-art's-sake* mentality (e.g. Caves 2003; Eikhof and Haunschild 2007). In this regard, one of the freelancers said,

> As an illustrator, I have a style, I have a certain focus, and I have my tastes. Sometimes it's clear I am not a match with your brand, or my style is not a match for your brand.

It is also relevant to acknowledge that some research on CIs has been critical in terms of the involvement of customers in creative product development. While we have seen that there is a plethora of research that highlights the importance of customer involvement (Banks et al. 2002; Caves 2003; DeFillippi et al. 2007; Dempster 2006; De Propris 2013; Goodman-Deane et al. 2010; Hartley 2009; Jeppesen and Molin 2003; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014; Quero and Ventura 2015; Sanders 2002; Schmidt et al. 2018; Tschang 2007), there are also critics (e.g. Svejenova et al. 2015; Voss and Voss 2000). Svejenova et al. (2015, 190), in their study of haute cuisine business models, went as far as to say that 'unlike the case of ventures in other industries, customer's needs are rarely taken into account when creative products are created'. One could argue that Svejenova et al.'s findings might be only applicable to haute cuisine but, further, Voss and Voss (2000) found a negative association between customer orientation and business success metrics (subscriber ticket sales, total income, and net surplus/deficit) in the theatre industry.

Overall, the freelancers' defensive position clearly had an impact on the use of boundary objects after the first stage and, in addition, the dual nature of freelancers had a strong influence. This chapter now continues with a closer look at the dual nature of freelancers in CIs and also how this dual nature influences speed of development.

4.5.3 The dual nature of freelancers in CIs

In a manner similar to CIs and their products, freelancers in the creative industries stand somewhere between artistic and business logic, requiring them to develop a variety of artistic and business skills (Protogerou et al. 2017), thereby creating a struggle to find a suitable balance between artistic aims and economic demands (Gilson 2015; Swedberg 2006; Townley and Gulledge 2015). Economic logic is in sharp contrast with artistic logic (Hadida 2015), and CIs are in a difficult position since they have one foot in the *rational* economic world and another in the *irrational* artistic world (Swedberg 2006, emphasis added).

In this context, CIs must develop a special set of organisational mechanisms and procedures to relate these two worlds to one another (Swedberg 2006), as these industries increasingly rely on their business capabilities, rather than only their creative content alone, as the basis for competitiveness (Parker et al. 2017). This is particularly challenging for smaller companies, which need to balance creativity and business rationality, occasionally with one person, thus creating a very real tension (O'Connor 2004; c.f. Pisotska and Gurses 2023). In this context, self-employed creatives can feel ill-equipped to weave together their artist and business identities and reconcile their roles as creatives and as entrepreneurs (Hennekam 2015), even though business acumen is a significant enabler to overcome market precarity and income inadequacy (Farr-Wharton et al. 2015; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Stenholm et al. 2024).

With regard to this topic, and as discussed in section 2.1.2, the CI labour market has an extreme high-income variation due to stardom and star jobs (Currid-Halkett 2015; Menger 2015; Rosen 1981) and celebrity effects (Caves 2000). These stars and celebrities enjoy high salaries and their stories reinforce the determination of others in the sector to achieve the same status (Lampel and Germain 2016). On the one hand, this persistence, risk-taking propensity, and optimism, often makes creative workers assume characteristics usually found in entrepreneurs; this leads to individuals who function as micro-CIs and who have a strong entrepreneurial mindset (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013). In contrast, we also have examples of recent graduates from arts programs with an anti-entrepreneurial mindset (Lee et al. 2018) and of small CIs—arts and crafts firms in the UK—that do not strive to be financially successful and for which satisfying creative aspirations come first (Chaston 2008).

In this regard, the views of Swedberg (2006) regarding what he calls a Schumpeterian interpretation of CIs, can be of use. Swedberg (2006) highlights how an artist entrepreneur has different ways in which they can reconcile the economic and artistic worlds. They can act as someone who combines different items into a piece of art and an economic feature but could also decide to combine things in such a manner that he or she makes money or look for a combination that, on all levels,

rejects the official economy and the motive for profit (Swedberg 2006). What is evident is that, for creative entrepreneurs, success goes far beyond financial goals (Throsby 1994). This was also the reality for the interviewed freelancers:

> At the end you put in the hours, so the project ends up looking like you want it to look. You put more hours because you do not address this from an economic perspective.

> If I get excited with a project I don't really care and I put in hours and hours (…) and do more things than in the original quote.

