



Artistic Exploration for the Development of Soft and Digital Skills

Project Code: 2024-1-IT02-KA220-ADU-000245461

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0. Introduction

ARTSKILLS project background

The ARTSKILLS project is dedicated to enhancing adult learners' soft skills—such as creativity, communication, and empathy—alongside their digital skills through an art-based learning approach. By combining hands-on workshops, digital tools, and an interactive online platform, the project supports diverse learning pathways. A core element of ARTSKILLS is community engagement, which includes cultural events that foster social inclusion and encourage lifelong learning.

Partners

Teleconsys SPA (Italy) – Lead Partner

A specialist in digital transformation and cultural heritage, Teleconsys SPA oversees project coordination, financial management, and the development of the digital platform.

Centrul de Meditatii CONIL (Romania)

Focused on inclusive education, this tutoring and learning support center contributes to data analysis, the development of educational materials, and training initiatives in Romania.

Hyper Island Program AB (Sweden)

With expertise in digital learning and experiential training, Hyper Island leads the project's communication strategy, creates promotional materials, and contributes to educational content development in Sweden.

Project research aim and outcomes

The ARTSKILLS project aims to develop art-based teaching modules and a digital platform to enhance soft and digital skills for adult learners. The first phase focuses on research, with a key focus in assessing the impact of art on skill development. This provides a context and roadmap for sharing best practices across national contexts in Italy, Romania and Sweden. The next phase promotes the application of creative and interactive methods by providing training sessions for educators and fostering inclusive learning experiences. During this phase, teaching modules are developed which can be used in a variety of educational settings. To support accessibility and evaluation, an online platform will offer educational resources, interactive tools, and progress tracking while also driving public engagement through cultural events and digital content. Each partner country will host community events to promote lifelong learning and social inclusion.

Key desired outcomes of this project are:



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- Increase understanding of the impact of art in social and digital skill development in adults through exploring Italian, Romanian and Swedish national contexts
- Create interactive modules and workshops which use art to build skills
- Develop an online platform to support studies and evaluation
- Raise awareness and accessibility of art-based skill building for lifelong learning through community led workshops

Research paper aims and outcomes

The aim of this report is to provide research on the Swedish national context. To achieve this, researchers will follow the proposed outline in order to:

- Provide an overview of the national context
- Explore the impact of art on social competencies in adults, including case studies, good practice and emerging trends
- Explore the impact of art on digital skills on adults
- Overview innovative approaches and methodologies
- Present challenges and opportunities
- Provide recommendations for: policymakers, educators and trainers, and cultural and artistic institutions

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this paper is a systematic literature review (Lame, 2019), given the aim of exploring a broad thematic area to provide analysis and recommendations.

The researchers first reframed the topic as a research question to create a scope for the paper. The primary research question is:

What is the impact of art on the development and social and digital skills of adults in Sweden ?

The researchers gathered publicly sourced data from Swedish government, cultural, and national agencies to achieve the aforementioned desired outcomes of the paper, which are aligned with the outline that the project partners from Sweden, Romania, and Italy provided.

The paper is divided into six parts. The introduction provides an overview of the scope of both the project this paper contributes to, and the aim and desired outcome of the paper itself. The following four sections explore the research question by providing an overview of the distinct national context in Sweden, the impact of arts on competencies in adults, the impact of art on digital skills in adults, and innovative approaches and methodologies. Shorter case studies illustrate the impact of arts on competences, and three full case studies explore the impact of arts on digital skills in adults to address the research question. The recommendation section synthesizes key learnings from the national context and cases to provide recommendations for



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policymakers, educators and trainers, and cultural/educational institutions. The final section indicates future research areas.

One limitation of the paper is that the case studies and recommendations are explored through literature research rather than qualitative or quantitative interviews. To enrich the report or continue to develop the research question, researchers recommend qualitative interviews with invited stakeholders to supplement the report, and provide additional perspectives from key national actors.

1. Overview of the national context

Adult education policies and initiatives

Adult education in Sweden aims to provide lifelong learning opportunities to all adults. To provide an overview of the adult education landscape in Sweden, it is useful to explore nine key national policies and the initiatives connected to them. These policies are designed to meet the needs of various groups, including unemployed individuals, immigrants, and the general adult population, helping them to improve their skills, integrate into society, and advance in their careers. While Sweden has a rich history of offering inclusive and varied adult education, policies and initiatives are subject to change based on a variety of external and internal factors. This includes which government party has been elected, which art and cultural ministers are allocating funding, and which incentives are provided to educators to pursue projects. However, Sweden has a rich history of offering inclusive and varied adult education. This overview highlights key initiatives embedded in Sweden's societal fabric as well as newer initiatives.

1. Municipal Adult Education (Komvux)

Municipal adult education is publicly funded education provided by municipalities for adults who want or need to continue their education. Programs support learners to complete high school, learn Swedish language, prepare for higher education, or gain the skills required for shifting careers. Initiatives which support this policy include basic secondary education including high school diploma topics ranging from mathematics to biology to history to languages. Komvux provides state funding to municipalities to ensure access to education for adults.

2. Higher vocational education (Yrkeshögskola)

Higher vocational education includes post-secondary vocational education and training, which meets the needs of working life and is conducted in close cooperation with industry. The system is designed based on policy to provide adults with industry-specific training that prepares them for immediate employment. Initiatives include short courses, LIA (learning-in-work) internships, and state funding for student seats to meet labor market demands.



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3. Folk high schools (Folkhögskola)

Folk high schools focus on personal development, democratic learning and community engagement by offering a variety of courses from arts and humanities to practical applied courses (Swedish Higher Education Authority, n.d.). These schools are a distinctive form of education in Sweden that are not bound by the formal educational structure, making them an attractive option for adult learners. The focus of the schools range from personal and creative development to specific hard skills and practical trainings.

4. Higher education and liberal adult education.

Today in 2025, Sweden has approximately 50 higher education institutions which include both universities and colleges (Swedish Higher Education Authority, n.d.). These accredited institutions are accessible to adult learners through loans and state support for Swedish citizens. The board of student finance (CSN) supports learners financially to structure loans.

5. Adult education for Unemployed Individuals and Labor Market Programs

Education for unemployed citizens (Arbetsmarknadsutbildning) as a collaboration with Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) and educational providers that supports unemployed adults to gain the skills needed to apply for current positions on Swedish job markets (Swedish Higher Education Authority, n.d.). Programs are designed in collaboration with industry sectors to address labor market needs. This includes initiatives in vocational training and certification programs in areas like healthcare, IT, and construction.

6. Digitization in Education

This policy focuses on integrating digital tools into all levels of education, including adult education, to make learning more accessible, flexible, and effective. They promote digital competence for adult learners, ensuring they can navigate and thrive in the digital age. These newer programs encourage the use of online platforms and distance learning for adult learners, particularly for those in remote areas or with busy schedules. This includes initiatives which support digital literacy programs for both the employed and unemployed adult learner sectors.

7. Social Inclusion and Equal Access to education

Sweden's adult education policies prioritize social inclusion by ensuring that all adults, regardless of their background or socio-economic status, have access to education and training. This includes financial support for adult learners, especially those from low-income families. Programs aimed at reducing educational inequalities and supporting learners with disabilities or those from immigrant backgrounds. Programs promote gender equality in education by encouraging women to participate in traditionally male-dominated fields such as technology and engineering. Online education and distance learning are designed for adults with families or dependencies, who require



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flexible work hours or who can not manage daily commutes to learning centers. These programs cover general education topics and professional development (Swedish Higher Education Authority, n.d.).

