

English Corner

Traduzioni a cura di
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My skills Capacità al centro

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Beyond the Myth of Spontaneous Innovation: Soft Skills that Guide Change

When talking about innovations, we often imagine that revolutionary ideas emerge from a random, spontaneous process – an outcome of pure inspiration or individual genius. When we think of great innovators, it's natural to picture their discoveries as the result of sudden epiphanies. This captivating view, however, overlooks the complexity and organization necessary to generate effective and sustainable innovation. Research shows that innovation rarely arises from a fortuitous event. While intuition and individual creativity play a role, innovation is fundamentally a collaborative process requiring specific methodologies, analytical tools, and coordinated efforts. In other words, individual talent alone is not enough to drive innovation; a structured organizational process and a range of competencies among those involved in generating innovation are essential.

This perspective leads us to understand innovation as a complex phenomenon that must be nurtured through a structured approach and specific soft skills, which are critical to addressing the challenges that arise throughout the innovation process.

In today's environment, successful organizations approach innovation as an organized practice, involving interdisciplinary teams, formalized methodologies – such as design thinking – and techniques for generating new ideas. However, for these tools to be effective, those involved need not only hard skills but also soft skills, including emotional, social, and cognitive skills, which form the intangible dimension of human capital. This set of soft skills enables

individuals to understand the organizational context, collaborate effectively, and experiment with new solutions.

The Ca' Foscari Competency Centre analysed 227 cases of innovation, defined as situations in which successful product, process, marketing, organizational, or strategic innovations were developed. For each case, the organizational conditions, people involved, and determining factors were examined. Special attention was given to the soft skills employed, particularly by entrepreneurs and managers, whose roles were central to the success of these innovations. These soft skills proved essential for achieving effective results in innovation processes, as they facilitated overcoming obstacles, managing uncertainties, exploring new environments, and assessing levels of criticality and risk.

Which soft skills were most useful in supporting innovative processes? Among the individuals analysed, a variety of soft skills emerged as especially valuable. Here is a brief description of the most commonly observed soft skills. The first skill is *Result orientation*: the ability to pursue goals with determination, even in the face of obstacles and difficulties. This skill is crucial in innovation processes, where achieving results often requires a long path marked by trials, errors, and successive improvements. It enables individuals to maintain motivation and focus on the final goal. For example, in an innovative process, a goal-oriented person facing technical obstacles or limited budgets can find alternative solutions or additional resources to complete the project successfully. The added value of result orientation lies in the capacity to define and maintain clear goals along the way. Those who possess this skill are able to map out a detailed roadmap, monitoring progress and identifying deviations from the ideal path. This approach is particularly useful in innovation contexts, where unsuccessful attempts are common; result orientation helps maintain focus on the ultimate objective.

Another essential skill to support innovation is *Diagnostic thinking*. This involves the ability to analyse complex situations and identify the root causes of problems. In innovative processes, we often encounter new situations or challenges that require fresh solutions. Diagnostic thinking allows us to manage these challenges through a systematic approach, grounded in deep analysis and a careful understanding of the

variables involved. This skill is critical for developing innovative solutions because it enables us to pinpoint genuine obstacles to innovation. Additionally, it prevents superficial approaches, helping us focus on the 'why' behind problems. In an innovation environment, where problems are complex and multidimensional, diagnostic thinking is essential to understand not just the symptoms but also the root causes. Possessing this skill enables one to design solutions that address real causes, improving the likelihood of success.

A third key skill is *Observing*. The ability to carefully observe the surrounding context is crucial for innovation. Observing allows individuals to notice details and insights that might otherwise go unnoticed. Moreover, this skill helps in gathering new ideas, stimuli, and suggestions, even from contexts different from the one in which problems are being addressed. This means it supports the practical application of solutions developed elsewhere. In innovation processes, observing requires constant attention and curiosity about unfamiliar environments, along with the capacity to adapt insights and intuitions gathered in other contexts to one's own. Lastly, the fourth skill is being a *Change agent*. Possessing this skill means having the ability and motivation to challenge the status quo, positively influencing the environment and inspiring others to do the same. This skill is fundamental in the innovation process, as it enables individuals to overcome internal resistance and foster a mindset open to change. It helps them view change as an opportunity for growth and improvement for everyone involved. Being a change agent is crucial in innovative contexts, helping to address cultural resistance and encouraging active, constructive participation in new initiatives.

In conclusion, innovation is not a random process; it requires methodology, organization, and soft skills that enable individuals to effectively address the unique obstacles of innovative processes. The soft skills we described are just a few of those necessary to build a supportive environment for innovation and make the best use of available technical resources. Recognizing the importance of these skills can make a significant difference for entrepreneurs, managers, and professionals, as well as for those preparing to fill these roles, since soft skills empower them to actively contribute to the development of innovative ideas.



