Cultural and creative networks as enabling contexts for artistic research

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Cultural and creative networks serve as essential environments that could foster innovation and advancement within artistic research practice. This study investigates how formal networks contribute to strengthening transdisciplinary collaboration, interdisciplinary dialogue, and societal impact of artistic research. Leveraging grounded theory principles, the research delves into the ways in which these networks can provide fertile ground for exploring novel artistic research pathways across ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions. Through the analysis of key categories and themes emerging from the empirical research, this study highlights the role of formal networks in the cultural and creative sector, particularly in addressing discipline-specific challenges and unlocking the full potential of artistic inquiry. By shedding light on the mechanisms through which networks facilitate the production and dissemination of knowledge, this study offers insights into the evolving landscape of artistic research and its broader societal impacts. The practical implications of the findings for practitioners, policymakers, and artistic stakeholders are examined. Ultimately, the findings underscore the significance of leveraging cultural and creative networks as drivers of transformative advancements within the artistic research community.

KEYWORDS

cultural and creative networks, artistic research, knowledge production, knowledge enabling context, grounded theory

Introduction

In a landscape defined by unprecedented social and economic complexities (Balland et al., 2022), networks have risen as adaptable organisational frameworks capable of thriving amidst rapid change, fostering environments where social activities and professional endeavours can uphold and flourish (Taylor, 2001). This transformative shift also impacts artistic production and research, as these spheres are deeply intertwined with evolving forms of social and professional organisation. Amidst this dynamic milieu, cultural and creative networks emerge as pivotal entities, providing fertile ground for the exploration of artistic inquiry. Through the intricate web of connections inherent in network interactions, artistic practice could gain depth and resonance by drawing from a diverse array of sources and engaging with a broader spectrum of influences. Consequently, these networks can become critical conduits to support artists in

navigating between subjective experience, critical inquiry, and disciplinary conventions in their quest for meaning (Pasquinelli and Sjöholm, 2015). Additionally, these networks could serve as conduits linking artistic inquiry with broader societal impact by influencing the context, approach, and dissemination reach of research findings.

Traditionally, artistic research has been closely associated with Higher Art Education Institutions (Borgdorff, 2013). However, formal education is increasingly challenged by alternative knowledge dissemination pathways, such as peer-based learning and self-directed learning approaches (Wakefield et al., 2013), networks emerge as indispensable alternatives, catering to the evolving needs of both artistic production and research, particularly in response to evolving educational paradigms. In the wake of uncertain times, postpandemic societies seek unique and critical outcomes that artistic research can offer. By nurturing resilience and sustainability within the artistic research ecosystem, cultural and creative networks could play a crucial role in cultivating a new generation of artists, creative thinkers, and artistic research practitioners, thereby unlocking the untapped potentials of artistic research at all levels (Bowman, 2020). Cultural and creative networks have the potential to serve as highly effective knowledge-enabling environments, legitimising new pathways for artistic research by bridging the gap between informal, spontaneous connections among practitioners and the formal artistic research programs offered by Higher Art Education Institutions.

The aim of the present study is to further the current body of literature by enhancing the comprehension of how cultural and creative networks stimulate innovation in artistic research pathways across ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions. Furthermore, it seeks to emphasise the importance of these networks in linking artistic inquiry with broader societal impact, while also functioning as alternative structures for the dissemination of artistic knowledge. Through these means, networks could effectively advocate for the needs and interests of artists and researchers, amplifying their voices within the broader community and serve as conduits for accessing funding resources, connecting practitioners with financial support for artistic research initiatives. Ultimately, formal networks may play a significant part in strengthening artistic research through cultivating diverse connections, wider dissemination, and resilience-building initiatives, hence contributing to the evolution and sustainability of artistic practice, thinking, and its impacts (O'Regan et al., 2004). The results of this research can help inform policymakers' decisions on funding and cultural policy by highlighting the impact of formal networks in the field of artistic research. Additionally, the findings can guide artist-researchers in understanding how these networks foster environments that enhance and support artistic research processes and outcomes. Additionally, the study offers valuable insights for Higher Art Education Institutions and

network's governing bodies, which should consider partnering with cultural and creative networks to foster more inclusive, flexible, and innovative environments for artistic research. By addressing the needs of these key stakeholders, this research provides an original contribution to understanding the pivotal role of cultural and creative networks in advancing both artistic research and practice.

To achieve this goal, the study presents a concise overview of the current state research of both artistic research and cultural and creative networks, followed by an exposition of the chosen methodological framework. Employing grounded theory principles, subsequent sections will delineate the categories emerging from empirical investigation, resulting in the generation of theoretical insights regarding the opportunity for networks to be leveraged as knowledge-enabling contexts. These insights will, in turn, inform the paper's limitations, practical implications and final conclusions.

Conceptual framework

Artistic research in volatile environments

Although the definition of artistic research remains subject to debate, its potential for value creation is undeniable. In essence, artistic research encompasses a diverse range of practices that integrate artistic creation with research inquiry. It involves the exploration, experimentation, and generation of knowledge through artistic processes and their outputs (Borgdorff, 2010; Klein, 2010). Characterised by its emphasis on the creative process, embodied knowledge, and the integration of artistic and scientific research methodologies, artistic research engages with questions of aesthetics, perception, interpretation, and meaning. In this sense, "artistic research is inseparably tied to the artistic development of the artist as well as to the development of the discipline or disciplines in which he or she works" (Borgdorff, 2010, p. 24).

