

Creative and cultural industries cross-innovations

Collaboration for sustainable growth in the Northern Dimension countries

by Petya Koleva, Terry Sandell, Yulia Bardun, Michela Di Nola and Jennifer Gaeta

The culture and creative industries (CCI) in many countries have developed into a strong economic sector with high turnover figures and important spill-over effects. In addition, the professionals and companies of the CCIs are important catalysts for development both for classical cultural institutions and for broad sections of the economy and society. However, while social distance and online work continue to redefine cultural life and creative processes, the cultural and creative industries are facing difficult times.

This is a timely moment to address their contribution to sustainable development through collaborative innovation. The analytical study '[Collaboration and Innovation](#)' provides the basis for defining the potential for CCI cross-sectoral innovation in the Northern Dimension countries. It focuses on initiatives from the region and related international opportunities. Involving over 100 contributors, the study analyses the data of 121 case studies from the 11 countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation and Sweden.

This article discusses key findings, the benefits and drawbacks of fully remote work in international projects and the policy relevance of cross-innovation for the Northern Dimension countries.

Collaborative innovation, opportunities and potential in the region

In the course of 2020, the EU-funded project 'Cultural and Creative Industries Cooperation and Innovation in the Northern Dimension Countries'¹

¹ The project team composed of Terry Sandell, Petya Koleva, Yulia Bardun, Signe Adamovica, Liene Lesina, Michela Di Nola and Jennifer Gaeta as well as the Head of NDPC Secretariat, Dace Resele, would like to thank all those who contributed to the project activities and participated in online events.

carried out its activities in a fully remote manner of work. The objective, defined by NDPC before the global pandemic, was to map and assess CCI cross-sectoral innovation potential and international opportunities related to the Northern Dimension countries. The scope, context and methodology of the study [have already been discussed](#), therefore the focus here is on key findings (Koleva, 2020).

The start of the project coincided with multiple surveys being carried out to assess the gravity of impact that the COVID 19 pandemic would have on CCIs. One [study](#) has indicated 31 % losses for the CCI's in Europe in total. Clearly, a new era of fierce competition for resources is on the rise and it heralds the advent of collaborative innovation in product and service creation. Among the topics addressed in the study 'Collaboration and Innovation in the Northern Dimension Countries' are therefore the questions: Why do transparent links of business to business and business to consumer matter? And which platforms are there for cross-innovation that scale from local to national or regional level?

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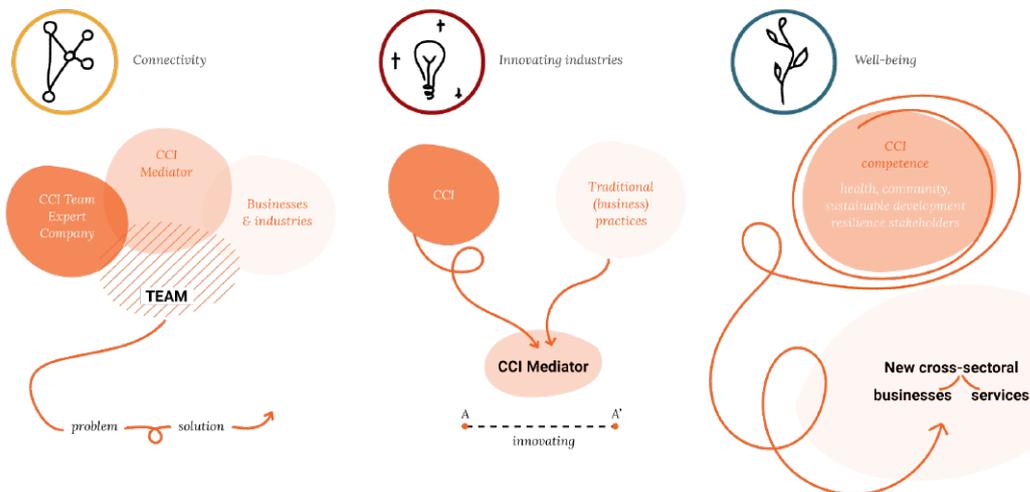
There is a clear potential for sustainable growth manifested in cross-sectoral innovation – this conclusion is drawn on the basis of the [121 cases](#) mapping cross-sectoral innovation. One of the key findings is related to distinguishing the innovation impact deriving from a given terrain of cross-sectoral innovation initiatives: In the domain of 'connectivity' for innovation the impact is strongly associated with innovations solving a unique business problem. The second domain addresses a context that alters the way 'traditional' businesses operate and is likely to affect similar entities and related stakeholders. The well-being domain demonstrates its impact on new types of businesses and services that depart from the CCI base of competences.

Fifteen inspiring stories about what is meant by impact and how it is achieved and measured in each of the three areas are available [online](#). The team recommends reviewing them as well as checking the images and links

that the contributors have provided in addition to exploring further illustrations of output containing all of the mapped cross-innovation initiatives from the eleven countries.

