



OPEN ACCESS

*CORRESPONDENCE

Anna Maria Ranczakowska,
✉ anna.ranczakowska@gmail.com

RECEIVED 24 April 2024

ACCEPTED 23 December 2024

PUBLISHED 03 February 2025

CITATION

Ranczakowska AM and
Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh K (2025) The
future is now: pioneering transformative
approaches in higher education within
creative fields.

Eur. J. Cult. Manag. Polic. 14:13171.
doi: 10.3389/ejcmp.2024.13171

COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Ranczakowska and Kuznetsova-
Bogdanovitsh. This is an open-access
article distributed under the terms of the
[Creative Commons Attribution License
\(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or
reproduction in other forums is
permitted, provided the original
author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are
credited and that the original
publication in this journal is cited, in
accordance with accepted academic
practice. No use, distribution or
reproduction is permitted which does
not comply with these terms.

The future is now: pioneering transformative approaches in higher education within creative fields

Anna Maria Ranczakowska^{1*} and
Kristina Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh²

¹School of Humanities, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia, ²Viljandi Culture Academy, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia

This study investigates transformative approaches in arts and arts management education, highlighting the urgency for adaptive pedagogies in response to the unprecedented disruptions caused by recent global crises. The impact of these crises has profoundly affected the arts and cultural sectors, emphasising the need for higher education to equip students with skills to navigate and lead through complex and evolving cultural, social and economical landscapes. Our research focuses on immersive learning experiences and transformative learning theories as crucial methodologies in fostering essential future skills like adaptability, critical thinking, and innovative problem-solving in higher education. By integrating transformative learning theory and UNESCO's model of future skills, we explore how such educational frameworks can profoundly influence students' abilities to address societal transitions effectively. This study draws on qualitative data from immersive learning experiences in arts universities and provides empirical insights into the pedagogical effectiveness of combining transformative learning with hands-on, real-world engagement. The findings advocate for an educational paradigm that not only transfers knowledge but also significantly enhances the resilience and inclusivity of future arts professionals. This research contributes to the discourse on higher education's role in cultivating creative leaders adept at navigating transitions towards more sustainable and inclusive cultural landscapes.

KEYWORDS

transformative learning, higher education, creative fields, skills for the future, global transitions

Introduction

In recent years, the global landscape has been dramatically reshaped by a series of unprecedented crises—ranging from wars and ecological disasters to pandemics and economic downturns. Among these, the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a particularly disruptive force, altering the fabric of societies worldwide. Its impact has

permeated various sectors, compelling a reevaluation of established norms and practices. Notably, the arts and culture sector, celebrated for its resilience and capacity for innovation, has not been immune to these challenges. The pandemic has unearthed the fragility, volatility, and unequal income distribution within the cultural value production chain, especially affecting live arts and cultural experiences, but also arts and arts management education. This period of turmoil has highlighted the urgent need for new methods of distribution and audience engagement, propelling a rapid pivot towards online platforms and streaming services. However, this shift has also magnified existing concerns around copyright, intellectual property rights, and the complexities introduced by advancements in artificial intelligence, raising fundamental questions about authorship and creativity at the heart of cultural production.

Parallel to these sector-specific challenges, the field of education, particularly arts management education, has encountered its own set of trials. The pandemic has accelerated a reconsideration of pedagogical approaches and educator skills (e.g., Dwivedi et al., 2020), emphasising the importance of learner-centeredness—an approach not new to education but now under renewed scrutiny (e.g., Sharaievska et al., 2022; Mishra et al., 2020). The relationships among learners, content, and learning methodologies moved into the spotlight, revealing a disconnection from real-world applicability and highlighting the struggle to translate educational outcomes into tangible skills and insights outside the classroom (e.g., Watermeyer et al., 2021; Carolan et al., 2020). This disjunction is particularly pronounced in international study programs, where diverse economic, social, and political contexts can amplify disparities and contribute to a sense of isolation and despair among students (e.g., Browning et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2021).

Arts universities among others were faced with the need to transition to online learning environments, quickly (and often clumsily) adapting the real life programmes to that new context. Cooperative learning of music students, for example, ensemble and choir practices, were entirely set aside or underwent significant alterations. Arts management learning, albeit not as dependent on “real sound and feel,” initially lost a big part of its co-creation too (e.g., Mishra et al., 2020). Amidst these challenges, the potential of the arts and culture sectors to drive collective transitions towards a more sustainable and inclusive future has never been more critical. The unique capacity of these sectors to navigate paradox, express fundamental human values, and foster community resilience is a catalyst for change (e.g., Rolling, 2021). Our research aims to explore the transformative potential of immersive learning experiences in creative fields’ education, guided by a theoretical framework that draws on transformative learning theory. Through this lens, we seek to understand how such educational experiences can equip students with future skills to navigate the complexities of the

contemporary cultural sector, foster resilience and adaptability, and ultimately contribute to the sector’s sustainability and inclusivity.

This study delves into the intersection of crises, culture and education, posing critical questions about the future of creative fields and arts management and the role of higher education in preparing the next generation of creative leaders and researchers. It does so by exploring the frameworks and tools for reaching the future skills necessary to address the global transitions taking place in the world (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023). As we navigate these turbulent times, the insights garnered from this investigation offers valuable guidance for educators, policymakers, and practitioners alike, charting a course towards a more resilient and vibrant cultural landscape. We offer a conceptual framework which allows Mezirow’s transformative learning and a model of future skills for global transitions offered by UNESCO applied into practical approach of immersive learning to be utilised as a theoretical and methodological tool to facilitate the meaningful preparation of creative leaders for the future that is emerging now.

Impact of crises on arts and culture and the responses to disruption

From natural disasters and ecological crises to economic downturns and pandemic, global crises have disrupted the status quo, influencing every aspect of human life. The arts and culture sector, often seen as a reflection of societal values and concerns, has been particularly affected. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, resulted in unprecedented closures of cultural institutions, cancellation of live performances, and the halting of community arts initiatives. These disruptions not only threatened the livelihoods of artists and cultural workers but also posed existential questions about the role and sustainability of arts and culture in society. In a short period of time, it became clear that mental wellbeing of people affected by the crises (including creative workers who were hit both by health problems as well as economic viability problems) suffered tremendously from the lack of social interaction, artistic escapism, reflective art practices, facilitate meaning making of overall experience of being human (e.g., Kuznetsova-Bogdanovits, 2022; Meadows, 2008).

In response to these crises, the arts and culture sector demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability (Ranczakowska, 2022). A significant body of literature has begun to document these responses, noting a pronounced shift towards digital platforms (i.e., Vlassis, 2021). Galleries, museums, and performance groups turned to online exhibitions, virtual tours, and streamed performances to maintain engagement with their audiences. Studies such as “Creativity and Arts in Digital Social Innovation” (Acomi

et al., 2023) have highlighted innovative practices in art creation and distribution, with artists and cultural organisations experimenting with new formats to reach their audiences, creative use of social media, and digital marketing tools to foster interactive and participatory experiences. While the pivot to digital platforms offered new opportunities for engagement and creativity, it also introduced a set of challenges. Industry reports such as *The impact of digital technology on arts and culture in the UK* (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2022) have increasingly focused on the complexities of the digital shift. Copyright concerns have intensified due to digital replication and distribution challenges, complicating intellectual property rights enforcement and sparking debate over balancing accessibility with creators' rights (Adams, 2023). Additionally, access inequalities, highlighted by the digital divide, worsen disparities in cultural participation (Keitsch, 2021). Furthermore, the sustainability of cultural production faces scrutiny, with studies examining digital platforms' effects on revenue, artist pay, and the economic health of cultural organisations.

Transformative learning and future skills for the global transitions

Amid these crises, education is often the place we turn to for answers on how to prepare future generations for similar challenges.

The cardinal goal of adult education is to facilitate autonomous thinking by enabling individuals to understand the meaning of their experiences and make their own interpretations rather than relying on uncritically assimilated explanations from authority figures (e.g., Mezirow, 1991).

A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. In contemporary societies, we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others (1991).

Transformative learning thus develops autonomous thinking and has been extensively applied across various fields of education and research programmes. Two major elements of transformative learning are critical reflection—or critical self-reflection—on assumptions, and critical discourse, in which the learner validates their best judgement (Dirkx et al., 2006; Mezirow, 1991). This involves “the process an individual evokes to monitor the epistemic nature of problems and the truth value of alternative solutions” (King and Kitchener, 1994: 12). Arts management education has increasingly embraced the principles of transformative learning to foster adaptive, reflective, and innovative leaders capable of navigating the complexities of the cultural sector. Melles et al. (2015) and Bailey (2006) highlight how museums and cultural institutions serve as

unique environments for experiential learning, enabling transformative educational experiences that challenge traditional pedagogies focusing on roles of educators in the process. Both suggest that engaging with art can catalyse transformative learning by encouraging individuals to question and reframe their assumptions and beliefs.

