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# POLICY ANALYSIS POLICY RECOM- MENDA- TIONS

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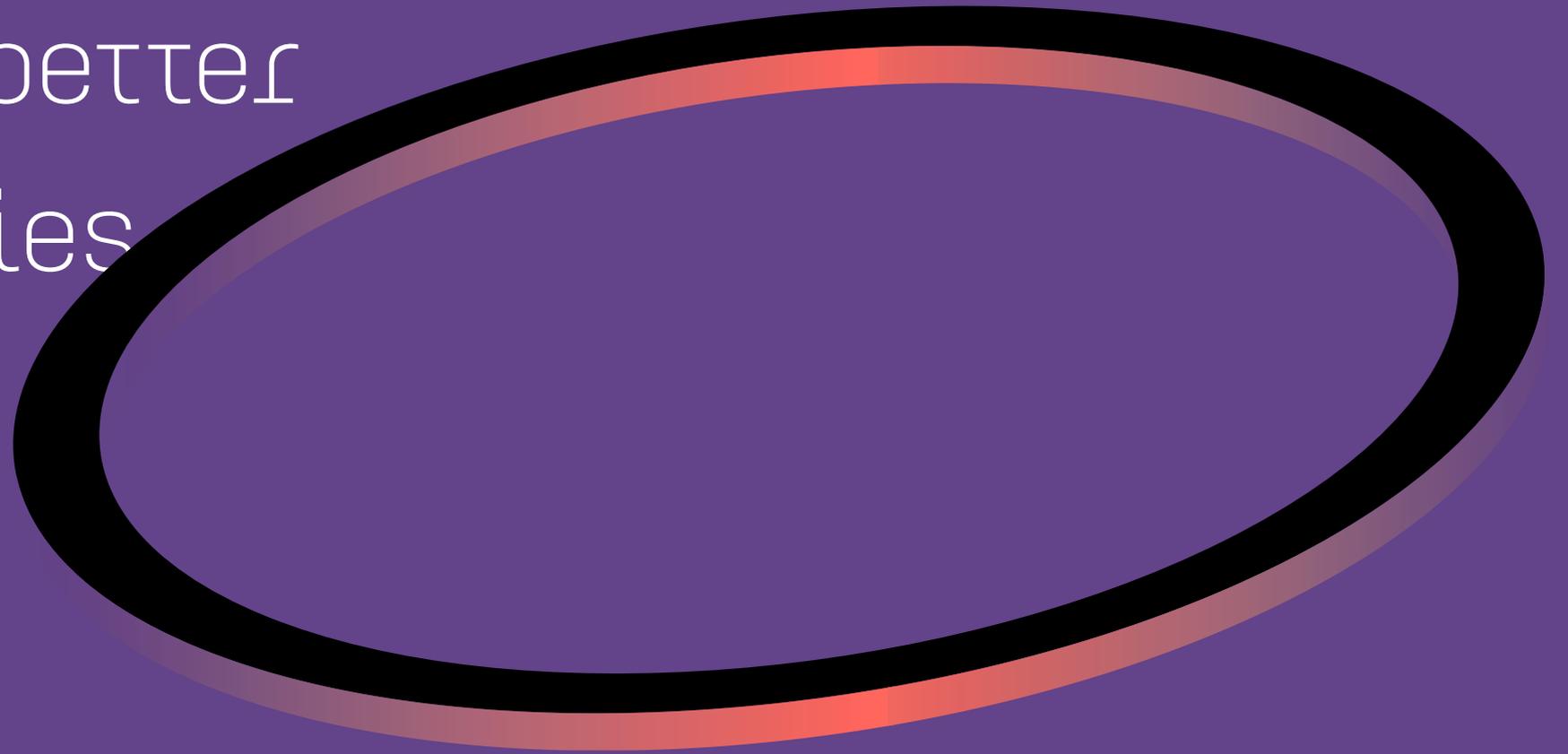


POLICY  
ANALYSIS

# Cultural Spaces and Cities as Commons

Why culture is  
key for a better  
life in cities

Violante Torre,  
European Cultural Foundation



# Introduction

This report is the outcome of the Cultural and Creative Cities (CCSC) project, which is a policy project co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union and managed by a consortium of eleven non-profit and public organisations. Seven Urban Labs based in seven European cities form the core of the project. Bringing together non-governmental cultural organisations and local/regional authorities, they address local challenges and find participatory and commoning solutions to them.

The CCSC:

- carries a vision of culture at the heart of local communities and at the centre of social life
- rejects the diminution of culture in contemporary society and swims against the current of the trending alignment of culture and the market economy and the consequent reduction of culture to a tool for profit
- believes in a more sustainable future for cities – a future in which the cultural and creative sectors can address urban challenges in cooperation with public authorities
- embraces alternative city models based on sharing and care. It is inspired by – and hopes to inspire – a vision of cities as commons: as shared resources that require attention and care from its citizens
- advocates for a new vision of local participation in which exchange and horizontality – cooperation rather than competition in participatory processes – are at the forefront

The CCSC forms a bridge over the national borders of Europe, interrogating the local and the European simultaneously, seeing them as two sides of the same coin. Remaining aware of local specificities, and dedicated to solving local problems, it also holds a perspective beyond the local, striving for a European presence in local realities based on the valuing of local expertise as an inspiration for European policy.

The need to think about the local and the European together is even more resonant with the outbreak of Covid-19. The cultural sector is one of the true economic victims of this crisis, which has also revealed the already precarious conditions of many cultural workers.

While many cultural workers and operators advocate for protection, culture has never stopped nourishing our cities during these hard times. Cultural events have been made available through digital means; public and private cultural institutions are publishing their archives in open format. The cultural sector is demonstrating its ability to continuously reinvent itself, even in times of crisis, to provide solutions to the most acute urban problems, and to allow culture to survive as the heart of our communities. We thus feel that advocating for a vision of culture that aims to create empathy, that gives voice to the voiceless, that overcomes social distance and the emptiness of public spaces, is fundamental for the credibility of Europe and local governments.

Taking these premises as a starting point, this report aims to:

- ① Bring together the outputs and the outcomes of the CCSC project and share the main lessons learned on the work done by the partners of the consortium
- ② Share insights on the two levels on which the CCSC has focused:
  - The interactions of the EU and local frameworks in widening the role of culture in urban life
  - The conditions and local contextual situations that influence the presence or obstacles for stronger links between culture and policymaking
- ③ Provide recommendations to the EU for the support and recognition of commons at the local and EU levels:
  - We advocate for the use of the commons as a policy framework that can reinforce the much-needed connection between the local and EU levels: on the one hand, by providing shared values between participants; on the other, by supporting a sense of care over cultural issues and the collective management of cultural spaces, both locally and for the EU as a whole
  - The outlining of the prototyping of ‘Homes of Commons’, as spaces of exchange and co-creation between the EU and local levels.

# The CCSC Partners

## Trans Europe Halles

Trans Europe Halles (TEH) is a network of grassroots cultural centres in Europe. As the leader of the consortium, Trans Europe Halles had the important role of project manager, a position which was crucial for the coordination among partners and the division of tasks. TEH was the main coordinator of the financial and communication aspects of the project. The network also played a pivotal role in bridging between the consortium and EU institutions and advocating for the perspective and needs of the cultural workers and spaces in the project. Finally, it coordinated the production of several important outputs of the project, such as the 'Urban Regeneration Knowledge Base' and the 'Mapping of European Cultural and Creative Spaces'.

## The University of Antwerp

The University of Antwerp (UoA) had a leading role in the research side of the project, providing continuous insights and knowledge about participation, cultural issues and commons. The University closely followed the Urban Labs in their work, developed qualitative indicators with the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and Timelab, and co-coordinated the development of the charter of principles. It coordinated the development of the first Co-Creation Lab with ECF and the second Co-Creation Lab with ECF and Timelab. Moreover, UoA cooperated in creating the toolkit and the prototyping of Homes of Commons and worked collaboratively in the development of policy recommendations. It was the coordinator and editor of one of the main outputs of the project: the book *'Commons. Between Dreams and Reality'*. It also established the China-EU Cultural Curatorship Studies Postgraduate Programme which will convey the fruits of the project to a wider audience.

## The European Cultural Foundation

The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) was the key partner for the policy-related aspects of the project. Following the progress of the Urban Labs closely, it guided policy and governance-related questions. It also provided insights and knowledge on the cultural sector and EU policy and programmes, thanks to the expertise it has gained over many years in both fields. It

coordinated the development of the first Co-Creation Lab with the University of Antwerp and the second Co-Creation Lab with Timelab and the University of Antwerp. It was the coordinator of several outputs of the project: mainly, the policy analysis, policy recommendations, the toolkit and the prototyping of Homes of Commons.

## Timelab

Timelab was the main partner for the methodology-related aspects of the project. It had a crucial role in:

- Facilitating peer-learning sessions and exchanges with Urban Labs, based not only on best practices but also on common challenges and difficulties.
- Experimenting with participatory platforms and introducing the consortium to several digital tools. Miro was a vital platform in enabling brainstorming and exchange among partners and in international events.
- Organising the second Co-Creation Lab (in connection with the School of Commons) which developed various methodologies that can help organisations to improve their shared approach and perspectives.

## The seven Urban Labs

The Urban Labs brought together cultural organisations, local authorities and also cultural and creative spaces to explore urban challenges in collaboration with other stakeholders. They organised over thirty workshops and training events for their local stakeholders and handshake partners.

### Urban Lab Madrid

**Leader:** Hablarenarte, Spain

**Challenge:** How can cultural institutions strengthen dialogue with the childhood community? Considering children as beings with rights, how can we implement meaningful participatory processes? How can we promote those structures involving citizens, schools, neighbourhood associations and art collectives?

**Local stakeholders:** Medialab-Prado; Intermediae, Division of Innovation and New Projects of Madrid Destino.

**Handshake partners:** L'Asilo (Italy), European Alternatives, Paris (France), Heart of Glass, Saint Helens (UK).

**Coordinator:**

Elena Lasala / [elenalasala@hablarenarte.com](mailto:elenalasala@hablarenarte.com)

### Urban Lab Coboilab

**Leader:** Coboilab, Spain — Social Innovation Lab in Sant boi de Llobregat

**Challenge:** How might we create a network of engaged and empowered citizens to integrate them as co-developers and co-creators in our strategic public innovation projects?

**Handshake partners:** The influencers (Spain), Dimmons (Spain), Sant Feliu Innova (Spain).

**Coordinator:**

Marcela Arreaga / [me.arreave@gmail.com](mailto:me.arreave@gmail.com)

### Urban Lab Timisoara

**Leader:** AMBASADA, Romania

**Challenge:** How could community-led organisations contribute to create public policies and how could they become responsible for their implementation?

**Handshake partners:** Foundation Novi Sad 2021 – European Cultural Capital (Serbia); Bakelit Multi Art Centre Foundation (Hungary); Rijeka2020 llc (Croatia); City of Leuven – Cultural and Creative Spaces Vaartopia (Belgium); Asociatia Timisoara Capitala Culturala Europeana2021(Romania); Timisoara City Hall (Romania).

**Coordinator:**

Andreea Iager-Tako / [andreea.iager@plai.ro](mailto:andreea.iager@plai.ro)

## Urban Lab Košice

**Leader:** Creative Industry Košice (CIKE), Slovakia

**Challenge:** How might CIKE involve stakeholders formulate a vision for the future of the city and, particularly, for the future of the cultural sector?

**Handshake partners:** Creativity Lab (Estonia); Creative Industries Styria (Austria); Creative Region Linz & Upper Austria (Austria); European Centre for Creative Economy (Germany); Creative England (United Kingdom).

**Coordinator:**

Zuzana Révészová / zuzana.reveszova@cike.sk

## Urban Lab Lund

**Leader:** City of Lund, Sweden

**Challenge:** This Urban Lab investigates how to enable actors in the cultural and innovation eco-system to cooperate, develop value-chains and reinforce positive actions. Urban Lab Lund also investigates the role of the municipality: what methodologies, activities and exchanges are required to facilitate cooperation.

**Local stakeholders:** Mejeriet and Stenkrossen (Lund, Sweden), Science Village Art and Science Center (Lund, Sweden).

**Handshake partners:** Giffoni Innovation Hub (Italy), Innovation Plattform City of Kiruna (Sweden), and Maltfabrikken (Ebeltoft, Denmark).

**Coordinator:**

Katarina Scott / katarina.scott@lund.se

## Urban Lab Helsinki

**Leader:** Kaapeli, Finland

**Challenge:** How might Kaapeli activate citizens and shift their role from an audience to co-creators? Kaapeli is investigating public property vs. city property, commons property strategies, sustainable heritage with living arts/cultural and creative activities. They are exploring how co-creation works in different cities and centres, what the value cultural centres the city and the benefits of cooperation on both sides.

**Handshake partners:** The Urban Biedriba Riga (Latvia) and cultural centre Aparaaditehas (Estonia) and in EstBayArea Development Helsinki-Tallinn (Estonia).

**Coordinator:**

Raisa Karttunen / raisa.karttunen@kaapelitehdas.fi

## Urban Lab Region Skåne

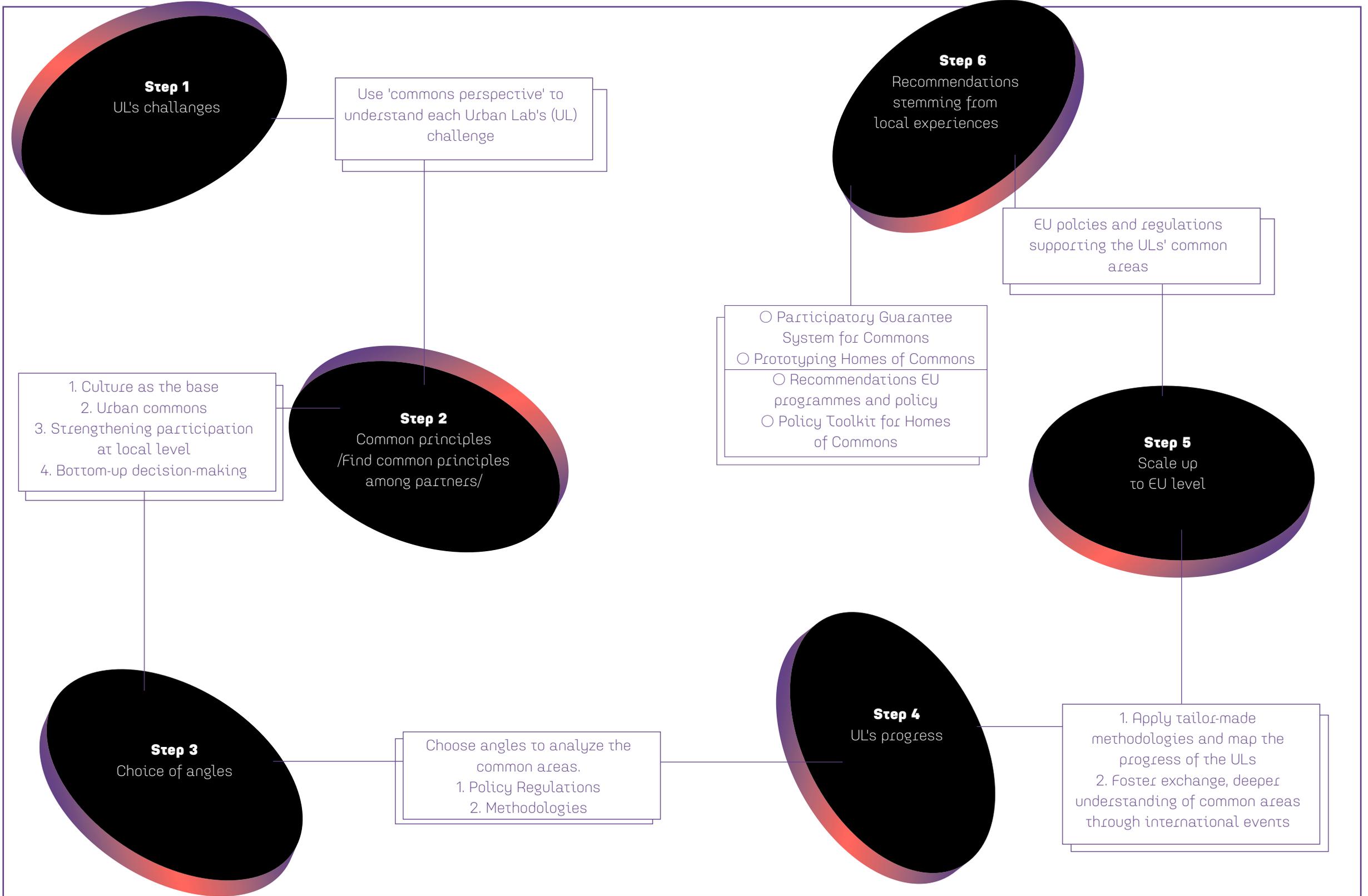
**Leader:** Region of Scania, Sweden

**Challenge:** How can the public administration mobilise and engage different stakeholders in developing and implementing the regional plan for culture?

**Handshake partners:** Region Midtjylland (Denmark) and Emilia-Romagna Region (Italy).

**Coordinator:**

Ola Jacobson / ola.jacobson@Skåne.se



# How Far Did We Go? On Process and Methodologies

The commons provide an “important ethical perspective and help us to understand what happens when people collectively manage and take stewardship over resources without the dominant, centralized roles of either the state or the market” (Bloemen and Hammerstein 2017, 4).

This ethical perspective has important methodological implications, as it gives a new sense of ownership to local communities and invites them to think out of the box of current participatory processes.

Interested in the horizontality and sharing inspired by the commons, the partners of the CCSC project experimented with

- several methodologies, both in the management of the CCSC and within the work of the Urban Labs.

Within the CCSC, we based the research aspect of the

- CCSC on the idea of ‘convoking’ (Khasnabish and Haiven 2014). In ‘convoking’, academic and policy researchers:
- analyse the practices developed in the local realities while committing to support their strategies in a commoning-inspired approach with local stakeholders

engage in making results available through panel discussions, public assemblies and open-source tools  
complement traditional research methods such as documentary analysis, in-depth interviews and participatory methods with ‘feedback loops’ from local stakeholders.

‘Convoking’ offers several advantages:

- ① It values local expertise, as it allows partners to agree on rules for the collective self-management of resources.
- ② It favours collective bottom-up processes, as it positions itself against a top-down approach between partners and against quantitative criteria and performance indicators as evaluation modalities.

These processes resulted in several main outcomes:

- ① A *Charter of Principles* (CCSC 2020). The Charter states re-

searchers’ and local stakeholders’ commitments and visions for the project. It is a vital step towards building trust and a collective vision on the project.

- ② On the basis of the Charter, a series of **qualitative indicators** were developed to progressively understand the work of the Urban Labs and reinforce the links between them.

- ③ A **collective written statement** on the *Covid-19 Pandemic and its Crisis* (CCSC 2020a). This is another example of a shared statement of values and common principles. It also provides an important depiction of the state of the cultural sector during the pandemic, both in terms of the resistance demonstrated by cultural realities across Europe and in terms of the necessity of EU support for the cultural sector.

- ④ **Two policy Co-Creation Labs:** Commons Sense in June 2020 (22<sup>nd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>) and Common Ground, in October 2020 (28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>). Both Co-Creation Labs were designed and implemented in a participatory and non-competitive way. Amidst a global pandemic, the easiest choice would have been to rely on methodologies that were easily adaptable to digital events, such as the hackathon. However, the common agreement of horizontality convinced the CCSC partners to go beyond the traditional hackathon methodology, which is intrinsically based on competition over the final price.

- ⑤ **Toolkit and prototyping Homes of Commons:** The same vision of collaboration and participation was at the heart of the collective exercises of the toolkit and the prototyping of Homes of Commons. With a willingness to go beyond the conceptualisation of the toolkit as a mere collection of best practices, the CCSC toolkit supports organisations at the local level in self-recognising themselves as commons, while the prototyping accompanies them in working towards collaborative organisation models.

## Methodology: lessons learned

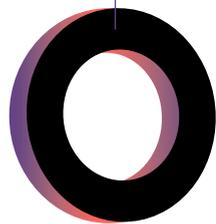
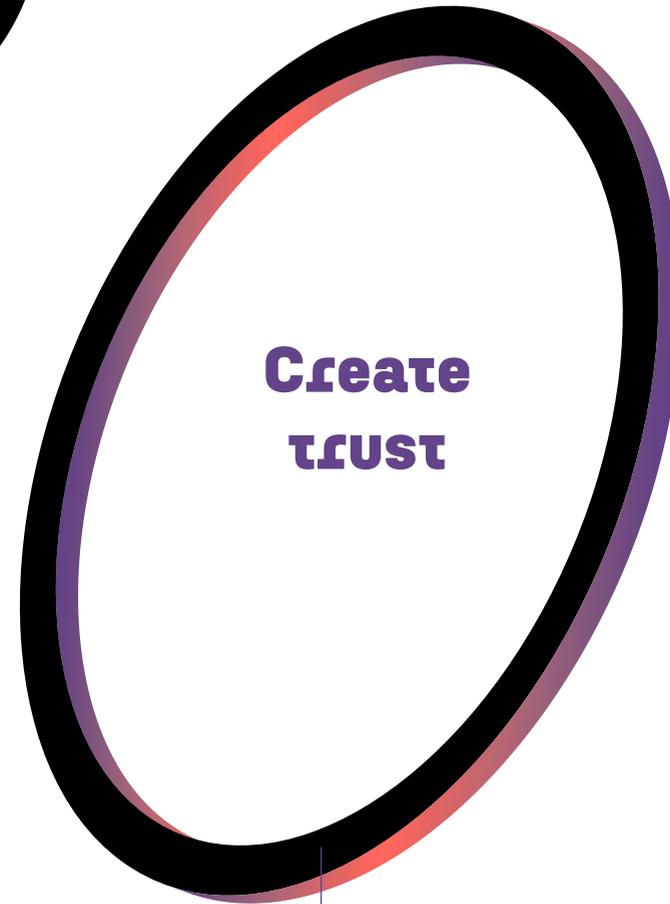
- ① **Methodologies should reflect the decision-making processes**, which are always a political act. It should never be the other way around. The recent increase of interest in participatory methodologies carries the risk of hiding the political dimension of participatory processes and of the decision-making which surround them in particular. Methodologies alone cannot reinforce more horizontal and participatory decision-making

# TRUST

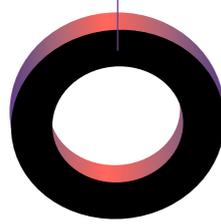
Lack of trust from the municipalities, not enough room to make mistakes and fail. Freedom is very important.

