

Creative Central Asia 2026

**Report on the 7-th
Networking Meeting of
Experts from Creative
Industries in Central
Asia**

**Tashkent, Samarkand
26 Feb - 02 Mar 2026**

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1. Manifesto CCA 2026

The development of cities, regions, and countries today is determined not only by natural resources, infrastructure, or technologies. A key factor is becoming the ability of territories to attract, retain, and bring together people — with ideas, education, skills, initiative, and responsibility. In other words, human capital. That is precisely why creative places and cultural events play a special role. They become magnets of meaning and identity, of economic and social energy, of innovation and interdisciplinary connections. Such initiatives create an emotional and social attachment to a place — something that cannot be achieved through decisions imposed from the top down.

Individual projects do not change cities on their own. Cities transform when projects begin to reinforce each other, horizontal connections form between culture, business, technology, education, and the urban environment, and intermediaries appear – curators, producers, platforms, and institutions. It is they who translate the language of culture into the language of economics, politics, and investment, connecting people, resources, and long-term goals. In such an environment, creative places and events become points of assembly for sustainable ecosystems. Creative industries today are not just a “culture” sector. They are an independent phenomenon that works as connective tissue between the economy and identity, technology and people, business and public meaning.

We often say that the creative economy, infrastructure for the creative industries, new skills, artificial intelligence, education, and values are the future. But that future has already arrived. This is our present, in which opportunities open up and responsibility arises for choosing a development trajectory. Today it is important not to watch from the sidelines, but to act: to learn,

to unite, to experiment, and to grow, turning ideas into real change.

For this reason, the themes selected for discussion at Creative Central Asia 2026 focused on areas essential for the practical development of the creative industries:

- collaboration, cross-disciplinarity, and the role of intermediaries;
- money, investment, and the language of values;
- education, artificial intelligence, and skills for the future.



2. Creative Central Asia 2026 in Tashkent and Samarkand

Creative Central Asia 2026 took place in Tashkent and Samarkand from 26 February to 2 March 2026. The event brought together participants from across Central Asia and the United Kingdom and was designed as a multi-format professional platform. The programme combined a preparatory briefing, a thematic hackathon, the main forum, an open mic session, speed dating for participants and delegates, various networking formats, and an off-site programme.

On 27 February, a hackathon took place focused on developing the first working prototype of the “Central Asian Creative Cities Ranking.” The day was built around creating a simple and

transparent model, with a limited set of indicators, a basic table and visualization, and an initial idea of how the tool could evolve further. This format added a practical layer to the programme and gave participants the chance to work together on something tangible that could be useful for analysing and promoting creative urban ecosystems in the region. In the second half of the day, delegates joined an express tour of creative spaces in Tashkent, helping connect the discussions to the real urban context of the city.



The main public event took place on 28 February. The programme included a press conference, the official opening, the Creative Central Asia Digest block, a presentation of the hackathon results, a speed dating session, a keynote speech, an open mic, and three thematic panels. The forum was also streamed live on YouTube, and simultaneous interpretation between English and Russian was provided for international participants. The Digest block gave participants a chance

to briefly present key developments, initiatives, challenges, and opportunities in the creative economy in their countries, helping to build a shared regional context for deeper discussion.

In the second half of the day, the forum focused on three interconnected themes. The first panel explored the “invisible infrastructure” of creative cities — from human connections and institutions to shared spaces and collaboration mechanisms. The second panel looked at questions of value, investment, social impact, and the long-term sustainability of creative projects. The third panel focused on the next generation of creators, the changing nature of skills, the role of education, and how technological shifts are reshaping creative work and urban environments.

The programme continued on 1 March with a visit by part of the delegation to Samarkand. This part of the programme aimed to extend the regional conversation, share the forum’s outcomes with the local community, and strengthen ties with the city’s creative scene. After visiting local creative spaces, participants took part in an open discussion titled “The Creative Economy of the City: People, Projects, Business,” which focused on the role of creative entrepreneurs, cultural initiatives, new forms of collaboration, and human capital in shaping today’s urban environment.

CCA 7th 2026 in numbers:

- **350 people** with diverse professional backgrounds registered online for the forum.
- **185 people** attended the forum in person.
- **70 people** joined the forum via livestream.
- **55 delegates** from Central Asian countries and the United Kingdom participated in the event, including:
 - 15 representatives from Kyrgyzstan
 - 15 representatives from Uzbekistan
 - 13 representatives from Turkmenistan
 - 8 representatives from Kazakhstan
 - 3 representatives from the United Kingdom
 - 1 representative from Tajikistan
- **43 delegates** participated in the hackathon.
- **30 people** attended the meeting in Samarkand.
- **10 participants** presented themselves and their projects during the open mic session.

