



DEVELOPING
INCLUSIVE
AND SUSTAINABLE
CREATIVE ECONOMIES

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

An Ecological Approach to Developing Inclusive and Sustainable Creative Economies

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An ecological Approach to Developing Inclusive and Sustainable Creative Economies

Ignasi Guardans, Jarna Heinonen, Roberta Comunian, Alessandro Crociata, Tamsyn Dent, Daria Denti, Jonathan Gross, Ulla Hytti, Sana Kim, Dmitrijs Kravčenko, Valeria Pica, Diāna Popova, Tommi Pukkinen, Arnis Sauka, Pekka Stenholm and Nick Wilson (June 2022)

INTRODUCTION

Developing Inclusive and Sustainable Creative Economies (DISCE) is a multi-disciplinary research project which has tackled the inherent tensions associated with creative economies by questioning their taken-for-granted assumptions. DISCE conducted research during the pandemic, which has highlighted the structural inequalities, unfulfilled potentials and limited inclusivity and sustainability of creative economies as well as the limited scope of the existing creative economy policy – challenges that already existed before Covid-19 (Comunian & England, 2020). This policy brief outlines specific policy considerations and suggestions based on the DISCE research project. The research findings based on which the policy considerations have been made are discussed more in detail in DISCE research reports of each Work Package. In addition, the Policy Recommendation reports of each Work Package further elaborate the policy considerations. The respective DISCE deliverables are referenced in the Policy Brief. Furthermore, we invite readers of this Policy Brief to have a look at the more detailed reports to be found in the DISCE website (<https://disce.eu>).

Creative economies operate via the interconnections and interdependencies of many different kinds of cultural resources and stakeholders. Furthermore, such economies are constituted by systemic conditions that mediate the relationships they share with each other. Acknowledging this ecological nature of creative economies was the starting point of the DISCE research project. We want to underline the absolute necessity of **assuming an ecological approach to investigating creative economies** as the only way to tackle the associated challenges. It is crucial that the policymakers capture and understand the reality of creative economies and all those involved for an effective coordination of policy responsibility among relevant the policy agents.

This ecosystem functions at different levels. Cultural policy, understood as a set of actions performed by public authorities, is most effective when it involves an actual territorial dimension, particularly at a local level. It needs to be set as a clear strategy and properly supported by funding to develop inclusive and sustainable economies. Cultural policy designed for a larger territorial level, such as national or even European, may also strongly contribute to inclusiveness and sustainability. However, cultural policy should always be conceived as a policy that interacts within an ecosystem (or different interrelated ecosystems) rooted in a territory at a local and regional level.

Effective creative-economic policy that leads to sustainable results needs to adopt an ecosystem approach with a range of interrelated cultural resources. Creative workers interact in an ecosystem characterised by numerous other actors and stakeholders, inter- and multi-disciplinary knowledge, different kinds of expertise and openness to different forms of work and entrepreneurship.

Applying such an ecological approach, DISCE has provided fresh research insights into creative economies, developed new knowledge and alternative stories about creative economies and, through its co-creational research approach, contributed to new policy processes. DISCE's findings open up new avenues and possibilities for mobilising public policy to develop more inclusive and sustainable creative economies. The Policy Brief is targeted at those who are involved in policy design and are planning to provide new insights into creative economies.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

This Policy Brief draws from DISCE's ecological research and findings, which are derived from investigating creative economies as systems or ecosystems characterised by interconnections and interdependencies that are deeply and complexly embedded within their 'contexts'. The research approach includes and compiles robust statistical analyses of existing European data, in-depth regional case studies in ten European locations as examples of inclusiveness and sustainability in creative economies as well as active interaction and co-creation with stakeholders. The findings presented below are thoroughly discussed in the respective DISCE research deliverables referenced at the end of the Policy Brief. The section starts by highlighting the need for cultural development, which is important for developing inclusive and sustainable creative economies. Then, we discuss creative careers, skills and education, followed by an unsustainable creative deal. Finally, we provide a critical review on measuring creative economies.

