



**Larnaka
2030**

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

LARNAKA

City Culture & SDG Impact Profile

ECoC Status	Candidate City — European Capital of Culture 2030 (title awarded)
Prepared by	Culture Next SDG Lab
Based on	Structured conversation with Christina Achilleos & Costas Mannouris, February 2026
Date	February 2026

Executive Summary

Headline: Culture as Democratic Transformation and Social Healing

ECOC Status: Candidate City — European Capital of Culture 2030

Larnaka is in the midst of a significant cultural transition. The award of the European Capital of Culture 2030 title has not simply elevated existing cultural activity — it has catalysed a shift in how culture is made, governed, and shared across the city.

The 2030 process introduced a different philosophy to cultural programming in Larnaka: one built on co-creation, cultural democracy, and the idea of common ground. Rather than culture being planned and delivered by a central authority for audiences to receive, Larnaka 2030 creates conditions in which projects can emerge organically from artists and communities working together. The results are already tangible: a street theatre performance co-created with the Turkish community of Larnaka; a bread-baking event in a mixed village that reunited Greek and Turkish Cypriots who had not met for fifty years; and an emerging co-creators assembly that places governance of culture in the hands of citizens and communities together.

Key Insights

- A co-creation model is taking hold in Larnaka, representing a meaningful shift in how cultural decisions are made and who participates in making them.
- Culture is serving as a vehicle for social cohesion and intercommunal connection, addressing some of Cyprus's deepest historical divisions.
- The 2030 process has fostered a genuine sense of civic community around culture — independently noted by the ECoC evaluation committee.
- Evaluation and monitoring capacity is being built thoughtfully from the ground up, with a story-based approach that suits the city's context.
- The core team is under real capacity pressure during the transition from bid to implementation; this is the primary fragility to manage.

SDG Pathway Overview

Pathway	Primary SDGs
1 — Culture as Democratic Transformation	SDG 16 · SDG 10 · SDG 11
2 — Culture as Social Cohesion & Healing	SDG 3 · SDG 10 · SDG 16
3 — Culture as Economic Pathway & Skills	SDG 8 · SDG 4 · SDG 11

Evaluation Maturity at a Glance

Dimension	Maturity Level
Vision & Strategic Narrative	Advanced

Partnership & Networks	Established
Delivery Capacity	Developing
Evaluation & Evidence	Emerging

Section 1 — Process & Capacity Profile

How culture is planned, delivered, and evidenced in Larnaka

1.1 City & ECoC Context

Larnaka is Cyprus's third-largest city (population ~85,000), with a complex social identity shaped by the events of 1974 and home to a significant international community. The award of the European Capital of Culture 2030 title is a defining moment: the city is now in early implementation, transitioning from bid process to programme delivery, while simultaneously building the organisational infrastructure to sustain it.

ECoC Lifecycle: Candidate City (title awarded)

Cities at this stage typically show strong strategic clarity and narrative, established partnerships, delivery capacity under pressure, and evaluation at an early stage of development. This is exactly the picture in Larnaka — a city with exceptional vision operating in a moment of significant organisational transition.

1.2 Delivery & Evaluation Capacity

The guiding principles of Larnaka 2030 — cultural democracy, co-creation, common ground, equal accessibility — are consistently and fluently articulated by the team. There is no ambiguity about what the organisation is trying to achieve or why. A structural distinction exists between Larnaka 2030 and the municipal cultural department, which continues to programme events using an older commission-based model. City government (mayor and council) is 100% supportive of Larnaka 2030; the distinction is one of philosophy rather than political conflict.

A new General Director is being appointed, with further line managers to follow. For now, two people carry the operational workload, managing production, communications, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning simultaneously. EU funding capability (Erasmus+, Creative Europe) is strong. Evaluation capacity is at an intentional early stage: an 8–10 month baseline mapping study is planned from mid-2026, covering participation, creative sector mapping, youth engagement, and media. Christina Achilleos describes it honestly: “We are starting from scratch on all grounds.”

Dimension	Maturity Level
Vision & Strategic Narrative	Advanced
Leadership & Guiding Principles	Advanced
Partnership & Networks	Established
EU Funding & Project Management	Established
Delivery Capacity (team & systems)	Developing
Quantitative Data & Indicators	Emerging
Qualitative Evaluation Practice	Emerging

1.3 What This Enables and Limits

Strong narrative and strategic clarity mean that cultural impact is easy to describe and communicate, even before formal evaluation systems are in place. The co-creation model generates authentic stories naturally. What is harder at this stage is measurement: the baseline mapping has not yet begun and systematic data collection is a near-term ambition rather than current practice. This is not a weakness — it is the honest reality of an organisation at this point in its lifecycle. The most important thing Larnaka can do now is build evaluation infrastructure without losing what makes it distinctive: trust in communities, willingness to let projects emerge, and commitment to authentic storytelling.