Lack of trust from EU: how to spend the fundings & what to give back?

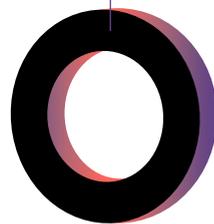
Tension between regulation & experimentation: without breaking the rules, cross-connecting democratic processes



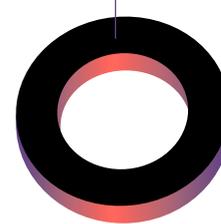
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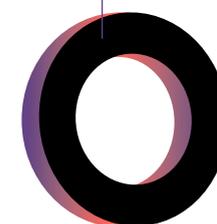
Kaapeli



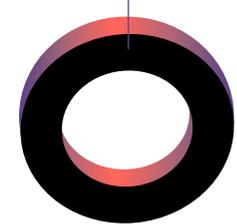
AMBASADA



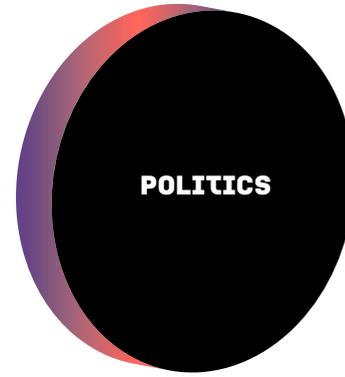
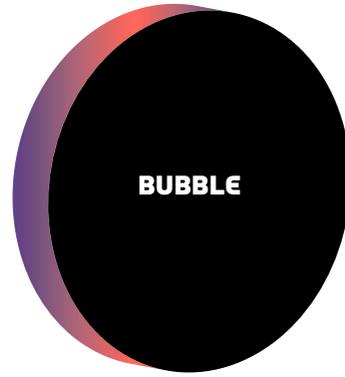
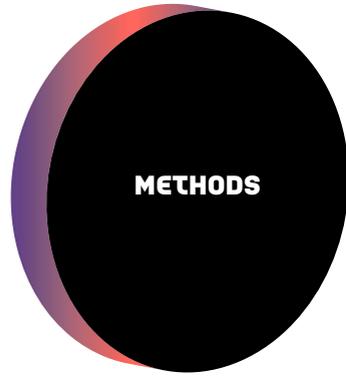
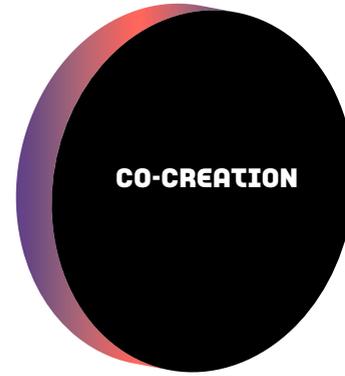
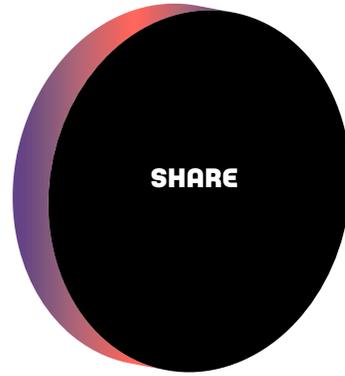
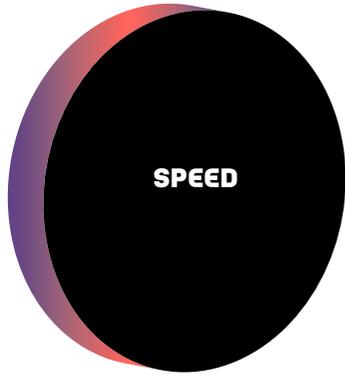
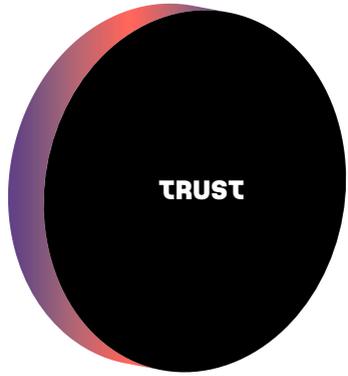
Hablarenarte



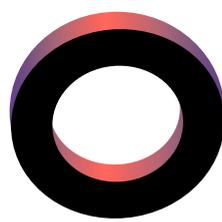
Region of Skåne



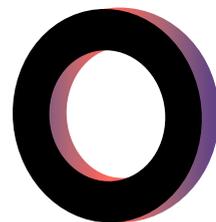
City of Lund



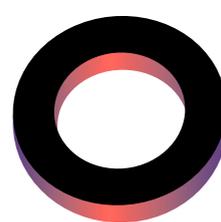
CoboiLab



Kaapeli



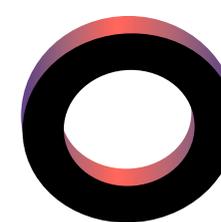
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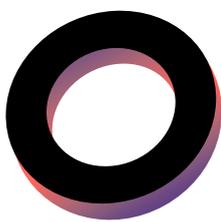
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Region of Skåne



City of Lund



CIKE

and create a more collaborative environment between cultural workers and policymakers. The ‘technicalities’ and methodologies of participation are just a one part of the issues which result from ‘political’ decision-making. For the CCSC project, the political choice in decision-making was the agreement on common values and principles as the basis of our participatory processes, represented in our formula of culture as the foundation. This, in turn, had consequences on the choice of methodologies for the project (and, again, not the other way around).

Value-driven exercises, such as the drafting of a collaborative manifesto, are fundamental in creating the foundation for a participatory process. It works as the core element that every participant can go back to in case of doubts or hesitation, or when commitment is wavering. Thanks to the value-driven methodology of the ‘scenario-planning’, the city of Lund, for example, established a strong relationship with local cultural centres and invested in the tightening of the relationship and the evaluation of common values with the core group (Scott & Persson 2020).

Urban Lab Hablarenarte exemplifies this tight relationship between decision-making and methodology in their reflection on their work. They learned to:

- ① keep always eyes/ears to the unpredicted, open to processes changing or evolving in different ways than the ones expected
- ② go back periodically to the main challenge and principles to not lose track. This may be contradictory, but it’s a process of round trip, a constant interpolation of what-we-are-doing / what-we-aim-to-do” (Urban Lab Hablarenarte 2020, 3–4).

② **Invest in qualitative analysis**, always remaining aware of the local context and power positions of the stakeholders. Qualitative analysis allows a deeper connection with local stakeholders. It also works on a long-term dimension, which allows more informal or unregulated realities to develop their expertise, without falling into the trap of performativity and quantitative criteria for evaluation. The benefits of a value-driven qualitative analysis have been manifold for the CCSC project. One example of this was the reflection on diversity and inclusion. In participatory processes, diversity is often measured simply through quantitative and performance-oriented indicators, such as quantifying the gender and ethnicity of participants. With Urban Labs, the consortium embraced a much wider definition of diversity. This was based on qualitative reflections of what we value as diversity or on what dimensions of diversity we would like to invest in

within the project (for example, the importance of accessible language to reach out to stakeholders unfamiliar with participatory processes, to invest in horizontality and exchange).

③ **Time factor:** In value-based processes, the ‘time factor’ is also important. The discussion of values requires time and resources. However, it also allows the expression of a plurality of views, a benefit which has been proven in the CCSC project to bring more solid bases for cooperation and mutualisation of tools and practices. In this sense, the partners’ meeting in Košice in September 2019 was a pivotal moment for the consortium cooperation, as the whole meeting was dedicated to voicing concerns, expectations, hopes and values, and the co-writing of the charter.

There are essential steps that should not be forgotten when investing in experimentation in participatory processes.

- When planning your activities, think of milestones and timelines that allow flexibility and continuous reorganisation.
- Do not forget about time and patience. As Urban Lab Skåne has observed, “When local and regional governments move toward the role of the caller, convener, and facilitator of processes, it is a big shift. It does require both skills, methods, maturity, and structures that make it possible to organize” (Jacobson & Ershammar 2020, 7).

④ **Risk and experimentation are the best practices:** Value them and include them in the methodology of projects, as they are key in helping to avoid the usual pitfalls of participatory processes, mainly the homogeneity of the audience and consultation over actual participation. Experimentation is not easy: it requires a lot of work in terms of methodology and can at first result in a sense of estrangement from the participants. Urban Lab Cike courageously acknowledges this. In their second workshop, the actors were very diverse, but the general feeling among the participants was that it was too experimental, and it was hard for the organising team to understand whether this was due to the audience heterogeneity itself or from the methodologies used.<sup>1</sup>

⑤ **In-person and digital go hand in hand:** As with many of the realities in Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced the CCSC partners to rethink their ways of working and to reorganise their events in a digital format.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Urban Lab Cike coordinator. Interview conducted during the CCSC partners meeting in Malmö, December 2019.

Digital tools have offered certain advantages in this arduous situation. They have allowed partners to continue their work despite not being able to travel. They have also allowed a wider diversity in events that were initially planned to be in-person. Event digitalisation also increased the visibility of the Urban Labs with an international audience, particularly through the two Co-Creation Labs. It also allowed the reuse of budgets that were initially allocated for travelling as remuneration for a scholarship<sup>2</sup> devoted to participation in the first Co-Creation Lab and the co-writing of three reports on its results.

However, several points that can help us to critically assess and nuance the international enthusiasm for all things digital should be noted:

- Digital is not a substitute for in-person encounters and events. The two processes are different and are not completely comparable.
- Digital has the potential to reach a wider audience, but it lacks the spontaneity and unpredictability that is key for a value-based approach.
- The time and patience that are vital for building trust are also limited in digital events. The necessary time constraints of digital events, which requires shorter working times and more frequent breaks, do not allow the natural building of relationships that are key in a project the size of the CCSC, where partners come from very different contexts and backgrounds.
- The enthusiasm for digital tools among European projects and partly within the cultural sectors often hides an element that many Urban Labs – and especially Urban Labs Ambasada and Hablarenarte – have pointed out: the unfamiliarity with digital tools, or digital illiteracy, and the uneven accessibility to digital tools which exists in many European countries. Ambasada, which works with low-income communities and whose work is closely linked with building continuous trust and exchange in-person, has faced considerable difficulties in its work due to the pandemic which have been only partly

<sup>2</sup> The scholarship was won by six candidates who participated in the Co-Creation Lab and then worked in pairs to write the final reports of the event. Julia Gouin and Matina Magkou (Report 1); Adrian Pleșca and Mateja Stanislava Rot (Report 2); Kitti Baracsi and Emmanuel Pidoux (Report 3). See the “References” section of this report for details.

solved through the digitalisation of events. Similarly, Hablarenarte has children as its primary protagonists, many of whom have only partial access to digital tools and whose access to digital tools is directly affected by the means of their families.

- However, digital enjoys the important and extremely necessary advantage today of having a lower impact on the environment. While the issue of green and sustainable cities was not necessarily one of the core topics for the Urban Labs, the frequent international travel involved in a project of the scale of the CCSC project was regarded as an almost contradictory aspect to the visions of cities as commons, based on the wish for a better quality of life for all citizens, and the respect for natural resources. The CCSC Charter of Principles states that: “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” (CCSC 2020, 5). Frequent international travel over short distances has a strong negative impact on the environment; most importantly, the short-term nature of the visits involved in this type of travel within European projects does not guarantee an important understanding of the local context.

The main lesson learned from the second phase of the project, as impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, is that a mixture of digital and physical events, according to the requirements and the predicted outputs of the event in question, is always advisable:

- When the event necessitates efficient decision-making and involves audiences that are already familiar with working with digital tools, the use of digital tools is preferable.
- Physical events should first and foremost be dedicated to stakeholders who can avoid flying as a means of travel.
- When the events are supposed to include international stakeholders, make sure to give enough time for participants to gain a good understanding of the local contexts and their challenges and opportunities. Overall, fewer but longer journeys should be prioritised over shorter and more frequent visits.

# Culture as the Base: For a New Centrality of Culture in Urban Spaces

"We believe that culture is a common good and we see culture as the basis of societal transformation" / CCSC 2020, 5.

This vision of culture is particularly necessary in light of current trends in European policy on culture. As Professor Miranda Iossifidis has highlighted in her analysis of the earlier projects and policies of the CCSC project (Iossifidis 2020, 4), culture is often put forward unproblematically as a relatively cheap magical solution for solving all urban problems. While "culture as a shared common resource is often noted, we can observe wildly different operationalization of what this might entail: there is slippage between culture as a shared social resource, its ability to bring people together in contexts of socio-economic disparity and community tensions; and culture as an economic resource, tied to culture-led development" (Ibid).

This is particularly true for the bid-books of European Capitals of Culture (ECoC). Here, the focus on creative industries is mainly on the role of culture in fostering social inclusion, and "represents the current iteration of policy orientation toward both ECoC specifically and urban cultural interventions more generally" whereby ECoC is a catalyst or driver for creative industries (Campbell and O'Brien, 2020, 278; in Iossifidis 2020, 39).

## 1 The CCSC position

While aware of these trends at the European level, the CCSC distances itself from a vision of culture that separates creative industries from cultural initiatives investing in participation and social cohesion.

Contrary to the main trends in policy and projects at the European level.

- It interprets culture not as merely a tool for economic growth, but rather as "an engine for bottom-up change" (CCSC 2020, 5).

- It values culture as the foundation of life in cities and understands it in a non-competitive way. It understands it "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" (Ibid).
- It thinks of cultural participation and thriving cultural and creative industries as part of a single overarching framework. This framework underpins the idea of culture and cities as 'commons': as shared resources and opportunities for both cultural workers and policy-makers.
- The commons allow us to think of culture as a means to achieving a better quality of life in cities through participation and collaboration, taking care not to instrumentalise culture as a solution for vaguely defined urban problems.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 Rethinking the relationship between cultural centres and public authorities

Earlier policy projects, such as the Culture for Cities and Regions (CCR), recommended that municipalities should shift their role towards that of facilitators. The CCR, for example, recommended that cities act as a trusted partner and facilitator. This idea is echoed in the Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage, suggesting a shift of the government citizens model towards a provider-customer model (CCR 2017, 39).

However, the CCSC analysis of previous projects and policies highlights how such trends carry the risk of vagueness and undifferentiated uses. From different projects, "we can see that such policies can be mobilized for very different aims and have vastly different expressions in diverse contexts. Inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration is recommended by all projects, but without being grounded in notions of social justice, democracy, and the commons, this buzzword becomes

<sup>1</sup> (Urban Lab Cike 2020; Jacobson & Ershammar 2020. For an interesting reflection on this point, see glossary of Urban Lab Cike and Skåne. When discussing the city of Košice's future cultural strategy, the glossary of Urban Lab Cike (2020, 1) states the importance of "the future of the people and their wellbeing as the center of its [i.e., the next cultural strategy] philosophy. We hope that culture in this sense, through the activities of individuals and organizations working in the field, will bring the change of the municipal mindset, establish more cooperation and support the infrastructure that will open the governance towards common projects."

quite hollow” (Iossifidis 2020, 39–40). Attentive to the risks elucidated above, the CCSC partners worked on bridging the gap between policy-makers and cultural actors. The overall objective is to understand policymaking as an ecosystem in which cultural representatives and public servants come together and work in non-competitive, horizontal, and collaborative ways to provide solutions to urban problems. As in an ecosystem, every actor has a role which is in balance with those of others.

### ● New roles for cultural spaces

*“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” / CCSC 2020, 5.*

Cultural spaces can have multiple and yet often unexplored roles in the construction of more just cities.

#### ○ Open spaces for all

Can opening a space up to the public be enough to reinforce participation? Urban Labs that concretise in a physical space – such as Kaapeli, Coboilab and Ambasada – have long reflected on this. Put bluntly, as Kaapeli does in its final report, “opening the doors is not enough” (Huotari 2020, 3).

#### **Kaapeli – Opening spaces, building trust**

Within the CCSC, Kaapeli worked from shifting from a model of the curated use of space (a strategy where citizens can use the space for a specific purpose) to a wild use (where the space is open to all for any activity they want). The wild use which they implemented was a huge success. However, as they note, merely opening the space would not have been enough on its own. The trust relationship they built with the community was the key success factor: “If we would have launched the idea by ourselves it wouldn’t have benefitted from the bottom-up feeling that it had thanks to this lucky coincidence and it may have died down because no one would have found it or appropriated it. Citizen participation cannot be forced” (Huotari 2020, 3). Opening spaces for all thus comes with a long-term process of building trust with citizens.

○ *Community-enabler spaces, when public authorities cannot do it*  
Cultural spaces can act as spaces for dialogue and connection and as a methodology for experimenting with policymaking. For example, the Lund cultural centres of Mejeriet and Stenkrossen organized a collaboration with policy groups of students from the university and with city hall, thereby turning cultural spaces into spaces of policy debate (Scott & Persson 2020, 22). As the example of Lund suggests, cultural spaces often are more capable of experimenting more than city administrations and regions. When a public authority aims to attract diversity, it might result in frustration because the long-term nature of the process often fails to offer immediate results (Jacobson & Ershammar 2020). Cultural centres, anchored in the local realities of their neighbourhoods, can act as a medium for attracting meaningful diversity for participatory processes.

○ *A methodology for public authorities to avoid working in silos*  
When supported by public authorities, cultural spaces can truly act as spaces for experimentation and risk. As Trans Europe Halles’ project manager José Luis Rodríguez and Urban Lab Coboilab’s coordinators, Marcela Arreaga and Sergi Frías Hernández, point out, the strengths of Urban Labs lie precisely in the coordination of the interests and needs of various actors engaging in co-creation. In this sense, Urban Labs can themselves act as a methodology. They are crucial in designing and implementing processes based on:

- ① “The active participation of the people involved
- ② The provision that the results should take into account the experiences and needs of the users
- ③ The assumption that the creative process is a complex, recursive and collaborative one” (Arreaga, Frías & Rodríguez 2020, 3).

### CoboiLab – Finding innovative models

Urban Lab CoboiLab exemplifies this potential and has inspired other Urban Labs through its role as a provider of tools and a facilitator of processes among different stakeholders. Continuously experimenting and working with innovation models, CoboiLab acts as both a residential space for cultural and creative workers and as a platform facilitating the collaboration between companies, knowledge centres, public administration and citizenship aiming for social impact and transformation to the territory of Sant Boi in Spain. The case of CoboiLab shows the incredible potential that cultural spaces have in acting both as an infrastructure for cultural expression, and as a facilitator of processes to co-design, prototype and test innovative solutions.

#### ● The public sector as a facilitator

One of the central questions for the CCSC project has been the search for an overarching understanding of several problems emerging from the relationship between public authorities and cultural centres.

Cultural spaces in Europe often face significant obstacles when interacting with public authorities.

- A **lack of transparency** from public authorities, especially where there is a lack of public record of public/private property in the city, which prevents experimentation on the ground for cultural actors. As Urban Lab Ambasada in Romania acknowledges, there can often be antagonistic relationships with the municipality. The relationship between civil servants and representatives of the cultural sector is far from being based on principles of co-creation and participation. For example, discussions over Timisoara 2021 (European Capital of Culture 2021) from the perspective of transparency have revealed a lack of awareness about the risk of gentrification and centralisation of culture in certain areas of the city – both of which are risks at the centre of Urban Lab Ambasada’s work – or that of other cultural actors in the city.
- **Excessive bureaucracy (particularly departmental division):** Excessive departmental divisions lead to dispersive

awards of grants and undermine trust with the cultural sector. Romania and Sweden represent two very different configurations of policymaking. In Romania, a lack of transparency still presents an obstacle to the implementation of policies, while Sweden is faced with overly detailed and sectorial policies.<sup>2</sup> However different the two cases may be, excessive bureaucracy slows down the implementation of already existing laws.

Public authorities, on the other hand, are often confronted with a dilemma concerning co-creation and dialogue with cultural workers. Urban Lab Skåne points out the difficulty that public authorities often share about their relationship with cultural representatives and initiatives. “The issue seems to be that of a tension between regulation and experimentation. How can we, without breaking the rules, cross-connect democratic processes and allow artistic freedom?”<sup>3</sup>

- The first fundamental step in changing how cultural workers and policymakers work together is to introduce working in layers or ‘by proxy’. This means that each participant alternates in the leading role according to their expertise. This also implies a need for **clarity of language**, in which care is taken to clearly define concepts collectively. Thus, each partner can point out the meaning which each concept has in its local context, and thereby avoid, as far as possible, any vagueness in the use of these terms.
- **An awareness of the importance of local contexts enables connections rather than preventing them.** While the contextual elements in many European projects are undermined in the search for ‘best practices’, the CCSC highlights how the contextual elements, and particularly the **political and cultural contingencies**, play a fundamental role in the relationship between authorities and cultural actors and strongly influence how their relationship may vary from that of governor-citizen, provider-customer or collaborators. Urban Lab Lund is a good example of this. This Urban Lab worked simultaneously with the notions of culture and innovation as framed under the idea

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with Urban Labs representatives. Interview conducted during the CCSC partners meeting in Košice, September 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Urban Lab Skåne coordinator. Conducted during the CCSC partners meeting in Košice, September 2019.

of entrepreneurship. The significance of this choice cannot be fully grasped if we do not consider how strongly the Swedish context is influenced by an individualistic vision of culture, understood first and foremost as a personal experience. This offers an excellent illustration of the marrying of the idea of entrepreneurship as a framework.<sup>4</sup>

- **Building a trust relationship** with public bodies is a fundamental condition for collaboration between cultural spaces and policymakers. As was seen in the case of Coboilab, this can be induced with the simple but very powerful act of sharing the working space. For Coboilab, the sharing of a working space with a public body representative was an effective way of developing an understanding of the other's perspective and of learning how to align both parties' objectives into a common strategy.
- For public authorities, building trust must involve an investment **in multi-stakeholder governance and an appreciation of its ethical dimension:** as a public authority, you cannot decide on your own and you do not have exclusive power. Accepting the right to grant decision-making powers to other actors means embracing a more holistic approach to culture and rethinking departmental bridging as only the first step in making culture more relevant in cities.
- Think of **culture as being linked to social rights and a better quality of life**, and never as a field or a department per se. Investing in a vision of culture with social rights helps to create the idea of the city as a common good. We should see the act of giving value to culture as a crucial dimension to the building of the community, and not just as an important dimension of the lives of cultural workers.

Several Urban Labs did pioneering work in this sense. Because culture permeates so many aspects of our social lives and is closely interlinked with both social and cultural identities, culture should go beyond the borders of artistic practices, cultural heritage and creative industries, and reach out to the social dimension of urban life. Ur-

ban Labs Ambasada and Hablarenarte have been pivotal in this sense through their holistic visions of culture. Ambasada worked with urban minorities on inclusion in public spaces, while Hablarenarte strived to link cultural institutions to schools in Madrid. Particularly during the Covid-19 crisis, the work of these two Urban Labs has been crucial in proving once again the fundamental role of culture as a common good, which should be funded and supported because of its benefits to the community as a whole.