8. Workplace learning and development

These programs focus on developing the competencies of employed adults by creating tailored training for employees at their workplace, focusing on technical skills, mentoring and communication. State funding for upskilling supports companies and private businesses to retain and attract talent by offering the opportunity to learn and develop within their roles.

9. Integration Policy (Integrationspolitik)

Sweden's integration policy includes adult education programs designed to help newcomers—including refugees and immigrants—integrate into Swedish society. This is done through language acquisition, vocational training, and cultural orientation. This includes language programs, such as SFI (Swedish for Immigrants), and other programs to help adults learn about Swedish society and the labor market. It also covers support services for immigrants, including career counseling and access to educational programs. These courses are targeted at adults who require language skills for professional development. These are offered by government programs, private language schools and universities.

In addition to initiatives that support these nine key policy areas, there are additional initiatives that extend the adult education landscape in Sweden. Short Courses have become increasingly popular in the last 5 years, both those offered by universities and those offered by private institutions. By focusing on specialized knowledge or career related skills, they develop adult learners' existing knowledge and support them in learning new technologies and approaches for the shifting workplace. (Swedish Council for Higher Education UHR, n.d.). Civic and nonprofit learning are typically free or low cost, with a focus on community development, social inclusion and lifelong learning (Swedish Agency for Non-Formal Education Folkbildningsrådet, n.d.).

Art-based programs and initiatives within Swedish education

Since 2011, arts subjects are not among the obligatory foundation subjects (gymnasiegemensamma ämnen) in upper secondary education. The Upper Secondary Education Inquiry (Gymnasieutredningen) proposed that all the national programmes in upper secondary schools should again incorporate an arts subject. The Swedish Parliament rejected the proposal by a vote in June 2018.

However, the subject of art and art based skills are incorporated to some extent in non formal learning. Municipal culture school (kommunala kulturskolan) form the largest voluntary cultural activity for children and young people in Sweden, and activities in arts school attract larger numbers of children and adolescents than the schools can accept.

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Young people's own cultural activities, outside of family or school context, often take place in study circles and in other activities within liberal adult education (folkbildning). Young people from the age of 13 years can participate in these activities. There is a long tradition of government grants to non-profit youth organisations in Sweden. Supporting young people's creativity is one of the priorities. Of the 2021 central government budget for the youth policy area, about 28 million euros (280 million Swedish kronor) were deposited as a state grant to youth organisations. (European Commission, n.d.)

Role of art and culture in lifelong learning

Sweden's integration of art and culture into lifelong learning reflects a commitment to fostering an inclusive, creative, and democratic society. Through various institutions and programs, individuals are encouraged to engage with the arts throughout their lives, enhancing personal fulfillment and societal cohesion.

Cultural Institutions as Learning Hubs

Sweden's cultural institutions, such as museums and art centers, play a pivotal role in lifelong learning. For instance, the Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning (NCK) in Östersund serves as a collaborative platform, promoting lifelong learning processes within cultural heritage institutions across the Nordic countries. NCK facilitates programs that encourage individuals to engage with cultural heritage, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of history and society.

Folk High Schools which include Cultural Education

As aforementioned, Folk high schools (folkhögskolor) are a cornerstone of Sweden's non-formal adult education system. These institutions offer courses in various artistic disciplines, including music, visual arts, and theater, providing adults with opportunities to explore creative interests and develop new skills. By fostering an environment that values cultural education, folk high schools contribute to personal growth and community engagement (Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d.)

Municipal Culture Schools for Youth

Municipal culture schools (kommunala kulturskolor) offer voluntary arts education to children and young people, making them the largest providers of extracurricular cultural activities in Sweden. These schools offer instruction in music, dance, theater, and visual arts, nurturing creativity and cultural awareness from an early age (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, n.d)

Advanced Artistic Education

Institutions like the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm provide advanced courses in architecture and fine arts, aimed at professionals seeking to deepen their expertise. These programs support



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lifelong learning by allowing artists and architects to engage with contemporary issues and practices in their fields (Kungl. Konsthögskolan, n.d).

Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund, (ABF)

The Workers' Educational Association, a non-governmental organization, is the largest study association in Sweden. ABF is politically independent but with values that coincide with the labour movement and its aim to counteract the class society. Established in 1912 by the social democratic party the basis of ABF is popular education and especially the study circle method. In Swedish we use the word Folkbildning, that directly translates to peoples education, and in English we usually say popular education or sometimes non-formal adult education. Groups of adult learners receive state funding to pursue hobbies and interests, providing opportunities for social inclusion and community building alongside skill development. The initiative is national, active in 290 Swedish municipalities (ABF, n.d).

Challenges and opportunities in the field of social and digital skills

Sweden's significant strides in the development of social and digital skills development are driven by a robust digital infrastructure, progressive education policies, and a commitment to inclusivity. However, challenges related to digital skills gaps, workforce upskilling, and integration barriers remain. While the country excels in social and emotional learning, gender equality, and peer-based interventions, issues like youth unemployment and immigrant inclusion require further attention.

Opportunities

1. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools:

Sweden has integrated Social and Emotional Training (SET) programs that focus on self-control, social competence, empathy, motivation, and self-awareness. These programs promote mental well-being and improve overall student performance. The emphasis on SEL reflects a recognition of its importance in developing well-rounded individuals capable of navigating complex social environments. The success of these interventions highlights the value of collaborative learning and peer support in social development.

2. Developing skillsets that match labour market trends

Adult learning in Sweden is well supported through government programs connected to the labor market, through Komvux and public education for unemployed citizens. These initiatives exist largely within formal educational settings and short courses. The methods used could be expanded to increase social inclusion and social skill development alongside practical and digital skills

3. Leverage cultural institutions and social clubs to promote social and digital skill building

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Sweden's strong cultural institutions and social clubs funded through ABF have a long history of creating social inclusion and building community. These initiatives, as well as Cultural Learning hubs, can be used as informal learning environments for adult learners. Given that these institutions are embedded within society, they can provide credible starting points for arts-based programs to gain traction, as new initiatives can often create resistance to change.

Challenges

1. Integration of immigrants into the labor market

New immigrants face significant barriers to social and professional integration, particularly in skills recognition and competence development. Policies must address language barriers, employment gaps, and access to training programs to improve inclusion efforts. The challenges faced by immigrants are compounded by issues such as limited recognition of foreign qualifications and the need for tailored support services. Sweden currently has strong policies to support this with connected initiatives such as Komvux and SFI. However, these policies and initiatives will need to continuously evolve and adapt to meet new labour trends, new skill gaps, and new adult learners within society. While language, communication, and key skill development have been the focus of Swedish initiatives, life long learning and social inclusion could be added to their aims and outcomes.

2. Youth unemployment & school-to-work transition

While Sweden has a strong labor market, young people still face challenges transitioning from education to employment. More vocational training and internship opportunities are needed to help students gain practical experience before entering the workforce. The mismatch between educational outcomes and labor market needs contributes to youth unemployment and underemployment. Adult learning initiatives will need to address this gap in order to equip young people with the skills they need to be a part of and contribute towards society,

3. Rapid change due to global trends and technology

Adult education initiatives in Sweden focus on preparing learners to enter the labour market, and by providing language classes, a basic level of social inclusion. As climate change and technological advancements create changes in society and the labour market, adults need to adapt and build life long and transferable skills. The nature of change is a challenge which needs to be considered in designing learning interventions and identifying key skills. Adapting to change and building resilience are crucial for adult learners to continue to develop and contribute to society,



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2. Impact of art on social competences in adults

In the Swedish context, art is increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing social competences in adults. Through structured educational programs, community initiatives, and healthcare collaborations, artistic engagement has proven effective in fostering empathy, collaboration, communication, and inclusion. Continued investment in art-based learning and interdisciplinary approaches will be key to addressing broader societal challenges and promoting a more cohesive society.

