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Competing Regimes of Creativity Under Digital Transformation

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ABSTRACT: Digital transformation is intensifying contestation over what counts as creativity in higher education. Rather than treating creativity as a stable competence, this study examines how different stakeholder groups mobilise competing regimes of valuation when assessing the same applied arts programmes.

Using a sequential mixed-method design (students N = 527; lecturers N = 60; industry N = 13), the findings show that evaluations do not converge. Instead, they stabilise into distinct regimes of valuation linked to institutional positions. These regimes operate through non-equivalent criteria and are sustained through institutional segmentation rather than agreement.

The analysis identifies a mechanism in which digital transformation compresses previously separate domains, exposes incommensurable evaluative logics, and reorganises them into a structure that allows coexistence without alignment. Differences are thus reproduced rather than resolved.

The study reconceptualises creativity as a multi-regime cultural configuration and shifts attention from how creativity is produced to how it is valued under conditions of technological change.

KEYWORDS: creativity, digital transformation, cultural valuation, higher education, regimes of value

1. INTRODUCTION

In a classroom within an applied arts programme in Vietnam, a seemingly simple question—what counts as creativity—becomes a site of contestation rather than agreement. Students value digital experimentation and AI-assisted design as practices that expand possibilities for exploration. Lecturers privilege artistic discipline, composition, and material sensitivity as markers of creative legitimacy. Employers, by contrast, evaluate creativity through responsiveness to professional demands, emphasising adaptability, efficiency, and market relevance. These differences do not merely reflect competing opinions. They articulate distinct regimes of cultural valuation through which educational practices are rendered meaningful and legitimate. The same curriculum, learning environment, or technological resource is therefore not evaluated within a shared framework but interpreted through positionally grounded logics of value. What emerges is not a failure of agreement but the simultaneous operation of multiple regimes of creativity within a shared institutional setting.

This condition is becoming increasingly visible as digital transformation reconfigures the relations between education, cultural production, and professional practice. The issue is not simply the introduction of new technologies, but the compression of domains that previously operated with relative autonomy. Artistic training, technological experimentation, and market-oriented production are now brought into direct relation and assessed within the same institutional space. Under these conditions, evaluation no longer proceeds from a common set of criteria. Instead, programmes become sites in which multiple regimes of valuation intersect without being reducible to a shared standard.

Existing scholarship has approached creativity through different analytical traditions. Research on digital creativity in education emphasises how technological environments expand possibilities for expression and learning (Bereczki and Kárpáti 2021; Cojocariu and Boghian 2024). Studies of creative industries conceptualise creativity as a resource organised across education, production, and policy (Chan 2021; Sacco, Ferilli and Tavano Blessi 2025). Sociological approaches demonstrate that creativity is constituted through systems of value, legitimacy, and recognition rather than residing in individual talent alone (Bourdieu 1993; Reckwitz 2017). Despite their differences, these perspectives share an implicit assumption: that evaluative criteria can ultimately be aligned—whether through pedagogical design, institutional coordination, or shared cultural frameworks.

What remains insufficiently examined is what happens when such alignment does not occur. When multiple criteria persist without convergence, evaluation does not collapse, nor does one regime displace the others. Instead, different systems of valuation remain simultaneously operative,

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each sustaining its own standards of legitimacy. The problem, therefore, is not one of disagreement but of organisation: how are multiple, non-equivalent regimes of value maintained within the same institutional configuration, and how do they continue to function without being reconciled? This article addresses that problem by examining how different stakeholder groups sustain distinct regimes of creativity when assessing the same educational programme. Rather than treating creativity as a fixed attribute or measurable outcome, the analysis approaches it as an effect of valuation processes that vary across institutional positions. The focus is not on determining what creativity is, but on tracing how it is differently constituted, evaluated, and stabilised within a shared institutional environment.

The study draws on applied arts education in Vietnam, where artistic training, technological development, and industry demands are closely intertwined. Students, lecturers, and industry representatives are treated as participants in a shared yet differentiated field of valuation, each mobilising distinct criteria in assessing the same programme. Creativity is therefore examined indirectly through stakeholder evaluations of the conditions intended to cultivate and recognise it. This approach allows the analysis to move beyond individual outcomes and to trace how differences in valuation are structured, sustained, and made consequential within institutional practice.

