

Lifestyle Meets Market: Bohemian Entrepreneurs in Creative Industries

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By linking lifestyle studies with creative industries research, this article opens a new perspective on creativity and innovation management. We argue that artists in the creative industries have to bridge the gap between artistic work and the economic need for self-management, and that a bohemian lifestyle essentially supports them in doing so. The bohemian lifestyle, which is characterized by a devotion to art for art's sake, is an essential source for work motivation of artists and an increasing number of other creative workers. The article draws upon an empirical study into artistic work and employment in German theatres. Enacting a bohemian lifestyle enables actors as 'bohemian entrepreneurs' to integrate intensive self-management and self-marketing as well as subordination of private life to work into their artistic work life. Analysing the link between lifestyle and creative work is crucial for understanding the way in which creative workers become artists and, at the same time, entrepreneurs of their creative talent.

Introduction

Creative industries are said to be a special sphere of economic production: art and artistic egos rule, managers are 'the enemies', motley crews turn production processes into mayhem, time flies and individual success is a result of God-given talent and earthly-earned networks of contacts. As heterogeneous as these creative industries are, researchers and practitioners identified the conflict between creativity and control to be a fundamental issue in all of them (e.g. Alvarez et al. 2005; Caves 2000; Davis & Scase 2000; Howkins 2001; Jeffcutt & Pratt 2002; Sutton 2001). Creative work is reported to be spontaneous, unpredictable and following no strict rules, whereas interference with the market brings about the need to manage, plan and organize processes of creative production. Since creative industries depend on artistic motivation as their primary resource for economic production, these tensions have to be bridged at individual, organizational and field level. These tensions are mirrored in a more encompassing dichotomy, the antagonism between art and business (see also Caves 2000; Lampel, Lant & Shamsie 2000). Art as a sphere of aesthetic performance in its own right deliberately negates economic market orientation. It thrives not only on being art for art's sake,

but also on being non-economic (Bourdieu 1993, 1999).

The conflict between art and business and the resulting consequences can be studied most persuasively amongst those artists who have to market and manage their own labour power. A large number of workers in the creative industries are self-employed or – because of strong pressures on internal labour markets – quasi self-employed, and thus forced to self-manage their own artistic capabilities (cf. Blair, Grey & Randle 2001; Storey, Salaman & Platman 2005). These entrepreneurs of themselves have to integrate two identities: their identity as an artist, which provides them with work motivation and creative impetus, and their identity as a 'small firm' (Menger 1999), which enables them to make a living out of being an artist.

The aim of this article is to analyse how the gap between art and business, between being artist and self-entrepreneur, is bridged. We argue that in order to understand how artists perceive themselves as involved in the production of art for art's sake and at the same time manage themselves as market subjects, the phenomenon of lifestyle has to be considered. Most artists understand themselves as bohemians, living a lifestyle that is distinct and distinguished from the rest of society, especially the bourgeoisie and business.

Drawing on a qualitative study among German theatre artists, we will show that their bohemian lifestyle is central to artistic self-understanding, influences working life and allows integrating artistic and self-management activities. We will use the term 'bohemian entrepreneur' to describe this amalgamation of theatre actors' lifestyle with entrepreneurial practices of risk taking, allocation of individual creative resources and self-marketing.

However, neither the phenomenon of bohemian lifestyle nor our findings are confined to artists. As Brooks (2000) and Florida (2002) show, an increasing number of workers derive their work motivation from a – more or less extreme – bohemian lifestyle. Most of them work in creative or artistic businesses, and many are entrepreneurs of creative businesses or of their own labour talent (cf. Howkins 2001). Thus, analysing the bohemian practices that help to bridge the gap between artistic work and the economic need for self-management adds to our understanding of a phenomenon most relevant for the creative industries in general and for creative entrepreneurs in specific.

After describing the empirical research in the following section, we will introduce the concept of lifestyle and describe the characteristics of bohemian lifestyle in particular. The third section presents our empirical findings and explores the links between bohemian lifestyle and everyday work for German theatre artists. To conclude, we discuss the relevance of bohemian lifestyle for being an artistic self-entrepreneur in the creative industries.

