



EVERYDAY CREATIVITY AS A SOCIOCULTURAL VALUE: STABILITY, SOCIAL DIVIDES, AND CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATION IN EUROPE

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Abstract. This study examines everyday creativity as a sociocultural value orientation across European societies, conceptualizing creativity not only as an individual capacity but also as a culturally embedded framework. Drawing on longitudinal and comparative data from the European Social Survey, it investigates cross-national variation in the valuation of everyday creativity, its stability or change over time, and its sociodemographic structuring. The results reveal persistent cross-national differences in creativity values and the absence of a uniform temporal trend. Although everyday creativity is widely valued across Europe, the extent to which it is socially structured varies substantially between societies.

Keywords: everyday creativity, creative values, cross-national comparison, European Social Survey, sociocultural context.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, creativity has become a central concept in academic research, public discourse, and policy debates. Alongside growing interest in creative industries and professional creativity, increasing attention has been devoted to everyday creativity, understood as the capacity to generate original and meaningful ideas, solutions, and perspectives in the course of daily activities (Boden, 2004; Richards, 2007). This broader perspective challenges elite and product-focused conceptions of creativity and emphasizes its relevance beyond artistic or occupational domains.

Despite a rich body of everyday creativity research, empirical studies have predominantly focused on individual-level constructs such as creative performance, creative self-efficacy, or personality characteristics. Comparatively little attention has been paid to creativity as a value orientation, that is, as a normative dimension shaping attitudes toward originality, autonomy, and innovation across societies. Yet values play a crucial role in structuring social expectations and guiding everyday practices, making them a key analytical entry point for understanding how creativity is distributed and sustained within different cultural contexts. Creativity is thus increasingly conceptualized not merely as an individual cognitive ability or personality trait, but as a phenomenon embedded in social and cultural contexts.

Against this background, the present study examines everyday creativity as a sociocultural value orientation across European societies. Drawing on comparative and longitudinal data from the European Social Survey (ESS) (2026) (2002–2024), the article addresses three core

questions: 1) how European societies differ in the value they attribute to everyday creativity; 2) whether this orientation has changed over time; and 3) how it is structured by key sociodemographic characteristics. By focusing on creative values rather than creative performance, the study contributes to ongoing debates in creativity research by highlighting the cultural stability, social differentiation, and contextual embeddedness of creativity in contemporary Europe.

2. Theoretical framework: a sociocultural conceptualization of everyday creativity

This article adopts a sociocultural understanding of creativity, focusing specifically on everyday creativity. Everyday creativity is defined here as a universal and multifaceted human capacity, linked to conscious intentionality and value orientations, that enables individuals to generate original and valuable ideas, unexpected solutions, or alternative perspectives, and to respond to everyday life situations in flexible, innovative, and meaningful ways. This definition deliberately moves beyond narrow, product-oriented or elite-focused conceptions of creativity and situates creative action within the ordinary practices of everyday life. A useful conceptual framework that helps to situate everyday creativity within a broader continuum of creative expression is provided by the four-C model of creativity proposed by Kaufman and Beghetto (2009), which distinguishes between 1) big-C creativity (eminent creative achievements), 2) pro-C creativity (professional-level creativity), 3) little-C creativity (everyday problem-solving and personal creative expression), and 4) mini-C creativity (personally meaningful interpretive processes involved in learning and sense-making). In contrast to traditional notions of creativity associated with exceptional achievements in science, art, or technology, everyday creativity corresponds primarily to the little-C level and refers to small-scale acts of originality embedded in routine activities of daily life such as problem-solving at home or work, organizing social interactions in novel ways, or expressing oneself through informal cultural practices.