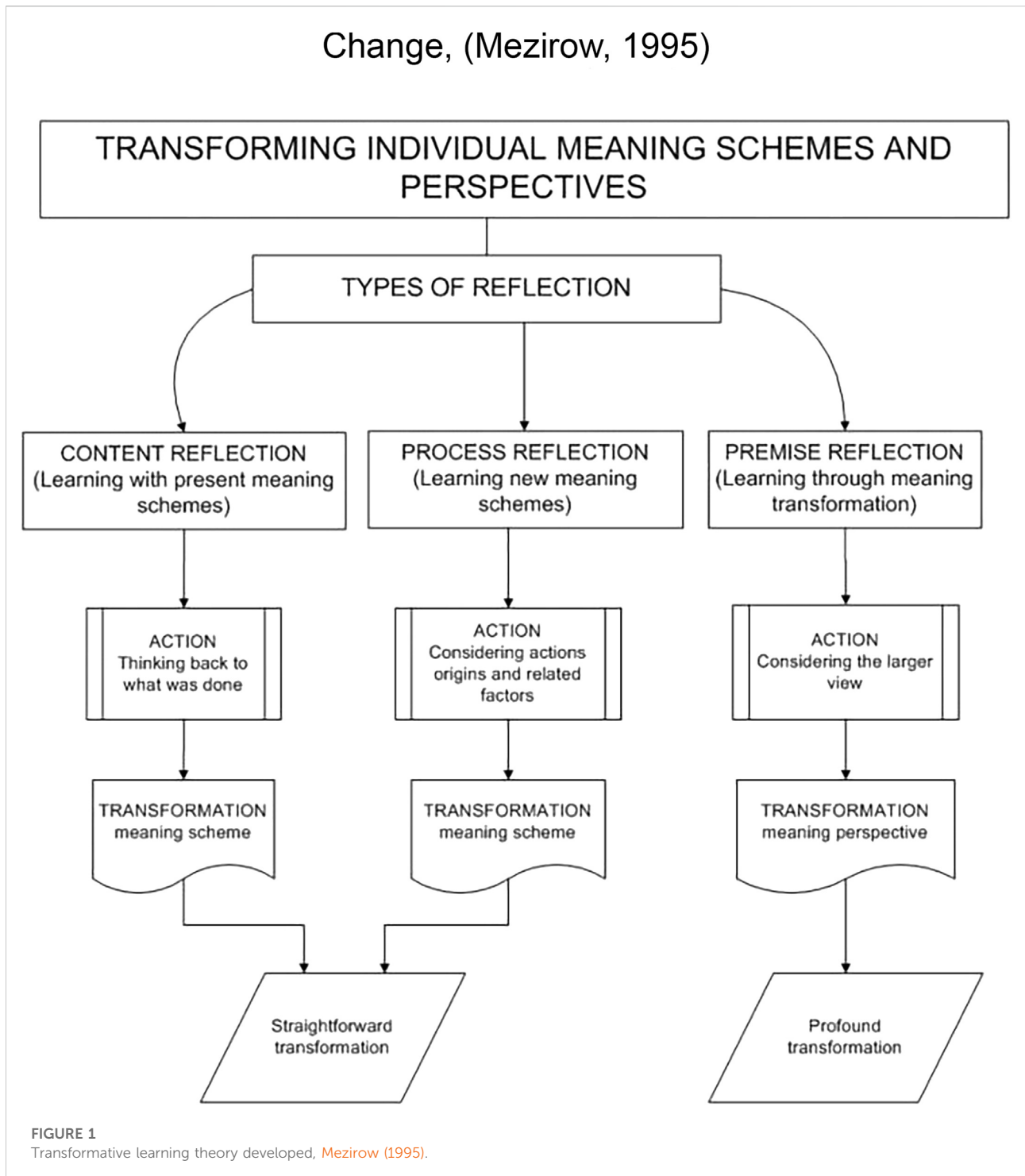
In Figure 1, which represents the transformative learning theory, we can see its constituent levels and elements: reflection, action, and different ways of transformation.

Mezirow argues that transformative learning involves changing the frames of reference through which we perceive, think, and feel, a process that is particularly relevant to the dynamic and reflective nature of the arts. Transformative learning aligns meaningfully with the big four of transitions set as a goal for future; social transition, digital transition, personal transition, ecological transition.

In addressing the critical skills for navigating global transitions, as outlined by UNESCO's IESALC framework and presented in Figure 2, our exploration highlights the essential role of higher education in equipping students with the competencies required for the 21st century and beyond. This encompasses not only the practical application of knowledge but also the cultivation of a mindset geared towards innovation, adaptability, and collaboration. The UNESCO framework identifies key areas of focus that align closely with the tenets of transformative learning and immersive experiences. These include coping with uncertainty, breaking orthodoxies, computational thinking, adaptability, and collaboration. Each of these skills reflects a deeper undercurrent of change impacting various sectors globally—social, digital, personal, and ecological transitions.

However, it's critical to acknowledge that while the UNESCO framework provides a comprehensive overview, it may not fully encapsulate all dimensions of global transitions. Notably, the model does not explicitly address the cultural transition, a gap identified by Ryba et al. (2016), which suggests that cultural dynamics play a pivotal role in how societies navigate and adapt to change. This oversight indicates an area ready for further exploration, highlighting the need for higher education and research frameworks to incorporate cultural adaptability and understanding as core components of future skills.

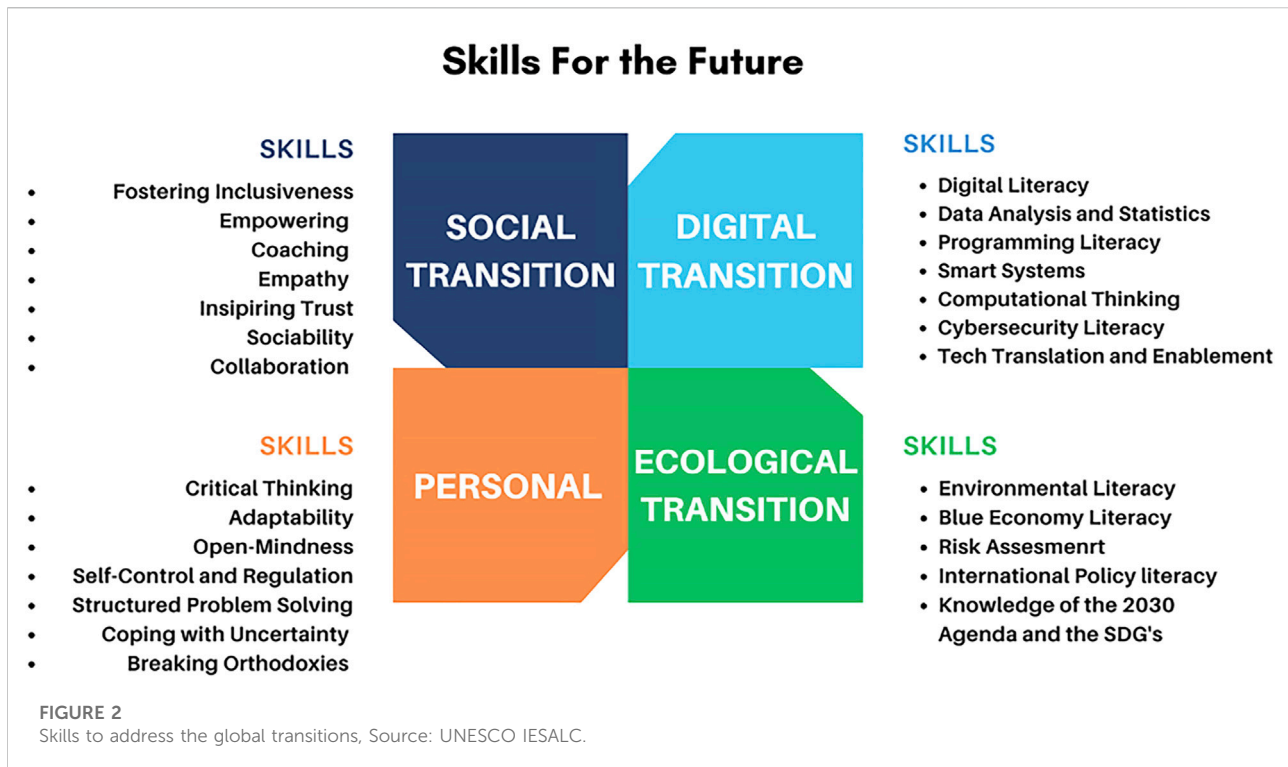
To integrate this analysis into the broader context of transformative learning and immersive experiences, it's imperative to consider how these approaches can uniquely address the skills outlined by UNESCO. Transformative learning, with its emphasis on critical reflection and perspective transformation, offers a pedagogical foundation for developing the resilience and adaptability needed to cope with uncertainty and embrace change. Through immersive learning experiences, students are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in a learning process that



mirrors the complexities and dynamism of the real world. Such experiences challenge traditional orthodoxies, fostering a space where computational thinking, adaptability, and collaboration can flourish.