Empirical Background

The article draws on qualitative empirical data and secondary data from a research project on German theatre conducted by the authors between 2000 and 2003. The overall aim of the project was to analyse various aspects of theatrical employment at the individual, organizational and industry levels. The German theatre system was chosen since its focus on projects results in a mix of self-employment and temporary employment that is likely to become widespread in other project-focused industries too (see also Davis & Scase 2000; Lampel et al. 2000). For this article, we have focused on the individual employment situation of creative staff and mainly draw on data from semi-structured in-depth interviews (cf. King 1994; Miles & Huberman 1994) with theatre actors, theatre managers and directors. Within this group, 30 interviews were carried out and analysed along categories such as

career aims, work motivation, perception of work situations, flexibility and spatial mobility and enactment of work–life boundaries. Most of the interviewees were employed by three repertory theatres, which stage a different play every night (the repertory system), derive around 80 percent of their annual budgets from public subsidies and rank as one of the approximately ten most artistically renowned theatres in Germany.

In order to relate the interview data to the broader structural context, representatives of the national employers' association (Deutscher Bühnenverein) and employees' association (Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger), the state-run work agency for actors (ZBF) and a state-run theatre school were interviewed as experts (see also Haunschild 2003). Additional information was collected in participant observation, which comprised attending premiere celebrations, gatherings after shows, rehearsals and other cultural events (e.g. readings), as well as informal discussions mainly with freelance artists. To validate the subjective information collected in the interviews, interview material was contrasted with information from secondary data sources such as statistical reports (e.g. by Deutscher Bühnenverein and Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger), media coverage on the German theatre industry and artists in newspapers and practitioner journals, and information given on the websites of theatres and intermediary organizations.

Our findings are derived from several rounds of independent and joint interpretations of the empirical data. To ensure intersubjective validity, research assistants were included in these discussions, and feedback sessions with respondents were carried out to validate the findings. From our interviews with theatre artists, the notion of lifestyle emerged as a dominant issue in individual work and employment. To verify this finding, interviews with experts, secondary sources and literature on artistic or bohemian lifestyle were analysed with respect to the relationship between bohemian lifestyle and artistic work. Indicative phrases from the interviews (indicated with inverted commas) are used to illustrate our findings.

La Vie de Bohème

Since the nineteenth century, an artistic lifestyle has emerged that differs significantly from lifestyles in other societal segments. This so-called bohemian lifestyle is marked by

egocentrism and a deliberate contradiction of bourgeois norms and values. In modern times, the ideas of praising art for art's sake and negating bourgeois world views, and thus the main point of reference for Western society in general and the economic sphere specifically, have been central to artistic identities (Bourdieu 1999: 96–103; see also Boltanski & Chiapello 1999; Brooks 2000). In this section, we will introduce the concept of lifestyle in general, and we will outline the historical roots and the main characteristics of the bohemian lifestyle as described in the literature. Lastly, we will discuss the relevance of a bohemian lifestyle for artists and creative workers today.

Lifestyles represent collectively shared patterns of perception, taste and behaviour, which are usually seen as rooted in social class and milieu (Bourdieu 1984; Weber 1972). In 'La distinction', his famous study of French society, Bourdieu has shown how social background is linked to taste (clothing, sports, food etc.), attitude and verbal and non-verbal patterns of expression. Studies of lifestyle focus on societal diversity and seek to identify societal sub-groups according to their distinguishable tastes, perceptions and behaviours (see, for example, Bourdieu 1984; Devine 1997; Schulze 1992; Vester 2005).

Lifestyles have been shaped significantly by the emergence of work organizations. Industrialization and the development of bureaucratic organizations (together with the supporting institutions such as social security systems, education systems etc.) 'created' social groups sharing a social and/or professional background as well as a certain lifestyle: factory/blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, public servants, sales people, senior managers and so on (Biernacki 1985; Bourdieu & Boltanski 1981; Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter 1956; Deutschmann 2002; Goldthorpe et al. 1968; Hartmann 1995; Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst 2005; see also, for example, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*). Thus, economic production and the phenomenon of lifestyles have long been linked – although their relationship has not been researched systematically.