I) Perception of culture in the society

Since its conception, DISCE has acknowledged the important role that culture plays in society. Our research findings suggest that there is some deep-rooted contradiction in the social perception of culture, such that it directly and indirectly results in the considerable undermining of the sustainable impact of culture and those working on it.

On one hand, culture and creative activities are understood as fundamental components of any social fabric that strongly shape collective identity and contribute to social peace and social stability. Our research confirms that creative economies have a significant influence on many aspects of sustainability and inclusiveness – even in areas where this is less evident. For example, our data show that regions with larger cultural and creative industries (CCIs) have communities with higher trust in people and institutions and are more accepting of minorities. Our results suggest that the presence of more robust CCIs also has a positive effect on people's attitudes and social wellbeing, creating more cohesive communities and countering discontent. (see more DISCE D2.4 Denti, 2022). Consequently, the role of culture is understood by the relevant stakeholders, by opinion and policymakers and by social actors as a fundamental set of activities that go far beyond the aspects linking culture to entertainment, to an escape from the weight of work and a productive life, through beauty and stimulated emotions.

On the other hand, the evidence also suggests the existence of some social negativity towards culture and creative economies, for example, when judged as a sustainable and productive educational option, when perceived as a professional dedication in life or when seen as an option for a long-term source of revenue and human development. Indeed, there may be only a few vocational careers that are as intense as those related to creative economies. In that sense, this contrast – this conflict or lack of appreciation by the 'surrounding society' – may be perceived as irrelevant by those current or future culture professionals who are its direct objects and suffer it the most. Still, our findings suggest that this negative social perception not only plays a role in shaping the paths of access to professional life in creative economies but also has a negative impact on the self-esteem and social consideration of many of those working in such economies. Most importantly, it also has a negative impact on their personal economic, social and mental wellbeing and on their role models and professional best practices.

There has never been a more important time to recognise the value of culture – what culture(s) do we need? DISCE has applied an ecological approach which acknowledges the interdependencies and interconnections of cultural ecosystems. In the DISCE project, we have focused on a capability approach that introduces cultural capability – people's substantive freedom to recognise the aspects that they have reason to value. Finally, we have focused on care as a process of fulfilling cultural needs – the need to recognise what one has reason to value. By doing so, we have introduced a new vision for cultural policy, which is framed in terms of cultural development: the expansion of people's cultural capabilities (people's opportunities to recognise the aspects that they have reason to value). Cultural development is the necessary foundation for the development of inclusive and sustainable creative economies. Complementing this vision, we have provided a policy tool to help achieve cultural development and inclusive and sustainable creative economies – the Cultural Development Index (CDI). (see more DISCE D5.3 Wilson, et al., 2022 and DISCE D5.4 Wilson & Gross, 2022)

II) Creative careers, skills and education (see more DISCE D3.3 Comunian et al., 2022)

We have identified career development pathways for cultural and creative workers through five stages, from early access to education and early careers towards the establishment of sustainable careers – not achieved by all – to, ultimately, a potential stage of being able to foster and support other cultural and creative workers. We believe that these stages are important for policymaking purposes. Based on our analysis, we have articulated specific capabilities for each key stage that enable access to sustainable creative and cultural careers. These stages are as follows:

- Stage 1 focuses on the period of compulsory education and is defined by **early access opportunities** – opportunities for encouragement or inspiration (as well as barriers) that might influence young people to aspire (or not) to pursue a creative career and under what conditions.

- Stage 2 relates to **further and higher education** or equivalent paths involving the development of skills and can be defined as another key period in which individuals identify and acquire the knowledge and skills that they assume are missing in their personal case in order to develop a creative career. These students may also actually and effectively engage in creative activities during this stage.
- Stage 3, labelled as **early career**, involves the moment at which the person will engage or try to engage in a sustainable activity in creative economies and defines the terms that will turn said activity into a job, a part-time activity, entrepreneurship or some kind of 'grey area' among other jobs.
- Stage 4, **creative and cultural work**, identifies the moment (if that moment is reached at all) when a sustainable career that provides a stable income and livelihood in creative economies actually starts. It is assumed that this can revert to any of the previous stages at any time.
- Some move from creative and cultural work to Stage 5, **fostering work**, which is directed towards enabling others to participate in creative work. This includes a range of intermediary organisations and a variety of resources from stakeholders. Stage 5 enables sustainable creative and cultural work at both the individual and the community level.