Moreover, immersive learning environments serve as catalysts for breaking down cultural barriers, encouraging

students to engage with diverse perspectives and contexts. This is particularly pertinent given the global nature of the transitions identified by UNESCO. By embedding cultural transition into the conversation, higher education can prepare students to not only navigate but also contribute to a more interconnected and culturally sensitive world.



Immersive learning experiences

Immersive learning experiences refer to educational approaches that engage learners in deeply interactive, often hands-on, and real-world relevant activities. These experiences are designed to enhance engagement, understanding, and retention of knowledge by simulating real-life scenarios or creating engaging learning environments. Falk and Dierking (2000) discuss the unique learning opportunities provided by museums and cultural institutions, where immersive environments facilitate deep personal and educational experiences.

The literature highlights several benefits of immersive learning, including increased student engagement, improved critical thinking skills, and enhanced ability to apply learned concepts in real-world contexts. Bell and Winn (2000) note that virtual reality and other immersive technologies offer new ways to experience and interact with complex concepts, making learning more engaging and accessible. However, challenges such as high development costs, technological accessibility, and the need for specialised facilitator training are also noted. Moreno and Mayer (2007) emphasise the importance of instructional design in developing effective immersive learning experiences, suggesting that without careful planning, the benefits of immersion can be lost.

In arts management education, immersive learning experiences take various forms, from outside of the classroom learning to project work, bootcamps and retreats,

debates, study visits and internships in cultural organisations. These approaches allow students to develop practical skills and understand the complexities of the arts and cultural sectors in authentic contexts. Pavlou (2013) argues that immersive learning in arts education not only enhances technical skills but also fosters critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to work collaboratively—skills essential for success both in the creative industries as well as research environments.

Research objective

In the evolving contemporary societies, the arts and culture sectors stand as important arenas for creativity and the exploration of the human experience. As noted by Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh (2022), these sectors not only reflect and explore the entirety of being human but also harbour the unique potential to drive collective transitions toward a more sustainable and inclusive future. This potential is largely attributed to the proficiency of artists in navigation of conflicts, crises, and the expression of basic human needs and values, thereby fostering the capability to build bridges between disparate communities and challenge dualistic phenomena (Bang, 2016). In this context, the role of arts managers becomes increasingly critical. To maximise the impact of the arts and culture sectors, arts managers must navigate complexity and embrace paradoxical thinking, transitioning from traditional

roles to those that emphasise facilitation, transformative leadership, and the co-construction of immersive learning experiences.

There is a clear need for alternative education programmes that give students the necessary tools, networks, and experience to thrive in today's complex world (Lähdemäki, 2019). Programmes that are able to empower students, cultivate their self-confidence, and build their faith in the future. As highlighted in the most recent UNESCO Report "Re|shaping policies for creativity: addressing culture as a global public good" (2022), we need programmes for a new generation of graduates that will take ownership of processes within the art field and have the initiative to serve as changemakers to transform the field of the arts, and to make it more sustainable, relevant, and ensure that it actively contributes to the wellbeing of society. We no longer need managers, but we need change agents, advocates, communicators, lobbyists, and leaders to point a new path for the entire cultural and creative industry to redesign its position in the society (Ranczakowska, 2022).

This research therefore aims to explore how integrating transformative learning and immersive experiences into higher education in the creative fields can prepare students for these evolving roles. Specifically, it seeks to understand how such an educational model impacts students' abilities to think critically, adapt to changing environments, and lead innovative projects within the cultural sector. The research questions guiding this study are:

- How can higher education in the creative fields, through the integration of transformative learning and immersive learning experiences, prepare students to navigate the complexities of the cultural sector and contribute to societal transitions toward sustainability and inclusivity?
- In what ways do immersive learning experiences within creative fields' higher education influence students' development of critical thinking, adaptability, and leadership skills necessary for their future roles?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the discourse on arts management education, offering insights into pedagogical strategies that align with the sector's dynamic needs. It endeavours to provide a foundation for educational practices that not only equip students with traditional managerial skills but also immerse them in the creative processes and critical thinking necessary for leading the arts and culture sectors into a future marked by inclusivity, sustainability, and continuous innovation.

Gaps in the literature and justification for the current study

While the literature provides a robust foundation for understanding the impacts of crises on arts and culture, the

application of transformative learning theory in arts management education and the benefits of immersive learning experiences, several gaps remain. Notably, less attention has been paid to how these educational theories and practices intersect in the context of contemporary societal challenges, particularly those faced by the arts and culture sectors during and after crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the literature is scant on empirical studies that explore the effectiveness of these pedagogical approaches in fostering resilience, adaptability, and innovative thinking among arts management students.

Despite the promising integration of transformative learning in arts education, challenges persist. Thompson and Jaque (2017) discuss the logistical and curricular barriers to implementing experiential and transformative learning methods in higher education settings. Moreover, the need for educators to be trained using transformative learning experiences is emphasised by Christie et al. (2015), who argues for a more deliberate approach in preparing faculty to support students' transformative processes effectively.

Theoretically, while the importance of transformative learning is acknowledged (i.e., Mayer, 2020), there is a need for more research on how it can be effectively integrated into the curriculum of arts management programs. Practically, while immersive learning experiences are touted for their potential benefits, detailed studies on their implementation, challenges, and long-term impacts on students' professional development in the arts sector are lacking.

This research aims to fill these gaps by exploring how arts management education can leverage transformative learning principles and immersive learning experiences. By focusing on the integration of these pedagogical approaches, the study seeks to contribute to the development of more resilient, adaptive, and innovative professionals in the arts and culture sectors. Furthermore, it intends to provide empirical evidence on the outcomes of such educational practices, offering insights into their effectiveness. Additionally, it aims to spur further research in these critical areas, enhancing the resilience and adaptability of future arts managers.

In preceding literature review we traversed the complex terrain of crises in the arts and culture sector, transformative learning theory, immersive learning experiences, and their interconnections, highlighting the sector's challenges and the transformative potential of learning in developing adaptive, creative arts professionals. By establishing the need for a comprehensive, empirically-supported approach to leveraging transformative learning and immersive experiences, this review sets the stage for the current study. It aims to fill these gaps, offering insights for arts management education that could enhance the sector's resilience and adaptability in facing uncertainty and change.

Towards the development of an integrated theoretical model for higher education in creative fields

In the contemporary cultural landscape, marked by its rapid evolution and the unprecedented challenges it faces, the education of arts managers stands at a critical juncture. Traditional pedagogical approaches, while foundational, no longer suffice in equipping the next generation of arts leaders with the skills, mindset, and agility required to navigate the complexities of the sector. The advent of global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside technological advancements and shifting societal values, has not only transformed the operational dynamics of the cultural sector but also redefined the attributes of effective leadership within it.

The cultural sector's unique blend of creative endeavour and organisational management is inherently fraught with paradoxes—between commercial viability and artistic integrity, global reach and local relevance, digital innovation and traditional practices. These contradictions have been exacerbated by recent crises, which have laid bare the vulnerabilities of the sector, from financial instability to issues of accessibility and equity. Such challenges necessitate a breed of arts managers who are not just adept at navigating financial spreadsheets and marketing strategies but are also visionary leaders capable of steering their organisations through turbulent waters (Ranczakowska, 2022).

Historically, arts management education has oscillated between emphasising the development of practical management skills and fostering an understanding of the arts and cultural policy. However, this bifurcation, while useful, often leaves graduates ill-prepared for the realities of the sector, where success hinges not on the mastery of isolated skills but on the ability to think holistically, adaptively, and creatively. The compartmentalization of learning into subjects—i.e., management, marketing, policy analysis—fails to mirror the interconnected, dynamic nature of the cultural sector, where knowledge must be applied in integrated, innovative ways.