For much of the 20th century, creativity research was dominated by psychological approaches emphasizing individual traits and cognitive abilities (Feist, 1998; Guilford, 1950). While these perspectives yielded important insights, they largely detached creativity from its social and cultural contexts. Subsequent interdisciplinary developments reframed creativity as a contextual phenomenon emerging from interactions between individuals and their social environments. Sociological and cultural theories, in particular, emphasize the embeddedness of creativity in social structures, institutional arrangements, and shared meanings, highlighting its operation at both individual and collective levels (Howkins, 2001; Reckwitz, 2017). Two interrelated considerations follow from this perspective. First, creativity is historically and culturally variable: what is considered creative or valuable changes in response to dominant cultural assumptions and societal needs (Sawyer & Henriksen, 2023). Second, sociocultural environments can both enable and constrain creativity. Through education systems, organizational practices, and prevailing value orientations, societies define which ideas are legitimized and which forms of creative expression are encouraged or marginalized (Lubart et al., 2019; Simonton, 2003). This view resonates with the systems perspective advanced by Csikszentmihalyi (1997), who argues that creativity cannot be adequately understood as an isolated personal trait but must be analysed within social fields that define standards of recognition and value.

Existing research suggests that everyday creativity is a multidimensional construct encompassing several closely related, yet analytically distinct, dimensions. First, creative values refer to normative orientations that define creativity as desirable and socially meaningful, shaping what is perceived as worth doing or pursuing creatively (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Second, creative personal identity captures the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as creative persons and integrate creativity into their self-concept (Karwowski et al., 2018). Third, creative self-efficacy denotes confidence in one's creative abilities and capacity to develop creatively over time (Beghetto & Karwowski, 2017; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Finally, creative performance refers to the actual enactment of creativity in everyday practices (Richards, 2007). These dimensions reinforce one another but remain conceptually distinct, each contributing differently to the overall expression of creativity.

The empirical focus of the present study is value orientation toward creativity, understood as the cultural and normative foundation of everyday creativity. Sociocultural theories emphasize that creativity as an orientation toward originality, autonomy, and innovation does not emerge in a normative vacuum. The conditions for creative expression are formed within cultural environments where creativity is embedded in social norms, socialization practices, and everyday expectations (Glăveanu, 2016; Hofstede, 2001). Within everyday life, value orientation toward creativity is expressed through attitudes that prioritize generating new ideas, seeking novel experiences, making autonomous decisions about how to act, and being open to experimentation or risk in ordinary situations. Value orientation toward creativity is closely associated with dispositions such as openness to new ideas, curiosity, flexibility, and tolerance for uncertainty, risk, and failure (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Thus, analysing value orientation toward creativity provides a crucial entry point for understanding how everyday creativity is socially patterned and culturally sustained.

3. Objective and method of the study

Despite the growing prominence of creativity in policy and educational discourses, little is known about its status as a cultural value across European societies. This article examines cross-national variation in value orientation toward creativity, its temporal dynamics, and the extent to which it is structured by sociodemographic divides. The analysis draws on data from the ESS, rounds 1–11 (2002 to 2024) (ESS Data Portal, 2026a). The sample includes 26 European countries representing four regions: Northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom), Southern Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain), and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia).

Value orientation toward creativity is operationalized using four items from the Schwartz portrait values questionnaire (Schwartz, 1992) embedded in the self-direction and stimulation value domains. These items capture the importance of generating new ideas, seeking novelty, autonomy in decision-making, and willingness to take risks on a six-point scale, which is reverse coded so that higher scores indicate a stronger orientation toward creativity. An index is constructed by averaging the four items, yielding a scale ranging from 1 (lowest) to

6 (highest). It is important to note that this index captures a specific normative conception of creativity centred on autonomy, novelty seeking, and risk orientation, rather than the full spectrum of domain-specific everyday creative practices, which may vary across social groups, including by gender.

The analysis controls for age, gender, educational attainment, and household income. Gender is coded as 1 = male and 2 = female. Education is classified into seven categories following the ESS–International Standard Classification of Education framework, and household income is measured in deciles. The analytical strategy combines descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate methods. All analyses were conducted using *International Business Machines Corporation SPSS*.

