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We Are All Cyanotypes: Reimagining Our Creative Futures

It begins, like so many stories of contemporary transformation, with a metaphor. Not one of progress, but of process: a print, an image, a blueprint. The CYANOTYPES project, an ongoing initiative supported by the Erasmus+ Programme, has taken this image—originally chemical, now conceptual—and developed from it an entire architecture for rethinking learning, skills, and futures in the cultural and creative sectors. That it takes its name from an older reproduction technique is no accident; the ghost of the analogue haunts the digital age, and CYANOTYPES embraces that spectral heritage with deliberate affection.

Much like the layered exposures of its namesake, CYANOTYPES offers a multiplicity of meanings. It is a framework, yes, but also a method, a provocation, a community. It works not simply to delineate competences—though that, too, it does—but to change the very way we think about skills and competences: not as a static condition of being qualified, but as a dynamic interplay between knowing, doing, and becoming.

From Crisis to Competence

The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) of Europe are no strangers to disruption. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced a reckoning with precarity, digitalisation and ecological crisis had already begun to unsettle inherited models of work, education, and value creation. CYANOTYPES responds to this entropic moment not by offering a cure-all but by supplying the tools—metaphorical and practical—for creative adaptation.

Its mechanism of choice is the competence framework: a matrix of skills and orientations mapped across five clusters, or what it calls "agencies": Collective, Public, Data-Driven, Value-Creating, and Regenerative. These are not simply categories, but modes of engagement—each with its own internal logics and outward-facing potentials. Within each cluster are five competences, yielding a total of twenty-five, from "Creative Confidence" to "Anticipatory Innovation" to "Digital Self-Determination." It is not a list for ticking boxes but a provocation to rethink professional and personal development in systemic, ethical, and creative terms.

Triple Loop Learning: Rethinking the Frame

Central to CYANOTYPES is the idea of triple loop learning. If single loop learning is about doing things right, and double loop learning about doing the right things, then triple loop learning is about interrogating the values and assumptions that determine what counts as "right" in the first place. It is not just a pedagogical tool but a philosophical stance: one that insists that knowing is always situated, provisional, and entangled.

This is not new—Argyris & Schön outlined it decades ago—but CYANOTYPES operationalises the insight in a way that makes it meaningful for 21st-century cultural and creative workers. Through workshops, scenarios, and pilot programmes, it builds capacity not just for technical skills but for reflective practice. In an era where the very basis of cultural legitimacy is contested, this may be the most radical move of all.

Triple loop learning offers a means to unlearn as much as to learn—to reframe not only what we know but how we know, and why we know it. It invites a critical re-evaluation of inherited paradigms. In creative work, where tacit knowledge and aesthetic judgment often outpace formal training, such learning can be transformative.

From Competence to Competitiveness

The very word "competence" carries with it a freight of implication. Derived from the Latin *competere*, meaning "to strive together" or "to come together, coincide,"

the term historically carried a sense of suitability, adequacy, or rightful capability. Only later, under the influence of modern economic thought, did it acquire the sharper edge of competitiveness.

This etymological shift is instructive. In its earliest uses, competence denoted fitness for purpose—being up to the task. It suggested congruity, alignment, appropriateness. But as market logics colonised language, competence became a vehicle for measuring performance, for comparing, for ranking. The plural—competences—was introduced in policy discourse precisely to granularise the notion: to dissect and distribute what it means to be capable.

CYANOTYPES, interestingly, both embraces and subverts this history. It acknowledges the instrumental need for competences—especially in a sector increasingly asked to demonstrate value—but it also seeks to restore the older, relational meanings: competence not as contest, but as co-presence; not as rivalry, but as resonance.

A Framework That Breathes

The CYANOTYPES framework is resolutely non-prescriptive. It invites use, misuse, adaptation. It is designed for flexibility, for repurposing, for critical engagement. Its clusters are lenses rather than silos, and the competences within them are articulated not only as outcomes but as invitations to exploration.

Take for example the competence of "Working with Values" (Public Agency cluster). Here, the emphasis is not just on

understanding abstract ethics but on navigating real-world complexities: aligning personal motivations with institutional missions, designing for inclusivity, surfacing the often-unstated assumptions that underpin cultural projects. The learning activities associated with this competence—role-play, value mapping, dialogue—reveal its social texture. It is, quite explicitly, a competence for negotiation, not prescription.
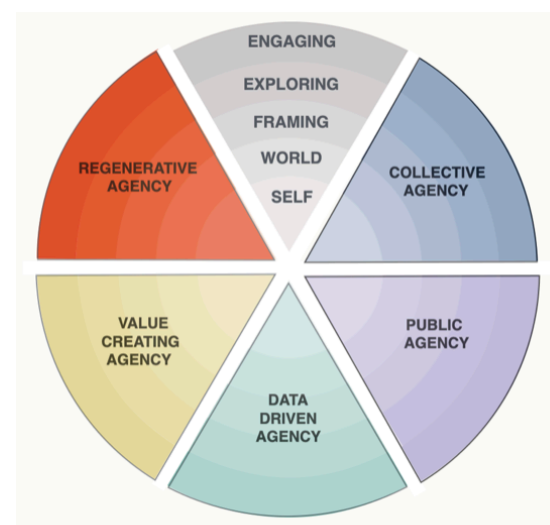
This ethos of reflexivity pervades the framework. The competences are aligned not just with jobs but with journeys. They are situated within a broader ecology of learning that includes formal, informal, and non-formal domains. In this sense, CYANOTYPES is not merely a training tool —it is an epistemological intervention.

