

Creative Communities in Motion

artlink
2026

A Practical Guide to Building Creative
Livelihoods for Young People

based on the Turntables programme

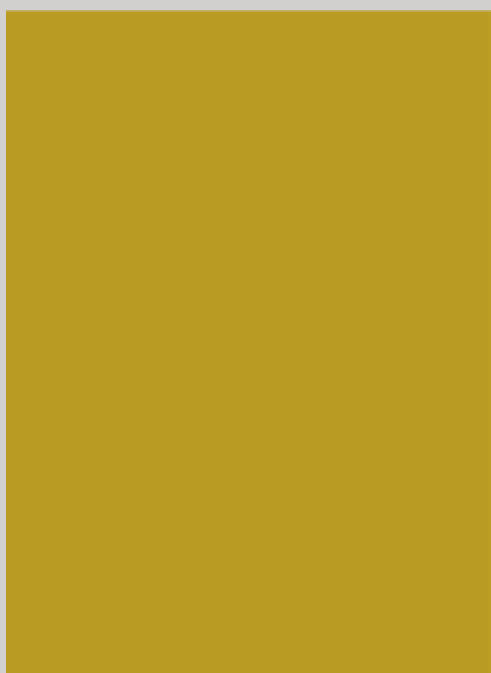


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Executive Summary

Creative Communities in Motion is a report for organisations working across culture, education, and international cooperation. It offers practical insights into how training and collaboration models can better support sustainable livelihood pathways for young, creative practitioners.

It shares learnings from the project *Turntables: LEARN! Fostering transcultural communities of practice*, which responds to the fundamental transformation of the global creative economy. While the creative industries contribute approximately 3% of global GDP and continue to grow, access to opportunities remains uneven. Many young practitioners, particularly in the Global South and in migration contexts, face barriers to entering and sustaining work in the sector. *Turntables* responds to this by moving beyond top-down educational models and supporting more practice-based, collaborative approaches to learning.

The programme set out to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) and higher education institutions (HEIs) to design sustainable training and international exchange formats, with the aim of improving livelihood pathways for young creative practitioners and supporting their ability to make a living in the arts.

It brought together CSOs, HEIs, artists, and cultural practitioners across Asia, Africa, and Switzerland. Through the co-development of new training programmes with artists and practitioners (Learning Labs), international roundtables, and a mix of online and in-person exchange activities, the programme:

- Engaged over 300+ young creative practitioners.
- Supported the development of four new skills training programmes.
- Convened over 300+ artists, educators, cultural professionals, and policymakers through workshops, online roundtables and a symposium in Switzerland.

Key Findings and Practical Insights

- **Creative work extends beyond artistic production.** Across all contexts, young creatives combine artistic practice with organisational, administrative, and relational tasks, from securing opportunities, managing projects, building networks, and working across digital platforms, often without stable support structures. This reflects how creative work is structured in practice.
- **Skills needs reflect how work is accessed and sustained.** In many contexts, creative work is accessed through projects, commissions, and networks rather than formal employment pathways. Practitioners therefore rely on a combination of artistic, digital, and transferable skills such as communication, adaptability, and relationship-building.
- **Creative resilience is a core competence.** Sustaining a creative practice requires the ability to adapt and navigate uncertainty in order to continue developing work over time.
- **Creative entrepreneurship enables practitioners to shape their own economies.** Many practitioners generate opportunities through projects, partnerships, and self-initiated work, building the conditions needed to sustain their practice.
- **Practice-based and context-responsive learning are critical.** Training programmes co-developed with practitioners, grounded in real projects, and adapted to local contexts enable participants to engage with skills that reflect their professional realities.
- **Collaboration between civil society organisations (CSOs) and higher education institutions (HEIs) strengthens learning relevance.** More effective models emerge when institutional knowledge is combined with practice-based experience, co-development with practitioners, and responsiveness to local conditions.
- **Non-formal learning and international exchange are critical enablers.** Peer learning, informal exchange, and transnational collaboration create spaces where practitioners can test ideas, build networks, and develop skills not addressed in formal education systems.

The findings position Turntables as a reference for strengthening arts education and supporting youth. They highlight the need for learning and collaboration models more closely aligned with how creative work is accessed, developed, and sustained in practice.

Takeaways for Policymakers

The competency shift:

Economic participation is increasingly driven by transferable skills (communication, confidence, connection) alongside technical craft. These are key differentiators in a digitalised and project-based work environment.

HEI-CSO nexus:

Partnerships between universities and cultural organisations help align learning with real working conditions and evolving professional realities.

Unfacilitated spaces for innovation:

Policy should support informal, community-based environments where experimentation, collaboration, and peer learning can take place outside rigid institutional structures.