Recently, though, the lifestyle of creative workers has become a focus of organization theory and management research (Davis & Scase 2000; Eikhof & Haunschild 2004; Florida 2002; Howkins 2001). In a broad sense, this lifestyle can be characterized as bohemian. The name 'bohemian' goes back to groups of 'gypsies' consisting of loiterers, impostors, beggars, vagabonds and tramps – called bohemians because of their ostensible local origin in Bohemia (Stein 1981). It was Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (1888;

first published in Paris, France, 1847–1849 as a magazine series and in 1951 as a book) that first expressed a certain way of living life as an artist beyond mainstream lifestyles. This bohemian lifestyle, as described by Murger (see also Kreuzer 1968; Stein 1981), was mainly characterized by its distinction from and often deliberate turning away from middle-class (bourgeois) conventions. In contrast to these conventions a bohemian life was marked by principles or ideas such as spontaneity, sporadic employment, lack of income, continuous improvisation, by living from hand to mouth and by trying to enjoy life from day to day instead of subordinating to fixed (work) schedules. Work in particular was not regarded as a means to earn one's living but as a vehicle for self-fulfilment. Since most bohemians were artists, self-fulfilment in work was tantamount to artistic expression and the participation in the art world for art's sake (Becker 1982, Caves 2000). The overall work motivation was to integrate work and life into life as a work of art itself.

Since bohemian clusters existed all across Europe, for example in Montmartre, Berlin, Vienna, Schwabing in Munich, Prague or Ascona, bohemians were often not nomads in a strict sense. Rather, they used to live in transient or transient-looking accommodation (the proverbial mansards for example). Groups of bohemians were heterogeneous but the typical member was a young, not yet successful (male) artist. Despite a high degree of individualism and the cultivation of selfishness and narcissism among this group there also was a strong feeling of belonging to a social milieu (Stein 1981). This combination of selfishness, collectivism and non-permanence makes it possible to understand the vital role of public space to enable continuous communication with other bohemians: coffee houses, pubs, gin palaces and restaurants.

According to Kreuzer (1968), the societal situation and position of artists at the beginning of the nineteenth century was essential for the emergence of a bohemian lifestyle. On the one hand, there was a certain liberal attitude among the bourgeois class that provided tolerance towards these forms of living; on the other hand, the bohemian lifestyle helped an 'artistic working class' to develop a self-identity at the margins of society. Therefore, the bohemian lifestyle is not only a negation of societal values but also a societal product or element. Many members of the bourgeoisie condemned and envied bohemians at the same time.

Undoubtedly, the outlined stereotype of a bohemian lifestyle still exists as a reference point for life scripts of artists (and would-be artists). However, societies change and, there-

fore, relational positions in the social space underlie a process of alteration. Artistic production itself has become more industrialized because of the possibility of technical reproduction (Benjamin 1977; Davis & Scase 2000; Smith & McKinley 2005) and a growing economic pressure on the market for artistic goods (Becker 1982; Caves 2000). Therefore, artists are more integrated in complex production processes with a high degree of labour division. At the same time, flexible forms of work have become widespread in non-artistic industries, too (Cappelli 1995), making work arrangements of artists and non-artists similar. Additionally, more and more creative or knowledge workers adapt elements of an artistic lifestyle (Brooks 2000, see also examples in Howkins 2001). This spreading of a (quasi-)bohemian principles and lifestyle co-evolves with flexible forms of work and a desire for a higher degree of self-actualization at work (Boltanski & Chiapello 1999; Florida 2002).

Therefore, it is today more difficult to identify bohemians in the classical sense (see also Stein 1981: 10). Whereas the traditional notion of bohemian applies to irregularly or non-employed artists only, the contemporary understanding of 'bohemian' is broader. New fields of artistic activity have emerged (film, video, photography, web design etc.) and work arrangements of artists vary today. Artists may work on the basis of an open-ended contract (orchestra musicians), on a temporary or project basis (actors, authors) or without any employer (painters or sculptors). One thing has not changed though: for artists, lifestyle and work activities are strongly linked. A bohemian lifestyle helps to amalgamate work and life and to follow only the logic of *l'art pour l'art* in doing so. Stable employment relationships as a means to earn one's living may be part of this, but are usually frowned upon. The exploration of the role of bohemian lifestyle in artists' life is thus essential for a deeper understanding of self-entrepreneurs in the creative industries.