Definition of social competences in the national context:

In Sweden, social competence (social kompetens) encompasses a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that enable individuals to interact effectively within society. These skills include empathy, communication, adaptability, and emotional regulation. Swedish preschool teachers often define social competence as a combination of intrapersonal abilities and interpersonal relationships (Lamb et al., 1988).

In the Swedish educational context, social and emotional competencies are largely framed as democratic values, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, mutual respect, and active participation in society (Jensen & Bungay, 2021).

Relevant studies and research

Social Competence Development:

Research in Sweden has examined the development of social competence from early childhood through adulthood. A study focusing on Swedish preschoolers identified determinants of social competence, highlighting the role of early social interactions and environmental factors in shaping these skills (Lamb et al., 1988).

Another study compared social and emotional competencies among children in Pakistan and Sweden, utilizing the Social Competence Scale – Teacher edition (SCS-T). The findings underscored the importance of cultural context in assessing and fostering social competence (Jensen & Bungay, 2021).

Arts and Social Competence

The intersection of arts and social competence has been explored in various studies. A review of arts and public mental health initiatives in Scandinavia, including Sweden, found that participation in arts activities can enhance psychosocial resources such as self-esteem, resilience, and emotional skills (WHO, 2019).

Additionally, a study on the "Arts on Prescription" program in Sweden revealed that engagement in arts activities provided patients with motivation, routine, social interaction, and increased



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self-esteem, contributing to improved mental health and social well-being (Jensen & Bungay, 2021).

Case Studies and examples of good practice

The following examples underscore the multifaceted role of art and culture in Sweden's approach to health, social development, and community engagement. By integrating artistic practices into various sectors, Sweden demonstrates a commitment to fostering well-being, inclusivity, and lifelong learning through creative expression.

Arts on Prescription in Sweden

The "Arts on Prescription" (AoP) program in Sweden allows healthcare practitioners to refer patients to participate in arts activities as a complementary treatment for mental health issues. Practitioners observed that AoP helped patients develop routines, enhance motivation, and foster social interactions, leading to increased self-esteem and improved mental health. These programs often include activities such as painting, music, dance, and creative writing, providing participants with a non-clinical environment to express themselves and connect with others. The integration of arts into healthcare reflects a holistic approach to well-being, recognizing the therapeutic benefits of creative engagement. (Jensen & Bungay (2021))

Moreover, AoP programs in Sweden have been associated with improvements in psychosocial wellbeing, offering both social and psychological benefits. Participants have reported enjoyment and pleasure, which are linked to the hedonistic elements of wellbeing. These findings support other reviews on the benefits of engaging with the arts for mental health in various settings, suggesting that AoP is an appropriate intervention for improving psychosocial wellbeing. (Jensen et al, 2024).

Despite these positive outcomes, challenges remain in the implementation and sustainability of AoP programs. Many programs are project-based and time-limited, highlighting the need for adequate funding and integration into standard healthcare practices to ensure long-term viability. Healthcare practitioners have emphasized the importance of including AoP as part of a wider range of interventions available to patients, requiring suitable levels of funding and support. (Jensen et al, 2024).

In summary, the AoP program in Sweden exemplifies an innovative approach to mental health care, leveraging the therapeutic potential of the arts to enhance well-being. By addressing both psychological and social aspects of health, AoP offers a holistic and person-centered alternative to traditional treatments, contributing to the broader goals of social inclusion and lifelong learning.

Public Art Agency Sweden Initiatives

Between 2020 and 2024, the Public Art Agency Sweden, in collaboration with Formas, the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, and

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ArkDes, conducted ten projects exploring the role of art in social development. These initiatives aimed to generate new knowledge about public art and its potential to contribute to sustainable urban and rural development. The projects investigated how artistic methods can foster collaboration in complex processes, address social challenges, and become an integral part of designing living environments. By bringing together professionals from various fields, these projects highlighted both the opportunities and challenges that arise when integrating artistic competence into societal development (Public Art Agency Sweden, n.d.).

A notable example is the "Tomorrow's Weather" installation at Stockholm Central Station, created by artists Bigert & Bergström. This artwork features a topographic staircase overhung by glowing molecules that change color based on the next day's weather forecast. By visualizing climate data in a public space, the installation engages commuters in environmental awareness and exemplifies how art can bridge the gap between science and society.

These initiatives underscore the Public Art Agency Sweden's commitment to integrating contemporary art into public spaces, thereby enhancing community participation and fostering dialogue on pressing societal issues. By leveraging artistic methods, the agency continues to explore innovative ways to contribute to the development of both contemporary art and public environments (Public Art Agency Sweden, n.d.).

Community-Based Art Projects

In addition to national programs, local community-based art projects have played a significant role in promoting social inclusion and lifelong learning in Sweden. A notable example is the "Solar Egg" project in Kiruna, conceived by the artist duo Bigert & Bergström in collaboration with the housing developer Riksbyggen. This egg-shaped sauna, clad in reflective gold-plated stainless steel, was installed in 2017 as a response to the town's significant urban transformation due to mining activities. As Kiruna undergoes relocation to accommodate mining operations, the Solar Egg serves as both a functional sauna and a symbolic space for community gathering, reflection, and dialogue about the town's future. Its design symbolizes rebirth and new opportunities, aligning with the community's transition. The project has garnered international attention, highlighting how art can facilitate community engagement during times of change.

Beyond the Solar Egg, Sweden has implemented various community-based art initiatives aimed at fostering social inclusion. For instance, the "Art Is Happening" initiative, led by the Public Art Agency Sweden between 2016 and 2018, focused on using artistic methods to strengthen democracy and citizen inclusion in areas with low voter turnout. By engaging residents in the creation and experience of public art, the initiative sought to empower communities and enhance participation in democratic processes (Buser et al., 2023).

These projects exemplify the potential of art to create meaningful experiences that resonate with local communities, particularly during periods of social and structural change. By providing



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platforms for expression, dialogue, and collaboration, community-based art initiatives in Sweden contribute to the broader goals of social inclusion, cultural engagement, and lifelong learning.

Analysis of results and emerging trends

The case studies presented—ranging from the Arts on Prescription (AoP) program to public installations and community-based initiatives—reveal how artistic engagement strengthens social competences among adults in Sweden. These examples collectively highlight how creative expression, when embedded in social or institutional settings, can foster emotional well-being, civic participation, and interpersonal connection. Four key trends emerge:

Expression as a Foundation for Resilience and Empowerment

Across all initiatives, art enabled adults to process emotions, externalize experiences, and gain confidence through creative output. Whether in clinical settings like AoP or public spaces like the *Solar Egg*, participants reported feeling more seen, heard, and capable. These experiences not only supported mental health but also built emotional resilience—crucial for navigating personal and societal change.

Social Connection Through Shared Creative Practice

Art-making fostered environments where adults could engage in mutual storytelling, co-creation, and reflection. Community-based projects, especially *Art Is Happening* and AoP, showed that creative collaboration nurtures empathy and dismantles social barriers. These initiatives often served as bridges between individuals from different generations, cultural backgrounds, or socio-economic groups, strengthening the social fabric through dialogue and participation.