4. Value orientation toward creativity at the country level

The first research question concerns the extent to which European societies converge or diverge in the value they attribute to everyday creativity. Country-level mean scores presented in Table 1 reveal persistent cross-national differences in value orientation toward creativity. These differences remain visible over more than two decades, with their statistical significance confirmed by Kruskal–Wallis test results (not shown here), indicating that creativity functions not only as an individual disposition but also as a culturally embedded value shaped by national contexts.

Table 1. Trends in value orientation toward creativity, 2002–2024: country mean scores on a 1–6 scale (source: created by author)

ESS round	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Slovenia	4.25	4.20	4.32	4.32	4.42	4.38	4.48	4.45	4.41	4.51	4.41
Cyprus			4.30	4.29	4.27	4.36			4.10		4.35
Switzerland	4.25	4.24	4.17	4.26	4.31	4.41	4.40	4.36	4.34	4.39	4.30
Greece	4.28	4.21		4.46	4.34					4.22	4.29
Netherlands	4.13	4.15	4.24	4.22	4.26	4.29	4.19	4.25	4.24	4.31	4.28
Denmark	4.22	4.12	4.09	4.15	4.20	4.27	4.28		4.24		
Belgium	4.17	4.10	4.10	4.11	4.08	4.19	4.15	4.19	4.22	4.23	4.19
Hungary	4.11	4.18	4.08	4.09	4.24	4.25	4.17	4.32	3.95	4.10	4.17
Iceland		4.03				4.16		4.12	4.07	4.10	4.17
Austria	4.19	4.22	4.20				4.15	4.09	4.08		4.16
Italy						4.34		4.00	3.88	4.20	4.14
United Kingdom	4.15	4.08	4.11	4.12	4.11	4.18	4.11	4.14	4.11	4.12	4.14
Finland	4.11	4.08	4.05	4.04	4.14	4.13	4.15	4.15	4.12	3.94	4.13
Spain	4.11	4.01	4.07	4.08	4.14	4.15	4.12	4.19	4.14	4.09	4.12
Ireland	4.14	4.10	4.15	4.30	4.20	4.23	4.16	4.19	4.11	4.13	4.12
Germany	4.04	4.02	4.04	4.02	4.11	4.16	4.12	4.13	4.09		4.10
Lithuania					3.73	3.71	3.69	3.74	3.43	3.87	4.10
Estonia		3.79	3.88	3.95	4.04	3.94	3.86	3.88	3.86	3.95	4.07
Portugal	3.88	3.81	3.78	3.74	3.88	3.85	3.86	3.97	3.90	3.83	4.06
Sweden	3.87	3.89	3.94	3.98	4.04	4.19	4.12	4.12	4.07		4.05
Norway	3.87	3.90	3.95	3.98	3.97	4.08	4.05	4.04	4.01	3.94	3.99
Poland	4.05	4.06	4.06	4.04	4.08	4.13	4.02	4.07	3.78		3.97
France	4.11	4.08	3.85	3.88	3.89	3.92	3.93	3.94	3.93		3.96
Slovakia		3.94	4.04	3.91	3.91	4.01			3.92	4.03	3.95
Czechia	3.80	3.87		3.96	4.03	4.01	4.08	4.03	4.07	4.00	
Croatia				3.77	3.71				3.87	3.82	3.72

Notes: 1. ESS – European Social Survey; 2. Countries are listed in descending order of their mean scores on value orientation toward creativity index in European Social Survey 11 (ESS Data Portal, 2026b). A colour gradient from white to dark grey is used to represent the lowest to the highest values of the indicator, respectively.

Contrary to expectations derived from modernization or regional clustering approaches, the results do not reveal clear regional patterns in the valuation of creativity across Europe. On average, residents of CEE and Southern European countries tend to assign slightly lower importance to creativity than those in Northern or Western European countries. In contexts where post-socialist or late-industrial transformations have been more recent and uneven, creativity may remain more closely associated with specific social roles, institutional domains, or privileged social groups, rather than functioning as a broadly internalized life principle. By contrast, in many Northern and Western European societies, creativity has been integrated earlier and more systematically into educational systems, labor market practices, and cultural policy frameworks, contributing to a more diffuse and normalized valuation of creativity across the population. Importantly, however, this tendency is far from homogeneous. Slovenia and Hungary emerge as notable exceptions, exhibiting levels of creativity orientation comparable to or higher than those observed in several Western European societies. Taken together, these patterns point to the need for a nuanced interpretation of regional differences that moves beyond simple geographical categorizations.