Resilience through well-being:

Entrepreneurial training should integrate self-efficacy and well-being as core professional capacities for navigating the precarious cultural sector.

AI for inclusion:

Emerging tools, such as AI-driven skills matching, can help connect informal skills profiles with opportunities in evolving labour markets.

Introduction

How can young, creative practitioners build sustainable careers in a changing world, when training systems, institutions, and opportunities remain fragmented, inaccessible or outdated?

This question sits at the heart of *Turntables: LEARN! Fostering transcultural communities of practice*, an international collaboration initiated by artlink (Switzerland) together with the Zurich University of the Arts Centre for Creative Economies (ZHdK/ZCCE), Mekong Cultural Hub (Southeast Asia), Black Rhino VR (Kenya), and Meta Arts (India).

We have created this report for civil society organisations (CSOs) seeking to engage more effectively with academic partners, and for higher education institutions (HEIs) aiming to connect their teaching and learning with real-world practices in the cultural sector. It is also for policymakers looking to better understand the skills needs of young creatives.

It brings together key learnings from the programme and reflects on how international collaboration can support more relevant, inclusive, and practice-based approaches to skills development.

The collaboration with ZHdK/ZCCE reflects a shared interest in bridging civil society practice and higher education. Together, the partners bring complementary perspectives to better understand how learning models can evolve in response to professional realities.

The title, *Creative Communities in Motion*, highlights the core premise of the programme: that learning and professional development in the creative sector increasingly take place through dynamic, transnational networks of practitioners, rather than within fixed institutional structures.

This report is co-authored by artlink and the Zurich University of the Arts Centre for Creative Economies (ZHdK/ZCCE), combining perspectives from civil society and higher education in dialogue with international partners.

Programme Context and Rationale

The global creative economy is expanding rapidly, yet access to its opportunities remains uneven. Cultural and creative industries contribute an estimated 3% of global GDP and are projected to grow significantly in the coming years, while demand for creative, digital, and interpersonal skills continues to increase across sectors. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 report highlights that skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration are becoming key differentiators in the labour market.

Despite this growing importance, many young creative practitioners, especially in parts of Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, face persistent barriers to participation. These include limited access to infrastructure, fragmented training opportunities, and a disconnect between formal education and the realities of creative work.

In Switzerland, these shifts are equally relevant. As younger generations enter the workforce, the ability to navigate complex, interdisciplinary, and rapidly evolving professional environments is becoming increasingly important. This raises questions for both education and international cooperation on how to better prepare young people for sustainable careers.

Turntables set out to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) and higher education institutions (HEIs) to design sustainable training and international exchange formats, with the aim of improving livelihood pathways for young creative practitioners and supporting their ability to make a living in the arts.

From 2024 to 2026, it supported the development of **four skills training programmes**. It engaged **over 300+ young creative practitioners** in Kenya, South Asia and the Mekong Region, including artists, cultural workers, and arts students. It convened four international roundtables **involving 300+ participants from culture, education, policy, and development**.

Activities

01 | Learning Labs

Partner organisations co-developed and implemented training programmes together with artists and cultural practitioners. These addressed locally identified skills gaps. Topics ranged from digital archiving, augmented reality, executive function skills, and using digital tools in art management.

03 | Designing Learning Workshops

Facilitated working sessions where partners exchanged methodologies, reflected on programme design, and shared their approaches across contexts.

02 | Creative Skills Roundtable Series

A series of international discussions bringing together artists, educators, cultural managers, and policymakers to explore themes such as future skills, the impact of AI, and the conditions for sustainable creative work.

04 | Study Tour and Symposium

Facilitated discussions that bring together diverse voices from the cultural sector to exchange insights, debate ideas, and co-create strategies, promoting reflection, collaboration, and shared understanding.

These rich and dynamic interactions slowly activated and grew the Turntables transcultural community of practice.

Relevance to Swiss Education

The project was launched in response to a global creative landscape where traditional career pathways are being rapidly replaced by digital transformation and decentralized work. For many practitioners - particularly those in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and those navigating migration - the nature of work has become less about following an established industry "ladder" and more about managing complex networks and digital tools.

The project moved beyond the traditional "North-to-South" aid model, fostering a transcultural community where learning is peer-to-peer and reciprocal. The core rationale is that being a creative professional today depends heavily on entrepreneurship, global connectedness, and digital skills. Competencies that are often best nurtured in non-formal "communities of practice" rather than formal classrooms.