### Ambasada – Culture as a common good

Ambasada's choice to focus on the Roma community shows the flexibility of cultural space and particularly of the informal realities involved in working in culture holistically.

The case of Hablarenarte is crucial in this sense because of its promotion and implementation of children's advisory boards within cultural institutions. Hablarenarte's project aims to create and sustain channels that guarantee and support the active participation of children in culture. "We must devote our work to promoting a real and well-established collaborative participation that creates not just Child-Friendly Cities, but also cities (and of course cultural institutions) where children are considered in every aspect of their lives as political subjects" (Hablarenarte & de Juan 2020, 93).

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Urban Lab Lund coordinator and representatives of the cultural centres of Stenkrossen and Mejeriet. Interviews conducted during the CCSC partners meeting in Košice, September 2019.

## Urban Commons: an Alternative Model for Cultural Centres

"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"  
/ CCSC 2020, 6.

It is undeniable that the above objective is a complex and tortuous one, but it is also full of possibilities. The flexibility of this framework certainly offers opportunities for exchange, but the same flexibility can also result in widely heterogeneous interpretations of what the commons are.

The CCSC consortium experienced precisely this diversity of definitions of commons, as well as their articulation in different parts of Europe. Some Urban Labs, such as Ambasada and Hablarenarte, were already familiar with the philosophy of the commons. Others such as Cike and Kaapeli relied mostly on the idea of creativity, and Coboilab with that of innovation. The challenge was thus to see whether we could find a common ground between commons, innovation and creativity, particularly given that the latter feature has long been criticised for contradicting the idea of commons (Gielen 2018).

The local context played a notable role in the initial phase of familiarizing ourselves with the idea of the commons. Urban Labs Skåne and Lund, for example, felt that the commons could only apply to Southern European contexts, as the Swedish reliance on individual talent and entrepreneurship was interpreted as clashing with the more bottom-up and grassroots perspectives on culture in cities. The CCSC project thus worked to overcome misinterpretations about the commons at both the local and EU levels.

At the local level, the main challenge was to identify how the framework of the commons could benefit a stronger and more sustainable relationship between local policymaking and

cultural work, even when under the framework of 'creativity' and 'innovation'. How can the commons provide solutions for more sustainable cultural work and combat precariousness and exploitation without undermining the role of cultural workers as artists and creative talents?

On the local level, the consortium worked on the concepts of **commons as sustainability** and **commons as exchanges**. This provided space to keep on working on creativity but also to reinforce a sustainable vision of it, inserting the needs and the wishes of communities as crucial dimensions in the artistic work. The need for civil and social sustainability dedicated to respecting and supporting culture in cities was particularly evident across the Urban Labs. The commons allowed the Urban Labs to work on finding a balance between the need for artistic autonomy and participation.

The idea of Urban Labs as a methodology (Vega, Hernández & Rodríguez, 2020, 3) is certainly useful in rethinking collaboration at the local level and in making the sustainability of the commons as tangible as possible. However, the CCSC argues that the role of the commons as a methodology can easily fall flat when not accompanied by two other necessary steps forward, both at the local and EU levels: funding and recognition.

### Funding grassroots initiatives on urban commons

The question of how to envision new forms of funding for culture at the local and EU levels that would be more inclusive to informal realities, more open and less constraining, grew to be one of the core issues of the CCSC. This question is linked to the willingness of public authorities to move from being a grant-provider to becoming a facilitator, a shift which several Urban Labs considered to be crucial, particularly Lund and Skåne. For both, investment in alternative forms of funding represents a key element in the shift towards a new relationship based on trust with cultural organisations.

Some Urban Labs had already been pointing out the need to rethink grants at the local level, even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. As Hablarenarte noted in reference to the Spanish context, grants can often be delayed by many months, and, as a consequence, only stable collectives can access them, while

there is a constant lack of resources for long-term projects.<sup>1</sup> We therefore feel that the conclusions on flexible grant-making can benefit many local contexts across Europe. The main need is for a **more flexible grant-making system which involves mixed stakeholders**. In practice, this means creating funding procedures that are less competitive and more participatory at the local level.

The drive for alternative funding has been at the centre of European projects for quite some time and has already been present in earlier creative European projects and networks across Europe. The CCR project, for example, had already suggested flexible grant-making at the local level. Cities could achieve this by “providing grants through calls for projects embodying interdisciplinary skills; [...] establishing innovation vouchers, namely small grants to encourage companies to access creative services (design, advertising, artistic intervention etc.)” (CCR, 2017, 24).

The CCSC project takes a different direction. It suggests that grant-making should not only limit itself to creative services per se but should include commons. This would allow informal collectives to participate in grant-making procedures precisely because of their fundamental knowledge of the local realities and communities.

When grant systems are more flexible, they foster greater forms of collaboration, in which informal realities can freely establish networks. This allows the creation of participatory processes whereby informal realities are acknowledged **as experts** and whereby public authorities can benefit from the knowledge of the local territory, its problems and its potential. The question of funding cannot be ignored by European institutions; indeed, quite the opposite, particularly considering the Covid-19 pandemic and the disastrous consequences for the sector.

Within the CCSC, we have worked to rethink European funding and have suggested that it can represent a framework and a source of inspiration for municipal and regional funding schemes. The necessity to rethink the funding system was so evident among the CCSC partners that it represented one of the three main strands of the digital policy Co-Creation Lab, organised in June 2020 by the CCSC consortium.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Urban Lab Hablarenarte coordinator. Interview conducted during the CCSC partners meeting in Košice, September 2019.

As one of the lessons learned from the CCSC, we argue that there is an urgent need to provide funding schemes for the commons. The financing of the commons can only benefit from a more sustainable vision of creativity in cities. It can promote creative work while reinforcing links with citizenship, without the threat of instrumentalising cultural initiatives and actors as mere service providers in the more general field of social cohesion.

The report provided by Julia Gouin and Matina Magdou (Gouin & Magdou 2020, 2) on the proposals put forward by the participants of the Co-Creation Lab highlights several ways forward.

As they argue, there is a need for:

- More flexibility in the design of the schemes to enable more crossover and to give better chances to projects that are working in a cross-disciplinary way or in undefined areas.
- More experimental funding schemes that can suit different needs and not only support ambitious large-scale projects across Europe. As an example, they suggest developing smaller grants (of less than €15,000) for cultural spaces which would facilitate more experimental initiatives to be tested as pilot schemes, as the first step towards further collaborations, or as specific help in the case of an unexpected transition being made.
- More grants that are rooted in the concepts of commons, allowing different arts practitioners to take the initiative and join forces to define a mutual resource or interest that is important for their work and to propose how to share in its development. Urban Lab Cike has truly made steps forward in this matter. Today Košice is one of the liveliest cultural centres in Slovakia. The key to this was creating a local grant system to support unregulated cultural actors and artists who, with their experience and energy, are necessary to maintain a healthy and diverse cultural programme.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Urban Lab Cike coordinator. Interview conducted during the CCSC partners' meeting in Košice, September 2019.

## Recognition of cultural actors' autonomy

*“How could we as artists and cultural actors keep our autonomy and use our resources effectively when we are asked to join more and more co-creative processes with public agencies?”*  
/ Urban Lab Skåne 2020, 4.

Within the CCSC project, we developed two main visions of ‘recognition’ that were tightly and necessarily interlinked. Firstly, we understand recognition as a deep self-understanding of the features and the work in progress of an organisation. Recognition can mean an organisation’s self-evaluation of its own characteristics as an effort to understand how close it is to the values and ideals of commons.

There is a clear need to provide adequate tools for organisations in order to help them understand their features and work towards an alignment with the ideals of commons, and to transform their work towards a sustainable, collaborative and democratic goal. As we will see in the next chapter, the provision of these tools lies at the core of the legacy of the project and represents one of the central elements of the project’s recommendations.

A second yet fundamental side of recognition concerns the relationship with the local authority. While in the previous chapter we underlined the importance of building trust and of building a common language, the work with urban commons has allowed us to advance the recognition of informal realities and bottom-up work on culture as a necessary and urgent step towards the building of collaboration and understanding between public officials and cultural workers.

At the core of this issue lies the question of the autonomy of cultural actors. The acknowledgement and support of cultural actors’ autonomy is a fundamental condition for improving the exchange and cooperation of the cultural sector and policymakers.

As the CCSC consortium wrote in the charter of principles of the CCSC, “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” (CCSC 2020, 5).

The issue of cultural actors’ autonomy is fundamental in the Europe of today. The Covid-19 crisis has only accentuated ex-

isting trends: the precariousness of local cultural activities, the inaccessibility of funding due to the exclusionary accessibility criteria which adversely affect smaller and informal realities. The crisis has demonstrated how unregulated cultural initiatives need to be valued as central actors in the cultural sector. What we need is an alternative approach in terms of participatory processes and the relationship which public authorities maintain with cultural realities.

Today, the relationship between public authorities and cultural workers has two contradictory main results. The first sees informal realities being excluded from consultation or exchange with municipalities over the future of the cultural sector in cities. The second is the dependence of cultural actors on public funds at the local level, thereby resulting in the problem of the continuous ‘delegation’ of the city to the cultural sector. The city thus exploits cultural actors for cultural activities in the city through inconsistent funding and inconclusive consultation processes. The issue of cultural autonomy highlights the need for a value change in the way informality is viewed in the sector at the EU level and in the participation in EU projects and calls.

The first Co-Creation Lab, and in particular the research conducted by researchers from l’Asilo<sup>3</sup> in Naples (de Tullio 2020a), were fundamental in terms of outlining several ways forward whereby local authorities can recognise and give space to bottom-up initiatives and informal realities. Key lessons learned can be taken from this crucial piece of research, which also forms the basis for the next and final chapter of this report, and which constitutes a key element of the policy recommendations of the CCSC.

- Many commons and creative spaces that work from a commons perspective often lack proper legal recognition (like foundations or associations) – taking into consideration the oppositional/conflict-base of such experiences. Therefore, it should be considered important to ‘open up’ more channels to offer informal/grassroots initiatives access to EU projects.
- The acknowledgment of unregulated culture should go beyond its economic value and focus on its social value as a fundamental role in urban life.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on l’Asilo and its experience of the commons, see <http://www.exasilofilangieri.it/>. Website accessed on 14 December 2020.

- It is important to recognise a single comprehensive legal/institutional framework both at the local and EU levels – experiences that work in the culture/commons field as ‘informal institutions’.
- To this end, we should consider building a comprehensive public-private network through which public authorities can establish a window of dialogue with such ‘informal institutions’ and also open up to individual/groups of cultural operators, activists and other stakeholders, in turn favouring participation and co-decisions (Cozzolino & Parenti 2020).

## Local Participation: How to Make It Meaningful?

"Local participation is fundamental so that citizens feel represented, included and recognized in decision-making processes. Participation is key to citizens' empowerment because it gives people a sense of responsibility and ownership" / CCSC 2020, 7.

Participation is probably the most encompassing theme of the CCSC. In fact, it represents a crucial condition for achieving the three other main dimensions of the CCSC: participation is crucial in thinking of culture as the base; participation is needed to strive for urban commons; and participation is key for imagining more democratic decision-making. Whether internally within a cultural organisation or at the municipal, regional or EU level, interpreting participation as a value and participatory methods as a necessary tool has become almost mandatory.

However, it is precisely in this omnipresence of participation that the danger lies. While the commons can scare people away for being too context-specific, the term ‘participation’ is so overused that the concept risks being watered down. This is even more true when it comes to ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’ as aspects of participatory processes. Inclusion and diversity are impossible to ignore in today’s participatory agendas and often appear to be crucial in validating participatory processes, regardless of the stakes. However, equally critical contributions have appeared on the uses of ‘participatory’; as a term, critical reflection should also develop towards both inclusion and diversity as criteria for participatory processes.

The CCSC was fundamental in allowing the partners to dissect the difficulties and barriers for participatory processes which present themselves at different levels.

### At the local level, between citizens and cultural organisations:

● **The problem of language:** as Coboilab highlighted in terms of the relationship which the Lab has with the local population, cultural workers often use language that citizens are unfamiliar with, an issue which often undermines the level of trust and reduces their willingness to familiarise themselves with the organisation.

● **Unwillingness to fully engage:** Several Urban Labs experienced the unwillingness of citizens to go beyond the simple proposal of new ideas in participation processes. They felt that participants believed that negotiations with local authorities, as well as the explanation of the outcomes of the participatory process, should be the responsibility of the Urban Labs.<sup>1</sup> This emphasises the importance of cultural centres acting as spaces of mediation between authorities and citizens. However, it also shows how this task can be interpreted as a burden for cultural centres.

At the local level, the barriers between cultural workers and local policymakers, which are partly acknowledged in section “Rethinking the relationship between cultural centres and public authorities”, pages 31–37 of this report, are numerous:

● **Lack of follow-up of participatory processes:** Often, public authorities rely heavily on the knowledge and expertise of cultural actors through participatory processes, but rarely follow the conclusions of these events. As a consequence, this enhances the lack of trust with cultural workers, who often feel they have been taken advantage of. In the Romanian case, for example, Urban Lab Ambasada noted how participation is often only encouraged by the municipality when representing small actions, but never in the case of more crucial decisions. The municipality provides ‘false entry points’: a proposal and complaints system in the form of an app. While this officially enables citizens to voice their concerns about an idea, these are not followed up or considered any further.

● **The limited vision of what diversity and plurality mean,** which results in a lack of unity and trust between cultural workers and policymakers. Urban Lab Lund, for example, noted that

<sup>1</sup> Interviews with representatives of Urban Labs Coboilab and Cike. Interview conducted during the CCSC partners’ meeting in Košice, September 2019 and Malmö, December 2019.

there is a need for such participation in Sweden, but the methodologies for design are often lacking, which in itself results in a lack of diversity in participatory processes. The result is confusion between participation and consultation. “Participation is an obligation, but every department/strategy has a different interpretation. Everyone knows it needs to be done, but they don’t know why, nor how.”<sup>2</sup>

● **Precariousness of cultural workers.** This reality was analysed in-depth in the first Co-Creation Lab of the project (see section “Recognition of cultural actors’s autonomy”, pages 42–44 of this report). The Concordia & Collaboration Magic teams sketched some aspects of precariousness that have become even more acute with onset of the Covid-19 pandemic: the lack of energy and time (of participants), the lack of motivation to participate in consultations, the risk of burn out, and the perceived lack of respect for individual cultural rights from the side of policymakers (Pleşca & Rot 2020).

### Proposals

○ In light of the precariousness of cultural workers, **cultural organisations should not be used as service providers or to complement or replace social services.** The value of their artistic and cultural work should first and foremost be valued as such before extracting any benefits for the community as a whole.

○ Local authorities need to move **from consultation to participation.** This comes primarily through an understanding of participation as a form of ownership over the projects and inclusive democratic decision-making, as well as participation in identifying the local resources necessary for policy success. In order to move around this, a starting point is investing in departmental flexibility and collaboration by, for example, formalising the departmental exchanges between the culture and other departments such as those supported by Urban Labs Lund and Skåne.

○ Give **responsibility to participants** and, even more so, establish a concrete output at the beginning of the participatory process. As Coboilab analyses, “having a process to work and experiment with bits of help, the team understands the challeng-

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with representatives of Urban Labs Coboilab and Lund. Interviews conducted during the CCSC partners’ meeting in Košice, September 2019.

es; it allows the identification and participation of the people who are affected by those problems, the co-design, prototyping, and creation of coalitions of stakeholders who can support the process” (Urban Lab Coboï 2020, 3). This would also clarify which roles should be in place to coordinate the participation and involvement of stakeholders in the project.

○ **The cost of participation needs to be addressed.** Participatory processes are labour-intensive, and as such necessitate compensation which could be provided, for example, in the form of in-kind support in training. Non-financial remuneration has already been pointed out as a necessity by Urban Labs Ambasada and Hablarenarte. The Concordia team in the first Co-Creation Lab, for example, mentioned that in-kind contributions that directly support activities which enhance participation and inclusion are more likely to promote a sense of purpose and belonging. Throughout its workshops in 2019, Urban Lab Skåne understood the importance of education as a form of in-kind remuneration of the participatory process. Therefore, its traineeships consisted of an educational programme for civil servants regarding the living environment, a crucial topic in the future strategy for the region. During this traineeship, the Lab provided training on cooperation and co-creation to its stakeholders in exchange for their inputs on the strategy they had provided beforehand throughout the workshops.

○ **Separate facilitators from mediators.** On the one hand, good facilitation requires good facilitators. The participatory process itself should be facilitated by someone with network building skills and the capacity of looking at challenges with a systemic perspective who can identify and generate synergies between participants. Sometimes, an internal member of the cultural organisation is the most knowledgeable about the challenge in question and thus has important facilitation abilities. Other times, the need for an external view requires a third party to act as a facilitator. One lesson learned, however, is that while facilitation is a crucial part of the process, it is also the moment where trust is the most vulnerable. Hence, as suggested by several Urban Labs, facilitators need to be involved throughout the process, regardless of their outcome.

The facilitation of participatory processes should be differentiated from the process of mediation between cultural communities and policymakers. It is indeed fundamental to have figures who are able to speak on behalf of the community. This task is

still very much attributed to highly skilled and profiled individuals outside of cultural organisations involved in participatory processes. On the contrary, a key finding for the CCSC is that this role should be redistributed and democratised by opening access to mediation to the cultural communities themselves. When accompanied by investment in qualitative analysis and research of the local context and its challenges, this can allow grassroots initiatives to develop their expertise. As Urban Lab Hablarenarte (2020, 4) points out, this “situated mediation” in policymaking, related to the cultural organisations themselves, can give shape to stronger self-reflection. However, it can also allow a connection with the local authority where cultural communities can evaluate whether those policy measures can actually be implemented or, if not, identify solutions and potential interlocutors to the local authority.

○ **Establish a core team:** When considering this specific type of “situated mediation”, it is crucial to establish a core team among cultural communities, employing a dedicated team or a diverse taskforce that includes members of the different silos who would focus on facilitating inclusive community engagement. As the example of CoboïLab and its core team, which includes municipality representatives shows, co-creating cultural policies can become more inclusive and effective by institutionalising this form of cooperation.

As Iossifidis suggests in her report, one solution could be strengthening “the democratic accountability structures: a board of trustees could be initiated, including local community members. Their meetings and feedback could also be used to develop qualitative indicators to ‘measure’ and study the lab, and as a tool/barometer of the social values emerging” (Iossifidis 2020, 53). This board of trustees, or core team, could also perform rigorous checks to ensure that the departmental bridging is respectful of the needs of cultural workers.

○ **Rethink plurality and diversity in participatory processes:** Diversity and inclusion often represent fundamental evaluation criteria in EU projects. One risk we identified is that both cultural actors and policymakers might simply tick the boxes of diversity according to quantitative criteria (mainly those of ethnic and professional diversity) in events. However, we also observed a frequent sense of disillusion when this does not result in long-term diversity. Therefore, we suggest taking a step back when investing in diversity and inclusion.

Diversity is hard to accomplish, so it is important to be realistic about expectations (Jacobson & Ershammar 2020, 5) and to be critical about the criteria for inclusion and diversity which you set. In particular: do you aim to achieve diversity in the long-term or only for the duration of an event?

Diversity as ‘positive discrimination’ in favour of underrepresented categories can help to move participatory processes from the impasse of consultation. Some Urban Labs have experimented with this approach and their experiences showed that being bold bears fruit. Urban lab Skåne, for example, held its third workshop at the IFO centre in a rural area of the Skåne region. Rural areas are often underrepresented in participatory processes, which tend to be concentrated in the main city of Malmö. While this choice required more logistics in terms of access and transportation and partly affected the number of participants, it also boosted the quality of the conversation in the participatory processes, motivated participants and created an image of trust and bonding with the region. As was pointed out by both cultural centres and public authorities when responding to the CCSC project, it is fundamental to understand the actors you are working with when aiming to achieve cultural diversity.

The **knowledge of the local territory**, or “recognising your field” (Urban Lab Hablarenarte 2020, 3), is fundamental to understanding diversity and inclusion. The mapping of cultural initiatives is a fundamental moment that should not be undermined. It supports participation by giving visibility to clusters of stakeholders and highlights the multiplicity of cultural infrastructure in a city. It helps stakeholders feel that they already belong to a network and encourages cooperation and participation. During its second workshop, for example, Urban Lab Cike<sup>3</sup> noticed how the mapping of existing cultural actors and initiatives enabled participants to see themselves as part of a ‘greater universe’.

Invest **in issues-based participatory processes**. The participation of the wider public is hard to achieve, especially in the short term. Hence, as Coboilab points out, “the engagement of a community in a lab environment comes from a sense of urgency from a specific challenge-based project or a perceived

direct benefit from participation” (Urban Lab Coboilab 2020, 3). A common challenge, if accompanied by value-driven methodologies, allows people to engage deeply with a specific urban question, invest value and collaborate with other stakeholders in the process of solving the challenge.

<sup>3</sup> Interview conducted during the CCSC partners’ meeting in Malmö, December 2019.

## New Visions of Decision-making: Homes of Commons

"We want to make the case for a new basis for the legitimisation of the EU, based on strong link with local democracies and practices of commoning and participation" / CCSC 2020, 8.

The fourth pillar of the CCSC is perhaps the most ambitious one: it tries to rethink the relationship between the local and EU levels through the three previous chapters. What would we need to improve cooperation between cultural workers and policymakers at the local and EU levels, using culture as the foundation in combination with urban commons and stronger participatory practices?

It is worth noting that the Urban Labs saw their participation in the CCSC project as a strong source of legitimacy in their local context. Hablarenarte, for example, acknowledged how an EU project gave them a new legitimacy in the eyes of municipal actors and in the context of fragile municipal authorities. Coboilab, for whom the CCSC is their first EU project, highlighted how the resources of an EU project – both in terms of finances as well as establishing new contacts and relationships – allow them to continue experimenting with bringing citizens into their space and in developing methodologies, tools and strategies.

However, the common wish for all Urban Labs was to concretise and stabilise this space of experimentation within an EU project into a concrete structure; one that would prevent the results and perhaps the achievements made during the project from fragmenting and dispersing at the end of the project; one that would defend culture as the foundation of urban life, building trust with public authorities while defending cultural actors' autonomy, truly moving from consultation to co-creation, and,

finally, turning cultural questions in cities into commons. All of these hopes need a safe space for exchange – a space that is open, inclusive and collaborative.

