

Creative Ventures:

Empowering Nordic-Baltic Creatives Through Collaboration and Entrepreneurship

A! Aalto University
Executive Education
Professional Development

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Creative Ventures has been a Nordic-Baltic keynote and workshop series that brought together entrepreneurs, artists, and creative field professionals to foster co-learning and innovation. It has provided a platform for cross-disciplinary learning through Nordic hybrid keynotes, workshops, and networking opportunities.

The initiative has been based on insights from the Aalto EE and Aalto University Future Artpreneurship project (2021-2022), which recommended topics such as business thinking, life-wide learning, mentoring, and process development for creative sector.

Creative Ventures was designed by Nana Salin and delivered together with Suvi Leinonen. The series has equipped participants with the business skills and resources needed to turn their creative passions into sustainable ventures, supporting entrepreneurship across diverse creative fields. Participation has been open and free for all interested parties, thanks to the support of the Saastamoinen Foundation.

FINAL STRUCTURE AND LOCATIONS, FROM CLOSING KEYNOTE TO FIRST

<p>CLOSING KEYNOTE Sustaining Creative Excellence in Entrepreneurship Networking Event</p>	<p>KEYNOTE 4 Strategic Business Planning for Creative Ventures</p>	<p>KEYNOTE 3 Building Your Tribe: Networking and Community Engagements</p>	<p>KEYNOTE 2 Radical Creativity, Ideas into Innovations: Navigating the Creative Business Landscape</p>	<p>KEYNOTE 1 The Convergence of Creativity and Entrepreneurship</p>
	<p>WORKSHOP 4 Financial Fitness for Creative Entrepreneurs</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 3 The Art of Networking for Creatives</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 2 Design Thinking and Radical Creativity for Creative Entrepreneurs</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 1 Discovering Your Creative Entrepreneurial DNA</p>
<p>SCHEDULE January 15, 2026</p>	<p>SCHEDULE November 4, 2025</p>	<p>SCHEDULE June 3, 2025</p>	<p>SCHEDULE April 8, 2025</p>	<p>SCHEDULE January 30, 2025</p>
<p>LOCATION Finlandia Hall, Helsinki, Finland and live online</p>	<p>LOCATION Oslo and live online</p>	<p>LOCATION Stockholm and live online</p>	<p>LOCATION Copenhagen and live online</p>	<p>LOCATION Aalto University Töölö, Helsinki, Finland and live online</p>

The keynote and workshop series was designed to address the topical needs of the Nordic and Baltic creative field through seven key objectives:

1

Sustainable Business and Creative Entrepreneurship:

It has provided training on essential business concepts such as planning, marketing, and financing opportunities.

2

AI and the Platform Economy:

It has equipped creative entrepreneurs with insights on leveraging platform-based models to grow businesses and monetize content in a digital landscape.

3

Collaborative Opportunities:

It has shown cross-disciplinary collaborations and highlighted the value of partnerships between creatives and other sectors.

4

Personal and Professional Development:

It has fostered resilience and growth through workshops on management, goal setting, negotiation, communication, and self-leadership.

5

Case Learnings:

It has engaged participants with real-world cases from creative businesses to apply knowledge and advance their ventures.

6

Networking and Collaboration -

It has facilitated peer learning, industry meetups, and community building for lasting relationships.

7

Access to Resources -

It has connected participants with funding, co-working spaces, and events to support their entrepreneurial journey.

1

FINLAND / HELSINKI

KEYNOTE

The Convergence of Creativity and Entrepreneurship

WORKSHOP

Discovering Your Creative Entrepreneurial DNA

SPEAKER



ASTRID HUOPALAINEN

Assistant Professor in Leadership for Creativity at the Department of Management Studies and Department of Art and Media at Aalto University.

Aalto EE Creative Ventures Keynote Report, Astrid Huopalainen



ASTRID HUOPALAINEN

Assistant Professor in Leadership for Creativity at the Department of Management Studies and Department of Art and Media at Aalto University

This document provides the summary for the keynote entitled “The convergence of creativity and entrepreneurship”, delivered on 30.1.2025 in the Aalto EE Creative Ventures series. The keynote addressed the intersection of creativity and entrepreneurship, fostering participants to reflect deeper on their entrepreneurial selves. I begin with reflecting on the following question:

How the Nordic creative industries can grow and evolve in the future, especially in relation to my area of expertise and the theme addressed in my keynote

The Nordic creative industries are a mix of *different* creative industries, where (local) context, national cultural policies, the overall economic situation and the citizen’s appreciation and possibility to consume culture always matters. My keynote highlighted that creativity and entrepreneurship are not to be treated as opposites but *interdependent and interlinked forces* constantly feeding each other. **Nordic creative industries can grow and evolve by integrating curiosity and creativity (openness to difference and to the world) and courage (taking bold action and daring to be different) through more fully embracing the convergence of creativity and entrepreneurship.** This convergence, taking both creativity and an entrepreneurial mindset seriously, can drive future growth, especially when a clear strategy, a commercial and entrepreneurial mindset and business-building are not seen as a

threat to creativity or the freedom of expression of the arts, but as a strategic imperative and a necessity to survive and thrive. **Future growth areas:**

- business models where organizations in creative industries become “DJ-like samplers,” creatively combining and mixing ideas, materials, tools, platforms, and cultural references to positively stand out and to be unique
- Experience-driven high-quality creative offerings, in line with Pine & Gilmore’s experience economy: Nordic creativity excels at meaningful, sustainable, affective, aesthetically grounded experiences for designated customers
- Cross-disciplinary “BIZ + ARTS” innovation, where artistic and creative thinking helps organizations differentiate and navigate uncertainty

Nordic creative industries can also grow and evolve by learning to work with constraints.

The keynote discussed bricolage, “making do” with limited resources and recombining what is available in novel and creative ways. Resource scarcity in the Nordics (small national markets, high costs, small populations) can actually spark growth by encouraging:

- Brave and bolder experimentation to be unique and collaboration across different sectors (collaboration rather than competition in some cases as a win-win situation)
- Creative reuse of ideas (revisiting what has worked in the past and not inventing the wheel over and over to save costs), circularity, and sustainability (already a Nordic strength)



Growth can come from adopting a *bricoleur mindset* across industries. **Nordic creative industries can also grow and evolve by more firmly cultivating storytelling and identity work as strategic capabilities.** The keynote emphasized that creative entrepreneurship is *identity work* involving self-presentation, (digital) performativity, and navigating multiple “personas”. This is especially important because Nordic creators increasingly compete in an attention economy. Growth will accelerate when creators master storytelling as differentiation, authentic visibility and narrative-driven branding that highlights Nordic values—sustainability, trust, craft, and experimentation.

