

skills2GO!
Building
Competences
for Cultural
Professionals



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NAZIONALE
PATRIMONIO
ATTIVITÀ
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skills2GO! **Building** **Competences** **for Cultural** **Professionals**

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Scuola nazionale del patrimonio e delle attività culturali

skills2GO!
Building Competences for Cultural Professionals

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skills2GO!

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The Scuola nazionale del patrimonio e delle attività culturali is delighted to present one of the outputs of skills2GO!, the capacity-building programme developed and delivered in collaboration with GECT GO and GO! 2025. These two public bodies are responsible for implementing GO! 2025, the programme of Nova Gorica/Gorizia European Capital of Culture for 2025. Skills2GO! addresses a variety of themes and this volume gathers the topics and reflections explored over various learning sessions throughout the programme; *skills2GO! Building Competences for Cultural Professionals* is intended both for those directly involved in the project and for all professionals committed to implementing complex cultural projects.

Among the missions of the Scuola nazionale del patrimonio there is the aim to collaborate with partner countries and institutions to support the development of a permanent international platform for the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage, with a focus on sharing best practices and intervention models. In collaboration with its partners, the Scuola faced a new challenge: applying the Cantiere Città model—previously tested at national level—to the context of the European Capital of Culture. Cantiere Città is a capacity-building project dedicated to the ten cities that advanced past the first stage of the selection process to become Italian Capital of Culture. Skill2GO! operated in a different transnational context and was carefully designed in collaboration with all partners involved, while following the Cantiere Città's methodological framework. This approach combined online and in-person training opportunities for professionals working in cultural project management while promoting peer-to-peer exchanges.

The skills2GO! programme was articulated in four in-presence workshops (two held in Nova Gorica and two in Gorizia) and eight online seminars, covering key topics for professionals responsible for implementing cultural projects.

To design the programme, we involved highly experienced professionals with excellent curricula, working either in an academic or in an entrepreneurial environment, with the aim of creating a cooperative atmosphere that stimulates better learning processes.

Cantiere Città has demonstrated how valuable it is to establish a learning community among peers.

It has shown that professionals working in cultural heritage management or cultural initiatives often need opportunities for exchange and discussion to find new solutions to professional challenges or to approach them from a different angle.

skills2GO! was able to gather a series of insightful, original and up-to-date contents that we believe is of interest to a larger audience beyond those initially involved in the training programme. This is why we compiled the project's proceedings into a book that we hope will be of use to all those engaged in cultural projects within a European perspective.

Onofrio Cutaia

Scuola nazionale del patrimonio e delle attività culturali, Special Commissioner



When Nova Gorica invited Gorizia to join forces in a joint bid for the European Capital of Culture, it was not just two cities from two countries coming together, but also two peripheral entities that, almost overnight, become central—the culture capital. In such cases, capacity building becomes even more important than usual, as the periphery does not necessarily have all the institutions and know-now required to meet the challenges of the capital.

That is why GO! 2025 and GECT GO were eager to accept the proposal from the Scuola nazionale del patrimonio e delle attività culturali to develop a tailor-made capacity-building project. This initiative would involve a highly qualified international teaching staff, offering expertise from a range of different fields, from cultural heritage and human resources management to communication methods. This is how skills2GO! was born.

Through this programme, Slovenian and Italian colleagues symbolically united the resources of the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia, the primary funder of GO! 2025, with the best practices of the Italian Ministry of Culture, confirming the cross-border origin of this project. If we judge by the first tangible results of 2025—including the spectacular opening in February, which engaged and moved very many citizens from both sides of the border, as well as many visitors from across Europe—the lessons of this particular *Scuola* were not only well received but also well learned.

And since “legacy” is the keyword of every contemporary Capital of Culture, the future will show just how important it was to build capacities together for them to flourish in the long-term. What started as a transversal educational project will remain one of the foundations of GO! 2025, testifying to its shared spirit.

Romina Kocina / Stojan Pelko

GECT GO, Director

GO! 2025, Programme director





Introduction



Managing Culture Across Borders: Lessons from the skills2GO! Project

Agnieszka Śmigiel

Scuola nazionale del patrimonio e delle attività culturali, Cultural Policy Expert

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast”

Peter Drucker

This assertion, attributed to Peter Drucker, sets the tone for understanding the deeply rooted dynamics underpinning the success or failure of any initiative—especially in the cultural sector. In the ever-evolving landscape shaped by digital transformation and new managerial challenges, it becomes evident that, regardless of how well-designed a strategy might be, it is the culture behind it—its values, behaviours, and shared understandings—that ultimately determines whether the strategy will thrive or falter. The publication *skills2GO! Building Competences for Cultural Professionals* reflects this imperative by presenting the outcomes of skills2GO!, a capacity-building initiative designed not only to equip cultural professionals with the tools to manage and implement complex cultural projects, but to foster the rethinking of habitual practices that may no longer be sustainable or effective. Developed by the Scuola nazionale del patrimonio e delle attività culturali in collaboration with GECT GO! and GO! 2025, this initiative directly addresses the challenges posed by cross-border cultural collaboration, particularly in the context of Nova Gorica and Gorizia's joint designation as the European Capital of Culture 2025 (ECoC 2025). One of the publication's core aspects is the emphasis on capacity building and cooperation in cross-border cultural initiatives as a foundation for inclusion, the acceptance of diversity, and—echoing the ECoC 2025 slogan—the concept of ‘borderlessness’. Recognising the geopolitical and institutional complexities inherent in transnational cultural projects, skills2GO! delivered a tailor-made programme comprising in-person workshops and webinars. By incorporating international expertise, including contributions from Italy and Slovenia, the initiative fostered a collaborative learning environment where cultural professionals could deepen innovative approaches to managing cross-border cultural projects.

This collection of essays, authored by experts involved in the workshops and webinars, offers a comprehensive panorama of contemporary cultural practices and their potential impact on local development, cross-border cooperation, and community well-being. Each contribution provides critical insights into the evolving dynamics of culture as both a social and political force, examining the relationships between cultural networks, governance, participation, and sustainability. Drawing on a range of case studies and theoretical perspectives, the essays offer a nuanced understanding of the roles cultural organisations can play in shaping urban development, social cohesion, and even individual health.

Collectively, the volume invites reflection on the intersections of culture, policy, and public life, offering both theoretical depth and practical guidance to help build a lasting legacy. At the heart of this volume lies the idea that culture—while often celebrated as a tool for social cohesion and urban transformation—must be navigated with care to ensure long-term sustainability. This sustainability is closely linked to the concept of legacy: meaningful legacies often emerge from sustainable practices, and sustainability itself becomes a legacy we leave behind.

The opening chapter, Luca Dal Pozzolo's "Cultural Networks and Local Development", critically examines cultural networks as catalysts for local growth. By distinguishing networks from systems, Dal Pozzolo challenges the often-idealised assumption that networks are inherently beneficial, highlighting their fragility and warning against the rhetorical overuse of the concept without empirical grounding. His analysis is particularly valuable in its focus on governance challenges, where the 'lightness' of networks—initially an asset—can lead to fragility and long-term unsustainability.

In this context, his concept of the "network angel" serves not only as an important corrective but also as a potential solution: a figure or mechanism ensuring ongoing coordination, shared vision, and strategic coherence. It emphasizes the necessity of continuous alignment to prevent networks from devolving into opportunistic or short-lived initiatives. This cautionary approach lays the foundation for the essays that follow, which explore the delicate balance between visionary ambition and practical sustainability.

In a similar vein, Riccardo Tovaglieri's "How Stakeholder Mapping and Management Can Benefit Complex, Cross-Border Cultural Events and Organisations" shifts focus to the operational side of cultural organisation, illustrating how stakeholder mapping and management can be embedded in everyday practice. Introducing frameworks such as the Stakeholder Identification and Salience model, Tovaglieri highlights the potential of these tools to enhance organisational effectiveness. While acknowledging the extensive discussion of stakeholder theory in management literature, the essay argues that its application in cultural contexts—particularly within cross-border and multi-level governance structures—remains underexplored. It also draws attention to the importance of internal alignment, warning that neglecting this aspect can lead to operational issues, diminished staff engagement, and to strategic misalignment, particularly in complex international settings.

The discussion broadens with Federico Borreani's exploration of audience development, posing essential questions about the sustainability of engagement strategies at a time of shifting priorities. The essay effectively demonstrates the strategic relevance of audience development for cultural organisations, while underlining the value of long-term sustainability, particularly in light of the growing focus on non-audiences and cultural welfare initiatives. By balancing theoretical insights with practical considerations, the text





presents audience development not merely as a set of marketing tools, but as a broader and ongoing organisational learning process—one that requires adaptability, cross-sector collaboration, and a deep engagement with the evolving needs of diverse publics. Beatriz Garcia's "Legacies of the European Capital of Culture Programme. Key Factors" analyses how the notion of legacy has become a defining benchmark for ECoC success. By examining past bid proposals and impact assessment models, the essay underscores the tension between ambitious cultural aspirations and the structural limitations of policy and governance. Her discussion of legacy as a process—rather than a mere outcome—offers a nuanced view of how cross-border collaboration, policy shifts, and institutional capacity-building efforts can serve as lasting markers of ECoC's impact. The essay also raises critical questions about the programme's long-term effectiveness: without sustained investment and institutional support, can the ECoC initiative truly deliver on its transformative promises, or does it risk becoming an ephemeral cultural spectacle? This discourse is further enriched by Pier Luigi Sacco's "Decoding European Capitals of Culture Models", which builds on Garcia's concerns through a comprehensive analysis of local development models within the ECoC framework, ranging from tourism-driven strategies to those focussed on cultural participation and systemic innovation. A key point in Sacco's study is the need to move beyond official evaluations, which often fail to provide robust ex-post assessments of ECoC outcomes. Sacco's comparative approach—examining cities such as Genoa, Lille, and Košice—offers valuable lessons about the importance of continuity in cultural strategies and the risks associated with short-term, event-driven models. Cities that integrated cultural strategies into broader urban development plans and sustained them beyond their designated ECoC year tended to achieve more lasting benefits. In contrast, approaches focussed on one-off events often saw their cultural impact dissipate rapidly. By evaluating both successful and unsuccessful models, Sacco's work offers valuable insights into how the ECoC title can serve as a transformative tool rather than merely a temporary honour. The publication also sheds light on innovative approaches to community-led cultural management. Case studies presented by Erminia Sciacchitano illustrate how grassroots involvement can redefine heritage management, fostering sustainable cultural development aligned with the principles of the Faro Convention, which connects cultural heritage with tourism, research, education, and even security policies. Furthermore, Saša Dobričić's discussion of cultural landscapes underscores the importance of balancing heritage preservation with environmental sustainability. Going beyond the urban context, Dobričić offers a thought-provoking reimagining of the relationship between nature and culture, advocating for a more integrated and participatory approach to landscape governance—one that recognises the co-creative processes shaping and maintaining the landscapes. This critical perspective challenges



traditional views of landscapes as either natural or cultural settings, calling for a more fluid understanding that recognizes the dynamic interplay of human and environmental forces. By proposing cultivation as a conceptual bridge between nature and culture and invoking the metaphor of gardening as a shift from exploitative land use to practices grounded in care, the discussion not only resonates with contemporary ecological thought but also provokes a reconsideration of human agency in shaping the environments we inhabit. Eleonora Berti's discussion of the Cultural Routes programme examines how integrating heritage into local strategies can reinforce regional identity and tourism.

Berti addresses the place-based approach in cultural development, highlighting how culture can be a catalyst for territorial cohesion and identity. She also analyses participatory governance models, emphasising co-creation as a strategic method for sustainable local development.

Another prominent theme in the publication is the emphasis on care and the increasing intersectionality—particularly between the arts, culture, and public health. Annalisa Cicerchia's research into the benefits of cultural engagement for individual and collective well-being shows how cultural initiatives can transcend traditional boundaries to address broader social challenges. Her perspective reinforces the idea that cultural policy should not stand in isolation, but rather function as a fundamental element of social and economic development. Presenting a variety of case studies—from the transformative use of art in hospital settings to the benefits of dance and museum programmes for individuals with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease—Cicerchia offers a timely counterpoint to conventional biomedical approaches. She promotes a holistic understanding of health that integrates biological, psychological, and social dimensions. By focussing on "salutogenesis" and the importance of cultural participation, the essay provides a multidimensional perspective on well-being, where health is intrinsically connected to creativity and cultural engagement.

Guido Guerzoni's examination of festivals considers them as platforms for innovation, community participation, and cultural relevance in an increasingly digital, experience-oriented society. His essay delves into the evolving relationship between cultural institutions and their audiences, with particular attention to shifting patterns of cultural consumption. Drawing on statistical data and historical trends, Guerzoni demonstrates how attendance, funding, and public engagement have changed over time. He highlights the challenges cultural institutions face in adapting to an increasingly fragmented and digital setting, stressing the need for innovation and audience-centred strategies to ensure relevance and sustainability.

Finally, Alessandro Bollo's "Monitoring and Evaluating Cultural Projects" addresses the often-overlooked dimension of evaluation in cultural initiatives. By emphasising the importance of monitoring and assessment not only for accountability but also for





improving project effectiveness, Bollo provides a comprehensive toolkit for cultural managers and policymakers. He challenges the common perception of evaluation as mere bureaucracy, arguing instead for its role in improving efficiency, ensuring relevance, and optimising resource allocation in cultural projects. Bollo explores the difference between monitoring and evaluation, highlighting how these processes converge to provide ongoing feedback and improve project outcomes. Through a discussion of the SoPHIA Model and examples such as Matera 2019, Bollo provides practical insights into how robust evaluation can secure long-term sustainability and impact of cultural initiatives.

In conclusion, *skills2GO! Building Competences for Cultural Professionals* is more than a retrospective on the training initiative; rather, it is a resource for cultural operators seeking to innovate within their fields. While each essay presents a distinct perspective, a shared theme emerges: the call for a more critical and reflective approach to cultural development—one that balances ambition with sustainability, theory with practice, and short-term success with long-term impact. In an era of shifting borders—geographical, disciplinary, and conceptual—*skills2GO!* proposes a model rooted in care, sustainability, and collaboration. If culture is to remain a driver of inclusion, innovation, and well-being, it must be constantly reimagined in relation to the people it serves and the challenges it seeks to address. This volume offers not only tools, but also a mindset: one that values reflexivity, cross-border solidarity, and the cultivation of long-term legacies. Ultimately, echoing Peter Drucker's insight—"Culture eats strategy for breakfast"—*skills2GO!* reminds us that successful strategies are those born from, and continually shaped by, a culture that is inclusive, adaptable, and aligned with the values of those who bring it to life.





**Readings
and Practical Insights**

Cultural Networks, Roles and Typologies

The role of cultural networks can be crucial in supporting and sustaining processes of culture-led local development, according to the network's dimension, type, and functioning.

A cultural network can indeed:

- strengthen the structure of a territory's cultural supply or that of a specific set of cultural goods;
- enhance communication about resources and opportunities of a territory;
- serve as the backbone for projects of audience development;
- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of cultural resource management, obtaining results that could not be achieved individually by single members of the network;
- support important scientific exchanges;
- design touristic itineraries for a region;
- manage specific aspects of a territory's heritage.

In recent years, the wide range of benefits associated with managing cultural networks turned the word “network” into a new mantra, often implying many positive effects in rhetorical terms, while lacking solid evidence in some cases. Understanding clearly the possible role of networks implies describing the different typologies, as well as their potential and constraints.

First of all, a conceptual distinction between a network and a system should be made, as the latter is often used as a synonym of network. However, a system represents a following stage and/or a development of a network, being a different and a more structured organisation.

A network can be defined as a formal or informal agreement among different institutions and partners, aimed at sharing information, communication tools, resources and coordinating activities such as event calendars or scheduled openings throughout the week. All these activities rely on the partners' commitment and do not entail any investment for new structures, such as a department, an office with new personnel, a management centre, etc, which a system would require instead.

When new structures are established in a network on behalf of its partners to manage services and activities for the network's members, this marks a transition towards a system. Of course, there can be grey areas between networks and systems, an

evolution without interruptions, a consistent second stage exceeding the status of network. However, the main point is that a system is no longer a horizontal organisation, but it operates on another level with a different hierarchical structure due to the new infrastructures agreed upon by the partners.

This distinction is essential since this text focusses on networks, their typologies, their functioning, without considering systems and their specific features.

In this sense we can recognise different types of networks:

- Thematic networks without a geographical scope;
- Thematic networks with a geographical scope;
- Territorial networks, thematic or non-thematic;
- Territorial hybrid networks.

Thematic networks without a geographical scope

Many networks are based on a common matter of interest. Scientific museums are often part of wide networks which include institutions in foreign countries, having a dense scientific exchange either in terms of research, or regarding temporary exhibitions.

This is also true for other types of museums and heritage, such as star-shaped cities (Palmanova in Italy, Neuf Brisach in France, Bourtange and Naarden in the Netherlands, Karlovac in Croatia), or European royal residences (Association des Résidences Royales Européennes - ARRE), for instance.

In these cases, the benefits can be defined as centripetal, since they primarily remain within the organisations. They strengthen research activities, scientific communication, and information exchange without directly involving the audience, who may be completely unaware of the network's existence without missing anything important. The relations among museums or other institutions are mainly intangible and immaterial, focussed on knowledge, information, and communication.

Thematic networks with a geographical scope

This type of network is based on the venues' specific location. This is the case for a region's medieval castles, for the Fortress of the Alps, the Walsers' settlements, the prehistoric pile dwellings around the Alps (sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage List). The sites can be scattered in vast regions, which makes it difficult for audiences to visit all of them due to the great distances.

Nonetheless, regardless of the previous typology, perceiving the geography of the network is essential to understand the importance of a single site. Raising awareness of the network benefits the internal institutional organisation and creates a sort of centrifugal return. Moreover, it serves as a stimulus for deciding to go on another trip, visiting the entire network.





At the same time, one must also consider a strong set of internal and centripetal effects, as seen in the previous case: scientific exchange, better communication, efficient organisation of content and storytelling through cross-references across all sites of the network.

Territorial networks, thematic or non-thematic

Territorial networks are those whose geographic scope is designed according to the opportunity of audience to visit a significant portion—or even the totality—of their venues during a short holiday. This requires that the area involved is not too vast, spanning one or two valleys, some municipalities, or a district with specific perimeters. Here, these networks can serve as the backbone of the cultural supply and shape itineraries and paths for cultural tourism.

Territorial networks can be thematic (e.g., the Romanesque churches of a county, the watermill route of a valley, the demo-ethnic museum of a sub-region etc.) or non-thematic and include different venues, institutions, and heritage sites (castles, churches archaeological sites, historical museums, etc.).

In both cases, these networks are the ones more closely linked to a specific territory and able to interpret it, representing an important asset for local development in terms of relation with both the local population and tourist flows. They have to be designed with the highest level of audience-friendly care, with well-coordinated public transport schedules, and potential pedestrian and bike tours or other forms of sustainable travel options, aligned with the availability of other hospitality services, such as hotels, bars, and restaurants. Special attention must also be given to the even distribution of tourist flows across the whole territory, avoiding dramatic pressure on very well-known destinations and monuments.

While a large part of the impacts is centrifugal or, in other words, addressing audiences, there are also important benefits for the internal structure of partners. These include more effective communication, the ability to share specialised professionals who would be too expensive to be employed by a small museum on its own (curators, restorers, safety and security managers, etc), and the fulfilment of minimum standards as a network rather than individually (e.g., a minimum number of weekly opening hours can be achieved by more than one venue together).

Territorial hybrid networks

Besides cultural organisations and heritage, these networks can include other economic activities, such as high-quality agricultural products, food production and processing, craft products, workshops with their intangible know-how, and specialised facilities. In this case, their main character lies in providing both tourists and residents with a complex offer. Here, the visitor is no longer seen as a one-dimensional target, a maniac



exclusively devoted to museums and heritage, but as a multidimensional person with multifaced interests, looking for a deeper understanding of local culture, including intangible cultural heritage and specific know-how.

Moreover, networks with different cultural and non-cultural activities imply great collaboration among diverse economic subjects, helping increase the network's role in local development strategies and achieve economic sustainability. Alongside heritage, also living activities—what one might call “active landscape”—can form part of the whole cultural supply.

Perceiving the Network

There is no doubt that the last two types of territorial networks are the most effective in contributing to local development strategies. They can be crucial and active partners in supporting the three main stages of the process:

- a)** building a supply: which means, coordinating cultural resources with services and facilities, according to the visitor's perspective rather than solely maximising the network's internal efficiency. The visitor is at the centre, and the whole supply should achieve the highest level of affordance in relation to the different audiences;
- b)** building a cultural image: in other words, both tangible and intangible cultural assets need to be brilliant and structured, not only as far as heritage or museums are involved but affecting every aspect of the visitor's stay in one territory. Everything must be perceived as a cultural experience, a way of understanding the cultural value of a place and its local community.
- c)** building a touristic product: all cultural assets, facilities, and resources should be presented through an effective cultural image. This cultural branding can attract visitors from other places to discover local landscapes, heritage, and the way of life embedded in the territory.

It is clear that contributing to the good organisation and functioning of these three strategic stages is one of the most challenging tasks for a territorial network, providing meaningful support for the local development.

However, it is worthwhile to highlight that not all the specific goals included in this strategy can be achieved only by the network alone. Rather, it is necessary to promote alliances with local administrations and the other stakeholders. Being an important actor of a local development strategy implies having a political role and the ability of negotiating all the required actions with the stakeholders.

These strategies, in fact, are not limited to marketing or mere communication. The network has to be visible and perceived on the territory, but it cannot be limited to a red line connecting churches and castles on a leaflet; routes and itineraries have to be recognisable in the landscape. Specific signage is important, but not just that. Roads





and itineraries need to be designed for sustainable mobility, with bicycle and pedestrian paths, equipped rest areas, bars and restaurants along the way, and, above all, a high-quality landscape.

In a network, connections and roads are as important as the destinations. A series of scattered monuments and heritage sites is not enough; the quality of the connections between them informs the quality of the overall experience.

The quality of a network is a diffuse feature, it is the base for providing a positive experience. If necessary, restorations should be undertaken to set up at least some “landscape corridors” connecting each destination, allowing visitors to seamlessly enjoy cultural and aesthetic appreciation.

All these elements require also infrastructure investments as well as coordinated services and facilities, often beyond the network’s own capacity. Hence the need of sharing strategies with local governments and stakeholders to secure and promote investments in physical infrastructures across the network’s territory for it to effectively welcome citizens and tourists.

Governance Issues

One of the key aspects of a network is its lightness and agility. Whether formal or informal, agreements are relatively easy to achieve, and the network’s structure does not imply huge investments or the hiring of new personnel.

At the same time, this trait can also be a weakness. So easy to create, networks can as easily dissolve. Lightness and fragility are setting up a sort of trade-off.

Managing agreements requires commitment and a certain amount of work that may compete, in some way, with the involvement in running one’s own institution.

Many solutions can be adopted, such as distributing different tasks among the network’s partners, giving specific responsibilities to each of them, or appointing a temporary, rotating coordinator or president.

All these tools can help, but an issue still remains. While the general benefits for the network and the territory may be easy to detect, each single partner does not automatically perceive equally strong benefits and motivation.

To prevent participation in a network from becoming a mere transfer of autonomy, it is necessary to very carefully combine all interests, defining in advance the benefits and the responsibilities for each partner, structuring a consistent general picture.

It is worth underlining that such a combination of interests and commitments is easier to reach when conducted by a neutral third party rather than a single network member, who might hold personal points of view and risk causing conflicts of interest.

Furthermore, the definition of these relations and tasks is not a one-time activity but the product of a careful design that has to be regularly updated according to the changing circumstances.



In other words, networks that are not opportunistic configurations designed only to participate to a bid require constant maintenance and work, an aspect that represents a weak point for many networks. Even if not in a full-time role, it is important that at least one person keeps stimulating and motivating the network, aiding the circulation of information while providing visions and hypothesis for future developments. This sort of “network angel” should possess skills and competences in cultural projects as well as in social and stakeholder relations, accompanying collective initiatives and helping partners converge on general goals minimising time loss.

The lack of this activity and of specific training in social processes and local development, alongside the difficulties for partners to play this role, are among the causes of network decline in the long run.

Professional Communities and Heritage Communities

Paradoxically, cultural work is often a solitary activity, run by small enterprises or single professionals who are completely absorbed in daily tasks and unable to profit from exchanges, benchmarking, or relations with a wider professional community.

Among the benefits of working within a network, the continuous practice of cooperation is key. Cultural and heritage management is a very complex activity, calling for diverse and specific strategies each time. The specificity of each case and context usually prevents from applying general solutions, demanding a high degree of customisation instead.

This condition makes the experience of other professionals and partners invaluable. Knowing problems faced by peer professionals and the solutions they adopted can inspire new approaches. Moreover, networks provide small organisations with access to skills and competences, such as those pertaining to curators or restorers, normally available only to larger institutions.

The emergence of a professional community within a network is a great benefit for all partners involved.

However, strengthening internal ties is not the only task of a network.

Equally important is its activity within local society, addressing residents and citizens.

Dealing daily with local society, networks have the opportunity to involve citizens in taking care of their heritage. This can lead to the creation of a real heritage community as defined by the Faro Convention, consisting “of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations.”¹





Heritage communities are multifaceted and able to transform the act of inheriting into an active practice, giving meaning to the future while facing the contradictions of both present and past.

In other words, “Heritage communities play a crucial role in redefining and redesigning relationships and actions between peoples, places and stories with an enhanced definition of heritage. They bridge gaps between all layers of society, highlighting the values of diverse and shared heritage, which are close to the heart of communities.”²

Beyond their managing form, beyond their topology and geography, networks can play a key role in shaping their environment, fostering citizenship growth, and sharing the richness of cultural heritage with increasingly diverse audiences.

1 — Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2005), 2, available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/1680083746>> accessed 19 February 2025.

2 — Statement by Hakan Shearer Demir, from the Democratic Governance Directorate of the Council of Europe. For more details, see: <<https://www.europeanheritagedays.com/EHD-Programme/Press-Corner/News/Heritage-Communities-as-a-Guiding-Force-of-Europes-Imaginative-Future>> accessed 19 February 2025.