WolmanitY

Ines Giunta
Associated Professor, Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage

in conversation in

Chloé Mukai
Senior Programme Officer, Ethical Fashion Initiative at International Trade Centre

The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of ITC and its partners.

Going to the philosophical roots of the problem of responsibility, which concerns not only survival but the unity of the species and the dignity of its existence, Hans Jonas states his famous phrase: "Act in such a way that the consequences of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on earth". How have you personally experienced that cyclical journey that allows one to move from the personal to the social, thus responding to that call?

I've never thought of this topic in this way, thank you for asking me to reflect on it: I probably experience this every day! My work entails working in multiple locations, with different stakeholder groups, and a very diverse range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This job requires managing difficult interpersonal situations and taking decisions that are often not linear – and which constantly moves me from personal to social. At my work at the Ethical Fashion Initiative, we strive to create decent work for impoverished groups who are often cut out of international trade chains, but who have valuable skills and views to bring to bear.

Morin speaks of the aesthetic feeling as something that places us in a state

definable as poetic, contrasting it with a state he calls prosaic, which characterizes what is done without pleasure or wonder, and is done out of obligation, for survival. Your way of promoting the work of African women seems to embrace the philosopher's invitation to bring together these two aspects, transforming work often seen as functional for survival into a creative act.

Exactly – and this is why I often say I have a dream job! Before joining EFI, I lived in London, where I studied fashion photography and had a short stint working in the fashion industry. While I was thrilled by the beauty of what we were creating, I also had this overwhelming feeling of emptiness and being lost. My current work combines these two different realms, connecting artisan producers – mainly women from Africa – with international fashion and creative brands. It merges a sense of fulfilment, and of course a means to generate a livelihood, and at the same time we are creating beautiful stories and objects that have a soul to them.

Care is the diligent concern for someone or something, the commitment or thought directed toward a living being or an object, attended to with solicitude. It also includes protection and attention for those who are more fragile or weak. Can your work, typically associated with women, be understood as an act of care?

It's an act of care, and it's the sense of responsibility, or duty, that connects us with the communities where we work. In fact, while our projects are limited in time and geography as we are funding by donors, our relationship with the women we are involved with outlives these boundaries.

The 'subaltern' woman, for Spivak, is doubly marginalized, both by capitalism and by patriarchal social structures. She is, in any case, a woman who cannot speak, a silence imposed on the social level and in the representation of herself. What has it meant for you to give voice to her?

I grew up in Japan until I was 18 years old, and this patriarchal representation of women who remained in the background is something also very familiar to me. At the same time, I knew there was another way. I was given a voice, through my work, and it means the world to me to see other women, flourish through work. The moment they are empowered,

and given the means to enact change, women are able to move things in their community and generate change.

The defence of women's values and rights today is often linked with the preservation of land, community, the biosphere, and health. How do these two aspects come together in your work?

Women – and specifically local communities like those with whom we work in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South – are deeply intertwined with their environment and their local community. By encouraging and supporting them to access fair and dignified jobs, we are simultaneously and organically contributing to working towards addressing global issues such as inequality and environmental degradation. Obviously, so much needs to be done to address the monumental challenges of social inequalities facing the world but defending women's values and rights is taking a step in the right direction.

Chloé Mukai is a Senior Programme Officer for the International Trade Centre's Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI). She has over 15 years of experience working at the intersection of the fashion industry, artisanal production in the Global South, and international development assistance. Currently based in Geneva, Switzerland, Chloé has been based with ITC in Burkina Faso (where she managed a project focusing artisanal production of hand-woven cotton fabric for the export market) and in Haiti (where she oversaw a multi-sectoral artisan support project that included metalwork and woven goods). She also has extensive experience working with artisans in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mali, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Before joining EFI, she was the editor of African Woman Magazine, a regional lifestyle magazine headquartered in Uganda. Originally from Tokyo, Japan, Ms. Mukai holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fashion Photography from the University of the Arts London and a Masters in Environmental Management from the Open University.



Women and Rights

by Vania Brino

Full professor in Labour Law
Coordinator of the Master's Degree Programme in Governance of Public Organizations, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Sara De Vido

Full professor in International Law
Rector's delegate for the International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the National Memorial Day of the Exiles and Foibe, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Interview by Sara De Vido, Claudia Irti, Sara Dal Monico, Federica Valerio
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

On 20 October, the workshop Women Empowerment Leadership Workshop *INTRAPRENDENTI: opportunità e servizi per favorire l'imprenditorialità femminile*, with Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari Venezia as lead partner, took place at San Giobbe, Department of Economics, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, with a group of students, setting the stage for the presentation of the book *Take the Lead* by Shaheena Janjuha-Jivraj, Anne-Valérie Corboz, and Delphine Mourot Haxaire. This session, led by Dr. Sara Dal Monico and Dr. Federica Valerio, preceded the book's formal presentation, aimed to spark a debate and deepen participants' understanding of empowerment through interactive activities and guided reflection.

