

Constructing Boundaries through Terminology: How ‘Culture’ and ‘Creativity’ Shape Inter-Ministerial Governance in Vietnam’s Cultural and Creative Industries Policy

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this piece is to investigate how “culture” and “creativity” inform and contour the policies relating to Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) in Vietnam. The author takes a qualitative approach to the study by analyzing meeting minutes and official documents, conducting interviews, and reviewing relevant media sources. The findings of this study indicate that the language of policy functions as a boundary tool, and as such, shapes the jurisdictional contestation between ministries and sectors. These processes, when viewed as institutional work, exhibit creation, maintenance, adaptation, and disruption. China and Singapore are cited as contrasting examples of how “creativity” is integrated into policy. The study suggests that a cohesive legal policy defining CCIs is necessary alongside enhanced multi-ministerial collaboration. There is a need to study the local and ASEAN levels to evaluate the impact of policy language on the governance and operations of CCIs.

Keywords: Boundary Work, Cultural and Creative Industries, Institutional Work, Policy Language, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years, cultural and creative industries (CCIs) have become a global policy focus due to the work of organizations like UNESCO, WIPO, and the World Bank (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2022). An important landmark was the 2005 UNESCO convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions which recognized the importance of culture beyond the artistic realm, to include sustainable socio-economic development drivers (Richeri Hanania, 2014; De Beukelaer, 2015; De Beukelaer et al., 2015). UNESCO’s 2022 Re Shaping Policies for Creativity report further highlights that CCIs on average add 3 to 5% on global GDP and create millions of new jobs, particularly for the youth and women.

The idea of CCIs stems from the ‘cultural industries’ approach that emerged in the 1980s – 1990s (Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2013) and further developed the ‘creative industries’ concept spurred by national policies from the UK, Australia, Singapore, and later China and Japan (DCMS, 2001; Keane, 2013; Kong, 2014; Yu et al., 2022). This shift in concept accompanied a change in resource allocation, policy crafting, and structured authority within a nation, as highlighted by Cunningham (2009) and Flew & Cunningham (2010). In Vietnam, CCIs were officially included in the national policy framework with the Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg issued in 2016 with a vision set for 2030 (Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam, 2016). Nevertheless, the policy document stems from a latent gridlock arguing ‘culture’ versus ‘creativity’ as the primary umbrella framework (Gasparin & Quinn, 2020;

Labbe et al., 2022). The choice of ‘culture’ draws from a narrative that ‘greens’ the approach, placing the emphasis on the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and therefore foregrounds the preservationist agenda.

On the other hand, the selection of “creativity” suggests a move towards the knowledge-based industries, technological development, and international markets, thus involving the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and many other ministries and sectors (Le, 2010; Gillen, 2011). This difference is more than mere semantics, as it also reflects a difference in the system of governance, funding allocation, and the structure of resources as well as inter-ministerial coordination systems (Vlassis & De Beukelaer, 2019). There is a rich international literature on the geography and politics of language in policy making (Gieryn, 1983; Hager, 1995; Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that is increasingly overlooked, focusing on the Vietnamese CCI governance framework as a system of the institution terminology governance. Most works analyze policy design of the CCI governance framework using international models (Pham, 2016; Gasparin & Quinn, 2021; Nguyen, 2022; Vu, 2023), or formulate policies that position CCIs as leading drivers of economic growth and tourism (Le, 2010; Jurriëns, 2018). However, no one seems to have tried to analyze the policy that inter-institutional and inter-ministerial relations and powers within the CCI framework using the selection and translation of “culture” and “creative” constructed federative terms.

This gap is of paramount importance because it addresses the policy discourse vis-a-vis the functioning of the state machinery in primitive institutional frameworks (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This study aims to clarify how the terms ‘culture’ and ‘creative’ function in defining and shaping institutional boundaries and coordination mechanisms between ministries and sectors in Vietnam’s CCI policy. The focus of analysis is on critical moments in the formation and enactment of the policy, which are compared with processes from other international transitional and emerging market economies. Accordingly, the study addresses three key research questions: (1) What is the meaning, interpretation, and translation of “culture” and “creative” in Vietnam’s CCI policy? (2) What is the impact of the choice of terminology on the construction of jurisdictional boundaries between the ministries and sectors? and (3) What types of boundary (Gieryn, 1983) and institutional work (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) are enacted through policy-making and implementation? The study is positioned to contribute to developing the unexplored notion of boundary work, which originated in the social and political sciences, into the realm of cultural policy within a transforming socialist context.

This adds to the existing literature on policy translation and change with focus on institutions (Callon, 1984, 2008; Clarke et al., 2015), while linking with the wider policy of language and power research (Gusfield, 1981; Austin, 2018). From a practical perspective, the research offers strategies for crafting policy language that achieves clarity and inclusiveness while appropriately balancing the interests of various ministries and sectors; thus, improving coordination and implementation for CCIs in Vietnam. These findings are applicable not just to Vietnam, but also to other countries looking for a tailored CCI policy framework for specific institutional settings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Boundary Work: Boundaries as a Product of Discourse and Power

Gieryn (1983) introduced boundaries work in the context of science, describing the efforts professional communities undertake to differentiate and preserve the “science” and “non-science” classifications. They described these boundaries as socially constructed through discourse within power dynamics of a group. They were later extended to other social domains by Lamont and Molnár (2002) highlighting the significance of intangible boundaries in constituting social and institutional divides. In public administration, boundaries work may emerge as the sectors and ministries negotiate their jurisdictions in relation to scope of work and interpretation of terms. The framing of a policy concept is not just a technical decision, but a deliberate power move to alter consolidate or increase territorial dominance of an agency (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Abbott, 1995) “Boundary work” is a well-studied issue in the cultural and creative industries. It documents the frequent role of policy change in organizational role shift (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2006; Banks & O’Connor, 2009).