What is required from individuals and organizations to support this development?

For individuals

- **Stronger self-awareness about identities and the core purpose:** This was central to my keynote—“Who am I, and what value do I want to create in the world?” “What is the key purpose of what I do?” This needs to be very clear, both for individuals as well as for organizations
- **Comfort with experimentation and failure:** Overcoming fear of failure is essential for both personal and organizational growth, and fear of making oneself ridiculous or failing in front of others is still, unfortunately, an obstacle in the organizational cultures in many creative industries
- **Skill in entrepreneurial sampling and recombination of existing resources:** Creators need to engage in constant remixing—of ideas, disciplines, platforms, tools, materials, communities.
- **Capacity for collaboration:** Nordic creative industries excel through collaborations across sectors—design + tech, art + science, fashion + AI.

For organizations

- **Structures and cultures that support experimentation and psychological safety**
To enable ‘failing’ (and continuous learning), as I mentioned in the keynote

- **Investment and reflection regarding the entire creative processes along the way—not just a focus on the end product or the creative outputs**
- **Resources and support allocated also for early-stage ideas:** Time to experiment, test and try things out, resources to support creativity
- **Cross-sector partnerships:** Companies partnering with artists, designers, and creatives unlock innovation beyond traditional R&D

My vision for the future of the Nordic creative sector, which areas do I believe will gain strength, and why?

The Nordics already excel at providing high quality cultural experiences, value for the customers, holistic thinking, and sustainability—these will become even more globally valuable. Nordic organizations in creative sectors will in my vision:

- Grow in experience economies by blending art, craft, entrepreneurship, and local culture
- integrate AI without losing human authenticity, merge digital and physical experiences, be strong in aesthetic sensibility, and user-centered thinking.

In summary

The future of Nordic creative industries lies in **embracing convergence:** creativity + entrepreneurship. My keynote presented Nordic creative entrepreneurship as **a blend of creative destruction, bricolage, identity work, and storytelling.** The future belongs to creators and organizations that:

- embrace experimentation and build strong identities;
- collaborate across disciplines;
- use constraints and limited resources as creative fuel;
- build meaningful, affective experiences;
- and combine art and entrepreneurship into new forms of value creation.

The Nordic region with its strong creative education, design heritage, and ethical orientation is uniquely positioned to lead this evolution.



2

DENMARK / COPENHAGEN

KEYNOTE

**Radical Creativity,
Ideas into
Innovations:
Navigating
the Creative
Business
Landscape**

WORKSHOP

**Design Thinking
and Radical
Creativity
for Creative
Entrepreneurs**

SPEAKERS



ANA KRISTIANSSON

Experienced leader in the apparel industry with over 25 years of expertise, and Founder of PORTIA, a tech company providing AI-powered solutions for SME fashion brands to streamline operations and embrace circularity.



RISTO SARVAS

University Lecturer at Aalto University. Sarvas has a strong history overlapping design, business, technology, and society.

Radical Creativity - Turning Ideas into Innovations



ANA
KRISTIANSSON
(Copyright author)

In my keynote, I wanted to do more than just talk about creativity - I wanted to help people act on it. We live in an age of overflow of ideas, and so much of what we see looks and feels the same. AI can replicate styles and automate tasks at insane speed, but it can't replicate human curiosity, intuition, or the ability to connect emotionally. That's where radical creativity comes in. To me, it's not about being more artistic or innovative for the sake of it. It's about breaking patterns, challenging assumptions, and building ideas that don't just improve what already exists - but reinvent it entirely.

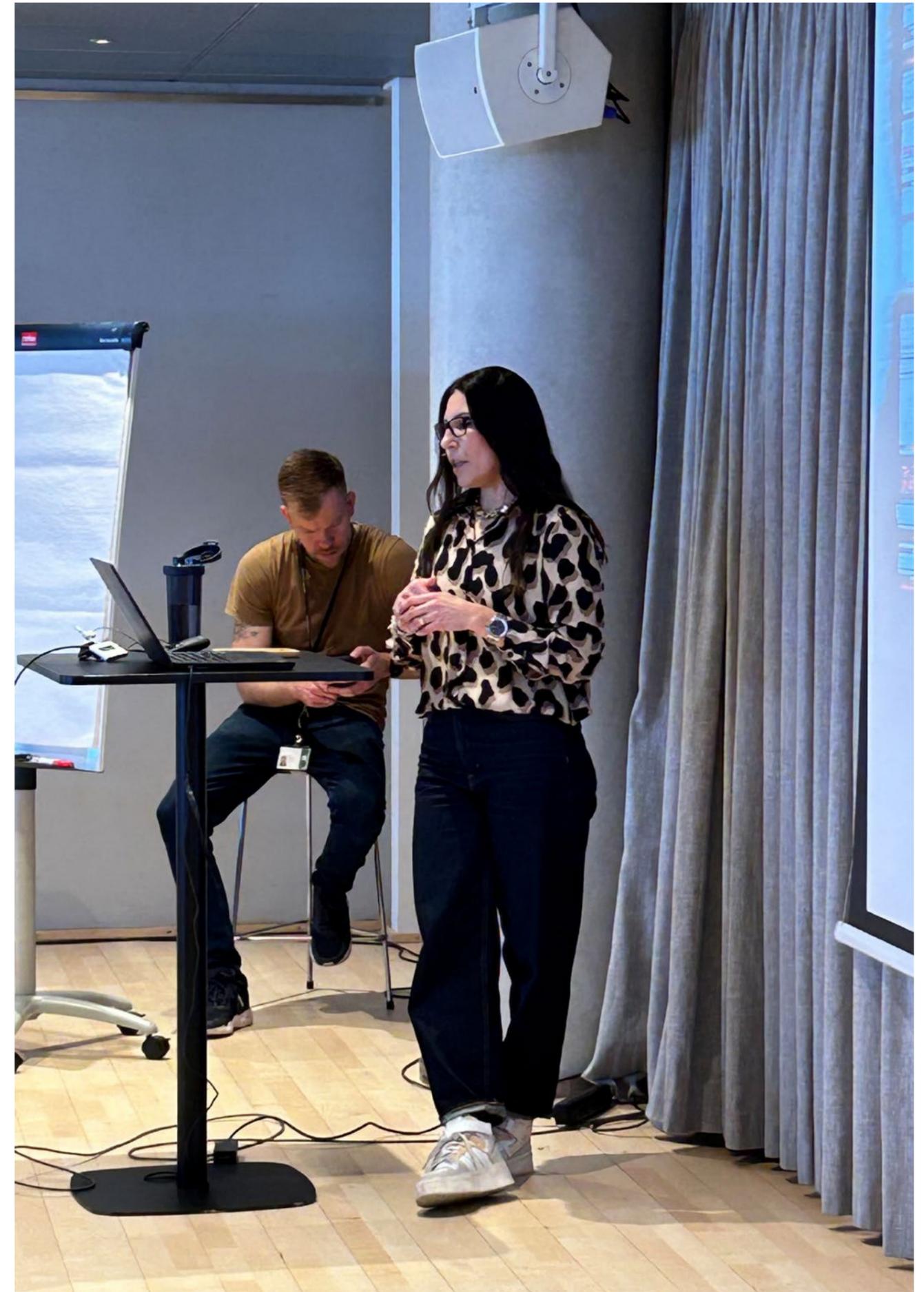
I believe the future of creative industries is in the intersection of purpose, circularity, and technology. Purpose gives clarity - it acts as a north star that aligns creative work with meaning and impact. Circularity makes sure that what we design contributes to regeneration instead of waste. And technology, especially AI, gives us the tools to move faster and smarter - as long as we stay human at the core. When these three forces merge, creativity moves from being expressive to being transformative.