The first session was centred around the question "What is women's empowerment to you?". Starting from some insights from the book, participants reflected on how empowerment is a process, a journey towards awareness; on how achieving empowerment involves making the situation fairer

by 'dodging obstacles', a strategy of learning to navigate entrenched societal and professional barriers that can hinder growth; on how it comes with a building a supportive network. The conversation then turned to the idea of different models of leadership, highlighting the limitations of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach; to the concepts of courage and vulnerability, which are not necessarily in contrast one with the other; and discussed the importance of 'working against the patriarchy' and the often unspoken 'rules' of professional behaviour that tend to benefit men disproportionately.

After the lively and insightful debate of the first session, followed by a coffee break which allowed to continue the discussion in a more relaxed setting, the author Delphine Mourot Haxaire was interviewed by Professors Sara De Vido and Claudia Irti. The interview was followed again by a second debate session, this time in the presence of the author, which made it altogether even more interesting. The following is an extract from the interview.

Please introduce yourself, your own journey and could you share a little bit more about your background?

I studied Business in Paris while simultaneously studying Law, I became a lawyer in France but moved to London soon after, following my then boyfriend now husband. I worked for two years at a law firm, working very hard and I learned a lot there. At some point I had to decide if I wanted to become a solicitor in the UK, but instead opted for a role in a US bank, where I worked for nearly thirteen years and I was doing execution of capital markets, and then business unit risk management in fixed income, which was both 'firefighting' on urgent issues and working on broad longer-term regulatory implementations for the floor (MIFID2 for example). While I was there, I started thinking a lot about these diversity topics as I was the chair of the family network for Europe. Five years ago, I had a change of heart and I became the director of HEC in London, my own alma mater, and I qualified as a coach in parallel.

What led you to co-write *Take the Lead*? Both your professional and personal experiences?

It was both actually. It all started while discussing with the co-authors. We were working on a lot of woman leadership

programs, and we had the feeling that most women went through similar experiences. We realized that when women were telling us their stories, they often used the word 'luck' – "I was lucky because I was proposed this role", "I was lucky because when I came back from maternity leave, this or that happened" – they tend to use the word 'luck' to describe what happened to them. And of course there is some degree of luck in life, but if you think that what happens to you is mostly luck, this does not empower you, hence *Take the lead*.

And what about the subtitle *How Women Leaders are Driving Success Through Innovation*? Could you tell us more about that?

I wrote this book with professors who are professors in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and in Strategy and Leadership. It was crucial for us to link diversity with innovation. So, the subtitle is *How Women Leaders are Driving Success through Innovation*. You get to innovation by thinking differently, and starting to focus on how you could do things just a little bit differently. This works only if you have an inclusive leadership, if you have a leader who allows 'crazy ideas', or at least different ideas.

This is very interesting; at university we talk a lot about diversity and inclusion also in research. Your book builds on seven 'Cs', represented like a ship, including creativity. Could you tell us a little but more about that, how the idea of the ship came about?

We started thinking about business models, and on the Cs. The one that was the starting point was Creativity, which we define very broadly as "another way to solve a problem" and is the link with innovation. Then we applied this creativity to our own canvas and created a ship for this, so you have the image of how you can navigate your career. It is very visual and speaks to our readers. In fact, when readers speak to me about the book, I am always struck by the fact that it is never the same thing that has made them react. Depending on where they are in their own life, things resonate differently with people. It is always a pleasure to realise this.

And the seven Cs?

Ah yes! It's like navigating a boat – you must be aware of all the seven Cs, but maybe one resonates with you more according to where you are in life, you may concentrate on one or two of them

at the same time, but you need to be aware of them all. They are Creativity, Career, Compass, Creating your teams, Courage, Connections and Champions.

We, as women, are most often asked to make compromises, between our careers and personal lives, but choosing courage over compromise makes you think about it from a different perspective. I did find myself in some parts of the book, and one that stuck with me was the ability to say no. A powerful no. Courage means saying a powerful no that puts you at the centre, not in the background: you say no because it's your choice. This is my takeaway at least, and so I wanted to ask if that was your intention in writing this, and whether you found yourself in situations where you said a 'powerful no'.

It's a struggle every day. It's about changing your perspective. You are saying no, but maybe at the same time you're saying yes to something else. The key is to be aware of *why* you are saying yes, or no. Change the perspective: you are saying yes, but you are really saying no, and maybe you can try to say, 'yes under certain conditions', which are the conditions that work for you? Find a way that works for you – again, be creative about it!

