





A Palette of Possibilities: Exploring the Potential of Youth Culture and Creative Arts for National Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the intricate nexus between youth culture, creative arts, and national development, emphasising the role of young populations as pivotal agents of socio-economic transformation. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks, through discursive evaluation of rhetorical strategies and societal resonance, the study discussed how youth-driven cultural expressions and creative practices foster innovation, social cohesion, and cultural identity within Ghana's development milieu. It further explored the potential of the creative sector as a strategic lever for sustainable development, advocating for policy interventions that nurture youth participation in cultural industries. The discussion suggests that empowering youth engagement in the arts can serve as a catalytic mechanism for enhancing national development trajectories through fostering creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, and social inclusion. Such an environment facilitates opportunities for youth to cultivate character, acquire knowledge, skills and develop innate talents and abilities. Based on these analyses, a key recommendation is that government policies should prioritise and vigorously promote investment in young people by harnessing their creative potential and culture for youth-centred sustainable development. Such an emphasis is essential for fostering sustainable socio-economic growth and ensuring political stability within society.

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INTRODUCTION

From the days of the Greatest Generation, the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z, Generation Alpha, and the new Generation Beta, youth have been unjustifiably misunderstood and marginalised, with society failing to recognise and effectively harness the positive aspects of youth culture and its potential for national development. Youth culture can sometimes seem elusive or obfuscating to conventional understanding, and it becomes more complex with its diverse array of subcultures, which are inherently fluid, mutable, and radically eccentric. For instance, the grunge movement of the 1990s to the contemporary aesthetics of e-girls and the rise of #Hyperpop, as well as the global popularity of "Afro-beats," youth subcultures continue to serve as powerful vehicles for self-expression, resistance, and the formation of alternative communities. Even though youth culture may appear complex to older generations because they have ideas not often

adult society, it holds significant promise for progress. It has consistently served as a driving force behind societal transformation, fuelling creativity, challenging norms, and sparking innovation. Unfortunately, many adults seem to have a love-hate relationship and are sceptical of youth culture, erroneously perceiving young people as a social problem, always in trouble with sex, drugs and rock' and roll.¹ A perception Huq finds unjustifiable. The perspective that delineates youth synonymously with criminality, juvenile delinquency or perceives them as NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and therefore deviants, is incongruous. Such pejorative framing pathologizes youth culture, overlooking its potential as a resource. Far too often, youth culture has consistently been linked with idealism and the pursuit of fantasies and fleeting illusions that contradict reality. That notwithstanding, today's youth are inquisitive, navigating cultural and technological landscapes unimaginable to previous generations. Indeed, the power of youth culture is dynamic and cannot be underestimated.

The old order where young people acquired knowledge through adults, educators or reading books such as Encyclopaedia for new knowledge, "Courtesy for boys and girls" to learn good manners and civility, is gone. This has been supplanted by a new order of Google search for information, YouTube for instructional videos, interactive media for do-it-yourself tutorials, and artificial intelligence functioning as a virtual omniscient instructor, all supported by an irresistible sharing culture via "dramatic" social media. Concurrently, there has been a noticeable decline in the influence of traditional socialising institutions such as churches, mosques, faith-based organisations, traditional media and even the familial unit. In their stead, social media influencers have assumed a prominent role in shaping contemporary youth's values, behaviours, and aspirations. Often called "digital natives" or "netizens," today's youth rely heavily on technology to address their everyday challenges. Jon Katz, cited by Tell, asserts, "Technology is youth culture". She adds, "These kids are building a revolution. Technology is part of their ideology, their language, everything they do."² However, she also warns that many adults remain either indifferent or antagonistic toward youth cyberculture, urging parents to take a more active interest in their children's online activities.

Although family influence is typically crucial, young people frequently seek external role models and subcultures that resonate with their developing sense of self.³ Trends that once took months to circulate now spread worldwide in a matter of hours, creating a shared cultural lexicon. However, as they expand their virtual experiences, they are increasingly distancing and isolating themselves physically from their parents and immediate families. Gidley aptly describes this phenomenon as the "unprecedented fragmentation of the social glue without which young people are rudderless in their social orientation,"⁴ which raises concerns about the erosion of foundational social orientation among youth. In Ghana, where family bonds have traditionally served as a cornerstone of social cohesion, this shift is particularly concerning and warrants urgent attention.

Since the development of any society is fundamentally contingent upon its youth demographic, investing in contemporary youth constitutes a strategic investment in the nation's future. Properly cultivated youth serve as responsible citizens, effective decision-makers, skilled workforce members, and future leaders. Research suggests that young populations are vital agents of socio-economic change, contributing to innovation, social cohesion, and reinforcing cultural identity within emerging economies.⁵ The youth represent a vital asset to any nation, serving as both the present and future drivers of development. In contemporary discourse, youth are increasingly understood not merely as passive recipients of cultural trends but as active agents shaping innovative practices and self-expressions that influence broader development trajectories. The intersection of youth and national development has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, particularly within the domain of socio-economic

¹ K. Questa et al., "Community Engagement Interventions for Communicable Disease Control in Low- and Lower- Middle-Income Countries: Evidence from a Review of Systematic Reviews," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 19, no. 1 (December 6, 2020): 51, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-01169-5>.

² Carol Tell, "Generation What? Connecting with Today's Youth.," *Educational Leadership* 57, no. 4 (2000): 8–13.

³ Easy Sociology, "Understanding Youth Culture Sociologically." (Easy Sociology., 2025).

⁴ Jennifer Gidley, "Global Youth Culture: A Transdisciplinary Perspective," *Youth Futures: Comparative Research and Transformative Visions*, 2002, 3–18.

⁵ María Martínez-Hita, Cosme Jesús Gómez-Carrasco, and Pedro Miralles-Martínez, "The Effects of a Gamified Project Based on Historical Thinking on the Academic Performance of Primary School Children," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 8, no. 1 (May 17, 2021): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00796-9>.

transformation in emerging economies. Nonetheless, in Ghana, the discourse regarding youth culture and creative arts has been surprisingly sparse, highlighting a notable gap in academic discourse.