One of the main findings of this research is that, similar to other enterprises in the CI sector, freelancers need to find a balance between artistic and economic value. With limited research focusing on freelancers (c.f. Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009), we can only examine the literature on CIs in a wider manner to identify similarities with this duality of freelancers and other actors in the sector.

As a start, these struggles appear to be very much in line with previous literature in the management of CIs (e.g. Banks et al. 2002; Cohendet and Simon 2007; Hadida 2015), with implications in the world of education and training. With regard to the latter, certain researchers emphasise that recent graduates who enter the CI market are dissatisfied because they are not ready for self-employment (Hennekam and Bennett 2017) and struggle to adapt to the speed of CIs (Leung and Bentley 2017). In this regard, as mentioned by Stenholm et al. (2024, 270), 'educators should provide current and future creative professionals with learning opportunities that enhance their business skills while enabling them to actively build an adaptive, artistic–entrepreneurial meta-level role identity that advances adaptation to varying environments and guarantees continuity in creative and innovative work'.

In the corporate world, managers in the video game industry must 'harness expression of artistic values and technological virtuosity to meet the constraints of the economics of mass entertainment' (Cohendet and Simon 2007, 588), and entrepreneurs in the fashion industry know they have to draw on skills out of their natural skillset—for example, business skills (Marcella and Rowley 2015). Similarly, in the performing arts, managers appear to agree that artistic excellence is their most important success factor, yet their most widely used performance indicators are economic (Hadida 2015).

In general, complex organisational and managerial tensions arise in the creative industries when goals to develop art and wealth attempt to coexist (Hadida 2015). Specifically, Svejenova et al. (2015) investigated the business model of Spanish chef Ferran Adria as an example of the challenges faced by creative entrepreneurs when

they need to construct businesses around their artistic and creative products. Similarly, intermediaries in CIs also struggle with an increasing tension between maintaining their professional identities in niches while simultaneously serving the needs of a mass market (Foster and Ocejo 2015).

In general, the aim has appeared to be to reconcile artistic merit and economic performance (e.g. Hadida 2015; Schüßler and Sydow 2015); however, in many instances, a division between 'artisan and administrator' (Mintzberg 1998, 146) has been the answer, as is the case with the creatives and account managers in advertising or the artistic directors and executive directors in opera and ballet (Mintzberg 1998; Townley and Gulledge 2015). Similarly, certain organisations keep them separate by subcontracting artistic input to flexible and decentralised creative communities of specialists, keeping the firm focused on a management mode ruled by time, cost, and market constraints (Cohendet and Simon 2007).

This straightforward separation of roles is, for obvious reasons, impossible for freelancers; however, this separation of business and artistic roles can be literal or separate inner mindsets (Koch et al. 2023). Either way, and as highlighted by Eikhof and Haunschild (2006), these freelancers need to find a way to be artists while still making a living, and we have evidence in the literature of creative workers' non-creative second jobs providing the major portion of their income (Abfalter 2013; Cunningham and Potts 2015; Throsby and Zednik 2011). This also appears to be one of the reasons why many of the interviewed freelancers worked part time and needed to balance their tasks with other job positions. This is exemplified by the following quotes:

> I have worked as a freelance designer for two years, but I have a side job.

> I engage in not very large projects so I can deal with them while working full-time (in addition to my work as a freelancer).

> For the past three years, I've combined it with a weekend job.

In general, the freelancers that were part of this research were clearly under severe economic pressure. This is exemplified by one of the freelancers who stated,

> I'm an illustrator but, sometimes, out of need, you end up doing projects that deviate from illustration. I'm on this because I have an artistic vocation, yet I need to make a living. You do the work that you have to do!

This economic pressure clearly had an influence on the freelancers' dual nature and translated into the time devoted to knowledge-transfer activities. It may appear that

freelancers make (un-)conscious decisions to limit ambiguity and block customer input as a means to proceed more quickly towards the final product. These freelancers appear to act more like managers in media firms who understand that 'it is more important to deliver on time and within budget and avoid unnecessary complications usually associated with freer, more artistic designs' (Banks et al. 2002, 261). With this focus on exploitation, as further described in 4.5.4, freelancers limited the use of boundary objects after the shared cognitive space was achieved and developed the products mostly independently. As one can expect, and as described in Article III's findings, this had an impact on the client's views of the final product's artistic value.