At the core of this issue lies the question of how to rethink decision-making. In fact, what is missing are solutions for local decision-makers, EU policymakers and cultural works to come together and decide collectively about the future of culture in Europe. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has convinced us even more that this is an urgent question, one in which the legitimacy of the EU is at stake. The growing sense of detachment from Europe and the rise of extremism in many European contexts is impossible to ignore. Many Urban Labs themselves have lived through this experience firsthand and have chosen to position their work in sharp contrast to the rise of extremism.

While choices such as the one above are fundamental in creating cohesion at the local level, the feeling of distance from EU institutions is still very present, reinforcing the **barriers between the EU and local level**. As the report of the first Co-Creation Lab highlights, when it comes to participatory processes involving EU institutions, the problem is in the persisting top-down configuration of EU-induced participatory processes, according to which EU institutions call local realities to join participatory processes. There is a growing sense among participants of being disenfranchised (Gouin & Magkou 2020).

**Maintaining a trust relationship** with EU institutions is hard. The reason lies mainly in the critical stance towards the multiplicity of European-funded events as tools to build trust towards EU institutions. "There is a prevailing impression that the EU institution is a tentacular and opaque system. [...]. The need to multiply those events bears similarities with the logic of publicity: it is negatively revealing that trust is not a given and requires incentives to obtain it which is generating even more suspicion" (Ibid, 5).

Hence, the issue is to find new spaces of communication between the local and EU levels and to think about them simultaneously. As one of the teams for the Co-Creation Lab (Baracsi & Pidoux 2020, 2) highlighted, at the centre of this process of rethinking decision-making lies the hope for the EU as a more nurturing ecosystem, like a tree, with its needs, dependents and opportunities.

As the participants of the second Co-Creation Lab also highlighted, it is precisely because of the increasing precariousness of the cultural sector that there is a need for great adaptability and flexibility in finding solutions for the sector. This suggests that a potential solution could come precisely by shifting the direction of participatory processes towards a more bottom-up approach. “Cultural organizations cannot intervene on another scale than their local scene”; the EU institutions “must find a way to come to them instead of expecting local organizations to go to them” (Gouin & Magkou 2020, 3). What we need is thus the active involvement of EU institutions in supporting commons as powerful ways for a more democratic Europe. An approach that takes culture as its foundation and inclusive participation and collaborative decision-making as its core values.

### Homes of Commons as solutions

Throughout the second year of the project, ‘Homes of Commons’ appeared as potential solutions to this lack of communication in decision-making between the local and European levels. What became clear from the experience of the Urban Labs is the necessity of thinking about spaces of encounter between the EU and local level, where the EU learns from the territories and local actors, who can in turn be empowered and play a greater role in EU decisions.

The role of Homes of Commons follows the natural path of the CCSC project. Its core vision and mission are shaped around the work and understandings of the Urban Labs. They are then expanded and made more complex with the new and international perspectives obtained during the international phase of the project.

The first Co-Creation Lab focused on sketching the concept of the Homes of Commons as:

- Safe spaces for commoning to flourish and to experiment with participation and co-creation
- Physical or digital spaces that can allow exchange between different levels and which are open to citizens, policymakers and cultural workers to collaborate and exchange
- Spaces where EU institutions’ representatives physically contribute as participants to the co-creation of policy at the local level.

In the second Co-creation Lab (18–23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020) participants sketched the mission and concrete strategies and tools of Homes of Commons as spaces embodying the various themes analysed in this report and working as a conduit of the needs and hopes of the Urban Labs.

Homes of Commons:

① Work as **an ally for local initiatives**: They work with a long-term perspective, as incubators for long-term dreams, and act as rooms for experimentation. They invest in participatory methodologies and tailored activities aiming towards inclusive community engagement at the local level. In this sense, they go beyond infrastructure, remaining aware of the fact that physical spaces for culture do not always translate into more inclusive community engagement (Pleşca & Rot 2020, 2).

② Interpret culture in a broad sense, **targeting inequalities** and prioritising **diversity and inclusion**. For Homes of Commons, **culture is a political act**: it is tightly linked to a better quality of life for its cities, and thus questions the patriarchal, colonial and market-oriented vision of the cultural sector in Europe.

③ Act as a **mediator and translator** of local initiatives to both the local authorities and at the EU level. They work to bring Europe closer to citizens and cultural operators. They act as effective tools to decentralise EU institutions and foster a dialogue with the local contexts, to communicate and collaborate simultaneously with EU institutions, local authorities and citizens. As Team 7 of the first Co-Creation Lab in June 2020 suggested (Baracsi & Pidoux 2020,3), the EU functions in a blue zone (rigid) and the local initiatives operate in a yellow zone (agile). The green zone of the Home of Commons must act as a connector. This green zone represents the power to make connections and to create dialogues. This green zone is a strategy, a role and a practice.

④ Are **spaces of experimentation of policymaking**.

To use a term previously employed by Urban Lab Skåne, Homes of Commons are spaces of “Learning – action – policy lab” (Jacobson & Ershammar 2020, 8). This means they act as spaces where collaboration, exchange, policy reflections and design are part of the same process among multiple stakeholders. Or, to put it in Urban Lab Hablarenarte’s words, Homes of Commons could enact a participatory and ‘situated’ vision to make policies based on three main stages.

- Recognition of the field: where representatives identify capabilities and lack of capabilities in the mechanisms of collaboration.
- Sharing and putting in common: bringing experiences to a wider field, identifying commonalities between the different agents.
- Giving shape to desires and self-reflection: to formalise concrete and directed policies and, eventually, to evaluate if the measures can be implemented or, if not, identify to whom this matter should be addressed.

## The Future of Homes of Commons and the Legacy of the CCSC<sup>1</sup>

The question regarding the Homes of Commons represents the culmination of the two-year CCSC project. The Homes of Commons lie at the heart of the project's policy recommendations, and their continuation is at the heart of the last months of the project.

We recognised that cultural commons produce immeasurable civil, social and political value, and all across Europe they can serve as engines for trans-territorial and cross-level participation. At the same time, cultural spaces and initiatives that are inspired by the commons are under attack because of the pressure of the market, which pushes towards the precariousness of cultural labour and financial speculation in urban spaces. Moreover, in many instances, commons are threatened by adverse political conditions at the local, regional or state level.

Therefore, we concluded that **commons**:<sup>1</sup>

- need funding and recognition from the EU. Protecting the commons should be mainstreamed in EU cultural programmes as a key driver for the democratic legitimacy of EU institutions and the inclusiveness of EU decision-making processes.

- can only survive if a strong degree of autonomy is recognised by the commoners. This means that we need mechanisms of funding and recognition that do not interfere with the acknowledgment and protection of commoners' self-organisation.

### A certification system for the commons

To address these two needs, the CCSC advocates for the creation of a **certification system for the commons**. This certification system can be used both at the local and EU levels. Firstly, it is dedicated to allowing commons to mutually recognise themselves, expand their networks and build joint initiatives. Secondly, it builds a reputation for commons within their broader community of reference. Thirdly, it can also be used by the EU institutions to recognise and fund the commons.

<sup>1</sup> This section has been written in collaboration with Maria Francesca De Tullio (University of Antwerp).

EU projects need rules and criteria that can help them to identify and support commons initiatives and thus avoid ‘commons washing’. This expression indicates the use of the term ‘commons’ to label initiatives that have the external appearance of open, inclusive and democratic participation, but where in fact only superficially tackle and implement these issues, thereby reinforcing the barriers to participation analysed in this report.

The certification system interprets the recognition of commons as a collective bottom-up advocacy exercise, rather than as a top-down concession.

This system is characterised by:

- building peer-to-peer networks of knowledge exchange, rather than top-down control
- the absence of a distinction between ‘experts’ and ‘commoners’, valuing informal realities as true local experts
- self-regulated political values, negotiated within the communities of commoners, rather than a reliance on standard quantitative indicators established by an external party
- making costs accessible for grassroots initiatives that wish to be recognised as commons
- ensuring that bureaucratic application procedures are more accessible.

To implement this certification system, we developed a proposal for a **participatory guarantee system for commons**, inspired by the Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs) that have been developed by agroecological movements concerning the certification of organic food. PGS is a system of quality assurance “based on the active participation of farmers, consumers, rural advisors, local authorities: they come together to make decisions, visit farms, support each other and check that farmers are producing according to an Organic Standard” established by the PSG networks themselves (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN 2018, 1).

The PGS inspired us to develop a participatory guarantee system for Homes of Commons as a low-cost, locally based and bottom-up mechanism that allows for fully community-driven recognition.

This proposal is developed in the **policy recommendations of the CCSC project, addressed to the EU**. The objective of the recommendations is to suggest ways in which EU institutions can: ① support commons by building infrastructures

that enhance the establishment and networking of Homes of Commons; ② recognise a participatory guarantee system for Homes of Commons.

## Prototyping Homes of Commons

A participatory guarantee system for Homes of Commons needs a community-driven movement. It cannot be established solely by the EU institutions: communities also need tools to grow their own networks for mutual recognition and advocacy. Therefore, to elaborate the content of the Homes of Commons further, the CCSC consortium focused in the last months of the project on the participatory **prototyping of Homes of Commons** from the perspectives of communities.

The starting point for this prototyping is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution since, by their very nature, commons are an open and variegated concept. Hence, the prototyping includes a variety of political objectives and tools that organisations can use in their quest to become Homes of Commons.

① With the support of Zemos98,<sup>2</sup> we worked on a series of eleven political objectives that establish a gradual process towards the implementation of Homes of Commons.

② The CCSC partners also developed a **toolkit addressed to communities** that want to build Homes of Commons (or transform themselves into Homes of Commons) and networks of Homes of Commons. The toolkit helps them to facilitate their self-assessment, mutual recognition and struggle for institutional acknowledgement. Among them, the toolkit includes a self-assessment tool for organisations which will allow them to evaluate their position concerning the eleven political sectors and will guide them in choosing the sector in which they want to work. The toolkit will also facilitate the implementation of the various tools in the organisation through the elaboration of exercises and learning materials.

③ The next step in the prototyping process is the definition of a **pilot phase** for the experimentation of the toolkit. This phase entails the choice of organisations among the CCSC Urban Labs (with the possibility of also involving external organisations) as pilots. They will be accompanied by a mentoring organisation

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Zemos98, see <http://zemos98.org/en/>. Website accessed on 13 December 2020.

(to be confirmed in January 2021) for the creation of a tailored plan for implementing some of the tools indicated in the toolkit and test the possibilities of becoming Homes of Commons

## Conclusions

As the prototyping demonstrates, commons require a shared commitment and responsibility from both communities and institutions.

The CCSC navigated this issue by identifying the shortcomings and barriers that hinder dialogue between cultural workers and policymakers, and between local needs and EU institutions. It tested methodologies, researched solutions, and tested and implemented them in exchange and collaboration with all partners.

Starting from the very local experience of the Urban Labs, the project culminates with a proposal for valorising and supporting commons across Europe. This is an urgent need, stemming from the difficulties which the sector is facing in the current climate. Supporting culture in its close relationship with social rights, mutual aid, cooperation and inclusion is a fundamental choice to be made. It has the potential to unleash new imaginings and dreams for finding solutions to the highly local European challenges, needs and desires. Furthermore, it holds the great responsibility of advocating for a vision of culture as the true foundation of social life in Europe.

The European Union has the opportunity to be a partner in these solutions, by recognising, protecting and nurturing the Homes of Commons as ecosystems for the promotion of sustainable culture, inclusiveness and a better quality of life for all citizens.

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POLICY  
RECOMMEN-  
DATIONS

# **Introduction Commoning Culture and a Commons- based Cultural Europe**

Pascal Gielen



In tandem with the Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities (CCSC) book *Commons. Between Dreams and Reality*<sup>1</sup> and the policy analysis *Cultural Spaces and Cities as Commons*,<sup>2</sup> this publication is a further exploration of our recommendations for the development of a Homes of Commons certificate at the European Union (EU) level. These recommendations are aimed at EU institutions and at the European Commission in particular. They are complementary to the CCSC policy toolkit<sup>3</sup> which has been designed specifically for cultural organisations and spaces.

This document starts with a detailed description of what Homes of Commons might look like and how best to create them from a policy point of view. We then look at existing EU cultural programmes through the lens of the commons. How do these programmes meet the values of the commons today, and how can they be improved?

As with the entire CCSC project, this report assumes that culture forms the foundation of Europe. **Culture as a system of the production of meaning gives citizens the opportunity to give meaning to themselves and their environment** and thus to give meaning to their own existence. We therefore interpret culture in the first place in a broad anthropological way as the whole range of processes of the production of meaning.

From this point of view, commons also represent a specific value framework or a ‘commoning culture’.

Commons are spaces where the precarity of the cultural sector can be challenged together with many other forms of precarity and poverty. In these spaces, cultural workers can meet other workers and commoners who are struggling for social rights, thus building alliances that aim to amplify everyone’s voices.<sup>4</sup> Commoners and cultural actors both undertake a labour of care and concrete solidarity towards society as a whole.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, they are on the frontline in the struggle to fulfil our collective needs and desires; on the other hand, and for the same reason, they also risk being instrumentalised by the institutions

<sup>1</sup> De Tullio 2020a.

<sup>2</sup> Torre, 2020. The outputs will be published on the CCSC website: <https://www.spacesandcities.com/publications/>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://httpswwwwspacesandcities-toolkit.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Micciarelli and D’Andrea 2020.

<sup>5</sup> De Angelis 2019.

that exploit that labour of care in order to avoid undertaking more serious efforts in social protection and to avoid responding to society's needs themselves.

For these reasons, both commons and culture can gain new power from a mutual alliance that aims to transform political institutions and subvert the current economic system – which is based on competition and exclusion – by emancipating care labour as a key for well-being and non-competitive human relationships. Therefore, our objective is to favour a reciprocal rapprochement between the two. On the one hand, commons should be aware of culture as a necessary foundation of their activity: while we feel stuck in the current market order, art keeps the possibility of different worlds and narratives open. On the other hand, cultural labour can strengthen its claims by linking its struggles to a broader movement that calls for an income as well as environmental and social rights for everyone.

It is from this starting point that we outline the contours for Homes of Commons and comment on current EU cultural programmes. After both have been tested against these values, we will look at what is needed from a commons perspective to improve support for cultural actors in the EU. In this second phase, we interpret culture much more narrowly, specifically as the field of cultural players (artists, cultural organisations etc...) in Europe. However, this double lens through which we see culture means that we also go much further than the cultural sector. We want to investigate what it means to call for a commoning culture as the basis for our societies – in other words, what such a culture could mean for the economy, for politics or for education.

We are convinced that culture plays a crucial role in all these areas – and that what is understood today by economics, politics or democracy could well be understood completely differently if reframed under a commoning perspective. In other words, we would reverse the prevailing view. While Europe today still understands culture primarily as an economic good, we see economics as a cultural affair in which certain values (for example, the belief in economic growth), norms (for example, free trade and competition) and human behaviour (for example, profiteering) are expressed. The very reason for this specific behaviour depends on how we were schooled in very specific sense-making processes. So, it is all a matter of culture, just as the concept

of 'homo economicus' is nothing but a culturally constructed meaning. From this point of view, cultural programmes at the EU level, as well as other levels of government, can play a key role in rethinking our economic and political system or, more broadly, our way of living together. It is also from this perspective that we look at the role of both Homes of Commons and existing EU cultural programmes. How could they function as a lever to enable the introduction of a widely supported commoning culture in Europe?

### Commoning Culture

What values are represented by a commoning culture? It may sound grotesque, but in fact, the values commoners endorse are not that far removed from the trinity of values that the French Revolution already espoused – namely Freedom, Equality and Fraternity. Within the commons, however, those three values are given a specific translation. For commoners, for example, freedom does not mean individual liberty, but rather the **freedom** of a collective or community to govern itself. Moreover, it is about the right and also the will to be able to self-manage vital material and immaterial resources (such as water, energy, language, culture). Autonomy is therefore crucial for commoners and that is why a lot of attention is also paid to democracy in what follows. The current liberal representative form of democracy is not sufficient for commoners, which is why they are looking for other, more radical forms of democratic self-governance.

The second value, **equality**, is of course closely related to that of democratic decision-making. After all, it assumes that everyone should be able to participate in decision-making processes, regardless of social origin, gender or cultural background. Hence, participation and means of stimulating inclusion are central to our analysis. Commoners emphasise the collective "use value"<sup>6</sup> of the sources they manage and try to pursue an open source policy based on that value as far as possible. Equality also means that policy must always be redefined from the bottom up. In other words, marginalised groups must be given the opportunity to manage and control their own resources.

<sup>6</sup> As is well-known, this form of value refers to the ability of an object to actually fulfil a need or purpose.

However, commoning principles can also lead to exclusion and exclusivity. The following explains how Homes of Commons can try to counter this.

Finally, commoners translate the rather male-centred notion of **fraternity** as solidarity. The commons stands or falls on one basic principle – that of reciprocity. Thanks to appropriate self-managed governance, those who use common resources are responsible for contributing to their preservation, which can sustain commoners in the long run. However, this simple principle applies to the global level as well as the local level. For example, it means that we cannot exploit – or exhaust – resources (such as labour – including reproductive and care labour – or natural resources) for the advantage of those who are already privileged; instead, we need a ‘political ecology’ based on the needs of communities that, until now, have suffered natural and social damage. This also means that commoners try to ensure social, economic and ecological sustainability keeping a special eye on those who are unable to contribute to the commons because of age, limitations or social and family situation. By rethinking the welfare state, commoners therefore focus on reciprocity between generations, social classes, the global north and south, but always starting from concrete sources that they manage and share locally (for example, a city garden or a building) or globally (for example, Wikipedia).

### **A Commons-based Cultural Europe**

Through the above-mentioned values of a commoning culture, the following text will lay out the building blocks for the Homes of Commons and analyse or “test” current EU culture programmes. In the second phase, however, we will switch to a narrower cultural view. Then, based on these values, we will put the European cultural sector under the spotlight to examine how commoning principles (and a cultural commons policy) could better support this sector. After all, while freedom or autonomy are pursued as important values in the cultural sector, many policy directives, instruments, legislation and subsidy regulations, but also so-called free-market conditions, tend to curtail that autonomy. This is evident from our analysis of European cultural programmes.<sup>7</sup> How could Homes of Commons

ensure – and perhaps even enforce – more self-governance for the cultural sector?

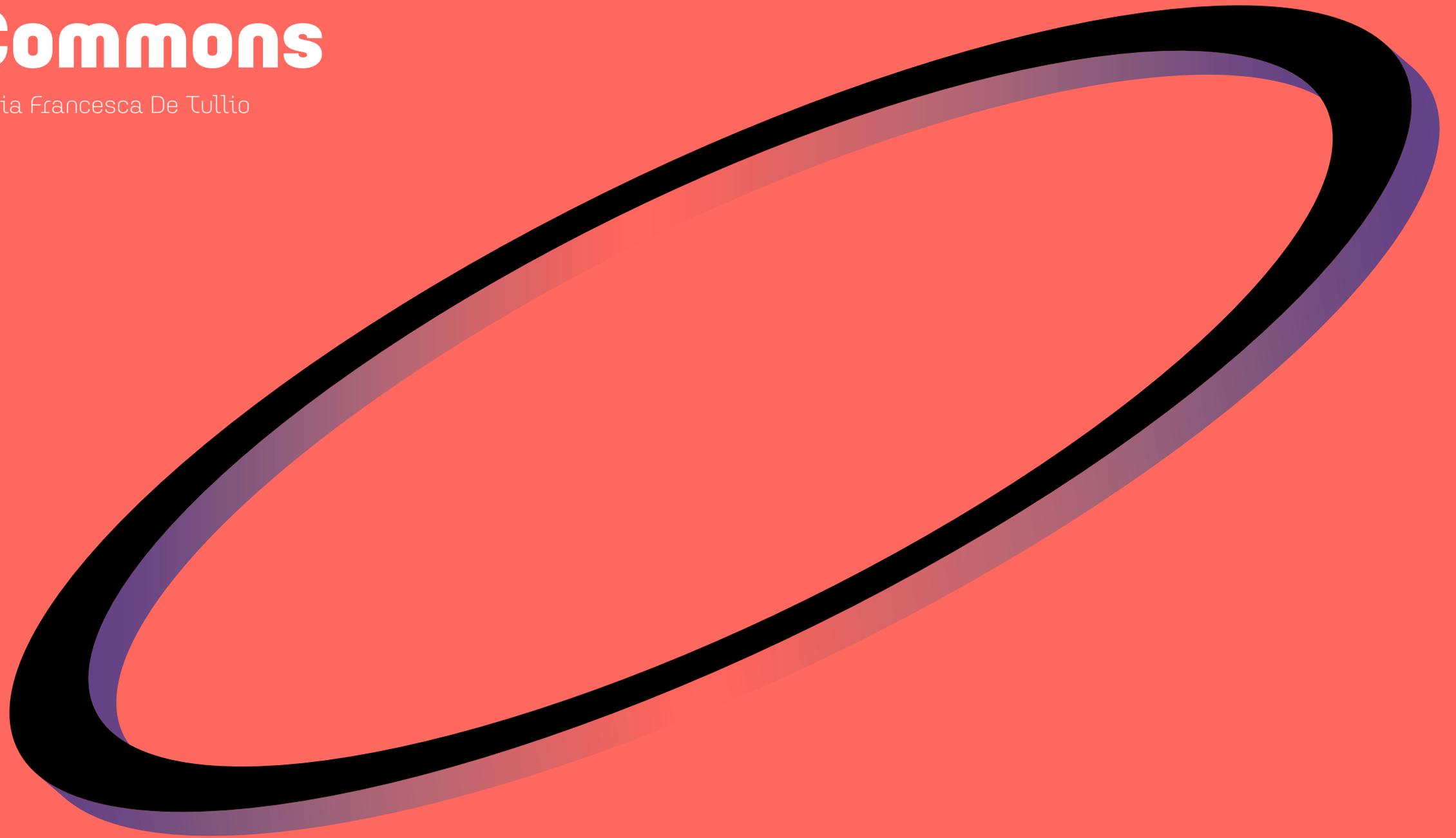
Equality is also high on the agenda in the cultural sector through the notion of participation, as well as on the policy agenda of European programmes. In the following chapters, we look at how this participation is understood by the European Commission (in its cultural programmes) and how it can possibly be redefined and improved via Homes of Commons. However, on a socio-economic level, we not only see a great inequality within the cultural sector – as a whole, this sector dangles from the bottom half of the social ladder. In particular, artists and grassroots cultural organisations ended the last decade in an increasingly precarious position. This situation requires new forms of solidarity and the setting up of innovative solidarity mechanisms. Homes of Commons could also play a role in this area. For example, how could social security be developed on the basis of a commoning culture? What role could a basic income play in this? And how could Europe strengthen the cultural sector through commoning principles? Where is the EU already doing this, and where could it do better?

