

MENTORSHIP FOR BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR

PhD Kaari Kiitsak-Prikk

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

PhD Annukka Jyrämä

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre; Aalto University, School of Business

Dr.oec. Ieva Zemīte

Latvian Academy of Culture, Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies

Abstract

This paper focuses on how mentorship as an integral part of cultural management higher education could enhance meeting the needs of the cultural and creative sector (CCS). As societal changes occur rapidly, there is a need for novel ways to adapt higher education curricula accordingly, ensuring flexibility in educating students to respond to societal needs. We suggest that integrating mentorship into formal education could be one such approach. The research question is: What are the potential roles, benefits and challenges of mentorship in cultural management programmes in terms of knowledge sharing and co-creation? The aim is to explain if and how mentorship could work as a tool in developing the skills and competencies of future forerunners of the sector.

The paper builds on an action research method and applies a qualitative approach to two cases of piloting mentorship programmes. The data collected include observation notes and surveys on interventions in two cultural management master's programmes. The interventions include mentoring activities, peer-to-peer mentoring and co-creational workshops. As a result, the paper outlines possible

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Ieva Zemīte

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approaches and suggestions for how mentorship schemes in the CCS could support the development of capacities to meet the sector's needs today and in the future. The originality of the paper lies on its novel view of how higher education could build a framework for a new type of solution to address gaps in skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes among professionals through mentorship.

Keywords: *arts management, CCS, mentorship, education, communities of practice.*

Introduction

This paper focuses on how mentorship, as an integral part of cultural management higher education, could enhance meeting the needs of the cultural and creative sector (CCS). As changes in society occur in unexpected and rapid ways, there is a need for novel ways to adapt curricula accordingly, and for flexibility in educating students to respond to societal needs. The CCS sector requires individuals with new competencies, such as understanding digitalization and new technologies, adapting to changes in social cohesion, and having the capacity to be activists or change agents [e. g., see VVA et al. 2021]. The range of skills and knowledge needed for new managers and policymakers in CCS calls for a new approach to learning and education. In this paper, we elaborate on the learning and knowledge creation perspectives within universities, focusing on programmes in arts and cultural management.

We aim to add a new understanding of the phenomena of capacity building through analysis from a knowledge co-creation perspective and the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge [see e. g. Nonaka et al. 2001, 2000; Von Korgh et al. 2000] with learning through communities of practice framework [see e. g. Brown and Duguid 1991; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2000; Wenger 1998] that has been used in analysing learning in the context of professional communities [Lave and Wenger 1991] as well as in the context of education [e. g. Goldie 2012; Tomlison and Jackson 2019; Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh 2022; Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh and Jyrämä 2023]. We aim to integrate the mentorship perspective with curriculum and education building on insights from previous literature [e. g. Grant-Vallone and Entsher 2000; Amayry and Crisp 2007]. The knowledge co-creation discussion is used as a tool to reflect on how to facilitate the changes in curricula in arts and cultural master's programmes. One way to tackle the challenge of keeping up with rapid changes in professional practice in CCS is through integrating mentorship into formal higher education. The research question is:

- *What are the potential roles, benefits, and challenges of mentorship in art and cultural master's programmes in terms of knowledge sharing and co-creation?*

The study analyses two arts and cultural management master programmes piloting novel ways to integrate mentorship into their curriculum. We assume educating managers for the CCS provides ways to build new competence and skills that allow agile governance, management and leadership which is capable of adapting to the ever-changing environment and capable of becoming active change markers if needed. The master programmes are the key actors in facilitating competence development among creatives and other stakeholders contributing to the sector.

We conclude the paper with implications for the higher education programmes in the CCS. We propose a framework for meeting the gaps in educating skills, knowledge, values and attitudes of the professionals in the format of mentorship.

Theoretical discussion

We acknowledge the multifaceted nature of knowledge: knowledge co-creation from the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge. This perspective relies on the insights of Nonaka et al. [2000, 2001] on the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge which we take as a starting point. Further we build on the knowledge co-creation processes analysed in organisational context [Von Korgh et al. 2000] where the role of shared beliefs, values and norms affect which facts, insights or experiences we perceive as valid and which ones we might omit [Von Korgh and Grand 2000 on dominant logic]. In addition, we look at co-creation occurring in communities [Von Krogh et al. 2000].