Institutional Recognition of Art's Role in Social Cohesion

There is growing support among Swedish institutions for integrating artistic methods into policy-driven programs. Projects led by the Public Art Agency Sweden reflect a strategic shift—art is no longer seen as peripheral but rather as a meaningful contributor to democratic engagement, urban development, and healthcare innovation. These programs are increasingly designed not only to reach individuals, but also to influence systems and environments that shape collective life.

3. Impact of art on digital skills in adults

In Sweden, the integration of art and digital technology serves as a powerful catalyst for enhancing digital skills among adults. Through educational reforms, community projects, and innovative programs, Sweden demonstrates how artistic engagement can lead to improved digital literacy,

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social inclusion, and lifelong learning. Continued investment in such interdisciplinary approaches will be crucial for fostering a digitally competent and culturally enriched society.

Defining digital skills in the national context:

In Sweden, digital skills are defined as the ability to use digital tools and services effectively, encompassing tasks such as information retrieval, communication, and problem-solving. These skills are crucial for participating fully in society and the workforce. The Swedish government emphasizes the development of digital competence across all levels of education and professional life (European Commission, n.d.).

As of 2024, Sweden has achieved a 66.4% basic digital skills coverage among its population, surpassing the EU average of 55.6%. This positions Sweden at 83% of the overall target for the EU 2030 goal, which aims for 80% of the EU population to possess at least basic digital skills.

Integration of Digital Media in Art Education

A case study on Swedish art education highlights the integration of digital media, noting that digital tools are time-saving, promote aesthetic aspects, and transform traditional art processes. The study emphasizes that the teaching method—shifting from a dialogic to a multivoiced approach—enables the embedded use of digital media in art education (Marner, 2013).

Artistic Activities and Digital Technology Development

A report by the European Parliamentary Research Service examines how digital technology changes are affecting artistic activity and vice versa. It emphasizes the role of digital technology in creating new forms of artistic expression and the importance of artistic activity in influencing digital technology development (Carrera et al., 2019).

Case studies and examples of good practice

The Playmäkers Project: Bridging Generations through Digital Arts in Sweden

Background and Project History

Projects like Playmäkers, a local initiative under Södertälje Municipality's Kultur 365 program, have shown that creative arts activities can be an effective means of connecting generations and promoting social inclusion (Södertälje Municipality, n.d.). Playmäkers, launched in 2007, focused on using storytelling, theatre, and physical art-making to foster intergenerational learning and engagement. Through creative collaboration across generations, Playmäkers helped bridge generational divides and provided opportunities for older adults and young people to learn from each other. The program highlighted the potential for artistic activities to serve as a common ground for communication and shared expression, contributing to stronger community ties and reduced feelings of isolation among older participants (Horwitz & Huss, 2016).

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Project Activities

The Playmåkars project, operating under Södertälje Municipality's Kultur 365 program, focused on enhancing the well-being of seniors through cultural and artistic engagement. Cultural coordinators, known as Kulturaktivitetskoordinatorer, visited care homes and day centers to facilitate activities such as music sessions, storytelling, and interactive discussions. Utilizing tools like tablets, they introduced multimedia content to evoke memories and stimulate conversations. These sessions aimed to create joyful experiences, foster social connections, and enrich the daily lives of older adults within the community.

Key Stakeholders

The Playmåkars project was coordinated by Södertälje Municipality through the Kultur 365 program, in collaboration with local community centers and cultural workers. Recruitment of participants, including both young people and older adults, was supported by community groups and local networks. Activities were led by municipal cultural coordinators with expertise in arts and community engagement, fostering creative collaboration and intergenerational learning within the local community.

Outcomes and Reports

The Playmåkars project had a significant impact on social inclusion and intergenerational engagement, particularly among older adults.

Enhancement of Social Connections: Through shared creative activities such as storytelling, theatre, and cultural sessions, Playmåkars fostered meaningful interactions between older adults and young people. Cultural coordinators facilitated spaces where participants could share memories, life experiences, and creative expressions. These interactions enhanced communication skills, empathy, and trust across generations. Participants reported feeling a stronger sense of belonging and connection to their communities, and many older adults noted a reduction in feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Support for Lifelong Learning and Well-being: The project demonstrated the value of lifelong learning through creative engagement. While Playmåkars did not primarily focus on digital literacy, it encouraged cognitive stimulation, emotional well-being, and active participation in cultural life among older adults. Creative activities helped participants remain mentally engaged and socially connected, which research shows is crucial for healthy aging. By offering new opportunities for artistic expression, the project fostered an attitude of openness toward learning and social interaction. Cognitive stimulation when engaging in the arts can provide opportunities for learning and skills development (WHO, 2021).

Cultural and Social Impact: Beyond strengthening intergenerational relationships, Playmåkars contributed to preserving personal stories and cultural heritage. Through storytelling and collaborative creative sessions, participants shared and celebrated their life experiences and

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cultural backgrounds. Although the project did not focus heavily on digital exhibitions, it had a profound impact by promoting dialogue, emotional expression, and cultural exchange within the local community.

The Playmakers project produced valuable outcomes that were shared through research and community engagement activities.

Research Report: A study by Horwitz and Huss (2016) provides insights into the Playmakers project's success in fostering intergenerational dialogue, emotional well-being, and social inclusion through arts-based activities. The report discusses the project's methods, challenges, and achievements, emphasizing the positive effects of cultural engagement across generations. It also provides interviews of the experience of the participants, valuable insights to consider when designing new initiatives.

Creative Activities and Community Sharing: Participants' creative expressions, including storytelling, performances, and artistic collaborations, were celebrated within local community centers and care facilities. These activities helped to strengthen social bonds and showcased the cultural and personal narratives of participants.

Personal Reflections: Reflections and experiences shared by participants during the project highlighted the emotional and social benefits of intergenerational interaction. These personal stories, captured through the facilitators' documentation, contributed to a deeper understanding of the project's community impact.

The Studio DöBra Project: Arts for Intergenerational Engagement and Social Cohesion

Background and Project History

The *Studio DöBra* project in Sweden represents another innovative initiative that integrates art with intergenerational engagement, focusing on addressing sensitive societal issues such as end-of-life discussions. The project used art to foster intergenerational dialogue and emotional connection among participants from different generations, particularly older adults. Digital tools were incorporated as a supplementary means to support storytelling and reflection.

Launched in 2016, *Studio DöBra* was created by a partnership between Swedish arts organizations, healthcare institutions, and local community centers. The project aimed to address the often-taboo topic of death and end-of-life care through the medium of art. It used creative workshops where children, adults, and seniors collaborated on art-based activities such as sculpture, painting, and digital storytelling, all of which provided a means to reflect on life, death, and memory.

The project was designed to engage participants in a multi-generational environment, allowing for mutual support and communication about sensitive subjects in an open, artistic space. Over time,

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Studio DöBra expanded its activities to include digital art forms such as interactive video storytelling, where participants could create digital narratives based on their experiences.

Project Activities

The *Studio DöBra* project offered a variety of creative and digital activities aimed at fostering both emotional expression and technological engagement:

Art-based workshops: Participants worked on projects like painting, clay sculpture, and photography. These activities provided a therapeutic outlet for addressing grief, life stories, and shared experiences, which helped in the emotional healing process.

Collaborative exhibitions: The final artworks, including both physical and digital creations, were displayed in local community spaces and museums. These exhibitions gave participants an opportunity to share their work and reflections with the public, creating a platform for broader community dialogue.

Intergenerational dialogue sessions: Throughout the project, structured dialogue sessions allowed participants to discuss their creations and life experiences. These conversations helped bridge generational divides, facilitated mutual learning, and encouraged respect and empathy.