Institutional Work: Creating, Maintaining, and Disrupting Institutions

Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) define institutional work as “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions.” This framework captures the agency of individuals and groups within the confines of institutional arrangements. Boundary work and institutional work tend to interact closely. Boundary work becomes a form of institutional work when the creation or alteration of boundaries is some form of institutional change (Lawrence et al., 2009). With reference to CCIs, institutional work is exemplified by the creation of new legal structures, inter-ministerial diplomacy, and moving reclassification of sectors (Garnham, 2005; Kong, 2014).

Language and power in policy: Speech acts and the Politics of Discourse

The policy language is not only an instrument for communication, but also an instrument for shaping a reality (Austin, 2018). As demonstrated by speech act theory, any state agency nomenclature defined or referenced in an official document entails a performative act that, in addition to creating obligations, grants powers, and establishes mechanisms for execution (Harris et al., 2018). Policy discourse, as demonstrated by Hager (1995) in *The Politics of Environmental Discourse*, molds the understanding of various stakeholders and problematizes and offers solutions around the issue at hand. In the same manner, Gusfield (1981) examined the language of “public issues” and showed how such phrases are woven into existence, alongside the imagination of who the decision makers and participants are. Within the CCI framework, the decision of including either “culture” or “creativity” in the policy goes beyond content preferences and into the balance of influence among ministries and sectors.

CCIs and policy language: The “Culture” vs “creative” Debate

The dispute over ‘cultural industries’ versus ‘creative industries’ has generated much discussion over the past twenty years (Pratt, 2006; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2006; O’Connor, 2013). Some researchers suggest that ‘cultural industries’ still protect the cultural and artistic values (Banks & O’Connor, 2009; Caust, 2018), while ‘creative industries’ broaden the focus to include technological, innovative, or knowledge-based industries (Flew & Cunningham, 2010). The explanation and assimilation of these concepts into specific national contexts often results in changes due to national institutional peculiarities (Cunningham, 2009; Keane, 2013). This is the reason why such constructs are always handy for policy discourse; they allow government bodies to curtail or broaden their domains of action.

Applying the Theoretical Framework in the Vietnamese Context

The study of Vietnam’s CCI policies (Le, 2010; Gasparin & Quinn, 2020, 2021; Labbe et al, 2022) demonstrated that the debate around “culture” versus “creativity” goes beyond translation and reflects strategic competition when power and resources are allocated between the Culture, Sports and Tourism Ministry with other ministries. As Gasparin and Quinn (2020) pointed out, there was fierce competition among stakeholders in the CCI Development Strategy for sectoral class identification and the criteria for categorization which serves exemplifies the negotiation of boundaries. In the study of the creative spaces of Hanoi, Labbe et al., (2022) also pointed out that the use of the term “creativity” while providing avenues for collaboration across several fields of study also created jurisdictional conflict. The observation demonstrates the efficacy of the combined boundary work–institutional work approach in the politically charged context of Vietnam.

VIETNAMESE CONTEXT

Key Policy Milestones

Vietnam became a signatory to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2007, which meant she undertook the responsibility to foster an enabling environment for creation, access, and preservation of cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2005; De Beukelaer et al., 2015; De Beukelaer, 2017; Vlassis, 2014, 2017). Joining the convention not only marked a step toward international integration but also enabled Vietnam to access mechanisms of technical and financial assistance from the International Fund for Cultural Diversity (De Beukelaer & Tran, 2022). Still, as Singh (2007) comments, the adoption of the Convention in developing countries is heavily influenced by internal given factors, such as the domestic governance environment, the state of cross-departmental collaboration, and coordination. For Vietnam, the first phase was dominated by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, supported by UNESCO Hanoi, while other ministries were largely absent from the early stages (Saltiel, 2014). This enabled the formation of what might be described as a rudimentary ‘institutional boundary’ between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the other relevant ministers.

In 2016, the Government released Decision 1755/QĐ-Ttg approving the “Strategy for the Development of Cultural Industries to 2020, Vision to 2030.” This was the first document at the national level which sought to specifically develop CCIs and it defined 12 key areas which included film, performing arts, fine arts, design, advertising, and video games (Pham, 2016; Nguyen, 2022). “Cultural industries” was placed at the center of the strategy which seemed to favor the continued dominance of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism as the principal lead agency. Gasparin and Quinn (2020) remark that, while international experience was drawn upon, the drafting phases were dominated by Vietnam’s traditional approach to cultural governance which emphasizes heritage and preservation as the main value rather than innovative development.

Following 2016, there were many other documents and action plans to implement Strategy 1755. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism put emphasis on the development of the film sector, performing arts, and preservation of cultural heritage (Jurriëns, 2018; Prime Minister, 2021). The Ministry of Science and Technology managed support for innovation and the development of creative start-ups in the design and digital media fields, which are more peripheral to “creative industries” (Ngoc & Anh, 2022). The Ministry of Planning and Investment included the CCIs in the strategy for the development of the digital economy focusing on creative start-up initiatives and foreign investment initiatives (O’Connor, 2020). The lack of a strong coordination mechanism created an environment where each of the ministries executed initiatives on their interpretations and uniquely prioritizing them, which created a number of gaps and overlaps in execution (Labbe et al., 2022).

Evolution of the terminology debate

Aspects of the “cultural” and “creative” approaches are the most prominent of issues regarding Vietnam’s CCI Policy. The cultural approach emphasizes cultural–artistic values, heritage, and national identity. It is linked to the state management of culture system from the subsidized economy period, where the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism was the primary figure (Kim, 2002; Raffin, 2008). Its priorities are focused on safeguarding and advancing heritage, enriching spiritual life, and enhancing national image via culture. The creative approach, on the other hand, is much more expansive and includes the broad categories of knowledge and technology, as well as the more specific design and innovation-based industries (Pratt, 2009; Flew & Cunningham, 2010). This approach is more in line with the strategies of the creative economy and international integration, although it poses the danger of merging cultural management with an economic–technological form of governance (Miller, 2009; Lee, 2016; Gilmore et al., 2019). Gasparin and Quinn (2021) suggest that the choice of terminology is not an academic concern but an institutional one, explaining that “culture” would allow the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to maintain its coordinating role, while “creativity” would enable the other ministries to assert their influence.

