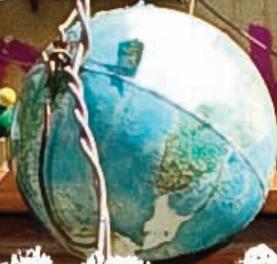


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COOPERATE  
THE CREATIVE  
NORMAL

**COOPERATE**

# COOPERATE

THE CREATIVE NORMAL

**Giep Hagoort**

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# Strategic partnerships on the dissecting table

LinC: How a co-creation lab can improve our insights

- A leadership program to improve strategic partnership
- Observations lead to a learning typology
- Concrete: a co-creation lab to produce tailor made knowledge
- The perspective of Learning playgrounds

Giep Hagoort and Nelly van der Geest

## Introduction

**During the 2008 economic crisis the right wing Dutch government decided a major cut-down on cultural organizations and budgets in 2010. This caused a vivid debate in the cultural sector on its legitimation towards society and professional quality of the sector as a whole. Inspired by the Clore Leadership program in UK ([www.cloreleadership.org](http://www.cloreleadership.org)), which has been initiated by the Art Council of England among others, a successor government decided in 2013 to repair part of the loss. The government decided to set up a leadership program that could enhance the connectedness and the entrepreneurship in the cultural sector. A tender was issued. A Utrecht consortium consisting of Utrecht University School of Government (USBO), HKU University of the Art Utrecht, Kennisland (an organization working on societal renewal), and Coaching in Culture (an independent cultural organization), won the tender with its four years proposal on Leadership in the Cultural sector (LinC, [www.leiderschapincultuur.nl](http://www.leiderschapincultuur.nl)).**

One of us, Nelly van der Geest, as an expert in education and training, and representative of HKU, was involved in designing the bid. After receiving the tender, she became co-lecturer in collaboration and creative partnerships, and *Interventure* coach. *Interventure* - a contamination of *Intervene* and *adventure* - is a practice based track in the program, in which interdisciplinary teams of participants intervene in a cultural or societal question to enhance their public leadership. Co-author of this article, Giep Hagoort, professor emeritus Art and Economics at the HKU, was an academic member of the presentation team during the tender procedure, and functioned with Nelly as co-lecturer on partnership from the start of the program in November 2013. In this article we sketch on a personal base the core issues of the LinC program. Nelly

van der Geest adds some critical observations on learning attitudes of the participants, based on the first years experiences. In the second part of this contribution, we discuss our lab on collaboration and partnership in detail. From a personal view we inform the reader about the essence of our lab on Co-creation and partnership, and give some insights in the first results.

## LinC: Leadership in Culture

LinC is a 14 month post-bachelor part-time program for cultural professionals in the arts. The consortium offers the program to leaders - both artistic or management orientated - from all types of cultural organizations, in addition to independent professionals with a key role in the cultural field.

The project is awarded for 4 annual cohorts. When writing this article we are finishing the third cohort as well starting the fourth in autumn 2016.

The program is based on the leadership model provided by the Tavistock Institute in which leadership forms the centre of three environments: the personal, the system and the context ([www.tavinstitute.org](http://www.tavinstitute.org)). The LinC-team designed the program as well on the strength as on the weaknesses of the cultural sector. As strengths the team identified *creativity* and being *action-orientated*. As weaknesses we noticed *the lack of learning capacity* as sector and *the focus inward* on own organizations and interests. The program elaborated three layers of cultural leadership-skills: personal, organizational and public leadership. Public leadership implies in this conception the capacity to connect over borders of interest, to embody values of humanity and inclusiveness and to stand up for this kind of values. The program aimed improvement of self-consciousness, reflective skills, innovative capacity and unifying leadership. In general the program has three educational tracks: one focussing on personal leadership issues; one focussing on innovative leadership in society (the so-called *interventure* track, see above) and one track on connectedness of the sector. One part of the program was organized in interactive labs of two days, in which academic knowledge transfer was combined with reflection on own practices of the participants. The themes of the labs are: *looking outside in* (context oriented); *looking inside out* (personal leadership values and skills); and *organizational dynamics* (innovation, collaboration and partnerships; business planning and new financial models for culture; team management and public leadership).

As we as team have chosen personal and social inclusiveness and the ability to connect as essential to leadership, we created a learning environment, in which diversity is key. We were allowed to educate 40 upcoming leaders per year. In the selection we took into account - besides experience in leadership - the distribution in the rich diversity of the cultural sector. So we weighted age, gender, disciplines, background, geographic distribution, diversity in functions and, size of the organization. We choose to invite not just mid-career leaders at the business -side of the organizations, but also young and senior professionals or artistic leaders. The program had never encountered a lack of applicants to follow the program.