UNESCO recognises creative populations as essential drivers of socio-economic change, highlighting the transformative potential of youth-driven cultural and creative industries.⁶ As an integral component of cultural production, the creative arts serve as a conduit for innovation, social cohesion, and the articulation of national identity. Creative arts encompassing visual arts, music, dance, and theatre serve as vital media through which youth articulate their identities, foster social cohesion, and engender economic opportunities. Indeed, youth culture and creative arts, particularly when enhanced by technology, hold significant promise as essential catalysts for socio-economic transformation. Theoretical frameworks rooted in cultural economics and developmental theory posit that investments in youth capacities, specifically within artistic and creative domains, serve as critical mechanisms for sustainable development.⁷ Existing literature underscores the potential of youth engagement in cultural and creative industries to catalyse socio-economic transformation, promoting entrepreneurship, employment, and social inclusion. However, in Ghana, there is a notable lack of sustained commitment to strategic policy interventions that nurture youth participation in creative sectors. Strategic policy interventions are essential mechanisms for harnessing the developmental benefits of arts-based engagement and, therefore lack of it is concerning, particularly given the wealth of gifted Ghanaian youth whose creative abilities remain untapped.

To enhance the understanding of theoretical and national youth-centred policies and legislation, this paper synthesises key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies to elucidate how youth culture and the creative arts can function as catalysts for sustainable national development grounded in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 framework.⁸ The discussion is contextualised within Ghana's national development paradigm, where youth populations constitute a significant demographic segment. Through this synthesis, this review seeks to identify strategic pathways through which youth-led creative initiatives can drive innovation, promote social cohesion, and stimulate economic growth. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on youth policy and its intersection with sustainable development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Contemporary discourses on youth agency and cultural participation are grounded in sociological, economic, and developmental frameworks that underscore the intrinsic link between artistic expression and socio-economic mobility. This paper is underpinned by the theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of Cultural Capital, Habitus and Amartya Sen's capability approach.⁹ Bourdieu's cultural capital theory emphasises the importance of non-economic assets, such as education, intellect, skills, speech styles, tastes, and dispositions acquired through socialization.¹⁰ For young people, cultural capital can include artistic talents, cultural expressions, and fashion sense, which can promote social mobility. The concept of habitus is closely linked to the resource of knowledge.¹¹ Knowledge refers to how individuals perceive and understand the world, a process shaped by the cultures in which they are immersed. Similarly, Sen's capability approach provides a lens through which youth involvement in the arts can be understood as a means of expanding freedoms and capacities necessary for meaningful

⁶ N. Crawhall, "Auditing and Managing Cultural Resources with Displaced Indigenous Peoples: A South African Case Study" (Paris: UNESCO, 2001).

⁷ UN Habitat, "UN-Habitat Annual Report" (UN. Retrieved from <https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-annual-report-2012>, 2012).

⁸ "Concepts of Sustainable Development; a Literature Review and a Systematic Framework for Connecting the Role of Education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).," *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education* 8, no. 8 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0808009>.

⁹ Ingrid Robeyns and Morten Fibieger Byskov., "'The Capability Approach', The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Summer 2025 Edition), Edward N. " (Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.): forthcoming URL , n.d.); Martina Musteen et al., "A Community of Practice Approach to Teaching International Entrepreneurship," *Administrative Sciences* 8, no. 4 (September 23, 2018): 56, <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci8040056>.

¹⁰ Xiaowei Huang, "Understanding Bourdieu - Cultural Capital and Habitus," *Review of European Studies* 11, no. 3 (August 7, 2019): 45, <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v11n3p45>.

¹¹ Jasmine Matope, "Making Wine Without Grapes: The Case for Quality Teaching With Limited Resources," *Educational Research for Social Change* 10, no. 2 (September 1, 2021): 33–46, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2021/v10i2a3>.

societal participation.¹² Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of how cultural assets and individual capabilities drive social and economic progress.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted an interdisciplinary, discursive approach to explore how youth-led cultural expressions and creative practices contribute to innovation, social cohesion, and identity formation within Ghana's development context. Although this study did not provide statistical data and research findings, it rather synthesised existing literature, youth policy documents, and scholarly research to advocate for the need to harness youth culture and creative arts for sustainable national development. The analysis engaged with the theoretical, conceptual, and contextual foundations of youth policy, drawing on national, regional, and global frameworks. The methodology was exploratory, descriptive, and interpretive to infer future directions.

DISCUSSION

This narrative literature review critically synthesises interdisciplinary research on youth-driven creative practices, exploring their potential contributions to sustainable development and the broader economic landscape. According to UNICEF, the active engagement of youth in cultural sectors not only catalyses entrepreneurial ventures but also advances social inclusion and skill acquisition, thereby contributing to broader economic and societal resilience.¹³ Similarly, in the literature, sustainable development policy analysts advocate for strategic interventions to nurture youth participation in arts and cultural industries, contending that such investments yield multifaceted benefits, including enhanced human capital formation and increased social stability.¹⁴ Furthermore, research indicates that creative sector growth correlates with enhanced social stability and political resilience, particularly when youth participation is actively encouraged and supported.¹⁵ The literature underscores the importance of integrating youth-focused cultural policies into broader development agendas, advocating for strategies that cultivate talent, innovation, and socio-economic inclusion to ensure sustainable progress.¹⁶ Again, the literature highlights a positive correlation between the growth of the creative sector and political stability, particularly when policies explicitly aim to empower and include youth as central stakeholders in development processes.¹⁷ Research further affirms that integrating youth-oriented cultural policies within national development frameworks is essential. Prioritising investment in young people's creative capacities is posited to foster innovation, catalyse economic diversification, and promote social equity, ultimately facilitating sustainable development and societal resilience.¹⁸

Who is a Youth? Conceptual Ambiguities

The term youth lack a universally accepted definition, generating ongoing debate in academic discourse. The United Nations officially defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states.¹⁹ This underscores the heterogeneity of young populations and their evolving socio-cultural experiences across different regions. Recognising the fluid nature of youth identity, the African Youth Charter (AYC) expands this classification to encompass individuals aged 15 to 29, acknowledging variations in cultural and national contexts that shape youth transitions into adulthood.²⁰

Historically, scholars have attempted to conceptualise youth through sociological and psychological lenses. Gidley, citing Hall, characterised youth as a period of "storm and stress,"

¹² Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).