How Stakeholder Mapping and Management Can Benefit Complex, Cross-Border Cultural Events and Organisations

Riccardo Tovaglieri

Patrimonio Cultura

This short paper aims to analyse from a practical and operational perspective the role of stakeholder mapping and management in complex and cross-border cultural environments. Although often overlooked or limited to a first programmatic approach by senior management, daily stakeholder analysis and management can serve as a powerful tool for aligning and coordinating large, highly stratified organisations. Starting from a general approach, the present analysis will examine what steps and operational tools can be implemented, considering also their impact on fundraising activities and the general sustainability of the projects.

The Role of Stakeholder Management in Cultural Organisations

Economic literature has devoted significant attention to the role of stakeholders, providing various models and perspectives on the subject. The first definition was elaborated in 1963 at the Stanford Research Institute, and the first book on stakeholder theory, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, was published by Edward Freeman in 1984. However, for the vast majority of cultural organisations and events, stakeholder management is just part of high-level, strategic views rather than daily activities. The risk is that stakeholders become nothing more than a page or a fancy graph in one's sustainability report, brochure or website.

Therefore, while top management may have developed a clear stakeholder map, perhaps investing time and money in professionals and consultants, middle managers and staff involved in the project might have little interest, knowledge, or opportunity to use this information in a practical context.

Definitions and Frameworks of Stakeholder Management

While there is a variety of definitions of stakeholders, for the purpose of this paper, we consider the one provided by the Project Management Institute (PMI), which defines a project stakeholder as “an individual, group, or organization, who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a project, program, or portfolio.”¹

Similarly, Freeman defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's purpose.”²

According to these definitions, stakeholders can initially be clustered into two main groups: internal and external. Internal stakeholders include individuals who have a direct relationship





with the organisations, such as employees, directors, artists, and volunteers. In complex, stratified and cross-border organisations or events, this group can extend to entities directly involved in the implementation of the programme, such as municipalities, public bodies, agencies, committees, non-profit organisations, and cultural and artistic institutions.

External stakeholders, on the other hand, are those who do not have a direct relationship with the organisation but can affect or be affected by its objectives. While external stakeholders are generally well-thought-out when we think about stakeholder management, it is vital to consider internal stakeholders at all levels as well. In complex, multi-level, and multi-organisation projects, this can represent the difference between success and failure. Failing to consider, map, and monitor the different goals, expectations, desired outcomes and preferences of internal stakeholders may lead to a demotivated team, inefficient workflows, loss of information, and lack of informal learning, communication, and coordination. This will result in a significant staff turnover, the need to micro-manage every task, an oversized number of employees or volunteers, and, ultimately, a less effective service for the public or community.

Conflicts between different parts of an organisation or between different public and private organisations involved in a long-term, complex project can arise. For instance, when the various internal stakeholders are not informed or aligned regarding economic resources and fundraising activities, a central, more powerful public authority may divert resources away from smaller, less structured organisations.

Frameworks such as the Stakeholder Identification and Salience model help classify and rank different stakeholder groups. “Stakeholder salience” refers to the degree to which managers prioritise stakeholder claims according to the presence or absence of three distinct attributes:

- Power: a stakeholder’s ability to influence the firm
- Legitimacy: the perceived legitimacy of a stakeholder’s claim
- Urgency: the degree to which a stakeholder requires immediate attention.

Stakeholder Classification and Categories

According to the Stakeholder Identification and Salience model, stakeholders can be classified into various groups based on distinct characteristics that define their role and significance within a project or organisation.³ This model provides a framework for evaluating stakeholders by considering key attributes such as power, legitimacy, and urgency, which helps to better understand their influence and the priority of their claims or interests.



Stakeholder Typology and Classification: Power, Legitimacy and Urgency Models

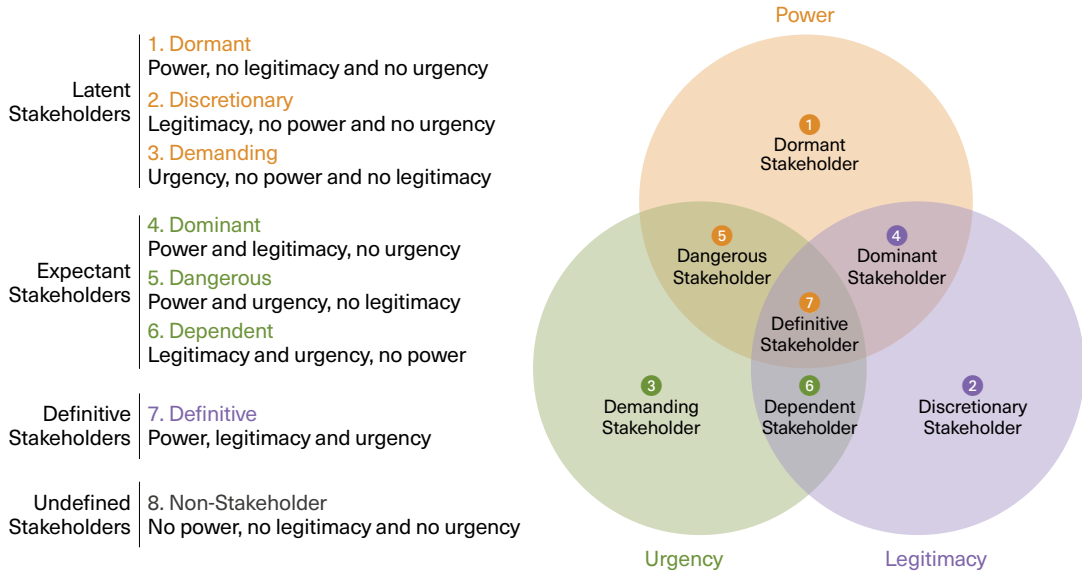


Fig. 1 – Graphical representation of the Stakeholder Identification and Salience model, developed based on the 1997 study by Ronald K. Mitchell, Bradley R. Agle, and Donna J. Wood “Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts”.

Latent stakeholders

Latent stakeholders possess only one of the three key attributes and do not have strong influence on the organisation.

This category includes three stakeholder classes:

1. **Dormant stakeholders:** possess the power to impose their views on the organisation but lack the legitimacy or urgency to actually do so, meaning their power remains unused.
2. **Discretionary stakeholders:** possess legitimacy but lack power and urgency, so they fail to influence the organisation significantly.
3. **Demanding stakeholders:** have urgent claims but lack the power and legitimacy to attract the attention of managers or decision-makers.

Expectant stakeholders

Expectant stakeholders possess two of the three key attributes and require increased responsiveness from the organisation toward their interests or views. It is possible for latent stakeholders to acquire one of the remaining attributes and become part of the expectant stakeholder category.





Expectant stakeholders fall into three classes:

1. Dominant stakeholders: both powerful and legitimate, with views that matter to managers.
2. Dangerous stakeholders: have power and urgency but lack legitimacy, ending up having a negative impact on the organisation.
3. Dependent stakeholders: have urgent and legitimate claims but lack power, often relying on the help of other stakeholders.

Definitive stakeholders

Definitive stakeholders represent a distinct class and category. They possess all three attributes and require the most attention. Team leaders must engage with this group, maintaining a strong relationship with these stakeholders throughout the project while ensuring they have the opportunity to provide input and feedback on major decisions. These stakeholders may differ depending on the nature of the project and its different phases.

This model assumes that groups or individuals who do not fall into these three categories are non-stakeholders and are of least concern during the project. However, the stakeholder environment is often dynamic, so one should put appropriate strategies in place to address the ever-changing stakeholder priorities.

The resulting stakeholder map is a visual representation of individuals or groups designed to help identify these key stakeholders, understand their influence, and develop stakeholder management strategies.

Stakeholder Mapping in Complex Organisations

Considering this framework, the impact of stakeholder mapping on complex organisations or on projects involving different organisations is rather clear. Large-scale events with an international scope, such as the Olympic Games or national and European Capitals of Culture are perfect case studies. These events, limited in time, involve a large number of organisations, both pre-existing or created ad hoc, that need to collaborate with consultants, professionals, and suppliers to reach different and sometimes conflicting goals. These range from the actual organisation of activities (cultural or sporting) to audience engagement, infrastructures development, services enhancement (for instance accommodation), promotion, communication, fundraising and more, including building a legacy. Each of these activities may involve one or more organisations and have different, sometimes conflicting priorities, goals, and stakeholders.

Having a shared, bottom-up approach to stakeholder mapping, management, and engagement can prevent problems down the road or in later stages of the programme. In particular, this approach can prevent a disconnect between the institutional, political, or



decision-making levels and the operational level of the organisation. Likewise, it improves the coordination of different teams and facilitates the exchange of relevant information.

Practical Steps for Stakeholder Mapping

The main steps for a participative stakeholder mapping are: listing stakeholders, evaluating their influence, and defining a stakeholder management strategy. Let us now take a closer look at each of these three phases.

List stakeholders

List all possible stakeholders, regardless of their relevance or role. This should be done in an open, collaborative environment where everyone involved in the project can contribute.

This phase is generally overlooked but can provide significant insights to all levels of the project. For instance, public bodies can gather information on stakeholder categories they had not considered before. People coming from different organisations or countries can identify stakeholders that may not have been visible from their point of view before. Similarly, even within a single organisation, individuals can understand which stakeholders are relevant to each area or function. For instance, people involved in education can consider students, schools, universities, and teachers as their stakeholders while people focussed on incoming tourism can highlight the role of accommodations, tour operators, restaurants and so on.

Evaluate stakeholder influence

The second step consists of an evaluation of the role of each identified stakeholder to then position them within the Power–Legitimacy–Urgency model.

In order to be effective, this step must be clearly separated from the previous one.

While the goal of step one is to list as many stakeholders as possible, regardless of their importance or role, step two focusses only on their evaluation according to the three attributes (power, legitimacy, and urgency), without adding or removing any stakeholder to/from the list.

This phase is critical because several project members and organisations involved may have different, even diverging perceptions of each stakeholder's role. Someone can consider a stakeholder definitive, while others can perceive them as expectant or even latent. Understanding the reasons behind these differing points of view can be essential for aligning efforts from different parts of the organisations and work toward a common goal.

However, several biases can impact this phase. The most significant are those related to the widely studied effect of self-fulfilling prophecies and group dynamics, especially when individuals within a group do not feel free to express their views or are influenced by those in positions of power, authority or seniority.





Define a stakeholder management strategy

Once a clear, shared, and widely accepted stakeholder map has been defined according to the Power–Legitimacy–Urgency model, the final step is to define a strategy to manage stakeholders (at least the definitive ones) during the entire project or event.

The following list features some basic elements for any stakeholder management plan that should be defined and shared with the organisation(s):

- Area(s) of influence/interest
- Project phase
- Stakeholder manager
- Engagement approach
- Engagement tools
- Frequency of contact

These elements can be usefully represented in a table format, as illustrated in the example below:

Stakeholder	Areas of Influence/ Interest	Project Phase	Stakeholder Manager	Engagement Approach	Engagement Tools	Frequency of Contact

Imagine, for instance, that the local accommodation has been identified as a definitive stakeholder. This group can have a strong influence in multiple areas, including touristic flows, local promotion, and hospitality for artists and staff, being relevant during both the phases preceding the event and the actual event.



The identification of a single person as manager for each specific stakeholder (or stakeholder category) is fundamental. Furthermore, this is the most important piece of information to be always shared across all organisations involved in the project. This ensures that information, activities, and communications are directed to the right person, allowing efficient and timely actions and decisions.

The engagement approach for each stakeholder (for instance: listening, gathering opinions, engaging in common actions or activities, helping participation, contributions, communication, and so on) and the related tools can vary significantly. Similarly, the frequency of contact and the kind of messages may range from occasional updates a few times a year to a continuous, real-time exchange of information through technological platforms.

Each section in the management plan can be detailed and deepened as much as needed according to the complexity of the project or event and the stakeholder's relevance.

In any case, sharing a global view of stakeholder management with the entire team can greatly benefit the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall stakeholder strategy.

Stakeholder Mapping and Fundraising

Finally, it is worth noting how this approach can also be usefully applied to fundraising activities.

Regardless of its scale, every cultural project or event always faces the critical issue of securing resources. A strategic fundraising approach aims to address this by gathering financial, technical, and human resources to ensure the growth and development of an organisation's institutional mission.

While developing a stakeholder map, one may identify several organisations or individuals that could serve as the base of the fundraising strategy. In fact, the first step of any fundraising strategy involves defining and clustering potential prospects. This activity can be seen as a specific, limited part of the wider process of stakeholder mapping, with some peculiarities.

A useful model one can apply in this case is the Link–Ability–Interest model, generally used to prioritise and manage different groups of prospects. Similarly to stakeholder mapping, once all potential target groups of the fundraising strategy have been identified, one can use this framework to organise them.

First of all, it is crucial to determine whether the identified prospect has a relevant connection to the organisation, the event, their mission or values. The following are examples of possible links that can be taken into consideration:





- Product link
- Product-image link
- Corporate-image link
- Target link
- Historical link
- Opposed link
- Personal link
- Geographical link

Once one or more links are clearly identified, the next step is to insert the prospect in a two-by-two matrix (as the one illustrated below); if no relevant link can be identified, one can discard the prospect.

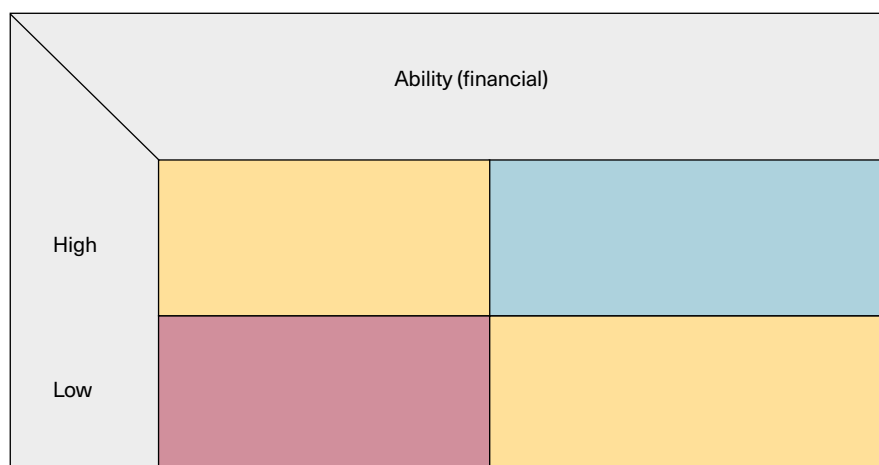


Fig. 2 – Two-by-two matrix for prospect evaluation, mapping financial ability and interest to identify relevant links for the project.

The matrix has the following structure: on one axis it features the (financial) ability—the prospect's possibility to contribute significantly to the project—and, on the other, the interest—the relevance of the project itself to the prospect.

While the ability is generally easier to measure (for instance, as net wealth or revenues in the corporate sector), the interest can be more challenging to assess. However, useful indicators include the prospect's rate of participation in events or meetings about the project, the frequency of interactions, and the previous support.

In this matrix, the first target group will consist of those with high interest and high ability.



Conversely, the subjects with low interest and low ability will be addressed last.

The other two groups must be carefully managed:

- Those with high ability but low interest should be involved and motivated (perhaps finding or developing specific activities of their interest);
- Those with low ability but high interest, on the contrary, should be involved as loyal supporters, with relatively small contributions over a long period of time.

In conclusion, it should be evident that all the activities described above, along with the potential mental frameworks, can serve as a powerful and cost-effective guiding star for organisations navigating complex, cross-border, stratified and multi-actor cultural environments. The models briefly outlined, if applied in daily work environment and personalised according to specific contexts, are a relevant tool for operating staff, middle and senior management, board of directors, and governing bodies alike.

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Audience Development: Where Do We Stand?

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A Threefold Movement

Audience development is an approach to cultural design that has gained considerable attention in Europe over the past decade, especially since 2014, with the launch of the European Union's Creative Europe programme.¹ The concept had been discussed as early as the 1990s, especially among Anglo-Saxon scholars in the UK and USA, where it appeared as a corollary of some cultural marketing theories that focussed more and more on the role and needs of cultural audiences.² However, it was only in 2014 that the term “audience development” became the buzzword of European cultural actions, once it was included among the priorities of the Creative Europe 2014-2020 programme, which supported European cooperation projects. Then, any cultural operator or project designer seeking European Commission funding had to familiarise with this approach, which European institutions posed as an objective and a requirement for project support. During this period, the European Commission was also responsible for the formalisation and the most concise and effective definition of the concept: audience development describes all activities aimed at making cultural content more accessible, comprehensible, and less distant from its audiences, both existing and potential, helping cultural organisations develop lasting relationships with them. In short, audience development entails a threefold strategy: broadening, diversifying, and improving audience relationships.

European policymakers promoted this approach in response to the declining participation reported by all key indices of cultural consumption from previous years, aiming to support the sector's growth by stimulating demand. They also believed that a more accessible and inclusive culture could engage less experienced audiences, reaching segments of the population less accustomed to cultural consumption, and, ultimately, stimulate civic participation, social cohesion, and cultural democratisation.

Audiences, Barriers, Needs

Years of reflection and practice in audience development have consolidated the use of visual maps, often featuring concentric circles, designed to identify and describe different types of audiences.³ “Regular audiences”—also called habitual or core audiences—are more assiduous in their attendance and can be engaged with little effort. “Occasional audiences” have a sporadic relationship with cultural activities, attending mostly for special events or specific content. In this case, organisations can offer targeted activities

to try to get them to attend more often. “Potential audiences” are potentially interested and aligned with an organisation’s offerings, but still participate very little or not at all. Finally, there are the so-called “non-audiences”, those most distant from cultural activities who seem to lack interest and motivation to participate, often due to structural barriers.⁴ One of the main focusses of audience development practices lies in questioning the specific needs of each audience category. Cultural organisations can construct identikits of the different audience segments in various ways, such as “personas cards”, brainstorming with different members of the team, or analysing available audience data. For each audience segment, it is important to ask how they relate to cultural activities, identifying the motivations that lead them to participate or, on the contrary, the barriers that prevent them from doing so. All types of barriers should be considered, including informational ones as well as comprehension, economic, psychological, and accessibility barriers.⁵ Once the audience map is built and the audience segments to focus on are identified, one can design different types of activities. When the aim is to broaden the audience by reaching those who are not yet connected with the organisation, like potential audiences or non-audiences, outreach activities should be implemented. When, on the other hand, the organisation tries to involve closer groups already connected with its activities, such as regular and occasional audiences, then engagement activities can be used. Both processes are fundamental to tailor an effective audience development strategy, each requiring specific approaches and sensitivities.

A Transversal Dimension

Designing cultural activities with the audience at the centre implies teamwork across different skills, roles, and functions within an organisation. This is true when it comes to barriers; to address information barriers, one must first work with communication strategies, while comprehension barriers demand good cultural mediation policies. To tackle economic barriers, one can make promotion and marketing efforts, while for psychological ones, one must act on their positioning, considering community-building actions or partnerships with other organisations to establish dialogues with distant communities. Accessibility barriers call for careful design and wise organisation of physical and digital spaces, involving also logistics and service orientation.⁶ In short, audience development is not a single activity to be delegated to the communication or public relations office of an organisation; rather, it is a set of practices, a strategic stimulus, an organisational vision. This feature was highlighted and effectively described by the 2017 *Study on Audience Development: How to Place Audiences at the Centre of Cultural Organisations*, commissioned by the European Union under the Creative Europe Programme.⁷ The research consortium, formed by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, Culture Action Europe, European Center for Cultural Organization and Management (ECCOM), and





Intercult, developed both a theoretical and empirical framework, collecting and studying dozens of cultural organisations that had actively engaged with their audiences. The study showed some fundamental prerequisites for these processes, such as the attitude to listen, the ability to learn from mistakes through trial and error, the importance of data and of sharing objectives across the entire organisation.

Promotion, Mediation, Participation

Holistic approaches to audience development strategies at an organisation-level may sound daunting to individual cultural professionals who would like to approach this theme. Therefore, it may be useful to simplify the picture and anchor audience development activities to three basic functions common to every cultural organisation and project: promotion, mediation, and participation.

Promotion activities

When carried out with sensitivity and attention toward specific audiences, promotion activities can certainly be considered audience development activities. They may include offers, products, discounts, and communication channels dedicated to a specific type of audience (e.g., young people or communities with unique territorial or cultural traits). Tools and activities from relational marketing, such as contests, rewarding schemes, subscriptions, and membership cards, can group the cultural offerings from regional organisations, stimulating curiosity and encouraging the discovery of new contents in the area. These are all tools designed to potentially expand the audience, building with them positive and engaging relationships while broadening a territory's cultural offerings.

Mediation activities

Mediation activities have traditionally been the most closely associated with audience enlargement and cultivation policies, making their link to audience development rather straightforward. They include all efforts to aid and enrich audience fruition, such as guided tours in heritage institutions, meetings with the artists before or after their performances, “spectator schools” in theatres, or film education programmes in cinemas. In general, the educational department of an institution manages these activities as workshops, laboratories, or intercultural initiatives. Today, this category also requires a new sensibility to carefully deal with information materials and texts, ranging from captions and panels in museums to programmes and information sheets in theatres. Who is our message directed to? Is our language accessible enough for different audiences to understand and interpreted it? Are we taking into account different sensitivities, identities, and specific communities in our communication?



Participation

Participation is certainly not a new topic for cultural organisations, but in recent years, it has returned to the heart of the debate. It can be useful to analyse it focussing on three key dimensions of participation, depending on the intensity and form these processes take. Let's start with digital engagement, a form of participation that was virtually unknown to cultural organisations just two decades ago. Web 2.0 ushered in the era of sharing and personalisation, initially through simple interactions and comments on social networks. More recently, the ability of cultural institutions to create digital libraries with digitised content has opened up new possibilities for appropriation, remixing, and reinterpretation by online audiences. People can now curate their own personal collections, create unprecedented connections, and lose themselves in endless journeys of discovery. This represents a completely new kind of relationship, capable of subverting the paradigm and challenge the very essence of traditional cultural institutions, especially heritage institutions such as museums, libraries, and archives.⁸ In the realm of performing arts, however, this digital revolution seems to remain rather unexplored at present.

Another important dimension of participation is community building, i.e., the construction of audience communities (online or offline) that engage with a project or cultural institution beyond extemporaneous interactions, triggering a long-term relationship based on exchange and dialogue. Let's consider the "practice groups" that may gather within cultural spaces: reading or writing groups in libraries, film or music appreciation groups in theatres and cinemas. These are small, temporary communities brought together by cultural institutions, providing opportunities for shared cultural growth, discussion, and mutual influence both among participants and with the institutions themselves. Volunteer groups also play a role, helping organise events and festivals. Many institutions have created "boards" or groups of "advisers" representing specific audience communities, such as youth boards, senior boards, or local boards. These groups help organisations make decisions and sometimes directly organise activities to engage their peers.

This leads us to the third aspect of participation: crowdsourcing. While it incorporates previously discussed elements, crowdsourcing entails artistic creation through the audience's input and resources to produce new participatory, co-created content. This includes experiments in co-curation or participatory programming, where the public, coordinated by the institution, selects parts of a cultural offering, such as a festival section. There are also more complex cultural products which are directly crowdsourced, such as community archives, exhibitions featuring objects lent by individuals, or theatre and dance productions involving groups of spectators or ordinary citizens.⁹ In these cases, different roles blend, and new relationships and hierarchies appear. On the one hand, the balance between professional and non-professional contributions has to be





constantly redefined and negotiated. On the other hand, the co-created works require careful mediation and storytelling when presented to the audience shifting focus from the final product to the creative process itself, where the true cultural valuable often lies.

Everybody Wants the Non-Audience

Over the past few years there has been a gradual shift away from traditional audience development practices toward a growing interest in projects devoted to non-audiences, addressing the specific needs of vulnerable or marginalised groups.¹⁰ This shift is partly due to a positive trend sweeping through our societies in all sectors: the ever-increasing sensitivity to issues of inclusion and the representation of communities that were previously overlooked or even oppressed. In the cultural sector, many of these projects have found an ideal context thanks to a new approach to cultural policy in Europe known as cultural welfare.¹¹ This approach is based on the idea that art and culture improve both individual well-being and the collective well-being of communities, directly impacting quality of life as well as physical and mental health. In recent years, this concept has gained increasing support from the medical and scientific community, especially through reports and recommendations from the World Health Organization. In this context, many policymakers have begun promoting greater collaboration between the cultural and social-health sectors, for example supporting projects that bring culture into healthcare institutions (such as hospitals or nursing homes) and into rehabilitation programmes for people with chronic or degenerative diseases, benefiting both patients and caregivers. Many studies and projects have investigated the role of culture in healthy ageing or the importance of cultural enjoyment from early childhood, with the introduction of “cultural passports” for families and young children. Another trend is “social prescribing”, where doctors and healthcare professionals recommend cultural and artistic activities as part of a patient’s therapeutic treatment. Within this new trend, also traditional cultural activities such as social and community theatre, art therapy workshops, and programmes for young people at risk of social exclusion have regained recognition and fortune. This approach has the obvious merit of fostering social cohesion, while also pursuing the most natural goal of cultural organisations and professionals: reaching the most distant and difficult audiences. It is no surprise, then, that cultural welfare can count on the enthusiasm of a wide community of cultural operators. However, these projects are very complex and challenging. They often require the construction of cross-sector networks (including culture, healthcare, education, and social services) where differences in language, objectives and working methods must be navigated. Measuring results and evaluating impacts present another big challenge. When projects set very ambitious goals, such as improving participants’ living conditions,



emotional well-being, and social integration, they require expertise and evaluation tools that most cultural organisations currently cannot afford.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is that of sustainability. Financially, cultural welfare projects often require significant investments, as they rarely involve ticket sales or an economic contribution from the participants. Therefore, cultural organisations end up relying even more than usual on public and private funding to ensure long-term continuity. Considering organisational sustainability, many institutions risk treating non-audience projects as “appendices”, dependent on external partnerships with professionals from other sectors. Thus, they may struggle to evolve and develop expertise within the team, or leave structural impact on the organisation’s audience map. Ultimately, to become occasional or habitual attenders of a cultural proposal, non-audiences need constant stimulation and guidance, which remain a major challenge, especially for one-off projects.

The Cornerstone: Organisational Learning

Let's be clear: the pursuit of non-audiences is right and praiseworthy. However, given the great challenges these projects pose for cultural institutions, it may be too early to dismiss the audience development approach as too holistic, or too difficult to explain and defend. By replacing it with a generic idea of inclusion, the risk of falling into rhetoric arises, especially when there is a lack of knowledge or understanding of audiences and their needs. Some of the methodologies and practices developed in recent years thanks to audience development should remain a valuable legacy for planners tackling the challenge of engaging non-audiences. For example, the practice of co-planning and co-design, bringing together different skills, both within and outside the cultural organisation. Equally useful is the focus on capacity building, investing in staff skills and team building alike, developing cohesive and motivated working groups, which are a necessary prerequisite for successful audience strategies.