Far from being universally established, the term remains a dynamic and evolving concept situated at the intersection of artistic, scientific, and academic inquiry (Boeck and Tepe, 2021). As a very specific form of inquiry, artistic research blurs the boundaries between art-making and academic scholarship, challenging conventional notions of both. It encompasses a diverse array of approaches, methodologies, and forms of expression, united by a common commitment to generating knowledge through the exploration of art and artistic experience. A number of interchangeable terms have been proposed, such as arts-based research, creation-research (Biggs and Karlsson, 2010). In the United Kingdom, the terms practice-based research and practice-led research are favoured by institutions and policymakers, such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Haslem, 2017). Fundamentally, artistic research entails the development of an inquiry aimed at

yielding original contributions to advance understanding through the production and acquisition of novel forms of knowledge derived from the artistic practice.

Unlike other research paradigms, artistic research privileges the experiential, sensory, and embodied dimensions of knowledge production, foregrounding the process of artistic inquiry as a mode of discovery and understanding. Therefore, its focus lies in contextualising artistic and aesthetic processes within a respective framework. As such, the fundamental space of artistic research is characterised by its openness to experimentation, ambiguity, and multiplicity of perspectives (Haslem, 2017; Klein, 2010). Artistic research benefits from environments that provide a fertile ground for creative exploration, critical reflection, and interdisciplinary dialogue, where artists, scholars, and practitioners can collaborate, exchange ideas, and push the boundaries of artistic experience. Within this space, artistic research thrives on the tension between tradition and innovation, convention and disruption, offering a platform for questioning established norms and exploring alternative modes of expression and understanding.

The environment in which the process of creation unfolds remains associated with the settings in which artists and creators conduct their practices. Artistic and creative milieus, with or without direct local government intervention, can be identified as venues that foster artists-researchers from all disciplines. Traditionally, these include theatres, visual arts studios, galleries, performance spaces. With the expansion of art practices into digital realms, environments conducive to digital and post-digital artistic practices have flourished. However, within a framework of profound revision of the basic constructs of art and artistic development, collaborative contexts have emerged to accommodate new working methods, contents, and ideals constituting the corpus of artistic research. These environments include innovative milieus, such as urban clusters (Méndez and Moral, 2011), artistic and creative spaces (Evans, 2009), incubators (Essig, 2014), hubs (Gill et al., 2019), communities (Landesman, 2013), districts (Zukin and Braslow, 2011), clusters (Chapain et al., 2010), and notably, networks (O'Regan et al., 2004).

In this context, cultural and creative networks, emerge as critical milieus for artistic production and knowledge generation developed through artistic and aesthetic processes. They have become a key component in understanding the artistic ecosystem and artistic research paradigms, as they are associated with the recognition of non-traditional forms of knowledge production (Castells, 2000).

Network dynamics and artistic entreprise

Reflecting on existence itself, Kauffman established, "networks in the regime near the edge of chaos—the compromise between order and surprise—appear best able to coordinate complex activities and best able to evolve as well" (Kauffman, 1995, p. 26). An immense array of network definitions and typological classifications have been advanced, however, for the purpose of this research, networks are considered structured and purposely governed member-based structures that operate to support participants to connect and collaborate as a set of interconnected nodes. They act as a community through a very adaptable, open-ended, and decentralised structure (Castells, 1996; Castells, 2000). Among them, cultural and creative networks are understood as structures that operate in "all sectors whose activities are based on cultural values, or other artistic individual or collective creative expressions" (European Commission, 2023).

In essence, these widespread platforms leverage non-hierarchical coordination and horizontal embedded relations amongst agents for the generation and spread of diverse forms of knowledge. Through these means, networks and especially inter-organisational networks have proven their efficacy in supporting the academic, public and private sectors in addressing individual and societal challenges by exercising alternative forms of formal and informal influence (Martinez-Diaz and Woods, 2009). Critically to the artistic endeavour, these organisational arrangements are capable of fostering creativity and innovation in the artistic arena and beyond by strengthening collaboration and cooperation, upgrading learning practices, enhancing knowledge-sharing processes, and intensifying the overall artistic vibrancy of individuals and communities (Hearn and Mendizabal, 2011).

As a social construct, networks can be considered as "the enduring exchange relations established between organisations, individuals, and groups" (Weber and Khademian, 2008, p. 334). In Social Network Theory, the agents participating in these configurations are referred to as nodes, while the connections amongst agents are called ties (Freeman, 2000). Provan et al. (2007), Provan and Lemaire (2012) considered that despite the different approaches to the subject, several common elements could be appreciated, namely, social interaction, relationships, connectedness, collaboration, collective action, trust, and cooperation (p. 480). The earlier conceptualisation of networks as hybrid forms of previous configurations has been challenged and debunked. Consequently, networks have been recognised as alternative governance setups to markets and hierarchies, endowed with their own particular logic (Hearn and Mendizabal, 2011).

In spite of a number of critics (Abell and Reyniers, 2000), networks stand as one of the dominant forms in the current society. Castells coined the term "network society" to refer to "a society whose social structure is made up of networks powered by micro-electronics-based information and communications technologies" (2004, p. 3), including in the artistic, cultural, and creative fields.

