

# COLLABORATION IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES – FROM CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS AND INTERMEDIARIES TO NETWORKS

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## **Abstract**

Collaboration is the core of creative work, and it can help small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as individual creative professionals, develop creative products that would not be possible if these parties were working separately. The aim of the paper is to reveal benefits of collaboration in creative industries from theoretical and practical perspectives. The paper analyses the concept of collaboration in creative industries and provides a theoretical overview of collaboration models that can take various forms, such as networks, creative intermediaries, and clusters.

Also, the author has developed a creative industry collaboration matrix, including the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia's list of creative industries (Architecture, Design, Cinema, Performing arts, Visual arts, Music, Publishing, Television, Radio and interactive media, Advertising, Computer games and Interactive software, Cultural heritage, Cultural education, Recreation, Advertising, Entertainment and other cultural activities) [LR Ministry of Culture 2022], as well as adding two more creative industries, which are identified in other theoretical models of creative industries used in Europe – Fashion and Crafts. By interviewing various experts from creative industries, the intensity and frequency of collaboration in creative industries are compared, and it is evaluated which creative industries are more prone to collaboration.

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This paper presents the collaboration matrix and summarizes the main conclusions on how this matrix could be used for future research.

**Keywords:** *creative industries, collaboration, creative synergy, networks, creative intermediaries.*

### Theoretical Overview

Collaboration has always functioned as the kernel of creative work [Graham and Gandini 2017], and by working together, creative industry professionals and businesses obtain several opportunities and benefits. Csikszentmihalyi also explains the essence of collaboration in his system theory. “Creativity does not happen inside people’s heads, but in the interaction between person’s thoughts and socio-cultural context” [Csikszentmihalyi 1996]. Also, Karlsson agrees with this point, mentioning that creative individuals and creative teams will be more creative the more exposed they are to a variety of ideas and this cannot be achieved in isolation [Karlsson 2010]. Significant amongst the reasons why companies want to build relationships is the value that relationships generate [Biggeman & Buttle 2012].

When working together, small and medium enterprises can increase their focus through specialisation in functions that are complementary within their networks [Bititci et al. 2007]. Barrett and colleagues also note that social interaction, communication, and collaboration are essential elements of creativity [Barrett et al. 2021]. Thus, collaboration partners bring different perspectives, combine skills and knowledge to create the most successful performance possible [Pakeltiene et al. 2017; Parida et al. 2017]. For example, in the more commercial creative industries, such as architecture, design, and advertising, it is generally accepted practice to compete in competitions to win orders [Plug and Rengers 2001]. For example, to develop a more comprehensive offering with better solutions, architects collaborate with other architects, attract designers, and artists.

In academic literature, two concepts are discussed – collaboration and synergy:

**Collaboration** is a number of autonomous organisations working together, pooling, and sharing resources, information, systems and risk for mutual benefit [Bititci et al. 2007]. Collaboration – a distinct mode of organising with a positive, purposive relationship between organisations that retain autonomy, integrity and distinct identity, and at the same time, the possibility to withdraw from the relationship [Cropper 1996, cited in Bititci et al. 2007]. Collaboration is not simply the sum of its parts where each team member contributes to the project separately; rather, one contributor may inspire new ideas that come from other contributors or go back and forth in the process thus making it a complex synthesis of creative

thinking [Adler & Chen 2011]. Recent studies have shown that collaboration with other entities (companies, suppliers, customers, universities, etc.) allows the effective use of the acquired knowledge [Stejskal & Hajek 2017]. In addition to the financial value of collaboration, knowledge transfer, reputation benefits, access to networks, and the creation of competitive advantages (strategic value) are also obtained [Day 2000]. Collaboration is also believed to help some artists, as their art is in a fragile position as soon as the word “business” is mentioned [Loncaric 2014]. Collaboration is therefore very important and crucial for the successful performance of companies. Relationally connected parties are able to discover new ways to manage their businesses to improve processes as well as to innovate jointly [Biggeman & Buttle 2012].