Over the years, a number of practical tools have emerged to help organisations stimulate internal discussion, share objectives, and ensure that their activities reach their intended impact. The Digital Engagement Framework,¹² developed a decade ago by consultants from the UK and the Netherlands, is still a very useful tool for aligning goals, resources and audiences, enabling organisations to plan and implement effective outreach or engagement strategies. For more comprehensive project designs, there is the Audience Centred Experience Design (ACED) Blueprint,¹³ a result of the Adeste Plus EU project¹⁴ providing a pathway divided in eight phases inspired by design-thinking techniques. It helps organisations prepare their team, identify audiences, prototype audience development actions, and embed them into organisational practice. Meanwhile, the MOI Framework,¹⁵ the EU project devoted to Museums of Impact, has developed a toolkit to





address the issue of social impact, which is closely linked to audiences and communities. While designed for museums, this strategic self-assessment pathway is useful for all heritage institutions, helping teams question their work across key themes related to social impact.

In all these examples, the cornerstone remains the same: organisational learning. Reflecting on audiences is a valuable opportunity for organisations or groups to bring out, share, remix, and produce knowledge. The core challenge lies in empowering cultural institutions to be protagonists in this process, enabling them to drive meaningful transformation in society. Their success depends on their ability to digest and strategically rework all the knowledge they generate. This is perhaps the most important lesson from years of audience development work across Europe, and it is the foundation upon which we can build the next chapters of this journey.

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Legacies of the European Capital of Culture Programme. Key Factors

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Expectations about the impact of European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programmes have grown exponentially over the past decade and securing a legacy has become one of the most important markers of success. Despite such expectations, current frameworks for planning, documenting, and delivering sustainable ECoC legacies remain unclear. Teams receive scarce formal support and few reliable reference points to help develop and secure them. This paper summarises the key points discussed during a day-long workshop with the Italian and Slovenian teams behind GO! 2025, European Capital of Culture 2025. Over the following pages, the paper explores the formal framework for legacy proposals, focussing on bidding requirements while featuring examples of ECoC bid proposals and of research and evaluation frameworks for measuring impact and legacy. It then examines the original GO! 2025 bid proposal in this context, highlighting its unique challenges and legacy opportunities.

The Existing Formal Framework for Legacy Proposals: Bidding Requirements

ECoC bidding cities must respond to a formal candidature questionnaire that outlines six essential criteria. These criteria must be fully met in order to be awarded the title.

The winning city secures the title based on a candidature file—or official bid book—which serves as its official contract with the European Commission. This document, which collects the city's responses to the questionnaire, identifies the main criterion for planning legacies as the first one: “contribution [of the ECoC project] to the [city's] long-term strategy.”

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- Describe any changes to the cultural strategy since the pre-selection stage, and the role of the ECoC pre-selection in these changes, if relevant. Indicate specifically which priorities of this strategy the ECoC action intends to contribute to, and how.
- Have your intentions in terms of long-term impact of the ECoC action on the city changed since pre-selection? If yes, please describe the changes or further impact foreseen.
- Describe your plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the title on your city and for disseminating the results of the evaluation. In particular, the following questions could be considered:
 - Who will carry out the evaluation?
 - What objectives and milestones will be included in your evaluation plan, between the designation and the year of the title?
 - What baseline studies or surveys do you intend to use?
 - What sort of information will you track and monitor?
 - How will you define “success”?
 - Over what time frame and how regularly will the evaluation be carried out?
 - How will the results be disseminated?

Fig. 1 – European Commission: *ECoC Final Selection, Candidate Questionnaire* (2017-2024).



This criterion and its associated requirements provide a crucial foundation for cities to reflect on their medium- to long-term aspirations. More importantly, it ensures that all ECoC proposals consider the relationship between their intended programme and the city's long-term cultural aspirations, as outlined in its official and published strategy. This criterion also requires cities to define key areas of impact and ways to measure them in order to demonstrate success. However, what this criterion does not do is request specific commitments to funding activities beyond the ECoC year or ensure that the evaluation plans extend over time, so that the proposed impacts—and their legacy—can materialise and be documented. This is an important caveat that explains the challenges many cities face after securing the title. While ECoC proposals may include ambitious plans and aspirations for legacy, they often lack material guarantees for continuity, such as sustained funding, staffing resources, and stakeholder commitments beyond their ECoC year. As a result, additional resources must be identified beyond the original budget, and further negotiations conducted—beyond those set out in the bid book—to make legacies a reality.

Examples of ECoC Bid Proposals for Legacy

The process of ECoC pre-selection and selection has evolved significantly since 2014, with selection panels paying increasing attention to the first criterion outlined in the previous section. ECoC teams are required to be quite specific in explaining their proposed impacts and convincing in their evaluation proposals to ensure these impacts can be measured. For candidate cities, this process is often a unique challenge, as official cultural strategies are not the norm across Europe, and consistent cultural evaluation practices among local authorities tend to be weak, uneven or even non-existent. In this context, the ECoC bidding process often serves as a platform for capacity building, fostering strategic thinking, cultural-impact planning, and the development of evaluation tools.

In the following pages there are some examples of how ECoC bidding candidates have addressed these requirements.



Example 1

PROGRAMME STRAND: PLATFORM	EXPECTED IMPACTS/SUCCESS FACTORS			INDICATORS FOR MONITORING SUCCESS
	CULTURAL	SOCIAL	ECONOMIC/URBAN	
CONFLUENCE ○	○ MODERNISM FOR THE FUTURE			Q8
	ECoC title gives an impulse for Kaunas to proceed on active interpretation of the Modernism movement in Europe and beyond.	Modernist heritage and its usage become key elements of the City's forward-looking identity. Awareness and emotional attachment to heritage is raised.	Currently abandoned prominent Modernist buildings (Kaunas Post Office, Milk Centre, Progress Building and others) are culturally revived and are under public use. European/international audience interest is enhanced and visits triggered.	• Number of renovated and revived private and public buildings; • Amount and quality of research and artistic interpretation of the Modernist heritage, its international importance during and beyond the title year; • Number of tourists visiting Kaunas for its Modernist heritage.
CONFLUENCE ○	○ MEMORY OFFICE			Q8
	Jewish, Russian, Polish, German, Roman and other minorities' culture and the memory of the former Europeaness of Kaunas will be evident in the City and the District.	The multicultural and multinational heritage of the City emerges overcoming common amnesia.	Kaunas is back on the European Culture Map, establishes itself on international creative networks, new businesses and strengthened CCI sector.	• Number of Jewish, German, Russian cultural figures, facts, sites and buildings commemorated and acknowledged; • Numbers of events, promoting the multicultural history of Kaunas; • Number of local and international visitors and tourists to Kaunas; • Number of the City's projects within the European networks.
CONFLUENCE ○	○ DESIGNING HAPPINESS			Q8
	The City Municipality and cultural organisations adapt design thinking methods to benefit the citizens and their feeling of Europeaness. New and unifying narrative is created, self-esteem, happiness and community spirit of citizens is raised.	Kaunas City and District designs itself into a place of happy experiences. Kaunas cultural organisations become physically, mentally, and linguistically accessible.	Previously disused buildings in New Town area are creatively used by the CCI sector, especially by new-generation and young businesses. The boost of the CCI sector, new workplaces created, more young people stay in the City, self-employment is raised. Being a site of unconventional approach towards art and design the City attracts international attention and visitors.	• Rate of accessibility to cultural services; • Happiness rate of citizens; • Statistics of social business sector; • Number of CCI businesses.

Fig. 2 – An ECoC bid proposal that aims for legacies rooted in symbolic change: a change in narrative, perception, and in storytelling. (This table is a graphical representation of a detail from the Final Stage Bid Book of Kaunas 2022 – European Capital of Culture, edited by this volume's editors).





Example 2

LONG-TERM IMPACT		
Impact area	Sample impact indicators 2026-2030 with related thematic indicators of culture in the UNESCO 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	ECoC implementation
Cultivation of democratic togetherness/social cohesion		
Active role of citizens in society	25% more participative interventions and cultural projects in public space	Generous Neighbours, Makers, Chemnitz Cultural Region <i>A, B, C, D</i>
	Greater self-initiative to improve city environment	
	More citizens engage in citizens' platforms and associations and as volunteers in the artistic sector	
	70% of citizens feel that urban development corresponds to their needs	
New strategies to face racism	Cultural mediation and exchange formats integrated into 70% of the activities of cultural organisations and associations	Generous Neighbours, Eastern State of Mind, Makers, It's Moving!, Chemnitz Cultural Region <i>A, B, C, D</i>
	Cross-cultural and intergroup activities and programming increased by 25%	
	300 requests are made every year to the European Workshop for Culture and Democracy to complement political education with cultural and artistic formats from the city, region and cross-border area	
	Increased media skills, especially among 14-20 year olds	
Social optimism and generalized trust	35% more citizens feel more competent to deal with diversity	Makers, It's Moving!, Eastern State of Mind <i>A, B, C</i>
	30% more citizens believe that the city's future development will be positive	
	Interpersonal trust will have increased by 5% in 2026 and 10% by 2030	
	Daily racist language decreases by 25% in the city and cross-border area	

Fig. 3 – An ECoC bid city that clearly connects impact areas with specific indicators and examples of ECoC programming and implementation to achieve such impacts.

Example 3

Key priority	Anticipated impact
Children and young people	An improved cultural education model
	Between 80% and 100% of school students take part
	Increase by 50% students returning after studying elsewhere
Growing our audience	Overall audience numbers improve by 30% and by 40% from hard to reach groups
Connections and capacity	Increase of 20% in cultural workforce
	Each of 10 main towns is a recognised cultural, cool hotspot
City Development	Bodø known as a cool European cultural city
	20% increase in new workers coming to Nordland and Bodø
	Creative businesses increase by 10%; Tourist jobs by 10%
	30% increase in hotel stays up to 2024; continued post 2024 growth
Freedom of expression	Nordland recognised as best practice example of cultural democracy

Fig. 4 – An ECoC bid proposal connecting the ECoC project priorities with anticipated impacts.



Example 4

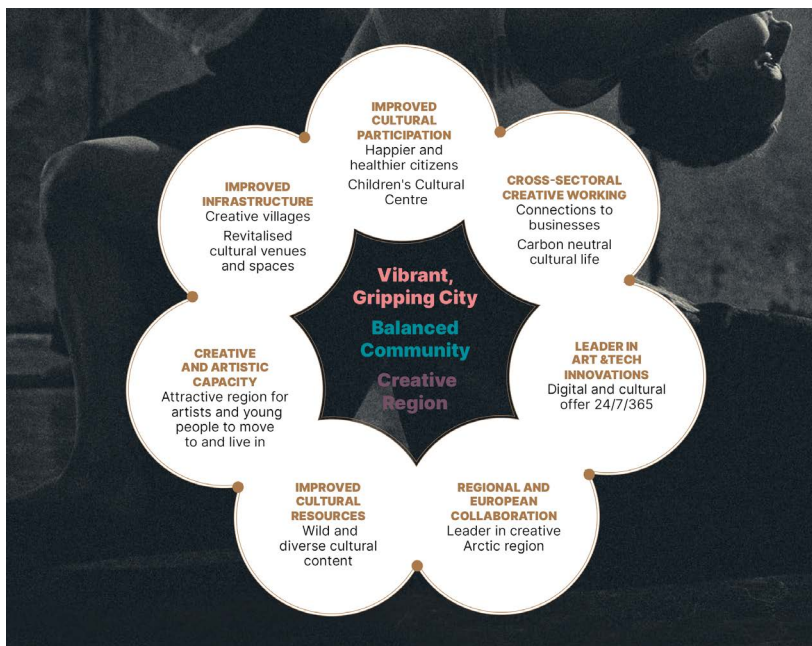
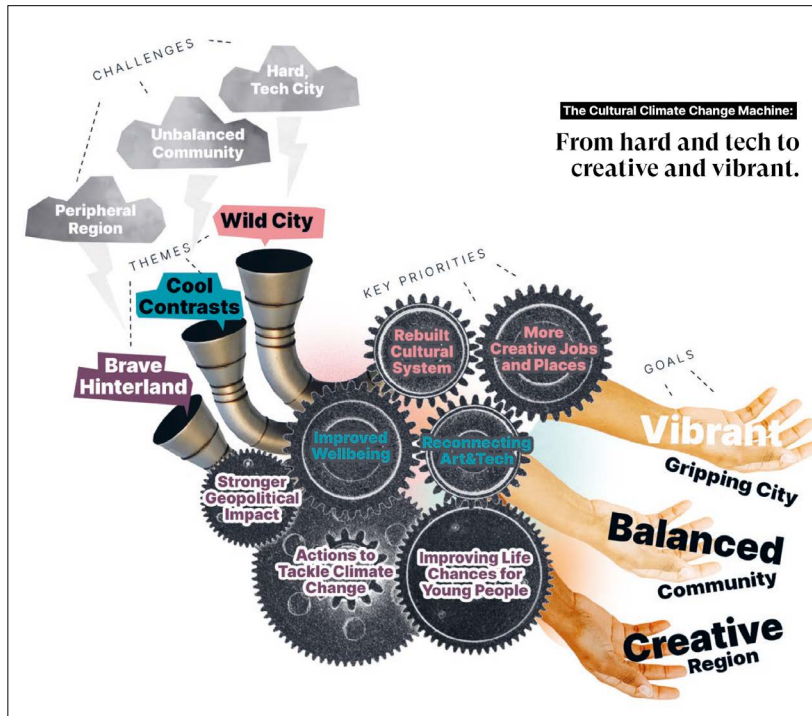
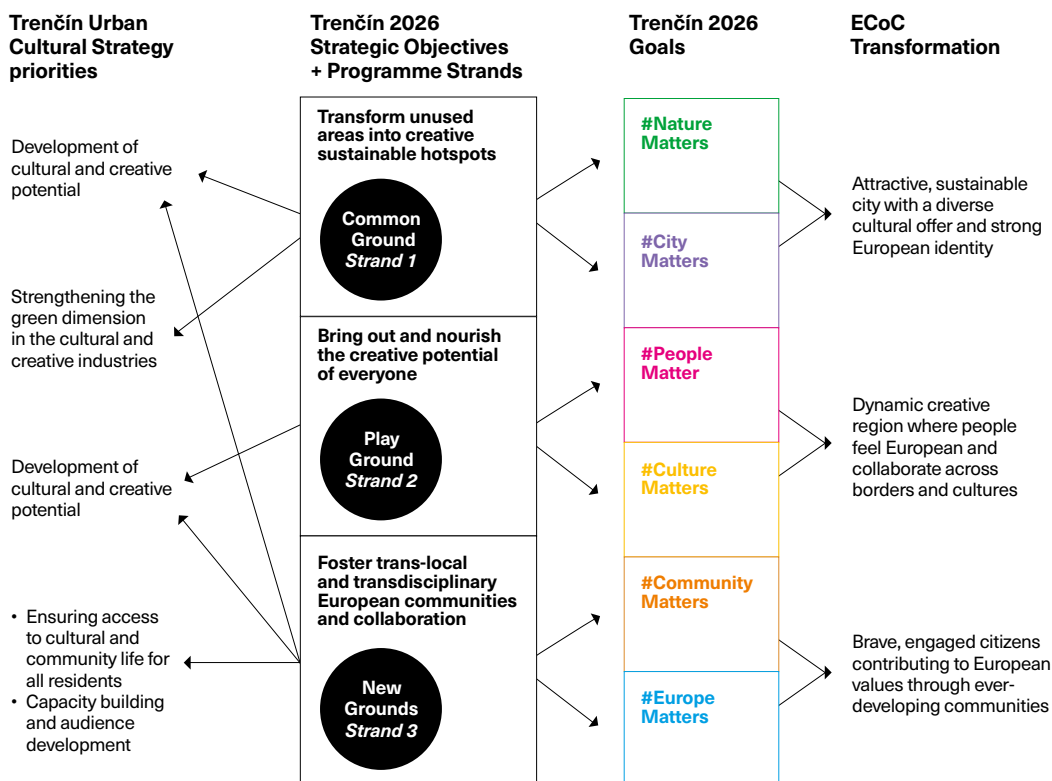


Fig. 5 – An ECoC bid proposal presenting a visual model and interpretation of its legacy and impact aspirations. (Graphics from the Oulu2026 ECoC Candidate City Bid Book *You Are Part of the Cultural Climate Change*).





Example 5



Long-term connections between cultural, economic and social sectors via Fields of Curiosity

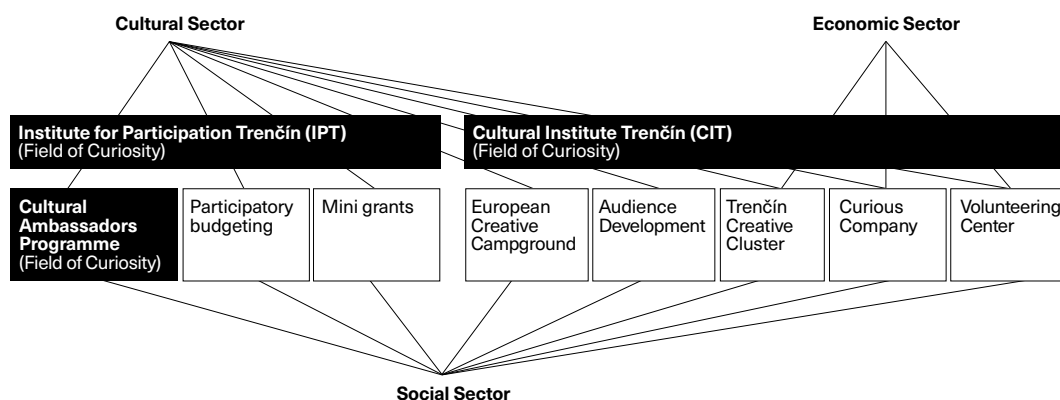


Fig. 6 – An ECoC bid proposal that clearly aligns the city's cultural strategy priorities with the strategic objectives and goals of the ECoC project and the expected legacy. (An ECoC transformation from the Trenčín 2026 ECoC Candidate City Bid Book *Cultivating Curiosity*).



Frameworks for Measuring and Evaluating Impacts and Potential Legacies

The previous section provides evidence of the significant advancements made in candidature books in outlining and projecting potential impacts and legacies. ECoC bids have become increasingly imaginative in their legacy projections, demonstrating how these potential legacies relate to the city's broader strategic vision, how they are embedded within ECoC goals and objectives, and how they could be measured through specific indicators and evaluation programmes. Despite such projections and bid-stage commitments, there are not yet many examples of actual research and evaluation programmes conducted before, during, or after the ECoC hosting year to fully document and substantiate legacies. Some pioneering examples of longitudinal evaluation (that is, ECoC evaluation programmes designed to capture impacts, effects, and legacies over two to ten years) are presented below. A well-known example is the Impacts 08 research programme on Liverpool 2008, which ran from 2005 to 2010 and was extended until 2018, providing over a decade of evidence on ECoC transformations. This programme provided the basis for a series of ECoC policy and evidence networks, facilitating greater knowledge transfer and collaboration between ECoC hosts in the area of evaluation and indicator development. A valuable outcome of this was the report *An International Framework of Good Practice in Research and Delivery of the European Capital of Culture Programme*,¹ published with the support of the European Commission, in 2010. Furthermore, in 2013, the European Parliament published a 30-year review of the key findings on *Success Strategies and Long-Term Effects* in the ECoC programme.² This comprehensive report, along with its appendices, was the first attempt at offering comparative evidence on the programme's full development, from its inception in 1985 up to 2013. The European Parliament report provided some guidelines for establishing a framework for assessing the ECoC programme. It argued that to capture legacy, host cities must carefully reflect on the relationship between their original vision, governance structures, and legacy planning, alongside the resulting programming, operations, and intended impacts. The report stressed the importance of avoiding fragmented delivery too: cities need to define what they mean by "success" and what constitutes a valuable legacy, as there is no unique formula for delivery, and the potential impacts of an ECoC programme can be diverse, or even contradictory.





Bidding + delivery approaches
& success strategies

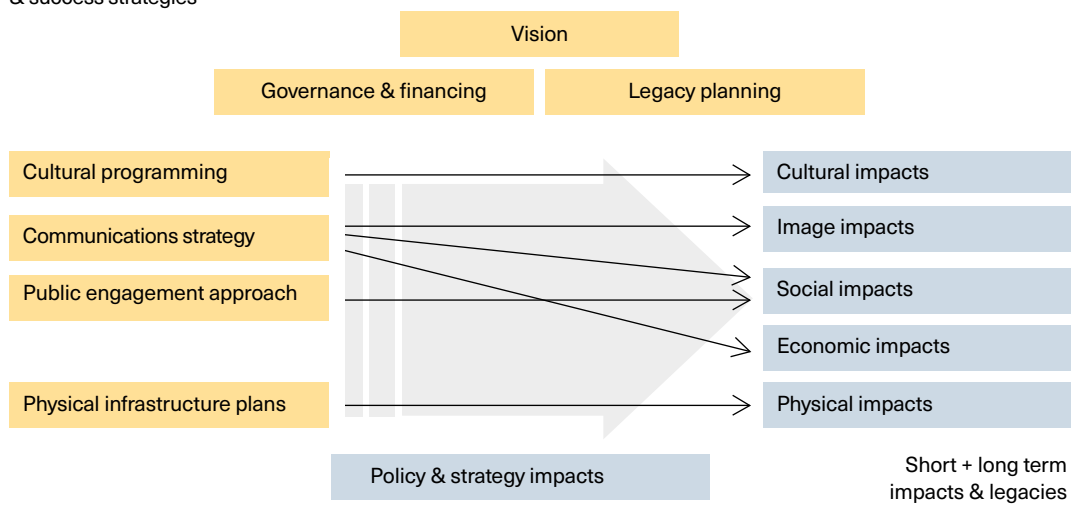


Fig. 7 – Simplified list of indicators from the ICC model of assessment. This diagram outlines key indicators for evaluating the ECoC initiative, distinguishing between delivery approaches and impact outcomes. (The graph is a graphical adaptation of the diagram presented in the document *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-Term Effects*).

Assessing a European Capital of Culture...

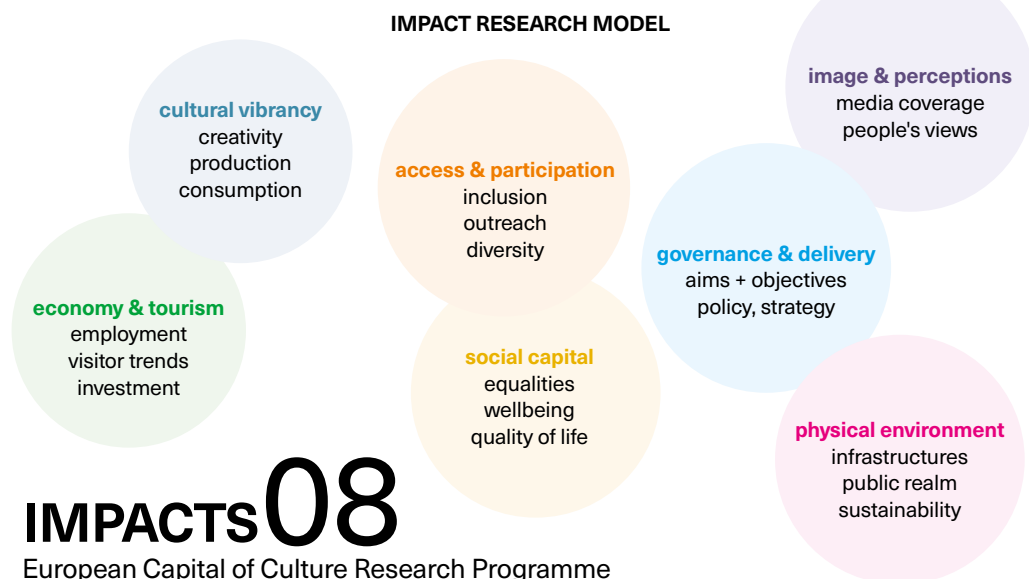


Fig. 8 – Overview of the IMPACTS 08 research model used to assess the outcomes of a European Capital of Culture.



The Impacts 08 framework became a key reference point for major event evaluation following its introduction back in 2006. The main advancement made through this research model was the recognition that major events such as an ECoC generate multiple types of impact beyond the economic, social, cultural or environmental ones. As a result, the approach to evaluation and legacy planning must be equally diverse and multidisciplinary.

Evidencing legacy also requires a combination of methodologies: at times, an event impact may translate into statistical evidence through some key numbers, but the most important legacies are very often qualitative and require a completely different approach to analysis and reporting.

The multiple impacts and legacies of major events

Economic impacts, Tourism impacts

- inward investment, job creation, tourism growth
- methods: cost-benefit analysis, contingent valuation, multipliers

Physical impacts, Environmental impacts

- infrastructure development, uses of public space, green agenda
- methods: design quality indicators, land values and occupancy

Social impacts, Health impacts

- confidence, aspirations, inclusion, access, engagement
- methods: levels of participation, trust & cohesion measures, health indicators

Cultural impacts, Image impacts

- codes of conduct, image, identity, cultural governance, creative production
- methods: cultural mapping, media content analysis, perception surveys

The wide range of research and evaluation modelling and reporting undertaken between 2006 and 2013 led the European Commission to establish in 2018 the first official guidelines for ECoC evaluation.³

These guidelines became a key reference for ECoC bid cities, as well as a shared resource to help articulate ECoC legacies in a more systematic manner.





General Objectives				
Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space (GO1), and foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities (GO2)				
Specific Objectives (SO)				
SO1: Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational co-operation	SO2: Widen access to and participation in culture	SO3: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors	SO4: Raise the international profile of cities through culture	
Operational Objectives				
Stimulate extensive cultural programmes of high artistic quality	Ensure cultural programmes feature a strong European dimension and transnational co-operation	Involve a wide range of citizens and stakeholders in preparing and implementing the cultural programme	Create new opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in cultural events	Improve cultural infrastructure
Develop the skills, capacity and governance of the cultural sector	Stimulate partnership and co-operation with other sectors	Promote the city and its cultural programme	Improve the international outlook of residents	

Fig. 9 – Overview of ECoC objectives.