Public symposium on "The Next Wave – Skills, Equity and Collaboration in Global Arts". © Ali Zigerli

From the perspective of a higher education institution (HEI) like ZHdK, participation in Turntables is a strategic priority for several reasons:

- **Curriculum evolution:** By partnering with CSOs, universities gain access to "living laboratories" where they can observe patterns of creative survival and innovation in real-time. This helps ZHdK evolve its curriculum to meet the demand for "Future Skills".
- **Internationalisation of learning:** The project enables two-way mobility (South-to-North and North-to-South), ensuring that Swiss education remains globally relevant and responsive to the resilience models developed in the Global South.
- **The shift to individual competencies:** We are witnessing a fundamental paradigm shift in how creativity is understood by policy makers and educators. The ZHdK/ZCCE utilises a "three-lens" model to explain this evolution to stakeholders:
 1. **The Wide Angle (creative industries):** Mapping sectors like film or music to create "clusters." While useful for macro-economic policy, this view often overlooks individuals working creatively in other industries.
 2. **The Medium Shot (creative occupations):** Identifying "embedded creatives" - professionals like designers in tech firms or narrators in banks. This lens revealed a much larger, more distributed workforce.
 3. **The Close-Up (creative skills):** ZCCE's current focus: individual, transferable competencies like complex problem-solving, collaboration, and confidence. In the age of AI, where technical "hard skills" are increasingly automated, these human-centric skills are the true drivers of progress and employment.

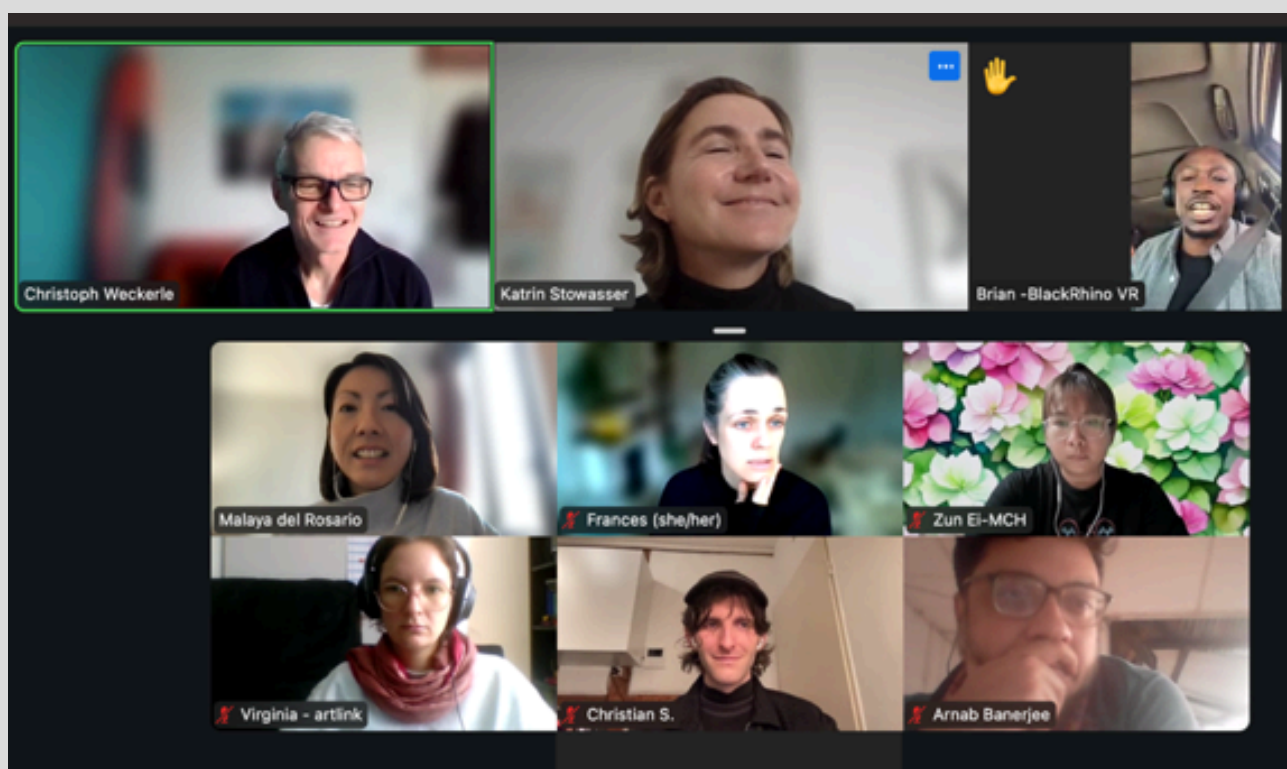
By focusing on these "Close-Up" skills, Turntables strengthens the Swiss educational landscape with a "sensorium for change," ensuring that the next generation of creative leaders is qualified not just to enter a market, but to lead it.