¹³ UNICEF., "UNICEF Annual Report 2017." (New York: United Nations, 2018).

¹⁴ World Bank, *The World Bank Annual Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016).

¹⁵ Media & Sport. Department for Culture, *Creative Industries Sector Vision: A Joint Plan to Drive Growth, Build Talent and Develop Skills.*, 2023.

¹⁶ Zethembe Mseleku, "Post-University Training for Jobless Market: The Experiences of Graduates in a Work Experience Programme," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 11, no. 5 (September 2, 2022): 86, <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0127>.

¹⁷ Department for Culture, *Creative Industries Sector Vision: A Joint Plan to Drive Growth, Build Talent and Develop Skills*.

¹⁸ R. F. Youngblood, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nelson Publishers United Nations Development Program, 2011).

¹⁹ United Nations, Division for Social Policy and Development, "The Definition of Youth.," www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/g-and-a/define.htm, 1999.

²⁰ African Union, "African Youth Charter," 2006.

emphasising the emotional and developmental complexities inherent in adolescence.²¹ The contested nature of youth as a category results in significant divergences in policy approaches. For instance, the Ghana National Youth Policy defines youth as individuals aged 15 to 35, aligning with the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560) and the National Youth Authority Act 2016 (Act 939).²² This broader classification reflects an effort to integrate youth within national development strategies while accommodating contextual socio-economic realities.

Dennis Francis underscores the transformative potential of youth, asserting that "history has shown us time and again that young people are architects of change, pushing the boundaries of what is possible and leading movements that have reshaped the world."²³ Young people have consistently redefined what is possible, challenging outdated norms and carving out space for new ideas. His remarks echo the sentiments of Kofi Annan, the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations, who maintained that "any society that does not succeed in tapping into the energy and creativity of its youth will be left behind."²⁴ These perspectives highlight the imperative for policies that recognise youth as agents of national progress and integrate global perspectives to harness the full potential of youth-led innovation and cultural production.

Conceptualising Culture

Culture is a nebulous, multifaceted, and obfuscating concept fraught with definitional challenges, nuances, and interpretations. While no universally accepted definition exists, the literature presents diverse interpretations. In anthropology, culture is commonly understood as encompassing both tangible and intangible elements, reflecting human experiences, traditions, and evolving societal structures. Williams argues that culture should be viewed as "a complex and dynamic process that is inclusive of the whole evolution of human consciousness rather than a fixed or static idea."²⁵ This perspective underscores culture's adaptive and evolving nature rather than treating it as an immutable construct.

Institutional definitions further expand upon these conceptualisations. UNESCO defines culture as;

"a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features that characterise a society or social group, [which] includes not only arts and letters but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, and beliefs".²⁶

This definition emphasises the holistic and integrative aspects of culture, recognising its role in shaping societal norms, identity formation, and human expression. Similarly, Ghana's cultural policy articulates culture as

"The totality of the way of life evolved by our people through experience and reflection in our attempt to fashion a harmonious co-existence with our environment. This culture is dynamic and gives order and meaning to the social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious practices of our people. Our culture also gives us our distinct identity as a people".²⁷

This framework highlights the interplay between culture and national identity, illustrating its function as an organising force within social and economic systems.

²¹ Gidley, "Global Youth Culture: A Transdisciplinary Perspective."

²² Government of Ghana, "National Youth Policy (2022-2032): Benefit for Youth, Involve Youth: Together for a Prosperous Future. Accra, Ghana." (Ministry of Youth and Sports, National Youth Authority, 2022); Republic of Ghana, *National Youth Policy (2022-2032): Benefit for Youth, Involve Youth—Together for a Prosperous Future.* (Accra: Ministry of Youth and Sports, National Youth Authority, 2022).

²³ United Nations, *Remarks by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Dennis Francis, at the Joint Briefing of the Presidents of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council.*, 2025.

²⁴ Republic of Ghana, *National Youth Policy (2022-2032): Benefit for Youth, Involve Youth—Together for a Prosperous Future.* .

²⁵ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society.* (Oxford University Press., 2014).

²⁶ "UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development MONDIACULT 2022, Mexico City 28-30 September 2022: Proceedings," February 28, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.58337/AIVC1941>.

²⁷ Cultural Policy, "The Cultural Policy of Ghana," *Accra, Ghana: Anttis*, 2004.

Barker provides a broader interpretative lens, suggesting that culture within cultural studies has been conceptualised in multiple ways, including as "a whole way of life; as like a language; as constituted by representation; as a tool; as practices; as artefacts; as spatial arrangements; as power; as high or low; as mass and as popular."²⁸ This definition reflects the diversity of scholarly approaches to culture, demonstrating how cultural studies engage with language, representation, material production, and systems of power.

As noted earlier, anthropologically, culture is widely defined as a way of life encompassing values, beliefs, norms, oral traditions, languages, and rituals. This broad characterisation is often employed in academic literature due to its inclusivity and ability to capture the comprehensive nature of human societal development. Williams further notes, "In contemporary common usage, the word 'culture' typically refers to works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity."²⁹ This distinction reinforces the evolving contextual applications of the term, demonstrating its adaptability across disciplines.

What is Youth Culture?