In parallel with these developments, a growing number of cities have shown stronger commitments to long-term legacy delivery and assessment, and some ECoC editions established legacy teams and programmes that have continued for decades beyond their original event year. This shift reflects a broader understanding of the ECoC not merely as a one-year cultural celebration, but as a catalyst for lasting transformation, with its strategies increasingly embedded within the city's cultural governance and contributing to wider urban, social, and economic regeneration efforts.



ECoC Long-Term Legacies...

- Glasgow 1990
- Lille 2004 | Lille3000
- Liverpool 2008 | Culture Liverpool
- Essen 2010 | Ruhr Creative Metropolis
- Marseille 2013
- Leeuwarden 2018 | Arcadia
- Matera 2019

The Original GO! 2025 Bid Proposal for Impact and Legacy

The Cross-Border Strategy

In 2020 the common strategy will be discussed through a number of cross-border meetings between cultural stakeholders. Until now, we have identified six common goals we want to develop. They are to:

- meet in queue for theater and concert tickets rather than just at the cash register in the grocery shop;
- soften, lessen and overcome language barriers;
- let Europe know of our extraordinary cultural heritage and motivate people to visit us;
- make the most of our border position by sharing and co-using cultural infrastructure and spaces;
- become culture smugglers, opening our border to the most modern and vibrant European creations and ideas;
- build upon the long collaboration between the cities, creating a live laboratory of solutions on the field of cross-border projects, useful to all European regions and EU policies.

The Local Strategy for Culture and the 2026 Vision

The Nova Gorica 2026 introduction aims to transform Nova Gorica into an open, dynamic trans-national, multilingual and multi-ethnic European local community. One which appreciates quality, respects

knowledge, provides access to European funds, and establishes connections with the private sector. One of the core dimensions of this goal is the ambition to upgrade the cross-border collaboration and build a transnational urban area.

Turning the region into a destination for cultural tourism. Nova Gorica wants to develop its sites and create a year-round cultural offer, but most importantly build a recognizable brand, articulate and promote the territory's cultural identity.

Renovate and revitalize cultural heritage sites, dedicating them to contents and activities, which are both suitable to the historical values of the sites and relevant for contemporary issues.

Nova Gorica - young city, aims to establish cultural activities as one of the tools for reversing the negative demographic trends in the municipality. The cultural strategy wants to involve children and young people of all ages not just as audiences but also as co-creators of the cultural scene. The strategy also aims to promote new media, digital arts, and other practices on the crossroads of art, technology and industry.

Nova Gorica - European Capital of Culture. The strategy points out the importance of the bidding process, regardless of the outcome. It embraces fully the concept of "borderless" in all its dimensions.

Fig. 10 – Pre-selection Bid Book Extract: this section highlights the connection between Nova Gorica's local strategy and cross-border goals, with a focus on long-term impacts in economic, cultural, social, and urban development. (This image is for illustrative purposes only).





Q07

The European Capital of Culture within the strategy

Strategic goals	Operational goals	GO! 2025 contribution
To become a national and European cultural center	Support, link and upgrade existing events and festivals	GONG festival brand; Pixxel-X; Go! For Lunch
	Create a multi-language digital platform and soften language barriers	Language Casino
	Develop degraded sites and urban spaces in culture venues	Dial 1024; Hopscotch; Clowncity
Cultural tourism destination	Support art in the communities and amateur culture as an important social force	The Choir of Eden; The March of Friendship; Cantaquartiere
	Identify elements of heritage to develop into cultural tourism stories, storytelling	Rescuers of Memory; 11. 11. - Film; DESTINYation
Rethinking heritage	Create a city brand	EPICenter
	Rediscover the Modernist tradition of the city	GoricASAugmented; Ab Initio
Young city	Renovate the Villa Laščak and create an “east-meets-west” cultural center	The Green Corridor
	Creative industries as a basis of economic and social development	ISOLABS, TrainLab; Ecothreads; Huture center; BulevAR
Capacity building goals	Unlock the creative potential of young people	Art against non-chemical addiction programs (dance therapy, programming workshops)
	Better communication between institutions and NGOs	Cultural Breakfasts, common open calls for projects for the whole sector
	Diversification of financial resources for cultural pro-jects	Building a European fund office as part of the ECoC legacy
	Cross-border communication	Cross-border ECoC team in bidding, preparation and delivery phase
	Knowledge and internationalization in the cultural sector	Workshops in the preparation phase, linking local cultural operators with hosting artists during the year of the title; helping local cultural operators to create permanent international links
	Supporting volunteering	The ECoC volunteering program



Q08

Foreseen long-term impacts

Area	Nova Gorica and Gorizia, a cross-border European city	A green, vibrant city with a high quality of life	An innovative, self-reinventing city
CULTURE	A cross-border network of institutions and NGOs exchanges contents and productions and addresses a unique audience. 15% of cross-border audience on large cultural events until 2030.	Visible art interventions transform both city centers. From April to October, the streets are alive with various cultural events. A 15% increase in daily visitors after the title year.	Cultural operators collaborate in the sector and with other sectors. Co-productions elevate the quality of cultural content. The share of funding from international sources and the private sector rises. The educational system and science play an important role in culture. Overall culture budget increase of 5% after 2025.
SOCIAL	Citizens understand each other's language and culture. They gradually overcome resentments. 25% of Gorizia inhabitants understand Slovenian and 75% of Nova Gorica inhabitants understand Italian by 2030.	A changed atmosphere attracts young people to move or return to the cities. The social ties and the intergenerational communication are strong. Reducing the gap between age average in the cities and nationwide by 0.5 years until 2040.	Cultural, humanitarian, sports and youth associations thrive and new are formed. Innovative community networks are created to help the children, the elderly and disadvantaged groups. Volunteer associations membership increases by 5% and by 10% among the 15–25 age group until 2030.
ECONOMIC	A cross-border cultural, oenological and gastronomical tourism offer is created. New answers are found for the post-border economy. A 30% increase of overnight stays in 2025 and a 15% increase until 2030.	The number of quality, high added value jobs is increased. Local companies easily convince foreign experts to move to the area. Companies, which offer green, alternative technological solutions, thrive. A 3% increase in average wage by 2030.	In creative industry and start-up hubs ideas are developed and companies are formed. The region gains reputation as leading in hi-tech and e-mobility industry. The agricultural and tourism sector use new technologies and concepts to increase added value and minimize environmental impact. An average of 5 successful start-ups per year in the region by 2030.
URBAN	Urban corridors, closed by the border, are reopened, a common green area is alive and visited by citizens of both communities. The degraded border area is revitalized. 25 km of new walking and cycling paths in the border area by 2030.	Residential areas and the historical center are being reinvented in mobility and energy consumption. The suburban and rural areas are connected to the city by railway and bicycle paths. The green swap: 150 fewer cars on the road daily and 150 more trees in the city center by 2026.	Heritage sites are renovated and host relevant public programmes. Three universities occupy important spaces in the centers of both cities. A free wi-lan and a high-speed access to the Internet are accessible in both urban and rural areas. Urban planning is directed toward traffic with zero emission vehicles, smart grids and networks. Application of 3 innovative pilot urban development projects by 2030.

Fig. 11 – Final Selection Bid Book Extract: this section further refines the vision by detailing specific ECoC projects and their expected cultural, social, and economic benefits, aligned with European standards. (This image is for illustrative purposes only. To read the full details, you can access the original bid books via <https://euro-go.eu/en/notizie-ed-eventi/pubblicazioni/bid-book-go2025/>).





The GO! 2025 bid proposal was submitted in two phases (pre-selection and final selection bid books) back in 2020. The project's original vision had clearly defined goals that linked Nova Gorica's local city strategy with the broader cross-border goals that made the ECoC proposal unique. This was then connected to specific ECoC projects and summarised as "foreseen long-term impacts" categorised into thematic clusters aligned with the recommendations from the Impacts 08 reports and European Commission guidelines (eg. economic, cultural, social, urban development).

Nova Gorica strategy goals	Cross-border strategy goals	Potential benefits	Reflected in GO 2025
An important cultural and creative centre	Shared system for cultural production Cross-border cultural production	Shared resources Ability to access more cross-border funding Audience growth Sector capacity building	EPICentre GO2GreenGo DESTYnation Cultural Improvement District, the Episcopo
Revitalising cultural heritage sites	Culture as a force for development – the modernisation of cross-border heritage	Using the strength of our shared history to unite us for the future rather than using our past relationships to divide us	Sounds of Nature Brave New World Future of Food cultural sites as venues
A strong cultural tourism model for the region	A shared "conurbation brand"	Increasing long term economic benefit through visitor and investment of new businesses in the region	Rescuers of Memory Art as Refuge Into Nature cultural products development marketing strategy
Nova Gorica innovative city	Culture as a major force for cross-border development	Promoting the region as a location for social and cultural innovation. Jointly addressing the different but connected issues of the "twin city centres"	Pixxel-X Cantaquartieri Borderless Body residencies digital outreach school related activities
Nova Gorica - European city	European conurbation	Bringing best practice and shared ideas to create a significant, dynamic and forward-thinking region Addressing post-covid challenges to city and town centres	All Man's Land March for Europe Borderless Wireless capacity ABC residencies international network

Fig. 12 – Nova Gorica's cultural strategy that points to align five key goals with a bold cross-border vision, translating shared values into impactful cultural initiatives across both municipalities.



The GO! 2025 Unique Challenges and Opportunities for Legacy

The table on the previous page, taken from the final GO! 2025 bid book, includes colour coding added by this report's author, Beatriz Garcia, to highlight linkages with established impact and legacy clusters (red = economic, blue = cultural, green = social, yellow = urban / physical transformation).

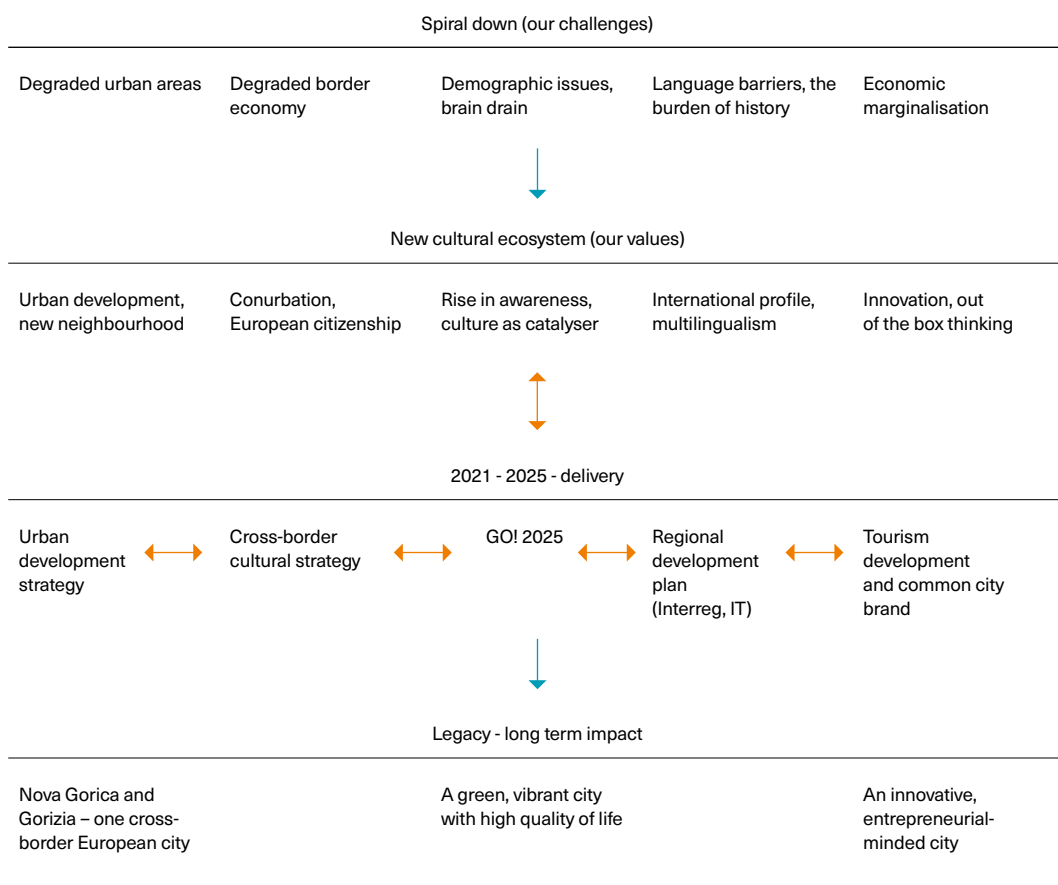


Fig. 13 – Long-term impacts of GO! 2025: this diagram illustrates the transition from regional challenges—such as urban degradation, demographic decline, and economic marginalisation—to the creation of a new cultural ecosystem. Through strategic actions implemented between 2021 and 2025, including cross-border cultural cooperation and urban regeneration, GO! 2025 aims to catalyse innovation, multilingualism, and a renewed European identity. (This image is for illustrative purposes only. To read the full details, you can access the original bid books via <https://euro-go.eu/en/notizie-ed-eventi/pubblicazioni/bid-book-go2025/>).





NOVA GORICA AND GORIZIA - ONE CROSS-BORDER EUROPEAN CITY

Objective 1	Specific objectives	Dimensions	Indicators (examples)
Culture	To establish a cross-border cultural ecosystem in the two cities	Cultural institutions	- Increase in cultural institutions participating in the GO! 2025 network; - Increase in cross-border partnerships, co-productions and collaborations for cultural events.
		Cross-border audiences	Increase of cross-border participation in cultural events.
		European networks	Increase in the joint participation of the two cities in European networking and projects (i.e. Network of towns).
Social	To foster a multicultural environment	Multilingualism	- Increase of multilingualism (i.e. Slovenes speaking Italian, Italians speaking Slovenian, inhabitants speaking more than two languages); - Increase of cultural activities fostering multilingualism.
		Proximity to European values	- Increase in the number of events highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history; - Increase in the number of events fostering cultural diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding between European citizens.
Economic	To foster cross-border cultural, oenological and gastronomical tourism	Attractiveness of the area	- Increase in Tourism Direct Gross Domestic Product of the area; - New sustainable tourist integrated offers (i.e. cultural, oenological, gastronomical).
		Attractiveness of the cultural offer	Increase in museums' visitors, festivals' and cultural events' participants.
Urban development	To give new life to border areas	Border area mobility and urban design	- Increase in urban cross-border cycling paths; - Number of new cross-border urban corridors; - quality of revitalisation of degraded border area.

A GREEN, VIBRANT CITY WITH A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

Objective 2	Specific objectives	Dimensions	Indicators (examples)
Culture	To improve the cultural vibrancy of the area	Cultural offer	- Increase of cross-border cultural events and visitor numbers; - Increase in satisfaction rates.
Social	To moderate demographic ageing and brain drain	Opportunities & Education	- Increase of career paths and guidance for young people in the field of culture; - Increase of internships/stages in the field of culture.
		Demographics	- New residents in the area; - Reduction of the gap to national age average.
Economic	To contribute to the economic prosperity of the area	Development	- New companies (i.e. creative industries); - New technological/sustainable solutions offered by local companies.
		Jobs and careers	- Increase in average wage; - New creative & knowledge-based jobs.
Urban development	To foster cross-border urban integration	City centres	- Decrease in motorised traffic in city centres; - Increase of bike sharing opportunities.
		Suburban and rural areas	- Increase in suburban and rural cycling paths; - Increase in public transport connecting suburban and rural areas with city centres.

Fig. 14 – Monitoring and Evaluation Framework from the GO! 2025 bidbook, outlining key objectives for Nova Gorica and Gorizia as a unified European Capital of Culture. (This image is for illustrative purposes only. To read the full details, you can access the original bid books via <https://euro-go.eu/en/notizie-ed-eventi/pubblicazioni/bid-book-go2025/>).



The GO! 2025 legacy aspiration is extremely ambitious, aiming to realise the vision of “going borderless”, a goal that not only requires strategic thinking but also a policy framework beyond the direct control of the ECoC team, that enables its implementation.

Discussions with the teams representing both Nova Gorica and Gorizia reveal the extent of the challenges they have faced, particularly from an administrative point of view. However, they also demonstrate the benefits of having established a clear roadmap and aspirational goals, summarised into three key long-term objectives:

- 1.** Nova Gorica and Gorizia as one cross-border European City
- 2.** A green, vibrant city with a high quality of life
- 3.** An innovative, entrepreneurial-minded city.

Since the bid stage in 2020, one aspect has become clearer to everyone involved: becoming a “borderless European city” cannot be treated as just another legacy strand, alongside becoming a “green and vibrant city” or an “innovative, entrepreneurial city.” While the second and third goals are likely to see significant progress and can be monitored or demonstrated using reasonably straightforward indicators, the first goal is far broader and requires more careful thinking about what constitutes evidence and what defines legacy. Indeed, some team members have suggested that the first goal may account for 90% of the legacy aspirations of this ECoC project—more than just a component of the legacy, it is the project’s *raison d’être*. This underscores the need for a far more sophisticated approach in developing indicators that can measure progress towards such an aspirational and wide-reaching goal.

A realistic discussion about what counts as success when working towards such an ambitious and wide-reaching goal led to accepting that the legacy of GO! 2025’s cross-border aspiration may not only be reflected in tangible outcomes or impacts but also in terms of processes—including the opportunity to change mindsets and initiate new conversations. This legacy may manifest in various ways, for instance:

- new ways of thinking among key stakeholders, such as replacing competition with cooperation between local and national agencies;
- progress towards legislative amendments: even if such changes may take much longer to implement than the ECoC year, initiating discussions is already a significant step;
- creating an environment that fosters facilitation and mediation between agencies, including improved coordination between the two leading bodies of the ECoC project (GO! 2025 and GECT GO), as well as enhanced staffing capacity to unify documents and produce joint summaries of their activities.





Capturing the legacy of these processes requires acknowledging that there may be different cross-border pathways for delivery and implementation, each with its own timeline and scale. As an example, team representatives highlighted that advancing towards a cross-border city requires both top-down and bottom-up approaches, which may at times involve opposing priorities and differing ways of defining success. Ultimately, the key achievement for the team was understanding that legacy for this unique project cannot be assessed only through economic, social, cultural, or urban development impacts. Equally crucial are policy and political impacts, along with the transformation of processes and ways of working.

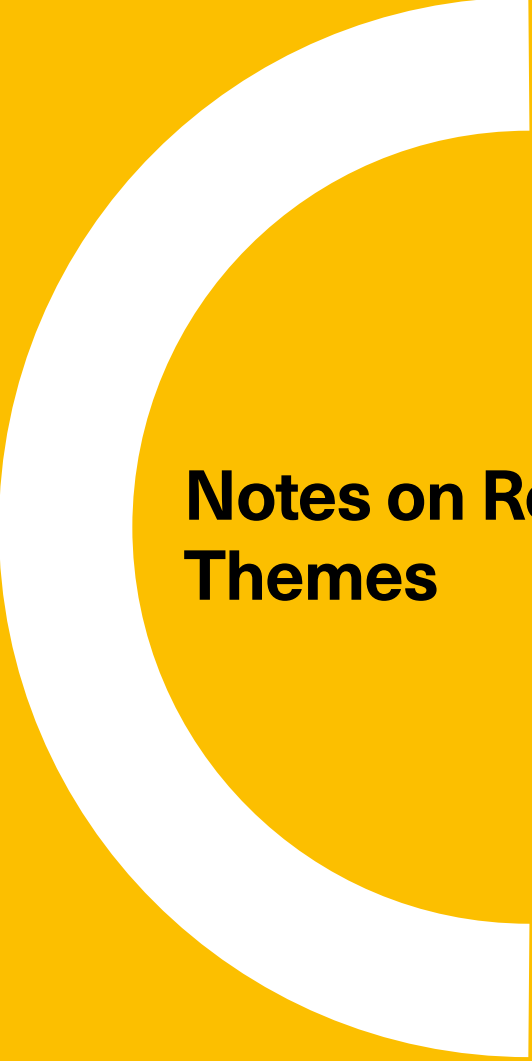
1 — See: <https://www.academia.edu/2313076/An_international_framework_of_good_practice_in_research_and_delivery_of_the_European_Capital_of_Culture_programme_Co_written_by_ECoC_Policy_Group_members_edited_by_Matti_Allam_and_Martin_Thompson> accessed 19 February 2025.

2 — See: <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/513985/IPOL-CULT_ET\(2013\)513985_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/513985/IPOL-CULT_ET(2013)513985_EN.pdf)> accessed 19 February 2025.

3 — See: <<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-04/ecoc-guidelines-for-cities-own-evaluations-2020-2033.pdf>> accessed 19 February 2025.







Notes on Relevant Themes



Decoding European Capitals of Culture Models: Strategies for Local Development, Impacts, and Lessons Learned

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The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative has been established long enough to allow for a critical examination of the process and an evaluation of what has worked—or not worked—across the different models of the programme that have emerged since the year 2000. The earlier editions of the programme are not directly comparable to how it functions today, which makes this analysis essential.

At this point, it is indeed possible to develop a clearer perspective on which capitals have been successful, yet this assessment cannot rely on the official evaluations of the programmes. As a matter of fact, ECoC has yet to develop a particularly effective evaluation methodology capable of providing substantial ex-post evidence regarding whether the programmes were successful or left a lasting legacy in their respective territories.

The Long-Term Impact of the Programme

Relevant differences between the programmes become evident over time. For instance, when comparing two European Capitals of Culture from 2004—Genoa (Italy) and Lille (France)—we can measure the long-term effects of the programme. Official evaluation data show that both cities succeeded in fundraising, and the number of visitors was significant. Yet, while Genoa is now scarcely remembered as a particularly impactful cultural capital, Lille stands out as one of the most successful cities in the history of the programme.

In Lille's case, the legacy was carefully integrated into the bid book, which included plans for continuing cultural activities, notably through the lille3000 project, which became one of the most celebrated examples of legacy planning at the European level. In contrast, Genoa's cultural programme lacked a long-term vision. After the ECoC year, the managing foundation was disbanded, and the momentum of the programme quickly dissipated. Despite significant visitor numbers and positive media coverage during the year, the absence of mid-term legacy planning led to the rapid fading of the event's influence. Today, Genoa's connection to its ECoC year is almost forgotten, while Lille remains a vibrant example of the enduring impact of such a designation.

The Diversity of European Capitals of Culture

Not all cities benefit from the same advantages and comparisons between them should be made with caution. Different cities and territories face different challenges and have distinct needs. Some cities that were named European Capitals of Culture were already well-established with international visibility, while others faced the challenge of promoting

themselves to a broader audience. For instance, Marseille (France, 2013) was a globally known city but faced significant internal challenges, including social cohesion issues and income inequality. Its programme focussed on positioning the city as a cultural hub capable of attracting significant European tourism, thereby fostering a tourist economy. On the other hand, Košice (Slovakia, 2013), which shared the title of European Capital with Marseille, faced the opposite challenge: it was virtually unknown to most Europeans. The city's goal was to establish itself on the map, so it opted to create a programme focussed on innovation rather than large-scale events. Košice established the Creative Industry Košice (CIKE), an organisation aimed at becoming a leader in cultural and creative industries in Eastern Europe. This vision aligned with its long-term legacy, and a year ago, the city launched the Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) for cultural creativity—an ambitious project aimed at fostering innovation in the cultural sector. Košice was later selected by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) as the Eastern European branch of EIT Culture & Creativity, joining cities like Barcelona, Vienna, Helsinki, Amsterdam, and Bologna in this innovation-driven network. It is noteworthy that many of these cities have also been European Capitals of Culture, demonstrating that participation in the initiative can have a lasting impact on a city's development beyond the year of designation.

Challenges of Managing Complex Programmes

There have been cases where the success of the European Capital of Culture was not necessarily the result of a flawlessly executed programme but rather the process of executing the bid book itself. Some cities faced severe challenges during the preparation phase, including conflicts and financial crises, which put the programme at risk of failure and threatened the realisation of a full-fledged cultural capital.

An example of this is Guimaraes (Portugal, 2012). In the final year leading up to its designation, Guimaraes completely revamped its programme. Confronted with a budget crisis and organisational challenges, the city invited the local cultural community to co-create the programme, resulting in a more dynamic and sustainable model. Despite these challenges, Guimaraes became a highly successful cultural capital, leaving a lasting positive effect on the local community.

Environmental Sustainability as a Future-Oriented Theme

Another important aspect of the European Capital of Culture programme is the extent to which it addresses emerging global issues. For a long time, environmental concerns—which are now central to both cultural and non-cultural European policies—were relatively overlooked in the context of the European Capitals of Culture. However, Leeuwarden, the Dutch Capital of Culture for 2018, marked a significant turning point by integrating





environmental sustainability into its programme while establishing a new methodology for addressing these concerns. Leeuwarden is located in a relatively marginal region of the Netherlands and yet it stood out as a memorable capital. In a territory with very little visibility compared to larger cities, Leeuwarden's plan focussed on the idea of a "Countryside Capital", emphasising environmental themes and rural heritage, which served as an inspiration for future European capitals. For example, this is the case of Bourges (France, 2028), which plans to centre its programme around radical environmental sustainability. One of its goals is to limit carbon emissions to no more than 44,000 tons of CO₂-equivalent during the ECoC year, including those generated by visitors' travel. Bourges has already signed agreements with partners such as the Société nationale des chemins de fer français (SNCF), the French national railways, to demonstrate that an environmentally sustainable Capital of Culture is possible.

The Role of Local Talent

In some cases, the true impact and success of an ECoC programme does not stem from large-scale events but rather from the ability to engage and activate local talent. Although this goal might seem obvious, it is not always pursued nor achieved, as there is often a significant pressure to have a programme featuring international names to attract visitors and media coverage. While such international stars may attract visitors and media attention, they often fail to build lasting connections with the local cultural scene. If there is no real connection with the local cultural communities, in the long term they may not contribute as expected to fostering local development in the city itself and this lack of local engagement can undermine the long-term impact of the programme.

This has been the case of Genoa, which hosted in 2004 high-profile exhibitions and international names but lacked local involvement, causing the programme's quick decline. In contrast, Wrocław (Poland, 2016) focussed on local engagement and this approach proved to be the most impactful in terms of fostering a lasting cultural legacy. While the city benefited from large events, the true success came from integrating local communities into the cultural fabric of the city.

Different Models of European Capitals of Culture

As demonstrated by these examples, ECoC programmes might go in different directions, and there have been disappointing cases that failed to meet expectations. Ultimately, the success of this initiative often depends on the specific focus and strategic goals of the programme. There are four main models of success focussing respectively on tourism, participation, innovation and the ability of cities to benefit from the ECoC programmes even without winning the title. Let us take a closer look at them.



