



Cultural Creative Spaces & Cities

Charter of principles

January 2020

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The Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities project

Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities is a policy project that is co-funded by the European Commission. Running from 2018 to 2021, the project aims to develop new ways for cities and regions to bring together the public administration and the cultural sector to **co-create public policies**.

At the core of the project, there are seven *Urban Labs* based in seven different European cities in Finland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.¹ Each one of these labs brings together non-governmental cultural organisations and local/regional authorities, as well as other relevant stakeholders in their regions. Their goal is to address local challenges together and to find participatory and commoning solutions to these challenges.

‘Commoning’ is the act of creating, constructing and maintaining shared resources and reclaiming ‘the commons’ – which are the cultural and natural resources accessible to all. ‘Urban commons’ situate citizens as key players in their neighbourhoods, rather than public authorities, private markets and technologies.

Through the Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities project, the seven Urban Labs are working together to show that culture and commoning practices can **transform neighbourhoods and cities into more sustainable places** – catalysing better lives for their citizens and communities.

¹ Urban Lab Lund, Sweden; Urban Lab Region Skåne, Sweden; Urban Lab Helsinki, Finland; Urban Lab Košice, Slovakia; Urban Lab Madrid, Spain; Urban Lab Timisoara, Romania; Urban Lab Sant Boi, Spain. Urban Lab Lund, Sweden; Urban Lab Region Skåne, Sweden; Urban Lab Helsinki, Finland; Urban Lab Košice, Slovakia; Urban Lab Madrid, Spain; Urban Lab Timisoara, Romania; Urban Lab Sant Boi, Spain.

Introduction

This Charter is a statement of the direction of the Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities project, and aims to clarify the points of departure and fundamental questions underpinning the project. The goal is to elucidate the concepts and intentions that were outlined in the initial funding application.

Taking the shared values of the Urban Labs as a starting point for the project, the aim is to experiment with new approaches to help restore trust in European society. The belief is that rebuilding trust can be achieved by promoting a new culture that works at the level of grassroots participation, local decision-making and commoning. The Charter will offer a guide for the project in its quest for structural change across European society.

1. We believe that *culture is a common good* and we see culture as the basis of societal transformation.

- a. We interpret culture as the starting point for a **new ecological awareness** of the interaction between humans and the ecosystems we live in, based on fair relationships with other living beings, respect for local communities and a measured impact regarding natural resources.

- b. We interpret culture in its anthropological sense, as the **foundation of society**. We understand culture as a practical toolbox to signify oneself in the world and to **give meaning** to the everyday social, political, economic and ecological contexts we live in. This is why culture can become the engine for bottom-up change.

- c. Culture also includes **cultural diversity**: culture needs to give visibility to plural and diverse expressions, in order for these expressions to be recognised and included in society.

- d. Because culture permeates so many aspects of our **social** life and is tightly interlinked with social – **as well as cultural – rights**, we believe culture cannot be reduced to artistic practices, cultural heritage and creative industries.

- e. Culture shapes the **common spaces** where people come together and builds social ties within communities. We value cultural spaces, since they play a vital role in the development of culture and its artistic manifestations, while stimulating the participation of communities.

- f. We believe that all deliberations about culture affect the public interest, and therefore cultural policies should not just be addressed by a few professionals, but by **civil society** as a whole.

- g. Culture also needs its **autonomy** and its connection to society. We believe culture is only sustainable if it is institutionally and **socially protected** from precariousness and uncertainty.

- h. In this new paradigm, public institutions interact with culture in the role of **facilitator**, without imposing an official role and without handing over the reins for cultural policy debate to private initiatives.

2. We want to stimulate the creation of economic, social and civic value around **urban commons**, as well as improving public awareness of commons as a key value for societal transformation.