The team divides the participants in two learning groups. During the central program, consisting of the labs, each group has a learning manager, with the central task to translate guest speakers to the individual learning questions, and to turn subconscious group processes into learning material. They emphasize the interconnection of person, system and context and they do connect the different themes of the labs.

Apart from the diversity of participants we make use of a diversity of learning paths. There is individual counselling on personal leadership, there is subgroup work, teamwork, readings, case-study and there are optional master-classes for those wishing to deepen a certain area or detect a lacking competency.

Although the program does have a very mixed group of participants with different needs, they validate the program as a good and interesting program. Seldom somebody stops, and if so it is often due to circumstances outside the program. They notice that the diversity of their mates in the program brings them a richer and more mature network in the cultural sector. A number of subgroups of LinC 1 or 2 have kept contact.

### Three types of learners

After three generations of educating cultural leaders, Nelly tentatively lingers on the type of learners we seem to attract and pose some questions on the proposition on leadership we intended. She observes three kinds of learners in the program.

- The majority does have the idealistic pragmatic approach that is dominant in the cultural sector. They are content driven and work hard for the common case: culture. They see the LinC program as a step in their careers and are open for the impact of the program on their own professional functioning and their lives. They like to become more in the lead of cultural organizations, and improve their personal and organizational leadership skills. In the *Interventure* track, but also in more creative assignments of Lab 5 on partnership (see below) she notices that it takes some time for these learners to re-interpret the relation of the assignment/posed question and their task as professionals. They tend to focus on efficient execution of the problem, with use of existing skills. A deeper context- or multiple-causes-analysis that expands their values is less available. Stretching of the creative skills and using this openly in capturing a question is - perhaps - too little encouraged in the program. Nelly thinks these learners could enhance their public leadership, and also improve the cultural sector beyond individual careers.
- A minority of participants are artistic leaders and they often have other learning issues. Some of them want to become an overall leader of small organizations. For those the program is rich, but for those who want to develop their leadership within the content of their artistry, the group seems to make to little use of their abilities. Their needs are connected to the legitimacy of culture, and it is wondering whether the underlying general Tavistock model of leadership is enough nourished by the oddities of artistic leadership. In designing the program the team thought public leadership is for both subgroups the same, but experiencing the program one could raise some doubts.

- The third type of learner is a more cognitive learner. They are often coming from organizations that are closely linked to civil servants and a culture of systems and action protocols. In general informal learning is not in their diary. They enjoy new academic models and input and knowledge is the gain they strive for. To seduce those learners to a more reflective learning style, asks strategies we up till now did not yet share in the team.

These three learning characteristics were also tangible during the two days lab on partnership which will be discussed in the following part of our chapter. It helps us to understand progress and obstacles in the learning quality of our lab (number 5 in the program).

### Co-creation of knowledge on partnership

Based on our backgrounds in experimental learning (Kolb, 1984) in the context of learning organizations (Senge, 1990), we designed a specific lab program in which the creation of new insights based on interactivity was a central topic. Although we – Nelly and Giep - both have published about creative partnerships (Van der Geest, 2014) and interactive learning processes (Hagoort, 1998) we conclude that the cultural sector in the field of cooperation and partnership needs new insights because of fast changing circumstances and conditions. Not only caused by reduced subsidies, but also because of the possibilities of internationalization and the digital revolution. Co-creation of knowledge on partnership in this context will say: participants and supervisors/teachers looking for relevant approaches to tackle new and urgent issues from practice. Our lab was not focused on one particular group of learners on leadership – see above - but tries to combine pragmatic effectiveness, artistic dynamics and cognitive needs in a creative and challenging way.

#### Box Outline two days co-creation lab 5 on partnership (based on the third year)

- Day one:** Opening by the learning manager: positioning the lab within the LinC- program
- General introduction by the co-lecturers: reflection on homework done by the participants and a sketch of the central issues of the lab on *Co-creation*. Room for discussions about the ways of working during the lab.
  - First action: in small groups to inform the own participants about their homework: the analysis of stakeholders of their practice on partnership. At the end: an stocktaking of relevant issues for the central meeting.
  - Second action: produce in your own team a prototype to tackle some specific partnership issues from the first action (using process design thinking to create a prototype, [www.designthink.ideo.com](http://www.designthink.ideo.com)).
  - Third action test your initial idea at a small team of participants.
- Day two:** Reflective moment by the learning manager on the results of the first day.
- Fourth action: preparation of the formal test on prototyping including the preparation of a protocol and an one minute movie to illustrate the partnership issue.
  - Fifth action: formal test of the prototype.