Tourism development

Cities like Marseille focus on attracting tourism as a primary driver, using large-scale events to position the city as a tourist destination, which also facilitates investment. These cities strive to change how they are perceived in Europe by both the general public and the business world. An interesting example is Matera (Italy, 2019), where strategic events were combined with significant efforts from the film commission, in an attempt to attract major cinema productions to the territory.

Cultural participation

Cities such as Guimarães, Leeuwarden, and Kaunas (Lithuania, 2022) prioritise cultural participation, working to involve local communities and fostering cultural dialogue.

System innovation

The system innovation model focusses on developing very innovative programmes or institutions that become a permanent legacy in the city. Some capitals, such as Aarhus (Denmark, 2017) and Umeå (Sweden, 2014), adopted this approach, creating innovative cultural programmes or institutions that represent lasting legacies.

Successful non-winning cities

While not directly relevant to this topic, it is important to stress what happens to the cities that do not win the title. A disappointing aspect of the European Capital of Culture programme is that the cities that do not win often discard all they had designed. Without the title, they often do near to nothing to fulfil their plans, even when they still get the funding. This obviously results in a big waste of time and resources. However, there are also examples of cities that have been successful without winning, some even becoming more successful than the awarded city. Cluj-Napoca (Romania, ECoC candidate city in 2021) is a notable example, as the city became a key player in European cultural networks despite not receiving the title.

The Nova Gorica-Gorizia Project

The project of Nova Gorica and Gorizia, which will jointly hold the title in 2025, is already in an advanced phase. While the geographical boundary between the Slovenian and the Italian city is clear, the real opportunity lies in transcending this boundary metaphorically. Previous successful capitals, such as Linz (Austria, 2009), have demonstrated how breaking borders—whether geographical or conceptual—can lead to transformative results. Linz's success in integrating digital arts with its traditional industrial sectors serves as a model for building innovative, cross-disciplinary partnerships.





For Nova Gorica-Gorizia, the key challenge is not to create separate programmes for each side of the border but to foster a profound dialogue between the two cities. This collaboration can result in a model of cultural integration which would serve as a lasting legacy for the region.

In today's geopolitical climate, initiatives that promote dialogue across borders are particularly relevant and inspiring. The Nova Gorica-Gorizia's project presents a unique opportunity to showcase how European cities can engage in cross-border cultural cooperation, contributing to the broader European dimension of the ECoC programme. One of the contradictions of the European culture capital is that the title holder is required to show that there is a European dimension; yet there can be a temptation—one that has occurred in past cases—to transform the event into something completely inward-looking, where the European dimension is not evident nor successfully deployed. From this point of view, starting from a dialogue between cities across a border ensures that the European dimension remains particularly clear, and readable.

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The Faro Convention¹ stands as a pivotal reference point in the field of cultural heritage, offering both theoretical insights and practical solutions to contemporary challenges. Its significance extends beyond mere discourse, demanding careful consideration of its tangible implications. More than just a policy framework, the Convention has significantly influenced European Union policies on cultural heritage, particularly during the period from 2014 to 2020. In 2014, the European Commission issued its first Communication on Cultural Heritage,² marking the beginning of a new phase following two decades of cultural policy under the Maastricht Treaty. While previous programmes had supported cultural heritage initiatives, this development represented a fundamental shift in the EU's approach to cultural policy at the supranational level.

Cultural Heritage in a Changing Policy Landscape

Prior to 2014, EU member states had a clear understanding of their responsibilities in managing cultural heritage. However, the economic crisis significantly weakened national and local capacities, affecting ministries, local organisations, and administrations at every level. This downturn sparked crucial debates on how to approach cultural heritage in times of crisis and prompted a re-evaluation of cultural heritage strategies, with the Faro Convention emerging as a key reference point. The Convention articulates fundamental principles within the European cultural heritage framework and serves as the cornerstone of the Council of Europe's approach to the subject.

Since 1964, the Council of Europe has played a leading role in shaping cultural heritage policies, working to harmonise national approaches. A major turning point occurred in the 1990s with the destruction of the Mostar Bridge during the Balkan conflicts,³ which shifted policy discussions from external threats—such as climate change and natural disasters—to internal challenges, including conflicts that endanger cultural heritage. This transformation prompted broader reflections on the relationship between cultural heritage, identity, and community values.

A Holistic and Integrated Approach

This shift in understanding calls for a holistic approach, which is embodied in the Faro Convention's framework. The principles of the Convention align closely with European cultural heritage policies, advocating for a comprehensive and integrated approach.



Indeed, cultural heritage is no longer viewed as an isolated sector but as one that intersects with tourism, research, education, and even security policies, particularly in relation to the illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts. Effective cultural heritage management requires multi-level collaboration across local, national, and European administrations.

These concepts found a concrete application during the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage.⁴ This initiative fostered collaboration between member states, EU institutions, and stakeholders, creating a multi-level governance framework that delivered significant outcomes. Although the Faro Convention is an instrument of the Council of Europe, its influence extends into EU policies, demonstrating its relevance in shaping regulatory frameworks and funding programmes.

Cultural Heritage as a Source of Value

A fundamental principle of contemporary cultural heritage policy is its recognition as a source of social, cultural, environmental, and economic value. The 2015 report *Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe*, supported by Creative Europe, analysed over 200 studies on the impact of cultural heritage on sustainable development.⁵ The findings highlighted that the most effective policies integrate cultural heritage within broader socio-economic strategies, fostering regenerative development for local communities. This perspective represents a paradigmatic shift, particularly for cultural heritage professionals. Cultural heritage management should extend beyond technical expertise and procedural considerations to embrace a participatory, community-centred model. The concept of quality is thus redefined as a collective responsibility, ensuring that cultural infrastructure remains actively used and valued by local populations. A key outcome of this shift has been the collaboration between the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the European Commission, resulting in the *European quality principles for EU-funded interventions with potential impact upon cultural heritage*.⁶ This manual provides a strategic framework for qualitative assessment, ensuring that interventions prioritise both community benefits and heritage conservation.

The Role of the Faro Convention in Community-Based Cultural Management

The Netherlands led national initiatives to explore the optimal implementation of the Faro Convention, assessing its capacity to address local community needs. The Convention requires a fundamental shift from the mere preservation of cultural heritage objects to a focus on the people and communities who interact with and benefit from heritage. This perspective builds upon the *European Cultural Convention*



(1954),⁷ which laid the foundation for shared European values and cultural diversity in the post-war context.

The Faro Convention offers a flexible framework, allowing countries to tailor its implementation to their specific contexts while benefiting from EU-coordinated support. It encourages stakeholders to reconceptualise cultural heritage governance and explore innovative approaches. Although it does not impose legally binding obligations, its principles influence national policies and cultural governance models.

A compelling example that highlights the Convention's relevance is the destruction of the above-mentioned Mostar Bridge, a historically significant structure that symbolised community and intercultural dialogue. Targeted during wartime, the bridge was deliberately destroyed not for strategic military reasons, but to sever communication and understanding between the communities it once connected. This case underscores the core principle of the Faro Convention, which views cultural heritage as a powerful tool for reconciliation and mutual understanding.

Community Engagement and Cultural Education

A key aspect of the Faro Convention is its emphasis on raising awareness and ensuring accessibility. Local communities must understand the value of cultural heritage in their daily lives, identity, and history, which requires targeted educational initiatives and cultural activities. Access to cultural education fosters engagement, enabling individuals to explore, experience, and appreciate their heritage. It is essential to consider both the physical and digital aspects of conservation and restoration. Raising awareness among local populations encourages them to recognise the value of cultural heritage and actively participate in its transmission. This is particularly important for intangible cultural heritage, which cannot be safeguarded and passed down without access and awareness. Without such awareness, cultural heritage risks being forgotten and neglected, leading to long-term consequences for its preservation.

The role of experts is also evolving. Traditionally responsible for preservation and technical assessments, heritage professionals are now increasingly expected to facilitate public participation. Cultural heritage should not be viewed in isolation but understood within its social context.

Organising and promoting cultural activities can be quite challenging, requiring complex planning and coordination. Understanding why certain activities hold significance for people and why they are passed down through generations is crucial. Analysing the anthropological aspects behind these traditions helps us comprehend the deep connection communities have with their cultural heritage and their willingness to preserve it without external pressures.

One of the core principles of the Faro Convention is recognising the strong connection





between cultural heritage and society, particularly within local communities. This connection is often more visible in small and medium-sized cities, where community ties are closer.

A compelling example of this connection is the European Capital of Culture initiative, particularly in Galway—European Capital of Culture 2020.⁸ Despite the significant impact of COVID-19, one artwork presented during the event stood out: John Gerrard's *Mirror Pavilion*. The installation reflected the surrounding landscape on three sides while featuring a contemporary artistic creation on the fourth. The artwork exemplified the essence of the European Capital of Culture—highlighting local cultural resources while fostering exchanges between local and international creatives. These interactions, which occur during the European Capital of Culture, add significant value through dialogue and exchange, provided there is accessibility and openness to such engagements.

Understanding and valuing the meanings individuals and communities attach to cultural heritage is fundamental, and the interaction between people, places, and narratives must be carefully considered. Different communities may interpret cultural heritage in distinct ways, as a single location can embody multiple layers of meaning.

Cultural Heritage, Identity, and Contested Histories

Cultural heritage is not always a source of celebration; it can also reflect controversial or difficult histories, as demonstrated by the varying perspectives people hold toward certain heritage sites.

In some cases, rather than merely celebrating cultural heritage, it is important to acknowledge and explore its complexities. This approach can foster dialogue and reconciliation, particularly in societies with contested histories.

Europe is full of such examples, from historic battlefields to contested monuments. A striking one, for instance, is the House of European History in Brussels,⁹ which adopts an approach that does not impose a fixed European identity but encourages critical engagement with Europe's diverse historical narratives. People's perceptions of history vary depending on where they live and the historical context in which they were raised. Cultural heritage provides valuable lessons from the past, helping us to better understand the present and shape the future. When developing policies and legislation, it is essential to consider and respect diverse viewpoints, a principle that applies to all stakeholders involved in cultural initiatives.

The 2020 Black Lives Matter movement similarly highlighted the tensions between cultural heritage, identity, and collective memory, raising essential questions about how societies interpret and engage with historical legacies.¹⁰ The movement triggered worldwide protests, leading to the defacement and removal of statues representing



individuals linked to the slave trade. While some viewed these actions as acts of destruction, they also revealed the deep connection between cultural heritage, identity, and values. This event underscored the responsibility of cultural professionals to facilitate dialogue and understanding, rather than simply preserving heritage uncritically. Contested heritage sites serve as reminders of history's complexities and can provide opportunities for reflection on the processes that have led societies toward democracy. Addressing these topics requires sensitivity, expertise, and a nuanced approach. Understanding the diverse meanings attributed to cultural heritage is fundamental. Different communities may interpret the same heritage site in multiple ways, reflecting varied historical experiences. Rather than avoiding these complexities, policymakers and cultural professionals should facilitate dialogue and reconciliation through inclusive heritage management approaches.

Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development: A Framework for Social Cohesion and Resilience

The concept of sustainable development and quality of life is another fundamental principle of the Faro Convention. The Convention anticipated the growing recognition of culture's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹¹ While culture does not have a dedicated SDG, extensive research has demonstrated its impact across all goals, as cultural heritage plays a crucial role in fostering resilient communities capable of addressing social challenges.

Sustainability also extends to the economic potential of cultural heritage, yet it is important not to view it solely as a tourist attraction. Overexploitation through tourism can harm both heritage and local communities. Instead, a balanced approach is necessary—one that aligns economic benefits with the values that matter to local populations. Cultural heritage can serve as a tool for addressing social challenges, fostering trust, and reinforcing social cohesion through shared responsibility.

Public policies must integrate cultural heritage, ensuring that all stakeholders recognise its role in sustainable development and quality of life. Shared responsibility and public participation are crucial to this process. Stakeholder involvement should be actively promoted through participatory governance, which fosters collaboration across multiple levels.

A notable initiative in this regard is the European Commission's report on the participatory governance of cultural heritage (2016–2017).¹² In this report, member states' experts analysed best practices and translated key lessons into actionable strategies, highlighting the importance of prioritising public interest and fostering strong relationships as a valuable asset. Expanding stakeholder engagement generates social capital and strengthens societal resilience.





Flexibility and support are essential for such initiatives, as they require time, energy, and resources. Cultural heritage professionals often lack specific training in these areas, underscoring the need for capacity-building programmes. An inspiring example is how trained communities can take care heritage sites themselves—by repainting historic buildings or repairing roofs—while using appropriate techniques and materials. These activities not only preserve heritage but also strengthen social ties.

Participation should be encouraged at all stages of cultural projects, from planning to implementation. Transparency is fundamental, as it enables meaningful participation by ensuring that stakeholders are informed and can contribute effectively.

Several current opportunities align with these principles. For instance, the EU's New European Bauhaus initiative¹³ is inspired by the Faro Convention. It is built upon three core values: sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics. The initiative promotes projects that connect these elements, creating sustainable, beautiful, and inclusive spaces. The European Bauhaus Compass¹⁴ serves as a guiding instrument, ensuring that initiatives align with the values of the Convention, promoting a participatory, interdisciplinary, and people-centered approach while bridging global and local perspectives and fostering cross-sector collaboration.

Cultural heritage must be recognised as a dynamic and evolving resource that connects people, places, and histories. The Faro Convention offers a forward-thinking approach to cultural heritage management that not only aligns with European values but also provides a model for global efforts in cultural preservation and community engagement. By fostering social cohesion, dialogue, and resilience through its inclusive and participatory framework, the Convention ensures that cultural heritage remains a vibrant, evolving resource for future generations.



1 — The full text of the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) is available at: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>> accessed 19 February 2025.

2 — The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe is available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52014DC0477>> accessed 19 February 2025.

3 — The reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge is considered a key example of post-war cultural heritage recovery in the Balkans. For more details, see: <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/946/>> accessed 19 February 2025.

4 — The 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage encouraged cooperation among EU member states to enhance cultural heritage policies. Summary and results are available at: <<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/eu-policy-for-cultural-heritage/european-year-of-cultural-heritage-2018>> accessed 19 February 2025.

5 — Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe Consortium, *Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe* (Krakow: International Cultural Centre, 2015) is a report that analyses the impact of cultural heritage on sustainable development. Document available at: <<http://blogs.encatc.org/culturalheritagecountsforeurope/outcomes/>> accessed 19 February 2025.

6 — The *European quality principles for EU-funded interventions with potential impact upon cultural heritage* provides a strategic framework for quality assessment. Document available at: <<https://publ.icomos.org/publicomos/jlbSai?html=Pag&page=PmI/Not&base=technica&ref=AB6E9D6130FB6ED4A9B-386BA22DADF90>> accessed 19 February 2025.

7 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/impact-convention-human-rights/european-cultural-convention/>> accessed 19 February 2025.

8 — For more details on Galway 2020 - European Capital of Culture, see: <<https://galway2020.ie/en/>> accessed 19 February 2020.

9 — This Brussels-based museum critically examines European history and narratives. For more details, see: <<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en>> accessed 19 February 2025.

10 — For more details, see: R. Smith, "Black Lives Matter", in *Encyclopedia of African-American Politics, Third Edition* (New York: Facts on File, 2021), 122–126. For an analysis of how the Black Lives Matter movement has influenced cultural heritage management, see: D. Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

11 — For more details, see: <<https://unosd.un.org/content/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>> accessed 19 February 2025.

12 — European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage – Report of the OMC (Open Method of Coordination) Working Group of Member States' Experts* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2018). Document available at: <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b8837a15-437c-11e8-a9f4-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>> accessed 19 February 2025.

13 — For more details, see: <https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en> accessed 19 February 2025.

14 — For more details, see: <https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/tools-and-resources/use-compass_en> accessed 19 February 2025.





The Cultural Routes Programme: Integrating Heritage into Local Strategies

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The Cultural Routes programme, initiated by the Council of Europe, is a cooperative project aimed at developing and promoting cultural itineraries. These routes can take the form of a physical road, a network of pathways, or a series of interconnected points of interest, all rooted in a historical, cultural, or thematic context. They are based on a historical, cultural, or geographical phenomenon of transnational significance, ranging from pilgrimage routes to cultural or natural landscapes, linking countries and communities.¹

Council of Europe vs European Union

A crucial distinction lies in the differing geographical scopes of the Council of Europe and the European Union. The Council of Europe is broader, encompassing 46 member states that extend from Greenland and Denmark to Turkey, Ukraine, and, until recently, the Russian Federation, which was a founding member. While many Council of Europe member states also belong to the EU, some do not. For instance, following Brexit, the United Kingdom remains in the Council but not in the European Union, alongside Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia.

Since 2010, the Cultural Routes programme has been managed by the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA).² This body consists of member states that voluntarily contribute to the programme's budget. The term 'enlarged' reflects its openness not only to Council of Europe member states but also to non-European countries, such as Lebanon. At present, 41 states participate in the agreement, alongside one observer: the Netherlands.³

The Role of Cultural Routes

Cultural routes play an essential role in fostering cooperation and understanding across borders. The Council of Europe's Cultural Routes programme highlights culture as a key driver of cooperation, promoting cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue that has shaped Europe's history through centuries of shared experiences.

New cultural routes are continuously being added to the programme. Two notable routes recently certified are the Leonardo da Vinci Route⁴ and the European Route of Historic Pharmacies,⁵ bringing the total number of certified routes to 48. The first cultural route ever certified, in 1987, was the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes system,⁶ which remains a key symbol of the programme.

Cultural Routes as Catalysts for Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable cultural tourism plays a vital role in ensuring that the Cultural Routes are accessible and meaningful to all Europeans, not just academic experts. Tourism, as a means of exploration and engagement, allows individuals to immerse themselves in these historical routes, deepening their connection to Europe's rich cultural heritage.

The long-term success and sustainability of the Cultural Routes programme depend on this relationship between tourism and cultural appreciation. Tourism serves not only as an economic driver but also as a means of fostering cultural exchange, enhancing mutual understanding, and enriching individuals' experiences of their shared heritage.⁷

A Cultural Initiative—Not a Tourism Project

It is crucial to remember that the Cultural Routes programme was established not as a tourism initiative but as a cultural one, just two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, at a time when Europe was undergoing a significant transformation. This initiative was designed to help citizens understand the heritage that unites them while also celebrating local histories and narratives, thereby reinforcing a sense of shared, European identity. To this day, its primary objective is to provide European citizens with opportunities to explore shared cultural heritage in their leisure time, fostering a deeper understanding of Europe's commonalities.⁸

To receive certification as a Cultural Route, a route must meet a range of criteria, including the establishment of a European network.⁹ The Santiago de Compostela route, for instance, embodies a well-defined historical theme that encapsulates the essence of European identity. This European dimension is central to every certified Cultural Route.

Key Areas of Action

Each Cultural Route is managed by an association or a federation of associations with legal status in one of the Council of Europe member states where the route or network is located. These associations oversee five key areas of action: conducting research, interpreting the route's theme through storytelling, promoting European citizenship by exploring what it means to be European today, and assessing how the route contributes to contemporary Europe. Cooperation is at the heart of the Cultural Routes, with each route establishing a scientific committee dedicated to advancing research and fostering discussion. This committee plays a crucial role in promoting new discoveries, facilitating academic study, and encouraging collaboration, ensuring that the route remains vibrant and relevant. Notably, the involvement of young people is essential in shaping the ongoing dialogue around contemporary European citizenship. By engaging with schools, universities, and informal learning initiatives, the Cultural Routes programme strengthens European memory, history, and heritage. Furthermore, these initiatives highlight the importance of cultural and artistic





practices in redefining and expressing European identity.¹⁰ The interplay between cultural and artistic expressions is central to this process, helping individuals appreciate the lasting impact of historical events and cultural heritage on their daily lives.

Certification Process

The certification process for Cultural Routes follows a structured and rigorous procedure to ensure that each route meets high standards of quality. Applicants must submit a comprehensive dossier to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. This dossier includes essential documents such as a completed application form and proof of the network's legal status.¹¹ The legal status is particularly significant, as it demonstrates the network's commitment to the democratic and participatory values upheld by the Council of Europe. It ensures that all members, regardless of their geographical or organisational context, have an equal voice in decision-making, particularly during general meetings.

Another key requirement is the inclusion of at least three countries in each Cultural Route. This international cooperation is essential to ensure that the routes extend beyond bilateral agreements, which the Council of Europe deems insufficient to foster genuine cultural exchange across Europe. By incorporating multiple countries, Cultural Routes reflect the continent's diverse cultures and histories, offering a richer, more multifaceted experience for participants. To maintain the integrity and relevance of the programme, every Cultural Route must submit updated documentation every five years to retain its certification. This ongoing evaluation process ensures that routes continue to meet the high standards set by the Council of Europe and remain pertinent to future generations.

Certification Criteria					
✓	European theme				
✓	Fields of action				
	Cooperation for research and development	Enhancement of European memory, history and heritage	Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans	Contemporary cultural and artistic practice	Sustainable cultural tourism and local development
✓	European network				

Fig. 1 – Table outlining the key criteria for certification, including European themes, fields of action, and network collaboration.



Minimal Certification Requirements

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| • Fulfilled application form | • Example of the logo of the Route |
| • Legal status of the network | • Three-year action and activity plan of the network |
| • List of network partners | • One-year provisional budget plan |
| • Report of network activities | • Three-year provisional budget |
| • Financial report | |

Fig. 2 – List of documents and criteria required for network certification.

Diverse Geographical Forms

Cultural Routes can take various geographical forms. They are not limited to historical pilgrimage paths such as the Santiago de Compostela, the Via Francigena,¹² or the Via Regia,¹³ but also include territorial or “clustered/thematic routes”. For example, the Iter Vitis Route¹⁴ connects wine-producing regions, while the Routes of the Olive Tree¹⁵ link areas where olives are cultivated. These routes connect multiple locations with a shared cultural theme, often spanning vast geographical distances.

Unlike continuous routes such as the Via Francigena, which can be experienced in a single journey, thematic routes require tailored planning and strategies due to their diverse characteristics and structures.

Rural Development and Local Community Empowerment

Approximately 90% of the sites, territories, and regions involved in certified Cultural Routes is located in rural areas. This highlights the role of the Cultural Routes programme in engaging lesser-known villages, small towns, and regions often overlooked by mainstream tourism. The following paragraphs will present two well-established itineraries.

Via Francigena

One notable example is surely the Via Francigena, a visionary project initially championed by Massimo Tedeschi and certified in 1994. This historic route connects four countries—Italy, Switzerland, France, and the UK—offering a rich cultural experience while fostering connections between rural landscapes and Europe's heritage.

What was once merely an ambitious vision has evolved into a thriving cultural and economic initiative. The Via Francigena demonstrates how cultural routes can revitalise ancient pathways, boost local economies, and promote sustainable tourism. Historically, the Via Francigena served both as a pilgrimage path and a trade route, with merchants and pilgrims sharing the same roads—much like today. Beyond its spiritual significance, the project actively supports local economies. A key component of this initiative is its focus





on locally produced goods, particularly zero-kilometre products—items sourced and crafted within the region rather than mass-produced. This approach not only preserves traditional craftsmanship but also strengthens the economic fabric of communities along the route.

Moreover, the Via Francigena exemplifies the power of cultural routes to engage local communities and support sustainable development. During walks, participants evaluate key aspects of the route, including signposting, trail safety, and accessibility challenges. Their feedback is collected via questionnaires and shared with local authorities, municipalities, and associations to improve the experience for future travellers.

A compelling example of community empowerment along this cultural route occurred during the 20th anniversary of the Via Francigena Association, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶ To mark the occasion, the organisation launched a special relay-style journey (Via Francigena. Road to Rome 2021. Start again!), beginning in Canterbury and progressing through France before concluding in Rome. This event highlighted local places, cultures and traditions, with pilgrims passing a “pilgrim stick” from one to another—much like an Olympic torch—step by step, along the entire journey.¹⁷

Destination Napoleon

A very different example of a Cultural Route is Destination Napoleon,¹⁸ which explores Napoleon’s legacy through a network of nearly 50 cities and museums across 11 countries. This route provides a multi-perspective view of Napoleon, incorporating history, culture, and contemporary artistic interpretations of his impact. Through a range of activities, including exhibitions, re-enactments, and cultural tourism initiatives, the Napoleon Route encourages visitors to engage with European heritage from a fresh, interdisciplinary perspective.

Functioning as a legally established association, the Federation ensures democratic participation among its member cities, fostering a sense of shared ownership and engagement. The governance structure of the European Federation of Napoleonic Cities is designed to maintain balanced representation across the 11 participating countries. Regular communication is maintained through bi-monthly online meetings and an annual General Assembly, hosted by different member cities, reinforcing active collaboration across the network.

A critical component of this governance framework is the interdisciplinary scientific committee, which brings together academics, historians, museum professionals, and experts in cultural heritage, tourism, and communication. This body facilitates intellectual exchange on Napoleon’s legacy, extending beyond traditional historiography to encompass cultural tourism, educational initiatives, and public engagement through re-enactments and other heritage-related activities.



Sustainability, both financial and operational, is another cornerstone of the cultural route framework. The Federation supports itself through membership fees, ensuring economic independence while enabling members to benefit from European funding opportunities. This financial stability allows the network to engage in long-term planning and to participate actively in EU initiatives.

Beyond financial considerations, sustainability also entails cultural and educational continuity.

Cultural Routes as a Framework for Legacy and Cross-Border Cooperation

Cultural Routes function as networks of networks, facilitating connections among institutions, municipalities, and cultural stakeholders across Europe. Sites such as the Fortress of Bard, which played a role both in medieval pilgrimages and in Napoleon's military campaigns, illustrate how these routes uncover the intricate layers of Europe's heritage.

This model is particularly relevant for cities like Gorizia and Nova Gorica, which, as European Capitals of Culture for 2025, have the opportunity to establish a lasting legacy beyond their designated year. Managing any cultural route requires navigating a multilayered system of local, national, and European stakeholders. In this respect, the challenges and objectives of certified Cultural Routes closely align with those of the European Capitals of Culture: promoting diverse heritage narratives, engaging local communities, and ensuring long-term sustainability. The collaboration between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the cultural sector reinforces these shared goals, affirming the role of cultural heritage as a powerful tool for European cohesion and identity.