I shared the ACTION Framework - Assess, Create, Test, Integrate, Own, Navigate - a hands-on and practical roadmap for turning ideas into tangible, purpose-driven innovations. It's built to help creators move from inspiration to impact, making sure that every idea solves a real problem, adds value, and stays aligned with sustainability and purpose.

Looking at the Nordic creative industries, I see an incredible foundation that can lead globally. Our cultural DNA is built on design integrity, equality, and environmental consciousness - real values the world desperately needs. But now, we need to go further. We need to take more risks, question the systems we've built, and design for progress, not perfection. The creative sector grows stronger when it's uncomfortable, experimental, and unapologetically value-driven.

For individuals, that means being bold and leading with conviction - being brave enough to push for ideas that feel bold or unconventional. For organizations, it means building cultures that encourage curiosity, iteration, and circular business thinking. Growth happens when creativity meets responsibility.

My vision for the Nordic creative sector is to become a global catalyst for responsible innovation - where creativity doesn't just create beauty through design, but builds systems that sustain life, culture, and community. We already have the values; now it's time to put them together with bold execution. Because creativity without action changes nothing. The world doesn't need more ideas - it needs more brave doers.



Design Thinking and Radical Creativity for Creative Entrepreneurs



ANA KRISTIANSSON
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This workshop was about going back to the core of where creativity really begins - within ourselves. Often, creative entrepreneurs start by looking at trends or analyzing what the market wants, when actually, the most powerful ideas come from our own stories, values, and lived experiences. That's why I created the Authentic Design Spiral - a framework that starts with you and spirals outward, turning self-awareness into innovation that connects on a deeper level with others.

We moved through five phases - Reflect, Connect, Envision, Materialize, and Amplify - each section is designed to help people uncover and express their authentic creative voice.

In the Reflect phase, we explored identity: personal history, cultural background, passions, and even the "weird" traits that make each of us unique. Those nuances are gold - they're what set us apart in a world of sameness.

Then came Connect, where we looked at how our individual stories resonate with the world around us. Instead of guessing what people want, we searched for alignment - places where our truth meets real human needs and market opportunities.

In Envision, we transformed that insight into bold, original concepts that couldn't have been created

**Traditional design thinking starts with the user.
The Authentic Design Spiral starts with the creator.**

by anyone else. It was about turning reflection into imagination - combining our authentic selves with purpose and vision. In Materialize, the participants started putting those ideas into something tangible: prototypes, visuals, words, experiences - anything that makes the abstract real. And the last section, in Amplify, we looked at how to communicate it - how to share your story and purpose in a way that builds trust, emotion, and community around your work.

This approach redefines what design thinking can be. Traditional design thinking starts with the user. The Authentic Design Spiral starts with the creator. Because when your work is rooted in truth, everything that follows - design, storytelling, innovation - gets emotional depth, meaning, and originality. In a world filled with templates, algorithms, and copy-paste culture, authenticity is a creative superpower.

For the Nordic creative industries, this shift feels really important. We already stand for craftsmanship, equality, and sustainability - but the next thing, the



evolution comes from embracing the deeply personal. I believe the future will belong to creators and entrepreneurs who merge authentic self-expression with responsible innovation. The individuals who combine creative courage with sustainability and entrepreneurship will shape culture itself, not only products and brands.

To get there, individuals must dare to trust their instincts, lean into what makes them different, and create with boldness and conviction. Organizations

need to build cultures that celebrate experimentation, purpose, and emotional intelligence as much as and as seriously as performance or profit.

My vision is for a Nordic creative landscape to have authenticity, sustainability, and innovation exist as one - where creativity starts with the individual but ripples outward to create lasting impact. Because when we create from truth, we don't just make things - we make meaning, and we make change.

Bureaucracy for Creativity, Seriously

DR. RISTO SARVAS

University Lecturer & Executive Educator, Aalto University (Copyright author)

There will probably always be a tug-of-war between bureaucracy and creativity. But in today's digitally marinated world, we're seeing a sea change in how people view rules, structures, and routines at work. This shift began in software development in the late 1990s, when teams reorganized around agile, adaptive, and collaborative methods. At the heart of this thinking was a simple idea: success doesn't come from resisting change, but from embracing it — and that requires clear rules, roles, and boundaries. Embracing change requires bureaucracy?

Fast forward to the 2020s: digital technologies now shape nearly every industry. Agile routines like sprints, dailies, retros, and kanban boards appear everywhere — even in museums. Add in a global pandemic, the rise of AI, and geopolitical instability, and it's no surprise that resilience, creativity, and adaptability have become central to successful work.

The question is no longer why organizations need to adapt, but how.

That's where bureaucracy re-enters the picture, not as the villain, but as a tool.

Structure Enables Creativity

This is what those 1990s software teams discovered. If you want flexibility, creativity, and meaningful outcomes in uncertainty, you need shared structure. Without it, people's energy gets drained in unpacking ambiguity: unclear goals, vague roles, and mismatched expectations. Without structure, teams drift. With structure, creative effort is focused.

Observe a high-performing product team today and you might be surprised how "bureaucratic" they are. They are almost religious about rules. But this is not bureaucracy in the old sense. The rules are about learning cycles, shared goals, psycho-

logical safety, and how to change the rules themselves. The structure serves the people, not the other way around.

Not all businesses have cracked this balance, but many, especially in the Nordics are trying. In fact, the holy grail of modern business is to build cultures that are agile, resilient, and creative. And to do so through structures that reduce friction, foster autonomy, and clarify what really matters.

Over the past decade, the business world has experimented to reach a balance between structure and creativity. And while it hasn't found a silver bullet, it has put the spotlight on structure as a source of resilience and creativity. That spotlight is worth shining on the creative sector too.

