



EDITORIAL

CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES:
STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION, NETWORKS, AND
PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Purpose: This editorial belongs to the joint Special Issue on "Cultural entrepreneurship and cultural initiatives: challenges in a new context" launched by PISB - Piccola Impresa - Small Business and the EJCMP - European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy. It focuses on how cultural entrepreneurship and cultural initiatives foster innovation and sustainable development across different socio-spatial contexts through collaboration, networks and participatory governance.

Design/methodology/approach: The editorial synthesizes findings from four contributions focused on cultural ecosystems, governance, entrepreneurship, and heritage-driven development.

Findings: Cultural initiatives serve as transformative connectors across sectors, supporting innovation, resilience, and inclusivity. Their impact varies contextually, influenced by governance models, entrepreneurial mindsets, and socio-cultural embeddedness, showing culture's potential in driving sustainable urban and regional development.

Practical and social implications: The studies highlight culture's capacity to foster equitable development, revitalize urban and peripheral areas, support inclusive governance, and enhance the sustainability of cultural ecosystems by linking tradition, innovation, and community engagement.

In contemporary society, cultural initiatives serve not only as platforms for artistic and cultural expression but also as systemic connectors bridging diverse institutional spheres. These initiatives constitute vital intellectual resources and infrastructural linkages that facilitate transformative interactions among cultural entrepreneurs, communities and a broad range of social actors. Through these exchanges, cultural initiatives nurture innovation, inclusivity, and resilience within complex societal systems (Bocconcelli et al., 2025).

The notion of the “cultural ecosystem”—and more broadly, the ecological metaphor increasingly employed in recent years (De Bernard et al., 2022)—has gained prominence in exploring the interconnections between creative industries, cultural institutions, and citizens. Ecological approaches thus provide a valuable framework for understanding the mutual dependencies and relational dynamics among these different domains of cultural and creative practice. Importantly, such linkages manifest organically within their multifaceted socio-institutional contexts (Pagano et al., 2021).

Cultural initiatives also operate as hybrid platforms where disciplinary and sector boundaries are reflected upon, reconfigured, and overcome (Piber, 2020; Demartini et al., 2021). These initiatives often entail collaborations where universities and local governments cooperate with cultural and creative organisations to promote public engagement, and entrepreneurs draw inspiration from artistic practices to reimagine economic paradigms (Bureau & Zander, 2014). Thereby, they contribute to the formation of complex cultural ecosystems (Bergamini et al., 2018; Dobрева & Ivanov, 2020; Magkou, 2024). Within this perspective, the meso-context emerges as particularly relevant in the expanding literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems (Stam & van de Ven, 2019), which continues to explore how various actors shape and sustain the evolution of their ecosystems.

Recent studies increasingly adopt contextualized perspectives, emphasizing local embeddedness, neighbourhood networks, and the social fabric of urban environments as key arenas for the emergence of novel business models, organizational forms, and start-up cultures (Vestrum, 2014; Summatave & Raudsaar, 2015; Borin & Delgado, 2018; Ben Hafaïedh et al., 2023).

The joint issue of the *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy (EJCMP)* and *Piccola Impresa – Small Business (PISB)* seeks to provide comprehensive insights into the evolving landscape of cultural and creative activities and their implications for sustainable development. These dynamics are analysed across diverse geographical contexts, as reflected in the nine contributions previously published (Fioravante et al., 2025; Lelo, 2025; Leonardi & Pareschi, 2025; Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh & Ranczakowska, 2025; Kostica, 2025; Masili et al., 2025; Pastore & Corvo, 2025; Oppioli et al., 2025; Vacca & Vandi, 2025).

The four articles featured in this Editorial and published in the current *PISB* issue turn the discussion on multi-stakeholder collaboration and network governance within the cultural and creative sectors. Special attention is directed toward the meso-level of analysis, underscoring its analytical value for understanding the interdependencies between entrepreneurial agency, practices, and contextual environments.

Can participatory processes contribute to the sustainability of cultural and creative ecosystems? by Giulia Lapucci, Mara Cerquetti and Carola Boehm explores how participatory and co-creative practices contribute to the sustainability of cultural ecosystems. Through a qualitative case study of *Appetite*—a community-led initiative within England’s *Creative People and Places (CPP)* program—the research integrates interviews, participant observations, and document analysis to investigate how collaborative cultural processes shape community engagement and long-term cultural vitality. Findings reveal that while participatory approaches can enhance inclusivity and local ownership of cultural activities, they also encounter challenges related to resource distribution, stakeholder coordination, and policy alignment.