Whether we recognise it or not, we transform the world in every moment of our acting and meaning. No one else has ever done quite the same mix of things that we have done in our lives, or made quite the same contribution, or represented the world to others with quite the timbre of our voice or overtones of our experience. To innovate is in our natures. At its best, science is innovative in a premeditated, systematic and self-reflective way. Applying creatively is a knowledge process in which we attempt to make big leaps. We take knowledge from one context and apply it in a vastly different one. We try to solve big problems that hitherto seemed insurmountable. We imagine new angles or perspectives. We take calculated but nevertheless significant risks. We imagine possibilities way beyond what currently seem realistic. In so doing, applying creatively can engage learners in higher-order problem solving and to grasp a sense of how invention and innovation happen (Lim et al., 2022).

Integrative pedagogy as imperative

In response to these complexities, there is a pressing need for a cohesive educational approach that transcends traditional boundaries, weaving together transformative learning and immersive experiences. This integrative pedagogy recognizes that the development of effective arts professionals requires not just the acquisition of knowledge but the transformation of perspective. It acknowledges that navigating the sector's paradoxes demands a capacity for complex, critical thought that can embrace and exploit contradictions. And it understands that theoretical knowledge, to be truly effective, must be tested and honed in the crucible of real-world experience.

Such a cohesive approach does not merely add these elements together in an educational program but interlaces them, creating a rich, multidimensional learning environment. This environment is designed to reflect the realities of the cultural sector, where challenges are multifaceted and solutions are rarely straightforward. It aims to cultivate arts professionals who are not only proficient in the technical aspects of management but are also thoughtful, reflective practitioners, capable of leading with empathy, innovation, and resilience.

The need for a cohesive approach in arts management education is therefore not just an academic concern; it is a practical imperative. As the cultural sector continues to navigate the uncertainties of the 21st century, the demand for leaders who are equipped to face its challenges will only grow. By integrating transformative learning and immersive experiences into a unified pedagogical model, we can prepare the next generation of arts managers for the complexities of their role, ensuring the vitality and sustainability of the cultural sector for years to come.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the qualitative methodology adopted to investigate the effectiveness of an integrated educational model that combines transformative learning and immersive learning experiences in arts and arts management education. The study focuses on analysing courses that employ this model, examining student feedback, and conducting interviews. The qualitative approach is chosen for its strength in exploring complex phenomena within their specific contexts, allowing for in-depth insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections.

The methodological approach of this paper is based on data gathered from a decade of immersive learning experiences in arts universities, mainly the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Estonian Academy of Arts as well as the international arts and arts management network ActinArt. The data includes feedback and research surveys, interviews with students and teachers,

which are analysed using thematic analysis and an inductive approach.

Research design

This research employs a case study design (e.g., Priya, 2021), a strategy particularly suited for an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The case studies were selected based on courses that integrate the components of the proposed model into their curriculum. The investigation explored how these courses are designed and implemented, the experiences of students with the model, and the perceived impact on learning outcomes and skills development.

Participants were drawn from a purposive sample of students and lecturers involved in the selected courses implying the transformative learning oriented design. The criteria for selecting student participants included having completed or currently enrolled in these courses. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of academic backgrounds, levels of experience, and perspectives on arts management education.

Data collection methods

- **Student Feedback Analysis:** Existing feedback from students, such as course evaluations and reflective essays, were analysed to extract insights into their perceptions of the learning experience and its impact on their skills and understanding of arts management. This analysis helped identify themes related to the effectiveness of the immersive educational model
- **Semi-structured Interviews with Students and Lecturers:** Interviews were conducted to gather detailed accounts of students' experiences with the courses. An interview guide was developed, focusing on their reflections on transformative learning, paradoxical thinking, and immersive experiences within the course.

Data analysis

In this section of our study, we delve into the qualitative data analysis process undertaken to examine the impact of integrating transformative learning and immersive learning experiences within arts and arts management education. Through an analysis of interviews, as well as an examination of course feedback, we aim to unearth rich insights into the effectiveness and transformative potential of the integrated model proposed for creative fields education. Our analysis not only seeks to answer the research questions posed but also to contribute to the broader conversation on enhancing arts

management education in the face of contemporary cultural and societal challenges.

The data analysis section of this study adopts a unique structure, where each UNESCO-identified skill critical for addressing global transitions is used as a thematic lens through which we examine our findings. This approach allows us to delve deeply into how transformative learning and immersive experiences within higher education in creative fields directly contribute to the development of these skills. By aligning our analysis with these specific skills, we aim to present a nuanced understanding of how educational practices can be optimised to prepare students for the complexities of the cultural sector and societal changes.

Through this analysis, we attempt to offer meaningful contributions to the field of arts management education, highlighting the potential of our integrated pedagogical model to equip future arts managers with the critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and adaptive leadership skills necessary for success in the dynamic and ever-evolving cultural sector.

Outcomes and discussion

This section presents our findings through the lens of UNESCO's quadrants for global transitions: social, digital, personal, and ecological. By categorising our observations under these quadrants, we aim to elucidate how higher education in creative fields can harness transformative learning and immersive experiences to equip students with the necessary skills to navigate the cultural sector's complexities and contribute to broader societal transitions. This approach allows us to systematically explore and discuss our data in a manner that aligns with our research objectives, providing insights into the development of critical thinking, adaptability, and leadership skills among students.

Skills related to social transitions

In addressing the social transition, the data collected reveals immersive learning experiences in higher education foster critical engagement with contemporary social issues, including decolonization, diversity, and inclusion. Students express a clear desire to move beyond high-low art discourse, engaging instead with current debates that resonate with their values and societal views more. Intensive bootcamps and reflective activities on personal influences are highlighted as transformative, enabling students to critically assess and embrace diverse perspectives. This approach not only prepares students for the cultural sector's complexities but also nurtures a socially responsible and inclusive mindset, crucial for contributing to societal transitions toward sustainability and inclusivity.

Starting with the skill of **Empowering**, the data reveals students' appreciation for tasks that challenge their comfort zones and trust their human competencies. This is encapsulated in students' feedback: "These bootcamps are very empowering. *I feel I'm getting my voice back . . .*" Such statements highlight the transformative potential of immersive learning experiences to embolden students, equipping them with the confidence required for leadership roles in the future.

For **Fostering Inclusiveness and Empathy**, the analysis draws on students' critical engagement with current social debates. One student reflected, "*Sitting here, talking about hard things . . . allows me to think what is important for ME.*" This illustrates how immersive experiences encourage a reflective and inclusive mindset, prompting students to question established norms and values, thereby fostering a deeper sense of empathy and inclusiveness.

Regarding **Collaboration**, the diversity of participants in immersive experiences enhances students' ability to work effectively in teams. The data highlights the recognition of the value in diversity, with students acknowledging, "*Intensive bootcamps allow us to understand the interconnectedness of what we do and how intertwined we are. . .*"

Sociability and **Inspiring Trust** within the context of social transformation skills was highlighted by the students commenting on the importance of building a safe space for these "more humane" processes in the learning environment. Culture of sharing inspires trust which in turn trains our vulnerability, which ultimately allows us to build relationships that are more profound and lasting. Naturally the collaborative nature of projects and immersive learning environments notably highlight the importance of these competencies. Students express a newfound appreciation for diverse perspectives and the importance of building trust within teams, indicative of a transformative educational journey that not only enhances their professional skills but also enriches their personal growth and ability to engage empathetically within diverse social contexts.

Skills related to ecological transitions

The ecological transition skills as defined by UNESCO—Environmental Literacy, Blue Economy Literacy, Risk Assessment, International Policy Literacy, and Knowledge of the 2030 Agenda and the SDG's—aim to empower learners to engage meaningfully with environmental challenges. The data suggests that while students often opt to work on environmental projects, there is a noticeable narrative thread emphasising a deep, horizontal integration of these issues rather than a vertical, objective-driven approach.

Environmental literacy

Students exhibit a passion for environmental projects, indicating an intrinsic motivation towards ecological issues.

These issues often feature in topics of discussions, and the environmental crisis occupies high importance. However, while students' selection of environmental projects suggests a foundational level of environmental literacy, the data does not explicitly indicate whether the transformative learning experience provides comprehensive knowledge on this topic unless it is integrated explicitly as a learning outcome. It does, however, seem to be fostering rising sensitivity to environmental topics and principles.

