

Cross-Sectoral Innovation Initiatives

Three Priority Areas in Northern European Countries

By Petya Koleva

The pandemic has placed cross-sectoral initiatives and cooperation even more in the spotlight and raised interest in the challenges and success factors defined by innovation pioneers. The power of successful cross-over cooperation between cultural and creative industry (CCI) professionals in innovating services and products in and beyond arts, cultural and creative industries can be reviewed positively in light of recent policy support at EU and local level. It is in line with the clear trend of accelerated transformations re-defining the CCI field that will intensify in the next decade. Policy makers and the creative communities are aware that the world is undergoing a dramatic change and can foster cross-sector cooperation to develop new approaches and products for themselves and broader society.

Based on the results of the study '[Cultural and Creative Industries Cooperation and Innovation in the Northern Dimension Countries](#)', this short paper discusses the models of cross-sectoral initiatives in two areas as a preview of the full study due in the coming weeks. It argues for further strategic support for knowledge-sharing among mediator organisations and longer-term financing for brokerage practices essential for the grounding of cross-sectoral teams working to solve specific challenges in the business or well-being domains.

Northern dimension regional context and scope of research

Eleven countries are part of the Northern Dimension (ND): Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland,

** The team of the project is composed of Terry Sandel, Petya Koleva, Yulia Bardun, Signe Adamoviča, Liene Lesiņa, and Michela Di Nola.*

Russian Federation and Sweden. This partnership on Culture is the fourth in the Northern Dimension Policy (NDPC), a common policy for four equal partners: the European Union, Iceland, Norway and Russia. NDPC focuses on improving operational conditions for cultural and creative industries, bridging the gap between various sources of funding and sectors of activity, and strengthening cooperation between project owners, business communities, the public sector and international institutions throughout Northern Europe. One of the aims of the EU-funded project ‘Cultural and Creative Industries Cooperation and Innovation in the Northern Dimension Countries’ was to support the strategy development of the Northern Dimension Partnership for Culture (NDPC) for 2021–2024.

This first study mapping cross-sectoral innovation in the Northern Dimension departed from the premise that the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) context of each of the eleven countries was already established and that a broad understanding of its positive impact exists, enhancing economic and social development as well as innovating growth sectors, (e.g. Bertschek et al 2018; McNeilly 2020, Heliste, Kupi & Kosonen 2015). The 2018 evaluation of NPDC activities found that the climate was ripe for more international events on cross-sectoral themes and that more online networking across the countries is timely (Laaser, Weber and Staines 2018). Both of these trends have intensified and defined the study.

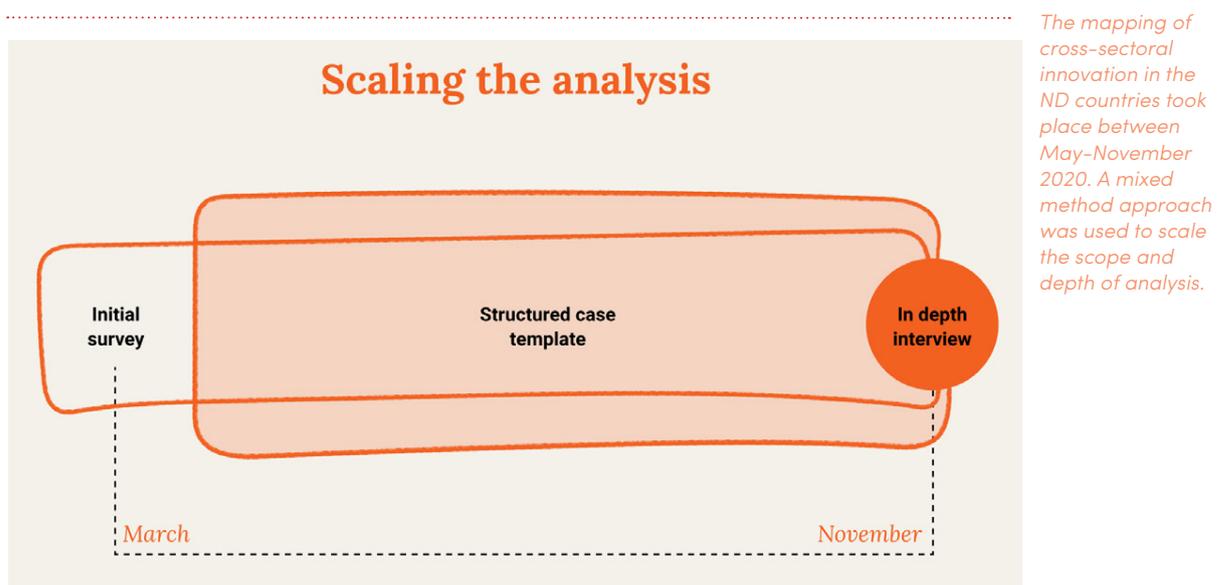
For these reasons, the field research collected evidence of current cross-sectoral innovation without imposing rigid ‘sector’ or ‘discipline’ classifications. The outputs of this project include the analysis of 121 case studies collected in the course seven months. The study as well as all key outputs of the project are available in two languages, English and Russian.

