Creative Industries and Cross-Sectoral Innovation: A European Story Through Policy and Funding
From the Green Paper to the New European Bauhaus

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A (Not So) Recent Beginning
Following the publication of the European Agenda for Culture in 2007 and the Green Paper on the potential of cultural and creative industries (CCIs) for economic growth in 2010, many European institutions and research centres have turned their attention to studying the impact of cultural and creative activities on the economy in general and on innovation in other industrial sectors.

Creative industries became a major focus of industrial policy throughout Europe. High expectations were placed on this sector as it was expected to contribute to the industrial renewal of the European economy.

However, both mapping operations and quantitative analyses were confronted with methodological questions (Which subsector should be included in the CCIs?), political questions (Is it fair to measure the economic performance of public subsidies to the arts sector?), and cultural questions (Do gastronomy, film, video, and photography, music, performing arts, publishing, software and video games, and television and radio. It also acknowledged that these industries are facing challenges such as digitalization and globalization, which are changing the way they operate and compete. The paper outlined a range of policy measures to support the growth and competitiveness of these industries, such as increasing access to finance, improving copyright and intellectual property protection, and fostering international cooperation.

The European Union's 2010 Green Paper on "Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries" was a policy document that aimed to identify the main challenges facing the cultural and creative industries in the EU and to outline a range of policy measures to support the growth and competitiveness of these industries. The paper recognized the significant economic and social contributions of the cultural and creative industries, which include sectors such as advertising, architecture, the arts, crafts, design, fashion,
Conexiones imposibles, as official partner of the New European Bauhaus, launched a series of meetings titled *What would Gropius do a century later? Network conversations on the New European Bauhaus*, that seek to analyse, from different thematic areas, the role played by the arts, culture, creativity and thought in the processes of transformation and innovation of organisations and territories, as well as create a network of dialogue and reflection on the contribution of transdisciplinarity, hybridisation and cross-fertilisation between sectors and knowledge to developing Europe’s future. Ph. Boris Meggiorin.
omy or tourism count as creative activities?). In some countries, such as France, ethical questions also rose to public attention: isn’t it risky to evaluate the economic impact of artistic expression? As recipients of public grants, why should we measure their impact in terms of economic value? Are we shifting from grants to investments? What about “L’art pour l’art”?4

Nevertheless, the banking and debt crisis in Europe in the early 2010s made the rhetoric of economic development inadequate (obsolete?). In the meantime, we witnessed the progressive introduction of environmental issues into national and European agendas. The European Union 2020 Agenda was replaced by a stricter net-zero strategy and the mitigation of climate change effects became an important field for the collaboration between CCI tools and ecological transition policies and circular economy.

At all these stages, interest in CCIs and their cross-cutting role in society and the economy has continued to grow, beyond their mere impact on employment and growth.

Joining the Dots

What used to be a set of local and isolated experiences in different European countries began to be placed under constant observation and framed by academia and policy makers. It meant reviewing organisations proposing the improvement of processes through artistic thinking, designers working on industrial projects since their early conception stages, spontaneous collectives of artists occupying abandoned urban areas following industrial transformation. Even if progress occurred at a different pace throughout European regions, the production of compelling academic research improved the availability of public funding at all levels of governance.

The recognition of the role of the arts and culture in society is nothing new. The pilgrims along the Via Francigena recognized a soothing function for body and spirit in the frescoes of Assisi, defining an intuitive link between art and health. In more recent times, industrial companies such as Italsider and Olivetti integrated artistic knowledge in different forms, both in production and in the well-being of the workers.

The contribution of creative industries to the broader economy became clearer in the early stages of globalisation and the digital shift at the turn of the millennium. Phenomena such as the collapse of the music industry or the development of the gaming industry, highlighted the global economic value of such sectors. The work of Richard Florida on the creative class5 in the US and the aforementioned Agenda for Culture and the Green Paper in Europe promoted new policy windows.

Framing the Phenomenon

The next step was to identify what we mean by cross-sectoral innovation involving the culture or creative practices. Terms such as spill over, hybridisation, creative fertilisation… were popularised and came to define these types of operation.

A new wave of research made it possible to classify these types of collaborations, assessing their intensity and impact, on a spectrum ranging from low intensity, e.g. SMEs hiring a graphic designer for a new website, to more radical high-intensity innovations promised by the artistic interventions in organisations6, appearing in the form of residencies of artists interacting with a company’s workers for one year.

European funding supported cross-sectoral local projects, even before national or...
Fig. 2
Architecture as well as other disciplines is changing greatly thanks to new innovative approaches for public spaces. Ph. Boris Meggiorin.
Fig. 3
regional funds. In fact, even if Treaties attributed no competence in cultural matters to the EU, they allowed a breach for action from an economic point of view.

EU Funding Support to Cross-Sectoral Innovation

Some examples in this sense were several projects that I followed closely, such as Creative Clash, TAF – Training Artists for Innovation, both supported by the EU Culture Programme in 2010 and the ECIA – European Creative Industries Alliance, co-financed in 2011 by the European Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP).

These projects involved scholars, practitioners and industrial companies acting as recipients of artistic interventions in organisations. They fed regional and European authorities with results and impacts and raised awareness of the potential of brokering actions to manage the collaboration between the world of the arts and traditional economic sectors.

ECIA in particular was a policy learning platform funded by the EU with more than 20 partnering organisations. It studied ways to improve regional conditions for growth through the creative sector. For example, it analysed the integration of creative services, such as design, with traditional manufacturing sectors to add value and enhance the economic performance and robustness of European industry. Although there was agreement that the collaboration between creative industries and traditional industrial sectors resulted in cross-innovation of new products, services and processes, back in 2011 there was still little proper understanding of the mechanism behind it.