Although statistically significant fluctuations in value orientation toward creativity over time are observed in several countries, including Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Lithuania, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, as indicated by Kruskal–Wallis test results, these changes do not follow a consistent directional pattern. Instead, national trajectories oscillate around relatively stable mean levels. This absence of a clear upward or downward trend suggests that value orientation toward creativity has not undergone systematic transformation between 2002 and 2024.

Despite profound social, economic, and technological changes over the past two decades, creativity has neither expanded uniformly as a dominant modern value nor declined under conditions of uncertainty and crisis. Rather, it appears to function as a resilient component of national value systems, embedded in durable normative frameworks that shape how autonomy, originality, and innovation are understood in everyday life. These findings indicate that cross-national variation in value orientation toward creativity reflects not only individual preferences but also deeper sociocultural mechanisms, including the timing of educational expansion, the degree of institutional support for self-expression, and the extent to which creativity has been normalized as a general life orientation rather than confined to specific social domains.

5. Demographic divides in value orientation toward creativity

A further objective is to assess whether value orientation toward creativity is evenly distributed within European societies or whether it is structured by distinct sociodemographic divides. Previous research consistently identifies age, level of educational attainment, income, and gender as the most relevant demographic correlates of creativity-related values. Age is a particularly salient factor because it captures cumulative life-course and generational influences shaping how creativity is valued. As openness to change tends to decline across adulthood while conservation-oriented values gain importance, age-related differences in creativity values reflect shifts in motivational priorities rather than changes in creative capacity.

At the same time, generational socialization under different cultural and educational regimes makes age a proxy for broader societal change, rendering it one of the strongest predictors of creativity-related value orientations. Education and income are also expected to be positively associated with value orientation toward creativity, though to a lesser extent. Higher education fosters abstract thinking, autonomy, and exposure and openness to diverse perspectives, facilitating the internalization of creativity as a valued principle. Income, in turn, reflects access to material and cultural resources that may support creative orientations, although its effect is typically weaker, more context dependent, and often diminishes once education is controlled for. Gender differences are typically small and inconsistent, suggesting a limited role in structuring creativity-related value orientations.

Table 2. Sociodemographic correlates of value orientation toward creativity index, European Social Survey 11: Pearson correlation coefficients (source: created by author, based on ESS Data Portal, 2026b)

Country	Age	Education	Income	Gender
Austria	−0.327**	0.104**	0.159**	−0.086**
Belgium	−0.239**	0.080**	0.111**	−0.053**
Cyprus	−0.300**		0.247**	−0.088**
Croatia	−0.422**	0.255**	0.302**	−0.106**
Estonia	−0.202**		0.134**	−0.078**
Finland	−0.183**			
France	−0.210**			
Germany	−0.178**	0.049*	0.050*	−0.073**
Greece	−0.345**	0.267**	0.256**	−0.090**
Hungary	−0.341**	0.269**	0.336**	−0.084**
Iceland	−0.108**			
Ireland	−0.250**	0.142**	0.104**	
Italy	−0.411**	0.216**	0.212**	−0.088**
Lithuania	−0.311**	0.150*	0.269**	−0.079**
Netherlands	−0.135**	0.090**	0.071**	−0.059*
Norway	−0.253**			−0.085**
Poland	−0.232**	0.144**	0.220**	−0.068*
Portugal	−0.283**	0.282**	0.215**	
Slovakia	−0.412**	0.293**	0.330**	−0.121**
Slovenia	−0.329**	0.098**	0.225**	
Spain	−0.326**	0.162**	0.081**	
Sweden	−0.149**	0.076**	0.070*	
Switzerland	−0.238**	0.079**	0.067*	−0.060*
United Kingdom	−0.271**	0.057*	0.143**	

Notes: * p (p -value) < .05 (two-tailed); ** p < .01 (two-tailed); blank cells indicate non-significant coefficients.