Cultural Entrepreneurial Opportunities: A Business Network Perspective by Chiara Cantù investigates how entrepreneurial networks facilitate the exploitation of cultural entrepreneurial opportunities. The paper shifts the focus from individual entrepreneurship to network-level cultural entrepreneurship, showing how collaborative relationships may foster sustainable regional development and creative innovation. Using a qualitative longitudinal case study of a startup in Lake Como’s audiovisual sector, the paper analyses interorganizational relationships and reveals that leveraging local, cultural, and relational proximity enables startups to transform local cultural opportunities into collective entrepreneurial initiatives.

Urban Commons and cultural activities by Nathalie Colasanti, Rocco Fronzizi and Carmela Gulluscio explores how community-managed urban commons can reshape urban cultural life. Using a qualitative case study of Rome’s *Lucha y Siesta Women’s House*, the paper combines a literature review, a document analysis, interviews, and field observations to examine governance and co-production dynamics. The study links urban commons theory with cultural governance, framing commons as engines of grassroots cultural production and urban regeneration. Findings show that urban commons function as inclusive, self-governed cultural hubs fostering collective creativity and social resilience, despite tensions with public administrations.

Finally, the contribution *Collaborative governance in the management of cultural site* by Krizia Ciangola and Filippo Giordano examines how collaborative governance frameworks shape the management of small-scale cultural sites. Through multiple case studies and semi-structured interviews

with cultural site managers, the study investigates how participatory governance relies on dense networks of actors engaged in policymaking and implementation. Findings highlight the need to balance inclusivity and coordination to avoid conflicts while fostering creative, context-sensitive solutions. Particular attention is given to the role of mediating bodies and the professional backgrounds of mediators in facilitating dialogue and cooperation. Ultimately, the study contributes to a refined understanding of collaborative governance as a dynamic system capable of sustaining “minor” cultural sites.

Taken together, the contributions included in the joint *Special Issue* offer a multi-dimensional examination of culture as a catalyst for transformation, highlighting its challenges, opportunities, and emerging trajectories. Collectively, these studies underscore the complexity and embeddedness of cultural and creative initiatives within specific socio-spatial and institutional contexts and show the leveraging capacities – especially of collaborative action and participatory governance.

More specifically, the four contributions featured in this issue of *Piccola Impresa/Small Business* emphasize the critical importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and network governance within the cultural and creative sectors. Across these works, a notable paradigmatic shift is observed—from a focus on individual-level agency to the collective dynamics of interorganizational networks and collaborative engagement as key enablers of sustainable cultural development and management.

Geography plays an undeniable role. Successful cultural projects often exhibit a distinctly *place-based* character, emerging among geographically proximate entities that benefit from shared spatial and cultural contexts. Proximity fosters the exchange of ideas, encourages cooperation, and strengthens local identity. However, physical proximity alone does not suffice to stimulate innovation. As Tremblay and Cecilli (2009) argue, “relational proximity”—built upon mutual trust, shared commitment, and a collective vision—constitutes the deeper connective tissue that transforms co-location into genuine collaboration. When individuals and organizations cultivate such relationships grounded in shared values and a strong sense of belonging, they generate a collective identity that aligns organizational and territorial aspirations.

True cultural vitality thus arises from interconnected networks. The key insight emerging from this *Special Issue* is a fundamental reorientation of perspective: from the *individual* to the *collective*, from *top-down direction* to *bottom-up collaboration*, and from the mere *significance of location* to the *quality of relational engagement*. The most dynamic forms of cultural innovation often originate from the ground up, through the co-creation of urban commons—initiatives that reclaim and repurpose underused or abandoned spaces into grass rooted cultural hubs deeply attuned to community needs.

Yet, these initiatives remain inherently fragile, requiring ongoing support and adaptive governance to sustain their transformative potential.

Understanding these dynamics allows us to more effectively nurture the ecosystems in which cultural initiatives, entrepreneurial ideas, and community engagement genuinely flourish. Such understanding, however, cannot emerge without methodological innovation and cross-disciplinary fertilization. The contributions within this Special Issue demonstrate the value of practice-based methodologies, ethnographic inquiry, and the attention to 'softer' institutional contexts that shape cultural production and collaboration.

Furthermore, the authors underscore the necessity of a methodological reflexivity and openness—safeguarding that the epistemologies and methodologies employed are aligned with the specificities of the research context. This reflexive stance is not ancillary but central to sensemaking and advancing theory-building in cultural entrepreneurship and creative ecosystems.

Ultimately, while this Special Issue introduces novel perspectives on cultural initiatives and entrepreneurship, it also serves as an invitation for future research—to deepen, expand, and challenge existing frameworks, ensuring that cultural inquiry remains as dynamic and adaptive as the transformation of the field and the practices it seeks to understand.

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