The argument advanced here is that these differences are not temporary misalignments awaiting resolution. Rather, digital transformation reorganises higher education into a configuration in which multiple regimes of creativity coexist without converging. These regimes remain connected not through shared standards but through institutional segmentation and conditional interdependence. Programme alignment, in this context, does not arise from consensus but from the managed coexistence of incommensurable systems of value that remain simultaneously legitimate. The analysis thus shifts the problem from identifying the "correct" criterion of creativity to explaining how multiple criteria persist and operate together without becoming unified.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Across contemporary scholarship, creativity has moved from a specialised concern to a central category through which transformations in higher education, cultural production, and economic organisation are interpreted. What distinguishes the current state of the literature is not a lack of theoretical development but the coexistence of distinct explanatory logics that stabilise creativity in fundamentally different ways. Rather than converging toward a unified account, these approaches construct partially overlapping interpretations that illuminate specific dimensions of creativity while relying on assumptions that become difficult to sustain when considered together. The resulting tension does not arise from empirical inconsistency but from the incompatibility of the analytical premises through which creativity is explained. In this sense, the literature does not merely describe creativity; it organises competing regimes of cultural valuation that define what creativity is and how it is to be recognised.

A first line of inquiry, most visible in research on digital creativity in higher education, approaches creativity as a capacity that can be enhanced through technological and pedagogical intervention. Studies of technology-integrated teaching emphasise how digital tools expand the range of creative practices and support new forms of learning (Bereczki and Kárpáti 2021; Cojocariu and Boghian 2024; Samper-Márquez, Martínez-Roig and Serrano-Pastor 2025). Systematic reviews consolidate this perspective by identifying institutional strategies—curriculum design, learning environments, and pedagogical innovation—through which creativity can be fostered and measured (Setiamurti, Pratama and Santoso 2024; Ranczakowska and Kuznetsova-Bogdanovitsh 2025). Across these contributions, creativity is treated as a competence that can be progressively developed, implying that differences in evaluation can be aligned through appropriate educational design. Even when definitional ambiguity is acknowledged, it is positioned as a problem to be clarified rather than as a structural condition that shapes how creativity is valued. The assumption underlying this perspective is that evaluative criteria, however diverse, ultimately belong to a common framework that can be stabilised through intervention.

A second line of work situates creativity within the dynamics of creative industries and cultural economies, where it is understood as a resource embedded in processes of innovation, growth, and labour organisation (Chan 2021; Sacco, Ferilli and Tavano Blessi 2025). Within this perspective, universities are positioned as actors within broader ecosystems linking education, production, and regional development (Cinar, Troelsen and Bunting 2023; Cinar and Coenen 2023; Kim and Comunian 2024; Roberts, Lowe and Moreton 2025). Policy-oriented analyses extend this view by examining how cultural and creative industries are incorporated into governance frameworks and strategic development agendas (Salvador and Benghozi 2023; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009). The explanatory logic here rests on the possibility that creativity can be coordinated across institutional domains, such that education, industry, and policy can be aligned through shared objectives and mutually reinforcing practices. Integration is therefore not only a descriptive claim but a normative expectation, presupposing that different regimes of valuation can be brought into coherence through institutional design.

Running alongside these perspectives, sociological and cultural analyses reframe creativity as a socially organised process structured through relations of value, legitimacy, and recognition. In this tradition, creativity does not reside in individuals but emerges within fields of cultural production in which actors compete to define what counts as valuable (Bourdieu 1993; Hanquinet and Savage 2022). Subsequent developments generalise this insight by conceptualising creativity as a broader organising principle of contemporary societies, in which the production of novelty becomes a cultural imperative (Reckwitz 2017). More recent work extends the analysis by incorporating relational and material dimensions, showing how audiences, artefacts, and socio-material configurations participate in shaping creative processes (Godart, Seong and Phillips 2020; Glăveanu 2020; Corazza and Glăveanu 2020). Studies of creative labour further demonstrate how criteria of value and expertise are continuously negotiated under conditions of institutional constraint and precarious employment (Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). Within this perspective, creativity is inherently relational and context-dependent, yet it is still often analysed as operating within relatively coherent evaluative systems, where differences are negotiated but ultimately rendered commensurable within a shared field.

Taken together, these lines of inquiry intersect in their recognition that creativity is shaped by technological change, institutional arrangements, and social relations. Yet they diverge in how they conceptualise the structure of valuation. Educational research assumes that evaluative criteria can be progressively aligned through pedagogical and technological development. Creative industries and policy research presuppose that such criteria can be coordinated across domains through processes of integration. Sociological approaches demonstrate that valuation is relational and

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contingent but often retain the assumption that it operates within a shared framework of value. Each perspective therefore illuminates a different dimension of creativity while relying on an implicit expectation of coherence—whether as convergence, coordination, or relational integration.