Another interesting part of the book is the quotes from women: how did you choose them? And why did you think it would be helpful to include these interviews in your book?

This book is about empowerment, about inspiring women to find their own way. So, we thought it was important to have examples of women who have done it in their own way, who have found a solution that worked for them. We interviewed around 30 women from all over the world, from very different backgrounds. One of them, for example, was working in hospitality, but her husband had to move every three years for work, so she had to find a new job every three years. As the years went by, she decided to start her own business. She now says that her business is 'in her suitcase', because she used her knowledge and expertise to find a solution that would work for her. What was also very interesting for us was the power of 'hindsight', and the importance of taking the time to stop, look back and eventually understand what you learnt and what you can take from those experiences.

What about the definition of success: what is success for you? And what is it for the women you interviewed?

In the "Career" chapter, we included an 'inspirational corner', where we included quotes from all the women we interviewed about their own definition of success. And it was such a difficult question at the end. For me personally it would be maybe balance and growth. It is very personal, since it has a lot to do with context and education.

The context that supports you is very important.

Yes, and related to education there is also the topic of girls education. Obviously, this means being open-minded and allowing women the opportunity to study, but also empowering them. It is important to remember that the world of work is different from the world of school for instance. It is so important to grasp and understand the rules of your work environment and find a way that works for you, find your own path in the work environment you're in, which means applying your creativity to this quest.

Delphine Mourot-Haxaire

Delphine Mourot is an executive coach, teacher and author, and a former banker and lawyer. She is also the Director of HEC in the UK. Delphine graduated from HEC Paris. She also holds a Master's degree in Political Science, a Master's degree in International Law and Taxation, and a Master's degree in European Law. Delphine teaches Ethics in Finance in the Master of International Finance at HEC Paris and facilitates executive education.



Lei & The World

Manuela Lietti

Researcher, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

in conversation with

Liao Wen

Artist

By Devouring it, I Learn About the World on view at Capsule Venice is your first solo exhibition in Europe. Featuring a completely new set of works specifically conceived for the occasion, this solo exhibition stems from a year of preparation during which you have taken your ongoing research about the body, about individual and collective rituals, and about ancient and contemporary myths, towards unexplored realms. Could you share a bit about the process that led you to this distinctive body of works on view?

The inspiration for this solo exhibition comes from a scene I encountered on the streets of New York last year: a small bird was pecking at the fresh vomit of a drunken man who was lying nearby. I couldn't bear to look directly at the scene. I held my breath, and my heart raced. My body experienced a strong sense of rejection, and I could hardly suppress the urge to vomit myself. But, my rationality told me that I must gaze at this filth. I had been tormented by severe pharyngitis and I thought that nausea was solely a physical reaction until I saw the bird nonchalantly enjoying the vomit as a delicacy. It made me reflect on whether the feeling of nausea also stems from psychological suggestion.

By Devouring it, I Learn About the World: this phrase hints at the concept of understanding the world through the act of swallowing. However, when faced with that pile of vomit, I closed my eyes and nostrils to prevent the invasion from the mouth of the other.

This violent act of invasion became the main impetus for conceptualizing the exhibition. By devouring it, I learn about the world explores, through different media and perspectives, the boundaries between the self and others in everyday life, as well as the potential for violence.

I am very interested in learning about your approach to the different materials you use. What is special about each material you work with?

Of course, every sculptor has materials

they are more skilled with and frequently use. So far, the primary material I have been using is wood. I initially chose wood unconsciously and coincidentally. On the one hand, it is partly because I used this type of linden wood when I studied puppetry in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, I had never received systematic training in sculpture before, and wood is a material that is easy to obtain, and to master. I feel a sense of pleasure when carving wood. This may be related to the satisfaction of controlling the material, or it may be connected to our latent tendencies toward violence. This is also a main theme of my solo exhibition.

Though most of the works you present in the exhibition use lime wood, I could not help but notice that you have added new elements, for example, seeds and grains. When did you start to experiment with these materials?

In 2021, I used grains and seeds in my first personal project. I covered the ground of the Cai Jin Space with 3 tonnes of soil and then scattered barley seeds. Over time, the audience entering the exhibition hall would see wheat in different stages of growth. In this solo exhibition, I also used grains. In the performance piece *I Swallow the Tides to Light Up...* the performers mixed grains with red mechanical grease. Two performers tore at each other, smearing the mixture on each other's bodies and faces. I learned from reading an anthropological text that a specific tribe has a custom of mixing menstrual blood with grains to pray for a bountiful harvest in the coming year. Grains are so common in our daily lives, yet we often only see them as food, neglecting the immense energy they contain. They can grow or decay, can be silently swallowed by us, and can possess powerful magical forces.