Institutional context: Ministerial structure and inter-ministerial roles in CCIs

The state governance system of Vietnam functions through a mix of sectoral and territorial governance where each ministry is allocated a specific area of responsibility as outlined in the Law on Government Organization and its corresponding decrees (Gillen, 2011; Schwenkel & Leshkowich, 2012; National Assembly, 2025). Within the CCI sector, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism manages the cultural and artistic industries, the conservation of heritage, and the image of the nation branding. The ministry of Science and Technology manages sci-tech policies, innovation, and marketable new ventures. The ministry of Planning and Investment deals with policies concerning development in the economy, attraction of investments, and support of businesses. This system creates distinct “institutional boundaries” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) where each ministry is able to command resources and policy tools within their area of jurisdiction, but there is no effective mechanism for inter-ministerial collaboration, which becomes a problem for the implementation of CCI policy (Vlassis & De Beukelaer, 2019). As noted by Labbe et al. (2022), in the case of creative space development projects in Hanoi, collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the local governments would often hit roadblocks because the work was within the purview of the Ministry of Science and Technology or the Ministry of Planning and Investment where support services like IT or business services interfaces.

This phenomenon vividly demonstrates how the impact of policies drawn up at the level of language and institutional silos has real-world consequences. Vietnam’s CCI policy framework is shaped by geopolitics and international integration (UNESCO, 2005), which is then institutionalized by the 1755/2016 Strategy. Within this framework, there exists a fragmented space where the “cultural” and “creative” paradigms coexist. The coined phrases and their defined meanings not only determine strategies for specific areas of development but also define the hierarchy of influence amongst the ministries, which is a key focus of the analyses within this study.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research approach: Interpretive Policy Analysis

This research aims to further explore the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘creative’ within the CCIs in the Vietnam context using interpretive policy analysis (IPA). IPA allows interdisciplinary research on the meanings policy stakeholders ascribe to concepts and words within their milieu, as opposed to just examining documents and outputs (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014). This method is preferable for the analysis of Gieryn (1983), Lamont & Molnár (2002) boundary work and Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) institutional work due to the emphasis on the intersection of discourse, power, and institutions. IPA is particularly relevant in studying the CCIs, which span

multiple sectors, as it is considered a highly developed methodology for analyzing cross-sector policy networks (Hajer, 1995; Clarke et al., 2015).

Data Sources

The study gathers breadth by using various qualitative sources and to aid triangulation and improve its quality. For instance, the documents include policies, Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg of 2016 and related action plans, and the midterm and final reports from the constituent ministries. Also, at the international and Vietnamese levels, the 2005 UNESCO Convention and the Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity report (Le, 2010; Nguyen, 2022) were studied. To monitor the usage of terms, the words “cultural-creative industries,” “cultural and creative industries,” and “cultural industries linked with innovation” were policy tracked by the research teams from documents between 2018 and 2023. Manual verification of occurrences was done by two researchers. The second source of data comprises of national and international meetings, on CCIs related to the ministries, along with the related minutes and addresses delivered by the Honorable ministers and consultant policy advisors for UNESCO, and also hired policy advisors (Gasparin and Quinn, 2020; Labbe et al. 2022). The 15 Culture, Sports and Tourism; Science and Technology; and Planning and Investment ministries, 5 academic researchers and policy advisors, and 10 practitioner and manager artists or creative directors of CCI constituents comprised the third data source. From April 2024 to June 2025, the participants were interviewed in semi-structured form. The participants were primarily selected based on the participants’ policy debate. Each of the 45 to 60 minute sessions was carried out on a face to face basis or on the web, and all were consented to by the participants. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed, anonymized, and reached data saturation. Capturing O’Connor (2020) and Lee (2016) methodologies, and spanning from 2010 to 2024, more primary sources and media such as press articles, CCIs investigative articles, and press features were used. This deepened the discourse analysis of public and policy documents, looking at the the “culture” and “creative” terms used in “academic” and “popular” discussions (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2006; Banks & O’Connor, 2009).

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis complied with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) steps for thematic analysis structured around boundary and institutional work coding schemes. The research team started with policy documents and meeting minutes, followed by transcripts from interviews and reports from the media. In the second step, two independent coders assigned initial codes to determine definitional, interpretative and translational elements of the terms “culture” and “creative.” Discrepancies in coding were raised, discussed, and resolved. From these codes, boundary work (settling, sustaining, negotiating, and diffusing boundaries) and institutional work (building, sustaining, and disrupting institutions) were crafted as themes. Alleged thematic overlap was further supported by cross-data source comparison and down to the level of themes, consistency was achieved through analytical rigor. The final step was conceptual framing using Gieryn’s (1983) and Zietsma & Lawrence’s (2010) work, along with the Vietnamese CCI policy, to balance practical and theoretical contributions.

Ensuring Research Reliability and Validity

The study’s integrity was tackled through the use of multiple verification and quality control methods. In terms of accuracy and consistency, data source triangulation was used and policy documents, interviews, and media sources were cross-checked (Denzin, 1978). To enhance the credibility of the interpretation, member checking was used by summarizing analytic findings and sending them to some interviewees to confirm, modify, or add information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To control possible researcher biases, the team practiced reflexive journaling, documenting the recording of descriptions, theories, and analytic focus (Alasuutari, 2016, 2019; Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019; Jalonen, 2024). Data collection and analysis were conducted without breaching any ethical principles, ensuring anonymity and voluntary informed consent were provided. The thorough and elaborate design enables accurate reconstruction of the debates surrounding terminology in CCI policymaking and highlights the processes of constructing, negotiating, and operating cross-boundary institutional frameworks between ministries and sectors, which is vital to understanding the political institutional context of Vietnam.