Cultural institutions already have what businesses are trying to build: purpose and creativity at their core. Theatres, museums, galleries — they exist to serve public life, not profit. Autonomy and artistry are valued, even protected. But here's the hard question: do their internal structures (bureaucracy) support these values — or get in their way?

Seven Categories of "Bureaucracy" That Support Creative Work

As highlighted above, the answer lies in structure — not just artistic or strategic vision, but the everyday rules, routines, and roles that shape how people work together. What can we learn from the business world?

There's no plug-and-play solution. Creativity and autonomy must be tailored to the context: the organization, the team, the individual. Still, certain patterns show up across successful, adaptive cultures. The following seven categories are based on collected best practices and rules from hundreds of professionals. Do not read the categories as ready answers, but more like invitations: "How might we

create...?". They offer starting points for dialogue — and the foundation for structures that support autonomy, wellbeing, and long-term creative success.

Clear Objectives and Guidelines

Shared goals made visible through routines like team-level OKRs, transparent KPIs, and live dashboards.

Decentralized Decision-Making

Boundaries and roles that enable teams to act without always asking permission. Requires trust, clarity, and a low approval threshold.

Continuous Improvement and Learning

Learning is built into the workflow — not an extra. Think retrospectives, post-mortems, coaching roles, and peer reflection habits.

Communication and Collaboration

Routines that encourage cross-functional visibility and dialogue: daily check-ins, kanban boards, shared goals, and "managers walking the floor."

Adaptability and Responsiveness

Plans that can — and should — change. Structures like dual roles, regularly updated "big picture" views, and clear responsibility/accountability splits.

Empowerment and Trust

Cultures of ownership, not micromanagement. Includes participatory goal-setting, meaningful 1-on-1s, and visible appreciation.

Wellbeing and Psychological Safety

Rules and norms that make it safe to be human at work. This includes remote work agreements, clear conflict resolution steps, and training in psychological safety.

These categories only work if they lead to real conversations. That's the difference between adaptive structure and dead bureaucracy. Without dialogue, rules become disconnected from purpose. But with shared ownership and reflection, structure becomes a shared architecture for creative resilience.

A Vision for the Nordic Creative Sector

Uncertainty is here to stay. In business, this means it's unclear what products or services will lead to success. In the cultural sector, it means it's unclear what productions, exhibitions, or campaigns will resonate next.

But here's the good news: you don't need perfect answers. You need structures that allow you to adapt with purpose.

This is the shift already happening in forward-looking organizations. The focus is no longer just on what we do, but on how we work.

For the creative sector, this means reclaiming structure. Even bureaucracy. Not as restrictive red tape, but as the scaffolding for creativity. Not despite structure, but because of it.

The Nordic creative sector has a rare opportunity: To lead not only through content, but through way of working and organizing - structure that embraces constant change!

So, here's the last question: Can you embrace bureaucracy as a means for sustainable creativity? You personally? You as in all of you in your organisation?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Risto Sarvas (D.Sc.) is a lecturer at Aalto University and a sought-after advisor on organizational culture and leadership. With a background ranging from software engineering to design leadership and executive education, he works with leaders and teams across the Nordics and Asia to rethink how creativity, autonomy, and structure coexist. Risto's practical frameworks — rooted in decades of experience bridging technology, design, and organizational change — help organizations build cultures capable of learning, adapting, and creating meaning in uncertain times.

3

SWEDEN / STOCKHOLM

KEYNOTE

Building Your Tribe: Networking and Community Engagements

WORKSHOP

The Art of Networking for Creatives

SPEAKER



EMMA STENSTRÖM

An Associate Professor at the Stockholm School of Economics in Sweden. Stenström researches and teaches social and existential sustainability, often with one foot in the arts. In 2023, she published the book "Bubblehopping: A Method for Understanding Others," which has been nominated for best marketing book and best HR book.

Connectivity as an Engine of the Nordic Cultural and Creative Industries (NCCI's)



EMMA STENSTRÖM

Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden
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The growth of the Nordic cultural and creative industries (NCCIs) could be viewed as partly dependent on a transition from local focus to strategic interconnectedness. This perspective suggests that connectivity - an ethos of collaboration - is one critical enabling factor for transforming the region's cultural depth into scalable economic value. It might help to think of NCCIs as one complex adaptive system.

Complexity and Concealed Value

One foundation may reside in accurately accounting for the sector's current, complex reality. New data from Sweden illustrates that the economic significance of the CCIs has been structurally obscured. The Swedish sector's scale - revenue exceeding SEK 650 billion and nearly 250,000 employees - demonstrates a considerable economic force that was previously underestimated by official statistics. The nature of the industry is highly complex, characterized by the value of intangible assets and a high proportion of micro-enterprises and solo players, especially in artistic fields. The development of new methodologies, such as refining industry codes to capture value from digital platforms like Spotify, underscores the need for intellectual humility - recognizing that existing analytical frameworks might be inadequate.

To achieve genuine regional scale, the focus might need to shift from individual or national success to maximizing the overall system's capacity for innovation.

This insight suggests that any successful regional strategy should begin by acknowledging the limitations of current visibility and complexity.

Shifting Focus from Self to System

To achieve genuine regional scale, the focus might need to shift from individual or national success to maximizing the overall system's capacity for innovation. While close networks and support is vital for survival, bridging capital - weak ties across disciplines, organizations and industries - is recognized as the engine of innovation. Growth may stem from actively seeking non-redundant information from outside the tribes. This bridging process is facilitated by curiosity and a conscious shift from internal persuasion to external dialogue. The



“broker” - the one who spans boundaries - thrives by moving between distinct spheres and seeing patterns others miss.

Enabling Conditions

For these individual practices to flourish across the Nordic region, supportive structures focused on sustained, organized capacity might be necessary. But tending to the system also means recognizing how different elements interact and influence each other - how strengthening connections in one area might unlock potential elsewhere, and how interventions that seem straightforward might produce unexpected effects in a system this complex and adaptive. This systemic perspective needs to be comple-

mented by an individual level: the broker thrives through curiosity and the ability to shift from internal persuasion to external dialogue - practicing what might be called bridging. When individuals can move fluidly between spheres, while maintaining connective practices, the weak ties that drive innovation multiply organically. The challenge is creating conditions - whether through professional development, collaborative platforms, or cross-sector gatherings - that make this kind of boundary-spanning both possible and valued.