Section 2 — Cultural Context & Quantitative Signals

The conditions in which culture operates in Larnaka

Data note: Quantitative indicators are contextual signals only — not benchmarks or performance comparisons. Data availability is variable and noted explicitly against each theme.

2.1 Cultural Ecosystem at a Glance

Culture Next quantitative theme framework — applied as contextual signals across all pilot cities

Economic — Value / Investment

Creative sector size not yet formally mapped. Baseline mapping planned mid-2026 will establish an economic baseline. City government funding for Larnaka 2030 confirmed.

Data: *Limited — pre-baseline*

Social — Sustainability / People

Co-creators assembly established; cultural strategy adopted unanimously post-shortlisting; strong equity and access commitments embedded in the bid book. Youth engagement as an explicit programme priority.

Data: *Qualitative / documented*

Governance — Management / Delivery

Dual governance: municipal cultural services alongside Larnaka 2030. City government 100% supportive of 2030. Philosophical distinction between two models being navigated constructively.

Data: *Qualitative*

Infrastructure — Physical Cultural

Existing municipal venues in place. New cultural infrastructure development planned and funded for the 2030 title year, with the aim of expanding accessible, non-institutional spaces.

Data: *Partial / developing*

Vibrancy — Cultural Vibrancy

Two major recurring municipal festivals (Katakmo; Larnaka Festival). Co-creation events introduced from 2023 onward. Growing event density anticipated across the city towards 2030.

Data: *Partial*

Images — Perceptions / Media

Strong and growing international profile following the ECoC 2030 award. Significant community identification with the bid process, independently observed by the evaluation committee.

Data: *Qualitative / partial*

2.2 What the Context Suggests

Larnaka's quantitative picture reflects its lifecycle stage: a city where cultural transformation is underway but where measurement systems are still being built. The strongest signals are qualitative — the co-creation model, the civic community that formed around the bid, the unanimous political support. A well-designed baseline study from mid-2026 will provide genuine before/after comparison as the city progresses toward 2030. Until then, the qualitative pathway analysis in Section 3 carries most of the evidential weight.

Section 3 — Impact & SDG Pathways

How culture contributes to change in Larnaka

How to read this section

SDG Pathways are structured accounts of how cultural activity in Larnaka creates meaningful change. Each pathway traces: what cultural activity or infrastructure exists → how people engage with it → what changes first → what broader outcomes this contributes to. SDG alignment is applied by Culture Next as an interpretive framework. Larnaka 2030 does not frame its work in SDG terms, nor does it need to.

PATHWAY 1

Culture as Democratic Transformation

Impact Domain: Governance, Voice & Participation

SDG 16

Peace & Justice

SDG 10

Reduced Inequalities

SDG 11

Sustainable Cities

Larnaka 2030 is replacing a top-down cultural model with one built on co-creation and cultural democracy — fundamentally changing who shapes culture in the city and how.

From Monumental to Participatory

Larnaka's cultural life was historically organised around large, centrally-programmed events: municipally-run festivals with predictable content, the same artists cycling through, no meaningful dialogue between programmers and communities. Larnaka 2030 has introduced a different way of working: rather than an authority deciding what culture looks like, the organisation creates a context in which projects emerge from artists and communities in dialogue. Costas describes the role simply: "We're facilitators — not an authority."

The co-creators assembly institutionalises this: an annual participatory governance body that brings together artists, citizens, municipal actors, and the business community to review progress and shape the programme going forward. This is cultural democracy made structural.

Case Study: Street Theatre in the Turkish Neighbourhood

Costas attended a Larnaka 2030 presentation as a local artist, with no expectation of involvement. At the end of the session, he suggested a street theatre performance. The idea was taken seriously, developed collaboratively with the Turkish neighbourhood of Larnaka, and staged on the streets. "It was a huge success — not because of me, but because of the team and the interaction with the people." This was co-creation in practice: culture made with a community rather than for it.



“For Larnaka 2030, we don’t accept or reject projects. We see our job as creating the circumstances that allow for projects to be suggested, developed and — once they are mature — supported in their implementation.”