RESULTS

Boundary Establishment

Examining the policy document system from 2005-2024 shows that the terms used and defined in national decisions, plans, and reports are crucial for defining the boundaries of the institutions (Gieryn, 1983; Lamont &

Molnár, 2002; Kong et al., 2006). In decision no. 1755/QĐ-TTg (2016) defines “cultural industries” to encompass twelve sectors including heritage, performing arts, film and fine arts, as well as design, advertising, and video games (Pham, 2016; Nguyen, 2022). The use of “culture” in these documents was more than a token phrase; it was a clear marker of the administrative scope of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, which has historically been the guardian of matters pertaining to the arts and heritage (Le, 2010; Gillen, 2011). In numerous instances, this jurisdiction was reinforced through legal boundaries, including definition, sector classification criteria, and priority investment lists which were devised on the basis of a prevailing cultural management model (Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Yet, in some innovative oriented documents (e.g. the proposed documents supporting creative businesses by the Ministry of Science and Technology or the Ministry of Planning and Investment), the phrases “creative industries” or “creative economy” were used as indicators of southern expansion meant to subsume knowledge, technology, and digital services sectors (Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Keane, 2013; O’Connor, 2020). This indicates the simultaneous existence of two conceptual frameworks; one grounded in cultural heritage and the other oriented towards economic innovation which set the stage for inter-ministerial disputes and agreements (Gasparin & Quinn, 2020; Labbe et al., 2022). As found in semi-structured interviews, most officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (n=10) saw the term “cultural industries” as “a way of affirming the scope of management and the advantage of jurisdiction” (GOV-03). An advisor or policy expert remarked with emphasis, “Once we use the word ‘culture,’ we have the legal basis to defend our coordinating authority, especially against other ministries” (EXP-02). Meanwhile, three artists and two creative managers (n=5) comments that it was “less evocative of opportunities for new sectors” and “traditional” (ART-04).

Table 1. Trends in the Use and Definition of Terms in CCI Policy in Vietnam (2005–2024) and Their Impact on Institutional Boundaries

Document	Year	Issuing Body	Main Term	Conceptual Scope	Boundary Implication
Decision No. 1755/QĐ-TTg	2016	Prime Minister (drafted by Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism)	Cultural industries	12 cultural-art sectors	Consolidates Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism’s coordinating authority
Creative Startup Support Program	2018	Ministry of Science and Technology	Creative economy	Technology, design, digital media	Expands into science and technology domains
Digital Economy Development Strategy	2020	Ministry of Planning and Investment	Creative industries	Integration of technology and creative services	Links CCIs to digital economy growth

Boundary Maintenance

After delineating the CCI sector's scope via policy language, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism took steps to sustain and solidify this scope of jurisdiction. One such strategy included the continuous use of the term 'cultural industries' in all legal documents, summary reports, and speeches, even in the face of other ministries or foreign bodies pushing to use 'creative industries' or 'creative economy' (Gasparin & Quinn, 2021; Labbe et al., 2022). Three key mechanisms strengthened this policy. The Ministry continuously defined and refined the legal boundaries and the implementation plans pertaining to the 12 cultural industry sectors, thereby reinforcing the traditional approach to management (Le, 2010; Nguyen, 2022). Furthermore, the term “culture” was intertwined with the objectives of safeguarding the heritage and advocating for the national identity which are contestable or diminish (Kim, 2002; Raffin, 2008). The Ministry formed political-administrative alliances local cultural offices and with networks of artists which fortified the protective armor for the terminology and the jurisdictional power (Gillen, 2011; Jurriëns, 2018). Though effective, this strategy occasionally led to redundant policies or stifled the incorporation of sectors like creative technology or digital services which fall under the Ministry of Science and Technology or the Ministry of Planning and Investment (Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Lee, 2016). This demonstrates both the difficulty of developing CCIs as a cohesive, integrated cross-system and the robust institutional cross-boundary work to defend the existing systemic order (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Most respondents from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (n=11) held the belief that the “cultural industries” terminology was used out of a defensive strategy, the possibility of being eclipsed by emerging new areas or losing coordinating power (GOV-07). One other participant mentioned that: “If we switched to ‘creative industries,’ it would be very difficult to define boundaries, and other ministries would have grounds to intervene” (GOV-02). From a local standpoint, three leaders from the provincial Department of Culture thought that the Ministry kept the term to allow them to “preserve existing budget structures and sectoral priorities” (GOV-12). On the other hand, two policy researchers argued that this approach resulted in “grey areas” around cross-sector coordination, particularly in projects that integrated technology with the arts (EXP-04).

Boundary Negotiation

The steps of boundary setting and boundary maintenance usually require enforcing control and oversight and defined roles, whereas the step of boundary negotiation is an effort to gain middle ground in cases where cross-sector collaboration is needed or in the face of external commitments. Looking at inter-ministerial documents from 2018 to 2023—such as the *Plan for Coordinated Implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention*, the *National Program for Digital Economy Development*, and the *Scheme to Support Creative Enterprises*—it becomes clear that terms such as “cultural-creative industries”, “cultural and creative industries”, or “cultural industries linked with innovation” are gaining popularity (Gasparin & Quinn, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). This can be viewed as some sort of linguistic compromise where the ‘cultural’ component is kept to defend the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism’s interests and, at the same time, the ‘creative’ component is added to allow the participation of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

An illustrative case is found in the Plan for Coordinated Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Cultural Industries to 2030 (Prime Minister, 2021), in which the phrase “cultural-creative industries” is used 17 times, further defined to include the 12 traditional cultural sectors as well as the technology based, design oriented, and digital creative service industries (Pratt, 2009; Keane, 2013). This indicates some purposeful attempt at resolving the conflicts in terms without upsetting the institutional sovereignty of the ministries involved. The conflicts and jurisdiction of the CCI policy framework’s administering bodies were settled in inter-ministerial meetings and national workshops.