Communities of practice provide a tool to look at learning occurring in the context of everyday activity. In communities of practice, people share similar values, norms and practices. The practice can be interpreted as a profession, but could also be any shared practice, such as shared education and learning [Lave and Wenger 1991]. Communities of practice can be seen as a place for learning, especially learning through socialisation and hence can be adapted to educational context [Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh and Jyrämä 2022; Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh and Jyrämä 2023]. Mentorship, similarly, is a way of co-creating knowledge through sharing experiences and networks. In many cases, mentors represent the communities of practice which students are aspiring for. Mentors' role in opening up the avenue to the negotiations of meanings within communities of practice can be vital. Mentorship relationships can be formal or informal encounters, occurring through expert-novice relationships or peer-to-peer interaction [e. g. Grant-Vallone and Ensher 2000; Bryant 2005; Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh and Jyrämä 2022]. Thus, we see mentorship as a means to enhance knowledge sharing and co-creation in our case in an educational context [see also Aranburu et al. 2023]. Mentoring relationships provide a platform for the co-creation of knowledge and mutual learning. Connecting mentorship to knowledge discussion with communities of practice perspective allows us to look at

knowledge co-creation and learning as interaction, highlighting the role of relationships and community as spaces of learning. This brings forth the experience (tacit knowledge) as one starting point for knowledge co-creation in addition to explicit knowledge as traditionally adopted in formal curricula. The skills and competencies for agility and activism are created in communities and in interaction, often developed through urgent needs to respond to challenges in practice. Hence, we argue that communities of practice within academia need to be more opened up to share practices to access these novel competencies, as discussed in Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh [2022]. Mentorship could integrate academic communities with the ones in practice. Focus on mentoring with an emphasis on experience and tacit knowledge creates new insights for curricula design and supporting structures. Our study opens up the role of communities of practice, the needed skills on competencies and the challenges of how they can be integrated into curricula with the focus on mentorship (see Figure 1).

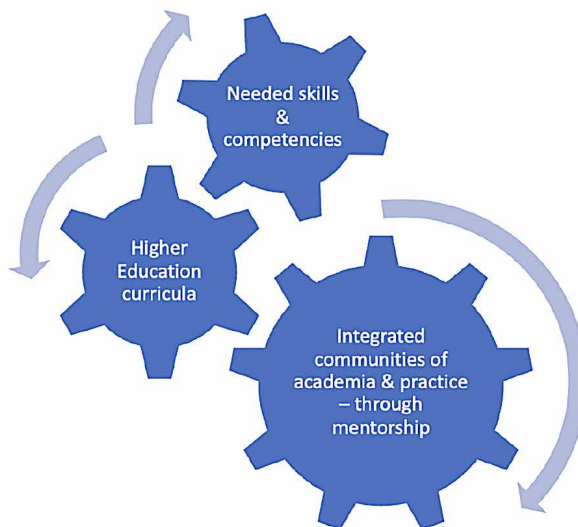


Figure 1. Summary framework by the authors.

Next, we shall look into the role of mentoring in two pilot cases followed by analysis from the perspective of knowledge co-creation and communities of practice.

Research Design

Two cases of piloting mentorship programmes were carried out with action research methods in the cultural/ arts management MA programmes in Latvia and Estonia. The cases provide a unique setting to analyse integration of mentorship to curriculum and the specific interventions created to both ensure smooth integration

but also to learn on the process of mentorship integration itself. Mentorship was a new concept for the organisations and was approached somewhat differently in the two cases, but both had a shared understanding of mentoring.

The analysis in action research traditionally occurs through cycles of action and reflection [e. g. Wadsworth 1998; Gronhaug et al. 1999]. During the action research period the interventions included setting up the mentorship schemes, providing training and consultations for both mentors and mentees. The interventional meetings and workshops enabled to design and affect how the cases proceed but also enabled to collect the empirical data, thus to continuously analyse and adapt the insight gained to the programmes. The interventions are described in more detail in the findings chapter.