- Sixth and final action: central presentation of the results to a panel with experts.
- Feedback session with participants, learning manager, teachers/supervisors and external members of the panel about the *co-creation* results.

### The results

Some results of the lab can already be presented in this article. We are still in the executing phase, so the collected information will just give a first impression. It is not a complete report on the evaluation results.

#### *First year/the start: the process of partnering*

1. The first year was strongly focused on collecting of new practical experiences about the whole process of partnering, specific for the cultural sector. We could not find this knowledge in the current manuals and handbooks, so it was important to create this knowledge together with the participants. A special editorial committee of participants was responsible for the editing of the results. The lab created a *wall of components* for a holistic checklist. This checklist has been summarized by the supervisors and can be found in the appendix. One year later this checklist with 60 elements has been processed in a book on the financing of public libraries, based on partnership (Vrolijk-De Mooij, Hagoort, 2015). The results are divided in six categories.

- At the start, with the main questions to be answered;
- At the design, with elements which are needed to form a partnership;
- Information and Communication elements;
- Methodology on working together and the relation with governance;
- Partner Leadership and its qualities;
- Team members and their competences.

De content of this lab was strongly influenced by the homework of the participants: reporting about their own cases in advance (the so called *rich pictures*) and that had been analysed by the teach team.

#### *Second year of lab 5: Thematic approach and collective ambition forming*

During the second edition of lab 5 we as co-lecturers, together with the participants did some initial research on the volume of strategic partnerships. We were surprised by the average number of partnerships per organization: 25. It seems to us that this number is very high because of time and energy which is needed to spend on these partnerships. In a round table with the participants it became clear that some participants also consider single, operational projects with other organizations as a partnerships (which is not strategic). Further research is important to know more about this quantitative aspect.

In the same initial research we needed a first impression about the main problems of partnerships. The following three problems were on the top of the list:

- Planning: 6 times
- Differences in knowledge by the partners: 4 times
- Financing: 2 times.

Knowing about the process of partnering with its 60 points from the checklist does not mean that each issue is clear. Especially the forming of a collective ambition for a partnership asks for a concrete approach. This was already indicated by the general literature but has a lot of unanswered questions in the cultural sector.

During the discussion with the participants about the results, we stretched the importance of the collaborative process of formulating partner ambitions as a fundament for cohesion and development.

Finally we conclude the following learning moments:

- Do explicit issues which are not clear. Do not allow taboos within a partner relationship. These taboos will hinder a sustainable development of your partnership.
- Be aware of the equality of the partners. A partnership can have small, medium and large members (in budget and in staff): equality has to be a mutual value. And be critical: only partnership on paper without input and output has to be finished. This partnership cannot be accepted by the others.
- Defining strategic (long term) partnership is needed to understand cooperation. We can compose the following list:
  - Member of a chain from production to distribution.* Not always with a strategic, future oriented purpose, in most of the cases operational.
  - Participant in a single project* (see lab 2). This project can have a potential power to grow but it is not (yet) a strategic partnership.
  - Participant of a platform or a network*, not having a partnership contract on paper. This relationship is more superficial and mostly pragmatic.
- To realize collective ambitions asks for clear conditions: time/money; the acceptance of the partnerships by the involved partners, not only at the top but also at the bottom, a clear mandate for the representatives to develop strategic partnership.
- A checklist is not enough: partners need a *flowchart* to see the dependency of activities. This will say a schematic image of the main activities, placed in time.
- If partners are focussed on (radical) innovation you have to pay attention to redefining ambitions and working processes all the time. It has to be on the agenda on regular base.

#### *Third year: Partner Leadership*

During the previous lab sessions we as co-lecturers had the impression that talking about specific leadership issues as strategy making, organizational design and decision making was not so easy. In most of the cases the participants are not common with

high leadership positions on the level of strategic partnerships. In opposite of these positions they are project leaders, members of an operational partnership committee or starters of a collaborative project. So - as homework for this lab - we gave the assignment to make a stakeholders analysis and to position themselves as (candidate-) leaders within this analysis, and to indicate their dilemmas and perspectives. These 'rich pictures' informed us about the main topics from the participants in their leadership roles. One participants wrote us: 'The preparation triggers me to consider my partnerships in another way.'