The role of cultural and creative networks in artistic ecosystems

The conceptualisation of the interconnectedness between artistic and creative pursuits, educational undertakings, broader social enterprises, sustainability journeys, and knowledge strivings has been extensively documented in an effort to depict the intertwined system of values surrounding artistic production and research. Among others, this endeavour encompasses various concepts such as the "Ecology of culture" (Holden, 2015), "Design ecologies" (Walker et al., 2019), "cultural ecosystem" (Jeffcutt, 2004), "creative ecologies" (Malinowski and Howkins, 2018), and "cultural networks" (Blackstone et al., 2016).

By their very nature, network structures serve as a conducive framework for arts production, creative thinking, and artistic research, offering an environment where members can actively participate in artistic thinking, question the creative process, and engage in contextual, interpretive, and conceptual reflection (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 19). In this manner, cultural and creative networks play a pivotal role in the continued development of societies (De Bernard et al., 2022). As knowledge-intensive organisations focused on individual and collective creativity and talent, they foster an environment that generates critical aesthetic, cultural, societal, and economic value, which in turn can be instrumental in advancing a broader artistic research agenda. Beyond a more traditional approach focused on physical colocation, ties among artistic agents across different spaces and times present a novel opportunity to increase the understanding of the cultural and creative sector (Comunian, 2017). Networks become appropriate avenues to uphold the main attributes underpinning the artistic and creative sector, being necessarily situated within communities of activity and unavoidably networked within relationships and interdependencies (Jeffcutt, 2004). Hence, they are considered instrumental for "nurturing individual creativity and for turning individual talent and imagination into collective creativity" (Staber, 2008, p. 569).

Cultural and creative networks operate at the crossroads of artistic areas where public, private, and not-for-profit models coexist and interact with the goal to develop aesthetic, cultural, social, and economic value. Their substantial contribution to growth and prosperity and to sustainable development has been proven (Skoglund and Laven, 2019). However, there is a need to further devote attention to the ways that networkspecific models underlie societal progress. As the framework and boundaries of the artistic and cultural sector are still to be defined in Europe, detailed analysis of sector-specificities may contribute to the determination of a shared understanding of the discipline and its impacts. Scholars have pointed out that networks operating in the arts milieu represent a means to capitalise on knowledge from the external environment, which has been substantially overlooked in relation to other social forms of organisation. It

is acknowledged that there is still a need to emphasise the subject to inform policymaking and advance towards an innovative research agenda (Gulati et al., 2000). Moreover, the models for sectorial classification appear unfit to represent new stakeholders and key actors of the artistic sector, including the emerging discipline of artistic research, which poses challenges in establishing transdisciplinary influences and determining value creation models capable of addressing current social challenges.

In this regard, acknowledging the pivotal role of networks and artistic research in fostering an environment conducive to generating, accessing, and disseminating knowledge in the spheres of art and sustainable development practices is essential for addressing the structural deficiencies within cultural and creative ecosystems and beyond. This recognition could also serve to counteract the perpetuation of widespread economic and social inequalities (O'Brien, 2020). Given the heightened volatility of current times, there is growing acknowledgment of the importance of investigating how the cultural and creative sector, and more specifically, artistic research, can utilise resources and expertise to confront the unprecedented challenges of today (Betzler and Leuschen, 2021; De Voldere et al., 2017). Therefore, this study aims to highlight how the advancement of artistic research within cultural and creative networks could significantly contribute to tackling our most pressing societal challenges.

Research design and methods

The objective of this research is to broaden our comprehension of how artistic, cultural, and creative networks contribute to the advancement of artistic research. To achieve this objective, the study will employ the grounded theory methodology, specifically adopting Charmaz's constructivist approach. Grounded theory is selected as the methodological framework due to its systematic yet adaptable characteristics, rendering it suitable for investigating phenomena where limited knowledge exists, particularly focusing on human behaviour and interaction within social contexts. Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) are acknowledged as the pioneers of grounded theory, Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory approach is particularly pertinent to this research owing to its emphasis on how participants construct meaning within the investigative context. As a symbolic interactionist, Charmaz underscores the collaborative construction of experience and meanings between the researcher and participants. In this approach, theory doesn't emerge as a discovery but rather takes shape through the inductive analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2003; Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2007).

The aim of grounded theory is to develop explanatory theories that uncover inherent processes within the specific area of study, with the theory emerging directly from the data itself. For the present investigation, qualitative research appears

to be the most suitable method for this exploration (Creswell, 2011). Two qualitative data collection techniques have been integrated into the research design, namely, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The methodology encompasses several stages, including theoretical sampling, which is vital for acquiring relevant data essential for theory emergence (Butler et al., 2018). Additionally, the literature review was conducted at a later stage to minimise the risk of researcher bias stemming from preconceived notions (Dunne, 2011).

A targeted group of potential interviewees was deliberately selected, as researchers sought out individuals who could offer valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The initial sample consisted of 35 individuals classified as working artists, artist-researchers, and network affiliates, as delineated by specific criteria. Working artists encompassed individuals currently engaged in artistic endeavours as their primary occupation, while artist-researchers were defined as practitioners who had completed at least one artistic research project in a formalised setting within the past 24 months. Network affiliates comprised representatives affiliated with a structured network operating at a pan-European level within the artistic, cultural, or creative field. This sample is posited to accurately represent the entire population regarding the characteristics of interest (Burns and Grove, 2010). Of these, 26 participants consented to participate in semistructured interviews lasting 45–60 min each, conducted via video conference systems between 2023 and 2024. Automatic transcription technology was employed as a foundation for thoroughly acquainting oneself with the transcripts.