The Oxford Handbook of the History of Youth Culture provides broadly contextualised case studies of the ways in which the meanings and expressions of both "youth" and "culture" have evolved through time and space.³⁰ Van den Beemt, Akkerman, and Simons define youth culture as "the reflection of the societal constellation of a specific era, characterised by the unique expressions and developmental process of young people, influenced by interactive media and evolving outside of traditional socialising institutions such as school and parents."³¹ In the literature, youth culture refers to the ways in which young people, typically between the ages of 12 and 25, express themselves, interact, and create a sense of identity. It encompasses the behaviours, values, interests, style and practices that are characteristic of this age group. It includes their modes of expression through fashion, music, language, beliefs, and social interactions, all of which contribute to shaping their identities and fostering a sense of belonging within distinct social groups. Youth culture thrives on curiosity, ambition, and resilience, making it an invaluable asset. Bucholtz described it as a "positive force" and a viable resource for national development.³² Nevertheless, intergenerational misunderstandings often result in the demonisation of youth practices, reinforcing stereotypes that fail to recognise the evolving realities of contemporary society. The tendency to view youth culture as inferior or exclusively as a negative force is counterproductive and pointedly destructive. It should be emphasised that evaluating youth culture solely through the lens of mainstream cultural superiority can be both problematic and reductive.

Building on these perspectives, Bennett critically problematises the concept of 'youth culture,' questioning its continued relevance as an analytical category.³³ He argues that youth cultural studies must recognise how both spectacular and mundane elements shape youth practices, which increasingly influence identity across the life course, not just during youth or early adulthood.

Youth Subcultures

While many scholars continue to treat youth culture as a unified or monolithic group, Marxist perspectives highlight its internal diversity by focusing on class distinctions and class fractions.³⁴ These class fractions delineate youth subcultures within broader youth culture. Hebdige views them as a form of resistance by marginalised groups against dominant cultural norms, incorporating elements such as

²⁸ Chris Barker, *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221280>.

²⁹ Williams, "Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society."

³⁰ James Marten, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Youth Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190920753.013.1>.

³¹ Antoine Van den Beemt, Sanne Akkerman, and Robert-Jan Simons, "Considering Young People's Motives for Interactive Media Use," *Educational Research Review* 6, no. 1 (2011): 55–66.

³² Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach," *Discourse Studies* 7, no. 4–5 (October 1, 2005): 585–614, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605054407>.

³³ Andy Bennett, "'Speaking of Youth Culture': A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Youth Cultural Practice," in *Youth Cultures, Transitions, and Generations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 42–55, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137377234_4.

³⁴ Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA., "School Mental Health Project." (University of California, n.d.).

gender, ethnicity, and age.³⁵ In contrast, the interactionist theorist Stan Cohen contends that youth subcultures do not emerge organically as unified responses to societal pressures. Instead, he suggests that the mass media plays a pivotal role in constructing these subcultures by framing behaviours within a specific ideological context.³⁶ These contrasting viewpoints contribute to the ongoing dilemma within the literature.

Within the Ghanaian context, Salm explores how subcultures and identity are shaped and how these groups are often defined in pejorative and negative terms. He notes that subcultures typically exist on the margins of mainstream Ghanaian society, which leads to their limited representation in conventional sources. When mentioned, they are frequently portrayed negatively, as disruptive or deviant elements symbolising societal decline.³⁷

Characteristically, many youth subcultures express their identity through distinctive visual and material symbols, such as unique styles of clothing, hairstyles, body art, makeup, and personalised vehicles like motorcycles, skateboards, or surfboards (e.g. Sandy Alibo-led Surf Ghana, Skate Gal Club).³⁸ Others define their group identity through shared interests, specific ways of speaking, and preferred social spaces. Some subgroups are drawn to niche or avant-garde music genres or adopt unconventional political ideologies, often developing a strong sense of in-group loyalty.³⁹

Within Ghana's dynamic creative ecosystem, youth are actively shaping communities and cultivating spaces for artistic expression, exemplified by initiatives such as Freedom Skatepark and Vibrate Space. At the forefront of this movement is New Era, an organisation committed to youth empowerment through the development of inclusive, resource-rich environments that nurture talent and promote global visibility.⁴⁰ These creative collectives often transcend geographical boundaries, forming tightly-knit communities unified by shared tastes, values, and cultural outlooks. Notable examples include the Shatta Movement (SM4L), The Bukom Boys, Kummericans, Fancy Gadam's fanbase, BHIM Nation, Asakaa Boys, and La Mème Gang. While these subgroups frequently engage in rivalry, particularly in digital spaces, such competition often extends beyond individual artists to encompass entire communities and their followers. Rather than viewing these dynamics solely as divisive, fan communities should be recognised as fertile platforms for promoting positive "vibes," cultural expression and youth empowerment. When strategically harnessed, these sonic rivalries possess considerable potential as platforms for youth empowerment and economic development, as previously explained. These subcultures can contribute meaningfully to cultural innovation, social cohesion, and broader socio-economic progress by channelling competitive energies into collaborative, entrepreneurial, and creative ventures.

Understanding youth subcultures is a complex task, yet it holds significant value, especially for adults who engage with young people in educational, social, or health-related contexts. Beyond being informed, gaining insight into these groups can reveal both the enriching and potentially harmful aspects of subcultural involvement. As previously discussed, on the positive side, youth subgroups can contribute to personal growth and cultural diversity. On the other hand, some elements may pose risks that require attention and action. Importantly, this understanding must avoid generalisations, taking notice of the fact that each subgroup contains a wide range of individual experiences and identities. However, the challenge lies in balancing an appreciation for personal differences with the need to grasp broader group dynamics, an essential skill for anyone aiming to support and guide young people effectively.⁴¹

To that end, this paper advocates a more nuanced approach to the study of youth culture, one that situates it within the broader framework of modernity and globalisation. Such perspectives enable

³⁵ Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

³⁶ Xiaodong Lin-Siegler, Carol S Dweck, and Geoffrey L Cohen, "Instructional Interventions That Motivate Classroom Learning," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 108, no. 3 (2016): 295.

³⁷ Steven J. Salm, "22 "Rain or Shine We Gonna' Rock" Dance Subcultures and Identity Construction in Accra, Ghana," in *Sources and Methods in African History* (Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 361–75, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781580466172-024>.

³⁸ Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA., "School Mental Health Project."

