

CREATIVE INTERMEDIARIES AS FUTURE MAKERS: CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND URBAN REGENERATION IN SMALL CITIES

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Abstract

In recent decades, culture and creativity have become essential drivers of urban regeneration. This has increased the role of creative intermediaries in enabling culture, entrepreneurship, and cross-sector collaboration. Yet, few studies demonstrate this relationship outside of large cities, where most cultural and creative activities are concentrated. This paper examines how the practices of creative intermediaries engaged in “future-making” are creating opportunities for Cultural and Creative Entrepreneurship (CCE) and contributing to urban regeneration in two small cities – Cēsis in Latvia and Caldas da Rainha in Portugal. Through case studies from Latvia and Portugal and based on an ethnographic approach, the study highlights how intermediaries operate at the intersection of policy, community, and creative practice. The research contributes new empirical evidence and extends theoretical perspectives on creative intermediation and urban regeneration.

Keywords: *cultural intermediaries, creative intermediaries, urban regeneration, creative entrepreneurship*

Culture Crossroads

Volume 31, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.55877/cc.vol31.573>

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ISSN 2500-9974



Introduction

Creative intermediaries are individuals and organisations that enable and support the work of other creatives [Comunian, England, and Hracs, 2018]. The concept emerged from long-standing theoretical debates on cultural intermediaries, first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu in 1979. Creative intermediaries foster cultural and creative industries (CCI) [Naudin et al., 2022], which are recognised as key drivers of urban regeneration and sustainable development [UNESCO; World Bank, 2021]. The economisation of culture and expansion of the CCI sector over recent decades has increased the need for specialised intermediaries [O'Connor, 2013]. Many operate in the “grey spaces” between grassroots initiatives and official planning structures, reinforcing their role in urban development through practice [Perry, 2019]. The rising importance of culture in urban regeneration has, in turn, elevated the role of creative intermediaries. However, few studies have demonstrated this relationship in small cities. Much of the existing research still focuses on large urban centres, where cultural and creative critical mass and revitalisation actions are concentrated. Understanding the role of creative intermediaries in smaller cities is crucial, particularly how they connect culture, economy, and political agency in regeneration processes.

Portugal and Latvia, although both EU member states, differ in terms of geography, economic development, and cultural policy traditions. Comparing them offers insight into how creative intermediaries operate across diverse European contexts and how such findings may inform EU-level cultural policy. The focus on Caldas da Rainha in Portugal and Cēsis in Latvia, two small cities outside major metropolitan areas, allows an exploration of intermediaries operating beyond dominant cultural hubs. Despite their size, both cities have active cultural scenes and creative potential. Portugal has a longer-established policy framework for CCI, while Latvia's sector has grown more rapidly in recent years. Both contexts utilize EU funding and policy tools to address local needs, illustrating how shared frameworks yield varied outcomes depending on the context.

This paper aims to answer how creative intermediaries contribute to creative entrepreneurship and urban regeneration in small cities. The main goal is to understand the role and positioning of creative intermediaries – their social profile and their positioning in the local cultural scene, in terms of the forms of action, motivations, social ethos and their relationships with local communities and institutions – and their power to foster CCE and the resonances of their action in the urban regeneration dynamics in small cities. The analysis is based on two case studies and a comparative methodology developed within the local context of the CCI.

From cultural to creative intermediaries

The concept of cultural intermediary has been discussed in sociological literature since Bourdieu [1979] described these actors as bridges between producers and consumers of cultural products. Over the past four decades, sectoral and societal changes have blurred the boundaries of intermediation, making it difficult to define the field of action clearly [Ferreira 2009]. According to Smith Maguire and Matthews [2012], two interpretations dominate: one focuses on a new middle class mediating production and consumption in line with Bourdieu [1984, 1996], while the other sees intermediaries as market actors positioned between culture and economy [Callon et al. 2002; Muniesa et al. 2007; Jakob and van Heur 2014]. Virani [2019: 5–6] describes cultural intermediaries as tastemakers who translate and give value to culture, including digital intermediaries such as crowdfunding platforms. As Smith Maguire and Matthews [2012] note, the concept invites reflection on agency, negotiation, and power. However, much academic work has tended to list intermediary roles without analysing the direction or complexity of their connections, whether between cultural producers, policy makers, or audiences. A study by O'Connor and Gu [2010] on Manchester's CCI reveals how intermediaries frequently struggle to connect public bodies and local actors, underscoring the importance of understanding the interplay between local histories, institutions, and socio-economic conditions.

