Culture Next Final Report

2022-2024 | Final Report



CULTURE NEXT

Co-funded by the European Union

2022-2024: Three years of Culture Next

Over the past three years, Culture Next has solidified its reputation as a transformative network empowering European cities to harness culture for sustainable development and innovation. Guided by a mission to integrate culture into urban planning and global sustainability frameworks, the network has achieved remarkable milestones across its primary areas of focus: tools and research, conferences, collaboration, and communication.

In 2022, Culture Next laid the foundation for its growth by formalizing its structure. The network introduced pivotal initiatives such as the Mobility Program and the SDG Guide, aligning cultural activities with global Sustainable Development Goals. The 8th Culture Next Conference in Aveiro, Portugal, marked a turning point.

Building on this momentum, 2023 saw the network's membership grow to 36 cities. Three impactful conferences emphasized culture's role in addressing SDGs and fostering community engagement. Thematic Working Groups tackled critical issues like youth participation and cultural financing, while the SDG Thing pilot program provided actionable insights into the cultural sector's impact on sustainability.

In 2024, Culture Next reached new heights by expanding its Mobility Program to 20 cities and hosting two major conferences in Oulu, Finland, and Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The network introduced cutting-edge tools such as the Polyloop AI platform and the Culture for SDG Guide, offering practical resources for cities to measure and amplify culture's impact. Key thematic initiatives like ECoC Reform demonstrated the network's forward-thinking approach to shaping European cultural policies. Additionally, Culture Next's communication efforts achieved unprecedented outreach, engaging nearly 200,000 individuals through social media and events.

Through its strategic focus on collaboration, innovative tools, and measurable outcomes, Culture Next has become an important resource for European cities. The achievements of the past three years highlight the network's role in integrating culture into the global sustainability agenda, paving the way for continued success and influence in the years to come.

Our journey

Successes

One of the most significant achievements of Culture Next has been the growth and vitality of its network. With 34 member cities across 19 European countries, the network has become a strong platform for cultural exchange, mutual learning, and collaboration. This expansion has not only built new bridges between cities but has also given rise to meaningful partnerships with influential European cultural organizations, extending the network's reach and relevance.

In terms of capacity-building and collaboration, the Mobility Programme has played a key role. It has opened new paths for cultural professionals to connect across borders, share expertise, and gain fresh perspectives. Similarly, the thematic working groups have proven to be an effective format for tackling timely challenges—such as youth participation, innovative cultural financing, and the evolving role of the European Capitals of Culture. These conversations have sparked practical ideas and collaborative responses that benefit cities across the network.

On the advocacy front, Culture Next has made important strides. By engaging with the European Commission and other cultural stakeholders, the network is increasingly recognized as a relevant and credible voice in shaping cultural policies. One of the most visionary steps has been the proposal to add culture as the 18th Sustainable Development Goal—an initiative that reflects the deep belief in culture's power to drive social and environmental progress.

Challenges

Of course, this journey has not been without its difficulties. A key challenge has been ensuring that all member cities, regardless of size or resources, can fully benefit from and contribute to the network. Balancing resource distribution and providing equal opportunities for participation remains an ongoing priority.
Another complex area is measuring impact. Demonstrating how cultural collaboration leads to sustainable development requires better tools and shared metrics—something the network continues to work on. And as with any large and diverse initiative, keeping momentum and active engagement across all member cities calls for constant communication and clear value for all involved.

Lessons Learned

Several important lessons have emerged along the way. First, inclusivity matters. Tailoring activities to fit the different needs and contexts of member cities strengthens both local relevance and collective ownership.
Second, the power of collaboration cannot be overstated. Whether it's between city officials, cultural workers, or policymakers, working together is what drives meaningful, long-term change. Finally, being open and flexible—ready to adapt to new realities or unexpected challenges—has been key to keeping the network both resilient and impactful.

Alignment with Objectives

These outcomes align closely with the core purpose of Culture Next. The growing network and its strategic partnerships reflect the goal of developing strong models for cultural capacity building. The Mobility Programme and working groups fulfill the ambition of promoting collaboration, shared resources, and civic participation in cultural policymaking. And the network's active advocacy efforts—especially around cultural rights and the SDGs—show that it is becoming a respected voice on the European and international stage.
Together, these elements demonstrate not only progress toward the project's goals, but also the potential of Culture Next to shape a more connected, inclusive, and culturally-driven future for Europe's cities.