4

NORWAY / OSLO

KEYNOTE

Strategic Business Planning for Creative Ventures

WORKSHOP

Financial Fitness for Creative Entrepreneurs

SPEAKERS



TERJE GAUSTAD

Kristiania University



KJETIL TRÆDAL THORSEN

Snøhetta



INGRID BJØRNOV

Artist



FREDRIK FOTTLAND

Expansive

“Capitalizing on the Un-Foreseen”

A panel with Kjetil Trædal Thorsen (Snøhetta), Ingrid Bjørnov (Artist/Musician/Composer), Fredrik Fottland (Expanse)



JØRN MORTENSEN
Strategic Business Planning
for Creative Ventures
(Copyright author)

The conversation will focus on how creative entrepreneurs can capitalize on using imagination and creativity to tackle the un-foreseen in a venturing process. Using the experiences of three innovative entrepreneurs as point of departure, the conversation investigates how uncertainty – as a 100% certain ingredient – can become a strategic advantage or opportunity in planning. The panel will try to identify those moments where the un-foreseen has happened in the panel members’ careers and speculate on how those pivotal moments was used constructively and productively.

To use the un-foreseen requires a portion of qualities like agility, bravery, curiosity and fearlessness. Those are qualities often associated with creativity and maker-capacity. These qualities are not only central to creative practice, but can also be central to effective venturing, where the path forward is rarely linear. The conversation thus proposes that embracing the unpredictable is not merely a survival skill, but a strategic creative stance – one that turns uncertainty itself into a form of creative capital. Rather than treating uncertainty as a threat, it becomes a constant and fertile condition of innovation – a space where the unexpected becomes the raw material for invention.

How does these ideas sit with Kjetil Thorsen, Ingrid Bjørnov, and Fredrik Fottland? Thorsen, being an innovative world known architect responsible for Bib-

To use the un-foreseen requires a portion of qualities like agility, bravery, curiosity and fearlessness.

liotheca Alexandrina, The Oslo Opera House, The National September 11 Memorial Museum Pavilion NY, to mention a few. Bjørnov, a highly respected artist, composer and pianist with a background from pop-music, experience from London’s West End, now renown entertainer and musician in Norway. Fottland, a Norwegian entrepreneur and producer in animation and creative media, operating through Expanse AS and related holding companies.

Change in has mode: One hypothesis is that Nordic creative industries can grow and evolve by using competitive advantages like accepting the un-foreseen. To make this happen, creators and entrepreneurs should do what we do best in the Nordic hemisphere: Share and trust each other. This could pave way not only for creative ventures, but also for bold political decision making.



Target groups in Keynotes, and workshops

- **Emerging Creative Entrepreneurs**

Individuals who have already started their ventures in the creative sector but are looking to scale or further develop their business. They could benefit from both foundational business concepts and advanced entrepreneurial strategies.

- **Artists and Creative Professionals**

This includes designers, musicians, visual artists, writers, performers, and other professionals in the creative fields who are exploring the possibility of turning their passions into viable businesses.

- **Graduates from Creative Disciplines**

Recent graduates from design, arts, media, music, and other related courses who are considering entrepreneurship as a career path.

- **Business Professionals**

Individuals from traditional business sectors who are looking to diversify into creative fields, collaborate with creatives, or infuse more creativity into their existing businesses.

- **Freelancers**

Independent professionals in the creative field are looking to expand their reach, network, or potentially turn their freelance endeavors into structured businesses.

Unique benefits for participating

- A blend of **hybrid keynotes** and **workshops** offering flexibility.
- A focus on **modern entrepreneurial aspects** and the platform economy.
- Emphasis on **collaboration** within and outside the creative economy.
- **Ecosystem-building** for robust growth opportunities.
- **Challenge-based learning** to provide hands-on insights from the creative business world.
- **Networking** to help entrepreneurs hit the ground running.

5

FINLAND / HELSINKI

KEYNOTE

Sustaining Creative Excellence in Entrepreneurship

COMMENTARY SESSION
FOLLOWING THE KEYNOTE

Leading the Creative Future: Nordic Collaboration, Skills for Tomorrow, and Culture as a Catalyst for Resilience

SPEAKERS



HILARY CARTY

CEO
Clore Leadership



KAISA RÖNKKÖ

Dean of
Sibelius Academy

(Starting from
January 1, 2026)



NANA SALIN

Senior Advisor
Aalto EE

Sustaining Creative Excellence in Entrepreneurship



HILARY CARTY
CEO
Clore Leadership

My talk is framed by my experience as a cultural leader and policy maker, and draws from my role as Executive Director of **Clore Leadership**, which, since 2003, has inspired and equipped cultural leaders at all stages of their careers to be change agents for their artforms, organisations, communities, and wider society.

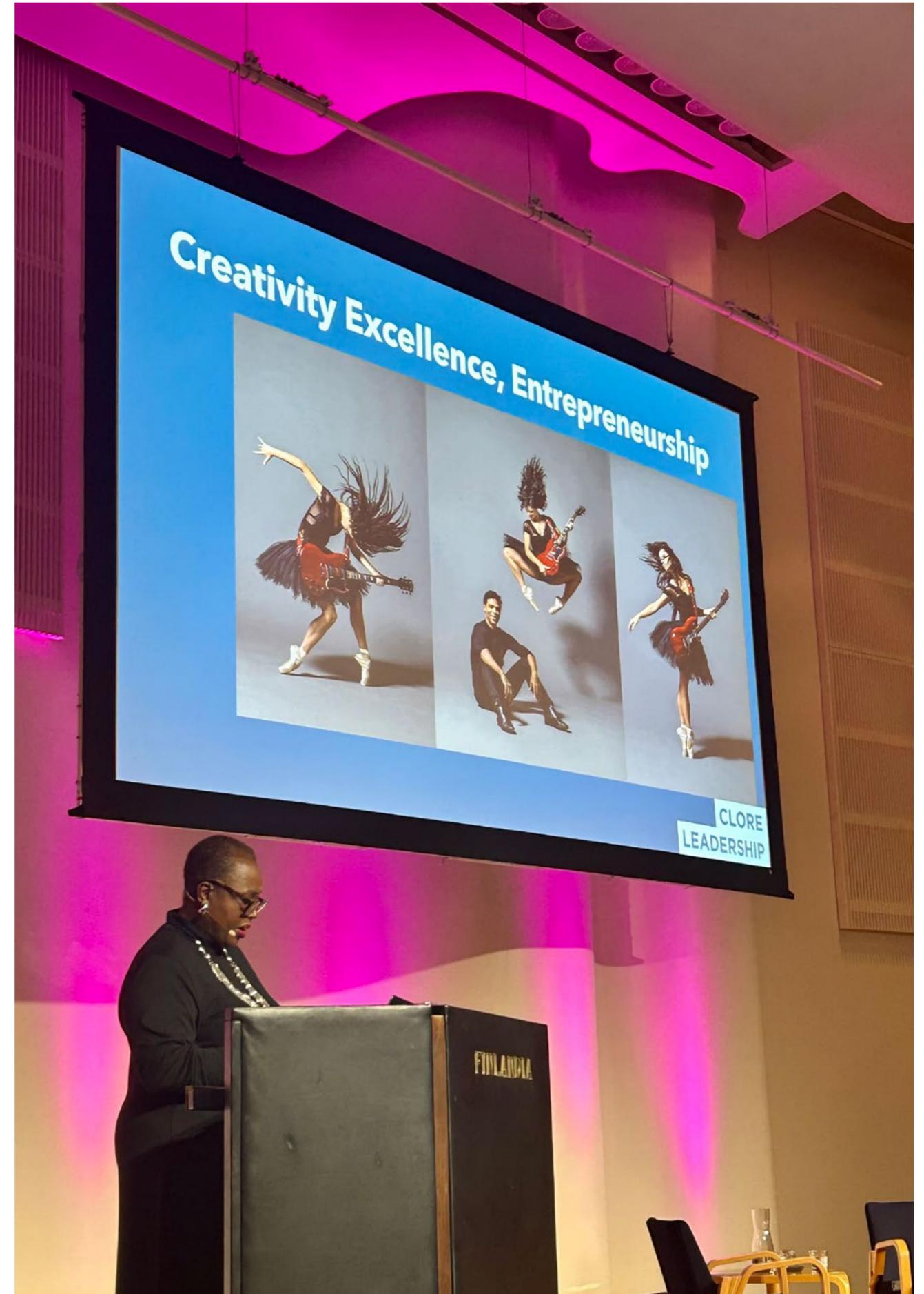
The cultural sector is operating in what has moved beyond a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) environment into a BANI world: Brittle, Anxious, Non linear, and Incomprehensible. Political polarisation, challenges to democratic norms, the climate emergency, economic precarity and the disruptive speed of digital technologies - including AI - have combined to destabilise long held assumptions about work, value, and leadership.