To conclude with this reflection, and while the dual nature of freelancers poses an obvious negative burden on the shoulders of CI freelancers, a positive aspect is that they may have more creative freedom. As already expressed, certain creative activities require not one but many creative inputs and types of workers (e.g. a film or a video game) with each contributing different skills but also their own *art-for-art's-sake* values (Caves 2000; Cohendet and Simon 2007; Pisotska and Gurses 2023). This makes coordination and reconciliation of their values difficult; an issue one could argue is not present when working alone. Freelancers can do their work on their own terms (Hermes et al. 2017), as their creative freedom allows them to decide how the creative task is performed and how much time is allocated to creative work (Caves 2000).

This dual nature of freelancers may come with little surprise yet, once again, these freelancers face a paradox in which, in principle, their freelance nature allows them more creative freedom, as they are not limited by company structures or the involvement of other people in development projects. However, creativity might, in fact, occur between equal freelancers and not as a result of their individual traits (Öberg 2024), and it would be wrong to assume this creative freedom equals economic freedom (Hermes et al. 2017). To elaborate on these aspects and to further focus on how economic pressure impacts freelancers' customer knowledge transfer decisions, this chapter continues with a discussion on the tension between ambidexterity, speed of development, and customer involvement in CIs.

4.5.4 The tension between ambidexterity, speed of development, and customer knowledge transfer in CIs

One key aspect that emerged from the analysis of all the three articles included in this dissertation is regarding the struggle of freelancers in CIs to find the right balance to create creative products with both sufficient artistic and economic value. This is a topic that emerged in all the papers but from different perspectives and one

that can be analysed from the prism of ambidexterity as well as speed of development.

With regard to the former, ambidexterity—the balance between exploitation of current ideas with the exploration of new ones—has been extensively researched (e.g. Duncan 1976; O'Reilly and Tushman 2013; Tushman & O'Reilly 1996). In CIs, this ambidexterity relates to the need to find a balance between exploration, which could be understood as producing new creative works such as written output, design briefs, new product development, and exploitation (including the reproduction of existing works, streamlining established processes, and other incremental innovation) (Knight and Harvey 2015). This balancing act is executed under severe pressure to develop products and introduce them into the market quickly (DeFillippi 2015; DeFillippi and Arthur 1998; Hauge 2012; Hotho and Champion 2011; Leung and Bentley 2017); in this context, it becomes a challenge for CIs to be ambidextrous and to balance exploitation and exploration. In the case of the interviewed freelancers, the focus on exploitation is evident in the words of one of the freelancers:

> In the beginning, I would pay more attention to her (the client), but then later on, I began ignore her.

Another freelancer said,

> I went to her (the client) with a proposal that was already finished, developed and with justified choices, colours... I did not want to show her things step by step. I wanted to go with a well-justified, well-defined and finished project

Or another freelancer,

> I had to be pretty firm and cut off a lot of ideas and input, because otherwise, time-wise, we wouldn't have gotten anywhere.

Overall, and although there are conflicting findings on the effect of time pressure on creativity (Aleksić et al. 2017; Khedhaouria et al. 2017), there is consensus on people being less creative under high time pressure (Amabile et al. 2002; Ensor et al. 2006). As we have seen, the nature of the job market in CIs is extremely precarious (Farr-Wharton et al. 2015; Hennekam and Bennet 2017; Leung and Bentley 2017; Morris et al. 2024) and, together with the fast pace of the industry, might negatively affect the core creativity of the industry (Leung and Bentley 2017). Overall, as the discourse and practices of business and markets take hold, the non-monetary value of culture and art is at risk of being lost (Townley et al. 2009).

In the case of the interviewed freelancers, as already introduced in 4.5.2, Article I specifically acknowledged that contradictions and ambiguity are needed for knowledge creation, but we also know this creates inefficiencies in terms of how much time is used for development. As the economic value begins to be prioritized by the freelancers, Article II provided further evidence of this struggle with the findings related to the non-use of boundary objects after the initial stages. This appears to be in line with some of the literature that emphasises the struggle of CI SMEs to access resources and how it forces them to focus on immediate commercial needs rather than creativity (Powell and Ennis 2007).

Article III is specifically the article that went further into the topic and examined the influence of speed of development on the creation of the final product. It is also in that article that it was concluded that an accelerated speed of development has a negative effect on the creative value of the final product.

Overall, this optimisation of the development process, driven by economic pressure and which translates into an accelerated speed of development, had a negative impact on the artistic side of the final product. In a different setting, that of integration of new competences in advertising agencies, Öberg (2013) reached a similar conclusion—as the output of a creative process became more streamlined, its novelty decreased. Specifically, 'decreased mutual exchanges between different individuals and customer representatives had negative impact on the companies' adaptability to customers' preferences and decreased the perceived usability' (Öberg 2013, 121). The interviewed freelancers appeared to suffer from the same decrease on perceived usability, or client-product fit, as they also decreased customer involvement.