Member cities at the end of 2024

Full members (in alphabetical order):

1. Aveiro, Portugal
2. Bielsko-Biała, Poland
3. Braga, Portugal
4. Brno, Czech Republic
5. Burgos, Spain
6. České Budějovice, Czech Republic
7. Chemnitz, Germany
8. Cluj-Napoca, Romania
9. Debrecen, Hungary
10. Dublin, Ireland
11. Elefsina, Greece
12. Faro, Portugal
13. Galway, Ireland
14. Gent, Belgium
15. Jerez de La Frontera, Spain
16. Katowice, Poland
17. Kortrijk, Belgium
18. Larnaka, Cyprus
19. Leeds, UK
20. Leeuwarden, Netherlands
21. Leuven, Belgium
22. Matera, Italy
23. Novi Sad, Serbia
24. Oulu, Finland
25. Plungė, Lithuania
26. Trenčín, Slovakia
27. Valmiera, Latvia

Observing members (in alphabetical order):

1. Donostia – San Sebastian, Spain
2. Lemesos, Cyprus
3. Molenbeek-Brussels, Belgium
4. Namur, Belgium
5. Niksic, Montenegro
6. Odesa, Ukraine
7. Oeiras, Portugal
8. Plovdiv, Bulgaria
9. Rivne, Ukraine
10. Rzeszow, Poland
11. Timișoara, Romania



Three years in numbers

35
Member cities

20
Cities in the Mobility Programme

3
Thematic Working Groups

6
Policy papers

1
Culture for SDG guide

1
ECoC research report

6
International conferences

1
Interactive platform for CN Members

1
AI tool for ECoC bidbooks exploration

240k
Reach on social media

7k
Website visitors

1
European Networks Meeting

Conferences

2022

- 8th Culture Next Conference (Aveiro, Portugal): Featured policy discussions, collaboration with European networks, and local cultural engagements.

2023

- 9th Conference (Elefsina, Greece): Focused on integrating local cultural programs with European initiatives.
- 10th Conference (Belfast, UK): Explored culture's alignment with SDGs and the inclusion of culture as an 18th SDG.
- 11th Conference (Leeuwarden, Netherlands): Highlighted grassroots engagement through the Mienskip framework.

2024

- 12th Conference (Oulu, Finland): Focused on SDGs, thematic working groups, and the Mobility Program. Attended by 25 cities.
- 13th Conference (Cluj-Napoca, Romania): Included 50 cities, exploring culture's transformation into the 18th SDG and ECoC reform.

Tools & Papers

2022

- Released a comprehensive SDG Guide aligning cultural activities with Sustainable Development Goals.

2023

- Published six policy papers, including topics such as ECoC legacy and youth engagement.
- Initiated the SDG Thing, assessing cultural impacts on SDGs across 14 member cities, with individual and collective impact reports planned.

2024

- Developed the Culture for SDG Guide, with detailed metrics for evaluating culture's role in sustainable development.
- Launched the Polyloop AI tool for exploring ECoC bidbooks.
- Published six new policy papers, including recommendations on cultural financing and SDG-related strategies.

Collaboration

2022

- Launched the Mobility Program, enabling exchanges between member cities to share cultural strategies.

2023

- Conducted targeted Culture Next Missions (e.g., Gijon, Spain) for advocacy and support.
- Thematic Working Groups:
- Youth Engagement (Rouen).
- Funding Culture (Bielsko-Biała).

2024

- Expanded the Mobility Program to 20 cities, incorporating eco-friendly travel and gender equality practices.
- Concluded Thematic Working Groups on Youth Engagement and Funding Culture. Introduced ECoC Reform as a new group.

Communication results

2022

- Achieved a social media reach of 25,000 and 5,300 website visitors.

2023

- Reached 21,600 on social media and attracted 3,500 website visitors.
- Generated 42 posts and 867 interactions (likes, shares, comments).

2024

- Achieved a social media reach of 193,500.
- Hosted joint events with European cultural networks and participated in campaigns like the Culture Goal Campaign.
- Developed interactive platforms for enhanced member engagement.



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