Virani [2019] proposes a newer category: creative and cultural economy intermediaries. These individuals understand the broader cultural ecosystem and actively build working connections across its subfields. Their work fosters collaboration and community development while offering valuable insights for public policy. They act as local transmitters between key stakeholders, supporting the development of place-based creative economies. In this sense, the primary role of creative intermediaries is not taste-making, but facilitating connections within cultural and creative ecologies in urban contexts.

Several authors argue that cultural intermediaries can be either individuals or organisations [Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012; De Propriis and Mwaura, 2013; Taylor, 2015; Ekins et al., 2019]. Regarding creative intermediaries, despite the focus of Virani's perspective on individuals, we consider that organizations can also act in this capacity, since they establish and sustain the conditions for individuals to work. As noted by Naudin, Zemîte, and Hermene [2022], individuals are often embedded in local communities, acting as connectors, mentors, or cultural practitioners, while organisational forms, such as hubs or associations, structure activities, resources, and partnerships [Perry 2019; Haugsevje et al. 2021]. Although their scales and modes of operation differ, both types play complementary roles in linking policy, practice, and community within the cultural and creative economy. While individuals perform taste and legitimization work, such as curation, reviewing, and

public relations, organisations perform on a structural intermediation level, such as funding, programme design, and governance processes that shape the conditions under which individual intermediaries work [Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012; De Propriis and Mwaura, 2013; Taylor, 2015].

It is important to note a distinction: creative intermediaries are not self-interested, econo-centric cultural workers [Perry et al. 2015]. Naudin, Zemite, and Hermene [2022] argue that creative intermediaries are motivated by their passion for the CCI and their position within the wider local community. They are bridging and shaping connections. By being involved in a variety of projects and cultural activities, creative intermediaries can both restrict and broaden local CCI activities [Maguire, Matthews 2014], conducting the creative industries' value networks [Bilton 2017]. Intermediaries who mainly act as facilitators might be seen as active mediators in connections with local bureaucracy or policy levels [Haugsevje et al. 2021].

Creative intermediaries as enablers of creative entrepreneurship and urban regeneration

Creative intermediaries can be seen as agents of “future-making” creating new solutions and opportunities, strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration, and fostering cultural and creative entrepreneurship. While policymakers increasingly recognise the potential of CCI as a growth sector, their efforts may fall short due to a limited understanding of the sector's dynamics. Creative and cultural entrepreneurship is often identified as a key driver of CCI development. The CRISP project [Kunda, Tjarve, Eglite 2021] notes that local CCI networks often remain closed, despite public efforts to encourage collaboration. Virani [2019] emphasises the importance of intermediaries who facilitate the flow of ideas, information, and access to broader networks. These individuals serve as key nodes in trans-organisational ecosystems, operating beyond their own organisational interests.

Urban development processes often reveal patterns of concentration and polarisation in cultural production, as well as in political, economic, and administrative spheres [Santos and Abreu 2000]. In this context, intermediaries take on various roles depending on their societal positioning [Ginzburg 1989], often acting as “gatekeepers” [Becker 1984] who enable cross-sectoral articulation between different professional domains [Madeira 1999]. In the last 30 years, culture has assumed a central role in urban regeneration, defining a new paradigm of urban [Bianchini 1995; Landry 2001; Scott 2001] and economic [Howkins 2001; Florida 2002] development associated with cultural and urban planning, and attraction and retention of creative human capital in cities. Although research is mainly focused on large cities, studies have corroborated the positive impacts of culture on small and medium-sized cities [Bianchini 1995; Bradley and Hall 2006; Breitbart and Stanton 2007; Evans and Foord 2006; Miles 2006]. Eventually, they contribute to the level of participatory

cultural practices that, in the long term, generate and feed participatory dynamics and governance in the city, fostering intersectoral articulations and cooperation between actors, and forming an inclusive framework for sustainable development [Ferreira and Duxbury 2017]. Their dynamics and actions benefit from the collaborative and sharing basis, among multiple agents, inherent to cultural activity embodied in formal and informal cooperation networks [Correia, Ferreira, Abreu 2017].

Methodology

This paper presents a comparative analysis of two case studies from Latvia and Portugal, focusing on the role of creative intermediaries in small cities in relation to creative entrepreneurship and urban regeneration. A multi-method ethnographic approach was applied, combining several qualitative methods.