3. Hackathon

On 27 February, a hackathon took place as part of the Creative Central Asia 2026 programme, focusing on developing the first working prototype of the “Central Asian Creative Cities Ranking.” It added a practical layer to the forum, shifting part of the programme from discussion to hands-on collaboration around a shared analytical tool.

The idea behind the hackathon was rooted in the belief that Central Asia can become a strong example of regional cooperation in the creative economy. Unlike more traditional sectors, often limited by bureaucratic or political barriers, creative industries tend to collaborate more easily across borders, building joint projects, products, and initiatives. In this context, the ranking was seen not just as an analytical exercise, but as a way to spark dialogue and encourage collaboration across the region.

The main goal of the hackathon was to create a prototype ranking of creative cities in Central Asia. At the same time, it was also about reflection — inviting participants to think about what kind of urban environment truly supports creativity, innovation, and quality of life. The ranking helped highlight gaps and opened up discussion about what makes a city attractive, or “magnetic,” for talent and creative activity.



The methodology was developed and tested directly during the hackathon. Ten mixed teams, each working on one city, spent several hours building and applying a simplified model. They focused on five indicators that could be checked relatively quickly using publicly available data:

- Standard of living (cost of a basic food basket and rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the city centre)
- Climate comfort and air quality (average annual PM2.5 and seasonal temperature variation)
- Cultural infrastructure (number of museums, galleries, and studios)
- Event activity (number of events planned for the next three months)
- Wi-Fi speed (measured across five locations in each city)

All data was sourced from open platforms and cross-checked by participants, which ensured a reasonable level of reliability given the time constraints and experimental nature of the exercise.

As a result, the teams produced a preliminary ranking of nine cities across the region. Bukhara came out on top, followed by Bishkek, Astana, Almaty, and Samarkand. The results highlighted several interesting patterns. For example, using per capita indicators gave smaller cities an advantage, while larger cities were more affected by factors like higher living costs and environmental pressures. The exercise also showed how strongly the choice of indicators can shape how we perceive a city's creative potential.

Another element of the methodology was the inclusion of so-called “signature facts” — unique, often intangible characteristics of cities that added an extra 1–10% to their overall score. This reflected the idea that not everything that makes a city attractive can be captured through numbers alone.

It is important to note that this ranking is a minimum viable product (MVP), not a final or comprehensive index. The limited number of indicators, the fast data collection process, and the experimental setup all point to the need for further development. At the same time, the hackathon showed that creating a shared regional tool like this is both possible and valuable, and it helped identify clear next steps — including expanding the set of indicators, improving data quality, and involving more cities.

In the longer term, the ranking could evolve into a regular analytical tool — a kind of barometer for the creative environment in Central Asia — supporting both policy discussions and practical decision-making.

4. Rethinking the Format and Strengthening Audience Engagement

The programme of Creative Central Asia 2026 demonstrates that the role of cities is becoming increasingly central within the regional creative economy agenda. The discussion is no longer focused solely on cultural projects themselves, but increasingly addresses issues related to the urban environment, infrastructure, collaboration, human capital, ecosystem development, and the evolving role of the arts, artists, and creative producers within these processes. This reflects a broader shift toward a more comprehensive understanding of the role of arts and culture in shaping cities, society, and responses to global challenges.

Particular attention should be given to the strong interest in practical tools. The hackathon dedicated to developing a Creative Cities Ranking demonstrated the demand for formats that allow participants not only to discuss general ideas but also to collaboratively create working models and instruments. At the same time, the prototype format itself highlights the need for further refinement of criteria, methodology, and possible approaches to the practical application of the results. Another important observation is the growing demand for developing a clearer language around the value and impact of creative projects. The topics of investment, impact, and long-term sustainability occupied a distinct place in the programme, reflecting a real need within the sector for more precise ways to articulate its significance to investors, city administrations, foundations, and partners.

Following the event, the team noted that the traditional conference format requires significant time and resources, while not delivering the expected levels of attendance and audience retention. This raises the question of whether it should be maintained in its current form. Alternative approaches were discussed, including a shift toward a more flexible structure with parallel sessions featuring case study presentations and expert talks across multiple rooms, as well as reducing the share of passive formats such as long panel discussions in favor of more interactive sessions.