Particular emphasis was placed on the instruments that could be used by local and regional authorities to promote cross-innovation involving both creative industries and traditional industrial sectors. This was the case with the study of the VINCI innovation vouchers in the Upper Austria region, run through the joint effort of the cultural unit and the economic development service of the regional government.

All these efforts converged into the design of the “perfect framework” for the regional development of cross-sectoral innovation based on cultural and creative industries.

These and other initiatives by the most dynamic territories have enabled the European Commission to gather evidence to come up with new funding schemes integrated in Horizon 2020, Erasmus + and the COSME programmes, specifically addressing the promotion of cross-sectoral innovation throughout the continent. They were designed to support collaboration between the creative industries and other sectors.

However, these kinds of initiatives were slowed down by a number of obstacles, such as:

• the degree of awareness of local public administrators and economic operators of what cross-innovation is;
• the compartmentalisation of knowledge in educational systems and the existence of administrative silos in the distribution of political competencies, as well as the fiscal categorisation of private activities;
• the uncertain ownership of intellectual property and copyrights of creative products generated by these collaborations;
• the internal culture of companies in dealing with change;
• the lack of training for artists willing to interact with realities other than their own;
• the urgent need to obtain tangible products from collaborations, reducing the time and resources available for process analysis and experimentation not linked to artefacts.

The obstacles have been extensively studied and each impediment has led to a new wave of projects proposing solutions to overcome them.

The more industrially or politically mature regional territories found an ally in the Intelli-
Fig. 4
Hybrid event in the form of a pop-up radio, produced by the author for MateraHub as part of the Deus project on open design as a method for innovation.
gent Specialisation Strategy RIS3, promoted by the EU more than 15 years ago. Giving priority to a reduced number of economic sectors improved the possibility for reciprocal collaborations. And when Cultural and Creative Industries were listed in the RIS3, it was a good observation point for cross-sectoral innovation experiences steered by regional authorities. The construction of a favourable environment at the national level also led to the establishment of inter-ministerial strategies, e.g. by the governments of the Netherlands and Estonia.

Some branches of the creative industries, such as architecture and design, have shown a greater affinity for working with private companies. It should be emphasised, however, that the most daring solutions are generally those resulting from artists’ collaborations with industry. Among the industrial sectors most receptive to this type of experience in Europe are textiles and automotive, transport, health and agribusiness, also driven by the ecological agenda and the subsequent crises.

Another new item in the agendas was citizens’ need for democratic participation, pushed to counteract the populist agenda. Citizen participation platforms benefited from the brokering experiences such as those between creative and cultural industries and other sectors. To name only a few that I had the chance to study closely in Italy: the Theatre of Citizenship of the Teatro Stabile in Venice\(^1\), the redevelopment of the old fire station in Ferrara by the architectural collective Spazio Grisù\(^2\), the Open Design School of Matera European Capital of Culture 2019\(^3\).

### Taking a Step to the Next Level

The EU has integrated all these practices into a new interdisciplinary platform accompanied by substantial project funding, called the New European Bauhaus.

The New European Bauhaus is an initiative proposed by the European Commission in 2020 as a way to promote sustainable and inclusive design in the built environment. The goal of the initiative is to bring together architects, designers, engineers and other experts to develop innovative solutions for housing, public spaces and infrastructure that are environmentally friendly, socially inclusive, and aesthetically pleasing. The initiative aims to promote a new vision for the built environment in Europe, one that is based on collaboration, experimentation, and creativity. It also aims to connect the creative sector with the construction and building industry and to promote a culture of circular economy.

The initiative, supported by several European universities, marks a new stage. Its motto, "Beautiful, sustainable, together", underlines the evolution in the methodology. Firstly, it shifts from the point to point relationship to the community-based initiative. Secondly it marks a partial emancipation from the problem-solving approach that we find in previous EU projects, allowing inspiration before solution.

Another rather new feature of the New European Bauhaus is the longer and deeper process of co-construction that took place in 2021. A first set of core partners have been selected based on their applications to define what the New European Bauhaus would have been, before deploying the funding scheme. I took part in this process as a member of Conexiones improbables, a Spanish company producing hybridisation and innovation projects. What was interesting was that the initiative generated both a Call for proposals from scratch, and the re-labelling of other calls for projects in existing EU funding programmes.
The Future of Cross-Sectoral Innovation

The elements formally introduced by the New European Bauhaus mean that cross-sectoral innovation isn't so special anymore. Sustainability resides in the collective dimension and in community-based projects. Specialisation has long been seen as the condition for innovation, but its consequences and the size of current challenges have pushed for a more flexible methodology.

Grassroots and peripheral ideas became projects and have been dignified by years of studies and practices. They have made it clear that solutions do not just come from well-funded technological research.

The low-tech movement also proposed an alternative agenda: why not fully exploit the technology we have instead of investing in continuously new hi-tech solutions?

The evolution of multidisciplinary and then interdisciplinary methods tends towards what insiders call transdisciplinarity, i.e. the creation of something new from previous disciplines (as might be the case with neuroscience within the field of the cognitive sciences)\(^\text{14}\).

Hopefully it will mainstream what I have called cross-sectoral innovation so far, which has proven to be a flexible tool able to adapt to the policy trend of the moment.

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\(^{14}\) Other experts already speak of “post-disciplinarity”.

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