**Synergy** is defined as the interactions among team members where the collective creative results are greater than the sum of their individual efforts [Pakeltiene et al. 2017]. Synergy promotes two effects – the additive effect (by using resources more efficiently) and the synergy effect (by utilizing unique resources of companies) [Itami 1987, cited in Holtström and Anderson 2020]. Anderson describes synergy as excellent resource utilization to adapt more successfully to a changing environment with increasing competitive pressure. An example of synergy is two integrated units that can achieve more together than by operating separately [Sirower 1997; Holtström and Anderson 2020]. In this way, a business network is dynamic and the different actors adapt mutually to each other’s activities [Holtström and Anderson 2020].

In essence, the concepts of “collaboration” and “synergy” are very similar. If “collaboration” is defined as the joint work and activities of several individuals who individually contribute to the achievement of a more effective result, then “synergy” is the interaction of two or more partners or forces, the combined effect of which is greater than the sum of the individual effects. Thus, further in the paper, the term “collaboration” will be used.

Companies face challenges in a world of increasing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), and they must overcome these challenges to survive and thrive. They need to be equipped and prepared with the skills and capability to do this. Cross-sectoral collaboration between artists, designers and the corporate world could, if formalised, professionalised, and orchestrated answer to the needs and problems in these areas [Kouzmine-Karavaïeff & Hameed 2022]. Cross-sectoral collaboration is the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately [Bryson et al. 2006]. Enterprises need new knowledge to ensure their new competitive innovation [Stejskal & Hajek 2017], and they bring innovations in other sectors due to their

marked tendency to cooperate with others. A large number of small enterprises and a high proportion of the self-employed characterize the market segments of cultural and creative industries; cooperation is, therefore, vital for companies' success. Knowledge spill-overs stemming from collaboration on innovation may represent another important source of knowledge generation [Agarwal et al. 2007]. Cross-sectoral cooperation between creative industries and other sectors promotes open innovation settings, and different perspectives are generated by the combination of several partners (KEA, n.d.). In addition, cross-sectoral collaboration, innovation, and spill-over effects are closely related phenomena [Loncaric 2014].

Deloitte specialists in professional services list the benefits of collaboration among creative industries in the development of creative products, including creative supply chains, common intellectual property and creative technologies [Deloitte 2022].

The following will examine several types of collaboration models in the creative industries.

**Networking** is a central mode of interaction. It functions as a means of sharing tacit knowledge, fostering relationships within flexible working environments and building competitive advantages [Grabher 2004]. Networks are dynamic, and the various participants adapt to one another's activities [Holtström and Anderson 2020]. It is very useful when creative actors operate in networks and maintain close collaboration and collaborative relationships with suppliers, customers, and demand and supply [Madudova 2017]. These networks have an economic function, providing cultural producers with vital routes to market, and are key sources of collaboration and competition [Pratt 2004]. Networks are valuable support structures for small and medium-sized enterprises, providing access to support, information, and knowledge [Comunian 2012]. Also, networks seem to play a central role in the development of sustainable creative production systems in the urban economy [ibid.]. Networks and networking can be seen as crucial practices for finding work, sustaining a career, and progressing within the often freelance and insecure labour markets of the cultural industries [Lee 2013].

**Clusters** are one of the types of creative industry networks where the collaboration and interaction of certain groups or individuals is promoted, often in a closed context (city, neighbourhood, region) [Comunian 2012]. Creative industries tend to cluster in specific places and the reasons of this phenomenon can be due to a multiplicity of elements linked mainly to culture, creativity, innovation and local development [Lazzeretti et al. 2009]. Such connections between companies and industries are fundamental to competition, productivity, new business formation, and innovation. Cluster evolves based on geographical proximity, develops over time, boosts competition and collaboration resulting in innovation, and potentially

creates greater economic benefits through higher productivity, better knowledge management, and entrepreneurial opportunities [Enkhbold et al. 2013]. Mostly, cluster participants are not direct competitors, but rather work in different industry segments. At the same time, they have common needs, opportunities, constraints, and obstacles [Porter 2000]. Common knowledge and ideas enable creative individuals in clusters to continue combining or recombining similar or different knowledge and ideas to create new ideas and creative expressions [Karlsson 2010]. Despite various studies on clusters, there is still a lack of understanding about the correct conceptualization of a cluster. It has been previously believed that creative industries and clusters are concentrated in specific locations such as large cities and metropolises [Lazzaretti et al. 2008; Florida 2002], but in recent years, with lifestyle changes, the impact of the pandemic, and technological advancements, creative industry companies and employees are also working in rural areas. Recent studies have also been critical of assumptions that the creative city model fosters creativity, demonstrating that creative and art-based initiatives also foster development opportunities in rural and local areas [Conticelli et al. 2020]. Moreover, a new term emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic – Zoom cities – describing neighbourhoods near big cities as places that can leverage the best of central business districts and create new experiences for residents and businesses [Shapiro 2022]. Shapiro also notes that the creative economy, particularly the phases where intellectual property rights are created and monetized, can occur anywhere [ibid.].