The field research, in view of COVID-19 pandemic context, was re-designed to a fully remote manner of operation. To turn this into advantage it proposed a large-scale participatory consultation in synergy with three online thematic experts’ focus group events convened on the following themes:

- The Partnership Market – CCI Connectivity and Cross-Sectoral Innovation
- Hearing and dancing? How can the Cultural and Creative Industries engage with ‘Traditional Industries’ to mutual benefit?
- Getting Better? CCIs engaging with Well-being: building inclusive communities and resilient societies.

Each of these events was associated with a respective policy brief and the thematic focus was retained in the analytical frame of the study.

Data collection took place in three partially overlapping phases, involving an online survey which achieved modest response at the time of early post-pandemic readjustment and the ‘flood’ of COVID related questionnaires. It was succeeded by a case study template sent via individual mailing to over 350 carefully selected recipients in the eleven countries between May and November 2020.

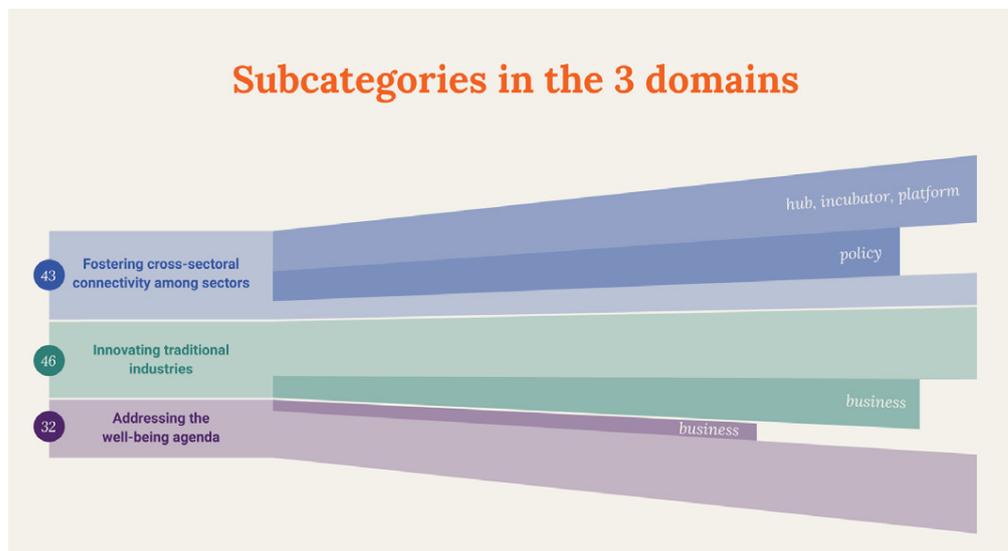


The most in-depth instrument used in the study was a structured virtual interview lasting up to 60 minutes. In total, 23 virtual meetings engaged mediators and experts from the Northern Dimension. These were held with representatives of cross-innovation initiatives, policy makers, CCI incubators, businesses and creative professionals.