In its meetings, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism seemed to focus on the “cultural” aspect as the most pivotal form of value, associating it with heritage conservation and the preservation of the identity of the nation (Kim, 2002; Raffin, 2008). On the contrary, the Ministry of Science and Technology was promoting policy inclusion of “creative technology” and “creative startups,” underscoring the power of innovation and the impact of science and technology on the creative industries (Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Lee, 2016). At the same time, the Ministry of Planning and Investment regarded the “creative economy” as an essential element of the digital economy evolution strategy and as a means to draw foreign direct investment (Kong, 2014; O’Connor, 2020). After several rounds of negotiation, a multi-centered power structure emerged: the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism retained coordination over the heritage and arts segments, while the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Planning and Investment took over innovation, enterprise development, and digital technology the responsibilities. This illustrates the balance of competing strategic priorities and serves as an example of “boundary negotiation” as it the governance of CCIs in Vietnam.

This language agreement has made possible the initiation of collaborative projects like the National Innovative Startup Ecosystem Support Program (spearheaded by the Ministry of Science and Technology and along with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) and the Project on Developing Creative Hubs Linked to Local Culture (spearheaded by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism with the aid of the Ministry of Planning and Investment). Nevertheless, Gasparin & Quinn (2021) warn that in many cases, a linguistic compromise does not equate to a compromise involving the sharing of resources, which leads to inter-ministerial collaboration that is, in many instances, merely window dressing.

Semi structured interviews conducted with the officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and policy experts indicated that 9 out of 15, and 4 out of 5 of them, respectively, regarded the hybrid term “cultural-creative industries” as “necessary to avoid conflict” but “insufficient to resolve differences in objectives” (GOV-05; EXP-03). One of the officials from the Ministry of Science and Technology commented: “We accept keeping the word ‘culture’ to reassure them, but the ‘creative’ part must clearly reflect the role of technology” (GOV-14). “The creative economy must be considered a pillar of digital growth, not merely an extension of culture” emphasized a representative from the Ministry of Planning and Investment (GOV-18). Some artists and creative managers (n=4) expressed their worry that negotiations seem to revolve around semantics, as in the case of framing, while budget allocation and the provision of support resources still prioritize traditional sectors (ART-02).

Boundary Blurring

While boundary negotiation aims to adjust and maintain a polycentric power framework, boundary blurring seeks to eliminate the distinction between “culture” and “creativity.” This often comes from cross-sector initiatives, experimental collaborations, or from the grassroots creative community. Some state-sponsored pilot projects have begun to remove institutional boundaries in the CCI sector. For instance, the Hà Nội - Creative City project within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network framework (Labbe et al., 2022) integrates heritage preservation, performing arts growth, and the innovative application of technology in cultural tourism. This creates an intersection of “culture” and “creativity.” Also, the Centre for Cultural Creativity and Start-up Support, which the Ministry of

Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Ministry of Science and Technology jointly established, offers legal, technological, and other support to artists and creative startups in shared office facilities.

The projects utilize terms like, “cultural creative centre,” or “cultural innovation,” which can be viewed as a kind of hybrid vocabulary aimed at minimizing conflicts of interest and promoting collaboration between different industries (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2006; Cunningham, 2009). These initiatives not only embody a practical “boundary blurring” approach, but they also indicate the capability of redefining institutional roles through the shifting and blending of policy terminology. Besides ministerial actors, many initiatives from the creative community itself have also contributed to the blurring of boundaries. Creative spaces like Complex 01 and The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre in Ho Chi Minh City and Hà Nội regularly hold interdisciplinary events that fuse visual art, electronics, and product design (Jurriëns, 2018). These events force local officials to modify their governance approaches from rigid, static classifications of activities to fostering the leap towards more fluid systems of categorized permissions. This, in turn, reduces the administrative divide between culture and the creative economy (Pratt, 2009; O’Connor, 2013). In Vietnam, the blurring of boundaries in CCI policy and practice has resulted in two major shifts at the institutional level. First, it has enhanced the interdependence between sectors that were previously separate. The traditional arts sectors have started incorporating modern technology and contemporary business practices which, in turn, has broadened income streams, diversified offerings, and increased collaborative potential with local and international stakeholders (Banks & O’Connor, 2009; Flew, 2012). Second, this process undermines the traditional power of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism because it is gradually losing its control over also defining cultural boundaries and managing the cultural domain. More and more, activities of the Creative Cultural Industries (CCIs) are executed under the direction of, or in close coordination with, other ministries, like the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, as well as with private companies, and independent creative collectives (Keane, 2013; Lee, 2016). These transformations not only reconfigure the authority boundaries among the governance structures but also create new, more adaptable governance frameworks which reflect the institutional evolution responsive to the innovations in, and globalisation integration trends (Prince, 2010; 2012).

Table 2. Representative initiatives promoting institutional boundary blurring in Vietnam’s CCI policy

Initiative/Project	Year	Lead Agency	Brief Description	Terminology Used	Impact on Boundaries
Hà Nội – Creative City	2019–present	Hà Nội People’s Committee + UNESCO	Integrates heritage preservation, arts development, and tourism technology	Creative City, Cultural Creativity	Blurs boundary between heritage and technological innovation
Centre for Cultural Creativity and Start-up Support	2021	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism + Ministry of Science and Technology	Co-working space, tech and legal support for artists and start-ups	Cultural Creative Centre	Connects cultural sector and creative start-up ecosystem
Complex 01	2016–present	Private	Event space combining art, music, and design	Creative Space	Moves beyond traditional sectoral management
The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre	2016–present	Private	Contemporary arts centre with integrated design workshops	Creative Arts	Blends art and design industries

Based on interviews, six government officials (GOV-06, GOV-11) and four specialists (EXP-01, EXP-05) regard the Hà Nội – Creative City initiative as one of the major innovation drivers for lifting the cross-sectoral integration of culture and the creative economy for “tearing down the wall between culture and the creative economy” and “establishing a unified base for cross-sector collaboration.” An artist involved with the Centre for Cultural Creativity and Start-up Support quoted, “We not only curate exhibitions, but we also integrate with tech teams and generate products, which is beyond imagination” (ART-03). An artist working for a private creative space stated as follows: “We don’t mind about the managerial structure, as we only need adaptability and a collaboration-friendly system” (ART-07). Some officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism have recognized saying, “these new models are challenging not only the way sectoral boundaries are structured, but also the definitions and frameworks of the sectors themselves” (GOV-09).