**Creative intermediaries or brokers** are individuals and organizations that provide and support the work of other creative individuals [Jansson and Hracis 2018, cited in Comunian 2018]. The concept of creative intermediaries was already defined by Bourdieu, identifying them as bridges between cultural product producers and consumers [Bourdieu 1979]. There are various designations for creative intermediaries in literature, including intermediaries, facilitators, and brokers, but their essence is very similar – these individuals and organizations are regarded as agents who operate as connectors between art, technology, and business. They have a social position that provides them with access to important knowledge [Stea and Pedersen 2017]. Also, in academic literature there is a concept “Creative brokers”. Creative brokers are regarded as agents who function as connectors between arts, technology, and business. They occupy a position in the social space that provides them with access to nonredundant knowledge [Stea and Pedersen 2017]. Creative brokers need to establish interaction among talented individuals to enhance the effectiveness of good ideas, connect otherwise isolated environments, support and monitor knowledge transfer, and encourage collaboration among different individuals [Long et al. 2013]. Creative brokers can generate ideas, stimulate knowledge transfer, and facilitate collaboration among various groups of people focused on creativity [Tjarve et al.

2021]. Creative industries require connecting points, actors, and coordinators or facilitators with interdisciplinary skills capable of operating in various sectors and understanding different perspectives, languages, and cultures. These coordinators or intermediaries translate challenges into adaptable solutions, present new visions for creative industries, and share the interest in working together to develop business practices [KEA 2019].

**Creative individuals** and artists are important because they develop ideas, metaphors, and messages that help promote social networking and experiences. Accordingly, creativity contributes to innovation, graphic design, human resources management, and communication [OECD 2018]. The ability to attract and retain creative people, the so-called creative class, is fundamental to sustainable economic development in society – and not just creative or knowledge-intensive businesses. Creative individuals promote collaboration and sustainable development through the dissemination of high-quality innovation and technology. Unlike cluster theories, theoretical approaches to creative individuals also involve the position that work follows people – if until now, “creative class approaches” dominated, where creative individuals concentrated in cities and metropolises [Florida 2002; De Propris 2009], individuals can choose alternative lifestyles, prioritize well-being, healthy food, nature, and sustainability practices, and live outside cities as well [Selada et al. 2011]. This trend is facilitated by the development of communication technologies, forms of entrepreneurship (most creative individuals are individual professionals (freelancers), self-employed or small business owners), and their boundaries between work, leisure, and life are often blurred [Selada et al. 2011].

To conclude, creativity is in core of creative industries and does not take place in isolation; collaboration acts as one of the main drivers of creative product development, innovation, and spill-over effects. Cross-sectoral cooperation can happen in various forms, starting from large networks and ending with cooperation between creative individuals.

### **Methodology**

To evaluate the collaboration between creative industries, a qualitative study was conducted, having structured interviews with 16 experts from Latvia. All experts were presented with an identical question structure, and these questions were arranged in matrix form. The collaboration matrix, created by the author of the paper, assesses the intensity and frequency of collaboration between creative industries, identifies which creative industries are most inclined to collaborate with others, and which creative industries collaborate the most with others. The matrix also provides the opportunity to identify potential innovation areas by revealing which creative industries have collaborated the least with each other.

The collaboration matrix includes the cultural and creative industries defined in the Republic of Latvia in the year 2022 (Architecture, Design, Cinema, Performing arts, Visual arts, Music, Publishing, Television, Radio and interactive media, Computer games and interactive software, Cultural heritage, Cultural education, Recreation, entertainment and other cultural activities) and is supplemented by three additional industries – Advertising, Fashion and Crafts. As the concept and listing of cultural and creative industries are inconsistent – it varies in the works of different theorists and models developed by organizations, there is no single definition of cultural and creative industries. Also, it is important to note that the list of cultural and creative industries in the Republic of Latvia, has changed in the year 2023 – with adjusting definitions and including Advertising in the list [LR Ministry of Culture 2023].