Key Stakeholders

Local healthcare institutions, particularly those dealing with palliative care and geriatric services, played an essential role in providing the context and support for involving seniors in the project. Community centers: These local hubs hosted the workshops, ensuring that participants from various backgrounds could access and engage with the program.

Outcomes and Reports

Studio DöBra Toolbox: One of the primary digital resources created was the toolbox, which consolidates various materials and methodologies from the project. This toolbox is freely available online and serves as a comprehensive guide for educators, healthcare providers, and community organizers interested in implementing similar intergenerational arts initiatives. It includes instructions, templates, and insights drawn from the project's experiences, aiming to support others in fostering meaningful dialogues around death and loss through creative expression (DöBra, n.d.)

Digital version of the DöBra cards: This tool was originally designed to prompt discussions about end-of-life preferences. This digital adaptation was co-created with community partners to ensure its relevance and user-friendliness for a broad Swedish public. The digital tool was tested with



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individuals and caregivers, some affected by dementia, to evaluate its effectiveness in supporting reflection and conversation about future end-of-life care ((DöBra, n.d.)

Short films: Furthermore, the project produced short films to artistically and emotionally convey how the DöBra cards can be used to support conversations about future end-of-life care. These films were created in collaboration with researchers and filmmakers and were made available online to reach a wider audience, including health and social care staff, managers, older people, and relatives (Kleijberg, 2023). Through these digital platforms, the Studio DöBra project has successfully extended its impact beyond its initial participants, providing resources that can be utilized by various stakeholders to engage in meaningful conversations about end-of-life issues.

Development of Digital Skills: While Studio DöBra incorporated digital elements such as digital storytelling and online resources like the Studio DöBra Toolbox and DöBra Cards, the project's primary focus was on fostering intergenerational dialogue about end-of-life issues through artistic expression. Although some participants engaged with digital platforms during the project, developing digital skills was not a core objective. Instead, digital tools served as a supplementary means to enhance reflection, storytelling, and accessibility. (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2019).

Social and Emotional Benefits: One of the significant outcomes of the project was the creation of a safe space for intergenerational dialogue about life and death. The act of creating art together facilitated emotional expression and provided a non-judgmental platform for participants to reflect on their experiences. Older adults, in particular, reported feeling more connected to younger generations, and the project significantly reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness. Moreover, the opportunity to collaborate with younger participants led to increased empathy and understanding across generations.

Fostering Community Cohesion: *Studio DöBra* also contributed to strengthening community ties. By bringing together participants from different walks of life—young people, adults, and seniors—the project created a more cohesive social fabric. The art exhibitions and public discussions allowed the broader community to engage with the stories and works created during the project, fostering greater mutual respect and awareness of the challenges older adults face.

Final report : This highlights the project outcomes, which includes feedback from participants and an overview of the digital art produced, can be accessed on the project's website (Studio DöBra, n.d.).

Interviews and personal stories shared by participants were published on the project's website, allowing the public to better understand the human side of the art created in the context of end-of-life conversations (Studio DöBra, n.d.).

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Digital Humanities Initiatives:

Swedish universities have been at the forefront of integrating digital humanities into their curricula, merging digital technologies with arts and humanities education. These initiatives foster interdisciplinary learning and contribute to the development of digital and social skills among adults.

For instance, Uppsala University offers a Master's Programme in Digital Humanities, providing students with computational methods to analyze, organize, and visualize digital and digitized materials. The program emphasizes critical evaluation of digital technologies and their impact on society and culture. Students engage in courses covering digitization, digital preservation, and the use of digital tools in humanities research. The program also offers opportunities for practical application through projects and collaborations with cultural heritage institutions. (MastersPortal, n.d.).

Similarly, Linnaeus University offers a two-year Master's Programme in Digital Humanities, focusing on the application of digital methods and technologies in humanities research. The program aims to foster an understanding of digital transformation across cultural and academic sectors. It is closely linked to the university's research initiatives and collaborates with international organizations to enhance educational and research opportunities (Linnaeus University, n.d.).

The University of Gothenburg hosts the Gothenburg Research Infrastructure in Digital Humanities (GRIDH), a research node focusing on artificial intelligence, archives, and novel ways of documenting and publishing. GRIDH aims to unify expertise, enhance education, and strengthen research opportunities across the university and beyond (University of Gothenburg, n.d.). The Key stakeholders include the University of Gothenburg: Hosts and administers GRIDH and collaborating research experts from various disciplines including literature, data science, and AI. GRIDH homepage shares all research projects and publications (University of Gothenburg Digital Humanities Hub, n.d.).

Umeå University has established a strong foundation in digital humanities, with research and teaching directed towards digital methods, digital practices, pedagogical development, and art. The university's initiatives aim to integrate digital tools and methods into humanities research and education (Umeå University, n.d.).

Analysis of results and emerging trends

The initiatives reviewed in this chapter highlight the multiple pathways through which art contributes to the development of digital and social skills in adults. Both community-based programs like Playmåkars and Studio DöBra, and university-led initiatives in digital humanities, demonstrate how artistic expression fosters engagement, learning, and inclusion.

Enhanced Digital Literacy through Artistic Engagement

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While university programs focused on advanced digital competencies—such as archiving, visualization, and AI integration—community-based projects like Studio DöBra also introduced digital tools through storytelling and collaborative reflection. These tools, although not the core focus, provided participants—especially older adults—with meaningful, accessible entry points into the digital realm.

Notably, higher education initiatives also foster critical reflection, cultural engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration—essential skills for navigating and shaping a digitized society.

Promotion of Lifelong Learning

All cases demonstrate the value of creative engagement as a driver of lifelong learning. At the community level, Playmäckers encouraged seniors to remain mentally and socially active, while university programs supported formal skill-building through interdisciplinary education. These approaches reflect Sweden's broader strategy of ensuring that adults remain adaptable and engaged in a digital society.

Social Inclusion and Community Building

A consistent trend across all examples is the use of art to strengthen social bonds. Playmäckers and Studio DöBra both promoted intergenerational connection and reduced isolation through shared creative processes. Similarly, digital humanities programs often link learners with cultural institutions, promoting collaboration and social awareness across generations and disciplines.

Art as a Driver and Reflector of Digital Transformation

As noted by the European Parliamentary Research Service, artistic activity not only adapts to technology—it helps shape it. GRIDH at the University of Gothenburg exemplifies how interdisciplinary art-based research contributes to digital innovation. Meanwhile, grassroots initiatives use digital media to preserve narratives, expand access, and support inclusion—especially among those traditionally excluded from tech-focused spaces.

In sum, Sweden's experience shows that both grassroots and institutional efforts offer structured, inclusive pathways for adults to develop digital and social competencies. Community projects provide emotionally resonant, collaborative learning experiences, while universities contribute research-driven education that bridges technical skills with cultural understanding. Together, they reflect a holistic, transdisciplinary vision for digital inclusion in adult learning.

4. Innovative approaches and methodologies

Sweden stands at the forefront of integrating art and technology within education, leveraging its robust digital infrastructure and progressive educational policies. This integration seeks not only to

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bridge the digital divide but also to cultivate creative expression and prepare learners for a dynamic, technology-driven world. The following initiatives exemplify Sweden's commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and future-readiness through the fusion of art and digital tools.

Programs and Initiatives that Integrate Art and Technology

Kulturskolan Stockholm – Digital School of the Arts

Kulturskolan Stockholm, Sweden's largest youth art school, has launched the Digital School of the Arts to democratize access to arts education. Serving over 17,000 learners aged 6 to 22, it offers courses in game development, film and music production, podcasting, and virtual reality. By adopting a hybrid delivery model, the program broadens participation and enhances digital fluency among both students and educators (World Cities Culture Forum, 2024). This model exemplifies how digital technology can reduce geographic and socioeconomic barriers in creative education.