This expectation becomes increasingly difficult to sustain as digital transformation intensifies the interaction between domains that were previously more clearly differentiated. Studies of artificial intelligence and digital transformation highlight how technological developments reshape not only creative practices but also the boundaries between professional and everyday creativity (Lee 2022; Gurel 2025). Analyses of creative networks and artistic research further point to the expanding complexity of the environments in which creativity is produced and evaluated (Grau Pérez 2025). These developments do not simply extend existing practices; they bring into proximity multiple systems of valuation that operate according to different logics. Under such conditions, the assumption that creativity can be aligned across contexts begins to encounter its analytical limits.

When considered together, the literature does not converge toward a unified explanation but instead reveals a structural tension between incommensurable regimes of valuation. Approaches that emphasise enhancement presuppose convergence; those that focus on ecosystems assume integration; and those that foreground relationality imply coherence within evaluative processes. Yet these assumptions cannot all hold simultaneously when multiple evaluative logics are mobilised within the same institutional space. The problem is therefore not that existing studies have overlooked diversity, but that they do not fully account for the conditions under which multiple regimes of value can persist without being resolved.

At this point, the analytical question shifts. It is no longer sufficient to ask how creativity is developed, coordinated, or socially constructed. The more pressing issue is how different regimes of valuation are maintained, related, and rendered effective when they do not share a common basis of evaluation. Existing scholarship approaches this problem indirectly but does not resolve it, because its explanatory frameworks remain organised around assumptions of eventual coherence. Once these assumptions are set aside, the need for a more precise analytical perspective becomes unavoidable. It is precisely this unresolved problem—the coexistence of multiple, non-equivalent regimes of creativity within the same institutional configuration—that motivates the development of the analytical lens that follows.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Treating creativity as a stable category becomes increasingly difficult once divergent approaches are placed in direct relation. Rather than proposing an alternative definition, this section develops an analytical lens designed to trace how meanings of creativity are produced, related, and sustained under specific conditions. The objective is not to exhaustively explain the phenomenon, but to render visible dimensions that remain inaccessible when creativity is approached through a single conceptual register. A necessary starting point is to shift the analytical focus from creativity as a capacity to creativity as a problem of cultural valuation. In higher education, this shift corresponds to moving from treating creativity as a measurable learning outcome to examining how different stakeholders mobilise distinct regimes of value within the same programme. Sociological approaches have shown that what counts as creative does not exist independently of the evaluative and interpretive systems through which it is recognised (Bourdieu 1993; Godart, Seong and Phillips 2020). From this perspective, creativity is not a property possessed by individuals but a status attributed to practices when they are deemed valuable within a given context. This move establishes two conditions: creativity is relational, and it is context-dependent. Yet this perspective reaches its limit when multiple regimes of valuation coexist. If each cultural field presupposes a relatively coherent logic, then the simultaneous operation of several logics within the same institutional space introduces a condition of incommensurability that this framework does not directly resolve.

Capturing such coexistence requires a second analytical dimension: creativity as an object of institutional organisation rather than merely negotiation. Research on creative labour demonstrates that criteria of value and expertise are not fixed in advance but are constituted within specific organisational settings (Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). What becomes visible here is that creativity is shaped not only by systems of meaning but also by the organisational conditions through which those systems are enacted and maintained. When multiple actors—each aligned with a distinct evaluative logic—participate within the same institutional setting, creativity ceases to function as a unified criterion and instead becomes a site where different regimes of valuation are positioned in relation to one another. However, this line of analysis, while attentive to labour conditions and professional structures, does not fully account for how different regimes can be sustained in parallel without being translated into a shared metric.

A third dimension becomes necessary when considering professional legitimacy as a regime-specific process. In creative fields, the recognition of a practice as creative depends not only on its characteristics but on whether it is deemed valid within a given community of expertise. Studies of creative industries and digital transformation indicate that these criteria of legitimacy are themselves subject to change as technological developments reshape modes of production and evaluation (Lee 2022; Sacco, Ferilli and Tavano Blessi 2025). This perspective foregrounds the role of professional validation in defining creativity, yet it also reveals a further complication: when multiple regimes of valuation coexist, legitimacy no longer operates as a single standard but as a distributed process across competing systems of value. Under such conditions, recognition does not converge on a unified norm but is sustained through parallel and partially intersecting frameworks of legitimacy.