Of course, it is impossible to offer definitive answers to all of these questions. However, both the 2008 financial crisis and the current coronavirus crisis make the search for answers more urgent than ever. It is already clear to us that it is not only the cultural sector that is suffering, but that Europe and in fact the entire world is creaking under the strain of a system where our policy-makers, business leaders, financial institutions, but also citizens themselves (as consumers) have marched in recent decades. It seems that we are back today in what the Italian philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci once called an “organic crisis”. This is a crisis in which one crisis (either ecological, economic, social, viral, etc.) follows another at breakneck speed, while the prevailing political system continues to believe in policy remedies and measures that in fact lie at the very heart of that very crisis. However, as Gramsci notes, an organic crisis is also marked by the lack of a proven functioning alternative system. The Homes of Commons could plant the seeds of an alternative path. However, we recognise only too well that we are at the beginning of a long and winding road and that CCSC is only a tiny droplet that could help the seed of the commons to grow and flourish.

<sup>7</sup> See, among others, Gielen 2020.

# Homes of Commons

Maria Francesca De Tullio



01

## Introduction

These recommendations put forward the concept of Homes of Commons as cultural and creative spaces of encounter between the EU, local institutions and the community at large. Homes of Commons are spaces – namely cultural and creative spaces – that also provide access to digital spaces. They are allocated as resources for autonomous, open and horizontal communities – including cultural and creative workers – to share knowledge and means of production, to initiate actions of solidarity and mutual aid and also to prototype their own policy proposals. Their role is to amplify the voices of communities and cultural actors in order to build a bottom-up agenda for local and EU institutions, starting from the needs that Homes of Commons are aiming to address and the policy choices that they are recommending.

*“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.”*  
/CCSC Charter of Principles<sup>1</sup>

Building a bottom-up agenda requires the EU to correct the present imbalances by actively supporting Homes of Commons and civil participation. Through Homes of Commons, the EU can learn about local contexts and needs and cooperate with civil society in prototyping solutions, thereby becoming more responsive, gaining consent and reinvigorating its democratic legitimacy. In that sense, Homes of Commons also represent “communities of practice” and “transition arenas” where innovative policy-making can be tested on the issues that crop up in each common context.

The EU recognises local institutions as key interlocutors for EU cultural policies given their geographical and political proximity to cultural workers and initiatives. In that sense, the EU makes international multi-level cooperation a key enabler for cultural rights. However, EU intervention also affects the content of local policies. Indeed, EU programmes – despite their formally non-binding nature – actually influence the behaviour and decisions of local authorities by means of economic

incentives: since local institutions face a structural scarcity of resources, they are pushed to apply for EU funds and therefore to comply with the agenda, criteria and requirements of the EU.

This form of EU “soft power” is largely outwith the control of local constituencies (and even less so for people who are not entitled to political rights), since EU funding programmes are intrinsically more opaque due to the technical content of the decisions and their multi-level nature.<sup>2</sup>

Under these conditions, we see the strong need for measures that empower and mutually connect local communities and cultural actors – in other words, the people to whom all democratic institutions are ultimately answerable. Therefore, our recommendations will tackle EU cultural programmes with an approach that is intentionally weighted in favour of Homes of Commons and participation. This imbalance is necessary since we recognise that, in the present moment, there are important barriers and inequalities that need to be addressed in order to give back decision-making power to communities.

*“We believe it is necessary to investigate effective measures and indicators that value commoners as key players in the EU projects, as well as acknowledging commons’ expertise as equally relevant as traditional institutions of research and policy.”* /De Tullio and Torre 2020

With this in mind, our research has highlighted that there are at least two forms of protection that commons need from institutions, and thus from EU institutions: funding and recognition intended as self-recognition, mutual recognition and institutional recognition.<sup>3</sup>

*“Within the CCSC project, we developed two main visions of ‘recognition’, tightly and necessarily interlinked. Firstly, we understand it as a deep self-understanding of the features and the work in progress of an organization. [...] What appears is a necessity to provide adequate tools for organizations to understand their features and work towards the alignment with the ideals of commons, to transform their work towards a sustainable, collaborative, and democratic one. [...] A second yet fundamental side of recognition concerns the relation by the local authority.”* /Torre 2020

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.spacesandcities.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CCSC-Charter-of-Principles.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Gouin and Magkou 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Torre 2020.

At the same time, while proposing institutional funding and recognition for Homes of Commons, we acknowledge that we have to remain aware of the fact that Homes of Commons need to be supported in a way that is able to preserve their autonomy with respect to both market and institutions. They are a stimulus and a guide for more egalitarian and transformative public policies, but they are not a substitute for institutions' social duties. Therefore, these recommendations aim to neutralise two main risks:

❶ **'Commons washing'**: Due to barriers – territorial as well as legal and procedural – that make commons invisible to EU institutions, it becomes hard for the EU to distinguish commons from other experiences that appear and name themselves as commons, but are the outcome of a top-down decision – self-declared participatory – or are well-established organisations that work instead with corporate-like criteria.<sup>4</sup>

❷ **'Commons fix'**<sup>5</sup>: Commons are transformative because they question the existing positions of economic and political power; however, the public and private sectors are tempted to support them only insofar as they can be instrumentalised as a “buffer” absorbing distress and avoiding social conflict. In conclusion, this document advocates for broader social measures in the cultural field. In that sense, our line of argument is connected to the claim often made by cultural actors that the amount of resources invested by the EU is not sufficient to guarantee culture in the terms outlined in our introduction. According to a study commissioned by the EU in 2016, culture generated 5.3 per cent of EU Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>6</sup> However, the European Commission itself recognised that – due to the scarcity of funds – “a large number of good applications are rejected” in cultural programmes.<sup>7</sup>

In 2018, the European Parliament's Culture Committee called for an increase in spending on culture, proposing the doubling

of the Creative Europe budget from €1.4 bn to €2.8 bn.<sup>8</sup> We therefore praise the increase to a dedicated budget of more than €2.4 bn and recommend it should also be invested in the Homes of Commons and cultural tools that are more participatory in nature. Moreover, we invite the European Commission to join the European Parliament's call to allocate €2.8 bn to culture.

<sup>4</sup> De Tullio and Torre, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> De Angelis, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Austrian Institute for SME Research and VVA Europe, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Mid-term evaluation of the Creative Europe programme (2014–2020), COM(2018) 248 final, 30 April. 2018.

<sup>8</sup> European Parliament legislative resolution of 28 March 2019 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Creative Europe programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013, COM(2018)0366 – C8-0237/2018 – 2018/0190(COD), 28 March 2019.

# A Participatory Guarantee System as a Certificate for Homes of Commons

These questions and challenges led us to develop a special certification system for commons – namely a Participatory Guarantee System – allowing the EU to recognise and fund Homes of Commons as hybrid (both physical and digital) spaces of encounter allowing the EU itself to get closer to local communities and join as a participant in inclusive democratic dynamics.<sup>1</sup>

## What are Homes of Commons?

Homes of Commons are based upon commons and serve as a way to articulate a resource, a community or a governance structure.

As has been demonstrated by previous experiences, such as the Italian Teatro Valle or l'Asilo, cultural spaces are at the forefront of a movement that promotes a social and political understanding of commons. Resources directly managed and used by cultural workers and the community at large in open, accessible and horizontal ways are spontaneously developed by collective intelligence as they are being used.<sup>2</sup> That way, they recognise culture and political participation as fundamental rights, to which everyone is entitled.

Therefore, common cultural spaces are not only a way to create a community. Common spaces are material resources that are subtracted from real estate market pressure and made socially accessible for producers, audiences and people in general; therefore, the benefits of these resources are redistributed, and commons become shared means of cultural production, hubs for collaborative learning and doing, but also places for non-competitive forms of social relationships and resources for mutual aid and fulfilment of social rights.

*“Commons are not just a ‘third way’ beyond state and market failures; they are a vehicle for claiming ownership in the conditions needed for life and its reproduction. The demands for greater democracy since the 1970s now exploding worldwide in the face of the social and economic crisis, are really grassroots democratic demands to control the means of social reproduction.” / De Angelis 2013*

For these reasons, commons are an opportunity to tackle the precarity of the cultural sector together with the pending issues of democratic participation, even at the EU level.

Commons emerged as a flexible concept which needs to be constantly adaptable to the community’s self-determination and self-definition. As was pointed out in the CCSC policy analysis, our research shows that the recognition and self-recognition of a space as a commons is neither easy nor obvious, but implies above all a path of self-reflection and relationships with other spaces and societal actors.

In that sense, the Homes of Commons certification should not entail a clear-cut boundary between “commons” and “non-commons”. Indeed, commoning is not about fitting ideal models; it is instead an everyday self-reflexive practice aimed at negotiating values in a world that is not commons-based.

Therefore, in order to concretise Homes of Commons and to make them operational in establishing a system of EU funding and recognition, we undertook a prototyping process with the support of Zemos98.<sup>3</sup>

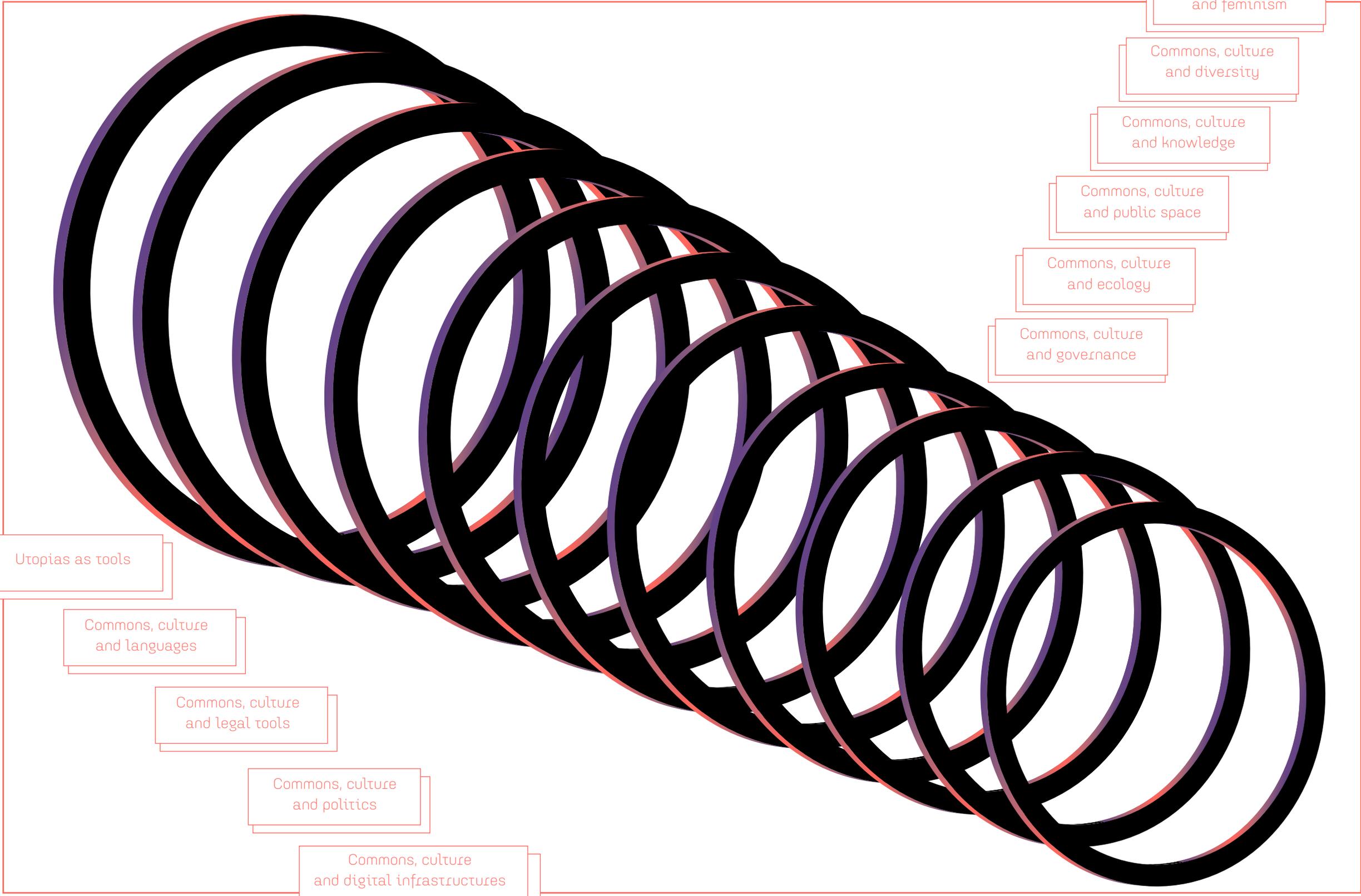
Along with the necessary openness of commons, we conceived the implementation of Homes of Commons as a gradual process that aimed to improve the fulfilment of eleven political objectives without establishing hierarchies and priorities between them. However, we acknowledge that each objective should at least be taken into account – and, to a certain extent, realised – by each organisation that wants to establish a Home of Commons.

These eleven objectives were identified as an articulation of the main principles of horizontality, openness and accessibility of commons, during both the internal research and debate –

<sup>1</sup> Rocha, Crosta and Acosta Alvarado 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Cozzolino and Parenti 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Zemos98 is a Spanish cooperative that works on cultural production and social research: <http://zemos98.org/en/about/>.



especially concerning the CCSC Charter of Principles – as well as the co-creation policy events in which external participants are involved. For this reason, the eleven objectives also form the basis of the CCSC policy toolkit which aims to support organisations that want to engage in the process of recognising themselves as possible Homes of Commons.

The CCSC policy toolkit represents the reverse side of these recommendations and is aimed at communities. Through this work, we exemplified how communities can exchange and adopt these learnings to achieve the eleven political objectives of Homes of Commons. A pivotal element of the toolkit is the self-assessment tool, which allows different actors and organisations to become aware of their conditions and then autonomously choose to allocate their resources to work on different objectives through the tools provided in the toolkit.

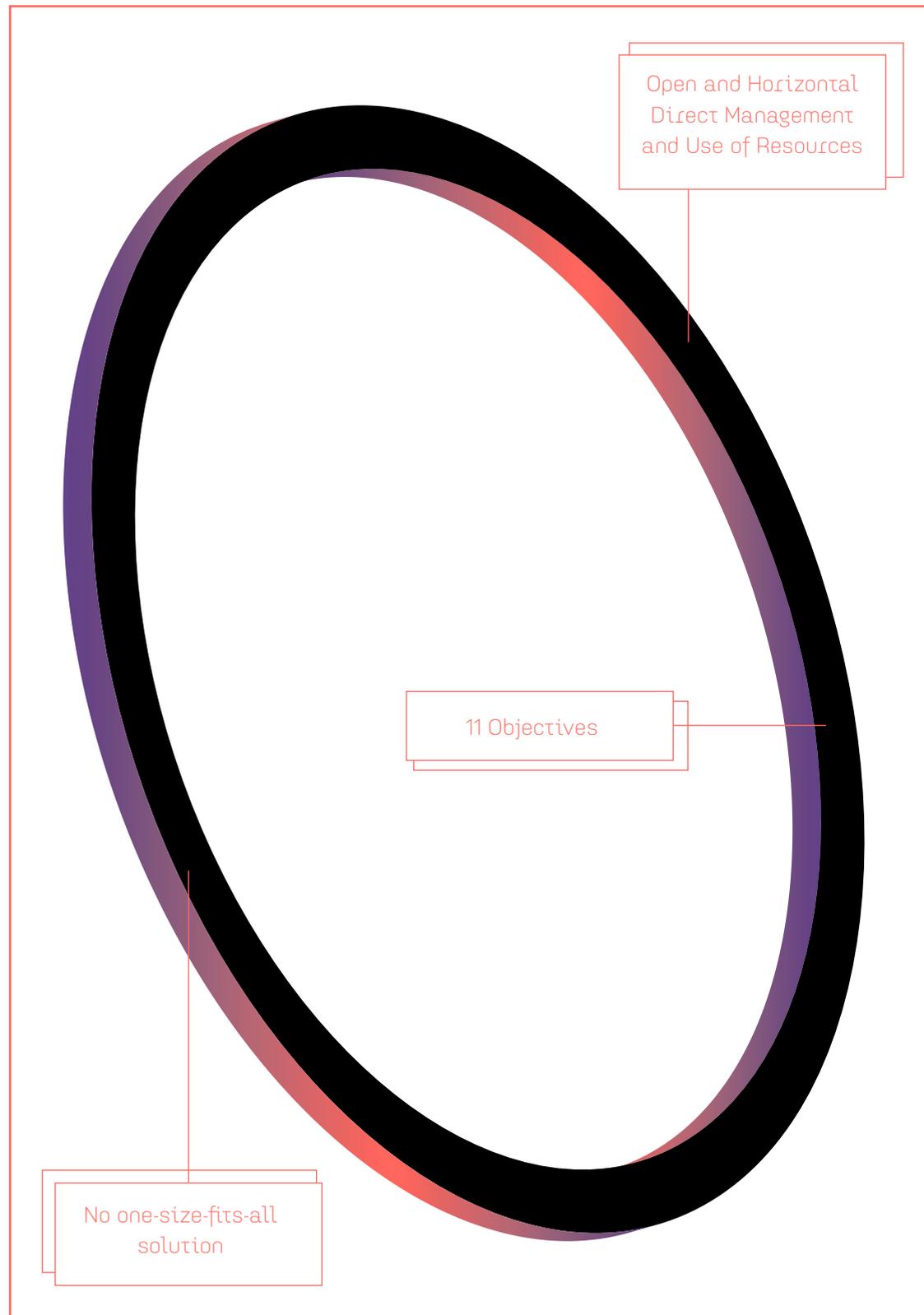
### Certifying Homes of Commons – A lesson from ecological farming

Homes of Commons, as described above, require specific mechanisms to be recognised which are consistent with a grassroots and non-competitive approach. Therefore, there are several criteria upon which the Homes of Commons certification needs to be based:

- peer-to-peer networks of knowledge exchange rather than top-down control
- the absence of a distinction between “experts” and “commoners”, valuing informal realities as true local experts
- self-regulated political values, negotiated within the communities of commoners, rather than the reliance on standard quantitative indicators established from an external party
- accessible costs for grassroots experiences that wish to be recognised as commons
- accessible bureaucratic application procedures
- accessible for informal organisations.

In order to implement a certification with the above requirements, we have developed a proposal for a **participatory guarantee system for commons**. This proposal is inspired by the Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs) that have been developed by agroecological movements concerning the certi-





fication of organic food. PGSs have also received formal legal recognition in some countries such as Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

PGS are systems of quality assurance “based on the active participation of farmers, consumers, rural advisors, local authorities: they come together to make decisions, visit farms, support each other and check that farmers are producing according to an Organic Standard” established by the PGS networks themselves.<sup>5</sup> They are an alternative to traditional third-party systems whose costs are unaffordable for many farmers and whose standards are defined in a top-down manner, often by private institutions connected to organised large-scale distribution.<sup>6</sup>

*“The basis of each PGS studied is... the continuous social control. What varies is the mechanisms through which this social control is systematised in order to generate trust and guarantee outside of the involved groups [...]. Visits, that usually last a half-day or a full day, are centered around the review of the accomplishment of established norms and, especially, an exchange of knowledge and problematics, so that they are transformed in moments for learning, mutual awareness and exchange of experiences.” /Cuellar Padilla 2010*

The characteristics of the mechanism establish a paradigm of mutual aid and peer review rather than external control:

- the certification is given to the overall attitude of the producer, rather than to the individual product
- periodic visits are made by groups of producers (and, sometimes, by consumers and technical persons) rather than third-party experts and are complemented by continuous social control
- the evaluation is made by other producers rather than certification entities
- standards are developed by the community of producers and consumers rather than by a certification entity
- procedures are transparent and are not covered by non-disclosure obligations
- the objective of the visits is not only to give a label – useful for the producers themselves, other producers, consumers and

<sup>4</sup> Boza Martinez 2013.

<sup>5</sup> FAO and IFOAM 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Caruso 2018; Lo Cascio 2018.

institutions – but also to empower producers in a broader sense by strengthening networks of peer-learning and mutual aid.

Finally, sanctions for the infringement of the standards could lead to exclusion but also to mechanisms to accompany the producers in case of difficulties and involuntary deviation from the standards.

In summary, basic principles of PGS are as follows<sup>7</sup>:

- shared vision: producers and consumers shall have common principles on the management of the system
- participation: actors interested in the products are granted responsibilities within the system
- transparency: procedures shall be clear
- trust: interested actors have to believe in the validity of the certificate in order to be involved in the system
- pedagogical process
- horizontality.

The PGS experience inspired us to elaborate and propose a Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of Commons based on networks of mutual recognition among Homes of Commons themselves as a low-cost, locally-based and bottom-up mechanism allowing a community-driven certification.

## Three Steps Towards a Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of Commons

The Participatory Guarantee System, as described above, requires networks that are not conceived as intermediaries, but as a means of building relationships of mutual aid that enhance the voice of each Home of Commons.

Such a mechanism is not something that the EU can accomplish in the short term, since it requires building an infrastructure which strengthens Homes of Commons and enables them to advocate for their recognition.

For this reason, we designed a path in three phases:

● **Phase 1: ‘The Foundations of Homes of Commons’** is a necessary shift of mindset through which the EU can identify and address the barriers and threats that affect Homes of Commons in their everyday coexistence with public sector and market.

● **Phase 2 (from 2021 to 2027): ‘Infrastructure for a Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of Commons’** aims to overcome structural barriers and build networks of mutual empowerment. This process of collective knowledge building can start by forming small networks of collaboration and add nodes of connection to transfer knowledge, support and resources through experiences of prototyping.

● **Phase 3 (from 2028 to 2034): ‘A Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of Commons’** can start when networks of Homes of Commons have implemented the necessary procedures and standards. In this final phase, the Participatory Guarantee System is fully in force as a means of recognising and funding commons at the EU level. However, EU action is needed to accompany its implementation and monitoring, but this should not jeopardise the experimentation of grassroots peer learning processes.

Therefore, the **period from 2021 to 2027** should be used to lay out the material bases and the policy debates necessary to include the Participatory Guarantee System in the EU Plan for

2028-2034. Moreover, the period from 2021 to 2027 would also one in which the EU could consider a further increase in funding to cultural activities in general – and most specifically when they push the values of commons to be used from 2028 to 2034.