Institutional Work in CCIs Policy

From the previously discussed boundary work forms, it is evident that the policy formation and implementation of cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in Vietnam involves more than simply dividing and conquering functions. Instead, it demonstrates a series of purposeful processes that Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) described as institutional work. Boundary setting, as discussed in Boundary Establishment, demonstrates the institutional creation within CCIs in Vietnam. With the issuance of Decision No. 1755/QĐ-TTg in 2016 that officially defined “cultural industries” and subsumed 12 sectors under it, a new institutional superstructure was woven around previously fragmented areas scattered over policy documents (Le, 2010; Nguyen, 2022). This was done using traditional institutional approaches such as legal definitions, industry categorization, and Investment Prioritization benchmarks (Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2006). Consequently, the previously unofficial and fragmented mandate of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism as the primary coordinator of CCIs in the country was legally cemented, thus permitting the use of public funds for development in these areas.

This represented an important starting milestone because it not only helped in shaping the governance structure of CCIs, but it also set the basis for the coordination and resource allocation systems that pertain to relevant ministries and agencies. The boundary maintenance stage, as discussed in Section Boundary Maintenance, captures the idea of governance and CCIs institutional maintenance in Vietnam. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has repeatedly used the term ‘cultural industries’ as a phrase of choice in policy documents, reports, and other official statements and has attempted to correlate it with heritage and national identity which are symbolically potent and hard to refute concepts (Kim, 2002; Raffin, 2008). The process of institutional maintenance employs a wide range of strategies such as the redefining or espousing the concept within circulars and reports, incorporating objectives for the preservation of heritage into plans for operational development, and rallying support among circles of artists and regional cultural agencies (Juriëns, 2018). Hence, the current institutional configuration is, to a large extent, resistant to change because there is limited introduction of new concepts or techniques that would destabilize the prevailing power structures among the ministries.

The phase of boundary negotiation that I described in Section Boundary Negotiation identifies the pattern of institutional change in the policy on CCIs in Vietnam, where ministries are responsive to calls for collaboration between sectors, as well as to global norms, and change their terminology and scope of policy to fit. This adaption tends to be opportunistic in nature, such as the incorporation of “cultural–creative industries” as a blend that attempts to cater to many participants and resolve some degree of clash (Keane, 2013; O’Connor, 2013). Additionally, some industries have been put in co-management arrangements where several ministries share jurisdiction, assets, and responsibilities over the sector. As a result, the policy becomes more integrated and facilitates cross-sectoral collaboration, thus diminishing the antagonistic conflict among agencies.

The definition of governance boundaries that requires greater control to prevent overlaps or gaps within responsibilities due to coordination complexities is known as polycentric power structure (Gasparin & Quinn, 2021). The boundary disruption phase, which is a form of institutional disruption described in Section Boundary Blurring, illustrates the governance breach within Vietnam's CCIs, where public–private partnerships, and community creative spaces function above or beyond the existing governance structure (Labbe et al., 2022; O’Connor, 2020). These public-private partnerships tend to merge operational structures that comprise art, technology, and business, coining phrases like “cultural creativity” or “creative hubs” in a bid to bypass legal frameworks and broaden collaborative spaces (Cunningham, 2009). The blurring of the dominant borders has resulted in amalgamation of fields, adopting the transdisciplinary approach towards the governance structure as well as policymakers. The disruption that is described here goes beyond constraining existing governance frameworks, but offers a chance to rethink and design more adaptive approaches that respond to the needs of globalization. Thus, the four forms of boundary work in Vietnam can be associated with four groups of institutional work activities as illustrated in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Correspondence between four forms of boundary work and institutional work groups in CCIs policy in Vietnam

Boundary work	Corresponding institutional work	Primary objective	Key actors	Outcomes
Boundary establishment	Institutional creation	Create a new institutional frame	Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism	Definition and scope of CCIs established
Boundary maintenance	Institutional maintenance	Preserve structural stability	Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism + cultural networks	Protection of the term “culture”
Boundary negotiation	Institutional adaptation	Adjust cooperation for	Inter-ministerial Culture, Sports, and Tourism; Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism;	Hybrid terminology, co-management

Boundary disruption	Institutional disruption	Innovate beyond the old framework	Cross-sectoral community	+	creative	Science and Technology; Planning and Investment)
						Blurred boundaries, reform incentives

The research shows that the language-based policies in Vietnam's CCIs are not only a product of the existing sociopolitical and power framework in the country, but also an instrument of institutional policy processes in the country. The way terms are chosen, modified, and blended shows the struggle between the effort of sustaining the order and the effort of creating something new, which is typical in the Vietnamese socialist-oriented market economy (Gasparin & Quinn, 2020; Labbe et al., 2022). In formulating CCIs policy, it is clear that the selection and use of terms is not merely a linguistic attribution; it is a conscious policy step that would determine the interface of power, strategic structure and framework of collaboration among sectors.