When these three dimensions—valuation, institutional organisation, and legitimacy—are brought into relation, a different analytical orientation emerges. Rather than seeking a unified definition, it becomes possible to trace how different meanings of creativity are produced within regimes of valuation, enacted within institutional structures, and affirmed or contested through competing criteria of legitimacy. Creativity can thus be approached not as a stable category but as a configuration of processes through which value is assigned. At this point, however, the limits of each dimension become more pronounced. A focus on valuation alone cannot explain how regimes are stabilised within institutional arrangements; an emphasis on organisation cannot account for the cultural logics that orient these regimes; and an exclusive concern with legitimacy cannot explain how multiple regimes persist without collapsing into a single evaluative order. Under conditions of digital transformation, where interactions across actors and institutions intensify, these limitations do not remain separate but begin to overlap, producing a configuration in which coexistence replaces convergence.

Rather than privileging one dimension, the framework developed here places them in an analytical relation, where each renders visible a specific aspect of the phenomenon without claiming explanatory completeness. This shift allows the analytical focus to move from defining creativity to

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tracing how different regimes of valuation are positioned in relation to one another. Within this perspective, creativity is no longer treated as an endpoint of analysis but as a site of intersection between processes—where valuation, organisation, and legitimacy meet without necessarily converging. This reorientation makes it possible to follow coexistence rather than assume unity, to analyse differentiation rather than resolve it, and to treat non-convergence not as a failure but as a structural condition of contemporary cultural systems.

With this set of conceptual tools, empirical analysis is no longer directed toward determining the degree of creativity, but toward identifying the configurations through which multiple regimes of valuation are formed, related, and sustained within the same institutional space.

4. METHODS

The methodological design of this study is structured as an integrated analytical sequence linking the research problem, data construction, and interpretive procedures, where each methodological choice is oriented toward explaining how the perceived alignment of educational programmes under conditions of digital transformation is differentially constructed and evaluated across institutional positions. The study was conducted between June and October 2025. This period is not treated as a purely administrative timeframe but as a sufficiently extended phase to capture data from multiple stakeholder groups within a single operational cycle of the programmes, thereby ensuring that the evaluations obtained reflect relatively stable patterns rather than short-term fluctuations.

Site selection was guided by analytical rather than geographical criteria. The study focuses on higher education institutions offering applied arts programmes that operate under direct exposure to digital transformation. These sites constitute an institutional field in which traditional modes of training—studio-based practice, material engagement, and aesthetic discipline—coexist and intersect with emerging demands associated with digital design technologies and creative labour markets. Within this configuration, programme alignment does not appear as an intrinsic attribute but becomes observable through patterned differences in evaluation. The aim of site selection, therefore, is not representativeness but the identification of settings in which the analytical tension under investigation becomes most visible.

The sample is organised around three stakeholder groups corresponding to distinct institutional positions: students, lecturers, and industry representatives. The student sample comprises 527 participants drawn from different year levels to capture varying degrees of exposure to the programme. The lecturer group includes 60 individuals directly involved in teaching applied arts, while the industry sample consists of 13 representatives from organisations engaged in design and creative production. These groups are not treated as independent datasets but as components of a comparative configuration, where each reflects a particular standpoint within a shared educational ecosystem. Sampling is therefore not probabilistic but purposive, oriented toward capturing variation in how programme alignment is understood and evaluated across stakeholder positions.

The study adopts a sequential mixed-method design in which quantitative and qualitative components are not conducted in parallel but are analytically linked through an explanatory sequence. The quantitative phase is used to identify the structure and distribution of evaluations. Descriptive statistics establish overall patterns, while Mann–Whitney U tests are employed to compare groups under non-normal distributions, and Kruskal–Wallis tests examine variation across student cohorts. In addition, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is applied to organise relationships among key components of the educational environment, including digital infrastructure, programme organisation, learning resources, and perceived alignment. The purpose of PLS-SEM in this context is not to establish a generalisable causal model but to render the relational structure of the data analytically tractable.

