VISEGRAD ART MARKET-RESEARCH REPORT DECEMBER 2025

PROJECT TITLE:
VISEGRAD ART MARKET - HAPPY TO SHARE
ID 22420315

Visegrad Fund

Research Report: Visegrad Art Market

Project Overview and Objectives

Within the framework of the Visegrad Art Market project, a comprehensive needs assessment survey and research initiative was conducted by **SIXAGON**, a Hungarian non-profit organization, in partnership with the Slovakian **Creative Laboratory Association** and the Polish **Estrada Rzeszowska**. SIXAGON is dedicated to identifying social innovation strategies that foster a more sustainable and resilient cultural ecosystem. Its primary mission involves supporting creative industry stakeholders through innovative project implementation, the development of new strategic frameworks, educational projects, and the facilitation of both national and international networking. Furthermore, the organization works toward enhancing the accessibility of grant opportunities.

During the **Visegrad Art Market** project's operational phase, it came to light that creative enterprises have become exceptionally vulnerable in the post-COVID-19 era. While the necessity for support is undeniable, creative professionals themselves often find it difficult to articulate the specific nature of the assistance they require or to pinpoint the underlying systemic causes of their business challenges. Consequently, the Visegrad Art Market project set out **to map the unique needs and obstacles faced by professionals within the cultural and creative industries (CCI)**. This mapping process is aimed to identify critical "hot points" — specific areas requiring targeted intervention and support from national, regional, and local government bodies. To provide a comprehensive regional perspective, the research was conducted across Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, based on the premise that members of the Visegrad Group (V4) encounter similar structural and economic issues. The Visegrad Art Market project extends beyond mere academic research; it serves as a **call to action for creative businesses to engage in cross-national community-building**. It acts as a platform for knowledge sharing and the promotion of regional innovation. The project was co-financed by the governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia through the **International Visegrad Fund**, an organization whose mission is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe.

Theoretical Background

Stakeholders within the cultural and creative industries (CCI) primarily operate as self-employed individuals or micro-enterprises. **This structural characteristic often prevents them from expanding beyond their immediate, limited markets and leaves them highly dependent on localized development opportunities.** This inherent vulnerability was significantly exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. According to a 2021 study by EY, the CCI was a primary driver of economic prosperity within the European Union prior to the pandemic. It functioned as a major economic force, contributing 4.4% to the EU's total GDP in terms of turnover.

In monetary terms, this amounted to 643 billion euros — a figure that surpassed the turnover of industries such as telecommunications, high technology, pharmaceuticals, and the automotive sector. Furthermore, the sector provided employment for over 7.6 million people across the EU-28, with **33% of the workforce being self-employed**. Between 2013 and 2019, the creative and cultural industries experienced a robust growth rate of 17%.

However, the subsequent pandemic triggered a devastating collapse within the CCI throughout the European Union. The closure of museums and theaters, combined with the failure of numerous small businesses, resulted in a net drop in turnover of 199 billion euros. By 2020, the cultural and creative sector had lost approximately 31% of its total revenues, reducing its total turnover to 444 billion euros. The performing arts were hit the hardest, suffering a 90% loss in turnover, followed by the music industry at -76%. Despite a 9% growth in the video game industry, nearly all other sub-sectors declined: advertising (-28%), architecture (-32%), audiovisuals (-22%), books (-25%), newspapers and magazines (-23%), radio (-20%), and visual arts (-38%). **The pandemic crisis also intensified pre-existing structural issues, including unpredictable working hours, precarious contracts, and widespread burnout.**

During the recovery phase, while digital media has shown growth, the performing arts continue to face persistent challenges. Freelancers and project-based workers are recovering more slowly due to the lack of adequate social safety nets. Consequently, **the post-pandemic recovery of the CCI has proven to be uneven and unequal.** The emergence and consolidation of streaming platforms (such as Netflix and Amazon Prime) have established a labor-market monopoly where a few dominant players dictate terms, thereby undermining wages and job security. Additionally, **the rise of artificial intelligence within creative fields poses a threat to many professional positions.** This digital transition, accelerated by the pandemic, is fundamentally reshaping the landscape of the cultural and creative sector and presenting new challenges.

The Visegrad Group is united by a common cultural and historical heritage, rooted in their collective past as members of the Soviet bloc. Although these nations joined the European Union more than 20 years ago and are largely aligned with the values of the European cultural sphere, the legacy of 40 years of socialism has not yet fully vanished. While post-communist countries successfully transitioned their political and economic systems, social transformation is a considerably slower process.

Nevertheless, as the EY research demonstrates, the cultural and creative industries can serve as major drivers of national GDP. This data actively challenges the common misconception — prevalent in many post-communist societies — that art is "unnecessary". For this reason, it is essential to support and empower creative businesses in need within the Visegrad Group countries. These societies are also entitled to experience and enjoy art to the same extent as any other nation within the European Union.

A 2016 study focusing on Poland, Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia found that only a limited number of creative clusters could be detected in the region. Of those that do exist, 36% originate from multimedia, 24% from press and commercial activities, 20% from the cultural field, and 20% from design. Most of these clusters were bottom-up initiatives, frequently launched by non-profit organizations. The primary motivations for their formation include networking (knowledge sharing and event planning) and collaborative research and innovation projects. However, administrative hurdles and a lack of trust often impede the formation of these clusters. Current research indicates that most businesses, particularly smaller ones, operate in isolation. They rarely form alliances or partnerships, and in many cases, they are unaware of the existence of their peers.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of the **Visegrad Art Market** research is to foster greater awareness regarding the systemic challenges within the cultural sector. This initiative is designed not only for potential external stakeholders and benefactors who seek to mitigate the industry's decline but require a clear starting point, but also for creative entrepreneurs who lack the necessary insights to optimize their market positioning. At the project's inception, three core hypotheses were established:

- **H1:** The cultural and creative industries are characterized by fragmentation; stakeholders operate largely in isolation without meaningful interconnections.
- **H2:** Entrepreneurs within the CCI encounter significant barriers when attempting to establish international professional networks.
- **H3:** Creative enterprises suffer from high levels of financial vulnerability and, consequently, require targeted intervention and support from national and local government authorities.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research instruments. Although the sample size precludes the study from being strictly representative in a statistical sense, it offers a rigorous and thoughtful "deep dive" into the specific needs of creative stakeholders. The overarching aim of this methodology is to provide a multifaceted perspective on the regional landscape.

Quantitative Method: Needs Assessment Survey

A comprehensive online needs assessment survey, consisting of 41 questions, was distributed to creative industry professionals across the Visegrad Group countries. While the questionnaire was accessible to any relevant professional via a public link, data collection primarily relied on the "snowball" sampling technique. A total of 152 valid responses were gathered.