Piloting the Possible

What does it mean to pilot a competence framework? In CYANOTYPES, the term is taken quite literally: across Europe, organisations are trialling its principles through concrete projects. From fashion

collectives exploring sustainable production to game designers engaging with narrative ethics, the framework is being tested in the crucible of real-world complexity. The piloting process is structured yet open-ended. Participants are encouraged to co-create learning pathways, to localise competences, to adapt the framework to their own contexts. This decentralised approach reflects the networked nature of contemporary culture and mirrors the transversal qualities that CYANOTYPES seeks to cultivate.

For policy makers, this offers a tool not for control but for coordination. For educators, a scaffold for curriculum design that privileges reflection over rote. For artists and cultural practitioners, a language for naming the often-invisible labour of cultural production. The framework's integration with local ecosystems of learning marks a shift from top-down policy to participatory infrastructure. The logic is less of implementation than of interpretation. CYANOTYPES does not travel as a finished product but as a set of questions.

An Emerging Community of Change

At its heart, CYANOTYPES is a social project and the idea of 'scaling across' rather than 'scaling up' plays a pivotal role. It is as much about community-building as it is about skills development. The initiative has brought together a consortium of institutions across Europe—universities, networks, think tanks, cultural hubs—all united by a shared interest in equipping the cultural sector for an uncertain future. This community is not

hierarchical but dialogical. Knowledge flows laterally, iteratively. Workshops and events become laboratories of mutual learning. The CYANOTYPES website functions not just as a repository but as a commons. Its ethos is not of dissemination but of participation.

Moreover, the inclusion of both vocational and higher education providers, alongside independent networks, reflects the commitment to multi-scalar engagement. The competences are not restricted to any one level or type of learner. They are transversal, mobile, responsive.

Learning as Cultural Practice

To engage seriously with CYANOTYPES is to rethink the boundaries between learning and making, between education and cultural work. In this sense, the project offers not merely a set of competences, but a new grammar for understanding how cultural value is produced.

The framework positions learning as an aesthetic and ethical act, as much as a technical or procedural one. It emphasises the cultivation of dispositions—curiosity, empathy, criticality—as foundational to professional capability. It challenges the instrumentalisation of education without denying the need for accountability. The insistence on agency—collective, public, data-driven, value-creating, regenerative—is itself a political statement. It resists the fragmentation of skills into discrete, decontextualised units, and reasserts the centrality of meaning-making.

The Future Is Not a Template

One of the more subtle achievements of CYANOTYPES is its resistance to futurism as a predictive endeavour. Instead of forecasting trends, it cultivates the conditions for readiness. The Framework's competences do not predict what will be needed—they prepare learners to engage with what emerges.

This is particularly evident in competences such as "Anticipatory Innovation" and "Actionable Futures," which ask not for clairvoyance but for strategic imagination. In an age of climate crisis, algorithmic governance, and cultural polarisation, such imagination is not a luxury. It is, perhaps, the very core of creative agency.

By cultivating competences as ways of seeing and acting—not merely as checklists—CYANOTYPES invites a deeper commitment to uncertainty. It reminds us that culture itself is a technology for living with the unknown.

Join A Work in Progress

CYANOTYPES does not pretend to offer a finished product. It is iterative, dialogic, and ongoing. It understands that competence is not a state but a trajectory. And in this, it mirrors the creative industries it serves: fluid, messy, inventive. To engage with CYANOTYPES is to accept the unfinishedness of learning, the incompleteness of frameworks, the provisionality of plans. It is to embrace a mode of working that is as much about process as product, about reflection as action.

In the end, the metaphor holds. We are all cyanotypes: exposed, reactive, shaped by context. But we are also printers of our own becoming, tracing new lines upon the blueprint of an uncertain world.

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Creative Skills Week 2025

Creative Skills Week 2025 (CSW2025) is a key meeting point for the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). It offers a dedicated platform to share knowledge, shape future competences, and promote new approaches to lifelong learning, re-skilling, and up-skilling.

Taking place in Prague and online, CSW2025 brings together educators, policymakers, sector leaders, artists, students, and learners of all kinds to collaborate across boundaries, co-create new learning pathways (CYANOTYPES Framework), and build skills for a resilient, future-ready sector.

CYANOTYPES

Join us from 22 – 26 September 2025 and let's create, transform, and regenerate.

Website:
https://creativeskillsweek.eu/

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