The qualitative component is developed in direct response to patterns identified in the quantitative analysis. Open-ended responses from lecturers and industry representatives are subjected to thematic analysis. Coding proceeds inductively, beginning with repeated readings to identify units of meaning, which are then grouped into initial codes and subsequently refined into higher-order themes through constant comparison. This process is inductive yet constrained: themes are retained not on the basis of frequency alone but on their capacity to account for observed divergences in the quantitative data. NVivo is used to support data management and coding traceability, while interpretation remains grounded in continuous movement between raw data and emerging thematic structures.

Data processing is thus organised as a connected analytical chain rather than as two independent streams. Survey data are first cleaned and examined in SPSS, after which patterns are identified and structured relationally through SmartPLS. Points of divergence are then traced back into the qualitative material for explanation, and the results are subsequently integrated into a unified interpretive system. This sequence ensures traceability from data to interpretation, with each analytical step building on the outcomes of the preceding one.

The position of the researcher is defined as that of an external observer with access facilitated through academic and professional networks. This position enables data collection while also shaping how responses are articulated. Rather than treating responses as direct reflections of reality, the analysis approaches them as positionally situated statements linked to the interests and roles of respondents. Subjectivity is therefore not treated as bias to be eliminated but as a source of variation through which the structure of the phenomenon can be examined.

All procedures adhered to standard ethical requirements. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents, who were informed of the study's purpose and retained the right to withdraw at any stage. Data were anonymised, with no identifying information retained, and used exclusively for research purposes. The primary limitation of the study lies not in ethical or technical constraints but in its analytical scope: the findings are not intended to generalise across higher education systems but to explain how programme alignment is constituted within a specific institutional configuration. This focus provides a basis for understanding comparable contexts in which creative education is undergoing similar forms of technological transformation.

5. FINDINGS

Analysis of the 527 student responses does not yield a convergent evaluative structure but instead reveals a stable stratification across factors. These factors are not treated here as general indicators of programme quality; rather, they function as empirical entry points through which different stakeholder groups articulate their evaluative criteria of creativity. What is observed, therefore, is not simply variation in perception but the patterned expression of distinct evaluative regimes. Within this configuration, the six components of the educational environment do not shift in

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parallel but separate into distinct operational clusters. All measured constructs demonstrate high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.921 to 0.966), allowing the retention of all observed variables in the analysis. This internal convergence, however, does not extend across constructs; instead, it sharpens the differentiation between them, indicating that evaluative criteria are coherent within regimes but not across them.

At the descriptive level, the factors form a stable but non-linear hierarchy. The academic environment (MTHT) and training management (QLDT) consistently occupy higher positions ($M \approx 3.00$ and 2.98), while digital infrastructure (CSVC) remains at the lowest level ($M \approx 2.60$), with the remaining factors distributed within an intermediate range (≈ 2.7–2.9). The significance of this pattern lies not in the absolute values but in its recurrence across observed variables and its persistence under subsample checks. Rather than reflecting random variation, the hierarchy indicates a structured evaluative order through which different aspects of the programme are differentially weighted depending on stakeholder position.

At the level of observed variables, the relative weakness of CSVC is not dispersed but concentrated in a coherent cluster. Indicators such as projection systems ($M \approx 2.47$; $SD \approx 0.91$), lighting, and classroom conditions (≈ 2.6–2.7) consistently fall below the thresholds of other factors. This cluster is not driven by outliers, as its standard deviations remain comparable to those of other constructs, suggesting a uniformly distributed experience rather than localised deviation. In contrast, MTHT maintains higher values, with indicators such as "support for creativity" reaching approximately 3.07, forming a counter-cluster to CSVC. These opposing clusters indicate that what is evaluated positively in one dimension does not compensate for deficiencies in another, reflecting the absence of a unified evaluative metric.

This differentiation becomes more pronounced when examined across stakeholder groups. Along the dimension of digital infrastructure, students consistently report lower evaluations than lecturers (≈ 2.47–2.60 versus ≈ 3.06), with Mann–Whitney U tests indicating statistical significance ($p < .001$) and a moderate effect size ($r \approx 0.355$). A comparable structure appears in evaluations of programme responsiveness to labour market demands, where lecturers again report higher values than students (≈ 3.52 versus ≈ 2.98; $p < .001$; $r \approx 0.415$), marking the largest divergence observed in the dataset. These differences are not treated as isolated perception gaps but as positionally structured expressions of distinct evaluative regimes: students evaluate from the standpoint of use and experience, lecturers from institutional operability, and industry from professional applicability. The observed divergences therefore indicate not disagreement within a shared framework but the coexistence of non-equivalent criteria.