— Costas Mannouris, Larnaka 2030

SDG Pathway Logic

Stage	What happens
Cultural inputs	Co-creation framework; open calls; co-creators assembly; community working groups
Participation mechanism	Artists and communities propose, develop and shape projects rather than receive them
Intermediate outcomes	First experience of co-creation; isolated artists now connected; communities shaping cultural activity
Urban outcomes	More democratic cultural governance; reduced power imbalance; increased civic trust and engagement

CONFIDENCE
High

Mechanism clearly described and operationally demonstrated. The co-creation model is active; the co-creators assembly provides institutional grounding.

PATHWAY 2

Culture as Social Cohesion & Healing

Impact Domain: Social Connection & Wellbeing

SDG 3

Good Health & Wellbeing

SDG 10

Reduced Inequalities

SDG 16

Peace & Justice

Culture in Larnaka is actively healing divided communities and rebuilding connections lost since 1974. The 2030 concept of ‘Common Ground’ is not a metaphor — it is being enacted through cultural events that bring people together across one of Europe’s most enduring social divisions.

The Power of Shared Cultural Practice

In a city shaped by the events of 1974, occasions for Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities to meet are rare and precious. Shared cultural practice — baking bread, making music, staging theatre — creates human connection at a level that formal dialogue often cannot reach. The 2030 process has also produced, for the first time, a shared civic identity around culture: the experience of Larnaka ‘working as a community’ was independently observed by the ECoC evaluation committee as a distinguishing feature of the city’s bid.

Case Study: Bread Baking in Agios Theodoros

Larnaka 2030 organised an event in Agios Theodoros — a mixed village whose Turkish Cypriot residents left for the north after 1974. Turkish Cypriot former residents travelled south, returned to their village, and met their Greek Cypriot neighbours and friends for the first time in fifty years. Together they baked the traditional bread of the village. There was music. There were stories. There were tears and embraces. “At least for a day, they unified their village.” This is culture as reconciliation — not as aspiration, but as lived experience.



“The sense of belonging is directly influencing social cohesion in the city. And I don’t find it a coincidence that Larnaka won.”

— Christina Achilleos, Larnaka 2030

SDG Pathway Logic

Stage	What happens
Cultural inputs	Common Ground concept; community-based events; intercommunal cultural programming; residencies and exchanges
Participation mechanism	Shared cultural practice creates occasions for connection that formal dialogue cannot easily replicate
Intermediate outcomes	Intercommunal connections rebuilt; culture experienced as emotionally meaningful; shared civic identity around 2030
Urban outcomes	Strengthened social cohesion; culture functioning as reconciliation infrastructure; city narrative of connection replacing fragmentation

CONFIDENCE
High

Agios Theodoros case study is concrete and specifically evidenced by participant testimony. Social cohesion outcome independently confirmed by ECoC evaluation committee.

PATHWAY 3

Culture as Economic Pathway & Skills

Impact Domain: Local Economies & Livelihoods

SDG 8

Decent Work

SDG 4

Quality Education

SDG 11

Sustainable Cities

Emerging pathway: This pathway reflects deliberate, funded intent and is beginning to materialise. Most implementation lies ahead, between now and 2030. It is included here because it is central to the programme — not as aspiration, but as commitment.

Culture is becoming a credible economic and skills pathway for young people in Larnaka, through new infrastructure, residencies, training programmes, and a growing creative sector.

Culture as an Economic Strategy

Christina is explicit: “Culture is actually becoming a very strategic path to the economic activity of the city and beyond.” New cultural infrastructure planned for 2030 will expand the physical space for creative practice. Artist residencies will create pathways for local practitioners to build international networks and professional careers. Training programmes offer routes into cultural work as a livelihood, particularly for young people who have not previously seen culture as an economic path.

A creative sector mapping exercise planned for 2026 will establish the economic baseline — the number of artists, cultural operators, and creative enterprises in the city. This will allow the economic contribution of culture to be tracked through to the title year and beyond.

“Culture is actually becoming a very strategic path to the economic activity of the city and beyond. The synergies we are building with key actors from abroad — residencies, exchanges — will have a lasting impact.”

— Christina Achilleos, Larnaka 2030

SDG Pathway Logic

Stage	What happens
Cultural inputs	New cultural infrastructure; artist residencies (in and out); training and upskilling programmes; creative sector mapping
Participation mechanism	Opportunity creation: new infrastructure, international connections, and skills routes open pathways into cultural work
Intermediate outcomes	Artists gaining professional development; young people seeing culture as a career path; creative sector becoming more visible and connected
Urban outcomes	More resilient creative economy; lasting international exchanges; culture contributing to economic diversification of the city

CONFIDENCE
Emerging

Intent is clear and well-articulated; mechanisms are funded and planned. Evidence of outcomes will grow as implementation progresses to 2030. Revisit at next review.