The geographical distribution of respondents is as follows:

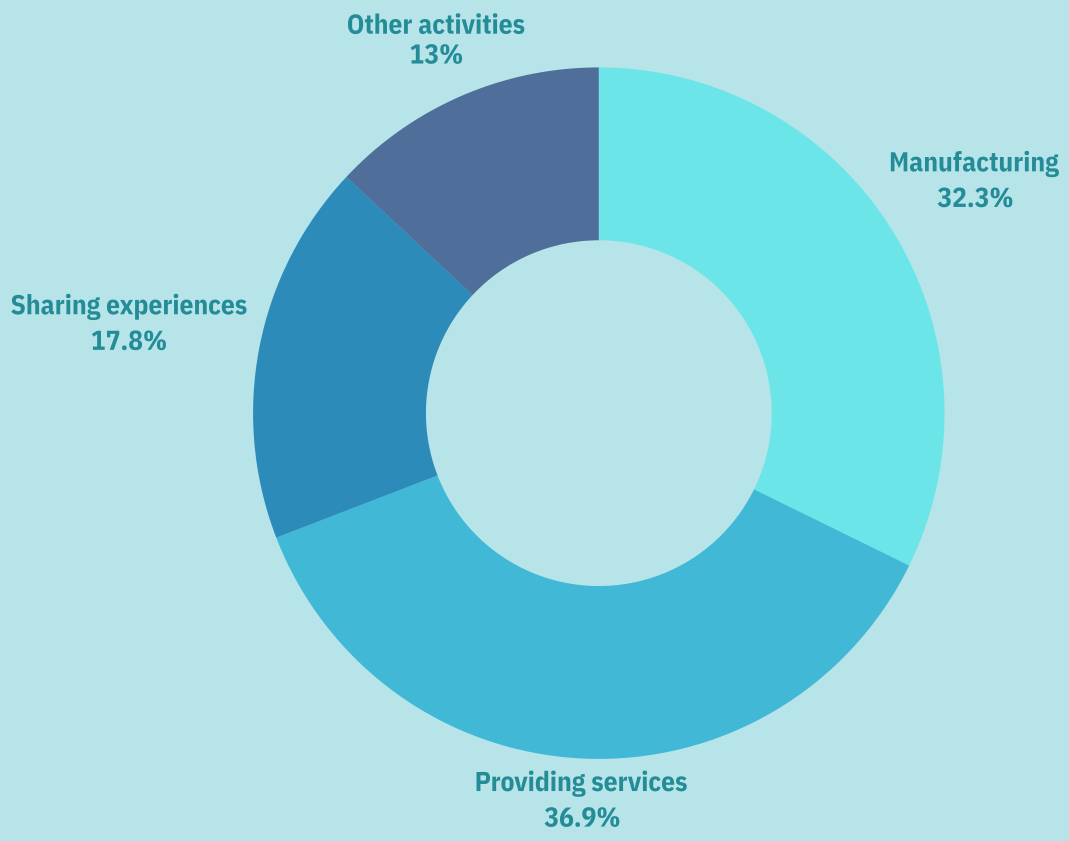
- **Poland:** 31.4%
- **Hungary:** 31.4%
- **Slovakia:** 26.8%
- **Czech Republic:** 5.2%

Note: 6 respondents (approx. 4%) did not disclose their geographic location.

As the survey did not include standard demographic queries, the analysis utilizes the following independent (explanatory) variables:

V1: Primary Activity of Respondents

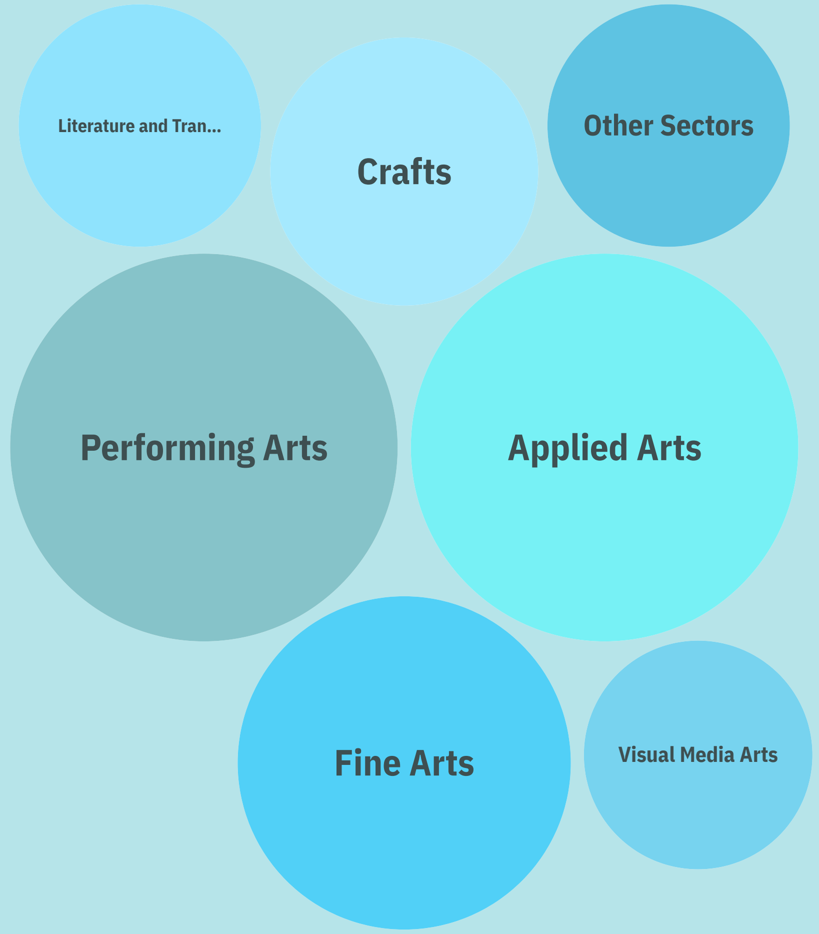
The distribution of the respondents' primary activities reveals that service provision is the most prominent category at 36.8%, closely followed by product manufacturing at 32.2%. Experience sharing accounts for 17.8% of the participants, while the remaining 13.2% engage in various other creative activities. These figures highlight the diverse nature of the sector, where the combination of tangible goods and professional services constitutes nearly seventy percent of the market.



V2: Creative Sector Specialization

The distribution across creative sectors shows that performing arts and applied arts are the most represented categories, each accounting for **23.0%** of the respondents. Visual arts also constitute a significant portion of the sample at **17.1%**, while the creative handmade industry represents **11.2%** of the participants. Smaller segments of the professional community include literature and translation at **9.2%**, followed by visual media arts at **7.9%**. Finally, the remaining **8.6%** of the respondents operate in various other creative sectors not specifically categorized.

Regarding professional experience, a significant majority (**60%**) have been active in their respective fields for over six years. However, the data reveals a high degree of structural diversity: **48%** of respondents do not officially own a business (operating instead as employees or hobbyists), and only **53.9%** pursue their creative activity as a full-time profession. Approximately **27%** of the participants engage in creative work on a part-time basis. These disparities highlight the heterogeneous nature of creative stakeholders, which complicates the development of "one-size-fits-all" support mechanisms.