Policy decisions and policy strategies may contribute to the promotion of key enabling factors along these stages or facilitate the overcoming of key inhibiting factors or barriers, as we detail in the recommendations' section.

III) Financially unsustainable creative deal (see more DISCE D4.2 Heinonen et al., 2022 and DISCE D4.3 Pukkinen et al., 2022)

Our research confirms that personal financial goals often only play a secondary role in the context of work among creative professionals who are instead inspired by their creative work. The research identifies two intertwined challenges – the '*unsustainable creative deal*' and the '*lack of an understanding of the different value creation models*' – within creative economies, both of which call for policy-related action. Individuals aim to create various types of non-economic value for others and themselves instead of prioritising the creation of economic value (livelihood, financial sustainability, affordability and profit) for themselves. In fact, non-economic-value creation can be in contradiction with the economic dimensions of work and one's professional life. Non-economic value can be classified as follows a) **Enjoyment** value (creative freedom, new experiences, joy, beauty and knowledge), b) **Social** value (collective learning, co-creation, networking and wellbeing), c) **Harmony** value (equality, inclusiveness, societal awareness and wholeness) and d) **Influence** value (autonomy, appreciation, publicity, power and empowerment). These well-identified tensions between the goals for economic- and non-economic-value creation have a common manifestation in the habits of the under-pricing of and the underpaying for creative work. This is something that applies to both the professionals themselves, when they are requested to define a financial value for their activity, and the society in general, when it comes to the perception of the value of such work.

The findings have led us to identify five different value creation models (adaptive, free spirit, high-end, brand-building and transformative) and how they relate to sustainability and inclusivity. Policy measures can contribute to the tackling of the major hurdles related to each value creation model (Figure 1).

