

CIIC SXSW LONDON

IMMERSIVE FUTURES, HUMAN FIRST

ROUNDTABLE DIGEST
CIIC @ SXSW LONDON 2026



FOREWORD HELEEN ROUW

Programme director CIIC

This SXSW edition in London CIIC brought together creators, researchers, policymakers, funders and industry leaders, to continue the international conversation on topics we address with our program. After our conversations at SXSW Austin 2026 we wanted to explore a shared central question: what does the immersive sector need to realise its full potential? Across three roundtables, conversations ranged from sustainable business models and societal impact to agency and control. Again and again, participants returned to the same underlying challenge. The immersive sector is no longer struggling to prove its creative value. The challenge now is creating the conditions that allow that value to endure, scale and create meaningful change.

We heard creative professionals speak about the difficulty of moving from project to product, struggling to create a sustainable business model. We heard policymakers and funders discuss the need for validation of the impact IX makes. We heard artists and technology driven experts question who shapes immersive experiences in an age of increasingly intelligent systems. Immersive futures need to be Human First. Their success will depend not on technology alone, but on the ecosystems, partnerships and people that build them together.

This document brings valuable insights, tensions and opportunities. It's an invitation to continue the conversation, which we will do at different places such as MatchXR in Helsinki, UnitedXR in Brussels, IDFA DocLab in Amsterdam and many more. CIIC is actively in conversation, stimulating international consortia working on the themes as mentioned in this document. Stay tuned and subscribe to our newsletter to stay updated.

I will be looking forward to seeing you at our next stop! And a big thank you to the participating experts to our tables.