- a. We define commons as **shared material and immaterial resources**. 'Urban commons' situates **citizens as key players** in their neighbourhoods in the place of public authorities, private markets and technologies.
- b. Commons encourage **ecological transition** of production and consumption, as an alternative to logics of commodification and exploitation, Commons **fairly redistribute resources and protect them for future generations**.
- c. Commoners have the potential to create dynamic **new democratic processes**. We value the importance of commoners' **direct management**, where citizens are able to self-govern and make proposals for new inclusive and participatory institutions.
- d. Commons are **participatory communities** that need to be inclusive of everyone.
- e. **Commons generate user-value, instead of profit**, and build forms of circular economy that continually reuse, share, repair and recycle resources to **minimize the creation of waste**. Commons as circular economies have a regenerative approach, in contrast to the disruptive 'take, make, dispose' model of linear economy.
- f. Commons are initiated by commoners and benefit from the support of **governments as partners**. This collaboration has the potential to make our welfare system sustainable, and helps to keep commoning practices independent of profit-making paradigms.
- g. Commons need regulation, **active policies and a supportive legislative framework**. This is based on the recognition of their social and civic value.
- h. Commons need to **interconnect in networks** to make them stronger and more resilient.
- i. **Commons and culture are tightly interlinked**. Culture as commons means that every community has the right to their own culture, as well as the means to self-govern their own cultural practices. This is fundamental to help our society go beyond a vision of culture as a commodity, and to value culture as a testing ground for more inclusive and democratic ways of living together.
- j. **Commons and individual authorship need to be in balance**. Cultural tools should be accessible to everyone, and the work of cultural operators should be sustained and protected.
- k. Commoning practices can be introduced gradually to existing organisations, through the **sharing** of knowledge, information, resources, data or networks.

3. We believe that decision-making should be democratised. This should happen through **bottom-up processes at a local level**, involving citizens in co-creating important aspects of daily life.

- a. **Local participation** is fundamental so that citizens feel represented, included and recognised in decision-making processes. Participation is key to **citizens' empowerment**, because it gives people a sense of responsibility and ownership.
- b. On a local level, citizens can **exchange, experiment and cooperate** in many different areas. People's capacity to **act on their own behalf** is a source of power that institutions should tap into.
- c. Co-creation is a way to reinforce this sense of recognition and inclusion. However, we are aware that co-creation is often not the same as truly democratic participation, particularly when it is reserved to a privileged part of society. We wish to challenge this by bringing **co-creation closer to inclusive participation**.
- d. We want to encourage local authorities to stimulate active civic and civil participation, create the necessary frameworks for it, and work collaboratively in the governance of common goods. By **including citizens and communities in decision-making** processes, we firmly believe that the gap between citizens and institutions can be narrowed, and democratic legitimacy can be strengthened.
- e. We also believe that it is important to keep broad perspectives and take **different scales** into account – for example, by embedding local realities in sustainable global perspectives.
- f. **Sharing and learning** are fundamental processes for this to happen. Solutions at one local level can be adapted to other realities, always taking into account the local context and needs.
- g. Local experiences can be **scaled up**, although we need to be aware that not all local experiences are suitable for scaling up in other contexts.
- h. We are optimistic that this new approach can lead to a **culture of citizen-led innovation** that can develop new solutions to systemic problems. It can catalyse creativity and provide out-of-the-box solutions to help deal with the challenges facing our society.

4. We want to make the case for a *new basis for the legitimisation of the EU*, based on a strong link with local democracies and practices of commoning and participation.

- a. We believe the **EU** needs better ways of creating engagement in policies and **restoring citizens' engagement** at a grassroots level.

- b. We want to develop a new vision of policy-making that begins with a **collaborative approach**, and that puts the decision-making focus **firmly at the local level**.

- c. We believe the EU can be inspired and **benefit from many local participatory** practices and we think that the involvement of citizens in the whole decision-making process could help to create new legitimacy for EU policies.

- d. We want to encourage the EU to support local participatory practices, by introducing **commons-inspired policy-making**, focussing on achieving real impact in local decision-making, and improving the quality of life for EU citizens.

- e. We want to encourage the EU to favour **regulatory frameworks** that are able to recognise collaboration with the **commons**, and offer material support to them.

- f. We believe this support can help to **network, grow and scale-up** to protect the vitality of local communities and to safeguard their commoning practices.

- g. We believe that this new cultural model of engaging with citizens around commons can create a truly participatory democracy that is structurally part of EU decision-making, and can help to **renew citizens' confidence** in the EU project.



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