Community Insights

“Turntables: LEARN! offered our organisation a rare space for thoughtful, peer-led exchange. It reinforced our belief that sustainable arts ecosystems are built through relationships, not templates.”

–Arijita Sanyal, Co-Founder Meta Arts

This chapter brings together insights from the Turntables exchange, showing how collaboration across contexts contributed to a more grounded understanding of skills development and creative work. It highlights how learning emerges through interaction between civil society organisations and higher education institutions, and what this means for sustaining creative livelihoods.



Exchange Formats and Shared Learning

Turntables brought together civil society organisations (CSOs), higher education institutions (HEIs), artists, and cultural practitioners across regions through a series of roundtables, workshops, and in-person exchanges.

In particular, the Swiss Week (November 2025) served as an important milestone, directly advancing Turntables' goals of cross-sectoral collaboration, capacity building, and network development. It started with a public symposium, *The Next Wave – Skills, Collaboration & Equity in Global Arts*, which brought together faculty from Swiss art universities, cultural policymakers, and practitioners. The discussions focused on how higher education institutions and cultural organisations can respond more effectively to the skills needs of young practitioners.

The programme also included institutional visits, thematic discussions, and informal exchange. Key areas included:

- Institutional strategy and international collaboration, through exchanges with ZHdK's International Affairs unit.
- Future skills and creative economies, explored through initiatives such as Z-Kubator, ZHdK's entrepreneurship and incubation platform, and the Physical Computing Lab.
- Alternative pedagogies, including peer-to-peer and non-formal learning approaches through the School of Commons.
- Network activation, through a final roundtable focused on identifying future collaborations.

By combining structured sessions with informal encounters, including site visits to external cultural spaces such as Rote Fabrik, an independent cultural centre in Zurich, the Swiss Week translated exchange into concrete professional relationships and potential collaborations.

Reflections from a Civil Society Organization (artlink)

From a CSO perspective, specifically artlink's role in facilitating the programme, several cross-cutting observations emerged across the different exchange formats.

- 1. Skills development needs to be understood in a broader and more practical sense.** Across regions, partners emphasised that sustaining a creative practice requires more than artistic or technical skills. Practitioners also need the ability to write proposals, manage budgets, promote their work, and document their activities. These skills are directly linked to accessing opportunities yet are often not addressed in formal education.
- 2. Effective collaboration depends on creating the right conditions for exchange.** While structured formats such as workshops and roundtables were important, some of the most productive discussions took place in informal settings, where participants could reflect openly and engage with each other's constraints and realities. These moments were critical in moving from general dialogue to identifying concrete areas for collaboration.
- 3. Learning approaches should involve input from practitioners.** Across all contexts, there was a strong emphasis on practice-based and context-responsive learning, often developed in direct collaboration with artists and cultural practitioners. This includes designing training around real projects, using accessible tools, and adapting content to local conditions rather than applying standardised models.

Reflections from a Higher Education Institution (ZHdK/ZCCE)

Focusing on how collaboration builds relevant skills and strengthens the learning ecosystem from a Higher Education perspective.

- 1. Understanding the practitioner in context.** One of the most vital insights from the exchange was the need to understand who "young practitioners" actually are in different contexts. In the Mekong region, a young artist is rarely "just" an artist. They are simultaneously producers, managers, and community organisers, often performing creative and non-creative roles out of necessity. It became clear that the skills needs of creatives are not always "artistic" in the traditional sense. There is an urgent need for management and executive skills to complement creative work. Practitioners must become proficient in navigating the gap between their aesthetic vision and the administrative requirements of the global market.
- 2. The future skills paradigm: Soft skills as differentiators.** Analysis conducted during the roundtables confirmed that artistic ability alone is no longer the primary differentiator for employment. Going back to the discussion on the importance of "Close-Up" skills in the Introduction, today's differentiators are creativity, communication, connection, and confidence. Research shows that students who found immediate employment were not necessarily the most technically proficient, but those with the best communication and relationship-building skills. In emerging markets, the skill of learning itself, the ability to navigate change and innovation, is more important than understanding any single technology. HEIs must prioritise nurturing these soft skills before moving to hard-skill instruction.
- 3. Collaboration models: Two-way mobility and unfacilitated spaces.** Roundtables moved beyond the old North-to-South developmental model toward a model of equity and reciprocity. True innovation requires participants to adapt to entirely different cultural and economic contexts. This means Swiss students and practitioners learning from the resilience and community-based models of the Global South, just as international partners engage with the Swiss context. Rigid, moderated structures can stifle innovation. The most profound learning and collaboration often happened in informal environments where participants could express themselves freely and develop their own ideas. These spaces allow for wayfinding, finding one's own path, rather than following a pre-set curriculum.