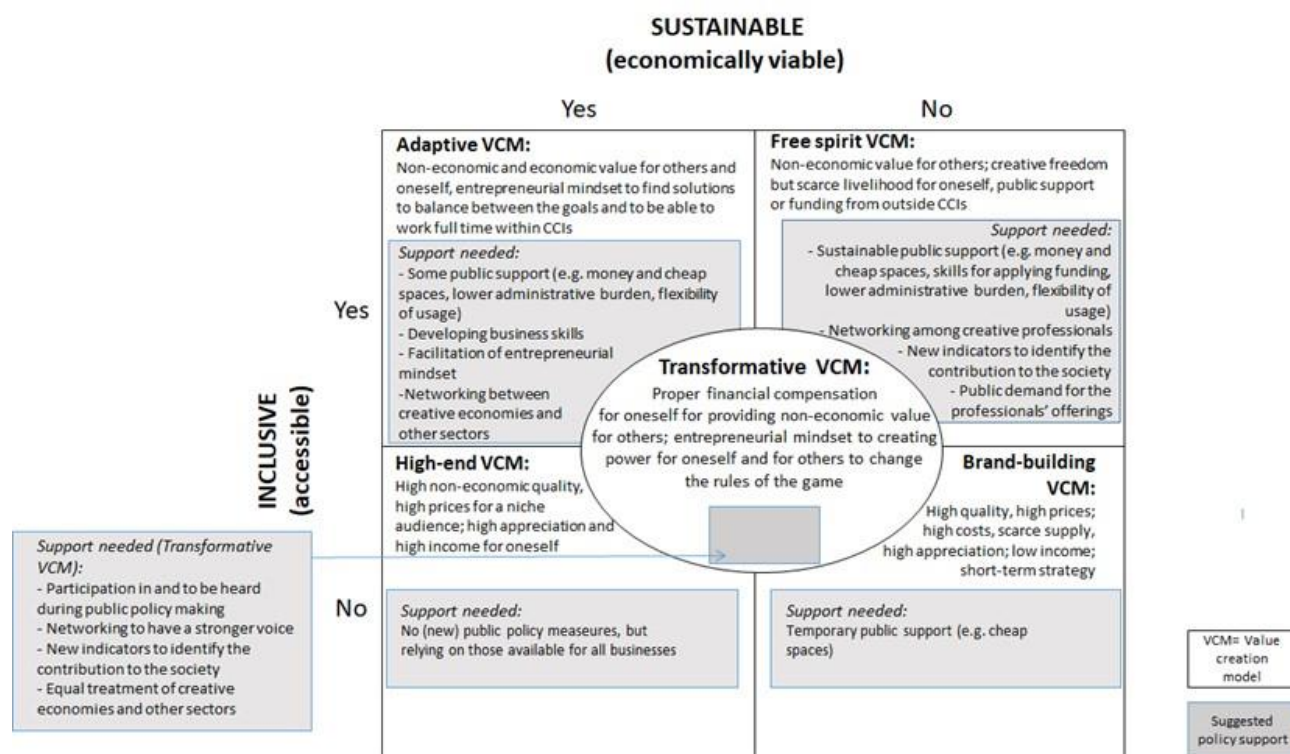


Figure 1. Framework for the value creation models and suggested support in creative economies

Furthermore, in our interpretation, the two challenges – the ‘unsustainable creative deal’ and the ‘lack of an understanding of the different value creation models’ – have become institutionalised, and, as such, they are continuously reinforced by systems, routines and artefacts across multiple levels in our societies. Therefore, institutional work is needed to disrupt the existing unsustainable institutionalised practices and to create new inclusive and sustainable creative economies.

IV) Measuring creative economies – a critical review of CCIs (see more DISCE D2.3 Crociata, 2022 and DISCE D2.4 Denti, 2022)

The European Commission (EC) supports policymaking in CCIs by building on the work of Eurostat as a part of the European Statistical System (ESS)-net culture. Still, at a European level, there are only a few comprehensive sources of statistical information on CCIs, and those that exist rely on data provided by member states. These, in turn, typically have insufficient means to properly monitor CCIs. European data cannot reach proper harmonisation because member states may use different national statistical systems. In addition, the very categorisation of CCIs is under discussion and not properly harmonised: relevant sub-sectors may be lost within overly broad categories or put into inappropriate categories. The rationale behind any classification should support evidence-based decision making, allow comparisons over time and between policies, countries, regions, social groups and industries and contribute to increased transparency and accountability.

The DISCE research confirms the need for reliable data across Europe. The project highlights the need for an inclusive understanding of CCIs. The issue involves coping with unlocking the potential of CCIs to contribute to a development that could be simultaneously sustainable and inclusive, going beyond pure economic assessment. In this regard, and by moving away from the actual shortcomings of the statistical analysis and mapping of CCIs, there are two main challenges to cope with.

- Improving the spatial unit of analysis at level NUTS2 as well the (NACE) digit level of data based on classic information such as the gross value added by the economic sector, input-output tables, the European Union Labour Force Survey, structural business statistics (SBS), *et similia*
- Improving data collection, with a focus on microdata at the individual level, to provide evidence that a statistically significant relation exists between some forms of cultural

consumption and the impact of cultural capital, in general, on the study of wellbeing, creativity, empowerment and diversity, which can be replicated for different socio-economic contexts, such as in other European countries

We are aware that the EC is conscious of these difficulties and challenges, and it is addressing these issues by stimulating critical reflections on the further harmonisation of taxonomies and statistics in the cultural and creative sectors. However, some deeper recommendations are drawn based on our findings.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I) Cultural development and the CDI (see more DISCE D5.4 Wilson & Gross, 2022)

We outline the policy recommendations under three priority areas, including the related sub-recommendations (Table 1):

1. **Commit to cultural development:** Cultural policy should be re-positioned to focus explicitly on cultural development (the expansion of people’s cultural opportunities). This should be the primary focus of cultural policy at the international (EU), national (member state), regional, city and local levels. Other policy objectives, including supporting the cultural and creative industries, follow from this.
2. **Adopt the CDI:** The new CDI should be adopted as the central policy tool to support policymakers across all levels to achieve cultural development, which is foundational to any other policy directed towards inclusive and sustainable creative economies.
3. **Champion (cultural) needs-based governance:** The existing policy structures and infrastructures, agendas and work plans should be built upon to develop a fit-for-purpose, needs-based approach to cultural governance that can support the role of the other two recommendations mentioned above.