Blue economy literacy

The explicit concept of Blue Economy Literacy is underrepresented in student feedback and project selection. The themes of water and oceans are present in the discussion and topics of concern, but similarly to environmental literacy, as long as it doesn't exist as an explicit learning outcome, it is present in the learning only implicitly.

Risk assessment

There is a general consensus that students feel the need for profound changes in consumption patterns and in navigating environmental crises, which implies a rudimentary understanding of risk assessment. However, the data doesn't demonstrate a rigorous application of risk assessment methodologies. Risk assessment as a practice is present in some tools in transformative learning and is enhanced by practising critical thinking and systemic problem-solving, thus it is not explicitly applied to the risks related to the environmental crisis. This could perhaps be addressed by more projects developed related to the environmental crisis.

International policy literacy

There is a keen awareness among students of the need for systemic change, which suggests an appreciation for policy's role in environmental issues. Many students stay informed and are up to speed with current EU, national, and regional policies regarding the environment. The data, however, doesn't detail students' engagement with actual policy analysis or creation.

Knowledge of the 2030 agenda and the SDG's

Students' drive to engage in environmental projects suggests alignment with the sustainability goals, yet there is no explicit mention of the 2030 Agenda or SDGs in their feedback. This absence signals a missed opportunity to link students' projects with global sustainability goals. The educational model could be enhanced by integrating these frameworks into the courses and project objectives to contextualise students' work within the global movement for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015).

The analysis indicates that while students are inclined to engage with environmental projects and sense the urgency for ecological sustainability, there might be a shortfall in the depth and breadth regarding ecological transition skills. To

remedy this, the courses could benefit from a more structured approach that embeds ecological literacy more deeply into all aspects of the program, explicitly tying coursework and projects to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

However, the narrative of environmental issues as a deep-running current rather than a vertical objective indicates students' preference for a holistic, integrated understanding of ecological issues, rather than isolated educational objectives. This approach should be fostered and supported with courses that offer opportunities for deep, critical engagement with these topics, ensuring students not only understand the issues but are also equipped with the skills to address them in their future careers.

Skills related to personal transitions

The transformative impact of intensive bootcamps and other immersive learning experiences outside the classroom settings emerges vividly in the personal narratives and feedback from students. These experiences, when well-facilitated, foster a co-creation of a shared repertoire of values, beliefs, and missions, underlining the profound impact on personal transition skills.

In exploring personal transition, the data illuminates how intensive bootcamps and immersive learning experiences within higher education significantly contribute to the development of personal transformation skills. These skills, crucial for navigating the complexities of the cultural sector and contributing to broader societal changes, include critical thinking, adaptability, open-mindedness, self-control and regulation, structured problem-solving, coping with uncertainty, and breaking orthodoxies.

Critical thinking

The immersive experiences challenge students to engage deeply with complex, often uncomfortable topics, fostering a critical perspective on personal values and societal issues. A participant's reflection, "*I want to be mindful of the environment around us ... people and not people alike,*" showcases the evolution of critical thinking skills. Students begin to understand the broader implications of their actions and decisions, encouraging a shift towards questioning established norms and seeking innovative solutions.

Adaptability

Diversity among bootcamp participants, reflecting varied backgrounds and experiences, necessitates adaptability. This diversity exposes students to a wide range of perspectives, compelling them to navigate and embrace these differences. "*A big discrepancy in participants' experience*" highlights the need for adaptability, a skill essential for future leaders in the ever-evolving cultural sector.

Open-mindedness

Activities described as "*very empowering*" highlight the role of immersive experiences in promoting open-mindedness. Students are encouraged to express their unique perspectives and explore diverse viewpoints, leading to a greater understanding of themselves and others. "*Sitting here, talking about hard things ... allows me to think what is important for ME,*" illustrates the growth of open-mindedness towards personal values and broader societal discussions.

Self-control and regulation

The challenging nature of immersive experiences pushes students to the edge of their comfort zones, requiring self-control and emotional regulation to navigate these situations effectively. The opportunity for introspection, allowing students "*to sit down, pause, and really think,*" fosters the development of self-regulation skills, preparing them to handle personal and professional challenges with grace.

Structured problem-solving

Intensive bootcamps facilitate the co-creation of shared values, beliefs, and missions, engaging students in structured problem-solving. The understanding of the "*interconnectedness of what they do*" equips students with the ability to tackle problems systematically, enhancing their strategic thinking and collaborative skills.

Coping with uncertainty

The variance in participants' backgrounds introduces elements of uncertainty, reflecting the real-world complexity students will face in their professional lives. "*The world is on fire, and in our educational system instead of getting water to put these fires down, I am getting matches,*" highlights the critical need for developing the ability to cope with uncertainty, a skill increasingly valuable in today's fast-paced, often unpredictable cultural landscape.

Breaking orthodoxies

Expressed fatigue with traditional "high art - low art" discussions indicates a strong desire to move beyond conventional boundaries. "*These bootcamps are very empowering. I feel I'm getting my voice and my courage back ...*" demonstrates the transformative impact of immersive learning in encouraging students to challenge and transcend established norms, fostering a willingness to embrace new, inclusive approaches to arts and culture.

Skills related to digital transitions

While the data doesn't specifically highlight any input about the importance and effectiveness of transformative learning

methodologies in the development of skills for the digital transitions, it does present the concern related to the digital transitions. In exploring students' attitudes towards the digital transition, a deep concern emerges regarding the rapidly changing cultural and technological landscapes that define our era. Courses' participants highlight the dual role of technology as both a catalyst for significant change and a source of new, often complex challenges. This duality is particularly evident in the context of the swift pace of technological innovation, with advancements in artificial intelligence and digital communication reshaping the very fabric of how we work, interact, and comprehend the world around us.

The transformation brought about by these technological advancements is not seen as uniformly positive by students. On one hand, the digital age has been instrumental in breaking down communication barriers, fostering a global dialogue that transcends geographical limitations. On the other hand, it has given rise to critical issues concerning misinformation, privacy breaches, and the erosion of quality public discourse. These challenges highlight the darker aspects of our digital evolution, where the very tools designed to bring us closer together can also drive wedges of division and misunderstanding.

Despite these concerns, students also recognize the silver lining in the digital cloud. Beyond merely facilitating easier communication, technology opens up vast avenues for creativity, collaboration, and community-building. Students emphasise that the digital realm offers unprecedented opportunities for individuals and groups to innovate, share, and connect in ways that were previously unimaginable. This optimistic view suggests that the primary challenge we face is not in the technology itself but in how we choose to use it. Harnessing digital tools for positive ends becomes a central theme in students' discussions about the digital transition. The consensus is that with mindful application and a critical understanding of the potential pitfalls, technology can serve as a powerful force for good. It can support efforts to solve complex problems, foster inclusive communities, and create spaces for constructive dialogue and creative expression.

Additional insights from the data

Besides the analysis performed according to the themes based on UNESCO identifies skills for the future there is an additional body of data emerging from our analysis. This subchapter delves into discussion on the transformative essence of intensive bootcamps, the critical importance of diversity, the empowering nature of challenging tasks, and the multifaceted dimensions of students' learning experiences. These insights collected from students not only change our understanding but also highlight the profound impact of such educational paradigms on fostering innovative, resilient, and inclusive future leaders in the arts and culture sectors.

Transformative Nature of Bootcamps: Intensive bootcamps stand out as transformative experiences that catalyse a co-creation of shared values, beliefs, and missions among participants. These immersive learning environments challenge traditional pedagogies, facilitating deep engagement with complex issues and fostering a sense of community and collaborative learning. Through these experiences, students navigate the terrain of creative exploration, critically engaging with current social issues, thereby enriching their educational journey with real-world applicability and transformative insights.

Embracing Diversity: The inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds enriches the learning experience by introducing a multitude of perspectives and ideas. This diversity, often reflective of varying countries of origin, fosters an environment where varied experiences contribute to a richer, more nuanced understanding of creative practices and their societal implications. Such inclusivity not only enhances the learning experience but also mirrors the globalised context within which contemporary arts and culture operate, highlighting the value of diversity in driving innovation and fostering a more inclusive cultural landscape.

The Empowering Effect of Challenging Tasks: Empowering tasks that push students beyond their comfort zones are paramount in developing human competencies essential for personal and professional growth. These tasks encourage students to engage deeply with their work, relying on their creativity, critical thinking, and resilience. This process not only fosters personal reflection and growth but also prepares students to navigate and contribute to the evolving demands of the cultural sector, equipping them with the confidence and skills necessary for transformative leadership.