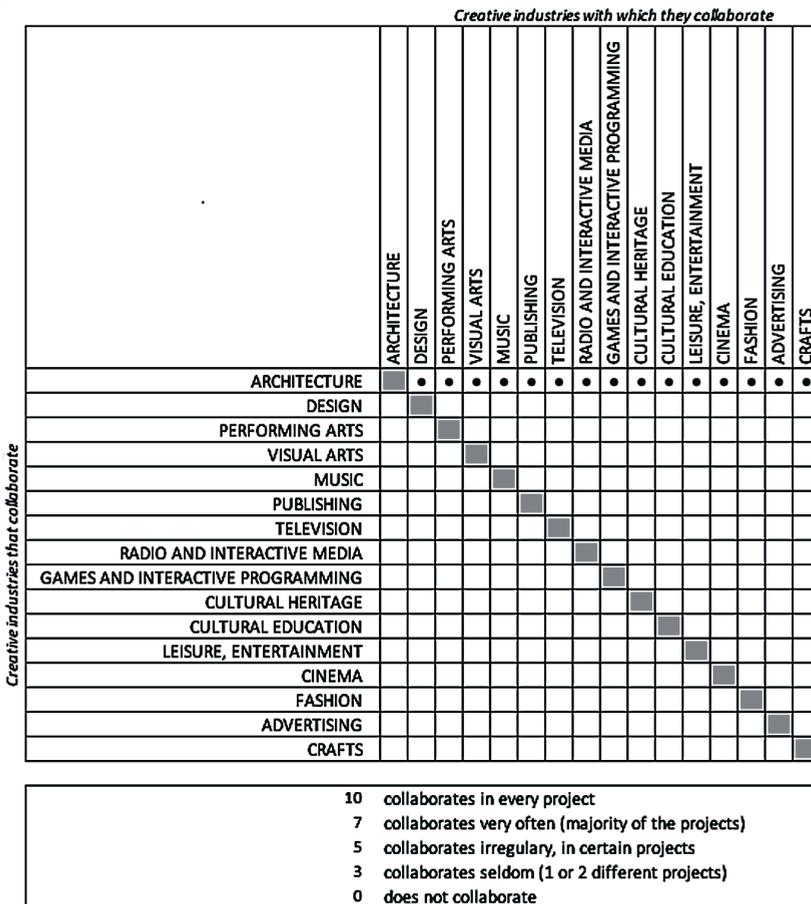


Figure 1. Collaboration matrix of creative industries. Includes evaluation principles and process samples for the architecture industry (created by the author).

In total, there were 16 initial interviews with 16 experts, one for each industry. The matrix was tested in a preliminary interview with one of the experts, who is experienced not only in the professional but also in the academic field (Design industry). Based on the preliminary interview, some changes were made to the matrix, and the next set of interviews were organized. Collaboration within one industry was not included in the matrix.

Experts for the structured interviews were selected by evaluating several criteria:

1. Acknowledged professional experience in the industry that the expert represents.
2. Academic experience, including teaching in universities and academies.
3. Awards received for professional projects.
4. Publicity in the local media, with more than one publication.
5. Expert experience in the public field when discussing actual industry issues.

Each expert representing a particular creative industry was asked to evaluate the collaboration and its intensity with other creative industries, arranged in a matrix, using a scale of collaboration intensity prepared by the author, where 10 is collaboration in every project and 0 is no collaboration. Then these expert evaluations were summarized in the matrix, and all intensity ratings were added together to obtain the total collaboration intensity rating points. The author also calculated the average indicator to make it easier to compare the collaboration intensity of industries.

In the horizontal direction, collaboration is visible, where experts from each industry evaluate collaboration with other industries. Experts make an assessment according to the gradation indicated in the matrix, starting from “collaborates in every project” and ending with “does not collaborate”. In the vertical direction, the intensity of collaboration is visible, as each industry is attracted as a collaboration partner.