Ultimately, Cultural Routes serve as conduits for historical dialogue, sustainable tourism, and cross-border cooperation. By fostering connections between local communities and European institutions, they contribute to a dynamic and interconnected cultural landscape.

1 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/home>> accessed 10 March 2025.

2 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/about-the-epa>> accessed 10 March 2025.

3 — For consulting Cultural Routes database, see: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/cultural-routes-database-main-page>> accessed 10 March 2025.

4 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/leonardo-da-vinci-route>> and the official Leonardo da Vinci Cultural Route's website <<https://leviedileonardodavinci.com/en/itinerari-del-consiglio-deuropa/>>, both accessed 10 March 2025.

5 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/european-route-of-historic-pharmacies>> and the official European Route of Historic Pharmacies' website <<https://aromassalutis.eu/it/>>, both accessed 10 March 2025.

6 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-santiago-de-compostela-pilgrim-routes>> and its official website <<https://saintjamesway.eu/>>, both accessed 10 March 2025.





7 — For more details on this topic, see some recent articles such as: A. Kavoura, T. Borges-Tiago, F. Tiago (eds.), “Sustainable Cultural Routes: A Literature Review of Key Fundamental Aspects”, in *Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism*, Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics 2023, 611-619, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51038-0_66> accessed 10 March 2025; X. Lin, et al., “Cultural Routes as Cultural Tourism Products for Heritage Conservation and Regional Development: A Systematic Review”, *Heritage*, 7 (2024): 2399-2425, <<https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage7050114>> accessed 10 March 2025; A.E. Fafouti, et al., “Designing Cultural Routes as a Tool of Responsible Tourism and Sustainable Local Development in Isolated and Less Developed Islands: The Case of Symi Island in Greece”, *Land*, 12 (2023): 1590, <<https://doi.org/10.3390/land12081590>> accessed 10 March 2025; A. Trono, *Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Routes in the Ionian and Adriatic Regions* (Rome: tab edizioni, 2022).

8 — For further insights, refer to the following works by the author: E. Berti, et al., *Cultural Routes Management: From Theory to Practice. Step by Step Guide to the Council of Europe Cultural Routes* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2015); E. Berti, et al., *Gestion des Itinéraires Culturels: De la Théorie à la Pratique. Vademecum des Itinéraires Culturels du Conseil de l'Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2015); E. Berti, *Itinerari Culturali del Consiglio d'Europa tra Ricerca di Identità e Progetto di Paesaggio* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2012); E. Berti, M. Thomas-Penette, *Alla Scoperta delle Radici Europee. I 29 Itinerari del Consiglio d'Europa* (Milan: Touring Club Italiano, 2011).

9 — For more details, see the resolution CM/Res(2023)2 revising the rules for the award of the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe certification, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 5 April 2023 at the 1462nd meeting of the Ministers Deputies: <<https://rm.coe.int/0900001680aa-cea6>> accessed 10 March 2025. See also the official website on Certification criteria: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/certification-criteria>> accessed 10 March 2025.

10 — See: S. Di Blasi, *Cultural Routes and European Identity: Exploring Heritage and Memory*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(3) (2020): 245-263.

11 — For more details, see: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/certification>> accessed 10 March 2025.

12 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-via-francigena>> accessed 10 March 2025.

13 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/via-regia>> accessed 10 March 2025.

14 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-iter-vitis-route>> accessed 10 March 2025.

15 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-routes-of-the-olive-tree>> accessed 10 March 2025.

16 — See: <<https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/20-ans-Via-Francigena-association-croisee-cultures-2021-08-10-1201170206>> accessed 10 March 2025.

17 — See: <<https://app.viefrancigene.org/en/road-to-rome-en/>> accessed 10 March 2025.

18 — See: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/destination-napoleon>> and its official website <<https://www.destination-napoleon.eu/>>, both accessed 10 March 2025.



Rethinking Landscape: Exploring the Inseparability of Nature and Culture in a Changing World

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The Challenges of Understanding and Defining Landscape

In recent decades, the importance of the landscape dimension has been increasingly acknowledged, leading to a more systematic integration of landscape-related concerns across various disciplines. Landscape is a critical area of study in fields such as art, aesthetics, architecture, planning, geography, and ecology, with each discipline interpreting it in distinct ways. A widely accepted definition describes cultural landscape as the combined work of humans and nature. However, landscape is also often perceived as a reflection of people's identities, beliefs, and livelihoods.

Despite its broad relevance, the concept of landscape remains elusive and multifaceted. The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”¹ This definition underscores the subjectivity of landscape perception, which varies depending on individuals' material and intellectual interactions with their surroundings. The diverse interpretations of landscape have influenced its management, protection, and planning, as demonstrated by the numerous protected areas across Europe today.

From a methodological perspective, landscape serves as a fundamental interpretative model of the Earth. It provides a space where different scientific disciplines converge to critically examine the complexities of life at both local and global levels. Furthermore, the European Landscape Convention promotes participatory action, encouraging a more inclusive approach to landscape governance. This fosters an understanding of landscapes as shared cultural and natural assets rather than objects of individual ownership. Consequently, a significant shift toward inclusive, co-created, and co-designed landscape management has emerged.

Rethinking Human Interaction with the Landscape

This discussion raises several important questions about contemporary human existence and our relationship with the world. Is our existence solely defined by our ability to build, occupy, demolish, and consume resources at any cost? How can we adopt new modes of action that prioritise care, protection, and maintenance beyond the confines of heritage or protected areas? What forms of spontaneous, creative interventions can reshape our daily interactions with the landscape? Can vulnerability and fragility become sources of empowerment rather than perceived weaknesses?





A key concept in this discourse is the relationship between culture and cultivation, two terms that share both etymological and conceptual roots. Cultivation refers to the physical act of nurturing the land, while culture extends this idea to the intellectual and societal dimensions of human existence. Cultural landscapes embody this interaction, emphasising an alternative theory of action—one that challenges the relentless drive to build, produce, and dominate at any cost. Instead, cultivation can be seen as a ‘soft’ form of intervention, guided by care, attention, and devotion, aimed at sustaining and enriching life.

Gardening as a Metaphor for Landscape Stewardship

Gardening serves as a metaphor for this approach. The act of kneeling to tend a garden symbolises humility and devotion to the Earth. Traditional agricultural practices demonstrate how cultivation supports both biological and cultural continuity while preserving biodiversity.

A gardener, aware of the complexities of natural cycles, works in collaboration with unpredictable forces—seasons, pests, and weather—rather than imposing rigid control. This perspective on landscape challenges the conventional notion of occupation and development, proposing an ‘art of living’ that is deeply rooted in embodied, sensory experiences instead.

While gardens represent a domesticated, human-centred approach to landscape, landscapes themselves encompass a broader and more dynamic aesthetic. They exist not only in places where humans actively shape their surroundings but also in spaces where nature thrives independently or where urban environments overshadow other forms of life. The aesthetics of landscape emerge through observation, an act that is itself a form of engagement. Landscapes are rarely fully designed; rather, they evolve through unpredictable encounters and interactions. This idea is reflected in historical art, such as ancient Roman frescoes, where cultivated gardens and wild landscapes are depicted in juxtaposition, suggesting a tension between domestication and untamed nature.

The Influence of Cartographic Representation on Landscape Perception

The conceptualisation of landscape is further complicated by the historical dominance of cartographic representations of space. Maps, as tools of abstraction, have shaped modern notions of territory by depicting the Earth as an infinite, measurable expanse. This abstraction has often served political and economic interests, reinforcing borders and facilitating territorial control. The cartographer’s work—presenting the world as a conceptual panorama rather than an embodied experience—exemplifies the detachment inherent in this spatial model. In contrast, landscape, as a way of understanding the Earth, resists such rigid abstraction, emphasizing lived experience and relational dynamics.



Over time, the conceptual shift from landscape to space and territory has contributed to the disconnection between humans and the land. The rise of urbanisation has physically and conceptually distanced people from the land they depend on for sustenance. Traditional forms of land use, such as kitchen gardens and small orchards, have been pushed to the outskirts of cities, becoming recreational rather than subsistence spaces. This shift signals the gradual erosion of the intimate relationship between people and their environment. As Bruno Latour aptly observes, the world we live in is not the world we live from.²

This disconnection is further reinforced by the abstraction of space through political and economic forces. Borders, regulations, and territorial policies increasingly shape our interactions with land, dictating its use and accessibility. At the same time, global migration patterns highlight the enduring interconnection between land and bodies, as displaced populations seek new territories for survival. The historical imposition of spatial and territorial divisions has long facilitated the exploitation of both land and people, reinforcing inequalities and environmental degradation.

In this context, the study of landscape provides a critical lens through which we can reassess our relationship with the Earth. By shifting from an exploitative, control-driven model toward one based on care, collaboration, and cultural continuity, we can envision new ways of inhabiting and engaging with our environment. Landscape, understood as a dynamic and participatory entity, challenges us to rethink conventional models of space and territory, offering a more holistic and inclusive approach to the future of our shared world.

Landscape: A Model of Coexistence and Perception

Landscape is one of the most subjective and aesthetic models we use to represent the Earth, and it is deeply intertwined with our embodied perception of the world. It silently preserves and reveals the intimate relationship between humans and the terrestrial materiality on which we depend. Even when we do not necessarily inhabit it, the landscape persistently reinforces our inseparability from the existential and emotional components that define life. It functions as a medium through which nature and culture coexist, shaped by human perception and representation throughout history.

Landscape emerges at the intersection of cognitive and emotional engagement, where human society—through its diverse social and cultural expressions—intertwines with both animate and inanimate elements of nature. This coexistence forms a dynamic matrix in which living beings merge with the inorganic world, a fusion eloquently illustrated in Caspar David Friedrich's famous painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*. Even degraded and seemingly uninhabitable lands, when perceived as landscape, become an inescapable part of our existence on Earth.



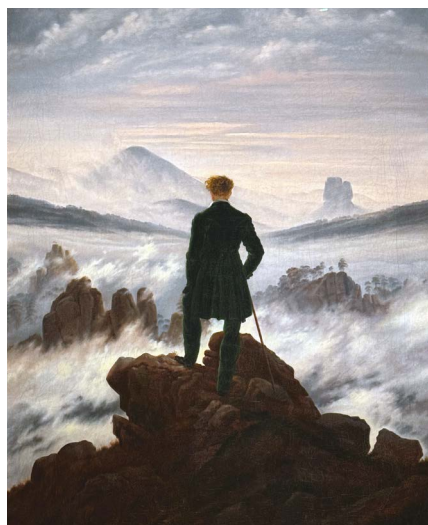


Fig. 1 – Landscape on the garden's threshold: the natural impossibility. Triclinium paintings from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, c. 30-20 BC.

Fig. 2 – *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog), 1817, oil on canvas, 98 x 74 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle.

Fig. 3 – Illustration from V. Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom: The Land and its Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).



The Indivisibility of Landscape and Perception

Landscape embodies our most profound, albeit sometimes unsettling, sense of belonging. Unlike other spatial concepts, it does not allow for the exclusion of undesirable elements—no waste, no spatial dislocation, no separation of residuals from meaningful existence. As Franco Farinelli suggests, if landscape is fundamentally about perception, then the observer and the observed become inseparable.³ This idea is well exemplified by images in which a subject simultaneously engages with both a cartographic representation of space and its sensory experience. Consequently, landscape resists symmetrical or neatly structured visions of the world, demanding instead a synthesis of external observation and inner intellectual reflection.

This inherent fluidity means that landscape-driven projects cannot be reduced to pre-defined, consumable solutions. Rather, they represent a continually evolving, adaptable process, responsive to context and unpredictable factors. Russian cartographic sketches offer a compelling example of this fluidity. These maps blend sensory perception with analytical observation, depicting landscapes not as static entities but as dynamic experiences shaped by the traveller's movement. Their pictorial, rather than graphic, nature and their imaginative, rather than purely informative, content demonstrate how landscape resists rigid mapping, existing instead as an ongoing, lived phenomenon.

Landscape as a Model for Inhabiting the World

Landscape challenges conventional notions of dwelling, homeland, and identity, which are often framed in binary oppositions such as local versus outsider or community versus individual. Instead, it promotes the idea of inhabiting as a possibility, particularly in an ecological perspective. It is composed of multiple proximities, allowing different species and forms of life to coexist, not for their utilitarian value but for their shared fate. Walter Benjamin's reflections suggest that landscape is about assimilation rather than transformation—about integrating difference rather than reshaping it for human purposes.⁴ Traditional definitions often describe cultural landscape as the transformation of nature through human action. However, a deeper understanding reveals landscape as a process of mutual assimilation, where nature and human existence intermingle in an existential, collective mixture. This perspective positions landscape as a natural model for designing ways of inhabiting that embrace diversity and fluidity, rather than imposing rigid structures. Each minor variation in perception can profoundly alter our understanding of the landscape, making observation a decisive act.

The Science and Sensory Experience of Landscape

The historical development of scientific instruments like the cyanometer—developed during Alexander von Humboldt's explorations in the 18th century—exemplifies the





intersection of sensory perception and empirical study in our appreciation of landscapes. This tool, designed to measure the blueness of the sky, illustrates how seemingly ordinary phenomena can elude conventional understanding, revealing unexpected complexities. At its core, the cyanometer represents an attempt to grasp the hidden intricacies of the visible world, an effort that aligns with the very essence of landscape perception. This interplay between scientific precision and sensory experience highlights a crucial aspect of landscape: it is both deeply personal and universally shared. Landscape invites an observation that transcends rigid classifications, requiring engagement through all the senses. It challenges the observer to participate actively in perceiving and interpreting the world, fostering a nuanced and empathetic interaction with the environment.

Language, Landscape, and Cultural Perception

The relationship between language and landscape perception is particularly evident in the proliferation of local terminologies used to describe natural features. These specialised lexicons, developed by scientists, poets, and local communities, serve not only to categorise nature but also to preserve its significance. Unlike standardised linguistic structures, these terms capture the subtle distinctions of wind, water, soil, and forest, anchoring them in cultural memory. This linguistic richness prevents places from dissolving into abstract spatial concepts, such as those defined by political borders. As Wendell Berry observes, people exploit what they find valuable, but they defend what they love.⁵ To cultivate a sense of attachment to a place, language must particularise it, making its nuances visible and meaningful. This attentiveness fosters a deeper connection to the landscape, ensuring that it is not merely a backdrop for human activity but a living entity that demands respect and care. In this way, landscape is not a mere static object of admiration but becomes an active force that shapes human perception and behaviour.

Landscape as an Act of Perception

Despite being ever-present in daily life, landscape remains elusive. It cannot be fully captured by maps, measurements, or conventional perspectives. Instead, it operates in a subtle manner, requiring an acute awareness and sensitivity to be truly seen. Detecting landscape necessitates a form of observational agility—a willingness to move beyond established visions and embrace alternative ways of seeing.

This inherent resistance to easy categorisation underscores the cultural nature of landscape. Much like a playground, landscape is not about measuring and evaluating static facts but about sensing and recalibrating distances, proximities, and relationships. It calls for an openness to the unexpected and a readiness to engage with the world on its own terms. In this sense, landscape is both a medium of discovery and an invitation to reimagine how we inhabit the Earth.



Landscape as a Sentinel of the Future

Ultimately, landscape serves as a sentinel of the future, urging us to choose between passive observation and active engagement. If we suffer from a form of perceptive amnesia, as Martin Duberman suggests, then landscape offers a means to reclaim our lost sensitivity.⁶ It challenges us to perceive not only with our own eyes but through the eyes of others, fostering a shared understanding of existence.

In the face of environmental and existential uncertainties, landscape provides a crucial framework for navigating change. It reminds us that real discovery lies not in domination but in the subtle art of perception. Whether through scientific inquiry, artistic representation, or linguistic nuances, landscape remains a powerful model for coexistence, continuously shaping and being shaped by those who observe it. In this act of observation, we find not only knowledge but also the possibility of a more harmonious way of living.

1 — European Landscape Convention Florence (ETS No. 176), 20.X.2000, Article 1, letter a), p. 2; see: <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=176>> accessed 19 February 2025.

2 — See: B. Latour, *How to Inhabit the Earth: Interviews with Nicolas Truong* (Cambridge: Polity, 2024).

3 — For more details, see: F. Farinelli, *I segni del mondo. Immagine cartografica e discorso geografico in età moderna* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1992); F. Farinelli, R. Olson, D. Reichert, *Limits of Representation* (Munich: Accedo, 1994).

4 — See: H. Eiland, M. W. Jennings (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006) 1, 107–8.

5 — See: W. Berry, *Life Is a Miracle. An Essay Against*

Modern Superstition (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 2000): “We know enough of our own history by now to be aware that people exploit what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they defend what they love. To defend what we love we need a particularizing language, for we love what we particularly know.”

6 — Martin Duberman has explored themes such as historical amnesia and the intentional forgetting of significant aspects of the past in various essays and articles, such as “The Undelivered Promise of the Gay Liberation Struggle”, published in *The Nation* (2019), as well as in works such as *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009) and his more recent book *Reaching Ninety* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2023).







Crafting Festival Experiences for Local Impacts

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Festivals represent a unique intersection of cultural expression, community engagement, and economic activity. My experience with festivals is twofold: as a researcher and as a practitioner directly involved in festival organisation. This dual perspective has enabled me to analyse festivals not only as cultural phenomena but also as dynamic tools for local development. In this essay, I will share insights drawn from both my research and practical experience, exploring how festivals evolve, impact communities, and navigate contemporary challenges.

The Lifecycle of Festivals

As part of an ongoing research project, we collected and analysed data from 123 emerging festivals up until 2023, providing valuable insights into their development and sustainability. Festivals can generally be classified into three categories based on their longevity:

- **Emerging Festivals:** these festivals have completed at least two editions and are still in their formative stages.
- **Developing Festivals:** typically ranging from ten to twenty editions, these festivals have established themselves but continue to refine their strategy.
- **Established Festivals:** with more than twenty-five editions, these festivals focus on maintaining their relevance and adapting to evolving cultural and economic conditions.

A key aspect of my research has been small and emerging festivals, particularly their ability to introduce new themes and cultural perspectives. Each year, new festivals present themselves as the “new wave”. They tend to be smaller, with limited budgets, but bring fresh perspectives. Over the past five years, Europe has seen a surge in niche festivals centred on sustainability, green technologies, and social and civil rights. This marks a shift from broader thematic festivals—such as those dedicated to literature, science, or the performing arts—towards more specialised and strategically positioned events.

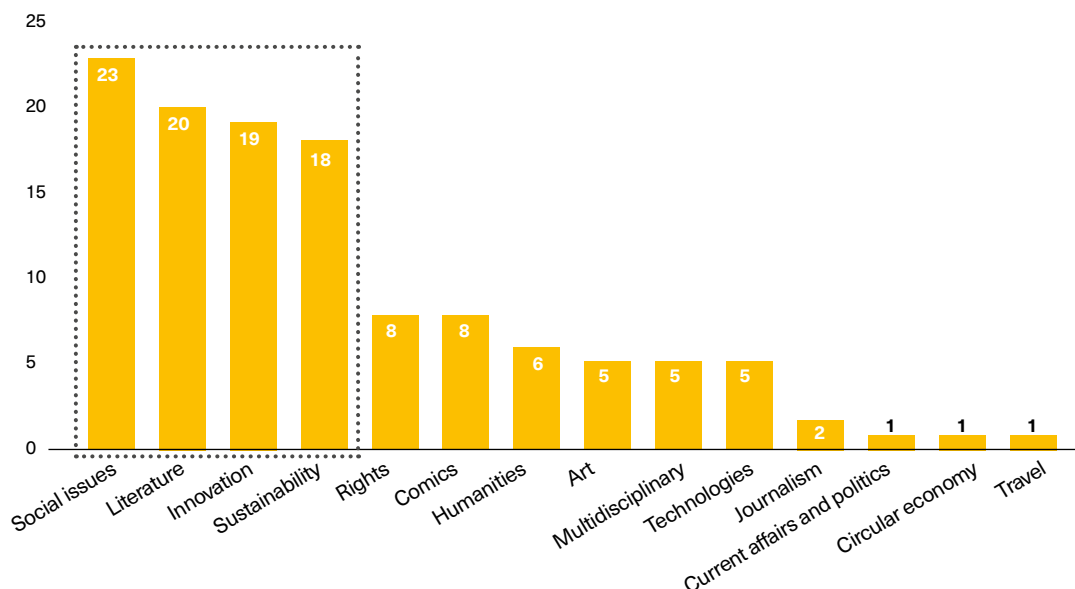


Fig. 1 – Graphic illustrating the increasing emphasis of emerging festivals on key generational themes: social and gender issues, sustainability, rights, and technological innovation.

In the 1990s, festivals began differentiating themselves by focussing on specific cultural themes: rather than simply “music”, there was “jazz” or “baroque music”; instead of “literature”, there was “noir”; instead of general “comics”, there was a focus on Japanese manga. This cultural and commercial propositioning required clear differentiation. In the post-pandemic era, many festivals have embraced themes such as sustainability, green energy, and civil rights, making them particularly attractive to younger generations.

Festivals as Catalysts for Local Development

Some festivals start as short, two- to three-day events but, particularly in smaller towns with limited cultural offerings, evolve into permanent cultural institutions. Many transition from being local events with modest budgets to becoming key cultural hubs within their communities. Often, they contribute to the regeneration of physical spaces, introducing activities that may eventually become permanent.

This phenomenon is quite common in Italy, where many festivals began as experimental initiatives led by community-based groups with strong local ties and limited budgets (typically between €10,000 and €20,000). In their early stages, 90% of Italian and European festivals receive no public funding, yet their organisers manage to attract a dedicated group



of volunteers. If a festival's theme resonates with the community and secures volunteer support, it can sustain itself in its initial form for two to three editions. If it continues to be successful, it may develop into something more substantial by its third or fifth year.

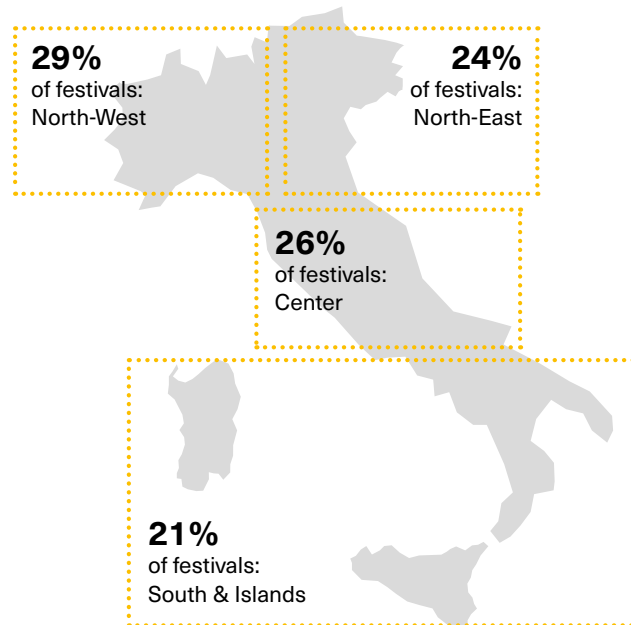


Fig. 2 – Geographic distribution of emerging festivals across Italy.

Festivals follow a lifecycle, and the risk of disappearance after two or three years is high. This is an accepted reality in a sector where new festivals are constantly emerging. Italy, which has the highest number of festivals in Europe—over 2,000, according to a recent census by the Italian Ministry of Culture—exemplifies this trend. The main challenge for festivals is securing the resources necessary for long-term survival. New events must compete for public attention, sponsorships, and public funding.

After the startup phase, successful festivals contribute to a city's recognition, becoming territorial assets and potentially permanent forms of social entrepreneurship. Their governance structures may evolve; many festivals begin as associations, later transitioning into foundations and eventually establishing themselves as permanent cultural institutions. In small towns without museums or theatres, festivals often serve as the primary cultural offering. This phenomenon is even more significant than is recorded in academic literature.





Community Engagement and Challenges

Festivals play a crucial role in local regeneration processes. However, they do not always succeed in attracting tourists or strengthening a location's reputation.

Their primary audience is the local community, which benefits through a strengthened sense of identity, belonging, and pride. Those designing new festivals must ask themselves: "Am I truly engaging the community, or is this just a vanity project led by a group of intellectuals or local leaders?" Successful festivals involve the entire community—from schools and teenagers to young adults and retirees—ensuring they are launched as genuine grassroots initiatives.

Once a festival reaches a certain scale, it can become a strategic tool for city branding, especially in towns with populations between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants. Festivals thrive in smaller towns, where attendees can easily move between venues and enjoy an intimate, immersive experience. This atmosphere is difficult to replicate in larger cities.

Data from our research show that 95% of festivals remains free of charge.

The top 5% may introduce a small fee (€5-€6 for a two-hour lecture), typically for special guests or curated content. More than half of festival funding comes from private contributions, sponsorships, and partnerships rather than public sources, distinguishing festivals from other temporary cultural events like exhibitions.

Despite their evolving nature, these initiatives retain a grassroots spirit, with 87% of Italian festivals run by private entities—a remarkable percentage.

The average age of European festival directors is between 30 and 40, whereas in Italy it was 51 last year, indicating that festival organisation has become an increasingly professionalised field. Additionally, 80% of European festivals now create digital archives, organising content on YouTube and reaching audiences far beyond their physical attendees. While a live event might attract 100-120 attendees, the same content online typically garners ten times more viewers.

The Digital Shift and Sustainability

The pandemic has transformed the festival landscape. Hybrid models now allow for 70% of events to take place in person and 30% online, making it easier to involve high-profile speakers without incurring in significant travel and accommodation costs. This shift has been particularly beneficial for small festivals, which have embraced digital platforms to expand their reach. Many now produce their own web radio programmes, audiobooks, and podcasts on platforms such as Spotify, Google Audio, and Audible. High-quality video production is now essential, even for documenting lectures and conferences.



Festivals are increasingly becoming content producers rather than mere presenters of third-party content. In the 1990s and early 2000s, literary festivals were often organised by publishers, while music festivals were typically run by record labels. Today, a growing number of festivals produce their own podcasts and audiovisual materials, elevating their content to professional publishing standards.

Sustainability as a Core Consideration

Sustainability has become a central focus for festivals. International organisations provide useful guidelines, such as Fáilte Ireland's *Sustainable Festivals Guidelines*,¹ which outline practical steps for making festivals more eco-friendly. These guidelines cover key areas including energy use, travel, materials, waste, food, water, biodiversity, and governance, offering twenty to thirty actionable measures per category.