Your work balances extremes of pleasure and disgust – attraction and repulsion coexisting at the same time. The texture of the materials intrigues our senses. It makes us want to interact physically with the works. At the same time, they often leave us with a sense of fear and repulsion. What do you think lies at the intersection of these emotions in your sculptures?

Perhaps everyone has a different perception of pleasure and disgust. In my work, I speculate that it may be the smooth surface of the sculpture and the delicate variations in skin tone that evoke a

sense of comfort for people. At the same time, my work possesses a strong sense of aggression, with sharp tentacles, and its form lies somewhere between human, plant, and animal, resembling a kind of mutant.

By articulating these elements, the correspondence between pleasure and discomfort may become clearer. So why do we feel fear and resistance towards aggressive objects and towards forms that are mutated and undefinable?

The topics I focus on are precisely those that are hidden beyond the norms of everyday life. For example, the piece *Tears of Succubus* in this exhibition is inspired by the sexual cannibalism of mantises, discussing the extremes of love and desire, violence, and possession in intimate relationships. I hope to reveal the fears and desires we conceal through my work. When we confront these fears and desires, whether visually or psychologically, we inevitably experience some degree of discomfort.

How do you see your sculptures as being in dialogue with the work other artists who explore hybrid forms?

No artist's style appears out of nowhere. There are many artists who inspire me. From the perspectives of form and medium, the one who has influenced me the most is probably Hans Bellmer. His female dolls, which are pieced together in unusual ways, may seem like outliers to many, but for someone like me who also straddles the fields of art and puppetry, they feel very familiar. In 2020, when I hesitated about whether to incorporate elements of puppetry into my sculptures, Bellmer's 1937 work, *The Machine-Gunneress in a State of Grace* gave me a great deal of confidence. I realised that I could continue his exploration. I could create sculptures with movable joints, I could piece things together freely, and I could express hidden desires through sculpture.

You spent a month in Venice, and some of your favourite spots during that time were the bookstores around Campo Santa Margherita. What are you currently reading?

Yes, my two favorite bookstores in Venice are Apollo Bookstore and Bruno Bookstore. At the Bruce Bookstore, I purchased Jeroen Peeters' book *And Then It Got Legs: Notes on Dance Dramaturgy*. It is a book about choreography. The author explores how to transform bodily movements from everyday life,

studio research, and improvisation into creative works. To some extent, I feel that the methods of choreography are similar to my approach to sculpture – both in an attempt to capture something tangible from the void, and both seek to express and reflect a person's mindset and state through posture and movement.

Liao Wen

Liao Wen's artistic practice includes sculpture, video, and performance. Her humanoid sculptures exude both a sense of primordiality and futurism, teetering on the edge of rules and taboo-breaking. She draws inspiration from puppetry, anthropology of ritual and myth, medicine, art history, and everyday norms. Through provocative language, she attempts to contemplate the social order, technology, and the disciplining of power projected onto the body while simultaneously imagining the possibilities of the future body.

Liao Wen (Chengdu, 1994) lives and works in Hong Kong. She received her MFA from Central Academy of Fine Arts China in 2019 and her BFA from Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in 2016. Her solo exhibitions include *By Devouring it, I Learn About the World*, Capsule Venice (Venice, 2024); *Naked*, Frieze New York (New York, 2023); *Almost Collapsing Balance*, Capsule Shanghai (Shanghai, 2021), and *The Body Knows Silently*, Cai Jin Space (Beijing, 2021). She has participated in group exhibitions *Durian-Durian: Southeast Asian Studies as a Methodology*, The First Trans-Southeast Asia Triennial (Guangzhou, 2023); *Bodies and Souls*, Cassina Projects (Milan, 2023); *Durian on the Skin*, François Ghebaly Gallery (Los Angeles, 2022); *BOOMERANG-O-CAT Biennale 2021*, OCT Art & Design Gallery (Shenzhen, 2021); *2nd Women Artists International Biennial of Macau* (Macau, 2020); *She Says*, Chengdu Contemporary Image Museum (Chengdu, 2019) among others.

She was one of the finalist artists of the Ducato Prize 2023 and was awarded the Frieze New York Stand prize in 2023. Her works have been featured in publications such as *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *The Art Newspaper China*, and *ArtReview*. She has been selected to be the resident of Pro Helvetia in Switzerland in 2025.



Wannabe Her
Da grande vorrei essere Lei

Fiorella Costantini

Storyteller and photographer, former student at Ca' Foscari University of Venice

in conversation with
Claudia Zini

Cultural Entrepreneur Abroad, Founder and Director of the Study Center Kuma International

Wannabe Her is a column dedicated to discovering and promoting innovative, 'out of the ordinary,' or hard-to-access professional roles in fields of interest to Ca' Foscari students. In this issue, we explore the role of a cultural entrepreneur abroad.