Particular attention should be given to engaging a younger audience, including more active involvement of influencers who can help increase interest and reach. It is also recommended to design clear “anchor moments” within the program to encourage participants to stay longer and remain engaged throughout the day. Additionally, diversifying speaker profiles by including not only representatives of the creative industries but also cross-disciplinary practitioners from adjacent fields could enrich the content and broaden its relevance. Expanding the overall perspective beyond a sole focus on the creative economy may also be beneficial—for example, by advocating for the role of the arts in raising awareness of global challenges and in imagining alternative futures.

At the same time, the open mic and speed dating sessions proved to be the most successful formats, demonstrating a high level of engagement and dynamic interaction among participants. This highlights the strong potential of further developing interactive and networking-based formats.

Appendix

1. Programme of the 7th CCA Networking Meeting

25 February (Wednesday) — Day 1	
Arrival of delegates (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan)	
26 February (Thursday) — Day 2	
Arrival of delegates (Kyrgyzstan, United Kingdom), delegate briefing and welcome dinner	
Location: moc hub	
Dinner at Joydaman	
8:35	UK delegates arrival, transfer to hotel
12:00	Delegates from Kyrgyzstan arrival, transfer to moc hub
12:40	Transfer for delegates from Sapiens Hotel
13:00 -14:00	Lunch at moc hub
14:00 - 16:00	Delegate briefing by organisers Discussion of Central Asia Digest presentations Moderators and speakers panel discussion
16:00	Transfer to hotel, free time
18:50	Meet in the lobby to go to dinner together
19:00 - 21:00	Welcome dinner in Joydaman
27 February (Friday) — Day 3 — Hackathon	
Location: moc hub	
Goals of the day: To create the first working prototype of the “Central Asian Creative Cities Ranking,” which will be publicly presented at the forum and further developed after CCA.	
Preliminary task: Participants receive an onboarding pack and collect basic data about their city before arrival.	
Outcome: A transparent ranking (6–8 indicators), a table and visualisation, and a project launch plan.	
10:00–15:00	Hackathon “Creative Cities Ranking” — Moderator: Daniyar Amanaliev

15:00–19:00	<p>Express tour “Creative Tashkent” Visits to creative spaces and meetings with teams and founders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Alisher Navoi State Academic Bolshoi Theatre — Teplo Store — Human House
19:00	Free evening.
28 February (Saturday) — Day 3 — CCA.log Forum Location: school21 (10:00–18:30)	
10:00 – 11:00	Press conference.
11:00–11:10	Opening remarks by the Director of the British Council in Uzbekistan
11:10–12:00	<p>Creative Central Asia Digest</p> <p>Creative Central Asia Digest What is happening in the creative economy of Central Asian countries and the United Kingdom?</p> <p>Each country (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and the United Kingdom) shares insights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key events and main themes of 2025 • Significant cultural, social, educational and technological initiatives • Local challenges and opportunities identified by creators and experts <p>Format: short 5-minute presentations + brief Q&A session.</p>
12:00–12:20	<p>Presentation of Hackathon Results “City Ranking”</p> <p>Why this ranking matters, how it can support creative industries and cities, and its practical application.</p>
12:20–12:30	10-minute break
12:30–13:30	<p>Speed Dating</p> <p>A series of short meetings with clear timing for networking, exchanging ideas and finding future collaboration partners.</p>
13:30–14:45	<p>Lunch and continued networking</p> <p>During lunch there will be an open microphone session (by prior registration) with moderated project presentations by participants.</p>
14.45 - 15.00	Keynote: John Newbiggin
15:00–16:00	<p>Panel 1: Invisible Infrastructure of Creative Cities</p> <p>This panel explores how interdisciplinary projects become key growth points for tourism, the night-time economy, local businesses and startups, as well as broader creative ecosystems — and how together they form a new type of urban infrastructure. This infrastructure is built not from roads and buildings,</p>