Additionally, documentary evidence served as method of data collection. This resulted in the retrieval and analysis of 258 documents pertaining to the artistic and professional spheres of the interview participants, encompassing social network posts, images, recordings, research papers, network governance documentation, statements on research affiliations, and reflexive notes on individual approaches to artistic practice and artistic research. Memoing was systematically conducted to heighten sensitivity to theoretical constructs within the data (Hoe and Hoare, 2012).

Initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding were subsequently undertaken in an iterative fashion. During the final coding stage, concepts that had advanced to the category level were abstracted to contribute to conceptual constructs. These theoretical constructs are delineated through interconnected categories, concluding in a discursive array of theoretical propositions (Birks and Mills, 2015). In this study, grounded theory principles evidenced three emerging categories from the data: 1) "Exploring New Horizons," 2) "Forging Connections," and 3) "Pushing the Boundaries." These categories played an important role in analytical conceptualisation, ultimately leading to the formulation of a theory on the role of artistic networks as facilitative environments for innovative pathways in artistic research.

Results

Exploring new horizons: redefining the object of artistic research

Artistic research extends beyond conventional ontological boundaries of traditional scientific and humanistic disciplines, delving into the depths of artistic experience in an attempt to reconfigure the very object of artistic inquiry (Klein, 2010). In this process, the multifaceted endeavour of cultural and networks, fosters the generation of informed debate to attain a robust body of knowledge about artists' work, practice, and experience. In this pursuit of redefinition of the artistic demarcation, cultural and creative networks emerge as essential catalysts, providing fertile ground for the advancement of shared understanding about the object of artistic research. This debate remains active, aiming towards a broader perspective of artistic practices, identified "as those through which we destabilise and thereby explore the dynamic mind—even if we cannot stick any art label to the artefact involved in this engagement." (Muth and Carbon, 2024).

In this context, establishing a consensual perspective of the meaning of art and artistic practice emerges as a significant concern for the participant community. As expressed by one informant, "What does it mean in today's AI world? It is even a human faculty . . . there is so much disruption and confusion around traditional conceptions of the very essence of art itself. Are they valid anymore?" (Artist 002, 2023). Consequently, adopting a network framework when approaching the subject matter aids in addressing challenges associated with clarifying the focus and object of artistic research endeavours. Another participant highlights the importance of collaboration, stating, "Artistic researchers need to work together and confront different perspectives . . . there is no other way; we cannot do that in isolation" (Network affiliate 012, 2024). As confirmed by the investigation, artistic research is founded on the open-ended nature of artistic contexts and on the infinite array of present and future possibilities for artistic practices. This boundless scope of research profoundly influences the focus and identity of the discipline, shaping the direction of inquiry in artistic research activities.

In the assessment of research data, networks emerge as collective and interdisciplinary domains, functioning as both physical and intellectual spaces that nurture dialogue and discourse on the subject of artistic research and art itself (Schwab and Benaroyo, 2009; Schwab, 2018). This concept finds further reinforcement in documentary research in social media platforms. Social media platforms are herein approached as a medium for artist and artist researchers to share life and professional experience (Kang et al., 2019) also in the context of the cultural and creative network interactions. For example, the Instagram post titled "THIS is Art?" (Artist 008, 2023) sparked a discussion on the focus of artistic research within the cultural and

creative network, generating a thread with eleven interactions. In this context, while cultural and creative networks serve as arenas for generating debate and consensus, particularly regarding the scope of research subjects, they also provide artists and researchers with a desired degree of freedom and autonomy. Respondents have approached this aspect from various angles, expressing how the network environment helps them maintain their uniqueness and agency in artistic research. Informants have stated, "I can still be myself" (Artist 006, 2023), "me as an artist" (Artist 013, 2024), "my artistic identity" (Artist 011, 2023), and "my work" (Artist-researcher 017, 2023). Informants emphasised that interactions within Cultural and creative networks enhance their ability and freedom to make independent choices and actively direct their artistic journeys, as exchanges within these frameworks remain non-prescriptive.

Overall, the data conform that within networks, separation and connection, individuality and contrast, freedom and integration, identity and difference, are mutually constitutive constructs. Consistent with the findings of Travis (2020), networks emerge as key players in reinforcing artistic identity, a critical component to artistic research. This is manifested through an exploration of the interplay between artistic agency, representation and lived experience, as well as the capacity of art to shape and mirror diverse realities (de Assis and Schwab, 2019). As one artist expressed, "I have doubts. Many times, I do not know if I am an artist, and if my work is really art . . . not sure. It is in these moments that I seek interaction and feedback from others. From the community. . . . so, I can continue on my journey" (Artist 023, 2024). Another artist-researcher echoed this sentiment, stating, "Is research in my own art worth it? It is certainly worth it for me, for my personal growth as a painter, and I can see that when I engage in artistic research for others, it helps, it inspires, and it generates new ideas" (Artist-researcher 023, 2024). Among networks, artistic research practitioners find a platform for deliberating the research's focal point and its distinctive aspects compared to other scholarly or scientific inquiries.