#	RECOMMENDATION	Sub-recommendation
R1.i	COMMIT TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT	Introduce Work Plan on Cultural Development (as part of Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026)
R1.ii		Establish a new Cultural Development OMC (Open Method of Coordination) group
R2.i	ADOPT THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT INDEX (CDI)	Cultural Development OMC group to provide coordinated visibility and leadership of CDI adoption across Member States
R2.ii		Policy makers to integrate use of the CDI with other indexes and initiatives
R2.iii		For city, regional and other local authorities to actively explore a wide range of participative decision-making formats for active discussion of cultural development, based on CDI data and analysis.
R3.i	CHAMPION (CULTURAL) NEEDS-BASED GOVERNANCE	Establish a European Cultural Development Council to champion (cultural) needs-based governance
R3.ii		Champion cultural needs-based governance in diverse local contexts across the creative economy

Table 1. Recommendations for policymakers

Collectively, the recommendations constitute a **new culture of care**, in which the cultural need that is being cared for is our need to recognise the aspects that we have reason to value. It is our recommendation that this approach is sincerely taken into consideration in any revision of the EC’s *European Agenda for Culture*.

II) Creative workforce, skills and higher education (see more DISCE D3.4 Dent et al., 2022)

We have reached the conclusion that policy decisions and policy strategies may contribute to promoting the key enabling factors along the *key professional stages in creative economies* that were previously described and, in some cases, can also play an important role in facilitating the overcoming of key inhibiting factors or barriers (Figure 2).

- Stage 1 is highly influenced by access to opportunities in early moments of life which shape a young person's aspiration to contribute to creative economies and their inclusivity. Funding opportunities and the role of (and access to) mentors and family support have an essential impact for this orientation.
- Stage 2 is conditioned by funding, but other also factors play an important role, such as the social perceptions regarding the career options in creative economies and the impact that these perceptions may have on families supporting this training period. In this sense, it would help to have a less isolated approach to creative education and strengthen its connection with other areas such as education, business, health and social and community service.
- Stage 3 is strongly dependent on the existence of (and access to) networks and community support together with people within the same or a similar creative sector, providing mentoring and access to specific needs (working spaces, venues, equipment, etc.). A public policy strategy should enhance this external social fabric support; this can be done through specific schemes or support initiatives, in particular if the creative person lacks internal support from their relatives, peers or any other informal networks. At the same time, public policy should also be orientated towards inhibiting negative factors: this may include stronger efforts to prevent working practices relying on unpaid labour.
- Stage 4 and actually making a living from work in the creative sector may be a clear challenge for a number of factors. The evidence shows that there is too much work-related activity in creative economies that takes place outside any kind of formalisation and without proper compensation. The policy could focus on developing certain enabling factors that may contribute to improving the legal framework for contracts in this area (eventually considering this reality in the context of labour law or independent services) or improving social security aspects. In several countries, some of these matters have been a long-time demand under the call for a so-called 'Statute of the Artist'. This can be combined with tools intended to facilitate shared working frameworks that promote exchange and mutual support (such as co-working, clusters or hubs). The inhibiting factors to be combatted for a long-term policy strategy would include the unfortunate lack of social recognition regarding a fair remuneration for creative work.
- Stage 5 is dependent on the recognition and support given to people and organisations that facilitate creative work or protect creative workers. The inhibiting factor to be tackled involves a lack of funding and support for the enabling intermediaries that make it possible for practices of care, sustainability and inclusivity to become central to creative ecologies.

Finally, we suggest a policy cycle that highlights the importance of ecosystem thinking as well as leadership and practices of care to help creative economies become more inclusive and sustainable. First, it is important to **understand and value the local cultural and creative ecology** in which the organisations or individuals operate. Second, each organisation or individual involved in the cultural and creative ecology needs **to assume leadership and form a strategic vision of their work** to consider not only how it is shaping or influencing the ecosystem but also how it might share agendas with others or influence different capabilities for the future of the local cultural and creative ecology. Finally, it is vital that each individual and organisation consider the **elements of 'care' that they might practice** or the ways in which they could pay attention to parts of the ecosystem that are less visible, have less access or need more support.