	but from communities, institutions, shared spaces and collaborative processes that ensure circulation of ideas, resources and talent throughout the city. Speakers will discuss the role of intermediaries and institutional collaboration, the importance of horizontal connections and collective work, and ways of building trust and cooperation between culture, business, government, education and civil society.
16:00–17:00	Panel 2: Speaking the Language of Values: Investment, Impact and Long-Term Sustainability Creative projects must be able to speak about their value not only in terms of cultural significance. This discussion focuses on how to define and measure the impact of creative industries on urban environments, how to build meaningful dialogue with investors and sponsors around shared values rather than profit alone, and how to create projects that are both economically sustainable and beneficial for cities. Participants will discuss the approaches and language needed to turn creative vision into scalable and investment-attractive urban transformation.
17:00–18:00	Panel 3: Gen-Next Cities: Who Creates Our Future? This discussion focuses on a new generation of creators growing up in a digital environment, and how their values, expectations and working methods are transforming creative production, labour and everyday urban life. We will discuss how knowledge, resources and ways of living and working flow across disciplines, sectors and national borders. Speakers will explore the skills and professions needed for creative urban life, the role of education systems in preparing a new generation of technologically skilled change-makers, and how cities can support lifelong learning and reskilling to retain young creators, technologists and creative professionals in the age of automation.
18:00–18:30	Closing and wrap-up
19:00 – 21:00	Welcome drink and networking at Gravity

1 March (Sunday) — Day 4 — Trip to Samarkand

Delegates depart home, and a small group (UK delegation, Nastya Goncharova, Daniyar Amanaliev, British Council) travels to Samarkand. If other delegates wish to join, they must cover the costs themselves.

Goals of the day: To present the results of the Creative Central Asia project to the Samarkand community, expand regional dialogue, integrate Samarkand into the CCAN network and hold an informal discussion with local creative leaders.

7:45	Transfer from hotel to railway station
8:30 - 11:00	Train to Samarkand Check-in at East Star Hotel
12:00 - 14:00	Express tour “Creative Samarkand” Visits to 3–4 creative spaces, meetings with teams and founders.

14:30	Arrival at meeting location
15:00 - 18:00	<p>Open meeting: Creative Economy of the City — People, Projects, Business</p> <p>Format: open meeting with the Samarkand creative community.</p> <p>The future of cities is shaped not by resources and infrastructure, but by people — creative entrepreneurs, art managers and producers who can turn ideas into sustainable businesses.</p> <p>Creative spaces, events and initiatives become points of attraction for meaning, investment and human capital. Today creative industries are not only about culture, but also about entrepreneurship, investment, new business models, technology and growth.</p> <p>At the meeting, we will present how the Creative Central Asia forum took place in Tashkent and discuss pressing issues with the Samarkand creative community.</p> <p>Guests of the meeting:</p> <p>John Newbigin (United Kingdom), Creative Industries Ambassador to the Mayor of London Sarah Jones (United Kingdom), Director of the Institute for Creativity and Artificial Intelligence Andrew Chitty (United Kingdom), Professor at Loughborough University London and De Montfort University; Chair of the CoSTAR network Tara Salisbury (United Kingdom), Conference Director and Co-founder of Beyond Studio Nastya Goncharova (Kazakhstan), Creative Economy Researcher Daniyar Amanaliev (Kyrgyzstan), Entrepreneur, Co-founder and Business Conductor of the ololo group of companies Galina Koretskaya (Kazakhstan), Head of Culture and Creative Economy Projects at the British Council</p> <p>Programme of the meeting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opening remarks by the Creative Central Asia team 2. What is the creative economy? (John Newbigin) 3. Presentation of the “Creative Cities Ranking” prototype (Daniyar Amanaliev) 4. Open informal discussion
18:30	dinner

2 March (Monday) — Samarkand tour, return to Tashkent

9:30 - 17:00	Check-out, luggage with participants, Samarkand city tour, lunch
18:15 - 20:30	Train to Tashkent (dinner on the train)

2. The List of Speakers and Delegates

DELEGATES FROM KAZAKHSTAN

Daniyar Kosnazarov

Advisor to the President of Narxoz University, founder of Case Lab. Former Marketing Director at KPMG in Central Asia and the Caucasus, former Editor-in-Chief of Steppe online media, and visiting research fellow at George Washington University.

Dennis Kin

Founder of the urbanism and architecture blog Walking Almaty, author of the research project Monumental Almaty, professional guide and educator.

Zhanna Prashkevich

Director for Neighbourhood Community Development at BI Service / BI Group and author of the book Conscious Service. Researches neighbourhood culture and transformations of social practices.