2. Qualitative Method: Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the survey data and provide deeper context, four in-depth interviews were conducted with creative stakeholders from diverse fields and nationalities. Two interviews were conducted in Hungarian with Hungarian entrepreneurs, while the remaining two were conducted in English—one with a Slovakian entrepreneur and another with a Czech professional operating within Poland. The interview protocols were designed to address the three primary hypotheses while also exploring specific issues identified during previous study tours, webinars, and preliminary survey analysis. The semi-structured interviews focused on several key dimensions:

- Financial stability and funding models.
- Perceptions of national and local government support.
- Networking opportunities and community building.
- Time management and administrative burdens.

Beyond these thematic areas, interviewees provided personal narratives regarding their daily operational challenges and the motivations that sustain their businesses. All interviews were conducted via online platforms.

The following sections will first analyze these qualitative interviews to provide a personal perspective on the "highs and lows" of creative entrepreneurship. Subsequently, we will present the quantitative survey results to determine the extent to which these personal narratives align with broader regional trends.

Research Results

1. Qualitative Analysis: In-Depth Interviews

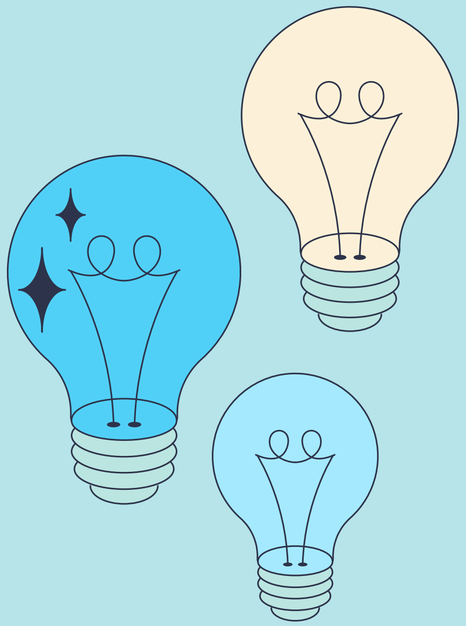
This section explores the qualitative dimensions of the research through four semi-structured interviews. These profiles illustrate the diverse motivations, operational models, and systemic barriers experienced by creative professionals in the V4 region.

Interviewee #1 (Slovakia)

Interviewee #1 has operated an online contemporary art gallery in Kosice, Slovakia, for two years. Having studied art history in various international contexts, she returned to Slovakia with the specific mission of bridging the gap between the general public and contemporary art. Her professional ecosystem consists of both national and international networks, including strategic partnerships with artists and other galleries. By maintaining a **purely digital presence** rather than a physical exhibition space, she enjoys the flexibility of collaborating with partners worldwide. However, this model requires her to **constantly navigate the differing expectations of her local and international communities**. Financially, the gallery does not yet generate a full-time salary; consequently, she maintains a position as a teacher to ensure financial stability. Due to the conservative and tradition-bound socio-political atmosphere in her region, she receives no support from national or local government bodies — a situation that has led her to **prioritize institutional independence**. Her primary operational challenges include marketing, managing complex relationships with "problematic" artists, and the constant pressure to curate fresh collections to retain customer engagement.

Interviewee #2 (Poland)

Interviewee #2 is a professional painter based in Krakow. His commercial strategy is twofold: he collaborates with established art galleries and manages his **own e-commerce platform** for the sale of limited-edition prints and graphics. His daily routine involves six to seven hours of intensive creative work, which he supplements with **a part-time job to cover essential living expenses**. Operating from a home-based studio, he expresses satisfaction with his current circumstances, maintaining that diligent financial management allows for a sustainable lifestyle as an artist, despite the inherent year-to-year volatility of art sales. Unlike many in the sector, he **successfully utilizes local government grants** to support his creative output. His professional network expands organically through consistent participation in exhibitions and specialized workshops.



Interviewee #3 (Hungary)

Interviewee #3 is a designer and manufacturer of unique handmade accessories, including bags and jewelry. Transitioning from a long career as an English teacher and translator, she pivoted to fashion design — a long-held ambition — while raising her children, focusing on the **creative upcycling of materials**. Now in her tenth year of operation, she manages a dual-workspace model: a craft laboratory at home and a dedicated showroom in the city center of Debrecen. She defines herself as an **"anti-entrepreneur"**, as her business model is guided by personal principles and intuition rather than aggressive marketing trends or manipulative sales tactics. While she possesses an **extensive professional network**, she intentionally maintains a selective, close-knit circle of customers to preserve a positive creative environment. Beyond her own brand, she serves as a **community catalyst** by organizing a monthly fair that provides a visibility platform for other creative entrepreneurs. Although the local government recognizes this fair, **the support remains largely symbolic**, limited to event invitations rather than financial backing. Her marketing efforts are concentrated on social media and her website, with the high-quality photography process identified as her most significant time investment.

Interviewee #4 (Hungary)

Interviewee #4 is a bibliotherapist currently **navigating a career transition**. While maintaining a full-time corporate position, she pursued specialized training in bibliotherapy and mental hygiene two years ago, driven by a desire to generate social value through her work. She facilitates group sessions for 10-12 participants in various cultural venues across Debrecen. Despite a wealth of innovative ideas for expansion, her **primary constraint is a severe lack of time**. Her promotional strategy is minimalist, relying almost exclusively on Facebook and the power of personal recommendations. Her partnerships with local venues provide essential visibility and serve as a primary marketing channel. Her approach to community building is highly intentional, prioritizing the quality of the therapeutic environment over the quantity of participants; consequently, **international networking is not a strategic priority**. Currently, all revenue generated is reinvested back into the practice. Her primary concerns regarding a full-time transition into entrepreneurship include financial instability and the fear that the pressure of a professionalized "hobby" might lead to exhaustion and a loss of creative passion.

2. Common Themes and Cross-Case Analysis

Despite the diverse fields and nationalities of the four interviewees, several recurring themes emerge, highlighting the systemic challenges and shared motivations within the V4 creative sector.

A. Financial Instability and Systemic Vulnerability

A defining characteristic of these creative enterprises is their **unpredictable revenue stream**. Respondents are highly susceptible to the economic fluctuations of the creative market. A poignant example is Interviewee #3, who faced a severe financial crisis in the spring of 2025 due to the Hungarian recession. This period of instability led her to question the ethical legitimacy of marketing high-priced, non-essential handmade goods during a time when many households were struggling with basic expenses. While Interviewee #3 is supported by her family and a full-time position, others rely on secondary employment to maintain their creative practice. For many, **the creative activity itself becomes a secondary occupation**.