DISCUSSION

Connection with the Theoretical Frameworks of Boundary Work and Institutional Work

The Vietnamese context of CCIs shows how policy language, in addition to conveying information, serves to shape and reshape institutional frameworks (Pham, 2011; Taylor & Corey, 2019). This is in accordance with Gieryn's (1983) boundary work where he discusses the policy and social governance boundaries in discourse, which is aimed to either protect or expand the jurisdiction of the governing entities. The four forms of boundary work that we identified—establishing, maintaining, negotiating, and boundary disruption—occur within a continuous process that captures the balance of institutional stasis and flux. Framed within the context of institutional work elaborated by Zietsma and Lawrence (2010), boundary establishing is institutional creation in defining 'cultural industries' and the sectoral list; maintaining boundaries is aligned with institutional maintenance, exemplified by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism which reinforces the term to protect the jurisdiction; negotiating boundaries illustrates institutional adaptation in the strategic shift with the use of "culture-creativity" to fulfill collaboration demands; disrupting boundaries is institutional disruption by creative communities or intersectoral initiatives that ignore the traditional governance structures.

As far as Vietnam is concerned, these types of boundary work take place, as in Gieryn's case of science versus non-science, inter-departmentally in a vertically arranged system of control. Here, policy text is simultaneously an outcome of conflict and a means of exercising control over bureaucratic power. It is also the case that the rendering of "creative industries" as "cultural industries" is not an act of translation in the foreign sense. It is a boundary work in the context of realigning institutional frameworks in the setting of a socialist state with market dynamics. This is enough to support Hager (1995) and Gusfield (1981) in their argument that policy discourse, as much as articulates the problem, also allocates roles in a hierarchy of power to resolve that problem.

Comparison with the Case of China

China serves as a more relevant comparison as it, like Vietnam, is a socialist-marketeering economy and has incorporated the concept of CCIs into its context. When the term "creative industries" was introduced, China translated it as chuangyi chanye (创意产业 – creative industries) and wenhua chuangyi chanye (文化创意产业 – cultural and creative industries) with an initial focus on the "creative" part to include technology, media, and innovation sectors. In contrast, Vietnam took a more cautious approach in translation and framing. Initially, the official documents favored "cultural industries", which linked to the preservation of heritage and the development of traditional arts. Only some push in form of digital economy policies and creative startup programs led to the incorporation of "creative", which more often than not was attached as an afterthought to "culture". What is striking in both countries is the use of terminology as a political-institutional device to define and divide jurisdictional boundaries, as well as management functions in a governance framework, and provide some form of construction for systematized, multidisciplinary collaboration through creative industry zones or designated creative cities.

The crucial distinction, though, is in how translation and policy focus diverge: China swiftly 'economized' the concept and incorporated it into the framework of technological development (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017, 2018; Li et al., 2024), while Vietnam kept a 'culture-centered' model much longer, allowing slower incorporation of the creative component into the policy design and increased reliance on global influences (UNESCO, 2022) and cooperative interventions.

Comparison with the Case of Singapore

Singapore serves as a model case for a modern example of employing boundary work as a policy tool within the framework of a developmental state. According to Kong (2014), the country embraced the ideas of “creative economy” and “creative city” for two reasons: to spur growth and improve the urban quality of life. Under a strong centralized coordination system led by an inter-ministerial committee that reports directly to the Prime Minister’s Office, these concepts were not a site of inter-ministerial contestation but were, instead, cohesively and collectively executed. In contrast to Singapore, Vietnam has a greater degree of decentralization, which leads to greater inter-ministerial terminological disputes that take a long time to negotiate a common agreement. In Vietnam, there is also no apex coordinating body which contributes to boundary negotiation difficulties, adding layers of complexity and time to the process. Many cross-sectoral activities remain as pilot projects and have not been fully integrated into national strategies the way Singapore has. In spite of this, the two countries recognize the relationship between culture and the creative economy as a primary driver of innovation. In Singapore, the process is managed top-down, while in Vietnam, it is more diffused and arises from the initiatives of creative communities or collaborative international project work, as noted by Gasparin and Quinn (2021) and Labbe et al. (2022).

Implications from International Comparison

Analyzing Vietnam, China, and Singapore reveals that policy language serves as an instrument for controlling institutional power because within all three countries, policy language selection serves as a means to define and delineate administrative borders and authority amongst state organs. The translation trajectory from the outset, whether prioritizing “culture” or “creativity” has institutional structural implications because it determines the scope of intervention and authority of each ministry or sector within the CCI policy. Initiatives of the policymakers, as much as the intervention framework, determine the pace of integration of new elements. The coordinated mechanism, which is a centralized model like Singapore, reduces conflicts over the terminology and coherently ensures implementation speed as opposed to the more decentralized model of Vietnam and, to an extent, China, which has multi round negotiative processes and greatly delays the boundary negotiation process. Moving to a different yet equally important aspect of community initiatives, the creative community and public-private partnerships drive the boundary-breaking initiatives in Vietnam, while in Singapore and China, these initiatives are fundamentally led by the central government. The above reinforces the arguments of Lawrence et al. (2009), Huang et al. (2019), along with Dauyen & Iiskakov (2025), asserts that institutional work is an ethnically diverse practice, in which participants utilize numerous tactics—from the creation, maintenance, adaptation, to even disruption of institutions. Furthermore, in consideration of Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs), policy language emerges as an instrumental policy for the execution of these strategies.

The Role of Policy Language in the Context of Socialism and a Socialist-Oriented Market Economy

Within the context of Vietnam—a socialist nation under the model of a socialist-oriented market economy—the policy vocabulary regarding the CCI sector serves both the protective and constructive ideological-political functions simultaneously on the political, global economic integration and competition level. Politically, the selection of the phrase “cultural industries” serves much more than being a straightforward translation of the concept of creative industries. It retains the State’s grip and control over cultural and ideological matters of governance (Kim, 2002; Le, 2010). In many of the Vietnam’s strategic documents, the element of “culture” is linked with “building an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity” which is the essence of the socialist orientation (Central Committee, 1998). Economically, the “creative” element is cited more often in relation to innovation, entrepreneurship, and the digital economy (Flew & Cunningham, 2010; O’Connor, 2020). It shows the intention to widen the scope of policy in relation to fulfill international obligations (UNESCO, 2022). This intertwining enables policy language to act as a balancing tool between two competing rationale: preservation and ideological orientation, and acceleration and integration. Because of the need for adjustments aimed at ensuring legitimacy and political trust, as well as economic viability, effectiveness in the specific context, boundary work in Vietnam is multilayered and more nuanced than in other countries.