By the third to fifth year, festivals typically begin implementing sustainability strategies, often hiring sustainability managers to oversee the process. The *Sustainable Events Guidelines*² by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability take a more theoretical approach but follow a similar structure, encouraging festivals to assess their carbon footprint, seek alternative suppliers, and balance cost with sustainability.

As festivals continue to evolve, integrating sustainability and digital engagement will be key to their long-term success. They serve not only as cultural platforms but also as drivers of local development, community identity, and economic growth. By carefully planning their themes, governance, and sustainability strategies, festivals can remain relevant and impactful for years to come.

1 — See: <<https://coalition2030.ie/resource/failte-ireland-sustainable-festivals-guidelines-2023-2/>> accessed 19 February 2025.

2 — See: <<https://e-lib.iclei.org/ICLEI%20SUSTAINABLE%20EVENT%20GUIDELINES.pdf>> accessed 19 February 2025.





Arts and Culture for Health and Well-Being: A Growing Field of Action

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Nowadays, there is a growing body of evidence that arts and culture contribute to health and well-being, as research has explored their full potential for improving people's lives. In Italy, this phenomenon is often referred to as “cultural welfare”.

An example of the application of these principles can be found in Turin, where artists contributed to the decoration of the walls of a large obstetric facility, the Sant'Anna Hospital. Their aim was to transform the physical environment's impact on people. This was particularly important for women giving birth, as it had a positive impact on their experience. The work of doctors and nurses was affected too and the hospital's reception and treatment of patients improved. The experiment was simple yet interesting, highlighting the importance of creating a welcoming and comforting space for both patients and staff.¹

Artistic practices can offer transformative experiences. For instance, using visual arts in community spaces or projects like mural painting can reshape our surroundings, making spaces more inviting. Collaborating with architects to design friendlier, softer, and more welcoming spaces can yield psychological benefits.

Yet evidence shows that the arts contribute to health and well-being in more ways than merely creating a nicer environment. In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a comprehensive map of the social determinants of health, urging us to recognise that health is not only the product of the complex balance between biomedical and biochemical factors—as conceptualised in the old biomedical approach.² In 2018, the WHO released a groundbreaking report based on the analysis of over three thousand studies,³ which found evidence that cultural activities and involvement in the arts effectively promote health and contribute to prevent, manage and treat pathologic conditions.

The new model of well-being incorporates biological, psychological, and social factors. This model recognises that people's health and well-being depend on various components, including their experience of arts and culture. Significant statistical evidence also indicates that lower levels of education are associated with poorer health conditions. Improvements in living, social, educational, and cultural conditions have a direct impact on both current and future health and well-being. This impact can be influenced by our access to cultural resources such as libraries, cinemas, theaters, concert halls, and similar facilities. Additionally, our personal experiences, such as participating in choirs, playing in musical bands, or spending time reading, profoundly affect our development. These activities,

including engaging in artistic pursuits and crafting, significantly shape our individual identities and contribute to our overall well-being.

Across Europe, people with a rich “cultural diet”, that is, a more intense, vibrant, and lively cultural life, have been statistically shown to live longer and healthier lives. Conversely, individuals with a less varied cultural and artistic experience tend to have shorter and less healthy life expectations, as extensive research indicates.⁴

Salutogenesis

The basis for our discussion on the contribution of arts and culture to well-being is the approach of *salutogenesis*, which focusses not only on avoiding harmful factors, but also on emphasising and multiplying the assets that contribute positively to our well-being, while underlining the factors that enable us to cope with life’s challenges in a healthy and balanced way.⁵

Examples of assets that can positively impact our well-being include gratitude—an attitude we can nurture every day. Gratitude stands in opposition to resentment or anger and acts as a fuel for positive actions. Similarly, learned optimism plays a crucial role, as the cultivation of pessimism may lead to depression, negatively affecting our psychological, mental, and even physical health. However, irrational optimism is not a sound approach either, as it often fails to reflect reality. Learned optimism involves critical thinking that helps us recognise the reasons to feel confident and approach the future with curiosity and interest. A sense of humor is another powerful asset. It is an art that can be cultivated within the appropriate cultural context, serving as a roadmap to creating new solutions and responding effectively and creatively to daily challenges.

Social capital is equally important. It is the ability to be part of networks of people who can be relied upon in times of need, and who in turn can rely on us. Individuals who are culturally poor and isolated tend to have very little social capital and few people to turn to when necessary. Participating in activities such as singing in a choir can help build social connections and support networks.

Salutogenic Policies

Investing in the promotion of positive elements that contribute to health is a long-term process, which can be costly and take a long time to produce visible outcomes. This is why politicians may be reluctant to invest in health promotion, as the benefits of such investments may not become evident for five, ten, or even twenty years.

What is essential is the effort to make cultural services and resources available to as many people as possible, starting from the very beginning of life. We know now that the first three thousand days in a newborn’s life—and especially the crucial first one thousand days—are vital for the future development of the child, and experiencing sounds, music,



words, readings is essential. By exposing children to cultural experiences early on, we can significantly improve their future lives.

Preventing illness is fundamental for effective health policies. Yet, recent studies show that in the European Union, for instance, only two per cent of overall health expenditure is devoted to prevention, despite the well-known fact that spending on prevention saves considerably on treatment. Many European countries focus more on emergency medicine, responding to crises rather than investing in building strategies for long-term health.

Arts and cultural practices can offer incredible relief and management solutions that complement traditional approaches. These practices are particularly valuable in situations ranging from end-of-life care to post-traumatic conditions. For example, young survivors of severe accidents, who may face long-term physical and emotional challenges, benefit from conventional medical treatments, yet the integration of cultural practices can provide additional support and improve their overall well-being.

Multidimensional Interventions

This integration highlights a new direction for engaging the cultural sector's energies in healthcare. By developing a dialogue with different sectors—healthcare, social assistance, education, etc.—each discipline can contribute its unique abilities, expertise, knowledge, and techniques. Without any confusion of roles, this approach fosters a comprehensive, multidimensional intervention, where a museum director does not become a doctor or a social worker, but all professionals collaborate and combine their strengths to intervene effectively and achieve significant results. This approach aligns with the aforementioned findings from the World Health Organization.

Artistic activities are complex interventions that address various dimensions—social, aesthetic, relational, and knowledge-related. These activities engage people on multiple levels, providing diverse responses that have proven quite interesting. One level is, of course, the aesthetic; however, when we speak of aesthetic engagement, we must clarify that the aesthetic dimension encompasses a range of experiences, including challenging or even unsettling ones. We may accept or reject different aesthetic experiences based on what resonates with us internally, yet they can remain very powerful. They include the gratification derived from harmony, beauty, and pleasure; additionally, components such as imagination and sensory activation play significant roles.

An example of powerful sensory activation through artistic activities is the Barcelona orchestra working specifically with deaf people. The musicians enabled people to perceive sound through vibrations, demonstrating how alternative sensory activations can be incredibly stimulating and beneficial.

By engaging and stimulating our senses, we interact more profoundly with the world around us, which in turn evokes a range of emotions. Emotions are crucial as they motivate



us to take action and form deep connections with our surroundings. This is particularly important when addressing mental health issues, which, as we know, are among the pressing problems we face today, especially among young people.

The Effects of Cultural Participation on People's Well-Being

Artistic activities contribute to cognitive stimulation, enriching our experiences and fostering feelings of attachment and affection, among others. In this way, art becomes a key tool for managing mental health, helping individuals navigate their emotions and create meaningful interactions with their environment.

In many cases, physical activities such as dance or theatrical arts demonstrate impressive results across various conditions. These activities not only foster social connections, which in itself is significant, but also offer profound physical- and mental-health benefits.

Cultural activities are important for individuals of all ages and conditions, as they can elicit physiological responses. Studies have shown that engaging in emotionally involving artistic activities can effectively regulate stress hormones such as cortisol. This is particularly beneficial for managing stress and promoting mental health.

Moreover, artistic and cultural activities have demonstrated efficacy in improving cardiovascular health. For example, recovery programmes that involve art have shown considerable benefits for individuals after heart attacks, helping them regain balance and improve their overall health through intense engagement in creative and cultural endeavours. There are some beautiful and remarkably tangible social effects that can be observed from engaging in artistic and cultural activities. The evidence supporting these benefits is substantial and clear. By fostering such engagement, we can reduce loneliness and isolation, factors that often precede mental health decline. Social support networks are strengthened, and one's sense of social capital is enhanced.

In an era when endemic violence is increasing across various environments, promoting social resilience and peaceful interactions through art can be incredibly valuable. The outcomes of integrating arts and culture into health strategies can be categorised into four key areas: prevention, promotion, management, and treatment. These are the domains where we can expect significant contributions from the arts and culture to improve people's lives.

Museums for Alzheimer's

One of the oldest, most consolidated, and effective projects combining healthcare and culture is the Meet Me at MoMA programme at the MoMA Museum in New York.⁶ Developed to improve accessibility and specifically targeting people with Alzheimer's disease, the programme was later implemented in many museums, including some in Tuscany, Italy. After making the museum accessible to individuals with Alzheimer's, it was discovered that specific programmes tailored to their needs could be highly beneficial. Since then, the





museum professional community has increasingly shown interest in addressing such challenges, particularly in areas where traditional medical interventions may fall short. In conditions like Alzheimer's, where treatments cannot reverse the condition, such programmes can mitigate some of the most challenging aspects of the disease, including providing support and improving quality of life for those affected.

Sixty museums across Tuscany offer various benefits to people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers.⁷ For a few hours each week, these museums provide relief and respite, working closely with geriatric experts and Alzheimer's specialists. They have developed a range of activities designed to reduce triggers of aggressiveness, fear, and violence often present in individuals with Alzheimer's. These sessions provide significant support while also offering respite for caregivers, who bear a heavy burden.

Although it has been proven impossible to halt the progression of this syndrome, which increasingly diminishes the ability to communicate, remember, and express oneself, the faculty of imagination is often the last to fade.

From the outset, Tuscan Museums for Alzheimer's⁸ aimed to address the social marginalisation and embarrassment faced by people with this syndrome. Bringing them into the esteemed spaces of the city helped convey the idea that these individuals are valued members of the community, not hidden away from public view.

Dance Programmes for Parkinson's Patients

Another condition that not only affects older individuals but also impacts relatively younger people is Parkinson's disease. Dance has been shown to be effective both for alleviating symptoms and in slowing the degenerative process.

In Bassano del Grappa, in the Veneto region, there is a remarkable programme centered on this concept.⁹ Hosted in a museum, the focus is on artistic practice, specifically dance: participants undergo a year of training and meet twice a week. This programme includes both people with Parkinson's and people without. Throughout the year, the participants prepare for a dance performance that rivals those of professional dance companies.

This initiative is also crucial in reducing stigma. Much like the Alzheimer's programmes in museums, this dance programme is highly effective and very low-cost, requiring primarily human engagement, expertise, and public spaces willing to host the activities.

Cultural Visits for Hearing and Non-Hearing Visitors

Another exemplary project takes place at the Galleria Borghese, in Rome. For the past four or five years, this initiative has brought deaf and hearing visitors together to share their experiences. Each group learns from the other, as the visits are conducted in sign language for the deaf audience.¹⁰



This arrangement creates a powerful form of integration and socialisation. In this cultural experience, each group has much to offer to the other. Interestingly, the more generous contributions often come from the deaf participants, providing hearing individuals with unique insights and perspectives.

These approaches underscore an alternative way to consider the relationship between well-being, the arts, and cultural heritage, which differs from art therapy. They offer a complementary and reinforcing approach to medical interventions, ultimately leading to positive outcomes for patients.

1 — The Cantiere dell'Arte (Art Yard) project, launched in 2011 by the Fondazione Medicina a Misura di Donna in collaboration with the Department of Education of the Castello di Rivoli – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, aimed to enhance the perception of hospital spaces through visual art. It engaged hospital staff, patients, and visitors in collective painting and community work, transforming the environment. Various groups, including sports teams, students, managers, and teachers, were invited to participate, integrating themes such as design thinking, problem-solving, team-building, and social impact into their learning experiences. The project fosters a sense of belonging and re-appropriation of space through creative and collective actions while relying on the potential of staff and contributing to the improvement of their daily life on the workplace.

2 — For more details, see: World Health Organization, *A Conceptual Framework for Action on the Social Determinants of Health* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2010), available at <<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241500852>> accessed 19 February 2025.

3 — For more details, see: D. Fancourt, S. Finn, World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, Health Evidence Network, *What is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being? A scoping review* (Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2019), available at <<https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/9789289054553>> accessed 19 February 2025.

4 — L.O. Bygren, B.B. Konlaan, S.-E. Johansson, "Attendance at Cultural Events, Reading Books or Periodicals, and Making Music or Singing in a Choir as Determinants for Survival: Swedish interview survey of living conditions", *British Medical Journal*, 313(7072), (1996): 1577 -1580.

5 — In the health promotion field, the term *salutogenesis* is associated with various meanings that Aaron Antonovsky introduced in his 1979 book *Health, Stress, and Coping*, and that he expounded in many subsequent works. In its most thoroughly explicated meaning, salutogenesis refers to the salutogenic model of health, which posits that life experiences help shape one's sense of coherence—an orientation towards life as more or less comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. A strong sense of coherence helps one mobilise resources to cope with stressors and manage tension successfully. See: A. Antonovsky, *Health, Stress, and Coping: New Perspectives on Mental and Physical Well-Being* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1979).

6 — See: <<https://www.moma.org/calendar/programs/35>> accessed 19 February 2025.

7 — See: <<https://www.museitoscanialzheimer.org/>> accessed 19 February 2025.

8 — *Ibidem*.

9 — See: <<https://dancewell.eu/en/the-project>> accessed 19 February 2025.

10 — See: <<https://galleriaborghese.beniculturali.it/en/visita/accessibilita/>> accessed 19 February 2025.





Monitoring and Evaluating Cultural Projects

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Why is it important to evaluate, collect, interpret, and analyse data? What is the difference between monitoring and evaluation? How can we adopt a multi-dimensional approach to evaluation? These are the questions we will explore, providing examples and models that can be applied in practice.

In many cases, evaluation is perceived as a bureaucratic requirement, often necessary to secure public funding. This perception can make monitoring and evaluation seem tedious formalities. However, adopting a different perspective reveals their true significance: evaluation is an essential tool for planning, improving efficiency, and ensuring that cultural projects are both relevant and necessary. It provides a solid foundation for decision-making, helping to determine whether a project aligns with broader cultural objectives. Additionally, it helps manage key resources—money, personnel, and time—by optimising their use, reducing waste, and maximising the impact of cultural initiatives.¹ Another crucial reason for evaluation is accountability. Transparent institutions must assess the success of cultural projects, programmes, and organisations against their intended goals. Evaluation not only highlights areas that need improvement but also identifies successful strategies. Moreover, it provides stakeholders with clear evidence of how resources have been used and the impact achieved.² Through evaluation, we can assess a project's actual impact on target audiences and the broader cultural landscape, offering tangible proof of its effectiveness and efficiency. By honestly recognising strengths and weaknesses, we can refine our projects, fostering a continuous cycle of feedback and improvement that enhances overall performance and outcomes.

The Three Key Perspectives of Evaluation

Evaluations generate knowledge, which is essential for designing cultural projects. These projects should rely on the connection we establish between data and insights gained through evaluation and our ability to improve both our skills and effectiveness in production. This enables us to refine our competencies, better define desired outcomes and focus on what really matters.

Evaluation must consider at least three perspectives: those of policymakers, cultural managers, and stakeholders/beneficiaries.

1. Policymakers and decision-makers use evaluations to assess investments, define criteria and priorities, and determine who and what to support.



2. Cultural managers rely on evaluation results to measure impact, monitor progress, and assess effectiveness.
3. Stakeholders and beneficiaries depend on evaluation for transparency and advocacy.
4. Evaluation outcomes help build trust and consensus among stakeholders, sponsors, and the public.

Distinguishing Between Monitoring and Evaluation

While monitoring and evaluation are often used interchangeably, they serve distinct but complementary roles. Monitoring is the systematic and continuous collection of data to track a project's progress. It identifies gaps, weaknesses, and strengths, focussing on both quantitative and qualitative data. Why do we create monitoring systems? Monitoring systems are designed to gather data and require IT software, skilled personnel, and administrative infrastructure. They should collect both qualitative and quantitative data to track a project's progress, detect early issues, and enable timely corrective actions. While the primary purpose of monitoring is to track ongoing progress against planned activities and timelines, it also serves as an early warning system, helping project managers implement necessary adjustments. Monitoring can function as an internal information system, providing data that can be shared with stakeholders through regular updates on the project's status and performance.

Moving from monitoring to evaluation involves systematic analysis, assessing outcomes, and measuring impact. Evaluation goes beyond data collection; it requires interpretation, performance assessment, and comparison with predetermined objectives. Together, monitoring and evaluation form a continuous feedback loop that is essential for effective project management.

Balancing Ambition and Resources in Evaluation

Evaluation is not an easy task. It is a broad process, but it can be extremely useful, particularly when sharing impact results with stakeholders and building consensus around our work. In some ways, monitoring and evaluation are the two sides of the same coin, they are interconnected, and if one does not function properly, the other is also compromised. Monitoring provides the real-time data necessary for evaluation, meaning that without monitoring we cannot have evaluation.

One of the key challenges in evaluation is finding a balance between ambitious goals and available resources. Measuring social, cultural, or economic impacts often requires significant resources, which are rarely included in a project's initial budget. In many cases, funding is allocated for a single, stand-alone project without provisions for evaluation, making it nearly impossible to secure resources once the project has ended. To address this, institutions should establish an ongoing system for data collection.





Reducing the scope of evaluation in favour of a regular, sustainable approach can be more practical and more effective.

Most institutions lack internal evaluation expertise. One solution is to identify whether such competencies exist within our city, region, or professional network and build alliances, particularly with universities or research centres. These institutions are often interested in collaborating on monitoring or evaluation systems, creating a mutually beneficial partnership. For example, while working at Polo del '900 in Turin, we lacked in-house expertise in social impact analysis. We then partnered with local university departments specialising in this area, creating an annual programme where students and researchers could analyse our data, benefiting both parties.

My advice is to map your local context, identifying people, institutions, skills, and competencies that can support the evaluation process. While monitoring is often an internal, institutional task, external expertise can truly help the evaluation.

Different Scales of Evaluation

Evaluations can vary in scale and may focus on:

- Annual institutional performance
- Programme-wide assessments
- Specific projects

Timing is also a crucial factor. Some impacts, such as social or educational outcomes, require long-term evaluation, whereas project-based assessments often operate within shorter time frames. Ideally, projects should be integrated into broader strategic frameworks with predefined objectives to enhance accountability. However, in many cases, the most significant effects only become apparent after a project has concluded. From a methodological perspective, it is essential to define objectives before initiating communication, identifying data sources, selecting indicators, and evaluating outcomes. Only by following this structured approach can results be assessed in a rigorous, consistent, and well-founded manner.

Communication is just as important as the other stages of the evaluation process. However, it is often overlooked because it is not perceived as a priority. Social reporting, supported by well-designed infographics, provides a simple yet powerful means of communication. It can be highly effective for building consensus, managing stakeholder expectations, and sharing valuable insights with the media.

In monitoring and evaluation, establishing a clear link between strategy and assessment is essential. To accurately interpret results or measure a programme's success, objectives must be clearly defined from the outset. Unfortunately, institutions often fail to specify—or at least effectively communicate—their intended goals.



Integrating projects into a broader strategic framework, with specific objectives set in advance, would not only improve evaluation processes but also enhance institutional accountability.

Evaluation also involves assessing changes over time. It is crucial to establish an initial reference point (T0) when objectives are declared. Once the objectives and expected results are identified, appropriate and effective indicators must be selected to measure key developments. This requires identifying relevant data sources and determining the best methods for data collection, whether through administrative records, qualitative surveys, focus groups, or questionnaires. Since tools, data, and indicators are highly interdependent, careful planning is essential to ensure a comprehensive evaluation process.

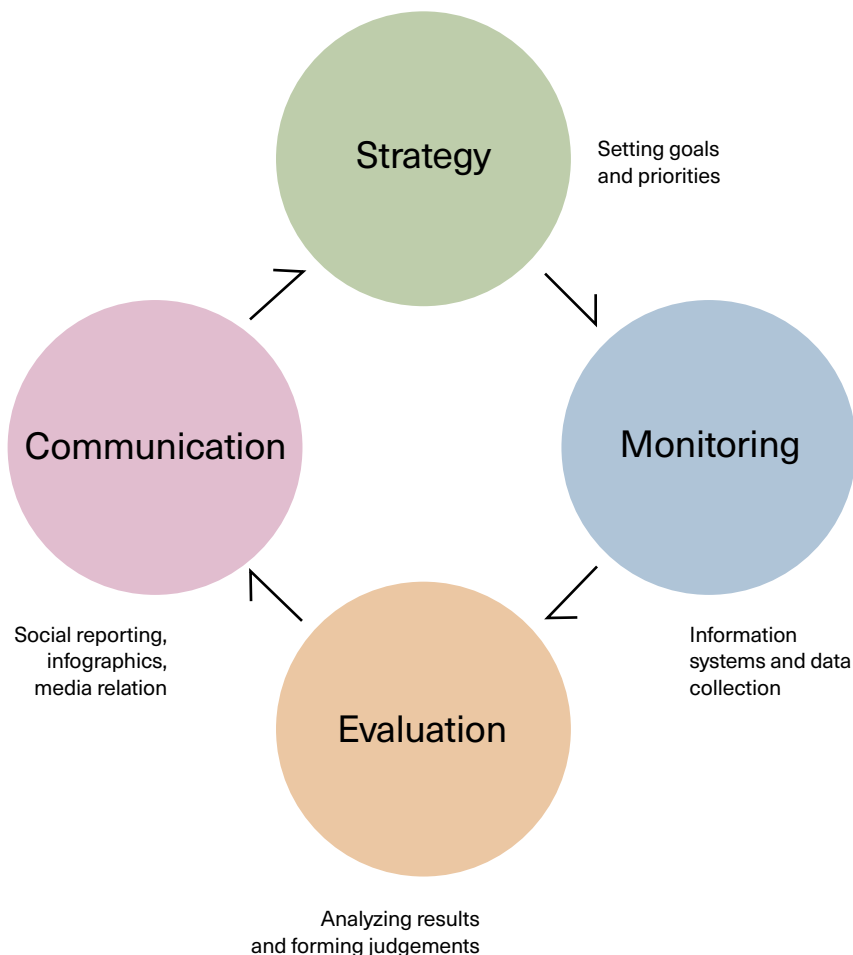


Fig. 1 – Overview of the evaluation cycle: from strategy to communication.





A clear methodological approach—beginning with defining objectives, followed by data collection, indicator selection, and outcome evaluation—ensures a well-founded assessment. Additionally, communication remains a vital yet frequently overlooked element. Social reporting, particularly through visually engaging infographics, serve as an effective tool for consensus building, stakeholder management, and media engagement.

Case Studies: Evaluation in Practice

Matera 2019, European Capital of Culture

One of the most compelling examples of cultural evaluation in practice is Matera 2019, when the city was designated as the European Capital of Culture. I had the privilege of coordinating the bid book for Matera's candidacy, a process that began in 2012—seven years before the official year as Capital. From the outset, we recognised the importance of clearly defining objectives and establishing mechanisms to measure the transformation that the programme aimed to achieve.

A key element of this process was documenting the city's pre-existing conditions to enable a robust assessment of change over time. Upon completing the candidature phase in 2014, we designed an extensive survey to identify indicators and data points that could serve as benchmarks for evaluating our objectives. This was essential for tracking progress and understanding the long-term impact of the European Capital of Culture programme on Matera. One of the principal goals of the candidacy was to create genuine opportunities particularly for young people, so they would not feel compelled to leave their hometown in search of better prospects. Instead, we sought to foster an environment where ideas, talent, investment, innovation, and creative communities would be drawn into Matera rather than flowing outwards. This bold and ambitious vision aimed at defining the European Capital of Culture as a catalyst for long-term transformation.

The challenge lays in measuring and evaluating such qualitative and complex objectives. Since no single model could fully encapsulate these ambitions, we adopted a multi-dimensional approach, selecting qualitative indicators as diagnostic tools to identify gaps and track improvements over time. One key indicator, for instance, focussed on public perception. In 2014, we conducted a survey to determine the percentage of residents who considered Matera an attractive city for young people. The results revealed that only 44% held this belief. Our aim was to repeat the survey six years later, after implementing the programme, with the expectation that at least 70% of respondents would perceive Matera as a city appealing to young people.

Another crucial aspect was the perceived relationship between culture and economic development. In 2014, only 64% of residents regarded culture as a fundamental driver of the economy. By 2020, this figure had risen to 90%, reflecting a significant shift in public awareness and attitudes towards culture's role in economic sustainability.



Similarly, we sought to measure the perception of Matera as an innovative and creative city. The initial survey in 2014 showed that only 47% of respondents agreed with this characterisation. However, by 2020, this figure had increased to 70%, indicating a growing recognition of Matera's cultural and creative potential.

Beyond changing perceptions, a fundamental goal of the Matera 2019 programme was to enhance active participation in cultural initiatives. Engagement is a critical factor not only for a European Capital of Culture but for any cultural project, festival, or exhibition. In Matera's case, the overarching ambition was to diversify participation, ensuring that a broad cross-section of the community was involved in cultural activities. Encouraging active engagement was seen as a way to foster a deeper sense of ownership, responsibility, and commitment to protecting, regenerating, and appreciating local cultural heritage.

To evaluate this objective, we defined several key indicators in the bid book. While not perfect, these metrics provided valuable insights into the programme's success. The first target was highly ambitious: we aimed for 80% of the cultural programme to involve citizens directly in co-creation and co-production. Given the centrality of these concepts to our approach, we implemented an administrative system to track the number of projects developed through co-creation. Education was another crucial pillar of our strategy. We aspired to ensure that all primary and junior high schools in Matera were directly engaged in cultural projects.

This was an ambitious goal, requiring active participation from every school, but it was instrumental in embedding cultural engagement within the younger generation.

Finally, we sought to measure the willingness of local residents to volunteer for Matera 2019. In the initial survey, only 18% of respondents expressed an interest in volunteering. Our target was to increase this figure to 60% by the end of the programme. The significant gap between these figures highlights the programme's potential to foster civic engagement and instil a sense of purpose within the community. This objective was particularly relevant in a southern Italian city where public engagement in shared cultural initiatives had historically been low. Rather than imposing a top-down approach, we aimed to reach a point where citizens took personal initiative in enhancing their city's cultural landscape. The indicators we selected for evaluation were not exhaustive; alternative metrics could have been employed. However, what matters most in any evaluation process is the establishment of clear objectives from the outset. Defining desired outcomes, outlining pathways to achieve them, and identifying relevant, adaptable, and measurable indicators are essential steps in ensuring a meaningful assessment of impact.