Introduction

Today, being a cultural entrepreneur means transforming artistic and cultural knowledge into a concrete, sustainable, and economically impactful entrepreneurial project. This role requires skills in identifying opportunities, creating innovative cultural initiatives, and building collaborative networks among artists and both private and public institutions, all aimed at influencing the surrounding economy and social fabric.

The cultural entrepreneur serves as a connecting point between art, community, and institutions. With a future-oriented vision, this professional links territories and people through projects that address contemporary challenges. The career path is not always straightforward, as shown by Claudia Zini, founder and director of Kuma International, a visual arts centre based in Sarajevo. Claudia identified a gap in the Bosnian cultural landscape and responded by establishing a centre that uses contemporary art to address complex issues such as identity, memory, trauma, and social reconstruction.

Claudia's project demonstrates how art can act as a catalyst for social transformation and how a local initiative can have a significant impact on an international scale, thanks to the participation of artists and researchers from around the world.

Cultural Entrepreneurship Abroad

A cultural entrepreneur is a key figure in the contemporary professional landscape, blending creativity, strategic management, and social impact into projects that reach beyond local

boundaries. Skills in fundraising and resource management ensure the long-term sustainability of these projects and help balance art with business.

The cultural entrepreneur identifies emerging cultural needs, develops innovative solutions, works in harmony with the surrounding context by involving the community, and uses art to address crucial issues such as inclusion and social cohesion, aiming to promote active participation and constructive interaction.

An international perspective is also essential to this role, as projects are often designed to foster cultural exchange and supported by cross-border collaborations.

Claudia has succeeded in developing and growing Kuma International within the complex context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country still marked by the war of the 1990s and not yet a member of the European Union. Kuma's activities hold the potential to address issues of international significance at multiple levels.

Hard Skills and Soft Skills Required

Becoming a cultural entrepreneur requires a blend of technical and cross-disciplinary skills. Passion for art alone is not enough; specific skills are essential to transform ideas into sustainable initiatives. A solid foundation in cultural management, fundraising, and administration is key among the hard skills required. It's crucial to understand the dynamics of the cultural market and to manage both public and private funds effectively. Additionally, knowledge of marketing strategies is essential. An understanding of the contemporary art scene is also necessary to identify emerging trends and support contemporary artists. In today's digital age, familiarity with technological tools is critical for engaging communication and effective project promotion.

Soft skills are equally central to this role. Skills such as leadership and networking help to build a strong network of contacts. Creativity, balanced with problem-solving skills, along with empathy, is fundamental for establishing meaningful dialogue with artists and the community. Finally, in a constantly evolving sector, flexibility and adaptability are essential to maintain impact and foster growth.

Required Educational Background

There is no well-defined path to follow, but certain qualifications can ease entry into this profession. A degree in Humanities – such as History of Art, Culture and

Media, or Cultural Heritage Management – can provide a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of the artistic and cultural landscape. A Master's in Cultural Management or interdisciplinary studies can add administrative, economic, and artistic skills.

Lifelong learning is also crucial: masterclasses or certifications enrich a professional's profile and increase the chances of success. Additionally, hands-on experiences, such as internships in cultural institutions or involvement in art projects, make candidates more competitive by offering valuable learning and networking opportunities.

Claudia's educational background, focused on Cultural Heritage, marked the beginning of her professional career. However, she leveraged additional opportunities, including internships and masterclasses, beyond the academic setting. Her travels and the people she met along the way also played a transformative role.

Beyond your academic journey, what key events or moments led you to move to Sarajevo and establish Kuma International? What inspired you to create a centre dedicated to visual arts from post-conflict societies, and what were the main challenges you faced in the delicate context of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Several key moments led me to move to Sarajevo and establish Kuma International. One of the first was my encounter with the Bosnian artistic community during my university studies. I met some Bosnian artists who had come to Trentino, my home region, as part of a cultural exchange program. I immediately sensed the potential of art as a tool for dialogue in fragile contexts, such as Bosnia.

Another pivotal experience was my Erasmus program, which allowed me to spend a full academic year in England. This first time abroad helped me explore new frontiers and develop adaptability skills that made future moves, such as to London for my PhD and later to Sarajevo, much easier.

During my doctorate, I conducted research in Bosnia, which allowed me to begin understanding the complexity of the country. I explored the connection between art, memory, and reconciliation, finding inspiration to establish Kuma International as a platform for promoting dialogue through innovative artistic projects.

The main challenges I faced relate to the instability of the context in which we

operate: it is difficult to secure financial and institutional support because, even today, Bosnia and Herzegovina is marked by ethnic divisions and political tensions. Additionally, gaining the trust of the local community has been challenging as I am a foreigner and, therefore, initially seen as an outsider. This required awareness, empathy, attentive listening, and the ability to adapt projects to the needs and expectations of the community. Kuma was founded as a space dedicated not only to art exhibitions but also to creating a living archive where personal stories and memories can be shared through the visual arts.