Nastia Goncharova

Researcher in creative industries. Author of the online course How the Economy Became Creative, co-founder of Creative Central Asia, and screener for the international startup competition Creative Business Cup 2023 (Denmark).

Natalya Tyan

Creative entrepreneur and restaurateur. Started with a confectionery business and currently leads the factory-kitchen project Ryadom by inDrive while developing independent ventures.

Nursultan Ziyadayev

Producer, organizer and social activist from Atyrau. CEO of Kilen Creative Studio and co-founder of Kilen Creative Hub.

Togzhan Kurmanzhanova

Producer and stage director. Director of the contemporary art space ÓzgeEpic, focused on the development of Kazakh culture.

DELEGATES FROM KYRGYZSTAN

Asel Bektenova

Founder and CEO of the public charitable foundation Teach for Kyrgyzstan – Zamanbap Mughalim. Member of the Supervisory Board of the Creative Industries Association of Kyrgyzstan.

Daniyar Amanaliev

Co-founder and business conductor of the large-scale creative ecosystem ololo. Member of the Global Council on Creative Economy, co-founder of the Creative Industries Association of Kyrgyzstan, and Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Creative Industries Park of Kyrgyzstan.

Nazgul Kubakaeva

Since 2021 has been leading the development of the creative economy in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as Executive Director of the Creative Industries Association.

Nurjamal Janibekova

Co-founder of the media platform Bashta, producing explainers on institutional democracy, human rights, gender equality, climate change, education and urbanism.

Aymzhan Almazbekova

Member of the Supervisory Board of the Creative Industries Park, representative of the Creative Industries Association, strategic development consultant at Compass College, designer.

Cholpon Tentiyeva

Member of the Supervisory Board of the Creative Industries Park, art historian, curator of multimedia exhibition projects, international festival organizer and expert in creative industries and intangible heritage.

Meerim Tolepbergen

Author of the million-follower blog @meerisha, founder of the beauty project Suiu and Suiu Beauty Festival, host of the culinary podcast Tamak Time.

Urmat Nasykulov

Social entrepreneur, founder of Jaratman Media and author of Jaratman Podcast. Director of the Tonus Public Foundation and organizer of international marathons M Bulak Kuz Demi.

Izat Mukhametaliev

Executive Producer of Jaratman Media — a creative production and media company producing YouTube shows, music videos and commercial projects for brands and artists.

Altynai Dzhumanazarova

Communications expert, founder of Kyrgyzstan's largest PR agency Noosphere, co-founder of ololoMedia digital agency and ololoPro educational platform.

Eduardo Pederneira

Founder & CEO of MADEin — a B2B ecosystem for the fashion industry in Central Asia. Textile industry expert, founder of ISKRA creative production studio and author of a major textile business blog.

Meerim Taabaldieva

Entrepreneur and blogger, founder of the footwear brand Meerim Taab and the French bakery Boulangerie.

Talgar Chokushov

Founder of Bold Brands International, expert in operational management and business scaling with 17 years of experience.

Zhakshylyk Aitbaev

Sociologist and analyst at Evidence CA research company, volunteer analyst at the YouTube channel Tereng Central Asia, and co-founder of the Republican Debate Center of Kyrgyzstan.

Kanyshai Mamytova

Director of the Creative Industries Park of Kyrgyzstan — the world's first special preferential tax regime for creative industry companies and entrepreneurs.

DELEGATES FROM TAJIKISTAN**Alexey Rumyantsev**

Multidisciplinary artist whose works were presented at the 11th and 13th Venice Biennale and Sotheby's London. Curator of projects including Gender Inequality through Contemporary Art, My Art Lab, and the experimental eco-art project Polygon.

Karolina Peskischeva

Co-founder of Tajikistan's first creative hub SANO Impact Hub. Curator of exhibition projects at the NGO Gender Equality for Inclusive Development.

DELEGATES FROM UZBEKISTAN**Behzod Boltaev**

Contemporary photographer from Bukhara whose work explores cultural heritage, identity and memory.

Gulnara Joldasbaeva

Communications consultant with experience in GGGI and KAS projects. Author of a Karakalpak-language video course for the Ibrat Farzandlari initiative. Coordinator of Aral Culture Summit and Aral School initiatives focused on social, environmental and creative transformation of the Aral Sea region.

Timur Kamalov

Director of Uzbekistan's largest independent designer platform *Teplo*. Mentor of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) startup programme.