3.4 Pathway Typology

Larnaka's three pathways reflect a coherent theme: culture as transformation — of governance, of social relations, and of economic opportunity. The thread connecting all three is the concept of Common Ground: a shared foundation that belongs to everyone, not only those with existing access to cultural power.

Pathway Type	What it means in Larnaka
Democratic Transformation	Culture changing how decisions are made and who holds power in the cultural ecosystem
Social Healing	Culture reconnecting communities divided by history, rebuilding trust across Cyprus's deepest social fault lines
Economic Pathway	Culture creating skills, livelihoods, and opportunity — especially for young people who previously saw no route into creative work

Section 4 — What This Means for Culture in Larnaka

Using this profile to strengthen practice, policy, and positioning

4.1 What This Profile Tells You

You have a compelling and credible story. The shift from centralised programming to co-creation and cultural democracy is one of the strongest cultural transformation narratives in the Culture Next pilot cohort. It is credible because it is grounded in real projects and real experiences.

Your social cohesion impact is exceptional. The Agios Theodoros bread-baking event is not a minor case study. It is an example of culture doing something few policy tools can: rebuilding human connection across one of Europe’s most enduring social divisions. This deserves to be central to how Larnaka 2030 communicates its impact.

Your evaluation foundations are being built thoughtfully. The story-based approach — podcasts, story festivals, printed collections — is methodologically appropriate and creatively distinctive. It will generate qualitative evidence that is as valuable as quantitative data, and more honest about what culture actually does.

4.2 How You Can Use This Profile

Political and budget conversations

The three pathways give culture teams clear, credible language for conversations with the mayor, city council, and non-culture departments. Rather than arguing for culture in cultural terms, the pathways connect to outcomes that colleagues in health, planning, social services, and economic development care about. The reconciliation pathway has particular political salience in the Cypriot context.

European and international funding bids

This profile provides ready-made narrative and analytical content for Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and other funding applications. SDG pathway framing aligns with EU horizontal objectives and demonstrates rigour without overstating what can be evidenced at this stage. The intercommunal dimension also opens potential connections to EU peace-building and cohesion funding streams.

Communications and public engagement

The stories in this profile — the bread baking, the street theatre, the evaluation committee’s observation that Larnaka ‘worked as a community’ — are the kind of content that makes culture legible to general audiences. Costas’s observation that “positive things don’t get the same share of attention” is right. This profile is one tool for addressing that, alongside the AI cultural conversations tool being developed as part of the SDG Lab.

Monitoring and evaluation design

The pathway framework can directly inform the baseline mapping study planned for mid-2026. Each pathway suggests specific things to measure: participation in co-creation activities; community

composition of events; number and reach of residency exchanges; youth employment in the creative sector; and qualitative evidence of social connection and trust.

4.3 Learning for Cities at a Similar Stage

- The gap between narrative clarity and delivery capacity is real and manageable, but requires deliberate attention to team resourcing and workload in the transition period.
- The dual governance challenge — an innovative 2030 organisation alongside an established municipal cultural department with different approaches — is common at this stage and does not need immediate resolution. Clear public communication about the difference in approach is the most useful short-term action.
- Starting evaluation from scratch is not a weakness. A well-designed baseline conducted before the programme fully scales is more valuable than retrospective measurement.
- The most powerful evidence at this stage is qualitative: stories, testimonials, and concrete case studies. These are not inferior to quantitative data — they are the appropriate evidence for a transformation still in its early stages.

4.4 Suggested Next Steps

Area	Action
Evaluation design	Use the three pathway frameworks to structure baseline mapping questions and indicators for the 2026–2027 study
Social cohesion impact	Develop the Agios Theodoros story into a longer-form narrative for communications and funding bids — it deserves a fuller, richer telling with photos
Governance narrative	Document the co-creators assembly as an example of cultural democracy in practice — useful for SDG 16 evidence and peer learning
Economic pathway	Prioritise creative sector mapping in the baseline study to establish an economic baseline trackable through to 2030
Next review	Revisit this profile following completion of the baseline mapping study (early 2027) to assess progress across all three pathways

About Culture Next

Culture Next supports cities to better understand, articulate, and evidence the role of culture in sustainable urban development, using a qualitative impact framework aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. culturenext.eu

Methodology note

This profile draws on a structured conversation with Christina Achilleos and Costas Mannouris (Larnaka 2030) in February 2026, supplemented by desk review of publicly available documentation including the Larnaka 2030 bid book. SDG mapping is applied by Culture Next as an interpretive layer. Quantitative data is used as contextual signal only and is explicitly non-comparative.