Designing Learning

“The Turntables programme catalysed the creation of a new and much needed training for young creatives... This larger perspective has enriched our work and opened up new networks.”

— Frances Rudgard, Mekong Cultural Hub

The chapter presents case studies on the training programmes developed through Turntables' Learning Labs. Each case highlights practical approaches that can be adapted by organisations designing training programmes in different contexts.

It also uses the ZHdK/ZCCE framework of Creative Spheres to analyse how different organisational models support creative careers across contexts. The framework distinguishes between three types of ecosystems:

- **The Core**, where innovation is driven through specialised expertise, technological development, and market-oriented production.
- **The Extended Sphere**, where organisations provide access, infrastructure, and networks that enable participation in the creative economy.
- **The Collocated Sphere**, where different forms of knowledge, such as cultural practice, education, and professional development, intersect within shared environments.

These spheres do not represent fixed categories, but rather different ways in which creative work is structured and sustained.

Case 1: Black Rhino VR (Kenya) – The Creative Core

How can emerging technologies become viable creative and economic opportunities to young practitioners?

Nairobi is a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem often described as the “Silicon Savannah.” Mobile connectivity is expanding rapidly, and a growing number of young creatives are engaging with digital tools and platforms.

However, access to immersive technologies such as augmented reality remains uneven. While interest is high, practical pathways into application are limited. Many young creatives are experimenting with digital tools but lack the organisational, strategic, and applied skills needed to translate this into sustainable work.

Many of these practitioners are at an early stage of their careers, navigating entry into a rapidly evolving digital sector without clear pathways, mentorship, or access to infrastructure. This reflects a broader mismatch between formal education and the realities of the digital creative economy, where work is increasingly project-based, collaborative, and network-driven.



Black Rhino VR is an extended reality (XR) studio working at the intersection of technology, storytelling, and youth innovation. Its work focuses on creating accessible entry points into immersive media while connecting creative experimentation to real-world use cases across sectors. The training they developed responded directly to this gap through a 5-day intensive, practice-based training programme. It combined:

- Augmented Reality (AR) production using the no-code platform [MediAR](#).
- Executive function skills, including planning, time management, goal setting, and collaboration.

The programme was co-developed with creative practitioners, including participating artists, ensuring that the curriculum reflected skills needs and interests. The design was iterative, incorporating feedback from participants to refine future delivery.

Training was structured around hands-on, project-based learning. Participants worked with real assets—images, video, and 3D elements—to develop interactive AR prototypes. They explored applications across sectors such as storytelling, fashion, education, and marketing.

A key feature of the programme was its progression-based and competitive element. Participants developed projects that were presented and evaluated, with selected participants gaining access to further opportunities. This created a bridge between learning and professional visibility.

For example, Nairobi-based visual artist Arnold Muthama Mutisya, with his team members, 2nd Look, developed an AR project exploring sustainable fashion through interactive storytelling. His work, Trashion, was selected for further presentation at Swiss Week in Zurich. This enabled him to apply not only technical skills, but also communication and pitching skills developed during the training, while building international networks.

Alongside technical production, sessions on organisation and collaboration were embedded directly into the project workflow. This ensured that participants were developing both creative outputs and the ability to manage and position their work in professional contexts.

ZCCE Analysis: The Creative Core

From a ZCCE perspective, Black Rhino VR represents a Creative Core model, where innovation is driven by the integration of advanced tools, creative practice, and market-oriented thinking.

In this model:

- Technology is a tool for creating value, not an end in itself.
- Sustainability depends on translating ideas into applied outputs.
- Learning is most effective when tied to real projects, feedback, and iteration.

The training demonstrates that access to emerging technologies alone is not sufficient. What enables creative resilience is the ability to connect tools to real-world use cases, income pathways, and collaborative workflows.

Practical guidance for programme design

- Combine technical and organisational skills within a single learning process.
- Anchor training in real projects and applied outputs.
- Integrate progression pathways that link learning to opportunities and visibility.
- Co-develop training with practitioners to ensure alignment with in-demand skills.

Case 2: Mekong Cultural Hub (Southeast Asia) – The Extended Sphere

How can creative practitioners develop the administrative and digital skills needed to sustain their work using tools and learning approaches that fit their realities?

The cultural ecosystem of the Mekong Region in Southeast Asia is diverse but often under-resourced. Many young and early-career practitioners work independently or in small collectives, often without access to institutional support or structured entry pathways into the cultural sector.