Reflective Tools on Influential Relationships: Analysing relationships with influential individuals through reflective tools provides profound insights into students' value systems and decision-making processes. This reflective practice supports the transformative learning objective of fostering autonomous thinking, enabling students to critically assess and question their assumptions and beliefs.

Importance of Diversity: The inclusion of diverse perspectives within these educational settings is underscored as a critical factor for enriching learning outcomes. This diversity, reflecting a broad spectrum of cultural backgrounds and experiences, enhances the creative process and fosters a more inclusive understanding of global cultural dynamics. It aligns with the call for a more resilient and vibrant cultural landscape, advocating for pedagogical strategies that embrace inclusivity as a cornerstone of transformative education.

Value of Empowering Tasks: The emphasis on empowering tasks that challenge students beyond their comfort zones is pivotal for personal and professional growth. Such tasks encourage resilience, critical thinking, and adaptability, preparing students for the uncertainties of the cultural sector. This approach resonates with the study's focus on developing

future skills necessary for navigating global transitions, emphasising the role of transformative learning in fostering innovation and adaptability.

Limits to Comfort Zone Expansion: While the value of challenging activities is acknowledged, the importance of recognizing the limits of discomfort acceptance is also emphasised. This balance ensures that educational experiences remain transformative rather than overwhelming, aligning with the pedagogical approach outlined in the foundational text that advocates for learner-centeredness and real-world applicability.

Contemporary Discourses: A marked preference for engaging with current social issues over “outdated” discussions highlights a shift towards relevance and contemporaneity in creative education. Students express a desire to tackle pressing challenges such as decolonisation, diversity, inclusion, reflecting a broader societal move towards addressing these critical issues within educational frameworks and creative practices.

Understanding Systems and Interconnectedness: Recognition of the systems within which individuals operate and the interconnectedness of actions highlights the importance of a holistic understanding of the cultural sector. Such awareness is crucial in navigating the complexities of creative practices, emphasising the value of diverse experiences and engagements in contributing to a more interconnected and inclusive cultural landscape.

Horizontal Education: Integrating Future Skills: The shift towards horizontal education, which emphasises the integration of skills across various domains, reflects an acknowledgment of the changing demands on creative professionals. This approach ensures that students are not only proficient in their main fields of study but also equipped with a broad range of competencies that are increasingly relevant in a rapidly evolving cultural sector.

Critical and Mindful Online Learning: The challenge of engaging with online resources in a critical and mindful manner is particularly pertinent in an era of information overload. Students highlight the importance of discerning and evaluating online content, emphasising the need for educational paradigms that foster critical thinking and mindful engagement with digital resources.

Mindfulness of Surroundings: A desire to be more mindful of one’s environment, including people and nature, reflects a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of our actions and their impact on the world around us. This mindset, though often not supported by current educational paradigms, is crucial in fostering a sense of responsibility and empathy towards our surroundings, underlining the importance of integrating such perspectives into creative education.

Despite the plethora of positive impact of the transformative learning processes on the learners, our data identifies a number of challenges in the implementation of similar paradigms in the learning environments. Integrating these challenges emerging from our data with the literature review offers a nuanced

understanding of the challenges in implementing transformative learning within creative fields, connecting these findings with established scholarly discourse.

Our analysis illuminates the misalignment between the pace of societal and educational transitions, echoing [Mezirow \(1991\)](#) and highlighting the difficulty students face in integrating transformative learning experiences with the practical demands of a rapidly evolving cultural sector. This gap is further magnified by the educational system’s sluggish adaptation to global crises, as critiqued by [Carolan et al. \(2020\)](#), underscoring an urgent need for educational reforms that are responsive and resilient, akin to adaptive strategies suggested by [Rolling \(2021\)](#). Additionally, the data shed light on the difficulties in sustaining the transformative momentum post-bootcamp, resonating with the need for continued support mechanisms highlighted by [Dirkx et al. \(2006\)](#). The role of educators, as highlighted in our findings, is pivotal in shaping transformative learning experiences. This finding is supported by [Mishra et al. \(2020\)](#), who emphasise the educator’s readiness and persona as critical in creating an environment conducive to transformative learning.

The complexity involved in creating safe spaces for transformative learning, as outlined in our analysis, aligns with observations made by [Falk and Dierking \(2000\)](#). Our data highlights the necessity of dedicated efforts and time in this process, echoing broader educational discourse challenges. Furthermore, the importance of linking immersive learning experiences with the larger organisational or educational contexts emerged, resonating with the perspectives of [Vlassis \(2021\)](#) on the impact of digital transitions on cultural engagement.

Our findings on the challenge of unheard student voices and the misalignment between educational focus and student needs reflect a broader critique of the educational system. This issue, highlighted in the document and supported by the insights of [Sharaievska et al. \(2022\)](#), points to a systemic flaw in how education is structured and delivered. It advocates for a more student-centred approach that aligns with [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(2023\)](#) vision for future skills.

This comprehensive perspective suggests a pathway towards more effective and inclusive educational practices in arts management and beyond, advocating for a seamless integration of theory, practice, and the critical role of educators in facilitating a transformative educational journey.

Further discussion

The findings from our analysis, enriched by the thematic exploration of UNESCO’s quadrants for global transitions, provide compelling answers to our research questions.

Through this exploration, we've uncovered how higher education in creative fields can effectively utilise transformative learning and immersive experiences to prepare students for the dynamics of the cultural sector and foster their contribution towards sustainable and inclusive societal transitions.

Preparing students for the cultural sector's complexities

Higher education, by integrating transformative learning and immersive experiences, primes students to navigate the cultural sector's complexities. This preparation is rooted in a curriculum that actively engages students with contemporary social issues, including decolonization, diversity, and inclusion, moving beyond traditional discourses. Such engagement not only equips students with the necessary knowledge and skills but also nurtures a socially responsible and inclusive mindset. This aligns with the findings from [Carolan et al. \(2020\)](#) and echoes [Mezirow \(1991\)](#) transformative learning theory, advocating for a critical reflection process that enables learners to adapt their frames of reference to better meet the demands of their environment. Moreover, the emphasis on empowering tasks that challenge students, as noted in our data, corresponds with [Dirkx et al. \(2006\)](#) discussion on the transformative potential of learning experiences. These tasks, by pushing students beyond their comfort zones, foster the development of leadership skills, adaptability, and a capacity for empathy—qualities indispensable for future roles in the ever-evolving cultural sector.

Influence on critical thinking, adaptability, and leadership skills

Immersive learning experiences within creative fields' higher education significantly impact students' development of critical thinking, adaptability, and leadership skills. By immersing students in real-world scenarios and reflective activities, these educational experiences encourage a deep, personal engagement with learning material. This approach, as highlighted in our findings and supported by [Falk and Dierking \(2000\)](#), facilitates a co-creation of shared values and beliefs, fostering a sense of community and collaborative learning.

Such immersive experiences also enhance students' ability to work effectively in diverse teams, recognizing the value in diversity—an aspect underscored in our data and resonant with the perspectives of [Vlassis \(2021\)](#) on digital transitions and cultural engagement. Furthermore, the data suggest that these experiences equip students with the resilience and strategic thinking necessary to tackle environmental challenges, thereby contributing to ecological transitions. This observation aligns with the UNESCO framework (2023) on future skills,

emphasising the role of education in preparing students for global transitions.

It is noteworthy that the landscape of higher education already features courses that inherently possess the flexibility and depth required to serve as fertile grounds for employing transformative learning broadly. For instance, courses centred around the entrepreneurial mindset, self-development, service design, and philosophy stand out as particularly conducive environments for this pedagogical approach. These subjects, by their very nature, encourage learners to engage deeply with the material, question existing paradigms, and explore innovative solutions to complex problems.

However, the necessity for learning opportunities that extend beyond the mandatory curriculum cannot be overstated. While courses in entrepreneurial mindset, self-development, service design, and philosophy significantly contribute to fostering an environment conducive to transformative learning, the full potential of this educational approach is often best realised in settings that fall outside the traditional curricular boundaries. These supplemental learning experiences—ranging from internships and workshops to study abroad programs and cultural immersion experiences—offer invaluable opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, engage with diverse perspectives, and develop a nuanced understanding of global challenges and opportunities.