III) Financial sustainability (see more DISCE D4.4. Hytti et al., 2022)

As it has been extensively highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of personal finance and individual wellbeing, the earning logics of creative economies may not be sustainable in the long run, as demonstrated by the two key intertwined challenges identified in our research. Policymakers interested in supporting creative economies have the overwhelming responsibility to take note of this reality and shape policies while taking into consideration these structural challenges to financial sustainability. The policy recommendations are organised in layers, representing the magnitude of the changes needed.

1. It is important for policies and institutional work to disrupt the existing institutions and institutionalised practices within creative economies, i.e. to address the two key intertwined challenges – the *'unsustainable creative deal'* and the *'lack of an understanding of the*

different value creation models' – within creative economies. First, policies should **address the rewards, sanctions, laws and regulations** to change and call into question the existing rules, norms and practices. Second, it is important to **disassociate the unsustainable creative deal from its moral foundation as appropriate** within this specific context. Third, it is necessary to **challenge the core individual-level assumptions and beliefs** related to appropriate work practices in creative economies.

2. We also recommend **constructing new institutions and institutionalised practices** by a) having a stronger advocacy for inclusive and sustainable economies, b) creating rule systems that confer identity and define the boundaries of membership and status hierarchies within creative economies, c) constructing identities at the individual level, d) re-establishing the connections between the new sets of practices and the moral foundations for the same, e) building stronger networks and f) educating actors with regard to skills and knowledge that align with the new institutions and practices.
3. We also consider it important to have and maintain **incremental everyday ('traditional') policy measures and support practices at different levels** (individual, local/regional, national and European) within creative economies for them to flourish and for the wellbeing of the people. We suggest improvements in inclusive and sustainable funding, value creation, networking and innovation activity as well as outline the roles and means of policymakers in relation to these goals. As for the five identified value creation models, the policy suggestions for each model are presented in Figure 1. Only the high-end value creation model requires no new public policy measures to be sustainable and inclusive, and it can operate efficiently by relying on those available for other businesses. All other value creation models require at least some temporary public support to be sustainable and inclusive.

The responsibility of implementing the suggested measures is in the hands of the creative professionals themselves as well as the numerous and varied stakeholders at different levels (local, regional, national and European) of the creative economies.

IV) Statistical analyses and mapping of CCIs (see more DISCE D2.3 Crociata, 2022)

There is no need to emphasise that the current lack of consolidated and comparable data and of other reliable information on CCIs creates serious difficulties with regard to determining evidence-based policy strategies and their actions. The EC's efforts towards a possible revision of the CCI statistical framework are well acknowledged but as such it does not cover the full need for reliable and comparable information. Hence, several proposals can be made to contribute to improving this aspect:

- **Harmonised system of national observatories:** This would improve the mapping of the reality of the multifaceted CCIs, especially with respect to accounting for specific national characteristics, through specific policy interventions, fiscal regimes and legislation dedicated to not-for-profit actors. It should also foster synergies across national statistics offices that are focused on cultural mapping and cultural statistics.
- **European survey:** A European survey would account for relevant features that are not covered by administrative data, such as not-for-profit and charity activities and workforces and the elements associated with inclusiveness and sustainability. The survey should be designed at the European level so it can then be carried out at the national level as well.
- **Urban laboratory in several pilot cities:** It would be extremely useful to have a specific tool at the service of the cultural ecosystem of urban settings, characterised by dense social networks, creative networks and multi-partner activities that need to be monitored beyond narrow dichotomies such as for-profit and not-for-profit, digital and analogue or heritage and contemporary creation.