Document analysis was used to understand institutional narratives, public discourse, and organisational practices. Aimee Grant [2018] highlights the value of documents in ethnographic studies, particularly in understanding literate societies and institutional behaviour. Reviewed materials included policy documents (*Cēsis Municipality Cultural Development Strategy 2030*), project reports (*Creative Industries in Small Towns: Potential and Contribution to Sustainability*), and internal documents from both hubs.

Site visits are a valuable qualitative method for observing the physical and social dynamics of a place. Lawrence, Keiser, and Levoie [2003] describe evaluative site visits as a method for collecting observational and experiential data to assess program implementation and outcomes. Fieldwork was conducted in both cities between 2021 and 2023, allowing for direct observation of the physical spaces, activities, and interactions within the hubs and their surrounding urban environments.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives, while maintaining thematic consistency. Following the approaches of Bryman [2012] and Galletta [2013], interviews captured the views of hub managers, resident creatives, local policymakers (including the Vice-Mayor of Cēsis), and community partners.

Participant observation provided an immersive understanding of the hubs' everyday dynamics. Following Boccagni and Schrooten [2018], this method offered insight into informal relationships and lived practices. Researchers attended co-creation workshops, public events, and informal gatherings to understand the relational dimensions of creative intermediation.

This study adopts an analytical model that combines macro, meso, and micro-level perspectives to explore culture- and creativity-led urban regeneration in small cities. Based on the works of Comunian, Hrac, and England [2018], Munro [2017], and Jakob and van Heur [2014], the analysis is structured around three interconnected dimensions. See Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of the role of creative intermediaries

Micro level	Meso level	Macro level
Operational practices	Networks, partnerships, and institutional positioning	Urban regeneration
What activities and actions do they do? <i>training, skill-building for cultural and creative entrepreneurship, organisational management, financial sustainability</i>	How do they position themselves? <i>supporting the emergence of new intermediaries, strengthening collaboration, encouraging dialogue between creative actors and policymakers</i>	What kind of outputs are provided by their action? <i>contributions to social, cultural, economic, and environmental regeneration</i>

At the micro level, the focus is on the operational practices of creative intermediaries, including training, skill-building for cultural and creative entrepreneurship, and ensuring organisational sustainability through diverse funding sources such as public support, private investment, and EU programmes. The meso level examines how these intermediaries build networks, form partnerships, and position themselves within the local ecosystem. This includes supporting the emergence of new intermediaries, strengthening collaboration, and encouraging dialogue between creative actors and policymakers. Finally, at the macro level, the analysis considers the broader impact of these efforts on urban regeneration, looking at how creative activity contributes to social, cultural, economic, and environmental renewal. By connecting these levels, the model offers a comprehensive understanding of the role creative intermediaries play in shaping regeneration processes in smaller urban contexts.

Case studies

Skola6 is a creative hub and coworking space located in the small city of Cēsis, Latvia. Serving as a focal point for the creative industries, it primarily operates in product design, graphic design, and fashion design. In collaboration with the local municipality, Skola6 runs a design laboratory offering tailored business consultations in areas such as product development, business modelling, design, prototyping, and the use of emerging technologies. It also organises seminars and lectures on design thinking and business development, targeting NGOs, public institutions, and educational organisations to foster knowledge exchange and capacity building. Daily activities include coworking, consultations, and design lab services for local businesses and creatives. In partnership with Neredzīgo kvartāls, Skola6 is expanding to create a new creative quarter, increasing workspace availability for its residents. As part of the SOUP movement, it also contributes to community crowdfunding initiatives, highlighting its grassroots engagement. Skola6 collaborates on a European co-project

assessing the impact of community initiatives. In cooperation with the Cēsis City Council, the hub organises grant competitions for local entrepreneurs, offering financial support alongside expert consultations and project development. It also works with the Vidzeme Planning Region to establish an audiovisual studio, further strengthening support for local businesses. It actively supports collaboration across the creative and entrepreneurial sectors, encouraging the growth of its residents' ideas and businesses. In 2023, Skola6 supported around 57 creatives.