Innovation impact per domain

Innovation impact per domain (non-exclusive typology)



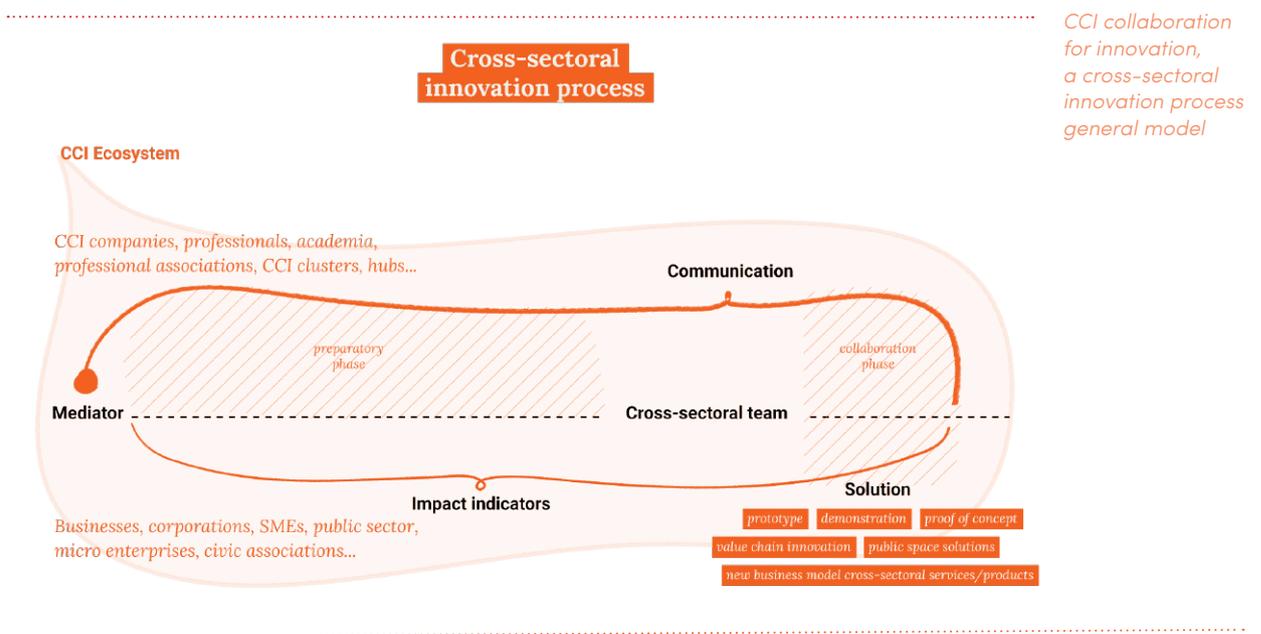
The key contribution of the study has been its attempt to answer the question ‘How to create a successful cross-innovation process?’. This issue has been the object of discussion in all of the six online events (four focus groups and two wrap-up events) held between March 2020 and March 2021. The study has proposed a general model that may serve as guidance.

The image on the next page illustrates that cross-sectoral innovation initiatives typically result from a process of collaboration via establishing a cross-sectoral team.

Another common trait is that the preparatory phase demands considerable attention and resources. It is crucial for the success of innovation initiatives irrespective of the domain of activities. Three fundamental activities complement this model:

1. the role of a CCI mediator
2. impact indicators being developed
3. communication activities

All three elements listed above begin at the onset of the preparatory phase before the actual collaborative innovation process starts. The focus on impact assessment, dissemination and communication continues after the solution has been found. It is estimated that from the point of establishing a ‘proof of concept’ or a ‘prototype’ or ‘demonstration’ there is a period lasting between 2 to 5 years to reach a level where broader economic impacts can be traced after the actual collaborative process has finished. The positive news is that most initiatives are fully aware of this fact and there is both experience as well as methods of impact assessment being developed in the countries of the Northern Dimension. The study provides useful guidance on this and other clear challenges that have been overcome in the process of collaborative innovation.



Finally, it became visible in this study that a rich innovation context is the one where the CCIs interact with diverse and multiple players, institutional, businesses or not-for-profit entities, research centres etc. This means that supporting the cultural and creative sectors to grow remains important while also stimulating collaborative innovation processes.

Collaborative definition of policy

One very interesting aspect of the project was the process of developing four policy briefs. These are both exploratory and explanatory documents which

were informed by four very productive thematic events. A total of 70 experts, specialists and experienced professionals participated in the Experts' Focus Groups and their contribution to the evolution of the policy briefs was invaluable both at a collective and individual level.

The Policy Briefs themselves, intended as a contribution to NDPC's emerging strategy for 2021-2024, were intentionally produced with a much wider audience in mind and to stimulate further thinking in four areas of cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation that the project had identified as particularly important.

The [first Policy Brief](#) was intended to look at the issue of relationship development which is fundamental in beginning a cross-sectoral innovation journey. Two of the key elements that emerged from discussions of this domain are the fact that different sectors have different 'languages' which present barriers to matchmaking. This in turn throws up the question of the frequent need for 'mediation' in one form or another, an undeveloped area.