RATS Theatre – Research in Arts and Technology in Society

Established in 2008, RATS Theatre—part of Stockholm University's Department of Computer and Systems Sciences—bridges the worlds of art, research, and public dialogue. Its digital productions across web, mobile, and public platforms encourage audience co-creation and critical reflection. Through this work, RATS fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and positions art as a medium for engaging citizens in societal questions, while also advancing digital literacies (Stockholm University, 2019).

Digital Tools and Platforms for Art-Based Learning

Sigtunaskolan Humanistiska Läroverket (SSHL) – The Digital Art Studio

Although targeted at youth aged 7–17, the Digital Art Studio at SSHL offers relevant pedagogical insights for adult learning. Early exposure to arts integrated with digital tools nurtures habits of lifelong learning and creative digital expression that can be extended into adulthood. Launched in 2020, this initiative equips students with skills in visual communication, 3D modeling, photography, and digital storytelling—skills transferable to various fields of study and work.

Background and Rationale

SSHL's commitment to embedding arts education despite its non-mandatory status in Swedish high schools reflects a progressive stance on transdisciplinary learning. By integrating digital tools like iPads, design apps, and 3D printing equipment, the program helps students move beyond traditional forms of art, engaging them in meaningful, multimodal creation. This early foundation lays the groundwork for confidence in digital contexts, an essential quality for future adult learners.

Key Stakeholders

The initiative is supported by SSHL itself along with private donors. Their partnership has provided the physical and technological infrastructure required to sustain this innovative approach.

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Outcomes and Reflections

Students report increased self-esteem and motivation, linked to their ability to express themselves through contemporary digital mediums. The school has positioned digital art as both a learning tool and a professional asset, preparing students for evolving demands in creative industries.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of These Approaches

Enhanced Digital Competence

Programs like Kulturskolan and SSKL have proven effective in improving digital literacy by embedding practical, hands-on digital engagement into creative education. They foster confidence in navigating technology while building creative capacity.

Increased Accessibility and Inclusivity

Hybrid and tech-enabled learning models broaden access to high-quality arts education. These approaches reach marginalized groups and diversify the types of learners who can benefit from structured creative learning environments (World Cities Culture Forum, 2024).

Fostering Innovation and Critical Thinking

Through experimental formats, RATS Theatre and other initiatives demonstrate that artistic expression is a pathway to public innovation. By encouraging co-creation and public participation, these programs support critical engagement and societal reflection through art (Stockholm University, 2019).

5. Challenges and Opportunities

Barriers to Implementing Art-Based Programs

While Sweden's integration of art into education, healthcare, and digital skills development has shown promising outcomes, there are several barriers to the widespread implementation of art-based programs.

A key barrier is funding and resource constraints: Many art-based initiatives, especially those that integrate digital tools or are designed to promote social inclusion, are often project-based and time-limited. This leads to sustainability challenges, as long-term funding is necessary for the continuity and expansion of such programs. Given that they include transdisciplinary teams, the budget also requires engaging a large team of experts to deliver the projects. Many programs, such as the *Studio DöBra* and *Digital Art Studio* at SSKL, rely on grants from government agencies, private donors, or cultural institutions. These funding sources are often limited and competitive. Smaller projects, especially those aimed at marginalized or older populations, may struggle to



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secure sustainable funding. In the case of *Studio DöBra*, for example, while the project received initial backing from cultural institutions and healthcare providers, ongoing financial support remains a challenge, particularly for scaling the initiative to other regions in Sweden. Without continuous financial investment, projects may lack the resources to maintain their technological infrastructure, artistic materials, or staff, which can hinder their long-term success.

Another barrier is access and inclusivity: Despite Sweden's progress, certain groups, particularly marginalized communities, still face barriers to accessing art-based education and cultural activities. This includes physical, geographical, and digital access challenges, particularly in rural areas. An aspect of accessibility that is particularly relevant in this context, is the technological accessibility and digital divide: Despite Sweden's reputation for high digital engagement, access to technology can still be a significant barrier. Many art-based programs, especially those that incorporate digital tools, require participants to have access to computers, software, and reliable internet connections. Older adults, individuals in rural areas, or those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may have limited access to these technologies, which can create a barrier to participation. For example, in *Studio DöBra*, while digital art and storytelling were key components, not all participants had prior experience with technology. The initial learning curve for older adults, who may not be as digitally literate, can be a challenge. Although workshops were designed to be accessible, the effectiveness of digital tools depends largely on participants' prior knowledge and comfort with technology.

A huge barrier is resistance to change and societal perception. In some educational contexts, there remains resistance to incorporating non-traditional methods like digital or interdisciplinary arts. This is often due to a lack of familiarity with the benefits of arts education and an emphasis on more conventional academic disciplines. While there are existing policies, initiatives and case studies that point toward positive outcomes, the field is relatively new and requires more research and evaluation. A connected and significant challenge is the perception of art-based programs, especially those aimed at adults. In some societal contexts, art and creativity may still be seen as primarily for children or hobbyists, rather than valuable tools for lifelong learning and professional development. Adults who are looking to develop new skills may perceive art-based programs as recreational rather than as essential means of social and digital skills development. However, the stigma against adult participation in "creative" education is still a barrier that may need further societal shift.

Connected to resistance to change, many initiatives also face institutional resistance, based on the educational structure: The Swedish education system, while progressive, can sometimes present institutional resistance to integrating art-based programs into mainstream adult education. Many educational institutions prioritize more traditional, academic programs, leaving limited space for creative courses. The success of *Uppsala University's* Master's Programme in Digital Humanities, which integrates technology with humanities and arts, is a notable example of overcoming this resistance. However, this remains an exception rather than the norm. Integrating art into formal



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curricula, especially in universities and adult education institutions, often requires challenging the traditional notions of what constitutes valuable education. While there is growing recognition of the importance of digital competencies, traditional art education is sometimes seen as less essential in preparing students for the job market, particularly in non-urban areas.

Potential Mitigation Solutions and Strategies

To overcome these barriers, the case studies and examples highlighted in this research provide a few strategies which can already support in overcoming barriers.

One approach is to secure long-term funding and support through public-private partnerships, along with EU funding programs. This can be leveraged to provide sustainable financial backing for art-based programs. Additionally, integrating art more directly into national policy frameworks could ensure better allocation of resources. Integrating public companies or organizations who wish to foster talent or require social and digital skills could play a crucial role in designing mutually beneficial projects which they finance in order to prepare their companies and employees for the future.

To work with accessibility, expanding digital access by ensuring that digital tools and platforms are accessible to all, including those in rural or marginalized communities, will be crucial. This can be achieved by providing subsidized internet access, offering digital literacy training, and developing mobile-friendly platforms for remote participation. Several models are used in the case studies and innovative approaches, as well as hybrid scenarios which include onsite engagement at crucial junctures but not during the entire project.

By advocating for policy reform in education and encouraging policymakers to recognize the value of art-based learning as part of a holistic educational approach could lead to reforms that incorporate creative expression and digital skills into all areas of education. While social and digital skills are already part of Swedish policy, as are inclusion and life long learning and the arts, uniting these topics through an integrative policy could bolster support for more holistic programming. This can also provide a stronger connection between the arts and skill-based outcomes, expanding and enriching the field of study.

Opportunities for Future Development and Expansion of These Approaches

There are several opportunities for the future growth of art-based programs.