SILOS Contentor Criativo (Portugal) is a bottom-up creative hub located in Caldas da Rainha, Portugal. Established in 2010, in a former flour mill, it holds studios for artists and creatives, an event room and an exhibition gallery, providing affordable workspace and hosting a wide range of cultural, scientific, and entrepreneurial events. Its core functions are incubation and capacity building for the creative sector, support for the performing arts, strengthening of local commerce, and fostering community engagement. In 2023, the hub hosted 32 creatives in 27 studios. Therefore, SILOS undertakes several initiatives to support local creatives, especially those at the early stage of their careers—such as graduates of the Higher School Art and Design (ESAD.CR) – working as a starting point for their professional endeavours, often moving on to more specialized spaces or new opportunities as their careers progress. In December 2022, the Training School for Young Creators was launched, as a pilot project. A non-formal education program that aims to train young creators for the creative market by topics such as intellectual property, copyright, digital marketing, brand management or accounting. In terms of the management model, the hub is run by its founder and executive director Nicola Henriques as a business. Due to management and development constraints within the cultural sector, in 2013, a group of stakeholders created Destino Caldas, a nonprofit cultural association to support and expand SILOS activity. This has broadened the type of initiatives and funding instruments through a hybrid management model with a business and nonprofit framework ensuring the long-term sustainability of the hub.

Results and discussion

Building skills and sustaining organisations

At the micro level, the analysis focuses on the operational practices of creative intermediaries, including how they build skills and entrepreneurial capacities in local creative communities and ensure the financial sustainability of their organisations. The following subsections examine these two aspects: Training and skills for cultural and creative entrepreneurship (CCE) and Financial sustainability of creative hubs. Together, these practices provide the foundation for intermediaries to connect outward at the meso level.

Training and skills towards the direction of CCE

In the context of small cities, creative intermediaries operate through two interrelated dimensions – individuals and organizations, each contributing in distinct ways to the development of training and skills for CCE. The case studies of SILOS in Caldas da Rainha and Skola6 in Cēsis illustrate how these dimensions function in tandem to support local creative ecosystems. At the organizational level, both SILOS and Skola6 serve as institutional intermediaries that structure and deliver capacity-building initiatives. SILOS exemplifies a bottom-up, community-rooted model of creative intermediation. Its Training School for Young Creators pilot project reflects a sustained commitment to non-formal education. This initiative equips emerging creatives with essential entrepreneurial skills. Through strategic partnerships with incubators and other stakeholders, SILOS provides a comprehensive framework for professionalization and market readiness, particularly for early-career artists and creators.

Skola6, by contrast, operates within a more formalized and policy-aligned framework, closely linked to the strategic goals of the Cēsis City Council. Its collaboration with the organization “Design Elevator” and the implementation of the “Design Lab” program reflect a partnership-based approach to training. Skola6 offers masterclasses, seminars, and business consultations, and organizes an entrepreneurship contest for local schools. These activities are designed to foster entrepreneurial thinking among students and the broader community, with a particular emphasis on product design and business modelling. Unlike SILOS, Skola6 does not provide mentoring for broader entrepreneurial groups, as this role is assigned to the national Investment and Development Agency of Latvia.

While organizational structures provide the necessary infrastructure for training, individual creative intermediaries are essential in bringing these structures to life. At SILOS, the founder and executive director, along with mentors and facilitators, act as key enablers of knowledge transfer. Their embeddedness in the local creative scene allows them to identify emerging needs and tailor training programs accordingly. These individuals serve not only as educators but also as role models, bridging the gap between artistic practice and entrepreneurial engagement.

Similarly, at Skola6, individual intermediaries such as the hub manager and board members, many of whom are also active in local governance or education, act as connectors between policy, practice, and community. Their dual roles enable them to mediate between institutional priorities and grassroots needs, ensuring that training initiatives remain contextually relevant and inclusive. These individuals function as cultural translators, helping participants navigate the complexities of creative work, business development, and community engagement. Together, SILOS

and Skola6 demonstrate complementary approaches to CCE development. SILOS emphasizes deep, sustained engagement with creatives through long-term mentoring and capacity-building programs, while Skola6 adopts a broader outreach model that targets a wider audience, including students and community members. These distinct strategies highlight the value of both organizational infrastructure and individual agency in fostering resilient and adaptive creative ecosystems in small urban contexts.

Financial sustainability of the organisation

The financial sustainability of creative hubs in small cities depends not only on institutional design but also on the strategic actions and relational capacities of the individuals who bring these structures to life. In the cases of SILOS and Skola6, both organizational and individual creative intermediaries play essential roles in securing and managing diverse funding streams, aligning with local development agendas, and navigating the challenges of long-term viability.