The [second Policy Brief](#) focused on CCIs interaction with traditional cultural sectors and their practices and also on education. The most pressing question that has emerged is the need for imaginative support and inducement mechanisms which enable individual businesses, organizations and creative individuals to explore and engage in cross-sectoral activity.

The [third Policy Brief](#) and related Experts' Focus Group focused on the interplay of culture, arts, health and well-being. A key message that it carries forward is that sectors that will prove easier in terms of engagement for cross-sectoral innovation are health, social welfare and well-being, especially in COVID and post-COVID times.

The [final Policy Brief](#) looked at Serious Games (SG)/Gamification and cross-innovation in relation to the Cultural Heritage, Education, Medical, Health and Well-Being Sectors. The potential for greatly increased application of SG and gamification is considerable and the boundaries of SG/gamification are being pushed outwards. One of the key issues was to draw attention to the quite differing needs of the SG sector and the entertainment games sector.

Engaging the stakeholders – online expertise collected and shared

This first study mapping cross-sectoral innovation in the Northern Dimension was based on bottom-up participatory research in two languages, English and Russian. Four online thematic experts' focus group formed the backbone of the project. The use of the groups was instrumental in capturing the knowledge of those already engaged in cross-sectoral innovation as well as for reaching out to stakeholders interested in or already supporting such initiatives and those who seek to be informed by their results. In general, the project team has found this to be a successful approach. A recommendation for future projects may be that certain national or industry-specific online networking events would be useful to integrate in the mix, in order to increase interaction from the start.

The outreach activities of the project specifically addressing a broader audience included fourteen flagship cases being published on social media as well as a large-scale online campaign to promote the findings of the project in its last weeks. It showed that paid campaigns and promotional content could serve similar projects in the future, especially if a strategy is developed for the entire duration of the project timeline.

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The final online Wrap-up Event, where the key outputs were publicly presented, involved 70 participants from the NDPC partnership countries as well as international stakeholders such as WIPO, the EC and international organisations. In these challenging times for the cultural and creative industries, the online events provided an opportunity to network around topics of relevance encompassing culture, arts and cultural and creative industries involved in collaborative innovation. Diverse stakeholders interacted: companies, CCI hubs, CCI clusters, public and mixed initiatives.

The project team has dedicated significant attention to leaving online a legacy of the project that would be useful for a broader user base. The team and NDPC have been advised by the online participants that its findings can serve to illustrate the potential of collaborative innovation, best-practice sharing being requested by most participants in the events. The web-resource [Collaboration and Innovation](#), CCIs in the Northern Dimension Countries serves this interest. Besides providing detailed information about the project and all outputs, it is a tool to inspire new initiatives of cross-sectoral innovation.

Looking ahead – the legacy of the project

There are specific recommendations that the project at large has produced in order to facilitate individuals or organisations seeking to build on existing knowledge and experience. For example, each of the three domains analysed in the study has been a [source for solutions](#) to problems that have already been encountered by collaborative innovation initiatives in the 11 countries. These can serve as guidance for ongoing or future projects.

The project has indicated also the future significance of each domain of cross-sectoral collaboration. For example, innovations working on traditional industries are the ones that transform practices that affect multiple entities – the economic or public sector. The connectivity domain is the one that serves most directly innovations in the business value chain and the one that is the object of recent policies. It also demonstrates the capacity of virtual platforms for connectivity to scale from local to national, from national to international levels and to overcome linguistic and sectoral divides. Finally, the well-being domain is the one that addresses challenges which are key to innovation practices that most societies and economies will attempt to address in the coming years. These regard health and well-being at individual and social level, economic resilience with involvement of the local community and ecosystem.

Seven general trends have been identified of relevance to various stakeholders and to the NDPC's future strategic positioning and identifying potential priority policy action and activity areas.

1. Connectivity as a key for the preparatory phase of cross-sectoral innovation teamwork

2. Knowledge-sharing on CCIs' roles as mediators or initiators of cross-sectoral innovation
3. Multilevel approaches to innovation – risks to be shared by diverse partners
4. Broader definition of CCI innovation and its impact (including 'soft' innovation)
5. Attention to long-term assessment of impact and tracking results
6. Broader vision of cross-innovation in relation to sustainable development goals (SDG)
7. Legal frameworks facilitating CCIs' involvement in cross-sectoral innovation

Each of these policy considerations has been contextualised in the study and they are a starting point for the design of suitable future interventions. Over the past decade an important phase has finished in which public support was instrumental in developing partnerships and networks, allowing cultural and creative ecosystem to emerge and cross borders and disciplinary boundaries. The new focus is on collaborative work.

The project specifically focused on cross-sectoral points of reference, therefore leaving behind specific industrial or sectoral restrictions. However, it is clear that some CCI industries such as the music or game industries bear specific potential for cross-sectoral collaboration in the Northern Dimension countries.

The project's conclusion, through the Policy Brief activities, was that in terms of NDPC's 2021–2024 Strategy, the two most promising areas of particular relevance are firstly CCIs and the Health and Well-Being agenda working in partnership with the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS). The second area is being active in promoting and developing the cross-sectoral innovation potential of Serious Games and gamification.

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