On a different take on this matter, and as is the case with other CI products—for example, films, books, music, and computer games (Townley et al. 2009)—the development process went through numerous stages of production, with costs being sunk at each stage, and with the final customer evaluation remaining highly uncertain. At each stage, the likelihood of acceptance by the customer increased, and additional costs and time were incurred. Due to the dual nature of creative products, and the same duality we see in freelancers of CIs, a tension between speed of development and knowledge creation began to arise early in the process.

Moreover, we know that fixed costs in CIs grow from and depend sensitively on the quality or elaborateness of the creative product (Caves 2000), a reality which is difficult to manage for freelance workers. At the end of the day, to be appreciated, creative goods must satisfy the symbolic; to be viable, they must address the economic (Townley and Gulledge 2015) and, to be successful, they must satisfy aesthetics and market imperatives (Hadida 2015; Townley et al. 2009).

Overall, what is evident is that the interviewed freelancers appear to aim for a boost in the speed of development, but this accelerated speed was achieved by

limiting the use of boundary objects and blocking the client's input. Limiting this input, at least in the case of the projects explored, clearly had a negative effect on the client's perception of artistic value. Moreover, as complex as it already is to explain the value of the final product and its uniqueness to clients, limiting their involvement certainly did not help and further fuelled this perception of misalignment.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical contributions

Overall, the purpose of this research was to understand how freelancers in CIs conduct knowledge-transfer activities in the context of customer involvement in product development processes.

This study was developed on three main pillars that provided the foundation for the research. First, the literature acknowledges the importance of freelancers as key economic actors in CIs (Banks et al. 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013), but studies focusing on freelancers in the sector remain scarce (c.f. Eikhof and Haunschild 2006; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009; Hennekam 2015; Hermes et al. 2017). Second, previous research emphasises the critical role of knowledge in CIs (e.g. Granger and Hamilton 2010, Potts and Cunningham 2008) and that knowledge transfer models from other sectors may not be applicable to CIs (Brindley 2008; Colette 2008; Collinge and Staines 2009; Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Weller 2007). Third, despite the importance of knowledge and the relevance of customer involvement for CIs (Banks et al. 2002; Dempster 2006; Goodman-Deane et al. 2010; Tschang 2007), studies focusing on customer knowledge transfer in the sector remain scarce and limited to a few studies (Collinge and Staines 2009; Kalogerakis et al. 2010; Sanders 2002).

Taking all these aspects into account, this research was built on the overall assumption that, due to the special characteristics of CIs and the heterogeneity of freelancers (e.g. Caves 2000; Jones et al. 2015a; Knapp et al. 2021; Pratt 2015; Skrzek-Lubasińska and Szaban 2019), customer knowledge transfer activities led by freelancers in the creative industries were likely to differ from those of larger enterprises and those in other sectors. Specifically, this research made contributions to the research streams described in **Figure 1**. These main theoretical contributions are summarised in **Table 9** and described thereafter.

Table 9. Main research contributions.

Area of contribution	Theoretical contribution
• Knowledge transfer • Creative industries	This study conceptualised customer knowledge transfer activities conducted by freelancers in product development processes in CIs. In doing so, and despite nuances, this research provided evidence of the applicability of traditional knowledge transfer models for customer knowledge transfer in product development in CIs.
	This research reconciled two theoretical concepts, shared understanding and shared spaces, by emphasising the importance of the creation of a shared cognitive space in the initial stages of creative product development. This shared cognitive space is a new theoretical concept which encompasses characteristics of boundary objects while also serving as a preliminary outcome of creative product development.
	This study broke down the process of customer knowledge transfer led by freelancers in product development in CIs. By doing so, the study found that the use of boundary objects is mostly anchored in the initial stages of the process, and that the usage of these objects diminishes after these initial stages.
• Customer involvement • Speed of development	This research took a critical look at the concept of speed of development in CIs and found that, in the context of customer involvement in product development process led by freelancers, an accelerated speed was achieved mostly by blocking customer input. This increased speed of development came at the expense of the symbolic value of the creative product.
• Creative industries • Dual nature of CIs	This study found that the dual nature of freelancers has a negative impact on the symbolic value of creative products due to both economic but also artistic-driven reasons.