TABLE & TOPICS



ROUNDTABLE 1 **CREATING VALUE IN IX**

Speaker

Dagmar van Ravenswaay Claasen
LUMO Labs



ROUNDTABLE 2 **FROM DATA TO SOCIETAL IMPACT**

Speaker

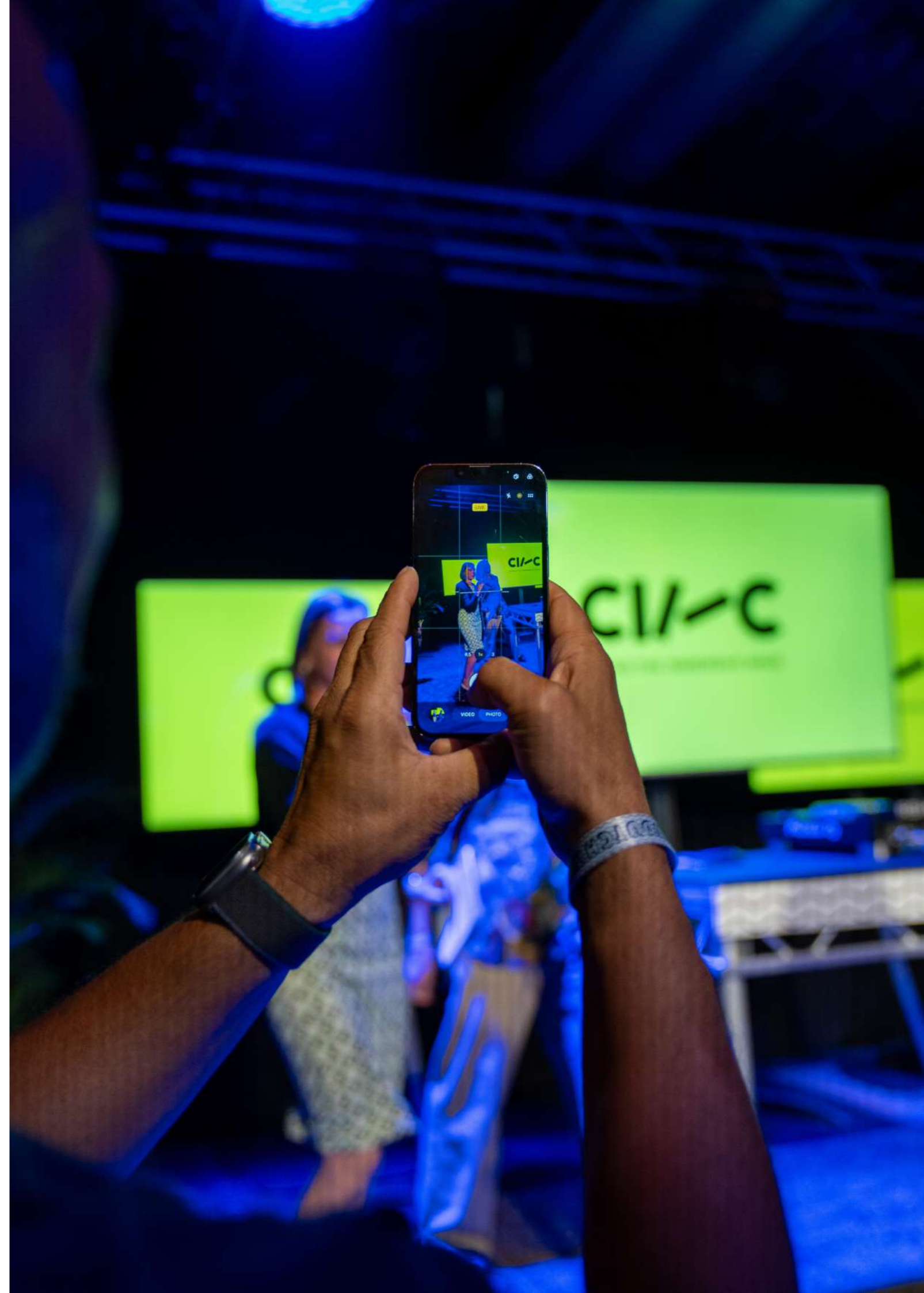
Thijs Biersteker
Woven Studio



ROUNDTABLE 3 **WHO'S IN CHARGE?**

Speaker

Robin Coops
Coops&Co







ROUNDTABLE 1 CREATING VALUE IN IX

On impact-driven initiatives with sustainable business models

The central question

Immersive experiences have demonstrated their creative and societal value, but what is needed to build sustainable business models and long-term ecosystems around

2. The sector needs clearer pathways from project to product. Too many immersive experiences remain dependent on one-off grants and pilot funding. While projects are often successfully produced and presented, they struggle to continue beyond the initial phase. The next stage of growth depends on creating routes towards scalable products, recurring revenue models and

“WHAT WE OFTEN SEE IS THAT PEOPLE CAN BUILD A BEAUTIFUL PRODUCT, BUT BUILDING A BUSINESS AROUND IT IS SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT.”

— Dagmar van Ravenswaay Claasen, LUMO Labs

them? How can creators, investors, policymakers and institutions work together to move the sector beyond project-based experimentation towards lasting economic and societal impact?

Key takeaways

1. The biggest gap is not funding, but entrepreneurial capability. Many immersive creators excel at developing compelling experiences but lack access to commercial expertise, strategic guidance and entrepreneurial support. Participants repeatedly stressed that sustainable growth requires investment in business development just as much as creative development.

sustainable market adoption.

3. Shared infrastructure is a prerequisite for scale. Venues, equipment, distribution networks and specialist knowledge remain fragmented. Participants advocated for collaborative investment models, shared ownership structures and stronger partnerships between creators, venues and institutions. Access to knowledge and networks was often considered just as valuable as direct funding.

Practical nuance

A recurring tension throughout the discussion centred on the relationship between artistic integrity and commercial viability. While some

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creators successfully expand into sectors such as healthcare, education and industry, others choose to remain focused on artistic practice. Participants agreed that the sector should avoid imposing a single definition of success. The challenge is not turning every creator into an entrepreneur, but ensuring that multiple pathways can coexist within a healthy ecosystem.

Reflection

The discussion revealed a sector that no longer needs to prove its value. The challenge now is creating the conditions that allow that value to endure. Stronger connections between creators, investors, venues, policymakers and industry partners may ultimately prove more valuable than any individual technology or funding programme. Sustainable growth will depend on helping creators not only build experiences, but build organisations around them.



ROUNDTABLE 2 FROM DATA TO SOCIETAL IMPACT

How can we work together to turn complex knowledge into meaningful public engagement through experiential storytelling?

The central question

Immersive experiences have a unique ability to make complex information tangible and emotionally meaningful. But how can emotional engagement be translated into measurable societal impact, behavioural change and long-term public value?

is missing are the support systems that allow projects to grow: production networks, distribution channels, talent development, investment structures and long-term partnerships. As one participant put it, the sector is simultaneously building the trains, laying the tracks and creating the signals.

3. Impact must become more visible and measurable. While immersive experiences frequently generate powerful emotional responses,

“FACTS DON’T MOVE PEOPLE,
EMOTIONS DO!”

