Culture Next Annual Report

2024 | The third year of the project

CULTURE NEXT

Co-funded by
the European Union

2024: The third year of Culture Next

In the third year, Culture Next organized two major conferences: one in Oulu, Finland (February, 100+ participants), and another in Cluj-Napoca, Romania (October, 150+ participants). These events expanded the network, refined training formats, and strengthened connections between local cultural sectors and member cities.

We concluded two thematic working groups: Youth Engagement (hosted by Rouen and Budweiss) and Funding Culture (hosted by Bielsko-Biała). A third, ECoC Reform (hosted by Cluj-Napoca), was launched and completed. Each group held internal meetings, workshops for member cities, masterclasses for external stakeholders, and recorded podcasts.

The first edition of our Mobility Programme featured 18 one-week exchanges hosted by member cities, supported by targeted open calls to align needs and opportunities.

An open call for a Cities Fund for Culture engaged member cities in exploring funding for a shared cultural agenda.

A new Culture Next Mission in Bielsko-Biała, Poland, focused on the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) as a potential European brand.

The SDG Thing pilot measured cultural impacts on SDGs in over ten member cities. The first phase concluded with reports, and we committed to extending the program for two more years.

We maintained regular monthly meetings, board sessions, and management workshops, while externally strengthening ties with major European cultural networks. Highlights included joint events, a Brussels meeting of ten international networks, and participation in the Culture Goal Campaign.

These efforts enhanced training, collaboration, and partnerships, solidifying Culture Next's role as a vital resource for its member cities.

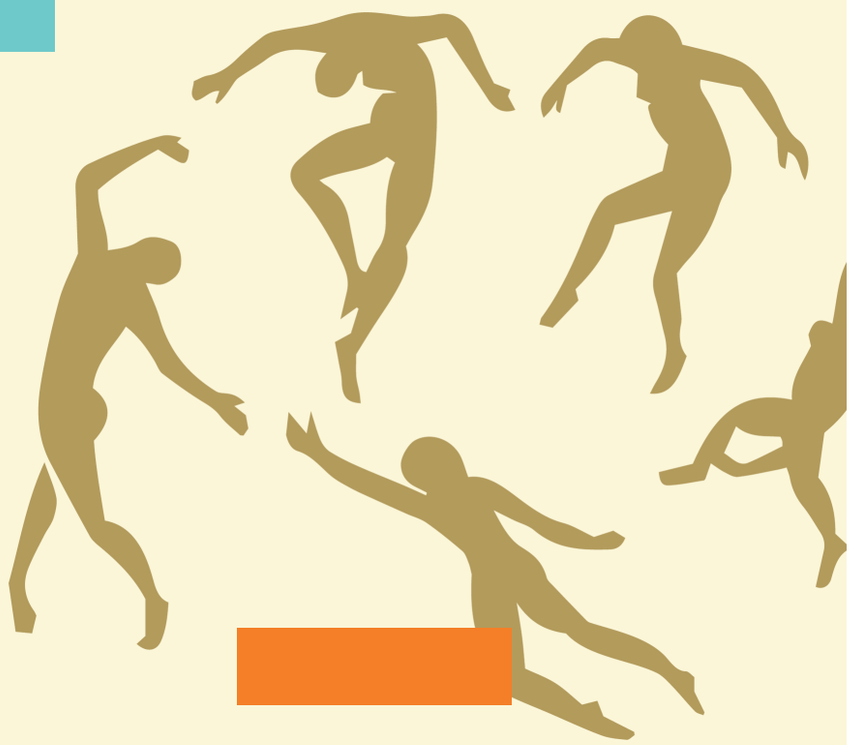
Member cities at the end of 2024

Full members (in alphabetical order):

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

Observing members (in alphabetical order):

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



Our year in numbers

35
Member cities

20
Cities in the Mobility Programme

3
Thematic Working Groups

6
Policy papers

1
Culture for SDG guide

1
ECoC research report

2
International conferences

1
Interactive platform for CN Members

1
AI tool for ECoC bidbooks exploration

193.5k
Reach on social media

3.4k
Website visitors

Project activities

#1 Conferences

The 12th Culture Next Conference (Oulu, Finland)

February 28 - March 1, 2024

The event brought together 25 cities to discuss the 2024 network agenda regarding SDGs, Thematic Working Groups, and the Mobility Program, among others. It was an opportunity to discover Oulu as the European Capital of Culture for 2026 and to interact and connect with local actors.