First, this dissertation adds to the literature on knowledge transfer and creative industries by conceptualising how freelancers in CIs conduct customer knowledge transfer in the context of product development processes. Existing studies in CIs had highlighted that traditional processes of knowledge transfer might not be adequate for CIs (Brindley 2008; Colette 2008; Collinge and Staines 2009; Heidemann-Lassen et al. 2018; Weller 2007), but this research shows that traditional models of knowledge transfer (e.g. Zahra and George 2002) are relatively applicable to CIs in the context of customer knowledge transfer in product development. As introduced in **Figure 10**, freelancers who were part of this research went through a process of knowledge acquisition, conversion, and application. The overall process was far from clearcut, and stage changes were relatively blurred, but the knowledge transfer activities matched the three main stages previously described in section 4.1. The

specificities are described hereafter and appear to be mostly rooted in the special characteristics of creative products and CIs (Caves 2000, 2003).

Second, this research shed light on the initial stages of customer knowledge transfer in product development by describing the creation process of a shared cognitive space. The literature had previously highlighted the need to have a shared understanding for knowledge creation (e.g. Gateau and Simon 2016; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Szulanski 1996), and literature on CIs had emphasised the importance of shared spaces for knowledge transfer (e.g. Brindley 2008; Comunian et al. 2015; O'Connor 2004; Vinodrai and Keddy 2015). This research reconciled these two separate concepts and improved the understanding of how customer knowledge transfer is conducted by emphasising the dual role of a shared cognitive space as a boundary object in itself but also as the first outcome of creative product development.

As a *third theoretical contribution*, this research specifically examined freelancers' usage of boundary objects in the context of product development. This study expanded on existing research by finding that these boundary objects were the main vehicles for knowledge codification, but they were used in a limited manner after a shared cognitive space was created. The literature had previously highlighted the extensive use of boundary objects in the creative industries (Cohendet and Simon 2007; Gateau and Simon 2016; Jarvenpaa and Lang 2011; Parmentier and Mangematin 2014); however, by looking specifically at the different stages described in **Figure 10**, this research extended previous findings by specifically anchoring this use to the initial stages of product development. As such, the creation of a shared cognitive space served as the foundation for meaningful dialogue to take place and, thereafter, boundary objects were not used as extensively.

Fourth, this research also contributed to the literature on customer involvement. Specifically, this research critically applied the concept of speed of development and investigated how it influenced decision-making regarding customer knowledge transfer. Speed of development has been traditionally regarded as a positive aspect in product development and as a potential source of competitive advantage (e.g. Carbonell and Rodriguez-Escudero 2011; Menon et al. 2002; Wynarczyk, 2013; cf. Cankurtaran et al. 2013); however, this research found that, in the case of freelancers leading CI product development, this increased speed was mostly achieved by blocking customer input and had a negative influence on the symbolic value perceived by the client. These findings appear to indicate that the commodification concerns of Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) back in the 1940s[12] remain rather relevant and topical. As expressed by Coulson (2012, 258) in her study of musicians,

[12] Original in German from 1944. First translated edition in English from 1972.

the establishment of CIs might have done a disservice to artists because their 'occupations within the creative industries are robbed of their distinctive practices and their worth as contributors to cultural life, esteemed only if they have economic impact'. The accelerated pace of CIs in general, and in a great majority of their sub-sectors in particular, appear to force freelancers operating in the field towards further commodification of creative products.

As a *fifth contribution*, and as introduced in **Figure 1**, this dissertation aimed at contributing to the overall literature on CIs and increase our understanding regarding the dual nature of CI freelancers. Previous studies had highlighted that CIs live between a rational economic world and an irrational artistic world (Swedberg 2006), a reality that creates a struggle to find a suitable balance between artistic aims and economic demands (Gilson 2015; Townley and Gulledge 2015). This research posited that freelancers indeed struggle to find this balance and, in so doing, the symbolic value of the creative products they develop suffer from both artistic and economic-driven decisions. As we have seen, on the one hand, freelancers adopted a defensive position, very likely rooted in their art-for-art's-sake values, and positioned themselves as experts on creativity. As the freelancers emphasised their role as experts, they also proceeded to block customers' input. In contrast, the economic pressure posed by being an artist while still trying to make a living (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006) influenced the prioritisation of economic value in the form of fast revenue. Both the freelancers' artistic and economic-driven decisions had a negative influence on the artistic value that makes creative products appealing in the first place.