In these contexts, artists are rarely “just” artists. They are also project managers, fundraisers, coordinators, and communicators, responsible for navigating administrative systems alongside their creative work. However, many of these skills are learned informally, making them difficult to sustain and scale over time.

While digital tools are increasingly available, the ability to use them effectively remains uneven. This creates barriers to accessing funding, managing projects, and building longer-term professional trajectories. Infrastructure constraints, including unstable internet access and reliance on mobile devices, further shape how practitioners engage with digital systems.



Course

Digital Skills for Arts Administration

Session 1

Foundational Digital Tools for the Arts

MEKONG CULTURAL HUB **Kai Vallya PLAYS** **THE XYZ ART CENTER** **ASSOCIATION for MYANMAR CONTEMPORARY ARTS** **HERITAGE ARTSPACE**

Mekong Cultural Hub is a regional network organisation that supports cultural practitioners and organisations through capacity-building, exchange, and ecosystem development. Its work focuses on strengthening access, connectivity, and practical support structures for creative work across the Mekong region. The training they developed focused on foundational digital and administrative skills for arts practice, grounded in the everyday realities of practitioners.

The programme was co-developed with Kaivalya Plays, a practitioner-led theatre and training organisation in India working across performance, education, and applied learning. It was implemented in collaboration with regional partners, namely:

- Association for Myanmar Contemporary Arts (AMCA, Myanmar), an organisation supporting contemporary artists through exhibitions, capacity-building, and international exchange.
- Heritage Art Space (HAS, Vietnam), focused on arts education, community engagement, and supporting emerging practitioners.
- XYZ Art Center (Laos), a social enterprise and cultural space that supports local artists through exhibitions, networking, and ecosystem development.

This decentralised model allowed training to be adapted to local contexts, including language, levels of digital literacy, and access to infrastructure.

Training was delivered through a combination of online sessions and in-person workshops, including a three-day training in Luang Prabang. It focused on practical, step-by-step tasks such as:

- Writing and structuring project proposals.
- Developing basic budgets using spreadsheets.
- Organising events and managing registrations using tools such as Google Forms.
- Documenting projects using shared digital systems.
- Communicating ideas clearly to funders and collaborators.

Widely accessible tools such as Google Docs, Sheets, and Forms were intentionally used so that participants could immediately apply what they learned within their existing working environments.

ZCCE Analysis: The Extended Sphere

MCH represents an Extended Sphere model, where organisations provide access, infrastructure, and networks that individual practitioners lack.

In this model:

- Sustainability is enabled through shared resources and support structures.
- Learning is distributed across networks rather than centralised institutions.
- Participation is strengthened through access to tools, knowledge, and opportunities.

The training demonstrates how decentralised, network-based approaches can support more inclusive and context-responsive forms of skills development.

Practical guidance for programme design

- Ground training in real administrative and organisational tasks.
- Use accessible and widely available digital tools.
- Co-develop training with practitioners and regional partners.
- Design flexible delivery models that adapt to local conditions.
- Recognise that enabling access and infrastructure is central to skills development.

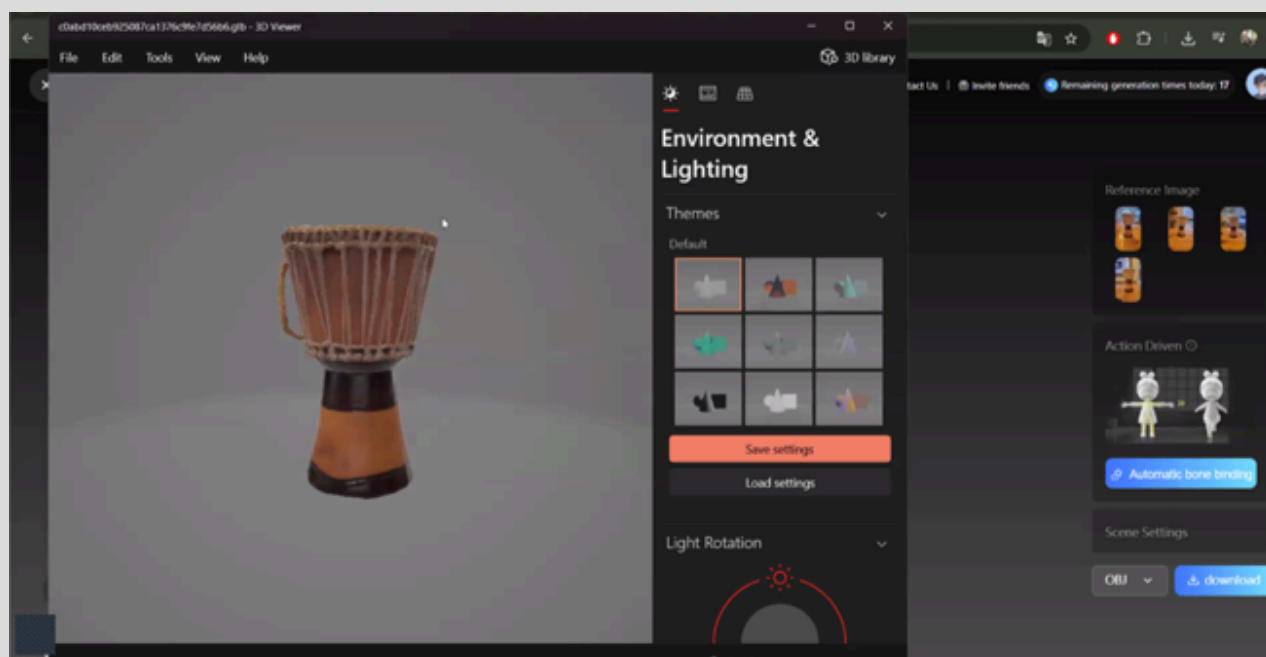
Case 3: Meta Arts (South Asia) – The Collocated Sphere