The 13th Culture Next Conference (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)

October 13-16, 2024

Representatives from 50 European cities convened to explore the transformation of culture into the 18th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and the reform of the ECoC program. The conference featured panel discussions, meetings with local artists, cultural tours, and events showcasing the connections between culture, well-being, and resilience.

#2 Collaboration and exchange

Thematic Working Groups

Throughout the year

Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) are collaborative spaces aimed at tackling major issues in the cultural sector. They bring together member cities to brainstorm solutions in three main areas: getting young people involved in cultural activities, finding new ways to fund culture, and reimagining the future of the European Capitals of Culture program. These groups not only promote teamwork and development within the network but also strengthen ties with local communities.

In 2024, within Culture Next we organized three TWGs. Each TWG delivered one workshop for capacity building dedicated to members of Culture Next only (whether they are full members or observing) and a masterclass for the broader audience.

The Mobility Programme

March - September 2024

The Mobility Programme is designed for cultural professionals in member cities. It creates well-thought-out partnerships that allow for sharing ideas, experiences, and practical solutions. By working together across borders, cultural workers can learn and grow, boosting the capabilities of host organizations and sparking innovative cultural projects.

Focusing on sustainability, open access, and gender equality, the program encourages responsible practices, like eco-friendly travel options and digital tools for planning and assessment. These mobility chances act as a springboard for organizational growth and personal development, helping to connect with other cultural spaces and broadening the network's reach throughout the European cultural scene.

Mobility pairs:

- Rouen (FR) -> Budweis (CZ)
- Burgos (ES) -> Chemnitz (DE)
- Budweis (CZ) -> Dublin (IE)
- Brno (CZ) -> Faro (PT)
- Oulu (FI) -> Leeuwarden (NL)
- Valmeira (LV) -> Elefsina (GR)
- Trencin (SK) -> Gijon (ES)
- Gijon (ES) -> Larnaka (CY)
- Chemnitz (DE) -> Debrecen (HU)
- Cluj (RO) -> Braga (PT)
- Elefsina (GR) -> Cluj (RO)
- Dublin (IE) -> Leuven (BE)
- Belfast (UK) -> Brno (CZ)
- Leeuwarden (NL) -> Leeds (UK)
- Plunge (LT) -> Valmeira (LV)
- Matera (IT) -> Larnaka (CY)
- Larnaka (CY) -> Trencin (SK)

Bilateral mobilities:

- Cluj-Napoca (RO) -> Leeuwarden (NL)
- Leeuwarden (NL) -> Cluj-Napoca (RO)
- Elefsina (GR) -> Faro (PT)
- Faro (PT) -> Elefsina (GR)
- Budweis (CZ) -> Chemnitz (DE)
- Chemnitz (DE) -> Budweis (CZ)

#3 Tools and papers

Culture for SDG Guide

Throughout the year

Developed across several SDG Labs and working sessions, with the coordination of Dr Beatriz García, Associate Director at the Centre for Cultural Value and Lead Expert for Culture & SDGs within Culture Next, the digital tools developed by Polyloop, and the involvement of 10 member cities, the guide explores how culture can become the 18th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).

The paper offers details about the Culture Next Evaluation Framework, followed by the experience of each of the cities involved in the pilot, as well as a cross-analysis of the obtained data. The results are meant to offer cities a unified set of metrics to evaluate the qualitative and quantitative impact of culture on sustainable development. This initiative transforms culture into a concrete tool for influencing cultural policies at both European and global levels.

The Polyloop tool for Culture Next

Throughout the year

Developed in parallel with the Culture for SDG Guide, the Polyloop tool allows people to have an in-depth exploration of the ECoC bidbooks by asking questions in a similar format to the already well known Chat GPT. The platform can be a useful tool for researchers, professionals and the broad audience.

The Role, Impact and Future of ECoC

Throughout the year

Working with most of the 34 member cities of Culture Next, the research explored the following:

- Considerations on and recommendations for an enhanced European Capital of Culture Programme which can deliver step-change and sustainable legacy for all cities involved in the programme – including candidate cities, 'winners' and 'losers'.
- How Culture Next is valued by member and associate cities which have participated in Culture Next activities. This includes perceptions of the role and impact of Culture Next for different types of cities across Europe.
- Aspirations for and recommendations on how Culture Next can be more impactful and of value to participating cities.

Policy papers

Throughout the year

The Culture Next Policies and Advocacy Taskforce (PATF) is an initiative meant to develop organically a network of individuals, organizations, and cities connected with Culture Next which would become able to work as an international trans-sectoral group.