In 2024 we commissioned research into the **World of Work**, to try to get to grips the new realities for cultural sector workers - and the picture was stark. It showed organisational leaders working in isolation; heads down struggling with persistent challenges. Alongside this, shifts in attitudes to work and wellbeing have reshaped organisational cultures, intensifying questions about sustainability, relevance, and mission. Our Relationship to Work has changed. Mental health, emotional well-being and compassion are higher on the professional agenda than ever before. Values-led lead-

ership, care, diligence and empathy now line up, often in tension with rules, policies and the former 'work ethic'.

If the working environment looks and feels significantly different; if the jobs we are doing now are becoming obsolete and those of tomorrow have yet to be invented, it is essential to review the priorities for sustaining creative excellence in entrepreneurship. And also to review our appreciation of creativity and excellence, as these are not fixed or absolute. Rather, they are inherently subjective and socially constructed. Opinions of excellence emerge through exposure, dialogue, and shared critical engagement across diverse voices. It must evolve with the times rather than remain static, requiring leaders and entrepreneurs to actively invite challenge, dissent, and experimentation. Fear of the unknown, the new, or the untested risks undermining creative vitality; instead, curiosity and openness should form the scaffolding that enables innovation to thrive.

And part of that scaffolding must include education, public investment, dialogue spaces, and opportunities for experimentation without predetermined outcomes. Creative entrepreneurship depends on conditions that allow risk-taking and even failure. When funding and policy environments demand guaranteed success or narrowly defined results, they restrict the very experimentation from which innovation arises. Supporting creative processes -





rather than only measurable outputs - is therefore crucial to long term sustainability.

Creativity underpins not only culture but the wider economy. *“The UK’s creative output, our creative history and our creative future are unmatched. The sector already acts as a dynamic growth engine for our economy across the UK’s nations and regions, contributing 2.4 million jobs and £124 billion GVA to the economy”*.¹

The cultural sector’s highly entrepreneurial structure - dominated by freelancers and microenterprises - makes it a vital incubator for innovation, ideation, and cross sectoral growth. Investment in public arts funding, skills development, mentoring, and business incubation is, therefore, also an investment in entrepreneurship itself.

However, economic contribution alone is insufficient to sustain excellence. There is a need to build resilience within the cultural workforce. Resilience not only in financial terms but as an emotional and cognitive capacity to navigate uncertainty, absorb setbacks, and regenerate creatively. I offer three core elements to underpin this resilience: clarity of purpose, strong networks, and increased comfort with uncertainty.

Purpose demands an honest assessment of relevance. Cultural leaders must ask difficult questions about whom they serve and why their work matters in a rapidly changing society. Passion alone is not enough; missions must be clearly articulated and responsive to the lived realities of audiences and communities.

Networks provide essential peer support, countering the isolation of entrepreneurial leadership and enabling collaboration, shared intelligence, and collective advocacy. Strong peer-to-peer communities are a vital resource for both wellbeing and innovation.

And it is essential to become more comfortable with uncertainty. In a world where long term certainty is increasingly elusive, strategic planning remains necessary but must accommodate multiple scenarios and rapid change. Rather than clinging to fixed answers, creative entrepreneurs benefit from embracing questioning, adaptability, and continuous learning. Optimism, courage, and lifelong learning are guiding principles for navigating complexity while sustaining momentum and creative integrity.

Culture and creativity are not peripheral but central to societal resilience. By investing in creative minds, nurturing dialogue and learning, and strengthening the infrastructures that support cultural leadership, societies invest in their capacity to imagine, adapt, and endure. Creative excellence in entrepreneurship is sustained not by certainty or control, but by openness, courage, and the collective commitment to shape a better future.

¹ Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, **Creative Industries Sector Plan 2025**

Leading the Creative Future: Nordic-Baltic Co-operation, Human Creativity and Nordic Wave



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The more advanced AI-based technologies develop, the more we need humanity, human creativity and the richness of emotions and lived experiences, and future scenarios painted by human imagination. Also in an age of multiple crises, everyone must always do what they do best; artists have to do art. This is how we build trust: a key prerequisite for sustainable growth and competitiveness.

Artistic creativity is not a peripheral or symbolic asset, but a structural condition for trust, innovation, and longterm competitiveness. While AI-based infrastructures increasingly dominate global economic growth, they rely heavily on efficiency, scale, and automation. What they cannot replace are human qualities such as imagination, emotion, lived experience, ethical judgement, and meaningmaking. These qualities are central to art.

The creative economy cannot be treated separately from the wider economy. **Art must be integrated into the economic ecosystem** in ways that respect artistic integrity while enabling sustainable value creation. Treating art merely as decoration, marketing material, or shortterm content undermines both its human and economic potential.

Hereby will be suggested three key points for Nordic and Baltic creative community concerning in-

novation, regional cooperation, and humanity as a competitive edge.