Additionally, documentary evidence highlights that materials generated through the artistic research process are presented as publicly accessible records, often disseminated through network activity, contributing to the perpetual cycle of experience, as articulated by Hannula et al. (2014). This sentiment was reaffirmed by an informant who stated, "In our network, the exploration of artistic journeys is a key component of knowledge sharing among members" (Network affiliate 021, 2024). Disseminating artistic research findings to a broader audience serves several crucial purposes, including eliciting feedback and constructive criticism to enrich the research process. Moreover, it enhances the legitimacy of artistic practice, bolstering the credibility and reliability of the study in the eyes of the wider community. Furthermore, such dissemination efforts can influence decision-making and policy development, advocating for the recognition and support of the arts and artistic research

practices. It also plays a vital role in educating fellow artists and the broader community on significant issues, methodologies, and findings within the sphere of artistic research, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the arts. In this sense, networks become important conduits beyond High Education Institutions, playing a role in addressing the ontological debates in the art community.

Forging connections: relating artistic research to mainstream knowledge creation processes

The analysis of the data has evidenced a direct connection between artistic research and cultural and creative networks also on the epistemological level. The nature of the knowledge embodied in or generated through artistic research and the ways in which this array of knowledge is positioned in respect to knowledge emerging from different disciplines appears recurrently in both interviews and documental analysis. One informant shared the reflection that "artists generate aesthetic experiences which can become new insights for the benefit of society thru artistic research. The network environment allows this to be shared with others, to fulfil the mission" (Network affiliate 022, 2024).

In line with the complexity of meanings of both concepts, artistic reach and networks, knowledge also appears as a holder of intrinsic ambiguity, with no consensus upon a conventional understanding of what the concept entails (Virkus, 2016). Davenport and Prusak (1998) also stressed the evasive nature of the term, characterising knowledge as "a slippery concept" (p. 6). Nonaka et al. (1996) approached the subject as a flow of meaningful messages, which entails the commitments and beliefs derived from pre-existing information. It involves interpreting and integrating various pieces of information, and often drawing upon personal experiences and social interactions to identify patterns, make connections and develop insights. Delving into the Nonaka and Takeuchi's work, they regarded knowledge as a "justified true belief that increases an entity's capacity for effective action" (1995, p. 61). In the specific case of artistic research, considering the discipline as a means to articulate new knowledge in the sphere of arts, we can convey knowledge to be viewed as a "dynamic human process of justifying personal belief toward the truth" (Nonaka et al., 1996, p. 58).

As evidenced, networks could become environments conducive to the generation, assessment, and dissemination of meanings inherent in art, encompassing both the artistic process and the artistic output. By harnessing the potential of artistic research, networks appear as a conduit to advance in the sphere of "knowledge embodied in art practices" (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 47). The contextual nature of knowledge has been highlighted under a constructivist outlook, as it carries a particular meaning because of the conditions that form part

of its description and that it may construct meaning based on specific experiences. Following this view, a shared contextual dimension is a necessary precondition to generate knowledge. This requirement does not imply a simplification into a unique view but accepts multiple interpretations in a social group that, in turn, facilitates sense-making. This is supported by the empirical findings as networks are reported to offer "many views" (Artist-researcher 22, 2023), "different perspectives" (Artist 004, 2023), and "Many contributions" (Network affiliate 012, 2024).

Artistic research encompasses a spectrum of meanings embedded within art-based knowledge, which largely consists of tacit elements. Networks are acknowledged as "non-linear dynamics of systems that act as a whole but do not totalize" (Taylor, 2013, p. 155), rendering them conducive for cultivating and disseminating the forms of non-conceptual knowledge inherent in artistic expression and facilitating the meaningful interpretation of the arts. Tacit knowledge is a highly impactful resource in the arts domain (Schindler, 2015; Budge, 2016; Marinkovic, 2021) and is closely linked with networked environments (Connell et al., 2003; Oğuz and Elif Şengün, 2011). The literature presents a significant contrast between tacit and explicit knowledge, a differentiation foundational to mainstream discussions on knowledge management (Collins, 2001). This conceptual division finds roots in Polanyi's work, "The Logic of Tacit Inference" (Polanyi, 1966), where he illustrates the nature of the inherent interplay between the two knowledge types. As the author posits, "while tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge" (p. 7). These principles find validation in the current study, where both documentary evidence and informant interviews consistently highlight concepts such as "unknown," (Artist-researcher 007, 2023) "intuition," (Artist 004, 2023) "inspiration," (Artist-researcher 001, 2023) "imagination," (Artist 008, 2023) and "experimental knowledge" (Artist 009, 2023) within the context of artistic creation in cultural and creative network environments.