The PATF was initiated in Aveiro, Portugal on 12 October 2022, when essential objectives, key principles, and general formats were discussed. At the end of 2024, the work of the PATF resulted in 6 policy papers on topics that have been at the core of the Culture Next activities throughout the years, and two digital tools:

Papers:

1. Role, Impact, and the Future of European Capital of Culture
2. Maximizing the Legacy of the European Capital of Culture: Recommendations for Long-term Impact
3. The Challenges of Monitoring and Evaluating Culture
4. Culture: The Hidden Catalyst for Achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals
5. Financing cultural activities
6. A place at the table: engaging young people in the culture sector

Tools:

1. ECoC Archive: Bid books & Monitoring Documents
2. Culture for SDG Measurement System

#4 Meetings

Culture Next Management Meeting (Talinn, Estonia)

January 28, 2024

The Culture Next management team met in Talinn to discuss and plan the agenda for 2024 and the future of the network for the following years.

Culture Next Meeting (Barcelona, Estonia)

September 3, 2024

Culture Next has met in Barcelona to discuss operative matters on the ongoing initiatives and actions during 2022-2024 and the upcoming new cycle of activities during 2025-2028.

Culture Next meeting in Brussels with the European Commission and relevant cultural networks

November 28, 2024

A delegation of the Culture Next network met with the representatives of DG Culture within the European Commission, responsible for the Creative Europe programs and for the European Capital of Culture Projects, to discuss the network's work and its contribution to the formulation of future regulations related to the European Capitals of Culture program.

The network also organized an informal meeting of European cultural networks for an information session on the next activities on the agenda and an open dialogue on how they can support, align, or complement each other's actions.

The informal gathering brought together ten major international cultural networks: Culture Action Europe, European Network for Cultural Centres, ENCATC, Eurocities Culture, European Cultural Foundation, European Festivals Association (EFA), Global Cultural Districts Network, International Federation of Libraries, Trans Europe Halles, and UBC – Union of Baltic Cities. This was an opportunity for representatives from these organizations to engage in a meaningful exchange about shared priorities and collaborative opportunities. The networks expressed unanimous support for a proposal to establish a mobility program for network managers, an idea advanced by Culture Next. Encouragingly, the European Commission committed to further exploring this initiative.

Communication strategy: results

193.5k Reach on social media	**2.7k** Content interactions	**3.4k** Website visitors
5.5k Profile visits	**14k** Webpage views	**70+** Dedicated posts

Highlights

- Initiating the **Culture Next Newsletter**, an every-two-months internal communication initiative meant to keep members connected to news, events and opoortunities from within the network.
- Activating the **Culture Next LinkedIn account** to be able to reach a broader audience, from various working industries.
- Activating the **Culture Next X (Twitter) account** to be able to communicate ideas and messages that could be of relevance for trending topics.
- Launching a **dissemination campaign** to communicate the results of the Culture Next project implemented between 2021-2024.
- Establishing an **exclusive international media partnership** with ECoC News.
- Meeting with **10 other European cultural networks** to establish connection and nurture potential opportunities for further collaboration.

Media appearances and articles

Culture Next: Shaping the Future of European Cities Through Culture

Read the article here.

Culture Next: viitorul orașelor europene prinde formă

Read the article here.

Culture & Capitals, The 13th Culture Next Conference

Read the article here.

13th Culture Next Conference

Read the article here.

Culture Next Conference, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Read the article here.

Culture Next - A network of cities for culture and sustainable development

Read the article here.

Culture Next Network and SDG Lab

Read the article here.

Matera 2019 at the conference of the European network Culture Next

Read the article here.

Culture Next: viitorul orașelor europene prinde formă prin cultură

Read the article here.

The 13th conference of Culture Next, capitals of culture confront (1)

Read the article here.

The 13th conference of Culture Next, capitals of culture confront (2)

Read the article here.

Culture Next meets in Brussels

Read the article here.

Immie Jonkman: "Harnessing the power of culture for a united Europe"

Read the article here.

Culture Next embarks on 2025 with an expanded membership representing more European countries

Read the article here.

Registrations open for the 13th Culture Next conference! Cluj-Napoca, 16th-18th of October, 2024

Read the article here.

Culture Next Mobilities: Brno in Faro, spring of 2024

Read the article here.

Culture Next Mobilities: Elefsina in Cluj, late spring 2024

Read the article here.

Thematic Working Group #2: Art branding as a financing strategy

Read the article here.

100 city representatives joined the 12th Culture Next Conference in Oulu, Finland

Read the article here.

Our team

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Photo gallery

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