— Thijs Biersteker, Woven Studio

Key takeaways

1. Immersive storytelling transforms knowledge into understanding. Facts and statistics alone rarely change behaviour. By creating emotional and shared experiences, immersive storytelling can open conversations around complex societal issues in ways that traditional communication often cannot. The group repeatedly returned to the idea that emotional understanding is often the first step towards societal change.
2. The sector faces an infrastructure challenge, not a technology challenge. Participants observed that the tools already exist. What

stronger frameworks are needed to demonstrate educational, behavioural and societal outcomes. Policymakers, funders and investors increasingly require evidence of long-term impact before committing to structural support.

4. Distribution remains one of the biggest barriers to impact. Many impactful immersive projects struggle to move beyond festivals, pilot programmes and specialist audiences. Better venue networks, touring models and distribution channels are needed to translate local success into broader societal impact.





ROUNDTABLE 3 WHO'S IN CHARGE?

On agency, ethics and control in immersive experiences

The central question

Who ultimately shapes an immersive experience: the creator, the audience or the system itself? As immersive experiences become increasingly participatory and adaptive, questions of agency, authorship and responsibility are becoming more urgent than ever.

Key takeaways

1. Control is negotiated, not owned. One of the strongest conclusions was that control within immersive experiences rarely belongs entirely to the creator, the audience or the technology. Agency emerges through a continuous negotiation between all actors involved. Immersive experiences are

designed frameworks where creators still define the rules, boundaries and possibilities.

3. AI introduces liveness, not necessarily autonomy. Rather than replacing creators, AI was largely viewed as a tool that introduces responsiveness, unpredictability and personalisation. The discussion shifted away from fears of machines taking control and towards questions of intentional design. The real challenge is not whether AI takes control, but how creators shape the systems within which AI operates.

Practical nuance

A recurring misconception challenged during the discussion was the assumption that more agency automatically creates better experiences. Participants noted that audiences are far from homo-

Practical nuance

Several participants cautioned against reducing impact to simple metrics. Not every meaningful outcome can be captured through numbers alone. At the same time, policymakers and funding organisations increasingly require evidence to support long-term investment. The challenge therefore lies in developing evaluation methods that respect both artistic value and measurable societal outcomes.

Reflection

The discussion revealed a sector that has already demonstrated its ability to engage audiences emotionally. The next challenge is ensuring those emotional experiences can travel further, reach more diverse audiences and contribute to lasting societal change. Achieving that ambition will require stronger infrastructure, better distribution and deeper collaboration between creators, researchers, policymakers and industry partners.