DISCE asks the following question: 'What are inclusive and sustainable creative economies, and how can they be developed?'. This research question is addressed collaboratively via the following [work packages \(WPs\)](#):

WP2 – Creative economies: mapping, identification and statistics

WP3 – Creative careers: from education and skills development to inequalities and activism

WP4 – Earning logics, business modelling and innovation

WP5 – Cultural development: rethinking inclusive and sustainable 'growth'

As discussed in the [DISCE Case Study Framework](#) (Gross et al., 2019), 10 case studies of medium-sized cities are at the centre of the project's research design. Case study research is specifically suited to investigating complex social phenomenon in which the boundaries between the phenomenon itself and its context are unclear. This is crucial to DISCE given that one of our central concerns is the need to provide a new account of the embeddedness of creative economies within a range of places and practices beyond the prevailing – and excessively narrow – accounts of the creative economy, the CCIs and the cultural sector.

Across these case studies, DISCE has taken an inclusive approach to data collection, conducting interviews with participants involved in a wide range of activities within each city. This includes the use of workshops, interviews and surveys tailored towards the specific goal of helping answer DISCE's overall research question. In these case studies, we have also deliberately considered multiple scales – micro, meso and macro – to understand how inclusive and sustainable creative economies are local, regional, national and European at the same time.

Developed in close relation to the 10 regional case studies are two other strands of work. The first is the analysis of pre-existing data that is pertinent to understanding European creative economies. Second, the DISCE team has held a series of policy webinars, workshops, co-creation labs and, ultimately, a final event in March 2022. During these interactive encounters, we shared our provisional findings and explored their implications for formulating new approaches to policy and practice in support of developing inclusive and sustainable creative economies.

DISCE has produced a series of research reports presenting the core findings of each WP (which can be found at www.disce.eu). WP2 has focused on measuring creative economies, with a critical review of CCIs, by providing the following reports: Current State of Knowledge about CCIs (D2.1), Guidelines for Operationalising the Data (D2.2), Policy Recommendations, Statistical Analyses and Mapping of CCIs (D2.3) and a Comprehensive Descriptive Profile of European CCIs (D2.4). Through their initial reports, WP3, WP4 and WP5 (D3.1, D4.1 and D5.1, respectively) have developed the DISCE case study framework for the joint execution of field work in 10 European locations, for which regional case study reports have been prepared to inform the local stakeholders of the respective creative ecology and its developments. WP3 has focused on creative careers in the following reports: Creative Workforce and HE in Europe Statistics Report (D3.2), Creative Workforce: Understanding the Skills and Training Needs in CCIs and Inequalities and Exclusion (D3.3) with related policy suggestions (D3.4). WP4 has focused on earning logics, value creation modelling and innovation in the following reports: Between Labour Markets and Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurial Behaviour in Creative Economies (D4.2) and Value Creation Modelling for Creative Economies: Networks, Innovation and Digitalisation (D4.3) with related policy suggestions (D4.4). In the WP5, the focus is on cultural development, which has been discussed in two reports: Re-thinking Inclusive and Sustainable Growth for the Creative Economy: A Literature Review (D5.2) and the Cultural Development Index: Theorisation and Implications (D5.3) with related policy suggestions (D5.4).

Considered together, these aspects of DISCE constitute an integrated and unique research design and active co-creation with stakeholders, using which it provides new understandings of what inclusive and sustainable creative economies are and how they can be developed.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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COORDINATOR Professor Jarna Heinonen, University of Turku, Turku, Finland
jarna.heinonen@utu.fi

CONSORTIUM Culture and Media Agency Europe aisbl (CUMEDIAE)
Brussels, Belgium

Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI)
L'Aquila, Italy

King's College London (KCL)
London, United Kingdom

Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (SSE Riga)
Riga, Latvia

Trans Europe Halles (TEH)
Lund, Sweden

University of Turku (UTU)
Turku, Finland

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WEBSITE <https://disce.eu/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact:

Ignasi Guardans, CUMEDIAE: iguardans@culture-media.eu

Professor Jarna Heinonen, University of Turku: jarna.heinonen@utu.fi

FURTHER READING

In addition to the research reports/deliverables listed in the research parameters and referenced, we suggest having a look at the following resources:

Comunian, R., Faggian, A., Heinonen, J., & Wilson, N. (Eds.) (Forthcoming) *A modern guide to the creative economy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

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