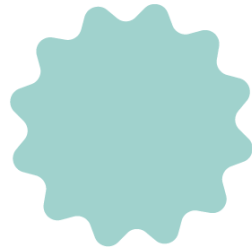
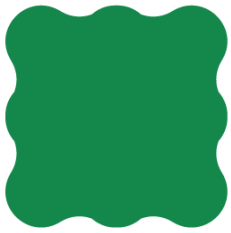


CrAFT



Creating
Actionable
Futures



ReCrAFTing Cities

Event proceedings

ReCrAFting Cities. The contribution of arts and culture for sustainable, resilient and creative cities

The online event was organised by [Creating Actionable Futures \(CrAFt\)](#) and the [European Cultural Foundation \(ECF\)](#). It was held on 06 December 2023, in the context of the New European Bauhaus revised environment, where more than ever Art and Culture need to be acknowledged as a worldwide social and human contribution to the achievement of climate-neutral cities in Europe. Through riveting keynotes, inspiring case studies, and engaging participant interactions, [ReCrAFting Cities](#) explored the intersection of culture, environmental sustainability and livable neighbourhoods. The programme included three complementary sections to maximise insights and sharing: a panel introducing the political dimension; practical case studies presenting challenges and successes on the local level; and breakout sessions discussing the efficient cooperation between cities and the cultural sector for the benefit of sustainable development through radical collaboration.

From EU policies to grass-rooted projects: the unique value of Arts and Culture towards a sustainable, inclusive and creative urban transition

Culture, Cities and the New European Bauhaus: policy context

Laura Hetel, Policy Officer for Urban Systems, DG RTD, European Commission, introduces the [EU Mission on climate-neutral and smart cities](#) which works with 100 cities in Europe to be transformed into hubs of innovation and experimentation for the green transition. She highlights the significance of including social and cultural dimensions in the urban transition, and pinpoints CRAFT as a guardian of the [New European Bauhaus](#) (NEB) principles of creating beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive cities.

With over 1,200 partners already involved, the NEB initiative aims at developing a human-centred and action-driven network for learning and collaboration based on community engagement and a systemic perspective. It aims to support frontrunners facilitating collaborations through training and funding. Vera Winthagen, Deputy Head of Unit of the New European Bauhaus team at the European Commission envisions the initiative as shaping the future of a lovable living environment, considering the necessity to bridge the green deal objectives with other transitions attached, both at global and local levels.

María Iglesias, Team Leader at the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, mentions several key policy documents related to the role of culture as a key driver for sustainability and local development (*A New European Agenda for Culture*, the [EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026](#), [European framework for action on cultural heritage](#)). She highlights specific programs and actions contributing to a sustainable culture sector, such as the recent report on [greening the Creative Europe program](#). She emphasises the significant increase in funding for cultural sectors during the current programming period, citing a 63% increase in the Creative Europe program. A dedicated *guide* [CulturEU](#) is available online and highlights various funding opportunities to the Cultural and Creative Sectors.

Additionally, a dedicated cluster on cultural creativity and inclusive society within the Horizon Europe research program is now a new doorway for contributing to the green transition through creative solutions.

From the civil society side, Culture Action Europe has been part of the Culture 2030 Goal campaign, which advocates for a dedicated cultural goal in the post-2030 UN sustainable development agenda. This proposed goal aims to ensure cultural sustainability, well-being, and cultural rights for all. It covers issues such as promoting diversity of cultural expressions, safeguarding heritage, enhancing the conditions of cultural actors, and strengthening cultural approaches in environmental protection, urban planning, and rural development.

Natalie Giorgadze, Communications and Community Director at Culture Action Europe, reflects on the prolonged process of advocating for mainstreaming culture in other policy fields, emphasising that change is a long journey. Additionally, she underscores the significance of conveying messages accessible to diverse communities. Culture Action Europe is continuously trying to tackle the challenge of translating technical and complex messages on culture and sustainability for a broader audience on the field.