In addition, student and mentor feedback was collected and analysed based on a survey done in August 2021 at the Latvian Academy of Culture (n – 24 students, n – 16 mentors, general sample – 25 students, 25 mentors); and a survey, personal feedback and observations were done in 2022 at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (n – 16 students, n – 16 mentors, general sample – 19 students). The primary themes of feedback were the advantages of the programme for mentors and mentees as well as the primary difficulties that programme participants faced. There were questions on development of competencies, skills and attitudes; effect of mentorship on vision of job and / or opportunities in the industry: knowledge of the daily professional environment, gaining contacts with people in the sector etc.

The data included written materials such as invitations, workshop guidelines and materials, photos etc. of the interventions and the feedback results. The material for analysis of the process consists also of our own field notes and remembrances, saved emails, and the presentations and papers made during the project.

In action research in one's own organisation, the difficulty of mixing different roles, researcher, project manager, organisation's member, has aroused discussion among the researchers [e. g. Holian 1999]. In our study, our priority was the education provided to students and second the research. However, as the mentorship programmes were openly presented as pilots, we were able to test and engage in different formats of mentorship and collect feedback. The role of self-reflection is crucial in action research, as one needs to be aware of one's actions and choices both as a researcher and as a project manager [e. g. Holian 1999; Marshall 2001]. It is not easy to know what feelings, ideas, and thoughts one can share with the group members or put into research material. As Marshall [2001] points out, there is no one way of reflecting and making the story. In our case we had regular meetings to reflect the pilots in the context of the REMAM project [see more: remam.eu], and inside the two programmes, these activities enabled us to tackle the above-mentioned

challenges in action research. In this paper, the two cases are used to illustrate the role of mentorship in education context with knowledge sharing and co-creation perspective rather than provide the final outcomes of the analysis.

The two pilot cases and findings

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT) carried out a pilot mentorship programme as an organic part of cultural management MA studies. 16 students with a versatile level of previous experience and with some experience as practitioners in CCS experienced the pilot programme in three phases over three semesters. Each student was matched with handpicked practitioners as mentors for one semester. For the next semester, the same students were matched to peers from Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) Creative Industries and Growth Management MA programmes. In addition, the pilot season consisted also of tutoring where the core academic staff supported each student's learning path. Thus, each student had a tutor throughout the three semesters, a mentor (practitioner) for the second semester, and a mentee (peer student from LAC) for the third semester.

The mentorship programme aimed to support students in their challenge-based learning and to provide practical insights for better integration of academic studies and practice. The practitioners-mentors (mostly graduates of the same MA programme) were briefed in a webinar and personal phone calls. Online materials and suggestions were provided. From February to June 2022, there were 1–3 mostly online meetings between mentee and mentor. The pilot season did not include any face-to-face network events, but the relationship between student and mentor was freely created based on the respective ways of each. The coordinator of the programme did not interfere between mentor and mentee, and the initiative to establish first contact was set on the students. Mentorship contributed to specific learning outcomes and was graded pass/ fail.

The peer-to-peer (P2P) mentorship served the purpose to support mentoring skills among future leaders of the CCS and build international connections within the same (sub)field. P2P mentorship pairs (mentor from EAMT – mentee from LAC) were matched by the programme coordinators based on the pre-survey among the students and taking into account the goals of each student. The students of EAMT had a week-long intensive training on the topic of mentorship and for the third semester they were assigned the role of mentor to share their experience and knowledge from their studies and practice. The P2P mentorship pairs met 2–3 times; five pairs managed to have an eye-to-eye meeting. P2P mentorship contributed to a curricular module and was graded pass/ fail.

The results of the pilot programme clearly outlined the benefits for the students. Mentorship contributed to their problem-solving and networking skills, as well

as helped to relate to practice. Students agreed the mentorship in both semesters enhanced competencies and industry relationships. For example, a student noted on the practitioner-mentorship: *“We had very helpful discussions which widened my view on the cultural sector.”* The mentorship enabled students to “observe different perspectives (mentor/mentee). *“The opportunity to think differently”* was highly appreciated, as well as the received *“new skills and educational moments”* throughout the pilot programme. The wish to have even more *“skill of flexibility”* and *“skill to make the room in your mind”* suggests the mentorship helps one to realise the need to become agile and open-minded.