As Interviewee #2 notes: *"That's why I have to keep a minimal part-time job, because the income from painting is very volatile."* Similarly, Interviewee #4 reinvests all her earnings from bibliotherapy back into the business, making her full-time job essential for survival. This financial pressure often creates a *"vicious circle"*. Interviewee #2 explains his rationale for part-time work as a means of preserving artistic integrity: *"I chose the minimal part-time job so I wouldn't be completely dependent on the customers... This way I remain free, and I can paint what I want, what I consider important, not what is sellable."* However, this pursuit of artistic autonomy frequently results in a loss of time, as **hours spent in secondary employment are hours taken away from creative production**.

Furthermore, there is a **perceived lack of institutional support.** While grant opportunities exist through the EU, local governments or various NGOs, the administrative complexity and strict compliance requirements often render them inaccessible to micro-enterprises. The time-intensive nature of applications, coupled with low success rates, means that for many small businesses, **grants represent a burden rather than a viable source of income**.

B. Autonomy, Freedom, and the Challenge of Time Management

Despite these hardships, a **profound passion for their creative acitivity remains a primary motivator**. Career-changers like Interviewees #3 and #4 left previous roles in search of greater purpose and vocational fulfillment. They highly value the flexibility and self-governance inherent in their work. Interviewee #1 articulates this drive for independence: *"That's why I'm doing it myself, because I didn't want [toxic curatorial work] anymore... I wanted to decide when, what, in what form, and with what artist I would work with."*

However, the "second job" that provides a safety net simultaneously creates a significant time deficit. Interviewee #1 admits, "my full-time teaching takes up the time, but it provides the safety net, so I have to keep it." **This lack of time hinders strategic planning, marketing, and administration.** While some receive assistance from family members, the inability to hire staff due to financial unpredictability keeps these businesses as "one-person operations." Consequently, the boundary between professional and personal life becomes blurred. Interviewee #3 highlights the difficulty of "self-bossing": *"I became the head of my own company... I need to not get mad at myself if one day I don't go to the workshop, but I'm with my family."*

> **"That's why I have to keep a minimal part-time job, because the income from painting is very volatile."**

> **"They only want to sell what has already been sold once. But if something is new, they can't do anything with it."**

> **"I wanted to decide when, what, in what form, and with what artist I would work with."**

> **"I became the head of my own company..."**

> **“My biggest problem is that marketing is very difficult... I cannot do good, up-to-date marketing as I should...”**

> **“I focus on creation rather than selling. I made my own website, but I don’t put energy into constantly posting.”**

> **“Networking comes naturally here; you don’t have to generate it artificially.”**

> **“I chose the minimal part-time job so I wouldn’t be completely dependent on the customers...”**

C. Online Marketing and the Digital Dilemma

While the interviewees are dedicated to their creative output, they often struggle with the *“entrepreneurial mindset”*, particularly regarding marketing. Interviewee #1 identifies this as her greatest challenge: *“My biggest problem is that marketing is very difficult... I cannot do good, up-to-date marketing as I should”.*

Most participants favor Facebook or personal websites to reach their audience, yet their level of activity varies. Interviewee #2 admits to a lack of engagement with digital networking: *“I focus on creation rather than selling. I made my own website, but I don’t put energy into constantly posting.”*

A recurring theme is **the tension between marketing necessity and artistic authenticity**. Interviewee #3 is particularly critical of modern promotional tactics, describing herself as an *“anti-entrepreneur”* who avoids manipulative trends to protect her integrity: *“This buying-purchasing and these tricks seem to me to be such a manipulation.”* Even during financial hardship, she refuses to utilize emotionally-driven posts to “foist” products on customers. Additionally, limited diversification across platforms (e.g., the absence of TikTok) restricts their marketing reach, largely due to the exhaustion of managing every aspect of the business alone.

D. Community, Trust, and Network Building

The nature of networking varies by location and discipline. In Krakow, Interviewee #2 experiences a cohesive and organic art community: *“Networking comes naturally here; you don’t have to generate it artificially.”* For others, community building is a more deliberate effort.

For Interviewee #4, the core of her work is the creation of deep, trust-based connections among strangers: *“Bibliotherapy provides such a safe framework for strangers to get to know each other and discover how much they have in common.”* Interviewees #1 and #3 possess broader professional networks that provide essential resources. Interviewee #3 values the social capital gained through her creative journey — connections and experiences she would have missed as a teacher. Through her monthly fair, she also acts as a mentor, supporting less developed businesses. Meanwhile, Interviewee #1 operates on two fronts: maintaining an international network of artists while building a local presence in Slovakia. This dual focus creates unique challenges, such as the language dilemma (English vs. Slovak) in her workshops and the **need for a physical “personal presence” to gain local trust**.

E. Systemic Barriers and Market Dangers

The research highlights several regional obstacles. Interviewee #1 notes that the Slovak market remains conservative and unaccustomed to online art sales, a sentiment echoed by Interviewee #3, who emphasizes that design appreciation must be built *“organically from the bottom up”*. There is a broader concern that Central-Eastern European societies, often driven by material-value preferences, may undervalue contemporary art and unique design. Furthermore, **overall economic instability reduces the public’s purchasing power**, directly impacting the industry. Interviewee #4 identifies mass production (e.g., platforms like Temu) as a major threat: *“You can order so cheaply... that the quality, unique, expensive handicraft product is probably not even necessary to be interested in.”* Finally, Interviewee #2 points to the risk-aversion of traditional galleries: *“They only want to sell what has already been sold once. But if something is new, they can’t do anything with it.”*

Summary: The interviews reveal a collective desire for a “safety-providing” larger community, such as a cluster, to mitigate these risks and foster collective resilience.

3. Quantitative Analysis: Survey Findings

Following the qualitative insights, this section presents the results of the quantitative survey. The analysis focuses on the frequencies of variables and seeks significant correlations between the two primary independent variables – sector and experience – and other operational factors. To identify these connections, Chi-square tests and ANOVA with Post Hoc tests were utilized. Given the relatively small sample size, **these findings should be regarded as exploratory, providing a foundational understanding of regional trends rather than definitive statistical proof**.