Arts and culture, catalysts for social inclusion

Nathalie emphasises the importance of cultural rights as human rights and highlights Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which underscores the right to freely participate in the cultural life of communities without barriers. Natalie reminds the comprehensive dimension of sustainability in the cultural sector, encompassing environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Discussions within the cultural sector actually often involve topics such as inclusion, diversity, climate and social justice, power relations, accessibility, democracy and participation.

This statement seems to echo to the top priorities mayors from large European cities aims at tackling. Julie Hervé, Head of Culture at Eurocities, evokes the results of a recent survey revealing the focus of mayors on tackling climate change and fighting against inequalities, for citizens to feel socially included and to benefit from a good quality of life in cities.

As underlined by Laura, cultural organisations have also the power to influence public behaviour and to spread the message of green and

socially cohesive cities. They are bound to become problem solvers, both internally, by adopting green practices, and externally, by influencing urban planning while developing local alliances and shaping positive, locally tailored messages for their communities.

Natalie mentions Culture Action Europe efforts to reduce their own carbon footprint, involving travel, procurement, and leveraging their network to empower the community. Discussions in the break-out rooms reinforce this idea. Cultural institutions and organisations should do their part when it comes to integrating environmental efforts in daily practices and activities.

Through helping young mothers facing social exclusion and building creative skills to access the job market, the project *Fashion for Inclusion* presented by Jaron Rowan from BAU, Arts and Design College in Barcelona, perfectly illustrates the benefits of professional inclusion through creativity.

Arts and Culture as remedies for well-being and a sense of belonging in time of crisis

Empower Yourself, Empower the World initiative, a project led by three local libraries in the Latvian rural territories of Valmiera and Gulbene focuses on addressing global and local challenges, including climate change and sustainability. The libraries, awarded by the European Culture Foundation's Europe Challenge, collaborated on art therapy, dance therapy, and bibliotherapy programs, designed to be inclusive and accessible to everyone.

The project was initiated in response to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the stress resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and underlying related societal changes, including an increase in anxiety and depression rates in Latvia. Libraries aimed to serve as a community hub, offering encouragement, involvement, and a sense of belonging to combat isolation and anxiety.

In this initiative, libraries are proved to be democratic, trusted spaces for creativity, education, and well-being. Inguna Dukure, Team Leader of the project, pinpoints the growing issue of eco-anxiety in Europe, and the role of libraries as places for healing and therapy in times of crisis.

According to Jaron, one of the main outcomes of the *fashion for inclusion* project has been in shifting from a productivity-focused approach to one emphasising creativity and collective well-being to address physical,

mental, and emotional components and incorporating techniques like breathing and movement.

There is a strong link between creative well-being and sustainability, and that climate change issues cannot be only tackled through the lenses of environmental and economical approaches.

Arts and Culture as sustainable cements for renewed urban spaces

Following Covid-19 crisis, there is an increased interest and investment in public spaces transformed into areas for social activities. A chance to develop lovely neighbourhoods. Key aspects cover the access to public services, a mix of housing and economic activities, vibrant public spaces, high-quality architecture, and a well-connected public transport network. Julie shares an example of the Central Library of Helsinki, Finland, as an illustration of a sustainable and inclusive space co-designed with citizens. The library serves various purposes, including borrowing books, cooking spaces for those without kitchens, repair spaces, and a large meeting area for concerts and festivals.

Eurocities' together with the Architects' Council of Europe are leading the peer learning programme *Living Spaces* that focus on high-quality architectural policies and built environments. The program includes a [catalog](#) gathering inspiring practices and on-site peer learning visits for city administrations, regions, architects, and organisations related to urban planning for social cohesion.

Participants in the breakout rooms recognize the value of cultural heritage and encourage existing cultural spaces (libraries, museums) to be used as meeting spaces for creative collaboration, as well as daily life encounters and conversations.

UfaFabrik, a cultural centre in the south of Berlin, is a good example of how Arts and Culture can perfectly intersect with environmental solutions for a sustainable future. The centre operates as a collective, focusing on arts, culture, and community services with a commitment to ecological sustainability. The place, a movie post-production facility during the 1920s and later abandoned, squatted and transformed into a cultural centre by activists in the late 1970s.