An integral aspect of artistic research encompasses not only the exchange or sharing of existing knowledge, whether tacit or explicit, but also the creation of novel forms of understanding. (Nonaka et al. 2002, p. 101) characterised this process as "an existential place where participants share their contexts and create new meanings through interactions." Consequently, the generation of knowledge relies on establishing an appropriate setting where novel and existing meanings are exchanged, generated, and utilised. Documentation underscores that networks act as enabling environments for all four processes of the SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka et al., 1996). This encompasses Socialisation, where tacit knowledge is disseminated among individuals, Externalisation, which entails transforming tacit knowledge into explicit forms, Combination, which merges various explicit knowledge resources, and

Internalisation, where explicit knowledge is reabsorbed into tacit understanding by participants. Informants also emphasise this aspect, highlighting the potential of cultural and creative networks in supporting the articulation of artistic research as a discipline. As expressed by one artist-researcher, "Artistic research allows me to reflect on my intuitive understanding of my art [...] and my network offers an environment where to crystallise these findings and progress" (Artist-researcher 018, 2023).

Pushing the boundaries: furthering the methodologies and techniques in artistic research

Data gathered has led to the emergence of a third logical category concerning how networks become a conducive environment for methodological advancement in artistic research. As evidenced by an artist researcher, "networks provided me with a context to inquire about ways in which research is conducted and by which means" (Artist-researcher 023, 2024). Additionally, another artist-researcher remarked, "my art has evolved so much since I completed the PhD, so I often need to look for insights on how to continue researching within the community" (Artist-researcher 007, 2023). Document research has also provided evidence of instances where questions on methodology were raised on the social network pages, indicating a vivid exchange of methodological insights in this milieu among participants, artists, and multiple agents of the value creation ecosystem of the arts. For example, the Facebook post on the cultural and creative network's social account, titled "Have you used the reflective video diary as a method for artistic research?" (Artist 004, 2023), generated a discussion with sixteen comments and nine replies on the topic. On many occasions, these concerns are echoed in scholarly works (Lee and Ocepek, 2022) as a constitutive part of the process of developing ephemeral knowledge on the artistic experience.

To capture the component of meaning in the arts, qualitative research methods appear to be most favoured within artistic research practice also as evidenced by documentary review. In line also with previous literature (Leavy, 2020; Vaart et al., 2018), participants declared to leverage qualitative methods as self-reflection accounts, observation of performances, self-recording, drawing, visual images and photographs, visual poetry, storytelling, memos, diaries, and personal accounts. Informants evidenced the challenges in devising methods and techniques suitable for conducting research in the arts, due to the unique nature of this domain and the inherent differences it holds from traditional scholarly disciplines. Methods that convey a humanistic approach, wherein phenomena under investigation are examined through the eyes and experiences of individual participants, are considered the most appropriate (Creswell, 2011). Evidence showed that networks appear to be a suitable

setting for questioning about methodological challenges and finding collective solutions. In this sense, despite the natural specificities of the discipline, convergences with qualitative methods form other scientific domains such as auto-ethnography have become apparent in exchanges among network members. As conveyed in the literature, "there has been a significant overlap between these fields in acknowledging the insights that come from researchers' own subjectivities, voices, and experiences" (Bartleet, 2021, p. 133).

Also, practitioners appear to seek methodological interdisciplinary references in networks to approach one of the most pressing subjects of artistic research, namely, the fact that artistic research is primarily carried out by artists themselves (Armstrong, 2020). The methodology of artistic research encompasses elements of practical experimentation, participation in artistic practice, and the interpretation of one's practice. In this sense, networks play a pivotal role in advancing methodological approaches in artistic research by fostering criticality, progress, and change in the practitioners' artistic endeavours. Unlike other restricted organisational models, networks are characterised by openness, allowing for the exchange of ideas and the enrichment of understanding through interdisciplinary collaboration, which in turn opens avenues for aspects of experiential exploration, involvement in artistic activity, and evaluation of said activity. In this sense, informants share the value of peer review both in formal and informal settings. "I value other researchers' feedback" (Artist 003, 2023), "in the network, we can find producing comments and advice upon our work" (Artist-researcher 018, 2023), "by integrating the opinions raised in the community, I can refine and redirect the methods of my research" (Artist-researcher 024, 2024).

In summary, within artistic research communities, networks overcome the insider/outsider alternation of perspectives from a methodological standpoint (Smith, 2018), promoting self-critical and selfconscious change. Networks not only provide shared practices and variables to evaluate and discuss artistic research contributions but also help overcome the challenges of the wall of articulation, understood as "when the values of a phenomena are self-evident in communities of the artists may not be self-evident in communities of scientists" (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 67). As the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature of artistic research calls for a methodological approach that embraces difference and facilitates transformative outcomes, the various perspectives and methodologies within artistic research discussed in cultural and creative networks could push the boundaries of established knowledge paradigms, paving the way for innovative insights and novel artistic expressions.

Discussion of results

The grounded theory analysis has revealed three key themes that shed light on the phenomenon under investigation and inform the theory emerging from the data. At the heart of the study lies the concept of cultural and creative networks as conducive environments for artistic research, which emerged as central to understanding how networks can support the discovery of progressive pathways in artistic research, across ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions.

The grounded theory analysis provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the exploration of new horizons in artistic research, transcending traditional boundaries, and how it is facilitated by cultural and creative networks. By deriving the most salient concepts, 1) "Exploring New Horizons," 2) "Forging Connections," and 3) "Pushing the Boundaries," networks appear as dynamic catalysts for innovation, progress, and societal impact, by forging connections between artists, researchers, and diverse stakeholders. Moreover, it is argued that networks not only foster interdisciplinary dialogue, understood as the interaction between different artistic disciplines, but also support transdisciplinary advancements, as the outcomes of these exchanges can transcend the boundaries of the original fields, supporting the creation of novel frames of reference for the endeavour of artistic research.