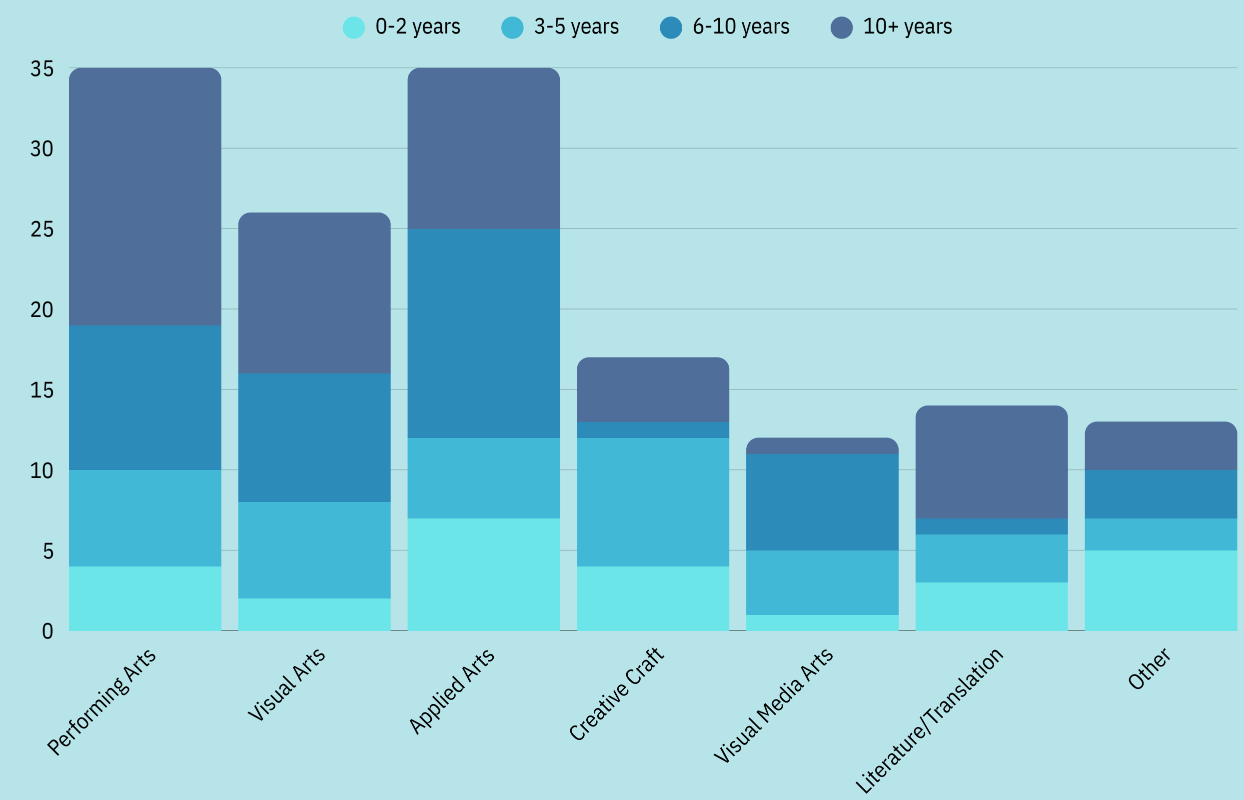
A. Professional Experience Across Sectors

The distribution of professional experience is not uniform across the various creative sectors, suggesting that certain fields are more effective at retaining "veterans" while others are more accessible to newcomers.

• **Performing Arts and Literature/Translation:**
These sectors boast the highest proportion of professionals with over 10 years of experience. This stability may reflect the established, yet potentially less accessible nature of these fields.

• **Applied Arts and "Other" Sectors:**
These areas appear to be the primary entry points for newcomers to the industry.

• **Creative Craft Industry:**
This sector is dominated by professionals with 3-5 years of experience, indicating a newer or more transition-heavy workforce.



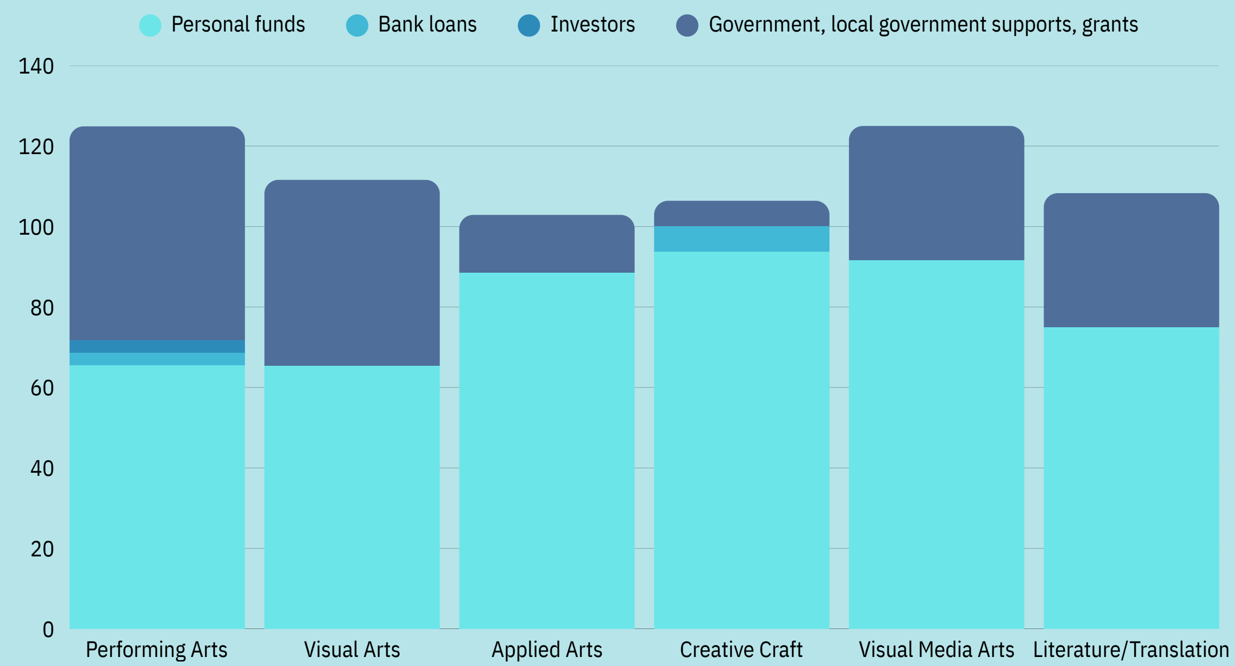
B. Financial Models and Funding Diversity

The research reveals stark differences in how creative businesses are financed. The data highlights a significant "financial isolation" in certain sub-sectors:

• **Self-Funding Dominance:** The **creative craft industry** (93.8%) and **visual media arts** (91.7%) rely almost exclusively on personal funds. The **applied arts** sector also shows a high degree of self-reliance at 88.6%. These sectors function as largely "closed" financial systems.

• **Funding Diversity:** Conversely, **performing arts** and **visual arts** are the most financially diverse. They are the least dependent on personal funds and utilize government or local government support at significantly higher rates (53.1% and 46.2%, respectively).

• **Institutional Gap:** Across all sectors, the role of bank loans and private investors is negligible. This indicates a complete disconnect between the creative industry and traditional financial or investment systems in the region.



3. Community Building and Operational Challenges

While the majority of respondents agree that community building is important, the intensity of this belief varies. Performing artists are the most vocal supporters of community integration, whereas those in visual media arts show the least interest (see the chart below).