During the two days lab we focused on the role of partner leadership to explore responsibilities and tasks. And we found another type of cooperation besides strategic partnerships, potential projects, platforms and networks: *the coalition*. A strongly political dominated cooperation, oriented on a program with a few years of existing. Coalition Leadership in this case is strongly oriented on results and (power) positions. In general a coalition is not focused on continuity after realizing its goals. This type of cooperation helps us to understand the political character of working together. Teams of participants have been working on developing a prototype (based on design thinking) to tackle the main issues. The questions are, among others:

- How to deal with imbalances (people, money, capabilities, time) within your partnership?
- How to keep your own (artistic) identity in relation to the collective ambitions?
- How to deal with different roles as partner leader (from pioneer to manager)?
- How to develop strategic partnerships with your individual financiers based on collaboration?
- Aspects of visionary leadership and ownership of the partnership.

Based on the test of prototyping, one and a half minutes movies had been made about these and other questions and presented to an external panel with experts from the field: a consultant/member of a supervisory board, a researcher and a program manager.

### Marking

The LinC program is still going on. The fourth cohort of participants will be entering the program in September 2016. After finishing the program in 2017 the program will be evaluated fundamentally. For now we want to formulate some provisional observations which can help to improve co-creation processes on creative partnership, within LinC but also in learning environments elsewhere.

To improve our approach we suggest the following interventions.

#### *Presentation & Participation*

Because of the different learning styles of participants within LinC (see above) - we experience the same styles in other trainings sessions - the presentation of a Lab based on co-creation must be very clear. In a co-creation session, structure and content are

based on interactivity as a combination of bottom up and top down approaches. If this is not clear some participants will complain about 'chaos' and 'confusion' without realizing that participants also have a responsibility for the co-creation process. One of the problems was, that the LinC-program has no clear presentation on what a specific co-creation lab can be. Also traditional programmes with speakers and q/a-moments have been mentioned as 'a lab'.

#### *Time and energy: differentiation*

LinC-Participants are very busy with their own job. Within some seasons they work day and night to realize deadlines on performances, exhibitions and festival events. Also paperwork for agencies, government and partners ask energy and time. *Co-creation* labs require an understanding about existing and non-existing knowledge to fill gaps in own knowledge domains, individually and as a collective. Time for reflection and preparations (home work) are essential in the weeks before the labs start. How to combine the obligations of the current work and to make space for preparations for the lab without creating 'lab consumers'? Partly the answer can be found in a diversification of the group, based on the own possibilities to participate within the lab. In this outline the lab will design different learning road maps. It is an option to discuss.

#### *Knowledge on Partnering*

Indeed, the labs created new knowledge (see above) and paid attention to new ways of working. Making a one and a half minute movie about your own partner-issue and present this movie for an expert panel was new in this context.

But we also experience a gap between our strategic goals – creating new future-proof knowledge on creative partnering - and the daily practice of the participants, which is strongly effected by operational issues like: making clear appointments, the relationship with its own management, budget problems, etc. For the fourth lab 5 we will focus on a few clear and concrete strategic and innovative issues, based on the previous labs and for sure connected with leadership. By doing so we hope to stimulate a strong concentration on a mutual *co-creation* environment. These new issues can be: how to use social media within your strategic partnerships, cultural business modelling of a creative partnership and the development of media to communicate without text on paper (what normally is the case).

#### *LinC 2.0?*

The last years we had the opportunity to transfer our new ways of working on *co-creation* and partnership to other organizations and situations. For instance as a project of collaborative financing of public libraries, an intensive change project on the countryside, commissioned by six small towns which want to work together in the cultural field. As a monitoring project about cooperation between schools and cultural institutes. And more individual activities like paper presentations, organizing round

tables, open consultations and feedback sessions. We really feel the need of a follow up: LinC 2.0.

For us an important issue is to stimulate co-creation sessions as a learning network within strategic partnerships with the involvement of management, professionals and the main stakeholders. Creating new learning playgrounds within the frame of the collective ambitions. Asking for new creative roles behind the functions of team leader, team members, managers and operational staff. With the help of digital possibilities we are curious which new knowledge will be created to realize a higher level of functioning of creative partnering.

### Appendix Checklist LinC Partner Leadership (LinC 09042015)

Note: Partnerships are tailored made. In organizing partnerships one will create unique practices for cooperation. De core issue is: mutuality; cooperation based on equality.