At the organizational level, SILOS operates through a hybrid management model that combines business and non-profit frameworks. This allows the hub to diversify its revenue sources, including studio and event space rentals, ticketed events, municipal support, and competitive project funding. The organizational model reflects a bottom-up approach, rooted in the local creative community and responsive to its evolving needs. SILOS's close partnership with the Municipality of Caldas da Rainha further enhances its strategic positioning, allowing it to align its activities with broader territorial development goals while maintaining operational autonomy. This dual orientation – community-driven yet institutionally connected – positions SILOS as a flexible and resilient intermediary capable of adapting to shifting funding landscapes.

Skola6, by contrast, exemplifies a mixed funding model that integrates public and private resources. As both a municipal institution and a non-governmental organization, Skola6 is uniquely positioned to access a wide range of funding opportunities, including subsidies from the Cēsis City Council, income from coworking space rentals and consultations, and EU project funding. This dual status enables the organization to serve as a formal intermediary within the city's strategic plan for creative industries, while also maintaining the agility of a grassroots initiative. However, Skola6 also faces structural challenges, particularly related to the renovation of its premises, which are protected as architectural heritage. The financial and regulatory demands of maintaining such a space highlight the complexities of sustaining creative infrastructure in small urban contexts. While organizational frameworks provide the scaffolding for financial sustainability, individual creative intermediaries play a crucial role in operationalizing these models. At SILOS, the founder and executive director plays a central role in securing funding, managing

partnerships, and articulating the hub's vision in ways that resonate with funders and policymakers. This individual leadership is critical in navigating the bureaucratic and relational dimensions of funding acquisition, particularly in competitive or fragmented cultural policy environments.

Similarly, at Skola6, individual actors such as the hub manager and board members, many of whom hold positions in local government or cultural institutions, serve as key brokers between the organization and its funding ecosystem. Their involvement in both civic and creative networks enables them to advocate for the hub's interests, identify funding opportunities, and ensure alignment with municipal and regional development strategies. The long-term financial planning initiative, launched in 2013, aimed to reduce dependency on municipal support, reflecting a proactive and strategic orientation often driven by individual vision and leadership. The interplay between organizational design and individual agency shapes the financial sustainability of SILOS and Skola6. While both hubs benefit from municipal support, their approaches differ in terms of autonomy, integration, and strategic orientation. SILOS maintains a more independent, community-led model that complements municipal goals, whereas Skola6 is more directly embedded within local governance structures.

In both hubs, financial sustainability results from the interplay between institutional structure and personal agency. SILOS maintains a more autonomous, community-led model that complements public objectives, while Skola6 is more embedded within local governance frameworks. In each case, the effectiveness of financial strategies depends not only on access to funding but on the ability of intermediaries to activate and align resources in support of creative ecosystems. Creative intermediaries play a crucial role in the sustainability of creative organisations, particularly in small urban areas where institutional support and market opportunities are often limited [Eglīte and Kalēja 2024]. Their deep integration into local networks enables them to identify emerging needs, interpret policy frameworks, and foster trust among stakeholders. In doing so, they not only ensure the operational continuity of creative hubs but also influence their developmental paths, whether through launching training programmes, securing funding, or advocating for inclusive cultural policies.

Networking, partnerships, and positioning of the organisation

At the meso level, the emphasis shifts from internal practices to the outward-facing role of creative intermediaries in building networks and partnerships. This level highlights how intermediaries establish their institutional positioning, mediate between different actors, and strengthen cross-sectoral ties within local and regional ecosystems. As creative intermediaries increasingly position themselves as key agents within the cultural and creative ecosystems of small cities, their influence extends

beyond individual initiatives to shape broader urban and institutional dynamics. At the meso and macro levels, their roles in fostering networks, building partnerships, and mediating between diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, educational institutions, and local communities, become critical levers for systemic change. This section examines the anticipated outcomes of such intermediation, specifically how these actors contribute to the emergence of new intermediaries, the expansion of collaborative networks, and the strengthening of cross-sectoral ties. By examining the positioning and strategic engagement of creative hubs like SILOS and Skola6, we gain insight into how creative intermediaries not only support entrepreneurship and innovation but also catalyse socially embedded and policy-relevant inclusive urban regeneration processes.