However, group differences do not follow a single directional pattern. In MTHT and partially in QLDT, the direction reverses, with students reporting higher evaluations than lecturers ($p < .001$; $r \approx -0.35$). These opposing shifts coexist within the same system, indicating that differences cannot be attributed to a generalised optimism or pessimism of any group. Instead, they reflect the simultaneous operation of distinct evaluative frames, each oriented toward different dimensions of the programme. Non-convergence here does not refer to inconsistency or measurement noise but to a stable condition in which evaluative criteria remain non-equivalent and are not required to align.

Analysis across year levels does not reveal a cumulative trend but identifies a single discontinuity at the third year ($M \approx 2.756$; $p \approx .032$), while other cohorts cluster around 3.00. This decline coincides with the transition to practice-oriented modules and marks a critical threshold at which previously segmented evaluative regimes are brought into direct interaction. The resulting drop does not indicate deterioration over time but the moment at which divergences become empirically visible. This suggests that non-convergence does not accumulate gradually but emerges when different evaluative logics are forced into functional proximity.

When the factors are organised within the PLS-SEM model, the relational structure does not form a linear chain but distributes into two linked clusters. MTHT and QLDT constitute an internally reinforcing cluster with stable positive path coefficients, whereas CSVC and HDNK form a conditional cluster in which weak or unstable coefficients attenuate the influence of other factors on the dependent variable of programme alignment. CTDT occupies an intermediate position, where influences from both sides intersect without complete integration. The purpose of the PLS-SEM model in this context is not to establish a generalisable causal structure but to render visible the absence of a coherent relational order across components. The resulting configuration indicates that the system does not operate through a unified metric but through conditional dependencies between partially connected evaluative domains.

These structures are not produced solely by the model but are reinforced through qualitative data. From 183 extracted meaning units, the coding process in NVivo does not generate independent themes but converges on three recurring configurations: (i) infrastructural and technological constraints, (ii) the gap between training and digital practice, and (iii) instability in industry linkages. These configurations are not treated as separate issues but as recurring points at which divergences between evaluative regimes become operationally visible. Their alignment with the largest quantitative divergences indicates that differences are not random but systematically organised.

The first configuration brings together codes such as lack of equipment, outdated software, and limited practice conditions, corresponding to the low-scoring CSVC cluster. The second revolves around insufficient specialised software skills and the inability to keep pace with technological change, aligning with the gap between student evaluations and industry expectations. The third includes references to reliance on personal networks and the absence of stable collaboration mechanisms, accounting for the unstable role of HDNK within the structural model. Across these configurations, what is observed is not fragmentation in the sense of breakdown, but differentiation in the sense of structured coexistence.

When these configurations are situated within the overall dataset, they do not reduce differences but further articulate the lack of synchronisation across components. Internal elements of the academic environment remain relatively stable and are evaluated positively, yet they do not compensate for external conditions related to technology and market demands. Conversely, these external factors not only receive lower evaluations but also mark the points at which differences between stakeholder groups become most pronounced. Individual evaluations are therefore not treated as isolated perceptions but as positionally structured expressions that, when patterned across groups, reveal the organisation of the system as a whole.

The dataset as a whole does not converge toward a composite indicator of programme alignment but maintains a condition of structured fragmentation, in which components of the educational system operate according to different logics and do not align along a single evaluative axis. Differences do not cancel out but accumulate across multiple directions, producing a system in which alignment is not a fixed attribute but an outcome contingent upon the evaluative configuration through which the programme is assessed. In this configuration, non-convergence emerges not as a temporary state but as the most stable characteristic of the system.

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6. DISCUSSION

The empirical structure does not simply indicate non-convergence; it imposes an explanatory constraint on how systems of cultural valuation are organised. A configuration can only remain stable when its evaluative criteria do not operate within a shared frame of reference. If creativity functioned as a unified cultural category, improvements in training conditions or technological infrastructure would tend to draw evaluations closer together. Instead, the persistence of digital infrastructure (CSVC) at the lowest level ($M \approx 2.60$), combined with significant inter-group divergence ($r \approx 0.355$), while other components remain comparatively higher, indicates that differences are not scalar variations within a common metric but principled distinctions between incommensurable regimes of valuation. The analytical problem therefore shifts from explaining the absence of convergence to explaining why convergence is not required for the system to reproduce itself as a stable cultural configuration.