However, the need for facilitation was also claimed, as some students were less active, or the relationship match was not ideal. The students expressed the wish for *“more guidelines and frame”*. There were also cases of mis-match either on personal level or having expertise in a topic less relevant for students. The mis-match led to informal endings of the mentoring relationships. This indicated that the mentorship programme requires coordination and support for both mentors and mentees; from matchmaking to goal setting to follow-up. The practicalities required more active intervention than provided in the pilot season. It speaks of expectations that the education system has a structured way of handling these initiatives.

All students were assigned to mentorship, regardless of their personal wishes and motivation. This might have been one of the reasons for the lack of interest from the student side to engage fully in the mentoring relationship in addition to unsuccessful matching. On the other hand, many students had access to relevant communities of practice outside academia already, hence there might have been lower motivation towards mentorship as access to relevant communities or competencies.

The feedback from mentors outlined the benefit of being involved in such a programme, indirectly. A mentor outlined: *“I could structure my knowledge better.”* Restructuring implicit knowledge contributes to new understandings. During the mentorship programme a mentor realised:

“...the labour market in the arts is so confusing and, in some way, transforming now that there is no concrete hard skill necessary for a student to acquire beyond those that can really be learned from the internet for example. I think more important is to be able to engage critically with the current discussion and situation and make informed decisions. Be able to assess your own competences and values and what are the places of these in the current situation in the sector and beyond. Because the sector is transforming, the skill necessary is the ability to tune into and predict what is about to happen in the world and how one acts upon this transformation.”

The same aspects – the ability to understand oneself and one’s competencies; as well as that *“it’s more about the gut feeling”* was noted by students.

Mentors confirmed the mentorship as a useful tool to make an impactful contribution. One mentor pointed out: *“It is always valuable when you can support, help someone struggling with some problem in which you have the competencies to help.”* Mentorship programmes have an impact on activating the practitioners of the CCS towards taking more of the role of a socially responsible leader. They perceived mentoring as part of their own professional development and societal engagement.

Both mentors (practitioners) and students (both in the role as a mentor to peer, and as a mentee) recognised the benefit of the programme to their communication skills and to the ability to be in the mentorship relationship. Students learned professional competencies needed for pro-active and agile arts management like problem solving, co-creation, purposefulness, flexibility, critical reflection. The competencies seem to be knowledge based, including both implicit tacit knowledge and elements of explicit knowledge (see Table 1 for the summary).

Table 1

Summary of the key aspects of the EAMT case. Based on a survey, personal feedback and observations were done in 2022 at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (n – 16 students, n – 16 mentors, general sample – 19 students).

Benefits	Requirements/ challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mentorship as tool for personal (or organisational) social impact and social engagement. ● Mentorship is an integral tool for professional development. ● Mentorship as a tool to connect academic content and build bridge towards practice – integrative activity. ● Mentorship leads to realisation about skills necessary in the sector and enables self-identification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mentorship requires stable coordination, professional facilitation and consistent structures. ● Need for support from both CCS and higher education frameworks. ● Flexibility of curriculum requirement – outcome based and “gradable” format creates challenges for students. ● Mentorship as an obligatory or optional activity affects motivation of students.

Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) launched a pilot mentoring programme involving 26 mentors and 30 mentees (from February – June, 2021). The pilot was created as a response to the growing requirement of the sector itself and also of the Latvian Ministry of Education to strive for higher education institutions (HEIs) meeting the needs of the corresponding industry. In addition, a report within LAC [2019] suggested to provide students with a deeper understanding of the diverse and

fragmented labour market of the CCS, to develop a network of mentors of the sector, who would create an in-depth understanding of the institutional and organisational specifics of a particular sub-sector.

The aim of the pilot mentoring programme was to strengthen the involvement of the industry players in the study process and by developing cooperation with industry professionals to expand student's experience and to give the student another tool to get to know the specifics of the future profession. First applications of mentors were asked for (mostly the graduates of the LAC) and then offered the list of mentors to students. Students applied for mentors of their own choice, but the final choice of a mentee in case several students applied was done by mentors themselves. Some of the mentors did not get any application which created some disappointments. The participation of the LAC programme is a voluntary option for students. Therefore, students who applied were motivated and deeply interested to participate. The mentors and the students, both, but separately, were briefed in an online seminar, materials about the programme were given and the aim of mentorship and some suggestions were provided. The mentorship consisted of mostly three online meetings between mentee and mentor. Due to the administrative issues, there was no mid-term evaluation meeting.