To examine demographic divides, the analysis focuses on the most recent ESS11 (2023–2024) round (ESS Data Portal, 2026b). As shown in Table 2, age emerges as the most pronounced correlate of value orientation toward creativity across all countries. The association is negative in every national context, indicating that younger individuals consistently place greater emphasis on creativity as a value. While the strength of this relationship varies, it remains statistically significant in all countries. Education and income display similar, though considerably weaker, patterns. In many countries, higher educational attainment and higher income are associated with stronger value orientation toward creativity, yet these relationships are modest or absent in several countries, indicating substantial cross-national variability. Gender plays only a marginal role in shaping value orientation toward creativity: in 15 out of 24 countries, men show a slightly higher orientation toward creativity, while in the remaining cases no statistically significant association is observed. Importantly, this gender difference is almost entirely driven by a single component of value orientation toward creativity index, orientation toward adventurous experience, whereas the remaining components show little to no gender differentiation. This finding should be interpreted with caution, as the index captures a specific normative configuration of creativity grounded in self-direction, novelty seeking, autonomy, and risk orientation, rather than the full range of everyday creative practices. Thus, the absence of substantial gender differences, or the slightly higher scores among men in some countries, should not be interpreted as indicating higher overall creativity, but rather as reflecting differences in how creativity is normatively defined and measured within the survey instrument.

Additional analyses using pooled data from all eleven ESS waves (not shown here) reveal that associations between value orientation toward creativity and education, income and gender are more frequently statistically significant when the full-time span is considered. This indicates that these sociodemographic divides have historically been more pronounced, while in several countries their impact – particularly that of gender – has weakened in the most recent period.

To disentangle the net effects of interrelated demographic factors, country-specific regression models were estimated. These models confirm that age remains the strongest predictor of value orientation toward creativity when all other variables are held constant, whereas the effects of education, income, and gender are weaker and vary substantially across countries (see Table 3). Particularly revealing is the explanatory power of the models: sociodemographic variables account for a substantial share of variance in value orientation toward creativity in CEE and Southern European countries, but explain very little in Northern and Western European countries. This contrast points to different sociocultural mechanisms of value formation across Europe. In CEE and Southern European societies, creativity-oriented values appear more closely linked to social structure and life-course positioning, forming part of broader patterns of social differentiation. In Northern and Western European societies, by contrast, the weak structural anchoring suggests a more universalized value landscape. Although average levels of creativity orientation do not differ markedly between these regions, the degree to which creativity is socially structured varies substantially, revealing distinct modes through which creative values are embedded and reproduced.

Table 3. Regression models predicting value orientation toward creativity by country, European Social Survey 11 (source: created by author, based on ESS Data Portal, 2026b)

Country	Beta				R ²	F-distribution	Valid number
	Age	Education	Income	Gender			
Slovakia	−0.319**	0.177**	0.108**	−0.108**	0.241	84.492**	1070
Greece	−0.252**	0.221	0.126**	−0.047*	0.228	106.221**	1443
Croatia	−0.353**	0.153**		−0.086**	0.221	73.404**	1040
Italy	−0.356**	0.093**	0.124**	−0.064**	0.196	110.667**	1826
Hungary	−0.209**	0.179**	0.207**	−0.092**	0.193	94.678**	1585
Lithuania	−0.242**	0.107**	0.119**		0.127	41.205**	1137
Austria	−0.297**	0.092**	0.111**	−0.056**	0.126	65.069**	1814
Cyprus	−0.241**		0.188**	−0.096*	0.122	17.445**	505
Slovenia	−0.282**		0.111**		0.121	35.403**	1035
Spain	−0.309**	0.104**			0.118	50.838**	1525
Portugal	−0.156**	0.135**	0.094**		0.095	27.083**	1038
United Kingdom	−0.249**		0.074**		0.080	24.452**	1128
Poland	−0.159**	0.088**	0.141**		0.080	21.492**	993
Norway	−0.252**			−0.103**	0.069	22.863**	1232
Ireland	−0.218**	0.100**		−0.065**	0.068	27.465**	1500
Belgium	−0.200**	0.095**			0.060	22.005**	1385
Switzerland	−0.214**	0.089**			0.056	17.292**	1164
France	−0.214**		−0.062**	−0.048*	0.049	19.942**	1551
Estonia	−0.173**			−0.066*	0.047	14.176**	1164
Finland	−0.169**		−0.071**	−0.056*	0.036	13.308**	1446
Germany	−0.166**			−0.064**	0.034	18.743**	2121
Netherlands	−0.132**	0.084**		−0.051*	0.030	11.183**	1468
Sweden	−0.133**	0.074**			0.027	7.845**	1149
Iceland	−0.097**		−0.079*		0.016	2.993**	756

