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RECEIVED 16 May 2026
ACCEPTED 05 June 2026
PUBLISHED 22 June 2026

CITATION

Saleh R and Komorowski M (2026)
Editorial: Cultural and creative industries
as drivers of the EU's triple transition:
needs, challenges, and future skills.
Front. Commun. 11:1882963.
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2026.1882963

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Editorial: Cultural and creative industries as drivers of the EU's triple transition: needs, challenges, and future skills

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KEYWORDS

CCSIs, institutional innovation, non-urban areas, regenerative practices, skills, social innovation, triple transition

Editorial on the Research Topic

Cultural and creative industries as drivers of the EU's triple transition: needs, challenges, and future skills

Why a triple transition now?

The EU's triple transition addresses ecological, technological and socio-economic crises. Yet policy remains focused on technology and market solutions, underestimating Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs). Without shifts in values, practices, funding logics, learning and imaginaries, transition risks remain incremental. CCIs foster participatory governance, behavioural change, cross-sectoral collaboration and regenerative approaches. This Research Topic examines how they can support green, digital and socially just transitions and what conditions are needed to recognise their role in national and EU policy.

Framing the collection: aims and scope

Across nine contributions, productive diversity emerges. The Research Topic spans [Granström et al.](#)'s survey of 355 film professionals, [Turegeldinova et al.](#)'s analysis of 5,601 Creative Europe projects, [Duxbury et al.](#)'s 12 non-urban case studies, [Raffa](#)'s ethnographic work in Como, [De Smedt and De Voldere](#)'s policy foresight, and [Saleh](#)'s evaluation of Brussels' strategy. [Pratt](#) critiques culture's exclusion from the triple transition, [Valiati and Möller](#) combine heterodox economics with dependency and capability frameworks, and [Apicerni et al.](#) develop an ArtScience framework.

Geographically, the papers range from hyper-local settings in southern Italy, Como, Brussels and non-urban localities across six countries to pan-European and global perspectives. They address skills, policy mandates, digital dependency, regenerative stewardship, UNESCO Creative City designation, ArtScience and regional transition.

A shared thread nevertheless emerges. CCI actors face precarious labour, financial and spatial constraints, fragmented networks, and a gap between symbolic recognition and

operational empowerment. Yet they also act as agents of transformation through place-based stewardship, hybrid entrepreneurship, innovation, solidarity networks and demands for tailored policy tools. Their role in the triple transition is therefore contested, context-dependent and political.

The contributions can be grouped in three thematic clusters.

Cluster A: policy architecture and systemic integration

De Smedt and De Voldere argue that the just transition is not an additional pillar but the foundation on which ecological and digital transformation must grow, and they propose policy options on working conditions, funding, collaboration, infrastructure, skills and governance. Saleh's evaluation of the Brussels Capital Region's Shifting Economy Strategy shows that formal prioritisation of CCIs does not automatically create operational empowerment, and calls for *ad hoc* instruments, co-designed action plans and mutual capacity-building. Turegeldinova et al. show that Creative Europe projects increasingly integrated digital, social and environmental aims after 2021, but that this standardised project design and favoured resource-rich projects.

Cluster B: economic models, technology, and power

Pratt and Valiati and Möller call for a reconceptualisation of culture's developmental role. Pratt argues for a shift from "culture and development" to "culture in development", positioning culture as intrinsic rather than external to development. Without this, the triple transition risks reproducing technocratic and market-centred logics. Valiati and Möller extend the critique through structuralism, dependency theory, capability approaches, institutional economics and collective governance. Their framework highlights digital dependency, heterogeneity and capability constraints, and calls for creative commons infrastructure, capability-based assessment, alternative economic models, stronger institutions and international cooperation.

Cluster C: place, practice, and people

Duxbury et al. show how grassroots cultural initiatives in non-urban areas enact regenerative micro-processes through stewardship, place-inspired work, capacity-building, local economic activity and public space activation, while facing precariousness, burnout and limited access to space. Granström et al. show that film professionals need continuous upskilling in response to AI, digitisation, streaming platforms and project-based work, and recommend reducing financial barriers and strengthening festivals and markets as learning spaces. Raffa identifies institutional disconnection, tourism-related spatial constraints and network fragmentation in Como, while showing

how cultural producers resist, reinterpret and build solidarity. Apicerni et al. argue that ArtScience can support circular design, inclusivity, ethical technology and regenerative innovation, but requires recognition in innovation strategies, industrial policy and entrepreneurship support.

Cross-cutting findings and what they mean together

Read together, the contributions point to four structural tensions defining the position of CCIs in the triple transition.

- First, symbolic recognition still exceeds operational empowerment. CCIs are often invoked in policy rhetoric but remain marginal in funding, governance and decision-making. Formal prioritisation requires dedicated tools, capacity and co-designed measures.
- Second, sequencing matters. Social justice, cultural capability and institutional reform are not downstream effects of green and digital transformation; they are enabling conditions. Culture and creativity must be understood as intrinsic to development, not merely as an instrument or beneficiary.
- Third, EU transition policy has a territorial and scalar blind spot. Non-urban, small-scale, place-based and non-platform-legible creative practices are often undervalued, despite their regenerative and socially embedded contributions.
- Fourth, skills and institutional capacity are critical bottlenecks. Training alone is insufficient: the sector needs a broader rethinking of how learning, labour and institutional knowledge circulate across the CCI ecosystem, including among policymakers.

An agenda for future research and policy

This Research Topic opens several directions for research and policy. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess whether precarious labour, spatial exclusion, funding gaps and institutional disconnection are genuinely addressed during the 2024–2029 EU policy cycle or merely renamed. Comparative research across Member States and regions would help distinguish context-specific barriers from systemic EU-level failures.

Artificial intelligence requires dedicated inquiry, as AI reshapes creative labour, intellectual property, platform power and cultural value creation. Measurement remains urgent: existing indicators struggle to capture the regenerative, relational and place-based contributions highlighted across this Research Topic.

Ultimately, CCIs are not instruments of the triple transition, nor passive beneficiaries of it. They are co-creators of the values, imaginaries, capabilities and social ecologies without which Europe's green, digital and socially just future cannot be

realised. Recognising this requires better policy design and a deeper cultural politics of transition. We thank all authors, reviewers and the editorial team at Frontiers in Communication for their support.

Author contributions

RS: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MK: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declared that financial support was received for this work and/or its publication. This work was undertaken with funding from UK Research & Innovation's Strength in Places Fund project "Media Cymru" (2021-2026) (grant number 99911) and the Arts & Humanities Research Council (UK) project "Clwstwr" (2018-2023) (grant number AH/S002790).

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The author MK declared that they were an editorial board member of Frontiers, at the time of submission. This had no impact on the peer review process and the final decision.

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