The LAC case highlighted that students value close collaboration between the HEI and the CCI and are looking for an opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of the sector. Students wish to get to know the industry "from inside", being interested in real, practical or new work experience or job opportunities, and in-depth insights into the profession from a person not directly related to the academy (hence "fresh", perhaps different opinion). Students look for contacts, networking with field professionals and would like to be presented with a "wide selection" of mentors". In addition, they indicated a wish of getting help in finding the right direction, individual approach and emotional support, getting support in the study process and opportunity to attend seminars on personal growth.

Evaluation of the LAC programme identified that mentors valued networking with other mentors and professionals in the field, were looking for tips on being a successful mentor and getting to know the new generation, and learn from them (reverse mentorship). They addressed an issue of the necessity to transfer real life experience, to involve mentees in practical tasks in a natural CCI setting.

The LAC case shows that both mentors and mentees agree that motivation of mentees to be part of the programme, to be the driving force of the process and to succeed is of utmost importance – if a mentee is not motivated, a mentor who is first and foremost a successful practitioner in the field but not a professional coach or psychologist cannot help and the process of mentorship will not be successful (see Table 2 for summary).

Table 2

Summary of the key aspect of the LAC case. Based on a survey done in August 2021 at the Latvian Academy of Culture (n – 24 students, n – 16 mentors).

Benefits of the mentoring programme	Requirements/challenges of the mentoring programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mutual benefits; e. g. mentors engaging mentees as employers or successors. ● Valuable networking with other mentors and professionals in the field. ● Closer collaboration between the HEI and the CCS. ● Development of professional competencies in CCS. ● Entrance into the labour market of the CCS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication of the goal, expectations and tasks within the programme for all participants. ● Guidelines for structuring mentoring meetings; facilitating networking events as a platform for sharing experiences. ● Need of training for mentorship managers, mentors and mentees; need of financial and human resources. ● Sustainability of the programmes needs facilitation and resources.

Discussion

The cases indicate that there is a need for explicit activity to integrate the academic and practice communities in the context of specific (master) programmes. It has been proposed that the academic communities are not closed, even if often concentrated around a discipline or a professor, the experts (i. e., academic staff) also have networks and connections beyond academia, hence can act as brokers between academics and the practice for the novices in the communities, i. e. students. Usually, the academic communities are created around a specific discipline or programmes with the relevant practitioners, alumni seen as the external community to connect with [e. g. Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh 2022; Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh and Jyrämä 2022]. The mentorship provided new insights, networks, and job opportunities for mentees. In co-creational workshops, mentors and mentees shared views on co-learning, resulting in some mentoring relationships leading to future job positions. Thus, mentorship can integrate the somewhat interlinked communities of practice, the one in academia and the professional one. On the other hand, cultural management is not a homogenous community of practice around distinct professional identity, but it is a heterogeneous field with multiple job descriptions and distinct (sub)fields within art forms, organisational formats etc. that create multiple (sub)communities of practice. It creates new challenges for mentorship matching and beneficial

mentoring relationships, as tackled also by Aranburu et al. [2023]. These sub-communities can have specific languages, norms, skills and competencies required, hence a student as a mentee might end up with a mismatching mentor. These specific characteristics affect the knowledge co-creation and mentoring relationship and need further analysis. The multifaceted nature of the cultural management field got highlighted when the mentor-mentee pairs were created – the mentors were hand-picked from different fields and positions to encompass the interest and topics of the master students; from museum leadership, to rock band agents to policy makers. However, based on the feedback, mentoring was a tool for building capacities to cope with new topics and challenges – and a way to enhance knowledge (co-)creation on one's skills and capacities rather than a tool for the field specific information, facts and matters.

In addition, MA students often have existing professional experience, and networks – and can perceive themselves as experts. The self-identified expertise showed especially in the peer-to-peer mentoring, where the students at times felt more senior than their peers, and some felt problematic their positions as mentors. This seems to point out that at times knowledge sharing, especially knowledge co-creation, requires self-identification as a knowledge owner.