### Phase 1: The Foundations of Homes of Commons

*“Competition generates death,  
cooperation generates fruits.”*

*/Corrado Gemini, quoted in Micciarelli and D’Andrea 2020*

During our studies, we found that many obstacles for culture and participatory processes derive from structural factors:

① Social inequalities, deepened by recent economic crises, are pushing an increasing number of people below the poverty line. This is especially true in the field of cultural and artistic labour which has also been affected by the precarisation of cognitive work.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, social inequalities are deepened by territorial divides between different areas of Europe and – within each area – between cities, suburbs and rural areas. Under these conditions, ensuring the involvement of the most disadvantaged communities in participatory processes is barely conceivable, given that they need most of their time and energy to satisfy their essential needs.

Thus, income is the first priority of commons, as a way of safeguarding cultural production and democratic participation:

*“The introduction of a conditional basic income must be thought of as a means of redistributing wealth, both from the point of view of citizens and from that of states. Only in this way can it be adjusted to the vital survival income for all. But that is still not enough: we want bread, roses and even stages where we dream!” / de Goyzueta, Micciarelli and Valentini 2020*

② EU budget rules impose a financial balance without establishing sound procedures for a “social-ecological balance” and/or a “diversity balance”, which would require states and local institutions to achieve key performance indicators in terms of social and environmental policies. As a result, the administration of public resources at the EU and local level is biased in

favour of economic efficiency. Therefore, when public funding, properties and services are entrusted to private actors, the administration’s “trust” is mainly based upon criteria of financial stability rather than social needs; of competition rather than cooperation, ex ante plans rather than open participatory processes, and rigid accounting rules in place of social control. Commons have demonstrated that different patterns of “trust” are possible. An outstanding example of this is Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS) which – thanks to broad horizontal collaboration and collective oversight – has been proven to ensure high-quality products, to save public resources in comparison with competition and third-party certifications,<sup>2</sup> and to serve needs that the public and private sectors had neglected.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, competitive procedures have generated enclosures and, therefore, a “tragedy of anticommons”<sup>4</sup>; i.e., the duplication of efforts and/or expenditure due to the inability to reuse existing proprietary solutions, and the slowdown in technological growth due to the fragmentation of property rights and the consequent lack of cooperation.

These barriers are even more present in the digital environment, where big market actors have the power to act as gatekeepers of information, thereby depriving users of the control over their data through collection in bulk and the subsequent profiting from the use of personal information. Moreover, the digital divide is a major barrier across the EU in terms of the unequal distribution of both connectivity and literacy.

All these problems cannot be addressed by commons and cultural programmes alone; instead, they require the EU to enact its own social policies and steer Member States’ policies in order to ensure that all fundamental rights are guaranteed, including cultural and social rights.

However, as was mentioned in section 1, Homes of Commons are places where the possibility for such structural transformation remains open. Therefore, we present below five ideas that address the most urgent threats and needs for commons: non-recognition and/or eviction of community spaces; the exclusion of commoners from decision-making processes and enclosure in urban-centric logics.

<sup>2</sup> Daffara and Gonzalez-Barahona 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Anticor et al. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Evans 2017.

<sup>1</sup> García Diaz and Gielen 2018.

**❶ EU cultural programmes could propose and promote an open legal toolkit for commons, including tools developed by commoners themselves.**

Legal obstacles can impede the allocation of public property to commons, generate the eviction of commons born from the spontaneous appropriation of abandoned spaces and/or make commons less visible and hinder their ability to innovate institutions and democratic forms.

Such obstacles can consist of: ❶ budgetary rules that encourage the privatisation of public property as a means of generating revenue for local institutions; ❷ legal frameworks based on competition and exclusive use; ❸ the tendency towards “defensive administration”; i.e., the over-bureaucratisation of decision-making due to public representatives’ fear that being flexible in the implementation of the regulation and in the experimentation of new forms could result in legal liability for their decisions.

Therefore, a legal framework is needed to recognise and protect commons. In that sense, the EU can support local institutions by proposing a range of tools that they can use. This would incentivise the allocation of public and private spaces to commoners and trigger dynamics of mutual learning among European local institutions.

The EU can draw from the experiments of many local institutions and communities that have developed different tools – depending on their different contexts – to seek the recognition of commons and the entrustment of public spaces to commoners. Sometimes this involves ad hoc tools provided in local regulations, such as the Italian “pacts of collaboration” for the shared care, regeneration and administration of commons or the assignment for community management made with Can Batlló in Barcelona<sup>5</sup> based on its civic profitability and valorising the social return on investment.

In other instances, these legal instruments are the result of the creative use of legal tools provided by private law, all of which are especially useful when a good is privately owned or sold off by the public authority. For example, tools such as Heritable Building Rights or Community Land Trusts have been used to impede the sale of the good on the speculative real es-

tate market and to impose affordable house rents; employed in this way, these tools shape forms of *propriété d’usage* (“use property”), entailing a form of ownership that does not produce revenues, but which is instead used to allow the access of all to housing and the means of production.<sup>6</sup> Finally, traditional and apparently outdated legal tools – such as the various forms of “communal property” that exist across Europe – can inspire new tools that are not explicitly provided by regulations. Namely, “urban civic and collective uses” avoid an exclusive entrustment to a legal person and allow the recognition of open and informal communities’ self-government.

With the outbreak of Covid-19 it is more evident than ever before that the same principles should guide administrations and communities in the management of digital data, platforms and hardware infrastructures.<sup>7</sup> The EU could encourage the creation of public servers and FLOSS platforms to be put at disposal of community initiatives at all levels of government; that way, “servers for commons” – as an equivalent of public physical spaces – could be provided for community use.

**❷ The EU could develop guidelines for participation as mandatory requirements for local institutions that want to apply for and participate in EU-funded programmes. Moreover, the EU should act as an impartial authority overseeing the implementation of the guidelines (similar to those provided in the paradigmatic model of the French “*débats publics*”).** Specific requirements for participation would compensate for the lack of transparency and accountability that usually occurs when supranational institutions intervene in local governance (see section 1). More specifically, for programmes that are focused on local participation, the establishment of specific guidelines would set criteria able to counter “commons washing” (see also section 1) by ensuring that the label of participation corresponds to the effective involvement of citizens.

These guidelines should set minimum qualitative thresholds for collaborative agenda-setting, transparency and collaborative data-sharing, inclusion, non-discrimination and the appropriate allocation of time and resources. The guidelines should also require local institutions to provide specific motivations when

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/canbatllo/>.

<sup>6</sup> Friot 2012; Sultan, Lucas and Lenoir 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Calleja-López 2018.

they do not implement the outcomes of a participatory process.

A key lesson from the CCSC policy analysis is that people lose trust in participation when they see that the outcomes of participatory decision-making processes are not even taken into account in the final decision.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, local institutions would be incentivised to dedicate more time and resources to the analysis of the results and comments, as well as to their evaluation and implementation.

These rules should be specifically targeted at individuals and small organisations – with mechanisms of positive discrimination – in order to ensure that their voices are properly heard. After all, understanding, trust and a strong sense of belonging are key to improving the outcomes of participation. Only by providing first-hand commoners' knowledge and passion is a project likely to gain followers.

Finally, interacting with communities that uphold values of democracy, inclusion and protection of culture and human rights could also improve democratic stability against adverse political contingencies and changes in local political governments.

*“An administration lasts five years, Neapolitans are there for their whole life.” (Un'amministrazione dura cinque anni, si è napoletani tutta la vita) /Slogan from the Massa Critica municipalist movement in Naples*

### ③ EU funding is needed to carry out further research on possible remuneration of participation and the boundaries between participation and unpaid consultancy labour.

Participation is proper labour, but it is usually not remunerated. This can become a factor for exclusion, especially for some socially marginalised classes, and can endanger commoners' autonomy with respect to public and private stakeholders.

*“Sometimes the independent spaces find themselves dragged by the main force, powered by the institutions. Our times (nr. of tasks x nr. of workers) and infrastructures (bureaucratic processes) are different and sometimes it's hard to follow the rhythm of the strongest.” /Hablaartenarte 2020*

Rewarding participants is not only a way of incentivising people's involvement but is also a means of recognising the attendees' time and knowledge. In that sense, CCSC's expe-

rience shows that a balanced mix should be reached between economic remuneration and non-economic (or in-kind) remuneration (which can consist of learning, reputation, influence on decision-making etc...).

In any case, economic and in-kind remuneration must not create positions of privilege for a limited number of “experts”. This can be made possible by mechanisms of the rotation and distribution of such roles, as well as by improving the dialogue between “experts”, “scholars” and “practitioners”. Moreover, “positive discrimination” can be studied in favour of people in precarious economic situations who donate their time to the common good.

Remuneration could also consist of supporting tools for the collective management of resources, including experiments in alternative currencies that can improve the sustainability of commons.<sup>9</sup> In the last few years, several social technologies have emerged and have been implemented for decentralising the decision-making power over funding. This is the case for co-budgeting tools, transparent co-funding platforms or decentralised blockchain enabled organisations. Those tools allow for more clarity and accountability, facilitating participatory funding and grant making at the local or national level where civil society, organisations, cultural operators and stakeholders decide to whom and how resources are distributed.

### ④ EU funding is needed for culture and commons in suburbs and rural areas to create social and territorial cohesion.

The lack of connection between cities and suburbs and/or rural areas and the lack of attention to these areas has resulted in the inability to foster funding models for the sustainable development of culture in local areas, except for festivals and big events. Urban Lab Skåne has focused on the lack of cohesion between urban and rural areas,<sup>10</sup> while Urban Lab Ambasada has highlighted the tendency to concentrate cultural centres and activities in downtown areas. This trend tends to create a vicious circle, combining with social and psychological distress, poor quality of life, the feeling of abandonment and criminality.

<sup>9</sup> Swinnen and Ruddick 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Jacobson and Ershammar 2020.

This issue is particularly pressing for EU institutions since suburbs and rural areas have also been affected by the radicalisation of the alt-right, often accompanied by euro-scepticism. Thus, culture can be a way for the EU to gain new legitimisation through funding durable cultural initiatives – especially through the empowerment of commons and/or small actors and networks composed of variegated societal forces – and improving their connection with larger urban centres.

*“Peripheral areas are not just a local or national theme, but a European one. There, cultural participation do[es] have the potential to thrive for the foreseeable future, inspiring positive relationships between people from different backgrounds, nationalities and neighbourhoods and helping urban regeneration, social cohesion and crime prevention.” /Co-creation Lab, Team “Cooperative Autonomies”<sup>11</sup>*

Moreover, suburbs and rural areas are often the custodians of material and immaterial cultural heritage, as well as a vehicle of cultural and political participation of disenfranchised communities.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, peripheries and rural areas “must have bread, but [she] must have roses, too”.

*“Proposal [...]:*

*- struggle for the recognition of the local knowledge and care practices that stem from an ‘ecology of ways of knowing’ that sometimes stand at odds with the instrumental rationality of European institutions; [...]*

*- Involve more people and guarantee the conditions for artists and cultural workers to stay for longer periods in the connected place and understand what people want.”*

*/Co-creation Lab, Team “Cooperative Autonomies”*

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.spacesandcities.com/event/co-creation-lab-commons-sense-re-sources/>.

<sup>12</sup> Sandström, Ekman and Lindholm 2017.

## Phase 2: Creating an Infrastructure for a Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of Commons

While Phase 1 is meant to address some main barriers that hinder participation, Phase 2 entails measures aimed at adding specific measures to support potential Homes of Commons in order to favour the construction of a Participatory Guarantee System in the long term.

This phase can already be adopted in the next Creative Europe programme from 2021 to 2027. Namely, a part of the Creative Europe budget could be devoted to creating the infrastructure through which Homes of Commons can overcome structural barriers and build networks of mutual empowerment.

This phase can be designed as a co-evolving process: supporting local groups to set up transition arenas (prototypes of Homes of Commons) in different contexts and accelerating learnings to shape what a Home of Commons will look like; engaging people in a collective process of understanding, learning, visioning and experimenting around the Participatory Guarantee System to start building the network of mutual trust and support.

Therefore, we call on the European Commission to establish an additional line of funding within the Cultural strand and/or the Cross-sectoral strand of Creative Europe: *a strand for small-scale organisations that want to become part of a Homes of Commons network and engage in a process of collectively prototyping and prefigurating Homes of Commons.*<sup>13</sup>

This strand would last until 2027 but with a rotation of beneficiaries (see point 7 below). It would be similar to Urbact<sup>14</sup> projects – since it would be aimed at building and reinforcing networks – but it is targeted at grassroots organisations rather than at local institutions. It is a strand that is:

① Targeted at small, independent and informal organisations that want to facilitate the creation of a Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of Commons. In socio-cultural contexts more densely and formally articulated, the call could involve prototyping stewards (i.e., a local coordination mechanism that

<sup>13</sup> This strand was inspired by an interview with Marcos García, Director of Medialab-Prado.

<sup>14</sup> <https://urbact.eu/>.

assures a connection with the European Commission and the ability to reach grassroots local communities).

② With a low-threshold fund (i.e., a fund that is accessible for small organisations) even without a partnership with larger actors. Accessibility would be guaranteed through the Creative Europe recommendations described below (see the second part of this work).

③ Open to informal organisations: this point, as with the previous one, would require changing the current regulation of Creative Europe funding. If that is not possible, “cascade funding” could be an option. This is a “second best” option, since it requires an intermediary. However, this can be tackled by the intermediary adoption of a participatory governance framework, as, for example, in the experience of Fundaction<sup>15</sup> or Transition Funding Infrastructures (such as Participatory Canada).

④ With positive discrimination: this strand should specifically prioritise those people or communities who are typically disadvantaged, especially when such realities are characterised – or want to become characterised – by an open and horizontal management as well as a social and community engagement.

⑤ For broad consortiums: ideally, this strand could involve up to 100 partners that join as Homes of Commons in order to build a network for a Participatory Guarantee System.

⑥ With small amounts of budget per partner: for example, this funding could be about €15,000. This relatively low amount reduces the risk for the EU, by diversifying it among many different actors; it could therefore justify the simplification of formal and procedural requirements, provided under point 1, and the openness to informal organisations. Moreover, it appears proportional to the fact that it only has the aim of building networks and, on the other hand, the EU will take responsibility for the governance and the facilitation of the network (see below).

⑦ For open networks: the network is open and organisations are required to ensure its accessibility by facilitating and supporting the involvement of new organisations – different from the funded ones – in the activities. In order to ensure accessibility, rotating roles or types of “memberships” could be established by members themselves, including the rules, requirements and

timescales for accessing them. Members come together to make decisions about how to support newcomers in order to ensure that inclusivity and diversity, and to decide who can access the resource and when. A system of endorsements by a given number of members can be put in place to support this process. It is also important for members to determine the process and reasons in revoking “membership”; a periodic peer review is advisable with a rotation of beneficiaries. Every eighteen months, new organisations will be funded that would participate in the same network, while the existing ones can have the opportunity to continue the network’s activities with their own resources (and with the EU’s support, as detailed below).

⑧ Open to experimentation with participatory resource allocation as a tool to increase engagement, transparency and agility in the networks. This can engage a wide base of participants who need to consider and decide on a wide range of items to be funded. This can be used to run participatory calls for proposals, enabling members to propose projects within the framework for activities to maintain and sustain the Homes of Commons and allocate resources with transparency and legitimacy, because this solution allows them to identify the preferences of the collective.

The EU would play an active role and hold responsibility in:

❶ **Mapping:** The EU should make a specific effort to involve actors and organisations that are not usually part of EU programmes. We suggest a mapping of the European ecosystem in order to identify relevant local opportunities. In this process both diversity and coherence need to be addressed. The mapping should be ongoing across a seven year period – suitable for the enlargement of the network – and should be continuously enriched by the peer-to-peer knowledge and networks produced within the implementation of the strand.

❷ **Facilitation:** The EU would actively engage with its own resources in the facilitation of the network in order to support the work of small organisations that do not have solid administrative structures and to enlarge the network. However, it is recommended that these networks should have very fluid and flexible governance, co-decided with the organisations themselves, allowing organisations to shift and evolve over time. The creation of a stewardship committee with dedicated funds to organise and

<sup>15</sup> <https://fundaction.eu/#what>.

facilitate the network's activities may be needed. Its members could rotate, and they should be made up of people representing several partners. Among others, facilitation will involve:

**A/** coordinating the organisations

**B/** setting work plans and following up

**C/** defining prototyping sprints, i.e., organising collective sessions where samples or models of the future PGS network are produced

**D/** integrating the knowledge into policy measures to be tested in a more general context

**E/** archiving, recording and disseminating both local and European learnings (as well as failures) as a way to leverage collective learning.

**3 Framework:** Before the implementation of the project, we suggest that the EU define a framework for the activities that can be funded through this strand. The framework should be articulated in three axes, according to the needs of PGSs of Homes of Commons, highlighted above (in section 2):

**A/** commons-proof organisations, open, horizontal and diverse

**B/** mutual learning and bottom-up production of knowledge

**C/** hybrid spaces of encounter.

**4 Fundraising and sustainability:** In order to sustain the Homes of Commons network, a partnership with actors of community and ethical finance could be created.<sup>16</sup> Ethical banks invest in new activities such as organic farming and renewable energy, so there is no reason why a democratic infrastructure like the Homes of Commons could not be part of these investments. A partnership between the EU, ethical banks or other community or participatory granting could be established. This operation is particularly fitting for EU institutions, since it requires a trans-territorial reach and a transnational redistribution of resources. The EU would also be well-positioned to involve local institutions in the support of Homes of Commons, inviting them to make their own property available or to participate in funding networks (see below). Finally, it can foster processes of mutual learning, support and exchange among Homes of Commons regarding financial matters. These partnerships would foster a multi-stakeholder dialogue which would increase the economic autonomy of the networks of Homes of Commons in the long-term.

<sup>16</sup> Patti and Polyak 2017.

**5 Design:** The experimentation on the axes, mentioned in point 2, will also be an opportunity to undertake *a process of collectively prototyping and prefiguring Homes of Commons*.<sup>17</sup> Namely, along with a design approach to policies, we suggest that the EU should design an iterative prototyping-testing-iterating scheme that allows for an infrastructure for a PGS to be built while overcoming structural barriers.

Commons are particularly suitable for a design approach to policies since by their nature they “participate by doing” (section 2). Self-government of commons is built on the use and management of a space with a combination of spontaneous self-organisation and reflexive reasoning on self-organisation itself, along with the eleven political objectives identified in our prototype of Homes of Commons. This peculiar form of elaboration of management and policy proposals concretely empowers communities in the shaping of urban and rural spaces since they help to bring down barriers linked to language, literacy and verbal communication.

*“Certainty does not increase in a laboratory because people in it are more honest, more rigorous, or more ‘falsificationist’. It is simply because they can make [...] more mistakes than others. Every mistake is in turn archived, saved, recorded, and made easily readable again, whatever the specific field or topic may be [...] When you sum up a series of mistakes, you are stronger than anyone who has been allowed fewer mistakes than you.” /Latour 1983*

In that sense, the prototype Homes of Commons might become free social spaces for peer-supported learning around decentralised organisation. The creation of Homes of Commons can essentially be modelled as a collective learning process of learning how to work together, how to manage and govern resources, how to articulate influence on other spheres of political action... The role that physical and digital space plays in these entanglements should also be taken into account. Infrastructure is a central issue since social innovation today, to a large degree, demands extensive collaboration over time and among many stakeholders. But, as Star argues, this demands that we see

<sup>17</sup> Prefiguration here means a collective action involving an effort of a group to reflect future society.

infrastructure not as a substrate that other actions can run on top of, but rather as an ongoing alignment between contexts.<sup>18</sup>

As a collateral effect, prototyping Homes of Commons can also be a way of piloting new forms of policy-making, integrated with a design approach, able to integrate the different steps of the policy cycle into a single process.<sup>19</sup>

### Phase 3: A Participatory Guarantee System for Commons

Phase 3 could be a possible proposal for the period of 2028–2034, starting with the recognition of networks of Participatory Guarantee for Homes of Commons.

Homes of Commons, certified through the PGS, should have the possibility of receiving support from the EU: the financing, allocation of resources and visibility of the work developed become vital for the support and sustainability of commons.

The CCSC project looked at forms of support suitable for commons, i.e., those which can avoid the distortion of the open and horizontal mechanisms of governing commons. Here, the difficulty is to ensure the sustainability of participation without generating hierarchies between paid and non-paid commoners or the formation of paid “boards” that can take over control. On the other hand, participation that is open to virtually everyone can only be remunerated through mechanisms such as a universal basic income or care incomes that are currently not available in the EU framework.

In this regard, we highlight the following results of the elaboration:

#### A/ EU Label

An EU label that could be provided through the PGS is in itself a form of remuneration since it provides legitimacy with respect to third parties such as individuals, possible civil society partners, as well as other private stakeholders, donors and institutions. Therefore, the recognition itself is already an advantage for the Home of Commons; for example, it would make it easier for local administrations to entrust public property to commoners and make it more difficult to evict them, or it would facilitate private donations and support...).

<sup>18</sup> Star and Ruhleder 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Howlett, Ramesh and Perl, 2009; Lasswell, 1956; Junginger 2013, 2014.

#### B/ Commoners in the Institutions

The PGS makes commons recognisable for the institutions, enabling them to involve commoners as experts in decision-making processes or even in new institutions.

For example, in the *Osservatorio permanente sui beni comuni della città di Napoli* (Permanent Observatory on commons of the city of Naples) and the *Consulta di Audit sulle risorse e sul debito della città di Napoli* (Audit Council on the Resources and the Debt of the City of Naples), the dialogue between commons and the local administrations allowed commoners to take part in the new institutions. The two entities are composed of people who were chosen because they are experts in “political, economic and/or social activism”. Therefore, “activist expertise” is valued as a true expertise in order to form boards that have consultative functions and which can make proposals for deliberations or promote participatory processes.

#### c/ Van Gogh Programme

The Van Gogh Programme was hypothesised in the report *Commons as Ecosystems for Culture*<sup>20</sup> – from which the name is derived – and was developed further with other participants of the CCSC Co-Creation Lab “Commons Sense”. We elaborated on this idea to present an example of how EU funding could support commons in a non-distorting way. The example is developed in the specific domain of the arts, with the participation of artistic workers active in a cultural commons since this is one of the most precarious within the artistic domain.

Inspired and modelled on existing successful European programmes such as Horizon 2020 and more specifically the European Research Council (ERC) grant schemes, the Van Gogh programme would aim to provide financial and institutional support to artists and host institutions. Under this programme, identifying commons as host institutions would give a preferential title to the applicant in the selection of grantees.