Matera 2019 serves as a valuable case study in cultural evaluation. It demonstrates how a rigorous, well-structured approach to measurement can provide critical insights into the effectiveness of cultural initiatives. More importantly, it highlights the transformative power of culture—not only in economic terms but also in shaping perceptions, fostering engagement, and inspiring a community to reimagine its future.





Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa

Moving from the scale of a cultural programme to a different context, I would like to share a simple yet effective example from a museum in New Zealand. The Te Papa Tongarewa museum in Wellington publishes its future triennial strategy plan on its website each year, allowing anyone to see its goals, planned actions, and the data it aims to collect. This transparent approach demonstrates a strong commitment to accountability—every aspect of the museum’s operations is monitored and evaluated.

Objectives	Goals	Target Level of Performance 2005/06; 2006/07; 2007/08
3.2 Access Making the Te Papa experience and collections accessible through (back and front of house) tours and providing in-depth information.	Goal 1: Maximise access to the collections.	A minimum of 15,000 visitors participate in front and back of house tours each year.
	Goal 2: Increase access to information about the collections.	2005/06 A pilot for providing access to collections through a web-based facility, Collections Online, is delivered. [New target introduced for 2004/05.] 2006/07; 2007/08 [Target level of performance to be established.]
3.3 Audience Making Te Papa appeal to all New Zealanders and visitors to New Zealand and meeting the needs and expectations of visitors.	Goal 1: Maximise visits.	Visitation is maintained at a minimum of 1.1 million visits. [Target increased from one million in 2004/05 reflecting projected levels of performance.]
	Goal 2: Ensure audiences reflect the demographic profile of New Zealand.	The demographic profile of adult domestic visitors to Te Papa broadly reflects that of the adult New Zealand population.
	Goal 3: Attract audiences from across New Zealand and internationally.	Of adult domestic visitors, a minimum of 35% are from outside the Wellington Region. A minimum of 35% of adult visits are from international visitors. [Target increased from 25% in 2004/05, reflecting projected level of performance, based on visitation trends.]
	Goal 4: Provide an experience that satisfies visitors.	An adult customer satisfaction rating of ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ is maintained at least 90% of times.

Fig. 2 – Audience development goals and performance targets at Te Papa (data sourced from Te Papa Annual Report 2014/2015).



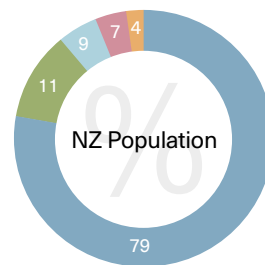
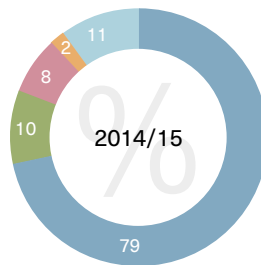
For this discussion, I have focussed on the section about audience engagement.

Objective 3.3, which relates to audience development, is structured around four key goals:

1. Maximizing visitation – The first goal is straightforward: to maintain annual visitor numbers at 1.1 million.
2. Ensuring demographic representation – This goal is particularly interesting as it is both qualitative and political. The aim is for Te Papa's audience to reflect the demographic profile of New Zealand, meaning the adult domestic visitor base should mirror the country's adult population.
3. Attracting diverse audiences – This goal focusses on drawing visitors from different regions of New Zealand as well as from abroad. The museum sets clear benchmarks: at least 35% of visitors should come from outside the region, while another 35% should be international. Although quantitative, this goal provides insight into the museum's broader outreach objectives.
4. Enhancing visitor experience – This goal centres on measuring visitor satisfaction, learning outcomes, and overall experience through various indicators.

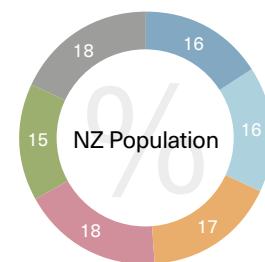
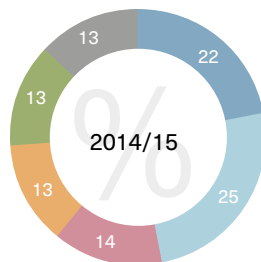
Ethnicity

- NZ European
- Māori
- Pacific Islander
- Asian
- Other



Age

- 16–24 years
- 25–34 years
- 35–44 years
- 45–54 years
- 55–64 years
- 65+



Gender

- Male
- Female

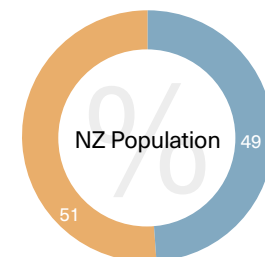
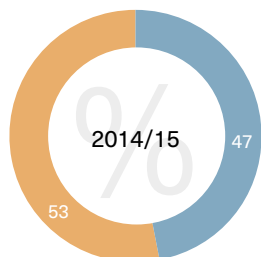


Fig. 3 – Visitor demographics at Te Papa: ethnicity, age, and gender compared to national data (data sourced from Te Papa Annual Report 2014/2015).





The data collected provide valuable insights.

For Goal 2 (demographic representation), charts on the right illustrate New Zealand's population breakdown by ethnicity, age, and gender. The data shows that Te Papa has successfully attracted a visitor base representative of the national population. For instance, the Māori community is proportionally represented, alongside Asian and European demographics. Similarly, all age groups are well covered, and gender representation closely mirrors national statistics.

Performance measure	Target 2014/15	Actual 2014/15	Actual 2013/14
Hours spent at Te Papa	2.6 million	2,977,228	2,598,044
Repeat NZ visitors to Te Papa*	Minimum of 3.75 repeated visits by New Zealanders every year	4.0	4.1
Percentage of adult NZ visitors indicating they have learned something about NZ during their visit	85%	81%	82%
Percentage of adult visitors reporting a satisfaction rating of 'satisfied' to 'extremely satisfied' for the overall museum experience.	95%	97%	98%

*This measure indicates how often people visited Te Papa within the last 12 months, excluding their visit on the day the survey was taken.

Fig. 4 – Visitor engagement and satisfaction indicators at Te Papa (data sourced from Te Papa Annual Report 2014/2015).

For Goal 3 (audience engagement), what stands out is that the museum does not simply count visitor numbers but also measures the total time spent on-site. With a digital ticketing system that tracks visit duration, Te Papa has set a target of 2.6 million visitor hours per year. Additional data highlights repeated visits by domestic visitors. The ambitious goal of 3.75 repeated visits per year by New Zealanders has been achieved. Another important indicator is related to learning outcomes—specifically, the percentage of adult visitors who report learning something about New Zealand during their visit. This suggests that one of the museum's core objectives is to foster transformation in visitors, particularly locals, by deepening their understanding of history. This outcome was likely measured through qualitative surveys, where visitors were asked if they had learned something new. Finally, visitor satisfaction is assessed through qualitative surveys. Measuring customer experience requires not only data collection but also effective identification, evaluation, and communication of findings. This structured and transparent approach is a highly effective way to build stakeholder consensus, secure funding, and provide strong evidence to financial backers and



stakeholders. By demonstrating impact through data, the museum strengthens its case for further investment and continued development.

A Multi-Dimensional Evaluation Framework

Evaluating cultural initiatives requires a methodological framework capable of capturing their multi-dimensional impacts. Cultural activities and projects generate effects that extend beyond the economic sphere, influencing various aspects of society and the environment. To assess these broader impacts, a holistic approach is necessary.³

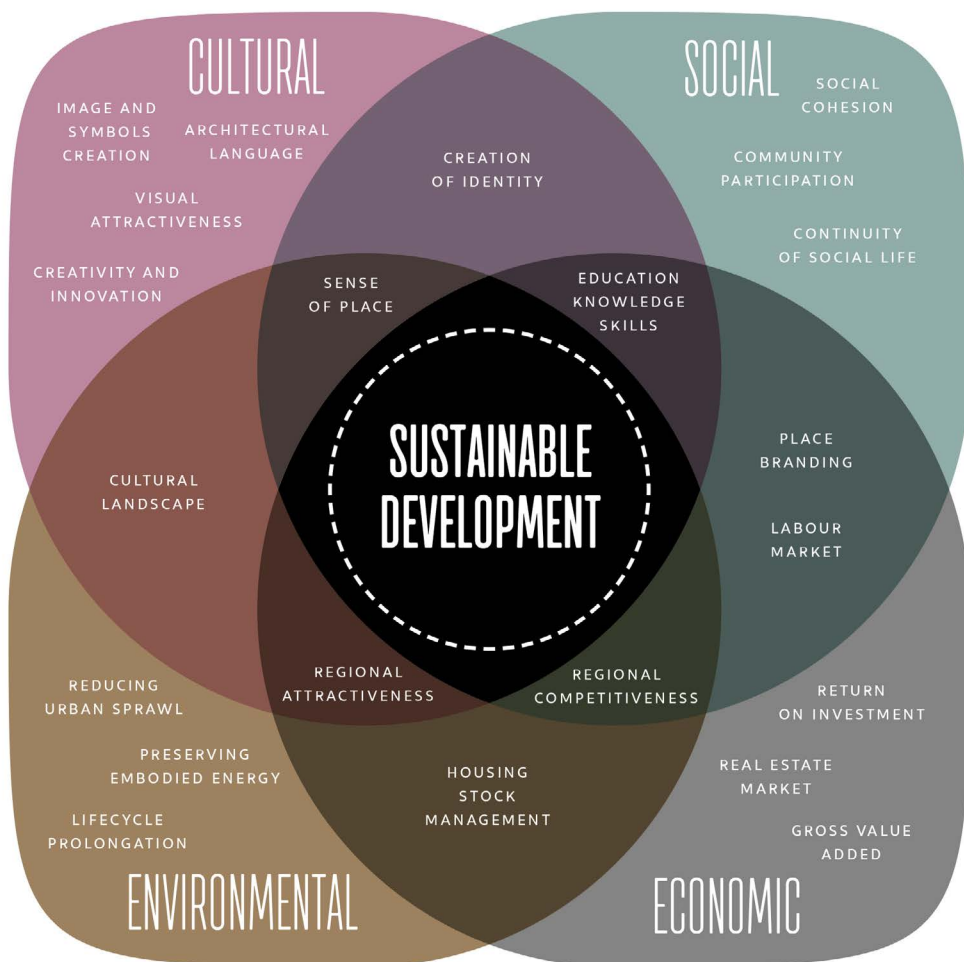


Fig. 5 – The four-domain model for holistic cultural impact assessment.





One such approach is the four-domain model, developed approximately a decade ago during the European Year of Cultural Heritage.⁴ This model suggests that sustainable development through heritage can be fostered by considering these four fundamental dimensions: cultural, social, environmental, and economic. Each dimension encompasses specific objectives that serve as indicators of impact. For instance, the cultural dimension may be assessed through factors such as the creation of symbolic imagery, visual appeal, creativity, sense of place, and levels of public participation.

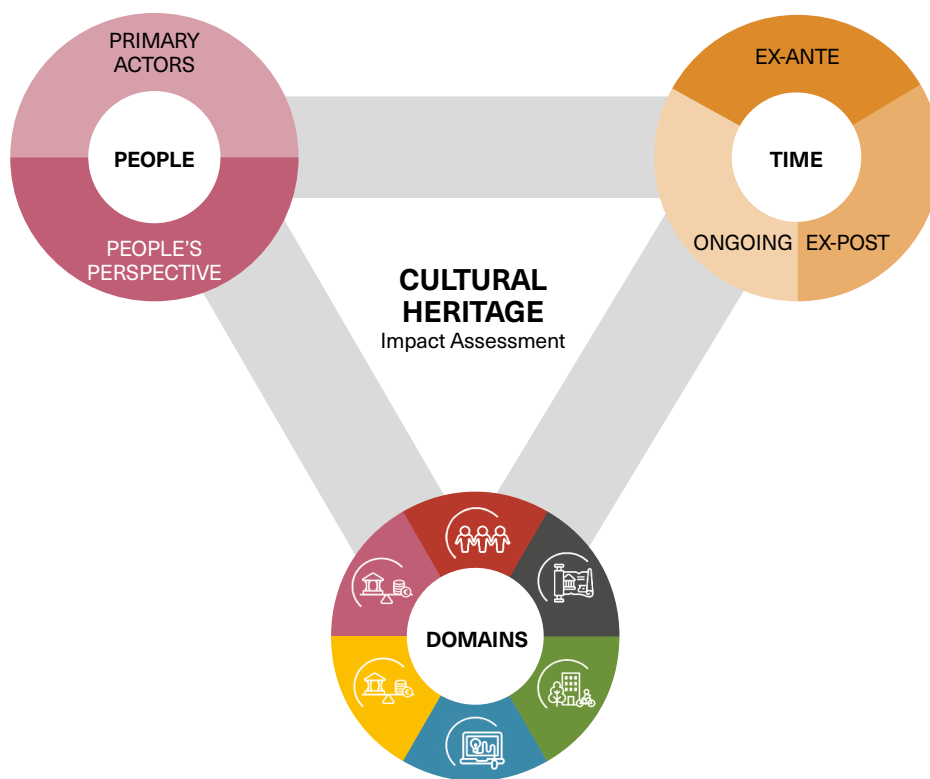


Fig. 6 – The SoPHIA model: domains and impact areas in cultural heritage evaluation.

Building on this concept, an advanced impact assessment framework is the SoPHIA Model, developed through a European project led by Roma Tre University in collaboration with renowned institutions, museums, academies, and technical universities. SoPHIA, which stands for Social Platform for Holistic Heritage Impact Assessment,⁵ provides a structured methodology for evaluating cultural projects across six key domains: social capital and governance, identity of place, quality of life, education, creativity and innovation, working conditions, prosperity, and protection.

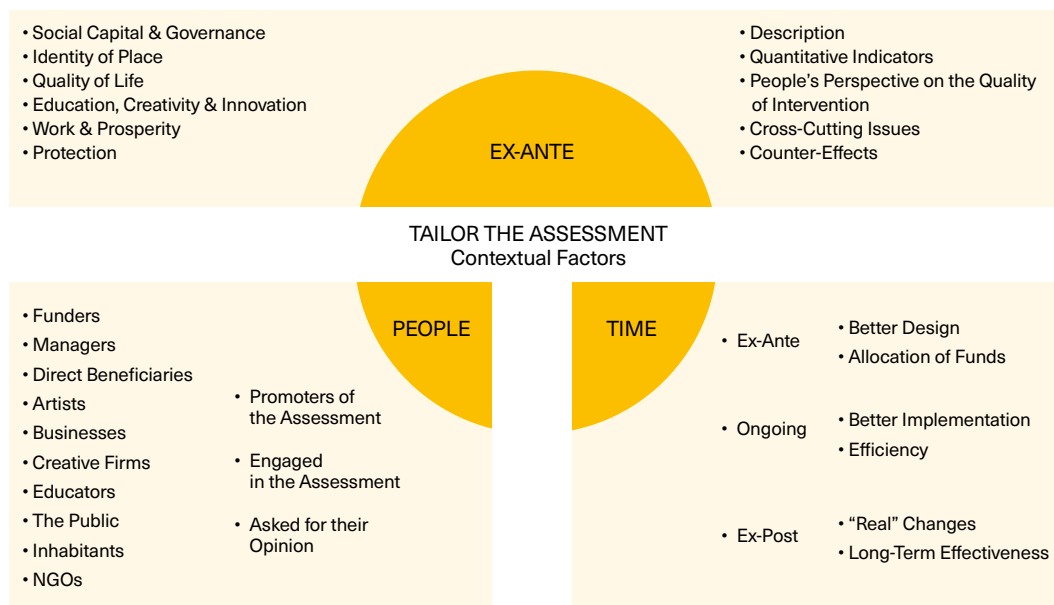


Fig. 7 – SoPHIA's multidimensional evaluation matrix: actors, timeframes, and types of assessment.

This framework serves as a practical toolkit for cultural practitioners and policymakers. By identifying relevant domains within their projects, users can systematically explore corresponding objectives, indicators, and data collection methods. For instance, if a project prioritises quality of life, the framework offers a set of tailored objectives and indicators, facilitating a structured and thorough assessment.

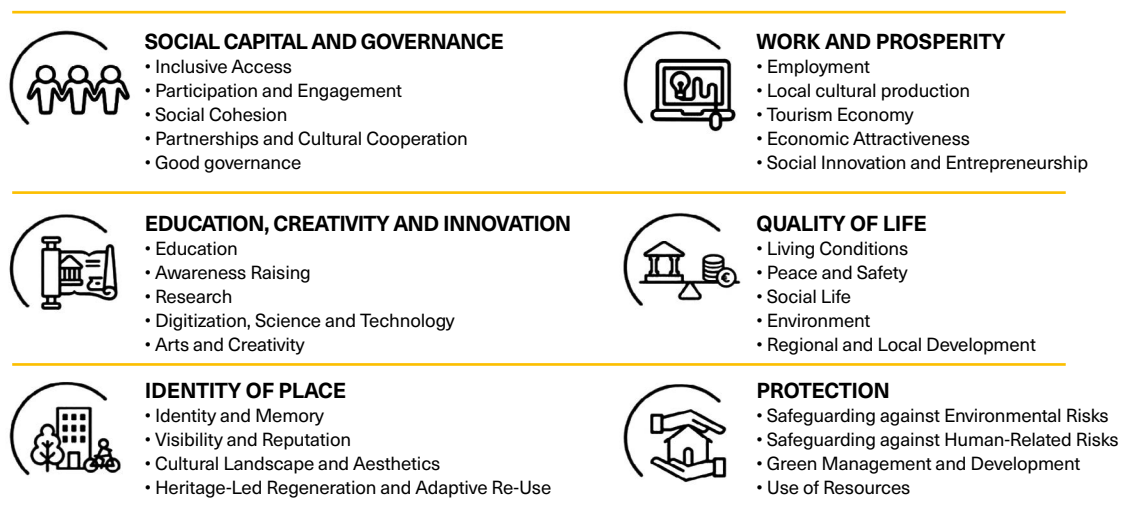


Fig. 8 – The six SoPHIA impact domains for cultural heritage assessment.



A distinctive feature of the SoPHIA Model is its hierarchical structure, comprising main domains and subdomains. For example, within the domain of social capital and governance, the subdomains include inclusive access, participation, engagement, social cohesion, partnerships, and cultural cooperation. Each subdomain is further defined by specific objectives and associated indicators.

Subtheme	Inclusive Access
Description	The aim is to assess the accessibility of cultural heritage resources to all groups of society. Specific issues: • Reducing financial, physical, architectural and other barriers of access • Efforts to provide access to societal groups with little access to intervention • Efforts to increase access via digital means
Options for Quantitative Indicators	• Number of Visitors (before and after the intervention in 5, 10, 20 years) in terms of age, gender, educational level, income, citizenship and spoken languages, visible and non-visible disabilities, and social marginalisation • Cost and number of tickets available and used (per day/week/month), including tickets with subventions or discounts/free events/online events • Hours and days of accessibility • To what degree does information material reflect the languages spoken in the city/region? • Number of people accessing information activities in terms of age; gender; educational level; citizenship and mother tongues; visible and non-visible disabilities • Number of people using digital access in terms of age; gender; educational level; citizenship and mother tongues; visible and non-visible disabilities
Counter Effects	• Protection: Access for everybody may be in conflict with the site's capacity and safeguarding cultural heritage against human related risks. • Quality of Life: Access for everybody can be in conflict with peace and safety ensured at cultural heritage. • Work & Prosperity: Ensuring accessibility to everybody may be less profitable.

Fig. 9 – Indicators for assessing inclusive access to cultural heritage within the SoPHIA model.

Consider, for instance, the subdomain of inclusive access within social capital and governance. One of its key objectives is to assess the accessibility of cultural resources for diverse social groups. To achieve this, the model outlines both qualitative and quantitative indicators, such as visitor demographics, ticket sales, accessibility measures, opening hours, and potential biases in data collection. By integrating such detailed metrics, the SoPHIA Model enables a comprehensive and nuanced assessment of cultural projects.



In conclusion, the adoption of multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks such as the four-domain model and the SoPHIA Model marks a significant advancement in cultural impact assessment. These methodologies provide robust tools for measuring the diverse effects of cultural initiatives, ensuring that their contributions to society, heritage, and sustainability are fully recognised and effectively managed.

Effective monitoring and evaluation are essential for cultural project management.

By setting clear objectives, defining indicators, and systematically collecting and analysing data, institutions can enhance transparency, optimise resources, and maximise impact.

Collaborative approaches and methodological frameworks ensure that evaluation remains a dynamic and valuable tool for continuous improvement and accountability.

1 — On this topic, see: A. Bollo, *Report 3: Measuring Museum Impacts* (Bologna: Istituto per i Beni Artistici Culturali e Naturali Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2013); F. Matarasso, *Full, Free and Equal: On the Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (Bristol: Knowle West Media Centre, 2010); V. Montalto, "AAA Data Wanted. Combining Creativity and Methodological Rigor to Measure Culture in Cities", in *Economia della Cultura*, vol. XXX, no. 3-4, 2020: 377-395; F. Neri, "La valutazione sugli impatti dell'Anno Europeo del Patrimonio Culturale e la 'Realistic Evaluation'. Una nota a margine", in *Economia della Cultura*, vol. XXXI, no. 1, 2021; C. Wood, D. Leighton, *Measuring Social Value* (London: Demos, 2010); R. Albano, *et al.*, "The Regenerative Impacts of the European City/Capital of Culture Events", in M.E. Leary, J. McCarthy (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Urban Regeneration* (London: Routledge, 2013), 515-525; C. Bezzi, *Cos'è la valutazione. Un'introduzione ai concetti, le parole chiave e i problemi metodologici* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2016).

2 — For further insights, see: A. Cicerchia, "Assessing the Impact of Culture in Wellbeing: from Indicators to Narra-

tives, and Back", in M. Cerquetti (ed.), *Bridging Theories, Strategies and Practices in Valuing Cultural Heritage* (Macerata: EUM, 2017), 181-195; Ead., *Che cosa muove la cultura. Impatti, misure e racconti tra economia e immaginario* (Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 2021).

3 — M. Baioni, *et al.*, "A Holistic Impact Assessment for Cultural Organisations", in *IFKAD Proceedings: Knowledge Drivers for Resilience and Transformation*, proceedings of the conference, Lugano, June 20-22, 2022 (Lugano: Arts for Business Institute, LUM University, SUPSI, Institute of Knowledge Asset Management (IKAM), 2022), 2275-2290; NEA, *The National Endowment for the Arts Guide to Community-Engaged Research in the Arts and Health*, (Washington: NEA Office of Research & Analysis, 2016); C. Landry, *Social Impact of the Arts* (London: Comedia Publications Limited, 1993).

4 — CHCFE Consortium, *Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe. Full Report*, 2015 <<https://www.europeanostrea.org/our-work/policy/cultural-heritage-counts-europe/>> accessed 19 February 2025.

5 — For further information, see: <<https://sophiaplatform.eu/>> accessed 19 February 2025.







Closing Remarks

The partnership behind skills2GO! includes members of the Scuola nazionale del patrimonio e delle attività culturali (known as the Fondazione Scuola dei beni e delle attività culturali at the project's start), of GECT GO, and of Javni Zavod GO! 2025. While GECT is a public body established in 2011 to support the development of the cross-border urban area of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba, GO! 2025 was created specifically to implement the European Capital of Culture programme for Nova Gorica and Gorizia. Together, the partners formed a Steering Committee, which acted as the executive body responsible for planning and managing the skills2GO! project.

It is worth noting that the Steering Committee brought together three working teams from the three partner organisations, including a very recently formed one with a very ambitious purpose. This team was transnational and multilingual, composed of individuals with very diverse backgrounds and experiences. These features also characterised the group of participants selected by GO! 2025 and GECT to be the trainees. The aim of the project was thus to contribute to the development of a common ground, a common vocabulary on which collaborative work could be built.

The Steering Committee identified themes of common interest with the goal of updating trainees' skillsets and of proposing a methodological framework through which everyday challenges could be understood and addressed. This was grounded in the belief that culture professionals benefit from constantly evolving and expanding their competencies. Although we all agree that culture is quintessentially specific (and site specific), and necessarily feeds from the context—both geographically and contextually—, we believed that a shared learning experience could provide a set of common tools useful for the implementation of future projects.

The resulting programme served a range of objectives, in strict connection with the implementation of the GO! 2025 agenda, while also considering the potentially long-term legacy of the European Capital of Culture designation in generating sustainable development mechanisms based on local heritage, social creativity, and entrepreneurship.

The programme aimed to strengthen the managerial competences of both public and private sector professionals for the sustainable use of cultural heritage—whether by developing new skills or making existing ones more efficient—while it also targeted the ability to cooperate within the team and with local stakeholders. Beyond its impact on the trainees, the project produced a compendium of contributions by experts that hold value far beyond the initiative itself. This volume gathers those contributions with the hope that they may benefit anyone involved in planning strategic cultural interventions across Europe—an imagined community of learners and practitioners operating in the direction inspired by the Faro Convention.

This initiative focussed primarily on the skills required to plan, manage, and evaluate cultural activities, which were the core of GO! 2025's programme. The cross-border area designated as the 2025 European Capital of Culture has indeed an impressive record in this field, and the project sought to build on that rich background and strong skills. Successfully managing such a large-scale and ambitious cultural programme demands a wide range of competences, from creativity and innovation to communication and interpersonal skills. Equally important are managerial qualities, administrative knowledge, and coordination experience. Providing an arena for peer-to-peer exchange enabled a learning journey for all cross-border participants.

The set of tools developed through skills2GO! can be viewed as a virtual toolbox, designed to accompany cultural professionals throughout their projects and careers. This publication aims to share the lessons learned with a wider audience, extending the reach of the insights our trainers generously contributed to the programme.



Ideally, all cultural projects are journeys—undertaken with the expectation of returning enriched, changed, and challenged by novelties, enabling us to reinterpret our familiar landscapes through new lenses. We hope this reading may accompany some of you on your next journeys and cultural endeavours.

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within the framework of



empowering

Nova Gorica — Gorizia
for European Capital of Culture 2025

GO! 2025
NOVA GORICA
GORIZIA

Evropska prestolnica kulture
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