Umida Yuldosheva

Founder and Director of Teach for Uzbekistan, advocate for social justice and education development.

Alexander Fedorov

Independent researcher, modernist architecture popularizer, graphic designer and media artist. Author of *Tashkent: Architecture of Historical Optimism* and founder of @tashkent_modernism — the first digital archive dedicated to Central Asian modernist architecture.

Charos Kamalova

Co-founder and Creative Director of *Teplo*. Independent board member of the Youth Entrepreneurs Foundation under the Youth Affairs Agency of Uzbekistan and mentor of the Chevening Programme (UK FCDO).

Bekhzod Maksudkhonov

Marketing and creative industry specialist with extensive cross-sector expertise. Marketing specialist in School 21

Zarina Lukhmanova

CEO of School 21, a tuition-free digital technology school. Expert in data analytics and youth policy, PhD holder and contributor to international projects including World Values Survey and Youth Policy Index.

Saida Rashidova

Founder of an online Uzbek language school, educator and children's author. Creator of the first Uzbek picture book The Story of Doppi and author of the first 100 free Uzbek-as-a-foreign-language lessons on YouTube.

DELEGATES FROM TURKMENISTAN**Abdyrakhym Agadzhikov**

Founder of NexVoke marketing agency, The Creative Corner creative space and Astra Consulting educational and consulting agency. Director of the Creative Economy and Innovation Department of the Union of Economists of Turkmenistan.

Farhad Artykov

Digital technology and innovation specialist with over 15 years of experience at international IT companies including Microsoft and Huawei. Co-founder of the Creative Economy and Innovation Department of the Union of Economists of Turkmenistan.

Gayane Israelyan

Project Assistant at the British Embassy and co-founder of the Creative and Innovation Economy Development Department in Turkmenistan.

Selbinyyaz Nurmammedova

Specialist in professional development within Turkmenistan's dance industry, creating fusion content combining local traditions with global aesthetics.

Begench Rejepov

Entrepreneur and startup founder working at the intersection of technology and the creative economy. Founder of Biar Delivery foodtech project and Hiñlen music service.

Kemal Babayev

Commercial Director and AI creator delivering projects for private and public sector organizations.

Myahri Gylyjova

Head of English Drama Studio, where children learn language through theatrical production. The studio applies a unique gamification system using “Mystery Maps” and handcrafted 3D costumes.

Muhammetberdi Jepbarov

Software engineer with over seven years of experience developing high-load systems in logistics, fintech and IoT. Organizer of GDG Ashgabat and tech events such as DevFest and Google I/O Extended. Technology blogger.

Batyr Rejepov

Co-founder of Clever Turkmenistan and Managing Partner at Imdat Bot Education Center. Led the project *Spirit of Turkmen Land*, recreating historical monuments using AI after documenting all five regions of Turkmenistan.

Katalina Midyan

Illustrator and cultural researcher exploring the Turkic world through contemporary illustration and author merchandise.

Aman Sapargeldiyev

Videographer specializing in visual storytelling and nonlinear narratives. Collaborated with UNDP, the EU Delegation and the British Embassy. Author of the *Saga* podcast on Instagram.

Aleksandra Ahmedova

Certified career guidance specialist and founder of the Modern Career Center. Chapter Ambassador of Technovation Girls Turkmenistan, certified mentor of the Union of Economists and Startup Academy trainer at MCT Agency.

Vasiliy Andronov

Founder of JAM Creative agency. Advocate of edutainment development in Turkmenistan, transforming entertainment events into intellectual creative products.

DELEGATES FROM UNITED KINGDOM**John Newbiggin**

Chair of the International Steering Committee of the World Conference on Creative Economy. Co-founder and first Chair of Creative England. Mayor of London’s Ambassador for Creative Industries and member of the London Economic Action Partnership.

Professor Andrew Chitty

Project Director at Loughborough London and Head of the Creative Experience Lab.

Dr Sara Jones

Professor at Bayes Business School. Director of the Institute for Creativity and AI and the Centre for Creativity in Professional Practice. Holds a BA in Psychology and Philosophy from Oxford and a PhD in Computer Science from City, University of London.

3. Hackathon Results

What was the purpose of the hackathon?

Richard Florida identified three key factors that attract and retain the creative class in cities: Talent, Technology, and Tolerance. The hackathon aimed to translate these factors into measurable indicators.