Kuma International has a strong educational focus, regularly organizing workshops and summer schools for both local and international students. How important is education in your work, and what impact do you believe it has had on participants? After seven editions, what do you consider to be the most significant results, and what are your future goals?

The educational component is a fundamental pillar of Kuma International's work. Our summer school, now in its seventh edition, was one of the first projects launched in 2018 and is the one I am most attached to. Its main goal is to offer participants – students, researchers, and young professionals from all over the world – the opportunity to immerse themselves in the Bosnian historical and cultural context and engage directly with its key figures.

One of the most significant achievements has been the creation of an international community committed to research and art through a thoughtful and ethical approach, inspired by local stories and experiences. This is evident in the exhibitions and publications produced by the participants.

The summer school draws people from 30 countries and demonstrates that issues of memory and reconciliation are not solely local but are part of a global discourse that transcends geographical and linguistic barriers.

Looking ahead, my goal is to broaden the international artistic dialogue by incorporating artistic experiences from other countries affected by conflict. I aim to bring artists and researchers from around the world together in Sarajevo, creating a space where people can share stories, insights, and artistic practices, contribute to building new connections of understanding, and work toward overcoming barriers created by violence and war.

Kuma International addresses complex issues like conflict, memory, and trauma. How do you balance artistic exploration of these themes with respect for local sensibilities? Since Kuma's founding in 2018, have you noticed any changes in how post-war art and culture are perceived?

Since the beginning, my goal has been to create a safe and respectful space where people can explore complex themes and study the personal experiences of local artists affected by four years of war. The main challenge has always been balancing artistic exploration with respect for the sensitivities and lived experiences of others. To achieve this, I use an approach centred on dialogue and active listening, developing every project with careful consideration of the cultural and historical nuances of the context in which we work. Building trusting relationships with the local community has been essential.

Today, there is a growing awareness, openness, and interest in art as a tool for processing the past and fostering dialogue. Initially, however, I encountered some resistance to discussing the war openly; many people feared that this might reopen unhealed wounds.

Interest from the international community in these themes has also grown gradually. Artists and researchers from around the world now see Bosnia as a unique place of study, leading to increased international collaboration and providing greater visibility for our work.

What fundamental skills are essential for a career as a cultural entrepreneur? Looking to the future, what are your plans for Kuma International? How do you see the role of art evolving in peace and reconciliation processes?

I believe there are certain fundamental skills that go beyond academics. Adaptability is essential, as working in the cultural sector demands flexibility and a willingness to adjust strategies and approaches to the circumstances. Additionally, strong empathy and listening skills are crucial to understanding the needs of the community and adapting activities and projects accordingly.

Another key skill is the ability to build a network and foster relationships. Cultural entrepreneurship relies on creating collaborations and partnerships that enable ambitious projects and increase impact.

Strategic vision is equally important: identifying funding opportunities, developing project proposals, and effectively

presenting your organization to potential partners and supporters are vital to advancing any initiative. Self-confidence and belief in one's ideas are also essential. I've learned that in challenging moments, holding fast to your vision and maintaining direction is fundamental. Being a woman and director of a cultural organization in a foreign country has presented additional challenges but also opportunities—to demonstrate that female leadership can bring positive change and to show that women are often stronger than we realize. I've also been fortunate to have the unwavering support of family, friends, and close collaborators. Their presence has given me the strength and dedication to never stop believing in Kuma.

Looking to the future, my primary goal is to strengthen Kuma's role as a centre of excellence and expand our educational offerings by extending our reach to other territories affected by war, such as Ukraine and the Middle East. Our aim is to create an internationally replicable method that fosters reconciliation and dialogue in various war-impacted regions.

Art has a unique ability to create spaces for reflection and dialogue, spaces often challenging to achieve through other forms of communication. Artistic practices can offer new perspectives, rebuild social connections, and create shared stories that transcend division.

Biography

Claudia Zini is a cultural entrepreneur and, since 2018, the founder and director of Kuma International, a centre dedicated to visual arts in contexts affected by conflict. Kuma's mission is to use contemporary art as a tool for dialogue and reconciliation by creating a space for reflection and exchange on essential themes such as identity, memory, and trauma.

Claudia studied Cultural Heritage at the University of Padua and then at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She completed her doctorate at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, specializing in the contemporary art of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2018, she has lived in Sarajevo, where she moved for research during her doctorate. In 2019, she was one of the curators of the Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Venice Biennale. In 2024, she was awarded the title of Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia in recognition of her cultural and professional dedication.