One opportunity is how to leverage government support and policy: Sweden's government is committed to promoting arts and culture, and there is a growing recognition of the role that art can play in social and educational development. This is reflected in various national policies and funding programs that support cultural and digital literacy initiatives, such as those by the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society. As highlighted in the case studies, *Studio DöBra* and other initiatives have benefited from collaborations with these

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government-funded cultural organization. Moreover, Sweden's strong commitment to digital inclusion presents an opportunity to incorporate art-based programs that emphasize digital literacy. Programs like *Studio DöBra* and the *Digital Art Studio* at SSHL can be expanded if they align with national goals of bridging the digital divide and promoting intergenerational learning.

A key opportunity is interdisciplinary collaboration. The intersection of art with digital technology, mental health, and social inclusion presents an opportunity for further collaboration across sectors. Interdisciplinary projects can integrate technology, education, and the arts to create more inclusive and innovative programs. This is evident from the research gathered from both case studies and universities, who engage partners from various backgrounds and disciplines to approach their work

Another opportunity is global knowledge sharing: Sweden can act as a leader in the field of arts and technology integration by sharing successful models and frameworks with other countries. This could lead to international collaboration and expanded cultural exchange.

Growing interest in digital transformation and innovation: The rise of digital platforms, tools, and social media presents an exciting opportunity for art-based programs to incorporate new technologies and digital skills. The digital world has opened new creative possibilities for artistic expression, from virtual galleries to interactive art experiences and online exhibitions. This digital transformation is particularly valuable in reaching non-traditional students, including older adults and individuals in remote areas, who may not otherwise have access to physical art spaces. For example, the *Digital Art Studio* at SSHL exemplifies how digital platforms can facilitate creative exploration. By providing adult learners with access to industry-standard design software and digital media, these programs offer a unique chance to develop both digital and creative skills, equipping individuals with competencies that are highly relevant in today's job market.

Intergenerational Engagement is a key opportunity. Art-based programs that focus on intergenerational learning, such as *Studio DöBra*, offer a unique opportunity to bring together diverse groups to foster mutual understanding and share knowledge. The Swedish model of intergenerational collaboration through art and digital storytelling can contribute to strengthening community cohesion and tackling issues such as social isolation, especially among older adults. By bridging generational divides, art-based initiatives can create shared spaces for dialogue, emotional expression, and creative exchange, which can be especially valuable for marginalized or isolated groups. Projects like *Playmåkars* have shown that digital arts can be an effective means of connecting generations, enhancing digital literacy, and promoting social inclusion.

Another key opportunity is expanding access through digital platforms: Online learning platforms, virtual workshops, and digital communities provide an excellent opportunity for expanding art-based programs across Sweden. Especially in rural areas or for people with mobility challenges, digital art education can become an accessible way to develop both digital skills and creative

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talents. The use of technology, as demonstrated in the case studies, can expand the reach of art-based programs, allowing for hybrid models of education that combine both face-to-face interaction and online resources. Digital art education is particularly beneficial in reaching adult learners who may not have the time or resources to attend traditional brick-and-mortar classes.

In conclusion, the implementation of art-based programs in Sweden, particularly those aimed at developing social and digital skills in adults, faces several barriers including resource limitations, technological accessibility, societal perceptions, and institutional resistance. However, these challenges also present opportunities to integrate art into the broader educational and social frameworks of Sweden. Through strategic support from government policies, digital innovation, and a focus on intergenerational learning, these programs can foster a more inclusive, creative, and digitally skilled society. The case studies shared earlier demonstrate both the challenges and successes in implementing these types of programs and show how art can serve as a powerful tool for personal development and community engagement.

By understanding and addressing these barriers, Sweden can continue to lead the way in promoting the value of art in adult education and contribute to the social and digital empowerment of its citizens.

6. Recommendations

The national context of Sweden's policies and programs related to adult education and the initiatives and cases provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing art-based programs aimed at developing social and digital skills in adults. Based on these findings, the following recommendations have been developed for policymakers, educators, trainers, and cultural institutions to foster a more inclusive, innovative, and impactful art-based educational environment.

For Policymakers

1. Prioritize art-based learning connected to key skill building in National Education Policy

Policymakers can continue to integrate arts into national curricula at all levels, emphasizing its critical role in developing essential skills like creativity, empathy, and digital literacy. All of these skills are relevant for national education policy given their ability to foster skills required to build a healthy sustainable society. As seen in the case of the *Master's Programme in Digital Humanities* at Uppsala University and *Studio DöBra*, art-based programs can foster interdisciplinary learning and equip individuals with the digital tools they need to thrive in a digital society (Uppsala University, n.d.; Studio DöBra, n.d.). As mentioned in the SSHL case, integrating art based learning into youth

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learning on a national level can provide a sustainable basis for continuing life long learning and adult education. Ensuring that arts-based programs receive adequate funding, consistent policy support, and alignment with digital skills initiatives will promote lifelong learning and social cohesion. Prioritizing art in policy also reinforces Sweden's commitment to enhancing cultural literacy, social engagement, and mental well-being, key elements that support a more inclusive and equitable society (European Commission, n.d.).

2. Promote Public-Private Partnerships to address skill gaps and secure funding

Encouraging collaborations between public institutions, private enterprises, and cultural organizations is essential for providing financial resources and technological infrastructure for art-based programs. Partnerships can address the digital divide, a critical barrier highlighted in programs like *Digital Art Studio* at SSHL, where access to technology played a role in ensuring inclusive participation (Sigtunaskolan Humanistiska Läroverket [SSHL], 2020). Collaborative efforts can secure the necessary funding and tech support to facilitate the scaling and sustainability of initiatives. This strategy would also foster innovation by combining the strengths of both public funding and private sector expertise in digital tools and platforms. Additionally, public-private partnerships create targeted programs aimed at addressing skill gaps in industry, providing an innovative approach for supporting adult learners to upskill for the labor market.

3. Support Rural and Marginalized Communities to foster social inclusion

To ensure that art-based programs reach all segments of society, particularly underrepresented groups, policies should focus on tailored strategies that serve rural populations, older adults, and marginalized communities. Sweden has made strides in this area through initiatives like *Playmåkars*, which targeted intergenerational engagement to bridge gaps between younger and older populations (Horwitz&Huss, 2016).. Extending similar programs to rural or economically disadvantaged areas could reduce social isolation, increase digital literacy, and empower underserved populations through creative expression. As highlighted in the *Studio DöBra* case study, art can serve as a vehicle for addressing sensitive issues like end-of-life care, thus fostering deeper social connections and community support.

For Educators and Trainers

1. Embrace Transdisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches for skill building

Educators can continue integrating arts into broader curricula, combining creative expression with subjects such as digital literacy, social studies, and health education. Programs like *Digital Media Embedded in Swedish Art Education* demonstrate how integrating digital media in art education fosters creativity and critical thinking skills (Marner, 2013). By offering interdisciplinary learning experiences, educators can enhance student engagement while developing the versatile skills

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needed in today's dynamic job market. The cases provided in this paper, alongside the digital initiatives in universities, provide compelling examples of how interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research can build both social and digital skills. Such initiatives connect partners from different members of society with different backgrounds, fostering inclusion and learning across sectors.