Why? The goal was to create a regional precedent for collaboration, encourage city leaders to reflect on why their cities may be falling behind, and prompt a broader discussion about the type of environment in which people want to live and build their businesses.

How did we measure it?

10 teams – 10 cities. We selected five indicators that can be verified using a smartphone within 30 minutes:

- **Standard of Living**

Cost of a basic food basket + rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the city center (USD)

- **Comfortable Climate and Air Quality**

Average annual PM2.5 + temperature difference between winter and summer

- **Cultural Infrastructure**

Number of museums, galleries, and creative studios

- **Event Pulse**

Number of events listed in the city's event agenda for the upcoming three months

- **Wi-Fi Speed**

Measured in five randomly selected venues in the city

Ranking of Creative Cities in Central Asia

Weighted Index

#1	Bukhara 	70.6
#2	Bishkek 	46.6
#3	Astana 	45.9
#4	Almaty 	44.3
#5	Samarkand 	37.7
#6	Ashgabat 	30.3
#7	Shymkent 	29.8
#8	Tashkent 	22.8
#9	Dushanbe 	18.3

Where is the 10th city? We compared ourselves with Manchester, but that is a separate story.

It is important to note that this ranking represents an **MVP (Minimum Viable Product)** rather than a comprehensive index.

How did we approach the measurement of creative cities?

- **Evidence-based approach:** external verification of data
- **Magnetism:** striking facts that may influence decisions to move to a city
- **Fair Play:** indicators calculated per 100,000 residents to balance large and smaller cities
- **Dynamism:** focus on current conditions rather than historical achievements
- **Speed:** data collection within 30 minutes

A “killer fact” — a unique intangible advantage of the city — added 1–10% weight to the city’s final ranking:

- **Bishkek:** 4 Diamond YouTube Creator Awards — more than all other Central Asian countries combined
- **Dushanbe:** A bank card for non-residents issued within 30 minutes
- **Shymkent:** “World Craft City 2025” — UNESCO recognition
- **Astana:** Central Asia’s first unicorn — Highfield, part of the Astana Hub ecosystem

What's next?

Five indicators do not provide a complete picture, but they open up space for important questions.

The long-term goal is to develop the ranking into a regular barometer of the creative environment in Central Asia.

The next version will include a more rigorous methodology, a larger number of cities, and additional indicators.

4. Feedback from delegates

We asked delegates what stood out to them most about the event, and here are some of their insights:

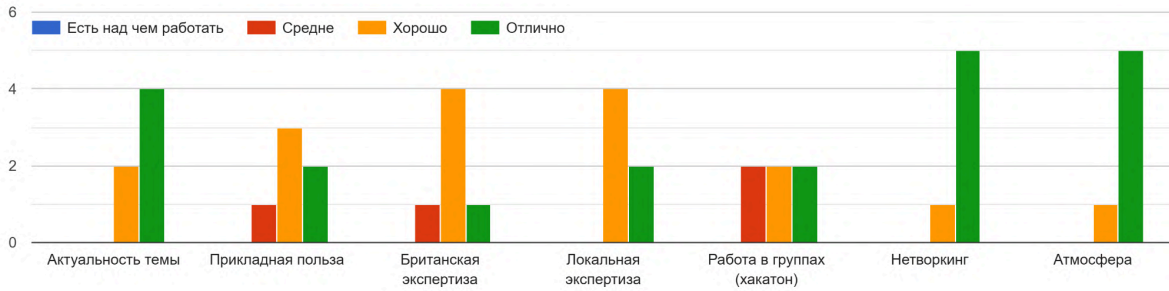
“I was inspired by the work, life, experience, and vision of participants from our neighboring countries — in my opinion, this was the most valuable aspect.”

“This forum is unique in that everyone shares their story — whether during a theatre visit, a short coffee break, or simply sitting in a circle — you feel a strong shared mission!”

“I am from Tajikistan, and sometimes we live in such an informational and intellectual ‘bubble’ there that being here, I really breathed in and enjoyed the community and people being on the same wavelength.”

We also asked delegates to evaluate the quality of the programme:

Пожалуйста, оцените качество программы по следующим параметрам:



Overall, participants felt that there was **insufficient time for deeper exchange of experience and ideas**. Some suggested adding an extra day dedicated purely to networking without a packed programme.

Several delegates proposed introducing a **new format focused on idea generation and the implementation of joint cross-country projects**. This could foster additional interaction beyond the event itself and help achieve concrete agreements for collaboration.