#### 1. At the start

1. Is the societal urgency of the partnership clear (positions, portfolio's, competences)?
2. Is the cultural urgency clear (contribution to the society)?
3. Has been the interest for your own organization formulated?
4. Do you know the interest of your possible partners?
5. Has been the motive for the partnership formulated?
6. Is there a project planning with a time horizon?
7. What is the initial business model of the partnership?
8. Is there a legal fundament for the partnerships?
9. Is there a partner leadership appointed?
10. Is there an ownership of the partnership indicated?
11. Is there a common ground about art, culture and creativity?
12. How is the involvement of the public (visitors, spectators, users, clients) organize?
13. Has been made a strong/weak analysis of the partnership?

#### 2. At the design

14. Is there an organizational scheme web management included?
15. Is there a budget with a cost-benefit analysis?
16. Has been made a risk analysis?
17. How is the independent budget-control organized?
18. Is there a cultural mission of the partnership?
19. Are collective ambitions formulated?
20. How is the quality of partner leadership indicated?
21. Is the organizational culture identified?
22. How is the governance structured (transparency, relationship between board and management)?

23. Is there a cooperation protocol, included regulations on lost and benefits?
24. Is a stakeholders analysis made?
25. Has been made a SWOT analysis of the partnership?
26. Is there a branding strategy?

#### 3. ICT

27. How is the access to information and privacy regulated.
28. Does the partnership function as a digital platform? How?
29. Is the role of social media indicated?
30. Is there an own website a web protocol included?

#### 4. Methodology

31. Will the process of phasing (life cycles) be followed?
32. Are the team roles defined?
33. Are the expectations formulated on an explicit way?
34. Are functions and tasks defined?
35. Are the points of view on 'trust' formulated?
36. How is the involvement of the supervisory board indicated?
37. How is the monitoring process organized?
38. What is the evaluation procedure?
39. How will good practices be processed?
40. On what way is the knowledge management organized?
41. What is the learning environment?

#### 5. Partner Leadership

42. Is the partner leadership positioned related tot the leadership of the involved organizations (politically, professionally)?
43. How will the partnership be translated to the involved organizations?
44. Do the members of the partnership dare their experiences?
45. What is the quality on how to motivate, inspire, energize?
46. Is there a compassion with people and goals?
47. What is the quality of connectivity?
48. What is the quality of creating a Common Ground?
49. Is there a competence to make a narrative on the collective ambitions?
50. What is the ability to create cohesion within the partnership

#### 6. Individual qualities of team members

51. Do the members can play with different roles and positions situationally?
52. Do they have an awareness about balancing individual and partnerships goals?
53. Is there an special eye on uncoupling individually?
54. Do the members recognize boundaries (including breaking them)?

55. Are the members capable to switch between projects, processes and partnership programs?
56. Do the members have insight in their own upgrading
57. Do the members have a self-awareness in their own professional functioning (and how to improve it)?
58. Do the members present the partnership in an adequate way?
59. Do they realize mutuality, in a personal way as well?
60. Are they aware the balance between work and private live?

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## Colophon

Composition and realization: Giep Hagoort, ERTNAM, Amsterdam School of Management

Editing and consult: Rene Kooyman, Ars Nova

Book design and consult: Erik Uitenbogaard, Via Traiectum

Cover photo: © Joke van den Berg, artist-photographer, 2016, Pictoright Amsterdam

Cover design and graphics: Erik Uitenbogaard, Via Traiectum

Publishing: Eburon Academic Publishers

© Authors/Amsterdam School of Management [www.asom.org](http://www.asom.org)

September 2016

Thanks to:

Cartesius Museum, Hacking Habitat - Art, Technology and Social Change,

HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, Province of Utrecht, authors, speakers and participants of the

ucooperate.eu Seminar June 23/24 2016, Ateliers 16X, Stichting Bijzondere Projecten,

Betty Kriekaard and Thera Jonker.