³⁹ Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA., "School Mental Health Project."

⁴⁰ Damilola. Animashaun, "New Era's Latest Documentary Explores Accra's Underground Youth Culture." (Dazed Digital, 2023).

⁴¹ Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA., "School Mental Health Project."

society to have a more comprehensive understanding of how young people navigate their identities and engage with social, political, and economic structures.

Youth Culture Today

Youth culture today is vibrant, diverse, and constantly evolving, reflecting young people's changing interests and values. It is heavily influenced by evolving digital technology and dramatic social media. It fosters creativity in music, fashion, digital art, memes, TikTok videos, remix culture, etc. Young people use these platforms not just to express themselves but also to challenge norms and push social conversations, leading to innovative trends and activism. In this context, it is increasingly untenable to assume that young people remain insulated from external cultural influences, regardless of geographic proximity. The notion of a culturally protected or haven has become obsolete in an era where the digital landscape constitutes a globalised, interconnected cultural sphere. For this reason, adults, stakeholders, educators, policymakers, and community leaders must understand, recognise, and engage with contemporary youth culture not as a threat, but as a valuable national resource.

The Impact of Globalisation on Ghanaian Youth

Globalisation encompasses a range of influential processes that present significant opportunities and considerable challenges. The development paradigm promoted by Western nations, often under the banner of modernisation, or what some refer to as “Americanisation,” has long been criticised by numerous scholars and activists from the Global South. They argue that this model represents a form of cultural imperialism, imposing Western values and systems on non-Western societies.⁴²

In a recent paper, Ken Roberts addresses a range of interconnected socio-economic and generational issues in Britain, particularly focusing on the decline in youth life chances and the erosion of the post-war welfare and economic model.⁴³ He argues that the trajectory of intergenerational progress began to reverse in the 1970s, driven by long-term economic, demographic, and policy changes. These shifts have created a bleak socio-economic landscape for today's youth, with limited prospects for reversing the trend without significant structural reform.

Similarly, a variety of factors drive and exacerbate the vulnerabilities facing Ghanaian youth today. Exacerbating this are the forces of globalisation that have introduced complex dynamics, reshaping Ghanaian society's moral, social, and economic fabric, particularly among the youth. It has significantly influenced the values and behaviours of young people in Ghana, contributing to a shift in traditional moral structures. Issues such as sexual liberalisation, gender-neutral fashion, neurodiversity, rising unemployment, and exposure to global geopolitical ideologies have led to the erosion of long-standing cultural norms.

Cherished traditional values such as chastity, fidelity, filial piety, patriarchy, and communal bonds are increasingly viewed by the youth as outdated and incompatible with modern life. In a recent study, Pijnaker examines how young Ghanaians balance traditional family expectations with modern entrepreneurial aspirations in the digital economy, reflecting the cultural tensions globalisation brings.⁴⁴ Ziblim Abukari underscores this phenomenon in his study, emphasising that Ghanaian students often exhibit remarkable resilience in navigating academic and social adversity.⁴⁵ He argues that this resilience is not merely an individual attribute but a manifestation of broader socio-cultural dynamics that shape the lived experiences of youth in Ghana. Similarly, Nkansah emphasises the need for a transformative educational model in Ghana that fosters critical thinking and aligns with national development goals, especially in the context of globalisation.⁴⁶

⁴² Gidley, “Global Youth Culture: A Transdisciplinary Perspective.”

⁴³ Ken Roberts, “Bleak Prospects: Youth Transitions in Twenty-First Century Britain,” *Journal of Youth Studies*, April 7, 2025, 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2488785>.

⁴⁴ Tessa Pijnaker, “Downward Social Mobility among Young Ghanaian Digital Entrepreneurs: Navigating Family Expectations and Digital Start-up Dreams,” *Africa* 95, no. 1 (February 26, 2025): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972025000129>.

⁴⁵ Ziblim Abukari, “‘Not Giving Up’: Ghanaian Students’ Perspectives on Resilience, Risk, and Academic Achievement,” *Sage Open* 8, no. 4 (October 21, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018820378>.

⁴⁶ Joan Nkansaa Nkansah, “The Future of Education in Ghana: Critical Education for Socio-Economic Development,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education* 10, no. S1 (2021): 57–78.

Consequently, this rapid cultural transformation has generated concern among older generations, who often perceive the youth not as a resource but as a societal challenge. The emergence of the "me-too" generation reflects a shift in focus from communal and familial ties to individualism and self-expression. Youth today exhibit greater mobility, both geographically and socially, than previous generations. While offering opportunities, this mobility also results in dislocation, acculturation, and cultural dilution as young people migrate to urban centres in search of better prospects. It is important to emphasise that the researchers do not advocate for cultural insularity, cultural delusion, or the rejection of cultural exchange. However, they equally do not support blind cultural appropriation, cultural imperialism, and the homogenisation of cultures under the guise of development.

According to Suntoo and Chittoo, when the youth transition from the familiar environment to the broader society, they often encounter a state of anomie, a breakdown of social norms, due to the divergence between home values and those encountered among peers and in the workplace.⁴⁷ This dissonance can lead to the abandonment of traditional customs in favour of new lifestyles. The family, therefore, plays a critical role in the socialisation process, helping youth navigate these transitions and adopt behaviours aligned with societal norms.

The youth represent nearly 36 per cent of Ghana's total population and over 18 per cent of the global population. Intriguingly, they are the most educated and technologically adept generation in history. They are characterised by ambition, adaptability, and a readiness to embrace change. With their energy, creativity, and capacity for networking, young people possess immense potential to contribute positively to national development. As suggested by the UN, youth are not merely inheritors of societal challenges but can also transform their nations through innovative and constructive solutions.⁴⁸ The net effect of globalisation on Africa is a contentious debate in the literature.⁴⁹

In summary, while globalisation presents opportunities and challenges, policymakers, educators, and families must recognise the transformative potential of youth. By fostering environments that support their development and integration, societies can harness young people's strengths to drive sustainable progress.