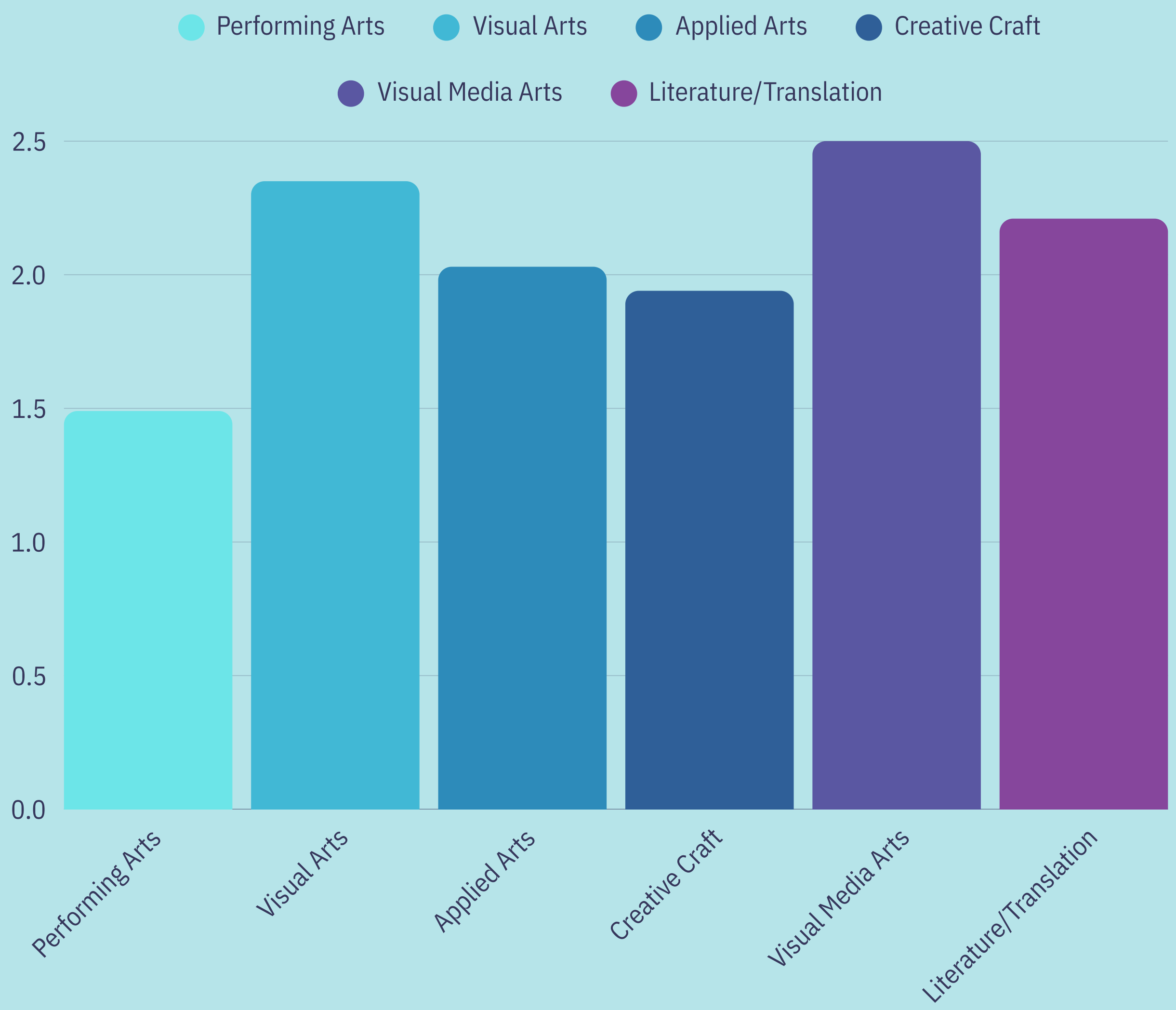
The challenges faced by these sectors are equally varied:

• **Financial Scarcity:** This is the primary obstacle for the **visual arts** sector (57.7%).

• **Marketing and Customer Acquisition:** The creative craft industry suffers the most from visibility issues and the difficulty of building a stable customer base.

• **Resilience:** The **visual media arts** and **literature/translation** sectors appear to be the most resilient, reporting the fewest startup challenges.

Notably, "strong competition" was not considered a significant threat in any sector.



(The lower the number the more community building is important.)

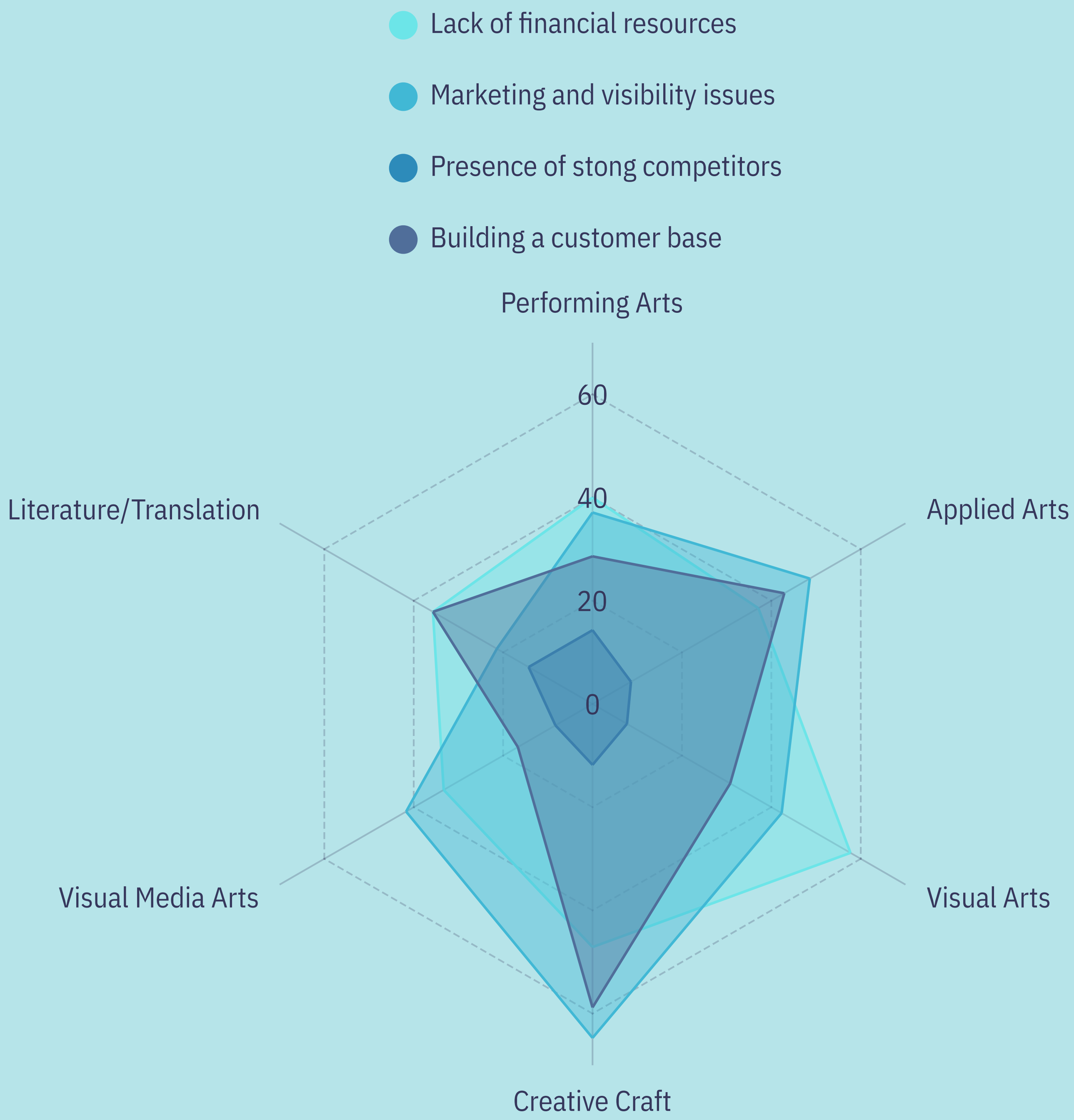
4. Industry Satisfaction and Support Perceptions