1. Rethinking innovation: artistic and economic logics

Artistic innovation and business innovation follow different logics, and that current systems too often fail to recognize this difference. Business innovation typically emphasizes linear processes, scalability, and measurable outputs. Artistic innovation, by contrast, involves experimentation, uncertainty, and timeintensive processes through which new meanings, forms, and cultural relevance emerge.

Many economic policy funding instruments and policy frameworks are poorly suited to artistic processes. When artistic work is forced too early into market logic, its capacity to generate longterm value is weakened. The task is therefore not to separate art from the economy, but to **sequence them correctly**: creation first, scaling later.

This requires an ecosystem view in which education, craft traditions, peer communities, international exposure, and professional readiness interact. Artistic excellence is not produced in isolation but emerges through sustained environments that allow risk, learning, and dialogue. Only once this foundation is strong can economic scaling occur without eroding trust or artistic value. One

crucial point is building a bridge between those two ecosystems.

2. Let's build the "Nordic Wave": from individual cases to Nordic-Baltic cooperation

Individually, Nordic and Baltic countries are small actors in global cultural markets. Sustainable impact therefore requires **cooperation, alignment, and shared understanding**.

The idea of a Nordic-Baltic "wave" is not framed as a nationalistic project. On the contrary, the region's strength lies in its openness, diversity, and global connectedness. Nordic-Baltic culture has always been shaped by movement, minorities, international exchange, and hybrid identities. Any shared strategy must therefore be **plural, inclusive, and internationally oriented**, rather than identity policing or inwardlooking.

The comparison with South Korea's wave *Hallyu* can be used analytically, not as a model to be copied. The key lesson is intentionality: cultural influence does not emerge accidentally but through longterm alignment between artists, institutions, industry, and public frameworks. For the Nordic-Baltic region, this alignment must be built on democratic values, public trust, and artistic freedom.

What they cannot replace are human qualities such as imagination, emotion, lived experience, ethical judgement, and meaningmaking. These qualities are central to art.

3. Human creativity as a competitive edge

AI-related companies dominate global rankings and infrastructure expands rapidly. The question is whether societies are culturally and ethically prepared for this transformation. AI is not foreign to the arts, but its use raises fundamental questions of ownership, authorship, and responsibility.

While AI can assist creative processes, **ethical foundations must remain human**. Artistic work is rooted in stories, emotions, vulnerability, and human relationships, elements that cannot be automated without loss. These qualities are the basis of trust and cultural legitimacy.

In this sense, humanity itself becomes a **competitive advantage**. The Nordic-Baltic region's traditions of public arts funding, education, freedom of expression, and democratic participation support precisely those aspects of creativity that technology cannot reach. Art thus plays a dual role: it contributes to economic value creation and acts as a safeguard for democratic culture in uncertain times.

Critical success factors: artistic and business paths: Across the keynote, two interconnected sets of success factors were identified.

Artistic path

On the artistic side, success depends first on **high artistic skill and mastery**. Equally important is the **freedom to experiment and to change direction**, often enabled through education systems that allow pivoting and international exposure.

Tradition and lineage matter not as constraints, but as resources providing technical depth and shared standards, while international networks expand perspectives and opportunities. Finally, artistic growth is sustained through dialogue, collaboration, and community, rather than individualism alone.

Business path

On the business side, **distinctive artistic language** is one of the core assets. Economic value emerges when this is recognizable, coherent, and transferable without losing meaning. Partner fit is crucial: collaborations work when art is not subordinated to commerce, but embedded as a central organizing principle.

A key success factor is the **integration of art into the economic ecosystem**. When art becomes part of how companies think, communicate and operate, it can generate value for both sides. Intellectual property strategy is essential here: scalability must be achieved **without dilution**, ensuring that original works retain scarcity while licensed forms expand reach in controlled ways.

Quite often between these two paths is the ability to **seize the moment**. Opportunities often arise unexpectedly, but only artists with sufficient professional readiness—networks, tools, and support infrastructures—can act on them without compromising their position.

References: illustrative artistic cases

Paula Pääkkönen (glass artist): mentioned as an example of how strong craft traditions, distinctive artistic language, and ethical licensing can integrate art into global economic ecosystems without undermining artistic integrity.

Neea River (music creator): referenced to illustrate how artistic excellence, speed, international networks, and professional readiness enable artists to seize timesensitive global opportunities, as the same time as she lives her real life creating an unique storyline.

Hildur Guðnadóttir (composer): cited as an example of artistic innovation at the intersection of tradition and experimentation, demonstrating how strong authorship can scale internationally while remaining artist-led.



Keynote events was organized as hybrids and workshops online, which ensured a very flexible way to participate.

Proposal: Creative Ventures – Workshop for Creative Industries (2.5 hours)

ASTRID HUOPALAINEN

Professor of Leadership for Creativity

Following material presents a follow-up model for creative industry professionals, recommended by Astrid Huopalainen. It builds on the original Creative Ventures – Workshop for Creative Industries concept and offers an alternative 2.5-hour workshop format. Designed for professionals in the creative sector, the model combines research-based insights on creativity and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial identity work, and Nordic examples of creative value creation.

Background and purpose

The Creative Ventures keynote and workshop series represents a new target group for Aalto EE in the Nordic and Baltic markets and is pilot in nature. Based on the attached Creative Ventures training material, this proposal outlines an alternative workshop solution of approximately 2.5 hours, tailored specifically for professionals in the creative industries.

The workshop builds on research-based perspectives on the convergence of creativity and entrepreneurship (also often referred to as ‘artpreneurship’), entrepreneurial identity work, creative value creation, and Nordic examples of creative entrepreneurship. The proposed structure is modular and conceptual.

Learning Objectives

After the workshop, participants will:

- Understand the inherent connections and potential clashes between creativity and entrepreneurship (or ‘artpreneurship’)
- Reflect on their own creative and entrepreneurial identities, strengths, and areas of development
- Recognise common barriers to entrepreneurial action in creative work
- Gain practical tools for transforming creative ideas into viable and commercial concepts
- Learn from inspiring Nordic examples of creative and/or artpreneurship
- Engage in thoughtful conversations about art, business, and their emerging hybrid form: artpreneurship.

Workshop structure (2.5 hours / 150 minutes)

1. Setting the Stage: Creativity meets entrepreneurship – and how to ‘think differently’, and critically make use of it (25 minutes)

*Creativity and entrepreneurship:
from perceived clashes to inherent
connections and entanglements*

Over the last decades, we have witnessed a growing interest in creativity and art as an approach to organizational and business transformation (see e.g., Björkman, 1998; Chong, 2002; Strati and Guillet de Monthoux, 2002), where art is largely reduced to a version of creativity, a key ingredient in entrepreneurship research. ‘Be creative and use your imagination!’ ‘Experience, invent, and create something *radically new!*’ ‘Find your inspiration and be visionary’. ‘Think about brand, design, and image’. Such somewhat shallow slogans or exhortations seem to have caught on in the corporate world: creativity, aesthetics, and the sensory dimensions have become major trends, reproducing the fetishization of novelty, creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1951), disruption, and originality (even though no one dares to be original in the true sense of the word).