In such a way, the collective approach of cultural and creative networks facilitates the integration of artistic research into mission-oriented research agendas, such as those addressing sustainability, health, social inclusion, and urban development (Pfeifer and Helming, 2024). As "the grand challenges of our time cannot be solved by one actor" (Jütting, 2020), these networks could bring together stakeholders from academia, industry, government, and civil society to define research priorities, co-create solutions, and implement projects that align with the overarching goals of society. In this sense, the knowledge produced by the artists' research process is conceptualised within the framework of its contribution to solving or alleviating environmental or social problems. By leveraging the unique perspectives and methodologies of artists, cultural and creative networks enrich mission-oriented research with imaginative approaches and alternative narratives, fostering deeper engagement and broader impact (Castelnovo and Florio, 2020).

Furthermore, cultural and creative networks contribute to the development of frameworks that provide guidance on interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical considerations, community engagement, and evaluation criteria for assessing the societal relevance and impact of artistic research projects. As such, networks could contribute to the legitimation of artistic research as a discipline (Haseman, 2009). By creating a productive framework that enables the establishment of standards and best practices, cultural and creative networks empower artists and researchers to navigate complex socio-cultural contexts, articulate their contributions, and advocate for the value of artistic research in addressing pressing societal issues. This interdisciplinary collaboration enriches not only artistic research but also fosters synergies that lead to novel insights and solutions to complex challenges, both within the

realm of artistic experience and beyond (Busch, 2009; Klein, 2010).

Cultural and creative networks could be instrumental in bolstering artistic research and uncovering novel avenues of value. These networks serve as vital platforms, enabling artists, researchers, and other stakeholders to delve into and express the multifaceted value derived from artistic research, transcending conventional metrics and indicators (Biggs and Karlsson, 2010). Through this process, cultural and creative networks empower artists and researchers to reimagine the impact and significance of artistic research in today's society, fostering the exploration of fresh pathways for enhancement its impact (Hellström, 2010; Varto, 2018). The value of artistic research is inherently context-dependent and should be understood within the contextual frameworks that shape the artistic experience. Within this paradigm, the objectives of artistic research are recognised for their capacity to articulate individual and social transformation, generating diverse forms of tangible and intangible value. As noted, "its importance must be recognised even in instances where its effects may not align with traditional measurement criteria and require alternative forms of validation" (Kaszynska and Crossick, 2016, p. 154). Even when networks foster the cultivation of intangible values, they remain instrumental in establishing frameworks for effectively addressing complex societal challenges.

By exposing the mechanisms through which networks facilitate knowledge creation, exchange, and dissemination in the artistic sphere, this study offers insights into the evolving landscape of artistic research and its broader societal implications. Through their openness and collaborative nature, networks provide environments conducive to methodological advancement, critical inquiry, and peer feedback, thereby pushing the boundaries of established knowledge paradigms and paving the way for transformative outcomes in artistic expression and research.

Conclusion

Practical implications

In the context of this investigation, evidence has underscored the potential of cultural and creative networks to significantly contribute to reframing and transforming current challenges in the development of ontological, epistemological, and methodological frameworks for artistic research in various concrete ways. Networks can foster collaborative spaces where artists, researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders come together to exchange ideas, share resources, and co-create new forms of knowledge. This collaboration can be facilitated through targeted initiatives such as residencies, fellowships, exchange opportunities, and project grants provided by the networks. These opportunities enable artists and researchers to

experiment with original proposals, methods, and technologies in a fertile environment, leading to the pursuit of innovative research projects and the exploration of new forms of artistic endeavours. In this sense, novel methodological avenues can be imagined, progressed, and evaluated, supporting the development of shared frameworks, tools, and resources that enhance the effectiveness and impact of artistic research approaches. This interdisciplinary dialogue fosters cross-pollination of ideas sparks new collaborations and could generate innovative approaches to addressing complex societal challenges through artistic research.

From a different angle, creative and cultural networks play a crucial role in advocating for policy change at local, national, and international levels to further support artistic research. By engaging with policymakers, government agencies, and cultural institutions, these networks can influence the development of policies and initiatives that prioritise the discipline. Additionally, through their connections with diverse funding sources, including public agencies, private foundations, philanthropic organisations, and crowdfunding platforms, cultural networks can explore alternative funding models for supporting artistic research practice. Indeed, through fostering the exchange of ideas and perspectives, these networks cultivate a dynamic environment that encourages the acceptance of artistic research as a fully recognised form of inquiry, paving the way for its much-needed institutional acknowledgment as a standalone discipline in established methodology guides, such as the Frascati Manual (Varto, 2018).

Furthermore, cultural networks can serve as a conducive environment to support capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills, knowledge, and expertise of artists, researchers, and cultural professionals involved in artistic research (Hellström, 2010). These structures often operate under the precepts of self-directed learning (Li and Wu, 2023) and peer-learning (Lew-Levy et al., 2023), enhancing the ability of professionals to benefit from the acquisition of knowledge beyond the confines of traditional institutions. Through the offering of conferences, online training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities, these networks could further empower individuals to develop the competencies needed to conduct impactful research in the arts, in consonance to the offering of Higher Art Education Institutions. Overall, cultural networks serve as powerful advocates and facilitators for the upskilling of artistic research practitioners, ensuring the continued growth of the discipline and impact in the broader cultural landscape.