Lastly, in addition to the explicit contributions discussed above, this study also addresses the Anglocentrism of CI research described in section 1.2 (e.g. Lee 2020; Prince 2010) by focusing on countries which are not as extensively covered in the literature. This research combined data from Spain and Finland to draw conclusions which can be of use in other geographical areas. Moreover, pairing these data with the extensive British- and Australian-based literature provided granularity regarding their applicability to other geographies.

To conclude, it is my hope that this dissertation will serve as a wake-up call for researchers in the field of CIs. A large proportion of CI literature and research thus far focuses on large enterprises, but we know that freelancers are key actors in the sector. Moreover, despite an acknowledgment of the importance of knowledge for the sector, research on customer knowledge transfer is almost inexistent. This research provides a few exploratory findings, but they are extensive avenues for research that could be explored from here and that are summarised in section 5.3.

5.2 Managerial contributions

In addition to the theoretical contributions described in section 5.1, the different articles also made a few managerial contributions that can be of interest to freelancers in the field of CIs as well as to customers/clients of those freelancers and managers involved in the development of creative products.

As a starting point, Article I emphasised that freelancers and customers in CIs field should pay attention to the level of ambiguity and contradictions in creative product development processes. While pursuing effectiveness appears reasonable, it should be acknowledged that reducing the number of knowledge-acquisition activities may impact the development process outcome. The artistic value of creative products is what makes them valuable to begin with, and making decisions that may harm this dimension should be made with utmost caution. Moreover, attention should be paid when deciding on communication channels, with the findings emphasising the critical importance of face-to-face communication to enable creative dialogue but also asynchronous channels to streamline product development and maintain a record of feedback and decisions in written form.

Article II concentrated on customer knowledge codification in the context of product development in creative industries and also put forward a series of managerial implications. First, the paper emphasised the paramount importance of boundary objects in achieving a shared understanding and highlighted the role of this understanding as the foundation for dialogue. This foundation, further developed in this introduction with the concept of shared cognitive space, is critical to guaranteeing that both the freelancer and client can communicate effectively, as dialogue becomes crucial in subsequent development stages. Moreover, the article also emphasised the relevancy of having a personal and project match to ensure a willingness to engage in this dialogue. Therefore, in this regard, the main managerial implication revolved around the fact that efforts to achieve a shared cognitive space at the beginning of the development and a focus on personal and project matches are of critical importance.

Article III put forward a few managerial insights by concentrating on barriers for knowledge transfer in the context of product development in CIs. Originating from the study of a failure case, the most relevant recommendation related to the importance of allowing sufficient time for user involvement to ensure knowledge creation can take place and that the artistic value of a creative product has sufficient time to be developed. Article III also called for freelancers in CIs to acknowledge the dual nature of their products and to ponder decisions on increasing/decreasing artistic/aesthetics or instrumental/economic value by acknowledging they might be made at the expense of the other dimension. Overall, and as already mentioned, freelancers are asked to consider that it is the artistic component that makes these types of works relevant and appealing in the first place.

Lastly, a general managerial contribution, which is well-documented in the literature (Cattani et al. 2015; Jones et al. 2015a; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Protogerou et al. 2017) relates to the importance of networks as a source of job opportunities, innovation, novelty, and credibility. We know that strong network ties are linked with economic and creative venture performance in CIs (Mylonas and Petridou 2018) and allow CIs to 'access a broader pool of knowledge, such as employment opportunities, potential partners, and new products and techniques to gain competitive advantage' (Lee 2015, 141). Moreover, Articles I–III highlight that, while formal networks are important, it is crucial for creative workers, freelancers or not, to maintain informal networks, often in the form of communities. In general, this research puts forward a call to invest time and capitalise on these networks—often embedded in creative clusters and cities—as another managerial contribution of this research.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The systematic literature review, the published articles, and this dissertation put forward a few avenues for research that are of relevance moving forward. Before diving into these suggestions, it is important to acknowledge that a number of the suggestions for further research introduced in the articles were addressed either directly in subsequent articles or in this introduction. For example, Article I set the stage for the research by being the first paper accepted for a conference and some of the suggestions for further research were addressed in Articles II and III as well as in this dissertation. Namely, the suggestions to investigate knowledge conversion and application were, at the very least, partially addressed in Articles II and III, while the focus on the impact of limiting ambiguity and contradictions was explored in Article III.