Notes: * p (p -value) < .05 (two-tailed); ** p < .01 (two-tailed); countries are listed in descending order of R² (coefficient of determination); blank cells indicate non-significant coefficients.

6. Conclusions

This article examined everyday creativity as a sociocultural value orientation rather than an individual competence. Drawing on comparative and longitudinal ESS data, it highlighted creative values as a distinct analytical layer that shapes the social conditions under which creativity is recognized and enacted. At the macro level, the findings show that value orientation toward creativity is remarkably stable over time. Despite substantial social, economic, and technological changes between 2002 and 2024, creativity has neither expanded uniformly as a dominant contemporary ideal nor declined in response to crises. Cross-national differences remain pronounced, yet they do not follow simple regional patterns, which can be interpreted as evidence of path-dependent cultural configurations in which creativity is embedded in long-standing institutional arrangements, educational traditions, and normative frameworks

that change more slowly than observable social conditions. At the micro level, value orientation toward creativity is systematically structured by sociodemographic factors. Age emerges as the most consistent predictor, with younger individuals placing greater emphasis on creativity. Education and income display weaker and context-dependent associations, while gender differences are minimal and largely confined to risk-related aspects of creativity. These patterns reflect broader processes of value formation, in which value orientation toward creativity is shaped by generational experiences, institutional exposure, and shifting cultural narratives rather than by individual characteristics alone. The degree of sociodemographic structuring varies markedly across Europe: in CEE and Southern European countries, value orientation toward creativity is more strongly anchored in social structure, whereas in Northern and Western European countries it appears more universalized. This contrast points to different modes of value formation and cultural embedding.

The observed patterns should be interpreted in light of the distinction between value orientations and everyday creative practices. While the present study focuses on normative orientations toward creativity, these orientations are likely to manifest in diverse everyday practices, including problem-solving in domestic settings, lifestyle choices, and informal cultural production. The limited gender differences observed in value orientation toward creativity therefore do not necessarily imply the absence of gendered patterns in everyday creative practices, which may be more strongly differentiated across specific domains of activity. This suggests that gender differences in creativity depend on how creativity is conceptualized and measured: whereas value-based indicators capture abstract orientations that show little differentiation, domain-specific practices may reveal more pronounced variation across social contexts. This interpretation is consistent with research indicating that gender differences in creativity are domain-specific rather than universal (Baer & Kaufman, 2008).

Overall, everyday creativity emerges as a resilient yet context-sensitive value, offering a valuable lens for understanding cultural continuity and change in contemporary Europe. By situating creativity at the intersection of values and social structures, this study contributes to a more integrated sociocultural understanding of creativity as a normative orientation that shapes the conditions under which everyday creative practices may emerge. Its findings suggest several directions for future research. Greater attention should be paid to creativity as a value orientation and to its links with everyday creative practices. Comparative studies would benefit from integrating individual-level analyses with macro-level indicators of inequality, education, and cultural policy. Future research should also aim to combine survey-based measures of creative values with more fine-grained indicators of everyday creative behaviour, thereby capturing how abstract orientations are translated into concrete practices across different social contexts.

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