In Portugal, SILOS maintains a strategic partnership with the Municipality of Caldas da Rainha and the Higher School of Arts and Design (ESAD.CR). It collaborates with local and national cultural organisations, tourism entrepreneurs, creative tourism initiatives, incubators, and universities engaged in research and development. SILOS plays a pivotal role in connecting local authorities, institutions, and communities through networking and collaborative approaches. In Latvia, the city of Cēsis aims to foster and sustain networks between the City Council and the local community. Skola6 plays a crucial role in executing this strategy. As a creative intermediary, Skola6 not only facilitates connections between policymakers, the City Council, and the local community but also encourages its residents to adopt similar roles. It actively identifies local individuals who can act as creative intermediaries, cataloguing their skills and areas of expertise in a shared document accessible to those seeking partners for creative or business ventures.

The leadership of Skola6 embodies this mediating role. Its manager, Amanda Strigele, is an active creative intermediary, as are board members Jānis Kīnasts, founder of Cēsis Pluriversity, and Dace Eihenbauma, manager of the Development Department in the Cēsis City Council. Other key supporters include the artist residence “Rucka”, and Atis Egliņš - Eglītis, the head of the City Administration, who actively supports Skola6 and the broader creative development of Cēsis.

Skola6 also extends its network beyond Cēsis. It collaborates with the European Creative Hubs Network and partners with the Latvian governmental organization, the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA), and its Creative Industries Incubator in Riga. The hub emphasizes the importance of informal networks and communication by organizing community-building activities such as resident breakfasts, film evenings, and social events.

SILOS primarily provides workspaces and nurtures creativity for artists in the early stages of their careers. Its close relationship with ESAD.CR and its role in urban and territorial regeneration underscore its focus on attracting and retaining

young talent and revitalizing urban spaces. In contrast, Skola6 operates as a creative hub and coworking space with a broader scope, encompassing product, graphic, and fashion design. It emphasizes business consultations and design thinking while serving as a strategic executor of Cēsis City Council's creative policies. The hub benefits from municipal co-funding and focuses on bridging the gap between the policy-making and creative sectors. While SILOS exemplifies a bottom-up approach with a focus on local creators' community development and culture-led urban regeneration, Skola6 adopts a more structured approach aligned with local government strategies and the broader creative industries.

Both hubs rely heavily on networking, using informal events to connect policy-makers, creative professionals, and the community. SILOS fosters community and institutional ties, whereas Skola6 employs a combination of formal and informal strategies to mediate between diverse stakeholders, reflecting their respective organizational objectives and contexts.

Culture and urban regeneration

At the macro level, the analysis addresses the broader impacts of creative intermediaries on small-city regeneration, including their contributions to social, cultural, economic, and environmental revitalization. The activities carried out by SILOS consistently integrate social, cultural, and economic dimensions. Their primary objectives include strengthening the local community through activation and engagement in various projects and activities, fostering and promoting cultural and artistic endeavours by supporting local artists and creators, revitalizing and bolstering local commerce to ensure the survival and sustainability of the creative community market, and promoting culture-based and creative tourism experiences within the city. From an environmental perspective, SILOS prioritizes urban regeneration through the renovation of abandoned or underutilized buildings, the revitalization and appropriation of public spaces, the restoration and cultivation of green spaces in the city, and the promotion of sustainable daily practices, including reducing, reusing, and recycling.

Socially, Skola6, in collaboration with the art space "Mala" and the association "Be the Light," supports community well-being through initiatives such as a community fridge. This project enables local residents to donate surplus food, which can then be made available to those in need. The SOUP project, with its local crowdfunding activities, is recognized as a significant effort toward social regeneration. Culturally, Skola6 raises awareness about the local creative industries and their contribution to community well-being by organizing creative film evenings, cultural events, and masterclasses. Economically, it plays a key role in educating and empowering local creative entrepreneurs, co-organizing local grant competitions

for business initiatives, and collaborating with the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia. The residents of Skola6 are not only economically active but also contribute to the local economy by creating businesses, generating profit, and paying taxes, positioning themselves as creative business professionals rather than charity organizations.

Environmentally, Skola6, in cooperation with board member Jānis Kīnasts organizes Cēsis Pluriversity, a project focused on local regeneration and environmental sustainability. This initiative also serves as a local representative of the New European Bauhaus movement, highlighting innovative and sustainable approaches to community development. By surfacing infrastructural inequalities, such as heritage renovation constraints at Skola6 and access limitations at SILOS, this study further contributes to critiques of the “creative city” paradigm [Jayne et al., 2010; García, 2005]. It highlights the limitations of scaling such models without considering the socio-material conditions of smaller cities.