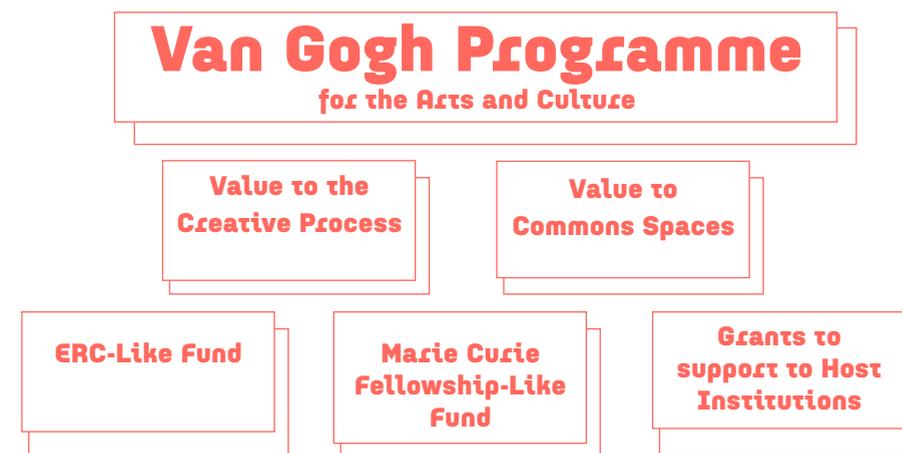
In this case, a strand of Creative Europe could specifically fund artistic work that would be developed within the framework of the Homes of Commons and/or in networks of Homes of Commons. This kind of work has its own peculiarities:

<sup>20</sup> De Tullio 2020b.

- commons enable the conditions in which artistic research is carried out in cooperation with other professionals and immersed in an open and porous community
- the market dimension is usually the hardest dimension for the commons to foster and provide for.<sup>21</sup> This situation hinders the sustainability of artistic work, and especially of community-engaged work. This strand would compensate this gap, by funding research that is “out of the market”
- commons enhance the social dimension of cultural work, putting culture at the heart of urban spaces, politics and society
- the legitimisation provided by the EU label and funding would put culture under the spotlight in the commons themselves, by making culture visible to citizens and residents of the area
- the legitimisation provided by the EU label would also promote a mediation between commons experiences in the territories and their local governments, thereby fostering a better dialogue between these institutions.

Funding rules have to be coherent with the principles of commons:

- an “artist” profile is included among the beneficiary profiles.  
*“there is a need for individual economic support for all those people not receiving a salary even if they actively and fully contribute to the development of the cultural and social life of cities.” /de Goyzueta, Micciarelli and Valentini 2020*
- expenses for a manager or a management team are not eligible under this project. Indeed:  
*“the presence of a paid organization, with a standard management team, would reduce a wide and diffuse participation.” /de Goyzueta, Micciarelli and Valentini 2020*
- funding is given:
  - I/ Partly to an individual cultural worker who wants to undertake research on a commons
  - II/ Partly to the commons as host institution. The host institution must spend the resources in accordance with the needs of the cultural worker and the decisions of its own community of reference. This is a practical way of mutually connecting cultural work with the general interest.



III/ Given the community’s consensus, all the expenses are eligible (except for point 2), including general expenses for the maintenance of the commons. This strand aims to protect both workers and commons, as they are both vital for culture. Individual cultural and creative workers should be entitled to apply for funding, by selecting a host institution. The budget is allocated through a procedure of participatory budgeting within the network, with criteria of rotation – among individuals and host institutions – and positive discrimination for artists and host institutions that do not have other ways of supporting their activity.

21 Acosta Alvarado 2020a.

**PHASE 0:  
'The Foundations  
of Homes of  
commons'**

is a necessary shift of mindset through which the EU can identify and address the barriers and threats that affect 'homes of commons' in their everyday coexistence with public sector and market.

**PHASE 1  
/years 2021—2027/  
'Infrastructure for  
a participatory  
guarantee system  
for homes of  
commons'**

aims at overcoming structural barriers and building networks of mutual empowerment. This process of collective knowledge construction can start forming small networks of collaboration and add nodes of connection to transferring knowledge, support and resources through experiences of prototyping.

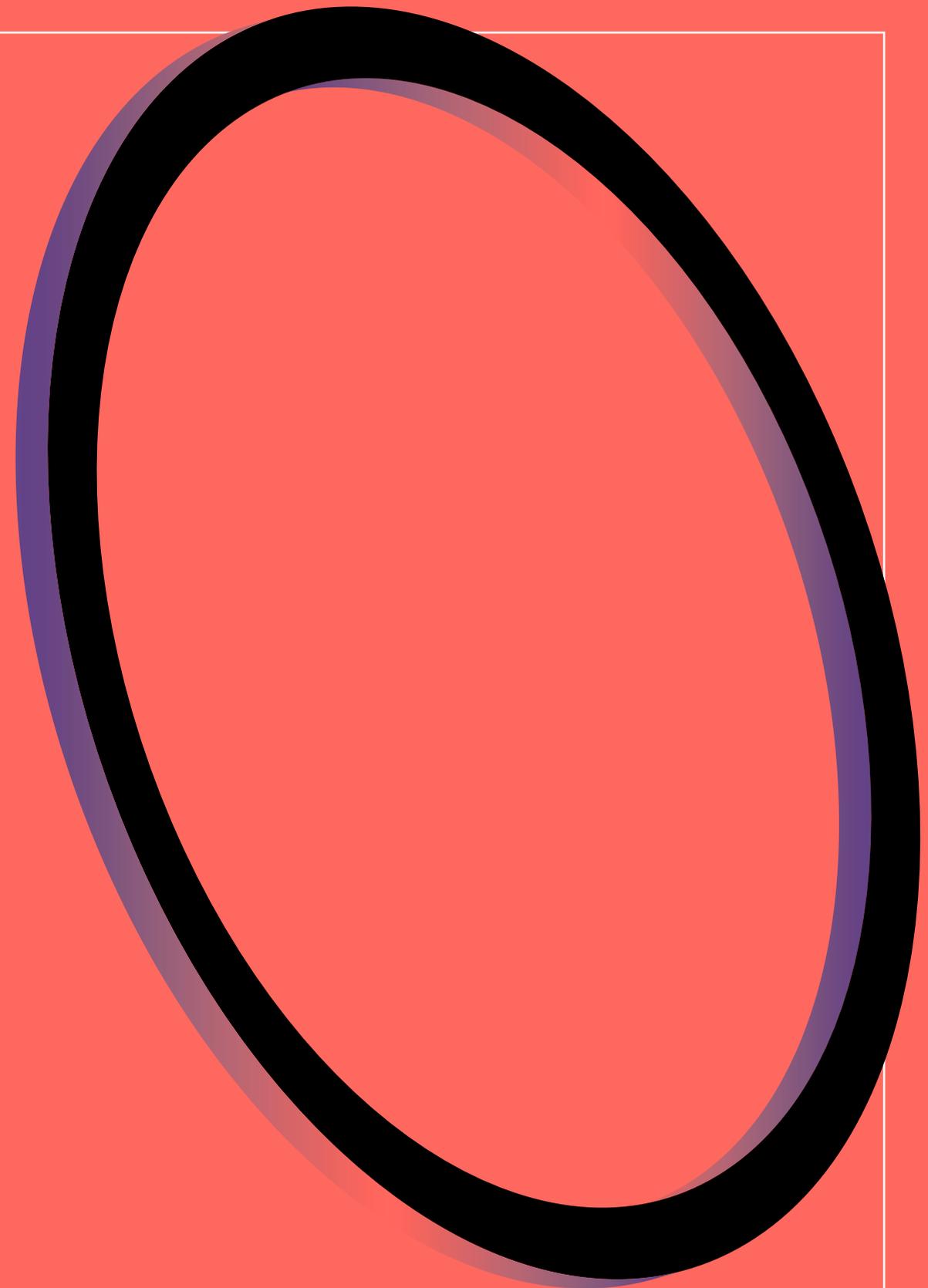
Starts when networks of homes of commons have implemented the necessary procedures and standards. In this final phase, the Participatory Guarantee System is fully in force as a way to recognise and fund commons at EU level; however, the EU action is needed to accompany its implementation and monitoring, still without stopping the experimentation of grassroots peer learning processes.

**PHASE 2  
/2028—2034/  
'A Participatory  
Guarantee  
System for Homes  
of Commons'**

# Recommendations on Existing EU Programmes and Tools

Marjolein Cremer

02



In this final chapter, we will apply the Homes of Commons framework to current EU cultural policies, programmes and tools. Through the policy analysis we have laid the groundwork for a new vision on decision-making for a more equal and democratic Europe. In this part we draft recommendations based on these principles. We will take a narrower look at how they are implemented in EU cultural frameworks, starting with participation and participatory processes. Once we have a complete picture of how participation should be defined on EU level, we will apply them to the current EU Creative Europe programme – the sole programme for the cultural sector on EU level, and to the Structured Dialogue process – the tool through which civil society can discuss cultural policies directly with the European Commission. We will conclude with what we see are the missing links at the EU level to create a stronger base for a future European commons culture.

## EU-level Participation and Participatory Approaches on Culture

Participation and participatory approaches are the focal point for reaching more democratic societies. And, as stated in the analysis, participation is the most encompassing theme of CCSC. There are different understandings and definitions of the term ‘participation’ in EU cultural policy documents. This can be quite problematic in policy terms. Multiple interpretations of participation can lead to conflicting objectives and can result in quite vague expectations and outputs. As we have identified in CCSC, this can often result in distrust from participants, who often feel taken advantage of, towards the authorities.

*“Funded events to promote European culture and citizenship do not necessarily tackle that growing sense of being disenfranchised.”/Gouin and Magkou 2020*

The EU policy mapping already revealed that there is not much detail regarding recommendations about what *sustainable* involvement of participants might entail. In the different EU projects, participation was understood in quite broad terms, varying from giving access to new audiences or creating engagement. For example, in *Culture for Cities and Regions*, it was seen as “encounters with mediators trying to bring people together in spaces”, while for the *European Creative Hub Network*, participation involved peer-led learning visits in order to gain new insights.

Very rarely does participation mean **actual direct involvement in setting the priorities, decision-making and evaluation criteria. Participatory approaches include, in this definition, some form of redistribution of power and ensuring that dissenting voices are not marginalised.** It needs to enhance public participation in the long run, create greater equality and generate encounters and dialogues that cross social and cultural boundaries.

Since the FARO Convention<sup>1</sup> was signed in 2005, participation and participatory processes in cultural heritage have played an important role in human rights and democracy. To summarise the most important ingredients in European and EU documents:

● **FARO Convention<sup>2</sup>** (ratified in 2011 by ten states): The convention specifically outlines the shared responsibility for cultural heritage and public participation. It refers to developing the legal, financial and professional frameworks that make possible joint action by public authorities, experts, owners, investors, businesses, non-governmental organisations and civil society. This is a very inclusive approach and stimulates the direct involvement of civil society.

● **Council conclusions on Cultural Governance in 2012<sup>3</sup>**: The Council of the European Union underlines the importance of strengthening the involvement of the relevant civil society actors in order to make cultural governance more open, participatory, effective and coherent; and invites Member States to promote a participatory approach to cultural policy-making.

● **Council conclusions on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage 2014<sup>4</sup>**: The Council of the European Union recognises that participatory governance offers opportunities to foster democratic participation, sustainability and social cohesion and to face the social, political and demographic challenges of today. It explicitly recommends that Member States should develop multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance frameworks that recognise cultural heritage as a shared resource by strengthening the links between the local, regional, national and European levels of governance of cultural heritage. It also recommends promoting the involvement of relevant stakeholders by ensuring that their participation is possible at all stages

1 The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, is a multilateral Council of Europe treaty whereby states agree to protect cultural heritage and the right of citizens to access and participate in that heritage.

2 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>

3 [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/133821.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/133821.pdf)

4 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XG1223\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XG1223(01)&from=EN)

of the decision-making process. Additionally, the European Commission and Member States are encouraged to promote civic participation in the framework of a smart development model for European cities.

Because participatory governance was recognised in the Council conclusions, we see that initiatives and programmes pay lip service to bottom up processes on the one hand and that they weaken the actual intention on the other. Another disturbing trend is that instead of considering participatory approaches as a move towards more democratic and collective forms of governance and meaningful co-creation, there is a shift to include it under “innovation”. This development is not necessarily alarming, as long as participatory approaches are connected to social innovation and directly connected to achieving more democratic forms of governance.

For example:

● **European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018<sup>5</sup>**: In the ten European initiatives following the European Year of Cultural Heritage, we see that themes around participation have been translated into ‘engagement’ (shared heritage) and ‘innovation’.

● **European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage<sup>6</sup>** (2019) only refers in footnotes in the Council conclusions and the **Open Method of Coordination (OMC)<sup>7</sup> report on participatory governance<sup>8</sup>**. Pillar 1, called *Participation and Access for All*, only relates to actions on fostering wider participation in cultural heritage, to “inspire” participation and suggests that the European Commission will foster cultural heritage as a key enabler of citizens’ participation. This is quite disappointing and it is clear that there needs to be more input regarding participatory approaches.

5 [https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/actions\\_en.html](https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/actions_en.html)

6 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5a9c3144-80f1-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1>

7 Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is an EU policy-making process, or regulatory instrument, that does not result in EU legislation, but is a method of soft governance which aims to share best practice and achieve convergence towards EU goals in those policy areas which fall under the partial or full competence of Member States.

8 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b8837a15-437c-11e8-a9f4-01aa75ed71a1>

● **New European Agenda for Culture**<sup>9</sup> (2018): Within the New European Agenda, participatory governance is only mentioned in relation to the Council Conclusions and is not further elaborated nor are the implications on policy or actions explained.

**This is why we are calling on the EU Commission and institutions to value, streamline and apply the term “Participation and Participatory Approaches” in future EU framework, policies and programmes to foster democratic participation, sustainability and social cohesion, recognise culture as a shared resource and by entrusting – as far as possible – decision-making power to citizens. Under this definition, participation should have the potential to alter existing power relationships and should also be open to new definitions coming from the community and the evolution of commoning practices.**

We will further explain how to actually implement and work with participatory approaches and more collaborative forms of decision-making on EU-level by applying these principles to the Creative Europe programme and the Structured Dialogue process. What does giving decision-making power to citizens actually mean? How can we set up such complex participatory approaches at the EU level?

9 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0267&from=EN>

## Creative Europe

### a Tool for the Empowerment of Commons and Cultural and Creative Spaces

The research in the CCSC project has acknowledged that the Creative Europe programme can potentially be a tool for the empowerment of commons and cultural and creative spaces. However, when applying the same values of participation, inclusion and equality, there are some barriers<sup>1</sup> we would like to address, followed by concrete recommendations. These proposals would greatly approve the accessibility of the programme, especially for small-scale and informal cultural and creative spaces and organisations.

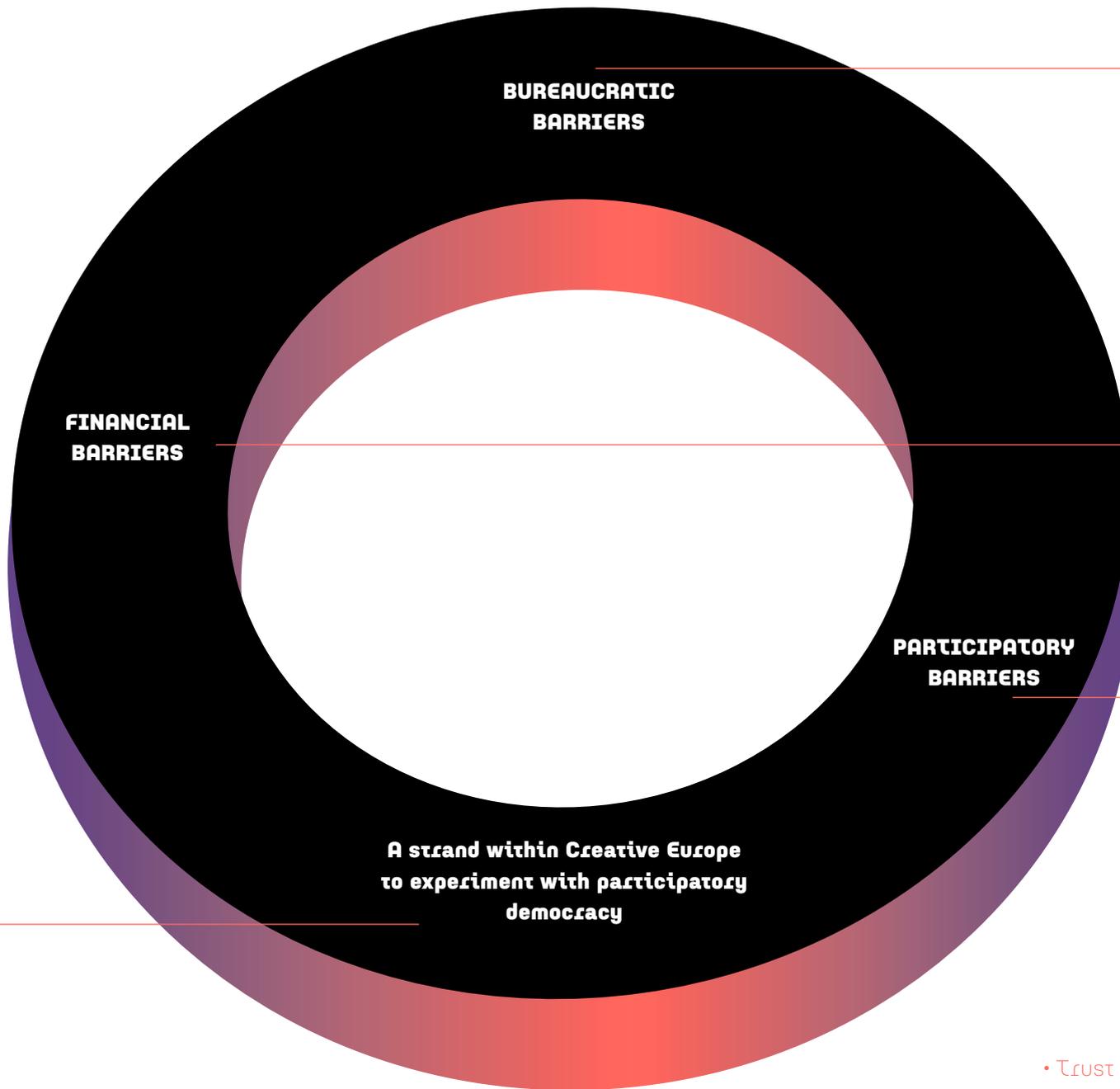
Through our research, participants in our co-creative policy events have indicated barriers that have been identified in previous EU consultations. For example, strict financial stability requirements and bureaucratic regulations hamper equal access to EU-wide participants.

Among the financial barriers are, for example, that the current Creative Europe eligibility criteria require applicants to have stable and sufficient sources of funding to maintain their activity throughout the period in which they are grantees. Pre-financing conditions require significant cash flow, because the preparation of an application requires significant time and specific expertise. This is always at the cost of the organisation itself, regardless of whether the project is selected or not. And the match-funding scheme and the financial assessment rules also prevent small-scale organisations – especially the non-profit ones – from applying.

Bureaucratic administration such as reporting duties divert a significant amount of time away from project duties, deviating resources (up to 20 per cent) from the actual implementation of the project.<sup>2</sup> The application and evaluation formats have a highly technical structure and require specialised expertise on language and techniques of EU applications. On top of that, the cost of audit and the reserve of the payment of the final instal-

1 The classification of these barriers is also the outcome of a research report carried out by Ana Sofia Acosta Alvarado (2020b) within CCSC.

2 Gielen 2020.



**Remove bureaucratic barriers to have more equal EU wide access**

- Simplify application procedures, reporting duties and auditing formats
- Have flexible procedures to adapt activities and budget in moments of crisis
- Evaluation criteria need to be more flexible and based on qualitative features

**Remove financial barriers to have more equal EU wide access**

- No financial matching or co-financing rate to 80%
- Smaller amount of grants
- Include application costs in budget

**Include flexible measures and processes to ensure a commons and participatory approach**

- Include informal realities
- Value and prioritise processes and methods that are open, adaptable and collectively decided with the community
- Design calls and projects that are open to more testing and piloting

**A strand within Creative Europe to experiment with participatory democracy**

- Create a bottom-up and participatory framework: local cultural players should co-decide on the framework.
- Be open and transparent about mutual expectations. What is the actual power of the community?

- Building principles are based on cooperation, sustainability, inclusion and diversity.
- No financial matching. This is an investment in new forms of democracy.

- Trust is essential: mistakes should be allowed, you learn from them.
- Expertise through political activism or practice should be valued as much as formal and academic titles.
- Sustainability: have a long-term process to socially embedded results.

- Green mobility: air travel should be justified by longer stays.
- Outputs and evaluation: the community should co-decide on evaluation criteria and expected outputs.

ment by the end of the project are also costly requirements. The random selection process for an audit within five years of the closure date imposes a heavy workload that is barely sustainable for small organisations.

With the current Covid-19 crisis, we have experienced that strict bureaucratic requirements hamper rapid adaptation and the ability of consortia to react to unexpected events. The budget and accounting rules made it difficult to adapt the plans – both for activities and expenditures – according to the new situation. **These limits can cause shortcomings in the quality and quantity of participation.**

As well as these barriers, we have identified specific **obstacles that hamper a commons and a more participatory approach** within the Creative Europe programme:

● **Informal realities** or organisations cannot apply and are excluded from consultation processes. Many commons and creative spaces that work from a commons perspective often lack proper legal recognition because they prefer an open and horizontal structure.

● **Language** in particular can be a significant barrier in participatory processes. Not only because English is needed as a common language, but also because EU cultural projects use a very specific language which is easier to understand for people who are already familiar with the EU context. It is not always easy to build a common understanding based on words and concepts. Moreover, arts and culture have multiple languages for expression, while participatory processes are typically centred around the verbal process; this circumstance could turn paradoxically into a factor of exclusion.

● The evaluation criteria prioritise quantifiable activities and outputs instead of valuing **processes and testing methods**. Creative Europe project proposals require a detailed plan of activities and pre-determined outputs. This contradicts the idea of open and horizontal participation. Moreover, output-oriented projects are hard to align with artistic research that delivers the best results when it is left as free as possible.

*“Rethink what ‘output/outcomes’ can be: value workshops, processes, organisational structures... (More focus on process)”  
/ Van Gogh Programme, Team 10 of the first co-creative policy event<sup>3</sup>*

**In order to address these financial, bureaucratic and structural obstacles, we recommend that regarding the future Creative Europe programme the European Commission should:**

① **Provide at least 80 per cent co-financing rates for grants or require no financial matching for small-scale organisations.** Alternatively, smaller amounts of grants that would not require financial matching would also be a solution.