Even so, a few of the suggestions from the articles remain to be addressed, as it is the case with the need for further research on the importance of networking for CI freelancers as well as the role of networking in knowledge transfer. Despite anecdotical evidence in Articles I and II regarding the role of networks for acquiring projects, literature in CIs emphasises the importance of networks (e.g. Cattani et al. 2015; Genders 2022; Jones et al. 2015a; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013; Protogerou et al. 2017), the collective/networked/social nature of knowledge in the industry (Brindley 2008; Souni et al. 2016), and even the relationship among these aspects (Felton et al. 2010). Specifically, the literature indicates that, due to the labour characteristics of creative industries, local networks play an important role in learning, knowledge exchange, and job search (Vinodrai and Keddy 2015). Moreover, social and professional network ties are significantly linked with

economic and creative venture performance in CIs (Mylonas and Petridou 2018). With this in mind, it is imperative to further explore freelancers utilisation of external networks, particularly when acknowledging that the majority of the interviewed freelancers mentioned their reliance on these networks for, at the very least, feedback and project sourcing.

Another area highlighted by the articles was regarding the need to further research knowledge conversion. In this dissertation, I mainly focused on codification (externalisation), but we know there are a variety of mechanisms that can be used for knowledge conversion. As an example, Ordanini et al. (2008) found that project-based organisations can effectively stimulate knowledge socialisation by bridging cognitive distance. As such, externalisation and socialisation are two of the components of the SECI model and it would be relevant to further explore their applicability as well as that of combination and internalisation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

In addition, a relevant avenue which could be worth exploring is that related to analogical thinking. Analogical thinking can be defined as 'the transfer of knowledge from a base domain to a target domain as a function of correspondence between these two' in the context of problem-solving (Kalogerakis et al. 2010, 418). As shown in the work of Kalogerakis et al. (2010), designers are known to use analogical thinking as they apply knowledge from one project to the next, but one can only wonder if freelancers do something similar with the transfer of knowledge from the customer's world to the freelancers' domain (for example in graphic design or in music composition). In addition to analogical thinking, related concepts such as transfer distance (Kalogerakis et al. 2010), the type of knowledge being transferred (Stejskal and Hajek 2019; Tempest 2009), and knowledge viscosity (Boisot 1998; Weller 2007) are dimensions that could be incorporated into future research on the topic of knowledge transfer in CIs. In addition, a deeper examination into the use of different boundary objects (e.g. Halpern 2012) could clarify whether there are differences that need to be acknowledged based on the type of object utilized.

In addition to the suggestions presented above, an interesting avenue for further research would be to go deeper into the motivations of freelancers to be self-employed and its influence on knowledge transfer. It could be argued that, depending on whether the freelancer's self-employment nature is influenced by push and pull factors (see section 3.2), their willingness to spend time on customer involvement and knowledge-transfer activities could be affected. Specifically, this research focused on freelancers; however, in certain instances, it referred to the literature on cultural (e.g. Höllen et al. 2020; Konrad 2013; Lee et al. 2018) and creative (e.g. Colette 2008; Svejenova et al. 2015) entrepreneurship.

As acknowledged in the literature, workers in CIs might be forced to become 'accidental entrepreneurs' (Coulson 2012, 251) and freelancers may exhibit

entrepreneurial competencies (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Lampel and Germain 2016; Mietzner and Kamprath 2013). Further exploring differences between 'forced freelancers' and 'cultural' and 'creative' entrepreneurs—for example, differences in economic pressure—could provide further granularity to the findings of this research. In addition, as Koch et al. (2023) highlighted, creative entrepreneurship research mainly focus on the macro-level, such as organisational structure and industry characteristics, and moving towards micro-level analysis is an interesting avenue of research.

In general, the papers indicated the need to have a more heterogenous sample and data from different subsectors of CIs to be able to obtain even more comprehensive findings on how freelancers conduct knowledge transfer activities and operate overall. Alternatively, a researcher could go completely in a different direction and focus specifically on a subset of CIs. As already mentioned, CIs are extremely diverse, with some of them very close to the original 'cultural industries'—for example, art galleries or theatres, and others closer to the 'creative' categorisation, such as video game development or graphic design. This leads to difficulties with the transferability of results (Gong and Hassink 2017), as expressed in 3.8.

While this research aimed at specifically providing a holistic view of the industries, it goes without saying that the subsectors do have differences, which might be worth exploring individually and without the umbrella of the creative industries. As better put in the European Cluster Observatory (2011, 22) report on CIs, 'despite many similarities and interdependencies, the activities gathered under the umbrella of creative and cultural industries need also to be understood as separate industries in their own rights'. There is substantial subsector variation in CIs (Potts and Cunningham 2008) and, as previously mentioned, this research design could be replicated with freelancers in other subsectors of CIs and potentially be the inception of a comparative study.