While SILOS is characterized by its emphasis on building renovation, such as transforming a segment of an old flour mill into a thriving creative hub, promoting cultural and creative tourism, and dynamizing local commerce and public space with activities such as the “Bazar à Noite” creative market, Skola6 adopts a more community-centred approach to regeneration. This is evident in its initiatives, such as the community fridge, the SOUP crowdfunding project for local initiatives, and the promotion of environmental education through Cēsis Pluriversity. SILOS primarily focuses on urban renewal and cultural events, whereas Skola6 integrates social and environmental initiatives into its urban regeneration efforts. This research complements Munro’s [2017] findings on soft skills and intermediary support structures in the creative economy. SILOS and Skola6 serve as grounded examples of localised, non-formal education that foster entrepreneurial capability, social cohesion, and civic innovation.

Conclusions

This research helps to fill existing gaps in the literature by contributing new empirical evidence on creative intermediaries in small-city contexts. At the same time, it reinforces and expands several established strands of scholarly work on cultural and creative intermediaries. The strategic role of intermediaries, as outlined by Virani [2019] and Jakob and van Heur [2014], is evident in both case studies, where SILOS and Skola6 function not only as infrastructure providers but also as civic translators and community connectors. This supports Smith Maguire and Matthews’ [2012] argument that intermediaries act as agents of negotiation and power, mediating between cultural production and urban transformation. The comparison between SILOS and Skola6 highlights the role of creative intermediaries as pivotal agents for

urban change, showcasing how these organizations foster regeneration and create new opportunities for the cultural and creative economy (CCE) through distinct approaches. SILOS exemplifies infrastructure renovation by transforming part of an old flour mill into a creative hub, focusing on urban regeneration and promoting cultural tourism. In contrast, Skola6 adopts a more community-centred approach, integrating social and environmental initiatives such as the community fridge, SOUP crowdfunding for local projects, and environmental education via Cēsis Pluriversity.

Moreover, the empirical evidence from Skola6 and SILOS deepens the analytical framework proposed by Comunian, Hrac, and England [2018], who emphasize a multilevel approach to understanding intermediaries. By applying their micro-meso-macro lens in small-city contexts, this study demonstrates how local intermediaries act across institutional layers – embedding themselves in community networks (micro), building cross-sector alliances (meso), and aligning their missions with broader regeneration goals (macro). Perry [2019] states that local cultural bodies and intermediaries cement their role in urban regeneration beyond top-down policies since they work within “grey spaces” between grassroots and official planning, translating culture into forms of community engagement, value creation, and urban innovation. Although both hubs benefit from municipal funding, they differ in their relationship with local governance. Skola6 is closely aligned with the strategic objectives of the Cēsis City Council, implementing its creative industry policies directly. SILOS, by contrast, retains a more autonomous, bottom-up structure that complements public policy without being dependent on it. Despite these differences, both organisations face challenges related to their activities, sectoral needs, and long-term sustainability. SILOS focuses on intellectual property, branding, and market readiness through its Training School for Young Creators, while also strengthening the local economy and public space through community-building and its “Bazar à Noite” creative market. Skola6 places greater emphasis on local entrepreneurship, product design, and educational initiatives aimed at a broader community.

These distinct yet complementary approaches underscore their shared reliance on networking and collaboration, as both organizations use informal and formal events to connect policymakers, creative professionals, and local stakeholders. SILOS builds community and institutional ties, while Skola6 mediates between diverse groups to bridge gaps and align with broader government strategies, illustrating different but effective methods of supporting creativity and innovation. Together, these findings provide a model for analysing creative intermediaries across Europe, identifying their similarities and differences to inform policy and decision-making at both national and European levels, ultimately highlighting their critical role in shaping vibrant and sustainable creative ecosystems.

Acknowledgment

The contributions of PhD candidate Tiago Vinagre de Castro were written under his research project “*INTERMEDIA – Cultural intermediaries in urban regeneration in small cities*” (2020.08826.BD), funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT).

The contributions of Dr.oec. Ieva Zemīte and PhD candidate Žanete Eglīte were written within the scope of the project “Rethinking Creative Cities: Networks, Intermediaries, Development Prospects/ REPRINT” (No. lzp-2021/1-0588), funded by the Latvian Council of Science.

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