



## **In dialogue with Dr. Tom Fleming, Director of Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy**



**Q You have worked in a range of countries to advise governments in developing the Cultural and Creative (CCI) sectors of their economies. How did you enter this field of consultancy and what initially sparked your interest in the subject?**

**A** I have been very fortunate to work in so many countries and explore the role of culture and creative industries in such contrasting contexts. This includes work in most EU Member states, GCC states, and a diverse portfolio of countries from Malaysia to Brazil, Mongolia to Jamaica, Nigeria to Georgia. I got into this field of consultancy after developing research, strategy and insight at a more local level - such as with municipalities. This was built on my passion for people and place - I am a geographer at heart and have a PhD in Cultural and Human Geography from the University of Sheffield, UK. Following University I worked as Research Associate at the Manchester Institute of Popular Culture and then helped set up the Cultural Industries Development Agency in East London - one of the first dedicated units to support the cultural and creative industries. Consultancy followed naturally from this - blending research, practical and strategic development, and a geographically and culturally tailored approach. Initial projects with agencies like UNESCO, Council of Europe and then the European Commission, helped me to leap to a policy development platform.

**Q You are currently carrying out an assignment for the Dialogue project on further developing the CCI sector in four GCC countries. What lessons are there for GCC countries in developing the CCI sector from the other markets where you have worked?**

**A** GCC countries are incredibly well-placed to develop dynamic CCIs. Their distinctive heritage, strong cultural identities, innovation capacity, entrepreneurship, and rapid urbanisation all point to significant opportunities. They are developing their own pathways and I am sure will be in a position to be innovators in the next generation of CCI development. But there is also much they can learn from other contexts. Not least the importance of developing a data and evidence-based approach, embracing the full diversity of the talent base, working across ministries to coordinate investment and support for the CCIs, and of connecting the cultural sector to the more commercially-facing parts of the CCIs.

Q

**As you know the GCC has a population structure with a predominance of young people under the age of 35. What makes the CCI sector attractive and particularly relevant for young workers?**

A

The CCIs are relevant and attractive to all generations - creativity doesn't stop at 40. However, having such a youthful population provides a set of specific opportunities. For example, this demographic is 'digitally native', already fluent with a range of technologies that are powering CCI development.

They are also global in mindset, recognising the value of their heritage but also that cultures are connected and that they always change. This gives them an openness to cultural exchange and the innovation that follows.

Plus, this more youthful demographic sees setting up a small business or working as a freelancer as a valid career path. Although this does bring risks - such as the fragility of work in the 'gig economy', it provides the basis for a rich and dynamic CCI ecosystem in the GCC.

Q

**Many countries have established dedicated agencies to support the creative sector whereas other countries seek to better coordinate the activities of various government economic and cultural development organisations to support the development of the sector. Which in your view is the most effective approach?**

A

There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. This is why data and evidence are so important to inform and shape an appropriate model. Dedicated agencies or special purpose vehicles are a proven delivery mechanism because they can connect activity areas that are otherwise the responsibility of different ministries or departments.

They can also work closer to the CCI sector and provide an intermediary role between Government, civil society, and enterprise. Development agencies are also able to build campaigns, nurture networks and flexibly distribute funding and support.

But they are only impactful if they forge a strong partnership with Government, are given a sufficient budget and are smart in the ways they build the overall CCI ecosystem. Some work best in the 'start-up phase' of sector development - providing urgency and focus. Others develop a more specialist model - e.g. focusing on skills, investment, or on specific CCI sectors such as design or film. The best models are based on genuine public/private partnerships underpinned by trust.

Q

**Many of the European Union member states have well developed CCI sectors with many businesses both large and small contributing to their vibrancy. How can this European experience and expertise be harnessed to support the further development of the CCI sector in the GCC?**

A

There are exciting opportunities for GCC/EU mutual exchange and development across the CCIs. Both are advanced and growing markets for the CCIs and both are driving innovation across the CCI value chain. From an EU perspective, there is, broadly, a well-structured regulatory environment and many examples of good practice in CCI education and skills, clusters and networks, trade/export, and investment.

These present opportunities for knowledge exchange to shape the policy and partnership landscape in the GCC. In addition, EU member states, supported by the European Commission, have developed a CCI policy and partnership model with culture and the arts as a foundation for wider socio-economic development. The strategic alignment between, for example, individual artists, museums, festivals, and CCI enterprises, is key to inclusive and sustainable development.

Q

**The EU commission has a number of programmes being implemented including the Creative Europe programme and the European Creative Business Network to support the CCI sector in the EU. What are the ways that GCC countries can connect to these networks?**

A

The recent opportunity to present on the CCIs through the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification project has highlighted opportunities for both informal and programmatic relationship building between EU and GCC partners. By working together, GCC countries can establish networks of CCI hubs/accelerators/platforms, which in turn can connect to peer networks in the EU to facilitate knowledge exchange and B2B activities.

There are also opportunities to link institutions which are driving CCI development - such as universities and cultural organisations. The new Knowledge Innovation Community Programme for the CCIs in the EU would benefit from a structured relationship with the GCC - to scale up and diversify innovation across the creative economy. With a clear and committed approach to CCIs in each GCC nation, plus stronger GCC partnership, I am sure a set of shared opportunities can be nurtured at an EU and EU member state level.