Innovation platforms for cross-sectoral initiatives and well-being pilots

A large segment of the mapped cases (35% of them) addresses cross-sectoral innovation within the frame of a general objective to improve connectivity between CCI professionals, CCI organisations and other sectors (represented by businesses in the local context, urban or industry clusters). Early in

the survey, it became apparent that CCI incubators, hubs and platforms have been paving the way of this ‘new’ terrain over the last decade. Therefore, some are now operating a second-generation programme/initiative. One of them is Creve (Creative Venture).

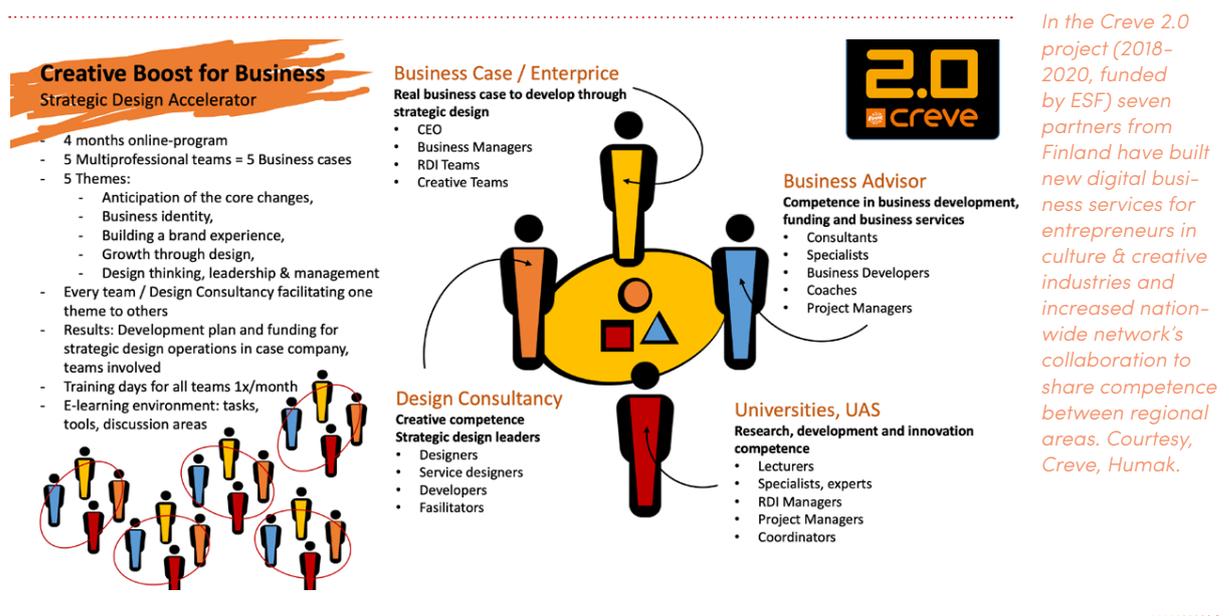


The collected 121 cases were grouped and analysed in three main types of cross-sectoral innovation initiatives corresponding to the expert focus groups held in the course of the project.

[Creve](#) is managed by Humak University of Applied Sciences in Finland. It has a strong nation-wide network in addition to a solid knowledge-platform built over a decade through partnerships with other universities, public bodies and CCI businesses, mostly small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Since 2018, Creve offers a virtual networking, collaboration and learning framework. Its latest project ‘Creve 2.0’ works intensively with Finnish CCI organizations, such as Music Finland or Design Forum Finland, and CCI funding bodies. Creve is determined to continue building a stronger network and co-operation with Finnish and international CCI organizations/ service providers. It is part of the ‘Portobello People’ initiative establishing a strategic business network of culture incubators in the Nordic and Baltic countries. NDPC participates in the network of eleven incubators currently in Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

A priority area of the study has been to analyse key challenges related to cross-sectoral innovation in the CCI faced by early experiments. Creve’s experience with its 2020 pilot business competence accelerator program, in

which partners had to find a solution to a real-life business case, proved that it takes time to 'establish a good match for cross-sectoral collaboration'. In fact, it took nearly the same number of months as the online program itself. Once matched, the collaboration of the partners involved in the process ran smooth. Such an initial phase of getting to know each other and building a relationship has been repeatedly indicated as a prerequisite for any successful program shared by experiences across the region.