How can performing arts practitioners sustain their work in a digital economy when their practice is live, ephemeral, and often undocumented?

The performing arts sector in South Asia is characterised by rich cultural traditions alongside limited infrastructure for documentation, visibility, and professional development. Much of this work exists in oral, embodied, and community-based forms, making it difficult to preserve, share, or translate into sustainable livelihoods.

Many practitioners lack access to the technical skills required to document and disseminate their work digitally. This creates a gap between artistic production and visibility, limiting opportunities for recognition, collaboration, and income generation.

These challenges are often more pronounced for early-career practitioners, those based outside major urban centres, and women practitioners, whose work is more likely to be under-documented or excluded from formal archives.



Meta Arts is a South Asia-based arts organisation and producer working across performance, research, and education. Its work focuses on documentation, archiving, and knowledge production in the performing arts, particularly in relation to underrepresented cultural practices and women practitioners.

The training developed was delivered across India and Bangladesh through a programme on digital archiving and documentation, skills that are increasingly in demand. The programme emphasised supporting women practitioners and those working outside major urban and institutional centres.

In India, the training was co-developed and led by artist and academic, Debaroti Chakraborty, whose work bridges research, performance, and oral history. In Bangladesh, the programme was developed in collaboration with artist and researcher Tasneem Arna, whose practice engages with gender, performance, and community-based cultural work.

Both combined technical skills, critical reflection, and applied learning, delivered through online sessions, workshops, and mentorship. Participants worked on their own documentation projects throughout the programme, translating learning directly into practice.

The curriculum included:

- Digital documentation techniques (audio, video, visual recording).
- Archiving methods, including metadata and cataloguing.
- Fieldwork approaches for documenting live and community-based practices.
- Ethics of documentation, including consent, ownership, and representation.
- Use of accessible digital tools such as cloud storage and transcription tools.
- Digital dissemination, including portfolio development and visibility strategies.

Participants created archive starter kits, including documentation samples and project concepts, linking learning directly to their ongoing work. A micro-grants component supported selected participants in further developing these projects.

ZCCE Analysis: The Collocated Sphere

Meta Arts represents a Collocated Sphere model, where cultural practice, knowledge systems, wider frameworks and professional pathways intersect.

In this model:

- Value is created by connecting traditional knowledge with contemporary tools.
- Sustainability depends on making cultural work visible, transferable, and accessible beyond the cultural sector.
- Learning integrates practice, research, and professional development, and understanding the logics of wider frameworks.

The training demonstrates that documentation and archiving are not only technical skills, but critical infrastructures for sustaining cultural work in a digital economy.

Practical guidance for programme design

- Design programmes that prioritise inclusion, gender responsiveness, and accessibility across contexts.
- Link documentation directly to visibility and employability.
- Combine technical skills with critical reflection on ethics and representation.
- Embed learning in participants' own practice and projects.
- Co-develop training with artist-academics to bridge formal and non-formal learning.
- Focus on the logics of political, legal or funding frameworks.

Future Directions

“The Turntables programme delivered strategic value. The grant equipped our artists with critical skills that directly enhance the quality and competitiveness of their work. The Swiss exchange connected us with high-level creative leaders, broadening our perspective and unlocking new avenues for collaboration. It created actionable opportunities that strengthen our ecosystem and drive long-term growth.”

— Abraham Kyalo, C.O.O BlackRhino VR

This chapter synthesises insights from the case studies and exchange formats and outlines their implications for policy and practice.