Key environmental initiatives include the installation of green roofs on buildings for natural insulation and biodiversity. In the late 1990s and early

2000s, photovoltaic systems were added to generate electricity, making Ufa fabric largely self-sufficient in energy in the organisation of its artistic and cultural events. The centre also has a rainwater harvesting system, collecting rainwater for flushing toilets and watering green spaces, saving millions of litres of fresh water annually. The development of these various sustainability measures showcase Ufa fabric as a model for combining cultural activities with eco-friendly practices and long-term planning.

Yet, Frido Hinde, Managing Director at UfaFabrik, discusses the challenges in implementing European harmonised eco-friendly practices, particularly in the context of conferences where plastic cups and utensils are still commonly used.

From global policies to local communities' engagement and projects: the role of Arts and Culture for radical, transversal and multi-actors collaborations

Radical collaboration for policy-making

Inspired by the old Bauhaus, the New European Bauhaus emphasises three core values: beautiful, sustainable, and together. Participatory and systemic approaches are considered essential for achieving these values. The New European Bauhaus aims at operating horizontally, linking various sectors and collaborating with different programs and organisations.

María speaks about the necessary interdisciplinary collaboration at the European Commission's level as a must to tackle complex challenges within the New European Bauhaus initiative framework. She highlights her regular interactions with other concerned services and acknowledges the necessary efforts for such a collaboration in the future.

Natalie invites active participation and support from the cultural sector in policy-making processes at local, regional, European, and global levels. Natalie also encourages cultural organisations to be more organised, politically articulated, and united to effectively contribute to decision-making spaces.

As stressed by Christophe Turon-Trommenschlager, Project manager at Ville de Lille, culture has the power to raise awareness and to promote change. The experience of Lille shows that convincing other departments' colleagues of cultural strategy's relevance to ecological transition while aligning objectives can be the most challenging. However, in the long-term, it eventually led to a shared vision and a reinforced team dedicated to implement the vision externally, with ripple effects.

Interdisciplinary collaboration for more impact

As underlined by Annemie Wyckmans, CRAFT Coordinator, Arts and Culture are drivers in societal transition, particularly in achieving climate-neutral, robust, and inclusive cities. She emphasises collective work as a catalyst for urban sustainability, and through CRAFT local collaborative governance, bringing together diverse actors, sectors, and interests for effective cooperation.

Vera highlights the importance of connecting formal and informal knowledge while adopting a transdisciplinary approach. Laura calls administrations at various levels to understand the multiple co-benefits of blending the green transition with cultural and social imperatives.

Culture Action Europe, as a major European trans-sectoral cultural network is already familiar with bringing together diverse representatives from the cultural sector, including international networks, organisations, institutions, individuals, activists, and artists. Natalie stresses the need for transversality and multi-stakeholder collaboration in addressing climate change challenges.

As an example of interdisciplinary joint effort, Julie and Christophe recall the [Eurocities-Lille Call to Action](#), a political commitment launched in June and gathering 42 mayors pledging to implement local cultural policies and events that prioritise sustainability and inclusivity. Signatory cities commit to report annually on their implementation progress through a total of 15 priorities. Upcoming collaborations with other EU networks are bound to foster greater impact.

Through its evolving policy at the intersection of culture and sustainable development, Lille has initiated an ecological transition strategy for building renewal and energy efficiency as well as an observatory for cultural practices targeting vulnerable groups. Lille also collaborated with a hospital to introduce museum prescriptions for individuals with Alzheimer's disease. Having been awarded European Capital of Culture 20 years ago, the city has sustained cultural policies and organised cultural seasons to explore themes related to climate change and global issues, such as *Utopia* in 2022, on the relationship between humankind and the environment.

At the local level, Inguna highlights the cooperation with other libraries as a milestone of the library program. She also considers incorporating new modalities such as music therapy, a new asset for the future of the library program. The multi-layered partnership has been central and core to the process.