In the following section, we will outline practices by which theatre actors, as 'bohemian entrepreneurs', combine bohemian lifestyle and self-management. We will use this example to show the way in which art and economy are intertwined in the creative industries and how creative entrepreneurs deal with the resulting tensions.

Bohemian Entrepreneurs in Theatre

Theatre actors in German repertory theatres either work as freelancers with contracts for single productions or on temporary contracts

as ensemble members. The latter have been the focus of our research, since ensemble membership is the main career aim of professional actors in Germany. An average repertory theatre employs a group of 25–40 actors on temporary contracts, the collectively negotiated *Normalvertrag Bühne*. These contracts run for one year and are automatically prolonged for another year if neither party to the contract terminates them. The theatre management casts plays with ensemble members, who will then rehearse for the premieres during daytime and put on repertory plays at night. In addition to their ensemble work, many actors engage in projects outside the theatre, for instance in much better paid TV or film productions.

Compared to the Anglo-Saxon theatrical system, ensemble contracts grant German actors considerable job security. Nevertheless, ensemble actors are notably active as marketers and entrepreneurs of their own labour power. They experience high pressures on internal and external labour markets (see also Becker 1982; Menger 1999) since (i) only few roles per play offer the opportunity to gain artistic reputation through outstanding performance and everyone in the ensemble competes for these roles; (ii) role assignments are influenced by reputation gained in theatre-external projects; (iii) theatre management can terminate ensemble contracts easily, with more than enough other actors in the market looking for an ensemble contract; and (iv) theatre management regularly hires freelance actors as guests for a play if they consider none of the ensemble members good enough or suitable for the role.

The effective average contract duration of ensemble members equals roughly half the average length of employment relationships (five years for established actors, two to three for beginners). As an actor's career is defined by moves from smaller to larger theatres, actors have to be mobile in terms of place at least during the first 20 years of their career. In addition to the flexibility required by the tight time schedule of daily rehearsals and nightly shows, short-term mobility is essential when actors work on several projects at the same time: Well-cast actors may shoot a film or rehearse for a guest role during the day several hundred kilometres from the place of their nightly show.

Our interviewees reported their daily work life to be influenced heavily by calculating their reputation within the occupational community. Indeed, despite all claims of contributing to *l'art pour l'art*, they were explicitly concerned with sustaining and increasing their employability by strategic networking,

moving to a more prestigious theatre, acting as a guest actor in a high-status festival production or starring in a movie. Their constant calculation of investments and returns for all of their work relationships and their allocation of resources as time, energy and artistic creativity justify interpreting actors as self-employed employees or entrepreneurs of themselves, respectively (cf. Eikhof & Haunschild 2004; similar accounts of the market situation of painters and other artists are given by Becker 1982; White & White 1993).

In addition to the self-entrepreneurial activities, a second, equally strong, characteristic of actors' work practices became obvious from the empirical data. To a large degree, the actors' behaviour and verbal statements match the bohemian lifestyle as described above. Our interviewees tended to regard their job as a vocation rather than an occupation and felt called to devote their working life to the production of theatre art as a greater good. For a lot of them, a career in acting has been a childhood dream, and often they could not even imagine working in another occupation. Our study shows bohemian principles to be most apparent in two fields of the actors' working life: accounts of daily working life, and subordination of private life to work.

Accounts of Daily Working Life

When describing their daily work life, our respondents did not employ terms commonly used for describing work, such as 'boss', 'subordinate' or 'personnel management'. Many had trouble (and some failed) to apply these terms to their own work relationships, usually ending up categorizing the theatre manager as 'some kind of boss'. These labelling difficulties were accompanied by an interpretation of hierarchy that judges individuals' positions according to their artistic impact. Actors work in co-operative (and project-based) relationships with directors and are usually required to offer their own interpretation of the roles rather than being told how to act. Consequently, the interviewees acknowledged directors' artistic influences on individual projects, but did not regard them as bosses in general. Theatre managers are responsible for a theatre's overall artistic outcome, but have little direct artistic influence on specific projects, and were thus not recognized as artistically superior by the actors either. Additionally, theatre actors did not talk of 'going into work', but of 'going into theatre' or 'going in for rehearsal'. Asked about success, all interviewees opted for 'being loved by theatre management, directors and critics' instead of high wages. They also stressed the friendship-

like nature of their relationships with fellow staff members. Summed up, in everyday life they did not present themselves as workers in the usual, slightly negatively connotated sense of labourers but as contributors to the production of *l'art pour l'art*.