COOPERATE is an initiative from ERTNAM and ucooperate.eu

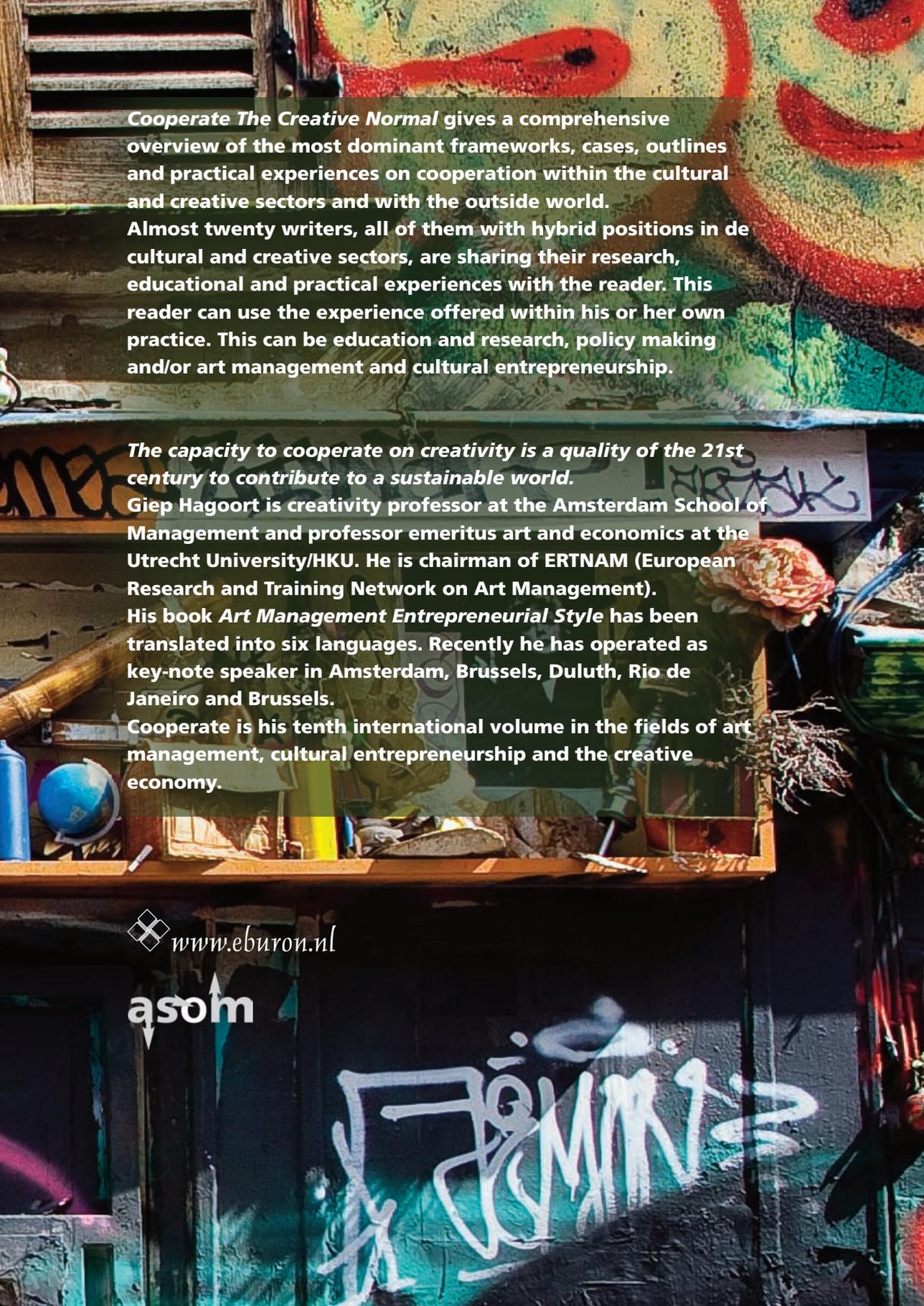
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**Cooperate** *The Creative Normal* gives a comprehensive overview of the most dominant frameworks, cases, outlines and practical experiences on cooperation within the cultural and creative sectors and with the outside world. Almost twenty writers, all of them with hybrid positions in de cultural and creative sectors, are sharing their research, educational and practical experiences with the reader. This reader can use the experience offered within his or her own practice. This can be education and research, policy making and/or art management and cultural entrepreneurship.

*The capacity to cooperate on creativity is a quality of the 21st century to contribute to a sustainable world.*

Giep Hagoort is creativity professor at the Amsterdam School of Management and professor emeritus art and economics at the Utrecht University/HKU. He is chairman of ERTNAM (European Research and Training Network on Art Management). His book *Art Management Entrepreneurial Style* has been translated into six languages. Recently he has operated as key-note speaker in Amsterdam, Brussels, Duluth, Rio de Janeiro and Brussels.

*Cooperate* is his tenth international volume in the fields of art management, cultural entrepreneurship and the creative economy.

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