On a related note, I made a conscious decision to particularly avoid examining design-related streams of research, unless the articles appeared as a result of the systematic literature review (e.g. Sanders 2002) to avoid focusing only on a subset of CIs. Regardless of this decision, exploring the research's themes through frameworks such as design thinking (e.g. Brown 2019; Buchanan 1992) or design-driven innovations (e.g. Verganti 2009) can certainly provide insights into how knowledge can be transferred from users/customers and applied to the development of creative products.

Regarding this line of thought, another relevant avenue that requires future research is the role of customers and users in the development process in CIs. This research focused explicitly on freelancers and data were collected from the customer in only one of the projects. Moreover, as expressed in 3.8, this research did not

account for differences between clients and (end) users, a limitation that should be addressed in future studies. We know clients influence user involvement in design industries (Goodman-Deane et al. 2010) and, therefore, it would be important to collect data from them and from users, and potentially compare whether the role of a client as a person affects the findings of this study.

To conclude, one of the main findings of this research—the impact of accelerated development speed on the artistic/symbolic value of creative product—also needs of further research. As a start, and as put forward by Svejenova (2005), the overall tension between art and commerce should still be further researched by examining the role of individuals in generating and adapting practices to understand the micro-dynamics that underpin this tension. In relation to the speed of development, Article I highlighted the fact that ambiguity and contradictions are needed for knowledge creation and that the impact of limiting or reducing them during development processes needed to be further analysed. Article III took on this task but relied solely on a single case study. While the initial findings of the article on how accelerated development affects the artistic value of the final product hold importance, further research with either a broader sample or a homogeneous sample from a subsector of CIs is rather important.

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Abbreviations

CI	Creative Industry
CCI	Cultural and Creative Industry
CR	Critical Realism
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ILO	Industry Liaison Office
IP	Intellectual Property
IT	Information Technology
NPD	New Product Development
KM	Knowledge Management
UK	United Kingdom
SIC	Standard Industrial Classification
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
VAT	Value Added Tax

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guide for all cases, with the exception of the failure case

Think of two projects in which you worked **alone with a client** and that you remember in detail. (Share before the interview)

We will not use your name, company or clients' names. All the information that can be used by a third party to identify your name or company/clients' name will also be omitted.

Guiding questions for the interviews

General background

General information regarding the interviewee, types of projects he/she has been working on (only those done alone), experience, age, etc.

List of the projects in which they worked alone.

General information regarding the creation process (both projects)

Overview of the project and duration

How did you get involved in the project? Which steps did you follow? (Overview to create a 'timeline')

Knowledge acquisition (both projects)

In project A/B, which process did you follow to ask the client what they needed or wanted? Are you able to identify the steps you followed to achieve an understanding of your client's needs or wants? Were the needs and wants the same?

How did you manage the communication in project A/B? Which means of communication did you use? Email? Meeting? Phone calls?

How did you decide what to ask client A/B?

Did you have a kick-off meeting at the beginning of the project? Which was/were the objective/s of this meeting?

Knowledge conversion (both projects)

In project A/B, did you find it difficult to understand what the client needed or what he/she wanted to say or explain? What could have been the reasons for this?

In project A/B, did you think at some point that the client was asking for something irrelevant or that lacked sophistication?

In project A/B, would you say you follow a process to attempt to understand what the client wanted or needed? How was this process?

In project A/B, did you use any metaphors, 'prototypes', or show the client what you were thinking or to make the client show you want he needed/wanted?

Knowledge application (both projects)

In project A/B, how much did you consider the input of the client? Do you think the client was 'wrong' in some of his requests? If so, how did you manage this situation?

In project A/B, would you say you followed a process to decide how to apply the client's input into the final 'product'? How did you deal with conflicting information?

General (both projects)

In project A/B, did you consult with someone at some point?

Final section

You have certainly heard the saying, 'the client does not know what he wants'— do you think that's occasionally the case? Do you think there might be other reasons why the client is not able to know or express what they want/need?

What do you do when a client asks you for something contradictory?

Related to kick-off meetings, did you try to have a kick-off meeting?

Meetings, phone calls, emails… What are the pros and cons of these methods? If you could choose, which means of communication would you use and when?

What would the ideal client look to you?

Do you think trust has a role in the creation process? Is it important to know the client?

Could you think of any projects you have done as a freelancer which you would categorise as a failure in terms of final product, time used, or not being able to understand the client?

Knowing I am researching the process on how a freelancer acquires, assimilates and applies knowledge from a client to a final product, is there anything else you would consider important in this regard?

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