Paradoxical thinking in creative processes

One of the outcomes which manifested itself through the data in connection to immersive experiences in particular was paradoxical mindset. In arts universities, this manifests as the ability to be both an artist/creative and navigate the economic domain and entrepreneurial activities, functioning in an inherently extrinsically competitive reality. The ability to navigate complexity, adapt to changing environments, think critically, reflect on their experiences, embrace diverse perspectives, and collaborate effectively are valuable in the dynamic and diverse cultural and creative industries sector, enabling individuals to contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive future. In the context of arts management, paradoxical thinking is crucial for navigating the dualities of creative integrity versus commercial viability, innovation versus tradition, and individual expression versus collective engagement ([Rothenberg, 1976](#)). [DeFillippi et al. \(2007\)](#) explore how project-based work in the cultural industries requires managing paradoxes between creative exploration and production constraints. Their findings highlight the importance of paradoxical thinking for arts managers in balancing these tensions effectively. Additionally, [Gaim and Wählin \(2016\)](#) as well as [Knight and Harvey \(2015\)](#) examine how arts organisations embrace paradoxes to remain adaptable and

innovative in rapidly changing cultural landscapes, suggesting that paradoxical thinking is integral to strategic management in the arts.

Nevertheless, this capacity for critical reflection and adaptability is not without its challenges. Transformative learning, as articulated by Mezirow (1991), emphasizes critical self-reflection as a means to achieve autonomous thinking. However, the context in which this reflection takes place profoundly influences its outcomes. Mezirow’s work reveals an inherent ambivalence in transformative learning, where critical reflection can inadvertently reinforce existing biases if not carefully facilitated. This ambivalence suggests that critical thinking may be appropriated by actors seeking to disrupt rather than constructively transform societal structures. This necessitates a more cautious and context-aware application of transformative learning within arts management education, ensuring that students are equipped not only to think critically but also to recognize the paradoxical nature of the skills they develop. Mezirow’s perspective highlights the importance of understanding that critical thinking and transformative practices can serve multiple purposes—not always aligned with progressive ideas such as, i.e., UN Sustainability Goals. This requires educators to facilitate discussions that help students critically evaluate the potential impacts of their actions within broader socio-political

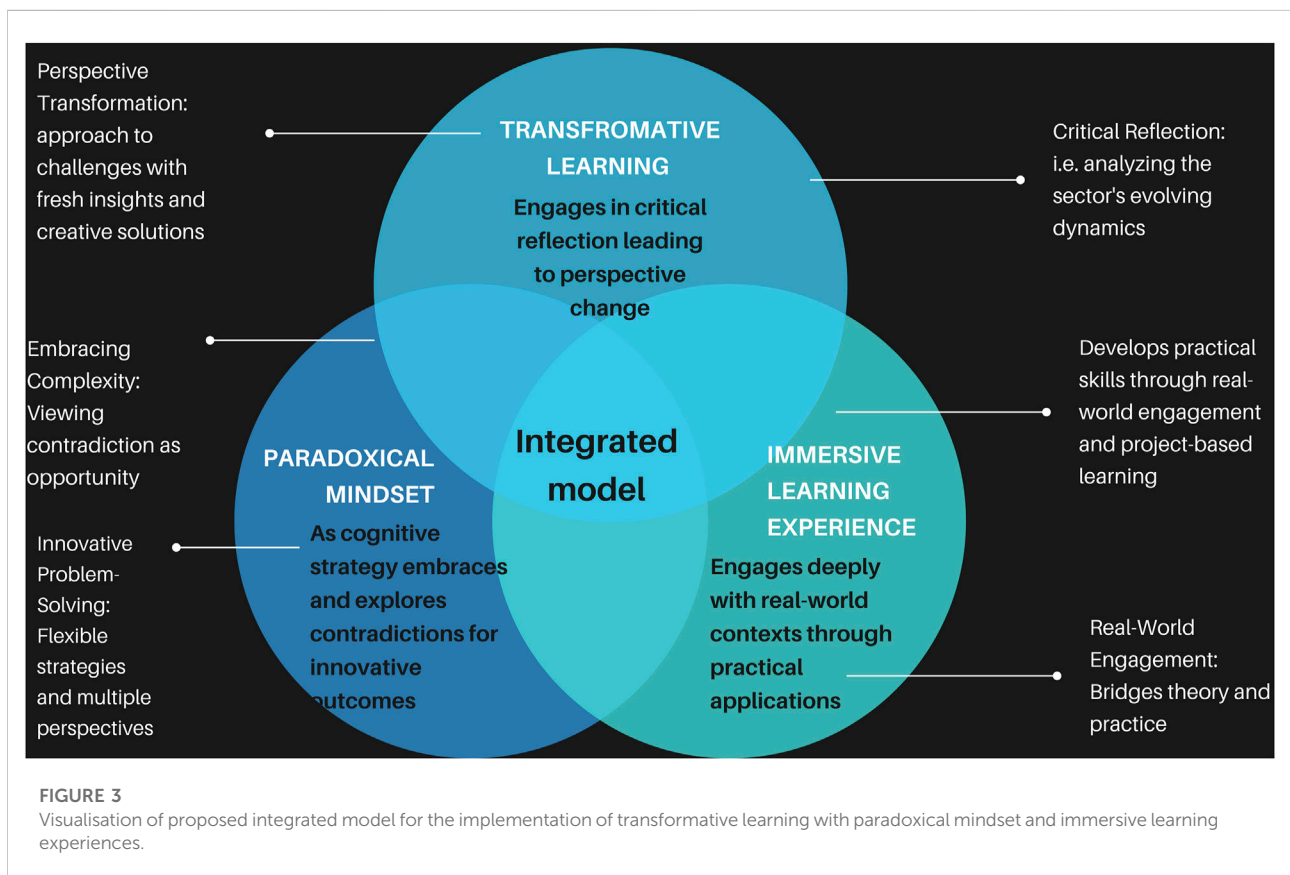
landscapes, and to navigate the complexities and contradictions inherent in the cultural sector.

Towards the integrated model

The integrated model for arts management education proposed here and represented in Figure 3 is a result of the theoretical discussion and empirical analysis and rests on the confluence of three foundational pillars: transformative learning, paradoxical thinking, and immersive learning experiences. This triad forms the core of a pedagogical approach designed to equip arts managers with the skills, insights, and adaptability needed to thrive in the dynamic cultural sector. Below, we present a model visualising how three approaches collectively form a robust model for contemporary arts management education.

Integration and synergy

The integration of these foundational elements within the educational framework ensures that learning is not only multidimensional but also deeply interconnected. This model advocates for an iterative learning process where reflection leads



to insight, insight informs action, and action, in turn, becomes a new basis for reflection. Such a cyclical approach mirrors the continuous process of adaptation and growth required in the arts management profession.

- **Holistic Curriculum Design:** The curriculum is designed to weave these elements together seamlessly, ensuring that students engage with learning materials dynamically, reflect on their experiences critically, and apply their insights in practical, immersive settings.
- **Preparation for Complexity:** Ultimately, this integrated model prepares arts management students for the complexities of their future roles, equipping them with a comprehensive toolkit of skills, strategies, and perspectives that are vital for navigating the cultural sector's evolving landscape.

In the light of the above, foundations of this integrated model—transformative learning, paradoxical thinking, and immersive learning experiences—collectively offer a robust framework for arts management education. By emphasising the synergy between reflective learning, cognitive flexibility, and practical engagement, this model aims to cultivate arts managers who are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also innovative, adaptive, and prepared to lead the cultural sector into the future.

Conclusion

Transformative learning emerges as a pivotal mechanism for facilitating immersive educational experiences, particularly within creative fields, to equip individuals with meaningful future skills necessary for navigating global transitions. By centering learners' individual values, competencies, and contexts, transformative learning fosters a holistic approach to skill development, empowering individuals to confront and reconcile complex societal challenges. However, it is essential to acknowledge that transformative learning is not without its potential problems and obstacles, necessitating further research into the role of educators in facilitating this process effectively. Moreover, the intersection of future skills with transformative learning underscores the importance of critical discussion, reflection, self-critical analysis, and empathy in an era where vast amounts of data are readily accessible online. These human skills, which are not "googlable," are integral to fostering a self-critical view and nurturing transformative learning for the future. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, it is imperative to prioritise these skills as essential components of transformative learning, enabling individuals to adapt and thrive in an ever-evolving global landscape.