Creativity and Remix-Culture

Research suggests that creative arts serve as a medium for self-expression, identity formation, and social activism among young populations.⁵⁰ Youth engagement in artistic endeavours has been linked to enhanced cognitive development, emotional resilience, and entrepreneurial capabilities.⁵¹ Youth engagement in creative arts facilitates constructing and negotiating cultural identity, reinforcing social cohesion within diverse populations. Research indicates that artistic practices, whether in music, visual arts, performance, or digital media, serve as modes of resistance, self-expression, and collective representation.⁵² Through these forms of participation, youth cultivate agency, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural democratisation and participatory governance.⁵³

Contemporary youth culture and creativity are deeply intertwined with technology, social media, and global connectivity, fostering a dynamic environment of innovation and self-expression. Creativity among youth today is more accessible than ever, thanks to advanced tools and online communities. They blend traditional art forms with new media, creating unique, hybrid ways of expression. Whether through viral videos, gaming culture, or sustainable fashion, young people are shaping culture and pushing boundaries at unprecedented speeds. Nonetheless, contemporary youth culture is not entirely novel; it often reengages with historical influences through adaptation and reinterpretation, particularly within remix culture.

⁴⁷ Rajen Suntoo and Hemant Chittoo, "Youth Culture and Development in Mauritius," *Global Journal of Management and Business Research* 11, no. 10 (2011): 1–5.

⁴⁸ Mseleku, "Post-University Training for Jobless Market: The Experiences of Graduates in a Work Experience Programme."

⁴⁹ Steven James. Salm, "Africanizing the West: Changing Expressions of Popular Culture among Urban Youth.," in *Globalisation and the African Experience*. , ed. Emmanuel M., and Salm, Steven James. (eds.). Mbah (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Joie D Acosta et al., "Stitching the Threads Together: A Cross-Disciplinary Literature Review on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being," *Rand Health Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2025): 5.

⁵¹ Acosta et al., "Stitching the Threads Together: A Cross-Disciplinary Literature Review on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being."

⁵² Centre for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA., "School Mental Health Project."

⁵³ Joie D Acosta et al., *Annex of Literature on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being* (RAND, 2025).

Digital tools such as Adobe Creative Cloud, Canva, and various animation apps democratise artistic creation, allowing youth to produce professional-quality content. According to the Pew Research Centre, 95% of teens use some form of social media, and many engage actively in creating content rather than just consuming it.⁵⁴ Young people today are shaping culture through digital spaces like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. These platforms are hubs for identity exploration, social activism, and cultural trends. They allow for instant sharing of art, music, dance, and other forms of creative expression, enabling trends to spread globally within hours. For example, TikTok has popularised new dance challenges (e.g., Renegade) and meme formats, influencing mainstream pop culture.⁵⁵ Digital art and internet memes have emerged as topical cultural phenomena in contemporary media landscapes. Although the meme concept is not new, tracing back to Richard Dawkins and further explored by David Hull, Today's meme culture is marked by a high degree of intertextuality, frequent parody, rapid evolution, and widespread virality within the social media space.⁵⁶ Platforms like Reddit and TikTok foster meme cultures that serve as social commentary and humour, fostering a sense of community and shared humour.⁵⁷ Today's African youth are embracing a variety of vibrant music genres like afrobeats, amapiano, afro house, Afro-Soca, reggaeton, hyperpop and lo-fi hip-hop that reflect their creativity, cultural heritage and contemporary influences through remix culture. Despite facing global challenges, young people are proving that creativity and collaboration can thrive even in the face of adversity. In today's diverse postmodern cultural landscape, they navigate both virtual and real-world challenges. Far from being passive consumers, today's youth are active cultural producers, shaping the narratives and aesthetics of their generation.

National Youth Policy

The Ghanaian National Youth Policy emphasises harnessing the potential of youth as a vital resource for national development through comprehensive, coordinated strategies that promote economic empowerment, health, education, participation, and institutional strengthening.⁵⁸ It aims to develop resilient, innovative, and self-reliant youth by addressing critical issues such as unemployment, health, education, environmental sustainability, and governance, while fostering inclusion and active civic engagement within a rights-based framework. The policy seeks to create an enabling environment for youth to contribute meaningfully locally and globally, ensuring their participation in decision-making, peacebuilding, and economic opportunities for a prosperous future.

Despite the 105-page document seeking to address various aspects of youth development, the strategies proposed to leverage youth culture as a driving force for national development are relevant to this paper. In this context, the policy emphasises the role of youth identity, creativity, and civic engagement in promoting social cohesion, economic opportunity, and cultural preservation. Key policy measures include promoting arts and cultural expression, supporting youth-led initiatives, integrating culture into education, organising cultural festivals, leveraging digital media, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.

While the policy presents a comprehensive and culturally grounded vision, several challenges may hinder its effective implementation. These include limited financial and institutional resources, urban-rural disparities in access, gaps between policy and practice, and the risk of commodifying culture. Additionally, ensuring inclusive youth participation and building the capacity of local institutions remain critical. To realise the policy's full potential, a multi-sectoral approach is needed, one that aligns national strategies with local implementation, ensures equitable access, and empowers youth as active agents of change. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and investing in infrastructure and training will be essential to translating policy into meaningful outcomes for Ghana's youth. These measures aim to channel the energy, creativity, and cultural expressions of youth towards national development goals

⁵⁴ Monica Anderson et al., "Connection, Creativity and Drama: Teen Life on Social Media in 2022," *Pew Research Center*, 2022.

⁵⁵ I Gusti Putu Asto Buditjahjanto and Juki Irfansyah, "Augmented Reality on Students' Academic Achievement Viewed from the Creative Thinking Level," *Journal of Technology and Science Education* 13, no. 3 (June 12, 2023): 597–612, <https://doi.org/10.3926/jotse.1813>.

⁵⁶ Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear., "New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Social Activism." (New York: Peter Lang, 201AD).

⁵⁷ Knobel and Colin Lankshear., "New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Social Activism." .