There is a profound and unanimous dissatisfaction with the current state of the cultural and creative industries within the respondents' respective countries. On a 5-point scale, no respondent reported being "absolutely satisfied," with mean scores ranging between a low 2.11 and 2.91.

A significant correlation exists between financial support and satisfaction:

• **Performing artists** report the highest (though still modest) satisfaction levels, directly correlating with the higher levels of financial support they receive.

• **Creative Craft Industry** feels the most marginalized. With only 6.3% of the sector receiving financial support, they strongly disagree with the statement that industry players are supported in their country. Statistically, this sector faces a "cumulative disadvantage": they endure the most market-entry challenges (marketing, visibility, customer building) while simultaneously being excluded from formal support systems.



5. Support Requirements and Collaborative Intent

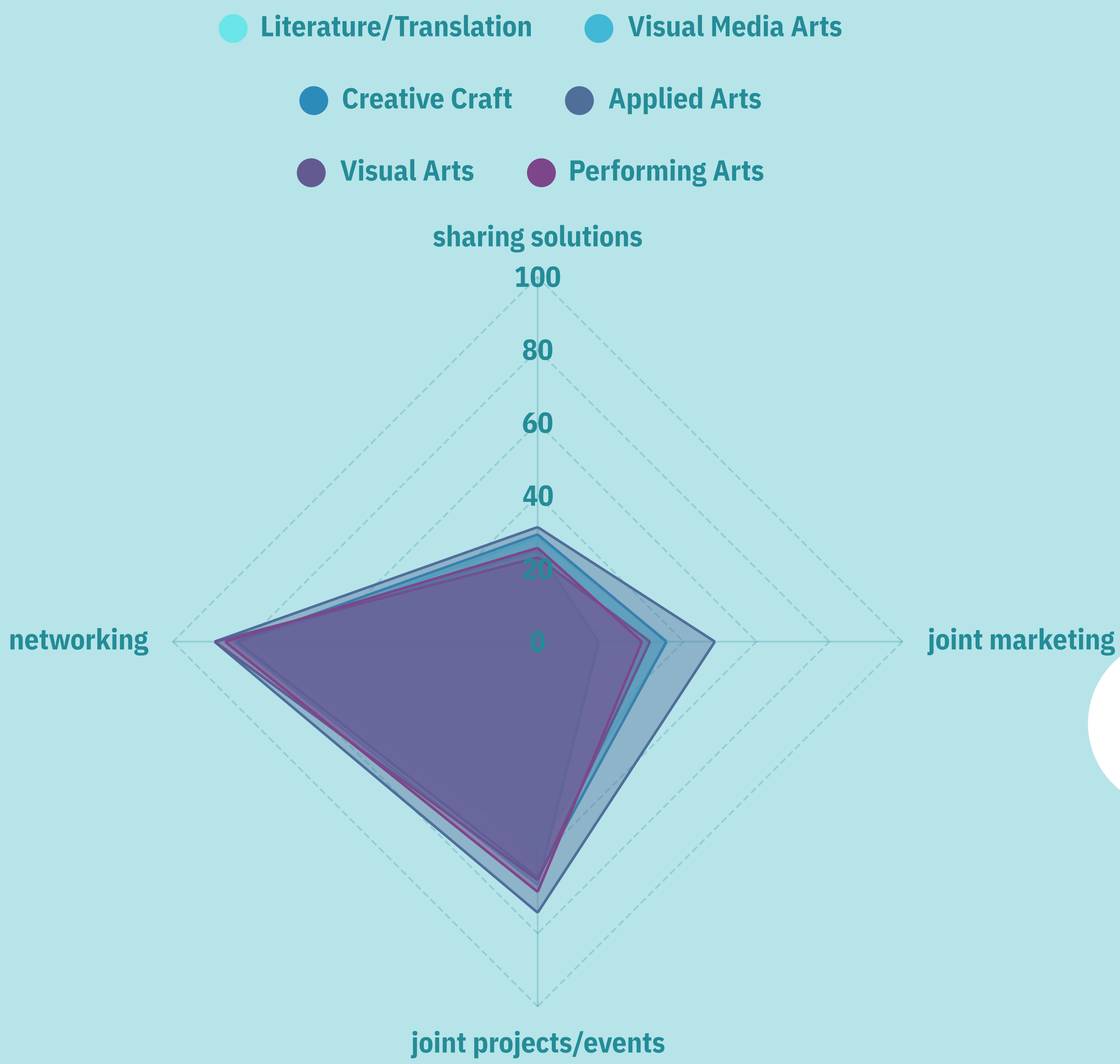
While specific needs vary, **financial support is a universal demand**. Regardless of sector, 79.1% of all respondents identify financial assistance or grants from local governments as essential for their survival. Regarding non-financial support, the needs diverge:

- **Event-Based Support:** The **applied arts** and **visual media arts** sectors (over 50% each) have the highest demand for exhibition platforms and public presentations.

- **Horizontal vs. Vertical Support:** Interestingly, the **creative craft industry** shows the least interest in top-down municipal event organization (29.4%) but is highly open to horizontal, market-based cooperation with other SMEs (64.7%). This suggests they value peer-to-peer alliances over formal government-led initiatives.

- **Networking and Communication:** The **literature and translation** sector prioritizes networking opportunities (71.4%), while **visual arts** identifies a critical need for communicational and promotional support (50.0%).

What forms of co-operation would you consider useful with other cultural and creative industry actors?



VI. Conclusion and Synthesis

The triangulation of the qualitative interviews and the quantitative needs assessment survey results provides strong confirmation for the three initial research hypotheses, while also uncovering the nuanced complexities of the regional creative sector.

H1: Fragmentation of the Cultural and Creative Industry

Status: Confirmed structurally, but challenged socially. The research confirms that the industry is structurally fragmented; the vast majority of businesses operate as sole proprietorships due to a lack of resources, leading to **significant professional isolation**. However, the quantitative data reveals a striking ambivalence: despite their isolation, actors demonstrate a **high degree of willingness to connect**. A significant proportion of respondents (67.6%) consider joint projects beneficial, and community building is viewed as universally important. This suggests that fragmentation is not a result of individual reluctance, but rather a **systemic lack of accessible platforms and resources**. Furthermore, stakeholders prioritize horizontal, market-based networking (such as self-organized fairs) over formal, “top-down” institutional initiatives. This inherent openness to voluntary, peer-to- peer organization represents a critical opportunity for future interventions.