2. Leverage Digital Platforms for Learning to increase access

Encouraging the use of online and hybrid learning models is crucial for expanding access to art-based education. This approach is particularly beneficial for adult learners who may face barriers to traditional classroom participation. The digital aspect of the *Digital Art Studio* and the *Playmakers* project shows how online platforms and virtual workshops can overcome geographical and logistical challenges (Sigtunaskolan Humanistiska Läroverket, 2020; Digital Commons, n.d.). Virtual spaces provide flexible opportunities for adults to engage in creative processes, gain digital skills, and connect with others. Therefore, it is essential that educational institutions support and incentivize the adoption of digital platforms for art-based learning. Many cases are based on in-person art-based programs. However, these can be integrated and expanded to include online art methods or guided practices where learners can learn from their home environments.

3. Focus on Lifelong Learning across age groups

Art-based programs should not be limited to traditional educational age groups. There is significant opportunity to expand these programs to adults, especially for workforce development, digital skills training, and social inclusion initiatives. Programs like the Master's Programme in Digital Humanities at Uppsala University, which offers adult learners the chance to explore digital tools through the lens of the humanities, serve as excellent models (Uppsala University, n.d.). Expanding such opportunities to other institutions can help adults improve both their digital literacy and their creative capacities, contributing to personal growth and community development. Several of the case studies, especially the Studio DoBra case, highlight the benefits of intergenerational learning, which can enhance adult learning and foster inclusion.

For Cultural and Artistic Institutions

1. Foster Collaboration with Educational and Social Sectors

Cultural institutions should form stronger collaborations with educational organizations and social providers to create interdisciplinary programs that promote arts education, mental well-being, and social inclusion. This approach could benefit not only adult learners but also vulnerable groups, including older adults and those with mental health challenges. Projects like Studio DöBra have demonstrated how art can be a tool for addressing end-of-life issues and fostering emotional well-being (Studio DöBra, n.d.). Encouraging more partnerships with healthcare providers could



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help expand the social and therapeutic potential of art, especially for marginalized communities. The cases in this study work with the health sector, however, this research could be expanded to work with other sectors within Swedish society.

2. Expand Community-Based Art Initiatives

Cultural institutions should focus on expanding community-based art initiatives that encourage local engagement and address the specific needs of communities. These initiatives could include public art installations, collaborative workshops, and art therapy sessions aimed at fostering community cohesion. Programs like *Playmåkars*, which bring different generations together through creative activities, highlight how art can facilitate social inclusion and break down generational divides (Digital Commons, n.d.). By engaging communities in these creative processes, cultural institutions can help strengthen the fabric of society while promoting positive social interaction. Particularly in Sweden, where nonformal education, clubs and hobbies play a crucial role in society, initiatives that focus on community and informal settings can be easily integrated into existing cultural norms.

3. Invest in Digital Tools for Artistic Expression

Investing in digital tools that enable artistic expression should be a priority for cultural institutions. Providing access to software, digital platforms, and interactive tools will allow individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in creative activities. As seen in the Digital Art Studio at SSSL, providing access to industry-standard design tools can encourage creativity while simultaneously improving participants' digital literacy (Sigtunaskolan Humanistiska Läroverket, 2020). Offering online resources and virtual workshops can extend the reach of these programs to individuals who may not have access to traditional art spaces, thus broadening participation in cultural activities.

By implementing these recommendations, Sweden can continue to build on its strong foundation of integrating art into education, fostering an inclusive society that values creativity, digital literacy, and lifelong learning. The case studies discussed demonstrate that art-based programs are powerful tools for developing social and digital skills in adults, especially when they are thoughtfully integrated into educational and community frameworks. Moving forward, strategic collaboration between policymakers, educators, cultural institutions, and communities will be essential to overcoming existing challenges and leveraging the opportunities that art-based programs offer for adult development and social inclusion.



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Conclusion and Future research areas

This paper provides literature review to explore the landscape of how arts foster digital and social skills in adults in Sweden. This research will contribute to the project's joint aim to identify skill gaps in Europe, which guide us toward developing courses and modules for future development.

This report will be combined with research from Italy and Romania to identify needed skills and modules. These modules will be further developed and delivered following the project partners meeting in June 2024.

The research has already identified several key stakeholders who would be crucial to consult. These stakeholders are involved in various sectors related to arts, education, digital technologies, health, and social inclusion. Future research can continue to refine and build this list based on the initial stakeholder meeting.

Cultural and Art Institutions

Swedish Arts Council (Kulturrådet)

The Swedish Arts Council is responsible for supporting and promoting arts and culture in Sweden. They fund cultural projects and initiatives and would be a vital resource for understanding the government's role in supporting art-based programs and their impact on adults.

Public Art Agency Sweden (Statens konstråd)

This agency is responsible for integrating art into public spaces and initiatives. They run projects like "Arts on Prescription," which could provide insight into how art contributes to social and emotional skills.

Kulturskolan Stockholm (Digital School of the Arts)

A significant provider of arts education, Kulturskolan focuses on integrating digital skills within artistic training for young people. They could offer valuable insights into how digital arts programs are fostering social and digital competencies in adults.

2. Educational Institutions

Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket)

Skolverket provides guidance and policy development on education in Sweden, including adult education. Their perspectives could offer valuable insights into how the Swedish education system integrates arts education to support social and digital skills development.

Universities and Digital Humanities Programs, Uppsala University



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Uppsala's Digital Humanities Master's program combines arts and digital technologies, making it a relevant institution to consult for research on integrating digital skills with art-based learning. Website: Uppsala University Digital Humanities

Linnaeus University

With its focus on digital humanities, Linnaeus University could offer insight into how higher education programs that combine digital technologies with art can enhance social and digital skills among adults.

Health and Social Welfare Organizations

Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen)

They focus on social and health policies in Sweden, and their input could be critical for understanding how art-based programs like "Arts on Prescription" impact social and mental health outcomes for adults.

Arts on Prescription (AoP) Program Coordinators

The AoP program is a key initiative linking arts with mental health and social inclusion in Sweden. Those coordinating AoP programs would be an essential stakeholder in understanding how arts initiatives support social skills and well-being. Relevant contacts: Local healthcare providers and municipal arts coordinators

Digital and Technology-Focused Organizations

Swedish Agency for Digital Government (DIGG)

DIGG is responsible for digital policy and strategies in Sweden, including digital skills development. They could offer insights into the intersection of digital skills and art education.

RATS Theatre (Research in Arts and Technology in Society)

As an organization that bridges art and technology, RATS Theatre would be a valuable source of information about how digital tools in art are contributing to adult digital skills development. Website: RATS Theatre

Playmåkars Project Coordinators

Playmåkars, a project utilizing digital arts to engage different generations, would provide insights into how art and digital technology can foster intergenerational learning and digital literacy.

Local Government and Municipalities

Stockholm Municipality



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As the home to major art and cultural programs, including those focusing on digital and social skills, Stockholm's local government is a key player in promoting art-based social and digital initiatives for adults.

Lund Municipality – Digital Art and Social Inclusion Initiatives

Known for various cultural and educational initiatives, Lund could provide insights into local arts programs designed to promote digital and social skills in communities.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

The Swedish Association for Culture and Learning (Svenska kultur- och lärandeförbundet)

This organization works to connect culture, education, and lifelong learning, making it a relevant stakeholder for understanding how arts education can support adult learning and social skills development.

Folkbildningsförbundet (The Swedish Adult Education Association)

Folkbildningsförbundet advocates for non-formal adult education, including arts-based learning. They can offer valuable information about adult education programs that integrate art, digital skills, and social development.

These stakeholders represent a broad spectrum of sectors involved in arts, education, digital technology, and social welfare in Sweden. By consulting them, you can gain valuable insights into how art-based initiatives are impacting the development of social and digital skills among adults in Sweden. Their input will also help you understand the challenges, opportunities, and best practices related to integrating art into adult education and community-building programs.



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