② **Include application costs** in the budget.

③ **Simplify** application procedures, reporting duties and auditing formats to soften the bureaucratic requirements and to ensure better inclusion of organisations with limited cash flow.

④ Include **informal realities** or organisations as project partners.

⑤ Value and prioritise **processes and methods that are open, adaptable and collectively decided with the community**, not only pre-fixed activities and outputs. Participatory processes should be structurally open to new activities and decided together with the community. Open decision-making processes should also not be determined in advance but should emerge from collective reasoning and evolve over time.

⑥ **Design calls and projects that are open to more testing and piloting**, research case studies or free to include activities as the grantees see fit. This new area of a more commons-based culture and inclusive decision-making processes specifically require more experimentation in order to further build up the necessary practice and impact to create a strong basis for it.

⑦ **Make sure evaluation criteria** are more **flexible and based on qualitative features**, not only on quantifiable performance.

⑧ Have **flexible procedures** to adapt activities and budget in moments of crisis and unexpected events.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.spacesandcities.com/event/co-creation-lab-commons-sense-resources/>.

Last but not least:

**We call on the European Commission to dedicate a part of the next Creative Europe budget to experiment with participatory democracy.**

The cultural sector needs to actually experiment, prototype and practice with participatory democracy. That is why we suggest including a specific strand within the cultural or cross-sectoral sub-programme of Creative Europe dedicated to more meaningful participation in decision-making processes and to building stronger ties between citizens and EU institutions. We would like to base this recommendation on one of the most important learnings from our CCSC project: in order to build trust, you need to let go of steering processes and let the community decide what they want to do and how they want to do it. Sharing power means sharing responsibility. This would be an authentic way of investing in innovative structures from the bottom up at EU level.

That is why the framework of such a call should not be determined from the top down but should be decided by or in co-creation with the communities, in order to implement the idea of open and horizontal participation. Ideally, in creating a culture of commons at the EU level, the community should decide what the priorities would be, develop an agenda and framework and draft expected processes, methodologies and budgets.

Conditions for such a strand and call would be:

- ❶ A real **bottom-up and participatory framework**: The notion of ownership is key. Local cultural players decide together on the priorities, aims and targets, decision-making model and evaluation criteria.
- ❷ Being open and **transparent about mutual expectations** is crucial when starting a participatory process. In other words, there needs to be clarity from the start about what can be changed or where the boundaries of the participatory process lie. What is the actual power of the community? This is essential to win trust on both sides and avoid the feeling of delusion when certain proposed ideas by the participants cannot or are not followed up. In this case, participants also deserve an explanation of what is not possible and why.
- ❸ Building principles are based on **cooperation, sustainability, inclusion and diversity**. Special attention would need

to be paid to diversity and inclusion. This requires a balance between origin, gender, the kind of stakeholders, social situation, language, and others. The question is how to value all of them in order to mutually integrate all these different points of view. Diversity does not come spontaneously with an “open doors” policy, but requires specific calls, “quotas” or positive discrimination, i.e., by giving an advantage to those who are usually under-represented.

❹ **No match funding**: This is an investment in new forms of democracy. The aim is to stimulate cooperation, inclusion and co-creation, and therefore financial requirements should not be an obstacle.

❺ **Trust** is essential, not bureaucracy. Processes need to be documented; this is based not on distrust, but on the aim of informing and sharing experiences, learnings or, even better, by making mistakes.

❻ **Expertise** through **political activism and/or practice** in the cultural field should be valued as much as formal and academic titles. Academic and technical experts can become actual political elites. However, we also acknowledge that some communities are not easily reached by the EU, due to inequalities.

❼ **Sustainability**: Have a long-term process, preferably for the whole seven years of the programme. Only then can this experiment create real value and more valuable and socially embedded results.

❽ **Green mobility**: Air travel should be justified by longer stays for a real understanding of the local context. Preference would also go to ecologically responsible transport and residencies.

❾ **Outputs and evaluation**: The community should co-decide on the criteria upon which they want to be evaluated and decide among themselves on the expected outputs. The main aim is to focus on quality, not quantity.

In order to further implement these conditions, we can showcase with the *Structured Dialogue* tool. We have developed the conditions regarding ownership, co-responsibility, trust and regulatory frameworks and designed specific building blocks and methodologies that can be included at the EU level.

## Structured Dialogue: Creating a Structural Tool for Participation

The core question of the CCSC project is how to rethink decision-making. In fact, as concluded in the policy analysis, what is missing are solutions which allow local decision-makers, EU policy-makers and cultural workers to come together and collectively decide about the future of culture in Europe. The problem is in the still frequent top-down configuration of EU participatory processes.

The current tool for the cultural sector to discuss cultural policy issues directly with the European Commission is the Structured Dialogue process. In the *New European Agenda for Culture*, the European Commission announced that it would broaden the current process, for example, by making greater use of online collaboration opportunities and proposing a more active role for civil society in preparing the biennial European Cultural Forums. This is why we would like to take on the challenge of proposing recommendations to not only broaden the process but to recommend the necessary steps to change this consultation process into a truly participatory bottom-up process for the EU.

The Structured Dialogue process was established in 2007 and the current process, called Voices of Culture, was launched in 2015. Through an open call, approximately forty selected participants brainstorm around a chosen topic. At a final dialogue meeting, the participants present the outcomes to representatives from the European Commission. The objective of this dialogue process is to make sure that the voice of cultural professionals is heard at the European level. The dialogue process also aims to strengthen the advocacy capacity of the cultural sector in policy debates on culture at the European level, while encouraging it to work in a more collaborative way.

The problem with this process is that it is based on an out-grown understanding of participation as a process of gathering already formed views and opinions. It favours an “expert” bias and silences relevant voices. Secondly, the dialogue is centred around brainstorming as a creative practice. Traditional brainstorming has been targeted by many critiques both from the perspective of the effectivity of the tool (Does it contribute to a richer solution space?) and of the embedded power and group conforming dynamics (Does it help to articulate the views of alternative voices?). The aim here is to actually contribute to

the empowerment of participants, balance the gender/racial/ableist bias in traditional participation schemes and hosting a future-oriented discussion that overcomes short-termism. Thirdly, the model is based on an open call for participation that expects a granular reach at a local level. Recruiting based on previous interest hinders organisations and individuals to even identify and locate participation processes. They also introduce bias because they attract organisations and individuals with a previously formed agenda who are thus less open to co-creating scenarios.

In order to achieve the European Commission’s ambition of working in a more collaborative way and strengthening the advocacy capacity of the sector, participatory governance processes should be at the very heart of an alternative process and methodology.

This process would need to include some **institutional implications or consequences** for the European Commission:

❶ Any effort to open decision-making processes from the institutional point of view should be the result of a conscious will to transfer power. Without this will, any participatory process has the risk of being merely an act of “transparency” or “opinion” on decisions previously taken by the institution. Opening participatory processes implies a concrete ethics of the institution and, above all, constant learning. It offers a framework of co-responsibility that helps to rethink, value and become aware of the act of co-participation itself, from a non-paternalistic perspective of the institutions, without losing sight of the responsibility that the institution has over financing and facilitating processes through public resources.

❷ Any institution that intends to open itself needs to dare to “be surprised” by aspects, results and dynamics that escape prediction and planning. Without this minimum willingness to accept the unpredictable, it is not possible to promote creativity, innovation and new ways of participating and collaborating in a more horizontal way.

❸ Establish relationships based on trust. This means understanding the local creative ecosystems and creating a safe environment for building trust. In a participatory process, people need to trust the process, making sure there is stability by managing expectations and knowing that it will have the

expected results.<sup>1</sup> Trust is based on fulfilling expectations of certain behaviour associated with interdependence, opening up, cooperation, information sharing and problem solving. And all these factors are needed in co-creation.

④ Last but not least, regulatory frameworks must often be adapted; new incentives, new forms of financing and new ways of managing shared risk are needed.

Furthermore, we recommend the following building blocks for a participative governance framework of the Structured Dialogue at EU level:

● **Decentralise the Structured Dialogue and organise them by and on local level**

Hybrid spaces of encounter such as Urban Labs, community managed cultural spaces or Homes of Commons are the best spaces to establish new and more collaborative trust relationships. They act as intermediate zones between institutional and non-institutional players. These spaces can, by their very nature, legitimise policies and participatory processes to ensure support from strategic partners and decision-makers. They generate relational ecosystems and respond to a unique way of operating, based on open co-innovation and processes in which collective intelligence is committed to generate value. These spaces generally work around the interest of many stakeholders, such as the public sector, private sector, academic and research and civil society, in order to find synergies and common ground, but they also engage with precarious actors. They coordinate the different interests of these multiple actors. Facilitation and dialogue are therefore crucial in identifying common ground and shared objectives and in aligning agendas. Moreover, emergent local agendas and representatives can be elevated to the European discussion. Participative processes can be fostered in these hybrid spaces: ① where collaboratively stakeholders find new opportunities and create knowledge to inspire traditional hierarchically-vertical and static organisations; ② where horizontal governance, creativity and dynamism of processes contribute to defining new solutions; ③ where coalitions or networks of collaboration can be formed to design effective responses to societal challenges.

● **Setting up a core team to facilitate the process:** As has already identified in the policy analysis, setting up a core team

of people to design and manage the participatory process and the policy development process is essential in conducting an effective participatory process. The core team should include people with specific skills to facilitate the process; they may be from different spaces or organisations and must be neutral and open to ideas from the various groups of stakeholders involved. They should form a common understanding of the participatory approach and assign roles and responsibilities to each person. These would be assigned stewardship of the participatory process both at a local and European level.

● **Map the ecosystem:** Partners who can support the process, leverage areas and can be possible resources together with their motivations and interest in participating in a shared governance structure should be identified.

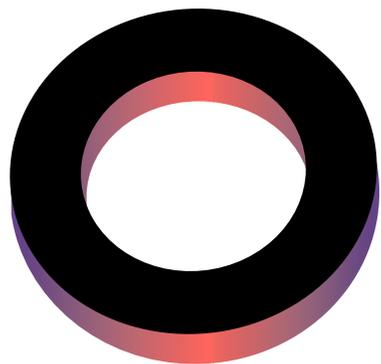
● **Analyse the situation from the local to the EU level:** Diagnose the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the participatory process. Take into account trends that may affect the process. Also, it is useful to understand mindsets, beliefs, values and goals to understand how these could help or hinder progress in the participatory process.

● **Identify future scenarios:** Asking stakeholders to co-create and predict what is likely to happen or what should happen in the future to envision more desirable, optimistic and plausible scenarios for the future to help suggest changes in policies that can help achieve those scenarios.

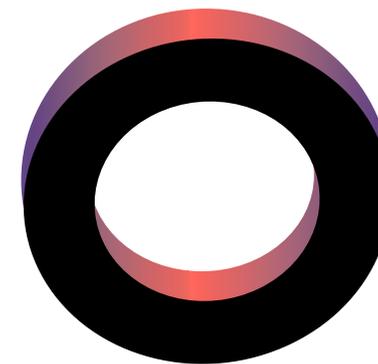
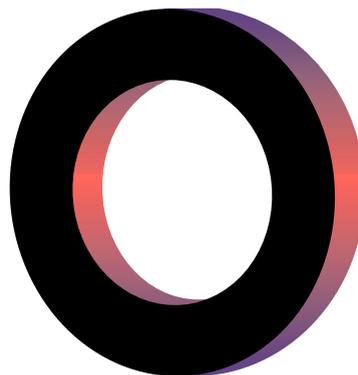
● **Include open source online collaboration to increase participation:** An open source online collaboration tool is key to support and further develop digital participation and co-creation processes. Combined with physical meetings (when these are possible again) a shared digital space enables participants to work on separate topics, develop ideas further, but also to co-decide on them.

● **Give responsibility and ownership to the local participants and be clear on mutual expectations:** As mentioned in the policy analysis and suggested for the strand on experimenting with participatory democracy within Creative Europe, ownership and openness are key. To win the trust of partners, expectations on their involvement, their level of engagement and on what level their input will be implemented in certain policies is essential. In other words, the level of influence and power of civil society in this process needs to be clear from the

<sup>1</sup> Tomlinson, Lewicki and Ash 2014.



Analyse the situation from the local to the EU level

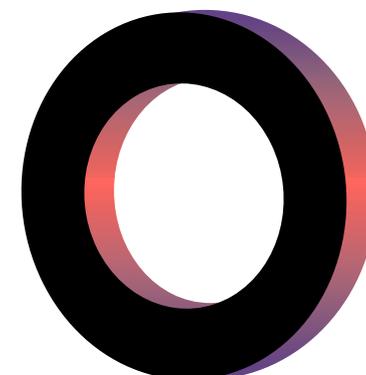
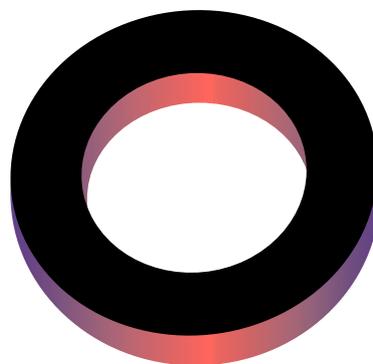


Decentralise the Structured Dialogue and organise them by and on local

Give responsibility and ownership to the local participants and be clear on mutual expectations



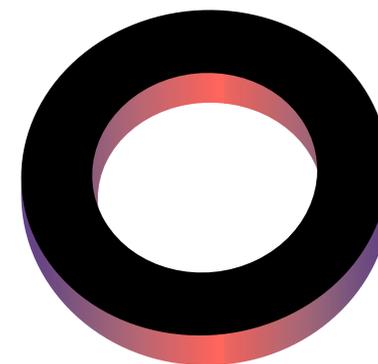
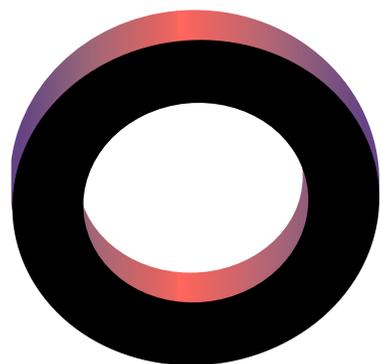
Identify future scenarios



Setting up a core team to facilitate the process

Include open source online collaboration to increase participation

Compensation costs



Map the ecosystem

Flexible long term process

start. This is to avoid loss of interest or any disillusion during or at the end of the participatory process. In order to set realistic expectations the “rules of the game” or in more institutional words, a framework including rules on accountability, responsibilities, ownership, etc. to safeguard the process needs to be in place. The best way to set these rules is to write them collaboratively with all stakeholders – between the European Commission representatives and the local partners – at the earliest occasion. A specific roadmap could be drafted between all partners, including a set of clear expectations, boundaries, decision-level, length of the process, priorities, topics, etc. Be aware that the needs and interests of all stakeholders involved should be included in the governance process. The purpose of the rules is not to limit the process, but to guide and steer towards the desirable goals. This process of setting collectively the rules and responsibilities and the further dialogue and decision-making process is as important as the final result. As it is, through the process that interactions and relationships between stakeholders are established, and they can learn from each other and build mutual trust through participation.<sup>2</sup>

● **Compensation costs:** if civil society and the cultural sector will be involved in such a structural participative governance process, there should be other ways of remuneration than networking and knowledge sharing. Especially in these times of travel restrictions, networking has its limits. But above all, time is precious and with these responsibilities certain compensation should be considered; for examples on remuneration, see pages 94–95 regarding the urgent needs for commons on EU level.

● **Flexible long-term process:** These collaborative processes require time and more responsibilities which cannot be met in one or two meetings, but which deserve a longer term investment. This could be seen as being analogous to a civil-public partnership and the work involved in a longer term relationship, involving multiple years. The process could even entail a seven year process to make it possible that the cultural sector can contribute to setting the agenda for the next cultural policy programme.

<sup>2</sup> Vidović 2018, 50.

## A European Bauhaus for the Commons

### Creating a Stronger Evidence Base for Commons and Culture by Connecting EU Programmes and Results More Closely

One final recommendation would be to make stronger alignments between the different programmes and to connect similar project results in order to build the necessary evidence for commons and cultural practices on EU level. Moreover, this calls for a breaking down of the same bureaucratic and administrative silos at the EU-level which we have observed at local and regional level. This urgency is also adopted in the New European Agenda for Culture. It states that the Commission will improve synergies between projects and policy activities, concluding that the framework offers the next phase of cooperation at EU level to address current societal challenges through the transformative power of culture. The Agenda holds a holistic vision, fostering synergies across cultural sectors and with other policy fields.

**Hence, we call for the need for more agility in the design of EU schemes to enable more crossovers and give better chances to projects that operate in a cross-disciplinary way. Specifically, stronger connections and alignments should be made between Creative Europe, Horizon EU, the Urban Agenda for the EU and the Digital Europe programmes in order to create a strong evidence base for commons, participatory governance and culture.**

In order to work in such a way, frameworks should be more agile in adapting to new situations. This is necessary not only to make crossovers more possible, but also because current projects within these different programmes work with the same goals but use different methods and tools, that could fuel each other’s work and, in the end, create more impact.

Through CCSC, we have opened up some first practical insights. And with the upcoming Pilot Phase of Homes of Commons, more test results will soon be available. But in other EU programmes, innovative testing and piloting with commons are also taking place. For example, with the Horizon 2020 project *Generative European Commons Living Lab*, innovative partner-

ships between public institutions and communities are also being tested and created. CLIC is testing circular models in cultural heritage and OpenHeritage is testing inclusive governance models in cooperative heritage labs, that can bring new insights to the Homes of Commons.

In the *Partnership on Culture & Cultural Heritage*, part of the Urban Agenda for the EU, participatory approaches are integrated as a working model and form one of the seven pillars of the project. CCSC is also mentioned for further examination and is linked to their Partnership. Last but not least, interesting links should be made with the Digital Europe programmes. This should be done from the point of view of building networks, such as the *European Network of Living Labs* or with the *European Crowdfunding Network* that provides interesting alternative funding perspectives for culture and the commons.

As well as aligning and making stronger connections between these existing projects and programmes, the future EU programmes **European Bauhaus** and the **Conference on the Future of Europe** would be pivotal in such an approach. The Conference on the Future of Europe was announced at the beginning of 2019 by the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, to give Europeans a greater say on what the EU does and how it works for them. The Conference should allow an *open, inclusive, transparent and structured debate with citizens from diverse backgrounds and from all walks of life*. The European Bauhaus is also a call by Von der Leyen to work in a cross-disciplinary way between arts and culture and the environmental and economic sectors to face the global challenges of climate change, pollution, digitalisation and demographic increases. She would like to build a European Bauhaus movement, based on a collaborative design and creative space, to bring the climate goals closer to people. It should experiment and provide practical answers to the social question of what modern life in harmony with nature can look like for Europeans.

These initiatives are urgent projects. The difficulty is that they are initiated from the top down. And, as we have explained in this project and report, whether creating a top-down discussion or even a movement, this has never really worked. Firstly, the urgency needs to be felt by the cultural workers, the communities, the students, scientists, engineers and designers

themselves. Secondly, they should be given the responsibility to own the process and the resources; let them decide how to frame, structure and evaluate the process. Hence, include and implement the necessary participatory approaches, collaborative steps, methods and tools that we have outlined above – for example, the recommendations for Creative Europe and the Structured Dialogue, and specifically in phase 0 of the Homes of Commons. The overall takeaway is that bottom-up participatory decision-making is not a luxury, but a necessity in finding solutions for the European challenges we face. So let's decide about the future of Europe together.

## Summary

- Reinvigorating bottom-up decision-making power is a way of reinvigorating EU democracy. However, neglecting social rights, precarisation, marginalisation and lack of security in many sectors – including the cultural sector – is a major barrier for the participation of many cultural actors as well as of a large part of the population.
- Commons are a way for culture to build new alliances with other marginalised and precarious communities that struggle for the recognition of social rights. At the same time, culture is the heart of commons, as well as being at the heart of society as a whole.
- We recommend a certification system for the EU to recognise and support Homes of Commons as cultural and creative (physical and digital) spaces of encounter between the EU, local institutions and the community at large. These spaces are allocated as resources for autonomous, open and horizontal communities – including cultural and creative workers – to share knowledge and means of production, to initiate actions of solidarity and mutual aid as well as to prototype their own policy proposals.
- This certification system should work as a Participatory Guarantee System centered around the peer review of the accomplishment of horizontally established norms and, especially, an exchange of knowledge and problematics, so that they are transformed in moments for learning, mutual awareness and the exchange of experiences. Therefore, the methodological approach that the EU should follow is to give priority to supporting community self-empowerment, along with the recommendations provided above about the “Three steps towards a Participatory Guarantee System for Homes of Commons”.
- As a necessary first step of this work, the EU should give a prompt answer to the urgent and essential needs of commons by promoting a legal toolkit for commons, establishing mandatory guidelines for participation in EU funded programmes, developing forms of remuneration of participation and incentivising rotation of paid roles, increasing the financial support for culture and commons in suburbs and rural areas to create social and territorial cohesion.

- In future EU policies and programmes the terms “Participation and Participatory Approaches” need to be valued, streamlined and applied in such a way that they foster democratic participation, sustainability and social cohesion and recognise culture as a shared resource. This includes entrusting, as far as possible, decision-making power to citizens.
- Creative Europe, the EU programme supporting cultural sector initiatives, could be a tool for the empowerment of commons and cultural and creative spaces. The same goes for the Structured Dialogue process, the tool which allows civil society to discuss cultural policies directly with the European Commission. Various barriers currently hinder a bottom-up structure for more meaningful participation and building stronger ties between citizens and EU institutions. If Creative Europe, as well as the Structured Dialogue process, would include a framework for participatory governance – in the form of a strand or as a whole participatory process – a true collaboration would be implemented to find solutions from EU policy-makers and cultural workers together that could collectively decide about the future of culture in Europe.
- Agility is needed in the design of existing and new EU schemes in order to enable working in a more cross-disciplinary way. Alignment between the different EU programmes is key to create a stronger evidence base for commons, participatory governance and culture.
- Bottom-up participatory decision-making is not a luxury, but a necessity in finding solutions for the European challenges we face. Future EU programmes – such as, for example, the European Bauhaus and the Conference on the Future of Europe – need to implement the necessary participatory approaches to create the bottom-up European movements and give Europeans a real say in the future of Europe and the EU.

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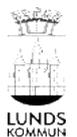


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## **Policy Analysis & Policy Recommendations**

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