Under these conditions, the emergence of competing creative cultures cannot be reduced to variation in opinion but must be understood as the outcome of distinct regimes of valuation that are simultaneously mobilised. The divergence between students and lecturers in evaluating digital infrastructure does not merely reflect differential experience; it marks the operation of two distinct logics of value—one grounded in immediate usability, the other in institutional operability under constraint. The largest gap, observed in evaluations of market responsiveness ($r \approx 0.415$), further demonstrates that these criteria do not occupy positions along a single evaluative continuum but operate across non-equivalent dimensions. When such criteria cannot be translated into one another yet remain operative within the same evaluative process, they stabilise into regimes. The variables measured in the dataset therefore do not function as independent dimensions of programme quality but constitute the empirical surface through which these regimes become observable. The resulting configuration is not random heterogeneity but a reproducible multi-regime structure in which each stakeholder group reiterates its own evaluative logic across assessments.

Within this configuration, negotiation can no longer be interpreted as a process oriented toward consensus. It operates instead as a mechanism through which incommensurable regimes are maintained in relation without being compelled into integration. The discontinuity observed at the third year ($M \approx 2.756$; $p \approx .032$) is critical in this respect. It marks the point at which previously segmented regimes of valuation are forced into direct interaction through practice-oriented requirements. The resulting divergence does not indicate breakdown but the moment at which underlying differences become empirically visible. Non-convergence, therefore, does not accumulate gradually but emerges when distinct regimes are brought into functional proximity.

The PLS-SEM structure renders this organisation visible, not as a causal model of alignment but as a representation of the absence of a unified relational order across evaluative domains. The clustering of factors indicates that the system does not integrate criteria into a common metric but organises them into partially connected regimes. MTHT and QLDT form an internally coherent cluster associated with institutional valuation, whereas CSVC and HDNK form a conditional cluster linked to technological and external constraints. CTDT occupies an intermediate position, reflecting the intersection of these regimes without resolving their differences. The model therefore does not demonstrate alignment but reveals how alignment remains contingent upon the interaction between incommensurable evaluative structures.

The qualitative configurations further specify how this condition is sustained at the level of practice. Infrastructural constraints, discontinuities between training and digital practice, and unstable industry linkages are not isolated issues but recurring points at which dependencies between regimes become operationally visible. Their alignment with the largest quantitative divergences indicates that divergence is not an outcome of failure but a condition through which the system operates. Individual evaluations, when patterned across stakeholder groups, thus reveal a system-level organisation in which regimes of valuation remain differentiated yet interconnected through specific points of dependency.

At this point, key assumptions in the international literature are unsettled at the level of structure. Studies of digital creativity often treat technology as a force of convergence in evaluative criteria (Bereczki and Kárpáti 2021; Cojocariu and Boghian 2024; Samper-Márquez et al. 2025). While these studies acknowledge variation, they typically position it as transitional or resolvable through improved design. This assumption becomes difficult to sustain when the variable most directly associated with technology is precisely where divergence is most pronounced. The issue is not whether technology expands creative capacity, but that such approaches operate at an inappropriate level of analysis, treating creativity as an attribute to be enhanced rather than as a system of valuation structured by multiple regimes. Similarly, analyses of AI and creativity that emphasise the restructuring of practice (Lee 2022) remain incomplete, as what is fundamentally reconfigured is not only production but the regime of legitimacy through which value is assigned.

Assumptions of integration in the literature on creative industries are also directly challenged (Chan 2021; Sacco et al. 2025; Cinar et al. 2023; Salvador and Benghozi 2023). If creative ecosystems functioned through integration, their components would align into a unified structure. The observed clustering suggests otherwise: the system does not integrate because its criteria do not share a common metric. What is often described as "connection" does not necessarily entail unification; it may instead operate as a mechanism for distributing regimes of valuation across institutional segments in order to minimise direct incompatibility. Integration, in this sense, appears less as a structural condition than as a surface effect of a deeper organisational process: the management of incommensurability.

At the level of foundational theory, the findings do not merely extend existing frameworks but expose their conditions of limitation. In Bourdieu (1993), competition presupposes a shared nomos; when evaluative criteria cannot be translated, competition no longer occurs within a single field but across distinct regimes. In Reckwitz (2017), creativity functions as a generalised organising principle; the present findings indicate that such generalisation is accompanied by internal differentiation, where no single regime defines creativity. Relational approaches (Godart et al. 2020; Glăveanu 2020), while attentive to interaction, continue to presuppose participation within a shared evaluative process. The evidence here suggests instead that this process is segmented into parallel regimes that intersect without converging. The theoretical problem thus shifts from how creativity is produced to how multiple regimes of valuation persist without requiring alignment.