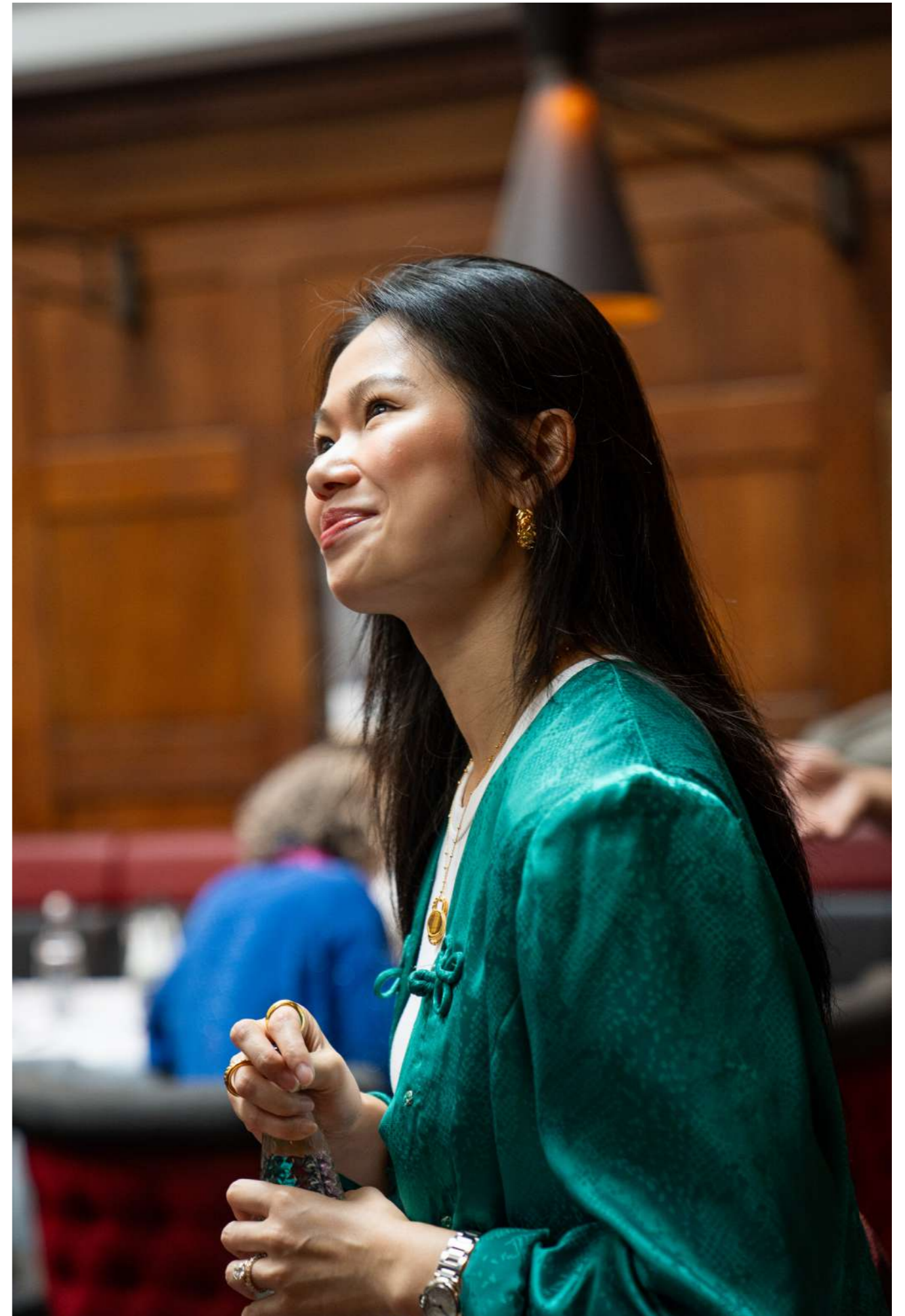
“I DON'T WANT TO CREATE A SPACE WHERE I KNOW THE ANSWER. I WANT TO CREATE A SPACE OF NOT KNOWING.”

— Robin Coops, Coops&Co

2. Agency and co-creation are not the same thing. Giving audiences choices does not automatically make them co-creators. Participants challenged the common assumption that participation equals authorship. In many immersive experiences, audiences operate within carefully

less about transferring control and more about sharing it. generous. Some seek deep participation, while others prefer observation, guidance and structure. Successful immersive experiences may therefore be less about maximising freedom and more about creating meaningful participation within clearly defined boundaries.

Questions of ethics, consent and responsibility remained central



throughout the conversation. While uncertainty and unpredictability can be powerful creative tools, participants agreed that audiences should always understand the boundaries of the experience and the conditions under which they participate.

Reflection

Perhaps the most surprising conclusion was that audiences do not necessarily want unlimited control. What they seek is meaningful involvement. As immersive experiences become increasingly adaptive and intelligent, the role of the creator does not disappear. Instead, it evolves from directing outcomes to designing the conditions from which

experiences emerge.

The session ultimately concluded without a definitive answer to its central question—and perhaps that was the point. Rather than identifying a single source of authority, the discussion revealed immersive experiences as ecosystems of influence in which creators, audiences, technologies and institutions continuously shape one another. Control is not something one party possesses. It is something that is constantly negotiated.



CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Although each roundtable approached the immersive sector from a different perspective, a common theme emerged throughout the day. Across all conversations, participants pointed to a sector that is rich in creativity, talent and innovation. Immersive experiences have already proven their ability to engage audiences, create emotional connections and generate societal value. The opportunity now lies in strengthening the conditions that allow this potential to grow further.

Whether discussing value creation, societal impact or questions of agency and control, participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of collaboration. The future of immersive experiences will not be shaped by individual projects alone, but by the ecosystems that connect creators, researchers, policymakers, funders, venues and industry partners. What emerged from SXSW London was a sense of momentum. The sector is moving beyond experimentation and into a new phase of maturity—one in which stronger infrastructure, new partnerships and shared knowledge can help immersive experiences reach broader audiences and create lasting impact.

If one message resonated throughout the day, it was this: the future of immersive experiences is Human First. And that future is already being built together.

Want to keep the conversation going? Join our [Community platform](#).



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