⁵⁸ Republic of Ghana, *National Youth Policy (2022–2032): Benefit for Youth, Involve Youth—Together for a Prosperous Future.* .

while promoting social cohesion, economic opportunities, and cultural preservation. The Ghana National Youth Policy prioritises nationalism and the conscientisation of young individuals, aligning with the African Youth Charter's (AYC) framework for shaping effective national youth policies. While this approach underscores the importance of fostering civic responsibility and national identity, the policy notably omits considerations of global youth cultures and subcultures as mechanisms for youth empowerment and socio-economic development. Given the increasing interconnectedness of youth experiences in a globalised world, this omission raises critical questions regarding the extent to which Ghana's policy framework accommodates the diverse cultural expressions shaping youth agency. Despite this limitation, the policy assigns implementation responsibilities to the National Youth Council (AYC), while the ministry overseeing youth affairs retains the mandate for coordination, evaluation, and policy revision.

In a move that aligns with the objectives of the National Youth Policy, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the governing party from 2025, has committed to a youth-centred manifesto designed to address the various challenges facing young people in Ghana. They pledged to "offer effective solutions to tackle the multifaceted issues encountered by the youth."⁵⁹ While this commitment signals a potentially progressive step toward youth empowerment, the extent to which it reflects genuine policy intent rather than political rhetoric remains to be seen. The authors contend that only time will reveal whether these promises will translate into substantive developmental outcomes for Ghanaian youth. This cautious outlook is informed by the political elite's historical pattern of unfulfilled promises and rhetorical posturing.

DISCUSSION

The creative sector is increasingly recognised as a strategic lever for economic growth and social inclusion. Studies indicate that investment in cultural industries contributes to job creation, economic diversification, and the promotion of cultural heritage.⁶⁰ Furthermore, youth participation in creative industries fosters a sense of belonging and civic engagement, reinforcing national identity and social cohesion.⁶¹ In Ghana, the creative sector has emerged as a significant driver of economic diversification, employment generation, and cultural preservation. Scholars have highlighted the potential of creative economies to foster inclusive growth through entrepreneurship, technological innovation, and cross-sector collaborations.⁶² Moreover, empirical studies suggest that investment in creative industries enhances cultural vitality and contributes to national branding and soft power influence, thereby positioning emerging economies within global creative networks. Policies that support youth engagement in the arts are crucial for harnessing these benefits and fostering national development.

"Social entrepreneurship creates opportunities, especially for youth in marginalised communities where the opportunity gap, suppressed social mobility, and economic disparity are most profound. In such settings, engaging youth as leaders of social change offers the potentially exponential benefits of personal empowerment, community improvement, and economic transformation."⁶³

Youth-driven cultural expressions and creative practices are catalysts for socio-economic transformation. Research highlights that youth participation in creative arts can lead to increased innovation and entrepreneurship. For instance, youth social entrepreneurship initiatives often leverage creative skills to address community challenges and drive economic change. A paragon of a communal art space is the Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA-Tamale), situated in Tamale, Ghana. Established by internationally acclaimed young Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama, the initiative represents a strategic contribution to the growth and diversification of Ghana's contemporary art landscape. The centre functions as a multidisciplinary platform encompassing an artist-run project space, exhibition and research hub, cultural archive, and artists' residency. Through its dynamic programming

⁵⁹ National Democratic Congress (NDC), "2024 Youth Manifesto." (Accra, Ghana: NDC, 2024).

⁶⁰ Acosta et al., *Annex of Literature on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being*.

⁶¹ Acosta et al., *Annex of Literature on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being*.

⁶² Ted D. Naylor and Richard Florida, "The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life," *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* 29, no. 3 (September 2003): 378, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3552294>.

⁶³ Eleanor Meda Chipeta, Philipp Kruse, and Jhalukpreya Surujlal, "Effects of Gender on Antecedents to Social Entrepreneurship among University Students in South Africa," *International Journal of Business and Management Studies* 12, no. 1 (2020): 18–33.

and research-driven agenda, SCCA-Tamale seeks to foreground pivotal developments in Ghanaian and global contemporary art within a communal and critically engaged environment. The Centre maintains an institutional affiliation with blaxTARLINES KUMASI (a creative incubator), further reinforcing its academic and artistic networks.

The current generation of youth represents more than 18% of the world's population. Being the best-educated generation and endowed with enormous technological advancements, they are presumably ambitious, rebellious, and flexible to adapt to the changing dynamics of contemporary life with optimism for a better life. Considering their energy, creativity, and networking capacity, they have a significant potential to contribute positively to national development.⁶⁴ The youth, therefore, can transform the future constructively, and they have the potential to solve problems they have inherited.

Policy Interventions and Institutional Support

Government policies play a crucial role in fostering youth participation in the creative sector. Comparative analyses of successful policy interventions demonstrate that comprehensive strategies, including education reform, financial incentives, and infrastructure investment, enhance creative capacities among young populations.⁶⁵ Countries that integrate the arts into national development agendas often witness increased innovation, social mobility, and economic resilience. Government policies play a crucial role in nurturing youth engagement in the arts. Research highlights the importance of institutional frameworks that provide financial support, educational opportunities, and infrastructure for creative industries.⁶⁶ Successful policy interventions have been observed in countries prioritising arts education, funding for cultural initiatives, and integrating creative arts into national development strategies.⁶⁷ Effective policy interventions are essential for nurturing youth participation in cultural industries.

In summary, the key challenges hindering the effective integration of youth culture into national development include the fragmentation of youth support services across schools, communities, studios, and creative art spaces. Additionally, there is a growing disconnection between youth and their families, as well as educational institutions. Factors such as limited early intervention for at-risk youth and the underutilisation of youth culture and creative expression in development strategies also contribute to these issues.