In addition, embracing these methods of transformative learning within creative professions holds the potential to make a significant contribution to sustainability transitions within the creative sector. By nurturing critical thinking, adaptability, and empathy among students, immersive educational experiences empower future creatives to address pressing environmental and social challenges within their respective fields. Through innovative approaches and interdisciplinary collaboration, individuals equipped with transformative learning skills can drive positive change and promote sustainability within the creative sector. As agents of transformation, students have the opportunity to shape a more sustainable and inclusive future, leveraging their creative talents to inspire meaningful societal transitions. Thus, the integration of transformative learning principles not only enriches educational experiences but also cultivates a generation of creatives poised to make lasting contributions to sustainability transitions on a global scale.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Our research was conducted in compliance with the Procedure of Tallinn University Ethics Committee for the Processing of Applications for Evaluating Research, which outlines the cases in which formal ethical committee approval is not required. Based on this procedure, our study did not fall under the categories that mandate prior ethical review. Specifically: The study primarily utilizes feedback and survey data from students and educators in higher education institutions and focuses on pedagogical methods rather than sensitive personal or health-related data. There was no direct intervention or experimentation on participants; the data analyzed was anonymized, non-identifiable, and collected in the context of standard educational practices. The research adheres to the principles of voluntary participation and informed consent, consistent with ethical standards for studies of this nature.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Acknowledgments

This article has been language-edited using OpenAI's ChatGPT (version 4), a generative AI language model developed by OpenAI

(<https://openai.com/>). The AI tool was used for language refinement, including clarity, coherence, and grammatical consistency, without influencing the authors' original content or arguments.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

References

- Acomi, N., Acomi, O., Ova, N., Akilli, A., Anlar, E., Martinez, H., et al. (2023). *Creativity and arts in digital social innovation*. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.8052835
- Adams, R. (2023). The evolution of intellectual property rights in the digital age. *J. Mod. Law Policy* 3, 52–63. doi:10.47941/jmlp.1554
- Bailey, E. B. (2006). Researching museum educators' perceptions of their roles, identity, and practice. *J. Mus. Educ.* 31 (3), 175–198. doi:10.1179/jme.2006.31.3.175
- Bang, A. H. (2016). The restorative and transformative power of the arts in conflict resolution. *J. Transformative Educ.* 14, 355–376. doi:10.1177/1541344616655886
- Bell, P., and Winn, W. (2000). "Distributed cognitions, by nature and by design," in *Theoretical foundations of learning environment*. Editors D. Jonassen and S. M. L. (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc), 123–145.
- Browning, M. H., Larson, L. R., Sharaievska, I., Rigolon, A., McAnirlin, O., Mullenbach, L., et al. (2021). Psychological impacts from COVID-19 among university students: risk factors across seven states in the United States. *PLoS One* 16 (1), e0245327. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0245327
- Carolan, C., Davies, C. L., Crookes, P., McGhee, S., and Rox-Burgh, M. (2020). COVID-19: disruptive impacts and transformative opportunities in undergraduate nurse education. *Nurse Educ. Pract.* 46, 102807. doi:10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102807
- Christie, M., Carey, M., Robertson, A., and Grainger, P. (2015). Putting transformative learning theory into practice. *Aust. J. Adult Learn.* 55 (1), 9–30. Available at: <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/ielapa.069076554869878>.
- DeFillippi, R., Grabher, G., and Jones, C. (2007). Introduction to paradoxes of creativity: managerial and organizational challenges in the cultural economy. *J. Organ. Behav.* 28 (5), 511–521. doi:10.1002/job.466
- Dirkx, J., Mezirow, J., and Cranton, P. (2006). Musings and reflections on the meaning, context, and process of transformative learning: a dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow. *J. Transformative Educ.* 4, 123–139. doi:10.1177/1541344606287503
- Dwivedi, Y., Hughes, L., Coombs, C., Constantiou, I., Duan, Y., Edwards, J., et al. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on information management research and practice: transforming education, work and life. *Int. J. Inf. Manag.* 55, 102211. doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102211
- Falk, J., and Dierking, L. (2000). Learning from museums: visitor experiences and the making of meaning.
- Gaim, M., and Wählin, N. (2016). In search of a creative space: a conceptual framework of synthesizing paradoxical tensions. *Scand. J. Manag.* 32 (1), 33–44. doi:10.1016/j.scaman.2015.12.002
- Keitsch, M. (2021). Enhancing collaboration between societal stakeholders for reduced inequalities. *Encycl. U. N. Sustain. Dev. Goals*, 1–14. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-71060-0_121-1
- King, P., and Kitchener, K. (2004). Reflective judgment: theory and research on the development of epistemic assumptions through adulthood. *Educ. Psychol.* 39, 5–18. doi:10.1207/s15326985ep3901_2
- Knight, E., and Harvey, W. (2015). Managing exploration and exploitation paradoxes in creative organisations. *Manag. Decis.* 53 (4), 809–827. doi:10.1108/md-03-2014-0124
- Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitch, K. (2022). "Co-constructing knowledge management practices in arts universities," in *The role of entrepreneurial mindset and education*. Helsinki: Sibelius Academy University of the Arts.
- Lähdemäki, J. (2019). "Case study: kaospilots—from passive listeners to global change agents," in *Sustainability, human well-being, and the future of education*. Editor J. W. Cook (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Lim, F. V., Cope, B., and Kalantzis, M. (2022). A metalanguage for learning: rebalancing the cognitive with the socio-material. *Front. Commun.* 7, 830613. doi:10.3389/fcomm.2022.830613
- Mayer, M. (2020). *Is transformative learning possible in neoliberal post 92 higher education in england?* Bournemouth: Bournemouth University. [unpublished Professional Doctorate Thesis].
- Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in systems: a primer*. Chelsea Green: White River Junction.
- Melles, G., Anderson, N., Barrett, T., and Thompson-Whiteside, S. (2015). "Problem finding through design thinking in education," in *Cutting-edge technologies in higher education* (Emerald Group Publishing Limited), 6, 191–209. doi:10.1108/S2055-364120150000003027
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1995). Transformation theory of adult learning, in *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*. Editor M. Welton (New York: State University of New York Press), 37–90.
- Mishra, L., Gupta, T., and Shree, A. (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. *Int. J. Educ. Res. Open* 1, 100012. doi:10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100012
- Moreno, R., and Mayer, R. (2007). Interactive multimodal learning environments. *Educ. Psychol. Rev.* 19, 309–326. doi:10.1007/s10648-007-9047-2
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (2022). *The impact of digital technology on arts and culture in the UK*. London: Westminster. POSTnote, number 669.
- Pavlou, V. (2013). Investigating interrelations in visual arts education: aesthetic enquiry, possibility thinking and creativity. *Int. J. Educ. Through Art* 9 (1), 71–88. doi:10.1386/eta.9.1.71_1
- Priya, A. (2021). Case study methodology of qualitative research: key attributes and navigating the conundrums in its application. *Sociol. Bull.* 70 (1), 94–110. doi:10.1177/0038022920970318
- Ranczakowska, A. M. (2022). "Hidden Curriculum in Arts Management— Perspectives on the learner's identity, community building and the activist mindset," in *Managing the arts*. Editors A. M. Ranczakowska and A. Jyrämä (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre Press), 182–199.
- Rolling, J. H. (2021). Resilience after isolation: the restorative power of the arts revisited. *Art. Educ.* 74 (6), 40–41. doi:10.1080/00043125.2021.1955547
- Rothenberg, A. (1976). Janusian thinking and creativity. *Psychoanal. Study Soc.* 7, 1–30. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.1971.01750090001001
- Ryba, T. V., Stambulova, N. B., and Ronkainen, N. J. (2016). The work of cultural transition: an emerging model. *Front. Psychol.* 7, 427. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00427
- Sharaievska, I., McAnirlin, O., Browning, M. H. E. M., Larson, L. R., Mullenbach, L., Rigolon, A., et al. (2022). "Messy transitions": students' perspectives on the

impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education. *High. Educ. (Dordr)*, 1–18. doi:10.1007/s10734-022-00843-7

Thomson, P., and Jaque, S. (2017). Creativity and the performing artist: behind the mask.

UNESCO (2021). The African film Industry: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379165>.

UNESCO (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2023). The future of higher education skills for the tomorrow. Available at: <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2023/08/11/the-future-of-higher-education-skills-for-the-world-of-tomorrow/>.

Vlassis, A. (2021). Global online platforms, COVID-19, and culture: the global pandemic, an accelerator towards which direction? *Media, Cult. and Soc.* 43, 957–969. doi:10.1177/0163443721994537

Watermeyer, R., Crick, T., Knight, C., and Goodall, J. (2021). COVID-19 and digital disruption in UK universities: afflictions and affordances of emergency online migration. *High. Educ.* 81, 623–641. doi:10.1007/s10734-020-00561-y