At the same time as companies are being increasingly aestheticized in a capitalist sense, one can also speak of the widespread corporatization of

art and cultural institutions, i.e., that today cultural organizations, enterprises, and institutions draw inspiration from and turn to the discipline of business economics in order to survive (Stenström, 2000). Blurred boundaries between producing and consuming in the experience economy.

The first part unpacks creativity as a driver of innovation, value creation, and competitive advantage by nuancing the common, cliché-ridden notion, and seeking to bring about a deeper and more interesting understanding of it. This is especially important in the creative industries. The part is situated in the vast body of research behind the merging of ‘art’ and ‘business’ in management and organizational research, inspiring participants to think about their own practice, and how these logics can be brought together in a playful, inspiring way.

Interactive prompt:

How and *why* are the creative process and the business side interconnected?

Unpack why there are structural norms/barriers/ stereotypes that hinder full potential

2. Imagination, play, and barriers and tensions in creative entrepreneurship (25 minutes)

The combination of art and entrepreneurship is also not new. As early as the 1990s, Guillet de Monthoux (1993, p. 1) argued that we cannot ‘understand entrepreneurship without understanding art’, highlighting that entrepreneurship encompasses dimensions beyond the rational, logical, serious, and reason-oriented. Accordingly, we should view entrepreneurship as art and turn to aesthetics (Strati, 2000ab). This aligns with Hjorth’s (2024)

recent notion that entrepreneuring makes space for free movement, or what can be understood as play (Hjorth et al., 2018), where we might ‘reach for what could become grasped’ (Hjorth, 2024). Common challenges in fostering creativity in entrepreneurship (creativity still an inherent part of entrepreneurship although the rational side of business is often prioritized, where aspects of aesthetics and play are undervalued):

- Fear of risk and failure and building on imagination, play, and intuition – cultivating play and turning to the aesthetics
- Resource scarcity and constraints
- Resistance to change and status quo thinking

Exercise:

Train the capacity to imagine, big and bold, and ‘differently’, and identifying personal and structural barriers to action

Understanding the importance of aesthetics and play in business and daring to be more playful

3. Inspiring Nordic examples of creative entrepreneurship/artpreneurship (35 minutes)

Some argue aesthetic experiences have been subordinated to the logic of supply and demand and, like any other commodity, now compete in the marketplace for appreciation (Boncori et al., 2025). However, to build a unique creative entrepreneurial venture, one can’t simply subordinate creativity to such logics. ‘Much contemporary art makes personal experience explicit and visible, and we tend to forget that almost all the masterpieces in museums or artwork in art shows actually emerged as ways to capture concrete experiences of the real world before the appropriate words and concepts had formed that could make such a discourse possible’, write Statler and Guillet de Monthoux (2015, p.- 11; see also Guillet de Monthoux, 2004). This part deals with creative entrepreneurship in practice: artists, designers, startups, and cultural

ventures and what we can learn from them: to explore why these are such inspirational examples and what they managed to do ‘differently’ while making experiences visible and affective.

Sampling, remixing, and experimentation as entrepreneurial acts

Platforms, storytelling, and aesthetics as tools for visibility and impact

Group work:

Small groups identify and analyse inspiring Nordic examples, discussing also the role of serendipity, play, and the different logics present

4. Creative identity and value creation (35 minutes)

Entrepreneurial identity work:

“Who am I and what kind of value do I want to create in the world?”

Multiple selves, performativity, and self-presentation across platforms

Attention economy and storytelling

Exercise:

Defining one’s creative strengths, potential weaknesses, and value proposition

5. Integration, reflection, and next steps (30 minutes)

Key insights and takeaways

Applying concepts, inspiration, and insight to participants’ own creative work

Identifying concrete next steps

Delivery format and reflection

Interactive workshop (preferably onsite or online)

Combination of research-based input, reflective exercises, and group discussions

Creativity, entrepreneurship and are are not about individuals, but about realtional encounters and spaces that may spark different movements and actions. It is clear that art can and should stimulate businesses. I see potential especially in building and nurturing ‘different’ relationships and partnerships across diverse communities and workshops can spark this endeavor. But I don’t see art as a ‘leadership method’ or tool. Art opens up much deeper possibilities for reimagining what businesses and organization can be., now as well as in the future.

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Recruitment and Selection

The Keynote series has been open to everyone in the Nordics and the Baltics, and they have been organized together with various Nordic experts in hybrid mode. We have been inviting creative professionals and artists who are committed to turning their creative passions into successful ventures.

All participants in the workshops were deeply appreciative and grateful for the high-quality content provided. However, it has been evident within the industry that reaching the target audience is extremely challenging, regardless of the amount of effort invested. This may partly be because the initiative promotes new skills that many do not yet recognize as necessary, combined with limited brand awareness and the overwhelming abundance of offerings, which makes choosing difficult.

Creative Ventures Outcomes: Keynote and Workshop Series Objectives Has Been Related to Topical Needs of the Field

The Nordic and Baltic Creative Ventures have aimed to empower entrepreneurs in the creative field and provide them with the tools, knowledge, and connections necessary to succeed in a dynamic and competitive industry. Here are some potential outcomes participants have been able to gain from this keynote and workshop series:

- **Business Development:** Entrepreneurs have received guidance on business strategy, market analysis, and growth opportunities tailored to the creative industry.
- **Prototyping and Innovation:** Workshops have guided participants through the process of prototyping and innovation, helping them turn creative ideas into tangible products or services.
- **Digital and Tech Integration:** The series has addressed the digital transformation of the creative sector, equipping entrepreneurs with the skills needed to leverage technology effectively.
- **Pitching and Presentation Skills:** Participants have had the opportunity to refine their pitching

and presentation skills, crucial for attracting investors and customers.

- **Collaborative Projects:** Attendees have had the chance to hear about cross-disciplinary projects during the series, fostering innovation and partnerships.
- **Measurable Progress:** Participants have been able to track their progress in implementing strategies and insights gained from the series, seeing tangible results in their ventures.
- **Community Building:** The series has helped build a supportive community of creative entrepreneurs who can continue to collaborate and share ideas beyond the workshops.
- **Nordic and Baltic Perspective:** Entrepreneurs have developed a valuable perspective on their creative ventures, potentially opening international opportunities and markets.





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