IMPLICATION

Today's Youth culture extends beyond entertainment; it is profoundly political and socially engaged. They are redefining the boundaries between art, activism, and entrepreneurship.⁶⁸ Young people are increasingly positioned at the forefront of global and local movements advocating for social justice, environmental sustainability, and equitable governance. Their activism reflects a persistent drive toward systemic transformation and a more just future. Recent developments illustrate this vividly. Across West Africa and in various global cities, youth-led demonstrations have expressed Pan-African solidarity, particularly in support of Burkina Faso and the leadership of Captain Ibrahim Traoré. In Ghana, movements such as *#FixTheCountry* emerged in response to perceived governmental inefficiencies and environmental degradation linked to illegal mining practices (commonly referred to as *Galamsey*). Similarly, the *#OccupyJulorbiHouse* protests, initially mobilised through social media platforms, addressed issues such as the rising cost of living and alleged moral failings among political elites.⁶⁹ Social media has become a tool for activism, allowing young people to bypass traditional gatekeepers and amplify their voices directly.⁷⁰ These instances exemplify a growing culture of political cynicism,

⁶⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). , UNESCO 2010. (Paris: Sector for External Relations and Public Information, 2011).

⁶⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). .

⁶⁶ Acosta et al., *Annex of Literature on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being*.

⁶⁷ Acosta et al., *Annex of Literature on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being*.

⁶⁸ George. Okonkwo, "Youth Culture: The Revolution in Real Time." (Voice Magazine, 2025).

⁶⁹ Africanews, "Ghana Police Worried over Death Prophecies, Creating Fear, Panic," 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2019/01/05/ghana-police-worried-over-death-prophecies-creating-fear-panic/>.

⁷⁰ Sebastián Valenzuela, "Unpacking the Use of Social Media for Protest Behavior," *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 7 (July 6, 2013): 920–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213479375>.

contestation, and resistance among youth, underscoring their role as critical agents of change in contemporary society. Consequently, pejoratively labelling youth as deviants is not only counterproductive but may also exacerbate the very behaviours such labels seek to condemn. Drawing on labelling theory, Pickard compellingly argues that the cumulative effects of stigmatisation, deviancy amplification, demonisation, and negative societal reactions can lead to secondary deviance.⁷¹ In this process, individuals internalise externally imposed definitions of deviance, which may reinforce or escalate deviant or defiant behaviour. The implications of this argument are profound for youth policy makers and stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations include providing financial support, creating educational programmes, and facilitating access to creative platforms. Such initiatives can empower youth to contribute to national development through their creative talents and entrepreneurial spirit.

It is recommended that school personnel and community stakeholders adopt a collaborative, systemic approach to youth development. By identifying and addressing the root causes of challenges youngsters face, stakeholders can unify fragmented and marginalised initiatives into a cohesive framework. This integrated strategy should aim to promote positive youth development, enable early intervention, and provide sustained responses to complex and persistent issues.

To this end, policymakers and implementers could foster collaborative frameworks by encouraging partnerships between schools, local governments, NGOs, and youth-led organisations to align goals and share resources.

Next, it is essential to develop comprehensive support systems. These systems should integrate academic, social, emotional, and developmental supports to holistically address the diverse needs of youngsters. In addition, stakeholders should leverage youth culture and creativity by recognising and incorporating youth-driven cultural practices and creative arts. These serve as powerful tools for engagement, empowerment, and identity formation.

Furthermore, there is a need to prioritise early intervention. Proactive strategies must be implemented to identify and support at-risk youth before challenges become deeply entrenched. Finally, to ensure coherence and sustainability, it is crucial to align national youth policies with local implementation strategies. This alignment will help avoid duplication of efforts and maximise the impact of youth development initiatives.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the potential benefits, several challenges hinder the full realisation of youth-driven creative industries. Limited access to resources, inadequate policy support, and socio-economic disparities often restrict opportunities for young artists.⁷² Future research should explore innovative approaches to overcoming these barriers, including digital platforms, cross-sector collaborations, and international partnerships. Despite the promise of youth-driven creative industries, numerous structural and systemic obstacles impede their full realisation. Limited funding, restricted access to resources, and socio-economic inequalities disproportionately affect young artists in emerging economies.⁷³ Considering the evolving landscape of youth identity, further research is required to explore the implications of emerging youth subcultures within national policy frameworks. Addressing these gaps could facilitate a more inclusive approach to youth development, leveraging global influences alongside localised strategies for sustainable impact. Future research should investigate scalable models for sustainable cultural entrepreneurship, leveraging digital technologies and transnational collaborations to overcome these limitations.

⁷¹ Sarah Pickard, "The Trouble with Young People These Days: 'Deviant' Youth, the Popular Press and Politics in Contemporary Britain," *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* 19, no. 1 (2014): 91–122.

⁷² Acosta et al., *Annex of Literature on Youth Arts Engagement and Well-Being*.

⁷³ David. Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*. 3rd Ed. (London: Sage, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This paper underscores the significance of youth engagement in creative arts as a catalyst for national development. By fostering creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, and social inclusion, the creative sector can contribute to sustainable socio-economic growth. Policy interventions prioritising investment in young people are essential for harnessing the full potential of youth culture in shaping future development trajectories. As the global economy increasingly values creative innovation, the imperative to integrate youth cultural participation into national agendas becomes more pronounced. Therefore, a collaborative, culturally responsive, and system-wide approach to youth development is essential for addressing today's youth's multifaceted challenges. By integrating efforts across sectors and valuing youth culture as a developmental asset, policymakers can foster more inclusive, resilient, and empowered communities. To conclude, it is important to reemphasise that policymakers hold the levers to transform arts and design from peripheral enrichment activities into core drivers of innovation. By adopting these recommendations, governments can unleash creative talent, foster resilient economies, and design a future aligned with human needs and values. The time to act is now: champion cross-innovation, embed creative practice in policy frameworks, and build ecosystems where art, design, and technology co-produce lasting societal benefit to empower today's youth for national development.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

While preparing this work, the authors sparingly utilised the Grammarly writing tool to carefully check for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and clarity. Subsequently, they revised, rephrased, and edited the text to ensure it reflected their own writing style and content. Additionally, the Consensus AI-powered Academic Search Engine was employed ethically to locate relevant literature and generate citations and syntheses. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

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