## **Findings**

Based on the results of expert interviews, information was obtained regarding the collaboration of each creative industry with other industries. By organizing these results in a collaboration matrix, it was possible to discover which creative industries collaborate the most with others. The interviews were structured, and an intensity scale with a specific gradation was used to evaluate the collaborations. The author coded all the obtained results and expressed them in points, both by calculating the total point count and by calculating the average indicator.



5	Advertising	111	7
6	Leisure, entertainment	106	7
7	Television	93	6
8	Cultural heritage	83	6
9	Music	82	5
10	Radio and interactive media	80	5
11	Design	79	5
12	Crafts	77	5
13	Cultural education	73	5
14	Games and interactive programming	72	5
15	Publishing	69	5
16	Architecture	52	3

Thus, performing arts is a creative industry that collaborates the most with other industries, especially actively with design, visual arts, music, publishing, television, radio, interactive media, cultural heritage, fashion, advertising, and crafts. The second most active industries are visual arts, cinema, and fashion. The least active industry is architecture – its most intense collaboration is with design and crafts industries, but it collaborates rarely with other industries. The other less active industries in collaboration are publishing, gaming and interactive software industry, as well as the cultural education industry.

Looking at the results vertically and studying with which industries all other industries most actively collaborate, the following results were obtained:

**Table 2. Creative industries, with which they collaborate  
(created by the author)**

Rank	Creative industry	Points total	Average result
1	Design	139	9
2	Music	114	8
3	Cultural heritage	110	7
4	Radio and interactive media	103	7

5	Leisure, entertainment	100	7
6	Advertising	96	6
7	Performing arts	92	6
8	Television	89	6
9	Cinema	87	6
10	Publishing	86	6
11	Visual arts	82	5
12	Crafts	82	5
13	Cultural education	80	5
14	Fashion	80	5
15	Architecture	63	4
16	Games and interactive media	63	4

The industry with which other creative industries collaborate the most is the design industry. Almost all industry experts pointed out that they collaborate the most with representatives of the design industry in their industry. Collaboration with the music industry, radio and interactive media, and cultural heritage is also actively developed. On the other hand, the industries with which they collaborate the least are architecture, gaming and interactive media, cultural education, and fashion.

It is essential to note that mutual collaboration is not linear – for example, if architecture collaborates with the design industry in almost every project, it does not mean that the design industry will collaborate with the architecture industry in every project.

The matrix also reflects the possible directions of innovation in the collaboration of creative industries – looking at collaborations where the rating is 0 or 3. Perhaps the collaboration of these industries could help create innovative creative products. For example, performing arts with the gaming and interactive software industry, architecture with television, publishing, or radio and interactive media, cultural education, and cinema.

During the interviews, the author realized that despite the experts' status, there were still additional details that might create biased results, such as strong personal influence and attitude against certain aspects of cooperation, and a constant desire to relate their experiences with the organization they work for.

It should also be noted that there are risks in defining the creative industries. For example, the non-uniform structure of each creative industry (such as radio and interactive media, whose working principles and tasks are often very different. Also, in the expert selection, it would be necessary to consider in even more detail the sub-specializations of each creative industry. For example, a film producer and an actor could have different views on collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

Collaboration involves a group of independent organizations working together, pooling and sharing resources, information, systems, and risks for mutual benefit. It is a similar theoretical concept to synergy, where the interactions among team members produce creative results greater than the sum of their individual efforts. Collaboration has always been at the core of creative work. Creative individuals and teams are more innovative when exposed to a variety of ideas, which cannot be achieved in isolation. Small and medium-sized enterprises can increase their focus by specializing in functions that complement each other within their networks.

Collaboration can be expressed through various models, including networks, clusters, creative intermediaries or brokers, and between creative individuals. Collaboration is one of the main drivers of creative product development, innovation, and spill-over effects.

The collaboration matrix, developed by the author, was tested and evaluated by 16 experts from the creative industries. It was discovered that collaboration between industries is non-linear, meaning that cooperation between two industries can vary in intensity. The performing arts industry has the most connections and collaborations with other industries, but the design industry has the highest demand for collaboration from other creative industries. The architecture and gaming and interactive programming industries collaborate the least and are also the least collaborated with. The collaboration matrix and structured interviews helped the author discover potential areas for research improvement and allowed for interviews with more experts to overcome potential biases from personal views, non-uniform industry structures, and differences in opinions among various professionals.

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