H2: Barriers to International Connectivity

Status: Confirmed as sector-dependent. While quantitative evidence on this point was less definitive, qualitative results highlight the specific nature of the struggle. The difficulty of international networking is largely dictated by the business model of the sub-sector. Interviews revealed that entrepreneurs already operating on an international scale (e.g., Interviewee #1) face significant challenges in balancing national and international demands, such as language selection and cultural adaptation. Conversely, for locally focused actors (e.g., bibliotherapy), international connections remain a low priority. Thus, the difficulty arises exactly where internationalization is a strategic necessity, yet a “one-size-fits-all” regional solution remains elusive. Notably, the **Visegrad Art Market** project was identified by participants as a highly positive and necessary initiative for fostering these cross-national connections.

H3: Financial Vulnerability and the Need for Institutional Support

Status: Clearly Confirmed. This hypothesis is unequivocally supported by both branches of the study. Quantitatively, 79.1% of respondents — regardless of their sector — identified **financial assistance as the most critical form of support** required from local governments. The negligible role of traditional banking and private investment systems underscores an extreme level of financial vulnerability. Qualitatively, the personal narratives were dominated by stories of unpredictable income and the necessity of "safety net" secondary jobs. The greatest fear cited by those in transition was the potential financial failure associated with becoming a full-time creative entrepreneur.

Summary: The Paradox of Creative Autonomy

The Visegrad Art Market project illuminates a fundamental contradiction within the Central and Eastern European creative sector: a fierce desire for artistic independence is inextricably linked to high levels of financial exposure. The “privilege” of following a creative passion often demands a disproportionate level of personal risk. By relying almost exclusively on personal revenue and private funds, creative actors secure their artistic freedom (*“I paint what I want”*), but they simultaneously hinder their own growth potential. This model reflects a complete lack of focus from traditional financial systems, such as banks and investors, toward the creative economy.

Despite the significant economic potential of the CCI – which contributes 4.4% to the EU’s total GDP – this potential remains largely untapped in the V4 region. The current support systems are incomplete, uneven, and often inflexible. Standardized solutions, such as large-scale grants with rigid compliance terms, are frequently out of reach for the micro-businesses that need them most.

The research identifies the **creative craft industry** as the sector in the most critical condition. Facing the most severe market-access challenges and receiving the least amount of formal support (6.3%), these entrepreneurs feel systematically excluded. Their primary struggle – marketing and content production (70.6%) – is exacerbated by a chronic lack of time due to secondary employment.

In conclusion, while creative entrepreneurs are driven by passion, they frequently lack the time, specialized knowledge, or financial capital to manage the “business” side of their craft. Moving forward primarily by intuition or luck, they remain in a cycle of survival. The **Visegrad Art Market** project seeks to facilitate a necessary “shift in consciousness”. By providing the tools for more conscious decision-making and professionalized management, the project aims to act as a catalyst – transforming fragmented passion into a sustainable, economically viable, and collaborative creative ecosystem across the Visegrad region.

Policy Recommendations for Local Governments to Support the CCI

1. Targeted Multi-Disciplinary Grants for Innovation and Collaboration
Establish a dedicated grant system accessible to all artistic disciplines within the CCI sector. These grants should specifically incentivize cross-sectoral collaboration and prioritize innovation aimed at launching new creative products or services, helping businesses diversify their revenue streams.

2. Subsidized Creative Hubs and Coworking Spaces
Repurpose underutilized, municipally-owned properties into creative hubs and coworking spaces. These should be offered at below-market rental rates, with management outsourced to a dedicated coordinator or a non-profit organization to foster a professional environment and a supportive community.

3. Capacity-Building Training on Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Provide free, specialized training sessions focused on the practical application of Artificial Intelligence in administrative and marketing workflows. By automating routine tasks, creative entrepreneurs can overcome their chronic lack of time and focus more on their core creative production.

4. Strategic PR and Marketing Assistance
Support the local CCI sector by actively contributing to its public relations and marketing activities. This could include featuring local artists in municipal communication channels, organizing city-wide promotion campaigns, and providing platforms that increase the visibility of creative businesses toward a wider audience.

5. Establishment of Regular Regional Creative Markets and Networking Platforms
Organize recurring, high-profile regional fairs and networking events that provide a direct marketplace for creative entrepreneurs. By creating these physical and digital platforms, the local government can facilitate horizontal, market-based partnerships among SMEs, helping them build a stable customer base and reduce the feeling of structural isolation.

Conclusion

Supporting the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) is far more than a simple act of cultural patronage; for local governments, it represents a multifaceted strategic investment with long-term dividends.

Strengthening this sector contributes directly to the diversification of the local economy, as creative businesses generate high added-value and demonstrate remarkable resilience in adapting to market shifts. Through innovation-focused grants, new products and services emerge that bolster the municipality's competitiveness and increase future tax revenues. The subsidized utilization of vacant municipal properties prevents the physical deterioration of the building stock while simultaneously revitalizing neglected urban areas. Furthermore, the establishment of creative hubs and coworking spaces acts as a deterrent to the "brain drain" of young talent by offering attractive professional perspectives locally.

By providing training in Artificial Intelligence, the local government fosters the development of a modern, technologically proficient entrepreneurial class capable of optimizing its own growth. As administrative and marketing processes become more efficient, local businesses achieve greater stability, which in turn mitigates unemployment risks. Strategic PR support and the promotion of creative events significantly enhance the municipality's brand, making it more appealing to outside investors and highly skilled professionals. A vibrant cultural landscape and the availability of unique, handmade products boost local tourism by increasing both visitor numbers and their average length of stay.

Additionally, supported creative communities foster social cohesion and provide essential platforms for public dialogue and engagement. The partnership between the municipality and the sector builds trust in local institutions and reduces the friction often caused by administrative bureaucracy. The development of horizontal networks leads to self-organizing communities that can address local social or economic challenges autonomously. In the long run, supporting the CCI sector improves the city's "livability index," which is fundamental to overall resident satisfaction.

Finally, the environmentally friendly nature of creative industries aligns perfectly with sustainable urban development goals and the transition to a green economy. Ultimately, these measures create an innovative ecosystem that can elevate a municipality into a prominent regional center of knowledge and culture.

PROJECT PARTNERS

SIXAGON
IN STRATEGY WE TRUST

ESTRADA RZESZOWSKA

MA ME

EXPERT PARTNER:
UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN, SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL POLICY DEPARTMENT

WEBSITE: **https://www.sixagon.hu/visegrad-eng**

E-MAIL: **sixagon@sixagon.hu**

SUPPORTED BY

Visegrad Fund

Visegrad Fund