Subordination of Private Life to Work

In various aspects, our interviewees subordinated most private and personal aspects of life to their work. They reported buying only furniture with which they could easily move house avoiding financial commitments such as real estate ownership or life insurances and choosing sports activities that enhance stage fitness. They recounted (re-)scheduling meetings with friends only short-term according to the next day's rehearsal schedule, and accepted even family troubles and divorces as results of spatial mobility with an explicit devotion to theatre. According to our respondents, theatre actors in general have few friends outside theatre, and even love relationships rarely transgress the occupational community. To actors, their artistic work justifies a lifestyle that to average citizens will seem restless, excessively work-dominated, and with respect to personal relationships, often very inconsiderate.

In these two fields in particular, but also in their work attitude in general, actors show practices that can thus be interpreted as elements of a bohemian lifestyle. Both the interviewees' deliberate verbal distinction from middle-class conventions and values (e.g. describing commuters as 'grey worn-out workers on the subway') and their willingness to be mobile and spontaneous and to follow project work around the country for art's sake strongly suggest that actors are driven by bohemian principles.

To analyse the relationship between self-entrepreneurship and bohemian lifestyle, it is most beneficial to study the actors' self-marketing of their labour power. On the one hand, bohemian principles include the deliberate rejection of economic principles and thus prohibit such economically driven behaviour. On the other hand, actors need to actively market their creative talent in order to be included in the production of art for art's sake. Both our interviews and participant observations revealed that actors deal with this contradiction by exerting their self-marketing through bohemian practices.

Just like 'old school bohemians', the actors used public spaces such as the theatre canteen or premier celebrations for gathering information and selling their labour power. Theatre

canteens and premiere celebrations are exchange forums for what at first glance seems to be daily theatre gossip, but is indeed vital information for a career in acting: who has cast whom for which project, who has sacked whom, who is planning which project and might be interested in new staff, which directors are going to be hired in the next season, that is, will affect future role assignments and should thus be schmoozed beforehand, whom did the theatre manager congratulate on a performance and to whom has he not spoken for several weeks. All this information keeps an individual actor up to date about his or her market value, future job possibilities and (potential) rivals. Canteen talk and premiere celebrations are used to make and maintain contacts, and to secure future employment. Theatre artists of all kinds try to get involved with people who might be able to offer jobs and career opportunities. Watching premiere celebrations from an upper balcony reveals clusters of artists carefully positioning themselves close to the influential people, waiting for an opportunity to edge into their conversation. As a rule of thumb, actors clustered around directors, whereas directors and authors clustered around theatre managers. Additionally, canteens and premiere celebrations are platforms on which acquaintances and alliances are publicly demonstrated. Being seen with an influential theatre manager, an award-winning director or a group of hip acting colleagues, stage designers and up-and-coming authors enhances the reputation of an actor or actresses as being successful. Consequently, artists have to 'avoid being seen with the wrong people', that is, unemployed actors or less successful directors.

Observed activity in these public spaces as well as stories told in interviews also show a typically bohemian combination of individualism and collectivity. On the one hand, actors understand, stylize (and sell) themselves as unique artists, emphasizing their uniqueness, for example, through extravagant clothing, typical gestures or habits such as preferences for special drinks or cigarettes. On the other hand, actors constantly referred to the occupational community as 'the theatre family', which they love and love being part of. They demonstrated closeness with others through gestures such as hugging and kissing, not only for hellos and goodbyes, but also throughout conversations or as good luck-rituals before a show. It goes without saying, though, that they take care to be seen hugging and kissing only the 'right' kind of people. Throughout all these activities, boundaries between work and private activities are so blurred that they tend to be invisible. But liv-

ing out bohemian principles, this poses little trouble for the actors.