Furthermore, through their programming, events, and outreach activities, cultural networks actively promote public engagement with artistic research, thus raising awareness about its value and significance. By showcasing artistic research projects, organising exhibitions, performances, and public lectures, and engaging with diverse audiences, networks could

contribute to demystifying artistic research and nurturing a deeper appreciation for the types of knowledge it generates and its contributions to society. Additionally, cultural networks provide essential resources and support structures that enable artists and researchers to push boundaries, challenge conventions, and pioneer innovative solutions that effectively respond to the evolving needs of our rapidly changing world (Klein, 2010). In essence, culture and creative networks serve as vital engines driving forward the transformative potential of artistic research in advancing overall societal wellbeing.

Limitations and future research venues

The research findings are subject to several inherent limitations that merit acknowledgment. Although purposive sampling was employed to select informed participants, the limited sample size could introduce bias and constrain the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the presence of self-selection bias among participants who consented to interviews may impact the results, potentially overlooking divergent perspectives held by those who declined participation (Neuman, 2011). To mitigate these limitations, future studies should consider undertaking larger-scale investigations encompassing a broader representation of artists, artist-researchers, and network affiliates. Furthermore, adopting a longitudinal approach could offer deeper insight into the dynamics of cultural and creative networks' impact on artistic research over time. Additionally, expanding the scope of research beyond Europe could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the global landscape of artistic research and its relationship with cultural and creative networks.

The study's exclusive focus on formalised cultural and creative networks represents a limitation, as it overlooks the potential influence of personal or social networks on artistic research. Comunian (2017) highlights the significant overlap between social and professional spheres within the cultural and creative sector, suggesting that a comprehensive examination should encompass both formal and informal infrastructures. By incorporating attention to the personal dimension of interconnection among artists, researchers could gain additional insights into the relationship which can shape artistic research paradigms.

Future studies should therefore consider exploring the influence of informal networks and personal connections in artistic research practices and outcomes.

Despite efforts to include professionals from various related disciplines, such as artists, artistic researchers, and network affiliates, there may still be gaps in representation within the sample. These gaps could result in certain perspectives or experiences being underrepresented, thus limiting insights into the full spectrum of viewpoints within the artistic community. Moreover, the study primarily focused on participants who identified as professional artists, which may have excluded individuals who engage in artistic research but do not primarily self-identify as professional artists, such as amateur artists or moonlighters. Also, future research endeavours should strive to consider a broader range of artistic practitioners and professionals from diverse scientific disciplines. By adopting more inclusive approaches, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in artistic research paradigms and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of cultural and creative networks in facilitating artistic research.

Empowering artistic research

As evidenced by the current inquiry, cultural and creative networks assume a crucial role in propelling artistic research forward, offering dynamic arenas that stimulate advancements on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects of the discipline. These networks function as focal points where a multitude of artists, researchers, organisations, and institutions intersect, cultivating a lively ecosystem of novel meanings and investigative agendas.

One of the key strengths of cultural and creative networks is their ability to break down institutional silos and geographical barriers, allowing artists to engage with a global community of practitioners. This global perspective not only broadens the horizons of artistic research but also facilitates transcultural inquiry, where artists can draw inspiration from diverse cultural contexts and traditions. In essence, cultural and creative networks provide an appropriate environment for artistic research to flourish by nurturing collaboration, diversity, and cross-cultural dialogue. By transcending physical, organisational and disciplinary boundaries, these networks enable meaningful exchanges and collaborations that enrich artistic exploration and drive innovation. Hence, through these networks, artists have the opportunity to explore new avenues of inquiry, challenge traditional norms, and ultimately push the boundaries of artistic expression.

Cultural and creative networks could serve as vital hubs where artists and creators can explore new ideas, methods, and technologies, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression. By providing access to resources, funding opportunities, and professional development programs, these networks are become enabling structures for artists to pursue their creative visions and bring innovative projects to fruition. Moreover, cultural and creative networks play a crucial role in advocacy and policy initiatives aimed at promoting innovative artistic practices and attracting additional funding. By advocating

for the recognition and support of experimental and groundbreaking work, these networks help bridge the gap between artistic experimentation, public and private financial support and scholarly recognition. Through collaborative efforts with policymakers, cultural institutions, and funding agencies, they can find common grounds to propel that critical research, creativity, innovation, and artistic excellence.

Despite their potential to advance in the ontological, epistemological, and methodological spheres, the development of artistic research within the cultural and creative network milieu often faces challenges such as limited availability of provisions, insufficient dedicated programs, and barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration. The present research contributes to the recognition that by harnessing the collective expertise of networks, practitioners can overcome current challenges and play a transformative role in reframing the future landscape of artistic research and broadening the acumen inferred through artistic exploration. By fully embracing networks as catalysts for artistic collaboration, advocacy, and knowledge exchange, artistic research could emphasise its disruptive and transformative potential, fulfilling its role in challenging established knowledge structures and progressing towards novel pathways of individual and collective inquiry of art, aesthetics, and, in essence, of the exploration of the "physical and human worlds" (Nisbet, 2017, p. 11).

Data availability statement

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

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