A Place for Her Un post(o) per LEI

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Training Uniqueness: Stand out in the Future of the Job Field

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are recurrent topics in corporate communication, job offers, and advertising. On one hand, it is positive that companies are committed to leave a positive impact in the surrounding socio-cultural context. On the other hand, it is questionable whether these declarations are reflected in daily experience or whether they are merely expressions of *carewashing*,¹ a façade interest finalized to marketing that does not have a real impact on society.

The era of *brand activism*, defined as companies' commitment towards social causes, appears to be entering a new phase. Immediately after the pandemic, many companies pledged to support different causes and changed their logos to adhere to social campaigns. Today, a turnaround is observable. Some companies, as Toyota² and Harley Davidson³ chose to quit their inclusivity activities related to LGBTQ+ themes, believing that these activities are not coherent anymore with their corporate communication.

Highlighting the importance of diversity in the business rhetoric appears 'less appealing' compared to the past. An article of *Harvard Business Review Italia*⁴ published in 2022 had already drawn attention to this phenomenon and reported the results of a research on the impact of the language used by companies to promote diversity. Neither the approach that valorises diversity as an economic stimulus, nor the approach that justifies diversity on moral grounds appear to be effective: the first one can make candidates feel like a mere instru-

ment for business profit; the second one risks appearing as a simple façade proclamation. According to the authors, the ideal approach is to consider diversity as an intrinsic value manifested by the concrete valorisation of talents and by the creation of a welcoming working environment.

What is the missing perspective of this narration? A focus on celebrating the uniqueness of every individual.

Focusing on the uniqueness of the candidate's contribution is already common practice in the recruitment process,⁵ as shown by the success of *Skills First Approach*, that evaluate more the skills and competencies compared to academic qualifications. In an ever-changing world, the only way for companies to deal with uncertainty is to focus on people's potential, on their soft skills, on their adaptation and on continuing education.

"Companies hire people for their titles and fire them for their skills and behaviours" sustains Gianni Rusconi on *Il Sole 24 Ore*.⁶ An unsuitable hiring can cost a company up to half of the gross annual remuneration of the employee, considering costs related to hiring process, salaries, formation, and impact on the organization.

We face a phase of great opportunities for candidates with a wide margin of growth and self-realization. However, uniqueness must be trained, and it is not always simple: we often come from educational paths in which we are used to delegate others in the evaluation of our skills and in defining ourselves through technical skills that could rapidly become obsolete.

How to develop and narrate your uniqueness

Here is a brief guide from my lectures in various universities:

Be acquainted with your soft skills

Create a personal timeline and write down significative events including the soft skills acquired during these events. This exercise helps you in gaining self-confidence on your path and uniqueness, even in absence of previous work experiences. It is a way to go beyond vague definitions of yourself (such as 'organized' or 'brilliant') by providing concrete example useful during job interviews.

5 <https://economicgraph.linkedin.com/research/skills-first-report>.

6 https://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/le-selezione-perfetta-come-trovare-giuste-competenze-evitando-errori-costosi-AGk1G2X?refresh_ce=1.

Personalize your CV

The CV does not leave plenty of room to creativity, but we can make it unique by drawing attention to personal and distinctive elements. We can, for example, adapt our CV to the desired position through a personal description in which we explain why we fit into that role, enhance our most relevant experience, include values and social causes we believe in and indicate professional condition that we would avoid.

A final touch? A QR code to show a portfolio or professional projects.

Create a personal showcase on LinkedIn

In a context where Artificial Intelligence makes the creation of generic texts trivial, it is fundamental to avoid banalities when we speak about ourselves. AI can help us beginning, but our personal style must come to light from the *headline*. Do not limit to key words but add a short statement on what you represent and what distinguish you. In the 'information' section, it is better to avoid impersonal *buzzword* and you should opt for anecdotes and narrations that show your uniqueness.

Cover letter connected to the company

The way we introduce ourselves to the company expresses our uniqueness. If we candidate ourselves for a job position or if we send a spontaneous application, it is not enough to describe ourselves as "motivated". It is better to focalize on concrete examples that show our skills and our interest in the company through our personal experiences.

Show the talent during job interviews

The talent, understood as awareness on your own path and contribution, is crucial. During a job interview, we should feel confident that all the choices we made were the best in that moment, without fearing others' opinion. To tell your experience, we can use STAR technique (Situation, Task, Action, Results) or PEARL (Problem, Epiphany, Action, Results, Learning) to maintain the attention of our interviewer. What are the best questions to get in tune with the selector? In-depth questions, which lead the interviewer to express an opinion, for example: "What is the best aspect of working here?" or "How would you define the leadership method?"

In a future characterized by faster technological change, affirming own uniqueness as value element and integration in profession context can help in remaining irreplaceable and in navigating uncertainty.