The thirty-two cases grouped under the domain of cross-sectoral innovation related to well-being in the context of the study also proved this point. One of them was illustrated by Startup Mannheim in a pilot involving medicine technology and the music industry clusters. The pilot project "Music industry and medical technology. The interdisciplinary working group on operation in full consciousness" tested a new technology for brain tumour operations utilising an in-ear monitoring system. The device allows the patients to listen to music and to hear the voice of just one of the medical team during an operation. The function facilitates monitoring the status of the language centre of the brain and allows surgeons to communicate without patients hearing them. The expected new products and patents are based on a different work process/ method, and a proof of concept tested during the projects.

Bridging the 'language' gap was a challenge faced in the initial phase of this pilot, when medical doctors, engineers, artist and creatives needed to

enter into dialogue and overcome differences. Startup Mannheim's team acted as an intermediary and was key to this process. The success factor is aligning the different sectors to make sure that they recognise the expertise from the other field. This is the prerequisite for cross-sectoral cooperation and this first phase is the one that support is needed for. Vouchers are a good second step that may stimulate any sector to embark on innovation involving CCIs.

The third most common challenge for all pioneers, validated by Creve and other cross-sectoral innovation cases in the Northern Dimension, was securing funding for the original attempt to draw the model, find the first interested partners and try the first co-operation activities with customers/clients, be they private or public. Continuous funding and lead organizations/ providers with a strong strategy were needed to build effective and continuous networks, co-operations and services. In the words of cross-sectoral innovation pioneers, 'pilots' and 'examples' that cross-sectoral innovation leads to tangible results are highly effective tools.

Conclusive remarks

The study mapping cross-sectoral innovation in the ND region favoured a mixed method approach of fact-finding and consultations. An advantage of this approach is that the study has gained in-depth focus in several aspects that increased its relevance and enabled it to underpin other or additional activities of the project such as an online publication showcasing inspiring initiatives and a more open approach to sharing results.



Music industry and medical technology. The interdisciplinary working group on operation in full consciousness © Vanessa Stachel/ Fraunhofer IPA, courtesy Startup Mannheim (left).

EcoDesign Circle (4.0) design sprint St Petersburg © Courtesy [Medina Art](#) (right).

The powerful argument of the contribution of the cultural and creative industries to sustainable development is carried forward by the 121 cases covered by the project study which range from large-scale regional initiatives innovating traditional industries, such as the '[EcoDesign Circle \(4.0\)](#)', to non-profit enterprises that thrive upon carefully designed ecosystems linking local and international producers. A common trait is that they are building a strong community affiliation with 'transparent' forms of productions such as the 'SPOK' (Contemporary production and consumption) (<https://www.formdesigncenter.com/en/projekt/spok/>) production platform and a good number of innovative business cases included in the mapping of the ND region.

In addition to effective networking being a crucial factor, all 'success story' cases underline the importance of communication and the use of monitoring, checklists and indicators to understand, test and demonstrate the impact of an initiative from the start. The pertinent point is that growth factors are also found in 'soft' innovations that transform roles and value chains. Innovation projects are not only essential for arts and cultural organisations but also to solving broader domain challenges linked to sustainable forms of production, consumption and living (Koleva 2013).

The case study contributors repeatedly indicated how essential knowledge-sharing formats are which inspire and demonstrate the huge potential of cross-sectoral innovation practices. A good number of the documented cases may be considered pioneers in establishing long-term platforms for cross-sectoral innovation. In view of this, the project dedicated additional attention and effort to provide an open-access web-resource accessible to anyone and utilising an engaging story-telling approach. It is foreseen that it will be live for at least 24 months and be used as a resource as much as a policy-informative tool.

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