From this, a mechanism can be specified as a traceable sequence grounded in the data. Digital transformation first produces institutional compression, bringing previously differentiated domains into a shared evaluative environment. This compression exposes divergence, empirically registered through significant inter-group differences ($p < .001$; $r \approx 0.355–0.415$). The system responds not by resolving these differences but by structuring them into distinct regimes, as evidenced by clustering in the PLS-SEM model and the recurrence of qualitative configurations. Segmentation generates conditional dependencies, in which regimes intersect only at specific points, such as the third year or within particular

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institutional processes. Through repetition, the system stabilises into a non-convergent configuration in which differences are reproduced rather than eliminated. Segmentation is therefore not an outcome but the mechanism through which the system avoids the requirement to translate criteria into a common scale.

Placed in a broader perspective, the contribution of this analysis lies not in documenting diversity but in explaining its stability. Existing studies either assume convergence or describe variation; the present case demonstrates that variation can constitute a stable cultural condition when organised through specific institutional arrangements. For higher education, this implies that curriculum alignment cannot be understood as a process of standardising criteria across stakeholders. Instead, alignment depends on how institutions organise the coexistence of multiple regimes of valuation that are not reducible to a single metric. What appears as misalignment is therefore not necessarily a failure of programme design, but an effect of structurally differentiated systems of valuation within the same educational environment. This mechanism operates under specific conditions: the presence of multiple regimes of valuation, the absence of a dominant regime capable of imposing a common metric, and the institutional capacity to distribute these regimes across differentiated segments. Outside these conditions, convergence or exclusion becomes more likely, delimiting the scope within which the mechanism identified here can operate.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has addressed a problem that appears familiar yet remains insufficiently theorised: why, within the same institutional space, incompatible evaluations of creativity are neither eliminated nor reconciled, but continue to operate simultaneously. Rather than treating this condition as a failure of alignment, the analysis has demonstrated that such coexistence reflects a specific organisation of cultural valuation. The issue does not lie in the presence of multiple criteria, but in the way these criteria are structured as incommensurable regimes that remain operative without requiring translation into a shared metric.

The central contribution lies in specifying the mechanism through which this condition is reproduced. Digital transformation does not simply expand creative possibilities or introduce new tools; it reorganises the evaluative environment by bringing previously differentiated domains into direct interaction. This compression renders divergences between stakeholder positions visible. Rather than resolving these divergences, the system stabilises them through institutional segmentation, distributing evaluative criteria across domains and generating conditional dependencies that allow different regimes to intersect without converging. Through repetition, this configuration consolidates into a non-convergent structure in which differences are not reduced but continuously reproduced.

This mechanism redefines the relationship between creativity and higher education. Creativity cannot be adequately conceptualised as an attribute, competence, or outcome subject to uniform assessment. It is more precisely understood as an effect of positionally grounded regimes of valuation, in which validity is established within specific systems of legitimacy rather than across a unified standard. From this perspective, phenomena commonly described as misalignment, gaps, or lack of fit do not necessarily indicate deficiencies to be corrected, but are expressions of a system organised through differentiated cultural evaluation.

Placed in relation to existing theoretical approaches, the findings do not extend current models by adding further variables but challenge their underlying assumptions. Frameworks that presuppose convergence, integration, or coherence cannot fully account for situations in which evaluative criteria persist without alignment. The analysis therefore shifts the theoretical problem from explaining how creativity is produced or coordinated to explaining how multiple regimes of valuation are sustained within the same institutional configuration.

The scope of this contribution lies in specifying the conditions under which such a configuration can emerge. The mechanism holds where evaluative regimes are incommensurable, where no single regime can impose a common metric, and where institutional arrangements distribute rather than resolve differences. Outside these conditions, systems are more likely to move toward convergence or exclusion, delimiting the range within which non-convergent configurations can be sustained.

At the conceptual level, the article does not propose a new definition of creativity. Instead, it demonstrates that, under specific conditions, creativity can only be understood through the organisation of valuation rather than through the intrinsic properties of practice. In this sense, inconsistency is not a problem to be resolved but the form through which the system maintains its capacity to operate as a differentiated cultural configuration.

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