To summarise, mentoring could be used as an **entrance** into the **labour market** of the CCS. According to NACE classification, professions corresponding to the CCS are employed in almost 300 sectors of the economy which face new challenges. The labour market needs people with high-level adaptability skills and the capacity to apply their knowledge and skills in a specific context in an agile environment. As the cases showed, mentorship opened up job opportunities, yet the diversity of the labour market creates challenges for mentoring programmes in terms of finding suitable mentors and having their organisation allowing time for such activity.

In addition, one of the main benefits of the programme is development of professional competences in CCS. Although various initiatives are supporting the **development of professional competencies** in CCS already, for example, as part of the Nordic Baltic mobility programme [Nordic Culture Point 2022]; and Creative Europe MEDIA business cluster programme [European Commission 2022], mentoring programme at the university level might foster this development. Mentoring is a two-way relationship where knowledge is co-created rather than one way of passing on information as found in previous research as well as noted in our case analysis. In particular, the mentoring relationships were noted as spaces of learning of how to become professional by both mentors and mentees during the co-creational workshop [see also e. g. Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh and Jyrämä 2022; 2023]. We assumed the students would learn about the practicalities of the

(sub)fields of CCS, while the feedback stressed the learning about themselves as professionals. Acknowledging mentoring as a tool for professional development could legitimise mentoring in educational lifelong learning policies as well as within art and cultural organisation as an option for learning for professionals, in addition to sharing their experience.

Conclusions

To conclude, the analysis pointed out several outcomes of mentorship programmes. Mentorship relation allows new types of competence and capacity co-creation through sharing mentees' (students) current academic knowledge and mentors' (practitioners') experiential knowledge with the mutual learning experience. We wish to emphasise that knowledge sharing and co-creation in mentorship relationships was building up professional identity and self-identification rather than learning facts and matters about the (sub)field itself. This would encourage us to propose that **mentoring is a tool for openness and adaptability**.

Our cases revealed the multifaceted nature of the CCS and the need for tailor-made mentoring pairs. The knowledge on (sub)field specificities were highlighted in some respect but the co-created knowledge which is adaptable beyond communities was more emphasised.

Mentorship could be a complementary element of facilitating cooperation, and modern management in the CCS by including mentors from different sectors, building cross-community/sector understanding and allowing joint activities. There could be supportive frameworks and structures such as incentives, assessment tools or role-modelling from the governance. This would enable the art and cultural managers to build competencies needed in the future as identified previously: *"Ability to collaborate and co-create with other sectors is a definite requirement to the professional cultural manager tomorrow"* [KEA & PPMI 2019]. Moreover, cross-sectorial symbiosis raises opportunities for cultural management as a discipline [VVA et al. 2021]. The educational and professional development programmes need means to build the required competencies, and mentoring could be one of the ways to respond to this identified need.

Mentorship integrated into the curriculum provided a platform for building agile managers both from students and similarly a platform for professional development for practitioners. Higher education programmes could facilitate and support this co-creation by adding flexibility to their study programmes to facilitate learning through mentorship, and on the other hand by acknowledging mentoring as a means of professional development, and providing incentives for professionals to engage in mentoring activities. In addition, mentoring can be seen as a tool for building cross-sectoral understanding and ability to collaborate.

Our results seem to point out that mentoring can be seen as building societal impact on an individual level as recognized by mentors. However, we wish to point out that also organisations could reflect that mentoring could be one tool for societal engagement. To conclude, it would be beneficial to acknowledge mentorship as a formal tool for both educational activities as well as a tool for building better professionals for CCS. This would require legitimation of mentorship both in curriculum context as well as in art and cultural organisations incentives, for example as a societal impact indicator and a tool for professional development.

Finally, there should be a wide range of **best practices shared and evaluated** within the CCS on a national and European level. For example, in Estonia, folk culture mentorship support for folk dance and music leaders has been implemented by the Ministry of Culture to improve their professional competencies [Estonian Ministry of Culture 2021]. These kinds of initiatives are great measures to strengthen the rise of competencies for cultural management as well. Yet, a similar approach could also be applied to the level of European national and local cultural policies. Higher education quality assessment could include an indicator of mentorship. HEI funding scheme could include an element of whether HEI has a mentorship scheme or not integrated to their processes (for students as well as for the staff). In the cultural management domain, the curricula evaluations should consider whether the programme participates in the international mentorship network or not. Practising mentorship could be considered as part of the quality indicators of the curricula if sustaining tight relatedness to CCI field practice.

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