These examples show how the bohemian lifestyle allows artists to integrate self-management activities into their artistic work life, and to market themselves without losing their artistic work motivation. Economic actions – such as marketing one's labour power or moving cities for a job – are carried out within typically bohemian practices – such as partaking in public events connected to art or living a nomad life – and can thus be camouflaged as part of the lifestyle of a bohemian entrepreneur rather than being a cold-blooded businessman. The idea of being part of a bohemian milieu, and sharing cultural rather than materialistic or economic values, is hence not only central to the actors' self-understanding, it also vitally backs up their high involvement with work and helps them to cope with disadvantages that other employees would find intolerable (e.g. short-term availability and mobility). Without the bohemian ambition to integrate all aspects of life into an individual life that is itself a work of art, devoted to *l'art pour l'art*, neither the continuous devotion to theatrical projects, which is seen as necessary to achieve certain artistic quality nor the self-management activities necessary for a career in acting could be ensured.

Conclusion

This article has shown that an analysis of creative entrepreneurs has to go beyond issues of individual creativity meeting managerial control in organizations. By including the more abstract antagonism of art versus business into the analysis, the bohemian lifestyle was identified as a concept contributing to the understanding and explanation of the link between individual behaviour of creative workers, and social structures (in other creative industries settings, trusted mediators fulfil similar functions, cf. Alvarez et al. 2005). By linking lifestyle studies with creative industries research, this article has opened a new perspective on creativity and innovation management.

We have analysed theatre actors as an example of the large number of workers who make their living as entrepreneurs of their artistic or creative talent in the creative industries. Our study has shown how their work life is shaped by both a considerable extent of self-management and by bohemian lifestyle. Although the creative industries can be understood as that part of the economy which depends on artistic motivation as its primary resource for production (cf. Eikhof & Haunschild 2006), the extent to which workers per-

ceive themselves as artists and are driven by bohemian principles varies. Nevertheless, since a growing number of workers in the creative industries draw work motivation from bohemian ideas (cf. Brooks 2000; Florida 2002), theatre actors can be studied as emblematic cases of how a bohemian lifestyle enables self-entrepreneurs in the creative industries to integrate artistic and self-management activities.

As the example of theatre artists reveals, creative and artistic workers show an extraordinarily high involvement with work. Long and irregular working hours are one aspect, but one that (a) is neither a unique feature of the creative industries, as it is also typical of, for example, hospital staff, airline crews or general managers, and (b) can be backed up by other, non-bohemian work motivations as well, for example by the bourgeois or protestant work ethic of conscientiousness. What is special, though, is the explicit devotion of all energy and aspects of life to work, combined with explicit self-management. Theatre artists bring not only artistic talent to the market but their whole personality (see also Menger 1999; Storr 1972). In entrepreneurial terms, they exploit their individual resources far more inclusively and thoroughly than workers in other industries. Contrary to long and irregular working hours, devotion to (artistic) work and the understanding of oneself as an artist rather than a responsible member of the family or society could not be justified by a bourgeois or protestant work ethic. Bohemian principles, though, endorse exactly such behaviour as the 'right' work-life attitude. Additionally, self-management can be carried out within activities perceived to be typically bohemian. The bohemian lifestyle allows integrating artistic work motivation with economic rationales and concerns about one's market value.

What also has to be taken into account is the special setting of the creative industries as an economic sphere. Although, as Kreuzer (1968) claims, the bohème as an intellectual community have succeeded in increasing their independence from the rest of society by setting their own standards, the creative industries evolved, providing a work environment in which economic principles of the market, added value, investment and return mingle with the artistic principles of individual genius, reputation, self-fulfilment and producing art for art's sake. A central reason for this co-existence is that, from an organization or industry perspective, bohemian principles play into the hands of economic profitability (see also Boltanski & Chiapello 1999): bohemian workers who cherish their independence do not care about, for example, costly long-term employment relationships, and art for

art's sake as a work motivation outperforms all organizational incentive schemes in terms of efficiency. Thus, the economic environment is conducive towards bohemian principles such as emphasis on individual performance, devotion to work, networking or the ideals of being mobile and moving from project to project in order to prevent deadlocks. As a result, self-employed workers in the creative industries do not have to see themselves as cold-blooded, hard-hearted entrepreneurs exploiting their very own individual creative potential. Their work context allows them to maintain a bohemian self-understanding, for which their work involvement simply means living out the bohemian principles of self-fulfilment and devotion to *l'art pour l'art* and managing themselves is part of being an artist. Enacting a bohemian lifestyle enables self-employed (employees) in the creative industries to be both artists and entrepreneurs of their creative talent.

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