Long-Term Implications for Inter-Ministerial Coordination Capacity

The previous analyses suggest that the wording used in the policies not only shapes the current-day power dynamics, but also influences the future capacity for coordination across ministries. Positively, the creation of hybrid terms or neologisms such as “cultural-creative industries” fostered the creation of a shared discursive framework which enables ministries to find common ground and ease collaboration on cross-sectoral projects. This behavior is also aligned with the notion by Lamont and Molnár (2002) that as boundaries are expanded to be more inclusive, the likelihood of cooperation increases. On the other hand, in the absence of a strong coordination mechanism, the sustaining of several parallel terms for a single domain tends to promote the fragmentation of

institutions, where cada ministerio defiende su territorio y colabora solo nominalmente (Gasparin & Quinn, 2021). Some of the resulting effects are increased inefficiency in resource allocation, lag in the execution of the national CCI strategy, and the enduring state where “policies overlap but resources are dispersed” (Pratt, 2009; Kong, 2014). Ultimately, if the trend of community-driven initiative and international cooperation that fosters boundary blurring continues, the “culture” and “creativity” silos may be eroded in the future by a truly integrated, cross-sectoral governance framework. Vietnam would need to revise its governance model to realize this, such as instituting a CCI national level coordination council like Singapore (Kong, 2014) or forming a CCI specific agency from within the central government. Simply put, the policy vernacular of today is, in silence, sculpting tomorrow’s coordination capability. Vietnam’s decisions on defining and framing CCIs will directly determine its long-term resource mobilization, strategic coordination, and policy coherence capabilities.

CONCLUSION

This research analyzes how “culture” and “creativity” are viewed, used, and translated in the context of CCIs policies in Vietnam, paying attention to how such terminology influenced the division of responsibilities and the coordination governance structures among ministries and sectors. The analysis shows four prominent types of boundary work. First, the boundary establishment stage, in which the policy framework is structured to set boundaries of responsibility for each ministry, especially accentuating the centrality of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Second, the boundary maintenance stage, wherein the protective strategy of the “culture” term is employed to defend the power base and align with objectives of preserving heritage. Third, the boundary negotiation stage, which is manifested in the employment of hybrid phrases like “cultural–creative industries” aiming at reducing tension and fostering collaboration among the ministries. Lastly, boundary disruption stage, which includes initiatives spanning multiple sectors, public-private partnerships, and community creative spaces that transcend the traditional governing boundaries. In comparison with the framework of institutional work, these four forms of boundary work relate to the institution of creation, maintenance, adaptation, and disruption.

The research shows Vietnam’s policymaking reflects established systems of power, but also strategically aims to change them through policy over time. In addition, a comparative analysis of China (Keane, 2013) and Singapore (Kong, 2014) shows how translation histories and coordination frameworks dictate how quickly and to what degree the element of “creativity” is integrated into the CCI policy framework. In reference to the selection of terminology, a coherent national linguistic policy is needed to stem the institutional fragmentation, which is undermining the effective implementation of CCI policies. The “culture and creative industries” designation builds a balance by maintaining the cultural heritage and identity values while expanding the focus to the creative fields which are tied to innovation and technology. This should be accompanied by a precise legal description to provide clear boundary limits detailing the sectoral scope, classification criteria, and the principles of inter-ministerial coordination that governs them. This would reduce the conflicts of power while increasing policy implementation, oversight, and transparency.

In regard to inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, a possible approach is to create a National Council for Coordination of Cultural and Creative Industries, which would answer directly to the government or led by a Deputy Prime Minister, to facilitate policy integration and streamline resource allocation across the various ministries. This mechanism should impose clear lines of responsibility and authority to each ministry, particularly in creative technology, design, and digital arts. Singapore’s experience indicates that establishing purpose-designed inter-ministerial groups for each priority area, like digital heritage, creative cities, or creative product exports, sustains genuine collaboration rather than superficial coordination and strengthens the national CCI strategy’s execution capacity. Shifting the focus from the center back to the periphery is one potential avenue for expanding this research, as this is the region of many creative initiatives and practical interdisciplinary collaborations, like in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, or Da Nang. Studying how the provinces and cities formulate or reformulate concepts and the collaboration among various departments and agencies would reveal much more about the use, adaptation, and flexibility of CCI policies in grassroots governance.

Furthermore, within ASEAN, comparative studies focusing on Vietnam in relation to Thailand, Indonesia, or Malaysia could provide deeper insights into the terminology selection strategies and the design of coordination mechanisms in relation to ASEAN’s political-economic cooperation in CCIs (Asian Development Bank Institute, 2022; ASEAN Secretariat, 2025). Additionally, other studies may conduct quantitative content analyses of the policies and media documents to assess the terminology’s frequency, context, and shifts over time. Such an approach could test some assumptions about the impact of the policy wording on the inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms and, in the process, contribute to evidence-based policy guidance for the policymaker’s iterative improvement cycles of the policy architecture. As articulated, policy wording goes beyond serving as a socio-linguistic medium; it forms a strategic tool for the delineation, configuration, and demolition of the CCIs institutional structural frameworks in Vietnam. The termed policy framework hinges on precise wording and

adequate inter-ministerial coordination, which are fundamental for the balanced sustainable development of the sector that aims to preserve culture while encouraging creative economic development in the era of globalization and digital transformation.

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Dr. Tran Minh Duc, Faculty of Cultural, Sports and Tourism Industries, Thu Dau Mot University, solely conceived the idea, designed, and carried out the entire research process.

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