Public symposium on “The Next Wave – Skills, Equity and Collaboration in Global Arts”. © Ali Zigerli

Conditions for Sustaining Creative Work

Across the programme conditions for creative work are often fragmented or insufficient. Young, creative practitioners are therefore not only producing work but actively navigating how work is accessed and sustained. They often need to combine creative, organisational, entrepreneurial and relational tasks to build and maintain their practice. In this sense, they are required to "invent their own economies".

Following the plea of poet Arthur Rimbaud—"il me faut une économie positive!" (I need a positive economy!) —we argue that a "positive economy" is one that provides the time, space, and freedom required for deep, creative work. It enables creative practitioners to recognise their work as valuable in and of itself, while also producing value for others.

Key dimensions for this positive economy include:

- **Scaling vs. growth:** For policymakers, it is important to understand that "success" for creative communities often means scaling up for impact or scaling down for depth, rather than simple commercial growth.
- **Well-being as an economic factor:** artlink and ZCCE have identified that resilience, mindfulness, and self-efficacy are not just personal traits, but core professional competencies. Well-being allows practitioners to navigate the precariousness of the cultural sector without burning out.
- **Addressing high youth unemployment:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents a promising opportunity for this through skills matching. The ZHdK/ZCCE is developing innovative AI-driven skills matching solutions. This initiative bridges the gap between the informal skills profiles of artists and the actual demands of regional labour markets. It demonstrates how core skills of creative practitioners can be used as a tool for social inclusion and economic stability by identifying the transferable soft skills (communication, problem-solving) that the market increasingly values.

Skills that Support Creative Resilience

Creative livelihoods in a digitalised, global economy need a complex repertoire of integrated skills rather than isolated technical crafts. In this context, creative resilience emerges as the ability to navigate and sustain work across changing conditions. It is not a single skill, but the result of developing interconnected competencies over time. We have identified four areas that allow the modern practitioner to become resilient:

- **Digital fluency:** Beyond basic computer skills, this involves using technology (like AI or VR) as a strategic "sparring partner" while maintaining human-centred storytelling and social relevance.
- **Entrepreneurial thinking and action:** Inspired by ZHdK's Z-Kubator model (an entrepreneurship incubator programme), this means shifting from a "jobseeker" to a "context-creator" mindset. It involves mastering the basics of project planning, legal structures, and self-marketing.
- **Intercultural agility:** The ability to navigate different cultural and economic contexts through two-way or mutual mobility. Practitioners must translate their local knowledge into a global language to access international markets.
- **Community-based learning:** Success is increasingly dependent on "communities of practice." These peer networks stabilise professional expectations and provide the infrastructure (the "Extended Sphere") that individual artists lack.

Implications for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

For Swiss art schools like ZHdK, the synthesis highlights a need for structural evolution:

- **Curriculum internationalisation:** Integrating lessons from the Global South regarding resilience and community-based innovation.
- **Mentoring and labs:** Moving from rigid training to the "experimental learning laboratory" model of the Z-Kubator, where students test aesthetic ideas against market realities.
- **Validation of non-formal learning:** Universities must find ways to validate the skills learned in "unfacilitated spaces" to improve the livelihood opportunities of their graduates.

Policy Recommendations and Future Development

The findings point to several priorities for policy makers and institutional leaders. The recommendation builds on practical approaches observed across the programme, including co-developed training with practitioners, practice-based learning, the use of accessible tools, and collaboration across networks.

- **Invest in the HEI–CSO nexus.** Partnerships between higher education institutions and civil society organisations should be recognised as key drivers of innovation and relevance.
- **Support the shift toward transferable skills.** Curricula should integrate entrepreneurial thinking, intercultural agility, and digital fluency alongside artistic practice.
- **Formalise the validation of non-formal learning.** Skills developed through peer networks and community-based practice should be recognised within education systems.
- **Prioritise two-way mobility.** International cooperation should support reciprocal learning across contexts. This strengthens the global relevance of training offers as well as young people’s resilience.
- **Leverage AI for inclusion.** AI-driven skills matching can help bridge the gap between informal skills and labour market opportunities.

Conclusion

Supporting creative livelihoods requires more than expanding access to training. It requires aligning skills, systems, and collaboration models.

Looking ahead, there is a continued need to strengthen models that connect education, practice, and international exchange, and to support systems that reflect how creative work is built and sustained.

Our sincere hope is that the insights generated through the programme enable organisations to better support young people in shaping, growing, and sustaining their future.

Acknowledgements

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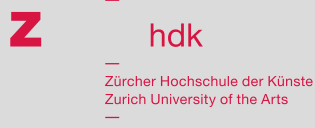
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