Working with people from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds brings challenges, and collaborating with a specialised NGO was crucial to the *Fashion for Inclusion* project, says Jaron. The interdisciplinary collaboration based on cross-cutting perspective and method fostered collective imagination to address common challenges while bridging

potential cultural gaps.

Multilevel-stakeholder's joint effort for funding

Laura emphasises the importance of addressing the needs of cultural and creative services communities at different levels. While acknowledging the significance of joint funding at the European level, she expresses a desire to see the effort replicated at national, regional, and local levels. Laura evokes Ireland's national approach as a good model of multi-layered and cross-sectoral funding efforts.

Maria introduces the upcoming expert group of Member States under the umbrella of the EU Group on Culture, which will focus on upscaling best practices for fostering policy solutions and reinforcing cultural sustainability in line with the Green Deal. In addition, *Culture Moves Europe* initiative supports individual mobility for artists as well as art residencies focusing on societal transformation in direct link with the New European Bauhaus.

Environmental actions at UfaFabric are cost-intensive, and while grants and partnerships have been secured with institutions like the Technical University, to raise funds for similar initiatives in other regional contexts is more challenging. There is hope for increased financial support, especially with initiatives like the European Bauhaus, easing the set-up of sustainable practices in cultural centres. UFA fabric has been engaged into a collaborative approach from the start partnering with the Technical University of Berlin for scientific support and participating in European networks of grassroots cultural centres.

From the breakout room's discussions, participants report the necessity to ensure equal access to funding for both small and structured initiatives to maintain and further develop the community. They wish also to mobilise collective intelligence to define shared goals through glossaries, a joint vision while identifying funding and partnership opportunities.

Communities engagement is the fuel for thriving societies

Jaron recognizes the importance of social rights and personal well-being in fostering creativity. *Fashion for inclusion* project fosters an environment that encourages personal and collective creativity while acknowledging the challenges and learning opportunities that arise from working with

diverse communities. Initially focusing on helping young mothers, particularly migrants, to develop creative skills, through the development of methods and workshops integrating sustainable fashion practices and locally sourced materials, the project has evolved by adapting to the needs of beneficiaries. From a teaching space to a learning and being space, learning from and with the communities while valuing their ideas.

The library project also expands now to events outside libraries, such as joint cleanups in neighbourhoods, open-air exhibitions, community excursions, and visits to museums. These activities aim to enhance the environment, foster a sense of community, and encourage people to enjoy being together again. Inguna emphasises that these initiatives are part of the ongoing efforts to deepen their engagement with the community through the library's therapy program. Last but not least, the project aims at strategizing and planning a people-centred approach by directly involving recipient communities and constantly adapting to their situation and needs.

Inguna mentions also [the *Sense of Belonging* publication](#), showcasing 39 initiatives created during the Europe Challenge between 2021 and 2023, and conveying inspiring stories where libraries are democratic spaces for expression, creation and solutions. The European Challenge offers support, resources and funding to libraries and communities – to help explore how people can meet, live together and work in the Europe of today.

There is a collective consensus amongst breakout rooms' participants to develop more co-creative, interdisciplinary and collaborative processes for governance. Participants also discuss the will to open such spaces to a wide range of participants, including students, out-of-reach communities and neighbourhoods' ambassadors.

Conclusions

The same way the European Cultural Foundation was founded in 1954 with a mission to grow a European sentiment through culture and education, there is an urgent need for a European sense of belonging to tackle collective issues linked to climate change and urban transition. Each organisation's and stakeholder's contribution counts in their own way. The key message is *"to be concrete, ambitious, and urgent"* in addressing sustainability challenges, says André Wilkens.

Annemie concludes by reaffirming that ReCrAFting Cities event aimed to start and foster a dialogue with Arts and Culture as a bridge and glue in collaborative efforts. She also expresses gratitude to the European Cultural Foundation for their support in making the event possible and looks forward to continuing discussions in the future with a shared goal to build a comprehensive body of knowledge that informs and guides future actions toward sustainable urban development.